



2018 DIGEST - ISSUE 1

Dreamers

Creative Writing

HAIKU

Contest Winners

NON-FICTION

For David

Interview with
Angie Abdou

**73 PLACES
TO SUBMIT WRITING
In Canada**

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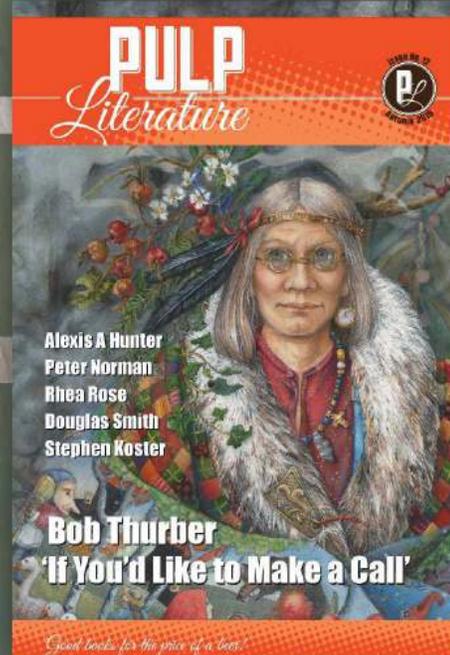
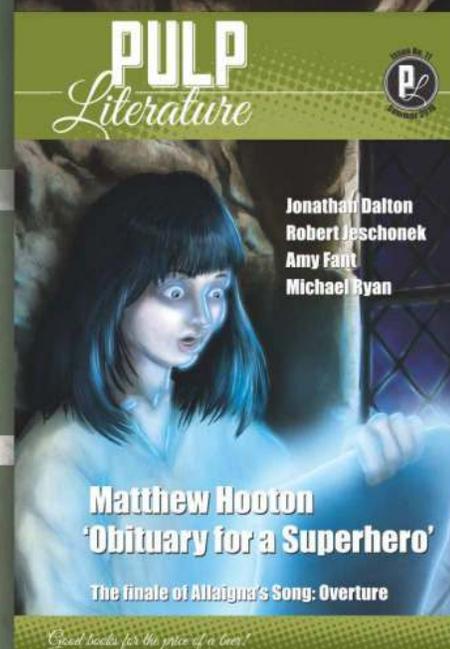
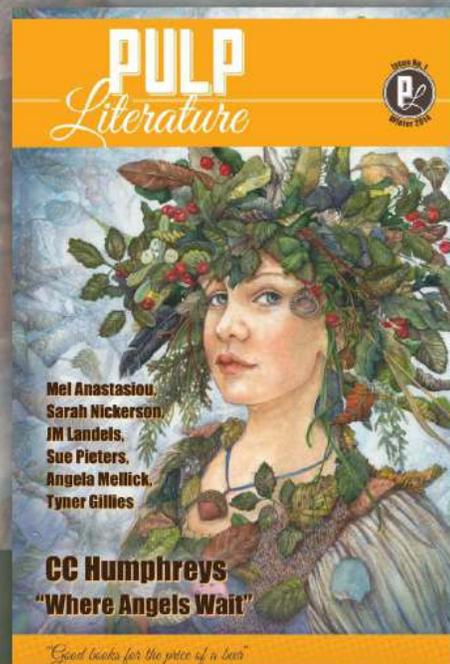
The Raven Short Story Contest

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Short stories, poetry, and
comics you can't put down.



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Congratulations to the winners of the 2018 Dreamers Haiku Contest!

To be in the summer

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Convergence III

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Endo No Yadoya

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The Pine

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Masthead

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Thank you

On December 29, 2017, Dreamers Creative Writing went live online. It was a quiet celebration. Launching a website can be a lonely endeavour. In the first week, I checked Google Analytics hourly and was excited to see Dreamers reach 100 total views within a few days. My goal was 10,000 views a month by the end of the first year. As an experienced marketer, I thought I knew what to expect, but, in its fifth month, Dreamers topped 30,000 views. It's hard to describe the feeling of that number, of knowing that so many people who share my love of personal, meaningful writing exist in the world. Finding myself surrounded by a community of kindred spirits is a lovely feeling. Turns out, I'm not as alone as I thought! Thank you for being out there. :)

I believe we can learn a lot from sharing our lived experiences. That's why Dreamers is dedicated to life writing in all its forms. Throughout human history, storytelling provided the thread that bound what was good in humanity together. But, when I look at contemporary life and culture, I can't help but think that we've lost our way—we've dropped the threads of our story. We need to find methods for encouraging understanding and empathy across borders, cultures, environments and genders in order to reestablish the emotional connection that makes us who we are. Because, if what is happening now is a true reflection of our species, then what kind of future are we facing? We need to dream, write, speak and live a better story.

With that in mind, please enjoy this inaugural issue of the Dreamers magazine. These writers have poured their hearts onto our pages and all they ask in return is that someone, somewhere, read what they've written. Reading this magazine is a gift, so on behalf of my team, and all the Dreamers' authors, *thank you*.

Kat McNichol

Editor-in-Chief

HAIKU

Congratulations to the winners of the 2018 Dreamers Haiku Contest!



“ *Tiny poems*
with big meanings.”

Winner

To be in the summer

by Emi Miyaoka

I closed poems of Shakespeare
And I made up my mind
To be in the summer

シェイクスピア閉じて夏を志す

Honourable Mentions

Convergence III

by Ana Martinez

Yesterday's full moon,
wet from uncensored kisses,
dew of morning song.

Endo No Yadoya

by Charles Kersey

Briefly, in passing,
I saw your eyes and was stopped
in my heart's echo.

The Pine

by Charlotte Nystrom

Wind blows sappy hot.
Pincones shake down the limb
and the moon shines cold.

Kerala

by Hannah Atkinson Renglich

Fishing nets hoisted,
two white-skirted men chit chat.
Dinner swims by.

Overcoat

by Joseph Cassidy-Skof

Overcast green grass,
petals peddling petrichor—
stuffed in the closet.

