

RamsayWrites

100-Word Memoir Writing Contest Submissions

March 20, 2025

GOLD WINNER

What can't you do? At 80, 5 years into her dementia, mom explained why she couldn't join the chair exercise group in her long-term care facility. "I can't raise my arms above my head like everyone else," she said, raising her arms to the ceiling to demonstrate. A moment of laughter (mine), then reflection. Trapped in a career I loved but was killing me, in a marriage that had lasted decades too long, in my relentless need for perfection and achievement. I suddenly wasn't. A final, unintended gift. **Shari Austin**

SILVER WINNER

48 years later and it's burned in my visions - it recurs in my dreams. I remember so little of my childhood but the trauma holds. Was it Buddha or some other genius who had their shit together who said that hating someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to get sick. And yet, my brain and my body hold on to the hate. A few moments that last a lifetime; moments that are nothing in the scheme of a lifetime. It didn't happen to me; it happened to my body. Or so therapists have told me.

Anonymous

BRONZE WINNER

I stared at Boris, sitting across the table, my new Russian 'friend'. Disco pulsed faintly. There was a pistol in his hand. "I should probably kill you." He ordered two more shots of vodka and offered me a stogie. "What else do you like, besides my wife?" "I had no idea, Boris," I choked, tears forming. He smirked. I paused, staring at him. "I like...Guy Lafleur and the Montreal Canadians," I confessed, haltingly. Boris grinned. "Great team. The Flower!" he boomed. "I won't kill you." And so hockey saved my life in a visit to Moscow in 1993. **David Sobel**

ALL OTHER ENTRIES

MaID, 2020 -- It was a weekend of memories. Laughter, stories, love. Leafing through photo albums. Generations together – to say goodbye.
 I was with my dad when the doctor came on Monday. “Do you understand that I’m here to end your life?” My dad nodding. The nurses having trouble with the IV because my dad’s veins were so thin. The circle of family. The final injection.
 And my dad just...going. The howl of grief from my mother. The strange... emptiness of the moment. People ask me how MAID was. I say – it was awful.
 And that I’m so grateful I could say goodbye. **Larry Bambrick**

When I go -- When I left my father, I told the nurse he didn’t look good. She didn’t seem concerned. The phone awakened me at 4:42. A cold voice informed me they’d found him with “no vital signs.” Five years later, my mother was in hospital. The nurse called suggesting I get there quickly. I wasn’t quick enough.
 That they both died alone haunts me still. And now, as I creep - or speed - toward my end, I don’t just think about when and how. But **who** will be there when I go? And do I have the right to expect anyone? **Kate Barris (1)**

“By the end of this year,” I told myself. “I will have done it.”
 The end of the year came and went.
 “This is the month,” I said to myself.
 For months, I said, “This is the month.”
 For weeks, I vowed, “By the end of the week.”
 But week after week passed.
 “This will be the day,” I promised myself.
 For days and days.
 Hour after hour, I repeated, “This will be the hour.”
 Each minute, I was sure that I’d arrived at the minute.
 Then, one second, I said, “I’m leaving”.
 And the next second, I was gone. **Kate Barris (2)**

Crying in the Parking lot ...Goodbye sweetheart! You’ll love your university years. We will miss you so much. Don’t mind our tears. Mom and Dad, we’re getting married, and We’re having a baby! Sweetheart, we are crying with happiness! Mom and Dad, Our baby is off to university! We’re so happy but we still sobbed in the parking lot.

