

MARCH-JUNE 2021 - ISSUE 8

Dreamers

Creative Writing

WINNERS

STORIES OF MIGRATION,
SENSE OF PLACE & HOME
WRITING CONTEST

INTERVIEW

ANGIE BULLARO, AUTHOR
OF *BREAKING THE ICE*,
AND MANON RHÉAUME,
ONLY WOMAN TO PLAY
HOCKEY IN THE NHL

+

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We started our *Stories of Migration, Sense of Place and Home* contest prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. At that time, my own sense of place and home felt solid and concrete. Home has since taken on a much weightier feeling (weighty though it already was). During the pandemic, "stay at home" has become a mantra for many of us. It is an obligation we've undertaken to keep each other safe. It is also our shelter from an illness that has profoundly changed the world beyond our walls. I connect safety and permanence with home, but what about those who don't have one? Or those who live alone and thus home means isolation? Where do refugees go when borders are closed? For them and many others, home is anything but safe. Increasing concerns about mental health and domestic violence are now frequent topics of conversation. My son is experiencing social anxiety so severe, I can barely get him past our front door. He's 6. Humanity's concept of home has always been complicated - the pandemic has made it even more so.

This is a heavy topic and one for which I have many questions and few answers, but what I can offer is the comfort of stories. This topic, these stories - they are important, more now than ever before. We need to keep engaging with each other, however we can.

Thank you to everyone who submitted to our *2021 Stories of Migration, Sense of Place and Home* contest. This year's batch of stories was more pain-filled than most, but as always, there was also hope, resilience, empathy, and understanding. In this issue of the Dreamers Magazine, I'm pleased to share with you the winning story and 3 honourable mentions. Find these winning entries on pages 3 through 11. And new this issue, we've also included an example of original art by Canadian artist, Ann-Marie Brown, who has produced several works on the theme of migration. Her painting, titled "Cold Crossing, Quebec Border," appears on our cover.

This issue also features an interview with Angie Bullaro, author of *Breaking the Ice*, the true story of Manon Rhéaume, first and only woman to play hockey in the NHL. Manon Rhéaume also joins us for this interview! Find as well a book review about Neill McKee's memoir, *Guns and Gods in My Genes*; a heartbreaking nonfiction story of loss and recovery by Shannon Lange; a personal essay by physician, Hilton Koppe, about his discovery of the healing power of writing; and a poem by Karol Guschuk in memory of Tracy Latimer.

Dear Reader, thank you. You are the inspiration for our words. Knowing you're out there waiting to read what we write is what unites us and keeps us going. Thanks for trusting us with your time. We wouldn't be here without you.

Kat McNichol

Editor-in-Chief

2021 Stories of Migration, Sense of Place and Home

Congratulations to the winner and honourable mentions!

First Place Winner

'I Have Been a Stranger in a Strange Land' *Exodus 2:22*

Fiction by **Pat Mullarkey**

Tiny hands wave, grab at the air. Elle moves closer to the Styrofoam container. There is no one else on the beach as the sun falls into the horizon. Pinks, oranges, grays streak across the sky like an artist in the throes of inspiration. Scattered across the sands are plastic water bottles, lifejackets, sandals, flip-flops, and ripped fishing nets. Elle does one more visual sweep of the beach. No one. But there in the midst of the forgotten detritus sits a white Styrofoam cooler with tiny brown fingers sprouting up, reaching for something.

...

Somewhere between Libya and Italy a rubber boat drifts in the Mediterranean. The sea of antiquity, the path of a modern-day Exodus. But there is no pillar of cloud in the day and fire at night to follow. Instead, only the brutal handoffs by smugglers. Each a pretend Moses. Then the bottom feeders vanish when there is nothing left to take.

The high noon sky of milky, faded blue presses down on a watery expanse. A smattering of hands reach out and up to grab for something. Bodies pressed against one another, only a few glimpses of bright orange lifejackets are visible. The boat stares back with many eyes. Some closed in prayer, others close to fainting. A few people imagine childhood homes or hold photos of a small Italian port. Some cry. Some are confused. Here and there a determined face, jaw jutted out in defiance. A last stand of anger and human dignity. Hands, arms reaching out and up. The last vestiges of hope on faces full of despair.

The rubber craft was mostly underwater when the rescue boat arrived. Thirty-three bedraggled refugees made it to shore with its help. Fifteen bodies pulled out of the water or difficult ones caught in a net.

...

Elle worked with three men and another woman when she first arrived about a year ago. The other woman, thirty-something, quit after four months. Linda said her stint in the Peace Corps hadn't prepared her for the floating bodies and crying orphans. Two months later Arte went on a bender after a particularly gruesome death count and never showed up for work. That's when the group of charities came up with the rotation plan. Some days in the water, others on the beach.

Tonight was Elle's beach check and cleanup rotation. Usually there were two, but Theo was sick from some poorly cooked shrimp. They spent last night at a service for the recent dead refugees. There was a meal afterward. Her mind wandered as she ate to an arcane practice during medieval times. You could take away a dead person's sins by hiring someone to "eat" them in a ritual meal. The "sin-eater" took on the transgressions of the deceased, who then rose to heaven. Typically, it was a poor person who did it for the food and drink. The most vulnerable twice damned, once for being poor and again by the guilt of others. Who eats the sins of a society that ignores the plight of the refugees?

Elle suddenly realized the tiny hands were gone. She started to run to the container as the tide came in. Soon the sea and more trash would wash up, making the cooler vulnerable. Instead of Moses in the rushes, a baby hidden by 21st century debris. The container moved with the incoming sea, pushed back and forth with the rhythm of the tide. Elle ran into the water, grabbed it and pulled it toward the beach. The tide tugged at her and the container. She looked inside as soon as she was anchored on a dry roll of sand.

The first bright stars led by Venus the pretender dotted the velvety blue twilight. A gentle breeze carried wisps of sand. Eyes looked up and the baby girl started to cry. Elle took the tiny body in her arms and cooed comforting sounds as she gently rocked. There was a small, almost empty plastic bottle and a note, both cradled in the baby's imprint left on the towel. Elle recognized a few words as Nigerian, but one word stood out. A name, Adaora. Elle knew its meaning, "daughter of all."

A tear or two ran down Elle's face as she held Adaora. It surprised her. She thought her tear ducts stopped working six months ago. She walked to the car to take Adaora to the small medical clinic. The young woman wondered what forced this baby girl on such a long exodus. It's the neediest who dance around the golden calf. The most exploited, the most persecuted, the most helpless. All pray to be delivered to a place with open hearts. Will this be Adaora's promised land? Elle and Adaora passed an old man sitting along the road eating a melon. He looked up with a watery smile. "Can I see the baby?" he said with the gentleness of a shepherd.

Honourable Mention

Dispersal Lessons

Nonfiction by **Lyn Baldwin**

Animals move—it's our birthright, a gift from ancient ancestors in the form of genes that could eventually code for leg or wing or fin. But how willing or how far we go always bears the imprint of home. If where we dwell is patchy or ephemeral—say, a spring pond that dries each year—bodies sprout wings or retreat into dormant cysts that blow with the wind. If where we live is stable and continuous—a deep sea vent or an old-growth forest—limbs remain rudimentary and our wandering limited. Most animals disperse only when young; a few continue to travel long distances throughout their life. Near or far, young or old—no mobility is without risk.

...

It is the third day of 2005. In the murky light of a January morning, three of us—my husband, Marc, our two-year old daughter, Maggie, and me—lean into the sharp curve of an entrance ramp, headed east out of Kamloops, British Columbia. From atop the TransCanada Highway, the view of this small city is not what you'd call pretty. To the north, a moving wall of westbound freight cars flashes by, obscuring all but a narrow strip of snow-covered hills and low-hanging clouds. To the south, American fast-food outlets, low-slung motels, mini-storage buildings, and car dealerships appear and then disappear, a sprawling geography of mobility.

Not for the first time, I think how happy I would be to leave this place—if I wasn't trying to call it home.

Part of it, I know, is just me. Mobility may be the evolutionary legacy of all animals, but today no species travels more than mine. Each year, as our planet orbits the sun—a distance of nearly one billion kilometers—we humans will travel more than twenty times that distance across its surface. Before Maggie was born, I'd travelled with the seasons, following first school and then work, east and west, north and south, across the continent.

But part of it is Kamloops. All animal mobility has consequences. Migrating birds disperse plant seed beyond its native range; earthworms tunnel aeration into soil, salmon replenish forests with nitrogen carried from the sea. In the last 500 years, as human mobility has skyrocketed, so too has our impact. But constrained by geography or history, we've travelled some places more frequently than others. Kamloops, I think, is one of those places where our travelling footprint has fallen particularly hard. Geographically, this small city sits at a river confluence—its name originating with the Secwépemc First Nation's word *T'Kemlups* meaning "meeting of the rivers." Today, two railroads, one national and four provincial highways converge within the city, making it the transportation hub of southern interior BC. Mobility feels cemented into the very fabric of this place.

Two months of residence in Kamloops, and what do I know?

This city sprawls outward—covering the same land area as BC's largest city, Vancouver, with less than one-sixth the population. Even our small neighborhood, near the eastern edge of downtown, feels unsettled, bisected by both highway and railroad, perforated by tunnels, paved with cement, dominated by a low-slung architecture that privileges quickness over quality. None of which makes me want to stay; all of it tempts a permanent get-away.

...

When the tattered edge of the city transitions into snow-covered fields sloping down to the dark water of the South Thompson River, I can feel my body relax. Outside, the air is leaden; snow, I fear, is imminent. But inside our van, the three of us are warm and contained. This trip feels like the first good decision I've made in months.

When the phone rang a week ago, and the familiarity of a voice echoed through time and space, my response had been immediate.

"We're throwing Tracey a surprise birthday party. Will you come?"

Tracey Morland. My best friend during the last year of my Canadian childhood. The first friend I could bring without concern into my mother's house. It's her mom, Jackie, on the phone. And, of course, I said yes.

Beside me, at the wheel, Marc asks, "Does the Thompson River empty into the Fraser or the Columbia? I pull out our new map book. This question isn't unexpected. My husband charts any new landscape through the rise and fall of its rivers. What's new is his expectation that I will have the answers.

Last November, our move from northwestern Montana to BC—Marc driving a 21-foot U-Haul truck, me following behind in our van with Maggie and our two dogs—cast me as the expert in more than just river drainages. BC is headed into a provincial election and there is talk that a federal election might occur next year. News junkie that he is, Marc has been exploring the political terrain of his new home via CBC radio. "What's a minority government?" he wants to know. "What's a vote of non-confidence?" Given that I just spent the last twenty-seven years living as an expatriate in the US, it doesn't take much to deplete my understanding of Canadian politics.

This is what I *do* know: be careful about what you start. Last year, the advertisement for what is now my job had seemed perfect. A position teaching university botany and ecology less than two hours from where I'd lived as a child in southern BC. Not just a job, but a chance to return to the landscape that I'd held in memory as "home" for as long as I could remember.

In my interview, when asked if I was prepared to teach the courses assigned to the position, I'd responded, "I don't think you ever *know* anything until you teach it."

They'd liked that. Nodded their heads. And their ready agreement let me avoid explaining that I'd never taken



several of the courses that I'd be expected to teach. That day in the interview, I'd thought myself clever; in reality, I'd been at best, glib, and at worst, arrogant. Now, two months into the reality of my new home, I'd give nearly anything to skedaddle. Pack our bags, grab the dogs and the kid and just leave.