Zen Garden, Kyoto

by Patrick ten Brink

White pebbled waves
Around jutting black boulders
Storm in a garden



For David

Non-Fiction by
Chandy C. John

I write this to remember, David. I need something more fluid than a photograph, something that comprehends more of you than how you looked at a certain point in time, to keep you fixed in my memory. And I need so much to write this down, now that you're gone and you have no gravestone or marker, no children to pass on your

stories, not even your name on one of those quilts I've seen. There's nothing but the memories of your friends – and in my case, at least, there are few people to share those memories with.

I remember when I first met you. I was the resident covering the Infectious Disease service for the weekend, and I felt duty-bound to see that your ears were recovering from their infection. Or was it less duty than curiosity? I remember you lying on the bed in your



blue hospital pajamas, your taut face with the dry, too-pink cheeks, your deep grey-blue eyes – the right eye deviated slightly to the side, your gentle Southern accent, your smile.

It shook me: your youth, your charm, and the fatal, wasting, stigmatic disease you had. I remember looking through your chart and seeing how you'd been diagnosed – the spot on your skin, the Kaposi's sarcoma, and being shaken again by your occupation: "Flight attendant."

“I write this to remember, David. I need something more fluid than a photograph, something that comprehends more of you than how you looked at a certain point in time, to keep you fixed in my memory.”

You fit the cliché so well – the gay male flight attendant with AIDS – and yet you didn't at all. I stayed awake thinking about you all that night.

We became friends through food. You told me you loved Indian food, and I told you to come to my house for an Indian meal you wouldn't forget. Your stomach wasn't up to Indian food, so the next time you came to the clinic we went out for lunch. You took me to Old Town, a restaurant in Ypsilanti that served "down home"

Southern food, and we ordered their fried chicken. Talking to you then, as we ate our greasy chicken, there was so much I liked and admired about you: your calm acceptance of what was happening to you, your wide-eyed descriptions of the simple pleasures in your life, your sense of humor – sometimes childish and broad, sometimes wry and witty. You talked about Kalamazoo, your dog Louis, going fishing, the places you'd travelled. I talked about work at the hospital, college days, my family, life in India. Conversation was unhurried and natural.

What did you think of me then? What did you think

when I first came to visit you in Kalamazoo? Your house became familiar. I visited you there every weekend I could get away, and I always looked forward to what I saw that first day – your face at the window, smiling.

I've never, before or after, had a friendship that was so easy, so relaxing. Going there to see you was like putting on a favorite sweater or sitting down to read a good book; it didn't matter what we did, only that it would mean time spent together. I could be myself with you.

For most of my life, I've been an anomaly – in America, an Indian in an all white setting; in India, unable to speak my native language. I'm always working to prove to those around me that I'm all right, that they can trust me, that they can *like* me. Every few years, though, I've met someone that I could talk to about anything – I had no need to prove anything; I was liked for exactly who I was. You made me feel that way, David. Your acceptance came with no strings attached. At least that's how you always made it seem. Within a few weeks I felt like we were old, close friends.

On that first visit, you pulled

out a photo album with pictures from when you were in Egypt, and later you showed me your Northwest Airlines I.D. The tan, muscular, good-looking man in the photos was you, three years earlier. You wanted me to see what you had been. But even that day in your living room, with your muscles wasting away and the purple blotches on your skin, your ravaged face had an undeniable attractiveness. I hope you believed me when I told you that you were still handsome. You were.

I remember my surprise when I first visited your house. It was spotless, and carefully and eclectically decorated – a gargoyle on the living room wall, cushions from Turkey, wall hangings from Egypt, a huge globe by the couch. Now I know that John arranged it all, and looking back, I see the house as an extension of his personality – a small house, slowly turning cream colored as John painted one outside section after another, on an oddly sloping lawn, with your dog Louis in the window.

You didn't tell me about John until I met him on that



first visit in Kalamazoo, and even then I wasn't sure – was he your roommate or your companion? I believed I had things figured out, but then I saw the calendar in the guest bathroom, with a woman in a bikini, and I thought maybe he was just a friend. John has since told me that you'd keep him out of the room when you visited the hospital because you "didn't want people to think we were married or anything." I was unsure of the depth of your feelings until John left for a five day trip to Korea, and I saw how much you were missing him.

You took a long time to tell me how much you cared about John. I could see he loved you, but you kept your feelings hidden most of the time. It was as if you took him for granted. John was so confused about what to do

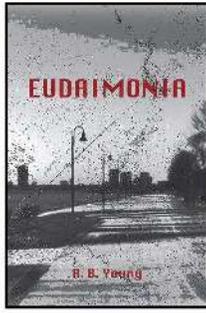
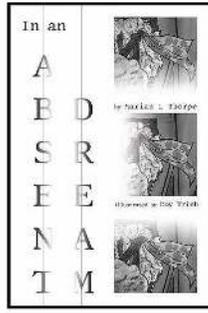
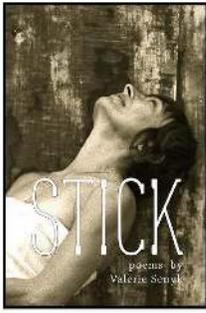
“ I had no need to prove anything; I was liked for exactly who I was. You made me feel that way, David.

for you. Day-to-day he had to decide – should he make you walk, should he let you sleep, should he have you do things around the house, should he do everything for you? He tried to do the best for you, David. I think you knew that.

I didn't know you when you were healthy. I formed my friendship with you knowing from that first day that you were going to die. Our time was limited, so I worked to find time to spend with you. I worried about calling, because I thought I might become annoying, but I

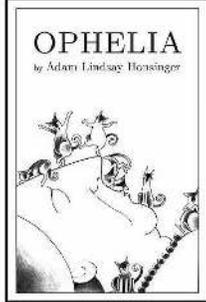
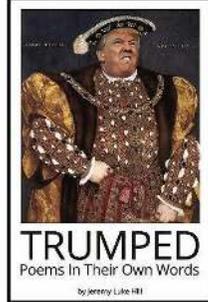
needed to be sure that you were doing all right, to hear your voice again – the soft, slightly Southern drawl that still plays back in my mind when I think of you. You didn't want to bother me so you rarely called and only when you had a medical problem. Although my heart lifted every time I heard your voice on the phone, I also knew each call meant you were getting sicker.

