

Stories

poetry, prose, and personal reflection

Vol. 1 — October 2021



*My gratitude for good writing is unbounded;
I'm grateful for it the way I'm grateful for the ocean.*

~ Anne Lamott

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Publisher
One Thousand Trees

Editorial Board
Francine Houston, Katherine Weir, Sandra Wilson

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



First and foremost, I want to express my appreciation to all my readers and writers, for your unending patience as this first issue of the new *Stories* magazine was put together. I didn't want to rush it, so it did take far longer than expected.

I thought it was appropriate, however, that the first issue be published on Thanksgiving weekend (well, the day after!), because it gives me an opportunity to say how very grateful I am, and how very blessed I feel, to have met so many wonderful, inspirational people through my journey as an editor and publisher. Everyone who has written for me, since I launched *One Thousand Trees* in 2010, has inspired me in some way.

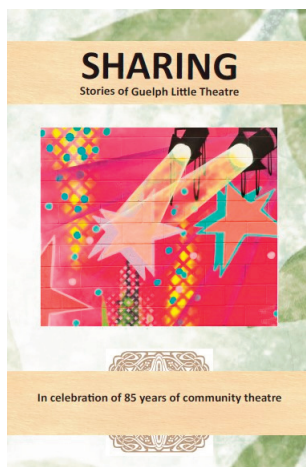
I am so very excited about this new venture! As many of you already know, my passion in this life is to help to empower others through storytelling. Whether we are reading/listening to someone else's story, or writing/telling our own, the potential is there for tremendous healing and growth.

Since 2010, I have been blessed to have published over 45 children's books (through Saplings), 10 anthologies (through Sharing), and over 25 "regular" books, as well as 10 years (120 issues) of my first magazine, *One Thousand Trees*. An interesting sidenote ... the magazine was called *One Thousand Trees*, because that was originally all I had planned to publish!! I was shown, in short order, what happens when we follow our passion!

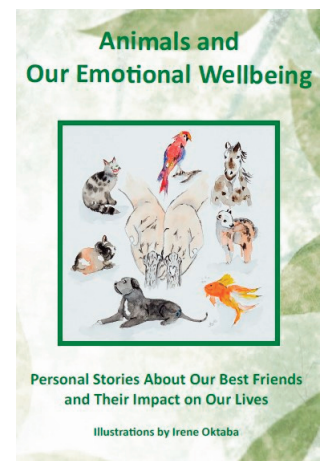
I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight the two most recent "Special Edition" Sharing anthologies published by *One Thousand Trees*: *Stories About Guelph Little Theatre*, and *Animals and Our Emotional Wellbeing*. Please visit www.sharinganthologies.com for more information, or email me at lisa@onethousandtrees.com for information on how to obtain your copy!

I hope you enjoy our first issue!

Lisa



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A Different Summer

Danielle Betts

I guess we got the summer we all have been waiting for since, well, last summer. I should be happy, right? I should be going to the beach, going to the bar, going *places*. I should be more than happy. Why aren't I? Why is this summer full of wintertime depression when winter has more than enough of it? Gosh, I'm tired.

Thinking of leaving the house and being around strangers in a space other than my own leaves me unable to breathe. I've been able to turn my empathy radar off for a year, but now that we're back in the world like somewhat normal beings, I can feel everyone's feelings again, and I can't just turn off my phone to lessen the impact; I have to actually feel things. Yucky. I mean, I felt things all winter, but now I have to feel others' things - like actually feel them and be around them. As my boyfriend once said, "You go to therapy for others' problems, not your own."

I started going to therapy for my own problems because I could turn the world off (literally) if I needed to. I'm scared all this hard work will go down the drain because, again, I can't just close the app or put down the technology and try to disconnect; I *have* to be connected or people will get mad. I have to be present, and I don't know if people will understand if I'm not. "Why don't you want to leave the house after being locked away for a year?" I'm a caged animal who found comfort in the silence.

On top of everything, I feel like I'm wasting a summer because I'm not doing all the things we were "supposed" to do when the world opened. Thanks for making me feel that way, social media! I would've been completely okay with taking things at my own pace. Now, I have a sense of urgency to enjoy the summer while it's here but enjoy it in a way that is worthy of likes.

If you're feeling this way, I hear you. I know everyone else is ready to make up for lost time and I know it's more complicated for you. Take a deep breath, step back, and hold onto what you learned while being alone with yourself. Implement it into your new routine. Make time for being alone and create space in your life for you. Don't let the summer pass you by, but also, don't let others tell you how you should be enjoying it. Take a deep breath, put one foot in front of the other, get out of the door, and, most importantly, celebrate each step. We can do this.

* * *

September – The Transition Month

Bill Brubacher

September always makes me nervous. It reminds me of returning to school and to change and childhood, and to forced regime and discipline and a new set of challenges and expectations ahead of me.

It feels like the freedom of summer is nearly gone. It's as though my timeless, Peter Pan wings have been clipped by the invisible hand of reality, and my 'little boy' spirit is being called 'home' to be put back on the shelf for yet another year—its former running, kicking, prancing, springing legs now just dangling useless in space.



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And after all these years I still can't break free of that powerful instinctive recall to life cycle—like the overpowering instinct geese have to form up together to fly south and for salmon to swim up river to spawn.

And it makes me mad because I feel so helpless against it.. like a mouse running in circles or an undercurrent taking me, like a defenceless twig, where it wants to go even through rapids or over water falls....that scare me....

Not everyone, of course, feels so strongly, because we're all different; but for those who can relate to my feelings well, let's talk about it shall we? ...

What happened to free will? Or, is that just another myth of growing up? I wonder...

Anyway, life is never good or bad for very long, thank goodness.

It just seems that when life is bad it lasts forever, and when good, it's fleeting. And everything in between is called transition, because time never stands still, no matter what we feel. There is always more to discover than we know.

It good to be reminded of that from time to time, especially when we're caught in a 'down' situation.

Transitions are always hard. It's like growing out of one pair of pants and into another—or from one size of shoes to the next. One is too tight—the other too loose, till we grow into the 'new.'

Life is like that and we can't avoid the in-between stages—the bridges between here and there. And there are a lot of those in life, aren't there? If we recognize them.

Not just in seasons, but in going from one grade to the next, one job to the next, one marriage to the next, one-child family to the next, one project to the next, one house to the next, one friend to the next, one city to the next...then there's the bigger

challenges, of one state of health to the next, and from one 'loss' /death to the next—till we look in the mirror one day, and see a whole life sequence of 'nexts' in our aging reflection...

Not all are bad though, but honestly it can be scary sometimes. Right?

Feeling just like September, and leaving our 'good times' childhood behind, sitting on the shelf, while we move on and grow up...

And is it worth it? Is it worth all that 'transition' and possibly pain?

Well, some of us may say no, and do our best to remain 'innocent' at the risk of becoming judgmental, protective of our innocence and critical of the 'progress' of others or even fearful of the world leaving us behind and, in later years, maybe even become cynical. Is it worth it? Well, for me it's not.

Another way of looking at life is to see it as the pain we can take now, or take it later. Either way, we really can't escape it. As the commercial says, "It tastes terrible—but it works." And it's always up to us, each of us, to choose whether to take it or not according to the worth of our lives.

And that's the transition I've been talking about, where what at first tastes terrible—later becomes bearable!

But it doesn't have to stop there. You see life is a process. And the actual process from terrible to bearable is the transitional step that leads from bearable to achievable ... which I think is what we all truly want.

I think most of know that either the summer following spring, or the 'summer' of our lives, just can't last and we have to go through the terrible—the growing up, to prepare us for the bearable, and from there, the achievable waiting for us is easy.

Ok—I know that’s a whole life philosophy in one quick pill to take in only a matter of minutes.

So if you’re at all intrigued by all this, why not take a moment to read it again and take what you can from it, what speaks to you, and go into September—the transition month—with a little courage and perhaps more determination to discover the new outcomes that await you on the other side? That’s when you reach the bearable—just one step away from the achievable. You’ll be amazed.

Growing up doesn’t have to be so bad after all. So make the best of your transitions and learn from them. Don’t be afraid of your destiny.... It’s yours to achieve and you can do it with just a little effort (less than you thought). And I’d be willing to bet you’ll be

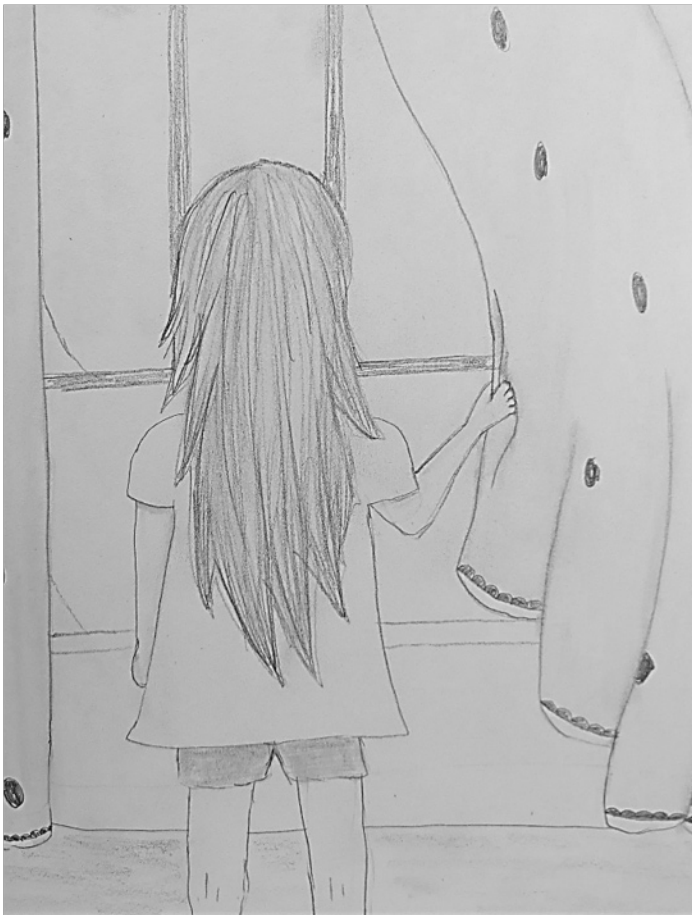
far better off letting go of the past and moving into the present with all the good potential it has waiting for you in the future.

Summer is really a gift like childhood, which—similar to all the transitions in life—prepares us for the life we truly deserve, so long as we keep moving, just one small step at a time.

At least, that’s what I’ve discovered.

Transition always prepares us for the next stage in life... welcome it and you’re on to one of life’s greatest adventures... your future!

* * *



The summer sun is shining
But it doesn't seem the same
The beaches are now all open
But they aren't calling my name.
I've been waiting for the opportunity
To go and travel once more
But now that it is here
It is difficult going out the door.
But this summer can still offer
A chance to sit in the yard
And time to reflect on ideas
That can make this new life less hard.

The Gift of Gardens (Part 1)

Joan Almond

I first met Sam in the days when she was still on social media. I contacted her during the pandemic. I was doing research for a new book. Sam agreed to do an interview with me via zoom. Sam is no quitter; we authors knew that after a time. This is Sam's Story.

"Christmas, 2014, I sold my home," Sam told me. "I needed to simplify my lifestyle," she said. "Things needed to shift if I hoped to continue writing."

Sam stopped.

"I needed somewhere I could write in quietness," she said. "By now, my camera was an important part of my life."



In the cold days of January; with temperatures reaching Polar Vortex lows; Sam came to a place that felt right.

"*The Garden View* with *Mature Trees* stood cold and barren beneath winter's chill," Sam told me.

She stopped.

"I knew then, *The Gift of Gardens* awaited me," Sam said. "I signed the lease."

"By May, 2019," Sam went on. "The area was changing; *Go West!* called my name. Days later, I discovered *Prairie Horizons CANSCAIP*, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan."

Sam stopped.

"I didn't know about the Provincial Group, or that it was a part of the National Organization in Toronto, Ontario," Sam said. "Living in Ontario; I was a friend to *CANSCAIP* in Toronto. Within minutes, I checked travel points, and booked my flight *West*. The Writer's Conference in Saskatoon; my destination."

Sam laughed.

"I'm a risk taker," she told me. "With anxiety!"

Sam continued.

"Everywhere I went," she said. "Complete strangers painted the same portrait of *The Prairie Town*."

"A vibrant arts community exists in Saskatoon," one woman told Sam.

I nodded.

"*The Prairie Town* is known for its *friendly vibe*, every stranger agreed," Sam went on.

I listened.

"The winters are cold," Sam's sister told her. "But dry."

Sam began dreaming about *life* in *The West*.

Her departure arrived, on May 19th, 2019.

"I carried stress from a difficult year," Sam told me. "I needed eye surgery; hidden health issues were diagnosed by the end of July."

I continued to listen.

"I got off the plane in Saskatoon," she told me. "It felt like coming home."

Sam's face lit up.

"There's something in your water, in all those rivers with all those bridges," Sam told new friends. "Come on, fess up!"

Sam smiled.

"Those buffalo on that ranch of yours will make an ideal critique group," She told one woman. "Stomp once if you like what you hear; snort twice if you don't."

Sam stopped again, looking toward *The Gardens*.

"I've lived in this area forty years," Sam told me, still looking out the window. "It's hard to explain; it's time to move *West*."

Her eyes danced.

"When are you going?" I asked.

"I don't know exactly," she answered. "It won't be ten minutes too early or, ten minutes too late."

"Takes the pressure off a *Big Move*," I said.

Sam nodded and smiled.

She seemed relieved by my response.

Sam began to tell me more of her story.

A train whistle blew in the distance.

The Journey is the Destination, Sam told a woman in the summer of 2019. "I worked hard, overcome obstacles, and was given incredible opportunities. The journey became surreal."

Her eyes watered; she choked back tears.

"The woman I met at *The Lake* emailed me," Sam told me.

Sam paused.

"My husband and I often talk about our conversation with you," the woman wrote to Sam.

I listened.

"Months later, as the global pandemic heated up; I let myself return to *The Lake*, Sam said. "Visual memories seldom leave me."

Sam took a deep breath.

"Cooling summer breezes floated in on aqua coloured waves; the sun dancing across shimmering waters," she said, closing her eyes.



I smiled.

In a world of social distancing, wearing gloves to the laundry room on the first floor, and following yellow arrows in the grocery store; Sam told me more about that summer.

"A pillow in my hotel room read, *Relax you're on Lake Time*," Sam said.

She smiled.

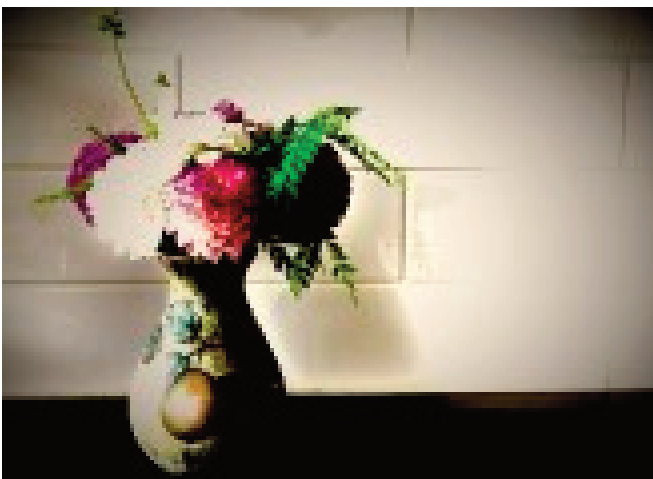
"I crawled beneath fresh linens; giving myself permission to rest," she told me. "I'd gone to sell my photography."

