

THE
MOCKINGOWL
ROOST

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

VISUAL POETRY: One World's Hope

FICTION: White Coon

POETRY: Block Party

NONFICTION: Breathing Room

FEATURED ARTIST: Beverly Munroe

POETRY: Pretty

INSPIRATION: Sowing Seeds

ARTWORK: Casting Stones

FEATURED ARTIST: Anthony

NONFICTION: Chicago TARDIS -

Thanksgiving with the Doctor

FEATURED ARTIST: Rhiannon Lee

INSPIRATION: The Difference

Between Equality and Uniformity

AND PART ONE OF
THE DRAGONS OF ASH

VOLUME I ISSUE 4: COMMUNITY

*In Loving
Memory of
Alan M. Snelson*



MASTHEAD

October 2021

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF	Rita Mock-Pike
CONTRIBUTING PUBLISHER	Soren Porter
COMMISSIONING EDITOR & CREATIVE TEAM	Cynthia Ann Lublink
EDITORIAL ILLUSTRATOR & DESIGNER	Elizabeth Mock
COMMISSIONING EDITOR	Rachael Britton
COPY EDITOR	JP DeNeui
COPY EDITOR	Helen Lee
COPY EDITOR	Chris Hagberg
PROOFREADER	Nancy Mock
CREATIVE TEAM	Annali Carmel
COMMISSIONING EDITOR	Jeff Kirby
STAFF WRITER	Sue Cook
STAFF WRITER	Katie Daniels
STAFF WRITER	Emily MacKenzie
STAFF WRITER	Tandy Malinak
STAFF WRITER	Dana Reeves



PUBLISHED BY THE MOCKINGOWL
CREATIVES © 2021



Image Credits

Cover image by Natureworks on Pixabay

Editorial Illustration by Elizabeth Mock, masthead

Pixabay:

Free-Photos, Ajay kumar Singh, Leslin_Liu, CollectingPixels , FlorenceD-pix, Lisa McKinley, Jason Leung, Myriams-Fotos, lilycrin, Enrique Meseguer, Mariya, jeawedtha, Adalhelma, ArtTower, Vinson Tan, rajukaleri9, Stefan Keller, Bilge Can Gürer

Unsplash:

Steve Johnson, Chirag Saini, Jonathan Borba , Klara Kulikova, Hans Vivek, Raphael Lovaski, Sigmund, Kotagauni Srinivas, Dmitry Ratushny, Jordan Whitt, Marcus Castro, Jordan Koons, Annie Spratt, Siora Photography, Simon Weisser, Library of Congress, Tim Mossholder, William Moreland, Anastase Maragos, Miryam León, Ava Sol, Ryoji Iwata, Donavon Wall, Clark Young

Wikipedia: Smudge 9000

Flickr:

John, Michael Livsey, Sarah, Matthew Smith, Sean O'Neill, gnomonic

TABLE OF

CONTENTS

35
POETRY - One World's
Hope

25
FEATURED ARTIST:
Beverly Munro

73
SERIALIZED FICTION:
Dragons of Ash



65

Chicago TARDIS: Thanksgiving
with the Doctor

A convention that creates family

- 01 Letter from the Editor
- 03 FICTION - Heads or Tails
- 11 POETRY - I Wonder
- 12 INSPIRATION - The Difference Between
Equality and Uniformity
- 13 POETRY - Pretty
- 15 POETRY - Megiddo Apocalypse
- 17 INSPIRATION - Kindness, pt 4:
There is no "I Love You, But..."
- 18 POEM - Brothers
- 19 FICTION - Class
- 29 POETRY - Lost Causes
- 31 ARTWORK - Casting Stones
- 33 NONFICTION - Sowing Seeds
- 40 FICTION - Familiar Spaces
- 45 POETRY - Look at Me!
- 46 INSPIRATION - A Day in the Life of
a NaNoWriMo-er
- 48 POETRY - Block Party
- 49 NONFICTION - Breathing Room
- 51 POETRY - Pandemic
- 53 FICTION - White Coon
- 60 FEATURED ARTIST - Anthony
- 71 COLUMN - Dancing with the Muse:
My Favorite Childhood Author, L.M.
Montgomery
- 80 NONFICTION - Quoting U2
Quoting Scripture
- 82 NONFICTION - Balancing Life as a
Christian with Two Worldviews
- 84 FICTION - The Seat Across From Me
- 86 POETRY - The Bee Box
- 88 FEATURED ARTIST - Rhiannon Lee
- 93 BYLINES

I attended college in Chicago and easily found and built a beautiful community among my fellow students. Returning to Florida, where I grew up, it was easy to pick up where I left off, as it were, with the non-biological family I had enjoyed there. But when I left the south for good and moved back to Chicago a decade later, I finally understood the complaint of some that making friends as an adult is “hard.”

I found myself living with only a handful of friends from my church. I worked as a nanny/daycare staff member, so there were no coworkers to connect with. My previous sources of community-building opportunities sorely lacked elsewhere as well. I wasn't heavily involved in the theatre world, I wasn't playing Ultimate Frisbee every week with the same people, and the church I attended was difficult to “get in” with.

Having spent the past seven years in a tiny community, with few friends I can simply hangout with “whenever,” I have come to understand the incredible need we humans have for a life spent with each other. Having a romantic partner and one or two friends isn't enough. We aren't meant to live with that little connection with the world around us. We are meant for many relationships at many levels. Intimate friends, close friends, casual friends, acquaintances, relatives: they're all a part of the fabric we need for a full, healthy, and happy life.

In the past few years, many – perhaps most – of us have experienced a break in relationships with people we thought we would always do life with. The political, emotional, spiritual, and physical distance rising through injustice and disparaging political views have destroyed many relationships. The divisions have mucked up communities across the globe.

For that reason, we have chosen to make community our focus for this issue of the MockingOwl Roost. For the world to heal, for our relationships to heal, we must recognize the value and beauty found in a healthy community. The beautiful diversity of humanity making up strong communities is reflected in the many colors used for this issue, unlike our usual singular color theme. Each person – reflected in these many colors – is an important part of the coterie in which they live.

Thank you for being a part of our family of readers, creators, and dreamers for this first year of the MockingOwl Roost. May you find your place in the world among many who love you as much and as well as you deserve.

- Rita Mock-Pike, Editor-in-chief



– Helen Keller

"Alone we
can do so
little;
together we
can do so
much."



Heads or Tails

EMILY MACKENZIE

It was an open secret: people like her wore price tags.

Extremely profitable.

Definitely less than human.

She knew it. Max, the 'BOOM-boy' locked up on her right, knew it. Amber, the master of 'not-seeing' stuck on her left, knew it. Above her, beneath her, everywhere in this wretched complex, she could sense their special qualities vibrating. She knew that each of them understood this simple fact as well as she did. They had each hidden themselves as long as they could before people discovered what they were. They had each watched the disgust on the faces of their loved ones turn to greed as they did what every normal person did:

Sold them.

It was how the world worked. It wasn't legal, but it certainly wasn't illegal, their situation was an open secret for the world to share.

She ran through the barracks, past the security checkpoints. There was no time to open any of the other doors. She felt qualities as her feet slapped the ground—

Thing finding, distance burning, not sleeping, never hurting, mental talking—

Her owner's guards shot at her until he screamed at them in ire, and then the BANG of bullets was quickly replaced by soft SNIPS of darts and hard THWACKS of bean bags.

She stumbled as something burned against her leg like a rash. Her bare feet bled from the abuse of the cold, hard floor. Her arms throbbed as adrenaline coursed through her body, making the bruises and needle marks stand out against her pale skin. Her head was dripping from a bullet which had grazed her before the command to stop had rung out. Reaching up, she grabbed a dark handful of hair and pressed it to the spiking pain in hope that it would help stop the bleeding.

She stumbled out the service door and tore her threadbare shirt on the fence as she spun wildly around the corner, feet skidding and gravel embedding itself in her flesh. She'd never been outside before, not here at least. Here, the streets were strangers and the buildings foreign, but—

There were rumors. Whispers, coded references, dreams, hopes of a place that was *good*.

She just had to get there.

The pawn shop storage room was filled to the roof with knick knacks and junk, treasures piled in the corner and toppling over the tops of shelves. Somewhere, deep within the mess, a whimper made her heart clench.

"I'm sorry!" A girl cried out as she curled as far into the dark corner as she could possibly get. "I'm sorry, I'm *sorry*," she repeated, "I didn't mean to!"

Looking to her husband, Rachel held back an eye roll at his hastily grabbed weapon. "Hun, it's just a kid. Put the bat away."

Ryan nodded at her, biting his lip. He lowered his arm and the girl flinched back regardless of his intentions, hitting the wall, and Rachel cautiously took a step towards her, hands out.

"It's alright, sweetie, shh. It's alright."

The girl couldn't have been older than thirteen or fourteen. Her long, dark hair was falling out of a messy braid and was matted with blood at her temple. There were ugly bruises along her arms.

"Babe," she directed the large man behind her, not looking away from the girl, "Grab some of that soup we had for dinner, won't you? And a roll?"

“Yeah...” he replied, the twang in his voice abrupt after the clarity of hers. “Yeah. I’ll be back in a tick.”

“It’s alright,” Rachel murmured to the scared girl as she slowly knelt down in front of her. “No one’s going to hurt you—you’re safe here. Ryan’s gone to get you something to eat; would you like that?”

She finally reached the hunched figure laying a soft hand on her shoulder. The girl’s form shook with each breath, and as she glanced up at Rachel, her eyes shone dark with fear.

There was a shadow behind Rachel, a flicker for just a second, and the woman spun her head around. There had been something—

The girl gasped and turned her head away, hiding her face between the wall and her legs. It was the first time she had taken her eyes off the woman in front of her.

She looked almost guilty.

Rachel looked at the girl again, her tone gentle when she spoke.

“It’s gonna be okay.”

Elsewhere— in a room where the light was broken on purpose, and the wind rattled the walls from a selective neglect of repairs— a cleaner mopped up a puddle of blood. The Owner shook his head, disappointed, and more than a little frustrated, as he called in his brand-new lieutenant.

One hell of a way to start a job.

“Find her,” he spat. “Find the *Thief*—”

That Thief was the most prized possession in his collection. They were even rarer to find than healers were, and so much more useful. Indeed, he would trade his whole stock to get her back—for if he had her, he wouldn’t need the rest. Not when she could simply steal their talents for him.

Damn it. He thought he’d broken her this time. He wouldn’t make that mistake again.

In front of him, the man stood stiff as a board, too nervous to move an inch and worsen the bone-deep shaking that laced his form.

Normally that sort of reaction would have prompted a smirk from the Owner at the very least. Today, he grimaced, adding:

“—and do it quickly.”

“She’ll stay in the loft, of course.”

Ryan nodded. “Of course. She say anythin’ else?”

“No. But I’ve got a feeling she’s talented, if you know what I mean.”

He frowned.

“Like your sister?” she prompted.

“Ahh.” His eyes widened suddenly, understanding what she was getting at. If this girl was talented like Sydney had been... “Others could be out lookin’ for her.”

Rachel nodded. “We’ve got to keep her out of sight, at least until we can get her valid papers. Poor thing.”

That was how they had met; his desperate search to find the sister he barely remembered, sold by their parents out of desperation and fear. Rachel had saved him from a few scrapes with various Owners and dealers as he fumbled his way through that world, looking for information, before deciding that she was better off just showing him the ropes.

They'd been together ever since. She kept an eye and an ear out for Sydney while she walked through the grey and murky world of talented trafficking, and he watched her back when she could no longer see through the haze.

"Rach?"

"Yeah?"

"I ever tell you that I love you?"

She wrapped her arms around her husband's waist, smiling. "Every day."

"I've decided I'm gonna call her 'Rome.'"

"Like the city?" Rachel frowned, only half listening as Ryan distracted her from her work. At the moment she was labouring over group migration plans halfway across the world in Mumbai, checking their own extraction routes, as well as tracking known traffickers in the area.

"Yeah, but it's kind of a play-on-words—see? She was roamin' about, and somehow ended up here. Like fate."

"Hmm," she nodded, still not looking at him. "You just wanted it to start with the letter 'R.'"

He shrugged. "Didn't mind that it fit the pattern."

Rachel finally drew her eyes away from the screen to look up at him with a sigh. "She has a name—"

"That she won't tell us," he interjected, "and it don't feel right to keep callin' her 'you' or 'girl.' If nothin' else, it's rude."

"Ryan, just call her whatever you want; if she's alright with it, I suppose she'll answer to it. That's all we can do." Rachel looked back at her figures and maps.

"It's been weeks now, and the quiet is just plain weird," he continued, oblivious to her divided attention. "If I hadn't heard her yellin' right at the beginning, I might have even been thinkin' she's a mute."

Rachel huffed. "That's not fair. She's been through something awful, anyone could see."

"I know, but—"

"This is her way of coping—we went over it in general training. It happens. Giving her a new name won't make it any easier for anyone."

He grunted. "Not with that attitude."

Rachel rolled her eyes.

"I'm just glad she's a willin' worker. With you doing your work on the side, it's been loads easier on me since she started helpin' out around the store, an' it's sweet how folks just think she's our kid—or niece. I told you when we were in Brisbane that we should hire someone when we came back to the north—"

"You knew that wasn't possible, not with the sorts of people the operation brings in. There'd be too many questions. But now you've got the help, she doesn't talk, let alone ask questions. We don't have to pay her, and she gets a roof and meals. I'd say it's a good deal all around. Besides, it's not like the space was in use before she came; this is what it's meant for. People who are... talented." She shrugged. "In one way or another."

His face softened, "Y're right."

After all, when it came to their duplicitous life, Rachel had been doing it for much longer than he had. She was the expert, and they both knew it.

"Of course, y're right." Ryan reached over to kiss her forehead, and she leant into his touch.

The bell on the shop door rang. Rachel automatically flashed a smile as she looked up.

“Hallo!” she called out in her friendliest voice; the one that Ryan said made his skin crawl when she used it on him accidentally. “If you’re lookin’ for anythin’ specific, my name’s Rachel, don’t be shy!” The rhythm of her words shifted slightly to mimic the local cadence.

The customer nodded, his posture stiff, and he disappeared around the end of the aisle.

After finishing with the close up that evening, Rachel caught a glimpse of Rome tinkering in an aisle. Odds and ends were scattered around her on the floor. From time to time the girl would reach over and strip an item for parts to add to the small toy in her hand, and occasionally she would twist various wires or screws into place. Rachel stopped to watch what the girl was doing, and couldn’t make heads or tails of it.

She mentioned it to Ryan that night, after they’d finished discussing the inflation in local bribe rates and prices of false documentation.

“Yeah, from time to time I’ll find her fidgetin’. She’s not hurtin’ anyone, ‘n I don’t mind.”

“You really shouldn’t get so attached. She could leave any day.”

“I ain’t attached to anyone but you, babe.”

Rachel groaned and reached over to flick off the light. “You’re lucky I like your sense of humour.”

“Don’t I know it.”

After dinner, Rome came up to Rachel and presented her with a small object.

Rachel tilted her head as she took it into her palm; she had no clue what the cluster of plastic and metal was supposed to be.

“Thanks, sweetie,”

“To protect,” the girl whispered, her tone small and nervous.

Rachel froze. Rome hadn’t spoken a single word since they’d found her cowering in the storage room months ago.

Rome pointed to a knob on the side of the object, and her suddenly piercing eyes were steady and serious as she looked up at the woman who had taken her into her home. “Max. Boom.”

“Boom?” Rachel asked after a moment, not quite sure she understood, although the word didn’t leave much room for confusion.

Rome’s voice barely rose above a whisper. “Boom.”

Making sure absolutely nothing would come into contact with the knob, just in case, Rachel carefully put the device in her personal drawer beneath the cash and locked it. She’d send it out to a contact of hers later, to see if it really did what Rome said it could.

“Thanks.”

Rome nodded.

“Do you feel like talking?” Rachel fidgeted with a pen as she inquired, “I’d love to hear your voice.”

Rome shook her head.

“What about your name, honey?”

The girl looked down, hesitant, and when their eyes met again, her expression was painfully steadfast. “Rome.”

“Aww, honey, that can’t be—”

“Rome,” she repeated. Stronger. Insistent.

After a few moments, Rachel nodded.

“Alright then, if you’re sure.”

Rome nodded.

“So it really—?”

“Yeah. Left a sizeable radius of destruction too.”

Ryan pouted. “She’s never given me anythin’ before.”

“Aww, babe, you’re not jealous, are you?” Rachel teased.

“Why would I be jealous?” he shot her a wide smile. “She might’a given you a bomb, which any other man might find threatening. But that’s forgettin’ one very important detail.”

“Oh?”

“I’ve got you. Y’re all mine.”

“Mm,” Rachel agreed, stretching out on the bed. “Yes I am.”

There were times in the shop when Rome was nowhere to be found. It didn’t take Rachel that long to realize that it wasn’t circumstances so much as people that provoked the need to hide. She didn’t mind—neither did Ryan—but she did start to keep track, and make a list of individuals who, for whatever reason, terrified their young guest. That sort of knowledge could be useful down the road if you knew what to do with it.

Rome continued to give Rachel gifts. Every time she ran off and hid, the young girl would inevitably come back with another destructive present—Rachel’s drawer was getting full. Rome seemed to be quite adept at manufacturing surprisingly lethal objects from innocuous junk people didn’t want. Rachel debated at one point selling some of the bombs on the market for some extra cash, but ultimately decided against it. She really ought to know a lot more about their origins before she needlessly drew unwanted attention to their operation.

Rachel was cataloging when Rome rushed into the back, and nearly tripped over her own legs in her hurry. Rachel reached an arm out to balance her and frowned slightly.

“Rome?” she queried.

The bell on the front door rang out, and Rachel dismissed it without giving the sound much thought. She should have known better, given the precedent for Rome’s behaviour.

“Jayyyniee!” Someone yelled. “It’s time to come home!”

The young girl froze.

Rachel focused immediately on Rome—until something exploded. She found herself already moving towards the front, trying to put the puzzle pieces together, trying to make it make sense—

Ryan must have been desperate enough—

What was he doing in her drawer? He could act the act, sure, but he had almost zero experience with explosives. Did the idiot think he could just grab one and use it and—

Or was that just a gunshot? God what was wrong with her, she should be able to tell the difference between an explosion and a gunshot and—

Rome grabbed her arm and, with a strong grip, pulled Rachel back from her own reckless sprint to the front.

“JAYNIE!”

Rome cowered at the sound of the man’s voice, pulling Rachel clumsily down along with her, forcing them both against the wall.

“There’s no one here goes by that name,” Rachel could hear Ryan tell the man up front. His tone was confident, his voice barely shook; and under her sheer relief at hearing his voice, Rachel couldn’t help but feel proud. “I’m afraid what you’re lookin’ for ain’t here,” Ryan continued, “and I think I’ll keep your gun as collateral for damagin’ my store.”

Just a gun then. That was good. Better than a bomb.

“I know she’s here!” the stranger yelled desperately. “She’s dangerous, she doesn’t belong to you, and it’s more than time I took her back!”

“I’m sorry, sir,” Ryan tried again. “It’s just me an’ my wife. My sister stays from time to time; works with us occasionally,” he said conversationally, “but I’ve known her since she was just a tyke and her name’s definitely Sydney, not Jamie.”

“Jane,” the man corrected.

“Jane then. We don’t have a Jane here, don’t know that we ever did.”

“Rome—” Rachel whispered as her attention was drawn from the conversation in the other room to the girl shaking in her grasp. She ran a hand down the girl’s arm in what she hoped was comfort. “Rome, how can I help?”

In front of Rachel, Rome’s eyes were shut tight, terrified.

Then, as if in a dream, the world around them started to *morph*.

Rachel still knew where she was, but it was like there was another image being laid on top of her vision. It wasn’t comparable to anything she’d ever experienced, and her jaw hung open as she stared through the illusion at Rome.

“I knew you were special,” she whispered. They’d both assumed, especially given the bombs, but this here was finally absolute proof.

She could see small rooms, bare cots, and blood stained walls. The shelves full of old-fashioned smartphones in front of her morphed into cold brick walls with hard steel doors and splintering wooden signs, and the clanking of metal shackles vibrated in the back of her mind louder than the shouting from the other room. In front of them a wall flickered, and the whole storage area was transformed into a desolate space, the two of them completely out of sight within the illusion.

There was a *slap* and a *thud* of a body hitting the ground, and before she could think to act on it, a strange man rounded the corner.

Not Ryan. Shit.

She’d kill him if it turned out he was dead. She couldn’t do this alone, even with Rome to help her. He was essential to her little family.

Gun out, the man scanned the storeroom, and stared right through them.

He left without incident, then proceeded to tear the shelves apart up front in a maddened search.

“Damn *Thief!*” He shouted as he left the store empty-handed. The illusion surrounding the two girls fell, and Rachel looked down at Rome in wonder.

“Amber,” Rome muttered softly, before passing out in Rachel’s arms.

Rachel glanced up at Ryan’s form as he came to stand in the doorway and nearly collapsed herself. He was fine. Alive—thank god. He winced and held a hand to his temple (she’d be checking *that* out later), but for now he looked all right.

“Did you see that?” he whispered. “The blood and walls—”

Rachel nodded, eyes wide, her hand resting protectively on Rome’s head. “She’s worth so much more than we could have imagined.”

The gunman approached the Owner wearily. “It’s her, sir, I found her. I’m sure this time.”

“She’s been gone for far too long; you know how dangerous that can be. I’ll have to start conditioning her all over again.” He sighed. “We need her back.” The Owner paused. “Now, are you sure it’s her?”

The gunman nodded vigorously. “Oh yeah.”

The Owner nodded, accepting his word. He wouldn’t dare lie. “Then where is she?”

“That Pawn Shop that opened up off of Chester about six months ago, not long before your girl ran off. We’d been keepin’ an eye on them anyways ‘cause we thought they’d been stealin’ our goods—you know, takin’ kids to the competition. Turns out one of ‘em wandered in by accident. Not just any old kid either. *This one*. The *Thief. Jane*.”

The Owner leaned forward slightly. “Do they know?”

“Course not,” the gunman scoffed. “Think they would’a kept her this long without sellin’ her if they knew what she was? What she’s worth?”

There was a grunt of approval. “Follow her. Double the reward if you bring her back within the week. After that, name the bullet.” Another pause. “That is what you do, after all, isn’t it?”

The gunman’s eyes widened. A named bullet never missed its mark, especially with a talent like his at the trigger. It was serious business if the Owner was willing to kill his property. “Yessir.”

Ryan winced as she dabbed at one of the cuts that she’d missed earlier. “She’s a what?”

“On the market they call them *Thieves*. They mimic the abilities of others like them,” Rachel explained.

“Well that’s dangerous, innit?”

“Depends who she’s been around.” Rachel shrugged. “With just illusions alone she’d be valuable, but as a *Thief*... Many would kill to get their hands on her.”

“N’ she trusts us?” There was disbelief in Ryan’s voice.

“We did take her in, took care of her... She’s become part of the family, and now decisions have to be made. It’s fortunate that we’ve kept that side of the business from her up to now though, considering who she ended up being. I’m not completely sure how she’ll react when she finds out.”

Ryan’s tone was hopeful. “So does that mean we’re tellin’ her?”

Rachel paused, pressing her lips together as she looked at her husband. “You’ve grown fond of the little thing haven’t you?” She said warmly. She certainly had.

He shrugged. “She hasn’t tried to kill us, and she’s actually been protective of you.”

“She would definitely make a valuable asset.” Rachel nodded, trying to remain impartial. “But if she knows how we get the talented out and happens to run back to him... I’m not sure that the risk is worth the possible exposure she could bring down on us...”

Ryan bit his lip nervously. "Coin flip?"

It was such a rudimentary form of decision making, she couldn't help herself. She laughed. "Why not? Heads?"

"Then we sell her before the night is out and be done with it."

"Tails?"

"Then we invite her to join our operation. And deal with the consequences later."

"And deal with the consequences later." She agreed with a smirk as he tossed a quarter into the air.

Rome stood outside the door as Rachel and Ryan spoke, catching their conversation. She didn't want to be sold again. She didn't care what their operation was, or what they did. Anything was better than being owned. Looking intently through a crack in the door, Rome focused all of her energy on one thing. That coin needed to land on tails.

Tails. Tails. Tails.

"Tails!"

Perfect.

"Thanks, Abby," Rome breathed, then smiled and knocked on the door.

