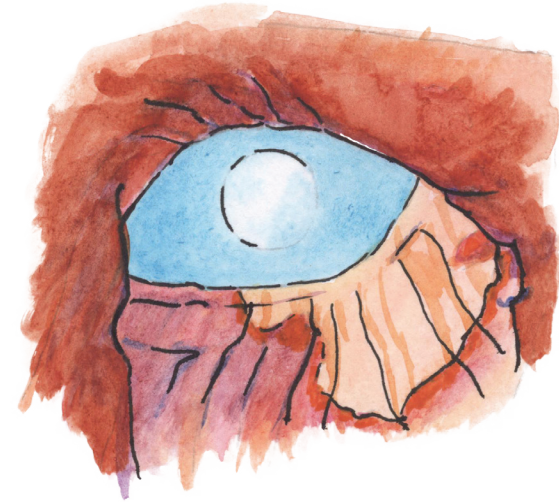


**A WRITER'S**  
*Wilderness*

A WRITER'S  
*Wilderness*

✦ KYLEE KOSOFF ✦



*Deuteronomy 32:10*

*He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.*

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# *mile markers*

*Without my parents, I would never have begun my journey as a writer.  
Their love gave me the courage to chase my dream.*

*My grandparents have cheered me on every step of the way.  
Grandpa and Grandma Brown  
Grandpa and Grandma Kosoff*

*My teachers have marked all over my papers and my wilderness.  
Their guidance has been priceless every step of the way.*

## **MILE 1 (FRESHMAN YEAR)**

*Teachers  
Mr. Miller  
Mr. Trout*

*My friends have lit up even the darkest moments of my journey.*

*Friends  
Emily (Sister)  
Abbie  
Elizabeth*

*My fellow professional writers or POWs have walked with me from start to finish.*

*POWs (Professional Writers ;)  
Eden  
Zach*

**MILE 2 (SOPHOMORE YEAR)**

*Teachers*

*Miss Oberto*  
*Mrs. MacIntyre*  
*Miss Brazil*

*Friends*

*Raleigh*  
*Deanna*

*POWs*

*Taylor*  
*Valerie*  
*Siera*

**MILE 3 (JUNIOR YEAR)**

*Teachers*

*Mrs. Miller*  
*Dr. Gregory*  
*Dr. Achuff*

*Friends*

*Stephanie (Roommate for 3.5 years)*

*POWs*

*Liz*  
*Danielle*  
*Cainan*

**MILE 4 (SENIOR YEAR)**

*Teachers*

*Dr. Northup*  
*Mr. Wainwright*  
*Miss Pearson*

*Friends*

*Eden*  
*Gina (Roommate)*

*POWs*

*Hannah*  
*Blaire*  
*Lilly*

*I couldn't have done this portfolio without Jenneth Dyck and Rebekah Webb.  
You brought my imagination to life beyond my wildest dreams.*

*God gave me writing. He made me exactly as I am: with an embarrassing speech deficit, a bizarre obsession with Communism, a love for deserts, an undeniable need to write about Russia, and a longing for the times of dragons.*

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# why i write

## WRITING: A MADE-UP LANGUAGE

*“Writing: A Made-Up Language” is a wilderness through insecurity. My journey as an author began when I was voiceless. Writing means so much to me because I would have never overcome my struggles without it.*

When I was little, I had a made-up language.

*Water was ooh oob; Tigger was ooglioglio; shoes were gees; grandma was mama papa, and daddy was gaggy.*

I never thought that my made-up language could have come from my birth. I was born on January 24, 1999, with the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck depriving me of oxygen.

Oxygen deprivation or asphyxia is a high risk for babies during labor which can cause long-term issues in vision, speech, and memory. According to Birth Injury Guide, “Infants suffering from oxygen deprivation often develop disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), seizures, and behavioral problems.... Unlike many illnesses, the consequences of oxygen deprivation most often last for a lifetime.”<sup>1</sup> If I’m honest the idea that my silly and embarrassing speech deficit could have been much worse is terrifying. I’ve struggled with my speech for my entire life.

I first noticed that I talked differently than other kids in kindergarten. I remember going home in tears asking my parents why the other kids called their *gaggies daddies!*



My parents finally decided that I needed speech therapy.

I've never hated anything as much as speech therapy except maybe humidity. I never wanted to go, and I prayed for it to get cancelled.

Speech therapy didn't fix me, if anything; it only made me more insecure.

Eventually, my parents pulled me out of speech therapy.

My mom explained that I just mixed things up.

What I said out loud didn't make sense, but what I thought in my head did make sense. For instance, I thought I was saying *shoes*, but what came out was *gees*.

I packed up my made-up language as best as I could. I tried to forget about it, but I still couldn't pronounce my *r*'s or my *w*'s. My inability made me even more uncomfortable. I had a hard time making friends, and an even harder time expressing myself.

Three of my teachers noticed something special about me—something that I didn't even realize: I had a knack for writing.

Mrs. Truman, the most memorable of these teachers, told my mom that Satan tied up my tongue, but God being God gave me an even greater voice.

Writing gave me my voice back. Writing is what has helped me and countless writers express themselves and overcome our physical and mental insecurities.

Writer Kelley Cherry explains, "Writers are driven by a primal urge to tell people who they are.... Writing is thus a means of becoming more human."<sup>2</sup> Physical and mental problems like chronic illnesses, blindness, dyslexia, epilepsy, the inability to move on, and grief can feel insurmountable and dehumanizing. To writers with physical or mental limitations, writing offers freedom.

The tortured artist or in this case the tortured writer can often write more beautifully because of experience. According to Poe, "Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality."<sup>3</sup> Experience doesn't always make you a better writer, but it helps. When you understand pain yourself, you can make it more believable in your writing.

I was shocked when I learned how many other authors had escaped physical and mental disabilities through writing. Just a quick google searched revealed that: Elizabeth Barret Browning was an invalid; John Milton was blind; Edgar Allan Poe suffered terrible grief; Helen Keller was blind and deaf; F. Scott Fitzgerald likely had dyslexia; Fyodor Dostoevsky had epilepsy; and Charles Dickens fought his past with his writing.

As a writer, I often have to imagine how others would feel. So, it wasn't hard

to imagine that they would feel excluded by physical or mental circumstances and stuck in a world that couldn't fully understand them. If I'm honest, I've felt just like them.

What does a writer do when he's trapped in a world where he can't express himself? He writes.

Readers read to escape.

Writers write to escape. Writers have discovered something that the rest of the world is just barely figuring out—writing is a form of therapy that is much more effective than speech therapy.

Courtney E. Ackerman explained that writing therapy has been effective in helping those who struggle with post-traumatic stress, anxiety and depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, grief, chronic illnesses, substance abuse, eating disorders, interpersonal relationship issues, communication skill issues, or low self-esteem.<sup>4</sup>

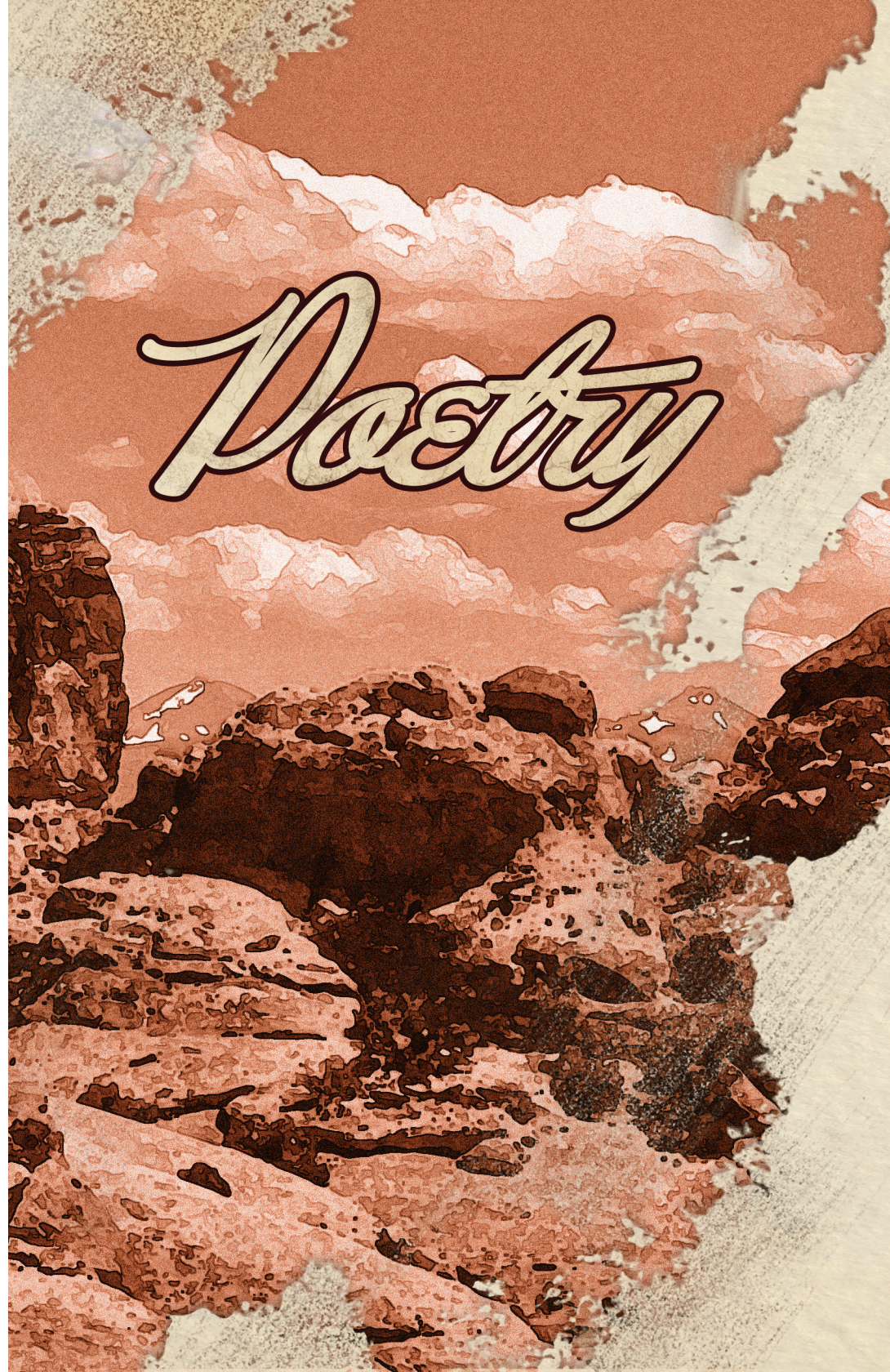
Without even understanding what I was doing, I found my own therapy in writing that helped me overcome my speech deficit.

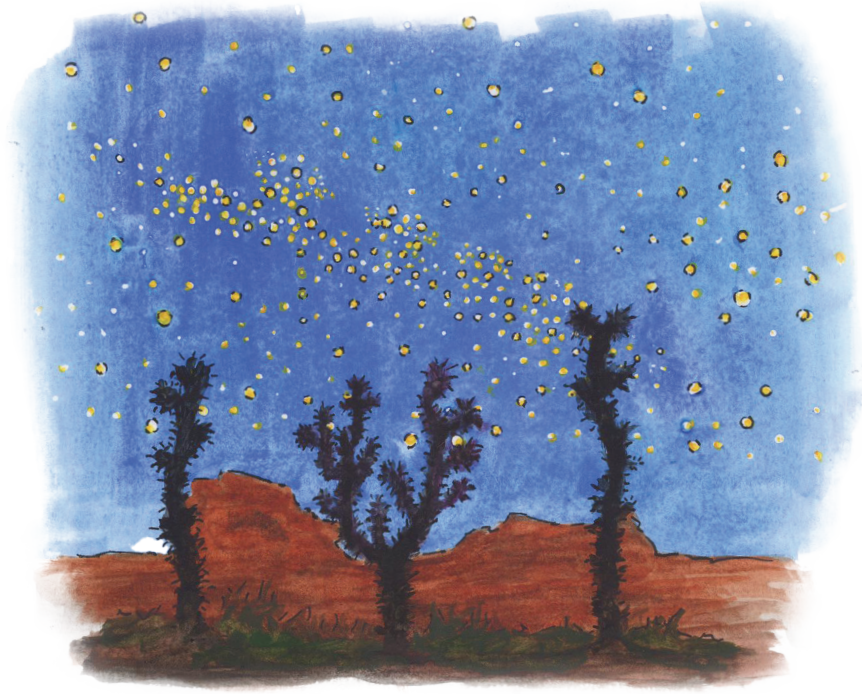
Writing didn't just give me my voice back; it gave me a brand-new language.

One that others can understand too.



*Dusty*





## *the painted desert*

*Free verse*

*Deserts are often associated with wildernesses. In a wilderness, one cannot help but wonder about existence. Why were we made this way?*

I prick and poke. I can't complain but don't like rain.  
I might nip but only need a sip of water that seldom falls.  
In the right season, I wear a soft crown of rosy petals.

I live under the bright and burning sun on red hot sands  
Of deserts where fossils lay lost and undiscovered.

The fragrant sagebrush offers cover on arid days.  
The burning sun banishes humidity away with sandy winds.

My friends are coyotes, lizards, and rattlesnakes;  
But they never come too close for fear of being poked.

I have lived my life at a distance. Although my thorns protect,  
They also keep everyone at bay—I'm lonelier than you think.

As the sun sets, the night air crisps cooling the sunburnt desert.  
But before the stars can twinkle, the desert sky is painted  
By His brushstrokes.

## A WRITER'S WILDERNESS

He made me just as I am: prickly and pokey;  
Mostly green but sometimes with flowers of magenta and yellow.

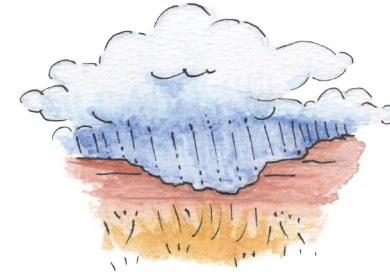
He knew that I would need a dry, hot place where rain rarely fell.  
Underneath all my spikes and thorns, He gave me an artist's soul.

Yet I am without a brush to paint, a voice to sing, and a mind to write.

My Creator knows what I cannot. So, He paints the desert each night on a  
Sunset canvas that flickers like fire in hues of gold, magenta, and indigo.

He sent me the singing of coyotes and the rattling of snakes to lull me to  
sleep.

He set the glittery stars above me to tell me stories written in constellations.  
He knew that a little cactus like me belonged in His perfect place—  
a painted desert.



## *it never rains in southern california*

*Terza Rima*

*Sometimes, a wilderness is a feeling even a longing for something that's  
just out of reach.*

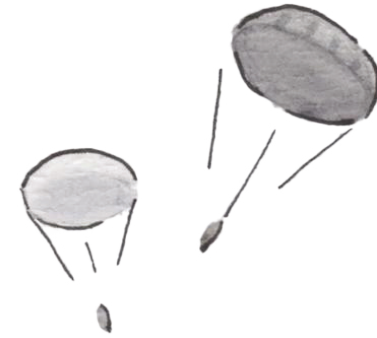
Rain is a drop of love in the desert.  
It's needed to bloom; it's needed to live;  
But rather than downpour great storms revert.

Rain is little to oceans where we dive.  
Water everywhere can't notice rainfall  
When underwater, raindrops wave and thrive.

Lovely flowers in gardens take love's all;  
While cactuses learn to live with little rain.  
Stormy clouds often follow beauty's call.

Heartbreaks hurt when rain never falls; such pain  
And longing more when for others it pours.  
A drop is all that's needed to stay sane.

Clouds with raindrops around the world tours  
But for deserts, clouds revert; yet love ignores.



## *band of brothers*

### *Shakespearean sonnet*

*I love wandering into the wilderness of history. I wrote this poem to honor Easy Company, 506th Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division of the U. S. Army. Stephen E. Ambrose's Band of Brothers inspired me to write about these World War II paratroopers who faced their first combat on D-Day, suffered terrible conditions in Bastogne, yet continued to stand alone together against a world-wide calamity.*

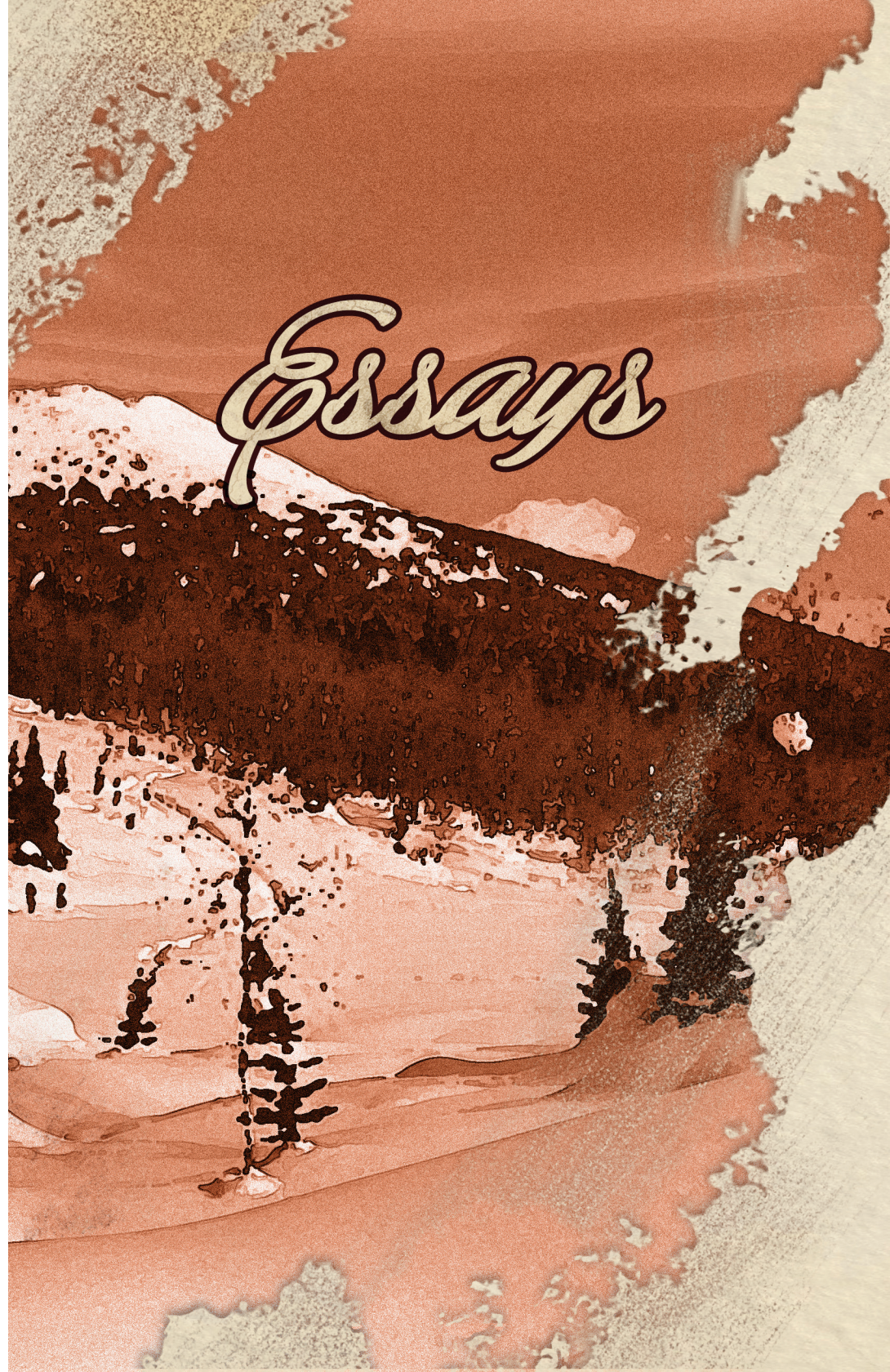
They were the best and brightest of us all.  
They stood alone together these few stars;  
They were brave never fearing they might fall.  
We never deserved these great heroes' scars.

On Mountain Carrahee, they trained and drilled.  
"We stand alone together!" They cried out.  
Never knowing which brothers would be killed—  
War sends young men to fight battles and die.

In Normandy, they first jumped from their planes—  
Behind German lines, they were surrounded.  
Outmanned, all fought, some died, through streets and lanes.  
They soldiered on till the war was ended.

These few, this Band of Brothers shed their blood;  
For you and me, they marched through the world's flood.

# Essays



## *the reflection of the author*

Every wilderness begins with a first step, and the first step is always the hardest.

The decline of literature marks the decline of a nation because literature reflects the morality of a nation. Therefore, godly novelists have never been a more crucial part of society than they are today.

First, a godly writer should consider the trial of the publication process. Getting published is one of the hardest steps to becoming a novelist. The publishing process is a long and complicated journey to embark upon. Writers must choose between self-publishing, hybrid publishing, and traditional publishing. They have to choose if they need an agent or not. An agent is a mediator between the author and the publisher. Patricia Klein, writer of the article “Onward, Christian Agents” writes, “Agents are able to give many benefits to authors and are able to discover and provide support to new authors.”<sup>5</sup> Agents are already engrained in the publishing world. Publishers trust them and are often more willing to take a risk on an untried author who has an agent on his side. Agents know the publishing process almost as well as writers know the writing process and can bring the two very different worlds together. Getting published can feel like a trial, but a godly novelist will run the race until he holds his book in his hands.

Second, a godly writer should consider the requirements of a novelist. A novelist requires the passion and perseverance to study Bible, English, and history.

