

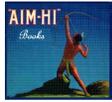
# The True-badour

A LITERARY NEWSLETTER

Vol. 3 – Issue 2

Spring 2018

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## The True-badour

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Describing and discussing the writing process through various genres, methods, and venues, for writers and readers alike.

(If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter, Unsubscribe by contacting [ernie.lee@live.com](mailto:ernie.lee@live.com).)

Last week I took a short day trip down to Port Aransas and Rockport, Texas. After whining all winter about the damages to my home during Hurricane Harvey, I feel a little selfish. Thousands of people have lost their homes in the horrible devastation in those places. We saw houses and businesses caved in, holes in walls, and even a rock wall completely blown down. Piles of debris were piled twenty feet high, waiting to be hauled away. It litterly looked like a bomb had gone off that covered the entire area. On a good note, Texas Authors Association has been working with other partners to restock school and public libraries. I was proud to be a part of that effort.

In December, I had the fortunate opportunity to have lunch with and visit a great blues harp player, **Tommy Z**. Tommy just finished (March 3) the COPD Blues Benefit at Giddy Ups in Austin. He's also working on a novel called "Busted Flat and Blowing the Blues." I can't wait to see it!



In December, I was selected as the event coordinator for the Landa Park venue for Authors in the Park. The event will occur on the dance slab on April 28<sup>th</sup>. We still have room for more authors. If you want to participate, please contact me.

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, I was honored to attend the Authors day at Baranoff Elementary in Austin, Texas. At this event, some twenty authors came and spoke to 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders about writing. I spoke about poetry to about fifty students. We had a great time. As a class, we collaborated, and the students created their own original poem. It was a great experience. Afterwards I got an envelope stuffed with fan mail! Dozens of thank you notes were stuffed inside. One in particular caught my attention. During my presentation, I encouraged these youngsters to go home and start writing down their ideas and creating poems and short stories. One 3<sup>rd</sup> grader, **Clara Hoffman** did exactly that! In fact is was so good, I have included it with her permission in this issue of **The True-badour**. I encourage you to read it below. Thank you Clara, I'm so pleased at your efforts. Keep up the good work!

On February 9<sup>th</sup>, I was interviewed on KUT radio (92.5 FM) that was broadcast to almost 40 NPR radio stations in Texas. The topic was my novel HIM, and the new information I uncovered in my reasearch on the novel.

The 2018 book fair season is kicking off, and plans are underway to attend as many as possible. See the schedule below, and join us if you can! I'd love to see you when we are in your area.

# INTRODUCING

*The True-badour* welcomes some new authors this issue. I hope you enjoy their contributions as much as I did reading them the first time.

## C. M. BRATTON



C.M. Bratton is a multi-award-winning writer from San Antonio, TX. A member of the Texas Association of Authors, C.M. has published twenty-two books and a solo comic series. In addition, C.M. has been a writer for several film projects, including *Sanitarium*, which is currently in talks to become a T.V. series.

With an intense focus on character-driven stories, C.M. explores how people react in unexpected and extraordinary situations. C.M. excels at writing sci-fi, fantasy, psychological thriller, crime, and satire. C.M. is also a strong researcher and editor, with excellent mastery of craft and structure. In addition, C.M. is a trained performer, with B.A.s in Theatre Arts & Spanish from Yale University and an M.A. in Drama from Texas Woman's University. C.M. also has an M.F.A. in Creative Writing for Media Arts from Full Sail University. Along with teaching undergraduate theatre and writing, C.M. is currently working on several writing projects, including several new scripts and books. From dragons to cyborgs to zombies (oh my!), C.M. looks forward to sharing more worlds with you. For more information, check out [www.cmbratton.com](http://www.cmbratton.com) or [www.facebook.com/writercmbratton](https://www.facebook.com/writercmbratton).



Excerpted from:  
**Borderlands Tales III**  
**THE TICKING HAND**  
**Prelude**

By: C. M. Bratton

It stares, this colossal eye, refusing to blink. It looms above, hovering... knowing. It holds me pinned, its grip a vise that tries to shatter all I hold dear.

Do I struggle?

Do I submit?

Do I dare to remember?

The eye gives me no hints, no measure by which to decide, to make that vital choice. It only watches with its distant stare, as if I was no more than a mere flea on its horizon.

Mostly likely, I am even less.

But even fleas have been known to bring down giants.

So I must do as well.

Still, the eye is too vast for me to truly comprehend. Yet even so, it has noticed me. It *knows* me. It measures out each of my days in an unending series of clicks that rule all I do in a totalitarian regime which offers no alternatives.

