

Thoughts On Paper

WBPL's Writers Group Quarterly Journal

The Corner by Carlo Frank Calo
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"hello goodbye, goodbye hello"

Before dawn breaks, the men arrive at the usual corner. This one alone, others in groups of two and three and four, they are drawn to this same place each day. They wait for the trucks and vans to come. Patience is rewarded for some, the regulars, who are canvassed before they even stop for coffee. The young bucks joke about this game, a ploy to avoid the truth of their circumstance. For the rest there is no ambiguity. This is their job, this is their life, and if they are to feed their children they must take what comes. The sun is in its descent, low in the cloud-scattered southern sky. As the shadows stretch, the bones chill and the crowd dwindles.....

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Our 'featured' member:

Carlo Frank Calo



Biography:

Carlo Frank Calo, the grandson of Sicilian immigrants, is a husband, father and grandfather. He was born in Harlem, grew up in the Bronx projects and is retired on Long Island. When not fishing, bicycling, playing poker, working part-time counseling TBI survivors or babysitting his grandchildren he enjoys writing eclectically. He has been published in Hippocampus Magazine, The Fast Forward Festival, The Copperfield Review, High Coupe, Great South Bay Magazine, Down in the Dirt Magazine and Amygdala Literary Magazine. He can be reached at:

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The last three gather at the corner, familiar these many years. Bouncing in place their skin is pricked, again and again, by stinging specks of earth and sand borne by the approaching nor'easter. Alien to the cold, huddled against it, the man elbows his remaining compadres. They call him the smiling man, always laughing. The jostling is as much for his warmth as for theirs. His friends accept this absent complaint. They are used to his nudges. Returning his smile they welcome the incursion, sun and sweat having long ago bleached away any remaining competition. Whether they are among the chosen today has less to do with talent than with luck.

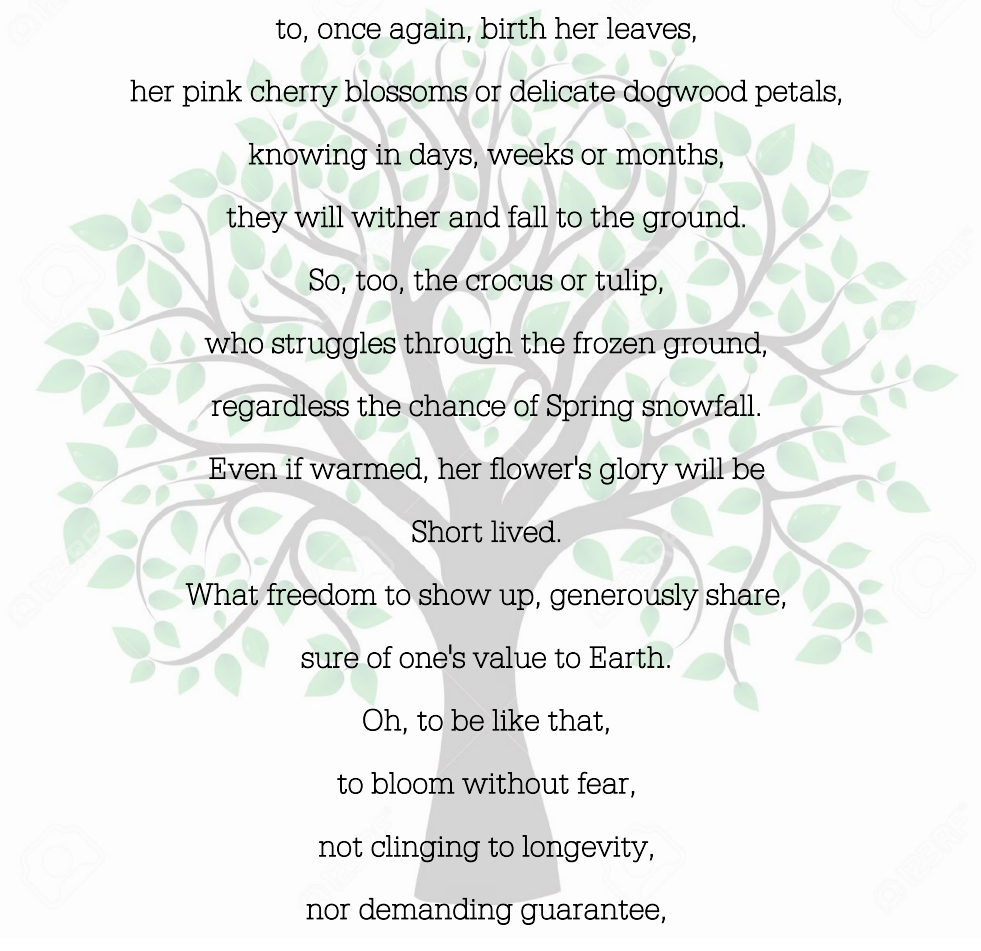
The smiling man crosses the road performing his customary traffic dance like a matador, dodging the cars honking from both directions. Walking a bit more he arrives at his bicycle and reaches under the seat to access his stash, glancing back to be sure that no one is watching. His stomach churns as he sees a van pull up to the corner. He curses himself for jeopardizing yet another opportunity, scarce as they have been. Rushing back across the road, smiling and waving – too late – the van passes, saluting him with the mocking beep of its horn. Inside, his friends – heads bowed and hands pressed to the windows in apology – turn to him, their Mayan eyes meeting and sharing regret. As he looks into their eyes he grins, baring his teeth while shaking his head, and thinks about that beeping horn. He is surprised that it bothers him more than the occasional cries of “Go back where you come from spic!” He is amused and at the same time angered. It is easier to accept the truth of hatred than the hypocrisy of mockery.

