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Tom is a mere fourteen years old when his father is murdered. The murderers are known all over the area, but there is no evidence, and Tom's rising rage affects him for the rest of his life.

Tom and his friend George are falsely accused of murder in a self-defense incident. George is tried and declared not guilty. Tom manages to attend the trial in disguise since he has become a fugitive. He pantomimes playing an invisible fiddle, their secret symbol of success, and only the two of them recognize the signal as a sign of victory.

Tom considers turning himself in but does not trust the justice system. He goes out to west Texas to work on a ranch, falls in love with Lilly, and continues his life as a fugitive. He becomes tired of nightmares about his capture or death but knows his chances of a fair trial are slim.

Determined law enforcement officers capture Tom, and he spends the rest of his short life in and out of prison. His sisters and especially his mother never falter in visiting and caring for him. Once she brings his fiddle, and he is allowed to keep it; Tom knows at that moment he is able to withstand his prison sentence.

Historically accurate, Sherri Knight has written *Tom P.'s Fiddle* in a wonderfully descriptive narrative. It reads like an old time Wild West tale with betrayal, revenge, trials, and escapes. For the reader and researcher, both will appreciate this novel of the early days of the Texas frontier.

KNIGHT, SHERRI. *TOM P.'S FIDDLE*. MINNEAPOLIS: LANGDON PRESS, 2008. 266 PP. \$16.95 PAPER. ISBN 13: 976-0979912078.

Evacuation Plan: A Novel from the Hospice Joe O'Connell

Glimpses

Review by JoAn W. Martin

Screenwriter Matt, searching for a story, becomes a volunteer at a hospice. He meets people living their final moments. He is "hanging out with dying people." The real mystery is, what does it feel like to die?

Strangely enough, it makes Matt feel like a vulture feasting on grief.

Charlie Wright's story returns again and again as the reader meets his son, Bob, and his daughter, Carla, when they visit their father. All three in the family have a story to tell, even Mike who is no longer there.

When Patrick goes through his mother's things, the boxes of pictures propel him back where he happens upon his five-year-old self. If he drinks enough beer, he visits with his teen-age self and his years of playing football.

Matt realizes his plot must concern the main character's problem, but with so many incongruent candidates, who will win out to be his protagonist? He lacks a structure, but when he returns each week to the hospice, he is afraid to go in. Which of his friends will have passed on in his absence? He needs synergy, a system to pull all the pieces together, but such disparate pieces remind him of a skeleton.

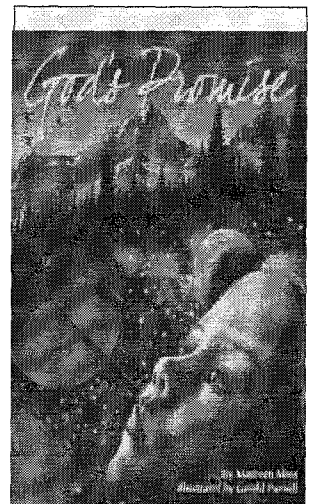
Perhaps Mary, a nurse, is less likely to have disappeared. She continues to work to put her son through college. But when the screenwriter probes too deeply, the business-like nurse's wall goes up.

Fred's problem is gambling, but when he becomes involved in a gambling venture with his father and his wife, the unbelievable occurs. O'Connell is at his best at building suspense in, of all things, a monopoly game.

Joe O'Connell attempts the biographer's task, that of bringing a person back to life for the reader. He refuses to allow death to occur without offering a history for the deceased. As Matt watches a body disintegrating on the bed, he becomes aware that he is picking at someone's scabs.

One writer says, "*Evacuation Plan* is an anthology with its vivid, touching glimpses into the lives of those in and around a hospice."

O'CONNELL, JOE. *EVACUATION PLAN: A NOVEL FROM THE HOSPICE*. AUSTIN: DALTON PUBLISHING, 2007. 182 PP. \$13.95 PAPER. ISBN 13: 978-0-9740703-8-4.



Joe O'Connell earned his MFA in creative writing from Southwest Texas State University. His stories have appeared in *The G. W. Review*, *Other Voice*, *Confrontation*, and many other journals.

