Author's BAZAAR ONLINE

December 2010 ■ No. 2

Confessions of a news reporter in the cop shop

As a journalist, I confess that I like cops because of the stories they tell.

Consider the saga of the lady cop who fought a feisty naked guy, an alleged peeping tom, on a second-story balcony one evening. She and her male partner had to call in five more cops to subdue this extraordinarily feisty nudist. In many instances, female cops tend to use verbal persuasion instead of force.

My cop stories roll on. The ones I fancy are not sensational murder or mayhem but rather the stories that cops like to tell about everyday adventures.

BY KENNETH METZLER

One day in Oregon, a deputy sheriff worked to rescue a hiker lost in lonely, rugged terrain somewhere near the bottom of a 286-foot waterfall coated with ice on a frigid winter day.

That's my Oregon, a dangerous beauty. Lane County, where I live, stretches from the rugged Pacific Coast though 120 miles of wild country eastward to a range of three mountains about 10,000 feet high. Much of it is lonesome country, forests, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, and rugged cliffs. On average about 150 people get lost there every year. A police function, usually aided by lots of volunteers, is to find them.

This time the lone deputy sheriff took the quickest way down the 286-foot cliff to find the lost hiker. He rappelled to within 20 feet of the bottom. He spotted the hiker standing below and apparently unharmed.

"Sir," he yelled. "Do you like cops?"

Well, he does now. The story is precious to cops who daily face a public quick to criticize, slow to appreciate.

Cops arrest people, but they also rescue. One time the dispatcher sent a cop to the house of a woman bent on suicide. She held a loaded pistol to her head. The officer claimed to be a man of few words. The ones he spoke had little effect. He took another approach, one based on experience.

"Have you ever seen anyone who has been shot with a gun?"

She promptly dropped the weapon. Later, at police headquarters, his fellow officers handed him a commendation, a hand-lettered placard inscribed "Hero First Class."

Some cops will surprise you. Officer Lloyd Davis, now retired, spent thousands during his career handing out silver dollars, his own money, to beleaguered kids. Often he would "pull it from their ear," a worthy gesture, he proclaimed, to teach children a lesson about sharing and perhaps to give them a positive memory about their encounter with a police officer.

Not every cop is a little darling, of course.

News articles had praised "Rick," the police chief of a small Oregon town, for his work helping troubled juveniles. How shocking to learn one day that he'd been arrested and eventually convicted of embezzlement. Equally shocking, I met him years later on a street corner — a destitute wanderer.

Then there's the cop named Randy, 63, who is stationed near a university campus in Eugene, Oregon, where he works on the side and collects donations to provide aid to the homeless.

Cops have an uncanny way to scope out problem drivers. Does the driver seem nervous, constantly scanning the cop car nearby? What's he hiding?" Nothing uncanny about that kind of observation.

Police dogs, however, are something else. Cops use them because their ability to scope out miscreants is indeed uncanny. They have million-dollar noses. A trained canine can differentiate between a bank robber running east from an ordinary jogger running west. The dog knows to chase the one emitting a "fear scent," an odor slightly different from ordinary perspiration.

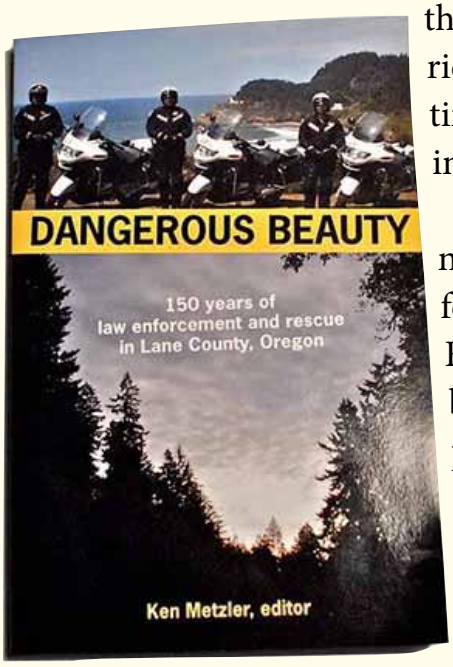
Consider the career of an officer named Fedor (the late Fedor) whose police record includes more than 600 arrests. A 2-year-old girl disappeared from her home at 4 o'clock one morning. The mother phoned police, almost apologetically reporting that her girl had somehow wandered away in the night, and suddenly she shrieked in horror. Her husband reported that a locked window in her bedroom had been pried open.

