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Twelve Short Stories

Bob McCauley

I dedicate this book to all the great writers who taught me how to write.

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[Confessions of a Body Builder](#) (2000)

[Achieving Great Health](#) (2005)

[The Miraculous Properties of Ionized Water](#) (2006)

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Note from the Author

“For a true writer each book should be a new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed.”

~ Ernest Hemingway

I am a word warrior. I started writing when I was 15 years old. I first wrote poetry. I scrawled long rambling poems that were my apprenticeship to the English language. Soon, I began writing fiction, short stories and vignettes, which later turned into novellas. Then I wrote my first novel, Usurped. It was set in Israel, which was only a stage to put forth my assertion that Western Civilization has at its core two main religious and secular influences, those of Israel and Greece. .

I have written three books on Natural Health. Writing fiction is many times more difficult than factual writing. With non-fiction, the words only need be in the correct order so that you can effectively communicate with your reader. With fiction you need to create emotion, sympathy and pathos in your reader and that is quite difficult.

This is my first published work of fiction. I started writing these 12 loosely connected, yet interwoven stories in 1988. They are short works of expressive language painted on the canvass of blank paper. Dynamic art, art that lives with a strong pulse and pumping lungs, has the potential to transform lives in positive ways. Experiencing true art makes one ponder life and consider souls, including your own. There is no greater accomplishment for an artist than to change a mind or make a heart flutter to read or hear or see the art they have created.

More than anything, I hope you enjoy these Twelve short works of fiction.

~ Bob McCauley

1



THE CONVERT

GOING TO BED ON CHRISTMAS EVE AS A CHILD IS AN HOUR OF ANXIETY. All the anticipation of the event, exacerbated by advertising's incessant promotions of this season's necessities, narrows to the head of a pin and there the child sits in agony and ecstasy.

Peter tried to close his eyes. He'd been lying in bed nearly two hours unable to sleep. Before him every notion, theory and memory he'd ever had whirred by on a mad carousel. His strategy of going to bed extraordinarily early that evening was that the sooner he slipped into the *otherworld* of sleep, the sooner he would wake, for it was during those missing hours that the marvel took place. He would wake in the morning and find under the tree every odd shape and color of wrapped box that Saint Nicholas had secretly delivered. In them would be the latest additions to his toy fortune, which he proudly put against any of his neighborhood peers. He only hoped his occasional bad conduct hadn't somehow disqualified him. He scoffed to hear his parents' claim that his every deed was observed and recorded by *helpers*, yet inside he wondered.

He had sung every song in a carol book several nights earlier and the episode had sent him headlong into Yule worship. His parents warned of applying methods of sedation and hypnotic therapies on him, which served only to further wind him into spring at its last turn before it snaps. His older sister did not partake in his enthusiasm for the mystery, which made him suspicious of her normalcy. In years past they had shared a common zeal for Christmas, but somewhere, like those who turn up one day brainwashed with weird philosophies, she had lost hers. He found himself the last believer in the noblest cause, which he vowed with solemnity and blood to carry on every year for the rest of his life.

Images of past Christmases refused to let him sleep so that morning could at last come. Like the story, he thought he saw three ghosts somewhere in the darkness, or perhaps it was the one bound in chains come to warn him that if he did not change he would suffer in the next life. A thousand times he was certain the next moment sleep would place its hand over his mouth and put him under. Sweat bled from his every pore. The bedcovers twisted like vines around his limbs and torso. His body laid in a fashion that made it appear to have been dropped from a great height. There was a struggle. He squirmed in a gesture of the dying. His legs kicked as though a door had opened under them. He arranged himself in endless postures, some so absurd to convince anyone who saw him believe here was a boy contortionist. But the sleep gods refused to allow him passage into their realm and

somehow he thought it was all meant to shame him because he should have already been asleep for hours.

Neglect is customarily the best method one can use to defeat the enemy of insomnia and the moment he forgot his dilemma, Peter fell asleep. The contest had exhausted him. His dreams were those of a child on such a singular night, neon, blinking, burdened with a terrible Yule joy.

He woke deep inside the night. It was the zenith hour when the pendulum is swung to its furthest point from dawn and land is absent from every horizon. He rubbed his ribs wondering if someone had poked his shoulder and woken him out of sheer meanness, for he knew instinctively that it was not the proper time. He felt he'd sat down at a half-set dinner table. He sensed something was subtly wrong, like the picture whose caption asks what is out of place. A voice whispered from the pitch of the room's corners that a plot had been carried out while he slept. There was innuendo and muttering of conspiracy in the boy's mind.

