



10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES



NUMBER 6
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Welcome to Issue #6 with apologies is a bit late, but nonetheless has ten great flash fiction stories by 10 outstanding writers. Every story is unique. Dibyasree Nandy offers a mythical story rooted in her India background. Gloria Mindock's short crime piece is reminiscent of some great detective stories. Phil Temples opens Issue 6 with his patented humor while Rob Dinsmoor closes out the issue with a bizarre, hilarious encounter. All the writers present wonderful, thoughtful stories that will entertain.

So enter these pages, read and enjoy the ten writers in 10 By 10.

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. Sesling's flash fiction book, *Secret Behind The Gate*, will be published in early 2023 by Cervena Barva Press. He lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.



Phil Temples

resides in Watertown, Massachusetts. He has had five mystery-thriller novels, a novella, and two short story anthologies published in addition to over 190 flash fiction stories. Phil is a member of New England Science Fiction Association, GrubStreet, and the Bagel Bards. You can learn more about him at <https://temples.com>.

Writer's Block

“I had a farm in Africa at the foot of the Ngong Hills.”

I wanted to pen a story about a person—a man, woman, I hadn't decided yet—who lived on a farm in Africa. But the epic beginning line from *Out of Africa* kept blocking me. Everything I tried to picture in my mind eventually kept coming back to that damned memoir by Danish author Karen Blixen!

Raising coffee beans was out of the question, as was situating the farm on the African continent. Instead, I settled on a young albino little person who started an iceberg lettuce farm on the outskirts of Reykjavik.



Peter Cherches

is called “one of the innovators of the short short story” by *Publishers Weekly*. He has published six volumes of fiction and nonfiction since 2013. His writing has also appeared in scores of magazines, anthologies and websites, including *Harper’s*, *Bomb*, *Semiotext(e)*, and *Fiction International*, as well as Billy Collins’ Poetry 180 website and anthology. His latest book is *Masks: Stories from a Pandemic* (Bamboo Dart Press, 2022). He is a native of Brooklyn, New York.

The Note

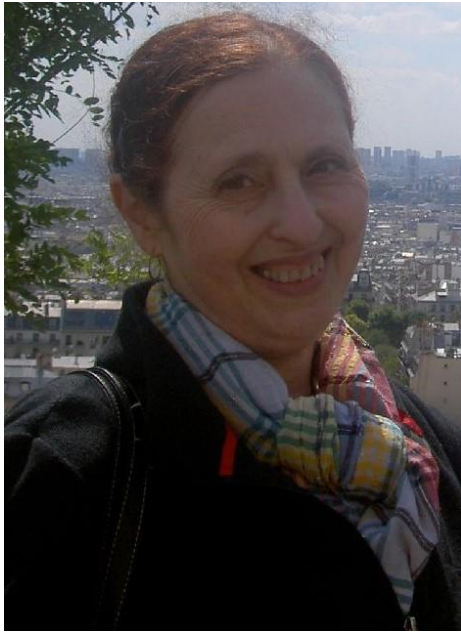
She left it on the kitchen table, under the pepper mill, so I wouldn’t miss it. The note thanked me for everything—that was it. How does someone leave you with nothing but a note that thanks you for everything? No explanation, no apologies, no regrets, no recriminations, just thanks. A note! Not even to my face! I’ve been left before, but always to my face. What kind of coward is she, to leave me with just a note, so impersonal? OK, she wanted to avoid confrontation, I get it. Sure I can be difficult. Sure she knew how I’d react. But so what? Didn’t I still deserve the common courtesy of being left in person? “We had some good times, Pete. Thanks for everything.” Thanks for everything? Isn’t that really a euphemism for “thanks for nothing”? We had some good times? *Some*? How many, a few? “Lots of” would have been nice, but “some”? What, could she count the good times on the fingers of one hand? Five years together, five good times? One good time a year, on average. Maybe one year had two good times and another year had none. The nerve of the woman. Thanks for everything indeed. And what did I have to thank her for? Plenty, actually, but she didn’t even give me the chance. I thought we had

plenty of good times. I mean too many to count, too many to remember. I thought they were good times for both of us, but apparently not. So which of my good times were also her good times? I really needed to know. If I was going to remember the good times we had together, I'd have to know which good times we really did have together. If they were only good times for me, they no longer counted. I was devastated. I hadn't counted on this. I certainly hadn't counted on her leaving, and even if I could have imagined it, I didn't think she'd do it in a way that called into question everything I'd believed about our time together. I thought it was a near-perfect relationship, actually, only to discover that for her it was nothing more than a few trifling good times. So what was the rest of the time like for her? Pure hell? Is that what life with me is, pure hell? I know I can be difficult. I've already said that, haven't I? But pure hell? Surely I'm not as bad as all that.

