THE BERRIES ARE SWEETER HERE:
OLDER WOMEN WRITING TOGETHER

EDITED BY

PAULA PAPKY

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Ellen B. Ryan, Series Editor

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Ellen Ryan for the leadership she provided in envisioning this book as part of the larger **Writing Down Our Years** series that she edited. She was unflagging in her support and enthusiasm. It was Ellen who offered the services of Ann Anas in the word processing of our manuscript. I am grateful for Ann's patience with our many changes, as well as her dedication and skills with the lay-out and design of the book. Thanks also go to Jim Ormond who was the reader for the final manuscript. Finally, thanks go to the McMaster Centre for Gerontological Studies for their ongoing support.

Paula Papky, Editor

FOREWORD

One day I stood in the doorway looking at a group of children on a school playground during recess. The principal was beside me. I said, "There is a poem out there." He replied, "Joanna, there's a poem wherever you look." He was right. There are poems in events and scenes throughout our lives, and there are other poems as well. Acres and acres of poems when we look within. The poets and writers in this book have pulled from both sources for their inspiration.

Memories and images pushed out by a pen or pencil provided the fertile fields for the poets and storytellers whose work is spread like a strawberry patch for our harvesting in *The Berries are Sweeter Here*.

Donald Murray, in *Expecting the Unexpected*, says that the 'quick write' elicits thoughts we didn't know we had and presents them in phrases and images we didn't know were in us. The work in this book confirms his expectations.

The 'berries' are truly sweeter here. The book is full of writings to enjoy. Every piece is worth reading and reading again. We are shown the value of writing workshops; the value of triggering the writer within us. We see how writing quickly, without controlling the thoughts that come, brings berries, without blemish, ripe for the picking. We learn the value of writing with others, sharing our work and seeing how the same muse moves others in different directions.

In each poem or prose piece the reader can follow the thoughts of sorrow or sadness, laughter and love, all told in clear concrete images that trigger memories from the reader's background. A double joy, touching another mind and drawing from our own.

Thank you, writers, for sharing your work with us. Now I must write. You have provided poems and stories that are springboards for me. My pen is itching to move.

Joanna Lawson

Joanna is a retired educator. She has three books of poetry published by Serengeti Press: Inner Voices, Anywhere is Home, and Journey with Grief.
Inner Voices won the Hamilton Arts Council Poetry Award for 2004.
Joanna has also written a series of Reading Workbooks that are published by Tree House Press.
Travel, grandchildren and playing the great bass recorder consume much of her spare time.

INTRODUCTION

Our small group has been writing together for five years, every other Thursday morning, meeting in Rosemary's or Naomi's living room, or occasionally someone's garden or deck. We are a dozen women from fifty-something to ninety-something, women who simply love words.

We began as an off-shoot of a book club in Hamilton, Ontario. Some members were so impressed with the new book, **Writing Your Way: Creating A Personal Journal** by Ellen Jaffe, that they decided to try out the ideas. Ellen came along as a writing companion and was so excited with the group's creativity and sensitivity that she stayed. I missed the first session or two, but friends invited me to come along and I was immediately hooked. We all were. As one woman said recently, "we went deep very quickly".

The Berries Are Sweeter Here is a collection of our writings together over the past five years. The title comes from a poem by a group member and it captures what we love about our writing:the more we write together, the sweeter life becomes, and the more we notice the sweetness of life. We remember and write about picking berries, making chili sauce, planting sweet peas, and baking bread. There's something about food that brings out strong memories. But the sweetness is there even as we've written about loss or about the difficulties we faced growing up. We have discovered that just writing the story down and reading it to uncritical friends makes some sorrows bearable, some bitterness sweet.

Our writings have been grouped by theme, for the most part. Had I set them out chronologically the reader would see that we progressed from beginning writers (some of us, at least) to experienced writers with much to say about ourselves, our histories, the world, and sometimes, the holy or divine. The thematic grouping seems to show more clearly the richness of writing in others' company; the way "seasons" can have multiple meanings, for instance, as we write together.

Throughout the book, I've used brief lines and phrases that were once part of larger, unfinished pieces of writing. Even these fragments can be powerful springboards for more writing.