Ryan slipped the trick coin into his pocket, and Rachel smirked. Turning around, she opened the door with a smile.

"Rome, honey," she welcomed the girl, "We've been chatting."

Rome nodded.

"How would you like to join the family business?" ♦

I WONDER

SUE COOK

I wonder if the Creators that look down upon this fragile globe know that I question their love, their devotion to a world on the brink of destruction.

I walk into the night, look at the majesty in the heavens, and realize I am looking death, dying, or decay in the face.

Vibrant stars, no longer.

Planets teeming with life, dead.

We see what was, not what is on our rover's screen.

How did they perish?

Did they ignore a plague that ravaged them, leaving only bones and fragments as a warning?

Are we heeding the warning? I wonder...

I wonder if the science given by our Creators is enough to stop the inevitable.

Will our end come as a surprise?

Perhaps they are hoping that this time their wards will listen.

I wonder...

I wonder if after the plague leaves many weeping, will the war over vaccines and paper masks take more than the plague itself?

After all, the heavenly beings gave their wards the means to survive this ordeal.

Or did they?

I wonder...

I wonder if on another planet far out in space, someone will look into the heavens, and question why the beautiful globe perished so long ago,

its death knell ringing loudly across light years. Its beacon of brightness for many millions seeking hope, hollow and dead.

I wonder what their rovers, much more advanced than ours, will find?

A discarded syringe?

A mask?

I wonder...

The Difference Between Equality and Uniformity

Cynthia Ann Lublink

These words may seem like synonyms but they are not. There is a significant difference between the two which can cause confusion.

Some describe a desire for uniformity – not understanding what it could cost – when the true desire is for equality.

There is no equality in uniformity.

Equality treats everyone, despite differences, as the same. It provides the same opportunities, statuses, and rights to all. It celebrates diversity of thought, culture, and personhood.

In an equitable society, everyone would have the same opportunity to achieve different goals, discover their talents and gifts, and rise to any level of accomplishment they desire to attain.

Uniformity demands that all people conform to usually one ideology or belief system, requiring the dismissal of all diversity. It sets aside who we uniquely are, potentially segregating us by need, talent, or goal for a perceived common good.

Uniformity does not encourage any mold breaking diversions of thought, idea, or creativity – the very things that challenge the status quo, discovery of new things, or allowance for us to be who we are. Uniformity merely gives an illusion of equality. It is based on a fear of true diversity.

True diversity can sit with thoughts that are not one's own, regardless of agreement. It allows space to exist between souls without the requirement of agreement or sameness – merely acceptance.

Many withhold acceptance because they believe it means agreement or approval of an opposing view. This is not true.

Personally, I can accept any soul as they are without necessarily agreeing or accepting everything that they believe. What is not acceptable for my life or yours does not have to be approved by either of us for us to accept one another.

I must put a caveat here because nothing covers all things or every soul. I want to make sure that you understand clearly what I am saying. We are not talking about being blind. There are societal boundaries that we can all agree are hard noes (and hopefully I don't need to spell those out).

There is an acceptance that we acquiesce to things we don't personally approve of for ourselves, yet we accept the reality of a situation, recognizing a process or condition (often a negative or uncomfortable situation) without attempting to change it or protest it. It is the process of finding rest in it, despite it.

For any who think that acceptance is quitting, below is a good definition which reminded me of the scripture verse, "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10) Being still is an active process, much like acceptance is.

"Acceptance doesn't, by any stretch of the imagination, mean passive resignation. Quite the opposite. It takes a huge amount of fortitude and motivation to accept what is – especially when you don't like it – and then work wisely and effectively as best you possibly can with the circumstances you find yourself in and with the resources at your disposal, both inner and outer, to mitigate, heal, redirect, and change what can be changed." –Jon Kabat-Zinn in *Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness*

In AA circles there is a Serenity Prayer that is prayed to give discernment and wisdom. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

The truth is, we want our diversity, our quirks, and uniqueness. We all want to be who we are. I believe our best selves need to keep pressing in to make sure we live in a society where we resist uniformity yet fight for equality. ◆

Pretty

Dee Allen

Pretty
Comes
In
All shades.

Vanilla ice cream,
Creamed coffee,
Creamy peanut butter,
Caramel,
Honey,
Cinnamon,
Pecan,
Milk chocolate,
Dark chocolate,
Molasses.

Delicious hues,
Sweet hues,
Tempting and
Watering mouths.

I could never
Understand why racism
Continues to exist
With multiculturalism in the midst.
Careful, conscious societal manoeuvres
From prejudice to justice.
But I understand
Far less colourism,
That sickening division
Among members of the same race
Along the lines of complexion.

Who has melanin?
How much melanin?
And who looks beautiful?

The division is large
And super-charged
Among females

Still performing
Plastic comb tests
Checking for kinks in hair,
Still performing
Brown paper bag tests
In their minds.

“Light girls are stuck-up.”
“Dark girls are envious and mean.”

Divisive notions
Grown out of polluted soil,
Near-European grade:

“In absence of whiteness,
Go for brightness.
You’ll get the goods with lightness,
For lightness is right-ness.”

Who decides
Who is pretty enough?
Who is Black enough?
What verdict does the bedroom mirror
Give the longer one stares into it?

Sisters lashing out
At each other,
Not once knowing
They’re all royalty.
Brothers ignore
Some sisters,
Not once knowing
The queens they’re missing out on—

Nature has a way
Of passing out
In equal shares
Beauty, brought to the surface
As distinct physical traits, female to female
Hair, eyes, noses, lips, skin—

Apparently, nature likes variety
As I do.
What catches my eye,
Appeals to my eye.

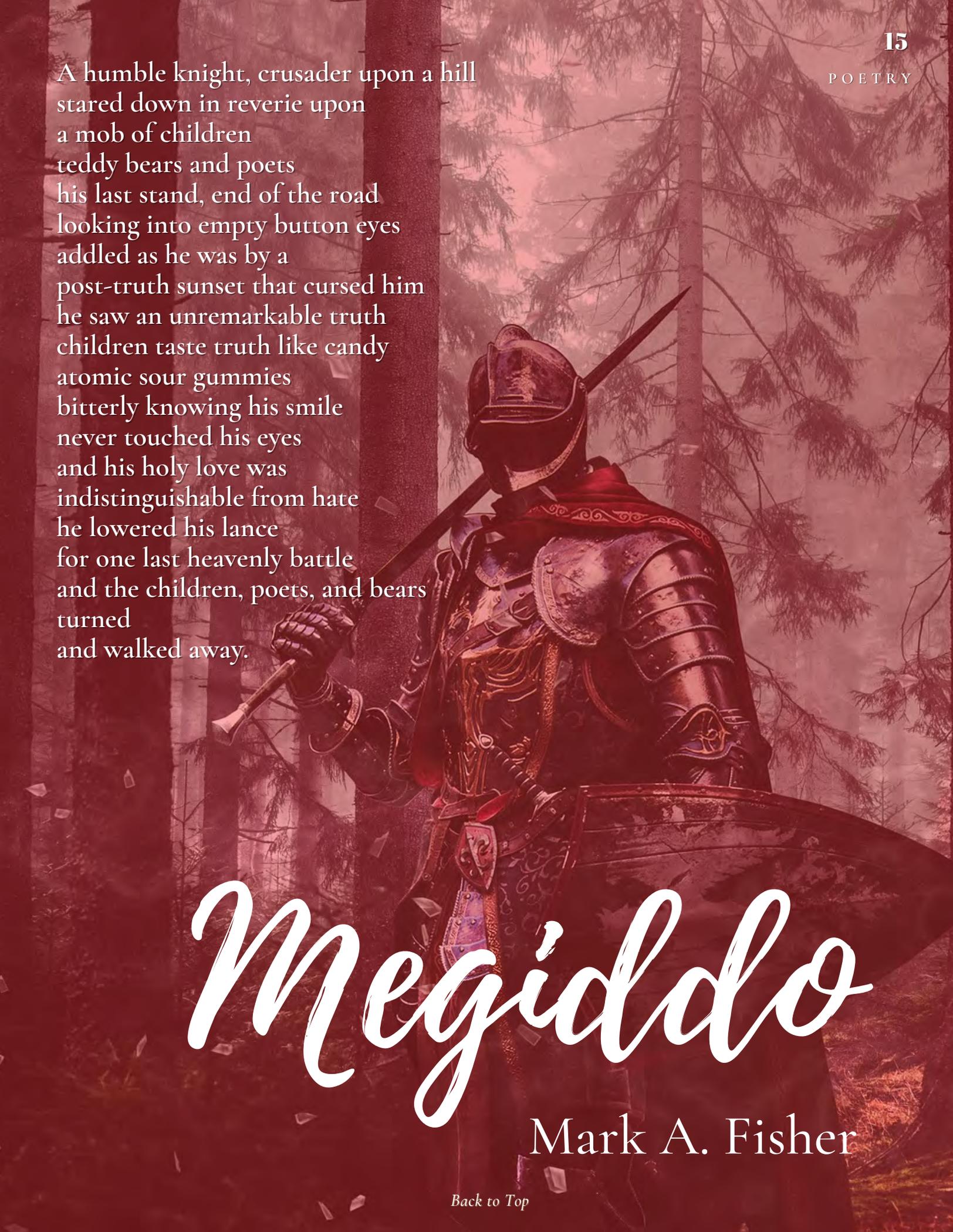
Pretty comes in all shades of black.



"The greatness of a
community is most
accurately measured by
the compassionate actions
of its members."

- Coretta Scott King

A humble knight, crusader upon a hill
stared down in reverie upon
a mob of children
teddy bears and poets
his last stand, end of the road
looking into empty button eyes
addled as he was by a
post-truth sunset that cursed him
he saw an unremarkable truth
children taste truth like candy
atomic sour gummies
bitterly knowing his smile
never touched his eyes
and his holy love was
indistinguishable from hate
he lowered his lance
for one last heavenly battle
and the children, poets, and bears
turned
and walked away.

A knight in full plate armor stands in a misty forest. He is holding a lance in his right hand and a large, dark shield in his left. The scene is bathed in a warm, reddish-orange light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The knight's armor is highly detailed, with a red surcoat. The background shows tall, thin trees and a dense canopy of evergreens.

Megiddo

Mark A. Fisher



Chicago TARDIS

2021

LEARN MORE AT
[HTTPS://WWW.CHICAGOTARDIS.COM/](https://www.chicagotardis.com/)



Chicago TARDIS is returning in person for its 22nd year!

Welcoming Sixth Doctor Colin Baker, Second Doctor Companion Frazer Hines, infamous villain the Valeyard Michael Jayston, and many more guests.

Attendees can look forward to discussion panels, workshops, specialized children's programming, Q&As with guests, costume contests, autographs and photographs with guests, and lots more to do at the Midwest's largest *Doctor Who* event.

Kindness: There is No "I Love You, But..."

CYNTHIA ANN LUBLINK

We have covered a lot of ground in looking at what kindness is and what it is not.

Kindness is defined as the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate. In today's political climate, we can add that kindness is an act of love that puts value on relationships over politics. Kindness is choosing to believe another's intent is as good as our own.

Kindness isn't merely a nice thought or an occasional thing to do; it is the very soul of love. If we desire to be truly loving beings, kindness must be at our core. It authenticates and validates our words and actions.

And if kindness is the very soul of love, then there is no "but" in I love you.

Let me state from the start, there are times we must draw boundaries when it comes to what is truly harmful. Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual abuse are all real and they should never be tolerated. Removing ourselves from harmful environments immediately is a healthy self-care choice.

With that said, there are things that we point at without ever seeing the three fingers pointing back at ourselves. Our hypocrisy is showing, and those are the things I am talking about.

In some conservative realms where we lay claim to Jesus, the "I love you, but" ...is spoken into the LGBTQIA+ community ad nauseum. The moment the word "but" is uttered, statements of love have been erased.

Why can't we just say I love you? Why does anyone feel the need to clarify anything beyond that?

Consider this statement: 'I love you, but I can't support your being a sinner.' The truth is, we all have sinned and fall short. Romans 3:23 NKJV And 'he who is without sin, cast the first stone.' John 8:7 NKJV

So, unless you are perfect, please stop saying 'but' with your 'I love yous.' It is unkind, devalues any real love you might have, and sits you right next to other pew-warming pharisees.

We are supposed to love one another as Jesus loved us.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one

another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35 NKJV

Let's set our hearts to doing just that.

In some liberal realms where we lay claim to acceptance, tolerance, and celebrating diversity, I'm not sure there is an "I love you, but," yet there definitely is a "but".

At times, some liberals will shred a Black person or someone who's gay for showing up conservative. It's as if that possibility can't exist. Often there is no attempt to tolerate, let alone accept, that side of diversity. Instead, horrific words are hurled that I will not repeat here.

The concept is so outside the "acceptable liberal box" that there must be a nefarious reason for it. And that's the issue: *The box*. They can't see the box that's been created. It exists because logic and understanding has been upended and as a result, disregards the very pillars liberalism claims to stand for.

We have drawn alongside to fight for freedom, equality, and identity for these communities and they are now being told to conform and stay in the boxes that we, *once again*, have designed for them?

As someone who is a believer with conservative and liberal leanings, I see the various dimensions, and we are not doing so well in some places. Yet, I also see the passion, love, righteousness, and deep sense of caring *each* side has for the ideals, principles, and beliefs they stand for.

Sometimes these things are not as far apart as they feel. If we could respond to one another, rather than react at one another, we might be able to take three seconds to pause and see that we are on the same coin, just the other side, possibly saying the same thing, using different words.

To discover if that is true, we must listen to one another. We listen to hear where our commonality joins us and move forward from there together. Listening is an act of kindness that loves and respects one another. There's no "but" about that. ♦



The future is uncertain
the past is folded into itself
We easily daydream
and think of what might be
but so often don't know what's already been.
I wish I could stop thinking
could stop hoping and wishing
and push off that hope into something else –
someone else.

But I can't.
I know them.
Knew them.
Not anymore.
If I ever did.



Brothers

Anonymous

CLASS

Carla M. Cherry

Sheila's chair was outside of the circle of twenty desks, and she had her clipboard in front of her. The Socratic Seminar was at its midway point. With her pen in her right hand, she was writing notes about student comments and rating their active listening strategies. Sheila smiled quietly, enjoying the raised adolescent voices in passionate conversation in her most resistant class, her twelfth graders, the final period of the day, the class that complained about almost every reading and writing task. She had spent the last two weeks delving into her "Bystander vs. Upstander" unit with her twelfth graders, and the last piece had been their viewing of *The Witness*, the documentary film about the Kitty Genovese murder, featuring Kitty's younger brother Bill Genovese and the journey he took exploring her life, the investigation of her death, and the aftermath. Today, not a single student slept, groaned loudly, or insisted on getting the hall pass.

Students had stuck to the protocols they had rehearsed for days during the first twenty minutes of class—maintaining eye contact with speakers as they talked, paraphrasing previous speakers' statements before sharing their thoughts, and not interrupting speakers—but the discussion was heated now, and they were responding to each other's points in rapid succession. Normally, Sheila would have intervened and re-directed, especially with Principal Martinez present, but their liveliness was so refreshing she remained an objective observer and stopped worrying about what her boss was furiously typing on his laptop.

Desiree shifted forward in her seat, flung her long box braids backwards, and waved her right hand with emphasis. "All I'm saying is, there were a lot of bystanders with this murder, not just Karl Ross! What about Abe Rosenthal and um, what's that other reporter's name?"

Half the class paused and put their heads down, looking over their notes.

"I think it's Danny something," Marco replied.

"Meehan!" David shouted, dimples deepening as he smiled triumphantly.

Desiree nodded at David vigorously before she continued. "Yeah! The New York Times printed a story in 1964 claiming that 38 people watched Kitty get murdered, and after a while they KNEW that the story didn't make sense and that neighbors in Kitty's building didn't all see what happened to her. Some of them just heard her scream and couldn't see her when she was stabbed. And those reporters didn't tell the truth, they just let the world think that Kew Gardens and New Yorkers everywhere don't care about people. They didn't want to change the story because it sold newspapers! They're bystanders too!"

"OK, that's true," Lisa interjected. "But does that mean they're more responsible than Karl Ross? He opened his door, saw Kitty laying near the stairs and Moseley attacking her, and he closed his door. Did he yell at him to leave? Did he threaten that he was going to call 911? No!"

Jose broke in. "Hold up, hold up, there was no 911 back then. They set that up after that controversy about Kitty's death."



Lisa replied, "You're right, my bad. But still, Ross should have done something! Maybe Kitty wouldn't have died!"

"Exactly!" Sharon shouted. "Even her friend Sophia went to look for Kitty and stayed with her. Kitty was bleeding everywhere, and Sophia could see the stab marks in her back. Sophia had a family, and she didn't know if the killer was going to come back! She had the courage to look for her and Kitty died in her arms. Fifty years later, that was still messing with her head!"

"Right? It's like they've been saying since 9/11! If you see something, say something!" Pablo exclaimed.

Sheila shrank in her seat a little, thinking about her upstairs neighbor. The thuds against her ceiling and the screams.

Rob raised his hand. "But what about that Psychology Today article we read last week about social and behavioral paralysis? Wait, hold on." Rob paused and looked at his notes. "And diffusion of responsibility, thinking somebody else is going to help?"

"What about it?" Jackie said. "People know right from wrong, and it's wrong not to help somebody in trouble. But then there is also that, um, wait, wait, social influence, where uh, people are looking to others to get involved. Kew Gardens is a neighborhood, and people knew their neighbors. Karl knew Kitty!"

"Yeah," Brandon said. "Karl Ross was a coward. Winston Moseley was this skinny dude, and Karl Ross should have kicked his ass!"

Mr. Martinez cleared his throat, and Brandon turned around and looked at him. "Excuse me, Mr. Martinez. Sorry, Ms. Davis."

Raquel turned and looked at Sheila. "Miss, what would you have done if you had been there and heard Kitty screaming for help?"

Twenty heads turned around and stared at Sheila.

Her heart began to race.

Sheila cleared her throat.

"Remember, I am an observer. Our Socratic Seminar is centered on all of you, your research, your notes, and your insights."

"We want to know what you think," Ciara said.

The rest of the class chimed in.

"Yeah, Miss!"

"Like you always tell us, dig deep and don't take the easy way out."

Sheila blinked. She nodded and tried to gather her thoughts.

In the twenty years she had been teaching, she had never cried in front of her students. Sheila encouraged her students to be critical thinkers, question everything, even her, to back up their opinions with evidence.

And she knew that they knew she was trying to avoid the question, which is something she would never accept from any of them.

She could not be a hypocrite.

She would lose their respect.

She exhaled deeply and stood up.

"I have a confession to make," she began, as her eyes swept across each face.

"I was a bystander to a crime. I heard my upstairs neighbor beating his wife and I didn't do anything."

The class stared at Sheila in silence.

Sheila, Stacey, Tanisha, and Trevor, Tanisha's boyfriend, had been headed uptown on their way home, seated side by side on the C train, talking and laughing about their dinner at South Street Seaport to celebrate Sheila's seventeenth birthday.

A man and a woman sitting near the other end of the subway car close to the door between the cars began arguing, and the man suddenly stood up and slapped the woman with a hard downward stroke. She screamed and cried, and Trevor got up to stride over to the couple.

No! Sheila and her friends cried, pulling Trevor back by his arms. "Don't do that!"

"Please," Tanisha said. "He's bigger than you and you could get hurt!"



After a minute, Trevor nodded, and sat back down in the mostly empty subway car, but the four of them kept their eyes trained on the man towering over the woman, who was on the floor and shielding her face.

“Bitch, what did I tell you?”

The man had drawn back his fist and punched her.

The four of them cringed.

A burly man, about 6'2" and wearing dark sunglasses, got up and sat in the two-seater directly across from the couple and did not say a word.

The abuser looked at the man for a few moments and sat down. The woman got up and sat next to her man.

Everyone in the car was silent as the quiet was overtaken by the roar of the train rolling over the tracks. Every time the train reached a subway stop and the doors opened, Sheila stared at the woman, willing her to escape.

Get up! Come on. Run!

The woman didn't move.

Finally, as the train screeched into 110th Street, the couple got off. When the doors closed, they heard him hit her again as she screamed.

“Damn!” Trevor said and hung his head.

Sheila muffled a sob.

She wished she had known what to say to that woman. She was shy and rarely talked to strangers. She felt bad that they hadn't intervened, but they were teenagers. Still in high school. If the man had hurt Trevor, and Tanisha or Stacy jumped in, what could Sheila have said to their families if one of her friends ended up in the hospital, or dead?

But Sheila swore to herself that once she was grown, if she ever saw another situation like that, she would do something.

Sunlight streamed through her blinds and rested on Sheila's face. She stirred and blinked.

“Sheila stretched her arms and legs across the otherwise empty king-sized bed and yawned and looked at the clock.

10:00.

It was quiet, so Kareem was probably still asleep. Maybe when he awakened, he would surprise her like he did last year, when he brought a tray with a sliced grapefruit and a bowl of cereal to her bedside and proclaimed, “Happy Mother's Day!”

Maybe we can ride our bikes to the park this afternoon, Sheila thought to herself.

Yes, Kareem would enjoy that.

Sheila rolled over and burrowed under her grandmother's purple crocheted blanket.

I'll get some more sleep, Sheila thought to herself, and laid back down.

Sheila closed her eyes but was startled by a scream and a crash against her ceiling.

“Nooooooo! Nooooooo!”

Sheila jumped up and listened.

There were multiple thuds against her ceiling, like heavy objects and heavy footsteps hitting the floor. A woman's screams.

Oh my God.

Besides the sound of children jumping and bouncing balls, Sheila would hear yelling and cursing upstairs from time to time and wonder why this couple did not just get divorced if they were so miserable together. She had wondered who the wife was.

This was the first time she had heard physical violence from upstairs. She reached for her phone to call the police.



But Sheila paused before she hit nine on the keypad.

“She remembered the one time the husband had come to her door from upstairs and rang her bell. Sheila had gone to the door and saw a tall, muscular, light-skinned man through the peephole. His body was so big she couldn’t see the rest of the hallway. Just him. She had quietly put the chain on the door. Who is it?” she yelled.

“It’s your neighbor from upstairs. We have a leak in our apartment. Do you?”

“No,” Sheila replied. “Thanks for asking.” The man left.

What if he figured out who called the police on him?

She, as his downstairs neighbor, or their next-door neighbor, would be likeliest to hear the commotion.

What if he came down to confront her? Sheila had only had a few fights as a child, and would hit if struck first, but this man was huge, and eleven-year-old Kareem would be no match for him. Ron was in Jersey, and Sheila knew Ron would not risk upsetting Diana, who would object to her husband playing hero for his ex.

And what if Sheila did call the police? What if the wife was too afraid to press charges? Would her husband beat her again, or more severely out of revenge?

Sheila put down the phone, got under the covers, and waited.

It was quiet.

She closed her eyes but could not go back to sleep.

Twenty-one sets of eyes were on her.

“It was eight years ago. I did not say anything because I was afraid he would come after me for calling the police,” Sheila said, her voice cracking.

Dominique, as usual, was frowning, and raised her hand for the first time all year.

Sheila locked eyes with her and nodded.

“But Miss,” Dominique proclaimed, “my aunt’s boyfriend beats her! Every time she tries to leave him, he threatens to kill her, so she stays. And this lady in my building got murdered by her husband. It was on the news! Maybe if her neighbors called the cops she’d still be alive!”

Sheila did not try to stop the tears that had gathered in her eyes from racing down her cheeks.

Paul got up, picked up the box of tissues on Sheila’s desk, and brought it over to her. “Here, Miss.”

Thank you.” Sheila paused.

“Dominique, I hear you. I felt guilty for months. And anytime I heard loud voices from upstairs, I listened to hear if it sounded like they were fighting. It was a few years later when I did hear him hit her again, and that time I did call the police. The dispatcher kept asking me questions, to describe what I heard exactly, and I told her, ‘I hear stomping on the floor and screaming, and it sounds like he is hitting her.’ I said, ‘Please just send someone.’ I don’t know if the police showed up or what happened afterward. I feel better now that I call the police when I hear their fights get bad, but I always think about the time I did not.”

Sheila sat.

Dominique put her head down.

Sheila waited for a few moments for something or someone to break the silence.

“Miss, it’s OK,” Desiree said. “You were scared.”

