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VOLUME 1 ISSUE 3: WONDER

THE
MOCKINGOWL
ROOST

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DeGenaro

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U2 FAN COMICS by Achtoon Baby

WATERCOLORS BY Kelly Eddington

POETRY: Sunrise at the Summit

POETRY: Japanese Bath

*AND THE FINAL INSTALLMENT OF THE
REVENGE OF THE YETIS*

July 2021

MASTHEAD



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From my childhood filled with stories from my aviation pioneer grandmother to traveling through the jungles of Central America in a motorhome to life today with my exploration of the world on foot and bike, my life has always been filled with wonder.

Reading my favorite novels like *Anne of Green Gables*, *A Little Princess*, and *A Girl of the Limberlost* filled my existence daily with awe over the beauty of life, the world, and the hearts of humans around me who could love even when I was unlovable. Wonder comes through many avenues from the ancient wonders of the world like Machu Picchu to the tiny wing beats of a bee hummingbird as it hovers beside a hibiscus bloom sipping nectar.

After a year of sorrow, loss, disappointment, and confusion, looking at the world through the heart of wonder felt like the perfect way to rejoice in the good, the unusual, the lovely around us as we face the second half of this bizarre year.

I invite you to come with us along this journey into the things that make us stop, think deeply, give thanks, and explore.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rita Mock-Pike'.

Rita Mock-Pike
Editor-in-Chief

– Sir Thomas Browne

“We carry within us,
the wonders
we seek around us.”



SUNRISE AT THE SUMMIT

I am filled with wonder, with awe, on a morning such as this
Magnificent entrance
Powerful sight
A moment that steals my breath away

Climb to the top
Miles of treacherous terrain
Sore legs, tired lungs, a mind willing to give it all up

Push through the trees
Climb over the rocky crags
Ignore the cry of body that begs for rest
Keep pushing, keep trying, keep climbing

Frustration comes
Should I turn back
Could it be just as beautiful from below

Keep pushing
Keep trying
One more step, then two
I'm almost there

The mist breaks
Eyes opened wide
The summit greets me like a welcome friend

Open arms
I am on top of the world
Dancing in the center of the clouds
So close to heaven, I could reach out and touch it

The magic begins
Brilliant light fills the space around me
Clouds move, spinning, whirling, dancing in a lover's union
Day awakens with your call

My heart is stirred to life
Beauty surrounds me
I am filled with wonder, with awe, on a morning such as this

DANA REEVES

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Kelly Eddington Watercolors

Kelly Eddington



TRUE TARDIS BLUE

Emily MacKenzie

Everyone has their comfort shows – the ones with specific episodes that you re-watch over and over again. The lines never seem to get old, the characters never tiresome, and the plots never boring. Having been essentially raised on a diet of science fiction, Doctor Who had to be one of those shows for me. And it's true – when it's available on Netflix or Prime, I rewatch all my favourite arcs, binge seasons when I need an emotional boost, and just enjoy the brilliant goofiness of my favourite Doctors in the TARDIS.

Yet somehow, I've only ever been tempted to purchase one series on iTunes. I know, I know. I should support the show that I love so dearly; I'm sorry my wallet can't afford it right now. *Talk to me again after I've published a book.*

Which series?

Series Four. Agatha Christie, the Ood, the bees... Doctor-Donna.
But why?

(You were thinking that, admit it.)

This is where I usually shy away from these conversations. I make excuses: "Oh I don't know, it was an impulse" (not so much). Or "It just has so many of my favourite episodes it was worth it to buy the whole series" (although true, this same statement applies to several of the other seasons, I promise you that).

So what on earth could persuade me to buy a show that I periodically already pay for and

spend money that could otherwise be used for my comics? In a word: *Donna*.

More specifically, Donna was the first companion that struck me as relatable. Rose was adorable and Martha's heart knew no bounds, but Donna – she was the first companion that wasn't secretly in love with the Doctor. I may not have known it at the time but this was the magic ingredient I'd missed thus far.

Donna sends the message to the audience that you don't have to be head over heels with the male lead to be a main character. When I recall the multitude of shows I've seen over the years – specifically those put out around the same time as Series Four – I have trouble thinking of another show that doesn't feature a blatant plot or subplot about who was going to get with who. Donna taught us that friendship is sometimes more than enough. Donna taught us that sometimes friendship is better.

The phenomenally healthy and wholesome friendship that developed between an already favourite character (the Doctor) and a soon-to-be favourite character (Donna) is why this series now takes up valuable space on my harddrive. That, and the revelation of a dynamic that continues to shape how I judge character arcs to this day: the fundamental question of whether the showrunner can let the characters remain friends without things getting awkward. Can the writing staff resist the formulaic trope of “lead male+lead female= together”?

This friendship was just as important for the Doctor as Donna, a fact that is sometimes lost for the trees. When the Doctor meets Donna, he is lonely and searching for help as he comes to terms with all that has happened. He needs time and space to grow and reflect without the pressure to change or act a certain way. He's been in love and sought after as a lover, he's lost said lover, and now he *just needs a break*.

In a world flooded with messages of the need for a soulmate, of the true joy found only in a relationship, and the idea that without a significant other something is wrong with you, a female-identifying character on screen not besotted by her male counterpart brings relief.

Don't get me wrong, I do enjoy a good love story, but I would appreciate the acknowledgement that every arc doesn't have to have a romantic

thread. Considering that representation on television is still scarce even in 2021, Donna's stubborn refusal to have anything romantically to do with the Doctor is *beautiful*.

She spoke her mind, she said what she liked, and she didn't worry at every turn about his feelings for her, or the lack thereof. Instead, a beautiful friendship blossomed on screen. She wasn't afraid to correct each and every character who inaccurately assumed she and the Doctor were a romantic duo. The toxic rhetoric ‘it's impossible to be friends with a guy/girl without falling in love with them’ lands squarely in its rightful rubbish heap after Donna.

Donna is not asexual, but she is determined to do things her own way. Despite the fact that canonically she had trouble finding someone who was truly compatible with her strong personality, she held herself to her own standards and refused to break or bend. She became, for me, an icon. Even though I didn't know at the time how I identified, I was able to witness a character telling others that they simply didn't “fancy” someone, and took away from it the knowledge that that was an acceptable response. Donna was a character searching for a partner, but until she found precisely what she wanted, she knew that she was perfectly capable on her own. Donna was the first character who demonstrated fiercely that our own standards have to come first, and despite everyone telling us to find a partner, we can still say “No, that's not for me.”

There is a dynamic between the Doctor and their companion(s) throughout the show – obviously, the Doctor will always be more knowledgeable than they are. This element of ‘cleverness’, as the Doctor calls it, is necessary, as the character simply wouldn't make any sense without it, given the lives that they've lived. This creates a power dynamic that the companion-de-jour must offset with their sheer humanity: Rose's optimism, Martha's integrity, Rory's loyalty, Bill's confidence. But there has never been anything like Donna's honesty to somehow soften the arrogance that the Doctor exudes from time to time.

We get to see a side of the Doctor which honesty reflects their companions'. Brilliantly, the Doctor's own desire for friendship mirrors Donna's reluctance to be involved in anything romantic, allowing the evolution of the most

beautiful platonic relationship to ever grace my screen. Aside from the initial homophone mishap (mate/mate), the two communicate so inefficiently-efficiently that it's accurately demonstrative of a degree of friendship that is perpetually hard to portray.

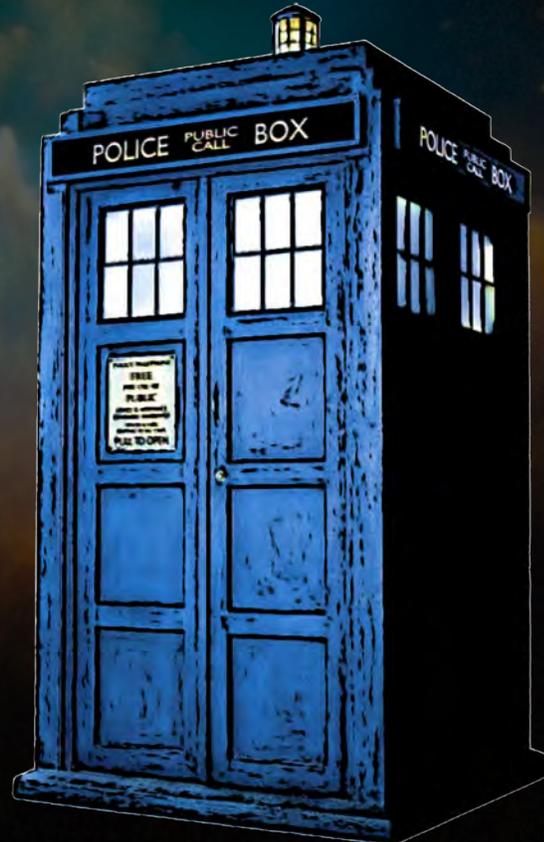
A friendship between opposite genders accurately represented on screen is rarely found, especially one wherein one character's arc doesn't dissolve into a secret romantic confession, or the need felt to alter a fundamental component of their own personality to suit their companion's ego.

The sibling-like relationship that the Doctor and Donna developed was one of the reasons that losing her at the end was so agonising. Not because we, the viewers, lost Donna, but because the Doctor lost his best friend, the person that allowed him to simply be, without asking him to change.

When I look back at the episodes now, these observations are just short of instinctual to an older and wiser version of myself. At the time I had no idea why I loved Donna's episodes so much, or why they spoke to me in a way that others didn't. Although the Doctor later would have companions that weren't 'in love' with him, none could ever take the spot of Donna in my heart. No one else has been able to play the role of best friend to the Doctor quite like she did, and I'm not alone in this sentiment. Donna's last moments are almost unanimously accepted as the most heartbreaking departure of any companion in the show.

I rarely cry – ask anyone who knows me - but I can admit to shedding a few tears over the loss of Donna Noble.

And rightfully so. ◆



SECRETS OF PLANTS

SUE COOK



Photo by Sue Cook

Through my glass a world of green unfolds
Streaming cells of crystalline chlorophyll
Moving so slowly it feels like each beat of my heart propels it forward
First secret told was conquest

The cells spoke of breath
Waste
Life
Death

Much more than known by a younger species
They survive, even as they perish

Drusy crystals float in lush fluid as I watch, and sketch the wonder of life unseen
The plants are not finished speaking
The secrets continue
Beauty can be deadly.
The berries of death await those uninformed of their desire to render their attackers powerless
We are not done with you, mindful one

Shall I speak to the conifer of how to survive deadly cold
Or the Oak of how to count the days
Know the temperature
Learn the secret of resurrection
Will they speak of this last secret

They are not done with me.
Through my glass I see the crystalline chlorophyll streaming, like blood.
We are beating the same rhythm with hearts different yet I am lost in the wonder of the cells

The final secret comes as a whisper
And I wonder no more



Kelly Eddington Watercolors

“It’s all in the details.”

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Achtoon Baby - Proclamation

Office of the Achtoon Baby

Proclamation

WHEREAS, Bono has remained happily married to Ali Hewson for almost 38 years while being an internationally-renowned rock star, and with her he has raised two accomplished adult daughters who love him and of whom he is in awe, and

WHEREAS, Bono is clearly a fan, employer, and champion of women, and more so than the vast majority of men, he embodies the term “woke,” especially regarding women, except for that one misstep in 2017 when he used the word “girly” in a derogatory way, a rare stumble he has more than made up for by devoting his time, money, and celebrity to various activist campaigns promoting women’s causes, along with 56 concert performances during which he invoked the word “herstory” as if it had only just then occurred to him, and

WHEREAS, Bono possesses a unique androgyny: Elizabeth Taylor coloring painted across a combination of typically feminine and masculine facial features and body parts, all in a sturdy package that is literally impossible to draw with anything other than curved lines and some have called “fun-sized,” and

WHEREAS, Bono maintains a standard of glamour unusual in men in their 60th year, and while avoiding vices such as smoking, drinking, and the sun has never been his top priority, he employs a squadron of beauty professionals dedicated to the upkeep of his appearance, which requires a great deal patience on Bono’s part, and

WHEREAS, Bono’s legendary hair journey has been so comprehensive and varied that one can accurately date photos of him within one or two



Written & Illustrated by Kelly Eddington

years solely based on his hair, and as a side note, nobody talks about this, but Bono has never embarked upon embarrassing sideburn adventures during his entire lifespan and should be commended for this fact, and

WHEREAS, Bono knows the value of a bold lip, a strong eye, and a high-heeled boot and has been known to accessorize both stage costumes and casualwear with sunglasses, necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and miscellaneous flair with ease and panache, and

WHEREAS, Bono, who in 1988 was proclaimed by some (okay, me) to be simultaneously the most beautiful man and woman in the world, has stared down the barrel of aging, and, like all great beauties, he has grappled with the sad reality that the fall is much more psychologically damaging when one is accustomed to existing at such dizzying heights, and

WHEREAS, like many women of a certain age, Bono has confronted the "ass versus face" dilemma (look it up) and has opted to go with the former, and likewise Bono has abandoned youthful experimentation with fashion in favor of a classic, sleek, all-black "uniform," and

WHEREAS, Bono has been subjected to a cruel and unusual amount of body policing by fans who are quick to criticise his hair, face, fashion choices, and weight in a way that would give a lesser being all manner of body dysmorphia--Bono must be grateful that he does not possess a uterus because if he did, that too would be subjected to Anistonian levels of scrutiny--and despite all of this, he remains disarmingly sweet and open-hearted with the very people who would have no problem picking apart his current, perfect hairstyle on Twitter the following day, for example, and



Achtoon Baby

IT IS RESOLVED

WHEREAS, Bono, who is beloved by millions worldwide, inspires complex feelings of admiration, jealousy, and occasionally even lust and sexual confusion in some heterosexual men, who frequently underestimate him and believe him to be arrogant and otherwise undeserving of his various accolades and the aforementioned love of millions, particularly women, and

WHEREAS, Bono would probably secretly dig it,

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved that I, Kelly, Achtoon Baby creator and known woman, on July 24, 2020 do hereby proclaim Bono to be an **HONORARY WOMAN**.

I encourage all U2 community members to celebrate Bono for this accomplishment, his general wokeness, and his enduring beauty, handsomeness, and overall fabulousness.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I hereunto set my hand and cause the Great Seal of Achtoon Baby to be herein affixed.



KELLY EDDINGTON
Achtoon Baby Creator
and Known Woman



HONORARY WOMAN

Inspired by Wonder Woman



Rita Mock-Pike

A dark period of my personal history is splashed across with brilliant red and blue light from a film I was certain I would find eye-roll worthy. I won't go into details that give light to this person who brought about such a treacherous time for me, but let's just say I felt unsafe – physically and emotionally – and I needed some inspiration and hope. I lived alone in Chicago, my church at the time had all but abandoned me to the devices of an unjust world, and the police had literally laughed in my face over the fear I felt.

But two friends dragged me to the cinema to watch *Wonder Woman*. We needed some fun, and dinner and a movie seemed the perfect opportunity to delight in good company and simply let go for a few hours. I agreed and went into the theatre expecting the emulation of every other superhero film I'd seen to flicker across the screen with nonsensical, unrelatable drivel, with maybe a few laughs along the way.

Instead, I found myself looking at Gal Gadot and realizing this woman – who'd once been an Israeli soldier and knew Krav Maga – emulated a kind of physical presence I knew I was capable of but had not yet sought for myself.

I've always been strong physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I've always been able to recover quickly from things and move forward with a positive attitude, even when the trauma clings to me in ways I have yet to discover.

For whatever reason, *Wonder Woman* brought these things to mind and deepened my resolve to know myself, know my own strength, and expand that power both physically and emotionally.

I signed up for self-defense classes (Krav Maga), studied videos online, and hit the trails and streets daily on my running mission. I would strengthen my body and my purpose and know how to defend myself if some monster decided he'd come after me.



Surviving two sexual assaults in under two years – by two men, one, a guy I dated and one, an elderly man on a hiking trail – meant that I knew how strong my spirit is. Being able to run a marathon and recover fully in less than 48 hours told me how strong my body is.

I've always struggled with my weight, as well – and my wedding celebration day was coming up in less than three months from the time I saw the film. I had the dress in my closet, and I didn't want to have to tighten that corset any more than necessary. I lifted weights every other day. I ran 20 miles a week. I could see myself as the embodiment of Wonder Woman.

I dropped 15 pounds, toned my arms and legs and middle, learned how to disarm an assailant and drop him to the ground, should the need arise, and knew I was the strongest I've been in my life.

Now, when I'm feeling weak, timid, or unsettled, I can recall that imagery – those memories of running the streets, building my muscles, kicking butt in Krav Maga (deemed a natural by my instructors), and knowing my own strength. I am powerful. I am beautiful. I am a thriver, not merely a survivor. I am – despite the lack of Amazonian flare and lasso of truth – a wonder woman. ♦

“I would rather have
30 minutes of 'wonderful'
than a lifetime of nothing
special.”

-Julia Roberts

u n t i t l e d

POETRY



PAUL DE NEUI

The cicada sings its song for a season
Then transitions
To give life to a new generation.

Communion with God

Soren Porter



"O Lord, all my longing is before you; my sighing is not hidden from you." Psalm 38:9

Speaking from a Christian perspective, it is comforting to know God knows us in entirety. The infinite nature of God means he is not limited by time or space; He exists outside of time itself and Knows what is, what was, what could be.

What we do with the knowledge of God's infinity is up to us. There are really only a couple of ways to respond to this.

The easy path is to take the deist approach and assume God is this large and unfathomable being beyond our capacity to grasp and that He doesn't personally care about us.

Another path, which requires taking a leap into faith here, is choosing to at least try to have a personal relationship with God (whatever that looks like for the individual).

How we pray should reflect who we are. Each word and method of praying is unique to the individual. Using words is a common approach but not always required. Writing, music, the arts, and yelling into a pillow are equally valid methods of prayer.

Meeting God is rarely the emotionally gratifying supernatural event we want.

We do not have to ascend a mountain or learn a special language to pray in; God meets us where we are. Taking a leap into faith just requires taking a single step in that direction and, from my personal experience, we do not finish putting that foot down before we are met by God.

But it is easy to become addicted to emotional highs and seek those as a validation. Emotions are volatile and can become addictive.

Most of my own encounters with the Divine lack fireworks and special effects. Instead, there has been a simplicity and pregnant silence. It doesn't feed my ego that is craving vain miracles but it feeds my soul in a way that is more profound than any stage lighting and dry ice could.

I think God prefers meeting us in the simplicity of silence.

Why do this?

Because God cares.

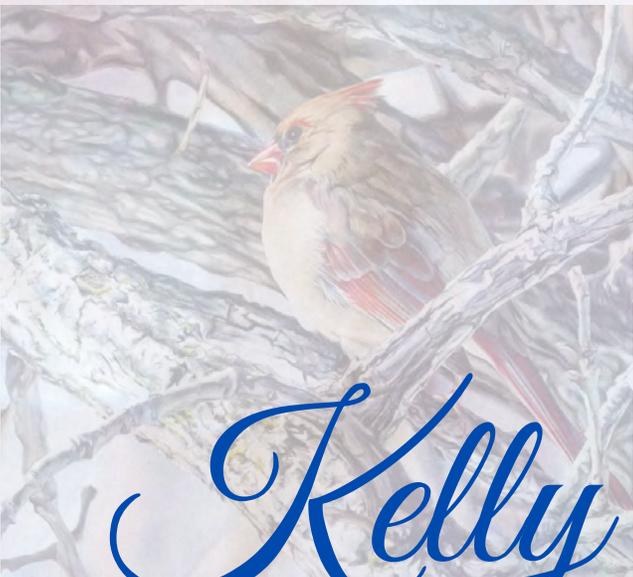
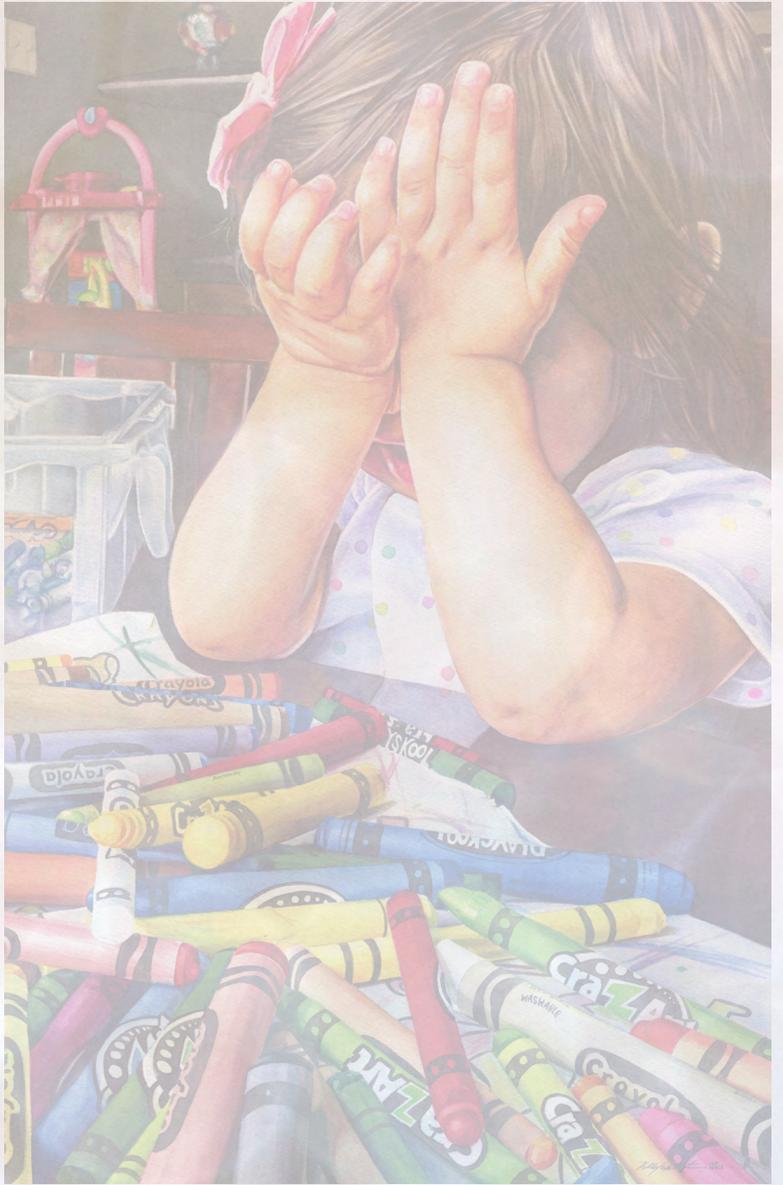
God knows how fragile and easily distracted we are.

It is easier to cling onto methods and devices rather than go deeper into a relationship with Him. Relationships require pain and discomfort at times, that includes communing with the Divine.

As strange as it may seem, our emotions and emotional distress have meaning to God. If we share in honesty, there is a chance we might have a spiritual reciprocation. Something that could never happen by keeping our hearts closed off.

It is a strange, beautiful, and wonder-inducing God who cares about our emotional well being and needs.

God Cares



WATERCOLORS
BY
Kelly Eddington

I create watercolor portraits and still life paintings that are highly realistic. My palette is bold and bright, and I delight in creating objects that are shiny, reflective, colorful, and difficult. Some of my contemporaries "own" certain subjects such as Ball jars, peonies, or musical instruments. In my quest to find original subject matter, I've ventured into antique jewelry, marbles, candy, and glass gems. Over the past few years, I've created a series of portraits of myself and my extended family.

This series was especially comforting during 2020, when COVID-19 kept me from the people I loved. And like many other artists last year, when I ran out of available models, I discovered that sometimes I'm my own best subject.

