

*Text from The 2023 Creative Writing and Storytelling Showcase*

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, Washington University, St Louis MO

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From: *Let's Tell (storytelling)*

Facilitator, January Kiefer

### **Truth and Story**

performed by January Kiefer

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From: *Writing for Ourselves and Others*, section II

Facilitators, January Kiefer and Dennis Smith

### **My Lake Superior**

by Sandy MacLean

“It’s as big and beautiful as an ocean,” I say to myself every year when I return to the southern shore of Lake Superior. Peering out into this Great Lake, I see the deep dark blue waters to the north, east, and west. Lowering my eyes to the shoreline, the water turns to white foam. Gentle waves caress small stones at the water edge.

On the horizon is an ore boat silhouetted against the sky. Undoubtedly it is headed west to Duluth, Minnesota or Superior, Wisconsin. Ore boats, as the locals call them, steamboats is their official name, carry millions of tons of iron ore, grain, cement, and coal through the five Great Lakes of the United States and Canada.

Modern steamboats are much longer, larger and lower than when I worked on one during the summer of my senior year in college. No longer is there a pilot house on the forward end of the ship. Instead, a tall lean five story cabin is on the after end where the pilot

house, men's cabins, mess hall and lounges must be. In the past, a large ship was over 600 feet, two football fields in length. Today's steamboats are over 1,000 feet; thus, over three football fields in length.

Born and raised on the shores of Lake Superior, as a child and a youth, I never lived more than several miles from its shores. The Lake was a place we visited often for picnics, swimming, and firesides. As a young child, I knew it was there before my father and grandfather. It would continue to be there after I leave.

Swimming was always a challenge in Lake Superior. It was always cold; some days colder than others. If the wind was blowing off the shore, the warm top water would blow into the Lake. Swimming then was all but impossible. If the wind was blowing off the lake, the warm top water would blow onto the shore. Then it would be warm enough for swimming.

As small children we were told how the Lake could be overpowering. Small and large ships could be crushed against its rocky shores. Storms blow up quickly; waves reach heights of over thirty feet. A steamboat can brake into thirds because the forward end is on one wave and the other after end is on another. With nothing to support the middle of the ship, the ship breaks into thirds. Such was the case with the famous Edmund Fitzgerald.

It is with admiration, appreciation, a sense of awe and love that I return to Lake Superior and pay my respects. I walk to the shore and say softly, "I am back, a native son who thought of you all year." I listen for the Lake to respond. It does with its soft breezes, beauty, and timelessness.

When I pass on, my ashes are to be sprinkled along the southern shore of Lake Superior. Hopefully, then I will be able to hear its gentle waves each morning. See the Sun rise over the Lake in the East. See the sun set in the West. Catch its fresh breeze throughout the Spring, Summer, and Fall. Observe the grandeur of snow and ice during the Winter months. Wait for Spring and the wild flowers to bloom along the shore. In the Fall watch the leaves turn bright red, gold and brown.

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From: *Memoirs: Writing Life Stories*

Facilitators: Ellen Boone and Rudy Yanuck

### **Deliverance Canoeing**

by Richard Kutta

The Big, Bourbeuse, and Upper Meramec comprise the headwaters of the Meramec River. The Meramec begins in Meramec State Park and flows east 200 miles through the Ozark Highland, ending at its confluence with the Mississippi. These typical Ozarks Plateau Rivers are calm, mostly clear, gravel-bottom streams flowing through farms and forests, featuring abundant fish, waterfowl, and wildlife. Each has a unique character.

The Bourbeuse flows west to east, draining what was once upland prairie - now farms and pasture. All three branches were proposed for damming by the 1938 Corps of Engineers Meramec Basin Project. A highly dedicated environmental movement, led by conservation organizations including the Sierra Club opposed the project, eventually leading to its de-authorization in 1978-81. I was a part of that opposition. To popularize the rivers, we led monthly river outings.

Fall is my favorite time to be on our rivers. Weather tends to be cool, clear, and dry - perfect for paddling and gravel bar camping so long as there is enough water. In October 1974 I led an outing on the Bourbeuse River introducing others to the resource that would be lost if the Meramec Basin Project was constructed.

We met early on Saturday morning at the designated put-in spot. We planned to float about 18 miles between Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon, camping one night on a gravel bar. There was a blue sky, cool with a soft breeze, sunny and quiet. Canoeing after Labor Day frees the rivers from summer family users there more for fun than for quiet enjoyment on the water. I was joined by a friend I had paddled with regularly, a pair of women clearly there for birding, and a couple with a new tent. Since camping equipment is only clean once, the newbies were especially welcome. She was reading *Deliverance*, about a canoe trip set on a Georgia river through a backwoods area planned for a dam. I smiled at the similarity.