Joseph F. Trimmer, the author of *Writing with a Purpose*, writes “But writing is also *opportunity*. It allows you to express something about yourself, to explore and explain ideas, and to assess the claims of other people.”<sup>6</sup> These opportunities are lost without Bible, English, and history. The novelist’s greatest opportunity is to express the unconditional love of Jesus Christ. A writer cannot intelligently express himself to the reader without a solid foundation in English. A writer assesses the world around him by observing both the present and the past. An author should be able to clarify misunderstandings in the present and accurately portray an ancient culture. Without these foundational requirements, an author has lost his opportunity to reach a lost world.

Third, a godly writer should consider the influence of a novelist. An author has great influence over the written word which can be used to positively to reflect Jesus Christ. Writers influence the world whether they mean to or not. Authors of *History of Civilization* Jerry Combee and Thompson George write, “A single poet has never had such influence on the thinking of a people as Homer had on the Greeks.”<sup>7</sup> It is unlikely that Homer intended for his fictional characters to morph into such a significant part of the Greek culture. However, the Greeks’ outlook on their gods affected every aspect of their lives. Homer might not have known what his influence would do, but Joseph Stalin and Adolph Hitler knowingly manipulated their influence. Their influence was just as harmful as Homer’s, but it was premeditated. The depravity of modern literature is a direct result from the bad influence of previous writers. The world has never needed godly writers more than now. The godly writer has the responsibility to use his writing for good.

A godly writer should consider the trial of the publication process, the requirements of a novelist, and the influence of a novelist. Thus, write unto the Lord a new novel.

## *has american society accepted communist ideals?*

*The wilderness of philosophy is one of questions.*

From World War II to the Cold War, America fought against socialist ideologies such as fascism and Communism. However, against such long exposure was it possible for America and the world to come away unscathed? Is it possible that Communist ideals not only infiltrated American society but controls it?

First, American society is controlled by Communist ideals because of the vacancy of God. A nation’s government is interconnected with its society. One affects the other, so how Communism has affected American society directly affects the American government. Stéphane Courtois writes, “The fact remains that our century has outdone its predecessors in bloodthirstiness.”<sup>8</sup> Two world wars, infamous tyrants, and genocide barely cover all the century’s bloodthirstiness. Why has this century outdone its past? Lloyd Billingsley answers this question in *The Generation That Knew Not Josef*, “The place of God has been vacant in the West since the end of the eighteenth century.”<sup>9</sup> With God out of His rightful place, something must take His place. Billingsley says that “when people cease to believe in God, they do not wind up believing in nothing, but what is worse, in anything.... Recent history is, for the most part, how that vacuum has been filled.”<sup>10</sup> Although this century claims to be atheistic, it has actually returned to theocracy with the State in the place of God. This means that the State has become the center of man’s new religion. According to Karl Marx,

“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”<sup>11</sup> Is that not what America looks like today? A society of victims, the genocide of over sixty million unborn babies, and a generation that is both confused and depressed. Just like man depends on religion to meet his needs, more and more Americans turn to the government to meet their needs.

The vacancy of God allowed evolution to tear down American morality. Thomas Jefferson warned that “God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that his justice cannot sleep forever.”<sup>12</sup> God judges the nations who reject Him. God used to be the world’s standard of morality, but Darwin “opened the door to Marxism by providing what Marx believed was a ‘scientific’ rationale to deny Creation and, by extension, to deny God.”<sup>13</sup> Denying God opens the door for morality to fall. The lack of morality is one of the reasons why these nations face such bloodthirsty terror. According to *The Red Sword*, a Russian newspaper for the Cheka, “We reject the old systems of morality and ‘humanity’ invented by the bourgeoisie to oppress and exploit the ‘lower classes.’ Our morality has no precedent, and our humanity is absolute because it rests on a new ideal.”<sup>14</sup> Evolution makes morality objective which is why American morality is so divided today. The lack of morality is one of the reasons why the American government is so divided today. Morality when it is based on anything other than God ultimately fails.

Second, American society is controlled by Communist ideals because of the perversion of language. Courtois said, “As if by magic, the concentration-camp system was turned into a ‘reeducation system,’ and the tyrants became ‘educators’ who transformed the people of the old society into ‘new people.’”<sup>15</sup> This perversion of language erased truth which is one of the reasons why Communism’s crimes are largely unknown or willfully ignored. Many today, deny that the Holocaust ever happened when there is an abundance of pictures and first-hand accounts which prove that it did. Similarly, they deny Communist Russia’s crimes against humanity. The sheer number of Communism’s victims may never be known, but it is estimated to be 100 million deaths.<sup>16</sup> Communism’s crimes were diminished because “leftists exempted communist leaders from the harsh criticism directed toward Adolf Hitler, even though Communist crimes against

humanity made Hitler’s slaughter of 11 million noncombatants appear almost amateurish.”<sup>17</sup> The perversion of language is why the world did not condemn or even do something against the horror of Communism. Communists have used propaganda to rewrite the narrative using writers like Anna Louise Strong and Reverend Hewlett Johnson. Today, America is perverting language such as the trend of labeling an opponent as a bigot, a racist, or a homophobe. Perversion of language also changes the connotation of terms like “fetus” or “pro-choice.” The American government adopted the Soviet Union’s method of perverting language to dupe the masses.

The perversion of language turns man into something that he is not. Man has lost his humanity. He is considered a machine, a part of the whole: dispensable and unimportant. Billingsley writes, “The individual has not fared well.”<sup>18</sup> The individual is the first to suffer. America was founded on the dignity of the individual which “finds strong resonances with Christian perspectives, asserts that the individual is not to be sacrificed for the sake of historical progress, the folk, the species, or other ends that have fueled 20th-century totalitarianism.”<sup>19</sup> However, this is the very obstacle of Communism. The individuals who have achieved success through ability or status are the very ones Communism must destroy. Perverting language is the single greatest weapon of Communist ideals.

Third, American society is controlled by Communist ideals because of political correctness. Tucker Carlson writes, “If you’re going to run a country for the benefit of a few, it’s dangerous to let people complain about it. The only way to impose unpopular policies on a population is through fear and silence. Free speech is the enemy of the authoritarian rule.”<sup>20</sup> Today, free speech must first be politically correct, and if it is considered offensive or hate speech, one should not have the right to say it. According to Greg Lukianoff, “A generation is being raised not to believe in freedom of speech, but rather that they should have freedom from speech—from speech they dislike.”<sup>21</sup> Believing that the government should limit free speech is exactly what will lose it. For if American rights are given from the government, then the government can take them away. America’s society and government have both slowly accepted Communist ideals that Americans fought against during the World Wars. America’s foundation was God and freedom, but the State and socialism are tearing down the American dream.

The American government was designed to check and balance power. How-



ever, since World War II, the government has been consolidating more and more power. America is not a Communist nation, but she has accepted many Communist ideals that undermine the American dream. Just as man cannot serve two masters neither can America. Either America is a nation under God or a nation under the state. American society and government are controlled by Communist ideals because of the vacancy of God, the perversion of language, and political correctness.

*when can their glory fade?*

*This one has all of the things! I loved all of my literature classes, but there was definitely something about British Literature. This is my section of a group project on Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade." This one goes to Mrs. MacIntyre and Sarah!*

In "Charge of the Light Brigade," Alfred, Lord Tennyson memorializes the soldiers of the Light Brigade who died in the Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War. The Crimean War began because of a power struggle between Russia, Britain, and France. The poem was written during the war to boost English morale and honor the soldiers of the Light Brigade. Tennyson portrays the theme of courage in the face of adversity through war.

First, "Charge of the Light Brigade" portrays the theme of courage in the face of adversity through the horror of war that soldiers faced during the Crimean War. The Crimean War was teetering on the precipice of traditional warfare and modern warfare. Traditional warfare was slipping away as modern warfare made its appearance. Despite the World Wars' modern warfare still being decades away, the soldiers of the Crimean War faced advanced weaponry which was more accurate and deadlier than the world had seen before which caused untold damage in the American Civil War. This advanced weaponry is what the Light Brigade charged into. As Cyril Falls records in *Great Military Battles*, the surrounded Light Brigade was "advancing through increasingly heavy fire

from both the front and from left and right. Inevitably the pace quickened and the casualties multiplied, but the squadrons closed their ranks with astonishing coolness.”<sup>22</sup> This source explains the horror that the soldiers of the Light Brigade faced during the Battle of Balaclava, but also the soldiers’ courage as they faced death. While Falls realistically shows the horror of war, Tennyson poetically describes it with cadence,

Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them (lines 18-20).

Tennyson uses cadence to emotionally connect the reader to the soldier. The cadence sounds like the beating drums of a death march. This allows the reader to feel the soldiers’ helplessness in being surrounded. By poetically illustrating the soldiers’ position, Tennyson showcases the soldiers’ courage in the face of adversity.

The horror of war leads to the soldiers’ courageous fall which portrays the horror of war’s cruel reality. The reality of war cannot be truly comprehended by someone who has not experienced it. According to Stephen Ambrose author of *Band of Brothers*, “Going into combat for the first time is an ultimate experience for which one can never be fully ready.... There is a mystery about the thing, heightened by the fact that those who have done it cannot put into words what it is like, how it feels.... No matter how hard you train, nor however realistic the training, no one can ever be fully prepared for the intensity of the real thing.”<sup>23</sup> Here, Ambrose describes combat. Combat is something that soldiers train for and expect; however, soldiers never fully understand how they will react during combat. This quote highlights the horror of war because of the reality that not all of these men will survive. Death is simply a cruel reality of war’s horror because war could not be won without death. Tennyson uses vivid imagery to describe the cruel reality that the soldiers face,

While horse and hero fell.  
They that had fought so well  
Came through the jaws of Death,  
Back from the mouth of hell (lines 44-47).

The poem acknowledges their fall, but rather than focusing on war’s cruel reality Tennyson focuses on the soldiers’ courage in facing death. He mourns for the fallen *hero* who *fought so well*. He also uses vivid imagery to highlight

the horror of war. His vivid images of *the jaws of Death* and *the mouth of hell* could describe the jagged bayonets of the enemy, the roar of cannon fire, and the stench of death. This vivid image captures the horror of war and forces the reader to almost feel and smell the horror of war. Essentially, Tennyson asks the reader to realize that for soldiers to face the horror of war, soldiers need true courage.

Second, “Charge of the Light Brigade” portrays the theme of courage in the face of adversity through the honor of war. The horror of war often overshadows the honor of war, however; soldiers cannot focus on the atrocities that they have faced during war. Rather soldiers form a bond of brotherhood. This bond demands honor because of the soldiers’ unfailing duty to one another. Ambrose defines this bond as “the degree of comradeship commonly known in war.... At its height, this sense of comradeship is an ecstasy.... Men are true comrades only when each is ready to give up his life for the other, without reflection and without thought of personal loss.”<sup>24</sup> The bond of camaraderie that soldiers form with each other is stronger than any other human relationship. Comradeship gives soldiers a radical sense of courage in the face of adversity. Their bond to one another demonstrates their unfailing duty which allows soldiers to endure the horror of war with honor. Tennyson portrays this bond of duty by referring to the soldiers of the Light Brigade as a unit,

Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die (lines 13-15).

He shows the bond through the choice of his wording: *theirs*, and he repeats this word to solidify to the reader the soldiers’ comradeship.

The honor of war illustrates the soldiers’ unfailing duty. Unfailing duty has two aspects: duty for one another and duty for their country. In war, soldiers pay the highest cost and face the worst horror imaginable to do so they must believe in their country. They must inexplicably trust their cause, country, and leadership. This unfailing duty earns honor even when the outcome is fatal. If the soldiers’ belief in their country is so great, then their country must also believe in them. Tennyson uses “Charge of the Light Brigade” to portray his belief in the British soldiers fighting in the Crimean War. When he heard that the soldiers of the Crimean War liked “Charge of the Light Brigade,” Tennyson bought hundreds of copies for “the brave soldiers... whom I am proud to call my

countrymen .... No writing of mine can add to the glory they have acquired in the Crimea... and to know that those who sit at home love and honour them.”

<sup>25</sup>This source gives Tennyson's direct quote about his belief in the soldiers defending his country. He calls them *brave* and *my countrymen*. He gives them the *glory, love, and honour* that the soldiers' unflinching duty to their country earned. In the “Charge of the Light Brigade,” Tennyson memorializes his belief in his countrymen,

When can their glory fade?

O the wild charge they made (lines 50-51)!

Tennyson understood the honor of war that stems from the soldiers' unflinching duty. Soldiers create the honor of war by living out unflinching duty for one another and their country.

Third, the poem portrays the theme of courage in the face of adversity by reminding the modern reader of the price of war. War comes at a steep price. To do what must be done, sacrifices must be made. No one pays this price more heavily than the soldiers who risk everything. The soldiers' lives portray the price of war because of their willing sacrifice. Tennyson portrays this willing sacrifice in the daring charge made by the soldiers of the Light Brigade soldiers who “knew that it was a risky charge.... A soldier should be ready to fight for any war at any time, he has to go to the battlefield and fight to defend his country against the enemies or invaders of the land, and if necessary, he has to lay down his life in the defense of his country.”<sup>26</sup> These men did not wish to die, but they were willing to pay the price. The soldiers willingly risked their lives for their country. Their willing sacrifice transforms the soldiers' lives into legacy. The soldiers' legacy reminds the modern reader of their needed sacrifice. The modern reader would do well to remember the cost of the freedom he enjoys today. Freedom is not free. It is paid for by the willing sacrifice of those who have given everything for their country. According to Charles Plumb, a prisoner of war during the Vietnam War, “not until I had lived year after year under totalitarian domination did I learn to fully appreciate the freedom that Americans have fought for and have won. Growing up in America provided the training grounds necessary to endure the North Vietnamese attempts at dehumanization. Even though America has made its mistakes, it still provides a means to correct them.”<sup>27</sup> This soldier sacrificed and suffered greatly for his country, but instead of becoming bitter that his country asked so much from him, he was proud to protect the country he loved so much.

The soldiers of the Light Brigade paid a heavier price than Plumb with their lives. It would be easy to say that their sacrifice was unnecessary because it was needless death caused by a series of mistakes. However, Tennyson challenges his readers to see the “Charge of the Light Brigade” as a needed sacrifice,

All the world wondered.

Honour the charge they made!

Honour the Light Brigade,

Noble six hundred (lines 52-55)!

Tennyson does not focus on the mistake that caused the need for the soldiers' sacrifice. His poem refers to death, but he makes the reader believe that the soldiers live on despite the price they paid. He challenges the reader to *honour* the *noble* Light Brigade because he recognizes that their sacrifice was needed. Understanding this needed sacrifice applies to the modern reader who forgets what freedom cost and who paid the price. Freedom's high cost is the price of war which soldiers pay willingly to preserve what they believe they are fighting for. Soldiers willingly pay the price of war with needed sacrifice which illustrates their unbelievable courage in the face of adversity.

The Bible acknowledges that “there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.... A time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.”<sup>28</sup> Although not many have heard of the Crimean War, very few have not read, loved, nor studied Alfred, Lord Tennyson's “The Charge of the Light Brigade.” This beloved poem forever memorializes the courageous soldiers who fought in the Crimean War. “The Charge of the Light Brigade” demonstrates the theme of courage in facing adversity through the soldiers' life and death in war.

## *the russian soldier*

*Before taking Modern History Since the 1900s, I had never heard of the Battle of Stalingrad. I wish that Dr. Northrup could have gone into greater detail, but I ended up doing a lot of research of my own. I wanted to know who the Russian soldier was, why he fought, and whom he fought for.*

The narrative of World War II is one of the most familiar parts of history. However, history can never be fully known because man is not God. One part of World War II's narrative that is still debated by historians is the Russian soldier. Two conflicting views control the Russian narrative of the war: oppression and patriotism. Was the Russian soldier oppressed and manipulated by Communism? Or was the Russian soldier patriotic and willing to fight for his country? The only thing history records is that the Russian soldier fought with fervor and desperation.

First, the fervor and desperation with which the Russians fought were due to the total war that the Germans waged against them. Hitler planned to totally exterminate the Slavic race. However, Hitler and the German soldiers vastly underestimated Stalin and the Russian soldiers. Paul Carell, author of *Hitler's War on Russia*, writes, "The German troops were beginning to realize that this was not an opponent to be trifled with. These men were not only brave but also full of guile. They were masters at camouflage and ambush. They were first-rate riflemen."<sup>29</sup> The ideal Russian soldier was bloodthirsty. The Red Army

was diverse not only in station but race. Unlike Hitler, Stalin had no qualms about using inferior races to strengthen his army. Some were farmers, some were factory workers, and some were freed criminals. Many were only eighteen or twenty, but some had experience from the unrest following the Bolshevik Revolution. The high casualty rate of the Red Army meant that new soldiers had to be continually added including women. No one believed that the Russian army could beat the German army not even the Russian soldier. William Craig writes, "Most soldiers in the Soviet Army had become convinced the Germans were unbeatable."<sup>30</sup> Despite the Russian soldier's fear and doubt, Germany faced three major defeats on Russian soil. The defeat at Stalingrad shows the clearest picture of Hitler's total war because it was one of the bloodiest battles in all of World War II. Jochen Hellbeck writes, "We still lack a clear picture of how Red Army Soldiers fought, of the cultural impressions they brought to bear on the war, what drove them as they fought against forces they believed were superior to their own, and what Stalingrad meant to them."<sup>31</sup> The reason that the Russian narrative is still lacking today is because of Soviet censorship. Communist countries have always had a history of keeping secrets not only from their own citizens but especially from the West. To survive the total war against them, the Russian soldiers waged a total war against the Germans.

In many ways, the Russians were as ruthless as the Germans. To have a clearer understanding of the Russian soldier, his past character must be understood. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is a unique expert on Russia's past character. He was a Russian soldier who turned against Communism because of the brutality at the Battle of Berlin. He writes, "The character of the Russian people... was continuously oppressed, darkened, mangled during the entire Soviet period."<sup>32</sup> From 1917 to the 1940s, Communist Russia fashioned the soldiers who would eventually fight in World War II. Solzhenitsyn realized that Communism destroyed Russian characteristics like "openness, straightforwardness... patience, endurance... humility in heroic deeds, compassion and magnanimity—all these began to leave and seep out of our soul."<sup>33</sup> These characteristics that the Soviet regime crushed reveal a clear picture of what the Russian soldiers had left during World War II. Solzhenitsyn said, "The Bolsheviks harassed, exhausted and charred our character—above all, they scorched out compassion, the willingness to help others, the feeling of brotherhood; they made us more dynamic in only the bad and cruel."<sup>34</sup> World War II was the height of Communist Russia's power and

leadership, so it only makes sense that it was the lowest point of the Russian character. The Russian soldier fought with desperate ruthlessness because he faced a total war on all sides against the Germans and his own country.

Second, the fervor and desperation with which the Russians fought were due to the rigid and unforgiving Soviet Regime. According to the *Black Book of Communism*, approximately 20 million Russians died because of the Soviet Union's reign of terror. These deaths are not to be mistaken with the estimated 26 million deaths of Russian soldiers in World War II. The Soviet Regime never cared for the Russian people: both civilian and soldier were expendable. Ultimately, the Russian soldier fought and died for a lie. Shakespeare says it best in *Henry IV*, "Honor hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honor? A word. What is that word honor? Air... Who hath it? He that died a Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No."<sup>35</sup> It is often considered honorable when one fights and dies for his country; however, Communist Russia had no honor. The Russian soldier's love for country was not reciprocated. The Russian soldiers blindly believed in their country even when their country demanded utter devotion and disregard for their own lives.

The Russian soldier had no choice but to fight and to die. They were surrounded by total war on all fronts. The Soviet Regime and Stalin were just as unforgiving and ruthless as the Germans and Hitler. Stalin not only made it a crime to be taken as a prisoner, but he also ordered blocking units to kill their own soldiers if they took one step back. Hellbeck describes that the Russian soldiers "attack until total exhaustion, and defend themselves until the physical extermination of the last man and weapon... Sometimes the individual will fight beyond the point considered humanly possible."<sup>36</sup> This description of a reckless and ruthless opponent resembles how the Germans remember the Russian soldier. Hellbeck continues, "The soldiers of the Red Army were thought to fight with a disregard for death that was foreign to culturally superior Europeans."<sup>37</sup> Not only does this description contradict human nature but the very idea of the greatest generation. Because the World War II narrative is so familiar, the World War II soldier is remembered through other Allied like the men of Easy Company and Desmond Doss—men with unbelievable courage and comradery who became the epitome of heroism. The Russian soldiers were deliberately stopped from forming brotherhoods. Hellbeck explains that "for one, the terrible casualty rate on the Soviet side consumed whole unites in a matter of days

and made it impossible for soldiers to develop personal cohesion. Moreover, communist authorities actively sought to suppress such ties: they feared that soldiers' particularist visions and desires might undermine their larger Soviet identity.<sup>38</sup> This separation is opposite from the German, British and American soldiers. The Russian soldier faced a completely different government than their counterparts which is why they go against expectations.

