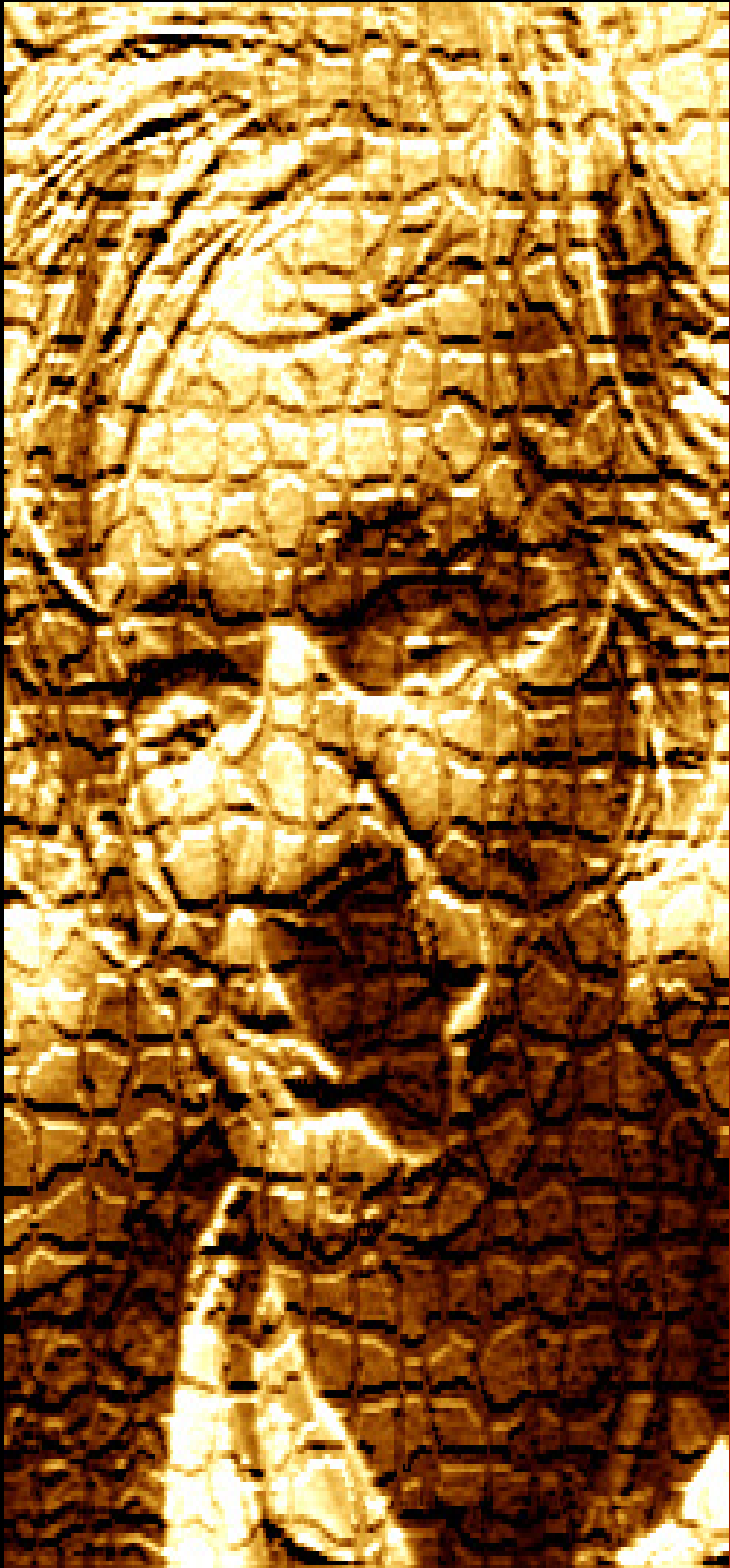


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IMPACT TIMES

Volume 3: Issue 12:

Winter 2010



WORLD NEWS AND POLITICS

A HERO AND A VILLAIN IN 2010—The tyranny of Nazism and the bombing of Pearl Harbor tugged America into a conflict that would ultimately establish it as a world superpower. From a combined Army and Navy of nearly two million on the eve of Pearl Harbor, America’s armed forces expanded to more than ten million soldiers by mid-1945. The number of men and women who take arms to serve this great nation today has obviously multiplied, as this nation’s population has multiplied. And half a century later, America and other nations of the world are still at war.

