

Refractions

Very Short
Stories of
2014

Bradley Davidson

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DEDICATION

To my son, Noah, smart, creative, full of stories, hard headed and stubborn. He is a companion on our adventures, insightful participant in our discussions and portal into the wondrous workings of our world and the human race.

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Preface

Writers are a strange breed. I know because I hang out with a bunch once or twice a month at some writers' gathering or other. I read these stories out loud, one at a time, and listen to their creative, insightful and entertaining stories and thoughts. They are artists expressing themselves in a jumble of words put together to show us all their world view. They are of all ages from kids with their imaginary tales to elderly ladies and gentlemen with life experience to share. They are Bohemians and free thinkers where the blank page opens up the gates to pour their souls upon the world.

They are mavericks going against the grain of conventional thinking and they are ordinary people working within the confines of society. Writers are a strange breed with stories to tell.

They are, or can be, a funny looking breed as well with colorful garb and funny hats which kind of proclaims their creativity or extenuates their strangeness or perhaps they are just colorblind or wardrobe challenged for a normal existence. Or perhaps they fight against that normalcy. Or perhaps they are proclaiming their individuality. I've thought about wearing a unique hat or some combination of colors which would state I am a creative one, a writer, a strange breed. But I am the wardrobe challenged one and can't come up with anything that would say what I want. Not so creative after all. Others can dress as normally as most and blend in with the rest of society. You would never know, never think, never suspect, there was a writer standing before you.

Why writers write is not always clear, but I suspect it is a similar reason that I do. I have to. It bubbles up from a human urge to express oneself and if I didn't, I would regret missing the chance. I can't

think fast enough to be a witty orator or debater of obtuse issues. And it's not that I have so much to say but that I enjoy the attempt to say it in a compelling and concise way. And perhaps I have no other way to do it. I have no other talents. I can't draw or sculpt and music does not come pouring from my psyche. But to create a picture in another's mind with an assortment of scribbles on a page is a challenging and very personal endeavor. Whether I come anywhere close to doing that is questionable, but the attempt is very satisfying.

But enough about writers. It is the reader that lets us exist, for writers would be nothing were it not for the reader. We all write for someone, and for me I divide my time between writing for myself and writing for some theoretical reader who might enjoy, relate, be inspired by or simply rise some emotion within. So, there must usually be that someone at the end of the endeavor waiting at the destination ready to catch our fare. For those who write letters and correspondence and put that work into a mailbox, there must be that person at the other mailbox to receive. Sometimes it's me, but I like to think most often it is you. So, thank

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you , dear reader, for being there for me, for catching
my heap of words and reading and digesting them, or
simply listening to them as I read them to you.



Immortality

The visionaries of our time tell us we will soon be immortal. In one way or another we will either have the technology to keep our human bodies working indefinitely, or we will figure out how to download and store our consciousness, memories, our ability to reason, essentially our being. In the former we will master transplants of all organs and regeneration techniques of tissues so that we can inhabit our own bodies forever. In the later, we can download ourselves into androids or cyborgs or store ourselves on some sort of durable media. Those familiar with the state of this technology tell us immortality is not far off.

This is, of course, an incredibly bad idea. There is no stopping progress, and eventually, no matter what people say or what laws are enacted, someone will perfect and offer some sort of immortality to the world. And once that happens, once it is actually available, most everyone will want it. After all, who wants to die?

But it doesn't take much thinking or imagination to see the peril. First and most obviously, what are all us immortals going to do? One gets tired of working a day job and looks forward to retirement. But our 401(k)'s aren't going to cover us even if we do die on time. And if we download into an android who's going to pay the power bill. We can hardly keep our cars running, so the children will most likely just turn us off to conserve energy and bring us online if they have an important question to ask like how long to cook a turkey. Eventually they'll keep us off and stand us up in the yard for weeds to grow up around or in the back shed maybe bringing us out and powering us on for Christmas and holidays. To save storage space, our descendants will most likely store us on a gazigabyte flash drive and rent a universal android and load us up if they want us to do something. Most likely our little flash drives will get

stored in the kitchen junk draw or misplaced all together until our children's children move and find us in some dusty shoebox.

And what would it feel like to be stored on some electronic media? One minute you are in an android feeling the world with all the sensors and interacting with live people or other androids. Then you lose power. Time goes by. Do you sleep? Do you feel and remember nothing? Do you just wait until the lights come on? I mean, you could be talking to your son when he disagrees with you and turns you off. The next thing you know you are talking with him but its ten years later. Your son may carry a long grudge. Was it an instant? Did you wait like in solitary confinement for someone to open the door and let some light in again? Did you dream?

