

Stories

poetry, prose, and personal reflection

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*As a writer, you try to listen to what others
aren't saying ... and write about the silence.*

~ N.R. Heart

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Publisher

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Stories is published monthly, on the first day of each month. Submissions are due no later than 10 days prior to the date of publication.

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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Table of Contents

Poetry

In Silence, Draw Near, by Lisa Browning	13
Spring, by Colleen Heighington	14

Prose

Nightshade in the Garden, by Brenda Cassidy.....	8
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Personal Reflection

Covid Reflections, by Lisa Browning	12
Fairy Tales, Princesses, and Prancing Unicorns, by Bill Brubacher.....	6
Opening a Can of Worms, by Carrie Hamer-Jonkhout.....	1
What Does It Mean To Write? by Francine Houston	1
The Story Behind the Story: <i>Hugo and the Silver Lining</i> , by Jess Foye	4
Bruce Trail, End to End (part 8), by Clay Williams.....	10
Let Your Imagination Soar! by Sandra Wilson.....	5

The Month in Review	3
This Month's Contributors.....	16

Publisher's Ponderings



One month soon, I will actually have this magazine put live on the first of the month!!

But being as busy as I am while overwhelming at times, is a great “problem” to have ... as it is an indication of how many people have reached out because they want to ... you guessed ... share their story and speak their truth.

Spring has always been my favourite time of year ... such hope and promise of renewal! It has been wonderful to see all the birds, bunnies and chipmunks back in my yard ... although I’m not so sure yet about the skunk and the raccoon who have apparently taken up residence under my deck.

I also had the “pleasure” (which it became after I got over the initial terror!) of trying to help nurse a baby mouse back to health, after I found it struggling in my basement. I’ve had mouse in my basement on occasion, and have always been somewhat fearful of them. I guess it’s different because this particular mouse needed help. Interesting.

Sadly, after rallying and becoming full of energy, on the day I had planned to let him loose outside, he suddenly died. He is now buried in one of my back gardens, with my Francis of Assisi statue marking his place. And I’m sure I will remember that experience always, every time I look out at that spot in my garden. Hmmm ... I think that just might be another children’s story in the making!

Lisa



What Does It Mean to Write?

Francine Houston

The Universe has an interesting way of helping us out. I have been thinking about the prompt for weeks. I have had a number of false starts, trying to create coherent thoughts around this topic. Then, it happened: I was talking to someone I haven't spoken to in several years. She shared the changes in her life, and I told her about the recent changes in mine, as one does after a time apart. She and I had never been particularly close, and she was not aware that I journaled, much less that I had aspirations of writing full time (among other interests). When I shared that I was in the process of creating and expanding my business, which includes, among other things, a component of ghostwriting, as well as writing my own stories and that I was currently working on 2 books, she was quite surprised.

Then, she asked a question: How do you do that? To be honest, my answer was a little bit glib at first: with pen and paper, or the computer sometimes. She got "that look" on her face. I don't think I realized that she wanted a real answer. You see, she was one of those people who doesn't and never has journaled. I remembered that in university, she took a program and courses that had a minimum of writing: no essays, and only short answer questions, because this was not something she had any desire for or interest in. To be honest, I think the idea of putting thoughts on paper was completely intimidating to her, although I didn't understand that at the time. When I realized that she was completely genuine and looking for a real answer, I had to sit quietly for a minute or two: not WHY do I write, which is what would have come out first, but I never have thought about the HOW, not really.

When I ghostwrite, I say that I "put on" the hat of the client and write, meaning that I try to put myself in the mindset of the client to effectively "channel" their perspective. I realize that for most people that answer doesn't really make sense, and when I said that, the look on her face certainly brought that home.

So I tried to frame it in a different way. The quote came to me again: I write in the silence between the words. It still didn't fully make sense to her, because she doesn't like to write, and finds no joy in it, even now. For me, the words and the meaning behind them, comes in the breath between the sentences, and in the pause. When I write, I seek the space between the stars, and sit in that expanded moment. The deeper expression of Universal Truths flood in: in sights, in souls and most deeply, in the feelings.

I'm still not sure she fully understood, but I saw, just for a moment, that flicker of feeling behind her eyes, and through her heart: she felt, I think that it was akin to what she feels when she is digging through forensic accounting files; that KNOWING of what is, what calls deeper and that speaks into the silence between: between the words, between the worlds, between the tangible, and that sits in the space and silence of the intangible.

