

THE SHUSWAP ASSOCIATION OF WRITERS PRESENTS

WORD FROM THE LAKE

ISSUE #1

SPRING 2026

wordfromthelake@gmail.com



Understanding impermanence, the snowdrop bows as it says good-bye.. Photo by: Päivi Sarre

WORD FROM THE LAKE



PUBLISHER
SHUSWAP
ASSOCIATION
OF WRITERS

ISSUE 1

SPRING 2026

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WORD FROM THE LAKE is a quarterly publication of the SHUSWAP ASSOCIATION OF WRITERS. SAW was founded as a vehicle for organizing the Word on the Lake Writers' Festival.

We offer other events throughout the year to inspire and support writers and readers in the BC interior.

The Shuswap Association of Writers' mandate is to organize events to enrich cultural life in the BC Interior, especially the written and spoken arts.

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EDITORIAL

Issue #1

The Shuswap Association of Writers is a medium sized writer's organization based in the beautiful city of Salmon Arm and we are looking to increase our membership and our reach. So, what do we do?

Well, we've decided to lean into our strengths and start up this magazine.


WORD FROM THE LAKE is going to be the flagship publication for the Shuswap Association of Writers and it is going to try to raise awareness about the club and the WORD ON THE LAKE Writer's Festival

which will be happening in May.

This issue contains short fiction, poetry, and other material from local writers, Frances Simpson, Eleanor McGaughey, Shawn Bird, and Kay Johnston are all among the contributors to this inaugural/preliminary issue. We've numbered it 0 to reflect that this is a 'test run'.

Our hope is that the magazine will grow from here and increase excitement for the upcoming Word on the Lake Festival.

So, welcome to Issue 1. We hope you enjoy it.



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EVERYONE HAS OPINIONS.

Maybe you have one about this publication. Let us know.

Tell us what you liked, what you didn't like or what you'd like to see in upcoming issues.

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Opening Pandora's Box

A short story by SHAWN L. BIRD

Darren stared at me with a blank look, while I waited for him to react. Finally he smacked his hand on his thigh and said, "Well, that ladder isn't going to put itself away. We'll talk later."

"You can't just walk away! I just told you something incredible! Don't you have something to say about it?"

He squished his lips up in a fishy sort of way, clicked his tongue, and turned away. "Nope. Not a God-damned thing."

"Why not?"

"Because I am not stupid enough to open a Pandora's box of trouble. You go right ahead. You tell that tale all over town. That's your business, but I'm staying out of it."

I grabbed his arm, "But Darren! You're supposed to love me! When a person loves

another person they're supposed to support them."

"I'll buy you a new brassiere if you need support."

With that, he stomped off.

So I went to my truck. I checked the box was tied down tightly and that I had some cardboard and a marker.

Pandora is a nice name, I thought, as I drove. I could use that one. I'd call the ugly one Darren the Second.

I drove to the farmer's market. It was my lucky day, I found a perfect spot right next to the entrance. Everyone would be walking right past. I wrote my sign and propped it in the back window, then I hopped into the truck bed. With a prayer to the heavens that this wouldn't cause any of the trouble that

Darren foretold, I opened the box.

Seven kittens blinked up at me. “Now listen you guys, you need to be really chill, okay?” I whispered. “You’re going to go to great homes today, so you can’t tell them anything. You’re not going to mention that you were found in a field next to what looked suspiciously like a downed spaceship. You’re going to play with catnip mice and use litter boxes, and you’re not going to do anything weird, right? I don’t want my neighbours coming after me!”

“Meow,” they replied and blinked so adorably that no one would believe in potentially nefarious origins. I could have kept them all, but I’d seen Little Shop of Horrors. I wasn’t taking any chances.

“Oh!” said a little girl. “Mummy! Can I have a kitten? You said I could have one for my birthday. Remember?”

The little girl climbed onto the bumper and reached into the box. A grey kitten came up to her and rolled onto its belly, purring.

“Mummy! It likes me! Please can I have it?”

“How much?” sighed the mother.

“Free today. Enjoy.”

After thirty minutes, six kittens were gone and the market was packing up.

A huge guy came past pushing a cart.

“Just one left,” I said, pointing at the black furball.

“Ah!” he chuckled as the kitten leapt and shimmied up his arm. “Looks like it wants to come home with me.” He tickled it under the chin and the little cat purred, climbed onto his shoulder and rubbed its head on the guy’s ear.

“What are you going to call it?” I laughed.

He stroked the little body with something like adoration. “Does it look like an Audrey to you?”

“It does,” I said. “It absolutely does.”

“This is great,” he said. “Thanks.”

“No problem,” I said watching them.

I swear that kitten winked at me as it was carried away.