Now, with even more pretext for his vice he sits at the corner's curb, alone, in an ongoing battle with the shifting winds to ignite. The winds prevail and he is out of matches. On this day he has shown neither talent nor luck. Arms resting on his knees, frozen hands release the matchbook. It flutters unnoticed to his heels joining the charred remnants previously bound to it, each spent, one by one, none having fulfilled its purpose.

His smile is gone, replaced by a vacant face, a mirror of the hungry emptiness inside. Taking a deep breath, and then another, the man gazes down the road toward the van as it shrinks, slowly, into the distance. Eyes never leaving the van he shivers – feeling a new chill – and thinks only of another corner, back home where he was born, where he first experienced a smile and a laugh, where he knows he will find warmth.

The Nature of Risk

by Patricia Soper

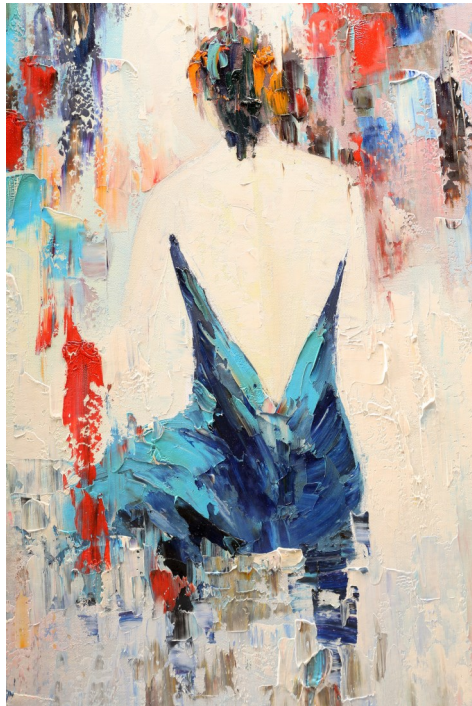


What courage each year has the tree
to, once again, birth her leaves,
her pink cherry blossoms or delicate dogwood petals,
knowing in days, weeks or months,
they will wither and fall to the ground.
So, too, the crocus or tulip,
who struggles through the frozen ground,
regardless the chance of Spring snowfall.
Even if warmed, her flower's glory will be
Short lived.
What freedom to show up, generously share,
sure of one's value to Earth.
Oh, to be like that,
to bloom without fear,
not clinging to longevity,
nor demanding guarantee,
but offer our best without expectation.