The day was outstanding. After lunch we had time for the birders to shoot some 35mm film and for my inner sloth to catch a quick nap in the midday sun. I'd planned a fairly short trip, knowing there would be numerous long pools that were great for fishing but took more time to paddle. We had the river to ourselves. A deer came down from a field to drink. We found a fair gravel bar by 4 pm and took off the water to set up tents and have dinner. I was slightly bothered by the small flowing water behind the campsite that we'd crossed to get wood for the campfire. Night fell silently at about 7 pm. River valley 'sunsets are brief, moving quickly from bright to dusk as the hills overtake the sun. The evening was calm and clear with enough open sky to pick out some constellations. We were entertained by feeding bats flapping about seeking the last insects of the year.

We agreed to get up early, eat, break camp, and be on the water by 8 am. I always sleep soundly accompanied by the gurgling river dancing around rocks and stumps. So soundly that it felt like I was floating. No, wait, I was floating on a first-rate waterbed except it was the whole tent billowing up and lifting me off the gravel.

Half awake, I glanced out the front flap as an aluminum cook pot floated by. The other half of me woke instantly and I called to others, "Get up! Get out! We're flooding!" I pulled myself out of the tent; two others did the same. Where were the rest? I slogged through the water toward their tent calling for them. Their tent flap opened suddenly; a woman emerged wielding a frying pan. Mountain men beware! Fortunately, I looked more like me than a marauding mountain man.

Time to pack everything in the canoes and get to higher ground quickly, except now the canoes were floating away. There were 2 left so in went all the gear. We crossed the trickle, which had suddenly grown into a creek. We were OK, wet, cold, and fully awake. As we sat and waited for the morning light, we were retrospectively frightened. The sun came up on schedule and my missing canoe was found floating upside down in a diminishing backwater pool. Our two paddles emerged, strained out by riverbank bushes. We picked our way downriver, only later learning that intense rain several miles upstream caused the river to flash flood.

We never saw the newbies on another outing, and I didn't win the new member recruitment award. Next time I'll ask for a reading list before traveling with anyone who has a clean tent.

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From: *Memoirs: Writing Life Stories*

Facilitators: Shirley Baker and David Krausch

**The Delphi Years 1996-2009- Pt. 7 (Final Years-2)**

by David Krausch

*But then they quenched the fire beneath the boilers*

*Gave me a watch and showed me out the door*

*At sixty-four, you're still the best;*

*One year more, and then you're less*

*Than dust upon the floor*

*--- The Last Watch - Stan Rogers ---*

The turmoil following the Delphi bankruptcy filing in 2005 provided quite a backdrop to deal with. I functioned much the same; with a smaller sphere of influence.

I now reported to the General Manager of our business unit, Scott, who reported to a new president replacing Guy. The new president was “okay”; but he wasn’t Guy.

Scott was previously the Director of Engineering; my peer on the former staff. Now he was my boss. I was one rung lower on the corporate ladder. My inclination to just pass the time, until I could retire, was growing.

Our HR director, Skip, was a good guy. He counseled me not to retire before we emerged from bankruptcy, telling me; “Dave, if you retire now, you’ll become a creditor. I can tell you what’s going to happen to creditors when we exit bankruptcy; they aren’t going to get paid.” So, I endured.

Days became long and boring. I fought feelings of guilt and uselessness for just continuing to take my compensation; waiting out the bankruptcy. In spite of my own feelings, I felt an obligation to my subordinates to maintain our mission to keep improving. I told myself that I'd worked many years with long productive days; and that I'd earned a little "rocking chair" time in my final days. I was now one of those "old guys".

By the 2006 timeframe, I'd been at Delphi 10 years. The processes and procedures that we'd worked on for almost a decade were institutionalized. Quality systems were capable and running stably. I took pride in that.

I still liked my job, but the circumstances made it difficult to maintain the old passion. My career was no longer expanding; it was contracting.

I was approaching 60 years old and 40 years' service. Unless I was traveling, days seemed endless. I drank heavily on trips; sometimes missing flights, sometimes winding up with strange women.

When I drank, I inevitably got behind the wheel. I'd received several drunk driving tickets over the years; just managing to keep them spaced out enough to avoid serious consequences. That all changed on December 6, 2007.

5 days after my 61<sup>st</sup> birthday, I was arrested and charged with a DWI near my home in Rochester, Michigan. I knew the jig was up; that it was serious, and could involve prison time. It was a significant emotional event.

I woke up in the Rochester jail the next morning with the mother of all hangovers. I accepted the fact that I was there because when I drink, I could not predict how much I would drink. It was a moment of clarity. It was the moment when I admitted to my inner most self that I was powerless over alcohol; the First Step in Alcoholics Anonymous.



I dozed back off on my concrete bed that morning for another 20 or 30 minutes, before waking up again. Even though I'd admitted powerlessness over alcohol, I knew I'd need to go to AA; whether I liked it or not. That was the Second Step; admitting that I needed help. That was the start of my sobriety.

Once again, I felt like Alice falling down the rabbit hole, not knowing where this was going to lead; yet feeling a freedom quite different from anything I'd ever experienced. Somehow, I knew I never needed to take a drink again.