Sam paused.

"I didn't make a dime," she said. "I photographed *The Lake* while I was there; met some incredible people. I needed to step out; it was time; I had to go."

Sam smiled.

"That summer, between trips to *The Lake*, I photographed *Garden Flowers* at a local café," Sam told me.



Sam's face lit up again.

"The photographs and the good food became my daily refreshment," she told me.

I smiled.

"Later, things became difficult. I pushed my way through the remainder of 2019," Sam told me.

She looked out the window again.

"I've been fortunate," Sam told me. "Mentors taught me to go over the obstacle, and keep going."

I nodded.

Sam went on...

"The more I thought about moving West; the more dissatisfied I became," she said. "*The Gift of Gardens* outside my window grew silent and cold."

Sam's looked away for a moment.

I listened in silence.

"Saskatoon felt like home," she said. "I wasn't afraid to tell others how I was feeling."

Sam looked toward *The Gardens* once again.

I could tell by the look on her face; the story was becoming difficult to tell.

She paused.

"Thank you, Sam," was all I knew to say. "I respect your vulnerability."

The concern on Sam's face changed; she relaxed.

"February 2020, my first short story was published," Sam told me. "For the first time in my life; I felt I'd been given a voice. It's hard to explain."

Sam's words went deep.

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It was me who looked away this time.

"2020, *Global Pandemic*," Sam said.

"I've heard of it," I told her.

Sam smiled.

"By now, I referred to Saskatoon as *The Land of Many Rivers*," Sam continued.

She stopped.

"You're not going to Saskatoon ten minutes too early or ten minutes too late!" I reminded Sam.

"Nice to know you're paying attention," Sam said to me.

We laughed.

"So, what's next for you Sam?" I asked.

She smiled.

She looked out at *The Gardens* again.

The look on Sam's face changed.

"I thought I'd let go of the past," Sam told me. "Until pain knocked on my door in the midst of a *Global Pandemic*."

I sat in silence; listening to Sam's story.

"I had a choice to hold on, or to let go in spite of pain," Sam said.

"Mmmm," I said.

"It's time to focus on the *Good Memories*," she told me. "Write them down; one a day, until I move."

We looked at each other.

"I won't be moving ten minutes too early, or ten minutes too late," we said together.

We laughed.

Our meeting was about to end; I asked Sam if she would send me some of her photography.

"Sure," she said.

Sam stopped.

She looked outside.

A robin sang in a nearby tree.

I could hear him too.

We said good-bye, leaving the *Virtual Meeting*.

"*The Gift of Gardens*," I said out loud. "I wonder if Sam might like to meet me for *Virtual Coffee*?"



Author's Note: Jean Little was one of the first children's authors whose story and writing impacted me.

She will missed by many , who knew her as a founding member of CANSCAIP. Her passing touched a chord with many, including myself.

***“Your only responsibility as a writer
is to be true to the story that has chosen
you as its writer.”***

- Jean Little

* * *

Hope
Rebecca Olayinka

Sorrow fills your heart like the mighty rushing wind
on a cold autumn's day.

The self-assurance and confidence
that you had in yourself is now gone,
And you have only God to rely on for support.
You find it hard to believe,
So trusting him is even harder.

You may put on a brave face but inside you are
crying and the tears are like that of a new-born baby.
In a sort of way the tears are like prayers in a bottle;

Salty and sweet,
A bit like rain or sleet.

The very notion of being seen and unheard
appeals to you,

Somehow, sometime in the night
when you cannot sleep or eat...

You wonder how on earth you are meant to run
this wretched race;

If your worst enemy is you and there is no voice,
No whisper, no answer in the night.

Yet you persevere even though ending it all
seems such a brilliant idea.

You begin to understand what has brought you here
and what you must do to succeed in this world.

Even though you do not like it and it would be
easier to be invisible, you decide....

You make a choice.

Like you've been doing all your life.

But there is a difference. There is something,
which you cannot quite put a finger on...

There is a feeling that...
There is a sense of hope.

* * *

Blessings of a Writing Goddess
Arlene Davies-Fuhr

The writing goddess waved her magic wand. My grade four teacher, Mrs. Fraser, encouraged her students to write poetry, and I took to the process like a dragonfly to a warm, flat rock. I composed zillions of pieces about daffodils, squirrels, robins, and woods. It was fun, and I included illustrations. By grade five, I was an observer and recorder extraordinaire as I diligently wrote daily diary entries. Sadly, during these years, my mother reiterated I was not the least bit creative and would never amount to anything.

High school provided opportunities to prepare speeches and share them. Each year I would be chosen to present to the assembled student/teacher body of 2,000. Quite the adrenaline rush! Creative writing assignments also challenged and excited me. Once, a teacher sent the class's creations to an outside marker. That individual thought I had plagiarized a writer's work. Wowzers! This made me proud yet angry. The assessor didn't even name the author I supposedly copied. As an avid reader, perhaps something subconsciously imbedded itself in my cortex but the influence would have been subtle and certainly not intentional.

At university, I majored In English and found essay writing enlightening and energizing. One professor insisted we not include our own assessments, but focus on critics' perceptions. However, I felt called to add some of my own comments. With a grade of 99%, my risk paid off. The prof appreciated my evaluation and, with permission, shared my insights with the entire class. Being a badass can have its rewards.

Honours English at Bishop's University meant I had to write a thesis. I chose the South African author, Alan Paton, who at the time was under house arrest during the apartheid era. I had never travelled to Africa so I wrote to the South African embassy in Ottawa requesting information. The packet arrived

along with a letter indicating I was *persona non grata* and would never be granted a visa to visit South Africa under apartheid. Somehow, the authorities sensed I was a radical, though at the time I was rather placid and apolitical. The unconventional nature of my personality took hold much later but tiny indications were emerging.

When I announced I would pursue a Master's in English at the University of Alberta, where Rudy Wiebe and Stephen Scobie taught, my mother advised, "That's a big mistake. You will end up marrying a PhD westerner and living in the West." Far from discouraging me, that propelled me to Edmonton.

The June before, a member of our United Church congregation asked me to be a lay minister for the summer in the small, remote, village of Harrington Harbour. What an opportunity, but quite the

challenge. I had never preached or written a sermon, but as the fellow pointed out, "You've attended church every Sunday, so something must have stuck." And I was an accomplished public speaker so that worked in my favour. So did the remote location because I figured I would never run into any of the folks again, and the shortness of the contract meant United Church folk would not have to endure me for long. But in Harrington Harbour people ministered to me. For my part, I intentionally visited every member of the far-flung congregation, thanks to a lobster yacht and fisherman. Harrington Harbour was a life-changing placement and gave me the confidence and courage to step into strange situations.

For my Master's thesis, I chose the London Ontario playwright James Reaney, who espoused community theatre as a way for individuals to play different roles and gain skills useful in many areas of their lives.



Eventually, I became an ESL, literacy, and college-level English instructor. For eight years, in different congregations, I was a lay minister and discovered the joy of that position as well. Once again, I found myself regularly wordsmithing but now I was getting paid.

When we lived on a street where elementary students attended French Immersion classes, I formed a poetry group so the young girls would have practice writing in English. They were a talented group and I created a small booklet titled *Under the Poa Tree* to share and celebrate their creations.

Around that time, I was hired by a private organization to survey then write a report on the Vietnamese Boat People sponsorship experience in Alberta. Responses to the survey were impressive, and I was thrilled to be a catalyst. Many folks were interested in the findings as well as my detailed observations and recommendations, which led to my brief appearance on local television.

My interest in theology attracted me to a Master of Theological Studies programme, and this thesis focused on the Psalms. My love of writing meant that I composed some contemporary prayer poems which eventually made their way into a religious publication. As well, a few years ago, I used some of the material to design an interactive workbook on the Psalms.

Recently, along with a friend and a talented photographer, I designed an informative, visual calendar focused on our local Guelph milieu while imbedding information on Africa and local sculptures. Visuals and words often work to complement each other.

The isolation of the pandemic and an American university's contest invited me to create a one-act play focusing on four dogs. The canines are puzzled by the strange activities of the human's Covid world. I fantasized how much fun it would be to create a YouTube of this funky, off-the-wall production. Meeting a tech wizard meant I could move the project forward. Friends read the script, people in our Village

shared original art, my son sang doggie songs and played the ukulele in the piece that danced joyfully into the light of day.

I am not sure what my next project will be, but if the pattern continues, I am confident it will be fulfilling in unexpected and surprising ways.

* * *

Gratitude, Resistance, and Inspiration

Francine Houston

Thanksgiving is days away, a new moon is just passed, the seasons and leaves are changing, and it has, for most of us, has been one heck of a year—or two! With all of the changes—dealing with redefining, reassessing, releasing that which no longer serves and establishing new patterns of behaviour and calling new processes and new choices into our lives—our love of communication and writing may have been compromised. This has been, for many, the overwhelming pattern of the last year or two, and as we come to the end of this cycle, we realize that we have been being held back or are holding ourselves back from our Best Selves.

The biggest culprit, for many, is one who could be referred to as “Mr. NOT-ENOUGH-A-GUS.” He is the collection of Voices that we hear—sometimes referred to as “monkey chatter”—in those quiet moments when we are alone with our thoughts. He also shows up especially when we start moving into our truest Selves and as we start to create the reality of our Dreams. He is crazy sneaky. He is a Ninja when it comes to tripping us up. He catches us with all the words that we have been working on letting go of and of concepts that we consciously have released.

“Really?!? Do you really think you are good enough to do that?”

“What gives *you* the authority to speak on that subject??”

“Who do you think you are to even think/do/
dream about doing that?”

“You’ll never amount to anything!”

“You’ll get *this* close, and then poof, it will always
disappear.”

Many of these voices are created by sometimes
well intentioned adults and others in our childhood:
teachers, parents, siblings, and the people we choose
as friends. Sometimes, the voices are not so well
intentioned. Some of those individuals use their voices
and their intimate knowledge to break down those
they perceive as strong, or intimidating, or different.

As we get older, even when we are able to shake
those voices off consciously, these deeply rooted
ideas, thoughts, and patterns can haunt us, interfering
in the development of the life and dreams we want to
create. Many of us, with the shifts in patterns brought
about by the current climate have fallen back into
those old cycles. We heal, we sort through all the old
karmic and childhood interference. We move along
tickity boo, and out of left field, BANG, Mr. NOT-
ENOUGH-A-GUS shows up. Words, feelings, and
interference rear up out of nowhere. Worse, we
sometimes subconsciously choose, even with all the
healing we do, people who reflect and mirror the old
ways of being.

We certainly expect those unhealed individuals
from our past who remain in our present to
occasionally bring forward these old messages. This
makes sense, especially if they have not done their
own healing. There are others, though some of the
most heartbreaking for our fragile Inner Selves, are
those who in the past we have chosen, with whom we
have been mutually supportive, and who suddenly go
on the offensive, attacking with the very messages
that they told us were nonsense during the journey of
healing.

The only thing we can do is breathe, let go, and
recognize that they are dealing with their own healing

journeys, to send them off with love and forgiveness
in our hearts, and trust that Divine has a larger Plan.
To stay in grateful and choose to continue on a
Creative’s Path.

Keep moving forward, keep on your personal
healing Path, keep putting one foot in front of the
other and create your Dreams. The right people and
the right timing will always show up.

Do you feel congested? Often sitting in grateful
allows us to hear our Muses, to catch the word
overheard that sparks an idea; the beauty of a tree
changing colour that sparks a new lyric. Grateful focus
can allow us to shift out of the external and internal
stresses that interfere with our Creative Connection.

Take 3 deep breaths, find 3 things to be grateful
for, and listen. Your Writing Way will become clear and
your Voice will sing.

* * *

My Experience with COVID-19

Giorgio Piscitelli

I think that I speak on the behalf of a lot of teens
when I say that this virus has, to say the least,
changed my life in ways that I never thought I
would experience. I’m not really sure whether it has
been for better or for worse, but since the pandemic
started, I’ve definitely done a few things that my 11-
year-old self of the past would probably not approve
of.

I feel like there are a lot of adults who will benefit
by truly knowing how COVID-19 has affected
teenagers. Also, I am grateful to have the opportunity
to use the writing process as a way to reflect on the
ways that this pandemic has changed me as a person.
To serve both purposes, I’m going to have to start at
the beginning.

About two years ago, my life was going pretty well. I was in grade 7 at the time, and we were nearing the last few months of the school year. At this point, COVID-19 had just started to become an issue in Ontario, so all of the schools were going to lock down for a two-week period, to prevent outbreaks in schools. Obviously, all the kids were excited, because it's school, and, let's be serious, who's really going to complain about a two week break from school, right? The break lasted a lot longer than two weeks. If my memory serves me well, I think that we were in online class for the rest of the year. Which, for me, wasn't very enjoyable, to say the least. I still remember the hell that I went through trying to learn integers with my mother, and an online teacher with some questionable teaching methods. So, school ends and summer break passes fairly quickly as well. There's nothing really important to note here, because we were basically in full lockdown for the whole summer break.

This is the point in the pandemic when a lot of important things started happening, so pay attention. At this point in time, I had been playing the piano for eight years, and I was playing at around a grade 7 level. In that summer lockdown, I wasn't really enjoying playing as much as I did before. I wasn't enjoying practicing, or even playing the pieces that took me so long to learn, and I was on the brink of quitting. I was often getting into huge arguments with my mother about how I didn't enjoy it like I used to, and I have to admit it did a number on my mental health at the time. All this combined with the anger and sadness of barely being able to see the few friends I had, was taking a much larger toll on my mental health than I could have anticipated.

In this frame of mind, I started grade 8. I'm back in the classroom, avoiding homework, doing stupid things at lunch, and overall having a good time. Despite the trouble my middle-school antics may have caused me, it was totally worth it. I think that it was so much better than being stuck inside for summer break. But as much fun as it might have been, it was annoying all the same. We had to wear masks all day,

and as much as it really doesn't matter to me now, it was *super* annoying for me back then. The annoyance of the teachers, tedious work, wearing a mask for six hours a day, and all the other school drama was really pointing me towards taking the option to attend virtual school.

Think of all the pros! Not being forced outside in the cold Canadian winters, hot lunches that my mother so kindly made for me during school hours, sleeping in for that extra half an hour, no walking to school, no annoying people and getting away from all the noise. For an introvert like me, virtual school was the perfect option. So, I chose it. Unfortunately, this proved to be a bad decision I realized soon after I started, due to the fact that paying attention has never been easy for me, along with the fact that it was substantially more difficult to pay attention or listen in online class than I thought it would be. Online learning was not a good decision for me. A lot of work was waved off, ignored, or deemed unimportant. Some of my close friends slowly started to drift away from me, since I wasn't able to see them in person anymore, but I didn't start to realize that they were slipping away until it was too late. And then winter rolled around, just as bitter and cold as always. But the start of 2020's winter hit me differently.

