



# Winners

of the  
Connecticut Authors and Publishers Association  
2009-2010 Writing Competition

The Connecticut Authors and Publishers Association's 2009-2010 Jerry Labriola/Brian Jud Annual Writing Competition was awarded at the Association's Annual Dinner on March 20, 2010. The contest was open from September until December 19<sup>th</sup>. The works were judged by a panel, which included teachers, writing professionals and experts in the publishing industry. The winners were notified on March 1, 2010. This is a report of the annual winners and the winning entries.

## **Children Stories**

First Place Barbara Klein  
Second Place Jim Norton

**My Grandma and Me**  
**When the Circus Came to Town**

## **Essays**

First Place Julie Barker  
Second Place Amy Soscia Paloski

**Overtured**  
**Equipped for Life**

## **Poetry**

First Place Serena Sinclair  
Second Place Jim Norton

**That Look is Clear and Cold my Friend – a Sonnet**  
**The Writer**

## **Short Stories**

First Place Louis Arthur Norton  
Second Place Tido H. Holtkamp

**Shoal Island**  
**The Coward**

## **My Grandma and Me**

By Barbara Klein

Grandma has time to stop and smell the roses...Grandma and me.

*Abuela tiene tiempo para detenerse y apreciar el aroma de las rosas...*  
Abuela y yo.

We have time to make up stories...Grandma and me.

*Tiene tiempo para crear historias sobre ...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to look at bugs and lizards...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo para mirar los insectos y lagartijos....Abuela y yo.*

We have time to make real cookies...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo para hacer galletas caseras.....Abuela y yo.*

We have time to catch butterflies with a net...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo para atrapar mariposas con una red...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to sit on the porch swing and listen to crickets in the grass...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo de mecernos en el columpio en la varanda...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to wish on a star...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo de ver una estrella y pedir un deseo...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to see shapes in the clouds ...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo de formar imagenes con las nubes....Abuela y yo.*

We have time to catch snowflakes with our tongues...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo de atrapar capullos de nieve con nuestra lengua...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to blow dandelions in the breeze...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo de esparcir dandelions al viento...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to catch fireflies in a jar...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo de atrapar luciernagas en un frasco...Abuela y yo.*

We have time for painting my toenails red...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo de pintarnos las unas de los pies...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to blow bubbles in the air...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo de esparcir pompas de jabon en el aire...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to sit in the back seat of a car and pretend it's a limousine...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo de sentarnos en un auto y pretender que es un limocina....Abuela y yo.*

We have time for tea parties and sipping pretend lemonade...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo para jugar al te y pretender que tomamos limonada....Abuela y yo.*

We have time for reading knock-knock jokes and laughing at them together...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo para reirnos al jugar “ ?quien esta all y yo.*

We have time to read my favorite books...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo para leer mis libros favoritos.....Abuela y yo.*

We have time to play card games...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo para jugar cartas...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to watch the sunset...Grandma and me.

*Tenemos tiempo para ver la puesta del sol...Abuela y yo.*

We have time to dance the jitterbug...Grandma and me.

*Tememos tempo para hacer el baile del bicho inquieto... Abuela y yo*

Grandma has time for helping me say my prayer...Grandma and me.

*Tiene tiempo para ayudarme a recitar mis oraciones...Abuela y yo.*

## **When the Circus Came to Town**

By Jim Norton

About five o'clock this morning  
When the world was sound asleep,  
And the moon was still there shining  
There were promises to keep.

I heard the far off whistle  
Sometimes a lonely sound,  
But today it brought the news  
That the circus was in town.

I heard my door slip open  
Saw my dad just standing there,  
I jumped from bed all fully dressed  
And bolted down the stairs.

Grabbing hat and jacket  
We both slipped out the door,  
And drove through morning  
As I wondered what's in store.

This was a special time for me  
This was Dad and me alone,  
With all the joy of Christmas  
And birthdays rolled in one.

And then we turned the corner. . .  
Well the sight before my eyes,  
Were things that I'll remember  
'Till I swear the day I die.

The train was there unloading  
And as far as I could see,  
There were horses, lions and tigers  
And apes and chimpanzees.

Now elephants all circled round  
And then they pulled the poles,  
That held the rings that held the tent. . .  
Least that's what I was told.

