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Behind  
the Story

notes from  
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## Harry's Our Man

I've written *Harry's Our Man*. A novel! It's set on Pill Hill in 1950 and the main character, Harry Hutchinson, fascinates me. Harry is a "son of privilege". He comes from an old Boston family but has long chafed under his father's oppressive domination.

In a sense, all hell breaks loose when Harry, a rather staid young professor, decides one night to run for Congress. What Harry saw in Hiroshima shortly after the bomb was dropped spurs his decision. He's in for the wildest, saddest, yet perhaps best ride of his life.

I discovered that novel writing is a very different form. An edge appears in the novel that is new for me. Some characters emerged whom I've never told about. As I wrote the novel they took their place. In the novel it was fun to

### HIGHLIGHTS

1 JAY'S NOVEL,  
HARRY'S OUR MAN

2 FORGED IN  
THE STARS IN  
CAPETOWN AND  
NEW ZEALAND

3 CHIP STEIMLE  
OBITUARY

watch Harry Hutchinson meeting some of the Boston politicians of the day including the legendary James Michael Curley, four-time mayor of Boston, congressman and governor. But what moves me most is Harry's headquarters. He has four loyal supporters: a boy, an eccentric woman, an angry World War II veteran and a mangled man. These become the closest friends Harry's ever made.

It's been a new experience entering into the world of the novel. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did writing it.

## Forged in the Stars in Cape Town, South Africa & New Zealand

*Forged in the Stars*, my story about NASA's struggles and achievements is bringing me around the world. I'll be performing the story at the International Astronautical Congress in Cape Town, South Africa. After the performance my wife, Linda and I hope to tour Cape Town, take an over-night train to Johannesburg and go on a safari.

We'll be back only for a few weeks before we head to New Zealand to once again tell *Forged in the Stars*. I'll be the keynote speaker at the ScenceTeller conference at Otago University in Dunedin, New Zealand. They've invited me because they feel my story shows how art and science come together. Having performed the story at space centers throughout the country and at Harvard University and MIT as well as on PRI's Living on Earth, taking it abroad is very special. All my storytelling began telling "hand" stories to my little brother and sister. I would look in the palm of their hands, see a line or a bump and begin a little story. I am grateful and full of wonder that these hand stories have led to the stars.

Pat Schneider, author of *Writing Alone and With Others*, said about the book, "This book is Jay O'Callahan at his deepest and his best. The characters he has immortalized in telling his Pill Hill stories have here their full voices, and what O'Callahan does with them amounts to a fugue – a symphony – or even more remarkable, a neighborhood. Harry truly is our man – our guide into what it means to be intensely alive in a real and imperfect human community."



Jay's novel, *Harry's Our Man*. Cover Art: Tara Law



Jay performing *Forged in the Stars* at MIT 150th Anniversary Exploration Symposium. © Chris Bernstein/CDBphotos

# The Skillings in Maine



Cora and Bobby Skillings at Supper with Laura and Linda O'Callahan

Once again we knew summer had begun when on a warm June day Cora and Bobby Skillings came walking towards our cottage, Camp Content in Gray, Maine, with a quart of strawberries. Cora said, "I've had a knee replacement so my granddaughter had to pick these this year." My wife, Linda replied, "Isn't that what grandchildren are for?" This year Linda decided to have a grand supper for the Skillings. My daughter, Laura and her husband, Tim and I all prepared the meal and welcomed nearly the entire two oldest generations of the Skillings family. Fourteen of us sat around the table and talked and laughed and heard wonderful stories.

Bobby said that Cora was the disciplinarian and when he came home long years ago, Cora said to go up and spank the boys because they had been naughty. Bobby went up to the room and whispered, "Just pretend." Then Bobby began to hit the pillow and the boys wailed and left the room delightedly holding their bottoms. There's nothing better than a summer evening of laughter and stories and good friends in Maine.

## New! Digital Downloads

My stories are going digital! My website store now has digital downloads of some of my stories. *Dancing With Fire*, *The Silver Stream*, *Strait of Magellan*, *Minister of Others Affairs* and *Mostly Scary* are all now available as downloads onto your computer, iPod or other digital device. Let me know what you think and what stories you'd like to see as digital downloads.

## Kathryn Windham Died June 12, 2011

Kathryn Tucker Windham of Selma, Alabama died June 12, 2011. Kathryn Windham was one of the first women reporters on the police beat at the *Alabama Journal*. She was the author of twenty books, a photographer and master storyteller.

