



TRICKY

a memoir
anthology



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Edited by Sandra Tonn



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Tricky

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adjective

1. (of a task, problem, or situation) requiring care and skill because difficult or awkward.
2. (of a person or act) deceitful, crafty, or skillful.

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Introduction *by Sandra Tonn*

Welcome to a book of tricky tales—all true stories, all written by seniors participating in the Powell River Public Library’s *Memoir Writing for Seniors* program. Each author has not only participated in one of the *Memoir Writing for Seniors* multi-week courses at some time over the past eight years, but has, in addition, committed to and attended a monthly memoir writing group to share work, receive feedback, and provide feedback to fellow writers.

The program provides the writers with a deadline, some guidance, and ongoing support. Many say that they never would have written their stories down if it weren’t for the course and the group. Others are amazed at the amount of memories and stories that come back to them, either when they are writing or when they hear the stories of others.

Publishing some of the many stories is a way to share them beyond the intimacy of the writing groups. This fourth memoir anthology published by the Library, has the theme of “tricky” tying the stories together. Some of the tricks are obvious—an outhouse prank, a Halloween ritual, the trick to getting the TV to work, and a magic show, which was the inspiration for the cover of this book. Other tricky stories are subtler—the trick to unlearning racism, finding the courage to do the right thing, and the tricks of the moon.

All of the stories are personal and offered with a wish to inspire, entertain, or simply share a tricky story from life.

Enjoy!

Call Me *by Sheila Banks*

"I'm going fishing," my husband said. He'd waited all morning and into the afternoon for the fellow to show up, but after seeing the tell-tale circles on the unruffled surface of the water, he knew the fish were rising.

"If the guy shows up, just call me," he added.

It was the mid '70s and Jack and I were living in a small cabin on the shore of Francois Lake in central British Columbia. He'd advertised an aluminum boat for sale and a fellow he worked with told him he was going to come and take a look at it that day.

I expected Jack to stay within sight of our property, but a couple of hours later, when the prospective buyer showed up, I couldn't spot him. We didn't have electricity and without power poles to utilize, Telus couldn't provide us with a landline. Cell phones didn't exist, and even today they don't work in that remote location.

"Is Jack home?" the man asked. "I'm here to look at the boat."

"He's out fishing," I said, "but hold on a minute, I'll call him."

With that, I left him standing on the beach and disappeared into our cabin.

He had a strange look on his face when I emerged carrying a double-barrelled 12-gauge shotgun. I "called" Jack twice, but he didn't answer.

"I don't think I want the boat," the guy mumbled, before he turned and left.

Sheila Banks is a BC girl with city, rural, resort, and small-town locales in her history. Always a storyteller and never shy about voicing an opinion, she has recently taken to writing memoirs.

A Pocket Full of Trouble *by Wendy Barker*

I wore one of my favourite dresses on the day of the Grade 8 Reading Skills exam. The brown shirt-waister had beautiful and deep tapestry pockets on either side of a full skirt. I had those pockets well-supplied with Kleenex as my insurance against a sudden burst of hay-fever.

Reading Skills was an easy-breezy course, and a nice change from the tough slog of studying for Geography, History, and Science. I finished the exam quite quickly, and so to fill in the time, I took out a Kleenex and wrote down some of my answers to compare with friends after school. We often recorded test answers on scraps of paper or on our hands and shared them afterwards as a way to reassure ourselves until we could get confirmation after the teacher had done the marking.

As I wrote, I heard my friend Beth whispering to get my attention from across the aisle. At first, I tried to ignore her because I didn't want to get caught talking during an exam. She persisted, and I realized she was asking for a Kleenex. To quiet her, I slipped another tissue out of my pocket and into her reaching hand. I noticed that instead of using it for her nose, she, too, began writing on it.

Soon afterwards, the bell rang to end the period, and the teacher asked the last person in each row to collect the papers. Beth and I were last in our respective rows, so we gathered up the exams and took them to the front.

The teacher then announced that two people had been cheating on the exam and would be getting zero. We were horrified, and all of us left the room speculating about who could have done such an awful thing. It was not until we were on our way home that I was struck by the thought that our teacher may have misunderstood the use of our Kleenex.

Beth and I spent the next couple of days wondering and uneasy, until the teacher handed out the marked tests and ours were not among them. Ours would be the zeroes. Apparently, the teacher had used the time while we were collecting the exams to pick up the Kleenex from Beth's desk. Beth had written on it in two different colours of ink, so circumstantial evidence suggested pretty clearly to my having shared my answers with her. We hurried home that afternoon to tell our sad tale to our mothers. They immediately went to the school principal to sort out the mess. Probably our bacon was saved because the Kleenex with my own writing on it was still in the tapestry pocket of that brown dress, and my mother took it to the school with her. Fortunately, the teachers also agreed that neither Beth nor I would have any reason to cheat on a subject that came so easily to us.

Even so, I know the principal was not entirely convinced of our innocence. He pulled me out of Science class a couple of days later for a little chat in the hallway. Acting ever so sympathetic, he said that he knew there might be times when kids could be afraid to tell their parents the

whole truth, but I should feel free to confide in him. I was shocked that he would think I'd be more likely to bare my soul to him than to my parents, and I assured him that I always told my parents the truth.

