

Sincerity:
An Anthology of
My Parents' Writings

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Compiled by
Kaitlyn Lansing

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Sincerity: An Anthology of My Parents' Writings

To Anita and Radomir, my mother and father, who each had a writer's soul



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My Mother's Writings (1989-1991)

TROUBLE IN MOUSE TOWN

[11/9/1989]

It was the biggest, darkest, scariest storm cloud any mouse in Mouse Town had ever seen. And it was heading this way.

A group of mice gossiping in the town square stopped talking and stood very still when they caught sight of it. Others moved toward City Hall, their tails twitching, their noses sniffing at the heavy air. Joey shivered as she watched the storm growing bigger and bigger. She turned to listen as the mayor of Mouse Town came running up with a huge bullhorn clasped between his paws.

"All you Mouse Town folk, get back to your houses. Hide in your basements. Looks like we're in for quite a tornado."

No one had to be told twice. Already mice were scattering, running, grabbing kids and pets and bicycles. But Joey couldn't resist one last look. She'd never seen a tornado before. In a funny way, it was quite pretty. Kind of shiny and tall, taller than any mouse's house. And when the sun came out from behind the clouds, it glinted something fierce. But that noise. Oh, what an awful noise it made. Like a broken motor, or worse, a ferociously purring cat.

Joey's momma called her name and she realized that she was still standing in the middle of the street—alone. Quickly she scurried home, diving head first down the hole in the floor to the basement. Her sister and brother were already there, curled up against their momma, their tails wrapped around their legs, their eyes tightly shut.

But now that Joey was safe in the basement, she didn't want to miss anything. She grabbed a box and pushed it up against the wall where there was a little worm hole. If she stood on the box and stuck her snout far into the hole and out, she could see a great deal of the town...and the tornado.

The tornado was much closer now. She could see it churning up dust, leaving a path of scattered leaves and broken branches. Flower petals were thrown into the sky and gently fell to earth. Even the insects were knocked off course. One bee was so dizzy he flew straight into a barn door. Another fell off a daisy and landed on his stinger. The tornado kept right on going.

I wonder what tornados are made of? Joey thought. The closer this one got, the more astounding it looked. It reminded her of a giant helicopter turned on its side. A graceful, powerful machine. And it was coming fast. It was almost to Carleton Pond.

"Come away from there, Joey," her momma said. But Joey couldn't be drawn away from that hole or the sight of the tornado heading into the water. *Splash...woosh...grrr...wbrrrr.* The calm peaceful pond was now a rolling rapids. The water was being churned up, thrown high into the sky. When it fell back it sprayed the mayor's house and the town hall. Miss Clara's clothes, hanging

out on the line, were soaking wet. And the main street was starting to flood. A turtle crawled out of the pond, shaking its head, scrambling up the bank as fast as it could go. And a tiny school of minnows flopped around on the tiles of Mr. Moody's roof, trying to get back into the water where they belonged.

Joey shook her head in wonder. The tornado had come out of the pond and was twirling through the center of town. Every time it came to a power line, the line would be pulled tight and then SNAP, it would break and be sucked into the center of the tornado. As the tornado moved through the park, it cut through the grass just like a lawn mower.

Joey hoped the tornado would pass by the library. Mr. Dillon, the librarian, would be mighty upset if his books were damaged. And how about Clara's bake shop. Oops! Too late. The tornado went around the library and right through the bake shop. A white cloud of flour filled the air, so thick you could barely see a thing. It hung for a moment in the sky. And when it finally fell away, Joey noticed something interesting. The tornado hadn't come out the other side of the shop. In fact, it seemed to be slowing down. The loud purr had become a soft, gentle hum.

Joey wished she could get a closer look. There was something very funny going on in that bake shop. Turning around, she peeked at her mother. Momma was busy comforting the others, so Joey sneaked upstairs...and out the door. A few other townspeople had come out to the street too, anxious to see what was going on. Slowly, carefully they approached Clara's bake shop. Half the tornado was inside the store, the other half reached high into the sky. It was enormous.

"Stand back, folks. I'll check this out," said the fire chief, as he disappeared into the building. There was a moment of silence.

Then came a shout. "Mayor, come on in here," yelled the fire chief.

The Mayor didn't look like he really wanted to go into the building with the tornado, but he did. And then he was back, and he was beaming.

"Folks," he said. "That little storm-maker there isn't a tornado."

"It's not?" asked one astonished mouse.

"No," he replied.

"Then what is it?"

"It's an eggbeater!"

"An EGGBEATER?!!!"

"It appears to be stuck in Clara's blueberry muffin mix. Looks like it's beaten up enough dough for about five hundred muffins or so."

Well, it didn't take long for *that* news to travel through Mouse Town. And soon, everyone was at Clara's bakeshop. Peering at the giant eggbeater. Laughing over how scared they all were. And waiting, quite patiently, for Clara to bake those blueberry muffins.

Today, the eggbeater has a special place of honor in the park, where the kids climb on it, slide down it, and remember the day the runaway eggbeater whirled into town.

THE END

THE LONELY LETTER

[~1990]

As everyone knows, there are twenty-six letters in the alphabet. Tall letters and skinny letters, short letters and fat letters. But there is only one lonely letter—the letter X. X spends weeks and sometimes months waiting to be used. Hoping and praying that someone will say Xebec or Xenia or Xerography.

X isn't like the letter A, which is seen in all the best places and is never out of work. X has a hard time finding a job. He hangs around taxi stands. He plays the xylophone in out-of-the-way cafes. He spends all year waiting for Xmas to come so he can find his way into your Xmas card.

Sometimes, he gets really sad, X wonders how it would feel to ride around in the longest words, like automobile or rhinoceros...or to be a real word all by himself.

Yes, X is truly a lonely letter. But one special X had a plan. *Maybe, he thought, if I try really hard, I can change myself into a better letter. An E or an F or an S. Why, I might even become an A.*

So he bent and he twisted and slowly he shaped himself into an A. Well, almost an A. But then he discovered that he couldn't move around very easily. He made a very Awkward A. And to tell you the truth, being an A was Awfully hard work. So he relaxed.

Perhaps he thought, I was meant to be an S. S was a Speedy letter, a Stunning letter with all those Slim and Sleek curves. Slowly X curved his Straight X body into an S. He Sucked in a breath. Hold it. There, he thought, admiring himself in the mirror, I make a Super Spectacular S. Except for one Small problem. He couldn't hold his breath for much longer. SSSSSsssss. He let go and the breath went out of him with such force that he Sailed around the room like a leaky balloon.

It will never do for me to be an S, he decided. How about an H? H was a very Handsome letter. Quickly, he bent and twisted and twisted some more (this was a Hard one) and suddenly he was an H. It made him Happy to be an H. It made him want to yell Hip Hip Hooray! *This is what I want to be,* he thought. But then a friend came along and asked for his Help. You see, as well as being Handsome, H is a very Helpful letter. But the X was so busy trying to Hold himself together, that he didn't have a Helping Hand to lend his friend. It made X sad to be an H.

I'm just not picking the right letter, he thought. Out of all the letters in this big beautiful alphabet, one letter has to be right for me. How about an F? F is the Fastest letter. F is the Funniest letter. F, X decided, was a Fantastic letter to be. Carefully, X pulled and pushed and wrapped himself into an F. Ahhh, that Felt Fine. Until he started to move. Hop, hop, hop on one leg. He wasn't going very Fast, but he did look kind of Funny. Hop, hop, hop. And then crash! The X shaped like an F Fell right over. Auggh! He was back to being an X again, but now he was black and blue with an Xtra large headache.

It's no use, he thought. *I can't be something I'm not.*

Maybe becoming a different letter wasn't the answer. Maybe there was something else he could do. Ah Hah! He had another idea. What if he visited the local Xerox machine? Surely he could make more of himself there. Then he'd have someone to talk to and he wouldn't be lonely anymore.

But after he hopped down from the machine, he only found himself surrounded by a lot of copies...who didn't have much to say.

Bored and lonely, X decided it was time to go off on his own. Away from paper and pens and people who wouldn't say X-words, he might find peace. He stayed away for a whole month. He looked at the trees and the flowers and the birds and the bees. He listened to the water

and watched the clouds. And he found peace. But he was still lonely.

Then he got another idea, a brilliant idea. Maybe if he could see deep down inside himself, he could come up with the answer to his problem. So he X-rayed himself! He sat for a long time, eXamining the X-ray. He turned it this way and that. He got out a magnifying glass and peered even closer... And he discovered a wonderful thing. He was actually Xtraordinary! Full of uneXpressed thoughts and ideas and feelings. All of a sudden, it was Xciting to be an X. And from that day on, the X knew he would never really be lonely again. When he looked inside, he found an Xtra special friend...himself.

