

Stories

poetry, prose, and personal reflection

Vol. 2 — November 2021



*We write to taste life twice,
in the moment and in retrospect.*

~ Anais Nin

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Publisher
One Thousand Trees

Editorial Board
Francine Houston, Sandra Wilson

Front Cover Photograph by Arlene Davies-Fuhr

Stories is published monthly, on the first day of each month. Submissions are due no later than 10 days prior to the date of publication.

Please submit by email, as a Word doc attachment. Please do not send PDFs. If you are including photos/illustrations to accompany your submission, please put a placeholder in your word doc, indicating where each graphic is to be placed, and send the graphics themselves as JPEG attachments. Please do not embed graphics in your word doc.

First-time writers for *Stories* are asked to send a brief (two to three sentence) bio with their submission.

Because of difficulties with some articles sent in the body of emails, we cannot accept submissions in this format. Please send a word doc attachment.

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Publisher's Ponderings



I will always remember the line from *The Lion King*, “Remember who you are.” Such a powerful line! And something I’ve been thinking a lot about lately. If there is anything good to say about the required isolation as a result of Covid-19, I believe it’s that it has caused us to do a lot of self-reflection. That self-reflection, for me, has caused me to realize, more clearly than ever before, that I have always been my own worst enemy.

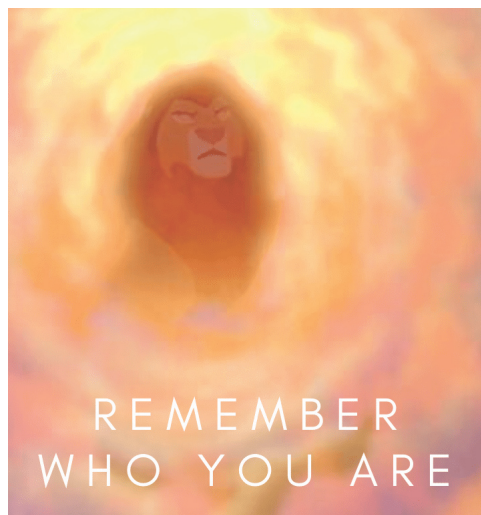
Despite the fact that I am so good (as I am told!) at inspiring and empowering others, I don’t often do it for myself. And being a perfectionist certainly doesn’t help! After every success, it seems, I look back over what I’ve done, and find something to find fault with. Something that I didn’t do as well as I believe I could have.

This has caused a lot of needless pain and anxiety, and I am making the decision to stop. It might not be easy; lifelong habits can be hard to break. But I feel so blessed to have the opportunity to provide a forum for (say it with me ...!) **telling our stories and speaking our truth**. The submissions again this month are so inspiring, and I am grateful to everyone who submitted their story, in a variety of means. The feedback from the first issue of *Stories* was so overwhelmingly positive that I know there is a need for this.

My story is far from over, and I know there is more work to do. But I am up for the challenge.

And I will always remember who I am, deep down ... beneath the fear and the insecurity. Please join me on the journey, and always remember who you are!

Lisa



Breathe Flower Fragrance *Arlene Davies-Fuhr*

This poem was submitted in response to the monthly themed quote, and accompanies the cover photograph.

Breathe flower fragrance
awaken restored
don't stand there
miserable paralyzed forlorn
fearful to step forward

Dip toes in refreshing pool
sun-warmed water soothes
body mindful soul
fractured reflections
jumble and misguide
insight resides beneath
with its surprising gifts

Banish distortions you create
dive into deeply nuanced living

* * *



Why I Write **Francine Houston**

I love words: so simple, but for me, so profound. I have never not written and books have always surrounded me. There is magic in the way they look and the way they sound. It hasn't always been a gentle road, but books, words have been a comfort, companion and a balm. Enter the world of words, find your Voice and Fly. That is my invitation and invocation as we move into this space. Welcome to the world of *Stories*.

A Lifetime of Writing *Francine Houston*

We write to taste life twice,
in the moment and in retrospect."

— Anais Nin

I have always loved this quote, and many others by Anais Nin. This one, though, has led me through most of my life. I heard/read this quote about 40 years ago, but my journey in writing had started perhaps 10 years before that. Through my life, when things have been challenging, the Universe brings me back to this quote: A reminder to look at things again, to perhaps to see things from a different point of view.

I started my journey into writing... 50 years ago. Grade 4, I think it was. We were given an assignment to write 2 pages per week into a "journal" that we were given. We were told to put the written pages in a cupboard, open if we were going to let the teacher read it, or closed if we didn't give her permission to read it. I don't know if the teacher actually honoured that agreement. I only know that I was very reluctant to write or share anything of consequence to me. I didn't trust ANYONE with my deepest thoughts or feelings. I don't know why there was so much reluctance: maybe it was because I am an only, or maybe it was because I have always been solitary. Regardless of the reason, I don't recall sharing anything deep or important in that steno pad: I do know, it began a lifetime of journaling, and a deep love of words, and the kinetic feel of the pen flowing across paper -- feeling the perfect paper under hand, and watching ink glide from the tip of a favourite fountain pen.

Certainly, there was a brief moment when writing for pleasure and perspective wasn't a priority. Life intervenes: loss, births, deaths, changes, and then, the urge, the NEED reasserted: the love affair with words, and the physical act of writing returns: comfort, clarity and perspective coming from the act itself.

Rivers of time flow, and the Wheel of Change turns, ever on, and the love affair for writing and words became more profound. After many years, many paths, there has been a fundamental shift and as much as I have wandered and continue to seek and explore, writing has been, and will continue to be an integral part of who I am and how I move in the world.

As I move into yet another phase- maybe an Act 3 or Act 4, this passion for words has become an avenue to become visible in the world through a more public sharing of words, and is creating many new blessings by allowing for the processing of events, both internal and in the outer world.

I invite you: What space can words/stories- create in your life? I bid you: look at the stories you have heard, been told, and tell yourself. Are the words/stories leading to your Higher Life or do they keep you stuck?

The beauty of our Inner stories is that we can choose to change our stories. We can shift from the stories and the use of words that we integrated and absorbed from others into creating a brand new, more proactive, aligned story that supports our growth into the Self that we choose to become.

I ask you, suggest to you, perhaps even implore you: Find your Voice, find a new way of seeing a situation that has had you stuck, or hurt. Celebrate the new way of seeing and moving in and away from the old stories. Celebrate those good times and the way those stories shaped who you are and their place in your memory and in the Quilt that is your life.



An Angel That I Know *Lisa Browning*

This piece was written many years ago, but I felt like it fit so well with this month's focus on remembering, and is so important to me, that I'm reprinting it!

In my front hall hangs a cross-stitch that holds a special place in my heart. It is a simple cross-stitch on navy cloth, depicting a winter scene of barren trees and a sky of stars. On the mat which frames the picture is inscribed "I believe in angels." On the back is my written tribute to a woman who began to change my life from the day I met her over thirty-five years ago.

My family moved to the outskirts of Toronto the winter before I was born. My parents, brother and sister hired a mover and drove their 1959 Pontiac from London to Etobicoke. They bought a house on a tree-lined street, and continued their individual and collective lives while waiting for my arrival.

