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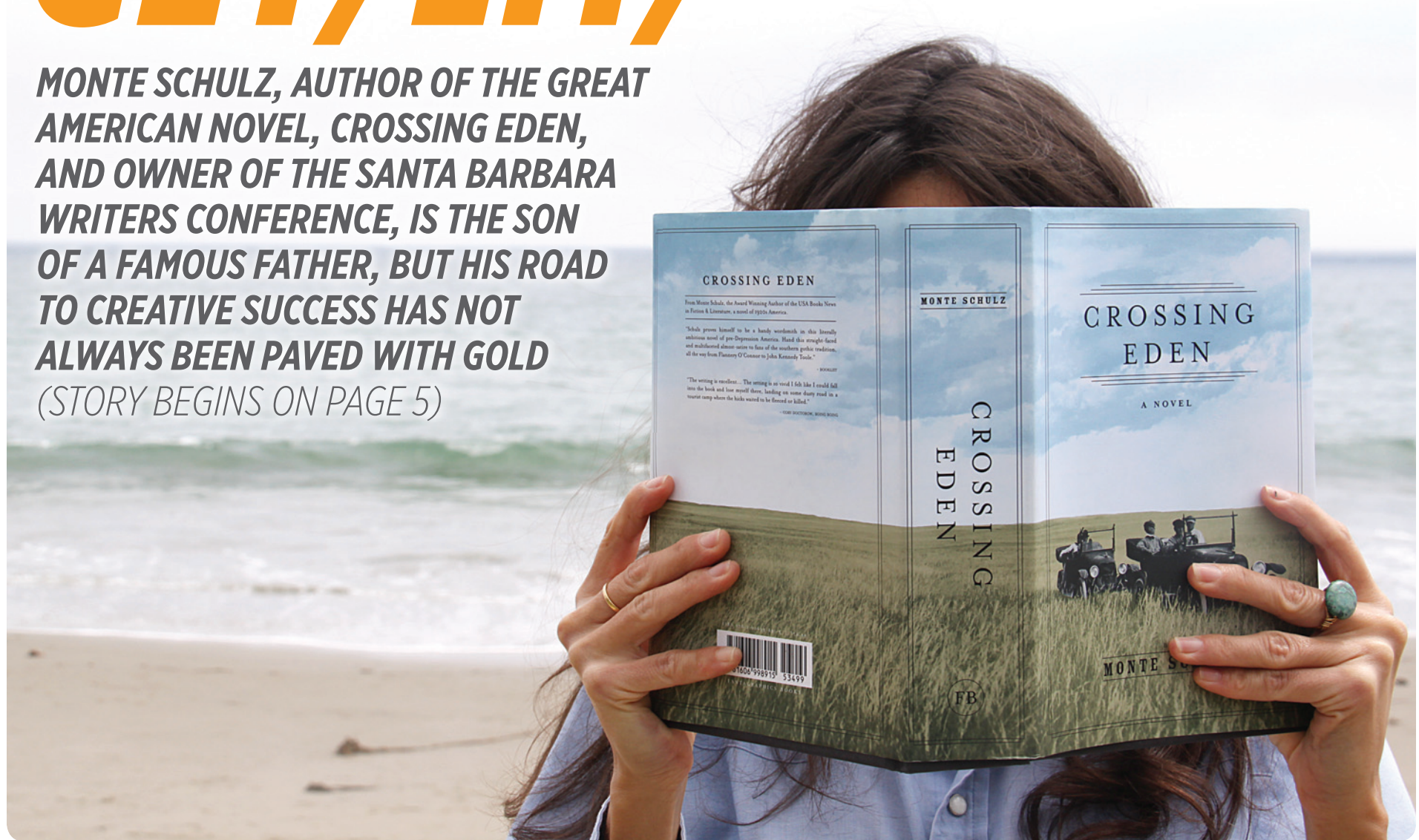
Santa Barbara Sentinel

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MONTE SCHULZ, AUTHOR OF THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL, CROSSING EDEN, AND OWNER OF THE SANTA BARBARA WRITERS CONFERENCE, IS THE SON OF A FAMOUS FATHER, BUT HIS ROAD TO CREATIVE SUCCESS HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN PAVED WITH GOLD

(STORY BEGINS ON PAGE 5)



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MADE/IN/SB

Meanwhile, in the Study...



