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## SOUVENIRS

(Dedicated to my forever friends, Judy, Janie,  
Jeannie, Ginny, Genrose, and Barbara)

*Sharon Canfield Dorsey*

The overflowing box is intimidating, but Judy takes a deep breath and pulls out a photograph, smiling as she recognizes the barbershop chorus she led to a regional championship.

She doesn't recall everybody's names, but some faces jump out – Ginny, whose costume design always won awards; Genrose, the tiny front-row dancer who stole hearts at each and every show.

She points out Janie with her booming bass voice; Jeannie, the founder of Publick Times Chapter of Sweet Adelines; Barbara, our hippie in her long baggy dresses and to-the-waist red ponytail.

Perhaps fortuitously, Alzheimer's has preserved these 45-year-old memories of a twenty-something group of women who loved music and each other. The pain of present-day reality has melted away.

Judy has forgotten that Ginny never fully recovered from her daughter's overdose death at twenty-one. Memories of Jeannie's blindness, Janie's cognitive issues, Barbara's lost battle with cancer – all gone.

I tear up at the joy in her voice as she extracts more happy souvenirs from the box and walks that youthful walk again. How blessed I am to have shared both the past and present journeys with my oldest, dearest friend.

## THE VIGIL

*Sharon Canfield Dorsey*

A solitary crane stands guard at pond's edge.

Only a ripple disturbs the glassy stillness.

A restless wind rustles the dried leaves.

Pale sun reflects a promising azure sky.

Marsh creatures slumber lightly,

poised for spring's awakening.

Soon.

# YOUNG LOVE

(Narrative Poem)

*Sharon Canfield Dorsey*

It was just a small purple bear with a tear on its cheek, stuffed into an old trunk filled with relics of childhood, but as her wrinkled fingers pulled it out and clasped it to her heart, it evoked dreams and sorrow of first love.

He was an Elvis look-alike with a shy smile and a curl that fell across his forehead when he strummed his guitar. She was a year ahead of him in school, a lofty “A” student senior who shouldn’t have given him a second glance.

Despite teasing from *his and her* friends, they fell madly in love. Her senior year flew by– filled with milestones of the Sweetheart Sock Hop, prom night, and graduation. They were inseparable. Her parents were not happy.

They were sixteen. He still had a year of school. Parents predicted this would not end well. So, they exercised their parental prerogative and decreed she would go to California, live with relatives, and attend college.

She sobbed and threatened to run away, but she knew they were idle threats – no money, no car, no job skills. That last day before she left, they stayed up all night, sitting in the porch swing, clinging to each other.

As he left the next morning, he handed her a package. It was a purple stuffed bear with a tear on its cheek. “This is me until you come back,” he said, his own eyes glistening. A last kiss, a lingering embrace, and he was gone.

Young love is potent, passionate, but it is also fickle. Months went by. Letters became less frequent, then stopped. Girlfriends tattled that he was secretly dating other girls. The purple bear absorbed many nights of anguished tears.

Now, sixty years later, as she clutched the purple lump, reliving the glory and pain of that first love, a deep voice behind her said, “I can’t believe you still have my bear after all these years.” She brushed a graying curl from his lined forehead and kissed him.

## IN THE FLUX OF NATURE

*In anticipation of fall*

*Reyn Kinzey*

The ospreys will be departing soon.  
Not far, just the Carolinas,  
to avoid the worst of winter.  
The egrets, children of the Caribbean,  
will go all the way to Florida.  
The hummingbirds, all the way  
to South America.  
The herons will stay the winter,  
uttering their prehistoric squawk.  
The eagles, too, staring from dead trees  
into Wilson Creek, looking for fish.

We are one family,  
floating in the flux of nature,  
obeying our primal instincts  
as long as we can,  
in a changing climate,  
in changing times.

The feast of the Holy Trinity, 2023



## REDEMPTION SONGS

Reyn Kinzey



Driving in Ireland can be a bit of a challenge, although I've always enjoyed it. Staying to the left is no problem, because the driver's seat is on the right, so you just have to keep yourself in the middle of the road. Let your passenger worry about the hedges encroaching from the left.

No, the bigger problem is getting lost, even with a navigation system. The last one we had tried to steer us into the center of every small town we passed by – to shop, to go into the pubs, to help the Irish economy. So we stopped paying attention to it.

So we were lost in the southwest of Ireland, when I saw what at first I thought was a road sign for a town I knew – Athenry. But in truth, over 30 trips to Ireland, I've not actually been to Athenry.

It's a town I know from a song, *The Fields of Athenry*, which has become a theme song for Irish rugby.

If you know Irish history, you understand that the song is a rebel one, crying out against *an Gorta mor*, the great hunger, crying out against English oppression.

And if you think about it, you realize what Bob Marley realized in a very different situation: songs of freedom are redemption songs.

All we ever have, redemption songs.



## REDEMPTION SONGS

*Reyn Kinzey*

for Bob Marley

Stay to the left.  
Shift with the left.  
Mind the hedges  
on your left.  
You can do this.  
Then, a familiar name  
on the road sign.  
Athenry.  
You know the town:  
*Lo li, the fields of Athenry.*  
But you don't  
know the town.  
Never been there.  
Only a song  
sung on a rainy rugby pitch.  
Like the songs of heaven.  
Redemption songs.  
*All I ever had,*  
*Redemption Songs.*

*Ordinary time, 2019*

## DAY OF THE DEAD

*Reyn Kinzey*



By the time I was 35 both my parents and my best friend were dead. Death is sadly all around us. During the pandemic, I lost two more close friends, not to Covid: one was literally hit by a truck; the other died from heart failure. He was the only one of my friends to die from semi-natural causes.

