

a memoir  
anthology

# TROUBLE



# TROUBLE

A memoir anthology

Edited by Sandra Tonn



POWELL RIVER  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

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# trou·ble

## *noun*

1. difficulty or problems.
2. public unrest or disorder.

## *verb*

1. cause distress or anxiety to.

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## Introduction *by Sandra Tonn*

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Welcome to a book full of trouble! All are true stories, all written by seniors participating in the Powell River Public Library's *Memoir Writing for Seniors* program.

This fifth memoir anthology published by the Library, has the theme of “trouble” tying the stories together. Usually it takes some time and work for the writers to come up with a story to match the annual anthology theme, but not this time! It seems trouble is at the core of many good stories and is a natural part of how we live, learn, and grow.

Some of the trouble in this anthology is fun, like purple hair and boogeymen, while other stories share tales of abuse, injury, and the need for courage. All of the stories are personal and offered with an intention to inspire, entertain, or simply share some true troubling experience from life.

Enjoy!

## The Art of a Trouble-maker *by Lesley Armstrong*

---

I was a brand-new teacher. My first classroom, teaching grade five/six students, was in a rickety old portable, and Freddy, who didn't have a wholesome family background, was one of my students. Underneath the ten-year-old stoic facial mask he wore, was a sweet child, but one would really have to dig to discover his sweet child's soul—or perhaps just luck out, like I did.

“Ow!”

“What is it Tom?” I asked.

“Freddy hit me!”

“Is that true Freddy?”

“No, Mrs. Armstrong.” Always the soft quiet voice.

“Hey, give me back my ruler, Freddy!”

“Would you please return the ruler, Freddy?” I asked.

“I don't have it, Mrs. Armstrong.”

“Maybe that's it over there under John's desk.”

“Yeah, that's my ruler.”

Somehow, it had quietly and magically moved to under John's desk.

“How'd it get over here?” asked John, exasperated.

He was getting pretty fed up with being Freddy's fall guy. All the boys were. That's what happened to you if you were lucky enough to be in the same classroom as Freddy. Freddy didn't have any buddies.

And, on it went, day in and day out. Ever the aspiring educator, I soldiered on. From Ruth James, my student practicum teacher, I had learned that if you include plenty of hands-on activities, students will succumb to the joy of learning. I wasn't placing bets on this crew though. Truth be told, I was not feeling like Ruth James material these days.

Researching and developing a cultural study of Japan, I discovered the ancient art of origami. I knew that if you married art to any form of learning, it would become a win-win situation. I went to our school library and was delighted to discover the card catalogue revealed a good selection of origami books to choose from. However, I was surprised to discover that they were all checked out, and all to one person.

“Who?” I asked the librarian, thinking that another teacher was also studying Japan with their class.

“Freddy,” she replied.

“My Freddy?” I gasped.

“Yes, when he moved here last year and discovered our origami book collection, he started signing them out. He’s obsessed with origami.”

*Flick!* went the light switch in my head.

During silent reading after lunch, I beckoned for Freddy to come up to my desk. Looking defensive, he rambled up slowly. He always moved slowly when you were watching him. Behind my back, I suspected that he was lightning fast.

“Freddy, do you have some folded origami characters at home that you could show me how to make? Our class is going to learn how to create origami art, but I need a lesson first, and I hear you’re really talented.”

“You want me to help you, Mrs. Armstrong?” he slowly questioned.

“Yes, I do, Freddy.”

He softly offered, “It’s easy once you get started.”

*Lesley has found the process of lifting memoirs from her memory to be most revealing. Details she had thought were lost, have been sifted and processed over time and emerge strong and often poignant to revisit.*

## Quite a Handful *by Wendy Barker*

---

Saturday morning was bright with the promise of springtime warmth and fun to be had. I took my six-year old self down the street to see if anyone was outside and looking to play.

Arleen was sitting on her front step, and keen for company. Just a year younger than I, she was quite adventurous, and I knew we could do something interesting together. Arleen told me her mother had just gone up to the corner store for some groceries, so she was on her own for a bit.

We wandered into her back yard, and began to admire all the colourful tulips curving up towards the sun. Arleen decided we should pick a large bouquet. I was pretty doubtful about this, as I'd been taught that flowers were for looking, not touching. However, Arleen assured me that she was allowed to do it. Because I wasn't fully convinced, I didn't pick any myself, but accepted her request to hold the bouquet as it grew.

She was still happily picking, and I was still holding, as her mother came around the side of the house. It quickly became apparent that the tulips were not supposed to be picked. Her mother whipped off her red high heeled shoe, turned Arleen over her knee, and gave her a serious spanking.

Then she turned to me and snapped, "You go home and tell your mother what a bad girl you've been!"

I did understand that I looked pretty guilty holding all those flowers, but in my own mind, I was quite convinced that I had done nothing wrong. So, I decided I really didn't need to tell my mother anything, and instead went to find another friend to play with.

I suppose that was my first exposure to the concept of circumstantial evidence, but I never did acknowledge my part as accessory to the tulip crime.

*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.*

## Der Daumen *by Kathy Bennett*

---

“Der Daumen! Der Daumen!” Mom growled at me, her eyebrows tightly scrunched together. She was perpetually ordering me to stop sucking my thumb. And if we were near other people, in church, shopping, or had visitors over she’d hiss the words, “Der Daumen!” in my direction. Der Daumen—German for, “the thumb”—was aimed at me like a secret code so that people outside the family wouldn’t know what she was saying and I had no choice but to immediately remove my thumb from my mouth.

I knew sucking my thumb was an embarrassment to my mom and yet I sucked it day in and day out. Doing so satisfied so many of my needs. If I was hungry, tired, bored, hurt, or lonely I had my thumb. My thumb helped me get through the day. It helped me to sleep at night. I needed my thumb. My thumb and I had a very close and loving relationship, but I couldn’t explain any of that to Mom. She wouldn’t understand. What frustrated her was that she had no control over my thumb sucking. And the older I got, the more ashamed and embarrassed she became.

“You should quit that thumb sucking right now,” she told me often enough, but I wasn’t going to. I couldn’t. I was addicted.

Mom told me my thumb would go flat and my teeth would stick out. That I’d have buck teeth and no one would want to be with someone with buck teeth. I worried a little about having buck teeth. When I wasn’t in need of my thumb, I’d make a fist and hold my thumb pressed hard against my front teeth in the hopes of keeping them from sticking out.

My mom had a German children’s story book. Us kids couldn’t read the language, but we certainly understood the pictures that went with the story—cruel pictures. Pictures of what happens to children when they don’t look where they’re going, or don’t eat their food, or are mean to animals. Mom would show me the picture of the man with his long, skinny legs and arms, leaping over the hills with a huge pair of scissors, searching for children who sucked their thumbs. She told me that man would come with his scissors for my thumb, too. And just in case that wasn’t scary enough, one day while chopping wood she threatened to chop my thumb off with the axe—that together we could finally be rid of this problem.

Dad was humbled and distraught by the ongoing conflict between Mom and myself. And my siblings, Theresa, Paul, Agnes, and Mike, couldn’t understand any of it. Why didn’t I just stop? They longed for me to quit. Longed for Mom to quit harping. No one else in the family sucked their thumb, so why did I suck mine? I wondered if they all wish I wasn’t their sister. Maybe I was adopted? Maybe my real family, a family who all sucked their thumbs, would come collect me one day? At least then Mom and everyone else in our family could relax.

What my mom didn’t know was that I often had pin worms. Living on the farm, I touched any number of things, then sucked my thumb. I couldn’t tell her that many, many nights throughout

my childhood I was so itchy it was enough to make me crazy. Or, how painfully hard it was for me to hide my thumb sucking habit at school, birthday parties, outings and sleep overs.

During my teen years I was more secretive of my habit, but at the same time I felt defensive of my thumb and my addiction. I pouted and I sulked. Why was it acceptable for adults to suck on their cigarettes, cigars, and pipes, but it wasn't okay for me to suck on my thumb?

Despite my mother's threats and warnings, my thumb didn't go flat, my teeth didn't stick out, and no skinny man with scissors came to snip it off. I suspect that for many years after I graduated and left home my mother, my siblings, and even my father wondered if I ever did stop sucking der daumen.

*Kathy Bennett enjoys writing her memoirs to one day pass along to her grandchildren.*

## Honour the Sabbath *by Jan Burnikell*

---

Sundays were always very serious days at our house. The focus was on going to church and one was expected to look “nice,” which is to say, one was to be dressed in one’s Sunday best and be on one’s Sunday best behaviour. This was not always easy for rambunctious children accustomed to the six-days-a-week freedom of life on a farm.