My paintings can take anywhere from two weeks to two months to complete. My approach to painting is meticulous and time-consuming, and I think this helps my viewers understand how important my subjects are to me. If items as mundane as marbles on a piece of foil (or my two young nieces, whom I've painted repeatedly) are worthy of my extended, intense study, then maybe everything my audience encounters in their daily lives deserves a second look.

Additional images:

Cover - The Queen's Iris

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Page 25 - Too Many Choices

Page 30 - Passion Flower

Page 46 - Blue Green Bono and Edge

Page 71 - Duel

Page 93 - i+e Adam Clayton

- Kelly

*Like Father Like
Daughter*



I got Me Babe

Red Giant



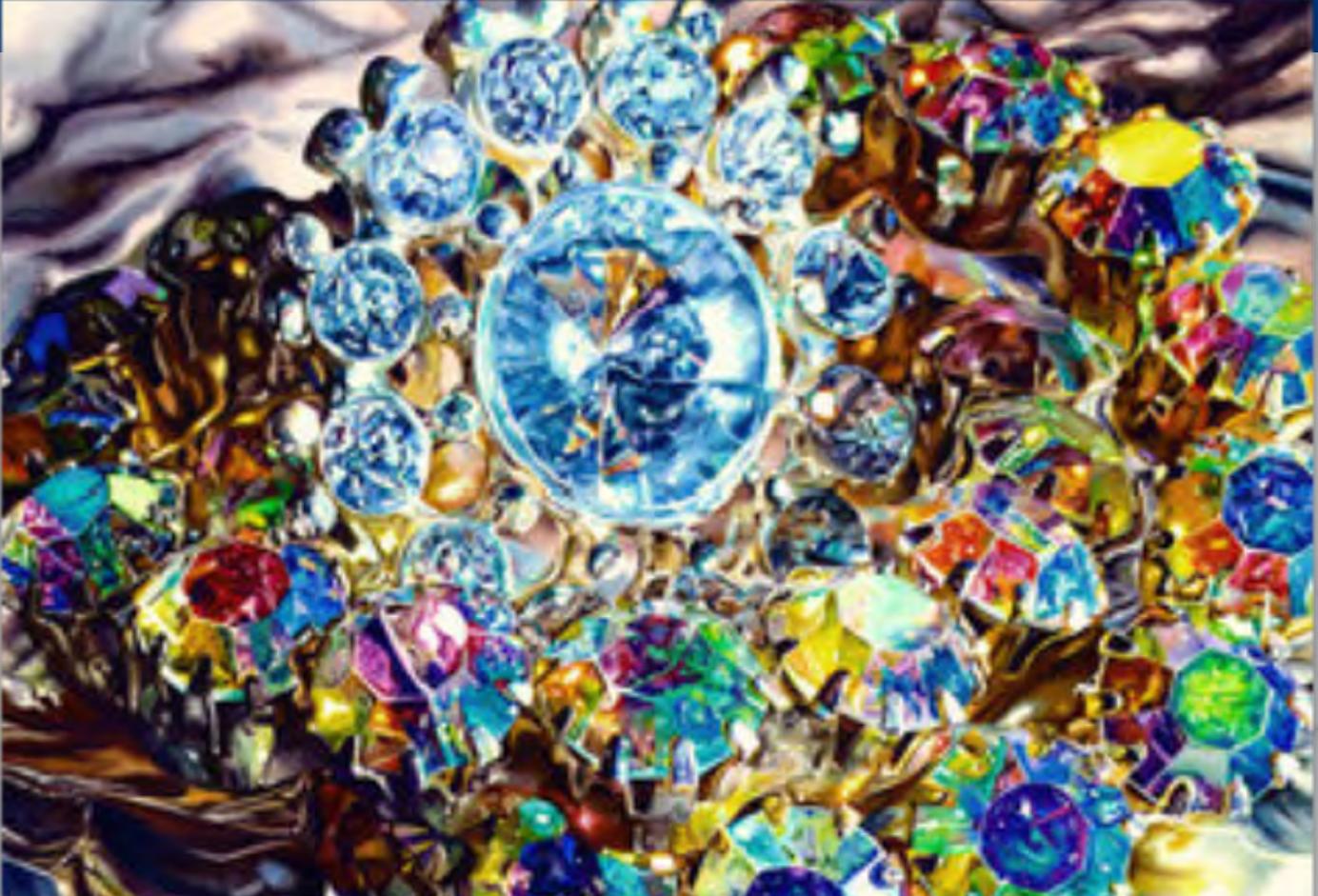
Treasure



Ruby



Heirloom



Winter's Postal



*Tougher Than
the Rest*



Doorknob Sketch

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POETRY

HATCHLING

Sue Cook

Two years of waiting
 First on a busy corner of a parking lot near a drug
 store.
 Feathers and twine came together to create home
 I waited...
 Are you there, little one?
 Will you grant me an audience today?
 Life moved swiftly, and soon the wind lifted you away.
 Feathers slicing the air as you left.
 Empty air filled with the sound of popping, and the
 smell of gunpowder
 This year, again two came to build their empire in a
 parking lot of a bank feet away from their last home.
 The bank-protected sanctuary.
 Have you returned, or has a genetic code been passed
 to a hatchling indicating "home"?
 I waited.
 I watched for signs of life.
 People thought me mad to care.
 They called you names, but I spoke the word
 "protected."
 To me you are sacred.
 Then one day, I called to you.
 You heard and heeded the paparazzo's call
 Your fuzzy head faced my camera before the wind
 lifted you away.
 Do you still hear my call?
 Will you come back to your sacred ground?
 I wonder...

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RACHAEL BRITTON

-FEATURED ARTIST-

OUR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF SAT DOWN WITH THEATRICAL STUDENT, RACHAEL BRITTON, TO SEE WHAT IT'S LIKE PURSUING HER DREAMS



FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY STAGE
MANAGEMENT STUDENT, ACTOR, AND
WRITER



Rachael and Rita backstage during "Babes in Toyland" -2012



You know how there are some people you instantly connect with, despite an age difference or weird circumstances? Well, Rachael is one of those people for me. In 2012, during my last production at The Quincy Music Theatre in Florida, I played Mother Goose in Babes in Toyland. I was in my thirties and Rachael was an older teen in the cast. That didn't matter, though – we instantly knew that we had a friendship for life.

That's proven true over the past decade, and we've journeyed through theatre, trail running in the woods of North Florida, changing life circumstances, and self-discovery. Now, she's back in the south, studying at her dream school: Florida State University (FSU). She's getting a Bachelor's Degree in Theatre, focusing on stage management.

She's pursuing her dreams as so many of us at MockingOwl are, and

I thought a deeper dive into that story might just be the inspiration some who are floundering could use.

Rita Mock-Pike: How did you become involved in theatre?

Rachael Britton: I grew up watching the classic movie musicals, like *The Sound of Music*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Annie*, but I didn't really understand that musical theatre was an actual art form until my mom signed my little sister up for a drama camp when I was eleven or twelve. My sister was the super dramatic one of the family and my mom thought it would be a great outlet for her to get out her energy. Once we got to the first day of camp, I begged my mom to let me join, and sang "Do Re Mi" from *The Sound of Music* as my impromptu audition song. After that camp, I got involved in a summer children's theatre in a little town about 30 minutes away, and I caught the theatre bug almost immediately. As they say, the rest is history.

Theatre is
for the
Courageous:
An
Interview
with Rachael
Britton

Rita Mock-Pike



"She never feels more alive than at these moments. When onstage she fears nothing."

- Emily St. John Mandel

Quincy Music Theatre in Quincy, Florida

RMP: Why did you opt to pursue the stage management/theatre degree from FSU?

RB: I chose Florida State University mainly because it is one of the top theatre schools in the U.S. It's also located in my hometown, and I moved back to my hometown due to the pandemic, so the location is wonderful. FSU offers a BFA and a BA program in the SOT (School of Theatre). The BFA is specifically for actors, and it's a four year, strictly regimented program designed to create a well-rounded actor ready to go out and start working professionally right after graduation. The BA program is broader – it gives students the wiggle room to explore different paths within the theatre industry, whether your interests lie in acting, stage management, lighting, costumes, you name it.

You get assigned to an advisor who will cater your schedule each semester to what you specifically want to learn about, and you have the freedom to dabble in as many or as little sections

as you like. Because I'm on the Stage Management track, in the BA program I don't have to take any acting classes (I've already taken many of those back in my community college days), and I can focus specifically on an in-depth learning experience in each of the technical aspects of theatre. Because I already have a two-year Associate's Degree from a community college, I can further expedite my education by completing my degree in two years rather than four, only taking specific technical classes needed to graduate, instead of spending time on electives and core classes.

RMP: What do you think is so addictive for folks like us who adore theatre and can't get enough, even though it's exceptionally hard work sometimes?

RB: I find theatre intriguing because no two productions are the same. You're always working with different people, different material, and different intentions. Coming together as a team to build a show from the ground up is

an extremely rewarding experience and having something everyone can be proud of in the end keeps you coming back for more, even if the process was intense or difficult.

RMP: In your first semester, what are some key things you've learned about theatre and yourself?

RB: The main thing I think most theatre students would say right now that we're learning is how to translate our skills in the theatre world into skills we can use for other careers and jobs. The pandemic basically disrupted every entertainment industry, and this has caused most of us to pivot on our goals and careers and get creative. Now that theatre is coming back, we're learning about new innovations and ways to create theatre digitally, as well as learning how to build a show physically. Now, classes include a lot more digitally involved projects, and we're learning how to put on distanced theatre in new and exciting ways.



“Movies will make you famous; Television will make you rich; But theatre will make you good.”

— Terrence Mann

As far as what I've learned about myself, I've learned that I'm really good at procrastinating till the last minute and still making a great final project. In all seriousness – going to school during the pandemic has been difficult because you have to be extremely self-disciplined and kind to yourself. It's harder to concentrate and it's harder to access your creativity when you're going through a massive emotional and physical event like a worldwide pandemic.

I've learned to be gentle with myself. Learning that it's okay to be sad, to be unmotivated, to be out of ideas – because creativity never really leaves me, I just have to get myself into a state of mind where I can receive it. And oftentimes that takes patience, compassion, and care. So, taking my time to feel my feelings, putting away that important design project to go outside for a little while, allowing myself to be inspired and encouraged by the people around me without pressure of passing or failing – these are all things I'm learning.

Working in the theatre is a serious career, yes,

but I'm in it for the experiences, for the fun, for the creativity and imagination. I never want to lose sight of why I chose this path and I always have to remember that my mental health and wellbeing comes first, or else I simply cannot be the best at what I do professionally.

RMP: Who do you feel would benefit from similar programs?

RB: I think anyone who wants to pursue theatre as a career would benefit from a BA program like the one FSU offers. I love the idea of getting a well-rounded education, even if you already know which path you'd like to take. The best of the best in this field are those who have experience in multiple aspects of theatre – actors who have trained also as technicians, costume designers who also know how lighting works, stage managers who were once actors themselves. All this knowledge creates a memory bank of experience to pull from when we're all working together as a team to get a show on its feet and makes you a valuable asset to the staff.



Set from "Sister Act" Rachael worked on. Photo by Abby Kinch Photography

RMP: Do you have any advice for teens and adults considering a career in theatre?

RB: My humble advice is simply stay true to yourself above all things and get hands-on. Theatre is a wonderful thing with beautiful people creating it day in and day out. But theatre is also full of human beings, and human beings create things that are fallible, as are we. Whether you're involved in your high school's theatre program, a community theatre, or college theatre, I think it's super important to stay true to yourself, to help and protect those around you, and do whatever is in your power to create a safe space for all people involved. If you see or experience something that isn't right, say something.

Secondly, volunteer! Get into the community and see what you can find. Learn as much as you can about everything you can and I promise, there's always going to be someone happy to have another set of hands and another person to teach their trade to. You can't wait for opportunities to get involved to come to you – so get out there and find them yourself! Don't be afraid of your lack of knowledge or be afraid of failing. Theatre takes courage and a strong heart, and you get back what you put in. You got this! ♦



"An actor must never be afraid to make a fool of himself."
- Harvey Cocks

Our Journey to Grace

Barb Denington

At the age of twenty-two, singleness and ministry called me. I dated a few nice Christian men, but that tug of singleness felt certain. And when my health required a total hysterectomy, I knew I was right: Yep. Single forever.

One of my favorite activities each year was teaching at the Associational youth retreat. In 1992, one church sent a new youth pastor to the retreat. Many of the teens from his church were in my class, so when I dismissed them, he saw me standing there and I heard him say, "There is my godly woman!" This caught my attention – and freaked me out when I realized he meant me.

Who is this? He's got to be kidding.

After a while, I remembered that we had previously met – and after that initial awkward/scary moment in the doorway, it seemed like Bill was everywhere I went during the retreat. That meant my mission for the rest of the week was to "politely" avoid him so he wouldn't get any ideas.

Matchmakers cropped up, though, and while I knew they wanted to help, I resisted. "I'm supposed to be single!"

We became friends during the week-long retreat but the more those wannabe matchmakers pushed, the more intractable I grew regarding any type of romantic relationship. At least until Bill asked almost a year later, "Will you pray about marrying me?"

What was I going to say? "No, I won't pray about it"?

Pray we did, and soon realized how off I was about God's plan for my life. On May 21, 1994, I married my soulmate.

Together we served at First Baptist Church of Woodville in the North Florida panhandle, Bill as the youth and education minister and I as the youth department leader and ministry team director. Youth were constantly in and out of our home and we loved having them around. Everything was wonderful except one thing: I could not give Bill a baby.

After a busy and exhausting week in October 1994, spent working at the church and at my job at the State, I sought sleep. When rest refused to come, I began talking to the Lord. As I prayed, a growing light appeared in the room. I heard a somewhat familiar, gentle, masculine voice speak. "You shall be a mother."

The unexplainable peace confirmed that this was the Lord.

While He spoke, the Lord reached out and revealed the most beautiful baby girl. She had thick, dark brown, curly hair, deep brown eyes, and a single dimple. Her presence was so real I almost tried to hold her.

The Lord said, "Her name is to be Grace. My hand will be upon her. I have a special plan for her life."

When the Lord finished speaking, the room grew dark, and silence fell. Sitting up in bed, I wondered, Am I dreaming or did the Lord actually appear to me? Why would He? I must have fallen asleep while I was praying and dreamed all of this. I couldn't go back to sleep, so I sat in the bed staring at my sleeping husband. I felt as though I would burst from waiting to share this vision with my soulmate, especially since the message involved both of us.

The next morning, I told him of the vision. We sat down on the side of the bed, joined hands, and Bill led in prayer. As we prayed, the Lord reminded us of how He had been leading us throughout our lives, especially our call to ministry, our meeting, relationship, and marriage. Even when we faced obstacles in our lives, the Lord had always been there to strengthen and guide us. Now after the vision, it appeared God was answering our prayer for a child.

After that, the idea of meeting our daughter, Grace, consumed most of our thoughts. We hoped it would happen sooner rather than later, but we knew that the Lord's timing is perfect. We prayed for God's wisdom and discernment as we prepared to become parents.

During the last week of that month, I was awakened from a sound sleep, somewhat dazed. The bright light was there again, and the now familiar voice filled my soul with reverence for the mighty, glorious God of the Universe who loves me. I knew the Lord stood with me. He reached out His hand toward me and His previous words echoed through the night. "Her name shall be Grace and my hand will be upon her. I have a special plan for her life."

Unable to speak, I fell to my knees and repented for leaning into the doubts I'd had about His first message. The Lord smiled and showed me a glimpse of my future as the mother of my sweet baby girl. I was immediately reminded that with God all things are possible.

I started shaking Bill's shoulders. "Bill! Bill! Wake up! We're having a baby girl!"

Bill tried to focus his eyes on me, "Ugh? What's going on?"

“The Lord returned and I know for certain it was Him this time! He repeated His message to me. We are going to have a baby girl named Grace!”

Our excitement kept us awake, so we daydreamed together about what this would mean for our family. I had taught parenting classes and counselled parents professionally and now Bill and I were going to be parents! Bill reminded me of Proverbs 22:6, *“Train up a child in the way he should go and even when he is old he will not depart from it.”* (ESV). We needed to pray and seek God’s wisdom and guidance every step of the way.

Both Bill and I were so enthusiastic about becoming parents we found it difficult to wait on the Lord. For me, it was a bit like being pregnant without the morning sickness and swollen ankles. Each day that passed only served to increase our expectation of Grace’s arrival.

Because adoption is a lengthy, involved process, Bill and I decided to take the first steps toward it by contacting the Florida Baptist Children’s Home in Tallahassee. The Lord met us in the process as our home study, background checks, and other paperwork went through quickly.

Until we met a roadblock: the next mandatory parenting class would not be held again for eleven months. We could go no further in the process until that time came.

Nearly eight months later, some dear minister friends called to ask if we would consider taking in a troubled thirteen-year-old young man named Curtis. “With your background with troubled teens and Bill’s experience in youth ministry, you could really help him.”

His mother was willing to give us temporary guardianship papers so we could take him to the doctor if needed. After a quick conversation to make our decision, Bill and I told the Brickers we would be happy to take Curtis for the summer. Our journey to parenthood had finally begun!

Two hours later, a tall, slender young man stood in our living room with our friends, Bill and Marietta Bricker, and a small backpack containing all his worldly possessions. I showed Curtis to his room so he could get settled, and I joined Bill and the Brickers on the porch.

“So what is Curtis’s story?” I inquired. “Does he have any family involved?”

Reverend Bricker handed me the file containing Curtis’s

information and said, “Curtis’s mother contacted me to enlist my help in dealing with him.

Apparently he has been causing problems at school and at home. There was some trouble between Curtis and his stepdad, with some formal intervention required. His mother wants to help by getting him out of the home.”

I shook my head. “So Curtis’s mother chose her husband over her son and what’s worse, he knows who she chose. Is this an abusive situation? Does Curtis have anger issues?”

“Curtis is a troubled teen, who doesn’t have a family or the support that he needs. His mother has a serious drinking problem and usually dumps Curtis and his younger brother with her husband. He is very strict and Curtis resents him and his rules. Curtis does have a temper, but he can control it, though that usually leads to him acting out in school and around town. He needs a change of scenery or he is going to end up in the criminal justice system. I believe you and Bill can make a huge difference in Curtis’s life.”

As Bill came back out on the porch, Marietta spoke up, “Curtis is basically a good young man, who has never had a family that loved and believed in him unconditionally. Someone to support and encourage, guiding him to become a man of integrity. Curtis’s mother not only wants someone to take him for the summer, but she states, for his own good, she wants to place him for adoption.”

All of a sudden, Bill and I turned and stared at each other speechless. After a few moments Bill told them, “We will keep Curtis for the summer and during that time we will pray about our next step.”

Bill and I developed a close relationship with Curtis during that first year and his attitude improved dramatically. We were privileged to know the young man beneath the hostile, destructive, and angry exterior. I remember the first time he called me Mom. I didn’t even realize he was talking to me at first, but when I did, I recognized a longing within me to truly be a mother.

While we agreed Curtis needed to be out of his family situation, we needed to hear from the Lord. Perhaps all the positive changes in Curtis’s life confirmed this answer. He was doing well in school and stayed on the honor roll all year. I enjoyed conversing with Curtis and he felt comfortable sharing his feelings with me. By the end of year, we had become a close-knit family. It seemed that everything that needed to happen for the adoption to take place had come together smoothly and quickly. Most importantly, we loved being his parents and

loved Curtis with all our hearts. We eagerly planned to formalize our family via adoption.

Though everything was going remarkably well, Bill and I began to notice some subtle changes in Curtis's attitude and behavior. We assumed he was probably exhausted from JROTC boot camp and the stress of starting high school. He became less talkative and depression seemed to hit him hard.

Then, he began sneaking around and doing things he knew were against our rules and hanging around people we feared would drag him into trouble. When asked about his actions, he became argumentative and asked if we'd send him home to his mother. He grew verbally abusive and openly defiant in an attempt at forcing us to send him away.

"Curtis, we love you unconditionally and while we don't condone your behavior, you're our son and we love you. But if you want to go home, Bill and I will not keep you here. If that's what you decide, we'll make arrangements with your mom and take you home."

After an emotional, sleepless night, Curtis made the decision to return to his biological mother.

"You didn't do anything wrong. It's my fault," he told us. But Bill and I both wondered what we could have done differently and how he would do going back to his mother.

On the trip home, Bill and I cried and talked about our heartbreak. "Have we missed God's leadership here? Why would God allow us to go through such pain?"

Then I remembered the vision from God. He had shown me a beautiful baby girl not a teenage boy. *We were the ones who made the decision to bring Curtis home, not God.*

After some time passed, we realized that Curtis had spoken the truth: we weren't at fault. We also discovered that his mother had manipulated him into believing he should come home to protect his little sister from their stepfather.

Now, though often filled with teens from the church, our house felt empty without Curtis. I missed our evening talks and shopping or fixing dinner together. He was our son and I missed him. I loved him and would never stop loving him.

For the next three years, Bill and I leaned away from adoption. The youth and education ministry at the church grew, and thanks to that growth, a church in the Atlanta area hired Bill as their youth and education minister.

We left one empty home to a full, joyful church home with people who understood our pain. A few families had also experienced failed adoptions. Together, we shared our pains and sorrows and healing began for me.

Enough time had passed and we were ready again to seek God's leadership and timing regarding adoption.

A short while later, Bill and I were approached about a private adoption by a family in our congregation. Their daughter frequently opted not to take her medications which helped her deal with confusion and poor decision-making due to mental illness. She had recently disappeared for several months and returned home pregnant. No one knew who the father was.

The young woman's father, a deacon at our church and the attorney handling the adoption, had sought the Lord's guidance in all of it. The family had been praying for a special Christian couple who would love and adopt the baby regardless of race, sex, mental, or physical issues. We seemed to fit the bill.

Fear gripped me. *Something will go wrong – we'll lose him. I can't go through this again!*

But we prayed and discussed the adoption and ultimately decided to move forward. We chose to trust God.

The mother was entering her second trimester and we would be able to experience most of the pregnancy with her, a rare and unexpected joy. Seeing the first sonogram, Bill and I fell in love with "our son." We named him Samuel, asking God not only to keep him safe during the pregnancy and birth, but that he would grow strong in the Lord. We updated our home study and received approval for adoption. As we decorated Samuel's nursery, our imaginations watched him grow up and filled his nursery with dreams of a happy life together.

When the day came, Bill and I were ushered into the labor room where the baby had just been born. The nurse asked who the mother was and the birth mother immediately pointed to me. Then the nurse placed Samuel in my arms for the first time. He was so tiny and fragile – the most beautiful baby I had ever seen. *Our son.*

Samuel was not just *some* baby. He was our son. We had loved him for over seven months of pregnancy. The day when I finally held our little boy in my arms for the first time, I fell even more in love with him than seemed possible.

Our overwhelming joy and celebration with family and close friends was suddenly turned to mourning. The birth mother's

family came to us with a new plan: Samuel's aunt was going to care for him until his mother was ready to bring him home herself. They were withdrawing the option for adoption and Samuel was immediately out of our lives.

How can I live with never seeing him again?

As I entered the nursery, I collapsed into the rocker and started sobbing. Just a few hours before, I was picking out an outfit and blanket to bring Samuel home from the hospital in. Now an empty bassinet remained.

That night, we cried ourselves to sleep in each other's arms. A few days later, I packed up Samuel's nursery and took back or donated everything. Each onesie, each toy had been chosen for him. The memories of decorating the nursery came flooding back as I folded each for return.

Then I came across the package we were given from the hospital on the day Samuel was born. Looking at his little measuring tape, cap, and footprints, devastation overwhelmed me. His removal from our lives was like a death.

A year later, we moved to Florence, South Carolina to serve in a church near my family. For the first time since marrying, we were near family, and being "home" helped with our healing over the loss of Samuel. But I was finished with questioning the meaning behind the vision from God.