You hated the hospital, but the hospital was where we had some of our best times together. There, we could talk freely about life and death and whether death



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I wanted to prescribe you pain medication myself, but I knew I shouldn't do that. You weren't my patient. So I called up the intern and resident taking care of you. The resident never called back. The intern did, and I asked him to give you something stronger for your pain. He said he would. I went back to taking care of my cardiology patients.

When I came back the next day, I learned you'd suffered all night. No one had given you anything extra for your pain. They said they were worried about the side effects of the one medication that had worked. You were lying in bed, looking like a corpse, covered up to your neck in a straight white sheet. Your eyes stared off into space. You wouldn't even turn to look at me when you spoke.

was indeed the end. One day when you were in great pain, I remember you saying "Chandy, I hope there's something better after this." I told you I knew there was. I have to believe that a life like yours doesn't just flit by, that there is a purpose and meaning to your being here that went beyond the time you spent alive. In the hospital, in those brief moments when you told me your fears and regrets, and I told you my doubts and failures, when for a short time neither of us had to be

strong, I think we saw each other most clearly.

I had a sense that the end was near on your next to last admission. You were so miserable that you could barely talk to me. I was on call for the Coronary Care Unit, so I had to make my visit brief. When I walked in the door, you were curled up in bed like a baby, moaning in pain. You could barely muster the energy to say hello.

I never did talk to the resident about it. I didn't know him well, and I didn't want to make him feel that I was dictating your care. I also didn't want to explain how we met or why we were such good friends. That was my private life, which I didn't care to share with him or anyone else. I told myself I was being professional, and I think that is the truth. I couldn't write that prescription or force the

resident's hand – that was not my right or prerogative, and the side effects he was concerned about were not trivial. But I felt miserable at my helplessness – not your doctor, not your family, just a friend in some odd middle place.

They finally put you on a morphine drip, and from that point on, you were in and out of consciousness. One night, John and I and your sister, Jeannette, were talking quietly around you. The TV was on in the background, as it often was. Your eyes opened for a second, you looked up at the Warner Brothers cartoon, muttered, "That Tasmanian Devil. Funny as hell!" and went back to sleep. And that was the David I knew – irreverent, fun-loving, celebrating the little things in life that made you laugh, back for one short visit.

The night you died, John and Jeanette and I were at your bedside. You were unresponsive. I talked to you for a little while, but there were no signs that you heard or understood anything I was saying. I couldn't bear to leave you without saying something, even if you didn't hear me.

So I leaned down to your ear and said this: "David, I love you very much. When you get to heaven, tell God that I say 'Hi' and that I'll be there to join you in a little while."

Do you remember that moment, David? The words look ridiculous as I read them back, but when you heard them, you nodded your head for the first time that evening, and reaching for my hand, you squeezed it with all your might. I now know what you were saying, and how generous that was. You were saying, *You are my friend, and I understand you, and no sappy words will change that.*

At four o'clock that morning, you died.

John and Jeanette knew you wouldn't want a funeral in a church. Instead, they arranged a sort of day of remembrance in Kalamazoo at your friends Roger and Barry's house and asked me to come and say something. There were only a few of your closest friends there. It was a strange time for me, David. Every other time I'd been to Roger and Barry's house, the conversations were edited because of my presence. This time, your friends chose to remember you just as you were, and details of your past and their present, of life as a gay person, of life as a wild young man, came out.

Once, when we sat in a movie theatre, you told me



that you felt sorry for the hemophiliacs who developed AIDS. I told you I felt sorry for them and for you. And you said, "Yeah, but I had a good time doing what I did." I wanted to ask you – did you really have a good time? But at your memorial, as I sat and listened to stories about how you loved to get high, how you would show up to model bargain basement clothing you'd bought, how you were always the one who wanted to party, I heard about a David I'd never seen, and didn't know.

John and I had bought some white helium balloons to release in your memory. When there was a lull in the conversation, we all went outside to the deck, balloons in hand, and let them go one by one. As they floated off together with their long ribbon tails behind them, Barry laughed and said, "Oh God! They look like sperm!" and everyone else laughed, too. "David would have loved that," said Barry, as he walked back in. And it's true; you would have enjoyed the irony of our unintentionally vulgar salute.

As we went back to the house, I fumbled with the piece of paper on which I had scribbled my few thoughts. I was ready to

leave these notes unspoken when John said, "Chandy, weren't you going to say something?" I pulled out the paper and read a passage from Psalms about the briefness of man's time here on earth. I said that your greatest accomplishment was that your life made such a difference to the people who'd known you. Vague, colorless sentiments – I didn't want to offend.

We went to your house then, to eat a meal Jeannette's partner Nancy had made. You would have loved it. It was your kind of food – chicken pot pie, mashed potatoes – but I was distracted as I ate it. I guess we all were. The mood was fairly upbeat; we were talking about various trivial things, and you would waft in and out of the

conversation.

I heard Jeanette say from the corner, "He told me just before he died that he had no regrets."

"That's amazing," said Barry. "To die with no regrets." Yes, *amazing*, I thought. Also untrue. The David I knew had a lot of regrets, spoken and unspoken. *But what was the point of bringing that up now?*

"What I mean," said Jeanette, "is about being gay. He said he had no regrets. He wouldn't change anything." And that made things clearer. She was saying this for the survivors, all of the people there in that room, still gay in a hostile world.

John walked me out to the



car, and I hugged him as we said goodbye. He's a good man, David. I wish you were still here for him.

A year and a half after your death, I had a talk with your friend, Ron. We sat in a San Francisco restaurant, talking about you and John – worrying, really, about what AIDS was doing to John. "There's more to the story," Ron said to me, as he stirred his iced tea. "David wasn't... careful." He measured his words, looking first at his glass and then at me. "He was gorgeous, and he could do anything he wanted, have anyone he wanted. By then we knew things were dangerous, and I told him to be careful, but he wouldn't listen. David liked to have a good time. And he did – he really enjoyed himself.

"When he met John, John was still so young and innocent. I didn't know how to warn John about David, but I had to say something. So I told John one day to be very safe when he was with David. He asked me why, and I just said to be careful, for his own sake. John told David. David called and yelled at me for half an hour."

Another side of you, David,

that I never knew.