On this particular warm Sunday in mid-October, Mom—a very organized person—had everyone—including Dad who could care less about what he wore—dressed in the appropriate finery in plenty of time, when the new baby brother decided he was hungry. Distracted by his wails, she gave my two brothers and my eight-year-old self permission to go outside, with the stern admonition *not* to get dirty and *not* to play in the hay barn.

There were some interesting renovations going on in the cow barn and since that hadn’t been expressly forbidden, we decided to check it out. The rickety old stairs were gone, but there was handy accessibility to the loft by way of a heavy, wide board slanting up to the big door, across the drainage ditch. Getting up there was no problem—you just walked up the steep slope like a monkey, holding the sides of the board firmly in your hands. Getting down was another story. The boys could just run down the plank as agile as you please in their rubber-soled shoes, but I had on my shiny, patent-leather Sunday shoes with the slippery, hard soles.

Dad was shouting, “It’s time to go!” and “Where are you?” with increasing impatience and so I chose the only option I saw open to me—I sat down and inched my way along what seemed an endless piece of very rough wood. Every fibre of my being was focused on not falling off into the ditch—so focused that I was oblivious to the damage being done to a certain part of my anatomy, though a quick check when I got to the bottom of the plank confirmed I’d done a fair bit of damage to the back of my hand-embroidered dress. However, feeling triumphant because I was not dirty, I resolved to keep my front facing Mom at all times, convinced she wouldn’t notice a thing.

Huffing and puffing, I raced to the house to present myself for inspection and promptly forgot my resolution. She immediately saw the mess I’d made of my dress. Her ominously arched eyebrows and the light flashing in her green eyes made it clear she was not pleased. She was even less pleased when she discovered a very fine collection of wood slivers firmly impaled in my behind, which was starting to sting uncomfortably. She took dirty wood slivers very seriously, having herself come close to dying of septicemia a few years before due to a severe infection caused by such a sliver.

Hauling me behind the dining room door, she ordered me to drop my Sunday drawers while, with a very grim look, she rummaged in her sewing chest. She sterilized what seemed an enormous needle, and ordered me to stand still while she picked the slivers out one by one. It

didn't feel like she was being particularly gentle and there were a lot of slivers, so she finally told Dad to go to church without her because she was going to be busy for a while.

I apologized over and over and wailed that it was all the baby's fault for being such a pig and wanting to eat when he knew we had to go to church. And besides, if he'd been a girl like he was supposed to be and if she didn't make me wear those stupid shoes, none of this would have happened. She just laughed.

"You are a hopeless tomboy," she sighed. "I don't know why I go to the trouble of dressing you up."

Stating calmly that I had no one to blame but myself and that "This is going to sting a little," she doused my raw behind with a generous dose of iodine, which I let her know in no uncertain terms was cruel and unusual punishment.

In the end (no pun intended) I remember that morning vividly as one of the few occasions Mom had time to direct her full attention to me. It is one of my favourite memories, for when I'd stopped yelping and grousing and was dressed in my "second Sunday best" (she never did stop trying to dress me up) we shared a nice cup of tea and a Sunday cookie and I lay sprawled, stomach down, on the floor at her feet while she read me several stories out of the big *Dutch Story Book for Children*. None of the stories out of that beloved book has had the shelf life of that particular Sunday morning incident, however. It became the stuff of family legend and is told and retold at family gatherings, "even unto the third generation."

*Jan Burnikell has been writing for her own pleasure since childhood, but is enjoying memoir writing as a way of sharing family history with her children, grandchildren, and large extended family.*

## Collateral Damage *by Roy Dale*

---

One sunny day in September at the age of five or six, I went to school. I do not remember any special preparations, just that I was to go there. One of the older boys escorted me to the designated classroom.

After entering the classroom, instructions were issued as to where to place coats and so forth. Then I was ushered to a desk. There were a lot of chatty, jittery kids. More than I had ever seen before. The ceiling seemed so very high.

A roll call was taken—the teacher read sternly from a list. When called, you stood by your desk. Everyone turned to look. Not that I knew then, but my registration for initiation into the arena of higher learning had arrived late. Very late. Consequently, my name was called near the end.

When addressed, I stood. The teacher spoke to me directly, as she had done with all the other kids.

“That is not my name,” I responded.

“Oh!” she replied, and with a curious look asked, “What is it then?”

I countered resolutely, “It is Roy!” but the damage was done.

The hated first name had been read aloud—the name that should never be spoken. It was still ringing in my ears and in the air for all to hear as I slowly sat down. For a time, I was teased about it; however, being a scrappy kid, the teasing did not last overly long.

I was woefully unprepared for grade one. Colours I knew, but not all the names, and who had ever heard of a thing called an alphabet? Numbers were an even greater mystery. I could count to ten, but had no idea what it meant. To say I struggled in grade one would be an understatement.

For instance, what is one stick plus another stick? Two, but in my mind if you had one stick it could be many things—a stick horse, a sword, or something to whack the fence with. So, in truth, one stick is more than one thing and if you had a second stick you were styling, because that, as well, could be a plethora of things. Further, who knew what a two really was? Not me.

At that time, your seating position was determined by the results of some test or evaluation. The first row nearest the windows was where all the sniveling smart kids sat and so on from there. My seat was the last seat in the last row, nearest the door, behind three other kids, who were also regarded as being special. I suppose we were special, and more.

In front of me sat Ronnie, then Larry, and finally Fat Billy, who nearly always had green boogers in his nose. Fat Billy was the biggest kid in class. He would slowly shuffle, snort, and moan his way around school, carelessly excavating boogers from his nose. He was harangued mercilessly.

Sometime during grade one, Fat Billy was removed after the day a rosy-cheeked boy teased Billy relentlessly. Fat Billy could be surprisingly quick over short distances. He caught the tormentor, and if not for a timely intervention, would have killed him. Rage. Larry, Ronnie, and I knew about rage. We drifted expertly away from the noise and carnage and with oh so tiny smiles on our kid faces, we thought, “Well done, Fat Billy.”

Larry, Ronnie, and I lived in the same neighbourhood. Previously, we had not known each other well. A couple of blocks of separation makes a difference. I suppose our progress in grade one was slow. It was a time when dunce hats were used. Ronnie, Larry, and I wore them regularly. We didn’t care. We came from similar environments—fraught with abuses, violence, and rough neglect. In our respective homes, in some way, we were told constantly that we were stupid, lazy, and useless. Wearing a dunce hat and being laughed at were the least of our anxieties.

Yes, grade one was difficult for us and we got the pointy point stick rapped over our knuckles many times. Teacher’s mantra was, “Pay attention, do you understand?” To say we hated the red-mouthed teacher-witch, is putting it mildly. We did escape to grade two, where there was more to endure. We were not angels and often fell prey to corporal punishment—the strap. Over time we slid through different grades, classrooms, and teachers. Eventually, we migrated to the first-row window seats.

Much, much later, Larry became a doctor, Ronnie founded and ran a successful cardboard box company. And I, I am here relating a slice of memory.

*Born and raised in the big smoke called Vancouver, Roy Dale escaped the noise and pollution in favour of Nanaimo on Vancouver Island and then even further, to the seaside, in Gillies Bay, Texada Island, where he watches the changing tides.*

## A Coup! *by Kate Day*

---

It was the morning of January 25, 1971, almost half-way through my husband Derek's and my two-year teaching contracts in Kampala, Uganda. Our routine 6:20 am alarm call was accompanied by a deafening volley of gunfire, unmistakably emanating from just outside our hilltop home. We leapt out of bed as our three children came tumbling through the door, their faces shining with excitement.

"There's a war in the field!" shouted eight-year-old Nicholas. "Come quickly! There are lots of soldiers firing guns. I've just been up to the road to look, but they are only shooting in the air so don't worry. Come on! Come quick!"

I stared at him in horror. He'd actually been up to the road to look!"

"Just stay in the house," roared his father above the din. "Stay away from doors and windows, and don't worry about school for the moment," he added as the children ran off in high glee.

The field in question was a large open space just yards from our driveway, used almost daily by us all as a thoroughfare to visit friends and neighbours in the next road. In the middle of the field, and presumably the reason for all the military activity, was a radio mast used to receive and transmit overseas programs by the Government, a link which, because of its proximity, we were able to share, thus enabling us to listen to BBC World Service.

Now the local radio stations were all playing solemn martial music, but our BBC headlines at 6:45 told us loudly and clearly that there had been a swift coup in Kampala with President Milton Obote having been overthrown, while out of the country, by one of his Army Generals, Idi Amin. The gunfire had now, thankfully, abated a little and our next task was to phone to reassure our parents in the UK.