And then as if on cue they turned  
And walked the other way,  
And then the tent rose off the ground  
And up and far away.

And then they put three rings down  
And the clowns began to play,  
While up above the tightrope hung  
And the trapeze bars all swayed.

The band began to practice now  
And the jugglers juggled some,  
While peddlers roasted peanuts  
And the sideshow acts came on.

Well this went on all morning  
'Till we finally left for home,  
With memories filled with laughter  
Just my dad and me alone.

As the years slip slowly by now  
When I hear that lonely sound,  
It only brings fond memories  
When the circus came to town.

## Overtured

By Julie Barker

My kitchen cabinet holds a coffee cup that sports the silhouettes of a man and a dog canoeing. To be more precise, the man is paddling, the dog's enjoying the ride. I once enjoyed a romantic image of canoeing, similar to this. I shed it on the Housatonic River, which rises in the Berkshire hills of Massachusetts and travels south-southeast through Connecticut for most of its 149-mile length.

I had imagined that this river's journey was lazy. Perhaps I thought so because I had glimpsed its broad estuary at Long Island Sound and the marshland and salt flats that it nourishes there. Near Falls Village, Connecticut, however, the river is dammed for a hydro plant. During periods of peak electricity usage—essentially during daytime hours—great pulses of water were released to rotate the turbines. So it was that when Andy and I embarked, the water had velocity and bright white crests.

I would not have gone seeking this type of adventure. In my family, no one pursued rugged sports. I'd learned to paddle on a lake, on waters ruffled by an occasional motorboat's wake, but otherwise quite calm. Having inherited my father's non-athleticism, I saw myself as the dog on the coffee cup, alert but content to glide while someone else used muscle. Andy's canoe expertise was acquired on a pond, where there is little pressure to perform. His basic stroke was, shall I say, basic.

The first indication that we were in for something other than a languorous day in the sun came before we were even on the water. Yelling over his shoulder as he steered a van, the outfitter who had rented us the equipment described the run. "Just get into the current quick and stay to the center. When you come to the rapids, the first set, keep left to avoid the boulders."

He said we'd have three or four miles of relative calm before the current picks up in a stretch called Push-em-up. He distributed maps, where Push-em-up looked like a speckled band. The speckles indicated only the biggest rocks. I understood from his offhand remark about the dry summer that the number of rocks breaching the surface would be extraordinary. The map, then, was useless. I tuned out the rest of his advice. Drumming in my head were the words, Say something, back out, be a wimp. I was remembering that the choices we think we can live with sometimes turn us inside out.

One evening seven years earlier, I had dialed the phone like a robot to report my husband's death. That was the ending we were heading toward even before our wedding. I knew "happily ever after" would elude us. Yet I was insanely happy to marry him.

At some point in the early years of that marriage, worry started to form a small stone inside me. At night I listened to his breathing stop for long seconds. I waited for the choking snort, the gasping intake, the start of regular snoring again, and hoped I could catch some sleep before the cycle repeated. In the daytime, too, I worried. I'd be dusting the bedroom, imagining making the 9-1-1 call if my Type A smoker had a heart attack. I didn't admit to myself that alcohol would kill him until very, very late in our ten-year marriage. Let me say that I don't think everyone can calmly handle death, but I could. When his cirrhotic liver gave out, I knew how to respond. I'd lived on the edge for a long time.

When Andy proposed to me, I felt at the center of my being a very big doubt that I was ready to be half of a married couple again. I didn't need a mate as I had in my twenties and thirties. I could go it alone. I'd been strengthened, but strengthened by bereavement. Why would I invite that again? The question was not yet resolved when we set out that day, but truly, I was standing with one foot in a fast-flowing stream. I'd accepted Andy's ring.

Now we were facing our first stretch of turbulent water. "Steer," I yelled.

Our canoe grazed rocks, scraped and cuffed boulders, but we found our rhythm somehow. Push-em-up presented more ways to crash, yet, banged and bumped, our boat remained afloat.

After the river made a jog, we emerged onto a smooth expanse of water. I caught the smell of pines, spiky and redolent of summers past. Bugs water-skied just off the bow, enjoying their day. Where a log was lodged against several rocks, tinkly water music answered the calls of birds. This was the canoe trip I'd envisioned. My shoulders shed tension. We would survive this river, even when it ran with shallow urgency.

