

HISTORICAL FICTION SHORT STORY: THE KILLING BY ROBERT KAHN

Summary: The submission is mostly autobiographical at around the time of sixth grade. It is a mix of memories that came as a single 'event' early one morning. I was compelled to attempt to write in the voice that I heard.

Growing up in the fifties, what would a kid really know about WWII residing quietly around us? Not much. Nobody wanted to talk about it. At the movies and on television we watched how our guys won the war. They had been home for a while, but not saying much about it. In my uncle's top dresser drawer I found black and white photos of him and his war buddies and some bullets. He wouldn't say much; until a long time later he did speak of how they set up camp his first night just off the Normandy beaches and how he was tripping over things in the dark. The next morning he saw what they were – dead Germans. But that was nothing, he said, as passing dead GI's when they moved out the next day. The war left reverberations and they could be felt, if not understood. But America was settling in. We were the winners.

Walking around in those days you would think it was an alright neighborhood, Auburndale, a section of Newton, a suburb of Boston. Moving there from a basement apartment with painted concrete walls to the upstairs of a two family, it seemed we had arrived. We came from Brookline which was concrete hard. Out here there was space, sky, trees, dirt and water from an inlet of the Charles River. People fished there, but caught mostly sunfish. They were greedy and stupid and thrown on the banks to flop, die and stink in the summer sun. At the end of my street, just before the river, was the woods. It was down there that the killing happened.

Jonny D lived in a small house with his mother and aunt. He was told his father worked for the railroad and was killed on the job. Jonny didn't have much of a memory of his father, but

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was made to feel proud of him. He had a paper route and was the first person to come to our door and welcome me to the neighborhood. When I was at his house, his mother and aunt always seemed stressed about something. Jonny seemed worried and sad a lot of the time and not just because he got his hair cut at home which looked it. He was the man of the house. Maybe he was sent to our door so we might be added to his route.

Across the street, in what seemed a large house, lived Peter W, an only child. He had a lot of neat Nazi things from the war. You could buy that stuff from army surplus stores around Boston. Peter got twisted somehow. When my little brother was in his playpen out on the upper porch, Peter would taunt him from the street. My brother didn't understand what he was doing. We were allowed to have a dog in our rental. There were times she would come home shaking, once with saw dust on her. Peter's father had a woodworking shop in their basement. I asked him if he took our dog into his house and he got angry. My mother caught on and realized Peter wasn't, "a good influence on me", and stopped me from playing with him. I was hurt and angry, but she was right. Whatever screwed him up probably has had him locked away somewhere by now. Reverberations of the war.

Our street intersected with an inclined street that ended on Commonwealth Avenue. There were a few shops across and one was a meat shop. Sometimes my mother would send me down to get something for dinner. The only person I ever saw in the place was the butcher who owned the shop. I'd tell him what was wanted and he would always try to get me to buy something else, like a candy bar. At some point I told my mother about this. She said she felt sorry for him and that he was trying to make a living and it was hard for him because a new supermarket opened a few blocks down the street. He was gone before we moved away.

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There was a kid in my class whose father worked the merry-go-round at Norumbega Park at the end of Comm. Ave. The park was built to attract people from Boston in the late nineteenth century. They would get there by trolley cars running down the middle of the street built by land developers. It worked; there were many nice homes built along Comm. Ave, but the trolleys were long gone because people were now driving cars. The park had carnival type rides, paddle boats for the river, popcorn and cotton candy. In the penny arcade was a creepy gypsy woman automaton that would tell your fortune in an unnerving voice after you put a coin in. This was a popular place, but it too is gone, replaced by a chain hotel. I thought my friend's father had a prestigious job running the merry-go-round. I thought again about that after going to their apartment for the first time. It was a warm day and his father was shaving in one of those under shirts with straps so his upper body hair showed. My friend's mother was distraught. She kept at him while he was shaving, "Ralph, Ralph". Ralph this and Ralph that. Her voice was breaking. He looked at me from the mirror a couple of times, expressionless. I think it was about money. My friend looked uncomfortable. It worried me and I never went back there again. I think I know what would have happened if I hadn't been there. Reverberations of the war.

But it reminds me of the first time I heard my mother and step-father fighting. Those images are burned in hard and can't be forgotten. I was in bed and suddenly they were yelling just outside my door by the bathroom. He threw his electric razor on the floor and it smashed into pieces. I can still see the light from the hallway coming in under the door. I was terrified, frozen, and knew that a pool of blood would come seeping under into my room. I thought one of them would be dead. But he stormed out and I finally got the courage to open the door and find my mother crying in bed with a book in her hands. I can't remember much of what she said,

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except she was sorry I had to hear this. She was hurt and embarrassed and couldn't comfort me much. I went back to bed sobbing myself. Nothing was said in the morning.

This area was very Catholic by way of Italians and Irish. There was a newly built church where my friends went, Corpus Christi. At that time I wanted to be Catholic, not just to belong and for the melodiously authoritative sound of Latin, but it was the mystery of it all. My friends had these medals of saints that were blessed. They wore them on their baseball caps - "Dear St. Christopher protect us". How could I compete against these guys without the power of magic saints? Now, after years of revelations of child abuse by priests in the Boston Arch Diocese, I'm glad I wasn't raised Catholic. Nobody was listening. Reverberations of the war.

The day of the killing my uncle dropped by and my mother sent him to find me in the woods near the river. On his way, he was hard bitten in his leg by a German Shepherd named, Tasker. The dog left us kids alone, but didn't like men, and maybe he sensed my uncle was once a soldier. He never found me that day, because the bite was so bad he had to go home. I was in the woods with a friend playing war, probably fighting the Japs. We were running around and got to the water's edge and there on the other bank was the mother and her babies. I was challenged to see how close I could come to them with a rock. I picked one up and let fly. One was hit and went upside down in the mud. The noise was terrible. Mother Mallard went berserk quacking and flying all around and the chick was crying and trying to up-right itself. We ran like hell and when we got far enough away to feel safe dropped to our knees and prayed not to get caught and that the chick would be alright. We probably bargained for our souls and promised to be good from then on, too. Reverberations of the war.

We lived there for two years and then we too were gone.