Thus the game was afoot. Child-snatching cases stem from either family disputes or pedophiles, and in the latter case the prospects of the child's survival are not good. By 4:15 a.m., 15 officers were searching the neighborhood.

Officer Fedor was brought in. His orders: "Backtrack fol-

lowing the freshest scent," pronounced in German because the dog was trained in Germany. Fedor promptly ran a quarter mile through residential yards and cozied up to a "black bundle" hidden beneath a tree by a vacant house. The tot was alive and well. In the distance, a young man was subsequently arrested and ultimately was sentenced to 26 years in prison.

So, I like cops, enough to edit a whole book about them, their experiences, their stories, their wisdom and sometimes their missteps whether in pathos or in laughter.



Missteps? In my town one night a cop inadvertently fell into a swimming pool. Fellow officers promptly labeled him "The Blue Dolphin." Another night a cop drew his gun on a suspected burglar inside a mini-market and yelled, "freeze" — only to discover that the burglar was a life-sized poster of the Marlboro Man standing in the shadows. ■

The Old Marine

BY ROSS CARLETTA

I met him at the VA hospital in Portland, Ore., where I was working as a volunteer. He was a patient on Ward C in a room with three other veterans.

I don't remember his name. I wish I could. Perhaps it's for the best.

The first time I walked into the room, all four vets looked

up at me. You could tell from their expressions that they were wondering who I was and welcomed any interruption in the dull routine of patient life.

My attention was caught by the lanky, obviously tall vet in the bed to my left.

He was in his 80s and almost bald. His face was long and angular. Even in bed, propped up on his elbow, there was a vitality about him, a charisma, a gleam of mischievousness in his pale blue eyes, a smile that was slight but intriguing. You could almost see behind his aged face the young, energetic recruit he must have been.

I was drawn to him over the others for reasons I'm not sure I understand. Perhaps it was because he seemed more open, more eager to engage me while the others were passive, doubtful.

In the few minutes that I stood at the foot of his bed and we talked, he told me he was a Marine. It didn't surprise me. There was something straight and proud in his being.

Then he told me he had cancer of the spine. I tried not to show my shock. I lost a sister to cancer, so I know the horror of that disease.

I tried to visit the hospital for a few hours at least once a week, and on each visit, I made a point to visit the old Marine. I'd save him for last so that I could spend a little more time with him. On each visit, he'd tell me a little

more about his life, that he had a son who came to visit almost every day, that he'd joined the Army at the age of 18 and had fought in World War II, then enlisted in the Marines and served in the Korean War.

He told me he was one of the Frozen Chosin.

He was with the 1st Marine Division in November 1950 when 8,000 men – mostly from the 5th and 7th Marines — found themselves trapped by tens of thousands of Communist Chinese at a snowy, frozen place called the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea.

From Nov. 27 to Dec. 13, the Marines and Army soldiers found themselves in an epic battle against swarms of attacking Chinese infantrymen. At times, the fighting was hand to hand. The temperature at night often fell to 50 below zero. It was North Korea's coldest winter in 100 years.

When I asked the old Marine to tell me more, he wouldn't. Not a word. It's a horror he didn't want to think about, talk about. As a Vietnam vet, I understood. You can't tell such a traumatic thing to someone who wasn't there. It's useless. It becomes nothing but a dra-

matic war story. The sense of what you experienced, the true reality of the sights, sounds, smells, agony, pain, sorrow cannot be translated through words. You have to live it. The only people you can talk to about such trauma are the people with whom you shared the trauma.

Each time that I came to visit, I could see the old Marine had deteriorated a little more from the week before. I knew the end was near. So did he, but he had yet to lose that sense of life and vitality that first caught my attention.

One day when I came to visit, a nurse had him in a wheelchair. She was rolling him down the ward corridor to the open hallway that had a wall of windows that offered a stunning view of the city, the Willamette River, the countryside and Mount Hood. It was a beautiful day with a clear, blue sky. Mount Hood seemed to loom over everything.