THE END

LOCO COOKIE DOUGH

[~1990]

Sara liked lots of things: ice cream and cats, picture books and pizza. She even liked her brother Sam...sometimes. But more than anything, Sara liked cookies. All kinds of cookies. Chocolate chip and oatmeal cookies, vanilla wafers and lemon drops, strawberry dips and peanutfudge swirls.

Her mom usually kept the cookie jar brimming with Sara's favorites. But today when Sara climbed up to have a look, the jar was empty. No cookies left at all. Only crumbs.

Sara looked around. Her mom and dad were outside in the garden. Sam was at a friend's house. So Sara pulled a chair up to the kitchen counter and brought out a big bowl. She reached into the cupboard and began pulling down canisters, boxes, and bags. Sara was going to bake her very own cookies.

Flour flew as she poured it into the bowl. She added a cup of sugar, a pinch of salt, and a handful of all the other ingredients. Then, out of the corner of her eye Sara spotted one more can...way in the back of the cupboard. It was red and white and shiny with the letters B A K I N G P O W D E R on it. *I'll only use a little*, Sara said to herself. But when she tilted the can, the powder poured out in a stream.

Now the stuff in the bowl looked more like white sand than cookie dough, so Sara stirred in a cup of water. She gave it a pat. It felt like dough. She leaned down. It smelled like dough. Sara grinned. These were going to be the best cookies ever!

But when Sara climbed down off the chair to find a baking pan, a funny thing happened. As she was bending down to look in the bottom cupboard, the dough in the bowl began to wiggle. Just a little.

Sara came out from the cupboard with her ponytail all out of whack and her apron twisted. She put the pan down on the counter and was about to put her apron twisted. She put the pan down on the counter and was about to put her hand in the dough when it did it again... wiggle...and then bubble...and then bump! Sara jumped and snatched her hand away. She'd never seen dough do that before. She waited and watched but when nothing else happened, she reached her hand into the bowl and pulled out a fistful.

Rolling it between her hands, she made little dough balls like she'd seen her mom do, and soon they covered the pan. But when she turned away to find a pan for a second pan, the dough began to wiggle...and bubble...and bump...and burp! And without any warning, the dough picked itself up off the cookie sheet and bounced...off walls, off the ceiling, off the refrigerator.

Sara pulled her head out of the cupboard just in time to see a piece of cookie dough bounce high into the cabinet near her head.

As for the dough in the bowl, it had started peeping over the rim, a mushy ball of slippery, stretchy, sloppy dough. Sara watched in amazement as it grew. Bigger and bigger and bigger, and all the while making those strange noises. *Bubble...bump...burp! Bubble...bump...BURP!*

Soon the dough in the bowl had overflowed onto the counter and then onto the floor. And still there was cookie dough smacking into counters, bouncing off chairs. What in the world would Sara's parents say? *How was Sara going to stop the crazy cookie dough?*

Maybe she could flatten it with a rolling pin. She pulled one out of the drawer and holding the pan in one hand like a shield and the rolling pin as a sword, she marched toward the monster dough. First she tried to roll the dough that had seeped onto the floor. But the dough sprang right back, bigger than ever. She rolled harder, and the dough squished out in all directions, but it didn't get any flatter or any smaller or any quieter. *Bubble...bump...burp!*

What if she tried to throw it away, Sara wondered. She threw down the rolling pin and grabbed hold of the garbage can. Then she scooped up an armful of squishy dough and stuffed it in the pail. But the cookie dough rumbled and went *bubble...bump...burp!*

Now there was dough everywhere and Sara started backing toward the door. The cookie dough blocked her way! Sara was stuck. Sara was scared. There was no way out of this sea of uncooked cookie dough, unless...she could reach the window. Carefully Sara placed her foot on a mound of dough, then on another higher mound, until she had climbed as high as the window. *Oomph*, she pushed, but the window wouldn't budge. "Help!" yelled Sara.

Outside, Sara's parents looked up from their gardening and saw Sara, pressed up against the window, surrounded by clouds of billowy dough. They dropped their hoses and rakes and ran for the house. Dad opened the window with a pop and out shot Sara, followed by an avalanche of dough. It was leaking out onto the lawn. It was winding its way up into the attic. And still it was going *bubble...bump...burp!*

Sara's mom ran for the neighbors. She called the fire department, she called the police, and then she called the bakery. Sirens screamed and horns blared and soon the house was surrounded. The dough was surrounded. But by now it was hanging from the trees and oozing out of the chimney. It was everywhere.

The firemen tried chopping it down and into little pieces with their shiny axes, but the axes just sunk deep into the dough. The policemen tried arresting it, but it wouldn't listen. It just went *bubble...bump...burp!*

Then the baker arrived and everyone cleared a path for him. Here was an expert on cookie dough. He would know what to do. "Who cooked up this runaway dough?" the baker asked, his moustache twitching, his tall white hat leaning drunkenly to one side. Sara raised her hand timidly. "Do you know what you've done?" he asked. Sara shook her head.

"You've mixed up a batch of LOCO COOKIE DOUGH. It isn't easy. It hardly ever happens. But when your baking powder is three and a half years old and twice as light as all the other ingredients combined, what can you expect?" Sara looked at the baker with wide eyes.

"Don't you see," he explained, "when the oven reached 352 degrees and the temperature outside reached 69, your cookie dough had nowhere to go but up!" The baker paused. "It's uncommon. It's outlandish, but it's also—" he stopped to scoop some up on his fingers and place it in his mouth—"DELICIOUS!"

By now the dough had oozed into the street. It was sticking up cars and stopping traffic. "Not to worry," he said, "we'll have it stopped in a jiffy."

"But how?" asked Sara.

"We have to add more flour, more sugar, more—"

"More?" asked Sara in amazement.

"Yes. It's the only way to balance out the baking powder. We can't take the baking powder OUT so we have to put more of everything else IN." He ran to the back of his truck and pulled out a bunch of hoses. Each one was connected to a canister. "Stand back," he cried as [he] turned them on full force and grains of white powder filled the air. As it hit the loco cookie dough, the dough began to slow down. Instead of bubbling and bouncing, it jogged, then crawled. Until it finally stopped (except for an occasional burp). "Yeah!" yelled the policemen and the firemen. "Yeah!" yelled Sara.

But there was still more work to be done. The baker climbed back into his truck. There was a rumble and a clang and the sound of a motor revving. Then the back doors of the truck flew open and the baker came riding out on a giant vacuum cleaner. Up and down the lawn he went, sucking up the cookie dough. He rode up one side of the house and down the other. He even had a special gizmo to pull the cookie dough off the trees.

And when he had finished, he unhooked the bag of dough from the side of the vacuum cleaner and motioned Sara to follow him. Together they climbed into the truck, and with Sara's help the baker squeezed the pastry bag until the cookie dough plopped out onto the baking pans. Then with a flourish, the baker swept all thirty-one pans into the oven. And soon, the smell of gently baking cookies wafted out into the yard.

For the rest of the afternoon, Sara gave out cookies by the handful. She gave some to the firemen, the policemen, the neighbors. She gave some to the people who'd been stuck in their cars, to her parents, and to her brother Sam when he came home. And when everyone had eaten as many cookies as their stomachs could hold, she filled the cookie jar with cookies. She filled the cupboards with cookies. She even filled her closet with cookies. There were enough cookies to last until Christmas. It was, Sara thought, as she munched on a freshly baked cookie, a delicious dream come true.

THE END

I DON'T DRINK MILK

[~1990]

Once there was a boy named Mike. He was a very agreeable little boy. He helped his mom carry the groceries. He didn't run when his grandma tried to kiss him. He even let his little sister tag along when he went out to play. But when it came to milk, Mike said NO.

I'll drink pink lemonade or orange juice by the ton.
Make me sip from a straw in the heat of the sun.
Brew up some tea or the strongest of soups.
Whip up a shake out of strawberry roots.
Give me a witches brew of coconuts and chives,
but milk, never milk. It gives me the hives!

But because Mike was still a little boy, people were always offering him milk. Milk with cookies. Milk with cake. Milk with dinner. Milk with lunch. Milk to build strong bones and teeth. Milk because... Oh, it went on and on. Mike just shook his head and said "NO."

I'd rather drink green slimy soup or cola in a jar.
Even medicinal remedies are tastier by far.
Hand me vats of apple cider.
Slip me juice from ground-up spiders.
Give me water from the sea.
But milk, never milk. It's not my cup of tea!

