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Works Cited

Brandon R. Schrand



Brinley, Bertrand R. *The Mad Scientist's Club*. New York: Scholastic Books, 1965.

When I was eleven and in that sunset year of childhood when it took actual concentration to discern the diaphanous line between daydreams and reality, when the stories I read so fully colored my day-to-day loafing in rural Idaho that I seldom knew where the page ended and the world began, I picked up a particular book about a gang of goofy kids whose lives I wanted to be my own so badly that it left me aching in the joyous way books often leave us: high, yet abandoned somehow. The feeling, when you have it, is tactile and intoxicating. It is like love or victory or surrender.

Set in the nostalgic and quaint town of Mammoth Falls, *The Mad Scientist's Club* centered on a group of boy geniuses whose singular occupation was to hatch harebrained schemes to save their town (or themselves) from one kind of danger or another. Led by Jeff Crocker and the bespectacled Henry Mulligan (the main brain), the club met daily in their headquarters, which was outfitted in the loft of Jeff Crocker's barn. They had an in-house laboratory complete with microscopes and vials of solutions and compounds. They had telescopes. Transmitters. Toolboxes. Plenty of books. And endless days to fill. It was a world that to me felt actual, a realm whose cinematic stories stamped my imagination, and I never wanted it to end.

Lee Smith said somewhere that as a girl she would write out additional chapters when she reached the end of a book, conjuring alternate endings that would sprawl on for pages. Because I grew up in a working-class family of little education, I was more apt to grab tools or weapons—a torque wrench or cross-bow, say—than I was a pencil or typewriter as a way to extend the story at hand. But I see now that our hunger was the same. So while I didn't draft my own narrative addenda, I did *enact* the stories as a way of physically inhabit-

ing, re-creating and living in my impromptu mock-up of what I imagined to be other worlds, or in this case, Mammoth Falls.

I formed my own Mad Scientist's Club. I enlisted four of the smartest kids in my school. I secured a workspace in the basement of the old hotel my family owned, plus I had claimed a stone clubhouse outside, whose former life had been as an aboveground root cellar. I bought a telescope. I gathered tools, rope, pocket knives, drafting paper, pencils, protractors, a Commodore VIC-20, walkie-talkies, everything. We were in business. I called the meeting to order, explained my intentions, my conception of what would surely be summer after summer of endless adventure, and then we started tossing out ideas, the mischief that would unfurl. But the first meeting seemed forced and stilted. Few if any of the ideas had legs. The short list of agreed-upon projects looked something like this:

- *Build a small, unmanned rocket.* We started with some basic blueprints that involved an old water heater I salvaged from our basement, an oxygen tank my grandfather used on account of his emphysema, a sledgehammer and a football helmet (for safety). The project, though, never got off the ground, so to speak.
- *Hack into the NORAD defense system mainframe using the Commodore VIC-20.* We spent hours in front of the "computer"—a keyboard hooked into a television set—running any number of commands that would, we were sure, destabilize global defense centers everywhere. We typed words like *NORAD* and *missile* and *defense* and *top secret*, and for each entry we jabbed into the keyboard, the television screen spat back its unwavering response: SYNTAX ERROR.
- *Build a satellite that will intercept alien communications.* I remember monkeying around with a coffee can, some parts from my Erector Set and some speaker wire, but the project did not live past a crude prototype, and we never intercepted anything but an all-Spanish radio station and dust motes.

I was so taken with the club and its promising future that I bought T-shirts and had Mrs. Jensen at Keith's Department Store affix three felt iron-on letters—"M.S.C."—on each shirt. But nothing—not monogrammed T-shirts, not cloud-high ideas or the books that inspired them—could prolong that age and that time, and soon the inevitability of girls or other tinselled distractions had eclipsed the Mad Scientists' Club, and that line between daydreaming and the actual world widened in a way that was both liberating and cruel.

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Fadiman, Anne. *Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.