When I talked to John, though, he only said, "You know, Chandy, I wasn't some angel when I met David. I met plenty of people before him."

John was protecting you again, David. I know that you loved John in your own way, and that your kindness battled your vanity. But as he suffered his illness without you there to care for him the way he cared for you, I saw how you often took him for granted.

I also understand this much now, David. I wanted you to be perfect, to be my "poster child" for AIDS, for gay men. I wanted you and John to be the perfect couple – flawless, loving, eternally faithful. You wanted me to be perfect, too, I think – some kind of brilliant, compassionate, spiritual friend without any emotional needs or problems. Neither of us was even close. We put on our best face for each other, but we knew more lurked underneath, not so much hidden as undiscussed.

We were friends on unequal terms. I knew, at least by implication, something of the complexity of your personality – that whether I

admitted it or not, everything in your life was not as I wished it to be. You, however, knew very little about what stirred beneath the surface I presented to you. We are on unequal terms still: I dissect your motives and character in hindsight, with the memories of your friends as my guide; you remain silent as I do this.

I've never been sure exactly what you got from our friendship. Maybe knowing that I loved you was reward enough for you. It doesn't seem like you got much.

John knew something of what you gave me – we talked about it before he died. We talked about how you and John taught me that it was okay to be gay, that normal, good, strong, decent men could be gay, that / could be gay. But I wasn't brave enough to tell you that I was gay, too, David. You and John were a big part of my coming to accept that. John didn't ask me. I told him. You never asked me either. But you must have wondered. I wonder, David, how much more we could have been for each other if you'd known that, if I'd been more honest, if *we'd* been more honest with each other about everything.



I never had a chance to thank you. I thanked John many times over. I prayed that he'd be spared the misery of your last days. But he wasn't. He died just a year before effective medication for HIV became widely available. It's strange and sad that AIDS tied us all together – in a world without it, I'd probably never have met you or John. My partner, Andy, and I have been together for 25 years now – we met just after you died. We live in a post-AIDS world for gay men, one where AIDS is not a death sentence, and I wish every day that you and John could have made it to the other

side of that timeline, to a time when anti-retroviral medications would have saved you.

I've struggled with how to write this down. I've worked at being truthful, David, knowing despite this that the end result has fallen short, and this picture of you as seen through my eyes, suffers for it. Can you see how hard I've tried to live up to *your* expectations? Knowing my struggle, perhaps you will forgive my mistakes.

I miss you, David. I think about you and John often. I've seen the AIDS specials on television, the rights marches, the movie: "Longtime Companion." They moved me, but there was something missing. I want to say: What about the everyday people, the ones who lived in Kalamazoo with their dogs and their small circle of friends? What about the ones who didn't want to march, the ones who weren't actors on soap operas or poets or musicians or architects?

What about David and John? Who will remember them?

A time to gather stones



by **Esther Muthoni Wafula**

I could not sleep
Because the poem was incomplete
The poem was incomplete
Because out I could not venture
Out I could not venture
Because it was an ungodly hour
The hour of sirens and vagabonds.

In the morning
The poem was still pulsing
In my heart like an incessant sobbing
I fled my dreams
And returned to the garden
Fell to my knees
And resumed my praying

I had to use a different language
Mine being obsolete and no longer calming
Slowly I eased from the burden.
Finally, I could open my eyes
And accept myself
There was no need for questions
It was not a time to scatter stones
But a time to gather them.

“The hour of sirens and vagabonds.”

Morning walk

by Reinekke Lengelle



Without me prompting,
or rather in my silent presence,
you begin to speak
along a field where asparagus will ripen,
and we walk hand in hand.

You ask about where you have trespassed
and how this stone on your heart
is another invitation to awaken
where we used to quarrel,
you the large-shouldered tiger
me the proud rooster
we remain quiet
making room for new
understandings.

In the space where all might be lost
where life shows us its opposite
we are given the things
we were hopelessly striving for.

Artist Statement



As Reinekke Lengelle was completing her book, *Happy: poems for writing and healing the self*, her partner in work and in life, Frans, was diagnosed with an advanced cancer. In her book she had already explained how writing poetry is a support system for life, in particular in the face of hardship and personal change, and this became even more meaningful after her spouse's diagnoses. Each day after their breakfast and walk, they circle a lake where two swans nest each year. This and other beautiful signs of spring seem in contrast to the news, but have become an impetus for writing and for concentrating fully on the here and now.

Two swans on the nest

by **Reinekke Lengelle**

**“People ask me
how I’m doing,
and I say, good,
he’s still here.
He’s here now.
We’re here, now.”**



Speak only kindnesses
and your unarguable truthfulness,
because there will be a moment
unexpected, where you realize
there is no time for other ways
of speaking.
I know, I know, you have tried it
the other did not listen,
they blamed you,
you blamed yourself,
you have had that same conversation
a hundred times
and the hurt was each time the same
and you thought you were used to it
and got better at putting it away.
There was one good thing that happened
you got worn out from trying,
you saw that your ego had
to have its final showdown before it crumbled
and you cleared the way for loving.
You saw without self-reproach
that you trespassed exactly the same way
you were trespassed upon,
that each of you were covering up
your own particular hurt,
that the repeated words they spewed out
were only saying, “please, hear me”
and never, “you’re no damn good”
(which is what you heard).
Speak only kindnesses
your unarguable truthfulness,
because there will be a moment
unexpected, where you realize
the time for listening is now.

Mother Poems

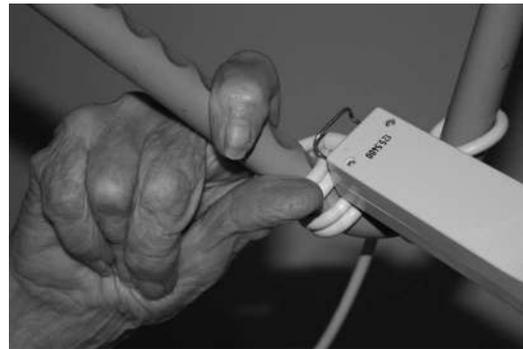
by Duane L. Herrmann

Just Breathing

It was odd to see
the breathing corpse
immobile, but alive,
resembling my mother –
That SHE
who terrorized my life,
tortured me
with screamed demands.
My mother? Really?
What am I to do?
I talked to her,
sat beside her
on her bed,
held her hand
then she held mine,
she'd never done before.
She could not speak
or move, but gave
more affection
than in sixty years.
I could regret
all we missed
and not fear
her anger.

