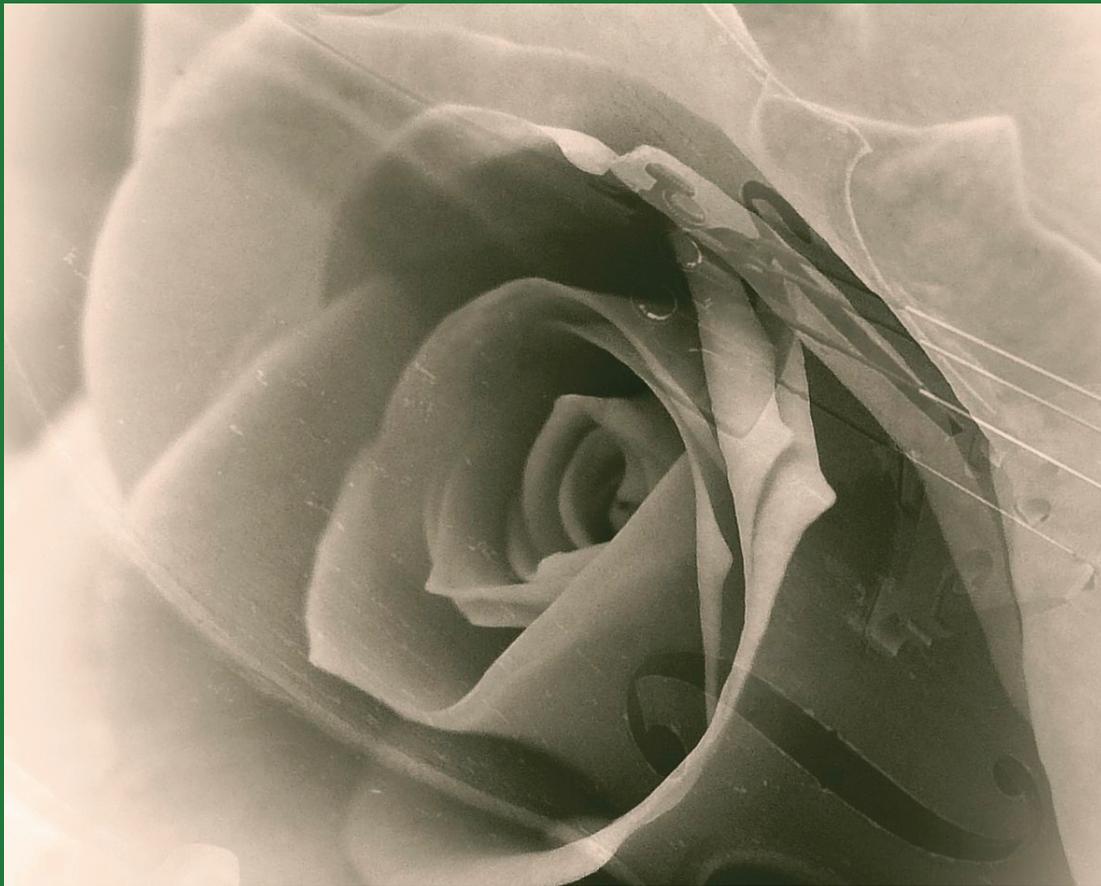


Stories

poetry, prose, and personal reflection

Vol. 3 — December 2021



*God gave us memory so that
we might have roses in December.*

~ James M. Barrie

Stories

poetry, prose, and personal reflection

Publisher

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Please submit by email, as a Word doc attachment. Please do not send PDFs. If you are including photos/illustrations to accompany your submission, please put a placeholder in your word doc, indicating where each graphic is to be placed, and send the graphics themselves as JPEG attachments. Please do not embed graphics in your word doc.

First-time writers for *Stories* are asked to send a brief (two to three sentence) bio with their submission.

Because of difficulties with some articles sent in the body of emails, we cannot accept submissions in this format. Please send a word doc attachment.

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Publisher's Ponderings



Over the last few weeks, as I started to pay more attention to self-care, I rediscovered my love of cross-stitch. It's interesting, as I reflect on that ... I never liked needlework, per se, but cross-stitch was different. I realize now that it's the uniformity of the stitches, whereas other needlework can be "all over the place!" Cross-stitch is creative, but it has a sense of order to it.

I can get lost for hours, doing cross-stitch. It becomes a form of meditation for me. Over the past month, I have completed quite a few cross-stitches, all of which I will be giving/have given as gifts. The photo below is one of the pieces that particularly moved me, from the moment I realized I needed to create it. In respect for the recipient of this piece, I won't go into further details. But she and I both know the significance behind it.

There are many ways to tell a story ...

Putting together the third issue of *Stories* magazine, I have been blessed yet again by everyone who submitted their story, in the form of poetry, prose, personal reflection, or photography. And as the holiday season is upon us, my hope is that you will find those quiet times of self-care and contemplation, doing what you love, and finding ways to share your story with the world in whatever ways feed your soul.

Lisa



Hidden Meanings in the Stories of Old Bill Brubacher

*For young children and especially
the 'child' in each of us...*



It occurred to me how many enchanting and enriching stories there are in our memory 'chest,' waiting to be re-opened and re-discovered, re-told and re-lived anew, during this annual holiday festive season.

And each story holds its own unique 'gift' of ageless charm and magic with the power to reignite our innocent hearts and restore our faith in miracles and the goodness of people.

These are the stories we need to be reminded of, especially during difficult times and particularly as we prepare for the celebration of the season and for, hopefully, a healthier and happier year ahead.

We all need something to look forward to, and isn't it natural our hopes and dreams be at their highest and our values the strongest right now? This is a time, if there ever was one, for renewing our faith in life and in ourselves.

As with most good stories, some of the oldest are often the best! And in my opinion, one of the oldest and best is the story of how one of the youngest and least of Santa's reindeer changed history that special night, once upon a time, so many years ago.



This story is a cherished gift of my childhood, still shared, I believe, by many of the young in spirit who, like me, will believe and behold, and see the 'truth' that lies in fantasy, where anything is possible.

Now, what could be more exciting than to see wide-eyed wonderment in a child's sparkling eyes and sense the stirring joy in their hearts, imagining the coming of a very magical man bearing gifts?

What fanciful character could be more alive than the one who lives at the top of the world, in the cold and icy North Pole all year long with his helpers working at top speed in the 'gift' shop, to create the toys and all manner of things that will keep spell-bound kids awake in anticipation weeks before that special night, in the hope of their dreams coming true?

What delight could be stronger than that of children leaving a tall glass of chocolate milk and their favourite cookies for Santa to drink and nibble on during the long night of deliveries all over the world?

And what could be more thrilling for a youngster than the possibility of catching even a glimpse of the giant sleigh with a mountain of colourful presents, flying through the sky at lightning speed, led by a mighty team of tall reindeer with jolly old Santa holding the reins while standing or sitting, calling out encouraging words to each of them by name?

It's a childhood image to last a lifetime; but shallows in comparison to the meaning of the real story that touches the hearts and minds of children everywhere.

It's the one that inspires them to believe that dreams can come true, and also proves that being different is no reason they too, can't rise to the top by doing their best – and by just being themselves.

And whose story is this? Well, it's the astonishing and beloved story of Rudolph – called the 'red-nosed' reindeer. Now, he was different than the other reindeer and felt he just didn't belong; so he had to work twice as hard as the others.

You see, Rudolph wasn't just any reindeer. No, he was a runt. No one even knew where he came from - - except Santa, and Rudolph was the smallest and most peculiar reindeer in the herd.



He had a bright red nose that always shone and he was small compared to the other taller and more muscular reindeer who laughed when they saw him. You see, they were so very full of their own self-importance and stature that they would make fun of him because he was different.

Rudolph wondered if he would ever be like them and able to join the team on that special night soon to arrive and he worked hard at everything he did in order to improve his strength and skills.

Santa always knew where he was and made sure he was included in all the reindeer activities. He would often give Rudolph a kind smile and encouraging word.

The other reindeer couldn't understand and sometimes resented the attention he got, and wondered what Santa had up his fur-bound sleeve.

Why did he keep him around? So, they would often just ignore him. Rudolph would feel very lonely, but also determined to do his best. He had spirit there was no doubt and even the rest of the reindeer had to give him that.

But secretly, they hoped Rudolph would be left behind this year because they thought he would only get in their way. Little did they know what Santa had in mind ...