After a lunch break we came to West Cornwall's covered bridge. Serenely attractive, it offers safe transport to either bank, but beneath it, like the sirens on Odysseus' journey, rocks and eddies lie. In my solar plexus terror formed a hard pit and the drumming resumed in my head. Andy and I hunkered on our knees so as to give the canoe a low center of gravity. We aimed our bow toward the precise window that we saw other canoes pass beneath. Andy steered us into the roiling, wild water. Just in front of us, a canoe capsized and the paddlers disappeared. We could not pause to see that they were okay. We could only keep taking strokes and hope that my inexpert ones would find some convergent harmony with his.

We paddled like contestants in a dragon boat race and avoided cascades. But Andy called out, "I'll head toward that far bank," and the canoe holding us in its palm turned sidewise to the current.

We plowed into a boulder, spun, and the boat dropped us. Submerged, I struggled against the water's force. I came up under the overturned canoe and gulped a breath. The river bottom was covered with slippery, bowling-ball-sized rocks, but I got a footing. The water wasn't deep.

I'm not sure how I got out from under the boat. Like a robot, I guess. In the wretched first weeks of widowhood, I'd learned self-sufficiency was instinctual. Then as now some part of my brain knew how my arms and legs and lungs must work to survive.

"I thought I'd lost you." It was Andy's voice.

Loss was something I thought I knew, but in that single syllable, "lost," his worry gave it a moral aspect. There was choice, the choice to be lost or to find myself.

I saw Andy then, really saw him, this tall man in his late fifties with white hair, a mustache defining his upper lip, large hands, and worried eyes. I knew him and I trusted him, largely because he'd never tried to present himself as braver, more competent, or more accomplished than he was. No airs. No fudging. He wasn't a hero in the stories he told, but he wasn't a victim either. I knew what he'd dreamed for his life, what he'd thought he could accomplish, and how chance and other people's actions—and his own—had intervened to change the outcome. I knew his disappointment. And when he fell in love with me, I saw his hope and excitement, thinking this is different, she is different. I wanted not to fail him.

For a while a river might carry a stick, dropped by a child prodding in the mud for tadpoles; for a while it might transport a feather or a branch, or something more likely to be called pollution: plastic bottles, cardboard boxes, aluminum cans. But ultimately, the river is only the water. Loss is in the very nature of rivers. They move on, leaving feather, branch, box behind.

When we got engaged, he'd said that he wouldn't move on without me, and I agreed I wouldn't move on either. But something had snagged me, and I couldn't seem to pull myself free.

Childishly I pointed out, "I was with the boat. You're supposed to stay with the boat."

"Who cares about the boat! I thought I'd lost you."

I argued with him silently, saying, *I was following standard operating procedure*. Was I ready to do the opposite of what my inner voice told me? Subsume myself to couplehood again? Was I ready for that?

I came to the answer slowly: I wanted to be self-reliant and yet to also join my fortunes with this man who might not steer a canoe all that well, but who watched out for me every bit as well as I did. I married Andy a short time later.

Every morning I open the kitchen cabinet in the course of making our coffee. Some days I notice the cup there. It's a simple design; no trees, no sun, no horizon. Just a man and a dog in a canoe. I see something more, though. I see the balance the two of them have worked out.

## **Equipped for Life**

By Amy Soscia Paloski

Sitting in the podiatrist's office, with my exposed feet dangling over the edge of the motorized chair, I wait. Doctor Dreamy-Eyes enters with a wide smile, offers a "good morning" and then takes his place on a backless stool with wheels. He unveils my custom-made graphite Orthotics and visually inspects them before pressing them against the soles of my cold feet. The curves of the Orthotics hug my feet like ying meeting yang. He nods in approval.

"Your new Orthotics look good. They should fit into most of your dress shoes" he says with another smile. "If this doesn't work, I can always give you a cortisone shot. Let me know how they're working out." He extends his hand to signal that my appointment is over

I slip the Orthotics into my shoes and slide out of the chair. I scoop the bulky plaster molds of my feet into the crook of one arm, sling my purse over my shoulder and hobble out to my car. The Orthotics squeak and feel odd, like I am walking on hardened lumps of clay.

