



ROOTS TO BRANCHES

Volume 5, January 2013

BROWNIES ARE
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~~DOWN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION~~ BUT I DON
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FOR ME IS ONE OF THOSE FEEL GOOD FOODS. MAYBE IT'S
USE CHOCOLATE FLAVOR BAKED INTO ONE PERFECT SQUARE

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Program Founder and Facilitator

Lauren Kirshner

Sister Writes Participants

Kaola Alison Baird
Jennifer Choo Chee
Hortencia Cruz
Mary Francisco
Keo Huynh
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Program Sponsors

Sister Writes thanks The Toronto Arts Council, The Ontario Arts Council, The Toronto Public Library, Women Helping Women and Sistering for their generous support of the program.

Want to join Sister Writes

To register for an upcoming session of Sister Writes or for more information, go to www.sisterwrites.com or call 416-926-9762.

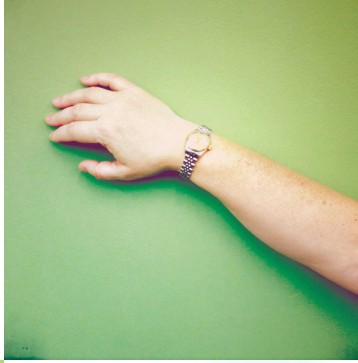


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A Note From Lauren Kirshner

Author and Sister Writes Program Founder/Facilitator

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the fifth volume of Roots to Branches, the magazine written and published by Sister Writes!

As well as being a celebration of the creativity and hard work of the Sister Writers, this magazine marks the three year anniversary of the program. Since January 2010, Sister Writes has delivered more than 100 free creative writing and literacy workshops; it has provided over 40 women with the opportunity to learn literacy skills in a structured and inclusive environment; it has brought budding women writers into contact with more than a dozen guest writers; it has provided one-on-one mentorship and writing coaching; and it has given women the opportunity to produce and launch five literary magazines, and write a collective total of over 150,000 words.

Sister Writes was made possible through the generous support of its sponsors. Sistering, The Toronto Arts Council, The Ontario Arts Council, Women Helping Women, The Toronto Public Library all showed tremendous commitment, and we thank them for supporting the work we do.

I hope you enjoy reading these pages as much as I enjoyed watching them come to life. And if you would like to learn more about Sister Writes, the participants, guest writers, or to read Roots to Branches Volume I, II, III, or IV, please visit our website –www.sisterwrites.com.

All best,

Lauren Kirshner

About Sister Writes

Sister Writes offers free creative writing classes for women in Parkdale and the surrounding neighbourhoods of Toronto's West End. The program was founded in January 2010 by writer Lauren Kirshner with the support of Sistering, a drop-in center empowering women since 1976.

Now celebrating its third anniversary, Sister Writes provides opportunities for women to learn creative writing skills from professional women writers. In weekly workshops, women develop their creative potential, hone literacy skills and build self-esteem. Women also learn organizational and presentation skills as they work toward producing a magazine to showcase their creations. Each session of the program culminates in the launch of the Sister Writes magazine, *Roots to Branches*, written and illustrated by the participants themselves.

Empowering, inclusive, and definitely hands-on, Sister Writes is dedicated to the principle of building community, one story at a time.

The Sister Writes Touchstones:

Word Power - By learning to write in a variety of genres with purpose, clarity, and flair, women develop literacy skills that help them gain greater control over their life circumstances.

Empowerment - Creativity builds confidence. Women learn how to represent their stories and interests through writing, becoming active and positive participants in their communities.

Fun - Learning and laughing go hand-in-hand. Sister Writes provides women with a positive and enriching environment to discuss ideas, laugh, and reflect on their unique and shared experiences.

Community - By sharing their writings in a magazine of their own creation, women of widely different backgrounds help to promote values of inclusiveness and diversity within their community.

Access - Everyone deserves high-quality education, regardless of age, race, class, sexual orientation, or ability. Sister Writes helps women overcome barriers to education by providing a free and inclusive program staffed by expert teachers and professional writers.

Child of the War

Keo Huynh

When I was a little child, I lived in a small village called Binh Anh. Every night I heard gunfire, which became familiar.

When the boom of cannons went off, we ran to the cellar pit which was made covered with straw and surrounded by big rice husk sacks.

One day my father and I took a shortcut home from visiting his friends. My father wore a white shirt with short sleeves, dark brown pants, black sandals and a conical hat. We were walking quickly through the dry farm, the stubble covered field cracking under our feet like a short bristly beard. In the distance, I could see a buffalo herd grazing in the meadow beside a small river. The river meandered like a snake, sparkling silver behind the green brush under the yellow hot sun. Meanwhile, buffalo boys were sitting on the backs of buffalo and some were running around.

Suddenly, we heard noise from a plane overhead. Bombs were dropping not far from us. To hide us, my father pulled us down to the ground like we were farm mice running to their cave. When I raised my head to watch the planes, he pushed me down. Hidden below it was quiet. I thought: Why have planes come to bomb my village? How about my grandparents? My mother? My sister? The elders of the

village? My friends? Also the buffalo herd and buffalo boys? Where could they hide? I turned back to my father. He had already stood up and was looking at the hamlet in the distance. He was quiet and motionless, watching the village, very sad, shaking his head but saying nothing. He took my hand and we walked home. I looked in the distance: all the buffalo and the buffalo boys had gone. Only landscape under the hot sun.

On the whole, from the past until now, war has spread to many countries around the world. Many people have had difficult lives. My father passed away but I will always remember his sorrowful face, so tanned by the sun at that time. He was a quiet man, though he taught us by suggestion and through action. He taught us to be hard-working, patient and open. He never gave up trying to meet his target. He had a good attitude. Even though I was a child of the war, we still had a wonderful time in our childhood.

Amelia's Encyclopedia of Baking

Amelia Peluso

Amond Macaroon Cookies: These are my favourite cookies to bake. They were a trademark of my high school best friend's Mom. She gave me her recipe because I couldn't get enough of these cookies. They look pretty fancy and you would think they came from a bakery. These cookies are made from ground almonds, sugar, and egg whites and piped from an icing bag as a star shape then dusted in icing sugar. I make these year round because I like to have them on hand.

Apple Pie: When I took baking classes at George Brown College we were taught to make pie dough. Making the dough is easy but mixing it is difficult. The dough has to come together to form a smooth ball. You need to make sure you don't add too much flour or water. After I watched the teacher demonstrate the process I tried it myself. As difficult as I thought it was, I got 90%. I was so surprised I was good at making pie dough.

Brownies: I think brownies are everyone's favourite treat. They are rich and ooey gooey. Brownies are my favourite chocolate treat. I get most of my recipes online and I also try experimenting with my own recipes. I think I get obsessed with doing that

but that is what I do. Brownies are one of those feel good foods because of all that chocolate goodness baked into one square.

Carrot Cake: My friends and I often go to Buffalo on mad shopping sprees. Since we go so often we now know every inch of Buffalo. Our favourite place to eat is the Cheesecake Factory at the Walden Galleria in Cheektowaga, Buffalo. They make the most amazing carrot cake – I prefer eating their carrot cake over my own. They are famous for their cheesecakes, everything from red velvet to chocolate truffle cheesecake. But their carrot cake is the most moist, creamy and decadent I have ever had. The cake measures 12" in height and is frosted in their luscious cream cheese frosting. I'd rather have carrot cake at The Cheesecake Factory as it's ten times better than mine.

Chocolate Chip Cookies: When I was a child we lived next door to a pleasant, warm old lady. She always gave us her special baked treats. I think that is why I'm a fanatic with sweets. She baked the best treats ever. One of them was her fabulous chocolate chip cookies. I was very young, about four years old, and I hadn't started baking yet. Her chocolate chip cookies were so good that I wish I knew her recipe. I've tried and

experimented with recipes but I cannot get them as good as hers.

Cinnabon Cinnamon Rolls: I have made cinnamon rolls a thousand times in hope of getting to taste as good as the Cinnabon rolls – but it’s impossible. They don’t come out as good as theirs but I always think I will come close.