I'm still not sure that he bought it, but in the end, we received our true exam marks, and Kleenex from then on was for drippy noses only.

Wendy Barker retired from a career composing practical business policies, reports, and grant applications. She is now enjoying the opportunity to explore creative writing while setting down her memoirs for her grandchildren.

Fun-o-Rama *by Kathy Bennett*

When my brother Paul and I got off the school bus that spring day in 1961 it seemed like any other day, but it wasn't. I was eight years old, Paul was six. When we walked into our house we saw our parents wrestling with what looked like a large piece of furniture, about the size of an easy chair, but it wasn't. It was our first television set. A few of the kids at school had televisions, TVs for short, and they talked non-stop about "Fun-O-Rama." I never thought our family would ever get a TV, but there right in front of us were our parents setting one up in the living room.

We were so excited to watch TV, but our after-school job was to get our cow home from the neighbor's field for milking. We didn't want to miss anything, but off we went. It didn't help that the neighbours had 30 or so acres of fields dotted with swamps, a creek, and bushes. The cow could be anywhere. After a cursory search for her, Paul and I gave up and ran back home.

Dad and mom were still fussing over the TV set and getting annoyed with each other as they struggled with wires and plugs. We were sent back out again to look for the cow, whining and complaining, which seemed to add to their frustration. Eventually the cow was found, brought home, and milked, but the TV was still not working right. The screen was filled with gray static. What was wrong? No one seemed to know. Supper was eaten in a tense and gloomy silence.

A few days later Dad chopped down a tall sapling, trimmed off the branches and skinned the tree to make a pole. He attached it to the side of the house, where it stretched above the roof line with an antenna on top that spread its wide, metal arms into the air. While Dad was on the roof adjusting the antennae Paul and I sat transfixed in front of the TV, willing it to do something. Mom was stationed in the kitchen doorway. Dad would call to Mom, "Do the kids see anything?" And Mom would ask us, "Do you see anything?" And we'd shake our heads and answer, "No." And Mom would call back to Dad, "Not yet." And Dad would fiddle some more. This went on for some time, until suddenly a picture appeared. It was a miracle. We screamed, "Yes! We see something!"

Dad scrambled down off the roof and together we all stared at the scene on the TV. And so began our new lifestyle. But, it was a tricky thing watching TV. Whenever we had a wind storm, the antenna would get buffeted and the TV screen would go fuzzy with static. Someone would have to go outside and turn the pole while someone else stood at the kitchen door relaying the messages back and forth. Sometimes this process was necessary two or three times during the course of a half hour show.

It wasn't just wind storms that made watching a show tricky. Quite frequently, for no reason that anyone could fathom, the top half of the picture would ever so slowly roll up, and as the top half of the picture disappeared off the screen, with the bottom half of the picture in pursuit, a horizontal line would appear as if to underline the picture frame. Eventually the top

half of the picture would reappear again but coming up from the bottom. This flipping would gain momentum and it would roll faster and faster, until it became too difficult to watch the show. Fortunately, the TV had a knob that helped adjust this and so we'd fiddle with that knob. We'd make the screen flip really, really fast as if to get this problem "cleared out." Then we'd carefully make the flipping slow right down and then stop. Sometimes this worked. Sometimes it didn't. Sometimes we'd reverse the flipping. Instead of the picture frames going up we'd turn the knob so the flipping would go down really, really fast, hoping that that would "clear it out." Sometimes that worked. And sometimes it didn't.

In the early days we only had one channel. Channel 12. In later years, Dad rigged up four homemade wooden poles on the lawn that were connected with wire. Another wire stretched to the house. That particular antennae brought in Channel 6.

"We don't need any more Channels," Dad said, "You can only watch one at a time."

And that was that. We were happy. "Fun-o-Rama" came into our lives along with "The Ed Sullivan Show," "The Honeymooners," "Mr. Ed," "Gunsmoke," and many more—providing, of course, that the cow was brought home first.

Kathy now prefers to read a good book as opposed to watching TV. She also enjoys writing her memoirs to one day pass along to her grandchildren.

Driving Habits *by Joanna Dunbar*

I was disbelieving, even horrified, riding the crowded bus in Boston. Here were these elderly people, struggling up off their seats and offering them to me, insisting I take them.

“Oh no, that’s fine,” I’d say, and, “No, thank you,” but even then, they would simply stand there, staring at me, leaving the seat empty. I would have to sit down. I would have to smile graciously even while I felt like scowling. I would sit, watching them wobble about, as the bus made its tortured way down narrow city streets.

What was this all about? I was, after all, a young, healthy woman. Finally, I got it. It was my habit—my nun’s clothes. I was obviously a nun and this was Boston where the Irish Catholic faith was strong and full of ritual and protocol. To these fellow riders, giving up their seat to a nun—no matter her age—was appropriate behaviour, even earning them points in heaven.

Fortunately, I didn’t have to ride the bus often once it was discovered I could drive a car with a certain competence, which was defined as *not* driving with my foot on the brake—as was the habit of the other resident driver—thus preventing very jerky motions. I was soon busy driving older nuns to appointments downtown. I found negotiating the rushing traffic and complicated roadways—probably laid out on the original cow paths—tricky but fun.

