

A and L Writing Contest Anthology

More info at:
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A and L's Writing Contest Livestream

Saturday, March 20th at 2PM

youtu.be/mFWbyiz6QQI

To our participants,

Thank you so, so much for participating in our writing contest! We thoroughly enjoyed reading everyone's submissions and can't wait to see what the future holds for more writing!

To readers,

We hope you enjoy reading everyone's submission. The prompt of this writing contest was to write about a memory that impacted your life a lot, whether it was negative or positive.

We remind you to check out our Writing Contest LiveStream by scanning the QR code on the cover at youtu.be/mFWbyiz6QQI or aandlmagazine.com/interactive-items/a-and-ls-writing-contest. Feel free to tell your friends and family about the contest, so they can enjoy the AMAZING responses!

-Leeya and Adalia

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FIRST PLACE!

A Solo Journey

by Lumina Kemp

New Mexico is such a big state. Bigger than whole countries! The road ahead of me stretches on for miles, and I can see far enough to know I won't be passing anyone anytime soon. I haven't passed anyone in hours already. Out here it's just me, and my car, and all my earthly possessions. My cell phone has no reception and with the land stretching out forever in every direction, I wonder if something were to happen to me how long it would take for anyone to notice. My car could run out of gas. Or it could break down. Neither of these would surprise me. I had been told by a mechanic before setting out from Arizona that the transmission was not up to scratch. I can feel my little Penelope chugging along like the little engine that could, especially going uphill. I had to speed down the backside of one hill and pray I would make it to the top of the next, peddle to the floor, struggling to stay at least 30mph on a 75mph highway.

The extra weight was an issue. The car was meticulously packed. Like a 3D Tetris game. Most of what I owned then is the same as now. Books. Lots and lots of books. And rocks. Living in Tucson for two years had given me plenty of time to satisfy my long-held love for making jewellery and collecting semi-precious stones. Also packed into my exhausted car was all of my sewing supplies, journals and artwork, camping kit and music collection. I was moving back to Ohio. A woodland creature at heart, I was never going to be able to stay in the desert forever. It was an excuse, but not the truth. The truth was that I was running away. Not from the law or from dodgy debt collectors. But from another relationship that wasn't going anywhere. I knew he wouldn't follow me this time. The west coast was in his blood. Crickets and fireflies in mine.

My friend James had helped me pack. He didn't own a cell phone, but always had a way of magically appearing when I needed advice. He couldn't help but laugh at the way I was strapping what wouldn't fit in the car onto the roof: boxes, bags and a sewing machine that probably wouldn't make it down the road let alone across the country. We took it all down and he showed me how to secure it piece by piece. Dozens of bungee cords and tarps later, it was pretty set to go. We chatted on the porch, admiring our work. He asked me about my route. I told him how I planned to meander my way across the belly of the States, taking one, maybe two weeks to get back to Wooster. I wanted to

stop off at National Parks to hike and camp. The last few times I had traversed the country this is how we rolled. James was worried. Because this time there was no “we”. I would be alone. Without a boyfriend, a comrade, or a dog. I told him I had a pocket knife and a strong belief that I was a “child of the universe”. This only worried him further. He warned me from stopping to rest at truck stops and showed me the basics of self-defense. “Aim for the center – eyes, nose, throat, groin.” We practiced a few moves together. I was going to miss James. He was like that really cool uncle I never had. Full of stories and adventure and advice. But this advice scared me. I hadn’t thought to be afraid before. But now, all alone in the middle of New Mexico I felt vulnerable and ill prepared. It was going to get dark soon and this road didn’t show any signs of ending.

