

Over exposed

By Joey Scarfone

WHY WE LIKE IT:

Writing can take many forms: from scribbled notes to polished prose. The latter is what you usually encounter in journals and e-zines but we forgot to add 'and everything in between'. What do you do about an author who is robustly talented, whose writing quivers with youthful hues and who obstinately sticks to his guns? What we mean by this is made clearer by quoting from an email exchange Joey had with Charles. The insanely-talented, semi-divine, modest to a fault senior editor approached Joey about rewriting his submission or at least doing a scrub edit. This is what Joey said:

I'm at a funny place with my short stories. My wife Debbie thinks it could be better and she's probably right. The thing is, i don't care to write like I'm professional. I don't want to take courses etc. I write for the simple pleasure and joy of it. If I start second guessing it, i lose my interest. I wrote the story in 3 hours. It came through me like a pure inspiration. It was great and I felt great about it. I'm open to your help in editing but once my ideas hit the page my job is over. I can see where story writing is a finer art than poetry. Kinda' like how baking is more exacting than cooking. With poetry you can invent your own grammar and composition. I like that. I'm not confined by proper writing techniques. I'm going to submit it as is. It probably won't win (and prize) but I'm not concerned about that.

So why are we publishing it? Because writing takes many forms and we are interested in ALL forms. We are equally drawn to any work, rough cut, torn at the knees, dirty behind the ears, in which writing qua writing reflects the literary experience as 'process' rather than finished product. Some people will be cool with it; some will hunger for polished prose. What distinguishes Joey's work from 'scribbled notes, is heart. A big one. Life goes on...CP (Font size and spacing is author's own.)

Over exposed

Prologue

The story of Tom Mitchel, an old photographer who lived in Victoria BC, raised a family and made his living from photography. He is 70 years old and looking back on his life. When these lines occur----- he is flashing back.

What is it about the ocean that draws us to her mystery?

Tom sat on his favourite bench on Dallas road and stared at the ocean. It was where he and his wife Molly had sat a thousand times before. His mind started to drift into the past. It was a familiar process which he enjoyed. He started to think of yesterday and last year and inevitably saw himself in the small projection room where his father would put on slide shows in their home. His father was also a photographer but worked as a bus driver to support his family. Tom would sit for hours watching the images projected onto a white bed sheet that his father would hang on the wall. Tiny flowers would become four feet wide as if they were exploding. His father explained the different shades of red....tomatoes, roses and blood from a deer that he accidentally hit with his car on the way back from Toffino. He explained how different brands of film yielded a different quality to each colour. Before Tom even went to university to study art he understood the dark room process and the importance of choosing proper film for particular photo shoots.

Tom met his wife Molly while attending art school at the university of Victoria in 1971. She was a painter. She introduced Tom to the great master painters and he introduced her to the world of photography. She had become his favourite subject. He enjoyed watching her work. She was so immersed in her paintings. Tom took pictures of her intensely staring at the canvases she was creating. He was captivated by her passion for her art. They were inseparable through the university years and after graduation they went to Europe to see the work of the masters on display in the museums. Molly absorbed it all in her head but Tom took hundreds of pictures. He didn't know it but he was building his resume. While in Paris Molly told Tom she was pregnant. They were standing under the Eiffel tower when Tom asked Molly to marry him. She accepted.

They returned to Victoria in 1973 and had their first child....Katherine, who everyone called Katie. Tom went to work at one of the two fish packing plants that were here at the time. The fishing trade was still vibrant back then. It was hard work but the pay was good....\$5 per hour and time and a half for over time. Tom laughed to himself as those numbers ran through his head. It was actually enough money in those days to afford an apartment, food and the necessities for his family.