* * *

Opening a Can of Worms: The Unexpected Journey Towards My Self-Worth ***Carrie Hamer-Jonkhout***

That statement has to be the truest phrase I could use when thinking back on my experience writing a story for the anthology on how pets have helped to heal us. At first, I was just excited about the opportunity to fundraise for an organization very close to my heart. Then as I started to compile things in my head I started to see the struggles I was going to have to work through in order to make it happen.

I always knew I wanted to be able to share my story about how animals have helped me through my mental health issues but I could never figure out what I wanted to say, or how to have it make sense to others. That, and trying to work through the fear of judgement—yes that's right, I said it, JUDGEMENT.

Mental health still has such a stigma attached to it, and I was fearful that by sharing my story, people I knew might look at me differently. They might judge me on my history, or the things they thought were happening vs the reality I was actually living in. I knew I needed to share my story, both to support others, and also as a cleansing part of my own journey to healing.

When Lisa approached me about writing a story for the latest Sharing anthology, I was open to it, but needed to figure out what story to tell. Did I tell the “real” story, the one where I was vulnerable and transparent, or did I choose to live in the “normal” and share parts of the story that would make people smile and feel good, without having to showcase my true struggles. Did I choose to be authentic and stand in my power today, or did I let myself be pulled back down into the ‘what ifs’ that dictated my life for so long.

In the end, I was able to put together into words, the story of my mental health struggles, and how my horses have helped to heal me. It required me to sit in silence, truly contemplate where I was currently, and where I had come from. I took the time to really immerse myself in my memories, pull the things out of the “hidden closets of my mind”, and really get honest with my past. I won’t say that the story came together in one fell swoop. It definitely required multiple sittings, re-readings, and a whole heck of a lot of vulnerability, but in the end, I was proud of what I had put together.

Knowing that the funds I was going to be able to raise for the organization I volunteer with (Collie Rescue Network) is what kept me going through the hard parts. I knew that if I could just put into words what I had experienced, then maybe it would help someone else (or someone they knew), and that in turn, I’d be able to give back to the organization that gave me my beautiful dog Atlas.



When it came time to share the books after they were published, it was another small hurdle to conquer. Now I had to share publicly that I was part of a book about mental health struggles. I wanted SO BADLY to be that person, the one I was inside, the one that could stand up and say “look at me, I did this” but I was scared. I hesitated, I talked to myself in a negative way, and I created more worries than I did excitement. Once I sat back and realized what was happening, I chose to change the narrative. I stepped away from the “what ifs” and started to think “what next” instead.

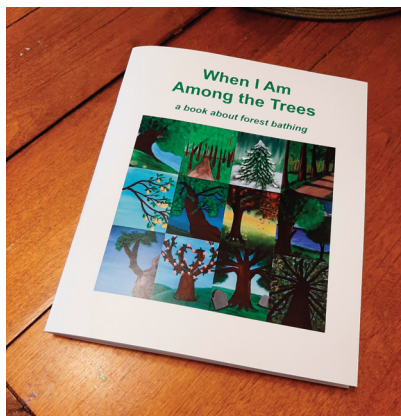
What next? Would it be a bunch of money to help animals in need?

What next? Would it be knowing that my story helped someone else to overcome something they were struggling with?

What next? Would someone share with me how they also felt the same way in their younger years?

After working through those thoughts, I started to see how I probably couldn’t change the world with just one story, but that maybe my story could change the world for even one person. Once I realized that was what could happen, all the other fears started to dissipate.

MONTH IN Review



Hot off the press in April:

Left: *Hugo and the Silver Lining* by Jess Foye (Saplings)

Middle: *When I Am Among the Trees*, a book about forest bathing (Saplings)