For a panicked moment he thought he had slept long past the appointed time and missed the entire day. He felt like a man on a platform watching the caboose of the day's last train grow smaller. Walking out he would find strewn wrapping and another boy playing with his toys. His parents would tell horror stories of letting him get his rest and not wanting to disturb him. He squinted to see if the room had been rearranged according to another's taste. His mind was still thick with sleep.

He threw off the covers, went to the door and gazed through a crack. The furnace had long ago been turned off and winter's chill had invaded through every crevice of the house only it knew of, which made him hug himself. It was the next signal to him that he didn't belong here, yet it somehow made him take his first step from his bedroom.

Christmas lights no longer blinked and tinted the living room. He found there all of Yule's paraphernalia attired in a sad darkness. It had the smell of a forest and he entered it as though it were such,

careful of his step. He felt he had arrived too late for a banquet and found the affair winding down.

The Christmas tree was a mere shape against the black pattern of the living room. He found that in the night its life was that of a pyramid. It seemed like a hole that if he stepped through he would find himself in some otherworld. Light from another room cast this one into a gray, gestalt-like place. Light had never before seemed sinister to him. One had to be suspicious of darkened windows and doorways where things waited to lunge at any fool who got too close. But the light that dripped into the living room seemed to beckon in a tongue he somehow perceived as a thing that waited only for him.

Around the corner was the basement door that had become a netherworld portal. The staircase was a black shaft with a puddle of dim light splashed at the bottom of it. Murmurs and rustling came from that deep place. He thought it must be an imps' labor, for this was their hour. The crackle and soft clicking made him know that he had exposed some brooding thing busy in its evil processes. As his eyes adjusted, he found that boxes had only been partially arranged around the foot of the tree like a baffling piece of evidence placed there only to confuse him. He crept closer to the light as he would a hibernating animal he wished to study. Voices rustled reminiscent of leaves driven across an autumn lawn. He recognized them, but he thought his ears must be liars, traitors rebelling against him.

As though he had been handed proof that he was someone other than whom he believed he was, Peter was suddenly aware of something far advanced from anything he knew. Saint Nicholas was some kind of hoax perpetrated against youths too trusting of every notion they are told. He immediately lost every ability except to stand and stare. There was a battle for his soul. Oddly, it dawned on him that magic was most likely a fraud as well. He'd heard of such a thing as the *conspiracy of history* and thought he might be witnessing it. Scales dropped from every orifice of his head. His limbs were liquid. Words suddenly became useless. Any attempt to describe the event would have seemed cliché, puerile. He thought this must be like the first revelation of someone who just died. Only they could have the same sensation. Like them, he wanted to say of his sudden awareness: *Of course*. He should have known all along for it could be no other way.

The episode was allegorical to the discovery of a new continent or the moment when evolution's chimp lifted some object and made it his first tool. He'd heard the words *paranormal* and *phenomena*, and he wondered if they applied here. Like a drunk who sees double, everything he believed could only exist as merely one now appeared as two. A spark had made his boyhood a plummeting fireball. It was as though he'd been gifted with a queer power to see through the gauze of material illusion. He'd instantly become a member of an ancient profession, that of the *iconoclast*.

He felt somehow that he'd been caught in a crime of shame, one that would make him lesser in the eyes of elders who believed him to be square and earnest. He'd kicked over his own bucket and saw its precious content was now a mere rug stain. It was an impossible spectacle. He felt he'd opened a box whose cover was meant to be left forever closed, and he wondered what curse had been put on him for doing so. If it would have been an episode recounted to him rather than one he'd gone through himself, he would have shrugged and said: *Nah, couldn't happen*.

A principle of paradox that refuted his most sacred beliefs had been demonstrated like a trick before his eyes. It was all a game they'd been playing. His eyes squinted to conclude that his sister was also in on it. At least it finally explained her oddness. "*Et tu?*" he wanted to ask her. The hand that had always gently caressed his hair had him now by the neck and was for no good reason pummeling him. He was forced to admit that scaffolding was erected behind painted flats of the universe and how tiny he stood against it all.

A curtain had been torn back to reveal that a gaunt man was behind the omniscient voice of life, and the smoke and flashing lights was only him working wheels, switches, levers. The youth's entire world had been ripped down as easily as if it were a faded poster. Behind it was a kingdom a thousand times mightier than the puny one he'd been living in. It made him gape and squint to realize that he'd lived his life in a series of minuscule boxes in which everything had been rigged. He felt he'd been deceived in the name of some adult principle. Yet he knew it was acceptable to allow a child to indulge in a sham world, for it was part of the esoteric apprenticeship of youth.