He started free lancing with his photography. Wedding and baby photos were his first jobs. Then he began to pick up work for the Time Colonist newspaper. It was mostly scenic pictures of boats, parades and the like but it lead to something better. The local police department would call him at all hours to take photos of accidents and crime scenes. This was far more interesting work for Tom and it payed well. He was able to quit his fish packing job and put some money in the bank. It also enabled him to buy better cameras and art supplies for Molly. In 1975 they had their second child.....Daniel, who everyone called Danny. Their one bedroom apartment had become too small. Tom and Molly began hunting for a house. They found a three bedroom heritage house in an area of town called Fairfield, close to the ocean, for \$55,000.00. Tom laughed to himself again when he remembered these numbers. They took \$5,000.00 from their savings for the down payment and bought the house. It had a garage that Tom converted into an art studio for Molly and a dark room for himself, and a projection room.

Their kids were growing fast. Tom took all the work he could get and Molly started selling her paintings to friends who would come to visit. Molly had become quite a good portrait painter. Tom would take someone's picture and Molly would paint it, always capturing the spirit of her subject. They made enough money to keep everything together but there was nothing left over for frills. They didn't travel but would take long drives up island and return the same day. The kids showed no interest in art or photography. Tom would try to sit them down to slide shows the way his father did but they were too restless for such a boring activity. Tom gave up on that and just let them do what they wanted to. They were very intelligent and Tom liked seeing them do well in school. They grew up surrounded by art so they would at least have an appreciation for it.

A cool breeze was blowing in Tom's face. The sun was going down and he was beginning to get hungry. He stood up slowly, brought himself back from his memories, and walked home to cook supper for himself.

The kids were now 14 and 16 years old and both were in high school. It was the eighties, the decade of excess. Banks had raised their interest rates to criminal levels and people were living way beyond their means. Consequently people started losing their houses. The job market changed as well. The economic tides were turning and not in favour of the working class. Tom's house was now worth three times what they paid for it and their mortgage was manageable but a lot of Tom's work had dried up and Molly's friends just couldn't afford her art, at any price. They decided to have a family meeting and let their kids know what was going on. Their kids would have to start working and contributing to the family's needs. Tom outlined exactly where every dollar went.....mortgage, food, clothes, insurance etc. Katie was 16 and understood the realities mom and dad were presenting. Danny however, was 2 years younger and didn't see why he couldn't just keep watching TV and everything would be OK.

Katie said she would go around to restaurants and see if she could get a job as a waitress, which she did. Danny begrudgingly went door to door asking if his neighbours needed any work done around the house. It was autumn and leaves needed to be raked up. Gardens also needed work so he found himself much busier than he wanted to be.

It was about this time that Molly started getting her dizzy spells. The doctors didn't know what to make of it but her health was definitely going down hill. On one trip to the doctor she got the dreaded news, it was cancer, a rare form of blood cancer that was not treatable by any known medicine. The family went into shock.

Tom cut the garlic into small pieces and tossed them into the frying pan with some olive oil. He loved that smell. It reminded him of all the natural remedies they tried to help Molly.....shark cartilage, herbs, oils. It was a desperate attempt that they knew wouldn't work..... but they went through the motions anyway. Then he added some onions, red peppers and small pieces of chicken to his stir fry. It was hard to estimate just for one person. He was used to cooking for the whole family and with two hungry kids around there were never left overs.

Katie was in her last grade of high school and Danny was in grade 10 when Molly passed away. The collective sadness was overwhelming. Tom didn't know what to do so he did nothing. He constantly revisited all the pictures he had taken of Molly and the kids.....at least he had memories. He knew one thing for sure.....he had to be strong. He couldn't let himself fall apart. His kids needed him more than ever. He went back to what he knew, wedding photography, baby pictures, pretty pictures of boats and anything that made a buck. Katie was heading off to university to become a dentist while Danny was discovering he had hormones and could throw a football further than anyone in school. His gardening work had made him physically strong.

When Katie graduated from high school she immediately enrolled in programs that would prepare her for a medical career as a dentist. Tom was grateful she knew what she wanted. He wouldn't have to worry about her. Danny was another story. He was enjoying the adulation that jocks get in school. Girls liked him. He was a star football player and didn't see too far past the next game. Tom went to all his games and took pictures. He didn't want to push Danny in any direction he didn't want to go. Danny did keep doing his gardening work and contributed to the house hold needs so Tom was grateful for that.