“New Mexico is a biiiiig state” I said into my mini MP3 player that also had a recording function. Finally, I saw a sign for a campsite and pulled over. I had all of my camping supplies in easy access. I had also packed a cooler with a 2-litre bottle of espresso and a selection of homemade ready meals that I could eat cold. Setting up my four-person tent in the wide-open desert I felt so small. Less than 10 hours into my trip and I was exhausted. Without a co-pilot I had no one to keep me company and I still didn’t have any cell reception. There was no soil here to stake my tent into. Only small stones like gravel covering vast sheets of rock that had been used to mark the individual campsites. My tent poles moved around in the wind, making a sound like someone walking right by where I lay. I curled up in my sleeping bag clenching my pocket knife and tried to sleep. But the espresso I had been drinking to stay alert on the road was mixed with the worry that James had planted inside of me had me getting up to peer out of the tent to see if someone was there. Only the wind. Only my tent poles scraping against the barren landscape. This went on for what felt like hours. I knew I would never sleep here. Before dawn, I tore down my tent-not bothering to roll in up properly-just shoved it back in my car and kept driving. I drank more espresso and talked to myself via my MP3 recorder. I listened to the mixtapes I had made for the journey and prayed that I’d make it out of New Mexico alive.

By the time I reached Oklahoma, it was midday. I stopped at a campsite I had been to before, hopeful that I was exhausted enough to take a nap. I set up my tent and stretched out inside with the front flap open. But it was too hot and sunny. Even though I had driven hour after hour, my body was still on full alert and sleep was nowhere in sight. I was disappointed that I wasn’t going to have the adventure I thought I would have. I wasn’t going to “find myself,” or talk with fellow travellers. I wouldn’t be picking up

any hitchhikers or sleeping peacefully under a bed of stars. Defeated, I rolled up my tent and set off again. At least the states left between me and home were smaller and more satisfying to get through. One after another, they rolled past my view. I laughed at the billboards in the bible belt that competed for your attention to advertise casinos, guns, porn, and Jesus. I knew I was getting closer now to my roots.

Somewhere in Illinois, I realized that I wasn't going to be able to go any further without some rest. I was counting exits. Just one more, then I'll stop. One more. Just after this next one. Finally, as darkness began to fall, I pulled into a Motel 6, bought some orange juice, and slept for eight solid hours. No dreams, no worries. I was safe behind locked doors to just sleep. I woke up the next morning and drove and drove and drove. It took me 52 hours to make the 2,000-mile journey to the house I had grown up in. No more looking out at horizons that never seemed to end. The air was full here. The land: busy, soft and fertile. Set within the woods among lush, rolling hills and fields of corn and soy. I was home. I had made it in one piece. Mama was there to greet me. She was the most beautiful sight my weary eyes had ever seen.

SECOND PLACE!

Daisy

by Lany McDonald

It was summer of 1941 and I was only four years old. Many would think having indelible memories from that young age is unlikely, but I can still close my eyes and relive the scene that shook my small world that day.

I was the youngest of six children. I had one brother who was only two years older than I, but my other brother and sisters were like grown-ups to me. The oldest left home for college the same September I was born. My older sisters cared for me, but they were busy with school and boyfriends. so that left me just my brother as a playmate.

I was too young to know it then, but my parents were quite poor. There had been a terrible depression nationwide and my father rarely had a job for several years. My mother made our clothes and managed to make us feel safe and cared for in spite of their financial difficulties. We lived in a rented house right next to the village general store.

Like many others in our small Virginia village, we were living "hand-to-mouth," as they said back then, meaning we were not quite sure where your next meal was coming from. But neighbors helped each other in hard times and shared food grown in their gardens and eggs from their hens.

Of course, because this was rural Virginia, our immediate neighbors were all white people like us. We only knew the African Americans who worked in our homes cleaning, cooking, or doing odd jobs, which in my family's case meant having an occasional babysitter during the day so my mother could get all her housework and sewing done.

That is how I came to know Daisy, a wizened black woman who was paid pennies to watch over my brother and me while we played that summer. There was no school for black children in our little town, so Daisy had grown up illiterate. She could not read to us as I often wanted her to do, but she made sure we were good children and obeyed our

parents' wishes. And she was always kind and patient with my brother and me. I loved her dearly.

This particularly summer day was a hot one and Daisy was babysitting my brother and me as we played outside. My brother got the great idea that it would be cooler if we walked to a nearby creek to catch minnows. That gave us an excuse to go barefoot and wade in the water to cool off. Our mother gave Daisy permission to take us to the creek, so off we went.