I glance at the clock on the dashboard before starting my car. Already late for work, I decide to take my time. It's a warm fall day. The trees are beginning to turn from green to an explosion of red, yellow, and orange. I bristle at the passing of the seasons. I need to slow things down, to hold onto the present, to prevent my life and time from drifting away.

While driving, my mind wanders. The phrase "You're not getting older, you're getting better" plays over and over like a record with a skip and a scratch. Whoever coined this phrase obviously doesn't have the collection of equipment that I have acquired in recent years.

A mental inventory of my closet at home produces a frightening list that includes: one pair of Orthotics for my sneakers to help me exercise and walk without pain, a bite guard to prevent me from clenching my teeth in my sleep; a pneumatic traction machine to relieve the pain in my neck, several cheap pairs of reading glasses to help me to see close-up; contact lenses to help me to see far away; and anti-snore strips that prevent my husband from wanting to duct tape my mouth shut when I snore. I add the brand new squeaky grey orthotics currently snuggling against my arches to my treasure trove. Each piece of equipment is designed to alleviate pain, prevent injury, or enhance my limitations.

My thoughts move to my bathroom cupboard and the shelves that are lined with items promising either to fix or to prevent some sort of bodily demise. I have cotton balls, cotton pads, and cotton swabs to clean surfaces and spread potions with. I have body lotion; hand lotion; baby oil; perfumed soaps in four different fragrances; eye cream; face cream; lip cream; wrinkle cream; night cream; cleanser; two types of herbal toners; and a facial masque,-- all to keep my epidermis soft, supple, and free of wrinkles, blemishes, and enlarged pores. I have an electric razor- for multitasking when peeing and running late; a safety razor and shaving cream for shaving in the shower; and disposable razors with only one blade, for travel or emergencies when neither of the other razors will do. I have sanitary napkins and tampons, in the event that my body should decide to do a U turn somewhere along the menopause super-highway; as well as panty liners for that 'all

day fresh feeling'. I have bottles of shampoo for color treated hair and conditioners to match the shampoos. I have mousse that promises to make my hair curl; anti frizz serum to fight humidity; styling gel and pomade to style my hair into magazine chic; and hair spray to inhibit even the slightest movement. My army of styling tools includes: three round brushes of varying circumferences, a flat brush, two wide tooth combs, two teasing combs, a curling iron, a straightening iron, a diffuser, and a hairdryer. Each tool promised to transform my luscious locks into a facsimile of one of my hair stylist's creations. Let me not forget to acknowledge the rows of medications, supplements and antidotes for every ailment ranging from a headache to constipation and everything in between. Aspirin; multivitamins; fish oil supplements; half empty boxes of menopausal support tablets that failed after a few hopeful weeks without hot flashes; antacids; stronger antacids; sinus relief; and nasal sprays. The images go on and on.

I approach a red light. My survey stops when I stop my car. I consider the weight of my 'life equipment'. If I use each item, according to its directions, I will have to give up sleeping. My morning routine, just achieve a baseline, nothing fabulous, okay look requires upwards of fifty items or products. As I begin to factor in the time and effort commitment demanded from each product, I become overwhelmed and hopeless.

The light turns green. I step on the accelerator and consider the every-day products and equipment that my husband uses. He has one hairbrush, a stick of deodorant, an electric razor, a couple of bottles of cologne, and a toothbrush. That's it! Right there in the middle of Route 66, I consider rolling down my window and flinging my Orthotics past the guard rail and into the woods before rushing home and bursting into my bathroom, like a storm trooper, to liberate myself.

**That Look is Clear and Cold my Friend - a Sonnet**

By Serena Sinclair

That look is clear and cold my dearest friend  
And met with charm and wit by only I  
Apparent now that this will be the end  
But you alone shall suffer this goodbye.  
I know the way this story soon will play  
The ghost of pity lying in disdain  
On you a look of apathy does stay.  
Is it enough to act like there's no pain?  
Too soon you'll wander back to me and plead  
And claim mistakes and accidents were made  
I'll say that I agree but won't concede  
Your heart shall know the truth and start to fade  
Your arms no longer home, your touch erased  
But lucky love is easily replaced.