The process we follow in writing together is simple and flexible. We gather in someone's living room, drink coffee and eat muffins, and set the timer for ten or fifteen minutes. We write fast, unedited prose or poems, a way of writing we learned from Natalie Goldberg in ***Writing Down the Bones.*** When the time is up, we read aloud. We find it comfortable to write in one another's company, the only sounds the scratches of pens on paper. And there is enormous trust, as well as enormous gratitude, when each one reads aloud. No one tries to fix anyone. We listen and say thank-you. We set the timer and write again.

Springboards are key to our writing sessions. We began with the springboards in Ellen's book and quickly discovered that we are all crazy about poetry. Usually, that's where we begin. One of us brings in a dozen copies of a poem -- from an anthology or a literary magazine. We read the poem aloud once or twice, talk briefly about it, and then just grab a line and write a poem or prose piece of our own.

We try to write three pieces in our mornings together, one a warm-up that could be as simple as "I remember…" or "the colour yellow is…" We usually don't read aloud our warm-up piece unless someone really wants to read. We're just priming the pump at the beginning. But even the other two pieces we regard as merely "writing practice", as Natalie Goldberg suggests. The aim is seldom to produce a brilliant, finished piece; rather, it is to see what pops up, what we know or remember that we never bothered to write about until now. And writing fast offers the possibility of exploring the depths, even though we may have begun with describing the surface alone. Writing about the green dress someone received as a birthday present may lead to the discovery of the way a beloved grandmother, long gone, continues to shape the present moment.

One of our first sessions of writing together began with the line, "Listen, I'll tell you the sweetest dream." And for a moment each of us imagined someone to whom we wanted to tell the sweetest dream: a friend facing cancer surgery; a brother dying; a frail parent; a daughter living far away. It didn't seem to matter that the poem with which we had begun was from the eighth century, "***The Dream Of The Rood**."*

The other springboards for fast writing together have been photographs of ourselves as children, pop song titles such as ***Dancing In The Dark*** or ***Me And My Shadow,*** mementos, and news events. From these springboards, and especially from poems, we have written lists, dialogues with ourselves and others, with nature, and with the Holy One, short stories, prayers and hymns, unsent letters, recipes, lyric poems and prose.

We aren't quite ready to call our efforts writings by *older women*, but as one of our group said, we can hardly call ourselves younger women! When we write together, aging feels more like deepening our understanding; more like taking care of one another; more like discovering the next direction for our life; more like gaining the confidence to speak and be who we are. At every session we marvel at the richness of life that we experience through words.

Paula Papky, Editor
May, 2006

Women Writing Together
Theme I:

--Trust the Process--

Gratitude

A cold day, warm with the gifts of
peace
friends
compassion
simplicity
moments of stillness
along the way to silence.

Silence – a making room – a time
to see and not to see
to know and not to know
to embrace
the unseen
the unknowable
the infinite and bountiful
heart of the universe.

Diane Zsepeczky

Stay with the Writing

Group gathered,
harvest-full with members
back from summer travels
and from illness,
end-of-season sunglow encircles us
homecoming calm.

Acceptance of emerging thoughts
and surprising images,
birthday-party joy in a bright memory,
a novel phrase,
words of our lives flow in the easy stream
of all-pens-on-the-page,
repeated sentence openers,
and poets' metaphors,
past the boulders
barring othertimes entry.

Among glimpses of our true selves,
within this womb where words
name the moment then
and beauty now,
Barbara falls
but does not break the spell,
waits in peace
till it's time to tape
an ankle and set an arm.

Ellen B. Ryan

Writing at Constance's House

I like being in your house
the strength of its blue stripes,
the blue and white bowls
standing solid on a chest,
the proud blue tea pot
and thick jug.

I love the piles of books
on the yellow ottoman by your chair
and underfoot a yellow rag rug
on an oak floor, the yellow
walls like butterscotch.

I love this tiny white-slatted table
just wide enough to hold two coffee mugs.
At one end of the room
sunlight screened by a white curtain
its figured surface like Queen Anne's lace
and below it a buffet
the rich warm yellow of apricots,
white bowl of greenish-yellow pears
and one red apple,
a pot of pale yellow dried hydrangea
like a wheat field ready for harvest.

I love the circles of blue china plates
hanging among the gold-framed prints
against the honeyed walls.

I drink coffee from a cobalt mug
and nibble at a rhubarb muffin,
read the titles on book spines,
hear the hum from the furnace
and revel in the quiet of Beulah Street,
which means beautiful in Hebrew.