Another lonely night passed the way they all eventually did. Tom woke up and did his morning rituals.....shower, stretches, breakfast and left the house for his morning walk on the breakwater. The face of the shore had changed. High winds had littered the beach with driftwood. Cut logs had escaped their booms and looked like large pencils against massive roots that had washed up. Tom took some pictures with his camera. Digital cameras were a great invention. Film used to be so expensive. You were lucky to get 3 or 4 good pictures from a roll of 36. Something was lost in the process however. Computers had made it easy to edit, crop or do just about anything to a bad picture to turn it into a good one. If you didn't like a shot....just erase it and start over for free. Tom had gotten into street photography for his own pleasure. Victoria was no longer the quaint little west coast town on a pretty island. Poverty, drugs and crime were more prevalent than musical buskers. It wasn't bad or good Tom thought. It just is. It is easier to photograph things without judging them.

The eighties came and went like all decades do. There were winners and losers.....survivors and casualties. Katie still lived at home with Tom and Danny while she went to school. Danny had no desire to go to university. He wanted to start his own gardening/landscaping business. He needed a good truck and tools and of course he had no money. He asked his dad for help. Tom explained that he was living month to month and just keeping his head above water but the house had gone up a lot and there was a large chunk of equity in it. Maybe the bank would give him a loan to help Danny start his business. This was Danny's first business lesson.....someone has to help you. They went to the bank together and talked to the loans officer. Tom's house was almost paid off and there was a large chunk of equity in it.....like \$100,000.00. Tom was pleasantly surprised with this news. He was able to give Danny \$20,000.00 to start his business. Danny would have to repay the loan plus the interest. The interest rates were way down from the early days of the eighties. The government simply slapped the banks on the wrist and said “no more gauging”.

It was the nineties. Danny's business was doing well. He had two employees and was making good money. Katie had finished her schooling and started working for a woman dentist who had her own practice. Tom was still keeping his head above water but not making much money. Two things

happened that changed that.....MTV and crime. All of a sudden rock bands were making videos for MTV. With the growing population in Victoria came more crime. Tom got a call from his old boss at the police department. They needed his services for crime photography. Tom had already been experimenting with camcorders and had taken courses in the new digital photography. The police needed pictures taken but they needed them immediately. Once again Tom's skill's were in demand. His first assignment was a murder scene. It was horrific. A young teenager had been gunned down in a drug deal gone bad. The crime scene was not like anything Tom had ever experienced. The victim had been shot several times and blood was everywhere. It reminded Tom of the blood from the deer in his father's slide show. Tom took all the necessary shots but also started taking pictures of the surrounding area that was was taped off. People were looking on from a distance with bewildered faces. Horror and disbelief were everywhere. This was a long way from pretty boats and sunsets. It rattled Tom and he had a hard time sleeping. The images kept appearing in his head. This was not easy work.....but it was the best money he ever made.

The music videos were much more fun. In the early days of MTV just about anything made it on the air. Lip synching and overdubs were part of the editing process. What you saw on tv was nothing like the band's live performance but it didn't matter...it was the nineties. Tom enjoyed producing videos. It was a younger generation who had the same ambition he did when he was their age. It made him feel younger and his own children were growing up. Tom would take photos and video of Danny's work, before and after. He made a website for Danny. It was almost mandatory to have one of these now if you had a business and it was another source of income for Tom.

Tom felt lonely but couldn't bring himself to start dating. Rather, he would go into the studio and just look at Molly's paintings. The sadness would get a little less every year but never totally went away. This changed when Danny got married. He met a wonderful woman named Kioko. She was Japanese but born in Victoria. She had a government job and although she wasn't 100% happy there, it was a good job with health benefits, regular holidays and maternity leave. Danny and Kioko had their first child one year after they were married. It was a girl and they named her Molly after Danny's mother. This brought more joy into Tom's life. He was a very proud grandfather. He insisted on having them over every Sunday for supper. Katie was also invited but didn't come as often. She was preoccupied with her own busy life and Sundays were her day for cycling and adventure.

