



10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES



**NUMBER 5
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*W*elcome back to issue Number 5 of 10By10 Flash Fiction Stories featuring more entertaining flash/micro fiction writers, each with a story for us to enjoy. These stories bring you a diverse group of flash/micro fiction tales that make us sit up and take notice of their creativity. Whatever you fancy, I am sure you will enjoy all the stories in this issue which run from fifty to nearly five hundred words. They are all short, concise and worth your time to read.

So, enter these pages and read and enjoy the ten writers.

Sincerely,

Zvi A. Sesling

Editor



Zvi A. Sesling, Brookline, MA Poet Laureate (2017-2020), has published numerous poems and flash fiction. He edits Muddy River Poetry Review and 10 By 10 Flash Fiction Stories. Sesling has won international and national poetry prizes He is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee. He lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.



Mikki Aronoff's

work appears or is forthcoming in *The Ekphrastic Review*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Intima*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *London Reader*, *SurVision*, *Rogue Agent*, *Popshot Quarterly*, *The South Shore Review*, *The Fortnightly Review*, *Feral*, *The Phare*, *Milk Candy Review*, *Flash Boulevard*, *New World Writing*, *Emerge*, *The Disappointed Housewife*, *Tiny Molecules*, *Microfiction Monday Magazine*, *Potato Soup Journal*, *RubyLit*, *Bending Genres*, *Gone Lawn*, and elsewhere. Her stories and poems have received Pushcart and Best Microfiction nominations.

Sparkle Plenty

S-h-a-m-e!

WTF? Still with the invisible gravelly voice? *Come out and show yourself*, I holler out the window, waving a fist in every direction and none in particular. Damn din's fracturing the blue movies I'm looping through my head of last night's knee-weakening tryst with the geek. Harry.
Shame on Y-O-U!

I push the control on my La-Z-Boy, stomp outside to the street. I twirl a 360°. Stop. Crane my neck. Wait for the voice to strike again. A kid on a bike speeds towards me. Spits. Spins a few wheelies. Speeds off. That's about it. I go back inside, put on some music and my headphones, rewind the film.

*

Harry's a microbiologist who can't find a job, so he helps his lanky dad run "Uncle Al's Alligator Farm — Have Yourself Some SCARY Fun Today! — Families Welcome." I met Harry the day I went there, the same day my therapist told me it was time I faced my fears in the *real* world. *You be YOU! Time to dip your toe back in the water! Put your Sparkle Plenty back in the picture!* She's such a balcony person. Was she referring to chandelier cleaner or the Playboy bunny? I do remember a Sparkle Plenty kid from the stack of comics Grandpa left me when he died, along with those pencils that showed bathing beauties when you turned them upside down. Whatever she meant, I wasn't ready to face those nitty-gritty fears. Not up for that much hurt in my head. But I could suck up to some *sparkling*. I decided to baby step, begin by hanging out with some reptiles that very afternoon. And therein lay a problem. After forking over the exorbitant entrance fee, I really *did* stick my toe in that pool of alligators. Folks do tell me I'm too literal, but the fence wasn't *that* high. Maybe I should've checked the feeding times. Going *after* would've been smarter. Those were some hungry suckers. But violet-eyed Hero Harry heard tails thrashing and my screams and rushed right over. I batted my eyelashes, he hoisted me up, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! SHAME!

My skin's pruning in the claw foot tub, and my whole body, minus some toes, is vibrating, and not in a good way. It's that voice I can't ever locate, that voice that seems to echo, ripple and boom every time I start to relive anything, well, juicy. I'm pretty sure it's outside my head. But still, I pull the plug, watch the bubbles go down the drain, and call my therapist for an emergency appointment. And, what the hell, I've got Harry on speed dial, too. Fingers and lips that know where to walk.



Paul Beckman's

new flash collection is *Kiss Kiss*, (Truth Serum Press). Paul had a micro story selected for the 2018 *Norton Anthology New Micro Exceptionally Short Fiction*. He was one of the winners in the 2016 *The Best Small Fictions* and his story "Mom's Goodbye" was chosen as the winner of the 2016 Fiction Southeast Editor's Prize. He's widely published in the following magazines among others: *Raleigh Review*, *Litro*, *Playboy*, *Pank*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Matter Press*, *Pure Slush*, *Thrice Fiction*, and *Literary Orphans*. Paul had a story nominated for the 2019 *Best Small Fictions* and a micro accepted for the 2022 *Best of Microfiction*. He hosts the monthly FBomb flash fiction reading series and he's judged writing contests for *Cahoodaloodaling*, *Brilliant Flash Fiction* and the State of New Jersey.

