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The Last Antelope Valley Anthology

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by

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DEDICATION

We, the editorial committee at MousePrints Publishing, have always tried to make our dedications significant. That is why the books have been dedicated to authors like Kurt Vonnegut and Kay Ryan and William Styron—writers who have changed the world with their words. We have even had ambitions of doing our own world-changing, and maybe we have, but this year's honoree has done more than change this world with his words. He has changed the cosmos.

Ray Bradbury has always been one of my favorite authors. His work fascinated and frightened me, with his stories of Martians and monsters, ghosts and ghouls. He even went one better than Herman Melville, since he wrote the screenplay for the literary classic *Moby-Dick*, with Gregory Peck playing Ahab, and showing him, in the final scene, beckoning to the crew of the “Pequod” with his dead hand to follow him into oblivion. Bradbury was very proud of that. He told me so the one time I got to hear him lecture. He was also very proud of *The Martian Chronicles* and always said that he hoped when we finally got to Mars we would be surrounded by mobs of Martians holding signs that read, “Bradbury was right.”

Now the Jet Propulsion Lab has decided to name the place where the Martian Rover “Curiosity” landed “The Ray Bradbury Landing.” That being said, how could we at MousePrints do any less? Therefore it is with great pride and great sadness that we dedicate this last issue of the Antelope Valley Anthology to...

**Ray
Douglas
Bradbury**

**22 August, 1920
5 June, 2012**

R.I.P.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Books do not suddenly spring into life like Athena from the brow of father Zeus. They require the work, sweat and determination of human beings, and those humans should be acknowledged.

First and foremost, the authors who often labor in exquisite isolation and would remain isolated without publication. Honor to you all for having the courage to put words on paper. That is an act of consummate, even foolhardy, bravery. But once the work is written it falls to other people to bring it to light.

All of the Antelope Valley Anthologies have been created by several people. The anthologies began as the brainchild of Rod Williams, who conceived, financed, and published the first two. Without his willingness to go *way* out on a limb, the annual anthologies would not have started. Next are the other three people who make up the editorial committee, Margaret L. Priddy, Marilyn Dalrymple, and Joan Fry. Margaret and Joan have tackled the chore of copy editing throughout. They edit and check grammar and word choice and edit and fact-check until they are cross eyed, and then they edit some more. This year Margaret has been particularly burdened, and has come through with flying colors. And finally Marilyn, whose photos and ideas have been instrumental in the creation of many of the covers for the AV Anthologies. Without her we probably would have had covers, but they would not have been nearly as eye-catching or heart-moving.

And finally there have been the advertisers/patrons who have helped with money. Without them the anthologies would not exist.

Thank you all.

GLH

NINE

The Last Antelope Valley Anthology

Nine is a significant number: Three times three, a prime number times itself, a trinity of trinities. In numerology it signifies endings, which, of course, also signify new beginnings. Cats are reputed to have nine lives. When one is in ecstasy, one is on cloud nine. There is a ninth heaven in Dante's "Paradiso" and a ninth hell in his "Inferno." The Beatles put a "Song," really more of a sound construction, on their *White Album*. It doesn't make a lot of sense until you listen to the background, day to day noises of people talking and pontificating and screaming with frustration. That song is almost a summation of what we at MousePrints have been doing for the last nine years. We have given people from the Antelope Valley a chance to laugh and cry and pontificate and scream with frustration, and now that time has come to an end. MousePrints simply cannot go on publishing the AV Anthologies. We are in debt up to our eyeballs and continuing to publish the anthologies would only make the problem worse. So this is the end. **Number Nine. *The Last Antelope Valley Anthology*.** We hate to see the book go because it has been a wonderful outlet for authors who might otherwise never see print, but what must be, must be. Farewell and good luck to all you authors. Keep writing.

G. L. Helm
MousePrints Publishing

INTRODUCTION

Joan Fry

Books can change your life—you probably already know that. Libraries are the macro version of books because libraries hold a multitude of life-changing books. The anthology you're holding in your hands is a mini library that contains a variety of stories and poems, any one of which has the same magic books have—the ability to take you to other lands and inside other people's minds and emotions. These stories and poems are so powerful they can transform you into another person. What you keep from that transformation—however brief it may have been—becomes part of who you are.

