

Tales From The Island



A Collection
of Cape Breton Poetry and Prose
From the Sydney Writing Circle

Tales From The Island

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FOREWORD

This volume, *Tales From The Island*, is an anthology of work produced by the members of the Sydney Seniors' Writing Circle. A few of these selections were previously included in other publications, but most were written since October, 2006 and are published here for the first time.

The members of the Sydney Seniors' Writing Circle: Kenneth Beaton, Jack Compton, Paula Hines, Judy Kaiser, Malcolm MacIver, Maureen MacIntosh, Rowe Rudderham and me - Kathy MacCuish - have one important thing in common. We all like words and we just love to use them to tell stories. We came together over the course of fall /winter 2006 - 07 as a result of a project sponsored by the [Adult Learning Association of Cape Breton County \(ALACBC\)](#) with funding provided by the Nova Scotia Senior Citizens Secretariat and the Adult Education Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Education. We would like to offer them our sincere thanks for the opportunity to come together and write.

Each Monday afternoon, beginning on October 16, 2006, we met from 2 - 4 PM in one of ALACBC's classrooms on the second floor of the Southend Community Centre on Hillview Avenue in Sydney. Every session included writing and sharing of things that we had written. We always started with "freewriting" - a 10 to 15 minute time in which we freely wrote on an assigned topic - and then we shared what we had written by reading it aloud to the others. This activity always prompted lots of discussion and often generated ideas for other writing sessions. We made time to share things we had written at home, we sometimes reviewed points of grammar and punctuation and we worked on expanding our vocabularies. And we laughed and laughed and laughed some more. Those Monday afternoons were wonderful times. I must thank Ken, Jack, Paula, Judy, Malcolm, Maureen, Rowe, and Bill Hall (who was with us for the fall only) for their great patience and cooperation. They are a special group and talented storytellers, to boot.

I believe that our enjoyment of the sessions owes a lot to our varying backgrounds and life experiences. We are all now retired (or, at least semi-retired) and so are enjoying the luxury of being able to make time for an activity we may have ignored when we were busier. Among us, we worked in the insurance industry, for government, in transportation, education, in service industries and as homemakers. Our educational backgrounds range from less than high school completion to master's degrees. Our family backgrounds are also widely varied.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Deborah Morgan, developer of the "Writing Out Loud" approach to adult writing. A number of years ago, I completed an on-line program of certification as a "Writing Out Loud Instructor" and found that this Seniors' Writing Circle was the perfect opportunity to put many of the things I learned

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from Deborah and her philosophy into practice. I would also like to thank the ALACBC Coordinator, Karen Blair, for giving me this opportunity - it has been great fun.

ALACBC provides free classes where adults can upgrade their reading, writing, math and critical thinking skills throughout the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, as well as sponsoring the family literacy Reading Together Clubs. For more information about ALACBC and its programs, you can call 902-564-8404 or email to alacbc@syd.eastlink.ca

Kathryn MacCuish
Writing Circle Facilitator
May 7, 2007

JUST A THOUGHT

You know we go around planning things and in the end it just doesn't matter. All of a sudden you die. There is no way around that. So, what do we **do** ...

We go on living and we hold the ones we love very, very dear.

Paula Hines

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CHANGE

Last Monday I walked here. The sky a cerulean blue. The sunlight a bright butter gold as it fought with the damp air off the ice in the gulf.

I rested on the rough rusty yellow pipe on the bridge where the brook crossed Cabot Street. I listened as the water gurgled in laughter, happy that the thick ice it wore a few days earlier was gone. In the adjoining park the cries of the seagulls blended with the moan of the wind. The wind tugged at my winter coat and hurried me along.

As I crossed from Cabot to Hillview Avenue, the sunshine glinted off the window panes. A door opened and the smell of cinnamon grabbed me. I could taste it. My mind raced, my nerves buzzed with endless questions. Questions like were they professional people drawn to putting words on paper.

With hesitancy I entered the split blue doors of the Southend Community Centre. The long two story brick building. A large white painted crescent with blue steel siding above and green eaves decorated the building.

I hurried upstairs and on the second floor landing I met a friendly lady who directed me to the room. In the room I was warmly welcomed by a gracious lady whose enthusiasm and warmed by her wonderful laugh made me feel at home. She quickly explained the program and asked me to take a seat.

Here I was in the magic room where imaginary worlds of the past and future collided with the present. A place where psychic windows of the soul open people's minds, that spoke of dreams, of experiences and of hope. How astonishing to share their innermost thoughts; to marvel at their skills to create new worlds.

Then I was introduced to the group.

When all were seated the lady instructor took a felt marker and wrote on a flip chart a number of clichés, phrases related to the use of the word green. She explained the exercise and gave a time limit for us to use as many of these on our tablet. And with the click, click of pens we began.

What amazed me was the speed and clarity with which the class wrote. Some had written two to three pages. I had seven sentences when the time expired. Needless to say I was highly embarrassed. It was like living in the castle of the Jolly Green Giant, sitting drinking green tea and staring out the window wondering when the lawn would be green with grass. Then all read what they wrote and it was impressive.

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Next the instructor guided us to an exercise in learning new words found by the group during the previous' week's reading. Some were known and lost, aged with the dust of time. These were defined on the flip chart and then checked in the dictionary for the correct meaning. Many of the words were new, all interesting, so alive and vital to the writers' craft.

In the remaining time the members were asked to read a piece they wrote.

One other thing that stood out was the happy atmosphere and the openness that filled the room. The heartfelt healing power of laughter - spontaneous, touching and wonderful. It was good. In this class I can learn and someday to feel at home in your seniors writing world. Thank you.

Malcolm MacIver

ONE OF THOSE TIMES

I stood back and watched as he backed away from the garage and moved toward the edge of the road. As he pulled away from the driveway he passed through the gateposts onto the highway. And as I watched, I saw my son pass from childhood into adulthood with the mere swing of a car onto a highway. As I watched, I followed the car to the end of the road until it made a turn and then lost sight.

It was one of those times in life that seem to make that special mark . . . like the first step or word, the first day of school and then this time ... learning to drive a car, the next step toward independence. Independence, it's sometimes dreaded, sometimes welcomed. It's kind of a double-edged sword, isn't it? With more independence there is more freedom, more time to be me again and I guess to develop a new me ... hopefully a new and improved one like every other product on the market. Why should I be any different? Hopefully it will be a time to begin again and do things I had dreamed about for some time now.

But in my heart there is a feeling of loss, the loss of a once small boy who called a bar "ba", bread "fa-fa" and me "maeee" instead of mom.

For to open that next door, you must close the one behind and you can never go back but only move ahead, on to life and on to opportunity knowing the tie that binds ... the only tie is that of love.

And so as I watch this special event, this special moment, I know we are moving down that

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road. And it is good. And our love for one another grows and deepens.

After a time, they returned and as I walked through the door, my son met my gaze with his and of course you know the sight... a face lit like a Christmas tree and a smile as broad as I ever saw and the pride ... well ... a face beaming tells it all. As I heard them discuss their next outing and other plans, I turned and went inside to be alone with my thoughts and to relish in the moment, in the happiness and pride born on this special day.

Paula Hines

MOVING ON

A "home writing" assignment to describe a memorable building resulted in this remembrance.

We found it on a gray, damp Sunday in May. We were exploring an unfamiliar road while on our way to visitors' afternoon at the May long weekend Scout - Guide Camp and there it was. It sat on a rise overlooking the Great Bras d'Or from which you could see the abandoned docks of the Ross Ferry.

It was a small old house and when we got to know it better, we could see its history in the way it had been added to and added to again. It wasn't in very good shape - the back door had been open for more than one winter - but the price was right. So, we bought it.

We had been half-heartedly looking for a small cottage or a piece of land on which we could camp for several years, mainly so we could get our children away from Glace Bay's Commercial Street whenever possible. Our budget was limited and nothing we had looked at before this had been the right place. But this place somehow spoke to us and we took the plunge.

We took possession in early July. The first weekend we spent there was damp and cold and we wondered what we had done, but then the weather broke. It was a wonderful place for the kids - once they stopped complaining about not being in Glace Bay. They wandered and they swam. They read, played board games, fought and helped when we could convince them to. Mainly, they weren't on Commercial Street. We cleaned, repaired and painted and late in the afternoon, we swam too. We barbecued and then we read and played board games as a family.

When I think of our little house in Big Harbour, many things come to mind. There were the "summer of the mouse" and the "winter of the squirrel". There was the mysterious

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awful smell that was finally traced to the five-gallon bucket of sand dollars collected on Englishtown beach. There was life with no running hot water and having to conserve water because it came from a spring up on the side of the hill. There was the wringer washer, shopping in Baddeck, our annual end of summer pizza party at the Yellow Cello and doing laundry and groceries for two houses. There were walks along the road after dark and learning the constellations, the construction of the sailboat, the canoe and expeditions in the little red motorboat. There was time together as a family.

But, all good things must end, and, if you are lucky, you can tell when to make that end. We spent eight summers in Big Harbour. During the last one, we were there mostly without the kids, who had grown and moved on the way kids do. So we again took a plunge and sold the small old house on the hill and moved on ourselves.

Kathryn MacCuish

CAPE BRETON, MY CAPE BRETON

I would rather walk the shores of Cape Breton
Than anywhere else on earth
So lord let me live free and roam
The land of my birth,
And call Cape Breton home

Cape Breton, my cape Breton
Your siren is calling me
Cape Breton, my Cape Breton out of my past
To revisit my kin folk, my memories
I revel in the task,
Cape Breton, my Cape Breton you live with me always,
Cape Breton, my Cape Breton, my everlasting praise.

Jack Compton

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REMEMBERING THE PAST

A "free-writing" exercise prompted this memoir of north-end Sydney.

With the bag of memorabilia that was produced at our last session, we were encouraged to write a short piece on what we garnered from the pickings. Household items, such as a button, an empty hand cream tin, a few toothpicks a packet of Kleenex tissues, a small battery, and a clothes pin, all seemed to stimulate our memory banks, and write about them we did. What was interesting to me was the discussion after each piece that seemed to bring us together in our memories of past times as the relationship to the household articles. We seemed to be on the same page or thought process when we discussed stories of our childhood years. With so many changes in the world today, it got me thinking that we were better off back in that time of our lives where less was actually more.

Growing up in the north-end of Sydney, to me was a real blessing. We lived on Dolbin Street and the backdoor to our house was less than 500 feet from the railroad tracks. Directly across the street was the Sunshine beverages bottling plant, around the corner was the Coca Cola factory, and the Havelock Home bottling company the next street over. Artesian wells apparently dominated the neighborhood. There were three schools in the north end, and we had two bakeries, Eastern's Butter-nut and Lynches Pan Dandy Bread, both located on Johnstone street. The Post Record was on the next street over and the harbour was three blocks to the west, and of course the business district up town, just minutes from home. The house we lived in couldn't have been situated any better than it was, everything was all connected within a small area.

With the CNR freight shed around the corner one way, and the CNR station and express depot around the corner the other way, and of course Ferry Street half a block away, that took the majority of workers to and from the Dosco steel mill, to say that the neighborhood was a beehive of activity would be an understatement. There was always something to do, the Sacred Heart outdoor rink in winter was a place to skate and to sled down off the banks of snow cleared from the ice surface, and of course a place to play ball in the summer time. There are numerous fond memories in all of these places and a story about each at another time.

In thinking about the CNR team tracks, I am reminded that just about everything that was produced for consumers back in the thirties, forties, and fifties, had to be unloaded at the railroad team tracks or the freight shed. Highway systems at the time were not properly thought out and pavement for the most part was a non -entity, and big trucks as transportation vehicles were unheard of. Everything that was produced here in the line of

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steel and coal left the island by rail. The steam locomotives back then were really not that efficient and powerful, so it took many freight trains in the run of a day to transport these goods to other places in Canada. When these trains returned the consist varied from rough freight, household merchandise, lumber, building materials, clothing, canned food, fresh meats, fresh fruit and vegetables and of course automobiles from the factories in Ontario and just about everything else that could be imagined. As kids we were all over what was called the acre, or the unloading or team tracks, and always on the lookout for the railroad police. We were in pursuit of all the wooden strapping and bracing that each boxcar would contain, that was used to hold the contents in place while in transit.

Electric, gas and oil stoves were rare indeed in households in Sydney back in those early days and just about everyone had a coal and woodstove for cooking and heating. With the demand for fuel we were always selling kindling in the neighborhood for 10, 15, or 25 cents a carton or bundle. We came to know what every box car contained and always left with boards and blocks of every description as our money making ventures and exploration proved profitable. There were days that we also came away with apples and oranges and really green bananas that we got from the unloading crews. The cleaning tracks also yielded left over coal from the hopper cars that we would gather up and bag and sell for 50 cents each.

