

2013

Very Short  
Stories

Bradley Davidson

2013

Very Short  
Stories

Bradley Davidson

Copyright © 2013 by Bradley Davidson  
Ruff-and-Ready.com

All rights reserved.

ISBN-10: 1492997463  
ISBN-13: 978-1492997467

## DEDICATION

To the eclectic gathering of writers who come  
together every first Friday and read wonderful stories  
and listen intently and applaud freely my allocution of  
these.



# CONTENTS

Preface.....	v
The Bell.....	1
The I-Kabob.....	5
Listen.....	9
Cutting the Lawn.....	17
Fog.....	21
California.....	25
The Green Planet.....	29
Evolution.....	33
Looking In.....	37
The Captain.....	41
Dirt.....	45
The Greatest Story Ever Told.....	49
About the Author.....	53



## Preface

Writing the story is the task. Reading it in front of an audience is the unknown icing on the cake which flavor you do not know whether you like or not. At least that is the way it is with me. All these stories have been read out loud to an audience of writers at one open mic opportunity or another with mostly good results. But reading one's writing is performance art. One needs to deal with the clarity of diction, the pace, the timing and the body language. Most have been read at a 3-minute open mic where the time limit is strictly enforced. So a few stumbles, bad lighting or a lagging



cadence after a tiring day can all set one back where the conclusion of one's carefully crafted tale is never heard or heard amidst a cacophony of bells and whistles indicating times up. Overall, however, I enjoy the writing part and look forward to the reading.

You can imagine the surprise of our small band of writers who show up for the 3-minute open mic that our hosting coffee house, which serves up superb lattes and offers tasty treats, informed us we were no longer welcomed for our monthly 2-hour gathering. I suppose it had something to do with disturbing the constant flow of laptop hypnotized clientele looking for a spot to sit down complete with free Wi-Fi. But I miss the coffee and the chance to give them my money. So, we became somewhat nomadic like the Great Plains Indians and foraged for a place to spout out our creations. We met at the downtown artsy loft of San Diego Writer's, Ink, and when they moved, we moved with them to a refurbished barracks at the previous Naval Training Center now a commercial and residential development known as Liberty Station. There is no coffee, and big jets from the

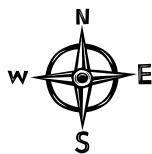
nearby Lindbergh Field take off over our heads. The jets have taught us to speak loudly in bursts, and the lack of coffee has taught us to bring our own. We get by. But an espresso machine would be nice. We continue to look towards the horizon for a hospitable and appropriate venue.

I say writing the story is the task not to imply it is a chore. It can be, but usually it is an enjoyable endeavor. Once I stop the procrastination and free myself from the guilt of not having been doing it by just starting, it is a joy and a challenge to funnel the chaotic thoughts in my mind into an idea and then into linear, coherent sentences that can paint a clear picture in another's mind. You can let me know how that is working. Completing a story is the hook that always brings me back. The rush induced by the accomplishment and an effort well executed cannot be duplicated by any drug or activity I am aware of, but then I'm a bit sheltered on those fronts.

Since these stories are very short, they are not too complicated. I get an idea and write about it. When it is done I tie it up with a bow and put it on a shelf and go to the next story. The stories themselves

may collect dust, but the ideas do not. They reappear in other stories as they live in my mind constantly in the churning chaos. They may appear in a different guise in another story or several at once may reveal themselves together. So just because I write about a certain topic doesn't mean I am done with it. The light may hit it differently one day and a new level may reveal itself. Or I may simply want to carry on what I started.

So enjoy these stories. They are written for anyone who would listen to me read them and to anyone who dare glance over the pages and process the words and have the pictures from my mind develop into theirs.



## The Bell

New Year's Eve was fast approaching, and I was busy gathering together the requisite items and supplies to ring in the new and bid fond adieu to the old. There were the foods to graze on during the pre-hours and the sparkling cider to sip as the year slipped away. There were the movies to pick out and music to get ready. And, of course, there was the bell.