December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007 was a Friday. I didn't get released from jail until noon. I was scheduled to leave for Asia Pacific the next morning; fearful of leaving the country with a pending legal charge. I finally made contact with my lawyer. Paul advised me that it was alright to travel; because I hadn't been arraigned yet. That was a relief.

I made the trip as normal; except it wasn't. I didn't drink; not on the plane or in Korea or in Singapore. I turned down alcohol at business dinners. By Tuesday, I was over the jet lag and functioning soberly; but anxious about my trouble back home. I fretted about the potential outcomes; including getting a prison sentence and seeing my career end abruptly in shame and disaster. In spite of that, I didn't feel the compulsion to drink. I knew drinking was not a solution.

I finished the Asian trip sober; returning home the following Saturday. That Sunday afternoon, December 16<sup>th</sup>, I found an AA meeting at a little church in Lakeville, Michigan; my first meeting with an honest desire to quit drinking.

Since then, I've been to hundreds, if not thousands, of meetings.

Life was never the same. It got better.....one day at a time.

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## Spring

*after The Traveling Performers by Yves Tanguy (1926)*

by Melissa Lynn Pomerantz

From beneath rotting brown leaves green sprouts push through  
the semi-frozen ground.

Fuzzy pale buds emerge

long before they will unfurl

like pink popcorn in the trees.

How do they know when it's safe

to reveal their tender petals to the world?

The birds migrate singing to each other,

calling out danger, engaging a suitor,

welcoming the morning. Acrobats in flight, they swirl

in the sky, lighting on thin bare branches. They collect the dry stalks, hollow straws of  
last summer's blooms,

to construct nests for eggs that will soon be nestled

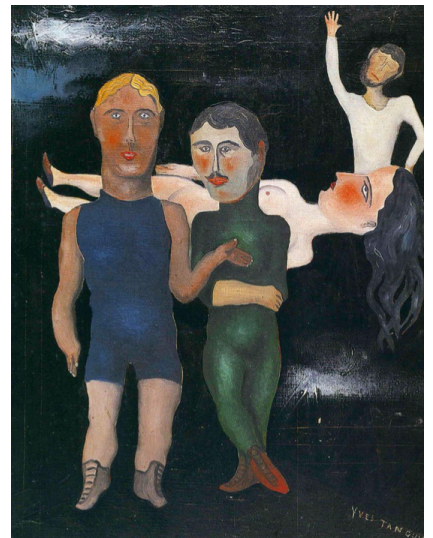
by patient bodies awaiting that life-stirring crack of shell.

The sun rises earlier, sets later, begins to warm

the bones, the hearts of those who have survived another long winter. It dances with the

rain, taking turns leading. And sometimes neither gets out of the way-- they step on each  
others' feet. Instead of bruised toes,

a rainbow embraces the entire sky in color and light.



Like watching the magician  
who cuts the woman in half  
or levitates her before our eyes,  
I know that there is logical science behind it all, but I don't really want to know the  
secret.  
I want to revel in the magic of spring.

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*From: Write Like a Reader*

Facilitators: Karen Sterbenz and Rita Hulbert

### **High Ground**

by Sarah Wilson

Bud squinted at his fields that lay lifeless under the sun's battering ram. Weeks of this unappeasable heat had cleaved his land into honeycombs of dry dirt. The creek, the reason he built on this spot, barely trickled.

*Without rain, all will be lost...* he thought, then coughed as he turned his dark-prone mind to speaking to his God; again. He knew God had a plan for him, for his land. God always did. Maybe he didn't understand it, but, as his Mother had frequently explained, he wasn't supposed to. A comment that made his Father snort not-so-quietly.

Bud turned toward the cabin. Nothing to do out here anyway. He passed his mare, Bessy, dozing in the heat, her tail lazily swiping at flies. Nothing for her to do either. He

commented about the heat as he walked by. She tossed her nose in his direction. He agreed. It was hot.

That evening, Bud noticed the maple leaves were white side up. He stepped outside; a light breeze caressed his cheeks. In the distance, mouse-gray clouds skimmed the horizon.

That night, the rain started - almost tentatively at first. Bud smiled; all would be well. God had answered him. God always did. He lay in bed, hands behind his head, content to listen to his hope patter on the roof.

Sometime in the night, the sound of water running down the inside walls where the chinking between the logs was giving way woke him; it pulsed under the door with each gust. Bud knew these sorts of storms generally passed fast. He'd open the cabin up tomorrow; It would all dry,

Then he looked out the window. In the corral, Bessy skidded in the mud as she ran at the fence. She wasn't usually thrown off by storms. Maybe the drought had weakened her understanding, but no, Bessy wasn't stupid. In the dark, he could not see the creek, but suddenly he wondered.

Lacing up his boots and grabbing his duster, he unlatched the door. It ripped from his hand, slamming open. He left it. Stepping on to the porch, the rain assaulted him as he stood - listening — for a different sort of water.