Christmas Cookies: It’s a family tradition to bake a variety of Christmas cookies each year. It’s mainly my sister and I gathering all our baking supplies and ingredients to start making cookies. There’s something about baking cookies, melting chocolate, and icing cookies that says Christmas to me. While taste testing the cookies batters I receive a “use your own judgement” warning from my sister as I consume the raw dough. I know it’s lame but we still leave cookies out for Santa.

Lemon Meringue Pie: I found a weird recipe for lemon meringue pie. You need to make the crust as usual but the filling was the weird part. You need to take the whole lemon and slice it very thin, add sugar to the sliced lemon and let that mixture sit overnight out of the fridge. The next day, you mix the lemon-sugar mixture with beaten eggs, salt and

a bit of flour, pour it into the crust and bake. It’s very good but I still prefer to make lemon pie filling from scratch.

Strawberry Cheesecake: This is one of my favourite cakes to eat and bake. I especially like strawberry topped cheesecake. I must have made every kind of cheesecake on earth. I make cheesecake so well that I feel I can accept a compliment without feeling modest about it. Now, if there was just a way to stop weight gain when it comes to eating your own baking. The fat free stuff doesn’t cut it.

Scalidri - Italian for fried Christmas cookies. My love of baking started when my grandmother started me baking. I found a lot of comfort in it. My grandmother was a big bosomed, no nonsense kind of woman who was never without an apron. She taught me most of her baking secrets including a recipe for fried cookies. The recipe was passed from generation to generation in my family as far back as 1846. Scalidri are something like a doughnut but a little more dense. Every time I make them, the memories of me standing on a kitchen chair in front of the stove, helping my grandmother make these goodies, always come to my mind.

On and Off Note

Kaola Alison Baird

Mary had finally found her voice: now she was ready to claim it. Now approaching middle age, she made to the decision to come out – as a vocal artist that is. This was not your typical coming out but for Mary, it meant being honest about who she was and how she wanted to live. She was an artist and she wanted to sing.

Her friends were neither surprised nor concerned; they were all busy trying to find their own path in life like owning a business and property. Once, over dinner and a generous supply of wine, a friend proclaimed, “You might as well go for it and be happy, at least that way, if you get hit by a roadblock, you’d at least be closer to nirvana.” Mary laughed at the reference to one of her favourite bands, “Hey I like that...” she said, noting the reference to one of her favourite bands. They both laughed, relieved that each wasn’t in the others’ shoes.

She was no longer concerned about her family’s reaction. She’d fought that inner battle for decades now, starting when she was 15 years old. It was June 1981, the family were gathered for the wedding of Mary’s cousin Margaret – there were two royal weddings that year, only one was official. The bridal committee was made up of the more popular members of the family. Margaret was the eldest and tallest of

the girls, she wore a chic blunt bob and had chocolate brown eyes, which were always overshadowed by a perfectly penciled brow. Ever so fashion conscious, Margaret was famous for her multiple outfit changes throughout the day. Even now, seemingly un-phased by the day’s events, she sat beautifully decked out in a blue and white summer dress, legs tucked neatly under the folds of her soft cotton skirt as she cozied up on the thick sage and mahogany couch. Her ladies-in-waiting filled the rest of the room; Beatrice her mother; Emma, her sister and maid of honour; Aunt Helen and her daughter Gillian, also a bridesmaid and Mary standing off to the side Gillian was the centre-piece of the room in Mary’s eyes.

Mary and Gillian grew up as best friends and shared any interests typical of teenage girls, music, fashion, boys, yet they couldn’t be more different. Gillian was taller, more confident and athletic. She excelled in almost everything she did whether it was straight A’s in school, any sport including captain of her football/soccer team.

She was the opposite of Mary – or so Mary thought. Together they shared a passion for music and Mary came to idolize Gillian and everything she did.

Mary had no official role to play at the

wedding. Used to such exclusions, she was content to tag along and indulge in her own thoughts. However, deep down she felt left-out and sad that she wasn't chosen to participate. Mary was an only child, her mother died when she was two and she was adopted by her aunt Victoria and family.

Victoria welcomed Mary from the day her mother died and was the only mother Mary could imagine. She looked like a starlet from the 50's and 60's, with dark wavy hair; glowing skin with "Yardley Red" lips that were thin and perfectly shaped. Mary thought they were the cutest dolls' lips she had ever seen. One of Victoria's many talents was sewing and her dresses gave a nod to her favourite actress Audrey Hepburn. But it was the voice - Mary adored her voice - a smooth mezzo-soprano beautifully on pitch. It could be heard echoing through-out the house, no orchestra needed.

That summer evening, aunts and cousins carefully draped themselves on the couches in the neatly arranged living room. Mary stood by the arch framed doorway, after long hours socialising a quick exit was necessary. They talked about wedding party favours, Aunt Helen's feathered hat and Mary's dress, an embarrassingly light pink, layered chiffon with long ruffled sleeves. Mary dreaded having to

wear it and worried about walking in the strappy heels she was forced to wear. Her thoughts had drifted on to the new song by the Talking Heads when she heard Gillian remark, "When I get married I'm not having a horse-ridden carriage mum!".

Mary froze; she could hardly believe her ears! Nervously she remarked, "What do you mean, when you get married?" her voice revealed her shock and disappointment. "I thought we were going to be in a band?" Eyes rolled and there were fits of laughter. Aunt Beatrice said what they were all thinking, "Oh Mary, you're such a dreamer." Most everyone in agreement, "How do you expect to earn a living, this is the real world!" Gillian sat quietly with a look of discomfort and guilt. Mary began to feel her legs go weak; her hands moisten; the air suddenly thick - she could hardly breathe. Shock and anger began to jostle for space in an already cramped living room.

"Was Gillian really going along with this ridiculous idea of getting married?" She wondered to herself. They took little notice of her leaving the room. She stood staring out the window in the bathroom upstairs, looking out at the steady stream of cars heading to and from the nearby airport. "How long had Gillian known this?" she wondered, "was this

something every young woman wanted? But I've never thought about it?" She remembered the numerous weekends at Gillian's house, hunkered down with song lists; carefully grouped records and tapes; discussing the latest songs and their pretend concerts.

Mary felt foolish and embarrassed realizing she was the only one with dreams of being a singer. Those concerts formed some of her best memories, from picking the songs to making the necessary mixed tapes. Gillian's brother Michael would set up the tape deck and provide the sound effects, including crowd noises. Because every rock band needs an arena full of screaming fans - this was crucial to having a successful show. They used his bedroom as the arena, it had floor to ceiling windows along two walls and light streamed in from the garden, giving the illusion they were playing outdoors.

Mary still fondly remembered those days. Sitting in her favourite coffee shop, she put down her pen and looked up from the note book where she scribbled ideas for new songs. Pursuing a traditional life left Mary depressed and lonely because essential to her was a life filled with music. She was beginning to feel better now, becoming engaged in a community of artists, singing in a choir, taking voice lessons and even signing up for a creative writing class.

She was no longer alone, there were many brilliant minded artists with whom she could learn, discover and create.

It was a cold, sunny winter's morning and Mary sat admiring the glittering snow that hugged the tops of cars and piled up along the sidewalks. She watched as everyone scurried past the window, wrapped in scarves like colourful mummies. She loved this time of year. She picked up her pen and with a melody in mind, set about writing the lyrics to a new song.

Love Donation

Nahid Mehrabi

In the women's clothes section at The Bay department store, Anita was hanging black pants on the racks. She was thinking deeply and more quietly than usual. It was a busy day for both her mind and the store.

Anita's sister had arrived for a visit a few days ago. During the lonely last few years in Toronto, the idea of sitting on the coach with her elder sister, holding hands and chatting, was all Anita had dreamt about. Now the dream had come true. Yet with the sweetness of her sister's arrival had come a flood of memories about her past life back home. Although she was making a good life for her family in Toronto, Anita could not shake the feeling that she was missing something of herself, something of home. Yet she could not identify exactly what it was. It was just a feeling like she was a bird that wanted to fly home.

