

10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES



NUMBER 7
DECEMBER 2022

*W*elcome to Issue #7. During the seven months we have been publishing, we have had a number of great writers, including some of the best of the genre like Paul Beckman, Robert Scotellaro, Kathy Fish, Karen Schaubert, Jacqueline Doyle, Katherine Kulpa, Jayne Martin, Michael C. Keith, Rob Dinsmoor, Phil Temples, Francine Witte, Tim Gager, Renuka Raghavan, Niles Reddick, Riham Adly, Gay Degani, Sandra Arnold, Gloria Mindock and Brad Rose to name but a few of the 70 authors so far. We have received submissions from Egypt, the U.K., New Zealand, Canada, Ukraine, Wales, Ireland, India and of course the United States. The stories have run the gamut from serious to crime to romantic to light sci-fi and humor. All the writers present wonderful, thoughtful stories that will entertain both in this issue, past issues and hopefully future issues. And at Paul Beckman's suggestion I have included a story of my own in this issue.

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.



Robin Stratton

is the author of seven novels, including one which was a National Indie Excellence Book Award finalist (*On Air*, Mustang Press, 2011), three collections of poetry and short fiction, and a writing guide. In 2022 she published her trilogy, *In Love with Spring*, which she began writing 35 years ago. A four-time Pushcart Prize nominee, she's been published in *Word Riot*, *63 Channels*, *Antithesis Common*, *Poor Richard's Almanac(k)*, *Blink-Ink*, *Pig in a Poke*, *Chick Flicks*, *Up the Staircase*, *Shoots and Vines*, and many others. Since 2004 she's been Acquisitions Editor for Big Table Publishing Company, Senior Editor of *Boston Literary Magazine* since 2009, and she was Director of the Newton Writing and Publishing Center until she moved from Boston to San Francisco in 2018. Now she leads the popular "Six Feet of Poetry" and "Fiction by the Foot" series. She'd love to have you visit her at www.robinstratton.com

In the Air

Love is in the air, they can both feel it. Even though he moved out a month ago, he comes by every evening to walk Dobie, their dog. Makes it hard for her to "move on," which is what every single person tells her she has to do—but what, she's going to say No to him? When they got Dobie, he was like their kid. She's not going to be one of those dog moms who refuses access to the dog dad.

Oh she misses being married. She misses having him around, driving her crazy with his complaining, his aches and pains, his family drama. She misses having someone to watch a movie with or eat dinner with or wake up to. His nightly visits keep the hole in her heart open. Does he ever wish he could move back in? How much easier that would be than going through the process of reinventing herself! She feels unprepared to embark on such a daunting endeavour, she feels like she's done growing, she is who she is and she's not

going to get any wiser; just older. And he must miss her too – why else would he come by every single evening?

She watches as he crouches down without looking at her and ruffles the fur on Dobie's head. *How you doing, buddy, huh? How you doing?* He strokes Dobie's head. Strokes it and strokes it.



Paul Hostovsky

His latest book of poems is *Mostly* (FutureCycle Press, 2021). He has won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net awards, and has been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily* and *The Writer's Almanac*. Website: paulhostovsky.com

Selfish

Bill sure hated to work. He didn't hate his job--he just hated to work. And then he got sick, and being sick became his job. "Going to dialysis three days a week sure beats going to work," he said.

"Are you serious?" I said. "You'd rather be sick with renal disease than go to work?"

"I have every other day off," he said. "I get disability and social security. It's a great country. I don't do a stitch of work, I just sit in the dialysis chair all day and I get a lot of reading done. I get to flirt with the nurses. It's a good life."

But after eight and a half years of it Bill had had enough of it. His vision was going and his knees were going and his feet were almost gone. And he didn't want to end up blind and in a wheelchair, he said. "What are you going to do?" I said.

“I’m going to stop going to dialysis,” he said. “It’s the perfect way to go. It’s legal. It’s painless, from what I’ve read. Come on up to Schenectady and say goodbye to me.”