So as the winter sun slipped slowly over the horizon and was replaced by an unusually dark and heavy curtain of night that even the stars couldn't penetrate, Santa went about his usual task of: making sure all the presents were secured to the sleigh so none would be lost, and that the sleigh's snow runners were waxed just right for landing on all kinds of surfaces from slippery roofs and snowy backyards to parking lots and city streets.

He made sure the reindeer were coated in oil and deeply massaged and fed their favourite food, and above all, that everything was ready for take-off on the very second of launch.

In no time, Santa had praised, patted and strapped the reindeer into their harnesses, each in place, with one exception. It was the front harness, which was left unfilled. This 'empty' position created quite a mystery among the reindeer because none of them expected this last minute suspense. After all, the front runner was the lead – the key to a smooth, successful run which was especially important on such a dark and cloudy night as this.



There had never been so deep a silence and bewilderment just before a flight before, and Rudolph stood alone in the shadows, tears welling up in his eyes, disappointed he would not be going. He felt sad and dejected as he had worked so hard.

Then suddenly Santa strongly called out his name: “Rudolph, come here; I need you. I’ve chosen you to lead my team tonight because you are now ready and your bright red nose will be a perfect beacon of light for the team to safely follow and will be seen far and wide across the sky to reassure all the children of our coming tonight.

And with that, Rudolph was brought to the front and strapped snugly into the harness attached to a single, special line, that led straight into Santa’s hand to direct him.

A moment of silence passed, then the rest of the reindeer suddenly understood and had a miraculous change in heart... They all loved Santa and trusted him to do the right thing and realized how wise it was for Rudolph to lead them and that there couldn’t have been a better choice.

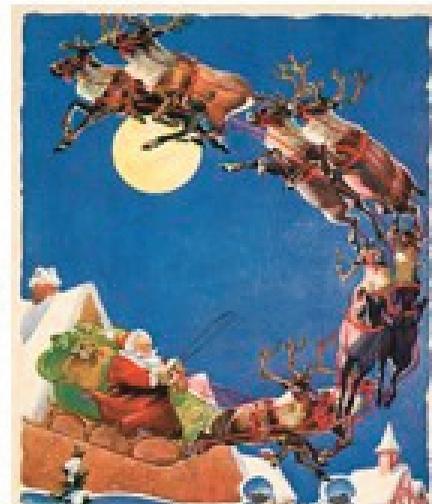
They felt energized and excited knowing they would be the first team in history with such a special and unique reindeer to lead them and all wished they had been blessed with such a bright red nose.

And even before the team left the Pole, word had spread on earth that a new small but mighty reindeer called Rudolph would be leading the herd, and that his mystical light would navigate the sky that night.

And with that the herd started running as one then gently lifting off the snowy run way, flying with Rudolph at the lead followed by a jolly, laughing Santa with a sleigh full of presents for the waiting children round the world.

~

Rudolph, once a small, lonely reindeer with a big heart, who was different from the others and who never gave up, was rewarded for his patience and perseverance, and became even more than he had ever dreamed possible.



Isn’t this what miracles are made of?

All we need to do, is believe like children...

And as Santa sped out of sight, he shouted in glee...

**“A Merry Season for all –
and to all a Good Night!”**

Santa Claus is Alive and Well in Downtown Toronto

Lisa Browning

During my childhood in Toronto, going to the Santa Claus Parade was an annual tradition. I can still remember the excitement in the air as my parents and I drove to the parade site. The air smelled buttery sweet as we passed street vendors selling roasted chestnuts from red metal carts. I was mesmerized by the kaleidoscope of colours as floats, marching bands and fairy princesses passed before me. My favourites were the upside-down clowns. It took me years to realize they weren't really walking on their hands.

I moved from Toronto to Guelph shortly before my daughter Carrie was born. When she turned eleven, I wanted her to experience the parade of my childhood. We picked up two of her friends and headed for the highway, two hours before the parade was to start. I did not expect a traffic jam on a Sunday afternoon, yet I was faced with stop-and-go traffic for the first forty-five minutes of a usual hour-long trip. I became more agitated with every slowly passing kilometre. The girls wanted to sing, but all I could do was concentrate on the drive, willing cars to disappear so we wouldn't be late.

The traffic let up just west of Mississauga, and I drove frantically to Yorkdale Shopping Centre, where we would catch the subway. "I think we'll make it," I said, as we waited for the southbound train. The girls giggled with excitement. Oh, to be young again, I thought.

When our train arrived, I ushered the girls to a seat. Watching three bundled, chattering girls, I relaxed. "Okay," I said as the train neared Osgoode Station, "this is our stop." The girls, wanting to commit every sight, sound and smell to memory, moved slowly toward the doors. "Hurry," I said.

Andrea exited the train, one step ahead of me. Without warning, the doors started to close. I put my arms out to stop them, but was unsuccessful. Beside me on the train, Christine's and Carrie's eyes filled with terror. As our train started moving, we stared helplessly at Andrea, alone on the platform.

The next station was only a few minutes away, but the ride was interminable. Thunder roared in my ears as I looked at the people on the train. The steady, sympathetic glance of a young couple sitting close to us did not silence my fears. As the doors opened, I jumped off the train, with Christine and Carrie close behind. My mind whirling, I circled the station twice, unable to find the northbound train.

"Excuse me," came a voice behind me. I recognized the man from the train. "Come with me," he said. "I'll take you back."

He led me through the turnstile, and spoke calmly to the ticket collector. "This lady's daughter got off the train at Osgoode. Can we go through?" The ticket collector nodded, and we headed down the escalator.

"She's not even my child," I said. "She's my daughter's friend. We don't live in Toronto. We're from Guelph." As I rambled, Christine said quietly, "She's my sister."

What would I tell Andrea's parents? I asked myself. Sorry ... but I lost your child. I dreaded looking out the window as we entered the station. "Please God," I prayed, "let her be there."

My earlier agitation with the traffic, and my incessant rushing, seemed ludicrous. I realized that simply being with those we love, enjoying whatever moments we have, is what matters.

"There she is!" Carrie's joyous shouting caused sheer relief to warm my body. We raced over to Andrea, and held each other tightly. I turned to my rescuer and thanked him with a shaky voice. He smiled, said "You're welcome," and was gone.

A group of strangers smiled at our reunion. Later Andrea told me they stayed with her until we returned. If I had known that at the time, I would have thanked them too.

“Well,” I said to the girls, “do you still want to see the parade?” Three heads nodded, and we walked outside.

In addition to floats, clowns and marching bands, the Santa Claus Parade held a new kind of magic for me that year. Through the actions of some real-life Santas, I experienced the true spirit of the season. And I rediscovered the city of my childhood, where the excitement of the Santa Claus Parade lived in my heart throughout the year.

* * *

They're Not Like Grandma's!

Joan Almond

“**W**here is it?” said Molly, riffling through the recipe drawer. “It has to be in here somewhere.”

Molly had inherited the family recipe collection; tiny pieces of browned paper, revealing generations of cooking secrets.

Her mother was gone now. This Christmas, like everybody else, Molly was relying on Google for cooking advice.

“Damn It!” she said to the cat.

Sometimes, Molly liked to swear like they did in the movies; it made her feel like Rhett Butler in *Gone with the Wind*.

“Ralph will be disappointed,” she went on. “He made it clear last Christmas; he wants no other gift, but his grandmother’s Marshmallow Dainties.

Molly’s mother had made the sweet treat for her grandson, every Christmas since he was a child. “If I could just find the recipe!” Molly said again.

She sat down on an old wooden chair, covered with a floral seat-cushion. The padded covering was tattered and worn from years of use. Her mother had sewn the cushion for Molly, the winter she’d moved into Grandmother’s cabin.

The memories of that time brought tears to Molly’s eyes. The laughter and the comfort of her mother, now stored in a few sentimental dishes, and a drawer full of recipes.

Molly looked out the window. Large snowflakes fell softly; the green grass of summer buried in banks of white snow. Chickadees hungry for food, flew to the bird feeder that hung from the old willow tree.

Molly opened the pot-belly stove and threw another log on the fire. Suddenly, she stepped back in time, to Christmas Past.

“Only one!” her mother told a neighbour who’d dropped in for tea. “Promise me, Edith!” Edith’s eyes opened wide, staring at the silver tray, filled with the decadent Dainties.

“They’re my grandson’s favourite,” Molly’s mother explained to her guest. “The only gift he wants. I’m sure you understand, Edith. After all, you have grandchildren of your own.”

In one bite, Edith inhaled the chocolate treat strewn with miniature marshmallows. Her face lit-up like a Christmas tree! It was clear, dear Edith longed for more.