(photo by Annie Gallup)

Monte Schulz is a torch bearer, author of *Crossing Eden* and owner of the Santa Barbara Writers Conference

I climb the stairs and meet the heavy wooden front door, deciding to ring the bell to spare my knuckles the pain from announcing my arrival. Moments later, the door opens and author **Monte Schulz**, owner of the Santa Barbara

Writers Conference (SBWC), appears. He is barefoot, dressed in dark, slim jeans and a casual button-up shirt. His long, blonde tousled hair accentuates his youthful spirit. "I totally forgot about the interview, and I knew I



by
**Megan
Waldrep**

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would, which is why I wanted to meet here. Come in!"

I follow Monte through the foyer and down the hall toward the office, a cozy room anchored with two desks and shelves full of books of assorted genres. He asks if I'd like to hear his newest creation, a song titled "Age of Sorrow", which will debut on his next album, a follow-up to *Seraphonium*, his first. In true Renaissance-man form, Monte is also a singer/songwriter. It can be said that *Seraphonium* is Monte's alter-ego, an outlet for his euphonic inner self.

He leans over, clicks play on the computer. The ballad is powerful, and the words longing with harmonies that build and build, creating waves of emotional resonance. Once the song is over, I'm eager to learn more about his creative process and life as a writer. I start with questions about his latest written work, a Jazz-Age Great

American Novel titled *Crossing Eden*, which was scripted as an homage to his father, Charles M. Schulz.

Monte grabs the book from a shelf, settles on a page, and reads aloud. His passages are rich in description. I close my eyes and let the scene play out in my mind, drifting through sights, sounds, smells, and colors. He gives just enough detail to shape your own personal version of his world and leaves out enough to keep your imagination at play.

Crossing Eden, published by Fantagraphics, is a first-person narrative set in the late 1920s, an age of opulence teetering on the edge of the Great Depression. The 1,088-page tome contains four individual stories of the Pendergast family, who are set apart due to hard times. The vignettes take place in the Midwest, East Texas, a vibrant city of the author's own making, with the narrative set in California. Monte chose those locations to give the reader a diverse grasp of American life of the era and analyzed period texts to bring authentic tone and speech to his work. For example, he used a love letter, verbatim, written in 1916 by his grandfather to his maternal

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It just feels good to dig in the dirt. Some of my earliest memories are of making mud pies and building sand castles. Now I spend most of my days playing in my garden with my sensational succulents. Here, I have created an elaborate display of my favorite plants in honor of my Mom – a great way to honor someone is to plant a tribute garden, which can be anything you want. A simple plant or a whole garden, whatever makes you smile and think of that person. Just get your hands in the dirt and let your imagination guide you.

Deana Rae McMillion is a designer and artist living in Carpinteria. She is a self-taught gardener and self-proclaimed succulent fanatic. Learn more about Deana Rae at www.deanarae.com and see her gardening magic on Instagram: @deanaraedesigns

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Wordsmiths loosening up after a long week at the SBWC talent show

grandmother and researched 58 books of that time to build one chapter.

This novel is an example of Monte's perseverance and comprehension of one's strength as a writer. At 23, inspired by works of Thomas Wolfe and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*, authors of his father's suggestion, Monte had it in mind that one day he, too, would write a Great American Novel. He put pen to paper, but came to the realization he hadn't yet the skill to produce a work of this grandeur. "I wrote *Down by the River* (my first novel) to see if I could publish a book, or to find out that my writing was not good at all and I was totally delusional." Turns out, he wasn't delusional, or he was just delusional enough – in 1990, Viking Press (now Penguin Random House) bought his first book, but Monte wasn't altogether satisfied. "I felt like I wished I had written a better book, a more ambitious book, a big literary novel not a crime novel set in a small town."

Time passed and Monte kept writing, published several books, and became a stronger writer. Ultimately, the foundation of what would become his most significant written work took shape. "I finished the basic structure of the book in 1999. When my dad was still alive," he says. "And then I wrote the prologue, these four vignettes, four page interludes, and the epilogue. I felt my dad had to die before I could write the epilogue. It was something I needed to do. It was very personal." He dedicated his entire 40s to complete *Crossing Eden*. Once his father had passed, Monte was able to pay the

ultimate tribute – the final words of his greatest work of art.

Once Upon a Time...