Except now.  
Do I struggle?  
Do I submit?  
Do I dare to remember?  
...  
I remember...

### Prologue

It was clear that magic of the greatest kind had just been performed, and the small crowd of creatures gathered around the long banquet table had all been quite eager participants.

"He did it!" the Doormouse caroled. "He stopped Khronos."

Slithery chuckles echoed around the clearing. "You can't halt Time. That's madness," Chess purred.

"Ah, well, at least we're in the best company," Haiga added.

Nearly everyone nodded. It was only sheer truth.

However, while the rest of the tea party watched the solemn figure of the Hatter float out of his clearing, there was one who was not. His ears swiveled towards the conversation, but his eyes remained fixed on the last spot Khronos had appeared.

*Too late yet again.*

His shoulders slumped. "I'll never catch him now."

"What's that?" Chess asked, popping in front of Hare.

Hare hopped backwards, but his shock was automatic. Chess had played this trick too many times before.

"Khronos. I- I need to speak with him."

The Hare straightened and gave Chess his most officious look. Unfortunately, Chess only grinned.

"Missed an important date then?"

Hare glared. "I said that one time!"

"I think we might remember it differently," Chess chortled. "Now, how to get you back to Khronos..."

"It took the Hatter ages. And now he's come and gone and... I remain cursed."

Chess reappeared floating belly up, front legs crossed behind his head. "The thing to consider is how to find him again."

Hare sat back on his hind legs. "I have no idea where to start. And the Queen needs me-"

Chess hissed with laughter. "Queen? What Queen? She just left, remember? And a King... whoo-hoo, I can barely think of a time we had one. Not since that old nutter."

Hare straightened indignantly. "Have respect for our monarchs – past and, er, future."

Chess airily waved a paw. "Sure, sure. But now, there's a larger problem, isn't there? This curse of yours. It's caught my imagination."

Hare blinked and Chess was suddenly standing next to him, front leg slung across his shoulders. Hare repressed a shudder at the claws so near to his neck.

"W-what should I do?"

"Begin at the beginning, I should think. You'll find your way to him in the end."

"The beginning..." Hare mused.

Chess faded out.

"Wait!" Hare called.

A set of yellow eyes opened in front of Hare. Despite expecting them, Hare stumbled back a step.

"Yes?" Chess rumbled.

"What if there's more than one beginning?"

Chess' mouth appeared, gaping wide in a perfect circle.

"More than one beginning? More than one? Why, that's-"

"Preposterous?" Hare asked timidly.

"Marvelous! That's the most fabulous thing I've heard all day."

"Really?" Hare quivered.

"No. Not even close. Between Hatter and Khronos, and then last night with the Queen and Knave, there's far too much excitement for you to come in more than a distant fifth."

Hare wilted completely.

"Still, that's more exciting than at least one or two million other ideas, isn't it?"

Hare's ears perked up. "I-I guess so."

"Guess again, because I'm ready to share my sage wisdom."

Hare blinked and fought back a giggle. Best not to anger Chess while he was in a magnanimous mood. He simply nodded and waited. Chess rose to his full height – although as he was floating upright in the air, surely that didn't matter as much – and clasped his paws together.

"Start at your midginning."

"Midginning?"

"Your middle beginning. Then you can choose whether to go backwards or forwards.

Somewhere in the midst of all that, you'll find Khronos."

"I see."

Chess snorted and his saintly pose fell away. "No, I doubt you do, but perhaps you shall. Eventually."

"It's to be a quest, then," Hare warbled as bravely as he could. "Very well. I accept."

"You accept?" Chess gasped. "But it's your- oh, never mind. Just don't ignore the Borderlands."

Hare gulped and nodded.

"Now go. There's a curse to break, and no time to lose. Well, I mean, Khronos is lost to us, but there's..."

Chess' voice faded out, leaving Hare to sit and ponder. He had a god to find, and a midginning to get to.

### **Part I:**

#### **As Big as a House**

He fled.

The pounding roar of his heart kept him leaping forward in a staccato rhythm that beat a circling refrain in his scattered thoughts...

*Late... late... for my plate... late... late... no time to wait...*

As repetitive as the thoughts were, they kept the terror at bay. Or at least, they were enough to keep him moving forward as fast as his little legs could take him. *Away*, his heart shouted. He didn't know where, exactly, but he hoped *away* was really just another word for *safety*.

He hoped. He wasn't certain. And that he did know – just how little he understood about the world outside his snug, secure home.

*Lost... lost... but, oh, such cost.*

His nose quivered at the new refrain. For a moment, he wished he remembered the original words, the ones his mother sang to him before he slept, the lullaby that had rocked him into blissful dreams his entire life.