So I drove up to Schenectady on the day after his last day of dialysis. And I spent the long weekend with him. Three days of gallows humor and morphine, which he got from the hospice people just in case he needed it. He didn’t need it. But he wanted to try it. And he wanted to start smoking again because, what the hell, he’d be dead soon anyway. He was free to do what he wanted to do, free to eat what he wanted to eat, and free finally from the dialysis. He was even free from the guilt that some of his friends and family had tried to lay on him when he told them in his lively way that he was choosing to die. ‘Selfish’ they called it. But the guilt got filtered out like the excess water and toxins that the dialysis had removed when his kidneys stopped doing the job. And now that his job was dying, “It sure beats going to work,” he said, taking a long drag on his cigarette, then coughing fitfully for a breathless minute, then smiling at me boyishly through the tear.



Dr. Deirdre Fagan

is an associate professor at Ferris State University and the award-winning author of a collection of poetry, *Phantom Limbs* (forthcoming, 2023), a memoir, *Find a Place for Me: Embracing Love and Life in the Face of Death* (2022), a short story collection, *The Grief Eater* (2020), a chapbook of poetry, *Have Love* (2019), and a reference book, *Critical Companion to Robert Frost* (2007). A creative writer and literary scholar, Fagan's essays, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction have appeared widely in literary and scholarly journals and anthologies, as well as newspapers and magazines. She is the poetry editor at *Orange Blossom Review*.

Over Hard

It's not that I cheated on you, but that I wanted to. When you left for Dallas that last time, I swore I would. I even went shopping for one of those pretty negligees you've never noticed me wearing. You don't even remember any of them, do you? I used to buy them at the Five and Dime when we was first married, but then I learned you liked me the way you like your eggs, over easy.

Last summer, I said to June while sittin' on the porch cracking beans, "Ain't no point bothering getting dolled up for him. He don't even care about the plate these eggs are served on," and I gave my bust a little lift, one boob in each hand, one at a time. Boom. Boom. I could tell June didn't know what I was talking about when I said that, but I knew.

I swear half the time you've just wanted it on the kitchen floor while I was hot from cooking and you was all sweaty from whatever you was messing with in the garage. I told June, "This time I'm gonna, I really am," and just to fix her, I bought that godforsaken negligee.

I've decided it's what I want you to box me in good, and on silk sheets. No skimping for no satin in my forever box. I want the good stuff. I've been losing weight for the day I hightail it outta here for good. I'm gonna slide into that pine box like it's home plate, I am.

Someone's gonna see me in that negligee, by God, and not just someone, but the whole goddamn town when they come out to pay their respects. My after wishes are in writin' and bonafide, notar-ied, that is.

When I'm no longer here, all this body and flesh you've been not even given a looksee, just takin' what you want when you want it, is gonna get that looksee, it's gonna get a lot of 'em.

I'm gonna fry your eggs, Ed, I'm gonna fry 'em good and hard.



Paul Beckman

His latest flash collection, *Kiss Kiss* (Truth Serum Press) was a finalist for the 2019 Indie Book Awards. Some of his stories have appeared in *Fiction*, *Litro*, *Pank*, *Playboy*, *WINK*, *Jellyfish Review*, *The Wax Paper*, *Monkey* and *The Lost Balloon*. He had a story selected for the 2020 National Flash Fiction Day Anthology Lineup and was shortlisted in the Strands International Flash Fiction Competition. He was nominated for 2021 Best of the Web and was a winner in the 2022 Best Micro Fiction Anthology.