Wanting More

We took the freshman's lunch bags often so we wouldn't go hungry.

We wanted more money, so we stopped the paperboys on their bikes collection day.

We wanted more clothes. We snuck into the Goodwill Bin at night and fought over the good stuff.

We wanted to play pinballs. We went to the Chrystal Palace and pushed the players away from their machines and finished their games.

We wanted more. We boosted candy and gum from the local stores.

We wanted more. We snuck into the church looking for the poor box and emptied it out.

We wanted more weed. We took it from the older girls in the park after dinner time.

We wanted more noise. We went into the library and beat our hands on the tables and yelled at the top of our lungs.

We wanted liquor. We waited outside the liquor store until we spotted a mark and took his purchase.

We wanted better grades. We cornered our teachers after class and explained life to them.

We wanted more. We took more of everything, anytime we felt like it.

We wanted girlfriends, but the girls wanted nothing to do with us. We bullied them, and they turned us in.

We wanted motorcycles. We sat on a half dozen of them parked outside the bar and when they guys came out in their leathers, we demanded their keys. Instead, we got a beating.

We wanted to heal our wounds, but the motorcycle guys wanted to give us more and bigger wounds.

We wanted more attention. We stopped a guy in a station wagon and ordered him to take us to the emergency room.

We wanted to stop wanting so much from where we could be seen so we stole from stores in the early morning.

We wanted the store owner who caught us to stop pointing his shotgun at us while we washed his floors and followed his instructions on cleaning out the walk-in freezer and the garbage cans.

We wanted not to hang out with each other anymore. The police came to the school and took us and we had to spend the night in the same jail cell.

We wanted the police to stop taking our pictures and our fingerprints.

We wanted them to not wake our parents in the middle of the night and have our fathers come down to the station.

We wanted our fathers to believe us that we learned our lesson, but they left us in custody and went back home to bed.

We wanted more as we got older and took what we wanted and ended up where we didn't want to be, jail again. We called our fathers and told them we really learned our lesson and to please come and get us and take us home, but our fathers just hung up on us and we wanted another phone call, but the guards just laughed. It didn't make any difference, because we had no one else to call.



J.G. Millie

is following her passion for storytelling by attending Sheridan College for Creative Writing and Publishing. She's fluent in French and English, and currently learning Spanish. This short story wouldn't be possible without the inspiration behind it, which is the following prompt given to me by a friend: "All you wanted was a popsicle. Go to the shop, buy it, and eat it. Simple. But on your way out of the shop you run into a movie star. A movie star that you hate, and they just made you drop your popsicle." - MacKenzie Chambers. And her dream is to travel the world, immersing herself in language and culture, with a pen and paper and a loved one by her side.

Why?

Why did I need a popsicle? Why did I walk to the nearest corner store to get one? Why did they only have grape flavoured ones? Why did I forget my wallet at home? Why did the stranger behind me pay for it? Why did I have to open it, run straight into a celebrity, and drop it? Why did I try to salvage it, and bend over? Why did my baby bump have to get in the way? Why did she burst into a fit of laughter? Why does this memory still haunt me three kids, and thirty years later?



Guy M. McBride, Ph.D.

was a school psychologist and is a licensed psychologist-health service provider (Lic 0663 NC) living in Hickory, North Carolina. A native New Yorker, he attended the State University of New York at Albany, graduating with a B.A. and state certification as a secondary English teacher. He served two years in the Peace Corps as a teacher in Tanzania and taught sixth grade one year in Irondequoit, NY, before going to George Peabody College at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee in 1968. Interning in Long Beach, New York, he served the next 37 years as a school psychologist first in New York (7 years in Rocky Point, NY) and then for Burke County Public Schools in North Carolina. He retired from the public school system in 2009. He obtained his doctoral degree from Peabody in 1975.

When I was a kid I tried out for Little League

When I was a kid I tried out for Little League. They said that they would have taken me but I couldn't hit and I couldn't catch.

And some of the mean players said I threw like a girl. I hated baseball.

Fast forward. I dated a young woman who liked sports. I mentioned one night that baseball was very boring.

She said, "You can't say that."

I said, "I can too say that." She never dated me again. I hated baseball.

But this summer the canine club where I take my dog to socialize with other dogs closed early. I asked why. Someone had given all the staff members tickets to a Crawdads afternoon baseball game. When I picked up my Carly several days later, a really pretty young woman brought her out.