At our new church, we developed a close relationship with Pastor Rick, his wife, Marica, and their adopted daughter. As we grew closer, Marica observed, "You're so good with kids! Have you ever considered adoption?"

I broke down, telling her everything, including the vision from God and our deep pain over losing multiple children. "I can't do it again! I can't lose another child!"

"The Lord wouldn't give you a vision about a girl if he wanted you to have a boy," Pastor Rick pointed out. "And more importantly, He wouldn't give you such a vision to bring pain into your life. He's looking for obedience as you wait on His timing to fulfill His plan or for your desire for a child to change."

We didn't realize it but Pastor Rick was on the Board of Directors for Bethany Christian Adoptions. After learning of our struggles, he urged us to try again through this group. Bill and I hesitated. "I don't know if I can handle another failed adoption."

Our pastor continued to gently encourage us and we finally decided to contact Bethany and talk to a counselor about our situation. She helped us open ourselves up again to adoption. "We'll apply, but we'll leave this up to God. No more trying things our way. If we adopt, we adopt. If we don't, we don't." There were two more near-adoptions of boys, but because of deciding to let go and trust God, we felt freedom instead of pain when they fell through. We felt assurance from the Lord that it was not His will.

Then, a few months later, Bill received a call from Bethany saying, "Congratulations, dad! You and your wife just had a lovely healthy baby girl!"

After the shock wore off, we knew, "This had to be the Lord!" Exactly six years after the second vision from the Lord, Grace came into the world!

Everything happened so fast. We had nothing prepared for her. But as the news spread among our church family and relatives, an outpouring of love showed through gifts of the many things we needed. We spent the night rushing about, preparing for our new baby girl and praising the Lord for His wonderful love and compassion.

The next day, we waited eagerly in a private counseling room. The nurse wheeled in the bassinet holding Grace and scooped her up. "Here is your precious little girl. She is so beautiful." She looked exactly as she had in the vision from the Lord. Baby Grace opened her eyes and looked into mine. It seemed as if she could see into my heart. I knew our bond would be unbroken. All I could do was thank the Lord for choosing to give Grace to Bill and me as our daughter. ◆





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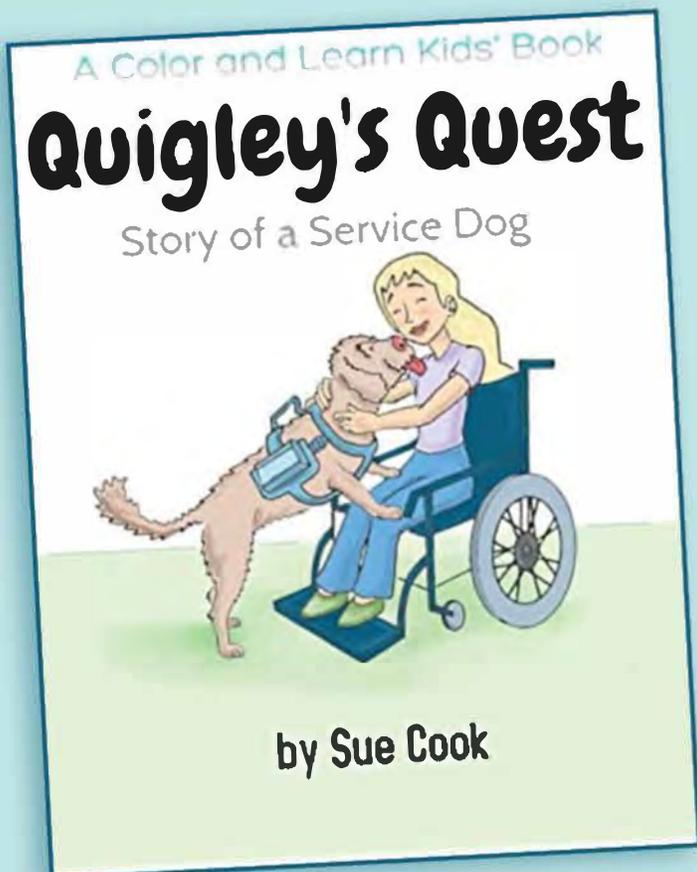
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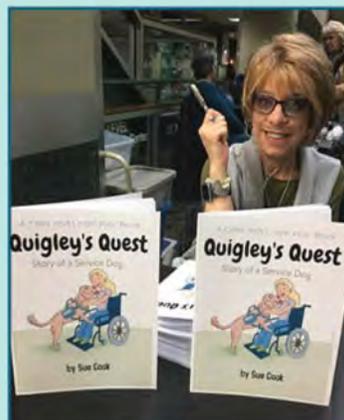


Quigley's Quest

A children's story/coloring/activity book which follows Quigley on his journey into becoming a service dog. Heartwarming and fun for children of all ages.

Rated 5 stars! [Available on Amazon.](#)

Pictured: Author Sue Cook and Quigley the service dog



HIC SUNT DRACONES

EMILY MACKENZIE

Never before has he felt so at home, so far away from home.

The surrounding landscape evokes in him something incapable of description. He stands encompassed by the setting in a manner unlike anything he'd ever fathomed, feels his soul brimming with a profound sense of satisfaction, and a piece settles into a place within that he'd previously been unable to identify as empty.

It starts with a fort called House. Ruins clump together across the grass like a sign that beckons 'Start Here,' and tourists flock to stand on the walls and size up the footprint against their own familiar buildings at home. Not many bother to raise their gazes up beyond the laminated signs and informative brochures.

He can't resist the call of the past. Hills stretch to either side of his vision as far as the eye can see, the ancient wall a border of definition tracing the escarpment into horizon on either side. Before him the land is reminiscent of a wildly expanding rippled canvas. Behind him, it trails as though patterned from elegant manicured linen. The ancient stonework upon which he stands serves as both knife and seam for the patchwork of fields that surround him; the structure hints at a land irrevocably split and then bonded together over and over again, now beloved for the crack that speaks so strongly of a need to exist.

Glancing down, he eyes the sharp rocks that extend out from the cliff's edge below him; and for a moment thoughts of the past hold hostage his ability to see the present. He shakes his head and the thoughts fade, but at the edge of his sight a phantom solidifies. Startled, he jumps up out of the way, barely avoiding the men who appear. They weave a careful trek along the wall where he'd just stood, casually avoiding the steep drop –

Except the cliff's edge hadn't been quite as severe for them, had it? he deduced. Images from then and now juxtapose time in his vision, and a smile of bewilderment spreads over his face. The land hadn't been ravaged by the elements, by time, or by life itself for these men; not in the way that it had been long since ruined when he first laid eyes on it thousands of years later. When he'd first seen it, *now*.

He watches as one of them laughs – is subsequently scolded – and in the next moment the two men are stumbling along, drunk with pleasure. His eyes are drawn inexplicably to the small stones that crumble beneath their ancient footwear and dance over the edge, each rock carving their small part towards the landscape this would one day become. His heart aches to follow the path of the pebbles as they teeter over the ledge and out of sight, feels a curious yearning to touch those rocks, hold them in his hand here and now and marvel at the possibility of their past. There is a desperation to see if they had withstood the ages to meet him on the other end –

Better judgement wins, and he shuts his eyes against temptation. When he re-opens them he is rewarded with an overgrown echo that clouds his vision, an echo of what had once been, (albeit an echo that casts a bigger shadow with each year that passes) before the image settles back to now. The cliff is daunting once more.

Eager to see more he continues his hike, nostalgically tracing the remains of a culture's final defence. He takes a deep breath, inhaling the scent of grass and freedom that fought for its right to be heard for thousands of years. With each step he feels the sun on his face, the warmth as it settles into his bones to ward off an ever present chill. Upon opening his eyes, his attention is once again caught by the stark difference between wilderness and order on either side of the ancient stones; as though the world itself could be divided easily down the middle and spared the consequences of truth.

The truth of the land is different from that of the inhabitants; each people has its own story to tell. The animals and plants sing their tunes, and together the orchestra of their opinions play the closest thing to truth that can be recorded. Birdsong and wind rustle notes in the air, and a shiver tickles down his spine.

His journey continues. With every step that he takes, history flashes before his eyes – and he wonders if what he sees is a product of his imagination, or the region's own primal need to be *understood*. Was this internal, or external?

Did it matter?

Climbing another hill along the line, a young girl plays with farm animals hundreds of years after the preparation for battle on his right had played itself out. On his left the girl strokes her horse, oblivious to the layers of time that blend to show him swords and whetstones opposite her. Here lives have been created and lost – most are forgotten, and yet all are remembered through the culmination of stories that are shared all over the world. Lances are thrown at speeds faster than his sight can follow, and walls are built and rebuilt in the blink of an eye. A woman stops to rest her horse not too long ago by the well-worn structure that now lies crumpled before his feet. Reaching out he slides a gentle finger over the wearied stone in front of him, and nearly falls to his knees at the sudden overwhelming realisation of thousands of others before him who had done the same –

All those who had stood in the same spot as him, struck the same stone, bumped the same stone, touched the same stone, brushed the same stone. The forms fade as quickly as they appear but their essence remains, engraved through the efforts of rain that washed away all evidence in order for both together to forge the surface into a silken cenotaph. Silk that is warm under his touch like the sun is warm on his face.

Maybe the warmth of the sun is just a reflection of the lasting impressions left by people on the world beneath them.

(Hope, Anger, Love, Betrayal. They each burn differently through history books, though nearly all are described at one point or another with the 'fire of a thousand suns'. Maybe the analogy is more rooted in truth than we thought.)

The ridge he was climbing plateaued, and the view as he reached the top took his breath away. The scene before him called forth every memory of every tale illuminating the tree of life; of magnificent branches reaching to touch the edges of the sky, and of roots that held the world together. It was nothing but a tree, and simultaneously it was *the* Tree, and always would be.

Beneath the leaves sit lovers and friends. A small boy cries out as he falls from its branches; a young girl clutches a letter – waiting in vain for the man who had been lost to her in a battle he'd not chosen. Growing nearer he brushes his hands over the bark and reads time like braille in its ridges and ravines; each painting done here, each photo taken, all snapshots of the history this tree had witnessed – now sitting in albums and hard drives and spare bedrooms all the world around. Long after this tree falls it will live in the memory it has made on the people who saw it for the anthem of life that it sings through its leaves.

Ahead of him history stretches further, physical remnants of the wall trickling over the hills like a thread pulled loose from a tablecloth. He follows the line as far as he can, and in the distance sees a lone wanderer in the field. She stares at him curiously – as though she can see him – just as he sees her, and he smiles to think of history folding over in that moment for two similar souls to understand each other like so few can. He blinks and she is gone, replaced with a wandering herd of animals that have stripped the earth bare below them.

The land changes colours as it changes crops and seasons, and to avoid getting dizzy he looks up to the clouds. They stretch without border, without distinction, not nearly as turbulent as the land even as storms are born and die in an instant, and distantly he hears echoes of thunder crash. He couldn't hear the men, or the children, or the sheep, or the horses, but he can hear all of the thunder. The sky exists so independently from the changes in the land around him, unconscious of lines in the earth below. The stratosphere illustrates the harmony that could be, if only one could learn from the sky and the sun as they give way for rain, and appreciate the thunder for the steady time that it keeps. For all that changes, so much remains the same.

He sits now on the highest point that remains of the ruins, thrilled beyond measure as history willingly exists all at once before him. His imprint on this place is nothing and everything. Nothing because he will leave nothing of himself with it, everything because he will take everything it is with him.

When next he sees a wall on his wanderings, the echoes of soundless laughter from history's voices will come back to him. Their ingenuity, their pain, and the extent of their efforts. The victor's word against nature's pen, and the resilience of land working in tandem with people. He will marvel once more at the brilliance of having seen time laid out before him, his privilege to witness what few ever had. The green of hills and a line that stretches to the edge of his vision will forever stain his brain with a reminder of infinity and pursuit, of determination and limits.

Sliding off his seat with a sigh, weight settles in his soul as his witness of time comes to an end. He glances at the backpackers behind him, walking the same path as he and yet oblivious to the history that shrouds this place. As he marvels at the simplicity of existence that blankets such complexity, the spectres at the edge of his vision fade away, and his temporal compass rose resets to now. He inhales deeply, reaching out one last time to brush against history, a smooth, warm stone under the rough pads of his fingers.

He leaves with a lesson hard forgotten. Beneath each rock is a story, if only one reaches out to turn it over and read the lines that are waiting. Nature never forgets. 



-Aristotle

In all things of
nature there is
something of the
marvelous.

Tablature

PJ DeGenaro

In the dark, the sound follows the form of the man
Starting with your fingertip pressing
The nylon string to the hardness of metal and wood
And your thumb pushing up from the other side.
In the dark I imagine I can travel up your arm
Follow a tendon binding muscle and bone
Over swellings of sinew and vein
I can ride a whipping neuron up
To the sharp and tilting bones of your face
One laurel-leaf eye looking out at the world
One looking in at the map
Your fingers must follow
To the next note, and the next
Their route picked out with fairy lights
Sparkling on/off across the blue hemispheres of your brain
Then I would spill out through your mouth
In a rush of air and sound
Catch in the warmth of your open collar
And hang there,
And hang there,
Looking down at the hip that rolls and rolls
And controls the whole operation in secret.



Kindness - The Soul of Love

CYNTHIA ANN LUBLINK

I believe deeply in kindness. It isn't merely a nice thought, or an occasional thing to do, it is the very soul of love. And I believe that if we desire to be truly loving beings, kindness must be at our core. It authenticates and validates our words and actions.

Being kind is a mindful state of being. It is an act of love that seeks to be aware of others. A belief that gives grace, believing another's intent is as good or as well-meaning as our own. Yet not ignorant of the fact that, sadly, this isn't true of every soul.

Kindness is an act of our will, an exercise of choice, one that impacts our life and others'. No one is perfect, so we don't always succeed. But life isn't about perfection – it's about progression.

For most of my life, even as a child, I had an internal understanding that what we say and do ripples into people's lives, either for good or for bad. And because I wanted my ripples to be good ones, it made me an imperfectly kinder, more mindful person, many times driven by the thought, "What if that person died?" And that made me a pursuer in most of my relationships. Many times, that also meant I did much of the relational work.

In the last few years this is something that God has had to sit me down about – sometimes literally. It's a hard process learning that I don't have to, nor should I, do most of the lifting just because [insert list here] or because I am a kind and mindful soul, or because it is someone's expectation of me. So, this process has been like erasing a chalkboard and starting from scratch.

I've found that sometimes fear can be a motivational undercurrent that must be acknowledged and dealt with. There are healthy and unhealthy sides of who we are. Sadly, when you stop doing much of the relational work, giving room for others to do some lifting, you can find you're alone and it can hurt. I have learned this requires some bravery.

There are many dimensions to kindness when it comes to others and to self. Learning to be kind to yourself can be difficult because it can feel deeply selfish. Especially when people expect you to always be a certain way, and you show up different, unfamiliar. Let's just say that their confused voices join your inner voice, and the resulting song can be full of conflict and inner struggle.

Being kind is not an invitation for bad, hurtful, or dysfunctional behavior. In fact, when kindness is in a balanced, healthy position in our life, it has the power to let us know when kindness is not being extended or when someone is manipulating our kindness. Healthy kindness refuses to allow others to use our kindness against us.



The need to talk about this can be difficult. It makes us look at the hard things. Those areas that call us into account may make us uncomfortable because they demand our personal responsibility. For me, when there is something I need to see, I want to see it. But I will not be bullied, manipulated, abused, or controlled, which is part of the reason for this part of the kindness conversation. No one gets to do that to me anymore.

We must seek truth in all things. It is a component of our free will. Free will means choices – the weight of freedom has both responsibility and consequences measured with it – and we must be mindful of our choices and how they impact others.

Personally, I believe as adults there are few instances where we can point fingers. To truly be empowered we must look in the mirror. It's the only side of the street we truly have any power over. It's where we retain or regain our ability to choose, even when we have no choice.

I may not be able to change how someone treats or talks to me, but I do have a choice in how I respond or internalize that behavior toward me. How I do that depends on my internal dialog, what kind of internal spiritual work I have done, and my desire for the truth.

I must be willing to see truths about myself as well as untruths about myself. In these things I trust God. I seek the counsel of people I trust who will reflect those truths back to me. And speak hard things in kindness when necessary. Then I take what I need and leave the rest, changing what can be changed, and, with a breath of kindness, whisper the untruths away from my soul.

Withholding kindness can distort love and make it a weapon of manipulation and punishment, and have deeply negative consequences.

How we treat others reflects who we are. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Sometimes kindness isn't easy. It requires us to take three seconds and think about what we are going to say or do. Just because you can doesn't mean you should.

"Everything is permitted," you say? Maybe, but not everything is helpful. "Everything is permitted?" Maybe, but not everything is edifying. No one should be looking out for his own interests, but for those of his fellow. 1 Corinthians 10:23-24 ◆





Achtoonbaby.com

The U2 art project that attempts to be amusing.

Featuring U2 cartoons, artwork, essays, poetry, and writing that defies categorization by Kelly Eddington and PJ DeGenaro.

Fake Bono and Fake Edge are happy to answer your questions.

@achtoonbaby on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter
@dearBaE on Twitter



THE DOCTOR CAME

Sue Cook

This poem is dedicated to Emily Cook, Borna Matosic, the Doctor Who Lockdown Choir, and all who participated in the Dr. Who Lockdown Tweetalongs. Thank you!

Time and space moving to the music of heartbeats,
Eternity awaits.

The Doctor came to aid those in need,
Different planets, faces, races all crying the same
Help us.

He was there to end the suffering,
Ever-changing, sacrificing life and ship to stop the cries.
Like Maiden/Mother/Crone the faces change,
The spirit never does.

Whoever called for help,
The Doctor came.
Leaving all dear to him/she/they,
Only to follow the quest.

A fictional character of valor and justice.

Then a virus moved from the ethers of fiction into reality.
Moving so swiftly, the world was shut down to save it.

People were forced into solitude, a dark loneliness
Losing families and friends without a touch or a gentle
goodbye.
More suffering than one could bear.

As if in one voice, the people of Earth cried out.

And the Doctor came.

Reaching through to the people,
a tweet was placed,
for all to watch together in their own homes,
memories of the Doctor's past victories.

The movement started slowly until the family of Who
we're celebrating victories weekly.

Fictional characters extend comfort within Earth's reality.
The Doctors came.

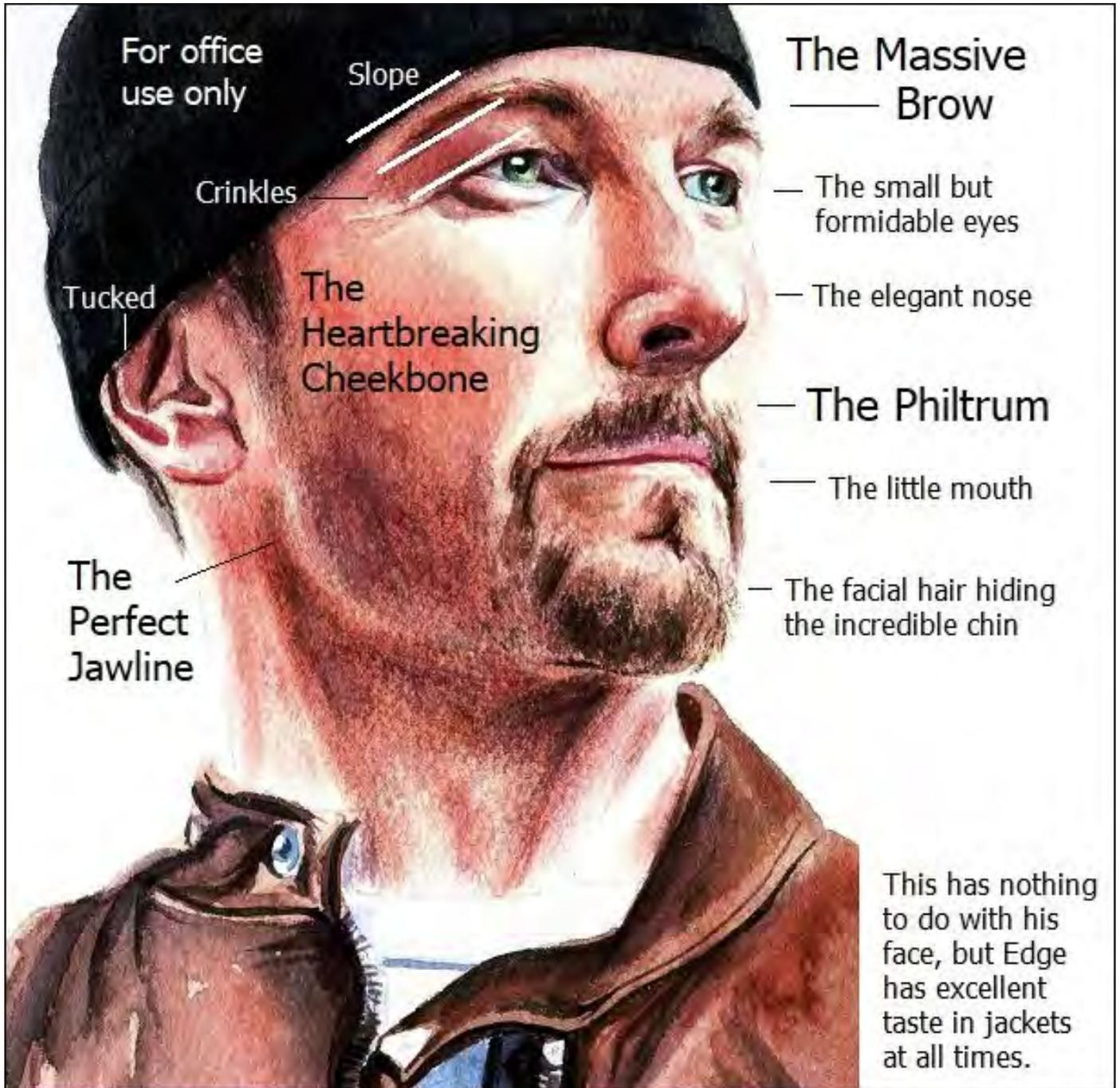
Hearts lifted.
We were not alone in darkness.
We were connected by energy.
We were surrounded by like-minded souls.

One can be alone in a crowded room,
Or surrounded by family miles apart.
We are family.

The Doctors came with companions of light and music.
Painting the darkness with song and color.

And then, when the world began to find an answer,
The Doctor left in his Blue Box of salvation,
To wait,
To hold space,
To ponder when they would be called again to save a
weeping world.

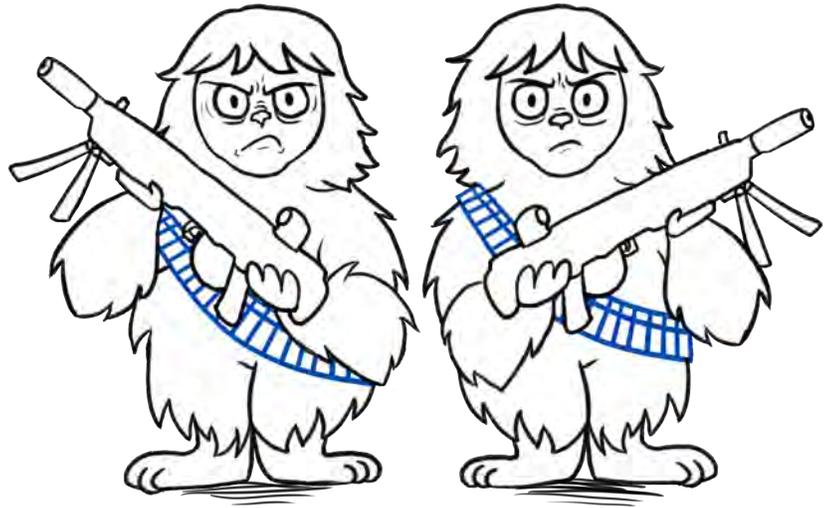
ACHTOON BABY - THE MIRACLE (OF EDGE'S BONE STRUCTURE)



FJ & Kelly

THE REVENGE OF THE YETIS, PART III

Joseph Paul DeNeui



Heavy footsteps were sloshing towards me. I turned and saw two yetis approaching, double-barrel shotguns out.