On www.mentalfloss.com, ("Where Knowledge Junkies Get Their Fix"), Lucas Riley reproduced a series of letters written over 40 years ago in response to a plea by Marguerite Hart of the Troy, Michigan, library. As Riley explains it, this children's librarian "wrote dozens of letters to actors, politicians, and authors from across the globe. . . . [and] asked them to address the children of Troy and speak about the importance of libraries, books, and reading. By the time the library opened, 97 letters had graced her mailbox. Here's a snapshot of what they had to say."

Science fiction author Isaac Asimov assured the children that a library isn't only a place to store books. "[A library] is a space ship that will take you to the farthest reaches of the Universe, a time machine that will take you to the far past and the far future, a teacher that knows more than any human being, a friend that will amuse you and console you—and, most of all, a gateway, to a better and happier and more useful life."

Astronaut Neil Armstrong, who briefly *was* the man on the moon, stressed the fact that "Your library is a storehouse for mind and spirit. Use it well."

Deane Davis, author, attorney, horseman, and former governor of Vermont, was oddly prescient when he told the children of Troy to "Read! It is nourishing, civilizing, worthwhile. Read! It destroys our ignorance and our prejudice. Read! It teaches us to understand our fellowman better, and once we understand this, it will be far easier to love him and work with him in a daily more complex society."

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet John Berryman wrote eloquently, "The chief thing is to read as hard as you play, with the same seriousness and a mind wide open . . . You have a pretty building for your books. Go in, and change your life."

Author and poet Richard Armour (whose light verse is often mistaken for Ogden Nash's) commented, "I am sixty-four years old, probably as old as your grandparents, but I am still learning. I learn from traveling and talking with people, but mostly I learn from reading books."

E. B. White, the author of *Charlotte's Web*, wrote, "A library is many things. It's a place to go, to get in out of the rain. It's a place to go if you want to sit and think. . . . A library is a good place to go when you feel unhappy, for there, in a book, you may find encouragement and comfort. A library is a good place to go when you feel bewildered or undecided, for there, in a book, you may have your question answered. Books are good company, in sad times and happy times, for books are people—people who had managed to stay alive by hiding between the covers of a book."

The ninth and final *Antelope Valley Anthology* offers readers the same rewards. "Just Walk beside Me and Be My Friend" is more than a short story. It is an invitation, and all the stories and poems in this anthology offer one—the invitation to become a friend, to appreciate

the majesty of the natural world, to do the right thing even if nobody notices, to be a traveler in a faraway country, to fall in love, even to experience what it's like to be a shoe.

The only thing these poems and short stories will not do is shelter you from the rain, although if you're really concentrating on what you read, you may not even notice.

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RAT RACE RUMINATION

Rod Williams

Deep breath, and once again it's time to switch off my brain, flee the looneytune supervisors and human anthrax masquerading as upper management, leave behind the dispiriting jive-talk of service production units, and uncoil with a Waldorf salad, a bottle of Pinot Grigio, and a basketful of good bread in a sunny little sidewalk café festooned with lantana and bougainvillea down an innocuous Palm Springs side street. The street is billed as a "gay rendezvous," but my wife and I are assured by the waiter that the shops and cafes are all "hetero-friendly." Good to know.

I'm ready for three glorious days of doing a whole lot of nothing. I have wonderful new music to absorb, some My Morning Jacket, and Ry Cooder's "No Banker Left Behind" and "John Lee Hooker for President," and the terrific "Harlem River Blues" by the son of a famous alt-country hellion. Poolside, and the San Jacinto Mountains loom two-dimensionally against a pellucid blue sky, the palms rise like tall green protective spirits safeguarding the hotel grounds, the tiki bar serves up cool mango and pomegranate vodka drinks. Mmm.