On the way to the creek we passed the place where Daisy lived. I knew she lived there but had never been inside because white children were not usually permitted to visit the homes of blacks, even those who lived nearby. Suddenly, I realized that I had forgotten to bring a pail for the minnows I would catch, and I wanted to go back home to get one. My brother had brought his and was disgusted with me for being such a baby. Since we were near Daisy's house, I persuaded her that we should go to her house to find a pail I could use. She did not want us to go inside her home, but I insisted and she did not want to disappoint me.

I remember we walked up two or three open steps and then went into her house. I was not prepared for what I saw. Daisy's house was one room with almost no furniture. There was an iron bed with one ragged quilt on it. The walls were partially covered with old newspapers that were peeling off. There were many huge, open cracks in the walls where I knew rain and snow could come pouring through.

I do not remember what I said or if I even spoke, but I do remember that I had never seen such poverty before and I knew something was wrong.

Daisy found a pail for me to use and we left for the creek. I do not know if we caught any minnows, but I remember my shock was not over by the time we got home. As soon as Daisy returned us to our house, I ran to my mother and began to cry.

I told my mother about the newspapers and the holes in the walls and that I loved Daisy and did not want her to live in such a place. I asked my mother why Daisy did not have a nice house like ours. My poor mother was unprepared for such a question. Unfortunately, the answer she gave was as unsatisfactory and as painful as the truth of our segregated world.

I never forgot this experience. The love and kindness one dear, uneducated black woman showed me as a little child provided a life lesson that still resonates today. After almost eighty years, I look back and I am still astounded that Daisy could give her love to two little white children when she was given so little in return. I did not understand what was wrong then, but the child I sensed the inequality and it hurt. I knew then, as I still do, that it was simply wrong.

THIRD PLACE!

My Little Brother

by Virgina

A memory that has changed my life is when my parents told me that I was going to be a big sister. This happened when I was six. It was just a normal Sunday for us because I remember my grandparents were over at our house for dinner. Both my parents brought me back to my bedroom and sat me down with a small present. I opened it and it was a shirt! I couldn't read very well, yet, but I did know it said something like, "I'm going to be a big sister!" or "Future big sister!". Of course I began to freak out, because I didn't really understand what it meant, but once I got it, I was overwhelmed! I started to cry but my parents made me run out into the living room where my grandparents were and show them what my shirt said, but I was crying and embarrassed because I did not, and still don't do well when I am overwhelmed. I quickly ran back to my room where my parents were still waiting. That was my first memory in a series of memories about when my mom was pregnant with my younger brother.

This changed my life because it was when our family changed. A few memories that go along with this memory are when we found out that my new sibling was a boy, which I cried then too because I was desperately hoping it was a girl, and when I had strep throat and could not visit my parents in the hospital after the baby was born.

A AND L HEART AWARD

The Adventure I Will Forget

by Mithu

I was raised in a very protective environment in an upper-middle class family in Calcutta, India. My father was a dedicated physician with a very busy practice. In those days, the city of Calcutta was much less crowded as it is now. Though our parents were all for good education for girls, they were not much for the outdoors, as it is in the United States. On the other hand, my brothers were reasonably good sportsmen, and with their help, I did some outdoor sports, joined Girls Scout, attended camps, and swam. I was more encouraged to act and sing.

My five other sisters were married within a couple of blocks of our large home. During my second year in college, I was introduced to a trainee surgeon from the United States. He was in for a long and rigorous training for a total of five years. During that process, we moved around St. Louis, Missouri, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Boston, Massachusetts. During those times, we did some limited camping and outdoors. In 1972, we moved down to Fayetteville, North Carolina, where my husband was a consulting surgeon at the Fayetteville VA Hospital (1972 to 1977). Here, we also did some outdoor camping while pitching a tent. While we were in Boston (because of the long winters), we learned skiing.

