

Goldfinch

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Lost Memories

Donna Piken

“This is the last shop. Promise,” Diane said, kissing her husband on the cheek. “I won’t be long.”

As she dashed up the short path to Lost Memories, Diane heard the echo of her husband Rob’s voice, “If you say so.” She smiled, thinking how unusually patient he was today on her antique hunt. But then again, she was making a concerted effort to whiz in and out of stores as quickly as she could.

Using both hands, Diane pulled open the heavy front door, jumping at the unexpected tinny sound of the small cowbell overhead. The entryway was narrow with barely enough space to walk.

The store was jam-packed from floor to ceiling with antique furniture, memorabilia, dishes, clocks, lamps, dolls, vintage games and more. She had been in antique stores before but had never seen such abundance and variety. She tread carefully, nervous that the slightest wrong move would send an old relic crashing to the floor. Every step led to something she recalled from her childhood—a tea set resembling her grandmother’s, a clock from her childhood bedroom, a pinball machine like the one she played as a teen at a local pizzeria.

She passed her fingers over the old typewriters – Corona, Underwood, Remington. Then she picked up a *Life* magazine covered in plastic. She remembered this December 6, 1963, issue of JFK’s funeral with Jackie and the children on the cover. Her mother would have appreciated seeing this. She had been a saver. Diane remembered when she used to stand next to her mother’s stack of *Life* magazines piled high on the floor wondering when she would be looking down at them instead of looking up.

The twisting path finally led Diane to an old silver cash register where a tall balding man with a sweepingly large white mustache sat, staring blankly into space.

“Excuse me,” she softly said. She waited for the old man to snap out of his reverie. “The sign outside said you’re closing. Are any items discounted?”

He made a sour face. “Nope.”

“When are you closing?”

“As soon as the building sells.”

Lost Memories (cont'd)

Donna Piken

Diane was persistent. "And, then you'll be having a sale?"

The man didn't bat an eye. "Nope."

"Well, what are you going to do with all these things if you don't sell them?"

The man calmly said, "Probably just dump them."

Diane was stunned. Trying to be helpful she said, "Maybe if you discounted them, people would buy them."

He snapped back. "Can't be bothered. You looking for something in particular?"

"An old typewriter," she replied. "Specifically, a Royal. One like I used to have with black keys and silver trim."

"That's what keeps me in business. People get rid of their things, then they want them back."

"It's nothing like that. Mine was stolen."

The man leaned in, "Stolen, huh? How?"

Diane looked down not really wanting to tell the story, but the man was staring at her, waiting.

"My stepfather helped me move from my apartment in New York. In the confusion of all the trips up and down to load the car, he accidentally left my Royal and a reel-to-reel tape recorder on the sidewalk. By the time he remembered, they were gone."

"That's a sad story."

"I've never gotten over it. I picked up an electric, but it's not the same. The computer works well enough, but I've always felt nostalgic for my old clicking keys. I taught myself to type on that Royal when I was five years old."

"How long ago was it stolen?"

Diane thought it odd that he was asking so many questions, but it felt good to talk about it. She thought for a moment. "It was the last weekend in October, a Sunday. That's when my lease was up, thirty-five years ago, a few weeks before my wedding."

"This is the last Sunday of October. So, it's thirty-five years ago today."

Lost Memories (cont'd)

Donna Piken

"I hadn't realized that. Well, if you don't have one ... I've taken enough of your time. Good luck with your closing." Diane turned to leave. She retraced her steps, taking a last glance around, but she was no longer in the mood to buy anything. As she made the final turn to leave, she heard footsteps and turned to see the store owner not too far behind.

"Miss, if you don't mind my asking, where'd you live back then when your things were stolen?"

Diane looked at his face wondering why the interest. "Excuse me?"

"You said it happened in New York, but where exactly?"

"In Manhattan. Downtown on East Twentieth Street."

He sighed. "I want to show you something. Would you indulge an old man?"

Diane started feeling claustrophobic. She wondered if following him was safe. He must have noticed her hesitation because he added, "By the way, I'm Chet."

"Pleased to officially meet you. I'm Diane. I'll go get my husband. He's outside."

Diane and Rob followed Chet through the narrow aisles to the back of the store. He stopped before a black door with the word *Office* written in chalk. Inside were two windows allowing lots of light to come in. Not a thing was in sight except for an empty desk, three chairs and a filing cabinet.

"I hate chaos." Chet was smiling for the first time since they'd met.

"Make yourselves comfortable. Be right back."

A few minutes later, Chet returned carrying a worn square black case. He placed it on his desk and opened it. "Look something like yours?"

It was a Royal typewriter with black keys and silver trim. A lump rose in Diane's throat.

Rob spoke up. "She goes into every antique shop we pass looking for her typewriter. Diane, is this one similar?"

"It looks just like it." She touched the keys. Memories flooded back of her typing schoolwork, writing stories and poems. "I can't believe it." Jokingly she said, "Chet, you wouldn't by chance happen to have an old

Lost Memories (cont'd)

Donna Piken

Revere tape recorder sitting around, a T-1100?" Seeing Chet's face dim, she added, "Sorry, I had to ask."

"Wait here. I'll be back in a minute," he said and left the room.

"Rob, I feel like I'm in a *Twilight Zone* episode. This is crazy."

After hearing some loud thumps, Chet returned holding an old carton. "A Revere, you said? What'd you use it for?"

"Recording and editing music mostly. Also, I was a newscaster for a time. The only remaining tape of my newscasts and interviews were in my recorder case."

He looked her in the eye. "You know, I've been in business here for some forty years. Never made a fortune, but I always thought I was doing a service by selling memories." He easily opened the cracked cardboard top of the box and peered inside. Then he lifted out a tan-colored case and placed it on the desk.

Diane's eyes widened.

"Want to have a look? See if it might be like yours?"

She nodded, tempering her excitement. She pushed the open button to the side and lifted up the top. A flash of memories flooded in from the times she sat small in a corner of the living room floor acting as the disc jockey at her older sister's parties, and when she practiced reading the news into the microphone.

A Scotch recording tape box was sticking up from the side pocket. Her fingers trembled as she opened it. Inside was a full reel of tape. She nervously opened the folded piece of yellow paper tucked inside. It was the same one she had written so long ago listing the dates of her recordings. Her eyes welled up.

Chet opened a drawer and handed her a tissue. "I gather it's yours. I'm sorry these were taken from you. They came in together, so the typewriter's bound to be yours too."

"I can't believe it. How is it you have these?"

"I can tell you exactly how," he said. "My good-for-nothing cousin was always looking to make an easy buck. Early on, when I was building my hobby of collecting into a business, he came to me and started yapping about how these were sitting on a downtown Manhattan curb waiting to be plucked. He knew he was stealing. I never felt right about

Lost Memories (Cont'd)

Donna Piken

putting them out. I forgot all about them until you started asking. I suppose they were placed in my safekeeping until you recovered them. If you believe in that kind of thing.”

Diane saw the sadness in his face. “I do believe and I’m really grateful.”

“It’s been something meeting you,” Chet said. “You know, many memories from so many lives are in this store. People pass on and most times their treasures become a novelty or junk. That’s what fills up the shelves. I’ve loved my years here, but it will be a relief to let it all go. Lately, the only place I can breathe is in this room.” He smiled sadly and walked them back into the store.

“Chet, this is awkward, but I’d like to pay for these. How much is fair?”

Chet waved his hand. “Please, you’ve renewed my sense of purpose and gifted me a happy ending to an otherwise terrible story. I may even shake things up and give my cousin a call.” Then after a moment he said, “You really think I should discount, huh?”