My first three summers were as eventful as any infant's could be — learning to walk, talk, and gain a perspective on the world. Then, in the summer of 1963, a new family moved in next door. This family boasted two exceedingly well-groomed little girls, with shoulder-length curls pulled back tightly in elasticized baubles, and crisp pinafores that you dare not touch, for fear of soiling them.

Forever etched in my consciousness is the vision of these sisters standing at their gate, watching me with stern faces.

Although our differences seemed insurmountable, gradually we became friends. Elaine and Kathleen's mother found me entirely frustrating. From the day I uprooted all her carefully placed border plants, until the day I locked Elaine in our tool shed for a joke, then forgot to let her out, Mrs. Sutherland begged, screamed and pleaded with my mother to "tame your child."

But I was not to be tamed. One July morning shortly after the flower-pulling, my parents awoke to very loud, metallic banging, and discovered Mr. Sutherland building a fence between our open-access backyards. "If you think that's going to keep Lisa out," my father said, almost defiantly, "You're wrong." The fence went up anyway.

As the years passed, I managed to get both Elaine and Kathleen into trouble regularly, but a lasting bond began to develop between us as well.

Mrs. Sutherland kept an impeccable house. Without fail, she apologized for messes whenever I visited, and I looked around in confusion, finding nothing out of place.

I can't imagine whatever possessed me to violate such sanctity, yet I managed to do so on a grand scale.

The entire Sutherland family were on their front porch when I, with my accomplice Stephen, snuck in the back door. To this day I can't figure out why, but we placed Mrs. Sutherland's expansion collection of Royal Doultons under the tables on which they formerly stood, and removed all the bed linens, placing these on the floor also.

Mrs. Sutherland discovered Stephen and I cowering in a bedroom closet. One look at her face, twisted with rage and disbelief, made us bolt outside without a backward glance.

My mother made me go back to apologize. Perhaps it was having to explain my actions that made me realize there was no excuse for my behaviour, then or in the past. Or perhaps it was the fact that Mrs. Sutherland was actually gracious when accepting my apology. I looked at her incredulously, asking "Why don't you hate me?"

"My dear," she said, "I know you can be better."

Mrs. Sutherland became my most stalwart supporter. With a grace I have yet to match, she saw through the mischief to my potential.

She saw me through years of boyfriend problems, career and lifestyle choices, she wrote me letters and we accumulated endless hours of telephone time. Through it all, her underlying concern was my happiness. The day after my daughter was born, she came to see me. Taking my face in her hands, she looked me straight in the eyes and asked, more forcefully than ever before, "Are you happy?!" In my drug-induced state, I answered yes.

Mrs. Sutherland passed away suddenly, several years ago. She had suffered a massive aneurism, and Kathleen found her when she arrived for her weekly visit. I had just come in from church when my father called to tell me the news. The bite of the submarine I had bought for lunch became like cement, and the remaining portion fell to the floor. It took only half an hour to drive from Guelph to Toronto, and I walked into that same impeccable house I had known for years. Words unnecessary and unavailable, Kathleen, Elaine and I held each other and cried, tears of anger, sadness and desolation.

The reception after the funeral was in the Sutherlands' house. Still numb from shock, I drifted aimlessly, not wanting to believe I would never see Mrs. Sutherland again. Visions of the past appeared before me, and I was again that little girl I once had been, longing for guidance and affirmation.

The sight in the family room stopped my feet in mid-step. On the piano stood three graduation pictures: one of Elaine, one of Kathleen, and one of me.

I heard it said that when we lose someone we love, we gain an angel that we know. I still miss Mrs. Sutherland, desperately sometimes. But I believe she watches over me, and the thought warms my soul.

My cross-stitch is one of my most cherished possessions, reminding me of the woman who changed my life forever.



* * *

Wartime Woman *Sandra Wilson*

Maureen quietly entered the nursery and peeked into the crib at the newborn sleeping inside. Her auburn hair fell over her shoulder and gently caressed the baby's face. Maureen could not imagine being any happier. Last year, when she married Grayson, the happiness was shattered when the war began. Grayson, a member of the Royal Air Force, was called to duty before the honeymoon ended. She became pregnant earlier in the honeymoon and although excited about the new arrival, Maureen felt trepidation about bringing a baby into a world racked with war.

The air force had allowed Grayson to return on a short leave for the birth of Logan but now he was off again. His job was to fly his Lancaster ahead of the troops, bombing enemies that stood in the way. Although Maureen missed her husband, she was

happy to have the baby and filled her days with his care so to avoid worry over her husband and the war.

She smiled at her son and quickly left the room to answer the knock at the door. Lt. Donaldson stood at the door with a grim expression that worried Maureen immediately.

"There is a report," Lt. Donaldson began, "that the Lancaster your husband was flying was shot down over occupied France. We haven't been able to confirm whether he survived the crash or if the Germans have captured him. Right now we must wait until we can find a safe route into the territory."

Maureen sat down hard on the stairs. Grayson -- shot down -- Germans -- so many thoughts filled her head. "The baby!" She jumped up. "How can I care for the baby alone? How can I support him?"

Lt. Donaldson held her shoulders at arm's length. "One day at a time, ma'am." And with that, he turned and marched out of the house.

Maureen stared after him until again the baby's cry broke her from her reverie. She turned and ran up the stairs to see to her son.

One week later, Maureen had still not heard anything new about Grayson. Money was getting tight since she had to stay home and care for the baby. She went to the market for some food and saw a notice pinned to the wall.

"Women needed to help with war effort — Earn money and help your country!"

Maureen jotted down the number and hurried home to call. The radio had reported a shortage of men to work in the factories because they had gone to war. Women were now being called on to work in the factories creating uniforms, military vehicles and explosives. A job would help Maureen take care of Logan. A few deep breaths allowed Maureen to muster up the courage to call. She needed this job, for

Logan's sake, but she had never worked before -- could she manage?

Maureen reported for work the following Monday. Logan, wrapped in a papoose style carrier, was strapped to her back. The factory was smelly, noisy and had little light coming through the small dirty windows. The women were expected to put in long days of work with few breaks. Maureen needed to stop more frequently to tend to Logan. This angered her supervisor who disliked working with women.

"You will make up for all your breaks at the end of the day, Mrs. Forrester," he would shout. Then, after her shift workers filed out, Maureen would put in another hour to cover her breaks. Maureen came home entirely exhausted. Her back ached from carrying Logan all day. Her arms ached from working the heavy machinery. Her eyes burned from the long hours of concentration and her feet swelled from the long time she spent standing on them.

The days were long and the week seemed endless but finally a rest came. Maureen had never felt so tired, she had little energy to tend to the household chores. There still was no word about Grayson and she felt very alone. Logan had become quiet and sallow, which Maureen expected, was due to those long days in the dirty factory. Despite the day off Maureen could only feel despair. The pay, although less than what Grayson had brought home, was needed in order for her and Logan to survive, but the work may kill them both.

A knock at the door meant that Maureen had to fight her aching muscles and lift herself up to answer the door. After great effort Maureen made it to the door and saw, on the other side, Sister Clarice from the nearby church. Maureen paled at the sight of the nun sure she had brought horrible news about her husband but Sister Clarice smiled and took Maureen's hands.