Those pop factories and bakeries also proved to be places of adventure and profit as we helped in the loading of the trucks in the early mornings and came away with 25 cents or a few loaves of bread or bottles of pop. The Post Record sold for 5 cents a copy in those days and the seller would get 2 cents for every paper sold. Just the scooting around town and in and out of buildings trying to sell the papers was an experience in itself. The express train that arrived in town around 7 PM in the evening also had on board the Chronicle Herald from Halifax another newspaper to be peddled. For the most part this all took place in the summer months and the days just never seemed long enough.

I also remember the going off to Camp Beaver just outside of Boisdale for two weeks every summer. I think it was a break for my poor mother to get rid of 4 or 5 of us to give her a much-needed vacation. I have so many other stories I recall of the Quinan Hall on George Street across from the old Lyceum Theater and the boats down at the government wharf and of course the circus and the train that took it to Sydney. These are all wonderful memories and to delve deeper there is probably a story in each incident. I bring light to all these thoughts to show that as a child growing up in Sydney's north end back in the 40's and 50's and even the 60's that there was plenty to do to keep the kids out of trouble.

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Andy Rooney last night on 60 minutes finished his piece by stating that "Sometimes all you remember are the things you want to forget." Well Andy has been writing for decades for CBS news sources and probably has forgotten more than most of us will ever learn in this life. However, as a group of people that are just starting out writing, albeit late in life, and wanting to learn to write properly and looking for story ideas, fond memories that we have about our childhood seem to rekindle our interest in the past and our writing from those experiences may just be a good starting point. That song made popular by Elvis Presley in the 50's, "I forgot to remember to forget," may just be the incentive we need.

Kenneth J. Beaton

we were all over what was called the acre, or the unloading or team tracks,

A MAN FOR ALL REASONS

You helped me to be man for all reasons,
To be patient, kind and humble
A safe haven, a net in stormy seasons,
And oft times I falter and stumble
You helped me to carry on
To be the best that I can be
You raised my self-esteem
You instilled in me a dream
To give respect and live in honesty
If I am the man I am today
You guided me
I found my way with you beside me
I am who I am
I am a gentleman.

Jack Compton

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GROWING UP IN POINT EDWARD

I was born in Sydney and brought up in Point Edward, C.B. on a farm. My father cleared the farm and every year he moved back towards the back field to get more hayfields for cattle. The farm was full of rocks and I did my share of picking them. In early years we used a horse and dump cart to pick the rocks. As we finished a square it looked good, but then it would be harrowed over again and just as many more rocks would appear. If I had a choice to weed a garden or pick rocks, I would weed, as things looked a lot better when I finished.

My father was also a carpenter and well driller. He and his brother ran a sawmill for about 2 months in the spring, along with farming. Logs would be brought to the mill in winter and many houses would be built that summer from the rough lumber.

At 6, I started school. I remember the crazy things rather than the education I got. I liked playing softball but I had to milk 8 cows by hand in 45 minutes to get to the game on time. I would wash hands and put on clean sneakers and away I went. One time, playing ball in the school yard, one player whose mother was from Frenchvale said he was going to throw a Frenchvale curve. The ball went through the school window, missing home plate by 20 feet. When winter came, we brought skates and hockey sticks to play with during recess or noon hour. As the pond was very close, some of us would leave our skates on in school all day. One afternoon we went out on the harbour during recess. The ice was so good we stayed out until class was over. That day a car came down to the school and we were scared to go ashore. But it was the attendance inspector, Mr. Ferguson, not Mr. Sullivan the much feared inspector.

At grade 9 we got a special test for Riverview. Richard and I could not do the test and told the teacher so. She did it for us and still only made in the 70's. So I went to Riverview the next year and sports kept me there for a year and a half.

I quit school and worked on the farm for a year as my older brother went to Agriculture College. I did not like the hours as cows had to be milked by hand twice a day 7 days a week, plus other chores. When my brother came home he wanted to stay on the farm so I went to Sydney to get a job. I got a call to the Cape Breton Dairy and I was in the milk business for many years until my retirement.

Rowe Rudderham

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THE ONE-ROOM SCHOOL

The small, white one-room building has squatted its wooden haunches into the same dirt atop the red clay hill for almost 100 years. Not much larger than a two-car garage, it housed 8 double seated desks, each complete with inkwell hole; and one wide teacher's desk with two side drawers - one for the teacher's small black handbag, the other for the dreaded leather strap. Behind her hung a wall-sized blackboard. To one side, our coats hung from nails under the tall, curtainless windows. A small bookcase graced the opposite wall by the water bucket with its single tin drinking mug. Overhead, large globe lights swung from chains, swaying loosely when the two large oak doors at the front were open to the breeze. In winter, heat miraculously and mysteriously burst up from somewhere beneath the unpainted floor to blow itself forcefully through the iron grate in the center of the classroom.

The morning always started with all 11 students murmuring the Lord's Prayer, followed by a feeble rendition of *Oh Canada*. Then in a swirl of chalk dust, pencil shavings and eraser rubbings, classes began amidst the rustle of papers as books were opened and pages flipped back and forth. At the end of the day, books closed and were put away quickly, soon forgotten, as we ran home to play.

Fifty years later, I sit in my car by the side of the gravel road and study the little green house that once was the school. The home stares aback at me through those tall front windows, half-hooded by the homeowner's dark privacy blinds - those same windows that had shone light on the workbooks of my earliest school years. Today, the blinds give the building a sober, worried look. No, maybe not worried, just resigned, that look of being left behind and feeling too weary to catch up. To spare it further loss of dignity, I drive away slowly leaving my memories in the safekeeping of its silent walls.

Judy Kaiser

YOU CAN FIND IT

There are days you never forget. Think back to your special days. Was it the fear of your first haircut, the shop with room rich with perfume smells; maybe buying your high school graduation gown you wanted. The special one with the blue lace; or was it the thrill of your first kiss. All are exciting moments, intoxicating and golden, bursting with anticipation and hope.

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These moments are little pearls on the string of life. Why do we remember them? The reasons are individual, are deeply personal and most precious. They hold the sense of wonder and eagerness and hope we felt as a child.

Travel with me on a warm July afternoon. My wife and I are crossing from North Sydney to Port-Aux-Basques Newfoundland on the M.V. Caribou. At that time of the year the Caribou carries approximately six hundred cars and twelve hundred passengers.

The sleek ferry of several hundred tones of steel slips away from the wharf and she cuts through the calm turquoise water. Her powerful diesel engines throbbing, joined in play with the murmurs of the sea. The grey and white seagulls cry as they circle above, in the tangy salt sea air.

Irene and I were returning from the dining room when we heard it. Curious, we stopped to look and listen and enjoy. It was dream music played on an old brown button accordion. The gentle haunting sound of the music was lilting like a Celtic pastoral air.

Who was this man who played the accordion? He was about thirty years of age, muscular and heavy-set. His coal black hair neat kept. What you noticed first were the large hands and how his fingers caressed the buttons with a natural grace.

During the band's first break in the set I approached him and asked him what was the name of the piece. He smiled and said "Tis the Old Time Waltz. I learned it from a friend in Saint Pierre and Miquelon."

I was surprised when I asked if he loved there and he said "No. On Kings Road in Sydney. I'm part of this band from Prince Edward Island. We play on the ship during July and August in the afternoon and evening." I thanked him for the music and the conversation.

These unexpected sunset gems are found round us in every day living. Maybe at your cottage or in the silvery softness of a full moon or in the sunshine peeking through your kitchen window; in the soap suds when doing dishes. Also they're found in the eyes of a child or in your favourite pet and in the eyes of someone you love. You don't have to search for them, they're in your own backyard. It's nature's way.

For me, I try to pay attention to our world and things that are different; to the interesting and that which is different. From them we can learn how marvelous and complex and wonderful life can be.

Think of the grace of a butterfly's wings as it flits from flower to flower. If I don't pay attention, I will pass this way and never see the beauty, hear the music or smell the

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flowers. But if I'm curious it won't be just music, but a strange magic, a blessed moment, a treasure and a bit of splendour. May you all enjoy these gifts we are given.

P.S. In the second set, the band played for me The Old Time Waltz. It was just a little bit of heaven.

Malcolm MacIver

TREASURE THE MOMENT

Sweet, enchanting, haunting music fills my spirit as I gently stroke the soft brown curls on that little head. It is by all comparisons a small and tiny mind that seems insignificant almost dismissible. I realize in a profound and significant way the tremendous love and allegiance that is within that little mind. I know in the bravest of ways he would defend me to the end.

But not now. Now is the eve following a long day. Here he stayed patiently and longingly for my return. That rest and relaxation would come only once I darkened this door. And now we are together resting in warmth and comfort by a fire.

Beautiful sweet music fills my mind taking me away to places I long to be, reticent to return to the reality that surrounds me. I treasure the quiet and the adoring silence. It lifts my spirit, and reaches inward to my soul. I long to stay in that place mindful of the ever present reality that's always there to take me back.

But at least for now, for this moment I can stay in that place, a place of peace, a place of quiet and tranquility. Treasure the moment.

Paula Hines

WHEN FIRST WE LEFT HOME

It was one of those little nights that somehow somewhere along the way seemed to be a big night. It's Junior High. It's Volleyball. It's kids, my little kid, a big grown up Grade Seven-er, almost thirteen year olds, heading off on the ferry to Newfoundland for a sports tournament.

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In a moment I saw her and her little five-year-old friends gathering around a birthday cake, all in their frilly dresses, looking so pretty and very dependent. And then in a flash, I'm at this ferry terminal taking her and her same friends' picture with two weeks of luggage for a three-day trip lying before them. These kids, only seven years later, now towered over us, the mothers, us with our very own bags under our eyes, and a few, quite a few grey hairs later.

It was first time away from home without us. Somehow it's moments like this that seem to make a special mark. We all knew how they were feeling. We could recognize in them the very same joy and excitement that we all felt when we were in that spot. We remembered all the fussing of our own mothers and "Oh my God, weren't we doing all the same things and maybe even worse" and the "yeah mom's, yeah mom's, and yeah mom's" that came back from these characters who looked like they couldn't wait to rid themselves of us forever.

There are so many things wrong in the world, so much hate, sorrow and suffering that seem to occupy newscasts and our front pages. This little story would not be felt to be very newsworthy. And yet, the care, the love, the sharing, the look of happiness, joy and excitement on these young faces, the loving, and caring expressions on these parent's faces, and the look and feeling of gratitude toward a fine teacher and coach ... well ... somehow ... it seemed to be a story that captured what is best about our world, what is best about our lives, and in essence ... what is best about ourselves.

Paula Hines

SOME DAY

Some day I'd like to sail away
Away where the skies are blue
Where sun doth shine both day and night
Palm trees for me and you.

Coconuts and mangoes will feed us,
Spirituality our soul,
With fern trees to shade us
And harbours to keep us
Safe, when the sun sets low.

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Oh beauty beauty is our cry,
Perfection abounds in this land.
Absolute ecstasy doth greet us,
At the beginning,
And when evening bends.

Suns set,
All red and aglow
Promising a sailor's delight.
We'll be up at the crack of dawn,
Sailing all day and all night.

And so blooms the stillness of the night
Engaging and inviting it is,
Providing moon, stars, and deep sleep,
As the day flies from beginning to end.

*"Ring ring" crows the clock
Up, dressed and out the door,
Back to work
Back to reality,
Traffic, clients and more ...*

But in my dreams,
I'll always be,
Far off in that wonderful land
With all that's fine and wonderful and free,
With you my love, I'll always be.

Paula Hines

D... APARTMENTS

*This story and the one that follows resulted from a class exercise in character development. Each writer was given a set of characteristics around which to develop a character. It was then suggested a story be written involving **everyone's character**.*

It was an early spring morning - sunny enough to be hopeful, yet cold enough to be wary of winter's lingering grip on anything optimistic.

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Timmy Banks adjusted his tie, laced his bony fingers through his shock of red hair, then reached for the D... Apartment glass door. Inside the lobby, he methodically checked the client names on his list against those on the tenants' mailboxes. He clicked his ballpoint pen efficiently. Dorothy Small, check; Louis Drikus, check; Marina Guy, check; John Angus MacMillan, check; Joe Rudderham. He paused, studying his client list. Ah, a new name. Timmy triumphantly triple clicked his pen and added "Joe Rudderham" to his list. Beside the new name, he carefully printed PROSPECT in bold, capital letters.

Even though he knew his father was back at the office, the old man's bark still pierced Timmy's thoughts with all the subtlety of a jackhammer. "Prospects, Timmy," his father had ranted earlier that morning, "Ya need to get your scrawny little self moving cuz prospects are the gravy. Potential clients, that's the target in life insurance! The sooner you get that into that thick red head of yours....." Then his father's tirade had shifted squarely onto Timmy, lacing the air with one of his "For god - sake lectures."