"Isolation Chamber" by Julie Newman

I use to care.
Share that is, with life all about.
They put me in isolation.
How's that for life?
Not in a cell or any real confinement.
No words said to my face.
Silently, without ado, it was you, who did this to me.
I shared what was happening.
I opened my deepest thoughts for the world to hear.
I wrote of a horror so real.
Devastation it did cause.
People listened to the wrong side.
A silent vow not to speak with me.
To push further away in silence, thinking ugliness would escape reality.
They chose not to believe me.
To make one sad for no reason.
Weep and have faith, someday it will all go away.
The taste of foul doings upon tongue.
The fever in the brain.
Bad deed will simmer for years, endured for nothing.
The simmering eats away at your dreams.
It will eat away at your life, as well.
The seams will burst into your daylight hours.
Reflections of what you have done.
Memories will appear and reappear.
The simmering never dies.
You fowled up the beauty in my life.
Now, you have your memories, of your deed.
Simmer simmer, in your head.
To create isolation, from others.
Make new friends and keep family in tact, no you took it all away.
A little dogs life was cut down.
A shell of a dog still walking around.
Her fervent energy trying to escape.
Put in isolation, since 3 years old.
No playing or romping.
No tail wagging or joy.
Won't forget, can't forget.
You made sure of that.
Hark, the birds are singing.
The song of getting even is being played.

Never had to do anything.
Years gone by, created your own sick memories.
Simmer, simmer, you will always remember , too.
The isolation within your brain.
We are all victims of wrongs.
Nightmares in isolation.
Stranded for life.
Because of you, we all get a lifetime sentence.
The prison of the mind.
Speak, I shall.
It is in my blood.
Bring awareness, I say.
My dog, don't let her die.
Simmer this on your souls and mind.
Your mind will now keep you, from being free.
How's that for isolation?



'The Lonely Woman'
Artist: Allen Xu

Animal Wisdom by Patricia Soper

I attend a Women's Circle which honors the change of seasons by celebrating the Spring and Fall Equinox and Summer and Winter Solstice. Each season, each of us is gifted with the awareness of an animal energy or totem who becomes an ally and guide for those next three months.

For winter, this year, mine was opossum. I'd heard of possums, but, Brooklyn-born and bred, I knew nothing about them. I did some research and learned that opossums "play dead" when stalked by taunting predators. Hence, the expression "playing possum." The wisdom behind this non-violent strategy is that the aggressor, in response to the possum's stillness, will lose interest and move on.

Within days of the Solstice, I was faced with opportunities to be still in the face of provocation. The positive results, early in the season, proved to me the value of opossum instinct. But, the most amazing incident happened in the last week of winter, as if opossum, aware I would move onto a new ally for Spring, wanted to leave me with a lesson I would never forget.

It began when I thought I'd left my eyeglasses in the clubhouse of my apartment complex. I cannot see without them, so rushed back to the clubhouse, bee-lining for the lounge where I had changed into prescription sunglasses before going outside. My regular glasses were not there. I raced to the laundry room where I had, moments earlier, put my clothes into the dryer. Not there either. I re-traced my steps again. In my "blind" panic, I did not realize that each time I passed from one room to the other, the door between had noisily slammed.

"Oh, that door!," angrily yelled a man seated in the folding area. "Do you have to let it slam?!"

I turned, startled, noticing him for the first time, but my eyes still scanning the tops of washers in search of my lost purple frames. "I'm sorry. I lost my glasses and I can't see without them."

He did not relent. "Why can't you hold the door when you go through?" A neighbor, seated beside him, just stared at me.

"I'm so sorry," I repeated and left.