I've known it all my life, this bell. It is a solid brass configuration with a brass clapper and woven lanyard dangling from it and measures 8 inches at its base. On the outside is molded into it the numbers

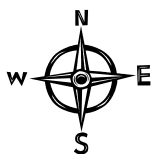
and words “1944/U.S. Army/Y-105”. It is obviously a ship’s bell. I’ve always been confused, and a bit amused, that a ship’s bell should have U.S. Army plastered on it, but it turns out the Army had over 100,000 (127,793) pieces of floating equipment during World War II. My father had been in the Navy and my younger self always assumed he acquired the bell somehow during that war. I know my father was on Midway Island at some point of the war and as a kid I had visions of him saving the ship’s bell as the vessel it was on had been bombed and was sinking and my dad nimbly freeing the bell and bounding over decks to safety. I figured this must have been the same incident where he lost most of his hearing from being near loud explosions. But in later years, piecing together my scant knowledge of the war and my father’s participation in it, I figure he came across it sometime after the war and before my collective consciousness. He was quite a collector of maritime paraphernalia. Our family home was brimming with ship parts and ground tackle. This piece had lain sequestered in the bowels of the house, the sub-basement of our home with the noisy, monstrous gas

furnace and its menacing ductwork and the copper lined hot water heater and the sump pump which would keep the subterranean space dry during heavy winter storms. I imagined it was being hidden from government agents in search of U.S. property that had come up missing decades ago. However the story unfolded, in my mind, the bell fascinated me during my whole adolescent life.

Back then, though, on New Year's Eve, the bell would stay concealed and we would haul out a big box about two feet tall, three feet long and a foot wide. It had a handle on the side and an opening on one end. One could kneel or sit on the box, pump the handle and a loud, bellowing fog horn blast would belch out of the opening. It was a portable fog horn off some other boat which my dad had mysteriously acquired as well. It would wake the neighbors and fill my brother and I with delight as we took turns pumping the handle and filling the new year and the neighborhood with ear wrenching, obnoxious music. Some years our street would actually be foggy.

So, later when my brother and I were cleaning out the family home and figuring what to do with a

lifetime of parents' possessions, we agreed he would take the horn and I would take the bell. Since then I've rung eight bells on my back patio at the stroke of midnight to ring in the New Year, recollect memories of my childhood and to pay homage to a vessel and its crew, the Y-105, which served this country well, whatever type vessel it was and whatever became of it.



## The I-Kabob

Nothing had changed. No one saw the big transformations that were predicted with great doomsday prophecies. At least no one noticed anything different. When Apple had come out with a new product, its announcement was greeted with great excitement at the technological achievement but also with great disbelief that anyone would unleash such a product. A prolonged and heated debate about its consequences and ethical and moral considerations followed.

Some people insisted time travel was impossible, and if it could be achieved, others insisted we could



not embark on such an endeavor because of the temporal paradox. No one could travel in time without altering events and changing the course of human destiny. Well, the engineers at Apple figured out it was indeed possible and traveling through time would make no difference in our history as it really didn't matter. Events in time were a result of happenstance and chaos and any changes in it would not make a difference in this chaotic world. More importantly, they theorized based on their research and data, or else they just plain decided to believe, that any change in the timeline would create a new timeline and not overwrite our existing one. Parallel timelines would exist and they calculated there could be an infinite number of lines existing simultaneously. If someone could travel back and change the course of history, their history would be changed only within their timeline. They would, of course, drag the rest of humanity along with them, but only in their world. These engineers also figured out one could only travel to the past as there was no "There" there in the future to travel to. But travelers could return to their altered timeline present.

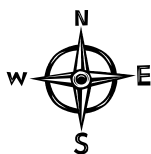
So they built this device into the latest version of their iPhone so these new time adventurers could travel with the convenience of having their iTunes and books with them as well as internet access and phone calls in time zones where available. They added a solar panel cleverly thinking some may travel where electricity had not yet been tamed.

Steve Jobs was actually the first to test and use the beta-beta version of this device. He didn't actually die but traveled back in time to use his vision and persistence to create a cure for cancer. His last words in this timeline, "Oh wow, oh wow!", was really a declaration that it was working. However, in his new timeline, there were no iPhones or Apple, but there was no cancer, either.

So, once released, people started disappearing in this world only to show up in worlds which they created by changing things that had happened before. Some avoided embarrassing episodes, corrected personal mistakes, put more effort into a relationship they regretted losing or just became filthy rich using knowledge from the future. Someone traveled back 2000 years and kidnapped Jesus so there was no

Christianity in that world. There were worlds with only Democrats, worlds with no gunpowder or guns, and worlds with too many iPods shooting atomic bullets. Yet however people changed events, they could not change human nature, so in all worlds there was still war and poverty and inequality.

And nothing changed. But, if you ever wonder who, what one person, is responsible for the world you live in, look around at those smiling with wires flowing from their ears listening to their cleaver, cleaver iPhones.



## **Listen**

United we stand, divided we stand... not so well.

We are a vast land, we contain multitudes.

From the splashing hissing shores of our coasts,

To the snow covered mountain spires,

To the fertile plains and barren deserts,

Down the mighty river that bisects us,

To the wilderness in the north and the islands in the  
oceans,

States and territories alike,

We are stewards of Mother Earth's jewels.

