

Just Write

Gloucester County Library System
Logan Township Branch

Writers' Group Selections

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Freeholder Library Liaison, Lyman Barnes



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The Wagon

by Marian M. Fay

When new it was forest green and pretty as latticework flat beds go
It worked well in dry or warm weather but not so much in deep snow
Now it leans against the shed, ready to haul heavy burdens when needed
It may now be weather beaten and rusty but its strength is undefeated

Our wagon has hauled countless garden supplies and giggling girls and boys
Plywood flooring, heavy doors, tree limbs, trash barrels, and broken toys
In the summer vibrant pots of red and pink geraniums and bright golden marigolds
Nestle atop the wagon as they adorn our back patio with colors and hues so bold

Green vines with blue flowers grow behind and through its bed softening the view
Constant trimming is needed to keep the floral blend harmonious not askew
The end of summer and beginning of fall marks the end of the summer flowers in bloom
Their temporary resting place will now haul them away and be swept clean with a broom

The rusty green wagon is now free to transport
Holiday decorations between the shed and the house who's distance is quite short
This wagon has been with us through three houses, two moves, and countless seasons
We could never just leave it, what would be the reason?

A trusted family servant, remaining strong and quiet, from dusk to dawn
It has seen us through all the joys and traumas we have born
Standing diligently by the shed ready to ease life's heavy loads
It will continue to travel with us down life's various and sundry roads.

Glass Jars by Marian M. Fay

Time was, you would wash and save empty glass jars
They held everything from condiments to left overs to nuts and bolts for cars
There were no plastic bottles or butter tubs
Glass jars held all kinds of cosmetics and sweet smelling rubs

Now, depending on their width, design and height
When filled with flowers their transformation is a delight
Some people use tins to hold buttons, others use button jars
I use mine to hold paint brushes, pallet knives, colored pencils and candy bars

Candles in a jar can smell waxy, fragrant or sweet
I decorated one with broken colored glass I found in the street
Jars can have many different uses and hold memories as well
Some of the jars in my house, oh the stories they could tell!

So, is a jar just a jar when it's empty and ready to be recycled?
Maybe and maybe not if with memories it has trifled
At the very least a recycled glass jar for the environment is healthy
It's something we can all do, you don't need to be wealthy

So what does an empty glass jar mean to you?
Will it hold life's bits and pieces of memories old and new?
Will its many uses speak to your practical or creative spirit?
Maybe the next time it calls to you, you'll stop long enough to hear it.

Ever Present

By Marian M. Fay

Blue sky through dark clouds

Purple flowers dust the lawn

Melodic bird song

Sun beams dance through leaves

Diamond dust on lakes glisten

His presence is clear

Prayers amidst rubble

He still is risen indeed

Christ needs no buildings

Lone Angel 2 (continued from the July issue of *Just Write*)

by Joshua Carter

Daniel: You know... I've been thinking about a lot of stuff.

Doc: About what?

Daniel: That I feel like my true identity should come out.

Doc: Am I hearing you right? You're gonna give a stranger the satisfaction of seeing a past killer?

Daniel: Well not a satisfying experience, but an experience all the same.

Doc: Well if you do go into that person...make sure you leave this place and take that hell with you.

Daniel: OK... I will. (He vanishes.)

Meanwhile, Liz came up with a plan to release the beast/killer inside of Daniel. She went to Joe's house.

As Liz was on the move, Dan was heading to Liz's house for an answer.

Liz: Hello, Mikey.

Doc: Liz...what- what are you doing here?

Liz: I want you to do something for me. But first...tell me everything about your friend, Dagger.

(Daniel goes to find the door to Liz's house open.)

He goes to her neighbor's house. He asks, "Have you seen Liz?"

Neighbor: Who?

Dagger: The girl that lives here.

Neighbor: Of all the years I've lived here, I ain't seen no girl nowhere near here.

Dagger: Huh?! Thank you, sir.

He bursts into Liz's house looking for information.