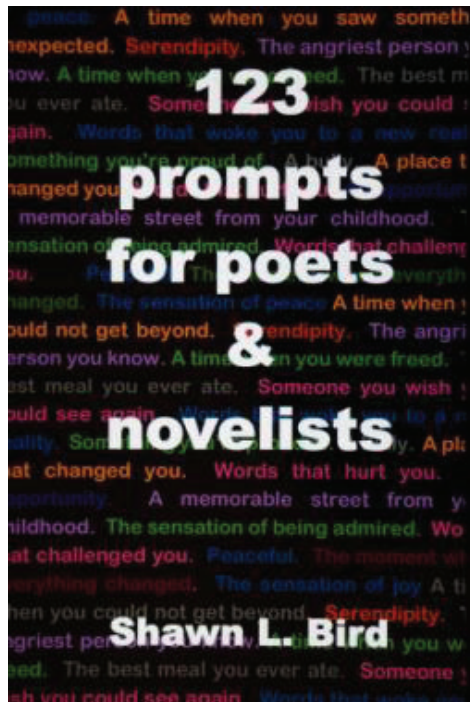
I’m definitely not mentioning that to Darren.



SHAWN BIRD has been in the SAW community since her first novel was in progress back in 2008.

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*the gaze of someone who
loves you*

a time you broke something

your household chores

Submit your story in the body of an email to wordfromthelake@gmail.com by April 20, 2026 for possible inclusion in the next issue of the Word on the Lake Quarterly.

(Submission fee \$5; free to SAW members)

POETRY FORM CHALLENGE

This quarter's poetry form is the TRICUBE

Each poem is 3 stanzas of 3 lines of 3 syllables.

e.g.

Fast Food Blues

© Shawn L. Bird 2022

*Another
shift behind
the counter*

*"Do you want
fries with that?"
"Super-size?"*

*but my smile's
genuine
on pay day*

Submit your poem in the body of an email to wordfromthelake@gmail.com (Submission fee \$5; free to SAW members)



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Hold-Up on Watershed Road

An excerpt from the upcoming biography *Sunshine and Shadows: Tales of life on the Lazy Dog Ranch, Enderby* by KAY JOHNSTON

Visitors were always welcome at the Lazy Dog; we were delighted that so many of our Vancouver friends made the trip out into our ‘wilderness’.

Walter, a friend of ours, and of Gordie and Les, visited quite often. He called one day and asked, “Can I bring two of my friends from London, UK, for a visit? They are just like me, theatre types. You will love them. We are on an Okanagan grand tour and they just have to see the Lazy Dog. Would tomorrow be, ok?”

“Absolutely. We will be delighted. Call us, when you are leaving Enderby, so that we can have fresh coffee ready.” We looked at each other and grinned. What a wonderful opportunity for us to exercise our warped sense of humour.

A hold-up definitely appealed to us.

Trusting soul that Walter was, he did in-

deed call us from Enderby. We were ready. We had our ‘outlaw’ outfits on-grubby blue jeans, cowboy hats, pulled down low, dusty boots, bandanas over our faces, a 30-gauge shotgun, and a dirty blue truck! PERFECT. We ‘moseyed’ down the road, passing Wanda, who looked at us as if to say, ‘What on earth are they up to now?’ We smiled, raised our fingers to our lips in a ‘shush’ and kept on going.

Close to the corner we backed the truck into a gateway, off the road, and waited. Soon we heard a car, a quick peek through the branches confirmed it was our guests. We let the truck roll, slowly, across the road, blocking it. We leapt out, sauntered over to the car, masked, with shotgun in full view. White, petrified faces with panic-stricken eyes, stared over the lower edges of the windows. All three of them were almost down

on the floor. We heard, 'Oh SHIT!' several times.

We covered both sides of the car; as we reached the door Maddie drawled (my British accent would have been a dead giveaway), "Where do ya think y'all going? This here's private land. No trespassing." The three quaking masses stuttered something unintelligible from floor level. A head slowly rose up to the window. Walter. Terrified, he tried to speak, then stopped and looked, looked again and spluttered, "For Christ's sake, its Kay and Maddie." The other two white faces rose from the depths, and gasped with relief. Walter reamed us out, as we stood there collapsing with laughter. "You scared the shit out of us. We thought this was it, we were gonna die here, I was wondering if my will was done..."

Back at the house, the fresh coffee was inhaled and their sense of humour, and colour, had returned. They relived every detail, from the first sight of the rolling truck and

wondering why, to the first glimpse of the gun and masks. Now, howling with laughter, or maybe sheer relief, they described their ensuing panic, sliding to the floor, trying to hide.