I love the flash of Barbara's orange t-shirt,
elegance of Rosemary's toffee-coloured sandals,
her claret painted nails,
her skirt of creamy elephants on a deep sea blue.

I could imagine a nap here
under the blue and yellow quilt
your mother made this spring.

Paula Papky

Springboard: May Swenson's poem, Staying at Ed's House, was an enticing springboard. One of the joys of writing together is being in each other's homes, being surrounded by pictures, bouquets and potted plants, the good china, and books, always books. Following Swenson's example, we looked around and wrote about what we saw and what it meant to us.

In Roger's Apartment (Toronto)

I like being in your apartment, though I can't say why: There are no carpets like bright meadows, sweet with flowers, and the burgundy towel is creased crossly along the rack, in the not-so-clean bathroom. There are still boxes piled up, half-packed, half-unpacked, as if for a quick getaway. One day you had camping gear laid out along the carpet, and I remembered a trip with my ex-husband in Killarny Park – prepackaged food in plastic bags, camp stove, sleeping bags in a green-dappled tent set up in a clearing.

From your balcony, I can see the Winchester Arms pub and the traffic on Kingston Road, the clanging clamour of the city. But inside it is cool, peaceful, despite the obstacles in getting here: the shadowy underground parking area, the long gray anonymous hallway. You have paintings that remind me of new physics – quarks, quirks, quantums, alternate realities; and we talk of everything under the sun, the moon, and other galaxies… of our own sons, yours and mine, who are the lights/the darks of our lives. We drink coffee or wine, eat impromptu meals at your round table.

And driving back to Hamilton in your car, we continue the conversation, talk of remembered moments, retell past beads of love, our particular rosaries: those moments of death, love, sex, creation, birth, that live like bubbles in the blood, waiting to explode – or keep us afloat.
The intimacy, as we drive, of your telling me that you need to find a washroom, and my knowing a nearby gas station, just an exit away.
Later, we sit outside on my deck, under the watchful white birch on Queen Street, dripping with catkins. In the garden, white columbine glows like wings of doves, and you remember the terrible shootings at Columbine School, "almost cancels the name of the flower." I tell you about a fever-dream I had of columbine flowers (long before the shooting) that rescued me from a runaway car which had me trapped.

Once, I talked to you through the air while I was flying over the Susquehanna River and you were driving on the 401 highway. Amazing, I said, how our words get through. Yet we always talk through air, even face to face, through the smoke of cigarettes and dying stars and our own thoughts, dark matter of inner and outer space, heart-stopping tension between chaos and connection. We are on echoing railroad tracks of parallel realities, stretching toward infinity – or toward the camps. So the touch of our hands, our minds, our lips, is the only moment we've got, the present tense, under light that comes from millions of light-years away, firefly flicker of fixed and wandering stars.

Ellen S. Jaffe

Under Where?

Barb and I strip
to camisole tops
because of the heat and light –
mine's purple, hers is white,
both trimmed with lace,
and Paula's down to her striped sleeveless top –

In writing, too, we strip
down to our underwear,
our inner layers,
"go naked in public"
as in those dreams
where we appear exposed
at some awkward moment,
giving the lie
to our mothers' and aunts' warnings
to wear clean panties in case we're hit by a bus
and have to go to hospital –
heaven forbid they see our worn, stained undies –
worse than broken bones.

We show our private selves,
our lacy or torn parts,
our hidden beauty,
frayed emotions, scars and skin –
ourselves.

Ellen S. Jaffe

A flash of crimson,
cardinals in the feeder,
gone as summer goes.

Naomi Wingfield

What to do if you want to write a poem

Scrub your mind clear
of the practical, the list
on the fridge door and the green stuff
inside that can walk on its own.
Just for now, this moment,
be open to the scratch
of your pen on the page,
the traffic coming in waves and receding,
speed in any form.

You don't need to hurry
when you enter the poem.
You stand very still,
listen to your breath and belly.
Now open your eyes
to the possibility of pink light
on an otherwise white wall,
of pink bark on apple trees,
of that orange striped cloth
draped on a table,
those tall gladioli in a green vase.
Keep looking. You aren't there yet.
Five petals, no, six,
like two triangles overlaid.
Blush of pink at petal edges
fading to pale salmon at the throat.