Liz: Well Doc, thanks for your cooperation. But I must go, and you are expecting a guest to come. And if I was you, well...I would be careful what I say. She leaves with a deadly smirk.

(Daniel rushes to Doc's house. He kicks the door down.)

Daniel: WERE YOU AT DOC'S?!!

Doc: [soft and hollow voice] Daniel.

Daniel rushes to the Doc.

Daniel: Tell me you didn't tell her.

Doc: Even if I did, she would've been able to find out, anyway.

(Daniel walks to see through the window of darkness while pondering a dark thought.)

Max: You know what you have to do, right?

Dagger: Max, I swore I'd never -

Max: I know, but this is no longer the satisfaction of seeing a beast coming out. This is someone wanting pure hell and death for their own pleasure.

Dagger: I understand that. You, of all people, know that the beast inside is an unstoppable killer. I just count myself lucky that one day I could reach him and calm him.

Max: Look Dagg, I don't know where she is going, but I believe she's baiting a trap, if you follow. But if you do decide to follow -

Dagger: I already told you. I'm not releasing it.

Max: I know you don't want to, but if she's as crazy as I think... then you just might have to.

Dagger: [angrily] I ALREADY TOLD YA I -

Max: [sadly] Dagg...before she left...she told me...your past will always match your future.

(Dagger looks at Max with a slight shock and nods at him with tears in his eyes. Dagger goes to his house; he senses something is wrong.)

Dagger [shouting]: RACHEL, BILL, WANDA!

He rushes into the house to find blood trails leading to the backyard. With heavy tears, he finds a note on the ground. It reads: *Regardless of your decisions I control the beast.*

Liz comes from behind him with a gun as he gathers his thoughts. She shoots him in the back. As he lies on the ground looking up, she presses the gun nozzle to his head. She whispers, "I'm going to see that beast one way or another...tell him I sent ya." She smiles as she pulls the trigger, and walks away.

Wake Up!

By Joshua Carter

It's funny sometimes how we get an idea, or what type of meaning that will be behind that idea. I don't know what brings people ideas, but I do know that an idea can be deadly; deadlier than anything worth dying for.

It all started, well... at the beginning. I keep having this dream. My doctor asked, "Well is it in your favor?" I said, "It's complicated. I feel like it's showing me my fate. I desire to go and want to experience it, but at the same time, it keeps me from moving forward to see it." He asked me, "Are you ready to make the move any time soon, or let it control your life?" I said, "Yeah, I want to." He said, "Well, first you need to... [His voice fades out.]"

Flashback – June '03

I remember the day I met two figures of religion. My father was something above the level of a smart alcoholic, mixed with a crazy sober person. And those two things don't combine very well. On this day he walks into the house. I'm sitting on the floor watching TV. He sat down on the couch. I turned around and said, "Hey, Dad, where did the family go? Why are we the only ones left? WHY DON'T YOU TALK OR EVEN LOOK AT ME? SAY SOMETHING, DAMN IT!" He remains frozen like a statue, staring straight ahead. Finally, he takes a deep breath and calmly says, "OK, you want to know your worth in this life? Go into the kitchen and reach into the trash and tell me what you find." I go and look into the trash and find dog shit in a bag and bring it to him. "I found this," I said. "Nice," my father said, "now you can keep it." "I don't want that," I said. He asked me why, and I said, "Because it's made out of stuff that was chewed up and turned into nothing. It has no value for me." He looked at me and smiled, "Well, there you have it; you just made a comparison to yourself."

Current Day

"So, you somehow – "

"Yes, Doc, I knew he was not a good father. But he taught me something, and that's what a father should do. But I just can't figure out why I have a voice saying, 'Wake up!' every time I sleep."

"Do you think there could be a meaning behind it?"

"No, I don't see that there is anything behind it."

"Well, let's test the theory. Close your eyes and sleep."

[five minutes later...]

"Wake up, Dear."