Sweetheart, your father has cancer. Mom, Dad is gone but you can live with us. Don't cry! Mom, Can you hear me? Our girl has graduated from Med school! We're so damned proud that we both cried in the car. **Penny Bell**

I laid the white sheet down on the warm stone floor and placed our dining room chair on top. My husband tentatively sat down and with a final look of desperation towards me, he said to Kathy, "Go ahead". The hair clippers were turned on and I knew there was no going back, as the first cut of his thick dark brown hair fell onto the white sheet, and then another and another, until my dear late husband was as bald as a baby's bottom.
Maggie Bras

Mongolia or Romania, a yurt or Transylvania, were our 1970 vacation choices. Ages 6 and 10, we chose Romania. Armed with tinfoil crosses to ward away Dracula (I want to driiiiink your blood, our father would mimic Boris Karloff, sticking two fingers into our necks), we drove past militia at the Hungarian border to a land of crumbling monasteries, alarming wisps of thin hungry children, postcards from western relatives for toilet paper. Any taste for adventure travel evaporated after that, and yet, from my very civilized snowbird winter 2025, I do yearn for that wacky family vacation, just a bit.
Judy Blumstock

HEALING ARCTIC WATERS -- Naked, every inch of me vulnerable to the icy kiss of Franklin Bay, NWT was akin to being knifed. In agony up to my neck, as chilled blood began to circulate through vital organs, I thought I'd die. I stumbled to shore on uncoordinated limbs. Then - a miracle! Indescribable joy flooded me. I was a newly hatched creature filled with love, happiness and hope. All from the past was forgiven. All in the future would be warm and golden. That Arctic skinny dip purged me, polished my capacity for ecstatic delight and promised a beautiful future. Memorable. **Wendy Cecil**

The past is simply memories and my only brother took much of mine with him when he died. We spent countless hours revisiting our lives together: What was that person really like? How did that event unfold? Did you really do that to me? Laughter and tears in equal measure. It was important because memory tries to protect you from pain and enhance joy and in so doing bends truth. Now I am left to parse my past alone and try to

avoid what seems inevitable: My past is becoming my fiction. ***Anonymous (1 of 3 from same author)***

I met Joe in the gym. He was bent, stiff and serious but kept at his exercises. We gym chatted often. The last time I spoke with Joe he told me how a skiing accident left his 45-year-old son a quadriplegic. After years of failed rehab and interventions, an estranged family and now in constant discomfort, his son begged to die. At his bedside Joe promised: "I've got some things I need to finish. Give me 3 months and we'll go together." In that instant Joe and I embraced in a fiercely intense, gut wrenching connection that every parent understands. ***Anonymous (2 of 3 from same author)***

Angel was on duty at the Cordelle Ga. Holiday Inn express when we checked in one December night.

Young. Welcoming. Efficient. Black.

When we got back from dinner, she was still there so I asked what shift she was working. Turn outs it was 6:00pm to 6:00am.

Telling me about her job: there were still guests to arrive, then she'd wash the floors, clean and prepare the breakfast area, study for her Supervisor Training Program and lastly prepare the breakfast. Then she'd find some time for herself.

Race, effort, opportunity, hope and disappointment all play out here in the lobby. ***Anonymous (3 of 3 from same author)***

In 1969 at the age of 18 I went for my first job interview. It was at one of London's oldest Fine Art & Antique dealers. They wanted an assistant secretary. I was ushered into the office of a senior manager. Without any preliminaries he asked me, "Do you ride?" "No sir, I've never been on a horse." Next, he asked "Do you ski?" "No. Actually, I've never been skiing, I can't afford it." Finally, he asked "Are you engaged?" "No," I replied, "I don't even have a boyfriend." "Perfect," he said, "when can you start?" "Monday," I replied. ***Suzanne Davis***

I have a very vivid memory. One that I've had all my life.

When I was four, I spent an entire day sitting on the far side of my parent's bed, alone, with a pillow on my lap. No one else was home. All day.

My Mother was in the midst of leaving my Father, who would continue to raise my brother and me. Oh, I also have another memory: Her black eye.

I spent many years trying to determine whether this memory was true or even accurate. Turns out, having the memory is more important than knowing the truth. **Chris Dawson**

I know the art of losing isn't hard to master (said the bishop to the queen) And nothing good gets away. -T'was lost on me A square six by six years, to my dismay. An empty shell hath no fury Where grief is the weakest knot. Out with the stale and the boring: The verdant clichés gambol in the grass. These two shall pass. **Michelle de Villiers**

So, I am now 75. Sixty years ago, I was 15, an awkward age, if your father was an evangelical preacher with God on his side. I asked permission to go to a party, and my father asked me if Jesus would be comfortable at this party. I told my father I had no idea what Jesus thought about anything. My father's solution? I could go if I took gospel tracts to everyone at the party. I stuffed the tracts in the mailboxes all along the street. So, with a clear conscience, there was drinking and dancing. **Jon Dellandrea**

I watch the gastric contents drip into the glass canister as the drainage tube sucks the life from my mother. At fourteen I glimpse the thick red scar across her chest, a stark reminder of how this disease has ravaged her.