At break time, the cup of coffee that Charlotte, her colleague, had brought her, was a drink of heaven, but Anita still found herself distracted.

"It's obvious that you're not sleeping enough. Is your sister still keeping you up with all of her chatter?" Charlotte said.

"If you had a sister you might know what it's like, our chats never end," Anita said. "You know, after 10 years living in this country, there is not a single day when I wake up and don't

wonder what I am doing here. It's not easy to cut your sole connection with all you belonged."

Charlotte put her hand on Anita's shoulder. "When I look at you and think about the guts it took for you to emigrate to another country with two kids, I really envy you. I am here just like a hen in my nest. I don't move farther than my own backyard. I am barely able to make any decisions."

Anita appreciated Charlotte's kindness, but she did not feel like they could understand each other. "Break is over, lets go back to work," said Anita. She left the lunchroom first.

It had been Anita's idea to leave home to make a better future for her daughters. What kind of future would they make for themselves in that country? As a woman, always being under the control of the men, at home or in society? Accepting that they ignore you as a human being? Accepting that you are a machine to give birth and raise the children and serve your husband? Be deprived of rights and opportunities? "I think immigration was the right decision," Anita thought. "But, was it not better to stay and try to change things? What about her responsibility to support others? Did she ignore it?"

She was immersed in her thoughts and putting T-shirts on shelves when she saw two

small, thin, old women enter her department. They had deeply wrinkled faces and hands, their backs were stooped, but they were happily chatting like schoolgirls. “Will I reach their ages with this hard and stressful life? If yes, I will be as happy and energetic as they are?” Anita looked at the mirror next to her. She felt she could see the tracks of a hard life in her face. “I am not sure!”

Anita stopped folding T-shirts and approached the two old women. Up close, she could see they were actually different. One was short with reddish hair and wore a milky coloured suit. The other was tall with silver hair and wore a pink blouse and white pants.

“Hello, may I help you?” Anita said.

“Yes,” said one of the women. “We are looking for suits and dresses for ourselves. You know, we are friends. When we first lived here in Toronto we used to buy our clothing from this store. We have lots of nice memories of shopping in this store.” She looked to the other old lady and smiled. “We came here to refresh our old memories, didn’t we, Mary?”

The other woman with reddish hair nodded. “Yes, we certainly did!”

“Really? Are you from one of the other provinces?” Anita asked as she led them to the petite section.

“Oh, no, dear, we don’t live in Canada anymore,” said the lady with the reddish hair. “We left Canada about three years ago. We are Irish. We emigrated Canada when we were young. Life was hard back home. So we decided to make better life in Canada. Of course, life was not easy here but we were young and ready to confront new challenges.”

“Yes, we were full of energy,” the woman with the white silvery hair nodded.

Anita smiled at the women. “Your story is interesting to me because I also immigrated here, ten years ago. Most of the time, I wish that I could go back and see the changes in my country. Many people have gone abroad to escape the restrictions back home. All my family and relatives still live there. During these years life was hard but good. I am happy that my daughters live with freedom and have equal rights with the men. But the problem is, you know, I feel like I have a halved heart. Half of it is here and another part remained there.” Anita suddenly felt embarrassed for having shared this information. “Please, let me show you the racks,” she said.

But the two old ladies were slower than Anita expected.

“Yes, we know what it’s like to leave the country where your roots are,” said the shorter



woman with the reddish hair. “My name is Julia and she is Mary.”

The white silvery hair woman smiled. “What is your name, dear?”

“Anita.”

Anita felt excited. She almost never had a full conversation with a customer – usually it was just a routine. She felt a stream of warm emotion flowing from these strangers’ hearts. Maybe, because they all were immigrants to this country!

Julia stopped beside a carousel of dresses. “You know dear,” she said, “we returned back to Ireland after fifty years, because of that root which was tied to our hearts. A narrow thread which got thicker and thicker during those years and one day, we looked around, the children were grown and living their lives Then, retirement came up and it time to grab the thread to go back to the root.”

Anita smiled. “You are right, maybe one day I will go back to my root, too.” Anita felt her shoulders rise as she inhaled deep in her lungs.

Julia smiled at her. “I know what you are thinking. I know you need money to get home and that money is always on your mind. But believe me, when you are not under pressure, you will begin to find yourself less tired, less stressed, and I think you will begin to enjoy

your life more. When you are under money pressures, you can’t think about art, humanity, social things, you don’t think about how you can make people happy. The first pressure is money. We understand that,” said Julia. “But don’t forget try to enjoy your life even now, even though it is very difficult. Go to a park, see the beauty there, make friends. Somehow you can find your luck here. You have many things, maybe you just don’t see them right now.”

“Thank you for your advice,” Anita said. She pointed to the racks. “Can I help you find anything else?”

“No, my dear, thank you,” said Mary.

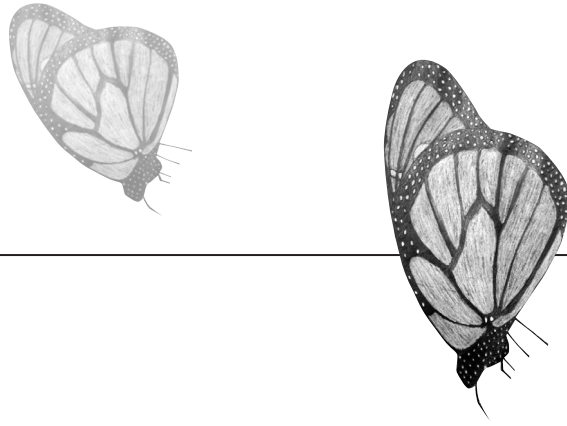
“Enjoy,” Anita said, and then she left them with a big smile and shiny eyes. Those women were right. She would save more money. A voice interrupted her thoughts.

“Excuse me, I am looking for jeans. Where I can find them?” A young woman was behind her.

“Yes, sure, please follow me,” Anita smiled.

Anita was behind the counter talking with the cashier when she saw Mary and Julia standing next to the door with their bags. They were waving at her to come to them. Anita walked toward them. “Hi again, do you need any help?”

“No my dear. We shopped already.” Mary pointed at the bags and stepped closer to her and



smiled shyly. “We just wanted to see you before we leave the store. We understand what is like to be prepared to return to back-home. Don’t forget about the saving money.” Mary held Anita’s hand gently with two hands. Anita felt her tiny bony but warm hands place something into her own hands. It was several \$50 and \$20 bills. Anita was shocked.

“We thought you might need this for your plan and we will be glad if you can achieve your goal,” Mary said as she folded Anita’s fingers on the bills.

A flood of blood was rushing inside Anita’s face. She just shook her head but couldn’t say any thing. Their faces showed happiness and kindness.

Anita gave a big hug to the women. Then she put the bills back in the Mary’s hands.

“Thank you, you are very kind, but I can’t accept that. I really thank you. I couldn’t imagine such a kindness in my life. I promise, I will save and treasure that kindness for all time.”

Anita walked the two old ladies to the door and watched them onto the busy street. Then, she put her empty hands in her dress pants pockets and happily and full of energy, went back to her department.

She was looking forward to telling her sister about that story tonight.



My Hair

Migdalia Jiménez

My mother told me when I was a little girl that my hair was like me: unpredictable, rebellious and stubborn. When I was good she would comb my hair in two long braids, so the part in my hair divided my head perfectly down the middle. But what she really liked to do was put my hair in two high ponytails, and then, using a brush, create one big curl on each side. After some coaxing, which consisted of hard downward strokes and periodically dipping the brush into a glass of water, the style stayed put, two dark banana curls framing my pale face. It seemed to delight her to no end.

Until I was 13, I had to submit to my mother combing and styling my hair every day. She was very clear that until that proscribed day came, I had no choice in the matter. That was just the tip of the iceberg. On Sundays, my mom would insist on marching me and my sisters to mass in formal dresses, skin-coloured panty-hose and dress shoes. I remember asking why we had to wear such formal clothes just to go to our local church, Our Lady of Immaculate Conception, two blocks away. Her answer was that we had to respect God's house, but I think this was her way of signalling to our neighbours that we were a proper and respectable family.

