

# PAGE & SPINE: fiction showcase

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## Miles Ryan Fisher

**Miles Ryan Fisher** is a Cornell University graduate and has a lot of fond memories of spending time with his grandparents in Ithaca, New York. He takes a lot of pride in his grandfather, who flew P-47 fighter planes over “The Hump” in World War II.

### Dash-Dash-Dot ... Dash-Dash-Dash (February 21, 2020)

I bent down to pick up the business card from the sidewalk that led to my work building, and even before I held it, I could tell it wasn’t from a co-worker. It didn’t have the blue border or mint green font that our company used. In fact, it didn’t have any color at all. Just a bunch of black dots and lines that I noticed before I saw the header: International Morse Code. I looked closer, and centered at the very bottom was printed simply—Mark Guiney, Creative Director—s followed by his email and phone number. I smiled. Because in spite of the card’s lack of color, it caught my eye.

Instead of throwing it out, I placed it on my desk. Throughout the day, I glanced at the card, studying individual letters and how the dots and dashes were arranged to communicate them.

Some were simple. E was just a dot. A was a dot and a dash. Others were more complicated. Y was a dash-dot-dash-dash. Q was a dash-dash-dot-dash. I started mimicking the letters, making a fist and using my thumb to press the proper Morse code sequence of a letter.

Doing this made me think about my grandfather. Not because he grew up as part of The Greatest Generation or ever tried to teach me Morse Code, but because, as he was dying and my mom was holding his hand, he tried relaying a message to her in Morse Code. But like me, she didn’t know it, either. At that moment, she wished she had.

I left Mark Guiney’s business card on my desk and, from time to time, I glanced at it and practiced a few letters, familiarizing myself with the alphabet. It came easier than I expected, far easier than learning a foreign language. Though, unlike a foreign language, I had nobody to share it with, which made me imagine how lonely my grandfather must have felt in those last moments, being able to speak a language nobody around him could understand.

The next time I went home to visit, I sat at the kitchen table, catching my parents up on all that’d been going on in my life. Relationships, work, various hobbies. And when I got to the various hobbies part, I mentioned the one that Mark Guiney’s simple business card had led me to.

“I learned Morse Code,” I told my parents.

“Is that so?” my mom said. “And what brought that about?”

When she said this, I was taken aback. How could she ask such a question after experiencing a time when she wished she’d known it? I thought about asking her why she hadn’t learned it. But then again, The Greatest Generation was gone, and with it, it seemed, had Morse code.

“I found a business card lying on the ground that had Morse code on it,” I said.

“A business card with Morse Code?” she said. “Isn’t that peculiar.”

So I told her that that was Mark Guiney’s point—to grab your attention in a creative way without relying on bright colors. I told her that I’d had the card on my desk ever since I’d found it and that I’d begun practicing the letters, enough to have memorized them.

“Well,” my mom said, “I wish I’d had that card a couple years ago.”

I nodded. It certainly would’ve been good to have had Mark Guiney’s card in her purse two years ago.

“It still feels like yesterday,” she added.

I nodded again. It certainly did feel like yesterday that he’d died. I could still feel the last time I held his hand and told him that I had to leave. “I love you,” I told him one last time. He responded by trying to use my hand to raise himself off the bed.

But that wasn't possible. The stroke had rendered him too feeble to ever rise again.

He fell back into the bed, unable to raise himself more than an inch.

"I love you," I repeated.

This time, he didn't try to lift himself off the bed. He relaxed, as if giving in, and mumbled, "I love you," in barely decipherable words.

"Do you think you would recognize his Morse code?" I asked my mom. "If I tried to guess what he was saying, would you recognize it?"

My mom shrugged. "We can try," she said.

So I held my mom's hand and squeezed a string of words—rock and roll—a placebo to make sure my mom wouldn't simply imagine what I wanted to try first, which was the obvious: I love you.

My mom shook her head. "That's too long," she said. "There weren't long breaks like that."

Which meant his message wasn't multiple words. So I pared down what I'd wanted to try and squeezed love. Five dots, seven dashes in total.

"Shorter than that," my mom said.

I thought for a moment. Then I tried die simply because it seemed to fit the situation.

Again my mom shook her head. "There were more long squeezes. Like in the word you did before. There weren't many short squeezes. Maybe one or two."

I tried to imagine what could possibly be that short with that many dashes and still make sense. Then I tried two fairly simple letters.

"Do that one again," my mom said.

So I squeezed dash-dot-pause-dash-dash-dash.

"That could be it," she said.

The word no. Then I realized. "What about this one." I squeezed dash-dash-dot-pause-dash-dash-dash.

"That feels just like the one you did," she said.

"When did he die after he tried using Morse code?" I asked.

"A little later," she said. "I stayed for another hour or so before going to the hotel to shower."

I knew he'd died after my mom had gone back to the hotel after spending most of the day in his room. She found out about his death the moment she returned to the hospital.

"Mom," I said, "he was telling you to go."

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