I asked, "Did you have a good time at the game?"

She replied, "Oh, I had a wonderful time."

Then I asked, "Did our side win?" She looked confused.

"I don't know," she said.

Baseball used to be about throwing, pitching, hitting, and catching. But times have changed. Now it's about special nights like Star Wars Night and the Night of Horrible Promotions. Kids get to run the bases and chase the team mascot. You can buy your pet a ticket for a dollar. Hot dogs are a dollar. Free fireworks at night games, too.

Now that baseball isn't about playing baseball any more I could get to like the sport. Especially craft beer Tuesdays. Although wine Wednesday is a close second.



Teddi DiCanio

Is a professional storyteller, intermittently, most often is saying her stories out loud. But writing short is an easy fit for her since she used to write and edit radio news. At present, she contributes periodically to *HubPages.com* and is the Media Contact person for Marblehead Festival of Arts. Living in New England, she is a member of Northeast Storytelling and The Authors Guild.

And What Does the Sequoia Say?

When events in Afghanistan took a nasty turn, thoughts of the tree kept him going. An IED caught the edge of a truck, leaving two soldiers badly injured. He'd gone through worse incidents, but he'd also gone through too many by that time. That night, after his injured buddies were operated on, he wrote a note to the tree.

The tree was a Sequoia, centuries old, and favorite of his family's. His family loved to camp nearby. They always visited the tree. On their last trip before he was deployed, his parents danced around it as their children sang the melody of a Strauss waltz, *Voice of Spring*. It was autumn at the time.

Years earlier, after a fight with their mother, his younger brother had run away from their tent in the middle of the night. They found him curled up by the tree. His sister, a poetry fanatic, was enamored of the fact the Sequoia shared its

name with the man who had created the writing system for the Cherokee language.

Now he dreamed about that tree. All his notes to it said he would go visit the tree as soon as he got home. He woke up from one dream worrying whether he should go see the tree before he saw his family. No. They would meet him at the airport.

Should he wait until then to say he wanted to go see the tree immediately or write them in advance? Wait. If he wrote them they'd go into panic mode about his emotional well-being. He was fine. Knowing he would go see the tree was a comforting distraction from his present horrendous surroundings.

He arrived at San Francisco's airport. When he explained to his family he wanted to go see the tree, they looked at one another. "I'm not nuts," he said, trying to reassure them. "The chaos of war is jarring. Thinking about that quiet place and that tree, well, it was soothing."

His father finally spoke. "There's chaos here, too. Have you heard about the wildfires?"

He had, but had not thought of them in conjunction with his tree. "Are you telling me it's gone?"

"I don't know. There were fires in that area. Sequoias can withstand some fire. They need fire to pop out their seeds."

His mother spoke. "Let's grab a bite and just go. We'll find out if it is still there."

The tree still stood, but was visibly damaged. The soldier felt wretched. Two forest rangers were working in the area. One said, "As bad as it looks, I think it will survive. It, they, all need time to heal."



Linda Allison

is a recovering banker, attempting to be what she always said she would be when she grew up: a writer. Linda lives in The Woodlands, Texas, with the love of her life, where together they're trying to figure out this retired thing. Her work has appeared in *McQueen's Quinterly*, *Star 82 Review*, and *Pile Press*. She was recently awarded first place in the Emerging Writers category of the *League of Utah Writers* annual Olive Woolley Burt writing contest. In the spirit of life-long learning, Linda will be entering an MFA program at Lindenberg University in the fall.

The Question of Those Panties

I've always wondered what would have happened if I hadn't pushed back that day, the day you said you wanted to break it off, the day after she found my panties in your suitcase. What if I hadn't protested? What if I hadn't said, "Let's talk about this"? What if I had told you I'd respect your decision? What if I had stood, given you a polite hug, and walked out of that restaurant we liked, the one with the good meatloaf? Would that have been the end of it? Would we have remained friendly in a distant kind of way, chatting occasionally on the phone, less and less over time?

You told me you feigned innocence when she produced the questionable panties, that you pretended to be offended. You told her they probably belonged to their son's girlfriend who had stayed at the house while her apartment was being redone.

The next morning you called and suggested we meet for lunch.

The topic of those errant panties has come up just a few times in the years since. When it does, you tease that I probably slipped them into your suitcase.

And although you make a joke of it, I believe deep down you suspect it might be true.