Bradley Davidson

Gold and silver and renewable riches,  
Wrapped in a bow of humbling scenery.

And we populate this geographic cornucopia with  
diversity,

A people of all peoples from around the world,

And through history,

The splendor of color and race combined into one  
tribe,

A people of choice and freedom and the pursuit of  
happiness,

Mixed into the bowl, stirred vigorously,

And served with confidence.

We are Americans.

The bankers, the bakers, the bouncers and barristers,

The maids and housekeepers and house builders,

The lawyers and clerks and collectors and filers,

The growers and pickers and packagers,

The cowboys and scientists and engineers,  
The designers and builders of things reaching to the  
sky,  
The innovators that connect us,  
The janitors and garbage gatherers,  
The writers and poets who make minds soar,  
The titans of industry,  
The CEOs and the CFOs and the EIOs,  
All mixed together and working in concert, making  
music,  
As Americans.

Together we build, together we innovate, together we  
fight,  
To keep our precious freedoms strong, our minds set,  
Our moral compass pointing in the right direction.  
We fight to defend this fragile order,  
Against enemies seen and not seen,

Bradley Davidson

Enemies foreign and within ourselves.

World Wars, policing actions and muddled jungle  
push backs,

Desert Storms and dangerous sabre rattlings,

A Civil War of our own, terrorism.

A harsh history laid down

To produce, to create, to protect what we have today.

We are fighters.

We Americans.

In a narrow aisle somewhere over Pennsylvania, a cry  
goes up,

“Let’s roll!” is heard, and lives on.

A battle cry for what is right, for what is just, for what  
is ours.

Ordinary people in unordinary circumstances,

We rise to the occasion and overcome,

Every effort contributing to defeating oppressive evil,

Every tiny struggle from every citizen from thought  
to action to raising arms,

Adds to our freedom, our ability to choose, our  
happiness.

In another aisle where laws are made,  
Men and women sit in rhetorical silence,  
History at their feet.

The aisle seemingly as wide and separating,  
As the mighty river that flows through our heartland.  
Thoughts cannot be heard across the great divide.  
Ears are closed, walls of pride go up, principles are  
taken to extremes.  
All stop except the shouting that cannot be heard.

Our kingdom is large, it contains humanity,  
This idea of pursuing happiness a right bestowed,  
Needs help from all.  
Sow in fertile soil this chance for happiness, for the  
dream to come true.  
Cultivate the landscape.



Bradley Davidson

Pick up those that fall along the way and help.

Progress for all is not just making new, but dealing  
with what is already.

This kingdom of opportunity is kind and  
compassionate.

Or should be.

Camelot comes and goes.

Remember how it goes?

It may be time.

It may be time to raise the battle cry.

“Let’s Roll!” Let’s go. Let’s get something done.

And storm down the aisle.

For those who can’t because of party, pride and  
prejudice,

Listen carefully to we ordinary citizens,

The ones that contribute in thought and action and  
raising arms.

Listen carefully to those who vote.

Every two years.

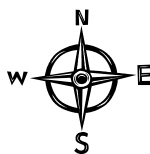
Listen.

Carefully.

To We Americans.

So let's roll!, Let's go! Let's get something done.

And we'll all meet back here in Camelot.





## Cutting the Lawn

I spend a lot of time watching my grass grow. Literally! I sit on my back patio daily and scan the field of organic brew that sprouts up in leaves of grass and watch it get longer and less ruley day after day. And when it gets long enough, when the field starts looking less like a *Field of Dreams* and more like something *Out of Africa*, I take action. I haul out my mower powered by petroleum hydrocarbons, rev it up, and beat back Mother Nature into a manicured carpet of green homogeneity. I then can sit on my back patio and admire the order, the neatness, the way civilized man has come to like his

Mother Nature, while enjoying the smell of freshly cut grass on a warm summer's day, that aroma rising up from recently sliced, diced and mangled plant flesh.

When Walt Whitman wrote, "A child said, What is grass? Fetch it to me with full hands; How could I answer the child?.... I do not know what it is any more than he." he obviously didn't have to mow it. He went on poetic suggesting it was the Handkerchief of the Lord with the owners name somewhere in the corners, or the child itself, and suggests the smallest sprout shows there is really no death. All very well for a poet. But I am simply a mower of lawns and wrestler of nature. It is also obvious Walt Whitman did not have a child to raise.

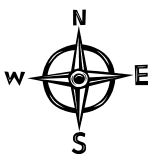
So, I like to beat back my grass and keep it in the confines of concrete walkways and brick bounded flower beds. When it is time, when the blades of grass reach an undefined height but sets off internal alarms, I drag my creaking bones and stiff muscles from the house on a weekend morning and haul out the implements. My mind swirls with resistance from the authority my grass has over me. But then something magic happens as I go through the tasks.

