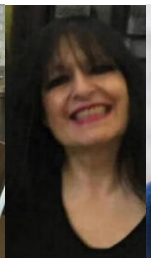
10 BY 10

FLASH FICTION STORIES

Issue 40, June 2026


Elaine Terranova


Cindy Rosmus


Don Tassone


Lisa N. Peters

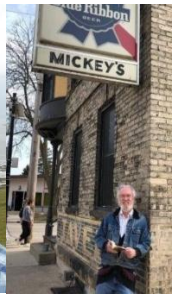

Robert Nisbet


Vallie Lynn Watson


Ken Kapp


Beth Sherman


Marc Audet



Roy Dorman

*W*elcome to our milestone Issue #40! We are thrilled that we have seven new contributors with very interesting and enjoyable stories. We are embarking on our fourth year and are proud that the magazine has featured writers from Uruguay, New Zealand, Australia, Ukraine, Belarus, Canada, Wales, England, France, China, Vietnam, India, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, Italy, Greece, Germany Nigeria, Ghana, Brazil, Ireland, South Africa and many parts of the United States. We will continue to publish writers who have never been published or have not previously published flash fiction as well as establish writers from whatever genre they have publish before. And we especially thank all our readers.

So, get a comfortable chair or couch, a cold or warm drink, perhaps a cookie and sit back, relax and enjoy these stories.

Zvi A. Sesling

Editor

Zvi A. Sesling, Brookline, MA Poet Laureate (2017-2020), has published numerous poems and flash fiction. He edits the online magazine *10 By 10 Flash Fiction Stories.* Sesling has won international and national poetry prizes. He is a five-time poetry Pushcart Prize nominee and a flash fiction story was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His flash fiction book is *Secret Behind The Gate* and his flash fiction chapbook is *Wheels.* Sesling and Paul Beckman co-authored the flash fiction book *40 Stories.* Sesling lives in Brookline, MA with his wife Susan J. Dechter.

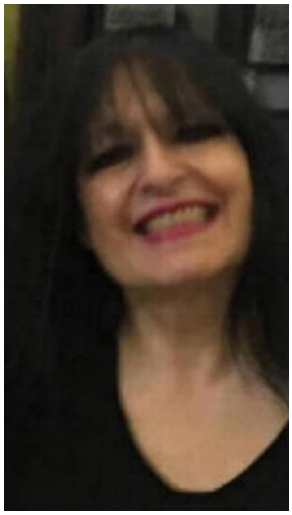
Elaine Terranova was born in Philadelphia where she still lives. She has taught at the Community College of Philadelphia and Temple University. She has published ten poetry collections and a memoir, *The Diamond Cutter's Daughter*. Awards include a Pushcart Prize, PA, NEA and Pew Fellowships, and the Walt Whitman Award.

At Dinner

There is the winter the older daughter comes to dinner every night wearing her coat. It is a ski jacket, waist length, beige with one curved stripe each of light blue, medium blue, and darker blue swooping around one side. She turns up the collar like pointy wings, as is the teen fashion. She keeps the jacket zipped at least part way up, even while eating. The mother and the father try to get her to take it off. "Take off your coat and stay a while," the mother says. "Why is she wearing her jacket?" the father asks the mother. "Are you going somewhere?" he asks the older daughter. "I'm cold, she says. "Turn the heat up," the mother tells her. "How about putting on a sweater?" says the father.

Dinner is more or less at the same time it has always been, 6 or 6:30, either before or after the father watches the news. The mother finishes setting the table or asks the younger daughter to do it if she is around. A paper napkin gets folded under each fork on the left, spoon/knife go on the right. This is also the winter the older daughter stops being good at setting the table. In the drawer the stainless steel forks are all kept together though they are different sizes, dinner forks and dessert forks. The older daughter disregards the difference, just picking up the first forks that come to hand and putting them on the table so that the mother, father, and younger daughter sometimes end up going back to the silverware drawer or else bearing their main course on very short forks. "Who cares?" the older daughter says, her chicken only half finished. "It's still a fork. May I be 'scused?"

