

10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES



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Welcome to Issue #28

Eight of the ten authors in this issue are appearing here for the first time, which continues my encouragement for writers to submit who have not been in 10 x 10. As always I read stories as they come in. In other words, I read submissions nearly every day and do my best to respond within thirty days. Sometimes, however, it may take longer. For those who may be submitting for the first time submit only one story that is 200 to 500 words in an attached Word.doc, along with a bio of any length and an attached head & shoulders jpeg photo. That means each submission should have three attachments to send in an email. Stories and bios should be in an easy-to-read type face, preferably 14 point Times New Roman in Word.doc. No PDFs or Google docs, etc. **Please do not submit previously published stories whether hard copy or online.** The same applies to AI. Please submit your own work. Finally, should I learn a piece is plagiarized I will notify social media so that other magazine editors are aware.

In the meantime note the stories in this issue come from various parts of the United States, including an author from India writing in California and Australia. In past issues writers have been from China, New Zealand, England, Wales, Ireland, Belarus, Ukraine, Canada, Greece, Egypt and Germany among others.

While reading these stories sit in a comfortable chair or couch, have a snack and an adult beverage or a soda, ice tea or coffee and enjoy these offerings.

Sincerely,

Zvi A. Sesling

Editor



Zvi A. Sesling, Brookline, MA Poet Laureate (2017-2020), has published numerous poems and flash fiction. He edits *10 By 10 Flash Fiction Stories*. Sesling has won international and national poetry prizes. He is a four-time Pushcart Prize poetry nominee. He has also been nominated for a flash fiction Pushcart Prize. Sesling's flash fiction book is, *Secret Behind The Gate* and his flash fiction chapbook is *Wheels*. Sesling and Paul Beckman recently collaborated on a flash fiction book *40 Stories*. His *Selected & New Poetry* will be published this summer by Big Table Publishing Company. Sesling lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.



Beth Knaus has published short stories, poetry, and op-eds. Her work has appeared in the following anthologies: *Movable Feasts: An Anthology* and *Losing the Map: Stories*. She's been nominated for the Pushcart Prize for flash fiction. She also edited and contributed to the book, *SheBreathes Soul stories: From Triumph to Transformation* and had a number of pieces published in the online publication, *On Purpose Woman Magazine*. An award-winning copywriter and messaging consultant, Beth is the owner of That's A Spade Copywriting Services. Originally from New York, she currently lives in Norwood, MA, with her husband Joe and their cat, Fifi. Her three adult children inspire her every day.

Confessions

“I stabbed my brother in the hand with my fork.”

This is how my father started these stories. Leaning in, his voice low and calm, so you had to pay attention. Full on eye contact. Hands together, fingers interlocked. He started by clearing his throat.

“We were poor, and didn’t have a lot of food. Eddie kept snatching food off my plate. I said, “Do it again, Eddie, and I’ll stab you in the hand. There was a dead-on stare-down between him and me. He just couldn’t help himself. I was no liar.

He bled pretty good.

Once he was bandaged up, I said, ‘Sorry, Eddie. I told you not to do it. But you called my bluff anyway.’”

He had scars from the tines of my fork for years.”

Then there was this one.

“I hit Liggy in the back of the head with a mallet.”

“What?” I said. “Who is Liggy?”

“He was Gigi’s boyfriend. I visited Liggy in the hospital afterwards.

Liggy said, “Billy, why the hell did you hit me in the back of the head?”

“You told me if anyone was ever hurting my mother, I should do whatever it took to protect her. I walked in, and you had her pinned to the wall by her throat, her feet dangling. So I did was told.

“You told me not to let anyone hurt my mother,” my dad said. “And you were hurting her.”

The moral of these stories?

The Griffins don’t bluff, and they don’t lie.