He felt at once a desire to hide yet shout his discovery through his bedroom window to his peers.

Noticing he now had wings made him recognize that he'd been inside a cocoon until that moment. Tomorrow he would wake into a world made over, as though he'd traveled to some distant shore. His was the martyr's journey, for he would not be returning.

He heard someone climbing the basement stairs, which made him feel like the man in a dream who suddenly realizes he's wearing no pants. The tree spread its black arms to jeer him as he dashed to his room, threatening to tell his secret if its extortion demands were not quietly met. One or two of the boxes went off like alarm snares as he stepped on them. His flight was like that of a thief. Hearing the basement door creak made him flinch as though a whip had snapped one of his thighs. He slipped quietly into his room. The execution of entry and exit was remarkably timed.

The bedroom door made as much noise as it could when he closed it. The bed pulled the same prank as he crawled in. It made him believe these two were in collusion, having a chuckle over his poignant dilemma. Outside, the wind moaned in December's naked boughs. It, too, seemed to have been arranged only to deepen his dread.

He lay motionless till the moment of terror passed and it was again quiet. His youth had been stolen from him the way a purse is grabbed from a frail woman. He felt swindled by those whom he trusted. He would now be living in a universe he knew nothing about and he panicked to wonder how he should act. He would need tutoring, but he knew he would be unable to openly ask for it. He was a soul caught between worlds, snagged like gossamer cloth in its whirring machinery. He would have to be cautious not to let on that his eyes had been opened and he was now aware that good and evil existed as more than mere theory. He determined that some would most certainly search for comedy in his dilemma.

He was not as troubled by his discovery as to how he was going to keep everyone from finding him out. He was certain he would be asked in the morning how he now knew he was naked. His mind was empty of any explanation he might give for his sudden self-awareness. He'd been asked to solve a calculus theorem while understanding but the rudiments of math. None of the excuses he'd trained himself to give

as a child would apply here. Everything he cherished had become splinters and metal shards. He was accustomed to bruises and rasped knees. Here was a hemorrhaging gash threatening to bleed him of his life.

His mind was empty of the chiffon visions that had whirled in it earlier. Tomorrow would begin the harvest of a field sowed by the forefathers of another race. He expected he would need to learn a strange, complex, advanced mythology entirely different from his flimsy, two-dimensional one.

The bedroom door cracked and a head peered in to check on him. He feigned death, as though an enemy was inspecting the aftermath of a great battle to be certain everyone was dead. A single twitch and he would end up counted amongst them. He fought an urge to rise and declare it was over, he knew. *But would it be a red victory or white surrender?*

He heard muttering as his parents crept and arrange themselves quietly in their beds believing they'd again charmed and tricked him. The fools. In a few minutes he heard his father snoring. Resentment spread through him to consider his parents' deception. Scenarios of how they often met to consider ways to deceive him went through his mind to make him grit and consider heavy notions.

Peter pondered whether he wished he could wake and discover it was all a dream. He felt he'd been exposed to a ray that had aged him remarkably. It produced a sensation that made him feel larger now than when he went to sleep. His limbs became ponderous and with each turn his body seemed to lumber more heavily. He thought that if he stood now he would bump his head on the ceiling. He calculated that by morning the room would become for him a cramped box.

Dawn transformed the objects of his room into worthless playthings he needed to find a way to quietly retire without arousing suspicion. Overnight they'd become embarrassments of his youth.

The first light of day peered suspiciously in the window as though to inquire what he'd been up to. It seeped into every corner proving there was nowhere it could not go, nothing it did not know. Its

Author Biography



I was born in Lansing, Michigan, Sparrow Hospital, September 20, 1957 at 3:01 am. I went to Eastern High School where I was the Captain of the cross-country and tracks teams (1975). I held the title as best long-distance runner in my school two years in a row. I graduated in Journalism from Michigan State University in 1980.

