

DOWNTOWN COOL

By Christopher Johnson

WHY I LIKE IT: *Guest editor JAMES HANNA writes: A powerful coming of age tale marked by haunting similes and textured writing. When two boys skip school in search of “adventure” in the red light part of Chicago, they do not count on the depressing banality of the neighborhood they enter. “We paid the driver and got out of the cab. The ride had taken only ten minutes, but we had left behind the immaculate world of skyscrapers and fancy restaurants and entered a world that time and prosperity had passed over, as if this part of Chicago had an incurable disease and had to be quarantined.” Still, the boys sneak into a burlesque house convinced that they are committing a mortal sin and will therefore have a wicked time. But, having sold their souls to the Devil, the boy’s reap the Devil’s wages—a bounty the author skillfully captures in his sobering depiction of the poverty of sex for sale. I am reminded of a character in Eugene O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey into Night, who remarks that whores might be mistaken for fascinating vampires instead of the poor diseased slobs they really are. I was moved and disturbed by this story and have no hesitation in awarding it **five stars**.*

James Hanna, author of The Siege, Call Me Pomeroy, A Second, Less Capable Head.

(Spacing and font size are author’s own.) Eds.

Downtown Cool

by

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When I was a teenager, I was torn tragically between being good and being bad—between being obedient and being rebellious—between following orders and defying them. I grew up in Elm Park, a leaf-endowed middle-middle-class suburb just over the border from the farthest tentacles of northwest Chicago. Elm Park was, to my tender and jaundiced eyes, hopelessly boring and safe. The main street was home to men's and women's clothing stores, a religious book store, a stationery store where we bought our school supplies, a classically designed public library that had originally been funded by Andrew Carnegie many many years before, and other little shops sprinkled along the sidewalks like the cut-outs in a make-believe village.

Main Street sloped up gradually to a soft pinnacle, where rested the Elm Park Theater, a gorgeous Art Deco structure that had been built in the 1920s and that displayed the Hollywood product that shaped and stirred my fantasies of romance and adventure and heroism and patriotism. As I grew into adolescence, I began to yearn to break out of the boringness, the middle classness, the safety of it all. I read Jack Kerouac and Thomas Wolfe and yearned for the open road, and I had some vague idea that I would find self-knowledge, passion, and adventure somewhere on this vague highway, which would lead me to a freer future.

My mentor was Ozzie—Oswald Jones III. During my junior year and his senior year, Ozzie persuaded me (although it did not take much persuading) to do what I would once have been far too afraid to do myself: cut school for a day and journey down to Chicago’s Loop to seek adventure. As Ozzie said, “Let’s *live* for once in our lives before we die.”

On the morning of that epochal day, I sat in the booth of a diner in uptown Elm Park. I wore khaki trousers and a madras shirt, and I hunched over my coffee, which was laden with cream and five spoonfuls of sugar; cupped my face in my right hand; and brushed my hair with my left hand. I took another sip of coffee, tapped my penny loafers against the linoleum floor, and waited for Ozzie.

At last he walked in, and immediately he owned the place. He wore high cheekbones, eyes like a snake’s, tight blue jeans, and a black T-shirt with the sleeves rolled up just over his biceps. He scanned the diner, taking it all in, not missing a thing. He sat down in the booth across from me and looked at me. He drawled, “Ulee, you gotta roll your sleeves up.” I, the acolyte, did as I was told. I rolled up the sleeves of my madras shirt over my biceps, and even though I had pathetic skinny arms, I knew—or at least felt--that without a doubt that I looked cooler now.

“Are you ready?” Ozzie asked.

“I am ready.”

“Did you call in?” He meant the Dean’s Office at Millard Fillmore High School, where attendance was meticulously recorded.

“I called in.”

“Did they buy it?”

“They bought it.”

“Cool.”

With an aplomb that had surprised me, I had called the Dean’s office that morning, assumed the voice and persona of my father, and told the woman who served as the school’s attendance maven that my son, Ulee Newman, was sick and would not be attending school that fine day. I had carried out my impersonation perfectly, and now our day of freedom beckoned without obstacle.

Ozzie and I finished our coffees and buzzed over to the little brick Elm Park train station and bought our tickets. The train arrived on schedule, just as it always did in this suburban world where things always seemed to operate according to plan. I followed Ozzie to the smoking car. He unrolled his right sleeve, slipped out his pack of Marlboros, tipped a cig between his lips, and lit it with his Zippo lighter. I said to Ozzie, “I’ve never cut school before, and it feels kind of weird. I even feel a little guilty about it.”