"Don't worry, Mum," said Derek in soothing tones, "we're all fine, in no danger at all. We'll just stay home until things settle down."

His calming words were interrupted by Nicholas running in.

"Just listen, Granny," he shouted breathlessly into the mouthpiece, "we are in the middle of a coup. You can hear the guns. They are on the other side of the field now. Can you hear them? Can you?"

He hopped up and down with satisfaction as a sharp burst of gunfire obligingly travelled down the phone line straight into his distraught grandmother's ear.

"There," cried Granny, "I just knew that you were in danger, I knew it. Oh, those poor children! What are you going to do?"

Oblivious to the bother he had caused, Nicholas skipped happily off once more as Derek's soothing words began all over again.

"Mr. Okot is here," called Sarah through the bedroom door, "He's waiting for you."

Mr. Okot and his family were our immediate neighbours. A large man, and head of President Obote's Special Police Force, he seemed somewhat bemused, as if he had not yet quite come to grips with last night's dramatic happenings. We then noticed with considerable alarm that his brightly coloured shirt featured a large portrait of the ousted President Obote. We gently suggested that in the circumstances and with the soldiers so near, it might be politic if he quickly slipped back next door to change. We were very relieved when he subsequently reappeared without President Obote on his chest.

In the event, life in Kampala returned to normal remarkably quickly. On the whole, the people seemed to welcome the change of regime and Britain was one of the first nations to recognize Idi Amin as Head of State. Initially, the new president outwardly presented a benign front, officiating at local events. There is a photo somewhere of Derek shaking hands with him and we sometimes saw Amin at the Apollo Hotel swimming pool where I remember on one such occasion, our four-year-old Michael proudly showing the new president how well he could dive.

As time passed, however, and our busy lives happily continued, the atmosphere almost imperceptibly began to change. Disturbing stories began to circulate—people were being imprisoned and tortured at a whim and Africans, perceived as enemies by Amin, were hounded, feared for their lives, and often forced secretly to flee the country. There were dreadful reports of people disappearing and of bodies regularly being found floating in the River Nile, in Lake Victoria, and lying in piles in the forests.

Then, to our utter horror and distress, Mr. Okot disappeared. He just did not come home one night. We waited and waited for news of him, but none came. Was it the high position he had held under the Obote Government? How many enemies might he have made as Chief of the Special Police Force? We would never know and poor Mrs. Okot, finally giving up hope of ever seeing her husband again, returned with her seven children to her home village in the north of the country.

Burglaries and theft became more prevalent and none of us will forget confidently approaching the garage one morning as usual, ready to pile into the car to go to school, only to see the sorry sight of our trusty Ford Estate sitting solidly on its middle with all its wheels having been stolen and hauled away. Suddenly, early in 1972, the entire Asian community was given 90 days to leave the country, including many of our friends, forfeiting their homes and businesses. This order caused incalculable distress and damage to both people and country.

We were due to leave Uganda in early April 1972, at the end of our contracts. Life was becoming increasingly tense and uncomfortable and when Nicholas announced that he and two

of his friends had discovered a dead body near his school, we knew that it was definitely time to go.

Nonetheless, when the day came, we departed with heavy hearts. Throughout the ensuing decades, however, President Idi Amin, for all his paranoia and appalling deeds, has never managed to erode the wonderful memories of our happy and adventurous times in his country, nor to diminish our countless experiences of the indescribable beauty that is Africa.

*Kate Day is a retired English teacher from Bristol, UK, now living in Powell River, BC. She has worked and travelled abroad with her husband, Derek, and their four children, and is currently enjoying writing her memoirs for her family.*

## Gold Rush *by Christa de Beaupre*

---

I was just about to take off on one of my shopping trips to Dawson City, a duty of mine as the camp cook, when I heard someone call my name. My boss dashed out of what we called “the gold room,” a wooden cabin opposite the camp’s main building. He waved in my direction and pointed to the white canvas bag he cradled in his other arm. When he caught up to me at the van, he handed me a bag of gold dust and nuggets, an estimated \$30,000-worth. It had to reach the buyer before 2 pm for the money to be transferred into the bank by 3 pm; otherwise our pay and other outstanding cheques wouldn’t be covered.

“Take this straight to the buyer,” he said.

Nervous, but excited, I promised to drop off the gold before running my errands—to pick up the grocery order, the mail, newspapers, my new tires, and the ordered parts at Finning. As always, I looked forward to the adventurous drive over the “Top of the World Highway” with its magnificent panoramic view of mountains and deep valleys—a break from my everyday routines. I pushed the heavy bag under the front seat, even though nobody would suspect I was carrying such precious cargo. After all, I was only the cook. From time to time, I reassured myself by touching my shoe to the gold and was determined that it would arrive at the destination on time.

After driving along for a while, the road narrowed to a stretch of new gravel, and I gripped the wheel and prayed. Just two weeks ago I’d punctured a tire, but a good Samaritan from a nearby highway crew, paid with a homemade pie, had changed my tire and put the spare on, which now left me without one. A new set of tires was waiting for me at the garage in Dawson City.

Despite my prayers, as I bumped along, one little sharp pebble punctured my right front tire. Frustrated I jumped out and kicked the offending tire, which did nothing but hurt my big toe.

Next I limped around the lopsided vehicle. I took in a big gulp of the fresh mountain air to help bring me to my senses.

“This isn’t funny!” I spoke aloud to myself, “What to do? What are my options? Calm down, think! I need a plan.”

I eyed the bag of gold under the seat. It had to reach the buyer! I tried to move it, but realized it was too bulky and heavy to conceal under my windbreaker. Thus, to accept a ride with a stranger was out of the question. Straightening, up I knew there was only one thing to do. I had to drive on, even if it meant ruining the wheel rim.

Several cars stopped to offer me a ride, but I politely declined.

“Thank you, but I can’t abandon the van,” I said to each one with a forced smile.

“Please don’t worry about me,” I told them.

“Do you realize how far you still have to go?” a concerned tourist asked.

“Yes, I know. I am about half way to Dawson, probably another 50 kilometres.”

Shaking his head, the man turned to his wife and said, “This must be what they call cabin fever. Bushed, no doubt,” before they disappeared in a cloud of dust.

On I went, bumpety, bump. I fought the impulse to look at my watch. Instead I concentrated on navigating safely around the narrow, very curvy mountain road and on avoiding the too-close edge of the precipice. More than one vehicle had tumbled down those steep slopes—some only discovered days later.

I repeated my mantra: “Concentrate. One more corner. One more curve. Don’t get too close to the edge. Easy does it.”

Another car stopped. By now, sick of the attention I attracted, I said, “Maybe you could stop at the garage in Dawson and let them know that I am on the way. Tell them they have to change my tires as soon as I get there.”

And on I went at a speed of 5 to 10 kilometres per hour, back muscles tight and knuckles white from gripping the steering wheel.

An hour later I came to the last hill on the road and like a mirage I saw a tow truck coming towards me. Hallelujah!

The tow truck driver got out and mentioned that an elderly couple had told them about my predicament. His boss decided I needed rescuing.

While the van got hooked up to the tow truck, I retrieved my cache from its hiding place as nonchalantly as possible and heaved it, and the rest of my belongings, onto the floor of the big truck, scrambling in after them, wishing I had longer legs.

Names were exchanged and the usual questions like, “Where do you come from?”

Dave, the driver said, “I just moved here from Victoria, BC.”

“Really?” I answered, surprised. “We’re practically neighbours. My home base is Powell River, BC.”

A strange look came over his face.

“That’s where I am from! Since no one knows where Powell River is, I just say Victoria.”

Dave admitted this rescue mission was a welcome diversion from his seven-days-a-week mechanic job. We laughed and swapped stories.

Downhill, I spotted the eight-car ferry leaving the opposite shore of the Yukon River. It would reach our side of the river by the time we arrived.

With the end of the journey in sight, relief swept over me. My tense back muscles started to relax, my clenched fists, stiff from tension, opened up. It was 1 pm. Just one hour left to deliver the gold, and notify the bookkeeper and the bank. We reached the garage with only minutes to spare. I placed a quick phone call from the payphone to inform a reluctant gold buyer to meet me right away at the garage. It just couldn't be helped, he had to come to me.

At the end of that exciting and exhausting journey, an enthusiastic crew and my relieved boss welcomed me back. They had heard about my bumpy ride from our bookkeeper and how, despite all the trouble, I delivered the gold on time.