I heard the key turn in the lock to my door. She came in and dropped the keys on the kitchen table. "I almost forgot," she said, and walked out before I could say a thing.

I called to her as she was walking down the hall, to the elevator.

"How many?" I pleaded. "How many times?"



Nina Rubinstein Alonso's

work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Ploughshares*, *Sumac*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Bluepepper*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, *New Boston Review*, *Broadkill Review*, *Nixes Mate*, *Southern Women's Review*, etc. Her book *This Body* was published by David Godine Press, her chapbook *Riot Wake* by Cervena Barva Press, and a story collection, poetry collection and novel are in the works.

Waiting For Rain

Claire's desk is next to her sleep sofa in the living room, everything jammed together, as Miguel needed the bed room when he got sick. Then he died and she was too numb to change anything.

At Emily's potluck, a man with glasses heard she's a widow and asks 'how's it going?' She not talking feelings with some stranger, but mentions a broken cabinet hinge, smoke alarm batteries.

"Easy fix," Harry says, and arrives with tools Saturday, fixes the hinge, changes batteris, then says, "Notice you have a back room, wonder if I could stay a few days as I'm between jobs."

"A few days," she says, hard to refuse after he helped her, though that was Miguel's room. A month passes and Harry's still here, complaining about migraine s as if she's supposed to care.

She can't find the classical art book Miguel gave her, but Harry claims he's never seen it. He starts a job with a data company, seems surprised she expects her loan to be repaid, "I thought it was a gift."

“A loan, until you found work.”

That job's quickly lost, can't pay her back as he's job-hunting. Suspicious, she checks his room, under his bed, no art book, maybe sold it? What else has he taken?

One morning before work, doing her usual exercises, she feels a pang of depression. She pictures Miguel sitting at the table, aches that he's not there, touches her cup to hear the physical clink of spoon on pottery. Miguel, her love, died young, cancer, and the table's empty, nothing but her cup and the Sunday paper she hasn't opened though it's Tuesday.

She hears about a man attacked in the park by robbers, hospitalized, wishes it was Harry. Sunday a woody fragrance floats from his room, his thin hair's tweaked by brown dye, and he's out late. At lunch, her friend Emily says, “I saw Harry at a restaurant Sunday with a red-headed older woman.” “Nasty leech, need to get rid of him.”

“Didn't know how things were, hesitated to mention it.”

“He fixed a cabinet hinge, changed alarm batteries, asked to stay a few days, now won't leave.”

“Sorry you met him at our potluck.”

Weeks pass, Emily reporting more Harry sightings.

Claire calls a lawyer, considers a court order to get rid of him, locks up her valuables, but Friday there's a note taped to the refrigerator asking her to forward his mail to a post office box, his clothes, tv and computer gone. She checks to see what else may be missing, cleans the back room, gets the locks changed, needing to feel safe, but it's like watching dry fields after long drought, waiting for rain.



Dibyasree Nandy

began writing at the age of 27, two years ago, after completing M.Sc and M.Tech. Since then, she has authored 'The Labyrinth of Silent Voices-Epistles from the Mahabharata', 'Stardust:Haiku and Other Poems', 'Studded With Rubies; A Hundred Short Stories', 'Marchen of Newer Days', 'Liebeslied', 'Windflower'. Several of her pieces have also appeared in 'The Pine Cone Review', 'The Telegraph', 'Proceedings From the Pondicherry Lodge (The Sherlock Holmes Society)', 'Indian Periodical', 'Literary Cocktail', 'White Enso', 'Open Skies Anthology', 'Dragonflies and Fairies', 'Ghostly Ghouls and Haunted Happenings', 'Dark Reflections', 'Haus-A Haunted House Anthology', 'Brown Sugar', 'Seaglass Literary', 'Soul Anthology', 'Double Speak Magazine', 'Mediterranean Poetry', 'LitGleam', 'Story Mirror', 'Aroma of Notions Anthology', 'Abominable', 'Soulmate Syndrome' and 'Kaidankai-Japanese 100 Horror Stories'.

The Executioner and the Raven

A dainty feather rested upon a balance scale. So light was it that equilibrium was attained with ease, ensuring that neither side would tip in the slightest.