"Look," said Mike's dad. "Your sister likes milk." But Mike didn't care. His sister also ate dirt. "How about if we make it chocolate milk?" his mother asked. But as far as Mike was concerned, milk was the same whether it was white or it was brown. Mike just shook his head and said "NO."

I'll drink the nectar from flowers or weeds
Give me the juice of crushed sunflower seeds
Pour me a tall icy tropical drink
Tell me to guzzle a seltzer that stinks
Offer me the sweat of an old fuzzy goat.
But milk, never milk. It sticks in my throat!

Then one day, Mike made a remarkable discovery. He learned that butter comes from milk. Ice cream comes from milk. Milk chocolate comes from milk. Whip cream comes from milk. Yogurt comes from milk. Cheese comes from milk. And if all those things come from milk, milk must not be so bad after all. So the next time his mom asked him if he wanted milk, he shook his head and said "YES!" And he's been glad ever since.

THE END

THE GOOD VOLCANO

[~1990]

In the deep blue ocean of the Pacific, far, far away from you and me, there lies a very beautiful island called Bahoo.

On Bahoo, the sun shines every day but Monday...when sparkling raindrops fall and a rainbow stretches across the island.

On Bahoo, every tree is green and leafy and great for climbing...and every other tree has its very own tree house.

On Bahoo, the flowers bloom all year round...and the pink and red ones taste like sugar and cinnamon.

But the most remarkable thing about Bahoo is its volcano. Each day when the sun peeks over the horizon, the volcano spouts the most wondrous and amazing delights: rivers of raspberry jam, billowing clouds of whipped cream, pink lemonade one day and hot butterscotch the next.

The villagers of Bahoo, the Bahooians, gather along its streams. They sip and they slurp until they can't sip any more. Then they fill their canteens with fresh coconut milk. They dip their ice cream under waterfalls of chocolate syrup and marshmallow cream. They fish for chocolate chips in craters filled to overflowing. And they bob for hard candies in the small pools around the volcano's edge.

Every day for the past one hundred and twenty two years the Bahooians have stood, man, woman, and child, under that volcano, waiting for the volcano's next gift. And the volcano has given them fizzy colas with ice flows, orange juice without seeds, and clear, cold, sparkling water.

The first time the Bahooians saw the magnificent volcano—back in your great-great grandparents' time—they gasped at its beauty. It was big, bigger than anything they had ever seen. And when it spouted water, the villagers were overjoyed. They sang and danced and gave thanks to the volcano. The next day, when it gave them water *and* honey, they were astonished. They wrote poems to the great volcano. They decorated the village with pictures of their marvelous new friend.

Each time the volcano gave them another surprise, they gave thanks. Until one day one of the old Bahooians decided that he was tired of all this thank you-for-this, thank you-for-that business. "Why not give thanks once a week?" he asked. So while the volcano provided new surprises each day, the Bahooians gave thanks once a week.

Well, it wasn't long before the Bahooians were so busy filling their buckets and canning their jams that they didn't have time to stop even once a week. That's when they decided to say thank you one day a year. And they declared August 10 Bahoo Volcano Day. On that day, the Bahooians had a huge parade that went from the very bottom of the island to the top of the volcano. They dressed up and sang special songs. They laid wreaths of fresh flowers at the bottom of the volcano's deepest crater. It was a truly wonderful celebration.

Yet as the years passed, the volcano didn't seem as remarkable to the Bahooians, and fewer and fewer Bahooians went to the celebration. Oh, they had schoolwork to do, or dishes to wash, or they just didn't feel like standing in the hot sun. This year, when August 10 came around, only a handful of Bahooians marched up the side of the volcano. Only one Bahooian sang. And no Bahooian laid wreaths of flowers in the deepest crater. It was as if the village had forgotten.

Now some say volcanos have no feelings, but the volcano on Bahoo does. And when the Bahooians missed Bahoo Volcano Day, the volcano was very, very sad. He even cried a few salty tears. But no one noticed because they flowed right into the saltwater taffy.

How could they forget? he wondered. They still gathered around him every morning. They still came to his craters and pools. They still fished in his streams. As he thought about it, he stopped feeling sad, and he started feeling mad. He grumbled...and the island shook.

What was that? the villagers wondered. They looked around. They looked at each other. But when it stopped a few minutes later, they all went back to their tasks.

They don't care about me, the volcano thought, feeling sad once more.

The next morning when the sun came up, the volcano erupted with orange juice and fizzy cola. But the orange juice had seeds and the cola had no fizz. *Whatever's the matter?* wondered the Bahooians. But they didn't think about it long, only picked the seeds out of the orange juice, tipped out the unfizzy cola and got on with their day.

The next morning when the sun came up, the volcano erupted with hot chocolate and whipped cream. But the chocolate was cold and the whipped cream was flat. "What's wrong with that silly volcano?" the Bahooians asked. "Can't he get anything right?"

The volcano couldn't believe what he was hearing. They didn't appreciate him at all. He grumbled...and the island shook.

The Bahooians stood very still. They were afraid. What could that rumbling mean? "Maybe," said a Bahooian doctor, "the volcano is sick."

"Ah hah," the other Bahooians said. "Can you fix him up?" they asked.

"We shall see," the doctor said, and he packed his medical bag and started up the volcano's side.

He took out his stethoscope and pressed it against the lip of the volcano. *Grumble...grrr...grumble...grrr,* he heard. *Must be a tummy ache,* he thought. From his black bag, he pulled out a tonic for tummies and he poured it into the crater. "That should do it," he said with a satisfied smile.

Now, the volcano didn't have a tummy ache. His pain was in his heart. So the medicine only made him feel sad again. The grumbling stopped, but the next morning when the sun came up and the volcano erupted there was only a trickle of raspberry jam. Not enough to make more than one peanut butter and jelly sandwich. And when the coconut milk came out, it was still in the coconuts!

This was getting serious, the Bahooians thought, as they dodged coconuts falling right and left. "Maybe we should plug it up," one Bahooian cried. "It's getting dangerous!"

When he heard that, the volcano got so mad he thought he would explode. Plug him up, would they. He held his breath and gave a huge grumble, and the island shook furiously. The trees bent, the flowers wilted, and the Bahooians ran for cover.

When the island finally stopped shaking, the Bahooians gathered under a huge palm tree for an emergency meeting.

"We must do something about the volcano," the village leader said. "But what?"

The Bahooians sat. The Bahooians thought.

"Maybe," said one Bahooian, "the volcano is just getting old. And we could fix it by filling in the cracks."

So the next morning, a bunch of Bahooians mixed up a batch of quick-drying cement. Up and down the volcano they went, filling in every last crack. But all the volcano did was give a mighty rumble and new cracks appeared.

They're trying to fill me in! thought the volcano. *They want to get rid of me.* The volcano got very angry. *Why, I could rumble and grumble and sink this whole island.* But he knew he couldn't do

that to the Bahooians—he loved them, even if they didn't care about him anymore. So the poor volcano simply gave up.

A week went by and the Bahooians started getting worried. At first they just missed the hot butterscotch and honey. But as the days passed, they realized how much they missed the volcano himself. He was there for them every day, rain or shine, a great big beautiful mountain looking down on them, filling their lives with good cheer.

Once more the village leader gathered the Bahooians together.

"I'm afraid, my friends, that the Bahoo Volcano is dying."

"Oh, no," the villagers cried.

"There must be something we can do," they said.

But the village chief shook his head sadly. All that was left was for the Bahooians to say good-bye to their special friend. On the next rainy Monday, they gathered heaps of flowers. They made wreaths. They crushed petals to sprinkle along the path up the volcano. And then, before they started climbing, they linked hands, forming a ring around the base of the volcano, and gave a great big hug.

That's all I ever wanted, the volcano thought as he looked down at the Bahooians. And suddenly he felt all warm inside.

And when they laid the wreaths in his craters and sprinkled petals along his path, he beamed. Fountains of white chocolate shot up all over the island. The Bahooians gasped...and then they let out a cheer. Their volcano was O.K. He was better than O.K. He was marvelous, the best volcano on the planet!

This was the most important day in Bahoo history. From this day on, a hug and the words THANK YOU were considered magic. And soon, every one of those Bahooians, even the smallest of them all, learned to say Thank you to anyone who gave him a helping hand. And Bahoo became the happiest island in the whole world.

THE END

THE BOY WHO YELLED HIMSELF HORSE

[~1990]

There once was a little boy...a very ordinary little boy, named Bill. He was not very tall as I recall. About so high. With green eyes and brown hair and ears that weren't too big or too small. But when this ordinary little boy opened his mouth, something quite extraordinary came out: the biggest, loudest, noisiest yell you've ever heard.