Internally, I felt the sting of his anger and inwardly I did react to being yelled at in front of the other residents, but the pursuit of the eyeglasses took precedence over my thoughts. Thankfully, at home, I found the missing glasses in the entryway where they had silently fallen from their case onto the carpet. I then returned to the laundry room to take my clothes from the dryer.

I was so relieved as I entered that I made a general and joyous announcement, "I found my glasses!" and began to attend to my laundry. As I stood at the dryer, I saw, from the corner of my eye, that the angry man was approaching.

"I'm so sorry for yelling like that," he said to my surprise. I looked toward him, a friendly smile forming on my face.

"I just lost my son two weeks ago," he added.

My smile turned to sorrow and I offered words of sympathy. Again, he apologized and again, so did I, adding that I had been so preoccupied that I had not even heard the door. He continued to stand there, so I asked if it had been a sudden death. He lifted his hand to the right side of his forehead and gestured the firing of a gun. I closed my eyes, sighed and gestured my empathy, continuing to listen.

"That makes it so much harder," he added. "And my nerves are so jangled, I can't even stand the sound of a door."

I said that I understood, that we had lost young people in my own family. I offered what comfort I could. After a few minutes more of sharing his pain, he returned to his laundry and even offered to clear the folding area of his things if I needed space. Before I left, I spoke to him again, encouraging self-care.

As I walked back to my apartment, I realized, with profound thanks to opossum, that, had I reacted to the bereaved father's anger, that conversation would never have happened, nor its potential for comfort and healing...for him nor for me.

Later that week, in sharing this story of opossum wisdom with the women in my Circle, I became profoundly aware that "playing dead" is not passive but can transform a situation. I realized and heard myself say what seems like contradiction, but I know now is truth, "There is energy in stillness."



Suffragette Crowns by Rita B. Rose

Come women, all hearts, all hues, all generations
Tread lightly over roads of tar, cobbles and dirt
March in solidarity in our homeland
And across the world; we blend to one
In this sea of pink, of suffragette crowns, a garnish on our heads



Great grandmothers, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, daughters, friends
From long ago, we honor you
You, who have carried us this far
Your spirits guide our every ebb and flow in our blushing sea
We roll call your names, never forgetting our struggles
As we demonstrate against inequality, for liberty
You are forever embraced in this sea of pink with suffragette crowns, a garnish on our heads

Come women, all hearts, all hues, all generations
Clamor with determined voices, echo throughout canyons of time and now
Never to be crammed into an archaic black night again
In this sea of pink, of suffragette crowns, a garnish on our heads

Combers of change, we demand it, crash onto our shores of tomorrow as we proceed
With spirit sisters walking at our side, conveying their words and how far we have come
Their life-force arousing our confidence, because of them we travel forth
We know how far we have come; we know we will succeed
Twenty-first Century Women march on, march on—
Together, in our sea of pink with suffragette crowns, a garnish on our heads



"Ocean View Spa" by J. Roland Sullivan

Two 67 yr. Old Men: Albert & Herbert

Scene: Sitting Room – Late August

Year: 2013 – Time: 4PM

Albert: "Good 'pickings,' Herb."

Herbert: It's a room that affords the most privacy!