Usually, I still had some close friends that I would rely on to get through the winter with me, but at that time, I didn't have anything or anyone that could help me out. So, winter started, and I could tell that it was going to be *way* more than what I was prepared for. It started like all Canadian winters do: cold and bitter. My overall mood and wellbeing started to decrease, just like they always do in the winter. But this winter it was different because I didn't have that many friends to counteract the negativity. I had been finding time almost every day to play the piano, which was the only thing keeping me relatively sane. Long days in front of the computer, spent either sitting in class without paying attention, or skipping classes that I didn't think were necessary took their toll.

As a family, we were very careful not to get the virus. My siblings and I were rarely allowed to go out to see friends, grandparents, or basically do anything with other people. I was isolating myself inside every day and I only went out when I needed to. Then, I guess some things just don't go according to plan because my grandfather (nonno) caught the virus soon after winter started, which made everybody's mood plummet tenfold. My grandfather wasn't among the healthiest people out there. He barely ever went outside, he ate lots of sugar and he smoked cigarettes for a lot of his life, just like many other Italian grandfathers out there. My sister and I were very close to him and my nonna (grandmother) as well, seeing them almost every weekend before COVID-19. This virus stopped us from being able to see them, for longer than my sister or I could imagine. It was hard to handle at first, but I moved on with my life for the next little while, going outside, getting exercise and playing piano.

Throughout my whole life, music has been the one thing I can pour my emotions into. Throughout the time that my nonno was sick, I was playing the piano about twice as much as I normally did, using the piano as something I could pour all my bad emotions into. My progression was pushed forward at a speed that I had never experienced before, but the euphoric experience that I had whenever I finished something that I needed to do was extinguished quickly, because after everything, I always had to remember what I was playing for my nonno. School became significantly less important than my piano, where all the time spent at the bench was finally starting to shine through, and it was great. Throughout my music practice before this point, I always felt like I was being blocked by something. I always felt that I couldn't enjoy the things I was playing enough so that all of the hard work would pay off in the end.

Constantly waiting for news about my grandfather was stressful and the few times that we were able to talk with him on the phone weren't long enough. It would never be long enough. We were reassuring ourselves that he would be all right, but it was hard

realizing that reassurance wasn't always guaranteed in the end. The news of my grandfather's death was brought to light on a weekend while we were visiting my dad who lives in Toronto. I barely had any notice beforehand, just the news from my mom earlier in the week noting that my grandfather was still sick. I was woken up on a Saturday by her, late into the morning and at that point, everything came crashing down. Everything that we did, and everything that I had reassured myself about, had proven to be a lie. He was dead. It was over, and I wasn't able to see him at all for the last few months of his life, and not even before he was gone.

When we were kids, my sister and I (arguably the closest to him in our family) spent so much time together. He used to pick us up after school, bring us to the convenience store, to the Tim Hortons near their house, or anywhere we wanted. My sister and I always used to get the same things: slushies and packs of gum from the convenience store, and sprinkled donuts from the Tim Hortons. Seeing a smile across his face was an amazing feeling and even when we got back home and our nonna ridiculed us for eating too much sugar, it would always end in happiness and laughter.

This past winter ended on a bittersweet note. I had finished the piece I was learning through the long winter months, started when my grandfather was first diagnosed with COVID-19 during the winter of 2021, both physically and mentally. I grew almost a foot in height over the winter. Having experienced isolation and loss for the first time, I felt emotions that I hadn't yet felt in my life and they allowed me to play the piano in a way that I had not been able to before.

Spring started and then spring ended in a daze that doesn't require any explanation. Summer started and I was happy to see it come—the summer before grade 9, the first year of high school. I decided it would be best to take a break from the piano during the summer due to the large amount of work I had put myself through during the winter.

During the summer, a lot of things happened. For one, I did try and get together with my friend that I had lost during the school year, which, to my disappointment, didn't have the outcome I had hoped for. I think I hung out with him for two days, back-to-back, and it was nothing like I remembered it. People change, especially during a pandemic. Due to my limited number of friends, I started hanging out with the wrong people over the summer. It's not like they weren't alright to hang out with, but they weren't meant for me, which I should have realized earlier. But I persisted and did a few questionable things along the way. Fortunately, I came to my senses and it all came together in the end.

Writing this has been a good way for me to reflect on my experiences during the pandemic and also on myself. As a typical teen, sometimes I have a hard time remembering and focusing on things, so sifting through my memories and putting them on paper was a very good way to help me look back and reflect on the ways COVID-19 has changed me and my life. The pandemic is still going, but now that I'm vaccinated, things are starting to get back to normal, somewhat. During the pandemic, I've lost a grandfather, become an accomplished piano player, lost a few friends I used to hang out with, and started high school. It's really interesting, being able to look back to when the pandemic started and to see how far I've come. I've changed immensely, both inside and out.

Well, that basically sums up my whole COVID-19 experience. There have been highs and lows, a few bad decisions and more than a few tears along the way. But don't read this and think about me. Think about all the other teenagers that had to go through the exact same things as me. There is probably a teenager just like me who has gone through the same, or at least similar, experiences reading this right now. This pandemic has given us all different experiences, but it has also changed us all—whether those changes are for better or for worse, I don't know.

* * *

An Early Morning Walk Peggy Dietrich

Closing the door on a slumbering house
Where moments ago warm quilts held me fast,
As dawn's early glow gently beckons my name,
I eagerly greet the crisp daybreak at last
....and God caresses my soul.

Under melon-kissed clouds,
as the sun's peeking through,
The winding park path invites me once more.
The whispering wind serenades a new song,
Making leaves dance as oft done before
....and God caresses my soul.

The path hugs a lake where ripples abound,
Reflecting the hues of a now glowing sky,
While a cluster of ducks share the morning anew
And, gabbling, send salutations on high
....and God caresses my soul.



A heron strolls gracefully, skirting tall reeds,
Where the soft morning mist
cloaks the lake's quaggy shore.
A sleepy-eyed doe is nudged by her fawn
As I hushedly pass on the park's earthy floor
....and God caresses my soul.

Each step is a prayer, each sound is a hymn,
Each encounter embraces my heart.
The glorious breeze once more kisses my cheek,
As if knowing that we'll soon be apart
....and God caresses my soul.

* * *

Feeling Empty Sandra Wilson

Raphael is a 13-year-old friend of mine. He attended a book workshop and helped create *Sensitive Sea Lion* so he is familiar with the *Emotional Animal Alphabet* series of books. Last year, when his guinea pig died, he asked me why I didn't have a book to help him with his emotion of grief. I met up with him so we could chat about how he was feeling, and he inspired the book *The Empty Cage*, a book about loss of a pet. He even drew a front cover for me. In fact, his question about books about grief inspired the whole *Feeling Empty* series.

The *Feeling Empty* series is meant to get the conversation started with kids about grief and loss. Each book represents a specific type of loss, but the story and questions within each book can connect to all aspects of grief. In *The Empty Cage*, the main character experiences the loss of his hamster, but his family all share with him their stories of a lost pet which covers dog, cat and bird as well. Losing a pet can be just as devastating as losing a family member because grief is about the loss of a relationship, and often the relationship between child and pet is stronger than one with a person that they may not see regularly.

The Empty Rocking Chair is a book about the loss of a grandparent. For the main character, their grandmother was an important and regular person in their life and so her death hit hard. The character displays a variety of emotions which is a good representation of grief and can show the reader that those feelings are normal. Six-year-old Madison drew the front cover in honour of her grandfather who died one year ago.

The Empty Swing is a book about the loss of a friend. I wish I had this book available to my nephew years ago when he lost his friend at the age of nine. But, now as an adult, he was able to share some of his feelings and experiences with Seth's death and

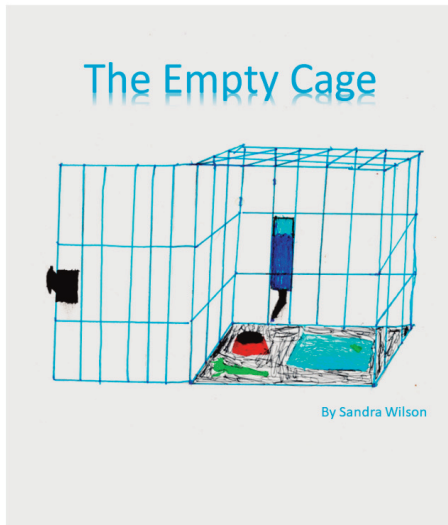
inspired a touching story about a character faced with the same situation. 13-year-old Gracie drew the front cover in honour of her friend Ryan, who died from cancer when they were just 7.

The Empty Crib is a little different from the other books as it doesn't include questions for the reader. It has a young character trying to understand why her baby sister isn't coming home from the hospital. Infant loss is a tough subject and for this book I consulted with a bereavement doula who had experienced this devastating loss herself. Our goal was to create a story that a young sibling could relate to and help them understand the situation. 12-year-old Amanda drew the front cover in honour of the siblings that she lost through infant death.

The Empty Heart is the last book in the series, and I wanted to use it to sum up some of the ideas of dealing with grief. I had read about grief camps that children can go to and be surrounded by other kids who have also faced a loss, counsellors to help them work through their feelings and activities to prove to them that they can make it through this difficult time in their lives. This book brings in some of the kids that inspired the other books, like my nephew Lucas and young Madison and the cover artist 7-year-old Paisley whose father died when she was 5. It focuses on the idea that although each loss is specific (father, friend, grandfather), the feelings of grief can be very similar, but together they could support each other and gain an understanding that they are not alone.

This wasn't an easy series to research or to write, but I felt that it was important. They will probably not be bestsellers, but they will make a difference in the life of a child. They will help start a conversation, aid in understanding and let children know that what they feel is part of the natural experience of grief and they will be okay.

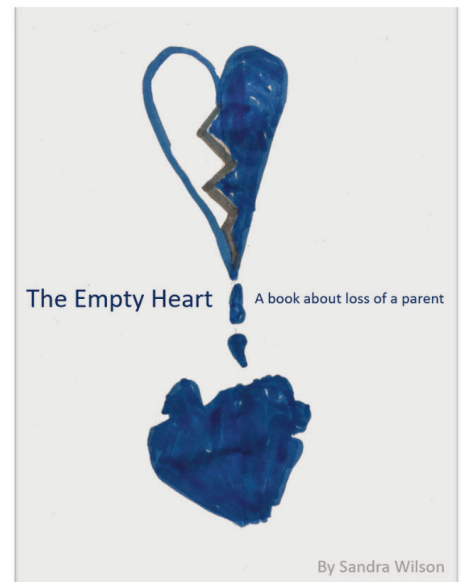
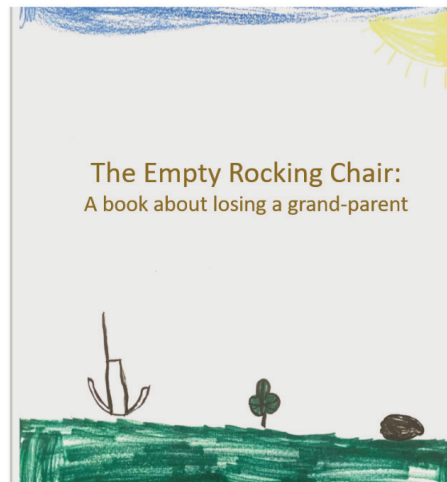
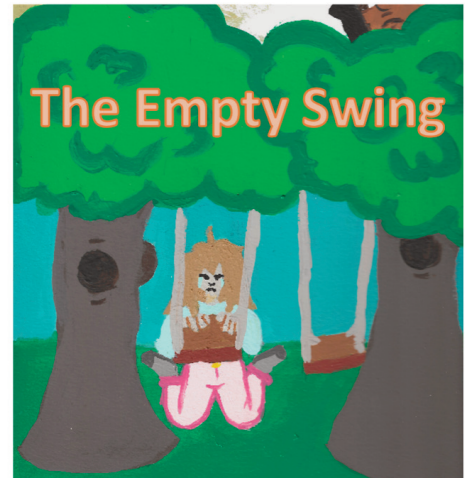
These books can be purchased individually through Amazon, or contact Author Sandra Wilson through her website www.quiteacharacter.ca to find out how you can get the whole set.



Feeling Empty

**A NEW BOOK
SERIES FOR KIDS
ABOUT LOSS AND
GRIEF**

QUITEACHARACTER.CA



**Remembering my Helen
(Life in the Rear-View Mirror)
*Bill Brubacher***

Driving through the neighbourhood of the past...

Turning the busy corner onto Speedvale Avenue in Guelph, I suddenly found myself driving through the same neighbourhood, once the home of the young woman I was in love with and hoping to marry at the time, some 50 years ago.

Though today, I was driving to her funeral. My heart and mind were awash with bittersweet memories of the halcyon days of the past, mixed with the feelings of sorrow and loss of the present.

It seemed like only yesterday, when my heart was beating nearly out of my chest in anticipation of seeing her. My life was a madness of crazy emotions almost beyond my control. I was in a time warp only one in love can understand though not really, because nobody really understands love. At best, one can only be held in the mystical spell of its eternal tides and unforeseen under-currents.

And I recall that long ago unforgettable dark night in the dead of a winter storm so blinding that behind the wheel of my royal red Cougar sports car (another love of mine at the time), I lost sight of the drifting road that kept disappearing in front of my snow-driven head lights, and we ended up in the cold embrace of a farmer's field, seemingly shifting in the fragments of the shadowy moonlight, my car stalled and nearly buried in snow.

Only one of the many memories that knits a young couple together in romantic love without suspecting the more devastating storms that lie ahead of them that will forge a very different and difficult icy ending.

Then in the blink of an eye, it was 20 years later, when my lovely wife, now stricken with MS and in deep depression, could no longer withstand sharing me with a business I was so desperately trying to salvage from bankruptcy, telling me she couldn't remain married to a man who was married to his business.

We separated shortly thereafter, then ten long years later divorced. Meanwhile, my business went through a receivership and to everyone's amazement survived as one of less than 1% of over 37,000 Canadian bankruptcies in that year. It took ten years of endless gut-wrenching work and struggle to rebuild it into a six figure profitable business I was able to sell—or should I say had to sell—because by then, I was personally burned out.



Neither my former wife nor I had remarried in the interim, though I had an 'LAT' partner (in Dutch meaning, "living alone together") where my partner had her own apartment and I mine, and we would come together every weekend when I wasn't traveling North America or Europe on business as a national and international publisher and record producer.

Some years after our divorce, my former wife's MS condition worsened, making it impossible for her to live on her own. She was now in a wheelchair, and moved into a long-term care home where her needs could be properly looked after.