“I’ll get you a soda cracker if you’re still hungry,” Molly’s mother said. “Would you like some peanut butter on it?”

Edith pursed her lips and said nothing. Trying to hide her reaction, she picked up a delicate rose-

coloured cup and saucer. Filled with hot tea, the steam rose like fog, in front of Edith's face.

Molly's mother was usually a gracious woman, but these were the Marshmallow Dainties, and this was her grandson.

In the next moment, Molly was thrown into Christmas Present. The fire roared in the stove. Molly turned her attention to the recipe drawer. "Found it!" she yelled, pulling out a small envelope.

Molly looked down at the yellowed paper, stained in bits of chocolate.

"No!" she screamed.

The tiny envelope had somehow been torn in two. Marshmallow Dainties, written in her mother's handwriting, identifying the missing recipe, was all she saw.

In a frenzy, Molly threw envelopes and bits of paper onto the counter. There was her mother's gumdrop cookie recipe, recorded on the back of an old hydro bill. The family recipe for Christmas Pudding, passed down from one generation to the next, was there too. Made from scratch, on the top of the pile, were the complete directions for her mother's famous mincemeat pie. The missing instructions for the Marshmallow Dainties were nowhere to be found.

It was Christmas Eve. Molly couldn't google the recipe; the internet had gone down again. She couldn't call anyone; a heavy snowfall overnight was interrupting phone service.

Molly sat down at the kitchen table and cried.

Without warning, Molly was transported to Christmas Future. Her nephew sat in front a 64-inch, state-of-the-art television. The young man was sobbing, while he watched the hockey game in surround sound.

A grey-haired woman approached him.

"I understand, Ralph," Molly told her nephew. "You wanted the Marshmallow Dainties for Christmas. The giant screen TV must seem like such a disappointment!"

Ralph nodded, wiping his tears on his flannelette shirt. In a flash, Molly was jolted back to Christmas Present. She jumped up from the table. "I've got to make the Marshmallow Dainties!" she said, heading into the kitchen.

Molly set to work. Reaching to the top shelf of the pantry, she pulled down an old double-boiler her mother had given her.

"Melt the chocolate chips and..." she said, reading the recipe to the cat. "What else?" The cat turned his head to one side. Molly shrugged her shoulders and began adding butterscotch chips.

"How many?" she said out loud, wishing her mother were here. She dumped in the rest of the package, unsure of the exact measurements.

Molly worked all through the night, doing her best to follow the recipe. By midnight, the Church Bells echoed across the valley. Molly put the Marshmallow Dainties into the refrigerator and went to bed.

On Christmas morning, her cat sounded the alarm, meowing as he always did at 5 am. Molly sat straight up in bed. "Shower!" she yelled, racing into the bathroom.

She looked at the clock. "No time for coffee!" she told her pet.

Molly threw on her coat and grabbed the Marshmallow Dainties from the refrigerator. Jumping into her boots, and forgetting her hat, she ran out the door.

Stories: poetry, prose, and personal reflection

Racing over snow-covered fields, she arrived at her sister's house, just in time for Christmas dinner.

Molly hid the Dainties in a cool place at the back of the tree.

"The Christmas tree looks a lot like an evergreen branch," Molly thought to herself. "I think it is an evergreen branch."

"Come on Molly, time to eat," her sister called from the other room.

The roasted turkey with savory stuffing, and freshly mashed potatoes with browned gravy filled Molly's empty stomach. She helped herself to seconds. In the rush of the day before, Molly had forgotten to eat.

Next came, homemade raspberry-red currant pie topped with vanilla ice cream, and served with freshly brewed coffee.

When everyone had eaten too much, the dishes were cleared.

"Time to open gifts?" said Molly's sister.

The family gathered around The Christmas Branch.

"Molly, you go first," someone said.

Molly smiled, reaching to the back of the Christmas Branch. She pulled out the Marshmallow Dainties wrapped in foil.

"I hope you like them," she said to Ralph, handing him the Dainties. Her nephew tore open the tinfoil.

"Marshmallow Dainties!" he shrieked, digging in with both hands.

Suddenly, he stopped.

"What's wrong?!" Molly gasped.

The room went silent. Ralph looked around.

"What?" Molly said.

"They're not like Grandma's!" Ralph said at last.

Tears welled up in the corners of Molly's big brown eyes. Ralph looked at his aunt. "Wait here," he said.

Ralph ran to the refrigerator. He was back in a minute, carrying a plate covered in plastic wrap. He lifted the wrap and presented the plate to his aunt.

"Try my Marshmallow Dainties, Aunt Molly," he said. "Grandma gave me the recipe. I knew she hoped I'd try to make the Dainties one day."

Molly took a big bite.

"What do you think?" her nephew asked.

Molly paused. Then she looked up at her nephew and winked.

"They're just like Grandma's!" answered Molly.



Author's Note: This story is part of The Recipe Keeper, a series of stories I wrote in 2018. For 102 days, I wrote 102 short stories, each inspired by my mother's recipe collection. To quote my nephew, who tasted my first attempt at the Marshmallow Dainties ... "They're not like Grandma's!"

Musings on a November Morning **Marilyn Elphick**

Saturday, November 20, 2021 @ 0620 AM

My scented candles burn brightly this early Saturday morning. Thank God it is my day off! After a particularly busy, sad week in the LTC facilities where I work as a chaplain, I relish this alone time with my meditative CD music of Buddhist chants from faraway Tibet. The rhythmic repetitive chants seem to ground me, quiet me and prepare me for the day I have planned for myself. My morning and evening routines now includes star gazing thanks to a new app (suggested by my friend Darlene) called Skyview Lite. It is a free download which allows you to see constellations and planets. All you do is point your phone skywards and, behold, what was invisible to the naked eye suddenly becomes visible. As I pointed my phone in several directions, I was rewarded with several constellations; Leo, Sagittarius, Gemini and the planets Saturn and Jupiter accompanied by celestial like music, no less. There I stood in flannel pajamas standing on my deck in fur-lined slippers smiling to myself in the early morning chill.

It is truly amazing, astonishing, and astounding-descriptive words often found in the Bible to illustrate Jesus' actions like healing the sick, forgiving sins, performing any number of miracles, deflecting pointed criticism with brilliant answers and so much more. I felt a great connection with the God of my understanding this morning as I took in the awe-full experience of creation in the stars.

As the season of Advent approaches, I have mixed feelings; anticipation, nonchalance, a sense of tedium and half-hearted preparations for what should be a joyous, happy time. This Christmas will be different from all other Christmases. There will be no grand family gathering or elaborate meal, and perhaps not even visitors. This year, I am preaching and presiding at my mom's LTC facility on Christmas Day followed by

having lunch with her. I am expecting tears but hoping for a few hours of smiles when she opens presents. Last year, we were not sure my Dad would last until Christmas but rallied a little. On Christmas Day he woke up and with uncharacteristic brightness with his familiar smile and in a strong voice proclaimed, "Merry Christmas! Where is the eggnog?" I rushed to the fridge in my parents' apartment to get him his eggnog, supremely grateful that I had remembered to get some. It was a good day.

He hung on for another month before succumbing to the cancer which ravaged his body. Miraculously he had no pain. It was a gift from God that he was spared this agony.

I believe this Christmas will be different. Not good, not bad just different. I got my mother and I matching Christmas dresses that could be classified as ugly Christmas sweaters but I thought it would be fun to remind her of how she used to dress my sister and I in the same outfits. Her dress has strings of colourful lights dancing on a black background while mine has candy canes, stockings, and Christmas trees on a black palette. That's not the best part. I got matching head bands. Mine has a Christmas tree and her headband has elf legs upside down. I think the staff will get a kick out of it. I know what it feels like to work Christmas and have done so for many decades so I wanted to make that day special for them as well by bringing extra treats and making sure they know how grateful I am for all they do for my mother.



At Thanksgiving, my adopted 'kids' (former students from the university days) came over and we had a huge dinner, turkey, several sides and two desserts. I invited them for Christmas but declared, "I am not making a big dinner, we did that for Thanksgiving. So I am suggesting a junk food day."

"Can we have a French fry bar?" Brian asked excitedly.

"What about a taco bar?" chimed in Kate.

"How about nachos?" Asma asked.

"That sounds amazing! We'll be eating all day, staying in pajamas and watching movies under the blankets! Besides I know you will all help especially with the clean-up." This sounds like the perfect Christmas celebration.