Third, the fervor and desperation with which the Russians fought were due to the idealistic almost nationalistic form of patriotism that controlled Russian life. While German units were made up of soldiers from the same region to strengthen their regional identity, Russian units were made up of soldiers from different regions and nations to weaken their individual identity. The Soviet Regime bound these diverse soldiers together through ideology. Hellbeck writes, "The party was an ever-present institutional force in the form of political officers and ideological messages. It permeated all military levels."<sup>39</sup> It permeated beyond the military; it permeated all aspects of Russian life. Most of the Russian soldiers had grown up in Lenin and Stalin's reigns of terror. Their history had been eradicated; their education had conditioned them to see Stalin as a god; and their training in the army had broken their self-interest. Leon Trosky said, "In a country where the sole employer is the state, opposition means death by slow starvation. The old principle: who does not work shall not eat, has been replaced by a new one: who does not obey shall not eat."<sup>40</sup> In the army, it was who does not obey shall die. The Russian soldier knew that his family could pay for his mistakes. If this terror was not enough to keep the Russian soldier in line, ideology was "preached incessantly and targeting every recruit, it was made up of accessible concepts with an enormous emotional charge: love for the homeland and hatred of the enemy."<sup>41</sup> This frenzied patriotism and burning hatred is what drove the Russian soldier throughout World War II. The Russian soldier's faith in his country made him blind to its manipulation. However, nationalistic patriotism is no substitute to the comradeship and brotherhood that the Russian soldiers lacked. Soviet Russia took advantage of her soldiers' love by elevating fearlessness and heroism. Hellbeck explains, "In Soviet Marxist ideology, human beings were inherently malleable, shaped by their surroundings; through social conditioning anyone could become a hero."<sup>42</sup> The Red Army molded its soldiers to be fearless. The Russian soldier was taught that fear could be overcome through willpower. However, human nature cannot help itself.

Commanders, officers, and soldiers felt fear alike, but the consequences were so brutal that they had to defy their own human nature.

Ultimately, the Russian soldier gave everything to his country, but his country gave nothing back. He fought with fervor and desperation because of the total war waged against him, the strict and unforgiving Soviet Regime, and because of the idealistic almost nationalistic form of patriotism that controlled Russian life. The Russian soldier goes against expectation because historians either look at Communist Russia at its worst or its perceived best. They refuse to see Communist Russia or its soldiers how they truly were. The Russian soldier was in the prime of his life with his whole future ahead of him. He loved his country because he had never known anything else. His story was filled with pain and great sacrifice for a country who never deserved him.

## *more than a hero*

*Although I love history, history is often rewritten. As a writer, I want to know more than just the history of someone. The Red Baron was a menacing sight in the skies of the first world war, but he was more than just a soldier.*

Every war has its heroes and villains. The heroes of World War I are not quite as defined as the heroes and villains of World War II. Manfred von Richthofen's name does not spark immediate recognition like Adolf Hitler, yet they both fought for Germany in World War I. Richthofen would not have recognized Hitler's name, but Hitler would have known who Richthofen was. The Red Baron was one of the First World War's greatest heroes. Officially, he shot down eighty enemy aircraft which was the highest score of the war's fighter pilots. This record was made in only twenty months of combat. He received twenty-four military decorations which was more than any other German pilot in World War I. He was a symbol of Germany's past who affected her future whether he meant to or not. He was unwillingly used as propaganda during his lifetime and after his death. Manfred von Richthofen was Germany's last true hero.

First, Richthofen was Germany's last true hero because he transcended heroism and villainy. Although every war has heroes and villains, the victor often determines who is seen as the villain. However, heroism is not always tied to one side or the other. Few heroes are honored by both sides. Jerry Palmer writes, "A war hero can have a long afterlife, but few individual soldiers' names from

the First World War have survived in public memory, and especially not in the public memory of all the combatant nations."<sup>43</sup> The Red Baron is an exception because he was more than just a hero or a villain. The Red Baron is often portrayed as a villain because he was on the losing side. Ryan Clauser writes, "The real Red Baron fancied himself more as a sportsman than a soldier and was so greatly respected by the enemy that the British gave him a funeral with full military honors upon his death."<sup>44</sup> Sportsmanship was key because modern warfare transformed traditional warfare. It appeared that "the pilots were the only ones who fought an honourable man-to-man war... the drama of the one-to-one combat contrasted with the killing machine of the Western Front, a place where life and death were randomly distributed."<sup>45</sup> The entire world was shattered by the awful horror and the waste of life. In her darkest hours, she needed heroes more than ever. Palmer explains, "The lone pilot came to be perceived as a modern version of the knight-errant of the old fables, seeking out opponents for single combat. Tales of chivalrous conduct were publicized... Richthofen was photographed chatting to a British pilot he shot down in 1917."<sup>46</sup> Richthofen had great respect for his enemies which they reciprocated. Throughout modern history, Richthofen's personality has been split into either a ruthless killing machine or a compassionate fellow soldier, but these are just stories. His memory is so diluted by propaganda that it is impossible to know who he really was. The Red Baron ruled the skies, but "every member of the Royal Flying Corps would also have been proud to shake his hand had he fallen into captivity alive."<sup>47</sup> They were enemies during battle, but they felt human pity for each other. They were all stuck in a war that wasn't theirs. The respect that the Red Baron's enemies gave him shows that he was more than just a hero or a villain.

Second, Richthofen was Germany's last true hero because he fought for his country despite its manipulation. Germany had manipulated and lied to her countrymen since its birth as a nation. Paul Johnson explains, "The Germans had been swindled for many years, but chiefly by their own governments... [Bismark] deliberately sought to preserve domestic unity by creating largely imaginary foreign threats of encirclement."<sup>48</sup> Although the war was not solely Germany's fault, they aggressively jumped into it because they believed that they had to fight for survival. Richthofen was like all young men caught in war. At first, the war was a game. Johnson writes "what youth wanted was

war."<sup>49</sup> Richthofen was not the only youth with a romantic notion of war, but eventually, his view on war drastically changed. Richthofen reflected,

Now the battle that is taking place on all fronts has become really serious; nothing remains of the "fresh, jolly war" as they used to call our activities at the outset. Now we must face up to a most desperate situation so that the enemy will not break into our land. Thus, I have an uneasy feeling that the public has been exposed to another Richthofen, not the real me.... Not that I am afraid, though death may be right on my neck, and I often think about it.<sup>50</sup>

Richthofen with the rest of the youth had lost his war lust. His friends had fallen. His faith in his country had shaken. His hope for a future had been lost even before he died. Richthofen's mother remembered his last visit home. "I found Manfred very changed.... He was taciturn, aloof, almost unapproachable; every one of his words seemed to come from an unknown distance. Why this change? ... I think he has seen death too often."<sup>51</sup> Richthofen knew his luck was running out. He knew it was only a matter of time until he would join his fallen friends. Once he was injured, he wrote that "higher authority has suggested that I should quit flying before it catches up with me. But I should despise myself if, now that I am famous and heavily decorated, I consented to live on as a pensioner of my honor, preserving my precious life for the nation while every poor fellow in the trenches, who is doing his duty no less than I am doing mine, has to stick it out."<sup>52</sup> Whether or not Richthofen recognized his country's manipulation is unknown, but he was determined to fight to the end. Richthofen's true feelings of the war were never known. He did not reason why. He did and died. The Red Baron's sense of duty and honor urged him to fight even when he had lost hope.

Third, Richthofen was Germany's last true hero because he continues to serve as a symbol of courage. Richthofen's memory faded after the war. He was dead, and the world had bigger problems than one lost hero. Richthofen's death has been a historical debate for centuries. No one knows for certain what really happened, but theories abound. He was possibly shot down by either British, Canadian, or even Australian pilots. Another story is that he managed to land safely, but he was shot. He may not have fully recovered from his head injury. The most likely theory is that there was a shooter from the ground, but who was the shooter? Some believe that Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's commander of the



air force, was the mastermind behind the Red Baron's mysterious fall. Whatever really happened has been lost to history. The British had buried him with full military honors. His autobiography which had been written by a reporter was a bestseller, but it was revised to fit Nazi propaganda. Ingrid Sharp writes, "The cult of Richthofen under National Socialism stressed his ruthless and single-minded dedication to killing the enemy, a quality that the National Socialists wanted to be emulated."<sup>53</sup> Hitler took this propaganda so far as to have Richthofen's body exhumed and reburied in Germany. Richthofen was then associated with Nazism. His image was marred by propaganda for a cause that he most likely would not have truly supported. If Richthofen had survived World War I, he may have been part of the few who stood against Hitler. Perhaps, he would have been like the Desert Fox. Those who had once seen him as a hero did not give him the benefit of doubt. Today, Germany is trying to revive her greatest hero. Sharp explains,

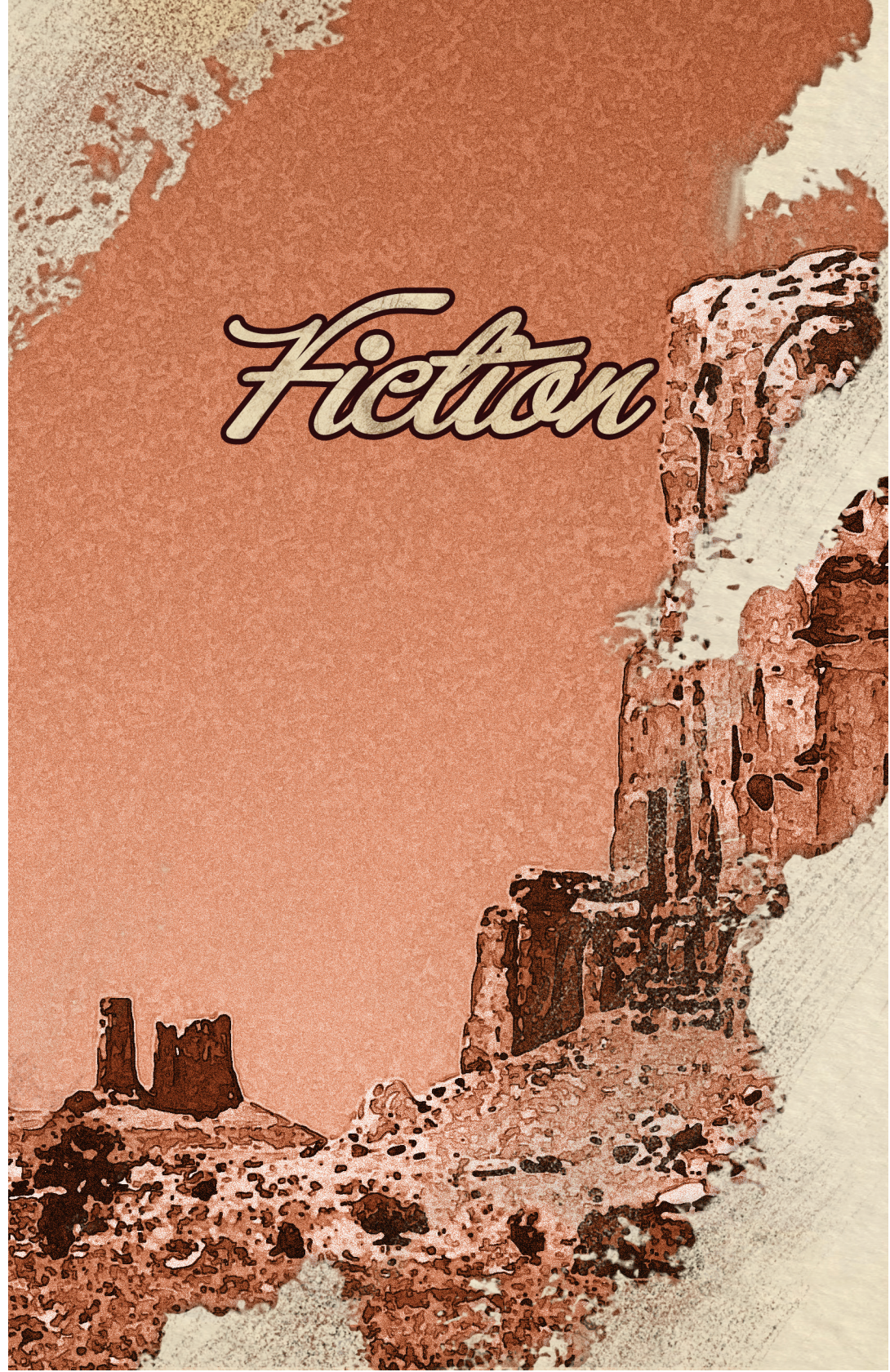
The Nazi's appropriation of this World War I hero meant that after 1945, the Red Baron's public profile plummeted and his chances of ever being celebrated as a popular hero again seemed bleak. But a German feature film "The Red Baron" recently attempted rehabilitate him, presenting him as a sympathetic hero with 21st-century sensibilities. The Red Baron of this film has little in common with the dedicated and emotionless killer propagated by the National Socialists. Instead, this is a highly emotional man, humanized by a love affair that opens his eyes to the role he's playing in the slaughter of the war.<sup>54</sup>

Germany has finally recognized Manfred von Richthofen as her true hero. During World War II, they hailed Hitler as a savior, but Hitler led Germany to ruin. Richthofen never led Germany anywhere; he never even wanted to be a hero. Instead of ruin, he gave the German people and the world hope. Today, the Red Baron's humanity reveals that he was a victim of war who was manipulated by his country; but he shines as a beacon of courage.

Finally, Germany's last true hero was Manfred von Richthofen because he transcended heroism and villainy; he fought for his country despite its manipulation; and he continues to serve as a symbol of courage. Richthofen's life was cut short; he was only twenty-five years old when he had died. He never had a wife, and he never had children. He faced the worst war that the world

had yet experienced but stayed true in honor, compassion, and sportsmanship. Richthofen's personal beliefs are unknown. Germans were usually Catholics or Lutherans, but moral relativity and evolution had eroded their faith. Most of them were "Christian" in tradition only. Only God knows Richthofen's heart, but Richthofen lived his life according to Psalm 18:29, "For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." God created Richthofen and empowered him during the war to be the Red Baron. Richthofen's successes were not possible without God's providence. It is not the world who makes heroes and villains. Rather it is God who makes ordinary men into heroes.

*Fiction*



# *the dragons and the west*

*I couldn't have written this story without my dad, my favorite cattle rustler. I got my love of westerns from him.*

For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be a dragon rider. But street rats never amount to much. My life of crime began when I tried to steal a dragon egg. I'll tell you what: a seven-year-old ain't gonna get far with a dragon egg. And that's how I got a family. Not just any family—an outlaw family the Kassidys.

They caught me red handed but liked my sand. So, they decided to keep me and raise me up to be an outlaw. The Kassidys were the only family I had. We were outlaws, and it was as simple as that.

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Frowning, I studied the poster before me: *Infamous dragon riders The Horned Dragon Duo wanted dead or alive. The masked outlaws evaded rangers and escaped out West. Rangers warn to keep an ear to the ground and an eye on the sky for strange dragon riders.* “Hutch, have you seen this?”

My adopted brother jabbed me in the ribs. Despite not having a drop of blood between us, no one would assume we weren't family. We both looked like dragon riders with disheveled brown hair; piercing gray eyes; and covered from head to toe in leather. The only reason we weren't twins was that Hutch was stockier and had a handlebar mustache. “I reckon we've made a name for ourselves.”

“I told you the last job was too much—”



“Quit being such a nervous Nelly! The sketch ain’t even decent that could be bout anyone.”

Ripping the poster from the board, I said, “Let’s keep it that way.”

“I’ll let the Browns know we’re here. Nelly, here, can bed the dragons down for the night.” Hutch’s shoulders shook with laughter at his own joke.

Shaking my head, I walked back to the post where we had tied our dragons. I was glad that we were back.

Mahoney’s was a small town in the middle of nowhere, but it was almost a second home.

Pop would always split the family after a job, and the Brown’s ranch was a swell place to lie low.

Hutch and I had worked on their ranch since we were knee hight. It was good, honest work.

The Browns didn’t know that we were outlaws. They were just good people.

The dusty roads twirled with tumbleweeds. The Blue Mountain stood stoically against the painted horizon while the red plateaus danced as the wildflowers, and sagebrush swayed in the wind. I swatted a fairy away—unable to decide which was ornerier—the tiny creatures or the mosquitoes they rode.

My amber dragon Sundance huffed puffs of smoke to keep the fairies at bay, while Hutch’s dragon Moondust snorted fire from his nostrils.

My hands deftly untied their ropes. I clicked signaling that they should follow me into the blue barn. Once inside, I grinned at the welcome sight of Edda Brown running away again.

For what she lacked in stature, she more than made up for in will. The fiery young woman with wild curls had a large bag slung over her shoulder and was trying to coax a white cantankerous dragon out of its stall with a strip of meat. “You stupid overgrown lizard!”

I coughed trying to cover up my laugh, as Ghost winked at me. “Come now, it’s not the dragon’s fault that you ain’t doing it right.”

Edda swirled in my direction, her eyes flashing like lightning. “And I suppose you could get Ghost out of his pen?”

“I could if I wanted, but then you’d run away. And I just got back—”

“Then chase me!” she exclaimed.

I laughed remembering how we’d first met.

She’d run away again, and Hutch and I had been sent to fetch her.

We’d split up mostly cause Hutch didn’t want to chase after a little girl.

I’d been worried about her though, so I chased after her all night.

She was a wily one though.

“Why’d you want to run away again?”

Edda’s face contorted in frustrated furry. “I’ll never be a proper lady, and I’m sick of trying.” Edda was strong willed, impetuous, and wild. Corraling her spirit was nothing short of cruelty.

“Now that’s not like you,” I commented stroking Sundance’s snout before unbuckling her saddle, so she could stretch her wings and click clack her way into a stall where she turned her glinting eyes to Edda who giggled before tossing the strip of meat towards the expectant dragon.

Moondust roared in indignation drawing attention. *I swear Hutch and his dragon have the same personality!*

While Edda scratched his scaly ears, I undid his saddle, “Pop says I only have a few more jobs left,” I spoke quietly not wanting to jinx it. I’d been in love with Edda since the first time I chased after her. My love had grown in the years since, but I couldn’t saddle her with an outlaw for a husband. Telling Pop that I wanted out was one of the hardest things I’d ever done. I still didn’t know what to do about Hutch.

Edda wouldn’t meet my gaze. “Mama’s probably done with dinner. Let’s go.”

“You know you can tell me anything?” I asked as we walked back to Edda’s home.

“I know,” she whispered. “But there are some burdens we carry alone.”

*Like not telling her you’re an outlaw.* How I yearned to tell her, but I didn’t know how’d she see me. I’d only ever been Harry Alonzo Cassidy with her. Not a street rat. Not an orphan. Not an outlaw. Just me.

Sheriff Brown, Edda’s father, leaned against their house staring up at the ocean of glittery stars above, “I heard the ugly rumor that you boys were back!”

I grinned, “Couldn’t keep us away. Hutch overstaying his welcome?”

“Of course! But we didn’t know what to do with a quiet house.”

We walked into the warm glow of the kitchen where Mama Brown was flipping pancakes, stirring molasses, and frying deer steak.



“Edda’s engagement party.”

Shock rippled through me. Sure, I’d not asked her yet, but I’d made my intentions clear. I’d told her I’d never leave her side once Pop let me quit. I’d even asked Sheriff Brown for her hand.

She loved me too; I could have sworn it...

\*\*\*

The next day, I stood in the dusty street before the bank wishing I’d stayed back at the ranch. I tried not to glare at Matt Dashing, the banker, with his slicked-back black hair and his fancy clothes. I couldn’t figure how Edda got engaged to him; she looked miserable next to him. My hands curled into fists.

Hutch grabbed my shoulder and squeezed. “Cool yer dragons.”

Matt had been droning on and on about the bank, his family, and his engagement—Yeaman, the town ne’er-do-well, staggered into the square and shouted at Matt, “Where’s my money? Ye deny me the right to take what’s mine! Now before all them witnesses, yer gon have to pay up!”

Matt sneered, “How dare you interrupt me!”

“Come now, give the man what he’s owed,” Sheriff Brown said.

Matt nodded and fiddled with his keys before unlocking the bank doors. He and Sheriff Brown walked in before coming out with faces creased with worry. “The money’s gone!”

Hutch was rocking back in a chair. “Took ya long enough.”

Shrugging, I sat across him and watched Edda pick up her pet coyote Cactus.

“Don’t make any plans to run off tomorrow, Edda. You know how important it is,” Mama said as everyone began to dig into supper.

Edda nodded looking like a lonely cloud over the desert.

Cactus whined sensing his mistress’s melancholy.

“What’s tomorrow?”

For once, I was glad Hutch couldn’t mind his own business.

The townsfolk were in a shindy screaming like panicked banshees, “What have you done with our money?”

Matt held up his hands. “Surely, you can trust me!”

“Then who did this? Who’s responsible!”

“Well, it must be the Horned Dragon Duo. What’s worse is that they’re right here among us! There’s yer outlaws Harry and Hutch!” Matt declared with a wink.

I heard Hutch swear before taking off like a pistol toward the post where our dragons were tied.

The crowd surrounded me screaming. “Hang ‘em!”

“That’s enough!” Sheriff Brown shouted. “We ain’t gonna hang a man without proof.”

But I could tell that they’d hang me regardless.

Hutch and I were outlaws. It didn’t matter a lick that we didn’t rob the bank.

I heard the thundering roars before I felt the gust of flapping wings.

Hutch standing on Moondust’s back swooped down scattering the mob. He held his pistols steady giving me a chance to mount Sundance.

I don’t know what possessed me, but I had all the foolishness of a man desperately in love as I grabbed Edda and jumped on Sundance.

As Sundance took to the skies, Edda fought me tooth and nail kicking and screaming. “Let me go!”

“If I fall, we’ll both fall to our death!” I yelled back trying to gain my balance.

“How dare you kidnap me!”

“Hear me out—it’s not what you think!”

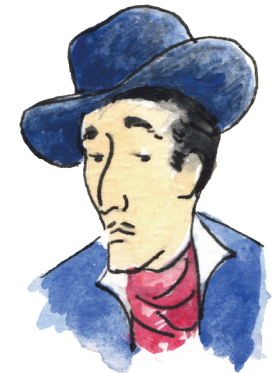
“You didn’t kidnap me, or you’re not an outlaw?”