Diane quickly answered. “It would drive people in, and they’d get a memory back at a bargain.”

He just shrugged his shoulders. “Good luck to you.”

Diane and Rob didn’t return to the town for two years. When they did, they saw a small strip mall standing where Lost Memories had been. In the diner across the street, Diane asked their elderly waitress if she knew what happened to the store and its owner, Chet.

The waitress leaned over. “It was quite a show. Chet sold the building around Thanksgiving. To everybody’s surprise, he put a huge sign outside – *Blow Out Sale. Find Your Lost Memory*. He was giving things away. We never saw him so happy. The store closed by New Year’s.”

Summer's Night Games

Bari Ecker

we flocked like Canada geese
to the street after dinner
no signal, no whistle, no cell phone, no text
we just knew
and we played
like the bullfrogs commencing their throaty warbling by the pond
crickets chirping their serenade
we just knew
and we played
streaming from compact suburban homes
lured by
Dodgeball. Mother May I? Red Light, Green Light. Hopscotch
Jeannie from next door
Paula from two doors down
trailed by her two little sisters following like ducklings
Craig and Jeff raced down on their bikes
from way down the block
Robin and Bobby brought Mike,
the regal, red Irish Setter with wise, old-man eyes
10, 15, maybe 20 kids with no adults present
to settle squabbles
to anxiously hover
to tell us the rules
we just knew

Summer's Night Games (cont'd)

Bari Ecker

and we played
as the summer sky went through its kaleidoscope of disguises
and the clouds
like lounging lavender ladies
stretched idly along the horizon
and dusk settled around us like a protective tent
The Good Humor truck turned the corner and our games would
pause
while we dug deep within pockets
for nickels, dimes, and quarters
and the ice cream man Charlie had been in the Navy
his bicep tattooed with an anchor
the only tattoo we had ever seen
we sat on the curb skinny legs splayed out
devouring ice pops and Fudgesicles and letting Mike lick our
sticky hands clean
when daylight surrendered to the night
we knew our games were over
scuff-kneed with grimy foreheads and eyelids already half-closed
we watched the lights of the neighborhood windows pop on one
by one
and fireflies
like hundreds of tiny blinking lanterns
would lead us home.

Patiently Waiting

Kathy Kane

The prognosis wasn't good. In fact, it was as bad as it could get. She was dying.

Sharma lay on a hospital bed in the middle of the living room, feeling like a grim centerpiece. While she could hear everything going on around her, she could neither open her eyes nor move her head to respond yes or no. She was almost gone except for those parts of her brain that allowed hearing and reason. The pain meds let her focus on what was happening outside her rather than the slow death happening inside.

Sharma had decided she would go quietly and gracefully. But first she would wait for her son, Trey. Oh, how she wanted to hear his voice one more time. The humor and sweetness reverberating through his rich, rumbling voice. She didn't need eyes to see his smile.

She would wait for him and then she would go.

The room filled and emptied as people stopped in to say their goodbyes. *That must be the new neighbor*, Sharma thought. *I never did get to know her. Just as well. One less person to have to leave.* Leaving was how she was looking at her situation. She was in control just as she had always been for her 67 years; she would leave when she was good and ready.

From the soft conversations swirling about, she was able to get a mental layout of the room. Her husband, Greg, was sitting in the corner. He was a quiet man, so she didn't hear much from him. She imagined him just nodding to the visitors as they came and went. Lucille, her eldest, appeared to be at his side, his mouthpiece, as well as his shield from the duties of the soon-to-be-bereaved. Sharma's inner eyes did a roll.

Then she heard Lucille quietly tell Greg that she'd just gotten a text from Trey. Traffic was heavy. Sharma's hearing was sharp, but she still had to strain to hear Lucille's annoying little girl voice.

Patiently Waiting (cont'd)

Kathy Kane

I can wait for Trey, she thought.

It was hard for her to gauge time in this state. The doctor stopped by. A quick conference with Greg and Lucille, a note on the chart. Failing organs, a matter of time. Murmurs and fussing, tutting.

This is actually fun, she thought with an inner chuckle. In a macabre way. Hey, isn't that Gladys, my beautician? She's probably pitching her skills to Lucille. How she can make me look almost lifelike in the coffin. I told them I don't want that. Just the crematorium and a sprinkle through the woods.

Where was her boy, Trey?

Ugh. Here was Georgette, her overbearing sister-in-law. Loud and dramatic. A bit of wailing for appearance's sake. She seemed to be moving toward Lucille. Probably sitting with her arm around her niece's shoulder. Lucille had that effect on people. As if she couldn't handle life on her own. Sharma knew it was an act; Lucille could manipulate with the best of them.

Wait. What was this now? Snow? Sleet? It seemed that Trey was texting Lucille with the latest update, and she relayed it to the rest of the room. "Oh, Mama, don't go yet!" she rushed to the bedside, grasping her mother's hand. "He's on his way."

As if I would, she snorted to herself. I'll keep waiting.

A new voice made its way into the room, accompanied by light steps clicking across the floor. In her mind, her brow furrowed as she tried to place it. Light, feminine, warm...but not stopping by her side. No, the voice drifted over from Greg's direction. His voice was soft in response. She sensed an intimacy between them.

Oh, that son of a bitch! It was Greg's new boss, Susan, or something like that. Sharma had met her at the last holiday party. *All this time I'm suffering, struggling to make my peace with all this and he's already working on the next wife.* She knew he wouldn't stay alone for long. He could never manage on his own.

Patiently Waiting (cont'd)

Kathy Kane

But couldn't he wait a little longer? Maybe be a bit more discreet?

As realization dawned, rage suffused her body. She could feel the blood surging through her veins, energizing, strengthening her, fueling a need to thwart her weak husband.

A commotion at the door. Here was Trey. Carrying in the cold on his hands that grasped hers and his cheek that lay on her cheek. Whispering to her, "I'm here, Mama. I'm here." She could feel the tearful smiles all around. "Now, Sharma can die happy. Her baby boy is here."

She laughed. Did she laugh out loud? The room got quiet. *I'm not going anywhere. Greg will just have to wait a little longer. I'll go when I'm good and ready.*

Gem

Maureen Lanagan Haggerty

We've all been there
searching the bookshelves
at our local library
we find a book
looks slightly familiar
read the inside cover
still not sure
start the first chapter
lean against the bookcase
turn page after page
hooked
remember the awesome character
that scary part
the unexpected turn
we keep going
(The Library will be closing in five minutes...)
loving the experience
loving the words
loving the whole story
once again

Writing Is Fattening

Doris Parmett

I don't know about other writers, but I find creating stories that you hope other people want to read is fattening. I just finished writing a mystery with 335 pages. I got on the scale and wasn't the least bit surprised to see it's going in the wrong direction. Up.

Every morning I promise the heavenly father (or mother) to munch carrots and celery instead of dark chocolate enrobed mangoes while sitting at the computer. FYI, I love the word *enrobed*. Enrobed is a highfalutin way to describe wrapping dark chocolate around dried mangoes. Trust me, it's still fattening.

I can truthfully say I haven't kept one promise on the dietary subject. Why do I do it? Why am I subjecting myself to who knows what illnesses? Obviously I'm an addict. So far that's my only vice. There is one way I can break the habit. I can stop writing!

I didn't always write and munch. Truth be told that fattening habit started about a year ago when I went to BJ's to buy dried mangoes for my grandson and his wife. It was there I was introduced to dark chocolate enrobed mangoes. The attractive bags faced me on the shelf. They looked a bit forlorn, as if they were asking me if they could please come home with me. Being a softie by nature, I reached over and in saying yes; I brought home five bags of dark chocolate enrobed dried mangoes.