The rest of the visit was normal. The London boys were amazed by all the trees, seeing 'our' deer, coyotes, bears, pigs, chickens, cattle and loved walking all over the land. They entertained us with their theatre experiences and escapades for hours. We were sad to see them go.

A few weeks later, Walter called to tell us they were home in the UK. "Ah yes," he said, "they told their tale about their 'wild west experience out in the wilderness', surrounded by MILLIONS of trees, in the theatre circles of London for a long time. Such drama queens."

We too, told the story of the 'Watershed Road Hold-Up' for a long time.

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Scruffy, The Warrior Cat

An excerpt from the upcoming biography *Sunshine and Shadows: Tales of life on the Lazy Dog Ranch, Enderby* by KAY JOHNSTON

What a gorgeous day, stretched out on loungers on the back lawn, we basked in the warmth, enjoying our surroundings, on the lookout for our regular visiting deer or bears. I gazed upwards as a movement caught my attention. It looked like a Red-Tailed Hawk. It soared, then caught a draft and let itself be carried along with ease. A sight to behold. Suddenly, the hawk stopped riding the breeze, and hovered over the field by the fruit trees. “Wonder if it has spotted a mouse, or a rabbit?” asked Maddie.

As we watched, it dived like a bullet, its claws grabbed something then it rose up high again. We squinted into the sun, seeing only a silhouette of the hawk with something hanging from its claws. “Bit big for a mouse,” said Maddie.

“Maybe it is a rabbit,” I said. Changing

direction, the hawk flew towards us. It was then we saw, whatever it was, fighting and squirming to get free.

“Oh My God! Its Scruffy.” Maddie gasped. All we could do was stand and watch in horror as our Scruffy dangled and fought for her life. Just as the hawk passed over the pond it let go of Scruffy. We sprinted down to the pond just as Scruffy plummeted into the mud.

Amazingly she was alive. Slowly, a bedraggled, dazed, little cat crawled out of the mud towards us as we waded in to get her. Maddie tenderly gathered her up and held her close. Examining her gently in the house we saw where the hawk’s claws had torn into her sides as she’d struggled to escape. Her fur was matted, glued together, with blood and mud. She was crying from the pain as we tried, ever so gently, to ease her onto

a soft towel. I held her as we drove to the vet in Armstrong. He carefully checked her over and cleaned away the blood and mud. "Poor little thing. She must have been terrified. What a fighter though. She needs a few stitches and a shot to fight any infection."

We took her home wearing an Elizabethan collar to prevent her from scratching her wounds. Surrounded by Tabbers, Marmie, Sitka and Potchee, she finally slept. She was quite dozy when she woke up, even so, she was not thrilled with her new collar, but was too weak to do anything about it...for the time being anyway. When she managed

to walk again, and wanted to go outside to sit in the sun, she was never alone. Usually, one, or both of us, both dogs and her cats, sat with her. Guarding for two reasons; to keep her safe and, to prevent her from fighting to get her collar off, which she was determined to do. It took about a week and a half before she appeared sans collar, smiling triumphantly. It did, however, take quite a long time for her to recover completely.

Scruffy, our brave, little, warrior cat, became a legend.



KAY JOHNSTON has a BA in English Literature from U. of British Columbia, and a Masters in Counselling Psychology from U. Victoria. She was a counselor at Salmon Arm Senior High School from 1973-1981 when she was seconded by the Attorney General to work with the Provincial Counter Attack Programme, from there she was headhunted to join the Insurance Corporation of B.C. as a Programme Manager. This entailed working on a Provincial Education Advisory Committee, giving training workshops to Teachers, Police, Medical Professionals, Municipalities, as well as developing a provincial Youth Leadership programme.

She has published two books. 'Spirit of Powwow', published by Hancock House, which has now sold approximately 3,000 copies. Her second book, The Amazing Mazie Baker, Squamish Nation's Warrior Elder, published by Caitlin Press, is a biography, with a Foreword by Senator Pat Carney. It has received excellent reviews and was nominated for a B.C. Book Prize and for The B.C. Historical Federation Book Award.

Kay's new book, 'Sunshine and Shadows' is under 'construction'.

She lives on acreage in Salmon Arm, British Columbia with her Westie, Sugar and tabby cat Sox.

Due Process

Poetry by FRANCES SIMPSON

He is repugnant they will love how he dies
Excitedly typing his eerie demise.
A few chapters before the lost strangers arrived,
Scared and weary and heat deprived.
Their bus broke down. What would they do,
In the dead of night where the cold wind blew?
That cabin on the hill where one light was shining.
They will walk through the forest shivering and whining.
There is a killer amongst them that will maim and maul.
The first one to go will set the tone for them all.