"For gods sake, Timmy, you're twenty-five years old. You can't just stand around filing address changes and writing poetry all your life. Now get out there! I didn't pay your university for nothing. New prospects, that's where the future lies for THIS company!"

"But I'm not very good at that," Timmy had confessed. "I don't really know how."

"How!" his father had bellowed, "Just do it, that's how. For gods sake, your brother was selling life insurance before he finished high school. There's no magic in it." The old man had poked a hard finger into Timmy's chest, emphasizing his words with each poke. "Just get out there and do it!"

With his father towering over him, Timmy had felt smaller than his already small 115 pounds on his short five foot frame, if that were possible. And it was possible, for he always felt small around his father. Not this time, Timmy thought, licking his lips with satisfaction as he wrote Apt 313 beside Joe Rudderham's name.

"Third floor," he whispered to himself as he pushed the elevator button. "Thirteen, lucky thirteen." he repeated hopefully, walking down the dimly lit corridor, glancing carefully at each apartment door number. "313", he said victoriously and raised his skinny hand to gently rap the door with the knuckle of his bent index finger. No answer. He listened intently, took a deep breath and rapped louder. Still no answer. He checked both ways in the corridor then placed his ear against the door. Nothing but silence. "What do you want?" a gruff voice exploded behind him.

Timmy jumped, his shoulders involuntarily shot up under his ears. "Oh, I'm looking for a Joe Rudderham," he breathlessly squeezed the words out as he turned to face the tall, skinny, slightly balding man.

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"He ain't here," the tall man drawled studying the little guy with suspicion.

Timmy's father's angry face flashed through his mind. He squared his shoulders and met the steel blue eyes that looked so piercingly through him. Timmy smiled weakly, "I, ah, I would, ah very much like to talk to him."

"What do you want with 'im?"

"Oh, I'll have to wait and see," Timmy side-stepped the question. Not wanting to appear rude, he added, "I would really appreciate your help."

The tall man tipped his head and looked down over this hooked nose at the short, little guy in the brown suit, standing before him. A little flicker of pity raised its head. "Ah, well, won't hurt, I guess." Hook Nose growled, then volunteered, "He's in the smoking room."

"Oh, you have a smoking room," Timmy said rather awkwardly. Trying to make small talk, he added, "Ah, that's very nice."

"Ya, a really big one," Hook Nose chuckled to himself as he strode away. "He's just outdoors," he laughed as his head gestured toward the back of the building. "I'll tell 'im you're here," he said over his shoulder. "The door's open, jest go in and sit down." Hook Nose heaved the stairwell door open, then whipped around abruptly to face Timmy. "Don't you touch nothin'," he cautioned, pointing a warning finger at him. Obediently, Timmy shook his head no.

Inside the tiny apartment, he sat in the sunshine at the chrome table. Gently edging the dirty frying pan and half-filled mug aside, he took a neatly folded tissue from his breast pocket and lightly brushed the crumbs away to make room for his new briefcase. With his hands tightly clasped in his lap, his eyes fell easily over the little room. A heap of work clothes draped over an overstuffed chair, a sleeping bag lay rumbled on the army cot, dirty dishes piled precariously on every surface except the floor - that was reserved for dirty pots and one large cardboard box with the words "Farm books" scrawled across its side. No TV, no microwave, no curtains. "Not finished unpacking yet," he thought as he looked at the large trunk, its heavy lid propped open against the wall.

"Learn something personal about your prospects," His father's voice echoed in his ear. "So you can engage them in conversation, that way, they think you're interested in them." Turtle-style, Timmy's head sunk into his shoulders as he rose to examine Joe Rudderham's open trunk. He gasped as his bulging eyes stared at the blood-stained hatchet resting across a farmer's almanac spread open in the trunk.

Tales From The Island

Almost in one fluid movement, he grabbed his briefcase and had his hand on the door knob when it effortlessly opened on its own. A giant of a man and Hook Nose stood before him. "That's him, Joe." Hook Nose said accusingly, then added almost as a warning to Timmy. "This here big guy's Joe."

Joe sighed. "What's your name, son?" Joe asked politely.

"Timmy." He squeaked.

"Timmy," Hook Nose echoed. Turning quickly to Joe, he reported, "This here's Timmy."

"Ya, I got that." Joe said patiently, "Maybe he and I have some business to talk over?" He looked at the little guy for confirmation. Timmy's unblinking stare froze on Joe's face. "So maybe you'd best leave us be for now." Joe suggested to Hook Nose.

"Oh, yeah. Right, Joe. I'll see ya later tonight. Heard you got some of that good stuff from that little runt on Charlotte Street." Hook Nose raised his eyebrows and winked conspiratorially at Joe. "Mother's milk, no less." he added as he backed out the door.

Joe sighed for the second time and locked the door. "Loneliness sure makes strange bedfellows of us all," he said in a low voice to no one in particular as he shook his head, almost imperceptibly. "Now then, ah, Timmy, is it? What's on your mind?"

Timmy stared at the locked door, then back at the big man. He started to speak, but no words actually came out.

Joe sensed a shyness in the little fellow and continued, "I don't get much normal company these days," he admitted. "Are you here on business?"

Timmy shivered and nodded as he edged toward the locked door.

"Want some coffee?" It's instant. With maybe little splash of rum to warm that shiver out of you."

Timmy nodded. He knew if worst came to worst, the rum would not slow his racing heart, but, at the very least, it might dull any pain. How he hated sharp objects. He wondered if it would hurt.

Joe plugged in the tea kettle. "I keep my mother's good cups in here." he said as he walked toward the trunk. Bending low he withdrew the hatchet and holding it high in the air, turned and grinned at Timmy.

Tales From The Island

"That guy that just left," Joe motioned the hatchet toward the locked door.

Timmy squinted and edged closer to the wall.

"That guy that just left," Joe repeated, "His grand kids did this. Little yard apes, they sprayed it with red paint last Hallowe'en. I wouldn't let them take it out. A real hatchet for trick or treating, mind you. The little yard apes," he muttered again. "The littlest guy screamed bloody murder when I said he couldn't have it. My good tools, mind you. I'm only a little beyond 40, but I don't mind telling you, I don't understand kids these days." He paused with a touch of embarrassment. "Listen to me doing all the talking. No company to speak of. That's what does it." He added as he half-filled the dainty china cup with hot water, spooned in the instant coffee and motioned for Timmy to sit down.

Suddenly Timmy realized how very dry his mouth felt, and he crossed the room as though in a dream.

"Aren't ya feeling well? You're lookin' a bit off. Here, have a shot of this to warm you." Joe diluted the black coffee with the black rum.

Expecting the mixture to be very hot, Timmy tested it with a slight sip. Lukewarm, he realized, and guzzled the entire contents in one take.

Amazed, Joe picked up the rum bottle and offered him a refill. "Maybe we'll forgo the coffee this time." he mused as he again half-filled Timmy's cup with the black tar. "I'd best add some water to that," Joe advised, but he was already too late; the cup was empty.

Timmy's cheeks quickly flushed red and, somewhat foolishly, he grinned for the first time at Joe.

"Yup, the shivers are gone all right," Joe observed as he tucked the rum bottle back under the sink. "Now, what's it you want to talk to me about?"

Timmy's grin widened as he stared at the writing on the cardboard box. "You just moving in?" Timmy's voice sounded foreign even to himself. "You haven't unpackaged yet?"

Joe grinned, "No, I haven't," he hesitated, then continued with a smile, "Unpackaged yet, cuz I want to be ready on a moment's notice to leave. I hate apartment living, I'm saving everything I can lay my hands on to buy a farm. It's just sitting there, just waiting for me."

"Where's it sittin'?" Timmy's head spun as he labored over the words.

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"Point Edward, right on the ocean."

"It's sittin' on the ocean?" Timmy's brain ground hard to squeeze out an understanding.

Joe chuckled, " Well, not on the ocean, beside it."

Timmy put both elbows on the table and propped his head in his hands. "Why beside the ocean?" he asked still working hard to understand farm and ocean in the same sentence.

" The seaweed and the view and the air and, oh just the salty smell of the place." Joe answered. A little cloud rolled across his face, and he rose to retrieve the bottle from under the sink. He held it up to the light of the window. Just one pull left. He split it between the two cups. "Mostly the seaweed, good fertilizer in that. Real good stuff that," he said a little dreamily.

"Why aren't you there yet?" Timmy's eyes tried to focus on Joe's face.

"Cuz I don't have all the money yet, and the bank won't loan me. I make good money when I make it, but the work's not steady." Joe said. Lifting his glass as he tipped his head back and with a quick jerk downed the last of his rum.

"You don't have any money?" Timmy mumbled and tried to sit up straighter.

"Oh, I have money," Joe reassured him, "But I don't have enough." Then he looked directly into Timmy's bleary eyes. " Why are you here?" he asked in bewilderment.

"I want to know if you want to buy insurance." Timmy smiled stupidly, yet warmly at the big man.

"Insurance? No, I already have insurance. Me Mum and Dad bought it when I was born. They got it for each of us, my three brothers, my sister and me." His broad shoulders sagged a little as buried emotions started to shovel themselves to the surface. His eyes filled with little pools of tears. "Me Mom and Dad, they was good to us." He reminisced. "Said t'would be our inheritance someday. But with insurance, I'd have to die. Wouldn't I? For someone to get something from it? So I can't see how its an inheritance for me."

He slowly shook his head," Never bought anything for themselves, always for us. Ah they worked so hard though." Then Joe straightened up as he got into his story. "My brothers and me learned to work with stone from our Dad and two of my brothers and me worked building wharfs with him for awhile. But he's gone now and I'm still working with stone and creosoted planks. Yep, they's both all gone now." Joe turned to Timmy, "You got your Mum and Dad now?"

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Timmy thought of his father. "No, she was killed when I was five, car accident." The little room was silent for a long time as though in reverence.

Joe got up and knelt beside the army cot, then swung his searching arm wide under the bed and came out with a bottle of cloudy liquid. "Mother's milk," he breathed. He poured Timmy a taste, "Very stiff, this stuff is." he warned and then tipped a healthy measure into his own cup. Joe leaned forward and peered close into Timmy's face. His rummy breath hung in the air. "I almost got killed last week." he said seriously. "Yup, almost died."

"How?" Timmy wanted to know.

"Well, I was walkin' down Alexandra Street the other night and some old beater of a car," he paused to loosen his collar, "When some old beater," Joe's head bobbed with emphasis as he raised one finger in the air, "with only one headlight drove right up over the curb and just missed me." He slapped his hands together in mid air then looked into his glass as though the whole scene were being replayed in the liquid. "Think it's a sign, a warning like?" Joe slurred. "Do you think I should buy insurance or something?"

Timmy's father's voice overrode his thoughts. "Go for the kill, close the deal. Close the deal you scrawny little redhead." Timmy brushed his hand across his forehead and asked confidentially, "Want to know something? Surance is overrated. Most person don't even need it." Timmy slid his china mug into a half turn, waited, then added in a slightly high pitched voice, "You're not married, are you?"

"No, not married."

"Well, there you go. No need to buy more. What do you have now?"

Joe shrugged, "Dunno."

Timmy felt a friendliness toward the big man. A feeling he had not felt for a long time. "Well, get your policy out and we'll have a little looksee." Timmy's vision was starting to clear with the added tax of thinking and talking business.

Joe weaved a bit as he got up to look for the insurance folder.

"There," he said as he laid the policy on the table. Timmy forced his eyes to lock themselves onto the words on the paper.

"What's it say?" Joe prompted eagerly, wiping his hand over his lips.

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Timmy looked up at him, then without speaking, looked back at the policy paper.

Joe tried a different approach, "What do I have?" he asked enthusiastically.

Timmy's face broke into a slow grin. "Well, speaking confidentially," he said, "You've got yourself a farm, that's what you've got."

"I don't get you," Joe slurred.

"Well, how much do you need for your farm?"

Joe withdrew a small black booklet from his back pocket, "Precisely \$ 11,588" he said.

Timmy's grin widened. "Well, you've got at least 25,000 you can borrow right here in this whole life policy. It's paid up. You borrow what you need, then pay it back with a small interest rate. The main thing is," he paused, "You got your farm."

Joe stared in bewilderment, unbelieving.

"See your own agent if you don't believe me." Timmy said.

"And I don't need to buy any more? There's no trick here is there?"

"Nope."

"What's in it for you?"

Timmy relaxed his back against the kitchen chair. "Nothing, 'cept maybe I could come and see your place by the sea sometime.

Joe gave him a studied side glance as though seeing him for the first time. Outside the window, a siren wrung the air with urgency. Timmy fixed his eyes on his watch. "Got to go," he said with resolution. "I'm sure there's something I should be doing back at the office. But, for the life of me, I can't think of what it could be. Where's your bathroom?"

"Down the hall on that side." Joe's big hand flung to the right.

"Well, I'll be off then." Timmy said as an odd sort of awkwardness surrounded them as Joe unlocked the door.

