

# WRITING THROUGH TIME



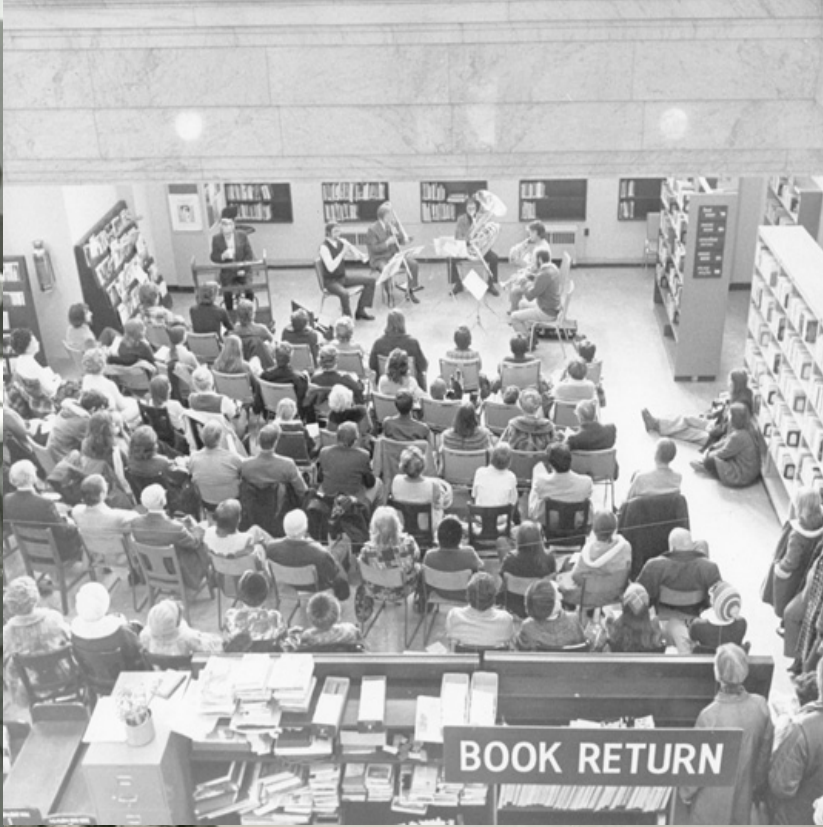
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# FOREWORD

This third and final issue of *Writing Through Time* is the output of a community engaged project offered in partnership with McMaster University's Reading Lab, the Seniors' Computer Lab Project and Hamilton Public Library. *Writing Through Time* brought together community members of Hamilton, Ontario and McMaster University students for intergenerational storytelling and digital skill learning,

Participants of this program worked together over several weeks to put together a collection of stories that were inspired by historical photos from the Hamilton Public Library's Local History and Archives and their own lives. This process involved first learning how to use video conferencing tools and navigating new websites, and then recording writing digitally, all while sharing experiences with other storytellers.

We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to all who participated in this program throughout the last year. It has been a joy to get to know you through your storytelling and put together three incredible publications with you. Thank you for creativity, enthusiasm, and guidance throughout the program.

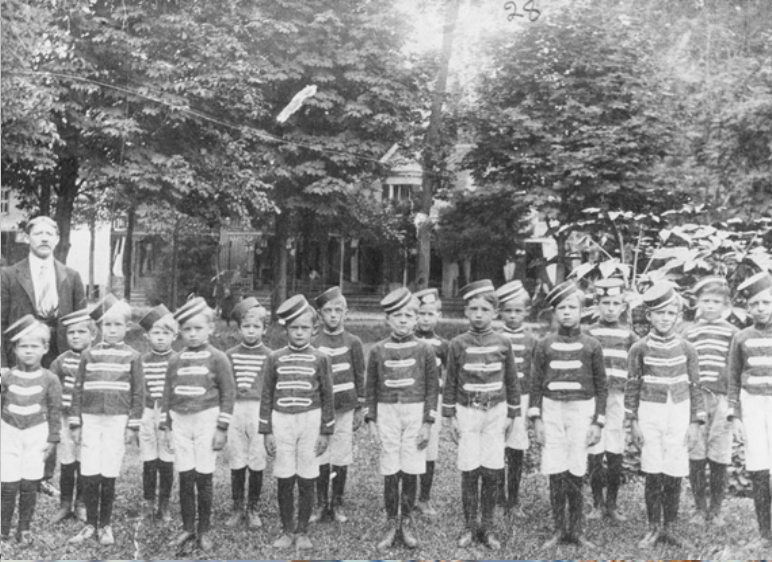
We would also like to thank Eniola Bode-Akinboye (BA, McMaster University), Adrienne Yau (BSc, McMaster University), Allyson Appleton (BA, McMaster University), Emilie Altman (MSc, McMaster University), Raghad Elgamal (PhD, McMaster University), Erica Conly (Manager, Adult Program Development), Katelyn Kirk (Public Service Programmer, Customer Service, Hamilton Public Library) Allison Stockton-Aird (Manager, Adult Program Development, Hamilton Public Library), Nancy McPhee (Manager, Adult Program Development, Hamilton Public Library), Cindy Poggiaroni (Director, Collections and Program Development, Hamilton Public Library), Leora Sas van der Linden (Program Manager, Community Research Platform, McMaster University), Nancy Siciliana (Community Partner, Seniors' Computer Lab Project), and the Future of Canada Project McMaster University team: Drs. Brian Detlor, James Gillett, Ranil Sonnadara, Brenda Vrkljan, and Victor Kuperman for their valuable contributions to this project.

Writing Through Time is supported by the Future of Canada Project at McMaster University.

Sincerely,  
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*Research Assistant, McMaster University*

*Nadia Lana*  
*PhD Candidate, McMaster University*





**“Old family photo albums sometimes don’t have names attached to the faces of the people who look back at us through the passage of time. Sometimes there are mysteries contained in old photographs.”**

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# A NAME AND A FACE

by Anita Joldersma

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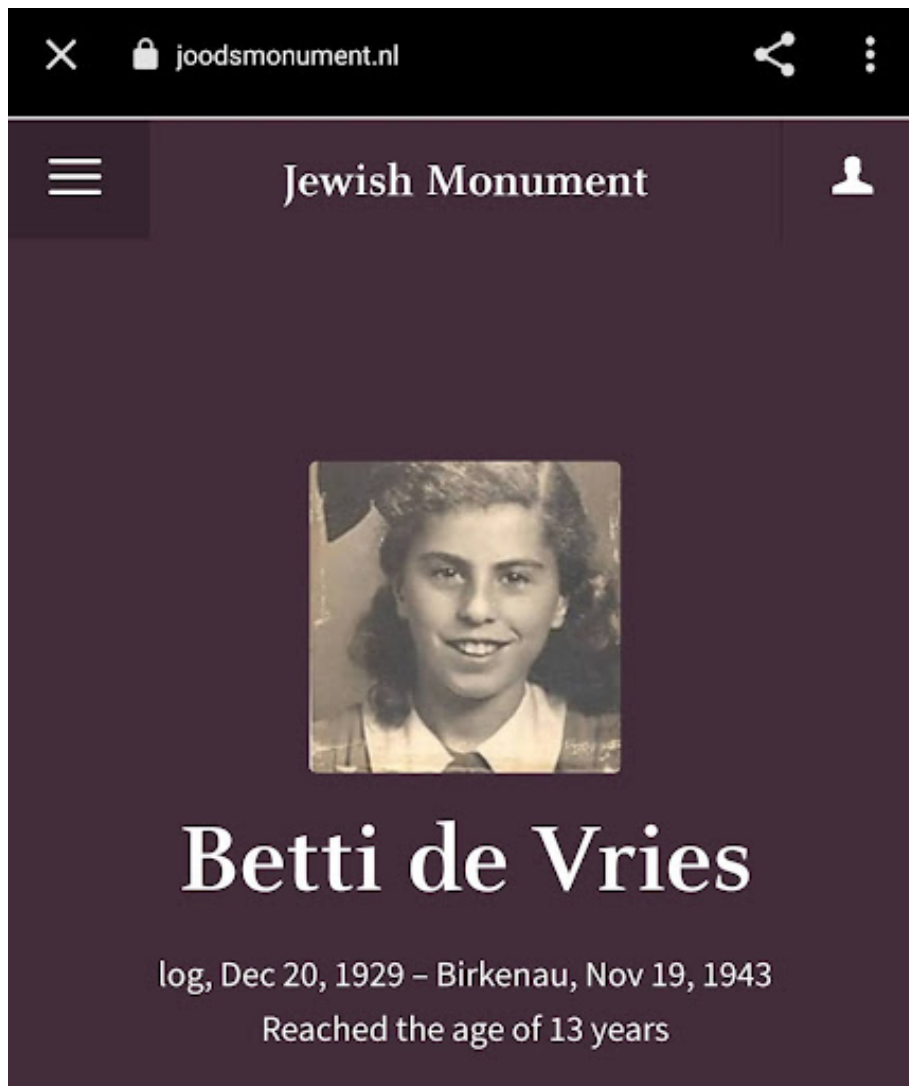
We are not sure exactly when the photograph came into her possession, but for all the time that I knew her, it was a treasured part of her photo album. Old family photo albums sometimes don't have names attached to the faces of the people who look back at us through the passage of time. Sometimes there are mysteries contained in old photographs.