“I didn’t steal that money! That’s not what we do, we don’t steal from people who don’t deserve it—”

“You’re not denying that you’re an outlaw!”

*How do I get her to understand?* “No, I’ve done plenty that I should hang for—”

“I absolutely forbid you from hanging!” She glared at me, but at least she didn’t wish me dead. “If anyone’s gonna kill you, it’s me!”



The dragons had flown well out of town before we landed in a meadow of wild oregano. Edda and I stumbled off Sundance.



She kicked me in the shin and tried to make a run for it.

“You stubborn girl! Yes, I lied about what I did, but that don’t mean I don’t love you!” I yelled after her. Edda froze, for once in her life she stayed still.

“We should keep moving,” Hutch said glancing between the two of us.

“We’re not leaving.” I’d already made up my mind.

“What do ya mean!”

“We didn’t steal that money. The

whole town will suffer if it’s not found.”

“So? They were gonna hang ya. But more important they were gonna hang me!”

“Hutch is right,” Edda whispered. “You should go and never look back.”

“I won’t. I’ll prove it wasn’t me.” “No matter what you do; you’ll just be an outlaw.” Hutch growled. “Won’t take geniuses for ‘em to figure out who we really are. At the end of the day, they’ll hang us.”

“We won’t stay, but we can help.”

“So, who took the money, and where’d they put it?” Hutch asked.

“You’re not gonna like it.”

“I never do.”

Waiting for the cover of night to sneak back into town, I explained my hunch to Edda and Hutch.

“Well, you sure took your sweet time before telling me your true feelings!” Edda’s tone barely concealed the furious storm stirring beneath her wild curls.

My heart twisted up like a cheap lariat. “I wanted to be worthy of you somehow. But I always thought you deserved better than a low-down outlaw like myself.”

“Who are you to decide what I deserve?”

“Will you two shut up! We’re breaking into a bank for Pete’s sake,” Hutch whispered sharply.

I quickly picked the lock trying to make as little noise as possible. Sure, enough no one guarded an empty bank. The one-room bank sure looked empty. I just hoped my hunch hadn’t been off. There was only one other who could’ve stolen that money—Dashing.

Hutch gripped his shovel. “If we get caught—”

“Oh, fiddlesticks just get to it!” Edda grabbed the shovel and hit the thin wall as hard as she could.

“You ain’t strong enough, give it back!” But before Hutch could grab it, the shovel broke through the wall, and gold coins clattered onto the floor. “Guess we were right; now how do we get ‘em to believe us?”

“I already do.” We all jumped like kangaroo rats as Sheriff Brown spoke. “Saw you three sneaking in. Figured you’d be up to trouble.”

“There’s yer proof! Harry and me didn’t do nothing.”

“I believe you, but that’s not going to be enough for the rest of the town.”

“I figured as much. I’ll own up to my past,” I said.

“That’s great for you, but I don’t wanna hang! And I’m not letting you hang either,” Hutch said.

“I admire that, but I’ll not hold you to it. The good Lord teaches mercy, so I’ll do the same. I trust you boys will give up your life of crime? After all, I can’t have an outlaw for a son in law.” He glanced at Edda with a smile. “Where will you go?”

Hutch grinned. “Wherever the wind will carry.”

“I’m coming with and don’t even try to tell me different!” Edda said with fire in her eyes.

“I can’t ask that of you.” I shook my head.

“Who says I care one lick what you think. I love you too, and I’m not letting you ride off into the sunset without me!” She crossed her arms.

Hutch nudged me. “If you don’t marry her, I will.”

I knelt before Edda. With the most solemn look I’d ever mustered, I looked her straight in the eye as I pulled out a ring that I’d worked for. It was a simple band with a cluster of small diamonds like flowers. I’d saved every penny that I’d ever earned working for the Browns. It was the only honest living that I’d ever had. And Edda made me want to be an honest man. “Guess I should have done this sooner? Ever since that first chase, I knew I’d follow you anywhere. Marry me?”

"You'll have to catch me first!"

Edda and me got married the same night that the Horned Dragon Duo and Matt Dashing mysteriously vanished. Many believed that the infamous outlaws died in an epic standoff (much to Hutch's delight). But the truth is: us three flew off into the sunset me on Sundance, Hutch on Moondust, and Edda on Ghost. I can't say for certain what happened to Dashing, but most likely his life of crime caught up to him.

We settled in the Book Cliffs, a country wilder than the West. I'd been worried that Hutch would go off on his own, but he figured I'd get myself hanged without him. he was right.

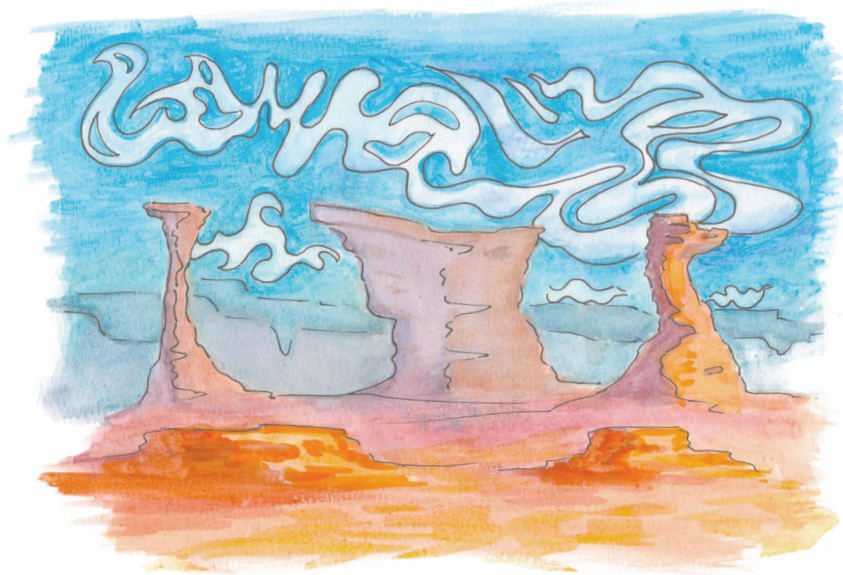
Hutch and me became honest cowboys with a knack for trouble. In fact, we went on to have many adventures.

Edda began writing the legends of Hutch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. Her writing became so popular that it spread throughout the West.

We had a home as grand as any palace, but it was never quiet. Either Hutch or our wild bunch would stir up some kind of ruckus.

Every now and then Edda'd sneak off for a bit of peace.

I'd chase after her and find her barefoot, crowned with wild oregano, and lost in the desert's sunset right where she belonged.



## *the shadow of death*

*Travelling through a wilderness is exhausting. Sometimes, you have to write when you're exhausted, but some of the best stories are written by a weary soul.*

Luka Ivanov stood at attention before his commanding officer James M. Gavin of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

Gavin was a disciplined man, but the war made him even more so. Frowning, he studied Luka who at first glance didn't belong in war. He was too scrawny, more like a choir boy than a soldier, "Do you know why you're here, Private?"

"Yes, sir."

"Come now, Ivanov. I want to know who's responsible." He glared. This wasn't the time to deal with silly disputes. They would soon be making history.

But Luka said nothing. This disobedience went against every bone in his body. He, like all the men, admired even idolized Gavin.

"I know the boys meant this for a bit of fun, and it speaks to your character that you would take the blame. Private, do you know why we can't have these pranks in a regiment?"

"It causes strife, sir."

"We're days away from combat. When we're under fire, those men are your brothers. Brothers fight like dogs, but in the end, they'd die for you."

Luka lost himself in painful memories. His shoulders tensed, and he glanced down at the commander's desk which was covered in maps and topography

with military markings. His whole body relaxed as his keen senses travelled the unseen landscape. He could picture Normandy, France clearly in his mind: the beaches that soldiers would hit with all of their might, the bridges that he and the other paratroopers were to secure, and the cities that they would take back from the Germans.

"Do you have any brothers, son?" the commander asked.

"The men, sir," Luka answered despite everything they had done.

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Something was wrong.

The plane jolted beneath his feet. He couldn't hear anything over the roar of the engine, but he swore the closer they were getting to the drop zone the louder the noise was getting. *We prepared for this.* Luka tried to remind himself. *But this is what it all comes down to.*

Tonight, they would jump behind enemy lines to give the men who'd be storming the beaches a fighting chance.

The sky seemed to explode in antiaircraft fire as the plane lurched forward, gathering more speed as the pilots panicked.

With the green light flashing, the paratroopers stood ready to jump despite the low altitude. "Let's go, let's go." They were already hooked onto the static line, and one by one they were pulled into the night sky. Thousands of paratroopers filled the night sky like falling stars.



The shock was more than Luka had ever experienced. He wasn't in the air long enough to orient himself with any precision, but he could see that the buildings in Ste. Mère Église were on fire. He tried to maneuver his leg bag, but having never used it before he wasn't able to do it right. Suddenly, it and all his equipment were gone. But he didn't have time to even process that before the Germans hit the plane that he'd just jumped from. At first, it sounded like ricochet, but the explosion threw him off course. He'd been in the air for seconds when he hit the ground hard. He didn't take time to think. Pausing just long enough to cut himself loose from the strings of his parachute, he grabbed his rifle and listened.

The crunching of footsteps made him draw his firearm. Luka used his cricket—*click clack*—and waited for a reply. When he didn't hear a returning *click clack*, Luka said softly, "Flash."

"Thunder."

That was the countersign, Luka knew that the man approaching him was an American.

"What's your name, Private?" Luka asked.

"Private Eddie Skeen." He sounded young.

"Which regiment?"

"506th. You?"

"We're both off mark then. I'm with 505th."

"Do you know where we are?"

"I saw Ste. Mère Église when I was going down." Luka looked up at the planes flying over. "The coast must be that way." He surmised by the direction that the planes were heading.

There was a thud as another paratrooper landed a few feet away. They heard a few choice words as the soldier struggled to free himself from his chute.

Luka froze as the familiar voice brought him back to the rough days of training camp.

Merrill Demears had been the first of many trials to keep him out of the war. His prank had landed the whole regiment in the dog house no matter that Luka tried taking the blame. Merrill was a born soldier at least in appearances. For whatever reason, he had taken a disliking to Luka from day one. "Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle. It's a Russian rat!" Merrill's voice carried with the night



air having never been described as a subtle man. “Didn’t think you’d make that jump Roosky.”

Luka hated that blasted nickname. In 1917, his parents had fled for their lives from Russia. He had no love for the Russians. “We need to get moving. Cut him loose.” He handed his knife to Eddie who followed his command.

Over the next hour or so, they banded together with stray paratroopers into a team of nine men. None had a rank higher than private, and most were from different regiments.

“What are we supposed to do?” Skeen’s voice trembled. His age showing.

“Exactly what they told us. I reckon Ste. Mère Église is that way give or take a couple miles which means that the Merderet River is to the east.”

“We’re on the wrong side of the river,” Merrill said. “We need to git to the other side of the river.”

Luka shook his head. “I say we make ourselves useful and do what they sent us here to do. What ammunition do we have?”

Most of them lost their equipment with their leg bags. But they had enough firepower to put up a fight.

“This is how I see it,” Luka said as he began to sketch out his plan on the ground. “We’re somewhere over here. The Merderet River is here. Ste. Mère Église and Carentan are here and here. The beaches are here. We dropped in about two hours ago which means that the amphibious assault will start in three hours.” He pointed out the locations. “We’re going find a way to secure this bridge.”

“Who died and made you commander?” Merrill snapped.

“He’s the one with the plan,” Skeen said. Apparently, that was enough for him.

“I’m not the commander, but if we don’t secure that bridge, a lot more of our men will die. Once the amphibious assault starts, the Germans are going to hit them with all their might. They’ll use the bridges as a supply line. If we manage to break that line, we’ll at least give our guys a fighting chance.”

“That’s too risky. We should find a C.O., and get on the right side of the river,” Merrill said.

“You do that. I’m going with him,” Eddie said. He and the rest of the guys nodded in agreement.

Merrill could tell that he was outmatched. “Fine,” he said begrudgingly.

“We scout the river and make a plan from there,” Luka said. He just prayed that he wasn’t leading these men astray.

The night still offered some cover, but the moon was three-quarters full. They had good visibility which meant that the Germans did too. They kept close to the ground. Luka knew that it was better safe than sorry. They moved slowly—carefully. Time doesn’t exist for a soldier. They could have crept along the French countryside for hours or mere minutes. Until there it was: the Merderet River. The winding river wasn’t very wide, but wide enough that a convoy couldn’t get across without a bridge.

When Luka saw headlights approaching, he signaled that the guys get down.

Lying on their stomachs on the river’s edge, the overgrown grass covered the paratroopers as Luka watched as the truck passed. Luka began to count. Sure enough, in about twenty minutes another truck passed. A plan began to form in his mind, but they’d have to act fast. Timing would be everything. “I’ve got a plan, but we’re going to have to split up.”

“There’s only nine of us,” Merrill reminded him.

“We know that, but the Germans won’t. We’re going to ambush the next truck and use it to block off the west side of the bridge. Merrill and you three will attack from the left flank. You’re throwing the grenades. Eddie and you three attack from the right flank. You deal with the rest of the Germans. I’ll take out the driver from the bridge—”

“That’s a purtty shot. Sure you can make it?” Merrill interrupted.

Luka ignored him and continued, “When I shoot that’s the cue for you to throw grenades. Our goal is to upend the truck on the west side of the river. Once that’s done, we get on the bridge, and we defend this position until backup arrives.”

“What backup?” Merrill asked.

“Whatever the Lord provides. Now I reckon we offer a prayer and get in position,” Luka bowed his head and prayed, “Lord, we ask for your protection. ‘For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall.’ Let us not fail in our courage. Amen.”

“Amen,” the men echoed.

Nerves threatened to overtake them. Skeen’s teeth were chattering; Merrill shifted his weight from one leg to another; and Luka prayed. *Preserve us.*

Most were untried. Sure, they had studied combat, but Luka knew that combat wasn't something learned—it had to be experienced.

"Get in position," Luka said as he watched Merrill lead his guys across the road.

Eddie saluted him as Luka walked on the road counting his steps.

He'd need a fair distance to aim right. Concealed by the bridge, he lay down on his belly; his rifle against the bridge to steady his aim. He saw the approaching headlights, but he held his position. He took a deep breath and fired.

*BANG!*

The shot shattered the eerie quiet of the dark night. The squeal of tires indicated that he hit his mark, and a resounding explosion proved that Merrill and his group hit the truck with grenades.

A breath later, Eddie and his group joined in with mortar fire.

Luka sighed a breath of relief. *It worked. Praise God, it worked!* He slung his rifle over his shoulder and ran over to where the guys were congratulating themselves.

"Search them for equipment," Luka ordered Eddie, glancing at the dead Germans.

They needed all the equipment that they could get. They'd secured their position and cut off the German supply line, but now they had to defend it.

Merrill stared down the road. "Won't take long now. You think they've stormed the beaches yet?"

Luka looked to where the sun was beginning to come up. "It'll be starting soon."

"How'd you make that shot?"

"Practice." But it was more than that. "My brothers were stationed at Pearl Harbor. They didn't make it, and I couldn't do anything about it. So, I enlisted. This war's personal."

They could see headlights in the distance.

"Well, Roosky, I'll see you on the other side." Merrill elbowed him, but his voice held a hint of respect.

Luka and the men held steady using the bridge and the overturned truck for cover. They listened as German voices carried.

*"Hände hoch!"* Luka barked.

The Germans instinctively raised their hands in salute only one tried to pull his pistol from his holster, but Luka shot him before he had a chance. Mortar

fire ensued as Luka's small band of nine defended with all their might. But the Germans just kept coming.

The night dragged on. They fought hard and unceasingly. They drew the attention of the more Germans who rallied against them and more American paratroopers who joined them.

They'd run out of ammo before the Germans would.

Luka's mind raced as he tried to think of what to do next. He'd completely lost track of time as his entire being oriented around combat.

"Panzer!" Eddie shouted.

"Fallback!" Luka ordered.

They made a run for it knowing they were no match for a Panzer tank.

The Germans continued to fire.

Merrill dropped as he took a hit in the leg.

Luka had almost made it to the other side of the river when he saw Merrill fall. He stopped short. He hadn't been there when his brothers had been lost to this war, but he liked to think that if he had been, he would have done whatever it took. So, he turned back. He didn't know who was more surprised the Germans or Merrill. Neither seemed to know what to do at first. Time seemed to freeze as Luka ran straight into enemy fire.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.* Luka felt peace settle over his heart; he wasn't afraid. He reached Merrill and half dragged—half carried him to the other side of the river.

"What in the world did you do that for?" Merrill asked as he used his machine gun for cover fire.

"You're the closest thing I've got to a brother, and I'm not losing another one to this war."

"You're an idiot, Roosky."

Panting, Luka grinned. The war was far from over, but they had survived. The Germans would not risk their position on the bridge to pursue them, but the Americans would return with a vengeance. "Yes, Comrade, but we made it through."

He couldn't bring his brothers back, but this war had given him a bond that was as strong as brotherhood.



## *Russian Snow*

*For my first creative narrative, I wanted to write a modern-day Esther set in Moscow, Russia. Mr. Wainwright warned me that it was too big of an idea for a short story, but I tried anyway.*

Dark clouds swirled around the golden spires of Saint Basil's Cathedral. Countless snowflakes fluttered downward like sparkling diamonds. The crimson stain of the past stood in stark contrast to the purity of the snow. As the czars of old, golden crowns sat atop buildings that shone like the jewels which were once worn by nobility before the treacherous fall. Emeralds, sapphires, and rubies—laden in gold and silver—lost to darkness. Palaces, kremlins, and cathedrals towered amid skyscrapers, factories, and homes—while past and present lodged together as if the czars were walking among the commoners. A chilly breeze twirled with the freshly fallen snow. The smell was clean as if something so pure could undo centuries of darkness. For Moscow had defined darkness. The red brushstrokes of communism were impossible to deny even in such a masterpiece. The snow which had fallen upon Russia for centuries remembered the dark past and the millions buried beneath her.

I didn't have time for snow. Dashing down a dark alley, I found my bodyguard Ivan leaning against my limo.

"Where to, Mr. Koskov?" He asked as he opened the door for me.

"The Moskva River."

"Odd request, sir." The car rumbled to life.

This whole ordeal was odd! My mother had forced me to be the prize for her Christmas Gala. The winner got to take me on a date of her choosing. I was expecting a lady of high society and a fancy restaurant. Instead, an anonymous winner had won and requested that we have a picnic at the Moskva River in the snow!

Ivan began humming the old Soviet anthem.

"You're in a cheerful mood," I noted, used to his dour scowl.

"Da." He grinned. "Your grandfather finally approved my legislation. You and the other delegates should be voting on it within the week." He grinned flashing his teeth.

I grimaced. Ivan's bill was a radical step backward, and I hadn't yet decided how I would vote. As Ivan opened my door, I pushed political thoughts from my mind and focused on finding my date.

It wasn't hard to find her because no one else sat on a picnic blanket by the river. Her name was Nadya Petrosky. Golden hair peeked from underneath a blue hat that matched the irises of her eyes. She wore a crimson red coat with a yellow scarf. A few curls had escaped and wisped about her face. Glasses that hid her thoughts sat atop her heart-shaped face. She had a small scar on her bottom lip.

"I made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches." She smiled brightly at me. Her accent was distinctly American.

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"My uncle and I travel a lot, but we've lived in Russia for a few years now." She handed me a sandwich with a topping of freshly fallen snow.

I couldn't remember the last time I had, had a sandwich.

Eyes sparkling, she handed me a thermos of hot chocolate.

"You put a lot of thought into this."

"No, not really, it's just a habit. My uncle and I have picnics by the river every Sunday." She nervously twirled a loose curl about her finger.

"Even in December?" I asked hoping to ease some of her tension. I assumed that she was simply nervous about being around Nikolai Koskov. I knew that my reputation preceded me. My grandfather, a powerful politician, was grooming me to be the same.

"There isn't a sight prettier than Moscow in the snow."

I'd never found much beauty in the city or snow. Moscow was a cesspool of corruption. Snow was a bother nothing more.

But she was right. The snow made the city look older almost as if the snow held memories of peace and beauty.

I concluded that Nadya Petrosky was a snowflake among women.

Time was too fleeting. Before I knew it, Nadya was packing up the picnic.

"This was quite lovely, but I should go home."

"I can at least drive you home."

"No! I—I mean that it is not far. It really isn't necessary," she said.

"I can't let you walk home alone."

She hesitated.

"You know technically our date isn't over yet." I wondered at her hesitancy.

"No?"

"Not until I drop you off at your door." I gently took her elbow and followed her down the sidewalk.

Although the streets were busy despite the snow, and traffic trumpeted its impatience; Nadya held all of my attention.

While we were waiting at a stoplight, Nadya fiddled with her scarf.

My brow furrowed as I watched an older gentleman touch her hand. "Be still," he whispered.

Something in his words seemed to quiet the worry in Nadya's spirit, but it unsettled mine. When the light turned green, I hastily took a step forward. The heavy snowfall obscured my view, but I heard screeching brakes skidding against the pavement. In my peripheral vision, I saw the faint lights of a car racing toward me. Time seemed frozen as I came face to face with death. I felt a hand roughly pull me back before the car could make its deadly impact. With adrenaline coursing through my veins, it took me a moment to realize that the old man had just saved my life! "What's your name?" I asked him, still shocked by what had just happened.

"Vlad."

"Is there anything I can do to repay you?"

"We cannot save ourselves."