*Christa de Beaupre (Koestler) took two years of Hotel Management in her hometown Vienna, Austria, with the goal to work and travel in different countries, which she did, including coming to Canada at the age of 19. After many adventures, she retired in Powell River, BC, and writes her memoirs for her three sons and grandchildren.*

## Boogeymen *by Joanna Dunbar*

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When I was five, my older brother represented wisdom. He was 10 and told me about the boogeymen living under my bed. Of course, I believed him and was terrified to go to bed. How was I to keep safe at night. How was I to sleep?

Curled up in a tight ball under my blankets I was sick with fear and could sense the boogeymen reaching up for me, pulling me down into their darkness, never allowing me to return. In daylight, down on all fours, I'd check under my bed—peering into the corners. There was nothing there. But during the nights, that all changed. Once the lights were out and the house was quiet, they arrived and waited for me to make one false move.

My brother said their existence was “secret information” and I was “not to tell anyone.” He also said they occupied the eaves of the house, access to which was through a mysterious rectangular door in my closet. This space had held a certain attraction for me. I had imagined it as a safe hiding place for me if ever I needed one, but I was forbidden entry into this totally dark space by my parents because, they said, it had no substantial floor, only the ceiling of the room below. I had been warned by them if I stepped into this cavity I would fall right through. But now I knew the real reason I was forbidden entry: boogeymen. It made even entering my dark closet, which was totally safe, fraught with peril.

Eventually I began to doubt my brother's wisdom. He was acting badly—punching me in the stomach for no reason as I was coming down the stairs, giving me an unwanted toy rifle for my birthday to claim for himself. His interest in me no longer seemed sincere. So, I began to test the demons under my bed.

The first night of testing I slowly stuck the tip of my toe out of the covers, just a bit, still terrified but also curious. I waited. Nothing happened. No claws, no fangs, no dragging me down into the abyss. The next night I investigated further. Trembling and whimpering, I slowly, slowly, moved my whole foot out of the covers. Nothing happened. Eventually I put it right down to the floor. Was that a touch, a grab, a creeping hand taking hold?

Nothing happened! Nothing! I was safe. How had I not known that it was my brother who was the demon? Now, however, I knew he was a liar and not to be trusted. Before my eyes, he fell from grace and I came of age. With my own courage, I had laid the boogeymen to rest.

*Words have always challenged Joanna Dunbar—she didn't begin to speak until she was four years old. She appreciates the opportunity memoir writing offers her to work with words to find her story.*

## Little House of Troubles *by Bev Falconer*

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We moved into our Crofton Street home in 1959, next to a small, well-kept rental house, usually occupied by young couples. Over the years, the house showed signs of deterioration as did the lives of the later occupants.

I talked to them, getting to know most of the people fairly well. But that little house heard their sobs and felt their fears and troubles. Many were hard to help—the girl with the rotten teeth had bulimia. She had started to confide in me, but then suddenly moved away.

Another woman came to the door every morning to use my telephone. Usually frothing at the mouth with pink Pepto Bismol, she looked as if she was just about to throw up all over my rug. Her troubles involved a son who lived with her. He threatened someone with a gun on the Moose Hall parking lot. She thought I was kind when I made them some chicken pot pies and helped them move. I felt guilty knowing it was really because I was so relieved, they were leaving.

Other tenants included an arthritic logger and his wife. They had no family, but often invited our kids in after school where they got to watch TV programs they weren't allowed at home, got sips of beer, and learned to play blackjack. This couple enjoyed our children's company and also invited all the kids on the block to a dress-up party, which was a huge success. One morning, the woman phoned to ask if I would take her to catch the bus to Vancouver. When I arrived, she had four battered cartons held together with clumsily knotted cord. They held all her belongings. She was leaving. Her husband had beaten her again and she wasn't taking it any more.

The arrival of one new neighbour was announced with a loud varoom, varoom and I watched as a jacked-up truck full of boxes and a sofa slammed to a stop on the lawn in front of the little house. I had tried to keep an open mind about the eclectic bunch of renters that had lived next door over the years, so when this newcomer with shaved head and gold earring appeared outside with a playful black puppy, I went out to introduce myself. He said he was Dave.

I patted the pup. "What a sweetie, is he/she a lab?" I asked.

"He's a Doberman/Pit Bull cross."

"And what's his name?"

"He's Goliath," Dave informed me.

"Well he sure doesn't look like a Goliath just now, does he?"

Dave was a big hefty fellow who walked around with his arms held out from his body as if his sleeves were cutting into his armpits. When “David and Goliath” headed back inside, I read the words on the back of Dave's sleeveless black T-shirt—“Say you love Satan.”

My son knew that shirt and its owner and said he was heavily into drugs and well-known to the police. “Keep your doors locked,” he warned me.

I did keep my doors locked, but also kept talking to Dave. If that little house of troubles could talk, I wondered what it would reveal about him. I wonder if he had as much unhappiness as the rest of its inhabitants.

These next-door residents have played an important role in my life, making me more aware of people's troubles. I'm thankful I have never been beaten or had to battle demons or addictions, and was touched deeply by my neighbours' struggles. As we grow older, we realize that no one escapes serious problems. Even a loving family, safe home, good health, and secure job cannot always protect us from trouble and trauma. But support can help us through.

A well-known quote, as meaningful today as it was 2,400 years ago when Plato wrote it, encourages us: “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”

*Bev Falconer moved to Powell River with her family in 1935. Even after enjoying many years of overseas travel adventures as an adult, she was always happy to return to her home town. Bev has kept journals for most of her life and when reading some of the old ones she discovers almost-forgotten entries she develops for her Memoir Writing group. These provide many stories of the “olden days” to inform and amuse her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.*

## Razor Blades, Fire, and Vomit—Oh My! *by Gail Fennell*

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When I was a child, I had no idea how trauma would singe memories into my vulnerable mind, but it did.

My parents built their own house, piece by piece, as they could afford it back in the late 1940s. I think we always had running water, but at first, there was no toilet. One day, I was assigned the task of taking used razor blades outside to dump down the hole in the outhouse. I decided to explore them first and deeply sliced my index finger. I recall squatting down by the creek that ran beside our property, rinsing off the blood. It would not stop bleeding! Eventually, I had to go and confess what I had done.

Before the final tiles went down on our living room, I had another serious incident on the rough, wood floor, while colouring with wax crayons in my book. My father didn't like the careless way I was doing it, so he made me take a blue crayon and scribble out the entire page. I ended up with a huge sliver in my hand. My parents did everything they could, including using razor blades to try to get the sliver out. I did a lot of screaming and crying to no avail. The sliver never worked its way out, and for many years thereafter I could still locate it in the fat part of my hand. Going to a doctor was rarely considered 70 years ago.

My grandfather lived next door and had a horse named Dixie on his acreage. Grandpa built a small, two-wheeled cart that could be hitched up behind Dixie. He probably used this to haul the milk cans from the milkhouse down the driveway to where the commercial milk truck would pick them up and take them to the creamery in town. The walls of that cart were built from sheets of aluminum. His youngest son, my uncle Eddy, still lived at home. When some cousins came to visit, my uncle decided to give us a ride. I was clutching the side of the cart when we careened over several gigantic bumps, causing the aluminum to slice into my hand. Another injury and another scar.

In our house, if one of the eight kids got a cold or the flu, we all ended up with it. One time, I had the flu accompanied by a fever and an upset stomach. In the night, I stumbled out of bed and dragged myself to the top of the stairway before my body decided to get rid of everything in my stomach. I projectile vomited all down the stairs. Normally, we would have to clean up after ourselves, but this one time, I was so sick I just crawled back into bed and my mother cleaned up after me.

One time, I touched a waxed margarine box to the wood-burning kitchen cookstove. It burst into flames. Shocked, I flung it into the big open wood box, and hightailed it out of the room. Fortunately, my mother saw the fire and put it out before the house burned down. Wax did make those cast-iron stoves glisten. In time, we got an electric stove.

Another kitchen accident happened at about age 11. After frying bacon in the cast iron frying pan, we would drain the grease into a thin tin can, storing it for later use in cooking. Before the tin had cooled, I naively picked it up to put it back into the cupboard. I jumped at the heat of it, and spilled the burning hot fat on my hand. In those days, we didn't know to put the burn under

cold running water. We put butter on it. My hand was on fire. Later, I went to my friend's house across the road where her mother, who was a nurse, comforted me by smoothing Ozonol on my burn. My hand hurt for a long time. I had done something stupid, so I suffered in silence.

I now wonder why we didn't have many first aid supplies at home. Women were probably meant to use cures passed down through the generations, but we had none.