When things didn't go Bill's way...like the time his mother wouldn't let him stay up to watch the *Terminator* and his dog ate his chocolate pudding...he yelled.

When someone said something Bill didn't like...like the time his brother said he was too small to play football and his sister asked him to set the table...Bill yelled.

When Bill didn't get exactly what he wanted...like the time his grandma made him peas when he asked for corn and Santa brought the wrong kind of snow shoes...Bill yelled. Out loud. Out long. Out strong.

Bill yelled all the time. In the morning and at night. In all kinds of places. At school. At home. In the car. In the grocery store. He even yelled in the library when the librarian said SHHHH!

When it snowed, Bill yelled so loud that an avalanche of snow buried his dog's house. In the early fall, Bill yelled so loud that the leaves fell off the trees before they turned color. In the summer, his yell made the birds fly south early, just so they could get some peace and quiet. And in the spring, the flowers stayed locked in the ground an extra ten or twelve days to escape the NOISE.

No one's ears were safe from Bill. He yelled at his mother and his father. He yelled at his neighbors. His sister. His brother. His dog. The birds. The mailman. He even yelled at strangers when they drove by his house. It made the other kids stop playing with him. It made the paper boy so angry that instead of coming over, he would climb a tree across the street and lower the newspaper into Bill's yard with a fishing rod. It made Bill's dog bark and run away or bury his head in his paws. It made Bill's father stay at his office and not come home until after Bill was asleep. It made his mother vacuum every room of the house every day. It made his brother turn up the stereo so loud the music blared. (Anyone passing Bill's house would think it was about to blow up...what with music blaring, the vacuum cleaner humming, the dog barking, and Bill yelling.)

And then one day, everything changed. Bill went for a walk. It wasn't a very silent walk. As he trudged along the sidewalk and then into the park, he yelled at a poodle, a pizza delivery boy on a bike, an old man with a cane, a cat with huge whiskers, a car that drove too fast, a little girl playing jacks, and...when he got to a stand of trees...a witch. Oh, he knew right away that she was a witch. She had a great black hat and a great black cat. She had long stringy hair and a wart on the tip of her nose. Her chin was as sharp as an axe, and her hands were gripping a long-handled broom. She was a witch all right. But Bill didn't care. He yelled, "Fly away, you old witch. It's not Halloween."

The witch looked at Bill for a long moment. Then an awfully evil grin spread across her face. It started at one ear and went straight across to the other. "Little boy, you don't have to yell," said the witch. "I hear you very clearly. V E R Y clearly."

She picked up her long tattered skirts in one hand and took a few steps closer. "Tell me," she asked, pointing one bony finger at Bill, "do you yell that way all the time?"

Bill stuck his chin out and put his hands on his hips. "Yeah. So what?"

“Most small boys know that if they yell all the time, they won’t have many friends. If they yell, they’ll make their parents sad. If they yell, they’ll get into lots of fights and never truly be happy. But you don’t seem to have learned that lesson.” She paused and gave a little giggle. “So I’m going to help you.” And with that, she whirled around twice, mumbled a few strange words, spit in her hand, and poof! Bill was no longer a little boy. He was a...let’s see. He had a tail. And a long nose. And four legs. And a mane. By gosh, Bill was a HORSE!

“Hee, hee, hee,” cackled the witch. “Hee, hee, hee.”

Bill stomped the ground with one hoof. But that made the witch laugh louder. Then Bill took a deep breath and tried to whinny. But all that came out was a tiny little neigh. Bill wasn’t just a horse, he was a *hoarse* horse!

He took another deep breath and tried again. But it was the same. Just a small sigh. A little neigh. Hardly enough noise to attract the attention of a gnat. Bill wanted to tell the witch to change him back, but he couldn’t say a word. So all he could do was watch as the witch danced and sang and kicked up her heels.

Finally she stopped and said, “Well, what are you waiting for? Run along...run along. I’m a witch, not a groom. Besides, I have witchly duties to perform.”

Bill gave an angry little neigh, then turned away and trotted home. Maybe his mother would know what to do. When Bill got to his house, he clomped up to the front door and pressed his nose against the doorbell. But when his mother answered the door, she didn’t recognize him. “Goodness,” she said. “What are you doing here?” Bill shook his mane and gave a little neigh. “Are you lost?” Bill shook his mane back and forth. “Then run along back to your stable. You don’t want to be here when my son gets home. His yelling would hurt your ears.” She patted his head and then closed the door.

Bill snuck around the house into the backyard. His sister was on the swing, trying to see how high she could go. “Neat,” she said when she saw him. “Can I have a ride?” She stopped the swing and led Bill over to a fence. Then she hopped up on top of him. Bill gave a very small neigh. “Gosh, you’re beautiful,” said his sister. She gave him a little pat.

They rode for hours...it was the most time they’d ever spent together...until Bill’s mother called his sister in for dinner. When they were both inside, Bill clomped over to one of the windows to take a look. The lights were on, the table was set with all his favorite foods, and for once the vacuum cleaner wasn’t running. Bill gave a sigh. It was so quiet and peaceful. It looked like such a nice place to live.

Bill turned and trotted across the street. The paper boy was climbing down from the tree. “Hi boy,” he said to Bill. “Take some advice from me. Don’t go across to that house over there again. A little boy with a big mouth lives there. Wow, does he yell.” The paper boy patted him. Then he fished an apple out of his pocket. “Here, have an apple, boy.”

Bill was so hungry he ate the apple in three bites. Then he walked along with the boy as he finished delivering the papers. Neighbors he didn’t even know came up to pat him on his sleek nose or rub his tummy. When the last of the papers was gone, the paper boy gave Bill a hug and said, “So long, boy.”

It was really dark now and Bill wondered where he was going to spend the night. He saw his father walking down the sidewalk, carrying his briefcase. He walked over to his father. *Clip clop, clip clop.* “Well, hello horse. What’s your name?” Bill gave a small neigh. “Kind of late for you to be outside, isn’t it?” Bill just shook his head. “Why don’t you come home with me. You can sleep in the garage...if my son’s asleep that is. When he’s awake, he yells so loud no one can sleep.”

Bill’s father led him into the garage and put a nice, cozy blanket over him.

Then he left, and Bill was alone in the dark garage. *It was so quiet,* he thought. He gave a little neigh. It was still quiet. But the neigh brought his mom to the door. Wow, maybe he’d

never really needed to yell. “How are you doing, horse?” she asked. “Would you like a bedtime snack?” She fed him a handful of oats. Then she gave him a pat and went off to bed.

It was still dark. But it didn't bother Bill. He thought about all the things that had happened to him since he became a horse. Everyone had been so nice. His mom, his dad, his sister, the paper boy, the neighbors. Then he remembered how it was when he was a boy. No one gave him a pat when he was a boy. No one told him he was beautiful or talked to him or spent time with him when he was a boy. It was nicer being a horse. *Or maybe*, thought Bill, *it was nicer being hoarse*. He gave a little sigh and a great big yawn, and drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, before anyone else was awake, Bill snuck out of the garage and trotted back to the park...back to the little clump of trees where he'd met the witch. She wasn't there. He turned around and around and then gave a soft nicker. And there she was...black hat, black cat and all.

“Have you learned your lesson, young man...or should I say young horse?” she asked with a funny little twinkle in her eye. Bill shook his head up and down so his mane flew. “Great...that didn't take as long as I thought it would. Only one night. I must be getting better at casting these spells.” The witch spit in her hand, twirled her hair, stamped her foot, and said *Achooo!*...and Bill was a...well, he had two legs, brown hair and green eyes. Bill was a BOY again!

“Thank you,” Bill said, trying out his voice. It sounded just like him...when he wasn't yelling.

“You're welcome. Now get going. I've got a million things to do...first I have to find flying frog eggs...Do you know how hard those things are to find. And I need the slimy tongue of a red sea serpent. And a hen's egg...brown of course. Then there's a...”

Bill left the witch making her grocery list and started walking home. Along the way, he said a nice “hi” to a woman on a bike, a clown juggling brightly colored baseballs, two small boys playing marbles, and a man selling peanuts. They all smiled and said hello back, except for the clown, who pulled a fourth ball out of his huge coat pocket and began juggling even faster.

When Bill got home he didn't stomp into the house, yell and slam the door. He walked into the kitchen and said hello to his mom. She felt his forehead and asked him if he was sick. “No, mom, I'm O.K. And how are you?”

“Fine, dear,” his mom said faintly. “What would you like for dinner?”

“Oh, anything would be fine,” he said walking upstairs. He went into his sister's room. “Want to play a game?” he asked. She looked at him suspiciously.

“Are you sick?” she asked.