We kept in touch and in those final years we fortunately rekindled a warm though distant friendship, staying in touch through email, telephone and periodic visits. We reminisced and relived through photographs the vacations we had taken when we were young. We developed a closer more understanding, appreciative and forgiving relationship than we had ever had previously and the time we shared was precious.

Then the late night telephone call from a mutual friend telling me she had passed, and a cold shudder ran through my body—like a light had been turned off—and only a darkness remained. My life changed. There was a hole in my heart where there was once a living person. A prior connection of 20 years of marriage and memories, of youth and dreams—both good and bad—of life and now death.... All had suddenly come to an abrupt end. I cried, for what had been and for what might have been that never had the chance, and for all of the unanswered questions of life in between. I cried over life....and what it was all about that it would hold such love and sorrow between its invisible lines.

I wondered how many others lives take similar paths each with their own stories, and all arriving at the same conclusion that, eventually, all things come to an end.

The day was grey driving down Speedvale Avenue with the usual traffic and people of all ages, going their separate busy ways, unaware of that empty wheelchair sitting in the corner of a room once occupied with the woman whose funeral I was on my way to attend—a woman who had once been my wife.

And as I drove, I found myself in two worlds simultaneously: one, still driving over to pick her up in joyful anticipation of the happiness of sharing a long and happy life together, and the other, on a wet dreary day driving to her funeral, my heart broken and aching over a past that couldn't be changed.

It was a small and simple ceremony in a common funeral parlour with a few friends and family, and because of Covid 19, safely socially distanced.

I sat alone in the middle of a wide wooden pew close to the front, where I could see her picture looking over the urn holding her ashes—as though from a great distance—from a different time and place unattached to the present. Happy and full of life. And I thought, surprised if she knew then, what she'd be looking out at today. Such is life—all appearances! Makes me wonder, where is the true reality? In the past, present or future, because sometimes they all intersect and maybe its best we don't know.

I looked into those formerly pretty eyes full of sparkling life, as though they were looking back at me—sadly, wondering if things could have been different, if we had only known, something, anything, that could have possibly changed the outcome. But of course, there were no such answers, and we had to take the different paths we were on at the time.... leading to what our lives would later become.

It was too much for me and I had to look away, sadness flooding my body.

Later, we gathered at the solitary cemetery in the country, that you would drive by without even noticing, a small group of us standing under the black umbrellas in the rain, bearing witness through tears

as her urn was gently placed to rest in the small hole set aside for her—lovingly dug in the ground. It was the kind of scene no one attending such a service ever forgets.

Death is always in the midst of life, invisible to most on any given day except to those it has touched, of course. And it's up to each of us to put our own meaning to that inescapable inevitability. Good to think about it once in a while though just in case we might wish to make an effort to change an outcome in someone's life while we still can—if only our own.

Driving back along Speedvale, there was a glorious break in the sky where the sun had broken through, and I felt a strange overwhelming comfort knowing that she was now finally free to walk and run and dance, and shine, and fly with the angels....

It had been a long while... since she had experienced such rapturous freedom!

* * *

A Return to Innocence ***Marilyn Elphick***

August 21, 2021

Is there anything more gratifying than hanging wet laundry on a clothesline? Today happens to be the perfect day, breezy and sunny. It's early Saturday morning when normally I would be rushing around to get ready for weekend guests. However, due to a rescheduling of the visit from my aunt and uncle, the whole weekend stretches out like a blank slate. I decided to start with the chores so I could see how the rest of the day would unfold. I absolutely detested hanging out the clothes when I was younger. I don't remember why I hated it. Was it because there was so much of it? Was it because it almost always came at a time when I was doing something else? Maybe it was hauling the heavy basket up from the basement. It might have been wondering what horrors I would

find in the pockets of my younger brother's pants like rocks or worse a dead frog once. My mother didn't always empty the boys' pockets and I can't say I blamed her after the frog incident. Poor frog met his end in the watery grave of the washing machine. Probable cause of death: drowning during the spin cycle.

Here it is August 21, 2021, in Fergus where there is an unmistakable hint of autumn in the air. I have even seen some changing leaves on the ground. Unlike my younger self, I couldn't wait to hang out sheets and linens on the clothesline. Later I would be rewarded with the fresh scent of the outdoors. It is quiet this morning. The birds chattered "TeeDee, TeeDee" to each other before swooping down to hunt for errant worms or food for their growing families. I haven't noticed much of anything lately because all I can manage is trying to hang on tight to what's left of my battered sanity.

Six and a half almost seven months ago, my father died of cancer at the age of ninety-five. We have always been close. I had the privilege of caring for him in the last seven or so weeks of his life. He was a very private man and yet he allowed me to do everything for him. My nursing background really was put to the test some days. My mom has dementia, but she certainly knew what was going on. After Dad's death, it became clear that Mom could not live alone. I made countless phone calls and got some agencies help in place, but I worried constantly about her. Eventually she was placed in a Long-Term Care facility in Arthur. There was so much to take care of including clearing out the apartment they had shared for over thirty years. Unfortunately, due to a falling out with my brother the POA, I was pretty much left to clear out the apartment on my own. God sent angels in the form of Mom's cousins and their children to help. Otherwise, I think I would still be clearing out their place.

As I sorted, gave away and donated, I was lost in the world of memories. Every item that I had to part with felt like a searing pain. There was no time to sift

through things respectfully. I took some of the more precious items to my house to go through later. There were pages and pages of my dad's recipes methodically recorded in his neat handwriting or typed. They were not going to be thrown out. After the job was done, I took all the recipes to London so my aunt, his youngest sister, could help me store all the recipes safely.

I cannot begin to describe how much emotional energy, tears, rage, and anger occupied every waking moment. There were too many sleepless nights when I was plagued by disturbing dreams and endless lists of what needed to be done. There were days when I called my doctor and told her I was having a breakdown. She has been through so much with me. Her compassion, professionalism and sage advice helped me through this darkness. I don't know how I managed to work two days a week as a chaplain in LTC. Having gone through similar situations with my residents did not help me to deal with my own situation. Every story told to me by my residents broke my heart. I keenly understood their pain. Their pain forced me to look at my own pain. I felt like I was being consumed, chewed, and spit out by life. There was no relief from the disturbing chaos that loomed over me like a great black shadow of despair.

I struggled to make sense of the estrangement from my family. As a Christian, I asked myself, "How can you minister to others when you are harbouring such anger and resentment to others?" I was able to seek help from good friends and some family members. I tried to work through spiritual issues through Theological Reflection and spiritual direction. I sought to restore my lacking spiritual reserves through seeking out help when needed. A writer's worst punishment is not being able to write. I had to keep reminding myself that killing my creativity was a certain descent into the depths of desolation. I was reminded that there was no way around pain except through it. The French translation for 'ressentiment' (resentment) is to 're-feel'. I had to put aside everything including toxic relationships to be able to feel again.

Like a tabula rasa, a blank slate, I started to slowly come to life again.

It became painfully obvious that the world, especially my world, was engaged in spiritual warfare. People might be skeptical or think that it is a non-sensical idea but believe me, it is a fact. Ephesians 6:10-20 describes spiritual warfare like this:

Ephesians 6:10-20

New Revised Standard Version

The Whole Armour of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our [a] struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole Armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, [b] take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, [c] ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

In essence, spiritual warfare involves the insidious battle between truth and deception. Evil takes the form of a deceiver that confuses, challenges the notion of self, confidence, strength, faith, and spirituality. Most people are familiar with the story of Job and his endless trials and tribulations which

should have him cursing God, but it never happens. The book of Job is part of the Bible's wisdom literature. No, it didn't really happen. It was written to illustrate the protection of God. One of the verses that really spoke to me was from Job :7-1-6.

Job 7:1-6 NRSV

Job: My Suffering Is without End

¹ "Do not human beings have a hard service on earth, and are not their days like the days of a labourer? ² Like a slave who longs for the shadow, and like labourers who look for their wages, ³ so I am allotted months of emptiness, and nights of misery are apportioned to me. ⁴ When I lie down I say, 'When shall I rise?' But the night is long, and I am full of tossing until dawn. ⁵ My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt; my skin hardens, then breaks out again. ⁶ My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and come to their end without hope.

Is there anything worse than experiencing hopelessness or not seeing a way out of the darkness? This is deception at its finest—instilling hopelessness. I felt suffocated by the isolating alienation. Then one day, mystically, magically, I stopped struggling. I gave up worrying about everyone else; their motives, consciences, shortcomings, mental issues but mostly the degree their toxicity, was affecting my life. I came to these realizations:

- I need to care for myself first, and my mother who is vulnerable.
- I need to spend as much time with my mother as she approaches the end of her life. This is time I will never get back.
- I need to eliminate all familial toxic relationships in my life.
- I need to painfully realize that some relationships are irreparable.
- Reconciliation is a two-way street.
- **I have a right and a responsibility to be happy.**
- **I have earned that right.**

Some days, I allow the sadness to co-exist alongside my thoughts. I allow those transient moments to exist but not to consume, overwhelm or ruin my day. In essence, feelings of sadness are just that, feelings. They have a right to exist along any other feelings without judgement. I seek to take pleasure in those activities with friends and colleagues that bring me life instead of those that drag me into the gutters of self-pity or self-chastisement without so much as a second thought for my health and wellbeing.

I am only a temporary inhabitant on this earth for a short time. Therefore, I have decided to enjoy every moment no matter what the moment looks like. I have come to love and understand the meaning of abundance which evokes images of excess. Perhaps it's excesses which lead to successes because it is in self-giving that one can taste all that life has to offer: bitter, sweet, salty, or spicy.

* * *

Valiant Hummingbird

***freely adapted by Honey Novick,
from a story as told by Wangari Maathai***

In a land far away, in a time not so long ago, trees, animals, people lived peacefully side by side.

One night, or maybe it was day, thunder boomed and lightning flashed. One little spark flew onto a dry tree branch and grew into a fire. The flame then became an inferno. Tree, frond, grass, straw, wood, flowers, everything was lapped up by the tongue of the fire. The animals smelled smoke and started to run. They ran fast, and as far away from the heat as they could. At the edge of the jungle/forest they turned—all of them—and stopped.

The lions, elephants, monkeys and lemurs, and all the other animal families, just stopped, and stared at the flames engulfing their homes. They stared and did nothing.

However, the little hummingbird fretted and flitted, and finally decided to fly to the nearest brook. Taking a sip of water, the bird flew once more, gathering a sip of water in its long beak, then flew closer to the flames. The hummingbird let that little drop of water fall onto the flames.

All the other animals watching started to laugh, mocking the efforts of the tiny little bird with the long beak.

"What good will one drop do?" cried the animals.

"Well," thought the hummingbird, "the elephant could easily fill its large trunk with water and hose the water onto the flames, but the elephant did nothing, just watched and waited and stared and stayed put!"

"Well," said the hummingbird, "I'm doing the best I can, with or without a plan, flying with the wind in my wing. I can't flit around and do nothing. I have to take a stand and do something!"

Shamed by the hummingbird's spirit of determination, the elephant went to the brook and filled its trunk with water. Then the elephant ambled towards the flames, trying to douse the fire.

The others, likewise, were inspired to do something. Thus, they began to help. Some kicked dirt at the fire. Others brought drops of water.

When the conflagration was over, the jungle/forest was burnt to the ground. Again the hummingbird and the others did their part. Seed by seed they replanted the earth. Some birds dropped seeds from their beaks. Some animals ate what little foliage they could find and spit out the seeds. Some animals foraged for seeds and carried them in their mouth or on their skin or between their toes and replanted the burnt out jungle/forest.

They worked tirelessly, companionably and with determination until a whole world of cooperation was planted anew.

SUPPORT AN INDIGENOUS CANADIAN AUTHOR

EMILY ANNE BRANT



Emily is woman on a mission to help as many souls as possible remember who they really are and what they came here to do! Her passion is to watch the ripple effect that takes place when beautiful souls ignite their inner light and let it all the way out!

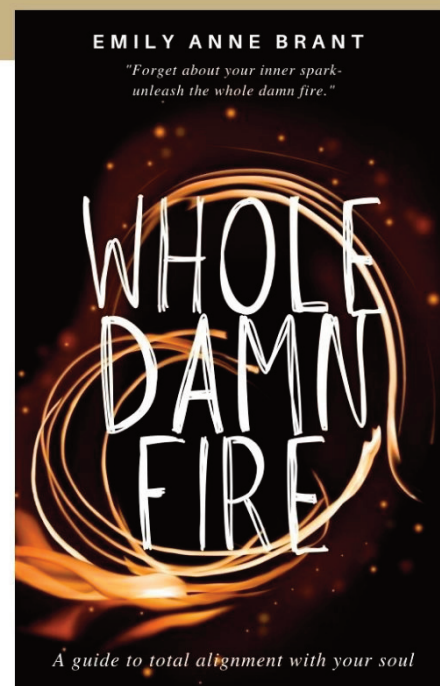
In her debut book, *Whole Damn Fire*, she is sharing a **brand new way of manifesting** and how to find **total alignment with your soul**.

Although Emily is certified in NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) & EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique), it is really her life experiences that make her the impactful speaker and mentor she is today.

These experiences include being born into physical adversities (clubbed feet, beals syndrome and scoliosis) and a near death experience at age 14. Emily also grew up in an Indigenous community and experienced racism and marginalization. She has overcome body shame and insecurity. Most recently and perhaps most profoundly, Emily has gone through **massive spiritual lessons** and growth that are all shared in her book, **Whole Damn Fire!**

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The Gift of Gardens (Part 2)

Joan Almond

“Sam,” I said, answering my cell phone, “where are you?”

“At a lookout on Highway 12,” Sam told me. “I’m on my way to Thunder Bay.”

I recalled that frigid January day in the winter of 2020, when I’d first met Sam. I’d interviewed the aspiring author for a piece I was working on, calling the article *The Gift of Gardens (Part One)*. By May, Lisa Browning had published the story in her magazine, *One Thousand Trees*.

I paused, looking out my window at the concrete sidewalk.

“Miff,” Sam said, “are you there?”

“I’m here,” I told my friend. “What are looking at?”

“Nothing much,” Sam said, laughing into the phone.

My text notification sounded. Swiping upwards on my iPhone, I moved into messages.

“OMG!” I said. “Is that Lake Superior?”



Beyond the twisted evergreens of Northern Ontario; the altitude of the lookout revealed the vastness of the Lake.

Sam laughed again.

“Wait, is that your Kona?” I asked. “I hope you have the emergency brake on!”

Sam’s white, mid-size SUV, packed to capacity, sat parked at the edge of a cliff. The drop-off by the car’s front bumper, straight down.

Sam laughed louder than before.

“Sam, it’s so great to hear your voice!” I told her.

Looking at the scenery of Northern Ontario, I turned my head for a moment. Catching a glimpse of the concrete sidewalk outside my office window, I went back to the photograph on my phone.

I wished I was with her.

“Do you remember when I interviewed you in 2020?” I asked my friend.

The phone went silent for a moment.

“Like it was yesterday,” Sam said.

She paused.

“Do you remember my dream?” Sam asked me.

“I won’t be moving ten minutes too early, or ten minutes too late,” I said. “Is that the one?”

