

# *Just Write*

Gloucester County Library System

Logan Township Branch

Writers' Group Selections

Volume 8, Issue 1

April 2019

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## *Ocean Eyes*

By Sabrina Hall

You hold the ocean's allure in your eyes—  
cerulean blue unfolding upon the azure,  
the temptation of sirens in your gaze.

You are a beautiful thing to want—  
I'm throwing myself overboard in the pursuit,  
your song belted off key with my screams.

I'm a sailor set adrift in your waves—  
my flares shot skyward in desperate rescue pleas, only  
to watch them fall back to you unanswered.

I thrash against the pull of your tide—  
your sea of deceit holds me under until I  
sink on my own, never to be found.

## *Find Someone*

By Sabrina Hall

Find someone who loves you—  
not despite your flaws,  
but because of them.

Find someone who doesn't shy from your past,  
but who sees each scar as another place  
along your skin to kiss.

Find someone who loves you—  
not because you complete them,  
but because you are their favorite mosaic.  
Find someone who doesn't bathe in your warm summer light,  
but someone who warms you  
when you are as cold as a starless night in the dead of winter.

Find someone who loves you—  
not for the way they can mold your broken pieces together,  
but for the way you stitch them back yourself.  
Find someone who doesn't sing along to your favorite chorus,  
but who knows every note  
of every heartstring plucked from your chest.

Find someone who loves you—  
not for who you could be one day,  
but for who you are right now.

## *What If*

By Sabrina Hall

What if true love doesn't exist?

What if every fairytale ending is meaningless,  
and two people can never be whole  
because we are greater than the sum of our parts?

What if the Symposium was a lie?

What if we're not perfect halves,  
but puzzle pieces all thrown on a table,  
scrambling to find our best fit in the pile?

What if we have no perfect fit?

What if we snap into pieces we hope will  
reveal a bigger picture— because  
we yearn for one to exist, and to be part of it?

What if soulmates are a fallacy?

What if love is less about wanting to find  
others, and more about not wanting  
to lose ourselves?

What if love doesn't matter?

What if we're so afraid of being silence in the void,

we'd rather be background noise in collective ambience  
than an unheard melody?

What if we're so desperate to be remembered,  
we don't care to be known?

*Cupid's Arrow*

By Shelby Carlton

Drowning in the depths of my anguish,

caused only by him,

Always him—

My thoughts are still consumed by his betrayal.

His voice lingers in my mind,

His grin haunts my dreams,

Piercing my soul.

Even in my dreams he doesn't want me,

Even in my dreams he feels nothing but guilt—

Overwhelmed by the feeling,

But never enough to come find me—

Never enough to save me from this utter devastation.

My flying Cupid's arrow missed his heart,

And I laughed at first because I thought it didn't matter—

But it turns out he couldn't love me without it.

His arrow,

Flying straight and true,

Pierced deep into my heart,

And I fell for him before I even knew what was happening—

I was lost in the sparkle of his smile,

Mesmerized by the twinkle in his eyes—

I fell for his captivating charm and devilish grin—

Falling so quickly I couldn't catch my breath.

I saw the stars in his eyes and heard the colors in his voice—

When he looked at me,

Stars fell from the sky and exploded at my feet—

When he spoke,



Rainbows formed in the air and danced around me.

When he left me for another girl,

The stars crumbled and disappeared one by one—

When he walked out of my life forever,

Silence descended and all the colors faded away.

I am left lonely and destroyed,

My dreams full of gray,

Always gray—

He's gone,

And he took all the colors with him.

*Human Nature*

By Shelby Carlton

Bright red roses bloom,  
Their vibrant color catches my eye—  
I smile with joy,  
Suddenly no longer full of gloom—  
Too late I realize their beauty is full of deceit.  
When I reach out to touch one  
I let out a painful gasp—  
I am suddenly filled with defeat.  
The bright red petals match the color of my blood—  
My finger throbs as I pull the thorn out.  
The roses laugh at me as they wave gleefully in the  
wind—  
Their scorn makes my regret come in a sudden flood.  
Their beauty masks the pain hidden underneath—  
Tricking unsuspecting victims into touching them

And suffering the consequences.