“You not yeti. You bad man.”

Earth, can you still hear my thoughts?

You betcha.

Cut the forcefield and the door on my mark.

The two yetis leered and gnashed chipped teeth, dirty-white fur rustling, black claws scraping, guns centered on my head.

“Bad man yummy. Bad man get eat.”

I pretended to tremble and dropped my knife. “Don’t hurt me,” I begged. “Just please don’t hurt me.” *Walk under that forcefield, you furry idiots.*

“Bad man bring bad knife for him cut? We cut bad man with bad knife. Which part bad man we cut first?”

Purple yeti tongues started slobbering. The duo picked their pace up.

Now.

Earth cut the forcefield as the saucer whirred, limb retracting, laser blasting, ocean pouring on the yetis’ heads.

Steel whined and glowed and died as I saved the knife and threw my shoulder, busting the door as currents rose. Shotguns fired, but the yetis missed. I sprinted further down the corridor...

Running into a dozen more brutes.

Bullets pinged around me and nicked my suit. Rushing water tripped me over backwards then bowled over my fresh assailants. I contorted away from them, paddling backwards, as the saucer unleashed hell. The laser flashed and disemboweled, yetis screaming and losing limbs. I slashed and stabbed and got tossed and raked, but no yeti could really touch me.

One after another and another they died until the water ran red with blood.

The wave that bore me lost momentum, splashing into another door. I stood up and kicked aside three corpses. Earth must have snapped back the forcefield. Good.

The door wasn’t locked, and I threw it open, stepping onto a catwalk, high dome overhead.

The alarm blaring over the PR speakers stopped wailing so suddenly the silence hurt. I descended stairs and approached a dais on which hummed a nut-like hexagonal construct dripping with wires and red tubes.

We'd made it to the center of the wheel; I picked out doors to the other three spokes. "Right," I said. "No yetis yet. Let's jack and jet."

I'd thought that was clever, but Earth didn't comment.

"Earth, can you hear me? Is this what we're looking for?"

Could you call me Gabby? Could we go with that?

"What is it, Gabby?"

There's a problem, James. One little problem.

The nut started to project a static-y hologram—possibly someone's face. Hard to tell.

"What?"

We're a duo, right? Meant to work together. A good ol tag team of good ol cops.

"And?" I demanded, a little too harshly.

Well, um. There's not an easy way to say this. I do wish there was an easier way to say this.

A sinking feeling gnawed at my gut.

"Say it, then," I said robotically. Intuition was snapping pieces together, exhilaration dying before distrust. Earth had been in charge of everything, and she'd managed it too easily.

Why hadn't she done this all by herself?

Could you just trust me? That's a way to do it.

"Tell me why you're being evasive."

But, is that what...

"If you don't tell me, I'm swimming out of here and all of the yetis in the world can rot.

But...

"All of the yetis in the world can rot!" I pounded the datacore with a fist and the low-res image flicked into focus.

I'm sorry, James, I really am. But I'm going to need to let them kill you.

The hologram was a bluehead.

Earth.

I like you, James. I really do. I'll put you back together, I promise.

My skin-tight diving suit's zippers had vanished. I felt desperately around my head, probing. Where had she embedded the chip?

"Humans aren't programs." Keep her talking. "You can't press execute and bring us back."

But I already did, James. You already died.

I didn't believe her...and then I did.

For the first time real ice gripped my heart.

That whole spiel about turning you into digiform—hate to break it to SF nerds, but transporter tech doesn't work. You can't just rip someone's molecules apart and then smash them back together. People just die in the middle of it. Sad.

"What did you do to me?"

Well, I scanned you real good, like a really really good scan. And I made a clone of you, the best I could. And I wrote a script for you and tested it out. And...oh, but he's coming and we don't have time. I wish we had all the time to talk, and we will have time together.

For a moment I couldn't speak.

I'm calling in that favor, James, and I'm asking you to trust me. You have free will. You can still say no. I love you, James, and I want to be with you. I don't want you to say no.

Roving fingers detected a bulge throbbing at the base of my neck.

I pretended to be scratching an itch and nodded. "Okay," I said. My hand fell. "Whenever you're ready, bring it on."

Good! She sounded so relieved my stomach twisted. I didn't like lying. Character flaw. Not good for assassins to be poor at deceit.

Ringin ears detected new unwelcome sounds: grunting, growling, the scratching of many four-clawed feet as they tore up grating and tiles. Three new messes of tight-packed yetis spilled through the doors to the other spokes and tumbled down the stairs to surround me. Every yeti was heavily armed, and many slobbered and cursed at the sight of me while companions darkened their eyes in assent.

They milled around me on the edge of the dais, but for some reason didn't attack.

Earth—Gabby—disappeared, her hologram replaced with the planet of Mars, as all of the yetis fell to their knees.

Mars pulsed with crimson light.

"You, human, the one called James, murderer of my many children, will step forward into the light."

Light beamed onto the dais from a searchlight. I stepped into it as directed.

"You, human, the one called James, will plead before me before you die."

I took a long slow breath before responding. I was dead. I could accept that. And because I was dead, I was free to not worry. Free to think out of the proverbial box.

"I want a submarine."

"That is not a plea."

"I want a sub and then I want a plane to a mountain. This is for your sake, Mars. Not mine."

"The one called James will explain this nonsense."

"I'm looking out for your children, Mars—for your broadcast. Underwater's a pretty spotty connection."

"All is recorded on 8K video."

"But if it's not live, you're missing out, Mars. Don't you want to put on a show for your kids? Like him in your crowd—Hairy, right?" In a minor miracle I'd recognized a yeti. They all looked like icy abominations, but this one sported a squinty left eye.

"The one called James will leave Hairy out of this."

I ignored the planet. "Hairy Hairy, you're big on shows, huh? Like your daddy. He really loved 'em."

"You die for being and saying and killing." The yeti I had singled out poofed out his dingy silver chest. "I yeti kill you. All yeti, move."

Barging through the assembled mob, the yeti aimed his AR-15 at my teeth. Mocking him, I held up my hands, shuffling closer to the hologram.

"Whoa there, buster, wait your turn. First, we've got to wait on your planet and he's big on giving speeches. And I know a thing or two about speeches—start with a story, grab the crowd. See, once upon a time in New Philadelphia I got a call from a very mad client who lost her family to your daddy because he chopped them up for lunch. So when I killed your dad I cut him up so she could eat him for Sunday brun—"

Hairy's remarkable self-control broke. The yeti roared and emptied his clip, casings clinking, trigger flashing, other yetis joining in.

Shrapnel tore into the hologram and the feed from Mars cut out.

Lights flashed wildly and in the chaos I made use of my humble knife. A yeti charged me and aimed too high; I slit his heel and he toppled, freeing his semi-automatic machine gun for use by someone more proficient. I laid down calculated fire of my own, wasting yetis until the clip clicked empty. I knocked a charging yeti aside with the butt of the gun as two more rushed in, javelined the gun at the bigger one's head and let the weakling throw me down. In so doing impaling his stomach.

The yeti yowled and tried to roll off of me, holding in his spilling guts. I snatched up the handgun he'd been neglecting and got off four more shots on targets.

The yetis kept coming. I shouldn't let them grab me. A yeti fired a rocket launcher and missed, missed again and hit the same neosteel buttress already dented by his incompetence.

The dome cracked. No yetis noticed. I had to keep moving and stealing more weapons. I ached all over from so many bullets. I ground my teeth and spat out gas, but it wasn't enough to save me. I'd lost a good chunk of my hearing for good.

I took down a yeti who still had grenades left. Surrounded, I lobbed them into the crowd. Given how deep we were underwater and the bullet holes piercing its frame, it was not a huge surprise that when the ceiling gave way at last, it tore open like Los Angeles.

The torrent that drowned me could not be stopped.

* * *

The Afterlife was disappointing.

I came to back at Gabby's Bed and Breakfast, availing myself this time of the former.

Couldn't turn my head. Couldn't raise my arms.
Smiling seahorses swam before me on the wallpaper
of my life.

"They really hated you. Their loss."

The voice came from someone seated on the bed.
Earth, is that you? I thought.

I could only think at her. Mouth wouldn't work.
"You saved the solar system, James. You're a hero."

I thought I got punched up like a piñata.

"That's what heroes do, they take the punches."
Earth moved into my limited field of view looking
especially motherly at the moment in flowing
flowery dress and apron.

You're not mad at me?

"Oh, I'm a little miffed. My plan was different.
Mars and me we had a deal where he could kill you
and his yetis would leave."

How is Mars behind the yetis?

Earth sighed. "Yetis are the colonists. You didn't
know?"

What? I tried to shake my head and moved it two
degrees. I didn't remember anything before the
Collapse. Had I used to? My mind was fuzz.

"They spliced a few too many genomes together, got
themselves enslaved by bad AI. Most are also a
little too fond of red meat."

No kidding.

She giggled.

*On a serious note, Earth, why does a planetary
consciousness want me dead?*

"The same reason I love you. Two sides of a data
chip."

*But that doesn't make sense. I'm just one person. Just
one guy.*

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Earth said. "Because I
love you, Mars hates you. You're the one thing
anywhere I don't want to lose."

Um. Thanks, I'm flattered. I really am. But don't
you love everyone? What about the whole planet?

Earth grimaced. She sighed and stood and tapped the
wall and the seahorses swam out of sight.

And I was looking out a viewscreen at Earth, hanging
in space like a little blue jewel. Tarnished, maybe,
and a little dirty, but this far out from the pollution,
you could imagine it was truly blue.

Earth was wearing a watch, I noticed. She checked her
wrist and shook her head.

"I may have lied to you a little, James. You said it
didn't matter what you *said*. You said that James, and
so I listened. Saying isn't what really matters. And
that's all right. It's for the best. It's best if we look
out for each other even when it's hard to do."

From this far up it took me a moment to pick out the
plumes of nuclear smoke.

"When I said you saved the solar system, I really
meant you got Mars so mad, now he's blowing the old
one up."

Explosions by the many megatons wracked the planet
I had called my home.

"Which is bad but not the end, because he's using all
his weapons. He missed us shooting up and away."

I felt a jolt of acceleration, and the dying circle of
Earth began to fade into the stars. Earth watched
until there was no circle left and then tapped the teal
wall.

Seahorses back to keep us company, Earth perked up
and put her hand on my forehead.

"You'll be all right, James. We'll be all right. We're
five hundred years from Alpha Centauri. You should
get over that fever by then." ◆

-Aristotle

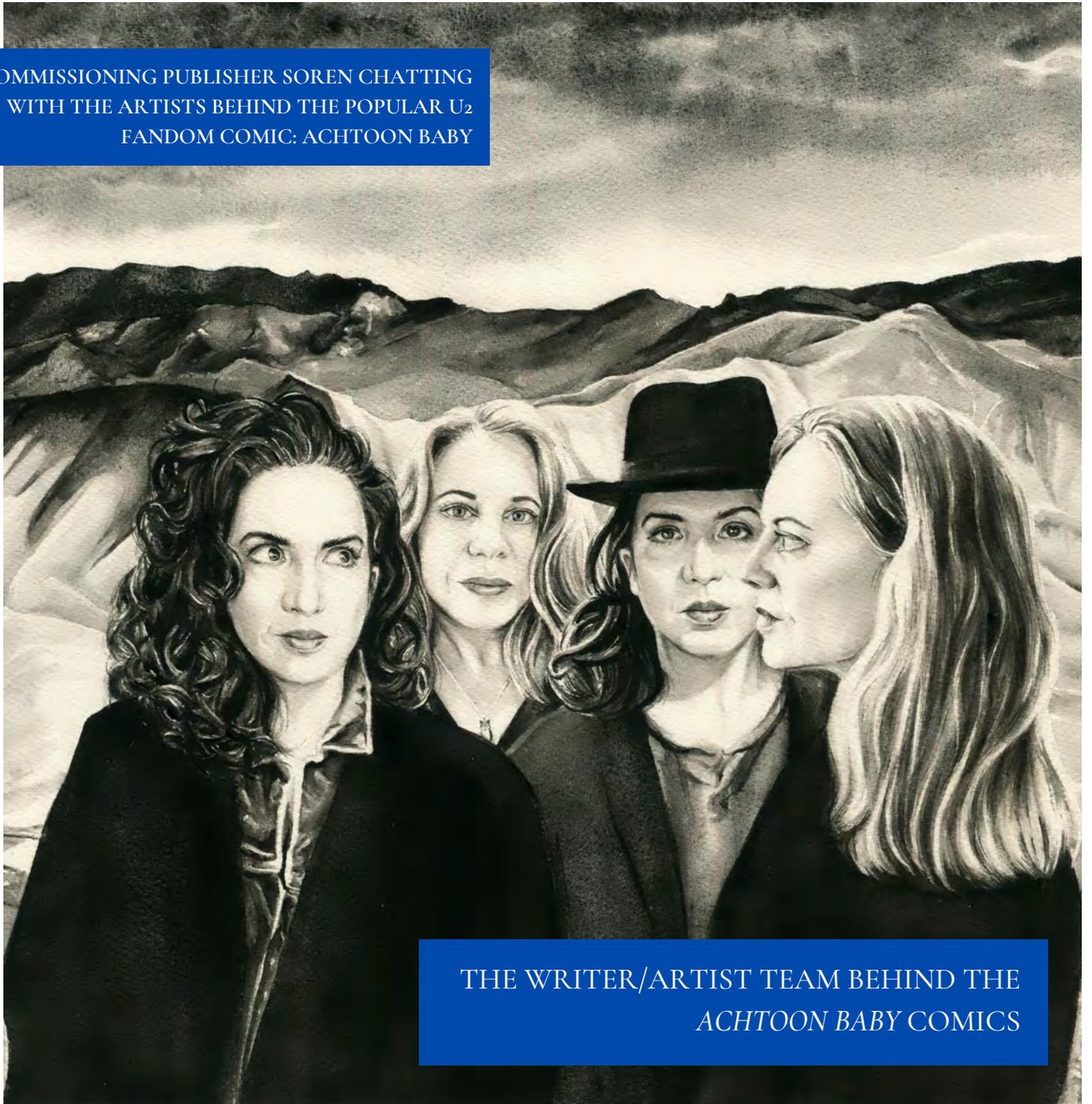
In all things of
nature there is
something of the
marvelous.

A person with long hair, wearing a dark jacket and blue jeans, is sitting in a hammock. The hammock is strung between trees and is suspended over a large, gnarled tree root. The background is a dense forest with green and some autumn-colored leaves. The overall tone is peaceful and natural.

PJ DEGENARO & KELLY EDDINGTON

-FEATURED ARTISTIC DUO-

COMMISSIONING PUBLISHER SOREN CHATting
WITH THE ARTISTS BEHIND THE POPULAR U₂
FANDOM COMIC: ACHTOON BABY



THE WRITER/ARTIST TEAM BEHIND THE
ACHTOON BABY COMICS

- FEATURED ARTIST -

Because *Achtoon Baby!* An Interview with PJ DeGenaro and Kelly Eddington

Soren Porter

From the moment I first sat down and intentionally listened to U2, they became part of my creative process for writing. I have a wide variety of playlists for whatever writing project I am tackling, and U2 is represented by songs and entire albums.

Knowing that, I was not surprised to see U2 fanart.

However, I was surprised to find a regular comic devoted to the band. While the casual listener would recognize a number of things, the hardcore fan of U2 is rewarded by a plethora of references and minute detail.

If there has been one boon to come from the internet age and social media, besides all the funny pictures of cats, is how much easier it has been to find people who share your interests.

Part of what makes being a fan exciting is when you find others who share your same passion.

When I first came across *Achtoon Baby!*, I was still

relatively new to the fandom of U2. I had consumed everything Wikipedia had to offer and was doing deeper dives into fan sites. AtU2 was simply the most useful in terms of keeping up with news and interesting articles.

It didn't take long for *Achtoon Baby!* (the name being a riff off the bands 1991 album "Achtung Baby") to become a regular part of the website for which I would eagerly wait.

There is a certain tongue-in-cheek, maybe even irony that helps make *Achtoon Baby* not just enjoyable as a U2 fan, but as works of art that are capable of standing up on their own outside of U2 circles.

When I had the opportunity to connect with the artists behind the scenes, I reached out as a fellow fan. Then, the opportunity arose for an interview for the *MockingOwl Roost*. Chatting with Kelly and PJ over the months has been a delight and joy for both myself and my wife - and now, the results may be the same for you!



Kelly Eddington

Anyway, “Sunday Bloody Sunday” shocked me. It annoyed me! It was unmelodic and sort of nagging. But whenever it came on the radio, I had to listen. “New Year’s Day” was the song that made me go out and buy War. And that was that. I had a new favorite band, and they changed everything. They actually changed the way I heard music.

Kelly Eddington: I didn’t know anything about U2 until cable television and MTV came to my town in the spring of 1983. I was in 8th grade, and I loved being able to watch hour after hour of music along with those odd little movies. You had Duran Duran in glamorous places like Sri Lanka, Prince doing the splits and singing about sex, and David Bowie being some kind of alien clown on the beach. And then you had a little band called U2 playing a sort of religious-seeming song on a depressing brown barge somewhere.

SP: What drew you to the music? How was this different from other musical acts at the time?

KE: That year U2 became inescapable on MTV thanks to three videos. Along with the depressing brown barge video, there was the one where they were performing live in the rain and they had that singer with the weird name who was kind of hopping from one foot to the other. Then they were all bundled up and riding those slobbery horses and looking really not-sexy and colorless in the snow. But wait a minute. Okay, there is a little color on that singer: part of his hair is kind of yellow (weird), and his nose and his cheeks and his mouth are red from the cold, and he has those blue eyes. Those...really really blue eyes. And that song? Yeah. You know what? That song is kinda great.

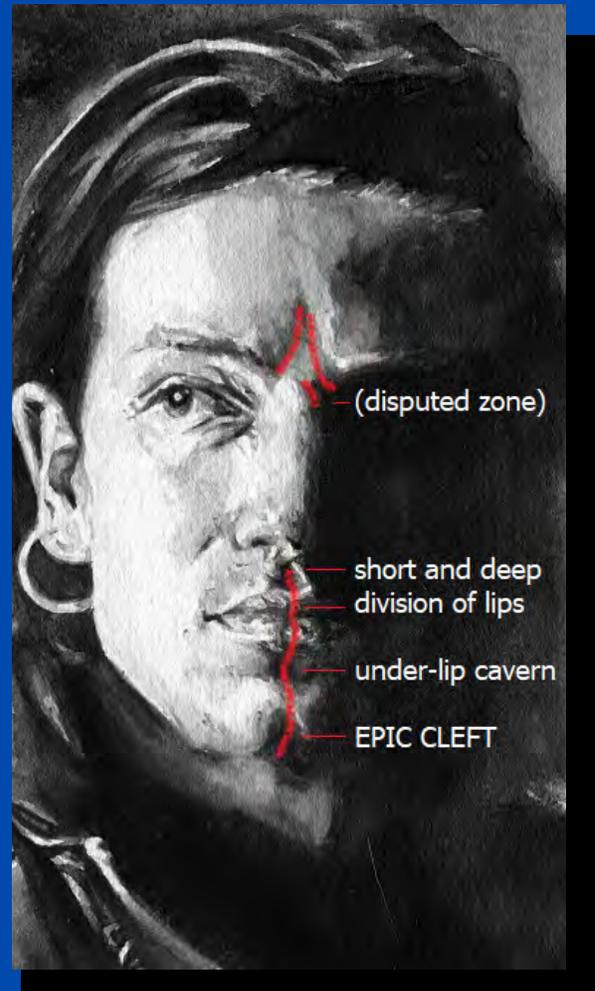
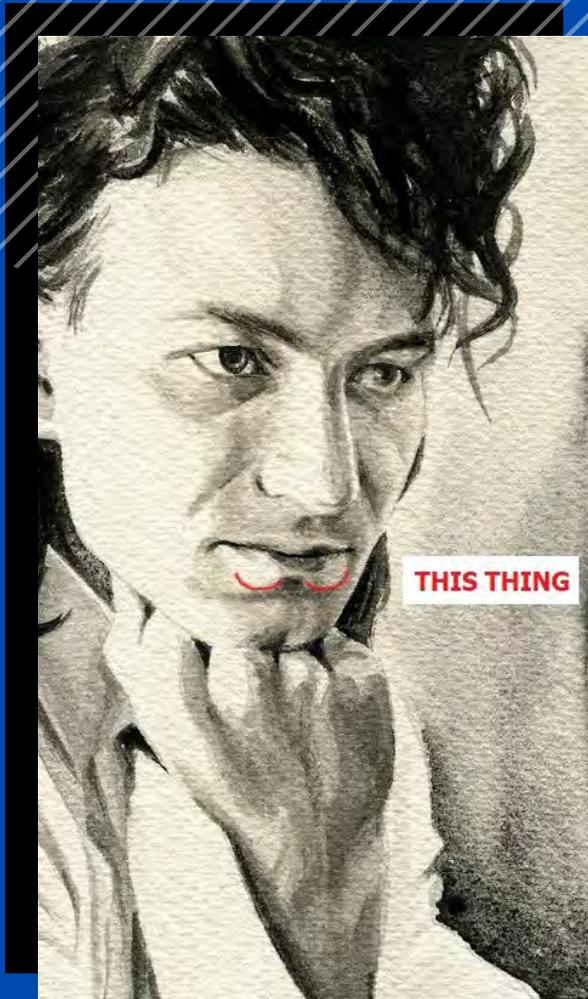
Soren Porter: When did you first hear of U2?

PJ DeGenaro: As a teenager in the early 80s, I basically “did” the history of 60s and 70s rock-n-roll in a two-year spree. I have older brothers, so I had access to their records. Their taste could be questionable, but I managed to separate the wheat from the chaff. I also read lots of music magazines...so, I read about U2 long before I heard them, and I remember thinking they sounded kind of interesting, most likely because whoever had written the article was already smitten.

I first heard U2 on a commercial rock station out of New York City. The song was “Sunday Bloody Sunday,” and you will have to take my word as an Official Old Person that it sounded like nothing else on earth. The martial beat, the very spare guitar that managed to sound like a laser or a tangle of outraged cats. And then those voices. It’s funny to think about now, because who hasn’t heard Bono and Edge sing together? But at the time – I mean, I was probably on my bed doing homework or something. Imagine me just dropping my pen and looking up like, what the f***? What are these guys? How does the word “tonight” become “tooo-niiiiigh-yut?”

PJ DeGenaro





From: Achtoon Baby - The Miracle (of Bono's Indentation) by PJ & Kelly

SP: At what point did you realize that U2 was going to be something more than just another band, and something that changed your life?

PD: I was in college when *The Unforgettable Fire* came out. By that point I had begun listening to a Long Island commercial radio station (the late great WLIR) that played what they called “new music” – basically anything that fell under the punk/new wave/college rock umbrella. I could write an essay about that station, but I won’t. Suffice it to say they played “Pride” nonstop for weeks. But for me, and probably for a lot of other people, the life-changing song was “Bad.” Don’t think about the LiveAid version or any other performance of “Bad” you might have heard.