A siren blared in the distance.

“I love a man who pays attention,” Sam said.

An awkward silence echoed across the airwaves.

"Love? Had Sam used the word love?" I asked myself.

We stopped.

"I love it when a friend remembers something that's important," Sam said, backing up from the words she'd spoken moments before.

I looked across my desk, piled with unopened files.

"Was our relationship more than either of us knew?" I wondered.

Staring at my unfinished manuscript, I sat in silence.

"Nah, we're friends, that's it," I said to myself.

"I have to go in a minute," Sam told me. "I still have another six hours to drive."

"What's it like?" I asked, bringing myself back to the present. "The driving, I mean."

"Steep!" Sam told me. "Interesting..."

"And what's interesting about it?" I asked. "Besides, that you've sold everything you own, to travel 6,000 kilometres, to another province. Not to mention your adventure takes place in the middle of a global pandemic."

Sam paused.

"Hey, I've had both my shots!" she said.

"The moose will be happy about that," I told her.

Sam groaned.

Wanting to say more, I twisted a paperclip in half.

"What is it that's interesting?" I asked again.

"Only one truck driver has honked at me," Sam told me. "It was just a little honk. He missed the sign that said to share the road with little white Kona's; I'm sure of it!"

This time, it was my turn to laugh.

I paused, looking at the dark clouds, casting a shadow on the concrete sidewalk.

"Be careful, Sam!" I said, in a more serious tone.

"I wasn't planning on being anything else," my friend told me.

I paused.

"I mean it!" I said, surprising myself. "I want you to promise me you'll be careful."

Sam stopped. The airwaves went silent once again.

"Of course," was all she said.

She paused.

"Please, don't worry Miff," she said. "My family is driving me crazy with their worry."

I stepped back from the conversation, recalling what it was like for Sam. She was the youngest in a big family. I remembered how it felt for her to have others question her dreams.

"You're right!" I told her.

I paused, digging deep for the words I wanted to say.

"You've got this Sam," I said. "I believe in you!"

One last time, the airways went silent.

"Miff," she said. "I have to go!"

I paused.

“Had I said too much?” I asked myself.

This was Sam’s adventure, not mine. I knew how important it was to Sam to travel this road alone. Others had challenged her about details that weren’t in place. Sam instead had trusted her dreams, trusted herself; it hadn’t been an easy path.

I looked for something light to end our call.

“Can I expect your call from some other mountain-top?” I asked. “I mean, if you can manage to get a connection.”

Sam laughed as she hung up the phone, leaving me hoping she’d call again.

I looked out at a robin, hopping along the concrete sidewalk.

Sitting back in my torn leather chair, I recalled *The Gift of Gardens*.

All those months ago, the gardens had gone dark for Sam. Then the long and narrow road of COVID had brought its gifts.

Now, the HIGHWAY of LIFE had opened its arms to Sam. Sam had said yes and so the RIDE had begun!

“Talk to you soon, Sam,” I said to myself. “Talk to you soon!”

* * *

End to End on the Bruce Trail *Clay Williams*

In early June 2021, my good friend Debbie and I decided that we would hike the full length of the Bruce Trail, all 900+ km, by doing day hikes on weekends throughout the coming year. I first met

Debbie in 2016 when I pace-ran for her during her first 100 mile race. Since then she has been a support runner for me in the *Canal Pursuit for Mental Health* as well as spending a lot of time with me during my 200 mile run in October 2020. She is a mountain climber and has reached the summits of the highest peaks on six continents, including Denali in Alaska in June of this year. We have been doing weighted-pack hikes together for the past two years, and we thought it would be a good thing to set a large goal like the Bruce Trail to keep us motivated to train and stay in shape.



Day 1: July 17-18, 2021

We started at 8:30 am in Tobermory with the goal of finishing the day’s hike in Lion’s head, a distance of 82 km. Since we had both run long multi-day races, we were confident (overconfident) that we would take 18-20 hours to hike this section. Those 18-20 hours turned into 23:15.

Debbie lives in Cambridge and I live in Elmira, so we drove up separately and met in Lion’s Head around 7:30 am. We left her car in Lion’s Head and drove up to Tobermory in my car. The place that I had planned to park, on advice from the Harbourmaster, was private property, so we couldn’t park there

overnight. All of the other parking spots we found would not allow us to park overnight. So I called the Harbourmaster's office to see if there was anywhere that I could leave the car, and eventually found a spot on the street near the ferry terminal. When we had parked and got ready for the hike, Debbie realized that she had forgotten her trekking poles in her car in Lion's Head. In the first few kilometres of the hike we picked up some wooden sticks to use as poles. They were a little helpful, but ended up giving her blistered hands.

The first half of the distance was almost all on rough trails with very few roads, with lots and lots of up and down and crazy rough terrain. Like, ankle- and leg-breaking rocks, cracks and slopes. I thought we would have plenty of time, so I packed plenty of food, a stove and firewood, pots, utensils and bowls, but as the hike progressed we realized how slow we were and there was just no time to stop and make a fire to cook. Throughout the day we saw three snakes. At least one was just a garter snake; I don't think any of them were Massassauga Rattlers.

By the time we got close to halfway we realized that it was going to be a REALLY long day. There was no rain, it was really warm during the day, and we had brought what we thought was too much water. My thinking was that I have to find a balance between the "expense" in energy of carrying too much water, and the risk of carrying too little water. We ran out when we were halfway to Lion's Head. I knew I was getting low so I wasn't drinking as much as I should. I became so dehydrated that I started cramping and had to stop several times to take in some electrolytes and most of my remaining water.

By that time we were on a section that was a country road, so we started looking for any signs of life at homes that we passed in order to beg for water. We saw a house with a horse in the side yard, and as we were passing the driveway I saw someone moving outside. I immediately started walking up the driveway to talk to the people we saw. A man in a power wheelchair and a woman were moving some things

across the yard as we approached. I had spent some time in the southern U.S. on a cross country relay run, and was "passive aggressive" threatened a couple of times with phrases like: "Some people around here would shoot trespassers first and ask questions later," so I did my best to appear needy and unthreatening.

It wasn't necessary. The homeowners were very friendly. They had seen thousands of Bruce Trail hikers over the years, and have given out water many times. We chatted for a while, and while the lady was filling our water bottles we took the opportunity to eat some food. We were told that the trail to Lion's Head was not going to be any easier than the trail we had just hiked, and that right after dark the mosquitoes would be pretty bad.

We continued on, and sure enough as soon as it was twilight the mosquitoes came out hungry. We were in the cover of the trees most of the time so there was no breeze to keep them away. Through the rest of the night we applied insect repellent four times.



Later in the night, inchworms started descending from the trees. As we were walking with headlamps, we were very focused on our footing. But every once in a while I would lift my head to look further forward, and I would see dozens of little threads hanging straight down and glinting in the LED light, with an inchworm at the end of each thread. It was like a horror movie; there was no escaping the inchworms. You know that feeling of walking through a spider web, feeling something across your nose and onto your ear, or in your mouth. I spent four hours clawing at the webs that were trailing behind my head, and brushing inchworms off my arms and legs.

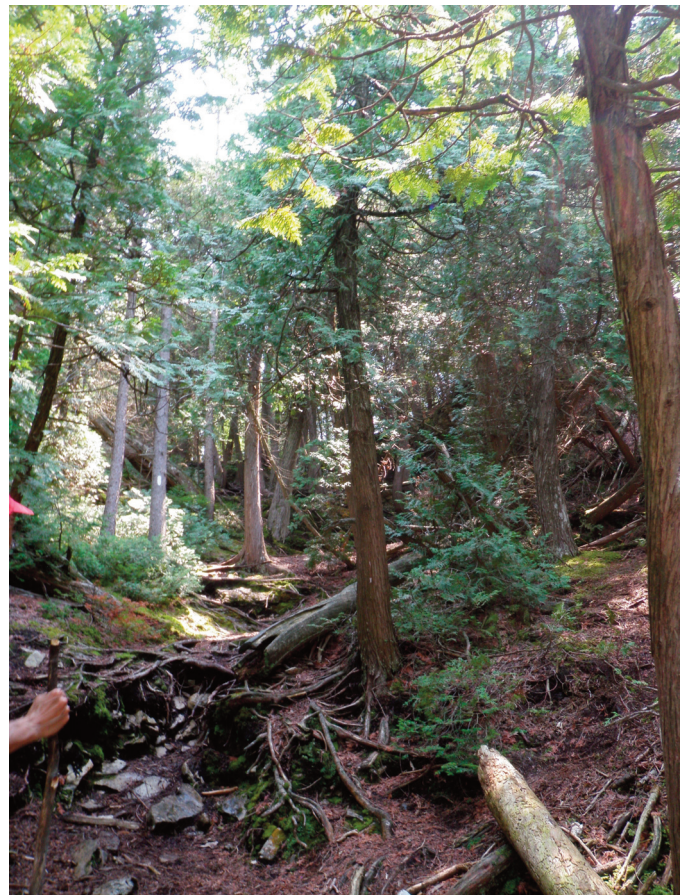
Around midnight we were so tired that we tried to take a nap. We were right at the edge of the escarpment, I think it was somewhere near Cape Chin. We both took off our packs and leaned against them and nodded off. It was only a few minutes of fitful sleep; I was worried about rolling over and falling off the cliff. Three or four hours later, exhausted again, we came across a house that was right on the trail. It looked like it was abandoned so we walked up onto the wooden deck and tried the door but it was locked. With our hopes of a sheltered resting place dashed, we lay down on the deck and had a nap. There was a light breeze that was blowing between the deck boards and I woke up shivering again. We had something to eat and drink and headed out again, knowing we still had a few hours to go. We just felt exhausted, but we also knew that the only way to get to our car was to walk.

The second half of the hike had only slightly less rough terrain than the first half, but there seemed to be a lot more loose rocks making the footing treacherous, especially in the dark. I was nauseous for most of the second half but ate and drank anyway, just not as much as I needed and I was very depleted near the end.

When we knew we were only a few kilometres from the end, I looked at my GPS and saw a road that was really close to the trail. We wanted to take the road as a shortcut, but when we got to the place

where we could see the road, we saw that it was at the bottom of a cliff, and we were at the top. Discouraged, we continued on the rough trail. We finally made it to the last 5 kilometres that I had thought was only on a road. I was so relieved that we wouldn't have to climb up any more slopes or over any more rocks. But the last 400m is a rocky trail that goes up a slope and a flight of steep stairs. It was like The Bruce was taunting us, showing us who's boss. By the end of the hike I had blisters on my hands from holding the trekking poles so tight and leaning so hard on them. I slipped and fell twice. Debbie fell three times, rolling over on the same ankle all three times.

The Bruce Trail demands our respect, and has shown us why.



* * *

Unseen
Rebecca Olayinka

I am a black woman. I don't know where I belong.
I was born in the UK, yet I still get asked,
"No, where are you really from?"

I go to places that are set up for white faces,
My face is not typical. It is not widely accepted.
I'm black and a woman.

This is more than enough to be rejected.
I stand out like a sore thumb.
I get curious looks and side eyes,
If their faces could talk, they would say,
"What are you doing here? You do not belong."

I feel anxious,
Yet you will never tell,
I have mastered a poker face,
I am composed.

Suddenly someone comes up from behind me,
Before I can react,
a sly hand reaches out and touches my hair
"Your hair is lovely!" she says.
"Don't you touch my hair!!" I say.

The woman is shocked,
like she doesn't understand consent.
"I...I I'm sorry," she stammers,
and her cheeks flush pink.

I am embarrassed too,
yet the noticeable pink in my cheeks is not visible
My skin is darker and does not betray my truth

I walk away silently,
What else can I say?
Yet there is a sad echo in my footsteps,
Here we go again.

There is no one to tell
and no one around who would care.

It's not the first time and it may not be the last,
I am left with silent whispers of a voice
that only I can hear:
"You don't belong here,
Your skin is black,
You're only an attraction,
You'd better go back."

Back where, I wonder?
There is nowhere to go,
Yet living in the UK does not feel like a home.

* * *

Writing, A Learned Retreat
Sandy Bassie

The morning of October 5th - I have the day off
work and time to reflect. I pulled out notes from
September 21st, also a Tuesday, looking back at
a writing retreat I'd just experienced.

This weekend was the perfect rest and discovery
within the perfect storm of my year. Nerves already
frayed by months managing emotions of angry
shoppers left me desperate to get away through
closed borders. My partner teaching in a northern
community in Quebec and lost suddenly to an
accident barely a month before he was to come home.
I spent the summer in a writer's solace, pouring tears
and heart onto page upon soggy page. For three
months it dominated my writing. Everything was
about love and loss and longing for different
outcomes. Release of sorts, but not rest. I needed
time away. That's what I brought with me to the
retreat; a churning pain looking for resolution and a
sheaf of poems honouring the mourning I still needed
to do.

Writers are wonderful, deep-hearted people. The
group I joined this weekend welcomed me, trauma
and all. In fact, I found it was a topic I shared with
others who brought books, essays, poems. Not one
person judged me for the emotions I still carried.

I was afraid of that; knew this retreat would bring me very close to elements of my grief. Our speaker was indigenous. My partner away teaching at a Cree school. The place taught whitewater paddling; what he was doing when he died. I was afraid how I would respond, whether going was wise. I struggled to decide, but held to my trust in universe or creator for moments like this, where opportunity leans in too close for comfort in the places shaken. I trust those moments. And so I went.

I look back through my notes, the poems I took to read, writing exercises we shared. Fireside readings, getting to know each other over meals and walks taken. Encouragement and reassurances given during times I did cry. I was not the only one. We bring our lives, our hopes, and the places we risk when gathering with other writers. I heard shared stories in the various poems and stories we brought to read. I found shared experience in many of our journeys. So much of what we do as writers is risk. We sit alone for hours and days to write, eventually letting our words be seen and heard. Knowing we risk ourselves as we do. We all went feeling vulnerable. As writers, that is what we do.

Adelle leads with this in mind. I could tell her my life, the stress, the tears. I could go knowing it would challenge me. The group would be other women who needed opportunities to share in a safe place as well. I could step back and rest where needed and push myself to share as much as I dared. The challenge was mine. She provided opportunity, experience, enrichment; gave balance for mind, body and emotions.

The words and encouragement received over the weekend have me thinking of where my writing holds strength and places to grow. I've written a few new pieces (poem and essay) since returning home, and see myself looking with new eyes, trusting my flow and the instincts that will take me back through for a second look. I write from a place of vulnerability and am learning to trust the process more each year that I write. The people and place were a big part of that

this year. I'm glad to hear Adelle has booked The Write Retreat at the same place, The Madawaska Kanu Centre, for next year. I think by then I will be ready to revisit it in my personal and writing journeys. I am glad I took the risk.

* * *

My Father's Last Gift **Catherine Chavez**

My father's health had been steadily declining for the past several years. He had pulmonary fibrosis and the prognosis was that it would progressively get worse, fatally worse. During that time, there was not much talk about what that meant, but Dad knew it. I knew it. My whole family knew it. However, no one really can prepare themselves for the fact one day, we will all have to say goodbye.

