**Excerpt from Going Long. Going Short.**

*By Grant Faulkner* September 30, 2013 9:00 pm September 30, 2013 9:00 pm 42

I’ve always wanted to go long, as in writing that big …saga called the “Great American Novel,” no matter the absurdity of questing after such a …[quest]. I thought the best way to understand the endless ribbons of America’s highways, the oozing boundaries of our …[lives]… resided in an ever expansive … roads and everyday living, full of crisscrossing tentacles of story lines and sentences bursting with syntactic curlicues. Our souls sprawl with this land, after all.

Most of my writing life has been a training ground of “more,” so I rarely conceived of less. In the many creative-writing workshops I have attended, I so frequently heard “I want to know more about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .” More characterization, more back story, more details — more of everything. Rarely did anyone advise places to cut or condense.

I tried my hand at writing such tiny stories because I like to experiment, but I quickly became exasperated by my early attempts. I couldn’t come anywhere close to the 100-word mark. At best, I could chisel a story down to 150 words, but I was frustrated by the gobs of material I left out.

My failure at concision made me reflect on my writing habits, especially when shaping a second draft. I began to think of how the chants of “more, more, more” I’d heard in my writing workshops were often the single least helpful bit of feedback…. I’d trained myself to write through back stories, layers of details and thickets of connections, but the more I pared my prose to reach 100 words, a different kind of storytelling presented itself.

[Flash fiction](http://www.flash-fiction-world.com/what-is-flash-fiction.html), which is defined as being a story under 1,000 words, goes by the names of “short shorts,” “miniatures,” “sudden fiction” and “postcard fiction,” among many others. Flash communicates via …{pauses and turns].

This form speaks to the singularity of stray moments by calling attention to the spectral blank spaces around them; it can perfectly capture the disconnections that existentially define us, whether it’s the gulf between a loved one, the natural world or God.

 “Flash fiction is about ambiguity [gray area, uncertainty, no definition]” [writes](http://www.amazon.com/Metal-Press-Field-Writing-Fiction/dp/0978984862#reader_B00BLLIS1U) the flash author Nathan Leslie. My memory, like that of many of us, tends not to follow a narrative trajectory with rising action as in a conventional plot, but is rather a collage smattered with as many small dull moments as big, dramatic ones. Moods mix with events. The memory of a scent, an illness, a random day at the beach, a slight, can be as sharp and moving to me as any more dramatic, plot-worthy event.

I learned that each line of a flash story must carry a symbolic weight that moves the story forward. Yet, at the same time, the gaps within and around the story speak as large as the text itself. “The words of the last line should create a silence, a white space in which the reader breathes. The story enters that breath, and continues,” [writes](http://flashfiction.net/2009/09/tuesday-focus-flash-notes.php) another flash writer Jayne Anne Phillips.

Such evocative, fragmentary brevity makes this Twitter and Facebook era perfect for flash fiction. Flash allows literature to be a part of our everyday life, even if we are strange multitasking creatures addled by a world that demands more, more, more.

This process also works for me when I’m writing flash fiction. I’ll let a gush of “more” guide the initial narrative. But then I focus on words that can be carved from sentences and how paragraphs and chapters can move with hints rather than declarations. As much as I liked watching my word count go up in a first draft, I thrill to see it go down in a second draft.

Now I rarely ask for more when I give feedback on an early draft of another’s work. Ghosts are good for writing, I’ve learned, so I’ve invited them in. Our lives are as much about the unspoken as the spoken.