An essential, often used, main road called Storrow Drive took us into the heart of downtown. I thought I knew it well, but there was one time, on a dark and rainy evening, when I simply couldn’t find it on our way home. I drove the circular route around and around and around Boston Common during rush hour, looking for that exit. Finally, for no apparent reason, it appeared right where I had been looking for it and we were once again on our way home, the nuns apparently not noticing we had been totally lost.

I continued to be the driver of choice, which saved me from sitting—and others from standing—on the crowded bus.

Putting a memory of an experience into words that can be appreciated by others thrills Joanna Dunbar. Through the practice of memoir writing, she has learned that doing so is an art requiring skill and attention.

The Goodwin Sisters *by Bev Falconer*

My mother and her sister were best friends and when I was in high school Mom asked me if I had missed having a sister. This was not an issue that concerned me. What did concern me at that time was travelling. I devoured travel books and dreamed of adventures. But where could I find a magic carpet?

I went on to attend the University of British Columbia and while browsing through their manual discovered a student exchange program that would finance a year at another Canadian university. My well-paid summer job at the Powell River Company offices would cover my travel expenses. I was ecstatic.

And so, in September 1951, the year I would turn 21, I departed our isolated town of Powell River on the Union Steamship—the only way out of town at that time. From Vancouver a train took me to Kingston, Ontario, the site of Queens University. An old brick house named Goodwin would be my home for the next ten months and when the door opened I was swarmed by 20 girls, welcoming the stranger who had come all the way from BC.

My housemates informed me that my trunk, the one my dad had built especially for my trip, had to go to the basement. However, they assured me they would all help me carry its contents to my third-floor room. I was so embarrassed when the trunk was opened. There was a hodgepodge of paints, inks, brushes, and pens (for my poster making) mixed indiscriminately along with a diary, books, and photos throughout the skirts, boots, and pajamas. If I'd known this was going to be open to public viewing I would have organized things more carefully. Anyway, no one seemed to notice. They were all talking so much and treating it like a party.

My roommate, Shelagh, the eldest of three girls in her family, was so competent. She normally lived in Toronto and drove in the downtown traffic, and even drove across the border to Buffalo during White Sales to buy sheets for the family's lodge-resort in northern Quebec. On two occasions she had taken her sisters to Ireland to visit their father's family. I really felt like a small-town hick with a capital H! Although we were the same age, Shelagh took me under her wing. My coat was not warm enough for an Ontario winter, she informed me, and took me to get a liner made for it. Then she made sure I wore it when we ran across the road to the dining hall. It was such a short distance I would just scoot out in my sweater. But Shelagh was used to the climate—and used to bossing around younger sisters.

It always seemed Shelagh was doing things for me. However, there was one thing she wanted me to teach her. I have always delighted in going to bed and cozying up under the covers. A sentence I had read about this pleasure in a French reader appealed to me and I memorized it. When Shelagh heard it, she loved it and learned it, too. Repeating it became our good-night ritual: "Jamais petit oiseau ne frotta plus délicieusement le duvet de son nid." Never did a little bird snuggle more deliciously in the down of his nest. My roomie and I became lifelong friends.

The adjustment to living with 20 girls was tricky. Privacy and modesty were the first things to go down the drain. Having a bath seemed to be considered a social event at Goodwin, and girls wandered in and out of the huge bathroom to visit. One of our girls, Vivian, was a photographer for the university newspaper and her camera flashed regularly at Goodwin House. She even took a picture of a back-scrubbing—fortunately not printed in the paper.

Terry belted out all the popular tunes on the piano in the common room. Although we groaned to hear yet another performance of “Heart and Soul,” or “Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered,” we enjoyed most of the other songs from her extensive repertoire. When Goodwin girls weren't ready to go when their dates arrived, Terry would serenade them with the current top hit song, “You keep me waitin’ till it’s getting’ aggravatin,’ you’re a slowpoke.”

Our “don” patrolled the halls on weekday evenings making sure it was quiet for studying. But on afternoons and weekends there was a constant pounding up and down stairs to visit. There were new records to listen to, letters to read to each other, clothes to swap, and things to learn about all the little towns in Ontario that were hometowns to our house sisters. One girl told me she worked summers picking tobacco. I didn't even know tobacco grew in Canada.

Another of the girls had a beautiful dove grey fur coat that she generously shared. She offered it to me to wear to the Engineer’s Ball over my pink formal. I was brought up with, “Never a borrower nor a lender be,” and was reluctant to borrow anything so precious. However, she wouldn't take no for an answer.

“It's just rabbit fur,” she said dismissively, draping it around my shoulders.

I felt like royalty. I later discovered her father was the Auditor General of Canada.

Every Sunday we morphed into proper young ladies as we got dressed up for our evening meal, known as “Tea.” The gathering was in the lounge instead of the dining room of Ban Righ Hall. We used fine china and were served dainty sandwiches and sweets. Queen’s University was founded by the Presbyterian Church in Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland, so I think Sunday Tea was part of their British tradition.

I did get a good education at Queen's even if different than expected, and Mom needn't have worried about my lack of a sister. It's never too late to adopt one—or 20!

Bev Falconer’s interest in writing began with early thank-you notes, pen pals, genealogy quests, and keeping in touch with family and friends. And then she found the Memoir Writing for Seniors program through the Library and became captivated with recording her memoirs of growing up in the Townsite during the Great Depression and World War II.