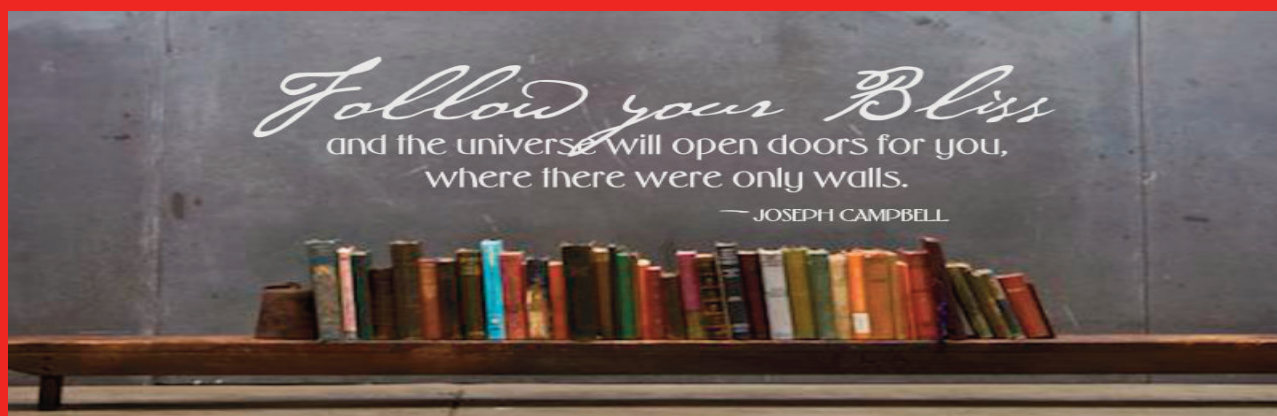
Right: *With Open Hearts*, stories of gratitude and inspiration (One Thousand Trees)



We're planning on hosting a book sale!

When: Sunday, June 26, 2-5pm

Details in our June issue!



I realized that my story was still important, that my journey was still moving forward, and that I needed to share where I had come from. It's been about 5 months since the books were published. I sold out of my first case of books, and had to order more. I'm hoping that by the end of summer, I'll have finished selling the remaining books and can make another large donation to Collie Rescue network, along with another organization that I've recently become involved in (more on that later...)

Once I finally realized that opening a can of worms was only the starting point to my journey with this anthology, it gave me the courage to keep going and to go on an unexpected journey into more self-discovery, and in turn, an increase in self-confidence and a reminder of my self-worth as well.

So If you are ever asked to step out of your comfort zone and share something with others for the greater good, make sure you genuinely think about it. You might be surprised by what you discover about yourself along the way!

* * *



Hugo and the Silver Lining

Jess Foye

I wrote *Hugo and the Silver Lining* thinking of children in foster care, yet it evolved into much more. Children in foster care are met with a unique set of challenges, often finding themselves in more adult situations in terms of subject matter than they have

the skills to adjust to. As a former foster child myself, I can remember well the situations leading up to and while in the system. While I was blessed with not one, but two amazing foster families during my 2 year stay, it's unavoidable to have some struggles while adjusting to new environments (and families). Even if a child were to have the best foster family there is, there are situations which a child in distress will find extra challenging.

The amount of foster families have also not kept up with the increase in foster children over the past few decades, which have left alternative resources (such as group homes) with the task of housing the remaining youth in need. Our at-risk youth in these situations often lack the tools and guidance needed to become happy, healthy, and functioning adults due to the fact they were never taught or given the tools necessary to flourish. A lot of skills taught in therapy to adults are at times things that could have been instilled during the early years of childhood and are often missed.

While in group therapy I often wondered how our society would look as a whole if we had more supports towards our children and youth; most of the coping mechanisms taught in therapy were things many of us missed during our most crucial developmental years. I hope to contribute to early intervention by teaching mindfulness skills to children through my stories and illustrations.

Left untreated, ineffective coping strategies in children contribute to poor mental health in adults, eventually leading to higher rates of homelessness and mental health concerns, substance abuse, and so on. I wrote and illustrated *Hugo and the Silver Lining* in hopes to help combat all these things through early intervention and assistance. I initially conceptualized this book with the struggles of one group of children in mind, yet as I developed the story it became clear that challenging situations and struggles are universal to being human, and skills to further ourselves and our responses can be used by anyone in any situation. It's not exclusively children in foster care that mindfulness

and meditation benefit, but anyone no matter their mental strength or lack of stress can benefit from having a clear mind and more effective coping strategies.

Hugo and the Silver Lining follows the story of a dog who finds himself in a very similar situation as thousands of children who are placed in care often do. Used to his life on a rural farm, Hugo goes through feelings of confusion and anxiety as a stranger shows up one day to take him to his “forever home.” The story follows the young dog in his new home with his new owner where he experiences feelings of fear and loneliness, the situation and emotions both being all too familiar with children in care upon being placed in either emergency or long term placements. Not after long Hugo meets some outside critters who become fast friends while teaching him some basic mindfulness techniques along with the message to always look for the silver lining, the positives in seemingly negative situations.



* * *



Let Your Imagination Soar! **Sandra Wilson**

At the beginning of the pandemic I started following some painting tutorials through Social Art and Michelle the Painter and I really started to enjoy painting. It was while doing one of these painting tutorials that I was inspired to make a creative writing book for kids.