Bessy normally called out to him whenever he opened the door; now she screamed. That's all he could call it. It ran up his body. He was off the porch running to her before that fear left the air.

Instantly, he was as wet as if he'd leapt into the swimming hole. His clothing stuck to him, the rain ran down his back. Leaning into the wind, he crossed the few yards. When he reached the corral, water was up near the top of his boots. Bessy raced to the gate, pacing and blowing, willing him to hurry.

Then the water was over his boots, he tugged at the gate. Rain poured so intensely now it was hard to see. It was at his knees. He heaved against the rising waters, wrestling the gate open a bit. Bessy seeing a slim gap, rammed her chest against it. As she plunged passed, Bud, by instinct more than thought, grabbed onto her tail.

She dragged him off his feet. His body swept with the current, yanking her hindquarters with him. She took two more leaps forward; then was swimming. Water beat at him in every way. He wondered, for a second, about his God. "Everyone dies praying," his Father used to say.

He tried to keep his head above the flood. Rain blinded, he knotted her tail in his fists and clung on. She struggled toward the hill. Quickly, his hands grew numb; his arms tired. Sheer native stubbornness kept him holding.

Then he felt her hooves find ground. She surged up the slope, slipping on the sodden soil, she dragged him behind. As soon as his legs were clear, he let go. He lay as flat as a fallen leaf. And as still. He knew he should check the floodwaters rise, but he could not find the energy to care as he lay gasping in the dirt.

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From: *Turning Life into Fiction*

Facilitators: Rita Hulbert and Karen Sterbenz

The Zoo

**by Esther Smoller**

I crawled into the lion's cage. He didn't notice at first. He was lying in the sun. Relaxed, no cares. He wasn't worried about dinner, until I came along. Would I spoil his day? Or make it?

He saw me out of the corner of his eye. At least, that is what I thought. Who knows what or where a lion sees. He didn't move; he was quiet as a mouse, a very large mouse. With teeth, very large teeth. Did he want to surprise me? He would intentionally or not.

He got up slowly with the utmost care. His fur-encrusted paws patted the earth. He made a motion in my direction. I looked into his eyes, not a blink. We met. I saw excitement there. He lay down next to me and stroked my back with those fur-encrusted paws.

I felt his nails reaching for my goose-pimpled skin. He was gentle at first, then deeper and deeper as he came closer and closer. We recognized each other. Animals in the wild.

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## **In Memoriam**

### **Who is that Man?**

by Bettye Dew

When I opened the New York Times one morning, my eyes fell squarely on the front page's central photograph. It featured an American soldier, returning from deployment in Afghanistan, joyously embracing his wife after a separation of eleven months. Poised on the wife's left hip was the couples 14 month old baby, who was eyeing her father suspiciously. Under the photo, the caption read, "Who is that man, Mommy?"

Who is that man, Mommy! That question could have been the refrain for a trip I took in November of 1970. My husband, in the army in Vietnam since February of that year, had been granted a week's R & R in Hawaii, Initially, we planned to leave our young children with relatives and make the time a vacation for the two of us. But then I began to receive letters from my husband wondering if I could possibly bring the three-year old, for he yearned so much to see her. I'd never endured such a long flight myself, much less taken a child with me, but after some thought, I declared myself up to the task. My husband was elated. Soon, though, another letter arrived, this time mentioning the baby. Would it be so hard to bring the baby too? He hadn't seen her since she was seven months old, thus missing out on so much of her development. If only he could hold her....

So that's how I ended up with two small, restless, non-sleeping children on a Braniff airplane for an eleven hour trip from Little Rock to Dallas to Honolulu! The day after our arrival, the three of us lined up at a military base with other "dependents," searching for a familiar face among the group of deplaning servicemen filing into the room. And then, there he was, the husband and father we hadn't seen since February. After a moment's hesitation, the three-year-old bounded forth and threw herself into her father's arms. The baby, however, took one look at this man and let out a thunderous wail, her hands

frantically squeezing my neck. He was not to touch her! The wailing eventually subsided, but it would start up again every time he reached out his arms to her. Only during the final hours of his leave did she allow her father to hold her. “Hmmm,” my mother-in-law said when she heard about our see. “Sounds like somebody got paid back.” Turned out, she had experienced her own “Who is that man, Mama?” in 1945, when her son, that thwarted baby-holder just mentioned, was a three-year-old called Buddy with one older sister. In October of that year, she told the children that, after an absence of more than two years in the South Pacific, their father was returning home to Arkansas. On the day of his arrival, the children, dressed in their best clothes, were ready to leave the house when their grandmother intervened. “Oh wait,” she said. “You need a present to take to your daddy,” With that, she opened her pantry and removed two small jars of homemade strawberry preserves, giving one to each child.