...

Running towards; running away: two different reasons to pick up and go. In my life, I've done both. Multiple times. This latest move from Helena, Montana to Kamloops—a distance of just over 1000 kilometers—has been unusual only in that it's accompanying grief has been so hard to shed. Months ago, when Marc and I debated leaving Montana, I thought I knew how to calculate the risks and opportunities of a mobile life; when to stay and when to go. But for the first time that I can remember, I have work that won't end, I live in a house I have no need to sell. And, still, all I think about is leaving.

Obviously, I miscalculated. Badly. Looking back, it's easy to see that renovating our house and giving birth to Maggie in Helena wedded me to community in ways I'd not understood. My pre-natal yoga class transformed into a circle of friends. Neighbors monitored my pregnancy and ran unfinished errands when Maggie arrived earlier than expected. Here in Kamloops, I'm lonely and exhausted. I have lectures to organize, labs to write, grants to propose. I live with a constant, if low-grade, case of diarrhea. Failure, I fear, is imminent. Last week, I started imagining scenarios that could let me leave without insulting those who hired me. An allergic reaction to the pulp mill in town? A death in

the family?

I can't tell if the true kernel of my despair is that I feel incapable of resisting mobility's pull or that we've nowhere to go. We sold the Craftsman bungalow that we'd just finished restoring in Helena. Marc quit his job as a wetlands ecologist—work that he loved—so that I could take this one. Last night, driving home, the lack of an obvious escape reduced me to tears. Seven minutes of solitary grief in the winter dark, before I pulled up in front of our new blue bungalow and rubbed my eyes dry.

Today's mobility is, at best, temporary.

...

Out the van window, crooked cottonwood trees back up against the South Thompson River. Each one of these trees—organisms without muscle or bone or neurons—once depended upon the mobility of seeds. Released just as flood waters are beginning to subside, cottonwood seeds are tiny—only two to three millimeters long—and held aloft by a cotton of silky hairs. Snagged by shrubs or branches, many will never touch the ground; others pile in miniature drifts along road or field edge. Sculpted by evolution, the mobility of these seeds is a one-time event, an all-or-nothing gamble on the whim of wind and flooding river waters.

Just before our route turns overland, I wonder when the seeds of these trees will next disperse. Sometime between May and June, I assume, but I'm not sure how the change in latitude and longitude (North four degrees, West eight degrees) and our loss of elevation (nearly 3000 feet) will

translate within the phenology of these cottonwoods.

When we turn south, driving up and out of the South Thompson River valley, I need to use our map book to give Marc directions. But the longer we travel, the more I recognize. In 1971, my hippie family wasn't the first of our kind to arrive in Armstrong—a small farming community in the north end of the Okanagan Valley—but we were close, arriving with what could be packed into a 1954 Studebaker. My family may have gone back-to-the-land, but we lived like our annual crops: dependent upon the soil, but never settling in place. Annual crops, unlike trees, end each growing season repackaged into the portability of seed or bulb or tuber. During the six years we lived in the North Okanagan, we regularly dispersed from one rented house to another. Our last move, after my mother and her hippie husband separated, brought us into town. That rented house was a converted garage, but unlike some of our previous homes, it had electricity, running water, a phone.

Of all our new amenities, the phone—matte black with a rotary dial, hanging on the kitchen wall—was the best. A form of bodiless mobility, voices weaving me into a larger, after-school, conversation. Little did I know that before the school year was finished, this same phone would announce my family's next move—this time across an international border.

That had been in January, too. Right after the only Christmas holiday my siblings and I ever spent with my biological father. On Boxing Day, Mom had driven us to the closest airport. When my siblings and I boarded a plane to Vancouver, Mom got on a plane to visit her new boyfriend, Glenn, in Montana.

On New Year's Day, she'd called us. She had a surprise, she said, that she'd tell us when we got home. Maybe, I thought, Glenn, who was quiet and read books, was coming to stay. When the phone rang at home, I raced to get it, Mom's voice scratchy and distant.

The surprise? She'd gotten married. No, not to Glenn, but to a man named Charlie. The last thing I heard before I handed the phone to my sister was, "We're moving to Montana."

The day my mother called to tell us she'd married a stranger, I couldn't bear to hear my sister's reaction. Instead, I grabbed my coat and ran away from a house made strange with impending loss; towards the Morland's house.

Theirs was another hippie house. When Tracey and I met in fifth grade, I'd gone through the hippie-kid ritual of parsing any paraphernalia I found in her house. Bead curtains hanging in doorways; macrame plant hangers crowding windows. Finally, I'd copied the lyrics from Dr. Hook's "Freakin' at the Freaker's Ball" and handed the words to Tracey as we walked home from school. It was enough. On Christmas Day, Tracey brought her family over to my house and the adults got stoned before we all went sledding.

That night in January, Donnie, Tracey's dad, came upstairs when he'd heard my entrance and all three Morlands sat with me at their square kitchen table as I sobbed out my story. After I'd calmed down, Donnie, in good hippie fashion,

wondered if I shouldn't consider this new move not a tragedy, but an adventure.

Mobility, dispersal: opportunity, risk. Good or bad, you trade familiar for strange, known for unknown. When my family left BC in 1977, it was easy to list my losses. The only home I could remember. The kids I had gone to school with since first grade. The comfort of a best friend with hippie parents. But it took me years to understand how one move can lead to others.

As a plant biologist, I chose to study a group of organisms who root in place. But I also chose a profession—university teaching—that assumes, even rewards, long-distance mobility. In his essay, "Rootless Professor," Eric Zencey argues that post-secondary education is largely provided by a transient class of intellectuals who owe no allegiance to a geographical territory. Against all odds, joining the professoriate has allowed me to return to the landscape from which I was exiled twenty-seven years ago. But today, I wonder about my allegiances. Do I have any real loyalty to the plants of this *place*: this valley, this watershed, this country? Or is my loyalty more to the *ideas*, the *practice*, of my discipline?

This is what I want to know. Do those cottonwood seeds who fail in dispersal—piled in drifts, suspended in the air—mourn the roots they will never know? Do the proteins in seed coats know their thirst as they reach for water—the first step in germination? Is the risk of mobility easier if you never have a choice, if you go by chance or by the desire of another? Or is the true cost only known when it's you who makes the decision when to go, when to stay?

In the van, Marc wants to know if we should turn left onto the Salmon River Road. "Yes," I say, already opening the map book, expecting his next question.

"So, does the Salmon flow north into the Thompson or south out the Okanagan?"

Before I can decipher the blue lines on the map, there are more directions to give. I guide him onto Deep Creek Road, and then another left and a right and then there's the Morland's house. Emerging from the side of a hill, the low-slung wooden house—built after my family had already left—is not one I know. The Morlands may have not been the first hippies to arrive in this valley, but unlike us, they *stayed*.

In the life of cottonwoods, dispersal is easy; establishment is far more difficult. Within twenty-four hours, seeds that land on sunny, moist riverbanks will split open to produce a sticky-haired foot. Once the foot stabilizes the seed, the embryonic root, the radicle, expands outward, making contact with the soil. And then, over the next few weeks, it's a race. To maintain contact with receding flood waters, root tips must push down through the soil as much as a centimeter each day. Bank position matters. Too high on a stream bank, and juvenile roots will wither from thirst. Too

low, and stems will be scoured by next winter's ice or drown in spring's flood. Of the seeds that disperse from a tree, only one in a million successfully roots.

...

In the entryway of the Morlands', it's a bustle of hugs and hellos. Donnie and Jackie are older versions of the gracious hosts I remember. As we settle into the living room—woodstove radiating heat, windows overlooking snow-covered lawn—I sense Donnie trying to read Marc's disposition. Refreshments differ in kind and impact; it's important to get it right. Marc's short, nearly crew-cut hair, full beard, worn jeans and faded work shirt is the attire of a field ecologist, but collectively the different pieces have left Donnie guessing. Finally, Donnie errs on the side of ambiguity.

"Marc," he asks, "How can I alter your consciousness?"

Marc looks stunned and I grin. My American husband has nothing against a finely malted scotch or a good porter, but he's generally comfortable with his consciousness just as it is. It's also mid-morning and we have to drive back through the now-falling snow to Kamloops. I can see Marc wondering where the boundaries of this particular culture-shed are.

"Coffee will be plenty," is his considered reply.

It's a good party. There are a few faces I recognize and more that I'm told that I once knew. When it's nearly over, I hear Donnie's voice boom out from the kitchen, "Well maybe I threw away my vote when I supported the Marijuana Party in the last election. Don't know that I'll do that again."

Marc, standing nearby, asks "A Marijuana Party? Did it run candidates province-wide or just here in the Okanagan?"

I'm disappointed not to hear more when Maggie calls me down to her level.

But on the way home, Marc only has to say, "The Marijuana Party? Really?" before we erupt into giggles.

Welcome to my history, Babe.

...

In the van, we are back alongside the Salmon River. I reach for the map book. From here, the Salmon River flows north into Shuswap Lake, which in turn is drained by the South Thompson River. Tracing the blue lines on the map, I realize that there's a divide—a barely distinguishable uptick in elevation—between here and my childhood home. I thought moving to Kamloops would be a homecoming. But I was wrong—both geographically and culturally. The home I was exiled from as a child drained south down the Okanagan Valley, into the Columbia River. The terrain of our new house, my new job, drains west into the Fraser River before spilling into the Pacific. And culturally? I might carry a Canadian passport and two graduate degrees in

botany, but I am like a cottonwood seed caught in a shrub— isolated by my time away, by my ignorance of Canada's most basic civil traditions, by my lack of intimacy with this *place*.

...

Back along the South Thompson, cottonwood trees braid twig into branch, branch into main stem. I can't see it, but below ground, cottonwood roots reverse the process, branching from main stem into increasingly smaller tributaries. Trees are mirrored rivers, their form collecting from both sky and earth.

But only if they remain in place. Once rooting occurs, further mobility risks everything. Large plants like trees get transplanted only with extreme intervention. To move a tree, a gardener must trench through the outer periphery of the tree's roots months before the move. The trench, in isolating the tree's roots from its extended community, forces the tree to grow new feeder roots in a much smaller root ball—a truncated form of rooting that can be moved, albeit with front-end loaders and cranes.

Even then there will be scars.

In our animal mobility, we humans assume we can bounce around, forsaking community; calling one place home, the other not; going back to the "land" without learning the plants native to its soil; relying on generalizations to make sense of the world's vastness. But mobile doesn't always mean *rootless*. As we drive into the eastern edge of Kamloops' sprawl, it occurs to me that my grief might reflect not failure but success. I may think of myself as a transient professional, a rolling seed, but isn't my persistent sorrow a sign that we'd begun to root in Montana? As we pull up in front of the bright blue bungalow on Pine Street that we paid too much for and that I have yet to love, I can feel the first trickle of grief slipping into question. What, I wonder, would it take to be as rooted as a tree?

Rooting, I know, rarely occurs alone. Belowground, embryonic radicles survive only in relationship. Carbon-rich molecules drip, squeeze and pass across root cell walls, and in doing so, they feed microbial multitudes. In return, root growth is modified, regulated, defended, orchestrated. In their rootedness, few trees can abandon community and survive. As I open the back door of our van, unbuckle Maggie's car seat and feel her sleepy body settle into my arms, this is what I think—beginnings matter. Even if they're hard to articulate, even if they consist of more question than answer.