But he couldn't think of Marlia, of the *zoarn* that had befallen. That hurt too much. Likewise, he'd already forgotten several words he thought he should still know, so many he felt like he was destined to be lost the rest of his existence.

*All gone... everyone... everything...*

He blinked back tears, as he had nearly every day of his life, afraid that blurry vision might send him crashing into a tree or bush or root. And even with his size, the path that stretched before him was filled with obstacles. But if he stopped to quiver, would *they* catch him?

Although... *why* him?

No, he couldn't stop. Couldn't think of an answer. He could only bound forward, one hop at a time, ignoring burs that caught on his soft, fine coat, or thorns that nipped at sensitive paws, and wish there'd been more time. More time to train, more time to become stronger. As much as he'd spent nearly every waking moment following orders, he'd not yet gotten big enough to learn about protecting himself. He only knew, as did every leveret, that he should hide from shadows in the sky and run from

claws. And more than anything, if he couldn't defeat his enemies, then he needed to retreat and save the fight for another day.

So he fled, until his body failed and he flopped to the ground, chest heaving, straining for breath, body trembling more from exhaustion than terror. Still, he knew he couldn't stay in that spot, open to the sky and all of its terrors. It wasn't safe. Instead, he pushed himself over to the nearest bush and dug a tiny burrow, just enough for his body to lie even with the ground. Then he slept. In his dreams, however, he couldn't escape remembering.

*Run! Marlia's voice echoed.*

*He'd been sitting in his room, polishing his new watch, when her scream had pierced the halls of their den. As the youngest of all his brothers and sisters, he was home the earliest every night. When he poked his nose out of his room, he knew he was the only one present and he wondered why his mother sounded so odd. He sniffed and found the familiar scent of his mother spiked with a strange copper smell. Worried, he hopped tentatively forward into the narrow hall. When nothing happened, he decided to follow the scent. Squaring his small shoulders, he allowed his nose to lead him to the entrance of his home.*

*And the recognizable form of Marlia, slumped on the ground. Fear spread throughout him. He fought back the thran as he dropped down and nudged her.*

*"Marlia?" he asked, not understanding why she remained so still.*

*He nudged her again. Her eyelids lifted.*

*"My... son..."*

*"What's wrong, Marlia?"*

*She lifted a paw and ever so gently stroked his quivering nose.*

*"Run... go alone... never... return..."*

*"But Marlia, I don't know where to go."*

*"As far as you can."*

*"What's wrong, Marlia? I'll go get help."*

*"No." Here her voice regained some of the sharp edge he knew so well. "You need to leave right now, before they find you."*

*"Who?"*

*His mother's breath turned into heaving gasps.*

*"The... ones... who... lied..."*

*Her eye rolled back in her head and her chest grew still.*

*"Marlia?"*

*But there was no reply. He leaned his head against her still-warm breast and breathed in the comforting reminder of grass and warm days in the sun. Tears flowed down his cheeks. He didn't understand what was happening, but he knew Marlia wouldn't be able to hold him anymore.*

*BANG!*

*The entrance to his home shuddered under the loud noise. He lifted his head, just now noticing the loud babble of voices echoing through the halls of the warren. He wanted to go to those voices, to show them Marlia and ask for help.*

*But she'd told him to leave, all by himself, and he'd always been obedient. The best of his age. Which was why he ran down to the emergency exit Papa had built long before he'd been born. It nothing more than a rough hole in the ground that led out past the bounds of their warren, but it was safer than any other route. He opened it and hopped inside. He took nothing with him. Marlia told him to flee, and he did.*

*When he emerged, the night glowed red. Screams echoed in the distance. He heard familiar voices shouting, giving orders, preparing for combat.*

*"Ready the battalion. My first has fallen in battle, lost to the treachery of the five."*

*For a moment, the little leveret yearned to run to that gruff, familiar voice, which he alternately feared and loved. But Marlia had told him to go alone.*

*Another babble of voices grabbed his attention.*

*"There's another one trying to flee!"*

*"Get him! There in the bushes! Stomp them hrakoo all out!"*

*Certain the voices meant him, the leveret leapt forward in a single bound, all thoughts of staying behind erased in the need to survive and terror of what might be chasing him.*

*He fled.*

With a start, he woke from his dream. Only it wasn't a dream, but a nightmare of truth. He'd been fleeing for days, but he knew he still wasn't far enough.

*Ed: For more on C.M. Bratton's book, **The Ticking Hand**, see Books for Sale, below.*

## Writing for Children

By: Billy James Wall



### FATAL FLAW: DUMBING-DOWN WRITING

When writing for children, I urge you to keep clever adults in mind. In other words, avoid dumbing-down your word choice, structure, pace, and vocabulary.