He said, “That is precisely why I have offered you this opportunity to skip one meaningless day of school *for the very first time in your whole life!*” He grasped my arm tightly in his and leaned forward so that our faces were two inches apart. When he spoke, he dropped in a pregnant pause between each word for emphasis. “You . . . must . . . not . . . waste . . . this . . . opportunity, . . . and . . . I . . . am . . . here . . . to . . . make . . . sure . . . that . . . you . . . use . . . it . . . to . . . the . . . utmost.”

I looked at Ozzie, who was smoking another cig, and thought about the fact that we had met in world history class when I was a freshman and Ozzie was a sophomore. I’d always been a little jealous of him, of the inside knowledge that he had, knowing just

how to do things like roll up the sleeves of his black T-shirt. Ozzie, I thought, had turned life into art.

Our train steamed underneath a long black steel roof and slowly drew closer to the terminal in what was then called Northwestern Station. Of course, I'd been to the Loop many times before with my parents and little brothers and sisters, but this time I was on my own, and I scraped the corners of my fingernails with excitement. We bounced out of the terminal and onto Madison Street and turned east toward the Loop.

The energy and chaos of the city exploded over us. We passed steakhouses, jewelry stores, banks, bars, restaurants, and electronics stores that blared out music that soared high into the sky and pierced the clouds hanging over the Loop. We zapped into one of those electronics shops. The assault of sights and sounds was so powerful that I felt disoriented. Hundreds of transistor radios blasted out music—Smoky Robinson, the Beach Boys, the Four Seasons. Stereos, watches, thousands of watches, and radios, oh my God, so many radios, not only tiny transistor ones but big ones with gargantuan stereo speakers. All the electronic devices spat out noise--a cacophony--and I couldn't pick out a single melody or song.

We came to State Street and turned right. Now we were in the heart of the Loop, and the sidewalk bustled with an incredible variety of people, all of them rushing as if they were on their way to meetings that would decide the fate of the world. Everything moved so fast that I had trouble making sense of it all. The movie theaters—the *Chicago*, the *State Lake*, the *Oriental*--stood astride State Street like Colossuses, blazing with millions of red and white light bulbs, their marquees vaulting toward the distant sky and

screaming the magic of escape in the way that only movie theaters can. *Cleopatra*. *The Longest Day*. *Irma La Douce*. The blockbusters of 1963.

We stopped for coffee at a burger place on State and slid into a booth. Ozzie said, “Christ, this is the real deal, isn’t it?” He smoothly tipped another Marlboro from his pack and fired it up with his always reliable Zippo. Every move was so self-assured.

“It sure is,” I said, sounding adolescently lame to myself.

Ozzie took a drag on his cigarette and nodded knowingly. “You know, Ulee, when we were walking down State Street, I’m looking at all the businessmen with their briefcases. They’re all wearing Hart Schaffner & Marx suits and Florsheim wingtips, just like my old man.”

“Mine wears that shit, too.” I matched Ozzie’s tone of contempt.

“They’re all going to their offices like herds of cattle.”

I picked up on Ozzie’s riff. “They dictate memos for a couple of hours, and then they go out for two-martini lunches. They go back to their offices and half-sleep through the afternoon.” I was certain that this was the most sophisticated observation ever made.

Ozzie moved his head a little closer to me and lowered his voice. “Did you see the prostitutes outside the Northwestern Station?” He said it matter-of-factly, as if seeing prostitutes were an everyday experience.

“Are you kidding?” I exclaimed. How could I have missed seeing them? I was mad at myself. I should have been on the lookout for them. Of course, I thought, there are prostitutes in the Loop. The Loop had *everything*. I’d know better next time. “Speaking of prostitutes,” I said, “I want to see *Irma La Douce*.” That was the latest movie with

Shirley MacLaine, in which she played a French lady of the night who was wooed by Jack Lemmon.

Ozzie looked at me. “Yeah, we could do that. I’m sure that’d be fine. But to tell you the truth, I’d like to do something new. I’d like to do something I’ve never done before.”

“Like what?”

“I was thinking we should go to one of the skin flicks west of the Loop. West of the river. What’s *Irma La Douce*—a B movie?”

I nodded.

“We can go to a B movie any time. Any old time. But they only have skin flicks down here in the Loop.”

“Oh.” Something about going to one of those theaters intimidated me. I’d come to the Loop with Ozzie to Embrace Life, to Experience Everything. But I hadn’t thought about this—going to a skin flick. It sounded . . . well, it sounded creepy. “I don’t know,” I murmured.