Her sleeves make the nylon sound of cars speeding by on wet pavement as she gets up to put her plate in the sink. It is still before dessert. She goes upstairs to her room and shuts the door. But while the older daughter has become careless about how she sets the table, she has become efficient at clearing it. "I'm not finished with that," says the father when the older daughter, her own plate in one hand, picks up his salad bowl as she turns to put dishes in the sink on her way out the door. "Just leave them," says the mother. "Where did the dressing go?" asks the father, looking around for it. "What happened to the butter?" The older daughter has put them back in the fridge but it is too late to ask her to return them to the table. She is already halfway up the stairs. "I'm finished. May I be 'scused?" says the older daughter and leaves her jacket hissing and deflating on the chair.



Cindy Rosmus is a diehard Jersey girl who talks like Anybodys from *West Side Story* and everybody from *Saturday Night Fever*. Her noir/horror/bizarro stories have been published in places like *Shotgun Honey*, *Megazine*, *Dark Dossier*, *Danse Macabre*, *The Rye Whiskey Review, Under the Bleachers*, *Punk Noir*, *Rock and a Hard Place* and *Gemini*. Her story "Toast, Jello, Tea" was nominated for both the 2025 Pushcart and Best Small Fictions prize. She is the editor/art director of *Yellow Mama* and has published seven collections of short stories. Cindy is a Gemini, a Christian, and an animal rights advocate.

Isabel

1986

Isabel, right? I was sick of hearing about her.

Pop's friend, from Boxer's Brew, where he hung out. How he talked about her, you'd think he'd forgot all about Mama, dead six months.

"Let's go see my girl," he'd said, smiling, as we walked up to the casket, arm-in-arm. Mama, in that sea-green outfit I'd found in her suitcase. With hospital cotton still stuck to her arm.

Then, suddenly, "Isabel." Over the phone, I heard Pop's smile. "She's a nice girl. Takes care of sick people. In their homes." Like he wished he was sick. "She wears real short skirts."

Since Mama passed, Pop talked weird, sometimes. More like a kid.

"She plays Madonna on the jukebox. Sometimes she dances for us."

"A stripper?" I yelled.

No!" Pop sounded sad. "Isabel plays shuffleboard with me. She lets me win."

I sighed. "Good."

Five days later, I felt something was wrong. This strange pain in the back of my head, I got at times. When I called Pop, he didn't pick up. And he hadn't called me.

If he wasn't home, he was . . .

Not here." Mack owned Boxer's. His getting on the phone scared me.

In the background was a girlish voice. "We're worried, too," he told me.

I called the supers in Pop's building. "Mary," Tony's wife whined, "Can't you come check yourself?"

"Please?"

I knew what was coming. A half hour later, the phone rang.

"Oh, my God!" Tony's wife screamed. Behind her was static radio. Cops. "Mary, he's dead! All purple, swollen . . . Like three times his . . . That room! And that *smell*!" She retched. Puke splashed somewhere.

Thanks, I thought, hanging up. For sugarcoating it.

At Pop's, it was still chaos. But Pop, in a bodybag, was gone. Not the smell, so I opened the windows and breathed nice, cold air. Sucked down the last beer left in the fridge.

Nosy neighbors lined the hallway. Tony's wife sobbed like she'd been Pop's instead.

At Boxer's, Mack held my hand tightly. "I'm sorry," he said. Then, "Come meet Isabel." Like she was a celebrity.

Perched on her regular stool, Isabel was a Madonna wannabe: bleached hair; a hot-pink headband with this huge bow. A crop top in winter, and tiny black skirt. Her musky perfume was as overpowering as the stench of death I'd just left.

She practically fell off the stool to run and hug me. Hanging on me, she exploded in sobs. "Stan," she said, "I mean, your Pop . . ."

I backed away and looked at her. Eye makeup all runny, but she left it. "He was my . . . best friend. He . . ." Through her tears, her smile showed a mouthful of ugly metal. "Paid for my braces."

I hugged myself, tight. "He what?" I whispered.

"So I could be pretty," she said, "Like his daughter."

Now I was crying. "Guess he had two."

Don Tassone is the author of two novels, one novella, 11 short story collections and one children's book. He lives in Loveland, Ohio.

No More Fun

My wife and I went to dinner with two other couples. They all ordered steaks, but I wasn't hungry. Maybe I should have taken my GLP-I earlier in the day.