Nearly two decades later, I found that my particular place in the world had widened in a different way. I was in graduate school and had begun hoarding books like they were stars to be gathered from the twilight, each one a point of light on some vast cartography of fate: read this book, learn how to live. It sounds foolish now, but that was how I saw books—as secrets, scrolls inviting imitation. I was in my first semester of a master’s program and teaching my first class—freshman composition—and could not have been happier, buried as I was in work. But I was out to prove something, to make up for years of trouble, time in jail, and flunking out of college.

Because my undergraduate GPA was abysmal, I had been accepted into my program on a conditional and probationary basis; to my thinking, it was a miracle that I was even there. It was unthinkable, for example, that I had a desk in a shared office, a key to that office, a grade book and some fifty students who showed up to hear me talk about writing. One of those students turned out to be a college friend’s younger brother. This student was smart and edgy (or as edgy as a young Mormon man can be without surrendering his faith). His hair was large and bushy and unkempt in a way that was stylish. He wore baggy pants and was never seen without his longboard. He preferred punk shows over school, or listening to jazz while longboarding around campus at night. And so his parents were guardedly concerned. They felt, and perhaps rightly so, that he “lacked direction.” In my class, he demonstrated direction—sort of. He loved reading and writing and couldn’t seem to get enough of either.

But his final essay, which I recall as an “argumentative essay,” lacked legitimate sources and was logically soupy, what with its wandering and ultimately untenable thesis statement: “Tom Waits is the Greatest Musician in the History of the World and All Mankind.” I encouraged him, demanded in fact that he change his topic or at least ground it in some concrete way. I made such demands because they needed to be made but also because I saw some version of my former self in this student.

One day after class, and after all the other students had cleared out, he handed me a copy of Anne Fadiman’s *Ex Libris*. “It’s from my mom,” he said. “You know, like a gift or something.” I was at once stunned and delighted. He was embarrassed, muttered something and ducked out with his longboard under one arm. Inside, on the flysheet, his mother had written how grateful she was that her son was in my class. She then wrote: “This book is something all lovers of writing and language can appreciate! We hope you like it!”

I loved it. I hadn’t yet heard of Anne Fadiman (though I would become a devoted fan), but I remember thinking, *This is what I want to do*. I had fallen in love with the essay as a form, though I never really thought of it in quite those sentimental terms. This thin, mint-green volume was a glimpse into the world of books and bibliophiles, and I felt at home between its covers. But I also felt cheated. She lived in New York, and her father was Clifton Fadiman. I lived in Idaho, and my dad was an electrician, and so I fought the impulse to feel sorry for myself for having grown up in the workaday country.

Flaubert, Gustave. *Madame Bovary: Life in a Country Town*.

As an only child who tended toward melodrama, I very often felt sorry for myself for any number of things. For a broken shoelace, a flat bike tire, a failed relationship—for having grown up in a blue-collar family in Idaho. You name it. When something went wrong, I was sure to go on a bender of self-loathing, especially if that something was genuinely grim. For instance, when I was in college—or more precisely, failing out of college—I was arrested on drunk-driving charges. There was no crash, no injuries, no blinding race to the hospital, but that night remains a blot in my memory, and I cringe when I think of the what-ifs and what-could-have-beens. An oncoming car, a sudden flood of headlights, a pedestrian or a cyclist cartwheeling over the hood of my vehicle. The reality was stark enough. My friends and I had a joint in the car, a loaded .9mm (for plinking), expired plates, no insurance, no seatbelts, and one of our cohort even flashed a false ID (god knows why). After I failed the roadside sobriety test, I was cuffed. Drunk, dumb and desperate, I cited

“benefit of clergy,” a seventeenth-century legal loophole Ben Jonson had once invoked when facing murder charges. Because he could read scripture in Latin, the reasoning went, he was above the law and therefore exonerated on that count. That I couldn’t cite *any* scripture, in Latin or otherwise, didn’t diminish my boozy hopes of the loophole’s potential. The arresting officers were unimpressed, and my friends kept begging me to stay quiet. My punishment rightly included a fine of a few hundred dollars, license suspension, SR-22 (high risk) insurance, alcohol counseling and two days behind the iron-clang of county bars.