My bones creak less, my muscles come to life, and my mind swoons in the meditative action of repeated motion. My being transcends into a Zen-like meditative state and I begin to feel one with the lawn. I feel its roots digging into the soft soil reaching out and deep for moisture. I feel the green blades racing for the sunlit sky in a sort of competition with each other right before I run over it with my equalizer. Then I feel the race begin again. I feel as I'm teaching the grass its bounds as I edge the mavericks back into their domain. But they ultimately do not listen, like children, and I wonder what they would be without me. And as I sweep the cuttings back onto itself, I feel the cycle is complete. The old will rejuvenate the new. There is really no death.

While I'm putting the tools back away for another day, I realize I'm thinking more like Whitman, more transcendent and ethereal. That may simply be the feeling of accomplishment at a job well done and the relief of knowing I won't have to do that again for a week or so. I've created that time, that space in my head where I can think poetic things. Maybe, just maybe, if I cut more lawns I could

become a poet.

But then I sit on my back patio and watch the grass grow and the cycle begins anew and the time and space for poetry grows small. I watch Mother Nature take back her realm chloroplast by chloroplast, cell by cell, blade by blade. It grows. Perhaps I should plant a xeroscape.



## Fog

**T**hat meteorological phenomena known as fog can be a mariner's nightmare, dread, or simply an annoyance, but it is seldom a joy to come across unless one is a pirate or the crew of a warship trying to hide or travel stealth. The mysterious gray, swirling mist is a hindrance to navigation which sometimes results in vessels sunk and lives lost. The process that creates fog is in itself mysterious. Warm water and cold air, or cold water and colder air can sometimes bring it on... or not. It can form on sunny days or dark, rainy nights. It's hard to predict. A mariner's defense against it is



knowledge, experience and, in modern times, an assortment of electronic navigation devices.

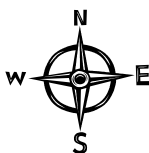
I had none of those things that sunny spring day in 1979 as I headed out the Mission Bay channel on my recently acquired wooden ketch as I had done only a handful of times before. I made it several miles offshore before a cold chill hit me, sort of like how people describe being close to a passing spirit. I looked up to see a wall of gray about a mile off coming towards me. Some instinctive reaction from my seafaring ancestors told me to turn the boat to the jetty and get a compass bearing. I did just that, and soon I was shrouded in gray, confused without sight bearings and steering by my small compass. After about an hour I came upon one of the jetties to the bay entrance. Only problem was I couldn't see far enough to the other, so I didn't know if the one I found was the north or south jetty. What side of this this rocky outcrop was I to follow to safe harbor rather than waves breaking on beach?

A seemingly simple and mundane navigation decision can become tragedy in fog. Take for example Captain Edward Howe Watson who was

fleet commander of Destroyer Squadron Eleven that fog laden evening of September 8, 1923. He led 14 ships down the California coast going 20 knots from San Francisco heading for San Diego when he miscalculated through dead reckoning when to veer east following the coast. His flagship plus six others ran aground on jagged rocks just north of Santa Barbara. Twenty three lives were lost that night as well as seven ships and an assortment of naval careers. To his credit, Capt Watson took the blame for the tragedy as he ambled off into the annals of the big "Oops!" More recently, in 1981 ( February 15, 1981) off San Diego, the 83-foot barkentine, *California*, was offshore Point Loma whale watching with a full deck of paid customers when fog rolled in. Captain Edward S. Barr, heading back into San Diego Bay, miscalculated and decided to start his turn east too early. The ship ended up on the rocks of Point Loma right under the watchful eye of the light house, its back broken.

The wind was pushing my small boat and I slowed while I decided which side to travel. Meanwhile another boat also feeling its was way back

into port appeared behind me. I chose to travel the south side of the rocks. To my consternation, the following boat took the north side. Doubt filled my mind as I sailed east toward land, my senses hanging out of my head trying to weigh my choice. Silence, fog, the water got calmer. When I heard yelling and bell ringing from the other side of the jetty, I knew I made the right choice. I never did hear what happened to the other boat, but I bet it was exciting.