At age 13, the first day of being able to

choose what to do with my own hair came, and I let it loose, un-combed and frizzy. It was my first taste of independence and I loved it. I revelled in it. It would take years before I would tolerate even the thought of putting my hair up or fixing it in any way.

Hair is so important in a woman's life. I think it's one of the major things that men will never get about us. I'd like to live one moment as a man so I can know what it feels like not to care about it. They may trivialize it as vanity, but to many women, hair is a basic prerequisite for looking acceptable.

My hair is long right now. I'm allowing it to be at its longest because after this point it will grow no longer. I'm jealous of people who are able to keep growing their hair to stupid lengths. My mother's straight blue-black hair was like that, luxuriously long, but I inherited my father's hair: brown, curly and dry. It puffs up in the humidity like cotton candy at a summer street festival but it also allows me not to wash it for days and still look presentable, which is nice. My hair looks different every day.

Ring

Cynthia Webb

Throughout high school, my girlfriends were getting rings from their parents. Here and there, a relative had given me costume jewellery rings; showy, overly ornate dinner rings, but I'd never had anything real. I was envious of my friends and ashamed that I didn't have real rings like them. At age 15, I told Mom, "I like emeralds, can I have a real emerald ring for Christmas?"

"We'll see. They might be too expensive. You always expect too much, my dear," she replied. As we talked the worn out black and white Formica dining room table groaned rhythmically under Mom's hands as she kneaded homemade bread dough.

"Well, Bev, Mary and Marlene all have rings and I want one, too." I wanted what was trendy and made girls look pretty.

"Cindy, you know we don't have much money."

"I know, but can we go look just in case?"

"O.K., but I am not making any promises."

That October, Mom and I went to the Corner Brook Mall to start Christmas shopping. The mall had been there since I could remember. Two stories, beige, beige, beige on the inside and out in a straight line of stores. The middle of the mall pushed back a bit allowing room

for the big staircase and cinema at the end. There was a new jewellery store upstairs on the second floor where there were optometrists and accounting offices as well. The mall had no elevator and I felt on display as we walked up the polished, flecked beige concrete stairs and I glided my hands along the smooth, cool, shiny silver metal rails. Oversized aluminum snowflakes and lengths of green, red and gold aluminum garland hung from the ceiling. Familiar Christmas songs played over the speakers contributing to my fantasy that I was for sure going to get a beautiful ring.

Mom and I looked around at the ladies rings and did see some emerald ones. The prices started in the hundreds of dollars and I knew they were way out of consideration. The jewellery man showed us some fake emerald rings set in real ten carat yellow gold. I liked one that had a nice size oval "emerald" with "diamonds" surrounding it. It was shiny and sparkly, and the gold band tapered to the top. I really wanted it. Mom said, "I don't have all that money today. I will put it on layaway."

It was the custom in our house to set out the Christmas presents under the tree on Christmas Eve and put the stockings on the coffee table after we went to bed. It was obvious to me that there was no ring box under the tree. I hoped

mom was trying to trick me and would put the ring under the tree after I went to bed. The usual finds in our stockings were an orange, traditional Christmas hard candy pieces, loose walnuts, filberts and Brazil nuts, socks and underwear. The next morning, my brother Darren and I rushed to the tree to see what we got. No ring. Mom was having a “lie-in” – that was what we called sleeping in – and after the tree gifts were opened I thanked her for them. My mood dampened. Oh, well. It was too much to hope for.

“Cindy!” Mom yelled from the bed.

“Ya?”

“Did you look in your stocking?”

“Ya.”

“Didn’t you find anything in there?”

“Ya, I got everything.”

“Look again, you might’ve missed something.”

I stuffed my hand in the stocking and poked my fingers through the nuts that were now all in the foot of the sock. I hadn’t poured them out because they would have rolled around the coffee table and made a mess. Well, surprise, surprise, there was a very small box mixed in with the nuts! I pulled it out, tore off the wrapping, opened the box and there it was. A 10 karat gold band tapered to a point on both sides

of the setting. At the centre was a fake oval emerald surrounded by little fake diamonds. Yay!

“I got it! I got the ring! Thanks Mom!”

I put the ring on my left ring finger and wore it proudly.

The Fever

Angel Vats

I am fever. I am stone. I am wire.
Sometimes I eat and shit and piss but mostly I am a cage within a cage that has been beaten, burnt and contorted down to the tendon and ligament. It is night and I think I'm delirious, the rats eating the remains of dinner startle me and I'm paranoid they'll come for me next like they did for the gecko whose curiosity got the better of him. There is a smell of something rotting and I can't tell what it is. It might be the bucket I go in but, it could also be me. I have open burns and lashes that they never allow to fully heal. The scar tissue around the open wounds is tight and itchy, the skin thick and rough from repeated injury. I drip piss and blood from my insides. Sometimes it feels like something is spreading down there but, I don't bother to look and would rather give it to them. I don't know when I stopped counting the days or realized that fighting back the regular ways was pointless, even with the taste of a bitten off earlobe or sounds of a torn scrotum as reward. In the end it only comes back on me burning hot and sharp taking months to be able to walk again, the flies unbearable. It was then I built my own cage, stronger than theirs, of steel and hard stone from the belly of the earth like the kind that surrounds the diamonds they take from the bush. They haven't gotten even a sound out of

me since, let alone a reaction. I no longer cry out even though they try harder to make me do so and I have forgotten the sound of my own voice. My neck and shoulders are sweating creating salt channels that collect down the small of my back, around and under my breasts. It feels as if I'm about to faint again. I imagine I'm wet with rain and that the buzzing is the rumble of distant thunder clouds. Maybe it actually is. I am fever. I am stone. I am wire.

It is day, I wake on the red clay floor with sunlight on my face from the small barred window close to the ceiling. The rats have spared me but, eaten all my food as the light reflects off the metal tray. I sit up and lean against the cursedly hard clay wall warm with sun. There are footsteps outside the heavy solid wood door so I know it is late morning. I look at the path I have worn into the floor of the cell and stretch out my legs pressing my feet into the facing wall. There are newcomers and I hear cries. They will come for me later than usual and maybe with a bucket of water because of the heat. They might be charged with the new flesh and take their frustrations out on me bending the wire of me again beyond breaking point but, I will not break. Or, they might be spent having found a weakness in one of them and cut it wide open. I am pacing within the eleven

steps needed to cross my cell. Fingers in ears I note each thousandth step absently now used to the rhythm. If I shuffle my feet and focus I can almost drown out the blood gurgle cries.

Afternoon light. New prisoners come with new recruits. As the bag over my head is lifted and my eyes adjust a young and terrified girl is forced to stroke a teenager before he is ordered to enter me. He is clumsy and expressionless except his eyes give away his recognition of me as something close to his sister or auntie. I am stone and wire and blood and I stare back into his face in the spirit of his mother until he comes, sweat dripping down his forehead, his whole body shuddering with a faint grunt. When the man soldier readies himself afterward, to show how it should be done, I hold my gaze onto the boy as my legs get pulled from their sockets and I feel my insides go numb below the waist. I look into the face of the boy even though it makes my neck and shoulders ache. The girl's quivering breath soon gives way to whimpers knowing what soon waits for her.

Evening and the sun has left me baking in my cell. I am lucid and preparing for fever. I dip my finger in the forgotten half cup of water and place it in my mouth, trace my gums where there used to be teeth. Smoke from the cooking fire, exhaust from returning jeeps, dogs barking,

and voices enter my window. A pig squeals for its life, the soldier's dinner, and I can hear metal clang on stone of the machete being sharpened, more wood being chopped for the fire. There is the sound of glass tinkling, the first round. I think of rain and flooding and check the ground for ants breaking soil beneath the cracks as sure sign the river will rise. I find nothing but rat droppings, my own blood and layers of compressed heat stacked upon each other from the window.