Yeah, Miss Davis,” Ciara said. “Remember when we were talking about, um, intimate partner violence? It’s hard for women to leave, and it is hard when people try to intervene. At least you called that second time.”

“I mean, like, think about it,” Rob said. “We are all bystanders sometimes. How many people see homeless people on the streets and walk right by them? How many people don’t talk to the cops when they witness a crime because they think they’ll be snitching?”



Lisa said, “Exactly! What happens if everybody is too scared to speak up?”

The bell rang.

Sheila blotted her eyes with her tissue, careful not to disturb her mascara. As the students gathered their things, and Rob and Desiree moved the desks back into five groups of four, Sheila approached Dominique, who was jamming her notes and notebook into her bag.

“Dominique, are you OK?”

Dominique rolled her eyes, slammed her chair against her desk, and stormed away.

Sheila began to follow her but decided to let her cool off. She made a mental note to speak to her on Monday.

Jackie walked over to Sheila. “Are you OK, Miss Davis?”

Sheila blew her nose softly into her tissue. “Yes, Jackie. Thank you. It was just an intense conversation.”

Jackie replied, “Yeah, but it was good. That’s why I like your class. Have a good weekend.”

“You too,” Sheila said. Jackie turned around, waved, and walked out.

Mr. Martinez clicked “Save,” shut down his laptop, and gently closed it. He rose, and watched silently as the students waved or shouted, “Bye, Miss!” as they filed out of the room.

He sat on top of one of the desks.

“That was an excellent lesson. You know, I have always admired the way your pedagogy is centered on social justice. And today, your students got to see how complicated it can be for human beings to show up for one another. Your admission was very brave.”

“Thank you. I always present myself as a role model to our students. I could not lie to them,” Sheila said.

“We’re human,” Mr. Martinez said. “We all have to make difficult choices, and by having this honest conversation with your class, you demonstrated that you are the kind of teacher they need.”

Mr. Martinez got up and smiled. “However, I would like for you to work on your questioning techniques so that students are asking each other more higher-order thinking questions. I suggest that you refer to the Depth of Knowledge chart from last week’s professional development session.”

Sheila smiled tightly. Another effective rating. I can never do enough for him to rate me as highly effective.

“I will.”

“I’ll send you my observation report by the end of the week. Excellent work.”

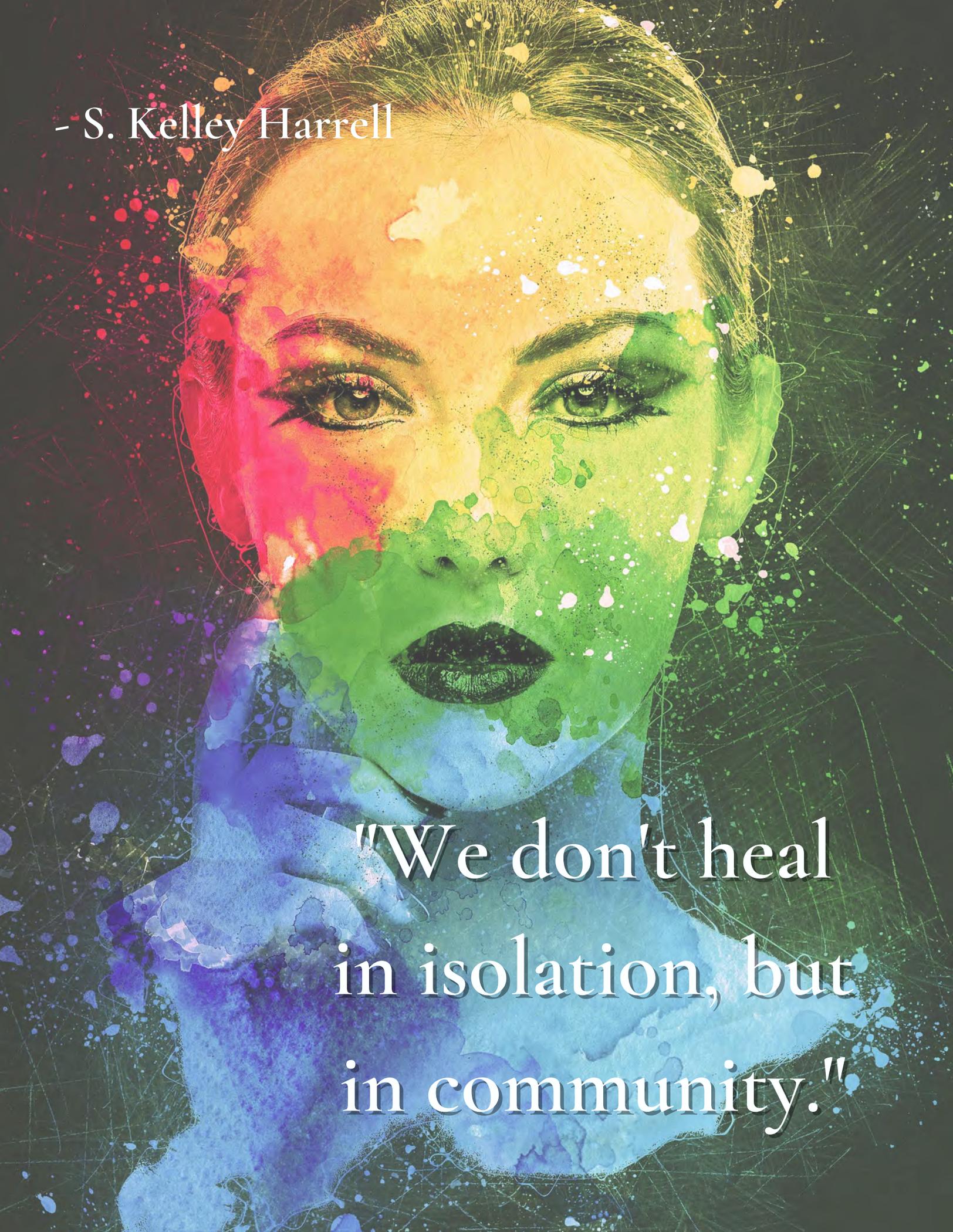
After he closed the door, Sheila unlocked her closet, pulled out her purse, locked the door to her classroom, and made her way to the front entrance. The May sun was beaming.

Sheila walked down the street, past curbside easements and small crowds of loud teenagers filing out of school buildings, with their cell phones in hand, as they jostled each other, checked out adolescent passerby, and headed to the subway to go home. Sheila rounded the corner as she passed the Schomburg on West 135th Street and tried to let the hip hop and bachata blasting from cars boost her mood as she headed to Abyssinia for a late lunch like she did every Friday. She would order the vegetable sambusa appetizer and Doro Tibs, pile the injera bread with neat spoonfuls of the chicken-filled stew, and let the aroma of curry distract her from Dominique, her aunt, and murdered neighbor.

When Sheila boarded the 5 train and hung on to the silver strap, she rested her head on her arm, trying hard to avoid looking for too long at any of the people seated in the row below her who were listening to music in their earbuds, reading, napping, and talking to their companions. She closed her eyes and lightly swayed against the rollicking rhythm of the subway car.

I’m going to talk to Dawn when I get home, she thought. She seems to know everyone in our building. I’ll see if she knows the wife’s name. ◆





- S. Kelley Harrell

"We don't heal
in isolation, but
in community."

BEVERLY MUNROE

- FEATURED ARTIST -

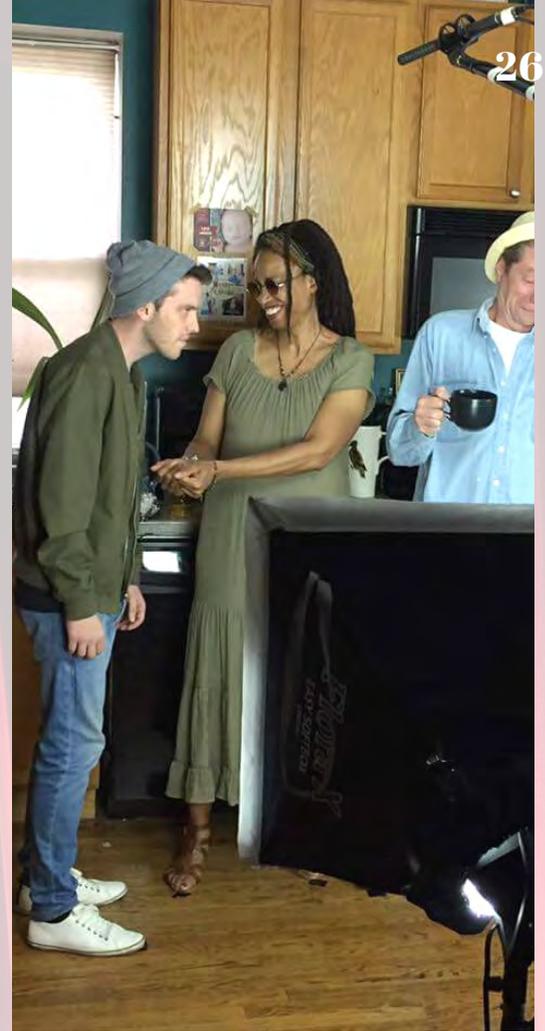
SITTING DOWN WITH ONE OF CHICAGO'S
LOVELIEST ACTRESSES FOR A CHAT ABOUT
THEATRE, FAITH, AND PERFORMANCE



ACTRESS, SINGER, DANCER IN
CHICAGO



BM:



Beverly and I first met when I moved back to Chicago in 2014. She was one of the first people I met in the city and I immediately recognized we had more than just theatre and “church” in common. She and I haven’t been able to work together in performing arts, but she’s been an inspiration to me in my pursuits of art and faith, especially as they intersect with the cultural challenges we face today.

Beverly’s been in the theatre world for many years and has a lot of wisdom to offer. I hope you receive as much from this encouraging interview as I have.

RMP: What creative mediums do you most engage with as self-expression? What about in ministry?

BM: I am a performance artist. I am a performer of “a certain age”, so my journey includes decades of work

while juggling family life, day jobs, etc. I have my degree in theatre from Northwestern University, which is how I ended up in Chicago. After graduation, and while working full-time jobs, I danced, modeled, sang, and produced R&B groups with a partner. I acted in primarily plays and musicals. I taught children’s theatre, and co-directed a gospel children’s show choir, with performances at Navy Pier.

I wrote and performed a monologue from the viewpoint of the child civil rights heroine Ruby Bridges, who was the subject of a Norman Rockwell painting. Subsequently, during Black History Month programs I have been able to share this short work. But believe me, there has been feast and famine. Now that I view it all as the business of life, not just “show”, serving as God leads brings me balance and joy. I know the call for my life is to prioritize my faith as a

“Where is the Love?” : An Interview with Performing Artist Beverly Murroe

RITA MOCK-PIKE



"Great theatre is about challenging how we think and encouraging us to fantasize about the world we aspire to." - William DaFoe

Christian. And a part of that is loving and supporting people in the arts community, as well as serving those who come to experience the work and be lifted up in their spirits.

RMP: What first drew you to theatre and how did you become involved in a semi-professional/professional way?

BM: My mother drew our family into the world of theatre when I was a child through the Karamu House Theater. It is touted as the oldest African-American theatre in the United States, opening in 1915. Many of Langston Hughes's plays were developed and premièred at the theatre. It had a proscenium theatre, a theatre in the round. There were acclaimed adult and children's theatre productions, as well as classes in the arts and community services. As a youngster it was an exciting moment when she announced we had tickets to go to Karamu.

RMP: What have you found to be some of the biggest challenges in doing theatre in Chicago?

BM: The biggest challenge, as I see it, for the Chicago theatre and improv community is getting people into the seats, particularly in the wonderful smaller theatres that abound on all sides of the city. Ticket prices, while reasonably priced by industry standards, are often out of the range of folks who might greatly benefit from and learn to love the richness and intimacy that live performance adds to the quality of life. There are amazing artists and companies that could sustain themselves with increased attendance and community support.

RMP: Have you done theatre or other performing arts outside of Chicago? If so, where and what were you doing? Any anecdotes to share?

BM: Most recently I traveled to NYC to bring a work from local playwright, Veronica Price Stopka, to a festival in Manhattan. In the past The Earth Theater company appeared at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival with an adaptation of Treasure Island for young audiences. Two of my most memorable musical revue performances were during the Kentucky Derby at a corporate venue, and a week-long appearance at Great Lakes Naval Base featuring R&B music by Celsius II. Earlier on in my career as a dancer I appeared in a tribute performance for Count Basie at the Auditorium Theater in Chicago, who was then in his mid-seventies, and had my picture featured in a magazine.



RMP: Do you have any advice for folks looking to break into the industry?

- BM:**
1. Don't chase the money.
 2. Ask yourself, as an actor may query in preparation for a scene, "Where is the love?" Performing can be competitive, addictive, and lonely. If you don't ask the right question or get a positive answer, the work will probably not bring happiness in your spirit.
 3. Keep working to improve, whatever that looks like for you, in order to be the best you can be. It will take time.
 4. All work is not good work. In other words, you don't have to do everything you are given. Listen to the spirit within you.
 5. Last, but certainly not least, pray about all of it!

RMP: How have the theatrical/performing arts helped to shape you as a human? What kind of impact would you say they've had in the formation of your spiritual life?

BM: Wenda Shereos, a pastor's wife and an accomplished actor and director, helped shape me in more ways than just my craft. We studied the Bible together, prayed, and had acting and improv classes with other Christians. She directed two companies of Christian actors, named Parable and Red Ink, as they performed secular and Christian plays and sketches. Providing opportunities for conversation and community around themes and questions we experience as humans will hopefully lead to conversations about what Christians believe. Some of those plays included *The Elephant Man*, *Wit*, *Miracle Worker*, and a little-known Neil Simon play, *God's Favorite*. This was not always without controversy.

Wenda also encouraged me to write the *Ruby Bridges* piece for a juried art festival in conjunction with the *Andersonville Arts Festival*. She helped me see that God's giftings in the arts are to be cultivated and used as he leads.



RMP: What's the most profound moment in your performing career?

BM: There are literally many profound moments I have had. However, two stand out from recent years performing a couple adaptations for *The Holiday Radio Show*. This was a musical about a Christmas radio show during World War II. Performing the adaptations by Andre Richardson Hogan, Chicago playwright, brought me the kind of moments when the goose bumps and tears are almost palpable, and made me sense that the audience felt it as well. One was a story of a little black boy and his mother in Harlem in the 1920s at Christmas, and the other was a story based on the account of a newly freed slave family during the late 1800s giving thanks to God for family and life itself. ♦

Upcoming performances:
Punk Grandpa, Opening Sept. 30th thru Oct. 16th (Thurs, Fri, Sat at 7 pm) - 5419 N, Lincoln

Eb and Belle, Opening November 18, 19 previews, thru December 19 (Fri, Sat 7:30 pm, Sun 3:30 pm) - Theater Above the Law, 1439 W. Jarvis



Lost Causes

Julie Hazlett



Hate explodes at different ideas of gods.
Another blast rips through the night.
The fires burn love away.
Stealing time from children's play,
as parents fall to their knees.
Meanwhile, 5000 miles away, it's just another day.

A huddled mass on a subway grate,
alone on a cold winter street.
Appease that sense of pity you feel.
Toss a coin in their wishing well.
Now you're in comfort, drinking Chianti.
Their faces are long forgotten.

Drawing last breath alone on a bed,
far from the view of man.
Now closes the eyes of another mother,
as the world continues outside her door.
The angels can't sing for those not remembered.
The silence will not be disturbed.

You were saving the world,
while Johnny grew up.
You were looking for causes when muzzle flash burned.
It was a bullet for her hero long gone.
She completes the motion, but only for show.
She said her goodbyes years ago.

Sitting in darkness, drinking again,
The eyes of the dying still caught in your head.
A young wife cries herself to sleep.
Wondering if you're really home.
Somewhere inside that bottle in hand,
lies what's left of her hope.

What happened to Jude when you fell to your knees?
The blood spilled through your hands.
Elsewhere, saviors and saved and lost still struggle,
and try to find meaning for life.
Families waiting at home,
praying for you to return.

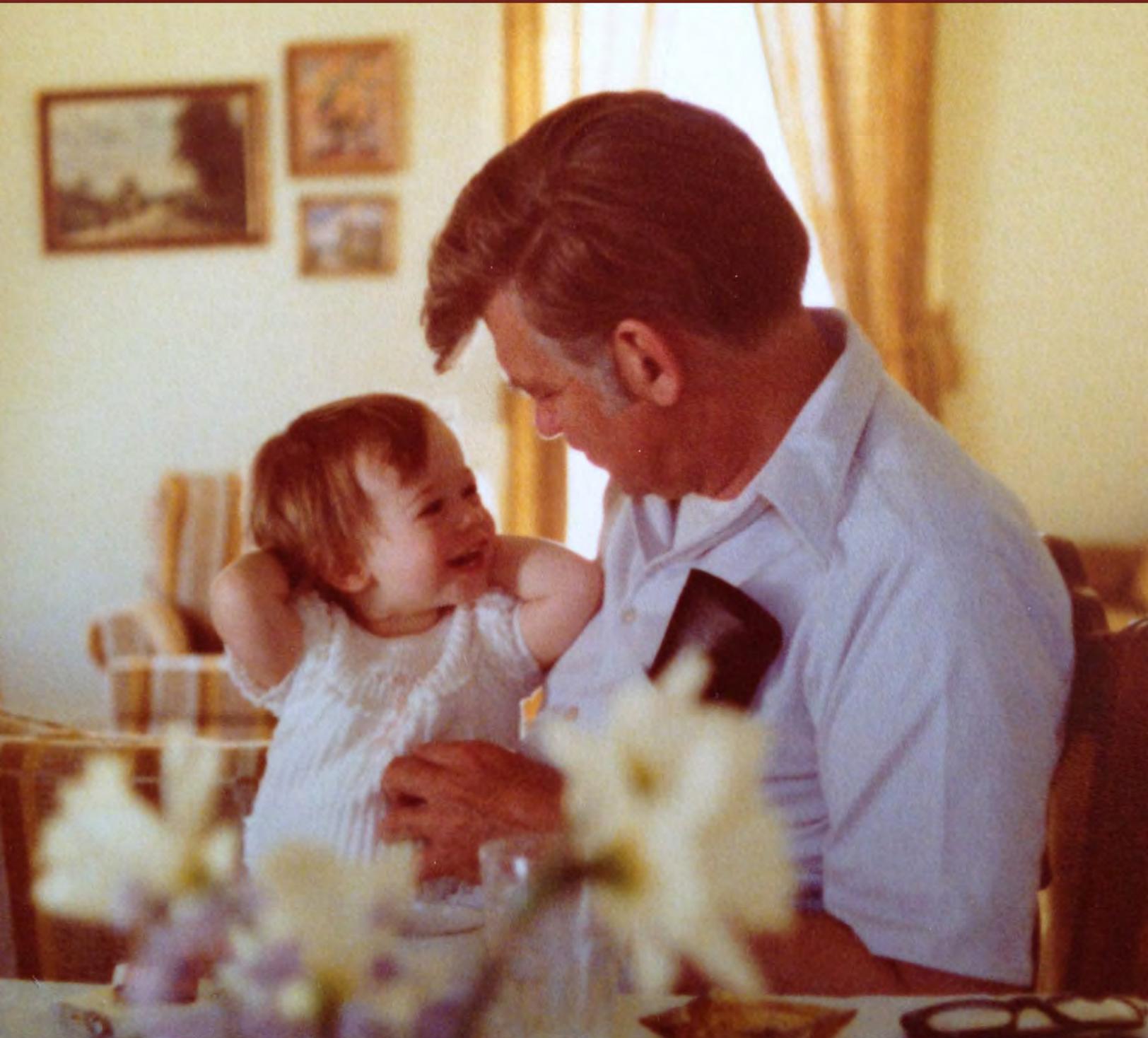
In the end, we all exchange places, but we're all still the same.
Are we all just someone's lost cause? ◆

DayJasFran Entertainment/Dreamers YOLO presents:

30

Dunk Grandpa

By LaurA! Force Scruggs



Produced by special arrangement with
PlayScripts Online

Directed by Davette J. Franklin
Stage Managed by Michelle Locke
Produced by DavJasFran Entertainment/
Dreamers YOLO & Barbara J. Wells

Cast

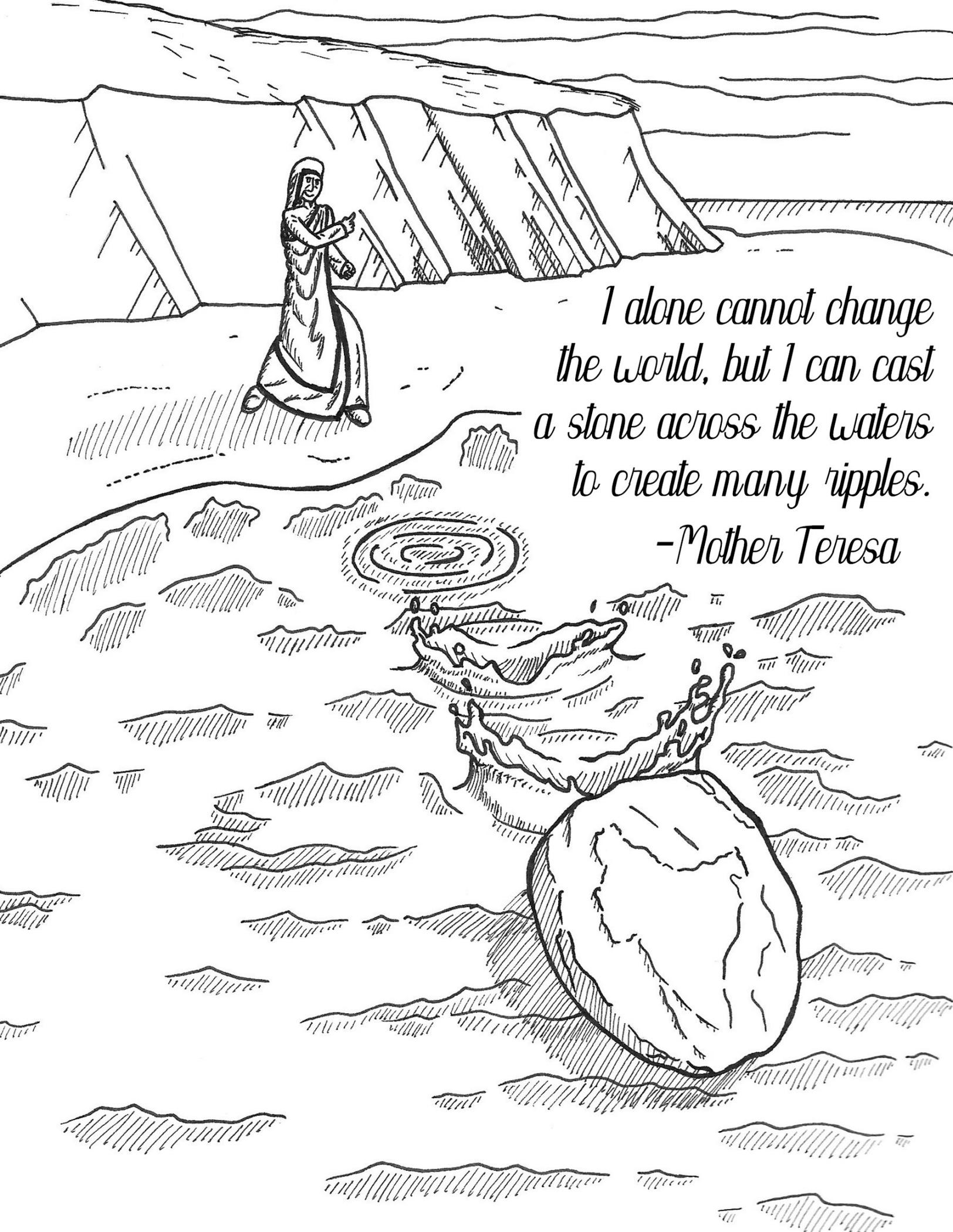
Older Laura/Narrator: Felisha Mcneal
Younger Laura: Sallie Anne Young
Grandpa: Colin Jones
Ensemble Members: Maria Lee, Beverly Munro,
Christopher Owen and Edwin Torres

Performance Dates

Thursdays, Fridays & Saturdays at 7 pm
Thursday, September 30th - Saturday, October 16th
At DavJasFran Entertainment/Dreamers YOLO
Theatre, 5419 N. Lincoln Ave.

