

The Writing Class

by Jake Barnes

I go down to the Senior Center and tell them I want to volunteer. A lady asks me what I did for a living before I retired. I tell her I taught school. You're the new creative writing teacher, she says.

There are twelve old ladies and two men in my class. One of the men is an East Indian. He is a tiny man with a big smile and a wall eye. The other man was a ball turret gunner in WW II.

The women are a colorful lot. There is a ninety year old who dresses like a hippy. A redhead is dressed in her Sunday finery. A short, round woman has shoes with springs on the heels. All of them dye their hair.

I ask if anyone has a poem or a story they would like to read. Everybody's hand shoots up. I nod at the redhead and she stands. Her "story" is a report of her fiftieth wedding anniversary party. It consists mainly of a listing of the names of the guests.

The veteran has brought a scrapbook with him. He reads several excerpts. I take the book home after class and check it out. It is a book of clever sayings by famous people. He tells me proudly the next week that he wrote some of the excerpts himself.

The Indian man is a plagiarist. He reads a story that he claims to have written titled "The Mare's Trick." Halfway through I interrupt him and tell him that I think we have heard enough. I check later, and sure enough, the story is from the Kama Sutra.

One of the last to read is the short woman with the funny shoes. She is wearing a red sweater vest that is covered with pins of various kinds. One is a rhinestone replica of the Golden Gate bridge. Another bears the likeness of Popeye.

She reads a story about her childhood in Illinois. Her descriptions are vivid. The story is about a visit to a dime store on a cold winter day. There were two drinking fountains at the back the store, and she wasn't allowed to drink at one of them, she said. She didn't know why.

After class I talk with her. I tell her that her story is wonderful. She beams. She tells me that she will never forget how cold it got in Illinois during the winter.

