

A promotional graphic for a free short story. The background is a light green gradient. At the top, the words "FREE WHISKEY!" are written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, a clear glass bottle is tilted, pouring a golden liquid into a square glass filled with ice cubes. The liquid is captured mid-pour, creating a dynamic splash. The text "Free Short Stories" is centered in a large, black, serif font. Below that, the title "Legacy" is in quotes, followed by "by Steven Douglas Womack" in a black serif font. At the bottom, "from Whiskey Creek Press" is written in a black serif font.

FREE WHISKEY!

Free Short Stories

**"Legacy"
by Steven
Douglas Womack**

from Whiskey Creek Press

HOPE: An Inspirational Anthology

by

Whiskey Creek Press Authors

Barri Bryan, Mary Eason, Loretta Jackson, Giovanna Lagana, Linda L. Lattimer, Janet Mills, Kathleen O'Connor, Steven Douglas Womack

WHISKEY CREEK PRESS

www.whiskeycreekpress.com

Published by
WHISKEY CREEK PRESS

Whiskey Creek Press
PO Box 51052
Casper, WY 82605-1052
www.whiskeycreekpress.com

The 2006 copyrights © for each story in this Anthology are held by the authors of the individual stories. All rights reserved.

Names, characters and incidents depicted in this book are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and beyond the intent of the author or the publisher.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

ISBN 978-1-59374-568-4

Credits

Cover Artist: Jinger Heaston
Editors: Katherine Smith, Louise Bohmer, & Giovanna Lagana

Printed in the United States of America

Dedication

These stories are a tribute to all of those who need, or inspire, that magical emotion, hope.

LEGACY

by Steven Douglas Womack

Dedicated to Dr. Ronald Bushell of Framingham, Massachusetts, on the occasion of his retirement

He opened the door, entered slowly without hesitation, and the final day began. He heard the familiar thud of the wooden door as it shut automatically back into its frame, a sound he had heard thousands of times but never felt. But this time, the resonance crashed into his very being and the sensation seemed to overwhelm him, as if the building itself rejoiced at the arrival of this day, mocking his mortality with all the conviction of the non-living, which had nothing to lose.

But of course, wasn't he losing everything? No, that was certainly a gross exaggeration, and besides, he always knew this day would come. But did he really? Of course not, he realized with a small silent laugh. It was only at the twilight of existence, from the vantage of a mountain of hindsight, that one's life seemed to follow an orderly, inevitable path to its ultimate conclusion.

He wondered if any of it had been inevitable, and he suddenly had a burst of random memories explode somewhere within him, flashing through him like a sun going nova, the memories accompanied by all the emotions that had gone with them at their original formation, each racing toward his soul in a desperate attempt to touch his life one more time.

The feeling was lost as he coughed, voluntarily or not, he was unsure. He glanced to his left and saw the small waiting room outside his office. In its emptiness, the few chairs, small couch, well-worn children's books, and the always-out-of-date magazines seemed trivial. Not much for a lifetime of work, he thought disappointedly, a rather insignificant monument of memorial to him.

He entered the office and was greeted warmly by the two women who had been with him for years. They had become friends as well as employees. He was glad the farewell parties, the teary good-byes, the pledges of lasting memories, the flow of remembrances that had eventually dried to nothing, had come and gone. He wanted his last day to be a day of work, in which he carried out his responsibilities as a professional. He wanted it to be a day like all the rest.

But, of course, it was not. This was his final day.

And he thought of his first day, just yesterday, wasn't it? No, no, a lifetime had come and gone, but wasn't it but a moment ago that he had anxiously waited the results of his entrance exams, and when would he actually be admitted, wondered how in the world he would pay for the schooling?

The tide of his thoughts pulled back and he refocused on the folder he was holding. And he heard a voice. What was it saying?

"Are you going to the Fourth of July parade this Sunday, doctor?" It was Cora, his nurse, who had just handed him the file he was holding, for the morning's first patient. The name on the side of the file was "Roberto Gonzalez," but he couldn't place the name with a face.

"No, I don't think so," he replied in a soft voice. He had always had a soft voice, a soothing voice, a voice of calm and confidence that people listened to carefully. But now it was a weak voice, fading with each new day.

"I haven't been to a parade in years, Cora. Too old, I guess. Besides, parades are for the young."

“Nonsense, doctor,” came the voice of the other woman, Bertha, his wizard at the computer, keeper of the records, and slayer of bureaucratic meddling that had plagued his profession his entire life, “it’s a special July Fourth, and the parade will be bigger than ever. Getting out will do you some good.”