When she died, well-meaning relatives warmed casseroles and made rice krispie squares. Our bereft father sent us to buy better bras in some misguided notion that this might ward off the cancer that took our mom.

Years later I take the scalpel from my scrub nurse. I take revenge on this disease as I know best. **Anonymous**

"... *But being ordinary IS your story*" argued a publisher years ago. It has bothered me ever since. Encouragement to write about thriving as an independent consultant was intended to fire me up, instead it planted an ear worm of doubt: Is ordinary enough? Could I have been or done more? Have I made a difference? What does that even mean? Lately, perhaps like the beachcomber who quietly tosses washed-up starfish into

the ocean to save them from drying out, I select Help Another Texter and wait as a volunteer crises responder. Maybe I can be okay with enough. **Carolyn Everson**

When I was a young mom, I let my one-year-old comb my hair. That gentle message from baby hands was blissful. That is until the comb unexpectedly crossed my eye. Running water, compresses, nothing relieve the pain. That would take a trip to ER and medication. Recently experiencing my first 80-year-old driver's exam and failing the peripheral vision test leads me to wonder what lasting impact the comb incident may have had. Regardless, whether permanent or not, today I recall a memorable and cherished time of a sweet baby girl and the joy she created with her little hands.

Joyce Fleet

My most impossible assignment ever was to give the eulogy for my father-in-law, a man whom I had not spoken to for the last two years of his life. He was charismatic, outrageously funny, anti-semitic, cruel to all who came close to him, a man I had loved, and then... not. I faced a packed church, filled with his community and his immediate family who were furious with me, but had no one else to ask. That was the day I learned to weave a fine line between memory and truth: his virtues shadowed with his dark side. **Eric Friesen**

My 13th year was a most eventful year: Bar Mitzvah; 'borrowed' my parents' car, which I totalled on a snowy Christmas Eve; was caught stealing tennis balls from Kresge's, and didn't even play tennis; was kicked out of school, not once, but, twice; and, of course, was not permitted to return to classical music camp that year, for cutting down a clothes-line. Good thing my parents stuck by me the whole time. Better thing the Judicial Affairs Office didn't have my records before my appointment to the Superior Court in 1997, from which gig I'm now retired, relatively unscathed. **Arthur Gans**

A dagger of pain stabs my head. It fades, but when I pick up a book I can't read. I can see letters, yet their meaning escapes me. Panic sets in - reading is my life. Paramedics arrive, find no typical stroke symptoms, and discount my alarm. I can walk and talk. What's the problem? "I can't read!" I insist. They grudgingly drive me to the hospital. The ER staff is also sceptical - until a scan reveals a hemorrhagic stroke. The following days are terrifying. Like a child, I practise, determined to relearn. Slowly, words return. Life is salvaged. **Lib Gibson**

I was paid to take it off. In the early hours of Valentine's Day, 2008, I found myself at Bergdorf Goodman in NYC trying on jewellery. A very well-dressed gentleman approached me and asked if I was purchasing the necklace I was trying on. I said I was considering it. He asked how much it would take for me to take it off. Jokingly, I asked him how much he was offering. He peeled off US\$500 and asked if that would do it. I took off the necklace, he gave me \$US500 and he bought it. Only in America.