A. Swell, we couldn't be luckier!

H. I'm starting to feel gun-shy, Albert.

A. Stay cool, Herb! Now, what about the 'Lincoln'?

H. I 'backed-it-in' by the exit for an easy getaway!

A. Super! "Wont it be great watching the 'Wall Street boys,' eat up our daring escapade?"

H. I hope, I don't get the willies while filming!

A. Don't sell yourself short, Herb!

H. What if we get caught, Albert?

A. Stop with the negativity – come Monday we'll have more fun than two old geezers deserve!

H. You know, Albert – "it wouldn't cost us peanuts to buy the stuff!"

A. Blah! I'm tired of us being known as the mild-mannered "Broads of Broad Street!"

H. But, at least we'd sleep soundly!

A. Who cares, with so little time left in the 'hour-glass'!

H. How 'bout, "we hit the pool for a dip?"

A. (*Looking out the window*) Let's! I see two 'cuties' dangling their toes in the water!

H. Dare we speak to them?

A. Why not – we're not carrying the plague!

H. I fancy the 'floppy one'!

A. That's a lot of woman, Herb!

H. I know – I hope I don't get tongue-tied!

A. You will, but don't sweat it - bring the camera!

H. "Us with girls," gosh, who would believe it?

A. How old do you think they are?

H. Can't tell - if under eighty, I'm game!

A. "Way to go tiger!"

H. C'mon, lets put on our bathing trunks!

A. Too late – your 'Jezebel' is leaving and my 'Vixen' is smooching the lifeguard . . . ugh!

H. Let's face it; we never had a way with the ladies!

A. Can't argue that, Herb!

H. I'm peeved enough to pull off the heist now!

A. Slow down, slugger – let's wait till the guests fill the dining room!

H. They're filing in as we speak!

A. Okay, go get our 'janitorial duds' out of the car – I'll keep an eye on things!

H. (*Exits, returns shortly*) "Bad news, Albert!"

A. What now?

H. The 'exit alarm' is trumpeting a break-in!

A. Did anyone happen to see you?

H. A 'beach bum' checking out the dumpster!

A. Best you cool your bones for a spell!

H. Hey, the girls from the pool are sitting down at a table – let's join them!

A. Maybe we can use them as decoys!

H. They seem to be gazing this way – I'll wave!

A. Hey, they're calling you over . . . go join them!

H. What will I say?

A. Offer them a cocktail to break the ice!

H. After that?

A. You're on your own, but don't fiddle-faddle!

H. (*Exits sitting room.*) Okay, wish me luck!

A. (*Pacing up & down*) "What took you so long?"

H. I couldn't think 'what-to-say,' so, so, so . . .

A. Oh, oh – what did you do?

H. They paid me 'no mind,' so I shocked them with what we planned. Now, they want 'two grand up front' or they're gonna call the cops!

A. Nuts to them . . . Jeez Herb, what made you do it? H. You know 'how I get' . . . "they own the SPA, Al!"

A. The bloody thieving wenches!

H. I heard them tell the busboy to put the bathrobes & towels we planned on pilfering into our room!

A. No doubt, "planting the evidence to prove their case." Ah, jeez Herb, "now we'll never get to see the 'fellas' pop their eyeballs at our audacity!"

H. Don't be so sure – to get even, I pulled a 'no-no'!

A. What do you mean? Hold-on, the girls are getting up – "roll the camera while I warm up the car!"

H. Will do! Boy-o-boy, this is great - I got them stumbling all over the place. "Viva la Champagne!"

A. Oh, my God, what did you do?

H. Some wise guy put a packet of white powder into my suit upon leaving work today – so naturally . . .

A. (*Exiting stage*) Yikes! Okay, keep shooting - have the barkeep send me the film by 'Fed Ex express!' If anyone asks, 'you were on your own!' Send a picture of your incarceration - the boys will love it. Ciao!

BLACKOUT



About the Authors' Six Word Biographies

Carlo Frank Calo: **Pondering life's journey; enjoying it more!**

Christine Colligan: **Star-drop in a cosmic sea.**

Megan Goff: **Always writing from the heart.**

Gail McGurty: **Spiritual, optimistic, lover of learning, dreamer of possibilities**

Julie Newman: **Perceptive, honest, kind and open-minded.**

Mary O'Brien: **Trust God; Faith, Hope & Love!**

Nicole Peters: **Forging the road ahead, endless skies.**

Katherine Regina: **Shelving books, writing stories, exploring worlds.**

Rita B. Rose: **Resilient, Perceptive, Honest, Kind, Sage**

Patricia Soper: **Discovering mystical wisdom in nature & crone-hood.**

J. Roland Sullivan: **Womb to crypt; so be it!**

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