

# Stories

*poetry, prose, and personal reflection*

Vol. 6 — March 2022



COME WITH ME  
INTO THE WOODS  
where spring is  
advancing, as it does,  
no matter what, not  
being singular or  
particular, but one of  
the forever gifts, and  
certainly visible.

MARY OLIVER



*It is spring again. The earth is  
like a child that knows poems by heart.*

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

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## **Publisher's Ponderings**



I find it very hard to believe that it's been almost two years since the world first shut down as a result of Covid. March 20, 2020. I will never forget that day. Since then, we have all dealt with so much ... and are still doing so. Sometimes it's difficult not to lapse into negativity and despondency. Certainly I for one have had more than my fair share of "dark nights of the soul" over the past two years.

But now, as I sit beside my office window, looking outside on a sunny day, I choose once again to focus on hope. Spring, the time of renewal and rebirth, is just around the corner, and I await its arrival like a child waits for Christmas!

I also choose to focus on the good things that have happened over the last two years ... the aha moments, the new directions explored, and the new paths now being followed, by me and by so many others I know.

It was Anais Nin who said, "And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom." I get that. And I agree.'

I am taking to heart the lessons I have learned, even (and perhaps more accurately, especially) the difficult ones. And I am venturing out of that tight little bud with newfound courage and confidence, looking forward to all that lies ahead.

*Lisa*



## **It's Spring Again** **Sandra Wilson**

The earth having slumbered  
Is beginning to stretch and yawn  
Light and warmth are returning  
And we can see patches of lawn

There is an overlapping of birds  
Before the winter ones fly away  
There is a delight of new songs  
As the spring birds come back to stay

The trees that shuddered  
And dropped all their leaves down  
Are starting to form new buds  
New life is appearing all around

Springtime triggers renewal  
For the Earth and us alike  
As new growth covers the land  
Hope in us begins to spike

As much as I get tired of winter  
I appreciate I live in a place  
That has tangible season changes  
And all these feelings I can embrace.

\* \* \*

## **Lessons in the Weeds** **Lisa Browning**

**M**y backyard is my sanctuary. It is filled with winding pathways, weaving their way through gardens. The birds love it, as it is one of the few backyards in my relatively new subdivision that has had any landscaping done ... and with my 13 bird feeders, I'll admit, I'm a little over the top!

Not only do I have a walk-out, but the yard slopes, to the back and to the right, which is why I decided to

take all the grass out in the first place. "It will be a lot less work," I told myself, "not having to lug the lawn mower down the hill, and then manoeuvre the uneven ground." Ya, right.

It seems like the good weather came all of a sudden in the spring of 2020 ... and with it, the weeds. I sat out on my deck one afternoon, somewhat incredulous at how many weeds there were, and how quickly they grew. Bright and early on a Saturday morning, while the temperature was still cool, I grabbed my gardening gloves, yard waste bags and pruning shears, preparing to go to work.

In the moments of overwhelm that followed, it struck me that this situation was a lot like life. Sometimes, we become overwhelmed by problems ... the weeds in the garden of life. And if those problems are numerous or large, we don't know where to start, in order to free ourselves of them all.

### **Start with the Bigger Weeds First**



In the mess that was my garden, I started with the bigger weeds first. I figured that, once I saw my way clear of those larger weeds, I'd be able to more freely more on the smaller ones. Just like life.

An interesting thing happened, as I worked my way from garden to garden. I became more energized,

more hopeful. I started to think that I just might be able to get this done after all. And so, I continued.

### **Once You Start, Keep Going!**



Garden by garden, weed by weed, I worked. Piles of weeds accumulated on my pathways, and when I had enough to fill a bag, I did just that.

As I continued to pull the weeds, I started to see the unobscured beauty of my gardens. Just like life.

That morning, I filled three bags in two hours. As the heat of the day bore down, I put my supplies away. In the early morning hours of Day 2, I began again.

### **Appreciate the Unexpected Gifts**

In a corner garden, one of the last to be pruned, a dappled willow had taken over. As I methodically cut back the overgrown branches, I was surprised to find a pink peony bush that I didn't remember was there. I was so struck by its beauty, and its unexpected presence, that I sat still for a moment, taking it all in. I knew it was important to be still, and take it all in. Just like life.



### **Hard Work and Determination Pay Off**



Five hours and six yard waste bags later, I sat down on my deck to enjoy a new view of my gardens. Despite feeling tired and worn out, I felt proud of my accomplishments ... of my perseverance and my vision. I smiled at St. Francis of Assisi, looking back at me from the centre garden.

There are definitely lessons in the weeds.

\* \* \*

## **Back in 2005** **Deb Speck**

**S**eventeen years ago this month my ex-husband and I had that huge fight that was the beginning of the end of a 32 year old marriage. I am still single and still struggle with the decision we both made when we had stopped yelling at each other. According to the statistics, it takes half the amount of years together to get over a relationship. So if I add on the 3 years we dated then this is the year.

This anniversary triggered memories of that fateful day and more depth of understanding. The proof is in the details. We were visiting our son in his Toronto apartment when Brad took control of the TV remote prompting a heated argument between the two. At one point I finally had heard enough and couldn't hold back. He was doing it again, taking over and acting like it was his right. I blurted out "it's Keith's apartment!" which ended the argument pretty quickly but started another one at home. When Brad yelled at me that maybe we should live apart for a while, I jumped at the chance to have my own space and place.

I have very seldom given myself credit for that decision. Instead I have fed that green monster of mine, believing I should have been able to stick it out like others have. The idea that maybe it wasn't just one argument or one event such as Brad not working for whatever reasons or that I wasn't just a cold hearted bitch came to me on this annual date. I saw this conflicting value all through our time together, right from the beginning when his tardiness angered me and his devil-me-care attracted me. The best label I can put on this value is responsibility but it is so broad that it was hard to narrow down and connect to any one fundamental issue.

My problem with this value was not being able to appreciate it, embrace it as something very important to me as a human being. It is one of the few beliefs that I have chosen to take from my upbringing. It

became buried under all my financial problems that ensued after that decision, creating an even stronger green monster while watching other women my age have so much more security. Somehow this time around I felt that strength in me instead. Gathering more information and having different connections showed me a broader perspective, the most influential one being I can not know what other problems other women have. Now I can appreciate my own strength in being able to overcome my own obstacles and there were many that I had to get past to get to where I am today, a strong intelligent resourceful independent woman.

\* \* \*

## **Spring-ish Reflections** **Francine Houston**

*It is spring again.*

*The earth is like a child that knows poems by heart.*

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

**I** am sitting here, wrapped in a fuzzy blanket, hands wrapped tightly around a warm cuppa, and listening to a howling wind, and watching the snow swirl. I wonder what happened: yesterday and the day before it was in the high single digits, pleasant, and rainy. Today, the weather is blustery and COLD. Today it doesn't feel like spring is close, but yesterday... yesterday .... I could feel the hints and promises of spring coming.

I know, spring is yet, a time away, but as I sit, reflections of the times and the upcoming season are bouncing around in my head and heart.

Two years ago, or near enough, the world underwent a dramatic and profound change. It is a time that, going forward, will be spoken about in, well... perhaps not glowing terms, but in terms of how much people were impacted: for good or for ill. I will acknowledge that for me, and for many others, there is something instinctually, intrinsically different about

the upcoming season. The last two years have changed us profoundly, and the looming spring somehow feels different, more significant.