I must bear my newfound pain and grit my teeth—

I will suffer in silence away from these mocking  
flowers.

But I cannot blame the roses,

For it's only their nature to inflict pain—

Much like you and the rest of humanity.

## *Unchanging*

By Shelby Carlton

Still stuck in the same old rut,  
Thinking of you when I shouldn't be—  
Lost without a map.  
I'm looking for something I cannot find,  
Haunted by dreams I can't remember—  
Trapped in old familiar places,  
Filled with memories I can never seem to forget.  
I can't escape the memory of your presence,  
Still stuck here in this same old place.  
It seems I'll always be missing you—  
Some things never change.  
I don't know what I'm still looking for,  
But I know I haven't found it yet.  
I think I'll probably be searching forever,

Stuck in this same old rut—  
Lingering here in this place,  
Filled with familiar faces I can never seem to forget.  
Haunted by dreams I can't remember,  
Thinking of you at the wrong time—  
Lost without a map to guide me.  
It seems I'll always be missing you—  
Some things never change.

## *Fred's Road Trip*

by Mary Ellen DeAngelo

It was the end of January 2018. There was electricity in the air in my part of the world. Those weeks leading up to Super Bowl LII were like a dream. It was an emotional rollercoaster. We Eagles fans were excited and thrilled, but each of us felt it could be snatched away from us at any moment. The hype escalated each week as the game approached. It was exhausting and exhilarating at the same time.

I was working as a nurse at Crozer Chester Medical Center. I would visit different floors reviewing charts to make sure the documentation was accurate. There is a special friendship that develops between the different clinicians that gather around the desk each day. We ask each other about the mundane circumstances of our lives – the usual small talk that happens between co-workers.

The Medical Center is in a very poor and depressed city. Drug addiction, murders and gang violence are rampant. The trauma team is kept very busy. There are many sad stories. The success of the Eagles lightened the spirits of everyone. The cafeteria staff would spontaneously break out into the “Fly Eagles Fly” song. The pride was palpable. Everyone was wearing green. It was magical!

Yet, there was one thing troubling me. My Uncle Fred was the most devoted, loyal Eagles fan. I had lost my father as a child and Uncle Fred was like a second father to me. Like so many Eagles fans, Fred had remained devoted to the team through thick and thin.

I never remembered him being sick. He was a tall, strong man who was able to do heavy tasks easily. In the summer of 2014, he collapsed getting off his farm tractor. I was sure it was something simple, like dehydration, and he would be fine in a few days. As his days in the hospital continued, I started to get a little concerned. I was getting information from his stepdaughter. I went to see him in

the hospital and he looked well. His wife had been in the hospital, herself, and Fred would spend every day, all day, with her. He developed a hospital-based infection in his blood stream that affected his heart. The doctors decided to operate and transferred Fred to a different hospital. He died the night before he was scheduled to go to the operating room. My indestructible uncle was gone. His loss struck me to the core. There are people that the world seems like a sadder place without them, and he was truly one of those people.

Fred was not in this world to experience the incredible Eagles' championship journey. It came three and a half years too late. It didn't seem fair.

As the Super Bowl approached, the talk around the desk was all Eagles. Brian, one of the physician assistants for the hospital group, shared with me that he and his buddies were driving out to the big game. Each day he would tell me another detail about the upcoming trip. They didn't have tickets but just wanted to be close to the stadium where the Eagles were playing. It shows the extreme loyalty of Eagle fans.

