



# Western Magazine Awards Foundation

The Magazine School TMS 2014  
*Bringing outstanding writing, design and  
photography to the classroom*

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# Western Magazine Awards Foundation

- ☆ An annual awards program recognizing excellence in Western Canadian editorial work and design.
- ☆ The Magazine School TMS 2014 is a project of the Western Magazine Awards Foundation. It provides classroom material to instructors and professors.



# Gold Award Best Article: Alberta & N.W.T.

## Finalists:

- ☆ In the Chair, Curtis Gillespie (Eighteen Bridges)
- ☆ Rebel Without Applause, Curtis Gillespie (Eighteen Bridges)
- ☆ Twilight of the Patriarchs, Lynn Coady (Eighteen Bridges)
- ☆ The Beautiful Day That You Beat Up Your Dad, Bruce McCullough (Swerve)
- ☆ Will The Real Burger Baron Please Stand Up, Omar Mouallem (Swerve)

The Winning Entry is:

Eighteen Bridges

*Curtis Gillespie*

*In the Chair*



## About 'Eighteen Bridges'

- ☆ Edmonton-based magazine started publishing in 2010
- ☆ Supported by the University of Alberta's Canadian Literature Centre
- ☆ Publishes articles that are “substantial, in-depth, and grounded in the narrative tradition”



[Click here for \*Eighteen Bridges\* website](#)



## About the author: Curtis Gillespie

- ☆ Grew up in Calgary, lives in Edmonton
- ☆ BA, English from University of Alberta; MA, history from University of Toronto
- ☆ Co-founded Eighteen Bridges
- ☆ Author of four books, including the novel Crown Shyness
- ☆ Winner of multiple awards, including seven National Magazine Awards



# Story Idea

- ☆ Gillespie knew he wanted to write about his dad and haircuts, but didn't know where to start

*“I didn't know what the entry point was, what the through-line was. You just feel in your bones there's something there, and you have to wait for it to reveal itself.”*

— Gillespie

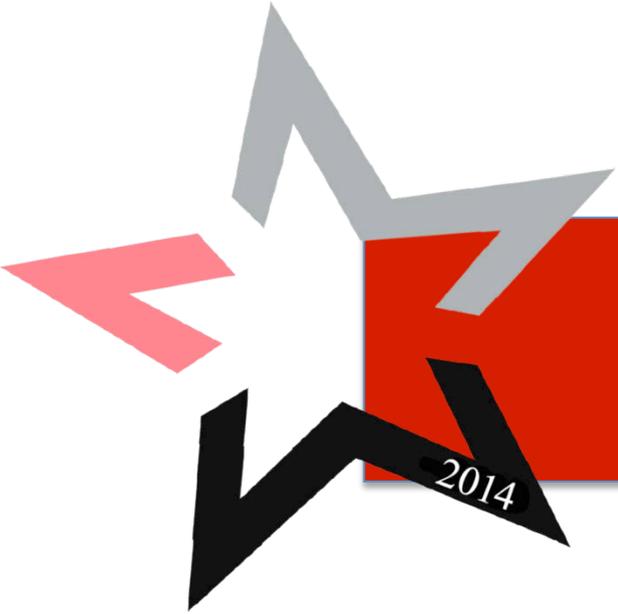
- ☆ First thought of writing about this in mid-90s, wasn't published until 2013

# The Epiphany

☆ Thought about how he grew up poor and that's why his dad cut his hair

*“It wasn't like he enjoyed doing it — it was a financial thing. Then I realized I had a through-line to play with.”*

— Gillespie



# Story Elements

# Headline and Deck





[Headline] In the Chair

[Deck] Clippings From Around the World

Theme: Author remembering his father through the experiences of terrible haircuts he's had around the world

## Lede

“I grew up in a lower-middle-class Western Canadian home with a limited haircut budget for male children—zero, to be precise—which meant a tension-filled hour for me and my four younger brother whenever our father brought his Sears Craftsman thirteen-piece barber kit out of the closet, the one that claimed on the box to contain ‘all the equipment needed for home hair-cutting.’”

# Theme Statement

“The still-visceral longing to see my father again — to witness his grin, to play cards with him, to watch him fix a radio at the kitchen table — must explain why even now a dodgy haircut makes me think of him.... Yes, a bad haircut is always going to be, publicly and inescapably, exactly what it is — a bad haircut. But it’s also much more than that to me. It’s a way to remember.”

# Context

“My father passed away on June 9, 1992, three days after suffering a stroke on the day of my wedding. It was devastating and, in the words of a friend of mine about his own father’s early death, my father’s untimely passing is luggage I have never unpacked, just learned to carry.”



## Use of Detail

“As he put me under the cape, I saw the clippers on the counter in front of me; grainy rust scabs covered the silver handle, the cord was badly frayed, the blade was missing a few teeth...”

# Use of Detail

- ☆ As an adult, Gillespie got haircuts while on assignment for other magazines
- ☆ He kept a journal and jotted down notes after each cut
- ☆ These notes helped him recreate scenes for the story



The Casbah of Algiers, where the author got "a really scary haircut."

## Use of Detail

*“Like a lot of writers, I’m very visual. I see things like a movie playing in my head. So when I’m putting it down on the page, I’m trying to look at every corner of the frame to see if there’s a detail I might have missed.”*

— Gillespie

## Use of Quotes/Detail

“Boy... you got your money’s worth,’ said Murray, deadpan, when I got back up to the room. ‘But why does the back of your neck have all those welts on it?’

I smiled, not in the least upset. It felt like being a kid at home.”

# Ending

“Life — my life, anyway — is a lake I’m crossing in a rowboat, which means the only way to go forward is to face backwards. The departing shore and the distance covered are receding all the time, growing ever more indistinct, but I want to know them and cherish them by remembering them.”

# Publication Attempt #1

- ☆ Originally submitted the essay to U.K.-based Granta Magazine
- ☆ Piece was rejected with kind words, but Gillespie knew editor wasn't telling him what she really thought
- ☆ He asked her to level with him and be direct on what the piece was missing

## Feedback from Granta Editor

*“I kept waiting and waiting for you to go deeper into the meaning and the symbolism of your relationship with your father, and it never happened. Even though it was funny, it felt very surface level.”*

## Publication Attempt #2

- ★ Feedback from Granta helped immensely
- ★ Decided to publish in Eighteen Bridges, where he is editor (at this point, the piece needed only very minor edits by other magazine staff)

*“That one simple metaphor [of rowboat] took it to that level where it put everything that I was thinking about in context.”*

— Gillespie

## What to avoid in personal essays

*“Sentimentality kills a piece stone-dead, but a lack of heart makes it never lift off the ground. It’s such a delicate balance. It’s something that I pay attention to anytime I write something that has any significant emotional content.”*

— Gillespie



The author's daughter, Grace, cuts her dad's hair for the first time (circa 2009)

## When to know if you're done

- ☆ Waiting paid off for Gillespie—in addition to the WMA, “In the Chair” won a gold National Magazine Award (essay category)

*“Don’t rush it. If you have something you know is good, but isn’t ready, put it away, because your subconscious is always working.”*

— Gillespie

# Credits

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Canada

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