What would it take to be as rooted as a tree? Years later, driving up to this same blue bungalow and worrying about how close we came to leaving, I will remember this question as the first sticky foot of rooting. In both rivers and trees, it is said, small things lead to big things. What starts with the painfully slow slip of water molecules across membranes, from one pore to another, coalesces into columns of water linking earth with sky, mountain with ocean. In the reciprocal relationship between people and place, stories do the same.

This is one.

Honourable Mention Immigrant

Poem by **Marlene Tartaglione**

I am

the Other Side of the story, the face
from a picture book whose title
you cannot pronounce:

In another life

I forged with you across continents,
hauling my history's

crudely-hewn grace
over waves which could scarcely
hold me up. The crusts on which I fed
even the pigeons refused,

but like the pigeons, I multiplied
into many clandestine tribes...

My poverty

was complete: My voice,
hoisted up the long ropes that led
to this song: I had a son
& he had a son,

our progeny

air, earth, water, fire... We evolved from
a dream which grew into an empire—

In the beginning, spawned
only by our blood:

Now, it is your own

...Thrust, as if still-born, through clouds
of ether & wreathes of foul air,

we battled wild currents

prolific as plague,

past quarantine, sewer—

from Birth to Old Age—

Rising, falling, then rising again—

an endless

vortex

of tenement stairs.

Still, we endured,

embraced & embellished

the years...

Like stained flags on a matrix

of polio & typhoid,

grief was our anthem, struggle, our stage.

How

we transcended fists, throngs
of asbestos & mud!— yet emerged
as forged monuments,

though exiled

deeper

into the harsh shape

of our own hammered blood.

...Still, the Dream remains

our Beacon,

enduring spark

proclaiming

each life a Living Ember:

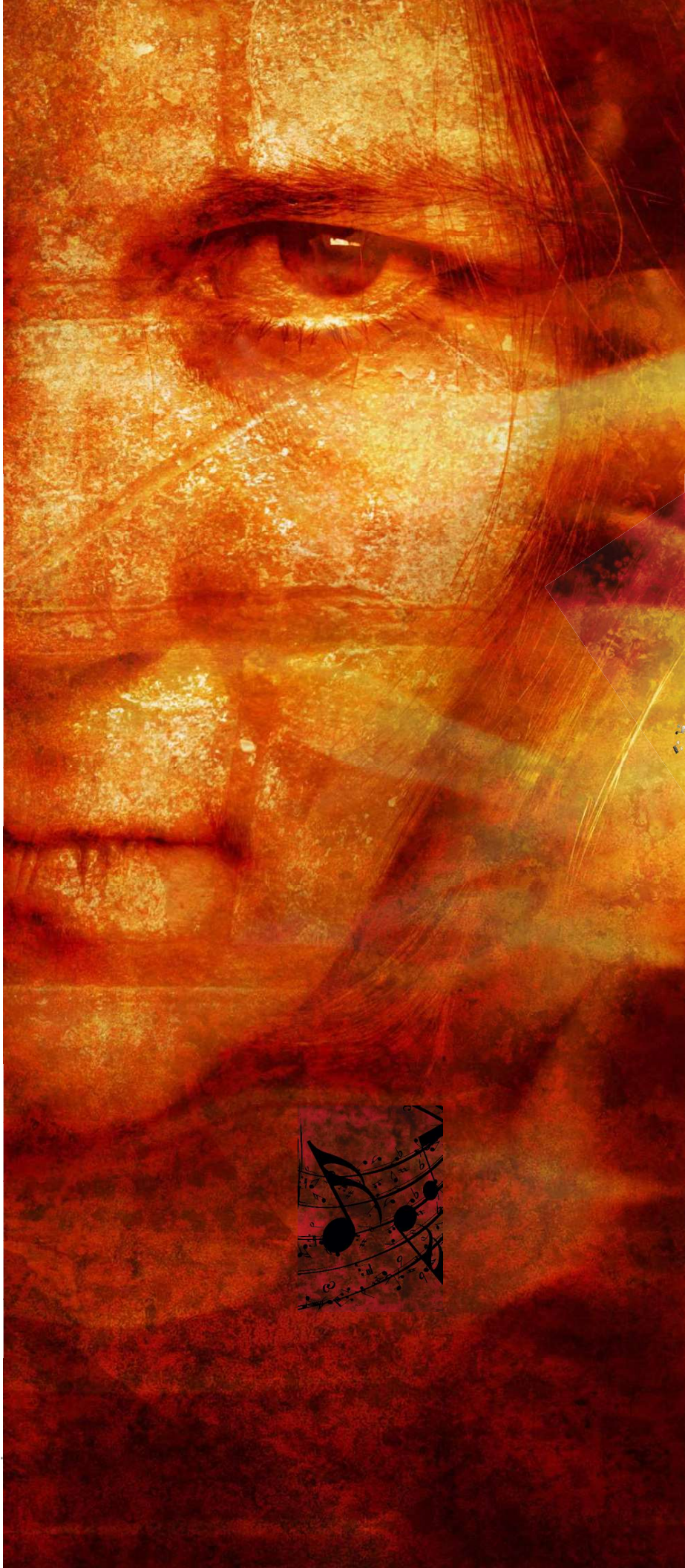
...If the music

which you hear

is the Song of Someone Else,

it is because

you fail to remember.





Honourable Mention Barbed Wilderness

Fiction by **Natalia Hrycay**

He's tired of feeling like a criminal. He's tired of being in a country that needed him, needed his people, but didn't want their kind. He's tired of the effort it takes to push away the knowledge that he is wrongfully interned in this Canadian prisoner's camp. The land he had worked on for two years is sitting idle, the house he put together piece by piece, empty; everything seized by the government. Instead of Olesya knocking back dough on the kitchen table he built and picking blueberries by the meadow with little Mykola tied to her side, they are here, interned with him. How easily freedom is taken for granted. What you think is a basic right gets twisted in times of war. Enemy aliens, such foreign words to him, yet the utterance screams of notions of traitor, foe, menace and disgust. The country that asked him to come and help build its land was now protecting its people from his family. He - a man who had never lifted a hand against anyone; Olesya, to whom he could not explain the meaning of the 1914 War Measures Act and how it related to them and their 10-month old infant.

Every day they stare through the barbed wire at the mountains, the ones they'll never see up close, the ones they'll never climb. Mountains which will be littered in coming times with hikers from all over the world, stopping to take in the sweeping views of the Canadian wilderness; ignorant of the fact that hundreds of innocent prisoners had once looked onto where they now stand. They will squirt water from their bottles to quench their thirst, snap pictures with their cameras, crunch on granola bars they pulled out of their backpacks. They will know nothing of the bitter cold of winters, of the 12-hour days of labour while sinking thigh-deep in snow, clothes frozen like cardboard. They will know nothing of the smell of sickness filling the barracks and the meagre food in half-filled bellies. They will not be told for a long time who cleared the bush, carved the mountainside and built the roads they navigated to get to the trailhead.

It was bad enough when he first registered for his identity papers. He dreaded that one day each month when he had to present himself to the local police station. Lined up in a queue with all the other men as locals walked by sneering, spitting, some even throwing rocks at them as the months passed, and the war continued. There he stood, head down, avoiding eye contact, trying to disappear. Disappear into the earth he toiled daily, the only place he felt at home. The shame of the immigrant; an accumulation of months in a foreign land. What had been natural their entire life suddenly reversed upon arrival. The warped sounds of their mother tongue, the offensive smell

of their food, their primitive way of dressing, their unsophisticated manner. Belittled, ridiculed, scorned. He could barely remember being a local; a simple citizen. As if his body was a puzzle and the pieces had been shifted around, parts of him displaced.

Then it started happening; men being detained and sent away. His turn came soon enough. The knock at the door, the officers in red coats and tall boots, the fear creeping up his spine. They had done nothing wrong. The added humiliation of being arrested, his family taken, the farm he had broken his back building, seized. Upon arrival; pockets emptied, wedding rings wrenched off shaking fingers, his gold cross - the only memory of his father, unclipped, never to be seen again.

The fall turned into winter and then, impossibly, the next winter came, as cold as the first. He thought they would have been released by then, but they remain behind the barbed wire. The days repeat themselves. Every morning he slips from his cot, fighting the chill of winter as he layers his clothes, the pain in his spine building along the full days of back-breaking work, the numbness in his hands mounting his fear as he tries not to lose grip of his saw, minute after minute, hour after hour. Every day, he continues his inner battle of pushing away thoughts of what was left behind; the chickens in his yard, the additional land he would have cleared by now, the crops that could have been, the crops that never were. He sets the goal of one day; to make it through one day, to make it to the doorway where Olesya always waits for him, her face awash with worry, quickly removing his dirty-wet clothing, rubbing life into his muscles, feeding love into his loss. He thinks of the interned bachelors who have toiled all day and come back to emptiness. He thanks the Lord for his blessings.

Then the moment they had all been waiting for arrives. After 794 days, they are free to go. Little do they know, there is no longer anywhere to go. Their land has been repossessed; another family sleeps in their bedroom, cooks in their kitchen, eats from their garden. It is almost too much to bear, but the years have made them strong. They have done it once, they must do it again.

And they succeed.

Sixty years later, Olesya long gone, he sits in his apartment staring across the kitchen table at his son and his grandson. What he had chosen to forget, what he thought he could keep from resurfacing, has now spilled out like backed up sewage.

"Why didn't you ever say anything?" Mykola asks.

"It was not a pleasant time, it was not something your mother and I wanted to remember."

"But what about your rights? You came to Canada for a better



life, and instead you were imprisoned," says Borys.

He smiles at his grandson, still in disbelief that he is no longer a child but a married man running the family farm better than he ever could. Graduated from university with his business degree and ideas he never would have imagined! Mykola thought he would work in some office, but he knew Borys loved the land too much to sit behind a desk. The young ones, he thinks, this new generation possesses the arrogance for demanding justice, acknowledgment and apology. They are not immigrants.

"Had I stayed in Galicia, life would have been worse. I would have died in the Great War or remained a poor peasant. And my children would have been poor peasants, and now you would be a poor peasant."

He watches as Borys tightens his lips, he has seen that frustration before on his grandson's face but has never been the cause of it. He can barely hear Borys add, "You don't know that."

"I do know that," he answers loud and clear.

"You were a civilian, you had no part in the war," his son says gently. Silence fills the space between them.

"People get suspicious, people get scared, people acting on fear make bad decisions," he says. He has thought of this before, has had similar arguments with himself inside his head.

"It can be about honouring your experience, revealing what happened, assuring that it won't happen again."

"It won't."

"But it did, it happened again to the Japanese during the Second World War!" He can tell Borys won't let go of the issue. "They've even tried to deny it, documents were thrown out, facts were tossed aside. They know what they did was wrong!"

He thinks back and knows their fear had not been without memory.

"We were terrified of being imprisoned again, we were thankful to be out, thankful for the opportunity of a normal life! No, it's just the way it was. We were happy to be able to work, to be able to eat. We welcomed the chance to start over with both hands and a full heart. And look now. I'm proud to say I helped build Canada, we are worthy of what we have achieved, and I love this country. You have the farm, the house, the tractors, 300 acres of land. Think of how many mouths we've helped feed over the years with what we've produced. I have two children with university degrees, four grand-children and a great grand-child on the way. The future is more beautiful than I ever could have imagined. There's no point in re-hashing the past, bringing all that pain to the surface. It's already dead and buried."