Our son was only three years old when we came to Fayetteville. While at Davidson College in North Carolina, he signed up to join a week-long trip in Colorado, arranged by the Colorado Outward Bound program with his classmate and paid with upfront money. Unfortunately, a severe flu prevented him from joining his group and his prepaid money was non-refundable, but renewable in the future. Because of this, we decided to join him on the next trip. Also, we thought it would be fun.

With such limited information and experience, we registered to be with my son. We flew from Fayetteville to Denver, Colorado, with the needed gears, rented a car, and drove around different natural parks (Rocky Mountains, Zion, Bryce Canyon, Arches) of Colorado and Utah. Then, we arrived at the assigned motel in Salt Lake City, Utah, where the rest of the group also arrived for the journey the next day.

We drove miles and miles east in the true wilderness by bus, along vast greeneries without any human habitations -- only deers and other few wild animals. We arrived late afternoon in the west bank of the Green River, near the town of Vernal, Utah where we left our bus and watched the beautiful sunset of the West. There, the Green River meets the other tributaries to form the Colorado River downstream.

We descended from the bus, all 22 people - from unknown and different families - with our gears. We were asked to form a big circle on the ground and hold each others' hand. They gave us tips on how to remember each others' names. This group consisted of 18 participants from different parts of the country. They were a mixed group such as:

- A socialite from New York and her daughter from Paris
- A Colorado judge with two children
- A cross-country skier
- A Kansas barber with children
- A policeman with his son

One of my husbands captains was a strong young lady from Raleigh. On the ground, they taught us how to pitch tents, inflate or deflate these rubber boats, how to dispose of food residue in accordance with not disturbing nature. They also separated us in three different boats to prevent a total family disaster if the boat overturned in the rapids. Also, the captains from the teams must be able to assess each rapid from the banks to determine how to get around the rapids.

For the first two days, the rapids were not too bad. We stopped before sundown, pitched our tent on the narrow river banks, cooked our food, and gathered around the campfire. On the third day, we had to go southwards and stopped in the middle of the day for rock climbing on one side of the mountain, which was difficult but with the help of a rope and encouragement, I did it. The policeman's son dislocated his left shoulder while climbing the wilderness. Thanks to my husband, who was the only doctor there, he put the patient in a lying head down position. My husband put his left heel in the son's armpit and reduced the dislocation and immobilized the son's arm in a sling. He was later airlifted to a local hospital with tears in his eyes for not completing the course he so earnestly desired.

Then, we went to the other side of the riverbank and slowly with quite a bit of effort we climbed the hill to a ridge incline, where a thick rope was tied to a stone for rappelling down about 300 feet. Most of the participants, one by one, went down, leaving my husband, myself and the trainer. Then, my husband went down with a sad smile. I was the last person standing. When I came close to the ridge, I was frozen in fear from the height I would have to descend. One time, I thought of walking back down the same path which breathlessly came up. I was praying to God intensely for the strength and courage, and I then started descending as instructed. At about 30 feet down from the top and the instructor no longer visible, my bandana got stuck to the rappelling rope, and I was hanging there with no visible help. At that moment, I became calm when the danger arrived, and after a while, I was able to free the bandana. I then came down to earth with applause with others, and to the relief of my son and husband. I kept saying to myself, “I did it! I did it!”

For the next two days, the rafting was somewhat rigorous, but we understood the sport by that time. As we went down south on the river, we admired the beauties of this Grand Canyon, the cave painting outside called petroglyphs, and the beautiful eagles flying out of the blue sky.

In the end, we had not seen our own faces in the mirror in the last week. But, we became emotionally attached to the team as one family. What an accomplishment for me, the city girl from Calcutta, and the confidence in me it embedded for the rest of my life. I can do it! I can do it!

The Spiritual Dimension

by Rob

I believe there is a spiritual dimension to reality. I can't prove it; however, people who believe reality is made up exclusively of what is measurable and concrete cannot prove their position either. The spiritual dimension is dynamic, thus experiments may not have repeatable results, and it takes into account an infinite number of circumstances so conditions cannot be controlled for scientific testing. Whether or not you believe there is a spiritual dimension is a choice.