Monte's interest in writing began through music when the college hockey player/German major and French minor found he had a skill for revising songs. "I remember rewriting the lyrics to the Rolling Stones's "Ruby Tuesday" and I discovered I had a talent for writing lyrical lines." Then came a song that altered Monte's outlook on life, a verse in "Helpless" by Neil Young:

*Blue, blue windows behind the stars,
Yellow moon on the rise,
Big birds flying across the sky,
Throwing shadows on our eyes.*

"And somehow at twenty or twenty-one years old, I saw the world differently. I saw it in an artistic way," Monte says. "Also, I was reading about California and I started writing poetry." His father, the influential cartoonist and Peanuts creator Charles M. Schulz, also took note of his son's interest, steering him to the pages of Carl Sandburg. Monte then found the works of Joan Didion and inspiration snowballed into a 26-page poem about California that he brought to a poetry workshop, led by Chuck Edwards, at the first Santa Barbara Writers Conference he attended with his father in 1975. "The three days I was at there, all they did was talk about my poem," he said. "That was very encouraging."

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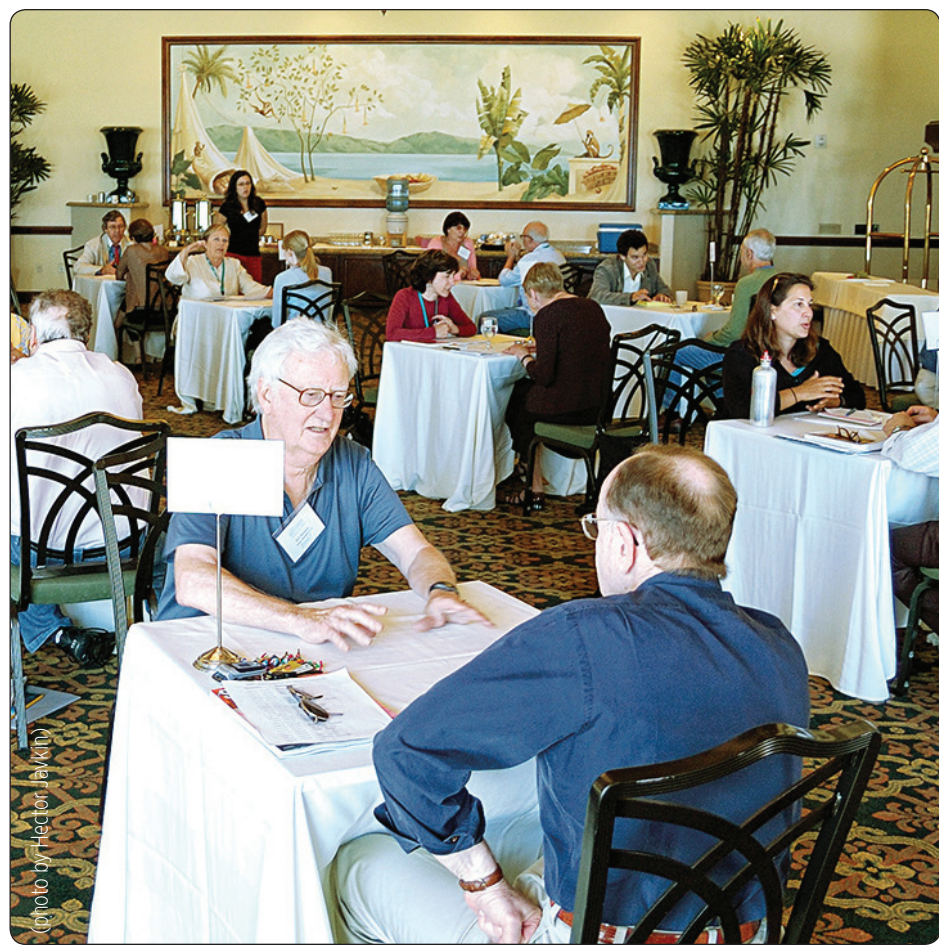
A POKE PARTY



Strolling the grounds at the Santa Barbara Public Market, the Ahi Tuna poke at I'A Fish Market & Café made us do a double take. I'A (pronounce ee-uh) is the place in SB to get the traditional Hawaiian dish poke (pronounce po-kee) in up to four varieties. The soy sauce, sesame oil, vinegar, green onions, and sesame seed flavors meld together and allow the tender and meaty Ahi to be the star of the show. Grab the family and call your friends. Time to go fishin'.

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www.sbpublicmarket.com

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Face-to-face meeting with agents is one of the many opportunities available to patrons of the conference

To Be or Not to Be

Monte checks the clock and hops out of his quilted leather chair. "I've got to take the boys to tennis. It's just right up the road. Would you like to come? We can continue in the car." We head out of the office and make our way back to the foyer. "Boys!" he yells up the stairs, "Time to go!" Moments later, I meet the two well-mannered young men. Their bright-blue eyes are marked by the same sparkle as their father's.

early experiences at the conference. He relays a story of his second, maybe third, visit to the SBWC, a visit with a much different outcome than his first. "I read a scene, just to introduce a couple characters. I thought if it was well-written, it would be good," he said. "But instead, the field didn't like it and one of the workshop leaders said, 'This scene is just a black hole. And this writer doesn't show any gift for creativity whatsoever.' My dad's head almost blew off. It's funny because the scene is in *Down by the River* verbatim. I just moved it."