He's thankful Olesya is not here for this discussion. Raising an infant in the camps had crushed her heart. The stress and poor nutrition had dried up her breast milk within weeks of their arrival. How she pleaded with the guards to find her some milk. The memory and the helplessness so long ago forgotten suddenly fill him. He feels the heat rise to his face.

"You were locked up and branded a POW," Borys says, taking up the argument.

"I was not a POW."

"Yes, you were. That is how you were filed on documents - a POW."

"Well, I wasn't. We knew that, the guards knew that, I'm sure the government knew that." He feels the beginning of a headache at his temples.

"Did you know there were over 20 such internment camps across Canada?" Borys says.

He didn't know there were so many, could not imagine more than 20 camps filled with men, women, children going through what they went through. He had never wondered much about similar places beyond his own barbed fence.

"The Ukrainian Canadian Congress is putting time into researching all this information. You could be of great help."

His fist comes down hard on the table, rattling the cups of coffee. The surprise on their faces equals his own. He has always been a gentle man.

"Enough." The finality of the word falls from his mouth like iron.

Twenty-eight years later, *The Internment of Persons of Ukrainian Origin Recognition Act* passes in Canada. Borys stands at the ceremony and for the first time in a long time, he feels peace come over him when thinking about what happened to his grandfather. Is this what he has needed all these years? Just a simple recognition? Would it have made a difference to his grandfather? He wishes he could witness this day, but he's been gone for over 25 years. He had remained adamant about leaving the past in the past. He is surprised by the tears that well in his eyes and the tightness in his throat. He looks at the people in attendance and feels oddly proud to be Canadian. When he had first found out about what had passed, he could not believe it had happened in his beautiful country. But now, this honouring of the memory of those who had suffered, the honouring of history, has made him come full circle.

He has finally come back home.



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Prairie Heartbeats

In Memory of Tracy Latimer

Poem by K-Lynn

Clear blue dipping onto the white-crusted fields of October
Defined by her birth, spastic, speechless
A decade and two years of prairie farming
Emotional turmoil gloved his weather worn hands
Cab of the pickup truck willingly demarcated
Wheelchair empty of her cheerful, mischievous spirit
Their hearts beat in shattered rhythm
His iron weighted footsteps trudge a distance
Smothering blanket of exhaust fumes invade
Gasping! Choking! Lungs bursting her demise—confined!
Watching the gassy fog become her grave, he waits
Tick tock, tick tock, thirty strokes of time she fades
The engine stops!
His hands touching her limp silhouette;
Laid in the comfort of her bed; a quilt of denial is tucked around her shoulders
Her words never to be revealed; his, "For the love of my child!"
Checks damp with wintriness reality
Advocates, grieve in synchronicity for justice
In pandemonium, throats cry out
Did her eyes blink once for yes, twice for no
Were their teardrops gushing waterfalls or barren Saskatchewan lands
Was her mind screaming DADDY, DDAAADDY don't make me go
Or thinking its time now we both know?
Only their hearts intertwined
Defending his heartbeat in a casket of second-degree murder
Still,
her heart beat
Remember?

“ ***Their hearts
beat in shattered
rhythm...*** ”

Chase Your Dreams, No Matter What...

An interview with author, Angie Bullaro, and hockey player, Manon Rhéaume



Manon Rhéaume (left) and Angie Bullaro (right). Photo by Mike Musco.

Angie Bullaro is an actress, film producer, and now a children's book author, publishing her inspiring first book, *Breaking the Ice*, in 2020. Described as lyrical, empowering, and wonderfully told, this is a book about a girl's groundbreaking courage and determination as she finds out just how far she can go in the world of hockey.

In this interview with Ryan Clark, General Manager of Dreamers Creative Writing, Angie Bullaro talks about her debut book, *Breaking the Ice*, the true story of Manon Rhéaume, first and only woman to play hockey in the NHL.

Manon Rhéaume, who authored the afterword for this book, joins us as well. OMG, my daughter is sooooo excited!

Angie and Manon, welcome to Dreamers!

Angie: Thank you for having us! We're excited to be here. And very excited for your daughter to read the book!

Manon: Thanks for having us.

Where did the idea to do this as a children's book come from?

Angie: It actually started as a movie idea. I own a production company with my husband, Mike Musco, and we were looking for our next film idea. We wanted to do a sports story that I

would write and star in. I had remembered years ago hearing about a woman who played goalie in the National Hockey League and had assumed other women had played in the years following. So I thought it would be interesting to tell the story of that first woman's story. My husband had no idea what I was talking about. He didn't remember hearing about a woman playing and he was a big hockey fan! When we researched it we realized that there weren't all these women playing in the NHL, there was just one – Manon. I was blown away by what she accomplished and her incredible journey to the NHL and beyond. So Manon and I met and talked about doing a film. We actually did a double take when we first met because we look like twins! People think I'm Manon all the time, which is great since I'll be playing her in the film.

After a couple years working on the film I realized I should write a children's book about her story. I had been writing children's stories for years but hadn't had anything published yet. I was hoping that with the movie in the works it might be easier to pitch this story to agents. And, though this happened in 1992, her story seemed more relevant and more important than ever to tell.

Angie, what drew you to Manon's "underdog story"?

Angie: I love underdogs! Their stories are always the most inspiring and powerful. They give us the courage to do that

"impossible" thing in our own life, to dream bigger, to never give up. Manon's story is so amazing, a classic "underdog." From an early age people told her no just because she was a girl. Coaches didn't want her on their teams, players did some really awful stuff to her to make her quit, parents tried to get her kicked off teams. And yet she never gave up and look what she accomplished. Proof of what can happen if you believe in yourself and don't let anyone limit you. I also really loved the support she received from her parents. They could've bowed under the pressure from other parents and coaches, but they didn't. They gave her space and time and encouragement to follow her passion, which isn't an easy thing for parents to do.

Manon, what do you think about how this booked turned out?

Manon: It turned out great! Angie is an amazing writer. She captured my story in a 40-page children's book, which is not easy to do. She picked the most meaningful events throughout my career. The illustrations are so great. I can relive my journey just by looking at the images and some of the facial expressions I still make today.

Angie: That's true. There's this one illustration that captures a look I've seen Manon give many times! It makes me laugh every time I see it. Chris (C.F. Payne) really captured her personality!

Two of my favourite winter and sports books are *The Snowman* and *The Hockey Sweater*. Do you have any favorite sports books? How did they inspire you?

Angie: I was really obsessed with the All American Girls Professional Baseball League growing up. I read a lot of books about them and the league. Manon's story reminds me so much of that. Women playing a male-dominated sport and not letting anyone tell them they couldn't. Talk about powerful!

Wayne Gretzky also learned hockey on a pond. Do pond rinks create a special type of player?

Manon: Pond hockey allows you to be creative and to try things that you would not necessarily have a chance to try on the ice in a practice setting with more structured drills. It also allows you to discover what works and doesn't work on your own, which is the best way to learn in my opinion.

Manon, I read you were also an excellent academic student. Did writing/journaling keep you motivated or help you cope with discouragement?

Manon: I never wrote a journal but being a good student came from my competitiveness of wanting to be the best at everything I was involved in. I was not happy with a 98 on a test knowing I could have had 100. I guess I was the same in hockey - always working hard to be better on the ice.

I also read about a statue of you planned in Quebec City. Has it been completed? Has your hometown Lac-Beauport honoured you in some special way?

Manon: The statue is completed but with Covid-19 the unveiling of it has been postponed. It's an honour to have Quebec City build this statue.

How is the pandemic impacting hockey? Do you think children's hockey leagues will function any differently when Covid-19 is under control?

Manon: It has been very challenging for all hockey families. It has been difficult for children to be away or restricted from a sport they love. Physical activity is so important, especially during this difficult time. I coached my girls' team on zoom for a couple months to keep them active and practicing. You get creative.

Manon, you're idolized by many young athletes as somewhat of a superhero. Who is your favorite superhero?

Manon: *The Incredibles*. I love the idea of having an entire family as super heroes, not just the man. Everyone has a different power, which makes the entire family amazing. That reminds me of a great hockey team. You need to have different kinds of players with different roles to be a good team.

Angie, here at Dreamers, we believe that the pen is mightier than the sword. You've got a pretty mighty pen yourself! Do you have a favorite superhero?

Angie: Oh man, Manon's answer is so good! I do love *The Incredibles*! I don't know if I have a favorite superhero, though. I'm a big superhero fan because somehow even as superheroes, they're still the underdogs. And even though it's fantasy it still relates to your life and what you're going through, which is pretty incredible. They make you feel like you can take on the world and do anything, absolutely anything. Who doesn't love that?!

Angie, this book teaches children and adults so many important lessons. What were your hopes for this book and what it might teach people?

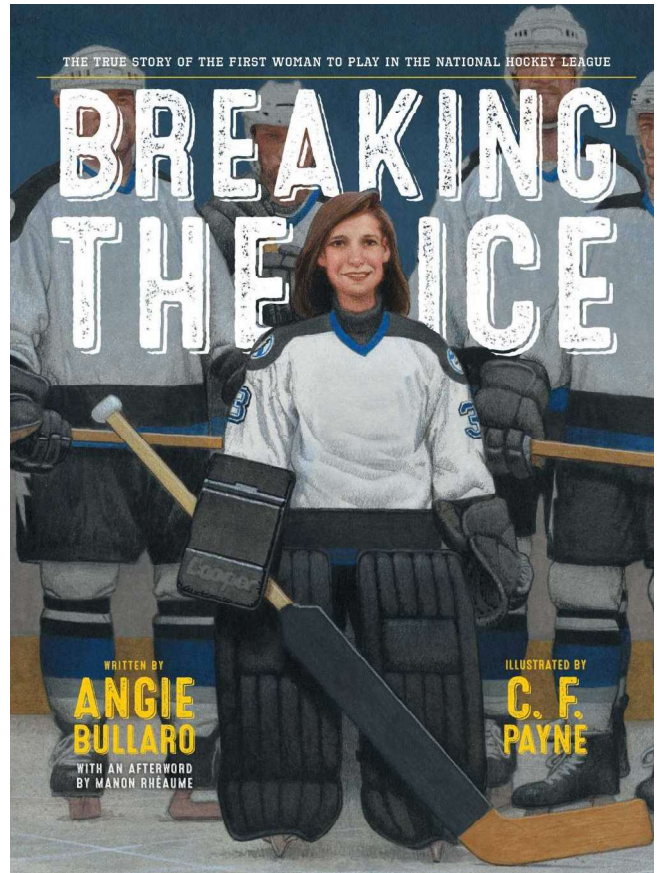
Angie: I really just wanted to inspire people. Inspire them to chase their own crazy dreams, to believe in themselves no matter what, and to never ever give up. From a young age I always wanted to be an actor, but most people thought I was crazy. I grew up in East Detroit - you didn't become an actor. My parents wanted me to become a doctor or lawyer. Ha! But I knew in my heart that I wanted to act. I remember watching *A League of Their Own* and finding so much inspiration and hope in it. Seeing those women do something that they "weren't supposed to do" and that everyone told them they couldn't do, gave me courage to keep following my own dream even if people told me I couldn't do it. And that's what Manon's story does, too. Her story isn't only a hockey story and it's not just for hockey fans. It's for anyone with an impossible dream. For anyone who's been told they can't do something because of their gender, race, sexual orientation, education level, background, etc. If this book can inspire even one person to not give up on their dreams, then it's a success!