At that point, most likely, some industry would spring up offering, for a price of course, a place for all us immortals to go, a program or algorithm in which we could interact with one another. And it would seem like a comfortable yet challenging place where we could use our reasoning and accomplish things and feel alive. We could be with all our immortal friends and family and still have access to the living world of flesh and bone people

although not having direct influence, being stuck in an algorithm and all. We could call this program, this place where all our collective beings are stored, our memories, our feelings, our dreams and desires, dare I call them our souls... We could call this place heaven.



It Takes a Child

To appreciate religion, one has to raise children. To understand the context, purpose and theology of most any organized form of deity worship, going through those motions, those trials and tribulations, victories and defeats, successes and failures, highs and lows of child rearing is essential. To even begin to approach the infinite or become one with or get close to or understand God, one must at least attempt to bring to adulthood from infancy one of God's greatest creations, a child.

This fact began to dawn on me a while back as my son was learning to talk and communicate and the

wonders of the world started pouring into his fertile mind. He wanted to know why. That was his favorite question. He wanted to know why the sky was blue, why his ears were shaped so funny, why it rained, why he got a cold and was miserable, why, why why. At first I would muster all the knowledge I had and fashioned answers that were logical, succinct and true to all the understanding I had of the world. I could tell by his blank face and glazed stare this didn't satisfy his curiosity, either because he didn't like the answers or he couldn't understand them, most likely the later. So, one day, as he was on a "why" tirade, I simply said, "Because God made you that way". This stopped him in his tracks for at least 15 seconds as he mulled over the meaning of my statement. He knew God. He knew God gave us everything. He knew we prayed to God and thanked him for food every time we had a meal. And he knew God was the authoritative figure above parents. He started talking about other things evidently very satisfied to know the answer to why. And I realized one good reason why we have a God.

He would sometimes forget this universal answer and ask "why" over and over, and when

rational answers weren't enough, I'd quiet him by giving God the credit he deserves. But as he got older, the questions started to become more complicated. Why do we have storms that kill people and earthquakes that destroy and why are there wars? Why don't people like each other? I tried the logic and facts again and started talking of weather patterns and plate tectonics and how wealth is not uniformly distributed throughout the world. He didn't like any of that and I couldn't say because God likes killing people. So the answer became more, "God has a plan, and we can't always understand His plan, but He knows best." This seemed okay, but the war thing stuck in his mind and he continued to ask, so I had to set the record straight. "God has given us everything and one thing he gave us all is free will, and some people use it good and some people use it not so good. God doesn't make war. People make war."

So I had opened the bag of free will and let the cat out. Free will was nothing new to my son. He exercised it often and liberally and without hesitation or thought. But to know that God has given us this ability seems to energize and relieve him. He was

acting as God had made him and somehow that made everything okay. And when he started telling me he acts as he does and doesn't listen and doesn't clean his room or turn in his homework because God made him that way and it was okay, I had to let him know how free will works. And back and forth it goes, his free will against my free will. And I started understanding God and what he has created and what he is up against because of his creation and why all things happen. I'm one with him and know him and realize why he created us with free will. The alternative, of course, wouldn't work.



Precipice

I stand at the precipice of the rest of my life. I peer across the threshold of my seventh decade wondering how did I get here and how can I make this passage slow down. What happened to all those years? It's been a journey of adventure full of life and love, many lives, few loves. The first 18 years was a life in itself, and then I started my second life then a third and on it went. I'm not sure what numbered life I'm leading now.

J. Alfred Prufrock lamented in one of T.S. Elliott's little ditties that he measured his life out in coffee spoons. I get it now grinding my coffee daily in

little cups or spoons punctuating my daily rut and routine. Those coffee spoons are one of the few things I remember of my second life, the college days. They were such different times when I had a concrete goal, the one and only in my head, to graduate. Then the goals became more transient and movable and it seemed I was just going with the flow guiding myself weakly by my dreams but being thrust down a torrent river by the wild currents of our time.

There was the career building, an endless litany of applications and interviews and hopes and high promise and the excitement of the first job in my field and then the slow realization that they wanted little of the knowledge I learned in college. But the learning of new things and the resources of a large corporation and the challenges of doing new projects propelled me ahead until... the first layoff. Then unemployment and despair until I hooked upon that upward tow lift of employment which carried me along mainly quenching their needs but filling my coffers with treasure which permitted me to participate, participate in the great American dream or at least the American way of life.

I bought a boat, and to afford it lived on it for

years while sailing the ocean on weekends and attending to work during the week. I had friends then, lots of friends, who would help me sail through the sunny Southern California days. I learned much about friendship when I moved ashore and left my boat behind.