During World War 2, Sjoukje lived in Musselkanaal where her family became acquainted with two young girls. They were Jewish girls and Sjoukje's family had helped hide them from the occupying forces. No one in the family could recall the names of the girls, and even if they had, the names would likely have been aliases. Names were often changed during war for everyone's protection. Somehow, the family ended up with a picture of those two girls.



The picture stayed in the family album for many years, refusing to give up its secrets. Sjoukje passed away in 2012 never knowing what happened to those two girls. The question remained - What were the names that belonged to those faces?

I had a digital copy of the photograph and one day, on a whim, I decided to do a Google Lens search to see if anything would show up. I felt shocked when the search revealed a Holocaust Memorial site which had pictures of Jewish victims. There was her picture. I finally had a name to go with one of the faces. The girl on the left was Elspeth 'Betti' de Vries.



She had been born on December 20, 1929 and died, at the age of 13, on November 19, 1943 in Birkenau, a Concentration Camp affiliated with Aushwitz. One of the reports mentioned that she had been gassed.

I went down a rabbit hole of information and, with the language barrier, it was not always clear what I was reading. I found her funeral card which stated that she was survived by her mother and Herta de Vries.

I have relatives in the Netherlands, so I sent my cousin Klaas the information I had. He sent it to his historical society friend Bas, who then sent it on to Ally, who was able to gather some more information through the A Name and a Face database. Ally sent back an email that stated that the second girl in the photograph was very likely Betti's cousin Herta.

There are a few articles about Herta that had been published that allowed me an informative peek at her life. During the war, Willem van der Zwan had come from Scheveningen, on behalf of his family, to bring Herta to live with them. In 1952, Herta and Willem were married and eventually had four children. After a long and fascinating life, Herta passed away on April 2, 2012 at the age of 89.

In Europe, there is a memorial project called Stolpersteine which, literally translated, means stumbling stone. It commemorates, with brass plate engravings, the names and dates of individuals where they last lived before they fell victim to Nazi terror. In Musselkanaal today there is a 'stolpersteine' for Betti, her father and uncle that marks where they once lived.

Our family mystery now has some answers. Betti de Vries and Herta van der Zwan are names and faces that I will not forget.

# THE CONVERSATION

by Lois Corey

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*DISCLAIMER: This is a work of fiction. While some of the historical events are true, the Names, characters and specific incidents are the products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

I was the rookie desperately trying to master a new job, eager to please. Betty had been brought in to train the new girls. She smiled into the camera while I fumbled with the equipment, flustered that my obvious ineptitude was being photographed. The photographer was a reporter from the local newspaper, covering the story of the takeover of West Garafraxa Telephone Co-op by Bell.

“It’s okay Pamela, said Betty, “Take your time. You’re doing fine.”

Five minutes later the photographer was gone, and Betty disappeared for a short coffee break. I was left alone to cope with the still confusing jumble of wires in front of me. I had managed to memorize all the numbers on the panel in front of me and was expected to connect them to each other without missing a beat as people called in. To hear the voices on the line, I simply flipped the “Listen” key.

Then came a call I will always remember.

“Operator, how may I help you?”

A brusque impatient male voice answers, “give me Melrose 7-5833 and make it fast!!”

“One moment please” “I have MELrose 7-5833 on the line, please go ahead”

Before I had time to flip back the “Listen” key, I heard these words: “Is she still on the line?” Fearing for my job I turned off the Listen key as quick and as hard as I could. This way he would hear it click and know that his conversation was now private.

But I had no time to wait and listen. Besides, we were forbidden to eavesdrop by law that is not to say we didn’t). I was expected to deal with 6-7 customers a minute. There was no room for mistakes or dilly-dallying. The calls came in like rapid fire. Being new on the job, I fumbled a bit. I accidentally flipped the listen key on the wrong plug and recognized once again the angry voice on the other end. Something made me ignore my training and stay on the line.

**“Whadya mean you can’t go through with it?! You better, I am counting on you! There will be trouble for you if you don’t!”**

**“Be at the east entrance to Stacey Park at 5:30 tomorrow night. ON THE DOT. That’s when you do it!”**

**Mortified by the nasty words I had just heard, I moved the listen key back as quickly as I could, yet softly, lest he notice.**

**In the meantime, I had two calls waiting, and rapidly went into operator mode once again. Lucky for me, Betty returned too late to witness my transgression of protocol. I tried to remember my training and work as fast as I could, but I was distracted now by the sinister words I had overheard. I made a few mistakes during the rest of my shift, but Betty put it down to being unsettled by the photographer.**

**Perhaps it was the invulnerability of youth, a naive hankering for adventure or just insatiable curiosity that propelled me to go the east entrance to Stacey Park at 5:20 the following night. I should have told someone, but I didn’t. I found a large bush, from behind which I could watch the entrance gate without myself being observed. I felt like Nancy Drew in one of the novels I had read as a child, consumed by excitement and mystery. What would happen at the gate at 5:30? depositing of a mystery bag full of money? Or perhaps even murder?! I waited breathless in my hiding place.**

**I checked my watch: 5:30 on the dot and no one came. I thought to myself, this is silly, Pamela, you should get yourself out of here and stop wasting time on ridiculous morbid fantasies!**

**Then at 5:32 a ragged looking man approached the gate, carrying what looked like a small crate. A couple approached from the other direction. I watched as the three of them sat down on a bench.**

The ragged man opened the crate – inside was a little Yorkshire Terrier. He lifted it out and gave it to the woman who cried out with joy, “Missie, you’ve come back to me!”. The ragged man looked sad. “I’m sorry Mam, I shouldn’t have taken him. I just couldn’t seem to bring myself to let go of her. I was so lonely, and she made me so happy. But your husband found me. He was really mad and made me give her back. Now she’s where she should be.”

The husband spoke and I recognized the angry voice on the phone. He didn’t sound so angry now. “Harry, thank you for doing the right thing. You have made Elsa very happy. We can let this go and let bygones be bygones.”

“Mam, you are a lucky woman, not only do you have a cute little dog, but a husband who cares enough about you that he managed to track me down and find and return your dog to you. I’ll be on my way now”.

“Wait a minute,” said the woman. It sounds like she really gave you comfort, and you were very kind to her. Maybe we can help you find a dog of your own. If you like, we can take you to the humane society where you can find your own little Missie. George, we can do that, can’t we?” she said imploringly. “well.....I guess we could” he answered.

“It’s not far, follow us.” With that they stood and all three walked off together. Well so much for the bag of money and dastardly deeds. My Nancy Drew sleuthing had taught me that things aren’t always as they appear.



# THE WOMEN ON THE BEACH

by Linda Lambert

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She watches from her balcony  
The women who stroll beside the sea  
Wondering what their stories might be  
Locked in their hearts waiting to be free  
The women on the beach

They all answered the siren call  
When first the leaves then snow did fall  
To rosy up their winter pall  
The setting sun casts shadows tall  
As they dream upon the beach

The fog rolls in and a woman dances  
Far away from judging glances  
Safe in the mist she pirouettes and prances  
Ignoring past admonishes to not take chances  
Her stage is limitless on this beach

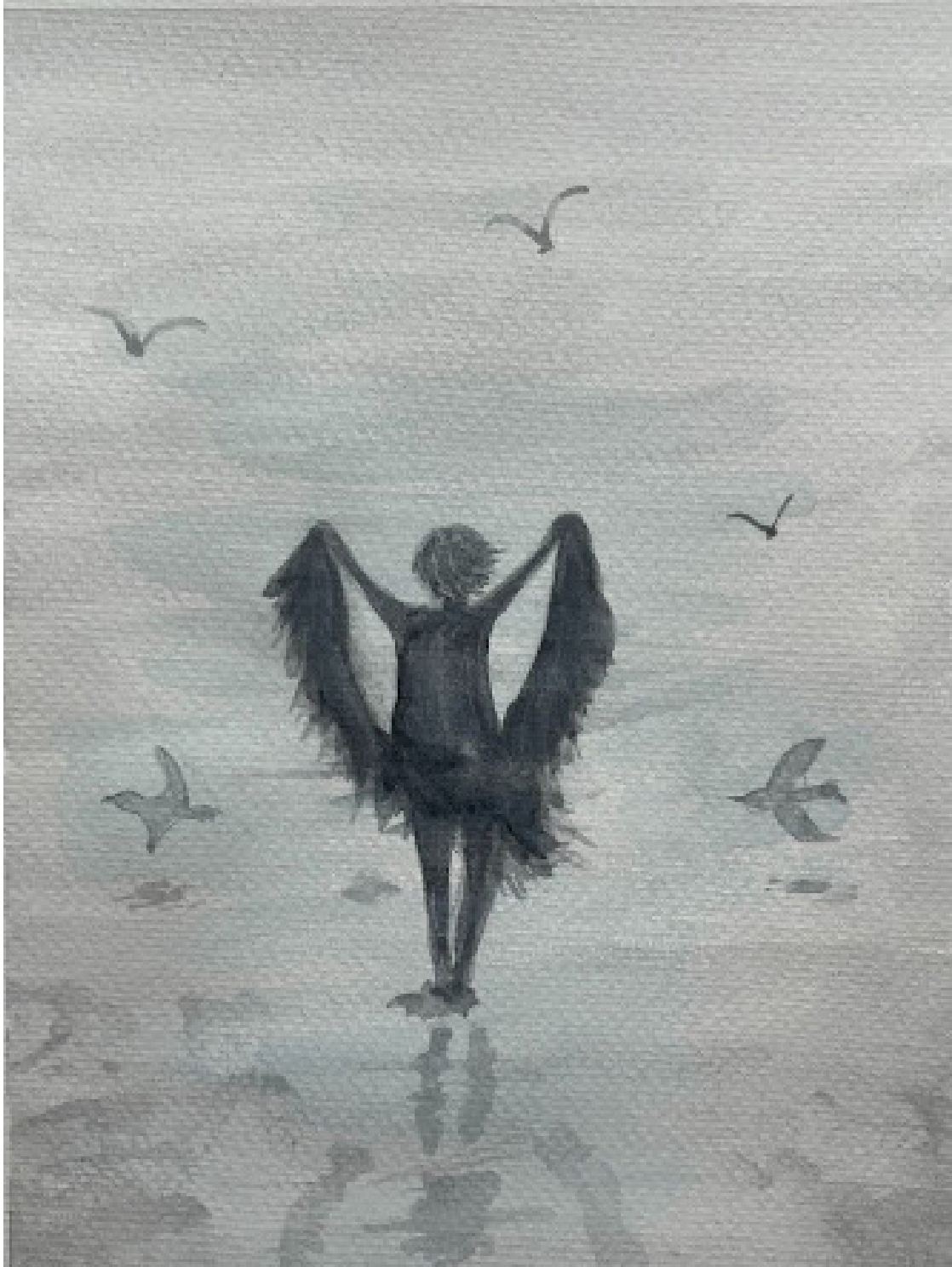
The winds toss the waves and a woman sings  
Rising to the crescendo that the breaking wave brings  
Her voice no longer silenced, is carried on angel wings  
And old inhibitions to the wind she flings  
Her voice is not lost on the beach

