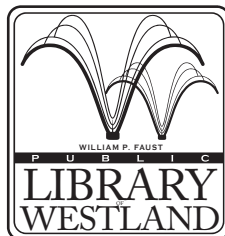


Westland Writes 2023

A Collection of Local Writing

Alexis Tharp

Editor



Public Library of Westland
6123 Central City Parkway
Westland, MI 48185
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Cover:

Sauer, W. C. "Nankin," in *Detailed official atlas of Wayne County, Michigan*. Detroit: Wm. C. Sauer, 1893. Map.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2008622019/>.

Contents

Poems

Jan Branton	
<i>Words</i>	9
<i>Seasons of a Woman's Life</i>	9
Ruth Duncan Dale	
<i>Special Day</i>	11
<i>Remembering "Mrs. Westland"</i>	12
WhyChris Daniels	
<i>For the "Broken"</i>	13
Laura Elliott	
<i>Origin of Fear</i>	15
<i>Seasons</i>	16
Diana Galante	
<i>Cloud Cover</i>	20
Kathryn Gross-Jacek	
<i>My Heart is Crying</i>	22
Jim Jeziorowski	
<i>Untitled</i>	23
<i>Dry Your Eyes</i>	24
Erin Knape	
<i>Love and Suffering</i>	25
Cheryl Martin, M.A.	
<i>Butterfly Hues</i>	27
<i>Birds of a Feather May Stick Together</i>	29
Michele Matuszewski	
<i>Uninspired-Land</i>	32

RL McDonald	
<i>Untitled</i>	33
<i>Sisterly Love</i>	33
Sherry Nichols	
<i>The Voice</i>	34
C. Reynolds	
<i>Out West</i>	36
Adrienne Thomas	
<i>Poem</i>	37
Teresa Q. Tucker	
<i>Mirrors</i>	39
Shari Welch	
<i>Moon/Sunshine Folks (Yin and Yang)</i>	40
Anette Wolski	
<i>Destiny</i>	41

Stories

Helaine Binstock	
<i>Sacrificial Rose—A Character Study</i>	45
Larry Binstock	
<i>The Creature</i>	49
Bettie Cunningham	
<i>Morah's Millions</i>	53
Ryan R. Ennis	
<i>Used Books, New Beginnings</i>	57
Lorie K. Frye	
<i>Miss Spickle</i>	61

Philip Howell	
<i>Galen: Physician to an Empire</i>	65
Chloe Kertesz	
<i>To My Dearest Daughter</i>	68
Debra Madonna	
<i>Excerpts from A Stroke. A Teeny, Broken Blood Vessel</i>	72
Michelle McTaggart	
<i>Writer's Block</i>	75
Sally Pinchock	
<i>Centered and Grounded</i>	79
Nancy Louise Spinelle	
<i>Once Upon a Time in the Forest</i>	81
Rebecca Wyckoff	
<i>Dead Man's Curve</i>	85
Imelda Zamora	
<i>Welcome</i>	91

Poems

Jan Branton

Words

When I try to put my mind at rest
The words come pouring in.
Wherever it takes me, I'll obey.
It's the perfect place to begin.
In the middle of the night,
I wake for just a moment or two,
And get those words right down so fast
Before I can think it through.
I know where they come from.
I'm sure I understand.
He speaks to me in sighs and whispers
He gently guides my hand.
My words are prayers to God above
Who guides me every day.
He keeps me in His presence
As I learn from Him along the way.

Seasons of a Woman's Life

A woman's life has many seasons
Filled with surprises beyond measure.
They can come gift-wrapped or even very messy
But all will be sweetly treasured.
Whatever path we choose in these seasons
Will be our own decision.
It can be changed or certainly altered
A process of God's revision.
Anticipation of the things to come
Is all a part of God's plan.
We plant the seeds and watch them grow

Then see where they will land.
Spring comes so bright and beautiful
We're young and can't wait to see what life brings.
As little girls, with a full life ahead,
How can we imagine such things?
When God's truth is planted deep in our roots
We bear good spiritual fruit.
We're ripe for planting all that's right
And we'll surely enjoy the pursuit.
A sense of purpose is revealed
As we enter the summer season.
God displays a guide for our life
That will prove to be the reason.
Whether that be as wives, mothers, sisters or aunts,
We cannot know for sure.
But God does, through this season of growth,
His plans are forever pure.
Still growing but changing in the autumn time
And filled with many surprises.
Did we do well, Lord, or did we mess up?
Our life has many disguises.
We've tried to nurture those seeds planted deep in our hearts
For such a time as this.
We look to see the fruits of our labor
That we don't intend to miss.
As we move on to the winter of life
We'll reflect on the things we've done.
We pray that we've honored God's plan for our lives
And accomplished what we had begun.
For when we plant those seeds of faith and kindness
We build God's kingdom with grace.
When the harvest has come and our seasons are done
He'll welcome us home with His embrace.

Ruth Duncan Dale

Special Day

Each birthday starts a new chapter in the story that life has to tell.
 This month, July, a new chapter starts for a person we know quite well.
 Can you think of a person, of a certain man
 Who's been called by many as our "Mr. Westland"?
 He served in the U.S. Army in World War II,
 A protector of this country for me and you.
 A native of Indiana, a 1917 birth date
 He settled in Nankin Township when he migrated to our state.
 Living in the community of Norwayne with his family,
 His interest in Nankin government began there, you see.
 In his political career three supportive people you might know,
 Are wives, namely Helen and Dee, and his best friend Joe.
 Some highlights to include on his government roster would be
 Nankin Township supervisor and the township treasury.
 The first mayor of the City of Westland, a city council seat,
 Six terms as state rep in Lansing, quite a feat to beat.
 He rescued old government records, and that was just the start.
 In preservation of local history, he has played a major part.
 He helped acquire a state grant, purchase a farmhouse very old,
 Which became the Historical Museum, artifacts to hold.
 He was instrumental in renovating a one-room school,
 A schoolroom that can be used as an education tool.
 By now you've thought of the name of this man around town,
 Known by some as "Tom," to others as Thomas H. Brown.

Happy birthday, Tom Brown, on your 85th birthday!

Remembering “Mrs. Westland”

When you hear the name Justine, what person comes to mind?
It belongs to a woman who was generous and kind.
Some call her the political matriarch of the City of Westland
She loved her community and always extended a helping hand.
She loved her husband, Jonathan, her two sons, Scott and Duane,
For 27 years she lived in Norwayne, where everyone knew her name.
In earlier days she was active in the Jefferson School PTA;
The school was named Jefferson-Barns in her honor at a later day.
For women in government in our city, Justine paved the way,
McKnight, DeHart, and Cicirelli are female names you hear today.
She was elected to the city charter commission, the only female,
And climbed tirelessly up the political ladder, her political ship set sail.
She was elected to the first City Council of the City of Westland,
A position she held around 16 years, now top that if you can.
She was seen at many events, that famous Justine smiling face,
It is my guess she had some doubles running loose around this place.
In 1983, she donned a new hat, she was elected as our state rep,
Where she served in Lansing 12 years, gave her community extra help.
The good deeds of Justine are too numerous to mention them all,
A donation to our Westland Public Library is one you may recall.
You all know by now this lady is JUSTINE BARNES, and that name
will stand
From this day forth her new title should be... let her be known as our
“Mrs. Westland.”

WhyChris Daniels

For the “Broken”

Broken like plates or shattered glass I intend to put every piece back together but they don't fit back together as uniquely as they once did

Broken like a puzzle missing pieces being put back together by a young kid

Broken like the spine of a book read so many times that it has detached from the binding and no longer looks as it originally did when it was first printed

Broken like jackhammering concrete and the cement is no longer cemented

Broken so far broken that I am choking on the waters I can't believe I'm drowning in

Broken assuming that the pain I am feeling comes from my outer body experiences but yet it hides within

Smashed shattered fragmented snapped crushed in pieces destroyed cracked chipped split fractured damaged defeated battered overpowered overwhelmed demoralized dispirited dishonored humbled.

Broken to the point where I no longer recognized myself in the cracked mirror surface lost in purpose trying to see my reflection much clearer no clarity

Not for the broken

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; of a broken and contrite heart, you will not despise or depart

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are
crushed in spirit

My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished the grave ready for me
soon however

He heals the broken hearted and binds their wounds up

So in being broken it allowed for transformation in a search
for salvation while being patient deliverance met me through a
revelation of being broken by my infatuation with temptation

I kneeled/repented and He showed up on time with restoration for
the broken

Who was never broken, but being pieced back together as uniquely as
they once did

Laura Elliott

Origin of Fear

In another lifetime

I was a sailor.

I knew the shape of the ocean, read the sparkling, heaving expanse.
 My eyes traced an endless horizon, squinting against the shards.
 And my fingers curled around hairy rope and heavy sailcloth,
 they knew the bite of a splinter from a weathered, cracking deck, the
 flaking skin of varnish sifting away to reveal the tired wood.

The sun dappled me in freckles, kissed each spot into my skin,
 and the salt curled my wild hair into tangled loops.
 The only land my feet knew was the pebbled shore, the razor dune grass.
 I scoured my skin with sand until it was feathery smooth,
 I could sleep only in the lap of waves, my only music the fog bell,
 my only light the slash of a lighthouse beam.

Somehow, my small body was born with this knowledge,
 the fear of the lightning as it shattered above, knowing it held fire in
 its slick hands.

Bone-deep knowledge of the searing heat in my lungs, as fire licked
 the deck, sparks settling next to freckles.

The instinct to leap, the gravity of falling, and the slice as searing
 heat turned to rushing air turned to churning water.

Then—

weightlessness.

The inevitable shift as the ocean transformed from loving embrace to
 knotted chokehold.

The pressure to gasp, to reach, fingers sluicing through nothingness.

My body still holds the knowing of the penetrating depth of silence
 of the rage of a storm above
 as a life was lost below.

Seasons

Summer

The leaves above whisper love as they slip
one against another.
Sunlight drips through the green
palms upturned, naked bellies soaking in the warmth

My eyes close, red enveloping my being
and I rest easy in the arms of the roots,
curving up and around me,
the intelligent design curling against my body
and I know
I know
I am loved.

I hear it in the beams dancing on my lids
and feel it deep in my core
with a surge,
praise dancing through my limbs
as hands rise, unbidden,
and words resonate from within
and without.

I rest easy, settling my hand-crafted,
lovingly made,
thoughtfully knitted
body between the sturdy boughs,
unyielding,
strong forevermore,
and I sleep.

Fall

My body rises,
muscles tearing and sliding against each other,
as I send my foot through yet another pile of
dried
crumbling leaves.
They shatter and drift beneath my boot,
slipping into the wind.

I watch, my stomach clenching.
It rises, unbidden, the tension,
sliding along the bottom of my stomach,
stabbing through my gut
to fill my torso, drag it down
to the ground.

The guilt is on my fingers,
in my hair,
my mouth.
It falls like a pebble through my mud-filled chest,
heavy ripples sluicing along my limbs,
tingling my fingers.

I know it is wrong,
I know it.
I hear it,
see it,
smell it,
taste it,
and yet my body rises,
aching for destruction
for desire.

Winter

My howl rises with the wind,
terror riding down the street
the needles piercing my face
tattooing their torture pattern deep into my skin.

And the indifferent silence stares me down
lets my rage ring against the concrete and street lights,
watches coldly as I break apart each piece
of belief and digest the shards, shatter them in my teeth,
snarl through the blood, snap through each one
slow
deliberate.

But it does not rise.
Does not rise to my tantrum. No murmur of love.
No slap of remonstrance.

My ears ring with the deafening silence.

And the heavy mantel settles on my shoulders
drips down through me
drowning my body
with its gravity fingers.
It scrapes along the rind of my body,
ripping my insides clean,
pulling the stringy mess out of me
and leaving the hull behind,
stumbling in the howl's memory.

I gasp.
But it goes right through me
in a white vapor.
And I know (but how can I, truly)
that the earth is irrevocably twisted on its axis,
and all I know—knew—is hatefully gone.

And I am left with nothing.
And I am everything between the stars
and at the center of the black hole
and the space between the snowflakes' spires.

Spring

My knees are pressed flowers
and grass clippings,
darkened with dirt and freckles.
Fingers soggy in the soil,
the clench, unclench, squish
through the heavy loam.
The seeds disappear with funereal suddenness
and I pat affectionately their grave.

The orange paw unearths a few
and moves on
and I lift my face to the bleakly trying sun.
A wind sweeps my arms and rises
marching goosebumps
and heavy on its feet the smell of damp
and ice.

Not yet,
it says.

Too soon,
it says.

But I turn away, turn the clumps, trowel loose in cracked hands,
ache deep in my belly,
nerves tingling with desperation.