*What does he mean?* At that moment, I heard Ivan shout out. I'd nearly forgotten—the board meeting. "I have to go—" I said to Nadya.

She looked relieved that I had to go but unexpectedly asked, "Do you want to go to dinner tomorrow?"

"Yes, I would like that. I'll arrange it."

"Let's meet on the bridge."

I glanced back toward Vlad. "I must repay you somehow."

Ivan approached us with a sneer. "Get away from him!"

"He just saved my life, Ivan."

"He's a Christian missionary," Ivan hissed.

I frowned. "He still saved my life."

But the debate progressed no further because I simply didn't have the time. It was ironic that a missionary had just saved my life because I was in a hurry for a bill that would expel missionaries. Ivan who had previously been thrilled that his bill was being approved now fumed. After an arduous board meeting, Ivan drove me to my home Koskov Mansion. Ivan drove through a turquoise metal gate with busts on each side. The three-story gothic building had been in my family for centuries. Striding up the stairs through the heavy cedar doors, my steps clattered against the black and white checkered floors. Paintings of my ancestors hung on the walls; thick fur carpets covered the cold floors; shelves filled with books, journals, and heirlooms—I had everything that I could ever want, but I felt hollow.

Something was missing. Nothing could satisfy me. I needed something more, but I didn't know what. I spent the night tossing and turning—my mind replaying the accident—I bolted awake drenched in sweat. My thoughts drifted back to the missionary who had saved my life.

He had told Nadya to be still.

*Nothing in this life is still! Even the snow, often an image of peace, is never still. Death isn't still. It flashed in violent delights. But Nadya was still. She was genuine and joyful. 'Be still,' he had said. Why did it make me feel so lost?*

The next morning the sky darkened while thunder rolled as if the clouds were at war with each other. Strikes of lightning marched against the heavenly gates reminiscent of the dark past. Choices of the heart with consequences of destruction had to be made. The war of men's hearts was never satisfied. Tears of division fell to the city below hardening into ice as they made their descent. It was in this gloomy weather that I waited for Nadya.

Ivan muttered gruffly in the background. "Sir, why can't we just wait in the car?"

"It's romantic."

"Bah!"

Even the Moskva swirled in dark hues of blues like a painter's palette. In the water's reflection, I saw myself: a tall man with dark hair and emerald eyes.

I smiled as Nadya appeared in the distance. As she neared, I saw a determination in her that I hadn't noticed before.

"Are we ready?" Ivan asked.

I rolled my eyes at his impatience as I opened the door of the limousine for Nadya.

"Where are we going?" She asked.

I told her that we were going to the Alexandria which was one of St. Petersburg's finest restaurants. It resembled the elegance of monarchy. The atmosphere captured a lost past. A dazzling chandelier hung on the ceiling over a marble floor. Nestled in glass display cases, Russian nesting dolls and Fabergé eggs filled the room with vibrant, sparkling colors.

The waitress led us to a marble table decorated with glowing candles and white roses. Nadya was wearing a soft yellow dress that ebbed like the candle's flame. The dance of the flames painted her as a sunset in hues of orange, yellow, and pink. Her brown hair shone like a golden crown. A sparkling necklace hung from her neck. Its bluish, green petals surrounded a rich red jewel.

As I pulled out her chair for her, my heart thumped wildly. She's beautiful.

Ivan sat in a booth behind us with a scowl. "I'll have borscht."

Nadya wrinkled her nose.

"Not a fan of borscht?" I chuckled.

"Not particularly, but I was wondering how your meeting went yesterday?"

*I didn't think she would care about politics.* "It went fine," I replied nonchalantly.

"So, do you think that the bill will be passed?" She whispered, clearly not wanting Ivan to overhear us.

"Unless someone speaks up, but most are too afraid of my grandfather."

"Nik, what do you think about the bill?"

"It is popular, and my grandfather is pleased with it."

"But what do *you* think?"

No one else had asked me that before, and I hesitated before responding. "I—I think it's a step backward."

"Then why have you not said anything?"

"What could I do? I'm just one man."

"It took only one man to seize control from the czar and kill millions. It

## A WRITER'S WILDERNESS

takes only one man to spark a war. It takes only one man to end it. And it only took one Man to save all of mankind. You might just be one man, but you can still try.”

“But why do you even care?”

“I care because this country is my home. To see her fall back into the past breaks my heart. A missionary saved your life! These missionaries sacrifice so much to give of themselves to Russia. They leave their native land, their friends and family, and sometimes even their safety to spread the gospel.”

Her passion shone too brightly like the sun sparkling upon the snow. With dawning realization, I exclaimed, “*You* are a missionary!”

“I am Vlad’s niece,” she whispered.

The truth explained why she had been vague and secretive. I didn’t know if I felt angry or honored that she would share her secrets with me. With the steady beating of my heart, I knew which emotion won. “You really think I could make a difference?” I asked.

“I think that we are all made for such a time as this.”

Right before Christmas, we voted on whether or not to pass Ivan’s bill. Once I cast the vote against it, there weren’t enough votes to pass it through. Ivan was so furious that I eventually had to fire him. His hardened heart kept him trapped in the past. However, Nadya’s light had freed me. She and her uncle taught me about their God. I had much to learn, but I wanted to know more. There was an emptiness inside me that Nadya and Vlad filled with Love.

We were bundled in coats as we sat beside the Neva for our Sunday picnic. The day was bright with hope. The river was frozen in shades of silvery grey. The snow looked like a blanket draped across the city. Icicles hung on trees as nature’s Christmas ornaments. I smiled at Nadya who twirled as the sparkling snow floated to the ground.

“Isn’t it just beautiful, Uncle Vlad?” she exclaimed.

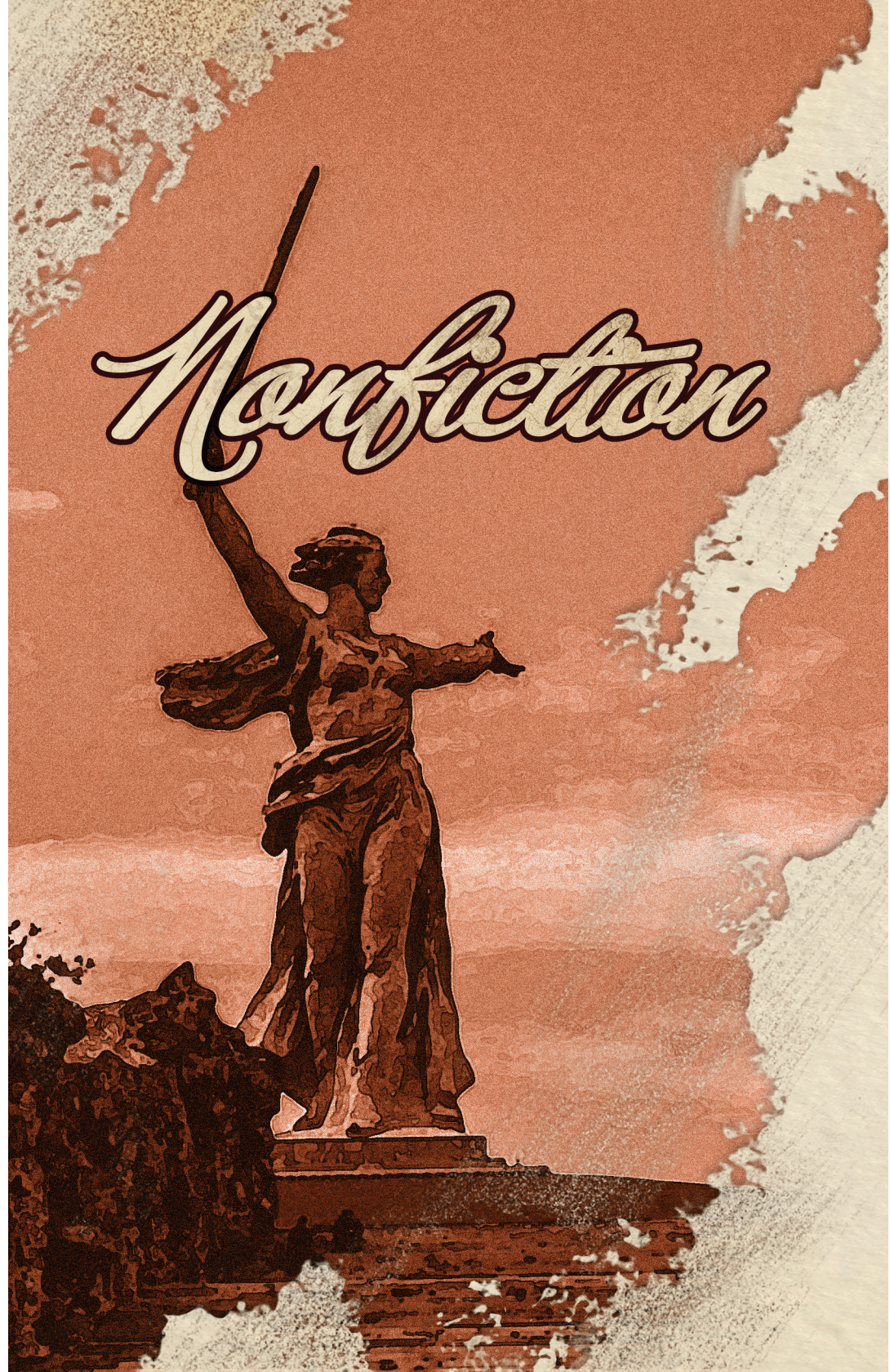
He laughed heartily, “Indeed! But then again I can find nothing in creation that is ugly.”

“Not even a mosquito?”

“Ah, but that is what is so great about Russia. It’s too cold for mosquitos!”

While I watched the Russian snow fall around my home and my hope, I noticed that the crimson stains of the past were gone. In its place was a purity that only God could provide.

# Nonfiction



## *the motherland is calling*

*My great, great grandmother escaped from Russia. Russia is in my roots, and if Olga hadn't escaped, my story would have been very different. I feel the pain of the Russian people because it could have been mine.*

What does Motherland mean? Her roots are tangled in the terror of Communism, but her roots reach far deeper than Communism's red stain. Motherland is more than love of country. She transcends time, history, and even death. She is not blind to the horror her people suffered, nor is she ignorant of those who perverted her call. But still, she loves her people.

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Every city has a story.

Volgograd is a city with a story so horrific it can never be fully understood. The city rests next to the Volga River which reflects the very heart and soul of Russia and her people.

For centuries, the Russian people have affectionally nicknamed the Volga *Matushka* or mother.

Mamayev Kurgan is the highest point of the city. It was once described as a hill, but today it is often described as a mound. On top of this mound is a statue.

“With her sword raised and mouth open in a scream. The Motherland Calls statue is Russia's most powerful symbol of sacrifice.”<sup>55</sup> Standing at 170 feet high, the Motherland Calls used to be the tallest statue in the world, and it is the tallest statue of a woman. She personifies Mother Russia herself. The





wind breathes against her hair and clothes as if the statue were flesh and blood.

Each step brings you closer and closer to the top where the statue seems to grow larger and larger before your eyes.

From her open mouth a thunderous sound...from the depths of the bowels of the earth... this cry, her call, and her challenge! This is the voice of the Mother, who appeals to her sons and daughters! Our Motherland is calling us, calling all to defend our native land, our homeland, our roots.<sup>56</sup>

Every story has roots.

The Motherland Calls is the crown of the tree whose roots reach every crevice of Volgograd. She guards tens of thousands of dead soldiers entombed in Mamayev Kurgan. And countless more left to be found. These are her roots. These are her stories.

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Vassili Zaitsev started his military career in the navy as a bookkeeper. He was only 5'3. He didn't look like much, and he especially didn't look like he belonged in "the battle of Stalingrad—the most ferocious and lethal battle in human history."<sup>57</sup>

Vassili felt restless like a wolf trapped in a rifle's scope. The severity of the war wasn't lost on him. "It hurt me to keep serving in a peaceful city, so far from the front."<sup>58</sup>

His motherland was calling. Russia was the only home he knew; Russia had nurtured his roots until he ripened for such a time; and now Russia needed to be defended by those who loved her most.

But willingness isn't always met with expectation.

He stood stiffly before an intimidating bald major, but Vassili locked their gazes. No, he would not be the first to look away.

The major finally asked, "So, where did you learn how to shoot?"<sup>59</sup>

Vassili replied that he had learned in weapons training, but that wasn't where Vassili had learned to shoot.

His grandfather had taught him how to shoot in the Ural Mountains. Mountains have a way of seeping inside of bones of steadying souls. "We come from a long line of hunters, my boy."

Vassili had always suffered for being a runt, but never from his grandfather. Up on top of the world, Vassili learned skills that would turn him into something much greater than a hunter.

The major who only saw Vassili's outward appearance said, "Now I'm going to teach you the real way to shoot."<sup>60</sup>

Vassili was a loaded gun who couldn't hold back his anger any longer. His body reverberated as the trigger released.

I was already in a foul mood and his words made me feel even worse. Sure, this chump was going to teach me how to shoot, and meanwhile, the war would be over!

"Excuse me, sir, you want to teach me to shoot? I guarantee that I'm already a better shot than you. For more than a year now I've been begging for a transfer to the front. Let me shoot at fascists, not paper targets!"

The major could have had me court-martialed for this idiotic outburst, but instead, something unexpected happened. He got up from behind his desk and shook my hand with a firm grip. He said, "Why, you're a real sailor, not some pansy.... You've got some backbone. Fine, I'll work on it. Consider your request granted. You're dismissed."<sup>61</sup>

Vassili had finally volunteered for the front, but he still had to prove himself to Kapitan Kotov.

The Kapitan eyed Vassili with obvious disdain. "Tell me, how does a bookkeeper like yourself stay in practice, when you're lucky if you see a target range once a year?"<sup>62</sup>

Vassili shook with rage.

No one took him seriously! They saw his height and laughed. They heard of his bookkeeping and scoffed.

It was as if he weren't a real military man!

“Careful what you say, *tovarich* [comrade] *Kapitan*. I might be a better shot than you.”

Kotov was astonished at my audacity, and the soldiers and sailors nearby who overheard my remark were all taken aback. But since I had tossed down the gauntlet, Kotov had to respond to my challenge.<sup>63</sup>

Three bottles were set up thirty paces away.

More soldiers and sailors gathered round unable to resist the showdown. “This was going to be a contest between the army and the navy.”<sup>64</sup> The army and the navy have a natural rivalry. Each thinking that they are better than the other, but now soldiers and sailors were forced to mix their ranks. The army needed more men. Some were volunteers like Vassili; some had no choice.

Kotov went first. He unholstered his pistol and took careful aim. “Now I’ll demonstrate how a real marksman shoots.” His first shot fell short.<sup>65</sup>

“The soldiers groaned, while the sailors all chuckled.”<sup>66</sup>

“Just warming up,” said *Kapitan* Kotov. He was embarrassed and was turning a bit red. He shot again, and this time he hit the first bottle. By the time he emptied his magazine, only one bottle was still whole, but it had fallen so that it faced us end-on—a much smaller and more difficult target.... “All right, chief, let’s see if you can live up to your recommendations.

I took the pistol and raised it theatrically, in the style of duelists of the nineteenth century. When I leveled it, I smoothly pulled the trigger and shot the bottle straight through.”<sup>67</sup>

Laughing his fellow seamen hooted and hollered, “There’s a sailor for you!” While the soldiers groaned and chanted, “Luck, luck!”<sup>68</sup>

“One shot doesn’t prove anything,” huffed *Kapitan* Kotov. “I doubt that you could pull that off again. Why don’t you try a different target?” He pulled off his hat to replace the broken bottles.<sup>69</sup>

Vassili had three bullets left. “But *tovarich kapitan*, you’ll end up without your hat,” he protested.<sup>70</sup>

Folding his arms, Kotov told Vassili to proceed.

In a blink of an eye, all three bullets were through the Red Army star emblem on top of the hat’s visor.

The sailors cheered, and the soldiers shrugged.

“Not bad,” *Kapitan* Kotov conceded.<sup>71</sup>

Vassili tried to return Kotov’s pistol, but Kotov refused and handed Vassili his belt and holster. “This is yours and with it a hundred bullets.”

Vassili was speechless.

Kotov put his hands on Vassili’s shoulders. “Now go drill holes in some fascists!”<sup>72</sup>

“The other sailors congratulated me on my ‘baptism of fire.’ One doubter cropped up, claiming ‘Zaitsev just got lucky,’ but others rebuked him, saying: ‘Have you ever heard about the hunters that come from the Urals? No? Then button up, wise guy.’”<sup>73</sup>

Vassili didn’t know where the motherland was calling him. He didn’t know that he was a pawn.

All he knew was that his country needed him, thus Vassili’s story began.

If a story has roots, a seed must have been planted. This seed was born through man-made gods playing “chess with humanity.”<sup>74</sup>

These man-made gods were parallels of each other. They were both outsiders; neither belonged to the country they controlled. They were cut off from their roots and had to tie themselves to something else. Both were abused by their fathers, both were doted on by their mothers; both turned to anarchy, brutality, and paranoia. Neither knew anything about Vassili Zaitsev yet.

Man-made gods demand sacrifice, but “I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”<sup>75</sup>

Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin would demand much more than mere sacrifice. They had both been very aware of the other and admired the other’s totalitarian brutality. It made sense that these socialist countries that these dictators would find an understanding in each other.

But both Hitler and Stalin were too greedy and too paranoid for such an alliance to last.

For Hitler “the ‘real’ war, the war he had always intended to wage, was against Russia.”<sup>76</sup> But Hitler’s plans concerning Russia were much darker, “in the East things were to be quite different. Against Russia, Germany would wage total war. ‘We have a war of annihilation on our hands.’”<sup>77</sup>

In 1941, Germany invaded Russia. Stalin had been warned by his generals and even Churchill of Hitler’s coming attack, but he refused to listen.

“Stalin, who trusted nobody else, appears to have been the last human being on earth to trust Hitler’s word.... Stalin gave way to hys-

teria and despair. Not until 3 July, eleven days later, could he bring himself to address the nation. Then he used a tone that was new to him: 'Brothers and sisters... my friends.'<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps, Stalin trusted Hitler because he recognized a kindred spirit? Like Hitler, Stalin would not easily give up his divinity. This was a man responsible for over 20 million deaths, and he knew how to play the game. Stalin turned Hitler's racism and war of extermination against him. He turned this fight into the Great Patriotic War. He called on the Russian people's roots. He called to them as brothers, sisters, and friends. He even allowed the practice of religion which "was perhaps the biggest single factor in the recovery of a national identity."<sup>79</sup>

Stalin called millions like Vassili Zaitsev with the false call of the motherland. He focused on the survival of his regime, not his country, or even his people.

At first, the Russian people had welcomed the Nazi soldiers as saviors from Stalin. They had no idea that Hitler and Stalin were two sides of the same coin.

Behind the Nazi armies, killing squads followed.

The Russians fled from one monster to the one they knew. They needed to believe in something, so they unwittingly allowed themselves to be manipulated. For the first time since the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian people had hope.

But Stalin had no friends just like Hitler.

These were men who were incapable of trust, and they cared nothing for the pawns they would use. They were master manipulators capable of leading millions to the slaughter.

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Operation Blue began on June 28, 1942; but this time the Russians knew that the Germans were coming. The Russian army had yet to recover from Germany's first invasion. "Most soldiers in the Soviet Army had become convinced the Germans were unbeatable."<sup>80</sup>

No one believed that Russia could stand against Germany.

In Hitler's mind, Russia was a hollow tree. One blow would topple it. But he failed to realize that invading Russia was like an elephant attacking a colony of ants. The elephant would kill some, but eventually, the sheer number of ants would overwhelm the elephant.

But it was not just sheer numbers that finally stopped the unbeatable German

army. It was men like Vassili Zaitsev with Russian stubbornness in their roots. It was men who heard their motherland's call.

Hitler's "Sixth Army had pushed through the southern Soviet Union at breathtaking speed, heading for the Caucasus where there was oil."<sup>81</sup>

The game was set. The seed was planted.

Two man-made gods circled each other like lions.

Their pawns would clash in Volgograd which was once called Stalingrad.

The Germans and Russians had absolute faith in their man-made gods. "The order from Stalin was 'No surrender.' The order from Hitler was 'No retreat.'"<sup>82</sup>

Stalingrad had not been Hitler's main objective, but the city's location made it valuable. Stalingrad was also an important industry in the Soviet Union's economy with factories and a civilian population "under half a million, and the city was considered a safe haven far behind the front lines; by the summer of 1942, it was teeming with refugees."<sup>83</sup>

Both Hitler and Stalin recognized the significance of this city.

From the outset of the battle, Soviet leaders impressed on soldiers the symbolic significance of Stalingrad.... Losing Stalingrad to the Germans would damage the myth of the city and its eponymous hero, and had to be prevented by all means. For the same reasons, the city was crucially important to Hitler. Banking on the psychological blow that a Soviet defeat would deliver to Stalin, he framed it early on as a battle between two opposing worldviews.<sup>84</sup>

Early September, the Sixth Army reached the city's edge.

"The city's administrators implored Stalin to permit the evacuation of factories and civilians—to no avail."<sup>85</sup>

Stalin pounded his fist on his desk and declared, "Where should they be evacuated? The city must be held. That's final!"<sup>86</sup>

For two weeks, the Luftwaffe mercilessly bombed the city.

The trapped civilians and soldiers trembled as their city fell apart around them. Stalingrad was reduced to ruins as fire rained from the sky. Over 40,000 civilians perished.

Only after the city had been reduced to nothing more than a skeletal figure, did Stalin allow the surviving women and children to evacuate.

