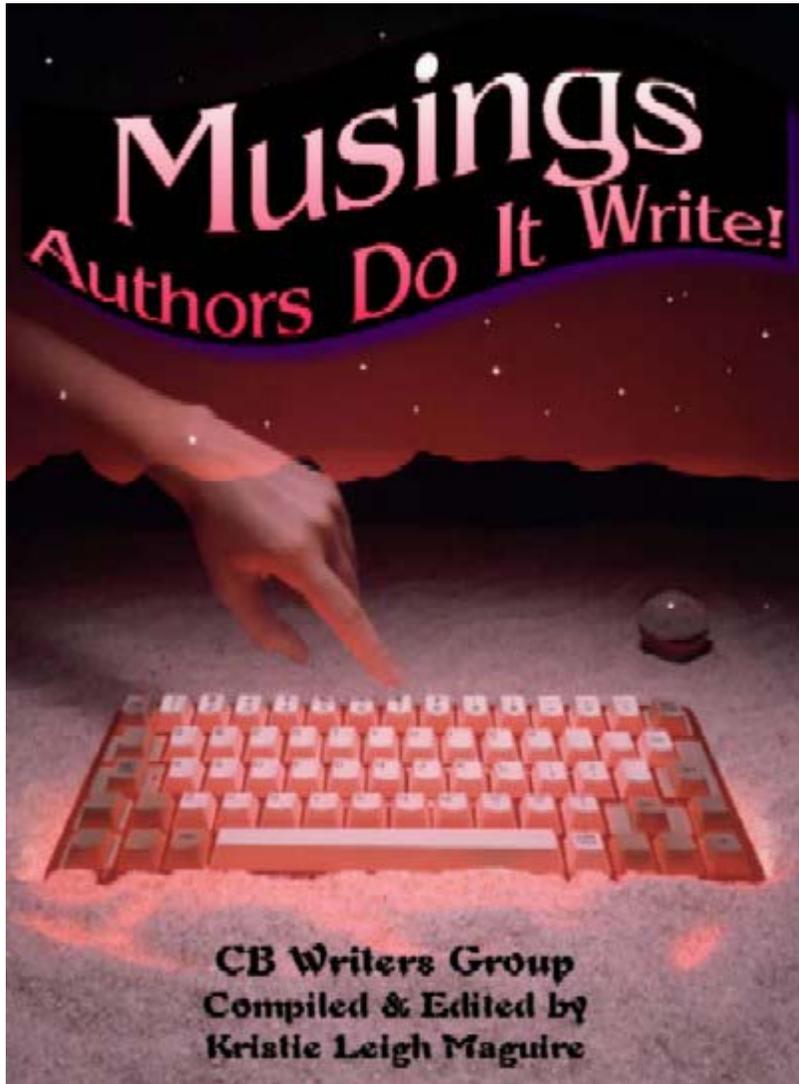


Musings

Authors Do It Write!



CB Writers Group
Compiled & Edited by
Kristie Leigh Maguire

Musings: Authors Do It Write!

Contributing Authors from
CB Writers Group

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Kristie Leigh Maguire

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"Writers live with the perpetual misapprehension that the world needs to hear what we have to say. The truth is, we need to say it."

Carolyn Howard-Johnson

"Sorrow looks back, worry looks around, and faith looks up!"

Joyce Livingston

"I feel that writing is just like singing – except nobody ever threw me out for writing!"

David Leonhardt

"Enjoy what you're doing and you'll never work a day in your life."

Phyllis Cambria

“Musings: Authors Do It Write!” consists of a collection of writings from twelve contributing authors of the CB Writers Group.

Authors are often asked: What makes you write? Did you always know you wanted to write? Where do you get your story ideas? How do you come up with your characters? – on and on and on.

To many people, authors aren't of the same breed as the normal species of the human race. However, we are very much human. We go about our daily lives nurturing to our family's needs, going to our jobs and dealing with the stresses that life throws our way. We twelve authors have come together in this book to shed some light on the 'author species of the human race' .

Each writer has his or her own 'writer's muse' - or 'voice'; although as you will see, each muse is unique for each author.

We hope that you enjoy reading our articles, our biographies – and excerpts from some of our works.

Kristie Leigh Maguire, editor

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PEGGY HAZELWOOD



Although Peggy Hazelwood has not fulfilled her dream of writing a novel (yet), she has written the e-book, 'From Old to Gold: How to Start and Run an Antiques Business'. Antiques and collectibles also fascinate her, and the e-book came from her experience buying and selling fun collectible "stuff."

Peggy runs the Albooktross Electronic Bookstore (<http://www.albooktross.com>) where self-published authors sell their print and e-books. Selections range from Running Against the Wind, a story of an adoptive father and son, to \$1,000 Awards for the Serious Writer, an e-book of sources of funding for writers. Peggy is also a technical editor for an engineering firm, and copyedits and proofreads textbooks and trade books for several university presses.

Staying A-mused

by Peggy Hazelwood

My muse? People. That's right. People are my muse. They stir me to write. Well, actually to jot down thoughts quickly, before I lose their language, their actions, my reactions to them, forever.

The smallest glance or slightest movement can strike me, and I have to get it on paper. An overheard conversation. The way a person walks. A nuance that many others probably don't think twice about and maybe don't even see at all. I'm basically a voyeur.

This trait, being a snoop, may not be the most desirable for the average person. After all, do we want others watching us, calculating our every move? I don't! But, I can't help it. I am fascinated by people. We are all so different, luckily. Our likes and dislikes are fodder for my writing.

The conflicts that people face and how they deal with them are like movies come to life. No script. No rehearsal. No wonder it's so fascinating!

I mentioned that I jot down thoughts before they're lost to me forever. I have been in a bar and have dictated entire conversations on cardboard coasters or on flimsy napkins. An airport is another stage that continues to intrigue. Any scrap of paper from my purse serves as notebook paper on which to describe travelers. Taking notes in my car can be dangerous, but I've found that it can be done. (Thank goodness for stop-and-go traffic!)

With all of this jotting going on, I should have written my novel by now. But I haven't. I have a notebook where I try to transfer all the notes from scraps of papers into legible memory joggers. Notes I draw from when I am stuck. When I need a good example of dialogue, out comes the notebook. Just hearing the flow of real people talking puts the cadence of real talk into my mind so I can put it onto the paper.

So, I'm on my way, working on my novel in spurts, as I find inspiration and time. In the meantime, people are everywhere. I'm able to "work on my novel" any time I'm out in public. Listening. Watching. Being a-mused.

© Peggy Hazelwood

Excerpt from

From Old to Gold: How to Start and Run an Antiques Business

By Peggy Hazelwood

Antiquing for me is first and foremost fun. When I say antiquing is fun, I mean that if I didn't enjoy it (the hunt, the chase, the thrill of the find), I wouldn't do it! My pot of gold isn't just a bunch of money but also being happy in my work.

Do what you love.
Know your own bone;
Gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it,
And gnaw it still.

– Henry David Thoreau

I've always loved antiques, before I even knew that the porcelain figurines and sturdy furniture and lacy doilies I grew up with were antiques – I just knew I loved them! Growing up in rural Illinois, I shopped at antique auctions, estate sales, and farm auctions, and visited family and friends' homes that were full of antiques that were used and enjoyed daily.

© Peggy Hazelwood

PHYLLIS CAMBRIA



If you ask most people, "What do you do for a living?" the answer comes rather easily. For me, it's likely to be preceded by "When?"

It's not that I don't understand the question; it's just that I have a number of professions that I work almost simultaneously. My reply literally depends on what time the question is asked. During any given week, I spend part of my time working as a special events coordinator, business owner, speaker, producer, homemaker, wife, teacher, actress, marketing manager and writer. And I don't mean that I do those things the way you would describe a normal mother who wears numerous hats in the course of her day-to-day duties. I mean, I actually get paid to do all those things.

My vanity prefers the title Renaissance Woman to the implication that I'm a "Jill of all Trades, Mistress of None".

Women, by nature, are multi-taskers. I have just taken it to a new level. Or maybe I just get bored easily and periodically, over the years, I've acquired new skills and jobs. I just never seem to quit my last profession before starting a new one.

Maybe if I told you about what is on my schedule next week, it will be easier to understand.

I have to complete a magazine article; continue locating presenters for an education program I'm producing for a client's upcoming trade show; write a special event proposal for a new client, prepare the outline and teach a seminar on getting started in event planning; follow up with my literary agent on a new book proposal a publisher requested; write two new presentations for a show I'm speaking at next month; work on the site copy for one my new web-based businesses; rehearse an upcoming play; edit some audio tapes I need for my speaker's kit; tutor an acting student; do the bookkeeping for several of my businesses; write some ad copy for one of my marketing clients; clean the house, do some laundry, and, oh, yes, celebrate my 53rd birthday. I admit it; I'm behind on the housecleaning and laundry. And sometimes I get overwhelmed. But these days, I'm never bored.

I'm a native New Yorker but have spent most of my married life in South Florida. I call my neighborhood "Camelot" and share my home with my husband of 30 years, Doug, and our cat, Digit.

I'm a Writer?

By Phyllis Cambria

I never planned to be a writer, but life has a way of making some decisions for you.

Since I couldn't decide what I wanted to be when I grew up, I changed careers often. Over the years, I worked as a special events coordinator, actress, producer, insurance agent, secretary, marketing manager, director, office manager, cashier, and for a two-week period while working for a department store, an elevator operator...not in that order. Oh, yeah, and I've worked as a writer too. I sought out, worked and studied for most of those other jobs. But being a writer wasn't a career I consciously planned to pursue.

Writing didn't seem a viable profession because I never thought I had a good enough story to tell. My imagination just doesn't work like that. I admire people like Stephen King, John Grisham, and even Jackie Collins. They aren't necessarily great writers, but they tell an interesting yarn with fascinating characters and a catchy plot. I can't even keep myself interested in story ideas I dream up. My fantasies are a great antidote to insomnia. Or worse. I'll think I have a terrific tale going on in my head and then realize it's a storyline I've read before or have seen on film. Now, does that sound like the makings of a writer to you?

I did toy with the idea of becoming another Lois Lane, but without a superhero as back up, I was too chicken for investigative reporting. And I didn't want to be a reporter who stalked people after a tragedy to ask how they felt or who covered local politics. Journalism was out.

So how did I get to be a writer? Well, as I said, life has a way of making some choices for you.

While I know I don't have what it takes to be a novelist, I've always had a knack for stringing words together in a cohesive form. If it's something that doesn't require any plot devices, I can write it well.