The keys are clicking with a life of their own.
Until a yell from the kitchen threw me out of my zone.
“No, I don’t know where you put the cheese!”
Inwardly muttering, oh leave me alone PLEASE!
My proofreader expects this, this week or next
If it’s only half finished she will be quite vexed.

Ok, the killer is the driver and only the blonde will survive,
But how do I keep her less marred and alive?
Aha, there will be a tunnel. From the house it will lead,
To a back forty road she will walk stunned and will bleed.

I am almost at the end and I am feeling exalted.
Until my thoughts are jarred and once again halted.
A crashing sound from the room next door.
I heard something shatter as it hit the floor.
Oh sweet bejesus it must be Scamp
I think he just broke my antique lamp.

Deadline fulfilled. I finally finish the end.
With a hopeful prayer, to the proofer I send.

So many days later I got the call.
Was then to my knees I made a fall.
My voice quavering. Two hands shaking my device.
“What do you mean I killed the short guy twice!”

“Ok, breathe. I can fix this” A quiet prayer to my commotion.
I need a place of peace to sit grateful in devotion.

I watch my feet while my head bows low.
Along the pier walking slow.
The end I reach seeing birds as they fly.
The soft fluffy clouds in a warm blue sky.
The ducks that are floating. The water serene
I now become one who is part of the scene.
As if in the breeze a force starts to hit
I start twisting the plot to make it all fit.


Furiously walking like my heels are on fire.
I come back to my story my soul now entire.

The final draft has gone and my publisher did take,
The gift I was offered from those words from the Lake.



FRANCES SIMPSON is a Director of SAW and a member of the Festival Planning Committee with a background in marketing and advertising.

She is currently looking for a word that rhymes with silver. Any suggestions?



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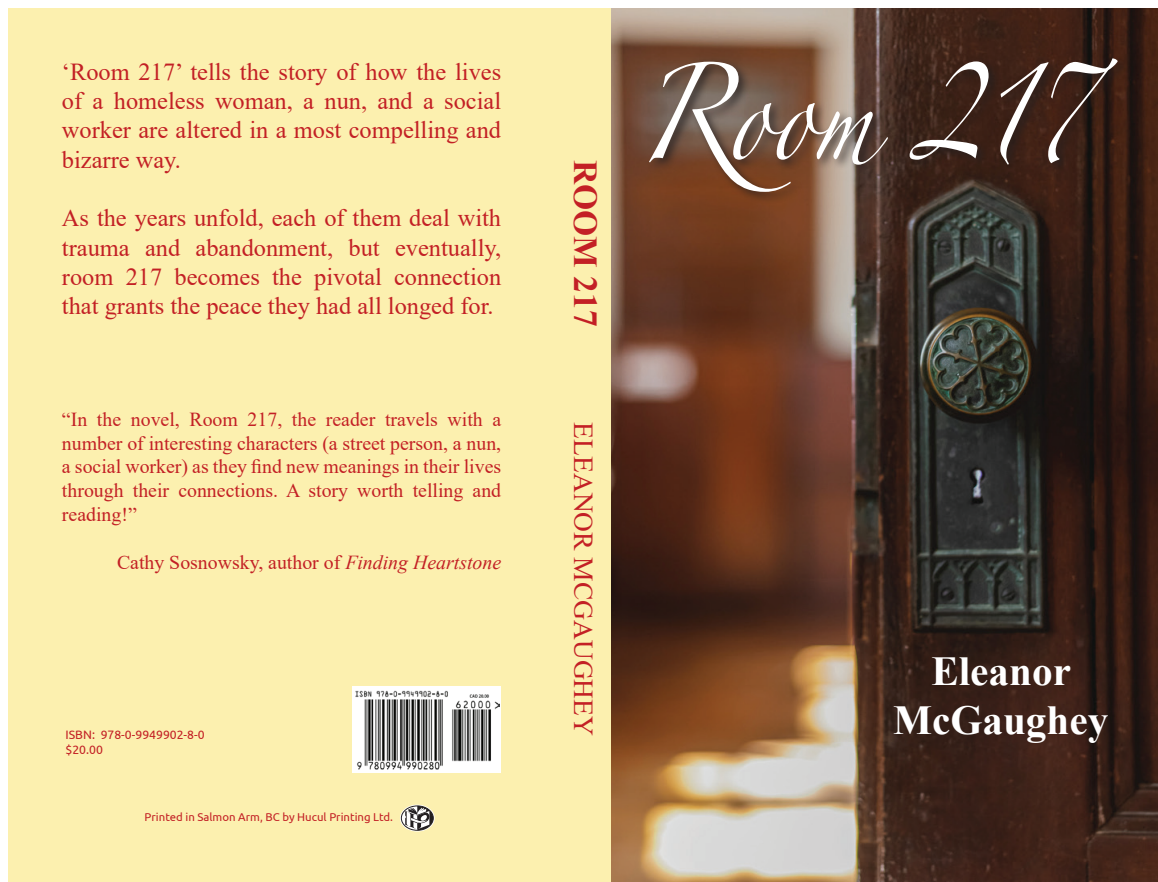
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Room 217