An old lady stoops and picks up a shell  
A moment of reprieve from her private hell  
Her daughter approaches and she feels her heart swell  
Able to banish the demons in her mind who dwell  
For an instant only on this beautiful beach

With caftan swirling and billowing around her  
The woman feels sylphlike but not demure  
The caressing winds never censure  
But instead bring a gentle pleasure  
Away from him she is beautiful on this beach

I rise and find my way to the sea  
The wind and fog conspire to free  
The shackles that others used to bind me  
My blinders are lifted, these women are all me  
Finding peace and serenity on my beach





Watercolour painting by Linda Lambert

# PIGEONMAN

by Viga Boland

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He sits on the paint-chipped park bench  
Pigeons at his feet  
Noduled hands clutching a paper bag of dried bread.

They eat lonely crumbs, leave no trace.  
While he watches, they nourish him,  
One of them,  
Gray and commonplace.

Behind them, great arthritic trees  
Note the silent exchange  
Sense their parting come about.

He lies down, dreams of pigeons.  
An old newspaper over his face  
Keeps people out.

*(Originally published in The Woman, 1976)*



# THE ENDOWMENT EFFECT

by Neil Chopp

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*This fictional piece is a chapter from a much larger story. **The Endowment Effect**, follows Randy McMichael as he investigates the origins of an evil chalice created for Jesus Christ in the first century. Randy uncovers the powers of the chalice and the destruction it has caused during the last 2000 years. He brings to light a hidden agenda of the Catholic Church to cover up the secrets of the chalice and Randy confronts his conscience and willpower when tempted by Satan. Additional excerpts of the **Endowment Effect** have been published in the **Hamilton Mountain Writers Guild Anthologies two and six** available at Amazon.*

*Neil Chopp lives in Welland. Writing has been an avenue of expression and creativity since his elementary school years. Neil has a long term goal of completing a self-help text for individuals who lose their spouse at an early age. He is actively involved in the Welland Library Writers Guild. Neil may be reached at [nchopp15@gmail.com](mailto:nchopp15@gmail.com).*

# Rainham

## March 2020

Agnes Brindle had a serious backbone inflammation that prevented her from sitting on anything other than a sturdy wood-framed chair. This was the least of her concerns for in seven minutes she would be dead. Agnes sat in her washed-out, blue night dress at the kitchen table.

She hated her old, run-down home, in fact, she hated everything. The annoying clock ticked away behind her while the blackened kettle screamed its readiness on the grimy unwashed gas stove.

She yelled to Hank, “Git yer ass out of bed and get da pot off da stove, ya lazy old coot.”

Hank, age 73 had retired 20 years past. His work life, driving, and repairing combines had destroyed his hearing.

Agnes yelled like she was being murdered, “Hank,... Hank, did ya hear me up dere?” She hated that Hank wouldn’t get a hearing aid.

“Hank, ya better...”

“Shut up, you crabby ole’ woman, I’m a-comin’” Hank shouted from the bedroom on the second floor.

Hank considered his deafness a blessing. He dragged his bare feet and cursed the uneven thirteen steps, scratching his balls through plaid coloured boxers. The muscle tank top he wore was yellowed and torn along the underarm seams. His body odour was pungent even to himself and with his right hand he rubbed his unshaven upper lip.

Agnes glanced out through the grease-coated kitchen window of the ramshackle farmhouse they’d lived in for more than 45 years. “Get da tea bag from da cupboard on da way,” Agnes demanded.

“Ya, Ya, I’ll git an old bag like you from the cupboard,” Hank grumbled to himself. “What d’ya say?” Agnes snapped back.

“I said, tea bag from the cupboard. Who really has the hearing problem?” Hank shot back as he chuckled to himself.

Hank dropped the last Rooibos tea bag into the ancient-looking cup he bought at an estate auction for a deceased acquaintance George Eastwood. Poor ole' George he thought, died in the Walkerton E. coli outbreak of 2000. His property and chattels were auctioned to pay the debt on his property. Hank recalled being at the auction, intrigued by the beautiful ancient-looking cup that he bought as a gesture for Valentine's Day. The cup had an unusually shaped handle that rose above the top edge like it had been stretched toward the sky. Hank thought it was a steal for \$5.00. He poured the hot water and returned upstairs not saying a word.

Agnes tapped the table with her nicotine-stained fingers as she waited and watched the tea surrender its flavour in red rusty swirls that spiralled in the water like blood leaking from a cloth. Impatient, she reached in with her spoon to lift the bag several times. "Ya better be dressin' Hank, so we's can go over to Muriel's and check on dem cats." Hank heard her, but didn't respond.

Agnes raised the cup to her lips and blew her stale smoker's breath across the surface to cool the first drops before they reached her tongue. Her last clear vision was of the spinning wind turbines across Kohler Road as the fiery hot liquid made her eyelids clench together. "Dammit, Hank, it's too hot!"

Agnes' eyes opened in panic with a clear view of the cup she dropped onto the table. She clutched at her neck, her throat felt like it had been torn open by a glowing hot blade. Blood quickly pooled in the back of her mouth, choking the airway. Agnes coughed. Crimson gore splattered over her outstretched arms and kitchen table as she tried to yell for Hank. Viscous blood filled the spaces of her throat and Agnes vomited. Red fluid and small pieces of her oesophagus landed in the leaf-shaped ashtray. She couldn't breathe. Blood vessels in her eyes began to pop, muscle spasms cramped her legs, and her bowels emptied.

Agnes was experiencing a most horrific death. In a final attempt at self-preservation, her body released a projectile vomit that showered blood into the cup, onto the curtains and blue flowered wallpaper. Agnes' 70-year-old heart continued to beat momentarily unaware of the trauma and then it burst as if squeezed by the hand of Satan. From the toppled ancient cup possessed by the egregious spirit of Satan, trickled Agnes' blood.

The coroner who completed the autopsy identified the cause of death as COVID-related. After being cleared of any wrongdoing in Agnes's death, Hank put the farm up for sale. His friend, Amos helped him pack and move to a decrepit apartment in Hamilton. Hank struggled with guilt for his beloved. He told friends at her funeral, "If I had only taken better care of Agnes and spent more time with her." Hoping to dull his loss Hank grabbed the familiar cup from a storage box in his apartment and filled it with a cold Lakeport. Strange he thought as time passed that night, how this cup managed to keep his ice beer cold.

Banging on the door startled Hank from his sleep. He closed his eyes and ignored the sound. Annoyed by the talking from outside and the door handle being jostled, Hank got up from his lazy boy, his lower back stiff and knees reluctant to bend. "Who is it? What do ya want?" Hank yelled from the safety of his apartment.

"Open this door old man, I moved out a month ago, yoo got my flow in there." An angry

voice called.

“Go away, there’s nothing in here that’s yours. Git lost!”

“Yoo a brave old man to talk wit me like dat. Open dis door or I’m gonna smash it down!”

“Git lost, you ass, I’ll call the police,” Hank replied.

Hank turned away, and a spray of gunshots erupted through the door and tore into his flesh. He dropped to the floor like a bull in a slaughterhouse. Hank grabbed his side. Hands filling with blood the door burst open behind him. Wood splinters and glass danced on the floor. The intruders barged in, the tall one demanded, “Where’s David? I want my flow! Tell me, I’ll put a slug in your head old man.”

The other intruder stomped upstairs calling, “David”.

Hank looked up, frightened. “I don’t understand, there’s no...” His plea was cut short by a shotgun butt to the jaw. Barely conscious, Hank heard the two men yelling at each other.

“You idiot, we’ve got the wrong shack!”

“Yoo got to doo him, bro, he saw our faces. Doo him!”