Go fishing.
Go to the river for salmon.
Watch for bears but don't let them
frighten you away
from the places the poem needs to begin:
in the field of goldenrod
humming around you,
the Virginia creeper scarlet
along the barbed wire fence,
leaves splashed with green
and the whole vine dizzy with red stems.

Stay right there. You've barely begun
to notice the breeze has picked up your sketches
and the glare from the page is blinding
and the green gloss of periwinkle
stays the same in every season.

And something I forgot to mention:
be open to the names of things:
hemlock, michaelmas daisies,
hosta, ageratum.
Be less precise – use the old names for plants:
speedwell, coral bells, lady's mantle,
sweet William, tickseed, foxglove.
Use even the names that sound ugly
when you first say them: scaveola, spiderwort,
digitalis, specularia.

What you really want to do
is spend a day, an hour even,
looking at clouds as children do.
When's the last time
you lay on a blanket in the yard
or went for a walk by a creek
or sat by a tree you love
reading a poem?

It's nearly over, that chance,
to catch the summer
and pop it in your mouth, a ripe berry,
licking the juice from your chin,
as if you had all day
and nowhere you had to be.

Paula Papky

A Poem Comes

A poem comes
quietly holding a loved one's hand,
remembering, sharing.

A poem comes
burying your face in a baby's hair,
snuggling so close you feel one.

A poem comes
drowning in scarlet and gold
on an autumn day.

Feeling family closeness,
the encompassing caring of friends,
a poem comes.

A poem is a prayer
of acceptance,
of praise,
of joy in creation
and the wonder of love.

Thank You for poetry,
thank You for prayer,
thank You God for love.

Naomi Wingfield

After a Busy Day

Oh ---- it is lovely to be in bed.
Your own bed, I mean.
Not a hotel bed
with a stiff spread,
javexed sheets and
big, hard pillows.

Not in Cousin Amy's guest room.
She calls it the spare room,
with dozens of frilly cushions
and lumpy pillows.

No, it's your own bed,
your own covers,
your favourite pillows,
and your memories.

Yes, it's lovely to be in bed.

Naomi Wingfield

Springboard: ***Choose Something Like a Star*** **by Robert Frost** was for me a recent find. I was singing in a choir that would perform this piece and wanted to share the beautiful images with our writing group. We were drawn to phrases such as "To stay our minds on" and "It asks a little of us here". We wanted to write about what things stay our minds or what life is asking of us this moment. Another possibility might be to write about something we have learned by heart and how those words affect us.

Choosing Stars

Choose something like a star, even one dying –
Even a dying star has something constant,
An audible frequency
F above middle C,
A chord we can all hear and understand.
Though its light comes from far
Away in space and time,
The underlying pulse is close
To our own hearts,
Not flat or sharp, but true --
In the seconds before the final explosion
Into supernovae,
Then black holes,
And the birth of something new.

Ellen S. Jaffe

Springboard: Howard Dietz' popular song, *Dancing in the Dark*, took us very deep at one of our early meetings. The idea for using a pop song as a springboard came from E. L. Doctorow's ***City Of God***. In that book, a washed-up clergyman writes midrashic material based on pop songs, calling these sections of the story, "Jazz Midrash Quartet". This springboard was very rich. We wrote what darkness we are dancing with, where in our lives we have "waltzed in a wonder".

Dancing in the Dark

My soul cries out to me, saying,
we're dancing in the dark,
we're bumping into objects
submerged in shadow,
we're too far from shore,
we're dancing to get our bearings.

We're pretending there's a tune
and we can hear it
but the melody is mixed,
words scrambled,
darkness palpable.

There's a shadowy part of me
I keep hidden, I take out only
once in a while and
waltz around the garden.
I don't want to face the music
alone or with a partner.
I've faced the music
in a long black dance,
found I didn't recognize myself.

Sometimes it is as if
in the close and holy darkness,
a child dances without shoes,
dances where no one sees her,
sees the sweet partner
holding her up.
She's dancing 'til the tune ends
and then keeps hearing
in her heart the one-two-three;
free of hurry,
of being here and then gone.
She's in the holy darkness
of her imagination,
every night new loves
summoned from her dream
to hold her through the dance,
their feet light as angels.

Paula Papky

A Sweet Voice Calls

A sweet voice calls from deep inside
saying, stretch your arms
as wide as you can—
like Mrs. Dalloway, her arms
full of sweet peas,
and yet, and yet,
my hands stay mostly clasped
even though I know
outstretched arms signify prayer
more than palms together.