Tickets will be available at:

<https://davjasfranentertainment.com>



*I alone cannot change
the world, but I can cast
a stone across the waters
to create many ripples.*

-Mother Teresa

Casting Stones

Karrie Huberts

When I think of “community,” I think of volunteering: helping our communities to grow and thrive. Mother Teresa immediately comes to mind when it comes to being a volunteer. Serving as a nun, she helped and touched so many lives throughout her life. She taught poor children, helped build orphanages, and cared for the sick. She devoted her life to helping others and putting them before herself.

In this artist sketch, Mother Teresa skips a stone across a body of water. As much as Mother Teresa knew that she couldn't change the entire world, she knew she could change a little part of it by her actions and it would cause a ripple effect, effecting change within the world. She inspired the world to help one another by her example.

[Back to Top](#)

Sowing Seeds

Susan Evans



Sixteen tomato plants, drooping in their starter pots, need to get into the ground pronto. My sister Sandy says, "Susie, start digging holes and I'll plant them." I diligently trowel through red clay soil.

A few minutes later, our niece Kim pulls up in her clunker and parks by the alley. Sandy tells her to fetch a trowel and some gardening gloves from the picnic table.

Soon, Kim commences digging too.

Dressed in a blousey green top and cut-off jeans, Kim has dyed swatches of her hair blaze-bright red. She has parted and pinned them helter-skelter behind her ears. Two sharp-looking piercings glint in the sun on either side of her mouth. Small tattoos encircle her wrists and ankles.

In her mid-40s, Kim looks at least fifteen years older. She scraped by in high school and thought it stupid to study when school graduates you anyway.

She worked a little – telemarketing, restaurant waitressing – but slept late, was a no-show, or stole merchandise. She always said, "Jobs are for suckers." At 19, she gave birth to a daughter. The father remains a mystery.

A decade or so ago, when Kim reached 300 pounds, her doctor recommended gastric bypass surgery. Because she continued to smoke, drink Cokes, and eat junk food, she stays sick a lot. Some of the weight returned.

She began drinking and moved in with her parents – my brother and sister-in-law – five years ago. She refuses to leave.

My brother forced her to go back to her old apartment a couple of times. The first time, she starved herself and wound up in the hospital, severely depressed, dehydrated, and malnourished. The second time, angry and belligerent, she bought a gallon of booze, then screamed and threw things until her grown daughter begged my brother to let her come back to his house. No one could tell her "no" growing up, either.

To Kim's disappointment, the world does not care for divas with no special talents or obvious resources. It must have been a big shock to Kim, who thought she could always be a material Madonna girl. She just "wanted to have fun" and let someone take care of her. If not her parents, then the state of Tennessee, or her illiterate husband.

Shockingly (to her), they didn't, or at least, not in the manner to which she dreamed of being accustomed. All the fun, riskless, free days of girlhood segued into adulthood while she slept late, waiting for Kardashian magic to strike.

Maybe that was when she picked up the beer bottle – a substitute, perhaps, for nourishment she didn't receive as a child. Kim's alcoholism became her defiant answer to a life that didn't deliver a celluloid existence.

Life seemed easier using drugs than soberly facing a non-Hollywood lifestyle with no fancy "cribs" and "bling."

She's gone to rehab twice; the first time she quickly found her way back to her old friend, the bottle. The second time, something seemed to click for her, and she remains sober after a year of taking Antabuse injections.

She may make it. I hope so. I remember a sweet, pretty, little girl with long dark curls full of smiles and curiosity.

After an hour and a half of the heat and humidity at my sister's, I rise, strip off the gardening gloves, and say I need to leave.

Kim sits in the shade of the shed, taking a break and smoking a cigarette. I say, "Kim, take care, and I am going to give you a piece of advice. I know you didn't ask for it – but here it is, anyway. Do what you love."

Kim flicks her cigarette ash and misunderstands me. "Oh, no, I can't get a job right now. I have my good days and my bad days when I can barely get out of bed."

"I don't mean work on a job – I mean do what you love to do. Create."



Dance of Creation

Writing Clarifies



"Oh, I love to write. I write every day."

I say, "Keep it up."

Writing is a tool for thinking deeply and expressing what lies hidden in the heart. Writing helps the author gain clarity as to how she feels. Once she understands herself better, she can work through the pain instead of trying to block it.

I hope Kim does write. It could save her life – putting to paper her pain, her disappointment, her half-buried dreams. And who knows? The words might begin healing.

I wish for my niece a long and wonderful dance of creation. I hope I planted the right seed in her although, like Sandy's garden soil – she is a tough one to penetrate. But seeds grow out of all sorts of soils, and that seed might be the one she needs to start growing upward. It is not too late for her to learn to re-birth herself, to learn to nurture and love herself, to accept who she is and her place in the world, and to begin a happier and more useful life.

If we don't create, we destroy. We may destroy ourselves, our families, the environment, and the world. And I think so many of us secretly wish to destroy ourselves. As a person who has struggled with depression for a large part of my life, sometimes I wish for self-annihilation. But on those days, I fetch my writing pad and pen and create until I grow strong enough to reject a living death. Miraculously, creativity doesn't just heal the artist. Like sparks of light, inspired creativity illuminates even the bleakest landscapes. It generates an energy that is like a ripple upon the ocean, an energy that swirls around all of us and enlightens, enlivens, and produces magic in all it touches.

According to Health Brief, "In 2016, nearly 400,000 Tennesseans, or about 1 in 20, abuse or are dependent on alcohol or drugs." ♦



One world's Hope

Words by
Andrea Vasile
Photography
by Michelle
Marcoux
Schuneman



A smiling face for a new day.
The same one she wears every morning.
Sparkling eyes, tilt of the head, a crooked grin. She shows the world she's fine, ready. The mask of strength and beauty.

The crinkles of her smile turn to cracks and the joy lines of her eyes deepen to painful reminders of a more loving day.
Her gritting teeth hold back a scream at what the world has done to itself. To her.





Unable to hug,
hold, feel the
warmth of her
dearest loves,
she dissolves to
a deep sigh. The
weight of
loneliness
crushes her.
Caring is too
difficult.

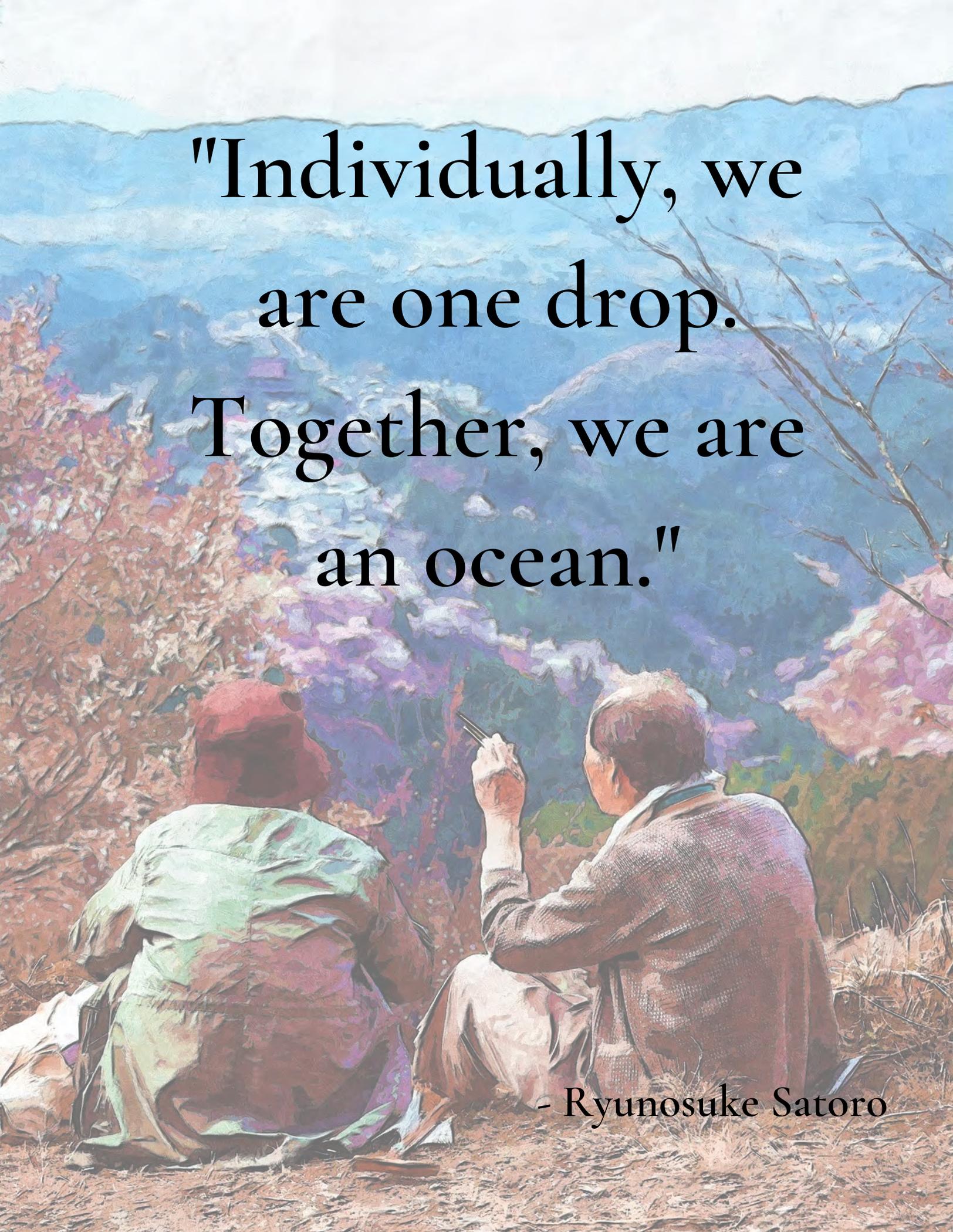
She hides her
face behind
trembling
hands, to keep
back the river of
disgust with
every gunshot,
the disbelief at
every hate-filled
utterance, and
the waves of
emptiness
ebbing through
our camera
lenses.



Today she can't be strong, she can't pretend.
Today, she emerges with her new face. The one
with fear and compassion. The one with empathy
and generosity. The one with worry and
aspiration.



One world's hope
begins with one woman's love.

A painting of two people sitting on a hillside, looking out over a valley with mountains and trees. The person on the right is holding a camera. The scene is rendered in a soft, painterly style with a palette of blues, greens, and earthy tones.

"Individually, we
are one drop.
Together, we are
an ocean."

- Ryunosuke Satoro

The hazy world plunged me into darkness as night fell. I hadn't seen sunlight in a week thanks to the rain rolling in from the intense storm that seemed to sit over Illyria that month. A cold chill ran down my spine, stopping abruptly at my hips.

The clink of china pulled my eyes back indoors. Susannah looked at me. "Ahem."

"I'm sorry, Sus," I shrugged. "I was... distracted for a minute there."

"You always seem to be these days." She glanced past me toward the counter of my favorite tea shop.

"Stop it! He's not my type."

"Oh, surely you don't expect me to believe that?" Susannah laughed.

"Well, okay. He's my type. I'm just not his."

"Have you even asked him out?"

"You know that's not my style."

"When was the last time you had a date?"

I muttered an unintelligible response.

"I thought so. Ask him out, girl. Seriously. He's so cute. You know I'd love to go out with a guy like that. You've got to let me live vicariously through you!"

"Sus!" I rolled my eyes at her.

"Come on. Give a girl a break."

I looked at her, shook my head, and picked up my own cup. The steam rising from the cup of Rooibos evoked memories from the day Susannah and I met. Well, the first time we'd talked, anyway. We were both a part of the massive touring chorale from college, on tour in South Africa, where the tea comes from. We'd been in it for a whole year together, but both of us were always so busy we only got to know the people immediately in our vicinity in the choir. At least, that's what I told myself whenever somebody asked me the names of the other members whom I didn't know. I was still amazed at that girl who knew every single person's name and story.

"I can't ask him out," I repeated, inhaling the earthy sweet scent once more.

"If you don't, I'll ask him for you!" she threatened.

"Don't you dare! The looks I'd get! The... No. Don't you dare."

"Fine. But you'd better do it. Today."



FICTION

Familiar Spaces

Rita Mock-Pike

I leaned back in my chair and sighed. "Give me a minute."

"I'll give you ten."

I grunted and took a sip. The steaming red liquid slid down my throat, coating my esophagus with the earthen brew and a comforting warmth. "I hate you."

"No you don't," Susannah laughed. "You love me or you wouldn't have tea with me here every month."

I groaned. "Fine. I do. Damn the consequences."

Susannah laughed. "Damn them all!"

I inhaled sharply and leaned forward, setting down the delicate pink bud covered teacup. "Okay. I'm going to do it."

"Do it!" Susannah chanted loudly.

"Shut up!" I squeaked at her.

"Excuse me?"

I gulped and looked up. He was standing there. "I'm so sorry. I... uh... I didn't mean you."

When I say the man was an Adonis, I don't just mean he had the body of the god-like creatures that myths and romance novels are built upon. He was a genetic anomaly of beauty. His rich, dark skin was so opaque and seamless it looked truly black. And the exceptionally unusual steel grey eyes peeked out from his rich, dark face like the sun shining in the night sky.

"I'm glad to hear that." A smile spread across his face. "You're my favorite customer. I wouldn't want to think I could offend you so."

I laughed nervously.

"Can I get you some more tea? Milk maybe? You said you first drank it that way in Cape Town, right?"

I gulped and nodded.

"My gran always teased me for drinking Rooibos with cream," he grinned back. "Fun being a little wild, eh?"

If that was his idea of "wild" maybe I stood a chance after all. "Sure is."

He laughed again, showing all his brilliant white teeth. "I'll be right back. I've got something for you."

He returned soon with a platter of green tea and

Rooibos macarons, a few tea biscuits I knew were imported from England, and a fat slab of lamington, made from his other grandmother's authentic Australian recipe.

"My treat."

"You are a god," I muttered, then blushed and looked away.

"That's what my gran always told me," he laughed. "Might be because I praised everything she did, though."

I smiled now.

"Enjoy. Let me know if you need anything."

"Thanks," I blushed.

He walked away, lightly laughing that sweet sort of musical spurt of a genuine soul.

"I told you," Susannah said.

"Oh, he just knows I like sweets," I rolled my eyes.

"Look around you, woman. Everyone here likes sweets," Susannah laughed.

"I... I suppose. But that doesn't mean..."

"Oh, shush. You know it does. Now, get up off your little rear and walk over to that counter. He threw open the door for you. Ask him out."

I crammed one of the Rooibos macarons into my mouth, sighed in utter bliss, then blinked back the fear that pounded my heart through a mambo. "Okay."

I stood up.

"Eh," Susannah pointed at the napkin on my side of the table.

"Oh, right. Uh..."

"Left cheek."

I wiped off a blob of Rooibos cream filling. For a second, I almost licked it off the napkin but managed to control myself. You are in public, Hailey. Behave!

Inhaling and exhaling like hyperventilating bellows, I stepped up to the counter.

"What did you think?" he asked.

"Oh, my heavens!" I burst in a very unladylike manner. "To die for!"

"I can't believe it took me that long to figure out how to use Rooibos for macarons."

"They are truly miraculous," I acknowledged.

"I'm glad you think so."

I stared at him awkwardly for a moment.

He smiled. "What can I do for you? More cream? Tea?"

"I, uh..." I looked over my shoulder. Susannah rolled her eyes and waved at me. I exhaled long and nervously. "Um... So... I ... uh..."

He smiled at me, a gentler, softer smile parting his lips now. "Would you like to get dinner with me sometime?"

My heart stopped for a second. "Yes," I said without thought. "I, uh..."

"Great!" he beamed. "I know a great little Jamaican place."

"I love Jamaican food."

"Perfect," he smiled.

We looked at each other for a moment before I started blushing. "Maybe Friday?"

"Perfect," he repeated. "Say, seven?"

"Sure."

"Um, I could pick you up, or...?"

I nodded, exhaling again. "Sure. I, uh... Let's see. On Friday I'll be working downtown. Um, maybe I should meet you somewhere instead? Long drive from here..."

"Sure," he nodded. "We could meet there, if you'd prefer."

"Perfect," I repeated his response now.

We exchanged numbers and I hurriedly went to sit down before my legs collapsed beneath me.

"What did I tell you?"

"Shut up," I hissed at Susannah.

She laughed.

"Well, my work here is done. I suppose I should beat it."

I stared at her. "What?"

"I don't think I can meet you anymore," she shrugged.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, this was it. My assignment. My... Purpose."

"To get me a date?"

"I think so, yeah. I feel all tingly now. I think that was it."

"But we've been meeting for nearly two years. Every single month."

"You remember where I died, right?"

I gulped back a lump. "Right there on the corner... On the way to meet me here. We..."

"Shh. Don't go fretting over that. It was my time."

"You can't seriously expect me to believe your sole mission of the afterlife was to help get me together with Minenhle?"

"I think it was."

"That's ridiculous."

"Well, I've been doing some other things between our tea dates."

"Like what?"

"I've said my goodbyes, for one."

"But what if I'm not ready to say goodbye?"

"You're ready now."

"Why? Because I just met the love of my life?" I snorted.

"Maybe. Maybe not. I don't know. I just... I think this is it for me."

"But..."

"I'll see you later. Er, well. Maybe not. I guess in heaven maybe?"

"Is there a heaven?"

"I'm about to find out, I think."

I sat there, staring across the table at her apparition. I thought maybe she'd melt away. I wasn't ready to let her go. But what could I do? I had no control over eternity.

"Are you going to fade or something?" I asked after several awkward minutes of waiting for... something.

"I don't know," she shrugged. "Maybe I'll just disappear when I go outside?"

"Then don't go outside. Stay here."

"Forever?"



“Please?”

Susannah laughed. “I love tea. But even I don’t think I could stand living in a tea shop for eternity. You’ve got to let me go.”

“The china clinked again. I looked up to see Minenhle looking over at me, smiling.

See. You’ll be all right. He’s a good one.”

“But, I…”

“I love you, Hailey. Be good to yourself. And him.”

“But, I…”

“Bye.”

She stood up, smiling at me. “Yep. This is it.”

I expected maybe a light or a trail of cloudy, sparkly dust or something. But she just looked at me for another second, sighing, then she walked out the door.

“You okay?” Minenhle stopped by my table. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

I nodded. “For the last time, it seems.”

He looked me over for a moment and nodded. “I thought there was something going on here. Always felt a chill right there, whenever you came in – and I knew it wasn’t you.”

I nodded. “Wait. You could…?”

“Well, yeah,” he nodded, tossing a glance over his shoulder to an empty chair tucked into the corner.

“That’s my gran. There’s something about this building. Kind of… Familiar spaces.”

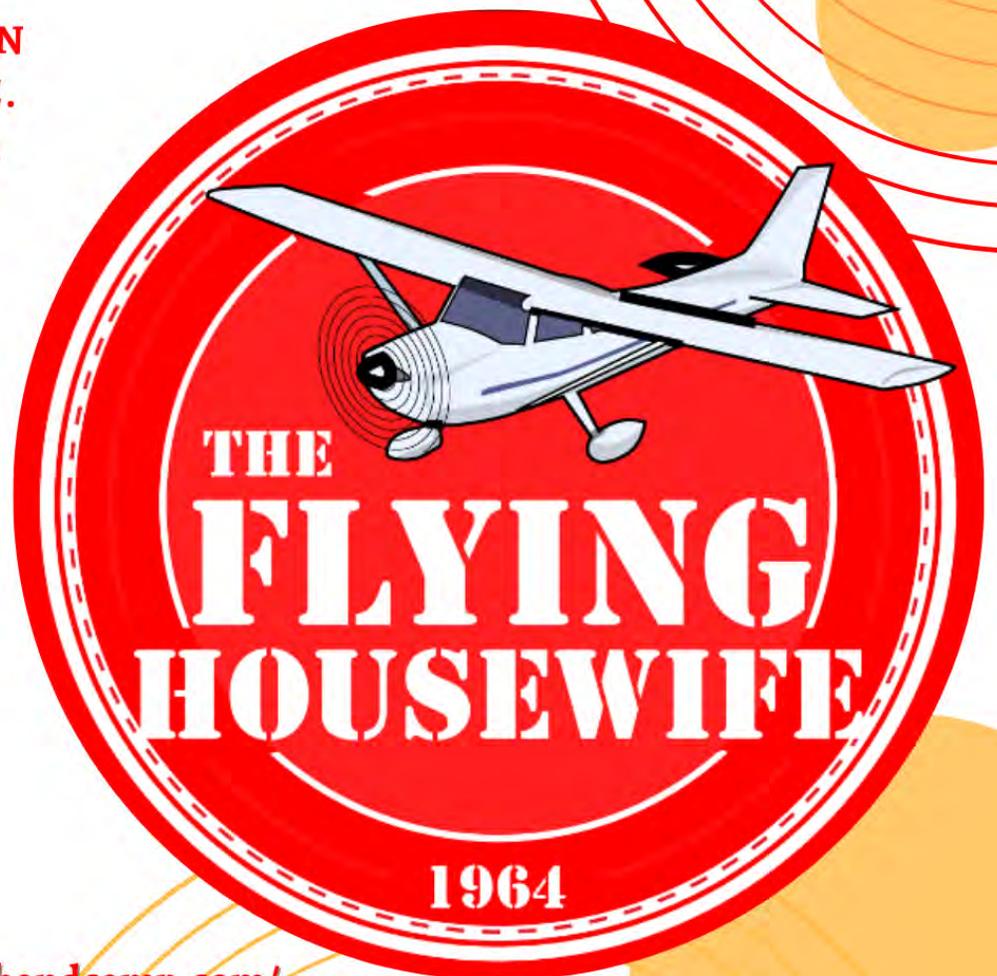
“Familiar spaces,” I echoed. I didn’t know what it meant, but it felt right. ♦

THE JERRIE MOCK
PODCAST

New episodes this October

Meet the first woman
to fly around the
world, Jerrie Mock.

**SHE WAS MORE THAN
"JUST" A HOUSEWIFE.
MORE THAN "JUST" A
WOMAN.**



<https://thejerriemockpodcast.bandcamp.com/>

Hosted by Jerrie's Granddaughter,
Rita Mock-Pike

LOOK AT ME!

Sue Cook

Look at me!

Like so many with bent backs and shuffling gait,
I have fought wars, taught children, healed the sick.
My back is bowed with pain, grief, and humility.
I am one with you.

Look at me!

My skin may be black like the finest of silks.
Or bronze like the sun which warms our souls.
It may be fair as milk –
or brown like the Mother who sustains us.
I am one with you.

Look at me!

I use devices to walk, or wheel through the mall
My Service Dog is always at my side.
She is my savior when illness grips me like a vice.
When death and the terrors of the night threaten
sleep,
I may not speak, hear or see.
Still... I am one with you.

Look at me!

Life is just beginning.
Learning to walk, talk, run, and play.
Children will fill this town with laughter, and joy.
My work will sustain us.
Yes... I am one with you.

Maybe that is the lesson the earth is trying to teach.
We are all one.
Spires of spirit swirling around a hunk of rock –
Creating life.
Creating joy.

Maybe the whisper in the wind is the song of *unity* –
Division a trick of the mind.
Only through *unity* are we whole.

Look at me!

I am you.

A Day in The Life of a NaNoWriMo-er

Rita
Mock-Pike

After twelve years of participation in NaNoWriMo, this year will look a bit different for me as I embark on the adventure of writing a 50,000+ word novel in the 30 days of November. I'm now a full-time grad student taking four classes, all of which require writing multiple essays, screenplays, stage plays, and research papers. As a full-time writer, as well, my word count this November will be higher than ever before.

So, my planning this year will be different and, for a change, look a little more "normal" for folks participating in this writing marathon. With this in mind, we thought sharing a cross-section of days past and anticipated days future might be helpful for folks planning to participate in NaNoWriMo this year. If you need a little help getting things organized, whether they're planners, pansters, or plansters, this is for you.

My Workday Before I Started Grad School

On a typical workday, I rise about an hour early to cram in an hour of writing before I get going on all those less-than-fictional tasks of checking in with clients, writing about fishkeeping or politics, and sitting through meetings.

During my lunch break and other breaks throughout the day, I write for fifteen minutes or so during each, making sure I get in movement while I write. This means I use my treadmill desk and laptop or open a Google doc and write on my phone while I walk around the neighborhood.