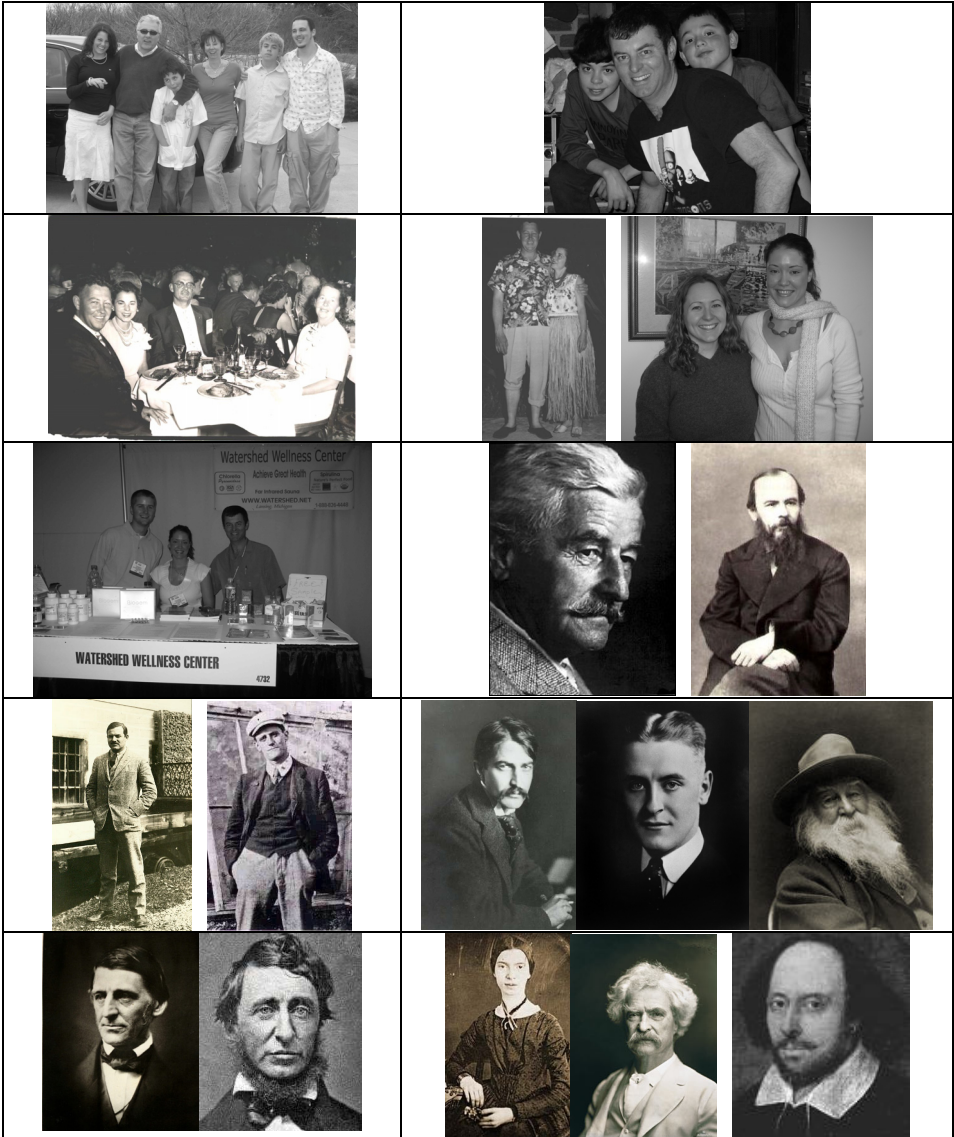
I have worked dozens of jobs from factory laborer to land surveyor to legal secretary at a major New York law firm. I lived on two kibbutzim in Israel, traveled through nearly every state of India, every country in Europe and most of the Far East. I have also traveled extensively throughout my homeland of America. I have run my own business, The Watershed Wellness Center, for 14 years.

I'm a 3rd degree black belt Tae Kwon Do and Certified Instructor with the American Taekwondo Association. I have written three books and lectured on natural health for 10 years. I have hosted both radio and TV shows on health. I am 50 and still run consecutive six-minute miles. I also practice Chi Gong and follow the Six Components of Natural Health laid out in my health books. I was born and still am a Catholic.

Of all my endeavors, nothing has been harder for me than to write these 12 works of short fiction because nothing is more difficult than writing fiction that actually moves the almighty reader. In the meantime, I intend to stay healthy and continue writing about natural health. I will also write more fiction, even though fiction is often the most believable thing I write about.

“True glory consists in doing what deserves to be written; in writing what deserves to be read; and in so living as to make the world happier for our living in it.” ~ Pliny the Elder (23 – 79 AD)

Photos



Top Left to Right: My family; Daniel, Me and Phillip; My Mom, Dad, Bill, Aunt Mary at a Convention; Mom and Dad in Hawaii; **My Excellent Editors:** Catherine Mack and Patti McDowell; Me and The Watershed A-Team (Ryan/Patti McDowell); **Writing Mentors:** William Faulkner; Fyodor Dostoyevsky; Ernest Hemingway; James Joyce; Stephen Crane; F. Scott Fitzgerald; Walt Whitman; Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau; Emily Dickenson; Mark Twain; William Shakespeare.