My grandson is married to a lovely young lady who watches what she eats. She also watches what her husband eats. They're both very healthy. I happen to get along beautifully with them. How come you might ask? I'll tell you why.

I live by a special mantra. Every marriage has its musical theme and I'm not the conductor. Translated: While I still buy dried mangoes for my married grandson and his wife, they are not enrobed.

How do I break a bad habit? A therapist would ask about my childhood, my marriage, my everything. What the therapist

Writing Is Fattening (cont'd)

Doris Parmett

should advise me to do to break my bad habit is to buy milk chocolate instead of dark chocolate enrobed mangoes.

Since I do not like milk chocolate, I would be wasting money if I bought milk chocolate. So that ends that; and besides money doesn't grow on trees and I haven't won the lottery. Next the therapist would suggest I join a group. I can't join Alcoholics Anonymous since I don't drink. I don't smoke and I don't do drugs. I won't join Weight Watchers since I'm not overweight. Yet. Yet being the operative word.

Sadly, my only course of action to break my addiction is to give up writing. If my computer and I were divorced, I could step on the scale and not count the numbers going up, but hopefully start subtracting numbers.

But would I be happier? Should I chance restarting my bad habit due to boredom or loneliness? Perhaps I should join a gym? I could work up a sweat and then treat myself to several pieces of dark chocolate enrobed mangoes without guilt. Do I want to join a gym? Not really. I prefer walking. It's cheaper.

So, what is my secret pleasure? Truthfully, it's writing. My brain takes me to faraway places, where I meet people with problems. I try to help them. At first, they don't listen to me, but eventually they follow my instructions. In taking my advice they solve their problems. Their future is bright, their lives happier. Mine is too. Naturally, I celebrate with dark chocolate enrobed mangoes, but we won't dwell on that topic.

Writing is my personal drug. It's not digestive. Since I don't eat my words, writing doesn't give me acid reflux. The fact is I've been writing forever. In grade school I used to write the plays for other classes to perform for a school audience. I didn't gain weight from that since there were no dark chocolate enrobed mangoes on the shelves in those days. Nor did I see any enrobed menace years later when I celebrated seeing my first book published.

Writing Is Fattening (cont'd)

Doris Parmett

I just thought of the perfect solution. I should remove the little card table I keep to my left when I'm sitting at the computer. My sweet, fattening culprits are one left hand away on the table.

Will I do it? Am I a strong enough woman? The simple answer is yes, provided I stop writing. You decide!

Holding On

Rose Morba

You held the handle of the parasail with determination
eyes fixed on the boat in front of you
while waiting for the signal to begin
hearing it was not an option

The shimmering lake sparkled in the afternoon sunlight
as you were lifted into the cloudless sky
I held my breath, watched as you rose above the water
and sighed with relief when you splashed down effortlessly

More daring acts followed –
skiing down snow-packed mountains
gliding on one water ski across crashing waves
Your home is an act of daring
rooms painted vibrant shades of gold and orange
boldly announcing who you are and where you've been

Now your graceful body and signing hands
don't move as they once did
memories of those exhilarating feats and days gone by – fading
On a winter day you asked if we could go swimming
I signed – too cold, wait until summer
you nodded, seeming to agree

I fixed my eyes on yours and smiled,
holding your tender fragile hand in mine
you smiled back as we sat together and watched TV
little did I know weeks later you would barely
recognize me
all I can do – is keep holding on

Annals of a Kitchen Gallery

Carole Garibaldi Rogers

When I first put Lorenzo's photo on our refrigerator, he was seven; a chubby little boy dressed neatly in a pale blue plaid shirt and dark blue pants, staring expressionless at the camera. I wanted to hug him, but he seemed so remote and untouchable.

It would take years for his personality to emerge from his photos, but gradually we learned some basic facts. He was one of eight children; his father was a farmer in a rural area of southern Guatemala. They lived in a one-room house with a dirt floor, but they had electricity and running water.

And soon, as his sponsors, we began to receive regular letters from Lorenzo. At first, adults wrote letters for him, telling us that he liked to play soccer, to eat chicken and eggs. By the time he was in third grade, he was writing to us himself. "I have a dog and a rabbit. I bath the dog in the yard." Or "I like the school because is big and have a yard where my friends and I play US ball." We smiled at the lapses in vocabulary and grammar and came to know this little boy and his world.

After we had been sponsors for six years, I knew I wanted to meet Lorenzo so I joined a sponsors' trip to San Lucas Toliman, Guatemala. We spent a week traveling through the countryside to various mission sites, but the highlight of the trip was on the second day when we each met our sponsored children and their families.

Lorenzo, his father, Francisco, his mother, Pedrona, and one-year-old sister, Evaline, came with an interpreter to the mission headquarters where we sponsors were staying. Each family group, gathered around separate tables, had its own small conversation. At our table, Pedrona offered me a recipe for a chocolate-rice-cinnamon drink and Francisco told me about the farm where he worked raising flowers, describing especially the beautiful fragrant *nardo*. Tentatively, they began to ask me questions. They wanted to know about my family. How could it be that I had no brothers or sisters and had only two sons? Francisco was one of nine; Pedrona one of eight, and they had eight children of their own.

Annals of a Kitchen Gallery (cont'd)

Carole Garibaldi Rogers

Lorenzo, their second oldest, was quiet but carefully listening. He had a shy dignity—even when the two of us dipped our hands in a bucket of blue paint and ceremoniously left our handprints with all the others on the whitewashed walls. Then he was off to the gym to join a pick-up game of basketball. After lunch, I sat in the bleachers with Pedrona and Francisco for a short program by the children. Lorenzo's soulfully crooned solo was a great hit—at least with me.

The day ended all too quickly as the families boarded the vans that would bring them back to their own villages. I promised to share photos and Lorenzo promised letters. It was a sad moment, but the visit had been a success. I had met Lorenzo and had so many memories to take with me. It was why I had come.

But I would have one more memorable connection to Lorenzo during that visit. We spent the next few days traveling to various mission projects and greeting many other children and usually their mothers. On our last stop of the week, at the most remote project, we were escorted into a small stadium in the midst of the tiny town. It was festively decorated with flowers and balloons and welcome signs. We sponsors sat in the center; mothers and children surrounded us.

After we had all danced together and the children had performed for us, I heard my name on the loudspeakers. The Spanish-speaking women around me were smiling and pushing me forward. I walked up to the microphone and was given a bouquet of *nardo*, long stems of fragrant white flowers, which were as beautiful as Lorenzo's father had described them to me. The tag read: "From Your Dear Sponsored Family with Love." Cameras captured the moment, including my tears, but only later did I learn how many people had worked to make this remarkable gift happen.

Francisco had shared his idea of a bouquet for me with a social worker from his village and she found out where our group would be traveling. They connected with a local driver who was

Annals of a Kitchen Gallery (cont'd)

Carole Garibaldi Rogers

coming to drive us that day and gave the bouquet to him; he handed it on to the women who were our local hosts. I was able to send a message back via the same human chain: *Muchas Gracias!*

Our next letter from Lorenzo was so much more personal. I had sent him photos of our time together. He wrote: "It was very funny for me to put my hands on the wall. I feel a lot of joy you liked the flowers we sent with lots of love."