I've written elsewhere that when someone you love dies, you never really get "over it;" you learn to get around it. You plan your day; you have some fun at night; and you don't dwell on the loss. Usually that works, but sometimes things make me remember my parents and I have to struggle not to tear up.

We all think we know about the Day of the Dead, Halloween, and All Saints. In the Catholic tradition, the entire month of November is given over to the remembrance of the departed.

But the tradition goes back beyond the coming of Christianity. Our Celtic ancestors celebrated the festival of Samhain at the end of October and the beginning of November. It was a harvest festival,

but it also marked the start of a new year, and the division of darkness and light. The entire harvest had to be brought in by Samhain so that none of it would be at risk of the dark forces of winter.

Samhain was also a time when the traveling dead could visit the living. They could speak to us in dreams of Halloween.

Pope Gregory the Great urged his Christian missionaries not to destroy local pagan customs, but to sanctify them to the light of Christ. So, Samhain became the festival of All Saints, on November 1, and the night before, All Hallows Eve, Halloween. We celebrate now with candy for children, but behind it all, the dead cling to us or we to them. They speak, but we do not know how to answer; we cannot fully articulate our loss.

And so we wait, from year to changing year, celebrating the seasons as long as the light lasts.

## DAY OF THE DEAD

*Reyn Kinzey*

for all the dead

November.  
The dead cling to us  
or we to them.  
They speak to us  
in dreams of Halloween,  
in tiresome days  
of failing light.  
In the fog over the creek  
they speak to us.

But we cannot answer,  
constrained by time and place,  
cannot articulate the loss,  
the mourning unachieved.  
We cannot answer.

So we wait.

*The feast of Saint John Lateran, 2021*

# INVASIONS OF THE IMAGINATION

Reyn Kinzey



An 11<sup>th</sup> century book called *Lebor Gabala Erin*, or The Book of Invasions, attempts to explain the origins of the Irish people. From a historical point of view, the major problem with the work is that it was written long after pagan Ireland had converted to Christianity, and the medieval scribes took pains to try to reconcile pre-Christian traditions with the light of Christ. The book contains some wonderful legends – the Fir Bolg, the druid-like Tuatha De Danann, magical mists and one-armed, one-legged giants. But would the pagan Irish work so hard to trace their origins back to the descendants of Noah?

Probably not, but we should not be too critical of the Irish writers of *Lebor Gabala Erin*. In modern times, we still slant “history” to tell the stories we want to tell, the stories – the historical fictions, actually – that are comfortable for us.

For example, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after centuries of persecuting Catholics, the Protestant English of the Oxford Movement created a story of an Anglican High Church that was somehow still in communion with the Roman Catholic Church. To do this, they had to overlook a depraved Queen Elizabeth who not only outlawed the wearing of crucifixes but

also outlawed praying for the dead, a custom that anthropologists usually link with the beginning of civilized behavior. She particularly favored the drawing and quartering of English Jesuits, who weren’t allowed in her kingdom. She was the head of the Anglican Church.

In Victorian times, the Pre-Raphaelites returned us to a Camelot that probably never existed.

But we’re no better on this side of the Atlantic. I come from a state that calls itself the Old Dominion. My college’s athletic teams are called the Cavaliers, all because Virginia supposedly supported the Anglican and Catholic Stuart kings during the English civil war, but there’s little to no historical proof of that.

And then there’s our own Civil War, in my part of the country called the War Between the States or the War to Stop Yankee Aggression. My UDC – that’s United Daughters of the Confederacy – great aunts helped to birth the myth of the noble Lost Cause. But the North won the war, and they got to write the history, favoring themselves a bit too much.

It works down to a personal level. I love my parents and my family, but growing up was not as idyllic as I sometimes want to remember it.

My website quotes Joan Didion’s famous comment, “we tell ourselves stories in order to live. At least for a while.”

She’s absolutely right, but the problem is that sometimes the stories we tell ourselves are lies, deceptions to make us feel better about ourselves.

The scholastic fathers were also right: “The heart is desperately wicked, and deceitful above all else.”

So where does that leave us?

## INVASIONS OF THE IMAGINATION

*Reyn Kinzey*

Imagination invades memory,  
twisting recollections  
into something more meaningful  
and more pleasant.  
The Pre-Raphaelites re-invented Camelot.  
The Oxford Movement created the High Church.  
My UDC great aunts birthed the Lost Cause.  
Me, I'm not immune.  
I've taken childhood memories  
and turned them to idylls of innocence.  
But it didn't really live that way.  
So we stand accused.  
The corrective is as clear as Scholasticism:  
"The heart is desperately wicked  
and deceitful above all else."  
True, but not so pleasant.  
So we stand corrected:  
History, at best, is historical fiction.  
We stand corrected.  
But where do we go  
from here?

*Feast of Saint Cloud, an honest man, 2021*

## SOUVENIRS

*by Peggy Newcomb*

A mug from Liverpool, a teapot from London  
mementos of visits to distant places.