With my background, I have become enough of an expert in a number of areas to write reports, speeches, scripts, press releases, newsletters, pamphlets and other material when it's required. I've found that most people don't like to write or don't think they do it well. So as long as I was willing to write something, I usually got the job.

Without fail, an employer or client would read something I wrote and would give me additional writing assignments. But I still never thought of myself as a writer. It was just another part of my job.

An event client who knew of my theatrical background was launching a newspaper and asked me to write a celebrity column. I love hanging out with show biz folks, so it sounded like fun. But, even a paycheck in hand and my name in print, I never considered myself a Writer. I just thought I was helping someone I knew who probably couldn't find a real writer.

As part of my event work, I like to brainstorm ideas to create outrageous parties. When I discovered message boards on the Internet, I wrote hundreds of responses to people who needed help planning a celebration. But I wasn't really writing; I was playing.

My copious replies on one board prompted party planner, Patty Sachs, to ask me why I had never written a book on the subject. I was delighted with her interest because I owned several party books she wrote.

I said I was just helping out on the boards, that I wasn't a real writer. But, at her request, I sent her some pieces I'd written. She asked if I'd be willing to co-author some articles she had assignments to write. If she didn't mind working with an amateur, I was willing to help my new friend.

By the time we had co-written several dozen articles, one of the editors of *The Complete Idiot's Guide* series asked Patty to write a party planning book for their line. She said, "Yes, but on one condition." Patty wanted me as her co-author. She sent them our clips. Surprisingly, they agreed to let the novice collaborate with the veteran.

I thought it would be fun working together on a book. Then they said we had six weeks to complete almost 300 pages. Patty said, "We can't do it." With the naiveté only an inexperienced writer can have, I said, "Sure we can." And we did.

In October 2000, my doorbell rang. The mail carrier handed me a package. I tore it open. There was a familiar orange and blue book inside. The cover read *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Throwing a Great Party* by Phyllis Cambria and Patty Sachs.

And that's when it hit me. I guess I am a Writer.

© Phyllis Cambria

Excerpt from:

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Throwing a Great Party

(Alpha Books/Macmillan 2000)

by Phyllis Cambria and Patty Sachs

Congratulations! You've finally realized that there's more to being a good host than opening a bag of chips and plunking down a six-pack on the coffee table in front of your friends. The problem is now that you want to throw parties with a little more style, you're not sure how to do it. Relax, we're going to give you all the tools to make you a host who can boast you're the best.

As professional party planners, we've thrown hundreds of parties with guest lists as small as two or as large as thousands. The interesting part is that the steps for planning these parties are still the same. In this case, size really doesn't matter, technique does - and we're going to teach you those techniques.

We'll take you from planning down-home hoe-downs to seasonal celebrations, from birthday blowouts to backyard brunches, from dinner at eight to dates with your mates. We've give you total plans for a year's worth of parties plus, with enough variations to make them uniquely your own.

Each chapter is filled with tricks of the trade and practical advice to help you give parties with panache for pennies or blowout bashes in your own home.

Please note that this isn't a recipe book. Since there are millions of books and Web sites available, we're sticking with the tools you'll need to make you a celebration host expert.

Just follow the step-by-step instructions for perfect party plans, or use them as an outline to organize your own outstanding occasions.

Parties are fun, so let us help you enjoy yourself even in the planning. It can be a party before the party!

Come on, don't wait for the milestone occasions in your life to throw a party.
Whatever your reason, it's a good one. So let the partying begin.

© Cambria and Sachs

GLENYS O'CONNELL



Glenys O'Connell has worked as a journalist in the UK, Canada, and Ireland where she now lives with her family. She writes for both children and adults, and has recently completed a series of inter-active children's stories for MyCDStory.com (www.mycdstory.com).

Her first romantic suspense novel, 'Judgement By Fire', is set in rural Ontario, Canada, and published by Puff Adder Books, UK, as an e-book (www.puff-adder.com).

She is currently working on her third novel and another series of children's stories. She enjoys hearing from other writers and readers, and can be contacted at oreo@eircom.net or through her writers' resource ezine, WriterInIreland, at www.geocities.com/writerinireland2002/.

A Patchwork Quilt

By Glenys O'Connell

When I think of my life as a writer, I see a patchwork quilt. One of those lovely pioneer quilts with the glowing colors, each square lovingly stitched using fabric scraps inlaid with memories.

I use the imagery of a patchwork quilt because I have done so many different forms of writing, and loved them all! And then, of course, every experience is grist to the writer's mill - so many of events of my life, its texture, have been reflected in my work as a writer. And there is a pattern to my work as with a quilt - squares that reflect who I have become over the years, my experiences and life.

My first published novel, 'Judgement By Fire', is set in Ontario, Canada, and readers have said it captures the majestic ambience of the Eastern Ontario area we called home for many years. The second novel takes place in England, which has been home on and off over the years. My third work is set in Ireland, where we live now. The current work-in-progress takes place in rural Maine, USA, a place I've only visited but would definitely like to live for a while.

But the pattern goes a long way back. I wrote my first story/article when I was five years old. I still remember the topic – it had to do with my five-year old mind questioning the idea (courtesy of Sunday School) that a loving God would not forgive bad people and allow them resurrection. Okay, it was a heavy topic for one so young and I doubt that my conclusions would have raised much of a flurry in theological circles, but it was the beginning of doing what writers do all the

time: using words to define and explain problems, questions and experiences that caught my interest.

I'd say that set me up beautifully for the career path I followed in journalism, wouldn't you? And I'm still asking questions, many years on, although more and more my questions begin with the fiction writer's: 'What if?' Rather than the journalist's: 'Who, What, Where, Why, When and How?' And the answers go on to follow flights of fancy and imagination that have no place on a newspaper's pages!

But my life is all there. There are some dark squares I rarely visit, although they have all been pulled out into the light occasionally, and I know they are reflected in certain aspects of my work. Some even in the topics and slant of articles I have written. An abused child, I have written many articles about this sad aspect of our society, but that square is now tucked away and rarely examined. Another square that is firmly in my heart and yet has touched my writing is the still-remembered child I lost by miscarriage. There are other dark squares, too, in which lost loved ones are forever remembered, and some are memories to be treasured silently and alone, although perhaps these emotions are examined in another set of squares: my life as a psychotherapist which, of course, has spawned its own memories and articles.

But I had lots of fun with the trials and tribulations of being a young professional woman; then came the joys and sorrows of married life and motherhood. All those squares that are filled with memories there – and the articles that sprang from them!

Of course, as a woman 'of a certain age' I'm busily creating many more squares. They reflect a long and happy marriage - even though there are a few slipped stitches here and there! – the pleasure of watching children grow and become independent, the confidence which comes with knowing that, for the most part, I've been there, done that, and can cope again if I have to. Even approaching middle age has its own potential for writing, both fact and fiction.

Then there are the squares I'm looking forward to adding: you can bet you'll see my name on articles about being a grandma, when the time comes! Meanwhile, there are two new books finished and looking for homes with a publisher who'll treat them right, and many more to come. And there's even a book about writing in which I'm condensing all these years of learning so that maybe someone else can benefit and add a few stitches to their own patchwork quilt of writing.

I've always wanted to quilt for real, but never found the time to actually complete more than a square or two. But I know that the patchwork quilt in my memory will keep me warm when I'm really, really old. The final square a peaceful time of reflection, a time to spend with my husband and loved ones reflecting on the glorious colors of the past in the soft glow of the evening.

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Excerpt from

JUDGEMENT BY FIRE

by Glenys O'Connell

Anger tightened whitely around his mouth and flushed red across his cheekbones as he grabbed her upper arm, his fingers biting painfully into her soft flesh.

"I cut the telephone lines, Lauren. You can't call out and have one of your boyfriends come running to save you," Stephen ground out, his voice hoarse with fury. "And, just so you'll know, I think you're a lying, cheating whore and I'd sooner lie down with one of the working girls from Jarvis Street than touch you. At least they're honest about their whoring!"

As he spoke he pulled her to her feet, dragging her from the bedroom. Halfway down the stairs, he turned to her again, and this time Lauren shrank back from the madness that peered out from his eyes, "I've seen you, fornicating with my cousin, tempting him with your naked body, offering him everything you should have been giving to me..." he spat.

Fear galvanised Lauren, and she lunged forwards, driving her knee upwards at Stephen. But he moved too fast, and instead of hitting delicate parts she only caught him a glancing blow on the thigh. Nevertheless he howled in pain, releasing his grip on her arm as she wrenched herself away. But before she could turn to flee, Stephen lashed out in fury. His fist caught her across the face, and hot red blood spurted from her nose as she tottered backwards on the wooden steps. Arms flailing, Lauren lost her balance and began to fall backwards - and as she fell she saw Stephen, a wild gleam of pleasure in his eyes, watching her fear and making no attempt to save her from the fall.

It was only then that she knew with terrible certainty that he intended to kill her.

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CAROLYN HOWARD-JOHNSON



Carolyn Howard-Johnson's novel, 'This is the Place', won Sime-Gen's Reviewers' Choice Award for mainstream novels in the spring of 2001. A chapter was a finalist for the prestigious Masters Literary Award and another was selected for publication in The Copperfield Review. It was voted a Top Ten Novel for 2001 in the Predator and Editors' Readers' Poll and garnered NUW's Award of Excellence.

One of the short stories from her book, 'Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered', won the Red Sky Writing Competition and is included in an anthology called 'Pass Fail'.

Her work has also been included in anthologies 'The Joy of Cancer' and 'Calliope's Mousepad'. Howard-Johnson also wrote a screenplay called 'The Killing Ground' and is now writing 'Skyscapes', a book of what she calls "accessible poems."

“You’ve got to jump off the cliff all the time and build your wings on the way down.”

Ray Bradbury

Learning to Motivate Great Characters

A Writer as Her Own Protagonist

By Carolyn Howard-Johnson

Few writers understand that their lead character is the person with her fingers on the keyboard. For many years, I was one of those writers. I had to learn that I can only write a damn good novel* if I know the lead character well.

To even pull that chair up to the computer screen and start, the writer must examine the person whose bottom is in that seat, know her weaknesses and strengths, hear her voice, identify the conflicts she is experiencing, know the premise (her philosophy or heart’s desire) and be willing to suffer the pain that comes with knowing.

A writer must treat the soul, her writers’ brain and her typing digits as if she were the protagonist in the most important story she’s ever told. She must *understand* this character and must *like* her because of her strengths and because of (not in spite of) her faults. Not until she does that, is she sure to become a better writer, is she assured that she will actually *write*.