2010, like other periods in history, may be marked by countless stories of social and political events; but if we were asked to close our eyes for a brief moment, take a deep breath and filter out all the noise, two stories resonate above all. They are the tales of two men who commanded the world’s attention in two contrasting styles: one is a southpaw boxer from the poverty stricken streets of the Philippines whose iron fists and heart of gold earned him the admiration and adoration of a nation; and the other is a silver-haired Australian Internet activist whose perseverance and activism stirred a political earthquake so big that it shook the very foundations of the White House and the Pentagon. The aftershocks of these two men’s activities are being felt from the streets of London to the marble hall of the President’s home.

Manny Pacquiao, a Philippine fighter, and Julian Assange, an Australian journalist and founder of a whistleblower website called WikiLeaks, however starkly contrasted their philosophies of life may be, will be remembered for many years to come. Moammar Gadhafi, Kim Jong II, Silvio Berlusconi, Robert Mugabe, Hamid Karzi, Robert Mugabe, and other world leaders, took punches to their faces, figuratively, on a fateful Sunday in November 2010 when WikiLeaks released secret U.S. diplomatic cables and offered us insights into the personal lives of these world leaders and how U.S. diplomats view them. Who would imagine that a man and his four-year organization held such power? Trained as a physicist and mathematician at the University of Melbourne, and later developed into a brilliant computer programmer whose specialty is devising software encryption, Julian Assange certainly left his mark on history by leaking to the world classified military documents dealing with the war in Afghanistan.

While Julian pounced on his opponents with a blitzkrieg of secret documents, Manny Pacquiao was destroying his opponents with lightning fast punches. Armies and rebels stopped fighting, streets emptied, and all eyes, young and old, were glued to every available television screen whenever Manny stepped into the ring. That is the power and influence of Manny Pacquiao, also known to his fans around the world as the Pacman. William Harrison Dempsey might have caught the boxing world’s attention in the 1920s, Cassius Clay in the 1960s, Muhammad Ali in the 1970s, and Mike Tyson in the 1980s, but none achieved what Manny has accomplished so far. The Pacman’s punches are like the blazeblitz that pummeled London in 1941. The impact from his fists explode at his opponents’ bodies like the crackling incendiaries of blue and rose-colored flames that once illuminated London’s smoke choked air.

Manny is the only boxer in history to win 10 world titles in eight different weight divisions. He has destroyed much bigger and stronger opponents. A short list of legendary fighters dismantled by this southpaw’s blazing speed and jaw dropping punches include Oscar De La Hoya, Ricky Hatton, Joshua Clottey, Miguel Cotto, Antonio Margarito, Erik Morales, David Diaz, and many more. Not only is he the premier fighter of all, time but he is also a humanitarian and a Congressman. The Boxing Writers Association of America named him “Fighter of the Decade” and *The Ring*, a boxing magazine, named him “Fighter of the Year” for three different years.

A poor boy struggling to survive in the poverty stricken streets of the Philippines, Manny earned his meals one fight at a time. From the streets he rose and his past hardships made him a better man, a more humane man who feeds the poor with his hard earned money. Manny is not only loved by boxing fans from his homeland but also by people from around the world. His voice captivated the attention of millions when he appeared on national television and sang “Imagine” alongside actor Will Ferrell.

Manny Pacquiao and Julian Assange: each a giant in his own right—one revered by millions and the other coined “Destroyer of Worlds”—will go down in history books, each in his own distinct way. They certainly have left indelible marks on 2010. Manny has entertained millions, given to the poor, and is preparing for a new style of fighting—in the political arena. While Julian has stirred the curiosity of millions, provoked nations, and forced us as a people to reexamine our First Amendment Rights. Freedom of Speech and Press will never be the same as the impact of WikiLeaks’ media blitz continues to be felt worldwide.



RICHARD QUAN

Managing Editor

HOLIDAY SEASON 2010: HOW BLACK?—The term “Black Friday” goes back to the nineteenth century, when it was associated with a financial crisis of 1869. The earliest known reference to the day after Thanksgiving was made by the Philadelphia police in 1966, in regard to the official start of the Christmas shopping season, the result of massive traffic jams and over-crowded sidewalks as the downtown stores were mobbed from open to close.