As Molly started growing they would leave her with Tom to babysit and after she was one year old Tom became the daycare when Kioko went back to work. Tom found himself having to get up earlier than he had become accustomed to but caught up on his sleep when Molly had her afternoon nap. Tom would lie with her on his bed and they would both drift off. Tom would feed her and change her diaper then put her in the stroller and take a walk on the breakwater. Molly loved this. The fresh ocean air was exhilarating. Molly laughed to herself and the passers by. Tom took lots of pictures and started compiling an album on her. It was like old times when he raised his own kids. Kioko would pick Molly up after work. She offered to pay Tom but he would not allow that. The joy and happiness Molly gave him was his reward, plus, Tom was beginning to be financially secure. The house he bought in the seventies was now paid off and his cost of living was not much. His life was simple with no extravagances. He didn't need any more cameras and had all the things he wanted in life. Most importantly, his growing family.

One afternoon he got a call from Katie. She wanted to come over and talk to her father. It sounded ominous. Tom prepared a light lunch and when she arrived they sat down at the kitchen table.

Dad, she said, I have something I want to ask you and something I want to tell you.

OK, Tom said, what is it?

First, I'm gay. I was too self conscious about it so I stayed in the closet.....until now. I have a girlfriend and I would like to share her with my family. I would like to bring her over for Sunday suppers like Danny does with his family.

Tom wasn't totally surprised. He didn't know Katie was gay but though it odd that she never talked about boyfriends and kept her distance.

I'm totally OK with your sexuality Katie. It makes no difference to me if anyone is gay or straight.....and I would love to meet your partner. Do you want to tell Danny or do you want me too?

I'll tell him dad. I think he should hear it from me.

What is your partner's name?

Her name is Beth, short for Elizabeth. She's a lawyer.

Well, why don't you and Beth come for supper on Sunday?

Thanks dad, that would be nice.

You said you had something to ask me as well.

Yes I do. I'm thinking of starting my own practice and I need help. It's incredibly expensive. I have some money saved but I'm still saddled with student loan payments. I know I can make good money once it's running but the start up is beyond my reach.

How much do you need?

I need \$100,000.00. I know it's a lot.

It is a lot. You know I helped Danny get started , don't you?

Yes I do. He told me all about it but I'm asking for a lot more than he needed.

Your business will make a lot more than his as well.....plus you won't have to fight the weather every day. My house is payed for and it's worth a half million. Let's go talk to the bank and see what we can work out. Maybe we can get your student loan out of the way immediately and you would just have one monthly payment.

Oh dad.....thank you so much. I knew you would come through for me.

Tom got up and gave Katie a big hug. She was in tears.....tears of joy.

Tom woke up and went through his morning rituals. It was a stormy today. The waves might be busting

over the breakwater. He thought he would put on his rain gear for today's walk and no sense bringing a camera, it would get soaked. He headed out into the storm only to see that the police had blocked off a portion of Dallas road. The water was splashing right over the road. Pedestrians weren't allowed into that section as well, it was too dangerous. Tom changed his route and headed north into the cook street village. Fallen branches were everywhere. This was a typical winter's day in Victoria. Tom loved it. He ran into a buddy in the village and the two of them had a coffee. They loved talking about their kids and grand kids. They were both 70 years old and as much as their stories were similar they enjoyed hearing them again.

Tom's buddy was named Frank. He was a retired mechanic and still restored vintage cars for a hobby. His prize possession was a 1961 corvette. He only took it out of the garage in the warm months. It was his baby. In the summer time he would take Tom for long rides up island. No particular destination. Just hit the road and see where it takes you. Tom would take his camera and get a lot of great shots of BC's incredible scenery.