Abracadabra! *by Terry Faubert*

I would be going out after dark? And staying up past my bedtime? The reason for this astonishing news was even more thrilling. The Christmas I was six, the rubber factory where my father worked was having a party for employees and their families—a party that promised a magic show!

I was eager to go, but we were delayed by my ten-year-old brother, Leo, who put up a huge fuss about having to wear a tie. I found his refusal faintly amusing. In the face of our parents' insistence, I knew his small rebellion was doomed to failure. Besides, I had little sympathy for his plight since a small piece of cloth around his neck seemed nothing compared to my uncomfortable crinkly dress.

He sulked and muttered beside me in the back seat of the car, the offending tie hidden for the moment beneath his winter coat. Once we arrived at the hall, all such woes were forgotten. Excitement crackled the air. There were hundreds of noisy children filling the seats, bouncing, laughing, and shouting.

We were sitting far back from the stage, my feet dangling above the floor, my brother hopping into the aisle. When the amazing magician asked children to come forward to assist, Dad gave his permission. Leo dragged me by the hand in his hurry, and we joined a small crowd of children huddling on the steps up to the stage. I was delighted and hoped to be chosen.

"There's no such thing as real magic," my brother informed me with a whisper. "You have to watch carefully to see how the magician fools people. Don't forget," he admonished me, "Look real hard and you'll discover his secret."

But it was my brother who was chosen first.

"The boy with the tie," the black-caped wizard called out, pointing.

After asking my brother if he liked wearing a tie, and receiving the expected answer, the magician instructed him to take it off and place it in a paper bag. Then, to gasps from the audience and my brother's huge grin, he set fire to the bag.

Good for Leo, I thought, but what will our parents say?

My brother was dismissed and the sorcerer went on to other children and other tricks.

"Did you see?" I whispered.

He shook his head, his eyes shining. "There was nothing. I think it's gone."

When it was my turn, the magician handed me a cloth sack. The lights were so bright I could see nothing of the audience. I had no idea where my parents were. My heart pounded and I could

hardly attend to what he wanted. He gave me cardboard lollipops, or what we called “suckers.” I placed them into the sack and closed it.

“Say ‘abracadabra,’” he ordered, waving his wand.

Upon my compliance, the sack was re-opened to reveal real suckers. How did he do that? I realized with dismay that I had forgotten to watch for the trick, but I got to keep the suckers and was smug with my prize. Leo was disgusted that I hadn’t discovered how such an obvious trick worked, but sucking my candy sweetened my failure.

For the show’s finale, the conjurer removed his black top hat and some of the children on stage examined it. Just an ordinary, empty top hat. With a great deal of flourish, the magician placed it on a table. While the whole audience shouted “Abracadabra!” he reached into the hat. The snow-white, wriggling rabbit he pulled out was wearing my brother’s tie!

“Where is the boy who owns this tie?” he called when the applause died down.

And that was how Snowball came to live in a cage my Dad built under our basement stairs and to hop around our rec room, while we dutifully followed behind picking up droppings. The forts and houses my brother and I built for Snowball occupied us through many a winter evening and weekend, long after the sweetness of my candy had been forgotten.

Originally from Toronto, Terry Faubert has lived on BC’s west coast for 40 years. She is currently working on a book-length memoir, The Way Home, detailing her grand adventure moving to the wilds north of Lund.

Texada Trick or Treat *by Winnie Ferrier*

One Halloween, a few Blubber Bay friends invited me along to the other side of the bay for “trick or treating.” I was 11 years old and had my nine-year-old sister, Marilyn, as a tag-a-long. I have no recollection of what costumes we were wearing, but they for sure would have been thrown together from things at home and nothing too cumbersome—possibly a hobo or a pirate or a miner. I was very “tomboyish” at that age, so I know I was past being a gypsy or a princess.

It was about a 20-minute walk, if I remember right, along a dark piece of road without any houses until we got there. The time and distance passed quickly as we yacked and joked together while we walked. We had to be sure to turn left at a “Y” in the road, since turning right would take us five kilometres down the lonely road to Van Anda. Once we arrived across the bay, we trudged up a big hill and away from the ocean to visit the row of about ten houses to get our treats. The folks on this side of the bay didn’t get as many kids visiting, so the goodies were more generous and plentiful.

As was the custom, our little troupe would all walk up to a door together and shout “trick or treat!” Then each would step forward to the welcoming, opened door and receive a goodie. With shouts of “thank you!” we carried on to the next house. We were especially happy if we got homemade treats, such as popcorn balls made with corn syrup or chocolate fudge. My favourite was getting an apple coated in hardened caramel. Yum.

We then ventured over to a bunkhouse, off to the side at the bottom of the hill, which housed about six to eight Chinese men. These fellows typically kept to themselves when they weren’t working in the limestone quarries, but we knew from other kids who had gone in previous years that we would probably score some firecrackers. Our parents didn’t approve of us going to the bunkhouse and bothering the men but it was too tempting to resist. We knocked on a couple of doors and were happy to receive a few firecrackers, then we lost our nerve and headed back onto the road towards home.