The nurse had some errands she needed to do, and she asked if I'd watch after the old Marine.

"Of course," I said. "We're old friends."

The Marine didn't say a word. It was obvious he'd lost a lot of energy in the past week. His head and shoulders were no longer straight and proud. They drooped in seeming despair. I stood behind the chair, looking at the postcard beauty of the scene before us. I wondered if the Marine saw the beauty. I put my hand on his thin shoulder. I could almost feel his sorrow. He said nothing. Neither did I.

The nurse returned soon and said she probably should get the Marine back to bed. I said good-bye to him and told him I'd visit again in a few days. He gave me a weak smile of thank you, nodded his head, but said nothing.

A few days later, I returned. I went straight to Ward C. The old Marine wasn't in the room with the other vets. I looked on the wall chart where the patients' names are written with their room numbers. He'd been moved to a private room.

I turned to a nurse and asked how he was.

"Not good," the nurse replied, shaking his head. "The cancer is spreading. There is nothing we can do for him. We're making him comfortable, but he doesn't have much longer."

The nurse said I could visit him. When I reached his door, I paused and listened. There was no sound from within. I slowly and quietly opened the door. The room was dark, the window shades drawn. I could see a figure in the bed, its back to me. I stood quietly and listened. I could hear him mutter but couldn't understand what he was saying. I had a feeling he was reliving his life? My instincts told me this was no time to interrupt.

I slipped out of the room, closed the door and leaned against the wall. A man in this room would be dead soon, and there was nothing anyone could do. There was nothing but waiting.

I started down the corridor. I didn't want to be there

any longer. I wanted out, to feel fresh air and the sun.

As I walked down the hall, two young nurses were sitting at computers along the wall. Neither could have been more than 25.

I paused as I approached them. Without turning to them or trying to draw their attention, I simply blurted out, "How do you do it?"

They looked up at me. One nurse replied: "I've wanted to be a nurse since I was a little girl."

She hadn't caught the meaning of my terse question.

"Yes," I said, "but how do you do it?"

The second nurse understood.

"You just do it," she said.

I nodded. Yes, of course. How else do you survive this kind of sorrow? You can't fight death and expect to win. These young women had learned this truth at an early age. It was part of their jobs. They had learned to live with death.

A few days later, I returned to the hospital. I went straight to Ward C and the old Marine's room. I opened the door slowly and quietly. The window curtains were open, sunlight was pouring in. The bed was empty.

I went to the wall chart. The Marine's name was no longer there

I haven't been back to volunteer since. ■

East Texas Root Hog

By Sheryl L. Nelms

We could always tell
when the hounds trapped
another armadillo under the house

because it
would go to jumping
and thumping up
against the floorboards

knocking and knocking

Until we couldn't stand it no more
and we'd all have to
go out there

No matter what time
and get a hold of all them dogs

and Grandma would crawl with the broom
in under the house and whisk it

Until the darn thing
waddled out

So cool!

Walking TOGETHER

Walking for our health comes secondary to our love of the scenic beauty around us. It's a four-season activity for my husband Ken and me.

Several nearby parks offer opportunities to mingle with creatures of the wild and to venture along the bluffs and shore of Lake Michigan.

Sharing the hobby of photography, we capture scenes along biking/hiking trails as well as wooded areas off the beaten path.

Every walk creates an adventure, togetherness and appreciation for the exciting World of Nature.

Text & photos by Charla Davis

Singing the Blues

Story and painting by Kathleen DesHotel

Singing was her life; her father sang, too. He sang in church, and everyone loved his voice, especially the ladies of the congregation. They were always bringing her and her daddy something they cooked. They ate good pies and cakes, baked macaroni, potato salad and baked chicken. What-

ever good food a person could think of, their little trailer where they lived had it.

Joe Paul was a bricklayer who even sang while he was working, mostly gospel songs. Not his daughter. She wanted to be a blues singer, and she wanted a handsome man to fall in love with her voice. She never wanted to sing when her daddy was around because she was afraid that she wouldn't be as good as he was and that his criticism might make her cry. She liked looking brave about everything.