And love, I found love, brief encounters that made my spirit soar the heavenly skies of connectedness, and sour as I fell back to earth, the connection being somehow severed. And learning from these ups and downs I meandered into a 20 year connection. But having not learned enough, I fell once again. I often wonder if I know or ever did know what love is. It wafts in and seems right at the time but slips through my fingers so fluid and delicate and fleeting and ungraspable. I can't hold it. I can only feel it. I wonder if that is love or just some mean trickery hardwired into the human spirit.

So now I concentrate on raising my son, a life in itself. And as I experiment and learn and find out what works and what doesn't and where that happiness lies or that meaning exists, the years roll on, faster and faster. The goal is nebulous, less defined, than when I

strove to simply graduate. But I continue to grind the coffee and measure it out as the years pass, a reminder of my participation in life, whatever that may be.

I stand at the precipice of the rest of my life, more learned in the ways of being than I was yesterday. I stand here wondering what happened to the past but looking forward with greater understanding and confidence. And I remember. I remember my dreams and hopes and desires and look ahead with optimism that I may one day figure them out. But through it all, I have come to realize it is the journey, not the destination, which gives me meaning. So, I take that next step forward not entirely voluntarily, but being persistently pushed by the years behind me.



The Weather

The small group of scientists huddled together as the sky grew darker and the winds increased. From their hillside perch, they could see on the horizon, 360 degrees around them, twisters churning up the earth. Their window of opportunity, that small pause in the atmospheric chaos, was over. It was time to wrap things up and go underground. Some collected a few last samples while others hurriedly packed the instruments away. They moved together up the hillside to a huge concrete monolith which had no windows and only one door at its base. Deep inside the thick bare walls was only an

elevator shaft and a stairwell both descending hundreds of feet into the earth. Nothing else was inside the massive building. The group piled into the elevator and were whisked at great speed down into the earth to be reunited with the rest of humanity.

You see, it wasn't a nuclear holocaust and radioactive fallout which drove mankind underground. It was the weather. The surface of the earth had become uninhabitable for most animals because the atmosphere had become violent. It warmed and melted the icecaps causing the oceans to rise and inundate all coastal civilization. People abandoned coastal cities and moved inland building new cities, but storm after storm flooded and toppled any structures that were built. Rebuilding became the norm, and expensive. People took refuge underground and soon they were digging deeper and building bigger in subterranean caverns just to protect the structures they built and to maintain an existence not interrupted by unpredictable chaos. Cities and homes and industries and power plants all moved underground leaving only a few reinforced access points to the surface and vents to suck in air and spew out the byproducts of their

industry.

Mankind was not alone. Most animals were driven from the earth's surface. If they couldn't burrow or withstand the floods and storms and winds of change, they became extinct. But the plants thrived. The warm atmosphere and regular watering let plants flourish and grow at increased speed like being in a giant greenhouse. Tornadoes and violent typhoons would uproot, tear and throw hither and yon plant flesh, but the strewn seeds and tendrils of the plants would take root and grow anew. Mankind still used these plants as fuel burning them deep underground and emitting the spent carbon and gases back into the air. Some thought this perpetuated and even exacerbated the weather problem. But others, centuries later, still didn't believe it was mankind burning fossil fuels and releasing historic levels of carbon into the atmosphere that caused the weather to go bad. They maintain it just happened.

So the scientist continue to collect data and monitor conditions on the surface and continue to build their mathematical models to predict and explain the weather. But few listen as they are busy digging

deeper into the ground, burying their heads as it were. And the science becomes less relevant as does the weather itself.

Meanwhile, on the surface, the plants grow into massive jungles fueled by the water and warmth and abundant amount of carbon dioxide in the air and the bright rays of the sun which continue to penetrate the clouded skies. Turning sunlight into stored energy is what plants do. And they produce oxygen as a waste product. If only the creatures underground could grasp this concept, they may, one day, again see the sun.



The Spring Trial

The bailiff had just called the court to order and all were seated.

“Good morning ladies and gentlemen,” the judge greeted. “I just want to remind you all this is a preliminary hearing to determine if there is enough evidence to hold the defendant over for trial. He is accused of murder although no body has been found, and the prosecution’s case is entirely circumstantial. I remind you, no need for flowery oratory or dramatics. There is no jury, just me. Now, are you ready to proceed Mr. Burger, Mr. Mason?”

“Yes, your honor. The prosecution is ready.”

Mr. Burger announced. Mr. Mason of the defense echoed his readiness.

“Call the first witness for the prosecution.” the judge ordered the prosecution.