Think of the Harry Potter books as an example. They were, and are, wildly popular with children and yet adults find them fun and challenging too. It seems the lesson here is children's books need to be written practically with an academic treatise or a literary adult novel in mind.

Please don't write-down to children, for the kids can tell when you are being talked-down to. They also can surmise when the writer hasn't fully understood their culture, their viewpoint, and their interests. That doesn't mean you need to learn the current slang. That actually dates your work, and most publishers are leery about that.

It does mean your characters should sound like children, think like children, and have names like contemporary children. Using a name like Nancy, Sally, Bobby or Jimmy may make you seem out of touch with the times. Even a made-up name like Liquinicia makes the story seem over authentic. Other ways a writer can fail to connect is by using overly formal word choices, overly formal sentence structure, and lengthy monologues. Of course, the young reader most likely can understand a formal work or can follow a formal sentence structure. The problem is that children readers will not believe you when you use them. They just won't believe a set of teens who talk like middle-aged attorneys. They won't believe a group of your children who spring into long soliloquys about duty, emotion, morality, or practically anything else. If your readers don't believe you, you've blow the chance to make your story connect.

Another reason to not dumb-down the story, is to create the chance to help the reader think. For example, the considerations of a big idea like injustice. What is injustice actually? Could it be something different from what we think? Can it be swept away by calling it something different?

An intelligent book creates opportunity for the reader to ask questions, explore, and examine. It doesn't tell the reader what to think but encourages the reader to think.

You might ask, "But shouldn't writers lead readers to the positive part of society?"

An intelligent book respects the readers' ability to think for themselves and make wise choices when given enough perspective.

An intelligent book knows people learn more by working out a problem than by being told how to do it. In sum, may I not tell you, but encourage you to write for children as if you were writing for an adult. And, a clever one at that!

## WHAT AM I TO MAKE OF THIS?

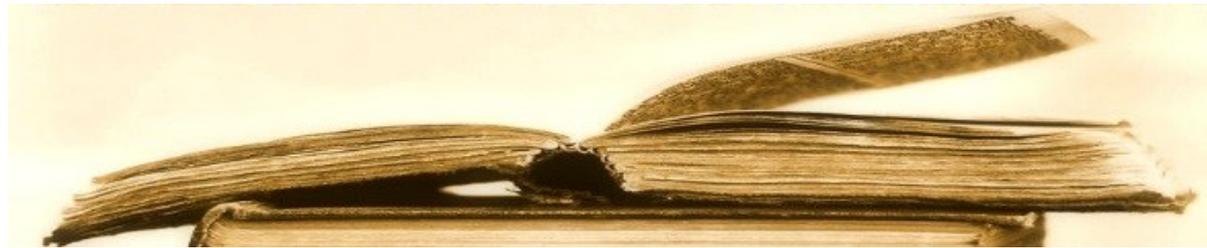
by: Nancy Fierstien

“They’re hatched,” he said Good Friday morn.  
All but one egg – the rest were born  
on a day synonymous with death.  
I thanked God for each tiny breath.

On Saturday, I peeked to see  
pink, fuzzy nestlings. Quietly  
I gasped to find  
only the unhatched egg enshrined.

“They never even got to peep!”  
I ranted. True dismay ran deep  
into the nest where babies died.  
“I hope that belly is satisfied.”

I checked again on Easter morn.  
Even the unhatched egg was gone.



## *A book review*

by: Billy Wall

**Harry Potter**, by J. K. Rowling

I am a new Harry Potter fan, having taken up the reading of the series after my 10-year-old granddaughter recently told me of her love of it. Since then, I’ve read five of the seven and now share her enthusiasm for British author J. K. Rowling’s exciting work.

I’m late to the wizarding world, but I intend to read the next two books as soon as possible. What I’ve observed so far of this runaway hit tale of magic and mayhem is that the book has remarkable characterization.

Oh, the books chronicle the life of student wizards Harry Potter, Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger as they attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The main story concerns Harry’s fight against Lord Voldemort, a dark wizard who wants to become immortal, overthrow the wizard governing body called the Ministry and Magic and rule over all wizards and muggles, a term that mean non-magical people.

All the stories I’ve read pack in lots of action as they move quickly from scene to scene. Some say the plot thickens too often, letting the main characters remain cartoonish and lacking in depth. I think the fast pace exhilarating and important to keep young readers flying along./ Some say Harry, Ron, and Hermione stay shallow characters throughout the series, but I feel they do change more each book. Harry, for instance, remains kind of bratty, short-tempered and always racing toward anger, but he does change.