We exit the house one-by-one, tennis gear in tow, and crunch our way across the gravel drive and pour into the car. As we pull out of the driveway, Monte flashes back to a similar experience. It was the the early 1960s, and his father was being filmed for a documentary.

He's had several opportunities at literary fame, all of which ended just shy of celebrity. "The muse has visited me and said, 'Monte, here's a story. You can create great works of art in writing your music, or you can have commercial success. But you can't have both. So what's it's going to be?' Commercially, as an artist, I am a black hole. Everything hits and dies here with me. And I've accepted it. It doesn't dissuade my art at all."

"They interviewed (my dad) on camera as he's driving us to school. All of a sudden, I got a glimpse of this. It was for a documentary called *A Boy Named Charlie Brown*." Monte's face lights up when he speaks of his father. "There's no such thing as writer's block.' My dad told me that years ago. He put it like this, 'Only amateurs get writer's block. Professionals can't afford it.'" I laugh as the intimidation of writing this article dissipates with thoughts of an impending deadline.

As we turn on his street and head toward the gravel drive, I ask what encouraged him to buy the conference six years ago. He references a line spoken by actor Alastair Sim who played Scrooge in the 1951 film version of *A Christmas Carol*. When Scrooge is asked to sell the vested interest in his business, he replies, "It's not just for money alone that one spends a lifetime building up a business... it's to preserve a way of life that one knew and loved."

We enter the grounds of the tennis club and park out front. "Okay, boys! Bounce out. I'll come get you guys. Enjoy your time." They climb out of the car and grab their tennis gear from the trunk. We wave goodbye and head back to the house. I'm curious to Monte's

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

DIVERSE MEDIUMS



"We have one more stop," my friend says. It's the last 15 minutes of 1st Thursday and we aren't ready to leave just yet. She leads me to The Press Room, where art by Michael Matheson hangs on the wall. His artwork is polarizing in a sense - precise, spit-shading/tattoo-style watercolor prints (as seen here) sandwich a large scale woodblock piece (which was printed by driving an industrial steamroller over the wood to create pressure for the print). The piece, titled "Death Grip", is inspired by Greek mythology that Matheson created for a gallery in L.A. Become

awed by this diverse artist and take in his work over the next three months at The Press Room. You can also find his art hanging at Municipal Wine Makers.

Michael Matheson

For inquiries and collaborations: michaelwmatheson@gmail.com
Instagram: @metalteepee
www.etsy.com/shop/METALTEEPEE

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Monte shares the same vision. "When I think of SBWC, I think of one thing. I think of a spot at the old Miramar where the tennis courts were, and where they used to have the train and a little sundeck for people to have lunch. And I picture my dad, Ray Bradbury, or Barnaby Conrad in their tennis shorts, wandering the grounds, playing doubles, and people walking by with books and that sort of thing," he says. "My memory, my thought, my present of the SBWC actually exists in the past. I bought the conference to preserve that part of my life knowing it was going to be good for other people. In that context, whether the attendance is up or down, it doesn't mean anything to me. What matters is that it goes on. I'm impervious to criticism that way. I've kept it the way it always was. The way it was back at the Miramar, and that's enough."

He parks the car and I open the door to step out. The late afternoon sun begins to fade, and I pause to take in the quiet of the golden hour. I have one question before we part ways. What would he like for people to take away from the conference? His answer is the reason why I and other writers rely on and cherish the SBWC. "The idea of being in a society of writers. It's mostly to celebrate the writers' life with people who share the same passion as you do. I don't see any greater reason to have the conference other than that. People feel buoyed by going there and being surrounded by writers. I think that's important."