Gradually Lorenzo grew up. His photos showed a teenage boy turning into a man who towered over his mother in one Christmas family photo. He decided he did not want to work as a farmer, and we agreed to help him with tuition for secondary school and university studies. He opened a bank account and wrote about buying "one desk for computer, one screen, one keyboard, battery, mouse, one pair of shoes for school, six notebooks, 500 hundred sheets of paper..." He also made his first tuition payment. That year our refrigerator gallery showed a solemn young man standing with his mother behind the new desk with all his supplies piled high.

In the next letters Lorenzo wrote about his studies. He began to have trouble with his courses. He found English very hard, he said, even though he wanted to learn to speak my language. Chemistry was difficult. So was algebra. He was working part time at a mechanic's shop, learning those skills, too.

He managed to stay through three semesters of university classes and then we received a formal letter from the agency. Lorenzo had decided to leave his studies behind and work full time as a mechanic. He would no longer be eligible for our sponsorship. We were welcome to write a farewell letter to him.

That was one of the hardest letters I have ever had to write. How do you convey sadness *and* optimism? Confidence *and* concern? Enough to last a lifetime? And evoke memories of one shared summer day when he was twelve?

During the years we sponsored Lorenzo, we had other spon-

Annals of a Kitchen Gallery (cont'd)

Carole Garibaldi Rogers

sored children, all girls— Spandana from India, Ana Christina from Guatemala, Selena from Nicaragua, Angelina from Uganda. For a while, their photos also found a place on the refrigerator. But new photos stopped arriving. One dropped out of school to marry; one had a baby and had to move from her village; and one found fifth grade too hard and left school to work. Sponsorship ends when the children sever connection with their local projects. I can only hope that our girls grew into good women whose children will fare better.

Over the years, in our kitchen gallery, we have also held spaces for photos of Max and Luna, two Syrian children whose family had to leave their home in Aleppo and resettle as refugees near us. Max was six when we met him. He knew no English and we played a game with post-it-notes, covering him and his sister with yellow squares that read “hair” or “arm” or “nose” or “knee.” Year after year we posted their new school photos. Max is 14 now; Luna is 16. Their latest photos, which will stay for a while, show them holding small American flags as they receive their USA citizenship certificates.

But next to their photos, and in my heart, there is a small empty space. That will always belong to Lorenzo. I imagine him married now, probably with children of his own. *Dios lo bendiga*, my friend.

Battle-axe

Lois B. Dornfeld

The old gray ironclad warship
Limps into port
Rusty, black and blue
Some faded, some fresh

Can't see the targets
Can't hear the guns fire
Determined to push on
Despite the Herculean effort it takes

Bruised and broken
Sidewalls splitting apart
She holds it together
While ignoring the pain

Reminiscing over battles lost
And moments of sheer glory

In the Shadow of Death

Prologue to a Ghost Story: “Death is But a Sleep and A New Beginning”

Sarah Smith Ducksworth

Snow fell heavily that cold December morning back in 1998. As the new day was breaking, a white sun invaded the horizon. Its silvery light edged gently into a corner of the horizon. Beneath the steel sky, slippery white powder covered the road, and huge snowflakes steadily cascaded down, making the earth appear at once pristine and ghostly.

The chalk-colored landscape seemed a fitting backdrop for dying. And Beatrice Labonde Bailey was dying very softly in the back of a Red Cross ambulance. Her quiet departure from earth was in stark contrast to her prime-time demeanor when she made her living working two jobs: driving a cab and house cleaning part time for rich white families. During those days, she was also a regular at the Vandermark Hotel Bar where she occupied her own stool from which she regaled other regulars with stories laced with wry humor and uncanny insight into human nature.

Other than the one ambulance on the road, carrying the ailing, elderly Black woman to the hospital, there were few cars out in this weather to test the elements. The roads were indeed treacherous. The ambulance driver, unaware of the futility of his mission, waged war against Fate. He was determined to get through the hostile terrain and save the woman’s life. He didn’t know that he would lose the battle because Beatrice had already accepted the opportunity to mingle with angels. She longed to see once more her son Milton, Grandmother Sarah, her mother Phoebe, her uncles Azariah Davis and John Showers; and she could hardly wait to meet all the unseen ancestors she had heard about throughout her life when kin who knew their stories still survived. She knew all her departed ancestors had not left her after they crossed over to what she called “the other side,” and she believed they propped her up even during the long years when she was the last of the clan alive—a lone survivor.

Now, Death was coming on cat feet early that morning. When the three-toed monster finally arrived, it sat down heavily on Bea’s chest. While sapping her remaining strength, it sucked the

In the Shadow of Death

Prologue to a Ghost Story: “Death is But a Sleep and A New Beginning” (cont’d)

Sarah Smith Ducksworth

air from her lungs. In a matter of minutes, her body was stilled, and she was released from the world of tears and shame, hope and commitment that had tethered her for a lifetime of eighty years. Her soul was now free.

The ambulance driver was still traveling down the open highway at top speed, which was about thirty miles per hour due to weather conditions. It was a dangerous ride, but he made it safely to the emergency lane of the Port Jervis hospital called Mercy, in less than a half hour.

He skidded to a stop in front of the building’s double doors. After exiting, he rushed to the rear of the ambulance and threw open the wide back doors. The medic and the sick woman’s neighbor, Betty Moore, looked up at him. One of them said, “She’s gone. She passed away a few minutes ago.” It was impossible for the driver to distinguish which one gave him the dreaded information. He had failed.

Dis Ease

Laura Daniels

darkness came
unexpected unwelcomed

a scanned shadow
a shape-shifted breast

guide markers implanted
radioactive beads removed

radiate. moisturize.
radiate. moisturize.

twenty days in a row
jagged scar incinerated

rest. heal.
rest. heal.

guide markers found
tight squeeze to the backbone

compress. hold.
another angle
compress. hold.

wait

more images needed

compress. hold.
tilt tray
compress. hold.

finally
all clear

brightness begins
wanted welcomed

Remember Me

Kate Cutts

My daughter Emelyn and I are sitting all cozy at my little round kitchen table catching up and eating her favorite soup, creamy chicken and rice. Outside is a cold dark dusk, but inside we chatter along warmly.

“I’m reading this book about memory right now. Let’s see, it’s called. . .” *I cannot believe I have a brain burp on a book about memory.* “I can’t remember.” The instant the word, “remember” is out of my mouth I laugh at myself. “Oh Jeez. The book is *Remember* by Lisa Genova. She wrote *Still Alice*.”

I watch my daughter closely to see if she smiles at the irony that I can’t remember a book called, *Remember*. Will her expression hint of wondering if this is a sign of early onset Alzheimer’s Disease? Her face is kindness itself and shows enough amusement that I continue laughing at my blip. Half of my brain continues telling her what I am learning. The other half is back in the eighties remembering my own grandmother’s first signs of dementia.

Our whole family is sitting around plump and full of Christmas dinner. We’re playing the dictionary game, and when it comes her turn to give a definition, she gets so tickled at herself; she has no idea how to play or what to do next. We can’t get her to stop laughing, to make her understand the game. Her fit is contagious, and soon we are all laughing along and helping her with her turn.

Back at my house in the present, Emelyn and I move from the kitchen into the living room where she is bombarded by my dog. Finn won’t leave her alone and keeps his nose pressed against her hoodie pocket despite her continued explanation, “There are no treats in there.” He doesn’t give up all night. I’m so embarrassed to have such a badly behaved dog.

It takes me back to when Mother had a little Pomeranian, Darcy, and she was first showing signs of cognitive struggles. Mom and Darcy sat where Emie and Finn are, with the dog in

Remember Me (cont'd)

Kate Cutts

Mom's lap the whole visit. She could hardly stand to part with her. "I don't see why y'all won't let me take her to church. She would just sit right in my lap the whole time like she is now."