## California

**I**n California public schools, fourth graders are taught about the great Golden State. It was true when I was in fourth grade and it is true today as my 10 year old son navigates through the halls of public education. They are taught the history mainly but find out about the geography, agriculture, and grizzly bears but not so much why that official state animal does not reside in California any longer. The colorful history including the Indians and their diet of acorns, the gold rush and the development of the mission system as the Catholic Church made its way through the state all pour into their fertile minds and

create an image of a land long ago. Field trips to missions and historic places punctuate these lessons. But one thing that is hard to grasp is the state's enormity, its vastness and diverse geography from rugged shorelines and beaches to mountains and fertile valleys, and wide deserts. So my son and I set out on a road trip from the lower left hand corner of the state to the northern San Francisco Bay Area just to give him a glimpse of the splendor this sprawling piece of real estate we call California has to offer.

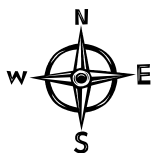
We left at 4:30 in the morning and by the time the sun came up we were eking our way through the Los Angeles basin trying to beat the morning mayhem of traffic. I started spouting the trivia of the cities we passed trying to see through the obvious concrete and asphalt to the colorful stories. Orange orchards and Walt Disney pacing out his dream. The birth of the aerospace industry. Movie stars. I soon felt like Huel Houser, that Tennessee native who became California's tour guide on public television. Soon we were winding our way over the mountains north of Los Angeles, those same mountains the TV series MASH made into the Korean peninsula. We

saw the descendants of the patrol cars that were portrayed in the 50's TV series, Highway Patrol with Broderick Crawford. We glided down the Grape Vine into the wide open Central Valley and I could imagine the ranch where another 50's show, Sky King, could have been filmed and his plane, Songbird, flying overhead.

As we progressed up the valley skirting the foothills of the coastal range, I pointed out the cows and horses and sheep and tried to identify the orchards and crops growing along the way. They used to post signs. My son seemed to enjoy it saying "Thank you Daddy for pointing that out" obviously tuned-in to the fact I was enjoying it probably more than he. I had made this trek many times through the years driving a Volkswagen Bug and Campervan, a Squareback and a Sirocco, or a Toyota truck and saw more each time. And smelled plenty! "What's that smell?" my son would ask. "Farmland!", I'd reply.

As we made our final approach to the Bay Area from the east, we drove through Livermore Valley. I explained my mother was raised on a huge ranch, one that covered most of the valley and parts of the

surrounding hills. “Where is the ranch now?, he asked. “Under all those houses”. I explained. “Why’d they destroy the ranch to build houses?” I could think of no reasonable answer except to say, “That’s California!”



## The Green Planet

**G**od is perfect, but, you know, He sometimes makes little mistakes. They are perfect mistakes, of course, but mistakes all the same, little things that just don't go the way He thought they might. I don't want to labor this point, but if He made man in His own image, well then, He makes mistakes. We make mistakes. He must. And sometimes, to correct these mistakes, He takes drastic actions, like the Great Flood, for example. Wipe the slate clean and start again. But more often He tries to correct a mistake with more subtle actions trying to set things the way He intended



them to be in the first place.

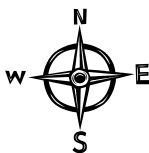
Take for example plants. He intended plants to rule the world, to be the ultimate inhabitant of our small orb. He was the ultimate botanist and put great effort in developing an environment which would nourish His leafy creation. He was rather proud of His chlorophyll invention, those little molecules that would actually catch and store energy from His shining stars. Genius, He thought. So He created the universe in a big bang and loaded up His jewel planet with an atmosphere full of carbon so His plants could grow and build themselves. He based His plant plan on the theory we base our economic plan today, on the idea that things must grow to be productive. They can't just be static and happy, things must grow and consume to be worthwhile. This was His first mistake. They grew, and died and grew and took all the carbon out of the atmosphere and deposited it in the ground in beds of coal and diamonds and liquid oil and gas. The air became full of oxygen, a byproduct of His precious chlorophyll process. So, He created animals to respire the oxygen and recycle His plants a bit to replace the carbon. The dinosaurs

did a great job, and for eons they lived in equilibrium with the plants. But the big animals ate too much and often sequestered His precious carbon as they died and got buried deep into the ground. Soon, the ground contained most of the carbon He meant for His plants to have. So Bam! A big meteor hit the earth and He started again.

He introduced a creature with enough intelligence that would lead to the advent and use of machines that would require these sequestered plants and dinosaurs to run, and this intelligence would figure out how to dig up all this carbon and burn it returning it to the skies for the plants to use anew. He created man. This was another little mistake. Things worked out great as they burned and huffed and puffed all these buried fuels until their intelligence figured out they were messing up the planet for themselves, and they started trying to fix the situation. They cut back on burning the fossil fuels and created policies amongst governments to return the atmosphere to a more animal friendly air.