Litsa Dremousis (she/her) is the author of *Altitude Sickness* (Future Tense Books). Seattle Metropolitan Magazine named it one of the all-time "20 Books Every Seattleite Must Read". Her essay "After the Fire" was selected as one of the "Most Notable Essays 2011" by *Best American Essays*, and The Seattle Weekly named her one of "50 Women Who Rock Seattle". She recently left the Washington Post, where she'd been an essayist who wrote extensively about Myalgic Encephalomyelitis. Her work has also appeared in *The Believer*, *BlackBook*, *Bookmarks*, *Esquire*, *Filter*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Hobart*, *Jezebel*, *The Literary Underground*, *The Manifest Station*, *McSweeney's*, *Monkeybicycle*, *MSN*, *New York Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, *Nylon*, *The Onion's A.V. Club*, *The Organ*, *Paper*, *Paste*, *PEN Center USA*, *Poets & Writers*, *Publishers Weekly*, *The Rumpus*, *Salon*, *Slate*, *Spartan Lit*, *The Weeklings*, several anthologies, myriad other outlets, and on NPR, KUOW, and additional radio programs and podcasts. She cohosts the Myalgic Encephalomyelitis and healthcare podcast PEM Pod. litsadremousis.com, @litsadremousis.bsky.social

The Bartender

1.

The doctors think I'll be gone in a year—eighteen months, tops—and I'm curled up in bed in my Little Richard shirt and plaid pajama bottoms, updating my will.

Three years ago, I had to sell my condo to pay for medical bills, so my assets have evaporated like the water I spilled on the nightstand this morning in my dorm-like studio apartment.

It's not all bad, though.

I mean, yes, I'm going to die, and some nights am tempted to get a head start on fate. But I love Roberto and won't leave him behind before I have to. He's a tan Pom mutt I adopted eight years ago, when I was 64 and he was a puppy. Each day we go for our walks and play fetch in the nearby park and I'm convinced Roberto is the reason I can still walk at all. I use my dwindling strength to keep him happy, but my love for him is transcendent and it wouldn't occur to me to do otherwise.

I was a young-old woman when I brought him home and I thought we'd grow old-old together.

Now I must figure out who to leave him to in my will.

2.

I'm 72 and despite being in physical agony since I first became disabled with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis when I was 24, I carved out a life and kept myself in the world, whether the world wanted me to or not. I published two novels and a memoir and god knows how many short stories and essays, all written from bed. My family loved me and while my parents are long dead, I look in the mirror and see Dad's eyes and Mom's hair and sometimes they still feel near. My closest friends left Seattle years ago, but we FaceTime and text and having loved ones in most time zones works out well as the pain increases—someone's always awake.

I had great loves, but their love for me was never greater than their aversion to caretaking. Getting sick that young wrought havoc on my romantic relationships, but it's okay now.

I just want Roberto to remain gleeful as he continues to grow old without me. He licks my face and I know everything makes sense.

3.

The pain is so bad today, it literally hurts to blink.

4.

"Roberto! My little dude!" the bartender calls as we enter Winston's, the pub down the block. I can't drink because of the morphine, but the bartender is kind and keeps dog treats in a canister, so Roberto drags me here often. He fishes out a handful of biscuits and comes 'round the bar to feed them to Roberto.

Suddenly the bartender is crying.

"Man, I'm sorry," he says and wipes his face with his sleeve. "My dog just died this morning."

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“Oh, honey. How awful,” I say.

“Can I just hold Roberto for awhile?” he asks as Roberto blissfully chews.

“Of course,” I say. “Of course.”



Elan Barnehama has published two novels: *Escape Route* and *Finding Bluefield*. His flash fiction collection is forthcoming in January 2026 from Poets Wear Prada. His writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Gooseberry Pie*, *ParisLitUp*, *Synchronized Chaos*, *10 x 10 Flash Fiction*, *Boog City*, *Jewish Fiction*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Rough Cut Press*, *Boston Accent*, *Red Fez*, *Syncopation Lit*, *HuffPost*, public radio, and more. Elan served as the flash fiction editor at *ForthMagazineLA*, was a radio news guy, and a mediocre short-order cook. He's a New Yorker by default and a Mets fan by geography. More @ <https://elanbarnehama.com>

Maps

Ben was ten when Emma decided they needed maps. Paper maps, atlases, globes. Ancient drawings that recorded the past, and new images that charted a future. The examining began close to home, but quickly ventured beyond the neighborhood, to all of NYC, and then everywhere and anywhere. The harder the name the more curious. Ideas as maps Dylan sang. Maps as ideas, Ben countered.