To be done.
To begin.

Diana Galante

Cloud Cover

When the Cloud finally took you in her arms
Wrapped you up in her darkness
Possessed your mind
Pulled the breath out of you
And in her pouring rain
You slipped to the ground
Earth took you too readily
He knew your final home.
Soaked in sadness the Flowers weep
Everywhere so many in grief
They turn to the Sky
Too soon they cry while searching for light
Some carry burden well
Reaching through open doors
Others drown when her wispy grip tightens
In aftermath she laughs
As they slip to the ground.
How clever the roaming Cloud
Moving disguised overhead
In the face of day
Under cloak of night
Teasing the luminaries
Swirling across the Moon
Daring the Sun to turn corners
To spill warmth over her shadows
Sent to chase helpless hearts
Fill them with black
Corrupt their souls
Until the days run out

Then she takes form
Walks unnoticed into their arms
Waiting as they embrace her
Smothering them in fog
Smiling as they choose their way
Slipping to the ground.

Kathryn Gross-Jacek

My Heart is Crying

My heart is crying, I feel the tears flow throughout my being.
The loss is too great, the burden too heavy, I cannot bear it anymore.
A child is gone, the laughter, the smile, the squeals and tears,
Why did you take her away, God, what was the suffering for?

My heart is crying, I find it hard to breathe,
I force myself—in and out, in and out—just one more day to endure.
No matter how hard I prayed, they said there was no cure.
Cancer destroys, eats away at the body, keeps on growing more.

So many people suffering, writhing and struggling with pain.
Treatment, sickness, hope, hopelessness, over and over again.
Where did it come from? Why me? Why him, why her?
The weakened joints, the stomach, the head, the hurting never ends
Their hearts are crying, can anyone hear them?

The sun comes out, but it doesn't warm my heart,
I start to cry again, and then I fall apart.
I gaze at the birds, singing joyfully by, why?
Don't they know my world ended and all I can do is cry?

Because my heart is crying, it is something you may never see
I don't know how to live without the child that has passed
All hope disappeared when she breathed her last.
My heart is crying because I have lost a part of me.

Jim Jeziorowski

I have met the prettiest gal I have ever seen
On that glorious day of the green

We met on March 17, 1997 and from that date
Forward felt a bit of heaven

There she was—so curvy and lean
Plenty of smiles—nothing mean

We had our first date which I am happy
To say that it lasted almost all the day

Was this lady I had recently met kind & compassionate?
—you bet!!

We liked each other from the start—feeling a
Spark go through my heart

My life went from one of confusion to one
Of inclusion

Four years had gone by and I asked this lovely
Lady to be my wife

Her answer positively changed my life

The prettiest gal I have ever seen is definitely
A rare breed—yes indeed

Our marriage has lasted 22 years
Through some trials and some tears
Also eliminating any tension and fears

We pray to our Lord for guidance & wisdom
To keep us strong in our faith
That this life we shall not waste

Dry Your Eyes

Dry your eyes as you hear their cries
For the child who dies by a bullet's surprise

What is happening in a world in which we live
Children have a lot to offer—much to give
They want to learn, they want to be safe
Why is this planet that we live on so
Full of hate?

Used to be that a child's life was so carefree
And fun and now can be taken in an instant with a gun

Children go to school—some with fear
We are losing what we hold dear

Leaders say there is nothing that can be done
So they allow whoever wants one to buy gun after gun

There is madness all around whether rural or a big downtown
Who will be the next to be gunned down?

Let's stop this nonsense and bring it to an end
Let's eliminate the hate and be a friend

Erin Knape

Love and Suffering

counterfeit consciousness

smiling faces in my view
with cheers that chip at my brain
hammering away at the worry
the fears
the anxiety

as laughter fills the air
forced out by these lungs of mine
the artificial happiness swells
and I choke on my insincerity

the sight of fresh and falling snow
bends new enthusiasm across their lips
mine mimic
 in an awkward
 sort of way

inside the bubble
of my thoughts
that ache and scream
while I wake and sleep
laugh and plead

I'm crying now
raw and raking tears

yet the worries never cease
with false air,
a smeared smile

faking, in the pursuit
of realness

last goodbye

she was evening nights freckled with fireflies. she was bouquets of every shade. she was long farewells, dandelion wishes, and chocolate pie. her heart beat atop my chest settling my breath into a steady patter every Sunday morning when the birds were chirping and her hands would hold mine delicate and powerful carrying me into the day excited and delighted and just when the world felt like it would burst to pieces she waved, with a smile, knowing I was hers and she was mine. she was warm embraces beneath a woven blanket. she was long road trips below a golden sun. she was mine, and I was hers, until our last goodbye.

Cheryl Martin, M.A.

Butterfly Hues

A garden for birds, butterflies, and
 Hummingbirds, the tiny creatures mimicking Tinkerbelle,
 Where the nectar feast is readily available for the visitor, who returns
 each year
 These Hummingbirds drink nectar every few hours for sustenance,
 And yet creativity in the butterfly species is evident when other
 winged creatures find sweetness there!
 One day a lively Monarch was visiting as the cool temperatures
 dropped further in September 2022,
 Hungry, looking for its beloved Hazel and Violet Butterfly bushes,
 and found them permanently drained,
 Yet found a different possibility,
 As Nectar from afar wasn't necessary,
 Nearby, a short distance away,
 A different source via the deep red Hummingbird feeder, sweetly
 filled to the brim,
 Its lively aroma filled with hope became the lifesaver for the butterfly
 in distress,
 Who must've been starving,
 Tentatively moving closer to it,
 Not a bird in sight,
 Eagerly began its journey for nutrients,
 Gracious in flight towards its food source, yet determined in that
 moment
 As its survival depended on that feeder,
 Through its dives and flapping wings, delicately immersing itself into
 the sweet nectar,
 Another visitor watched,
 Inching closer through the viewfinder watching its delicate
 movements, taking steps lightly

Forward to observe; Peering closer to the Monarch's position as it
changed with each flap of its wings,
Showing the fluid movements of up and down, and again, deep, slow
suction movements,
Sip nectar, re-energize, refill, which lasted for moments, all alone, not
a Hummingbird, either,
No feathered friends on the various roofs nearby, nor on the treetops,
Not even resting on the Hostas, nothing to interfere with its feeding,
A relaxing time for the Monarch, who savored its flavor easily as its
Continual dipping lasting for many moments,
Suctioning with a thirst needing to be satiated, like the
Hummingbird, who in its life span would understand that without
this sweetness his or her life would
Be a feather in the wind,
And that Tinkerbell creature when it visited its food source, darted,
flitted, nary a minute or two,
It didn't like to hang around as usually many other birds were at
their respective bird feeders,
Catching a snack, or meal, flying back and forth, and doing it again
and again,
The Hummingbird's quick darts for the sugary sustenance was
meaningful to it, knowing how much
It is needed for survival, finishing its visit,
Moving onto its daily flight plan, leaving, not like the stealth of the
full-grown caterpillar; quite
A contrast as the lingering Monarch needed a bit more at its fall visit
to survive,
However, no matter that the Hummingbird's short duration of
refueling visits passed by in a flash,
Those swirling tiny grey and white feathers in this tiny bird, is a
sight to behold.
As its magical dance is fairy like, where one dreams of light colored
flight
An airy delight,
Almost touching noses with its human fan, stopping by to say hello;
As fascinating as the Monarch

Reaching for its human touch, flitting so close, letting us know, we
 are here to visit,
 One would blink in awe,
 As both are favorites to view and interact with, friendly, peaceful
 creatures,
 Where one has to sit still, or stand silently like a soldier, for a
 potential visit, or close up view
 Nature's way provides when necessary and with available resources
 of earth, water, and food,
 Yet human intervention assists with survival,
 The butterflies are a delicate species,
 Flitting away towards extinction—
 Have a reprieve in a back yard, or front yard, or maybe a side yard
 with Forsythias, tall Yuccas,
 As well as a street full of yards, or urban places like Detroit, Boston,
 New York City, and Providence,
 Butterfly bushes, amongst gardens,
 Tulips by the side of the road,
 Nectar from plant life in abundance,
 With Hummingbird feeders as an additional food source, will
 embrace Nature's way,
 Bringing back Monarchs, Swallowtails, fulfilling their place and
 harmony where they are needed
 Here on earth.

Birds of a Feather May Stick Together

Trill sounds, out of tune, yet in sync at times,
 Branches filled with feathered friends,
 Deciphering what's there and what is not,
 Playing tag or hide and seek,
 Seeing a bird push another away, on a high wire, branch, or at a local
 feeder is startling for sure,
 A suet holder of a feast that all partake in,

Yea, even the bottom-feeders may take interest flying up and down
 landing first on the iron bird statue,
 Like a reviewing stand from across the way seeing the competition
 and then joining in to feast on
 Goodies that are tossed out of the suet and bird feeders in the grassy
 area with Tulips and Grape Hyacinth,
 Before descending to discarded seeds,
 As the Red-winged Blackbirds, one Hairy Woodpecker, a House
 Finch, with Grackles and plump Robins,
 Graze and gaze at what they need, and pop off in a second,
 A movie of birds at times when the wind is silent
 But the flapping of their wings, from the size of a Hummingbird,
 Black-capped Chickadee, Blue Jays,
 Multicolored Blackbirds in a huff to get away,
 Feathers in flight, blue and white, grey, red, brown, black, striped
 birds, white dotted, you name it, fling
 Their motors into the air whisked away to where they are destined
 to go,
 As haiku rhythms dance about, an exquisite 5 7 5 three-lined poem
 forms
 With the musicality of the birds,
 As the bird haiku takes shape, thus with the following beat to the
 rhyme;
 Nose dive to bottom,
 Strolling amongst wild bird seed,
 Grackles chat with Finch;
 Another synchronization far above, loving Doves,
 Side by side on wire,
 Resting, pecking,
 A pair sharing kisses, peck, peck, and another,
 Content with their view,
 Watching
 Finally, the winged creatures blending in with the grey bark,
 In harmony, fly together,
 As these lovebirds are known to do,
 One abrupt movement of a saw,

That long branch is finally toppled, dead;
Yet it may be a bug-filled delight
A nest of nutrients for the Black-capped Chickadee and his entourage,
The loud screeches registering annoyance that the dead beloved
 branch landed below
Dismantled, yet in reality is tucked away still for the birds of Paradise
 to enjoy.

Michele Matuszewski

Uninspired-Land

I read some poems from Dahlan Simpson and they inspire me.
They put me into a creative mood.
Do we need to be in a “mood” to feel inspired?

Coffee stirs my innards and seems to ignite my thoughts.
But alas, the caffeine passes too quickly and I’m left there all alone in
“uninspired-land!”

I get the urge and start with a vengeance
And then the moment is gone! Poof!

The first few lines are SO DYNAMIC, why can’t I keep it going?

I have so much “virtual paper” to fill—a computer full!
I own a million words and can borrow from the thesaurus for yet
more, should I need them.

Discipline has never been my strong suit.
When I worked professionally, I kept at it for hours, weeks, months
without coming up for air!
But when there is no deadline, I leave myself high and dry!

Abandonment issues surround me and thus I abandon myself.
Fear of success? Fear of failure? Fear of completion and that there be
nothing further to prove?

I call to God, a hasty short request
And then do not wait for a response.

That’s how it is when I try to create
When I try to write prose and dig into myself.

That’s how it is in “uninspired-land!”

RL McDonald

Michigan
Chilly, icy
Freezing, snowing, sleet, raining
Potholes, construction, traffic, trucks
Driving, riding, shooting, loving
Hot, arid
Texas

Sisterly Love

If I didn't love my sister so dearly,
Maybe I could tell her more clearly;
Instead, we argue and fight
All the way into the night.
Mama tells us to go sleep,
But I'm so mad I just wanna weep.
I toss and turn and fume.
I wish I could escape our room.
Then my sister says she's sorry,
For being so stubborn and bossy.
Now, I feel like such a creep:
I just wanna weep.

Sherry Nichols

The Voice

Have you ever taken a walk with God?
Mother Nature holding your hand.
Through the woods on a snowy white day.
Snowflakes falling, landing on your face.
Beautiful diamond dust, looking like Queen Anne's lace.

Adventure calling like a whisper on the wind.
Around every twist, turn and bend.
Memories and snow drifting away on the wind.
Just like saying goodbye to a loved one or friend.

Pine trees reaching for the sun.
Arms spread open wide.
Whispers of others who travelled along this same path before.
Into the forest to explore.
Shadows here and there loom.
As we wander and applaud the wonders of Nature's womb.