One of the couples had us over to their house afterwards. Everybody else was drinking, but I'd avoided alcohol ever since the link with cancer.

It was a nice night, and the guys went out back and lit up cigars. I'd given up smoking, and I was concerned about second-hand smoke, so I went inside and hung out with the ladies.

After a while, I got up and walked around. I'd read that too much sitting hinders circulation.

By the time we left, I could barely keep my eyes open, so my wife drove home. I'd stopped drinking coffee to avoid heart palpitations, and I tired easily.

That night, I woke up in a cold sweat. I'd been dreaming I was riding a motorcycle, something I hadn't done since I was in my twenties. So dangerous.

I tried to get back to sleep because I'd read insomnia leads to cognitive decline, but now I was wide awake. So I lay there, thinking about how healthy and dull my life had become.

Lisa N. Peters, New York, New York, is an art historian who has published extensively on US art, from the colonial era to the present (Lnpeters.com). Her book, *Reframing Allegory in Work by American Women Painters of the Gilded Age—Six Case Studies*, is forthcoming in summer 2026 from Routledge Press. She is currently focusing on fiction, including ekphrastic writing, flash fiction, and a historical novel. Her work has appeared in *Shortbeasts Flash Fiction Literary Magazine*.

Duct Tape

Luckily, I remember the roll of duct tape in the cabinet by the door. Glad no scissors are needed, I tear a piece and place it over the crack in the pot. It's my mother's pot, alone on a plexiglass stand. The white tape now covers the purple flower that reminded my mother of her childhood garden. I know she'll say I must have elbowed the pot out of sloppiness because I'm uncaring about what matters to her. I've flown from New York to Portland, Oregon, to attend a wedding, and she has already given me an earful about how I hadn't come just to see her.

While my mother takes a nap I know will be short, I assure myself that I can store away her critical voice—looping that I never do anything right, that I've never done anything right. Yet I can't avoid telling her about the pot and that my marriage has broken up. She will see this as: number one, my fault, and number two: I shouldn't have married him in the first place.

What he and I had has stopped working. Even duct tape can't fix it. When I told him to find something he cares about, he was taciturn and resentful of my tenure and students. Dragging his feet, he has left his boxes stacked by our apartment door, while I'm impatient to have the space to myself without his self-pity and aimless wandering.

Thinking I'm fragile, my mother will say, "I know this hurts and that you need me to help you through it." I will let her words flow over me even though a few might hit their mark. Sometimes I never want to hear her voice again, but this isn't enough to justify estrangement.

Suddenly it's clear the crack is widening, making the "irreplaceable" pot unstable. I support it by wrapping an arm around it, one hand trying to keep it from splitting apart. The duct tape roll is in my other hand. However, I can't break off a piece of tape without letting go of the pot.

Robert Nisbet is a Welsh writer who turned from prose to poetry in 2005, having earlier published six short story collections, one of them, *Sounds of the Town* (Alun Books, 1983) being shortlisted for the Dylan Thomas Award, alongside books by writers like William Boyd and Jane Gardam. His subsequent poetry has been widely published in Britain and the USA, where he had had four nominations for the Pushcart Prize. In Wales his collection, *In a Small County*, was published in 2025 by Seventh Quarry Press, of Swansea. Now, it seems, it's back to prose.

Post-match

It was nearing half-past nine, Saturday night and Joe and Larry (they were ten and eight) were threatened by a looming bedtime. They'd had a good enough evening, The Generation Game on television, a quick game of cards with Mum, before browsing their beloved football mags. They wouldn't be allowed to stay up for Match of the Day. In the background was the knowledge that around eleven their Dad would be getting home. How drunk he'd be you couldn't say. Sometimes it was awful, the shouting and the anger. Other times it would just be mumbling and boring.

In the week he wasn't too bad. He didn't take too much interest in them though, and regularly grumbled about their fascination for football. And things had really flared on Wednesday, the day of the mid-week international, with their local boy Cliff Hamilton making a début for Wales. After the rush of their enthusiasm their Dad had roared in anger, "There's too much bloody sport in this house. Football, football, bloody football." He crashed the door noisily behind him as he left for work.