When I reported to the courthouse on the first morning of my incarceration, I had two books with me: Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (as mentioned, I tended toward melodrama and self-loathing) and Flaubert’s *Madam Bovary* (it was assigned reading for a class). In my cell, however, which was what you would expect it to be—iron, cold, gray—I couldn’t bring myself to read Dostoevsky. It was a narrative locked behind some wall as real and solid as the one that kept me from the clear, bright day outside. In that cell there was no daydreaming. There was only the sudden reality of things I had done and who I had become.

My bed was a thin rubber mat with a transparent sheet and a pillow no thicker than a sock. I wore an orange jumpsuit and brown rubber sandals. The toilet was stainless steel, with a drinking fountain attached to its back, suggesting, somehow, that you were drinking toilet water, and after a cursory glance at the plumbing I felt more, not less, uneasy. The shower was also stainless steel and cylindrical, so that it felt like you were standing inside a soda can or the barrel of a gun. I showered only once but did not drink from the fountain/toilet contraption. Instead, I read Flaubert. And I read the book with a strange hunger. I read nonstop for two days. I read as a way to beat back the iron, to color the gray and to obliterate the cruel quiet of incarceration. I wanted again to tumble headlong into that world of daydreams, to find my way back to a simpler place. But most of all I wanted to absolve myself. Read the book, pass the class, and none of this ever happened.

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Old Man and the Sea*. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1980.

All through high school and most of college, reading the books and passing my classes was a problem. Mostly I suffered from that common disease of assignments. Once a book was *assigned*, I lost interest. But the books I discovered on my own—the *Mad Scientists’ Club* for instance—were just that:

I met up with Hemingway again . . . and began what would be an enduring fascination with the author and his work. . . . Like so many people, I was leveled by his economy. His nouns seemed to fall from the sky like anvils to the page—decided and forceful. Here were unpretentious verbs. See the dialogue firing like pistons. What wasn't to admire?

discoveries, not requirements. Very few assigned books became favorites during high school, but there were some: *Fahrenheit 451*, *Lord of the Flies* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* were books that I accepted, if reluctantly, into my discretionary confidence. Others, though, I rejected flat-out. *Great Expectations*, *Les Miserables* and *The Grapes of Wrath* amounted to a few thousand pages of time-suck, as far as I could tell. I couldn't be bothered. You are what you read—or so I thought—and I didn't want to be any of the characters in any of those books, thank you very much.

And so it was with Ernest Hemingway's epic tale *The Old Man and the Sea*. It was assigned in my ninth grade English class, and I recall meeting it with heady amounts of derision. I could not have cared less about some old dude in a stupid boat and a dumb fish and a little kid and the sharks and blah, blah, blah. It was, to my thinking, a complete waste of time.

It didn't help that we weren't actually *reading* the book but rather listening to it on a cassette recorder in class. One day during our stint with Hemingway, we had a substitute teacher who, through no fault of her own except that she was a sub and we were pimply blowhards, became our singular target. Shortly before we turned to the story on tape—and while the sub wasn't looking—my friend absconded with the cassette player's AC cord. She inquired regarding its whereabouts, detecting, no doubt, some shenanigans afoot. "It doesn't need a cord," someone said. "Yeah," I seconded. "It's solar-powered." Everyone laughed. Everyone, that is, except the sub, who stood before us with folded arms and flaring eyes. Meanwhile, as this poor woman rifled through cupboards for the cord, the captain of the wrestling team and all-around cowboy

dropped a pinch of chewing tobacco in her coffee. It was a cruel trick, but we were rebelling in that unthinking and self-absorbed way that pubescent show-offs do, and any distractions that staved off old man Santiago and his fish were all to the good.

If we were punished for our antics, I don't recall the specifics. What I do recall was that every afternoon afterward, while heat poured in through the old clanking radiators of our classroom and snow billowed outside in a flat white, our English teacher would stop the tape just before the bell, and I would wake from an unremembered dream to find my desk pooled with drool.