And for the next several hours the prosecution presented a case where the defendant had murdered the victim over a business disagreement. Witnesses were called about the relationship between the two and how the defendant wanted the business all to himself. Instances of public arguments were brought up and a quote of “if you cross me, I’ll kill you”, was entered. Because of this statement, murder charges were filed once the victim went missing.

“Mr. Mason, you may call your first witness.” The judge said after the prosecution had finished.

“We have but one witness, your honor. The defendant.” Mr. Mason announced. “We call to the stand... Mr. Bunny.”

Once sworn in and seated, Mr. Mason began.

“For the record, would you state your name, please?” Mr. Mason asked.

“It’s Mr. Bunny. Mr. E. Bunny.” The defendant answered.

“And what’s the E. stand for?”

“Easter. My full name is, of course, Mr. Easter Bunny.”

“And you are a pretty popular celebrity, aren’t you Mr. Bunny?”

“Well, yeah. At least this time of year people love me.”

“And why is that?”

“Because I deliver Easter eggs to all the children of the world. Every kid likes to get an Easter egg. They love me and look forward to my coming.”

“That’s quite an endeavor.” Mr. Mason exclaimed. “Just how do you manage this amazing feat?”

“Magic, mostly.” Mr. Bunny replied. “But lately we’ve had to use FedEx to pick up the slack. Magic just doesn’t seem to go as far these days. And, heck, there are millions more kids every year.”

“I mean, where do you get all those eggs?” Mr. Mason continued.

“Oh that... Well, from my business partner, Mrs. Chicken, of course. We’ve worked together for centuries. You see, we are both magical beings which

a long life sort of goes along with. She supplies the eggs and I deliver. It's a pretty simple arrangement."

"Ah! So you don't actually lay the eggs. You just deliver them" Mr. Mason queried further.

"Correct. I know there has been some confusion about that in most people's mind. But we just let it be. Facts just complicate traditions like this."

"So, you would have no motive for killing your business partner if she supplies the magical, colorful eggs you deliver." Mr. Mason prodded. "I mean, there would be no business, isn't that right, Mr. Bunny?"

"Exactly! And besides, I love Mrs. Chicken. She's a sweet dear. Sure we have our disagreements, but everyone who's been together as long as we have certainly disagree from time to time. And I'm just a hothead and my mouth gets out of control sometimes. I'd never kill her like I said. She can have a pretty fowl mouth, too, you know."

"Thank you, Mr. Bunny. That's all I have for this witness, your honor." Mr. Mason concluded.

"Mr. Burger. Do you want to cross-examine the witness?" The judge asked.

"Yes your honor, I would."

“The floor is yours, Mr. Burger.”

“Sooooooo..., Mr. Bunny,” The prosecutor began with a slow deliberate intent. “Isn’t it true you recently made arrangements with Albertson’s to purchase 200 million dozen large grade double A eggs. And isn’t it true you’ve been systematically clearing the shelves of egg coloring kits?”

“Well, sure.” Mr. Bunny responded with a worried look. “Like I said, demand is up and, well, Mrs. Chicken is no er... ah.... spring chicken anymore. She gets pretty worn out laying all those magic eggs, so we were going to mix in a few counterfeits.”

“Isn’t it true, Mr. Bunny, that you were scheming to take over the entire business with counterfeit eggs and foist an egregious fraud upon us all because you couldn’t stand Mrs. Chicken anymore and you wanted all the profits. Isn’t it true you planned to kill and actually murdered the chicken. Isn’t it true, Mr. Bunny. Isn’t it true?”

“No, no” Mr. Bunny said almost on the verge of tears. “That’s not what happened at all. I love Mrs. Chicken.” He started sobbing uncontrollably

From the back of the courtroom a woman

stood up and yelled, “Stop! Stop!. Stop badgering the nice bunny. I did it. It was my fault. It was all my fault.”

“Order! Order!” the judge gaveled. “And just who are you Miss?”

“The name is Callender,... Marie Callender. I make pot pies.



Chevron Hydrocarbons

During my early years of college, I lived at home most of the time with my parents. It was a nice arrangement as I had few expenses. I worked part time as a gas jokey at a full service gas station mainly to earn money to keep my 1964 Volkswagen Bug running. Wayne K. Weber Chevron Service was a hometown icon starting out as a two pump gas station with room for one car to be wheeled in and serviced at a time. It grew into a multi island, state of the art service station with four bays for servicing and two full time mechanics. The gas jockeys such as myself would change oil and perform tire

repairs in two bays and the other two were reserved for the mechanics and the tune-ups and major engine and suspension work. When a car rolled up to the pumps, us jockeys would run out, pump gas, wash windows and check oil. It's true! There was such a time.