Soon, where I live, the Earth will shed Her wintery blanket, and She will start to slowly awaken: breathing, stretching, beginning to unfurl. This year, I will not wait for the robins to appear. We had them overwintering around the creek near my home. This year, as I see signs in the outside world, I realize that for me, spring is already here. I have already begun to breathe life into new projects, to start formalizing new ways of moving in the world, and creating.

Old Man Winter is beginning to release his hold. We are seeing hints now and again, between the fingers that are trying to keep us locked in this hibernation that we started in mid-January, significantly later than usual. Hibernation is a gift, it allows for germination, the incubation of new thoughts, new ideas, new shifts in consciousness. What a beautiful gift, moving into the longer days, the warming sun, and the melt of the snowpack. The earth is getting lighter, the days are getting longer, the spring birds are returning and soon the trees will start wearing their crowns of a myriad of greens.

Breathe deep, spring is coming. New growth, new be-ing, new life. Do you feel the difference this year? Does this season transition feel different for you? What new will you grow? What will you breathe life into? What wonderful living will you find in this new season?

\* \* \*

## **A Summer Disguise** ***Brenda Cassidy***

**M**arch 14<sup>th</sup> and 75 degrees outside? No way! This television cablecast weather report must be a mistake. Well, there is only one way to find out for sure.

Brushing the curtain aside, I push the clip back with my thumb and slide the window open. That's a great feeling after four months of hibernation! Resting my bare arms on the dusty sill, I am aware of the roughness of the screen. I brace myself now for an icy blast, but instead, I feel the welcome warmth of the sun, creeping across my face and working its way down to the tip of my toes.

The sky is cloaked in my favourite colour, powder blue, and is clear except for a couple of fluffy cotton ball clouds, drifting lazily on to an unknown destination. The winter air, disguised as a summer breeze, is floating gently through the screen. Ah! The air smells so incredibly fresh!

As I look out my second-story window, I have an overall view of the identically-styled townhouses and their undersized yards. Beyond the green-tinged, weather-treated fencing, is the larger-scaled common area, punctuated by bare, scrawny, twig-like trees, newly planted last spring. At the far end of this area, there remains—temporarily, I'm sure—one mountainous snow pile, dirty now, and reminding me of a giant chocolate sundae. Water surrounds the bottom and is streaming steadily down the slightly sloping ground to the drainage sewer. A dank, damp odour drifts across my nostrils. Everything below is so muddy and soggy. Numerous footprints, resembling miniature ponds, create a predictable pathway in the direction of the school.

A faint rustling sound captures my attention now. It's just the warm breeze feeling its way delicately around the yards. Dried brown leaves are huddled, curled and shrinking in the corners and along the sides of the fences, like dead decaying leftovers from another season. With a sudden spurt of strength, the breeze sends the leaves dancing. They twirl and whirl, around and around, until they meet together as one swirling dancer. The breeze tires now and lets them down gently to rest.

The sun seems to be shining even brighter now, and warmer. A fly has joined me at the screen, enticed from its sleep by the premature summer-like day.

This is so peculiar. There are no birds singing. There are no lawnmowers humming. There aren't even any buds on the trees yet.

As I step back from the window, I notice the imprint of the window screen, a tiny little checkerboard, on my slightly cramped arms. I can see no sense in standing here any longer. I should be taking advantage of this record-breaking day. "Come on, kids! Let's go outside!"

\* \* \*

## **Late Winter Days** ***Arlene Davies-Fuhr***

**A**s snow drifts and blows, it is pleasant to think about spring flowers and the return of songbirds. Yet this time of year has her own place in the cycle of the seasons as blustery days provide time to reflect. The cold encourages me to remain as quiet and dormant as trees. A gift and opportunity to sit quietly and ponder.

In late winter, I go out for daily walks that are not as long as when the weather is more conducive. What I discover is that this multifaceted, varied season contains her own lessons for me to consider. She is teaching me patience and perseverance. Even as I fervently long for the soft, warm light of spring, I know there will still be many days of sharp winds and minus temperatures. I can endure them because I am confident the swirling blizzard will not last. Better days are ahead.

Folks find it difficult to endure this period of not yet but soon. A tantalizing sense that better times are on the horizon but cannot materialize quite yet. People are frustrated by faux Spring days with their

bright warmth and reassurance only to be followed by plunging, falling, frigid temperatures. Nature plays with us in not very kind ways. She is a trickster. This causes me to think of all the jokes I have played on people which amuse me but humiliate others and cause stress and anxiety. All the times creative dreams and aspirations never came to fruition. Even my memoir that I talk about so often but is not yet complete.

This is a liminal, in-between, time of year as I stand on the doorstep of Spring yet still have to experience bitter winter climes. Much like the coolness I display towards some family members whom I love dearly yet who still cause me consternation. Like the buffeting of trees who are able to dance with more vitality the stronger the wind blows. A time to express my love and concern for my Ukrainian friends spending nights in deep subway tunnels as the Russian bombs drop. A time to donate money to causes to help this country's citizens who are experiencing such distress.

Late winter is like a fourth place in the Olympics. So close I can smell the brightness of Spring while tough days loom on the horizon. This brings to mind times when I invest incredible energy into an event that flops. Like courses I spent so much time developing only to hear that they have been cancelled due to low enrollment.

Late winter is a job interview that does not result in dependable employment. A tease. An opportunity that speaks of promise and fulfillment that is not mine to savour. A time to embrace possibilities that still require a significant amount of work before they will result in a viable project. A time when I admit it is not possible to achieve the result I would like no matter how hard I try. Like investing energy into preparing a tasty meal that does not quite deliver. My culinary skills are not good enough but I exhibit great potential.

These not yet but soon days encourage me to be patient and remain hopeful. They make me resilient.

Better times are coming. They will arrive soon. I will not lose hope. I will keep trying. Spring will eventually come as it always does.

\* \* \*

**Give Tomorrow a Chance  
(and see what happens)  
Bill Brubacher**



**H**aven't we all heard it at some point in our lives? It's one of the easiest pieces of advice to give, the most sage piece of advice that anyone can get, and yet, one of the hardest to take. It's often used as a strong appeal to not give in, or give up, or despair. Most often it's saved for those times when we're at a significant crossroads in our lives.

Usually, when facing a very difficult decision, or complex condition and we're being exhorted to stretch our depleted endurance and faith, to what feels like the farthest limits – out of sight. Not an easy challenge.

Timing is everything and paradoxically how often have we wished we had either been given or taken that advice at a critical period which might have

created or caused an entirely different outcome than the one we got? And for that reason, the appeal to "Give tomorrow a chance" is an universal and ageless wisdom, holding as true today as it has at any pivotal point in the past, or applicable to any poignant point in the future.

You see, tomorrow is about the potential of change and change is one of the laws of probability. You can count on it because like death and taxes, change is one of the constants of life, and always will be a 'constant.'

It's interesting to remember, though, that outcomes are often beyond our control like the irony of the "best made plans of mice and men," meaning we can plan all we want, but nothing is fail proof and outcomes are often full of spectacular surprises. So timing can potentially make a big difference... giving us a bit longer for the situation to play itself out.