**

The bloodied blade of the gallows glinted ominously crimson at high noon when the prisoner was carefully manacled by the executioner. A hand on the rope, the executioner stepped back to get a full view of the prisoner's face.

He was beautiful, yes, ethereal even, the solar orb setting his golden, slightly longer locks blindingly ablaze.

A raven circled overhead. It was rather natural for carrion crows to be present in the vicinity of guillotines. They picked apart corpses and peered straight into the naked souls of criminals. Flapping its wings, a couple of onyx feathers fell from the sky, one settling on the executioner's shoulder while his arms shook.

This had never happened before.

Those eyes. They changed form ever so swiftly. From a lovely pair of rubies to the drops of dew on a blushing, budding rose at dawn to raging volcanoes from which magma threatened to spill and smoulder all. On the prisoner's lips was a serene, gentle smile that would haunt him for the rest of his days.

"Why did you do it?"

Another feather gracefully descended. The prisoner replied, "Look behind you."

A jostling crowd had gathered there to witness the execution.

"They are all united, see?" The prisoner emphasized.

One of the men, quite regal-looking, yelled, "He targeted us from the aristocracy! The nerve!"

Another young man, his garments shabby, hair tousled, refuted hotly, "Justified he was, too. He only murdered the corrupt ones!"

"Silence! Know your place, peasant!"

“He... uh... rescued us all from the slums...” A woman spoke, her tone uncertain.

However, one middle-aged man shrieked, “Sarah, be quiet! And you lot! Are you all insane? Don’t you know what the authorities say about him?”

A poignant cry of the raven was heard.

“He’s right, you know. That man is the most vicious criminal the nation has ever seen!”

Both the nobles and the people from the lower classes began to murmur in agreement.

The executioner turned his head towards the prisoner. “Is this what you desired? A common enemy for them to hate in unison?”

“It was a gamble. I had to take the risk.”

“I see. In any case, it appears as though you were successful.” He then frowned. “Ah, the crows are rather loud today.”

“They can’t wait to have their fill, I suppose.” The prisoner’s smile widened. “Well, what are you waiting for?”

The grating sound of the blade resounded and the mob cheered.

The raven took flight, shedding a few more feathers.



Gloria Mindock

is editor of Cervena Barva Press. She is the author of six books of poetry, most recently, *Ash*, which won 6 book awards. Gloria has been translated and published into eleven languages. Her work has appeared in *Gargoyle*, *KGB Lit*, *The James Dickey Review*, *10 X 10*, *Ibbetson*, *Growth: Journal of Literature, Culture, & Art (Macedonia)* and others. She was Poet Laureate of Somerville, MA (USA) in 2017 and 2018.

A

He murdered A this afternoon so now many words don't exist. I have no way of communicating anymore but neither do you. It was a hot afternoon. The sun is making us all sweat. Only one fraction of A was found in a pile of blood. Too red to pick up. Some on the police force barfed. Did I tell you I have police in my family? The Italian Mafia wanted to kill them. They were smarter, kept guns in the cellar. In a small town like this everyone knows everyone's business. Somewhere someone had binoculars and was watching. Rumors spread around about who did it. Turns out it was C. They were wrong. C laughed as he was arrested. Curved himself backwards and stabbed a police officer in the throat. After this, no one could ever speak again.



Kathryn Silver-Hajo's

fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry appears, or is forthcoming, in *Litro Magazine*, *Citron Review*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Atticus Review*, *Ruby Literary*, *SoFloPoJo*, *Fictive Dream*, *New York Times-Tiny Love Stories*, *New World Writing*, *Flash Boulevard*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Bending Genres*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and others. Kathryn lives in Providence, Rhode Island with her husband and sassy, curly-tailed pup, Kaya. Discover more at <https://www.kathrynsilverhajo.com/> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/KSilverHajo> and Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/kathrynsilverhajo/>

Turning the Other Cheek

For the first time in his life, Jay finds himself questioning the wisdom of *insisting*—as his long-time girlfriend Maria would say—on always seeing the best in everyone. He wonders how it might feel to be rude and judgmental for once. But just the thought of hurting someone's feelings causes his reflux to rise, his heart to hurt.

Yet, even on this most terrible of nights he hesitates. Even after Maria said she'd had enough of his fire walking, flame swallowing and other crazy stunts, not to mention how he was far too forgiving when that jerk at the pub put his hand on her arse earlier this eve. What she'd really needed from Jay was for him set down his chalice of craft IPA and smite that yahoo on his ugly visage, but he just lectured him about decency and respect instead.