Emie and I try ignoring my present snuffling dog, naughty but adorable as he is, and talk about the latest with her work, her boyfriend, what we've been watching. We touch on our hopes and dreams, and exchange prayer requests. I wonder, *how long I will keep this pleasant memory stored*. Lisa Genova's book explains the different types of memories, and how each time we recall one, we're actually creating a "memory 2.0" and it is overwritten with slight changes. She tells how faulty our memories are, and how forgetting is really advantageous. Still, I yearn to never forget.

I've met two people with amazing powers of memory. One was Dr. Neil Prior, a professor at Harding University, who never forgot anyone's name. Each time my parents would return to his Bible class at the College Church, he would greet them, recalling their relevant data, and asking about other people he had met from their hometown, Vernon, Alabama.

The other person was a subject in Lisa Genova's book. In one chapter she describes her discussions with the actress Marilu Henner, famed for her role as Elaine O'Connor Nardo in the sitcom *Taxi*. My husband, Dan and I were in Manhattan in August of 2018 and wandered down a side street trying to navigate our way to our next destination. We saw a small crowd waiting for autographs from Marilu outside the stage door of *Getting the Band Back Together*. When the crowd thinned, I asked if she would mind taking a selfie with me. She was pure graciousness and had Dan take a proper photo of us.

According to Genova, Marilu remembers every day of her life from waking moment to falling back asleep exactly as it occurred. I've wanted to find her again and see the powers of her perfect episodic memory in action. Will my silvering hair and extra wrinkles give her a challenge? Or will she say, "Ah yes, you had been to the Downton Abbey Exhibit on August 18. It

Remember Me (cont'd)

Kate Cutts

was sunny and warm out that day, and you waited patiently to get your selfie with me, until all the theater goers got their autographs.”

What I would not do, if I were to see Marilu again, would be to prompt her with, “Do you remember me?” This is a dreadful question, especially for someone whose memory is in decline. I see how frustrating it is for my mother, when we have a few moments of quiet conversation in her single room at the convalescent center, to be interrupted by a staff member saying, “Well look who’s come to see you! Do you remember who this is?”

It's time for Emelyn to go home to her own two puppy dogs now. We hug at the door and say goodnight. I can't fathom this dearest of people to me being slowly erased by amyloid plaques. I pray her face will always be crystal clear in my visual cortex. In the meantime, I'm thankful she remembers me, and sends me sweet little messages like the one I get when she is safely home again. “I love you so much and am so glad you're MY mama!”

River to Joy

Donna Piken

The old man struggled to fasten his life vest.
He wiped sweat from his face, squinting in the hot sun
then slowly untwisted his awkwardly pretzeled
bare legs before him on the chaise lounge.

Papa, lift your arm...

His fortyish year-old son propped him
to standing, then slid the top pad of
a single crutch under his father's left arm.

Papa stood confidently and walked,
his right leg, half the width of his left one,
stiffly dragged behind scraping the ground.

They approached the entrance of the lazy
river where a donut tube carries you with
the slow-moving current through a maze.

The son placed the crutch on the ground
stepped into the cool water and held
the blue tube steady.

Papa inched back, his heels close
to the edge, eyed the donut, and
with a backward plunge, plopped
right into the dOnut hole.

River to Joy (cont'd)

Donna Piken

He let out a roar of laughter
splashed his arms and delighted in every
ripple, bend, and turn down the maze
unencumbered and free.

His son walked close behind him smiling
as his father transformed into a joyful child.

Seeds of Change

Erin Terese Murray

It's been four weeks since I left my job. It sounds so simple and straight forward, doesn't it? The story of a married woman with three kids struggling to manage it all who chooses herself and her family over her job is all too common, but to me it feels revolutionary.

To me it's a very big deal.

The thing is, I always wanted a family and children of my own, but life can be so unexpected. One day you're in a relationship heading toward a future you've been dreaming of for years, and the next day it's over. The relationship is done and the future you've been building in your mind is wiped away.

I spent the better part of my twenties and thirties either in a relationship or healing from one. It was never easy for me to brush off the remains of my love and move along like nothing happened. Sure, people do that all the time. How many friends have I watched hop from one relationship to the next and straight into a marriage? It was never like that for me.

My parents have been happily married for over 45 years. And I'm not just saying happily married because that's a common phrase used to describe couples who have been married for almost a lifetime. They actually are happy. Yes, of course, there have been some hiccups along the way—but they have always chosen each other and truly are best friends.

Their long-lasting relationship shaped my view of love and relationships.

In my twenties, I wanted more than what I believed my parents had. More love. More lust. More excitement. I didn't want some simple best-friend kind of love; I wanted the kind that left you longing, yearning, and flying high. And that's exactly what I got. The thing about that kind of love is it burns fast. It burns hard. And it leaves you tattered and torn.

Fortunately, in my thirties I began to grow up and look inward. I healed my heart, got clear about what mattered to me and what I really wanted, then started to take actionable steps toward getting it. For a time, that meant trying to meet a man and start a family, but that's an exhausting goal to chase. At least it was for me. I would kind of teeter-

Seeds of Change (cont'd)

Erin Terese Murray

totter between trying really hard to date and then stepping away from the dating game for a bit to spend some time with myself. To my surprise, I began to love the peace and calm of solitude.

Long walks alone, solo trips to the museum, and trips abroad exploring new places on my own filled my cup in many ways. I felt strong, capable, and clearheaded.

At the age of 35, I moved across the country for a big job opportunity. It was a thrilling choice. After 17 years on the West Coast, I finally felt ready to attempt the fast-paced life of the East Coast for a bit. Convinced I would only stay for three to five years before heading back West, I dove into my life there ready to soak up every ounce of it and seize every opportunity that came my way.

I loved it. I loved the city, I loved my job, and I loved the expansiveness of growing somewhere new. Like a plant that had been potted and repotted and potted again, I was planted in fertile soil, and I started to blossom and thrive like never before.

Entranced with my new chapter, I barely noticed the seeds of change when they arrived. A few years earlier I had befriended a man that I met in a leadership program who lived across the country. We hadn't kept in touch much since he was in the midst of a divorce, and I was focused on propelling my career (not to mention we lived thousands of miles apart). But when I moved to the East Coast and realized we now lived a few hours away from each other, I decided to reach out. A few months later he messaged that his divorce was final, and he'd like to come visit. Things moved quickly from there, though it felt slow to start.

We saw each other every few months, taking it slow with no pressure. He was finally able to breathe again after a tense divorce and custody negotiations over their two young sons. I was focused on making new friends, exploring the city, and making career advancements at work. The slow and steady pace was good for us both.

In early March of 2020, I met his sons and ex-wife on my 37th birthday at a playground in Northern New Jersey. We played, made small talk, and talked about the news—you know, that COVID-19 stuff

Seeds of Change (cont'd)

Erin Terese Murray

that seemed to be popping up in Italy and had people alarmed on social media. We weren't too concerned.

A few days later, I took the train back to my apartment in the city and listened to our then President announce the United States would soon be closing its borders. It was then we realized it was a true pandemic and things were about to change.

The following week, I returned to New Jersey to shelter-in-place with my boyfriend. We figured if we were going to be scared and alone, it was better to be scared and go through it together. Plus, we figured a few weeks of living together every day would give us the opportunity to see if our long-distance relationship had legs—and legs it had.