They heard him come in, not too angrily this time, around half-past ten, and saw him next at the breakfast table. Between their places was what looked like a glossy magazine, its cover torn a little raggedly, and with clear signs of beer-stains. "Got you this," he said. "I thought you'd like it." And by way of explanation, "Somebody must have left it in the pub."

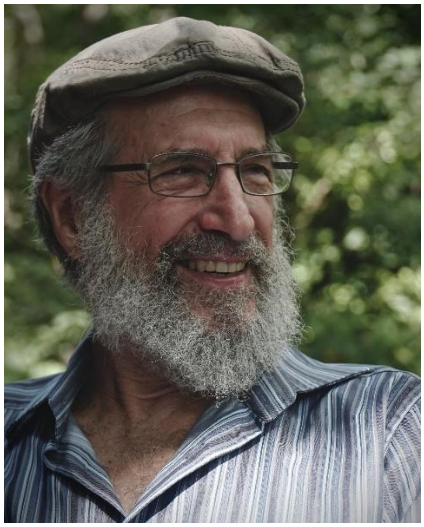
It was an official match programme from the mid-week game in Cardiff. Larry shouted, as their Dad was heading off to work, "Look Joe, it's the programme. That's great. that's just what we wanted." And Joe, two sad years older, thought, Yes, in a way.

Vallie Lynn Watson is the author of the novel *A River So Long* (Luminis Books); her work has recently appeared in *Midway Journal, Moon City Review, Bending Genres*, and more. Watson teaches in the MFA program at McNeese State University, and edits the magazine *Boudin*. She is an avid seaglass collector.

The Last Hello

We decided to have a goodbye party every January 26th, to honor the brothers' last show. We'd stayed that night, of course, long after the concert ended, lingered in the burgundy velvet seats, lingered in the back during the load out, lingered in the grand stairwell after the first doors shut, lingered in the lobby until the second doors shut, lingered on the sidewalk, then lingered the entire trek back to my hotel.

The hotel was unexpectedly quaint for this part of the city, so we decided we'd hold our yearly bon voyage parties there. Our first year, we sent a tangerine-scented invitation to the two of them, the brothers, even though we knew our attempts would be worthless; they wouldn't come even if they did receive the bid. Our second year, we walked over to the vacant theatre at 3am, danced under the gilded marquee, and sang the setlist from their last show. Our third year, we conducted a radio interview with the other brother, in the wood-paneled hotel library. We settled on worn leather couches, he settled in an overstuffed chair, his feet propped on an ottoman, a fake fire beaconing behind him. Our fourth year, my hotel was less quaint. This year will be our last.



Kenneth M. Kapp was a Professor of Mathematics, a ceramicist, a welder, an IBMer, and yoga teacher. He lives with his wife in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, writing late at night in his mancave. He enjoys chamber music and mysteries. His stories have appeared in more than one hundred publications worldwide including *The Saturday Evening Post* and *October Hill Magazine*. Please visit www.kmkbooks.com.

So Pretty

It was the end of March; the weather was perfect for walking. Until the weather warmed, Leon had the park much to himself but now others joined him. He didn't mind; he walked as he always did, moving his arms and humming. If people stared at him or moved to the side when he walked by, so be it. After all, the park was for everybody, including him. He felt sorry that they couldn't hear the wonderful music and he swept his arms up and down like a good conductor in front of a world-class symphony orchestra. The dried leaves left on the branches needed to know when to waggle to make crinkling sounds and birds high up in trees watched for their queues to enter with tweets. Even the people walking by had to watch for his signals to keep the cadence with their steps.

He smiled and danced with the melodies, gently waving downwards with his hands when the wind should hush, or point up and over when a car had to enter with a blaring honk for a modern composition.

Leon came to his favorite section of the walk – the bridge crossing a ravine that ran down to a small pond. There were two sandstone lions at both ends, one on each side of the path, guarding the way, sitting proudly on a pedestal. He stopped, let silence fill the music, and then walked closer to feel their breath.

How sad they look. I bet they haven't had a bite to eat in decades. He leaned forward. *And the elements haven't been kind – just look at the wrinkles under their eyes!*

Leon had an idea. He laughed. *I know exactly what they need!*

That evening he went to his neighborhood drugstore and bought a few items. The following morning, he drove to several thrift shops, making a purchase here and another there until he was satisfied that he had enough for his purposes.