Phillip was a tall skinny kid who had worked there for years and had been taken under the wing of the owner as the son he never had. Harlan, a big Hawaiian, was one of the rare full-time employees. That pair was like Laurel and Hardy, joking together, complaining about each other but best of friends. Phillip was mostly annoying talking mainly and consistently about the legs and breasts of any girl that walked close to the station and constantly plotting on how to get out of the work that needed doing. Harlan would smile at this annoyance behind bloodshot eyes from all the pakalolo he would never be seen smoking. There was a never ending stream of part-time and full-time employees that came and went. But these two were the mainstay I worked with.

My older brother worked there, too, as a shift manager who often supervised us unruly band of dealers of hydrocarbon products. It also may have

been how I got my start in the business. Nepotism has been known to happen.

One sunny Saturday in the 70's when the Gulf Oil Cartel was playing games with supply and the world was seemingly running out of gas, cars were lined up at all islands and we were rationing out 10 gallons per car. The once pleasant customers were now fuming silent or grumbling about the hours they had to wait in line blaming us front line workers for the games world leaders were playing. We were pleasantly accommodating and pumped the gas as fast as we could doing windows and checking oil only if requested. Few requested.

Suddenly the pumps stopped. They didn't slow as if we were getting low on gas. They just stopped dead. We jockeys looked up quizzically at each other, at the long line of cars, then at the office where my manager brother came out and declared we were closed. "Closed!" came the cry from the customers as word spread. "How can you be closed? Are you out of gas?" "Yes!" My brother lied. "We're out of gas. You will have to go elsewhere. Please leave." They did not. Nor did they believe we were out of gas.

Phillip, Harlan and I finished our current transactions and knew instinctively to retreat into the cinderblock garage and started closing the bay doors. My brother continued attempting to convince the angry mob they had to leave. We pulled him in as well and shut the last door. With a lot of banging, yelling and honking, the crowd slowly dispersed.

It turns out Wayne, the independent dealer business man, wanted to save his supply on hand as he was told by big oil to raise the price the next day. My less than subtle brother, upon receiving his call, simply switched off the pumps. Such a combination of greed and not-so-well-thought-out execution almost caused a riot.

I learned much those years working at Wayne K. Weber Chevron Service, the least of which was how to pump gas.



Guilty Pleasures

The piece of chocolate sits there in front of you, innocent, enticing. You know you shouldn't eat it. First of all, there is the zit factor. You know you break out. Then there is the expanding hips factor. Chocolate goes straight to your hips. And you've already had enough. But it rests there before your eyes, seemingly calling your name. You know it's meant for you. But you know you really shouldn't.

Guilty pleasures. We all have them. Those little tugs and pulls of desire we know are wrong. Some are innocent enough, others not so innocent, all working

at the guilt response built into us by decades of upbringing and programing of what is right behavior. Religion helps. They sow the seeds of guilt and remorse deep within us at an early age. Hell is a terrible destination, by definition. And we learn consequences from earlier experience. But it was so good and we keep coming back for more.

Chocolate, being lazy, living unproductive, couch sitting movie watching afternoons, intoxicating elixirs, smoldering sticks of leaves, mind blowing substances, erotic and carnal adventures. We think of them with fondness or obsess and fantasize about them continuously usually not being offered the opportunity. But when it sits there before you, when it knocks on your door, you know you shouldn't but often jump and consume and partake like a beast. We are all beasts or at least have one lying hidden inside us.

Is it normal to eat more than we need or induce a drunken stupor or go on a mind bending, chemically induced trip or do those wild, interpersonal, physical and erotic maneuvers with another person? Just a small step, a toe dipping into the pond of misbehaving, is usually how it starts. Then another step or two. And

soon you are stuffing your face or are drunk, or tripping or trying to be one with another or tying up another or being tied up and swooning in the pleasure. It is bizarre behavior to our common senses and to what we've all learned. But we end up there. Because we know we shouldn't.

We are all born innocent enough. It is life's experiences that build the beast. Once tasted, the mind is programmed. And the imagination soars. What if, we wonder, we do this or that? The old thing worked well, the new must be better. More must be better! Curiosity drives us. Imagination fuels us. The beast drops us at our destination.

The morsel of chocolate has not moved. It is still displayed before you and it will be until it is gone. Put it away? Walk away? Eat it? Will you regret eating it or regret more not eating it. You touch it, smell it. Then it's gone. It was so sweet and good breaking up and melting in your mouth. The taste electrifying. The immediate aftertaste, guilt.

You can pretend tomorrow it never happened.

But you'll know it did.



