

MAKE GOOD THE DAY

(NOT BAD. GOOD!)

By

Jeanie Fitchen

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... On one level this story reads like a creative writing class assignment; there is a reliance on certain stock phrases, there's too much editorializing, some of the dialogue is sugary and there is a predictable tendency to tie up loose strings. But these things hardly matter here. As the narrative develops into a chaotic unfolding of events the author builds a frenetic energy that storms and tosses beneath the words and becomes, in its impactful intensity, almost slapstick by the tale's end. It's a device that proves tremendously effective. I'm not entirely sure whether this was intentional or not but I'll give Ms. Fitchen the benefit of the doubt and it probably doesn't matter anyway. All I can say is read 'Make Good the Day' and you'll see what I mean. Finally—and I loved this—there's a clever parallelism between the day the story takes place and an unforgettable day in American history. Enjoy!*

QUALITY QUOTABLE *(for the love of language...)*

“Wonderful? Wonderful for whom? You? My husband? Oh, sure, Peter can brag all he wants to his colleagues about the efficiency of my reproductive system or how well he can hit the target ... and not necessarily in that order.” She sighed resignedly and waved her hands.

At the conclusion of dinner, which consisted of everyone's favorite, shepherd's pie, the ultimate comfort food for acute emotional trauma, the Foster family resumed their hypnotic vigil before the television. At Carmen's request, they had shared their meal together at the small, crowded table in the kitchen, far removed from the agonizing details and annoyingly protracted reports of what may or may not have taken place before, during, and after the three definitive shots were fired.

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Richard had lived in the house with his sister-in-law long enough to recognize when she was courting depression and dragging about without her usual punch. On this particular morning, her lovely oval-shaped face seemed blanched, almost ashen, exaggerated by sunken, bloodshot eyes. “Are you sure you don’t want me to stay awhile, Susan? I don’t mind, honestly. I haven’t missed a single class this semester—”

“And you’re not about to today! Debbie kept me awake all night; I’m tired and haven’t had any coffee. Just go ... go on before you’re late.”

Holding her breath, Susan practically pushed Richard with his jacket and book bag out of the house. She slammed the door shut then made a wild dash for the bathroom. Clutching the rim of the toilet, she heaved repeatedly but could produce nothing but bile. Moaning softly, she lowered herself to the floor, leaned back against the tub, and placed her head between her knees.

From the playpen in the dining room she could hear Debbie squalling hoarsely. The child was hungry; her diaper was full, and she had not the slightest sympathy for the mother whose loving arms had held and caressed her for most of the night. By early morning the wheezing and coughing had all but disappeared along with the fever, so that now the toddler in her typical resilience, was feeling quite fit.

There was a gentle knock at the front door. “You-hoo, we’re here!” It was Paula, the

next-door-neighbor delivering her two-year-old son Michael into Susan's care, a daily event now at the end of its third week.

"Hold on, I'll be right out, Paula!" Horrified by her reflection in the mirror, Susan patted her face with cold water, pinched her cheeks, and ran a quick finger comb through her hair. "This will have to do," she grumbled, straightening the collar on her bathrobe and retying the belt. She sucked in a lung full of air then forced herself to smile before joining her neighbor in the dining room. "Good morning, Paula, and good morning, Michael. Someone is certainly happy to see you today."

Debbie, whose nose, mouth, and hands were covered in a variety of mucilaginous secretions, was reaching through the bars of the playpen in an effort to pull Michael closer. "Oh, my dear child, what a mess you are!" Embarrassed, Susan quickly reached into her pocket and retrieved a used tissue to wipe her daughter's face. Meanwhile, Paula, impeccably coifed as usual and dressed smartly in a gentian-blue beltless shift that nearly matched her eyes, yanked her son well away from Debbie's squalid hands.

"That's a lovely dress you're wearing, Paula."

"Thank you. It's an Oleg Cassini." Taking in Susan's shabby chenille robe, Paula paused briefly, a pronounced scowl belying her expression of gratitude. "Well ... Jackie always says, 'A simple shift dress can take you anywhere.'"

"Ah, but I doubt Jackie would be wearing pastels on—what is today—November 22?"

"As a matter of fact, Jackie and the President arrived in Texas just yesterday, and I saw on the news that she was wearing a white ensemble with a black belt. Yesterday, November 21," she slapped on smugly.

Susan smiled sourly then used the sullied tissue to wipe down the peripheral horizontal

bar on which Debbie was gnawing.