He was happy as a lark though he was not sure he had ever seen one. The moon was waning and in four days there would be only faint stars to light the firmament. He could hardly wait.

When the time came, he dressed all in black and put a black face mask left from the COVID epidemic in the pocket of his coat. At midnight he went to visit his lion friends.

The next morning, early walkers in the park were surprised to see that the lions were wearing Easter bonnets and smiled with brightly colored lips. The nails in their forepaws displayed all the colors of the rainbow, crumbs of the pastel chalk spreading around the base of the pedestals.

That afternoon when Leon walked through the park he was singing, “They’re pretty, so pretty, they’re fine.”

Beth Sherman's novella-in-flash, *How to Get There from Here*, will be published in July 2026 by Ad Hoc Fiction. She has had more than 250 stories featured in literary journals, including *Ghost Parachute, Fictive Dream*, *Bending Genres* and *Smokelong Quarterly*, where she's a Submissions Editor. Her work appears in *Best Microfiction 2024* and 2026 and *Best Small Fictions 2025*. The author of five mystery novels, she can be reached on social media @bsherm36.

Quirks

When Lucy comes home, she removes every piece of clothing she wore to school. Blazer, blouse, skirt, knee socks, penny loafers, underpants. Then, she fixes herself a peanut butter and honey sandwich and watches the latest episode of Bluey. *Darling, you must get dressed*, says my wife who has spent the day ordering more things we don't need. *Six-year-olds can't walk around naked all the time.* Lucy ignores her. Ignores me too, when I emerge from hours of staring at a screen, watching the market plunge. *Do something*, my wife whispers later, in bed. Can I forcibly put Lucy's clothes back on? It's not like when she was a baby and we powdered her naked bottom. *Is this really so bad?* I ask rhetorically. *She has the rest of her life to feel self-conscious*.

But my wife insists we take Lucy to a therapist. The office is in one of those soulless skyscrapers downtown. There are dolls in the waiting room, some of them nude. We've been asked to bring in Lucy's drawings – all of which feature moody gray stick figures at the beach with mouths agape, mid-scream.

Who are those people? I asked her once. *Do we know them?*

She merely shrugged and handed me her socks.

She's a good kid. Does well in school. Has plenty of friends. Everyone's got their quirks. For instance, I cannot sit in a chair unless it faces a door, which my wife finds inexplicable.

The therapist is a woman with a posh British accent and glasses hanging from a chain. First, she talks to Lucy alone. Then she ushers my wife and I into her office while Lucy puts

together a puzzle of otters having tea. Many girls in Lucy's first grade class are seeing a psychologist. I've encountered the children at birthday parties -- in designer outfits for kids. The mothers are too thin, like my wife. They wear workout clothes all day long, not just at the gym. They go to the same doctor for Botox treatments, read the same self-help books, vacation at the same resorts.

When I met my wife, we were both 45. Thrilled when Lucy arrived, hopeful about the future. *We can't continue this way*, my wife is telling the therapist. And I realize she's not talking about Lucy – our daughter's feral behavior, her defiance. She means my failings as a husband and father. My financial struggles. My inability to make small talk at the club. My quirks. I want to defend myself but can't find the right words. My wife's anger washes over me, vast and relentless as a wave. I imagine how we'd look to an observer watching from one of those two-way mirrors – her yelling, me watching her helplessly. What they'd think as I slowly remove my suit jacket, shirt, tie, belt, pants, shoes – my wife screaming at me to *stop goddamn it*, the therapist staring with her cool, clinical gaze, like she's looking at Lucy's picture of someone drowning.

Marc Audet lives near New Haven, Connecticut, where he is self-employed as a web application developer. His short stories, creative nonfiction, and poetry have appeared in *Across the Margin, Flash Fiction Magazine, Uppagus, Rappahannock Review, The Prose Poem, The Gilded Weathervane, Flash Boulevard, Suddenly and Without Warning* and elsewhere.