And in a box with postcards and travel flyers  
is a collection of photographs of family picnics,  
children and grandchildren taking dancing lessons,  
swimming lessons, horseback riding lessons and sailing.  
Pictures of ski trips to Germany, Switzerland,  
and Italy. Even photos of a trip to war-torn Bosnia  
and Croatia.

Here's a birthday card from years past...  
with a message from John that warms  
my heart and brings tears to my eyes.

As so many memories flash through my mind  
like a TV screen, I sit here at the window and  
daydream about the past like Papa use to do...  
when he was my age and I a preteen.

I now understand that the past  
has made us who we are...  
one souvenir, one memory at a time.

# TIME LIKE A PICNIC LAID OUT IN FRONT OF US

*by Peggy Newcomb*

Tick, tock, tick, tock goes the clock,  
reminding us of time passing.  
As a child it went so slowly...  
because we were anxious to grow,  
to get to the next birthday.

We couldn't wait for school to be out for summer:  
to learn to ride a bike,  
to go on campouts, to go to the beach,  
to learn to drive a car,  
to go to dances, to go on our first date,  
to graduate!

And now we look back and wonder,  
where have the years gone?  
*Tempus fugit* (times flies)  
my aunt used to say.  
Oh, how right she was!

Tick, tock, tick, tock goes the clock,  
reminding us of time passing.  
As an adult it goes too fast  
because we're busy with jobs, marriage, children,  
soccer, swimming, and horseback riding lessons,  
paying bills, taxes, and summer vacations.

Now we look back and wonder where  
the years have gone  
and realize:  
It's been a wonderful FEAST of EVENTS  
that has shaped and molded us  
into whom we have become.





## LITTLE YELLOW BIRD

*Mary Montague Sikes*

A little yellow bird visited me one day.  
Is that you? I wondered.  
A tear fell.  
Mother had a yellow bird a long time ago.  
It was a canary.

Then the little yellow bird came back,  
This time at the kitchen window.  
Fleeting, hurrying.  
Is that you? I thought.  
A tear fell.

In the warm breezes of Key West,  
A little yellow bird landed on the rail.  
I watched and wondered, is that you?  
The bird flew away, came back  
Perched on a porch chair.

Is that you? I asked.  
Would you follow us wherever we go?  
Are you watching,  
Overseeing what we do?  
A tear fell.

A little yellow bird landed on the deck rail.  
It sat for a while chirping away.  
Its voice so strong  
Singing ever so loud.  
A tear fell.

A little yellow bird landed in my painting.  
I think it shall stay  
Forever with me, near me.  
Not to go away.  
Tears will fall.





## VALDINO'S BAR AND GRILL

*Bensonhurst Section of Brooklyn – Summer 1974*

*Marc Meth*

Mrs. Gennaro sighed as she walked into the living room early Saturday morning. Noodles, her cat, was gone again. Mr. Randazzo had been there yesterday and supposedly fixed the screen, but there it was lying in the alleyway. Mrs. Gennaro looked out of her first-floor window just in time to see Noodles walking around the back of the building. She called him but he ignored her, so she slipped on her housecoat and went to find him.

Mrs. Gennaro walked the narrow alley between her building and the next toward the back. Arriving, she gasped and screamed. Mr. Castelli, her neighbor on the first floor, opened his window and tried to ask her what happened, but all she could do was point and scream. Still in his pajamas, Mr. Castelli climbed out the window into the alleyway. As he approached Mrs. Gennaro, he saw Ray Valdino's body lying on the cement.

"Oh, my God!" he exclaimed as he turned to his wife. "Call the police."

Ray had broken bones sticking through his skin; his face was crushed; his head was shattered; and he was lying in a large pool of drying blood. Mrs. Gennaro got sick and had to be taken back to her apartment.

Ray's neighbors on the sixth floor told the police they had heard him yelling and cursing and what sounded like things being thrown about his apartment the night before, but they knew nothing about how he went out the window.

Ray's brother, Joey, arrived with the key shortly after. Showing little emotion, he identified the body, then went up to Ray's apartment with the police. The door was locked with no signs of forced entry. Joey opened the door to an apartment in ruin. Furniture was overturned and broken glass, plates, and picture frames were strewn everywhere. It appeared that a violent struggle had taken place, but there was no

blood. Pensive and quiet, Joey left after some brief questioning.

Initially the police deemed it a homicide and kept the case open. But as detectives followed their few leads to a dead-end, the case went cold. Some cops thought it was suicide, but no one would ever know for sure.

### The Day Before

Most of the time Ray's sister-in-law, Theresa, helped him with his groceries, but today she was too busy at the restaurant. Since the A&P didn't have a delivery service, he would have to shop for himself. On his own it took longer with him having to roll himself three blocks to the store and back in his wheelchair. Always on the lookout for *those kids*, it was a stressful excursion.

As Ray rolled down the aisle and turned into the next one, he practically bumped into one of the kids getting a soda.

Donny looked down at him. "What are you trying to do Ray, run me over?"

"Leave me alone!"

"I haven't done anything, Ray. You're the one who almost hit me."

Ray backed up and tried to go around Donny, but Donny stepped in front of him and glared downward with that menacing smile Ray was all too familiar with. "Ray, you know, the guys are outside. How about we carry your groceries and walk you safely home? You know what a tough neighborhood this is."

Ray's lips trembled and his mouth went dry. "Leave me alone!"

Ray turned and wheeled himself up to the register then asked to use a phone. The cashier said the only phone was in the manager's office, and he was at a meeting. Ray looked out the window and saw Sal and Tony, so he paid for his groceries but stayed in the store.