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With uncertainty, Timmy fumbled to shake Joe's hand. "Congratulations." he said quickly, then weaved out into the hallway to the elevator.

Joe sat at the table looking at the heap of insurance papers. Gathering them up like precious scrolls, he made his way to the window.

Timmy looked up from the sidewalk and waved gallantly. Joe gave half a salute with the papers clutched tightly in his big fist, the farm almost a reality.

Timmy smiled and hailed a cab. Even though he knew he might be sick with the movement of the taxi, he did not mind for he felt happy, a self-satisfied happy. He had done something good today, and he smiled as he leaned his head against the back seat of the taxi. As he closed his eyes, he could barely hear his father's voice, a mere whisper as it slowly faded into the warm afterglow of Joe Rudderham's mother's milk.

"Home, my good man," he gestured dramatically to the driver, eased his head against the back seat and promptly fell asleep.

Judy Kaiser

A CHARACTER TRANSFIGURATION

And it came to pass that man's ingenuity to advance in technology shrunk the broad expanse of the ethnologic world.

On the outskirts of Sydney in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality stands the D... Apartments, a conglomerate of modernized units. This is the scene, most of the characters involved in this story are residents.

In the main lounge, Dorothy is awaiting Marina and Lou. She is the driver today, transporting them to the Regional Hospital where they are employed as cleaners. They share a coop driving pool, since they all work the same 7 A.M. shift. Dorothy is chatting with a male resident, they are talking about hockey - she is quite an authority on the statistics of players - can name them, goals scored, assists, etc.

The two finally appear. They each exchange morning pleasantries. Marina is a slim, blond thirtyish woman quite pleasing and striking to the eye. Lou is short, almost squat with huge hands and forearms. He appears to be of Mongolian descent. Dorothy is a contrast; dark-haired, small of stature about five feet tall. They are compatible, and appear friendly to each other. They have been working together for almost a year.

Tales From The Island

Lou arrived in Cape Breton via a circuitous route. He spoke very little English, when he appeared at the apartments one day seeking his daughter Carla. She was spirited away from their village by Danny Boy Rutledge - a Canadian traveling salesman - particularly a Cape Bretoner. Carla sent letters home to Lou finally telling him they were coming to Sydney. Lou was a hero of a mighty tidal wave - a tsunami that devastated the entire community - wreaked havoc with a loss of lives, including his wife Lucretia and his younger daughter Attila. Lou was left unharmed and he immediately set out to help the unfortunate. Because of his great girth, he lifted splintered wood, debris, and uncovered survivors. He became a hero in the state of Ubetucan. They nicknamed him Little Lou. He was rewarded for his heroic efforts - a trip to a new land: Canada a chance to start fresh. It was also a new employment start - leaving behind his gas jockey and line painting jobs.

A clean cut, neatly dressed youth entered the lounge as the trio departed. He is seeking Joe, who is the new owner of the apartments.

The supervisor directs him to an office. Joe is sitting at a desk reading papers. He motioned to Timmy to come in and asked "Where is Hal?" "Dad wants me to hear what you have to say. I'll report it to him" Timmy replied to the question. "Good", Joe replied. "Timmy, your dad has been my advisor - actually since my mother Sally died. I inherited all the land, these apartments and the ranch in Edwardsville. I only had grade school and through Hal I upgraded my education, got my GED - well he's been like a father to me. Joe paused and moved toward Timmy - "you see, in a nutshell. We both, your father and I want you to handle all my interests - my investments since he is retiring shortly".

Timmy was taken aback with this overwhelming news. "Mr. Rudderham - I don't - I can't - know what to say" he managed to utter. "Call me Joe, say yes" was the firm response. Timmy walked around the other side of the desk and held out his hand in approval. "I will be extremely proud and Bank roll Insurance will do you good".

"Is there anything you would like to know, Timmy?" Joe questioned. Timmy pulled himself up to his full height, slightly over five feet - dwarfed by Joe's hulking frame and massive hands. Joe had formerly laboured as a stone mason.

"Where does John Angus MacMullin from Mira Gut fit in with you? I hear lately you have spent weekends with him at the Delta Bar". Joe looked quizzically at Timmy. He put his hand on his right shoulder. "I guess now I can tell you. Your father helped me find my birth father, he is John Angus and we have made peace to that. "Now", he said removing his hand, " I want you to handle the arrangements for a splendid party at the Leap Frog Ranch, on Canada Day.

Timmy showed his maturity and heartily accepted the responsibility Joe placed on him. July 1st dawned warm and sunny, a soft breeze wafting over the waters where the ranch

Tales From The Island

was located. They arrived shortly after dinner - all seven, not six of them. A young woman heavy with child was with John Angus, Dorothy and Marina. Timmy arrived in his SUV with Little Lou as his passenger. They all converged in a circle on the neatly manicured grounds.

Little Lou spotted the pregnant girl and screamed out "Carla". She replied "Papa".

Timmy looked at the young woman and her burgeoning belly. The feelings stirring within were new, never encountered before: a paternal instinct. She is beautiful, he thought. He took her hand, mustering up a "May I hug you?". Carla looked wonderingly at Timmy and nodded her head. Little Lou exclaimed hugging Timmy and Carla in his powerful arms. "Bambia" signifying his approval.

Joe, beaming approval also, is holding Marina's hand, a dainty one, in his huge mitt and presses it to his heart. "Is there a chance for me," he asks, almost pleading. "All the chances in the world", she replied, admiring his cheeky dimples. "You are my family now", Joe says.

Marina realized that all the side glances they had exchanged over the many months have meant something and everything she has longed for. In her mind she knew Joe was a good man. Marina Guy Rudderham has a nice ring to it. We'll make beautiful children together and I'll sing them to sleep. John Angus is also stirred by all that is happening now that he is acknowledged as Joe's father.

Lou is nodding to Dorothy. Haltingly he asks her, "you and me - together. Is nice, OK!" Dorothy shakes her head laughing and grabs his hand. Suddenly out of nowhere Marina's voice came singing "It's a small world, it's a small world after all".

Upon the calm breeze from the ranch's living room wafted the sound of John Allen's voice ringing out interspersed by the rousing cheers of all - chorusing in unison: "Halleluiah, Halleluiah".

Jack Compton

Tales From The Island

DRIFTWOOD

Raised on drift wood
Sand and salt,
Come a flood of
Hopes and dreams.

In the mind's eye,
The crowds, happiness
Joy, and excitement
Salt air and sea
Sunburned and free
Scalding days,
And the coolness of summer's eve.

Bountiful childhood dreams
The gift of a happy life
Given to me by them
Then that are no more
The gift I hope to leave
To me and mine,
Summers in the sun
Summers on mountain peaks,
Summers in the sand.

And although gone now
In the heart and in the mind
Forever there.

Paula Hines

COLTON'S STORY

This story was written a number of years ago for Colton, who loved saltines.

Once upon a time, there lived a boy named Colton. He had a special wish. When he wished upon a star, or threw a coin in a fountain or blew out his birthday candles, he made the same wish. His special wish: he wanted to fly.

One cold winter's night, the north wind whistled around the corner of his house and rattled the window panes. Colton was nestled warm and snug in his bed. Suddenly he heard what he thought was a chirp. It seemed to come from the folds of the comforter. There it was again.

Colton shook his covers and a tiny bird alighted on his pajamas' sleeve. "If you want to fly" says the bird softly, "come and join me on my journey. I have far to go." Colton jumped down from his bed, grabbed his knapsack, put on a wool sweater and warm socks. He took two books, an extra sweater and some saltines in case he should get hungry.

He had no sooner flung the knapsack on his back when the little bird flew out the window pulling him along. Colton was flabbergasted to see himself flying swiftly through the air.

Tales From The Island

The little bird shouted instructions as they journeyed along but Colton was too excited to hear and was soon hanging upside down from an electrical wire. His little friend helped him to free himself and on and on they went, flying over rooftops and whole villages.

The north wind continued to howl. Colton was growing weary and cold. Soon they sought shelter in a clump of spruce trees. The little bird advised Colton to be quiet as forest creatures do not like to be awakened from their slumber. Colton was so happy and he was unaware that he was chattering incessantly. A wise old owl nearby started to grumble and a wolf howled in the distance. Colton pulled on his extra sweater, ate some crackers and was soon lulled to sleep by the swaying of the spruce boughs.

Very early the next morning, the little bird awoke, ate a hearty breakfast, glanced at Colton nestled in the branches and quietly flew away. When Colton awoke he was wearing two sweaters and there were cracker crumbs in his bed.

Did Colton really fly? Who knows for sure. Once in a while he feels the flutter of bird's wings in his heart and he is filled with joy. What do you think?

Maureen MacIntosh

A QUILTER'S QUESTION

What is it, I wonder,
About piecing a quilt,
That leaves this poor woman
With a truckload of guilt?

My foremothers quilted,
Using many a patch,
And made pretty blankets
While not parting with cash.

Their fabrics they searched out
In the rag bags of home.
And they used all their skills
To make blankets so warm.

Tales From The Island

But I have a habit.
And I now confess
That I haunt fabric retailers
To bolster my stash.

I spend too much money.
I spend too much time.
And I enjoy every moment
Crafting blankets so fine.

My quilts they are pretty.
My quilts do no harm.
They give me much pleasure
And they keep people warm.

Thus, I guess, my dear reader
I should feel no great guilt
When I spend all my spare time
Making another patchwork quilt.

Kathryn MacCuish

GOING FISHING

This story is based on tales Rowe heard as a boy growing up in Point Edward.

In the early 1900's as a young boy on a small farm, I heard stories about the old times going out to sea. Finally when I became sixteen years old my father said I could go on the next trip. That fall they began planning their trip and I was among them. We packed a lot of supplies, as we did not know what was ahead of us.

Finally one November morning we got on the sailing ship and headed out to sea. I could only watch and try to help as we headed south.

About the tenth day a storm started. It did not seem that bad but later that night it got really bad. I knew my father and his friends were getting worried as the old ship started creaking badly. I was told to expect the worst and to strap all the food and water I could around my waist just in case.

Tales From The Island

Sure enough, one big wave hit the old ship and it flew into a million pieces. I was thrown out into the water and could not see or hear anyone. I grabbed on to the biggest block of wood I could reach and hung on for dear life.

As the daylight came I discovered I was alone in the ocean. But the wind had died down and I climbed up on the block of wood to get out of the water. All I could see was water and no sign of any other people or remaining pieces of ship.

I was glad I had some food and water to keep me alive. After many days of drifting, I saw some seagulls so I knew land was near. After a while I saw land. I did not care where I was, I just wanted to get on dry land. As I got closer I saw someone rowing out to me. He dragged me into his boat and spoke to me, but I could not speak his language.

He took me to shore where some people met us. They were short dark people, so I knew I was far from home. As I got onto shore, the people stared at me but they came to help. I was in bad shape but I was taken up to a house. I was there a long time slowly getting better. They talked to me with sign language and I was told I had to work or else. I did not care as long as I was alive. It was a small fishing village. Later on, I heard someone say this was Puerto Rico.

I worked with them on a wharf unloading fish. I met other people and tried to communicate with them to find out where I was and if I could get back to Nova Scotia. After a while, I learned some of their language. Finally I met a man that could speak English. He said he would ask around to see if any ships were going in that direction.

About two weeks later I met him again and he said he had some good news. He said his boat would drop me off somewhere on the east coast of Canada. I was happy and did not care where it was. I thanked the people who saved and cared for me and boarded the ship hoping for the best.

After weeks of travel I saw land and was told to get ready to go ashore. My friend told me it was Nova Scotia so I was helped to the shore and headed through the woods. I had no food but did not care, as I would eat berries and apples.

As I kept going I came to a clearing that reminded me of my own back field. I stayed away from houses as much as I could. Sure enough, as I got closer, I knew I was close to home.

I felt that I could not go to my house as they might not know me. I decided to cross other fields to the graveyard up the road. As I walked in to see whose name was marked on the gravestones, I saw my father's name and my name on a stone, Lost At Sea. As I sat there and cried I did not know what to do next, as everyone thought I was dead.

Tales From The Island

Later a man was walking by and saw me in the graveyard. He came in and started talking to me. After a while he recognized me and told me I had been away for years and that my mother was still living in the old house. He took me to his house to get cleaned up before I went home.

As I got to the driveway I was scared what might happen, but my friend was with me. My mother spoke to my friend but just stared at me. Finally I spoke to her and she knew who I was. After a long hug she said she never gave up on me.

That weekend they had a party for me and all the neighbours arrived. I told them I was sorry for their parents and friends who did not make it back. But they said they were happy that one came back from the dead.

Rowe Rudderham

IN FLANDERS FIELDS

This brief biography was written after reading about McCrae near Remembrance Day.