I woke up in a suspicious place, like it was someone's house. I was lying in bed when a woman walks into the room. She says, "Good morning Mark, how have you been?" like she knew me for years. "Who are you and how did I..." She stops me with a sensitive glance and said, "My name is - "

(Gwen!) I hear from a distance in a throbbing light. It felt like a metal rod chimed against my skull as I got a quick glance of a slim man. (As I faint, I hear a brief discussion of what they plan to do with me as I drift away.)

I wake up to a shot gun pressed against my head. I looked up, surprised to see an old man. He said, "I'm Kevin, and this is Gwen. And we don't like to keep uninvited guests around here. But we make exceptions when it comes to the Reaper taking the souls of the living, ha, ha, ha..."

"Come on man, there's no need for any bloodshed. We can –

"Give me a reason to let you live," Kevin said. I looked at him with confusion and fear in my eyes. "What will you get out of this, Kev?"

"On three, you're dead," Kevin said. "One..." Gun cocks. "Two..." He aims at my head as his eyes dare my voice to betray my soul. "Thre –

Gwen jumps in front of him with tears of fear in her eyes.

"WAIT!" Gwen said.

The Dress

By Mary Ellen De Angelo

The summer of 2019 will always be remembered as a whirlwind summer for my family. My third child is a girl who has always done everything in life on her own terms. Independence is something we all want for our children to develop and, yet, in raising them, it can be exasperating at times. Going against the “status quo” can make for a more challenging path in life. I have always said, though, these are the people you want to be with if you should get stranded on a desert island. They will think “outside the box,” immediately increasing your chances of survival.

On May 17th, my daughter gets engaged to a really nice guy. I never expected her to take the traditional path in life. She was settling down, and we would be planning a wedding together. I can remember having that sweet, happy feeling that my free-spirited daughter was going to plan a wedding the old-fashioned way.

Everything changes on Monday. I get a text telling me she is deciding on a date. The mother of the bride-to-be texts, “When are you thinking?” I hear the little beep on my phone: “We want to get married in August.” “No, no, no! She can’t think...could she?” said my interior voice. My supposedly supportive mother response is, “As in August 2019?!” Little beep signals a response: “Yeah.” This can’t be happening. Couples plan their weddings over 1 – 2 years. My brain is exploding but my text reads, “OK, let’s look at the calendar.”

For Christmas, I had gotten a week down the shore in August for my family. So those two weekends were out. The first weekend in August we had a niece getting married in Philadelphia, so we soon settled on August 10th. Several attempts on my part to push my daughter into a September wedding didn’t work. She was determined to get married in August. The wedding was going to be at the groom’s home, which is on a beautiful lake, so we had our venue.

The next weekend, my daughter, her soon to be sister-in-law and me set out to buy a dress. We arrive at the first bridal store. Every bridal store in the country (I never knew this) when you walk in gives you some form of greeting followed by, “Do you have an appointment?” They offer to schedule a time for the next day, but we decide to try more shops. I must say, at this point, I get it: it has to be this way to have a salesperson available to give the bride one-to-one attention.

The happy trio sets out for a quaint local town known for its bridal shops (locals will be able to guess which town). We go to our second shop and are greeted with the five words I have come to dread: “Do you have an appointment?” We hang our heads in shame. “No.” They do offer us a time later in the day, but we move on.

Our third shop is crowded with people. Apparently, wedding dress shopping involves wine, champagne, and many people. Years ago, the prospective bride went with her mom and maybe someone else, and that was it. Now it is an event. Who knew? Certainly not me!

We proceed to our fourth store. By now, my head is down, my shoulders are slumped, and my heart is heavy. The inevitable question comes and I say, “No, we don’t have an appointment. We will just leave.” It is almost 1:00 pm and we started out at 9:00 am, and my daughter has not tried on one dress.

The defeated trio turns toward the door. Just then a sales lady comes around the corner of the desk and says, "Wait! If you give me a minute, I can make a little place for us in the corner." My head snaps up, my shoulders straighten, my heart leaps with joy!" The first dress she tries on is *The Dress*. It is off the rack and just needs a few alterations.