"Look, babe, your kindness is part of what I love about you," she'd said on the way home, tugging at a charmingly wayward coil from his 'fro, *"but sometimes you seem to care more about the feelings of others than about mine."*

Though it grieves him, he isn't sure he can honestly promise her that he'll change, be that man she covets. Just moments ago, he watched her walk out the door and stride straight-backed down the street, captured in the vivid light of

Polaris and the full moon, her linen-cloaked body casting a dramatic shadow—and something in him broke. Now he lies paralyzed on the splintery floor, weeping into the warm, wooly coat of his Jack Russell, Muttonchop, until she shakes herself free of him with an irritated bleat.

Startled, he rises to his sore, calloused feet—toughened from his daily, contemplative, barefoot walks through the dusty alleyways and lanes of town. *O Hellfire!* he exclaims with uncharacteristic force, causing Muttonchop to jump and stare at him as if there's something she wishes she could say. *It's now or never.* Without bothering to change out of his muslin robe, he strikes out into the night on the same path his beloved recently trode upon, but then veers toward the village where that miserable rogue with his roving hands resides. Guided by the same bold light that graced Maria moments before, Jay clenches and unclenches his fists, resolves to do the one thing that might bring her back to him. Humility be damned.



Vic Larson

was a senior writer in a Fortune 100 company near Chicago. His work has appeared in *The Twin Bill*, *Beatdom*, *Between These Shores*, *Down in the Dirt* and *Existere*. He won the 2021 Gulf Coast Writers Association fiction contest. Vic writes fiction, essays and posts movie reviews at vixflixreview.com.

The Pool

The balcony is solid and large, built to Hank's specifications years earlier. Vague memories of family gatherings and pool parties sputter for air as they race to the bubbling surface of his new perspective. Hank looks out over the backyard from his cantilevered vantage point, across a bench and safety railing. The swimming pool is gone!

He remembers assembling treads and risers on a hand cut wooden frame, lifting completed stairs into place with the help of friends. Firmly anchored between the balcony and a lower deck, the stairway needed minimal fastening to hold it in place, shoehorned between the other wooden structures. Each step toward ground level accompanies a change in elevation that alters his view of the changed yard, thoughts of the missing pool and other rogue thoughts from his distant youth.

A privet hedge still guards two sides of the rectangular space, now green where crystal blue once steamed in white windborne eddies on cool October mornings. Hank pauses at the bottom of the stairs and turns to measure the meters from house to rear fence, and recalls the countless thousands of laps he swam each evening during summers. What an ordeal the pool had been to build on a narrow suburban lot. But what a joy, floating and facing skyward on sweltering

nights, stars and fireflies drizzling into the blue-green glow from illuminated water beneath his raft. Moments of bliss. Private. Secluded.

But his beloved swimming pool is gone, sold to strangers, forgotten for a time, and now destroyed. At what expense, he wonders, understanding the need to break the concrete to pieces before filling the gaping hole with soil and seed. An intact shell would rise like a ghost ship from the yard without the weight of water to counter hydrostatic pressure from beneath. Quite an undertaking.

Hank admires the lawn that spans the distance from spectral diving board to shallow fiberglass stairs. He heads onto the new lawn along the path where once he swam, suspended in water like a balloon in an Albuquerque sky. The grass is lush beneath his feet, sinking almost ankle deep in softness. It is disconcerting in its failure to support him fully, yielding to his stride as he approaches the middle of the yard.

Hank's gaze and stomach fall as water rises to lap the sides of his shoes. The yard undulates in a dizzying response to his shifting center of gravity. The pool is not gone! A seamless layer of perfect sod floats on the surface of deep and nutrient-rich, sinister black water. He dares not move suddenly for fear of being dragged downward, swallowed by living lawn and held beneath the surface by his own weight. Remorse for building the pool and moving away cause him to tremble and then shake violently. Word of a fascinated toddler reaches him in his absence. The gurgling water beneath the sod chuckles with indifference and rises up to remind him of his sins.



Sandra Arnold

is an award-winning writer who lives in New Zealand. She is the author of five books including *The Ash, the Well and the Bluebell*, Mākarō Press, NZ, *Soul Etchings*, Retreat West Books, UK and *Sing No Sad Songs*, Canterbury University Press, NZ. Her short fiction has been widely published and anthologised internationally. She has received nominations for The Best Small Fictions, Best Microfictions and The Pushcart Prize. She has a PhD in Creative Writing from Central Queensland University, Australia.