I found that once I identified my evil side, not only was I better writer, I actually committed myself to the process. I should back up a bit. To me evil is that insidious voice that daily whispers to each of us that we don't want to face the day, that we would rather watch "The Price is Right" than pick up a pen, that we would rather eat quiche with the girls than write an acknowledgement. A person who faces the daily demon of inactivity and does nothing to fight it, acquiesces to the evil of not following her calling. Like a character in a novel who makes no choices, she will drag her own novel into oblivion with her. A writer who accepts any excuse for not writing is facing a fate worse than death, that space of nothingness called limbo between heaven and hell.

I speak from experience.

I started off right, very early on. Youthful enthusiasm propelled me not only to write but also to hazard everything including pride to be certain I would have that opportunity. I wheedled my way onto my high school newspaper staff, badgered any editor with a desk at the *Salt Lake Tribune* until one finally gave me a shot at it. (There is a chapter based on that experience in my novel *This is the Place*.) When my husband went to New York for a graduate degree, I happily traipsed behind him hoping I would land a job at *Seventeen*, every young girl-writer's dream. *Seventeen* didn't pay enough to support a student and a budding writer so I went to work at a fashion publicity agency. When I didn't get to write enough there, my intrepid young spirit set out to find a job that would afford me that chance. Incredibly, the people at Hearst Corporation gave a nineteen-year-old woman a position at *Good Housekeeping Magazine*.

Then something happened. Or rather nothing happened. When nothing happens, the novel, the story, the writer gets lost. As life changed, I didn't keep

my eye on my goal. I made excuses. Part of it was due to the times. Others told me, but mostly I told myself:

“Why don’t you mature a little?”

“You aren’t going to write the great American novel anyway. Have a family and get on with life.”

“What are your chances? Look at the odds.”

They weren’t my true voices but they kept talking to me anyway. Another career was more lucrative, would let me spend more time with my family. Writing publicity releases for my business was writing, wasn’t it? Decorating my living room was surely just as creative. The protagonist in my own story wasn’t active—she was washed by the tides of circumstance. She was a character I would have edited from a novel—if I had been writing one.

Cancer was my wake-up call. It taught me that if a person does not listen to her true voice, if she represses her own song, the universe will continue to give her a push until she learns the lessons intended for this plane or dies. I chose to learn the lessons. I embraced my foolishness with bitterness at first, then with acceptance for my own foibles, then with humor. When I could see those lessons clearly (and I am still bringing many into focus), I cleared my life of the clutter that interfered with my writing and kept the parts that were supportive of it. A wonderful doctor cut out my cancer (along with a lot of other parts that I found wholly unnecessary when I was doing what I was meant to do) and that disease has not returned and will not. I believe that following one’s star keeps one healthy. I also know that if I should give it up, there will be dire consequences.

Francoise Sagan said, "I shall feel bad if I do not write and I shall write bad if I do not live."

Writing is perilous. To be worthy, a writer must lay her soul bare. That is an emotionally hazardous business. She will not necessarily be guaranteed a wage, certainly not one that is commensurate with her passion. There are many who will not like what she does and many more who will not understand what she does. For all the risks inherent in writing, there is a much greater peril in not doing so.

A writer will be better if she takes a page out of a good how-to book on writing, especially one with a chapter on building great characters, and applies it to her own life. With the skills she learns there she can analyze motivation, recognize the obstacles, and carefully plan choices. An irresolute protagonist can only undermine the greatest story ever told.

*once used as part of the title of a book on writing by James N. Frey, a teacher of writing at the University of California at Berkeley

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An excerpt from one of the stories in

Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered
called "A Different Generation."

By Carolyn Howard-Johnson
Author of the Award-Winning "This is the Place"

I once said that I never wanted to live my mother's life. Yet somehow I keep trying to do just that. I must have made that statement, without thinking, on a day when my fax was pleading with me with its whining beep to replace its paper roll, the hot-line from one of my stores was ringing and I was due to pick up my grandson from water polo practice. When life rains on your shoulders, it is hard to clearly see the scenery made crisp and clear by the rinse of water.

Mom-Bertie is now eighty-four. Cooking has been the artistry of Mom's life. Last time Mom Bertie came to visit, I decided to make her shrimp salad for her. I puzzled together the ingredients as best as I could. She likes half of a sandwich for lunch with a dollop of salad, and little slices of bread and butter pickles on the side. Before she came, I always stocked the pantry with the essentials. I didn't get the salad done, though, and was still making it when Stewart brought Mom-Bertie's tapestry bags in the front door.

"The airport was a madhouse," he announced. I knew it was difficult because, though Mom-Bertie still drives she doesn't walk as well as she once did. He had to pick her up at the gate. He couldn't dash by the curb and expect her to hustle her bags and body into the car as he used to do.

Bertie smelled the onions as Stewart ushered her and her suitcases into our front door. She was in the kitchen before she even had her bags unpacked.

"Does Stewart like the onions diced in the Cuisinart? It's just as easy to do it on the cutting board because onions have these little layers, see? They just fall into tiny, minced pieces as you slice." She picked up a knife and demonstrated, the knife clicking against the board in a blurred staccato.

"I don't think Stewart notices those things," Stewart said in third person as he turned the TV on to the Discovery Channel and put the fresh squeezed orange juice he had purchased for her at Whole Foods in the refrigerator. His voice caught in a chuckle and he kept busy putting the groceries away, avoiding eye contact with me.

I put the extra onions Mom-Bertie had chopped into the bowl, cooked the other half-box of little shell pastas, and added more salad dressing and mustard. I served the extra salad that had magically multiplied from "serves four" to "serves eight" because there were two cooks in the kitchen for dinner that night. I'd made Cornish Hens from the Greek Recipe Mom-Bertie often made. I used fresh lemons from our tree and sprinkles of oregano from a plant in my garden. I was rather proud of my efforts; it was easily the first meal I had put on a table in a couple of months. We mostly popped frozen dinners in the microwave, ate on the way home from checking on our stores, or went to get burritos at El Charros or Thai food at Min's Kitchen.

Mom sat down and tasted the shrimp salad. "You forgot the eggs."

"Sometimes I don't use them."

"Well, it's no good without hard-boiled eggs. It's not too late. I'll put some in it." She pushed her chair back from the table.

"Mom, I don't have any."

"Well, I'll just boil some."

"No. I mean I don't have any eggs."

"Carrie, everyone keeps eggs in the house."

"You forget that we don't cook much. I truly don't have any eggs."

She went to the refrigerator, opened the door and peered into the little smoky gray egg tray, pushing her glasses down on her nose to get a better view. Then she looked on the refrigerator shelves. Then she looked in the produce drawers. Stewart winked at me. I was not nearly so amused but the wink helped.

"There aren't any eggs there, Mom. Why don't you come back and eat your food before it gets cold. Maybe we can stop to get some tomorrow." I should have stopped there. Eggs were not important. "But I really don't think it ruins the salad not to have them. There's more than one way to skin a cat-or make a salad."

As we were eating, Stewart pulled one of the hen's legs away from the breast like a twig, its little bone-stem protruding from the meat. Some pink juice dribbled onto his plate.

"Damn." I scooped all the hens onto a platter. The oven was still warm but I put them into the microwave instead. This was the reason I never cooked. The mashed potatoes would have lumps in them or leak excess cream onto the dinner plates; the cake would list like a sinking battleship; the meat would refuse to cook and it was no wonder no one ever showed up on time. I felt heat crawl up my neck and around my ears. I squinted my eyes at those hens and willed them to get done in three minutes of nuking.

That night as I was dressing for bed, I tried to erase my annoyance, tried to examine why I didn't think the whole evening was as funny as Stewart did.

.....More to come.....

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KAREN MUELLER BRYSON



Karen Mueller Bryson is an award-winning playwright, novelist, and actress. Karen has appeared in theatre productions throughout the Tampa Bay area, as well as local television shows, and several independent and student films. Her plays, which include such titles as *WHEN FAT CHICKS RULE THE WORLD*, *THAZEL HOFFSTETTER LIVES HERE, BUT DOES HE KNOW BOTTICELLI* and *THE STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED WHEN BEBE ROMANO SAID SHE WAS HAVING A BABY*, have been produced throughout the United States and have received numerous accolades including an honorable mention in the McLaren Memorial Playwriting Contest, semi-finalist in the Henrico Theatre Company One-Act Playwriting Competition, finalist in the North Bay Theatre Group-Sonoma County Rep Script Festival, and winner of the Scriptwriters of South Carolina Playwriting Contest. Two of her plays are published by Brooklyn Publishers in Odessa, Texas, and a monologue from one of her plays was included in *MONOLOGS FOR YOUNG ACTORS II* published by Meriwether Publishing in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Karen is the author of *HEY DOROTHY YOU'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE*, a fast-paced and funny novel, which tells the story of a young woman's wild journey coming to terms with her father's sudden death. The novel is published by *Virtualbookworm*. Karen's second novel, *WHERE IS WONDERLAND ANYWAY*, tells the story of a young woman's ascent from the trailer parks of central Florida to become one of Hollywood's hottest celebrities, and will be released in the Fall 2002.

Karen earned a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative Writing from Warnborough University in England. Prior to becoming a playwright and novelist, she earned a Master's Degree in Human Development Counseling and worked for a number of years as a counselor and educator.

My Muse

By Karen Mueller Bryson

Every night after my day job, and for several hours each Saturday and Sunday, I set aside time for a “rendezvous” with my muse. This writing time is my own special time. It is a sacred time when I am alone in front of my computer, free to enter new worlds of my imagination. It is during this time that I abandon my everyday self, and become a vessel through which the characters I have created can tell their stories.

Writing has always come easily to me. I have never experienced the dreaded “writer’s block” nor have I experienced a dry spell. Quite the contrary, my writer’s mind always seems to be overflowing with words and ideas. When I am alone with my muse, the words spill forth, often faster than my hands can type. I have filled notebooks with ideas for stories I will one day tell. I have created characters, who dwell in my mind’s attic, waiting patiently for me to bring their tales to life.

When I think of my muse, I am drawn to the myth of The Dagda – the greatest and most powerful of the Irish gods. He was the master of all arts and knowledge, as well as of the Earth’s fertility and abundance. The Dagda is said to have had a bottomless cauldron, which was always full, symbolic of inspiration and wisdom. When I write, I feel a deep connection to the Divine – the Universe – or to what Carl Jung called the collective unconscious. I feel as though there is an ever-flowing stream of characters and stories that I can allow to flow through me to the written page. Like The Dagda’s cauldron – my Divine inspiration and

my connection to the sources of that inspiration – is abundant and endless. It's up to me to make the connection, tap into the well, and allow the words to flow through me onto the page. I often wonder if I will have enough time to write all that is in me – whether I will be blessed with the years and the physical capacity to allow all those untold stories to unfold.