"Our youth group would like to help the community," she began. "We want to run a daycare centre for all the lovely children who need someone to watch them while their fathers are at war and their mothers are in the factories."

Maureen stared at the nun in disbelief. If Logan could be left in the care of the youth group she would not have to carry him on her back. He would not have to breathe in the stank factory air or suffer the noise and grime of the machines. Her back felt stronger already.

Months went by. Maureen's body adjusted to the physical demands of the factory. Her worry about Logan eased as he developed into a happy, healthy boy thanks to the time spent at the daycare.

In August the Germans bombed the factories. Maureen stood in horror as she saw the front of the factory she was working in become rubble. She and her fellow workers cowered in the furthest corner of the factory, and despite the fear, and the bombs, they survived.

Later that month the air raid sirens pierced the air. Maureen stopped her work and ran out of the factory. People everywhere were running for cover. Maureen ran to the church. She picked up Logan and along with the rest of the daycare workers and children she huddled in the church basement. The noise of the air raid siren was followed by the sound of engines from the low flying German aircraft. Maureen continued to protect her baby until at last they were given the all clear.

One day, as she worked in the factory, she looked up from her machine and saw someone walking toward her. She rubbed her tired eyes and tried to focus in the dim light. The man wore a tattered flight jacket and a rough beard. His hair was graying on the sides. Maureen focused again, he looked so much like Grayson. "Grayson!" she cried as the man came closer. "It is you!"

She ran to him and jumped into his arms. He hugged her tightly then put her down gently. "I almost did not recognize you," she told him.

"I barely recognized you either with those overalls and black smudges on your face," replied Grayson.

"Well," Maureen commented, "the war has changed us all."

* * *

A Senior's Day *Colleen Heighington*

There's no more schedule to follow
I can get up at any time
Sometimes ... it's at 6:00am
Other times ... half past 9:00 ...

I slowly come down the stairs
To get my cereal and cup of tea
Then I plop down in my easy chair
Now ... it's time for me ...

I open up my Bible reading it everyday
It fills my day with faith and hope
As I let Jesus lead the way ...

And now it's time for a little make-up
It doesn't take too long for me
My face is quite a bit different now
Than what it used to be ...

I get dressed and clean up a little
Now it's time for my walk
which I do three times a day
And as some of you might already know
I walk, talk and shop, shop, shop along the way ...

I have some lunch and go upstairs
To lay down for a minute or two
It helps to renew my energy
For my second walk which I always do ...

Now I relax and watch some TV
Then supertime is here
Most of the meals are made by hubby
Oh! he is such a dear ...

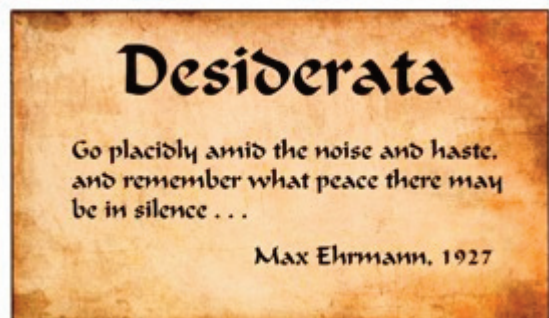
Finally, I do my last walk in the mall
Completing the day for me
I come back and watch a little more TV
I am content as content can be ...

It's 8 o'clock and I am watching the old movies
Which I enjoy watching mostly every night
Then I see it's nearly midnight
It's time for nighty-night ...

I finally lay down my weary head
And say a prayer for the lovely day
Then before I close my eyes to doze off
I have this to say ... Tomorrow is another Seniors Day
Hip Hip Hurrah !!!!!

* * *

The Gift of Life *Bill Brubacher*



I'm a grief mentor and know that there are a lot of deaths at this time of the year, leading up to and including Christmas.

Moreover, we've already experienced so many tragic deaths from the pandemic over the last two years you might think we've almost become numbed by it.

But just ask the families who have lost loved ones, for a very different response.

Every single death matters no matter how many, especially when traditional funerals haven't been allowed and the whole experience of death has been distilled to its very essence, without the shared significance of the loss – from which so much is gained.

Life has been turned upside-down with many of us feeling the 'down' effects, and also helpless to change them.

It will take a while for us to 'right' ourselves and return to some semblance of reality as it was before the pandemic.

It concerns me that this time in our history has had such a profound impact on us and it will be interesting to see how we come out of it – and what we've learned from it.

Only time will tell. There's little any of us can do to prepare for major transition in our lives and no one can predict the long term effects, because the after-shock of crisis can sometimes remain with us, depending on the person and circumstances.

So how are you and I going to handle it? Are we going to feel angry and bitter, feel betrayed by our leaders, feel abandoned by our bosses, feel surprised and shocked by some of our fellow workers who chose not to be vaccinated....leaving the rest exposed without choice, feeling generally more vulnerable



Why I Write

Sandra Wilson

I write because my feelings get knotted up inside
The words I write often help get that knot to untie.

I write because there are stories that are filling up my head
Stories I think with lessons that are important to be said.

I write because its something I know just how to do
And something, since a child, I always wanted to pursue

I write because I want to share a little part of me
Who I am and what I hope, others can strive to be.

I write because my passion, is to show the power of word
Which, when used properly, can inspire when it is heard

I write because I need to, it is a driving force
It's not just a path to follow, it is my life's course.

than ever and pushed to believe we're really all alone and have to look after ourselves?

Is that to be the new world? Or is there still room for love and compassion and difference of opinion, and trust in our fellow man and our leaders?

Only time will tell...

In ongoing stressful times like these I believe we can see our true colours as resilient or not – as having generally positive or negative values – as being models of strength or weakness – as being pioneers, or plodders of change.

And which one are you? Which one am I? Each of us has a responsibility – each of us a role to play in creating the world of tomorrow. Are we up to it? Well, we need to dig deep that's clear, and here is where I confess to being the eternal optimist.

I think we will survive and endure and learn and grow and thrive as man has always done... and we can choose to either be a part of that 'tide' or not...

As the Desiderata says :

***"You are a child of the universe
no less than the trees and the stars;
you have a right to be here.
And whether or not it is clear to you,
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should."***

Oh, and about the "gift" – if you are still reading this, then fortunately, you are not dead; but can be very grateful for the 'gift' of life. We still have the time and opportunity to make choices that can truly make a difference in our life, and the lives of those going forward, in making this world a better place, "unfolding as it should."

* * *



Bruce Trail End to End

Day 2, August 1, 2021

Clay Williams

We started this leg of our End to End journey a little later in the day due to parking availability. The plan was to hike about 54 km from Lions Head to Cape Croker Park. Debbie and I met at Cape Croker Park Campground shortly after 8:00 am, took a few minutes to transfer my stuff to her car then paid for parking for the day. We drove up to Lion's Head in Debbie's car, arranged parking there and eventually got started on our hike around 9:15.