## **The Writer**

By Jim Norton

It begins with blank paper  
And pen now in hand,  
To capture that thought  
Only you understand.  
And then, oh so slowly  
It begins to click in,  
And the shape that it takes  
You capture with pen.  
There before you the form  
And the image you make,  
Is alive now and breathing. . .  
A journey to take.  
So throughout the night  
Your magic transcends,  
A lifetime of longings  
From beginning to end.  
And then just as quickly  
The magic takes leave,  
On the wings of your longings. . .  
No longer to be.  
And like fickle lover  
You're alone now and spent,  
With thoughts down on paper  
Your memories have sent.

## Shoal Island

By Louis Arthur Norton

As the low rising sun dimly lit a bedroom, a Maine lobsterman embraced his wife and left their bed. It was mid-winter and she did not want him to go. When his warm bare feet touched the cold floor and the chilly air struck his nude flesh, the lobsterman who seemed to delight in the harshness of winter, had second thoughts about going out, but he had promised his thirteen-year old son that they would go striped bass fishing off the rocks on Shoal Island at dawn. The island, a half-mile off shore, was a grey granite and black shale craggy rock off the Maine coast adorned with a ruffled skirt of brown kelp. It disappeared under the ocean at high tide forming a breaker-roll blemish on the sea where the relentless North Atlantic daily challenged the underwater geology of coastal New England—but also marked a favorite striped bass feeding ground in winter.

The lobsterman was a big man with a local reputation for being tough, but the he plainly loved his son. He had recently given the boy a rod and reel for Christmas and wanted to take him fishing to use the new gear. This would be a chance to bond and create fun and excitement for father and son. The boy was eager to learn to fish along the shores off the bay, but was apprehensive because he could not swim and often got sick on very choppy waters. In contrast, the lobsterman was a strong swimmer and never got seasick.

His legs firmly planted, the lobsterman raised his arms and stretched as high as he could in his bedroom. He then listened to the wind in the pines. It sounded like an easterly breeze—ideal conditions. The bass should be running and the boy would get a taste of a man's sport for his first time on Shoal Island. The father quickly dressed in the cold and dark, then woke his son who tumbled out of bed. As the boy groped for his trousers, his thoughts were still fogged by the recent slumber, yet he became increasingly excited about the fishing trip with his father.

The lobsterman's wife heard her son dressing as he fumbled sleepily, but at the same time mumbled happily. Meanwhile her husband busied himself cooking a hearty Maine breakfast of fishcakes, baked beans and black coffee.

Maine winter weather could be treacherous and in case there was trouble there were few others out on the water. The experienced lobsterman thought that these were woman's fears and to be laughed off. When they were first married they argued about whether he should put up his lobster boat until spring, but the price of winter lobster was profitable even though the frequent storms took a toll on his gear. He worked hard and made a comfortable living for them. Over their many years of marriage she had learned to accept his ways and take comfort in his work ethic and competence. She frequently dreamed or rather had nightmares about widowhood and having to raise her boy without his father, but did not discuss it. The backdoor slammed as her husband, son and their chocolate Labrador retriever went out into the yard. The wife thought anyone going out to fish on such a cold morning had to be incurably male. They would probably not think about her until they returned with their catch and piled the fish into the sink for her to dress. The sound of the snow grinding dryly beneath two pairs of boots could be heard though her partly opened bedroom window. Her husband's sharp commands to the boy were punctuated by barks from the dog; the animal emphasizing his master's exhortations.

The early morning sun lit the snow-covered path that led to the shore, frozen suds marking the water's edge. Because it was January, there was some ice around the skiff that would take them to Shoal Island. The lobsterman maintained his motors taking pride in their condition. With first a sputter then a snarl, the outboard on the small boat ripped apart the early morning silence. The motor coughed once then abruptly burst into life with a warm reassuring roar. The lobsterman's son went forward to cast the mooring line loose of the skiff. Inside the house his wife closed her eyes as the drone from the motor's exhaust deepened, then gradually the steady sound faded into the distance,