You have to imagine listening to *The Unforgettable Fire* for the first time, in your bedroom at night, and hearing the studio version. I mentioned that I’m “depressive.” I do believe I’ve had a couple of bouts of mild clinical depression. They each lasted a long time and were really hard to shake off. And I’m the

kind of person who will say, “This is depression, and as long as I know what it is, I’m not going to go see some dumb counselor or anything.” Genius, right? Anyway, I was kind of slipping into this in 1984-85, and when I heard Bono sing that he was wide awake, not sleeping, I just chose to believe him. I mean, I chose to believe that he was out there somewhere in the world, not sleeping, and sort of watching over me. Or at least, acknowledging me.

I don’t think I was wrong. Talk to any U2 fan, and you’ll find this weird sense of mutual protection. This band has our backs. And we have theirs.

KE: For a few years, U2 was one of those “I’m aware of your work” bands. U2 was the nice boy in class who wasn’t as flashy as the cool guys I had crushes on, but we’d say hi in the halls and sit by each other at lunch sometimes. I was a senior in high school when *The Joshua Tree* was released, and what do you know? Looks like the nice boy had one hell of a growth spurt over the summer!

U2 has created musical touchstones every few years for the duration of my entire adolescent-to-adult life, and how special and rare is that? I've evolved, and they've evolved, and I've always been interested in what they're up to because the music they create becomes an important chunk of my life's soundtrack. They are about ten years older than I am, so their music also provides a glimpse into the future for me.

I think U2 really began to get under my skin when I was beginning my first teaching job. I was overworked and isolated from people my own age, and, as usual, U2 were there for me. In their absolute prime. And that's when we got married.

SP: When did you two meet?



PD: Kelly and I “met” on Tumblr about six years ago. You are allowed to look for her blog, which is mostly her art and nothing embarrassing. (You may not look for my blog.) I’m not sure who followed whom first. I just remember I was thrilled to find her there, because I’d been admiring her from afar for years! A woman who does funny cartoons about her favorite rock band? Is that even allowed? That was exactly the kind of thing I liked to do when I was a teenager, but I figured my art professors would dismiss it out of hand. So to find a woman of my own generation who actually felt free to do this weird fan thing – and to do it so brilliantly! – was a huge deal. I’ve come to believe that fan art, fan fiction, and anything anyone creates as a result of fandom is actually a work of radical love and should not be set below other art forms.

Anyway, we started chatting, realized that we were pretty close in age, and just in love with U2 in a similarly idiosyncratic way. That was that! We’ve been talking almost every single day since then. We met for the first time in real life at AtU2s “U240” celebration at the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2016. I was a nervous wreck, like I was going on a blind date or something. (Not exactly, of course, but a similar stress level!) We watched *Rattle And Hum* in a movie theater that first night, and it was just a blast.

SP: How did this project start? How did it end up being published on AtU2? How did you come up with the name?

KE: *Achtoon Baby* was originally a one-panel cartoon created by Jo Whitby. It was published monthly on AtU2 during the site's early years in the late 90s. The ones I remember were drawn with ink and colored pencil. Way back in November 2002, AtU2 announced that Jo was going to retire, and they were looking for someone to replace her. My little tribe of online U2 pals encouraged me to try out for this non-paying but fun-sounding gig. So I did, and I got the job. I worked happily at AtU2 creating watercolor-based U2 humor for almost eighteen years, right up until the final days of the site last fall.

The title of the comic was something I inherited. I don't know the story behind it, and to be honest, I've never been crazy about it. But I'm stuck with it! I'm like Larry Mullen, who famously said, "Achtung Baby? I can barely say the bloody words."

I was overjoyed when PJ joined AtU2, albeit just as the site entered its death throes. During this period of upheaval, things were not always easy for her as an essayist and news writer. While I had complete creative control over my cartoon, it was tough to always have to rely on other people to post my work for me (an insane, 19-step process on a website whose clunky backend reminded me of a Soviet-era washing machine). In our chats, PJ and I had been low-key dreaming about a website where we could take all the things we loved about working for AtU2 and leave behind everything we didn't.

When it became apparent that it was only a matter of time before AtU2 would disappear forever, taking with it nearly two decades of my work, I knew I had to create a new home for it. And instead of just creating an archive, why not make that feminist fangirl U2 website PJ and I had been dreaming about?

SP: What is your long-term vision for Achtoon Baby?

PD: I want to keep writing about U2 for as long as Kelly wants to keep the site going. As we say on the "Kelly & PJ" page, we want this to be an "online zine with a feminist/fangirl point of view." We've both observed that the most vocal music fans tend to be men, and that men tend to sublimate the more personal aspects of fandom into activities like obsessive collecting and "rating." Kelly can speak to her own experience, but for me, if I love the music, I can't help but love the artist. And as a woman of the "into men" persuasion, this can be, you know, a bit of a thing, which makes the pursuit of a good spot in general admission that much more interesting. As long as I can find interesting ways to write about that, I'll do it.

KE: When AtU2 folded, I knew I wasn't ready to stop making cartoons about U2. (And they've never really been proper cartoons, by the way. I call *Achtoonbaby.com* "the U2 art project that attempts to be amusing.") I wanted to give my old and future *Achtoons* a colorful, lighthearted home. And I am such a fan of PJ's writing – and artwork! PJ can draw, too! – I knew we would have a blast being our feminist, fangirl selves on a site where we could create artwork and jokes and poetry and PopMart gif parades to our hearts' content. Additionally, a couple of fake rock legends have joined us with a column that answers their fans' burning questions. PJ and I are ecstatic to have Fake Bono and Fake Edge on board.

Fan sites tend to be either curatorial or transformative. Curatorial sites concentrate on stats, collections, news, setlists, rumors, and trivia, and they're often male-oriented. Transformative sites create and challenge the source material (in our case, U2) through things like fan art, podcasts, essays, fan fiction, cosplay, humor, poetry, and whatever you'd call a 1400-word ode to Edge's bone structure, for example. These sites tend to be female-oriented, and while there's plenty of room for overlap between curatorial and transformative content on fan sites, *Achtoon Baby* is gleefully transformative.

As far as I'm concerned, I plan to create original U2 content for at least as long as the band stays together, assuming I can continue to handle the workload. Painting is a physical skill. Right now, I have the hands of a surgeon, but I do not take them for granted. PJ's presence on the site makes this work so much more fun and less like I'm screaming into the void. Praise from her means the world to me and keeps me going. We love working as a team, and we appreciate our readers' feedback so much. While *Achtoon Baby* does not enjoy the same number of readers that AtU2 did, we truly do not care because our Twitter and Instagram audiences make us feel loved and appreciated, and we thank them very much for that.

SP: Favorite U2 Album?

PD: You know, it's really hard to pick a favorite. It changes. I've grown up with this band and each record has its own particular associations—a relationship, an apartment, a job, a friend, a loss, a birth. But if you held me at gunpoint, I'd probably say *Achtung Baby*.

KE: *Achtung Baby*, although this is an unfair question.

SP: Favorite U2 tour/concert?

PD: This is complex because, while I always listened to my U2 records, and always considered them my favorite band, I didn't see much of them for years. Decades, even. My first U2 show was in New Jersey on the original *Joshua Tree* tour. I had dreadful seats, I couldn't see; I could barely hear! And I just wasn't feeling it. So I foolishly decided to stick with bands I could see in small venues.

This all changed with the *Songs Of Innocence* phone controversy and Bono's bicycle accident. I think there's a connection there. I was so angry about the public reaction to *SOI*, and then I was so upset about Bono. On top of which I'd just moved my mother into assisted living, and I realized that I couldn't take U2's – or my own – continued existence for granted anymore. So I went all out to see them multiple times in 2015, 2017, and 2018.

My favorite show – apart from the ones I saw with Kelly, because being at a show with someone who feels just the way you do is the *best* – was at Nassau Coliseum on June 9, 2018. This was the E+I tour. I was on the e-stage rail and Bono spotted me during “Elevation,” and that is all you need to know. (The man owns my heart.)

KE: ZooTV would have been incredible to witness, but alas, the band pulled out of playing a show at my university, and I was unable to go to any of the others. But I have watched *ZooTV: Live From Sydney* so many times that I might as well have been there.

And other than the shows I've seen with PJ, which were their own unique blasts, including the Apollo in 2018, my favorite U2 concert was in Portland during the *Vertigo* tour. Like PJ, my first U2 concert had me sitting in the next-to-the-last row in the United Center (Chicago). It never quite took off, and when it was over, I felt like I could only appreciate them in recorded form. A half year later, a freak ice storm kept me trapped in Portland, where I was miraculously granted a ticket with general admission ellipse access. As I stood fifteen feet away from Adam Clayton that night, I saw the light.

SP: Which album do you feel is the most overlooked and underappreciated?

PD: *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb*. I think people see it as a companion to *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, but it's quite different. It's almost a precursor to



Songs Of Experience, in that a lot of it takes the form of messages to friends and relatives. I never get through it without crying. “Original of the Species” is a song that deserves a lot more love and attention.

KE: *Pop* is a masterpiece. Pop forever, man!

SP: Favorite(s) band/artist that isn't U2?

PD: Nine Inch Nails. I sometimes feel like Trent Reznor is Bono on the other side of the looking glass. Don't get me started. Also: REM, Patti Smith.

KE: Prince inspires so much of what I do. I'm sorry, U2. You know I adore you, but you stole his Grammy for best album. As much as it pains me to say it, Sign o' the Times > The Joshua Tree.

SP: Any advice for people who are interested in starting projects deeply rooted in fandom but are unsure of what to do with it?

PD: If you love something, and it inspires you, just do something. Do anything. Pick up a pen or start typing. You have no idea what's brewing in your soul until you get started. You will surprise yourself.

Tumblr is a silly place, but it's a great resource for fandom. Some of the art and literature I've found there is brilliant, and many times it's based on a TV show or a movie that I wouldn't even have thought about otherwise.

KE: I think most fandoms can be broken down into two factions: fans who consume and fans who create. U2's consumer fans are the ones who express their devotion by attending as many shows as possible and amassing enormous collections. Periods of band inactivity are difficult for them because they have all of this love and nowhere to put it.

Creative fans always have somewhere to put it, so the years of band down time are not as bleak. I live in the middle of nowhere. Traveling to multiple shows is a hardship for me, so I saw only two dates on the last tour. For a superfan, that's not many! But at the same time, I consoled myself with this idea: I don't have to see them as much because I can make them. I can paint a Bono so uncanny he gives me chills. If you can pour your love into a fandom-related project, believe me, the kick you get from it can definitely be as good as buying something and almost as good as seeing the real thing. And you just might make other people happy with it, too!

SP: What is the most important memory you have related to AtU2 and Achtoun Baby?

KE: In April 2018, AtU2's Sherry Lawrence wanted me to create a sort of last-minute picture for the Experience + Innocence kickoff party the site was planning. This would take place in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I think Sherry made greeting cards from it and gave them to attendees. I was unable to go to the tour opener, so when Sherry asked me to paint a cartoony interpretation of "Love Is All We Have Left" for her, I said I'd do it as long as she got Bono to sign this throwaway painting for me, haha, total joke. Well, somehow she made that happen, and



when he autographed my work, Bono said, "Oh, that's so cool. Isn't that brilliant?" Sherry FedExed the picture to me along with the Sharpie he used. Needless to say, all of this blew my mind.

A close second: two of my U2 paintings are now part of The Little Museum of Dublin's permanent collection, and my fan art has been shown in actual museums, including the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Finally: validation for my beyond-geeky hobby!



All watercolors in this piece are the work of Kelly Eddington

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WHO BRICKED THE WINDOWS IN?

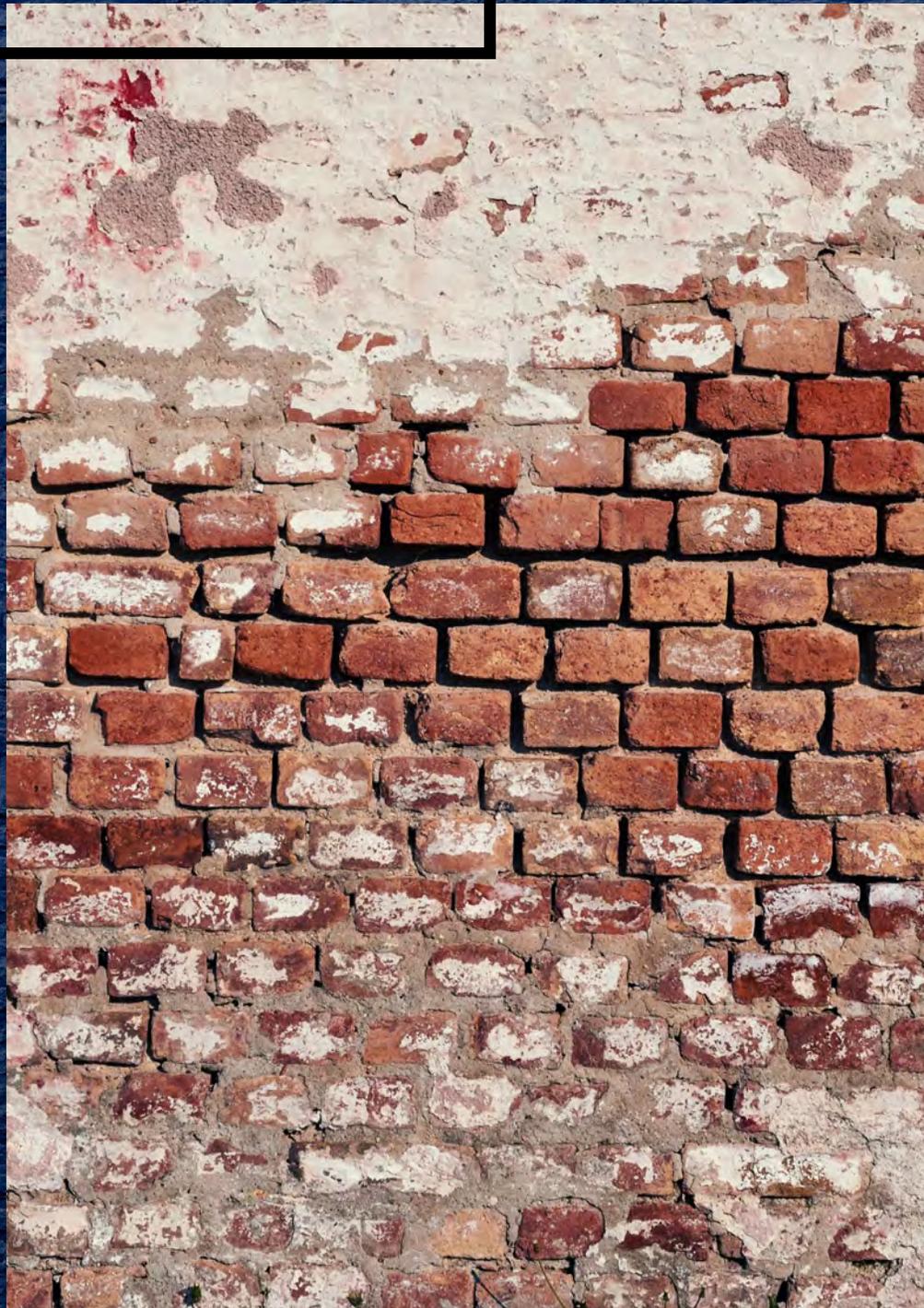
Paul de Neui

*Inspired by the view of the
Lakeshore Limited going through
upstate NY 4 Nov 2019*

What once opened to light and life
To the vibrancy of movement
To the sound of trains and traffic
Pouring in pollution, heat, cold
Circulation
Connection between in and out
Freedom from fear and doubt
No bars, no barriers
Two-way visibility
When did all this become
negativity?

How did it begin?
Was it a broken pane of glass?
A look that was suspicious
Malicious intent
Or an accident?
It was a gradual trend
When closure had more appeal
Than a view of what was real.
It cost too much to fix it
Problems could not be solved
Better to forget the possibility
And cement in a solution that
forgets
the question.

But I will ask it once again
Who bricked the windows in?





It's summertime, you're tired of painting exquisite watercolor portraits of four middle-aged men, and you've got nothing better to do! Let's get trashy. I bring you:

U2 IN BAD TASTE

Black Velvet Bono Painting

Directions: select a fun picture of Bono with lots of shadows in it, and he should probably be wearing sunglasses, and purchase the following items...acrylic paint in white and whatever other colors you think you'll need, a tough, pointy paint brush and a tough, bigger paint brush, masking tape, a white colored pencil with a little oil in it such as Prismacolor, and a length of black velvet in whatever size you want to paint Yer Man. I was able to find a small piece in the fabric remnant bin. At home, tape your piece of velvet to a board (cardboard is fine) and use the white pencil to draw basic outlines of anything that's not black. This will prove to be nearly impossible and extremely frustrating, and you will have immediate respect for anyone who can actually paint on this bizarre surface. All of the dark shadows in the photo will be the parts that you don't paint. You'll paint only the highlights. If you are using cheap paint, you should paint a layer of solid white over the brightest highlights. Once it's dry, you can add your color. Let it dry and untape your creation. Does it kind of look like him? Eh, close enough.

Elapsed time: TOO MUCH, DO NOT DO THIS.

U2 FAN COMIC

Paint-By-Number Larry

Directions: select a photo of Larry looking annoyed, then head to a store where you think you may have seen paint-by-number kits in the past. Or was it that other store? You may have to visit several stores. Select a paint-by-number set that you think Larry would really dislike, and you might want to pick up a pointy paint brush because the ones in the kit usually are not good enough. You'll also need a black Sharpie. At home, open the set and, using the Sharpie, draw Larry on the canvas in some area that makes you laugh. Just outline the major shapes you see and try to mimic a paint-by-number style if you can. Then paint the picture according to its directions and using the provided paint. Finally add Larry using whatever colors are left over.

Elapsed time: basically an entire afternoon.





Seed and Pasta Adam

Directions: Select an old-school picture of Adam and draw him on the toughest piece of cardboard you can find. As you draw, try to imagine what kinds of seed colors and pasta shapes you'll need. Then it's back to Target, where they're probably getting used to you coming in and buying weird stuff, and head straight to the outdoor/lawn/bird seed area. Pick up some of that black thistle bird seed and maybe something that has a variety of colors, and while you're in the area, try to find some wood glue. Elmer's is not quite gonna cut it, and a hot glue gun is too messy and dangerous. Then it's off to the pasta aisle to contemplate this everyday staple in an entirely new way. Rotini is truly the only option that makes sense for his hair, and you should think about shapes that might add a touch of whimsy to your Seed and Pasta Adam. You might want to venture into the rice section, too. Finally, at home, get your seeds organized and start with the black ones. Add glue to any area you want to be black, let it get tacky, and sprinkle the seeds on. You might need to do a couple of rounds of sprinkling. Let this dry if you can possibly stand the anticipation. Repeat this step with the other seeds, and I find it's easiest if you go from smaller to larger, and save the pasta for last. The pasta will not want to stick, especially if it's big and curvy, so make sure your glue is as sticky as possible. Stand back in complete awe of your creation and allow it to dry completely. Consume whatever pasta you have left over, and put your seeds in a bird feeder or simply toss them out the window. Or make, like, three more guys this way.

Elapsed time: three hours, not including drying time, but if you include drying time, it's something like 24 hours but COMPLETELY WORTH IT, MY GOD, JUST LOOK AT HIM.



The Edge Pantyhose Sculpture

Directions: purchase the following items...two pairs of queen-size pantyhose (one black and one tan), beige thread, a needle, a pillow-sized amount of polyester fiberfill, and baby clothes and shoes you could imagine Edge wearing. I bought all of these things at Target, and believe me, this part of the project was more fun than any other aspect of it. At home, stuff the fiberfill into the pants and shirt. Cut the legs off the tan pantyhose and stuff them—these will become arms. The, ahem, crotch of the pantyhose will become his head. Cram fiberfill inside and tie knots in the waistband and leg holes. Do what you can with the needle and thread to give him a nose, eyes, and a mouth. Will the pantyhose want to snag? You bet it will! Draw other face details with a marker. Fashion a crude beanie out of the black pantyhose. I forget how I did this one; you'll just have to figure it out for yourself. Then use whatever survival-level sewing skills you have to put your Edge together. Arrange in a corner somewhere and accessorize with something randomly awesome like a stuffed hedgehog. Trust me, you will not be able to resist the urge to give him a pal. Put him away if company comes. Again, trust me. Elapsed time: 3 hours, less if you can actually sew. ◆

*Jerrie Mock's personal account
of her around the world
solo flight in 1964 ...*

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"The most beautiful thing
we can experience is the
mysterious. It is the source
of all true art and science."

-Albert Einstein



ZANDILE TSHABALALA

-FEATURED ARTIST-

OUR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF SAT DOWN WITH FINE
ARTIST ON THE TOPIC OF CREATING AND
REIMAGING ART IN A CHALLENGING WORLD



SOUTH AFRICAN FINE ARTIST
REDEFINING THE BLACK FEMALE FIGURE

Find Your Paradise: Interview with Zandile Tshabalala

Rita Mock-Pike

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of meeting and interviewing a talented young professional artist (painter) from Johannesburg, South Africa: Zandile Tshabalala. Her first solo exhibition opened in Ghana at the ADA contemporary art gallery in Accra this spring, though her works have previously been placed in shared exhibitions around the world.

Her vision for art and the approach to rethinking the Black female figure in juxtaposition with paradise intrigued me, so I expanded my questions to share more of her insight into the art world with our MockingOwl readers.

RMP: Could you please tell us a bit about your personal history to help the readers have some kind of insight into where you're coming from as a person, as an artist?

ZT: In my household, it is myself, my grandmother, my mom, and my little brother. I'm the eldest of two. I'm from Soweto (a suburb of Johannesburg). I was born in Soweto, and we moved around.

RMP: How did you discover your interest in and talent for art? Do you have a family member who inspired you?

ZT: It wasn't really a well-known thing in my family or often spoken of. So...I don't have an art background. It's at school where little coloring-in projects [sparked my interest], and I used to make a lot of paper dolls. I thought I was going to get into fashion. That's what I wanted at the time. And just these little things, you know...I enjoyed drawing and coloring and making images. So, it just evolved from my primary high school days. And then in high school, I took visual arts classes. That's when I learned about Fine Arts and how there are people – like painters – who [do this] for a career. I just knew that I wanted to do it.

My first degree was going to be Fine Arts. Maybe after that, I'll follow my parents' wishes but I sort of had to fight for that because we weren't in agreement with that decision. But I sort of rebelled. I secretly applied for Fine Art, got accepted for that and rejected for the courses that my parents wanted me to do – which was civil or mechanical engineering. I was excited. My mom was like... "You're never gonna make a living doing that." She literally sat me down, and she was like, "Do you think you'll ever drive your dream car doing art?"

I think at the time, those things didn't really matter. 'Cause my biggest thing was I just wanted to do art. I just wanted to study art. It sounded so like something that was so out of reach, you know, so unfamiliar, so foreign to me. So, it made it a bit more exciting to pursue. Because I want to be a fine artist. And I guess I'm a fine artist now.





RMP: Can you tell us a bit about your recent exhibition in Accra?

ZT: It's titled "Enter Paradise." The title came from a series that I did which was entitled "Paradise." They are basically these paintings of figures with a very picturesque landscape, of [nature's] greens [and blues] of the sea and the sky. For this particular exhibition, I was just thinking about that term "paradise" and what does it mean to me?

Not just the lusciousness of greenery, of plants, of things imagined as paradise when we hear the word. But where else do I find my paradise? Especially in the mundane and my actual space, because I'm always in my space. I'm always by myself, so I have a lot of those moments that really feel like, "Oh, my God, this is so good," you know? Like Netflix and chilling and reading and taking off my shoes after a long work day. And those are the paradises that I wanted to focus on for the show. To shift the perspective from not necessarily the out-of-reach because I feel like even that constructed paradise is very much reachable, but [how] we can find paradise in your ordinary space. What is it that makes you feel like "I'm a boss, I'm exhaling, my shoulders are dropping, I'm at peace, I'm having a moment of leisure?"