Lying in bed one night in that dream-like state between the physical and spiritual world, I was struck with an idea: "I am going to ask Brian to carry a picture of Uncle Fred with him to Minneapolis." I found a picture and laminated it. I couldn't wait to see Brian the next day at work. The hospitalists are very busy when they first arrive, so I waited to page him. He was leaving the next day, so I had to see him that day. I paged him midmorning and asked him where he was in the hospital. I went to the unit where he was working and took Fred's picture with me. I explained what a devoted fan and dear uncle Fred was and asked Brian if he would put "Fred" in his wallet and carry his image with him to the game. If Brian thought it was a crazy idea, he didn't say so. Brian didn't hesitate: he would be happy to do it. He put Fred's picture in his wallet right there.

Just thinking of Uncle Fred's photo so close to this historic game made me so happy. I kept asking Fred and all the passed loyal Eagles fans to help our team during that nail-biting game. I was so proud of the team, the city – everything. Everyone had a pep in their step.

Now I couldn't wait to see Brian and hear about his trip. Then I realized a remarkable thing had happened. Brian didn't just keep Fred in his wallet. He had included him on his trip. He had a picture of Fred with him taken at the bar in the airport and with Quarterback Nick Foles' picture at the Mall of America. The dearest picture was of all his friends holding my uncle's photo at a bar in Minneapolis as they celebrated the Eagles' amazing win. I was so touched by Brian's and his friends' kindness.

So the next time you get an idea to ask someone to do something for you that seems a little quirky, I say, just ask! You never know the wonderful outcome you might get. Brian and I still text each other once in awhile during Eagles games. My heart is full of gratitude to Brian, his friends and that amazing Eagles team.



# *The American Revolution in Swedesboro as*

*Recorded by Reverend Nicholas Collin*

By Ben Carlton

Most of the stirring events of the American Revolution that occurred in and around the village of Swedesboro and the environs of Woolwich Township happened at the time of the British Army's conquest and subsequent occupation of Philadelphia from September 1777 to June 1778. At that time Swedesboro consisted of about 12 log-built houses, one Swedish Lutheran church and parsonage, a school house and a tavern, all constructed mostly of native cedar logs, and situated at the head of navigation of the Raccoon Creek, which feeds into the Delaware. The area near Swedesboro, known then as Raccoon (the name was changed to "Swedesborough" in 1763, but was still often referred to by its former appellation) and surrounding Woolwich Township, was still considered a wilderness on the eastern side of the Delaware River. The early Swedes, who began to settle the area about 1640, were fur trappers, and raccoons were abundant in this region of southern New Jersey, thence the names, "Raccoon," and later "Swedesborough." The Native Americans, of course, were the first claimants to the area, and the Swedes negotiated for purchase of the land from Raccoon Creek all the way to Cape May with the Lenni-Lenape tribe, who called the area around Swedesboro, "Narraticon," which, being translated, means "Raccoon." Nineteenth Century historian, Isaac Mickle relates an amusing anecdote about a Native American who walked into the Swedesboro church at Raccoon during a service one day and exclaimed in the middle of the sermon, "'Here is a great deal of prattle and nonsense, but neither brandy nor cyder!' and went out again."<sup>1</sup>

In 1770, the Reverend Nicholas Collin, the last Swedish rector to officiate at the Swedesboro parish, had described the still sparsely populated region as heavily forested and full of marshes. With the exception of the Salem Road (today's King's Highway) running directly through the village, the area roads were "miserable" or nonexistent. The Kings Highway had finally reached from Burlington to the Swedesboro settlement in 1703, the same year that the Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church was built. It was the first Swedish church in New Jersey. Despite the new thoroughfare, the boggy country and sandy soil would not support carts or wagons, and travel was mostly conducted on foot or on horseback. The country people, mostly

poor, who lived outside the confines of Swedesboro, were much scattered in this “terribly dark country.” Yet, in the winter of 1778, both the British, ensconced in Philadelphia, and the Americans, camped at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, found this area ripe for supplying food and forage to their insatiable armies. Even before the war, Gloucester County in West Jersey was thought to be in an advantageous location opposite Philadelphia: beef, pork, mutton, cheese, butter and other products found a ready market in the great Quaker City. Thus, when war visited the region, raids and reprisals by the contending armies in search of supplies occurred frequently, and a bitter civil strife developed between the Whigs and Tories, who were formerly friends and neighbors in Raccoon and Woolwich.