Ozzie looked at me, and he was irritated. “Listen, we were just talking about doing things our own way and following our own path. But I come up with something that’s a little out of the ordinary, something you can’t do in Elm Park, and you get cold feet on me.”

I still wasn’t sure. I had this picture of . . . well, a bunch of horny old men sitting there panting as they watched the skin flick. I didn’t want Ozzie to think I was scared. Then I thought of a good obstacle. “Don’t you have to be 18 to get into one of those theaters?”

“That shouldn’t be a problem. First of all, both of us look 18.”

I knew that Ozzie didn’t look 18. And I knew that I barely even looked 16. “What if they want an ID?”

“Then we’ll talk our way in. We’re smart guys. We can figure out a way around that.”

“Have you ever gone to one?”

Ozzie shook his head.

“Then how can you be so sure we’ll get in?”

“I got buddies who go all the time. If they can get in, we can get in.” He paused and thought for a moment. “There’s another thing. It’ll be a Condemned movie. It’ll be a sin to see it. A mortal sin. If you see a Condemned movie, you have to go to confession. If you want to take Communion.” He paused. “And damn it, I want to commit a mortal sin! Today. Right now.”

I grinned. “One thing I always wondered about Condemned movies. Who really does the condemning? I mean, I know it’s the Legion of Decency. But who’s the power behind the Legion of Decency?”

Ozzie looked at me. “Well, the Pope, dummy. Of course.”

“So the Pope watches all these movies and decides which ones to condemn? Then isn’t the Pope committing a mortal sin? And besides, how can he possibly have time to watch all these movies?”

Ozzie thought for a minute. “It’s probably not the Pope himself who condemns all the movies. Maybe they hire old guys to watch the movies, and if they get boners, then it’s Condemned. It has to be old guys. Because young guys like us, we get boners when

we see Shirley MacLaine kiss someone. But old guys, it takes a really good Condemned movie to give them a woody.”

I laughed. “That still doesn’t sound very likely.”

“Man, you’re just too damned logical! Sometimes you need to forget logic and dive into the muck!” He paused. “You know, even if you get a boner from something innocent like watching Shirley MacLaine kiss, you’re still morally polluted. You’re screwed. You’re going to hell. End of story. See you later, alligator. Get used to the heat. So don’t try to hide behind that innocent kissing Shirley MacLaine crap. It’s still sex. Nothing more, nothing less.”

I laughed again. “All right. Let’s go to the skin flick.”

“That’s the spirit. Let’s go commit a mortal sin!”

We hustled out of the burger place and tramped to Madison Street and turned west. Ozzie sailed forward in his black boots with the Cuban heels and did a French inhale on his cig. We roved past City Hall and the Civic Opera House and came to the Chicago River, which looked dull and gray beneath the clotted clouds. This was taking a long time, and finally we decided to catch a cab, which careened its way west to Halsted Street and then a few blocks north. There, the burlesque houses congregated like churches that had been invaded by the devil.

We paid the driver and got out of the cab. The ride had taken only ten minutes, but we had left behind the immaculate world of skyscrapers and fancy restaurants and entered a world that time and prosperity had passed over, as if this part of Chicago had an incurable disease and had to be quarantined. The cab deposited us in front of our destination, the Regal Theater. With blood-red signs, the marquee shouted out the title of

the movie—*The Blondes of Sweden*. Below that sign was another—“Special Liv Show--Miss Stella, for One Week Only!!!” The *e* had dropped from the word *live* as if a lizard had gobbled it up for a snack.

I licked my lips and looked around. Cheap hotels and liquor stores surrounded the theater like a pack of wolves. Ozzie also looked around. “Wow,” he murmured. Both of us had driven down Halsted Street before with our parents, but now we stood exposed, outside the barrier of the locked doors of our parents’ automobiles. “Well, we wanted an adventure,” Ozzie said.

I just nodded.

A panhandler approached us, and Ozzie fished a dollar out of his pocket and dropped it into the man’s hands. I couldn’t help staring at the man’s face. Lines crisscrossed his cheeks and forehead like the rivers marked on a map, and his cheeks and chin were shaded with stubble like desert vegetation. For an instant, I saw myself through the man’s eyes, and suddenly I felt ashamed of my rigidly pressed khaki pants, my madras shirt, my penny loafers.