An excerpt from the novella *Room 217* by ELEANOR McGAUGHEY

Estelle had to get help for Marcie and she needed it now! Her coughing spells were close to convulsive, but Estelle was sure the hospitals wouldn’t take her because she didn’t have any medical plan in place. Not only that, the nurses would be asking too many questions. No, Estelle had to figure out something else.

It had been three days since she had eaten, leaving her very weak. All her money was spent on food for Marcie and gas for the truck. She was frightened, but suddenly remembered a story Mitzie had told her about a group of nuns who had helped her once when her life was in the most dire of states.

“Think Estelle, think harder. Where was that place? Think, think, Oh God please help me!” Her mind was blocked. All she could

do was drive as she held her darling daughter tight on her lap, still burning with fever and screaming in pain.

As she turned a corner, the road turned into a small cobble stone lane, almost hidden. It was a dead end. Estelle stopped the truck and sobbed as she held on to Marcie with all her might.

“Please Honey, please don’t die! Momma’s so very sorry. The road has ended, we’ve nowhere else to go. Don’t die, please please don’t die. I’m so sorry!”

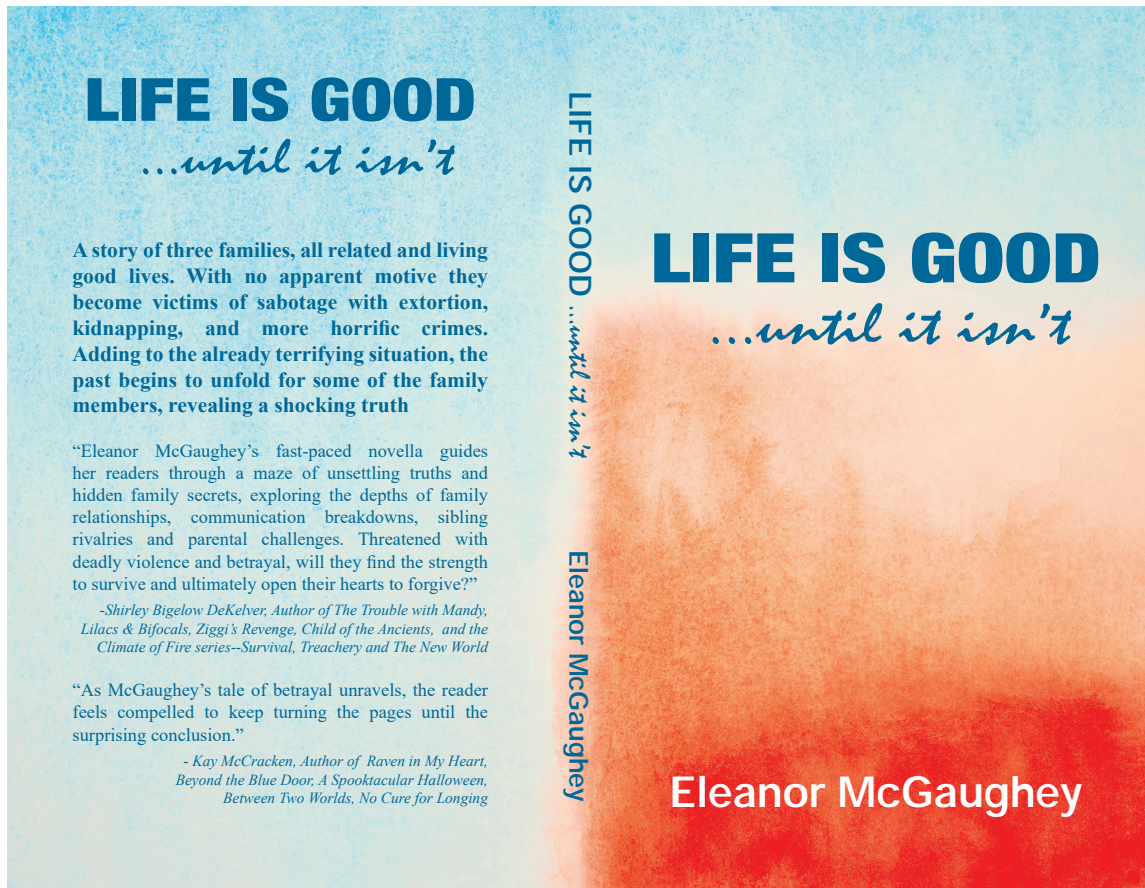
In her frantic state, Estelle hadn’t realized that she was pushing on the horn as she clutched her baby. She was astonished when her door opened and someone was calling to her. “Miss, miss, can we help you?” There was a small figure standing beside the truck

dressed in a long black dress with a white cloth draped over her head.