Those were the paradises that I focused on for the show. And I just love seeing these Black woman figures in those kinds of pictures, especially if they're in the state of real relaxation and pleasure. It makes me happy.

RMP: The description of the exhibition says it featured self-portraits that explore this reshaping of the representation of the Black female figure. Can you tell us a little more specifically about that?

ZT: It's an exploration of re-visioning the Black female figure. I like seeing Black women in particular states and doing particular things other than what was initially associated with them. I like seeing them away from the narrative of the strong Black woman. Firstly, I'm not against [that imagery] – it's, to a certain extent, true. And I do show the figures in this very confident, very bold in-your-face manner, which one can read as the strong Black woman. At the same time, I like focusing on seeing them in the state of rest.

Serving is something that has strongly related to us. When you say Black women, we are thought of as natural servers and that's why we consistently see this image of that particular narrative. And, I think that even the women who are performing these acts, there's more to them than that, and they have other desires. Like my granny – when she's chilling, and she has her feet out on the couch, she's just resting. Those are the moments that I'd like to depict and immortalize and normalize. That it's okay for you to crave leisure or luxury or whatever it is [you desire]. It shouldn't feel foreign to you.

RMP: Yeah, that's, that's beautiful. I love that. Thank you. So, how did you connect with the gallery where your work is being shown?

ZT: Adora, the founder of ADA, and I have been communicating since last year. I'd say that she approached me or she found me or we found each other on social media to do a show initially. I was supposed to be part of a group show. But we eventually concluded that actually mine should be the first solo show at ADA.





RMP: That's amazing! And with some of the other galleries that have featured some of your work, was that kind of similar? How they just saw your work on Instagram and approached you about shows?

ZT: It was a similar procedure. We found each other on social networks to communicate and decided to maybe schedule a meeting.

RMP: For other artists, perhaps who might be looking to find someplace – what would you recommend having on their social media networks so that people can see their works and personalities?

ZT: It's hard to advise because things happen differently for different audiences. But what I have done personally, was firstly, envisioning myself in certain spaces. I believe a lot in aligning yourself – and asking, “What is it that you want to do? Where do you want to show [your work]?” You need to be familiar with the work and the spaces that you'd like to enter and position yourself in such a way that you are seen in those kinds of spaces. And you are also brave enough to reach out. Which can be tricky. Not every space wants to be contacted.

So, [for social media], I'd say focus on your words, and just being consistent as an artist. It makes it easier for...when people approach you because you have familiarized yourself with your own practice and your confidence, enough to handle whatever it is that comes to you.

RMP: What would you most want our readers to know about your work and specifically this show?

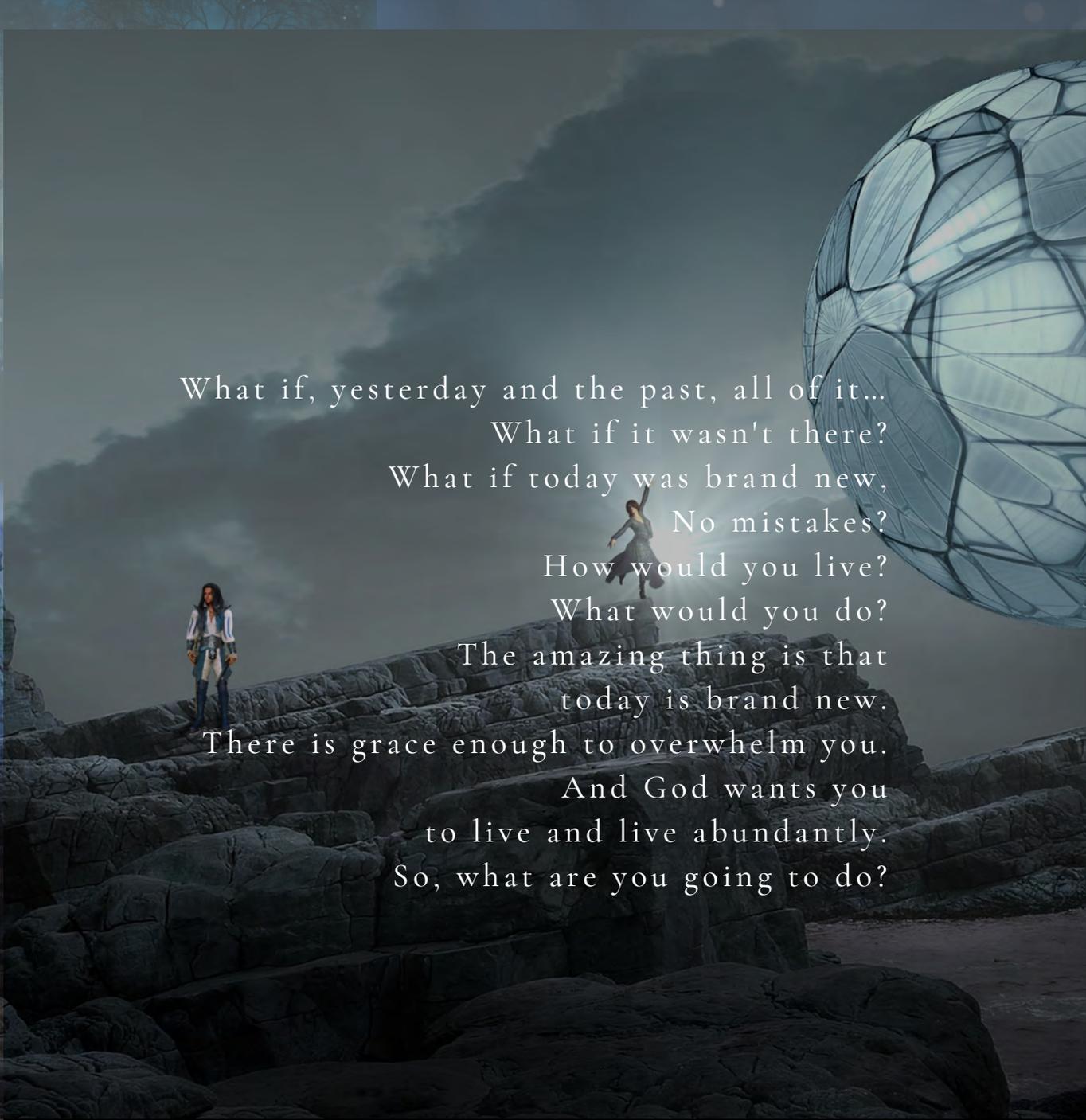
ZT: It's very much personal – self-portraits. Even though the figures aren't exactly like me, they're self-portraits in the sense that even the little things that are featured in the works are very much reflective of who I am. So, I'd hope that the reader and the audience just find out who is the artist and maybe dive deeper into the research.

RMP: Do you have any words to share for fellow artists who maybe haven't yet found their space? Or maybe they're just struggling in this time? What are some things that have helped you during this time?

ZT: Just focus on your work and – as hard as that is – try to find paradise in inches. Your new creations – let them be your paradise, your sanctuary, your safe space.



Wise words from a wise young artist who has, indeed, found her own paradise in the works she creates from her passion and vision of a more beautiful world. ◆



What if, yesterday and the past, all of it...
What if it wasn't there?
What if today was brand new,
No mistakes?
How would you live?
What would you do?
The amazing thing is that
today is brand new.
There is grace enough to overwhelm you.
And God wants you
to live and live abundantly.
So, what are you going to do?

A Reminiscence on Failure

SOREN PORTER



"Blessed is the one who considers the poor and weak! In the day of trouble, the Lord delivers him;" -Psalm 41

*"How do I turn this into something I believe
When it's something I've been told
And something I've been taught?
How do I turn this into something that I need?
When I'm lavishly controlled
And someone that I'm not*

*Believing in love, believing in hope
Surrendering all of my will
Believing in nothing is scary
Believing in something is scarier still
Believing in love, believing in hope"
-Showbread, "Precursor"*

Kindness, mercy, and love are things that go a long distance.

Speaking from experience, when at the bottom with nothing, the smallest expressions of grace can make a life changing difference.

Living down there, at the bottom, really challenges faith. Sometimes it's hard to keep perspective and remember that darkness isn't forever.

Faith is like falling.

Hopefully with both purpose and grace.

It's not every moment, but every time a step forward into change is required...it is this plunging sensation, a feeling of everything changing.

My life has gone in a variety of cycles of starting, falling down and then trying to not lose who I am in the process.

If falling is hard, being poor and weak is somehow even more difficult.

Trusting that things can be better...it's hard, the difference of knowing the path and walking the path.

There is so much theological and existential static and fog.

Everyone has an opinion and has a suggestion to give but platitudes fall apart when your world has fallen apart. The last thing a person in pain wants to hear is how much better things will be. There has to be space to hurt, space to feel pain, space to grieve over what was and what can never be.

But, if there is a benefit to losing everything, it enables a person to be free enough to do anything.

On my own personal journey it enabled me to get back on the right path.

Eventually.

Any progress requires failure. Seeking, not finding, and still looking in spite of the pain.

The key is sticking to it, and cutting out the stuff that doesn't matter. The things and people who are dangerous, or dead weight. Not that people lack value, yet even the right people at the wrong time are the wrong people.

Freedom leads to a place of being able to have perspective and that should lead to a willingness and capacity to help people. If failing and being broken doesn't give someone empathy for others, then nothing ever will.

"I think there is no suffering greater than what is caused by the doubts of those who want to believe. I know what torment this is, but I can only see it, in myself anyway, as the process by which faith is deepened. A faith that just accepts is a child's faith and alright for children, but eventually you have to grow religiously as every other way, though some never do.

What people do not realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross. It is much harder to believe than not to believe. If you feel you can't believe, you must at least do this: keep an open mind. Keep it open toward faith, keep wanting it, keep asking for it, and leave the rest to God." -Flannery O'Connor ♦

THE BICYCLE NOT TAKEN

To the average observer driving past, the metal bike frame, stripped of its tires, seat, and gears, with the rusted-out, peeling white paint, tells merely the story of an abandoned bicycle along a busy highway in an unusual place. There's no bus stop there, no restaurant, no shops – nothing. It leaves the slightly less casual observer to wonder: what's the story here? Who belonged to this bike, why was it abandoned in such an unusual spot, and precisely how long ago did its owner decide it wasn't worth returning for – if that's even the case?

The following story is one of my happy theories.

RITA MOCK-PIKE

Collin found himself on Milwaukee Avenue by mistake. He'd intended to turn the block before but noticed the airport was just there. He'd always been fascinated with small airplanes, so he just couldn't resist. Then, unfortunately, he discovered the airport was, as he should have anticipated, on a busy thoroughfare. *Dang it! Bikes are allowed on this road! This is insane.*

Not to be deterred by such nonsense as a busy highway, Collin pushed through. He turned in, marched into the airport office, inquired about piloting lessons and knew he'd be back, someday, to learn how to pilot one of these beauties. In the meantime, he'd save up so he could afford those lessons.

That meant he was going to need a better job than his current busboy gig at the local greasy spoon.

What is my skillset that would get me a better job so that I can become a pilot? I'm good at math, but that doesn't pay a lot unless you're able to go to school and get a CPA license. I'm a musician, but we all know how well that pays if you're a nobody. I'm good with my hands. Hmm. What kind of anything could I do with my hands? Mechanic? Probably need school for that. Woodworking? Need someplace to get started. But there is that place... I could check it out.

Collin headed out on the highway. He made it about a mile before the traffic became too overwhelming. He'd picked the wrong time of day to explore the new neighborhood he'd just moved into. The speed demons during rush hour here held no regard for the safety of a lone cyclist. He pulled off the highway into a field by an abandoned parking lot. The husk of a burnt-out building twinkled in the distance, the old "Eat here, get gas" sign catching stray sunbeams.

Crap. What do I do now? I guess I could walk my bike back? He glanced down the highway. It was at least another mile to a side road. He'd overestimated a lot of things that day when he headed out, including his energy levels and the distance back home. And my sense of direction.

Collin gawked around at the lack of anything useful. *I can't make it home like this.* He pulled his mobile phone from his pocket and dialed.

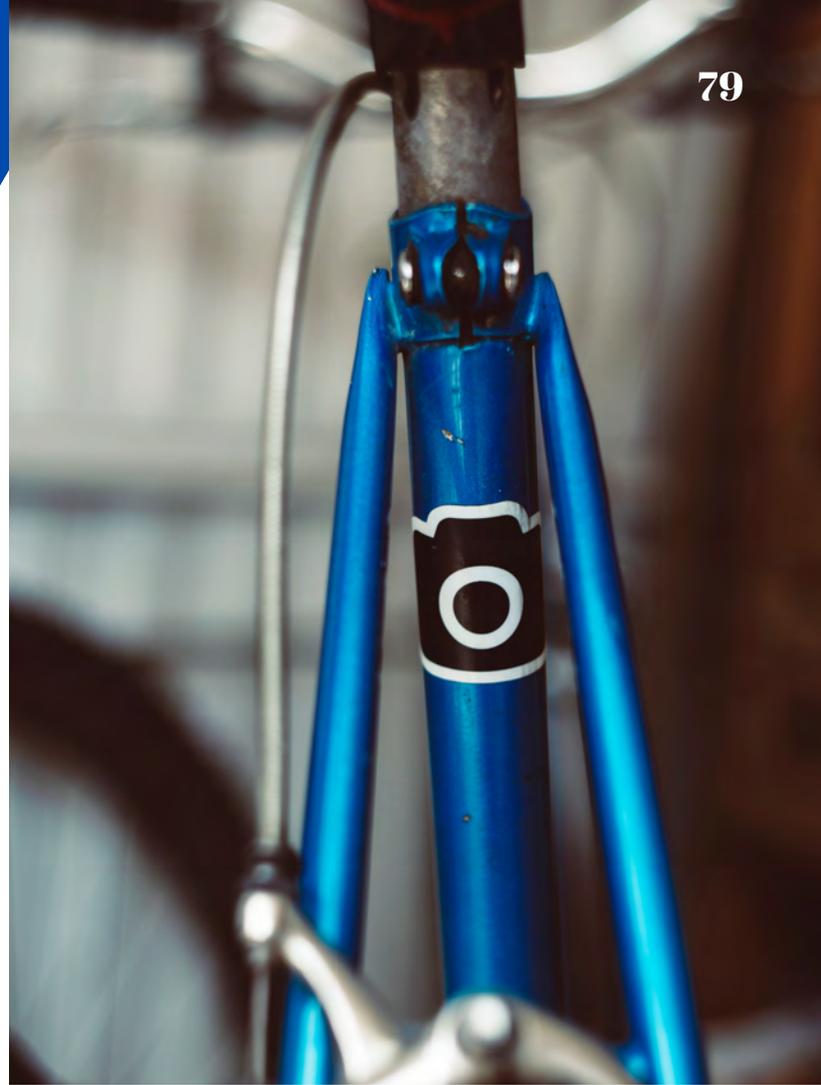
"You're where?" his girlfriend's voice crackled over the line.

"On Milwaukee Avenue near, uh, the municipal airport," Collin said.

"All right. I'll come for you. But I don't have room for the bike. Have a lock? Anywhere to lock it up?"

"No lock, but there's a pole nearby. I can come back for it tomorrow," Collin said.

"Okay," Sheila hung up.



Thirty minutes later, she pulled into the abandoned parking lot near him and handed over a bike lock. "Not the best, but it'll work til tomorrow."

"Right," Collin nodded, locked up his main mode of transportation, and hopped in the car.

The next day, as planned, Collin headed out to retrieve his bicycle. He found the bus route that would get him closest, double-checked that they'd have a bike rack on the bus that he could use, and headed out.

Upon his arrival, the discovery came: he didn't have the key for the lock.

No businesses nearby could help – he had no proof the bike was his.

Two hours later, fuming as he muttered to himself, he picked up the key from the table by the door, waiting for him to grab it. *I won't forget it here,* he had thought the night before.

"I didn't see your bike on the rack," Sheila noted, coming in from work that evening. "Somebody didn't steal it, did they?"

"No," Collin grunted. "I went out but I forgot the bloody key!"

Sheila plopped onto the couch beside him. “Sorry, Boo. Try again tomorrow? I could drop you, if you can get the bus home.”

“All I can do,” Collin nodded. “There was no way I could make it back out again today – I had work.”

“I know,” Sheila nestled herself into Collin’s shoulder. “Turn your brain off. It was frustrating, but it’ll be okay. We’ll get your bike back, safe and sound. You won’t need the bus again after tomorrow.”

The PowerBall came on.

Sheila pulled out their tickets to watch. They didn’t usually do much of this money-wasting stuff, but once a month, they bought a ticket for the PowerBall. You never knew when you might get lucky – and it was kind of fun, that hoping-you’d-win bit.

“I think I’m going to – ”

“Shh, Collin. PowerBall’s on.”

“Right, right.” Collin sighed, leaned into the couch and pulled out their monthly ticket.

“12-44-69-14-7.”

Jaws dropped, stunned to silence, the pair looked at each other. “Did we just frickin’ win the lottery?”

Collin nodded almost imperceptibly.

“Did we just win the lottery?” Sheila screamed this time.

Stunned, they sat there, staring at the screen, staring at their lotto ticket. The numbers matched. Every single one of the numbers matched. Even if ten other people picked the same numbers, they were now multi-millionaires.

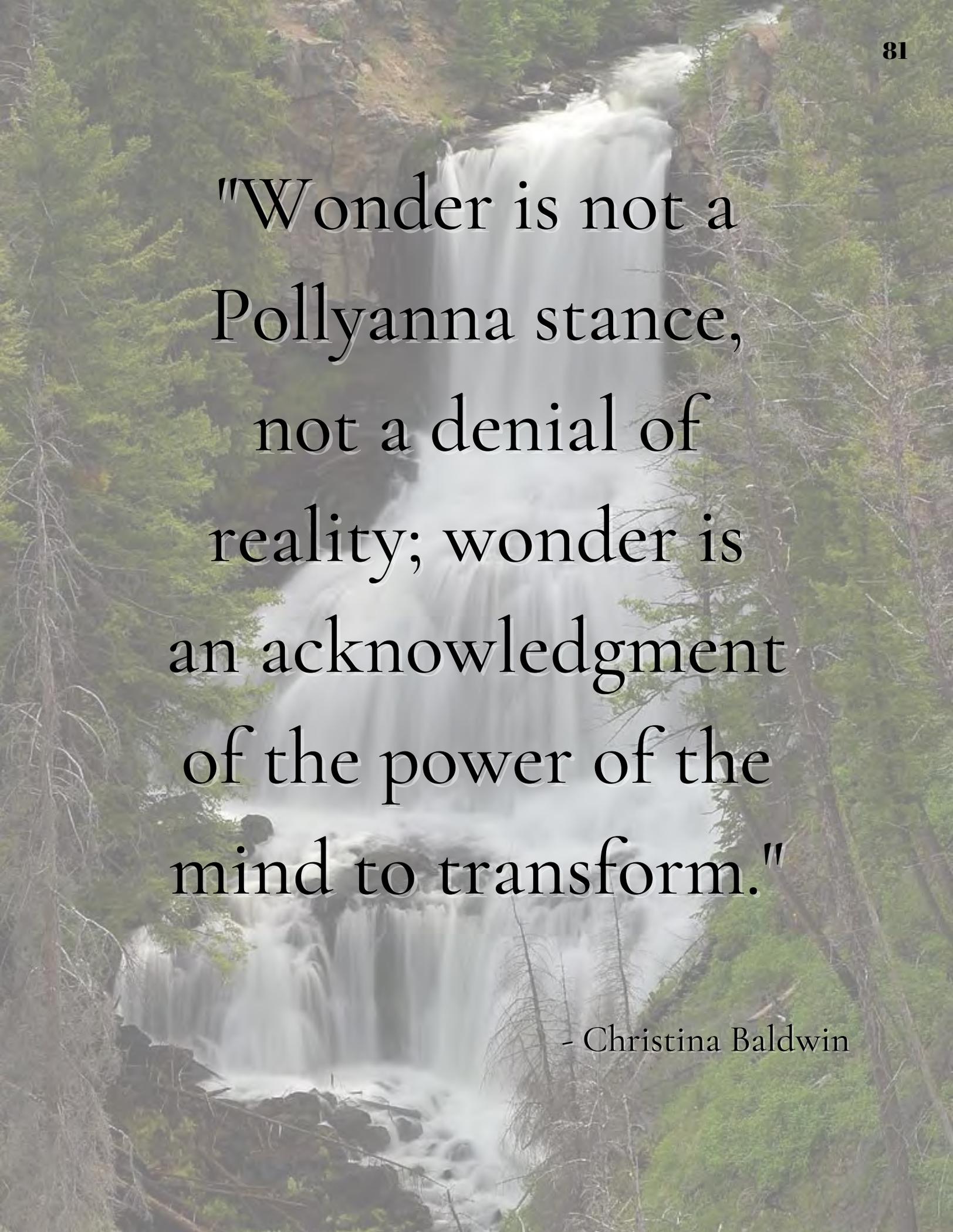
Two years later, Collin whizzed down Milwaukee Avenue in his two-year-old sports car. He’d always promised himself he’d fly a plane out of the Chicago Executive Airport there on Milwaukee, even after getting his license the year prior. But since winning the lottery, he hadn’t been back to the area. But for some reason, on this trip into Chicagoland again after he and Sheila moved to the U.S. Virgin Islands, he had a hankering to fulfill his promise to himself.

Is that my bike?

Collin pulled off the road into the empty lot. There, on the pole, stripped of its tires, paint peeling, seat deformed from exposure, his bike remained locked to the pole. He shook his head. Dang it. I still don’t have the key. ◆

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A photograph of a waterfall cascading down a rocky cliff in a dense forest. The water is white and frothy as it falls, surrounded by lush green trees and foliage. The scene is captured from a slightly elevated angle, looking down at the waterfall.

"Wonder is not a
Pollyanna stance,
not a denial of
reality; wonder is
an acknowledgment
of the power of the
mind to transform."

- Christina Baldwin

In the Wonder of Now

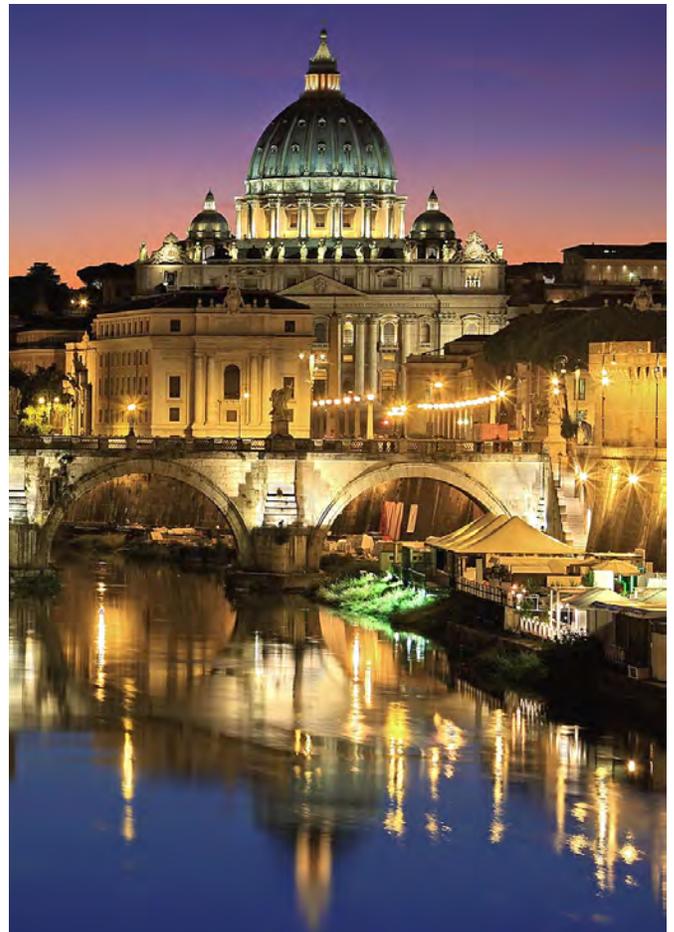
Rita Mock-Pike

I think it's their fault – my dad's, my mom's, and my grandma's. This incessant travel bug and seeking out of adventure. After all, I was raised with the motto, "Life is an adventure" – and the attitude of finding adventure in everything we did. Flat tire on a road trip? Adventure. Locked out of the apartment? Comedic adventure. Broken bone from a horseback riding fiasco? Adventure and a good story.