It was the new millenium. Y2K had come and gone, the world was still here, there was no global computer meltdown and Molly was in grade school. Tom's day care duties were no longer needed although he would pick Molly up from school when mom and dad were too busy. Tom was in his 50's now and aside from the regular Sunday supper that included everyone in the family he lived a quiet somewhat monastic life. He still didn't have a girlfriend but was beginning to feel like he needed one. Life was starting to feel empty. The on line dating thing didn't appeal to him.....too impersonal. He decided to trade in his Toyota for a more sportier car. Girls like sport cars he thought and if he didn't have luck with this idea he would still have a fun car to drive around in. He called Frank.

Hy Frank. I'm going through my mid life crisis and I need your help. I think it's time I had a girl friend....and a sports car.

Frank just broke out into laughter.

Which one are you thinking of getting first?

The car, Tom said.

What are you looking for? Frank asked.

I don't know. Tom said. You have a handle on the car thing so I thought you could help me out.

Well.....I know where there's a Mercedes convertible. It a 1965 and in good shape. Not cheap though.'Gonna cost you about \$25,000.00

I can handle that Frank. It should at least hold its value if I take care of it right?

Ya it should. Those babies don't go down in value.

Ok. Set up a meeting and I'll take a look at it.

The next morning Frank took Tom over to his friend's place. Randy made a living dealing in rare cars.

This Mercedes was just that. It was a beauty. Ivory white colour, automatic, power steering, power brakes. Randy could tell Tom was attracted to the car. Tom opened the door and sat behind the wheel.

Can I take it for a spin Randy?

Absolutely Tom. Frank opened the passenger door and jumped in. Let's go.

The car had a lot of power. Tom wasn't used to such a performance vehicle. When he stepped on the gas the car lunged forward. It set Tom back in his seat. The top was down and the wind felt good in Tom's face. He was beginning to feel younger every moment. They drove back to Randy's place where Frank was waiting in the driveway. If this isn't a babe magnet nothing is, Frank said.

I'll take it Tom said. Can I rely on you to keep it in good shape Randy?

Absolutely Tom. I'll give you a one year warranty on the engine and body but you should change the oil and other liquids on a regular basis.

OK Randy! You got a deal.

They did the paper work and Tom drove his new car home. He put the top up and admired his new acquisition. He had never spent this much on himself. He almost felt guilty..... his family always came first.....but now his needs were in the forefront and he was thinking if he would ever be able to have another relationship. It was so natural with Molly. They were forever.....he thought. Damn that cancer anyway. Tom's phone rang, it was Frank.

Hy Tom. There's a vintage car show this weekend. How would you like to take it in. It's too late to actually put your car in the show but I thought you might like to drive out to Sidney and look at some cool cars.

Sounds good Frank. I'll pick you up at 9am and we can drive in my car.

OK. See you then.

Tom picked Frank up Saturday morning and took the winding back roads to Sidney. The small town was converted into a massive show case for local cars. Tom and Frank parked his Mercedes and just walked around. He took his camera and was enjoying all the eye candy. This was a new world for Tom. Each car was more beautiful than the one beside it. It would be hard to be a judge in this show.

Tom was staring out his kitchen window when his cell phone rang. It was Kioko.

Hy dad. I was wondering if you could watch Molly for a couple hours. I have some appointments and running around to do.

Sure Kioko. I'll be in the studio.

Tom had amassed thousands of photos over the years. He had broken them down into categories; flowers, people, weddings, babies, nature, birds and now cars. His grand daughter loved sitting in the

projection room and just looking at the pictures. His own children didn't like this pass time at all. It wasn't hard to entertain young Molly, she was amused with everything. So inquisitive Tom thought. He wondered what profession she would chose. It would probably be something in the arts. She already had her own cell phone and would take pictures of everything. Tom made sure he put them on the computer. What used to be a slide show was now Power Point. It was more efficient but the old slide projectors made a sound, and they literally projected a beam of light so they created an atmosphere in the room. But that was then.

Tom heard the car pull into the driveway. Molly jumped out and ran to the studio. Papa Tom papa Tom. The studio door opened and Molly ran into Tom's arms. He picked her up and raised her to the ceiling.