I've been exploring the spiritual dimension for decades. I began with an interest in Taoism. Some may look at other eastern religions, for example Buddhism. Some explore pre-Christian European religions, such as Wicca. I'm told the Nazis in Germany were especially intrigued by Teutonic mythology. Still others may focus on science fiction, or fictional books and movies, which in one way or another make magic part of the plot.

Taoism didn't work for me. I was exploring the spiritual dimension out of personal need; I did not have an adequate understanding of the world or reality. I had grown up in a dysfunctional family, where I did not learn about healthy, well-adjusted human relationships, nor did I develop a sense of self-worth or self-identity. Because I did not trust my parents to have my best interests at heart, I did not trust what they told me and I grew up without sound values or principles. I absorbed the values of the society offered by the advertising industry and the entertainment industry. As a result, I had a lot of garbage in my mind. I was really ignorant.

I began to explore Christianity because, with its Jewish roots, Christianity has been developing insight into the spiritual dimension for 4000 years. At first I did not find what I needed; Sunday morning sermons were about how to be nice to people or how to feel good about yourself, things which did not directly meet my need for identity, purpose, values, and a confident understanding or reality. Then, I became involved with people who believed in and actively sought the presence of the Holy Spirit, and who did their best to understand the original texts of the church, the New Testament.

One evening at home I was studying and thinking, and I came to the point where I prayed or really just said, "OK God, if you are real, prove it." Immediately, in my mind

a phrase formed, which was entirely separate from my train of thought up to that point, “My beloved son, in whom I am well-pleased.” This was a quote from the New Testament describing events surrounding Jesus’ baptism. In my context, that evening, the words expressed to me God was communicating to me by His Spirit, that God fully accepted me and even loved me, just as I am, and my identity and purpose was wrapped up in my relationship with Him.

At that point I was a believer. Since then I have felt the leading of the Holy Spirit countless times, on issues large and small, usually before I can finish forming the question in my mind. The Spirit does not tell me how to become rich or powerful, or to fulfill any self-serving wish list. It does “speak” about things that matter personally. The Spirit “speaks” very softly; it takes training and practice to “hear”. The Spirit may speak with words, images, or feelings. Knowledge of the Bible helps to “hear”.

The beliefs and worldview, which come from a relationship with God have met the needs, which caused me to begin searching. My identity is that of a child of God, loved and accepted. My purpose is to live the way God wants me to and to learn more and more what God’s will is. My values are those taught in the New Testament such as seeking peace, having good will toward others, speaking the truth in love, and so on. I am still learning about reality, but I can engage challenging issues in my life and relationships with confidence that God is with me and the Spirit leads me.

For me Christianity is a very spiritual faith, where a major goal is to get closer and hear better from my heavenly Father.

My Bond with America

by Ramesh

The most far-reaching event in my life took place when a high school friend in Kolkata took me to the American library. It had fabulous books you could borrow, glossy US magazines one could find nowhere else, and movies showing scenic national parks and university grounds, all for no charge! Membership there for just a few months taught me how to write better English for most situations and get near top grades in the language at school. The bond with American things that was formed during high school years lasted a lifetime. Walls of my home were filled with Readers Digest magazines and Condensed Books, issues of National Geographic, and Saturday Evening Post.

Years went by, which included efforts to find business opportunities in the US and Canada. So, when a business trip to Belgium was planned in 1974, a month long US trip was added. My admiration for how comfortably even the not-so-rich strata of society in America lived went up, and, just 2 years later, I landed in New York, as the paying guest of a very cordial Patel family, in an effort to expand my business. Next October, I saw my wife and children land at JFK airport. These 44 years have been richly rewarding for everyone in the family. Rarely has another moment like the entry to the USIS (United States Information Services Library) that day in early fifties shaped my life.