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Excerpt from

Hey Dorothy, You're Not in Kansas Anymore

By Karen Mueller Bryson

Dorothy Gale Robinson, an aspiring actress, is the daughter of hippie parents with a passion for old movies. When her father is killed suddenly while sipping a non-fat decaf mocha latte at a local coffee shop, Dorothy's life is turned upside down. After an unconventional dispersing of her father's ashes at the Universal Studios' Psycho House, Dorothy's mother decides to sell all her worldly possessions and join a New Age cult headquartered in Banff, Canada. Of course, Dorothy's twin brother, Jude, is too busy with his law firm to help Dorothy save their mother from the clutches of the sinister cult, so she seeks the aid of her new boyfriend, Lahrs, and a cult-buster, Mervyn O'Roy, who just happens to look like Mickey Rooney. The motley trio ventures from Florida to Canada, and through a series of mishaps and misadventures, Dorothy and her fellow rescuers recover Dorothy's mother, and everyone finds a little romance in the Canadian Rockies.

In her fast-paced and funny first novel, Karen Mueller Bryson tells the story of a young woman's wild journey coming to terms with her father's sudden death. **HEY DOROTHY YOU'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE** is a delightful and engaging tale reminiscent of THE WIZARD OF OZ.

Want to know more about the book? Visit the website at:

<http://www.homestead.com/heydorothy/>

JOYCE LIVINGSTON



JOYCE LIVINGSTON is a real Kansas “lady” who lives in a cabin her husband built overlooking a lake. Wife of Don and mother of six children, she is a proud grandmother who retired after eighteen years as a Television Broadcaster. Now she keeps busy writing romance novels and working as a part-time tour escort (which takes her to all kinds of fantastic places she uses in her novels). She has had books and articles published on sewing, quilting, crafts, cooking, parenting, travel, personal color, devotions, and now inspirational romance—you name it!

In 2000, she was voted HEARTSONG’S favorite new author and her second published inspirational romance, *THE BRIDE WORE BOOTS*, was named favorite contemporary book of the year. She currently has five romance novels published by Heartsong/Barbour Publishing, another one due out this year, and four more contracted for next year. Joyce’s titles are: *ICE CASTLE*, *THE BRIDE WORE BOOTS*, *NORTHERN EXPOSURE*, *HAND QUILTED WITH LOVE*, *AS AMERICAN AS APPLE PIE*, *LUCY’S QUILT*, *BE MY VALENTINE*, *THE BIRTHDAY WISH*, *LOVE IS KIND*, and *WITH THIS RING* from the Novella collection – *A GOLD RUSH CHRISTMAS*.

Joyce invites you to visit her website at:

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LISTENING TO THEODOSIA

By Joyce Livingston

“Now, where did I put that manuscript?” That’s the question I asked myself last year after attending the Romance Writers of America (RWA) Conference in New Orleans, where a Harlequin Senior Editor moderated one of the workshops. Way back in 1987, I had sent this same editor my very first submission, a completed 52,000-word romance novel. I’d never even heard of guidelines or formatting, or any of those other *requirements* for proposals. I just knew my muse (whom I later named Theodosia, which means supreme gift) had given me a story and I wanted to write it, and I hoped Harlequin wanted to publish it.

Well, about 3 months after I had mailed off my precious parcel, I received a 2-page letter from a Harlequin editor, outlining in detail everything that was wrong with my manuscript and my story. Her last line said, “If you would revise and rewrite this, I would like to take another look at it.” Being the absolute novice that I was, I immediately began to shed tumultuous tears, screaming out between sobs, “She hated it so bad she took time to write two whole pages telling me how awful it was! I’ll never write another novel!” And I didn’t, until 1997, after I’d established some writing credibility by having my articles on quilting, sewing, family, travel, and other subjects, published in a number of national magazines.

Theodosia perched herself on my shoulder and said, “Come on, Joyce, you can do it. Give it another try! You’ve learned a lot about writing since you wrote that first novel.” I gave her a perplexed look then answered, “You really think I should?” Being the encourager that she is, she gave me a nudge and said, “I’ll help you,” and she did.

This time my writing was aimed at the Inspirational Market. I followed all the rules, formatted properly, paid close attention to POV (point of view), got my hero and heroine together on the first page – did all the *right* things, mailed it off and – got a rejection. This time the editor didn't even go to the trouble to sign her name, just sent a form letter. Theodosia whispered in my ear, "What'd you expect? This was your first real try. You're not going to give up, are you? Why don't you attend that writer's conference you heard about? Maybe you can pick up some pointers." I nodded. She was right, of course.

The conference was exactly what I needed. I learned most writers write and submit for years before they sell their first book. Encouraged by both the conference and Theodosia, I started and finished another book, sent it off – and received another rejection, but this time I was prepared for it, and I didn't even cry! Neither did Theodosia! At Theodosia's advice, I joined Kansas Fiction Writers, a newly formed chapter of The Romance Writers of America, and attended my first meeting. Each person there introduced themselves and told what they were writing and if they'd sold yet. Me included.

What I didn't know was that one of the attendees was the Acquiring Editor for Heartsong Presents, the inspirational romance line of Barbour Publishing. So I was both shocked and pleased when she approached me after the meeting and told me she'd like to take a look at those two books that'd been recently rejected by Steeple Hill (Harlequin). I sent them to her the next day and she liked them. Heartsong bought the first one. Six months later, they bought the second manuscript. My fourth book with Heartsong was released recently, and I'm already contracted for four more books for next year. In addition, they published one of my novellas in an anthology, and another of my novellas will be featured

in their Christmas Anthology next year. Ten books, all together. Not bad for almost four years.

So? What ever happened to that first manuscript? The one the editor wrote the two pages about? Funny you should ask. I have a wonderful story to tell you. At the end of that workshop I attended in New Orleans, I approached that editor and told her about that first book, explaining how upset I had been by what I'd perceived as a cruel form of rejection, and how I had put that book away, never to see the light of day again. She laughed and asked, "Do you still have it?" Theodosia gave me one of her nudges. I quickly answered, "Yes, somewhere in the back of a closet." The editor said, "When you have time, rework it and bring it up to date. If I took the time to write two whole pages, I'm sure I must've loved your story. I'd like to take another look at it."

Have I done the revisions and sent it to her? No. Not yet. It's going to take as much time, maybe more, as writing a new novel. But she'd said, "Anytime will be fine. Just mark *requested material* on the outside." Am I going to do it? "Theodosia, quit poking me!" Yes, someday. I still love the story, but first I have contracted books I need to write.

I think we all have that little voice inside us. That voice some of us call our Muse (or Theodosia). Sometimes I even think that Muse is what we call, "Our Voice". It's that quality and distinction we give to our writing that makes it uniquely ours. Someone else could take the same plot with the same characters and their story would be totally different than ours. No one, absolutely no one, can write it as we would write it. Oh, theirs may be better, or it may be worse, but when your family, friends, and readers can tell from your writing, YOU are the one who wrote it,

that's the VOICE we hear so much about. So write! Develop your voice! Keep learning, and submitting, and never, never give up! Persistence pays!

By the way, Theodosia sends her regards!

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APPLE ANNIE by Joyce Livingston,
From the Novella Collection AS AMERICAN AS APPLE PIE
Barbour Publishing Company
ISBN #1-58660-505-4

APPLE ANNIE
by Joyce Livingston

“Hey, lady. Wanna ride?”

Annie spun around, momentarily startled. Most of her dinner patrons had already headed for the barn, those who planned to attend the evening’ performance of their latest Melodrama. She hadn’t expected anyone to be waiting when she’d opened the door.

“Didn’t mean to frighten you,” Brad explained as he rolled his wheel chair toward her. “I’m sure you’ve been on your feet all day and I thought I’d give you a lift up to the Barn.”

She gave the man a blank stare. “Li—lift? How? There’s only a path.”

He shot back a smile as he patted his lap, his eyes twinkling. “Right here.”

“There? You’re kidding, aren’t you?” She sent him a dubious smile. Thinking back, she couldn’t remember a single time she’d ever sat on a man’s lap, other than her father’s or her uncle’s.

He held out a hand. “No, I’m not kidding. Climb on. I’m a safe driver. I promise not to exceed the speed limit.”

Annie watched as he skillfully maneuvered the chair, coming to a stop right next to her, headed toward the big barn. Was he putting her on? Surely he wasn’t serious.

“You’re afraid I’ll drop you, or we’ll run into a tree, aren’t you? Don’t worry, I’ve been driving this little jewel for years.” He patted his lap again. “Come on. I’ll bet none of your other boyfriends offered you a ride in a wheelchair. This could be the experience of a lifetime. You wouldn’t want to miss it, would you? This baby will do every bit of three miles per hour.”

She shifted her purse from one hand to the other. He was right. She was afraid. The path to the barn was up a gentle hill most of the way. What if—

“Annie, you’ll be perfectly safe.” His tone was reassuring. “I promise. It’ll be fun.”

She accepted his hand but kept her feet on the ground. “Have you ever—“

“Carried someone like this? On my lap?”

She nodded.

“Sure I have. My nephews. My nieces.” He tugged on her hand but she stood fast.

She tilted her head and raised a brow. “How old were they?”

“Well, the oldest niece was seven, but the oldest nephew was—“ He paused.

“Brad! How old was your nephew? And be honest,” she cautioned. “I want the truth.”

“Ah—nine?”

She withdrew her hand and slapped at his arm playfully. “Nine? You’ve only carried a nine-year-old child on that chair and you expect to carry me? Forget it.”

Brad grabbed her hand and gave it a tender squeeze. “Did I mention he was a very big nine-year-old?”

“You’re incorrigible!”

“But lovable, right?” His brown eyes gleamed.

She ignored his question. But yes, no doubt about it, he was loveable, in a big brotherly sort of way. “You promise you won’t drop me?”

“Try me.”

Warily, she slipped onto his lap, his one arm circling her tiny waist as he pulled her to him. He smelled nice, like shampoo and after-shave and she found herself melting against his body as her arms wound around his thick neck. Surprisingly, she felt safe.

“Put your feet on the empty foot rest,” he told her.

“Are you sure it won’t crowd you?”

He answered with a snicker. “Annie, I only need one footrest, remember?”

She blushed.

“Ready?” His face was so close to hers their cheeks nearly touched.