The first section as we were leaving the town of Lions Head was a trail that curved around Lions Head Lookout, an area with beautiful cliffs looking out over Georgian Bay and some very rough terrain. We were in good spirits, confident that the shorter distance was going to be a much easier thing to do than our previous 84 km outing. The sky was overcast and the

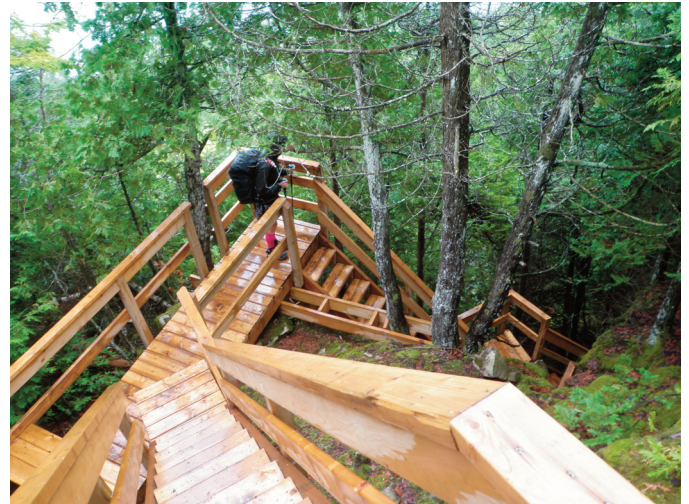
water looked kind of moody, as if the cloud cover had removed the color and left it dark and cold.

You can't see it when you're standing on it, but Lion's Head got its name because the overhanging cliffs, when viewed from the bay, look like the head of a lion.



There were many places on the Lion's Head peninsula where the trail comes right up to the edge of the escarpment, and there is a sheer drop to the broken rocks below. Each time we came out of the woods onto one of these lookouts, Debbie, the mountain climber, would walk right up to the edge and lean over with her camera in her hands. I would struggle between the feeling that I should back away from the edge to avoid death and the feeling that I should get close enough to at least grab Debbie and pull her back from the edge. Every time she got close to the edge, my arm would involuntarily reach out toward her to grab her backpack, to keep her from falling.

After hiking around the Lions Head peninsula we came to Barrow Bay and got onto a section of road; a nice break from the tough trail. Just after Barrow Bay road there was a new section of the trail which had just been opened the month before, and it was very technical. This new section included a long downward stairway followed by a steep downhill, and then a steep uphill afterwards using a plastic coated cable to hold onto to keep steady.



I have to admit that by the time we got to that uphill section, after the rain, I was getting tired and I was really nervous about falling. At one point I was seriously afraid to go either up or down, but knew that I had to keep moving. When we got to the top of the steepest part, there was a warning sign for hikers going the other way saying it was steep and slippery when wet. Hah. Too little too late. There was a section, I don't recall exactly where, probably Cape Dundas, that had a lot of "potholes", smooth rounded holes on the rock carved out by glacier melt water.

They were a pretty cool reminder of the power of nature combined with time. That area must have been a waterfall for decades, maybe centuries, as the glaciers receded. There were also eroded pockets in the sides of the cliffs that we called hidy holes, cute little caves with overhanging rock that could provide some shelter. "Hidy holes good, poison ivy bad."



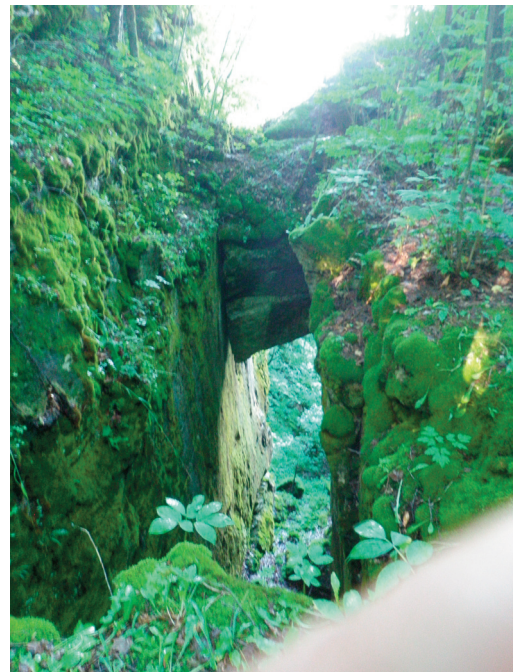
After going past Rush Cove we met Gillian Chow. She doesn't know this, but I saw her running past as I was walking out of the woods after "answering nature's call". I sanitized before calling out her name so she would stop to talk. It was kind of a cool surprise to see someone we knew in such a remote place. At that point we were about half done our day. When we got to about 25 km, we realized it had taken us 7 hours, and we were likely going to be taking 14 hours to finish. We had both expected it would take us about 12 hours. It wasn't an encouraging discovery, and we each quietly decided not to talk about time anymore.

It had started raining mid morning, just a light drizzle at first and then a little heavier in the afternoon. It stopped in the late afternoon, and even though I wore a rain jacket when the rain started, I didn't wear rain pants so my shorts were wet for almost the entire day from the water running off my rain jacket.

As we came into the bottom of Hope Bay, there was a steep treacherous descent down the escarpment to the road. It was another one of those times when I was really concerned about my footing and afraid that a fall would be a disaster.

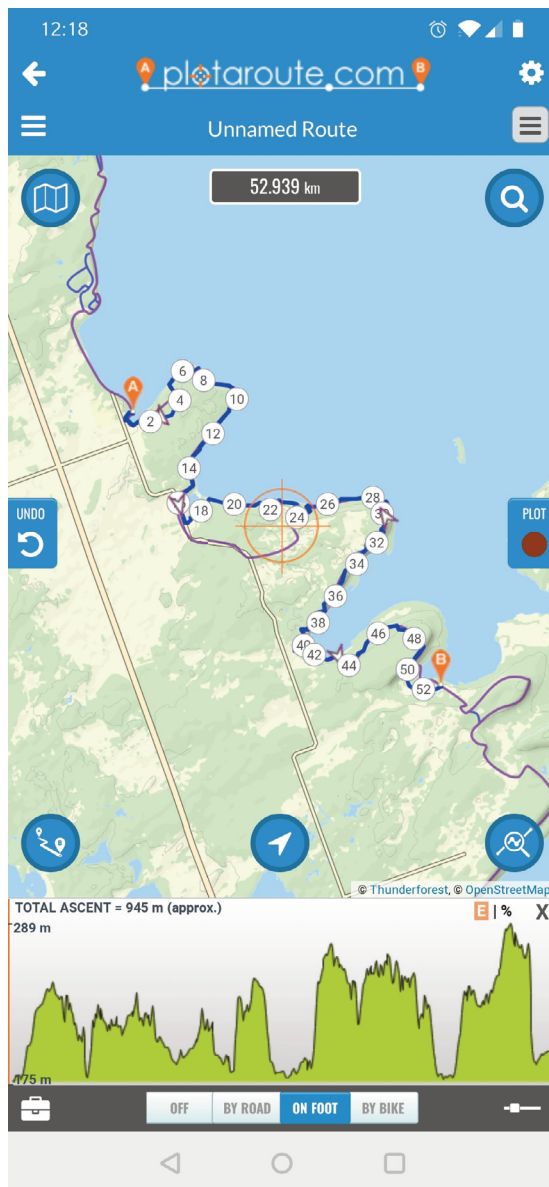
We hiked across Hope Bay as the sun was getting low on the horizon. It was so humid after the rain that my glasses were constantly foggy, making it difficult

to see with the sun straight ahead of us. Also by then the effects of a week of antibiotics were taking their toll on my stamina and my stomach. Every time there was even a small hill to climb, it would exhaust me and I had to slow down A LOT. Slower than even a walking pace. My legs hadn't felt that kind of exhaustion and lactic acid burn in a long long time. Each time we started up an incline, I would walk a little then stop to rest for fear that my legs would just give out. Again because of the antibiotics, my gut was not working properly, and I think I made more bathroom stops on that 14 hour hike than on my entire 200 mile run last year.