Honestly, I do not remember much about the telephone call on April 24, 2021. I know my husband spoke to my sister-in-law, and she said Dad had passed away. He was transported by ambulance, and they believed he expired on the way. He was pronounced dead at the hospital. She said my brother was with my mom in the emergency room, both struggling to cope with the weight and enormity of what all of it meant. My husband held me. I cried. At some point my house filled with my stepchildren, the grandkids, and my mother-in-law. Someone ordered pizza. There were calls between my brother and I; my daughter and I; my mother and me. I had to make work plans. The news seemed to spread like a wildfire throughout my circle and as people learned of Dad's death, they reached out...calls, texts, flowers, food. I was grateful for the busy activity that surrounded me. It kept me from falling into a deep abyss of sadness.

The funeral would be held in about three weeks. Dad was cremated. My husband packed the car, and we made the long trip from Arizona to Illinois. I

contemplated the activities that lay ahead, the visitation, the funeral, the internment ceremony. I thought about the last-minute plans that might need to be taken care of for the funeral luncheon and thank you notes. I needed to be available to spend time with my daughter, I worried how Mom was holding up, how my brother was doing, and my three nieces, but mostly that long car ride offered quiet time and the opportunity to reflect on my father and his life.

My mind wandered back to the last time I was with my father. It had only been about 25 days before his death. My work had allowed me to telecommute from Illinois for 30 days in March. I had planned to come in June or July, but Dad had just been released from assisted living. It made sense to come earlier, so during that time, as the eldest child, I wanted to have frank and open discussion with my parents about the near future, to make sure that they were prepared if Dad needed long-term care, or when the time came, Mom could continue at the family home alone. Most of those conversations were quick, without much depth, but I felt satisfied understanding what their options were and concentrated on just “being” with them.

Over the next few weeks, conversations with my parents became much lighter, mostly everyday topics or events. Dad really was not much of a conversationalist, as Mom had always done most of the talking during my visits, but during one of those days, when Mom left to run errands I stayed home with Dad, who had become homebound.

I sat across from him on the couch, as he semi reclined in his easy chair. He usually spent most of the day asleep, with his oxygen tube in full time. He was always cold and had the blanket up around his chin. He seemed old and frail looking to me at that moment, but his eyes were bright, and his essence still radiated despite his illness.

We just started talking. It was nothing specific, but he talked about his parents, his childhood. He told me how proud he was of me and my brother. He told me

he loved my mother, and how well she cared for him all 60 years of their marriage. He talked about his navy days, friends old and new, and everyday things he liked. We laughed and reminisced for about two hours. It was just him and me, and I could have asked for nothing more.

When I left at the end of the month, I said I would be back soon for a long weekend, maybe in two months. He smiled and nodded, both of us not wanting to admit that this could be the last time we see each other. Neither of us would have thought he would be gone less than a month later. I still see him standing in the living room, unable to walk us to the car. My last memory of him is that he is smiling and saying see you next time.

When my husband and I finally arrived in Illinois a few days before the funeral, I was apprehensive about being in the house without Dad. I entered the living room, his chair was empty, the blanket folded neatly on the back, as if he would be returning any moment. I saw the spot where I last saw him standing, waving, and smiling, and I swallowed back the tears, feeling the huge void in my heart double in size. Yet, there was a calm that overcame me.

If he was afraid of death, he did not show it.

He never complained about his condition. He was not a burden on any of us. He remained until the very end, full of humour, of sound mind and the giant of a man he always was for me.

His words rang loud in my head. “I’ve had a good life. I did not always make the right decisions, but I always did the best I could do. I love your mother, the grandkids, and you kids. All in all, I can’t complain.”

I closed my eyes and realized that conversation was his goodbye. It was our final private conversation. In those hours, we left nothing on the table. No regrets. It was his last gift to me, his affirmation of love and of a life well lived.

It has been about five months since my father's death. Still fresh are the wounds and the pain that he is gone. His time on this earth has ended, and all that remain are the lessons and memories we are left with and the love that he gave.

* * *

There's Laughter in Heaven **Marilyn Helmer**

I first met Brenda Fisher when she was in grade five and I was in grade six. I don't remember how we met but we became best friends very quickly. As I look back on it now, Brenda had a joie de vivre, a love of life, that made her fun to be with. She loved to laugh and giggle at the sometimes off-colour jokes we secretly shared, at that age often not quite certain of what they meant.

Brenda had an older brother, Doug, who seemed to constantly be in trouble for one reason or another. You did not want to get on his bad side. He struck terror into my wimpy eleven-year-old heart because he was Brenda's constant defender. She also had a younger brother, Ted, who was born with Down's Syndrome.

Brenda's family lived in a basement apartment in a building which catered to retired people who had downsized from their luxury Westmount homes. Brenda's dad looked after the maintenance of the building while her mom looked after Ted and answered phone calls from residents, asking to have a lightbulb changed or a piece of furniture moved. Their requests were often simply an excuse to have kind Mrs. Fisher come and spend a few minutes visiting and sharing a cup of tea with them.

Mr. Fisher also did part time work, usually in the evening. That was when most of the phone calls came from the apartment residents and Brenda's mom had to respond. Ted could not be left alone so Brenda had to look after him and get him into bed. He was her

responsibility after supper when the rest of us were outside playing hide-and-seek, tag or riding our bicycles. Brenda never complained about having to look after her brother although I'm sure she could hear the joyful shouts of us at play while she waited hopefully to join us before the curfew call of streetlights sent us all home.

When we reached Junior High, we had to wear a school uniform, except for the last two months of school before summer holidays. Then the girls were allowed to wear dresses. There were a lot of very wealthy kids in our school so the fashion parade began. Brenda had one dress which she wore, always clean, for the entire two months. I remember one person asking her why she always wore the same dress. She replied simply and honestly, "This is the only good dress I have." She never complained.

Brenda loved to write—stories, notes, poems and letters. She had beautiful handwriting which I envied and she excelled in school, composition and math being her favourite subjects. At that time, you were allowed to quit school at fourteen. By the time Brenda turned fourteen, Ted was twelve. He was big for his age, very strong and given to violent outbursts. The Fishers decide to put him into a home for disabled and retarded children (retarded being an acceptable term back then). The only way they could afford the monthly fees for the home was if Brenda quit school and went to work.

Brenda was such a good student and such an enthusiastic participant in class that some of the teachers actually got together and collected money to give her a scholarship so she could stay in school. Unfortunately, the scholarship wouldn't be enough to pay for Ted's care so at fourteen, Brenda quit school and went to work. She never complained and was her usual cheerful, happy self.

With me in school and Brenda at work, we eventually lost touch. The years flew by and it wasn't until I was engaged to be married that we re-connected through a mutual acquaintance. At that

point Brenda was married and had a new baby, a little boy named Conner. The handsome little lad was nicknamed Frosty, the name the nurses in the hospital gave him because of his fine fuzz of reddish-blond hair. Frosty had a few minor health problems that made him a very fussy baby. Once again Brenda never complained. She just cuddled him and rocked him and nursed him. I don't think he ever saw anything but a smile on his mother's face.

Frosty kept Brenda busy and by then I was working and busy planning my wedding. There was a get together though that I remember well. My fiancé Gary and I went to visit Brenda and her husband in the cozy apartment they were then living in. I remember Gary, who loves children, asking to hold Frosty. The beautiful little boy sat on Gary's knee smiling and cooing and finally fell asleep in his arms. When we left that night, I thought finally Brenda is getting the life she deserves.

On an evening not long after that, I was home with my parents, catching up with the news in *The Montreal Star*. My dad passed me a section that happened to have the obituaries on the front page. I had no earthly reason to look over the obituaries but as I was about to turn the page, a name jumped out at me. *Brenda Fisher Lewington in a tragic car accident, survived by her loving husband Fred Lewington and their baby son, Conner*. I won't even try to describe the shock, heartbreak and sorrow that my parents and I experienced that night.

Gary and I went to the visitation. The venue was packed with people. Two of her former teachers came. In contrast to Brenda's joie de vive it was the saddest visitation I have ever been to. When I spoke to Brenda's husband I remember his words: "Frosty will never know his mother. He will never have a chance to know the beautiful person she was."

That happened in the spring of 1969. When I think of Brenda, especially in times of trouble, I try to emulate her wonderful joie de vive, her ability to find the positive in the negative. I don't always succeed but

when I do, it is a tribute to her memory.

Many years later, I dedicated one of my books to Brenda. The simple message reads, "To my childhood friend, Brenda Fisher Lewington—there's laughter in heaven."

* * *

A Senior's Moment **Colleen Heighington**

I am having one of my senior's moments. I am thinking a lot more differently now and as awful as it sounds ... time is marching on. I have tried to block this thought out of my mind but it still comes to me now and again!

About two years ago, I bought some really nice storage boxes and started to fill them up with beautiful cards that I have collected and saved over the years. They include birthday and anniversary cards, along with special notes and other cards. But before I carefully place each one in, I read it one last time. Some have made me laugh, some have made me cry, and others through written words have touched my heart. They all hold beautiful memories that I will cherish forever and when the right time comes, my family will also enjoy them. I can't believe that I have said this but that is the reality of it.

I was talking to my older brother about getting things in order and he wanted nothing to do with it. He said that he had no time for it and was just enjoying each day. He did have a good point but I suppose we all have our own different opinions on it. Each to their own!!!

A while ago, I went to the crafts store and bought some latch hooking kits which I so much enjoy doing. I decided that I wanted to do one for each of my four grandsons and for the rest of my family. I want each of them to have something special that was made just from me. My mom had made all of her family beauti-

ful blankets which we will always have and cherish.
Thanks Mom ... for giving me that inspiration.

Now that I think of it, it's been a while since I have done any of my latch hooking and I still have several more to do. Guess what? I'm having a Senior's Moment, so I better close off and get working on those kits again.

* * *

Goodnight, World **Marilyn Helmer**

Evening comes
and stars appear,
to tell the world
that night is here.

In the garden
birds and bees
are resting in
the apple trees.

The mice, the squirrels,
the star-nosed moles
are safe inside
their secret holes.

In bed I snuggle
way down deep,
Goodnight, world,
it's time to sleep.



* * *

I Can't Feel **Nancy Favro**

I am pretty sure we met as teens, after a college frat, after the thrill was gone from a three-year courtship. Or during a coal walking ceremony on a stranded yacht from a filming of Fantasy Island. Friends begin anywhere, but when do we first learn to feel?

Meh was her name, and she began in the womb, drawing caricatures of Madonna on her spleen and dancing to the matrix, while Mommy slept.

Then you let your guard down as a young adult and the game changes. Feelings creep up on you out of the blue. Suddenly my ego screams, "No one wants to hear it!" This leaves you crying in the corner until your spine hurts and your ego can hardly budge.

Meh was the quiet one—naive I suppose. Braveheart was a quick learner, jumping through more hoops than Meh could see. Braveheart spoke second, and began, "Hi, glad to meet you, let's try risky things and get away with it. Meh tried to honour her new friend and let her know new quests are not her thing unless embedded in code or moola. After a few weeks of working and shop till you drop, a friendship had been established.

Ego came out to play, sometimes stuck on repeat. "Should I tell her?" You know the drill. One day Braveheart suggested, "Let's plan a camp over with our fellows."

"Oh, you mean the vacation where we roam around in North Canada and try to see who survives?" Meh did not seem as excited for this trip.

Until they met the fellows. Then Braveheart's eyes lit up like opals. So they gathered up the resources, hormones in tow, and piled into someone's half tankard, paint peeling Honda and rushed off to the boonies. Finally, after many bouts of whiplash and a

few detour routes, they appeared at the destination. Fort Everwoods.

Two men crawled from the wreckage of five shoeboxes, Starbucks containers and burrito wrappers. One beckoned to anyone listening, "Hear ye, hear ye, we have come in peace to hug a tree!"

And with a quick twist of a cap, he plucked a full Molson Canadian bottle from the cooler and engulfed the whole thing. Drops fell from his lips onto his sneakers and the smaller guy garnished his anthem with, "Amen!"

Meh could still feel her toes, although three hours crammed into a pair of poly vinyl crocs can be demanding. She unleashed herself from the cavern and extended her body to lie flat eagle onto a paleolithic rock, following its contour. Acasta Gneisses of slave creator was here. "Well, that's what the sign read." They laughed ferociously.

Minutes later they were silenced, as Braveheart disrobed nonchalantly. Her orb vanished into the veil of a lake as if she owned it. The creator was untouched by man and glistened like jewels. They lay in meditation for some time, absorbing the molecules and as chisel man arose gritty rock fell off of his back. One of the males declared 'hunger stricken' so off they went in search of dried kindling. After a good meal they spent the day tossing boundaries around on a map. Quarreling over how to navigate the trail to the next camp position.

Fighting the heat and bugs, one of them yelled, "What's written on the map stays on the map" and killed a giant zebra horse fly with it. As twilight faded into grey, they filled the old rusted stove with wood, creaking open and shut every few moments. They searched for small game to photo shame, but alas grew weary. Braveheart dried off, her skin shining, and Meh cried at the idea of immersing her vital organs into the unknown vat of ice water.

They sipped on their ciders and listened to pine cones sizzle, told some old rumoured tales until the colour faded from the cones returning to the earth as ash. "Is it time?" Meh pondered.

Braveheart was instructing them about the practical matters, a well calculated plan. Chisel man and pencil man remained silent but were on quick release, forget another round. A show stopper indeed. Thankful that one of them sorted out the first map, and they burned the others. Meh had the compass deep in her pocket and remained the leader. They gave her credit for her work after three sweaty hours of being lost to mankind. Her plain Joe attire and attack of asthma remained a memory.

Penicillin brought out a deck of cards and this put me into another fit. She belted out a "Mama Mia" serenade, testing her pipes to the pines. Boy, they knew that she had had a little too few.

Legend remains, as night fell, that Meh did too. But they left her there all night, inches from the firelight. His Nikes in full view. But one could follow the tread marks just past midnight. After the coyotes prowl. Braveheart scrambled out from one of the tents, probably her old chisel man. Then she heard Braveheart, whispering "Psst, can I borrow your shoes? I've got to pee."

"Yes, of course," Meh replied. "Why do you think they are semi reflective, have no knots and are easy to slip on? You already went three times."

An argument began, five times chiseled rages. Penciled straightened it out, telling them when they got old they would have nothing to worry about. "Old people can't feel, can't feel cold, can't feel their boobs, and can't feel when they have to pee." Yay! They all cheered.

Morning started to break, and Meh wondered, should I tell her? Since she noticed Mr. Chiselman smiling more at mighty Brave. She could feel it in her bones, she was losing him. I am going to miss that

chiseled jaw and those nice dinners at the club. His refined manners and relaxed posture are hard to come by. Would anyone miss the vagueness in his eyes after saying goodbye? Or the flowers after the slap on my precious cheek? I know some that would. Don't tell her, ego-go away, mind your own business. This is my business, or is it?

She knew, he knew, they might have all known. One did not care. It was going to happen anyway.