John McCrae, the Canadian who penned *In Flanders Fields*, was born in 1872. To those who watched him grow up, he was a conscientious boy who studied hard and followed two very separate interests - one in the military, like his father; and one in medicine, becoming a doctor at the age of 26.

In the military, we know from fact that he held many posts over his 30 years of service. Starting at the young age of 14, he enlisted in the Militia and continued up through the ranks. Duty bound at 27, he eagerly enlisted in the South African War but returned home disillusioned by war and the poor treatment of fellow soldiers. After returning to Canada, he left military life altogether. Ten years later, the Second World War drew him back, reluctantly on his part. We also know that he was an accomplished medical professional. By 31, he had set up his own practice. Throughout his medical career, he lectured, wrote articles and co-authored a pathology textbook.

The facts of his life speak for themselves; however, what do we know about John McCrae, the person? It is through his writings and the recollections of those close to him, we learn that he was a caring person who worked for the common good - sick children, his family, animals and fellow soldiers. Throughout, he was a man of the arts: poetry, drama and drawing.

Tales From The Island

Three years before his death, he wrote *In Flanders Fields*. Through this single poem, John McCrae became the voice of the dead to many people. Every November 11, we recite "if ye break faith, we shall not sleep" and we feel the loss anew. Many poems have been written about war, yet Flanders Fields stands out.

I wonder why this particular poem stimulates so much reality in our minds and seems so personal to each of us. Is it the topic of war, in general, that we struggle to understand; or is it the topic of death, our own, in particular? We know that each of us will have a last day, a last breathe, one last thought. It is all so personally final, yet so intrinsically vague.

There are words etched on a Polish crypt that, when translated, read "Who I was, you are; who I am, you will surely be." Such a mystery.

Today I reread *In Flanders Fields* and hear his voice added to "we are the dead" and marvel at the sustaining power of words written 90 years and many wars later.

Judy Kaiser

GADGETS AND LIFE

This essay on modern technology was prompted by a Circle discussion on changes members have seen in their lifetimes.

There is no question, gadgets have been invented since the beginning of time to make life easier and simpler for all. In most cases this has proven to be true, and without going back through time to cite obvious examples, we have only to look at some gadgets that have appeared in the past few decades, to see how life, as we live it today, has indeed become much more simplistic.

With the advancements in health, communication, entertainment, and leisure, in this short period of time, we are able to associate this success with the use of ingenious mechanical or electronic gadgets. In health care alone, doctors once relied on x-ray machines for certain illness and indeed still do today, but now they have much more sophisticated equipment in the treatment outpatient's symptoms to locate causes that can be detected with the latest technology, including MRI's, Cat scans, heart monitors, and electronic devices that can be hooked up to patients and record their every movement. No one today would ever want to go back to the old days, particularly as it refers to health care.

In communication, we can look at the improvements in how people are able to converse with one another today, as compared to say 40 years ago. I can recall the day we had our first

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telephone installed with a four digit number, that we shared on a party line with other people, of course that was back in the early 50's. Today people are walking around the streets, driving cars, in classrooms, in shopping centers, churches, even in elevators, speaking on cellular phones that also play music, take pictures, and surf the Internet along with the ability to view TV programs. Talk about Dick Tracy and his two way radio back in the 30's and 40's. And oh yes, never mind George Orwell's book, 1984, with his "thought police" and his famous phrase "Big brother is watching you." Now we are being monitored as we walk into buildings or down streets or as we drive through intersections.

It's hard to believe that television has been here for the past 53 years. When we first tuned in back in 1954, it was for limited coverage, in black and white and on one channel, to view news coverage that wasn't even current at the time. Today everything on TV is live and interactive and in living colour and on satellite and cable systems with hundred of channels, and all in a digital and high definition quality, that almost puts you inside sets, that can be smaller than 2 inches or bigger than the one wall of a room.

To touch on entertainment and leisure, which have really become part of communication and, without going into transportation, another topic that gadgets have changed over the years, we have seen advancements in capturing and viewing and listening, to all of our daily activities. It seems like yesterday when 78 RPM records were the rage, and then these gave way to the 45's and in turn to the LP's. Then along came the tape recorders and the 8 tracks and the cassettes. Well if you're getting dizzy so am I, as we are now leaving the age of VCR's and CD players and DVD players and recorders, and going into digital equipment that will make the last group also a memory and old technology within a year.

With the progress this technology brings, especially in health care, there is no question that we are living longer and better lives, however, having seen the evolution and progress in other areas of our lives where more, becomes less, on account of our materialistic lifestyle, I believe that easier and simpler lifestyles may not be what these gadgets have yielded. School children today are relying more on computers and gadgets, and now the fear is that they will lose their ability to be able to read and write and to think for themselves in the years ahead. If this is the consequence of technology and the gadgets that it produces, then even with all of the benefits they may well provide life itself may be more of a struggle.

With regards to all of these gadgets flooding the market, I am reminded of a quote by Laura Ingalls Wilder, "I am beginning to learn that it is the sweet simple things of life which are the real ones after all." As I reach for the book I borrowed from the library, and settle in for an evening of reading, I can't help but think she just may be right.

Kenneth J. Beaton

Tales From The Island

LIFE TEMPERS THE SOUL

I met a man today,
One time full of power and influence,
Changing one man's life with the stroke of a pen.
I, the man,
He, the power monger,
I swore I would dance on his grave, full of hate and disdain.

Today, I met the man,
Depleted of all power,
Now only emaciated,
Dying, a shell of his former self,
All memory of his place in my life erased.
However not forgotten by me,
But now,
Hate existed no more in my eyes.
Sorrow and pain ever present in his,
And only pity in mine.

Paula Hines

PURPOSE

As I walked along a narrow path,
in the cool, brisk, autumn air,
I saw a leaf fall from the sky,
that made me stop and stare.

An old and crinkled leaf it was,
with tints of red and brown,
and I gazed in thought upon it,
as it lay upon the ground.

This thought occurred as I looked down,
on that withered, forlorn thing,
which had thrived in bloom up in that tree
since early in the spring.

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That now, as fate would have it,
its life had met its end,
it had fallen from the tree above,
and would never bloom again.

But while in bloom, up in that tree,
in rain, and wind, and sun,
it proved its worth upon the earth,
until its time had come.

Now what of me? I'm like the leaf,
I'm only here for a stay,
and when asked to account for my life on earth,
what will I have to say?

Kenneth J. Beaton

CHRISTMAS TAILS

It's Christmas Eve and a special one for me, the mother of two grown children. My daughter, who works in Toronto, was home for the Holidays and we were spending them with my son and daughter-in-law and their two dogs. Newman, the smaller dog, is a bit of a rogue, while Sawyer, the larger dog, is kind of a gentle nature.

Before we left for church and to visit relatives, a gift for each dog was taken from the large stash under the tree. Like children, they excitedly tore off the wrappings, and were very happy with gifts of pig's ears. As we left the house, we looked back at two contented dogs.

Upon returning home, around midnight, the dogs met us at the door and bolted outside. My son chose to stay out on this moonlit night and frolic with them for a while. My daughter-in-law was the first to enter the living room and a scream pierced the air. My daughter entered next and I heard her gasp. As I rounded the corner, I saw them standing knee-deep in paper, cardboard and styrofoam particles. The dogs had opened every gift under the tree in hopes of finding another treat. Boxes of candy had the corners chewed, just to make sure of the contents, but the candy was intact. A crystal vase stood upright under the tree, its box and packing shredded about the room.

When my son entered, I can't repeat his first few words but he ended with, "Christmas is ruined!" Mother, in her wisdom, replied "Christmas is a spirit that comes from the heart!"

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We proceeded to dig out and exchange gifts and hug and laugh till tears came. We couldn't identify the giver or receiver of some gifts. When the mess was cleared away, we changed into our comfy nightwear. As my son poured the wine, my daughter-in-law set out a scrumptious array of food and my daughter slipped "It's a Wonderful Life" into the VCR.

As I looked out onto the sparkling snow, I felt Jesus must have been born on a night as beautiful as this one and I realized that the true gifts of Christmas cannot be wrapped. They need to be exposed and shared with one another. We had been blessed with peace, love and goodwill on this special night.

These memories would be etched in our minds indelibly and bring forth joy and laughter in the days ahead.

Maureen MacIntosh

THINGS CHANGE

It had been 13 years and very little contact over the last 5, only the odd card with a brief message. We had been such good friends. But for one reason or another, a new life for me, a return to the work force, another child and three thousand miles, well, we just lost contact.

But this Christmas so many years later I decided to call, a Christmas gift to myself. I was going to call and ask her for coffee as we did in those days, so many years ago ...

We would come together almost every day like clock work at her house or mine. And with us came the little ones. Our kids were small and we would get them involved in some activity so we could do a little gossiping and have a few laughs. Sometimes Diane would join us. Oh God, it helped to keep us sane between the diapers, bottles and training pants.

Let's see, how old would Sean be? ... 21 I guess, probably has a girl friend now ... Tracey would be 18. Let's see it's 12 o'clock here, 9 o'clock there. We had just finished opening our gifts, had breakfast, Dad done with all his videotaping of the happiness and excitement of another Christmas morning. Oh the heck with it. I got out my book and dialed the number.

"Hello, how about going for coffee?"

"Who's this?"

"Hi, it's me, you moron."

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"Oh my God. It's not you!"

"Oh my God, I can't believe it!"

She talked some small talk but eventually the cold reality of truth found it's way to the top. I had a wonderful picture of life and what happens to it in the passage of time. You see, when I left there was this blonde blue-eyed 8 year old boy and a 5 year old girl and a friend strong as an ox. And instead I heard something very different. Sean was now not a boy with this girlfriend but a boy into alcohol and drugs and trouble with the law living at home sometimes and sometimes not. Tracey was distraught to the point of over dosing on medication in an attempt to end her life. And my friend she was battling cancer and a nervous breakdown. She was no longer working in a position but at McDonalds. She was unable to cope at times with life not knowing whether cancer would end it anyway.

We talked for a long time. And I felt her pain. This had all happened within a short space of time. At times her circumstances gave me the feeling I was talking to a stranger, not my friend. But eventually she got to talk to my son and more especially my daughter. You see, she was her Godmother and they had never spoken and they were meeting for the first time. That was very special. When I got off the phone, I felt kind of empty ... bewildered ... very sad. What happened to my world, the world I had left. I guess in a way I expected it to stay the same, untouched just like I left it. It was like the second last scene in the last act. The next scene would only play itself out when I returned. But life was playing itself out all along with or without my help or involvement.

I checked the old turkey and looked to the living room, everyone happy and contented. Yes, there were difficulties here the usual stuff that happens to families. But overall everyone was doing O.K. They were a fairly happy and contented bunch. But I also know how fragile life can at times. Oh, I was well aware of that. I guess that's why I go around unbeknownst to others with my fingers and toes crossed all the time.

Guests were beginning to arrive for Christmas dinner.

As the day wore on along with the fun and merriment I couldn't help but think back to my telephone conversation. It seemed to just "sit" in the back of my mind. I was appreciating the kindness, tenderness and love which prevailed before me mindful of the dark reality just beyond my door, in the friend's life and I guess in the lives of so many on this Christmas day.

Life is tenuous at best, I guess. As I grow older, I have come to realize that more and more: "It's the best of times and the worst of times". I never understood that for a lot of years. But I understand it now.

But in my heart there is forever ... hope.

As for my friend, we exchanged addresses, new phone numbers and decided to stay in

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touch. We even talked about a lot of other things over the phone and she felt a lot better. And there was a lot of laughter as we eventually shared about the old days and the crazy times we had together.

It was strange how I was compelled to make that call that day. It couldn't have come at a better time. I think maybe it was meant to be. It was the best present I gave that Christmas, to *her...and* to me ... and more especially ... to us. We were together once again!

Paula Hines

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

How do I remember you, Christmases of my childhood? Let me count the ways:

The agony of bed and trying to sleep on Christmas Eve,
empty wrinkled long brown stockings waiting forlornly for Santa
and decorated trees that magically appeared on Christmas morning.

The mystery and hard work of the Christmas card ritual -
my mother writing out what seemed like hundreds of cards and
the suspense each day of seeing how many the mailman delivered to us.
How to display them?
On the mantel, taped to the panes of a French door, on a doorframe.

Special cookies that I liked
and mincemeat pies and dark fruitcake that I didn't.

Wonderful presents:
an illustrated volume of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*
that I completely consumed on the day I received it,
curled up in a corner of the scratchy maroon couch;
a Scrabble game that I still have, minus only one tile - a blank;
my last doll - a wonderful baby doll - my little sister got one, too;
a 78 rpm recording of Elvis' Jailhouse Rock.

Did it always snow?
It seemed like it, but I'm sure it didn't.

Television specials in black and white - with lots of dancing and singing.
Snacks and drinks (for Mom and Daddy) on Christmas Eve.

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Packages from Moncton containing knitted slippers and one year for my mother a small sandwich tray that I still have and think fondly of my mother's friend Chris when I use it.