My eyes wandered to one of the cheap hotels that lined Halsted Street. An obscenely red sign blinked on and off: “ROOMS--\$2.00 A NIGHT.” The front door to the hotel was open. Just inside was a cage guarded by iron bars, and in the cage sat the hotel clerk. As the clerk waited for his nightly customers, he read something. He yawned, scratched his armpit, and resumed his rapt attention to whatever it was that he was reading.

We walked up to the Regal's box office, and inside was a hunched-over, heavysset man who breathed through his mouth, wheezing like an exhausted steam engine. Ozzie spoke to the man as if he were a regular customer. "Two tickets," he demanded.

The man in the caged box office looked at us and pointed lazily to a sign that read, "Must be 18." In a voice scraped with gravel, he said, "ID?"

Ozzie didn't miss a beat. "We forgot them, sir. But we're 20 years old."

"You two ain't no 20 years old. Ya gotta have ID's."

Ozzie motioned me away from the box office. "I got a plan," he said in a whisper.

"We don't have to go to this movie. We could still see *Irma La Douce*."

"No, we gotta see this one. It is absolutely necessary. I didn't come downtown to see no stinkin' A movie or B movie. We're gonna pay someone to let us in. Gimme ten bucks." I unswaddled the money from my wallet, while Ozzie rescued a ten-dollar bill from the recesses of his own pockets.

We walked a little way south of the theater. A man with a Camel resting casually on his lower lip and a beautiful mermaid tattooed on his forearm leaned against the wall as if he personally were preventing the building from falling down. Ozzie went over and whispered to him and handed him the twenty bucks. With a sudden sense of purpose, the man walked up to the box office, bought tickets for five dollars each, and disappeared inside.

"Come on! Hurry!" Ozzie motioned to me. We scurried around the building to the alley in back, distracting a couple of rats from their midday snacks on garbage. After a couple of minutes, we saw the door at the back of the theater open. Darkness from inside

leaked out the door like radioactivity. We stepped inside. We heard the sounds of the movie. I licked my lips again, and my palms slid with sweat.

Ozzie strutted ahead of me like a rooster, and I fell in behind him, sliding my feet ahead cautiously, feeling my way along the carpet that draped the floor. In a few moments, we entered the small auditorium where the movie was playing. Ever so slowly, my eyes adjusted to the darkness. The eyes of five, maybe seven, men were fixed on the screen. Ozzie and I walked to the third row and sat down. The stench of something assaulted my nose. I couldn't tell what it was. Vomit? Urine? My belly rolled over slowly.

Cavorting across the screen were nude men and women playing a volleyball game. Men on one side of the net. Women on the other. Perfectly bronzed Swedish bodies flew through the air. The women's breasts danced like beachballs. The women's bushes and the men's penises were out of sight, because the camera lingered over only the upper halves of their perfect bodies.

"This is weird," I whispered to Ozzie.

"Sshh!" Ozzie put his index finger to his pursed lips. "Pay attention!"

I looked at the screen again. I was amazed at how insanely happy the nudists looked as they played volleyball. Smiles were plastered on their faces like papier-mâché. The men and women bounced and jiggled and hit the volleyball. Then they finished their volleyball game and slid into a whirlpool together and started talking. They talked in Swedish, and I read the subtitles. One woman eyed the man next to her and said, "Erik, you flew through the air like a god!"

The man said, "The sand is hot when I step on it with my nude feet!"

Another woman said, “The blue of the sky matches the blue of your eyes!”

A man said, “Volleyball is such the healthy exercise!”

Then, like a cat creeping up on a bird, one of the men started kissing one of the women, and I felt a stirring in my groin. The Swedish man’s hand crept like a Gila monster onto the woman’s breasts, and he caressed her as if he were kneading dough. Then he lowered his lips to her breasts, and she threw back her head and let her scorching blonde hair trail over the edge of the whirlpool. Soon, everyone in the whirlpool was kissing and caressing, all the time wearing insanely happy grins.

Then, with absolutely no warning, the movie ended, as if the last reel had gotten lost on the way from Sweden. The lights came up, and I blinked my eyes at the harsh brightness. I looked around, careful not to catch the eye of the older men in the theater. My senses were filed to razor sharpness. Adorning the seat next to me was a wad of gum as ancient and hardened as a fossil. The walls were black with peeling paint and swaths of unpainted Spackle where someone had tried to patch up cracks in the plaster. The Spackle had been smeared on sloppily, and nobody had bothered to paint over it, so the gray patches of Spackle hung like a foreign substance thrown at the black wall and left there to decay until the end of time. Behind us, the men stared blankly at the stage, waiting for Miss Stella’s Special Live Show to start. One man got up and walked up the aisle. I assumed he was going to the bathroom. I desperately hoped that I wouldn’t have to pee.