God became concerned. Just as His greenhouse was getting back to supporting the major life form of

the planet, these little animals were messing it up. So He sent warnings in the forms of storms, some major earthquakes and a steady rise of the ocean levels. “Stop it! Stop it!” He ordered. But they would not listen. Another flood, He thought, may be in order.



## Evolution

**T**here was no moon. It was gone. In the place of the smooth orb shining lunar beams onto the earth was space rubble glowing diffuse in the night sky. Some members of the resistance blamed the current state of affairs on man's predisposition to fool with his own evolution. It really wasn't much of a resistance with members hiding in holes, caves and cavernous basements of once gigantic skyscrapers. They were not organized nor did they have much of a plan. It really didn't matter, though. As soon as the technology was perfected, their earth would be cracked open like an

egg and its resources sucked up and absorbed, assimilated. Resistance, it seemed, was futile.

The story of man's evolution is short as is his stay on the planet. He emerged from the sea and eventually stood on two legs and was solitary at first. He became social then built cities and governments, developed business and finally huge corporations ruled with their wealth. Individuals simply became their customers, workers, citizens, slaves.

At first individuals believed they were special and unique and masters of their own destiny. They still thought this as the corporations slowly took power selling them things they needed and things they didn't even realize they needed or wanted. At the same time science and technology took great leaps of progress and they were soon weakening their gene pool by simply finding ways of letting the sick and the weak live. Information technology exploded linking all the individuals together into one great consciousness,... controlled, of course, by the corporations. Individuals were linked together by computers, then phones, then glasses, then WIFI enabled implants that required no devices to carry and keep track of.

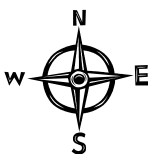
Information inundated and influenced and soon took over their frail individuality, their ability to think for themselves. Those in the resistance were pretty sure the implants were the tipping point.

At each step of man's development ethicists had grand discussions and colorful arguments of whether they should be doing this or that, altering their own evolution with test tube births, stem cells and medical science and information technology. But such talk were simply polite parlor games and entertainment. Because, in truth, if man is capable of doing something, he will. Someone will. It's human nature. Whether he should or not is never the driving force.

So now, the combined brainpower of all the connected individuals was developing new technology to consume and grow as this was, and always has been, the corporate mantra. Individual wealth had long ago been spent. The collective was now drawing resources directly and growing the hive. There was no individual. And the hive moved to outer space in large cube shaped space ships capable of gathering resources directly from space and building itself. They were currently working out the last few details

having experimented on the moon.

Long ago, a well-known possum from the Okefenokee Swamp once lamented, “We have met the enemy, and he is us!” referring to man’s proclivity to work against himself. Someone in the resistance, cold and dirty, hiding underground, recalled this thought. “It’s always us”, he moaned. He also thought it was man’s nature to resist. There is always a resistance. They often don’t win. But they do resist. He climbed out of his hiding place, stood up, dusted himself off and initiated his plan.



## Looking In

I've always wanted to be an eccentric. Not the kind where people would walk on the other side of the street to avoid you or stay in their houses when they see you in your front yard just to not get sucked into that vacuum of time chatting with no polite exit. No. But more the pleasant, polite and slightly quirky eccentric living in my own reality and exuding an air that I know something most people don't, and it is good.

Ever since I saw the movie *Harvey* as a kid with James Stewart playing Elwood P. Dowd, I've wanted to be like him. I've wanted to have my invisible 6



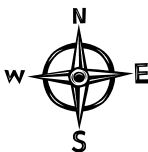
foot rabbit friend or other pooka accompany me through life as I pleasantly befriended strangers handing them my card at the same time pointing out I was a member in good standing of the National Geographic Society. People didn't know quite what to make of him, but they bought into it with the barman regularly pouring two martinis, and bar patrons not even considering sitting in the seemingly empty barstool next to him. Of course, he had the advantage of imbibing and being drunk most of the time, a charming affliction in his social circles, but frowned upon these days in most. I know. Been there. Done that. It didn't work for me.

There are no schools or course work or training to become an eccentric. There are no diplomas in eccentricity, although liberal arts curricula in most colleges produces a fair amount of odd characters. So how does one become an eccentric?