Girls of Good Character

On Good Friday, Dublin endured a well deserved penance of miserable rain. On her way to Rathmines Shopping Centre, Mary passed Our Lady's Girls School where she was the head girl in the senior class. All the teachers held Mary in high esteem, except the principal, Sister Veronica, who disliked Mary even more when she got the lead in the senior musical instead of Nora, the principal's charming but unremarkable niece. Nora was the principal's darling and could do no wrong.

Though the school was closed, the chapel was open. Mary, partly to get out of the rain, stepped in for a quick prayer. The racks of votive candles were empty because of the holy day, yet she smelled something burning, a whiff drifting in from the front entrance. As she approached the vestibule, she heard whispering, then sniffed the stale odor of cigarettes.

Nora and two other girls from the school were horrified when they saw Mary looking at them.

"You EEJITS! Smoking on school property, in the chapel, on Good Friday?"

"Mary! What are you doing here?" said Nora.

"Nora, of all people, you should know better."

"Mary, you can't tell, otherwise we'll all be suspended."

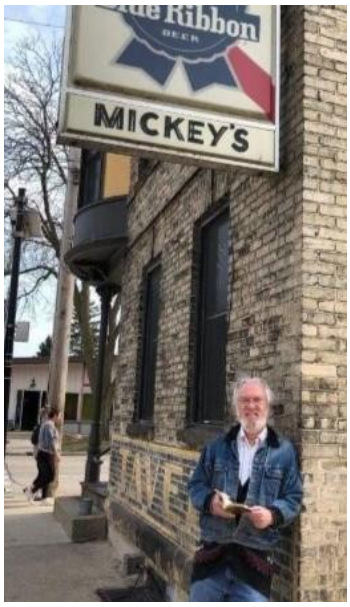
"You know the School Code. I need to report this."

"But there's no one here. No one needs to know. Remember, don't judge and you will not be judged? Besides, we'll say that you were smoking too!"

Mary called Nora's bluff.

"Your aunt might believe you, but will your Father?" Nora's father was a posh solicitor in Ballsbridge. "He can spot a liar a mile off."

"My dad can't find out," Nora shrieked, "he'll kill me!"
"In that case, you better go see Auntie Veronica and beg for mercy!"
Mary turned to face the altar, genuflected, then left.



Roy Dorman is retired from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Benefits Office and has been a voracious reader for over 70 years. At the prompting of an old high school friend, himself a retired English teacher, Roy is now a voracious writer. He has had flash fiction and poetry published in *Black Petals, Bewildering Stories, One Sentence Poems, Yellow Mama, Drunk Monkeys, Literally Stories, Dark Dossier, The Rye Whiskey Review, Near To The Knuckle, Theme of Absence, Shotgun Honey, Punk Noir, The Yard*, and a number of other online and print journals. *Unweaving a Tangled Web*, published by Hekate Publishing, is his first novel.

Looking For Something

"I think you and I can help each other out here."

"Stay away from me or I'll jump!"

Cassie Boyd was standing on the other side of the railing of the Brooklyn Bridge. The East River was one hundred and twenty feet below.

"Now, that's where I can help you," said Al Foster. "You're having trouble deciding, and I can give you the little push you need."

Al had been out walking after midnight hoping to find …. something. Anything. He thinks he has.

"What?"

"I can help you make the jump."

Cassie stared at Al, sighed, and then said, "You're sick."

"Says the little lady standing on the edge of the bridge."

Al had been slowly moving closer to Cassie and was now just ten feet from her.

"Stay back. Please. I mean it. I'll jump…."

Cassie now sounded a little less sure about jumping. At least she hoped she did.

“Okay. Let’s try this?” said Al. “Instead of jumping, how about we go to a bar and have a few beers?”

“I hate beer.”

“Well, have something else, then. Whatever you want. I’m buying.”

“A glass of Merlot?”

“What’s Merlot?”

“Wine, silly.”

Al was now just a couple of feet from Cassie, with his hand held out to her.

“I think I might need some help getting turned around,” she said with a little laugh. “Wouldn’t wanna slip and fall.”

Al reached out to her. Cassie grabbed a handful of his coat sleeve and roughly pulled him toward her. Before he could regain his balance, she gave him a push and he fell toward the river, screaming all the way down.

Cassie had perched herself on the bridge earlier that evening hoping to find …. something. Anything.

She did.