I love you, Mom,
I'm sorry,
Goodbye.

Four Days Forever



The last four days
I saw her,
bedfast
unable to talk,
I could finally speak
after being forbidden
for over sixty years.
I said more truth
than ever
of pain she caused
and found I loved her
and always had,
she held my hand,
giving more affection
than I'd ever known.

I love you, Mom.
I'm sorry,
Goodbye.

Lotus

Non-Fiction by
Lori-Ana Guillen

“*It doesn't
matter how old
the wound is;
the mere
mention of him
makes my mood
shift.*



I ask myself what I'm doing here in a room filled with friends and family who are strangers, sipping on beer. I laugh, trying to conceal the scars as the subject comes up as to why I ignore *him*. *He* is family after all. My smile begins to fall.

It doesn't matter how old the wound is; the mere mention of *him* makes my mood shift.

"Let the past be the past," they claim. I am. "What's your problem?" I have none.

Three drinks in and my mind takes me back there. I am hiding. Playing my favorite game of hide and seek when he finds me. Telling me if I was really quiet, *he* wouldn't tag me out. I didn't even shout.

I open my eyes when it's over, unsure of what game this was when I try to explain. But who believes the babbles of a child over an adult who has words for every reason. No one wants to see the bad. So,



we make excuses. "Kids do that. It's a joke. It's exaggerated."

Well, it happened.

No one talks about it so it sits, building under the rug. Everyone tiptoes around, afraid of the dirt that will come up. They look at me as if I am the one that is about to cause this eruption. Why, because I don't say 'hi'?

I am not mad anymore. Not mad at how they handled it. Or, how they acknowledge it now only in whispers.

Or even, how every time *he* sees me *he* runs in the other direction spewing gossip to try and tear me down and discredit who I am. I am not even mad at myself for staying quiet or shutting my eyes instead of fighting.

"Let the past be the past," they claim. I am. "What's your problem?" I have none, because I am the lotus growing out of the mud and no one will ever force me to do anything again.

Not even to say "hi."

An Interview with Angie Abdou

Writing from the heart, writing as an act of radical empathy, and writing without urgency.



PHOTO BY KEVAN WILKIE

Angie Abdou is a Canadian author of numerous books, essays, and short stories, including *Anything Boys Can Do*, *The Bone Cage*, *Canterbury Trail*, and *Between*. She is one of those rare writers who can write well in multiple genres and styles, from memoir to academic essay to fiction.

Regardless of the form she chooses, Abdou's elegant writing style always contains emotional depth and unexpected complexity. She writes about things that matter, focusing on difficult themes surrounding the human condition, including the body and medicine in

athletics, the inner state of mind and emotions, the dismantling of stereotypes, infidelity, depression, modern motherhood, feminist politics, and indigenous relations.

In this interview with Kat McNichol, Editor-in-Chief of Dreamers Creative Writing, Angie Abdou talks about writing from the heart, writing as an act of radical empathy, and writing without urgency. Angie, thank you for joining us!

You're a Professor of Creative Writing at Athabasca University. What do you like most about teaching writing?

I love helping aspiring writers realize their dreams. Often a student comes to me with the goal of writing a book – but the student is almost afraid to even articulate that goal, to even say “I want to be a writer” out loud, because this notion of author-hood seems so far out of reach. I help students break the book into manageable steps, and we go back and forth with chapters, sometimes over the period of years. As they get to the end, I love being able to say “Look! You wrote a book!”

These days, I get more excited over a student’s new publishing contract than over my own book deals.

How has your academic background impacted your writing choices and goals?

For a long time, I came to my fiction ideas by talking through what the story was “about” in academic terms. Even though I’d made the transition to fiction, I still thought about writing first as an academic then as a creative writer. With my most recent novel, *In Case I Go*, I tried to get out of my head and let the book come more from my heart. That involved letting go of control to a greater extent than I had before. In the end, I’m happier with the result.

My latest book is a memoir about family life and the role of sport (*Home Ice: Reflections of a Hockey Mom*, forthcoming September 2018). For it, I drew on my academic background to do more research than I have for my novels, but when I sat down at the page, I wrote from the heart – *Home Ice* is a personal, emotional story even though it’s grounded in academic research. I guess it’s a mix of heart and head.

Your recent novel, *In Case I Go*, is part historical fiction, part ghost story. This is

an unusual combination. What inspired you to write it?

This book proved impossible to control. I kept finding myself in a different century, and thinking *But I don’t write historical fiction!!* The more I tried to rein it in, the less it came alive. Eventually, I gave myself over to the story as it came to me (and then relied on the Fernie Museum Manager to help me make sure I got the historical elements right). The ghost story part was exciting – the realization that *anything* can happen in fiction, as long as I can make the reader believe it. Since I’d only written realist novels before, I enjoyed stretching in this new way.

***In Case I Go* has Ktunaxa (First Nations) characters. I understand you consulted with many people, including Ktunaxa elders, out of regard for the Ktunaxa culture and how to respectfully represent it. As a result of your consultations you chose to make substantial revisions to your book.**

Why did you choose to make these revisions?

I chose to do the consultation with an awareness that in light of truth and reconciliation, we’re trying to do all things in new more respectful ways. If I’m writing an Indigenous character, I want to do what I can to make sure I’ve written the character accurately and that I haven’t been unintentionally offensive or exploitive. The revisions themselves, I made in conversation with the cultural liaison. If something about my plot or characters or setting bothered her or seemed inaccurate with her, I worked out a solution that addressed her concerns while staying true to my fictional construct. In the end, I enjoyed the process. I learned a lot from the Ktunaxa woman I worked with, and

her suggestions made *In Case I Go* a better book. She helped me avoid problems that I would not have seen by myself. I've never been a fan of group work, so the process was a challenge for me, but maybe that involved some necessary personal growth too.

In hindsight, would you make the same choices?