The lobsterman steered to starboard, quickly glanced at his compass and headed toward the bay's mouth and the sea. There was just enough visibility to navigate to the headland through the crooked channel that cut between the many small islands. The lobsterman had motored through this nasty stretch of water many times in fog and darkness; his skill was such that he could find his way anywhere in the bay blindfolded. From the mouth of the channel he would take a northeasterly course straight for Shoal Island and on landing, drag the skiff to safety well onto the rocks. The low tide would expose the seaweed-covered ledge that predominated on the Island. It was a cold morning and farther out than most striper fishermen cared to go in January, but the lobsterman knew that Shoal Island was the best place to catch stripers on rod and reel in the winter. Of course you had to plan for the right tide, the time of day—and of course weather conditions. Four hours should be all they needed. At high tide the sea would cover Shoal Island, but they should be home long before supper with a boatload of fish to show for their efforts. There was no the legal limit and there should be good fishing. The east wind he estimated was at about ten knots and the tide was right. Yes, a storm was predicted for nightfall, but that meant that the fish would be moving up the coast. Everything seemed perfect, but he kept a weather eye to the murk off his bow and a steady hand on the tiller. Experience told him to be alert for sudden changes in the wind and sea surface.

The boy checked on their live sea herring bait while the retriever, like an old fashion figurehead, stationed himself at the bow, wagging his tail with excitement and barking into the wind. Groping in his pocket for his pipe, the lobsterman suddenly discovered that he had left his tobacco at home. A day on the water with nothing to smoke upset him. He searched all his pockets and, although he had matches, there was no tobacco. He thought about returning for tobacco, but that would lessen the chance of reaching the island at the right tide level. Somewhat irritated, he clamped his pipe between his teeth and sucked the empty pipe. Was this an omen? They had a water jug and he had a stowed pint of whiskey in case it got too uncomfortable on the rocky island. In the knapsack were lunches that the lobsterman had prepared, so he felt reassured. Passing the headland he turned the skiff toward the open ocean. The wind seemed noticeably stronger off shore and the cold coming from the sea a bit more than he expected. Astern the headland faded into the distance, but no other boats were about. The lobsterman turned the skiff toward Shoal Island, its ledge a broken belly of rock protruding from the sea.

The Atlantic swelled and swirled as they hauled the skiff well ashore and made themselves as comfortable as they could out of the wind in a shallow crag. The trip made both of them hungry so they each ate one sandwich and shared part of their snack with the dog. It was cold, but they were warm enough in their woolen clothes and socks underneath oilskins and tall rubber boots. They then set about baiting their hooks with the live bait and cast into the choppy waters at the edge of the island into the advancing tide.

The fishing was good, but looking aloft the lobsterman was beginning to have misgivings. Could the ideal conditions be masking an uncalculated risk? The wind freshened, shifted to the northeast and ominous dark storm clouds skidded toward them. Overhead, seagulls squawked loudly and flew toward the shelter of the mainland. The choppy sea around the island first formed blankets of foam then became a wind driven surf. The lobsterman thought that it was time that they reel in their lines and head home when a twenty-foot rogue ocean wave crashed onto the Island, first smashing their skiff, then carrying away the broken boat with their gear, water, whisky, the remaining food and their catch. The seemingly trivial skiff, a project he and the boy had completed in less than a week, was their lifeline. Now wet and getting chilled, they were stranded on their rocky island.

The boy gazed in fear at the rising water. He couldn't swim. The dog violently shook the saltwater from his back, ran back and forth whining, and then sank to his belly, his muzzle on his forepaws. It was getting much colder.

"Damn it!" the lobsterman yelled as he sighted what was left of the skiff bobbing on the sea fifty yards away. Then he gazed into the eyes of his son.

"Dad," asked the boy, "what do we do now?"

"I might be able to swim to the skiff, but it is not seaworthy and the cold water would likely do me in," he said.

"Couldn't we wave something or shout so somebody passing by or ashore would see or hear us?" his son asked.

The lobsterman stared silently at the increasingly turbulent sea.

The sun was obscured behind thickening clouds and the rising water looked dark and foreboding. The lobsterman thought he told his wife they would be home a few hours before dark since the tide was due to be high a few hours after sunset. Seeing that they were not in by late afternoon, she likely would send neighbors to hunt for them right away, but in good weather it was a two-hour run to Shoal Island and the intensifying storm and rising tide was rapidly shrinking the island's edges. The rocky shoal, their temporary earthen lifeboat, was almost awash. The cold sea and the now biting wind now bore a deathly chill.