We climbed the last section over the last hill in the dark. First there was a steep climb up a sloped trail, then a steeper climb using a cable to keep steady, and just when we thought it couldn't get any steeper there was a ladder to climb up a cliff. I have to admit I was seriously afraid as I was going up the ladder. My legs were so tired that I really had to focus with each step to make sure my footing was good and I was balancing my body weight and the weight of my pack. We got to within a kilometre or so of where we thought our finish should be and discovered that we were still about 5 km from the end. I remember being mad at

myself for the poor mapping skills. We were really tired and just wanted to get to the car, relax a little, and get home. We went on in silence, just wanting to get this section behind us. In the last few kilometres there were many, many little ups and downs before a long steep descent near the end; very steep, wet and slippery. It was another one of those sections that made me worry about what a disaster it would be if I fell. The last 1.9 km was on a road that was flat and easy and very dark under the overcast sky. It felt good to settle into a rhythm of stepping and breathing again, instead of having to focus on each foot placement on the rugged trail.



I had carried 2 litres more water than our previous hike and it wasn't nearly as hot, so I actually had a little left over at the end of the trip. We got Debbie back to her car in Lions Head, and I was able to change out of my wet clothes at the marina. It was pitch black out and I remember sitting in the car with the windows fogging up from my breath, and thinking about how tired I was. Rather than driving home right away, I decided to take a cat nap in the car before starting the two hour drive home. The lot where I was parked was completely abandoned, not a soul was stirring, so it was super quiet. Bucket seats are not designed for sleeping, but I slept like the dead for about two hours, and when I woke I felt good enough to start the trek home.

Once again the Bruce Trail had reminded us that it deserves respect.

* * *

Grampa's Butterfly

The Story Behind the Story

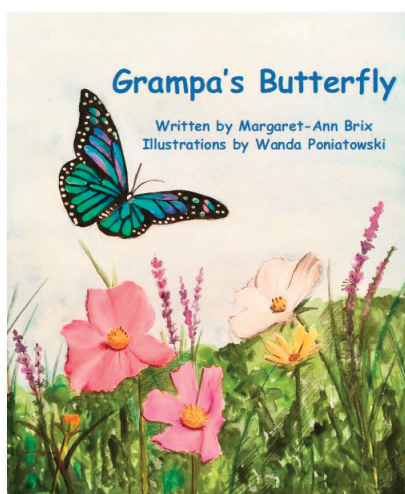
Margaret Brix

The story behind *Grampa's Butterfly* was told to me by my grandfather, Collin Todd, when I was a child. Unfortunately, my grandfather passed away when I was only 10 years old, but my memory of this story would help carry me through some difficult days that lay ahead.

In the fall of 2013, my father, Gary Brix, passed away from COPD, and within the next 8 months my mother would be diagnosed with Alzheimer's and my grandmother, my father's mother, would also pass away. At the time, I had three young children, all struggling to understand and process the grief that they were feeling. I wanted my children to know that grief was, unfortunately, a part of life, and that we needed to focus on the beauty of the life that had been lived rather than on the pain that came with the loss of our loved ones. As a result, I found myself telling my own children my grandfather's story, that

we are all like caterpillars, living in a cocoon until it's our time to fly free.

During those difficult months, when I spoke to family and friends about how I was helping my children cope, I was encouraged to write the story so that it could be shared with others. The idea of writing a children's book was completely foreign to me, but I embraced the challenge and within a year, I published *Grampa's Butterfly*. The publishing of the book took me on a journey; one which seemed at times to be guided by something greater than myself. I reconnected with Wanda Poniatowski, a childhood friend, who became the illustrator, and I found a new friend in my publisher, Lisa Browning. The love and support I received throughout this process was life altering. Seeing my story in print was very emotional as it had been "my story" for many years and I was now preparing to share it with the world.



Looking back, publishing *Grampa's Butterfly* was one of the best moments of my life. When my father passed away, I was so grief stricken that I couldn't give his eulogy. Something I deeply regretted afterwards. Dedicating *Grampa's Butterfly* to my father, who was my rock, my champion, my North Star, allowed me the opportunity to celebrate his life and release me from my feelings of regret. Only two months after I published my book, my mother, Colleen Brix, passed away. This time I was prepared to give her eulogy and tell everyone what a phenomenal mother and human

being she was. At the end of my eulogy, with my children by my side, we unveiled my mother's butterfly. It is a beautiful combination of all the colours that represented her in life to us, her family.



Before COVID shut down the world, I had done readings to children at public libraries and schools, which generated hundreds and hundreds of butterflies. I have been amazed and humbled by how *Grampa's Butterfly* has touched the lives of so many and brought them comfort during times of loss. One thing is very true, it does not matter who you are, how much money you have or how popular you are, grief will touch you during your lifetime; it is a great equalizer. *Grampa's Butterfly* allows all of us to reflect on the lives of those we have lost, imagine our loved ones as beautiful butterflies and realize that we are all simply caterpillars who will one day fly free.

I ended my Mother's eulogy with a slightly altered version of the final poem from *Grampa's Butterfly*, and it seems only fitting to conclude with that message.

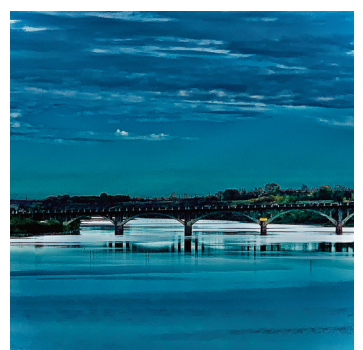
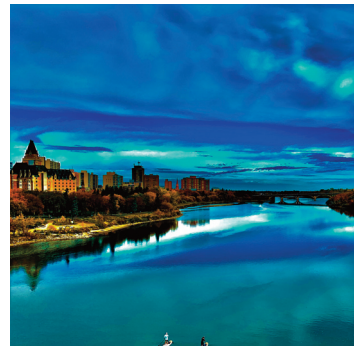
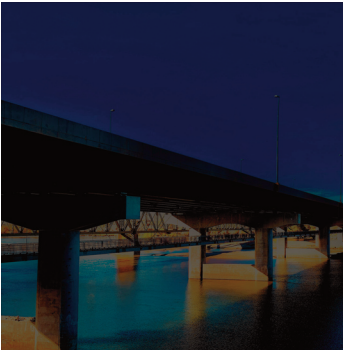
"As the sun rises up above, in the morning sky
I look in wonder and see
that you now have wings to fly.
You are a beautiful butterfly, so colourful and free
I will miss our time together,
just my mother and me.
One day it will be my turn to fly,
just like you have now done
Right by my side you'll stay with me,
until my time has come."