Things moved both slowly and at warp speed. That's how the pandemic was—it was a complete time warp. By the time I reached my 38th birthday, I was a wife, mother, stepmother, and homeowner. All my dreams that I'd released and let go of because they were too hard and too painful to cling to, came flooding to me and manifesting in the most beautiful way, all at once. But even good things—great things—can be a lot to process.

I went from climbing the corporate ladder in headquarters to trying to somehow hold onto and grow my career and “personal brand” from home while also taking on the new roles of wife, mother, and stepmother.

Normally you have some time to acclimate to your new chapter or role before another wave of change arrives, but when it arrives all at once, there is a lot to do and process. For years now, I have struggled to stay afloat. A staunch feminist, I'd grown up believing that women can have it all. We should be able to climb the corporate ladder, have a sexy and thriving romantic relationship with our partner, and a strong loving relationship with our kids (and be available for all the milestones and tiny moments, since they're important too). Easy. Women can do it all! Except that it's really, really hard and, despite all my best efforts to do it all, I felt more like I was drowning or hanging on by a rope with a life vest, than sitting up on the boat enjoying the view.

All I want is to enjoy the view. I just want to be with my family and enjoy the life I have dreamed of for so many years. I want some time

Seeds of Change (Cont'd)

Erin Terese Murray

for myself to think and dream and create—and to have the energy to do it.

For most of my life I could never understand how women could just stay home and be with their kids and not work. Didn't they want more? Didn't they have more they wanted to prove or accomplish or create? But oh, how I understand it now. Life is so strange like that. Sometimes you can be empathetic and compassionate and envision yourself in someone else's shoes and sometimes you have to be standing in them to actually see it and finally get it.

After spending the past three years walking on a tightrope and trying to balance it all, I chose myself and my family, and I walked away from my career.

I didn't make the decision overnight. I thought about it for the better part of a year. I weighed my options (and my feelings), did some vision boarding, journaling, and lots of long discussions with my husband. It was hard. But it was also easy. It was both.

I'm about to turn 41 in a few weeks and I feel calm and steady, feet planted on the ground. I feel like myself again—albeit a somewhat new self, one that I now have time and energy to explore. And I now have the space in my mind and my heart to feel the gratitude that one can feel when so many of their dreams have become a reality.

With more change for myself and our family on the horizon, I'm planting the seeds of what comes next and nurturing our future. There will be something for me, something for them, and something for us all.

Marcos Grigorian
Dried Earth on Canvas
1963
MOMA NYC
Dana Faulkner

Heavy wet winter boots
wait behind the red line on the floor
My arms fold, chin tucks in
mesmerized eyes travel over canvas
and the artist's notes

Grigorian used natural materials:
Soil, sand, and mud
he shares natural surfaces
reminiscent of Iranian dwellings
revisited from the artist's childhood

My imagination runs barefoot
I am transported to an exotic circle of women
dancing in the hot desert sand
jasmine sweetened musk perfumes the air

Saffron and turquoise-colored scarves spun over silk skirts
tricolor metal; bangled arms glisten and clank
street musicians worship this muse
twirl our weightless bodies into unified harmony
tanned feet stomp rhythm over dried earth
my sacred soul slips into Marcos' painting
that January afternoon.

Ode To The Pants

Julie McCormick

I hopped a plane to Paris, France, with a friend. And there, in the city of love, I fell in love.

THAT is where I met LE PANTALON.

THE PANTS.

THIS is what happened:

My friend and I were walking down a side street just off the Champs-Élysée near the Louis Vuitton shop.

A Chinese woman jumped out of the back of a van, handed us cash, and asked if we would go in and purchase two very specific wallets for her.

I thought, “I’m a good actor and a nice person.”

I said, “Oui.”

She said, “Merci.”

Security led us through the door. They ushered us to the wallet counter. I got as far as holding said wallet in my hands, when the security guards returned and politely took me by the arm (as only the French will do) and promptly ushered us to the door.

“NON! SORTEZ! OUT!”

They were on to the Chinese woman. (They had cameras on all the surrounding side streets.) Clearly, I was not the first shill she had sent in.

They told me I was banned from Louis Vuitton—for life! (You can probably still find a wanted poster in their break room with my face on it.)

My friend and I walked back to the van and returned the cash, which the Chinese woman seemed to take in stride. (You know: If at first you don’t succeed, try, and try again.)

That is how I ended up at a mall on the outskirts of Paris, far from the Champs-Élysée, Louis Vuitton, and the Chinese counterfeiters. Funny how life works because that is where I met THE PANTS. The ones that CHANGED my life.

Ode To The Pants (cont'd)

Julie McCormick

They fit like they were made for me. When I put them on, I felt unconventional, European, and definitely NOT FROM IOWA.

When I got back to my current home in New Jersey, I wore THE PANTS everywhere:

to the grocery store,

to the podiatrist,

to Walmart.

I felt thin.

I felt CHIC.

In NYC people stopped me on the streets and asked, "I love your style. Are you famous?"

Merci. Non.

That's why I LOVED those pants. They made me feel young and thin and just a little bit famous.

Every Spring I tried them on as I turned 49, then 57, and then 63.

Every Spring they were a little tighter, a little less COMFORTABLE, until I finally donated them and bought new pants.

Because constantly starving, working out, trying too hard, and depriving myself of all the good stuff (like French croissants and wine) in pursuit of staying the IDEAL age and size is exhausting.

The French pants will always be the same size.

I will never be that IDEAL size or age again.

I fantasize that THE PANTS have found a new mistress and that she is feeling young and thin...and maybe just a little famous.

Aging is a shape shifting experience.

*LIFE has only two sure things,
change and death.*

Never changing is death.

The only change in death is decay.

So, get comfy with what fits today.

Ode To The Pants (cont'd)

Julie McCormick

Because when you are comfortable in your OWN SKIN, your old pants will cease to matter.

Do you really need your tombstone to say: SHE NEVER GOT NEW PANTS!

If you really can't bear to donate them, why not make them into a quilt! Then wrap yourself in that soft, cozy quilt made of all your old, tiny pants.

Quilts are always comfortable—and they ALWAYS fit.

Now, go forth, have some fun, eat the croissants, drink the wine, and by the way: BUY NEW PANTS!

“Closets”

Lori Carlson

The home of costumes
and confusion to some,
images of organization
to others.

Never enough most claim!
Beneath the bed ain't the same
as shelf space.

But the dreams hung here
can wither and die in the dark,
moth-eaten and buried
treasures lie deep within.

Don't close the door
unless it's cedar,
and the walk-in
is the same distance
as the walkout.

Throne Thrumming

Diane T. Masucci

It killed the odor.

Growing up with boys—four of them—who often missed the powder blue porcelain toilet bowl, I learned to hold my breath before entering the family bathroom.

I mastered this technique when using a porta-potty at family campgrounds and applied it at home, where four rambunctious males zipped in and out of the throne room from morning to night.

I had the auspicious task of cleaning the bathroom every week, so by Saturday the odors had accumulated around the base of the toilet which, as my aunt pointed out, needed extra scrubbing. “Your brothers need better aim!” Aunt Sophia used to joke and wink as she showed me how to use the tools of the trade: a rag, a brush, and Comet.

She, after all, had been raised in an immigrant family of 11 who pulled her out of high school so she could clean other people’s houses while her siblings attended school.

I guess I was luckier in the next generation because I was still enrolled.

How the bathroom cleaning task fell to me, the only girl, one can quibble about, but it would do no good. In the Roman Catholic households of the 1950’s, children basically obeyed or risked losing a seat at the dinner table.

So as an adolescent girl, I basically complied with whatever tasks were assigned and carried on.