The waves almost reached the lobsterman's knees and he said to his son, "Get up on my shoulders." The quickly boy obeyed. The man opened his oilskin jacket and clamped the boy's booted ankles into his body with his elbows.

"What about the dog?" the boy asked.

"He'll be all right," the lobsterman said. "He can take the cold water."

The wintry sea swept the island with a relentless ebb and flow, and then it suddenly filled the lobsterman's rubber boots with water. His legs were getting numb and the upper half of his body started to shiver. While atop the lobsterman's shoulders, the boy's extended arms must have reached nine feet above the drenched ledge. The boy frantically waved his yellow oilskin jacket over his head and shouted, hoping someone might hear or see them. Suddenly a second huge cascading wave engulfed the island sweeping the three of them into the cruel sea.

After daybreak a fleet of small craft scurried off shore like swarming water bugs and found the smashed skiff on the headland. Close by was a frozen form, that of their retriever. At mid-morning they found the body of the lobsterman, a rubber boot containing a red woolen sock under his elbow. They unsuccessfully dragged the depths

for the boy, then brought the lobsterman home and laid his body on the town wharf. The lobsterman's cold dead eyes seemed to stare heavenward, a small rubber boot frozen under a clenched arm. His wife stood transfixed; her frequent nightmare was now a horrible reality.

## The Coward

By Tido H. Holtkamp

Even though we had no infantry training, in the waning days of the war the German Navy sent us naval cadets to an infantry division to help stop the Russian juggernaut, which was cutting through Germany. Trucks brought us in field-gray uniforms to a town somewhere in the Province of Mecklenburg. A young infantry lieutenant handed each of us each a Belgian rifle and some ammunition, and a middle-aged medal-ridden major reminded us to “fight like lions for the fatherland” and to defeat those “Mongolian hordes who have come to rape your sisters and mothers”. Outside of the town we noticed several German soldiers hanging from trees with signs around their necks *I was a coward*. “They were caught behind the lines without their rifles”, the lieutenant said.

On a mild April evening we found ourselves at the edge of a large forest. We had been told to dig in, but we had no shovels; we had been promised bazookas, but they never came. We had no doubt that we were near the front: all night long we could hear the rumble of heavy cannons or the stuttering of machine guns, and in the night to the east the clouds reflected the flames from many burning villages. My buddy Bruno whispered that the Americans and British were about 40 kilometers west of us. We slept little, we worried: what would the next day bring?

We did not have to wait very long. At first daylight we could hear the thunder of motors and the clanking of chains. “T-34’s!” Bruno whispered; I nodded. Just as the sun sent her rays over the hill into our eyes, we could see the low-slung monsters crawl over the crest of the hill with little men behind them - straight at us. I remember thinking “Why at us?” We fired our rifles, and suddenly the whole line of tanks lit up with endless flashes: machine gun bursts splattered into the trees above us, and screaming shells exploded with numbing shocks all around us. Out of the corner of my eye I saw cadets get up and run back into the woods, and within seconds I joined them. They were running down a narrow path without stopping or looking back, and I had a tough time keeping up with them. After about 5 minutes I had to slow down, I could barely breathe.

Suddenly I heard a couple of shots up ahead and loud shouts of “Stoij! Stoij!” Purely by instinct I threw myself to the right into a bundle of pine trees and lay still. I felt the soft moss under me and tried to slither away from the path – without making any noise. I heard Russian voices coming close and with “Davai! Davai” herding my buddies together. Then it sounded like rifles dropped together on the ground, and soon I heard many feet walking past me back to where we had come from. Then all was still except for some shooting and motors in the distance.

After a while I carefully got up and looked about. Nothing but trees and bushes – birches, pines, firs, birches, maples, and other types I did not recognize. I could smell pines and the musty soil, the ground lay covered with leaves and branches, a mild wind rustled through the new leaves, and a bright sun coming through the tree tops created a panorama of bright light and dark shades. From my watch and the sun’s position I quickly found south and decided to move westward, away from the Russians and towards the British and Americans. I kept my rifle in case I needed it or should run into a German Military Police patrol. Always listening and often taking cover, I moved on very carefully. Late in the afternoon I came to the end of the forest. I surveyed the land ahead: hills, some forests, and no signs of life. I drank some water from my canteen and ate a

piece of bread from my food bag. I did not dare smoke a cigarette, although I wanted one badly. I thought of my buddies – they were now on the way to years of captivity and hard labor in Siberia. But then I was not safe yet, either.