In “Philosopher’s Stone,” Harry looks at things only on the surface an feels he can, without adult hope, save the day. By “Goblet of Fire” he starts to have empathy for those around him , especially Cedric Diggory, and begins to rely on his friends for help. I understand Harry changes even more in the last two novels.

Hermione beings in “Philosopher’s Stone” as the smarter one, the one who understands human emotion, unlike Harry and Ron. She’s also without friends and easily upset and simply unlikeable. In “Goblet of Fire”: she’s sure of herself and emotionally savvy for herself and those around her, but practically willing to give up her friends to assert herself. And, there’s more growth in the last two books.

And then there's Ron who begins in the shadow of Harry and Hermione and all the people around him, the sidekick, and the comic relief. In "Philosopher's Stone," Ron shows his unique skills. He rids himself of self-consciousness by becoming proficient on the Quidditch team. Ron's character (like all characters should) has a beginning, middle and end. He starts out lacking in confidence and inferior to those around him, and in the end confident and one of the books' most loyal characters.

So I say all three main characters are molder into heroic fictional beings. In fact, Harry Potter takes the classic hero road: From self-centered to empathetic, to willing to sacrifice for others. I look forward to following more of the adventures of this set of memorable characters.



I am so happy to include this poem from Clara Hoffman. Clara is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader at Baranoff Elementary in Austin, Texas. What a pleasure it was to meet and visit with Clara and all the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders at the school last January.

## Untitled

© 2018, Clara Hoffman

**The cotton candy sky looked beautify against the sunset below a farm.**

**Cows, horses, and chickens, moonlit now, shine.**

**We let our heads rest on pillows of trees on the farm.**

**Reach – reach – reach toward the sky**

**Oaks and willows.**

**Each blade of grass told a story that night,**

**Their voices cascading over the hills.**

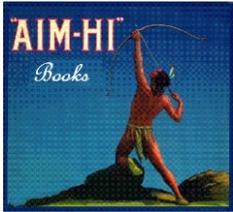
## A Voice of Hope

by: Billy James Wall

I hear the voice of hope. It comes not with a shout  
But in a whisper to help me cope, keeping me seldom without  
A lifeline to cling to during stormy seas.  
It gives me a solid crew; a shoreline to seize.  
Be it night or day, summer or winter  
That voice seems here to stay and helps me enter  
Loving times along the way. That voice seems to hum.  
Through trials and tribulations it bids me to come  
Towards better relations. And as far away from  
Sadness and despair as deep prayers can bring. I listen to become  
Aware of the of the lessening of the sting.  
That voice becomes more steady  
As I listen hard to always stay ready  
To keep up my guard.  
So I always plan to hear that voice of hope.  
May it stay forever clear so I live beyond simply to cope.

Have you a poem you would like to share in the *True-badour*?

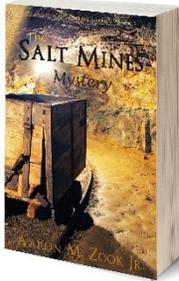
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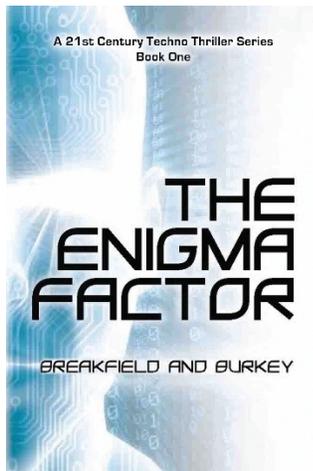
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Title: The Salt Mines Mystery  
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## ROXANNE BURKEY



The Enigma Factor

ISBN: 978-1946858009

Available at Amazon and

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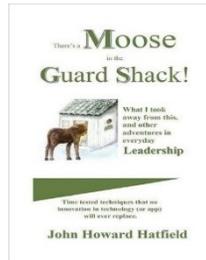
Rouge cyber-criminals want Jacob Michaels, a brilliant young programmer, to join them. He just doesn't know it yet. Jacob has the brains, expertise, and programming methods to get them what they want without discovery. With his best friend, Buzz, and an distractingly beautiful encryptionist in tow, Jacob enters the world of Dark Net here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the computer is the weapon of choice! With the cyber-criminals engaged in international hacking, it's easy to have your identity slip through your fingers. No one, including Jacob, believes it when he learns he has been targeted. Jacob finds the space between cyber good and cyber evil difficult to navigate, as well as dangerous.