Today, in America, Black Friday references whether retailers turn a profit, or are “in the black.”

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Normally I eschew sales, as well as our society’s fixation on materialism, and focus on the real meaning of Christmas, choosing to ignore the weekly updates of this year’s sales figures as compared to previous years. But this year I’ve been curious to watch the numbers.

October boasted 150,000 new jobs; yet unemployment remained stagnant, hovering around 10% nationwide. Here in Michigan it’s much higher, and I continue to give thanks for my gainful employment.

The Fed continues to print greenbacks, making our currency nearly worthless overseas and to our neighbor to the north.

With such news, dare I become hopeful of the future of our economy let alone the country?

And what of elsewhere in the global economy?

The Chinese economy is reportedly to be among the strongest; yet recently I read that it, too, is suffering from a rapid rise in inflation. It is expected to rise for the next few years.

The Chinese government blames the U.S. Federal Reserve’s quantitative easing of policy for boosting commodity prices and therefore Chinese inflation. But there is more.

The Chinese money supply has increased 78% during the past three years, and while inflation has been reported at 4.4% annually—well above the government’s 3% target—some economists estimate the actual rate to be in excess of 6%, which no doubt would leave the average Chinese citizen angry, were the truth known.

Fear of social instability is but one reason the Chinese government has instituted price controls and hostility towards speculators who might stockpile provisions in order to benefit from the opportunity for exploitation that comes with inflation.

Allowing interest rates to rise along with inflation could help savers and others on fixed incomes, which should dissuade people from withdrawing money and putting it into physical assets and goods, the mechanism that drives inflation; therefore, rising interest rates would go a long way toward rebalancing the Chinese economy.

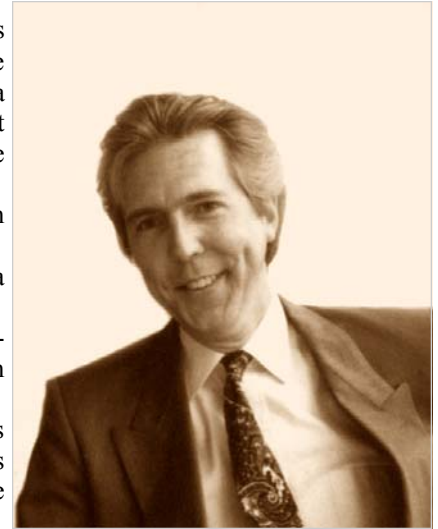
Michael Pettis, a finance professor at Peking University, believes that by increasing interest rates, the Chinese government can boost domestic demand by increasing household incomes. As a consequence, a falling savings rate would slow the buildup of excess capacity in China’s industry and reduce the country’s current account surplus with the U.S. Unfortunately, that would likely strain relations in trade relations with the U.S.

I don’t envy the Chinese government, the tough decisions with which they are faced, even if they are no more difficult than those which Obama faces.

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Frankly, I don’t believe we’ll ever return to our former way of life, and a part of me is pleased—I think we’d be far better off, both as a society as well as citizens of the global community, if we set about acquiring more values than mere things.



J. Conrad Guest
Contributing Editor

*Toys designed to save children from the dangers
of our own youth*

THE HOLIDAYS mean different things to different faiths and cultures, but only one thing to children everywhere: toys. It follows that we rearers of these multi-cultural kiddies have the exact same thing on our collective minds this season too, only our goals regarding these toys are different. In this age of helicopter parenting, heaven forbid may we purchase something that might potentially corrupt mind, body, or soul of our sacred offspring.

Like most of the current batch of parents, I risked my youth in an age free from today's fears: lead paint, allergenic ingredients, chemical pollutants, swallowing hazards. We were taught that our Creepy Crawlers Set made rubber bugs and burned fingers the old-fashioned way. We also seemed to know, without a warning label, not to randomly swallow things just because they happen to fit in our mouths. Chemistry sets contained actual chemicals—*imagine*—and most toys didn't play themselves while we passively watched. Our toys were primitive: various balls, skates, jump ropes, playing cards, crayons, finger paints, squirt guns, cap guns, water rockets, and board games without microprocessors.