As mother and children entered a large reception room in Little Rock’s Lafayette Hotel, a tall, lanky man dressed in army khakis rose from a chair and rushed toward them. “Look!” the mother exclaimed. “Here’s Daddy! Say hello to Daddy!” With that, Buddy took his jar of strawberry preserves, flung it at the stranger with all his might, then spun around and bolted from the room.

In my own lineage, there’s also a “Who is that man, Mama?” story, this one reaching back to a more distant war. In May of 1865, a five-year-old girl was playing quietly in the front yard of a farmhouse in Marion County, Georgia when she was startled by the sound of approaching hooves. She looked up to see a mule coming to a halt, its rider a man in worn, stained clothing. Eyeing her, the man said, “Hello. Would your name be Sally?” With those words, the little girl took off, barreling across the yard and into the house, shrieking at the top of her lungs.

The ragged stranger was, of course, her father, returning from a three-year-absence as an artilleryman in the Confederate Army. This was a story my cousin Thelma, twenty years



my6 senior, loved to tell. She had heard it many times from her grandmother Sally, once that little girl playing in the yard. When Thelma related the simple details, her eyes bright, the two of us would envision a poignant moment in the life of our mutual great-grandfather.

A soldier comes home from war: In fiction, it's a plot surely older than the Odyssey. And it live, though wars and circumstances change, as do travel and communication, at base it is the same human story ever repeating itself.

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From: *Writing for Ourselves and Others*, section II

Facilitators: January Kiefer and Dennis Smith

## **Bronx Chicken Soup**

by Arnold Kaplan

It is 1947 in the Bronx. I am 8 years old. More Jews live in the Bronx than in Israel. My mother and I are among the poorest of these. The Bronx serves as an alternate parent. We can pay rent and eat because I am entitled to Aid for Dependent Children. My father has abandoned us and never sends support. My mother is the youngest of 5 children and her siblings are as generous as they can be with their limited incomes. Each Thursday we travel from our foundering building in the West Bronx to my aunt's kosher chicken store in the East Bronx to get a free kosher chicken. I hate going there.

One reason is that I am walking on public streets with my mother. This embarrasses me. I see myself as old enough to be independent and the presence of my mother ruins the effect I am trying to project. Another is that it is a long, boring trip. First we take a bus east to Southern Boulevard. We transfer to a trolley that takes us south to Simpson Street.

After the walk to the market we arrive to a teaming collection of shops within small buildings surrounded by makeshift selling shacks.

Everyone is talking Yiddish and buying or selling. I can not translate the yiddish writing on the shop windows. The street is narrow and crowded, with room only for shoppers. The occasional car slowly meanders around them and amazingly no- one is injured.

To me, my Aunt Ruth and Uncle Louis are rich as royalty. I would later learn that my uncle brewed moonshine in the basement of his store during Prohibition. It was with his illegal profits that he bought a house and hired a live-in maid, Julia. She is like a member of the family.

My Aunt is the salesperson. On the counter in front of her are about one hundred dead chickens, stinking, unplucked, and surrounded by a cloud of fleas. Her typical conversation with a customer is like this:

*“\$1.03 for a pullet! Why the 3 cents? That 3 cents will not make you rich. Sell it to me for a dollar.”* To which my Aunt replied *“And the 3 cents will not make you poor. So the final price is \$1.03”*

So begins a period of waiting. Free chicken is the last on her list. Since we are beggars, my mother does not interfere with my Aunt’s interaction with shoppers. When she did find a time to talk, she and Ruth loads to talk about. I wonder how this could be. Adults never seem to run out of things to say. I walk outside to see a pickleman. He has two barrels of pickles, one sour, one half sour. I loves the sour pickles and they are only five cents. This is the only treat I have for all this wasted time.

Toward the end of the wait my mother selects a chicken. It had to be defeathered. Sender, another long time employee, was the chicken flicker. He could pluck a chicken with speed. What slowed him down are the pin feathers. They are burned off leaving a foul

fowl odor. Sender was often a guest at family affairs. The final leave taking means I get a kiss from my aunt and a 5 dollar bill. As usual she warns, “ Don’t tell Louie” Since I never see my uncle talking to anyone I feel safe with this secret. Ruth’s precaution is empty because even a child could see she is the leader in the family.

After the long journey home my mother continues the koshering process. This involved further cleaning of the chicken and burying it in salt to extract the last drop of blood. The product was a stringy corpse which could never be reconstituted into something tasty.

On the other hand she used the less edible parts to prepare a golden aromatic liquor of chicken broth. The liver, heart and kidneys cook as they rest on thick paper by the fire at the edge of the pot. The undeveloped chicken eggs are boiled in the soup.

Chicken fat is simmered with onions and salt to make the magically tasty. Sometimes she also prepared noodles . She lays the folded noodle sheets on the beds to dry then hangs the sheets on the dryer above our heads over the kitchen table. I laugh when I remember eating meals with raindrops from drying sheets falling on my head.