Book 1 of the Enigma Series

Also available e-book and audio

## JOHN HOWARD HATFIELD

Title: There's a Moose in the Guard Shack!  
Genre: Business & Economics / Leadership  
ISBN: 978-14958-082-5-8  
Publisher: Infinity Publishing  
[Link: Infinity - Moose in the Guard Shack](#)



A management-leadership book like no other you have ever read. Hatfield shares his insights of leadership from military assignments in the great frozen great northwest of Alaska!

## MARK LIEBMAN



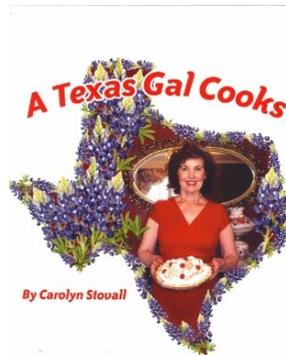
Title: Moscow Airlift  
ISBN: 978-1-946409-44-7  
Available: Amazon, and

[www.marcliebman.com](http://www.marcliebman.com)

When Gorbachev committed his country to purchasing at least eight million tons of grain over the next five years by signing the historic U.S./Soviet grain deal in 1991, he knew the country was broke. Inflation in the Soviet Union is almost out of control; the government is losing its iron grip on the population and in March; and the Soviet parliament votes to dissolve the Soviet Union. Hardliners want Gorbachev out of power and the Iranians see the turmoil as a chance to acquire tactical nuclear weapons.

The U.S. is getting conflicting intelligence on the situation in the Soviet Union and Josh Haman is sent to Moscow to be an independent set of eyes and ears. On the day he arrives, a KGB general promises to give him the names and addresses of the man who ordered the killing of his first wife's parents. His mission expands from gathering intelligence on the volatile political situation to stopping the delivery of the nuclear weapons to the Iranians all the while he is tormented by the desire to exact revenge.

## CAROLYN STOVALL



Title: A Texas Gal Cooks  
ISBN: 978-0-692-52528-9  
Available on Amazon, and



[www.atexasgalcooks.com](http://www.atexasgalcooks.com)

## GRETCHEN RIX

### Nana's Banana Pudding

This banana pudding is one that I have experimented with until I think that it is the best banana pudding ever. The real cream and the real butter in this pudding makes it so creamy, and smooth tasting. I cook this recipe in the microwave, and it is smooth as silk.

1 ½ c. sugar      1 ½ t. real vanilla      4 T. flour  
3 large egg yolks, separated from the whites, beaten  
large can Carnation      2 T. real butter      ½ c. milk  
5 to 6 bananas      1 c. heavy whipping cream  
1 pkg. vanilla wafers

In a large Pyrex mixing bowl, add the sugar and flour. Mix until well blended. Shake the can of Carnation. Add the can of milk slowly to the sugar/flour mixture, stirring as added. Add the beaten egg yolks. Stir well. Add the whipping cream, slowly, stirring as it is added. Add the milk. Stir all of these ingredients well with a whisk. Cook two minutes in the microwave, and stir with a wooden spoon. Stir every two minutes until the mixture begins to thicken. Then cook it for one minute at a time, stirring each time, until it is thick. Take the pudding out of the microwave, and stir well. Add the butter, and vanilla. Stir well and let the pudding sit for about ten minutes to cool before putting in the sliced bananas. Pour the pudding into a pretty bowl, and decorate the edges with vanilla wafers.

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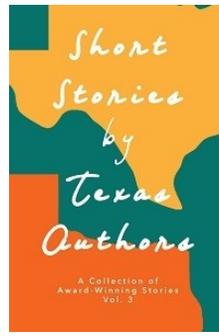
Title: Him

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**AIM-HI BOOKS CALENDAR:** Here is the list of places I'm supposed to appear this fall. If you are in the area, please stop by and say hi! I'd love to see you, sign a card or a book for you, and get to know you better, or catch up on old times.

MARCH	24 <sup>th</sup>	Galveston Island Book Fest	Galveston, Texas
APRIL	14 <sup>th</sup>	Brazos Valley Book Festival	Bryan/CS, Texas
	28 <sup>th</sup>	Authors in the Park (Landa Park)	New Braunfels, Texas
MAY	6 <sup>th</sup>	Texas Authors Spring Meeting	Lockhart, Texas
	17 <sup>th</sup>	Writers Group, Bulverde Library	Bulverde, Texas
JUNE	5 <sup>th</sup>	Canyon Lake Writers Group	Canyon Lake, Texas
	9 <sup>th</sup>	Wimberley Book Fest	Wimberley, Texas
	23 <sup>rd</sup>	Corpus Christi Comic Con	Corpus Christi, Texas

**BONUS FEATURE:**

**By: John Howard Hatfield**

**The World has gone to Hell!**

**(From the Grumpy Grand Dad Series)**

This past weekend while I sat on the deck reading my paper, I was kinda watching the grandkids playing out of the corner of my left eye. They were in the outback on the play-scape that I refer to as PupHouse. I was just a bit amazed at their resourcefulness. During their most recent sojourn to A-Town, the rain had limited their outside activities quite a bit. Finally, a chance to get outside in the back, primarily in PupLand, up, down, on the slide and on the connected swings.