But you're wrong. I hadn't even missed those panties. And if indeed a pair of panties had made their way into your suitcase, they wouldn't have escaped your attention for long. A pair of white cotton bikinis nestled among the slacks you always fold perfectly along the crease or tucked next to the shirts you arrange so carefully they could have come straight from a gift box? Not a chance.

When the panty incident occasionally surfaces from my pool of memories, I idly wonder if maybe you allowed them to stow away. I don't think it would have been deliberate. Or willful. But maybe subconsciously, maybe it was a subliminal plea for attention. Bound by obligation, trapped in an unsatisfying relationship, it was your attempt to tell your partner, a good stable woman with little talent for affection, "Hey, I'm attractive and desirable. Try harder." And not yet seeing the inevitable, you panicked just a little, when confronted with a pair of panties.

We'll never know what would have happened had I walked away that day. And we'll never know how those panties got into your suitcase. But as I write this, listening to the soft rhythm of your sleeping breath, sitting next to you in the bed we've shared for years, in the home we built together, I don't think it matters.



Tony Tinsley

is an award-winning professor emeritus of psychology and author of more than 150 works on critical issues in psychology. His work as an editor includes a research handbook, encyclopedia volume, and textbook on counselling and psychotherapy. His short fiction has appeared in *50 Give or Take* and his poetry and short fiction have been selected for inclusion in a presently untitled anthology scheduled for release in early 2023.

Memories

He met her in Shamrock, a rundown Irish bar in South Philly. He was short, fat, and bald, and she was recently divorced. *Swing for the fence*, he told himself. *What the hell?* she asked herself. Ever after, he dreamed of his once-in-a-lifetime encounter, and she drank to forget it.



Karen Schauber's

Karen Schauber's flash fiction appears in seventy-five international literary magazines, journals, and anthologies. including *Bending Genres*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *Cease Cows*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Fiction Southeast*, *New World Writing*, *Spelk*; and three 'Best Microfiction' nominations. She is editor of the award-winning flash fiction anthology [*The Group of Seven Reimagined: Contemporary Stories Inspired by Historic Canadian Paintings*](#) (Heritage House, 2019). Schauber curates [*Vancouver Flash Fiction*](#), an online resource hub, and [*Miramichi Flash*](#), a monthly literary column. In her spare time, she is a seasoned family therapist.

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Virus

The crowd has ballooned by the time we arrive. Mathieu does his wheely thing. A Cirque du Soleil improv. The multitudes are mesmerized, buzzing with excitement as the rhythmic hammering of the cymbalom and snaking of oboe

arpeggios enchant, leading attention astray. I rifle through pockets and half-zipped purses, filling my pouch with every nugget I can pilfer; sifting through the loot will come later. The crowd gasps and laughs with nervous delight as Mathieu wheels atop the unicycle weaving to-and-fro losing his balance threatening to crash into onlookers and recovering within the very last inch with nothing to spare, thrilling the crowd. The Quartier is a mix of exhilaration and danger. Danger when the first onlooker reaches into their bag to retrieve their coin-purse, their iPhone, their keys; their shrieks no longer register pleasure, the pitch a little higher a little thinner as their breath is dislocated in their chest gasping and hyperventilating in panic. One after the next goes off like a pop toaster. Catchy like a virus.



Gary Fincke's

collection of flash fiction *The Corridors of Longing* will be published by Pelekinesis Press in October. Collections of his full-length stories have won the Flannery O'Connor Prize (University of Georgia Press) and the Elixir Press Fiction prize. He is co-editor of the annual anthology series Best Microfiction.

Marking the Solstice

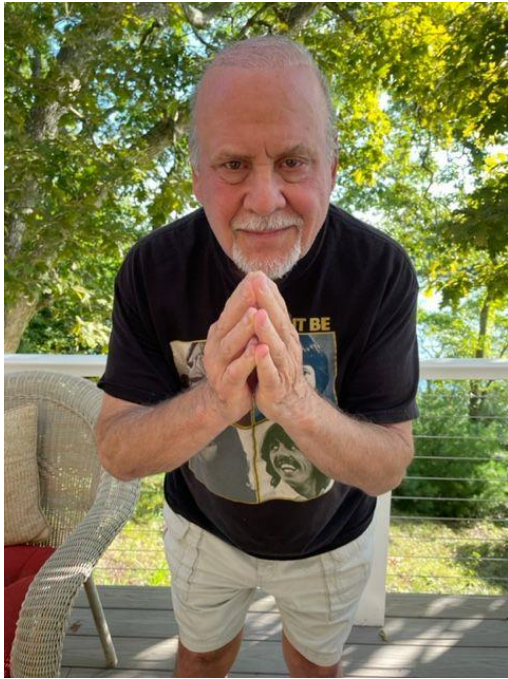
Because I was born on my mother's birthday, our parties were divided into day and night. My friends, full of cake and ice cream, left before dinner. My mother's friends arrived at twilight, drinking wine as the mid-summer sky went dark. But each year, at noon, before either party began, she asked me into the yard to wait for the moment she said the sun would pause before its annual slow decline.