The Bridge of Transition

Joan Almond

The Bridge, the decision.
Transition rising, like the sky opening after a storm.
The Bridge, the move.
Transition rising, like a windstorm
shifting clouds beyond the horizon
The bridge, the journey.
Transition rising, like uncharted waters
with new worlds to be discovered.
The bridge, the crossing.
Transition rising, like a ship tossed
by mountainous waves in a tumultuous sea.
The bridge, the foundation.
Transition rising, like the appearance of light
at the end of a dark tunnel.
The bridge, the transformation.
Transition rising, like a long-awaited child
innocent and pure.
The bridge, the rebirth.
Transition rising, like the morning sun
announcing the dawning of a new day.



Arbour Connections

Arlene Davies-Fuhr

Though icy winds buffet
trees renew over time
nutritious sap stirs
memories of sweeter climes

Spring's buds burst forth
join cardinal's evensong
tough textured tenacity
to branches belong

Summer's greenery dances
rays mature tasty fruit
soft shady respite
tired pilgrims seduce

Frame skeletal by autumn
twigs airily play
bark scoured by raindrops
armour for wintry days

Strong arbour connections
I readily embrace
ancient tree kinship
rooted in sky and space

* * *

Forgiving Mom

Deb Speck

I didn't see any compassion. You didn't see me. But
I watched you like a hawk. Even when you were out
of sight. Even when you were gone.

But was there compassion there? Was it buried so
deep even you didn't feel it? When did it get buried?
Was it ever there? Was it beaten out of you? Did you
feel any in the end?

You hid your compassion. I can see it now. So
covered up in your pain. You had little to give. You
tried to get more. It showed up in bits and pieces.

I didn't hear any guidance. You didn't hear my
voice. But I heard them loud and clear. Even when you
were silent. Even when you were gone.

But was there guidance there? Was it cloaked in
orders even you couldn't hear? When did it change?
Was it ever spoken? Was it too loud to hear? Did you
hear any at the end?

Your guidance was disguised. I can hear that now.
But it was too covered up with anger. You thought it
was right. It sounded one way or the other to me.



Why I Write

Katherine Weir

I write because I was born this way. With words that fall out of my brain much like the fall ripening of leaves on the majestic maple. Coloured. Abundant. Stunning. Peaceful. In a cacophony of inspiration for others because I see my fallen leaves as a playhouse for the child-gift minds who find adventure in the decayingly-beautiful wisdom within the tree's off-spring of this year's shade over those who cross under her, climb in her and hug her for the sap of sweetness that runs through her veins. I write because I was born this way.

I didn't see the compassion. I didn't hear the guidance. Both were buried in your pain that became mine. Both were there silent and out of sight. But they didn't lead me astray.

I found compassion in other places and began to understand. I had guides that pointed a different direction. I can see and hear the gifts you gave me now. Strength in spite of weakness and courage out of fear. They lead me to who I am now.

I wish I could have given you the compassion you needed at the end. I wish you could have guided me when I needed it most. I hope you can see the whole picture now. I hope you are free and at peace.

* * *



Why I Write ***Lisa Browning***

For as long as I can remember, I have been writing. Whether stories, poems, or business letters, putting thoughts to paper is my passion. In a recent moment of introspection, however, I wondered why I came to favour this particular form of self-expression, as opposed to ... painting ... photography ... dance ...

In my office closet are all the essays and stories I've written since grade 4, meticulously categorized and filed in labelled folders. Some are illustrated renderings of my imagination and others are merely researched thoughts, enhanced by the poetic musings of a young adult. All are the words of my soul.

Recovery Speaking Initiative ***Lisa Browning***

I often say that there are no coincidences in this life, and that we meet the people we are meant to meet, when we are meant to meet them. A perfect example of that is my connection with Bob McCabe.

I first met Bob in November of 2019, when a friend sent me an email notification about a documentary screening at the River Run. I glanced through the email, and the words "trauma" and "addiction" jumped out at me. Because I was (and still am) passionate about advocacy in both of these areas, I went to the screening.

Little did I know, until I got there, that the documentary was about the abuse of young boys by priests in the Catholic church. Bob was one of those boys. Although this area of trauma and abuse was not something I had been particularly involved in, I knew there had to be a reason why I was at that screening.

After the screening, I got my answer. Just before the evening ended, Bob got up to say a few words. The sentence that stood out for me was, "Now, if only there was a way for us to give these men a platform to share their stories!"

Needless to say, I emailed Bob at my first opportunity, and offered my assistance with the publication of a "Special Edition" *Sharing* anthology for survivors of this type of abuse. We made arrangements to meet for lunch the next week.

Bob was one of those people who I felt like I'd known forever, even upon first meeting. As we chatted over lunch, I discovered how much we had in common, including some mutual acquaintances.

So, later on, when he asked me if I'd consider joining the Board of Directors of a new charity he was launching, I didn't have to hesitate.

Since that first meeting, Bob has written his story in one of my regular *Sharing* anthologies, as well as spoken onstage at a *momondays* event, of which I was cohost. He is truly an inspiration!



Recovery Speaking Initiative (RSI) is his dream, 5 years in the making, which has finally come to fruition. RSI is excited to start making a difference in the lives of those who have suffered profound trauma, and support them on their path towards healing and recovery. And I am thrilled to be on the board, and to help out in whatever way I can!

Please help us by spreading the word, and liking our Facebook page to follow along the journey.

For more information please visit the RSI website at www.recoveryspeaking.org, and facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Recovery-Speaking-Initiative-112112794581364>

P.S. The “Special Edition” anthology is forthcoming, as are many other amazing storytelling initiatives!



Unity

Arlene Davies-Fuhr

If it is so affirming
to live in unity
why do many factions
stab with great enmity?

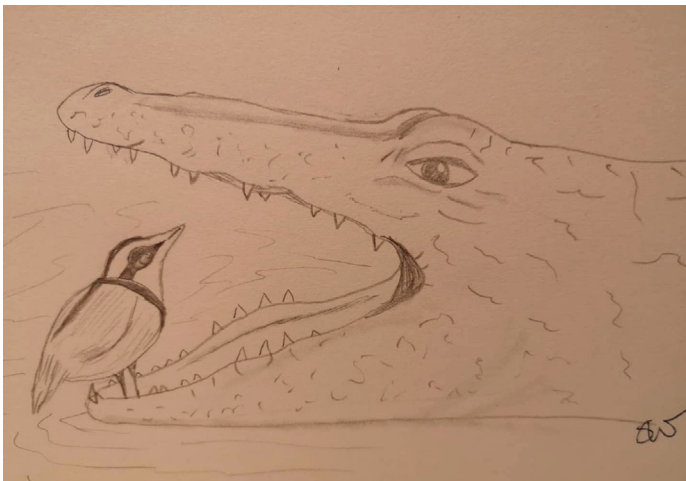
Why are we so hostile?
Fear diversity's increase?
Why can't we share stories
'til our balled fists release?