This is why Meh sat so long by the fire. Perhaps too long. The morning light appeared over the poplar, then cascaded onto the scene below. Melted soles, two dangling half in the stove, melted to smithereens, oozing liquid out their sides. The rest soon awakened to find Meh dancing across the hot coals, criss-crossing like a promise to her heart. Her shoes stretched like bands.

"Tomorrow will happen but please don't let me feel," she proclaimed.

* * *

Bard of the Bench ***Lisa Browning***

once upon a time

a daughter explains
out of the blue to me
u do the things u do
because u cannot
give birth to babies
it's compensation
she explained
u create places
and things as wombs
for people to live in
while they get fixed
or ready to start over
& when she finished
making her comment

went back to reading
her book of homework
next day she said
it must be frustrating
to be a man like you

This was the poem that really pushed me to approach local activist Edward Pickersgill, well known in Guelph for his work with the homeless and marginalized, to publish his poetry. I had been asking him repeatedly, as had many others ... but Ed, preferring to remain behind the scenes as much as possible, always politely declined.

Until the summer of 2020. "Okay," he said, "let's do it."

And so *splinters & fragments* was born. This anthology contains 85 of Edward's poems, all very raw and very real, like the one above. *One Thousand Trees* is all about empowerment, especially through the written word, so this project was a perfect fit! Editing and formatting services for this book were provided free of charge, and a GoFundMe campaign covered all but \$200 of the cost of printing 500 copies. One hundred percent of the \$20 sale price of each volume sold goes to support Ed's efforts.

To date, over 200 copies have been sold, and very well received.

"splinters & fragments is a well written gem for our community. Its subject matter is raw and authentic, evidence that Ed has had decades of personal experience with a segment of the population that is frequently misunderstood and often shunned. I would seriously recommend this book of poetry to local senior high school students, before they set out to do their 40 hours of volunteer work in Guelph. It should be a must read for all local politicians. I also think it could be used as a textbook in Schools of Social work since it could lead to important discussions on how to respectfully work alongside anyone who is experiencing homeless, addiction and food insecurity."

Sandy

P.

"splinters & fragments is not a book you would pick up in order to escape reality...but rather to help put you in touch with what is happening around you, and spark you to help make change. His juxtaposition of words and images will strike a chord within you."

Cynthia S.

Please consider supporting this very worthwhile, very much needed, initiative in our community ... by purchasing a book, and/or spreading the word about this project. Copies are available at the following Guelph locations: The Bookshelf, the office of Mairin Viol (55 Cork St), Janus Books, Smitten Apparel, Kirtida Kitchen, or Pita Pit (Silvercreek location), or can be ordered (to be shipped) at www.ottbookstore.com.

"Some things don't fit into what some call, pages-of-life poetry. Some feelings, some memories, some tears, some fears, some laughter, some pains, some injuries, some deaths, some splinters, some fragments."

Edward Pickersgill, August 2020



* * *

The Write Retreat: Empowering Women Writers Adelle Purdham

Humble Beginnings:

The first time I organized a writer's retreat, in 2019, I did it because, as a mother to three young kids, I wanted the time and space to write. A word to the wise: if you want time and space to write, don't organize a writing retreat and facilitate it yourself. Renting a space meant I had to do all the grunt work. I was preparing lunches and bringing in yoga instructors and providing feedback on writers' work. With a clump of mainly memoir writers, I was faced with participants in tears and traumas that risked repeating themselves, skipping from body to body like a virus to a host. How to manage it all, in my new-found role of hostess, chef, therapist, teacher? While still making space for my own emotions?

In truth, I didn't, I could not. I resigned myself to giving the time and space to other women to write, and when I did that I encountered a truth perhaps greater than the value of that writing time I was giving up. Hosting the retreat was a time for me to teach, and to help other women find their story, their voice, and share it with the world. There are times to write and there are times to learn. Teaching is the highest form of learning. Despite being relatively good at math, I'm reminded of this every time I try to give my ten-year-old daughter a math lesson. And it's not that I necessarily learn directly from the writing of the writers I'm working with, though often I do, but I learn from their bravery; I learn from their curiosity and courage. I learn from their open hearts. And in return, I offer them mine.

Running a writer's retreat has allowed me to listen deeply to the work of other women writers. And why is this significant? Why do we have to make space to hear the voice of women writers, specifically? Aren't men and women writers treated equally now? Women writers continue to work within the context

of some invisible and some not so invisible forces working against them.

Some not so invisible forces: Recently, the finalists for a Canada-wide Creative Nonfiction contest were announced and the five finalists happened to be pieces written by women. On the contest's Facebook group for writers across Canada, an individual felt compelled to comment: "Five finalists are women, really? Have we gone too far?" *Have we gone too far*. The response from the other writers in the group was outrage, incredulity. *Too far*? The pieces were judged anonymously, irrespective of sex or gender, dependent entirely on the merit of the writing. One of the finalists identified as a trans male anyway, had the commenter cared to be inclusive. *Too far*? No, we haven't gone far enough. Would it surprise you if I said the individual who made the comment was a woman? I'm reminded of a former neighbour who read an article I'd written in the newspaper, my very first. "Did your husband help you with that?" she wanted to know. When I insisted that he hadn't, she looked at me, surprised, "You wrote that all by yourself? Are you sure?" *Are you sure*? Yes, I'm sure women's voices deserve a place to be heard, a place where we can be listened to, a place where we can be believed. Yes, I'm sure, we haven't gone far enough.

Invisible forces. Invisible forces can look like emotional trauma. Mothers are often the work horses expected to carry the weight of emotional labour in the family, of children and spouses, with little space left over for themselves to think and feel. Women need safe spaces to express their feelings, but we also need spaces where we can work, unencumbered by expectation or any other form of labour, besides creativity. Women, all women, deserve access to their creativity.

The Write Retreat today:

The Write Retreat is a place and a space for women writers to come together and create in an environment conducive to wellness with catered healthy food and optional activities, such as yoga,

which enhance the writer's experience and allow for relaxation and focus. The retreat includes workshops, individual conferencing and guidance on participant's work and welcomes women writers from emerging to experienced skill level in every genre of writing.

The Write Retreat provides a wonderful opportunity to connect with other writers, fostering a sense of community, while giving participants the solace needed to engage in the craft of writing.

What began in a private setting, moved to virtual at the onset of Covid, and then found a new home at the Madawaska Kanu Centre (MKC) this past September 2021. Plans are already underway for next year's retreat at MKC, slated for September 24th and 25th, 2022.



Feature Author:

The concept and realization of inviting a feature author to be a part of The Write Retreat began last year with poet laureate Kim Fahner (*These Wings*, Pedlar Press 2019) and was immediately successful and a facet of the retreat I wanted to continue. This year's feature author was celebrated Canadian writer Drew Hayden Taylor, an award-winning playwright, journalist, novelist, and filmmaker. Born on the Curve Lake First Nation in Central Ontario, Drew has done everything from performing stand-up comedy at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. to serving as Artistic Director at Canada's premiere Indigenous

theatre company, Native Earth Performing Arts. This coming year will see the publication of his 34th book, *Me Tomorrow*, a collection of essays concerning Indigenous futurisms, and the launch of *Going Native*, a 13-part documentary series on APTN that he co-produced, co-wrote and hosted. Scheduled for publication next year is his book *Cold*, an Indigenous horror novel.

Drew Hayden Taylor came to The Write Retreat to inspire us with his storytelling as women writers from across Ontario about to embark on sharing our own stories. As is typical Drew style, he delivered a humorous account of his pathway to becoming a “grown up writer!” interwoven with valuable advice that made us think. How does one go about writing? And what is that creative process like for Drew?

“Pay attention to the world and then plagiarize the creator,” he encouraged us.

When ideas present themselves, take action.

“You see an apple on a tree, you take it!” Drew said. The room was filled with laughter, happy sighs and the sound of the occasional pen scribbling furiously across the page as Drew relayed yet another inspiring idea we could hold onto.

After his presentation, Drew was gracious with his time, answering questions, signing books and speaking with retreat participants one-on-one, several of whom teach his plays to their students. As writers, it’s wonderful to speak to such an experienced and well recognized professional. Maybe you can even imagine yourself standing in their shoes one day.

Writer’s Circle: Moonshine

A highlight of The Write Retreat weekend is always the Saturday night Writer’s Circle, and this year was no exception. Every participant prepares a two-page, double-spaced piece of writing that is to be shared with me, and ideally each other, beforehand. On Saturday night, writers each receive a turn to read

their work aloud and then receive feedback from me and each other. They also receive more detailed feedback on their particular piece, in writing, usually following the retreat. Reading our words out loud is a transformative, empowering, experience that, of course, can bring up many nerves too. By the end of the night, each woman was glowing like slivers of the moon, and truly a sense of starlight and kinship wound its way around our storytelling fire. I found myself filled with gratitude for the gift of these women’s words.



What else?

Pre-retreat, participants met with me individually, and as a group, online, to get to know one another, ask any questions and talk about their writing. On opening night, after a site tour we met up for a wine and cheese and mystic Karen Warner told her story of The Three Drums around the fire.



The next morning began with yoga lead by Stefi at MKC and followed with the first of many delicious chef-prepared locally-sourced meals provided by MKC. I ran two guided writing workshops: one 'on noticing', with a focus on poetry, and one related to metaphorical writing, with text examples. An optional hike took those interested off-site high up to a scenic view overlooking the valley and Lake Kamaniskeg, which was followed by an impromptu swim for the brave in the still-warm-enough-but-just-barely Madawaska River. The Write Retreat concluded with readings, recognition of 'lingering lines' from each writer, and a feeling that is hard to capture in words, but 'love' might be a good start.



Tips for organizing your own writer's retreat:

Know your why. I thought I was getting into organizing writing retreats because I love to write, but it turns out I also love to teach and facilitating The Write Retreat has been a perfect marriage of these skills. Empowering and supporting women writers is deeply gratifying work.

Know your audience. I've heard of a doctor who runs writing retreats for other doctors. Find your niche by considering what specifically you have to offer. With an MFA in creative nonfiction writing, I attend to attract more memoir/ personal narrative writers to my retreats.

Create a sustainable business model. Consider partnering with other writers and other businesses that can add value to the service you are providing. For example, working with a venue that can manage administrative tasks for you, such as registration, saves time and energy that can then be put back into the retreat, while inviting guest speakers brings in expertise to support the work you are doing.

Put your heart into it. Your participants are counting on you to deliver quality programming. Are you able to meet as many of the group's needs as possible? Consider setting up Zoom meetings beforehand to get to know participants and find out what those needs are. Send out a questionnaire afterwards and reassess how each session went and learn what you can do better for next time. Let your passion shine through.

Create a safe space. As writers, we know how vulnerable it can feel to share our work, especially work that's newly formed. Create parameters around how work is shared and how feedback is provided. Focus on what works in the piece and celebrate loudly.

Tips when deciding if a writing retreat is right for you:

What do you hope to get out of it? Are you seeking comradery and community or solace and space? Do you want intensive feedback, one-on-one time, or time to play on the page? Each writing retreat is going to offer a balance of these things—a coming together and time apart. Feedback and inspiration. Find the retreat that offers the balance that's right for you.

Does it add value? Is there a guest author you want to meet or a writer you really want to workshop with? Is the location ideal? Is the timing right given the stage of your project, or during the period when you want to get a new project going? Is it the chance to relax and inspiration that you need? The retreat needs to bring value to you and your work.

Does it feel right? Often, we know in our gut if something is right for us or not. Read the fine print. Does the idea of sharing a room with a stranger put you off? Are your food requirements able to be met? Is the retreat space accessible for your mobility needs? Are you attracted to everything on offer? If not, wait for the next one.

Are your friends interested? While attending a retreat on our own is a wonderful opportunity to meet new people and make connections with other writers, there's a level of comfort that comes with bringing a friend along. Also, reading past participants' testimonials can be a great indicator of what you may be in for.

When in doubt, reach out. My expectation is that if a business wants my patronage, they should be willing to answer any questions I may have. If you're at all unsure, reach out with any questions and an organized facilitator will be happy to answer them.

After facilitating my latest retreat, feelings of wellbeing and gratitude washed over me. I spent the weekend as one of fifteen women sharing stories, with catered food and a team of other professionals to share the load of running the weekend. I've learned a few things about how to run a retreat as the years have gone by and I continue to learn. I drove home alone afterwards along the open stretch of road, rows of pines waving at me as I passed by, and I knew I had experienced something with these writers so seldom granted to women, and especially mothers: *freedom*.



Teaching Storytelling Skills to Kids

Sandra Wilson

When we build storytelling skills in kids we can give them confidence, spark their creativity and give them tools like critical thinking and problem solving.

When building characters for a story we can encourage children to build on their own experiences, we can show them how to connect with their emotions, understand character traits and learn how to develop a character (and therefore themselves) in order to create a character that reaches its goal by the end of the story. Talking about emotions, skills and goals is relative to building a character in the story, but also an important conversation to have with kids in real life. As they tell you about a character you can ask them if they feel they can relate, do they have examples in real life of similar situations etc. When I work with kids to create books through the *Kindness Kangaroo Project* I find they like to share their stories, connect to the characters and even learn from each other.

When we help a child build settings for their stories we are showing them how important it is to connect to the world around them. We can encourage them to sit somewhere and really take in the space, find out how they feel being there, what sights, sounds and smells they encounter while they are there. Focusing on that space, that moment is a great habit for kids to create for their own lives.

When developing the plot of a story we are teaching kids not only how to set goals to get their character from start to finish but also allowing them to grow critical thinking skills and encourage problem solving. As a writer I can tell you there are many times I have gotten stuck and had to find a way past the block so I could keep writing the story. Sometimes, when I get near the end of the story I realize there are some loose ends that I need to wrap up so I have to think a bit about how to do that. I have to decide what

else my story needs to incorporate those ideas and I have to think through the scenarios to make sure it all connects well. These are all aspects of teaching storytelling skills to kids, and that they can use in real life.

Kids have great imaginations and often enjoy telling stories about robots, monsters, animals and more. By providing them with the proper storytelling skills they can not only make these stories great, but they could also learn ways to tell their own story.

I feel one of the most important parts of teaching storytelling skills to kids is to encourage them to tell stories. Many stories can involve aspects of their life, real emotions or scenarios that they have gone through. By allowing them to tell these stories we can offer them a chance to heal, to grow and to understand things so much better. And by encouraging them to finish a story we can not only acknowledge what an amazing accomplishment that is, but also show them that telling their story is a wonderful way to help others who may have had similar experiences. It is a chance to bring power to voices that everyone may not hear. We can encourage them to tell the story that only they can tell.

Storytelling skills provides the tools for telling our own stories, for creating great presentations for school, or later, work. It can help children get a better understanding of their own emotions, of others and of the world around them. It can encourage their imagination which could lead to innovation and creativity that could change the world!

The Creativity Adventure is a video course I have created using my thirty years of experience working with kids and writing. It offers lessons to build storytelling skills, off-screen activities to build observation skills and enjoy the world around them and inspiration to write a story.