“No,” he said, “I just thought it would be nice to do something fun together.” And they did. They played Candyland and catch.

Dinner that night was the best Bill had ever eaten—although his mom kept feeling his forehead. And when his father came home, he and Bill had a nice chat. His father even promised to come home on time from now on. From that day on, everything got better. The family began talking to each other and laughing and having fun. The house stopped being so noisy. (Although mom still ran the vacuum cleaner once in a while, his brother played loud music once in a while, the dog barked once in a while, and they all yelled once in a while.)

Bill started making friends. His dog stopped hiding from him. The paper boy taught him how to fish. His brother even let Bill play his video games.

Boy, that old witch was right, Bill thought, as he hit the control that slammed the dungeon door shut to save the beautiful princess. Being a *hoarse* horse had taught him one of the best lessons in the whole world.

THE END

*A True Story
of Love and Fear and Growing Up*
[~1990]

I learned the feel of his shoulder under my hand, the sweet curve of his smile, the strength of him, long before I knew his name. With one hand in the small of my back, he brought me in close and then swung me away. Together. Apart. He led. I followed. And each time I caught sight of our reflections in that mirror-lined dance studio, I remembered...the fear, the shame, the helplessness that once shaped my life, and I have thanks to those who coaxed me out from under my mother's wing—and out of the house I had not left for two years.

My illness has been called many things: agoraphobia, panic disorder, anxiety neurosis. They are labels for what is both devastatingly painful and a peculiar gift. It has isolated me. It has kept me prisoner. It has robbed me of years when I might have been more useful, when I might have been happy. It has also forced me to grow...as a friend, as a woman, as a human being. Fear has taught me compassion and empathy. He is teaching me trust.

That first night passes in a whirl. I am afraid...not of this man, but of the shakiness that starts in the pit of my stomach and spreads to my knees. We move to the lilting strains of the Blue Danube waltz, but my heart beats to a rhythm all its own, sometimes faintly, sometimes so strongly I'm sure that he can hear it. No matter how many times I panic, it always feels like this, like the first time...

I've signed up for six lessons. That's all I can afford. At first, he puts on his salesman's smile and dances a patter of special prices and package deals. I can't swing it. He gives up with a shrug. Very European. Suave. His name is Radomir. At first I think it's Vladimir and he's insulted. That's Russian, and after years of being force-fed Soviet propaganda, this man has just risked his life and limb to leave Czechoslovakia and everything Communist behind. Already I know we have something in common. But he has the edge: he has escaped.

I always wanted to dance. At the age of four. I was tapping away to "On the Good Ship Lollypop." At the age of eight, I was doing pliés at the bar. At the age of seventeen, I was at home, too scared to go to the prom. Now, I'm twenty-seven. I've just seen "Dirty Dancing" for the third time—sitting in an aisle seat near the exit. As Jennifer Grey leaps into Patrick Swayze's arms, I'm filled with elation. I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to dance.

My grandfather went to an Arthur Murray Dance Studio. So did my Uncle. They got taken, and so, my mother warns me, will I. "They'll slip alcohol into the punch and you won't know what you're signing. You'll be paying off those dance lessons when you're old and gray." I hear echoes of the warnings that reverberated throughout my childhood. This time I choose not to listen.

I made a bargain early on in life. I can't remember exactly when. It went like this: I will do everything you say. I will be a good girl. I will never be angry or selfish or demanding. I will be perfect. I will do you proud and in return you will take care of me always.

But then they broke their word. I was adrift on a sea of fear and they were no longer my lifeboat. Why didn't they tell me that's not how life works? Why didn't they teach me that I, and only I, can really take care of myself?

It's four months before my eighteenth birthday. College looms right around the corner, and my mother is packing to go away, leaving to visit her dying great grandmother...leaving me. With the closing of the door and the sound of the car backing out of the driveway, the terror is unleashed. It rises up and smacks me in the face, squeezing the breath from my chest, the blood

from my limbs. Don't leave me, the words scream through my brain. Help me. But I know no one can help me. They'll have to lock me away...

I feel safe in Radomir's arms. They are the arms of a man who relinquished his family to grasp freedom...the arms of a man who is as comfortable in the wheat fields as he is in the Metropolitan Opera. Above all, they are the arms of a man who is secure enough in himself to take my hand and not let go.

I can't remember a time when I wasn't afraid...of dying, of losing control, of making a fool out of myself, of failing, of being abandoned, alone, helpless and hurt. Panic is all of my fears combined. It is an explosion that takes place inside, where it doesn't show until you look into my eyes. Psychology texts describe it in breathtaking detail, but they don't tell you how it feels when the line between nightmarish fantasy and reality blurs. Each time I panic, I swear it will be the last time. The next attack will surely kill me.

Radomir calls and invites me to a dance at the studio. I say yes. On the subway I take out my bible, *Living Fear Free* by Melvin Green. It is the only book I have ever read that describes my feelings to a tee. Mel Green knows about panic the only way a person can: he's a recovered agoraphobic. Deep breathing, positive imagery, relaxation exercises—none of these helps as much as knowing that I am not alone, that I'm not the only one who has ever felt this way. It makes me brave. It gives me the breathing room I need to approach my fears logically. I start reciting the alphabet backwards until the train doors slide open.

I've always felt as if a part of me were missing. Maybe I was born without a backbone, or maybe it was just squeezed out of me along the way. Now, gradually, through word and deed, I am working to rebuild my spine. One day it will be so strong, so supple, that I will stand tall enough to be any man's equal.

I let him dip me.

Arthur Murray dance instructors are permitted to dance only two dances with a particular student. Mine breaks the rule. It is his nature. As the music switches from swing to mambo, we part and come together again. When the music stops, I stay in the curve of his arm. This, he later tells me, is what makes him think I'm interested. One halting step back and we might never have kissed in Trump Tower or necked in that foreign movie theater on Broadway. I would have walked away with a rudimentary knowledge of ballroom dancing. Instead, I walk away with a complimentary soul.

That first panic attack is followed by another and another, each one as horrible as the last. No one knows why agoraphobia strikes, whether it's a chemical imbalance, a genetic predisposition, an unhappy home, or a combination of all three. All I know is that I can't go to college. And when I panic on my way to the store and then on my way to work, I stop driving. Slowly, I relinquish more and more of my life to the fear until it seems there is no place that is safe anymore. And all the while I wonder why I am being punished, what I could have done to deserve this pain. I can't see that the attacks are coming from within, that it is my attitude, my anger, my thoughts that trigger the fear, feed the fear, until the fear finally starts feeding on me.

Not so very long ago I would have made the perfect Communist subject: passive, fearful, not given to questioning authority, adverse to travel. It has taken just three hundred and seventy eight hours of therapy to find the girl within the robot, the woman beneath the layers of self-loathing. The first time I explain this to him, he is uncomprehending. He, who yearned for freedom...to walk away, to cross borders, to hurl words of rage and hate at the government leaders and party members who wanted to control his destiny cannot fathom the internal police that terrorize me. But many months down the line, he will come face to face with my panic. So vicious, so fierce, it will almost knock *him* over the edge, because through it, he will not be able to reach me with rational words or tender kisses. He'll feel in himself my rising helplessness. He will blanch...

but he will not walk away.

He can't afford a phone. It is the dead of winter, but every night we're apart, he trudges out to the phone booth on the corner to call me. I picture the snow falling on his dark head. Ice forms on his breath as he speaks. Neither one of us has ever been so warm.

For those twenty-four months when I couldn't leave my parent's house, each day followed with an awful sameness as I grappled to understand and withstand the anxiety. The world moved—people moved, got married, changed jobs, finished school, had babies—and I stood still.

We are sitting in a coffee house on Seventh Avenue, near the N train. He is describing to me the anatomy of defection: the twenty official signatures on a piece of paper that allow him to travel to Yugoslavia. The note he leaves behind with a friend to give to his parents. The decision to smuggle out a role of film, a few of his poems, but nothing else to arouse suspicion. The transfer to a ship bound for Italy. The mad scramble on foreign ground to find a police officer who will understand his broken Italian and smattering of English. Nine months of uncertainty in a refugee camp. "I carry them in my heart," he says, when I ask him how he could have left his family and friends behind.

Why, I wonder, does this man know that no matter what life brings, he will survive, while my hold on this world seems so tenuous, so fragile? I imagine that my oxygen supply is directly linked to my mother. If I venture too far away, the line will snap, and I will suffocate.

I am on intimate terms with fear; the other thirty-six flavors of feeling are often outside my range of emotion. I can bump into anger without recognizing it. I can mistake excitement for anxiety, or mask jealousy with guilt. I am a master at avoiding the truth. It has taken me years to recognize just what I feel—and months to learn the words to express it. The first week we move in together, we are both on edge. We fight over food, toothpaste, dirty towels. We mark our territory like two spitting cats. It is a joyous time.