“Uh, Susan, shouldn’t you be using soap and water? Debbie’s still highly infectious, and she’s had her mouth and teeth all over that, that—”

“Plastic teething bar, Paula. That’s what it’s for—teething babies. And yes, it’s exactly what I’m going to do as soon as you leave,” she answered curtly. “And then I will wipe down all these wooden bars with alcohol.”

“Oh that’s good. That’s very good,” said Paula, releasing her son’s hands at last. “Well, so long, my little one. You mind Susan now, and Mommy will bring you home a special surprise.”

Susan frowned and shook her head as she followed Paula and her ridiculously high-heeled shoes to the door. *Each day the woman makes the same promise to her son and never comes through, and it’s only because he is so young that she is able to get away with it.*

“Oh, by the way, Susan, Michael woke up this morning with a cough ... no doubt acquired from your Debbie,” she added. Susan bristled but held her tongue even though Michael had been the first to present with cold symptoms the previous week. “If he comes down with a fever, call me right away. Oh, and don’t let him lie down. Keep him as active as possible.”

“Why?” asked Susan.

“Well, Michael might have a teensy-weensy seizure ... or maybe stop breathing.”

“He might what?”

“It’s only happened once or twice before.”

Debbie, having lost interest in Michael, began to wail again, louder than ever.

“Paula, wait! I don’t think you should leave Michael with me today.”

“Nonsense. It’s only a little cough. Besides I have an appointment to show several

houses this morning. He'll be fine, I'm sure. Just call my office if he gets a fever, and I'll check in with you as often as possible."

"Wa ... wait, hold on a minute, please." Suddenly overcome with another bout of nausea, Susan covered her mouth, did an about face, and raced again to the bathroom. By the time she returned, Paula was nowhere in sight, and Michael, oblivious to his mother's forewarning, was sitting quietly on the floor flipping through a picture book. Susan studied the child carefully before reaching down to feel his forehead. Satisfied that there was no fever present, she gently lifted his cherubic face to examine his eyes. They were as bright as usual without a hint of redness or tearing. His color was good, and his nose was dry, perhaps for the first time in over a week. She lifted him into her arms and pressed her lips to his forehead, checking again for the fever that wasn't there, prompting the child to release a giggle that launched a deep-seated spasm of coughing, sounding much like a honking goose in flight.

It had seemed like such a good idea, taking care of Michael a few hours every day, not only for the extra money, but also because it provided an added distraction for Debbie. The little boy was a gem—well mannered, always happy, and so easy-going—a joy to have around. Debbie, on the other hand, was a puissant little demon even at one year, demanding, incredibly willful, and equipped with a set of pipes to rival any opera singer.

The morning passed without incident, Susan checking every fifteen minutes for any change in Michael's comportment or temperature. Although he showed little interest in eating, he consumed every bit of his juice and then asked for more. That was a good sign, so Susan thought.

At 12:30 p.m. she put both children down for a nap, Debbie in her crib and Michael on a pallet in the living room. A few moments later she collapsed on the sofa nearby, closed her

wearily eyes, and fell into a deep sleep. She was startled awake by what sounded like soft mewling sounds coming from the little heap on the floor. Michael was sitting up, rubbing his eyes, and crying pathetically for his mother.

In an instant Susan was there beside him, holding the boy to her breast, rocking back and forth. She put her lips to his forehead once again, then drew back in horror. He was burning with fever. “Oh no,” she cried. “Oh no, please don’t let this happen!”

With Michael in her arms, she rose unsteadily to her feet and hurried to the phone in the kitchen. “It’s okay, sweetie. I’m calling your Mommy, and she’ll be here soon, I promise.” Susan flipped through the phone book, located the number to Pacific Real Estate, and dialed. “Hello? May I speak to Paula ... Paula Reeves?”

“I’m sorry, she’s not in. May I help you?”

“No, no, I need Paula. It’s an emergency. When will she be back?”

“I don’t know. She’s out showing property.”

“Well, then you have to get a message to her immediately. Please tell her—”

“I’m sorry. That’s impossible. I’m the only one here in the office.”

“Damn! Her son is running a high fever—it’s very serious! I need her now!”

The woman on the other end was all together unnerved, but could not think of any way to be helpful. “I’m so sorry; I’m afraid I don’t even know which property she is showing.”

“All right, all right, I have to go. If she calls, please tell her to come home quickly.”