Dressing up in honour of the day, only to stay at home.

The loneliness of Christmas on the Airport Road.

That flat feeling after all the anticipation.

Kathryn MacCuish

HARBOUR HOCKEY

This story was brought about from old memories of harbor ice moving out one Saturday as we cleaned ice for a game of hockey on Sunday. Sunday came and there was nothing but water in the harbor. Other times we kids would go way up the harbor with sleighs and open our jackets for the wind to take us down harbor. This wind would also move us out. One day the neighbors called our parents telling them to get us off the ice as the ice was breaking up.

One late Saturday afternoon, I decided to clean off the harbor ice for a hockey game ON Sunday. I made a wooden scraper and took a long shovel down to the harbor in front of our house in Point Edward. As I started clearing ice, I saw three boys come down to the shoreline. I went in to see them and ask what their plans were. They said they were going for a skate. I told them I would clean a circle for them and told them to skate both directions as that would help them make the N.H.L.

It was almost dark when I went back to my rink clearing. I looked over to check on the kids, they were skating around the circle. The next time I looked towards shore I could not see any lights on the shoreline. I knew what was happening as it had happened before. The ice was moving out towards the ocean.

I went over to where the kids were and told them to stay calm and stay together as we waited to see what was going to happen. It got darker and colder, and we could not see any sign of the shore or lights.

They still had their skates on and had their hockey sticks also. I told them to keep still and wait as the ice we were on could hit the South Bar sand bar, as that was the way we were

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going. As we kept moving there was open water all around us. Later on we hit something and I said this is our chance as I could see land.

As the ice was piling up we jumped off. There were woods in sight so we walked towards shelter but the kids still had their skates on so we could not travel far.

We had no matches to start a fire so we tried to find shelter along the woods. We huddled up trying to keep from freezing. I kept telling the kids someone would find us. Later that night we could hear a plane but it was far away. I guess they were looking for us on the ice but we could only wait. The kids were very good as I kept telling them how happy their parents would be to find them still alive. They took off their skates and I told them to blow on their socks and mitts to keep from freezing. I knew they had water rescue at the Sydney Mines Fire Department. And I hoped they would show up soon as it was getting colder. We could not go through the woods, as their footwear would not allow it.

About 8 am when it got bright out we could hear boats in the water but they were not very close. Finally one boat did come close so we waved and hollered. Sure enough one person saw us. He waved to us and I saw him talking on his radio so I knew news would travel to our parents and other rescue boats. In about 20 minutes fishing boats and rescue boats were all around us. The smallest dinghy came to shore to take us out to the bigger boat.

We jumped into the water, as then wet feet did not matter. The ice was gone so they took us to North Sydney wharf. There were hundreds of people on the wharf to welcome us ashore. We went right to the hospital for a checkup but we had no serious frostbite. They gave me credit for the rescue but all I said was I kept them together and still while we were on the ice.

Rowe Rudderham

SEEKING WARMTH

It's night... it's cold ... and it's winter... winter in Cape Breton. I'm on my way home from work... and it's late. Into the driveway I can hear the crackle and crunch of tires on ice and snow until I come to a complete stop.

Sighing, I glance around, seeing only dark and cold. But over to the left I see the incandescent lighting through the front window on my home ... and it looks warm. I exit the car and make my way to the front door.

As I open it, I immediately hear the crackle of fire in the fireplace.

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My little dog, Sandy comes running and jumping up on me. As I rub his head and speak to him, I look over to see the kids both amusing themselves playing a board game. My husband appears from the kitchen with a hot plate of food and a drink.

After pleasantries are exchanged, I look to my recliner chair and fall into it.

As I recline back and begin enjoying my food I look around the room ... at the children ... my dog ... my better-half ... my home ... my life ... and I feel warm and wonderful.

That night I stayed there all that evening. We all did. It's usually so hectic here but not tonight. Tonight was different. We all knew that, although we did not speak of it. It was one of those rare occasions in a family's busy life where we could just enjoy spending time together.

Looking through the window I sensed the coldness and darkness of night only a window pane away. Then, I glanced back inside. I could feel and sense the warmth, the glow, and the intimacy ... but most of all ... the love.

Paula Hines

THE BLESSING

If I could reclaim the thunder from the hills
And instill it in my voice
Eradicate the worldly ills,
Would be primal choice
A mortal I be, the power the difference in me,
Pass it on,
With each new dawn
Resounding, multiplying, simplicity,
To give the blessing, to endure eternally.
"I love you!"

Jack Compton

Tales From The Island

RED DINNERS - A TRADITION

Valentine's Day is one of my favorite days and I would like to tell you about my Red Dinners. I became almost famous through these celebrations.

My children were 2 and 4 years old when I started this tradition and it continued for close to 25 years. When I first came up with the idea, I had to work with what I had on hand. With two small children and no car available, I had to make do. We did walk to the corner store and purchase red cream soda and candy hearts. I think the soft falling snow and the fact that I had lit the stone fireplace in our cozy den, helped set the wheels in motion.

I can recall our first red Dinner as if it were yesterday. The children helped make red jelly. I whipped the cream and they placed the red candy hearts on top. While I made spaghetti and meatballs, they coloured red hearts on the white napkins and stapled red paper together for streamers. Their father was greatly impressed when he arrived home after a hard day's work, to find such a festive atmosphere. And so began what was to become a wonderful and long tradition in our household.

Over the years, I collected red dishes or heart shaped ones; a heart-shaped butter dish, a red salad dish, salt and pepper shakers with red tops. Red wine and candles were added. I'd search for material with heart designs, add a little lace and create a festive tablecloth. The food had to be red. Lasagna and cherry cheesecake was a favourite. Spaghetti and meatballs with strawberry shortcake was another. I'd make heart shaped tea biscuits.

There was no end to my imagination when it came to my Red Dinners. Each year I'd bring in something different; a red gift by each plate, a chocolate heart. One year, each person had to wear something red. I remember my son coming to the table with no red showing. When questioned, he stood up and showed us a little of his red underwear.

After the children left for college, I thought I might cancel my special dinners but then, it would be just another day. So I started inviting friends and to this day, when I meet them, my Red Dinners always come up in the conversation. They were greatly enjoyed and I received great satisfaction in preparing them. Nowadays, my son usually drops by on Valentine's Day with a chocolate heart and a card and my daughter calls from Ontario to wish me a Happy Day and we reminisce. So the spirit is marching on.

Maureen MacIntosh

Tales From The Island

LOVE

You know there are certain things in this life that are inescapable, things like fear of the dark, fear of the unknown. There are so many wonderful things, the love we share, the peace that comes with a close family, our faith in God and Heaven above, how we all lean on one another to help us through trials, difficulties that come with life.

This is a story of fear. This is a story of love. This is a story about peace. It's also a true story.

It was just a usual winter night, Saturday, snow gusting down in and around the city. The night was dark and cold. It was one of those nights to stare out the window at the darkness, the foreboding night, and glance back inside to see and feel the warmth of the fire, everyone in pajamas and warm cozy housecoats. There were lots of treats, movies and just togetherness. I love these times, family together having fun far away from the bustle of a busy week, with school homework, tests, work for Mom and Dad.

After a great night we all retired to our warm cozy beds to snooze the night away.

Sometime in the middle of the night I awoke and felt awe struck. I got up and went to the washroom. As I came back to my bed I lay down and wept silently. I had the most extraordinary dream. It was wonderful, absolutely wonderful ... and so real. You see, I have often thought about dying and maybe knowing you're dying and it's the last hours, like dying from cancer for example. And I know we all have these thoughts. We just don't like having them or talking about them or admitting them to others. Anyway I guess working in hospitals and having two parents die, I guess it doesn't surprise me. Anyway I have often thought I would be really scared, terrified even, scared to let go and slip away. But to what? What's it like not to exist? Is there Heaven? Where did my parents go?

At any rate in the dream I *am* dying and it's the last hours and I'm scared, really scared. The family is around but there's nothing they can do, nothing anyone can do. I'm lying there and it's the most terrifying time. I feel so helpless and it's the lowest time in my entire life. And as I lay in my bed all alone and scared and helpless, my mother comes to me and lies down beside me to my left and takes my hand. And it's so wonderful. She had been gone from me so many years and has come back to help me in my time of need.

She says, "Don't be afraid ... It's wonderful! Let yourself go. It's all waiting for you."

I feel the softness, the tenderness and motherly love in her touch ... in her beautiful words. It's been so long since I have felt her. It was so wonderful to be with her. And I let go. And as I do, I guess I died. Immediately, I feel the absolute peace, wonder and exhilaration. I have this sense of happiness and joy that I had never felt *ever* before. And as we fly through this tunnel, I realize ... It's all true ... It's all true ... All the stuff we

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learned in church, all the stuff we believed and had hoped was there ... It's all true after all. And as we sped through together I saw flashes of my life. I remembered when I lost the ones I loved and remembered how bad I felt for them, and now realized that I never had to feel that way. They were way beyond us. They were the winners, really. And I saw the nurse come out of the hospital room I was in to tell my loved ones. I knew they would be devastated and would cry. But you know I understood them. I knew they would miss me and would be sad. However it did not make *me* sad. I knew that in only a brief time they would be with us.

The comfort of my mother was beyond words. I had had many dreams since she had gone but always she was back to life. This time it was different. I was passing over to where *she* was now. She was there waiting for me. And she was different... so peaceful, almost angelic. And she came to help me, to comfort me. And I knew the others would be ahead. We were flying through this tunnel toward the lights ... but ... then ... it was not my time. I had to go back. I was a little disappointed by it but then was O.K. with it. And when I came back I told everyone about what had happened. I told them never to be afraid. I knew I would never be afraid again.

That was the dream.

I can tell you life was just a little different after that. I know it was a dream but it was so real. It was so much like the experiences of others who had died and came back, those who had seen what lies beyond.

It makes you wonder. What is this life? Is it an interlude between our two eternities? It's such a mystery. But most of all what my dream tells me is to explain even more than ever the power of love. It binds us all. Thank God for that.

Later on that day, I was driving out to pick up my daughter. I was thinking about my dream. I could actually feel the peace and the love of my mother. I felt a closeness I had never experienced before. I felt like she was there.

Sometimes dreams make no sense compared to our everyday reality. But sometimes dreams seem like reality and real life just a mass of confusion. But as I sped along I could only feel her touch ... her tenderness ... her compassion ... and most of all her love.

Paula Hines

Tales From The Island

BEAUTY

Throughout my life, there have been many people who I have admired. One who stands out as an exceptional human being is an old man whose name I do not even know.

I met him by his wife's hospital bed over forty years ago. It was one of those chance meetings, lasting but a few minutes; yet, his unfailing love and devotion to her are etched in my memory forever.

Before I met him, I dreaded going into his wife's room. As a young, inexperienced RN in training, it was my responsibility to wash her foul-smelling body, comb her long, dirty hair and attempt to brush her decaying teeth.

She was a huge woman in the last stage of dementia who smelled so bad that, even from her doorway, she repulsed most hospital staff. Her bulk was so large, she could not physically get out of bed and would continually attempt to roll from side to side.

Each morning over a period of a week, I would steel myself to the ritual of attempting to clean her. As I tried to wash between her many folds of rolling flesh, I would chatter away to distract myself while metering out my breathing for the human stench almost stopped my breath.

To be honest, I was frightened of her, partly because she never spoke as her darting eyes followed every moment of my hands and partly because I did not know whether her ravaged mind perceived me as a threat or a help.

As I was gathering my supplies to leave the last morning I was to be with her, a tall, well dressed, elderly, very clean gentleman stepped through the doorway. My first impression of him was his impeccable appearance. My second impression was his eagerness to be by her side. I did not even think he knew I was in the room.

With comfortable familiarity and sincere affection, he kissed her full on her oversized lips. Without making direct eye contact with him, her eyelids closed as she made a low slurred mumbling sound. At first, I could not make out what she was saying, her voice was so low. She repeated it over and over, the string of words rhyming into a forlorn chant. Then it came to me. "I sorry, I sorry, I sorry."

The scene had unfolded so quickly that I felt I had intruded on a private moment and swung around to leave them. Just then, I realized he had spoken to me.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

Tales From The Island

"Isn't she beautiful." He repeated. It was more a statement than a question. I looked directly at him to catch his meaning, for it seemed incongruous that he was talking about her. His face had an enlightened look as though his day was complete now that he was by her side.

In that split second, I saw in his eyes a deep love for her as he held her fleshy hand. It was the purest look of love I have ever seen, a look that had a sort of wonder attached to it.

In that moment, I admired him, not for the romantic notion of a man loving a woman. It was deeper than that. It was his ability to see beyond the outside and to cherish who he knew she would be if nature had not played such a cruel trick on both of them.