In college, however, I met up with Hemingway again, on my own terms, and began what would be an enduring fascination with the author and his work. Put another way, I surrendered to this author and his stories. Like so many people, I was leveled by his economy. His nouns seemed to fall from the sky like anvils to the page—decided and forceful. Here were unpretentious verbs. See the dialogue firing like pistons. What wasn't to admire? My favorite Hemingway book was *The Sun Also Rises*, and it was with this book that I learned how to type. The first summer, after a disastrous freshman year (I earned a whopping 1.72 GPA), I decided that if I wanted to write I needed to master the typewriter. I was in college, on the brink of the computer age, and although my small university had a computer lab, the dot-matrix printers were almost too cumbersome to deal with, so I used a Smith Corona. As a self-ascribed apprentice to the craft of writing stories, I practiced by typing the opening lines of *SAR*: "Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton. Do not think that I am very much impressed by that as a boxing title, but it meant a lot to Cohn." I had gotten the idea from some other writer, of course, and was imitating an imitation of the real thing, the true gen. Eventually, though, I could type sixty words per minute and felt a warm satisfaction at hearing the keys clacking against the paper, at seeing the story, however bad, lift itself out of its own primordial dream. My stories were terrible, and most of their terribleness had everything to do with their being a cheap carbon copy of the stories I loved. I was trying to *be* Hemingway, and it would take years for me to root out his haunting voice from my own.

Hinton, S. E. *The Outsiders*. New York: Laurel Leaf, 1968.

In the seventh grade my literal voice was cracking with embarrassing frequency. I was gangly and awkward and had just been prescribed glasses. It was during this year that I had become aware, if only vaguely, that my family wasn't like those I read about or saw on television. We didn't do ski trips, the lake

or Orlando. We never used *summer* as a verb. Days and months and seasons were containers to be filled with work and work alone. A line had been drawn not between daydreams and the here-and-now but between other kids whose families retreated to their cabins and those of us who wore long hair and heavy-metal T-shirts that said it all: "If it's too loud, you're too old."

So when Ms. Clack, my seventh grade English teacher, passed around a book called *The Outsiders*, I felt my spirits lift a little: here was one of the few assigned books I enjoyed. She told us to think about the title, to consider this book as a tale of those with and those without, and then shot me a steady glance and said, "I think you'll like it."

Of course I loved it. But I loved it for all the wrong reasons. I didn't merely sympathize with Johnny, Sodapop, Ponyboy et al., I *empathized* with them. And here it gets strange because while we were working class, we weren't poor by any means, and, most of all, my parents were *alive*, unlike Ponyboy's. So the basis of my empathy was false and self-serving. I wanted to be poorer, more troubled and badder than I was. In short, I wanted to be an Outsider. I convinced myself that I understood that world of denim and switchblades and sneakers and long, oiled hair. I convinced myself of it so thoroughly that I started to look like a character from the book. And so did my best friend, B. J., himself a M.S.C. alumnus. We wore our Levi jackets and denim jeans, and I carried a butterfly knife in my back pocket. We traded in our glasses for contacts, smoked cigarettes and wore cynicism like a new skin.

I remember wanting to live in a city, to have real alleys to prowl and to stake out as my own. To have territory and what people called "street smarts." But we only had so many streets in my hometown: "street smarts" in rural Idaho are, by virtue of diminished geography—three traffic lights and a semaphore—hard to come by. Our town did have one honest-to-goodness alley, which was behind the movie theater. It was a place of asphalt and cement and bricks and cinder-block walls and broken bottle glass and medallion-like puddles ringed with the oil-slick colors of the rainbow. We called that our place. It suited us. There we could exhale drags of blue smoke, kick a brick wall and spout backward, ingrown teenaged maxims like, "This town blows" or "Preppies are lame." If I ever doubted our proclamations, I needed only to go to *The Outsiders* to see a hardened, cruel world mirrored back to me. Becoming an Outsider was an easy and satisfying way of drawing a line between realms. In other words, I had entered the world of fiction, casting myself as its lead character.