Susan hung up the phone and settled Michael firmly on the counter while he labored through another coughing spasm, which left him wheezy and lethargic. She offered him water, but he pushed the glass away. All the boy wanted was her bony shoulder to lay his head against as he continued to whimper softly. “It’s okay, honey. It’s okay.”

But it was plainly not okay, and by now Susan was livid. Paula was nowhere to be found, and not once had she bothered to call in as promised. *What kind of mother would leave her sick child like this ... a child who very well might ... die!* Susan suddenly thought of Michael's father, a man whom she had never seen nor met. Locating his office number, she dialed frantically, aware that, according to Paula, he'd been out of the picture for quite some time. *Well, it was high time to bring him back!*

"Yes, hello, I'm trying to get in touch with Mr. Reeves ... a ... Jeffrey Reeves."

"Mr. Reeves is out of the office. May I take a message?" The secretary was overtly officious, speaking in a monotone, and sounding almost like a machine.

"I'm calling about his son." There was complete silence at the other end. "Hello, are you there?"

"Well, yes. How can I help you?"

"I'm caring for Mr. Reeves' son. The boy is quite ill, and I can't reach his mother. Can you ask him ... Mr. Reeves to come here to my home as soon as possible? The address is—"

"Excuse me ... I'm sorry, I didn't get your name."

"It's Susan Foster."

"Miss Foster, Mr. Reeves is at a convention in Seattle. I can call him with this message, but I'm afraid that's all I can do."

"Oh, God!" moaned Susan. She had run out of options. "All right, you do that ... I have to go." Susan was sick to her stomach, and all she had eaten was a slice of toast with butter.

"Not now ... oh, not now." She took several deep breaths, and the nausea passed.

Michael's whimpering had stopped, his eyes were closed, and he was asleep against Susan's shoulder. "Oh no, wake up, Michael." She held the boy away and shook him gently.

“Wake up, Michael.” He opened his eyes and smiled, then closed them again. “Michael, wake up!” All at once the child went rigid, and lost consciousness, his eyes rolling back into his head, his arms and legs jerking uncontrollably. “Oh no ... please no, this can’t be happening. Michael, please, please wake up.” Afraid that she might collapse on the spot, Susan very gently laid the little boy on the counter, letting her face fall on his chest. She wept unashamedly.

Moments later, the phone began to ring at the same instant that Michael’s seizure subsided. Susan pulled his languid body into her arms and reached breathlessly for the phone. “Oh, Paula, thank God—oh—Peter, it’s you. I ... I can’t talk now, Michael’s—what was that about the President? Oh, never mind; I can’t talk now. Michael’s very sick, and I’m waiting for Paula to call; I have to hang up ... now!”

Hearing his mother’s name kick-started Michael into a freshet of tears and a coughing fit producing a mouthful of cloudy green sputum. The deep paroxysms and coarse crackling sounds under normal circumstances would have terrified Susan. However, in this instance, it was all music to her ears, if nothing more than to guarantee that the boy was indeed breathing. “That’s it, Michael, cough it up, honey. Your mommy will be here soon.”

“Hello! Anybody home?”

“Oh, thank God! We’re here in the kitchen!” Susan hollered hoarsely through the house. “See, Michael, what did I tell you? Oh thank God, Paula, I was about to—” Susan scooped Michael up in her arms and turned around expecting to see the boy’s mother. “Carmen! What are you doing here?”

“We closed down the office for the afternoon. I didn’t want to go home to an empty house, so I picked up a few things for dinner, and ... here I am,” she answered, placing a bag of groceries on the kitchen table. “Am I interrupting something?”

“Only my nervous breakdown,” groaned Susan. “I am so happy to see you, Carmen, you’ve no idea.” Without mincing any of the words for Michael’s sake, she told her mother-in-law everything that had transpired from the moment Paula arrived with her sick son. “So, here I am struggling to keep him awake. I suppose if Paula doesn’t call soon I should try to get Michael to his—” Susan’s narrative was interrupted by a tenacious wail broadcasting from the other end of the house. “Oh, not yet,” whined Susan. “I had hoped she would sleep a bit longer.”

“I’ll see to Debbie, you can—”

“No!” barked Susan. “Here, take Michael ... quickly.” She practically tossed the boy to Carmen, then turning back to the sink, heaved once, twice, and finally regurgitated the entire contents of her stomach, which was next to nothing.

“Oh, honey, you’re sick.”