Hank heard their shoes clump on the wooden floor as he let out a groan.

Two more shotgun blasts reverberated through the small apartment and all was quiet. Hank’s oversized, blood-soaked sweater looked like a well-used pin cushion. The sheer force of the shots was enough to propel Hank’s blood and bone into the nearby cup. The scene looked like an artist’s abstract of mid-century modern furniture and colour.

The room remained locked as the coroner catalogued and then moved unnecessary items to a window ledge an arm’s length from where Hank lay in a pool of gore. Chalk lines were drawn and the police investigation began. No one in the nearby apartments was talking. Onlookers stood like statues and shared comments of disgust and fear that the city street was becoming violent.

A passerby would hardly notice the dusty, forgotten cup. It was neither attractive nor interesting waiting in the window of 305 Barton Street East. The King of Evil is certain it will only be a matter of time before His chalice is chosen once again.

# The Barton Street Cup

June 2023

The forty-three-year-old Randy McMichael, editor of the Mountain News, believed this Saturday morning would be a respite from the incessant demands of research and article writing. Randy could not have imagined the pathway he was about to confront. He listened to the group's tour guide, Anna Sparsfeld chinwag on the hidden mysteries of Barton Street East. For the next two hours, Randy would be dialled in for the seedy stories of the people and buildings in the Landsdale District of Hamilton. With the rising early-summer sun on his backside, and a large coffee in hand from the 541 Eatery & Exchange, the tour group headed west toward James Street. Anna's voice heightened with noticeable excitement as she dropped a point of interest as they walked past Wentworth Street.

"During this tour," she said, "You will cast your eyes upon a two-thousand-year-old pottery cup that has found its way to Hamilton."

Anna's raised hand showed it was time to stop on the north side of Barton in front of two vacant storefront buildings. Dirty, cracked windows and sagging structures were evidence of the ill-kept low-cost apartments. An unlikely place for a rare historical item, Randy thought. There were no historical museums or antique collectors at this end of town.

Anna pointed to a notice taped to the inside of the glass-framed door, "These two buildings behind me," she said, "will be demolished in September. Sad that buildings with such architectural heritage and history have to be destroyed to make way for condos."

Anna withdrew a small yellow, soft-covered text, titled *Ascending*, from her brown, leather satchel. Opening it to a page marked with a torn, light blue HSR bus transfer, she paused, took a deep breath, and read aloud over the sounds of intermittent traffic.

"According to legend, this cup created centuries ago, has caused havoc throughout many generations. The unfortunate folks who have drunk from the cup have died in the most mysterious ways."

"Can you tell us more about the recent people who owned the cup? A tour member interrupted."

"Why is the cup here?" Another spoke out.

In one's peripheral vision and barely noticeable, a ceramic coffee mug sat tucked away in the corner of a large window next to the weather-beaten entrance of #305. Rubbish, Randy mused. This mug is a rare artefact, passed down for generations? "Right, another morning wasted," Randy whispered to himself.

Anna answered, "The most recent owner of the cup was Hank Brindle. Shot dead inside this door in a case of mistaken identity. The coroner, Dr. Shlitzbaum, had moved the cup to the ledge where it has remained untouched. The cup has become an omen for bad luck."

Before moving on with the tour, Anna added another snippet of interest. "Folks have said, the cup is so possessed that it appears different to each beholder." As Anna turned and led the group westward, she ended this section of the tour with a closing hook. "What did the cup look like to you?"



\* \* \*

As the group walked past General Hospital, Randy overheard a couple chatting about their perceptions of the cup. “That beautiful golden ceramic chalice. Honey, did you see its mouth delicately trimmed with black opals?”

Her partner responded with a raised eyebrow. “You must’ve not slept well last night. That awful thing was a rough, muddy clay piece of junk with a cracked handle stretching high above its rim.”

Randy watched as they each raised their shoulders in unison, signifying they didn’t care to dispute the other’s opinion.

Following the conclusion of the tour, Randy gestured to Anna.

“Thank you for an interesting tour of Lansdale.”

“You’re welcome,” Anna said.

“I have one question, though. About that peculiar cup.”

“Yup, you’re not alone. Most folks want to know more. The information I shared is from the author of a story titled *The Endowment Effect*.” She removed the book from her satchel. “See,” she pointed, with her arthritic bent index finger, “The author claims this story to be factual. He has referenced an interview with a professor from McMaster University.”

Anna flipped the dog-eared, Cheetos-stained pages to the end of the story. “Let’s see, the reference, ah yes, here it is. Professor Cribstien has a doctorate with accolades for historical research on religious and cult artefacts. Doctor of Sacred Theology from the University of Edinburgh and an esteemed member of the Historical Society of Canada. Have you heard of him? He’s been in the news for a controversial translation of the scrolls of Samael.”

“Yes, I have read about him, Dr. Ron Cribstien.”

“He’s the one! During one of my tours of the Blakely District, along Maplewood Avenue, I heard he was at St. Peter’s hospice. If you are lucky enough, he may speak with you about that old wooden cup in 305.”

A wooden cup. How peculiar, Randy thought to himself. Perhaps it is true. The cup looks different to everyone.

Randy spent the next hour at the Central Library reading the short story, *The Endowment Effect*. The story described the cup’s history from the early 1800s in Ireland to the turn of the century in New York City and ended with the death of Hank Brindle in 2020. An intriguing story filled with mysticism and legend.

Later that night, Randy had a restless sleep. His mind was pummelled with unanswered questions. Where did the cup originate? Why does it look different to everyone? What horror and destruction has it caused? Randy woke in a cold sweat from a nightmare about the Barton Street Cup. While his heart rate and breathing slowed, he worked out a plan.

# THE GOOD. THE BAD. THE UGLY.

by Johanna Matthews

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## THE GOOD

August 1953. My parents, three older brothers, our baby sister and I stood on deck of the converted troop ship, Groote Bear or Big Bear for our immigration sea voyage to Canada. I was six years old.

Months of filling out immigration papers, long bike rides into the city for meetings with officials, packing and visiting grandparents to say last good-byes were now memories.

Wearing our Sunday best, we stood at the ship's railing searching the dock below for relatives and friends who had come to see us off, but who, from a distance, had shrunk into the mass of people, waving and with upturned tearful faces looking as if we were abandoning them.

Immigrating to Canada was my parents' dream and a scary lifetime adventure for my older brothers, but for me at the age of six, it was just life. I was happy to be wherever my family was, warm and safe, feeding off the adrenaline I felt from my older siblings and parents and excited about the new toy I received for the journey.

Following a difficult and stormy voyage, sorting out logistics and unpacking what had arrived, our family settled into a large farmhouse that was part of the dairy farm our dad was to manage. Dairy farming was not what my father had signed up for.

The day following the September long weekend, two of my brothers and I walked the few miles from the farmhouse, down a long driveway lined with tall maple trees on either side and scuffed our way along two dusty gravel roads to the one room schoolhouse to start the school year in our newly adopted country. I was in Grade one. We had been in Canada for eight days and spoke no English.

There were nineteen kids from the surrounding rural areas in the classroom. Miss Bell, our teacher, was young and kind. Billy and I were the only first graders. Language did

not seem to be a barrier to friendship and Billy became my best friend. I loved going to this school. My memory is that all nineteen pupils interacted easily with each other. Together, we ate our lunches and played during recess, regardless of our age or grade. Whatever language I spoke was accepted and understood.

The immigration bureaucracy had mistakenly connected our family with a sponsor who owned a dairy farm near Fergus, Ontario, although my father's schooling and work experience in the Netherlands had been as a fruit grower managing a large orchard operation.

My parents were grateful for any new beginnings but before the end of our first year in Canada, Dad was fortunate to find a position suited to his experience, managing an orchard in the Ontario fruit belt. We moved to Winona, Ontario.

And so, my two brothers and I relocated to a transitional school in Winona for a few months and in September of 1954 we enrolled in the brand-new Glover Road Elementary school that had been built to fill the demand of many families moving to a newly created urban area.



Cumnock School. S.S.No. 6 Nichol. 1953

## THE BAD

It was in grade two, at the new school, I learned that my name, Hanne, a shortened version of my given name Johanna and pronounced “Honey”, was a term of endearment and not appropriate in Canada. I informed my mother, while enjoying my after school cookie and cup of tea, I wanted to be called by my given name Johanna. Johanna was also not really a common name and the school suggested “Joanne” which became my name for many years.

The inclusive and warm experience at the one room school in Fergus had made me oblivious to the fact that English was not my first language. In the new school, I didn't understand that my unusual first name, traditional large Dutch bow in my hair and my strange way of speaking in broken English, was probably why my classmates didn't include me in their recess activities. A note to my parents, on my report card read, “Please speak more English with the children at home”.

I often stood, hands behind my back, against the red brick wall of the school, rocking back and forth, watching others play double Dutch or tag.

It was April and warm outside. After lunch I went out and picked a shady spot against the wall, rocking, watching kids in the field just off the tarmac from where I stood, playing a game with a ball.

A teacher, who monitored the section of the school yard where primary grades were not allowed, and whom I didn't know, walked over to me. “What are you doing?” he asked.

“Nothing,” I said.

He spoke harshly. I only understood:

“Go inside and sit in your classroom.”

Lunch hour was not over, and I was confused but I obeyed the teacher and followed him inside my classroom. My teacher was also angry. “Sit in your seat until the others come back in. You'll have to stay after school”.