Dear sweet kindness! I will always be grateful to that wonderful saleslady. I believe she could feel our discouragement. From that moment on, everything seemed to fall into place for the wedding.

Remember that I said we had a niece getting married the weekend before my daughter's wedding? She got her dress from the same shop. Plus, my niece was friends with the seamstress. We had three fittings. When we picked up the dress, it was as if we were leaving dear friends. Anyway, if you can put a little kindness into your day to help someone, DO IT! You never know what a difference you could be making in another person's life.

It was an outdoor wedding. Butterflies fluttered in the air, the lake was glistening in the background, and the happy couple glowed with love. We had tents, wonderful food, beautiful flowers, music, two bars, and even a surprise ice cream truck (a gift from one of the guests). My gorgeous daughter was extra gorgeous in her beautiful dress. For me, that beautiful day all began with the words, Wait! If you give me a minute, I can make a little place for us in the corner." Oh, how we need kindness in this world!

Growing Up in a Small Town

By Kathleen Pierson

As I have often stated before, I loved growing up in Bridgeport, New Jersey. It was such a homey town and everyone knew everyone and – for the most part – got along fine.

My grandfather, Charles Barker, was sort of the “unofficial mayor” of that town when I was very young. He was head of the school board, active in the Building and Loan Association and many other organizations. There is a street named after him off of Route 295 – BARKER AVENUE.

When I was young, I believe he owned the only phone in our entire family. Any time you wanted to make a call, you went to “Pop-Pop’s” house. And when someone wanted to reach you, you knew the call would come in on his phone. Wouldn’t he be surprised to see all of the phones available today!!! My husband has an Apple Watch and can take phone messages on it – and call people, too.

My Grandmother Barker (Carrie – a nickname for Caroline) was such a dear woman. Her daughters just adored her. When she became older and not well at all, they all took turns caring for her in her home. My Mother took the bus from Woodbury to Bridgeport at least once a week for her shift. I never really got to know her well because she became ill when I was quite young and passed away when I was seven. I remember they did have the home visitation in her front parlor when she passed away, and there is a window dedicated to her at the St. Paul’s Methodist Church in Bridgeport. She is buried along with Pop-Pop Barker in the cemetery at Bridgeport. I am posting a photo of them below.

One interesting thing I will mention here is that out of seven Barker girls, only two of them, to my knowledge, ever drove a car. I think only my Mother went to college – but I am not positive about that. She went to Glassboro State College when it was a “Normal School,” and took a two-year course in education and became a very good teacher in Bridgeport. She even taught music, art, and shop. There were no specialty teachers back in that era.

My Mother, Francis, certainly was way ahead of her time. She married a man her Dad did not approve of because he was a Catholic. My Dad, John, became a very active Methodist after he married my Mother. They were married in Elkton, Maryland, in June of 1926. A Methodist minister married them. His name was Reverend Prettyman.

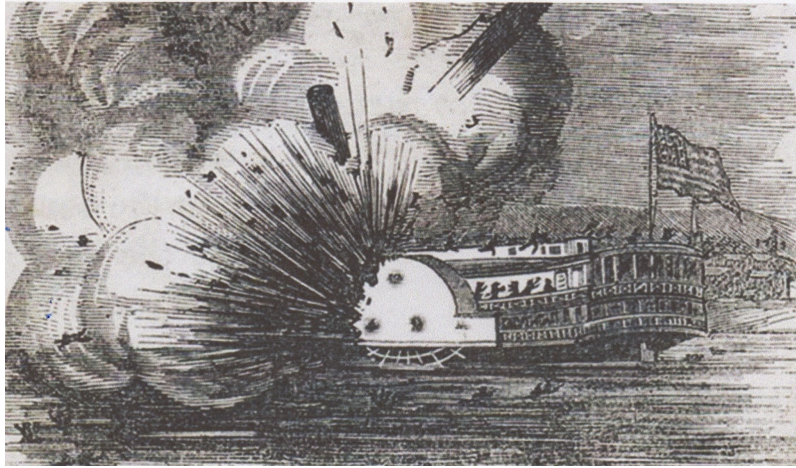
When we visited our cousins, Lucy and Francis Morrison in Silver Springs, Maryland, Francis would take us on a tour of Washington, D.C. We would park right outside of the White House and we would go inside and visit the various parts of the White House that were open to the public (a huge difference from the way it is today). It may have helped that Francis worked in the Pentagon.