A year later when Emma left for college, she told Ben he didn't need a map to find himself. For that, he needed some thing he loved and to make it his. And, she added, he needed people. But they were hard to come by, she cautioned, adding that he would lose more friends than he would keep. This is the way it is for everyone, she sighed.

When Emma returned from her first year Ben showed her a 15th Century map of Paris he found at the Strand. Later, when Ben thought back on that day, he wondered why he hadn't seen it coming. He did not understand how his ordinary day could unfold while he remained unaware of the approaching doom.

At the service, he placed Emma's favorite map inside her coffin while he told her that he'd lost the path that could get him through his day intact.

He told her he needed to find her again. She was his people. He told her that as soon as he was able, he would set out from there to the rest of the world.



Paul Stapleton has published fiction in *Aethlon*, *Ruminate*, *storySouth* and various other literary journals, including a short story in *J Journal* that was selected for the *Pushcart Prize XXXVII* anthology. A graduate of Boston College, he has taught in high schools, prisons, and universities primarily in North Carolina but also in New York City, Chicago, and Houston. He currently teaches at North Carolina Central University, a public HBCU.

Pizzeria Ethics

Nico greeted Stanley as always, “Ciao, Professore!”

The night before, Stanley had called in his order, telling Nico he needed the pies at 2:30 pm, on the dot, so he could get to the prison on time. Stanley knew the pizza ovens would be empty, the lunch crowd dispersed, the school kids not piling in yet.

Like clockwork, the twelve pies now rested on the counter, stacked in two neat columns, boxed and ready to go, enough pizza for all the students, courtesy of the Prison Education Program.

Stanley had finally gotten the program up and running despite years of resistance at every turn.

As Stanley was paying, Nico said, “I hope you’re not feeding the criminals for free.” Then he added with a leer, “What’s in it for you, Boss?”

With a twist at the hip, ever so slightly, Nico hiked a buttock.

Laughter arose from the oven boys.

Embarrassment flushed across Stanley’s face.

“I’ve been coming here a long time, Nico” Stanley said. “I’ve always liked you and your business, but I am free to take my business elsewhere.”

This was not exactly true. The party was that afternoon, the final day of the semester. He needed the pizzas pronto so he could reach the middle of nowhere where the prison was located before the warden left to go home. That was the agreement.

Stanley tried to focus, rifling through his options. The national chains were unacceptable, their pies imposters for pizza: prepackaged generic saline slag. Besides, Stanley hated their impersonality, their staffs an anonymous stream of minimum-wage hirees. There was Uptown Slim’s, but Slim was good for gab, not speed.

Stanley was in a bind.

Nico and the oven boys stood by in silence.

The scent of the pizzas wafted from the counter.

Stanley’s stomach growled.

“Come on, Boss,” Nico said. “We’re just joking around here.”

Despite the concession, Stanley didn’t like the term “Boss.” It was condescending. Nico still considered this his game.

“There’s nothing funny,” Stanley replied, “about my line of work.”

Of course, his line of work was not throwing pizza parties. He was a member of the university professoriate, not a party clown, but at this point, the line was drawn in the sand.

Stanley held Nico’s eye.

Nico stared back.

Stanley had played this game with too many students in too many classes not to know how to win.

Nico, seeing the firmness in Stanley’s face, flung up his hands in defeat. “Okay, I apologize.”

Stanley was victorious.

He paid for the pizzas and gathered up the first stack of pies to carry to his car.

Inside himself, he felt righteously vindicated.

When he returned for the second stack, however, there was none to be found. Instead, several bills lay on the counter.

Devious smiles spread across the oven boys’ faces.

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“We’re short six pies,” Nico said, scooping up the cash and offering it to Stanley. “I’m sorry. But please, tell me, the murderers, thieves, and rapists, do you make them apologize?”



Swetha Amit is an Indian author based in California and an MFA graduate from the University of San Francisco. Her works across genres appear in *Atticus Review*, *Had*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, *Maudlin House*, and *Oyez Review*. (<https://swethaamit.com>). She has received three Pushcart and Best of the Net nominations.