At 3:15, the school bell rang signalling the end of the school day. The teacher pointed at me, “You have to stay,” I continued to sit.



**"Honey" Grade 2.**

**My classmates left the room, and it was quiet as I sat there waiting. Then the door opened and a dozen or so children from other primary grades started coming in. My teacher signalled me to sit at a desk other than my own.**

**When all the children were seated, my teacher and a second young female teacher pulled a study table to the front of the room, placed two chairs behind it and sat down.**

**One by one each child was called by name to stand in front of the table.**

**One by one the teachers spoke to each child about a violation.**

**One by one each child denied or apologised or cried or all three.**

**One by one each child was told to hold both of their hands in front of them, palms up.**

**One by one, a teacher stood up, picked up the leather strap that lay on the table in front of them and struck the child's outstretched hand with it. First, one hand and then the other, back and forth, the number of times the crime deserved.**

**I sat and watched this from my new seat in the middle row in wonder. I had no idea what was going on. Then my name was called.**

**I walked to the front of the classroom and stood facing the teachers; the table and leather strap between us. My teacher asked me, "Are you sorry for what you did?"**

**I said, "I don't know."**

**"What do you mean you don't know?"**

**"I don't know."**

**"Do you know you are here to be punished for what you did?"**

**"I don't know."**

**"Do you understand why you are here?"**

**"No."**

**"Are you lying?"**

**"No."**

**"Hold out your hands."**

**I did as I was told. My teacher stood, picked up the strap, lifted it and slapped it on the palm of my outstretched right hand. It wrapped slightly around the front.**

**The pain was instant and stung sharply. I said nothing. My hand turned bright red. She struck my left hand.**

**Again, the pain was instant and stung. I said nothing.**

**She repeated the punishment, hitting each hand once more.**

I stood resolute, full of bewilderment but not crying, not speaking. I really had no idea what else to do.

“Are you sorry for what you did?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean? You don’t know what you did?”

“No.”

“Well, you can go now.”

As I walked towards the door at the back of the classroom, I heard my teacher say to her colleague. “I don’t think she knows what she did.”

We lived two miles from school, and every day I walked the distance to school and back again with my 11-year-old brother Rene.

That day, when I walked out of the building, the school ground was quiet and empty.

Students were not allowed on school property before or after school hours. I didn’t see my brother and recall standing for some time looking around for him. I started to walk home.

Then I saw him. He was speaking with a small group of kids. They were on the gravel path that ran beside the road. The path started near a clump of trees just off of the school property. It was the path we took to and from school. As I walked across the school property towards him, he turned and saw me.

“Where were you? I’ve been waiting for you. Everyone else has gone home already. I didn’t know where you were, and I was ready to start walking home.”

“I had to stay after school.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. The teacher gave me the strap on both my hands.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

And so, we walked home. I had no idea what I had done wrong. My brother had no idea what I had done wrong. I didn’t tell my parents. There was no point. I didn’t know what I had done. My parents didn’t understand the culture or the school system and at the age of seven I already understood that my mother was loath to make any waves in our new country. Their lives were filled with making a living and a new life for their family. Besides, as the much younger sister to three older brothers I had learned to stay silent.

Seventy years later. I see the innocent wonderment and acceptance of my seven-year-old me slightly altered that day as a tiny, new awareness of injustice started to form.

# THE UGLY

*This memoir was written on a writing prompt sent to us before a meeting of local budding and seasoned writers. I nervously read my first draft at the meeting. I am a less than mediocre writer, so I was not prepared for the strong reaction from my audience, and it shocked me. Later, on reflection, I understood it was not my “gift of prose” but the injustice to a vulnerable child that initiated their response.*

*In Canada in the 1950’s (also before and later), variations of my story of corporal punishment to primary school children were part of the system and not specific to immigrants. Corporal punishment: using a strap; rapping a child’s knuckles with a pointer or ruler; use of a belt; throwing a wooden eraser at a pupil’s head; slapping the child on the back of the head or even their face and verbal abuse, were commonplace and acceptable methods of controlling young students.*

*In the early 1970’s, parents started questioning treatment of children in schools and many schools abandoned the practices, but it was not until 2004 that the Supreme Court of Canada outlawed corporal punishment in all schools, public and private.*

*My story was not intended to elicit the responses it received. I didn’t write it to belittle the teachers or the times. It is my story of how a misunderstanding started the evolution of my childish understanding about injustice. Niggling in my mind has always been that another student, possibly to save their own skin, had falsely accused me and I was consequently punished.*

*The reaction from my colleagues overwhelmed me in such a way, it forced me to peel back a few layers about what I had written.*

*An adult who hits another adult can be charged with assault, but corporal punishment by educated male and female adults, not related to the child and the child’s misbehaviour not always verified, were allowed to physically punish children at their discretion.*

*My experience also showed me, in a small way, the brutality that Indigenous children must have experienced at residential schools, hundreds of miles from home, after being yanked from the arms of their parents.*

*The depth of their abuse and tragedy still exists today and can’t be measured against mine, but if my story has opened a can and a tiny awareness seeps out that we can identify with, then I am glad it invoked the response I didn’t intend.*



**“In the new school, I didn’t understand that my unusual first name, traditional large Dutch bow in my hair and my strange way of speaking in broken English, was probably why my classmates didn’t include me in their recess activities. A note to my parents, on my report card read, ‘Please speak more English with the children at home.’”**

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# NOVEMBER TREES

by Viga Boland

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There is a kind of bleak nobility to these trees

Charred

Onto a grey November sky.

Even though abandoned by birds

Raped of leaves by too lustful winds

They feel no shame for their ravaged limbs.

Instead

Gathering folds of mist

Around their exposed boles

The filigreed black tangle of their branches

Frost-kissed...

They stand proud

Defying painter and poet

To confine their naked souls

(originally published in Repository, 1975)



**Photo by John Boland**

# SUMMER OF THE GOLDEN HARVEST

by Lois Corey

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*DISCLAIMER: This is a work of fiction. While some of the historical events are true, the Names, characters and specific incidents are the products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

In my dream I was flying above a field of barley, the sun glinting off the grassy tips below.

Lately my dreams were usually dark and ominous nightmares. This one was a welcome departure from the norm which made me resentful of being awakened by the bang of a door. I glanced over at the clock – 5am. My mother had just left for work at the factory, not to return until the sun was setting. Instead of golden grains, I was surrounded by the all too familiar dingy and dark walls of the basement apartment where we lived. I was overcome by a desire to fade back into sleep and dreams of beauty, but knew I had to get myself off to school or there would be trouble. I clambered reluctantly out of bed and went through a mindless routine of wash, dress, grab a piece of toast and my books and run outside to catch the bus to school.

The memory of the golden sunny dream lingered in my heart. For the rest of the day, I felt as if I was outside my life, distracted by visions of another world so different than the one I presently occupied. It was a strange feeling, one that carried with it a sense of change in the air.

My powers of concentration were even worse than usual. At lunch, I met up with Cathy at our usual spot behind the beech tree, where she gave me a cigarette and we inhaled, giddy with the forbidden fruit. Mr. Collins wandered around the corner and spotted us before we could hide. “Becky and Cathy – what do you think you’re doing!? Put those out and get over here at once! Please remain behind at the end of the class!”. Not again! I was forever doing the wrong thing, it seemed. Math class ended and I plodded resentfully up to the desk after the other kids had left. “Becky, you’re a bright girl, but I’m afraid with the way things are going, you may not pass your year, and worse, you’re getting in with a bad crowd. I have asked to meet with your mother in the principal’s office at 4pm tomorrow.”

Oh no, I thought to myself, my Mom is going to be mad at me yet again. Since that awful day when we got the telegram about my Dad, she had struggled to make ends meet.

Despite her best efforts, we lost the house. Her face seemed to age beyond its forty years. Every morning now there were dark circles under her eyes. She no longer had time for me or much else besides work. Now, because of me she had to ask for time off work at the last minute, and to make matters worse would lose some pay to boot, money we could not afford to be without.

How had our life gone from a normal family life, free of care, to this scraping existence?! I was angry at the world, angry at my father for dying, angry at my country for forcing him to fight, angry at my mother for losing the house. It 's not fair, I thought resentfully as I cried myself to sleep that night.

On my way to the principals office the next day, some words on a hallway poster caught my eye: "FOR A HEALTHY HAPPY JOB Join the WOMEN'S LAND ARMY, BECOME A FARMERETTE. Our men can't fight if they don't eat! We won't eat if you don't help Ontario farmers this summer." Then I thought of my dream – the golden field of barley seemed to be beckoning.

I endured the meeting with the adults, and swallowed my anger as I was admonished about buckling down and not causing my mother any more stress and headaches. People were suffering all over, and doing their part. I needed to stop feeling sorry for myself I was told. It's hard for everyone.

On the way home, I couldn't stop thinking about the poster. I told Mom to sit down and rest, I would fry us up some eggs for dinner. Her dark circles seemed worse and I could swear there were some strands of hair showing white. I knew I was making t'hings worse for her. After we ate, I offered to clean up at which she seemed pleasantly surprised. Now was a good time for me to bring up my idea.

"Mom, I saw a poster at school today. They are asking for girls to go work on farms this summer to help feed the soldiers. I really want to do this. It says they will pay, which will help us and it will give you a break from me".

"Oh no, but dear it will mean you will have to live away from home. That is not a situation that would be good for you or for me. No, I won't hear of it".