When will tolerance be pervasive
as moon's luminous face?
Peace be as tenacious
as moss in precarious place?
Hospitality as genuine
as a refugee's embrace?

Only when we truly empathize
with another's twisted fate
we won't always agree
but we don't have to hate

openhearted folk create
an ever-enriching space
as they connect and relate
with love and joy and grace

* * *



Caffeinated Crocodile

Sandra Wilson

Eyes are open!
And closed once more
But I'm sitting up
With my feet on the floor!
I do the zombie walk
Into the kitchen space
It seems to take forever
With my shuffle along pace
At
last I reach the counter
Where the coffee pot resides
Now to find the coffee
I should really open my eyes
I put in the coffee and get
The water filled up
But as the coffee starts to drip
I realize I forgot the cup!
I scramble to find one
To place under the spout
Before that needed coffee
Drains itself all out
At
last I have succeeded
I can sit and enjoy the brew
But now the kids are up
And I have so much to do

.....

Oh
there you are my precious
You are probably cold by now
A little warm up is all you need
And hopefully time will allow
At
last the cup is empty
And its magic has begun
Now I feel I can get through the day
And get my to
do list done.

* * *

The Midas Touch *Marilyn Helmer*

*This story appears in Marilyn's newest book of short stories, entitled **Birdsong on a Summer Evening**.*

“ ‘ve got the Midas Touch. Everything I touch turns to gold...” The words from the 1980s Midnight Star song echoed in Nick's ears as he came out of The Mill Street Café. It used to be a good place to get a cup of lukewarm coffee and a day-old donut back when it was Rita's Kitchen. Under new management, the cup of coffee, albeit hot and fragrant, and a slice of Carrot Cake, decadent and delicious, cost five times what Rita had charged. It was a cost hike Nick could barely afford.

The bitter January wind didn't help his mood. At this time of year, the streets were at their dingiest. Bare trees shivered like lonesome ghosts. Cars flew by, carelessly spraying slush onto slippery sidewalks. Nick yanked at the zipper of his jacket. Jammed again. He retrieved one worn leather glove from his right pocket and searched his left for the other one. Missing. He retraced his steps. There it was, kicked aside into a dirty snowbank. He grabbed it and shoved his hand into the icy interior.

The Midas Touch. At one time, he'd had it all. Everything he touched turned to gold. His fists clenched in helpless anger. He never suspected his boss was running a Ponzi scheme. Not until it all crashed around him. By then the scumbag was lying on a sunny beach somewhere, counting the money he'd moved off-shore, leaving Nick to face the music. He spent two years in jail while his charge-by-the-minute lawyer worked to prove him innocent. Every dollar he'd saved and invested was gone. And no one in the corporate world wanted to hire an ex-con.

Nick checked his cell phone, another luxury he could barely afford, but how else could he keep in touch with the Employment Office? There were no messages. He searched his pockets and dug out

enough money to catch a bus downtown to TempJobs. Snow shoveling and delivering packages had kept the wolves from the door so far but it would be another evening of Mac and Cheese at the Bates Motel.

By now, early winter darkness had fallen. The streets were almost empty. Shoppers had headed home for supper. Office workers were on the job for another hour or two.

The wind picked up suddenly, blowing a blast of icy air in Nick's face. He hurried past the brightly lit shops, heading for the bus shelter two blocks away. He could wait in the shelter out of the cold and catch a bus back to the motel. Even the small, colourless room with the sulky TV and the hotplate that only worked intermittently was better than walking the streets in this perishing wind.

As he approached the bus shelter, he noticed that the street light beside it had gone out. He shrugged and moved to the back, out of the wind, to wait.

Two blocks away, Bernard J. Harrington, Bernie as he was known to his associates, emerged from Freedman, Jackes & Harrington with a smile on his face. He was a small man in his late sixties but a power house in the business world. It had been a good day, no, make that a great day. He'd clinched a deal that had been on the table for weeks, a deal with Westminster Enterprises, the largest distributor of office equipment in the country.

Bernie wrapped his Armani jacket around him and frowned at the winter chill. A false sun, shining when he left the house that morning, had promised a day warm enough to go without a coat. He scowled. How quickly things change. He'd parked his Lexus in a garage six blocks away because it was the only heated indoor garage in this end of the city with 24-hour security. Foolish, maybe, but Bernie liked things safe and certain.

He looked around but there wasn't a taxi in sight. Then he noticed the bus shelter. He couldn't

remember the last time he'd taken a bus but anything was better than walking six blocks in this weather. Meanwhile he could wait in the shelter.

Bernie was annoyed to find that he wasn't the only one waiting in the bus shelter. He did not like the looks of the man at the back. He was poorly dressed and had a lean, mean look about him. With a stab of fear, Bernie recalled hearing on the news last night that a mugger was on the loose. Could this be him? The man looked up and stared right at him. Alarmed, Bernie backed out of the shelter onto the street.

Suddenly the man lunged at him and grabbed him by his coat sleeve. Bernie was so terrified that he didn't see the Jeep as it sped by and disappeared into the darkness. Weak with fear, he pleaded, "Please, please, don't hurt me." He jammed a hand into his jacket pocket, yanked out his wallet, extracted a fistful of bills and shoved them into the mugger's hand.

"No, wait," he heard the mugger say, "you don't understand..."

"That's all I've got with me," Bernie stammered, shaking, almost sobbing.

"But I'm not..." the mugger said.

In a burst of desperation, Bernie yanked his arm from the mugger's grasp just as the bus pulled to a stop. The doors opened and Bernie leapt on.

Nick stood, too stunned to follow, as the bus pulled away. He stared at the hundred dollar bills in his hand. Ten of them. One thousand dollars. One. Thousand. Dollars.

Slowly Nick took his frayed wallet from his pocket. He put the thousand dollars carefully into the bill section that had been empty for so long. In a daze, he tried to collect his thoughts. One thousand dollars and all he had done was pull that old guy to safety out of the way of the speeding Jeep.

The Midas Touch — the words of the song played in Nick's ears as he left the dark bus shelter and headed back up the street toward the bright city lights.

* * *



Why I Write

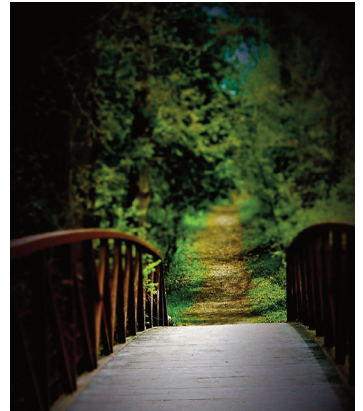
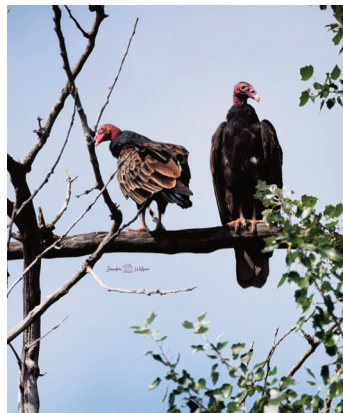
Adelle Purdham

I write to be seen. To be made real. To relive what I haven't fully figured out. I write because I love it, because I can't not write, and because I was lead here, to this place where I call myself a writer, by invisible heart strings. I like to discover what I'm feeling on the page, explore the world around me, and writing is my chosen medium. Words are a place to set myself down, stay grounded and put. Perhaps without words, I would disappear. I write to advocate, on behalf of myself as a woman and others, and this writing life has become a passion.