The six-year-old (just a month shy of seven) and fairly *in-charge*, if you know what I mean, was directing the activity. As yet, the almost-four-year-old was going along with the direction. The almost-four-year-old decided it was best to resurrect the *Club* she had initiated on her last visit. I tried to look as uninvolved as possible, hoping to remain on the sideline; but, as usual, that wasn't gonna happen.

First, she wanted me to run over the *Secret Handshake*, two strong glad hand movements and next the thumb attached to the forehead with four fingers waving in the breeze. Once both the six-year-old and the almost-four-year-old remembered the sequence without prompting, they were off to get the *Club* started and I went back to my paper.

Soon, the same old argument arose as to the appropriate name for the club and they returned to my chair on the deck, the six-year-old trailed by the almost-four-year-old, seeking out a referee. I suggested, again as usual, my old standby: *The He-Man Woman Hater's Club*; thinking to myself: if it's good enough for Spanky, Alfalfa and the rest of Our Gang, it's good enough for a run-of-the-mill backyard PupLand club. Well the six-year-old is having none of that and soundly rejects my suggestion. Mind you, she does not have a better choice, at least not right away. Still I say: "*The He-Man Woman Hater's Club*" and still she insists on having her way. Her almost-four-year-old brother does not care one way or the other. He's still workin' on the handshake.

Not more than a little while later, the six-year-old is again at my chair and again asks my advice on a club name. Not being one to give in easily, I repeat my suggestion: *The He-Man Woman Hater's Club* and again, as you probably expect, it is once more soundly vetoed. If she doesn't want my opinion, she shouldn't ask! Just maybe that's asking far too much for a six-year-old to take on at this time, but Grand Dads just oughta get more respect, don't ja' think?

Before you know it, the six-year-old once more back up to the deck to inform me that she has now



decided on a name for the club. I'm assuming she remains under the impression that I really care. Turns out the feller getting all the glory is my pup, Gus. The club is now and forever to be named *The Little Gus Club*. Grand Dad has lost out to his own dog, a mongrel breed and a rescue hound at that. Just imagine the embarrassment I felt?

The play continues and I keep somewhat of a watchful eye out; after all they are elevated some five feet up on a platform roughly five feet square. Before I know what is happening they have decided to try swinging from the ladder to the clubhouse; a stretch of some eight to ten feet. This is a rather unusual feat for these two as they aren't usually this adventuresome. It all works out OK



for a while and nobody is snagged on the swing chain, which now the almost-four-year-old has somehow managed to unravel completely. The last time it took me un-told hours of manipulation and hard sweat to get the seat and chain back in working order after he had *fixed* it. I removed the now unserviceable swing seat from the immediate area thus allowing the club functions to resume.

Knowing peace couldn't reign long, I hear the six-year-old announcing to all within earshot as she repeatedly pokes her index finger at one of the clubhouse stanchions that we must now use our secret code to LOGIN to secure entrance to the clubhouse. It's just a play-scape and a place for the Pups to get in out of the weather—there's nothin' digital about it! Now we gotta have a password? I blame this twist on her father. After all it's his IT influence on her that has most likely brought about this revelation.



The assignment of individual secret codes is initiated immediately to everybody who may ever have reason to enter the club's confines. The six-year-old has to make positive damn sure, that each of us has our own code. She goes about scribbling each code on a piece of paper that we are to maintain individually—allowing no one to see. Nobody is to know our code. It doesn't seem to matter that we are discussing this feature of the game aloud and within earshot of the entire neighborhood. It seems to be of no concern; however. As far as I know the codes did remain somewhat a *secret*.

Before I realized it, I was being drug into the fracas again—please note the kicking and screaming I'm exhibiting.

"Howie! What's gonna be your password?" the six-year-old asked.

"Why do I need a password?"

"You need a password to get into the clubhouse."

"What clubhouse?" I replied

"Our clubhouse!"

"Where is it?" I string her out.

"In PupLand on the top of PupHouse."

"I can get up there without a password."