She said the last with little conviction, and he knew why. It had eaten at him like a starving beast, his strength taken milligram by milligram by the thief of time, as he slept each night, ever so slowly draining him, unafraid the morning light would come and reveal its terrible crime.

That his body was ravaged in innumerable ways by this unbeatable foe was crime enough, but even worse, he had become philosophical. He had never stopped believing in the utility of his efforts; he knew he had been a good pediatrician, had helped countless children through the years. But now that knowledge didn’t seem enough. As he had worked through his final days to this moment, something nagged at what otherwise was a sense of satisfaction at a lifetime of service. By any measurement, he was a success, but still something gnawed at the back of his awareness, like a vaguely remembered dream, an obligation long forgotten and past due.

Then the answer began to appear, to form into a recognizable concept, to take on a shape a vocabulary could recognize.

Legacy. He wanted to leave a legacy. But hadn’t he, more times than he could ever know, by helping children, including those who would have their own children someday? And certainly, was not his own family his ultimate legacy?

No, there was something else.

Roberto Gonzales, his first patient of the morning, turned out to be an eight-year-old boy with incredibly curly black hair, who had broken his arm two weeks earlier when he had fallen out of a tree. Some things never changed, he thought with self-assurance as he checked the arm. And soon the day began to speed by as the patients, children of all ages and the inevitable concerned parents, began their daily flow through his examination rooms: the infants and toddlers, just beginning the journey, the boys and girls a few steps down the road, the adolescents so inexplicably eager to reach the road’s end.

He was tired, and he realized the day was almost over. The final day. Was Med School really that many decades ago? There was just one more patient, in Room 3. He pulled the chart from the holder attached to the door and entered the room. He recognized the young boy sitting on the examination table with his shirt off. His mother stood in the corner, an apologetic look on her face.

“I’m sorry to have to bring him in on your last day, doctor, but his ears are bothering him so much. I didn’t think I should wait another day.”

Danny, the six-year-old boy, looked up at the doctor with a small smile of recognition, and the doctor returned the smile. So this was his final patient, on his final day. He had always had a soft spot for this boy, had never found the professional detachment for this patient. For some reason, he had never wanted to.

He examined him carefully, thoroughly, as he had done before through the years, while the boy talked excitedly of the July Fourth parade, just two days away. The doctor listened to the boy’s talk, and his mood lightened. He finished the exam, and the mother thanked him as he wrote a prescription for the mild infection. Words of congratulation were given to him on his retirement, words he had heard all through the day, and he walked the last patient and his mother to the waiting room. So it ended. He was now a retired doctor.

He bent down to say good-bye to Danny, and was surprised when the child gave him a big hug.

"I'm going to be a doctor like you," the boy began, words the doctor had heard from many children through the years, and he began to nod the expected agreement. But the next words took him by surprise.

"And when I'm an old doctor like you," Danny continued in his child's voice, "I'm going to get a little boy like me to become a doctor, too."

As if by magic, the doctor felt himself transported through the decades, past Med School, past his teens, beyond his elementary school years, to a place he had forgotten, to a time existing only in the recesses of his memory, covered in the dust of subsequent events. Now he knew why he was what he was, had always known in the recesses of memory. How could he have forgotten? He saw the man's face clearly, a tired face from years of dedication to his profession, the face of a doctor about to retire, unaware that he had already inspired a little boy. And that ancient doctor looked at the boy, and the old doctor the boy had become, and smiled from somewhere beyond life. He seemed to utter a single word across time and space.

Legacy.

The doctor shook his head, and the face of the doctor from his past became little Danny, filled with the confidence of a six-year-old who was right with the world. Somehow, the doctor seemed to absorb the feeling, and the finality of the day melted away.

"I'm sure you will be a very good doctor, Danny. And watch for that little boy when you get old."

"Okay, doctor," said the boy eagerly. "Will I see you at the parade? Mommy said she would buy me a flag."

"Yes, I think so," the doctor answered quickly. "I hadn't planned to go, but I think I will. I'll see you there if the crowd isn't too big."

"I'll wave to you," the boy said enthusiastically as his mother led him out the door, and a moment later they were gone.

His final day was over, but the weight of the day had disappeared. He was going to a parade, and maybe, just maybe, he would see a little six-year-old boy.

His legacy.

About Steven Douglas Womack

Steven Douglas Womack wrote his first short stories before he was ten, and became enamored with the genre by the time he read his first O'Henry tales. A dedicated native Hoosier who holds a Ph.D. in history, Womack is the author of the award-winning Science Fiction thriller *Cyclopean Rescue*, a novel set in 23rd century Indianapolis and beyond. Womack lives with his wife and three children somewhere in the Wild West. Visit the author at www.stevendouglaswomack.com