It was a concept by artist Michelle the Painter. She posted her painting tutorial on YouTube for people to follow along at home. Flight of the Imagination had a bird carrying a person on a swing over some amazing landscape. As I painted, I wondered about how I would feel on this journey, what I would see, what kind of adventure this would be...well my imagination soared with ideas. The painting gave me the idea for the book, *Let Your Imagination Soar* (and that painting is on the cover!). I thought if the painting inspired my imagination to think of an adventure story perhaps, I could offer paintings to kids that inspired them to write stories.

I continued to follow more of Michelle's painting tutorials and continued to be inspired. There were paintings that made me think of characters, of

settings, of situations. There were paintings that reminded me of classic stories, that brought memories to mind. These ideas all started to come together into a book that could build storytelling skills in kids.

I started creating lessons to teach kids how a story is inspired and then would offer a painting to illustrate this idea. I would include a painting with questions they could ask themselves and that could lead to a wonderful story idea. These writing prompts helped develop their characters and settings but also would show the importance of emotions and point of view in a story.

Each section of the book offers some insight as to how a story can be inspired by the world around us. Then there is a painting and questions to encourage kids to use the image as a story starter. The goal of the book is to show the reader how to find ideas to help write a story, to encourage them to explore their imagination, and to inspire them to create. (There are even suggestions to inspire them to create paintings of their own!)

The idea is to encourage the reader to enjoy exploring their imagination, learning to see the world a little more differently, and maybe write a story or two. Kids are encouraged to write a bit, leave it alone, and come back and write some more. Most of all they are encouraged to enjoy the process, get excited about writing stories, and celebrate inspiration! I am hoping kids will send me some of their finished stories so I can create a follow-up book that features these wonderful tales.

* * *

Creativity is contagious, pass it on!

Albert Einstein



Fairy Tales, Princesses, and Prancing Unicorns

Bill Brubacher

The evening movie was about to begin. I sat alone as usual at the back of the sparsely-filled theatre in anticipation of seeing *The Student Prince*, one of the popular ‘fairy-tale’ musicals of the day.

Going to the movies especially musicals was a cherished escape from a very young age. Later, as I grew older into my teens, and even to this day in my seventies, my enchantment of the ‘big screen’ has never changed.

It’s such a delight to sit cozily sequestered in a nearly empty theatre auditorium, awaiting the flight of my spirit into the fantasy world of movie intrigue and glamour, unexpected thrills and romance, in all its forms and genres.

In my opinion, there’s nothing to compare to the magical larger-than-life movie experience sparking my insatiable imagination.

Tonight, the lights had just begun to flicker dim and the curtain slowly rise when my eyes saw swift movement along the aisle to my right, and to my surprise, I suddenly saw her.

My heart skipped a beat and my breath abruptly stopped. I recognized her from another world and only from a safe, admiring distance, at my high school. I was a 'loner': very shy, introverted and highly sensitive, with no friends. I was also taking private music lessons, and had little time for special interest clubs, sports or social activities like dances where one could connect easily and naturally with fellow students. I wasn't very 'visible' or available to attract the sight or attention of a pretty young girl no matter how strong my will or desire.

And there she was. Where had she come from? Why was she here and alone, in this of all places? I bowed my head to avoid the blush reddening my face hoping she wouldn't see me – yet desperately wanting to be seen, to be able to shout out, "Here, here I am, back here!"

She slid lightly into one of the empty seats closer to the centre of the theatre where she could get a full view of the screen.

The movie started and Mario Lanza's hypnotic voice enthralled my soul with the heart-moving songs and gut wrenching love story of dreams thwarted, then finally fulfilled.

Throughout the movie two conflicting scenarios were competing for my attention, the powerful and dramatic one playing out on the screen and the other compelling and distracting one in my mind.

Time stood still, or at least I wanted it to, and to never end. I simply wished to bask in this exciting and enchanting moment of unfolding possibilities. The inner struggle continued until suddenly the movie ended with the memorable songs still ringing in my ears as the dark burgundy curtain was slowly sinking into the stage.

The beaming bright lights sent shivers of shock through my senses like a heart-paddle, jolting my life back to the terrifying moment of reality.

I secretly feared this time would come and had pushed the dread thought aside. As I scrambled to pull myself together, my heart was swamped in waves of panic, wondering what would happen next. Suddenly, this was a new set and a new 'play', in which she and I were the only two 'characters' left 'on this side of the 'stage' waiting for another invisible curtain to rise and a new scenario to begin with the potential of a 'fairy tale ending' for the two of us, as well.