Comet came to my rescue.

The material, wrapped in its bright green 10” cylindrical can, not only killed the odor but cleaned the rims and blue and white tile floors that I scrubbed each week.

Throne Thrumming (cont'd)

Diane T. Masucci

Like magical pixie dust, it attacked the stench and bleached the surfaces with its sprinkle of rough powder.

It was my weapon against the scrum of boys who daily invaded the only bathroom in our house.

After Comet, I could enter the room, remove my clothes, and turn the hot and cold fixtures on for a hot bubble bath. I could finally relax, alone, in a clean bathroom.

Comet made the silver knobs and faucets shine with its bleaching action. I loved that smell!

It provided a little respite for me as an adolescent girl who needed a getaway from the family.

Indeed, Comet gave me my day at the spa!

Me and My N-95

Vivian Fransen

It used to be “me and my shadow
strolling down the avenue”
but now throughout 2023 and beyond
it’s me and my N-95 inside and outside
especially whenever I’m out and about.

You give me the freedom
to venture out
to fly on a plane and navigate a crowded airport
to watch a parade or check out the state fair
you reduce my fear of face-to-face interactions.

Others may see me as a bit of a Lone Ranger
masking my nose and mouth
during food shopping, at the bank, and at church
so vigilant to protect myself and others
from the spread of COVID-19 and other airborne diseases.

We are now inextricably bonded
you serve not only as a prophylactic
but a sort of security blanket
giving me a measure of confidence
knowing if I sneeze I pose no danger to others.

It’s a different way of life
grabbing you, my eyeglasses, car keys, and wallet
—in that order—
along with the gloves I now always wear in public
I don’t leave home without you.

Me and My N-95 (cont'd)

Vivian Fransen

Your presence makes people wonder
if I smile or frown or have crooked teeth
instead, they gaze at my eyes
for any hints of connection
and need to listen carefully to the words I say.

I give thanks for you, my constant companion.
Masks used to be a way to conceal our identities
especially amid the revelry of a masquerade ball
but now you allow me to go that extra mile
to help keep myself and others safe.

A Vermont View

Kim A. Crumrine

I have often reminisced about the Vermont ski trips my husband and I used to take. In particular, the view we would see from the top of the slopes: cornflower blue sky as far as the eye could see; snow and ice twinkling and the sun, a bright bold presence uplifting our spirits. This view before the descent is pure magic. Its beauty pops into my thoughts at random moments.

My memory of these trips also includes how much I enjoyed the drive up north, the cozy condominium where we would stay, and the beckoning ski trails. But the best part undoubtedly was when I was poised at the top of the mountain, my face rosy from the chilly air, the rest of me bundled up and warm. I would inhale the sharp cold and the bright beautiful view. I must have absorbed this scene into my body because it's been with me ever since. After I would gleefully take off down the slopes, slicing through the soft snow, I was already thinking about returning to the glorious mountain top.

The likelihood of our returning to the ski slopes is decreasing as our ages increase. Oh well. I would just have to hold on to my recollection of a spectacular snowy mountain view. This would have to suffice.

Imagine my surprise when just the other day around 6 a.m. on my own property, I experienced the exact thrill of being up on top of a ski mountain. I was outside. It was bitter cold. The tip of my nose was beginning to numb. The snow on our hill was the purist of white. The sky was a beautiful tapestry of dawn colors peeking from behind the trees' silhouettes. Off in the distance, undulating purple mountains majesty provided a soft backdrop to it all. The sun was due to rise any second. I had a flash of recognition. I had seen this sight before. That spectacular ski mountain view. My heart soared.

In that moment of clarity, I realized the beautiful mountain view in front of me rivaled any manicured commercial Vermont ski slope. The similarity to what I was seeing with my tired eyes could not be denied. I compared the two snap shots: the one in

A Vermont View (cont'd)

Kim A. Crumrine

front of me, and the one in my memory. Yes, they were about identical.

At my feet, a twelve-pound Corgi puppy named Torrey was admiring the view too. He had woken us up early and gotten me outside into the frigid cold on our frosty hill when I normally would be dreaming under layers of warm blankets.

I realized at that moment that I did not have to go back to skiing in Vermont to see a glorious snowy mountain view! But how could a view right outside my window measure up to a “vacation” view? It is because even though I may not be on a trip, it doesn’t mean I can’t find and appreciate incredible experiences often reserved for destinations other than home. The happiness and joy I feel when I’m with Torrey softens every nook and cranny inside me. I am soft and mushy like his little body. I am open and content to deeply feel things, and I notice more. I looked again at the view. Breathed it in. Spectacular. Thank you, Torrey, for getting me outside in ideal conditions for my little epiphany.

After we went back inside the house, I fed the puppy and rubbed his soft little belly. I knew we would be going outside again soon. And soon again, after that. It was supposed to get warmer in a few days. I wouldn’t have to bundle up and wear my bulky boots on all our trips outside. The snow would be gone. The snowy mountain view as well. But what else would we see and discover together? I couldn’t wait to find out.

One last note. If I am being completely honest, I should add this: The snow on our hill was not the purist of ski slope white. There were little patches of color dotted here and there. That was just part of the wonderful view.

A Game of Skill

Ginger Rockett Pate

Grab that cue stick to your right
Make sure the balls are in your sight
Roll them, rack them, keep them still
This is quite a game of skill

Six ball, four ball, three ball, five ball
One ball even looks like an eyeball
Which ball's left at the end of the game?
Does it have a special name?

Lonely eight ball is facing me
I am certainly full of glee
Grab that cue stick to your right
We'll be here for the rest of the night.

About Our Authors

Lori Carlson

Lori is a newly published poet who has been a member of WWW for almost 2 years. She is a licensed spiritual practitioner at Center for Spiritual Living Morristown and poetry has always been a big part of her journey. After spending most of her adult life in NYC, she now resides in Madison, NJ. Her poetry has been published in *New Jersey Bards Poetry Review 2023*, *The Poetry Marathon 2023 Anthology*, printed edition, and will be in the upcoming volume of *Prompted Poetry*.

Kim Crumrine

Kim is a picture book writer/illustrator and the artist and owner of the card company Water Street Design. (www.etsy.com/shop/waterstreetdesign) Her first picture book will be published by Mini-bombo in 2024. Her cards can also be found in retail stores such as Just Jersey in Morristown, and Paper Source. Kim's favorite causes are supporting her local library, environmental protection, and animal rescue through her art donations. She is so grateful for the encouragement, support, and education she has received from WWW.

Kate Cutts

Following a rewarding career as a teacher of the gifted, Kate is now a writer and voice actor. She writes three-minute stories, children's books, and is currently revising a novel. She holds a master's degree in Instructional Technology and lives and works on her family's cranberry farm. Kate appears in the Ocean Spray television commercial campaign, "Act Tiny, Be Mighty"™. Visit her webpage at KateCutts.com and subscribe to her mailing list to get her three-minute stories delivered to your email monthly.

Laura Daniels

Laura (she/her) is a multi-genre writer and founder of the Facebook blog *The Fringe 999* <https://www.facebook.com/groups/399191694738673> published daily. Her work has been curated in the *Visible Ink Anthology*, *New Jersey Bards Anthology*, *New Note Poetry*, Silver Birch Press, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Smarty Pants Magazine for Kids*, and elsewhere. She's an active member of Women Who Write, JCW Plum Poets, and Livingston Writers Critique Group and is on Instagram @thefringe999. Her poems grow from a love of

About Our Authors

learning and New Jersey, where she lives with her partner in Mt Arlington and is currently working on her first poetry collection.