And then gradually, our mutual defensiveness fades. We trade toothpaste in a tube for toothpaste in a pump, and I make an important discovery: my knight *sans* armor has fears of his own. On the subway, while I am locked safely behind my newspaper, he is feeling invisible, worrying that in this city of millions he will lose his identity. I assure him that he is like no other.

My therapist sits across from me. He has never had a panic attack. I try to explain: It is not a nervous feeling like taking a test when you haven't studied or being afraid of the dark when you're at home all alone. It is doubting your own sanity. It is feeling like you're going to die, then wishing you would die so that the agony would go away. It is experiencing a dizzy separateness from your own body and waking up with the paralyzing feeling that you can't breathe. It is having a movie reel of your worst fears running swiftly, silently through your head, and you're powerless to turn off the projector.

I carry my fears to bed with us. Between the sheets. Being agoraphobic is like walking a tightrope, and every action I take is for the sole purpose of helping me keep my equilibrium. I'm always aware that one false move, toward passion or pain, could send me toppling into a black abyss. He leads. I follow...but oh so hesitantly.

Months pass, and our love ebbs and flows, ever changing but always there, and I come to a startling conclusion: There is nothing like sharing your life with someone. Here, in our apartment with our cat and our books and our music, we find freedom—and I find a safe haven from which I can continue to fight my fears. I think it should be mandatory for couples to share an apartment this size: one bedroom, a kitchen leading into a living room, a bathroom. No room for anything but communication. Not even enough space to mambo—and that's O.K., for this is only the beginning...

My Father's Writings (1999-2016)

The Land Of The Free And The Land Of The Brave?

[2/21/1999]

Bill Clinton, the Liar

President **Bill Clinton** despoiled the truth, the United State Senate killed it. Too dramatic? I don't think so. World War II did not start with Hitler's massive attack on anyone. It started with cowardly politicians who wanted to sweep an obvious looming peril under the carpet - because polls (if they were what they are today) would probably not show approval of any stronger action.

In January 1998, Bill Clinton looked us straight in the eye and told us that he did not have sexual *relations* with *that* woman. Six months later he was forced to admit--under the weight of the evidence and the growing scandal--that he indeed **did** have sexual *relations* with *that* woman. No doubt if it wasn't for the stain on that dress there would be no admission and no trial. So far it was *only* about an adultery, having adulterous sex on the job, having adulterous sex with a woman less than half his age, having an adulterous sex with a subordinate. We all know that, if this situation occurred in a business, school or in the army, the perpetrator would be out of the job no matter how consensual the sex was.

However those who chose to chuckle over the *I did not inhale* remarks decided to chuckle over this one too and are probably laughing out loud now. The president is grateful to the *chucklers* and at the same time has only contempt for them. Because *he* knows what *they* know - and he also knows that *they* will not tell that *they* know, because they have as much contempt for themselves, others and the truth as he does.

Bill did lie under oath and we all know it. But *chucklers* say that it doesn't matter because of *what he lied about*. And the rest of them say that it is his *personal* business. How would you feel if a college professor who had a reputation for having consensual affairs with his or her students were teaching your daughter or son? Would that be all right? Since when is adultery perfectly acceptable behavior for anyone - not mentioning those who are public employees and should be acting as role models?

When did it start to matter to courts what was a perjurious statement was about? Perhaps from now on we should rule that all judges and all juries in this country should consider public polls as an important part of their deliberations.

As a result of being fired, nothing terrible would have happened to President Clinton. He would have gone to his Hollywood buddies who would have offered him an extremely lucrative job and within a few years he would be a multimillionaire. He would write books about his presidency and the vast republican conspiracy, and the *chucklers* would eat it up. Nixon survived scandal--why

wouldn't Bill?

Senate, the Lawbreakers

But Bill is just a human being. That much is true. He is a lying, indecent, adulterous, and slick human being, but human nevertheless. He has his own person to protect, his legacy, his name, his pride and, therefore, he is just doing what is natural for people of his caliber. The United States Senate, however, is supposed to embody the *collective* wisdom.

We have many reasons to believe that the day Bill Clinton was acquitted should go down as a tragic day in the history of the United States of America. Fifty senators--our law-makers--whose justice was supposed to be blind made her also deaf.

All Americans with their sense of personal integrity intact felt contempt for those senators who voted to acquit. The poll does not fit—we must acquit. I think those senators did even more damage to our system of justice and deserve more contempt than O.J. Simpson's jury did.

Those fifty senators have A: been fooled; B: are trying to fool us; C: are lying, indecent, adulterous, and slick human beings. They have argued that A: the house managers did not prove their case *beyond reasonable doubt*. That is -- as we know -- complete nonsense, because this rule only applies in criminal trials, which this was not. These senators know this - they are those who are trying to fool us. B: those senators say that Bill Clinton indeed did what the managers accused him of but *it* does not rise to the level of high crimes and misdemeanors prescribed by the founding fathers as the benchmark for removing the president. These senators likely belong to the above-mentioned C category. Presuming that our founding fathers were people with personal integrity I believe that they would not only have impeached Bill Clinton but that they would have tied him up backwards on a horse's back and chased him out of the White House in shame. That leaves senators in category A: and I don't think that there are any. I mean I don't have *that* low opinion of the intellectual abilities of the members of our senate.

People, the Chucklers

The ultimate responsibility however lies with those of us in the general public who believe that the state of our bank account is more important than truth and justice; those of us who are blinded by our own partisanship (not even one democratic senator voted to impeach); and all those who told these senators in the polls that we care neither about truth nor justice. What [do] these polls tell us about our moral values? What did these 60 or 70 percent of Americans tell us about our ability to be outraged by lies, deceit, and adultery?

Supposedly the Europeans are laughing at America and its values that drove up to embark on this trial. We are too prudish, silly, laughable, they say. Were *they* laughing when the prudish, silly, laughable Americans were dying on *their* continent in *their* war? Were they laughing when those same Americans later helped *them* with American dollars to get out of a largely self-inflicted catastrophe? Are they laughing at the Americans of the Reagan Era who destroyed the European cancer of Communism? My dear European brand of *chucklers*, the values you are laughing at, are the same values which brought *us* to your aid time and time again.

Our undiminished -- and if we are to believe the polls--even increased admiration for Bill Clinton reveals two things about us. A: we are incapable of recognizing the difference between the truth and lies or B: our sense of the **value** of truth and justice has been greatly diminished.

Either of these two ingredients is sufficient to cause the internal moral decay and ultimately death of the greatness once bestowed by our forefathers upon this country. Bill Bennett, Judge Bork, and many other American intellectuals and just plain Americans are continuously issuing warnings about the grave, even mortal dangers stemming from our moral decay.

We are worried about leaving Medicare and Social Security intact for our children and

grandchildren. But if we do not find our moral compass as Americans again, if we just wallow in our comfort, if we give into [in to] the cowardice and permissiveness of the apparent majority, we will not only be unable to leave our children economic safety, we will leave them a country which will be neither brave, nor free.

Pig Slaughter

[7/6/2016]

My mother, my sister and I were in the kitchen. I was the youngest. The story told by my eldest brother has it that my father insisted that I will be the one who will keep her faithful. This was apparently early 1960 since I was born prematurely in November of that year as my mother was fighting full blown hepatitis. I was denied mother's milk for that reason. Even though four decades later in America I discovered that most likely I was born with the ailment. "You were born sick." My mother would tell me when I was a teenager. "You wouldn't drink any of the formulas" (I am convinced that under the communist regime these were awful tasting) "and I thought you are going to die." The last child, child of "love" losing weight and withering to nothing. Well, finally, desperate my mother ready to try anything to save me, went to the neighbor who, miraculously, had his own cow. This was highly unusual as most of the farms were confiscated a decade ago. Just a very few farmers survived and lived through the communist terror. Apparently this farmers' wife gave my mother some freshly squeezed milk from the cows' utter, unpasteurized, raw, but apparently the dying me thought: "Damn this ain't that bad." After days of refusing to eat anything, I began to suckle on that bottle of raw cow milk. And, ... I recovered, I grew and I became who I am. I consider myself fiercely independent. Perhaps it is because I was willing (unconsciously of course ...?) to die for my "cause" when I was 5 days old. Give me the true substance, don't deny me the truth, feed me the essence of what is the raw and unvarnished substance of our essential, existential needs. I decided to live when destiny, by chance, and my mother's perseverance along with desperation convinced me that living might just be by chance somewhat more interesting than going back to the time when I didn't exist. So I sucked and suckled the whole, raw cow milk (btw [by the way] I still buy only whole milk – organic!) from the bottle and the rubber nipple. I firmly believe now, at fifty-five years of age, that this experience made me crave the real nipple for the remainder of my life.