She closed her eyes and leaned into him. “Ready, I think. Just be careful, okay?”

* * *

Brad adjusted his grip about Annie’s waist as his right hand moved to press the lever. The chair moved forward slowly. Annie, the woman he’d fallen helplessly in love with the first night he’d visited Apple Valley Farm was in his lap, her arms hugging his neck. How many times had he dreamt of being this close to her? Of holding her? Kissing her? The tendrils of her lovely dark hair touched his cheek as she leaned against him. If only she was his. If only—“

“Brad? Did you hear me?”

“Sure, Annie. I’d never let anything happen to you. I promise.”

MARY EMMA ALLEN



Mary Emma Allen writes for children and adults from her multi-generational home in New Hampshire, USA.

Her stories also appear in anthologies, such as 'HeartWarmers with Spirit', 'Let Us Not Forget', 'God Allows U-Turns', and 'Finding the Joy in Alzheimer's'.

She's a columnist, travel writer, book author, illustrator and teacher. She schedules writing workshops for writers of all ages online and in schools.

Visit her web site for more information about her books and writing:

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SEARCHING FOR ONE'S LIFE PURPOSE

By Mary Emma Allen

"What is my purpose in life?" we often wonder. "Why was I placed on earth?"

Each of us has a reason for being here; each of us has talents to use for good or ill. So as we search within ourselves, we can find a way to help others and bring a sense of purpose and accomplishment to ourselves.

I've always wanted to write, from the time I was a child. No matter what else I've done or am doing in life, I find time to write. At first I desired to write for self-satisfaction. Now I find my purpose in writing is to help, inspire, comfort, and inform others.

There's such a reward when someone reads one of my books or an article, then writes or remarks, "You've helped me so much, Mary Emma. I found such comfort in your story/article/book. It was just what I needed at the time."

When you've brought a smile to someone's face, helped them with information they need to solve a challenge, encouraged them to accomplish their life's purpose...you know you've found a larger purpose with your writing in addition to your own satisfaction...God's purpose as you use your talents for good.

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UNFORESEEN OPPORTUNITIES LED TO WRITING SERENDIPITIES (And a Career as a Columnist)

By Mary Emma Allen

I was going to set the world on fire with a best selling children's book, then proceed to adult novels, like Phyllis Whitney and other novelists. However, my continual rejection in these areas was discouraging. So I didn't take seriously the urging from my father to look elsewhere and take a correspondence course in journalism.

"How will that help my writing career?" I wondered.

However, my dad was excited about the advertisement for the correspondence course with a well-known journalism school. Newly married, helping put my husband through a final year of college, I thought our budget too tight for course tuition.

"I'll make the first few payments until you can manage it," Father said. "Then you can pay me back."

How could I refuse? He was so enthusiastic about my taking this course even though he wasn't a writer, simply a great reader and self-educated man who had reached only the eighth grade. As I progressed through the course, however, I became more excited about newspaper writing and was pleased when my instructor gave me encouragement.

First Newspaper Column

Coincidentally when I finished the course, a weekly newspaper started up in my hometown. Although I was living halfway across the country by then (my husband now was an Air Force pilot), my mom mentioned to the editor I could write a cooking column for him. I'd written lengthy letters to my mom about the various foods served in different parts of the country where we traveled and lived. The editor asked me to write this column, which was received enthusiastically by the readers. The following year he asked me to write a second column on antiques and collectibles. I even did sketches for this one. Column writing for another weekly newspaper eventually opened the door to a reporter's position there.

Various Columns Throughout the Years

Since then, I've gone on to write columns for newspapers and magazines and now for online publications. As I was writing columns, I didn't give up on my dream of becoming a children's writer. I've had more than 200 children's stories published in magazines and collections, written a children's anthology, published and illustrated a children's coloring book, written a resource book for writers, compiled a book of essays on coping with a parent's journey through Alzheimer's, produced a quilt book, and am working on two children's novels.

However, my start as a published writer was not at all what I'd planned and taught me not to turn down the unexpected opportunities that come one's way. I've found column writing a very enjoyable aspect of my writing career.

Currently, I write two newspaper columns, a magazine column, five columns for an online newspaper, and columns for four other online publications. Some of these I plan to collect into books.

Look for those unexpected opportunities, which will yield you many serendipities.

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Excerpt from

WHEN WE BECOME THE PARENT TO OUR PARENTS

By Mary Emma Allen

Published by MEA Productions

ISBN 0-9651675-1-8

"At some point in your life you may find yourself stepping over that 'invisible line' when suddenly you realize you've become the parent and your parent is the child. It isn't something you've planned for nor are prepared for. You may not even want this responsibility. But it's yours."

Learn how Mary Emma and her mother faced the journey through Alzheimer's. They discovered they could enjoy one another in spite of the challenges the disease brought.

Mary Emma wrote this book to encourage other caregivers and help them enjoy that friend/family member during this phase of life when they must step over the 'invisible line'.

© Mary Emma Allen

GAIL JENNER



Gail L. Fiorini-Jenner is the wife of fourth generation cattle rancher/farmer, Doug Jenner. They have three children (plus a son-in-law, a daughter-in-law and a new grandson!) and live on the original homestead in the northern California mountains. Gail believes that few lifestyles bring to light the strong, traditional values that farming or ranching does.

A secondary history and English teacher for over twenty years, with a degree in Anthropology and English, Gail has also worked as an in-service instructor and writing consultant for the local county schools office.

To date, Gail has completed three historical novels and a screenplay and is working on a fictionalized historical biography of one of California's infamous stage bandits. Her first novel, *ACROSS THE SWEET GRASS HILLS*, was recently named the 2002 WILLA AWARD WINNER for Original Paperback Fiction by Women Writing the West. It was also nominated for a Historical Reviewer's Choice Award last July. Her second book, a nonfiction, anecdotal history, *WESTERN SISKIYOU COUNTY: GOLD AND DREAMS* (co-authored with Monica Hall), will be released in December 2002.

In addition, she's published articles and stories for a variety of Christian, regional, and educational publishers. In 1996, she co-authored a teacher's curriculum guidebook for Simon & Schuster, and in 1997, she contributed to a teacher's gift book for Publications International. Several of her children's stories were included in anthologies published by

Tyndale (1995-2000). Other publishing goals include a cookbook and a series of young adult novels. Her newest endeavor includes writing a historical column for the local weekly paper.

She has placed as a finalist in a number of outstanding writing contests including: The Jack London Novel Contest; The National Writers' Novel Contest; The William Faulkner Literary Short Story Contest; The Writers' Network International Screenplay and Fiction Contest; The Florida First Coast's Novel Writer's Contest; The Chesterfield Film Co. Writer's Film Project; The FADE IN Screenplay Contest; and most recently, The Acclaim Film and Television Contest.

Gail is a member of Women Writing the West, Western Writers of America, NAWW, The Historical Novel Society, Rogue Writers Ink, Romance Writers of America, the Italian-American Writers' Association, and the American Screenwriters Association (ASA). She also belongs to The Siskiyou County Historical Society, Friends of the Library, and The National CattleWomen's Association.

The Power of Language

by Gail L. Fiorini-Jenner

The call to write comes from a place almost imperceptible. Whether it derives from the desire to propel one's identity into the future or to express one's inner self, words and stories seem to bubble up from a wellspring deep within the writer. Even with all of the analysis of why writers write, the question eludes us, really. Writers write because they must. They write because they are driven. Like a worm moving through the heart of an apple, words move through the writer until they erupt and are exposed.

Words are powerful. As a teacher, I have observed what happens when students harness the words they're looking for: the power and the satisfaction they experience when 'they've gotten it' are tangible. For the student who struggles to put together even a few words, however, the disappointment and frustration are equally as tangible. We do children a disservice when we deprive them of words. When parents fail to read to children as youngsters or when they replace books with television, children enter school with a deficit that is hard to overcome. In contrast, children given access to words and ideas blossom.

Most writers fall in love with words at an early age. I can remember being fascinated with libraries and old bookstores. I would sometimes just sit and 'smell' the books. I would touch their covers; there was magic in those pages. But I was blessed: my parents loved the written word. And my grandmother, who lived with us for several years, savored words and their definitions like most

people savor ice cream. From reading daily to doing crossword puzzles or playing Scrabble, even to 'reading dictionaries and encyclopedias aloud,' she was always playing with words.

In seventh grade, I had a teacher who similarly loved words. Each day we had a 'semantics' lesson and I waited for that 20 minutes of discussion and analysis each day while most of my classmates frowned and yawned as the lesson unfolded. The study of Latin and foreign language augmented my love of words and their history; of course, my father – a first generation American-Italian – introduced us to the world of language at an early age. He used to say 'words are powerful.' And it wasn't long before I understood exactly what he meant.

As an anthropology student, I learned quickly that within cultures, words 'frame' our reality. They power our dreams, our ideas, and our ideals. I remember a professor pointing out that within Eskimo tribes, there are more words for water and ice than we (who live outside that reality) can imagine. And when one compares cultural differences, it becomes evident quite quickly the differences in expression or cultural definitions. How we define love or commitment or duty is 'controlled' by the words within our culture group.

As a writer, I must experience those language differences if I want to understand how people think or relate. I must open myself up to the power of words within people groups and 'play' with their history, their origin, and their broad range of differences. It can only heighten my depth of understanding, my analysis of the human condition or conflicts.

To this end, I believe writers are not only drawn to the power of language, I believe they have a responsibility to language. Especially now, in this age of

quick sound bytes and flashing imagery, the written word is becoming almost archaic. Writers, however, must devote themselves to preserving the beauty and the importance of language. And the muse, wherever she leads us, demands that we dig into the words and stories that are worming their way through our consciousness. We cannot ignore them. We must not ignore them. They have 'called us.'

And as Tom Stoppard has written, *"Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones, in the right order, you can nudge the world a little."*

© Gail Jenner

Excerpt from

ACROSS THE SWEET GRASS HILLS,
2002 Willa Award Winner for Original Paperback Fiction

by Gail Jenner

PROLOGUE

The old woman came to him in sleep, her dark eyes round and large, white eyebrows a stripe across her forehead. From the yawning black hole of her mouth came a haunting cry that curled up through the darkness like a thin thread of smoke. Another cry answered it.

The man shivered as the sounds whirled around him, rising higher and higher. He wanted to cover his ears, but couldn't move his hands. Instead he closed his eyes, trying to stop the pain in his head, but there was no way to shut it out. He wanted to shout at the old woman, but his throat was dry and his words transparent. The woman's black turtle eyes closed suddenly and her mouth snapped shut. Then she glided away, strands of long gray hair billowing about her like a cloud, the ends twirling like ribbons around her beaded white buckskin dress. Beyond, blue shadows weaved back and forth.