Icicles and miniature snowballs laying on the boughs of trees.
Frozen ice on ponds,
rivers, lakes and me.
I'm overtaken with the beauty of this sacred place.
The sun shining through and washing over me with tender grace.
Harsh and gentle like a two sided face.

Time and time again, over the hills and along the trails.
Deer jumping across your path, leaving just a glimpse of their pretty
white tails.

The snow keeps falling, a whisper calling.
Yet the woods give up no secrets.
I keep crawling through the magic that God has made.
Old memories returning, some beginning to fade.

Frolic and play, and being so bold.
Leaving behind nature's bounty and garden of gold.
The presence of silver sprinkled around.
And in this quiet place I hear in my heart a voice speaking wisely
and profound.
With compassion and grace it tells me.
We all are connected in this journey called life.
Take time to enjoy the wonders of this place.

Dusk is approaching.
God's carpet changes hues.
I'm in a hurry now to go home and share the news.
The twinkling stars wrap the night with tender light.
Darkness is approaching.
Shadows are encroaching.
I watch as the woods pull their white blanket over.
Downy flakes, and marshmallow, fluffy cover.
The woods begin to sleep and dreams are calling.
The blanket of snow keeps falling.

I've had quite a journey and then some.
That's a wrap this evening in God's Kingdom.

C. Reynolds

Out West

We lived our whole lives there
In a dark valley
The shadow of death
Hanging on our food and clothes
Desperate laborers bones grinding
In these confines
The greedy grow and leave less space
Less air and water
The light we do get in our valley is being blocked out a little at a time
No one has come to lead us from this place
Nobody can see us down here and I am quite sure
Nobody wants to give up what they have
Broken bones and teeth for
Like the brick being mortared in I feel it
A transient experience leaving
Only nothing behind
I want to claw into it all
To scream while flying above the valley
To say no and wipe all of their noses and pat them on the head
Off to bed
Here it is though, a brick, a structure, a great wall on either side
Pressing inwards
There's not enough for everyone
Not enough roof or wall
And we'll hold it up and bang our heads together
Scrape away our surface or go over it but it's there
A deep aching trouble
So much fear to leave home for a promised land
I don't know if it's our fault or if it's our design
I don't know if the valley is escapable
I haven't tried
I looked before but couldn't see
I learned to let go but couldn't leave
Just here

Adrienne Thomas

Poem

She wasn't taught the birds and the bees and how to love, you see her dad had loved her unconditionally, and momma did the best she could too, but she was never told how to love herself, too. Simple things that a girl needed to know she was simply told I got mine, and you gotta learn to get yours, too.

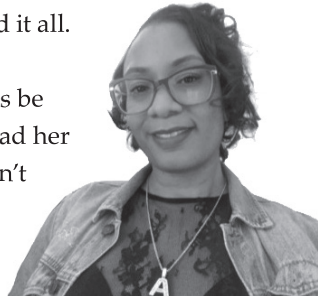
See, she wasn't prepared to know how to love herself first. She wasn't taught that God would send you everything you need. Once again she was simply told I got mine, and you gotta learn to get yours, too.

She decided to learn from experience, but she messed up and was never told how to clean it up and get back on track. Remembering those words, I got mine, and you gotta learn to get yours, too.

She had children back to back, worked many jobs, educated herself, got married and turned into a person she simply didn't know who she was. She smiled on the outside and was torn up on the inside.

When the weight of the world fell on her, she had lost herself including staying connected to God, she simply couldn't believe how could this ever be. A person who said I love you simply didn't show me. She worked she cooked, she cleaned, and she managed the home, took care of the family, the dog and the turtle too, but that simply wasn't enough she was ready to end it all.

She no longer knew herself how could this be she was the life of the party and always had her own unique style you see. She simply didn't know who she had become after the love she gave to others their love had run out for me.



She stayed in a situation that had attacked her soul, mentally she had many late nights of crying and hiding behind a cloud just to make her kids smile, all while trying to figure things out.

There were nights she had took an uncountable amount of pills and cut her wrist, seems like life would be better if she simply just ended it all and disappeared.

God gave grace and mercy to say today won't be the day to say goodbye, it's time for me to show you just what you mean to me. God said I will carry you lean on me as we leave don't look back everything you lost I will give double plus that. The road God took her down was lonely, bumpy it had some twists and turns many stop and yield signs and dead ends too God told her just continue to follow the map I have prepared for you. She is now walking in her purpose no turning back she kept going and never looked back.

She is Me.....

Teresa Q. Tucker

Mirrors

Mirrors change us daily.
They don't freeze time.

Moments are simply reflections or placeholders for feelings to be held tightly to the chest.

And mirrors are not meant to capture static moments.
After all, they are not cameras; they were not designed to be.

We are in a new time and space each time we approach them.

Mirrors start the process of shapeshifting.
They change their focus, their shift, their gaze, and show us that
clocks and calendars may not really exist in a manner we imagine.

Over time reflections can become impertinent, and we understand
that they have controlled and ruled who we think we are since the
moment we realized their existence.

Yet, frequently, we go back just to see what we have turned into since
the last time we ventured to take another look.

Shari Welch

Moon/Sunshine Folks (Yin and Yang)

When the moon is full, big and bright
It is time for the demons to come out at night
Vicious, evil, and mean folks fuss and fight
No matter how hard we try, we can't get along right

The littlest things can set us off
He looked at me wrong
She's coming on strong
He yelled at me loud
Do we stand out in a crowd?
Us moon folks

When the sun comes out nice and bright
It is that time everything is all right
Warm and loving folks smile and grin
Harmoniously we come together like kin

The littlest things mean so much
He is so helpful and caring
She is a giving soul and always sharing
He looks so handsome and doing well
Do we come together real swell?
Us sunshine folks

Anette Wolski

Destiny

Monarch butterflies
Quietly soaring in circles
Gently tickling each other
As they fly through the wind
Enjoying their journey before they
Alight on a stalk of swaying milkweed.

I embrace my milkweed jungle.
It not only provides the
Sweet smell of enticing fragrance,
But provides for tasty nourishment
For traveling insects...
Butterflies and bees
And black- and orange-colored
Autumn-forecast insects.

The jungle started by the suggestion
Of one tiny seed.
Come, follow me, it said.
Let's fly on gossamer wings,
Drifting and floating to
Enchanted destinations
And create a beautiful refuge
For all to embrace.

And the seeds listened,
And heeded the tiny one's advice.
And they created a haven
Of awe and wonder
Tranquility
and
Peace
Encouraging my mind to wander
And to wonder
How this elegant beauty
Chose my yard
As its destiny.

Stories

Helaine Binstock

Sacrificial Rose—A Character Study

Rose Benson may be the most fascinating character you've ever known. Obese, seldom wearing her dentures or bra, always seated in her living room on the same huge chair, legs splayed unashamedly. Her home attire, for whomever present, guests or family, is invariably a soiled, worn housedress, split at the seams. Rose appears to have no pride whatsoever, no self-regard. Yet Rose, unquestionably, is more than meets the eye. Lacking intelligence, dense enough to insist "North is always on your right," despite explanations how illogical, she displays additional dimwittedness to rational reasoning, adding, "Well, it's different around my apartment."

Nevertheless, Rose is shrewd enough to inflict massive doses of undeserved guilt to anyone forced to rely on her for assistance. Nobody can lay on guilt like Rose. That's her expertise. Repeated, unrelenting outbursts of disappointment, voiced feelings of ingratitude for her services are constantly repeated to whomever she lends a hand. Myriad hurtful complaints to her children, continuing throughout adulthood, eventually affecting marriages and spouses. In whatever fashion Rose assists anybody—family or friend—she perpetually reminds them throughout their lives of her unselfish good deeds performed for them in their times of need. Additionally, to whomever is listening, she reports how unappreciative recipients of her services were. Nobody ever shows enough gratitude, never what she expects, for what she, herself, labels selfless acts of kindness. Never enough to satisfy her demands! Ask her. "Not enough thanks for all I did for her. I really wore myself out helping her. Nobody, and I mean nobody, ever realizes just exactly how I put myself out. With me it's all give and no take! I'm not that strong myself but nobody realizes that. Believe me, I suffer for it an entire week afterward. I limped for an entire week after I helped Marion."

Precisely how their mother actually convinces herself, and few others, that she is magnanimous is a mystery to her children. Her mastery of deception astounds them. Indeed, she is quick to offer help. She's

often the first to offer herself, which is admirable, but to her children, her proffer definitely stems not from altruism but, instead, as a tool to obligate her "prey." Their weird, abnormally untidy, mother is amazingly cunning. She has the uncanny ability to make people feel morally bound.

"What I did for her, she owes me! I was kind enough to drive her to her cancer treatments. Following the treatments, I took her to lunch. You'd think she'd pick up the check; well, she didn't. Can you believe that? I stopped for gas and she didn't even offer to pay that bill either. I expected at least that much from her, but no! Not even a 'let me help pay for the gas for all you're doing.'"

"You, my son, get embarrassed just because I wave and shout your name when you march by in the Boy Scout parade. I come watch you for a couple hours on a rainy day and now, after standing a few hours in the rain, I actually came down with miserable cold. I don't know why I even try to be a good mother. If you only knew how I suffered when you were born, coming out breach and all. I almost died. Some appreciation! I saw another boy wave to his mother. Why do I even try?"

"Other married children with families include their mothers in family vacations. Not mine. Bertha's kids took her to Disneyland with them. She's not nearly as helpful a mother as me and she gets to go on trips with her kids. Mine never even give a thought to include me. What, I'm not as good a mother? How much more can I do? Nobody does as much as I do...ever! Why do I even try?"

Carefully weighing words, daughter tactfully suggests it would be appreciated if Rose phone prior to arriving unexpectedly again. She carefully chooses kind words following yet another disturbance at an inopportune time, this one especially embarrassing, to which Rose angrily remarks, "What, I need an invitation to visit my own children? Bertha's kids are always glad to see us whenever we show up. We don't need an invitation from them. But with MY kids, I need an invitation! What makes Bertha's kids happier to see me, more appreciating than my own kids? Bertha drops over at her kids' anytime she wants. And I'm always welcomed there with flying colors with no invitation! They're always glad to see me. You should see how they greet us. With hugs and kisses. Not like my own kids. Why is that? Is Bertha a better

mother than me? I'm sure that's not possible. Nobody does more for her kids and for other people than me. Only my own kids don't appreciate how I put myself out for them. Only my own kids!"

The phone rings constantly. It's Rose again. Calling, complaining about someone, some occurrence, where she feels her acts of kindness were not sufficiently recognized. Depleted and upset, Rose's daughter concludes yet another one-way, Rose's self-congratulatory conversation consisting of Rose elaborating on her good deeds, another spoken exchange for which the recipient was, as usual, ungrateful. Once more, her young recently-married daughter returns the receiver to its cradle, sighs deeply, and heads directly toward the medicine cabinet for two precious aspirins, another two which often can soothe her pounding head following Rose's thrice-daily, often more, phone calls.

Ask Rose. She'll tell you she's a saint. She actually uses the blessed word: "saint." She regularly uses it when describing herself. "Nobody is as giving as me. If you need help, who's there to help but Rose? Everyone always calls Rose when they need help. Rose to the rescue! Rose the saint."

"I sacrificed my life for my kids. Sometime I wonder if it was worth it. Nobody gives of themselves as much as me! And what for? Nobody appreciates what I do. I don't know why I keep giving of myself. One of these days, I'll smarten up. Let somebody else help for a change. Why always me? Why? Because I'm a saint. Rose the saint."

Undeniably, Rose's "victims," especially her children, don't see her through her same Rose-colored glasses. Instead, they regard her self-proclaimed "bounteous giving" as power to overcome their resistance. Could it possibly be true? Can each and every one of Rose's "victims" indeed be unappreciative? Every single individual she's dealt with without exception? If you were a recipient of her so-called saintly help, would you regard her a "saint," the word she uses repeatedly when describing herself? Most often, she'll echo it repeatedly to whomever actually availed themselves of her help.

"Saint Rose I call myself. Nobody helps people more than me. Everybody somehow manages to find me. People always call on Rose when they seek help. It's always me who's there for them. Me, Rose the saint. I simply can't say no. Have you ever heard me refuse to help

anyone? Not me! I'm never-say-no Rose! Saint Rose!"

Time to evaluate Rose. How do you judge her? Incidentally, have you ever come across a personage mentioned in the Bible, a benefactress called Saint Rose? Was that particular saint mistakenly overlooked—or deliberately dismissed?

Larry Binstock

The Creature

In the 1950s, during the height of the Cold War, I was drafted into the U.S. Army, and stationed in a small German town. My wife soon joined me, and we set up housekeeping for the first time in our nascent marriage.