Night. Slices of sharp light through the window. I am drenched and shivering again. Fever makes it hard to stand. Sudden footsteps by window, and khaki pant legs through the bars temporarily block most of light. A hushed voice.

"Ishani," the voice says.

I scurry as best I can to the dark corner, pull my rags around me in attempt to cover up, cross one arm in front of me and stretch the other against the wall to steady myself. I am stone. I am wire. I do my best to be still and blend into the wall. Yet, this name, I know it. I had a name. It was mine.

"Ishani..."

Light seeps through and I see a face through the bars. A mesh of familiar curls, hazel eyes, mustache.

"That face..." I think.

“Ishani!” he says again, this time as if in a gasp. I do not move, I look away. I have no voice. No real form. Just stone and wire.

“I...it’s me....Sammy...I...your....”

There is a pause and then his words come urgent and quick.

“Day after tomorrow, after they take you, at night. The window, climb out and head west, toward the acacia trees. We will find you. Be careful.” Another pause, “I...lo...” He clears his throat. “Understand?” It takes a few moments before I am able to nod yes, blood pounding in my ears. I am dizzy and start to see flashes of colour in the light behind his head. I close my eyes. His voice catches, he clears his throat and then he is gone. I remain frozen against the wall as stone and wire for some time after.

There is the sound of laughter and glasses tinkling to yet another round through the window. Someone close by is sobbing. Then, quiet. Out of habit I return my fingers to my ears and begin pacing, unstable like the soldiers who come in groups when drunk and are most dangerous. I try to remember how long ago it was that the strangle grip of loss of someone named Sammy almost took me with it. I once was able to shed tears for someone named Sammy. This same Sammy who called me by a name that once belonged to me instead of

assigned number 17. My skin aches and my teeth are chattering as I shiver to a stop and look up in disbelief at the window and the jarring colours and shapes that now fill the cell. A wave, like being thrown against a wall, slams into me taking my breath away just as the blaring shapes descend. I make it to my knees before the pitch black vacuum pins me down and I can no longer fight back.

Craps

T1B1

He pulls the drivers' door of his old hooptie to see if it's locked. There's nothing to steal in there but he checks just the same and then heads across the street.

He is tall and slim with a signature walk: nice and easy, no need to rush, arms swaying ever so gently in time with his step, elbows bent at 45 degree angles. The cap on his head is black leather with braided trim wrapped around, something a Greek fisherman might wear. He's got it pulled down just low enough to cover the emerging silver hair but not so low that he can't keep an eye on the other players.

His jacket is rumpled and the slacks have seen better days. The shirt used to be white but he's never been good with laundry. His hammer-toed feet are comfortable in a pair of brown leather slides that he picked up for five bucks at Hadassah Wizo ten years ago.

In his right hand, between the tips of his thumb and forefinger a cigarette burns, smoked half way, the rest a mottled cylinder of gray ash curving down, looking like it's going to fall but it doesn't and it wont until it burns down to the filter. Deep brown stains are embedded in the fingernails of his thumbs and the first two fingers of both hands. He can't remember when it wasn't there. No matter, he's not vain about his hands as long as they roll lucky sevens.

Through the glass door, six stairs up and straight ahead is the Satellite Lounge, throbbing with the sounds of a happening Saturday night. There's plenty of action up there but not the kind he's looking for. Descending the granite stairs he can hear the hollers of the other players. There's shy Nate from around the block; Ches, a guy from his hometown -big powerful shoulders, little skinny legs; Sheldon, the guy who complains the loudest when he loses; Berkley, the honey-brown ladies man and the new guy, just up from Buffalo.

They are gathered in the alcove beneath the stairs that lead to the cellar doors.

Ches says: "Hell, yeah, here he is...now the game is really ON!"

Kool is happy to be there and greets them all with a single tap to the brim of his cap. They don't call him 'Kool' for nothing. He smoothly takes up his customary spot in the corner near the stairs and pulls out his stash of fives and tens. With his right hand he probes the small change in his pocket for the single die he always carries and gives it a rub for luck. It's Shel's roll and the 'point' is five. Two rolls later Shel craps out and commences to gripe and moan right on cue.

Kool steps up, tosses the dice and snaps his fingers like he's shaking off water as the bones hit the wall. He grunts under his breath: "C'mon, c'mon, c'mon.....OOOOOh! Yeah, that's right!"

He's rolled eleven, which is just as good as seven and he knows he's on a roll so he repeats the motions.

"Sho you right." He holds onto his advantage for four more roles, collects and pockets his winnings.

Upstairs, pounding Funk gives way to mellow Soul as the DJ announces last call at the Satellite Lounge. A little after 1 a.m. Dexter the maintenance man comes down to collect the mop and pail and the players make room for him to pass. They can hear the crowd spilling out onto the street.

Suddenly the sound of heels, women's high-heeled shoes come clacking down the stairs and play stops. She's mocha brown and even though it's June, she's wearing a fur coat over a polyester leopard print dress clinging to a figure that calls into question whether she's wearing the proper undergarments. Her fulsome lips are champagne pink, the eye shadow is blue and she carries no purse.

All eyes are on the new arrival as she reaches

deep into her bosom and pulls out her 'bank'.

"What's the game, gentlemen? Can a lady get in?"

Kool swears he knows that voice from somewhere but it's the Buffalo guy's turn and he's about ready to shoot so without any objections, Berkley, (the ladies man) and shy Nate open up a space and she slides in. She flicks a fin onto the floor just in time for Buffalo's roll. Playing it safe. Another five. She's following Berkley's bets and they're both doing alright.

The winners collect and the losers pay out. Play goes 'round.

Finally it's her time to shoot. Clutching her cash, she hitches up the hem of her dress and crouches low. On the other side, opposite her, Ches is in the key position and the look on his face says it all: *she's not wearing panties*.

Kool doesn't care if she's buck naked... he keeps his eyes on the dice.

A Good Day

Liliana Mihajlovic

Whenever somebody asks me to relate an incident that I'll always remember, hundreds of different experiences come to mind. Just recently, it was a "good day" and a good day is not to be wasted. Why not? I decided to go to Beerfest on Queen St.

Queen St. is never boring. It's busy all the time, with streetcars, cars moving at considerable speeds and it's noisy. There are many shops selling clothes, shoes, restaurants, galleries and smartly dressed men and women. Queen Street: it's the street that never sleeps. I had a new dress on, white with navy flowers, a black hat, sunglasses, and I must admit, I looked good, at least that is how I felt.

Beerfest took place at Berkley Church, which looks impressive. Most of the original architecture still remains. Many of the elements of the building are still original, like stained glass windows, hardwood floors, and stairs. I had a tour inside the church, which was built in 1871. I found myself surrounded by the happy chatter of people and the background of jazz music. I could not clearly indentify what music was played, for all I could hear from time to time *bump, bump, bump* and there were no church bells! It seemed like everyone was having a good time. On the main floor, I decided to try some Belgian beer. I will never forget

that awful, bitter taste. I am not an expert on beer and there are so many different flavors and brands of beer on the market. What I do value in beer, personally, are just a couple of things: first, of course, is taste. Beer sells because people like the way it tastes! Most of us stick to one particular brand. Me, I like Heineken – it's just right for me. I compare everything to Heineken. Most of the time I am reluctant to try something new. I left the glass on the counter, practically full.

To my surprise, a nice girl asked me to pay for it. I thought: *why should I pay for something I don't like?* Why, when I have already paid for the admission to the Beerfest, and here was not a sign with a price on it. Those seemed like two good reasons and I decided that I would not pay for that bitter beer. I left.

On my way home, I was thinking about having a beer at home. A Heineken. After all, it was still a "good day."

Falling in Love with the Wrong Person

Migdalia Jiménez

Falling in love with the wrong person is like getting on the wrong bus and only noticing an hour into the trip. I should know, I've done it more times than I'd like to admit.

The first time I met L, I felt immediately attracted and repelled. I tried to look directly at his face, but it seemed as if all the light in the room was concentrated on him. I think he felt it too because as soon as I turned my gaze to him, he nervously covered his face with a notebook that he held in his hand. I couldn't know that this moment would carry me almost seven years forward into that last, cold, early spring day when we emptied our shared home and tearfully said goodbye. I don't think I believed it was over until I stood alone, hours later and miles away.