Libby Gillman

A Moment -- As a free-range 11-year-old wandering down Ste Catherine Street in Montreal, I spied a sign in a coffee-shop window: "World's Finest Coffee". With my trademark gullibility and concreteness, I asked myself, "How do they know?" and imagined gruelling global field trials by exacting judges. My immediate second thought was, "How lucky am I to be living in a city with the world's finest coffee?", even though I had never had a cup at that point. At age 71, I remain in stupefied awe of hierarchical evaluations (thanks, Wirecutter) and grateful for my good fortune. **David Goldbloom**

I never wanted to be an adult and now that I am - except to my kids - I spend most of my time trying to go back. The older I get, the more likely I am to achieve it. The irony is that if I'm successful I probably won't be aware of it. **Cliff Goldfarb**

Why is it that women who get into a tussle on the ice become enemies for life, when men can swear and throw a punch at each other during a game, and shrug it off over a beer in the dressing room afterward?

I've been playing women's ice hockey for fifty years, and it's always been the same. It's time women start fighting like men. Not necessarily throwing punches, but leaving the game on the ice and supporting each other off the ice.

It's time women stopped being worst to each other. Women helping women could change the world. **Anne Greenwood**

To My Surprise

In my early thirties, I visited Benares, India, where a palm reader told me that I had many siblings (true) and a half sibling (ignored). Many years later, a "23 and Me" kit revealed two people that I shared a lot of DNA with. I reached out to discover they were casting a net for their British father who was orphaned in WW2. The deceased birth

mother apparently worked in a munitions factory near a Canadian base in England. When they sent a picture it was though I was staring at my father! **Virginia Griffin**

In the still of the night shift, with the faint sound of alarms and monitors, I rocked slowly, comforting their beautiful boy. Deep into my own emotions, ignoring the wires and tubes that invaded his tiny, struggling body. How do I make sense of their pain, their love and eventual loss? Trying to understand my pain and deep sadness. He is too young to die! I was too young to completely comprehend. Profoundly, and to this day, he has been a cherished part of my life's mosaic. **Mary Jo Haddad**

Ignited in high school, my passion for words culminated in the founding of Hume Publishing. The venture succeeded beyond my wildest dreams. For decades, I lived life in the fast lane. After selling the company, my publishing career ended abruptly. For thirty years, a grey cloud hung over me. Then, at 85, my wife inspired me to cross the desk and become a writer. This brought back a long-forgotten sense of purpose and joy. Now 93, I am happier than ever. Reinvention knows no age, and dreams, no matter how long deferred, are always worth chasing. **Ron Hume**

TWO FACES -- At the door, we braced ourselves, knowing we would be stepping into madness. And we did. His once immaculate apartment was littered with junk; discarded bits of food on the floor; here and there, peculiar electric parts; a bicycle frame; in the middle of the kitchen was a large lawnmower; the fridge and stove were filthy. However, the biggest shock was finding the corpses of three small animals in the freezer. The only oasis was a neat bookcase. I took out a book I had given him myself some years ago. I'd inscribed it, 'With love.' **Maureen Jennings**

In a small room in a beautiful village that smelt of dead fish, he slumped silent and sightless. But when he understood that I was there about the oldest of songs, he came alive and gifted me to splendid hours of chants in an ancient language, Noh-like pantomimes throughout. About how before the Whites came, he'd spent a year on the Upper Skeena inviting neighbouring villages to a massive potlatch. About visions of ancient choirs in ghost villages decimated by intentional smallpox. And then the great Eagle Clan Chief Laelt of Kitwanga slumped back in his chair, silent and sightless. **Ellen Karp**

I heard the sickening slither first.
 My heart stopped. Frozen I waited.... nothing.
 Snapping on the light, my eyes darted to the plastic covered ceiling. The underside of a soft pink belly, curling toes and rapier tail slalomed powerfully through the frothy insulation above my head.
 I choked back a scream.
 I was alone, at midnight in a crumbling stone farm house.
 With pounding heart and frantic breaths I stumbled downstairs and dialed my husband of 28 years working nights, 400 kms away.
 Pleading for help, "What can I do?"
 Pause "Tell someone who cares?"...click.
 Eventually, I did. **Louise Kerr**