I stopped watching the news this weekend the 47th time I heard about Whitney Houston's death, unable to bear the media's idiotic tunnel vision with celebrities, unable to endure the endless speculations. Is it mean-spirited of me to confess that I miss Etta, Amy, and Ray Charles a hundred times more than this late diva with her majestic voice, her tortured heart, and her lousy choice in men? And by the way, CNN, are we still at war with Afghanistan? Does the economy remain comatose? Is Santorum still a moron? Do Americans continue to be out

of work, out of luck, and out of patience? I can't tell because, you know, Whitney Houston is the only story that seems to gain coverage in this attention-deficit world of ours.

Well, one must fight the blues with the blues, so in the chilly purple evening, we're off to Woody's to hear the Barry Baughn Band cover the hell out of Jonny Lang and Junior Wells and Sonny Boy Williamson while we devour juicy turkey burgers and share a basket of sweet potato fries, a little maple syrup on the side, then down a couple of Stellas for good measure. This small back room is packed, young people feeling the bass in their hips, older couples tripping the light fantastic, the keyboardist looking like an ordinary accountant, the drummer like a plumber, and the music drenching all of us like a crying sky, like a whiskey river, like a hard rain, the lyrics pummeling and shielding us at the same time, reminding us that being human is a rough whitewater ride- broken hearts! no money! acts of vengeance! backbreaking work!—and that we all need to hang on tight if we don't want to be violently launched overboard, forever lost in the quick black rapids surrounding us. Drink up. Dance. Dispel the dark.

On our walk back to the hotel, we encounter a young disheveled albino moaning to the stars, howling at the casino, stomping in circles in the midst of a one-way boulevard, heedless of traffic, reeling with schizophrenia. The voices in his head, what secrets do they whisper? Cars weave around him, it's a minor miracle he isn't struck and killed, and my wife and I take care to tiptoe across the street. I fight my natural impulse to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, feeling a bit ashamed for not intervening or calling 911 or approaching the young man and offering resources for shelter, food, meds, a sympathetic ear. But this is Palm Springs, not Palmdale. I don't know this community, I've got a bit of a beer buzz going on, and there's likely more than a trace of cowardice involved in the turning of my back. This long weekend

was pencilled in for music, alcohol, the penny slots and blackjack tables, sunshine. Oh, listen, I'm happy to do the hard work Monday through Friday, pick up that rock and carry it on, and maybe on a future getaway I'll feel more like what I'd like to believe is my true self: the caregiver, the Good Samaritan.

Someday, perhaps, I'll also be more of a culture-vulture and take in the celebrated glassblower exhibit at the local museum, learn more about the dream of the enormous blue frog, get around to playing eighteen holes, partake of the hot mineral springs and the mazes of hiking trails studded with palms and wildflowers, ride the tram and enjoy the Follies, and do whatever else it is that tourists do in this town. Maybe I'll allow myself to be photographed wearing khaki cargo shorts, Rockport sandals, and a Billabong t-shirt, grinning as I wrap my arm around a bronze statue of Lucy or snuggle up to beautiful Marilyn, her skirt billowing in the warm afternoon wind.

But now the young albino has evaporated into a nearby parking garage, and the sound of his voice carries into the light fog of the desert evening, and... is he singing? Is it my imagination or is he singing, *Don't you wanna dance? Say you wanna dance. Don't you wanna dance? Say you wanna dance.* We step off the sidewalk, step away from his shrieks and bellows, into a 24/7 fortuneteller's tiny storefront and I ask the gypsy, hey, what's my future? Ah, she sighs, the mists are parting. I see a table for two at a little seafood joint, I smell crabcakes and mahi mahi, I feel outdoor heat lamps, I hear a white bartender mixing killer mojitos and croaking the muddy workingman blues in the growly rasp of an old black troubadour, why it's Barry Baughn again and he's channeling "T-Bone" Walker and Mississippi John Hurt, and in a thundercrack I remember that what's waiting out there for me, for my wife, for all of us is that great void, the yawning wilderness without music, and a small shudder runs through me.