As we returned to the “Y” in the road we encountered a group of older kids—teenagers—who were pulling brush from the side of the road and piling it into the center of the road that lead to Van Anda. It was a favourite annual activity at Halloween in those days for the older kids to build a road block so that the school bus couldn’t get through from Van Anda to pick up the kids in Blubber Bay the next morning. It must have been successful at some point in time because it seemed like a tradition during my youth. I had never participated in this ritual because I was still young, but there we were with the perfect opportunity to join in. It didn’t take long for our merry little band to decide this was a really “grown up” thing to do, so we asked if we could help.

We were allowed to stay so we got on with lugging pieces of wood onto the road. It was very daring and exciting to be a part of this prank. Then we heard a vehicle approaching so we all dashed into the woods to hide, me still with my little sister in tow. I was terrified at the thought of being caught. Marilyn and I crouched down behind a fallen log in the bush and I told her to stay really still. She was almost crying but I kept encouraging her to keep quiet. We heard some booming male voices out on the road and I was sure we were doomed. Instead of approaching us though, we heard conversation and then the sound of chain saws. We thought they were dismantling our road block, but then one of my friends whispered to me, "They're cutting wood to add to the road block." It turned out that these guys we thought were "heavies," were just another group of older teenagers—probably loggers—who decided to help out with "the cause." What a relief! My friends and I decided it was time to slink away home before there really was any trouble, so off we went.

I guess the huge road block was taken apart that night at some point because the next morning my school bus arrived as usual. It was a big disappointment.

It was her grandson, Keegan, who motivated Winnie to write down her childhood memories from growing up on Texada Island because he enjoyed hearing them as bedtime stories when he was younger.

Young and Handsome *by Rosemary Hawkins*

I had been a widow for five years when I startled my family with an announcement. We were having a nice visit and I told them I had something to tell them.

“I have met a handsome fellow and fallen madly in love,” I told them. I explained that he was younger, but well mannered, and affectionate.

A worried hush fell over the room.

“How much younger?” my son asked.

I said I figured about 10 years, and that he’s still frisky. Then I admitted that I’d actually invited him to come home with me.

“I’m sure we’ll get along and he will be great company,” I said.

They truly were at a loss for words.

“I’m sure you’ll all like him,” I added.

“What’s his name?” my son asked.

I grinned and told him: “Mango.”

He sighed with relief and said, “You’ve got a cat!”

I was so pleased with myself. Pretty tricky!

Rosemary Hawkins began writing her memoirs so that her 24 great-grandchildren will know her stories, but her fan base grew quickly. One of her memoirs, about early days in Vancouver, was featured on a Vancouver news station, and another, about love and married life, was published in PR Living magazine.

Once Upon a Moon-lit Night *by Christa Köstler-de Beaupré*

A welcome breeze at the end of a hot summer day ruffled our curtains. The tall cottonwood tree across from our rented cabin was silhouetted against the fading sunlight. I looked forward to a relaxing evening, curled up with a book.

As a single mom, instead of paying for holiday camps, I took my three boys from our home in Vancouver to the Cariboo region for a summer adventure, which included living in a primitive cabin. I hoped to show them there can be life beyond the big city and its amenities.

My middle son Eric, 14, who had a knack for befriending some of the locals, was friends with a boy his age, Willy, who lived not far from us on a small farm up the hill. They would get together after supper and practice target shooting with Eric's .22 Rimfire rifle, a present from my brother. On the way to Willy's, Eric had to pass the property of a grizzled old timer. Several wooden signs announced: "Trespassers shot on sight!" He also owned a dog who barked excitedly, tail wagging at a staccato pace, whenever it caught a glimpse of my animal-loving son. I suspect the dog played a role in the unusual friendship that developed, because soon the grumpy old timer let Eric on his extensive property, which included the use of some weather-beaten miners' cabins dating back to the gold rush. They were tiny one-room log structures, with a small table and chair, and just enough room for a man, or in this case a boy, to put his bedroll on a wooden platform.

As was often the case, on this particular evening Eric had left with a plan to see Willy and then stay overnight at "his" cabin to sleep with the moon shining through the window. He didn't mind that small critters such as mice ran over him. In fact, he thought it was "so cool."

My oldest son Michael, 17, who loved earning money, was tired from a day's work logging in Wingdam and already in bed. Eight-year-old Christian was already asleep.

Finished with my book and without television or phone, I decided to turn in early. I glanced at the outline of the plump full moon rising, bathing the surrounding landscape in an eerie pale light. I hoped its beams wouldn't interrupt my dreams.

I was startled by sudden heavy knocks on our front door.

"Who is it? What do you want?" I shouted as I scrambled for my dressing gown.

I peeked through the window and saw several trucks and burly men looking in my direction. One bearded man, cradling a gun, knocked again, demanding to talk to my husband. Of course, there was no husband, but was that wise to admit?

"Well," I stammered, attempting to talk with a firm voice, "he is still out, but my oldest son is here. How can we help you?"

Just then Michael, hearing the commotion, joined me.

The man explained to us that Willy's mother had phoned to say her son heard shots down the road and is worried that something happened to his friend. Willy figures the crazy old timer might have mistaken Eric for a trespasser.

"Did your son take his gun?" the man at my door demanded.

Afraid my voice would fail me, I answered with a solemn nod of my head.

Fearing there may have been a shoot-out, the men decided to take Michael with them to communicate with Eric—to assure him that he was safe so he wouldn't panic or defend himself by shooting at them. They only want to make sure that he was ok.