Donny came up and paid for his soda. "Come on, Ray, we'll walk you home."

"I'm not going anywhere with you. When the manager comes back, I'm going to call my brother, and he'll get me home. You can all go to hell!"

"That's awfully rude, Ray. We're just trying to help."

"Yeah, right!"

"Okay, just don't say we didn't offer,"

"Hey," Donny called to the cashier as he was walking out the door. "Make sure he pays for that stuff." The cashier nodded and they both laughed.

After half an hour, the manager hadn't returned, so Ray got the cashier to look outside for the kids. When she said she didn't see them, Ray slowly rolled himself out the door. Looking in all directions he didn't see them either, so he quickly wheeled himself home. Just as he reached the entrance to his building and felt safe, the kids stepped out from the foyer. Ray, already shaken and nauseous, threw up.

Donny looked down at him feigning concern. "Damn, Ray, are you sick? Did someone say something to upset you?"

Tony looked at Ray mockingly. "Did Donny say something to upset you?"

Sal smiled. "Yeah, Ray, did he? Tell us and we'll kick his ass." They all laughed.

"Just let me by. I want to go home," Ray implored.

"What's in the bag?" asked Donny.

"My food. What'd you think?"

"I'm kind of hungry. Let's see what's in there."

"Get away from me," yelled Ray as he tightened his arms around the bag.

Sal and Tony went behind Ray and pulled his arms apart while Donny took the bag.

"Give that back, you bastards!"

"Let's see," said Donny, ignoring him. "Oh, look! We have salami, ham, Italian bread, Swiss cheese, beer, milk, cereal, and instant coffee."

"Great!" said Sal. "We have lunch."

"Yes, we do," replied Donny. "And look, Fruit Loops. My sister loves Fruit Loops. I'll take those and the milk. All we have left is the coffee."

"My parents drink instant coffee," said Sal. "I'll take that."

"Wait a minute," called Tony. "Where's the mustard? We can't eat salami and Swiss without mustard."

"Yeah, Ray, where's the mustard?" Sal asked, grimacing.

"You know, Tony's right," said Donny as he hit Ray in the back of the head. "You" *smack* "forgot" *smack* "the mustard" *smack*.

"You can all drop dead. If I weren't in this wheelchair, I'd beat you to a bloody pulp."

"We know that, Ray," said Donny smiling. "But you *are* in a wheelchair. So, sucks to be you."

"Now I can't eat. That's all the money I had," Ray whimpered.

"Your brother owns a restaurant. Go and eat there," said Sal.

"That's two miles away!"

"Think of the exercise you'll get."

"I'm crippled for Christ sakes—just leave me alone."

"Leave you alone, Ray? When did *you* ever leave anyone alone?" Tony glared at him, his voice cracking with emotion. "Remember what you did to my father when he tried to stop you from stealing a bottle of wine from our store? His jaw never healed right, and he's still missing three teeth because we couldn't afford to replace them."

"And how about *my* father, Ray," said Sal. "Remember how you used to go into our family shop, steal boxes of ties, and sell them on the street? Remember how you ransacked the store when he tried to stop you? Do you remember that, Ray?"

"And then there was *my* father, Ray, who *you* bumped into on the street and blamed him for it," said Donny as his veins bulged and his fists clenched in rage. "You sent him to the hospital for three days. I saw the beating you gave him; I was at the ice cream shop down the street waiting for him. Do you remember that, Ray?"

Ray looked at the ground. "I'm sorry," he whispered, eyes welling with tears. "I'm really sorry."

"Oh no, Ray. If you want forgiveness, go to church, because there's none here," Tony said. "As far as leaving you alone, we're all joining the Navy next summer, so until then, don't forget the mustard," *smack*. Then Donny and Sal tipped him over backward as they left.

While Ray cursed, cried, and yelled for help, some people opened their windows and looked, but closed them when they saw who it was. The few who went in and out of the building ignored him as they passed by.

Eventually two cops drove up. Saying nothing, they put Ray back in his wheelchair and rolled him inside to the elevator. While Ray railed about the kids, the cops ignored him and walked away.

## Ray Valdino

When Ray walked down the street, people either diverted into whichever store they were in front of or crossed over to the other side. Ray knew people were afraid of him and he loved it. He was a bully, and anyone who knew him as a child would say that he was always like that. Ray had no real friends growing up - just a bunch of kids like him that he ran with who terrorized the neighborhood. Of the bunch, a couple went to prison, but most outgrew their delinquency and lived productive, working-class lives.

As a kid, some of Ray's activities landed him

before a judge and he did time in Juvie. In 1964, at age eighteen and on probation from an earlier crime, Ray was caught stealing copper from a junkyard. The judge gave him the option of prison or the Marines. Ray chose the Marines.

Like many Italians of the time, Ray hated Black people. If you asked him why, he couldn't tell you, he just did, as though it was something genetic. In bootcamp, Ray was frequently in fights with Black recruits. Always disrespectful of authority, he refused a disciplinary punishment from his dark-skinned drill instructor and unleashed a stream of profanity and racial slurs. When the drill instructor had a recruit double-time it to the military police office, Ray attacked him.

After recovering at the base hospital from the beating inflicted by the drill instructor and half a dozen recruits, Black and White, Ray was promptly court-martialed. He served his six-month sentence in the brig and was dishonorably discharged. The judge who had offered Ray the choice of the Marines or prison had him rearrested and sent to Riker's Island to serve out his fifteen-month sentence.