A man came out on the stage in front of the movie screen and wearily set up a drum kit and two small amplifiers in front of the movie screen. Three musicians traipsed onto the stage, one carrying an electric guitar, one carrying a bass guitar, and one planting

himself behind the drum kit. The guitarist wore a beret and a goatee and looked like Dizzy Gillespie. The drummer wore a sleeveless T-shirt, and tattoos wandered up and down his arms like maggots. The drummer was heavy-set and stared blankly in front of him as he applied the drumsticks to the drums. They started to play a blues number with a downbeat so heavy that it sounded like an earthquake.

Then Miss Stella herself sidled onto the stage like a python. I guessed that she was around forty years old. She was adorned with a rose-colored, sequined evening dress, and the upper curves of her breasts rose and fell like the waves of the ocean. She started swaying and dancing to the insistent beat. Her creamy skin glowed pink under the spotlight, which followed her around on the stage as if it were glued to her. She paced back and forth like a cheetah. Bit by bit, article by article, she disrobed.

I suddenly felt very self-conscious of my body. I didn't want to put my right arm on the armrest because I might touch Ozzie, and I didn't want to do that. I clasped my hands in my lap, but then I felt like I was at church, and I didn't want that. Finally, I crossed my arms in front of me.

By now, Miss Stella was down to nothing except for pasties shaped like stars on her breasts and a G-string. She looked at the audience but was detached from it. She was mechanical and sensuous at the same time. The music thumped its heavy rhythm like bedsprings during sex, and she swayed to the music, closed her eyes, moved her hands sensually over her body. The cave of sex was dark and mysterious, and I felt myself plunging into it, utterly naked. I was aroused, and I felt warm. I could not take my eyes off Miss Stella as she swayed and danced. "Do you think she's a prostitute?" I whispered to Ozzie.

“Shh!” Ozzie answered sharply, keeping his eyes fixed like lasers on Miss Stella.

I looked back at Miss Stella on the stage. She looked out over the audience at some point far in the distance as she snaked her way back and forth on the stage, and I looked into her eyes, and in spite of the fact that her eyelids were blanketed with mascara, I saw that her eyes were a lovely brown, and then in those eyes I saw something—a tiny light into who she was--and when I saw that, I wanted to know more about her. What was her real name? Did her parents know that she was a stripper? Did she have children? How old were they? How did she take care of them? What did the children do while she was here stripping? How much money did she make as a stripper? I imagined Stella’s life—that her children were twelve and eight, that their names were Adam and Sarah, that Stella’s real name was Rebecca, that she stripped during the daytime so that she could spend time with her children in the evening, that she read to her children every night, that she caressed their hair and faces tenderly as they slipped into a deep and innocent sleep.

And then, as I sat there next to Ozzie and in the midst of the other men in the audience who out of the vast desert of their loneliness stared at Miss Stella’s nakedness--suddenly, without warning, I felt a welling of shame that Ozzie and I had come to this place, and I was overwhelmed by the shame I felt, and queasiness roiled the pit of my stomach. I looked at Ozzie and choked, “I gotta get out of here.”

Ozzie looked at me in surprise but said nothing. He turned quickly back to Miss Stella.

I got up and bolted up the aisle and through the lobby and out the doors into the blazing sunlight of Halsted Street. The air hit my face like a slap, and I gulped in oxygen. I sat on the curb of Halsted Street, waiting for Ozzie as the cars and trucks lumbered by. I

paid no attention to the traffic, no attention to anything. Slowly my nausea subsided. I sat, feeling a deep sense of shame and embarrassment.

After half an hour, Ozzie came out. He sat down next to me and said, “What the hell happened?”

I avoided his eyes. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Are you all right?”

I nodded.

“Are you sure?”

“I just felt a little sick.”

“But you’re all right now?”

I nodded again.

We were silent, neither of us sure what to say to the other, separated from each other like distant spheres. My shame and embarrassment enveloped me, set me apart, stole my voice. Finally, Ozzie looked at his watch. “Oh, Christ! We gotta hurry if we’re gonna catch the 4:35.” We got up and flagged down a cab that scurried us to the Northwestern station. We found the smoking car. Ozzie tipped a cig between his lips and lit it. He didn’t look at me. I didn’t look at him.