*Gail Fennell is known locally as a substitute teacher, proprietor of Yarncraft, and for her accomplishments at sporting activities, including softball, tennis, badminton, racquetball, and golf. She spent many years teaching bridge both locally and on cruise ships and continues to play competitive bridge, both at home and away at tournaments.*

## Stranger on the Beach *by Rosemary Hawkins*

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In 1980, while on holiday in Hawaii, I met a lovely Japanese couple. One morning on the way to the ocean for my morning swim, I met them as they left their spot on the beach to feed bread crumbs to the fish. We said our “Good Mornings” and went our separate ways.

As I slowly waded into the water, a stranger caught my eye. He was too neatly dressed for the beach and was scanning the crowds of people. At first, I thought maybe he was a new arrival, but something about him kept bothering me. I started to walk out to sea and then turned back. He had stopped by the blanket and bag that belonged to my friends. I watched as he deftly bent down, tipped the bag and grabbed a wallet before casually strolling towards the ramp that led up to the sidewalk.

I started to run and yelled, “Halt right now and give me that wallet!”

“You’re mistaken,” he said, “I’m just getting it for my aunt.”

“I saw what you did,” I said, “Just hand it over!”

He glared at me with cold, steely blue eyes. I knew in that moment that if he’d had a weapon, he would have used it. There was pure hatred in his eyes!

I hadn’t realized the men on the beach within hearing distance of us had stood up and were now behind me. The stranger angrily threw the wallet at me and bolted up the ramp.

I asked a family to watch over my friend’s wallet and I went for a swim, feeling quite shaky. I thought I spotted the stranger another day, but I didn’t go looking for him. I didn’t want a second encounter.

*Rosemary Hawkins and her husband enjoyed many years of travelling after raising a wonderful family. When her husband passed, she joined the Memoir Writing for Seniors program at the Library. She loves hearing everyone’s interesting stories and also preserving her own memories for her family—five children, 14 grandchildren, and 25 great grandchildren.*

## Soft with Handling *by Lynn McCann*

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His words kept me from crossing over the line of sanity. *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale was the glue that held me together.

I was young, in my early twenties. It was a time of life that should have been fun and exciting, but it wasn't. My 13-month-old baby had died tragically and since day three of my marriage, my husband had been using me for his personal punching bag. I had to hide my beatings and not tell anyone for fear of what would happen if anyone found out.

The pages of Peale's book became soft with handling and wrinkled with tears, but it didn't fall apart completely and, neither did I. I vowed I would one day go to New York City, to Marble Collegiate Church, and listen to Norman Vincent Peale preach and thank him for keeping me sane.

Time went on and eventually I summoned up the courage to leave my toxic marriage. My two remaining children and I left town and made a new life in a new city. It wasn't easy. I took whatever jobs I could get to support my family and although money was meager, we were happy. Two years later, I met Tony. The next week, he proposed! Poor man. I put him through the wringer. I pushed his buttons left, right, and center.

Finally, he said, "It doesn't matter how much you push, I will never hit or abuse you," and we were married six months after his proposal.

Eight weeks after Tony and I were married, in October 1977, I saw a poster that thrilled me beyond belief. There would be a seminar in town with four guest speakers—someone named Herb True; Earle Nightingale, whose radio show I never missed; Dr. Joyce Brothers, whom I had seen often on TV; and Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. I was so excited! Then I read that the event tickets were \$20 and was devastated. Tony had suffered a rupture and was still off on medical leave so we had no extra money for anything, no matter how wonderful it would be.

This was Thursday. I shuffled my way home from the business college I was attending, thinking sadly how \$20 stood between me and my dream. As I told Tony my tale of woe, he handed me a letter from my Mom. When I opened the letter, a \$20 bill fell out. Oh my gosh!

Common sense gripped me and I said, "I really should use this to get some groceries."

Tony replied, "We can always eat porridge. You go get a ticket to see your preacher."

The next day was Friday, I could hardly wait for lunch hour when I raced to the ticket place and bought the last available ticket. I no longer had to save forever and ever to get to Marble Collegiate Church in New York City to meet Norman Vincent Peale. He was coming to meet me, the very next day.

Knowing I wouldn't be able to buy any of the speakers' books or tapes, I used my biggest purse to smuggle in my tape recorder. This was totally against the rules, but I knew that Dr. Peale would understand. I arrived very early to get a center seat close to the front. I remember nothing of the first speaker, I just remember wishing he would hurry up and finish. Earle Nightingale was very interesting and it was nice to put a face to the voice I knew so well.

After the lunch break, during which I devoured the peanut butter sandwich even though it had been completely squished by my tape recorder, it was time for my hero. Quietly, I turned on the tape recorder as the emcee introduced Dr. Peale. I was shocked to see how short he was! His writings were so powerful, I expected to see a man at least seven feet tall. He wasn't even as tall as me and looked much shorter due to his protruding belly, which was rather like Santa's.

Dr. Peale didn't stand at a lectern as the other speakers had, but instead roamed about the stage. I knew his every inspirational story by heart. I had read them hundreds of times. Sometimes, to make a point, he would shove his hands in his pockets and lean back, propelling his round belly forward, and dropped his chin until it doubled and gravelled his voice, which was an amazing instrument—larger than life, like a symphony. He was hilarious and so entertaining I could've listened to him for days.

Joyce Brothers came on last with a wonderful speech about self-confidence. She inspired the audience to face life and whatever challenges came our way. After the seminar, with the confidence she inspired in me, I wove my way towards the stage, through the throngs making their way out. I had no idea what lay behind the stage except that somewhere back there was the man I came to meet. What if security stopped me? What if they didn't? I was getting nervous, but climbed the stage stairs anyway and kept on, wandering through the dimly lit hallways, following voices. Gradually, one voice became fully audible.

"How was it? Did it come across okay? Do you think they liked it?"

It was Joyce Brothers, full of doubt about her delivery on self-confidence! I thought, "Hmm...I can meet you. You're just like the rest of us."

With that, I knocked on the open door and stepped inside. I introduced myself to the group and went over to Dr. and Mrs. Peale. My tears started to flow as I explained how his book had gotten me through the worst experiences of my life. They both wrapped in me in a loving hug and we sat together on the sofa chatting a while before I floated out to the parking lot and my old beater car.

When I got home, I played my tape for Tony.

"I thought you went to hear a preacher," he said, puzzled.

"I did!"

"That's no preacher. That guy's a comedian! If preachers were all like him," he chuckled, "I might even go to church."

Laughing, I immediately sat down to write Mom a letter, thanking her for her part in making my dream come true.

Tony died two weeks before our 40th anniversary and true to his words, his hands were never lifted against me. He used his powerful hands to gently lift me when I was down and to hold me in love.

*Born and raised in Powell River, BC, Lynn McCann is well known and appreciated for both her sincere gift of helping others, in the very many ways she does, and for her unfailing sense of humour. She is working on a book-length memoir.*

## Great Balls of Fire *by Alice McNair*

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I was home from my second year of university at UBC and had landed the dream job—working in the mill! My other job as it turned out, although it didn't come with a job description, was to help my parents get my youngest brother to school. He was in grade nine at Brooks Secondary, hated school, and was constantly in trouble with his teachers. He would rather stay home and work on his dirt bike.

I was working the night shift at the mill, so sleeping soundly each morning, but I did need to get up to feed and water the horses at 7 am. I had this down to a routine—when the alarm went off, I automatically got out of bed, put on a pair of old gumboots, then left through the basement door to walk up to the barn. The trip back to bed was fast and well-practiced so I was back asleep by 7:15.

One day I was sleeping soundly after my morning routine when there was a loud knock on my bedroom door. My mother, who was all dressed and ready for her workday, was in a rage because my brother had missed the school bus “on purpose.” No one else could take him to school, so I had to.

I wasn't happy, but I knew I had to do it. I rolled out of bed, put the old gumboots back on and trudged out to the light grey Volkswagen Beetle that Dad had found to serve as our second car. I just needed to drop my brother off at school, drive home, and go back to bed.

Along the way, when the car started to sputter, I laughed, thinking the car was tired, too. But then going up the hill, the car started going in slow motion. My gumboot was flat on the floor pushing on the pedal.

“Maybe put it in first gear,” my brother commanded in his usual deadpan voice.

It was hard to change gears but I did, and we continued going up the hill, but very slowly.

“Do you smell smoke?” I asked him?

He was mechanically inclined and often took motors apart. He thought the smell must be from a little oil burning from the recent oil change. I looked in the rearview mirror to see out through the tiny oval window on the back of the Volkswagen.

“I think we are on fire!” I screamed hysterically.

There were big puffs of smoke and flames coming out the back of the car. I had enough sense to pull over and jump out. My brother, though, wouldn't move because he saw the big orange school bus coming up the hill behind us. Being burned alive was less a concern than being seen by anyone on the bus. And they were all looking! Once the bus passed, he jumped out and high-tailed it to school on foot.