My life altering 5 minutes -- I fold into myself like a deflating balloon, flushed cheeks betraying my embarrassment. The other grade-six girls snicker and whisper. My Zellers sneakers and "last-picked reputation" scream I don't belong. I gulp back tears, undeterred. The gun fires. For the next five minutes my arms flail and I gasp for air, my eyes laser-focussed on the six girls ahead of me. Seven will be chosen for a coveted spot on the cross-country team. Heavy breathing behind me, I fumble defiantly across the finish line, past the row of speechless onlookers. Yes I can. Just watch me. **Jane Kidner**

Healer. Hours pass in an urban ER hallway: no relief, no diagnosis. I breathe, deeply, suppressing moans, hoping for IV meds to work. Across the hall, a patient insists he needs help, now. Now! He can't wait any longer! He looks life-weary, weather-worn, survivor of unimaginable harshness. Nurses know him. Cajole him. Re-assure him. Remind him of his usual next stop. As he leaves, he walks over to me; his tone mellows, his expression changes from patient to healer, he slowly places his hand on my chest, pauses, and says: "this will cure you." I am still here. He was right.
Michael Leckman (1)

Security. Jangle of keys falling into a drop box, the final call to board the flight, the warning that security is closing, when I realize my ID is still in the rental car, 300m away, and the service desk is empty. My heart instantly pounds, in my chest, my ears, my head. A bit of luck - the ticket agent knows the security guard, the guard knows the rental agent, and calls. She answers! In one stupendous magnificent leap, he is over the desk, unlocks the drop box, and shakes my keys; a sweet sound, briefly louder than my chest. **Michael Leckman (2)**

And on that day..... The day we were to cycle along the Grand Canyon dawned chilly and misty. I plugged in my headphones, locked in my shoes and took off singing. There were no cars. There was no view. I chuckled thinking of my colleagues who had come on the trip specifically for that. After thirty days of riding from Banff, this was turning out to be the best: my favorite songs, the empty road and finally, the sun breaking through the clouds. When I checked my phone, I read that my mother had had a stroke. The lord giveth. The lord taketh away. **Louise Levitt**

It is natural in this life to take many things for granted. A few years ago, invited to a friends for dinner, I went upstairs to view his new art acquisition. A Colville. Minutes later, I came downstairs and mistook the bottom step for the main floor. A subsequent somersault brought both knees into the staircase and tore apart the quad muscle in each leg. To emergency, then surgery. I was told it was like knitting the ends of horse's tails together. Two months in Bridgepoint rehab and home for six months of physio and exercise. My most consistent memory through all that time was looking out the window at people passing by and wondering if I'd ever be able to walk. I now can. Every step is a treasure. **Doug Linton**

August 1992 I am driving our last child 1200 miles to university . Calling home that night I learned that my father had suffered a heart attack .The next day we sped to the airport and I spent precious days with Dad . Nights later, my husband and I were returning home after a hasty dinner and I told him I wanted to say goodnight to Dad . It turned out to be goodbye.I sat with him, told him I Douhim as he passed. I am now 90. I don't want to die alone. **Libby Macaulay**

It was a rattlesnake afternoon, hot, humid, and heavy. Massasauga bathed on sun-baked Cognashene rocks. Even the air felt lazy. Tranquility was shattered by Feisty Family Terrier, intent on herding Resident *Sistrurus catenatus* into crawl spaces between dock and shoreline. Snake coiled her long body and rattled her tail. Head raised high, she flicked her tongue in agitation. We locked eyes. "Please", I whispered inside my head. "I'm so sorry. Please, let him live. I'll take him away." Snake studied me intently, then settled. Slowly I reached out and hooked Leo. Snake swayed gently. Head bowed, I breathed, "Thank you."
Claudia Mandler McKnight

We glanced at each other, grinned, and fired our jets to crest the hill to the finish. Endorphins coursing, body strong, spirits high. How did this happen? Nine months training through sleet, snow and rain. The germ of a thought. The inspiration of a story. Seven male runners who qualified for Boston. Their cardiac physician / runner who trained and prepared them. Diligently absorbing cardiac rehab sessions. Will she make it, will she not? That shocking day and discovery. The tingle from shoulder through fingertips, the suddenly sore throat, the aching jaw. **A Jean's Marine**