After work, I relax for about an hour with my husband, noshing on whatever meal I prepared in advance, then I get to work on that novel. I often write for two to four hours each night, getting in as much fiction as I can.

My Weekends Before Starting Grad School

In addition to all those hours writing during the workweek, I scheduled my weekends around writing. I rise early, make a large pot of black tea, and get to work. Using a tomato timer, I mix up workouts and writing throughout the day, making sure I'm moving almost as much as I'm writing. The saying, "sitting is the new smoking" may or may not be true, according to experts, but my body, especially once I hit my mid-thirties, has made it clear that sitting for hours on end is a completely unacceptable practice.

I usually give myself a two-hour lunch break, several fifteen to thirty-minute breaks throughout the day, and spend the rest of the time writing.

The Results of My Crazy Writing Plan Pre-Grad School

Because of all those writing hours, I typically finish the bare minimum word count for NaNoWriMo before mid-month, often completing during the first week. Last year, I completed it early in the first week of November.

This New Life and Writing While Surviving Grad School

This year, as I mentioned, things will be different. If I weren't writing thousands of words, researching dozens of scholars, and reading tens of thousands of pages for my mixture of theology, history, wellness, and writing courses, I'd have no issue maintaining my former schedule during NaNoWriMo past.

My plan this year looks like this:

1. Rise an extra 20 to 30 minutes early before school/work to cram in a little writing.
2. Schedule in writing sessions on school days between class and homework.
3. Adjust my morning walking routine to include writing time at my treadmill desk. (If you have a gym membership, you can write on your phone while you walk on the treadmill. That's what I used to do!)
4. Schedule one to two hours of writing after work hours on my workdays.
5. Reserve one to two hours on Saturdays and Sundays exclusively for writing.

Between now and November 1, I'll be experimenting with other writing projects to find the right balance to ensure I'll have the time to make it all the way through NaNoWriMo. Hopefully, my process in the past and plan for this year can help you figure out your own writing schedule for NaNoWriMo 2021. Good luck! ♦

NaNo WriMo 2021

[Back to Top](#)

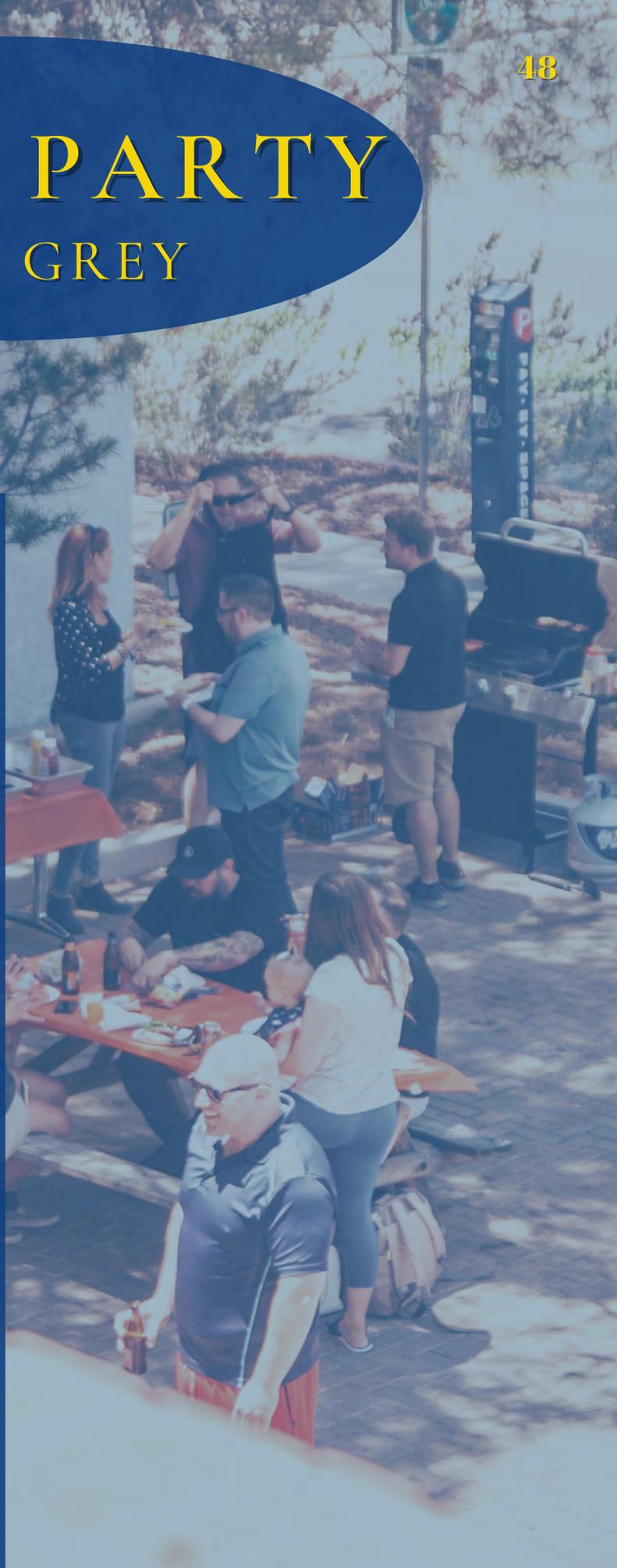
BLOCK PARTY

JOHN GREY

White and black and brown streets congregate
in the grammar school grounds,
set up tables, stoke the grill,
unpack paper plates and plastic settings,
quiet field transformed into revelry.

Folks who never knew they lived so close
breathe the same charcoal fumes,
chide the playfully braggart chefs
in high white puffy hats and fancy aprons.
The air soon smells of sausage, hamburger,
mustard,
ketchup, and home-made relish.
Two large crocks, steaming with beans,
threaten with one lift of a lid.
Children gravitate to games,
the youngest in laugh-filled tournaments
of their own invention,
while teenagers invade the basketball court
in random mixed-race teams.
Done eating, the sexes separate,
find more in common than they realize.
The men drink beer, dip chips in salsa,
regurgitate the local sports talk.
Women concur on
how hard it is to raise a child
and wonder why there can't be more events like
this.

As afternoon shifts ground for early evening
the raps of sneakers on tar dissipate.
Kids chase lightning bugs
or settle close to parents.
The cleaning up is slow but efficient.
Then it is hugs all around,
and a drift apart,
homeward bound under radiant street lamps.





BREATHING

ROOM

Soren Porter

“I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love,
because you have seen my affliction;
you have known the distress of my soul,
and you have not delivered me into the hand of the enemy;
you have set my feet in a broad place.”
Psalm 31:7-8 (ESV)

It’s nice to have breathing room after the string of crazy traumatic events over the last decade (not to mention, even more earlier than that). It is nice to be able to look back and see the progress I’ve made, the positive choices I decided to take, and how even when I made terrible choices, the world didn’t end. My world may have been turned upside down, but I am on the other side of a lot of crazy.

It’s nice to have as few enemies as I currently do. Spending long periods of time with an active fear of death starts to weigh on the soul as few things do. I get why David would pray so often to be delivered from his enemies. It takes having enemies to fully appreciate that.

Looking forward, I do anticipate a large amount of crazy, uncertainty, difficulties, more illness, and eventually the finale. But the view from here is beautiful, looking back to where I was and looking forward to where I can go – it is beautiful to know life matters and the choices made matter. Life is simple in ways I am not sure how to express, especially when I stop to admire the beautiful absurdity to it.

Selah.

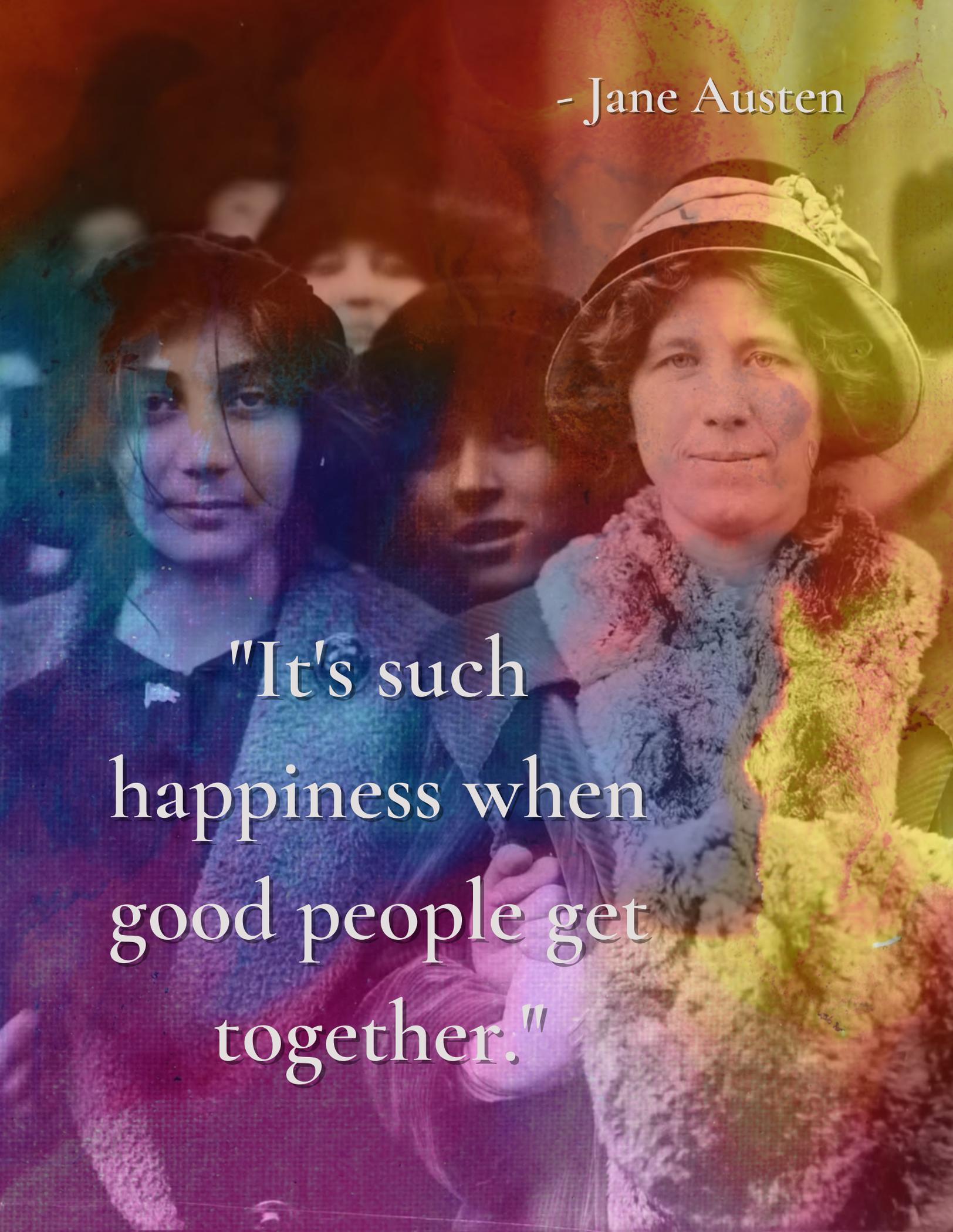
Rest and peace.

The evening is here, the day, and all damage is done.

Tomorrow’s worry and sorrow will be there until we get there.

Until then, rest and peace.

Sometimes the bravest thing is to hope. ◆



- Jane Austen

"It's such
happiness when
good people get
together."

P₃ A₁ N₁ D₂ E₁ M₃ I₁ C₃

Mark A. Fisher

I passed through anomalous dimensions
world shrunk to just these rooms
constructed out of social conventions
connected to others only through Zooms
linked across the world's vast distances
world shrunk to just these rooms
all bound together against resistances
alloyed together with thoughts and images
linked across the world's vast distances
enclaves formed and became villages
separated merely by thousands of miles
alloyed together with thoughts and images
joined by these electronic files
having being transformed by community
separated merely by thousands of miles



Back to Top





Kelly Eddington Watercolors

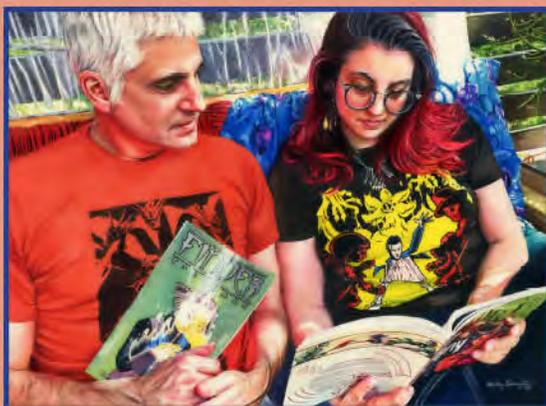
“It’s all in the details.”

Specializing in highly realistic portraits, florals, and still life watercolors.

Available for commissions. <https://www.kellyeddington.com/>.

[Prints](#) • [Patreon](#) • [YouTube](#) • [Learn to Paint with Kelly](#)

@kellyeddington on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest



WHITE COON

Tiffany Lindfield

"We all tole ya to leave them damn coons alone. Yet you always in the yard tryin' to feed 'em. We gotta eat and you feedin' wild animals. Now look at ya!"

"It was a lil' baby and I was just tryin' to give it a sippa water. You know how hot it is and it was pantin' like it about to die."

"Well, now look at ya arm all tore up."

"Jus' goawn and get Saddle over here to fix up my arm," Shirley snapped, the hard wrinkle in between her eyes blaring. She was tired of her aunt wanting to bitch instead of help.

Shirley knew it wasn't a good idea to mess with raccoons, but it happened, and that one was thirsty. Besides, some folks throw slop in the yard just to see a coon or two. People like to watch them eat with their hands so human-like. She had seen people do this. No, they don't go around trying to cuddle them and lay them down to bed like her, but they do like to watch them close. Besides all that, this one was thirsty, and looked different from the other coons. It was a solid white coon, which was rare. Some folks had told her this was a bad omen and others had said it was a sign of luck.

"Goawn now before I get sick," Shirley said pulling a hot soapy rag out of the pot. She rubbed it over her arm, over the teeth marks in her flesh. She had grown accustomed to pain, to things hurting and didn't wince. Just scrubbed the rag over her arm, like it was a dirty plate.

Berturd stomped out the door.

Before her aunt came back, Shirley's man, Bill, came through the door. He smelt like swamp fish, but Shirley didn't care.

They ran up to the other like they had not seen each other in forever, and Shirley pouted her lip, "look here at my arm."

Bill's eyes widened, "what happened Bear?" He called her bear because she was built like a bear; stout on top with short legs.

"Raccoon got me. That baby raccoon was thirsty, so I tried to give it a sippa' water but it got skeert and bit me bad. It was hung on my arm like a trap. Ya know da white one I showed you in the yard?"

"Bear you so gentle that you carin' about everythin.' I love ya for that, but...we gotta get you some of Saddle's medicine... somethin."

"Berturd up the road gettin' Saddle now."

Berturd walked in with Saddle about an hour later. Saddle was liquored up and moving her hips saucy for Bill. She would sleep with any man, or woman. She sometimes used her magic potions on people if she really wanted them, and they did not want her. As she got older, she had to use the potions more and more. But when she was younger, she could knock a man or a woman out with just one dip of her slim hips.

Bill was so in love with Shirley he didn't notice Saddle. Just held Shirley's arm like it was a baby to rock.

Berturd hit him upside the head. "Get us some water, and quit coddlin' her for playin' with damned ole' animals."

Bill made a show of standing up and going out the door, but he did what he was told.

Saddle lifted Shirley's arm and examined it. She looked into Shirley's eyes. "You done got it. You done got the rabies. Nothin' I can do for ya now."

"What ya mean? What is Rabies? Ain't you got some of that oily stuff to put on my arm to make it right? That V-a-s-o-l-i-n-e?"

"I ain'tastin' my good magic on someone who be dead soon."
Shirley spat, "I ain't goawn be dead soon. Berturd tell her to stop puttin' that in da air."

Berturd got up and stood at the doorway with a rolled cigarette. She didn't say anything but hotbox that cigarette. Shirley could tell Berturd believed in what Saddy was saying, and that it troubled her.

"Need a way to the big hospital 'den. They can help me there then since you won't."

"Ya can take up there, but they can't cure it. It's a brain disease. It's a neurotoxin. No cure," Saddy said, with a shoulder shrug.

Shirley waved the woman off, wildly with her hands, "get outta here with ya devil magic and don't come back around here. Take that dark magic out da door!"

Berturd sat on the porch hunched over her cigarette like the wind was blowing and she needed to shield it. But the wind wasn't blowing. The heat was so thick you could wrap it over your shoulders like a blanket.

Saddy stood at the bottom of the porch. "Ain't no dark magic in me. I do the Lord's work."

"Well do the Lord's work down the road!" Shirley screamed and Bill came up with a bucket of water. He didn't know what had Shirley upset, but he yelled with her, "what you done did to my Bear?"

Shirley woke up in the night with bad sweats. She peeled the sheet off her body and slinked out of the bed to the bathroom where the only mirror in the house hung on the wall. The moonlight was pouring in through the window, but there wasn't enough light, so she lit one of the candles on the sink basin. She wanted to see her eyes. To see if she had rabies. They looked normal.

She pulled off her nightgown and looked over her legs and arms. Everything except for the wound on her arm was in place. She didn't feel normal though. She was scared, and her head was spinning. She carried the candle into the living room where she saw her aunt sitting on the couch smoking a cigarette.

"You got one rolled for me?"

Her aunt handed her the cigarette, half-smoked. "You spooked aint ya?"

Shirley nodded.

Berturd stood up and stared out the window. "Ya ain't got to worry. I had the pastor come over and he done blessed you, this house, and every critter that steps through da door."

Shirley shook her head. She didn't remember the pastor coming. It was always a fuss when the pastor came, so there was no way he could come and go, and she not know. "When he come here?"

"Look out the window. He still trekking up da road."

Shirley rushed to the window like the man would disappear if her eyes weren't on the road. "I don't see no one. Why you lyin' to me?"

Berturd pursed her lips. "You can't see everything with your eyes. Wake up, woman!!"

"I got a real disease. I looked it up in that big medical book uncle Buck found at the dump that day. Rabies is real," Shirley said, running to her room and back, and handing Berturd the book. She had the page saved and opened it to show her aunt. "So, I'm gonna need a real cure. Not the ghost in ya head, woman! I need ya to help me get to the big hospital."

Berturd took the book but couldn't read. She had only pretended to read in the past. This time she didn't make a show of reading. She simply sat the book down. "I done tole you that you is cured. Now if you wanna worry yourself to death, we got another thing to pray about."

Shirley stared at the book with the word rabies in it. She stared at the illustration of a raccoon. The raccoon wasn't solid white but had pencil drawn stripes down its back. Maybe white ones couldn't give you rabies, Shirley thought. Maybe they were luck after all. She wished the page wasn't mauled but like her arm, it was. Her uncle had carried the book everywhere and so page after page had coffee stains and even the legs of crawdads stuck in the binding.

This page was smeared with tobacco juice. She only knew from the book that rabies was real and caused a fever and hallucinations. But she didn't know what hallucinations were. The raccoon in the picture had foam in its mouth, too. She didn't know what that meant. She closed the book and paced the front room. She touched her forehead, checking for a fever. She felt sweat on her palms and felt like her chest would explode. Bill woke up and carried her to bed. He sang to her until she fell asleep.

Bill walked in the yard smelling like the swamp. They all smelled like the swamp, but since he had been waddling in some of its deeper parts hunting alligators, he really smelled like it. Berturd and Shirley were in the garden. Shirley smelt the thickness of the swamp's algae sitting on the hot air and looked up to find Bill.

He was carrying a trap. "Bear, we gonna cure your rabies."

She wiped the dirt from her hands onto her dress and ran up to hear him better. All day, her head had been spinning, and her heart was fluttering in her chest. She was sure she would be dead soon. "What you mean, Bill?"

"Well, I tole the boys what you were facin' and they said they had seen rabies before. Said the only way to cure it is to catch the coon that gave it to ya, and to fry up its brains and eat 'em. Since this one you took a likin' to is white, we'll know when we got it. It's the only cure. They even let me borrow a good trap. Better than the one we got. We can trap the fella tonight and by mornin, you'll be right as rain Bear."

Shirly knew Bill loved her more than his own life. She knew he wouldn't tell her something unless he really believed it. "Bill, that don't sound right to me."

He sat the cage down like it was a delicate cup and took her shoulders. "It can't hurt but it can save your life."

"I dunno."

"I'll fry 'em up so good with onions and spice."

Shirley nodded and looked at the cage.

That night, her and Bill sat on the porch drinking and smoking. They had put a bit of meat in the cage and waited on the coons to come. They didn't know which coon would go in the trap but said they would keep trying until they caught the albino one.

The coons never came out, and Shirley figured they knew something funny was in the air. Bill and she fell asleep on the porch, snuggled, getting eaten up by mosquitos. The wound in her arm was just beginning to scab up.

Morning came with a ridiculous sun, bright and blaring.

Bill jumped up like a sun flare had slapped him in the butt. "I gotta get down to port," he said, running around in search of his tools.

Shirley rolled on her back and let the wood planks massage the soreness out. Her aunt was already in the garden.

Berturd yelled out to them, "y'all got that damn coon in the cage."

Shirley hustled to the trap, and there in the cage was the albino raccoon. His face and paws were bloody from trying to escape.

Bill stood behind her. "Bear, we got 'em! We got him! Keep him in there and I'll cook him up tonight. Keep him alive while I'm gone." He kissed her on the forehead. "I gotta get to port."

Berturd slapped the stagnant air. "Well, goawn and get outta here then, and Shirley get in there and eat ya breakfast then get to helpin' me."

Shirley stared at the coon. It made her sad to see the fright in his eyes. She went inside and grabbed the pancake Berturd made. She ate most of it but saved a piece for the coon. With Bill long gone, and Berturd bent over, she dipped the cake in water and handed it to him. He ate in relief. She then started stripping cane but couldn't help but look over her shoulder at the coon in the cage. It didn't seem right that he had to die.

She could just catch a way to the big hospital and let him go, she figured. She knew Berturd would laugh at her if she unlatched the cage's lock, and she knew Bill would be upset. She also knew they were both used to her by now, and wouldn't laugh or be upset too long, so when Berturd went inside for a siesta from the sun, Shirley walked over to the cage, and fed the coon a handful of berries, then she let him go. She watched as he ran away. He only turned once to make sure she wasn't after him.

"Go on little one," is all Shirley could say. She took comfort that his belly was full of berries, and that he could make it through another night. And maybe she would live another night too. She figured that was fair enough. They both had another night.

"I gotta get to da big hospital!"

Bill kissed her nose, "I will get my cousin Peggy to take us. I'll go get her now. Be ready when I get back."

Berturd rolled her eyes, and Shirley sat on the porch waiting over an hour for Bill to show back up.

He called for her to come down the lane, and she did. They had to trek around the marsh but finally made it to the road where Peggy sat in her dead husband's truck. She had fallen asleep, but jerked up with a fart when they climbed in. "Ya ready?"

"Get us there," Bill said, wiping his tired face.

Shirley knew Peggy could get them to the big hospital because Peggy's husband had got cancer and--as Peggy told it--had been taken to the big hospital to die. "I don't know why anyone would wanna go there. They don't do nuthin' but kill people up there."

Bill slapped the air. "Peggy, stop," and Peggy sucked her lips in her mouth, and shook her head.

Shirley rested in Bill's lap while he scratched her head. She listened to Peggy and him talk, even talk about her, and they reminisced a lot about Peggy's husband. Shirley noticed people did that when people died. They would talk a blue streak about everything funny, or kind the dead person had done, and she took comfort in that. If the doctors at the big hospital couldn't help her--and if they did kill her--well at least people would still talk about her, and talk good at that.

"Baby, goawn and sit up. We here," Bill said, and Shirley rubbed her eyes awake.

The moon was hiked high in the sky, and judging by its position, she knew it was about 2 a.m. Shirley took in the oddness of everything. Everything outside the swamp was always weird, like the giant lights that stood on poles, and the paved lot.

"I ain't going in there. I'll sit out here," Peggy said, and Bill helped Shirley out of the truck.

Inside the bright building, a receptionist with her hair pinned in a bun greeted them. "Can I help you, Sir?"

"I need help. Not him," Shirley said. "I caught rabies from a white coon." Shirley held her hand up. "Got bit a while ago now."