\*\*\*

Born sixteen years after Joey, Ray had been spoiled by their mother, especially after the untimely death of their father when he was five. When Ray would steal or vandalize something, their mother would blame other kids for being a bad influence on him then pay for whatever it was so the victim wouldn't press charges. When he got into fights at school, it was always the other kids' fault. This went on for years until finally their mother assumed that Ray was just a bad kid. Maybe if his father was alive, Ray would have turned out better—maybe, but she eventually accepted that, at a certain point, a person must be responsible for his own actions.

But Ray wasn't really a bad kid; it's just that he had a secret, a secret so devastating he couldn't face it himself. So, he worked out with weights, learned how to box, and accepted any challenge from any kid in the neighborhood. When no one challenged him anymore, Ray went out looking for fights anywhere he could find them. He took pleasure in beating up gay men while berating them as *faggots*, *fudge packers*, or any other derogatory name he could think of. Ray developed a reputation for being a violent and formidable street fighter, so no one would ever suspect that *he* was gay. Ray drowned his shame and self-loathing in violence

and alcohol, and was able to keep his secret, with a few exceptions, for the rest of his short life.

Joey knew Ray was homosexual, because as someone who *knew people*, Joey had heard things about Ray while his brother was incarcerated. It was the '70s and this was a huge embarrassment for Joey. so he used his connections to make sure word didn't get out. Joey never tried to understand the tortured soul that was his younger brother. Perhaps because Ray had already descended into the world of violence, crime, and alcoholism, or perhaps because Joey, a product of his time, place, and culture, had no way to comprehend a reality so foreign to his own.

As a result, never looking deeper, Joey saw Ray as a drunk and a loser. While he had been in the Army and fought in Korea, Ray never even made it through bootcamp. Joey bought an ordinary neighborhood bar and grill and turned it into one of the best Italian restaurants in Brooklyn while Ray couldn't hold down a dishwashing job. Joey never had a traffic ticket while Ray spent much of his life behind bars.

Having dropped out of high school and been dishonorably discharged, Ray had nothing to offer an employer except manual labor. Over the years he worked construction, drove a tow truck, worked as a janitor, stocked shelves, and held various other dead-end jobs, which he either quit or was fired from. In a desperate plea from their aging mother, Joey gave Ray a job working in the kitchen of his restaurant but eventually fired him for coming to work drunk.

Living with his mother, Ray didn't need money for rent. But without a job, and unable to get one due to his poor work history, he had no money for anything else—so he started stealing.

Joey Valdino was not in the Mafia, but he had *friends*, and everyone in the neighborhood knew that Joey had *friends*. Ray prided himself on this and used it to his advantage knowing that no one would call the police. If Ray was hungry, he'd go into a neighborhood grocery store, order a hero and a soda, then smile and wave at the owner as he left without paying. It was the same at the Italian bakeries. Ray would order a pastry and an espresso, have it served to him at one of their tables, then leave without paying under the enraged eye of the owner. Every local business in the neighborhood suffered: liquor stores, clothing stores, card shops, and hardware stores. Whatever Ray wanted he took. On the rare occasion that the owner tried to stop him, he beat the owner and ransacked the store. No one called the police.

One day a group of business owners went to see Joey and pleaded with him to make Ray stop. Joey felt bad for them—and guilty because he knew what Ray was doing and did nothing to help these good, hard-working people, all of whom he knew. Joey promised that while he couldn't make Ray stop, he would do nothing to protect him if they wanted to call the police.

With this promise, the business owners formed a plan. Knowing when Ray usually went to the bakery for his pastry and espresso, three of them waited in the back, while another three waited in a car out front. When Ray tried to leave without paying, the owner confronted him. Ray immediately grabbed a chair and smashed the display case sending shards of glass into all the pastries, then attacked the owner. The six men rushed in and gave Ray a savage beating before calling the police.

As a result, Ray was charged with twenty-three counts of larceny, destruction of property, and extortion. Through a plea deal he was sentenced to thirty-one months at Attica and ordered to pay restitution.

\*\*\*

Ray's release from prison was forlorn on that rainy day. No one picked him up, so he returned by Greyhound bus, then subway, to an empty apartment as their mother had died while he was in prison. Joey, through some connections, kept the rent-controlled apartment their mother lived in and had it put in Ray's name. In truth, Joey hated Ray, but still felt some obligation to help him, waning though it was.

Joey had arranged for Ray to get a job in a warehouse. All he had to do was carry boxes from one place to another and load trucks. Joey warned Ray that if he lost this job, he'd never help him again, nor would he allow Ray in the restaurant where Joey gave him two free meals a week. Ray promised there would be no more problems.

## The Beginning of the End

"What are you doing here?" Theresa asked angrily as Ray stumbled in holding a half empty bottle of cheap wine. "You're supposed to be at work."

"Screw them!" he yelled.

"You got fired again, didn't you?"

"I quit."

"Bull!" cried Theresa. "Get out, now!"

"I'm hungry."

"Tough!"

"Come on, Theresa, I'm hungry."

"You better get out before Joey comes back."

"Just give me a chicken parmigiana hero and a Budweiser and I'll leave."

Theresa looked at Ray with disgust, but decided she'd feed him one last time. Maybe food would help absorb some of the alcohol. "You'll get a ham and cheese hero and coffee, and then you'll get the hell out of here for good. Now find a table in the back, sit down, and keep your mouth shut."