I knew he was wrong from the beginning.

So maybe I should re-state my first line:

Falling in love with the wrong person is like hitting the snooze button on your alarm clock over and over again. You know as you're doing it that it's not a good idea. You swear you'll stop soon and that it won't affect you too badly. More than anything, you keep hitting the snooze button because the warm sleepiness feels so good.

Falling in love with the wrong person is about living in the moment and enjoying

yourself while you can, and not caring about the consequences you know that you'll have to deal with soon enough.

Jennifer Has Three Kidneys Now

Jennifer Choo Chee

see life differently since my kidneys failed. I really do not want to back on dialysis, so I am very thankful for my transplant. I would like to be around as long as possible for my son and husband so hopefully the transplant will last ten years or more.

We had just come back from Disney World in Florida on May 20, 2003. It was my four year old son's first trip out of the country. My friend had come back from Disney World in March 2003 and showed me 600 breathtaking family pictures from her Disney trip with her family. We went to Disney World for two days and Universal Studios for three days and we had amazing, relaxing time.

2003 was a difficult year for my family as my husband lost his job because the company was moving to Quebec. Around May 27th 2003, I began to feel very tired after work. I went to the doctor and he decided to check my hemoglobin and it was 67, so he decided that I should go to the hospital. This was the time of the SARS outbreak in Toronto, so I could not go in. I went back to the doctor and told him that the hospital would not admit me, but he said that I had to find another hospital. I went on a following Tuesday, and the doctor asked me if I had any kidney problems. I said no, but he said that I needed to be admitted into the hospital

and have a blood transfusion. I ended up in the hospital for three extremely long months. I was put on dialysis right away because both of my kidneys were functioning at 10% and my creatine was 770. The kidneys were removing the waste from my body. By my third day at the hospital I was hooked up to a dialysis machine that acted like my kidney to remove the waste that was building up in my body. I was an inpatient for three months at the hospital and I was not allowed out of the hospital because I may pass SARS onto the people outside. My son who was four years old was not allowed into the hospital so thank goodness I had a room with a window so we could see each other and talk by phone. This made my situation more bearable and less stressful.

Since then I have had about eleven blood transfusions because I am anemic and my hemoglobin is always low and that makes my antibodies high. The nephrologists told me that I would have to wait ten years before I get a kidney from anyone because my antibodies would reject any kidney.

However, I received a phone call five years later on September 2008 for a cadaver kidney. I now have three kidneys - my own two kidneys are the size of a quarter. It would be complicated for the doctors to remove the kidneys because

they would have to cut tubes, veins and other parts of the body to take them out and there is possible chance of infection.

It's now December 2012 - four years since I had my kidney transplant. A kidney transplant on average survives for ten years, therefore, I think differently of life. I enjoy life and try to keep busy. I have about 6 more years to enjoy life without the machine, after 6 yrs, I will have to go back on the dialysis machine to remove the waste from my body.

Going for the operation was very scary because you could die from surgery. When they called me to tell me that they have a kidney for me, and asked if I wanted it, I said yes. I phoned my sister and asked her what I should do – she said she did not know. I then contacted a patient who had a kidney transplant and he told me to go for it - at least I will not be on the machine for ten years. I could enjoy life and spend time with my son who was four years old and my loving but stressed husband.

I try to do as much as possible with my son, as he is in grade nine, and studying cyber arts and robotics because who knows what is in the future for me. So I will enjoy my time with my son and husband until my kidney issue has to be addressed again.

Annie May

Carol Jeanne Richards

“What’s your name?” asks mom. Her voice is querulous, small. I move to the bed to sit beside her. I want to reassure her with my presence.

“My name is Carol.” I tell her. She hesitates. She is unsure.

“I’m your daughter,” I add. Her hand flies to her forehead in confusion. Perhaps despair.

“Oh yes! Carol. Of course! Oh dear, how, how, how did I ever get to be this way?” she laments.

“Well, it’s your age mom.” Then, because we are both so sad, and this answer seems so unsatisfying, I begin to sing. “The old grey mare, she ain’t what she used to be, ain’t what she used to be, ain’t what she used to be. The old grey mare, she ain’t what she used to be...” Mom is laughing when I reach the end and we crow “Many long years ago!” She laughs and laughs, then the voice is tiny again and the words emerge slowly.

“How old am I now?”

“You are 98,” I say gently. “You will be 99 in February.” Her brow furrows and her hand returns to rest there. The sadness is back.

“Is my father gone?” she wants to know.

“Yes mom. He has been gone for a long time. He died when I was a little girl.” Once again, she seems confused and so I ask “Do you mean

daddy? Do mean my father? Your husband?”

She remembers the distant past, she relates more to her childhood than she does to what came after. “Where is my husband?” she queries.

“He is gone, Mommy. He died six years ago when he was 92.” She has nothing to say.

“Do you remember him?” I ask tenderly.

“No not really,” she replies. I feel so deeply grieved. “How old am I now?”

Patently I repeat, “You are 98, almost 99.”

She brightens and informs me, “I’m going to make it to 100!”

It is hard to be cheerful and sincere. I love her and I will miss her dearly when she is gone, but the prospect of another year and a half of decline, illness and confusion does not fill me with joy.

“Maybe you will,” I answer, hating myself for the ambivalence I am feeling. But she seems reassured and she draws closer with a confidential air.

“Now tell me. Where am I?”

“You are in a residence mom. This is your home now.”

Another sad subject for me. She should be tucked up under and afghan beside the stove somewhere, listening to the voices of her family as they come and go and share meals with her.

Not all alone in a single bed in a tiny room waiting for death while she wonders where she is.

My sense of her longing for a true home is confirmed when she whispers “We were nine.” This is familiar theme. She was one of nine children and she never tires of hearing their names. We try to go by order of birth. I begin the recitation as she nods and listens.

“First there was George, the Janet, then Martha, then Angus. Who came next? I always ask. She loves this part.

“Me!” Does she love this because it is one of the few things she can still be sure of?

“That’s right and what were you called?” I always ask.

“Annie May!” she says happily. I continue the list. “Then Jessie, then Theresa, then Mary and last came Dougal. “ Because she enjoys it so much, I always end by asking “Do you remember where you were all born?”

The answer is slower and slower in coming each time but she always remembers.

“Cape Breton.” She breathes with a sigh. Now we come back to the present. The world of uncertainty.

“Will I sleep here tonight?”

“Yes mom. You sleep here every night. This is where you live.” I feel so inadequate yet. I have

no other answer for her.

“Is the place where...?” Her voice fades.

“This is the old age home,” I tell her.

“Oh, I never wanted to end up here,” she informs me.

“No Mom, none of us do.” Then I forge ahead in another futile attempt at reassurance.

“This is a nice place. Everyone is so kind. The food is good. They take such good care of you here. Your night nurse Dion will be here soon to get you ready for bed.”

“Who?!” She has no idea who I am talking about. She has no memory of the day to day or even of a few minutes ago.

Dion arrives. A very tall Jamaican lady with a deep voice. She is a Victorian Order of Nurses caregiver. She patiently toilets and bathes all of the residents over 90 in several private residences. She is a kind gentle woman, but I sense that mom is afraid of her. I remember my childhood in Windsor Ontario beside the Detroit River. Mom was terrified of black people.

Mom is perched now on the edge of her bed, peering blankly up at Dion. She sees a huge dark shape. Ninety per cent of her vision is gone. She lost her sight gradually through macular degeneration so she is remarkably well adapted to her surroundings. She had more sight when he came here four years ago, so she

has memorized the route from her room to the dining room, from her room to the lounge. She does not let on that she is blind. She has no white cane. She walks with a walker. People don't realize that she is sight challenged. It seems to give her more independence. They expect more of her.