Her mama left them when her daughter was only eight, and she faced that bravely. No one truly knew where her mother went, but Alysha heard church ladies sitting behind her and gossiping about how her mama found a man with a little money and his own new car. Her mama liked the flashy life.

When she started high school, her favorite class was home economics. That's where she learned how to sew. From her freshman year on, she made all her own clothes. Before she quit school at sixteen, her teacher offered her the most beautiful piece of blue velvet fabric. Usually, she didn't like to take handouts, but she didn't hesitate in taking this beautiful material.

She worked on making a beautiful dress for months in every spare minute she had after work where she sham-

pooed hair at Ms. Lily's Beauty Salon. Ms. Lily liked her daddy too; because of this, she allowed his girl to work there. It was a good arrangement because sometimes Ms. Lily would help her out by putting a relaxer in her long, tangled hair. She loved Ms. Lily for this. Sometimes Alysha would sing at the salon while she washed people's hair, and they would all say, "Oh, girl, you got the gene, just like your daddy."

Their compliments gave her the incentive to sing even more. She sang about a woman leaving her man, which everyone knew was about her mama even though she didn't name her in the song. Velma would never get any mention from her abandoned daughter. The only thing she ever said about her mama was, "That woman was no help to me. She left me." Other songs she sang were about getting away from Mississippi. She wanted to go up north where she could get a chance to make a lot of money.

One day a lady in the salon said to her, "Alysha, you should go to Nashville and try to make it there." She knew that wasn't exactly the north, but she knew that people went there to sing. The thought of singing in Nashville kept going over and over in her head, and a plan came together. She would take a train to Nashville and work somewhere there to pay for someplace to live until she was famous.

She started saving all her salary, finished her beautiful blue dress and secretly packed all the little things she had. There wasn't much, but she'd need something to wear. All day every day, she thought about getting on that bus. She thought that she might be like her mama after all because she was going to get out of Mound Bayou, Mississippi.

It took several months to save $255. After her last customer, she went home and counted out the money, $255 all cash plus her piggy bank, which might have had another $20 in it. She was ready. So, one morning when she was supposed to go to work and after her daddy left for work, without telling anyone she walked to the depot, boarded a train and headed to find singing fame.

She disembarked at Nashville's Riverfront Station. Carrying her suitcase she waked until she found a beauty salon.

The ladies inside the Star Salon were blonde and had big teased hair, not at all like her ladies back in Mound Bayou. The salon owner was surprised to see a girl walk in with her suitcase, but she took a liking to her after a little conversation and gave

her a job as a shampoo girl. She worked that very day with her suitcase at her side, and she was good at what she did.

Pretty soon, she was singing for all the ladies at Star Salon, and they were liking it. She got tips from some of them, a couple of dollars here and there. The owner helped her find a place to stay at a homeless shelter. She told Miss Faye that she wouldn't be poor for long because she would someday make a lot of money with her singing.

Miss Faye shook her head and told her, "Many people come to this city with dreams, but what they need is find something to do just in case they cannot reach where they hope to be. You need to go to beauty school, Little Miss Alysha."

Alysha thought about this because in her experience beauty salon owners were usually very smart ladies. The problem was that Alysha didn't make enough money to pay for beauty school. There had to be other ways to make money, like singing.

One day on her walk home to her shelter, she saw a sign in a bar room window: Entertainer Wanted. She knocked on the glass door, and a very, very big man came to the door. "What you want, girl?"

"I can sing," she said with confidence.

"Oh, yeah? Come in and meet the owner. He'll decide whether you can sing."

Then the most gorgeous dark skinned man walked from the back room. Alysha had to gasp for breath. He looked her over up and down, told her to turn around, and asked, "How old are you?"

She lied and said that she was 21 even though she had just turned 18.

"Come back tonight at exactly 9. Lots of girls are trying out. We'll se what you got then. Oh, and dress up."

She guaranteed him that she had the perfect dress to wear and walked out of the Good Looks Bar in a daze. "I am in love. He is going to want me; I can tell by the way he looked all over me. I will sing for him for the rest of my life," she contemplated and hurriedly walked the three miles to the shelter.