"Bitch," he muttered to himself as she walked away.

Within three minutes, Theresa was back with the hero and coffee. "Here! When you're done, leave." Theresa walked back to the bar taking the bottle of wine with her.

\*\*\*

While Ray was eating, Joey walked in. Theresa explained why Ray was there, then grabbed her pocketbook and left. Joey decided to ignore Ray and only confront him if he didn't leave after eating. Joey was behind the bar doing some inventory when Mr. Wilkins walked in. Ray stared in disbelief as the Black man took a seat at the bar and Joey greeted him like an old friend.

Mr. Wilkins was a district manager for a food distributor who came to Bensonhurst every few months to meet with business owners. He looked forward to it because of Valdino's Bar and Grill where he knew he'd get the best Italian food and a warm welcome. It was an oasis in a normally hostile neighborhood.

Joey had learned much after leaving Bensonhurst, courtesy of the United States Army. Having fought alongside Black soldiers in Korea, and gotten to know them personally, he no longer had the fear and distrust of Black people he had felt growing up in his insular Italian neighborhood. Mr. Wilkins had fought in Korea also, so they shared a common bond and mutual respect. Joey had learned that Wilkins was a decorated veteran, a man who moved up from truck driver to district manager by hard work and seven years of night school to earn a business degree. He knew that Mr. Wilkins worked an extra job so he could help his two daughters through college.

Joey took Mr. Wilkins's order and was walking back to the kitchen when Ray called him over. "What's *he* doing here?"

"He's a paying customer—unlike you. So, finish your meal, shut up, get out, and don't come back."

As Joey walked away, a delivery man came in with

a shipment of beer. Joey placed Mr. Wilkins's order, then he and the deliveryman carried the beer to the cellar.

Ray sat there smoldering as he stared at the back of Mr. Wilkins. He couldn't believe that his own brother would kick him out of the restaurant while letting some *malignan* come in and treat him like a friend no less. Who was this guy and what was he doing in Bensonhurst? Already drunk, Ray stood, went behind the bar, and took a bottle of scotch while glaring at Mr. Wilkins the whole time. Mr. Wilkins looked at Ray as he came into sight but glanced away quickly. When the chef came out with Mr. Wilkin's chicken parmigiana hero, Ray stopped for a moment and stared then returned to his table.

"They give *him* chicken parmigiana but not me," he grumbled as he took a big swig of scotch. He looked at the remainder of his ham hero and pushed it away, then got up and approached Mr. Wilkins, scowling. As Ray sat on the stool next to him, Mr. Wilkins looked around for Joey, but he was nowhere in sight. Mr. Wilkins could smell the stench of booze immediately and braced for a fight.

"That good?" asked Ray.

"Yes," said Mr. Wilkins without looking at him.

"That chicken parmigiana, no one makes it better than Joey."

"I know."

"All they gave me was ham."

"So, buy one."

"I don't have money."

"I can't help you with that."

"Yes, you can," said Ray as he reached for the uneaten half of the hero and took a big bite.

Mr. Wilkins, a bit overweight and long past his prime, likely realizing that a fight with Ray would end badly for him, got up and walked toward the kitchen.

"Where you going?" asked Ray.

"To find Joey," he replied, clearly exasperated.

"No, you're not. You're leaving. I'll tell Joey you said goodbye."

"Who are you and what do you want from me?"

"I'm Ray Valdino, Joey's brother, and I want you to leave."

"What? You're Joey's brother!" Mr. Wilkins exclaimed.

"That's right. So, get your black ass out of here and out of Bensonhurst."

"I'll leave after I speak to Joey," he replied angrily and started to walk around Ray.

Ray stepped in front of him. "No, you're leaving now."

"I'm not talking to you anymore," said Mr. Wilkins, stepping around Ray again. As he passed, Ray—a former Golden Gloves boxer—let loose a thunderous punch to Mr. Wilkins's back, causing him to cry out in pain and fall to the floor.

"I told you to leave," said Ray, smiling, "but you didn't listen."

Mr. Wilkins, on all fours and gasping for breath, tried to get up, but Ray kicked him in the ribs. Joey, who had heard the thud of Mr. Wilkins falling, ran upstairs. He screamed out Ray's name, but Ray, consumed by his frenzy of violence, didn't hear him.

As Mr. Wilkins lay helpless on the floor, Joey ran up to him, pushing Ray aside and causing him to stumble backward. The sturdy wooden bar broke his momentum and snapped his spine. Joey heard the snap and gaped in wide-eyed terror as Ray's legs gave out and he collapsed to the floor.

## The End

As the hearse drove away, Joey returned to the restaurant and closed it for the day. Then he went down to the basement, sat on a crate, and sobbed. He knew deep down that he bore some responsibility for Ray's tragic life. Not just in the accidental crippling of Ray and his final demise, but in the neglect of his much younger brother, who, without a father, had needed him.

Would it have made a difference? Nobody knows. But now it was too late.

# GRATITUDE CHANGES EVERYTHING

*Cindy L. Freeman*

In general, I do not enjoy book-marketing events. Why? They're usually long and tiring. But, as an author, I know that, unless I hire a publicist (which is expensive) I must be responsible for marketing and selling my books.