Journey of Life

by Usha

My parents decided to move to Nairobi, a beautiful city in East Africa. I was born in that city. I studied in a girls school and finished high school. Since there were no good colleges in Nairobi, my dad decided to send me to Bombay, India for further studies. This was the best thing that happened to me. In Bombay, I was alone doing everything by myself. I stayed at my uncle's home for sometime and then I had to look for a dorm nearby my college. In the beginning, for several months, I had to stay in an orphanage. Many nights, I would just cry and miss my parents, my siblings, and my friends a lot. But then I got an admission in a nice hostel. I could see the ocean from my hostel room window. I could look at the waves at sunrise and sunset. I made many friends during my four years. Even now, we often get together and have fun. These four years taught me many things like planning because there was no TV, phones, or internet.

I faced many difficulties but accomplished the task that was to study and be successful. The best thing was my fiancé, who lived in Calcutta, would come often to see me. The stay in Bombay made me strong and confident. When I think about those four years, I realize these were the best years of my life because after that I was totally ready for my future life.

My Father and I

by Debi

As I look at my success in this country, with a successful and kind son, loving wife, caring daughter in law, and my two beloved grandchildren, I am thankful. But I often think of my father too. My father was born in 1892 and I was born to him as the 8th child. Even then we bonded so well that he truly became “My friend, philosopher, and guide" from childhood and on. He was a very proud man with an intense feeling for heritage. Rather unknowingly, I followed that trend. My son and grandchildren both carry part of his name. His favorite niece compared him to a Prince. He was an outdoor man, avid hunter, and accomplished judge.

But first before I talk about my memory, a bit of history about my and my father’s ancestors. His namesake can be traced by a thousand years to the Hhatriyas who were fighters and landowners that was bestowed upon them by the Mogul King in recognition of valor and support. His ancestors protested against these false occupations by British admistantors and were black listed for the next 180 years of British years. But alas, it survived. On his maternal side, his great grandfather was village born. He was a handsome young man who, by his courage, truthfulness and good education, became judicial magistrate Chief of police. He performed his very difficult jobs so well and bravely that he became one of the most trusted offices of the then British Administration of India.

My father carried out the formidable task from the teenage years, by managing the spread out properties as the most trusted dectant of the extended family. This was not an easy job to carry out while completing his education. He received a bachelorette in English and Law and year of Journalism at London school under famous professor Sir Harold Lasky. On return to India, he anchored himself with the family in the town of Chinsurah located in Bengal on the bank of the Ganges river. There he built a beautiful house of his own design matching the architect of Occident/Orient. I was the first child who was born and raised there. I loved it there because it was a beautiful district and town by a river with many open play fields and historical buildings with Dutch Architecture. My father practiced law in that district and divisional court and was highly respected by English judges. The discussion at home that came from my father being a lawyer and defending the criminals added to my further interest in medicine.

However once I grew up, I had to leave for the USA for my assigned medical training. For the next 26 months, we were separated by worlds apart. Our only communication was through a blue envelope (postal aerogramme letter) on a monthly basis. I kept many of his letters because he was a prolific writer. As much as I wanted to, due to my intersense surgical training and very meager salary, I was not able to visit him. There were no other means of communications such as telephone, fax, cell phone, or internet service that were available to both of us at that time.

Amidst many correspondence, following are the few lines I would like to mention;
He often addressed me as “Dearest Debji- Apple of my eye and then always ended with his blessing and blessing from God which kept up my morale. Earlier he wrote on his 75th birthday:
“74 years have gone by like bubbles in the ocean of the year. And today is my 75th birthday. Those who are near and dear to me have gathered here in the heartfelt job to wish me happy return of the day. But before I conclude- I see around me a new generation springing up, some of them very strong and resolute who will bring glory to the house… May thus new band live long and fulfill my heart's desire.”

Then the communication stopped. Then another blue aerogramme letter came and a few lines wrote that he died. That was such a bolt from the blue that I never fully recovered. I have not yet accepted his death, even half a century letter. His invisible soul guides me forever, he was a great man. There is an old Sanskirit hymn translated in English to “Father is heaven, father in religion, worship father in heaven.”

So to answer the question, it was not a memory that impacted my life that most but a person that impacted my life the most: My father.