When Alysha arrived, she took her beautiful blue velvet dress out of her suitcase and smoothed it out on her cot. She figured by 9 it would be just right. Passing the next three hours until tryout really wore out her brain, but by 8 she was dressed and wore some makeup. Everyone at the shelter assured her that she looked good.

She had to pace her walk to the Good Looks Bar so that she wouldn't get all sweaty. When she arrived, the owner sat at the bar as a line of girls stood waiting for his attention. The big, big man passed and gave each one a number.

Alysha received the number 11 and within 10 minutes the numbers 12, 13, 14, and 15 were given out.

Alysha didn't expect anyone else to be there, but she could see by the way he looked at her that she was the one he wanted. Some of the girls were dressed in bikinis, others in sequined costumes, one fat girl in a long gathered skirt, some in shorts, and only one other girl in a dress. But, that girl's dress was not as beautiful at the blue velvet dress. Alysha closed her eyes and imagined how beautiful the velvet would look under the yellowed stage lights.

"Number one," the owner said in a smooth and sexy voice, and the first girl in a bikini went up and did some acrobatics to the music. The men inside applauded. The owner told her he would call her to let her know if she got the job. The girl looked disappointed, but she put on a jacket and left.

One by one, the girls performed, but the few who did sing, couldn't sing like Alysha. "I am better than all of them," she thought.

Then suddenly she heard, "Number 11," and this snapped her out of her concentration.

She climbed the four steps to the stage and stood under the lights. She looked directly at the owner as she began her song and realized that he was looking intently right back at her. In her mind, she thought, "He wants me," then cleared

her throat and began to sing. She knew that her voice was perfect, on key, in tune, filled with the blues emotion of a song about losing the man you love.

The owner didn't interrupt her once like he had done to some of the other girls. When she finished the song, everyone was quiet. She knew that they were shocked by the beauty of the gene she inherited from her daddy. Then while she still stood on the stage in the yellow light, the owner broke the silence and said, "You're pretty good, kid, but you are not right for this place," and then he casually said, "Twelve."

One of her eyes betrayed her artificial bravery as a tear ran down her right cheek. "This is a terrible sign of weakness," she thought through her broken heart. Another girl in a bikini went up on stage, and all the men in the bar applauded even before she performed.

Alysha went back down the four steps, grabbed her purse and walked the three miles back to the shelter. When she arrived, everyone was asleep on their cots. She quietly changed her clothes, folded her beautiful blue dress and put it in her suitcase.

She fell asleep wondering how she would afford classes in a beauty school. ■

Authors

Kenneth Metzler, an emeritus journalism professor at the University of Oregon, has written six books, including his latest "Dangerous Beauty," a chronicle of 150 years of law enforcement in Lane County, Oregon. He is a frequent contributor to several journals published by AAPA members. You can get in touch with him at his e-mail address. **kmetz@darkwing.uoregon.edu**

Ross Carletta is a retired newspaper journalist who was awarded an AAPA prose non-fiction laureate in 2009-10 for his story, "Combat Reporter." When he's not fly-fishing or playing the classical guitar, you can get in touch with him at his e-mail address. **rac117@comcast.net**

Charla Davis is an avid amateur photographer who enjoys documenting family history and walks she and her husband Ken take in the Lake Michigan area. She prefers to take scenic pictures, some of which have been contest winners. You can get in touch with her at this e-mail address. **mrshookshake@yanoo.com**

Sheryl L. Nelms has written more than 5,000 poems, many of which are described as "tasting of earth" and "emanating from deep family roots." Her poem, "East Texas Root Hog," originally appeared in the July 1995 issue of *Writers' Voice,* an AAPA journal published by John Horn of Little Rock. She is an AAPA laureate winner and can be reached at this e-mail address. **slnelms@aol.com**

Kathleen DesHotel is a recently retired teacher of gifted English IV, broadcasting and photography. She says that leaving the classroom was a tough decision because she loved what she did, but 30 years seemed like time for freedom to pursue long-standing obsessions. Today, she paints, writes and produces a weekly art critic's column in her city's newspaper, *The Times-Picayune*. You can reach her at this e-mail address. **kathleenrose624@aol.com**