Cascading Waters

George hit the off button on his alarm, rolled out of bed, showered and climbed into his daily uniform of a suit and tie. After grabbing a cup of coffee in his spill-proof coffee mug and a prepackaged, nutritious sounding breakfast bar, he proceeded outside to the curb where he stepped into his waiting Google car to be swept away to his office. He programmed the touchscreen, and the robot auto came alive and proceeded down the street which was lined with other like Google cars parked along the curb.

George settled back to sip his coffee and read the

news on his Google glasses as he had nothing else to do while the car navigated through streets of Google car traffic. He liked reading on his glasses because he could keep one eye, literally, on the moving surroundings which lessened his tendency for motion sickness. After a few moments he stopped looking at the scrolling words or the scenery racing by and started to think. George's brain started a mind cascade, one of those little flights of thinking that starts on one thought and ends up on a total different and unrelated thought after cascading down and across a multitude of slightly related ideas and ends somewhere possibly a universe away.

How did he end up here, he thought, sitting in an automated electronic toy car with toy wheels and loaded with airbags and other safety equipment? Why did everyone have their own private taxi to shuttle them around? Cars used to symbolize freedom and the open road as everyone zoomed down their own paths. They used to denote power and control with Chevy 350 V-8s and 4-barrel carburetors and the ability to smoke up big tires with a movement of the foot. Cars epitomized the American spirit. This electronic device

he was sitting in was all that was left of that spirit. So why did everyone need one? Why not just take trollies and trains. We used to have them, you know. The tire and oil barons not so much conspired but pushed their agendas on us back in the 1940's and all but put the trollies out of business. Then we had the love affair with power and gas and freedom. But now, he thought, all we have are these individual electric go-carts that don't even have a steering wheel to even pretend we have control of anything.

Its technologies fault, he thought, and business. Progress is like water finding its way down a slope. It takes the easiest path as it gains enough force to go forward. It branches this way and that as technology finds new applications to fill. Car? Got it. Computer? Got it. Car controlled with computer? Possible. Some branches don't work out and dry up and what works is what we end up with. Business pushes the technology in search of profits. What works and is profitable is good enough for business. But is it good enough, George wondered?

It was vision that was missing, he realized. Vision is like that finger or trowel or shovel or bulldozer that

knows where the water should go and digs a trench to guide it. Vision can assimilate the technology and see the multiple destinations and pick one, the best one. This was a George epiphany. He took off his Google glasses and instantly could see clearly. He pressed the one control button in his car, emergency stop, climbed out, and started to walk. All the Google traffic stopped behind his stalled car and waited patiently, obediently.



Rats!

It started innocently enough as these things usually do. I heard noises in the attic, little sounds of light feet pitter patter along the beams. How cute, I thought. Tiny furry rodents are making a home in my attic. Well, they have to live someplace, I reasoned, and why not here? I'm a compassionate, animal loving person. I can provide them their needed shelter and maybe generate some good karma along the way. So, I did nothing.

The first signs of disharmony appeared on my television screen in the form of image ghosts, a result of little teeth gnawing on my cable running across the

attic. Then they spread their mischief to my garage, evidently their passage way to the outside. Every time I turned on my washer, water would come spraying out of it in different places. Then one day, an adventurous soul crawled into the fan housing of my garage refrigerator and got pinned by the fan when it switched on. Weeks later when I was investigating why my ice cream was always soft and the otter pops wouldn't freeze, I found his desiccated little body caught tight in the fan. The Rambo moment came, however, when I went in the garage carrying my daily work stuff to get my truck and found a puddle of coolant under it. They had attacked my engine hoses. I calmly put my things on the workbench, got out my bike and rode it to the local Toyota dealer to get a new hose. Upon my return, I found my lunch had been gnawed into. The camel's back was broken. The *pièce de résistance* had been placed. It was an affront to my reason, the final stroke, the last lick, the match in the powder barrel. The war was on.

Now, the question, "Can't we all just get along?" comes to mind, and it is a complicated one. It is reasonable to assume we can be understanding of

differences and tolerant of interspecies lifestyles. But it boils down to when such differences start affecting my happiness and well-being in my own castle, I become less tolerant and understanding. The answer to that question is evidentially no.

I got out the sticky traps and baited them with their favorite treat, old washing machine hoses. It worked like a charm. Every morning I had more struggling, stuck furry rodents to deal with. And using sticky traps, well, you do have to deal with them, end their life. There are many ways to do this of which I won't get into. I took no pleasure in it... yeah right. The cute little pitter patter of eight feet had turned into a family of brothers and sisters. And aunts and uncles, nieces and nephews evidently came from all around to live in my attic. I slowly decimated the entire clan, one corpse at a time, until finally there was one left, the granddaddy who, late at night, would venture out looking for his family but was smart enough to avoid the traps. For him I pulled out the huge snap trap, and he perished in one surprising contraction of the loaded spring.