Our apartment in Germany was on the top floor of a three-story building. The stairway in our hall was covered by a ceiling that followed the contour of the stairs and was never too far above our heads as we descended. Placed in that ceiling was a small window, kept slightly open during warm weather to allow cool air in. Both the hall and stairway were mundane features in our lives. Except on this one evening when, walking out of our apartment, we were startled by an aberration—a creature of frightening aspect clinging to the ceiling at the top of the stairs.

It resembled a bird, but was clearly not a bird. Birds can be cute or even pretty. This creature was ugly. I dislike using the adjective “ugly” when describing an animal since I must use human factors in making that judgment. To those in its own species, that animal could be the equivalent of George Clooney. But I had no other description for this creature. It was indeed ugly, so much so that it sent Helaine and me scurrying back into our apartment for safety.

“What is that thing?” asked my wide-eyed wife.

“I’m not sure,” I answered, equally shaken. “I’ve never seen one in person, but I think it might be a bat. It probably flew in through the open window in the ceiling.”

My wife’s next question was easy to predict. “How do we get rid of it?”

“I’m not going to fight with it,” I responded, “so let’s think of something else.”

The answer came quickly. Harold Elson! Harold and Libby Elson lived on the second floor, and were not only neighbors, but good friends. We spent much time with them. In fact, we were supposed to

pick them up on the way out that evening and go somewhere together. Harold was a sergeant in the motor pool, but was a former member of the Army's Special Forces. The reason for his departure from that famous fighting force was vague. Something to do with an "accident." He never defined the details. And we never pushed him for them. However, we felt that Harold's training for that elite group must have equipped him to handle any enemy, and so he most likely could use that training in evicting our stairway interloper. But alerting Harold to the situation meant I had to descend those stairs and pass by the creature.

Helaine produced a medium-sized box in which she had received a gift from her mother. "Here," she said, "put this over your head so that you can protect your head and face in case that thing attacks you."

I accepted her suggestion, and donned this cardboard protection. But it proved unnecessary. The creature remained docile as I passed beneath it.

I explained the situation to Harold and said, "I need someone with your courage and expertise to take care of the problem."

"Okay, let's go," said Harold, putting on his best Green Beret bravado.

I expected Libby to remain safely ensconced in her apartment, but she chose to come along, and all three of us trooped up the stairs. When the creature came into sight, however, Harold's courage visibly faltered, and Harold, Libby, and I joined Helaine behind the closed door of our apartment. We stood there trying to formulate some plan of attack. The only weapon we had was the box that I used for protection. It was Libby who came up with an idea. "Honey," she said to her husband, "why don't you take that box and get that thing inside of it. Then we'll come out, seal up the box, and carry it outside, and let that thing out."

Obviously, Harold was reluctant to carry out this plan, but his Green-Beret pride didn't allow him to refuse. In a state of pseudo bravery, he left the sanctuary of the apartment and walked resolutely towards the creature, box in hand. We quickly closed the door and waited for what came next. In a short time, we heard Harold's triumphant announcement: "I got him in the box." With joy in our hearts and appreciation for Harold, we opened the door and entered the hall. Harold stood there with the box pressed against the spot where the creature lurked. He yanked the box away and, lo and behold, the creature still

clung to its place. Harold had not succeeded in his mission. That failure robbed Harold of any pretense of courage. He dropped the box and rapidly joined Libby, Helaine, and me in re-entering the apartment—slash fortification—and shutting the door. Once again we stood there trying to formulate a plan for ridding ourselves of this obnoxious visitor. “We have to get Frau Dorenbacher involved,” I suggested, referring to our landlady who lived on the first floor. For a short time we debated the practicality of asking a 60-year-old lady to engage in combat with a potentially dangerous foe. In the end, we decided to enlist her aid. Since Harold was still shaken from his futile encounter, I volunteered to bypass the creature and head downstairs to fetch Frau Dorenbacher.

About halfway downstairs I paused to determine how I would convey the idea of a bat to a woman who spoke no English. Even for a competent charades player like myself, depicting a bat in some kind of sign language would be difficult. Then I remembered. that I indeed knew the German word for bat. In my college Humanities class we had listened to a recording of the opera *Die Fledermaus*, and the professor informed us that “Fledermaus” was bat in the German language. Armed with this memory, I confidently knocked on our landlady’s door.

Upon opening the door, the good Frau smiled graciously as she always did, but her expression turned to concern when she saw the look on my face. In my best German, I said, “Ein Fledermaus in Eingang oben,” a bat is in the hall above. Without a word, Frau Dorenbacher disappeared into the innards of her apartment and reemerged with a broom in her hand. She gently pushed by me and staunchly headed for the stairs, with me cautiously behind her.

I eagerly awaited the impending confrontation between the uninvited guest and Frau Dorenbacher with her now weaponized broom. But I was deprived of that scene. When we reached the spot inhabited the by the creature, I saw it was now vacant. The bat must have sensed the hostility of the residents of this building and flown to find quarters with more welcoming occupants. Frau Dorenbacher gave me a silent gesture that clearly said, “well, that’s that.” Afraid that Frau Dorenbacher was upset because I interrupted her evening for nothing, I tried to soften the moment with some humor and attempted to say in German that the bat must have been afraid of her. Apparently

she understood because she chuckled. The broom didn't go to waste. She reached up with the handle and completely closed the window so other flying creatures couldn't invade her building. Giving me a slight wave of her hand, she headed back downstairs.

I lost no time in joining Helaine, Harold, and Libby, still behind the closed door. They had no knowledge of the creature's voluntary departure and were, of course, delighted to learn of it. After some hand clapping and exclamations of joy, the four of us headed down the now bat-free stairway and out of the building. It was a foursome that included two American soldiers stationed in Germany to protect world freedom and, if necessary, to face down the entire Russian army. But if that didn't work, they could always count on Frau Dorenbacher and her broom.

Bettie Cunningham

Morah's Millions

As she rummages through the clothes at the bottom of the thrift store bin, she loses herself in the hopes of finding something different, unique yet suitable to wear to this evening's after-work festivities. After all, she must show them that she cleans up well when she really wants to and without spending goo gobs of money on red bottoms and designer brands. Morah knows what they don't know! She knows how to make something out of nothing. Well, not quite nothing! But she does know how to make something out of very little, so little that most people would call it nothing.

Morah knows how to "stretch a dollar," as her grandmother used to say. She knows how to make money last and how to create good, wholesome meals from scraps. Morah knows what it's like to barely get by, to not know what her next meal will be or whether she will even have a next meal. She knows what it's like to do without: to go to bed without dinner, to get up in the morning so hungry that she feels that her large intestine is trying to eat her small intestine. She knows the torture of hunger, the devastation of homelessness, the hopelessness of loneliness. Morah knows the danger of being on the brink of losing everything, including her mind.

She knows because that was once her life! Having never known her father and having lost her mother to cancer when she was only 5 years old, Morah was raised by her grandmother, Ganny. That's what she called her because when she was little, she couldn't say "Granny," and so the name Ganny just stuck. Ganny was her mother's mom, a kind and gentle soul who was everything to Morah. Ganny cared for her and looked after her and loved her more than anyone in the entire world, even her own mother. Ganny was her angel! Her savior, next to Jesus! "Nobody can save you but Jesus," that's what Ganny used to say. "I can help you, other people might help you and you shole can help yourself... but nobody can save you but Jesus." That's exactly what Ganny used to say, and so Morah ends every prayer with "Jesus, please

save me." Morah says it so much that throughout the day she finds herself saying "Jesus, please save me!"

Ganny! Morah's own Ganny filled the shoes of her mother and father—her friend and her confidante, her Santa Claus and Tooth Fairy, her prayer warrior and her protector, and her everything, next to Jesus. Ganny! A memory, a misty memory that always brings forth tears when Morah thinks about Ganny. It has been 8 years since Ganny passed, but boy, does it still hurt like it was yesterday.

Ganny had a stroke when Morah was 16. She never recovered. Morah recalls seeing Ganny in the hospital for the first time and can still see how fragile and worn Ganny looked. Morah had never seen Ganny look so weak and vulnerable. She had never even known Ganny to be sick.

She was in the cafeteria at Cass Technical High School when she heard her name called from the loud speaker, "Morah Tyme, please come to the principal's office immediately." She remembers taking her slow time walking the halls to the principal's office, wondering "what now?" as her right hand drew an invisible line across the wall. She remembers wondering why she was being called anyway. Why? And she most definitely remembers the feeling in her stomach when she was told that her grandmother was taken to the hospital and that she needed to get there as soon as possible. There was a pit in her stomach: a pit that has never been filled since that day.

A neighbor and Ganny's friend, Ms. Kay, had rushed to the school and informed them of the news. Ms. Kay greeted Morah with a big bosomey hug as Morah stood stiff in disbelief, tears rolling down her face and not a sound as the principal and social worker explained what had happened to Ganny. "We're excusing you from school, Morah, so you can go with Ms. Kay to the hospital to see your grandmother." They never told her that Ganny was in critical condition, that she would not get well, that she would not come home. They never told her that her life would be changed forever. Morah remembers praying, "Jesus, please save Ganny. Please, save me!" Ganny passed!

That was 8 years ago when everything seemed bleak and hopeless and scary. It's a very present misty memory and yet something that seems so long ago. It sometimes seems like it was only yesterday, and

at other times it seems like it was eons ago. She misses Ganny with every ounce of her being. More than she misses anyone or anything.

After Ganny passed, Morah had to fend for herself, grow up fast! The home that Ganny owned wasn't really hers. There was still a mortgage on it, and it was repossessed by the mortgage company for non-payment after Ganny passed. Eventually, Morah found herself couch hopping from one friend's house to another until she had nowhere else to hop to but to a shelter. It was during this time in her life that Morah felt the torture of hunger, the devastation of homelessness, the hopelessness of loneliness.

The cold shelter was no comparison to the warmth of Ganny's home, and the coldness of the staff was no comparison to the warmth and love of Ganny. But Morah stayed at the shelter for as long as she could, long enough to graduate high school. Interestingly enough, all the while at the shelter, nobody ever asked her much about her life before. Actually, she was glad they didn't because it was too hard to talk about. She just stayed out of the way: went to school, spent a lot of time in the library doing school work and then to the shelter at sundown, just enough time to complete her assigned chores, eat the dinner that they served (if any was left or if it was edible) and take a lukewarm shower. This was her life for nearly two years after Ganny passed.

She barely graduated high school. Soon afterwards, she got a job and moved out of the shelter and into a one-bedroom apartment on the west end of the city—Detroit, that is. It wasn't much but it was hers. She worked two jobs for a while, saved enough money to buy a hoopty, and found a better job, paying more than the last one. Things were looking up for Morah.

That was then. Things are looking even better now. This is a new day and Morah is looking forward to the festivities of the evening. Where she once felt like she was living at the bottom of the barrel of life, she is now searching through the bottom of the bin at the thrift store. Not because she has to, but because she wants to. She enjoys finding something different, unique yet suitable! She likes saying the word "suitable." This is suitable for my taste! That is suitable for the occasion. "Suitable" sounds like a word that rich people might use—suitable!

To Morah, "suitable" sounds like a word that rich people might use,

and she is rich. All the while that she was in the shelter, for two whole years, Morah had no idea that Ganny had several life insurance policies and had invested money for her when she was only 5 years old. That money is in a trust and is now worth more than \$1 million. She is now of age to access the trust since she turned 24 years old. She had no idea! An attorney somehow tracked her down after 8 years and gave her the good news. She was paralyzed in disbelief and still has not touched any of the money. Just knowing it's hers is enough for now.

Her Ganny was there for her all those years that she was growing up, looked out for her in every way and made sure that she was taken care of, even now. Morah cannot believe it, but yet she can. Ganny taught her to believe only Jesus can save us, but Morah can't help but think that Jesus used Ganny to save her back then and now.

Every night when she kneels to pray, right before getting into bed in the small one-bedroom apartment on the west end of Detroit, or when driving in to work in her li'l blue 1992 Toyota Paseo hoopty, Morah says a prayer of thanks and always ends it with "Jesus, please save me. Amen."

Ryan R. Ennis

Used Books, New Beginnings

Approaching his used bookstore that spring morning, he was surprised to find Elise standing in front of the stained-glass front door. The day before, the attractive woman had purchased a handsome leather-bound set of Jane Austen's complete works. It had been his first major sale since he had taken over The Book Lure more than a week ago. He had wrapped the Austen collection in heavy tissue paper and put them in a large fancy box (white with gold polka dots) that he had unearthed in the crowded storage room. To show Elise his appreciation, he had temporarily abandoned his store to carry the box out to her car in the back parking lot.