For some reason we cannot allow our own children to experience these risks we all survived. Keeping our kids safe at all times is *de rigueur*, and parental protectionism must include psychological realms as well. Nowadays little Nate & Nan must not have their pint-sized egos challenged or their psyches ever be allowed to feel less than perfectly competent, otherwise how will they grow up to successfully manage corporations? Winning is everything and losing is for suckers. What could possibly be gained by having your child *lose* at a challenge, or not be able to succeed with only applying minor effort?

Obviously the marketplace understands the importance of our new parental paradigm and is keen to exploit it, as is demonstrated by these updates of the following familiar games, toys, and activities of our own youth:

The vtech V.Reader vs. Actual Reading: Buying one of these for your illiterate child is a two-fer—your kid doesn't ever need to actually learn to read to enjoy a good book and you'll never have to read to them. Those annoying words that pop up on the screen can be ignored like foreign subtitles on a movie while the perky cartoon voices and music do the work. Plus, it provides parents the guilt-assuaging "educational" label. An actual three-fer! It's not the olden days anymore where parents have to read bedtime stories and point to words while patiently waiting as their child struggles to grasp them.

Mattel's Pictionary Card Game vs. Pictionary: Nothing can be more humiliating to your children than to make drawings no one but they can comprehend. This new version of Pictionary assures them that they will never have to face that possibility. Why learn to doodle their own ideas and observations when they can simply use someone else's, say, one drawn by a

professional Mattel artist? (And what did learning to draw do for that guy except get him the lame job of drawing on these cards so we don't have to?)

Crayola Beginnings Color Me A Song vs. Crayons and Butcher Paper: "*The faster you scribble... the faster the song!*" the ad line on the box proclaims. Scribbling fast is very important, as this toy's musical behavior-reward system demonstrates. Drawing, like current manufacturing and business practices, is all about hastening the process and not caring about the end product. And your child will be encouraged to fine tune their scribbling skills so they can someday write like a doctor or a busy CEO.

Any Electronic Gaming vs. Playing Out-of-Doors: Virtual knees don't get skinned; even death can be undone by simply hitting "restart." No bee stings. No tracked-in dirt. No falling out of trees, getting lost in the woods, chipping teeth, being late for supper, or "getting into trouble." You'll always know where your kids are if you get them a Wii. Those dark circles around their eyes just show they're keenly focused. We're a push-button society now, so what could possibly better prepare your tykes for the real world than the virtual one?

Activision's Guitar Hero vs. Music Lessons: If your child can play like a rock star without years of practice and expensive music tutelage, what could be better? No groupies, drugs, or grasping agents to worry about either. Real musicianship is outmoded anyway, Millie Vanilli proved that. It's all about "attitude" now, which is exactly what Guitar Hero will give your little ones—heaps and heaps of it. And with all that attitude they'll conquer the world in no time flat, once they master those colored buttons.

I hope this list comes in handy as you shop. These manufacturers deserve our support. May my gift suggestions help you make your children's holidays merry—if not so bright.



AURELIO O'BRIEN is a writer and artist. He spent over 25 years as an artist, animator, designer, and storyteller in Hollywood, working in the field of Feature Animation. He is the author of the science fiction novel, *EVE*, and the ten part eSerial, *GENeration eXtraTERrestrial*.

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THE TERM “BLACK FRIDAY” goes back to the nineteenth century, when it was associated with a financial crisis of 1869. The earliest known reference to the day after Thanksgiving was made by the Philadelphia police in 1966, in regard to the official start of the Christmas shopping season, the result of massive traffic jams and over-crowded sidewalks as the downtown stores were mobbed from open to close.

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J. CONRAD GUEST is the author of Backstop: A Baseball Love Story in Nine Innings and January’s Paradigm. His third novel, One Hot January, also from Second Wind Publishing, is due to be released in early 2011. His fiction and essays appear in various online and print publications, including Cezanne’s Carrot, Saucy Vox, River Walk Journal, 63 Channels, The Writers Post Journal, Redbridge Review, and Blood and Thunder: Musings on the Art of Medicine. He is also the cofounder of The Smoking Poet. Photo courtesy of Sommerville Photographie.