Yes, if I had it all to do over again, I would have consulted with the Ktunaxa Nation Council and worked with the cultural liaison and made the same changes. The thing I might not have done is write the article about the process: <https://quillandquire.com/omni/angie-abdou-on-seeking-permission-to-use-first-nations-stories/>. The controversy that emerged in response to my consultation

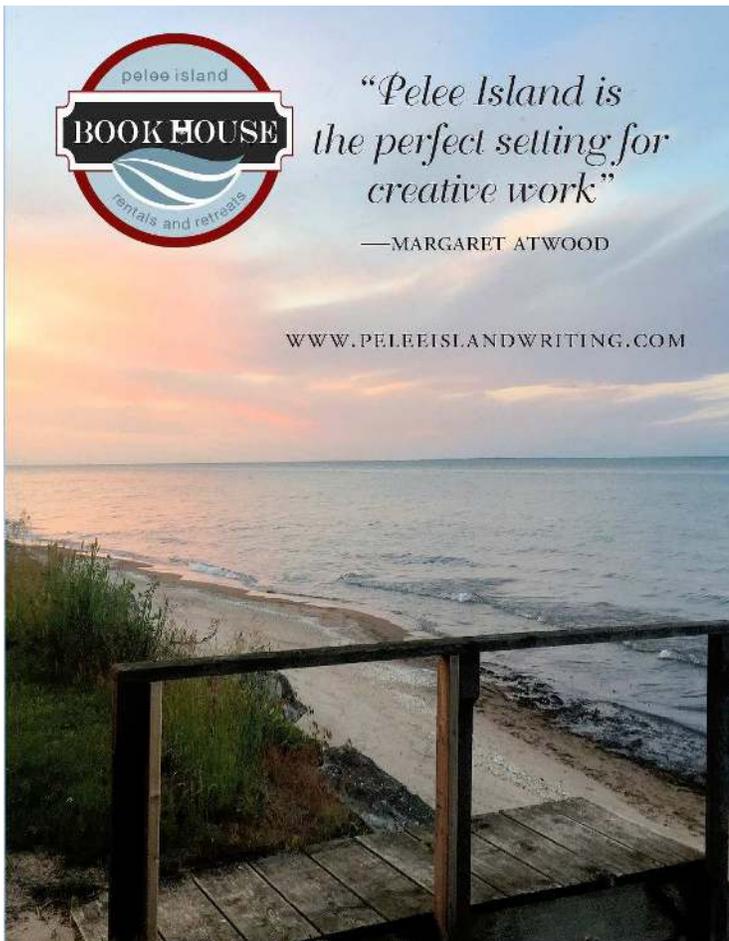
process was about the article, rather than the book. Some people read the essay as self-aggrandizing. That's not how I meant it: I wanted to share news of a positive experience and name names and thank people who had been so helpful and influential. In the end, the essay drew attention away from the contents of the actual book and caused conflict and stress for the very people I meant to thank.

***In Case I Go* received a number of glowing reviews but also resulted in substantial controversy concerning indigenous representation by white authors.**

Can you describe your feelings about the controversy that arose? Did it surprise you?

I don't love conflict. If I had a good tolerance for that kind of stress, I likely would have been a lawyer or a politician, not an English teacher. So, yes, I found the whole controversy very unpleasant. It did surprise me in a way. Though, I am an excellent worrier, which means part of me is always waiting for the worst possible scenario to unfold – so that part of me thought: *Ah ha! Here we go! I knew it!* Looking back, I wish I would have consulted about my essay on consultation – just to make sure I had all my words correct and I hadn't misunderstood anything about the process. That might have avoided the whole controversy and the hard feelings. We have a lot to learn about this kind of cross-cultural collaboration. I'm learning.

You are the Editor, along with Jamie Dopp, of *Writing the Body in Motion: A Critical Anthology on Canadian Sport Literature*, which was just recently published by AU Press. What was the motivation for producing an anthology dedicated to sports literature?



I enjoy reading and teaching sport literature, and (as the author of *The Bone Cage*) I often visit Sport Literature courses in Canada and United States. I heard professors of these courses complain that though the sport material is very popular with students, it's hard to find secondary sources. Professors were looking for essays to help with lecture preparation or readings to assign to students as research or as sample literary analysis. Jamie Dopp and I decided to create exactly that. We both belong to the International Sport Literature Association – so we had good access to the experts to write the essays. We compiled a list of the most commonly taught texts in Canadian Sport Lit courses, and then solicited an academic to write an essay on each.

Shortly after the book became available on Kindle, an Austrian academic wrote to me praising Cory Willard's essay on Thomas Wharton's *Icelfields*. That was exciting in a whole new way for me – to bring international attention to a young scholar and a great Western Canadian novel. Well-deserved in both cases.

You often reference Richard Wagamese in your articles, on Twitter, and in your interviews. *In Case I Go* has a dedication “– for the haunted – especially for Richard Wagamese...” What impact has he had on your life and work?

Richard was a lovely man and a great writer. *Indian Horse* is one of my favourite novels: he has a deceptively simple storytelling style, pulling the reader along in an engaging, easy-to-read narrative, but then the book is also imbued with such visceral heartbreak and profound wisdom. The simple style means that the wisdom sneaks up on the reader in surprising ways. Wagamese is a master. *Indian Horse* is a

book that will be read and studied for a long, long time.

Richard Wagamese was as great on the stage as he is on the page. We often ended up doing events together, and I never saw him do the same talk twice. He'd get up to the podium, pause to read the audience, and then launch into some completely original speech – whatever he thought that particular audience needed to hear. One time we were speaking at a venue on Granville Island and he noticed that it was usually a comedy club, so he decided to start his speech with a stand-up comedy routine. He did, and he was really funny. I don't know another writer who could pull that off. I loved that about him – his spontaneity, his ease, his personal rapport with each new audience.

A speech he gave at a festival on Denman Island influenced *In Case I Go*. He looked out at a mostly white audience and told them they didn't have to feel bad on his account. He said he didn't expect them to change the past (because doing so was impossible) and he didn't need them to say sorry (because they weren't the ones who had committed atrocities). He said that all they had to do was say: *YES, yes this happened*. He said, “We can start there.” That yes is the truth part of truth and reconciliation. In that moment, I realized *In Case I Go* was my yes. That's one of the reasons I dedicated the book to him. The other reason: I miss him.