How's my little girl? He said.

I have some new pictures on my phone papa Tom. Can we put them on the computer and look at them?

Of course we can sweetie.

Kioko just stood in the doorway with a big smile on her face. Molly loved visiting her grandfather who had become papa Tom. It was the name she gave him years ago. It was easier than saying grandfather.

Thanks for doing this dad, Kioko said. I'll get my chores done quicker this way.

No problem Kioko. I'm sure Molly and I will find something to amuse ourselves.

Kioko left and Tom started loading Molly's pictures onto the computer. Molly watched intently. She hadn't quite learned the process yet but Tom knew she would have it down soon. When the pictures were loaded Tom gave the remote control to Molly.

Ok Molly. It's ready. You tell papa what the pictures are.

Molly sat in Tom's lap and started her show. This is Mrs. Greene. She is my teacher. And this is Mary, my friend. This is dad at work. He's digging a hole. I don't know why he digs so many holes. He just fills them back up.

Tom interjected. He's laying irrigation pipes Molly. That's so water can get from one place to another and the pipes aren't exposed.

Molly didn't comprehend this so she just went onto the next picture. This is Max our dog. We got him last week. Dad says I have to be gentle with him. I feed him and play with him and he comes with us for walks.

This was news to Tom. He hadn't seen Max yet. He was a golden retriever. Very handsome and very protective of children. Good move Tom thought. Danny was looking out for his family.

Molly went on to show her latest pictures of everything and anything that captured her eye. Tom could see she had inherited his love of photography and this pleased him. The show came to an end and Molly jumped down from Tom's lap.

What do you want to do now papa, she asked.

How about going for a ride in my new car, Tom said.

Ok, Molly replied. She was up for anything.

Tom put the top down, secured Molly in her seat belt, sat in the drivers seat and headed out. It was a warm sunny day and the ocean was reflecting the sunlight. They headed east on Dallas road towards the Uplands, the high real estate district. Tom pulled into St. George's Terrace. It was the first lookout on the route. Molly pulled out her cell phone and started snapping pictures. They would be overexposed because the sun was so bright but Tom didn't want to dampen Molly's instincts. He would point this out when they did the next show together. Tom carried on and pulled over at Cattle Point, the second lookout on the way. Molly didn't take pictures this time. She was hypnotized by the beauty of everything. Tom could tell she was in an artist's trance. He looked at her absorbing the sun. She was so cute with her sunglasses on. They were both caught in time for a brief moment. Tom didn't want to break the spell in an unpleasant way so he said.....how would you like an ice cream cone. Molly slowly looked toward him as if being pulled by the tide, smiled and said.....ice cream!!!

Last stop was the dairy queen. Tom got two butterscotch ice cream cones and passed one to Molly. This was her focus in life for the remainder of the trip. They arrived home and as soon as they got out of the car Kioko pulled into the driveway.

Perfect timing, she said. Molly had ice cream all over her face so they went inside to clean her up.

We're having a barbecue this Sunday dad and we're wondering if you'd like to come. You don't have to do all the cooking every weekend for us. We've already invited Katie and Beth and a few other friends.

That sounds great Kioko. Shall I bring something?

No. we got it covered.

With that she and Molly gave Tom a hug and a kiss and they were gone. And just like that Tom was alone again.

Tom was beginning to wonder if he liked the modern world. It was too fast. He tried to keep up with technology but it was impossible. New things were obsolete in months. His real pleasure was photography and the thrill of discovering a new shot. He spent most of his time going over the same slide shows he had seen a hundred times because he felt secure in the projection room. He felt the warmth of his father and mother, his children and his grand child. The rest of the world seemed cold....even on a warm day. Tom was 70 years old and feeling his age.

The barbecue was a pleasant diversion. There were about 20 people there that Tom hadn't met before. Kioko started introducing him. This is my father in law/ babysitter/ cook and all round great grandfather. Tom was a little embarrassed. He didn't really think of himself in those terms. He was just Tom the photographer.