I was looking forward to my trip. My suitcase was packed with my carefully curated wardrobe, intended to create a good impression on my 21 travelling companions from Verity. But, my suitcase never arrived. In Paris, my jeans and I dined at Michelin starred restaurants and sipped champagne at the ballet. In Egypt, I added a scarf as we sailed the Nile, rode camels and marvelled at the sphinx, pyramids and tombs of ancient kings and queens. It was a great trip with lasting memories, and I did leave a good impression after all - my "Carry On" attitude. **Janice May**

My history teacher's antique Churchill poster enjoyed pride of place above his chalkboard. The poster inspired some, but it also conjured teenage mischief. So, pre-class, I crafted a paper Hitler-moustache, mounted a chair, and taped it to Winston's gnarled lip. In those libertine 1970s I thought it ironic, and for a day or so the moustache beamed my cleverness, undiscovered by our teacher. When, however, he finally glimpsed my perfidy, he sighed weightily. He scanned our lowered faces, and murmured softly, "Who did this?" And, sadly, I lacked the Churchillian temerity to reply to this aged veteran, "I did." **Malcolm H. Nanji**

Do not wear anything sexy or go alone: advice for working in remote FN communities. Nevertheless, I set out on my own, knocking on Rez doors. I came upon a full nest. They hated school and had all quit. I invited them into an environment nothing like school. They signed up. Weeks later I was jogging alone at dusk. An erratic car, rap blaring, arms waving. My dread interrupted: "Hey Heather!" They were my students. No worries because all the "worst" people were in our program. They are people. And people respond well when they are seen, heard, and loved. **Heather MacTaggart**

When I was 13 I visited my Grandma in the hospital. Grandma was asleep and her roommate told me I looked like my Grandma. I was appalled that I looked like a 70 year old. Sixty years later, my friend has her 6 year old grandson with her and he looks like his Grandma. I waited until the boy left to let my friend know that I saw this resemblance. My friend was thrilled to hear my words. I wonder if my Grandma would have been as thrilled as my friend.

Marylou McCarthy

It was a cold winter's evening as my two-year old son and I approached our front door. A single parent, I balanced grocery bags and encouraged my son to walk ahead of me as the door opened to a dark foyer. He stumbled and I heard myself say unconsciously, impatiently: 'let's go hurry up'. My tiny boy responded: "sorry Dad, I'm trying as hard as I can" - as he walked bravely into the darkness. I froze. I realized I did not have the luxury of impatience. I was his world. That pivotal exchange informed 'my parental development'...forty years ago. **Duncan McIntyre**

We don't live together anymore, but people ask about him with the same well-intentioned question, "Does he know you?" This seems to be the measure for how much of him remains. If he "knows" me, he is still here. If he doesn't, he is gone, his loss of self more frightening than death itself. He can't speak, can barely move, so I have accepted not knowing the answer to the question. But I do know he can feel me, so he can feel when I am with him. It doesn't matter if he knows it's me. I know it's him. **Jane Minett**

My Heart is Breaking for My Daughter's Whose Needs Repairing.

"Unicuspid aortic valve?"

My daughter's unsettling annual visits with cardiologists have always maintained her heart is Bicuspid; she would never excel in sports and would require heart surgery in her 50s. She'd triumph in proving them wrong every year and persevered to become captain of the Princeton squash team. Now living in NYC with a new cardiologist, the report says Unicuspid, severe stenosis, semi-annual appointments, and surgery imminent.

"Roberta, have you read this?"

"Naw, late for work. It's more of the same. I'll see him in another year."

How does a mother break the invincibility of youth, but not her daughter? **Anonymous**

4711 -- After surviving eight years in Siberia, my father became a parent at forty-eight. Until his death twelve years later, one memory was him waltzing with me, the smell of his cologne on my collar. At my engagement, I dreamed somehow, he would appear at my wedding. Before the ceremony, a cosmetician applied make-up for my mother and me. She spoke tenderly to my mother, noticing Mom's early dementia. Then she paused at the door, silhouetted by the late afternoon sun, and reached into her bag. "Wait, I have something for you," she said, handing me a packet of 4711 cologne.