At that moment, his happiness from the memory was overshadowed by the sight of that same decorative box resting near Elise's heeled sandals. As he pulled the store keys out of his pants pocket, his stomach churned with anxiety. Was she just returning the box—or wanting a refund? He had checked the book covers and pages thoroughly before packing them—no marks or tears on any of them—all in excellent condition. The only reason he could think of why she might want a refund is that she regretted the price: \$125.

"Good morning, Elise," he said. "What brings you back today?" He gazed at her pretty face and long chestnut hair, whose reddish highlights shimmered in the sun.

She met his slight smile with a serious look on her face. With the manicured and painted toes of her left foot, she motioned to the box. "I'm returning this to you," she replied.

Her eyes dropped from his face to his shirt. Glancing down, he discovered his tie was a bit crooked. He quickly straightened it. With hesitation, he asked, "Just the . . . box?"

A modest breeze blew around them. He swallowed some of the cool air, barely sensing how it ruffled his curly hair. Nervously, he rubbed the keyring before his fingers. Since she didn't answer, he decided to press, "You didn't like the books?"

Chilled by the wind, she shivered for a moment as she turned up the wide collar of her hip-length cotton jacket. Laughing softly, as if avoiding his question, she pointed at the box. "There's something in it for you."

Unclear on what that *something* was, he asked, "You have books you want to sell?"

Again, she didn't answer. She simply looked at him with a playful grin.

"Is anything the matter?" He tapped the store's old-fashioned skeleton key against his chin.

She shook her head. "I'm fine, but I must get moving. I must be at work soon. We'll talk later." Then she hurried off.

Although he was eager to check out the contents of the box, he couldn't help standing there and watching her, riveted by the confidence in her glide, until she disappeared around the corner of the next block. There was no denying his attraction to her. He hadn't dated anyone in a few years because of his past involvements with unstable women. But he knew he shouldn't let these bad experiences affect the rest of his life. Maybe it was time to give dating a try again. If he were to ask Elsie out, would she say *yes*?

After unlocking the door, he picked up the box. It felt heavier than it had yesterday, yet still manageable. Bringing it inside, he used his elbow to clear away some papers on the counter and then set it down. He was eager to find out why the box seemed like it had added weight. He pulled the flaps away and discovered there was a different set of books inside. The volumes looked old but were in like-new condition—bound in stunning black leather and embossed with ornate gold lettering. He scanned the titles: *All's Well that Ends Well*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Measure for Measure* . . . With his finger, he counted them. Fourteen in total. All comedies. He smelled each book as he placed them on the counter. No odors. He estimated the collection could sell for \$200, possibly more. Could these be a gift? He shook his head. Most likely, she would be returning later to inquire how much their value was and whether he would be interested in buying them. He would be interested, but with his business so sluggish, he would have to turn her down.

At the bottom of the box was a glittery Thank You card that answered

his questions. Opening it, he held the card under the glow of the brass desk lamp beside the register, impressed by the small, neat penmanship:

Dear Thomas,

It was nice to meet you yesterday. It was my first time in your establishment, and you made it a satisfying experience. My friends and family may enjoy ordering books online—but not me. I love to browse the bookshelves and see what I can find. I really appreciate you helping me score a beautiful collection of Jane Austen’s books.

Once again, I’m sorry to hear about your grandfather’s passing. I, too, was close to my grandfather and looked up to him. I’m gifting you his prized collection of Shakespeare. The plays cheered him whenever his spirits were down. I hope they will do the same for you.

Are you doing anything after work? Any dinner plans? I plan to stop by after work. It would be wonderful to get to know you better.

See you later,

Elise

P.S. I’m predicting business will be good today.

The chime above the door sounded as the first customer of the day entered the shop. He looked up and saw it was a gray-haired woman with glasses. *What types of books will she like?* he wondered. Moving from behind the counter, he stepped toward her with the same assuredness in Elsie’s stride. “May I help you?” he asked enthusiastically.

“Just browsing,” she replied.

He smiled pleasantly. “Can I point you in any particular direction?”

“Biographies.”

“All along the back wall.”

She nodded a thank you.

A feeling of excitement came over him. He had failed at many ventures—dismissed from art school, fired from a fast-food management position, denied admission to an accelerated teacher-training program—and so was now hopeful that running the business he had inherited from his grandfather would be his niche. When he and Elise had talked about what she might enjoy reading, he’d steered her toward Jane Austen after learning of her preference for stories with

upbeat endings. And most likely, she was recommending Shakespeare's comedies because she could tell that he was still struggling with his grandfather's sudden death and could use an upbeat new beginning. Her gift and note were such wonderful gestures!

His attention went back to his customer, who was halfway down an aisle. "Browse as long as you want," he said. "And feel free to ask if you need help."

Within minutes, another customer walked into the store. And then another. And before long, yet another. He was certain that time would fly by as he awaited Elise's return. . . .

Lorie K. Frye

Miss Spickle

Tat tat, tat. Tat tat, tat. The obnoxious sound upset the quiet of the library. Miss Spickle, the librarian, looked over her spectacles at the little freckled boy playing with the typewriter. She seemed very much the grandmother type, although she had no children. Her sparse gray hair, once dishwater blonde, appeared unkempt, though she attempted to tie it back each morning. Her fingers, gnarled with arthritis, made it difficult to manage anything, much less her hair. Her spine had curved, taking at least an inch from her already short stature, but she didn't let the pain stop her from opening the county library. She had not missed a single day over the past thirty years. Miss Spickle left the library desk, pulling her knitted sweater down around her ample hips. She stationed herself behind the child, who was so engrossed in striking the typewriter keys that she startled him when she spoke.

"Young man, the typewriter is for people that need to type something."

"But I am typing something." The little boy answered her in a raspy voice without taking his eyes off the keyboard.

Miss Spickle placed her hands on her hips.

"You don't have any paper." She quipped.

He peered up at Miss Spickle, raised one brow, and wrinkled his nose.

"Do you got any paper?" He asked.

The librarian loved words and their correct use. She promptly corrected him by repeating what he had said in a proper sentence. "Do you have any paper?"

The boy seemed not to notice he had been corrected. He innocently answered, "No, that's why I asked you."

Miss Spickle pursed her thin, wrinkled lips, then tried again, emphasizing the word have.

"Do you *have* any paper?" She repeated in a less library-like volume. "I was correcting you. We don't say, got any paper?"

The child appeared undaunted by her gruffness. He returned to

pecking at the typewriter. She looked around the library, noting that only an elderly gentleman reading the local paper was present. Even so, rules were rules.

"What is your name, young man?" She prompted him.

"Jeffrey," he told her.

"Well, Jeffrey," Miss Spickle addressed him, "I don't see your mother anywhere."

Finally, Jeffrey stopped. He sat back in his chair to meet the old woman's gaze.

"My mom dropped me off," he explained. "She's taking the other kids to the park, but I can't go because I have asthma." He said the word asthma as though it caused him shame; his chin dropped. Miss Spickle softened. She smiled at the boy.

"Perhaps, Jeffrey, you might find a nice book to read in the children's section."

The boy lifted his head and wrinkled his nose again.

"I already looked, but I can't read."

"My goodness, Jeffrey. What grade are you in?"

His freckled face flushed. He blurted out his confession.

"I'm going to be eight, and I'm supposed to go to the third grade, but my mom is going to hold me back because I miss a lot of school days. I don't know how to read."

What a terrible shame, Miss Spickle thought. Books had been her life, and you could go anywhere you wanted from inside the pages of a book. She couldn't imagine how awful it would be to miss out on so much. This just was not acceptable. She placed a crooked finger to her lips while she looked around the room. She wasn't actually seeing the tables and chairs or the rows of bookshelves, as her mission obstructed her vision.

"Come with me, Jeffrey," she ordered, and he followed her to the children's section. "Please choose a book that looks interesting to you."

He looked at the collection of colorful books on the shelves, but, bewildered, he turned to her with a shrug.

"I don't know if they're interesting, and I don't know what the stories are about," he said.

She spoke sweetly to him. "That's all right, honey. Just tell me some-

thing you would like to do... someplace you would like to see.”

“I’d like to go to the Grand Canyon,” Jeffrey said. “My dad takes my brothers there every year, but he won’t take me because of my asthma.”

Miss Spickle paused in thought. She knew every book in the children’s section.

“I don’t think I have any books on the Grand Canyon that would be appropriate for you, but I know a book that little boys enjoy.”

She pulled a copy of *The Call of the Wild* from one of the shelves, carefully sat herself down on a child-sized seat, and pulled another chair close to her.

“Let’s read this together, Jeffrey. I think you’ll enjoy it.”

And so it was. Every week Miss Spickle read to Jeffrey. In time, she began to teach him to sound out syllables until he could read the words by himself. She looked forward to the days he spent in the library, and the days he was absent, she thought of innovative ways to improve his reading ability. Jeffrey also enjoyed the learning sessions and often pestered his mother to take him to the library. Delighted that her son had learned to read so well, Jeffrey’s mother decided to accompany him to see Miss Spickle. She wanted to thank her for what she had done. Miss Spickle was not behind the librarian’s desk when they arrived at the library. A young woman greeted them instead. Jeffrey looked around the library and returned to the desk.

“Where is Miss Spickle?” he asked.

The young woman smiled at the boy and his mother and explained. “Miss Spickle, I’m sorry to say, has suffered a stroke and had to be hospitalized. I’m just here until a replacement can be found.”

Jeffrey’s mother saw tears in her son’s eyes and desperately wanted to lighten his pain. She spoke soothingly to him, but he was inconsolable. In despair, she offered, “We’ll go to the hospital to see Miss Spickle.”

As the two forlornly turned to leave, the young woman pulled a large book from behind the desk and called after them.

“Does your name happen to be Jeffrey?” He nodded. “This book has your name on it.”

The little boy took the heavy book from her. On the cover, the title read, *The Grand Canyon*. The book cover also displayed a colorful picture of the magnificent gorge. Inside the book jacket, he found, “To

Jeffrey, from Miss Spickle. Welcome to the Grand Canyon!"

Mother and son found Miss Spickle in a hospital bed, partially paralyzed and unable to speak. She could only manage a half-smile when they entered her room, but her eyes transcended her affection for the boy.

Jeffrey's mother told Miss Spickle how highly her son regarded her and thanked her for teaching her son to read. Jeffrey asked if he could stay awhile.

Alone in the room with the librarian, he placed his gift on her bed beside her. He sat in a chair. With one hand, he opened the book, and with the other, he held her crooked hand. He began to read, taking Miss Spickle away to the Grand Canyon.

Philip Howell

Galen: Physician to an Empire

Galen of Pergamon (129 AD/CE – 216 AD/CE) was born into a wealthy Roman family in Pergamon, an ancient Greek city off of the Mediterranean coast of present-day Turkey. From his admittedly privileged birth as one destined for the ruling elite, he went on to live the most unique life of any physician in recorded history. He became the premier physician of his age and a leading medical expert for the next thousand years. Galen excelled in both hands-on medicine and the intellectual/theoretical understanding of medicine.

Originally, Galen was trained in philosophy, as were many of the young elites of his day. His father envisioned a career for him in either philosophy or politics, until one fateful night. As the story goes, his father had a dream where he was told that his son should go into medicine, or perhaps his son just had a change of heart and convinced his father to let him change careers. In any event, from studying philosophy with some of the best tutors of his day, Galen started studying medicine. His studies took more than a decade to complete and included traveling to a number of different leading cities, capped with a stay in Alexandria, the intellectual capital of the Roman Empire and of Western development for the next thousand years. So exactly what did Galen do? What did he accomplish that set him above his peers?

After completing his extensive studies, his first position was that, incredible as it may seem, of a physician to gladiators. Here, according to surviving records, he dramatically lowered the death rate among the gladiators from sixty under his predecessor to just five under his tenure. Thus he made himself very valuable to the gladiators and their promoters alike. During this time, he learned from hands-on experience the value of exercise, nutrition, and hygiene in promoting human health. Also, no doubt from working in the blood-soaked world of the arena, he honed his skills in surgery. The arena also gave Galen a unique opportunity to learn about the intricacies of the human anatomy, as human dissection was not allowed at this time in history. As a

physician, he could both see and do to an extent far removed from his medical rivals.

Being more than moderately ambitious and extremely self-confident in his abilities, Galen moved to Rome. Here, by use of his medical skills and by giving, of all things, public medical exhibitions, he soon began mingling with the Roman elite, both as a friend and as a physician. This in turn brought him to the attention of none other than Marcus Aurelius, one of Rome's greatest emperors and a leading stoic philosopher. Galen then went on to become the personal physician of Marcus Aurelius and two succeeding Roman emperors. Remarkably, he survived serving under the Roman Emperor Commodus, who, to put it politely, was not a nice man—think of Caligula and Nero. Many a promising career came to an untimely end in Rome. Somehow, he had flourished in the bloody world of the arena and now he survived the equally bloody world of Roman politics. Today's sporting events and politics are tame, even genteel, in comparison to Ancient Rome, where "to the death" was no idle figure of speech and "stabbed in the back" often involved a sharpened knife—just ask the shade of Julius Caesar about that one.