Playing Scrabble

For what felt like the last time, I visited my eighty-year-old Grandma in her San Jose one-bedroom apartment, where she had lived for the past twenty years. She slumped awkwardly between the pale white sheets, her legs immobile after the accident a few months ago near the steps to her apartment, while the soft hum of the fan filled the room, carrying the scent of the talcum powder she consistently applied after her bath. The photo of my dead Grandpa hung on the wall, where the cream paint was wearing off, and cracks were visible. Her full-time caretaker stood beside her, holding a glass of orange juice that Grandma liked to drink every morning.

Grandma's face broke into a smile when I walked in. She beckoned me with her wrinkled right hand, bulging with veins, and pointed to the Scrabble board beside her, pretending everything was fine. I sat beside her, leaned in, and hugged her. I could feel a sting of tears at the back of my neck. I signaled to the caretaker to hand me the glass of orange juice before leaving the room. Ma excused herself, too.

Grandma released me from her embrace and took a sip of the juice.

"I'm ok, Pinky," she said.

I knew she wasn't. I could hear the clock ticking seconds on her nightstand.

"Let's play," she began, arranging the letters on the board.

A lump formed in my throat.

Granma made her first word: Walk.

"Your turn," she said.

Her eyes held a dreamy look. She was probably reminiscing about her morning walks in the neighborhood garden, where she would pluck hibiscus flowers, listen to the birds chirping, watch the bees buzzing around the roses, and see squirrels scrambling up the branches of trees dripping with the morning dew.

I came up with my word: waited.

Over the past twenty years, Grandma witnessed her husband's death in the hospital, navigated Ma's sudden divorce, healed my heartbreaks, faced my struggles with alcohol, dealt with my troubled career, experienced my rushed wedding to a guy I dated for only a year, and cared for a seven-year-old great-grandson. Grandma always said things would turn out ok in the end. It always did. With a successful marriage, a career as a software engineer, a cozy home in Mountain View, and quitting alcohol, things were fine. Ma, too, revived her career as a student counselor in a private school.

Grandma arranged the letters to the word 'time'

I longed to play more Scrabble games with her, like in the old days. Yet, the thought of her living a life reliant on others, even for relieving her bowels, felt selfish on my part. For a moment, the room was suddenly enveloped in darkness. She took a deep breath. I didn't want her to leave anytime soon.

"Come on, play," she urged.

I racked my brain and formed the word: 'hope.'

Her eyes appeared brighter.

"It will be ok," she smiled, taking another sip of the orange juice.



Brenna Walch is the poetry editor for the online literary magazine *Lodestar Lit* and an MFA student in Creative Writing Fiction at West Virginia Wesleyan College. Her poetry has been published in *Oddball Magazine*, and her fiction has been published in *Sky Island Journal*, *Jokes Literary Review*, and *All Your Stories*. Brenna is currently working on a novel duology, a short fiction collection, and a few creative nonfiction pieces.

Wanderlust

It's a habit.

I got to downtown cafés I've never been to before and will never visit again. I bring a tote bag or a backpack, depending on the vibe. Some places are modern minimalist; some are *Howl's Moving Castle* meets Versailles. I order a drink I've never tasted—affogato, recently, and something called The French Capo—and I sit down with a book, the title of which will catch a few customers' eyes.

I observe the types: college-hoodied twenty-somethings laughing on a date; businesswomen in sensible blouses and '90s flats; SoundCloud artists who are two life choices away from a better job; thrift store girlyies with bleach-blond hair and handheld wallets themed like the furthest possible beach. I consider making them characters but never go through with it.

I think about the next four hours of this, of savoring every coffee order's scents, of noting the décor and the other menu items I'm missing out on like the homemade cinnamon buns pre-wrapped at the cash register. I think of driving to a valet-only bar later tonight and pretending I'm single or pretending I'm not but am in the process of being stood-up. I wonder who else is pretending.

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I leave at closing time, and on the drive home, I imagine myself on a plane flight far away from here, from every café I've ever known, seated first class and staring earnestly out the window, maybe with a coffee in hand, wishing I could kick the habit.