One of the joys of telling stories at last year's National Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee was sitting at supper with Kathryn Windham. My new son-in-law, Tim Kinsella was sitting beside Kathryn and I mentioned that I was trying to remember a song about Billy Boy. Kathryn smiled and she and Tim began to sing "Where Have You Been Billy Boy." It was delightful to watch her sing and laugh afterwards. Lots of the joy and love and mischief in the world were captured in her laughter. I think the people who have the clearest sense of who they are, are the most mysterious. Kathryn Windham was a magical magnet. At supper even the beans seemed to be drawn towards her and on stage in front of two thousand people, she made everyone feel as if they were sitting at the table with her. Kathryn loved to sing and she loved to say that her children told her not to sing.

For years my wife, Linda has served cornbread and Linda always tells people that Kathryn Windham said, "Don't put sugar in cornbread. If you want cake, make cake. If you want cornbread, make cornbread." There was no more beloved storyteller in the land than Kathryn Windham. We're sad she's gone but what a joy to have known her.



Kathryn Windham tasting a cherry.  
Photo: Paul Kennedy

## Ted & Kim Have Articles in the New York Times and the Washington Post

My son, Ted teamed up with Kim Hubbard on an article with photos in the *New York Times*. We whooped when we opened the travel section of the *Sunday New York Times* May 15th to see a half page photo of a Kodiak bear that Kim had taken. Read the article online at: <http://travel.nytimes.com/2011/05/15/travel/its-a-bears-world-in-kodiak-alaska.html>

When Kim and Ted were up in Alaska they also interviewed and took pictures for a story on bush pilots. That story appeared in the *Washington Post* on August 7th.

Kim and Ted are living in

downtown Washington DC and Kim is photo editor at the *National Geographic* magazine. Ted is still writing for *Qn*, the Yale School of Management magazine and continuing his NOLS adventures. This past summer Ted led a month long kayaking and hiking expedition for NOLS in Alaska.

## Chip Steimle

**M**y sister Mickey's husband, Chip Steimle, died suddenly June 8, 2011. He was 64. It was shocking and has left an awful hole in our family.

Chip worked in health care and was vice president of the New England Baptist Hospital in the 1980's. Chip was courtly, welcoming and wonderful fun. He was the family poet and at family celebrations he would recite original rhymed poems to everyone's delight. For years we celebrated Christmas Eve at Chip and Mickey's house, dressed in tuxedos and formal gowns. There was dancing, laughter and the singing of Silent Night led by Chip as grace before dinner. All through the years Chip's lifting his glass after singing Silent Night was one of the threads holding the family together. At all of the family gatherings it was always special to watch the way Chip and Mickey and their two wonderful daughters Kim and Erin, would laugh together. You could see a magical bond.

Chip had a sense of humor, which bordered on genius. I remember when I first told him my story *Electra* he burst out laughing, so I knew the story worked. He was a wonderful dad, husband and friend.

## Juliano Mer Khamis

**I**was saddened to read that Juliano Mer Khamis was murdered April 4, 2011 outside the Freedom Theatre which he managed and directed in a refugee camp in the West Bank city of Jenin, in occupied Palestine. Two years ago I visited Juliano at the theater. Juliano, charismatic and dynamic, asked me to do a short workshop for his Palestinian actors. Juliano, an Israeli actor, followed in his mother Arna's, footsteps. They both felt that young Palestinians could discover their creativity through theatre. They thought they could give Palestinian youth an opportunity to express themselves peacefully through culture and the arts. Check out the movie *Arna's Children*, on Netflix. His death was devastating. [www.thefreedomtheatre.org/](http://www.thefreedomtheatre.org/)

## Buzz Aldrin and Jay Over the Moon

I told *Forged in the Stars* to between fifteen hundred and two thousand NASA personnel at the NASA Project Management Challenge Forum 2011 in Long Beach, California. I was very nervous because when you have fifteen hundred people sitting at tables, which hold twelve each, people stretch way, way back. But they settled down and listened! Buzz Aldrin, the second person to step on the moon, was in the audience. I was told he was weeping at one point. After the story Buzz came up and we talked. Photographers gathered around. I felt I'd just come back from the moon. Buzz, full of beans, told me about a children's story he's writing. It was a buoyant and very special time.