Santa Barbara Writers Conference

June 5-10, 2016 at Hyatt Centric Santa Barbara

1111 East Cabrillo Boulevard, Santa Barbara

To learn more about the conference and events open to the public, visit www.sbwriters.com

www.sbwriters.com

SBWC Contest Winners

After reviewing more than 250 entries from all over the United States, the SBWC would like to congratulate three winners who won full tuition scholarships to this year's Santa Barbara Writers Conference:

Prose Winner

Melanie Howard

From Alexandria, Virginia

Excerpt from an autobiographical novel:

It would be nice if the night that changed my life had happened in Paris, on rain splattered ancient streets, or on one of those bleached Greek island outcroppings overlooking an azure sea. But life – my life anyway – is not a romance novel. That night, I was the unlikely final third of a trio of blue-jeaned Lolitas, sipping cherry cola Slurpees on the curb in front of 7-11, barefoot among the pop-tops and cigarette butts. I remember I'd used heroic amounts of Cover Girl Erase to try and disguise a zit on my chin, and it itched miserably, but I was determined not to touch it. I'd spent hours perfecting my appearance, and worried that the August humidity would not only melt off my Erase, but also frizz my hair. I'd spent After a tortured night sleeping in orange juice cans, it hung straight below my shoulders, just like Julie's on *The Mod Squad*.

This was the era of sunny girls who lightened their hair with Sun-In and tanned their skin with oil that smelled of coconut, who wore Love's Baby Soft and pulled the wings on their Sun In streaked hair back with baby girl barrettes shaped like bows. I was trying hard to be one of them. I'd just moved here, to Hampton, a military town on the edge of the Chesapeake.

Thick glasses and a love of reading had put me on the very bottom of the social food chain in my early teen years, spent in a split-level outside Washington, D.C. Over the summer, I'd gotten both contact lenses and boobs. And I realized, when I arrived at our new half-built housing development, that no one there knew that in my previous incarnation, I'd been the nerd who even the boys in Advanced French wouldn't dance with at school sock hops. This was 1972, and

there was no Instagram or Face Book to follow me. I decided to invent a past as a popular girl. This was a risk, of course, because I had no inside information about how popular girls behaved. But I knew how to recognize opportunity. So when Cathy and Sally showed up on my doorstep to ask if I would go to them to a party on Saturday night, I took one look at them and said yes.

"You know, there will be drinking and maybe some pot," Sally had said in a low voice, after peering behind me to make sure my mother wasn't nearby.

"I've never had a marijuana cigarette," I blurted out.

Cathy and Sally exchanged looks, their eyes sliding sideways and down. I had said precisely two sentences, but had already blown it, condemning myself to another night in my room with my two closest friends, Simon and Garfunkel. "You know what the Sounds of Silence really sound like, right?" my father had said last night. "I'll give you a hint. There's no hippie crap playing on a record player."

Prose Winner

Wanda Maureen Miller

Manhattan Beach, California

Excerpt from an autobiographical novel, *Last Trip Home*:

I buried Daddy on Christmas Eve, 1995, in Arkansas. Even in death, he was inconsiderate. Nick and I were getting ready to go to a private party at our tennis club when Aunt Desser called with the news. It was always my aunts, Desser or Guster, Daddy's younger sisters, who called with bad news. None of my older relatives had owned telephones long enough to feel free to waste hard-earned money on a long distance call just to chat. I had longed for this call all my adult life.

In my reoccurring pre-menstrual murder fantasy, Daddy's death is always dramatic. The setting is the middle of the

night in the sharecropper shack. He is driven over the edge, by despair or perhaps by some act of disobedience, maybe mine. He and Mama are in the front bedroom. He shoots her first with the .22 rifle he uses for squirrel hunting.

Asleep in the side room, I am awakened by the shot and filled with dread, but I am frozen, unable to move. I conveniently remain frozen while he continues his bloody path through the front room, where my younger handicapped sister, Violet, is asleep on a pallet. I hear Violet's piteous cries as she begs him not to kill her. One more shot and I am up. I stumble over the trunk on the floor and am unable to save my sister.

I hear him thump heavily into the middle room, where so many bad things happened. I turn on the light and fearlessly fling myself at him before he shoots my older brother, Joe Buck. Sometimes I allow Daddy merely to wound Joe Buck, so I will have to drag us both to the hospital later. Daddy is always wearing the dingy white jockey shorts he wore when he walked around the house at night, when he sat in the pink plastic platform rocker and read or watched television. With superhuman strength, I wrestle the gun away from him. Sometimes he shoots me in the struggle, a serious wound but not mortal.

He throws me against the wall, but I keep coming back. Sometimes I beat him to death with his own gun. I never shoot him. That's too quick and impersonal, to let a bullet kill him. I prefer hands on. Touching him in real life repels me, but in my revenge fantasy I am thrilled to grab him by his leathery neck and beat his head against the wall until his skull turns to mush and his brains drain through the hole in the floor where I used to sweep dirt. His last breath makes my breath quicken.

The reality was less dramatic. Aunt Desser got right to the point. "Grace Mayree, your daddy's dead."

First Sentence Winner

Sharon Brown

Carlotta, California

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