When it was time to eat the shabbos meal I was often not hungry. Memories of the unpleasant shopping , the odors and the carcass chased away my appetite. My mothers response was *“Eat everything on your plate. Don’t you realize children in Russia are starving!”*

I was unmoved. First, I could not believe that children in Russia were starving even if my mother said it was true. Second, I did not understand how my eating everything would help these children.

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From: Memoirs: Writing Life Stories  
Facilitators: Ruby Lapin and Jeannette Altman

## **The Neighborhood**

Jeannette Altman

Long before the changes of the 1960's- the race riots and the urban blight- plus the recent chi-chi lofts, it was my neighborhood.

The center of my world was Nostrand Avenue and Bergen Street. If you drew a radius of fifteen blocks from that point, you viewed my whole world. It was called Brooklyn, New York, or to be more specific, Bedford-Stuyvesant.

It was the 1940's and we were deep in a war that defined our daily lives. We rationed food, gas, and items that the government needed for the war. The catch phrase was "Don't you know there's a war on? ". It explained everything we did, thought, or planned for.

The neighborhood was the true melting pot that signified America to us and the rest of the world. We lived together- Irish, Jews, Greeks, Russians, Italians, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans. We did not notice that this was a problem, because it wasn't. Each time I look at my grade school graduation class picture, it shows all of us together, smiling, unaware that we were integrated, unaware that we got along well, unaware that this was not the norm and would never be again.

We had a richness of languages. On any warm night when the mothers were calling the children to dinner, no one could hear the names, but by the accent, we would call out, “Gerry, your mother’s calling you”. We first-generation Americans identified what was cooking in each apartment, by the smells. When Mrs. Callas was making moussaka, we all wanted to eat at Billy’s house. When the Russian mothers were making liver, we were nowhere to be seen.

We shopped in small specialty stores: the Greek fruit and vegetable market, the German deli, the Italian meat market, the fish market, the local hardware store, and the wonderful German bakery (Ebinger’s). No supermarkets, each store had its own charm, smells, and storekeeper’s personality (some were better than others).

We walked to school. No school buses needed. Everyone lived right near the school. You attended either P.S. 138 or St. Theresa’s Catholic School. We played in both school yards and delighted in confusing the nuns, each trying to figure out which were her students and which were the guests. We were respectful of the sisters and our teachers. Our worst offense was chewing gum or speaking to our desk mate when we were supposed to be paying attention to the teacher. No one cut school; our parents would have killed us. It was a toss- up as to who we were more afraid of, the teacher, the principal, or mom and dad.

We learned some lessons in that neighborhood. The war took some of the husbands and dads. Widows were often without skills to support the family left behind. We learned that we girls had to be able to support ourselves. My mother said, “You should have a trade, just in case your husband is not around to support you”. We also learned that some husbands went out for a newspaper, pack of cigarettes, or groceries and never came back, another reason to have a trade.

By the way, we did not know that we were poor. No one owned a car or single family home. Our clothes came from the local dress store, or from May's, Brooklyn's low-price department store. No one had air conditioners or television sets. Even when both became available, it was years before the neighborhood sported TV antennas or window air conditioners.

We were lucky in our neighborhood; we had three bus lines and two subway lines, all within walking distance. We could go anywhere, from Manhattan to Coney Island, from Canarsie to the Bronx, all for fifteen cents with transfers. All public transportation was safe and clean.

I grew up thinking everybody lived this way, sharing life with people from all races and religions, feeling safe in your neighborhood. We travelled to exotic places on the subway or buses. We walked the straight and narrow, because we knew the difference between right and wrong. We learned life lessons from the events that happened to our neighbors. We shared blessings and sorrows with everyone around us.

In my neighborhood, I saw a life that should have become the national norm, but was cut short. Looming around the corner were prejudice, white flight, race riots, and intolerance. Where were those attitudes when I was growing up?

How lucky I was to have been born in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, in 1938.

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From: Memoirs: Writing Life Stories  
Facilitators: Ellen Boone and Rudy Yanuck

### **Trip Interruptus, Paris.**

by Sara Burke

To my own surprise, I am home from Paris. Paris, where I come alive, live out my dreams, feel like I fit. But I am back now. Here, St. Louis. When Paris beckons, calls and waits for me, I flee into her arms. That warm embrace, the language of love, where every molecule of my being is alive, lively and living. St. Louis. Now. Why? Because, my years of dance caught up to me this time. I could not hide. The discs I abused fought back and they won. Well, they won this round.

Walking is painful.

On my first day in Paris, I hobbled to the Bastille where I dined at Café Francaise. I ate slowly, bite by bite resting my body. I sipped a glass of Sancerre hoping to stay a little longer, just enough to build the fortitude to walk the three blocks back to my beautiful apartment. The air so crisp, cool, an April Paris. Paris in April. The time to walk, to stroll, to ramble down the myriad narrow streets with the uneven, treacherous cobblestones. Each stone more beautiful than the next. I could barely complete my walk back. I looked at the cobblestones not for beauty but for the threat of a fall.