We haven't totally figured out the menu yet, but it will be fun to be together. By the time Christmas comes along, most people are exhausted, myself included. For some reason, I am pretty much done my shopping. I started in October by buying some original and unique gifts at the Chippewa Indigenous reserve in London. That started me on the track to get shopping done before the rush. The meaning of the day is often lost in the hustle and bustle of preparations but with Covid, we have been forced to pare down the frenetic preparations for travel and the like.

Spiritually it is a time of reflection and soul rest. The story of Jesus' birth is told in Matthew 1:18-23.

The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah^[i] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this,

an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

And in Luke 2:1-7:

The Birth of Jesus

² In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

The few words devoted to this monumental event, hides the unwritten story; the trials that Mary and Joseph went through, their rejection in Nazareth, Mary's precarious state as a young unwed mother punishable by death. She is a courageous woman, feisty, brave, and fearful yet fearless in her determination to do what God asks of her. I know a lot of people have a problem with the nativity story but frankly, I have a harder time with the commercialism and materialism that overtakes the true

meaning of this sacred season. So, I choose to celebrate this year with the people in my life who have come to my rescue when I needed rescuing the most.

* * *

Nature's Promise **Brenda Cassidy**

As my gaze rests upon you, my sleeping darlings,
My soul longs for warmer days;
When your beauty is resurrected,
Filling my heart with joy, and my eyes with wonder.

And so continues the cycle of death and rebirth,
The energy returning to the root from which it came,
Providing the miracle of growth,
So that you may once again bask in the sun
and drink of the rain.

* * *

Am I Enough? **Serena Hubercheck**

In a world that has taught us to live outside of ourselves, how can we know who we really are?

In the stillness of the night, I lay not in silence, but rather in the frenzy of thoughts percolating in my brain. "I should put a hypnotic audio on", I tell myself. "Those always help me to fall back to sleep." That's when the tug of war begins. Do I really need the assistance of the audio, or do I just hammer through and create my own relaxing inner dialogue? The next words swirling around in my head are, "You're letting your ego get in the way Hubercheck – listen to the audio."

Why is it this relationship with self must constantly stand in the approval of EGO?

I love Freud's observations on the Ego. As quoted in an article I have just finished, written by Kendra Cherry, in <https://www.verywellmind.com>, "Ego as the Rational Part of Personality," she states, "In his 1933 book *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud compared the relationship between the id and the ego to that of a horse and rider. The horse represents the id, a powerful force that offers the energy to propel forward motion. The rider represents the ego, the guiding force that directs the power of the id toward a goal. Freud noted, however, that this relationship did not always go as planned. In less ideal situations, a rider may find himself simply along for the ride as he allows his horse to go in the direction the animal wants to go. Just as a rider may not always be able to control a horse, the id's primal urges may sometimes be too powerful for the ego to keep in check."

Psycho blah blah blah! Or is it? Not all of us want to get to the root of what is driving our moods and behaviours. Isn't it just much easier to take a pill or have a few drinks or what ever your vice might be, to aid in balancing our out of whack chemistry and overriding the things we are running from?

What if you and I had the power to change that out of whack chemistry using nothing else but our own thoughts?





What forms our reality? Is it the external or physical world we live in that creates this, or our perception of those experiences? What about the history of our perception of those things?

Jesus, Buddha, Dalai Lama, Joseph Smith, to name a few of the great spiritual leaders that have practiced and taught about self-love. Historical agents of faith, the real founders of Health, Lifestyle, Relationship and Resilience Coaching. Isn't that what their purpose on this earth was: to bring us closer to the Divine through our personal evolution and self-awareness?

This is not a lecture on theology or world religion. This blog is about grasping a concept, one that each of us is born to experience. The very thing that generations of gurus and spiritual leaders have attempted to show us since the beginning of time. Let's imagine that we are a collective part of the I AM. We have been taught there is light/good and evil/darkness. Let's be curious about these things for a moment. How do we know light or darkness? What do they "feel" like beyond the ocular sense of them? Can you "sense" good and evil without first experiencing evidence of them? What is coming into your mental awareness as you read these questions? I can tell you – words. Words are coming into your mental awareness.

"Sticks and Stones ... "

Imagine the powerful force of words that forms a child's reality. Imagine that you carry your inner child with you, even until the moment that you take your last breath. Words have created who you see yourself to be and how you believe the world perceives you.

Words form every element of our daily existence. Even in our sleeping lives, dreams are created through the mental images dancing around inside of our brains. To process those images, you must put them into words.

As humans we compartmentalize and put names and meanings to things through words.

We are each taught the concepts and meanings of words in languages relative to where we live in this world and who we live with. We are groomed from pre-infancy to formulate an emotional response to "words." It is how we communicate with ourselves and with others. It is how we identify and relate to everyone and everything around us.

Is it any wonder then that as we grow older and live to accumulate more and more experiences, we become lost in a sea of beliefs, behaviours, and patterns? Whether healthy and helpful or not, and most times not, they exist to protect us. We all have them.

So, back to id and ego. If you tell yourself that you are too tall, too short, too fat, too thin, too ugly, too pretty, too stupid, too smart – guess what? You will find evidence that you are the very things that you say you are. What's more interesting is, you will create experiences that validate your thoughts. What are your thoughts? Words!

"Well then, I will just tell myself better words."

Easy right?! Nope! The other thing about being human is that we are hard wired to stay "safe." What does safe look like to our brain? It looks like what is

familiar. If you have spent most of your life telling yourself you're "not enough," you'll have created protective habits and behaviours over the years, those are the things that will be familiar. Familiar equals safe. To allow better thoughts to become integrated into who we are, it helps to have someone to guide and encourage us, to coach us. Someone to help us stay focused on our "why" behind wanting to change the negative words that taunt and remind us of our inadequacies. Someone who will edify and help to celebrate us when we have overcome hurdles and made even the smallest steps towards the big changes. I have a few favorites for sure and am thankful for the light they've shared with me when I couldn't clearly see my way.

It's nearing the holidays, an especially challenging time of the year for most of us.

Maintaining our mental health is not enough these days. It is imperative that we take a good look at how we feel about ourselves and others and take stock of what words are forming in our minds. How are we feeling? Ask yourself, how are my words making me feel? We each need to prepare our personalized toolboxes. Let's fill them with healthy strategies, plans and exercises that will ensure our low times are short lived and that we can safely step forward into the best versions of ourselves.

There really is a thing called magic, it is the most magnificent phenomena when you believe in something so powerfully that you find the evidence to validate what you believe to be true.

Twenty-one days to change a thought and form a new one. I believe that tonight is a good night to begin.

I reach for my personalized audio recording. It's a lovely recording, the wind is blowing through the trees and the waves are dancing on the shore. In the distance there is an owl and then begins the gentle voice, the voice that will remind me as I am drifting off to sleep, "I AM ENOUGH"...

The World of Addiction

Lizzy Wisniewski

If I asked you to describe a drug addict, what image pops in your head? C'mon, we've all got an image of a stereo typical drug addict.

Ok, here is mine. Based on what is shown in movies and on TV, the vision I see is someone who is dirty, disheveled, unemployed, and begging for money to fund their ever-increasing drug habit. They probably have track marks on their arms from all of the needles they've injected, and they look malnourished, and deranged. Once they've got enough money for their next "fix," they have their "drug dealer" on speed dial and meet up to buy their drugs. They know where all of the "crack" houses are where they go just to get high. They are chasing that euphoric feeling — "that high" — that only lasts a few moments and then it's gone. And then they are back to begging on the streets hoping that they will have enough money to buy more drugs. If they don't give their body enough drugs, they will get "dope sick" from not supplying the volume of drugs that their body is used to and demands. It's a vicious cycle that just keeps repeating.

Now, what if I told you that I was an addict but I've never snorted, injected, smoked, or even taken any illegal drug EVER in my life. I've never been "high." I've never seen nor met a drug dealer. And I'm so naïve about illegal drugs that I don't even know what street to buy them on. I don't know where any crack houses are in any city and I've never had to beg for drug money on the street. And there are no track marks on my body.

You see, I wasn't looking for a fix. I wasn't looking to get high. I just wanted to get my severe back pain under control. But after meeting with a pain specialist over the course of 15 months, I was prescribed 5 different narcotics in extremely high doses, one of those being the "new" OxyContin. The amounts were increased to such high levels that my daily drug

consumption would have tranquilized an elephant!! And I am certainly much smaller than an elephant! It was a potent, dangerous cocktail of drugs.