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Mother's Day

Frances packs her case, checks her air ticket and passport for the umpteenth time, says goodbye to each room, erasing all their memories. The final item on her list is to write her Mother's Day card. For the last two weeks her mother has been repeating that her friend Maureen's daughter is planning on taking Maureen out to a nice restaurant on Mother's day. Maureen's daughter always gives Maureen a lovely bunch of flowers on Mother's Day. Maureen always says her daughter is the sweetest, kindest, most thoughtful, most loving daughter anyone could wish for. Maureen is so lucky having a daughter like that. The card Frances has chosen for her mother has a photo of yellow roses on the front. She'd chosen it because she'd read somewhere that yellow roses symbolise forgiveness. She tells herself that at some point in the future she might. She just might. She checks that what she's written on the card is enough and decides it is.

For Mum

So I'm the worst daughter in the world? Take a good long look in the mirror and ask yourself what sort of mother would say that to her own child, along with these:

'I wish you'd never been born.'

‘If I was dying I wouldn’t ask you for a drink of water.’

‘You’ll never amount to anything.’

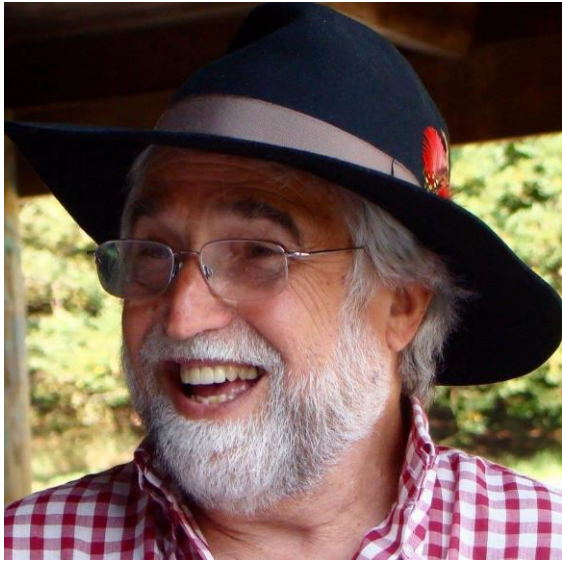
‘I hope that when you have children of your own you’ll know what it is to have a thankless child.’

What sort of mother would tell her child’s teacher that her child had lied, to save the mother’s embarrassment of being found out in her own lies?

You’ve told me often enough what sort of daughter I am. I could fill a couple of pages telling you what sort of mother you are. But I’ll simply tell you that now I’m in a position to leave that’s what I’m doing. You won’t see me again. If I’m lucky enough to have children of my own in the future I promise you this – I will make sure I don’t turn into you. Of all the ‘lessons’ you’ve tried to instill in me over the years, this is one I will not forget.

Frances.

She slips the card into the envelope and places it on the table, heads out the back door, locks it and places the key under the doormat. She walks down the garden path and opens the gate. A shrill scream rips through the quiet. She looks up to see seagulls circling in the pale sky, the sun catching on their white wings. She tries to remember the collective noun for seagulls. Is it a flock or a squabble? A hawk appears from behind a cloud and glides nearer the seagulls. They scream louder, stop wheeling in circles, change direction and chase the hawk away. Frances waves to the empty patch of sky and closes the gate behind her.



Tony Press

writes fiction when he has questions and poems when he thinks he has answers: thus, mostly fiction, but a fair amount of poetry.. His story collection, *Crossing the Lines*, was published by *Big Table* and an e-chapbook of his poems appears online at *Right Hand Pointing*. He claims - remember, he writes fiction - 25 criminal jury trials, 12 years in a single high school classroom, and several nominations: Pushcart (twice), Best of the Web, and the Million Writers Award. He enjoys the San Francisco Bay from his window, and he knows how fortunate he is.

Keeping The Water At Bay

Until I was sixteen, I lived with my grandfather, but it is more accurate to say I lived with my grandfather and *only my grandfather*, from the age of four. I truly do not remember my parents, neither how they acted toward me, whether they hugged me or not, or even how they looked. Our cottage in Falmouth had no photographs, no paintings, no pencil-drawings, nothing to indicate whether I looked like my father, or my mother, or neither.

Eventually, I did look rather like my grandfather, but not until I was forty or so and he was long-buried behind the hilltop church. By then, I, too, was bearded, and even a bit stooped as I walked my beat. I had become a part of the Royal Mail, carrying and delivering letters and cards and packages, six days a week, in and near Falmouth. In truth, I left the county of Cornwall only once in my life, when I took an extended holiday in London when I was twenty. As they say, it was large. Clearly, it was the right place for many people but I was not one of them. Not then, not ever.