Her mouth is a small round pucker. Her teeth are under her pillow with her rosary. These are the only things left for her to keep track of. She is diligent in this tiny task. Dion is asking about her teeth but mom doesn't know where they are. She looks scared until I tell her where to find them. She retrieves them while Dion holds out a plastic cup. Mom places them inside by finding the edges of her cup with her fingers.

"Mommy, I'm going to go now." She bursts into tears. I am astonished because she has never done this before. I rush to her side to embrace her.

"No, no mommy. I'm not going back to South America. I'll be here tomorrow. I'll see you in the morning."

"What if I'm not here in the morning?" she sobs.

I look up helplessly at Dion who now towers over both of us. Desperately I appeal to her.

"She'll be here in the morning, won't she Dion?"

"Yes she will," booms Dion. I kiss my mother goodbye, grateful to be leaving her in the hands of a caregiver, even if it just for the next few minutes. Leaving her there alone is so incredibly difficult.

In a quiet corner of the GO train I weep all the way from Port Credit to Union Station.

Maple Leaf

Helen Hwang

Look at the bottom of the ramp under the garage and entrance door. It's full of leaves. Wind brought in many different kinds of leaves— they accumulated in this area. They block the way in and out. I use the broom to brush the leaves into bags. I can recognize many types of leaves: one of them is a maple leaf. The parks are full of them, the street corners too in the autumn. Last summer was very hot and long. That caused the maple leaves to turn red later than usual. Then suddenly the weather changed – it became cold very fast. Some of the leaves are still on the trees and they turned red. They were changed by nature's temperatures. Cold leaves fall down fast.

Some of the maple leaves have not turned red. Some of the leaves have big black spots on them. I couldn't believe nature had created those black spots – they looked like stamps on the leaves. My memory goes back to many years ago when I was young in Taiwan.

Taiwan is a hot country. I never knew about maple leaves when I was back in Taiwan. When I was 30 years old, a very popular was released in Taiwan: it was called "Maple Leaf's Love." The singer in the movie sang about a young handsome man who met a younger, beautiful woman in a maple leaf forest. That beautiful colourful red orange maple leaf created a

backdrop for a love story. Many fans of that movie went crazy trying to locate that maple leaf forest.

One day the media – at that time there were only a few radio stations – and the TV news found that there was actually one maple leaf forest in Taiwan. The media introduced the public to that maple forest – and they said it looked like a dream. One day I joined a group of tourists to visit that forest. From the tour bus we transferred to a truck. We finally arrived at a nature reserve. A Chinese minority person tour guide brought us through many mountains in the area until we arrived at a flat, muddy area. The small area was filled with trees that had already lost their leaves. That was where the famous movie scene had taken place. The tour guide told us "You have missed the leaves this year. You need to come back again next year." After that, I didn't have a chance to go back to that mountain maple leaf forest again and I didn't see real maple leaves in Taiwan.

When I arrived in Canada, I saw real maple leaves for the first time. The orange yellow leaves on the trees fell and I picked some up, dried them by putting them in a magazine, which also flattened them. Then I mailed a magazine with the maple leaves inside to my father, with a letter attached describing the

world that I now lived in – Canada – that was so different from ours.

Before coming to Canada, I didn't know that maple leaves depend for life on the temperature outside. After I got Canadian citizenship I went back to Taiwan to see my father. He showed me the maple leaves I had mailed them. He liked them very much and had preserved them carefully in a magazine. The result was the maple leaves were still flat but the colour had faded. I was the only child who had sent him a beautiful maple leaf. Others had sent him letters complaining about the difficulty of their lives in foreign countries.

Home

Hortencia Cruz

Fear was everywhere. It had invaded her once quiet and peaceful homeland. She could feel it, smell it, it was visible on the kids' and adults' foreheads, like a tattoo.

Caridad felt the ghost of fear as soon as she stepped down off the bus. She had had a long trip and all she wanted to do was go straight to sleep, let her arms and legs relax and allow the warmth of the sun to touch her eyes. She was anticipating this moment.

And there she was, after 18 years of running away, hopping to erase her past – that past that is always attach to our souls like a disease.

She came back alone. With no kids or husband of her own, the same way she left, but with a few new deep lines around her eyes and neck.

When by accident she looked at herself in the bus's mirror she was sure that woman was her mom; she looked away immediately.

The bus terminal had the same faded yellow color in the walls, and the cafeteria looked almost identical, it was missing the bakery smell though. Perhaps now they bring the bread from the city, she thought.

-Is that you Caridad? an old man with missing teeth asked.

-Yes. I came back –He must be my father, she thought.

-Is that really you Caridad?

-Yes. I came back.

She followed him in silence.

-Things have changed. We have a new boss. The police respect and fear this new boss, and you will too – her father whispered.

-We have a new gun at home. I will teach you how to use it. Just in case.

They kept walking; the streets were torn up, with holes here and there. Not even the sun dared to appear; it was hidden behind that tall and deforested mountain once green with trees and life.

-Do not look at anybody in the eyes. They might not like it.

He continued talking. Caridad buried her last bits of hope in the fragile earth.

The “Evil Virus”

Hortencia Cruz

He was rushing home when his legs suddenly refused continue walking. He saw an obese middle aged man eating a titanic bowl of noodle soup. He was using chopsticks, and the greasy water was all over this cheeks and mouth. When the chopsticks couldn't catch a piece of meat, he would use his fingers.

Vincent saw the man from the sidewalk. His gloves and boots weren't enough to keep him warm, snow was falling on his hair and eyelashes.

Just to look at the guy inside that tiny, old fashioned fast food restaurant was bothering him. The hot soup made the window's glass fog up. Dinner time had passed hours ago, but that individual was eating.

Chom chom -he imagined the chewing sound- chom chom – the noodles all over his fat face.

He didn't think twice, he opened the restaurant's door, got close to the man and grabbed the bowl from the bottom, then he took hold of the eating man's hair and pulled it back.

-Here is your disgusting meal, eat it, eat it!!

-Why don't you swallow it stupid pig, eat it!!

-Stop him, somebody stop him –a woman's voice screamed- he is infected, call the police!

-Don't touch him. That man got the evil virus; it is contagious, stay away!

The “evil virus.” It was the official name that doctors gave to that new sickness that started affecting citizens of any age: kids, youth, adults, seniors, men and women. It would start with sadness feelings, then anger, and later on with an uncontrollable aggression.

So far scientists and doctors couldn't come with a cure. People were afraid to go out, and more and more citizens were getting sick. They had tried every drug and surgery possible but none of that with a positive result.

It was a young farmer who without any scientific proof came with an effective remedy: “Abandon the city. Keep away from that polluted and stressful world to reconnect yourself with nature.”

The price was too high: houses, cars, money, debts. Pharmacists will come up with a solution. It was the media and the public response.

Meanwhile Vincent was taken away. He was tied to a chair in a tiny hospital room, where a nurse was making him swallow some drugs, mixed with a big hot bowl of noodle soup.

David the Baker

Mary Francisco

David was a 40-year-old man who stood at 5 feet 9 inches. He had blue green eyes and black straight hair. He was the son of a Portuguese woman and a Greek man and he had no siblings. He worked five days a week in a big bakery. The bakery had once belonged to his parents but David had inherited it upon their death. David loved working at the bakery so much that he had no time for friends or going out on dates – that is until he met 35-year-old Deana. Now, Deana was a beautiful woman with reddish brown hair and hazel eyes and she had the smallest mouth he had ever seen. He took interest in her right away. He learned that she lived close by and one morning he worked up the courage to ask her out on a date. When she said yes he felt weak at the knees and his hands started to sweat. “Get a grip on yourself, David,” he thought.

The big day came. He picked her up at 6:30 pm and took her to the most expensive restaurant in town. They ordered the special of the day: turkey meatballs with wild rice, asparagus, broccoli, a crisp garden salad and Baby Duck champagne.

After they had placed their orders, Deana turned to David. “How long have you been working at a bakery?”

He answered, “I’ve been working there since I was 16, then it became mine after my parents died.”

“I’m sorry,” Deana said, “I work in a fac –”
“—well baking is all I’ve ever done. You should come by the bakery one night and watch me work, maybe you could learn a thing or two.”