All of my drugs were legally prescribed by doctors, filled by licensed pharmacists, delivered to my door by the pharmacy's taxi delivery service, and consumed as directed by my doctor in the comfort of my own home. I was chemically addicted to OxyContin.

Me, an ADDICT????? How on earth could this have happened to me?

After hurting my back, and suffering from constant excruciating back spasms and pain, I've gone from being a fully functioning, employed, social butterfly with many friends, and activities to fill my days, to sleeping 22 hours a day, slurring my words, bumping into walls, and unable to focus on the smallest of tasks.

My sister, Eley, and my best friends have finally convinced me that I need to move back home. They have just spent the weekend with me and can see just how sick I really am. They are alarmed by the sheer volume of drugs I'm taking and the amount that I am sleeping. When I am awake, they are shocked by my inability to function. Because I live alone, Eley has already been calling me twice a day to make sure I'm still alive. But they are really scared for my safety and sanity. I am only a shell of the person they know and love.

And I know they are right. I had been hoping for almost 3 years now that I would have found a diagnosis for my back pain. I wanted to return to my full-time job which I loved. But now, I am so drugged and sedated, that I can NOT function on my own. I can't concentrate. I can't find the right words. I can't think straight. It takes every bit of strength I have just to keep breathing. I need help.

I really don't know how I got here. I had seen so many doctors who couldn't determine what was

causing all of my pain. But I felt hope that the pain specialist would help me get my pain under control so that I could get back to my life, my dreams and my goals.

But little did I know just how life altering this one pill, OxyContin, would have affected my life. It was touted as the greatest pain reliever of all time to doctors, with no limit on the amount they could prescribe per patient, and no addictive concerns for the patient. Doctors were happy to prescribe this pill to help their patients and we, as patients, were relieved to get something that would control our pain.

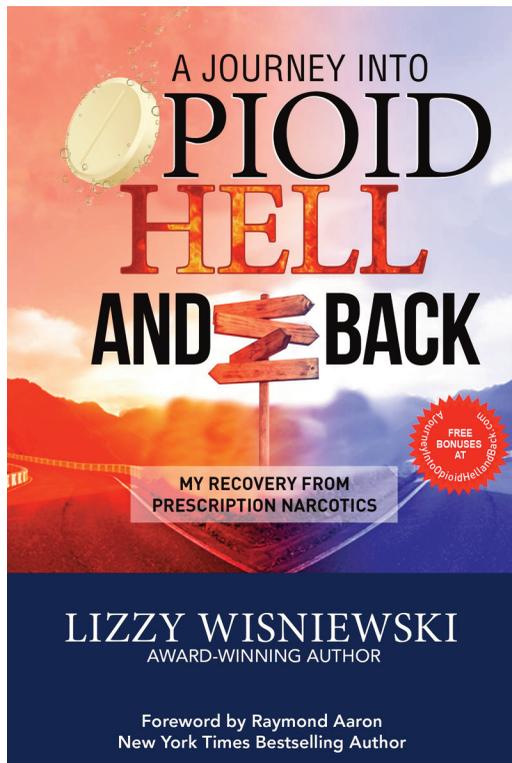
It was only after doctors were seeing their patients becoming addicted to and/or dying from OxyContin that concerns were raised to the pharmaceutical that was making OxyContin. By then, the pharmaceutical had mentioned that they might have not been forthcoming in how addictive this opioid really was. However, millions had fallen under the opioid's addictive spell and lives were being ruined and unfortunately, lost.

But where do I go from here? I was so sick, so malnourished and so drugged. And still in so much pain! I had no idea that narcotics, in that high of a dosage, CAUSE pain! So, the more opioids I took, the pain would keep increasing. I've been told I have a high pain tolerance but this was ridiculous.

And now that I'm so addicted, decisions are being made for me by my sister because honestly, I can't even think straight. Once I moved back home with Eley, our new battle begins. Where do we go to get help? What do we do now with me, this sick, pain-filled person who is addicted to all of these drugs that were prescribed??? Some of the drugs were so new there was no data about how they reacted with the other powerful drugs I was taking. Drug reactions? You bet I had them. Visits to the ICU? Oh, yes, there is nothing like the feeling of thousands of bugs crawling on you!

I knew logically that I had to get off of these drugs like my new specialist had suggested. But no one can prepare you for the hell that is withdrawal. If you look up the withdrawal symptoms on any web browser, I had all of them to varying degrees. And they were horrific, not only for me, the addict, having to physically experience them but for my family members who witnessed my withdrawal.

In my book, *A Journey into Opioid Hell and Back*, I detail my addiction, my painful withdrawal process and my successful recovery. My wish is to educate people on this opioid crisis that we are facing and to help end the stigma about addiction. I was a compliant patient who followed her doctors' orders and ended up in the battle for my life. By sharing my story, I hope it will help you and your loved ones better understand how this opioid crisis is affecting all of us.



A Journey into Opioid Hell and Back, is available on Amazon.ca, Amazon. Com, and Barnes and Noble.

A Double-Edged Sword Francine Houston

What would we be without our memories? Who are you without your memories? How would you move in the world? What would be different if we had no memory of times before? For most of us it seems inconceivable to not have any memory of our past. For some of us, though, events, situations and even people feel as though they vanish over time. Whether it occurs from emotional or physical trauma, a brain injury, or the side effect of medications, some people aren't capable of making or accessing memories. How then, do those people move in the world, and how does that impact their lives?

Memories, good and bad, easy and difficult, make us who we are... or at least shapes us. Cultural, geographic, familiar, and personal, inform our personality, our emotional health and our progress through life. Many of us revisit those memories over and over again, reinforcing those stories based on our interpretation of those thoughts. Are memories accurate though? What is the emotional price of those thoughts? Who are you when there is no one around to tell you who you need to or should be? Who would you be without the memories to guide you?

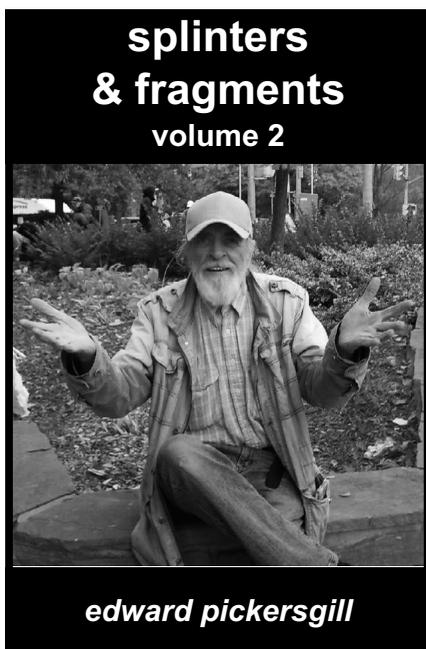
Memories can bring us comfort, cause us pain, or give us joy. For those of us who have challenges with accessing our memories, life sometimes feels like we are floating through time and space, never really anchored. We do recognize people, moment by moment. We know who we are, and where we are at any singular point in time. We may even know someone, or have some recognition of them within a hazy context, but often, the exact circumstances of our connection to them, or events that we might have shared with them that they recall clearly are, at best, barely on the edge of our ability to bring to the surface. There are times that certain things like photos, or the recounting of events by the other party, may prompt some degree of recall, but often, there

isn't any strong emotional connection or ability to sequence events or memory.

How does it feel, both for the person who doesn't recall, and for the person sharing the event? For those who have challenges in recall, there is a sense of disconnection. For those who do recall the event, it may feel as though the event that was important to them is being negated, or minimized.

For many of us with memory or recall issues, writing, diarizing, making photo records are a way to feel more connected. It allows us to embrace the good and process the bad. Often, it supports our ability to feel, or at least appear to have connection. Having worked with seniors who have Alzheimer's and other cognitive challenges, it has made me wonder about memory a lot. I see the parallels: an inability to sometimes access memories or incidents, and the vagaries of memory loss associated with those disorders. I know they aren't the same, but as I watch

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individuals lose their grasp of current memory, accessing those memories, and in fact often living in those past memories, I wonder if perhaps memories are a double edged sword. They allow us to connect through time. They allow us to process events and shape future behaviour. They serve as a retreat. They allow us to appreciate our lives. We write to retain, to relive, to embrace our lives. What will your December look like? What memories will you store in your “bank” for later?

* * *

Memories **Sandra Wilson**

Memories can be brutal
When we think of days gone by
But they can also be a gift
Like when hearing a baby’s first cry.