Angie, will you be writing another volume of *Breaking the Ice*? What's your next project?

Angie: What's crazy about Manon's story is that it doesn't stop at the NHL. She goes on to sign a contract to play in the minors, to play professional roller hockey, and to be part of Team Canada when women's ice hockey was an official sport at the Olympics in 1998. There is so much more to tell, so



Photo of Manon Rhéaume by Nicole Rhéaume.



we've thought about a follow up for sure. We're also securing financing for the film "Between The Pipes" (about Manon's story) which will hopefully film this summer. The pandemic slowed things down, but if we've learned anything from Manon it's to never give up.

Manon, when I first read the book, I was struck by how much support you got from your family, especially your dad. They broke barriers just by letting you play on a boys team! Can you speak to how this support helped you achieve your goals?

Manon: That support was everything. Not only did my parents support me but they also didn't try to protect me from adversity. Instead, they helped me navigate through it. I would have never made it to where I made it if I hadn't faced all that adversity.

The Bad News Bears and The Mighty Ducks are both great sports movies. If Breaking the Ice got a blockbuster movie deal, what actor would best play the part of Manon?

Angie: Me! Ha! We laugh that I know Manon's story better than she does now. And, besides, we look like twins! It was fate!

Manon: Angie Bullaro, she knows my story in and out.

Angie: Good answer, Manon. If you said someone else we might have had a problem!

When I started as a goalie, my uncle Terry's advice was to "just fall down". It worked well, until players were skilled

enough to raise the puck. Do you have any protips for new players?

Manon: Work ethic is the key to being successful.

The illustrator C.F. Payne added great details to the illustrations in this book, like tattered jersey's and detailed facial expressions. Have you collaborated with him before, Angie?

Angie: This was the first time working with him. He's such a prolific illustrator it was truly an honor to have him come on board.

Angie, do you have any advice for new writers?

Angie: Don't give up. It took me over ten years to get my first book published. Keep writing, finish your stories, revise them like crazy, and then have faith that they'll find a home no matter how long it takes. I'm rooting for you!

And don't forget to follow the book, the film, and us on social media!

Twitter: @BtwnThePipesMov, @ManonRheaume, @AngieBullaro

Instagram: @BetweenThePipesMovie, @ManonRheaume33, @AngieBullaro

Websites: www.betweenthepipesmovie.com, www.manonrheaume33.com, and www.angiebullaro.com

Governance, Gun Control and Religion in McKee's *Guns and Gods in My Genes*

Book Review by **Carole Mertz**

Neill McKee's memoir, *Guns and Gods in My Genes*, could be described as a personalized history of North America. He begins his historical overview in modern day by sharing discussions with his oldest living relatives, before taking us back through four centuries of North American history. In his 15,000-mile, 400 year journey through his genealogy, Neill McKee considers his own citizenship as he examines cultural distinctions between Canada and the USA that lead to significant differences in governance, gun control, and religion between the two countries.

In the initial chapters, we learn that McKee's ancestors arrived in Canada from sites in Ireland and the Scottish lowlands where they had been tailors, cloth dyers, or weavers. He records his father's lineage, traced back to his 4th great-grandfather, Thomas McKee, who lived from 1777 to 1867. We sense a hardy family line. Many of the McKees, through the generations, had born large families; raising 8 and 9 children was fairly common. In learning more about his mother's line and his grandmother, Effie Jane Haskins, McKee's search led him to relatives who had moved from Canada to America. Many of his forerunners were involved in the American wars, in one capacity or another. His research brings us into the American Civil War era and eventually to the pre-Revolutionary days. Early pilgrim settlers in his lineage had established friendly relations with nearby indigenous people, only to see those relations deteriorate, probably due to quick-tempered pilgrim leaders. McKee describes the regrettable Pequot War

(1637-38) as one of the bloodiest.

With photos, maps, a major genealogical chart, 8 tables, and meticulous chapter notes, McKee transports us through his detailed memoir all the way back to the 1620 landing of the famous *Mayflower* at Plymouth. In closing lines, the author shares that, in spite of the fact that he's married to an American and has discovered many of his ancestors were American, he has decided against dual citizenship. He will remain Canadian and will be buried in the Glen Allan Cemetery in Glen Allan, Ontario, Canada, near his birthplace.

McKee succeeds in creating a memoir of great interest to the general reader because, in a sense, his quest becomes our quest. What part had guns and gods played in the life of McKee's ancestors? Curious, as McKee was, we join his quest. How far back into history will the author trace his familial lines? What will we learn about the history of Canada and about its earliest dwellers and its immigrants? How will that history compare with Canada and America's founding? What struggles did McKee's Scottish and Irish ancestors face as they coped with unfamiliar life in their new land? Finally, will McKee's research and documentation satisfy our curiosities? Most of my questions were answered in the reading of this fascinating and fertile memoir – an account that is vividly descriptive, poetic, and analytic, in equal measures.



Into the Abaddon

Nonfiction by **Shannon Lange**

It was a beautiful, sunny June day, warm but comfortable.

Perfect for a drive in the country, and I had spontaneously offered to drive a young girl to see her boyfriend that day.

I had met her a month before through an acquaintance. She was new to the city and was struggling to catch a break. She was a lovely little free spirit – 19 years old and alone in a new city with a lousy job at 7-11. Her name was April and within an hour of meeting her, I knew her entire life story. She talked a mile a minute and laughed and touched you while she was excitedly telling you everything about her. I worried for her. Her open heart and being alone in the city, so I offered to let her stay with me for a couple of months until she "got on her feet." I had recently left my husband of almost twenty years and was settling into a new home with my two sons; she may be of help to me while I was helping her, watching the boys for that hour or so after school before I got home from work.

I was like my mother that way – helping others, taking them in, getting them sorted and sending them on their way. I was not selfless – I knew she could help me too, but from the bottom of my heart, my primary purpose was to keep her safe. I felt such an intense feeling that I needed to protect her...from...something. That feeling of mine will become a mockery as this story finds its way out of me. My only hope is that I can somehow explain in a way that makes sense, a truly senseless tragedy that to this day confuses me to my core in regards to why April had to be a part of it.

We were driving in my car away from her boyfriend. She had visited with him and kissed and giggled and laughed her way through the entire time she spent with him. She was on top of the world, motor-mouthing to me about how she was so in love and how they would get married some day and the names her children would have, and how I was the BEST person she had EVER met for helping her out and taking care of her like a MOTHER would. She was sitting sideways in the passenger seat and talking with her arms and hands flying with emotion and I laughed as I told her to sit properly in her seat and to put her seat belt on before we reached the highway. I couldn't see out her side of the car at all and didn't see anything until it was just....this....much...too...late. I strained to look around her as we came to the train crossing, and not seeing anything, I drove forward.

The last words out of my mouth in the split second of realization that occurred were: "Oh no."

RCMP Accident Report: The Northbound Canadian Pacific train struck the passenger side of vehicle at 15:35 June 08 2012. The car was pushed for approximately 30 meters, with the occupants remaining inside the vehicle, with occupant belongings being ejected out the shattered

passenger window and rear windows.

Witness reports stated there was a smell of gasoline and burning rubber, and that one witness crawled under the train to get to the victims inside the vehicle.

Eyes wide open in shock, mouth gasping for air, hurts, hurts, hurts. "HURTS, HURTS, IT HURTS IT HURTS IT HURTS – OHMYGOD WHAT IS HAPPENING TO MEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE??? SOMEBODY HELP ME PLEASE, MOM. MOM, MOM, MOM, PLEASE HELP ME ANYBODY HELP ME OHMYGOD IMDYING IMDYINGMYSONSMYSONSMYSONSRORYNICKYRORYNICKY RORYNICKYRORY OH NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!! WHAT HAVE I DONE??????? I LEFT THEM ALONE I LEFT THEM ALONE NO MOTHER NO MOTHER I'M SO STUPIDSTUPIDSTUPID!!!!!! WHAT IS ON TOP OF ME? WHAT IS THAT? I HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE BUT I CAN'T GET THIS OFF OF ME! WHAT IS IT?"

Closing my eyes, too bright, too much, too hot, close them for just a minute, put my head back and rest and close them for a minute, they are burning and something hot and sticky is in them and on my face and suddenly I am consumed by the scent of my newborn son's neck. The car is filled with the smell of new baby and the sweet smell envelopes me and I want to close my eyes (but just for a minute) and I hear my Dad's voice and I can almost see him but he can't help me now and I cry a little and moan and almost pant like an animal and then hear his voice saying, "No, not yet, no, no, not yet – OPEN YOUR EYES!"

So hard to breathe and whistling sounds and I sit straight and look down... and I push... that... off of me. I push hard and cry and try to breathe and then I push the arm away and I push...the other... away and I turn to the door and slide out the shattered window like a snake and fall to the ground. Get up to stand and fall again. I do this three times before someone holds me down and tells me to stay down. She tells me that I'm badly injured and need to stay down. She is crying but she doesn't even know me... She cries as she holds me down gently. I try to tell her that if I can stand up I'm still alive, but she can't hear me. I have no voice left, just whistling, whining puffs of nothingness. On my stomach with my face in the prickly grass and ditch weeds, I can smell the earth and the dirt and can feel the sun hot on my back and the blood and the tears and the dirt become one and I hear the others whispering but I don't care as I think about my babies and everyone I ever loved and those that loved me and it goes so fast in my head and spins and whirls that I feel dizzy and want to sit up. I almost feel like throwing up but know that these people are sad already and I try to keep all that down and let myself go, go, go.

I awaken in the ambulance tied to a board and the lady with

the blonde hair is asking me who to call and I can't say my mother because she is old and far away and you know that is the call that will kill her so I tell her to call my brother who is reckless but strong like me and who will come for my sons if I die and they need him. She wants to know the names of my children and how old they are and what I would say to them if they were with me right now and I watch her try to write in her little coil notepad and her hands are shaking and I can't breathe but she keeps talking and asking and writing as the ambulance moves to where they are taking me. She asks about April's family and contact numbers and I try to turn my head as far as I can in the brace and then close my eyes and disappear.

Paramedics transported the 37 year old female victim of the MVA to nearest acute hospital twenty miles away from the crash site. Assessment by Emergency Medical Transport personnel indicates multiple spinal fractures. Pressure gauze applied to gaping head wound. O2 given by nasal cannula as SATS decreasing rapidly. Shock. Blood pressure decreasing to 96/57 during transport. Patient responsive to stimulus but non-verbal.

Blinding lights and pain. More pain than could ever be imagined or a loving god to allow to be suffered by one of his children. Too many faces, shimmering in the lights of the icy cold room. Chattering teeth slamming uncontrollably against each other. Can't stop them from tearing into my lips and tongue and a hand shoves something warm between them to stop the violence of the shaking. Taste of warm blood in my mouth, coppery, thick, running down my throat, causing the heaving. Ohmygodohmygod can't breathe. Struggling to sit up and stop the hurting and then a prick of the needle... and...

nothingness.