Dating back to the earliest Colonial period, the climate of southern New Jersey was considered by the inhabitants to be very unhealthful, as fever and ague (i.e., malarial fever) were always present during the summer and fall. Within Collin's Raccoon parish, many suffered from such common maladies as severe vomiting and diarrhea brought on by the extremes of summer heat, and the subsequent “fearful cold” (this observation coming from a native of Sweden!) and chill rains of winter. Nervous disorders, rheumatism, intermitting fevers, loss of teeth, and colds along with the afore mentioned ague were prevalent. Climate and lifestyle in the southern portion of the state were thought to contribute to the premature deaths of many people and their animals. In 1784, the year the present Trinity Church building was constructed, Collin wrote:

[At] the end of summer and the entire autumn the people were generally ill with fevers. I had my ample share, too, which was unavoidable on so frequent and long journeys in severe cold, rain and heat, which [the journeys] increased in number this year because of the erection of the new church.<sup>2</sup>

Death could come suddenly in Collin's parish. In 1771, a 58-year-old Swede was found dead floating in his punt at the mouth of Raccoon Creek. Collin wrote in his journal that the deceased had been a “great drunkard for a long time.” The good Reverend conducted the man's funeral service, quoting Ecclesiastes 9:12: “Man knows not his time.”<sup>3</sup>

Certainly, Esaias Lock, “a few and 30 years old,” was taken unawares when he fell headlong in Pastor Collin's own parish house:

He lived only 24 hours after an unfortunate fall from the top of the attic stairs in my house by which he immediately lost his speech, and nearly all consciousness. This accident affected me so much more as it occurred through his friendship for me; he had brought me a sack of flour and after he had emptied it, he stumbled on the top step going down and fell, head foremost, down the stairs. Since he could not be moved, the funeral took place from my house, which, at my expense, was made respectable.<sup>4</sup>

The inscrutable ways of God notwithstanding, Reverend Collin had dreamed of becoming a missionary to America while still in Sweden at seminary, despite reports of the wild and dangerous nature of the country. Soon after being ordained at the University of Uppsala in 1768, the Consistory of Uppsala recommended him as an assistant pastor to the Swedish mission on the Delaware. Accordingly, Collin sailed from Stockholm to London in September 1769, the first leg of his journey to the American colonies. A prolonged stay in England helped the young pastor become more proficient at speaking the English language. Finally, Collin boarded a vessel for Philadelphia, arriving there on 12 May 1770 after a difficult voyage of seven weeks. Collin stayed briefly in Pennsylvania before traveling across the Delaware River to New Jersey. He arrived in Swedesboro on 19 May and resided as a welcome guest at the home of the senior pastor, Johan Wicksell. Collin delivered his first sermon at the old log church in Swedesboro on 8 July 1770, and preached the following Sunday at the church in Penn's Neck.

Collin was young and adventurous, bringing an initial enthusiasm to his missionary calling to West Jersey. Collin often traveled far and wide on horseback through the thickly wooded area, sometimes at night or in haste, to comfort a dying parishioner, baptize a sick child, or deliver a funeral oration. Collin sometimes would have to ride upwards of four to five Swedish miles, roughly 24 to 30 English miles (one Swedish mile the equivalent of six English miles), to minister to a member of the flock. He once "went astray in the wilderness a whole afternoon" traveling from Swedesboro to the Maurice River district in 1770. Collin was obliged to purchase his own horse, complaining: "Upon my arrival I bought a horse and retained this horse the whole time at my own expense. The last-mentioned parishes [i.e., Raccoon and Penn's Neck] promised indeed to pay for it, but never did anything." The Pastor lost his horse in March of 1775, making his ministry very difficult: "...I lost my horse and was not able to buy another one until August, the year following, and frequently had to walk one and sometimes two [Swedish] miles [i.e., six or seven English] miles when I could not borrow or hire a horse." Yet such was Collin's devotion to his parishioners, "...for a God-loving and kind people [not necessarily his own congregation] I would with pleasure crawl on my hands and knees, if necessary." Even on horseback, Collin would still have to travel 25 or 30 miles a day because of the scattered location of the people, causing Collin "unbelievable toil."<sup>5</sup>

