

[Deaf Uncle](#) [1]

March 3, 2014 [Flash Fiction](#) [2]

By Charlotte M. Porter

Winner of the 2013 Talking Writing Prize for Flash Fiction



Ghosts haunted my childhood, but daunting syllables filled cousin Biff's home. His father, Ronald "Beau" Rutledge, III, pronounced coin like co-win although he didn't care a fig for teamwork. When he pontificated, his bushy eyebrows bunched across his brow like two baited lab rats.

Uncle borrowed valor from the Classics. Allergic to my first name, Leigh, he called me Bea. My head index shortened his name to Ro Bo, spelled out as Rowboat or Robot and colored in depending on my mood mice.

Thursdays, Uncle padded about in a shabby silk housecoat. A Hong Kong smoking jacket, insisted Aunt, dusting stacks of his leather-bound vocabularies.

Saturdays, Uncle translated Caesar's Latin: *All Gaul is divided into three parts*. Like the human year, Uncle added, meaning ear—outer, middle, inner.

One Sunday dinner required Homer's *Iliad* in Greek, Achilles's wondrous shield engraved with *parthenikai de kai aethioi atala phroneontes, plectois en tallaroisen...* maidens with woven baskets, youths with lofty ambitions. To my mind, *crafts for girls, sports for boys...* same old Scout badges.

Achilles's war tympanum, Uncle insisted, surpassed hammerclaw and virgin cartilage. He meant Hammurabi's Law and Virgil's Carthage. Scipio Africanus, he added for emphasis, soiled the sow with salt.

Pained, Biff withdrew from the table in tears, and I realized how deeply he loved his deaf father. Behind the garble of memorized syllables, the good son saw a warrior's search for honor and memorial. Heedless, I sensed revenge.

Years later, while Uncle was dying of cancer, he couldn't hear his doctors to consult with them. Enjoying a dumbfounded hospital audience, he recounted the old days: a litany of Greek weaponry, an undercooked turkey, his overweight dog, a Japanese wife too short, his present spouse too long.

Biff wept by his bedside.

Bea, parched, fled the soil sown with salt.

Art Information

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Charlotte M. Porter lives in an old citrus hamlet in north-central Florida.

Her recent work appears in *Burningwood*, *Baseball Bard*, and the Remaking Moby-Dick project of *Pea River Journal*.

Charlotte shares her thoughts on the role of language, both in creating poetry and prose and as a player in "Deaf Uncle":

For much of my work, language provides thought, word, and deed. That is, language describes language in a meta function, or app. In this story, language, ancient and modern, provides both portal and partition, brattice, as, one by one, the characters turn a deaf ear.

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