Meandering is style of life, writing and thought... So back to the pig. I fed him, scratched him behind the ears and ... named him. He screamed, undoubtedly knowing his faith. Yes, I say He ... because He had a name... The butcher had a tool which shot a rod into the pigs' skull [skull] upon him hitting this merciful tool with a hammer. The loud heart wrenching squeals and screams stopped. I knew it is my time to enter the stage. Ferentz now being dead, I no longer feared and felt bad for the doubtlessly deceased pig. In the middle of snow and freezing weather I walked to my appointed station and started to squish the fresh blood still pouring out of Ferentz's jugular vein with my fingers. It felt good, it was warm in the freezing cold. I was to prevent the blood from coagulating too fast so it can be used in the blood sausages to be produced in the very near and almost palpable future. And there he was, Ferentz, giving (involuntarily) his short life in honor of our bellies. And although we loved him in the sincerest way, we now eagerly anticipated the delicacies which were an inevitable outcome of our care and love. Delicacies which somewhere from the not so ancient past meant that we won't be starving through the winter. Our animalistic anticipation of the delicious soon to be cooked ears and snout not mentioning the smoked sausages later on overcame our sense of compassion and sympathy and although we did love the pig, we acknowledged all along that this is his destiny. That is, to provide food, sustain us in exchange for care, steady supply of feed and the relatively care-free life ... as long as it lasts. So many humans, my neighbors, people I know personally, appear to want nothing more than that. But I was deprived of my mother's breast milk. And therefore I have never accepted the mantras of any organization,

institution or faith. I have to survive on my own terms and completely independent perception of the world. It appears to be a dichotomy, the pig who was for a while part of our family and whose blood I stirred with my bare hands feeling good about being useful in the process. But, of course there is no contradiction. This pig had no capacity of deciding his own destiny. He served his purpose, he lived, died and was consumed, with much appreciation, by species which, presumably, can decide their own destiny. And therefore through the millions of years of evolution – evolved to have such right. To decide destiny of all the animals and those among our own species who are in any way inferior. While listening to the unsurmountable artistry of the Russian exile pianist Vladimir Horowitz playing Rachmaninov I am frightened by the vast numbers of PEOPLE who act as if they are prepared to be quite content to accept the role of a pig.

Poem

Strach z nepozastavení se nad smrtí,
neznámé budoucnosti a únavy entusiasmů.

Snad víc než závan Slunce
pozastavil mne vzdech neznámého
a než zpěv ptáků pominul
tíše se rozproztřelo neočekávání.

V kryptě než tma - oleptávána otokem žalu,
sesule vřhmatává vlhkými prsty
osamělého zesnulého
jako bezduchý žalm stmívání
a chladnoucích nadějí.

A mezi veškerou tou úzkostí
málem zapomenuta
taková naprosto malá ulpělá slza
chvěje se v koutě této krypty.

Čas pominul
tak bezplodný
a mnou se rozproztřel
zármutek tápajících andělů.

Až závan slunce dotkl se té krypty
a ač nepronikl v její pokrytecky pomlčovaná
tajemství
vdechnul jsem jej v mezibytí
a sklenul jej přes jezera nevyplakatelých slz.

Očekávání ve ztrachu z bezvýslednosti
se tiší víc než je smysluplné
jak zakleté holubice
zpomaleně mávají křídly hluše.

Jsem z toho smuten a zmaten
zpomalen a znaven
tak tíživě lopotíc se
k neznámé, ale určitě osamocené
smrtící tísní.

Než zítra Slunce zas zastíní oblohu
jako král provokativně žhnoucího úspěchu
na nesmyslně rozpolcené lidstvo

Fear from ignoring deaths, an unknown future
and tired enthusiasm.

Perhaps more than the brief Sun's-breeze
I was taken aback by the sigh of unknown
and before the birds' song left
non-expectation silently spread around.

In the crypt nothing but darkness –
dissolved by the distension of sorrow
slumped, in-reaching with its clammy fingers
lonely goner - like spiritless psalm of twilight
and getting-cold hopes.

And among all this fright
nearly forgotten
this totally insignificant tear is hanging on
trembling in the corner of this crypt.

Time passed
so fruitless
and in me spread all over
grief of fumbling angels.

Then Sun's-breeze touched that crypt
and although it didn't penetrate its
hypocritically unspoken secrets
I inhaled it during the so-so living
and arched it over the lakes of un-cried tears.

Expectations fearing lack of results
are hushing themselves more than is reasonable
like doves under the spell
slowly and noiselessly swinging their wings.

It makes me sad, confused
sluggish and tired
therefore heavily I drag
toward an unknown, but undoubtedly lonely
murderous anguish.

Nevertheless tomorrow the Sun will shadow the
sky
as king of provocatively blazing success

Sincerity: An Anthology of My Parents' Writings

a se svou armádou atomových paprsků začne
hlaholit
do mého zašlého ucha
jako by se nic nedělo.

upon the senselessly divided humanity
and with its army of atomic rays will begin to
holler
into my tired ear
as if nothing happened.

These Days

[3/4/2001]

Abandoned children,
fleeing chivalry
blame and responsibility for it all

In the dark abysses of despair
Fear and resulting Anger

The edges are crumbling under your feet

The hidden love and tenderness
trembling in the deep shadows
- so threatening

Due to their propensity
of making you feel vulnerable
Breakable, Brave-less
And mortal.

Is it not love indeed for whom you fear the most?

When, where, and who taught you how to cope?
And who will?

No easy answers
To difficult questions.

Go on and try to forget.

Peaceful active ignorance
helps to walk and breath.

And to kill the fear of the unknown
and untested.

That's what you desire, -
but apparently don't get.

Oh, - if there was a prayer
in godless world
To the Trees and Stones
and all the other incredible beauty of the deadly
omnipresent and totally uninvolved
universe

Sincerity: An Anthology of My Parents' Writings

it might be easier to bear.

But fast shallow breathing,
confused and terrified
warm little
people and fuzzy bunnies
Are incapable to perpetually rely on the size of the universe
to ease their pain
(Caused by their cognitive capacity
and a bit of what may be just a case of simple bad luck.)

Thus - mind guessing doctors,
some chemistry jesters
combined with the frightfully
weakened desire for self-preservation

and the shear power of innocence,
the Complete Vulnerability
and the Absolute Reliance on us
as the most trustworthy and powerful
in our children's eyes

are kicking us to crawl
with our wounds and all
maybe forward – or at least somewhere
attempting (again and again) to heal
the bleeding and infected sores

with almost no help from what could be effective doctors
such as experience
and the good example in our “formative” years.

Grasping for what could be perceived as hope
we continue
this difficult journey
without transmitting sense of joy
wonder or contentment

with faint thoughts
of portraying tenacity
by dealing with adversity.

Though even that - might be just an automatic pilot
of not knowing any better.

My prayer goes to our children
who deserve nothing but the best.

Sincerity: An Anthology of My Parents' Writings

As I stand terrified,
responsible for the delivery
on that Inalienable right.

Help, from no one.

Universe and still warm
Little fuzzy bunny

Frozen by fear.

Zprávy

Kecy politiků,
denní tragedie,
počasí,
rozhlašují se internetem, televizí
a ještě i po papíru
hlavou mi bzučí
změť těch zcela nepotřebných informací
a přesto zírám na televizi
bez poesie
bez knih
zírám do práznoty
zaplněné hlukem
miliard prázdných duší
a pak pilulkou na spaní
ubíjím
poslední živé vzpomínky snů

jen tu a tam
ve dne zaslychám ještě úryvky hymnů Bacha
pak pláču autě
otočím klíčem
a vraždím je
zvukem motoru

News

Politicians' trivial blabs
daily tragedies
weather,
are pronouncing themselves via the internet, TV
and still in the paper
buzzing through my head
this completely useless tangled mess of
information
in spite of that I stare at the television
without poetry
without books
I stare into the emptiness
filled with noise
of billions of empty souls
and then with a sleeping pill
I butcher
the last live remembrances of dreams

just here and there
during the day - I am still overhearing snippets of
Bach's hymns
then weeping in the car
I turn the key
and murder them
with the sound of the motor

Povzdech

Polibkem mlh
ztišená ústa
splývají temnoucím obzorem
něžně, smyslně
hrud' skrývá vzdech lásky,
poupata růží
pnou se ke slunci
zmírají
nevýslovnou rozkoší

A sigh

[2/16/2013]

By the fogs' kiss
quieted mouth
are merging through the darkening horizon
tenderly, sensuously
chest hides the whimper of love,
rosebuds
outstretch toward the sun
expire
in an unspeakable ecstasy

Destined to be an American

Czech native feels at home in Penn Yan

By CAROLYN SHERIDAN FOSTER
Finger Lakes Times

PENN YAN — It seems that Radomir Quis was destined to become an American. He defected from Czechoslovakia on July 4, 1984, unaware that the date marks Independence Day in the land where he would eventually become a citizen.