“What should I do?” I yelled after him. He didn’t look back.

I was sure someone would help me. It was Powell River after all, not Vancouver where I could be flattened by traffic just for sport. I tried to flag down a sympathetic driver, assured they would see my plight and understand what had happened. When this failed, I thought hitchhiking would show the drivers I meant business and those inclined to pick up hitch hikers would do so. I was always successful with this mode of transportation in the past. Hitchhiking didn’t work either. There was lots of eye contact, but no one stopped. Perhaps it was my outfit? When I left home, I was too tired to care if I was dressed at all, which was why I was still wearing my knee-length baby blue nightie adorned with ruffles and bows. My long hair was in the rags that served as curlers—softer to sleep on but messier looking.

I began to realize I wouldn’t be back in bed anytime soon. I removed the rags from my hair and combed it with my fingers. I didn’t think I could remove the gumboots, as being barefoot was somehow just not right. The engine had stopped burning, so I looked through the car. There was nothing to help me—no piece of clothing, not even a cloth to wipe the windshield. And there was no money—no dime, nickel, or penny tucked away in the glove box, in the rear seat pocket, in the ashtray, or on the floor. I would have to walk the 12 miles back home, through downtown and the neighbourhoods, dressed in my nightie and gumboots.

Finally, a kind pair of municipal workers picked me up in their work truck.

“What are we going to do with her?” one asked the other.

“I guess we can take her to the yard,” the other replied in a matter of fact manner.

I was very grateful, and tried to make light of my situation. I told them how I happened to be stuck on the hill dressed the way I was, but they didn’t say much. In fact, they were very nonplussed by all of it and didn’t even crack a smile. I guess they saw all sorts of things—more odd and interesting than some young woman dressed like me on their drives around town. At the yard they redeemed themselves and gave me a much-needed coffee, then let me use their phone. After calling several numbers, I reached a friend who could pick me up and drive me home. Finally, at noon, I crawled into bed for a few hours of much needed sleep before heading in to my other job.

*When Alice was growing up, she heard many interesting stories from relatives and family friends. Now she has a few stories of her own. By taking the memoir writing course offered by the Library, she is now capturing these memories for her daughter and granddaughter.*

February 14, 1969. I knew I was in trouble when just before the end of fifth period I heard my name called over the PA system.

“Please report to the office immediately.”

My first thought was, I’m glad I’m not skipping class this afternoon as was planned.

As my classmates turned to stare at me, all kinds of worrisome thoughts whirred through my head. I packed my books and slowly wandered out of class, headed toward the office. Had something happened to Dad at work, or had Mom been in an accident, or one of my brothers, or my sister? Did someone rat us out about the smoking at the beach? But only I was called, so it must be something about me alone or about my family.

I quietly stood by the front counter for a couple of minutes trying to compose myself when, finally, a school secretary, looked up from her typewriter.

“Oh Carol, the principal wants to speak with you.”

I looked over at him, thinking, why? What did I do? He quickly came over and pulled me aside, speaking quietly.

“Carol, the police would like to ask you some questions about Mr. Young.”

My stomach dropped to my toes as my head hung down in shame, and I knew my reddening face was giving my guilt away. Mr. Young was the woodwork shop teacher and I babysat his daughter because they lived just down the street from us. I loved that little girl with every ounce of my being. I silently prayed that nothing had happened to her, knowing full well what the other possibility might be.

“Why me?” I asked softly, but was quickly told the office was not the place to discuss it.

The principal took me to the police station for questioning and told me that when the interview was finished, the officer would bring me back to school so I could catch the bus home so none of the neighbours would see me being dropped off in a police car.

He handed me over to an RCMP officer who took me upstairs to a large room at the back of the police station. The officer asked me all kinds of questions about my relationship with Tom Young, his wife, and their daughter. Many questions were of a personal nature and had to do with what we girls called Tom’s “WHT,” which stood for “wandering hand trouble.”

In my misguided consideration for Tom’s wife and daughter, I vehemently denied everything that happened because I didn’t want to destroy my relationship with them. I also didn’t want

my parents to know what Tom had been doing, because they would have been livid, especially my father.

When we were done, the officer took me to his police car and opened the back, passenger door and waited while I got in before shutting the door behind me. I had never been in a cop car before and noticed there was no door handle. How weird was that, I thought, and then realized I couldn't escape even if I wanted to. The officer attempted to make small talk, but I was having none of it and just stared blankly out the car window worrying about what would happen next. He gave up trying to engage me in conversation and before I knew it, we were back at school. As he got out of the car, I reached for a door handle that wasn't there and once again was rattled by that fact.

Most of the classes were out for the day by that time and the buses had begun to fill the upper tarmac, waiting to take kids home. I remember feeling such deep shame as I slunk from the police cruiser while students were milling about and running for their respective buses home. Oh, how I wished I was one of them and not this girl arriving in a police car. I attempted to duck my head, but knew my long shiny, ginger hair gave away my identity, so I just did my best to appear nonchalant.

My bus was crowded, but Ingrid had a seat saved at the back and she let me sit there. I plopped down beside her and looked at her.

"Oh, I'm in trouble," I said in answer to her puzzled look.

"Why, what did you do?"

"Nothing," I replied and started to bawl my eyes out.

My dad, our neighbour, and an RCMP officer met Tom when he came to pick me up to babysit that night. They confronted him with the charges that had been filed against him. As my best friend, Linda, and I watched out the window from her place across the street, we saw Tom race his vehicle out of the driveway and roar away. That ended my babysitting for his daughter. Fifty years on and I still remember that sweet little girl I never got to say goodbye to.

The trouble that was exposed that day was not resolved until 1992 when Thomas William Young was charged with, and pled guilty to, child sexual abuse of me and a number of other students. I redeemed my younger self as a 40-year-old woman when I testified to the RCMP and BC College of Teachers about the things Tom had done.

Turns out, I wasn't in trouble after all. He was.

*Caroline McPhail grew up in Powell River. She 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, now she is doing so.*

## Hair Daze *by Teresa Rice*

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While I was waiting for my son Tony to emerge from Kindergarten one day, a classmate called out to him.

“Tony, your Grandmother’s here.”

I was horrified. Grandmother indeed! I was only in my 40s!

Upon arriving home, I studied my reflection in the bathroom mirror. No wrinkles, thank goodness. Brown hair with a liberal sprinkling of grey. It did look rather dull and lifeless. Until recently, it was tinted a warm chestnut brown. The colour had grown out because regardless of the product used, my hair turned a fluorescent purple. I loved purple, but not on my hair. I had called Clairol, who were sympathetic but not much help. Perhaps hormones were the culprit was one suggestion. Of course, that must be the problem! If you are a woman, with anything from a sore toe to purple hair, hormones are always to blame!

Today, bright coloured locks would be perfectly acceptable. Back then, however, it was definitely ageing to be a member of the blue rinse brigade (a term used by the younger generation). Something had to be done, so off to the salon I went to consult Janet, my hair stylist. There was a new highlighting system just on the market. It was not as sophisticated as today’s highlighting methods; nevertheless, I decided to give it a try. Wrong decision—it was dreadful. There were no streaks or highlights, just yellow blobs. My head looked like an abstract painting of a spotted dog.

I was frantic because a vacation to England was planned for later that year. Janet gave me two options, first was to colour the hair close to my original shade; second was to bleach it and then use a pale blond toner. Never one to take the easy way out, I chose the second option. After all, blonds do have more fun. Don’t they?

While waiting a week or so for the big transformation, I went outside the house as little as possible and, even then, covered my polka dotted head with a scarf. Despite the misadventures at the salon, somehow I trusted Janet to fix the problem, and she didn’t let me down.

Fortunately, the new shade was a success, and feeling re-invented by my new blond coiffure certainly was fun. The same formula was used (always by a professional) to colour my hair until about eight years ago. That’s when I noticed that most of my hair had slowly turned white over the years. At that point I actually was a grandmother and proud to look like one.

Although I’m quite satisfied with my silver hair, there are times when the urge to try something new is almost irresistible. Perhaps a few pink or green streaks, or maybe even revisit the

purple? Now that age is no barrier to having trendy hair, should I move with the times? After all, purple is my favourite colour.

*A retired bookkeeper, Teresa is originally from England and has retired in Powell River where her son and family also live. Teresa likes travelling, spending time with her grandson, and writing about her early years growing up in Liverpool.*

## The Price of Freedom *by Sandra Ritter*

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In February of my senior year we moved to be closer to the base, but it was two hours away from my school. It was already dark when I came home that first evening after moving in, and snowing hard. My mother had to pick up my little sister Rae Jean at the sitter's after work and wouldn't be home for another hour. My stepfather Ray was probably at the NCO Club, drinking.