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SOME OF THE MANTRAS for creating good screenplays are the exact challenges in adapting fiction to the big screen: *show don't tell, get in late, leave early - get to the hook by the twentieth page* and more. Still, the vaults of Hollywood are filled with beloved novels that have been made into movies. It is cliché to say, "The book was better than the movie" as fiction fosters the sort of intimate experience that kindles the imagination in its readers, and taps into a trove of experiences and responses to the material that's highly personal. So rare is the movie that is considered "better" than the book, that top 10 lists have been created to honor these few. Such lists invariably include *The Godfather*, which could smack as an insult to the author. Yet Mario Puzo's book spent 67 weeks on the "New York Times Bestsellers-List" and he was a part of the duo that took the material to the next level using the art of motion pictures. He was already screenwriting the disaster movie *Earthquake* when tapped to write the adaptation with Francis Coppola. For his efforts, Mr. Puzo went home with an Oscar® for Best Adapted Screenplay. Here, the original storyteller was on hand to lure audiences strategically - perhaps poetically - into that nefarious world washed in old-fashioned imagery.

As one moves down the lists of movies that are *better* than the book, each instance can be debated and personally, I disagree with the conclusion that the film *Gone With The Wind* is better than the sweeping epic Margaret Mitchell penned, which at its height was the second best-selling book of all time after the Bible {long before there was a chap named Harry Potter}. Ms. Mitchell provided a depth of insight and facts to that era in a way the images could not fully grasp. You might see *The Bridges of Madison County* on "the list" yet for me, given the fact that this is the only novel I had personally read in a single sitting - I'd disagree with that claim. And much as *The English Patient* dwells in my all-time favorite films list {I even have a signed copy of its screenplay from the late director, Anthony Minghella} again there is so much detail and scope to be gleaned from the novel that inspired this cinematic achievement. Rooting for the adaptations of particular works has been somewhat of a hobby for a better part of my life and I view the movie as a crowning glory to a well told story and refrain from the sport of be-moaning the interpretation as much as possible - after all we always have our own version in memory to reflect upon. Today, it is the inspired works from Isabel Allende that I would most like to see adapted, particularly *The Island Beneath The Sea* and *Daughter of Fortune*.

Authors like John Grisham have a writing style that parlays effortlessly into movies as the stories move along with more action and dialogue than is typical in a novel, yet when time comes to write the script, heavy hitting screenwriters are dispatched to enliven the works with visual punch that made *A Time to Kill*, *The Firm*, *The Pelican Brief*, *The Client* et al truly zing. Same in the case of Ian Fleming, a master of creating such memorable characters as 007, it is still necessary to pull in the screenwriters who are able to make a film from fiction like we create photo albums from our lives.

Late Michael Crichton is a renaissance man and dynamo that agilely crossed professions. Readers return to his books like academics use the library - to gain the raw data and scientific facts from the Harvard-educated MD - who also happens to write. Or is it the other way around? So important is his part in spearheading quality entertainment that he also launched a career as a film & television producer, most notably for ER. His is a unique case as fans of Jurassic Park also found themselves picking up the book to learn more about the maestro's theories on his extinct creatures. At 7, the very first novel I ever read cover to cover after moving past "Dick & Jane" children's books was adapted to film, twice - *Freaky Friday*. I can clearly recall the anticipation of awaiting the release date to see Annelise Andrews come to life on screen, portrayed first by Jodie Foster. Since that time, I've read dozens of books that went on to be films and in a handful of cases has a movie, like *Black Hawk Down* or *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, inspired me to return to the text to learn more. One recent adaptation that I celebrate, yet never read the book, is *For Colored Girls*. Never before have I seen a director weave poetry so seamlessly into a film as in this one - kudos to 34th Street Films.

The act of casting beloved characters from cherished books has created some of the most legendary casting calls, such as for Scarlett O' Hara. And with the most recent literary sensation, "The Millennium Trilogy" there's a new girl in town with a sensation all her own... Lisbeth Salander is a character that was first discovered in *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* and with all three books simultaneously appearing in the top 5 slots of the "New York Times Bestsellers-List" along with the 3 Swedish-produced films {with English subtitles} a casting search in Hollywood was launched in 2010. With that now decided, we will have the opportunity to view another interpretation of this compelling material by the late Stieg Larsson, who incidentally did not live long enough to see his works published and produced.

The role of author is a vital member of the arts. Catalyzing the film medium from the voices that first creep around the psyche of the scribes, then stir the imaginations of its readers. I marvel at the process and know that cinematic history is deeply indebted to the original storytellers for their courage and persistence to weave absorbing tales.