Don't get me wrong. After a year-and-a-half of quarantine, I was grateful for the return of in-person events; and I was pleasantly surprised to meet many people who engaged in meaningful conversations. Their interactions made the entry fees, hours of standing—sometimes in the hot sun—and sales-pitch repetitions worthwhile, especially when they bought a book or two.

A post-pandemic event in downtown Williamsburg, Virginia was such an experience. Two other local authors and I shared a tent to market our books. The weather was pleasant, and, as we enjoyed good camaraderie, the time passed quickly.

Best of all, we met hundreds of friendly, kind, and interesting people. One couple was especially memorable. They had traveled to Williamsburg from New York City with another couple. The women approached our display while the men stood across the street talking, laughing, and obviously enjoying each other's company. One of the women suggested that her husband should be a character in a book. "He's definitely a character," she said. She explained that he hadn't had a bad day in his entire life; he laughed every day, and for their forty-some years of marriage, he had made her laugh every day. I told her I'd like to meet him, so she called him over.

I wish I could remember his name. I certainly won't forget his attitude. "Your wife says you've never had a bad day," I said. "What's your secret?"

"I've had plenty of bad things happen in my life," he answered, "but a long time ago, I decided to view everything as a blessing. I was injured in Vietnam. We lost a child in infancy. I lost my job once. The worst experience was when my wife, here"—he wrapped his arms around her shoulders—"was diagnosed with kidney cancer. I thought my life was over because I thought her life was over. The lowest blow was when I discovered I wasn't a match to donate a kidney."

"But our son was!" she chimed in. "It was a miracle. That was twenty-five years ago, and I thank God every day for my life."

"And I thank God every day for her," he said, beaming.

"So, would you say that how we view life determines our level of contentment?" I asked.

"Absolutely! It's all about gratitude...being thankful for what and who we have, not moaning about what we don't have or what we've lost."

As his wife turned back to her friend, he spotted my book, *After Rain*, and asked about it. I told him it had been my pandemic project. "I wrote it during the lockdown because I strongly sensed that we all needed comfort and peace." I mentioned that one of the devotions was about the practice of gratitude, the very topic we had been discussing. "I have to remind myself every morning to be grateful," I said. "It's so easy to slip into complaining, especially during the last year-and-a-half when it seems like our world has turned upside down. That's why I wrote *After Rain*. I needed the reminder that, no matter what we are going through, God stands ready to walk us through it and help us triumph over every challenge."

"Amen!" said his wife, who I didn't realize was still listening. She bought the book. Then, she bought one for a friend. I hope she and her friend are as blessed by reading it as I was in meeting her and her grateful husband.



# WHEN GRATITUDE “GROWS UP”

David Reid Brown

*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.  
When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. —1 Corinthians 13:11*

I learned a long time ago that gratitude is being grateful for a kindness shown to you on your behalf. That if you just “count your blessing and name them one-by-one”, you will realize that you have been blessed, just as you are, right where you are. Focus on the simple things in life—breath, health, strength, food, shelter, clothing—and you will always have a cheerful heart full of gratitude.

But I don’t think that way anymore. “Why?”, you might ask. What has caused this shift in perspective? Age, most certainly, experience, probably so, but I would like to think that maturity has played a part. I’ve grown up (not just older) and so I think, believe, and act quite differently than I did in my younger years. Thus, my worldview has followed accordingly in the maturation process. I no longer see gratitude as a response to the proverbial “random acts of kindness”, which were never random at all but, rather, an intention that was born in the heart of giver before it came into fruition. As for the almost-trite “Attitude of Gratitude”, it only finds its value and validity in being shared with others.

When gratitude “grows up”, it becomes love. The focus of your benevolence shifts from self-satisfaction to the welfare and well-being of others, that they too might feel the warmth of gratitude’s favor. It is more than just counting your blessings so that you can feel good about them but it’s actively reflecting on those blessings to the point where it changes your heart so that you desire to be a blessing to someone else. Gratitude in maturity need only touch one other’s life but shouldn’t be restricted to just one, though. Besides, “Love is not love until you give it away”—trite but true! God has pre-filled your life with all kinds of people who will need to experience the manifestation of your full-grown gratitude, which is love in action. I would encourage you to keep finding them, keep sharing with them, and keep growing.



## Rebecca Day

Rebecca Day was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. Her parents enrolled her in ballet lessons when she was very young. By the time she turned sixteen, they enrolled her in a professional children's school in New York City. She stayed in the National Academy of Ballet through high school and then entered American Ballet Theater. A severe back injury ended her dance career, so she had to find something else to do. She moved back to Richmond and went to Virginia Commonwealth University, earning a B.S. in business with a concentration in marketing and an M.S. in marketing with a concentration in marketing research and group dynamics.

She drifted into a career of marketing research, which led to owning Kinzey & Day Qualitative Research with Reyn Kinzey for twenty-five years. It was a good leap from ballet since focus groups and in-depth interviews are choreographed, conducted in front of a mirror, and attended by an audience of clients. She is a self-taught amateur photographer, who loves photographing nature, her travels with Reyn, and underwater coral reefs. She is an avid kayaker and quilter, who believes naps are an art form.



Reyn Kinzey

Reyn Kinzey was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. He went to UVA, and having no idea what he was going to do with his life, he hung around and got an MA, an M. Ed., and even finished the course work for a PhD. But he never finished his dissertation "Actually, I never started one: my attention span isn't that long."

Still not knowing what he wanted to do with his life, he took a job at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he taught for twenty years, both full time and in the night school.