One of the persons he was introduced to was Heather. She was Kioko and Danny's neighbour. She was a violin player and worked in the Victoria symphony. It was the first woman Tom actually got a spark from since Molly had died many years ago.....

How are you Heather, it's nice to meet you.

Very nice to meet you as well Tom.

Tom looked at her ring finger and saw it had no ring on it. She's single he thought.....or maybe she doesn't wear a ring because she's a violin player. All of a sudden Tom felt those awkward but exciting "boy meets girl" feelings come over him. He grasped for any question he could just to keep the conversation going.....so you're a fiddle player?

Heather laughed. Well, yes. I play fiddle when I'm fiddling around and violin when I'm working.

It wasn't the greatest ice breaker but it got them both laughing.

Tom was going to try and cover his tracks but simply said....I have to admit....I don't know much about music, especially symphony music.

Well, Heather said, if you would like to see what I do, we are playing next week at the Royal theatre. I can get you a complimentary ticket if you like.

That would be great Tom said. I have only been to the symphony once before.

Tom and Heather hung out together for the duration of the barbecue. They discovered their tastes in food were completely different, their tastes in art were completely different and probably the only thing they had in common was the attraction they were both feeling. Tom said his goodbyes to his family with hugs and kisses. He and Heather shook hands and Tom drove off in his sports car.

Heather grabbed Danny by the arm and said.....why didn't you introduce me to your father before this? Danny just smiled. It was time his dad had a girlfriend. It would be nice to see the two of them get together.

Tom went to the symphony and saw Heather play. It was incredible. She was the second violinist. Tom didn't know good playing from bad but couldn't deny how the music was making him feel. After the concert they went out for a late supper. Tom decided to put all his cards on the table. He told of how he lost Molly and hadn't been with anyone since. He talked of his passion for his art form and his devotion to his family. Heather was honest as well. She was Tom's age and had devoted herself to her music. She had several boyfriends but nothing that lasted. She would tell herself her music was the most important thing to her and every time a boyfriend would leave...that's all she had left. She had never wanted children. They would just get in the way of her career. She was tired of being OCD about her independence. They were totally different people but had arrived at the exact same place....lonely street. They finished a bottle of wine and left the restaurant. Heather lived in a small one bedroom apartment. She moved from one city to another like a gypsy following seasonal work in the fruit orchards. She had no roots. Tom was very heavily rooted in his home life. When they arrived at her apartment Heather asked Tom to stay the night.

This is going real fast Tom said.

At our age we don't have time to waste, Heather said. Those words would resonate with Tom down the road.

Heather and Tom fell in love that night. It felt so good. They were both transported from their loneliness. Now they were lovers. They had someone to call for no other reason than to talk. They had each other's bodies on an intimate level and a casual level. Heather loved his sports car. They would take long drives with the music blaring. Tom was learning all about Stravinsky, Mozart, Beethoven and the classical composers. He enjoyed photographing Heather. She was a pretty woman and didn't mind her picture being taken. She loved little Molly. Now when they had their slide shows there were three of them. Molly still controlled the remote and gave her commentary. Tom had to set another chair for Sunday supper. Heather would come over early to help prepare supper or just stay over from Saturday night. The family was happy for Tom. He was a whole person again. It was as if the burden of grief had been lifted from his shoulders.

Tom sat in his sun chair in the living room. He looked at the massive tankers waiting to dock on the American side and drop their loads of tech toys. The Olympic mountains were only half visible today. They are so large they have their own ecosystem. It was sunny today but clouds hung over the mountains. Tom's mind drifted back as it always did. It drifted back to three wonderful years he and Heather had together. It drifted back to little Molly's graduation from high school and it drifted back to the car crash that killed Heather. Tom had gotten a call from the police station to come and take pictures of an accident on the Pat Bay highway. When Tom arrived there was Heather inside the back seat of the taxi cab, her violin beside her. She didn't have her seat belt on. She was coming home from a concert in Sidney. A drunk driver ran a red light and wiped out the taxi cab. The driver had his seat belt on and survived. Tom couldn't bring himself to take the pictures. He didn't want this memory to stick in his mind but it would.....forever.