Was this co-incidence or destiny I wondered? (*This question would echo in my mind for years to come.*) Surely this was beyond the chance of co-incidence; otherwise, how could the fates have put me in such a promising position without the intention of fulfilling a miracle? The stars must have been aligned in my favour for a reason.

The auditorium quickly emptied and then unexpectedly, her breathtaking shape sailed smoothly by me with what I saw as a slight smile parting her beautiful lips. Or, was I simply imagining it? My legs went weak and I felt myself sinking uncontrollably beneath the unfathomable grey depths of my seat.

It only took a fleeting moment and then she disappeared into the darkness of the night from whence she had come, like an angel.

My head was swooning until I noticed a light crimson mohair scarf beckoning me, like a small bouquet of flowers, softly spilling over the back of her seat. My heart leapt skyward. I nearly ran to recover it, hoping the spell wouldn't be broken by her re-appearance to claim it.

As I drew closer, there was the subtle aroma of lilacs in the air drawing my spirit into a glorious sun-bathed spring meadow painted by Monet. I totally surrendered to the timeless sweet-smelling meadow and couldn't remember returning home.

Next day at school, my moment of destiny finally came. I waited in the area where I hoped she might be and when she suddenly appeared, I made my

move, pushing myself into her view *token* scarf in hand.

The soft and shy words that came out of my mouth completely betrayed my desire to impress her with the fairy-tale words I had chosen to win her heart.

Instead, I was so overcome by a feeling of silent helplessness, the strength of the spell was broken all, in a life-changing second. I found myself fleeing the scene feeling both my fairy-tale princess, and 'fate' shaking their heads in disappointment and disbelief with sadness beyond words.

Our paths never crossed again, yet I learned one of the best lessons of my life, that while fate can bring the fairy-tale stage to the fore, the actors must play their parts, to bring the fortunes of their 'destiny' to fruition.

Moreover, the real magic of the 'play' is to be found in the 'wings' of one's courage to transform that special 'unicorn' moment of life, into the fairy-tale ending of one's dreams.

* * *

Nightshade in the Garden

Brenda Cassidy

“Isn't this great, Jonathan? I have my own patch of garden for my flowers, and you have your own space for making roads for your little cars. Dad said we can have our own space every year, as long as we stay out of his vegetables.”

“Yeah, that's great, Kelly, but why is your spot bigger than mine?”

“That's because you're only seven, and I'm six years older.”

“I wish we were twins, Kelly.”

“Sorry, Jonathan. We both have blond hair and blue eyes, and skinny legs, but we'll never be the same age.” Kelly went back to concentrating on smoothing out the dirt for her garden. She had picked out all the stones and weeds, and planned on planting the seeds tomorrow. She was determined to grow the most beautiful flowers anyone would ever see.

Just then, Kelly heard a jingling noise and looked up. A stone-faced old man was standing on the other side of the fence that separated their lot from his. With him was an enormous black dog. Jonathan moved over to where Kelly sat.

“Who's that?” he whispered.

“It must be old Mr. McAllister,” Kelly whispered back. “Dad says he hardly ever comes out of his house. And he never talks to anyone.”

“What are you doing there?” the old man asked, in a rather demanding voice. Without waiting for an answer, he continued, “What do you think of my new dog? Don't worry; he won't hurt you much—just bite your legs off, that's all. You better be making sure you don't come near my yard.” He turned to leave. “Come on, Nightshade!” he called to his dog.

Kelly watched as the old man and his dog disappeared from sight. What a name for a dog, she thought. Nightshade is something poisonous. Kelly shivered and looked at Jonathan, whose mouth was hanging open. “Don't worry, Jonathan. He's just a mean, grumpy old man.”

“Gee Kelly, do you think his dog would really bite our legs off?” Jonathan asked, his eyes as wide as saucers.

“Naw! Our legs are too skinny. He'd want something fatter and juicier than us,” replied Kelly, hoping to make Jonathan feel better.

The next morning, Kelly was up bright and early. It was seed planting time. She packed a picnic lunch and

hurried out of the house. Jonathan caught up with her halfway down the long path that led to the garden.

Kelly worked hard all morning, stopping only when lunchtime arrived. She was lost in her thoughts as she sat eating her sandwich beside Jonathan. A jingling noise sounded behind her, causing her to jump up and turn around. She caught Jonathan's arm and put her hand over his mouth. Standing a few feet from them was the old man's dog. He must have gotten through the fence somehow.