Memories can help you treasure
The people who are no longer here
But they can also trigger
Childhood anxiety and fear

But to erase one’s memory
Would be to delete who you are
The things that made you stronger
That show you’ve come so far.

And not having to remember
All the tragedy you faced
Means not having a memory
Of your favourite happy place.

Holding on to memories
Helps you work through things once ignored
It can guide you to learn from mistakes
And inspire dreams to move toward.

Allow memories to enhance you
To help encourage you to grow
To remind you there is still beauty
Hidden under all the snow.

Cindy’s Dream **Cynthia Bragg**

The bedroom was dark but Cindy could see the silhouettes of her mother and father arguing in the hall from where she lay huddled under the covers in her parent’s bed.

She didn’t understand what they were arguing about but she imagined the scar on her father’s chest had been made by her mother because her mother made her feel uneasy too.

Then in the midst of the argument she heard her father say a word she had never heard before: divorce. It troubled her and as she fell asleep with a pain in her heart she descended into her private world where she felt safe.

She opened the cellar door and went down the dark staircase to the cinder block basement fearfully holding her breath as she always did, believing a monster loomed behind the coal furnace beside the dark coal bin full of black coal.

As she approached the concrete supports that held up the floor above, she wiggled one of the cold cement blocks and it came loose revealing a dark hole that dropped down. The hole was big enough for Cindy to squeeze through and she fell down and down through the dark, landing on a trampoline that triggered on the light in her underworld room.

She smoothed down her pyjama top and brushed back her brown hair off of her forehead trying to locate the door she must pass through. There it was, off to her left, so she pushed it open and stood on the platform of her secret subway that could take her anywhere in the world in 10 minutes. It was something like those vacuum tubes her dad had showed her at the airport where he worked that sucked up rolls of messages in an instant. She boarded the next train and knew where the first stop must be.

There it was, a rippling blue pool surrounded by beautiful flowers: tall fragile hollyhocks at the back and then purple coneflowers and purple asters, a butterfly bush with pretty magenta flowers that filled the air with a heavenly scent. She took a deep breath eyeing tall blue delphiniums, pink hydrangea clusters, pink turtlehead flowers and anise hyssop. Her mother had taught her the names of so many flowers though she was only seven.

She had to step into the water that was slightly warm and soothing as it quickly rose to her chest wrapping her wet pyjamas around her legs. She pushed slowly against the water walking towards the garden feeling for the steps that would take her to another platform with a row of tall cupboards behind it. There she could find hundreds of costumes, clothes from all over the world, from the past to the present, that she could don becoming anyone she wanted to be. She removed her soggy nightwear leaving the drippy pile on the platform and chose a long flowing white dress. There was a towel and undergarments in a basket on the floor of the cupboard and as she dressed herself, she could feel herself getting taller and her hair growing long down her back. The golden shoes fit her perfectly and Cindy knew she had left her home behind where every night at dinner you could cut the tension with a knife and she would get heck for twisting her hair anxiously between her fingers staring down at her plate while her parents sat in silence, her mother glaring at her dad.

The next doorway led to a ballroom but off to one side was the mood tube if she needed it. It was like a tall cylindrical elevator that could take her down into cooling swirling blues and greens while calming music played or up into warm dizzying swirling orange and red lights with lively music and a voice calling to her, "You are OK. Everything is OK."

Sometimes if the garden pool had not settled her down enough she would detour to the paint parlour and heave full pails of red paint at the wall screaming out her anger at her mother, staining the room with violent splashes of blood red.

Tonight she just drifted into the ballroom drawn by the music being played by the band seated on a moving platform that rolled over the floor between other costumed couples dreamingly waltzing to the music. Above the dancers suspended from the high ceiling were large circular pods like rooms you could climb to up spiral staircases through the doors on the opposite wall. The pods had mattresses in them where Cindy knew that couples "made love". She climbed up and lay down peering through the windows at the twirling figures down below. Tears rolled down her face. She wanted someone to love her too but her mother had stopped touching her and she didn't know why.

Knowing she had a job to do that meant going back to the subway that would take her to the rock forest she climbed down. She had been endowed with the power to meet people there who were full of hate and anger like Hitler and the wicked witch from the east and heal them restoring peace to the world.

A faint glimmer of light shone through the curtains casting a vertical streak on the wall opposite her bed. Suddenly Cindy woke up knowing she was back in her own bed. She listened but the arguing had stopped. She heard her father jiggling the hangers in the closet as he removed his suit. She kept really still as she heard the toaster and the smell of toast wafted down the hall. There was no talking this morning, no yelling, no crying—just the scrape of the knife over the toast and the sound of coffee being poured into a cup. Soon after the door slammed and her father was gone.

The next few days she never saw her father. On Sunday her mother took her on a long streetcar ride. They had to transfer to a Queen car at the Humber loop and two hours later walked along Dupont Street to her grandmother's house.

Cindy was ordered to go upstairs to the third floor, up the big wide stairs and then up another narrow staircase to the third floor bedroom. It had faded yellowy wallpaper covered with big, dark red flowers all over it. There was a small window at one end of the

room and a large bed that Cindy climbed onto covering herself with a cold satin quilt, listening, listening to her mother crying downstairs, crying and crying and her grandmother talking in her crisp English accent.

Cindy felt all alone and a little scared. She inhaled the musty, dusty smell of the room and wondered how long she would be left alone lying on the bed.

As weeks went by, Cindy begging her mother to explain where her daddy had gone and why, her mother just cried saying her sisters had told her not to tell her. No pleading helped. When her mother was out Cindy fell on her knees praying to God to send her father back. Day after day she prayed.

But he never came and God never answered.

And now Cindy knew the meaning of that word. Divorce. It meant that her daddy was never ever coming back.

This story is based upon a real serial dream I had as a child and on real events that happened. It offers a child's perspective on how parental discord and separation can be viewed and maybe misinterpreted at a young age, and how the imagination can offer comfort and protection in the midst of trauma.

* * *

A Rose for Barb Judith Rosenberg

She was miniscule in stature, yet a titan warrior in life!

Barbara Julie Cohen. Born September 9, 1953. Died tragically and unnecessarily on August 29, 2021, alone in a barren hospital room. Without her cell phone. Without her chosen brother who was ever by her side in life.



Twenty-three years ago, I was called by my mentor Susan, who wished for me to meet the mother of a woman, an artist, with severe mental health issues. The intention was for this mother and I, both devoted to our beloved adult children with the lived experience of mental illness, artists in common and with a shared love of their faith, to somehow introduce our kids to each other.

In the end, we mothers were not the impetus in these two meeting. In fact, my son was hosting his first exhibition as “Artist in Residence” at the original Wyndham Arts in downtown Guelph, and Barb walked in on opening day. She was forever on the streets and in the studios of established and fringe artists, curious, supportive and asking, “Would you like to see my work?” And out of that ever-present, oversized satchel bag, would appear reams of tiny booklets and photocopied, plastic-coated pages of her unending drawings of robots and the ‘project themed-machinations’ of the moment.

Breath-taking, haunting, disturbing, genius ... all with tiny, almost illegible, words in English or Hebrew, delving into G-d's meaning and messages to her as she suffered to understand her mission on this earth. Her constant torment was of how to live the life that He had prescribed for her and gain acceptance of her

work and her tiny, humble being. Little did she know or understand that her very presence, her life of sacrifice, her love of all who came before, her courage and resilience, were more ... so much more ... than any god would ask of her.

She and my son, her “Gentle Giant” of a chosen brother, would speak on the phone and meet weekly, sometimes daily and of late, during COVID, use text to stay connected. Their bond was rock-solid, never wavering, constant throughout the years as each experienced the ebb and flow of the ravages of mental illness. The hospitalizations. The messed-up medication pitfalls. The collecting/hoarding of found objects, saved as precious, sometimes for years, to become an art piece ... perhaps, or never. Visiting each other in the mental institutions that became ‘home’ for months on end, or the psychosocial rehabilitation centers where they each lived, toward recovery, amongst others who walked and ate in silence or spoke in less than understandable mumblings. Sitting for hours when neither spoke or one or both slept away the day under the influence of heavy, brutal anti-psychotic drugs.

And other times, Barb was included in every gathering, every celebration, every restaurant dinner and was saved a place beside us in Synagogue on Sabbath and High Holy Days. That was us ... the three Amigos. Barb took over the seat in our family pew where my beloved mother Bess once sat with my son and I. Barb was the perfect companion to occupy that special seat with us. Her quiet, reverent, presence was always comforting and when my son was called to the Bimah (altar) for the honour of reading from the Torah, I could ‘feel’ Barb’s heart fill and soar with pride and love for Jay.