The next thing Estelle remembered was waking up lying on a bed in a tiny room. Her baby was gone!

“Oh God,” she screamed, “Where’s my baby, where’s my Marcie?” She hysterically ran to the door flinging it open.

“Marcie, Marcie! Where’s my baby?” she screamed again.



Life is Good (Until it isn't)

An excerpt from *Life is Good... Until it isn't* by ELEANOR McGAUGHEY

This is what’s going on.” In a flash her mouth was covered with duct tape and a cloth bag slid over her head, then she was forced into the back seat. Before she could move, her hands were tied to the bottom part of the front passenger seat belt.

“There, this gives me a little bit of insurance you won’t jump out.”

Connie was petrified. Her heart was beating so loud she could feel it thumping in her head, and terrified when she realized the baby had stopped kicking. “This can’t really be happening.” She screamed behind the

duct tape.

She couldn't tell how long they drove, but it seemed like an eternity before the car finally came to a stop and the ignition turned off.

"I'm going to untie you, so don't try anything you're going to regret."

As she was being pulled out of the car she became disoriented and began stumbling in the snow.

"Don't pull that act with me. Get moving." Her shoulders were being held from behind to lead her. "I'm holding a knife that's long enough to go right through your back and into your kid, so think about that."

Connie could hear what sounded like a key turning and then heard the squeaking of a door. She was pushed inside where her

blindfold and duct tape were yanked off.

It only took a few seconds for her eyes to adjust to the dimly lit landing with a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling.

There was nowhere to go except down a long flight of stairs. The stench of musty dank air similar to that of an underground train station or sewer system made Connie light headed and nauseated.

"Stop it! Please, you're scaring me half to death. I beg you, don't hurt my baby. I don't know what you want, but I know we can work something out. Please let's just talk." Connie begged. "I thought we were..."

"Shut up and get downstairs."

At the bottom was another door leading to a small room where she was forced inside.



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The Day We Talked

Poetry from scrapbook of poetry 1995 by ELEANOR McGAUGHEY

A friend and I talked the other day
Of many things adhered within our beliefs
Our likes, our differences, our pains
Our ambitions, our inspirations.
We talked of people who could have made a difference in our lives
Of those who did and of those who didn't
Of days gone by with and without triumphs, mostly without
Where we have been and where we are going
No explanations expected, the day we talked.

I felt a distinct calm fused with an urgent strive
To explore the things within me I thought were impossible
Or at least improbable.
A friend let me see the endless possibilities
If only I were to search and destroy my instinctive fears
To put *me* in command of *me*.
I *can* turn my dreams into realities, whenever and however I *choose*
For there is no need to prove to others, only to myself.
A true friend pushed open a heavy door, the day we talked.



ELEANOR McGAUGHEY was raised in Calgary, Alberta, lived in the area of Ponoka and Red Deer for many years, then eventually moved to Fort Saskatchewan. She and her husband Mitch have now happily retired and settled in Salm-on Arm. She is currently president of Shuswap Writers' Group. Ellie has published several works including: *Asea, a Journey Told, Room 217*, and her latest novella *Life is Good...until it isn't*.



Dinner Hour

A short story by M. D. JACKSON

Abner Jenkins was making good time – he would be home well before supper – when he saw the little barefoot girl walking on the side of the highway.

She was picking her way over some rocks left over from a slide that happened months ago. She was wearing a dirty tie-die T-shirt and a pair of cut-offs. She may have been twelve, but was probably younger. She had dark, limp hair that fell straight around her ears.

This was all in a fleeting impression as he rounded the curve of the highway. The sign had said SLOW TO 70 KMH and he had... sort of. The sight of the little girl surprised him and he had a moment of panic. He touched his brakes slightly as he navigated the curve.

It was late in the day. The sun was getting low but wouldn't set for another hour or two.

Several thoughts went through his mind in what seemed like seconds. What was she doing out on the highway? Had she come from a trail that Abner didn't know about? He'd driven this stretch of the highway many times but wasn't intimately familiar with all its ins and outs, nooks and crannies, but a little girl shouldn't be walking on the narrow shoulder of a rural highway like that. He hadn't recalled seeing a car parked on the side of the road the stretch he'd just driven. Perhaps around the corner?