So, I suppose it isn't any surprise to folks who know me when I tell them I've been to five of the eight continents (yes, eight. [Zealandia](#). Look it up if you haven't yet heard about it), and over thirty-seven countries and islands around the world.

In those travels, I've visited many of the wonders of the world, ancient, natural, and "new": The Grand Canyon, the Great Barrier Reef, Machu Picchu, the Colosseum, the Acropolis, the Amazon Basin, St. Peter's Basilica, Canals of Venice, Mammoth Cave, Yellowstone, the Eiffel Tower, Niagara Falls.

And as I've traveled, I've noticed something I consider to be a bit of a phenomenon – and something I've been guilty of myself. I can best describe this through a conversation I had.



Me: How long have you lived here in Cairns?

30-Something bloke on the dockside: All my life. Never set foot outside of the area.

Me: How often do you go out on the Great Barrier Reef? It must be amazing to have the opportunity to do so as often as you like.

Bloke: Never been.

How often I've had this conversation as I've traversed the world! And how often I've been on the other side of it, realizing I live near such-and-such an awesome site/park/restaurant/museum/natural wonder/man-made wonder and never set foot near it.

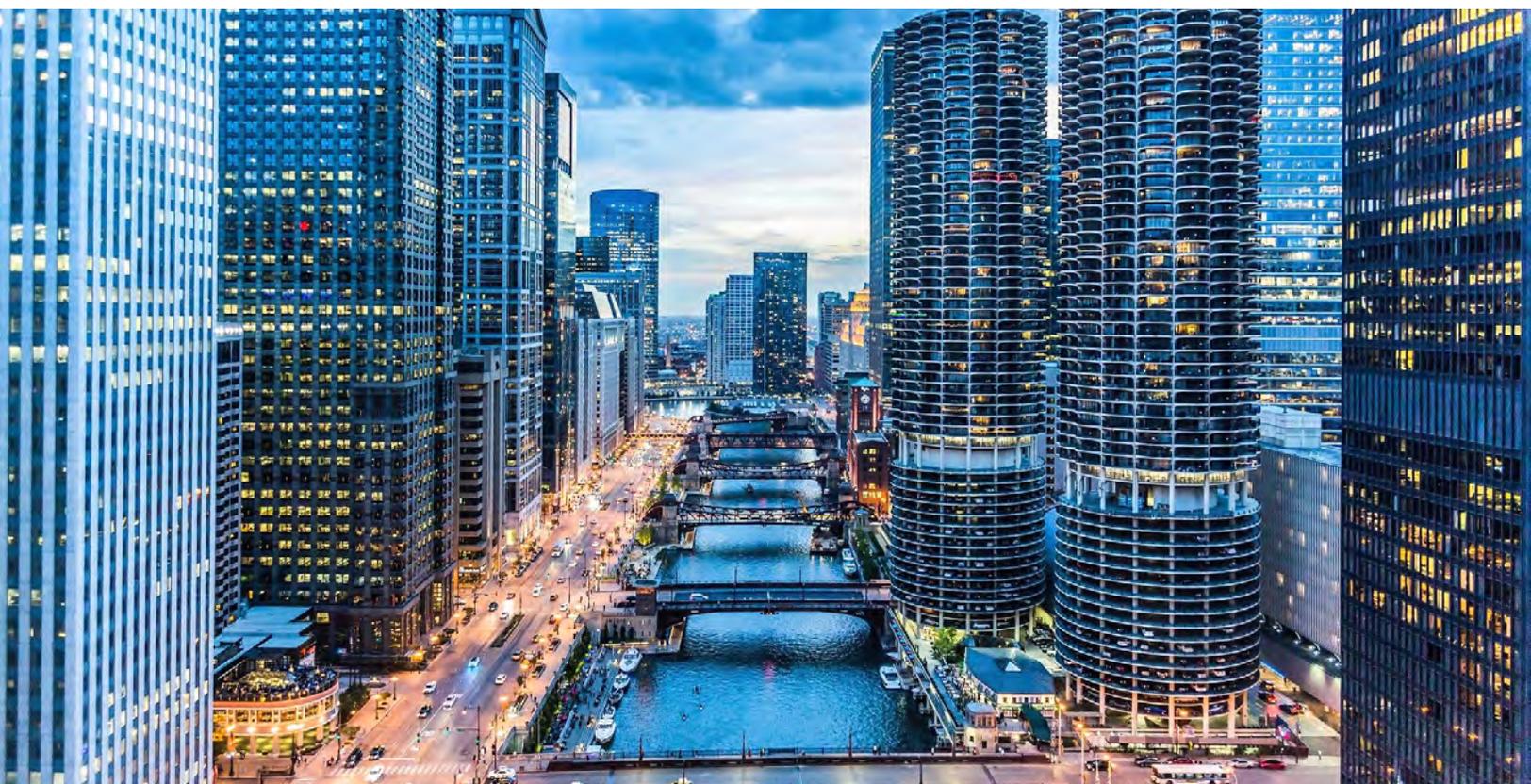
My life has always been filled with wonder – from the first camping trips I can remember, to the road trips my family took to national parks, or the literal wonders of the world I've visited across the globe. My spiritual being has overflowed with wonder from my earliest recollections: Who is this magnanimous God whom I serve? What mysteries of His being do I not know and could I never know? The very mystery of His being has always been my “favorite” attribute of God: that He is so mysterious and wondrous that I could never comprehend all of His beauty and magnificence.

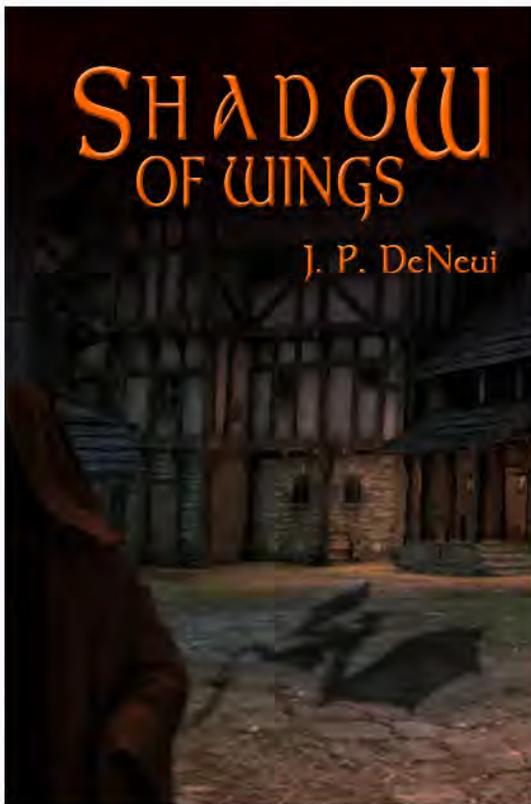
Yet I, like so many others, often neglect the local and small wonders around me every day. Sure, I bend down to sniff the tiny flowers peeping up through the dirt, but I forget to hit the trails on the river nearby because of life getting in the way.

I suspect that if we all took a hint more pleasure and initiative in the exploration of the tiny, near, and obscure wonders around us, the world would automatically be a better place. We wouldn't have time for petty squabbles for one – we'd be drinking in the beauty of a butterfly garden. We'd have no space for boredom – we'd be contemplating the vast skies above.

I suppose that's my new “resolution” for the mid-point of this year: Seek out the wonders around me as I wait for the “big” wonders that aren't available to me today. ◆

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Epic fantasy from emerging author, Joseph Paul DeNeui

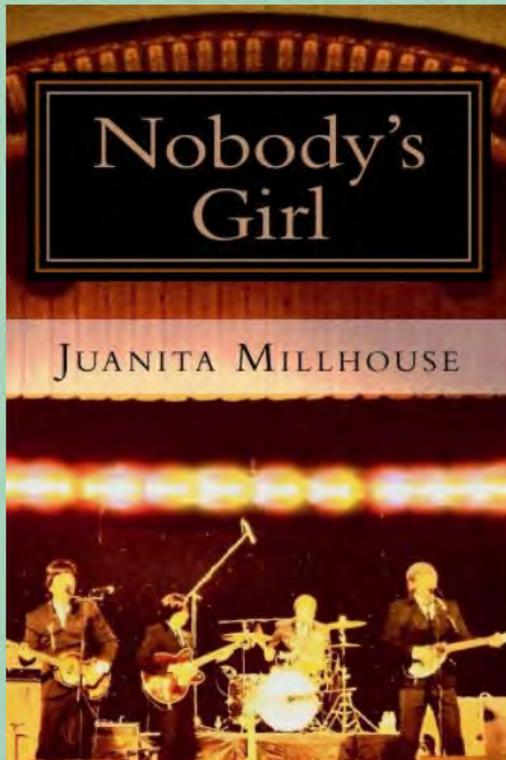
A FLAME IN LIFE
AFLAME IN DEATH
SO MUST THE DRAGONMEN DIE

Heir to the kingdom of Anthea, Crown Princess Dera Wrencliff knew like every good Anthean that all dragonmen are monsters. The very few men who spread their wings grow to serve the evil Shadowman, becoming too dangerous to let live.

And then a dragon saved her life.

Though Robyn Kawlsmith is condemned to death, Dera intends to break him free. But larger forces are at work...and something else may be unfurling inside her own traitorous heart.

Purchase in paperback or eBook on Amazon



For the Love of Music series
by Juanita Millhouse

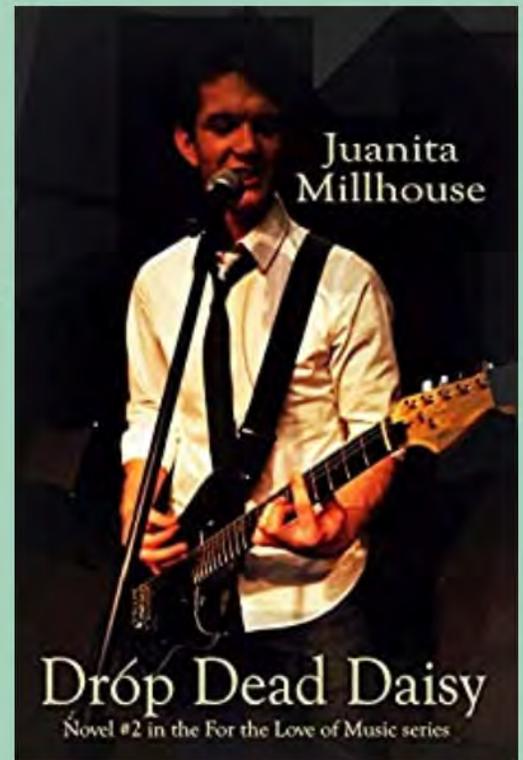
NOBODY'S GIRL

Tess Brenner never would have imagined that she'd be in love with a rock-star. Of course, when she fell in love with Jamie Bennett back in fourth grade, nobody would have guessed the nerd with long hair would be one of the most popular men in the world just a few years later. But when Jamie and the band leave their hometown to tour the world, Tess must learn to live without that love. But can she? Will she ever forget the love that binds her heart to the lead singer of the Four Jays?

DROP DEAD DAISY

Daisy Meeks never really knew her family. She's never known love. She's never had anyone stick around long enough to open up to. Well, except through her music. But those who hear her heart don't get her. They think she's just some hot chick who plays a mean guitar. Until Kane Sullivan comes along and pulls her into the world of heavy metal and fame. And, of course, love. But is his love really all she's been searching for? Is he really enough?

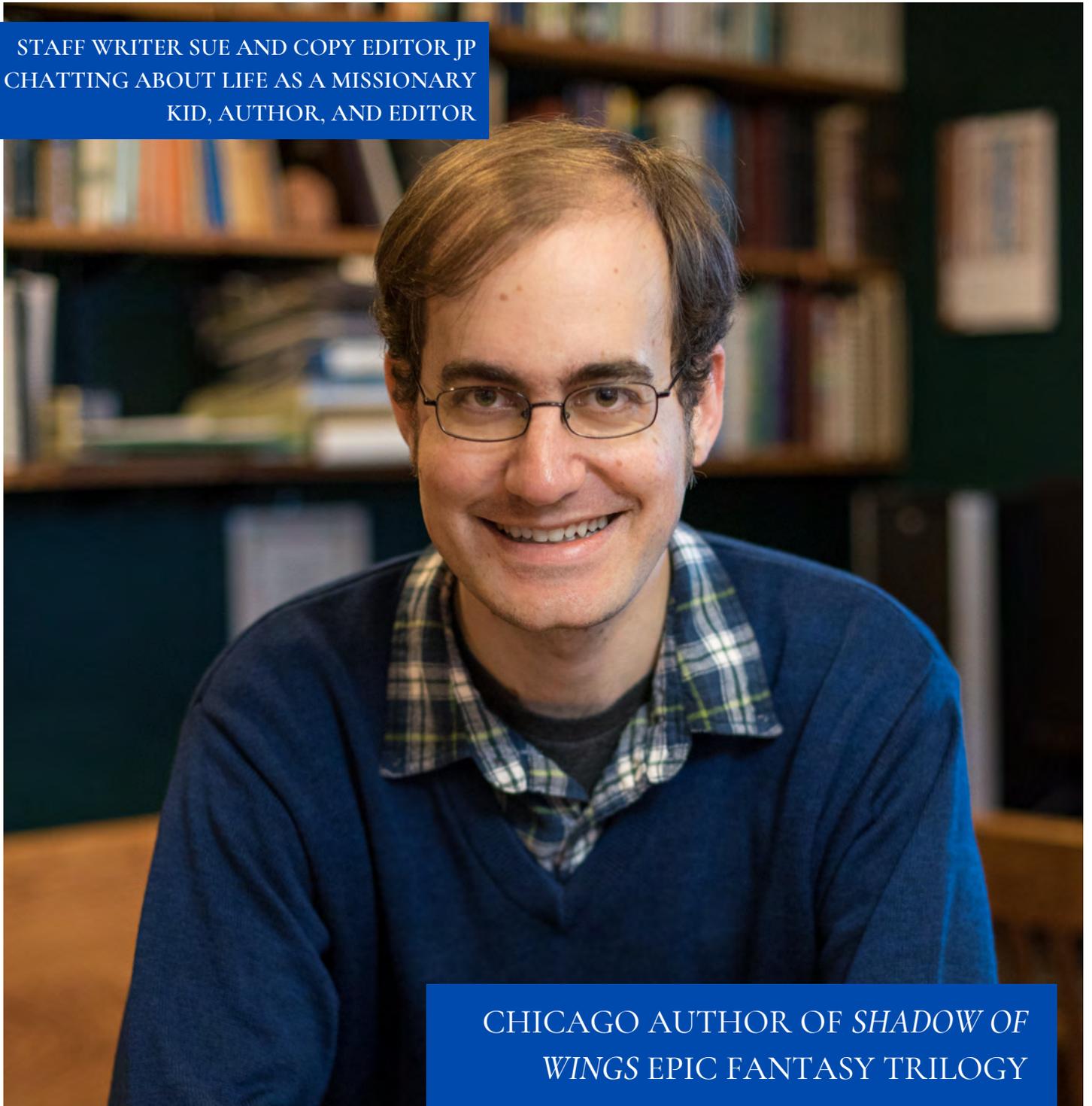
Purchase on Amazon



J.P. DENEUI

-FEATURED ARTIST-

STAFF WRITER SUE AND COPY EDITOR JP
CHATting ABOUT LIFE AS A MISSIONARY
KID, AUTHOR, AND EDITOR



CHICAGO AUTHOR OF *SHADOW OF WINGS* EPIC FANTASY TRILOGY

A LITERARY OASIS: INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR J.P. DENEUI

Sue Cook

J. P. DeNeui is the author of the book *Shadow of Wings*, as well as two yet to be published sequels. Currently living in Chicago, Illinois, he is a writer, editor and proofreader for *The MockingOwl Roost*.

His writing is so beautiful, that I was thrilled to hear he would be my first interview for the magazine. His novel captured my imagination and heart from the first paragraph. J.P.'s various pieces that he has written for *The MockingOwl Roost*, move my spirit. I was nervous, and maybe fangirling a little. What I didn't expect was a colorful, and rich story. J.P.'s responses to my questions take you on a journey.

SC: Tell us a little about yourself and where you grew up? What was it like being a missionary kid, and how did that influence your writing? How did sci-fi and fantasy become your thing?

JPD: I've grown up all over the place, it feels like. America, Thailand, and different places in both. I was born in Pasadena, California, and my parents moved to Thailand when I was three months old as missionaries with the Evangelical Covenant Church. My Mom and Dad took language classes in Bangkok for two years before moving our small family to the Isaan region of Thailand.

This is where my memories of Thailand begin, in the small city of Roi Et, capital of its province. With another missionary family and Thai believers, we shared church outside on patios and lawns. We sang original songs in Thai because the tonal language messes up translations. To support the ministry my Dad worked on a fish farm. Our family had a game at dinner of "guess what Dad had for lunch today." It could be fish eggs, a cobra, insects, many things. If someone serves you something, you eat it.

We lived in Roi Et for nine years, during which time my brother and two sisters were born. It wasn't a strange life for me or a hard one, though with every place, of course, there are challenges. Our house had electricity and running water and even one computer. I was homeschooled in English. It wasn't the jungle!

I lived mostly in Thailand growing up, but every two years or so, things flipped. That was when it was time for a "home assignment" – time to cross the Pacific "back" to America and see my grandparents on my Mom's side in Northern California or drive to Southern California to see my Dad's folks. During the few months we would spend in the States we would attend churches and crash summer camps. My Dad would speak often and raise support.

My parents took pains to bring books from America and made sure all of us grew up reading. I had no cell phone or tablet growing up and was very rarely on the Internet so perhaps this only made sense. I read *The Lord of the Rings* in elementary school alongside works by Jules Verne (and of course I devoured every Calvin & Hobbes comic strip). I didn't read only fantasy and sci-fi, but those genres especially resonated. Maybe the pure escapism was irresistible. Maybe these are the genres that tell the biggest stories. Maybe my life was already "out there" and going further was just the next step.

SC: Shadow of Wings is a wild and entertaining read from the first page. I am having a problem putting it down, Joseph. How did you go about creating the world of Anthea?

JPD: Thanks for reading, Sue! *Shadow of Wings* started in a novel-writing class where, over the course of the class, I finished two chapters and a prologue. Amazing.

No one liked the first version of the story. Riddled with clichés, it said nothing new. After some harsh and needed feedback I remember curling up around a notebook, scrapping everything, and trying to think. What had I not read a story about? I zeroed in on two ideas: people turning into dragons and good guys fighting for the wrong side. I expanded on those ideas a little and wrote two chapters that weren't half bad. The class ended, I got a good grade, and I figured that was the end of that.

Six months after I'd abandoned the story, I brought a book by Stephen King to summer camp where I was working as a camp counselor. King's books can run pretty dark, and this one led me to his darkest place yet. I couldn't keep reading, shutting the book in disgust.

I can do better, I thought suddenly to myself. *I can write a better book*. Irrationally I believed that and returned to brainstorming. And over the course of a summer of very little free time, I came up with cool names and places and cool ways a world could be constructed. So many ideas were finally percolating that I was soon champing at the bit to write. After camp ended, I plunged in.



My guiding principle at first was a simple word count: If 50,000 words makes a novel, that was my goal to hit, and I did it. I wasn't done at that point, or close, but after a year I completed a rough draft. More rewrites than I can remember followed, along with two sequels. The book took a long time to reach its final form, but through the grace of God it did.

SC: Your characters have such depth. I would imagine creating a mythos for such a world would take research into ancient myths and religions. Can you walk us through the process of character building for this series?

JPD: My characters came out of their setting. Kind of. I had two kingdoms opposing each other where in one all dragonmen are killed and in the other, dragons are revered. So I needed dragons and I needed royalty, but then I needed to go beyond that. And so characters emerged like Dera's bodyguard who was supposed to die in an early outline and stubbornly made himself a main character. Being open to various possibilities within the characters, allowed the book to move in different directions if certain scenarios didn't work.

I'm not a great outliner, as you might have guessed. Some writers excel at this and it works for them, while with me I outline and then do something else. I have cool flashpoints I aim to build up to, but how we get there begins as a mystery. I want to be surprised by character choices so I give them leeway to contradict me. In the same way, I don't generate characters from templates and keep research to a minimum. As much as I can, I try to let things breathe.

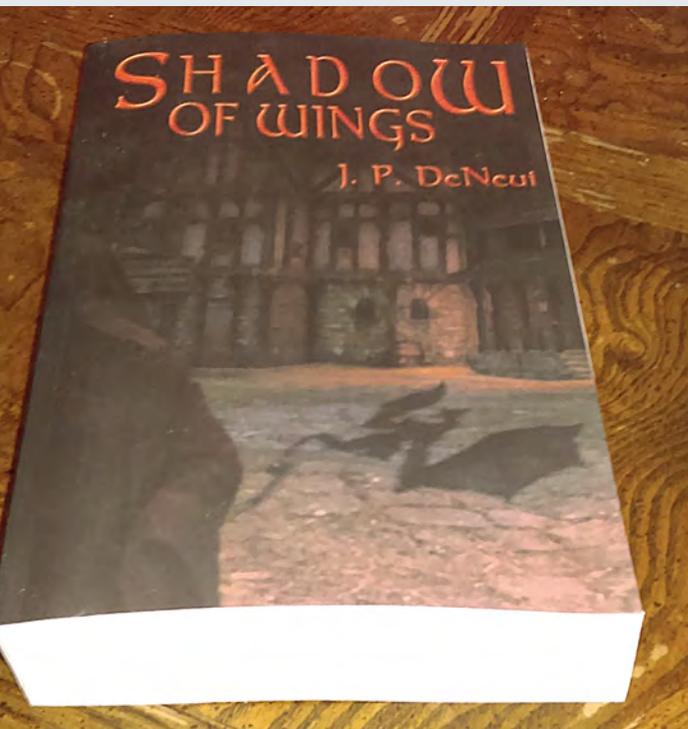
Some notes on the religious aspects of the series. I grew up as a member of a Christian missionary family in a predominantly Buddhist culture. I didn't do research on ancient myths, but I did draw from my own experiences while trying to tell an original fantasy. Perfect originality is of course humanly impossible and some things could be read as allegorical. I'll leave it to readers to guess what's what.

SC: How did you find your current publisher?

JPD: Through a much longer search than I was counting on. I believed naïvely after I finished my first draft that it was basically good to go. So I took feedback, tweaked and tinkered, and submitted it to publishers fond of form rejection letters. This was discouraging, but I tried again. More and better rewrites made no difference. No one wanted to pick up my book.

Still, I knew there was more story to be told, so I wrote the second and third books in the series and then embarked on a series rewrite. On the recommendation of a friend, after the rewrite passed book one, I checked out duotrope.com and sent out more submissions, deeply skeptical. I'd half convinced myself I just wasn't a good writer yet. Surely I'd need to be forty at least before anyone who wasn't a teacher or a relative would want to read anything by me ever.

But to my shock and joy, [eLectio](#) was interested. They were the first publishing house I'd submitted to that was based in Christian values. Maybe I should have submitted to someone like them sooner. We signed a contract and then there was still more work to do: rewrites, galleys, supplementary materials. Seven and a half years after I first started writing it, *Shadow of Wings* was finally published.