"So, you need to see a doctor?"

"Yea."

Please fill this form out," the woman said, handing Shirley a form. Shirley sat down and tried to make sense of the form. She knew her name, but not her address. She didn't have a phone number, or an *employer contact*. Bill couldn't read and couldn't help. After she turned in the form, a woman wearing a starch white dress, and hat called her name. She had never seen anyone so clean, and stiff in her life. The nurse took her and Bill down a long hallway and set them up in a small room.

The woman used different instruments Shirley had never seen to check her heart rate, blood pressure, eyes, and ears. Shirley tried to sniff the air to get a scent from the woman but only smelled chemicals.

The nurse asked them where they were from as if they belonged to another world, and Bill answered matter-of-factly, "swamp."

The nurse smirked. "I see now."

The nurse left, then returned, spraying something in the room that made Bill and Shirley grab their noses; some kind of perfume that made Shirley's head spin.

"She actin' like we stink when she smells like plastic," Bill said, slapping the air.

"We smell like the Earth," Shirley said, looking inside the glass jars that sat on the counter. One jar held cotton balls, and another small sticks of wood. She pulled them out and played with them. She handed them to Bill. She then opened a drawer and her mouth dropped. She pulled a small tub of *V-a-s-e-l-i-n-e* out of the drawer.

She opened it, smelled it, and dipped her finger in it. "Bill! Look! It's the same magic that Saddy has."

"Well how did Saddy's magic stuff get here?"

Shirley shook her head. "She's obviously a fake but put 'em in your pocket. We'll put her face to face with her lies when we see her again." Shirley handed him two more jars, and kept looking for more, but that was it.

An old man peeked his head in the door, "everyone decent?"

"Decent as can be," Shirley said, eyeing the man in a white coat, and glasses.

"Miss. Shirley, can you tell me what brought you here?"

"I done tole the lady at the counter and the lady that came in here. Y'all not talking to each other 'round here?"

The doctor laughed. "Well, can I see your arm--where the bite is?"

Shirley held up her arm. "It's scabbin' over and itchin' like hell. Medicine woman told me I had rabies, and I've been feelin' like somethin' ain't right...but she may be a fake or of the Devil one."

"Itching is normal. Just scar tissue."

"What now?"

The doctor smiled. "It's normal. And all your vital signs are normal. Other than this nasty wound, you seem normal," the doctor said, waving a small flashlight across her eyes.

"So, there's nothin' wrong wit me?"

"Nurse said you've been keeping tabs on the raccoon that bit you too?"

"I've been making sure he got water and sorts."

"And he seems healthy? No foam coming from his mouth?"

Shirley remembered the book's drawing of the raccoon with foam in its mouth. "No, not a drop, and she's a white coon, too."

The doctor raised his eyebrows. "Well, then I feel confident that you will be okay."

"You sure? Medicine woman said I have rabies, and I've been feeling sick."

"The thing about rabies is that it can show up days and even months later. I've known a case where someone was bit by a dog and didn't show signs until two years after, but most people feel something in a few days. If I were a betting man, I'd say you just got bit by a mean raccoon."

"It ain't a mean coon. Just a baby wantin' a sippa' water."

"We'll treat the wound and you'll be fine. Watch."

Shirley soaked in what was said. The nurse came in to dress her wound, bandaging it up with tincture, and a medicated ointment.

"How y'all come across that V-a-s-e-l-i-n-e?" Shirley asked.

The nurse laughed. She kept laughing at them. "You can get that from any drug store. It's cheap, too. But this ain't Vaseline I'm putting on your arm. This is medicated ointment. Same base, but extra ingredients."

"Same base?"

"Oil."

"Oil?" Shirley asked, smirking at Bill whose pockets were swollen with the jars of stolen Vaseline.

After her arm was dressed, the doctor approved, and pulled two squares of chocolate from his pocket. He handed each of them one with a smile.

"So, I'm... Okay?" Shirley asked.

"I'd say you got another day or two," the doctor said playfully.

"Like the coon," Shirley said, which made the doctor cock his head with a smile.

The sun was showing out on the way home, making them sweat and curse in the truck. Bill and Shirley shared the chocolate with Peggy who liked it so much she licked the paper it came on.

At home, they poured buckets of water over each other and sat on the porch with cigarettes. Berturd brought them all a cold drink to celebrate the return.

Shirley chewed a chunk of ice from her glass. "Me and the coon both got a day more, and probably more than that. But at least a day more. That's what the man said"

Berturd laughed. "What else can we ask for?"

Peggy slapped her knee. "Sure wish my sweet husband had another day. Damn, I do."

A bee buzzed around them. Flies hovered over their dirty feet. "He had lots of days before he went."

"Yeah. Yeah, he did," Peggy said with a half-smile. "Oh, he was a mess!"

Then Berturd began laughing. Laughing so hard she lost her breath. Her face turned beet red.

"What got you goin' crazy?" Shirley asked.

Berturd regained herself. "You drove off the way to town just to learn you had a day more. Well, hell, the flies flappin' their wings coulda tole ya that. I tole ya that."

Shirley stared at the horizon, the afternoon sun still showing out. "I reckon I just needed to know. Like the coon looked back when I let her a' loose. Sometimes you jus' wanna know ya odds I suppose." ♦



ANTHONY

- FEATURED ARTIST -

OUR COMMISSIONING EDITOR SAT DOWN
WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER AND
COSPLAYER, ANTHONY



SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER,
COSPLAYER, ACTOR, AND WRITER

Reaching Students with Cosplay and Marvel: An Interview with Anthony

Cynthia Ann Lublink

I met Anthony at a mutual friend's birthday party. I discovered that he, like so many of the rest of us, loves cosplay, Marvel, and fantasy. Since then, we've chatted semi-regularly and shared matters of importance to us both, resulting in a new friendship I hope we continue to both benefit from. A few weeks ago, the opportunity to interview Anthony came up and I took it, wanting to learn more about my new friend.

Cynthia: Hi Anthony, thank you for doing this interview with me. I appreciate your taking the time to share with our readers a little about yourself.

Anthony: Hey Cynthia. It's super great to get a chance to talk to you.

Cynthia: What types of creative works do you enjoy? (Cosplay creation, writing, music, theatre, or others?)

Anthony: The main creative work I enjoy is cosplay creation. I majored in Music Education, and still have my trombone. I do some writing, photography, and theatre - I used to act in middle school and high school.

Cynthia: You have a lot of great interests. Do you still play your trombone?

Anthony: Unfortunately, I haven't been able to play my trombone much because I live in an apartment. But a few times I wrote music for one of the churches I went to, for myself, and a small ensemble.

Cynthia: You mentioned writing, what kind of writing do you do?

Anthony: If I had to qualify my writing, it would be informal writing. I used to write articles for a website that dealt with conventions, writing on simple topics like choosing cosplay, how to properly take care of yourself at cons (making sure you're getting enough sleep, eating healthy, etc.). I've written content about video games which culminated in my being on two panels that presented at conventions dealing with Japanese Role-Playing Games. I've also written on critical issue topics like racism within the cosplay community, including my responses to being called "the black" *insert character name*.

Cynthia: How did you get into cosplay?

Anthony: I remember going to my first Anime Central (ACEN) convention in 2002, it's one of the largest Midwest conventions in Rosemont, IL. I was so in awe of all the cosplay I saw. It was kind of a dream to be able to portray some of my favorite video game characters. It wouldn't be until I was in college that I started experimenting with dressing up as characters from sci-fi, video games, and movies. I dressed up as Superman, Malcolm Reynolds, and Locke Cole from Final Fantasy VI by getting thrift items. My friend from HS invited me to Anime Central in 2010, and with the help of some other friends, I was able to make my very first costume as Hiro from Lunar 2. And that launched me into the cosplay world.



Cynthia: What do you most enjoy about cosplay?

Anthony: Honestly, I love portraying the characters. I grew up being in plays and was saddened when I had to stop doing them. Cosplaying gives me the opportunity not only to portray characters again, but also the opportunity to portray characters I grew up watching on TV, movies, or played in a game.

Cynthia: How'd you come up with your cosplay name?

Anthony: My cosplay name is Pally Kashra. Pally is a shortened form of Paladin...a title i've given myself because of my faith and my wanting to help others. People started to just call me Pally for short without me even requesting it and it stuck. Kashra is actually a name generated from the game Star Wars: Knight of the Old Republic that I always liked and has been with me since then.

Cynthia: What are your favorite characters or cosplays?

Anthony: I've done so many that it's difficult for me to pick my favorite. The first one would have to be the 10th Doctor from Doctor Who. I have always loved his larger-than-life personality, and it's so much fun to portray him at various conventions.

The second is Welkin Gunther from the game Valkyria Chronicles. This was a character that I wanted to portray for a while because I liked his leadership. The costume was elaborate, and I had to push it back numerous times because of construction and real-life issues that came up. I finally did some extra research, buckled down, and I was able to pull it off. I was so happy with the result.

Finally, the third is one I'm truly proud of: Crono from the game Chrono Trigger. He was one of my earliest cosplay characters and at the time was a challenge. His hair was spiked, which required a lot of styling, and his tunic was light blue, which I couldn't find in stores. So I had to learn how to style wigs with the help of a friend (thank you Carlynn), and how to dye fabric. The result was a super fun character to portray, and my very first win in a masquerade.



First Win in a Masquerade

Cynthia: You mentioned writing on racism within the cosplay community and being referred to as “the black” fill-in-the-blank character. Can you share your thoughts about this with our readers?

Anthony: I feel this is something we are still trying to deal with as a community. I know others have had it much worse than I have, but I've had moments where I feel like I've experienced a sense of gatekeeping. Once when I wore my 10th Doctor cosplay a guy came up to me and said, “Hey it's the black doctor. Hey Bloctor.” Which really made me mad to the point where I (calmly) told him that comments like that are very inappropriate. There were other times when I'm automatically expected to cosplay just black characters. The thing with me is, who I choose to cosplay is based on who I connect with as a character, whether it's Luke Cage, or it's Avatar Aang. We should be able to cosplay who we want regardless of gender, ethnicity, or body type.

Cynthia: I agree and I'm sorry you encountered this. I'm grateful you were able to use your voice to speak up. Thank you for sharing your heart and experience with us. You are a Special Education teacher; how do you bring creativity into your career?

Anthony: To be honest, it's been a bit difficult to add my creativity as a special education teacher. In the past, I worked as a paraprofessional, then I worked at a behavioral school where most of the students were aggressive. Which meant anything creative would run the risk of being destroyed. And dealing with Covid meant I was teaching from home. With my students, I always try to encourage them to use their interests in their schoolwork, as well as try to link their understanding of content to their interests. This year, I was able to make a fun board where I put references and math formulas for them to use, and I intend on using it to highlight more of my nerdy side like nerdy quotes and even fun projects that I think they would like.

Cynthia: I love the idea of a fun board; can you expand on that a bit?

Anthony: When it comes to references, I currently have a few quotes up from historical figures, but I also added some from The Doctor and from various Marvel characters. I currently have an Avatar: The Last Airbender poster on the wall that says, “Reading is mind bending.” I hope it will encourage students to read more. Ideally, I'd like to find more posters with anime characters like My Hero Academia or Naruto since those seem to be the anime the kids like the most. If I can't find them, I might make some of my own.



“We should be able to cosplay who we want regardless of gender, ethnicity, or body type.”

Cynthia: Can you give me an example of how the tools you use make teaching easier or fun?

Anthony: One time when we were learning about Greek myths, one of my students was able to draw a parallel to the movie Tron, which takes place inside of a computer that's run by the user (humans basically). The user creates the programs (who are shown as people inside the computer world) to do their tasks. Most of the programs consider the users to be godlike. Others might think they don't exist. So, when the student drew the parallel, he connected that the programs in Tron were like humans in Greek myths, that the users were like the gods in that universe.

Cynthia: That is wonderful to see those connections happen in your students. What kind of responses have you noticed to showing your nerdy side in the classroom?

Anthony: I've had some interesting experiences with some of my students to my nerdy side. In my current position, many of the kids love anime. So I find that to be a wonderful way to connect with them. I try finding books or movies that they have mentioned enjoying, then based on that, I can draw parallels to the stories that we are reading in literature. It helps them learn the material I am teaching. There has been the rare occasion when some students saw me dressed up in cosplay. They were happy to see me.

Cynthia: Wow, that's a wonderful example. One I am sure is satisfying as a teacher.

Anthony: I believe the kids really appreciate the fact that I try to find ways to connect to them and even relate to them with their interests.

Cynthia: You have shared that you deal with autism. How has autism equipped you as a special education teacher?

Anthony: I found out I was on the autism spectrum in January 2020...right before the pandemic started. It's been a whirlwind because I am still figuring out how my mind works. When it comes to students, it gives me a bit more insight when they are struggling, especially when it comes to social cues. That is the area I struggle the most with. Knowing what I know now definitely gives me more patience and insight on how I can work with my students, and help them gain their own insight.

It was wonderful getting to know my new friend, Anthony. I deeply appreciate the various aspects of his personality and talents. Learning about his career as a special education teacher and the unique intersection his autism creates in the classroom inspires me. I especially love how Anthony uses his love of cosplay and marvel to reach his students.

GOALS

I currently have
Avatar: The Last Airbender
poster on the wall that says,
"Reading is Mind Bending."
I hope it will encourage
students to read more.

CHICAGO TARDIS:

THANKSGIVING
WITH THE
DOCTOR

Sue Cook

THE DOCTOR IS IN



Autumn is the time of year when our thoughts turn to welcoming the beautiful sight of bright leaves on trees, taking hayrides, and picking apples. The delicious scents of pumpkin-spice-everything and bacon waft through the air. Autumn culminates in Thanksgiving with its wonderful aromas and families gathered together at the table.

In the Midwest, however, Thanksgiving has added meaning for Doctor Who fans. It's time for the Chicago TARDIS, considered the premier Doctor Who Convention in the Midwest. It's been held each year over Thanksgiving weekend since 2000.

The Host of the con, the Westin in Lombard Illinois, has been home to aliens, Daleks, a cadre of celebrities, vendors, and all things Who-related for over 10 years. Beautifully decorated for the holidays and spacious, it's the perfect venue for the thousands of fans who gather each year. And despite the large numbers, by the end of each con, if you join in as all of us hope you will, you'll walk away feeling like those thousands are family – as though you know every person who's graced the halls of the Westin.

Photos this page courtesy Chicago TARDIS & Rita Mock-Pike



THE HUNT FOR
ADRIC

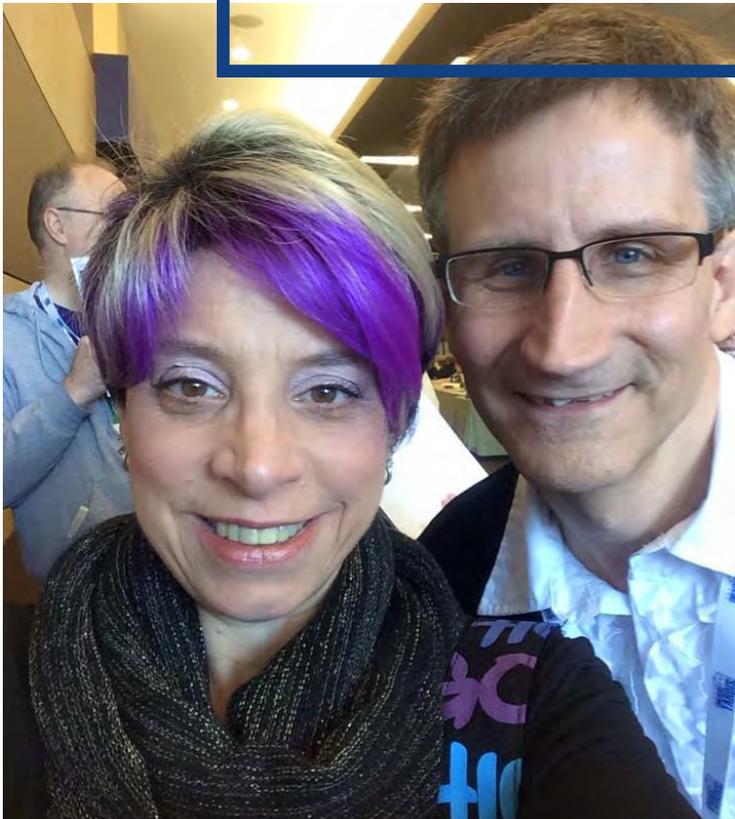
During the 50th Anniversary of Doctor Who, approximately 3,000 fans attended, plus the celebrities the convention draws such as: Sylvester McCoy, Paul McGann, Peter Davison, Colin Baker, Janet Fielding, Nicola Bryant, Katy Manning, Sophie Aldred, Daphne Ashbrook, Nicholas Briggs, Arthur Darvill, and Andrew Cartmel. Gene and Karen Smith, along with Alien Entertainment, pull out all the stops to provide an amazing fan experience for the growing collection of attendees.



Photos this page courtesy of Sue Cook & Cathy Cole

Fans, creators, and actors come together at TARDIS, celebrating this amazing show and the fandom in which so many of us have found family. With activities for the kids, photos and autograph sessions, dance parties, game rooms, vendor and artist spaces, a “midweekend show” and other activities, we find many opportunities to bond under the umbrella of The Doctor.

One of the favorite activities at TARDIS includes panels, which have included celebrities telling tales (and some secrets) about their time on the show, writers discussing their scriptwriting for the show, gamer makers chatting about game building, and much more. (The “Rory Dies” game is a hoot and was actually played by Arthur Darvill. Arthur didn’t fare too well. Rory...died.) Fans lead panels, as well, conversing with other panelists on Cosplay, cultural intersection with the show, and other fandom topics.



You can purchase tickets of varying levels to fit most budgets and interest levels. The “All-Access Pass” is akin to the Holy Grail. These prized tickets are coveted and passed from generation to generation or woefully returned to staff to be offered to the public raffle-style when someone is no longer able to claim them. Thankfully, other ticket levels are more readily available, including Reserved, Priority, and General.

Fans across the globe – some coming for their annual vacation, some for their honeymoon, some even choosing to get married at the convention! – converge on the Westin for TARDIS each year. Why? Because the community of TARDIS unites fans into family.

What better time to gather around the table, sit in panels, and gather in the lobby with family than Thanksgiving weekend?

Chicago TARDIS remains a light in the window, even in the midst of the pandemic, world-wide upheaval and personal troubles, drawing family home for tearful reunions, life-infusing hugs, and wicked fun stories. After so long apart there is always joyous laughter coupled with heartbreaking tears.

Live once more this year, it's time to find new healing and create uplifting memories that will carry us forward until the next TARDIS.



Who knows? There may even be a Dalek or two.

Will the last one in please close
the TARDIS door?



Chicago
TARDIS
always has the
loveliest guests.

Photos this page courtesy of Catherine Cranston



Happy Thanksgiving from the Chicago TARDIS family and from the MockingOwl Roost staff, many of whom met at TARDIS just a few years ago and there became family.



Photos this page courtesy of Elizabeth Clark & Rita Mock-Pike

Anne of Green Gables wasn't the first novel I read as a child, but it was one of the first that I remember being unable to put down. If you appreciate whimsy and romance, you probably had a similar experience with this series of books. It is, after all, one of the most popular English language book series of all time for good reason.

As a young girl, my first attempts at writing emulated, to the best of my ability, the whimsical, poetic style of the books I adored. I could not begin to tell you how many flowery prosaic pieces filled dozens of notebooks in my first three or four years of writing.

Though my writing style has shifted from the romantic prose of my childhood dreams for publication, I still find inspiration in L.M. Montgomery's works. The beautiful descriptive language dances across my imagination, bringing the images of gardens and violins, boat rides and drama into vivid focus. I cannot quote much of her writing by heart, but the imagery remains with me.

I own a copy of every book ever

written by Montgomery, save her poetry, and frequently find myself revisiting the pages for inspiration, encouragement, and hope. Her short stories are a study for me as I craft my own short works; her novels, a respite from formula and rules of writing.

Stories I began writing in my childhood, based loosely on concepts I latched onto from Montgomery's writings, still play around in my head. I have visions of these novels coming to life for my own readers one day the way Pat and Kilmeny play on repeat for me.

I may never complete those novels and short stories, but the influence of my childhood favorite author remains in my writings, nonetheless.

I encourage you to embrace the positive influences of your childhood and young adult years. Rejoice in the beauty of those words that taught you to love language and writing and creativity. Let them lead you down the path into your own creations, imitating as you must to learn and develop your skills as a writer.



"Kindred spirits are not so scarce as I used to think. It's splendid to find out there are so many of them in the world."

- Anne Shirley of Green Gables

DANCING WITH THE MUSE: MY FAVORITE CHILDHOOD AUTHOR, L.M. MONTGOMERY

Rita Mock-Pike

[Back to Top](#)



- Margaret J. Wheatley

"There is no power for
change greater than a
community discovering
what it cares about."

JP DENEUI

DRAGONS OF ASH, PART I

There is no such thing as an ash dragon.

First, I tried to be nice about it. I told Hurli there might have been ice dragons flapping back when the Sheets covered all of Plaintiff. Rock dragons are real but rare and slow. Sea serpents might have chomped up a ship or two and wind dragons or Wafters are probably mythology – but maybe if you're in just the right place, you can peer up into a bright summer's day and see something that is probably, certainly, a cloud, only this far down you thought you saw wings.

Hurli snorted at the bit about Wafters and a trickle of rum leaked out of his nose. Either rum or snot. I didn't look too close.

"You don't know Kararra's Truth, my friend! I saw an *ash dragon* and it weren't no cloud. I swear on the grave of my father-kin's soul..."

He took another large swig of the drink I was buying him. Whatever-it-was that had escaped his nostrils dribbled into his thick red moustache, never again to see the light of day.

"So we had a bad storm and it took out your peaches." Repeating was the way to reason with Hurli to help reacquaint his ears with his mouth. "For some reason you're certain it wasn't an accident."

"Zham, it was not! The lightning dropped like the rod of Marrara and the earth shook like a chastened initiate and there was thunder—"

"And scales and fire. How's the wife?"

"I... She's fine, Yerrl-kin. Marri's always had more of a hankering for plums."

"Any luck with the baby?"

"No. No little Hurli yet. Rascal's coming, but –" He cut himself off and shot me a glare. "It was like the great legends of old, Yerrl-kin! Like Rererr had come down with his hammer of judgment and shaken the Warp and Weft of Illishah!"

"Starting in your greengrove. I see."

"Yes, if you could have seen it." A glint lit up Hurli's dust-brown eyes that should have made me leave. But my woodshed was leaking and the squashes submerged and if I'd wanted to deal with the drudgeries of life I wouldn't be plopped in this hard-backed chair. Afternoons were supposed to be uneventful at Eller's. Nobody around, rum comfortably bad.

One knife-scratch on the table was followed by another. One of Eller's girls made a shrill little gasp and I flipped her a gilding and drew a hand over my neck. She stammered, curtsied, and flitted away.

Hurli continued to deface the table, apparently creating an impromptu map.

“North,” he said, scratching out an arrow. “My place,” he said, tapping an x. “Once the dragon set the fire, it flew away east. I jumped on old Nelle and rode her hard on after. Followed that fiend right up to Uller’s. Figured with the houndjacks I’d need a hand getting in.”

I thought about it for two seconds.

“No.”

“Dragons, Yerrl-kin. How long has it been?”

“Not long enough.”

“But you found a heart.”

“And paid more for it than it was worth.” Which got me in debt, which landed me here, minding squashes in Neren, this backwater town.

“Look,” I said reasonably. “Whatever happened last night, today it’s not your problem.” I took out my purse. “Your trees are worth what, five silvers?”

Hurli opened and closed his mouth like a fish. “I... You are generous, Yerrl-kin.” I slapped the gildings on the table and slid them over. Hurli picked one up then set it down.

“Yerrl-kin.” Hurli licked moist lips. “Thing with the dragon got me thinking ‘bout Enne.”

Enne. Enne Maril Scrath. How could such simple words stick in your craw?

“That’s hearsay, Hurli. No one’s ever seen her.”

“Because Uller locked her up in that house of his. Never cracks one window. Keeps her shut in the dark.”

“And you know this how?” I asked, inwardly groaning at my curiosity. I’ve lived in Neren near ten years and never once caught a whiff of Uller’s daughter. Oh, I’ve talked to some people who said they saw her. Uller had a maid before his wife passed away and she’d tiptoed once into Uller’s. I’d bought her two and she let the name slip. Little rose. Enne was beautiful. Girl would have bloomed like her ma.