Visit the Quite a Character classroom at www.quiteacharacter.ca to find out more.

The Blank Page ***Lisa Browning***

There is nothing worse for a writer
than a blank page
The agony of nothingness
The fears of unworthiness
Is my life really so insignificant
that there is nothing to say?

There is a coffee mug in my cupboard
bought as a gift for someone who never received it
It states simply "Attitude is Everything"
Simple, but profound

I, as a writer, can choose to revel
in the nothingness of the blank page
I can choose to believe the best insights
always come in silence
and the next blessing is a pen-stroke away
I, as a woman, can choose to believe the same

I need not fear the blank page

* * *

Thanksgiving ***Bill Brubacher***

Surprising as this may sound ... what if you didn't feel you had anything to be thankful for? What then? Well, it would just be another day like any other, I suppose.

I have no doubt that there may be people out there who feel exactly that way. And I neither condemn them nor pity them.

They have that right and, realistically, not everyone is or feels equally blessed. Besides it's been a tough year for many dealing with the all of the adverse effects of the pandemic, unemployment, learning to work at home, school at home and all the other changes we've had to accept into our lives.

It's likely a lot of people are just feeling numb and that life has 'served them' up to an uncertain future.

It raises the question of why we celebrate anything, doesn't it?

What does a 'holiday' really mean, and how fully and deeply is it truly celebrated, especially if we just take it for granted? Then there's the effects of being 'politically correct,' which has further corrupted long-standing cultural traditions that once unified our society.

Being a multi-cultural society is in my opinion like a quilt, creating a wonderful mosaic of the old and the new, which if sewn together with mutual respect and understanding makes us all better. There's no question in my mind that we should respect differences because differences I believe also make us stronger and more self-reflective, which I think is a good thing.

Differences are what make us who we are, and traditions should be practiced with commitment, seriousness and enthusiasm—never taken for granted.

Frankly, rather than simply going through the same mechanical motions of so many special days each year, I think a moratorium should be called.

Perhaps we should go back to basics to discover the kind of core principles we want to represent the rudder of our society. We should understand what they mean, and hopefully rekindle a passion and compassion for our traditions and others I feel we've lost.

So my message is to rethink the meaning of Thanksgiving and every other holiday and for now, only if you feel truly thankful for the blessings in your life, then celebrate, otherwise, be honest and don't celebrate it half-heartedly.

And finally, I would also like to encourage any of you to commit to living more wholeheartedly as best you can, so that Thanksgiving—meaning being grateful

and sharing your blessings—once again stands for something worth celebrating because of its profound meaning in our culture.

Wishing you a HAPPY THANKSGIVING!



* * *

Channa Bhatara
Marilyn Elphick

August 26, 2021

Today marks the seven-month death anniversary of my father, Patrick. It may seem like an unusual way to start a story, but you will understand the method to my madness in good time. Lately I have been habitually making my dad's favourite dishes as a homage to his cooking expertise. He loved to experiment with every kind of ethnic recipe, reworking the ingredients to make the oil-laden recipes more heart healthy. He meticulously measured out the ingredients, weighed them on his trusty kitchen scale and recording his revamped recipes "So they would always turn out the same. Not like how you and mother cook." Well, that was true. My mother and I had our unique way of mixing flavours and spices. Dad's favourite expression to dinner guests was, "Enjoy this dish now because it will never be the same again. My wife does not measure or write down what she does!"

One of the dishes he loved to make was called Channa Bhatara, a spicy chickpea curry accompanied by fried bread that resembled a paratha. The sight of this dish causes your arteries to protest. In Indian take-out restaurants, oil is floating on top of the curry. Dad

absolutely would not tolerate that, so he re-invented it by adjusting the amount of oil and making the bhaturas light and fluffy with a minimum amount of oil. Being the purist that he was, there was no shortcuts like using canned chickpeas because there was too much salt. So, he would soak the dry beans overnight with a healthy dash of baking soda (to cut down on the gaseousness of the beans). One must be prepared to begin this two-day process to achieve the proper results. I have started using dried beans for many of my recipes. With the Instantpot, the beans do not have to be soaked overnight but this day I decided to do it like my dad would do it. I soaked the beans overnight and the next morning pressure cooked them in the instantpot.

Perfect! Out came the pot to which I added a tablespoon or two of olive oil. It is important to make sure the oil is hot before adding onions, garlic and ginger, the trifecta of Indian cooking. I am not as patient as my dad but today, I waited until the onions caramelized. The last time we made this together, I was about to add the spices too soon. “Not yet!” he said. “You have to be patient until the onions caramelize.”

“Dad, I have been making curry practically my whole life, I know how to do it.”

“Yes, but your curry is never as good as mine,” he laughed. I could hear him this day as clearly as if he was standing beside me while I cooked.

“Not yet.”

Finally, I was rewarded for my patience as the mixture turned a lovely golden brown and the after the spices were added, the kitchen was filled with an exotic aroma of the comforting scents I grew up with. I had a good chuckle; The old man knew his recipes. I ‘m glad I listened! His response would have been “Finally, you learned something from your father!” This is a heart healthy dish that goes well with Basmati rice or naans or pita.



As with any loss of a loved one, there’s no getting over it just struggling to get through it. I know I am a lot like him because we spent so much time together from early childhood, young adulthood, adulthood, seniorhood. Both my parents were with me through all my trials and tribulations and there were many.

I love to cook and then give away the food because I cannot possibly eat all of it. I seem to be able to sense spiritual and emotional hunger in others. I suppose it comes with the territory of being a chaplain and a nurse. I was taught to listen, observe, and ask questions before speaking.

Feeding is a common theme in the Bible as is bread. There is an interesting metaphor of heaven and hell which goes something like this: In hell you are seated at a large banquet table with a table groaning with every delicacy you could ever imagine. There is one problem. Your utensils are too long, and the people can’t possibly bring them to their mouths. All they can do is stare at the food and nothing else. In Heaven, we have the same scenario except here, the people feed each other. Jesus had such compassion for the hungry as illustrated by this pericope from Luke.

Luke 9:10-17 ***Feeding the Five Thousand***

¹⁰On their return the apostles told Jesus^[a] all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. ¹¹When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he

welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured. ¹² The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.” ¹³ But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.” ¹⁴ For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” ¹⁵ They did so and made them all sit down. ¹⁶ And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷ And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.”

I believe I have found a way to honour both my parents by sharing recipes and food. It makes me feel closer to them. People always ask, “Why do you make so much food and then give it away?” The simple answer is, it makes me happy. Is there any better reason than that?

* * *

Under the Influence ***Nancy Favro***

When the moon is naked to the eye,
it hides its glory but who knows why?
How dare it cast its spell on me,
dismantling my thoughts like Irish moss,
for all to see
Scattered and strewn over deserted river beds
Worry and slanderous thoughts prevail,
amidst our sleep
Careful crews of quambats spread yesterday's ashes
down in the glades
So savour this space that surrounds you
Substance sways in your favour
Can your mind survive the fall?
Into the messy barbled vines,
tugging and encasing your torso
The moon is solid as an oak
and begs you to leave behind what you strive for,
long enough to rest your tongue
In the moonlight, my skin is semi transparent
Brittle but still

* * *

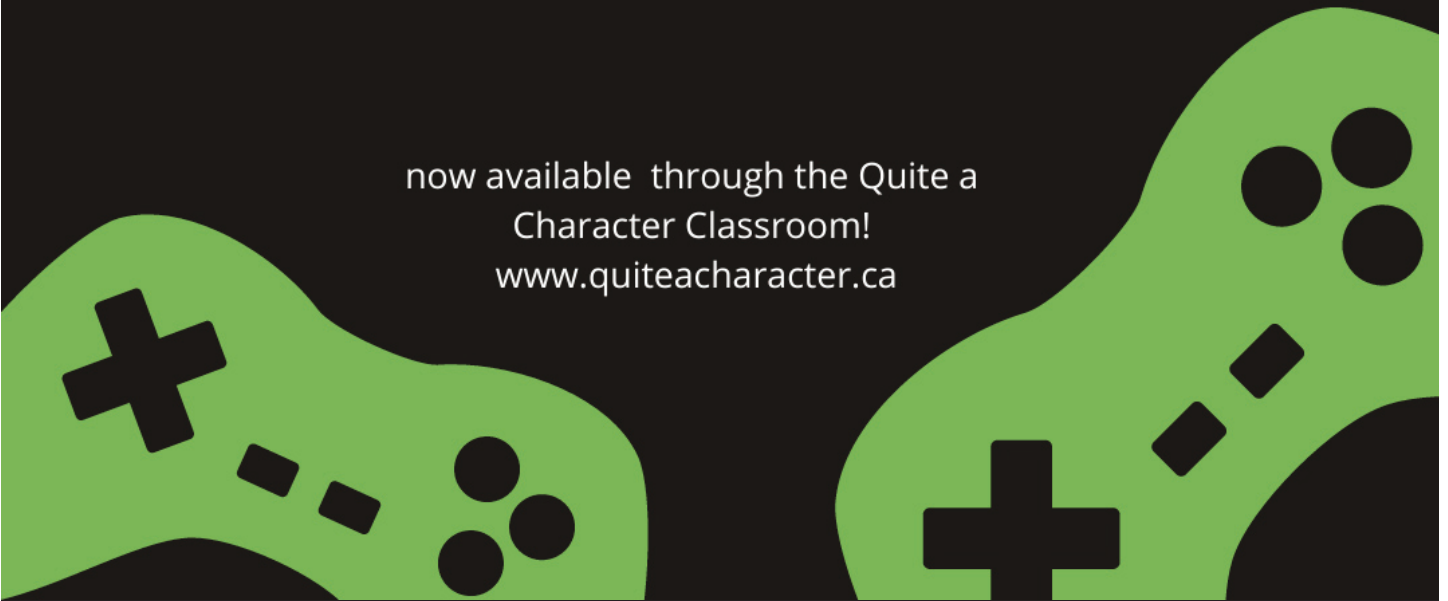


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THE CREATIVITY ADVENTURE

a creative writing course for kids, that
shows how building story-telling skills
can be like playing a video game

now available through the Quite a
Character Classroom!
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Now

Colleen Heighington

Now is the time...
We can go back to the mall
To ... shop, shop, shop
Until we ...
drop, drop, drop!!!!

Now is the time ...
We can go back for a swim
In the ... pool, pool, pool
To keep us refreshed and to stay ...
cool, cool, cool!!!!

Now is the time ...
We can go back inside of the restaurants
To ... eat, eat, eat
And that in itself is a ...
treat, treat, treat!!!!

Now is the time ...
We can go back to the gym
To work out and ... run, run, run
And make all of that hard work lots of ...
fun, fun, fun!!!!

Now is the time...
Students can go back to school
Let's give that ... a hurray, hurray, hurray
And hopefully this time around it will ...
stay, stay, stay!!!!

AND

Now is the time ...
We can go back to the church
To ... pray, pray, pray
And to thank the Dear Lord
For all of these glorious ...
days, days, days!!!!

**We hope you have enjoyed this
first issue of *Stories*.
Until next month**

**STAY SAFE
STAY HAPPY
KEEP WRITING!**

**Deadline for submissions
for November is Sunday,
October 24.**

Here's a focus quote to inspire you

...

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

— Anais Nin

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*.

Sandy Bassie

Artist, poet, dreamer. Sandy is a stubborn advocate for those she loves. Fierce, yet tender. She holds to this: it is never too late to learn or change. The things we believe about ourselves drive our lives and choices. Choose to believe the good and those will be places we soar.

Danielle Betts

Struggling with mental illnesses through most of her life, Danielle has always had a drive to change how the world talks about mental health and how they see it.

Danielle began Mental Health Mondays during high school, where she made an announcement each morning regarding a mental health topic. The intent was to start the conversation, and that it did. She continued her mental health work by taking part in YouthTalk, a club through the Canadian Mental Health Association, run by students, for students. On top of this, she has been dancing since she was 3 years old and writing poetry, songs, and stories for as long as she can remember.

In university now, she continues to follow her dreams by pursuing a degree in psychology. Danielle has always had a passion for helping, advocacy, activism, and creativity. She is looking forward to what this new adventure will bring for her and for the world.

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.

Catherine Chavez

As a woman, Cathy sees the opportunities that being a wife, mother, sister and daughter provides in her everyday life to empower others by sharing stories that enrich the soul, expand the mind, and warm the heart from everyday experiences. She lives in Arizona with her husband and their dog Jasper. When not reading or writing, she also enjoys traveling, cooking and spending time with friends debating the meaning of life over a raucous game of dominoes whenever possible.

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.

Peggy Dietrich

Peggy is a mother and grandmother, residing in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. She has been writing poetry since she was young, and published her first book, *The Women in the Moon*, in 2019. When she isn't playing with her grandchildren, hosting dinners for friends and family or helping at her church, you can find Peggy strolling the parks close to her house – capturing the most astonishing aspects of nature through photography.

Marilyn Elphick

Marilyn's first career was as a Registered Nurse in various fields of medicine. Her last position was as a dialysis nurse. She completed an MDiv degree in 2002 and a TH.M in 2013. From 2002-2015 she worked as the Director of Campus Ministry, and at present she works as a chaplain at a long-term care facility. She recently moved to Fergus, Ontario, and she loves to write!

Nancy Favro

Nancy is a little scattered ... a little torn gypsy heart trying things on at a different pace than the norm. An ADHD mother of two, she studied visual art at Sheridan College. As a 3d artist of La La land, she believes that art is a weapon to regain peace on all platforms.

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.

Honey Novick

Honey is a singer/songwriter/voice teacher/poet, living in Toronto, Canada. She has been published in numerous anthologies and has 9 chapbooks and 8 CDs. She is the 2020 Recipient of the Mentor Award (CSARN) Canadian Senior Artists Resource Network), 3rd time awardee of the Dr. Reva Gerstein Legacy Fund and recipient of the 2020 Community Hero Award. She teaches Voice Yoga and sings with Bill Bissett and George Elliott Clarke. Her next collection of poetry is called "Bob Dylan, My Rabbi." You can connect with her at honeynovick.com, or by emailing creativevocalizationstudio@hotmail.com.

Rebecca Olayinka

Rebecca is from and lives in London, UK. She has been a qualified social worker for 10 years. She is also a freelance writer primarily for The Everyday Magazine, in which she has written opinion articles and poetry. Her poem "Strong Black Women" was featured in *Chicken Soup for the Soul: I'm Speaking Now -- Black Women Share Their Truth in 101 Stories of Love, Courage and Hope*. Rebecca has also been a contributing author to the book *Outlanders- Hidden Narrative's From Social Workers of Colour*, and is currently writing her own personal memoir to inspire Black foster children to live a life of their own creation.

Giorgio Piscitelli

Giorgio is a high school student who lives in Guelph, Ontario. An accomplished pianist who has won awards for his performance, Giorgio also enjoys playing guitar and drums as well as cooking and skateboarding. He hopes to pursue a career in writing.

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.

Clay Williams

Clay is a 60-year-old Manitoba-born father of two living in Elmira Ontario with his wife of 39 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.