On September 14, 1942, the Sixth Army stormed the city convinced that nothing

could have survived. But the Germans “didn’t really know their adversary.”<sup>87</sup>

The Russian soldiers had dug in like roots to every crevice of Stalingrad. They grew to spite the enemy that would destroy them.

The Germans could barely believe the bitter street fighting they met. German propaganda explained, “The Bolsheviks attack until total exhaustion, and defend themselves until the physical extermination of the last man and weapon.... The Soviet soldiers originated from a ‘baser, dim-witted humanity’ unable to ‘recognize the meaning and value of life.’”<sup>88</sup>

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The night of September 22, 1942, Vassili took his first steps in Stalingrad. He had no idea that he was living history; no one ever does.

Their crossing of the Volga was made in the dead of night. They were blinded by the darkness, but still, they tried to peer ahead to see what was in store for them. It was pitch black with no sound beyond their own breathing and the thrumming tugboats.

They were sitting ducks braced for an impact that didn’t come.

The Germans did not fire a single round at us.... The Germans simply let their guard down, presuming that the Russian army at Stalingrad was already broken, and that among the city’s ruins there only remained isolated bands of “kamikaze” communists. The Nazis must have believed that all that remained for them to do were a few wipe-up operations, and the Red Army in Stalingrad would be *kaput*.<sup>89</sup>

Vassili only had an idea of what was coming, but “I was resigned to whatever was going to come.... I was not going to retreat, even if I was staring death in the face.”<sup>90</sup>

Combat isn’t something that can be understood without experience.

Once on the shore, “we could see that our officers were getting jittery, and this made us even more nervous. It became obvious that we were going into battle at any minute. But where was the enemy, where was his front line? It seemed like no one wanted to find out.”<sup>91</sup>

A blood-red dawn rose revealing the broken factory district. Giant petrol

tanks blocked their view to the left. What could be behind them? Farther back, a railway yard was littered with empty carriages. God only knew what was hiding there.

German scouts spotted the Russian recruits in minutes.

“Incendiary bombs began raining down, with a steady pattern of concussions, each one of which rattled our teeth. Turmoil reigned amongst us—sailors rushed back and forth, not knowing what to do.”<sup>92</sup>

Kotov and Vassili leaped into a bomb crater. They were trapped there “glued to the earth.”<sup>93</sup> All they could do was wait for the bombing to die down while their wounded comrades cried out pleading for help.

“We heard the whoosh, whoosh, whoosh of our *katyushas*, firing from the opposite bank. Nice job, boys, and right on time!”<sup>94</sup> The Russian multi-barreled rocket launcher pulverized the Germans back.

Vassili watched the mesmerizing yellow and gold flames as “men and pieces of men [were] thrown into the air in every direction.”<sup>95</sup>

“*Rodina!* [For the motherland!]” The Leytenant shouted as he raised his pistol and dashed toward the petrol tanks where the Germans had taken position.

It was as if a spring had shot me to my feet—I don’t recall how, but I ended up at his side. I urged my fellow sailors to follow me. Our line—which had been wavering—suddenly pulled back together. Every one of us leaped to our feet. Our fear and hesitation had been eradicated. A united attack can embolden even the most timid.<sup>96</sup>

As the Russians charged almost outflanking the Germans, the Luftwaffe rained fire above them. The petrol tanks exploded like kernels of popcorn. Yellow fire embraced the charging soldiers.

Everything was showered with burning fuel. Above us were gigantic tongues of flame, dancing with a deafening roar.... The soldiers and sailors who were engulfed in flames ripped off their burning clothes, but none of us halted our advance, nor did we drop our weapons. An attack of naked, burning men—what the Germans must have thought about us, I can only guess. Perhaps they took us for demons, or maybe saints that not even flames could stop.<sup>97</sup>

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The life expectancy of a Russian soldier in Stalingrad was less than twenty-four hours.

But Vassili survived his first week despite constant fighting.

His unit was stationed in the most dangerous part of the city: Mamayev Hill. They fought constantly with the Germans over a metalworking factory that would change hands “five to six times daily.”<sup>98</sup>

The city looked crushed. Skeletons of buildings stood lifeless. Craters punctured what was once sidewalks, streets, and roads. Bodies littered the earth with no care whether they were friends or foes.

Vassili barely noticed the carnage and destruction around him. He only had one goal: to reach his bunker which was as safe as anything ever was in Stalingrad and fall asleep. He and his fellow soldiers fought until total exhaustion. “I was passing out on my feet, and I wandered past this nightmare scenario like a sleepwalker.”<sup>99</sup> When he reached his bunker, he heard the unmistakable sound of the German artillery. The very earth trembled and shook from the violence inflicted on it.

“Exhaustion pressed me against the wall of the bunker. I squatted down, then leaned back until sleep overpowered me. what a strong force it can be—neither the sound of pounding fists nor of shooting guns can call you back when sleep wants to carry you away.”<sup>100</sup>

Vassili dreamed of a beautiful nurse he had met and sworn to protect as if he were her brother. Both he and his friend Nikolai were in love with her.

He woke from hunger to find nothing but darkness. He barely remembered where he was as he tried to find a match to light a cigarette.

One of my hands brushed something nearby. It was a face. I felt a moustache, and then sticky congealing blood. I finally located my matches and lit one. My hands were shaking. In the flickering light, I saw what at first looked to be men sleeping, but their legs and arms were frozen at odd angles.... They were the slain bodies of Russian soldiers, dozens of them, tossed into this abandoned bunker.<sup>101</sup>

With his heart beating like a hammer, Vassili used a lit cigarette to look around. The light barely broke through the thick darkness, but it was all he had. “I realized that somehow I had been sleeping amidst corpses. My

comrades must have taken me for dead and tossed me into a mass grave! I broke into a cold sweat.”<sup>102</sup>

Fear and panic threatened to overtake him, but Vassili told himself to snap out of it. He crept like a worm along the wooden wall of the bunker. He was boxed in. He managed to find a small shovel that he had seen with his lit cigarette. But no matter where he dug, he hit wood.

“I had been buried alive, and it was impossible to control my reactions. I began to hyperventilate, and then I realized that the air was getting stuffy. If I did not make my way out soon. I would suffocate, like a bug in a glass jar.”<sup>103</sup>

Vassili’s shovel hit against a crate filled with grenades. He tried to find spots where he hadn’t already dug, but darkness and panic made this much more difficult. He was terrified knowing that his air supply was diminishing, but he kept digging. “Let me get to freedom, let me see the sky, let me see my buddies again!”<sup>104</sup>

He collapsed and thought desperately for a way to escape. “I couldn’t think straight; my ears were ringing, and with every passing minute, breathing was getting more difficult.”<sup>105</sup>

Death was coming for him like roots pulling him to an early grave. But Vassili refused to die buried alive. He grabbed the shovel and worked non-stop. He could barely breathe.

“With my absolute last strength, I shoved my legs against the wooden beams and bashed at the wall with my shovel. I hit the wall three times. On the final thrust, I broke through to emptiness.” He was still surrounded by darkness, and his breathing was labored, “but this was the darkness of the night sky and not that of the tomb.”<sup>106</sup>

The inky darkness felt like an old friend. Even the awful noise of war confirmed that he was still alive. Vassili soon realized that he was on the wrong side; “the only way I could return to the Russian lines would be to eliminate both the Fritz machine guns at the metalworking factory.”<sup>107</sup> He crawled back into the tomb knowing he had to find the box of grenades, but he was out of cigarettes. Gritting his teeth, he set to his morbid task—searching through pockets of fallen comrades until he found a matchbox. The tiny flame flickered leading him like the north star to the broken crate filled with grenades. He stuffed his pockets with as many as he could carry.

Rising from the tomb, Vassili was grateful to the flares popping above him

briefly illuminating the darkness. He knew that a Russian raid on the factory was imminent.

Every few hours, the Russians or the Germans would retake the factory from each other. It was a never-ending battle.

Vassili was covered in dirt and essentially undistinguishable. He pressed himself into the ground watching the German post before heaving grenades through the windows of the factory. He could hear the Russians charge as they overran the factory.



Knowing that now the position was theirs, Vassili propped himself up against a wall. His body quaked with exhaustion.

“No one thought of me. I was still covered with filth, and stood like an apparition against a wall.”<sup>108</sup>

Kapitan Kotov found Vassili like this looking like a standing corpse. Kotov wiped the filth

off Vassili’s face. Shock and recognition filled his eyes. He froze before grabbing Vassili and dragging him to the Leytenant.

The Leytenant stared at Vassili as if he were a ghost before crying, “He’s alive, he’s alive.” He embraced Vassili. “I thought we had buried you.”<sup>109</sup>

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Vassili’s journey to sniper would not be without tragedy. After his friend Kuzma had died from friendly fire, Vassili reminisced about a moment when he had seen the real beauty of Kuzma’s soul.

They had been marching through a town where a crowd had gathered hoping to see their sons.

Kuzma spotted his mother and requested permission to break formation. He ran across the street “as the rest of us sailors watched the reunion.”<sup>110</sup>

Vassili and the other soldiers could not help but think of their own mothers as Kuzma embraced his.

Mother—it is a sacred word. It is the honour and root of the family.  
A mother represents the family’s immortality. Our very first word

is directed to her: ‘Mama.’ And when a soldier is about to leave this world, the words that escape his lips are also spoken to her. There is no deeper or more nobler thing on this earth than a mother’s love for her children.<sup>111</sup>

Before he died, Kuzma had promised Vassili that they would get out of Stalingrad alive.

“Now it was up to me to seek retribution. And the ones who were guilty of Kuzma’s death were the invaders. I picked up my rifle and left the bunker. I would avenge Kuzma. The enemy would find no mercy from me.”<sup>112</sup>

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It was now October.

“The enemy soldiers advanced ruthlessly, with no concern for casualties. At times it seemed that Hitler had decided to drown his entire army in blood.”<sup>113</sup>

The Russian soldiers had “learned to live under fire, and to the enemy, it must have seemed that the stones, the bricks, and even the dead were firing at them.”<sup>114</sup>

The only solution to the Germans was to turn the city into dust. “They even destroyed our dead.... It is difficult to sit by and watch, while your comrades are suffering. You feel as if you should be there in their place; that is just the nature of the Russian soldier.”<sup>115</sup>

The lessons from his grandfather kept Vassili alive. He could hear his grandfather’s voice as he faced a new prey, “Look, my boy, and learn how one must bravely and calmly deal with a ferocious adversary.”<sup>116</sup>

And indeed, his adversary was ferocious.

“Shoot with a steady aim and look your prey in the eye.... Become one with the ground, press yourself against it.... Crawl up as closely as possible—if you don’t, your shot will miss its mark.”<sup>117</sup>

Crawling in the ruins of Stalingrad, Vassili had to become invisible. Their supplies came ever slowly from across the Volga—every bullet counted.

It was as if his grandfather had known that Vassili would need the skills of a hunter to survive. “Use every bullet wisely, Vassili. Learn to shoot and never miss. This will help you, and not just when you are hunting four-legged beasts.”

As the German soldiers approached, Vassili remembered his grandfather’s words. “Find yourself a good spot, be silent, and wait.... Lie perfectly still, and

don't move a muscle.... Never get big-headed over your accomplishments, let them speak for themselves. That way you'll always remember to try harder the next time."<sup>118</sup>

These are the skills that helped him survive much longer than twenty-four hours. These are the skills that caught the eye of a major. And these are the skills that turned him into a sniper.

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The sniper would become Stalingrad's greatest weapon.

The broken city provided countless hiding places for snipers.

Snipers picked off specific targets: machine gunners, ranking officers, and other snipers. Often, they saved the lives of their fellow soldiers with a single bullet. "A sniper must be courageous and have an iron will."<sup>119</sup>

The sniper became so indispensable that more were needed.

Vassili was ordered to start a sniper school. This was no ordinary school for their training field would be in a warzone. He formed a rag-tag group consisting of a Ukrainian, an intellectual, and a farmer.

"Unlike the German army that filled its units with soldiers from the same region so as to buttress their regional identity... the Soviet military mixed recruits from different nationalities, lest they turn nationalistic."<sup>120</sup>

Vassili was a natural professor and explained that being a sniper was about "awareness and self-control. The sniper must identify his target, immediately size it up, and then destroy it with a single shot."<sup>121</sup> He burned small details into his mind creating a map of the area he guarded. "Small changes that appeared insignificant could in reality be targets. The sniper had to be able to react instantaneously when a worthy target exposed itself."<sup>122</sup>

Vassili did all he could to prepare his students, and his methods were very effective.

The graduates of his sniper school killed over 3,000 Germans in the battle of Stalingrad.

The soldier's constant worry is how to survive and defeat the enemy.... My obligation went further: to turn soldiers into snipers.... It was my belief that every sniper I trained would be capable of avenging me, and could protect our comrades from a premature death. Even if I should be killed, my students would be able to act

on what I had taught them and help bring the war to a victorious conclusion. For that reason, the sniper's art determined my every thought and action."<sup>123</sup>

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General Chuikov called a Vassili and several other soldiers to his bunker. He gave them each a medal with the inscription *for valour*. Holding their gazes intently, he began to speak:

By defending Stalingrad, we're tying the enemy hand and foot. The outcome of this war and the fate of millions of Soviet citizens—our fathers, mothers, wives, and children—depend upon our determination to fight here to the bitter end.... How could we ever look our fellow countrymen in the eyes, if we retreat?<sup>124</sup>

Vassili felt that Chuikov was speaking directly to him.

"He knew that I had been born in the Urals, and knew that my family—grandfather, father, and mother, as well as many of my comrades—were there now. No, there was no way I could face them."<sup>125</sup>

Vassili answered the general without hesitation, "We have nowhere to retreat; for us, there is no land beyond the Volga."<sup>126</sup>

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Vassili mastered the art of being a sniper. He methodically studied his prey knowing that men were not wolves.

Every man was a different beast who would fall for different tricks.

Experienced Nazi snipers moved into their positions under cover of machine-gun fire, in the company of two to three assistants. Thereafter, they worked alone.

When facing such a lone wolf, I would usually pretend to be a beginner or even an ordinary infantryman. I would dull my opponent's vigilance or simply play around with him a bit. I would set up a decoy to draw his fire.

The Nazi would soon become accustomed to such a target and

would stop noticing it.

As soon as something else distracted him, I would instantly take up the position of my decoy.<sup>127</sup>

He learned through experience that a deadly silent location could hide a cunning enemy. "This is why I told my fellow snipers: if you haven't studied your surroundings, if you haven't spoken with your men on the ground in the area, then you're asking for trouble."<sup>128</sup> But even more important was staying hidden. He would use a trench periscope to carefully observe the area. "When you go out to the front lines, conceal yourself from view completely. Lie there like a stone and merely observe."<sup>129</sup>

Vassili would press himself against the charred bones of the city and become a rock scarcely breathing as he waited. He always remembered that his greatest enemy was another sniper.

"You must outsmart him, draw him into an intricate battle, and in this way, tether him to a single spot.... You must create distractions, scatter his attention, change your tracks, exasperate him with diversionary movements, and exhaust his ability to concentrate."<sup>130</sup>

These tactics would make Vassili infamous among the Germans.

Vassili had no home. He had sniper holes, bomb craters, or sewer tunnels. "A sniper is a nomad, and his job is to pop up where his enemy least expects him."<sup>131</sup>

The Germans expected snipers.

Vassili's achievements did not go unnoticed.

"The Wehrmacht command was seriously concerned about the damage being inflicted by our snipers."<sup>132</sup> Their concern was great enough to summon Major Konings, history's ghost.

No records have ever been found on Konings, and many historians believe that he is no more than Soviet propaganda.

A captured German told Vassili's officers that Konings "had been flown in for the express purpose of taking out... the Russian's 'main rabbit.'"<sup>133</sup>

Vassili Zaitsev was such a notorious name that the Germans knew its literal translation: rabbit.

Their greatest predator was named after prey.

Vassili's commanding officers were confident of an easy victory, but Vassili "was apprehensive. I was worn down, tired to the bone, and fatigue is the sniper's

worst enemy. The sniper who is fatigued becomes hasty and loses his accuracy."

<sup>134</sup>He was always a humble man and knew his greatness couldn't last. "Every day I watched my fellow Russian soldiers being killed or wounded. As day after day passed without my being hit, I kept thinking this was like having a run of luck at cards: I knew it couldn't last forever."<sup>135</sup>

Vassili was no stranger to sniper dueling, but neither was Konings. They would be well-matched. Two snipers in a game created by their man-made gods. Their battle would represent the battle of the gods.

Vassili began his hunt. "My comrades and I sought the path to a decisive battle with the Berlin super-sniper, who so far outsmarted us. His talent began taking its toll on us."<sup>136</sup>

Finally, Vassili's enemy showed his hand.

Two of his snipers found themselves in a duel but were outfoxed. "Both Morozov and Shaikin were experienced snipers who had come out on top in numerous complex and arduous duels; the fact that they had been outsmarted convinced me their opponent could only have been Konings."<sup>137</sup>

Vassili and Nikolai Kulikov, one of his students and friends, followed this trail. "All of a sudden a helmet rose into view and slowly moved along the trench. Shoot? No—it was a trap: the bobbing of the helmet was clearly unnatural."<sup>138</sup>

The bobbing helmet was not Konings but rather his assistant holding a helmet up on a stick. A method that had been used in World War 1 to draw a sniper's fire. If a sniper fired, he gave away his position.

Vassili and Nikolai didn't take the bait. They waited until darkness had swallowed them whole. Still, they had no notion of where their enemy was hiding; "the German was truly a master of the art of camouflage."<sup>139</sup>

"Where can that blasted cur be hiding?" Nikolai asked.<sup>140</sup>

Vassili sighed. "That's the rub. We don't have a clue."<sup>141</sup>

"Maybe he left a long time ago."<sup>142</sup>

Vassili didn't reply, but he doubted it. "Something told me that a sniper as skillful and as patient as Konings could have sat opposite us for an entire week, if he had to, without moving a muscle. It was necessary for us to be especially vigilant."<sup>143</sup>

They retreated under the cover of the night only to return the next day. They could hear the hissing of shells, but "we stayed glued to our scopes."<sup>144</sup>

"There he is! I can point him out to you—" one of Vassili's men cried. For



barely a second, he had raised himself over the trench's rim.  
Just enough time for their ghost to fire a wounding shot.

Only a top sniper could have made that shot, could have fired with such quickness and precision. I peered into my scope for hour after hour, but still couldn't locate him.... I saw nothing suspicious. Our opponent seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth. Nevertheless, by the quickness of the shot, I concluded that the Berlin super-sniper had to be somewhere in front of us.<sup>145</sup>

Vassili and Nikolai watched their surroundings but saw nothing new. A bombed-out tank, but a sniper like Konings would never hide there; a pillbox, but he wouldn't hide there either; in between the tank and the pillbox there was a sheet of iron next to a pile of broken bricks on a flat clearing.

It had been there since we first arrived at this position, and I had been ignoring it. I put myself in the shoes of my enemy: What would be the ideal sniper's roost? What about digging out a little hole beneath that sheet of iron? I could sneak out to it during the night... Yes, I realized he was probably right there, under the sheet of iron, lying out in no man's land.<sup>146</sup>

Vassili's hunch had to be checked. Playing with fire, he took off his glove and tugged it onto a plank of wood before carefully raising it over the trench.

"The Nazi took my bait! Aha—excellent. I carefully lowered the board down into the trench, holding its face in the same direction in which I had raised it. I inspected the hole—it was perfectly flat and round... the bullet had entered the board head-on."<sup>147</sup>

"There's our serpent," Nikolai whispered.<sup>148</sup>

Knowing where Konings was hidden did them little good if they couldn't lure him out of his haunting. They would have to wait for the perfect moment.

The harsh Russian winter was setting in. It was a frigid night with howling wind echoing between the ruins of Stalingrad.

Both sides were suffering with little food or water.

Vassili and his men had become so desperate for water they had taken canteens from the dead German soldiers.

Both sides were past the point of exhaustion. They were holding on for dear

life. They were hopeless, trapped in hell on earth. They continued to survive paying more for survival every day.

Vassili and Nikolai waited the entire night in a frozen trench. Perhaps, they tried to sleep despite the constant groans of a war-stricken city. They leaned on each other offering what little warmth they had. They probably didn't dare light a cigarette; and if they had food, they probably shared it.

"While the direct rays of the sun fell upon our rival's position. Something glimmered beneath the edge of the iron plate—was it a random fragment of glass or a rifle's scope?"<sup>149</sup>

Something unsaid between them determined that the culmination of this battle of wits was here.

Nikolai took off his helmet and raised it above the trench. He attempted "a feint that only an experienced sniper can pull off credibly. The enemy fired." Nikolai put on a show as if he had been shot. He "cried out loudly and collapsed."<sup>150</sup>

"At last, the Soviet sniper, their 'main rabbit' that I've hunted these four long days, is dead!" the German probably thought to himself, and he stuck his head up behind the sheet of iron. I pulled the trigger and the Nazi's head sunk."<sup>151</sup>

Vassili's shoulders finally relaxed. He had earned himself another day. But how many more would he have?



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Vassili was one of the few who survived Stalingrad. But it would not be without sacrifice. He was wounded and almost lost his sight.

Blackness—the symbol of opposition to knowledge, of oppression and violence; the colour of the swastika.... The most malicious creatures always rely darkness. This is how I thought about the black mist that had overtaken me. This darkness had robbed me of the greatest contribution I had to offer my country—the ability to see the enemy and destroy him.<sup>152</sup>

One man-made god had been toppled, but a far worse one survived. He would continue his oppression of the Russian people despite all they sacrificed.