Sinking of the Greyhound By Ben Carlton

From Fortress Monroe, Virginia.

Saturday, December 6, 1864.

The following is the *New-York Times*' special account of the explosion and sinking of the *Greyhound* on the James River near Bermuda Hundred that occurred November 27, 1864.



It has now been determined beyond a reasonable doubt that the boiler explosion and subsequent sinking of Major General Benjamin F. Butler's headquarters ship, *Greyhound*, was a nefarious act of Confederate sabotage. Sources say the violent explosion was caused by an "infernal machine," also known as a "coal shell" or "coal torpedo," that was inadvertently shoved into the ship's fire box by an unsuspecting crewman. The bomb was a hollow, cast iron device loaded with black powder and cleverly covered with coal dust. It was deliberately made by southern operatives to look like an ordinary lump of coal, and was apparently tossed into the ship's coal bunker just prior to the explosion.

Rear Admiral David D. Porter, Commander of the North Atlantic Blockading Squadron had been invited aboard by General Butler for a conference. A number of suspicious-looking characters had been noticed by the Admiral loitering about the ship's lounge. The suspicious civilians were put ashore at Porter's insistence just minutes prior to the eruption of the *Greyhound's* boiler as she was cruising downriver, six miles below Bermuda Hundred. The mysterious explosion blew open the furnace door, scattering burning coals throughout the ship. The machinery was instantly stopped and the stricken vessel drifted with the tide toward the flats. Pumps were applied as the crew courageously battled the fire, but the flames were soon out of control. The vessel was quickly enveloped and sank within twenty minutes of the blast. Admiral Porter was seen putting a shoulder to the captain's gig, helping the steward put it over the side. Porter, General Butler, Ohio Congressman Robert C. Shenck, and all hands escaped with their lives but, unfortunately, the General's valuable horses perished in the conflagration.

The sinking of the *Greyhound* is eerily reminiscent of the boiler explosion that occurred on board the USS *Chenango* on April 15 of this year. Thirty-three sailors were scalded to death when the boiler exploded on the gunboat's maiden voyage out of New York harbor, though the side-wheeler,

herself, was saved and is currently undergoing repairs. Investigators strongly suspected sabotage in the *Chenango* affair, as well as in this case, the destruction of the *Greyhound*. Although foul play has been determined to be the most likely cause, Admiral Porter has made it known that he blames General Butler for the disaster, noting the absence of security on board his headquarters vessel. For his part, General Butler hinted that, perhaps, the Admiral was just expressing his disappointment with the loss of a very fast ship he coveted, adding further that Porter despises his own flagship, the slow-moving *Malvern*.

The British-built *Greyhound* was a former blockade runner previously captured by the Navy and purchased by the U. S. Government. At the time of her capture, the *Greyhound* was carrying an important passenger: the notorious rebel spy, Belle Boyd, who was attempting to deliver military dispatches to England. The 320-ton, iron-hulled side-wheel steamer was then purchased by Mr. George H. Powers of Hudson, New York, and later commandeered by Butler as his floating headquarters. She was widely known as one of the fastest ships afloat.

Both the Navy and Army have been ordered to guard all coal supplies with greater vigilance. Any unauthorized person seen placing or taking an object on or near the government's coal piles is to be shot on sight.

- H. J. W.

[For more information, see: *The Second Admiral: A Life of David Dixon Porter* by Richard S. West, Jr.; *Confederate Goliath: The Battle of Fort Fisher* by Rod Gragg]

Just Write

Meetings held one Saturday a month 10:00 am at the Gloucester County Library

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