This would more than cap off a successful career for any physician, ancient or modern, but Galen went on to do even more, much more. By dissecting animals, principally primates like monkeys, he was able to investigate nerves, heart valves, arteries, veins, and the spinal cord among other anatomical items. Then by combining reasoning and experimentation, he was able to determine the functions of many of these body parts. He also engaged in pharmaceutical studies and diagnostic techniques. In his "spare time," he was also one of the most prolific authors of the ancient world, writing literally hundreds of works on both medicine and philosophy.

With the fall of the Roman world, his reputation and knowledge could have been lost to us. Fortunately, much of his amazing history and many of his works were preserved in Byzantium and later by the Arabs, who in turn made them available for reintroduction into Europe during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. These works continued to be major sources of medical information into the 17th century, with some concepts continuing even longer. Not bad: Rome

lasted for a thousand years and Galen's medical works lasted for a thousand-plus years.

How can I even begin to summarize this most remarkable life? First, Galen was a physician par excellence to both gladiators and emperors alike. Next, he became the leading researcher of the day, with his findings lasting a thousand years or more. Finally, he was a prolific author in both philosophy and medicine. Even today, his ideas of promoting health through exercise, nutrition, and hygiene still ring true. So, to stretch a point, when asked who is the father of exercise, nutrition, or hygiene, you may not be too far off the mark by answering Galen was the great-grandfather in all of these areas. If you want to argue this point, look up a gladiator.

Chloe Kertesz

To My Dearest Daughter

It was the end of 1983, a most beautiful but tasking time for your father and me. We had just moved to the city the year prior. Our official move date was September 10th, 1982. I had explicitly picked our move to be on our anniversary as a gesture to show how far we have come in the 3 years we have been together. A year later, we still had boxes to unpack and didn't fully have the brownstone the way we wanted, but it worked for us nonetheless. I had found a job at the local hospital as a nurse while your father tried to find himself one job after the next.

While living in the city, we found our favorite food and coffee shops, our favorites being found by Washington Square park. Life was going great for us. On the other hand, our families were more concerned with our non-marital status. "How can you feel comfortable living under the same roof and sharing the same money with someone who is not your husband?" My parents would ask me that same question every time I called home, with my response being the same every time, "I love him, and we are happy," then quickly changing the subject. I never thought it was weird; we were just taking our time and enjoying each other's company.

It was 2 months after our first year in the apartment and our 4th anniversary, and we had gotten some big news that would change our lives forever. I was pregnant, 4 weeks to be exact. When I tell you we were absolutely terrified, that would be an understatement. What would our parents think? What would work do? My mind was going a thousand miles a minute; it wasn't until your father squeezed my hand and smiled at me that I knew what a wonderful thing this was.

Deciding not to tell anyone about you until we found out your sex was one of the best decisions that could have ever been made. The only people who knew besides us was my work. After I notified them, with AIDs on the rise, my workstation had to be moved, and my hours were being shortened. I started working with the elderly and helping with end-of-life services as I got further into my pregnancy. Though,

once we discovered you were a girl, I was over the moon to have a little mini-me. Your grandparents, however, had very different opinions. My mom had said that if we don't get married before you were born, she would not claim you as a grandchild; with my father backing her up, they had made up their minds.

On the other hand, your father's parents were much more forgiving of us not being married. They understood that getting married was expensive and time-consuming and planned to help us once you had been born. Even though they disagreed with us wanting to wait, they stayed and gave us as much support as possible.

After you were born, life became a tad more complicated. I went back to work as soon as possible, and your father stayed with you. I got moved back to the central part of the hospital and had to work 10-15 hour shifts as more and more people were getting sick and starting to die. Your father had become somewhat of a hermit, never leaving the house unless necessary, like going to the store or doctor's appointments. He found out that as a stay-at-home dad, the ridicule he would get affected him much more than he anticipated. It was very uncommon for men to stay home and do skirt work.

He noticed it first as just sideways glances and small chatter from the women around him. It reached a breaking point when I gave him a break, and he went to the bar with a few friends. Once they found out he had stopped trying to find work, they called him Mr. Mom, pussy whipped, and told him unless he finds work, he will never know what it is to be a man. After that night, he stopped wanting to go out and even started going to the store after I got home late at night, so he didn't have to deal with stares. I started sympathizing with him as my coworkers treated me like I was this crazy person for leaving my baby at home. I had been told by almost every other mother here that I would never be fulfilled, my life would become empty, and you would never know me as your mom. It definitely hurt, as I love my job and being your mom.

As the days turned into months, we finally started to get the hang of this parenting thing and found a way for me to cut my hours by 2 to 3 hours a week to be home with you. As you approached your first birthday, tensions in the house were growing between your father and

me. His parents tried pressuring him to propose to me since we said we would get married after you were born. It was ridiculous since we had already established common-law marriage and were happy with how we were living. Not only were we being told we had to get married, but we were also informed by my in-laws and parents that we would have to switch roles for the marriage to work. I would need to quit my job or work part-time while your father worked endless hours; I found this frivolous and unnecessary. Every time it would be brought up, I would laugh just a little, thinking about how ridiculous that notion is. It's the 80s, and the 50s housewife and breadwinning husband was abandoned in the late 60s and 70s.

I didn't care until someone called you, my beautiful little girl, a bastardized love child. I never thought having unmarried parents would affect you and how people saw you. It wasn't until that very moment I knew times weren't changing as fast as I thought. Your father and I had doomed you to a particular set of awful expectations from other people, friends, teachers, and eventually lovers. After this exchange with a fellow nurse, I decided that your father and I would get married. I knew it would not change your status as a love child. I know it would give you a good example of marriage. Doing so would show you do not have a skewed view of love and marriage.

As the days got longer, showing signs spring is near and summer not too far behind, I began to think. I had been working as a nurse at Mount Sinai Beth Israel hospital for about 2 years now. You would be turning 1 soon, and the world around us would just get crazier. The AIDs crisis was getting worse, the Manhattan crime rate was continuing to increase, and your father's and my overall well-being was slowly drifting downward. After this realization, I made another big decision: we would be moving as soon as we could. I didn't care where we went, just as long as it was away from crime, gangs, AIDs, and anything else that had to go along with this city. Once I explained to your father how moving back home to small-town life in Michigan would benefit our relationship and your overall safety, he agreed.

Now that you are 1, I feel the need to write this letter to you. Explaining the crazy first year of life you had. Documenting the history of how you came to be and how the world looks now. Hopefully, by the

time you read this in 16 to 20 years, the times will be different. Hospitals will have less death, unmarried couples will have less scrutiny, and crime will come down. I hope you can walk the streets of your birth home and feel safe there, like there is a purpose to all the noise, not just graffiti and gang art. I hope you know how much you are loved even though you are a love child. We love you, my beautiful baby, Jessi.

Love,
Momma

Debra Madonna

Excerpts from *A Stroke. A Teeny, Broken Blood Vessel* *The Power of Others*

Many of the books and movies I enjoyed when I was a young reader had a thread running through them: *Lassie*, *The Little Princess*, *Pollyanna*, and *Captain January*. I read *Heidi* when I was 7 or 8 and watched the Shirley Temple movie over and over. Heidi had a grandfather. I had a grandfather. Heidi lived with her grandfather on the mountains. I lived with my grandfather on a farm. Heidi helped her friend, Clara, walk again. I believed I could help others to walk again. I wanted to help people walk, run, or do anything. Lassie helped everyone, and there were times that Lassie needed help, too.

From fictional characters to real-life people, I could see how powerful they were, even in their struggles. I just wanted to know everything they were dealing with: Helen Keller, Anne Frank, and Franklin Roosevelt. Harold Russell was a returning veteran, a double amputee—both arms below the elbow—who portrayed a veteran, a double amputee in a wonderful movie, *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

When I heard about someone's illness or condition, I never thought I had "the disease." I was curious and I always wanted to learn more. As I grew up, I expanded my "medical practice" to diagnosing conditions and creating treatment plans for others. I did not charge for this information because I kept it to myself. This "imaginary medical practice" I have come in handy when I dealt with my illness in a logical practice and creative way.

Frail as Butterfly Wings

Some have a very strong opinion of what we should do when we have an illness. We want to be strong and dignified, but sometimes, the body is just worn out.

No one doubted that my grandfather, Bill, had a lot of spunk. He died at 98. Until the last two weeks of his life, he got dressed and went to the cafeteria for meals. A few nights before he died, he was eating

applesauce. He told me it was the best applesauce that he ever had. I asked him if I could have some. His answer: "No, get your own." He was playful and cantankerous. It was his nature from his beginning to his end.

My grandmother, Blanche, was so different. I would not use athletic, powerful and energetic to describe her. My grandmother was delicate, tender, and quiet.

She was 4'11" and petite. Bill had a booming voice, and he was not interrupted very often. Blanche crocheted doilies and afghans quietly. If she made a mistake, she ripped out what she had done. She grumbled and scowled until she'd retraced her steps to the point that she'd realized she had made a mistake. Then she was quiet again. She was a great cook and baker. She was famous for a chocolate cake with a seven-minute whipped frosting. I often stopped to see her in the afternoons, and we watched soap operas; we talked, talked, talked and laughed.

The last few years of her life, she was frail and in constant pain. She was not the person who went outside and walked off the pain. She remained in a spot on the couch. I saw the pain on her face. When I visited, she always held my hand until I left. She held my hand not because she was in pain; my grandmother held my hand from the day I was born; she protected me. When she took my hand during the last days, she was just as tender.

Jeff Good, When It Is Not You

Recovering from my stroke had challenges, but it was easier than watching someone you love go through pain and suffering. And it was easier than watching my brother go through things that little boys should never have to face. I am my brother's older sister, but about 15 years ago, I decided I would stop getting older and declared that he was the older brother.



Blanche working at the Plymouth Mail

While my 3-year-old brother was in another room with a chiropractor, the doctor stretched, pulled, and yanked his legs. I sat in the waiting room. I did not understand the pain he was experiencing, but I heard his pain. He was being tortured. When he was 5 or 6, my brother went into the hospital, stayed for weeks, several times. When he was in an operating room, his tendons were being cut and sliced. I did not hear anything because I could not be in the hospital or visit him. He came home covered with bandages and wearing bulky casts or hard braces. He returned to the hospital for more surgeries. His scars remained a reminder, in case he forgot. The pulling, yanking, cutting, and bracing did not accomplish a thing.



My little brother, Jeff Good

When he returned to the school's playground, he made it to the top of the slide wearing braces. Heaven help the kid who did not get down the slide as fast as possible because my brother was going down the slide, feet, and braces first. I wish I had a video of him, climbing the stairs to the top, maneuvering his body to get in a seated position, and then pushing off. I cringe thinking of Jeff's recently cut tendons, minimally protected by metal braces and shoes, colliding with the ground. I remember Jeff's best friend was cheering him on.

Michelle McTaggart

Writer's Block

Discussing the perceived superiority of Lamy versus Waterman fountain pens with a friend just seemed to further stiffen the writer's block that was keeping Marie from getting her next story idea fleshed out for the deadline. The plotlines were at a standstill, and Marie was grasping at ways to untangle her thoughts. Perhaps she should purchase one of these old-fashioned pens to see if it would help engender an interesting narrative.

Surely the antique flea market down the road would be the place to shop for just the right pen. After all, it didn't have to work perfectly. It was just a springboard. Walking past the old sepia globes and various other office furniture, Marie wracked her brain on topics. Sure, she felt inspired to write—that was probably inborn. And in such an atmosphere, she could imagine herself sitting at one of these walnut barrister desks covering sheets of paper with real ink and dynamic characters. Only . . . who are these dynamic characters? They seemed out of reach lately, as if behind a curtain with only dim light casting vague shadows. She had nothing exciting to even discuss these days, let alone weave into an interesting story. After writing that one cathartic memoir years ago about her experience with suffering and loss, the rest of her budding ideas seemed to wither in darkness. She needed some sun.

The quill pen she fingered felt foreign in her hand. Could this really do the trick and cause some dormant ideas to wake? Marie wandered the different booths of the flea market in step with her meandering thoughts. Spinning desk chairs, glass-doored bookshelves, old heavy bookends, more fountain pens than she expected. But what to write about?