But slowly I worked away at her until she gave in. "It will give us extra money, and I will be working so hard I won't have time to get into any trouble". It worked.

In one month my bags were packed and I was standing ticket in hand at the bus stop. My mother waved goodbye, tears in her eyes. With the callousness of youth, I thought only about the adventure ahead and that I was getting away from my dreary existence.

Upon arriving in Geraldton, I was met by the YMCA "Camp Mother" and taken to a camp, where I was to spend the next few months with 8 other girls. Having been a city girl my whole life, I was amazed by the wide open spaces and acres of crops as far as the eye could see. As we approached the camp, I was overcome by a sense of Déjà

vu as a golden field of barley came into view, with the sun glinting off the tips. An overpowering feeling of delight came over me as I instinctively knew this felt like a second home already.

During the months that followed I worked hard from sunup to sun down, weeding onions, pulling celery and hoeing beets. We even worked in the fields alongside German POW's, whom I felt sorry for, as they were just boys the same age as me and far from home.

Living circumstances were simple: bunk beds in barracks, but we had the whole wonderful outdoors as our backyard. What fun we had! We worked hard, but played even harder. On our time off we would hitchhike into town and swim at the beach. We learned all kinds of things, including how to drive a tractor. We became more independent and lived more freely than other girls back home – dressing in what would be considered very unladylike garb - overalls, t-shirt, shorts. . The farmers put on a big picnic for us at the end of season. I still have life long friends to this day that I met there.

There was no time to smoke or get into other kinds of trouble, nor did I have the inclination.

When the summer came to an end, I was sorry to leave. My Mom hardly recognized the girl that got off the bus. My angry resentful look had been replaced by a happy smile and I came home with some money for my Mom. I went back to school with a different attitude and actually worked at it. I don't like to think what might have become of me if I had not been a Farmerette. It became my second home for awhile, I like to think of it as the summer of my golden harvest. I could hardly wait to return the next summer.



**“On my way to the principals office the next day,  
some words on a hallway poster caught my eye:  
“FOR A HEALTHY HAPPY JOB Join the WOMEN’S  
LAND ARMY, BECOME A FARMERETTE.”**

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# WETTING MY PLANTS

by Anita Joldersma

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I have never been good with plants. Or if I am truthful, I am rather bad with plants. They do not flourish under my care. I forget to water them and then I over-water them. One recommendation is to talk to them. Say pretty words or sing to them. So far, that advice has not helped any of my plants. So, if I am lucky, they die slowly.

My Dad was always great with plants. His garden and flower beds were abundant and verdant. He just had that touch. My Mom did not have the touch. So, for many years, any living plant in their home was under his tender care.

Dad now resides in a Long Term Care facility. This circumstance relegated Mom to be the keeper of the plants in their apartment. You would think that she would now be regularly tossing dead plants, but to our (and her) surprise, the plants have been flourishing. Flowers have appeared on plants that had no previous blooms. Wonders will never cease.

So there may yet be hope for me. I rather think not, but you never know.

My last plant had started out as a cute little succulent. I forgot many times to water it and then would drown it to make up for the neglect. I am sure that I should have repotted it but I am quite unsure of how to go about it. I noticed strings growing down from the stem and later realized that it was roots that had formed - desperately looking for water.





**That poor little plant eventually ended up in the compost bin. It was put out of its misery and surely contributed, with its remains, to the circle of life.**

**I would like to be able to blame the plant pot...or the window...or the sunshine...or the lack of sunshine, but I know it's me. And the plants know it's me. They told me so.**

Poetry

# THE MOTH

by Linda Lambert

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Photograph by Linda Lambert

Where did you come from so suddenly  
In the middle of winter  
When there are no blossoms for you to alight  
Were your fluttering wings echoing the wild fluttering of my heart  
Were you drawn to my light  
to my glow  
My body still deliciously aching with the memory of his touch  
I watch as you frantically look for a way out  
And pick you up tenderly cupped in my hands  
Your wings beating softly against my palm  
Reminding me of his kisses there  
I hold you close to my heart  
Feeling more than hearing  
Wishing that you were still safe  
In the spun silk of your cocoon  
But you had to break free  
If only for a short time  
Perhaps you knew in your primitive soul that there was beauty waiting  
With each instar you were more revealed and ready  
I watch as you flutter towards the light  
To the bright winter sun shining through my opened bedroom window  
Dancing away with the dust motes  
And I smile  
Snug in my own cocoon of white cotton sheets

# HOW A CRUMMY WEEK BEGIN...

by Lynda DiPietro

---

It had been a crummy couple of weeks for Eleanor. Not disastrous but one of those times when things don't go too well.

Her best friend Mary's husband Earl, had taken ill and was admitted to the hospital. Although she was sorry to hear that he was sick, she was mostly upset because she and Mary had made plans to go to the movies. Now Mary couldn't go.

It crossed her mind that she was being selfish thinking this way but she couldn't help it. Besides which she had never really liked Earl. He had never taken good care of himself despite Mary's best efforts. He was a cantankerous, know-it-all who regularly offered his pronouncements on almost every subject known. Mostly to Mary but to her friends as well who weren't the least bit interested in anything that Earl had to say.

The thought quickly crossed her mind that except for Mary, no one else would miss him all that much, should the inevitable happen. She tried not to think about that but really couldn't help herself. Quickly she said out loud to no one in particular "That's an awful thought to have. You should be ashamed."

Yesterday, her cat had eaten something that didn't agree with him so she had to take him to the vet which cost a few hundred dollars. Her car went in for servicing and came out \$700 later. Her cousin's son flunked out of university in his first term and her hairdresser had broken her arm. That meant that she wasn't able to get her hair done and wouldn't be able to until her hairdresser's arm was healed. Then the sink in the kitchen had backed up requiring an expensive visit from the plumber which meant that everything under the sink was now on her dining room table.

Her next-door neighbours who were nice, quiet people and with whom she'd always got along had just sold their house to a young couple with two little ones and were moving across the country to be with their children. The topper was that the vicar at her church who she had reluctantly come to admire, had been transferred to another church two provinces away. The newly assigned vicar she remembered not very fondly from when she was a girl. So, all in all, it hadn't been a good couple of weeks.

She had really been looking forward to seeing the movie 'Casablanca'. There was a special showing at the local movie theatre in two days time and she had two tickets. Now she'd have to go alone.

She'd seen 'Casablanca' at least a dozen times when it had aired on television on her big

screen TV but she had never seen it in a movie theatre. She was thinking about that when she drove to Serenity Pines Rest Home to visit her elderly aunt Lil, as she did at least twice a month. Aunt Lil was ninety-three years old, still quite able-minded but she suffered cruelly from arthritis so wasn't able to look after herself anymore.

Her aunt had always been Eleanor's favourite relative. She'd been a very young widow and had never married again. She said no one could ever compare to Uncle David, so there was no use in even looking at anyone else. They were devoted to each other.

As a child Eleanor loved visiting her aunt. Lil and Eleanor's Mom were as close as any two sisters could be. She told the most wonderful stories about when she and her sister were young girls. She encouraged Eleanor to read the classics, took her to museums, art galleries, plays and concerts. Her life was so much fuller because of her Aunt Lil. Between her mom and her aunt, she couldn't have had better role models or more fun. She loved them both fiercely.

As she made her way down the hall to her aunt's room, she came across Mrs. Scott. Mrs. Scott's mother Ann Flynn, was ten years young than Eleanor's aunt and resided in the room next door. She was on her way out having just visited her mother and stopped to talk.

She told her that she had a lovely visit with her mom. She'd brought her a book about classic movies and they had spent some time together looking at the photos in the book. Her mom was a particular fan of Ingrid Bergman. She had commented that Ms. Bergman never looked lovelier than she did in the movie 'Casablanca'. She loved that movie because it reminded her of her mother's family's journey when they made their way to settling in Canada. They had originally made their way via the United States through Morocco, just as the characters in the movie had done.

Mrs. Flynn had seen the movie when it first came out at the theatre and had been enthralled ever since. She'd seen it numerous times on TV but, oh, she would have liked to see it again on a big movie theatre screen.

Eleanor took a deep breath, gently placed her hand on Mrs. Scott's arm and said, "I think I have something that you might like."

She then told her that she had two tickets to a showing of 'Casablanca' at the Palace Theatre for the day after tomorrow. She was supposed to go with her friend but her friend was now unable to go.

She was going to go alone but she would be thrilled if Mrs. Scott would take her mom to see the movie. She wanted her to have the tickets. Mrs. Scott was taken aback. She said that she had tried to get some tickets but they were all sold out. But she insisted that she couldn't accept them.

**“Why don’t you take your Aunt Lil? I’m sure that she’d love to see the movie,” she asked.**

**Eleanor countered with “Unfortunately, my aunt isn’t able to go to the theatre or I would take her.”**

**“Please say yes. Take the tickets. Take your mom and I hope that you have the best time ever.” She pulled out an envelope from her handbag and handed the tickets to Mrs. Scott.**

**She looked at Eleanor and said, “It’s hard to believe that this is happening. You can’t imagine how happy my mom will be when I tell her about this. I’m going to go back and let her know. I don’t know how I can ever thank you.”**

**Eleanor smiled and said, “There’s no need to thank me. If I could do something like this for my mom or my aunt, I would. So, if I can’t take them, then I’m so pleased that you can go with your mom.”**

**With that she walked down the hallway with a huge smile on her face. She was surprised at how joyous she felt.**

**“Mom and Aunt Lil,” she said out loud. “This is for you.”**

**“She had really been looking forward to seeing the movie ‘Casablanca.’ There was a special showing at the local movie theatre in two days time and she had two tickets.”**

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Palace Theatre, Hamilton Spectator [194-?]