Our birthday was June 21st, and I was eight before I learned that the solstice didn't always happen on that day. Because I loved seeing her happy, I never told her I knew which years we were late, that the sun had changed directions the day before. I loved that impossible story she told while we waited for twelve o'clock and the tolling of the bell from the nearby church. "It's as far north as it ever gets." she would say. "Now it begins to scuttle backwards, like our astral sign, toward winter."

The summer before I started high school, the solstice was June 20th-- Gemini, not Cancer--but she called me, as she always did, a few minutes before noon. By then, what would kill her had begun in her arms and legs. What I also knew, by then, was that crabs, nearly always, walk sideways, not backwards. That if you thought about that the right way, it meant they stayed in the same place, not coming or going.

Standing near the living room picture window, she paused to show me two old towels that had been wedding presents, ones worn so thin by fifteen years of use that the sunlight filtered through them. She handed me one and kept the other for herself. "Nothing is gone," she said, "if you keep it." She led me to the dining room clock she wound daily and asked me to turn the key. On our way through the kitchen, she pointed out the old rotary phone and said it was as good as new. Outside, we walked past the ancient station wagon she said would last until I would learn to master the stick shift that the world was forgetting.

Then, in the yard, noon about to arrive in the year that would mark the middle of my time with her, she handed me the key to the three rooms she rented for us until I was seven. "You'll thank me someday," she said as the church bell began counting to twelve. "And keep this one, too," she said, handing me a thin, but heavy key I'd never seen before, the one, she explained, to where she had lived with my father for a year without me. Where those towels we were holding hung thick and bright. Where, after an evening shower, she often wrapped her body inside one for warmth as she walked to the bedroom to part the wedding-present sheets and unlocked herself, welcoming the possibility of me into this world.



Paul Steven Stone

enjoyed a storied career as a creative advertising professional in the Boston area, crafting memorable brands, ads and TV commercials for clients such as Garelick Farms, Fleet Bank and W.B. Mason, whose theme "Who But W.B. Mason!" was Stone's signature brand creation. Stone also toiled as a newspaper columnist for the *Mariner* newspapers for 25 years; his best columns appearing in *How To Train A Rock*, available on Amazon. Stone's first novel, *Or So It Seems*, is a "rollicking spiritual odyssey" as one reviewer said. His second novel, *SOULJOURNER*, was published last year by Fahrenheit Press. Stone has also written children's books, his two latest being, "The Wind's Tale" and "Cock-A-Doodle-Don't." Stone lives in Plymouth, MA, where he is busily at work on his next novel.

Love In No Man's Land

He had dared step out from the anonymity of his own 'safe' territory to a zone where the enemy could attack at will at any moment. He had been here before, so he knew what to expect. Within five seconds after beginning to call out to his heart's companion, the enemy fire would begin.

Left, right...the artillery could come from either side. High, low...you could never anticipate the arc of the incoming trajectory. Heavy, light...the

frequency of the firing was mercurial, often depending on the mood of his unseen adversaries and the nature of the weapons they had to hand.

You would think the presence of danger would inhibit his behavior. That the cough syrup bottle that hit him on the nose last night might have soothed his ardor, if it did nothing for his scratchy throat.

There was a time he could have called out to his girlfriend at 3 am with impunity, for long minutes at a stretch. A time when he could have sat on any segment of the back alley fence and caterwauled without fear of human threats and imprecations. Without the eruption of curses, soon to be followed by enemy artillery fire...shoes, sneakers, old 45 records, soup spoons, cough syrup bottles, broken umbrellas and half-filled plastic garbage bags.

But that was three weeks ago—a veritable lifetime to a cat in love—soon after he first met his Juliet and had his heart stolen for life.

How quickly his worst fears had been realized. And the lesson swiftly burnt into his tiny cat's brain. That human beings, the strangest creatures he knew, had no place in their hearts for love at 3am.