One less chair was set for supper on Sundays until it became too painful to pretend things could ever be the same without Heather. Kioko and Danny would always invite Tom for Sunday supper but he declined. He would retreat to the projection room and watch pictures by himself. He felt that life had cheated him. He was beyond loneliness. The only satisfaction he got was watching his precious pictures over and over. The police would call him for more work but he quit doing that gig. He quit doing weddings and babies and pretty pictures. Now his work was totally abstract. Close ups of tree bark were his latest muse. They looked like things they weren't. Blow up a piece of tree bark and it becomes a landscape, a mountain side or anything you want it to look like. Realism was too painful for Tom.

Tom's phone rang. He didn't want to be disturbed so he checked who was calling before he answered. It was Molly. He couldn't shut her out.

Hy Molly.

Hy papa. Is it ok if I come over? I have some new photos to show you.

Sure Molly. I'm here all day.

Molly had picked up photography where Tom had left off. He introduced her to the police and now she

was their official photographer. She also did weddings and family portraits. She was only 19 and was making a good income as a freelancer. Tom was pleased to see this because he had lost interest in his art.

Molly arrived and they went into the studio. She loaded the pictures onto the computer and started her show. Every picture was a picture of Tom either on his own or with someone. Molly had taken all of them and compiled a portfolio of her papa Tom. Molly gave her commentary....here's you and Max and here's you with me when I was 8 and here's you with mom and dad and on and on. Tom was in tears. You have touched our lives in such a wonderful way papa Tom. We know you have had to go through terrible losses but we want you back in our lives at least for Sunday supper.

Tom wiped his tears away.

Do you remember when you taught me that shooting into the sun caused overexposure? Well, that's what has happened to you papa. You have been overexposed to life. It's not your fault. The sun was just too bright. You went for the best shot and paid the price.

Where did you get all this wisdom Molly?

I got it from you. You taught me these things.

So what are you planning to do with your life Molly?

Right now I'm working with dad in his landscaping business and freelancing with the photography. I want to save enough money to go to Europe. I'd like to see the museums and architecture. It's a long range plan. I have no desire to go to university. I'm already doing the art I love so I don't see the point in paying to study it. It's way too expensive.

I understand. I met your grandmother in university. We were both studying art. Then we went to Europe for the same reasons you want to. It's a wonderful experience. If you need help with your trip let me know. Do it soon while you are young and energetic. Life goes by way too fast. I'll start the Sunday supper going again at my house. Let your mom and dad know that. They will want to have it at their place but this would give me something to plan every week. It's time I got out of the projection room again.

The End

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

I woke up one day with this word flashing in my head like a neon light. I went down to the ocean with my camera, sat on a bench, and the story came to me. I was heavily into a video and photo phase then.

I was just talking to my daughter (Olivia) about you and your magazine. She is a professional journalist and works for post media in Montreal.

I'm sending her your contact info because I think she would enjoy what you are about.

I'm also entering a short story contest with the CBC. i just wrote the story yesterday. My wife has proof read it and I'm making the necessary corrections. To qualify for the contest it can't be a story that is already published so I'll send it off to you just to read when I've finished it. It's only 2500 words.

Things have changed again at the Loft. New rules. I used to just go there and chose what musicians I wanted to jam with but now you can't do that. You have to have a half hour set planned with specific people. It's always some new twist with the social distancing rules. I still go there but I'm just video recording other people. I sit with my friend Peter. He is 83 years old and needs a walker to get around. he orders his food and a pint of beer and then falls asleep when the music starts. I am his apprentice. If I live to be 83 i will follow in his foot steps.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Joey Scarfone lives in Victoria, BC where he owned Lazy Joe's Vinyl Emporium—a store devoted to classic vinyl. He devotes some of his time and all of his interest to poetry and music.