I learned later that, in her youth, she had been crowned Queen at the Annapolis Valley Apple festival parade. Well educated and beautiful, she had accomplished a lot in her life until that fateful diagnosis in her late forties.

From the beginning, he had insisted that she be cared for in their home. Caregivers were hired as necessary, but he was the one who slept on a cot outside her bedroom door each night for over thirty years in case she needed watching on her nightly wanderings.

I admire him even today when I think of how they must have suffered when the life they had together all started to unravel.

Yes, I know this must sound like an idealistic teenager's interruption of what had been witnessed in only a split second; yet, even at that young age, I sensed the utter desolation he must have felt for her as he had watched her lose herself into that black hole of dementia. And how, on some solitary evening, he had sat by himself with the knowledge that she did not recognize him, and that what they had had was gone from her mind. And how he must have come to some understanding of how to go on with her, yet alone.

They were gone the next day to set her up in a nursing home a fair distance from their home.

I have often wondered how many times he traveled that road to visit the one person who could make his face so radiant, and I still admire him for his ability to overcome such loss.

Judy Kaiser

Tales From The Island

TRAINS

I heard a train the other day. It made me feel happy and sad all at the same time. Later on, I found myself thinking about the big part that trains have played in my life.

Even before I was born, trains had an influence on me. Both my parents grew up near train tracks. My mother's father was a driver with the CNR and so her home revolved around train schedules and her father's "runs". My father grew up on a farm beside the CNR mainline and went to work as an apprentice in the big shops in Moncton when he finished school.

My parents married in 1941 before my father went overseas with the Canadian army. After he came back to Canada, he returned to work at the shops. It was there, in the fall of 1948, that he was killed in a horrific accident.

One of my earliest memories is of trains. It was dark and cold and I was wearing my red wool coat, hat and leggings while standing on a train platform beside a huge, hissing train with my mother, who was wearing a fur coat, and a whole lot of other tall people. I know now that we were taking the train west to visit my mother's friend Norma, who lived in Winnipeg, and my aunt Muriel and her family in St. Catherines. I have another memory of that trip. We were sitting in the dining car at a table set with starched white linen and silver. Our table companion was a Mountie in his red serge coat. It must have been breakfast, because I had a grapefruit half, and I embarrassed my mother by picking it up to squeeze out the last of the juice.

I remember taking the train to Birch Ridge to visit my father's parents on their farm. The train would stop just long enough for you to swing off and then it would be on its way again. The tracks ran in a straight line for as far as you could see in both directions. Beside the end of the driveway, there was a little maroon painted shanty between the road and the tracks. It was furnished with a bench and a potbellied stove and it provided shelter while you were waiting for the train. In my mind's eye, I can still see my grandfather standing on the track, swinging a lantern with red shades to signal to the train to stop.

My grandfather, Walter, seemed to spend a lot of time waiting for trains. The train would pick up cream in big milk cans and take it to Moncton to the dairy. My grand mother was the postmistress and so, three times a week, Walter would wait for the train to slow down so he could toss the outgoing mailbag to the men in the mail car and catch the incoming one. I learned to pick blueberries beside those tracks. Because the section crews burned the vegetation away every few years to keep the tracks clear, they grew especially big and fat there. And of course, the drivers were always very willing to wave to a little girl.

Tales From The Island

When we moved to Cape Breton, trains continued to play an important part in my life. I had a pass, a legacy from my father, and so I started traveling by myself at an early age. My first trips were to Moncton and Birch Ridge to visit. The summer after high school, I went to Ontario by myself to attend a science summer school. How did I get there? On the train, of course. That time I had a sleeper! And then I started going back and forth to Sackville on a regular basis, when I was studying at Mt A. On the way home, especially at Christmas, the train would always be very crowded when it left Truro. It gradually emptied out, until on that last long stretch from Orangedale to Sydney, I seemed to be almost alone on the train, rattling along in the dark.

Even after I started working, trains continued to play a role in my life. I began my career as a teacher in Ontario. How did I get there? On the train, of course. When I came home the first few times, it was on the train. Some how, I ended up settling in Cape Breton. I married a man, not a trainman, but a man who worked at a power plant and who dealt with the trains that brought the coal there. For about 15 years we lived in a house from which you could hear the coal trains blow for the Union Street crossings. That was one of the best things about that house - hearing those comforting wails while tucked up in bed. I even used to take my children back and forth to Moncton on the train, in the days before I had the guts to drive long distances by myself. And I seem to have even passed my love of trains on to them.

A few years ago, I came into some money. Not enough to do anything serious with, but enough to pay for a good trip. So, to celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary, I took my husband on a guided train tour of Canada. Neither of us had ever seen the Prairies, the mountains or the Pacific and the train, first class all the way, was a wonderful way to go.

I'm not finished with trains yet. Our daughter lives in Bathurst and a trip to see her would be a good excuse for a train ride. Our son lives in Vancouver - a visit to him would be a wonderful reason to take another transcontinental train journey. And, if I'm ever really flush, there's the Orient Express from Vienna to Istanbul and a train that runs from one side of Australia to the other and, of course, the train from Moscow through Siberia. And, for \$17,000 each, the holy grail of train trips: a 21-day ride on the world's most luxurious train through the wilds of Africa.

All aboard!

Kathryn MacCuish

Tales From The Island

DANIEL

Most of you from my generation will recognize this song by Elton John. It's a pretty lament. I bet some songs you remember remind you of a special time. *Daniel* is one that brings back great memories for me.

I guess I must have been twenty-one, a half a life ago, traveling in Europe with my college friend, Linda. We had just graduated from university, and were on our way to jobs, but felt we deserved a nice respite in between. We were *foot-loose and fancy-free*, no commitments, no responsibility for anything other than ourselves.

We were on the island of Corfu in Greece staying at a hotel along with a group of kids like ourselves from the U. K. We hung in pretty close with them. They were a nice bunch and it was wonderful to be with people who spoke English.

One night, we all headed to the golf club. We spent the night filling ourselves with food and drink, dancing the night away!

At one point, I slipped out to get some air. I walked out onto the balcony. I was all alone. It was an absolutely beautiful night. The sky was filled with stars as I looked over the Aegean Sea. It was warm and quiet and very still. And then the music began to play ... *Daniel*.

Beautiful, sweet music filled the air. I just stood there ... listening and absorbing the moment. I don't know why that special moment in time stood out and stayed with me all these years. Maybe it was the way I felt: so wonderful, so free, so young, so happy. I had my whole life ahead of me. It was a period in time marked by great innocence and idealism. I was just a kid who looked forward with wonder and excitement at the life and the road that lay ahead.

A lot has happened since then: some good; some bad. The innocence has definitely gone. I'm not as strong as I used to be, but have more wisdom. I'm not as energetic as I used to be, but have more patience. I'm much more sedate and have lost some of my reckless abandonment. I'm not as loud, but speak with a quiet assurance. So much has changed. I'm a mom now and a wife. I'm a bit of a writer ... well, at least in my own mind. I've lived long enough to understand "life is a journey". I'm old enough to look back, young enough to look ahead. At forty-one, I'm too young to be old, but at the same time, too old to be young; living in the realm of the "great compromise" between wisdom and youth.

One day I was at the office, gabbing away with my co-workers. The radio played in the background. Suddenly the sweet haunting melody of Elton John's *Daniel* filled the room ... And I traveled back...

Tales From The Island

"Hey, are you with it today?"

"What? Oh, sorry. I was just thinking of something. "

As I walked back to my office, I listened to the melody, felt the warmth and stillness of the night, gazed at the stars and looked over the Aegean Sea.

Paula Hines

DELIGHTFULLY SCARY HALLOWE'EN THINGS

Ghosts and goblins
Spooks and screamers
Tricky tricksters
Cobweb streamers.

Candy and costumes
Masks and madness
Broomstick bombers
Black-cat badness.

Ghosts and ghouls
Skulls and bones
Witches and wizards
Chasing us home.

Judy Kaiser

Tales From The Island

BERRY PICKING

Growing up on a farm in Point Edward one of my chores was to pick berries. Going back to the back field I would cross overland to a neighbour's field to pick raspberries, because my mother liked them better than other berries.

One day I came to a large hollow that seemed like the size of a football field. As I started picking, I had a strange feeling that I could just put my arms up and drift to the end of the hollow where the berries were more plentiful. I don't know how I did it but it happened. And I never forced it.

One evening I was in our back field and as it was getting dark I looked across to the berry patch and I saw a green light. I did not go over to check it that night but thought I would check it later. I did not tell anyone but a few nights later I went over to the field where I had seen the light. As I sat on the edge of the hollow, I waited for it to get dark.

Around darkness I heard a machine up in the air coming down to land. I stayed out of sight and as it landed it looked like a small flying saucer. A small door opened and 2 short people came out. They had breathing gear on. As I moved towards them they stopped short. I waved to them as they looked around. They pointed to the door and made signs for me to enter. I did and they signaled for me to go up in the air with them. I made it known I needed air to go up in the sky. They took me to a small room where many containers were available full of air. They hooked me up to breathing gear and pointed upward. I nodded ok, so up we went.

As we were way up in sky they took their breathing gear off. I was getting a little scared but they kept changing air bottles for me. I was getting weaker and worried about how much air was left. I saw them talking and they pointed down, so back to land we went. They landed in the same place hours later. They let me out and they filled up their air tanks. It was very dark as I left and I shook hands and waved good-bye. I did not know where they came from but hoped to see them again.

The next morning I headed back to home, it was just getting daylight. My mother met me at the door and she asked me where I had been. I told her I was in the back field when it got dark and I got lost. I wandered around and took shelter and waited until it got light and then found my way home. She said she thought I might have gone to a friend's house. I never saw the flying saucer again.

Rowe Rudderham

Tales From The Island

LESSONS IN GOLF AND LIFE, A FRIENDSHIP REMEMBERED

An assignment to write about a memorable character produced this fond recollection.

" I like looking for golf balls. Not mine, other people's golf balls, long lost in the woods." With these words, I had an introduction to a man who would have a great influence on me, and on the way I would play the game of golf for the rest of my life. I first met Pius Mac Donald at the Lingan Golf Club about twenty-five years ago. He had recently retired from the open hearth department of the Sydney Steel Corporation, and was resuming the game of golf that he had taken up a few years earlier. I had just taken out a trial membership with the club, and with the old set of Campbell Plus Four golf clubs that I had purchased for fifteen dollars, I hooked up with him on the number one tee on that most memorable day.

Although he was older than me, we kind of hit it off right from the start. A big, burly man, he reminded me of the comedian Jonathan Winters in looks and wit, facial expressions and all. He drove his ball off the first tee with a beautiful shot that went straight down the fairway. My attempt wasn't as successful and I'm sure that if I had tee'd off with anyone else that day, they would have made up some kind of excuse not to continue, but not Pius. As we made our way off the tee box and towards where our balls had landed, he quickly told me not to be too concerned about scoring well, and not to get too serious about this game of golf. It being in the early morning and in the spring of the year, there was no one in front of us and no one coming behind. It was at this time that Pius was quick to point out to me what indeed must have been glaring deficiencies in the way I held and swung the golf club. It seemed like we had all the time in the world and Pius began to teach me the basic fundamentals of grip, posture, alignment, and swing patterns for the various shots throughout that morning. Don't get me wrong, you don't learn the game of golf in one day, as a matter of fact, I would be learning the game from that moment on. I guess that is one of the reasons they call golf the the game for life. On that first day, I would indeed learn the most useful of all tips, not to get frustrated.

Most people can and do become frustrated with the game of golf. I mean how hard can it be? There's that little white ball just sitting there waiting to be hit. Ah, if it was only that simple. Having received my first lessons from Pius on how to play the game, we continued on, and as we strolled the fairways at Lingan, Pius introduced me to another aspect of the game, looking for ball.

Now, not that I wasn't in the woods up to this point on that particular day looking for my own golf ball, but Pius showed me spots on certain holes that would yield numerous golf balls over the years. With his" Come on in here, this looks like a good place to look for some balls." Away we would go, and out we would come with a few balls each. Never short with the

Tales From The Island

wit, Pius would say, "Now don't use those balls right away, leave them in the bag for a few days as they are still wild, they have to be tamed."

Pius, as I was to learn, was quite a story teller. As we wandered around the course at a leisurely pace in and out of the woods on most holes, he would tell stories of his days in the second world war, of his war bride wife Dora, and of his four children. He would tell tales of his hunting and fishing trips, and of his dogs, and his knowledge of wildlife, and of the books he had on the different bird species. Indeed, it was with great interest that I would listen to those stories over the years, and at some time if I would become a little leery of their authenticity, he would produce the evidence. Like the time he went fishing in the North West Territories, flown into some remote lake by a bush pilot he befriended while visiting his daughter out west. I saw the pictures of the plane, and the fish, and yes, there was Pius standing next to the pilot. I also saw the guns, and the fishing rods and the books on the birds and wildlife.