When I learned that Morrison wrote “poetry” . . . I hitched a ride to the nearest bookstore and bought three volumes. I read nearly all of them on the way home, mesmerized by deep lines like, “Midnight/criminal metabolism of guilt forest/Rattlesnakes whistles castanets.” I had *no idea* what this meant (still don’t), but that was okay. Poetry wasn’t written to be understood.

Morrison, Jim. *Wilderness: The Lost Writings of Jim Morrison, Volume I*. New York: Vintage, 1988.

I remained an Outsider, more or less, for the rest of junior high and some of high school. It was an identity that suited me, and one that lent itself to an extension of that identity: I had become a metalhead, a rocker, a hesh. I was even in a metal band that played gigs around the greater southern Idaho circuit. Almost weekly we came up with new band names: Terminal Clapp, Overdrive, Scab, The Rabid-Green Mosquito Vikings, etc. But soon I started to see the sad and empty limitations of this rocker daydream, itself a brand of fiction, and could, much to my dismay, discern where the guitar distortion ended and I began. Music would remain important, but my tastes and wandering interests shifted. While I cannot pinpoint exactly when I started to shelve my Metallica albums in preference to the cosmic, circus-organ vibes of the Doors, I think it was sometime during my senior year of high school. At night in my room, I would write embarrassing poetry by candlelight while Morrison crooned from my stereo about how no one would get out of here alive. *This shit is deep*, I remember thinking. I would pick up the phone and call this girl Polly, who was also into The Doors. “He was so *misunderstood*, you know?” I would say.

And she would agree. “Their songs are like so *deep*.”
“I *know!*”

So when I learned that Morrison wrote “poetry,” that there were books out there filled with his “lost writings,” I hitched a ride to the nearest bookstore (fifty-four miles northwest to Pocatello) and bought three volumes. I read nearly all of them on the way home, mesmerized by deep lines like “Midnight/criminal metabolism of guilt forest/Rattlesnakes whistles castanets.” I had *no idea* what this meant (still don’t), but that was okay. Poetry wasn’t written to be understood. This was clear to me. After all, I reasoned, if his poetry was understood easily, then it would forestall the possibility of his being *misunderstood*, and if he wasn’t misunderstood, then he wouldn’t be an artist. And I wouldn’t have made the two-hour round-trip journey to fetch his poems.

Soon it became urgent that I *read* Morrison to Polly (the urgency here stemming from her oh-my-god good looks) late at night on the phone while my candle threw billowing shapes over my walls. And when that wouldn’t do, I pumped my bicycle across town beneath our three traffic lights (which were turned to blinking mode at ten P.M.) and rapped at her door, breathless. She would step out on the stoop. The porch light would snap on, and I would wave Morrison in her face. “Check it out!” I would say.

Little surprise, then, that I started smoking pot in college. And dropping acid and writing even worse and more embarrassing poetry. I was the long-haired kid with a Jim Morrison poster on my dorm-room wall, which is another way of saying I was a walking cliché. Actually, it was worse: I was the early ’90s kid who was imitating the ’60s kid who was imitating Jim Morrison. I wore beaded necklaces. I got ironic and spacey. In my literature courses, I cited Morrison at every turn. The lecture might center on Andrew Marvell or John Milton or Sylvia Plath, and my hand would shoot up, the beads around my neck jumping and clicking. “*Totally* reminds me of Jim Morrison, you know? He’s like talking about like the *same* thing.”

Here would have been a cue to lay off the pipe, but no.

An even bigger cue came in the form of a nine-car police roadblock on an Arizona highway. Two friends and I were joyriding through the desert at a hundred miles per hour, smoking a bowl, our heads swimming like three balloons in so much smoke. The tape player churned out the lambent drone of “Riders on the Storm,” and then we saw it, the whole spectacle. The state troopers, the dragnet, the end of something in that Arizona wash.