Lois B. Dornfeld

Lois began writing poetry in November 2020, one month after beginning *The Artist Way*, a three-month course that required morning pages. She is a retired corporate meeting planner, lives in Mendham, NJ with her husband and dog and continues to write poems in her home studio. She is the leader of a WWW critique group, Jersey Girl Poets. She has also participated in various writing workshops: one run by a certified Amherst Writers and Artists facilitator; another online class that brings together meditation, yoga, and writing; and a webinar about finding your voice through writing by TAPS.

Sarah Smith Ducksworth

Sarah finds stories about ordinary people rising above less than ideal circumstances compelling. She has been writing and telling stories all her life. Her stories and poems reflect her keen awareness of the harshness of life and the resiliency of the human spirit to overcome adversity. Her published writings have appeared in academic journals and newspapers, including *The New York Times*, *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, and *The Magill's Series of Masterpieces of Literature*. In 1995 she wrote the Foreword to the *5th Edition of The Underground Railroad*, and appeared in the PBS documentary, *The William Still Story*, as an expert commentator.

Bari Ecker

Bari is a retired family therapist and an active member of Women Who Write. She is a participant in the Jersey Girls Poetry critique group. Her work has appeared in *Moving Forward: Stories of Courage and Strength*, *Goldfinch*, *The Anthologist: Rutgers Literary Magazine*, *Sensations Magazine*, and *More* magazine. She lives in Morristown with her husband of 49 years and loves spending time with their five grandsons.

Dana Faulkner

Dana is interested in making the mundane magical and vice versa using just a pencil, a notebook, and a smile.

About Our Authors

Vivian Fransen

Vivian, a longtime WWW member who is part of the Just Write critique group, writes nonfiction, poetry, and short stories. She is a published author with her book titled *The Straight Spouse: A Memoir* (published by Open Door Publications, 2017). Visit her book's website at straightspousememoir.com for more details.

Maureen Lanagan Haggerty

Maureen's poems have appeared in *Frogpond*, *hedgerow* (England), *Poetry Pea Journal*, *Paper Mountains*, *tinywords*, *Haiku Society of America Members' Anthology*, *EXIT 13*, *Off the Coast*, *The Tower Poets* and *If Only You Knew*. She is a past president of Women Who Write and a founding member of Poets' Corner. Maureen's book of poetry is titled *Deeply Home*; her poems are inspired by nature and the changing of the seasons, memories of childhood and family, and Irish country life.

Kathy Kane

Kathy is a writer, an Amherst Writers and Artists workshop leader, creativity coach, and book midwife. She works with women in mid-life who have books to birth. Kathy spent 30+ years in a successful career in financial services before rediscovering her creativity. She now works with others to help them do the same. She lives in Morris Township with her husband of 37 years and enjoys the gift of two stepdaughters and three grandchildren. She loves books, journals, special pens, and gardens that dream of spring and second chances.

Diane (Trumbauer) Masucci

Diane writes fiction, poetry, and essays. A veteran print journalist who taught in the Montclair Writer's Room, she holds an MFA in fiction from The New School. She lives with her husband in Montclair, N.J. where she is building a library for visiting grandchildren.

Julie "MAC" McCormick

Julie is an Iowa native who has called New Jersey home since 1985. Her specialty is finding the funny (and inspiring) everywhere! Julie per-

About Our Authors

formed her first one-woman cabaret show in 2012 at The Metropolitan Room in NYC. She performed stand-up comedy for several years and sang with a jazz trio until the 2020 pandemic put a stop to that. What to do? A new show! Her next bigger and better one-woman show, *Julie Mac: States of Mind* is currently in the works along with a book of essays and an audio book.

Rose Morba

Rose was born and raised in New Jersey and lived in the Boston area and in Philadelphia before returning. She is a retired educator and has joined several writing groups, both prose and poetry, since retirement. The Women Who Write Poetry group is one of her favorites and has inspired her to continue writing. In high school, Rose and several students attempted to publish the first literary magazine under the guidance of advisor and English teacher, Dianne Cook. Although their endeavors were not successful, she would like to acknowledge Mrs. Cook for her support and for instilling a love of the written word in her students.

Erin Terese Murray

Erin is an American writer and lover of words. She has written countless personal essays, poems, and AI conversations. After nearly 20 years in the Financial Services Industry where she had tens of thousands of conversations with clients over the course of 13 years and spent her last 7 building advanced digital conversations, she swapped AI content for poetry and prose. A believer in the power of storytelling, she now explores life, love, and humanity with words. She lives in Morristown, New Jersey with her husband, daughter, and stepsons.

Doris Parmett

Doris enjoyed a dual career as a reading specialist and national bestselling author. In addition to her many novels, she has had poetry, plays, magazine articles, and short stories published. A former board member of the Romance Writers of America and the National Reading Association, Doris was instrumental in bringing the Young Authors Program to New Jersey.

About Our Authors

Ginger Rockett Pate

Ginger is the author of *Look Left, Look Right, Look Left Again* which was a Moonbeam Children's Book award winner and a finalist in the International Book Awards, and *Would You Invite a Skunk to Your Wedding?* Both were published by Greene Bark Press.

Donna Piken

Donna writes poetry, fiction, and memoir. She is a longtime member of Women Who Write and coordinator of the Livingston Mixed Genre group. She served numerous years on the editorial staff of *Goldfinch* and was the Editor-in-Chief for last year's edition, volume 25. Donna's mixed media art and photography has been featured locally in juried shows and in *The Writers Circle Journal*, issue 5. She is also proud to have had her work on the covers of *Goldfinch* volumes 21 and 24.

Carole Garibaldi Rogers

Carole has been a journalist, oral historian, and poet. For more than 30 years, she has published numerous articles and essays in national newspapers and magazines, including *The New York Times* and *America*. Her poetry has appeared in a variety of small-press journals and in anthologies. Her eighth book, *Hidden Lives: My Three Grandmothers*, was published in 2013 by Serving House Books. She is currently at work on another book, a collection of personal essays, with a working title of *Conversations with My Life: Essays from My Eight Decade*. She lives in Morristown with her husband, Leo.

About Our Cover Artist

Liz Lewis

Liz is a writer from New Jersey. Her work has been published in USA Today and NCURA Magazine, and she has authored dozens of written products on behalf of the federal government. When she's not writing, she's enjoying the chaos of raising two daughters alongside her husband. Follow her on Instagram @lizlewiswrites.

About Our Editor

Bernice Bellouny

Bernice is currently the Senior Staff Writer for a women-led digital marketing/website development company in NJ. Her long-running career has included writing and editing for various media channels. She enjoys writing fiction, particularly flash-fiction, and dabbles in poetry; samples of both have been published in *Goldfinch*. Preparing for that next chapter in life, Bernice and her husband recently moved to North Carolina and are looking forward to traveling the country in their RV. She is grateful that, thanks to the internet, she can continue her membership in WWW and the Just Write critique and writing groups.

About Us

Women Who Write, Inc. began in June 1988 as a single writing group called Mothers Who Write. Today, we are a regional women writers' organization and nonprofit corporation with writing groups that meet throughout New Jersey.

Any woman who writes may join Women Who Write, Inc. Our members include writers of short and long fiction, poetry, plays, journalism, essays, autobiography, science, mystery, history, romans and children's literature. Some are award-winning professionals who publish regularly; others write mainly for pleasure and self-discovery. We support each writer in establishing and meeting personal objectives.

Officers:

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Scan before April 1, 2025 to join for the
2024-2025 membership year.