Now, that philosophy cuts two ways, it can be used as both a rationalization for resignation, or a reason for hope. It all depends on the individual and the complexity of the condition. But the odds of probability and time patience, generally favours the person not the condition.

I wish a former friend of mine had thought that way before taking his life and depriving the world of what he was capable of working with and recovering from. HE was the one who chose to not let time work in his favour.

The fact of the matter is that we humans don't have very much control of our lives and that timing, when we let it do it's job, generally comes through for us.

Now as we all know, life never runs smoothly nor badly for long and when it comes to those dire times when tomorrow can feel dark, it's important to remember that while the sky is always in the heavens, the clouds are continually passing slowly or quickly across it – light and fluffy, or dark and heavy.

I myself am no stranger to those periods known as the “dark night of the soul.” And while those times were the most difficult times in my life, I personally know what it takes to fight every inclination to give in, and believe, even in the tomorrow of tomorrow, the law of probability to do what only it can do. And believe it or not, unexpected change worked its miraculous way to me over all the obstacles in its way -- much to my supreme amazement. But you might think you’re not one of those ‘lucky’ people. Truth is, you are. We all are!

None of us is so special that we are hopeless and helpless for very long, especially when we’re willing to courageously wait and do the little we can -- with the little we have. The hardest thing is to believe that even a little effort can make a huge difference.

Look at what that little oak seed produced...

The Green Berets, you’ve undoubtedly heard of, are taught a lesson that keeps them the elite soldiers they are. They are taught about their limits – that is the limits they think they have by confronting them – getting to know them through practice.

And why? Because these fighters are the ones who face the most life threatening conditions anyone can to up against. They have to know the limits of their capabilities.

They say that “knowledge is power.” and it’s no less true when dealing with adversity. It can make the difference between living or dying. Winning or losing. And knowledge is not exclusive to the few, but available to anyone just willing to try.

The Green Berets are taught to know their limits so they know they can exceed them. For example: they are taught through trial and confrontation that on average when we think we can’t go on – we’re done – wasted – it’s over, we are in fact, only at about 40% of our full capability and capacity. (Imagine thinking you had ran out of gas, when you still had 60% in reserve.)

Most of us don’t know that, aren’t told that and often give in too soon, and far short of our actual capabilities. And stopping too soon can result in terrible or regrettable consequences.

It’s been proven that people lost in a bush or in severe conditions often succumb to those conditions because they listen to themselves thinking the conditions are stronger than them – which isn’t true. Give a little time a chance.....

Stop and think for a moment what that could mean to you? In the first place, when we’re at 40% of our limitations, who can’t try just another 5% or 10%? And often that relatively little difference is all that’s needed for a game changer.

And that’s the difference a day can make particularly when you don’t think things can or will ever change.

The biggest differences are made simply by opening yourself to the possibility of change and then believing in the PROBABILITY of change. And you do this by choosing not to give in or give up, but instead to give yourself another day.

We might not be able to change the deck of cards but we can wait out the turn and get a new hand – with the probability of getting better cards.

And that’s how the law of probability works because tomorrow is always a new day, with a new deck, giving us a new hand. And all you’ve got to do is play them, even playing a ‘bluff’ if necessary - and in all probability, things will change for the better.

And remember, all we ever need is one small thing to change to change everything in our lives.

How many people’s lives have been changed just that way, when they least expected it, both for good or bad. We can’t control what happens but as they say we can control our reaction to it.

Only losers give up and you're not one of those, I'm sure.

How does all of this relate to you? Think of it this way. If we have little control over most of life's circumstances and if those circumstances can happen to anyone at any time (which they do!), then chances are you have just as good an opportunity for positive change as anyone else in any circumstances – and at any time. All we have to do is not panic and keep on keeping on.

So I've taken this month of March to champion the literal meaning of March, as in, to march forward against all of your limitations, weaknesses, fears, desperation, yes even depression.

Leave that old day behind and muster the courage and strength to look at tomorrow as a NEW day – to give TOMORROW A CHANCE.

You can do it. Give me a call. I may not have your answer (only you do); but I will listen and I will understand because I've been there.

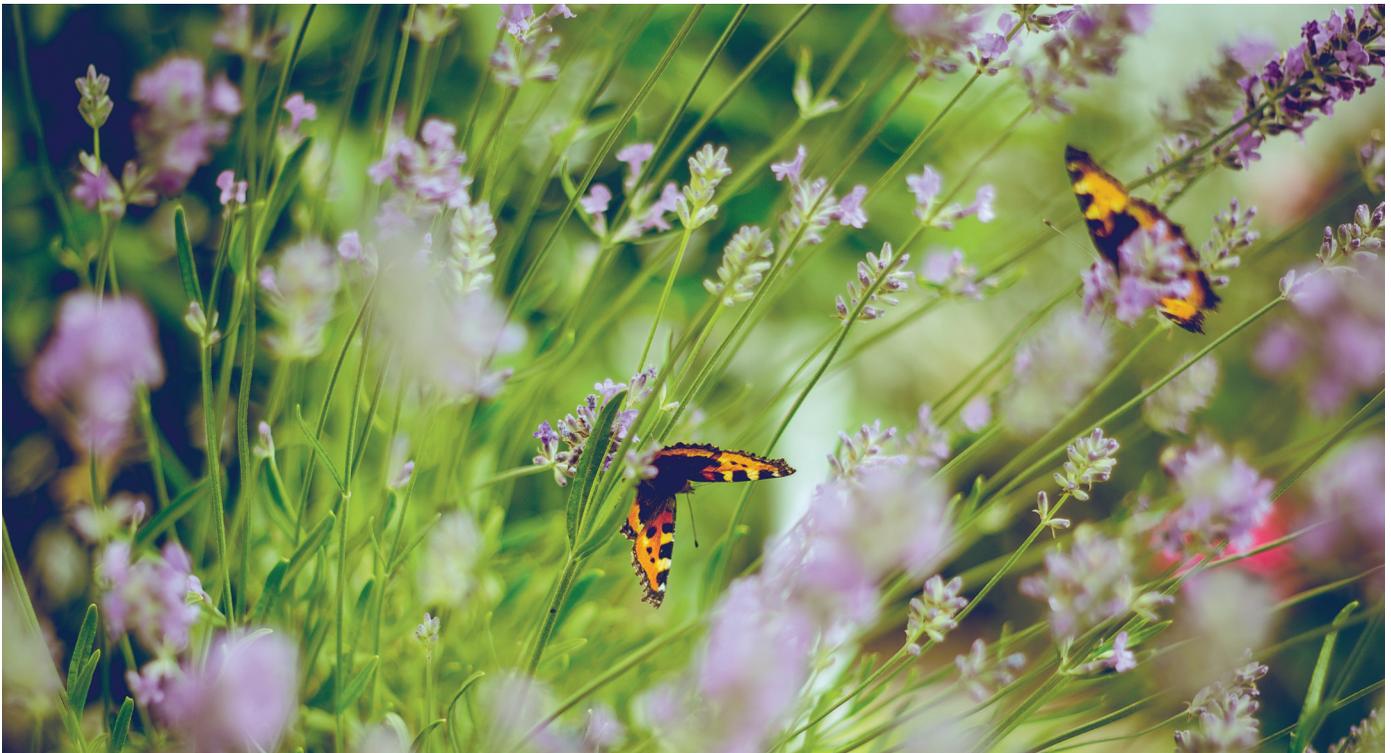
All of us have been where you may be right now at one point or another. And who knows what we can do together... Lets get MARCH-ing!