I waited until it got dark, then I walked briskly ahead. I saw fires light up the sky behind me, but ahead of me it was dark. Good omen, I thought. The night air felt cool and clean, and I could clearly see Cassiopeia and the North Star. Whenever I saw what looked like a house, I made a careful detour; I was afraid of dogs spotting me and barking. I crossed a couple of roads, but saw no signs and no traffic. Besides – how would I tell a Russian from a German vehicle? When morning came I found a forest and slept for a while, then carefully and slowly worked my way through trees and bushes. Late in the afternoon I saw a hill with a large barn on top. The barn even had windows and looked like a good place to find some rest. Seeing no sign of human life I walked up the hill.

When I entered the barn, I suddenly found myself surrounded: there must have been more than a hundred women and children staring at me. Then from many mouths came the first question: “where are the Russians?” I told them I did not know. Then they seemed to all talk at once: they had come here from the nearby town of Tannhausen to avoid the Red Army and the usual gang raping or worse, at least for a few day or until things would calm down. They immediately greeted me as their protector and welcomed me with open arms. I wolfed down some food they gave me and explained my escape; then I crawled into the warm hay, and fell asleep immediately.

The smell of coffee woke me. I sat up and saw morning light come in through the windows, while all around me curious women were eyeing me, feeding their children, or simply talking. All at once one blond woman excitedly called from a window; I ran over and looked down the hill: a company of soldiers – their brown uniforms and hats immediately marking them as Russians – came slowly walking up the hill.

A hundred eyes turned to me for help, and I had to think quickly. If I fired at them, they might burn down the barn. Go out and negotiate? I spoke no Russian. I could not stop the Russians. They would do to the women what they wanted to regardless of what I did. I would only serve as a red flag, an unwelcome witness maybe. At best it would mean years in a Siberian coal mine for me. I grabbed my hat and rifle, and ignoring a thousand imploring voices, bolted out the back door, shouts of “Coward!!!” ringing in my ears. I went at a full run down the hill and up the next one. At the first bunch of trees I looked back: nobody had followed me.

From there I walked quickly until I reached another woods, always aiming westward. I walked for several hours, and was about to take a rest, when suddenly two figures in brown uniforms stepped out of the shadows pointing their rifles at me. For a moment I shuddered: “here comes Siberia”; but then I heard two words (thank God for high school English), two wonderful, calming, reassuring English words, words I will never forget: “Hands up!” I had fallen into British hands; one of my captors immediately offered me a cigarette, a *Playars*. It smelled good, and I took a deep breath: I had escaped death, wounds, Siberia, and German military Police. My captors put me on a lorry and took me to a camp for German prisoners. That night I slept behind barbed wire.

After a few months the British released me, and I returned to my little German hometown, which had survived the war all in one piece. Already the Iron Curtain had descended over Mecklenburg and Tannhausen; and although I often thought of the

women in the barn, I could not visit the town to find out what had happened to them. And I could not tell anyone about this affair, I was afraid of what they might think or say. I never told my wife, nor my navy buddies at the annual reunions. I studied law and became a successful lawyer.

Almost 50 years later –after the Iron Curtain had collapsed – I rented a car in Hamburg and drove to Mecklenburg. I found Tannhausen and decided to have lunch in a prosperous-looking restaurant in the middle of town. I asked the waiter how the town had fared during the war; he did not know as he was born in the fifties. He called the owner, but the owner and his wife had come as refugees after the war. They offered to call the town historian, a lady who had lived in town during the war and was now the director of the public library. I declined, saying it was not important. (I was afraid of being recognized: “Look at this man! This is the coward who deserted us women in the barn!”)

I never did find out what happened to the women in the barn. I am an old man now, and it looks like I will take my secret with me into my grave. But I have now decided to write it all down - I have to get it off my chest. If you should read this, tell me: was I a coward? What would you have done?