Awaken to the uniformed man asking about drinking that day and how much. Crying please leave me alone, no, no, I wouldn't do that ever... He is telling the nurse with grey hair that he wants the blood immediately. Has to have it before I de cease for some legal reasons. The priest who is sitting by the stretcher tells him to stop, he is upsetting me as I am gasping for air, and to go away and what does any of it matter anymore. The nurse is pushing the officer out of the room telling him she will get to it after, unless he wants to steal it like a thief right off the floor or me and that it can be done quickly when it is needed. Am I dying? I turn to the priest and whisper "am I dying?" and he looks at me with the saddest eyes and moves his lips in prayer. "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell."

I awaken in the blackness of nothing and silence. It is quiet and feels like death has come for me after all. No pain, no sound, womb-like, with no atmosphere but the absence of everything. Entombed in a shroud of blank space and opiates. Sensing with animalistic sense that I am not alone, I turn my head and see the whites of my son's eyes looking at me. "Mom Mom Mom, are you going to be ok? Please be ok." I must be dreaming or stoned or dead. I feel removed and cannot open my lips to speak to him. He isn't here, I must be dreaming of him. Suddenly a horrible pain in my stomach and a splintering inside of me. Feeling the heat of it rising up my stomach to my throat and the spewing out of the blackness and a sudden tearing of tissue and searing agony and... ohmyGOD... and as it comes pouring out of me, out of everywhere it possibly can, burning me with its heat, I hear my son's voice again. "SOMEBODY COME HELP US, PLEASE COME HELP US, MY MOM IS BLEEDING, SHES BLEEDING ALL OVER AND IT'S EVERYWHERE! HELP, HELP, HELP!"

STARS air ambulance dispatched to rural hospital at approximately 2000 hours to transport MVA patient to urban trauma center. Internal hemorrhaging, bilateral pneumothorax and C7 spinal fracture were primary injuries noted on the transfer form.

Whirring and roaring in my ears and freezing like ice, oh so cold. Machines are bleeping and sending spirals of paper down to the floor and something is covering my ears. Someone in a spacesuit is trying to talk to me but I can't hear him over the whirring and clattering sounds of the copter blades and the screeching coming from the machines. I understand I am alive and moving to another hospital but not aware of urgency. I feel like I am in a space ship with all the machines and coloured lights and sounds. I don't recall my son being with me at the hospital at all. My reality has turned into a series of waking and nothing moments. No slow drifting from consciousness to sleep, rather a sudden jolting of existences. I no longer feel sadness or fear. I feel weightless, floating along wherever these ever-changing faces take me.

What makes me ME, the ego, the id, my instinctive force within, has disappeared.

There was a profound, and yet aching sense of wonder and relief in the letting go.

A Gentle Man of Science

Nonfiction by **Hilton Koppe**

Some of my colleagues don't believe in evidence-based guidelines. They say it diminishes the art of medicine. Turns it into a cookbook. My doctor is one of the guideline sceptics. "You can train a monkey to follow a recipe."

Me, I find comfort in knowing that there are researchers who have applied proven scientific methods and given deep thought to which treatments work best. I work part-time translating what are often city-centric guidelines into clinical pathways more suitable for my rural community.

But in some respects, my doubting colleagues are right. Many patients in my country practice have conditions for which there are no guidelines. Research is usually done on people under 75 years of age with only one medical condition. I have very few patients like that. Even when my patients do fit the guidelines, the recommendations don't suit everyone.

In times like these, I need to make up my own recipe and hope that it turns out okay.

Like the stew I was forced to brew with Sophie.

Sophie first came to see me on a Saturday morning at my clinic. Saturday morning is reserved for immediate care needs. Quick in, quick out. Sophie had an earache. Something easy to fix. Just what I needed on this busy morning.

During the visit she mentioned a couple of times that she was under a lot of stress at work. I did my best to ignore these cues. It was a Saturday morning after all. Stress management was not on my agenda. When she mentioned it for a third time as I was showing her the door, I felt obliged to offer to see her again, at a more appropriate time, if she still felt the need.

Sophie returned the following week. She believed that her ongoing stress was caused by a vindictive work supervisor's accusation of professional misconduct.

Sophie didn't have stress. She was suffering from a major depressive illness.

I offered Sophie what the guidelines recommend, but nothing worked. The antidepressants were useless. Sophie was a poet. She couldn't write while on antidepressants so she stopped taking them.

I arranged an urgent appointment with a psychologist. Sophie

didn't like the psychologist's approach. She found the therapy boring. Repetitive. Predictable. She didn't return for further visits.

Finding a psychiatrist for Sophie was challenging. The best psychiatrist in our region was the godmother of Sophie's daughter. It was not appropriate for her to be the treating psychiatrist. There was just one other option. I was not confident that it would be a good match. She saw that psychiatrist just once. As I feared, all he did was offer more drugs.

Sophie and I agreed to manage her condition as a work-related injury. This made her care more complex. The interference of the WorkCover insurance company and their appointed third parties eroded our fragile patient-doctor relationship. I was left juggling competing external demands while attempting to do what I thought was in Sophie's best interests.

We live in a small town. I would see Sophie during my early morning bike rides, pushing her daughter's pram as I had done with my kids a few years earlier. But she was hunched over, her gaze downward. I hoped that she was following my recommendation for exercise to improve her mood. But I feared that her posture was the embodiment of unrelenting depression.

There were times when I felt desperately alone. Overwhelmed with responsibility for Sophie's care. She refused to go to other health professionals, but she did keep visiting me. She would come for appointments weekly, sometimes twice a week. I didn't really know what I was doing a lot of the time. Perhaps my job was to sit and bear witness to the suffering, while Nature, and Sophie's determination to recover, did the actual work.

To get some support for the load I was carrying, I phoned the psychiatrist Sophie had seen. I outlined my concerns and told him my treatment plan. "You're doing a great job," he said. "Just keep going. I definitely do not need to see her again."

I was not reassured and continued to worry about Sophie. More than I knew I should. But it's hard to flick the switch to *Off* in the presence of remorseless distress.

All the while, the ghost of Richie was pestering me. "You need to do more. You need to do more," his spectre implored. "More than what you did for me." Richie was the father of my son's best friend. He had been an occasional patient. His black dog led him to a noose at the end of a rope tied to the rafters in his garage. I



was fearful that Sophie was on a similar path.

I was getting desperate. Sophie and I were alone together in a deep pit. About nine months into her illness, I tentatively suggested that either admission to a psychiatric hospital or Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) may be needed, to help restore Sophie, and to keep her safe. In all my years as a doctor, I had never needed to consider ECT for a patient. Now I had.

As with most of my offerings, Sophie declined hospital admission. And ECT. Instead she went to a new psychologist on the recommendation of her daughter's godmother. He suggested that she try writing as a tool for recovery, perhaps even write some poems about being depressed.

Unlike my rudimentary therapeutic interventions, Sophie found this suggestion palatable.

Her condition began to improve in parallel with her recovered ability to write. This gave me a sniff of optimism for the first time in months. And a path forward. I'd had no experience at that time with the therapeutic benefits of writing but was relieved to be able to encourage her in what seemed like a safe pursuit.

Sophie wrote a collection of poems reflecting on her journey with depression. The more she wrote, the better she felt. She told me that she believed the writing process was the cure she had been yearning for since we first met.

I was intrigued by Sophie's assumption and curious to learn more. She became animated in a way I hadn't seen for months when I asked if I could read some of her poems.

The next day, a thick pile of poems was waiting for me at my reception desk. I took them home. The pile sat at the bottom of my in-tray. Late one evening a few weeks later, when the documents burying the poems had all been dealt with, I sensed them calling to me. "Read me. Read me. Read me."

I flicked through the poems, not knowing quite what to expect. I did, however, know what I was hoping to find somewhere on those pages. Something about how I had been Sophie's knight in shining armour. How without me, she would not have made it through the blackness.

I stumbled upon a poem called *A Gentleman Of Science*. I scanned the poem and saw reference to hospital and ECT. Could I be the gentleman in that poem? I was about to find out.

To say that the poem was less than complimentary about my care would be an understatement. It called me ignorant, naive, cruel and stupid. That perhaps a 19th Century barber/surgeon may have been able to offer a more sensitive approach.

My curiosity about the poem was transformed into anger and betrayal. *How could you say such things about me? After all I have done for you!* I raged.

A hint of curiosity persisted through the hurt as my cry of despair was soon followed by an unexpected thought. *If Sophie was helped by writing poetry, maybe I should try writing something too.* I didn't have too many other options. There was no one to talk to. The glass of red wine on the table next to me, my default option for dealing with unease, looked pathetically inadequate.

I bypassed the red and chose the pen. Despite not having written a creative piece since Grade 4 when Miss Black made us write a poem about our summer vacation, words flew onto the page in front of me. It felt like the pen had harnessed all the energy of my pent up anxieties. My black dog was straining at its leash. I just needed to stay out of the road and let the pen do its magic.

A Slow Cooked Black Dog Stew For Two

Required equipment

*Deep cast-iron pot
Pot stirring implement
Sharpened cleaver
Electric blow torch*

Ingredients

*Patient – freshly crushed
Black Dog – untameable
Quart of muddy water
Doctor – overripe, bruised
Psychologist – green
Psychiatrist – non-malleable
Employer organization
Multinational insurer
Tablespoon of acrimony
Dash of fermented adversarial style
Psychologist – red*

Method

- 1. Blend Patient with Black Dog to form paste with consistency of melted tar.*
- 2. Slush muddy water into deep pot.*
- 3. Immerse paste in muddy waters over maximum heat until drowning point is reached.*
- 4. Add Doctor, green psychologist and psychiatrist. Stir hopefully.*
- 5. Reduce heat and simmer until all flesh falling from bones.*
- 6. Finely dice employer, insurer, acrimony and adversarial style.*
- 7. Chuck diced mixture into pot from great height.*
- 8. Continue to simmer for 9 months until all ingredients thoroughly reduced.*
- 9. Sprinkle over red psychologist to form an optimistic crust.*
- 10. Threaten to blacken crust with electric blow torch.*
- 11. Let sit.*
- 12. Hope for the best.*

I put down the pen. Took a breath. Reflected on how I was feeling in that moment. Unexpectedly calmer. Less agitated. Definitely more at peace than I had been prior to this writing experiment.

I was intrigued. Perhaps it really was the writing that had cured Sophie. Might it have saved Richie? Could writing heal me too? Would it ease the distress which accumulates after a generation of caring for people suffering like Sophie and Richie? Might it diminish the impact of all the worrying and repeated losses encountered in my work? And what about my colleagues who face similar situations? Might they too be helped in this way?

Perhaps a new guideline on the therapeutic benefits of poetry and reflective writing needs to be added to medicine's cookbook.

What harm could one more recipe do?

A top-down photograph of a wooden table. On the table is a white ceramic mug filled with coffee, a black and silver pen, and a white card with text. The background is a lush green leafy plant.

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The Living Room

Nonfiction by Kim Brookes

Citrine colored paint covered every surface but the cigarette-burned parquet floor; the living room was tired and ready for renewal. Would these two prospective residents, Kim and Susan, see beyond cosmetics? Would the living room be able to harbor these women, as it had the family that had just moved out, and the families before that?

Kim shook rain off her arms and wiped her hands on her work slacks. She muttered that this house was out of their price range and that nice woodwork oughtn't be painted. She leaned against the cold, silver-painted radiator, squinting down at the burn marks. "Those look like signs of neglect," she said. "This house needs a lot of work."