Barb enjoyed many true and long-lasting friendships throughout her years in Guelph. She gathered dozens, perhaps hundreds of people from all stations in life. She attracted every manner of intellectual, creators, makers of art, poets, authors, business people, religious and agnostics. All were Barb’s fan club, protectors, students and beloveds.

She could be spotted daily in the downtown core. Walking in her trademark stride. Burdened by her huge knapsack, bags and purses. Attired in whatever ‘costume-like’ expression she decided upon for that day. She saved every imaginable pair of shoes, boots, jackets, patterned tights, decorated socks, adorable hats, colourful scarves and jeans ... many different styles of tiny, little jeans. She remembered each item ... when it was purchased ... what year ... the shop ... who gave it to her and why. In our many, many hours over the years of attempting to downsize and purge her sparse living space to make room for more, for new works of art, for a spot for her to sit or sleep, she would not part with any of it. If we did manage to slip a few things into a donation bag, she would continue to ask for it ... for years to come. The guilt for me was deep and profound.

There were some improvements she permitted. When her mother passed away and we felt it was now respectful to step in to help in some little way, it was shocking and heartbreaking to witness how she treated herself in her privacy. We removed that broken down bed without a mattress and only a board to sleep on ... precariously propped up at the head with the foot on the floor. I couldn’t sleep or find any peace until we were able to convince her that her G-d did not want her to suffer in this way. That she was enough and more without suffering and was able to have a new bed and mattress purchased and installed.



There came a time, sadly, when Barb experienced one too many falls, was walking with a cane and would benefit from a safe environment with care, medications monitored, meals prepared and no stairs to climb. Of course, a pathetic sign of the times is that such facilities of quality care where a person such as Barb who was not considered ... elderly ... or with dementia, could find a place that would provide her with access to her studio space downtown in Necessary Arts with her fellow creators, close to her community of artists and friends and where she could meet and greet folks at the Bookshelf and Miiijidaa for a coffee and a chat. And of course, where the meager government subsidy for people with mental health disabilities would cover the expenses.

So, the place Barb would be 'housed' was in the South end of Guelph, where she would need to take the Assisted Care Bus to the City bus stop, to wherever she was headed, or cover the cost of a taxi once mobility became too challenging. She would prepare for a full day in her studio, take a lunch and arrange to meet up with her beloveds.

On that Friday afternoon in August 2021, my son faintly remembers her usual call to wish each other a "Shabbat Shalom." He remembers the spot at my flat where he took the call. That was the very last time he spoke to Barb. He was confused why he had not heard from her, but of course, they never spoke on Saturday, our Sabbath as Jay had become Shomar Shabbat, where he refrains from work, phone calls, technology and reads Jewish scriptures and prays during the day until sunset.

On Monday morning Jay received a call from Barb's sister in Kingston, Ontario, as he was going through the car rental, to give him the devastating news that ... his soul sister Barb was dead.

In shock and total disbelief, he arrived at my doorstep for comfort. Together we grieved but I could not possibly be in his heart and share his decades of memories. He disappeared into his private world of Barb and his life of shared experiences for a very long

time. We listened to Dylan and Leonard Cohen ... her music and her creative muses, in silence. I stayed with the lyrics and finally understood and heard her heart in those words.

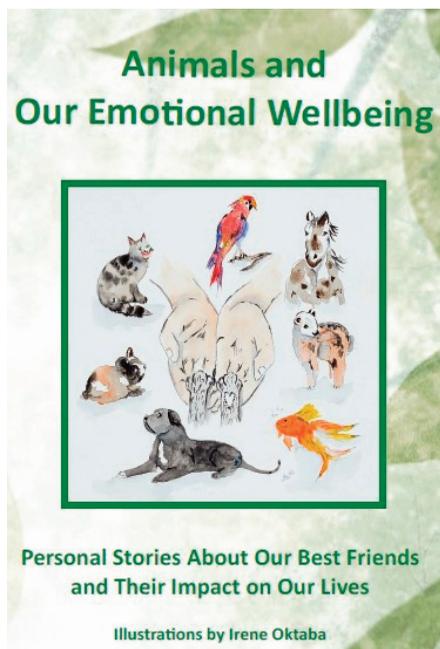


We planned and hosted a memorial for Barb on her birthday in the Guelph Enabling Garden where perhaps 75 or more souls who loved Barb and could not make sense of this unexplained and sudden loss, came together in masked silence, heavy with tears and hearts burdened in sorrow. We spoke of her. Sang and listened to local musicians play their memories. Said prayers and read self-written poems and stories of our own special bond with Barb.

And WE FLOATED ROSES, again in silence, along the Speed River!



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**Trees You Planted
For DDR
Linda Hamel**

Trees you planted, roots to hold the soil,
and laid down boulders along the riverbank
to choke the hungry current's eager bite
and hold to you what your soul did not hold.
Your own roots grew no deeper than the moss
plucked by a child's fingers from a stone.
What eddy caught you, sped your willing drift
beyond our reach? So falsely free,
you sank beneath the water and were gone.

And still you shape the river. Hidden stones
drive currents from our shores; in years of loam
new saplings sprout and shoot. You planted trees.

* * *

**Bruce Trail, End to End
Part 3
Clay Williams**

August was an eventful month for Debbie and me. During the week of August 23rd, I ran (conducted) the 7th annual Canal Pursuit for Mental Health, an eight day relay run along the Trent-Severn and Rideau canals ending in Ottawa. It was a hectic nine day stretch away from home, driving on back roads and supporting runners as they ran their 10 km relay legs along the Canals. It's a lot of work with some long days, but it felt great to be outside for the week, and to have the opportunity to visit and catch up with some friends that I hadn't seen since the year before. I was still struggling with some stomach trouble that I'll explain later, so I was running very little, and counting on the relay runners to cover the distance.



Part way through that time, on August 27th, Debbie had major hip reconstructive surgery, resulting in her being bed-ridden for 6 weeks. The recovery period is going to include a few weeks on crutches, a few weeks with a cane, a few weeks of limited walking, eventually leading to longer and more vigorous exercise: we are planning to run a 100 mile trail run in September 2022 and Debbie plans to climb Mount Everest the next year.

Since we had been working out together almost every week for quite a long time, we were both pining for our workouts. We had texted back and forth a few times, and she seemed pretty discouraged about having to be so sedentary, and worried about the atrophy her muscles were suffering. I was starting to feel some pent-up frustration as well; not being confident enough to venture very far from my house for fear of an emergency trip to a washroom. I decided that Debbie and I needed to get out somehow, and because she wasn't walking yet, a wheelchair was the only option I could think of. I became very focused on getting her out in a wheelchair but I didn't want to spend any money. I did a little crowdsourcing to see if I could borrow a chair but had no luck. My wife's health is not good and I rationalized that she will eventually need a wheelchair, and there was a sale at Canadian Tire, so I did the "smart thing" and bought a wheelchair and brought it to Debbie's house.

I got there mid-morning on the Saturday of the Labour Day weekend, we got her loaded into the chair with some extra padding and we headed out, booking forward to an adventure. Pushing along the gravel driveway we found it was really bumpy, which was pretty painful for her, so we stuck to the flat asphalt once we got onto the road. We went for a stroll around the industrial park near her house, past the “homeless naked woods” (long story there), and had enough time to catch up on things. It felt really good to just walk and chat, a lot like our Bruce Trail Hikes, but without the threat of falling off a cliff or dying of dehydration. It was a cool morning and Debbie initially thought about wearing a jacket but decided not to. She later regretted not bringing it as it was cool and breezy out in the open. She wasn’t doing any vigorous exercise while sitting in the chair, so she got colder than she expected. By the time we got back to her house after a 5km walk, she was getting a little cold and sore, but I think we both enjoyed the low key “adventure.”



We took another wheelchair hike on labour day Monday. It was a little cooler but Deb decided on a jacket this time, and a little more padding on the chair. Just for fun I brought a GoPro to record a little of the walk and then posted it to Facebook. We also found out on that day that the sale-priced Canadian Tire wheelchair gets a little wobbly at running speed, but nobody got hurt during that learning process.