Give the Man a Chipped Tooth Special

He couldn't go home and face Katy's badgering, so he hung out in McCallister's nursing beers hoping to run into old friends who'd stand him a shot. A noisy group entered, and he recognized the voices from when they all worked the late shift getting the morning paper ready to run for the midnight crew. Those were the days—noisy, crowded, typewriters banging away, announcements over the speaker from the editor singing out the countdown time, and a mickey in his desk drawer calling to him. He was once a decent reporter and people liked hanging around with him listening to his stories but that was then and this is now, he sucked in his gut, swallowed his pride, and made his way over to their table. "Long time no see," he said, and he got murmurs in return. "I could use a stiff one if you're inclined and they were embarrassed for him and invited him to join the group and they ordered fish and chips all around and depth charges and Mike told them how he chipped his tooth the first time he had a depth charge. The oohs came on until he said he was celebrating his eleventh birthday at the time and the

oohs turned to guffaws and he loaded his plate with fried cod and chips, and with a big smile his chipped tooth all prominent he told a story with every round and then as it was getting close to his turn to buy, he said, "Time to go home to the old ball and chain." And they shook hands all around and he thanked them for the food and libations and pulled his sport coat tight around him and walked out into the winter weather where he circled the block looking for a cardboard box, an unused heat grate, or an unlocked building where he could go in and warm up comfy-like in the hall corner. He found an unlocked door and went in like he lived there walked around the hall and found himself a nice comfy spot behind the stairs where he dozed off and never woke up in this unheated empty building. If Mike knew how many old friends showed up at his wake, and how many kegs for black and tans, and bottles for shots and more shots, he would've made more of an effort to face Katy and her badgering that freezing January night.



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. He began writing short fiction and poetry in 1993 and has studied briefly with Lex Williford, now an associate professor of fiction writing, screenwriting, and contemporary fiction at the University of Texas El Paso, and Carolyn Alessio. His short fiction has appeared in *50 Give or Take* and *10x10 Flash Fiction Stories*, and his flash fiction and poetry have been selected for inclusion in an anthology scheduled for publication in early 2023. Recently, he completed a young adult mystery now undergoing final editing.

Hunting Grounds

Sam met Tiffany in The Wastrel, a waterfront bar in Seattle. He was sure he charmed her out of her pants but was too drunk to remember the details. Sam returned nightly, looking for Tiff—was that her name?— but soon met Suzi. Drunk but charming, he must have scored again. Then Tricia. Rinse and repeat. But the action dried up, and, in a flash of brilliance, Sam chose a new hunting

ground. Spiffed up, fortified by liquid confidence, and oozing bonhomie, he strutted into the library for book club night. And there were Tiffany, Suzi, and Tricia, each with a copy of the runaway best-seller, *Clueless: A synonym for male*. An epidemic of giggling erupted and morphed into uncontrollable laughter.



Cynthia Graae

Her fiction, nonfiction, and translations have been published by the *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Humans in the Wild* (an anthology about gun violence), *Barren Magazine*, *the Westview News*, *Kinder Link*, *Maine Public*, *HuffPo*, *the LA Review*, *Rattle*, *Exchanges*, *the International Poetry Review*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *World Literature Today*, *Griffel*, *the Bridge: Journal of the Danish American Heritage Society*, *Canadian Women Studies: les cahiers de la femme*, *Griffel (Norway)* and *Persimmon Tree*. She lives in New York City and Hiram, Maine.

Candescent

My husband hadn't seen the television ad that dazzled our six-year-old daughter into believing that its slogan, You'll Love It, was Absolute Truth, so he said, "When she wanted to see tigers and giraffes, we went to the zoo. Why don't we take her to that furniture store today? She's been begging for weeks."

I acquiesced, but I wasn't happy. She was easily upset by our arguments. He wanted teak to go with his family's Danish modern cast-offs. I wanted pine because of my family's early American hand-me-downs. The two of us together in a furniture store didn't seem like a good idea.

"We're sightseeing, not buying," he whispered as the three of us climbed into our second-hand car. "It's not as if that will change our lives."

“True enough,” I said, and off we drove to the suburbs. Our disputes over décor were hypothetical—he was in law school. We could barely afford the essentials.