Collin described the physical parameters of his ministry at Swedesboro and Penn's Neck:

These parishes extended a distance of 5 [30 English] miles in length and two [12 English miles] in width, on the east shore of the river Delaware, over a neighborhood full of marshes and woods. The churches are of wood, in very bad repair, two and a half [15] miles away from each other. The vicarage is close to the Raccoon church in a small place intended for a town called Sveaborg (in English Swedesborough), which is laid out on the church property and pays rent for it [to the church]. As the greater part of the congregation lives closer to this church, the pastor lives quite in the center of his activities, but must, however, often travel two and sometimes three [Swedish] miles below Pensneck church.<sup>6</sup>

Collin wrote that the people of his parish were mostly poor, still struggling to subdue the wilds surrounding them. The sandy soil had yet to be drained to produce sufficient pastureland and fields for planting. However, the main crops the Swedes did manage to grow were corn, rye, wheat, oats and potatoes on hardscrabble farms. Horses, cattle, sheep, and hogs were raised by the Swedish farmers. The hogs roamed freely as there were no fences to pen them in, running wild through the woods, and were shot when required for sustenance. Because of the swine, a strong fence was needed to keep the rapacious pigs away from the burial ground adjacent to the Swedesboro church.

Collin's congregation was a mix of nationalities and religions – English Quakers, Anglicans and Methodists, German and Swedish Moravians and Lutherans. Collin held services in both Swedish and English, but the English congregation had become larger than the Swedish and began to dominate the parish. His church at Penn's Neck (present-day Pennsville, New Jersey) was entirely English. He lamented the fact that many Swedes (and thus their children) no longer spoke or remembered their native tongue.

Collin reported that the people of his diocese were generally lacking in morality, and that "Self-interest is a prevailing passion." One example of such covetousness Collin noted in his journal. A tavern-keeper of his congregation had taken advantage of his own sister's death to sell liquor during her funeral as the weather on the day of the service had turned out cold and wet. Apparently, the law of self-preservation and a pecuniary motivation prevailed over sentimentality in this harsh environment.<sup>7</sup>

Collin further described the locals living between Raccoon and Oldman's Creeks, as rather promiscuous and overly fond of horse racing, both pastimes known to be fraught with

certain hazards, but providing entertainment and emotional release from the unremitting toil required to tame this wilderness area. Such had been the case of the unfortunate parishioner, Alexander Veer, who died after a fall from his runaway horse. Collin observed, "He had been very fond of horse racing, a too common amusement here, which causes many disorders, poverty and accidents."<sup>8</sup>

The Reverend Collin commented that "The morals of the people are not of the best," although he *almost* complimented the ladies of Raccoon and Woolwich by writing that they were generally "not ugly." However, as Collin further observed, the women, some of whom were "a head taller than I," also tended to lose their teeth before the age of twenty. In a letter to a friend in Sweden, he described entering a house where the ladies sat "bare-footed and quite scantily clad at their tea, coffee and chocolate." (This savory repast may help to explain somewhat the general absence of teeth in some of the young women; although, what Collin considered to be "scantily clad" can only be surmised.)<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps Collin was too scholarly for the "rough and tumble new world" where he ministered. He was one of the most learned men of colonial America. In addition to theology, in Sweden Collin had studied mathematics, philosophy, and other disciplines of higher learning. At Swedesboro and Penn's Neck, he fought against the broiling summer heat and swarms of mosquitoes that he was not used to, and the general apathy and waywardness of his rustic congregants. He expressed his exasperation on paper:

Good and evil are mixed in a queer way in this free country. Many who diligently make use of the clergyman's services contribute little to his support; others again, less fervent, and sometimes those who can hardly be considered parishioners, are more liberal, and in other matters more honest minded. The real Swedes are generally no better than others, neither in religion, morals, nor friendliness toward their pastors.<sup>10</sup>

In October 1773 Collin was appointed the senior rector at Raccoon and Penn's Neck churches, just as the clouds of war were gathering ominously on the horizon. He had served for three years as assistant pastor under the tutelage of the Rev. Wicksell, who was now returning to Sweden. Throughout the looming revolutionary conflict, Reverend Collin would attempt to remain neutral, often at the peril of his own life, as he continued to minister to the congregants of both churches at Swedesboro and Penn's Neck. Once the British gained control of Philadelphia and the Delaware River, many people from Swedesboro and Woolwich began to break the law by trading with the enemy despite threats of dire punishment from the new Patriot government. In the autumn of 1777 the British army captured Fort Billings located near

modern-day Paulsboro. It provided a haven for those who wished to change sides out of loyalty to the King, or from fear of reprisals by the Patriot militiamen. It also provided a base of operations for the British and Loyalists to conduct foraging raids into the country. From this time on, until the British evacuated Philadelphia in June 1778, a terrible civil war raged in West Jersey that encompassed Swedesboro and Woolwich, although in Collin's parish, the Pastor observed, only one man actually fell in battle "because both parties fought not like real men with sword and gun, but like robbers and incendiaries."<sup>11</sup>

Both sides employed terror tactics and did not hesitate to make war on defenseless civilians. Collin wrote a vivid description of the true nature of the war in Swedesboro and Woolwich:

Everywhere distrust, fear, hatred and abominable selfishness were met with. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, wife and husband, were enemies to one another. The militia and some regular troops [i.e., Continental line soldiers] on one side and refugees [i.e., Loyalists] with the Englishmen [British soldiers] on the other were constantly roving about in smaller or greater numbers, plundering and destroying everything in a barbarous manner, cattle, furniture, clothing and food; they smashed mirrors, tables and china, etc., and plundered women and children of their most necessary clothing, cut up the bolsters and scattered the feathers to the winds, burned houses, whipped and imprisoned each other, and surprised people when they were deep asleep.<sup>12</sup>

Pastor Collin, his congregations at Raccoon and Penn's Neck, and all the people of Swedesboro and Woolwich endured a civil war that lasted about nine months in this locale. Only some of the inhabitants were involved in actual fighting, but all were touched by the calamity of war in one way or another. Collin wrote to a friend of the hardship he had personally endured: "My suffering indeed was multifarious and painful during the many years of the Revolutionary War..." Accused of being pro-British and a spy for the crown forces, Collin was arrested, threatened with hanging by the Americans, and twice was nearly shot by soldiers of both parties. Collin wrote in 1779, "I thank God Almighty, Who gave me the strength to go through this fiery ordeal with Christian steadfastness and the good conscience of never having taken a step from the path of honor either from hope or fear."<sup>13</sup>

## *Notes.*

1. Mickel I, *Reminiscences of Old Gloucester County or Incidents in the History of the Counties of Gloucester, Atlantic and Camden New Jersey*; p. 25.
2. Johnson A, ed., *Journal and Biography of Nicholas Collin, 1746 – 1831*; p. 283.
3. *Ibid.*; p. 215.
4. *Ibid.*; p. 229.
5. *Ibid.*; p. 235.
6. *Ibid.*; p. 217.
7. *Ibid.*; p. 229.
8. *Ibid.*; p. 234.
9. *Ibid.*; pp. 26 – 7.
10. Leiby AC, *The Early Dutch and Swedish Settlers of New Jersey*; p. 107.
11. Johnson A; p. 249.
12. *Ibid.*; p. 245.
13. *Ibid.*; p. 251.

# ***Just Write***

**Meetings Held 2nd & 4th Wednesdays @  
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