Susan wiped away the residual saliva with the back of her hand and turned around to confront Carmen point-blank. Leaning against the counter and clutching the edge from behind, she snapped, “No ... I’m not sick. I’m pregnant!”

Carmen bit her bottom lip, unsure of how to respond considering her daughter-in-law’s current emotional state. She took the high road. “You’re pregnant ... why that’s wonderful news, Susan, wonderful!”

“Wonderful? Wonderful for whom? You? My husband? Oh, sure, Peter can brag all he wants to his colleagues about the efficiency of my reproductive system or how well he can hit the target ... and not necessarily in that order.” She sighed resignedly and waved her hands.

“Oh, I can’t take time to discuss this now, Carmen ... we have to deal with Michael. “I’ll go get Debbie. Keep him awake, Carmen, ... please!”

“And in the meantime,” she called after Susan, “I’ll see what I can do about bringing this child’s fever down.”

No sooner had the words left her lips when the front door flew open. “I’m here, Susan!” It was Paula, and she was fit to be tied. Carmen met her with Michael in her arms halfway through the house.

“You must be Paula!” Michael raised his head and reached out for his mother, who snatched him away from Carmen as if she were some dreaded monster.

“Where’s Susan?” she demanded, without an inkling of respect for the older woman.

“I’m right here!” Susan burst into the living room with Debbie held tautly against her right hip. “Where were you, Paula, and why didn’t you call in like you promised?”

“I told you I had to show some properties, and, as it turned out, I made a sale. There was no way I could get to a phone to call. I only learned about Michael after returning to the office to pick up some paperwork. There were two messages waiting for me, one from you and the other—and I didn’t appreciate this at all—from Jeffrey. Please tell me, Susan ... why did you have to involve him?”

As if on cue, Michael’s body seized up briefly then relaxed. He then began a deep, productive cough, this time throwing up all over his mother and her lovely dress. “Dammit, Michael.” Paula flushed and looked around miserably for a blanket, tissue, anything with which to wipe away the stinking mess. “Look what you’ve done!” she shouted at the bewildered child, her blue eyes turning brittle. She looked accusingly at Susan. “See what you made him do?”

Carmen had already rushed to the kitchen for towels, while trying at the same time to control her rage. Susan, however, remained calm. “Paula, this isn’t about me or your ex-husband or your dandy Oleg Cassini ... shift. Take your son to his doctor. We’ll talk later.

Now go!”

When Carmen returned with a handful of wet dishtowels, Paula and Michael were gone. “And, we hadn’t even been introduced properly,” she said, feigning disappointment.

Susan chuckled wearily. “Will you forgive my outburst earlier, Carmen? I ... I didn’t mean a word of it. Of course, I’m thrilled about being pregnant again, and I adore this little imp!” She snuggled Debbie’s neck and delivered a dozen kisses to her face.

“You’re a natural-born mother, Susan. This I know,” she said lovingly, reaching out to take her granddaughter who was squirming to get down to the floor. “Why don’t we talk more about this over a cup of tea. I know I could use one.”

Susan’s color returned even before the kettle had begun to whistle. The overwhelming fear that had occupied her very being throughout much of the day was passing finally, and Carmen’s presence and comforting words were in many ways even more restorative than a cup of Lipton tea.

“I suppose Peter is thrilled,” said Carmen as she secured Debbie in her high chair.

“He will be I suppose, when he finds out.” She expected to surprise her mother-in-law with that statement, and she did. “Peter’s been very ... preoccupied lately with his bridge project. He leaves early each day before the nausea begins, and I just wanted to be sure before I broke the news.”

“You are, aren’t you?”

“Quite! I think tonight will be the night,” said Susan, smiling guilefully.

Feeling a bit hungry at last, she reached for a banana from a nearby fruit bowl and began to peel it. “I just remembered something you said earlier, Carmen. Isn’t it highly unusual for your office to close down for the afternoon? Is this some kind of holiday?” After discarding the

peel, Susan broke the banana into several small pieces making finger food to share with her daughter. “Here you are, my little monkey.”

Carmen sighed wistfully. “Not a holiday at all, Susan. You haven’t had the television on, I suppose. Of course not, with all the goings-on of the day.” Pausing briefly to refill her teacup and, at the same time, garner a kindly way to relate really horrible news, Carmen continued. “I’m afraid that—”

“Something’s happened, hasn’t it? Something awful.”

“It’s the President, Susan.”