As I mentioned earlier, during this same period my stomach has been slowly recovering. Back in late July I had a dental abscess, so I was put on antibiotics for a week. Coincidentally in the preceding week I had watched two documentaries about gut bacteria, our biome. One of the results of taking the antibiotics was that it destroyed the bacteria in my gut biome, and I couldn’t process food properly. This might be T.M.I. but for the month of August everything I ate went through me like water through a firehose. I started taking a couple of different probiotics each day, and spent the entire week of the Canal Pursuit being very conscious of the location of the nearest washroom. It took frustratingly long to build the biome back up, but by early November I was once again confident enough to go for a 10 km run without having to make a bathroom stop. I’m still not nearly back to my normal self, but I’m much better than I was in August.

So here we are at the beginning of December; two recovering ultra runners still intent on hiking the full 900 km length of the Bruce Trail, and now with an added goal of running 100 miles in one of Ontario’s toughest trail races in Haliburton Forest, near Algonquin Park.

It may sound like overconfidence, but I think these long range goals play a huge role in keeping me motivated to train and stay in shape. And I definitely have to stay in shape if we’re going to continue the Bruce Trail End to End adventure!

* * *

Reflections Colleen Heighington

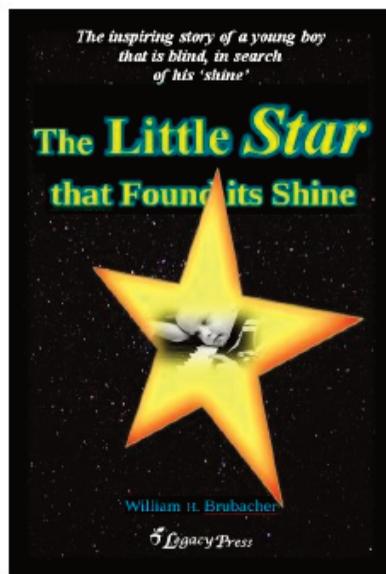
Now that I have more time on my hands, I have been reflecting on my life this far. So far ... so good!!! I recently was talking to a dear friend of mine who is 96 years young and asked him on any advice that he could pass on to me as he reflected on his own life. He told me to have "no regrets in life" and as far as aging, said that each birthday he has had (so so many) he has seen them as only numbers and not as getting older. This is good advice ... and I will always remember those words of wisdom and pass them along to others. Maybe all of us might live well into our nineties too, that would be nice!!!

Also, recently while doing my walk in the mall, I was chit-chatting with a nice gentleman who is 81 years old and as he was talking to me, I picked up something that I thought was so true. He said that he never meddles into anyone else's business. I reflected on this and realized that I needed to heed to this

message. It will take time, but I will try, especially being the nosey person that I am.

Lately, I have been reflecting on how life has been very good to me and continues to be. I have been blessed with a wonderful mom and dad who I absolutely adore. Even though they have passed on, I keep them alive in my heart with all the beautiful memories that they have left with me. Also, I have an amazing hubby and lots of loving family and friends. Life is so, so good and I couldn't ask for more ... but there is something more ... with Christmas fast approaching, it is the season of love, peace and hope, and that gets me reflecting on my unforeseen future. Personally, the hope of heaven and eternal life through the birth of our saviour Jesus at this beautiful time of year makes me want to praise and give thanks to God who has so freely given this precious gift of love to all of us. My future is safe and secured in the loving and everlasting arms of Jesus!!!!

* * *



I encourage everyone to read this book and find out for themselves how a small blind boy and his faithful friend can change the world. Dave Budeviek

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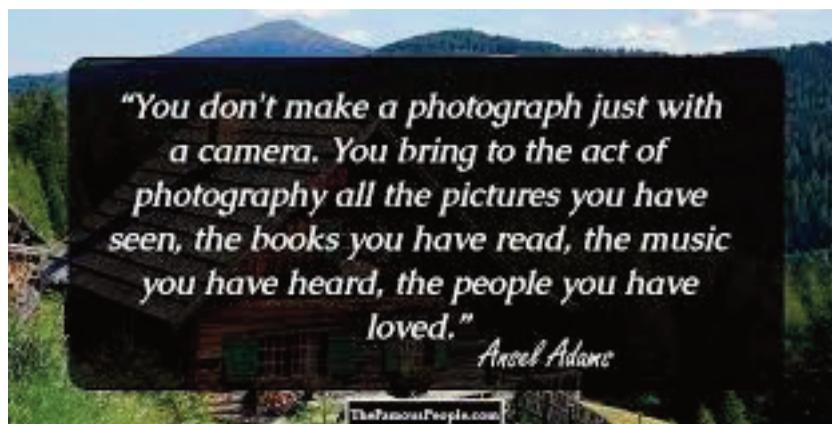
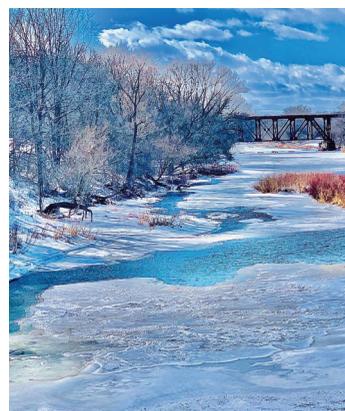
Stories: poetry, prose, and personal reflection

Reflections on the Theme

The following photos were submitted in response to the monthly theme of reflection and memories.

Top Row: Joan Almond

Bottom Row: Margreet Kuypers



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*.

Cynthia Bragg

Cynthia is a retired school teacher, reflexologist and teacher of reflexology, and worked as a sales rep and manager in the health food industry for 22 years. She trained for 6 years as a medical herbalist with the School of Phytotherapy in England and she wrote for the *Guelph Mercury* for two years as part of their Community Editorial Board. She is passionate about the health and protection of all animals including wildlife. One of her greatest joys has been growing her own vegetable organically every year at Ignatius farm in Guelph.

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.

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.

Marilyn Elphick

Marilyn’s first career was as a Registered Nurse in various fields of medicine. Her last position was as a dialysis nurse. She completed an MDiv degree in 2002 and a TH.M in 2013. From 2002-2015 she worked as the Director of Campus Ministry, and at present she works as a chaplain at a long-term care facility. She recently moved to Fergus, Ontario, and she loves to write!

Linda Hamel

Linda wrote her first poem when she was six years old, but only in the last few years has she become serious about writing. She is a retired educator living in Guelph, whose work deals with themes of hope, legacy, Christian faith, and the wonder of trees.

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.

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.

Serena Hubercheck

Serena is the proprietor and facilitator of "The Art of You Inc". She uses her diverse skills and rich life experiences to help others connect to the depth and beauty of their own life's struggles. As a resilience, health and lifestyle coach Serena supports others to move through difficult setbacks, find their unique gifts and stand in the joy and freedom of their true and authentic selves. Serena uses a variety of modalities to create a unique experience, tailored to suite each clients needs and expression. Through her personal testimony, she believes that it is imperative that each of us possesses a customized and personalized "toolbox", fueled with the necessary strategies and resources, which can aid in improving an individual's life. She believes that ongoing inner work is essential to becoming the best version of oneself. Serena has been dedicated to lifelong learning.

Margreet Kuypers

Marge has immigrated twice, and as a result has lived on three continents. As an introvert she prefers to observe, rather than share her views. Until now she used to communicate mainly through music and photography, since then it wasn't necessary to put thoughts into words. Marge did an online Memoir writing course during 2020 which inspired her to share some of her experiences on paper. Visit her at www.walkingthewalk.life.

Judith Rosenberg

Judith is the founder of the *Spark of Brilliance* program, focusing on healing and recovery through the arts, and *R.I.S.E., Aging with Pride and Satisfaction*. She is currently Program Facilitator & Community Outreach Lead with *J.O.E., Jobs Opportunities Enterprise* (2019 to the present), and was Community Engagement Coordinator with The Distress Centre of Guelph/TorchLight (2011 to December 2019). She is a long-standing social activist in capacity building and transformation, and her commitment to providing personalized facilitation service to individuals and families is well documented in the community.

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 that 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.

Lizzy Wisniewski

Lizzy was working for the federal government in Gatineau, Quebec until her back injury in 2005. Her book, *A Journey into Opioid Hell and Back*, details her struggle with addiction, withdrawal and her successful recovery from opioids. Her mission now is to end the stigma attached to addiction. She is using her voice to educate others as a way to honour those who have lost their battle with addiction and whose voices have been silenced forever.

STAY WELL STAY HAPPY KEEP WRITING!

**Deadline for submissions for January is
Friday, December 24.**

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

*“The new year stands before us,
like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written.”*
— Melody Beattie