I walked my sheltie, Angus, and was in my room taking off my coat and boots when I heard Ray come home and stagger into their bedroom, probably hoping to pass out on the bed. A few minutes later I smelled whiskey as he came up behind me. I cringed when he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "You didn't unpack the boxes in our bedroom."

"I just got home," I said, ducking away from him. I was supposed to add "Sir" whenever I spoke to him, and I don't know why I didn't then. I suppose I hoped he was too drunk to notice, but when I went into their room to start on the boxes, he followed me.

"You didn't say Sir," he said. I felt a little stab of fear, but also something else. I just couldn't say it. I opened my mouth, but nothing came out.

"You call me Sir, God damn it!" he yelled, shoving me backward until I fell. I looked up at this abusive drunk, and with all the disrespect and disgust I could muster, I said it.

"Sir," I hissed.

When he kicked me, it felt like his combat boot had shattered my ribs. For a moment I couldn't breathe, let alone get up. As he lifted his foot again, Angus flew at him, sank his teeth into his leg and hung on until Ray fell, landing on top of me. He tore my blouse as I struggled out from under him. I made it into the living room and was almost to the front door when I heard Angus yelp. I turned to go back, but he was already limping out after me, with Ray not far behind. I picked up my dog, opened the door and escaped into the snowy night.

I didn't dare go back for my coat and boots. I ran through the woods in my stocking feet, my ribs stabbing me with each step. At first, I didn't even feel the cold. I think I was more afraid of Ray finding us than of freezing.

There was a construction site on the other side of the trees, and I hid in the basement of an unfinished house for a long time. I just wanted to bury my face in Angus's fur and go to sleep, but he kept getting up and running to the door, clearly wanting us to leave.

When I started walking again, the snow was deeper and the streets were deserted. Angus could walk now, but I carried him for warmth as I shuffled forward, one step at a time toward a distant porch light.

An elderly man opened the door and caught me as I fell. He brought me inside, and then his wife took over, helping me out of my wet school clothes and wrapping me in her warm robe. She brought me a cup of soup as I sat on their sofa next to the fire. My feet were warming in a basin of water, stinging painfully as the circulation returned. Angus, my hero, slept beside me, his head on my lap.

They wanted to call the police, but I was afraid of what Ray would do to me if they did. So, these kind Samaritans called a cab to take me to my friend Karen's house, and loaned me a coat and gumboots for the drive.

Karen's mother called my mother and told her that Angus and I would be staying there for a week, or she *would* call the police. She even took me for x-rays, but I finally had to go home.

When the cab dropped me at the apartment, my little sister jumped into my arms, almost knocking me over.

"Sissy!" she crowed, "You came back!"

I had been her playmate and main caregiver for most of her six years, and we adored each other.

Mother was lying on the sofa smoking, a half-empty bottle of wine on the coffee table beside her. She sent Rae Jean outside. I looked around, feeling apprehensive.

"Where's Ray?"

"Ray," she said, refilling her glass, "is in the barracks. He left me. I hope you're happy."

"Mother, he pushed me down and kicked me and cracked two ribs."

Then I took a breath said it.

"He tore my blouse. He could have done worse, and you know it."

She slapped me.

"You provoked him! Why couldn't you just say 'Sir'? You've ruined my life," she wailed.

"Again," she added.

She finished the wine, and then told me that Ray would come back to her if I wasn't around. I knew he wouldn't, but she had already paid a woman to take me in until June.

“Good,” I thought, until I learned that this woman, whose name was Sue, wouldn’t take a dog.

“No!” I cried, “then I won’t go either.”

“Well, you can’t stay here,” she said.

I had no choice but to leave Angus with her for now and find a way to keep him after graduation.

“He’s not really yours, you know,” she said. “He’s a valuable show dog, and he’s AKC registered to Ray. He said you could buy him. If you apologize.”

Angus had been my best buddy since I was 11, and I knew he had saved me from Ray that terrifying night. I sat on the floor and hugged him.

“I’ll come back for you,” I said, starting to cry. “I promise.”

I packed some clothes, and Sue arrived to bring me to her house. As we pulled away from the curb, I saw Rae Jean running down the middle of the street after us.

“Sissy!” she howled, “Sissy, don’t leave me!”

“Stop!” I yelled, but Sue kept driving. Through the back window I saw Mother catch up to her and drag her, screaming, back to the apartment.

The next day Ray sold my dog to a breeder in Florida.

Losing Angus and leaving Rae Jean broke my heart. They were a high price to pay for my freedom. But at last Ray was gone, and maybe even my mother, and I would make a better, more meaningful life for myself.

And I have. But that memory has always brought sorrow but shame. It’s only now, with this writing, that I truly understand my choices. At last I can open my heart to the devastating grief of my young self, and weep for her.

*Sandra Ritter is a visual artist who began writing as a way to share a few memories with her daughters. However, the writing temporarily eclipsed her painting when it grew into a book of her sometimes moving, sometimes bizarre childhood in California, Hawaii, and Washington DC.*

## Criticized to Death *by George Samuel*

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Being little and in a war made me desperate not to die before I'd had a chance to live. While my luck seemed to get better and better as I stayed alive with the passing years, my doubt and skepticism also increased and this feeling I have of battling in a corner for my life tends to issue as rage. My father's critical instruction, "George, control yourself," I always criticized as terribly British, not to say 19th-century.

Lately, however, I've begun to agree with him. More control might really, actually, help. Maybe my rage is not protecting me from my enemy but is actually my enemy itself—myself. How I longed to make my father pleased with me. If ever he did like something I did, it was either grudgingly or condescendingly.

What horror I feel at the possibility I might be naive, made a fool of, like when, at age 13, Ronnie Haug caught me with magpie eggs in my pockets. I was out in the bush with my good and trusted friend Vernon and he was robbing magpie nests. Why he found this a correct behaviour I don't know. He gave me the eggs to hold in my windbreaker pockets, so I wouldn't have the dangerous task of climbing the trees. All innocence, I told Ronnie Haug we were robbing magpie nests. He knew exactly where the eggs were, and punch-punched me right in the windbreaker pockets.

My mother was upset by the mess when I got home. I'm upset now to remember how we killed the magpie babies. My friend Vernon was a killer born and bred. He was the proud owner of a tiny rifle, a .22. It was for killing gophers, he told me. I think I can understand how, as a farm boy, he must have believed that gophers were an enemy, a threat to his family's livelihood. But magpies could not have been this kind of enemy.

I never was critical of my friends. If they wanted my company, that was good enough for me. But I criticized and quarrelled with family members. Both my younger brothers have predeceased me and I sometimes worry that when they died, I owed them both apologies for my behaviour to them. Especially Alex, the middle boy—there were yelling and fisticuffs between us as children when we couldn't agree on the details of the fantasy stories we were inventing together. My guilt and my frustration were especially intense because these were our colonial times when he was my only companion.

My issue with Tom, eight years my junior, is much less clear. It erupted when we were middle-aged. It seemed to me the resentment that divided us was all on his side. It deeply hurt and greatly startled me. Recently, I've begun to speculate that what he resented in me was that he always felt I was condescending to him. There was a widespread theory of the dysfunctional family, Tom mentioned to me, according to which the older brother was the image of the father, and the younger brother was forever in the role of the cute baby. I was never frightened of Tom; he seemed to be always smiling. Maybe I didn't show him the respect he deserved.

Maybe now that it's too late to work things out with my brothers, it's just time to forgive myself.

*George Samuel enjoys searching in his past for information about who he is. As a child he lived in a colonial setting in Burma and during World War II. He is obsessed as to these influences.*

## Northwest in a Southeaster *by Rose Marie Williams*

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It is 1970 and my husband, two children and I have chartered a floatplane from Rivers Inlet to Powell Lake for spring break. The weather is sunny and very pleasant. While in Powell River we apply, and are accepted, to teach in Powell River again, starting in the fall.

To head back to Rivers Inlet, we catch the first ferry leaving Powell River to Vancouver Island on a blustery, stormy day with the seas roiling. Our plan is to drive part way up Vancouver Island, to Kelsey Bay, then fly from there back to Rivers Inlet, which is only accessible by air or water. We will complete the school year, and at the end of June we will move back to Powell River.

After passing the north tip of Texada Island, the ferry turns into the wind, and heads down the east side of the island. It is a very rough ride. The waves are splashing onto the windows of the cafeteria, and our seven-year-old daughter, Barbara, is most upset. Her dad takes her down to the car deck, and together they stand in the center where it is a bit steadier. But even there the water washes over the decks, and salt spray covers all the vehicles. It only gets worse when the ferry has to brave the heavy seas broadside, run for the Vancouver Island coast, and then with a following sea, push back up the coast to the ferry dock. That is the last sailing for the ferry that day. We are told the only reason they made that trip was so the crew could get home.