“Oh, God—Peter called earlier and mentioned something about the President, but ... I practically hung up on him. What is it? What’s happened, Carmen?”

“President Kennedy ... well he was riding in a motorcade through downtown Dallas ... and, I’m so sorry to say, he was shot by a sniper.”

Susan chewed absentmindedly on the knuckle of her right index finger waiting to hear the outcome. “And?”

“And ... he was killed.”

“Oh my God! Oh my God, I can’t believe it.” Susan stood up quickly and removed Debbie from her high chair, the child’s hands and mouth smeared with smashed banana. “Please ... let’s go into the living room. I need to see ... hear this for myself.”

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At the conclusion of dinner, which consisted of everyone’s favorite, shepherd’s pie, the ultimate comfort food for acute emotional trauma, the Foster family resumed their hypnotic vigil before the television. At Carmen’s request, they had shared their meal together at the small, crowded table in the kitchen, far removed from the agonizing details and annoyingly protracted

reports of what may or may not have taken place before, during, and after the three definitive shots were fired.

Richard, pleased to see Susan feeling physically hale and hearty once again, had been the first to arrive at his brother and sister-in-law's home following the cancellation of afternoon classes. Not long thereafter, Peter and his father, George, showed up, restrained in expression and manner, struggling to make sense of the tragic events of the day. Only little Debbie, unaware of the harrowing melodrama in which she and her family were unwilling participants, maintained her usual rosy if not obstreperous disposition.

"Everyone, listen up, please." Unable to remain silent any longer, Susan rose from her chair, walked to the television, and lowered the volume. Rubbing her hands together, she turned and faced her audience head on with a bright and confident smile which may have seemed inappropriate under the circumstances, just like the pastel pink simple shift and matching pumps she had changed into before dinner, at Carmen's urging. Her hair, having been teased and styled in a modified Jackie bouffant with feathery bangs, was window dressing for her delicately made-up face. The resemblance to Jackie Kennedy was phenomenal. All that was missing was the iconic pillbox hat.

Susan cleared her throat and began, her skin suddenly taking on a rosy flush of youth. "I would like to make good the day ... if possible. Peter, Richard, George and—well, Carmen, you already know, of course—I'm ... I'm going to have a baby!"

"Attagirl, I knew it!" hollered Peter, jumping up to dance his wife around the playpen to the astonishment and great delight of Debbie.

"Well, that's a relief," whispered Richard to his father. "I've been hearing Susan puke her guts out every morning for the past week."

“You don’t say? She certainly looks in fine form tonight,” said George, rising creakily from the sofa. “Here’s to a new life,” he announced proudly, hoisting his empty coffee cup in the air.

Peter released his wife and pulled Debbie brusquely from her playpen. “Did you hear that, sweetheart? You’re going to have a baby brother to play with. What do you think about that?” After a few dizzying whirligigs, which left him somewhat light-headed, he flopped down on the couch with Debbie in his arms. “You know what?” he announced. “I’ve read somewhere that when you hear of a death, you hear of a pregnancy ... or something like that.”

Susan shot her head back and laughed lustily. “I believe it goes: when you hear of a death, you hear of a birth. And what makes you think we’re going to have a boy? I certainly wouldn’t mind having another beautiful girl!”

“Jackie says, ‘Your best accessory is a gorgeous family.’”

The startling comment from a seemingly unknown source emerged from the darkened area of the living room at the front of the house. Susan spun about on her heels just as a chilly wind blew in through the open door. “What? Paula! Is that you? We didn’t hear you come in.”

Ignoring Susan altogether, the woman floated in a ghostly apparition from the dark into the light moving in the direction of the television. Gone were not only the stiletto heels she’d worn earlier in the day, but also the loathsome and pretentious courtliness she carried around like a calling card. And cradled protectively in her arms was Michael, pale-faced and sleeping quite soundly.

“He’s gone,” she muttered quietly with trembling lips, her eyes staring at a full-sized headshot of a smiling John Kennedy on the television screen.

“Yes, it’s ... horrible, isn’t it. Why don’t you sit here with us awhile, Paula?”

“Look—Jackie is wearing her strawberry pink suit with the navy blue collar,” said Paula, again paying no attention to Susan. “It’s a Chanel design, you know.”

The news coverage of the assassination had been broadcast in black and white the entire day. *How could she possibly have known the color of Jackie Kennedy’s suit?* Susan thought better than to challenge Paula particularly when she realized the woman was still wearing the same stained blue Oleg Cassini shift, her feet were bare, and her pitiful face was streaked in long narrow bands of mascara. Even her hair, loosened from its fashionable French twist, looked as if it had been restyled by a power fan. Clearly she was not herself.