On Election Day last Tuesday, Quis cast his ballot for the first time as an American citizen, and also celebrated his 38th birthday.

"It was very exciting," said Quis. It made no sense to vote in the old country, because all the candidates were candidates of the Communist Party. It is really kind of interesting all these coincidences with the dates — that I left on July 4 and my birthday happens to be Election Day this year. My wife says, 'it's almost as though you were meant to live here.'"

Quis, who became an American citizen Aug. 28, already feels at home in Yates County, where the rolling hills remind him of his boyhood home in Czechoslovakia.

He came here this summer after being hired as the new music teacher and choral director at Penn Yan Elementary School. He and his wife, Anita, 38, and their two children, Kaitlyn, 4½, and Kevin, 14 months, live at 111 Chestnut St.

"With the lake, the grapes growing, the orchards, it is idyllic here. It is absolutely beautiful. It is even better than what I grew up with," said Quis.

Penn Yan Elementary School Principal Matthew Herz said Quis is a wonderful addition to the school.

"He saw that he had a different purpose in life than what his country wanted, and he followed his dream — which takes a lot of guts. He brings to us such a repertoire with his knowledge and experience, his energy and creativity. We couldn't ask for better."

"He's just an unusually nice person," agreed Connie Gibson of Penn Yan, who shares the organist job at St. Michael's Catholic Church with Quis, who is also choir director there. "He is always interested in the other person, and he has a wonderful voice. It is fascinating to listen to him talk about the arts in Europe."

Since he was 16, Quis had been planning to defect because of the oppressive Communist regime. All aspects of life were controlled by the regime, and travel to countries outside the Communist bloc was forbidden.

"There was a mile-section along our border, where there were fences, police towers and policemen on the ground with dogs. Basically, up until 1989 (when Communist rule ended), they had orders to shoot to kill," he said. "And several people were killed as they tried to get across."

Quis' cousin defected to West Germany in 1968 after the Soviet-led invasion crushed the liberal reforms of the "Prague Spring." Although he was only 7 then, Quis clearly remembers the Soviet occupation. As a teen-ager, he decided he would defect while he was still



Carolyn Sheridan Foster / Finger Lakes Times

Radomir Quis, his wife, Anita, and their two children, Kaitlyn, 4½, and Kevin, 14 months, live in Penn Yan.

young enough to assimilate into a new culture.

"I imagined my children having to deal with these limitations and things, and I knew I couldn't stay," he said.

Quis was born in the city of Opava and grew up in nearby Mladecko. His father, Rudolf, was a music teacher and sang baritone with a professional Moravian men's choir that competed throughout Europe. His mother, Marie, a bookkeeper, regularly attended classical opera. His three older siblings also played strings and piano.

"Music pretty much permeated my house," said Quis. "We would have gatherings in our home, friends from the choirs, other teachers, people from different towns. And there was quite a lot of singing and parting going on."

Growing up, Quis played piano and sang alto with a children's choir that competed regionally. After ninth grade, he attended a music conservatory, majoring in voice. While there, he sang in operas at the local theater.

In 1981, he continued his music studies at the University of Music, Film and Drama in Prague. He steered clear of rebel political groups. "My primary goal was to get my education. If I was involved with anything close to that, I would not get into the university."

One conservative professor he knew was banned from teaching because he criticized the government, and was forced to shovel coal. Later, he was sent to a mental institution for his "complaints" and eventually committed suicide there.

During his second and third years at the university, Quis spent one day a week in mandatory military training. Knowing he could possibly be pulled into long-term military duty, he decided to defect as soon as he graduated.

He confided only in his dearest friends, debating the matter late

into the night with one of his closest friends, a pianist and composer. "My friend would play the devil's advocate. For him, overcoming all the cultural differences and the assimilation process seemed too big a price to pay," said Quis.

The start of a new life

On July 4, 1984, while visiting Venice with other students, Quis fled into the streets. He said, noting with a broad smile, "I had no idea July 4 was Independence Day in the United States, but now I celebrate a double independence day."

Venice was the first Western city Quis had ever seen, and the most obvious differences were economic.

"There were fruit stands full of bananas, oranges and fruits of all kinds. Seeing all those precious fruits, scattered all over the place, it was overwhelming. In my village, watermelon was delivered only twice a year."

In broken English, he sought help from a Venetian policeman. He was directed to UNESCO, which offered him a train ticket to a refugee camp 20 miles south of Rome. He left for the camp that same day, with little money and an overnight bag filled with his personal belongings.

"There were thousands of refugees there — Albanians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Polish, Russians, Czechs, Slovaks," said Quis. "The barracks were very bare — with concrete floors, no warm water, no heat."

Quis lived there nine months, lining up with other refugees at 6 a.m. daily when local farmers and builders "would pull up in their little Fiats, looking for help." He picked tomatoes, washed dishes in the camp kitchen and, in the evenings, studied English. He set his sights on gaining entry to Australia, but a friend encouraged him to apply to the U.S. He did and began the daunting task of finding

an American sponsor.

"We were always living in fear that we would not be accepted," said Quis. "For most of us, it didn't matter where we ended up. We just wanted to be away from our country. It was very difficult to take the uncertainty."

But luck was his when in March 1985 an American-born costume designer, Paolo D'Anna, appeared at the camp. D'Anna, who lived part time in Rome, had learned about Quis' plight from a mutual friend, a Czechoslovakian ballet dancer now living in Greece.

D'Anna offered to help find Quis a sponsor in the U.S. He took him home that day, and put Quis in touch with Candida Pilla of New Jersey, a Broadway singer. "I was completely shocked," said Quis. "Here I was taken from the camp to a very beautiful apartment, with marble floors, and told, 'You are headed to America.'"

Quis flew into New York City on March 29, 1985. "For me, to go from Czechoslovakia to Venice, then across the Atlantic Ocean to New York, would be for an American like going to the moon. It was the most unbelievable thing to happen to me, especially after not being able to cross the border of my own country."

For two years, Quis lived with Pilla. He worked several jobs and enrolled at the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied voice with Metropolitan opera soloist Spiro Malas. In 1988, he moved to New York to be closer to school. Since none of his university credits could be transferred, he had to start over. He eventually earned his bachelor's degree there and then his master's degree in 1993 from Queens College.

To help pay his way, Quis juggled several jobs. Among them was teaching ballroom dancing at the Arthur Murray Dance Studio on Fifth Avenue. It was there he met his future wife, Anita, formerly of Buffalo, and a copywriter for Warner Books. They were married in August 1990.

Quis remained heavily involved in music, playing the organ at churches and singing in a Greek Orthodox church in Queens. Among his interesting experiences were singing with the New York Philharmonic Choir under conductor Zubin Mehta and the current conductor, Kurt Mazur. He also sang at Carnegie Hall with the New York Opera Orchestra's choir.

Quis taught elementary school music in parochial and public schools in the New York City area, but the couple wanted to return to small-town life.

"This is just perfect," he added.

After the fall of Communism in 1989, Quis thought he might obtain dual citizenship since his reasons for denouncing his homeland no longer existed. "But the dual citizenship was never offered," he said, and becoming a U.S. citizen was very appealing because of the freedoms and choices he has found here.

Quis has since visited his family at home three or four times, including his father's 70th birthday and his funeral in 1994. When his mother visited him in the U.S. a few years ago, Quis took her to Florida.

Walking through a mall there, with sunlight streaming through the skylights, Quis said she told him, "if I were you, I probably would have done the same."

Compiler's Bio



Kaitlyn Bankson (born Kaitlyn Marie Quis in New York, January 3, 1994), better known by her pen name Kaitlyn Lansing, is an American writer. Kaitlyn studied literature and philosophy throughout her education which shaped her creative voice. Her published works include: *Metamorphosis: An Anthology of Poems*; *Unveiled: An Anthology of Nonfiction*; *Urgency: An Anthology of Short Stories*; *Marginalia from the Snake Pit: A Novella*; and *The Paper Pusher*. Kaitlyn's unique perspective and raw prose bring light to matters that are often left untouched. Readers can see more of Kaitlyn's work at www.kaitlynlansing.com.