ELISA DIMITRIA BOWMAN is a filmmaker. She is the producer of *Dear Willie*. Ms. Bowman served as production resource executive in the production of major motion pictures and television shows such as *Will & Grace*; *Runaway Bride*; *Beverly Hills 90210*; *Striptease*; *Multiplicity*; *Nixon*; *The Getaway*; and more. She also served as production coordinator and director's assistant in projects such as *Fashionably L.A.* and *Ringer*.

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Sweets and wine, so divine,
Come back— another time,

Parenthetic, you're pathetic,
Spending money— on more aesthetic,

Stopped to think, amongst the pink?
Only the surface, on the ice rink,
Found a link, soul shrink,
You're wasting time, pierced lime,
Precious minutes,

Butterfly stitches,
Little glitches,

Promising witches,

What's it like to be free, tell me,
When you don't care, people stare.
All raw, emotions tore,
Make sense? Pretense,

Beautiful, it's not a question,
Observe, be gracious,

Salacious,

Adore, be more,
J'adore, more,

It's a debacle, no, oracle,
To structure debacle,

No shackle.
Felt?

Managed.



CATHERINE MICHAELA RUSSELL is a writer and artist. Born in Hendon, London and currently living in Luton, Bedfordshire UK, Ms. Michaela specializes in metaphysical poetry writing and short children's adventure stories.

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“Where is Sparta?” I asked, hanging up the phone.

“It’s the high school across the street from the nursing home where I used to work. Why?” my dad asked.

“There’s a job opening there...teaching Spanish. Douglas, Georgia is the only other system with an opening right now. Where is Douglas located?” I asked.

“I think its South Georgia, near Valdosta!” my mom hollered from the kitchen.

“That’s too far away from civilization!” I quickly replied. “I haven’t heard back from any of the Mexican private schools and the Department of Defense Schools don’t hire first year teachers. But the Peace Corps still looks like an interesting opportunity.”

The truth about the Peace Corps was that I was scared I’d end up in Africa. I’d read several stories enclosed in the application that bothered me. Some volunteers ended up in remote regions of the continent. They were so remote that there was no electricity, no running water nor any nearby medical facilities. Occasionally, a volunteer would become so homesick that they would leave before they completed their two years of service. Without much stretch of the imagination, I could see myself in their shoes. I really wanted to live overseas in a Latin American country, but the disclaimer, “we cannot guarantee you’ll be placed in the region of your choice,” cast such a strong shadow over the whole idea, that I just wouldn’t take the risk. During my workday at the local health food store, I’d imagine living in some small town somewhere in Chile, Venezuela, or El Salvador. Next, I’d see an African shack, the kind shown on National Geographic specials with no running water, and I’d cringe. I was certain that’s where I’d end up. I could see myself sleeping on a dirt floor and waking up covered in mosquito bites.

Finally, after several weeks of pondering the options, I called both high schools and scheduled interviews. I went to Sparta first. When I entered the board office I was a little taken aback. Everyone was black. The assistant principal interviewed me.

“Hello, Miz Tollman. Just have a seat right here.” I sat down in a chair across from him. He looked at my resume and then asked me a typical interview question. While I gave a typical interview answer, his eyes never left my resume. Later in the interview, he asked me what I thought about history. *I hate history!* “Well, (I paused for 5 seconds, and during those seconds I examined the benefits of telling white lies.) I like it all right,” I replied. My answer didn’t seem to deter him. Without making eye contact, he offered me the job.

I was amazed at the variety of skin colors that entered my classroom. As they filed in, I heard under someone’s breath a comment about Mr. Gonzalez, the Spanish teacher, who had left at Christmas. I called the roll and mispronounced many of the names. The students didn’t seem to mind. After just a few days, my fear of the new and different was replaced with affection and concern for my students. A set of twin girls became like little sisters to me. One day they came to my classroom after school, hoping for a word of encouragement.

“Miss Tollman, we want to go to college. We’re in an SAT prep class and our teacher said that we haven’t had the right courses.” One of the twins asked, “Why doesn’t our school offer physics?” I reacted, forgetting the professional distance, “What?

You don’t have physics here?” The only help I could offer was simply to listen. Periodically, a student would ask, “Are you going to stay?” *What a bizarre thing to ask your teacher!* “Of course I’m staying!”