\* \* \*

**I Am**  
***Marilyn Helmer***

In this house, in this tree,  
on this old vacant lot,  
In this place where I am  
and my brother is not,  
The biggest and bravest,  
the strongest and boldest,  
The shrewdest and smartest,  
the wisest and oldest.  
In my house, in my tree,  
in my own special spot,  
In this place where I am  
and my brother is not.

\* \* \*



## **The Secret Pond** **Bill Brubacher**

### **Love At First Sight**

**T**hey would never forget meeting that day crossing a small silken lake together with their families when they were both young goslings.

They were lagging behind the rest of their brothers and sisters, perhaps intentionally, ever since they first caught sight of each other.

And it seemed in that moment of sight, there was an unknown 'recognition', and exciting attraction that held them close, and a strange feeling they were always meant to be together.

At first, they were a little shy and awkward, and pretended to try to keep up with the pack, though unknowingly paddling slower and moving closer to each other, as if wanting to say something, well, special...

Then suddenly they nearly swam into one another with surprised amusement – though filled to bursting with a wondrous new feeling – an overwhelming attraction that neither of them could describe, because neither of them had ever felt that way before.

It was such an awesome feeling even greater than the thrill of first learning how to glide on the surface of the rippling water.

And soon, they were paddling together in the fullness of silence, side by side to the shore, hurrying to catch up with the rest of their families.

Then all their brothers and sisters were scrambling to get out of the water at the same time, slipping and falling over one another in joyful comedy, laughing and joking with each other, which just added to the fun.

Finally, they were all out of the water, standing upright on the wet grassy land, stretching upward as far as they could reach, shaking the dripping water off and splashing each other – the air filled with bristling excitement.

For a moment the little boy goose lost sight of his new friend and stood anxiously, watching and waiting, breathlessly... looking in all directions for her. His little heart beat more quickly than he had ever experienced before and he felt it would burst!

Then suddenly she appeared so beautiful, out of nowhere, and he smiled in relief and vowed he would always love and protect her – keeping her close to him and in sight at all times from then on.

Then the two goslings felt drawn together into the same world and in that magical moment, looking deeply into each other's eyes, they felt totally complete and fulfilled and told each other their names: Robbie and Sophie.

They went everywhere together, and later, when they grew up, they raised several lively and beautiful families of their own and made great memories together. They deeply loved their offspring... and were very proud when the young ones became old enough to finish growing up on their own, as nature would have it.

### **Only a Year Before...**

Peter was lost in thought, trudging slowly along the winding country road that he and his younger sister Annie used to walk going to school every morning. It seemed like a lifetime ago, lost in blurry memories and painful loneliness amidst the forest shadows. It was only a year before...

They were happily playing and jostling each other and didn't see the monstrous car speeding down the old dusty road behind them, then veering wildly out of control.

In the next unforgettable moment, the car had run into his sister, instantly taking her from him forever.

Losing his sister in that tragic way changed his carefree life in blinding seconds, leaving him feeling helpless, with a deep hole in his young life and sensitive heart, almost larger than he could bear.

It was on a fresh early morning such as this, that the spreading sun was just poking its outstretched golden rays like small, curious fingers through the dewy shadows of low hanging branches and the tall peaks of trees, in search of finding things large and small to awaken and brighten.

Peter was on his way to a secret place he discovered after his sister's death. It felt like he had been drawn to this special place, this ancient forest, seemingly forgotten by time and invisible to people, other than him.

### **Peter Meets Sophie Beside the Road**

It was a beautiful oasis, all his own, beyond an expansive field just over the next hill and Peter liked to slip away there, whenever he could, to spend quiet time alone to ponder the curious ways and mysterious nature of so many things he could not understand at his young age.

The forest always welcomed him and he was heading there now, when he suddenly spotted a couple of geese in the tangled brush by the side of the road, a short distance ahead of him.

One of them was lying very still on its right side, with his back to him.

As Peter drew nearer, he could see the goose on the ground looked 'broken', and his mate was looking down on him sadly, unable to do anything, other than to give whatever comfort she could by her loving presence.

And as he got closer, Peter could see the 'broken' one was badly injured and close to death. Not wishing to disturb them, he slowly crouched down and waited, giving space and safe distance to the loving companion holding vigil in the twisted grass.

He said a little prayer for the two of them, as he could do nothing more in the depth and intimacy of those precious moments.

The female goose standing, acknowledged Peter warily at first, then feeling safe, sighed and looked down, gently nudging her partner to let him know she was still with him.

The injured one couldn't respond other than to blink a couple of times as he clung to the remaining moments of his fading life.

### **"I Will Always Love You"**

A misty cloud of dust and dirt blew over them by a passing car either unaware or uncaring of the dying scene on the side of the road.

A field of golden shoots of wheat swayed nearby and swished like waves in the soft wind, as the dying goose took his final breaths, not so much from his fatal injuries, as from his broken heart – knowing he was unable to change his dire condition.

He somehow knew he would soon have to leave, to go on alone, to a new destination.

And in those waning seconds, he whispered his last words to his devoted mate from deep within his heart and soul – that only the two of them could hear: "I will always love you..."

Then Peter felt a subtle breeze, like a whisper of air flutter by him, and knew the goose had gone.

## **Like a Gentle Comforting Hand**

Peter slowly rose and silently walked up to the two of them, so as not to disturb the fragile moment of final togetherness they had. He saw her looking down, bewildered at her mate's now limp and lifeless body, sensing her deep sorrow and helplessness. She looked pleadingly up at Peter trusting his caring presence and he instinctively understood the painful meaning in what lay behind those watery pools of dark pearl eyes.

Peter carefully knelt beside them and through his aching heart told her how sorry he felt... He asked if he could stay and sit with her a while and she slowly nodded. Quiet came over the three of them like a gentle comforting hand and Peter felt a light touch of breeze caress the dampness on his cheeks.

Sometime later, Peter gently asked the living one, if he could carry her beloved's body to its final resting place in his ancient forest, where her mate could be at peace.

## **The Ancient Forest**

Peter cradled the goose's lifeless body close to his warm chest in the hammock of his light jacket and together, they headed in silence toward the forest waiting for them on the far side of the field.

Peter knew the unmarked trail so well, because he had walked it so often after his sister died. The dense forest 'wall' looked unyielding, yet Peter walked purposefully and confidently up to it as the sentry-like trees leaned slowly apart with each advancing step, until they were finally through the thick 'wall' and on the other side – seemingly waiting for them....

Peter never penetrated the wall without standing in awe on the inside. This place was special and felt fanciful and welcoming, beckoning them into an enchanted forest of colourful carpets of flowers stretching out in all directions as far as they could see.

A winding path led them through the ancient trees to a secluded sun-filled clearing, which grew larger and brighter, radiating outward the closer they got to it. There, shimmering in the middle of the clearing was a large sparkling crystal pond, completely encircled by a light yellow fringe of short grass.