When we reached the store, our daughter led us across the parking lot and into a cavernous warehouse filled with acres and acres of glitz. She chattered nonstop about sparkles as we passed curvilinear coffee tables, shimmering white arabesque sofas, silver-glow armchairs, tinselly mobiles, hammered-copper dinner tables, and ersatz-crystal chandeliers.

At some point, my husband leaned toward me and mouthed, “Get me out of here.” My head ached as if I were being assaulted by strobe lights. For once we were unified.

We continued to follow our daughter. As if she knew the route from her nightly dreams, she was striding toward the heart of the showroom, where a five-foot table lamp glittered with fake jewels and mirror shard inlays. She positioned us in front of it and pushed the button on its base. Instantly we were inside a circle of brilliant light.

She stood on tiptoes at the center. I will never forget how our little girl, who loved television ballets, twirled and twirled.

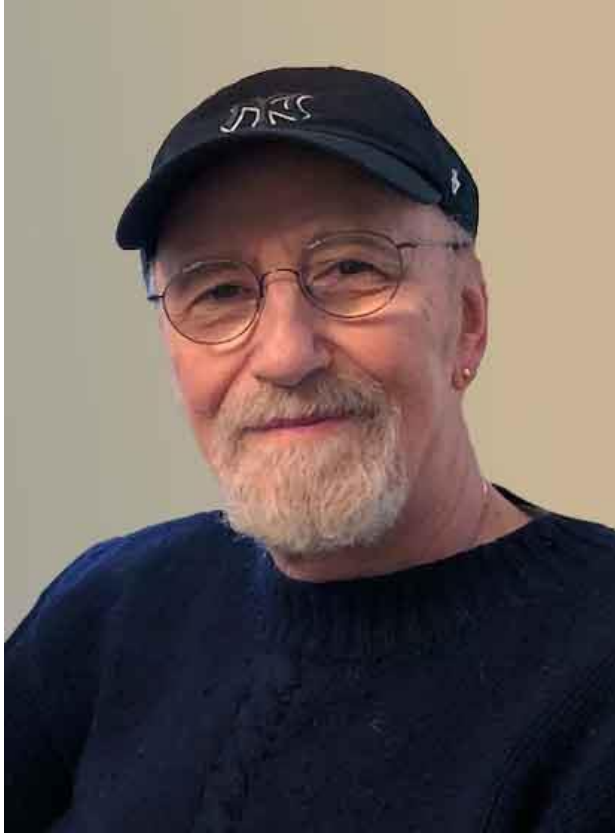
I glanced at my husband. What will we do if she wants us to buy the lamp? He had no answer.

When she finished twirling, she put my hand in his and danced ahead of us through the store. The bright light seemed to travel with her. At the entrance, she turned for one more glance. We studied her face. Was she longing for that lamp?

She was looking at us. Our fingers were entwined.

She bowed.

“I knew you would love it,” she said.



Robert Scotellaro

His work has been included in W.W. Norton's Flash Fiction International, Maryland Literary Review, Gargoyle, Matter Press, New World Writing, Best Small Fictions 2016, 2017, and 2021, Best Microfiction 2020, and elsewhere. He is the author of seven chapbooks, several books for children, and six flash fiction collections. He was the winner of Zone 3's Rainmaker Award in Poetry and the Blue Light Book Award for his fiction. His flash collection, *What Are the Chances?* (Press 53) was a finalist for the 2020 Big Other Book Award for fiction. A new chapbook of flash and micro stories, *God in a Can* (Bamboo Dart Press) is scheduled for release in 2022. He has, along with James Thomas, coedited *New Micro: Exceptionally Short Fiction*, published by W.W. Norton & Co. Robert is one of the founding donors to The Ransom Flash Fiction Collection at the University of Texas, Austin. He lives in San Francisco. Visit him at www.robertscotellaro.com

Bomb Shelter

I could almost feel my father's curious disappointment that it never happened. That searing light and disintegrating light he never had a chance to mitigate with his preparations. Those drab green cans of stacked water, rations: his and our salvation that never came to pass. That atomic realization later that anticipated things that do not occur can steer a life with hot hands on the wheel. The atomic blasts which came, were *so* ordinary: bills, the bottle, the piled up weight of days. Weeds now atop that subterranean vault—a stack of *Better Homes and Gardens* rotting in a corner, a rusted out transistor radio that never did, but should have, with staticky panic told him/us how wise, how very, very wise he'd been.