Off they went, climbing over the fence built from scrawny trees, cautiously trespassing under the bright night by taking cover behind bushes and tall grass. They worked their way towards the mining cabin Eric liked to use and encouraged Michael to call out and identify himself and to assure his brother that he was safe. There was no response from inside. Finally, Michael entered, by now fearing the worst, but just in time to see Eric sit up, rub his eyes, and show bewilderment as to what the heck was going on.

Relieved, all had a good laugh. The men left Eric to return to his moonlit sleep in the cabin and dropped Michael off at our summer home, where he shared the adrenalin-fired story of the tricky approach to find Eric. The men, who had agreed a truck's backfire is easily mistaken for gun shots probably headed back to the pub.

Grateful for the happy ending, I gazed into the peaceful night. Luna winked at me, and whispered, "Imaginations run wild and strange things happen when I'm full."

Christa Köstler-de Beaupré arrived from her native Austria, at the age of 21, to visit relatives in Montreal and fell in love with Canada. After living many careers and adventures she has retired in Powell River and is writing about them for her children and grandchildren.

Trolling the Boss *by Sandy McCartie*

One of the best jobs I ever had came with a boss who was a short, tiny, and powerful woman. She worked hard but she liked to have fun, too.

One day, not long after I had been hired, another staff person gave the boss one of those little green-haired plastic trolls as a joke gift. Our boss displayed the troll, which she named Con-Troll, on her desk.

“Nobody touch my troll!” she said as she was leaving the office that afternoon. As the door closed behind her, I felt my eyes crinkle with mischief and I said to my coworkers, “We’re going to kidnap the troll.” Everyone thought that was a great idea.

We took the troll and hid it, and several of us stayed after work to create a ransom note out of words cut from the newspaper. Our boss came in the next morning to find the troll missing and the ransom note in its place, demanding “one dollar in unmarked bill” for the safe return of Con-Troll!

Of course, the boss made a huge drama out of her missing troll. She questioned all the staff and then, finally, came to me. She said that, as the newest person in the office, and someone who had been hired to be a champion advocate, would I please handle the negotiations for the safe return of her troll. Little did she know!

Over the next few weeks, our boss received further ransom notes. One included a polaroid print of Con-Troll his mouth taped shut with duct tape and with a little derringer gun, held by a black gloved hand, pointed to his head. Another ransom note showed up with some of the troll’s green hair taped to it. Eventually, arrangements were made for the exchange. It was to take place the afternoon of our big holiday party and open house. Our boss enlisted the woman who ran the photocopy room to be the impartial go-between. At the designated time, the swap was made in the underground parking garage of our building. Con-Troll was returned safely—minus a few green hairs—to his owner.

But that wasn’t the end of the story. Over the next year Con-Troll acquired a mate, Connie. And, of course, they had a couple of kids. (Trolls apparently have a very short gestation period.) Then, about a month before Christmas, the whole Troll family just disappeared! Boss lady was frantic! No one knew anything.

A couple of weeks passed and a post card came from the Trolls via Hawaii. (Yes, postmarked Hawaii, since my parents, who were on vacation there, had agreed to be part of the scheme.) Finally, the mystery was solved. The Troll family was on vacation! They’d apparently got a last-minute deal on airfare and hadn’t had time to leave a note.

Since our office had a bit of an international reach, post cards started arriving from all around the globe, including Thailand, Australia, and Japan. The Trolls were having a great time and wished we could all be there with them.

One Sunday afternoon, my staff team secretly joined me in the office with props and a VHS camcorder. We made a movie of the Troll family vacation. Parts of it contained nudity and sex and therefore the film was X-rated.

At our staff Christmas party that year, which was held at the boss's house, the doorbell rang. The boss went to answer it and discovered the whole Troll family, back from their year-long vacation and bearing the gift of a videotape of their adventures!

Sandy McCartie is a retired social worker and educator. She started writing her memoirs a few years ago to help her remember some more details of her life and to entertain her friends and family.

Unlearning Racism *by Mary Morgan*

Recently, while I was participating in an exercise of making a bracelet with beads representing losses in my life, I was drawn to a bead that was wooden, off-white, and oval shaped. It looked exactly like a bead I'd used to make a simple bracelet for an elder I had met back in 1975, when I was 17.

I met Brother Joe in Changuinola, Panama—a rural community where Chiquita Bananas operated, employing black people who were descendants of slaves from the Caribbean. The workers lived in shacks with no plumbing, and only some with a single light bulb. People were very poor.

Brother Joe was tall, thin, loving, and generous, with a twinkle in his eye. He'd give me a dime so I could get a soda pop, and a dime had value at that time. I called him Brother Joe because he called me Sister Mary. He was the first elder in my life to be interested in my thoughts and experiences, and I treasured that. He taught me, just in the way he treated me, that care and kindness is not confined to "our own." I learned that we all have hearts that beat, so we need to take care of each other.

After two months in Changuinola, I continued my travels. First to Colombia on the Caribbean side. In the Amazon Basin in Peru, I travelled down the Ucalyi River, a tributary of the Amazon, hoping to make it to Iquitos, where Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil intersected. There were not many boats moving, so I travelled with Gonzalo, a young Peruvian doing the same journey who made a balsa raft for us. Our first stop was in a Machiguengua, where some of the villagers had never seen a white person and thought I was an evil spirit. The local teacher had interfaced with the likes of me before, so he let them know I was just a person. They had no hair, so were curious about the hair on my skin. Surrounding me, they ran their hands up and down my hairy arms.