# VALLEY INN CREEK

by Terry Martens

---

Finally, a spring day without rain. The boys could not wait to gather their fishing gear and head down to the creek. They had been talking about their fishing outing for what seemed like months although it had only been a week. This would be the beginning of their favourite activity. The ice had finally disappeared and although the weather was cool, spirits were high.

Soon they were sitting on the bank of the creek, rods in the water. The best part was spending time together, laughing and joking. Back in those days, they would leave early in the morning and be gone most of the day. Parents knew where to find the group of boys.

The boys often took turns using the fishing poles as they did not all have one. That was fine, no one thought anything about it. There were no judgments and all that mattered was being together. There were days when all the boys wanted to fish at the same time, no problem they always had extra hooks and lines and would quickly make rods out of long sticks.

Kids and their families often picnicked or played by the creek. You could hear laughter, little children playing and people chattering. It was like taking a mini vacation from the city. Although the creek is located within Burlington city limits the road leads you to a quiet sanctuary where you feel like you have escaped.

Some days the fishing was great. The boys would catch several fish that they would take home to their parents to prepare for dinner. Often the fish became a distraction. They would play with the fish before adding them to the string. Like a little friend to hold onto or pretend to make them talk.

In the fall the salmon would leave Lake Ontario and head into local creeks to return to warmer waters for spawning. During the fall there would be a great deal of people along the sides of the creek. The clear shallow waters made it easy to spot the salmon. At times they appear to be fighting for space to swim as there were so many fish in the narrow creek.





**Fishing at the Valley Inn 1960**

**Many of the observers brought cameras with them to catch pictures of the fish as they jumped out of the water trying to make it up the little rock barricade, a small waterfall feature that hindered their smooth swim up the creek. Children squealed with delight watching as many jumped several times before making it over the wall. Many adults also commented as they watched. It was something that few people had the opportunity to witness. One of nature's most beautiful experiences.**

**The area around the creek has changed, and many houses have been erected nearby. The creek has been formally recognized as a park in this area of Aldershot/Burlington. There are now different picnic areas, a baseball diamond, trails, a splash pad, and a playground. Though many changes have been made it is still a great opportunity for a quick escape from the city and a place to enjoy nature.**

# THE JAGUAR

by Viga Boland

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*(Note: A Jaguar Caller is a device that emits a mating call)*

To feed her young, she killed  
Knowing no law 'cept hunger

In the morning came the men.  
One by one, they trampled the sun to blood beneath their hooves  
And in the evening, the desert, which had been her friend  
disclosed her tracks.

Now they drew their steady rifles from their sacks  
Lured her forward with sweet Judas sounds  
From their jaguar caller.

She came lithely,  
Every sultry limb ready for romance.  
When the bullets struck her throbbing chest  
The anguished scream which severed the night  
Was not unlike Salome's at the climax of her dance.

*(Honourable Mention, Alberta Poetry Yearbook 1975)*

# ROADKILL

by Viga Boland

---

He was cold,  
colder than the snow gathering in ruts at the side of the road  
I leaned over to touch him  
Felt my own heat beneath my chin

That first wheel had stapled him to the median strip  
Others had kindly gone 'round a raccoon that wasn't

I lay him in the field near the old cemetery  
A pitiful bush for a tombstone  
And the snow, like a weary coroner  
Drew a white sheet over him.

*(Originally published in Echo, 1976)*

# THE VISTA AND THE VOW

by Linda Peart

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**“One of her sisters visited Canada, and they met in Hamilton after 40 years of separation. This was remarkable evidence of the existence of the ‘bamboo curtain’, and it was a tremendous joy to witness their reunion.”**

---

**In my mother's youth, she lost her father, possibly due to a sudden heart failure. In the 1930s China prospects for the eldest girl narrowed down to two options: marriage, or work until marriage happened.**



In 21st century Canada, I flipped through my family albums, and returned time after time to the one and only photograph of my maternal grandfather. It showed him sitting cross-legged on a mountain looking at the vista below, with his face slightly turned to the camera. It was impossible to see his features because of the indistinct focus and the grainy black and white print. He was very tanned and bald and seemed powerful even while seated. I was sad knowing I could never see his face. Resigned to the fact that I met none of my grandparents, this photo always spoke to me. When viewing this photo, it often left me with an empty feeling, as if the vitality of this man reached out, but I could never connect with him.

In theory, had he lived a longer life, my mother's life could have been very different. My grandfather was a land-owner, being a large-scale rice producer in the southern China fertile landscape. In terms of history, they never continued in prosperity because of the rise of communism and all that followed when they achieved power. Its very ideology dictated no ownership of property and lands could continue.

Both events: the loss of her father, and the inroads of the communists on the landscape impacted the course of my mother's life. As a teenager in the good times, they sent her away from the village to train as a nurse. However, she soon returned home because it was not a good career fit. Compounding this change in direction was her father's sudden death. Without the head of the family to provide protection and care, her gender determined her future outlook.

The carefree days of youth changed when they planned her marriage. There was a time-honoured process of photoshopping (as technology allowed this) with family background checks on prospective husbands by the family elders. My mother selected my father and vice versa. It appeared both families were satisfied with their children's choices.

They married, taking a vow for a life together, and went halfway across the world to live in freedom and safety, never to return to China. However, longing for family was always in her heart. Decades passed before she saw her mother in Hong Kong almost 30 years later, and a few of her siblings and relatives. One of her sisters visited Canada, and they met in Hamilton after 40 years of separation. This was remarkable evidence of the existence of the “bamboo curtain”, and it was a tremendous joy to witness their reunion.

My grandfather’s and parents’ emotional and cultural ties to China were very strong. Many of their male peers had arranged their end-of-lifetime in China so they could be buried with their ancestors. Instead, they made a tremendous sacrifice and saved money to send their two eldest children to live a few years in China. There they travelled with my paternal grandfather when they were around 10 and 11 years of age.

In my imagination’s viewing, the panoramic vista that my grandfather overlooked from that mountain included his eldest daughter’s pathway in life as he envisioned it. It warmed his heart because he loved her. His commanding view placed him as a watchman over his family, a role he would have fulfilled had he lived longer.

The past and the future were linked by the vow my parents exchanged. Even if it took place in a civil office, it carried them through the flow and tumbles of life’s riverway, eventually leading to a peaceful end in the ocean. My mother’s wish was carried out as she believed her ashes would end up on China’s shores. She completed her journey to her homeland.

# THE ACORN

by Bob Nothnagel

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It was my sixth birthday, and I was opening tons of presents from my family. There were Legos, racetracks, Megatrons, and even a remote-control car. But I was eagerly waiting for my grandpa's present. We did cool things together, and he always got me cool stuff. I was looking around when he handed me a small present. It was about ten by ten centimetres and maybe five thick. There must have been something really special in there, it being so small and all. Maybe it was a secret code or a treasure map, where we would go into the forest and get clues for a great adventure. Man, I tore open that present like my life depended on it.

Words can't quite describe my disappointment. I had trouble fighting back tears. It was like getting underwear for Christmas. Inside this small box was some sort of nut. My gaze went from the present to my parents. They had their eyes cocked towards my grandpa, nodding slightly. I knew the signal.

"Thank you, Grandpa." I went over to give him a hug.

"Do you know what it is?" he asked.

"A nut," I replied.

"Not just any nut. It's an acorn. Later today, we can go out to the backfield and plant it. Over the years, you can watch it grow into a mighty tree."

"Never heard of an Acorn Tree."

"No. Acorns come from Oak Trees."

"Oh. Cool." I said, not really caring. The acorn got put aside as I started building my new Legos.



Later that day, my grandpa and I headed out to the backfield. He had his shovel, and I had mine, and he had some chicken wire. We lived on the edge of the city on a huge piece of land. My dad said it was two acres, whatever that meant. The house was big, and my family had been living there for many years. We had a regular backyard with the grass all cut real nice, but there was a backfield beyond that where I horsed around playing Transformers, war, and other games. My friends liked coming over because we had lots of room to play. We walked over to one corner of the field.



“This here looks pretty good, Joey,” my grandpa said, driving the shovel into the ground.

“It’s a little far from the corner,” I offered.

“Well,” he smiled. “It will need room to grow. The trunk is going to get this big.” He held his hands as wide apart as possible. “And we want all the shade on our property.” “How long will it take, Grandpa? Can I have a tree fort in it?”

He chuckled. “It will take some time before that happens. Let’s see how fast it will grow.” He began cutting a circle in the soil. When he was almost done, he looked at me. “Do you think you can finish this off? Lift that dirt out and make a nice hole. I’m getting tired.”

I knew he wasn’t tired. He just wanted me to do some. Maybe way back when I was five, I would have believed him, but now that I was six, I knew he wanted us to do this together. I grabbed my shovel. “Sure thing, Grandpa.” I worked the soil out to the side until we had a nice hole. “How’s that?”

“I’d have to say that’s about the finest acorn hole I’ve ever seen. Great job.”

I smiled, and I must admit, my chest stuck out a bit. Grandpa had a way of doing that to you. “Thanks.”