So since then I live in happiness knowing my stuff will not wear out prematurely from searching, gnawing little sharp teeth. I am robbed, however, of the experience of sharing one's living space with another diverse culture. And so much for the good karma.

Now excuse me. I have to go talked to the squirrels in my backyard. Maybe they will be a little more reasonable.



Where the Ghosts Go

"I wonder where the ghosts go." This was the puzzle I posed to my 11- year-old son while we waited at a stop light in Linda Vista the other day.

"What do you mean, Daddy?" he queried back.

"I wonder where the ghosts go when they tear down a haunted house. I mean, do they leave? Hang out in a vacant lot? Hang out on the street corner and spook people out in the open? That corner lot across the street used to have a haunted house on it and they just tore it down and carted it away? Looks like they are going to build a new one. You think the ghosts will

wait around and haunt the new house?

"You know there are no such things as ghosts, daddy," he quipped back thinking that would probably quiet my nonsensical ramblings from the front seat.

Well now, that was a logical and reasonable and rational statement. But coming from a kid who firmly believes in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy, I wasn't buying it. I had to push on.

"Well, ghosts are just lost souls looking for the way on. You believe we all have souls, right?"

"Sure, we have souls. And angels in the bible and the demons they talk about in church are all true. But ghosts? Spirits of dead people hanging around and bothering people? I don't think so."

"Well, ghosts are people, too. They deserve some respect. And not all ghosts haunt people. You know what a poltergeist is?"

"No, what's that?"

"It's a mischievous ghost. One that makes noise, moves things and generally bothers people. Not all ghosts are poltergeist."

"How do you know that house was haunted anyway? It looked like a regular house to me."

"I read it on the internet", I answered.

From the prolonged silence in the back seat I could tell he was processing that last statement. He surely believed everything on the internet was true.

"We've been driving by that abandoned house for years, right?" I continued. "And there was a big sign outside. Paul E. Kidd, with two d's in big letters then a bunch of stuff in smaller letters. I thought I saw D.D.S. at one point and for a long time envisioned a dentist working out of that house. Then I read the sign more closely and it said it was a church of some evidentially small congregation. So, I got curious about this church and why it's been empty for so long and I looked it up on the internet."

"There are all kinds of comments about that house. How there was a gruesome murder and the bodies buried in the yard and how people would go inside and then find themselves outside again for no apparent reason. A Buddhist priest went to perform an exorcism and ended up on the roof with no recollection of how he got there. People would walk by and the street light would flicker and go out then come back on after they passed by. People were dared

to break in and spend the night, but no one made it through the whole night. 'They'd be found walking the streets with no memory of what happened.'"

"So, now it's torn down and I just wonder where the ghosts go."

My son became quiet and except for some rustling in the back seat, I didn't hear a peep from him the rest of the ride home.

I parked in our driveway and turned to look at my son. Instantly I knew we were in trouble. The back seat was a mess. His drink was spilled all over him, his toys strewn around and he sitting there with a worried look verging on tears but a very slight smirk on his face.

All he said was, "They're here."



Government Scientists

I recently came across some top secret government documents I'd like to share with you. I do this not to overthrow my government or even embarrass it. On the contrary, I do this to let people know what really cool stuff the government is doing on your behalf funded with your dollars. I'm speaking of the cutting edge scientific research being done in numerous federal laboratories and even black labs which really don't exist, but really cool stuff goes on there, anyway.

Take for example this highly redacted, detailed transcript of a job interview with a prospective scientist

the government was headhunting. The federal service was after this individual because of the highly secret research he was doing in the private sector pertaining to mind control and thought transference. Unfortunately I've been unable to find any trace of this Dr. D after this interview was performed. He was either spirited away to some black research facility, inducted into the witless scientist protective program or simply neutralized as a threat the way our government takes care of such things. But his research does sound amazing. Just listen to this.

Govt. Scientist 1: So, Dr. D, we are aware of your work in mind control. We've been working on that for years and have made some small progress. Can you tell us the basic concept of your work?

Dr. D: During the last few years I've been experimenting not so much with mind control as with thought transference, the taking of an idea in one person's mind and transferring it to another.

Govt. Scientist 2: Oh yes, yes. We've been working

on just that. We've gotten to the point where we can have a subject think of a color, download that thought with electrodes and upload it into another, and 50% of the time they think of the same color! It's very exciting.