He reached out, hoping to capture the old woman and draw her back. What secret did she hide? What warning did she bring? But as quickly as she had appeared, the old woman vanished. A strange, chilling emptiness descended upon him.

Red Eagle sat up slowly, his heart thumping, his hands damp. He looked around, but saw only the dying embers of the cooking fire and the shadowy darkness of a night when the moon is hiding.

"Tomorrow," he said out loud, addressing his restless spirit. "I must find Crying Wind." Surely his uncle would know why the old woman wept.

CHAPTER 1

Montana Territory, September 1869

Liza stirred restlessly, trying to make herself more comfortable. Was she home in her own bed? She opened her eyes, then closed them, remembering where she was. She drew the wool blanket up to her chin, frowning. Her dreams had deceived again. St.

Louis was a lifetime away. She crawled out from under the blankets and took a deep breath, pushing aside the tears that threatened to weaken her spirit. She had to remain strong, or the fear that followed like a shadow might overwhelm her.

Stepping carefully over the rocky soil, Liza felt her way to the fire, spreading her hands out over the glowing coals. Glancing up at the moonless sky, handfuls of stars glittered like fool's gold, and she found herself wondering if this journey wasn't just a fool's dream.

If only she'd remained in St. Louis. Perhaps, if she'd said no to Father, he would have reconsidered. He might have changed his mind altogether, and then, Mother -- Mother would be alive, even now...

© Gail Jenner

DAVID LEONHARDT



David Leonhardt is the Happy Guy, author ...No, make that writer. No, wait. Yes, he's an author. But he's also a writer. And a book reviewer. And a speaker. And for the past decade or more he's been one of North America's most vocal and visible consumer advocates.

There's much more to do at www.TheHappyGuy.com than just pick up a copy of his book. "My goal is to make TheHappyGuy.com the Net's happiest place to be."

How to tell if you are a literary snob

By David Leonhardt

"I don't know if I should put 'writer' on my business card," I murmured.

"Then don't," my wife said in her infinite wisdom. "Put 'author' on it."

"But if I put 'author' on, none of those big companies with overflowing coffers will want to hire me as a writer," I said, wondering if George Bush needed a speechwriter or if General Motors wanted someone to write the owner's manual for next year's Oldsmobile.

"Fine. Put 'writer' on your card then, and all those fancy people you give it to will know you can write for them."

"But writer looks so small," I pointed out. "I also want Fortune 500 companies to hire me as a speaker, and nobody important hires a writer to speak. They hire *authors*."

"OK, why don't you put both?" she offered.

"Ho, right. That'll impress them. A writer who can't even write his own business card without duplicating his redundancies," I said. "I might as well shoot myself with my own sword."

In the end, I put "author," figuring I would get most writing jobs over the Internet, but when I speak live I would have to hand out cards to lots of people. An author's autograph would make those people giddy as strawberry Jell-O on the

Amtrak Express. Those same people would search nervously for a graceful retreat from the company of a mere writer.

What is it about being an author? You can author an article or a report or just about anything. And you can be the author of just about anything (including "your own misfortunes"). But you can't be "an author - period" unless you've published a book.

Big warning: writing a book does not count. I have a friend who wrote a book. That makes him a writer, not an author. When he publishes it, only THEN will he be a real author and only THEN will he be entitled to learn the authors' secret handshake. Don't try sneaking into the clubhouse on the scant pretext that you *wrote* a book. *Anybody* can write a book. Even a *writer*. You have to publish the book to get through these gates of glory.

But if my friend does publish, and he does become an author, and he does learn the secret handshake, then he'll be ready to cross that threshold of pride when a reader he's never met before tells him, "I just couldn't put your book down."

Well, not quite. In fact, his book is about humorous anecdotes from many years in his particular profession. Hmm. That wouldn't qualify him as an author, even if he publishes. It would put him in that blurry purgatory between "writer" "and" "author" in the company of so many silver medal winners who *almost* made it and whose names we *almost* remember.

Why? Because he doesn't qualify for that crucial qualifying praise, "I just couldn't put your book down." That comment is reserved for novels, "serious" non-fiction like biographies and history, and how-to books on topics that require wads of glue. Other lowly books just don't count.

But what if a lowly book could attract an "I just couldn't put your book down?"
Would that make the writer an author, or would the author remain just a writer?

My book is a self-help book. *Climb your Stairway to Heaven: the 9 habits of maximum happiness*. Self-help books are certainly not considered second-class books by the literary elite. They wouldn't even let self-help books into fourth class. In other words, mine is not a title any self-respecting *New York Times* book reviewer would allow to qualify for "I just couldn't put your book down."

At least, not in theory. But several people have said exactly that. (Too bad they said it to me and not to the *New York Times*.)

One lady even apologized for not calling me back one morning because she had stayed up into the wee hours of the morning reading my book. Now that's the kind of feedback that makes an author smile. What the heck, that kind of feedback would make even a writer smile.

Call me a writer. Call me an author. I couldn't care less. As long as you tell me "I just couldn't put your book down," I'm happy as a pig in ... uh ... Jell-O.

© David Leonhardt

Excerpt from

Climb your Stairway to Heaven: the 9 habits of maximum happiness

By David Leonhardt

Fear of the unknown is pessimism. Think about it. Something unknown could be good or bad, lucky or unlucky, welcome or unwelcome. The unknown could be Noah's arc, teeming with life, packed with excitement. Or it could be a Trojan horse, stuffed with hungry saber-toothed tigers lying in ambush. Why choose to fear? We could just as easily choose to cheer. Being hopeful—but careful—is cautious optimism (and possibly the best compromise between happiness and not being eaten).

Stress breeds fear. Philip Gold, a psychologist with the National Institute of Mental Health, reports that stress helps people survive in immediate, threatening situations. But their lives are less comfortable. Remember Miles, the producer in *Murphy Brown*? Always stressed, always on guard, never in truly threatening situations. Given that few saber-toothed tigers roam the streets of Detroit or the beaches of North Carolina, wouldn't we all be better off with less fear?

© David Leonhardt

KRISTIE LEIGH MAGUIRE



Who is Kristie Leigh Maguire?

Kristie is one of those new breed of authors who chose to follow the road less traveled in her writing career.

She is quoted as saying, "I am an Independent Author and damn proud of it. I have found my 'voice' in my writing and I want my stories to be published in the way that I intended for them to be, not changed to suit a publisher's idea of what the public wants to read. I have never been accused of 'being like everyone else'. I guess you could say that I am a true child of the sixties, doing things my way, and just a bit of a rebel at heart. I'm not a part of the masses of hopeful writers who dream about that big name publisher discovering me. I choose the publisher that I want to represent me instead of waiting on the publisher to choose me. I feel that Joe Blow Public has sense enough to know what they like to read without being held by the hand and led down the garden path. And if Joe Blow Public decides that they don't like my books that I put out in the world, then so be it. That is their choice. At least I had the guts to put them out there – my way."

Kristie puts her money where her mouth is when it comes to promoting the Independent Author. She founded the NUW (Not the Usual Way) Independent Authors Community

back in January 2001 so that this new breed of authors could have a place of networking and support. Not just everyone can get into NUW; prior approval is required before joining this group. Each member has to have at least one book published by non-traditional methods. NUW is fast becoming the most desired Community to belong to for those who 'follow the road less traveled'.

Kristie is also Romance Editor/Reviewer, columnist for 'Between 2 Authors', and co-columnist along with Suzie Housley for 'Have You Heard' at MyShelf.com. She is also Staff Reviewer for Bridges Magazine, a monthly print magazine.

Her stories 'The Land of the Rising Sun' and 'Christmas in a Foreign Land' appear in *Calliope's Mousepad: Women Writers Online*. Her story 'Soul Mates and Lovers' will appear in *Romancing the Soul: True Soul Mate Stories From Around the World and Beyond*, which will be published in the near future. She is also a contributor to two cookbooks: 'Now We're Cooking! 43 Authors in the Kitchen' and 'Cooking By The Book'.

Her novel, *Emails from the Edge (The Life of an Expatriate Wife)*, is based on a true story of Kristie's expatriate days while following her husband around the globe. *No Lady and Her Tramp* by Kristie Leigh Maguire and Mark Haeuser is scheduled for release soon.

Kristie lived in St. Croix, Aruba, Thailand, Japan, and three times in Saudi Arabia during her expatriate years - and many regions of the United States before she started roaming the globe. As she says, "I am from the South and proud of it - but I have learned that home is where you hang your hat."

The Writing Bug: A Blessing or a Curse?

By Kristie Leigh Maguire

I was living in Japan when the Writing Bug bit me. At first I thought it was a 24-hour virus – or the Asian flu. But I didn't get better after 24 hours - and if it was the Asian flu, it was the most terrible case known to mankind and should have been written up in the medical journals. It just wouldn't go away! If I had known then what I know now, I think I would have killed that little critter.

The Writing Bug just won't let me alone. It keeps swarming around me, annoying at times with its incessant buzzing, whining noise. Sometimes I just don't want to bother with it. I try swatting it away, but it is a persistent little devil, more annoying than a mosquito and its bite just as itchy. And like with a mosquito bite, you just can't keep from scratching that itchy spot. That's what that Writing Bug has done to me - bitten me and left me with a permanent itchy spot that just has to be scratched. There is no ointment made that I have found to put on that spot to keep it from itching; I just have to keep scratching and scratching at it. That itch just won't let up. It has consumed me. The Itch is more powerful than a speeding bullet, and like Superman, it makes me think I can jump over buildings with a single mighty bound.

So I don my Writing Cape and sit down at my computer--that blank screen in front of me just waiting to be filled with those words of fantasy, romance and mystery. I dream up new worlds with words mightier than the sword and populate those worlds with people that I create--larger than life and twice as nice, or as

bad, whichever the case may be. With my Writing Cape on, I am invincible, lifted out of my normal self and transported to another place and time.

God created the world in seven days. I am not God. It takes me much longer to create my worlds. Did God agonize over the world He made and the people and animals that He created to fill it as I do when I am creating my new worlds and populating them? Oh, here is a perplexing thought! What if God decides that the world and the animals and the people that He created to fill it aren't up to His satisfaction, just as I sometimes feel with the world and the people that I create? I hit the delete button on my computer when that happens. Does God have a great big computer up there in Heaven? Maybe a great big old Writing Bug bit God way back in the beginning of time! What if He decides that He is most unhappy with his creation and hits the delete button on this world? Oh my! Just a thought.