I recall my grandfather telling me of the American troops stationed here in the Second World War. He, too, was in the military but thankfully never crossed

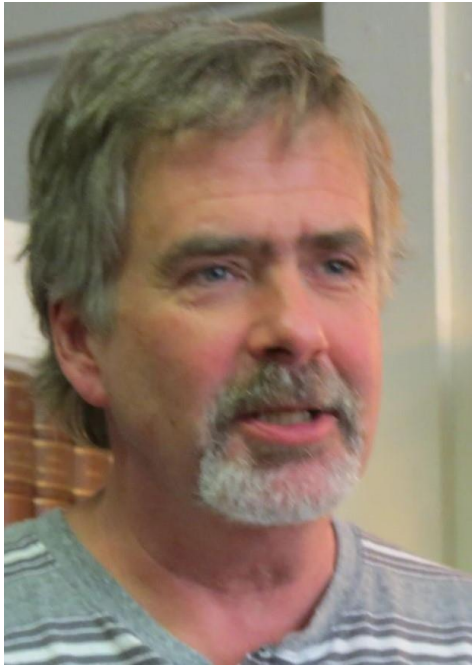
into Europe. Many who did, he told me (and I later read) — many who did, never returned. Or, if they did, they were not the same, even if alive.

Later, in peacetime, my parents — so I was told — were competitive sailors, so competitive that they never missed a chance to sail the Lizard Peninsula challenges, no matter the wind, the waves, the warnings.

Again, I remember nothing of them, but it was from this spot that, on my birthdays, my grandfather would gaze out over the sea and tell me stories of them. Other than that one day a year, he almost never mentioned them. It was an understanding we had, though I'm not sure if an understanding is possible between unequal parties. Still, I never questioned it, and I'm not really doing so now. Just, it is just that I am remembering those afternoons above the ever-present sea.

I've never been on the water. That is an unusual fact for a Cornwall native, but it is true. I will swim, but I will not set foot on a boat of any size. My grandfather never told me I shouldn't, but I heard it as clearly as if he had. He was a communicative man, silent though he was.

I'm not a big believer in heavenly bodies, but if people truly can look down from above, I suspect he is one who does. It is a comfort to think so.



Rob Dinsmoor

has written dozens of scripts for Nickelodeon and MTV and published dozens of stories in literary magazines, some of them nominated for Pushcart Prizes. He also published several memoirs and two books of short stories, the most recent of which is titled *You'll Never See It Coming*. He lives on the North Shore of Massachusetts with his dog Jack, a fellow native of Indiana.

Corn Chps With Einstein

Q: If you could spend an hour with any famous person from history, who would it be?

ME: Einstein. Definitely Albert Einstein.

Scene: Chi Chi's Restaurant. ALBERT EINSTEIN sits alone at a booth, nibbling on corn chips. Enter ME.

ME: Sorry I'm a little late.

EINSTEIN: Yes, well, if you consider twenty minutes a little.

ME: Time is relative—right?

EINSTEIN forces a tiny smile. I pull out my cell phone and prepare to take a picture.

ME: Hey, I'd like to take my picture with you. Could you stick your tongue out?

EINSTEIN: No. Is there anything you wanted to ask me? We only have forty minutes left.

ME: Well, obviously, I'm very curious about your Theory of Relativity

EINSTEIN: I've written volumes on the subject. Have you read them?

ME: Of course! But not, you know, recently.

EINSTEIN: I studied and expanded upon the theories developed by Max Planck, who did a lot of work in something called "relativity theory." Planck had already posited that—

ME: And hey! What about time travel?

EINSTEIN: What about it?

ME: I mean, is it possible or not?

EINSTEIN: From everything I've been able to ascertain—

ME: Did you see "The Terminator?"

EINSTEIN: Excuse me?

ME: It's this movie from the nineteen-eighties where this cyborg played by Arnold Schartzenegger travels back in time from the future to kill the mother of a guy who, in the future, leads the war against the killer robots who want to destroy humanity. You can't make this stuff up!

EINSTEIN: Well, I passed away in 1955, so I didn't—

MY CELLPHONE DINGS.

ME (*standing up*) Sorry, Professor Einstein, I have to take this. Oh, it's a Google calendar notification. I'm supposed to be meeting Abraham Lincoln at Bertucci's in twenty minutes. But, hey! It's been great talking to you. I've learned so much!