Pauline Pariser

"If music be the food of love, play on" -- Shakespeare captured me in one phrase. At eight it was piano lessons, forced at first, then I grew to love music and how it brings people together. In my 30's, it was the violin. Very squeaky. Tried again in my 40's. Now in my 60's, hoping third time is a charm. I have a Russian violinist instructor who is passionate about teaching. Very inspirational. A connection we share. As I teach people to love food again through cooking classes. The thread of music, love and food are truly intertwined. Play on. **Cynthia Peters**

Night time in London in the 1940's and the familiar air raid siren was wailing again. My brother and I were put to bed in the Anderson shelter located in the back room of our house safely away from windows. My parents were sleeping on a mattress on top of the shelter. They quickly joined my brother and me, now awake, in the shelter. The siren stopped and there was silence. An explosion, not far away, followed by the sound of breaking glass. This time it was our kitchen windows. But, this night we were all safe. The next day at school an empty desk beside me. Tommy's house had been demolished last evening. **Jo Robertson**

Consequences, When I Was Young - It was moving fast, and was it picking up speed as I pounded the gravel path swiftly beside the train tracks? We had a great 'hike' to that greening ravine this fine day, the latter part of April and leaves starting to bud. With my neighbour-hood friends we had jumped trains many times, just because we could, for fun, run along beside the monster Iron machines churning slowly hauling loads of coal through downtown Toronto. I did learn that it was fast, as I stood on the gravel afterward, looking down at my mangled running shoe, and the realization of consequences that I would live with the rest of my life. **Paul Doodle**

Altitude – A Life Saved...It would be so easy just to sit, the snow looks so comfortable. All I need to do is to stop and sit down. The sun is bright, and I can feel its radiant

energy on my body, I feel so warm. Now that I have taken a seat, I'm so relaxed, at peace. I can see the entire Vinson Massif laid out before me. It is so beautiful, stretching out unblemished for eternity. Please just leave me here with my thoughts and this view. Why are you making me walk again?

Heather Ross

Respect your elders -- This is the mantra for Asian cultures: respect your elders. As they age, we seek their wisdom and guidance from their life's journey. But what if that journey causes a train wreck in your life? What if that person who was severely abused becomes an even more vicious abuser? What if that person now has dementia, doesn't recall the old hurt and continues to inflict more? Respect is now an obligation with disdain in every conversation. The proverbial yoke is now around my psyche. But what if their death doesn't lift the yoke? Then what do I do? **Anonymous**

The Apartment. As a kid, I'd climb out of bed and onto the radiator to gaze at the new apartments on Sherbrooke street. I could breathe as I watched the lights. That was freedom. From these oppressing walls. The heaviness. Them. An apartment was not this. Nor any other home stale with secrets. People come and go in an elevator. To their own door. I'd stay until I got sleepy. Had the neighbours heard? The dinner guests had seen the fearful child. But that was then and trauma hadn't yet been invented. One day I would have my own apartment. Apart. Safe. **Nina Slawek**

Love Beyond the Gate -- I saw him the first day I arrived in the Mexican fishing village. He lay languishing outside his home, surrounded by hot pavement. As I passed by each day, I called out, "Hola." He made eye contact, but not wanting to intrude, I kept walking. One night, I noticed a lady sitting inside the open door while he rested just outside. I called over the front gate, "Why is he always chained up? May I take him for a walk?" Her nod, "Si," transformed my two-week stay. As we walked away together, my love affair began with a Mexican dog. **Shellie Suter**

Sister, can you spare a kidney? Three years ago, in my early 60's, I gave away one of my kidneys. The recipient was a stranger, who rightly remains anonymous. I had long felt that I was not good at small gestures, so I opted for a big one, thinking that might compensate. Whatever else, when I look back, I know that somewhere in the GTA someone who was counting their days can now live them fully. I considered moving on to the liver, but my family, mercifully, put the brakes on that... **Faye Winberg**