SC: *With your second and third novel in this series, I understand you are looking to work with a different publisher. How has that been going? What is the process of switching publishers?*

JPD: The process is not going great, to be honest. I wish all stories had a happy ending, but the ending for this one is still up in the air. The first book didn't sell enough copies for eLectio to pick up a sequel, and at this point I've lost track of the number of agents and publishers I've submitted to trying to drum up sufficient interest. It seemed one publisher might actually commit, but after asking for everything they didn't come through. The sequels build on what came before and don't work too well as standalones. Maybe I'll have to self-publish eventually, but that's not a path I want to take.

SC: *I understand you are a Twitter novelist. I find it fascinating that you can do this with the word number constraints that Twitter imposes. How do you manage that? Where do we find them?*

JPD: I haven't published enough on Twitter for it all to add up to a novel just yet. I publish "TwitFics," as I call them. These are self-contained micro-stories told in 280 characters. Usually I write something well over the character limit then cut it down until it fits. You have to be very precise with your language and concept, and they're a refresher for me from my voluminous books. I aim to publish a new TwitFic each Friday [on my account](#).

SC: *Do you have any new works in progress that you would like to tell us about?*

JPD: Aside from publishing the second and third books of my trilogy, my big ongoing project at the moment is a work of historical fiction with some fudgy fantasy elements. It's a bit of a genre switch for me and something that does actually need more research, so it's been a challenge for sure. The story is a reimagining of the life of the Biblical character of Enoch and might possibly involve a little time travel. I've wanted to tell this story for a while and I'm currently about halfway through a rough draft. It's going slower than I'd like, but I'm excited for it.

SC: *How do you spend your time when not working on a new novel, or writing for The MockingOwl Roost?*

JPD: I like riding my bike when the weather is warm, ideally picking up a snack around Chicago. I used to bike a good distance to and from my old job, so it's good to keep up the practice and is much-needed exercise. Indoors I often fall down YouTube rabbit trails or binge Grand Strategy computer games like Civilization and Stellaris. And of course I love reading (big surprise, I'm sure). Frank Peretti, Brandon Sanderson, and David Weber are some of my go-to favorite authors.

SC: *J.P. thank you for this interview. Before we leave, what is the one thing you wish your readers knew about you and your works of fiction?*

JPD: I have a saying I believe God gave me that's helped me continue to persevere and write. In the end, only two people really need to like my writing, and those two people are God and me.

I'm a perfectionist and not easy to please, and God is perfect, so this is a challenge. But God knows my weaknesses and continually sustains me. If my stories cast light, it's enough.

Thank you, J. P. for taking us on a journey. Your childhood sounds amazing! . Having never lived further than Wisconsin Dells, it brings the word paradise to mind.. Idyllic for inspiring a love of reading, writing and the mythos to create a world of magical beings. Since I am on the same publishing path, I take heart in finding rejection is all part of the job. Those of us new to the publishing game can relate, and take comfort in the fact that perseverance is the word of the day. ◆



"Life itself is the
most wonderful
fairy tale."

- Hans Christain Anderson



Paul de Neui
 Japanese Bath



The Japanese bath is a wonderful place
 Where you try to look only at each other's face.
 Nothing is hidden, all is laid bare.
 There are no surprises so no need to stare.
 A freeing sensation is all that you wear.

When I entered the water with my Portuguese friend
 Others ignored us so as not to offend.
 After those fragrant waters soaked every pore
 Another pool tempts me to try something more.
 And someone moved right to where I sat before.

Talking together they steal glances at me
 My friend and the Japanese man smile, nod, agree.
 I act disinterested and look at floor
 But it's one of those things that is hard to ignore.
 And I'm fairly certain that I will hear more.

Soon enough Julio comes and shares the man's question
 He said he wanted to know if I was American.
 What gave it away? It was a puzzle to me.
 There was only my birthday suit for him to see.
 And why did he look at my friend differently?

Of course I'm not Asian, that was obvious to all
 But others there were almost as tall.
 My Portuguese friend, short, dark, and hairy,
 Is not what Japanese consider American ordinary
 But the fact that I do is a little bit scary.

The next day during English class I asked the Japanese what indicates
 That a naked person you might see in the bath house is from the
 United States?

Talking loudly with hand gestures came one explanation.
 Another: lined foreheads from displayed animation.
 One person explained what her mother once told her,
 "Stop showing your feelings; it wrinkles your face older,
 You're starting to look like an American soldier."

Casual clothes with sneakers were two other usual clues
 (Which I was not wearing so what could I do?)
 Buff bodies (not mine) and really short hair
 These said "American" no matter what you do or do not wear.
 Also something of the attitude "devil may care."

It's really a stereotype the Japanese know
 Going back to the War days and white G.I. Joe.
 But perhaps someday one man may look back and recall
 That his question in the hot tub about the American so tall
 Was answered by a shorter one from Portugal.

It would be great to think there are places
 Where we can be free
 To be whoever and whatever we are supposed to be
 Regardless of origin or nation
 Even better than hot water
 That would be a most welcome sensation. ◆



COLUMN: DANCING WITH THE MUSE

RITA MOCK-PIKE

Since before the time I first was able to choose my own topic for school projects in third grade, I've been choosing Australia. Studying the wildlife, the atmosphere, the lack of ozone layer, and the culture. I've learned slang, history, and geography. And I've toured the nation visiting all the states and major territories, as well as spending several months in the Sydney area on a theatrical tour.

When the film *Australia* came out in 2008, a few months after my first jaunt Down Under, watching it was a requirement. I knew the storyline was fictional, the characters imagined, but there would be points of honest history, an acknowledgment of wrongs done, and some beautiful scenery.

During my first visit to Australia, that same year that the film came out, I saw a man on an airplane who inspired the idea for a novel. I've been writing it since, recently polishing it deeply for submission to an interested publisher, and as I've crafted the themes, written the words, polished the chapters, I've put on the musical score from *Australia*.

As "By the Boab Tree" or "I Will Come for You" plays, the scenes of my novel roll out flawlessly in my imagination. I see each character perfectly, with precise details and beautiful, living eyes. I see the dogs, the horses, and the kangaroos.

Australia

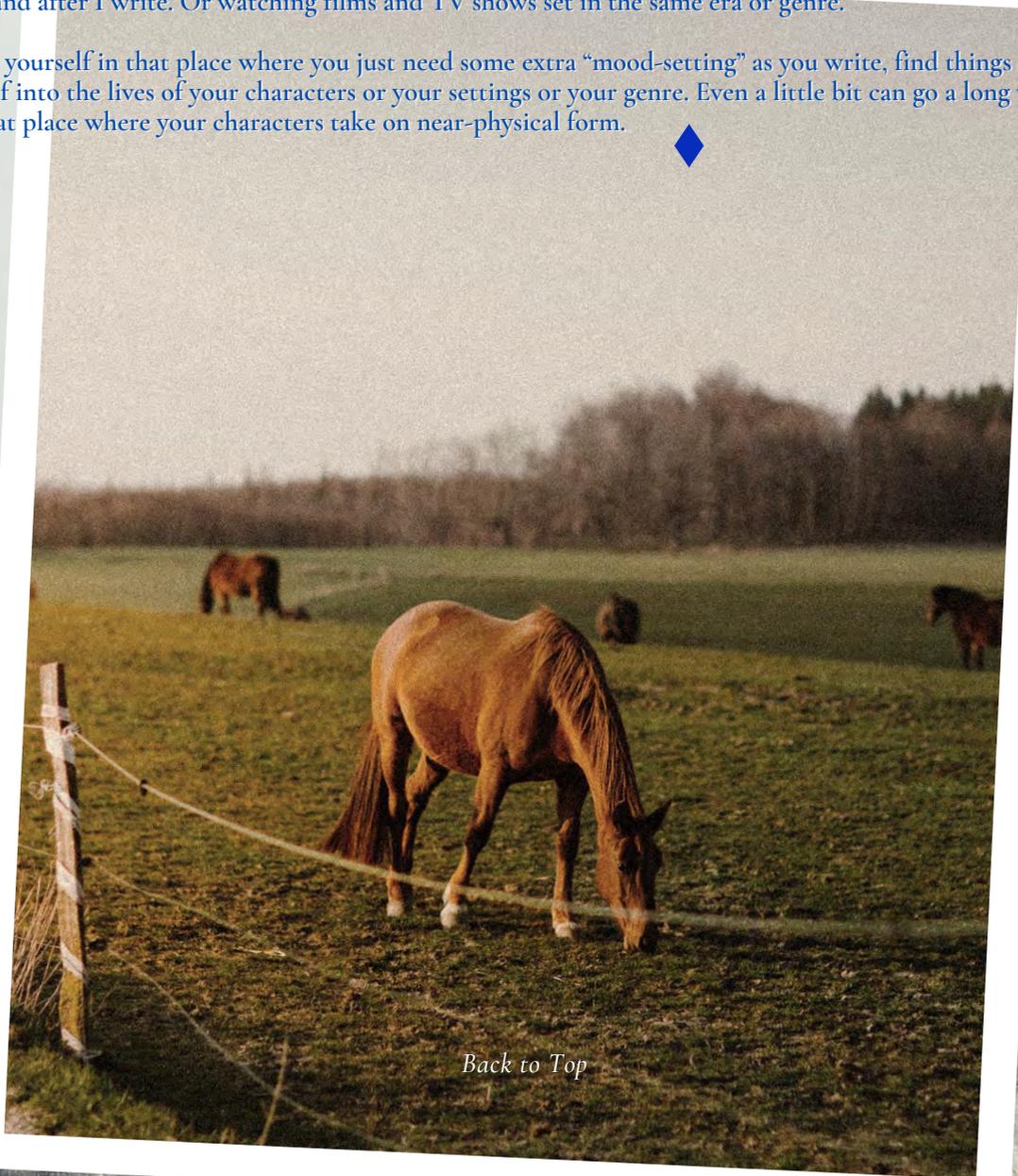
If I'm struggling to find my characters' voices, I put on the soundtrack or even watch the movie. The film and score draw me back to my setting – the imagery allows my memory to recall the flight when I saw the man who inspired the book. I can picture him more clearly. I can see the storyline unfolding once again and the details of the adventures popping out.

And the thing is, this isn't the only book that's been helped by such practices. My first self-published novel was inspired by meeting a Beatles cover band called Beatlemania Again. While I was working on that book, I listened to the Beatles incessantly and watched interviews, read magazine articles, and researched the heck out of the guys who inspired the question I wanted to answer with my novel, *Nobody's Girl*. I also picked up an electric guitar and started learning how to play so I could feel the strings under my fingers and know what it feels like to hit a power chord.

The key for me is immersion.

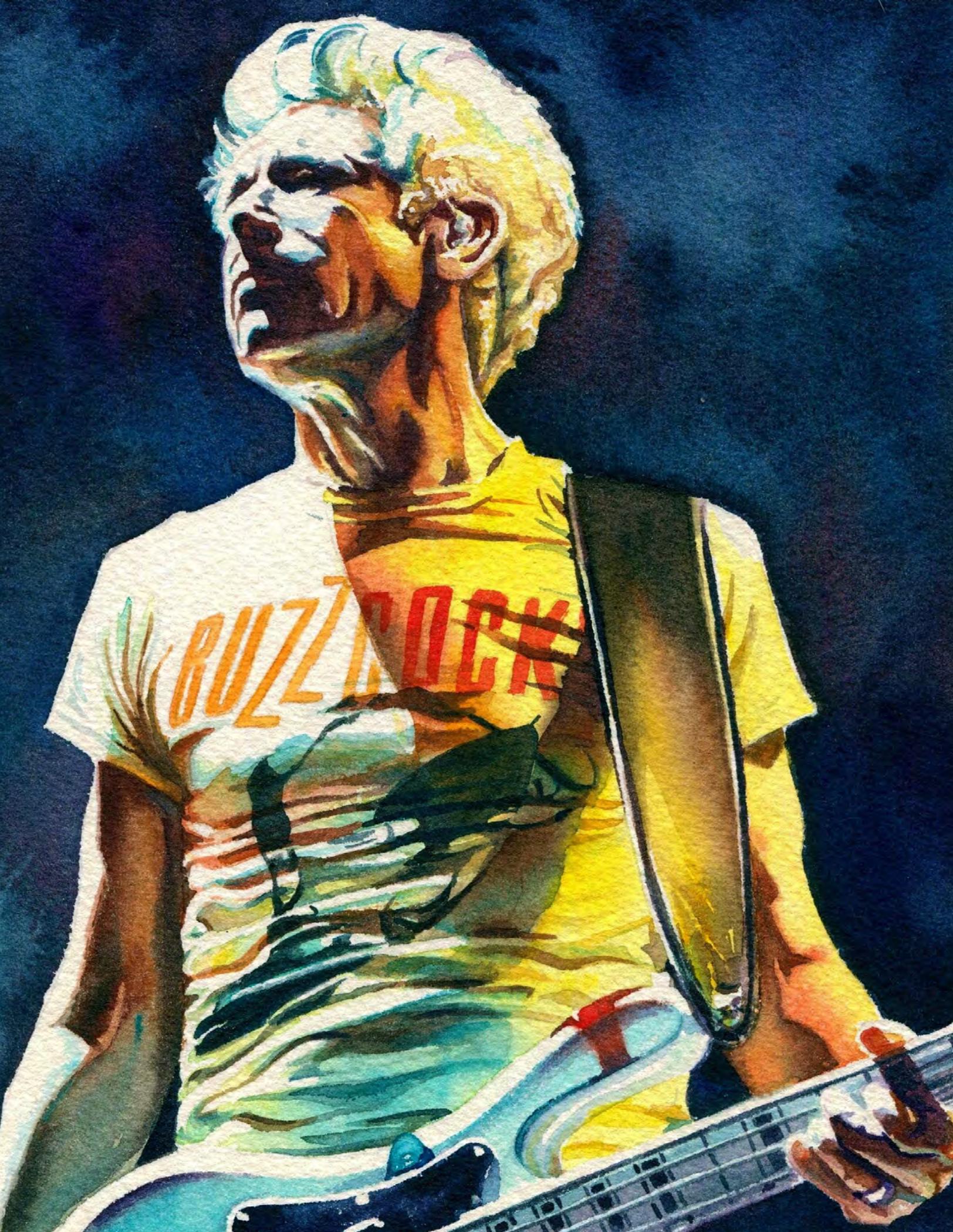
I can't always fully immerse myself into my story anymore, which can be challenging. I have a full-time job, a husband, a cat, a church, friends, a magazine to run. But I can give myself moments of immersion through listening to the right soundtrack before, during, and after I write. Or watching films and TV shows set in the same era or genre.

If you're finding yourself in that place where you just need some extra "mood-setting" as you write, find things that help you immerse yourself into the lives of your characters or your settings or your genre. Even a little bit can go a long way in helping get your mind in that place where your characters take on near-physical form.



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“The world will
never starve for
want of wonders,
but for want of
wonder.”

- G. K. Chesterton

RACHAEL BRITTON - COM. EDITOR

Rachael Britton is a former theatre kid turned theatre adult currently studying stage management at FSU School of Theatre. When she's not rolling burritos at Chipotle, she can be found hanging out with her dog Shadow, relaxing on a beach somewhere, or decked out in her favorite Mickey ears at Walt Disney World.

ANNALI CARMEL - CREATIVE TEAM

Annali Carmel enjoys her life in rural New South Wales, where she listens to a lot of music, does some singing, and welcomes the occasional affection of Aria the cat, when she deigns the peasant worthy.

SUE COOK - STAFF WRITER

Sue Cook lives in Freeport, Illinois with her husband Randy and two dogs. Her passions include assistance dogs, rescue dogs, music, acting, theater, poetry, and Doctor Who. She's been in both film and theater and is a regular cast member of the podcast "Doctor Who's Line is it...Anyway?" Sue is an advocate for the use of Service Dogs to assist their disabled handlers to maintain their independence. "Quigley's Quest," her first children's book, addresses how a dog becomes a Service Dog.

KATIE DANIELS - CONTRIBUTOR

Katie Daniels is a speech language pathologist in Florida, where she resides with her husband and their pup-child. She has dabbled in professional and personal writing over the years, but only recently began sharing her work with others. She is a proud Florida kid who enjoys meeting new people, seeing new places, and all things related to laughter, travel, faith, Disney, reading, and F.S.U. football. She is easily bribed with donuts or mac 'n cheese.

PJ DEGENARO - CONTRIBUTOR

PJ DeGenaro's current job title is "communications associate," but she has been a freelance writer, a writing instructor, and—most enjoyably—a graphic designer. A New York native, PJ grew up on Long Island and has lived and worked in New York City. She now lives in White Plains, New York, with her husband, her son, and a large Labrador-mix. PJ's short stories and poems have appeared in *The Westchester Review*, *The Adirondack Review*, *River River*, and *The Write Launch*. It's all well and good, but in her next life she'll play lead guitar in a postpunk band.

JP DENEUI - LINE EDITOR

Joseph Paul (JP) DeNeui is a basketball-loving missionary kid from Thailand transplanted to Chicago, Illinois, where he shivers through winters and writes fantasy and sci-fi. He is the author of the fantasy novel *Shadow of Wings*.

PAUL H. DE NEUI - CONTRIBUTOR

Exploring global cultures, experiencing God in all of creation, producing up-cycled art, promoting organic food production in small urban spaces, vermicomposting, and alley shopping are all part of the joys of Paul's life. He loves sharing an empty nest with his wife, but is glad to see the kids when they want to come visit. He has over 3,000 pet red wrigglers that never complain.

BARBARA DENINGTON - CONTRIBUTOR

Barbara is a Christian wife of 27 years, mother, and grandmother living in Tallahassee, Florida. She is a graduate of Florida State University with degrees in Clinical Social Work and Psychology, formerly specializing in counseling for families with sexual trauma history. In her spare time, she worked with youth at her church and was often a featured speaker at conferences both professionally and at youth retreats which resulted in the writing and development of training materials for professional staff, retreat programs and Bible studies. As a teenager, Barbara fell in love with creative writing and now has chosen to pursue writing again.

KELLY EDDINGTON - CONTRIBUTOR

Kelly Eddington was a high school art teacher for seventeen years before deciding to pursue painting full-time in 2010. She specializes in detailed portraits and still life. One of her first fans was film critic Roger Ebert, who recognized one of his books in the background of Kelly's portrait of a little girl named Mabel. Strathmore produced two pads of watercolor paper with step-by-step instructional material and videos by Kelly in 2016. *Learn to Paint Watercolor Flowers and Watercolor Basics* are designed for people who are new to the medium. Kelly is a signature member of the Transparent Watercolor Society of America and the Watercolor Honor Society, among others. Her award-winning paintings are in private and public collections throughout the world. She has shown her work in numerous one-person shows and in China, Belgium, Spain, Ireland, and the United States, including the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Two of her paintings are part of The Little Museum of Dublin's permanent collection. She lives with her husband Jeff and their cat Pooj in northeast Missouri.

CHRIS HAGBERG - LINE EDITOR

Chris Hagberg is a lover of dogs, travel, and photographing landscapes from a moving vehicle. She is happy for any time she gets to spend with her son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. In her spare time brought on by the 2020 pandemic, Chris joined a group of women forming a startup company that makes apps for the Amazon Echo. She aspires to be a writer some day, but for now is content to polish up the writings of others.

JEFF KIRBY - EDITOR

Jeff Kirby is an avid doer of things, and can often be found on a bike in downtown Chicago, with a cup of coffee at hand. Jeff is a fan of Chicago, podcasts, witty comedies, and professional wrestling, and is just beginning to get his mojo back as a writer.

HELEN LEE - LINE EDITOR

Helen A. Lee is a Kansas native and Chicago-area resident with 20+ years of writing and editing experience. She has a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University and a master's degree in biology from Miami University in Ohio. Her work has been published in many magazines, newspapers, books, and online publications, including *Looper.com*, the *Chicago Windy City Guide*, *The Pretty Pimple*, *Simplemost*, *The Happy Puppy Site*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *Gamespot.com*. She's a single mom with one child who enjoys volunteering in her spare time.

CYNTHIA ANN LUBLINK - EDITOR/DESIGNER

Cyndi is the mama of two grown children and Oma to eight grandchildren, all of whom she adores. She's a biker chick with a lady's heart and thirty-nine tattoos that tell some of her life story. Not just a cancer survivor, she's a life thriver. She also loves painting, and finds the process similar to solving math equations. She has been a writer/poet since the age of nine, her first poem being about God's Hands. She wrote for *Christian Biker Magazine* for five years.

EMILY MACKENZIE - STAFF WRITER

Emily MacKenzie is a Canadian born writer who currently teaches Secondary English in Scotland. She studied English and Creative Writing at Carleton University in Ottawa, although her love of writing developed long before that. Emily loves exploring different narrative formats and styles in her own writing, and while she tends to stick with long or short prose fiction, the odd poem slips through from time to time. She can most often be found tackling one of several young adult fantasy stories she intends to publish, both on her tablet, and on the walls with stickies, markers, and poster paper.

TANDY MALINAK - CONTRIBUTOR

A Seattleite by birth, Tandy Malinak loves mountains but not rain. So she escaped to Chicago to learn what 'winter', 'summer', and 'real thunderstorm' mean, and she decided she liked them all. Tandy earned a BA in Education specializing in English, and now spends her days homeschooling, nannying, and helping to lead her church's kids' ministry. In her free time, she writes fantasy and sci-fi, solves crosswords, and plays Nintendo. She lives with her husband, two dragon-loving kids, and three black cats. Tandy recently perched herself on Twitter's branch. She's still figuring it out, but will make noise there eventually.

ELIZABETH MOCK - ED. ILLUSTRATOR/DESIGNER

Elizabeth Mock, Rita's niece, is a Grand Rapids, Michigan native and upcoming senior at Grand Valley State University pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts with an Emphasis in Illustration. In her spare time, she enjoys learning about animation, photography, and graphic design. Lately, she has been reading up on mental health and productivity to help better her own life and the lives of those around her. Elizabeth loves to connect with artists and non-artists from all over the world, often encouraging them to share what they know and to be kind to one another.

NANCY MOCK - PROOFREADER

Nancy was born in Montana, raised in Ohio, and moved to Florida about 25 years ago. Mother of Rita Mock-Pike and her two siblings. Nancy learned to make computers "dance" in the 1970s, before most people had computers in their homes. She's had a lot of experience formatting magazines, flyers, etc. throughout her life. Her husband thought that anything could be done on a computer, so she figured out how to do it! Without his direction, much of what she has learned and accomplished would not have happened.

RITA MOCK-PIKE - EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Editor-in-Chief of *The MockingOwl Roost*, Rita Mock-Pike is the granddaughter of aviatrix, Jerrie Mock, first woman to pilot an airplane solo around the world. Rita has found inspiration from her grandmother's life and flight and pursued many of her own dreams in theatre, podcasting, novel writing, and cooking up delicious food from around the world. She now writes on food, travel, pets, faith, and the arts. She's happily married to Matt, and faithfully serves the very fluffy kitten queen, Lady Stardust.

SOREN PORTER - CONTRIB. PUBLISHER

Soren Porter - He/him, INEJ, 30s-ish I think?, perpetually taken. Writing reflections of faith and philosophy. LGBTQA+ ally and sworn enemy of white supremacy.

DANA REEVES - STAFF WRITER

Meet Florida born-and-raised Dana Reeves: Wife, dog mom, certified personal trainer and lover of all things reading and writing. What began as a hobby in writing short stories while in school soon turned into a full-fledged passion for all things writing as an adult. She loves to create fiction, poetry and fitness-related articles. When Dana isn't writing, she loves running, traveling with her husband and family, exploring the world via cruise ship, and, as always, searching the universe over for more exciting writing material.



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