So, here I sit at my computer in my Writing Cape. The Cape is red. We all know the color red is a symbol of power - and with my red Writing Cape, I am most powerful. It has the letter 'A' for 'Author' emblazoned on it in royal purple. And I do feel quite royal when I don my Cape. After all, I am 'Queen of The Computer' when I am wearing it. Sometimes I hit a brick wall and my words just can't get over that blamed wall. But hey, I can leap tall buildings with a single bound! I am Super Author in my Writing Cape! Superman ain't got nothin' on me!

But then along comes the time to take off my powerful Writing Cape and put on my Publishing Hat. Oh, how I hate that Publishing Hat! It is the sickest color of yellow that I have ever seen! I look awful in it. The color does not become me at all and I long for my beautiful red Writing Cape. But Super Author time is over for a bit; the worlds have been created and populated. It is time; time to send those mighty and powerful words out to the general population of the world that God

created. My beautiful creation, my baby. Will the General Public like what I have created, sweated over, agonized over?

When God so created the world, he didn't make it perfect. He not only created the Writing Bug, he created Publishers. Publishers are the sworn enemy of the Writing Bug. They try every way they know how to squash that little critter. It is just their nature; they can't help it. As I said, God didn't create a perfect world.

Writers have to go through the Publisher in order to get their creation out to the General Public. If ever there was a time when the Writing Bug was threatened with extinction, this is that time. Super Author isn't invincible without the Super Writing Cape. Super Author now has on that really ugly yellow Publishing Hat and nothing seems possible anymore, as it did when wearing that beautiful red Super Writing Cape. The Publisher is the all-powerful being now, with the little old writer bowing at their feet, begging for admittance to the Hallowed Halls of Bookdom. There is a little-known fact that the Publishers can't seem to grasp: Publishers can't exist without Writers. Facts are facts - but the Publishers were issued blinders when they were created. They can't see the facts with those blinders on. They think they are the Almighty Powerful Being in the Writing World. Little do they know that with the advent of the world of Computers and Internet – and the mighty and powerful Super Writing Cape – writers are finding ways to exist without the Almighty Powerful Publisher.

So, here I sit at my computer with that blamed Writing Bug buzzing around me, never letting up, constantly nagging at me to create more worlds, more people, more images. I look in the mirror at my image wearing that sickly yellow Publishing Hat and think how truly ugly it is. I can stand it no longer. I take off that

hated Publishing Hat and once again don my beautiful red Super Writing Cape. I am Super Author!

The Writing Bug – A Blessing or a Curse? I have yet to decide. But I still keep scratching that Itch from its bite.

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Excerpt from

**Emails from the Edge
(The Life Of an Expatriate Wife)**

By Kristie Leigh Maguire

1/26/98

Margie Tovrea

My take on the mess

Seems like the bitter chick who had the ear of the sweet innocent young thing had the ear of an even more bitter old hen who had advised the bitter chick to wire herself and tape the dialogue of the sweet innocent young thing under the guise of friendship and oh you will feel much better after having a little gab fest strictly amongst friends, don't you know.

Seems like the even more bitter old hen had a vested interest in the bitter chick taping the dialogue of the sweet innocent young thing because bitter old hen and bitter chick were in cahoots to write a book on the expose of the scandalous sex life of Prez and gals of his life. Seems like bitter old hen is a literary agent who then in turn decided to wire herself and/or her phone and then tape conversations amongst herself and bitter chick just strictly to protect her interest and reputation, don't you know.

Seems like bitter old hen had an even more bitter grudge against Prez than bitter chick. Maybe Prez turned down the advances of the bitter old hen? Maybe Prez turned down the advances of bitter chick? Maybe sweet innocent young thing had a wonderful imagination or fantasies? Maybe sweet innocent young thing wanted to appear more important than she was? Maybe the Republicans have finally gotten what they have been looking for for 5 years now?

Tune in next hour for the continuing story of "*As the White House Falls*". We will give you all the graphic details of: Is oral sex really considered sex? Is it really sex if there is not actually penetration? Was it really semen on sweet innocent young thing's dress? If it was semen, is it really the Prez's? Why did sweet innocent young thing preserve this infamous dress for posterity? Will Star request a sample in a little brown bag from Prez? Will Prez shoot off a rocket to Iraq to divert attention from *another shooting rocket*? Stay tuned for all the lurid details. We will deliver. If we don't have the facts, we will still deliver. What the hay, this is too important to wait on facts. The

PUBLIC demands to know so if we don't know, that will not stop us getting the story to you in *blow-by-blow* detail. No pun intended.

Next week we will air our first episode in the exciting new series, *The Sex Lives of the Rich and Famous*. Remember, you never know where the camera will be aiming next! This is the 90's version of Candid Camera. Sooo, stay tuned and see if you see yourself on this new and exciting program!!

Enough of that for now.

* * * * *

© Kristie Leigh Maguire 2001

Back Cover

Emails from the Edge (The Life of an Expatriate Wife)

Saipan is a tropical island with clear blue waters, sandy beaches, tropical flowers, swaying palm trees, gentle breezes and warm and friendly Micronesian South Pacific natives - plus the added bonus of being a U.S. territory with American goods in the stores and with American money as the local currency. What more could a girl ask for?!

All of the Japanese people on the tour were *oooohing* and *ahhhhing* over all the duty free shops and souvenirs. I was in the local version of Wal-Mart, *oooohing* and *ahhhhing* over shampoo and conditioner, body lotion, Pepto Bismol, Tylenol and Motrin - and generally running wild through the aisles like a crazy woman!

I got up before dawn each day and sat out on my balcony by myself while my husband slept. As I watched the sun come up, peace flooded my soul. That old church song, "*Precious Memories*", kept playing itself in my mind like Daddy used to sing it in church. I sat out there and watched the colors tint the clouds and the ocean waters while the refrain of "*Precious memories, unseen angels, how they ever flood my soul, in the stillness of the midnight, precious memories scenes unfold*" played over and over in my head.

I was reborn. I found myself again. I knew that I was *on the edge* but I had not realized how close I had come to losing myself till that moment.

Kristie Leigh Maguire

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KATHLEEN WALLS



Kathleen must have been born beneath a wandering star. The thought of getting on the road and going somewhere new has always thrilled her. Another favorite pastime from earliest youth was listening to her Irish Grandmother tell ghost stories. Kathleen grew up in New Orleans, which is a hotbed of legends and haunted spots. What could be more natural than combining the love of travel and fascination with the unknown to produce a book on haunted places, her upcoming book, *Georgia's Ghostly Getaways*. It is due to be released in October 2002 by Southern Charm Press.

When not traveling around looking for interesting places to write about, she is either at her cabin in the North Georgia Mountains or in St. Augustine, Florida. She shares both places with husband, Martin, a canine companion, Romeo, and two cats, Smokey and Spice.

Last Step, a novel of drugs, murder and romance was her first novel in print and she is currently working on *Kudzu*, a tale of love and betrayal, past and present, set in the North Georgia mountains. She also has a book of Florida's favorite haunts in the works. Her creative career is varied. She currently writes travel articles as well as novels with a touch of murder and mayhem. She has also just finishing writing the script for an audiobook, *Tax Sale Tactics*, to be published by www.drive2learn.com. In the past she has worked as a reporter for a local newspaper and briefly had her own real estate show on a local television channel. She also is the editor of an online travel magazine. You can visit it at www.americanroads.net. She is a member of League of American Penwomen.

Please visit www.katywalls.com or www.americanroads.net for more about the author.

Scary Sadie's Curse

By Kathleen Walls

Most people think a writer's life is all glamour and fun. Well my friends, I'm here to tell you there are days that are just down and dirty. Oh, in retrospect they're funny but at the time they make you wish you were a Wal-Mart greeter.

A few months back I had one of those days. I was doing a combination book signing/information-gathering trip, zigzagging from St. Augustine to Tampa then back via the East Coast. I had set six book signings promoting my current book, *Last Step*. Now *Last Step* has nothing to do with travel. It's a mystery romance about a mother's quest to find the truth behind her daughter's drug related death. However, since, authors aren't all rich from the sale of their books, I'm also a travel writer. I enjoy the excitement of new places and love passing that information on to my readers. This trip was going to provide more excitement than even I craved.

Normally, with travel writing, you get comp lodging, attractions and even meals.. Book signing tours are different. If you're with a small press or print on demand, you're on your own.

This trip was a combination, I did get some lodgings and attractions comped in Lake Wales, St. Cloud, Sebring and Tampa. The rest of the time I was on my own so I decided to take my pick-up and slide in camper to save on expenses. Besides selling books, and getting material for travel articles, I needed to locate interesting ghost stories for my new book, *Finding Florida's Phantoms*. I had a

contract with Southern Charm Press for my *Georgia's Ghostly Getaways*, due out in October of 2002, so I felt a book on Florida's haunted spots was my next step.

Right from the beginning, the Florida book picked its own direction. I would hear about a place with a ghost. When I checked with local people I found no story there but learned of another story nearby. This created a lot of surprises but that was okay. In fact, most of these new places had never been written about so it was a "scoop" for my book.

By the tenth and last day of the trip I had experienced the usual ups and downs. I had spent nights in fabulous places like Saddlebrook Resort and Chalet Suzette I had discovered lots of ghost stories like the long dead former owner of the Hunter-Arms who still supervised the maids, and the spirit on the third floor of Kenilworth Lodge in Sebring. I had found lots of good magazine article material like the Plant City Strawberry Festival where I parked in the front yard of a lovely older couple who lived near the fairgrounds and rented parking spots. Have you ever tried to sleep in a camper with the sounds of the roller coaster and carousel just two blocks away?

It was March 17, St Patrick's Day, when I rolled into Melbourne. I had time before my 3PM signing at Books-A-Million. After checking the known local haunts I began looking for new blood. There was an Irish festival downtown that was as good a place to start as any. I learned of a coffee shop on the beach that was reputedly haunted so I headed there. I ordered tea and a muffin at Murray's. The china was chipped and the service was slow. The owner was cooking inside. Since the place was packed and they were two people short, she informed me briefly, "Some people claim to have seen things but I don't believe it."

I asked if I could come back after they closed, around four, and talk to her. She agreed. If I knew then what would befall me, I would have accepted her disbelief and left, never to return. But, of course, curiosity drew me back after the book signing.