*Jay and Buzz Aldrin at NASA Project Management Challenge Forum 2011 in Long Beach, CA*



*Main Street Jonesborough, Tennessee*

## Hear Them Buildings Talk

**T**wo of the most beautiful main streets in America are in Nantucket, Massachusetts and Jonesborough, Tennessee. Jonesborough, Tennessee, is among other things, the home of the National Storytelling Festival. I'm working on a story set in Jonesborough in which an invisible character is Main Street in downtown Jonesborough. When you walk down Main Street there are beautiful old brick buildings from the 1820s through the 1880s. You can almost hear the buildings talking.

Jonesborough, like thousands of towns, could have dried up and blown away in the era of the malls and the great shopping centers, but instead it's thriving. What happened? There's a story there.

## Lifetime Achievement Award



*Jim May presenting the Lifetime Achievement Award to Jay.*

Thank you National Storytelling Network folks and all for awarding me the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Tejas Storytelling Conference in the magical city of San Antonio, Texas. What an honor to be part of this extraordinary community.

# Tim and Laura's Wedding

*She was born on a warm spring night.  
In the morning, on the edge of the marsh,  
a wild cherry tree  
Burst into blossoms bright  
As if to say,  
"Welcome to you little girl of the marsh."  
You'll be a delight.*

**M**y daughter, Laura, wanted to be married on the edge of the saltwater marsh in Marshfield, Massachusetts because that's where she had been brought up.

We gathered at the edge of the marsh on September 25th, 2010 for the ceremony. It was high tide so the creeks on the marsh were filled, the spartina grass was vivid green and the white egrets were stunning. I had the honor of officiating and of telling a story at the end of the service. Our dear friends, storyteller-singers, David Holt and Bill Harley led us singing "Wild Mountain Time."

Mary Stewart, storyteller and chef par excellence catered the meal and then we had an old fashioned ceilidh. There were stories and songs by storytelling friends Michael Parent, Bill Harley, Len Cabral, Milbre Burch, Connie Regan-Blake, David Holt, Jim May and Doug Lipman. There was also fiddle music by our dear friends Joe and Joe Beals and songs by Tim brother Matthew Kinsella and his wife Lisa.

The toasts at the wedding were very perfect. Linda, my wife wept as she gave her toast and of course Laura and her new husband, Tim Kinsella wept with her. Tim Kinsella, interpreter for the Deaf, pacifist, lover of poetry, literature, music, biking and mountain climbing, has effortlessly and warmly embraced us all. It was one of the shining days of life.



*Jay telling Laura and Tim's wedding story.*



*Laura peeking as guests arrive.*

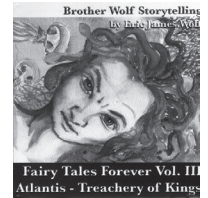
## IN BRIEF

**Doug Lipman's** *Birds, Bread and Blessings* is a CD of "dangerous, Hasidic stories". Doug tells the listeners that hearing Hasidic stories planted a seeds in his heart, which grew into a tree and then a forest. This is a forest of stories that have grown with Doug over the years. They are told with spirit and joy and they challenge us to be alive. <http://www.storydynamics.com/>



**Fran Stallings'** CD, *Stories and Songs for a Green Earth* is a wonderful collection of folktales, fact-tales and songs. The CD is like a series of beautiful brush strokes. In one story we're suddenly aware of the crucial necessity of beavers on the San Pedro River. When the beavers are hunted to the point they're all gone, life on the river dries up. These stories delight and wake us up! <http://www.franstallings.com/>

**Eric Wolf's** CD, *Fairy Tales Forever Vol III* manages to do the impossible. He brings to life an imaginary world that's full of surprise, both ancient and modern language and lots of humor. Ancient Greek heroes become as real as your mailman or supermarket checkout person. I think you'd love having this on a trip. <http://www.ericwolf.org/>



**Susan Reed's** latest CD, *Lion In The Sky* is full of music, song, story and delight. Just listening to the first song *Echo* made me want to dance. It's a joyful CD with vocals, banjo, guitar, dulcimer, violin, cello, mandolin, base and a chorus of Reeds: Allison, Kate, Jon, Ken and Eric Killburn. Amazing. It's wonderful. <http://www.susanreed.com>



**Alton Chung's** new DVD, *Life is the Treasure* is superb. Alton's telling of the story of the Himeuri, Okinawan high school girls who served as nurses aides during the battle of Okinawa is high art. This is a story of war, tragedy, courage and great beauty. Please get this DVD. <http://www.altonchung.com/>

*Freein' Pancho* by **Lloyd Prentice** is a terrific novel. It's a modern Tom Sawyer . . . funny, sad and deeply moving. <http://www.freeinpancho.com>