The first thing we do when we drive off the ferry is to find a car wash, and get all the salt water off the car. We then head for Campbell River where we will spend the night. However, in the morning, when we call our pilot, he says the weather is too rough and we will not be flying.

We inform the hotel that we will be staying another night. Finally, after four nights in the hotel, waiting out the weather, our pilot agrees to meet us at Kelsey Bay, and we quickly check out of the hotel, load up the car, and drive up the Island. We meet our floatplane at the dock and load our stock of groceries onto the plane.

Barbara, myself, and our six-year-old son Kim sit behind the pilot while Bob gets in the co-pilot's seat since he has a pilot's license and a float endorsement. As I step up into the cabin, I look behind me. Way down the Johnston Strait in the south sky there are very big, and very dark clouds.

"What's that?" I ask our pilot.

"Hurry up and get in," he says, "That's more bad weather."

I scramble in, sitting in the middle with Barbara on one side of me and Kim on the other side. Finally, we're off on the 170 km journey from Kelsey Bay to Rivers Inlet's entrance.

Flying northwest with the southeaster on our tail pushing us up the Johnson Strait we pass Alert Bay on our left, and the entrances to Knight Inlet, Kingcome Inlet, and Seymour Inlet on our right, past Bull Harbour, and out into the open Pacific Ocean. We pass Cape Caution and Goose

Bay. The black clouds are starting to catch up to us, and the weather is closing in. It is a bumpy ride.

We are approaching the entrance to Rivers Inlet when suddenly our left wing is pulled straight down, and the right wing straight above it. We lose altitude fast! Everyone is jolted as down we go. Our hearts collectively stop in terror. There is only the glass window between my daughter and the ocean. Frantically, the pilot pulls us out of the deadly descent and we all gasp. What was that? We had hit a wind shear and fortunately recovered, but I realize we are still in serious trouble.

Our pilot is calling Ocean Falls to see if we can land there. No, we cannot. The water is too rough for the floatplane. We circle Calvert Island looking for some place to set the plane down. There is nothing but rocks, wind, and surging waves. We can't go east because of the wind shear. We can't go north because the water is too rough, and there is no place to set the plane down. We can't go back because the storm has caught up with us. We can't go west because that is open ocean all the way to Japan. What are we going to do? I'm beginning to panic, but the pilot asks Bob to keep me quiet, and I immediately realize my job is to keep my cool, and help my kids stay calm.

The pilot and Bob take out the maps, and look for some solution to get us safely out of this situation. If a wind shear still blocks us from entering Rivers Inlet then we will go back up Moses Inlet, back to the lake, set the plane down on the lake, and wait out the storm. With the load of groceries, we have plenty to eat. That's the plan, but coming out of Moses Inlet into Rivers Inlet we find ourselves in calm air and we are now flying up the inlet towards home. But there is a new problem—it has begun to snow and visibility is poor to zero. We are flying low, skimming over the water, and hugging the shoreline. The pilot asks Bob for some landmark at the end of the inlet so we don't plow into the shore.

"There is a sawmill on floats, just before we come to the end of the inlet," he says.

Suddenly there is a roar, and out of the snowy skies a twin-engine plane barrels past us heading in the opposite direction. But now we are at the dock. We made it. We're here and we're alive.

We tie up the plane and go up to our house. The pilot comes with us to relax for a while before heading out. I make coffee and something to eat.

"I have often been afraid for the safety of the plane, but never have I ever been afraid for my life," he says. "Today, I was scared for my life, and your lives."

I announce that I will not leave Rivers Inlet until I can see clear skies all the way to Kelsey Bay.

*Rose Marie Williams started writing memoirs for her children and grandchildren in 2010. It has been a most enjoyable and valued experience sharing memoirs and supporting each other.*

## One Last Cast *by Barry Wood*

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It seemed like a good idea at the time, and like many ill-fated expeditions, this one started with a maximum of enthusiasm and a minimum of planning and forethought. Our goal was to locate a fabled lake—rumoured to be full of hungry fish—on the rocky ridges outside our village. A holy grail for a 12-year-old boy obsessed with fishing.

My brother, a couple of cousins, and I packed our rucksacks with drinks, lunch, and bait and took up our rods. I can't remember if we told anyone specifically where we were going. Let me say, in my defense, we often left the house in the morning with only a very general idea of where we were going and probably an equally vague explanation to our mother. Those were different times.

It was a beautiful summer day and we set off in high spirits, our hearts full of youthful hope. We rode to the jump-off point where we cached our bikes by a deserted cabin. Then we set off uphill into the forest in the general direction where I believed the lake must lie.

The Ontario forest is often dense and overgrown, but we persevered and eventually broke out onto some higher rocky ridges. Following instinct, we pushed on and finally we saw sunlight reflecting on water through the trees. We had found the lake!

Nestled in a rocky basin, the lake was beautiful. Surrounded by mature pines, it seemed everything we could want in a lost watery treasure. We soon found a rocky ledge by the water—perfect for fishing. We unlimbered our rods and made the long-anticipated first cast. Fish! Hungry smallmouth bass, just as the legend foretold, and lots of them. Dreams do come true.

We fished and picnicked and fished some more. Our stringers were loaded with plump bass. Eventually, the sun started sinking towards the treetops. Here's where the plot thickens.

We probably should have packed up and left, but I had a plan. So, one more cast.

While exploring the lakeshore on the way to our fishing ledge, I had spotted a trail leading in the direction of the road. I was positive this was the official trail to the lake and would provide an efficient, bushwhacking-free way out, getting us to our bikes in a fraction of the time we took getting in.

Therefore, no need to rush, therefore, one last cast.

That's when we heard the village church bells ring! In our village it was common practice to ring the church bells if anyone was missing in the bush, in the hope that this would guide them back to civilization. Our immediate reaction was, "Wow, someone is lost. I wonder who it is?"

One last cast ....

Then we heard gun shots! This was another tried and true method to draw poor lost souls back to the land of the living. At this point a sneaking suspicion (not yet fear) began to creep into me. Could we possibly be the lost souls? But how could that be? We knew exactly where we were. The path to the road, I assumed, was just a few feet along the shore. Surely no one could be worried about a group of seasoned ridge runners like us.

One last cast.

I suppose from my youthful perspective my reasoning made sense. But now, as a father, grandfather, and great grandfather, I know how worry can come upon us when our children are involved. The vision of miles and miles of trackless bush swallowing up young boys would surely do that.

One final last cast and we quickly packed up and made a hasty retreat from the lake. As I had supposed, the trail did lead us back to the road. We hurried to our bikes to find a beehive of activity, parked vehicles, and men milling about. Our worst fear was confirmed—we were assumed lost in the bush after our bikes had been found and we had not responded to the bells or gun shots.

I saw my father's old red truck and his presence was confirmed when one of the men said a man with a flaming red mustache was up in the bush organizing a search party. My father had a handsome red moustache, but when it ignited, we knew we were in serious trouble! We waited in fearful anticipation as someone went up the hill to let the incipient search party know we had been "found."

The flaming red moustache soon emerged from the bush carrying a 30-30 rifle, and a frightful tongue lashing was forthcoming (accompanied by intense fatherly relief, I'm sure). I remember feeling somewhat indignant at the time, thinking my expedition-leading skills were not being fully appreciated.

Our bikes were loaded in the truck and we were transported, in disgrace, back home for further interrogation and infamy. As the leader, I took the brunt. The stringer of fish hung in the back yard overnight, forgotten in the hubbub. The next morning, I quietly buried them in the bush beside our house.

I've never been back to the lake, but I'm sure it rests peacefully in the tall pines and rocky ridges, waiting to be rediscovered by some fish-full thinking boys someday soon.

*Born and raised in a small village in Ontario's cottage country, Barry Wood is writing about his pioneer family history and childhood memories of growing up on the rugged and beautiful Canadian Shield.*

## Acknowledgments

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Most participants of *Memoir Writing for Seniors* say the program itself has been troublesome at times—making space in one’s busy life for writing, meeting deadlines, delving into a sometimes- troubling past, and being vulnerable enough to express and share life’s experiences in the form of story. But in doing so, they also admit to the many rewards in honouring memories, in the recall of memories once forgotten, in improving writing skills and getting the stories down on paper, in the opportunity to be published and speak one’s story in public, in learning and being inspired by the stories of others, and in finding oneself a valued member and belonging to a writing group.

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—Sandra Tonn, editor