In November, the Soviets encircled the city trapping the Sixth Army. Little by little, they squeezed the Germans into a tighter and tighter position. Literally, starving them of Hitler's promised supplies. The Soviets would capture 90,000 German survivors, but only 5,000 would ever see Germany again.

After six months, of constant fighting, bombing, and conditions that no human being should ever face, the Russians had won. But the truth is, no one won the battle of Stalingrad.

Two million died.

Civilian and soldier. Friend and foe. German and Russian. Both sides had starved. Both sides had fought until the last with all their might. And both sides were nothing more than pawns of man-made gods.

Neither Hitler nor Stalin cared about this waste of life.

Hitler blamed the Sixth Army for not fighting until the last bullet.

Stalin erased the true story of Stalingrad. He hid behind his iron curtain censoring every detail of the battle that held the fate of World War II.

Vassili had missed the final victory of the battle of Stalingrad, but he recovered from his injuries and fought at the gates of Berlin. Another wound would prevent him from partaking in the seize of Berlin. He had already become a hero of Russia when he received the highest medals of honor the Hero of the Soviet Union and the Order of Lenin.

During the battle of Stalingrad, he killed at least 4 or 5 Germans a day amounting to 225 German officers and soldiers. Some even estimate that his kills reach beyond three hundred.

His ingenious techniques as a sniper are still being taught today.

He served his country never balking at the task set before him. He died in 1991, 11 days before the fall of the Soviet Union. His last request was to be buried in Volgograd, the city where his roots had dug in decades before and stood

against an unbeatable enemy.

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Today, Hitler and Stalin, these man-made gods, are dead; but Volgograd is still picking up the pieces.

Hundreds of bodies are still being found right where they were buried still wearing their helmets and boots. Seventy-eight years after Stalingrad, they are finally being put to rest.

Stalingrad's story is a tragedy. Two armies with man-made gods fighting desperately for survival, both sides did unspeakable things. The battle stains history and still haunts the city where it happened.

What does the Motherland mean? In her captivity, Alexandra Romanov explained, "But I am still the mother of this country. And I love it in spite of all its sins and horrors. No one can tear a child from its mother's heart. And neither can you tear away one's country."<sup>153</sup>



## *a writer's wilderness*

*Sometimes, a wilderness is a literal desert. Emotion is difficult to capture on paper, but even more so, if your own feelings are as dark as a starless night.*

Wildflowers shouldn't be picked like weeds, trimmed like flowers, or cut down like trees. No, wildflowers should be left alone. My favorite wildflowers are Indian paintbrush, wild oregano, and cacti.

If I want to find a wildflower, I really have to search for it. Unlike the flowers in my mom or grandma's gardens, wildflowers are rare. Wildflowers are hard to find. No matter their beauty, I've never picked one.

Most people can't find beauty in the desert. Especially those who live there.

My grandma has lived in our patch of desert for about fifty years. "Oh, the desert is so ugly!" She trilled to my other grandmother who laughed and said, "I just thought it was a god-forsaken land when Craig (my dad) moved out here with Beth (my mom). I never imagined I'd want to live here."

I understand. At first glance, there isn't much beauty in a rugged, barren land. And maybe it's different for those who were born amid the wildflowers (not literally, of course). My frayed edges were cut on the desert where I grew up. I've scraped my knees on sandstone rocks that feel like sandpaper. I've been blinded by a sandstorm that came out of a sunny day. I've fallen from the height of two haybales almost breaking my nose.

I've seen the desert through its droughts, and the desert has seen me through my storms.

Flowers never travel far, and neither did I. I've always been rooted in a desert in the middle of nowhere Utah.

I literally grew up on the road less travelled. Down the sloping hills through the twists and turns, the only sights to be seen are reddish-orange plateaus and pale green sagebrush where cows and antelope graze. Farther down the road, the first house can be spotted as a ray of sunlight. The little yellow house is almost as familiar as where I grew up because my grandparents live there with their many cats. In between the few houses, fields grow despite the harsh climate. At the very end of the road before it drops off is a red brick house with a giant tree in the front yard. The tree has two rope swings. A very good place to begin.

I always wanted a swing set like my friend Kenny. His dad had welded a tall and sturdy swing set. It was a kid's dream that was high enough to fly into the clouds and never come down. Kenny had a lot of fancy things. He was an only child with just about anything that he could ever want.

My sister Emily and I had toys, but they weren't quite so fancy. Em always wanted a treehouse, and I always wanted a dollhouse. But we never got those. We both wanted a swing set, and we begged my parents.

My dad did his best. He could have welded, but he didn't have the time. Instead, he used small planks of wood and stiff calving rope instead of linked chains. He drilled a hole through the middle of the wood and threaded the rope through it before tying a knot to keep it all together. He scaled our giant tree like a precarious cat. It wasn't fancy.

Calving rope is stiff. Rope burn probably originates from calving rope. The wood plank was small and uncomfortable. We had to straddle the rope and plank. Perching just right on our swings meant the difference between swinging or falling. The rope would fray losing its stiffness and tightness until the planks would practically plop to the ground, and my dad would tie the knot higher and higher making it even harder to get onto our swings. Nonetheless, my sister and I spent hours on those swings.

"I wanna play with my new knife!" Em is twenty-one months younger than me. We were nothing alike. She had curly, crazy blonde hair with bright blue eyes.

I had wavy brown hair that could never make up its mind with boring brown eyes.

We were yin and yang. Fair and coarse.

Emily was a tomboy. She wore boy clothes and had her long, curly hair pulled into a severe ponytail.

I was a girly girl. I loved dressing up and wearing as many colors as I could. I was chubby or at least I thought I was.

Her new knife was a big knife with an antler horn hilt. She twirled in her swing clutching her knife like a knight of old.

"What if it's a magic knife?" My imagination ran wild.

Emily became Max Earnest, and I became his sister Cassandra or Cassie. Two young children with their very own treehouse and a pet ferret. Two young children who knew the secrets of the magic knife. We were the only ones who did, and the only ones who tried to stop it.

The magic knife cursed its wielder. He who took the knife to war would be unbeatable, but he would die on the last battle of the war. That was the cost.

Max Earnest and I were determined to save him.

But we failed. Over and over again.

For the magic knife has seen every war in human history.

That's how Em and I spent our afternoons. We didn't always play the Magic Knife. No, we had many other games that we made swinging from the giant cottonwood tree.

One of our favorites was Questions of the Law or QOL. We became a band of troubled kids sent to a corrective camp that was actually a ninja training camp. Em's character Jack killed a man with a French fry; while my character thought she was allergic to everything except oranges. It turned out the only thing she was allergic to was oranges.

We played on our swings almost every day, but even the desert has rainy days.

It doesn't often rain in the desert. But when it does, "it pours; man, it pours."<sup>154</sup> On days like those, Em and I would slide down the carpeted stairs one bump at a time.

My mom hated rainy days. My mom or the meanager as we often called her is one of the most OCD clean freaks alive. She cannot stand a mess.

Emily and I perfected the art of mess making. We would turn the entirety of downstairs which wasn't much into Littlest Pet Shop Land.

Emily transformed into Beethoven, a Saint Bernard who was the president.

I became Pinky, a pink duck who was stupid but had a giant heart and ran Littlest Pet Shop Land's adoption center.

Beethoven and Pinky were best friends even though they were complete opposites. They literally built Littlest Pet Shop Land because they were the first Littlest Pet Shopians to ever settle there. Or so the story goes.

Littlest Pet Shop Land grew and grew; eventually, we had at least five generations of stories.

Each character had families, friends, and enemies. For instance, Beethoven was married to Iris. They had two daughters: Moondog, who was the rebellious Rockstar, and Boss, who was the disciplined military general. Beethoven's greatest enemy was Pete the Monkey who overran the Littlest Pet Shopian government on several occasions, but those revolutions should not be mistaken with the Great Lego Wars!

Each character had their own home: a shoebox that I meticulously decorated. I forced Em to build the houses, the furniture, and all of the little things that make a house a home. She even made a towering skyscraper from cardboard and duct tape. It almost made up for never getting a dollhouse.

I think that's where it all began for Em and me.

She's studying mechanical engineering because she built an entire town of cardboard, shoe boxes, and duct tape.

And I'm almost a professional writer because I crafted entire worlds out of two girls playing pretend.

Naturally, Emily and I didn't always get along. We were very close in age and very different. We didn't really see eye to eye on a lot of things.

Em loved Spongebob Squarepants, and I hated Spongebob Squarepants. What's funny is that now I love Spongebob, and Em hates it! But at the time, I did not appreciate being forced to watch Spongebob the Movie again.

I would have rather watched Anastasia. She was my favorite princess and my great, great, great, great, great aunt. I was sure of it. After all, my great, great, great, great, great grandmother Olga had escaped from Russia. Surely, there could only be one Olga in Russia!

My mom let me believe it.

I was the kind of kid who believed in everything.

Em and I almost caught the Easter Bunny (my dad), and every Christmas we tried to sleep under the tree to catch Santa Clause.

I believed in fairies and dragons and monsters.

I couldn't stand the dark and had to sleep with a night light. But sometimes,

my dad and I would walk around the Hay Club at night. My gaze would be locked on the endless ocean that is the night sky. Thousands of stars filled the sky like glittering stories. There's something about clouds at night. They look even more ethereal, even more haunting. Some nights, if we were lucky, we could see the milky way: a green river cutting through the night sky.

If you can't see the beauty of the desert during the day, you can't miss it during the night.

There are hardly any other lights to distract. There is little noise beyond your breath or the lonely lament of coyotes.

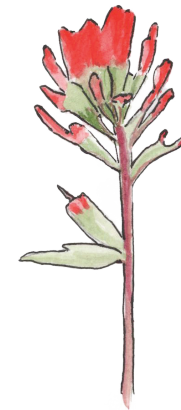
I wandered away from the desert to its opposite. I lost sight of wildflowers, starry nights, and myself. The rain became foreign.

You can always smell the rain in the desert. Probably because it's so rare.

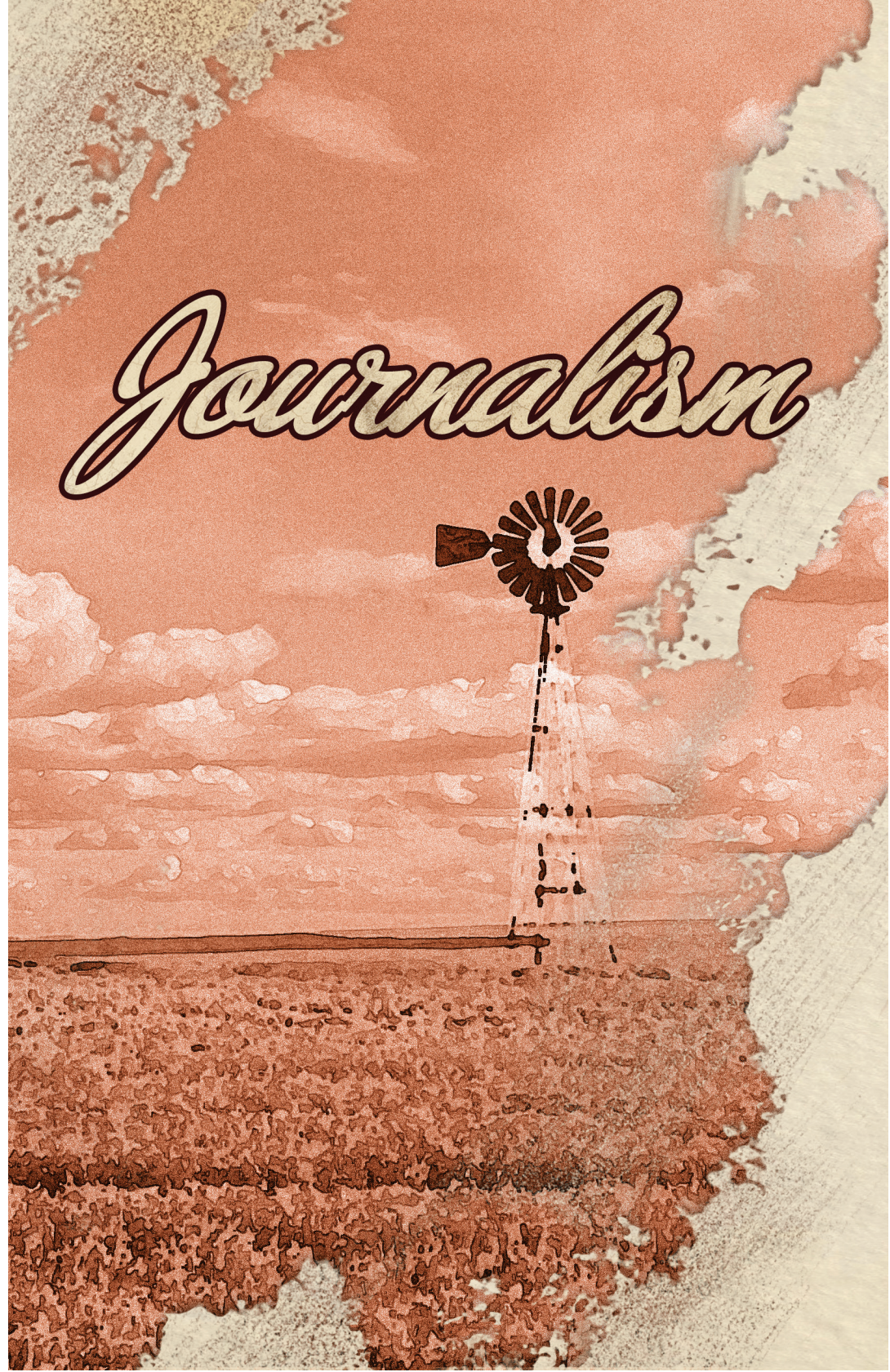
Wildflowers never know when to expect rain. Unlike garden flowers which are watered each and every day, wildflowers have to hope.

I've discovered that hope is more painful than anything else. It is more painful than watching as other flowers are watered. It is more painful than being ripped out from the roots. It is more painful than dying of thirst.

Here I lie crumpled and broken dreaming of a place I once called home. Ripped from my roots, I no longer know where I belong. But a desert is etched in my heart.



# Journalism





## *the american rancher*

PM-American Rancher, 869.

*Some wildernesses bring you home.*

RANDLETT, UT.—Turn South on US Highway 88, you'll find a road that is mostly used by oil-field drivers who speed down its narrow hills. But 5 miles down that road stands a small, yellow farmhouse amid tough, barren desert land.

It was here in 1972 where William Eugene Brown risked everything for 120 acres. He had a dream: he wanted to be a rancher. He soon discovered that as he put it "ranch life is not equated to the land of milk and honey."

His tanned skin is from working from sun up till sun down on his family-run ranch in Randlett, Utah. He manifests not only the American dream but the American rancher.

None of our lives would be the same without the American rancher, yet he is struggling more today than ever before.

Brown says that "the first thing you need to know about the American rancher is that he is going broke." This is true for ranchers throughout the country. There are three reasons why the rancher is going broke: first, unfair cattle markets; second, the cost of raising cattle; and third, government and environmental intrusion.

Unfair cattle markets have been an increasing problem for all ranchers. Jim Akers said, "Without a significant change in the markets, it looks like we are



in for a brutal fall. The frustration out in the country breaks your heart.”

Ranchers put the most work into cattle yet are paid the short end of the stick. They own their cattle year-round. They live and breathe for the livelihood of their herd. This is more than a full-time job; it's a lifestyle.

Western Ag Reporter says, “We take all of the risk; we fight all of the elements; we battle the banker to try to stay financed. And for what?”

On average, ranchers make about \$68 per head of cattle. Western Ag explains that this average is “before paying labor, taxes, interest, or general overhead. Then the packers who only

own those cattle for around a week out of the year are profiting \$200-plus per head.” That's a huge difference between the amount of work put in and the amount of profit gained.

Brown says that “the average American thinks the rancher/farmer is rich. That isn't so. The average rancher/farmer never has any extra money until he or she sells the ranch or farm. They then pay the taxes and hope to have enough left over to sustain themselves until the Grim Reaper comes.”

What money the rancher has left goes straight to the cost of keeping cattle. The cost of raising cattle is a huge cost of running a ranch. Just like any animal, cattle need proper care this includes costs like land, feed, and extra medical supplies.

According to Livestock Marketing Information Center's the estimated average annual cow costs was about \$400 per head in the 1990s. In the 2000s, the average spiked to about \$900 per cow.

Because cattle are not selling at their true value and the rising cost to keep cattle, it is no shock that ranchers are struggling.

Craig Kosoff who has been working with Brown for over twenty years said that sustaining a ranch “is a daily struggle. This is the fifth year in a row that we will receive unsustainable prices for our calves. It is not sustainable and will remain our biggest challenge going forward for our operation!”

Ranchers are going broke because of government and environmental intrusion.

Environmentalists and government employees' opinions on their intrusion are very different from ranchers.

According to the Center for Biological Diversity, “Ranchers pay just \$1.35 a month to graze cattle on public lands and national forests.... The shocking thing is, ranchers now pay even less than they used to. Earlier this year the Trump administration lowered the monthly fee for grazing on public lands and national forests from \$1.41 to \$1.35—the lowest price allowed by law.”

That might not seem like a lot, but ranchers only get one paycheck a year. Most Americans live off of a weekly or monthly wage. These are small wages but they are regular.

Ranchers on the other hand have to stretch out their paycheck for the entire year.

In one way or another, all Americans are impacted by the American rancher. Whether it's juicy hamburgers or steaks, reminiscent western movies, or the core values found in ranchers.

These men and women support our country's economy, food supply, and history. The American rancher is a part of the American dream.

They might be struggling today, but they're hard workers who will continue to preserve the lifestyle that they love. No one understands ranch life the ups or downs better than a rancher.

Brown said, “The only way you can get along with most of the government is to smile and thank them or agree. However, you don't really mean it because most of the government employees are totally stupid as far as how to run a ranch.”







## *gene brown: a dream takes work*

PM-Gene Brown, 1049.

*My grandpa's wilderness affected mine. He hasn't stopped working for his dream a day in his life, and I hope that I can follow in his footsteps.*

RANDLETT, Utah— “Looking back, I would not have got so big, it seems that the hard work for so many years has caused me to age rapidly,” he says looking over the 4,400 deeded acres, the 26,000 acres of grazing permits, and the 650 head of cattle that make up his ranch. William Eugene Brown’s dream was always to be a rancher, but it would take years of hard work to achieve his dream.

Fifty years ago, Brown and his wife Glenda Brown made a risky investment in 120 acres. Brown was in his senior year of college studying chemistry when a friend told him about an opportunity to buy a homestead place. He and his wife had \$10,000 saved, but if they were going to buy the ranch they would need more.

His wife remembers that Brown went to “the Bank of Vernal because he knew that the bank manager was a good guy who knew Gene was local, and he had known all the Broughs and that was who we were buying the place from.”

The banker that Brown went to asked him, “Are you sure about this, sonny?” Brown was sure.

“Well, I know you’re good for it.”

Brown and his wife borrowed \$10,000 from the bank. They moved their



small family to their 160-acre ranch. They purchased an additional 40 acres and leased twelve cows. It was a humble beginning to his dream, but Brown was determined to work for his dream. Both he and his wife worked jobs off of the ranch to support their family.

Brown's dream began in his childhood. "I was raised in an extremely rural area on a small farm. I always felt out of place living in towns and large cities. I did like working with animals, growing crops, and caring for livestock in the mountains in fall, spring, and winter. I really liked it when the new baby animals were born and watching them grow." Brown never liked city life which is one of the reasons he worked so hard to keep his ranch. His favorite part of ranch life was the independence it gave him.

But it came at a cost. He explains, "Ranching was not what I thought it to be, primarily because livestock and crops have never sold at the market to bring extra money for the things that I wish we had."

Brown had a wife and two young children to support. He found work in the oilfield, learning the different aspects of drilling and completing wells. His knowledge and experience with drilling wells were a commodity. He officially retired from the oilfield in 1991, but he was hired as a consultant in 2006. Brown's hard work in the oilfield business kept his ranch afloat. Brown was determined to make something of his ranch. They started small, but little by little his dream was realized. He said, "We would sell the steers and keep the heifers to add to our growing herd. With the sale of the steers, we paid some of the ranch operating expenses and bought a cow or heifer or two."

Brown knew that they needed to get out of sustenance farming which meant they needed to be able to produce their own feed. He remembers, "As time went on, we were able to purchase used machinery to grow winter feed. We learned a lot about farm mechanics by repairing our own equipment, therefore, saving a lot of money on machinery repair."

However, they still had a long way to go until their ranch would amount to anything. He said, "We continued to work at the off-farm jobs and did the ranch

work after work and at night. We almost never had a vacation or a day off."

Brown's work ethic is not only admired by family and close friends but by anyone who has ever met him. He gets up with the sun and gets to work. He says that work has become a habit.

Craig Kosoff who has worked side by side with Gene Brown for over twenty years says that he would describe Brown in "two words: unflappable and determined. In a sentence: if I ever had to go war, the first person I would want by my side would be Gene Brown." Brown admits that "there have been several times we should have quit. The thought of living in town kept me going. I kept asking the banker to extend extra credit loans and borrowing money against the accrued equity." Brown's love for country life continued to grow the longer he lived on the ranch. He could never give up that lifestyle.

Brown never gave up on his dream, and to keep it alive he took even more chances. He said, "As time passed neighbor farms and ranches came up for sale, and we would purchase those with borrowed money." With more land, they could buy more cattle which allowed them to make the payment and afford some of the operating expenses.