The second day there, someone offered us plant medicine. Gonzalo knew about such things. I had no idea, but trusted the experience was being offered for me to learn. Well learn I did, as I spent three days with spirits in the jungle. When I left the jungle and returned to the village I became paralyzed. It took a week for me to regain my ability to walk. It was as if the plant spirits wanted me to stop, reflect, and learn from my journey into their realm.

I left South America and returned to Changuinola nine months later, in December. Brother Joe was so happy to see me that he gave me the gift of a five-year-old Christmas card—the only ornament in his home—with a lovely note saying he had missed me. He also sang a song in the church for me, with his booming voice singing out for all to hear. I had never been honoured like that before. When I told him about my journey in Peru, he listened intently. Most people I told just thought I'd been on a drug trip or something, but not Brother Joe.

"Did you learn something Sister Mary?" he asked gently when I'd finished my story.

“Yes, I sure did, Brother Joe,”

“Well then, it was good for you.”

No judgment, no questioning, just a simple statement that taught me a life lesson—we are here to learn.

Before I left Changuinola, not knowing if I would ever return, I gifted Brother Joe the simple bead bracelet I’d made. When I returned to Canada, after 13 months away, I felt out of place in my so-called home. I was uncomfortable with the myopic view of the world reflected all around me. To survive my time away—first living with Cuna Indians, then hanging out in Changuinola, and finally travelling through South America on a budget of \$2 a day—I had to open my heart to others. This was contrary to my socialization from my family and society, which taught me not to trust “other” folks.

The racism I grew up with did not feel right in me. But as a dependent child how was I to turn against my parents, family, church, and everything else that standardizes and sets up such discriminatory social norms? I had no other experiences to teach me that racism excludes other perspectives and fosters hatred. Meeting Brother Joe was such a gift. We appreciated each other, which encouraged me to have the strength to follow my own heart and be authentic with everyone I met along the way.

I did return to Changuinola a few years later and sought out Brother Joe, but learned that he had passed. I was told that in the hospital he wouldn’t take his bracelet off. He died with it on. I still have the Christmas Card that he gifted me so many years ago. Yes, losing Brother Joe was a loss, but meeting him changed my life.

Mary Morgan has slowed down from a life of adventures and working in post conflict regions developing economic strategies and promoting stability for the most vulnerable. She is now living in Powell River enjoying her new pace of life.

Baby Pamela *by Caroline McPhail*

I had done many stinky diaper changes for sweet golden Pamela in the five months she had been coming to our family day care, but this one had somehow travelled right up her backside to her shoulder blades.

“Oh Pamela,” I sighed in frustration, “If you would cooperate with me, we could get this done much quicker.”

As I held her legs, lifted her butt, and reached for baby wipes, I noticed a large dark spot that spread across the middle of her back.

“What is this, my darling girl?” I asked as I looked at her. She just grinned at me and squealed.

I wiped gently to not cause any pain and sang softly, but my mind raged with questions as I completed the messy task. Is it a bruise? It sure looks like a bruise. If it is a bruise, how did she get it? Did she fall off something? But why wouldn't someone tell me about it? Did someone hit her?

I knew what I had to do but was afraid. Momentarily, I thought I could wait and speak with Pamela's mother, Denise, when she came to pick up Pamela, but what if someone else came for her? Or what if she knows nothing about the bruise? Worse yet, what if she thinks I did it? What if she accuses me of hurting precious Pamela?

Once the children were settled to play, I gathered my nerve and called my day care supervisor. I explained my discovery.

“Why are you calling me?” she said. “Who should you be calling?”

Wow, I thought, thanks for the support! She was certainly not telling me what I wanted to hear.

“I thought I was supposed to call you, and you would call Child and Family Services,” I blundered.

“No. You call CFS, you know the specifics,” Sharron said.

“I can't,” I blubbered, “I'm too afraid.” All my fear and apprehension came gushing forth in one long breath.

“What if Denise hates me? What if she thinks I did something to Pamela? What if she accuses me? Or what if she did something to Pamela or knows who did? What if she's protecting someone?”

Sharron interrupted before I could continue along the same battering line.

“Carol, get a grip. You know what to do. Call CFS and tell them what you told me. You didn't do anything to Pamela, did you?”

“No!” I said, “But I can't—”

I found myself whining to a loud dial tone.

Well that was a call for nothing, I thought. I paced between the family room and the phone on the kitchen wall as I checked the children and tried to gather the courage to do what needed to be done. My courage finally came from looking at Pamela's angelic face—knowing I could never live with myself if she was being abused by someone and I sent her back to it because I was too cowardly to call CFS.

Before I lost my nerve, I grabbed the phone, dialed CFS and was connected to Mary. I explained the situation. Phew, now my part is over, I thought to myself. They will take this incident forward. But no such luck. Discussion with Mary went along the same lines as my conversation with Sharron. Mary wanted me to do things I didn't feel were my responsibility, nor felt capable of.

Eventually we came to a mutual agreement. Mary was to arrive before Pamela's mother and would take them both to her office to explain the situation.