James Hanna

is a retired probation officer and a former fiction editor. His work has appeared in over thirty journals, including *Sixfold*, *Crack the Spine*, and *The Literary Review*. His books, most of which have won awards, are available on Amazon.

A Chicken Story

Lung cancer was much too ambitious when it claimed John, my youngest brother. Since he died within days of his diagnosis, he hardly seemed to have passed. Memories of him were yet pulsing in me; family photos preserved his broad grin. And his still-powerful presence, which assailed me in moments of restless sleep, was like an old familiar sweater. But it was the anecdotes John had inspired—small but enduring tales—that most effectively blunted the Reaper’s untimely blade. I have a favorite:

Before he grew into a jovial bear of a man, John was a sunny pre-schooler attending a daycare center. One day, his teacher took John and the other five-year-olds to visit a local farm. During the tour, the children watched as a callous farmer whacked off the head of a chicken. Returning home from daycare, John eagerly described this incident to the family.

Our mother, of course, was appalled. “Do you mean to tell me,” she gasped, “that you saw a farmer kill a chicken?”

“Nooo,” piped wee John, his smile wide as a barn. “The chicken was still running around.”



Melissa Chan

Her stories have been published in *Crack the Spine* and mentioned in *Glimmer Train*. She lives in Irvington, NY where she is currently working on her first novel.

Strangers At A Table

We are always better than the last time we met. We are always doing well. Under a veil of ambivalence, we smile politely at one another, holding forks, folding napkins, strangers at a table. Conversations have become arenas for bragging rights. Every opportunity is taken to extol new jobs, renovated kitchens, the alignment of the stars in our swelling galaxies. We hurry to name that thing we read that day, an intrepid factoid in that esteemed newspaper. We boast: “Did you know...?” or perhaps, “Did you read about...?” Our friendships are cemented in perfectly round stones, shiny and hollow. Saliva coats our words. Napkins take our stains. My best friend, the one with whom I will grow old when our husbands are dead and gone, pours ketchup all over her salad, something I never understood. I rehash the same funny story, sliced in mutant angles, seasoned to taste—boiled, steamed, fried. At a French bistro years later, I’ll tell it again as if it had just happened on the street that morning. My friend will smile widely, legs loose and lips wet, her greasy fork spearing the grapes and, at the idea of whipped dessert, all teeth.



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.

Lola

I am driving on the turnpike heading home late at night with the radio blasting to keep me awake. The Kinks sing *Lola* and I tap my foot to the music making the car speed up and slow down with the net cumulative effect of my driving about twenty miles over the speed limit.

Suddenly, a blue light flashes behind me, siren wailing. Pulling over I hear a voice boom out on a loudspeaker, "Turn off the motor and put your hands on the steering wheel."

I do as ordered and wait for the police officer to come up to me. It is a female officer saying, "Lower the window." I could not do that because the motor was off. The window is electric, so she signals me to get out of the car, orders me to turn, spread my legs, put my hands on the car. She pats me down, tells me to walk a straight line, which I gratefully do successfully. She requests I spread my arms, touch my nose, first with the index finger of my right hand, then my left. I pass this test.

"You realize you were exceeding the speed limit by twenty miles per hour," she asks?

"Actually officer I didn't. I was tapping my foot to the music," I tell her politely, explaining I was seduced by *Lola*.

"I see, she said, you like to dance while driving?"

"No, the music just got to me, it's a great beat," I responded

She studies me for a minute, "There's a dance down at the high school, follow me, we'll probably have a good time."