## **The Secret Pond**

Families of friendly croaking frogs sat 'talking' on water lily pads close to shore. A majestic deer stood waiting and smiling warmly at them from the other side of the water. The scene was alive with the joyful chirping sounds of many different kinds of birds and, the excited scampering of several lively groups of young squirrels and baby rabbits at play. And the reflective pond was embraced by a billowy green canopy of gracefully bending and bowing trees, their regal feather-like leaves dancing lightly on the water.

At the far end of the peaceful pond, was a hill hollowed out of the thickly treed landscape, crowned with a small stand of bright birch trees. A shallow stream flowed easily out of the 'temple' forest over sun dappled silk-smooth rocks, into a natural waterfall, spilling melodically into the velvet blue pool below. Schools of brightly coloured fish were diving and leaping in twos and threes into the rhythmic water, as though in honour and celebration of the new arrivals.

It was a magical scene in all its magnificence and unexpected glory. They stood in bewildered silence surveying a majestic sanctuary of the most incredible beauty, breathing in the clear, clean universal spirit and pure essence of love and joy.

## **The Resting Place**

They walked up the small hill overlooking the shimmering golden pond, resonating with peace, and together chose the location of a bed of soft ground for her mate's final resting place. He learned her name

was Sophie and her mate's had been Robbie. The sun was at its peak and warmly blanketed the land where Robbie would lie.

After the burial bed was dug and Robbie put to rest, the mystical sound of a plaintiff flute was heard faintly coming from the ancient forest. It was followed by a growing chorus of all living things combining their angelic voices and filling the entire inner circle of the clearing and pond with the most incredibly glorious music.

Peter had never heard such peaceful and ethereal music that touched their hearts and soothed their souls so deeply. He could see Sophie was just as moved as he, and through the majestic sound of that heavenly music it felt like all spirits were joined as one.

The singing then slowly softened into a mellow hum that drifted lightly on the air and disappeared into a distant mist of quiet mystery and golden silence...

### **The End of a Fateful Day**

Later, after saying their good-bye to Robbie, Sophie and Peter sat looking down on the secluded pond, from their higher vantage point, watching the silvery clouds floating peacefully by in the blue sky, reflected in the deep mystical water. Everything was still and serene as though perfect, and eternal, just like it was meant to be.

They sat alone, side by side, in the sacred space of universal silence and in the fullness of emptiness – beyond words, beyond emotions, that only those having experienced the profound loss of a loved one can understand.

Each of them reflected on the unspeakable sadness of their own losses: Peter's beloved sister Annie, and Sophie's dearest life-time mate, Robbie. Then, Sophie slowly surrendered her weary head to

Peter's lap, as his quiet tears lightly bathed her soft feathered body.

It had been a long, exhausting day, far different than either of them ever imagined it would be at the beginning, and Sophie needed time to rest and ponder the 'great mystery' of loss and death.

Later, Peter rose reluctantly to his feet, sad to leave and begin his long trek home. He spoke gently to Sophie through the universal language of emotions, telling her he would return the following day.

### **Peter and Sophie Share Their Tragedies**

Peter came back to the pond next day as he promised and they felt as close as two could possibly be, united by their precious bond of friendship and loss. He thought it would help if she could talk, so he asked Sophie how she had met Robbie. She told him everything about that first day they met crossing the small lake, leaving nothing out. Peter understood because he too had always wanted and was expected to keep his younger sister Annie protected and safe, being her older brother.

Peter remembered how happy the earlier story of Robbie and Sophie's meeting had been, and how it all came to this sudden and very sad ending in that unexpected and fateful moment, when Robbie saw the speeding car racing toward them on the side of the road and flung himself to push Sophie out of the way to safety – doing the only thing he could have done at the time, sacrificing his own life for hers!

And Peter remembered how he too, had lost his sister Annie just a year ago in the same way on the same road, as she sacrificed her life for Peter and then both Sophie and Peter fell into a deep reflective silence embraced by the ancient forest.

## **Discovering a Deeper Meaning to Life and Death**

They continued to meet at the secret pond while Sophie was slowly and painfully settling into her new life without her loving companion. She had never felt so lonely. Peter desperately wanted to bring Robbie back to life and knew from his own painful experience, he couldn't. Tragedy had tainted both their lives and there was no more he could do to change Sophie's sad reality than his own. They were both lost in grief and bewilderment.

Peter and Sophie spent a lot of time walking together in the forest in the warm glow of the afternoon sun, feeling comforted by the cool shade of the tall protective trees, being serenaded by small groups of colourful birds sitting on the strong, outstretched arms of burly trees, and being consoled by the loving animals large and small, that always gathered like friends round them on their walks, giving them quiet support and company.

Gradually, they were able to speak more easily and openly about their deepest feelings against the unmerciful randomness in life, their loneliness without their companions – and their guilt of being saved by the quick actions of their loved ones, rather than having protected them instead, from the tragedy as was their expected roles.

Sophie said she felt so helpless and angry at the driver that took her Robbie's life. She couldn't understand why it had to happen. Her heaviness seemed almost more than she could bear and she wondered if she would ever get over the anger, guilt and loneliness she felt in the fathomless depth of her broken heart. Peter could understand such despair and helplessness, because of his sister Annie's sacrifice on that day a year before, saving Peter from being hit by another car on that same road.

Peter shared what had happened to his younger sister Annie and how she too, had sacrificed her life

for him in a similar circumstance. And ever since he felt confused, alone and overwhelmed with emotions he didn't understand and couldn't resolve. He sought refuge in darkness, deep within himself and one day this ancient forest appeared to him where he could go to be alone. It seemed to be waiting for him...and he always felt safe there, as though he belonged.

And now, it was as though he, too, was confronting all the fears, angers, guilt, helplessness, loneliness, he couldn't face or allow himself to speak or feel about his own sister's tragic death. It was as if the forest was taking him into its heart, speaking its loving wisdom to him softly and it was strangely soothing, encouraging and gradually strengthening him without his knowing how or why...

## **The Gift of Love**

Peter and Sophie shared lots of tears and hugs. Gentle healing seemed to come gradually from the other side of feeling words, which released complex emotions that had been dammed up within both of them, by their tragic losses. Together they discovered a deeper understanding of love and loss, death and tragedy, and the meaning of life and forgiveness, at their young ages. They realized that the sacrifices their mates gave to them were freely given out of love, without debt or regret.

Soon they came to know and accept their loved ones would have wanted their gift to be lovingly received and cherished without it being lessened or over-shadowed by guilt, anger, sorrow or self-pity. It was as though the weight of a heavy burden was slowly being lifted from their aching hearts and they could begin to treasure the ultimate gift of love given out of sacrifice, and to accept the lives they were spared to live. And that knowledge and understanding somehow made their love even stronger for the ones they lost and they felt even more grateful and closer to their loved ones.

*continued on page 15*

# Do you have a story to tell?



**SHARING**

our stories, our selves, our success



## Call for Submissions

What better way to start the new year than to think, and write, about someone or something you are inspired by or grateful for?

Submission deadline: March 1, 2022

If you are interested in writing for this anthology, visit [www.sharinganthologies.com](http://www.sharinganthologies.com) for details, or email [lisa@onethousandtrees.com](mailto:lisa@onethousandtrees.com).