The maid had clammed up like she’d blasphemed Kararra, face blanching white before running out.

“Give me my money back.”

“What?”

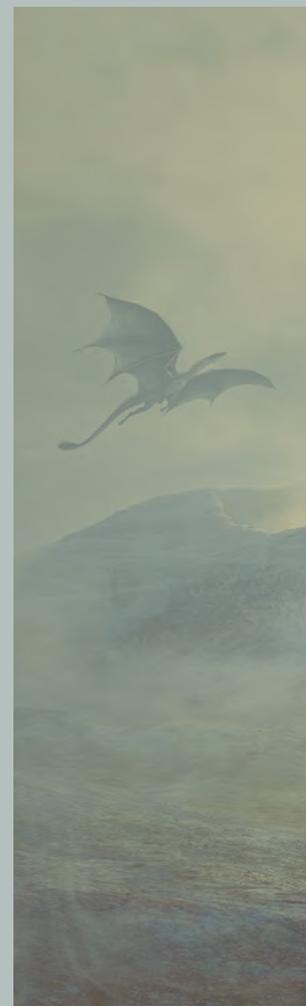
“You don’t want it, right? This isn’t a charity.”

He slid the gildings over; I clinked the coins in my purse. I set my revolver on Hurli’s x, and my friend’s fatty cheeks stretched wide. He picked up the gun and literally drooled.

“Your Mohenian five,” he said in awe. “Fixed cylinder, .30 caliber, double-action.”

“No dragon-scale rounds. You’ll have to make do.”

“Does this mean...?”



“Learn how to use it. See you at six.”

There were several dozen toothy reasons why we couldn't just knock on Uller's front door. Houndjacks aren't "dogs," but they aren't friendly either. Packs can hamstring a stallion in seconds and without any predators worse than themselves, there might be hundreds in the Moerling Hills. Sure there was a fence around Uller's estate, but a motivated houndjack could burrow through floorboards, to say nothing of flimsy dirt. So the postman never delivered the mail, taxmen never darkened his doorway, and whoever was running for mayor never solicited the wolf man's vote.

By the time I made it to Hurli's ranch, the sun was slipping like yolk off the sky. My friend was waiting by the gate, strings of ammo draped over his vest. He'd stuck my revolver in a horsehide holster, grandfather's rifle propped on his hip. The heirloom's barrel was oiled clean and Hurli stood proudly with an ear-to-ear grin. Marri frowned beside her husband, arms crossed under her breasts.

Hurli ran to meet me as I approached. "Yerrl-kin, you came! By Kararra, I almost thought you would not. And, by Ilshisha, you must see it yourself!"

He dragged me up to the gate where Marri sniffed at me. "How you boys killing a dragon without scale rounds?"

"Ash dragon," corrected Hurli, and he pinched her on the cheek. "Flimsier, I reckon, once you corner it."

Hurli threw the rifle over his shoulder. Marri rolled her eyes behind her husband's back and we all trudged over to what had been his third greengrove, some thirty-odd fruit trees near the eastern fence. About half were still upright and none in good standing. "Hit the heart." Hurli jabbed at a small black crater. "Zham, the dragon landed right on the seed."

I picked my way through the foliage of rubble, noting orange peach stains and thrashed trunks. There had been a fire here, though the rain had suppressed it. The trees left behind didn't seem to be withering. Heart-hit or no, the seed would survive.

"Dragon broke through that." Hurli nodded at what had been his fence. "Blasted a hole out and then he was off."

"How big was he?"

"Kararra, he was huge! Three horse-lengths, tail to teeth. Four, even."

"Then why are there only boot prints in this mud?"

Hurli scowled at the offending terrain.

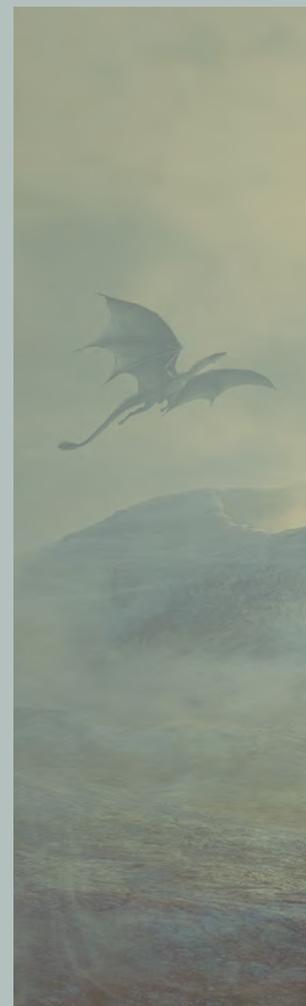
"Yes?"

"Yerrl-kin, I *saw* it!" Hurli bent down and snapped off a stick. "What's *on* this?"

"Powder."

"Ash," he said, as he thrust it in my face. "Ash dragon ash! Smell it for yourself!"

I accepted the charred stick and blew on it softly. The glitter of the



powder seemed off. “Ash happens,” I said, “when things happen to burn.”

Hurli looked hurt; his wife smug. “Yerrl-kin,” he managed, “have you come all this way to mock me?”

“No,” I sighed. Hurli’s smile picked up. “But,” I added, and I stared him down, “I hope to Toerral there really is a dragon and it ate all the houndjacks we’re going to have to kill.”

Hurli licked his dry lips, gaze flicking to the revolvers I wore at my waist, the smoothbore shotgun I’d strapped to my back.

“Still ready?” I asked him. “We’re going on foot.”

The yolk of the sun was a memory of yellow once we’d crossed the old footbridge over Biller’s creek. When I first moved to Neren the Moerling Hills had been verdant. Uller’d had nine of the ten best greengroves and three had a bumper crop every year. Then he’d retreated into his mansion, firing servants after his wife died, and his once-tidy groves went feral – bleeding out thistles and prickly weeds and finally ghoulish black-barked trees studded with thorns fit to puncture hips. If it weren’t for the creek to hold it all back, the good townsfolk of Neren might have got up the gumption to purge Uller’s lands a long time ago. But the creek had held and now there were houndjacks. Let a greengrove keep bleeding and who knew what would worm out.

“Melillu’s diamonds,” Hurli whispered, “what would someone pay for an ash dragon heart?”

“The going rate for mythology.”

“Would be heavy though. Bet we couldn’t lug more than a scale. Eyes maybe – Kararra, he had fierce eyes. I couldn’t look away.”

Hurli glanced at me for encouragement. “I believe you,” I lied.

“He must let her out at night, Yerrl-kin. The back porch, maybe? The balcony?”

I grunted.

“The woods, even,” Hurli insisted. “He can’t keep her locked in that room forever.”

“He’s bigger. He’s stronger. It’s not very hard.”

“But how could you do that to your own daughter?”

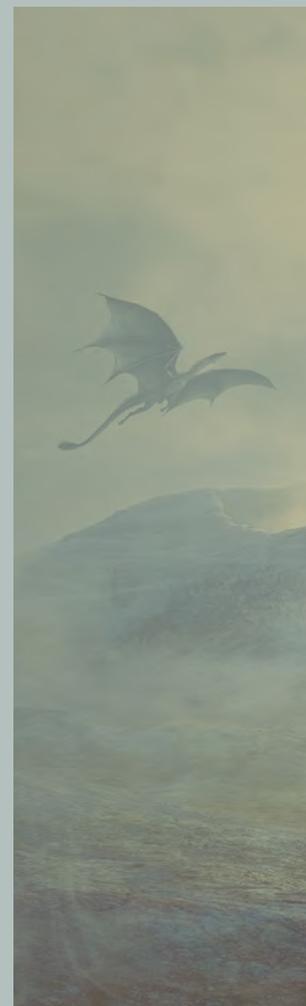
You’d be surprised. I didn’t say it. We kept trekking up to a shoddy fence. Yesterday’s clouds had stuck around and the wind cut sharp and cold through my coat. I vaulted over, but Hurli had trouble, cracking a board with his noisy efforts.

“Hurli! Dead leaves: bad. Twigs: worse.”

“But Yerrl-kin, I can’t see.”

“Step where I step and don’t drop your whole weight.”

Lecture over, I led us on as Hurli made a little less noise. The trees pressed closer and thistles snagged my pants. Our luck Hurli’s



dragon had presumably touched down right in the heart of a bled-out grove.

I stopped. There was a solid wall of trees up ahead, spines dripping white sap.

“Couldn’t a’ landed in there. Would’ve knocked ‘em all down,” Hurli breathed.

The same mythical creature that hadn’t left tracks. “Where did it go then?”

“You don’t know?”

I cursed quietly. “I don’t know anything about ash dragons.”

“But you used to hunt dragons—”

“Rock dragons. Little ones. One dragon heart after fifteen years. I don’t know anything, Hurli. I was terrible. You still want my opinion, I say we head back.”

Hurli was in the middle of belabored objections when I clapped my hand on his mouth. I nodded over my shoulder and he stopped complaining, his eyes swelling wide in their sockets. The wall of trees quivered. Cold winds whirred. White dripping sap dripped red.

The greengrove was bleeding out something new.

Plaintier is like a quilt of greengroves, each grove a plot of fertile land. Near towns most greengroves have been beaten down, forced to grow crops in straight, strong lines, hacked back to make room for houses and roads. The rare wild greengrove plays nice on its own: Sometimes in even the thickest jungle you’ll wander into a grove so perfect you’ll think you’re in Kararra’s Garden and around the next fern you’ll meet the goddess dipping her toes in a crystal stream.

This is rare.

Most wild greengroves bleed blacker than darkness. They get nasty ideas about what should survive, worse about how to keep it that way. No one heard of a houndjack until a century back and now there’s talk of packs as far west as Chell. Whatever was coming out of this greengrove now, the brave thing would be to charge in directly and blast the newest horror to shreds.

The smart thing would be to do anything else.

My hand was getting slobbery. I took it off Hurli’s mouth to wipe it on my pants. Drooling and standing stiff as an icicle, my friend did not appear especially brave.

“We go back,” I hissed. He finally looked at me, snapping out of it.

“Zham, what if she’s in there?”

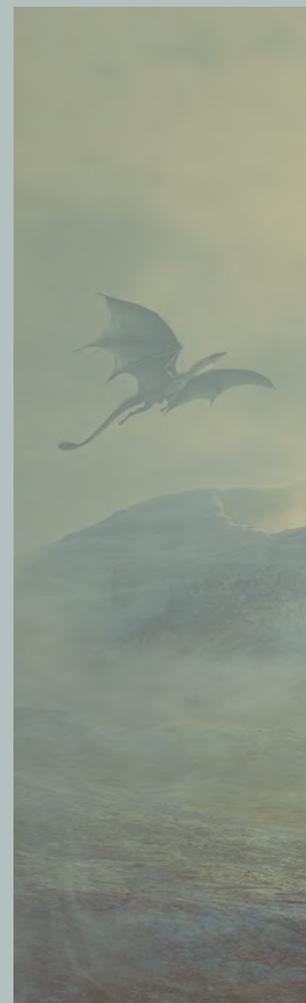
“Then Enne’s already dead.”

“I mean the dragon.”

“Same difference,” I started to say, before feeling eyes on the back of my head.

I whirled. Movement farther down the hill. I caught a whiff of oily fur.

I tugged Hurli’s coat and he followed close. Houndjacks had crept up behind us, aiming to pin us against the heartwall. We scooted



sideways, and then I stopped without warning. Three houndjacks give or take. The fiends were only moving when we did, counting on bootsteps to cover their approach.

I could feel Hurli trembling, his grip bone-tight on the barrel of his rifle. If he couldn't calm those nerves he'd shoot me before a houndjack. "Go first," I ordered. That should direct him away from the houndjacks. "Head towards the manor, they won't go inside."

"But I don't see—"

"Blast anything ahead of you. Walk straight."

More rustles in the undergrowth as our escort followed. I spun and walked backwards after Hurli's steps. With any luck these were only a few nosy scouts. With more luck they wouldn't be particularly ravenous. With greater luck still they were on patrol, warding out intruders from the groveheart.

I am not a lucky man.

Hurli's rifle exploded with a BANG as angry shapes charged out of the woods. I got six shots off in fast succession before a houndjack tried to rip my leg off. I kicked it away as another one hit me and I lost my balance and rolled down the hill. One thudding roll and I'd lost a revolver; another and we'd slammed a thornless trunk. Teeth gnashed for my neck as I fired over my body, splattering the creature's brains on the bark.

I jumped up and there were more of them but I had separation. Bang. Through the ribcage. Bang. Through the skull. Bang and I missed and threw the gun at a head.

BANG! Hurli hit the mongrel's foot and the houndjack yowled and limped away.

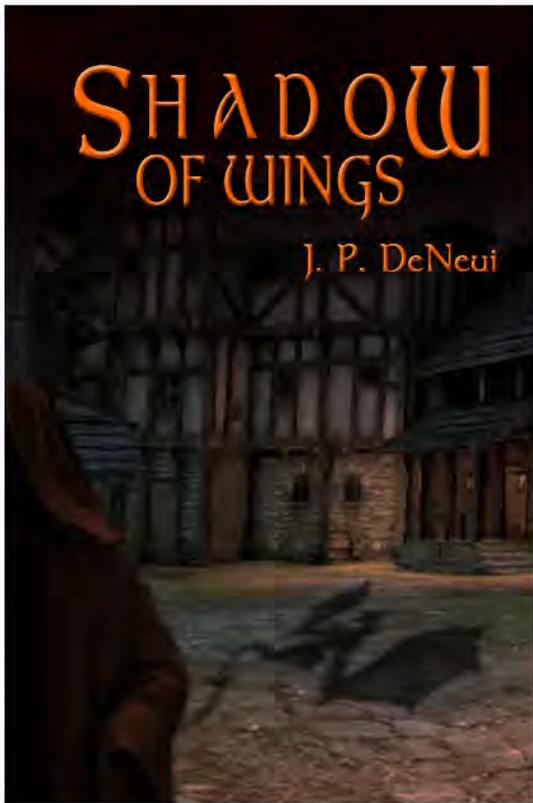
Howling. Growling. Hissing. Screams. It sounded like we'd just woken every monster lurking in the Moerling Hills. "Run!" I shouted and Hurli was off like a runaway boulder as I reached in my coat and whipped out pistols, firing at anything I could see that moved.

Bang-click, I was empty. Bang-click, again. I caught a houndjack in the middle of a pounce, nailing bullets between its eyes. Hurli screamed a battle cry as he smashed through a thicket that a few seconds back hadn't been so thick.

I tossed empty revolvers and slid out my shotgun. I outpaced Hurli and took aim at a branch swinging thorns about like a scythe. I fired at the base of the offending limb and the branch snapped off and writhed like a snake. We ran past the snake-branch as the ground leveled out and then two branches swung and I had to duck. Hurli fired backwards and almost hit me, exploding a tuft of blade-sharp leaves.

Just as suddenly as the attack had come, we were running through grass that wasn't trying to kill us, and the houndjacks pursuing us skidded to a stop. Hurli gasped for air and leaned on his rifle. Fierce yellow eyes stared out of the trees, but the pack made no move to follow us further. This strip of calm marked the edge of the greengrove.

To be continued...



Epic fantasy from emerging author, Joseph Paul DeNeui

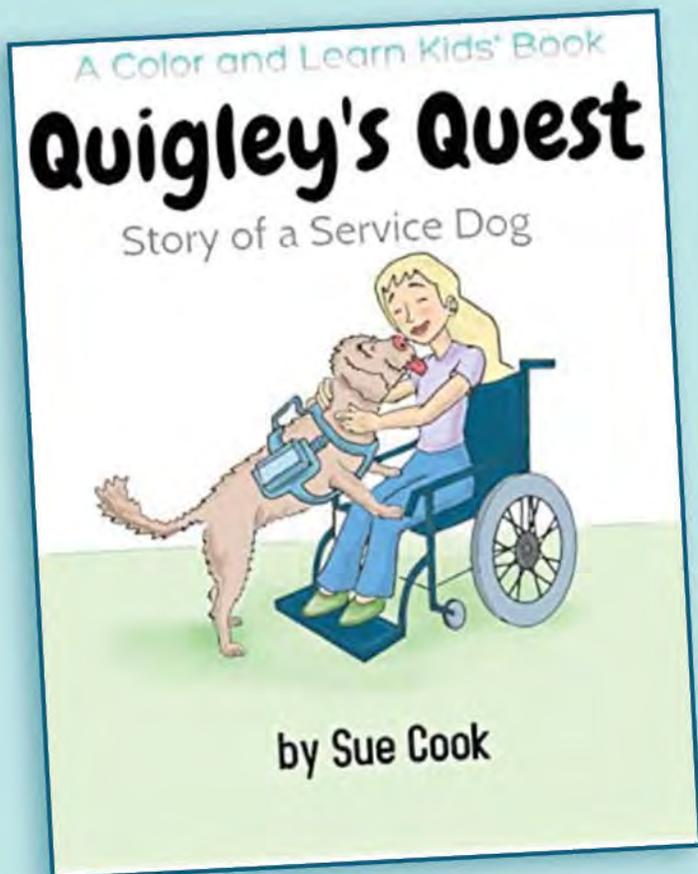
A FLAME IN LIFE
AFLAME IN DEATH
SO MUST THE DRAGONMEN DIE

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

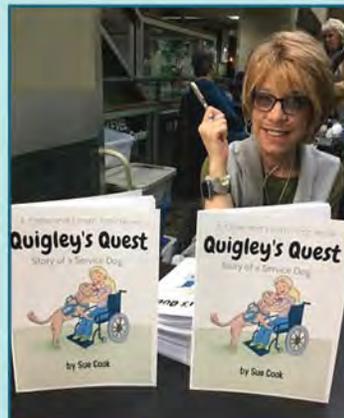


Quigley's Quest

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



Quoting U2

Quoting Scripture

Soren Porter

“I waited patiently for the Lord;
He inclined to me and heard my cry.
He drew me up from the pit of destruction,
out of the miry bog,
and set my feet upon a rock,
making my steps secure.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a song of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear,
and put their trust in the Lord.”
Psalm 40:1-3

This Psalm and specifically this collection of verses are important to me because of the role they play in a U2 song. “40” is a song I first heard covered by dc Talk. I was fifteen and that was the first time U2 entered my cognition.

It took a few more years for me to listen to the band and become a fan.

I heard dc Talk’s cover around the time I felt called to ministry and when I started deep reads of the Bible and began devouring all the theology books I could find or buy with my allowance.

Gobsmacked, I realized that a Psalm was the basis for the song. Somehow this made the Psalm feel more real – more accessible.

I also realized that all the stories I heard in Sunday School while growing up were all in the Bible. I started doing deep dives into the history of scripture. It was equal parts validating and engrossing that historical evidence backs up several things.

But, to borrow a phrase from Jesus, I was building on a foundation of sand. I had a lot of the cultural Christian stuff down. I was great at being a chameleon and adapting to whoever I was around so that I would not be an inconvenience.

I had all this knowledge but my emotional connection to God was so shallow. Which, I suppose, might be a form of irony.

It took falling into the miry clay, the deep and dark bogs, and drowning before I realized how weak my foundation was. Even after being lifted out, it’s been a cycle. I try to do everything and then I break. After my last major break, I decided I needed to get off this cycle.

Part of recovering and realigning my priorities was an accidental Psalm project of posting a reflection on the Psalms each day of Lent this year.

I guess most of you assume I’m talking to you, and if you get something out of this, cool and rad. But the one whose opinion I care most about is Jesus.

I always feel a bit weird when we reach this point.

“Yes Virginia, I believe in a Jewish carpenter who claimed to be equal to God (Homoousion) and was executed as a criminal about 2000-ish years ago. Oh, and that he was resurrected and has a plan that involves sharing love with all people, including [insert evil politician].”

It’s hard for me to articulate these beliefs in conversation. It’s not that I have extreme doubts in my belief and faith, but so many so-called Christians have made it toxic to talk about Jesus.

What an irony for Christians to make it difficult, if not impossible, for those outside the church to see Jesus for who He is.

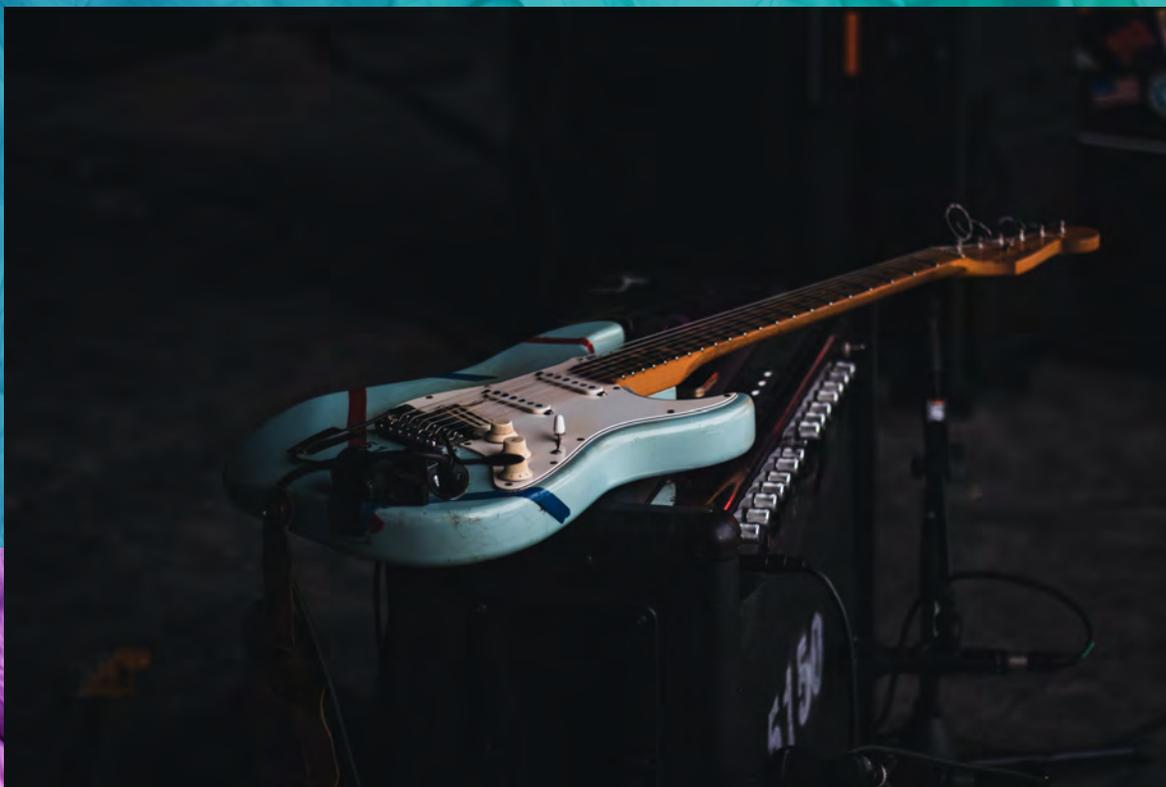
God calls people regardless of where they are politically, spiritually, financially, or any other “place”. And thank God, we are not left where we are called. There is a journey and a process of change.

However, I am not being called to minister to those who weaponize hate of any type. The people I feel called to show love and open support for are those who are being systematically oppressed.

I’m just some dumb white guy.

I’m not pretending to understand the misery and hell on earth faced by those who are subjected to racism, homophobia, transphobia, bigotry, prejudice, and everything else those with hate can invent. I don’t understand what it means to suffer those things, but I know I don’t have to be quiet. I can educate myself and I can try my best to offer support however I can.

Going back to the Psalm, the idea is that we need not just to be renewed, but completely different – wholly new in our love for God and each other. This is what brings Heaven to earth now. ♦



Back to Top

Balancing Life as a Christian with Two World Views

Cynthia Ann Lublink

I have both liberal *and* conservative leanings. It may seem a paradox, yet for me, this adds perspective as I see things in life differently most of the time.

I refer to this dichotomy not because I need the reminder, but because some around me insist I be either one or the other, rather than understand this is how I am uniquely created. Sometimes it takes a minute for them to remember who I am, but when they listen, they hear the balance between these two sides of my soul.

In today's political and spiritual climate, I have needed to stop, unpack, and process many things. I know many have. Many of us could have various definitions for liberal and conservative, so I went to the dictionary to get a few basic definitions of each, with the understanding that these words are not mutually exclusive, nor does either side have ownership of the terms and definitions.