"Now you can't. You need a password. You didn't before, but you do now." Again, I blame this all on her *IT* Daddy and I shouldn't stand for it. But...

"OK!" I told the six-year-old. "1-2-3 is my password."

The six-year-old says: "It needs to be longer than that."

I insist on a three-digit code and tell the six-year-old: "I'm old and I cannot remember a string of numbers longer than three." Eventually she gives in and I am granted an executive waiver to maintain a three-digit passcode.

The six-year-old records my password on one of those paper scraps and hands it over. I told her "I don't need this. I can remember my code. "Why do I need this?"

"Because, it's your password."

"I know my password. Its 1-2-3. I don't need a scrap of paper to remember it." I hand her the scrap back.

"But. It's your password!" She hands me the scrap of paper back and I let it go and the kids moved on to their next agenda item.

club houses:  
Papland and  
Howies house  
use code for  
getting in and  
out. And also  
when asked, ~~say~~  
~~the code~~

Howie  
member  
club code:  
87316  
Have fun!

use this to  
get in/out  
of our  
clubhouse.  
Please ~~at~~  
check in  
with  
the president's  
Alison &  
gavin

When I looked over what the six-year-old had handed me, I realized I really had not won the argument. I now had both my instructions and my new password.

Next up for assignment was the almost-four-year-old. Try as he might, he could not begin to come up with a code on his own—working on the problem for some four or five minutes; the task remained completely above him. The six-year-old tried combination after combination on him. Every set meets with failure from the almost-four-year-old. Finally, through sheer determination the six-year-old and the almost-four-year-old settle on the set: 1-2-3-4.

Feeling very put out, I complained to the six-year-old that this combination was just one digit off from my code; I have to wonder if their *system* is up to the task and just what the NSA might make out of the similarity of codes—probably confound them. This entire matter seems to be *over-the-head-complex* to the assemblage. Soon everything again seems to be right in the world—at least in this little corner of the universe.

Before play resumes again, the six-year-old makes sure her Grandmother is assigned a code, understands and remembers the established rules and instructions. I not sure if I am being slighted or not, but Maw seems to hold some elevated (although secret) level of authority here that I have yet to achieve.

ID:  
34759  
Maw  
Agent  
Grandmaw

Maw  
secret Agent  
Member  
43759

From my perch on the deck, I watched as the almost-four-year-old climbed the back ladder of PupHouse and tapped his index finger on one of the stanchions of the upper deck. Finishing and just as obviously receiving clearance to enter, the almost-four-year-old continues on his quest to frivolity and command of the *Secret Handshake* five feet above the ground.

I thought to myself: “A digitized clubhouse in PupLand; I tell you the World has gone to Hell in a hand basket!”

Again feeling unbothered, back on an even keel, and moving on to the Metro Section, my world suddenly comes to another halt— my reprieve not lasting long. There’d somehow been an argument about the club name and now they have to change it. While I wonder what Little Gus thinks about his departure from Sainthood, I can see they are again headed my direction.

“Howie, we need a new name for our club.” The six-year-old advises me.

“Does your brother have any ideas?” I ask, making eye contact and staring directly at the almost-four-year-old.

“No!” replied both in unison. The six-year-old adds: “Not that we can agree on.”

I suggest, once more, my old standby: “*The He-Man Woman Haters’ Club* is a good name. If it was good enough for Spanky, Alfalfa and the rest of Our Gang, it’s good enough for a run-of-the-mill backyard PupLand club.”

Well, the six-year-old is still having none of that and again soundly rejects my effort. You know, she still doesn’t have a better choice. I say again: “*The He-Man Woman Haters’ Club*” and still she’s not having any of what I have to say.

“No! That’s not a good name for a club. There’s gotta be a better name than that.” I believe she thinks it’s my fault that she can’t come up with a name.

“No. ‘*The He-Man Woman Haters’ Club*’; that’s what it’ll be.” I state profoundly.

“No. That’s not what it’s gonna be!” Her almost-four-year-old brother still does not care one way or the other. He’s tickled that he’s finally mastered the *Secret Handshake*.

Together they amble off for some five to ten minutes—seems more like seconds to me—and again the six-year-old asks my advice on a club name. This has really gotten old by this time. Not being one to give in easily, I repeat my suggestion: “*The He-Man Woman Haters’ Club*” and again, as you might probably expect, it’s again vetoed.

Tired of the constant arguing about a club name, passwords and the such, I gather the Pups and the kids and we head to the park—thinking a walk and a change of venue best.

Someday soon, I’ll paint up a sign and hang it on PupHouse. Most likely after they’ve left for home, but before they return again. Age and treachery will overcome!

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