[www.sharinganthologies.com](http://www.sharinganthologies.com)



**SHARING**

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*Believe you can, and you're halfway there.*  
Theodore Roosevelt



## Call for Submissions

In recognition of Sexual Assault Prevention Month, a "Special Edition" anthology of empowerment stories about sexual abuse, addiction and recovery will be published in May 2022.

Submission deadline: April 1, 2022.

If you are interested in submitting a story, visit [www.sharinganthologies.com](http://www.sharinganthologies.com) for details, or email [lisa@onethousandtrees.com](mailto:lisa@onethousandtrees.com).

All proceeds will go to  
**Recovery Speaking Initiative**  
([www.recoveryspeaking.org](http://www.recoveryspeaking.org))



[www.onethousandtrees.com](http://www.onethousandtrees.com)

[lisa@onethousandtrees.com](mailto:lisa@onethousandtrees.com)

519-362-5494

## PLEASE NOTE:

Although the stated deadline for our "Gratitude and Inspiration" anthology has passed, we still have a few spots left to fill ... and have therefore extended the deadline to March 18. Let us know if you're interested in being a part of this anthology!

*(continued from page 13)*

They also felt deeply thankful for the mysterious friendship forged between them meeting on the destined road that day, not long ago, which had supported and guided them to this point.

Through sharing, they felt they had discovered something universal and transcendental about love, and the meaning and message it has for everyone, who can come to see and treasure it fully, under all circumstances good and bad.

And together they came to accept and know love can survive the veil of death. That love is stronger than death, and nothing can separate us from its reach and bond.

### **Making Peace With Grief**

A couple of weeks later, Sophie asked Peter if she could spend some time alone with her beloved – to thank Robbie for his love and sacrifice, and the precious years they had shared together, she would never forget.

She wanted to tell Robbie: how much she treasured his being a good father and good husband; for having been the good listener he was; the special being he was; his good heart; the responsibility he took in all things; his smile and humour, and the way he always made her feel so safe... and finally for his ultimate sacrifice.

She now truly and fully understood and could accept his loving gift to her, going all the way back to when they first looked deeply into each other's eyes and instinctively knew they could never be apart – and for having learned their love had far greater meaning and strength than she could ever have imagined at the time.

Peter understood, because he too, finally felt he could honestly tell his sister through his heart, how

much she had meant to him, how he felt when she looked up to him as her older brother, and how proud he was of her. He began to see himself from her perspective and knew she would continue to love and believe in him always, and he could honour that belief by now believing in himself.

Both Sophie and Peter had a lot to think about....

### **Final Crossing in the Moonlight**

Next night, Sophie spent time alone with Robbie, silently paddling together in the moonlight, in peaceful solitude on the sparkling water of the secret pond – inseparable, in spiritual union.

Sophie felt Robbie's presence and felt his love, as fully 'alive' as it was before his death. Moreover, she now knew she had a new purpose to fulfill as her destiny here on earth. It was the one Robbie told her she now had. She had never expected there to be more for her to live for, after him. His secret message to her was his final gift. Robbie had assured her he would always be with her through every moment of every day, till they would meet again on the eternal 'lake' of the great beyond.

It was a perfect and glorious day, one she didn't want to end and would never forget.

### **News of a Journey**

The next time Peter returned to the pond, he found Sophie quite excited about the news she had to share with him. She told him about a new flock of geese that had been coming to the pond. She had gotten to know them and had shared her story with them explaining why she was alone. So they asked her if she would join them.

It was nearing the end of summer and the invisible hand of the Universal Spirit was now beginning to

paint the ancient forest in spectacular colours celebrating the end of another season in preparation for the beginning of the forest's deep winter sleep.

And there was a new restless feeling stirring amongst the flock that each could deeply sense, like a distant calling – a beckoning of having to move on, to a new warmer home in the south.

Peter also knew deep within him, his time with Sophie was coming to an end and he had learned and grown so much from the time they had spent together. He felt strengthened by Sophie's love and trust and awakened to a new 'alive' closeness to his sister Annie, that he hadn't felt since before her death. And for some mysterious reason it seemed like something else was happening...

Sophie had been growing fainter and fainter in appearance each time they met, as though she was somehow disappearing... and he didn't know if it was his imagination... He still felt her presence through her spirit, as strongly as ever, which might have been why he didn't pay much attention to her changing appearance.

## **Forever Friends**

Then one day Peter heard Sophie calling him to the pond because she wanted to talk to him. She told him about the inner calling and he understood its meaning and they both knew she would soon be leaving.

They hugged and cried tears of love and joy - of sadness and thankfulness, for their time together and for the union of their two spirits. They both knew they would be forever friends and that nothing could ever keep them apart, because of the closeness they had shared at the secret pond, in the ancient forest.

Then Sophie announced the special news: the elders of the flock had asked her to lead them on their long and challenging journey across the vast sky to

their new winter home. This was a great and precious honour for her.

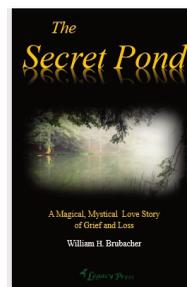
## **Goodbye at Sunset**

A few days later at sunset, Peter was again called by Sophie to his bedroom window at dusk. Scanning the dimming night he saw a huge gathering of geese, coming from all directions growing larger and larger in the sky. With each new circle, the flock grew in number until finally an immense perfect V formation took shape.

At the very front, he spotted his soul partner, her unmistakable body outlined in the fading rays of the setting sun making a final turn with her strong powerful wings. She dove gracefully down cutting through the sky with the entire flock in pursuit and flew majestically past his window...

She looked over one last time into Peter's knowing loving eyes with those same sad eyes that he had looked into just a few short months before, though now glowing alive with love, confidence, wisdom and purpose.

She then turned skyward, gracefully picking up speed getting fainter and fainter until the entire flock disappeared out of sight over the mystical horizon...



Copies of Bill's book, *The Secret Pond*, complete with beautiful illustrations throughout, can be purchased from the author directly.

Email [billbrubacher@gmail.com](mailto:billbrubacher@gmail.com).

\* \* \*

**Love**  
***Colleen Heighington***

Love is in the air  
Love is everywhere  
Just look around and see  
There's lots of love out there  
For you and me ...

Love is found in our families  
Who we cherish and hold so dear  
Love is found in our friends  
Who bring us good times and good cheer ...

Love is expressed in one's letter writing  
Making one feel so well loved and brightening up their day  
Love is expressed in one's poetry  
With words of love written from their heart  
Expressed in a loving and touching way ...

Love is a Beautiful thing  
Especially when you love someone so very much  
Love is a very special feeling  
When the heart is forever touched ...

But there is a Love that Out Shines them all  
The Love from the Cross Our Saviour bore that I recall  
A Love Everlasting ... A Love that has no end  
A Love that God has freely given to us  
And that means You and I ... My Dear Friends!!!!

\* \* \*

**Fifteen Minutes of Fame**  
***Joan Almond***

**O**n wooden planks, mason jars of syrup stood in rows. The cold cellar held a bountiful supply of 'liquid gold,' waiting to proof itself.

In the same family farmhouse, my father enveloped the sweetness of the season. My dad loved

'syrup season' more than most. The season suited him; the tastes, the smells, the look of the clear maple syrup, through the glass of a preserving jar. He poured the sweet liquid over a freshly baked muffin, other times spooning the syrup into a delicate fruit dish. Dipping a slice of homemade bread, into the syrup, he smiled. The look on his face said the simple dessert, was sweet, and satisfying.