"Don't move, Jonathan," Kelly whispered. The dog sat down and stared at them for what seemed like forever. Kelly was finding it hard to continue to stay so still. Her face turned red as she clenched her fists. "This is ridiculous!" she sputtered. "I'll be darned if all I'm going to end up having in my garden is Nightshade!"

Kelly then picked up a bologna sandwich and held it out to the dog. "Here, Nightshade!" she called, her voice quivering. Kelly looked at Jonathan and smiled. Nightshade was wagging his tail. He stood on his hind legs and made funny little barking noises.

"He's asking for the sandwich!" Jonathan said, his face relaxing.

Kelly tossed the sandwich, and Nightshade jumped up and caught it. He gobbled it down in one bite. "He sure is hungry," said Jonathan. "You'd better give him something else in case he starts thinking about our legs."

"Hush, Jonathan!" Kelly said, as she clapped her hands. "Here, Nightshade! Here, boy!"

"What are you doing, Kelly?" Jonathan said, looking frightened.

"It's okay," Kelly said, as Nightshade wagged his tail and licked her face. "See? That old man was just trying to scare us."

"But why?" asked Jonathan.

"I'm not sure," Kelly answered. "But we're not going to let him ruin our summer projects. We're going to show old Mr. McAllister that he can't scare us anymore. I can't wait to see his face when he opens his door and sees us with his *ferocious* dog."

Kelly led the way through a hole in the fence. As she approached the old man's door, her stomach flip-flopped and her mouth felt dry. She was tempted to run back to their own yard, but when she looked down at Jonathan, he was looking proudly up at her. She forced herself to knock on the door. She was about to knock again when Nightshade jumped up against the door, causing it to swing open. He ran into the house. Kelly stood at the open door, with Jonathan hiding behind her.

"Mr. McAllister!" Kelly's voice came out in a whisper. "Mr. McAllister!" she called, finding her voice again. Nightshade was barking loudly from inside the house. Kelly cautiously crept through the doorway. She walked through the kitchen and called louder this time.

"I'm down here!" called a voice.

Kelly stopped at a door where Nightshade was sitting. She reached out and slowly opened the door. Kelly gasped. There, lying at the bottom of the basement stairs, was old Mr. McAllister.

"Well, don't just stand there with your tonsils showing!" Call an ambulance!" he ordered. Kelly did just that and then went down to the basement.

"How did you know to come?" asked Mr. McAllister, looking puzzled and a lot less scary.

"I didn't," said Kelly. I was bringing your dog home. He was in our garden."

"Really? And you didn't bite his legs off, I see," said Mr. McAllister, with a twinkle in his eye.

The ambulance attendants arrived and put Mr. McAllister on a stretcher. As they were about to put him in the ambulance, he turned to Kelly. “You wouldn’t be too afraid to watch Nightshade for me ‘til I get home, would you, Kelly?” he asked, with apologetic eyes.

“No, I won’t be afraid, Mr. McAllister,” said Kelly, with a mischievous grin. “Your bark is worse than his bite.”

The old man smiled for the first time, and waved goodbye.

* * *

Bruce Trail, End to End (Part 8)

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.

When we started this quest, I didn’t think that driving my car was going to be such a big part of it. Our first couple of weekends of hiking were up on the Bruce Peninsula from Tobermory towards Wiarton and we were aware that it was a long drive up there, so we made sure we did long hikes to “economize”. I mean, who wants to drive five hours, round trip, just to do a four hour hike? When we restarted in “Southern Ontario” after Debbie’s surgery, we would drive two vehicles for an hour to the end point of our hike, leave my car there, and drive Debbie’s car to the start point to start the hike. When we had hiked to the end point we would drive my car back up to the start point then drive our two vehicles back home. The shortest time we ever spent driving one-way was 30 minutes, and we’re gradually moving to trail sections that are further and further from home. We’re at a point now where the one-way trips are over 90 minutes. As we are working our way northward, I’ve

been driving on the same section of Sideroad 20 for several weeks, it feels almost like my daily commute to work.



On March 12th, there was a little fresh snow that had fallen overnight, so the drive up to the trail was on snow covered roads. But during the drive back home there were a dozen times when I was seriously contemplating pulling over to the side of the road and spending the night in the car. There was very heavy snowfall and the wind was so strong that it was whipping up the fresh snow and in the areas of the road where there were no trees on either side, I couldn’t see more than a few feet in front of the car. Total white-out. I could see that the little bit in front of the car was flat, but I couldn’t see sideways very far so I couldn’t see where the edges of the road were. I hadn’t driven in this kind of “weather” since moving away from Thunder Bay, so I spent most of the drive leaning forward in my seat trying to see anything in front of me, and holding onto the steering wheel with white knuckled hands in case I had to do some crazy emergency maneuver.