For answers, I've observed some without gaining much enlightenment. There is the guy in the desert living in his house made of hay bales and mud. There is my friend in Ocean Beach who believes secret societies and governments in general are manipulating

our lives for their own agendas. Then there is this guy in Mission Bay. I've seen him on occasion in different circumstances and he seems to be pleasantly eccentric. He has a 30 foot sailboat which he rows in and out of his mooring with an intricate arrangement of huge oars and bungee cords he devised. He is the only person I've seen row a sailboat of that size. He sails most every day beginning and ending his voyages by rowing his boat which must weigh around 3 to 4 tons with the weighted keel and maneuvering within tight spaces that hardly leave room enough for his oars extended. An older gentleman, tall and lanky, he walks with a stoop and a limp, an individual you would not think would put his body through the strains of sailing solo and rowing heavy boats. He rides his high tech bike with all the fancy equipment to and from his boat. While lunching at the marina I've noticed he comes into the marina deli, limping, after his morning sail and eats lunch. And he socializes, talking with others in what appears to be a pleasant experience for all. And why I believe him to be eccentric is because his weathered face sporting a scraggly gray beard has eyes that are alive, slightly

crazed, but alive. And he appears happy and content. He sure seems to know something I don't, and whatever that is, looks pretty good to me. Where or how do I get some of that?



## The Captain

The house on Channing Way in Berkeley was haunted. I know this because I spent time in that house as a small kid, in my early years, when my memory was developing and before that. My friend King, a long haired collie, lived there along with his owners, my grandparents. I would be dropped off there some evenings and on weekends along with my older brother to hang out with King and the grandparents often spending the night.

The house was a Victorian with three floors and 12 foot ceilings and built at the turn of the century when Berkeley actually did have farms. King lived on

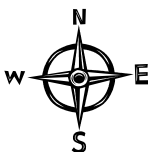
the bottom floor which was a basement full of my Grandpa's work shop, a lifetime of stuff and walls of bundled up newspapers. A front staircase led to a porch and the middle floor where most of the living went on. The top was a large attic divided into rooms, and that is where the haunting began.

Before my collective self existed, my grandparents rented out the attic rooms to The Captain, a merchant marine officer who evidentially came and went on extended sea voyages and wasn't much trouble when ashore, apparently a quiet man. That quiet translated into mysterious in my mind when my grandparents would refer to him. The Captain this, the Captain that, they would say. I imagined a tall dark fellow always dressed in his navy blue uniform with heavy jacket and wool captains' hat moving slowly around the house, possibly with a limp, possibly because he had a wooden leg. And a dark beard, of course, and smoking a pipe. The grandparents never said what became of the Captain, so I assumed he vanished at sea, possibly in a huge storm, and returned in spirit to that house, where he had lived his last mortal days ashore.

I would peer up the long straight stairway behind the kitchen leading up to attic and know he was up there, smoking his pipe and staring out the front window. I could hear him late at night as the house creaked and the floorboards thumped. I knew he must have been responsible for sending my brother's baby carriage down the front steps when the parents looked away and before I was even born. Brother survived, unscathed, mostly. I know it was he who made me walk across the floor furnace and burn my feet. And I know he was responsible for King pooping rainbows even though I was warned not to leave my crayons around because they looked an awful lot like King's Walter Kendell Fives kibble. He'd try to burn down the house repeatedly by convincing my grandmother it was OK to throw in a cup of kerosene into the wood burning kitchen stove to clean the flu. And I know it was he who pushed me into the fish pond that sunny afternoon as I was raking the weeds in the back yard.

The house is gone now, having been bulldozed and replaced by cheap, profitable apartments for UC Berkeley students, but word of the Captain lives on.

I'm sure he still roams the halls creating light mischief especially during midterms and finals when harried, young minds look for any excuses for everything that goes wrong.



## Dirt

When one reads history it is usually about dates and places and people who have done significant deeds under perilous odds. They say history is written by the winners, and the losers have little place in it. The defeated in battle and states that never became all vanish in the history books written by those who won. But something else that doesn't get mentioned or is lost in the passage of time is the mere state of existence of those who lived. We live in a time of high technology and gadgets that help keep things orderly and clean. We've defeated diseases which have plagued and sent civilizations



into oblivion. But this has not always been the case. The past was a grimy place full of sickness and suffering where tooth decay was a significant cause of death, and where my ancestors in soggy old England lived in mud. This battle we wage today against dirt and grim may very well be a modern phenomenon where those in the past simply put up with it as a normal part of living on a planet made of dirt.

Our first instincts when we come into this world are to embrace the dirt. Children play in it, eat it and make mud pies with it. They track it into our houses from which we spend considerable effort keeping such stuff out. We are created with fingernails under which we can store small bits of dirt showing where we've been and what we've been doing. But at an early age we learn to keep the dirt outside, to wash our hands constantly and to bathe excessively. We are indoctrinated into the clean society.