The voice says,
slow down and look
at what is near you.
Know everything is sacred,
alive, in flux.

The voice says, if there's one thing
you really want to hold in your arms,
do it now, this moment.

But there's never just one thing, is there?

I reach toward so many lovely things
that I feel greedy, complacent.
Why do I love my life so much
when most of the world is so needy,
so full of voices that call out
and no one answers?

Oh, sure, the old saying,
God answers, but says
not now.

(You have a strange idea of the Sacred
if you hear God say *not now*
to human suffering).

What the Beloved wishes for you
is that you try to hold
all that you desire,
that is good for you,
for others,
and for the poor old earth.

So get on with it.
Open up. Blossom.
Crack wide open.
Let in the voice, the light,
the soft rain, the sweetness
of blossom, the golden peach
on your tongue.
You don't have to pay with your soul –
or anyone else's –
to love this moment and its gifts.
Feed your strength
so that all this beauty is offered
to more and more.

If there are things you desire,
gather them:
poems and friends to share them with;
paint and brushes and white paper;
food warm from the sun;
sweet yellow roses;
the high sound of a jet
across the blue sky.

Are you still afraid?
Write a poem. Paint a picture.

Paula Papky

Springboard: *Possibilities*, by Wiskawa Szymborska, is a springboard that can lead anywhere. One can discover, through fast writing that begins, "I prefer", just what one's preferences are and why.

I Prefer ...

Conversation, heart-to-heart
    silence
    music without words
Eye contact
    skin contact
    smiles and laughter
Trees, grass, wild woods
    open spaces rather than cluttered places
Shapes
Newness, strangeness rather than routine
Adventure
    risk
Curious minds
    questions, rather than facts
    seekers
Listeners, to those who need to tell
Hopeful people, to those who mourn the past
Commitment
    engagement, rather than keeping my options open
Generosity
    patience
Awareness, to day dreaming
    tears
    an open heart

Don't know, to knowing

Ramona Carbotte

I remember wide fields
of yellow grasses and blue chicory,
huge elms in whose shadowed walls
we climbed and dreamed.

Paula Papky

Hope is a weed,
    coming up through the pavement,
Life of the earth
    breaking off our coverings of convenience.

Ellen Ryan

Women Writing Together
Theme II:

--I Remember--

Springboard: *Where I'm From*, by George Ella Lyon, brought floods of memories. Our poems took us to different countries and different years, offering everything from Cheez Whiz to marmite, from hula hoops to ration books. We've used this springboard at least half a dozen times and always surprised ourselves.

Where I'm From... I

I am from Paincourt and Dover Centre
Snelgrove, Brampton and Chatham.
Fauberts and Charbonneaus,
Cations, McClures and O'Neils.
French Canadian habitants,
Irish potato famine immigrants
And Presbyterian Scots from Orange country.
My great grandfather McClure rode
the white horse in the annual parade.
I am from reserved and proper people
who cannot talk about their feelings.
I am from warm and affectionate people
who hug and kiss and say nothing but kind words.
My grandmother Faubert/O'Neil played
the organ at the Catholic church in Paincourt
and said the rosary with her family after supper.
She called us her "little childrens"
and let us watch her braid
her long salt and pepper hair.
She would play the piano for us --
songs we heard on the radio
like "Tip Toe Through the Tulips"
and "Let Me Call You Sweetheart".
I am from flat, open land
with fields of corn, tomatoes,
sugar beets and soy beans.
I am from a house with hollyhocks, lilacs,
tea roses and peonies
and a white birch and a pear tree
in the backyard..
A row of tall elms borders the yard
and behind the elms, there is a lover's lane
where cars park at night with no lights on.
I am from a wood frame house with a back stoop
where Mom would stand on a cold winter day
taking frozen spectres from the line,
putting the clothes pins in the pockets
of a Beaver Lumber apron.

I am from a place where, in January,
in the icy, late afternoon,
the deep burgundy and slate grey of the sunset
streak across the sky
over the field behind the house
And the winter sun sinks slowly
behind a mountain made of snow-covered coal.

Barbara Ormond

Where I'm From... II

I'm from sliced bread and jam sandwiches
from Shredded Wheat and Corn Flakes
coffee from the percolator and Carnation milk.