Your most recent book, *Home Ice: Reflections of a Reluctant Hockey Mom*, combines “revealing stories and careful research of an often troubling sport culture.” Tell us about it. What do you want readers to know about this book?

This time I followed the advice “write the book you want to read.” I had to unlearn

some lessons of sport and the way a competitive sporting outlook plays into other parts of my life and into my parenting. I wrote myself into that new knowledge. Thinking about this question now (with the book off to the printers), I realize that the year which makes up the content of this memoir was the hardest year of my marriage, and the perspective I gained by writing the book has moved us into a much better place – as parents and as spouses. We were going in the wrong direction, and this project rerouted us. I hope it can, where helpful, reroute its readers too. I guess what I want readers to know is that *Home Ice* is about more than hockey.

Your publication history over the past 10+ years is impressive. Have you ever faced writer's block? How do you deal with it?

Yes. I suspect every writer faces writer's block. Writer's block is a product of perfectionism. If you want your writing to be perfect, you'll never fill a page. I like the saying "Perfection is the enemy of good." I get over writer's block by not judging the quality of draft material. The only goal of that first draft is to get some words onto the paper. Then I have something to work with. A perfect idea in my head is no good to anybody. Getting that "perfect" idea from the mind onto the page is going to involve some mess and some letting go of control – once we accept that mess as part of the process, we have no more writer's block.

There has been a growing interest in writing for wellness, therapeutic writing and expressive writing, as it is variously known. Have you found writing to be healing in your own life? Please explain.

Yes, my books have all been on subjects close to home: *Anything Boys Can Do*

(infidelity and relationship collapse), *The Bone Cage* (transitioning out of the athletic life), *The Canterbury Trail* (relationship to the environment and contradictions of adventure tourism), *Between* (motherhood and foreign domestic labour), and *In Case I Go* (our children carrying the burden of mistakes of our ancestors). I write to understand life. I've heard many writers say you don't know what you know until you write it down. In that way, writing involves a kind of self-discovery.

Of course, I have also focused on external elements of writing – getting publishing contracts, getting reviews, getting invited to festivals, pleasing readers. In the future, I plan to focus more on the internal rewards (self-discovery, increased understanding of topics of personal interest). Of late, those personal elements of writing are what matter to me – and I'm starting to suspect that if I put my focus there, the writing will be more genuine and honest and moving, and it will find its readers.

In a conversation we had a couple years ago when you were my creative writing professor at Athabasca University, you talked about *The Bone Cage* and how the story grew out of your own experiences as a swimmer, a car accident you once had and the resulting trauma you experienced, and your fears about your brother and what would happen to his sense of self after his Olympic experience was over. It seems that *The Bone Cage* evolved out of a combination of personal experience, powerful emotion and empathy.

Can you speak to this?

Recently when I told someone my early novels were more from my head but *In Case I Go* came more from my heart, the person looked at me unconvinced and said "But *The*

Bone Cage. It's from you heart." I suppose that's true. Digger shares some qualities with my brother, and my brother's well-being is, of course, very close to my heart. I wrote the book out of sisterly concern (remember, I'm an excessive worrier). So yes – that aspect of *The Bone Cage* comes from my heart and out of empathy for my brother and other elite athletes working to redefine themselves at the end of successful Olympic careers.

That kind of empathy is, I believe, crucial to any novel project. Reading itself is an act of empathy: we imagine ourselves into other lives, and we inhabit the space of what it means to be other people. Writing – the act of creating those other lives and other spaces – is an act of radical empathy.

Did writing contribute to your understanding of these experiences?

Writing always contributes to my understanding, of every experience. Yes.

What writing projects are you working on now?

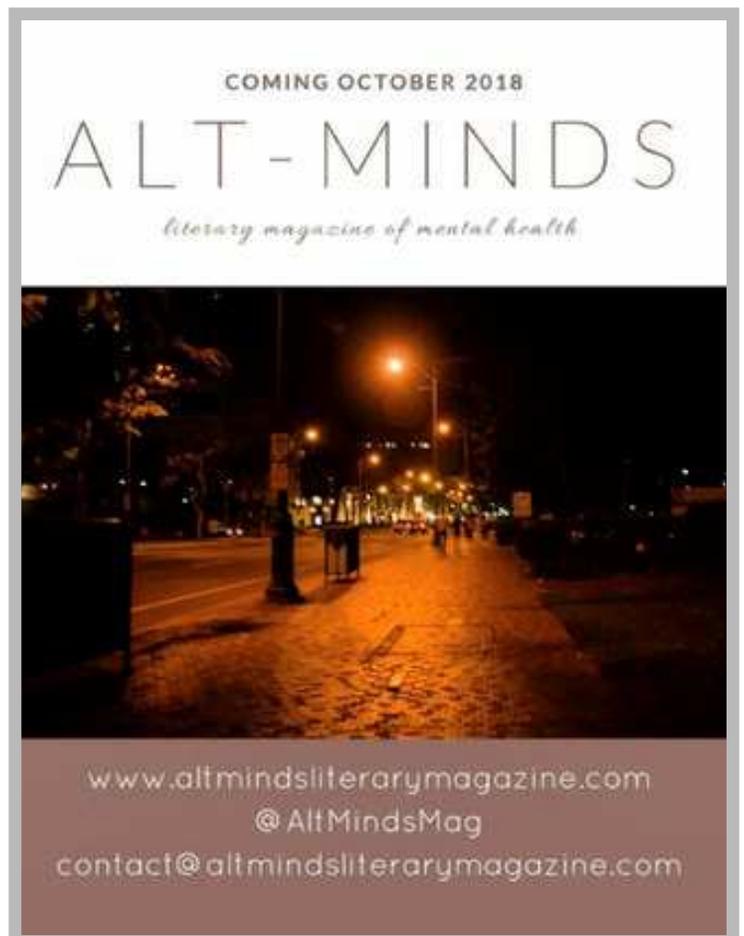
I'm starting a new novel, at the earliest stages, and I'm experimenting with writing-without-urgency. I've always put a lot of pressure on myself and imposed tight deadlines. I had an idea that I wanted a book every three years – an arbitrary goal. I don't even know what gave me the idea that every-three-years should be something to strive for. Because of this pressure, I have always written under stress and in an odd kind of artificial duress. I'm experimenting with finding pleasure in the writing process and exploring whether or not that process and its pace can be leisurely.