The definition of liberal is tolerant, unprejudiced, unbigoted, open-minded, unbiased, impartial, nonpartisan. Liberal principles are inclusivity, acceptance, diversity, and tolerance. This definition calls us to confront our pride, bigotries, and the ways we have segregated ourselves from each other.

The definition of conservative is traditional, conventional, stable, prudent, careful, and safe. Conservative principles are personal responsibility, moral order, tradition, family, and liberty. These words provide structure, stability, and freedom. They are ways in which we can keep ourselves and others safe.

I see the ways in which these principles are tethered to one another. They are not meant to compete, but to complement one another. This is the biggest reason these "sides" live peaceably within me.

This duality describes how seemingly contrary forces can be complementary and interdependent. And how together, if we remove the labels, we'd see how the two parts create a *whole* picture and why we need both sides.

In the past, it feels like we used to value one another's contribution to the world, just by being who we are. Today, we judge, tear at, bully, and demand that others align with us, no matter what side we stand on.

We live in a time when exhibiting anything resembling "a side", you are labeled as that side – and not in a good way. It's a no-win situation for anyone unless you are on the same "side" as those who label you.

Often, we rush to judgement and accusations, motivated by fear or self-righteousness. We don't stop to consider who a person is, what we know, or even love about them. Our perspectives are so skewed by suspicion that we stand ready to hit the "kill button", placing relationships on the altar of politics believing it is a litmus test of who a person is. We aren't asking sincere questions, being willing to listen and accept one another's answers. We aren't practicing a basic element of kindness, believing another's intent is as good as our own.

Instead, what I see is a forming progression of segregation – something the liberal part of me is abhorred by.

I see both sides doing the same thing and accusing each other of doing it "worse" than each other.

As conservatives, we believe in being good Samaritans, stopping on the side of the road and offering help to those in need. Yet we are found as Pharisee's pew warming on the side lines. We stand in judgement on procedure, or law, rather than finding ways to make things easier to accomplish. Many risk their lives for our freedoms, yet we have forgotten our own beginnings, and the humility we should walk in, remembering that this land was not ours to take, or to share.





Christians say we love everyone, yet we qualify our love with the LBGTQIA+ community with some ingrained need to say, “I love you, but...”

Why do we do that? Stop it!

No, really. Stop it.

We don't say to each other “I love you, but you are a sinner.” And why not? because it is *that* ridiculous.

Our constitution has from the beginning stated that all men are created equal. All men (and women) are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The creation of laws to restore to any soul what is God-given, constitutionally guaranteed, and protected should immediately show us our issues.

He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

For I was hungry, and you gave Me food; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you took Me in. I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ Matthew 25:35-40

Can we not see the hypocrisy?

Liberals stand against racism and believe in diversity, and fight for equality and justice. These are foundational columns within the liberal code. We accept one another regardless of our personal choices to live or even believe a given way another chooses to live. We understand that is not a requirement of acceptance.

Yet some liberals will attack both Black and LBGTQIA+ souls for merely showing up as conservatives. Have we completely forgotten that we should not bully *anyone*? I have seen Black businesses destroyed and threatened for supporting or not supporting what the liberal community has deemed worthy, becoming the very thing we *say* we hate, creating boxes and *demanding people fit into* them. We are a house divided, denying the very core of our liberal principles.

MLK fought *against* segregation and *for* freedom. Yet I see segregation being chosen, and the removal of constitutional freedoms as an option to enslave those we do not agree with or those who'd choose differently than us. Let us not forget MLK had a dream, and it is *rooted* in the American dream.

“I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Every wise woman (or man) builds her (or his) house, but a foolish one tears it down with her (or his) own hands.” (parentheses mine) Proverbs 14:1

Can we not see the hypocrisy?

I see each side separated by a fine line – the edge to the other side of a coin. The dime is 0.0531 inches thick, and our thickest coin is the half-dollar coming in at 0.0846 inches thick. One coin, two sides. Not very far apart at all.

As a believer, God met me where I was and continually meets me where I am. God calls us all, just as we are.

If I could tear off all “labels” so we can be who we are and practice the good principles we believe in, I would. Practicing any principle does not mean it is, or should be, at the expense of any other. Every principle has a time and place and complements the whole.

Being able to take the good principles from both perspectives can give us a clearer and wider embrace of who we are, and how our diversity makes us closer than we realize. ♦





THE SEAT ACROSS FROM ME

Rita Mock-Pike

I looked up just in time to see him. I'd seen him before and felt a cold chill sweep through my body as the doors of the train car closed behind him.

His sickly white skin – nearly transparent – and piercing green eyes capable of penetrating the depths of your soul gave me the impression of a once strong, still dangerous soul.

He slowly edged down the aisle, dodging knobby elbows poking out, manspreaders with bodies akimbo, children suddenly hushed and standing dead still in the center of the path. Though he moved awkwardly, a purpose seemed to fill each step as he drew nearer and nearer to me.

I sucked in a tight breath as quietly as I could manage. I knew he'd sit near me. *They always do.*

He sat across the aisle and rested his eyes on my face.

"Hello, miss," he said, in a surprisingly syrupy first tenor voice. It wasn't pleasant, but oddly, I knew that when he sang the world hushed in awe. I sat contemplating that voice, hearing it soar among the clouds above an ancient cathedral somewhere deep in Romania's Carpathian Mountains.

Being a single woman who weighed about the same as a toddler, with the upper body strength of a newborn pigeon, I avoided making eye contact. I felt the heat rise in my cheeks as his gaze grew more intent, more purposeful.

Then a sigh emanated from him. I looked up to see a single tear roll down his pale, weathered, yet young, cheek.

Our eyes locked for a moment. I swallowed back a lump and bowed my head. Ignoring the lifelong lessons from society, I looked up again. "I'm sorry. That was rude of me. Hello."

It almost seemed as though he stopped breathing. Tears filled his eyes, a rosy flush came into his cheeks. For a brief moment, he looked as though he hadn't crawled out of a bad vampire film as the healthy tint of humanity filled his cheeks.

"It's all right, Miss. I know I don't look so good. I don't look like a good person. I shouldn't talk to people no more. I

scare them. I don't mean to, but I do. I know I look like something that fell out of a coffin. I can't help it, though. I'm allergic to vitamin D, I can't keep food down, my family all died and left me alone from early on, so I've never had a safe place to be. And I know I smell bad. I don't blame a nice lady like you for not thinking anything of me."

Tears welled in my own eyes now. How could I speak to that? All those things were true. He looked awful – and scary. He looked like someone who'd drag me off to a cabin in the woods and suck my blood for snacks between other virgin sacrifices with more meat on their bones. *I seriously watch too many vampire shows*, I thought, shaking my head internally.

But he was as human as I – with a series of hurtful, evil, problems that resulted in him looking like the kind of person he didn't appear to be at all.

"I'm sorry you've had such a hard life," I said softly. "Everyone deserves better than that."

"Thanks, Miss," he said, a soft smile parting his cracked, dry lips surrounded by patchy, broken skin to reveal a set of mangled, but white, teeth. "I appreciate the acknowledgement."

We sat looking at each other for a while, until his stop came. He stood and walked to the nearest door. As he did so, I noticed a limp. His left leg was shorter than his right, his left arm shorter than his right. His left hand was shriveled and slightly twisted.

He turned and looked back at me as the doors opened. He smiled at me. "God bless you, Miss. I pray you have a life filled with kindness and love."

And he was gone. ♦



THE BEE BOX

HEIDI
HERMANSON

My grandparents
practiced recycling
before 90 percent of Americans
knew what that meant.
They had a terrifying
compost heap
that emanated a dark smell
even when sealed tight shut.

Their backyard, a Garden of Eden:
apple trees,
grape vines,
and straight rows
of vegetables
in big boxes.

Bee hives!
Once Grandpa
put me in a bee suit,
white with a jungle hat,
netting falling like water.

I felt like a spaceman.
He assured me I was safe.
I stood
while bees swarmed me
Industriously.

In all my travels
I occasionally pass a bee box,
a "hello"
from Grandpa and Grandma.



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



RHIANNON LEE

-FEATURED ARTIST-

SITTING DOWN WITH THE DELIGHTFUL
COCKTAIL BOOK CREATOR, RHIANNON LEE, TO
CHAT ABOUT FIRST-TIME AUTHORSHIP



SCIENTIST, WRITER, AND POTTERHEAD
FROM THE U.K.



Last year, when my first traditionally published book came out, I received an email from a British woman interested in pursuing the publication of her own Harry Potter fandom cookbook. An enjoyable acquaintanceship has arisen, connecting us across the pond with discussions of tea and other things we both love.

I don't know how much my meager advice for the publishing world helped, but Rhiannon Lee has successfully found a press eager to produce and share her book with the world.

RMP: Tell us a little about yourself – where you're from, what kind of background you've got, some of your favorite things to do.

RL: I currently live in York, England, which is rumored to be the real-life inspiration of Diagon Alley for J. K. Rowling in the Harry Potter Universe. Outside of writing, I love exploring the Yorkshire countryside and travelling further afield to visit different countries (when COVID allows!).

RMP: If I remember correctly, you've got a background more in science than traditional "writing" that folks might expect from a cookbook author. Tell us about that background and how that played into creating this cocktail cookbook.

RL: Yes that's right, I have a PhD in nuclear medicine and my many years at University have allowed me to become an expert in all things alcohol, both inside and outside the laboratory! However, in all seriousness, knowing the science behind the mixology has allowed me to create some unique and fun creations such as colour-changing beverages, fizzing-cocktail bombs, and mysterious alcoholic bubbles. All of which look like they could be straight out of Professor Snape's potions classroom.

RMP: Tell us about your book. How did you decide to write it and who joined you in creating the recipes and text for the book? How did you get partnered up?

RL: It will be no surprise that I am a massive cocktail fan and love all things Harry Potter, so I thought why not bring them together? Me and a close friend from childhood, Georgia Hingston, started thinking up possible ideas and just got really excited with the concept.

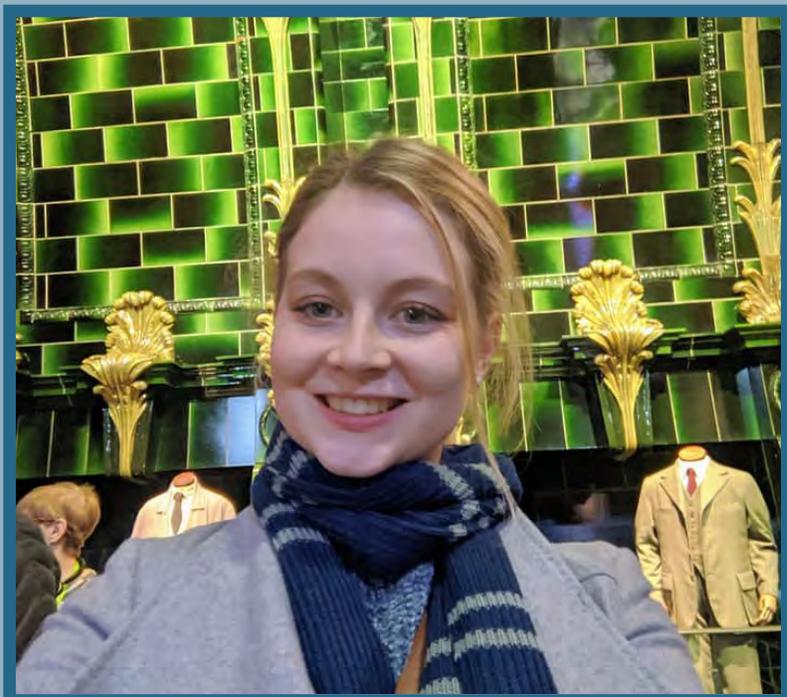
The Unofficial Harry Potter-Inspired Book of Cocktails: Fantastic Drinks and How to Make Them is a really fun cocktail book, featuring full-color photographs to help you re-create the various concoctions. I hope that it's perfect for any fan who, like myself, grew up loving the magical wizarding world! It is set for release October 19th at major retailers and online, perfect for anyone planning a Halloween Party and in need of some magical inspiration!

RMP: You contacted me when you discovered my Harry Potter cookbook was about to be published. I was able to share a few thoughts on getting published, but what was your journey like?

RL: I can't thank you enough for the advice you gave me when I was starting to write this book. Looking from the outside in, the whole publishing process seemed like an enigma, especially in the field of fandom as I was worried I would have the wrath of WB Studios and J. K. Rowling herself raining down on me. I think the best advice you gave me was to look for a publisher that is already operating in that area and to show some personality in your submission. A publisher is going to want to work with someone that is interested in their chosen field, not just treat it as a business transaction.

RMP: What was it like creating this cookbook for a publisher? What were some of the highs and lows of the work, of getting published, etc.?

RL: Skyhorse Publishing has been an amazing publisher to work with and has allowed me to run with this project, which I really appreciate. They have been great to bounce ideas off and I am working with them on several other projects now. The only downside is the publishing world moves slower than the academic journal world and it feels like I have been waiting forever to see my book in print!



RMP: So, you're obviously a big fan of Harry Potter – what has it been like for you to work on a book in that fandom space?

RL: It has been really fun working within the Harry Potter fandom and combining two of my greatest passions: cocktails and all things Potter!

RMP: Do you have any other book ideas brewing (pun intended?) in the wake of your recent publication?

RL: Yes, I am currently in the process of writing two further books with Skyhorse Publishing. Another really fun, pun-filled fan-based Star Wars cocktail book set to be published May 4, 2022 (think Baby Yo-da-quiri and much, much more!). I'm also working on a humorous, beautifully illustrated book all about my top 50 fictional feminist characters and the lessons they've taught me, covering childhood classics all the way to current pop-cultural icons (and, of course, Hermione Granger gets a shoutout).

RMP: I know your book is brand new, so there hasn't been much time yet, but have you been able to make any connections with other writers, folks into Harry Potter, etc. since getting your book accepted and published traditionally?

RL: Social media has been wonderful for this and through growing our Instagram (@Fantastic_Cocktails) we have connected with some amazingly creative people all across the world. I think this is one of the best things about the Harry Potter fan-base, as there's a real community online that really stands up for one another. It was inspiring to see how in the wake of J. K. Rowling's transphobic comments the community rallied to not allow that negativity to take away what the Harry Potter Universe means to fans.

RMP: Is there anything else you'd like to add for our readers? Any words of advice on getting their books published or creating their own fandom works?

RL: I think the best thing we did to attract a publisher was promoting ourselves on social media platforms. We were able to show the publisher that people were really interested in the idea and content we were creating, so it definitely helped sell the idea.

I look forward to COVID ending for many reasons, but one of the biggest ones is being able to finally meet Rhiannon in person, visiting some tea shops together in the UK, and chatting, in person, about all the things we love. Until then, I think of my friend each time I have a cuppa Taylors of Harrogate tea. ♦

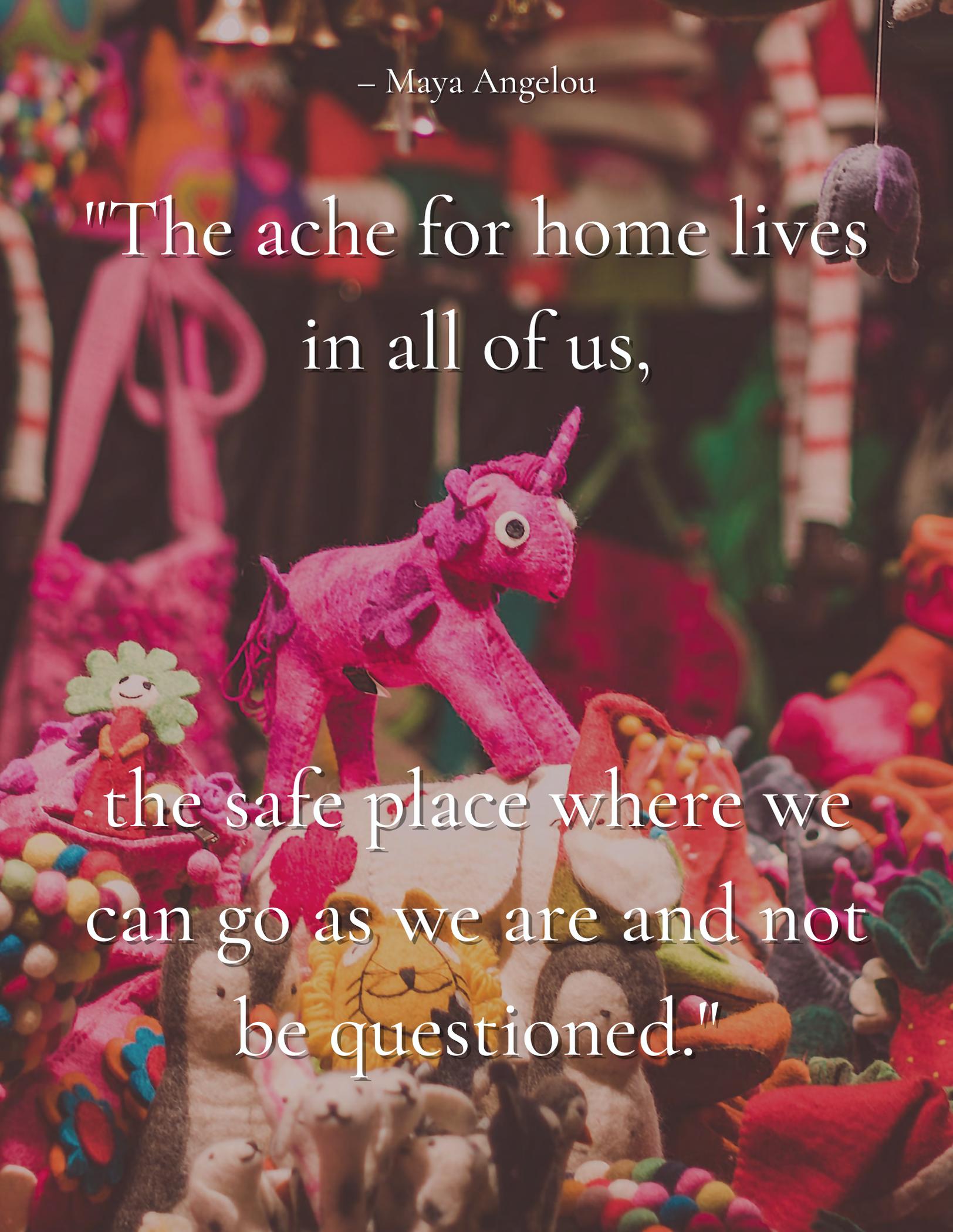
"I have a PhD in nuclear medicine and my many years at University have allowed me to become an expert in all things alcohol, both inside and outside the laboratory! However, in all seriousness, knowing the science behind the mixology has allowed me to create some unique and fun creations such as colour-changing beverages, fizzing-cocktail bombs, and mysterious alcoholic bubbles. All of which look like they could be straight out of Professor Snape's potions classroom."



– Maya Angelou

"The ache for home lives
in all of us,

the safe place where we
can go as we are and not
be questioned."



DEE ALLEN - CONTRIBUTOR

Dee Allen is an African-Italian performance poet based in Oakland, California. He's been active at creative writing & Spoken Word since the early 1990s, and the author of 7 books ["Boneyard", "Unwritten Law", "Stormwater", and "Skeletal Black", all from POOR Press, "Elohi Unitsi" from Conviction 2 Change Publishing and coming in February 2022, "Rusty Gallows" from Vagabond Books and "Plans" from Nomadic Press], with 42 anthology appearances under his figurative belt so far. Dee Allen applies his pen to notebook and responds to current events, long-suppressed historical events and inscrutable human nature.

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.

CARLA M. CHERRY - CONTRIBUTOR

Carla M. Cherry is a veteran English teacher studying for her M.F.A. in Creative Writing at The City College of New York. Her poetry has appeared in Random Sample Review, MemoryHouse, Bop Dead City, Anti-Heroin Chic, 433, The Racket, and Raising Mothers. She has written five books of poetry: Gnat Feathers and Butterfly Wings, Thirty Dollars and a Bowl of Soup, Honeysuckle Me, These Pearls Are Real, and Stardust and Skin.

SUE COOK - STAFF WRITER/SENSITIVITY READER

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 - STAFF WRITER

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.

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*.

SUSAN H. EVANS - CONTRIBUTOR

Susan H. Evans writes and teaches writing at a community college in east Tennessee, USA. Her contribution speaks of community in an indirect way. In Tennessee alone, there are nearly 400,000 people, or about 1 in 20, who abuse or are dependent on alcohol or drugs. She sincerely hopes this piece helps in some way, gives hope to someone, and inspires all readers. Evans is published in many online and print magazines and journals.

MARK A. FISHER - CONTRIBUTOR

Mark A. Fisher is a writer, poet, and playwright living in Tehachapi, CA at the southern end of the Sierra Nevadas just west of Mojave. He ended up here by accident, having inquired about a job with Enron Wind (yes that Enron) and getting hired before the company went bankrupt. He's been living in the same small town for over twenty years, and has acquired a wife (Sharon), a dog (Moonpi), and a cat (Bill).

JOHN GREY - CONTRIBUTOR

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, and an avid collector of everything from early editions of Mad Magazine to vinyl to art books, all of which somehow find a way into his writing, along with the view from his study window and the happenings and/or non-happenings in his life.

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.

JULIE HAZLETT - CONTRIBUTOR

Julie Hazlett, of South Bend, Indiana, creates art using many materials from tinted mica powders to special effects makeup. When not creating this art “officially,” she is driven to learn the things and whys of life and the world.

HEIDI HERMANSON - CONTRIBUTOR

Heidi Hermanson is a first-generation Nebraskan. Upon finding herself with an abundance of time due to Covid-19, she is documenting and photographing nearby rivers and cemeteries. A recipient of both the Nebraska Book Award and the Arts Council Fellowship, she organized the first Poets' Chautauqua at the State Fair. She aspires to found a library of towns that no longer exist and learn dialects of the 17-year cicada. Her books are *Waking to the Dream* (Stephen Austin University Press, 2018) and *Cocktails with God* (forthcoming from Finishing Line Press). She received her MFA from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2008.

KARRIE HUBERTS - CONTRIBUTOR

Karrington Huberts is from the small town of Hudsonville, Michigan. After trying digital art and finding it wasn't for her, she returned to traditional mediums – though she often combines the two. With a love for all things black and white, she can usually be found at her desk working on her most recent pen and ink drawing.

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.

TIFFANY LINDFIELD - CONTRIBUTOR

Tiffany Lindfield is a social worker by day, trade, and heart, advocating for climate justice, gender equality, and animal welfare. By night she is a prolific reader of anything decent and a writer.

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 - STAFF WRITER

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 - ILLUSTRATOR/DESIGNER

Elizabeth Mock is a Grand Rapids, Michigan native and senior in illustration studying at Grand Valley State University, where she is also the Vice President of the Student Interest Group of Illustrators, the university's illustration club. Outside of school and The MockingOwl Roost, she is a community manager at Adobe. In the official Adobe Creative Career (ACC) Discord server, she helps host panels, challenges, and discussions to elevate members' careers through mentorship. With hopes to pursue a career in graphic, layout, and information design, Elizabeth also enjoys community engagement, animation, and photography. You can find her daily in ACC.

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, INFJ, 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.

JORIS SOEDING - CONTRIBUTOR

Joris Soeding's most recent collections of poetry are *Forty* (Rinky Dink Press, 2019) and *Home in Nine Moons* (Clare Songbirds Publishing House, 2018). His writing has appeared in publications such as *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Red River Review*, and *Spillway*. He is a fifth grade Language Arts teacher in Chicago, where he resides with his wife, son, daughter, and kittens.

ANDREA VASILE - CONTRIBUTOR

Growing up in Ottawa and New Jersey, Andrea is greatly inspired by nature and the ever-changing city. She has written ever since she won a contest for Valentine's poetry in *The Ottawa Journal* in 1979. Andrea found continued success in publications such as *Clevermag*, *Turbula*, *Jones Ave*, and *Ascent Aspirations*, and most recently in *The Basil O'Flarhety, Feminist Voice*, and *Event Horizon Literary Magazine Issue 9*. She finds our world changing in many puzzling and curious ways and feels the need to speak out and also to remind us of the goodness we challenge for.



THE
M  C K I N G  W L
ROOST