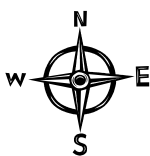
Hollywood in its early days is much to blame for this clean resolve by portraying places and characters in history as clean and tidy. Daniel Boone wore a tailor made buckskin suit and the good guys traipsing over the dusty plains always wore sparkling clean

white hats. Castles and palaces were always scrubbed immaculate and the silver candle sticks always shined bright. But I'm pretty sure even the Queen of England dealt with dirt. Certainly the serfs lived in it. Hollywood today is a bit better not only portraying past figures in grimy costumes, but showing the violence, gore and inhumanity of civilizations growing. But that's Hollywood.

I like dirt. As a kid I tried selling some during a stage of early entrepreneurial pursuits. I would dig up our backyard of rich topsoil, put it in paper bags and haul it around the neighborhood on my wagon selling each bag for a nickel. I now feel a bit sorry for those neighbors who, I'm sure, didn't know how to respond. The business was an initial success, but the market soon became saturated, and I moved on to other things.

Today I still deal in dirt, in my garden, turning the soil, blending in mulch, and keeping as much of it up on my back slope as possible. And when I am covered in it and my sweat smears it onto my skin and into my cloths, I think of those jolly old ancestors living in their mud houses with dirt floors and open

sewers and am pretty sure they were having a good time.



## The Greatest Story Ever Told

**C**hristmas is a special time of year full of joy and hope, and people are usually nicer to each other. They decorate their homes with trees and ornaments and sparkly warm lights that brighten the long winter's nights and exchange gifts freely and cook food and sweet treats and visit family and friends or send greetings to those not heard from all year. It's a magic time of year and basically perpetuated by two stories, possibly the two greatest stories ever told, at least to some.

The second greatest story ever told, the penultimate one as it were, that has been foisted upon

the impressionable minds and gullible souls of us all, as well as those of children, is that of Santa Claus. The jolly fat man in the red suit that flies his reindeer around the world in one night delivering presents to the good and pieces of coal to the bad has been told about through the years with each generation falling for it based on the authority of those telling it, parents. It's believed unconditionally until those minds gain the ability to do math and have garnered some observational powers of how the world really works. Then a bit of doubt sets in, and thinking needs to change just a bit to accommodate the whole scenario. First there is the flying forest hoofed animals to reconcile. Then the sheer numbers don't make sense and is becoming more absurd by the year. There are over 7 billion people in the world, and even if you drop the Buddhists and Muslims and Hindus and atheists and even the Scientologists and limit Santa Claus's visits to only Christians, which Christmas has a lot to do with, you still have over 2 billion folks to deal with. Divide that by an average family of four and you have 500 million homes to visit. Even though winter nights are long and Santa

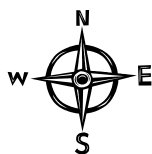
has the advantage of a rotating Earth which gives him 24 hours to make his rounds, that results in approximately .002 seconds to spend at each house. Then there is the chimney part that becomes more and more unlikely in a young mind as it ages especially since there are fires in most hearths this time of year. True believers have adjusted to these inconvenient truths by either applying magic or an altered belief system such as the existence of a parallel universe where time is enhanced and Santa visits through a wormhole or tear in the fabric of space-time and wears asbestos suits... or they just have a little faith.

Faith goes a long way and works for the ultimate greatest story ever told, at least for those 2 billion Christian earth inhabitants. And that story is the one about Jesus Christ himself who basically it is we celebrate during this season. His birth and life and crucifixion and resurrection and relationship with the Almighty seem incredible and a bit hard to believe. There is not much math to do, but biology and medical students may have a hard time with the Virgin Birth of Jesus and rising from the dead and

rebirth and eternal life parts. But it all has to be true to work. And with faith it does work. It's faith not only in Jesus Christ but faith in our fellow selves, all the people around us regardless of religious belief, a faith that we can help each other and be better as a whole and attain our goal and enlightenment and advancement right here. It's a type of magic, this faith, and it makes everything work.

And, of course, there is still the alternate, parallel universe if that works.

Merry Christmas!



## About the Author

The author is an idiot. Bradley Davidson fancies himself a writer, a turner of tall tales, but works as a scientist, a profession where fiction and reports and papers beginning with “Once upon a time...” are frowned upon. His day job is an oceanographer and environmental scientist, but he works for the Federal Government, that bastion of bureaucracy which tends to stifle creative thought. Brad is a 100 ton certified United States Coast Guard boat master, but all he does is ferry scientists on scientific surveys, scientists who throw good seamanship to the wind. San Diego, coastal city of wonderful beaches, is home, but he never lies on the beach. His 27-foot Catalina sloop always needs some work. The ranch (style) home he lives in consumes his time as does his 10-year old son. The author is an idiot, but he chooses to be an idiot. And he loves it!