There was a gravelled pull-out around the bend of the road. There was no parked car there. If there had been Abner would have driven on and not given it another thought, but... she was just a little girl.

At the last minute Abner turned his Buick onto the gravel pull-out. He put the car in park but left the engine running. He stood

up from the driver's seat, the car door open and waited for the girl to pick her way around the cliff face and into view.

It took time and the persistent chiming of his Buick's door ajar alarm was getting on his nerves. Had he imagined her? Had he seen something else? A mountain goat, maybe? Perhaps his brain had interpreted it wrong?

He was starting to feel foolish, waiting for what may have been a figment of his imagination to come around the rocky corner, when the girl appeared. She was, indeed, a little girl and not a mountain goat. She had one hand on the rocky cliff face, the other outstretched, providing balance as she made her way over the rocks.

"Are you lost?" Abner shouted.

The little girl started, looked up suspiciously. She stared at him a moment. Obviously assessing if Abner was a threat.

New jeans, a blue golf shirt, short hair cut recently, white trainers, Rolex. Abner appeared not to be a threat, or so he thought. He had no idea what this kid's experiences were. Perhaps he came across like a predator? He tried to smile to put her at ease.

"I can't find my Daddy," she said.

Abner nodded, as her words confirmed his worry. *Lost girl.*

"We were hiking," she said, not moving from where she stood. "I took a trail and when I got to the end I couldn't find my Daddy."

Abner nodded again, trying to project an air of sympathy. "Where did you start your hike?" he asked. "Did you park somewhere?"

The little girl nodded.

Abner let out a breath. "Can you remember where you parked? Do you think your Daddy might be waiting by your car?"

The little girl nodded, uncertain, but it was a start.

He suggested that he drive the girl back to her Daddy's car. It was more like he was talking out his plan out loud for his own benefit. Drive back to the girl's car. Maybe her Daddy would be waiting there. Even if

he wasn't he would be close. Perhaps desperately yelling his little girl's name. He shouldn't be difficult to locate... if he hadn't come to some mishap, that is...

First things first, though.

The girl climbed into the passenger seat without hesitation once he'd opened it for her. Once in the driver's seat he told her to put on her seat belt and she complied. She smelled like moss and wood smoke. He pulled the Buick out onto the highway and began driving back the way he'd come.

A little over five minutes later the girl pointed a skinny, tanned arm towards a paved side road that curved up into the trees. Abner pulled the Buick off the highway.

The road curved up and around and emptied into a rough parking area cut into the trees. A single beat up old van was parked in the lot. Abner looked at the little girl questioningly. She nodded. Abner pulled up next to the van.

It was an old grey Dodge Caravan. The windows were tinted but Abner could see in well enough to note that the back seats were folded down and the rear was filled with a jumble of worldly possessions. Abner began to feel a sense of outrage that came from someplace deep inside.

He tried to tell himself that he was not prejudiced against the girl's father for clearly not having much in the way of funds. There were many who were impoverished, but they still had needs and were entitled to go camping if they so choose. Perhaps that was all this was. Perhaps he was a well-meaning father and not a drunk or drug addicted reprobate, but Abner was beginning to have his doubts.

He made his way around the van, inwardly tutting to himself about the state of it; scrapes, dents, rust, bald tires.

The girl had quietly slipped out of the passenger seat and was standing at foot of a trail that led into the woods, staring into the shadows created by the trees.

"Was this the trail you hiked?" Abner

asked the girl.

She continued to stare into the shadows. Abner's gaze followed hers and his eyes discerned a shape somewhere up the trail. The shape was impossibly huge and Abner's stomach gripped itself in panic at the thought that there was a bear on the trail.

"You can come out," the little girl said.

The shape lumbered slowly along the trail into the waning light.

It wasn't a bear.

It was worse.

Abner stared in apoplectic terror at the thing that undulated itself forward, stopping a mere hair's breath from the little girl.

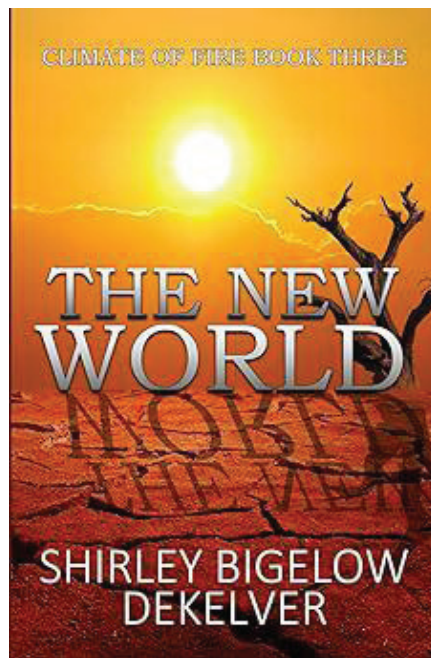
...is it for me...? the thing hissed/slithered in a way that sent beetles skittering over Abner's skin.

