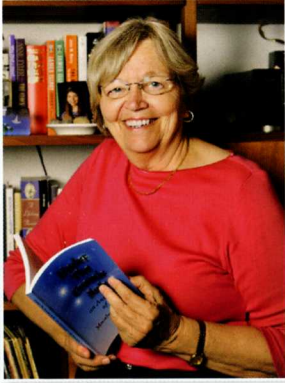


# Writers one flight up

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photography by Bill Casey



Nancy Riikonen,  
Writers One Flight Up

*Our token Finn in Writers One Flight Up, Nancy Riikonen, has entertained us for several years with her dry, sly wit and somewhat bent sense of humor. We thought it was time for her to expose herself to you. As Nancy might say, "And, aren't you lucky."*

Nancy's published a history of the Finnish settlers in her hometown of Lunenburg, MA. She is currently working on another ancestry piece for her own family – some in the US and many still in Finland. Yes, she is fluent in Finnish. A short story and an essay by Nancy appeared in the 2010 WOFU anthology, "Under the Cosmic Sofa."

*A Merciless Love Story is an extract from a longer piece. It gives you a glimpse into Nancy's spirited mind which we think you'll enjoy as much as we do.*

## **A Merciless Love Story (An Extract)**

by Nancy Riikonen

Ted barely remembered his real father. His last memory was of a fleeting figure escaping out the back door, an English muffin clenched between his teeth dripping grape jelly onto his new white shirt.

In time, his mother Elsa took another stroll down the aisle—sole candidate, Paulie Mattson. Paulie was a

## **"A Merciless Love Story"**

much younger man, sorta like Ted's older brother. And Ted suffered because of this comparison. But Paulie had a fatal flaw. He liked to take a drink and he always ended up having a few too many. Could never say "no" to the second one, or to any of the following ones. Perhaps that was why he had stayed single so long.

Paulie's last act opened and closed in the hush of a white winter's evening as he rambled home from the Moose Lodge, singing and staggering. He was an extremely good singer too. His little Walkman tape player was tucked into the pocket of his navy-blue down parka, volume up to the max. Headset, hidden under the flaps of his red and black checked-wool hat, was clamped down over his big ears.

He never heard the snowplow coming up behind him—and the driver never saw Paulie either. It was freezing cold inside the plow truck—heater was conked out. It was late and the plow driver was in a hurry to get home. Paulie was scooped up in a snowy vortex and catapulted into a ten-foot high roadside snow pile. For a couple of hours, he slept peacefully in his snowy cocoon as the Beach Boys sang *California Dreaming* over and over again until the batteries gave out. Then he froze solid as a brick in spite of his elevated alcohol content.

*But Paulie  
had a  
fatal flaw.*

Paulie's body wasn't found until many weeks later, in

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late April when an early warm spell began to melt the snow. Some high school kids were walking to the local Quiki-Mart when they saw an L.L. Bean snow boot and one red-gloved hand jutting from a melting pile of dirty snow. The girls screamed and ran off. But one of the boys, Joey Martin, who was the town's worst rowdy, said, "Hey, you guys help me yank on the boot and the glove and let's see who's in here."

A few minutes later Paulie Mattson plopped out onto the sidewalk, slightly thawed and sort of flexible, but perfectly preserved. Not one sign of decomposition. They all laughed and then Joey yelled, "Hey, it's Paulie Mattson. I found the missing person. Maybe I can get a reward. I can't wait to tell Ted we found his Pa." Everyone laughed even harder. They all knew Paulie wasn't Ted's real father but they weren't the most caring people in town, especially Joey Martin. Ted had put up with Joey's step-father jokes ever since junior high school.

The police showed up when a passer-by reported

some odd activity near the Quiki-Mart. Everyone stood around watching for a time and even the girls slinked back. Eventually, the bored group resumed their trek to the Quiki-Mart, and Joey Martin was wearing Paulie's red gloves. Before the police arrived, Joey had tried to pilfer the boots too, but as hard as he yanked, they wouldn't budge—frozen solid onto Paulie's feet.

Some things were missing when Elsa and Ted went to pick up Paulie's personal items from the funeral home. "So where's his L.L. Bean snow boots? For damn sure somebody musta took 'em! Don't seem possible the police coulda done it. Those were top a' the line boots too! And where's his down parka? Gone? And the Walkman? Gone too, huh?"

"Never mind, Ted. What the heck does a dead guy need with boots and a parka anyways, and they weren't even the right sizes for you or me. But—it sure woulda been nice to have that Walkman, maybe listen to some nice summery Beach Boys music when it's so snowy outside..." ■