I am not ready for this yet. I am not there yet. It is not yet time for my life in dance to end my walk in life. So I sat down, had a talk with myself and I made a bargain with my body: I will return you to St. Louis to seek more help, more medical intervention, more solutions so that I may win the next round. The round where I return to Paris, whole enough to walk long distances, to meander, to pick up where I was just two days ago.

And you will come with me pain free.

I thought I could do it. Even though my diagnosis a month before leaving was serious I believed I could gut it out. I walked with severe pain for over 3 months and I really believed I could walk through the pain. Even though I have an almost “full thickness gluteus medius tendon tear.” I still thought with my high pain tolerance I could suck it up, I could make this trip. I danced with injuries, I lived with pain; why should this stop me, stop me cold in my steps: I knew I had to fly back. I could not fight through almost 3 more weeks of pain. And then there were the 10 steps before the lift and the 10 more to reach the apartment.

I also have herniated discs. L4, L5 S1 and stenosis. All my toes are dislocated and I walk in turnout. I am so turned out I bump into floor boards. Turnout is everything for a dancer but for a person it is a nightmare.

But, after another talk with my rebellious body; I kept moving, soaking up the last few days I had left in Paris. A few more adored restaurants. I met people in cafés, trying to gracefully exit an Uber, trying not to wince in pain. I am a dancer after all. I garnered as much grace as I could, as much courage as I needed.

I saw Larry - renowned dancer/choreographer/ director. He'd understand when the body has to cancel. I did not cancel; my body did.

While there, I wrote, I read, looked out the beautiful windows, heard the church bells, the doves cooing, the Spring rain pelting against the windows, and still felt the magic surrounding me.

Reality was knocking. Time to go. I booked my flight, ordered wheelchairs and packed my bag.



In Paris, you wait and wait and wait for wheelchairs. Finally my pusher came. I held back tears as I sat in the chair. This is not me. Not me. But it was. It was me in that wheelchair, in Charles De Gaulle airport. I was so sad, bereft really. This is not how I planned to leave Paris. But I'd be back again. Some way.

I've told no one I am back. I want to savor my memories, to wallow in my sadness, to vent, to pound the floor, to scream: "It's not fair! Why me? I hate you bad body, mean sadistic body!" I'll have my own pity party. And then I'll fight back. I'll begin again that arduous journey to regain my strength, to get answers and find solutions. To make the pain stop. To return to Paris.

I get asked a lot: Was it worth it? Your life in dance: worth this now? And every time, through pain and tears, I say, Yes, it was all worth it. I would do it all again.

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From: *Writing for Ourselves and Others*, section I

Facilitators: Nina Kaplan and Rita Hulbert

### **In it together (a marriage of 60 years)**

by Nina Kaplan

Riding the steed of emotional

See-saw

Him up you down round and round

Courting contentious friends

Connections frayed and broken

Thinly rebranded  
A ponytail toss... in his direction

Beyond awareness  
A chemistry forged  
Together each others climate  
No matter The weather

The marriage its own body  
Performed in public  
Each other the scriptwriter  
Inherited shadows fall Your father His mother

The melody  
The mutter the murmur  
The two part invention the fugue  
Of shared laughter

New Parents  
She's losing her nights her days  
He tosses baby in the air  
She cuddles and soothes to sleep  
He sleeps  
He needs to sleep When will she sleep

What stays A shoulder to lean on  
An embrace  
A choir of gentle kisses

**In Memoriam**

**Low Water Bridge, Late Spring, 1928**

By Helen Schrader

*Edited for the Showcase by January Kiefer*

My feet are numb an I think ‘bout the waders I saw back at Rollie’s bait shop. Them with a pair of Shannie’s knit socks would keep my feet warm and cozy. But then I’m standin here fishin cause I aint got no money; not fer food nor to fix my truck what needs its motor rebuilt – and sure not for waders.

Dang, this water is cold. Its runnin clean and swift over the top of the bridge today – bout ankle deep. The pool where the trout shimmer an wait is a clear blue green. I love this stream – it’s just plumb purty.

I flick my line an let er settle on top the water upstream at the head of the pool. Right away I get a strike, but it don’t take. I reel it in an cast her again. Two more casts an, by golly, I hook ‘im. A rainbow – good size – maybe two pound. Three more like him an I kin go home. There’s a lot to do at home. Don’t never get it all done.

I admire that fish ‘fore I put ‘im on the stringer an into the bucket of water. He’ll live jest fine there until I git home an clean my catch. Shannie’ll be so pleased.

I’m real lucky to have Shannie. She’s a treasure. Lawsey – she’s good with the kids an the house. She cleans, knits, sews an takes care of the garden. Every year she puts up all them veg’tables and stores ‘em in the root cellar. And cook – my land can she cook.