Marc Frazier has been published in more than a hundred journals. A recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Award for poetry, Marc Frazier has also been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and two “Best of the Nets.” His four books are available online. His latest poetry book, *If It Comes To That* recently won Silver in the Florida Writers Association Royal Palm Literary Awards contest. He has published a great deal of flash fiction, essays, and memoir pieces. Marc, an LGBTQ author, can be found on his website www.marcfrazierwrites.com

The Outing

He knew his father wouldn’t buy him anything. “Crying is pointless,” the smartly tailored father said to his young son as they exited FAO Schwarz and continued along Michigan Avenue. “Stop it right now. You already have more junk than I could ever have imagined at your age.” The boy let out his last uneven sobs and snuffles as he wiped the back of his hands across his eyes. “See, that wasn’t so hard.”

“This used to be the place to be but now this city has so many thugs smashing windows, taking what doesn’t belong to them, not to mention all the muggings in broad daylight.” The boy wasn’t really listening as he watched the crowds of people and looked into windows when something caught his eye. “This town has gone to the dogs,” the father muttered in conclusion.

“Are you hungry?” the father asked. The boy shrugged his shoulders knowing the decision wouldn’t be up to him. “How about the Rock ‘n Roll McDonalds?” This was the one offering the father felt most proud of as he believed it proved he could think of someone besides himself. Now he was the best dad.

The boy would have liked to skip lunch and go to the Lego Store at Water Tower Place, and though he knew he wouldn’t be able to take anything away with him, it would be fun while it lasted. But he’d heard his dad say on several occasions that Water Tower was now “ghetto” after Macy’s abandoned eight floors, and he knew they wouldn’t go there.

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“Okay”

“It’s a deal.”

The boy almost expected his father to shake his hand, for that would be the image the boy would always remember. The shaking of hands.



Lucinda Kempe's work is forthcoming in *Salvage*, *Summerset Review*, *SoFloPoJo*, *Bull*, *Does It Have Pockets*, *Gooseberry Pie*, *New Flash Fiction Review* and *Centaur*, among places. An excerpt of her memoir was short listed for the Fish Memoir Prize in April 2021. She lives on Long Island where she exorcises with words. You can find her here: <https://lucindakempe.substack.com>

Angel in America

Art Girl got off at Fifth Avenue, following the mosaic of monkeys, penguins, parrots and ducks, clutching her Angels in America tote in both hands. Her English aunt had willed the bag to her saying, “The play was a pivotal turning point in gay drama and in my world. I lost my beloved friend to AIDS.”

On the avenue she saw the girl with the ugly boots covered in brass studs and the other girl, who had obsessively re-braided her plait on the train. Art Girl had good peripheral vision. A tall blond man passed by, and she rendered him with a Kabuki face—red orange around the eyes and up the forehead. Then a woman with bare legs, one purple, one red, who slipped on the sidewalk but recovered.

She knew about the absence of color. On the class trip to MOMA, she'd fallen in love with M.C. Escher's woodcuts of weird babies and trees. Escher understood the power of gradations of “gray and weirdness.” She liked it; she'd get over it shorty. The Rhode Island School of Design said good things about her notebooks. Now to apply. Complete the whole portfolio.

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A year later she still had her Angels in America tote and took it with her everywhere. It was as important to her as her art. It felt good to have known someone who was as different as she was. A comfort.

Lately, she'd begun experimenting with inks and watercolors. Ink bled better than watercolor, but she loved her new Windsor & Newton set, the minute half-pans in the little box with its removable water container—a gift from Baba. They suggested to her that England, perhaps, would be a place to live one day, though she'd heard it was cold, and damp and the food was unacceptable. But England must be a place full of exacting people like her beloved aunt who troubled themselves with important details and made sure to pass on valuable information.

She considered herself a sensible unusual girl.



