

The First Two Pages of “Old Soles” by Chris Dreith

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An Essay by Chris Dreith

A few years ago, way before 2020, my husband and I were watching a news clip showing the looting of a Best Buy store. The newscaster shoved the microphone in the face of someone struggling to carry out a huge TV and asked, “Why are you stealing that?” The reply came with a straight face, “I’m not stealing anything.” We howled with laughter.

But that made me wonder if there was more to this story. Maybe the person was the general manager of that Best Buy and was trying to save the store’s inventory one TV at a time. Or maybe the store’s cashier was working late, and the person bought the TV while the front windows were being demolished and hordes were running in and grabbing things. Heck, maybe this wasn’t even a true story, but something the news cast created to fill time. I will never know.

That line, “I’m not stealing anything” hid in my subconscious until I wrote “Old Soles” and used the excuse in my first paragraph.

I’m not a thief. Not really. OK, maybe I took some stuff without paying, but there was a good reason. It’s not like I’m actually stealing. It’s just that those shoes were perfect.

In this story, I wanted to explore the personality of someone who does something wrong but can justify it in their own mind. Even make themselves the hero because of this action.

I also knew that I didn't want to delve too deeply or move this narrative into the heavy emotions of social injustices. So, I chose something that I have had to deal with lately: elderly discrimination.

Now, I know that elderly discrimination is a horrid and skanky issue, but I wanted to show different levels of social injustice. My narrator, Clio, was surprised to discover she was looked at as elderly. I myself have been surprised when I happen to look in a mirror. The inevitable age awareness can be terrifying or humorous. I chose the funny if not a bit sarcastic route for this story.

Writing in first person, I wanted to look through the eyes of a well-educated, professional, retired woman who has no idea that she has reached that elderly position. The reader experiences the dismissal from the clerks that Clio feels when she enters the shoe store. By the end of the first page, I wanted a rhythm to be formed, allowing the readers to form their own opinions of what is happening from Clio's actions rather than her words.

I looked around for someone to fetch my size. The young girl leaning on the wall behind the register was on her cell phone and hadn't looked up since I walked in. Her conversation didn't seem like it was going anywhere – “Yeah, that's what I said, but then, like, I said, sure, you know, like that, and he said..” – so I interrupted by shaking my selection of shoes in front of her face, causing my

shoulder bag to shake out a cabbage head which rolled under a table of socks.

The location was important to me since this story was to be submitted to the Bouchercon 2020 Anthology, *California Schemin*. Midtown Sacramento would have been close to where the conference was to be held, so I have Clio walking to meet her friends at the Sterling Hotel in Midtown. On her way from the J Street Farmers Market she stops in a new shoe store called What A Pair. There is a boutique hotel called the Sterling, but I don't think they have a Tea Room where Clio and friends meet each week. J Street is real, as is a Farmers Market, but What A Pair is all my imagination.

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Chris Dreith got hooked on writing mysteries while creating plays for her local Carnegie Library's fund raiser, *Mystery In The Library*. While there's a novel in process, her quirky sense of humor, partnering with a few bloody scenes, transitioned nicely into "Old Soles", her first published short story. But don't worry. Clio, Thalia, Polly, and Calliope will be showing up again!