Across from Kim, Susan stood, feet planted firmly, legs apart, arms behind her back. "Yes, but we can do a lot ourselves." Her voice resonated throughout the first floor of the empty Victorian. She listed the house's assets: tin ceilings; no vinyl siding; lots of space; on a quiet, winding street, near the subway into Boston. "Besides," she added, "it has strong bones."

Kim's view shifted. She felt the spaciousness of the living room's four windows sheltering them from the rain outside. She looked through its two doorways into more rooms, all with original, shellacked woodwork, and calm off-white walls.

"You think we can really take care of such a huge house?" Kim asked.

"Absolutely," said Susan.

Kim trusted her partner that this should be their home. Though they squabbled over the little things, they always agreed on the big ones.

The living room was ready for the fresh air of a new family. Susan and Kim took ownership by painting the walls pearl gray, the ceiling a darker blue-gray, and the woodwork around the doors slate blue. Susan meticulously painted each concentric circle of the corner rosettes alternating colors. They stripped the backs of the doors using a paint-dissolving goo they'd learned about from their new subscription to *Old House Journal*.

The doors, with their mostly bare wood, were left mottled with a few stubborn spots of yellow. The couple hid the still-yellow trim around the windows with big white curtains and added a soft-gray carpet that concealed the burn marks. They brought in a couch for lounging, and upholstered, mismatched, hand-me-down chairs that fit the room's elegance, though not its new colors. Kim liked to think that guests saw not eccentricity, but charm.

Attended to and rejuvenated, the living room gave them a comfortable place to spend most evenings and held countenance to the laughter, arguments and concessions of daily life.

When Susan complained about socks Kim left around, Kim said, "You never know when you might need a different pair." When Kim complained the thermostat was set to only sixty degrees, Susan countered, "If we're always in the living room, why waste money by heating the whole house?" Kim put on thicker socks and joined Susan under the blankets on the couch.

"Let's keep the curtains drawn. I don't like people looking at us," Kim grumbled.

Susan said, "I can't stand feeling closed in."

As a compromise, Kim opened the curtain covering the side window that faced the neighbor's yard. She fastened the tiebacks onto brass hooks. The curtain, and the blinds that later replaced it, stayed open for most of twenty years.

Three years after Kim and Susan moved in, Kim told Susan, "It's too overwhelming. I can't just decide to become a parent. I wish it could happen by accident like it does for straight people. How would we pay for college? I can raise a strong girl, but a gentle boy?"

"I've always wanted to be a mother, to give birth," Susan said. "Kim, I need to do this. Can you at least stand out of my way?"

Kim did. Nine months after an IVF-implanted egg finally stayed put, Susan delivered the couple's beautiful boy. Kim's love for Bobby was instantaneous and fierce.

Kim and Susan became Mommy and Mueti (Swiss-German for mother), and the living room had new needs to fill. A pile of baby blankets appeared. A rocking chair moved in. The carpet sprouted train tracks. Floor space shrank as the number of toys stored around the edges grew. The room filled with kids' TV theme songs and tantrums that resulted in loving reconciliation.

As their financial confidence grew, Susan and Kim gave the living room respectability. A seasoned carpenter sanded out most of the cigarette burns and refinished the parquet. A painter brushed over the window woodwork, so it matched the rest of the molding. The oversized white curtains gave way to inset blinds that could be lowered from the top; the inside could now see the sky through all four windows, without outsiders seeing in.

The winter after Bobby turned twelve, Susan's high-pitched

coughing fits began to drown out the TV. Kim and Bobby took care of it by shushing her and turning up the volume, but the living room was starting to shift. When the family was together, the atmosphere was as bright as usual, but after Bobby went to bed, the air filled with words like "biopsy" and "cancer." When their son asked, they shared whatever they knew, but they tried to protect him from the worst of it.

One night, Susan's place on the couch was empty.

Kim said, "You know how Mueti had some fluid taken out of her lungs last week, and her cough got better? Today, the doctors are making it so the fluid won't get back in. She should be home tomorrow." Kim asked if he wanted to know more.

Bobby scrunched up his nose and shook his head.

Several days later, when Susan came home from the hospital, a wave of relief swept through the room. Susan sat on the couch and peered at her laptop through half-glasses perched on her nose. She used the "hunt and peck" method—tap, tap, tap—to answer work email. Beside her, Kim's fingers ran like a bullet train, updating friends and family. On the couch between them was unspoken tumult about the future. The floor, on the other hand, held their son solid. His game cards strewn around him, he interrupted his parents' work to explain the characteristics of a particular deck he'd constructed—its powers and weaknesses to good and evil.

A few days later, the clouds outside followed Kim and Bobby into the living room. Susan's spot on the couch was empty again.

Kim told him, "We went back to the hospital today. Mueti has to stay there a while."

Bobby shifted his feet, grimaced, and asked if he had to go visit her. "I don't like how she looks in the hospital," he said, "but I don't want to hurt her feelings."

"It's okay. You don't have to go."

"Tell her I love her and I'll see her soon. Give her a big kiss from me," he said.

When Susan was missing for the third time in a month, Kim's mother sat in the green armchair in the living room, reading and knitting. Kim passed through once a day, pausing to talk about ovarian cancer, now known to be the root of Susan's lung problems. The living room missed all the conversations between Susan and Kim, or them and Bobby; those were at the hospital or upstairs in his room.

Absent for what felt like forever but was not quite two weeks, Susan came back, and the family of three resumed their living room lives.

One day Bobby asked, "Can we play restaurant?"

Kim said, "Sure, what's on the menu?" The boy disappeared for a bit, then swooshed open the door. "Good evening," he said in a deep voice. "Here are your menus and some water."

Susan perused the menu, then exclaimed, "Look! We could have bread OR toast. This must be a fancy restaurant."

Another day, Susan eased herself down, one hand cradling her sore belly, and told Bobby there were still cancer cells inside her. "I have to have 'chemotherapy.'"

Kim asked him, "What word does that remind you of?"

The twelve-year-old answered, "Chemical?"

Susan began drawing dots on a piece of paper, "Like Pac-man: they're going to eat all the cancer dots. You want to draw a picture?"

Bobby knelt beside the coffee table and grabbed the pen. "Maybe they have little swords and stick them into the cancer."

Kim nodded her head, "Sure. You also need to know Mueti will get a little sick."

Susan reassured, "Just a little, not much. I'll probably lose my hair. And be tired."

Their son asked, but gave no space to answer, "When? Are you going to be bald? You said my head looked really good when I was little and didn't have hair yet. Know what? Today, my friend gave me two great Digimon cards . . ."

The living room became a sanctuary: safety only occasionally breached by the truths of life and death the adults rarely acknowledged, even to one another. When alone together in the living room, Kim and Susan stuck to logistics and mechanics: who would do after school pick-up, what was happening at work, where the next appointment was. They didn't talk about how life had changed, and never about when death might come. For nearly three years, the family adjusted to each new normal Susan's illness dealt, all the while enjoying eating and watching TV together in the living room—despite Susan's occasional lament that they "eat in the dining room, like civilized people." The room couldn't assuage their pain but it did what it was able—give them a semblance of normalcy.

The time came when alien devices barged into the living room. Three small canisters took their turn atop a three-foot-high, blue machine for filling them with pure oxygen. On the side of the loud, droning device was a long plastic tube that could be attached to Susan's nose. At first, Susan needed only a little extra oxygen to feed her lungs; she put a canister in their son's old backpack and carried it on walks. When her need for oxygen became constant, Bobby, by then fourteen, learned how to turn off the flow of a dying canister, take off the tubing, move it to a full one, and restart the flow.

When Susan wasn't able to lie flat anymore for fear she wouldn't be able to breathe, the living room served as the couple's bedroom. The couch under the front windows left. Armchairs and the coffee table moved into another room. A poofy, dark brown rocker and a huge beige love seat appeared. Each night, Susan leaned back slightly on the reclining love seat, plastic tube carefully slung over her ears and the cannula's prongs stuck in her nose. Kim slept fully

reclined in the brown rocker. Kim's snoring, which usually caused Susan to whine, was drowned out by the blue machine as it monotonously drew in air and expelled oxygen to a 6/8 beat. Even when they were asleep, the room felt alert.

Normally at peace during daylight hours, the living room now held Susan whenever she was home, which was most of the time. Throughout her partner's illness, Kim had remained by Susan's side, patient and calm, saving her crying for times when she was alone. Now, the more sedate Susan was, the more frenetic Kim became. She popped up from her email to get Susan anything she needed. She ran downstairs for five minutes at a time to refinish a wooden box for Susan's medicines. She jumped to the door to let in the nurses who came and went.

A portable breathing machine in a rolling suitcase and an adult potty chair joined the new furniture. Susan's medicine box took over the side table. A nebulizer moved from chair to chair. The living room felt crowded.

Two weeks after starting to sleep on the new love seat, Susan woke up at 3:00 a.m., panicking because she couldn't breathe. It was no longer enough to push a button to send more opiates into one of her veins to calm her lungs. She began to hallucinate. She looked out the living room door and said, "I thought everyone had left, but there's someone there." Kim nervously looked over her shoulder; she knew no one was there, but fear of a phantom momentarily relieved her from the very real nightmare in front of her. On the phone, the hospice nurse told Kim which medicine to give Susan to stop the hallucinations.

"I'm sorry (breath)," Susan whispered. "You need to (breath) sleep. But I really (breath) don't feel good. (Breath, breath) I think we have to go (breath) to the hospital."

The air in the living room was heavy with despair. For the first time during Susan's illness, worn down by caregiving and worry, Kim couldn't bolt into action.

Kim told Susan, "I don't know what to do. I can't think straight.

I won't be able to help you with the doctors. Can I sleep for just a little bit?"

Susan said, "I'll try to wait. (breath breath) I just don't (breath) know how long (breath) I can."

Two and a half hours later, at 5:30 a.m., Susan woke Kim up again. Kim shook herself alert.

Susan panted, "We (breath) need to (breath) go."

Kim said, "On it. But I don't think I can get you into the car. How do we get an ambulance?"

Always the practical one, Susan said, "I guess (breath) you dial 911?"

The ambulance crew helped Susan move from the couch onto the stretcher. Susan told Bobby, "I'm so sorry we have to leave you home alone. I'll be back before you know it." Before they wheeled Susan out of the house, Bobby went up to his room. The living room sat bereft.

The next day, Kim's mother put aside her knitting and answered the living room phone. "Oh dear, my poor Kimmy. Of course, I'll bring him right away."

Kim's foggy presence came home to a living room without Susan. Her parents tidied up the detritus of Susan's last weeks, ridding the room of dangerous drugs, medical devices, blankets, and sleepwear. The living room, recuperated, entertained a stream of somber people. They brought food. Hugged Kim. Told stories about Susan. Asked how Bobby was doing.

The stream ended. Kim's parents left. Then there they were. A family of two. In a house with strong bones and a living room ready to hold them. And so, the mother and not-so-little boy began their new lives, sitting together, one sprawled on the beige love seat, the other rocking in the dark brown chair, in the gray and blue living room filled with light from the four windows and two doors, at the front of the tall house on the quiet street.



Lake Powell

Nonfiction by **Kimi Ceridon**

I wake up alone in Page, Arizona. Today is my fourth day on the road. I am 900 miles into a motorcycle ride from California to Massachusetts - a road trip mostly about avoiding life and responsibility. My eyes blink open just before sunrise; it's a time called civil twilight. I linger in soft, billowy cotton sheets staring at the ceiling. The windows are open to the crisp air. Outside the slumbering desert echoes with stillness and silence. The only other guest at the bed-n-breakfast occupies a room a floor below and on the other side of the house. The rest of the building is dim and motionless.