"Eat, my son," the little girl replied in a voice that was older than the mountains. "It's all for you."



M. D. JACKSON has been writing non-fiction for over forty years. He has written for numerous magazines and websites such as *Amazing Stories Magazine*, *Dark Worlds Quarterly* and *Shuswap Magazine*.

He has been a professional fiction writer since 2007 under a pseudonym, Jack Mackenzie. However, he has recently come out of the pseudonymus closet and has begun writing fiction under his own name.



The New World

An excerpt from CLIMATE OF FIRE, Book Three by SHIRLEY BIGELOW DEKELVER

I spotted a raspberry bush, gorged on the berries, and ate until my stomach protested. I picked up my pace. I had not gone far when I heard heavy footsteps behind me. I dashed behind an enormous lodgepole pine and was not surprised to see Lars standing next to a birch. Any sound or movement I made would give away my location. I took a deep breath, remained motionless, and prayed he would keep moving.

“I know you’re close, you might as well show yourself.”

I gritted my teeth; there was no way in hell I was going to reveal my location to him. I inspected the area around me; to my right I spotted a raised embankment, long since taken over by erosion and sediment. It was steep and might provide a chance for me to hide and find cover. I inched over to the slope and lowered my foot over the ledge when suddenly the loam started to move, I scrambled to keep upright, lost my balance, and careened headfirst down the hill. I screamed, and the last thing I recalled was

striking my head on a rock.

I slowly opened my eyes, overcome with nausea and dizziness, and felt a huge lump on my head. I spotted movement overhead and caught sight of Lars as he leaned over the ledge. I had fallen into a ravine and landed next to a bramble bush covered in thorny stems and leaves. It was growing flush against the back wall of the ravine and unseen by Lars. I rolled on my stomach, gritted my teeth when a sharp muscle spasm hit my back. I edged gently under the shrub.

Lars marched back and forth on the rim of the slope, he kicked the ground angrily, then spat in disgust when he realized how steep the hill was, clearly aware he was in no shape to climb down and make his way back up. I lay motionless, breathing lightly. Lars did not have a lot of patience, which might work to my advantage.

“You down there, girly?” he yelled. When he got no response, he cursed loudly, then grabbed a handful of rocks and threw them over the ledge. Although he could not see

me, he was aware I was at the bottom of the trench. I covered the back of my head with my hands, the projectiles landed in the middle of the ditch, and one hit the back of my leg. I clenched my teeth to stop from screaming. If I moved or made any sound, he would know I was still alive.

When Lars discovered I escaped from the shed, his first reaction would have been to grab his firearm. He was also carrying the propane lantern, and in his arrogance had miscalculated how far he would have to track me and had not brought his water flask. Lars was obese and suffered from the oppressive heat. He cursed loudly, then disappeared from my vision. His only alternative would be to backtrack to the cabin, and I knew him well enough to realize the only reason he left was because he assumed I was either dead or seriously injured and unable

to climb back up the embankment.

The blazing sun shone relentlessly in the cloudless sky. There was no wind or relief. It was a waiting game; I was exhausted and weak from lack of food and water. I carried no weapons; I was in no shape to climb the bank and dared not take a chance I might fall. There had to be an alternate route. I had marched for over an hour before I took refuge in the cedar tree last night, then this morning, another hour before I arrived at the slope. Not knowing the extent of my injuries or how far I would be able to travel, I decided I had no alternative except to return to the cabin. I would hide in the surrounding undergrowth until dark, then take cover in Taylor's wood shop, which I doubted Lars knew existed.



SHIRLEY DEKELVER is a member of the Shuswap Association of Writers, and the author of six novels: *The Trouble with Mandy*, *Lilacs & Bifocals*, *Child of the Ancients*, and the *Climate of Fire Series*, *Book One: Survival*; *Book Two: Treachery*, and *Book Three: The New World*, (available January 1st, 2026). She has also authored and published five short stories: *Nature's Precious Gift*, published by Voices from the Valleys; *Ziggy's Revenge*, second place winner in the Young Adult Fiction category of the 2014 Askew's Foods' Word on the Lake Writing Contest; and *One of a Kind*, *Abigail*, *Grey Mist Manor*, and *Wilderness Path*, included in the Shuswap Writers' Group *Kaleidoscope V* Anthology.

Shirley is also a photographer, artist, and birdwatcher, and copies of her photos, artwork, and published works can be found on her website and blog: www.shirleydekelver.com.

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