Stories: poetry, prose, and personal reflection

Reflections on the Theme

*The following photos were submitted in response to the monthly theme of reflection and remembering.
From left to right: Sandra Wilson (photos 1-3); Margreet Kuypers (photos 4-7); Joan Almond (photos 8-12).*



This Month's Contributors

Joan Almond

Joan is a Canadian writer and self-taught photographer. Mentored by Dan Needles and Joe Kertes, she has been encouraged to follow the “heart” in her writing. Most recently, the author’s short stories are published in *Our Canada*. A third publication in the October/November edition of the national magazine will show case her Children’s writing. A proud supporter of the Canadian Society of Children’s Authors, illustrators, and Performers, Joan’s great joy is reading Canadian children’s literature. Joan is thankful to award-winning author Marilyn Helmer, who encouraged her to submit her story to this anthology. The author extends gratitude to Lisa Browning who first gave her a voice in February of 2019, in the online publication known as *One Thousand Trees*.

Margaret Brix

Margaret was born and raised in Guelph and obtained a Bachelor of Commerce degree from Queen’s University. She recently moved back to Guelph, where she lives with her husband, Andrew Brooks, and their three children Jaimie, Liam and Adam. Margaret has always dreamed of writing a children’s book and *Grampa’s Butterfly* is the fulfillment of that dream. After losing her father and grandmother, two people who greatly influenced her life, within 8 months of each other, she found herself telling the story of the butterfly to her own children to help them cope with their sense of loss and grief. Writing this story has been such a positive experience that Margaret hopes to publish more children’s books in the future.

Bill Brubacher

Bill is a long-time resident of the Region of Waterloo, a former successful business entrepreneur and an internationally published author of 15 national bestselling books. He is a Certified Bereavement Specialist, and a Certified Conflict Coach/ Elder Mediator, helping seniors and their families through difficult time through Caregivers Oasis, Pathfinder Canada, and Heart and Soul Bereavement for Seniors.

Bill has recently authored a new book about his amazing life’s journey. His book, *Against the Odds*, is a ten-year testament to his incredible emotional, spiritual and mental tenacity as he fought to reinvent himself after experiencing tremendous loss. His model and message are an inspiration to all who struggle to survive in the face of defeat. His latest book, *The Secret Pond*, is a classic love story fantasy about the shared journey of a young boy and an unusual stranger finding healing from grief and loss at a mystical pond in the midst of an ancient magical forest.

For more information about his books go to <https://legacypress.ca/> or contact Bill at billbrubacher@gmail.com.

Arlene Davies-Fuhr

Arlene is retired and resides in Guelph. She has been a lay-minister in the United and Mennonite churches, a college English instructor, and an ESL teacher. She has published a workbook on the Psalms and has edited a book of essays. She has travelled widely and currently enjoys playing the ukulele and the mountain dulcimer.

Colleen Heighington

Colleen is happily married to a wonderful husband named Ken. They have been blessed with three beautiful children, and four terrific grandsons. She enjoys reading, writing stories and poetry, and she keeps fit by walking 3 to 4 kilometres every day. Her summers are spent at their trailer in Orillia, and she really enjoys the time she spends with family and friends. She has been a volunteer with Hospice Wellington since 2015.

Marilyn Helmer

Marilyn is the award-winning author of many children's books including picture books, early chapters, retold fairy tales, riddle books and novels. Her short stories, poetry and articles have appeared in numerous children's magazines and anthologies in Canada and the United States and her penchant for entering writing contests has resulted in success with short adult fiction as well. Marilyn has just published a collection of her short adult fiction called "Birdsong on a Summer Evening" with One Thousand Trees Publishing.

You can visit her at www.marilynhelmer.com.

Francine Houston

Francine is a transformational intuitive, animal lover and fibre artist. She spends her time writing, doing fibre arts, and supporting animals and their human companions in transitional times.

Margreet Kuypers

Marge has immigrated twice, and as a result has lived on three continents. As an introvert she prefers to observe, rather than share her views. Until now she used to communicate mainly through music and photography, since then it wasn't necessary to put thoughts into words. Marge did an online Memoir writing course during 2020 which inspired her to share some of her experiences on paper. Visit her at www.walkingthewalk.life.

Adelle Purdham

Adelle is a writer, speaker and parent disability advocate. She holds an honours degree in French literature from Western University and is a certified teacher. She wrote her memoir *Here We Are, Happy* (in progress) through Humber College's Creative Writing by Correspondence program. Her work has appeared in *The Toronto Star*, *The Mighty*, *Broadview Magazine*, and she's a regular contributor to *3.21: Canada's Down Syndrome Magazine*. Adelle is the founder of *The Write Retreat*, facilitating wellness, workshops, time and space for women writers to create. She is currently completing her MFA in creative nonfiction writing at the University of King's College and writing her next book, *I Don't Do Disability and Other Lies I've Told Myself*, an ensemble of first-person essays through memoir. She loves going for runs and hikes with her family and fur baby Louie, and swimming with the wild loons. Visit her online adellepurdham.ca.

Deb Speck

Deb started journaling when she was a teenager to cope with family problems. The words that poured onto the book at times came out as poetry. The creative writing group she belongs to gathered 50 word stories jointly in a book titled "Stories to Chew On." This project inspired her to write stories about her fascinating ancestors in the family tree found through searching online and surprising DNA matches. She hopes to gather her best poems and compile them into a book one day.

Katherine Weir

Katherine, Guelphite, feminist, mother, grandmother, furkid mother, bereaved, First Nations and Metis Peoples' supporter/honourer and Nature lover, has been writing since the beginning of time. She focuses her creative genius on poetry and short stories, and visual art genres of pottery and mixed media, as well as sewing.

Clay Williams

Clay is a 61-year-old Manitoba-born father of two living in Elmira Ontario with his wife of 40 years. He manages the Engineering Department of a manufacturing company in Kitchener and has worked in Northern Ontario, Germany and South Carolina. Clay is an avid distance runner, having run dozens of marathons and longer runs, and creator of the Canal Pursuit for Mental Health, a 785 km run along two of Canada's longest canals as well as The Monarch Ultra, a 4300 km run following the migration path of Monarch Butterflies.

Sandra Wilson

Sandra is a children's author, educator and illustrator that lives Ontario, Canada.

With her writing she hopes to empower and inspire children and help get the conversation started on topics that can make a difference in the life of a child.

She believes compassion and understanding are key concepts to learn to create a better world. And stories are a powerful tool to help teach these concepts to children.

STAY WELL STAY HAPPY KEEP WRITING!

**Deadline for submissions for December is
Friday, November 26.**

Here's a focus quote to inspire you ...

"God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December."
— James M. Barrie