He also started a rugby career of playing and coaching for over twenty-five years. "I wasn't much good, but I loved the game."

From academia, he drifted into market research, which proved a good fit. For twenty-five years, Rebecca Day and Reyn operated Kinzey & Day Qualitative Research. They had a good run, working for clients such as Hilton, McDonalds, Anthem, and various hospitals and universities.

The poems in his second collection, *Sleeping Dragons*, were written during the 70th year of his pilgrimage on Earth. "I hope I have a few more years left. I know I have to go home at some point, but for now, I'm still enjoying the traveling."

## Peggy Newcomb



Peggy Newcomb was born and raised in Chester, Virginia. She graduated from Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia (UVA) with a BS degree in Chemistry. At the time of her graduation, women were not allowed to attend UVA unless you were in the nursing program. She taught Chemistry and Science at York High School, Yorktown, Virginia.

She wrote for several newspapers and has been published in numerous venues including *The Poet's Domain*. She was awarded first place in non-fiction by the Chesapeake Bay Writers. She is a member of the National League of American Pen Women and the James City Poets.

A portrait artist, her art has been displayed in several local galleries including Arts on Main in Gloucester, Virginia and The Bay School in Mathews, Virginia. She has published two books - *I Used to Wear Shoes Like That* and *The Curtis Letters - A Cat's Eye View of Life*.

*Sharon Canfield Dorsey*



Sharon Canfield Dorsey is an award-winning poet and author. She has written four children's books, a memoir, two books of poetry, an anthology, and a travel memoir. "Writing is like breathing for me – necessary for survival. It's the first thing I want to do in the morning and the last thing I want to do at night. I have been honored to have my work published in many anthologies and prestigious magazines like *The Pen Woman*, the publication of the National League of American Pen Women, alongside the work of such icons as Maya Angelou."

<https://www.sharoncanfielddorsey.com>

*Marc R. Meth*



Marc R. Meth is a police officer near retirement with a late life penchant for writing. He was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, moving to Connecticut when he was eighteen. Just after turning twenty-one, he met the beautiful Italian girl who would become his wife and enlisted in the Navy. During fifteen years of on again/off again attendance, he was able to piece together a bachelor of science degree from New Hampshire College, after which he worked as an electronic technician, a graphic designer, and held a variety of jack-of-all-trades-type jobs, but his passion to protect and serve never faded.

He lives and works in Hampton Roads with his wife of more than forty years. They have a son in his mid-thirties and a cat who recently celebrated her first birthday.

He has written a novelette, a novella, and is finalizing edits on his first book. "What I write about varies from the gravely serious to the hilarious (hopefully), but whatever I write comes from my heart. What I hope for in the end, is that

those who read my work will laugh, cry, or in some way be moved for the better." [stewgus7993@gmail.com](mailto:stewgus7993@gmail.com)

*Mary Montague Sikes*



Mary Montague Sikes grew up near the bloody Civil War battlefields of Central Virginia where thousands died. Those early years in a landscape where tears still flowed sparked her interest in the psychic and the paranormal that carries over into her writing today.

Sikes loved to travel, especially to the Caribbean and Jamaica where she discovered the legend of the White Witch of Rose Hall Great House that inspired her first novel, *Hearts Across Forever*. More psychic encounters in Sedona, Arizona led to her novel, *Eagle Rising*. Adventures in Antigua became the book, *Secrets by the Sea*. Then, an escapade in Trinidad developed into the story of *Night Watch*. Her love of "Indiana Jones" type quests took her to the Maya Ruins of Palenque and eventually directed her to write *Jungle Jeopardy*.

A published author and photographer as well as an artist, Sikes holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Mary Washington and a masters of fine arts from Virginia Commonwealth University. She has exhibited in one-person, invitational, and juried shows in the United States and Canada.

## Cindy L. Freeman



Cindy L. Freeman began earnest writing after retiring from a long career in music education and music ministry. A published author of novels, blogs, and award-winning essays, she also edits for High Tide Publications. In her novels, she tackles sensitive social issues where strong women find the courage to overcome adversity.

Cindy serves on the Writers Guild of Virginia Board as editor of the organization's literary journal and monthly newsletter. She lives in James City County, Virginia with her husband, Carl, with whom she has co-written, under duress, the first science-fiction novel of a trilogy, *Krell Domus: Katerina*.

They have two amazing children, five favorite grandchildren, and numerous granddogs and grandhorses.

To learn more, visit her:

Website at <http://www.cindylfreeman.com>,

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/cindy.l.freeman.9>, or

Blog site: [www.cindylfreeman.blogspot.com](http://www.cindylfreeman.blogspot.com)

## David Reid Brown



David Reid Brown is an artist, pastor, and retired Navy Chaplain. His first books, *Spirit Soundings: A Chaplain's Journal of Life at Sea* and *Lost Summer*, were born out of his global experiences in the chaplaincy, spanning twenty-one years of peace, war, and three overseas deployments. He is living out his God-given passion to "build people" through teaching high school government, history, and art at Grace Christian School in Mechanicsville, VA.

David has been married to his beautiful wife, Rayna, for twenty-nine years. He earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Virginia State University, a Master of Divinity degree from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, and a Master of Elementary Education degree from Hawaii Pacific University.

You can purchase any of David's books at:  
[www.GetMyNewBook.com](http://www.GetMyNewBook.com)

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