He smiled too and then worked his way to the ground beside the hole. “Okay, now we have to place some of that loose dirt in the bottom of the hole. You go ahead, maybe this much.” He spread his thumb and finger apart maybe five centimetres. “Can you think of a reason why?”

I tried hard to think why as I grabbed a handful of dirt and dumped it in. “Oh, I know. We dug the hole too deep.”

“Great thinking. It’s important the hole is not too deep, but the other reason is when the acorn starts to grow and make roots, we want the soil to be loose so it’s easier for the roots to grow down and get stronger. Then, when they’re stronger, they can work

through the harder soil beneath. So, we're helping the acorn. Same as you. Remember when you were learning to do a front roll? I helped you with the first few, but then you were able to do them yourself."

"Oh yeah. Hey, watch me." I did a front roll in the grass. "Easy peasy. Your turn," I challenged him.

"I don't think so."

"Why not?"

"Getting too old for that sort of stuff. Okay, let's stay focused and get this acorn planted." We spent the next little bit planting the acorn, covering it with dirt, and giving it water. Then we placed chicken wire around the tree, using stakes to hold it in place.

"What's this for?" I asked.

"It's to keep any animals away from your tree. Squirrels would love to dig this up and rabbits will eat the leaves. So, we have to protect it until it gets strong enough to look after itself. Kind of like you when you were a baby. You slept in a crib with bars to protect you from falling out."

I nodded. "Yeah. I see." I liked that he called it my tree.

"So," he said, standing there with his shovel over one shoulder. I did the same. "Now, this is your tree to look after. You'll need to water it and make sure it is safe until it is strong enough to look after itself. Do you think you might know why I gave you this acorn?"

I thought for a minute. The right answer was so I could have a tree fort, but with Grandpa, there was usually another kind of teaching reason. Then I got it. "It's like when I have to clean up my Legos or make my bed. I have to be... responsible."

"That's part of it. If you look after the acorn, the tree will grow big and you can see the results. Eventually, this tree may grow taller than the silo at the farm down the road."

My eyes popped out. "Really. When?"

"It will take many years, but it will get there." He looked me in the eye. "This tree could be a place to come when you have to think, or just to hang out by yourself. You'll be able to tell this tree anything, and it will listen. It's also like a bond between you and me." I saw his eyes were misting. "When I get much older and go to heaven, you can remember me through this tree."

Of course, I knew about dying, but my grandpa would be around for a long time. "I'm going to look after this tree really good, you'll see." I gave him a big hug. "Thank you, Grandpa," I said, and this time I meant it.

Every day I went to check on my acorn, hoping I'd see something, knowing it would take a while. Sometimes Grandpa came with me, but often I went alone, watering it and checking the chicken wire. Then, one day, I saw a green thing poking through the ground. I was freaking out, jumping around the field, screaming. A few weeks later, my tree was ten centimetres high with two leaves. Over the summer it grew slowly—too slowly for me and I admit sometimes I forgot about it and left it for a week. But it always

seemed to have water in the soil. I think Grandpa was sneaking out to make sure it was looked after. When my friends came over to play, I made sure we were on the other side of the field. I didn't want anything to happen to my tree. By fall, it was up to my chest. Sometime around Thanksgiving, me and my grandpa were out at the tree. "Will it be okay over the winter?" I asked him.

"Sure it will be. It was well taken care of, watered lots, and should have good roots. It will lose its leaves like any other tree and get them back in the spring."

"Promise?"

"Well, I can't really promise that, Joey, because I don't control nature, but I think there's a very good chance it will survive."

"Okay," I said, suddenly needing it to live.

It was the longest winter of my life. Every few days I would check the calendar and ask my mom and dad how long until spring. They asked me if I was the least bit interested in Christmas. Of course, I was. Sometime after Christmas I kinda forgot about my tree for a while but come around March it started to get back in my head. Even with snow up past my waist, my dad and I made a path to the tree and watched. Finally, in April, I spotted a bud, then a couple more, then leaves. Grandpa came over to see and we gave each other a thumbs up.

Over the next few years, the cycle continued. Buds in the spring, leaves, half a metre of growth, lose the leaves in the fall, and survive the winter. We took out the chicken wire when I was ten and the tree was twice my height and placed some wrappings around the trunk. We don't get many deer around here, but Grandpa thought to do it just in case.

Life went on. I grew up. Went to high school. Graduated and attended a local university. But no matter what, I spent time at my tree. Sometimes Grandpa was there, often not. When I fell off the rope maze at the park and broke my arm, I hung out at my tree. When I broke up with my first girlfriend in high school, I hung out at my tree. When I failed my first driver's test, I hung out at my tree. Don't get me wrong, my parents were always there for me and guided me along life's path, but I found an extra special solace when talking to my tree. I wasn't bonkers or anything; it was just a place to feel comfortable. I graduated from university at twenty-four and my tree was somewhere around seven metres. Grandpa had moved from our house to a nursing home and every Sunday I would pick him up and bring him back for a large dinner. We would make our way over to the tree and reminisce about all the things we did while I was growing up. The last few years he wasn't able to make it across the rough terrain.

"That's okay Joe. I can see it from here. It's a mighty fine tree. You've done well."

My eyes glistened and I put my arm over his shoulder. "You taught me well, Grandpa."

He died three weeks later. I missed him badly. At least I had my tree and our memories to help me through it.

I got a job in an accounting firm and life went on. A routine developed that helped me forget about my grandpa. Not totally. He was always there in the back of my mind. I met a nice girl and we dated for almost a year before we got married. As I said, my family's home was massive, with separate wings for different generations. Jennie and I took up

one of the wings and my parents had the other. A year later we were blessed with a Joey Jr. It was a momentous occasion, and I did my best to be the greatest dad I could. I never got to play in a tree house but my son sure did. When he was old enough, we built that tree house in Grandpa's and my tree and Joey Jr. spent many hours up there.

As the years went by, he went to school, high school, then university. He graduated and got a job with the city. I couldn't believe how fast time flew by. Soon, he was dating a nice girl and they got married. Two years later, they had their first child, and I had a wonderful grandson.

I remember the many hours of playing and spoiling my grandchild. He got to play in his dad's tree house. I tried to bestow in him all the wisdom my grandpa had given me. He quickly grew, and of course, on his sixth birthday, I gave him an acorn. Almost the same reaction as mine. But he warmed up to the idea, knowing the story of my tree.

That afternoon we walked out to the back field and together we planted the acorn. I told him the importance of watering it, caring for it, and protecting it. After we were finished, we both stood there with our shovels over our shoulders.

"If you look after this tree," I said, "it will grow big and strong, just like Grandpa's tree over there."

He looked up at me and then at my tree. I could sense a little bit of me in that six-year-old. He reached for my hand and grabbed it.

"Grandpa, this is going to be the biggest tree in the whole wide world, you wait and see. You'll be able to see it from anywhere. I'm going to look after it the very best I can. Thank you, Grandpa. I love you."

It was at that moment I truly realized why my grandpa had given me that acorn.



# RED TRUCK IN MY GARDEN

by Johanna Matthews

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Sunday:

Bedlam made up of joyful noises, sweet voices, and sunshine smiles.  
Innocent eyes brimming with rain drop tears after five-minute meltdowns.  
Naked Barbies, scratched metal dinky cars, scattered puzzle pieces

Unidentified sticky spots on my hardwood floor  
transfer to my flip flops,  
making a sucking noise as I walk

Temporarily forgotten,  
a fuzzy bear, its floppy stubby legs under the sofa,  
lies next to cookie crumbs and cracker bits.

Every surface is dulled by mini fingerprints and tiny streaks of snot.  
Living memories of a weekend at Oma's house

Monday:

A draft of warm air pushes the morning's sun rays through my open bedroom window,  
and home ground coffee smells  
roll through my cleaned-up flat

Steaming hot coffee. Almond cream  
frothing in a pottery mug

Flip flops still sticky,  
slap as I walk across the cleaned floor  
to the back door  
in anticipation of slurping the hot brew  
in the morning sun.

The feeling envelopes me  
even before I step out.  
Ah sweet bliss.  
Quiet solitude.  
Nothing amiss.

There is no humility  
for my spa-like tranquility.  
Cloaked with warmth.  
A blessed morn.  
June's late spring rippling into summer



**I will absorb yesterday's happiness  
through today's solitude.  
In my chair. Greenery everywhere  
Drawing into myself.**

**Slipping out of sticky flip flops and  
sliding the screen door open,  
I step out onto flat gray patio stones,  
sun-warmed under my bare feet.  
I look down.**

**Beside a broadleaf blown into a dark corner  
next to the concrete bench,  
a fuzzy brown and orange caterpillar  
humps forward  
minding its business of living.**

**Then I see it.  
Forgotten or just left for next time.  
Missed in the tidying up.  
The red plastic toy truck.**

**A memory lingering in my garden  
My heart bursts with love  
Nothing is amiss.**





# SHIVERING BRANCHES

by Lois Corey

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Inside here  
Warmth and laughter  
Contented kittens lick their paws

Rise from the soft couch  
And pull back the curtain,  
Fire at your back.  
Through the window,  
Shivering branches.

It is more pleasant  
To turn back round,  
sink again  
Into the pillows  
And watch the flames  
Tease the shadows.

Ah, but now  
The wind's voice  
Rises sometimes  
Between the words  
And the shivering branches  
Tap softly on the glass.









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