Like most connoisseurs, Dad graded a jar of syrup by its colour. The difference in colour had mostly to do with when the syrup was made. As the spring warmed up, the sap coming from the trees became darker in colour, producing darker syrup. Corresponding to colour, the darker the syrup was, the stronger its flavour. The syrup was always sweet, as was the season...

But the spring of 1949, (long before I was born), 'syrup season' was sweeter than most.

Dad was nineteen that year. Like many young boys, he'd left school to help on the farm.

The 'sugar shack' stood, hidden in a forest of mature trees. Rich in the maples, needed for sap, Great Grandfather Samuel had seen its potential.



In the spring of 1949, the 'sugar bush' was in full swing! The March nights had been cold, with temperatures dipping below zero. By the time, the sun rose, the thermostat reached plus 40 (Fahrenheit), the kind of weather perfect for collecting sap.

A small creek flowed past the 'sugar shanty,' where the maple syrup was made. My grandfather's horses, May and King were trustworthy steeds. The pair, pulled the 360-gallon 'Grim' supply tank back to the 'sugar shack,' after the sap was collected. Preserving every drop of the sap was vital, it was no time to be entertaining an anxious animal.

From the tank, there was a line that ran underground to the evaporator. In those days, it took a full day to boil a tank of sap. A long day's work, yielding 10 gallons of syrup. Stored in mason jars, syrup in 1949, sold for \$3.00. The same amount selling for \$30.00, would have turned heads back then.

The sights and sounds of the 'sugar shack' were unforgettable. Smoke rising from the wooden hut, filling my father's lungs. Blackened wood in the middle of a bush, changed by the elements, created a world of memories to last a lifetime. The smell of the sap boiling into sweet syrup at the 'sugar camp' was raw and rustic, the perfect environment for a farm boy.

Behind the scenes, as the season progressed, a perfect storm was brewing. The spring of '49 was proving to be a great year for syrup. Word was getting out about a little 'sugar camp,' up the fourth. My father was about to get his fifteen minutes of fame. Fifteen minutes, that would be remembered, over seventy years later.

A reporter from *The Owen Sound Sun Times* called asking to take a photo. The paper hoped to use the 'sugar bush' shot for a calendar, they were producing the following year.

The day photographer Bill Prettie arrived, my father was wearing a pair of overalls stitched together with baler twine. May and King seemed unimpressed by the notoriety. The massive geldings, on more than one occasion, had made their way into the family history books.

Hughie McLandress was there that day for the photo opp. Born in 1913, at 36, Hughie was

considered more family than farm-hand. Uncle David, only 11 in 1949, posed for the shot alongside his older brother, my father.

The rest as they say is history. Prettie got his shot! The photograph was impressive, enough to make its way to the cover of the 1950 calendar. As for my father...

*The Owen Sound Sun Times* gave a hard-working farm boy, with a love of 'the sugar bush,' his 'fifteen minutes of fame!'

\* \* \*

## **Bruce Trail, End to End (part 6)** ***Clay Williams***

In early June 2021, my good friend Debbie and I decided that we would hike the full length of the Bruce Trail, all 800+ km, by doing day hikes on weekends throughout the coming year. This is the next chapter in our adventures on and off the trail. **(photo snow trail)**



Days 8, 9 and 10 were on three consecutive Saturdays starting January 22nd. I certainly learned a few things about winter hiking on those three weekends. Over the past few years I have been doing much more running than hiking in the winter months, so I have had to modify the way I dress. I need to stay

warm enough in breezy conditions, but also avoid overheating while climbing some of the longer hills. It can be dangerous to get too sweaty when it's really cold out, especially since we are outdoors and away from a car for five hours at a time. I imagine all of my Canadian friends know this. If you're sweating and have to stop for something, your body will generate less heat. Wet clothing allows the cold to drive right through the layers and you can get dangerously cold fairly quickly. I know that when I'm running I need to wear much lighter clothing because the increased circulation from constant movement keeps me warm, and I know I'm going to be sweating. For hiking I've learned to wear a little heavier clothing, and a couple of windbreaker layers because I'm not working quite so hard, but I have to be able to open or remove some layers if I start to get a little too warm.



For my hands, I start the day with a really warm pair of gloves because my hands are always cold at the start due to putting on my backpack and all the little prep things that get done before we start moving. As I warm up I change to a thin pair of gloves. My hands seem to stay pretty warm when I'm moving, even if it's really cold out. On the first really cold hiking day I wore my waterproof winter gloves for the entire day, and I noticed near the end of the day that they were wet inside. When I got home I put them on a heat vent, but because they are waterproof they didn't dry out. A few days later I put them in my car and wore

them on my drive to work. When I got to work I took the gloves off and left them in the car, and when I got into the office I couldn't figure out why my hands smelled so bad. I finally figured out that my gloves had stayed wet for almost a week, and were starting to smell like a gym bag. When I got home I turned them inside out, hand washed them, and dried them thoroughly before turning them right side out again.

For my feet, I've been wearing running shoes rather than hiking boots. I like the freedom of movement of shoes compared to boots, but there are some compromises. The summer shoes that I wear have great ventilation for summer running, but they can be cold in the winter, and even colder when I'm walking through snow that covers the top of the shoes. So for these Bruce Trail winter hikes I have put a layer of duct tape across the toes of the shoes to block off the ventilation, and I wear gators that keep snow from getting into the shoes. I guess you can tell I'm hardly a fashionisto. I also wrap duct tape around the whole shoe after I have them on.



Even with this protection my tootsies get a little cold when we're trudging through the deeper snow, such as areas that haven't had any foot traffic to pack down the trails.

Parking in the winter months is also different than in summer. Many of the "Trail Head" parking lots have space for only a half dozen cars, and most of the ones

*Stories: poetry, prose, and personal reflection*

that we've encountered so far along the trail are NOT in high priority snow removal areas. This means there are fewer available parking spots in parking lots that are already relatively small. Parking is precious, so each week we get out as early as we're comfortable with so that we can get to the trail heads first and find parking.

On Day 8, January 22nd, the weather forecast was for a temperature of -20°C Friday night, and it was -15 by the time we got to our start point. By the end of our hike it was -5 but it definitely felt colder. It was three days after a big snowfall and there were spots where the snow was quite deep. We started the day in the Speyside Resource management area, crossed under the 401, and finished by climbing up the side of the ski hill at Kelso in the deep snow. It was our longest hike since the summer, and the last stretch up the ski hill was a killer.



Day 9, January 29th, was bitter cold again to start, a little colder than previous week. It was a very bright sunny day, with very little breeze as we hiked past Rattlesnake Point and Crawford Conservation areas. There were quite a few spots where it was slippery. Debbie's recovery from surgery meant she shouldn't be running quite yet, so every time she trotted down a steep incline to avoid slipping and falling she would say she is "anti-falling" and not running. This was the first week that I tried carrying my good camera in a small shoulder bag, and I found I was able to take photos while still keeping my gloves on. Something

that was not possible with a smartphone. Also on this day, for about an hour we could smell something like a combination of urine and burning. It wasn't a familiar smell at all, so when I got home I did a little looking around for Google Maps for businesses that might be the source of the smell. My best guess is a mushroom farm that we were near.