Do you have any advice for new writers?

Yes, I do: Do NOT focus on "being a writer" and the external validation required to accomplish this status. It's a moving goal, possibly unreachable. I thought I would feel like A Real Writer when I published my first book, and then I thought I'll feel like A Real Writer when I get my first review in a notable journal, and then I thought well maybe I will feel like A Real Writer when I get invited to my first literary festival, and then for sure I'll feel like a Real Writer when I finally get my first interview on CBC.

That feeling of having arrived never arrived.

Here's my advice: write only because you love to write. Focus on putting your pen on the paper. If you write, you're a real writer: now get on with it.



A Superior Cancer

sam sax's *Madness* Under Examination by Will Bahr

Madness by sam sax (whose name is stylized

lowercase) is perhaps described best in his own words—the book is a “vast pastoral of... illness,” a sightseeing tour of disorders of the mind and body, the dead and dying (Hematology, 28). In this landscape, bold formatting and bizarre images reign chief physicians.

96 pages long, *Madness* is divided into four sections. Each begins with the title page of “Nomenclature: Appendix C of the DSM-I” from 1952.

“NOMENCLATURE” is gradually pared down until we’re left with its different contents—the second section is entitled “MEN,” the third “ATE,” the final “NATURE.” (“Men ate nature”—I charge you to find a more concise encapsulation of Western medicine.) With each title page, the letters fade progressively until only the punctuation remains. This renders two effects—we’re treated to a gradual sense of decay, and shown in glaring clarity what we normally ignore. Mental

illness, plaguing many of these poems’ speakers, comes to mind.

After all, who else but the insane and the haunted could conjure images like this? “...there was one man in the corner / who pulled at his nose until his face elongated / into a plague doctor’s bird mask” (Willowbrook, 12). The bulk of *Madness* is equally nightmarish, because, as sax will tell you, “fear is a superior cancer to cancer” (Psychotherapy, 65). Fear is potent stuff, directing no

small number of our decisions, while nomenclature the ilk of the DSM gives it teeth and arms. These primal fears, dormant and ready to spring on any of us, are oftentimes unleashed at our sickest and most vulnerable. They are then embodied, born and named by modernity: “thank you / science” the speaker quips in “#Hypochondria,” “for teaching me what to fear most” (8). *Madness*, no doubt, but method in it.

“We’re treated to a gradual sense of decay...”



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Circles

Auto-Fiction by **Carla Myers**

My first surgery is two weeks from today so I am walking in tight circles. Instead of walking to the park a mile away, I go to the end of my block and make a left, and then a left, a left, left, home. My legs aren't done walking, so I do it again, and again, until I lose track of how many times. The sidewalk is slap-up against my house and I tap the doorframe with my pointer-finger each time I pass. So, while I'm not counting, perhaps my house is.

The inside of my house has

become a labyrinth. I wear my fluffy slippers and walk tightly, heel to toe, counter-clockwise around the perimeter of each room, in and out of doors, sliding down hallways, dragging my body along kitchen counters. Then I move exactly one inch to the left and do the loop again. I move deliberately. I might be a yogi or a hollowed-out gourd. I walk one thousand miles in my house and have yet to reach the center.

I walk the pink chalk-outline of my body. I start at my left shoulder, move down my

arm, around my thanksgiving turkey fingers to my armpit. I slide around my breast with my back to it, like a thief on a ledge ten stories up. I run, gathering speed, hands raised, hair streaming—down my torso and leg and then back up the mountain between them, up my other leg, torso, back to breast, armpit to turkey, and end at the handle of my collarbone. I skip my head and slice across my neck. I move exactly one inch to the left and do it again and again until I reach my heart, where I sit while it pulses and counts.

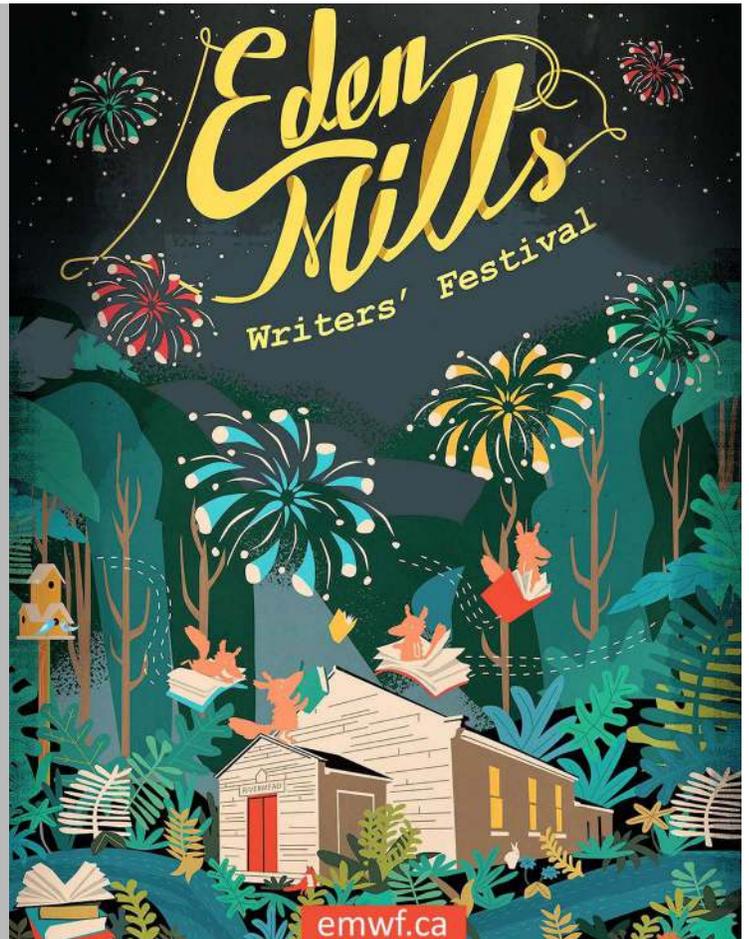
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