Mackenzie Meeker resides in Mentor, Ohio. Her works of poetry such as “Iphigenia to King Agamemnon” and “A Wife’s Duty to her Husband” (satirical poem) have appeared in the first edition of the *Lake Erie College Literary Magazine: Lake Erie Echos*. She has also been featured on the Lake Erie Website for winning the Dawn Powell and Kate Carter writing contest for her poem “Papa is There” and her research paper “A Queen’s mourning and her influence on the Victorian Era”. Mackenzie is working on a poetry book titled *The Burden of Grief at a Funeral*. Mackenzie dedicates everything she writes to her grandpa, James Owens, who passed away in 2023.

Alarm Clock

I stand at work with an old alarm clock in my hands. It’s moments like this that I think of Papa. It’s weird because as I was holding this clock trying to figure out how to change the time on it. I thought back to living with my grandparents and having a room next to Papa when I was little. His alarm clock would faintly go off at four in the morning, when he was still working at his job programming items like computers. I loved Papa a lot and since I knew he got up early, I would fall asleep in the hallway for him to wake me up and tuck me back into bed, met with a kiss on the top of the head. Sometimes I would wake to his alarm and quickly go to the hallway and pretend I was sleeping, just to have a moment of interaction with him.

When Papa did not work anymore and his dementia kept him in archaic times, he would still use an alarm clock, except it never went off again. This alarm clock would stay in constant limbo on his bedside table never singing again. The

only time Papa would truly touch the clocks was when daylight savings occurred. He would ask if I turned my clock back and I would tell him my phone completed that action for me. He always was mystified by this as his dementia seemed to give him a childhood curiosity and spark that never gave out. It's weird holding this alarm clock in my hands and realizing that Papa will never need one again.

I can't figure the alarm clock out and none of the buttons want to work. It's moments like this I wish Papa were here to help me.



Leonie Jarrett lives in Melbourne, Australia, with her husband of more than three decades, two of her four adult children and her two Golden Retriever dogs.

Anniversary Dinner

Seamus had picked the restaurant on the fifty-fifth floor of the Ritz Carlton Hotel for our anniversary dinner. Luckily, he didn't tell me where we were going until we arrived at the private lift.

Luckily, because I am claustrophobic. The idea of being in a lift whilst I journey fifty-five floors is enough to catapult me back home to Thai takeaway on the couch. Seamus and I are going through a rough patch and I hadn't even felt like going out tonight. Now, I have to cope with fifty-five floors of prison.

The lift doors glide open, revealing a gleaming, mirrored enclosed space to whisk me fifty-five floors up.

"I don't think I can do it Seamus," I murmur nervously.

"Of course you can," says Seamus dismissively.

Seamus places his hand on my back and guides me inside the lift. "Close your eyes if you have to Lindy. I really don't know why you carry on like this."

Carry on? I can't help it. I silently fume.

I shut my eyes and my heart thumps harder and harder. I hear the lift doors shut and I know that I am now captive. My breathing is already shallow.

I try and remember the breathing technique that my psychologist has practised with me...*Breathe in through your nose for four seconds. Hold your breath for two seconds. Breathe out through your nose for six seconds.*

I am concentrating so hard on not panicking and on my breathing that I don't hear what Seamus is saying to me. "Sorry, what did you say?" I whisper, digging my fingernails into my thighs, still with my eyes closed.

"You hold the stick too tight Lindy, that's why you get so anxious. Just relax. We're having a special night out without the kids. Mum is babysitting. She's always telling me that you're too wound up. That's why I splurged this year on this fancy place. Let go of this stupid fear. You never used to be like this."

If I wasn't so freaking terrified, I would blow my top. *How dare Seamus say that to me?* But I'm so close to having a panic attack that I don't have the energy to say anything. *God, when are we going to get there? How long does it take to travel fifty-five floors anyway?*

"Lindy, are you listening to me? I said you need to chill out. Mum says that time just you and me is really valuable. You're ruining it."

*Ruining it am I? I'm just staving off a panic attack but I am ruining the night. And since when did my mother-in-law become a f***ing marriage counsellor?*

I hear the lift ding to signal that we have arrived. *Thank God, I made it.*

I start to gulp for air and I leap out of the lift as soon as the doors open.

"Come on Lindy. Lighten up," says Seamus, irritated.

This is shaping up to be a great dinner. Not.