Then something caught her eye. She stopped in front of a matted charcoal typewriter with gold-ringed letter keys. A couple of sheets of paper lay next to it, inviting a try at punching out some words. Marie remembered the old typewriter her mom kept in the dining room

cupboard at her childhood home in Detroit. No one had used it much by the time she started investigating its function. A little tickle in her belly alerted her to the memories she had tucked away until this instant. She had learned to type—no, not just type but string together imagery—on such a machine as this. The quill pen was not from her time. This typewriter, she had to bring home. The price handwritten on the little cardboard tag tied to the carriage release was more than she had planned to spend today, but wasn't it worth it to help her meet a deadline, she mused.

Carefully unpacking the machine and setting it on her desk in place of her laptop caused a little smile to emerge. The nostalgia amused her for a minute. "I am not usually so sentimental," she stated to herself out loud. *I need a little lamp with warm light*, she thought. *This old thing does not have the backlit screen I am used to*. As Marie rolled the first sheet of paper around the cylinder, everything in her appreciated the familiarity. Her hands experienced the muscle memory from many years ago.

Without really thinking, she began to hit the keys, just to practice the feel and see the imprint through the ribbon. A couple times, she instinctively reached into the basket to pull back two typebars that stuck together now and again. The popping metal sound obscured the ticking of her rather antiquated analogue clock she kept in the corner of her office. In fact, that rhythmic typing lulled her into a mood. A mood that shifted her focus somewhere else. Somewhere she felt pulled as if by a current she lost track of fighting against.

Marie didn't realize how long she had been out, but opening her eyes to the opposite direction of the clock and feeling the stiffness in her neck from laying her head on her desk assured her it must be late into the night by now. While the little desk lamp was on, the rest of the house was completely dark, and she felt a grumbling in her stomach from missing any sort of dinner. *I'll make one of those folded peanut butter sandwiches and heat up some tea before I clean up my new-old typewriter and fire up my computer to catch up with the world before bed*.

Washing down the bread with a couple sips of chamomile, Marie began pulling out the paper left in the cylinder. To her surprise, the words seemed to be forming coherent paragraphs. She chuckled for

a second, wondering how in the world she wrote any sentences when she was just playing with the new toy for a few minutes before she must have given in to her fatigue and fallen asleep at the helm.

The little girls, one tall and one short, draped the tree brush over the seemingly endless hedges to make a roof between the top of the hedge and the gate behind it. Collecting these branches that they dubbed witch's hair took the better part of the morning. Now to cover the witch's hair with leaves and natural mulch will take even longer. "We better go get some snacks before we finish our castle," they agreed before running back to the house that butted up against the woods that offered acres of trails around the Rouge River in Detroit. At this time, they didn't understand the uniqueness of this place in which to grow up. All they knew was that the forest was their playground. Their parents didn't even investigate these trails like they did, so they were free to roam and play for hours on end. Summer and winter, year after year, they played in these woods and escaped the trappings of the outside world. This is where the girls saw fairies and pixies dancing on moss-covered boulders. This is where they watched tadpoles turn into frogs. This is where they tried and tried to start a fire by rubbing two sticks together but resigned themselves to the fact that matches were a perfect invention and easy enough to find in the junk drawer at home.

This is where the petite girl hid away when her parents yelled and swore at each other. This is where she brought her notebooks of stories and hid them in sturdy treasure boxes set partially underground in their fort, concealed by witch's hair and dried mud and leaves overhead. Should this little girl ever need to be reminded of what it was like to be a child in somewhat of a tumultuous home, she needed nothing else but to follow one of their old trails and unearth these notebooks. She may someday need to know how she was able to overcome and survive those years. She will always remember crouching under the tree brush and trying to write in the dimness of the shade. Through the tight branches of the boxwoods, little rays of sunshine would filter in and cast just enough light to illuminate her

pages and the dark recesses of her mind, enabling her to keep her stories from clogging up her head and stifling her growth. The people in her life became complex characters, some full of humor as well as angst. Some working through deep sadness or holding major secrets. Others providing wisdom and tools by which the young girl learned to adapt. These characters began to have lives of their own, turning up in stories throughout the girl's life, inspiring her to catalogue all of their antics into organized narratives, for she was the writer of her family. She was the one who knew how to tap into her imagination and bring light to life's most profound situations.

Marie read of these little girls' romps through the woods and wondered how these words came to be. She couldn't remember typing them. The little girls were vivid and complex. They each had personality and intricate workings of their minds. Even their dialogue was believable as they built forts and hid treasure, or as they took turns relating their latest make-believe stories of princesses and elves. Marie studied the ten or so paragraphs, reading one particular section over and over again. She remembered that she too had concealed a notebook in a treasure box and hidden it in the woods behind her house. Could it still be there? Could she actually find this notebook all these years later and discover new characters for new stories? Should she go back to these woods and search? Had she found her muse? She remembered the light that she used to write by all those years ago in her fort. It was just the light she needed now. She would follow the details of these typewritten paragraphs and find the old sturdy fort. She would walk in the little girl's footsteps. Perhaps this little girl would show her the sun. Perhaps she *was* this little girl.

Sally Pinchock

Centered and Grounded

Are you feeling like life is whizzing by almost in a blur? Does time run out before the list of 'to do's' gets done? Or do the days linger on and stretch out? Do life and the life situations that we are in feel overwhelming? How do we keep our sanity? My life seems to be in a chaotic state more than I would like.

So what to do? First of all, we need to become aware, aware that we are out of balance. Is it physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually because we are a composite of wholeness? Sometimes we fool ourselves and when we become aware, we dismiss what we have just realized by excusing it away. So awareness is really about being honest with ourselves about what we are really feeling. Taking some slow, deep breaths and staying in the present moment is the beginning of getting back into equilibrium, being centered, being grounded.

Being centered and being grounded are phrases that we hear often. What do they mean? My understanding is that being centered is being able to move to a place of calmness when thoughts and feelings are creating anxiety, fear, or some other strong emotion. It is learning to simply 'be still.' It's kind of like watching a movie where there is activity going on around us and we are choosing not to react to it. We are choosing not to sit in judgment. Calmly breathing and allowing the body, mind, and spirit to become calm.

When we are centered, we can say that we are grounded or we can look at grounding metaphorically or practically. Metaphorically is visualizing that we are a tree with deep roots into the earth that are holding us up even though we are being buffeted around in some unsettling way. We feel the strength of the roots through our legs and the core of our body. We feel prepared to handle whatever is disturbing us. Practically, grounding can be called earthing as well. This is actually stepping on the ground, preferably barefooted, where there is an electrical exchange from the Earth's electrons which is beneficial for the body in numerous ways. Lying on the ground is even better because so

much of the surface of the body is touching the Earth. As the body gets the message that it is supported, the mind relaxes as well.

So being still, centered, grounded, we become able to stay in the present moment, to be empowered to trust our own intuition, and we move to a state of balance physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. So be still, centered and grounded and enjoy life.

Namaste

Nancy Louise Spinelle

Once Upon a Time in the Forest

The Valley of Evergreen

In the valley of evergreens, surrounded by lovely high hills, the morning began just like any other day. The sky opened with a crack of sunlight announcing the dawn to the forest. One by one each evergreen, one hundred and fifty-five to be exact, stretched their branches awake with a yawn.

The two young pines, born connected by the base of their trunks, began to bicker. They bicker each and every morning about the most unimportant things, waking the others in the forest from their good night's slumber.

"He's touching me with one of his branches," complained Whitey the White Pine, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"Was not!" battled back his cousin Scotty the Scotch Pine. "And besides, it was just yesterday morning that you blew into my branches."

"So? You still can't talk without moving your needles!"

"Whitey! Scotty!" interrupted Bruce the Blue Spruce, the tallest tree in the forest. "That'll be enough out of both of you," his voice now less stern. "You two are nearly grown now and should know better than to bicker."

A Strange Sound

Bruce would have gone on to settle the arguing, if not for a strange sound that echoed throughout the valley. The noise made the ground beneath them shake like the Earth itself was in pain.

"What's that noise?" asked Doug, the newborn Douglas fir, as he snuggled beneath the branches of his father.

"I'm not at all sure," his father sighed. "It could well be Mother Nature complaining that the humans are not caring for the Earth. I remember that Little River cried when intruders came tossing trash into

her stream. It took years of tears to wash her waters clean."

"Quick!" spoke out Nora the Norwegian Fir. "Look and see who's coming."

Bruce stretched himself as tall as he could over the tops of the other trees. "I can see fresh tire tracks just over the first hill."

"Maybe it's the kids coming to play and picnic," said Cindy the Cedar excitedly.

"Wait!" said Bruce. "It's... it's..." his voice suddenly shaking.

"Stop babbling," interrupted Ben the Balsam. "Tell us exactly what you see!"

Bruce took a deep breath. "I think it's the woodcutters," he said with his head bent low.

What Will Become of Us?

"What's he mean by woodcutters?" asked Doug in a soft voice that only his father could hear.

Douglas wrapped his son close within his branches and tried to explain about the large machines with lumberjacks who would soon come with sharp saws, axes and grinders. Frightened, Doug began to tremble. "But what will become of the birds and bees and animals of the forest who live within our branches?" His father had no answer.

A tear filled his eye and trickled down his branches onto a small flower that sat beneath his tiny trunk.

"Thanks, Duggie," called out Daisy. "I needed a little drink!"

"That was a tear," corrected Sunflower in a somber voice. "I'm afraid those awful stories the trees talk about when they think everyone else in the forest is asleep are true."

All the wildflowers bent close to hear as Sunflower explained how the monster machines would come and all the trees would be cut and ground.

"What will become of us?" asked Daisy as she pulled her petals close to her stem.

"The machines are heavy," was the only answer Sunflower could think to give.

Use Your Talents Wisely

The hours passed as the machines grew closer and closer and word of the woodcutters spread throughout the valley. Soon every animal of the forest gathered to hear Wise Old Owl speak.

As dusk approached, Owl sat perched atop the highest branch of Bruce the Spruce, who stood tall and proud, pleased that Owl had chosen his branch.

“Save our trees!” spoke Owl in a deep voice.

“But how?” questioned Susie the Spruce.

“You must use your talents wisely,” answered Owl knowingly.

But before anyone could ask Owl to explain, the first of the big trucks, in a long line of strange machines, began to arrive. On the roof of the trucks were pipes. And out of the pipes came puffs of smoke, choking away the fresh air. Next, there were machines that came pulling links of chains across the ground, causing the dust in the trail to flare up like flames of fire. Finally, there came huge cutting equipment. They had round saws with jagged teeth and a long ramp that led down into a deep, dark hole.

Birds, Bees and Fireflies

As darkness came over the valley, the woodcutters climbed out of their trucks. But before the first of the lumberjacks could put an ax to Ben the Balsam, a flock of small swallows began to flutter their wings between his branches, making an eerie sound that rustled throughout the forest.

“What’s that?!” shouted the first woodcutter aloud.

“Best leave that tree be!” hollered back another.

But then as another of the lumbermen started up a buzz saw to cut down Douglas the Fir, a hive of bees spread throughout his branches, making a buzzing sound much louder than that of the saw.

“What’s that?” questioned the second woodcutter.

“It sounds like this tree is hissing at us!” yelled another.

This made Scotty and Whitey begin to giggle aloud, their needles quivering uncontrollably. “Do you see that? Do you hear that?” whispered the third lumberman. “They’re laughing at us!”

"I hear them too!" said all the others at once.

Then, as if on command, hundreds upon hundreds of fireflies filled each and every evergreen tree, setting the forest aglow with flickering lights. "Ghosts!" the woodcutters screamed. Without another word, they ran huffing and puffing to their trucks and sped away with their tires spinning, never to return again.

Just Like Any Other Day

In the morning in the peaceful valley, the sun woke them, just like any other day. And the flowers danced in and out of the shadows of the evergreens, just like any other day.

And Scotty and Whitey bickered...

"He's touching me again with one of his branches!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Liar, liar, trunk on fire!"

... just like any other day!

Rebecca Wyckoff

Dead Man's Curve

Tucked away in the Appalachian Mountains stood the Lake Side Roadhouse and Banquet Hall, a locally famous establishment along a winding roadway nicknamed Dead Man's Curve. The road was host to countless accidents due to both recklessness and unfortunate run-ins with scared, jumping deer from the woods. A mile-long stretch was littered with makeshift memorials—wooden crosses, burnt-out candles, stuffed animals, and framed photographs of victims of the Curve.

The patrons liked to jest that the building, and even the road itself, was haunted. They all had their own accounts. Some said that they could hear phantom cars' brakes locking up, but no wreck was to be found. Others swore they could hear the sounds of painful moaning late at night at some of the memorials. There were countless reports of feeling uneasy as they drove through the area, particularly late at night.