One day in early February, all faculty and students reported to the gym for a school-wide assembly. While students entered, I panned the crowd from my nosebleed seat, and noticed that I was the only white female in the entire building. Minutes later, the elementary school filed in and 10 ghosts caught my eye. “So, they’re eleven of us here.” I thought to myself. The speech began. The speaker was the first black probate judge in Georgia and I was eager to hear her. About 20 minutes into the speech, she declared, “white teachers can *not* lead black children.” A tremendous roar of approval came from the student body. I kept my eyes on the principal and superintendent, who stayed seated. The audience increased its roar and sections of the crowd rose to their feet. I focused on the administration, seated right beside the speaker. The assistant principal slowly rose and began applauding. The speaker shouted over the applause, “...and what this school needs is to get rid of all the white teachers!” The cheering increased and I felt my seat vibrate. Soon the entire gym was filled with the cascading thunder of stomping feet. The only black person still seated was the superintendent. The storm inside that gym seemed to be waiting for its final victim. He finally stood up. I wanted to slide through one of the cracks under my seat and drop to the floor. Then I could run towards my car. The last thing I remember is watching several well-dressed black men wave their fists in the air.

I went back to my classroom carrying an invisible lead blanket. I wanted to lay my head down on my desk and cry. But I couldn’t. I had three more classes to teach before I could leave: *three histories*. I didn’t see a face, but I heard someone ask, “Are you still gonna stay?”



KATHY T. CAMP is a high school Spanish teacher. She was born and raised in Atlanta and is a current resident of a small western Georgia town called Bowdon. Her passion is in writing. Kathy discovered that tragedies make the best story and therefore incorporated dark chapters of her life into her collection of short stories. Kathy enjoys playing the guitar, reading, writing and painting.

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Something Good From Each Experience by Craig Elliott

Vol. 3: Issue 12: Winter 2010

SEVERAL WEEKS BACK I made an expensive mistake with my primary drive, a '01 Eclipse Spyder. Say what you want about my mechanical inability, but the bottom line is this: I did not pay close attention to the maintenance schedule or I would have noticed the line about replacing the timing belt at 60K miles. I haven't driven a car with that requirement in a while, and this happens to be a non-clearance engine. That means bent valves, all twenty-four of them. It happened two hours from my house, so I chose to have it towed to a local shop near the Georgia/North Carolina border. It took several weeks for the repairs to be completed, mostly due to a two-week backup at the local machine shop where the head was taken for resurfacing. My son accompanied me on the two-hour drive to pick it up, soaking up the mountain views as we approached the garage. Afterwards he joined me for breakfast at a local diner before driving back.

My two daughters were in the vehicle with me the day my car broke down. We sat for an hour at a pull off where the belt snapped. We ended up talking to three different locals that stopped to help, all very eccentric, each one of them worth writing about. One man was trying to sell painted mailboxes after telling me all that is wrong with the world, another had pulled in to roll his tobacco and didn't even know we were there (his words, not mine,) and the other guy just wanted to see what was going on. It will worry me when my girls are both driving by themselves after seeing who stopped to help. They deserve a thank you for their concern, but still, I will be worried.

After the car was towed a few miles back stream, the garage desk operator suggested we walk down to the breakfast house while we waited for our ride to arrive, a short walk from the highway. We arrived at the diner after the girls jumped mud puddles and complained about the high grass and chiggers. Nothing but locals and a guy (me) with his chatty daughters. No one seemed too concerned about us as we enjoyed a nice lunch. A sign mounted on the wall behind the counter where the bill was to be paid read: *We cook food to order. It takes time. If you want fast food, there is a McDonald's in town.*

So my son and I made the return trip to eat, this time driving from the garage to the diner. I decided on pancakes, large ones. I went up front to pay. The lady behind the register counter was the same one who took the order, brought out the food, and refilled our drinks. I suspect she is the owner. She seemed to be a kind, gentle soul. As I was paying, I mentioned to her how much I liked the two black and white studio framed portraits on the wall. Both featured a baby, and one photo had the dad, one had the mom. The lady's eyes lit up. She told me about the photographer who took these photos at a local event. "I have something else you would probably enjoy," she said.