The next weekend our start point was on a road called Centre Road. We usually navigate to our parking spots using Google maps, and it’s often difficult to

know in what condition the roads are and how hilly they are. It turns out that Centre Road is VERY hilly and curvy, and gradually dwindles down to a one lane road. As we were driving from our end point to our start point, I was navigating. Debbie was driving and I felt it was a little too fast for the snow covered curvy hilly road conditions. I was getting so nervous that at one point as we were going down a hill toward a sharp curve I asked her to slow down because she was scaring the sh&%t out of me. When we arrived at our parking spot we both agreed it was the sketchiest road we had driven on so far.

Day 16, March 12th: We hiked through Mono Mills and the Glen Haffy Conservation Area. We were joined by our friend Rhonda and her teenage son Izzy.



Our pace was a little slower than usual, and although the temperature wasn't very low, we weren't heating up much for exertion and were quite cold by the time we were done. That was the day that I learned you can make a raspberry sound on many different body parts. It was a slow hike, but we had a lot of laughs.

Day 17, March 13th: I think it was on this day that we realized that we won't finish by July 17th, our target "one year" completion date, we'll have to add some time. It was a little disappointing to have our goal out of reach, so we were a little less talkative that

day. We pushed hard all day and kept a pretty fast pace. The footing was mostly good except for the edges of some fields that had some drifting snow. One place with lots of soft drifts was near Hockley Valley, and there was a sign saying that access was granted courtesy of Hockley Valley Convention Centre. Walking through these drifted areas was difficult, with each step we would break through the crust of snow and sink knee deep. We joked for the rest of the day about how unimpressed we were with their trail maintenance, knowing full well that there is no such thing as winter trail maintenance on the Brue Trail.

Day 18, March 19th: We hiked through Boyne Valley Provincial Park and Mono Cliffs Provincial Park. Right from the start of our hike that day, Debbie seemed a little stressed. Her house was in the middle of repairs after a flooded basement, and she had a lot of things going on. A few kilometres into the hike we stopped for a pee break and Debbie lost a glove. Then with soft snow on the trail making for poor footing, her hip became very sore quite early. Ultimately Debbie stopped early, I ran to the car with plans to go back and pick her up. When I got to the car, I got stuck in the slippery spring mud of the parking lot, and spent 45 minutes digging myself out with a snow brush. I had to use the little triangular snow scraper on the end of my snow brush to dig a trench in the mud. By the time I got back to Debbie she was cold and already walking down the road toward me. During the day there was also rain and fog, and just gloom. It just seemed like one of those days that starts out poorly and doesn't get any better. Debbie returned to finish the section the following Wednesday.



Day 19, March 27th: We started near Honeywood, a tiny hamlet with a few houses and a community centre with a parking lot that was jammed with cars and pickups. It looked like a busy place for such a small community. It had been quite warm for several days, then in the morning before we started our hike it got really cold again and there was quite a bit of fresh blowing snow. The temperature was -8°C or so and it was really windy all day with lots of drifts and slippery footing. It seemed like we did a lot of climbing that day, so much that we had three bacon stops. I've told you about the bacon, right?

* * *

Covid Reflections

Lisa Browning

*Hope is the thing with feathers,
that perches in the soul,
and sings the tune without the words
And never stops, at all.
~ Emily Dickinson*

I have never been one to watch the news very much. And so, on March 17, 2020, when we received an email at work stating that "if you are not feeling well, go home" I was a bit surprised. I went into my manager's office and asked, "Do I really have to go home?"

"I don't know how you feel," she said.

"Well, I don't feel great," I replied.

"Then go home."

There was nothing seriously wrong with me ... I was just feeling a little run down. But I did what I was told, and I went home. The next day, I was back at work, but not for long. We received another email, stating that we were all to go home, and would be working from home until further notice. It was then that I learned about Covid.

I never would have guessed that we'd still be dealing with this more than two years later. I, and many others, thought March Break 2020 might be extended, to keep the kids out of school, but then everything would go back to normal.