Dr. D: That's nice. I've actually had success transferring entire paintings, color, texture, content, and quite accurately, too. And I don't revert to electrodes.

Govt. Scientist 3: So, what? You use Wi-Fi? Bluetooth? Infrared?

Dr. D: No, no. I use a method which utilizes the natural wiring of the brain. With it I have not only transferred the thought of a painting, but also concepts, ideas, entire histories, and of course, introducing false information as truth. I'm sure you are interested in the false information part, being the government and all.

Govt. Scientist 1: My! Yes, of course, we would be interested in that. Very handy, you know, for turning

spies, winning over enemies and of course governing our own people. That is quite advanced research. How do you accomplish such an amazing thing? How can you transfer such information?

Dr. D: Well, I've only experimented with transferring from my mind to numerous test subjects, and in that way have achieved the success.

Govt. Scientist 2: Yes yes, but how do you do it? What is the technology behind this achievement?

Dr. D: Well, it's really rather simple, gentlemen. You see, I'm an author. I write. My subjects read.



Holi Daze

There is nothing wrong with my memory. Really! Sure, sometimes I forget why I walked into the garage, and if my car keys aren't in my pocket, I have no idea where they are. But I can remember with fondness my carefree days of childhood as if they were yesterday. The warm sundrenched days at summer camp in the pine scented mountains and the salt spray wetting my face while sailing on the family sailboat in San Francisco Bay are recent experiences in my mind. Even the struggle and pain of learning the times tables and "new" math are re-experienced every time I try to figure out what 7

times 8 is today. But I cannot remember, no matter how hard I try, the colorful relatives and characters that visited during holiday dinners and gatherings and the ensuing events that took place which can be retold time and time again prompting hearty laughs and looks of amazement that other people seem to remember of their families. The uncles and aunts and bickerings and fights and the one time the cousins blew up the tool shed. These things I cannot remember primarily because they never happened. My family and relatives were less than colorful like the black and white photos that recorded such events.

Our Thanksgiving dinners were small with just the immediate family, mom, dad and my brother and a few relatives or friends like my grandparents, or Aunt Phyllis and her husband at the time with the cousins or my Godparents and their kids. My mother, the messy cook, would work all day in the kitchen piling up dishes and pans for later cleaning. My father would sharpen the carving knife and play marching band music on the hi-fi as he drank rye whiskey or ale and put on a clean plaid wool shirt before the guests arrived. My brother and I just kept ourselves busy, usually watching TV,

and stayed out of the way. We would come out when the guests arrived. I would sit quietly and listen to the conversation while my brother started developing and mastering his lifelong ability to win conversations by simply speaking louder than anyone else.

When dinner came my dad would sit and the head of the table, my mom on the other end with my brother and I on opposite sides of the table next to my mom, an arrangement we had since infancy and which extended through college. Everyone else would fill in around the table which we had expanded with wooden leaves and which used to belong to my grandmother. The turkey was brought out and my dad would deftly slice it up with his sharpened knives except the one year electric carving knives were popular at which time we ate odd shaped pieces of turkey. We'd have mashed potatoes, and stuffing made of pork and apples and celery and butter, a family recipe. There were also the rolls, string bean casserole, cranberry sauce both gel and regular, and more butter. My mother would also make, just this one time a year, a fruit salad made of bananas, mandarin oranges and walnuts mixed together in mayonnaise and served on a leaf of lettuce

which I relished.

We would, of course, stuff ourselves and the men would sit back and loosen their belts complimenting my mom on a great dinner. We'd have pumpkin pie for desert and at some point move to the living room to carry on the conversation.

I can remember that all very well as I now roast the turkey stuffed with the same family recipe, less about a pound of butter, and set it out on that expanded table of my grandmother's. I also make that silly salad which I had liked so much. I just can't remember the cousins blowing up the tool shed.



About the Author

The winds of change push this author's boat across the perilous yet adventurous seas of our time. Bradly Davidson lives, works and plays in San Diego, California, where Gray Whales migrate and captive Orcas captivate the mind. His day job is working for the Navy investigating environmental challenges for that military/industrial complex. In that work he uses his degree in oceanography well and maintains a 100-ton US Coast Guard captain's license. He ambles about in a near empty ranch (style) home on a mesa above San Diego Bay and the Pacific Ocean raising his 11 year old son and keeping his sprawling hacienda working. He and his son also enjoy the salty waters of the area aboard their 27-foot sailing sloop where fishing, sailing and general replenishment of heart occurs. The winds of change push this author's boat, but he steers, when he can, with his spirit compass which always indicates a cardinal point towards fulfillment and happiness which includes writing these stories.