Finally I said, “That was really stupid.” I was angry at Ozzie. “I feel guilty about going to that thing.”

“Why? Nobody twisted your arm. You knew what you were getting into. You asked for adventure, and you got it.”

“Well, I didn’t know what it was going to be like. It was completely humiliating for her.”

“It’s a job for her. It’s a way to make money. Nothing more, nothing less. Who are we to judge?”

“Bullshit. It was completely humiliating for her. Would you want your sister up there on the stage?”

Ozzie sucked in some smoke and slowly let it out. He didn’t answer.

“Then just shut up about it.”

“OK,” he said. “OK.”

We retreated fast from the Loop, and as we withdrew from the city, the neighborhoods became less dense. We left behind the old tenements that had been built in the early 20th century and entered the part of the city that had newer apartments, built after World War II. I felt the Loop releasing its grip on me. We rode in silence.

We got off the train at Elm Park. “Listen, Ulee,” Ozzie said as we stepped off the train. “I’m sorry if it bothered you.”

I looked at Ozzie. “It was strange,” I said.

“That is true,” Ozzie said. “It was very strange.” We said so long to each other. We would still be friends. I knew that, but for now, I couldn’t wait to get away from Ozzie. I went home. I was afraid that my parents would figure out that I had cut school that day, but they didn’t seem to have a clue. Like a child, I dawdled over my dinner. I pretended to do homework and then watched TV. But as I watched, I could only half-concentrate on the shows.

I went to bed early. I covered myself with my blanket, pulling it over my head. The abandoned men on Halsted Street, the dilapidated stores, the Swedish nudists, Miss Stella—they swirled before me like misshapen phantasms. I felt as if I were standing on

the edge of a steep precipice, about to plunge into a swirling mess of emotions and mysteries. I couldn't sleep.

I had a strange impulse—an impulse out of my boyhood. I crawled out of bed and went to my closet and dug through all my stuff and dragged out two shoeboxes. I opened them. There were my tin soldiers—red ones for the British and blue ones for the French. I hadn't played with them since I'd been ten years old. But I had this strong urge to play with them now. I *had* to play with them. I set up each army for confrontation—the Battle of Waterloo, which I had re-enacted many times when I'd been a kid. Napoleon attacked, and Wellington led the British and their allies in defense. Then Wellington attacked. I coordinated infantry and artillery, just I'd done as a kid. An hour, two hours flew by, and I was lost in being ten years old again. I shouted orders, and my soldiers obeyed. The strange events of the day faded, and the battle became the most important thing. Finally I put the soldiers away. I crawled back into bed. I buried myself under my blanket and surrendered to sleep.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: “Downtown Cool” *started as a memoir piece. I wanted to capture what downtown Chicago was like in the Sixties. So glamorous! So larger-than-life! And I wanted to capture something about adolescence. I write often about childhood and adolescence. The piece evolved toward fiction. It needed some embellishment and drama, and that's how it ended up as a short story. Influences? Probably Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway--the way in which they transmuted everyday experience into compelling fiction. I reread Winesburg, Ohio every other year or so.*

AUTHOR'S BIO: I'm a writer based in the Chicago area. I've done a lot of different stuff in my life. I've been a merchant seaman, a high school English teacher, a corporate communications writer, a textbook editor, an educational consultant, and a free-lance writer. I've published short stories, articles, and essays in *The Progressive*, *Snowy Egret*, *Earth Island Journal*, *Chicago Wilderness*, *American Forests*, *Chicago Life*, *Across the Margin*,

Adelaide Literary Magazine, The Literary Yard, Scarlet Leaf Review, Spillwords Press, Fiction on the Web, Sweet Tree Review, and other journals and magazines. In 2006, the University of New Hampshire Press published my first book, This Grand and Magnificent Place: The Wilderness Heritage of the White Mountains. My second book, which I co-authored with a prominent New Hampshire forester named David Govatski, was Forests for the People: The Story of America's Eastern National Forests, published by Island Press in 2013

EDITOR'S BIO: : James Hanna is a former fiction editor and a retired probation officer. He has had over seventy story publications and three Pushcart nominations. Many of his stories deal with the criminal element. James' books, three of which have won awards, are available on Amazon. You can visit him there at:

https://www.amazon.com/James-Hanna/e/B00WNH356Y?ref_=dbs_p_ebk_r00_abau_000000

We published his story **The Lottery** in Issue 4 (Fiction). His story **How I Done Good in School** is published in this issue (Fiction).