Shannie can make a meal out of almost nothin'. And how that girl does love me. Almost as much as I love her. Yesiree, I'm real lucky to have Shannie.

Flick, flick. I got two now. Two more an I kin go home. We'll have a real nice supper tonight – trout with maters an lettuce an some of them taters we dug the other day. Maybe Shannie'll make biscuits - her biscuits are real special. Wonder if there's any canned peaches left in the root cellar.

Thank God for that root cellar. Without it to help us through the winter we'd all starve.

I can usually kill a deer or two and there's gen'rally squirrel an rabbit but kids need veg'tables. At least, that's what Shannie says an she's right smart about them things.

Flick, flick. Come on little trout. I see you hidin there in the shade. I need to get on home so lets get this over with, huh. Someday I'm gonna come here just to fish fer pleasure – guess maybe I'll be a old man by then.

Hey, there's a car comin'. Hey slow down. Can't you see there aint enough room here for you and me both? An stop blowin that dang burned horn. You're skeerin the fish. I'm skedadlin. I'm skedadlin. Dag burned city slicker with your fancy car.

Okay yer majesty. I'm outta the way now. You kin rush on to wherever the heck your goin in sech a hurry in that Model A or T or whatever that is. I'd salute you with this finger but Shannie says that aint perlite. Shannie says, put your hand in your pocket an you won't get in no trouble.

Now, I gotta wade back. Maybe next time I'll just stand there, let him wait.

Flick, flick

Was that a strike? Yup. Only one more fish to go.

It's gettin dark now. Just one more. Come on little fishies.

Maybe I'll bring Dan'l next time. Shannie says he's too young, but I don't think so.  
Fishin aint dangerous - lessen some dag burned city slicker pushes you offen the bridge.  
I bet Dan'l and me could catch em twice as fast, and it won' be so dark on the walk home.  
Flick. Flick – got cha!

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From: *Memoirs: Writing Life Stories*  
Facilitators: Shirley Baker & David Krausch

### **The Young are Growing Old, Too**

by Madge Tregger

Jennie will be 60 next month. I was 60 recently. The years fold like an accordian bellows...sometimes fanning out to the 30 years between and other times so close together, it is yesterday. My 60s were my favorite decade. We were young enough to be in good shape. Our daughters were out of the house, young women still in process, with their futures on the horizon. We had gotten through the financial stress of the college years. We liked our work, our friends, our life.

Our fifties were not the greatest years. I had two bouts of cancer, with several surgeries, a year of chemo and 6 weeks of radiation, and all the short-term and long-term fallout (including my hair) that comes with it. Tom lost his job just as Jennie was starting college, and then took an unexciting job with The Binkley Company, an hour's drive away, in Warrenton...three years before his big transition, starting over as a broker and eventually a V.P. at Merrill Lynch. His new career at age fifty two was challenging and

suited his talents. He made it fit his financially conservative temperament (he was, after all, a product of the depression), and loved teaching and consulting with families. He looked forward to going to work everyday for the next twenty five years.

Our sixties...of blessed memory...were healthy, happy and prosperous.

Jennie is not looking forward to being sixty. For one thing, her husband is fourteen years younger and quit his job. He is studying for a new career; her son has had an unidentified illness and is home until they figure out what it is. They have found substantial mold in their house...and are dealing with the major stress of lifting up carpeting, decluttering the house, putting in new flooring and a new kitchen. Jennie is holding down the fort with a full-time job...she works from home. All is on hold for Charlie, her son, until they find out if the mold is responsible for his chronic pain. Jennie handles it with grace and resilience. Maybe her 60's will be her favorite decade too. Time will tell. Of course, we can't predict which will be our favorite decade, but I can be sure that, though I am grateful to be here, this is not up there in the top three of my favorite decades.

My 60th birthday celebration was the best family vacation we ever had. Tom surprised me, renting a house on Coral Bay in St. John in the Virgin Islands. We had been to Cinnamon Bay on the Island in the first years of our marriage...a beautiful spot with rented tents with cots inside, on the beach for (is this possible?) 5\$ a night. I learned to snorkle, to not be afraid of lizards and to use an outhouse. We returned in 1994 when we upgraded from a tent and rented a house. close to our dearest friends, the Bermans. We hiked, swam and snorkelled on different beaches, danced at the local bars. The eight of us celebrated with champagne on our deck and calypso dancing at the Bermans. Anne and Paul did yoga and meditated on a small balcony on the top of a tower adjoining the house. Jennie presented me with a quilt with all the families' hand prints handprints on it.

I am the only one of my generation still here, but the quilt has followed me to the Barclay House and lies on the back of the wing chair in my bedroom. And the girls and I hold wonderful memories of the warmth, laughter, beauty and love of that 60th birthday.

The family has shrunk. The family has grown. My memories stay. Sometimes they are bittersweet as the losses creep in. But the joys of the present and watching the future unfold as we become the ancestors to our grandchildren, fill me with gratitude and a birds-eye view of the miracle of life.