Even my Aunt Lynda, the owner of the Roadhouse, had many paranormal tales. She told stories of plates and glasses falling off the bar without explanation. She swore she heard whispers while closing the building up for the night. She, along with many others, recalled having witnessed shadow figures out of the corner of her eye in passing.

I never believed them.

I had worked for my aunt for almost three years but yet never witnessed anything of the paranormal. People told me that it was because I was a non-believer that the spirits didn't bother to interact with me. I just rolled my eyes and shrugged my shoulders.

"But Sage, don't you ever feel like you're being *watched*?" They would ask.

"No." I would smile and shake my head.

The paranormal was nothing but nonsense. I believed there was a *logical* explanation behind these ghostly encounters, but no one wanted to listen to reason. They were happy to live in their delusions. Perhaps it was more exciting that way—something to liven up this small mountain town.

The spring and summer months quickly arrived, bringing a boost of business to the banquet hall. I was slammed with events as the Roadhouse's head event planner. Everything from high school proms, sports banquets, and senior dinners to baby showers, engagement parties, and wedding receptions. The Roadhouse was booming, offering a picturesque lake view in a big, beautiful log cabin with stone arches and fireplaces.

"Sage," my aunt called from across the empty restaurant. "I think I heard the back door. Can you check to see if the delivery is here?"

I set down my basket of decorations for the banquet hall. "Sure thing!"

I headed for the basement through the kitchen and down a set of stone stairs. The basement was dark and drafty, a place that most employees avoided. The lights tended to flicker and buzz at their leisure, filling people with a sense that the paranormal was at work. They didn't seem to believe that the electrical was faulty—it always had to be a ghost.

I hit the light switch at the bottom of the stairs, illuminating the area with fluorescent lights. I heard the rustling of someone in the storage room at the far end of the basement and followed the noise.

"Hello?" I called into the empty room. I was only greeted with more rustling somewhere close to the walk-in refrigerator. "Hello?" I called again, this time louder and a touch annoyed.

I moved cautiously toward the door of the walk-in as the overhead light began to buzz loudly. It flickered a few times, leaving me in the dark for a moment every few seconds. I reached out to grab the handle of the walk-in as it suddenly popped open. The lights went dark for a second and came back on a moment later—I jumped and let out a short yelp. A young man in a gray delivery shirt and dark hair stood within the walk-in threshold with an empty dolly.

"Oh! Sorry, didn't mean to startle you. I just went ahead and started putting everything away."

"Oh, that's alright." I snorted, my heart still fluttering with adrenaline. "Is this the order for tomorrow's wedding reception?"

He looked behind him for a moment, "Uh...no, this is just the normal weekly order. They should be sending someone out tomorrow for

the rest.”

“Oh, okay, that’s fine. Do I need to sign?”

“Nah, I got you.” He pulled out a device from his pocket and tapped the screen a few times with a stylus. “What’s your name?”

“Sage Pfeiffer.”

“Oh, like Lynda, the owner?” He tapped the screen again before shoving the device back into his pocket.

I smiled, “She’s my aunt.”

“I’ve known her since I started.” He pulled off a thick glove and extended a hand. “Camden Michaels.”

I shook his hand; it was ice-cold from handling the kegs. “Pleasure. Are you sure you don’t need anything from me?”

“Nope, we’re all finished here.” Camden flashed a gleaming smile. “Maybe I’ll see you next week?”

“I’ll be here,” I couldn’t help but smile back at the handsome young man.

I returned to the banquet hall and began setting up for the reception. The bride would be here later this afternoon to make her last-minute adjustments, but I hadn’t even started. I dove into my work, listening to music on my earbuds.

Aunt Lynda came in after a few hours to check on my progress. There was only a half hour left before she opened the restaurant up for the day.

“Doing alright, I see,” She smiled approvingly at the banquet hall. “Did the order get here?”

“The weekly order arrived. He said that the order for the reception will be here tomorrow,” I replied, pulling out an earbud.

Aunt Lynda scrunched her nose with confusion, “Really? They normally just bring one large order. Ah, oh well. As long as it gets here. Did he give you a receipt?”

I shot upright, “Oh! No, I’m sorry I forgot to get one from him.”

“Ah, alright. We’ll get one tomorrow, I suppose. He must’ve distracted you,” She wiggled her eyebrows.

I felt my face blush, “Well...yeah. He was pretty cute.”

Aunt Lynda snorted. “You’ve been single for far too long. Flirting

with delivery drivers on the clock!"

"Oh, come on!" I laughed.

Another week passed by in a swirl of activity. I stood at the bar polishing glasses when I heard the sounds of heavy boots coming through the kitchen. I looked up to find Camden Michaels in his gray delivery shirt heading for the front door. He locked eyes and gave me a short wave.

"Sage Pfeiffer for the order?" He raised his device with a smile.

I gave him a thumbs-up and flashed my best smile, "You got it!"

"Alright, see you next time!" He pushed open the front door and stepped out into the summer heat.

My heart fluttered in my chest. Perhaps my aunt was right—I *had* been single for too long. I shot up from the bar stool I was occupying and rushed over to the receipt printer. I hit the feed button and ripped off a blank sheet of paper before fumbling for a working ink pen to write down my cell phone number. I ran out of the bar and out the front door, hoping to catch Camden before he left. But I was too late, I watched a scuffed-up delivery truck pull out of the driveway and onto Dead Man's Curve. With a roar of the engine and a few short beeps of his horn, he disappeared within the tree line.

With a defeated sigh, I headed back inside, shoving the receipt paper into the breast pocket of my company shirt. Hopefully next week we'll meet again.

Another week came and went as the summer heat sweltered, bringing in boaters from the lake to enjoy our inside air conditioning and live entertainment on the shaded back deck. I had another reception scheduled for this weekend that came with a hefty order. I heard the back door open and close; I immediately rushed downstairs in hopes to see Camden. To my disappointment, I only found my aunt with an order receipt in hand.

"Oh, did I miss the delivery?" I shoved my hands into my jean's back pockets.

My aunt eyed me, "Just missed him, actually. I hate to ask, but did you *really* receive a delivery a few weeks ago?"

“Yeah, of course I did.”

My aunt squinted at the receipt in her hand, “By the looks of it, we didn’t get anything. Your name isn’t even listed as a recipient.”

“What?” I asked, moving closer to read the receipt myself.

She was right, the dates didn’t match and my name was nowhere to be found. Instead, it looked like the only people to have accepted orders in the last month had been the kitchen manager, Mike, and my aunt.

“Well, that doesn’t make any sense,” I mumbled to myself. “We stood here and talked. I even shook the guy’s hand!”

My aunt scrunched up her nose, “What was his name? Maybe he’s new and wasn’t doing the receipts right?”

“Camden Michaels.” I let out a frustrated sigh.

My aunt’s eyes widened. Her face seemed to pale. “You...said Camden?”

“Yeah,” I nodded, crossing my arms. “Tall guy about my age. Dark hair. Great smile. He was always wearing a gray delivery shirt.”

“Sage...I think I need to show you something.” Aunt Lynda pushed open the back door and pulled some car keys from her pocket. “It’s just down the road. It won’t take long.”

“Uh...alright,” I shrugged, confused.

We jumped into her SUV and pulled out onto Dead Man’s Curve. Aunt Lynda drove in silence for about a quarter of a mile, gripping the steering wheel so tightly that her knuckles turned white. I didn’t question what we were doing—whatever it was she wanted to do seemed important enough that she left the restaurant without telling the rest of the staff. She carefully pulled off onto the side of the road and turned on her hazard lights.

“Come on,” Her hand shook as she reached for the door handle.

I followed her across the road to a wooden cross. It was a small memorial covered in felt flowers and teddy bears. There were remnants of multiple candles that had been burnt to completion. In the center of the cross was a small framed photo. I got closer to it, wiping off the dust that had accumulated on the glass. With a gasp, I pulled away.

It was the smiling face of Camden Michaels.

As my aunt spoke, her voice was weak. "Poor Camden died three years ago this month. He was such a nice kid...did our deliveries just about every week since he started. One day, he was driving his company delivery truck when a deer jumped out in front of him. He tried to swerve and avoid it, but his load shifted and flipped the truck. It ejected him from the vehicle and he...well..." She trailed off. "It was all caught on dashcam. He was on his way to the Roadhouse when he... well, when the *accident* happened. Mike and I were standing outside and heard the brakes lock up. *I'm* the one that called 911, knowing that the Curve caused another accident."

"No...no, no, no, *no!* I saw him! I've been *talking* to him! Aunt Lynda...we *shook* hands! It was real, *he* was real! I've seen him *several* times!"

Aunt Lynda just shook her head. "Sage..."

"No! I'm *telling* you!"

"I believe you, Sage. But...Camden Michaels is dead. He died on the scene before EMS could arrive."

A chill ran down my spine as I turned back to stare at the picture upon the wooden cross. It was him. There was no mistaking it. As the realization began to set in, I heard the sound of a heavy truck driving along the road.

I looked up to find a scuffed-up delivery truck with a smashed-in grille coming around the bend. As the truck passed, the driver beeped his horn, giving a wave out the window as he smiled.

That same gleaming smile.

Imelda Zamora

Welcome

It was late April 1967. My husband and I were saying tearful goodbyes to our family and friends at the Manila International Airport. We were moving to the United States to join my sister and her family in Detroit, Michigan. She had found a job for me at the laboratory where she worked. There had been a lot of paperwork involved here and there, but it was finally approved.

The first leg of our journey was from Manila to Honolulu, Hawaii, which would be our entry into the United States, and where we would have to change planes. After going through customs, etc., and waiting for a couple of hours, we boarded another plane, this time for San Francisco. We lucked out. Our seats were in the front row with lots of leg room. There were 3 seats. My husband took the one by the window, and I sat in the middle with an empty one on my left. Passengers were coming on board, looking for their seats. Presently, a man came, nodded at us and sat next to me. Once in a while, my husband and I would talk—mostly in Tagalog, sometimes with a spattering of English. About midflight, the man turned to me and asked where we were from. Were we on a visit? I told him we were Filipinos, and we were moving there to work.

“My sister found a job for me at the clinical laboratory of the hospital where she worked as an intern at their pharmacy department in Detroit, Michigan. I have a bachelor’s degree in chemistry, but I needed to do some hospital training to qualify. It took a lot of work and a lot of waiting. Anyway, here we are. My sister’s husband is a doctor working on his residency at St. John Hospital. My husband hopes to find work. He’s an accountant. We are joining them, hoping to start a new life.”

Whew, I thought I would never stop talking, but he was very polite and listened attentively. After some time, he leaned forward and turned to my husband and asked him about something or other. I was not listening to their conversation, because all this time I was looking

at him and could not help notice.

"Excuse me," I said, "do you watch television?"

"Yes," he answered.

"You know, you look like a movie actor. Do you watch the series *Mission Impossible*?"

"Sorry, no," he shook his head.

"You look like the actor who plays Mr. Phelps. His name is Peter Graves. You look like Peter Graves!"

The poor man didn't know what to say to that, so he just smiled.

I didn't bother him the rest of the flight—to his relief, I'm sure.

We finally landed in San Francisco. He unstrapped himself, turned to us and said, "Well, this is where I get off. Good luck to both of you."

We thanked him and I waved goodbye. A lot of people were leaving and new passengers were coming on board. The plane had to refuel, so we had to wait. After a while, a stewardess came to us with a clipboard. She checked something on it and said, "Mr. and Mrs. Zamora?"

"Yes?" We both answered.

"Will you both come with me, please?"

My husband and I looked at each other. What could this be?

"Take all of your belongings with you. And follow me, please."

She led us to the first class section and showed two empty seats for us.

"Your seats has been upgraded to first class." That was all she said. We were still looking at her when she started to leave. Finally, she said, "Okay, well, you know the man seated beside you? He is one of our airline pilots, and before he left, he made a request to upgrade your seats to first class."

"Oh, that was very nice of him. Will you thank him for us, please?"

"I'm sorry," the stewardess said. "He does not want you to know."

And that was how we arrived in Detroit, Michigan—in first class—thanks to an anonymous airline pilot who looked like Peter Graves ... or was it really him?!

Footnote:

The CBS TV series *Mission Impossible* ran from 1966 to 1973.

The cast:

Peter Graves as Jim Phelps, the cool spymaster

Barbara Bain as Cinnamon Carter

Greg Morris as Barney Collier

Peter Lupus as Willy Armitage

Martin Landau as Rollin Hand

Peter Graves was born Peter Aurness. He was in several TV shows and movies, including *Airplane!* His brother was James Arness, who played Marshall Matt Dillon on the TV series *Gunsmoke*, which ran from 1955 to 1975.