They searched our car, found the baggie of weed, cuffed us and booked us on felony drug possession. We were then transported to a courthouse—cum—mobile home in Moccasin, Arizona, where we were handcuffed to metal folding

chairs in the living room. I recall the cheap cream draperies, gray shag carpet and wood paneling. The judge, who was also a farmer, stomped in through the kitchen, removed his rubber irrigation boots and sat before us at a card table in his tube socks. An American flag and an Arizona state flag flanked the rickety card table. He shoved his glasses up the bridge of his nose and picked through some papers on the table before him. As it turned out, we had two things going for us: (1) it was our first offense; (2) the judge happened to be the grandfather of one of our fraternity brothers. The felony count was dropped to a Class B misdemeanor, and we were released on our own recognizance.

We did not listen to the Doors on the way home, or if we did, I do not remember it. In the weeks and months that stretched outward after that, Morrison lost his appeal. I cut my hair, lost the beads and turned my attention elsewhere.

Pirsig, Robert. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. New York: Bantam, 1984.

For one thing, I turned to other books. Books that I saw as bridges between the ethereal if incomprehensible faux philosophies of Morrison and philosophies that seemed more elevated or legitimate. I found such a book one afternoon at the downtown bookstore near my college campus. I was likely skipping class, and if I was, I didn't care. I was in a bookstore. Like all bibliophiles—Anne Fadiman on down—I knew my home away from home: it was the local bookshop. Libraries are sanctuaries, but there is an element of surrender in taking the volumes back. And guilt and fines when you don't. So I would spend unreasonable amounts of time in this bookshop (and therefore not in class), and on this particular afternoon I plucked a purplish volume titled *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* from the shelf.

Pirsig's masterwork called to me for any number of reasons that day. Perhaps I felt that if I could just read this one book, I would become smart. Or smarter than I was. Perhaps by reading its pages, I could make up for my blue-collar roots. By surrendering to its leaves, I would truly be bookish—which, now that I think about it, is a strange desire for a young man who mostly wanted to bed girls. I was eager to shuck off my former self and inhabit a new fiction that might reveal, at long last, the real me.

And so I set out to read the book but stalled around page 70. Months would blow by, and on some random Sunday afternoon with snow swirling outside, I would pull it from my bookcase and try again, only to find my interest veering from the story around page 100. This was my hot-cold relationship with

Zen for several years, until July 2000, when my wife, Kelli, and I decided to drive from Logan, Utah, where we lived and worked, to Port Townsend, Washington, where I would attend the Centrum Writers' Workshop.

It had been two years since I had graduated from college, and I was working at an environmental consulting firm trying to con my way into graduate school. Kelli was the branch manager for a temp agency. She was also seven months pregnant with our first son. We owned a house. I wanted to become a writer. I had an upstairs office with wooden floors and built-in bookshelves. And from those shelves I pulled once again that purplish book. Our trip, we knew, would be long—thirteen hours one way—and *Zen* was just the right book.

We rented a guest house in the woods that overlooked the Strait of Juan de Fuca. We had little money and spent it carefully. When I wasn't preparing for workshop, I buried myself in Pirsig's book. In the evenings we walked down a path cut through the tall grass that took us to a bench with a view of the strait. I would bring a glass of wine and my book. Kelli would bring a book, too, and some lemon water. Foghorns moaned in the distance. Orcas broke the water's surface. We sat there and looked and breathed and never, ever wanted to leave.

For the first time I found traction in the book, though I did not know what accounted for it. Or maybe I did know. Maybe it had something to do with just (barely) graduating from college. Or getting married two weeks later. Or moving, job finding, house buying. Or this: the swell of my wife's stomach. This place. The orcas and the sun—a coin cast in that spot where the water and sky meet. My son would be born in two months, on September 11, as it happened, and I had a lot of questions both Classical and Romantic, and I remember peering out into the strait and thinking about one day taking my not-yet-born son on a motorcycle trip through the switchgrass plains and showing him the great system of systems we call the world.

Watson, Larry. *Montana 1948*. New York: Washington Square Press, 1993.