Brown's children left the ranch one for college and the other for the oil field. Brown and his wife continued to work on the ranch with limited hired help. At this point, they had been on the ranch for twenty years. He said, "We added more land and cattle, used part-time hired help, paid down debt, and after an additional twenty years; my wife and I thought we ought to sell the ranch and retire."

After dedicating his life to his dream, it all could have been lost. He and his wife could not run the ranch on their own. He says that "our daughter and son in law elected to move to the ranch."

Brown's daughter and her husband spent the next twenty years building the ranch with more land and more cattle.

He says, "At this point, my wife and I are nearly 80 years old and not able to work as hard, so we are you might say semi-retired but still working."

The future of his ranch is still uncertain, but he says, "I hope the future will be that the ranch will be kept in the family."





## *cow farts or the food supply*

PM-Food supply, 819.

*One hardly survives a wilderness without a murmur.*

RANDLETT, Utah—William Eugene Brown, a rancher for over fifty years, says that the American rancher is important because “the cattle industry provides beef for the country. Starting right after the Civil War, cattle were driven to slaughter in cities like Chicago by the thousands. From there it was processed and shipped all over the country. It was important enough that during both world wars ranchers were exempted from the fighting. An army fights on its belly—keeping soldiers fed is just as important as shooting.”

A nation cannot survive without a food supply or a thriving agriculture community. But today, many want to get rid of the cattle industry once and for all.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is perhaps one of the most notable enemies against the ranching community. She said, “And so, it’s not to say you get rid of agriculture. It’s not to say we’re going to force everybody to go vegan or anything crazy like that. But it’s to say, listen, we’ve got to address factory farming. Maybe we shouldn’t be eating a hamburger for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Like, let’s keep it real.”

Tanya Storer rebuked the Green New Deal, “Under AOC’s socialist plan, the productivity will be sucked out of our economic system and the end result ultimately will be limited and more expensive food supplies. Socialism is a great

idea for those who are too young to understand the real consequences of it.”

Imagine if that were the case right now amid the coronavirus pandemic. If AOC and fellow environmentalists had their way, running out of toilet paper would be the last thing on American minds.

What do environmentalists and politicians have against cows? Well, according to AOC, they fart. The United Nations says, “Methane gas produced by bovine flatulence contributes a significant portion of the greenhouse gases contributing to global warming. Livestock farming produces about 18% of all those environmentally damaging gases—and about a quarter of that chunk comes from cow farts and burps.”

The 18% has environmentalists and politicians suggesting government policy changes like a meat tax and even the abolition of the cattle industry. Ryan Katz-Rosene says, “If that misunderstanding persists and pushes policymakers to force a societal shift from meat-eating, it could lead to disaster. There were several problems with the 18% figure, but it still managed to brand livestock as one of the villains in the war on climate change.”

The 18% is an overestimation because it does not account for the carbon that cows remove from the atmosphere by eating plants. Katz-Rosene explains, “Flatulence is an essential part of the cycling of carbon: a cow eats the plant and breaks it down, then passes it back into the atmosphere through gas or manure. It’s inaccurate to count the carbon released in the process, but not the carbon sequestered.”

He says that the real problem is management, “At feedlots, the livestock feed is produced industrially rather than naturally. The cows don’t graze fertilizing the soil with their manure as they go. They are fed crops that have been produced using synthetic fertilizers and heavy machinery trucked from farm to feedlot.” Ranchers send their calves to feedlots for six months before being sold.

Worldwatch Institute’s study showed that 51% of global greenhouse gases emissions come from cows. According to Frank M. Mitloehner, the study was wrong because they used “a comprehensive life-cycle assessment to study the climate impact of livestock, but a different method when they analyzed transportation.”

His study shows that the total of all of agriculture greenhouse gas is 9%. Mitloehner says, “Many people continue to think avoiding meat as infrequently as once a week will make a significant difference to the climate. But according to one recent study, even if Americans eliminated all animal protein from their di-

ets, they would reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by only 2.6%. According to our research, if the practice of Meatless Monday were to be adopted by all Americans, we’d see a reduction of only 0.5%.”

Ranching has changed drastically over the past 70 years not only has production more than doubled, cows’ greenhouse gas emission has also declined 11.3% since 1961. However, this fact gets lost with scientists, environmentalists, and politicians who focus on cow farts. They spread fear with false numbers and their suggestions will ultimately hurt Americans, ranchers, and cows.

Mitloehner says, “The world population is currently projected to reach 9.8 billion people by 2050. Feeding this many people will raise immense challenges. Meat is more nutrient-dense per serving than vegetarian options, and ruminant animals largely thrive on feed that is not suitable for humans. Raising livestock also offers much-needed income for small-scale farmers in developing nations. Worldwide, livestock provides a livelihood for one billion people.” The coronavirus pandemic has changed how Americans and the world view many things.

Now more than ever, Americans need to realize how important the American rancher is to the future of the country.





## *the wild west's ghost*

*A journey through a wilderness requires strength, and I don't know anyone stronger than my mom, a genuine woman of the Wild West.*

There's something about the Wild West that still lives today. The memories of the Wild West's legends, cowboys, Indians, and outlaws—still haunt the West.

You can see them when the wind kicks up the dust as if they were riding off into the sunset once more.

You can smell them through the crunch of sagebrush.

You can hear them in the silence of the mountains and the desert.

In many ways, the Wild West hasn't changed. The land is much the same if not for roads that now cut across it, or the slightly more civilized towns. But the people living in the West are just as resilient and stubborn as ever.

The West has always been wild, but its people have always been wilder. Bob Boze Bell wrote, "Among both, the natives and newcomers were plenty of feisty women who weren't afraid to mix it up with anyone, man or beast. As a modern leader put it, 'No country, no culture, no people will ever rise above the standards of its women.'"

The West set the bar for "feisty" women with legends such as Annie Oakley, Calamity Jane, Ann Bassett, and Etta Place.

The most mysterious being Etta or Ethel Place. Almost nothing is known about her for certain not even her real name.

John Young explains, "People who knew her said she was the most beautiful and wildest woman in the Old West. But she is also the most mysterious as facts about her life are shrouded in obscurity. Not much is known about Etta. And what is known came subject to exaggeration by dime novels and the motion picture industry."

As fun as a good Western is, the facts of history are easily eroded. It is one of history's greatest tragedies: how easily it is forgotten.

Marshall Trimble writes, "The enigmatic Etta (Ethel) Place is one of the Old West's most enthralling mysteries. We know from her photo she was a beautiful, intelligent-looking woman. According to author Donna Ernst, her name was Ethel. There's almost nothing known about the real Etta. Other than the few years she was associated with the Wild Bunch about the only thing we know is she was probably from Texas."

The Wild Bunch is the only thing keeping Etta Place from slipping away from history entirely. The Wild Bunch was a bunch of outlaws led by Butch Cassidy. They were notorious throughout the country but immortalized in the West.

Etta Place was one of only five women allowed in the Wild Bunch's hideout Robbers Roost in Southern Utah.

Ciaran Conliffe wrote, "The reason why Ethel became famous had to do with the man she married in February of 1901: Harry Alonzo Longabaugh. Or, to give him his more famous nickname, the Sundance Kid. Harry had been a member of the Wild Bunch, a gang of outlaws who had formed in Utah in 1897."

Although not as notorious as his best friend Butch Cassidy, the Sundance Kid is just as remembered. You hardly hear of Butch Cassidy without the Sundance Kid.

Conliffe enlightens Etta and Harry's relationship, "Their wedding photo is one of only two pictures of Ethel that survive, and the only one that shows her face clearly. She was considered extremely attractive by those who met her, with blue-gray eyes and dark brown hair. In the photo, she is also wearing what appears to be an engagement ring, showing this was probably no whirlwind romance."

Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid are legends but so is Etta.

La Prensa described her as "an interesting woman, very masculine, who wears male clothing with total correctness, and who is dedicated more to the occupations of men than to those of women... a fine rider, handles with precision all classes of firearms, and has an admirable male temperament."

Etta lived a unique life. And it's a crying shame that we remember so little of her story.

Conliffe explains that back in the Wild West "there was nothing less feminine than bravery and competency."

She would've had to be brave because she and her husband and Butch were often on the run. Hiding from the law and fleeing the country requires a woman with much inner strength.

The closest we can get to understanding who Edda was, is by understanding who the women of the West were.

Bell writes, "Whether she was addressed as Madame or Ma'am, Señorita or Squaw, a woman needed guts to live out West. The 'weaker sex' encountered savage, brutal and obnoxious obstacles (and these were just the men!), not to mention mean ole Mother Nature and a plague or two. Or three. In spite of these barriers, or maybe because of them, the American frontier attracted legions of nonconforming women—mavericks, loners, eccentrics and adventurers."

Etta certainly had guts.

Bell explains that "the women were typically cut off from family, friends, their native culture and the 'protective strictures' of Eastern society. Some were crushed by the experience, others survived and more than a few thrived."

We know that Etta Place was educated, but something had to have happened to her to put her in the same circles as the Wild Bunch. She must have been alone whether by choice or circumstances, but instead of being crushed, she thrived.

Women in the West were the type of women to get their hands dirty. If something needed to be done, they weren't going to wait for a man to do it. Bell writes, "More than any other virtue, women brought a hearty pragmatism to the West."

Etta's ability to get the job done clearly attracted Butch and the Sundance Kid. In many ways, the West brought equality to its height. Race or gender never mattered much in the West. All that truly mattered was a person's character and ability.

Mark Lee Gardner, author of *To Hell on a Fast Horse*, explains what it meant to be an outlaw in the Wild West, "They lived in a harsh land and time, a time that saw tremendous change while still retaining, in some instances, the cut-throat ways of its recent past. In the end, it was not as much about right versus

## A WRITER'S WILDERNESS

wrong, lawman versus outlaw as it was about survival." History is always easy to judge, but during the moment, history is never simple.

We don't know Etta's story; we only know her legend.

Etta Place like most outlaws only did the best she could to survive.

Bell wrote, "Like their male counterparts on the frontier, the early female arrivals were rugged individualists who angled west to gain the cherished privilege of being left alone to do what they pleased."

These characteristics are still verdant among women still living in the West. Etta's greatest legacy perhaps is the fierce Western women who continue to thrive.

Bell explains that "the history of the wild women of the Wild West does not end in the 1890s. The dance hall girls, gritty pioneers, and savvy señoritas gave way to a new breed of Western women, even wilder and, in many cases, stronger than their mothers. Many of the daughters and granddaughters of those feisty women continue to live in the West and to look back at the often-unsung frontier heroines with pride."

Why did Etta come out West? Bell writes that "many women who came West were trying to escape their past. Others saw too many restrictions in Eastern society and wanted to create a future in this new land of opportunity. All were hoping against hope, and many had nothing to lose."

We'll never know which scenario applied to Etta, but we do know that she found hope. Even if it were unorthodox.

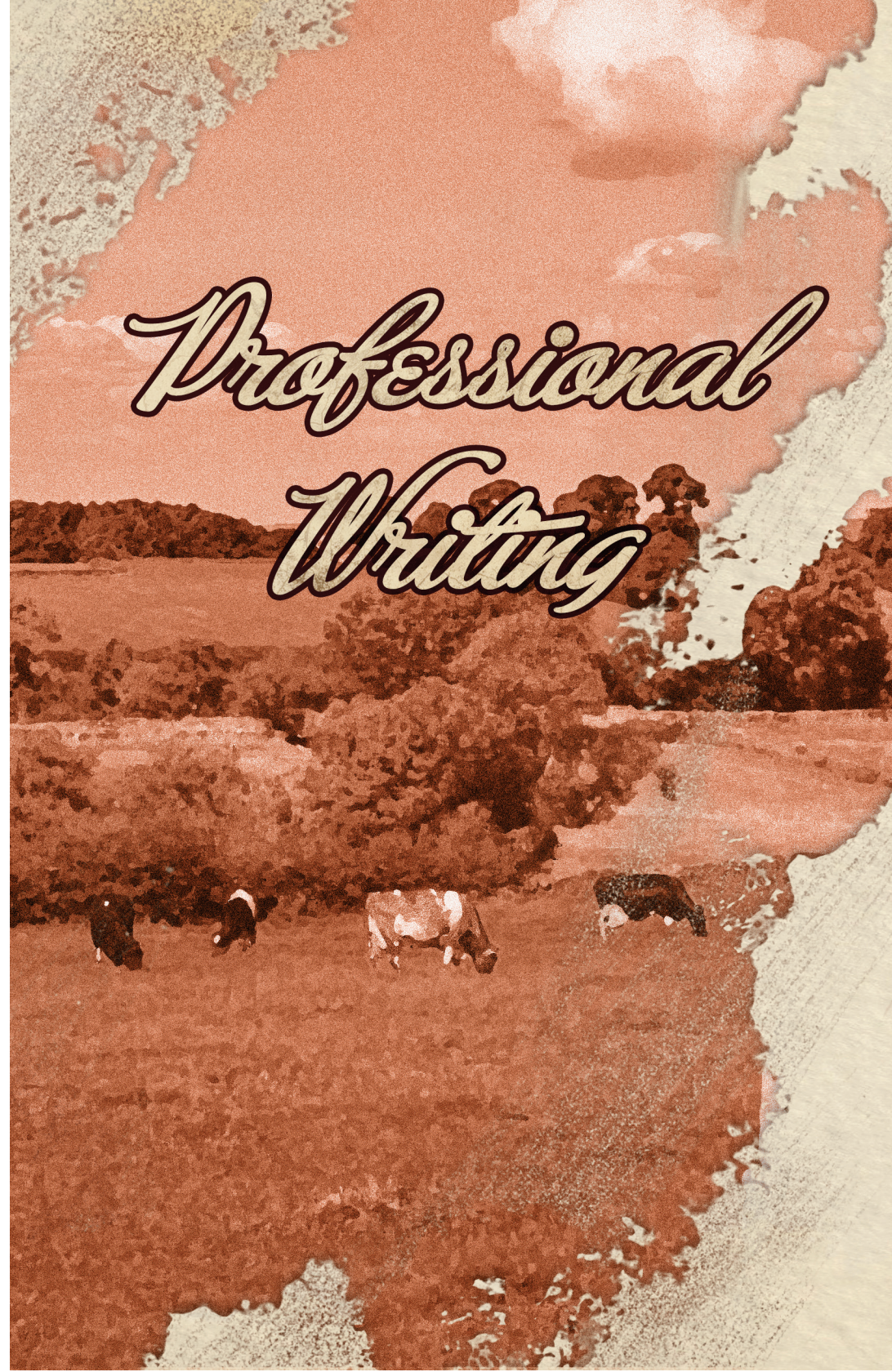
Whatever the case, Etta Place vanished with the Wild Bunch, Butch Cassidy, and the Sundance Kid. What truly happened to them is a historical debate. Were they killed in a shootout in South America or did they escape and live the rest of their days in the Wild West? All we'll ever know with certainty is that they vanished.

Conliffe explains, "It wasn't difficult, back then, for somebody to vanish. It helped if you had money, of course." Money was something that Etta, Harry, and Butch had plenty of. History net records that the Wild Bunch made off with a total of \$200,000 the equivalent of \$2.5 million today.

We'll never know the entire truth of Etta Place's history. Conliffe writes, "The truth is that Ethel Place's story doesn't have any such neat conclusion. Instead, like all good legends, she vanishes into the mists of history. Because legends never die."



# *Professional Writing*







## *high tailing it!*

*Pets come in all shapes and sizes. I've had cats and dogs and calves! My fuzzy companions have often travelled through the wilderness with me.*

### **Watching the Herd**

Calving season begins in early spring, and a good rancher understands that it is important to watch the herd closely. He will especially watch the heifers who tend to walk away from their calves. Heifers are cows that are going through their first calving season. The rancher will also keep a careful watch on twins because even with mature cows, the mothers will often reject the weaker calf. Both of these situations lead to struggling calves.

The rancher spots struggling calves through these basic signs: a weak calf, a calf laying down by itself, a calf with a dry and peeling nose, or a calf that is stealing milk from a cow that is not its mother. He will also watch the mother's udder if the cow is tight-bagged this means that the calf is not sucking. In any of these situations, the rancher must intercede on behalf of the calf.

### **Helping the Calf**

Once a struggling calf is spotted, it is taken out of the field with its mother. Ultimately, the rancher's goal is to reconnect mother and calf. When the calf is orphaned or the calf's mother cannot be found, the same processes are used to help the struggling calf:

- Bottle-feeding the Calf
- Grafting the Calf
- Adopting the Calf

### Bottle-feeding the Calf

This process is not only the most expensive but also the worst option for the calf. Although expensive, calf formula is easily available through a local vet or IFA. The formula cannot come close to a mother's natural milk because it is missing the necessary colostrum. The mother produces colostrum which contains the vitamins, minerals, and probiotics that the calf needs in the first three days after birth.

After the struggling calf is placed in a small corral, the rancher will mix the formula with water on a warm stove and thoroughly stir it to ensure that there are no lumps in it. Once the formula is made, the rancher will add an egg which adds nutritional value. The rancher will then pour the milk into a gallon bottle specifically made for calves. (A newborn calf will need 1/4 of a gallon every 2-3 hours). The milk must be lukewarm before giving it to the calf. Depending on how weak or young the calf is, it may be unable to suck from the bottle which means that the rancher will have to use a tube. (This should only be used by experienced ranchers because the tube is inserted down the calf's throat, and there is a chance of the milk getting into the lungs).



If the calf can suck, the rancher will need to straddle the calf. This position is the easiest method to bottle feed a calf who has not been bottle fed before. The rancher will gently teach the calf how to suck on the bottle by rubbing its throat to stimulate sucking. Once the calf gets used to sucking a bottle, its instinct will be to headbutt the rancher's hold on the bottle because that is how calves make their mothers produce more milk. The rancher will need to regularly feed the calf; pet or rub the calf to stimulate the warmth (cows do this by licking the calf), and he will watch out for scours or diarrhea (if this is not treated it can be fatal). If done well, this process will produce a high tailing calf which means a happy calf.

### Grafting the Calf

This process is the best option for the calf. Grafting can only be done if a cow loses her calf and the rancher currently has one or more bottle babies (calves being

bottle-fed). The goal with grafting is for the mother to accept the bottle baby as her own calf. The rancher will skin the dead calf as quickly as possible. Once the hide is ready, the farmer will tie the hide to the bottle baby using twine and shake "Orphan-No-More" powder on the calf. Tying the dead calf's hide on the bottle baby, causes the mother to smell her baby's scent on the bottle baby.

In the beginning, the ranch may need to place the cow in a squeeze-chute which will not allow her to kick the calf. He may also need to help the calf transition from bottle to udder, but once the calf gets a taste of real milk it will learn quickly. Within the first few days, the cow will either accept the calf or reject the calf. However, it is more common that the cow will accept the calf once her milk is digesting through the calf. The rancher will watch her behavior toward the calf whether she is licking the calf and allowing it to suck. After the calf is accepted, the hide will be cut off; and the mother and calf will be returned to the herd. If this process is completed, both mother and calf will be high tailing it!

### Adopting the Calf

This is probably the easiest option for the rancher. The only thing required is a milk cow that is producing milk. Milk cows can be acquired through a local dairy farm. A milk cow can "adopt" up to three bottle babies. She will produce more than enough milk for all of them. At first, the rancher may place her in a squeeze shoot because the calves will need to be taught how to suck. While they are learning, the rancher will place a small bucket of oats in front of the cow.

Within the next days, the calves and their adopted mother will no longer need to be separated by the squeeze-chute. The rancher may choose to keep them separated from the herd because milk cows require a special diet and extra care. Through this process, more than one bottle baby will be high tailing it!





## *treat your cat like royalty!*

*Some wildernesses bloom after tragedy. About two weeks after we lost our dog Hush Puppy, we found Queen Chivers. A few months later we found Flipper.*

You care about your cat's health.

We do too!

Your cat already believes it rules the world,  
so treat them with a fancy feast fit for royalty.

**Fancy Feast** has been satisfying cat kings and queens since 1982. It's one of the best-selling cat foods in the world because cats rule the world. **Fancy Feast** isn't just fancy, it's healthy!

Real meat packed with vitamins, minerals, and flavor.

And if your little king or queen is picky,  
there's plenty of options to choose from.

What's even better is that you can treat your cat like royalty  
at an affordable price!

**Available at local supermarkets starting at \$1.08!  
Just listen to the royal decree—I want it meow!**

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## about the author



**KYLEE KOSOFF** is known primarily for her young adult fantasy novel, *Not Your Average Princess*. Kylee is a lover of history, westerns, books, and of course, dragons—hence why she identifies as a huge geek. From the young age of six she loved painting exciting stories full of adventure and wonder with her words. She hails from Randlett, Utah, and is currently studying professional writing in Pensacola, Florida, as she prepares to release her stories on the world.

# about the artists



**REBEKAH WEBB** is an avid artist with an intense and active imagination. She devours books, explores the wild with her younger siblings, and is always up for an adventure. Much of her art is a reflection of the colorful and varied life of growing up traveling the world. Rebek



**JENNETH DYCK** is a dyslexic cover designer, layout nerd, and author of several short stories. She has designed both fiction and nonfiction covers, including the Amazon top-ten category bestseller, *Power Author*, by Ben Wolf. Jenneth has received a bachelor's in professional writing and is graduating with a master's in graphic design.

She currently resides outside of Washington D. C. You can follow her work at [www.jennethdyck.wordpress.com](http://www.jennethdyck.wordpress.com), or connect with her on Instagram at [@jennethleed\\_author](https://www.instagram.com/jennethleed_author).