And here we are ... As I write this, it is two years and one month to the day, since I was sent home, and the world changed. It hasn't been easy, by any stretch of the imagination. Because I live alone, I found it especially difficult not being able to socialize with people, and having no one to talk to except by phone or over zoom. The most difficult challenge for me, though, was having to come face to face with those thoughts and feelings that I had stuffed deep inside. But when you're alone, with no distractions, you eventually realize you have no choice but to face those things you tried so hard to avoid.

In retrospect, it was the best thing that could have happened to me. As Brené Brown says, "Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light." I carried that lesson with me, through the isolation that Covid forced upon us all.

I confronted fear, anger, and hopelessness, just as so many others did. As a publisher, I found it fascinating how many people approached me about publishing a book during the last two years .. and especially how many people were interested in publishing poetry. I firmly believe that people need to tell their stories, to express themselves, to be heard. Especially during the times like we have just been through.

My second grandchild was born during Covid (funny, isn't it, how we refer to Covid as a period of time now?). I have a photo of my daughter wearing a mask while holding her newborn baby. What a story she will have to tell my granddaughter, about the day she was born! I published a book of stories written by mothers who gave birth during the last two years. Amazing, sad, yet full of hope too, I think.

A few weeks ago, I noticed a mourning dove sitting in a planter on my front porch. I didn't think too much about it (other than how beautiful the dove was) until I noticed, a week or so later, two eggs lying in a nest in the planter. I was excited, full of hope, waiting to see those eggs hatch. I have numerous bird feeders in both my front and back yards. Birds are such a blessing to me.



I became more and more concerned when the mother dove did not return to the nest. One day, after the unexpected cold and snow we experienced a week or so ago, I saw that the eggs had frozen and cracked. Yesterday, I watched a dove walking along my front pathway, close to that nest. I choose to believe it was the mother, longing for her babies.



"Life is difficult," said Scott Peck. Yes, it is. And it has been especially difficult during the last two years. But we must hold on to hope. We all will continue living post-Covid ... perhaps with a new perspective and new values, which is not a bad thing at all. The mother dove will no doubt lay more eggs, and have more babies. And hope will live on.

In Silence, Draw Near ***Lisa Browning***

It is not a good day,
It was not a good year,
In the darkness of soul

this I say,
this I fear

Fleeting thoughts
Fleeting passions
The remnants of days

In my mind's eye
I capture the sun
through the haze

It started in spring
and may end with the snow
Words and emotions
with nowhere to go

But there's strength in the words
and hope in the fear

If I listen, I feel it

In silence
Draw near

Spring **Colleen Heighington**

I opened up the curtains
And what did I see? ...
A robin hopping on the lawn
And staring right back at me ...

Then, it began to sing a tune
As if to say ... look around and see
That spring is coming soon ...

I looked around and beyond
And saw that the trees were budding
And in them ...
so many birds chirping spring-time songs...

I turned my head
And saw children at play
With skipping ropes, scooters and bicycles
And going on their merry - old - way!!!

I could hear laughter
And saw smiles on faces
As the people walked on by ...
They all looked so happy and content
On this spring-like day
Being I'm sure was the reason why!!!

The sun was shining ever so bright
And the skies were of a very deep blue
And what did I see? ...
The same robin staring right back at me!!!

Finally, it flew away up into the sky
Way ... way ... up ... ever so high
As if flying right up to Heaven
To let the Dear Lord know ...
That His World was being awakened ...
By blessing us with this beautiful season
of Spring below!!!





**STAY WELL
STAY HAPPY
KEEP WRITING!**

**Deadline for submissions for June is
Friday, May 27.**

Here's a quote to inspire you ...

***"I can shake off everything as I write;
my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn."***

— Anne Frank

(in commemoration of Anne Frank Day — June 12)



This Month's Contributors

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.

Jess Foye

Jess currently works in the hospitality industry after attending college for Print and Broadcast Journalism in Toronto in 2015, as well as a certification in Mental Health Support in early 2020. Born in New Westminster BC., Jess currently resides just outside of Toronto, ON., where she is also working towards returning to post-secondary to continue her education and skills to continue to assist in the mental health field and further assist children in foster care.

Carrie Hamer-Jonkhout

Carrie is an accomplished equestrian with a passion for animals of all kinds, and loves being able to give back. She has found her passion in the goal of helping others to live their lives to the fullest. She is actively involved in the Collie Rescue Network of Canada and has big dreams of how to help as many animals as she can! Carrie has a BA in History and can often be found watching random documentaries on Netflix, or curled up somewhere with a good book when she's not out walking her sweet Rough Collie Atlas, having a day-date with her husband Jason, or out at the barn with her lovely Quarter Horse River.

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.

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.

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.