Denise arrived, and I watched as Mary met her on the sidewalk. Denise looked up at me in the window, with shock and horror on her face. My heart sunk into terror once again. As I got Pamela ready to go, I gave her extra hugs and kisses, wondering if I would ever see her again.

A few hours later, I received a call from Mary to tell me all was good. It seems the bruise I saw on Pamela's back was a birth mark called Mongolian spots, common in Aboriginal children. I heaved a sigh of relief and thought, oh I wish I had known that before.

After I hung up I again wondered, will Pamela return?

I wasn't to find out for a few long days, as it was the Friday of a long weekend. Thankfully, early Tuesday morning, Pamela and Denise were at the door.

As she passed Pamela to me, Denise gave me a big hug and whispered softly in my ear, "Thank you for loving Pamela enough to call the family cops on me."

Caroline McPhail had been wanting to write down memories for her children and grandchildren since she retired. Since taking the Memoir Writing for Seniors course through the Library last year, now she is doing so.

A Tricky Outhouse *by Theresa Pinel*

My 12-year-old cousin, Eileen, lived close to our place in Keremeos. She often strolled up the hill on a Sunday afternoon to see if anything exciting might be happening at our place. If not, she loved to bug my two teenage brothers.

Edward and Joe, both a little older than Eileen, noticed that every time she came to our place, Eileen used our toilet. That annoyed my brothers. At that time, in the early 1950s, we had no indoor plumbing, and their Saturday job was to empty the buckets of waste from under the seat. The back of the latrine had a trap door for easy bucket removal, but the problem was the stench, which was far worse than the raw cow manure they had to shovel out of the barn.

One Sunday afternoon, my brothers decided to play a trick on Eileen. They filled an empty Macdonald's tobacco can with water, left the outhouse door ajar, and hoisted the can to balance on the top of the door. It was foolproof as they were sure she wouldn't look up.

That day Uncle Stan and Aunt Wilhelmina walked over to visit us from River Road. After the long walk, Auntie hurried to use the toilet.

"Warum ist dass!" she gasped, as the water hit her. "Never before I find such Geschichte."

Seeing her confused and wet, the boys quickly disappeared.

My brothers set up for another opportunity to sting Eileen, but Dad walked into that one. He didn't laugh. I don't know if Joe and Edward received a whipping or a tongue lashing, but that was the end of their trickery. Worse than any punishments though, were Eileen's taunts.

"Ha! Ha! You didn't get me."

Theresa Pinel, a retired teacher, is writing her memoirs to put some flesh on her genealogy. She is also writing so that the younger generation in her extended family will know their history and how things were before social networking.

Rituals, Secrets, Miracles, and the Moon *by George Samuel*

My first curiosities were about my mother. In the blissful days before World War II, she had a mysterious ritual called “egg-zer-cizes” in which, I believed, she would make herself as smooth as an egg. My confusion here was somewhat like my confusing “soldier” with “shoulder,” which bore on the fact that soldiers shoulder their weapons when they march. I was combining my language learning with my learning about everything else.

Another mysterious ritual of my mother’s I was curious about and fascinated by was that of the rouge and the powder-puff—a secret process only I was allowed to witness. Years later, wars and revolutions later, when I was 11, I met a cousin in Toronto—a young woman who also allowed me to watch her rouge and powder-puff ritual. When I met her again another ten years later she told me, “You sure were some weird kid.”

My father, too, had a secret in his hideout—his woodworking shop in his garage—that appealed to my curiosity. While I was visiting him there, he showed me the wonderful secret: a green toy yacht, four feet long with sails and rigging and a large keel. He promised me we would go and sail it together some day. We never did. I don’t blame him. I now know I was witnessing the fall into dormancy of his inner child. The boat never made the trip from Burma to Edmonton with us. Wars and revolutions interfered in our father-and-son life and he didn’t have a garage again for many years.

But war had not yet broken out when I was shown the miracles of weather and space-time. My father showed me a distant rain shower that looked like a curtain hanging from its cloud to the ground. Astonishing! He had lifted me up onto the work-bench to see this out the window.

But the greatest marvel of all was the view from the car window when we drove to the hospital to see my mother when she was there to give birth to my brother. First of all, there’s the moon, following us everywhere we go, travelling at the same speed we are. Then there are the trees, not keeping up with us but falling behind, and the little bushes right next to us rushing past and left behind completely. But it’s all an illusion, you see, because actually we are passing moon, bushes, and trees all at the same speed, our speed. The moon just looks like it’s travelling with us because it’s so far away.

As I age, death obviously becomes more imminent along with the fears that come with it. However, it also appears that my curiosity is affected—the thing that more than anything else has kept me alive and well. Experiences seem less new and there is a feedback loop in which curiosity itself becomes a thing to fear. Don’t forget, it killed the cat.

George Samuel enjoys writing and sharing memoirs for the help it gives him in both understanding the meaning of his life, and in giving it meaning.

Acknowledgments

Most writers, I think, will agree that writing is, in and of itself, a tricky task—a process that requires trust, patience, creativity, vulnerability, and the resiliency to keep at it. I'd like to acknowledge all of the memoir writers, published and not, who see the benefits and value of writing down their memories. We can never know the impact they have or will have on family, friends, and the world.

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—Sandra Tonn, editor