I was in a good mood as I approached her parking lot. The signing had gone well and I was heading home as soon as I left here. I pulled into the lot and all that changed instantly. Crash - the edge of my camper top hit a slightly overhanging limb. I had safely entered this same driveway just hours ago but the overhanging oak limb had just enough hook that it got you if you pulled in close to the tree side of the driveway. I had and it did! It slammed the top driver's side of my camper like a giant battering ram. The force of the blow threw the camper backward. It popped the safety chains like they were made of paper instead of heavy gauge steel. I jumped out and surveyed the damage. My camper sat almost completely off the truck with one corner smashed into the dirt and only a few inches of one front corner still on the truck.

I rushed to the restaurant door and frantically pounded. I could see the owner and another person inside but she wouldn't answer the door. My husband later suggested she was afraid I wanted to sue. I was just seeking help or even consolation and a Coke while I decided what to do.

As I turned from the porch, three men who could have passed for Hell's Angels approached me. "What happened?"

"I was just pulling in and knocked my camper off." My need for help was stronger than my fear of their appearance. I need not have worried. They were more like regular angels, abet slightly tipsy angels, than anything else.

Donald, Scott and Beef spent the next three hours helping me right the camper and get it reattached to the truck. As my guardian angels had been strenuously celebrating St. Patty's Day, I had the added burden of being careful no one got hurt in the process.

After attaching it as best they could, my helpers queried, "What brought you up here anyway?"

I replied I was a writer looking for ghost stories. That elicited boisterous laughter. Beef replied, "Ma'am, there ain't no ghost here. It's just Scary Sadie's curse. A woman named Sadie lived here before it was a coffee shop. When she had to move, she cursed the place. It was Scary Sadie's Curse what got you."

Needless to say, I drove the ensuing 140 miles or so home that night praying no one stopped me with my one working taillight and my very insecurely fastened camper. I guess Scary Sadie had finished with me as I made it home with no more mishaps.

Excerpt from

Georgia's Ghostly Getaways

By Kathleen Walls

Dahlonega's gold still lies buried deep within its hills but it reaps another rich bounty Today, Dahlonega mines the golden tide of tourism. The old county courthouse, built in 1836, still stands. It is the fourth oldest courthouse still in existence and the state's second most visited museum. It houses the Dahlonega Gold Museum and tells the history of Lumpkin County from the gold rush days until the present. Its exhibits and film give you an exciting glimpse of a turbulent era. With such a heritage, it's only natural that there would be some restless spirits still hanging around. To find evidence of them you need look no farther than the courthouse wall. There is a framed photo taken by an amateur photographer, Madeline Anthony, at the Mount Hope Cemetery. Ms. Anthony was cleaning up the cemetery grounds with another church member on a spring day in 1953. She shot several snapshots of their handiwork to show the church committee. She had them developed and printed and had the developer enlarge the one he considered the best. When she looked at the finished print, there, among the gravestones, were the images of several people dressed in old-fashioned clothing. Since no one had been there when she took the photo, she confronted the studio that had developed the prints. The person who developed them had no idea where they could have come from but he had no inclination or motive to play this kind of trick. His assessment was that she had truly captured spirits from the past. Look at the photo and decide for yourself.

After that, your choices will vary according to personal interest. The visitor's center is on the square and is a good place to gather brochures and information. The square, which is registered as a National Historic District, offers many small shops ranging from art and antiques to jewelry and native crafts. If you only stop in one store, make it the Dahlonega General Store. It's a step back in time to the old country store and then some. Its nickel cups of coffee should be inducement enough.

The Holly Theater is another must see. You can see a live stage performance or maybe a performance by someone that is no longer alive.

© Kathleen Walls

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Visit the online magazine for anyone who travels in America at www.americanroads.net

LESLIE GARCIA



Romance writer Leslie P. Garcia invites readers, writers, educators – everyone – to visit RioRendezvous. RioRendezvous offers editorial on current events ranging from the growing problem of violence against children to the much less important possibility of a baseball strike. Visitors can weigh in on these timely issues by using the RioRendezvous forums and polls.

Read reviews of current romances, find original classroom incentives, amuse yourself with some “animal anecdotes” on the CritterClips pages, or exchange thoughts on the message boards. (Visitors are encouraged to register to have full use of the message boards.)

Upcoming features will include “Romantic Nudges” for writing romance when you’d really rather not, and some “must have” children’s books that lend themselves to home or classroom enjoyment.

So please come visit, and check back regularly, as RioRendezvous meets the new millennium down along the fabled banks of the Rio Grande.

The Writing Wounded

By Leslie Garcia

Six years old...a little girl sits in silence under a Christmas tree, looking not at the presents heaped under the freshly cut pine, but at the way the lights turn opalescent and mystic through the thick layers of silvery icicles. The little girl rummages around for paper and pencil.

“Go to sleep!” her mother’s groggy voice calls from the first bedroom down the hall. “It’s too early to be up!”

Finally, on a torn piece of paper, the girl—who somehow could always read and write, it seems—writes a line on the paper. Something like ‘God lives in the branches of pine and dances across each brightly wrapped gift.’

The girl is a poet and a writer—if not truly a believer, yet—and she always will be.

Fast forward a few years, and the girl’s stories, always well-received in elementary story, have become poems and novels. Too much to say in the brief pages of a short story, although poetry can tell the world in a line or two. The novel’s the thing, though, to paraphrase Shakespeare—which she does often, hoping that she will win her father’s approval. High school garners a rejection from *Playboy*, and when integration finally comes to her sleepy Georgia town, changes in her life. Again.

But wait—why is a young teen submitting stories to *Playboy*? Does she read just the articles, as men do? Detectives would seize on such a clue, investigate, uncover. Today's experts would come to all the right conclusions that were unthinkable when the six-year-old became ten, twelve...when she sent a tear-stained letter to *Dear Abby* that almost cost her her life. And writers would know, too...know that the wounded write, that salvation is putting words, seen or unseen, into the precise order some worlds never achieve.

So many wounded, in the world. . .yet not everyone writes. Some who do write foster destruction, rather than seeking salvation. And there are words, sunny happy genuine words, that cover no ugliness, bandage nothing. . .aren't there? Not every writer knows the answer to that. I don't.

What I do know is that the six year old wrote always—that she still writes. Through murder that stole a much loved brother away, through the trauma of moving, the heartbreak of being disowned and discredited by the very man that once stole innocence...she writes. Wounded words, often, but sometimes they are filled with the laughter of children...the love of a world where there are sunsets...beaches...babies. Even pine trees, unadorned but still whispering the secrets of higher powers.

Lonely? Pick up a pen. Deliriously happy? Guard that moment forever.

When the six year old gave birth to her third child—okay, when the woman the six-year-old became gave birth—she almost died. Didn't see the baby for more than a day. When the nurse brought him in, his head sat on his shoulders—no neck. (That would become his football moniker, but she didn't know that at the time.) He seemed deformed. But tears streamed down her face at the wonder of

him—the warm, solid, living part of her brought forward to carry on if she faltered. She wrote a poem about him, sold later to *McCall's*. But because the world is as it is—she changed the title to “First Born.” And now, occasionally, the third son envies the first, because those particular words were his words. Neither understands that when a writer sends words out into the world—they remain hers. Wounded or happy, full of self or full of selflessness, words constitute each writer’s being.

The six-year-old feels a hundred some days, now, and occasionally she feels just six or seven, especially when she surrounds herself with little ones and their books. Color and innocent words, uninjured yet. On those days, she isn’t among the writing wounded.

Most days, though, the words she puts on paper seek salvation. For her. For the world. And it’s godly somehow, doing that...seeking salvation...even if she isn’t always a believer, yet...still, she’s a reader. And a writer. The writing wounded find comfort in that...and faith. Rummage around for a pen and paper. And write.

© Leslie Garcia

Excerpt from

Love's Lasting Song (595173802 - Published by iUniverse, 2001)

by Leslie P. Garcia

Joaquin seemed a little bemused by the barrage of conversation, and Elvira saw it and clarified her question immediately. "The part about Sheryl," she explained, and then, "I do talk too much, don't I?"

Dimples slashed his cheeks. "No, to the part about talking too much," he said. "And Sheryl doesn't have anything on Julie, or either of you, I daresay." Ana giggled, and Elvira reached out to link an arm in his.

"I think I like you, Joaquin Gonzalez," she announced. "If you decide Julie's really not your type, we can talk. Shall we get busy?"

They spent several hours putting up the figures, and Julie found that the obnoxious octopus forms were not quite as repulsive on the backdrop as she had expected. The four of them stood back, looking at their handiwork and catching their breath.

"Not bad," Ana said. She smiled flirtatiously at Joaquin, fiddling with the front tie of her top. "I bet you're used to a little more elegance, though, right?"

"My last set cost several hundred million pesos," he admitted wryly. He thought for a moment, then smiled slightly. "Then again it was basically as garish as this. Lights and smoke and too much of everything."

"Then why did you use it?" Julie asked, puzzled, and he shrugged. "It seemed like a good idea at the time. Besides," he went on, winking at Elvira, "it was the perfect setting for the twenty naked dancers."

"Very funny," Julie grumbled. "I'm glad we're finished."

"So am I," Ana said. "You can feed us." She was retying her shirt again, knotting the tails just below her breasts, leaving even more sweat-dampened skin exposed. "It's too hot to wear this much," she complained. "So, food?"

Elvira and Julie exchanged glances and groaned. Ana was petite and curvaceous, but her appetite was enormous. She ate constantly and never gained weight.

“You did promise,” Ana reminded. “Your treat. She did say that, didn’t she?”

Elvira nodded, and Julie sighed in defeat. “My treat.”

Joaquin came back, dusting his shorts. “I see that they’ve been fixing the auditorium up,” he mused. “So why is it no one ever thinks to clean prop rooms?”

“You’ll come with us, won’t you?” Elvira asked Joaquin. “Julie’s buying us pizza.”

“Sounds great.” He quirked an eyebrow at Julie. “How about it, boss? Am I invited?”

“Of course,” she murmured, although she wasn’t sure she could sit in a crowded booth with him and pretend indifference to what she felt.

“Good. Pizza’s the best,” Ana enthused, plucking her huge bag from one of the seats where she’d thrown it on her way in. “You know,” she added cheerfully, “sometimes I think pizza’s even better than sex!”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Elvira said calmly, catching Joaquin’s arm with one hand and looping her other arm through Julie’s. “What do you think, Joaquin?”

Joaquin grinned down at Elvira, but not before looking consideringly across at Julie—something she knew her friend hadn’t missed.

“I guess it depends,” he said. “On the pizza. And the sex.” He paused a moment, his dimples deepening. “And I think that in this company, the pizza would have to be very, very good!”