We completed our transaction and the woman took me through a closed door into a secondary dining area, one that must be reserved for peak times. She switched on the overhead fluorescent lights and pointed to a large painting on the outside

wall, mounted between two windows. The painting showed two boys dressed in overalls, sitting on hay bales, with a pig in the foreground. Looked like a country fair scene. The two boys were her two grandsons, and the painting was made from a photograph taken of them recently. The photo was nice, but the story behind it made it more special. The artist, a friend of the woman, suffered a stroke before painting the work of art. The artist had to hold her hand on the arm she painted with to keep it steady. After the disability, the artist had to relearn, and figure out how to overcome the obstacles to keep doing what she loved. As we left the room the woman turned the lights back off and said, "Wish I could paint like that. I can't even draw a straight line. Guess I'm just here to takes money and wait tables."

I told her kind words can touch people and you may never know what you've done for the other person.

The woman agreed. "We all have a purpose, I guess," she said.

She talked about the painting, saying when she looked at the older boy, probably around eight or nine years old, she saw everything about him. The personality just jumped off the canvas. She pointed to the eyes, and said they were captured just right. It seemed the artist was looking straight into his heart and mind and pulled everything out, through those beautiful eyes.



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NEVER WOULD I have considered the word *insanity*, in any shape, form or fashion pertained to me or anyone I knew. I pictured straight-jackets and padded-walls. However, I've discovered insanity runs amuck. Having heard the infamous quote from Albert Einstein about the definition of insanity meaning doing the same thing over and over yet expecting different results, it's only recently I received the revelation of that fundamental truth.

While watching an episode of *Wipe Out* with my family, I remarked how '*insane*' these people must be to put themselves, their bodies and their sanity through such a daunting obstacle course. But, in the middle of that statement, I realized these contestants were not insane at all. They embarked on an exciting and dangerous, yet new-fangled adventure. That doesn't fit in any circumstance under the definition of insanity. It may fit under the guise of extreme, crazy or even stupid behavior, but not insane.

Since receiving this revelation, I've noticed just how insane the world really behaves. I see insanity at work, insanity at church, insanity on the radio, television and big screen. I've run into insanity in my family, friends and with people whom I fellowship. I've even met some insane writers, and how is that possible? Before I received the revelation of the meaning of insanity, I thought all writers were a bit insane, but now I understand that creating an original work of art is anything but insane. However, the pattern of behavior many people perform, hinges on the line of insanity in many of the decisions they make every day. Here are a few examples to show what I'm talking about.

I have a friend who is a terrible flirt. She flirts with all men, no matter their status or success. Being the center of attention takes the highest priority in a social atmosphere. This is habitual for her, yet it never ceases to surprise her that she is inappropriately propositioned by men or finds herself in trouble. The insanity of the situation is that without a shift or change in her behavior, she continually expects a different outcome from the men.

In the political arena, we 'the people' are insane. We watch our political leaders do something year after year (they have voting records), all the while promising what our itching ears want to hear, yet we EXPECT them to act and vote differently than they have been all along, just because they said they would. Who's the truly insane – the politician or the people expecting them to do something they've never done before? We forget... if it acts like a duck, quacks like a duck, looks like a duck... IT'S A DUCK! Yet, we expect our ducks to magically turn into swans, and make excuses when it's pointed out our swans are really ducks. Who says magic is make-believe and miracles don't exist?

With this new revelation of insanity, I've gained a sense of liberty; freedom from false expectations. I used to get disappointed in people because they didn't live up to my level of standards, or I didn't live up to someone else's level of expectations for me. Now, I measure a person by their own rulers. If they have short rulers, that's not my responsi-

bility. I'd be '*insane*' to expect them to behave to the standards of my own ruler. Some have bigger rulers than me, filled with more responsibilities and capabilities. Some have smaller rulers, smaller expectations; smaller life goals. I'm happier. I might be crazy, but at least I'm not insane.



T.L. GRAY has held many titles throughout her life such as deck-hand (of a commercial fishing boat in the Gulf), co-captain, reporter, deaconess, director, abstractor, company president, and author. Fireside Publications published her debut novel, "The Blood of Cain." The sequel, "The Arcainians" is due for release. She is currently working on several non-fiction projects. Visit www.thebloodofcain.com for more information on Ms. Gray's book.

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Q Vision Press & Multimedia, Inc.
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Roswell, GA 30076
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