I make note of these stories, told to me as we strolled the links at Lingan, to point out the way I learned to play the game of golf. I believe it was the late great George Knudson, one of Canada's finest golfers, who said, "I relax to golf." Well Pius and I wouldn't fit into that category, as we golfed to relax. Over the next ten years Pius and I were to become great friends, and we had a good many golfers join us in pursuit of that little white ball. Some appreciated the stories and some didn't. I guess the competitive spirit was not to be found in our group. As I was to learn, that even though I love the game, there is more to life than just golf.

As I walk and golf the course at Lingan to this day, whenever I see someone making a bad shot and taking his revenge out on his club, by either flinging it into the woods or into the water on one of the water holes, or pounding the club into the ground or the golf bag, I am reminded of the wonderful wisdom of my old departed friend Pius, to never get frustrated or to take this game too seriously. As I watch the fellow collect himself and his club across the next fairway, I say to myself, " This looks like a good place to find some golf balls." And into the woods I go.

Kenneth J. Beaton

Tales From The Island

TED MALONE

This story resulted from an activity in which each circle member drew a name, a location and an emotion from a series of envelopes. Malcolm's name was Ted, location Ingonish and emotion awe.

Ted Malone couldn't explain it. Only that before his last assignment he had planned to come, but had to cancel. Still the invitation surprised him. His feelings were a strange mix of excitement, wonder and hope. Perhaps he was imagining it. And what did he have to lose? Anyway, it was a second chance. And would he get there in time? Life is full of what if's.

The July high noon sun teased the scarf of earth and stunted spruce growth by the highway. The sunlight bounced off the rugged sharp granite rocks and the light danced on the black 2007 Sebring Chrysler that he guided up the winding curves over Smokey. On the way he puzzled if anyone had plunged over the cliff and lived. Not likely he thought as he pulled into the partly filled lookout at the top. He stopped.

When he stepped out of the car he was awestruck. The view was like a master painting. The colour, the depth and harmony were perfect. His eyes followed the cliffs' drop hundreds of feet below as if it were volcanic lava. It reached the ocean which hissed and pounded a wash of whitecaps on a long smooth stretch of brown sugar sand that matched his loafers. Above the cerulean blue sky wore a soft white cloud spotted dress.

At thirty-five, he is a successful defence attorney and a partner in a prestigious Los Angeles law firm. Although a big man most of his colleagues see him as an affectionate, gentle man. In court, others see his dark eyes and handsome face and razor mind and gestures and an ability to freeze a witness in seconds; as if he read their mind.

Ted's thoughts drifted away to another time, like ghosts that haunted him in sleep on a dark rainy night.

He had just returned from the chaos in Iraq where he worked for a corporation client. His job was legal litigation in the dangerous oil fields. In memory trance that gripped his heart, he heard the guns roar, smelt the smell of fresh cordite, shook at the sound of explosions; he witnessed the driven hungry desperation of the people's sunken faces; their relentless search for food and where dying and death were constant companions. And then there was the awful heat, dirt and dust. People were everywhere. He felt older, saddened by the experience and his emotions.

Now he stood alone and stared out at the ocean and watched three grey and white seagulls float dreamily on the fresh air currents.

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"Ah. Tis paradise," he whispered, "so quiet, scenic and still". Here nature remains untouched, not cluttered with neon signs and hotel and motel advertising boards. The harmony of colour and the softness of light creates primeval images: things of beauty, natural and unspoiled. Such precious gifts that touch the heart and still the soul. He looked at the sky and said, "Why does there have to be crime and hate and war?"

For a moment he lingered breathing in the sights, sounds and smell. He felt the joy of the light breeze drift through his thick brown neat-trimmed hair. He savoured the heat of the sun, the taste and smell of the salt tang in the air. Then, he pulled the crinkled letter from his shirt pocket. He smoothed it with his fingers, then studied it and satisfied, climbed into the car.

When he arrived in Ingonish after taking a wrong turn, he saw the place was alive with strangers gawking at things and asking questions. Somewhere he had read that prime ministers, leaders and other dignitaries came there. "Amazing," Ted said. "Such a small place and so much to offer."

Five minutes later he met his friend - a senior partner. "You'll like it here" the man said. After lunch and a double scotch on the rocks, they set off in their golf cart, with their clubs, for the greens. They left behind the aroma of lobster fresh boiled, for the promise of new-mown grass and a blue sky.

Ted's dream came true. He played on the Highland links Golf Course, which is rated high among the world's top courses. Ted smiled, remembering that for years he had longed to play here - a golfer's dream. Thanks for inviting me to come" he said to his friend. "It was really great."

The next day, they shook hands and said their goodbyes. Ted drove to the lookout for one last view and grudgingly began his descent on Smokey and on to Sydney Airport. And, as he drove, he carried with him a golfer's dream wrapped in memory's beautiful world.

Malcolm MacIver

CAP

It had been a long night and the hour was late. We had just finished a "night of cards": pretty much a weekly Friday night tradition at our house. But it was always somewhat special when "Cap" was there.

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Cap was the nickname for Captain John Cowley, a commander in the British Navy, specifically the merchant marine. During his service with the navy and earlier as a seaman on ocean-going cargo ships, he had the occasion to circle the globe more times than he could possibly remember. He touched the shores of Canada, the United States, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, Africa, the Philippines, Japan, China, South America, Europe, and countless other countries and continents.

On this particular night, Cap began to tell a story about a ship he commissioned during World War II, before the invasion of France, in 1943. She was called the HMR T *Sesame*, and he, like many others, was in Solent, readying themselves for battle.

Cap spontaneously began to speak and we gathered around almost like little school children listening to a story read, or told, by a teacher. He was a wonderful storyteller and always kept you spellbound, and in all the years we've known him, he never told the same story twice. They were all borrowed from an extraordinary life at sea.

He related in the story that he had won a substantial amount of money one night doing what he always loved to do - playing cards. Unfortunately, on that same night, a torpedo hit his vessel, blowing him clear off the bridge, and into the sea. Most, if not all, his crew was thrown overboard. The *Sesame* went to the bottom in Life's Rich Tapestry of the sea. The situation became even more treacherous when he realized they were in mine-filled waters. Mines weren't all they had to worry about. The Germans were there and began to open fire on them. They were literally "sitting ducks".

After all that, Cap continued to explain, a guy was ready for some good luck. And good luck came his way that night. When the *Sesame* went down, oil escaped from it and flowed to the top. It covered Cap and his crew, acting as a camouflage. And it was that bit of luck that probably saved many lives.

Good fortune came Cap's way many times in his life. There were many ships that set sail, ships he was supposed to be on, ships that went down. Luck prevented him somehow from going.

Lady Luck would smile on him again on the rescue of the *Leicester*, when he commanded the *Foundation Josephine*. You see, besides the sea being a dangerous environment, the salvage of ships was a very competitive game. Luck was a big factor. Several ships would be steaming at great speeds, at times dodging hurricanes and treacherous seas, to be the all-important "first" ship on the scene. Second netted you nothing, at great cost to your company, not to mention your career.

The rescue of the *Leicester*, while Cap didn't know it at the time, was to be written about years later, by Farley Mowat in his book *The Serpent's Coil*. Cap would be one of the main

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characters. He played a similar role in another one of Mowat's books called Grey Seas Under.

Cap Cowley, the man, had many faces. He was a father, a husband, and a seaman. He was a great cook. He loved his garden and grew the most wonderful tomatoes, and was somewhat of an expert on mushrooms that grow wild here nb Cape Breton.

In later years, after his seafaring days, he operated a store, and involved himself in politics. But overall, he was a real gentleman. He devoured books by the dozens, having an insatiable appetite for knowledge. He loved the sea, and playing card games of all kinds. But I guess what I found really remarkable about Cap was his great love of life, and his respect and admiration for the people he knew and met. So much of our lives appeared, at least on the surface, to be dull and boring. But to Cap, he had a profound respect and interest in everyone and everything. His life was characterized by always being a man who sought adventure in extraordinary times but also in every moment he lived. Life was an adventure for Cap. He was a man of great humanity, great strength, courage, and humility.

Cap is gone now, and most people leave some possessions for those left behind. Cap's legacy for me was his great love of life. He's one of those people you feel is a privilege to know. I saw him just a few days before he left us, and as in everything he did in his life, he accepted this and showed great courage and dignity.

He was truly an extraordinary man, and I feel fortunate to have known him and shared at least a small part of his life.

I miss you, Cap!

Paula Hines

THE SATURDAY SINGER

One Saturday summer morning I took my car to the garage for repairs. To pass the time, I went to the Sydney Shopping Centre. Later on, I met a lady who was a former high school friend. She said she was away for many years.

After talking awhile, she said she would like to go somewhere for a drink. I said we could go over to Townsend Street to a tavern. After many drinks, she said she used to sing and that she wanted to go somewhere to sing. I told her we could go down to the Government Wharf. So, I went over to pick up my car and we drove down.

Tales From The Island

As she started to sing, I told her we had to wait for the Big Fiddle player. She did not wait. As she sang, birds came close. It sounded like someone was killing a pig. As her singing continued, the seagulls left and moved out to sea. Even the fish moved away from the shoreline.

She then noticed a big ferryboat over at the North Sydney wharf. I told her it went to Newfoundland and that the people over there were very friendly and liked good singers. So I drove her over to the boat and dropped her off.

It was a Saturday I could gladly forget.

Rowe Rudderham

FAIRWAYS OF LIFE

Lush they were as I walked them in every corner of all the months.
Some in thoughts as was the case most days in winter,
and some as they were under the golden sun of summer.

In winter's cold, and we both being clothed, me bundled under a layer of cloth and leather,
and they, under a shimmering blanket of white, caught then as we were, in the brightness
of the day, with shadows of the woods that were always so near, casting their reflections
on us.

Tall those shadows were, as I thought of my life in kind in that moment, my fairway. And
as the ground beneath my feet lay frozen in time,
there was no sound of birds, or people, or things,
just me and a golfers dream.

Kenneth J. Beaton

Tales From The Island

SECOND CHANCE

The working of a child's mind is often complex. No one actually knew why four-year old Annie Jane was not enjoying herself that Christmas morning. Usually a rough-and-ready, happy-go-lucky child, she sat studying the used wrapping paper that littered the living room floor, after the two sisters and their parents had opened all their Christmas gifts.

"Hey, Annie Jane, why the long face?" Sara, her older sister asked.

Annie Jane said nothing.

Then her mother tried, "Don't you like your teddy bear?"

The little girl nodded a yes and hugged the furry bear closer.

"Well, whatever is bothering you will get better, if you think hard enough about it and give it a second chance." her mother said.

Her daughter was not so sure. Most of the afternoon, Annie Jane and her teddy bear looked out the picture window and watched the snowflakes pile up, covering the sisters' footprints of the day before. Mostly her eyes focused on a thin red slab of color that strung itself across the snowbank, fading into a pink tinge beside the snow shovel. By the time the falling snow had covered the yard, she turned away from the window, whispering secretively into the teddy bear's ear.

That night her mother heard a faint, persistent clinking sound coming from Annie Jane's bedroom. There, with the teddy bear propped up by her side, the little girl sat in the dark on the edge of her bed, intensely tapping her front tooth with the handle of a stainless steel knife.

"Annie Jane, what in heaven's name are you doing?"

"I'm gettin' another tooth," she beamed, "Yesterday, Sara knocked this one out on the shovel handle."

She grabbed her bottom lip and yanked it down to show the toothless hole. "But I couldn't find it in the snow. The more I looked, the more lost it got. Sara told me not to tell or the Tooth Fairy wouldn't come. And I didn't tell. Not even anyone," she confessed.

"But how would the Tooth Fairy know," her mother asked, "If you don't have a tooth?"

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"I fixed that. I drew this picture of one," Annie Jane said as she pulled a piece of paper out from under her pillow.

"See. But this morning there wasn't any money. I thought that, maybe cuz it was Christmas, she hid it in one of the presents. But the Tooth Fairy didn't come, cuz it wasn't there either."

There was a long pause as Annie Jane, her mother and the teddy bear huddled together on the side of the bed.

"Pose she didn't want to get in Santa's way?" Annie Jane offered as she looked up at her mom.

Her mother nodded. "Maybe," she said slowly.

"So," Annie Jane continued hurriedly, "I'm gettin' her another tooth, so's she can have another chance, like you said."

"Annie, Annie, Annie," her mother whispered as she squeezed her arm tighter around her daughter's shoulder. "You never cease to amaze me."

And that is how the MacPherson's Christmas story started. And how, every December thereafter, the family laughs as they tell and retell their version of the Christmas the Tooth Fairy did not come.

And, yes Virginia, there is a Tooth Fairy. She came that Christmas night to lay a quarter on the picture of a tooth and a kiss on the forehead of a four year old who gave the Tooth Fairy a second chance.

Judy Kaiser