Day 10, February 5th, was another cold day with brilliant sunshine all day. We started just a little north of Mount Nemo Conservation area and hiked into Waterdown. The view from Mount Nemo was amazing; we were standing on the edge of a cliff overlooking fields and a huge house. It was like looking down from a plane. Even though it was cold, the bright sunshine made it a beautiful day to be outside.



\* \* \*

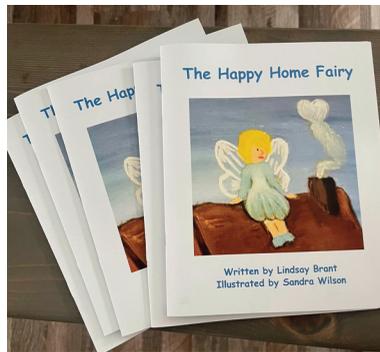
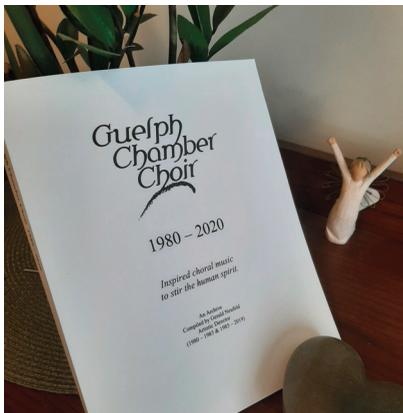
# MONTH IN Review



## Our books are getting around!

Left: *Stories About Guelph Little Theatre*, on the shelf in the Guelph Civic Museum gift shop.

Right: *Animals and Our Emotional Wellbeing*, on the shelf at The Healthy Owl in Waterloo.



## Hot off the press in February:

Left: *Guelph Chamber Choir: An Archive*, compiled by Gerald Neufeld

Middle: *The Happy Home Fairy*, by Lindsay Brant

Right: *Birdsong on a Summer Evening*, by Marilyn Helmer  
(in its second printing ... although the photo was taken after the book first came out last summer!)

**Nature's Gardens**  
***Brenda Cassidy***

The tulips, the daffodils,  
The lilacs and lily of the valley;  
They fulfill their promise,  
And from their winter slumber they rally.

Gracing us with their beauty and fragrance,  
And gone much too soon;  
They pass the baton of splendor  
On to the next to bloom.

And thus the dance continues  
To nature's song and tune;  
Something to always count on,  
Like the sun, the stars and moon.



**STAY WELL**  
**STAY HAPPY**  
**KEEP WRITING!**

**Deadline for submissions for April is  
Friday, March 25.**

**Here's a quote to inspire you ...**

***"Asleep or awake, writing or reading, whatever you do,  
you must never be without the remembrance of God."***

**— Rumi**

## This Month's Contributors

### Joan Almond

Joan is a Canadian writer and self-taught photographer. Mentored by Dan Needles and Joe Kertes, she has been encouraged to follow the “heart” in her writing. Most recently, the author’s short stories are published in Our Canada. A third publication in the October/November edition of the national magazine will show case her Children’s writing. A proud supporter of the Canadian Society of Children’s Authors, illustrators, and Performers, Joan’s great joy is reading Canadian children’s literature. Joan is thankful to award-winning author Marilyn Helmer, who encouraged her to submit her story to this anthology. The author extends gratitude to Lisa Browning who first gave her a voice in February of 2019, in the online publication known as One Thousand Trees.

### Bill Brubacher

Bill is a long-time resident of the Region of Waterloo, a former successful business entrepreneur and an internationally published author of 15 national bestselling books. He is a Certified Bereavement Specialist, and a Certified Conflict Coach/ Elder Mediator, helping seniors and their families through difficult time through Caregivers Oasis, Pathfinder Canada, and Heart and Soul Bereavement for Seniors. Bill has recently authored a new book about his amazing life’s journey. His book, *Against the Odds*, is a ten-year testament to his incredible emotional, spiritual and mental tenacity as he fought to reinvent himself after experiencing tremendous loss. His model and message are an inspiration to all who struggle to survive in the face of defeat. His latest book, *The Secret Pond*, is a classic love story fantasy about the shared journey of a young boy and an unusual stranger finding healing from grief and loss at a mystical pond in the midst of an ancient magical forest. For more information about his books go to <https://legacypress.ca/> or contact Bill at [billbrubacher@gmail.com](mailto:billbrubacher@gmail.com).

### Brenda Cassidy

Brenda has written two children’s books, *Who Needs Little Brothers Anyway?* and *Who Needs Little Sisters Anyway?* In addition to writing for children, she is also interested in writing about her spiritual journey, and hopes to achieve this in the future. In the meantime, Brenda also enjoys writing short poems and her own personal musings.

### Arlene Davies-Fuhr

Arlene is retired and resides in Guelph. She has been a lay-minister in the United and Mennonite churches, a college English instructor, and an ESL teacher. She has published a workbook on the Psalms and has edited a book of essays. She has travelled widely and currently enjoys playing the ukulele and the mountain dulcimer.

### Colleen Heighington

Colleen is happily married to a wonderful husband named Ken. They have been blessed with three beautiful children, and four terrific grandsons. She enjoys reading, writing stories and poetry, and she keeps fit by walking 3 to 4 kilometres every day. Her summers are spent at their trailer in Orillia, and she really enjoys the time she spends with family and friends. She has been a volunteer with Hospice Wellington since 2015.

### **Marilyn Helmer**

Marilyn is the award-winning author of many children's books including picture books, early chapters, retold fairy tales, riddle books and novels. Her short stories, poetry and articles have appeared in numerous children's magazines and anthologies in Canada and the United States and her penchant for entering writing contests has resulted in success with short adult fiction as well. Marilyn has just published a collection of her short adult fiction called "Birdsong on a Summer Evening" with One Thousand Trees Publishing. Visit her website at [www.marilynhelmer.com](http://www.marilynhelmer.com).

### **Francine Houston**

Francine is an animal lover, transformational intuitive, and full-time creator. She spends her time writing, doing fibre arts, and supporting individuals in telling their personal stories.

### **Deb Speck**

Deb started journaling as a teenager to deal with her family life, which led to poetry and memoirs. After Deb retired, she joined a creative writing group through the seniors group in Fergus and they put together 50 word stories jointly in a book called "Stories to Chew On." Deb hopes to write some stories about the fascinating ancestors that she found in her family tree.

### **Clay Williams**

Clay is a 61-year-old Manitoba-born father of two living in Elmira Ontario with his wife of 40 years. He manages the Engineering Department of a manufacturing company in Kitchener and has worked in Northern Ontario, Germany and South Carolina. Clay is an avid distance runner, having run dozens of marathons and longer runs, and creator of the Canal Pursuit for Mental Health, a 785 km run along two of Canada's longest canals as well as The Monarch Ultra, a 4300 km run following the migration path of Monarch Butterflies.

### **Sandra Wilson**

Sandra is a children's author, educator and illustrator who lives Ontario, Canada. With her writing she hopes to empower and inspire children and help get the conversation started on topics that can make a difference in the life of a child. She believes compassion and understanding are key concepts to learn to create a better world. And stories are a powerful tool to help teach these concepts to children.