“Paula ... tell me how it went with the doctor today.”

“Jackie once said, ‘If you mess up your children, nothing else you do really matters.’”

“What are you talking about, Paula?” Susan pressed, shooting a worried glance at the others who were listening in silent fascination. “Carmen, would you mind getting a glass of wine for Paula?”

“I think perhaps a cup of tea would be more suitable—with a drop or two of rat poison,” she added under her breath.

“Of course ... whatever you think best, Carmen.” Please sit, Paula. Michael must be getting heavy for you. Here, why don’t you let me take him.” Susan put her arms out for the boy, but his mother only clutched him tighter, never once taking her eyes from the television.

“I had him right next to me in the car.”

“Who, Paula? Who are you talking about?”

“This precious boy of mine. He was so quiet, so well-behaved, wasn’t he?”

Bewildered by Paula’s past-tense reference to Michael, Susan caught her breath, unable to imagine what the woman was leading up to. The child looked blissfully peaceful in his

mother's arms—no tearing from his eyes, no drooling from his open mouth, no wheezing from his chest. *No movement at all from his chest!* Instinctively Susan reached for Michael's chubby arm dangling almost contorted from his tiny torso. It was an impetuous move, one that would haunt her for the rest of her life. The boy was in full rigor mortis, and until that very moment no one in the room, except his mother, had even been aware that he was dead.

For the first time since walking through the front door, Paula turned to address Susan, who, if Peter had not immediately come to her aid, would have crumbled in a heap to the floor. "I told him over and over not to go to sleep ... the radio was turned up loud to keep him awake, and that's when I heard those horrible words, 'Jack was dead.' I ... I couldn't drive, so I pulled over and listened. My Jack was dead ... just like that ... killed by an assassin ... just like that." Paula sighed audibly before continuing. "You see, I never told a single soul ... about Jack and me. It was our secret." She paused briefly, expecting some kind of riposte from Susan that never materialized. "And then ... along came Michael." Paula looked lovingly at the little boy in her arms. "See this little angel; such a beautiful little angel with his long, dark eyelashes. He looks just like his father; don't you think so?"

"Paula, stop it! Stop it, right now," screamed Susan. "You ... you let your child die! You let him die! How could you?" Sobbing, she grabbed Paula by the shoulders and shook her violently until Peter pulled her away. Undeterred by the thrashing, Paula simply rearranged Michael's body in her arms, her demeanor peaceful and unaffected, her smile fixed and utterly unearthly.

"Don't be sad, Susan. Don't you see? It was meant to be. Now they're together ... father and son. Michael's in heaven with Jack. And I'll be joining them soon. It'll all be okay, I promise."

Apart from the images displayed on the muted television, the room was stone still and bathed in a tomblike silence. Who knew then what to do? No one. No one but Paula. She hugged her son tightly, kissed him on the forehead, and gave him up, gently positioning his cold, stiffened body in Susan's arms. "Goodbye now," she said airily, her smile refitted and radiant. These were Paula's last words before she marched out the front door, down the darkened driveway, and into what future?

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *Make Good the Day began as an excerpt from a novel; a superfluous distraction that needed to be eliminated. However, the story sits here resuscitated and reworked, bearing little resemblance to its original. As a songwriter, I'm often prompted by a word, phrase, or simply an intense emotional awakening. In this case it was cherub-faced Michael, a little boy I once cared for in my younger days, and who possessed a proclivity for fevers and prolonged apnea. I am most drawn to beautiful writing in the style of Rosamunde Pilcher, Pat Conroy, Cheryl Strayed, Leonard Cohen and others, books and stories that are never out of reach for my wanting.*

AUTHOR BIO: I started writing in 1968 while in high school as a monthly columnist to *The Broadside*, a folk revival magazine (1962 – 1988). Later, still in my folk-singer capacity, I was a contributing travel correspondent to *Southern Traditions*, a small Florida folk-culture magazine (1984 – 1988). I am also a songwriter, storyteller, performer, and recording artist, receiving a Grammy Nomination in 1999, a Florida Folk Heritage Award in 2001, the Fellow Man & Mother Earth Award from the Stetson Kennedy Foundation in 2010, and the Florida Folk Festival Legends and Legacy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2016.