In the dining room, I find a note next to a plate of pastries:

*There is a bowl of fruit in the fridge.
Help yourself to a yogurt.
Coffee in the thermos may still be warm.
Good luck on your journey. Enjoy the ride.*

I ferry luggage to my motorcycle relishing in the uninterrupted solitude. Coffee reheats in the microwave and I pick at the fruit bowl between trips. I smile to myself, grateful that I can slip away without engaging in idle chit-chat, superficial niceties, and discussions of travel plans. I want to exit as if I am a cowboy in a saloon finishing up her business. She claps her hat to her head and tips the brim as she leaves. "Thank you kindly," she nods to all and no one, before vanishing in a trail of dust, leaving the ghost of her memory. I blame the desert for turning my thoughts into western movie scenes.

The city of Page sleeps as I slide my leg over my motorcycle. The sun crowns over the horizon and sets the desert aglow. Before departing Page, I want to see the sunrise, so I ride to a pull-out that overlooks Lake Powell. Familiarity tugs at the hairs on my neck as I dismount my motorcycle, pull off my helmet, and stand alone at the overlook.

This massive lake formed when the Glen Canyon Dam was built across the Colorado River in 1963. The river used to flow freely from the top of Colorado's Rocky Mountains through Arizona and into the Gulf of California. Now, the water is high up on the canyon walls well above the original riverbanks. The human-made lake is 186 miles long, snaking through arid, parched earth from Utah into Arizona.

My family took road trips to the lake some summers to vacation when I was a kid. We filled a boat with gear and towed it behind our Chevrolet Blazer. The boat either stayed anchored near the campground or carried my family around the lake, sometimes with my mom in tow on water skis or one of us kids clinging to an inner tube. I know these details, but I have little memory of those trips. I don't know if we drove to Page or another town with a marina. The direct route from my childhood home east of Denver to any of the marinas is west on Interstate 70, a highway that climbs over the Rockies and

passes through the Eisenhower Tunnel, the Interstate Highway System's longest through-mountain tunnel. The route takes 10 hours, and the road steeply climbs or descends as it traverses the mountains. My parents could have chosen a longer route on scenic byways. I can't say for sure they didn't, but I remember taking long road trips and staring out of the backseat window mesmerized by the tunnel's fluorescent lights.

I texted my brother not long ago to ask if he knew if we camped near Page during those vacations. "Sure, that seems right," he said, then added, "I don't know, maybe." His brevity indicated he wasn't interested in digging up the details. I wasn't sure I wanted to know them either.

After my mother died, I found a four-by-four glossy image of us at Lake Powell in a disorganized jumble of photos. The print is hundreds of miles away in a closet in Massachusetts, but I can conjure the complete image from memory.

My father probably took the photo with a 110-millimeter Instamatic camera. The same oranges and yellows of the sunrise before me now fill the grainy photograph. My mom, my sister, my brother, and I are posed in the center. Mom's long braid hangs over her shoulder. She is wearing a swimsuit decorated with flowers and big, plastic-rimmed glasses hide her eyes. Her tanned arms wrap across my little sister and under her diapered bottom. Caught mid-giggle, my sister is chubby and tanned in a sundress with a ribbon in her hair. My older brother stands in front of Mom's right hip. His head of black hair hovers at Mom's shoulder while his white sneakers anchor him to the rock. He is physically there, but he has a far-away, wandering look. I am to his left. My hair is braided, like my Mom's, but it's dark brown contrasts with her golden locks. I wear a string bikini and am smirking at the camera with my left fist punching my sassily popped hip. I have the care-free confidence of a five-year-old. A care-free confidence my adult self is incapable of conjuring. Behind us, Lake Powell's glassy surface reflects the purple plateaus on the far shore and the bleached out, hazy sky.

I love this photo. Perhaps I enjoy the idea that I once proudly wore a bikini, unselfconscious about my body, my modesty, or my femininity. I was only five, but for this overweight, 40-something, there is joy in thinking I was once just a carefree blissed-out kid soaking in the sunshine and running around in a comfortable swimsuit. I don't recall feeling that way, but this photo offers proof that I might have.

I also love it because my father isn't in it and the four of us look like a content and peaceful family. He must be the one who took it though. Did he capture a happy moment, or was he behind the camera snarling at us?

My memory of trips to Lake Powell is like a quilt full of holes. Swaths of plain white fabric represent where my memory is blank. A few carefully quilted squares interrupt the blankness – the neatly constructed stories I was told about the vacations. They aren't my memories because I see myself from the outside. Real memories come from the deep recesses of my mind; they are ragged swatches with torn and frayed edges – melancholy first-person memories. Childhood memories follow this patchwork pattern, and I wonder if there is something wrong with me. Am I afflicted with an illness or virus that prevents me from remembering happy memories?

Happy fragments often came from my mom. She tinted memories with nostalgia when she told family stories. Perhaps she hoped to crowd out pain. My sister, the youngest, is certain the family didn't have any fun after she was born. I think she is afflicted with the same negative memory gene. I don't always trust my brother's memories. He was the focus of my father's fury, and after surviving a childhood filled with bruises, welts and insults he often remembers what he wanted childhood to be like, which is why I didn't press him about childhood camping.

Now, I am here, covered from head to toe in motorcycle gear and holding a helmet looking at the lakeshore below. I try to summon memories of campfires, hot dogs, and fireflies. My mind pastes the old photograph onto the morning and attempts to bring it to life. But the frame remains static. My younger bikini-clad self doesn't frolic fearlessly in the water. My brother doesn't leap from rocks. My sister doesn't splash in the shallows while my mother tends to camp. None of those moments are real to me.

Instead, my father teases me because I get constipated when we travel – he uses my body's failure to function as a way to torment me. He buys a new mobile toilet gadget – an unstable folding, aluminum frame attached to a padded toilet seat with a plastic bag dangling beneath to catch shit – to accommodate me every time we go camping. With unnecessary drama, he unpacks the contraptions and displays them at the campsite. I do not use them; there is no privacy. I wouldn't use them even if there were. It doesn't matter because he buys the camp toilets for humiliation. He uses my stubborn bowels as a social joke among adults. With a wink and a nod, he chuckles about his prissy little girl.

My father snatches my brother by the arm and drags him across the campsite. He scolds him and stabs a finger into his chest over and over while my brother looks away, dazed and distant. Mom begs him to stop, and I know she is willing my brother to appease him.

My father curses the stupidity of my mother and his 11-year-old son. We are on the lake after dark, and we can't find our campsite. My sister and I cower in front of the boat. It's not my father's fault we are lost, and he reminds them of their incompetence.

My humiliation conjures more moments, not just those from Lake Powell, but moments from my whole childhood.

Fearless bikini girl is gone; a fat teen with permed, frizzy hair replaces her. In his Hawaiian Pidgin English, my father is chanting, "Look at you. You so fat. You so ugly." Was that his version of reverse psychology to get me to lose weight? Or as an immigrant, did he want an All-American family so much he used cruelty to force us into conformity?

Now, my father chases my prepubescent friends around with his hand bent into a claw. "Watch out. I'm gonna pinch 'da girls' butts." He thinks this is funny and clever. I think my friends won't hang out at my house anymore.

It is Easter Sunday and father froths, ranting overused insults on repeat, "You look like a bunch of vagabonds. Where'd you learn to be so stupid?" He stabs his finger into our imperfectly combed hair, crooked skirt ruffles, mis-tucked shirts, and other imperfections. Then, despite our tear-reddening faces and fresh bruises, he stands behind the camera and demands a happy family snapshot.

I become aware of the warmth of the rising sun. I stand on a ledge looking down on the luminous lake. The memories wash over me in a shower of sadness and I feel deflated. Although my sorrow begs me to crawl back into a bed and wallow, I can't. I am alone, riding a motorcycle across the country.

The sun breaks free from the horizon. I relinquish my search for memories to the desert. My care-free, fearless, bikini-clad, five-year-old self is now a middle-aged woman who carries the burdens of her past. I am shaped by the man behind the camera. I have grieved for the woman with the golden braid. I have marveled at the adults the black-haired boy, and giggling baby have become. And now, I am riding a motorcycle across the country hoping to escape from the memories and pain that haunt me.

I take a deep breathe to still my mind and think about the road ahead. I exhale into the daybreak and pull on my helmet. Recapturing a bit of the calm that swaddled me earlier this morning, I take in the scene one last time and step into my own personal western movie scene. I clap down my visor and kick my leg over my motorcycle, offer a slight nod to no one, but in the direction of the lake. I whisper to myself, "Thank you kindly," as I slip out of Page and vanish in a trail of dust.

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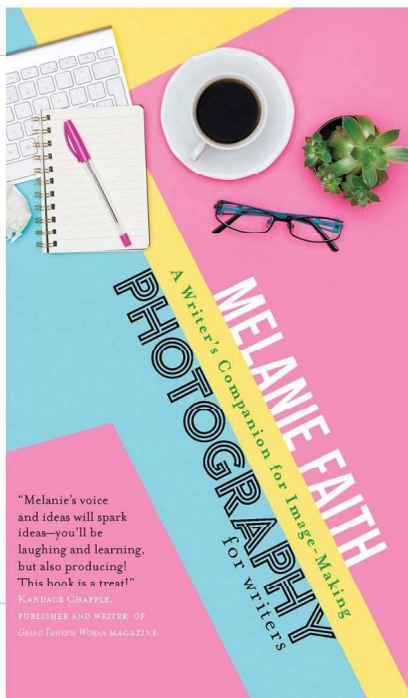
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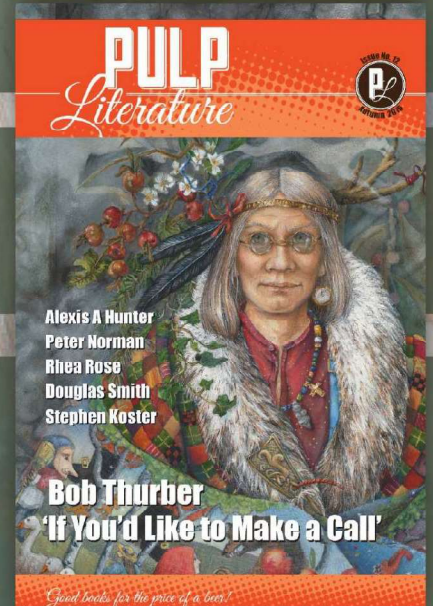
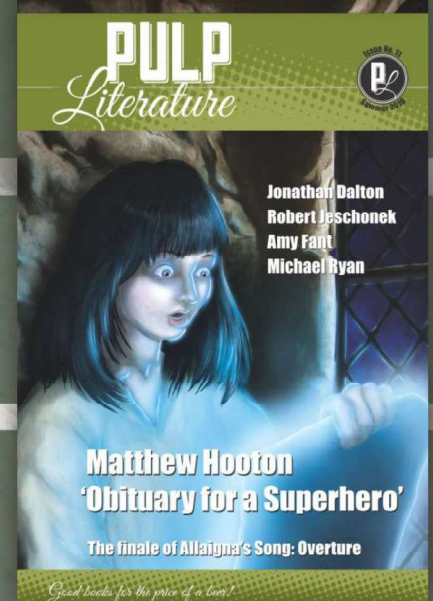
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