“Oh, no, my days are full I couldn’t go to the bak –”
“—The bakery is big and I work alone,”
David went on. “I love the feel of the dough in my hands. The thought of people eating the bread I make pleases me.

Deana thought to herself, he really likes to talk about his work. OK, I’ll let him tell me more. “I can see that you really love your work, do tell me more,” she said.

“You see by 3:00 am I start baking. It takes at least a few hours for the ovens to heat up. Do you know how big the oven is?”

“No,” said Deana. “How big is –”
“ – the oven is about six feet high and four feet wide with five shelves inside.”

All Deana could say to that was “wow.” The food finally came.

“Wow, that looks scrumptious, let’s dig in,” said David.

Slowly they started eating. The waiter poured the wine part way in the glass and gave it to David to taste. David took the glass, put it to his lips, and took a sip. “Ah, refreshing, very inviting to the palate.”

The waiter then poured some wine for Deana.

“As I was saying,” continued David, “I put 50 pounds of flour into the mixer, the mixer pours water from within, then I put yeast in water and let it sit for about 10 minutes, then I put it into the mixer, which mixes for about 10 minutes.”

“David, why don’t you eat? You can tell me more after eating.”

“OK,” said David. After a few moments he cleared his throat. “After the dough is ready I put it on a wooden table that’s about four feet wide and 30 inches long. Then I roll all the dough out and shape the dough into buns, Kaisers, French sticks, corn bread, just to name a few. I really get a workout rolling the cornbread. I particularly like the 3 inch cornbread.”

There was a silence of about two minutes, then Deana spoke. “You know, I too like working where I’m working.”

“Oh yeah?” David said. “I wonder if you have fun where you work like I do when I’m working.” “I do...it’s so quiet—”

“—and the part I really love is when I roll out the French sticks. I roll them out about 10 inches, then I put them in water, then into flour, then I roll them out into 20 inches and score them.”

“What do you mean by score?” asked Deana.

“I put slits into them. And I make two of them with seeds”

The waiter came back and asked if they

wanted dessert.

“Not for me,” Deana said.

“I’ll have a cherry pie with ice cream, please,” David said. He turned back to Deana. “Oh yeah, the Kaisers are fun too. I put the dough through this machine which flattens it much like old washing machines where you would put the clothes through two rollers to wring out the water from the clothes, well, when the dough comes out I put the more flat dough into another machine which forms small amounts of dough, then I put them through the Kaiser machine.”

The waiter came back with David’s pie and ice cream.

“—as I was saying,” said David.

“—excuse me, I need to go to the ladies’ room, I’ll be back.” Deana walked away and David had a big smile on his face.

In the ladies room, Deana thought to herself, “All he does is talk about his work, it’s as if he’s on a date with his job with me along.”

Leaving the ladies room, Deana also exited the restaurant.

After a good while, David became worried about Deana. He asked if someone could check to see if Deana was alright. After a while, David was told that the young woman who had accompanied him had left the restaurant. David was left in shock.

What I Wanted When I Was Six

Migdalia Jiménez

wanted to be a twin. Not just a twin, but specifically and intensely, my elder sister's twin. We were already so close in age, one year and nine months apart. My well-meaning mother dressed us identically, me in crayon-reds and she always in muted blues. She's still upset about that. And more importantly, we were so close, more than close, we were best friends.

I felt deeply that some cosmic mistake had been made: we should have been born twins. But there was nothing to be done, we were already born apart, like double moons in orbit, one following the other faithfully and mournfully.

I wanted us to have a logical reason for our connection and for it to be official, like long-dried concrete. Like the beamingly blond Sweet Valley Twins, we could walk through life together, going through the same milestones together, never apart. We'd be able to read each other's minds, and stand in for each other, tricking our friends, or deviously taking exams for each other, getting into all kinds of hijinks.

I never wondered, until now, whether she felt the same way.



About the Authors

Kaola Alison Baird developed a love of theatre, music and words from the moment she could talk. In her free time she could be found attached to the stereo, singing, or absorbed in books, newspapers and magazines. Her idea of play was constructing her own town out of natural materials or making up stories that she would then act out, playing multiple roles - much to the amusement of her mum. Joining Sister Writes is a way of re-connecting to that part of her that has lay buried over the years and yearns to come alive again.

Jennifer Choo Chee was born in Trinidad and grew up in a Chinese-Trinidadian household. She came to Toronto when she was 12, and went to Ryerson Public School and Parkdale Collegiate. She studied accounting and electronics technology at several colleges. She has one son who enjoys spending time with. Her favourite hobbies are knitting and crocheting.

Hortencia Cruz is a journalist from México and a freelance writer in Canada. She has been with Sister Writes for more than a year and focuses on writing short stories.

Mary Francisco was born in Portugal and immigrated to Toronto when she was three years old. She has been a member of Sister Writes since 2010 and has contributed short stories and original artwork to every issue of Roots to Branches. When she's not writing, she enjoys reading, knitting and crocheting.

Keo Huynh was born in the south of Vietnam, in a small village called Binh Anh. She came to Canada by boat in 1979, and on the way spent one year in a refugee camp in Malaysia. In Canada she lived in a small town in Saskatchewan where she worked on a potato and carrot farm before moving to Toronto. She enjoys playing traditional Vietnamese music, cooking, writing and doing volunteer work in the community.

Helen Hwang was born in Taiwan, where she worked as a bookkeeper. She has been a member of Sister Writes since 2011 and has contributed many stories to Roots to Branches, the Sister Writes magazine, including "Snowstorm" (May 2012) – a tale about getting lost in Toronto's east end during her first few weeks in Toronto many years ago.

Migdalia Jiménez was born and raised in Chicago to Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrant parents. She has been an avid reader since as far back as she can remember and has a life-long commitment to working for social justice. She loves singing, traveling, dancing, cats and most of all spending time with her family. She earned university degrees in Latin American Studies and Library and Information Sciences. As a new writer, she enjoys the challenges of learning the craft and being part of a community of writers.

TIBI is a Toronto daughter best known for her local adventures as a singer and songwriter of soul, rhythm & blues and reggae music. She credits her African Canadian heritage for her flare for story telling and her mother for her love of books. She enjoys beading, sewing and creating new items using recycled and reclaimed materials. She is grateful to Sister Writes for providing a safe, all female writers forum.

Nahid Mehrabi was born and grew up in Iran and now lives in Toronto with her family. She joined Sister Writes to learn writing skills, to listen to stories and to tell her own. In her point of view, the best way for achieving women's rights in the world is for women to share their experiences, pain, happiness, weaknesses and strengths.

Liliana Mihajlovic comes from Belgrade, Serbia. English is her second language. She joined Sister Writes to learn how to write, read stories and meet women of different cultural backgrounds. She enjoys travelling, classical music, long walks and she thinks writing is like psychotherapy and it's free.

Amelia Peluso was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada to immigrant parents from Calabria, Italy. Her parents owned their own business in running a fish store and after five years changed the fish store to an Italian food store. She worked

in her parents store for forty years. Her passion is baking and she has taken many baking classes at George Brown College. She also has interests in flower arranging, animal care and most recently, creative writing.

Carol Jeanne Richards is a retired elementary school teacher who is currently living in Toronto. She has been journaling daily for 20 years. In addition to writing, Carol enjoys storytelling, reading, photography, art, yoga, walking and swimming. She is pictured here with two of her favourite people, her nieces, Emma and Carly in 1990.

Angel Vats has travelled to, worked in and experienced fever in some of the worlds' most remote and isolated places like the one she writes about in this magazine. She exists at the nexus of many cultures, languages, disciplines and ideas and believes in asking questions about everything. Angel enjoys the outdoors, impromptu adventures and spending time with friends and family.

Cynthia Webb lives in Toronto with her ferret, Pokey. When Pokey is not busy walking over her keyboard, Cynthia works on her Sister Writes assignments and her memoir. Cynthia has a broad education and work experience which helps in her approach to memoir writing. She joined Sister Writes to increase her technical writing skills and find her own writing style.



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