Eventually I found my way to quieter, less assuming books. One such volume was a slim novel titled *Montana 1948*. No one gave it to me. No one recommended it. It was just there, haunting my bookcase. But I didn't get to it until the very day of my college graduation. It was an incongruous time. After seven years of taking classes and failing most of them, of getting kicked out of college and begging my way back in, I had finished. I would take my degree in English literature, which to me was another way of saying that I was no longer

a boy from the sticks and that I had something equivalent to, or better than, street smarts.

There was plenty to celebrate. In addition to my graduation, I was engaged to be married in a little over two weeks. The wedding was set, the plans in place, the ring secured, everything. Seven days before my graduation, though, Kelli had gone home for a bridal shower and I had been arrested again, cited for drunken and disorderly conduct. My friend Brad had thrown an end-of-the-year party, and everyone was there. The police showed up as they always did in our small town and told the partygoers to disperse. Boozy and with a head full of big ideas, I decided to engage the police officers, to reason with them, to spin some arguments, to show off a little, strut my strut. Friends intervened, but I wouldn't listen. At one point the officers had actually been entertained by my antics, and one said, "You might make a good lawyer someday." But when I started poking my finger in his chest citing this and that about the U-nited States Constitution, they tired of my game and cuffed me. "Okay, pal, you're coming with us." They shoved me in the squad car, and while they called off the party, I sat in the backseat with my arms wrenched behind me and began to cry. My friends bailed me out and took me home. The next morning Kelli called. Her voice was like birdsong. I was hungover and wracked with guilt, so it hurt to listen. The shower was *wonderful*, she said. And the *gifts!* she chimed. *You won't believe the gifts we got!*

That was when I told her.

Bless the woman.

So it was an uneven time. Everything had changed, and, of course, nothing had changed. I was still a restless young man desperate to find my own story and on occasion foolish enough to be hoodwinked by the allure of my daydreams. I didn't feel like you should feel upon graduating from college—smart, successful, poised for the world. I suppose I felt those things, but I also felt anxious and guilty and low all at once, there in my robe and cap with that book in my hands. Looking back on it, I wish there were an easy explanation for why I took *Montana 1948* (and not *Crime and Punishment*, say) to my college graduation, but there isn't. It was a shortish book—small enough to pocket—and that may have had something to do with it. But I suspect there was more. Perhaps I was suffering from a bout of nostalgia. Perhaps I wanted to be a boy again in a small rural town, and this book felt like my passage back to antiquity, to that Wordsworthian idyll of meadows, groves and streams. Maybe that was it.

Maybe.

All I know is that this story of a twelve-year-old boy growing up in Bantrook, Montana, who himself existed along that diaphanous line between the world of adults and the one of boys, was a story I wanted to be mine. After all, who among us can't admit wanting to live in a novel, wanting to walk around in a plot culled from some preexistence of the incandescent imagination? Who among us can't admit the fleeting desire to attend one of Gatsby's parties, to have visited Dinesen's African farm or accompanied Aureliano Buendia when he and his father discovered ice? Here's one even better: Who among us can't admit wanting to *be* Welty, Ellison or Bellow, if just for a day? At worst, daydreams might aid and abet envy, or they might get the better of our sure-sightedness, but can't they also be seen as the special residence of art unborn?

I think they can.

Looking back on that distant graduation day, it is as if the memory of *Montana 1948* has wholly supplanted the memory of my graduation, which is fine by me. After all, I'm indentured to story if nothing else, and I don't think I'll ever be able to find where the ragged edge of the page ends and the undulating world picks up. Or at least I hope not. This, I think, is the happy consequence of surrender, and I abide.



Brandon R. Schrand

Brandon R. Schrand is the author of *The Enders Hotel: A Memoir*, the 2007 River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Prize winner and a summer 2008 Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection. His work has appeared in *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Utne Reader*, *Tin House*, *Shenandoah*, *Colorado Review*, *River Teeth*, *Ecotone* and numerous other publications. His essay "The Enders Hotel," the title piece from his memoir, was a Notable Essay in the *Best American Essays 2007*. He lives with his wife and two children

in Moscow, Idaho, where he teaches and coordinates the MFA program in creative writing at the University of Idaho.