I'm from Windsor, from flat farmland,
from hot humid summers, from fireworks on the river,
from concerts at the band shell on Sunday afternoons.

I'm from Keep your eye on the ball
and Be a good sport if you lose the game.

I'm from wandering the fields that were farms
before we made them suburbs,
from wild raspberries and small wormy apples,
woody pears and fat asparagus
and poison ivy every spring.

I'm from the baby boom, the generation gap,
hippies and love-ins and bell-bottomed blue jeans,
from ban the bra and women's lib.

I'm from midnight smelt feasts,
their small glistening bodies gutted and de-headed,
spines and tails still intact,
rolled in flour and cracker crumbs, fried in butter.

I'm from a great-grandmother who sprinkled her tomatoes
with sugar,
from squeezing the margarine to make it yellow
and popping it into the icebox.

I'm from pot-luck suppers and family reunions,
from chocolate cakes made moist with Miracle Whip,
from Cheez Whiz, ice-box macaroons,
pineapple marshmallow salad.

I'm from Wayne Young and Barbara Burt,
from Walker, Shepherd, Jarvis and Rooke,
from Madoc, from Harrow, from Wilkesport,
from Ireland and potato famines,
from Germany through the Pennsylvania Deutsch.

I'm from English only spoken here
my husband from Dutch, German,
Russian, Ukranian and English spoken here,
from borscht, apfelkuchen and sauerkraut.

I'm from Toe the line
from I'll give you something to cry about,
from night, night, sleep tight,
from Dr. Zeuss and Louisa May Alcott
and the Star Weekly and Ladies' Home Journal.

Paula Papky

Where I'm From... III

I'm from
the sound of a euphonium haunting lonely
the back of the Army hall on a Sunday evening
motes of dust floating, floating through
the last wash of summer light

I'm from
blue serge and bonnets
and the flag with the star in the centre,
the yellow, the red and the blue

I'm from
Jimmy Haun leading the Junior Sunday school
gentle Jesus meek and mild look upon a little child
handing out Lifesavers, and
Alva Stewart's delphinium eyes

I'm from
Holiness Meeting, Junior Soldiers, Corp Cadets,
League of Mercy
from firing your cartridge, knee drill
and come to the mercy seat, don't delay

I'm from
the taste of brass against your tongue, Wednesday night
prayer meeting and Annie Van Tright singing
her testimony

extemporaneous prayer
hands clapping and
tambourines trilling through chorus time
altar calls that last until the roast has burned

I'm from
a man, hat in his hands, sidling into the back row
during the third verse waiting
for a meal ticket,
the rummage room
and I promise to abstain from tobacco
and all intoxicating liquor

I'm from
marching in the open air behind the band
clutching a small
flag in my small hand for all the
town to see and loving it

Constance Wesley

Where I'm From... IV

I'm from Passover seders, eating matzoh and singing "Dayenu,"
From the Fifth Avenue Hotel where my grandparents lived for a while, its dark lobby filled with birds in cages.
I'm from New York City, Long Beach, Wellesley College, San Francisco in 1968,
From Mount Sinai Hospital and Hunter College Elementary School, Dalton School and the YM-YWHA,
From Schrafft's and Chock Full O' Nuts, Hamburger Heaven and the Automat, and F.A.O. Schwartz toy store,
From the Central Park Zoo and carousel, Broadway theatres and neighbourhood movies,
From parakeets, pigeons, and pony rides, Hanukkeh candles, birthday candles, and knowing my great-grandmother Mary Axelrod had come from Russia when she was only fourteen,
From "Black Beauty" and "The Bobbsey Twins," "Nancy Drew" and "Cherry Ames, Student Nurse," and the golden treasury of Greek mythology,
The Museum of Natural History with dinosaurs, mammoths, and blue whales, the Metropolitan Museum of Art with its Egyptian tombs and suits of armour, and the Guggenheim with its winding spiral ramp,
From the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers, the circus at Madison Square Garden, and ice-skating at Wollman Memorial rink,
Prom dresses and bathing-suits, leotards and corduroy skirts, crinolines and saddle shoes and patent-leather pumps, and underpants with the days of the week embroidered in different colours,

Train-trips to California (really Nevada) when I was four, and summer camps in Massachusetts when I was nine, ten, eleven – including Hurricane Diane and the great flood in the summer of 1955.
I'm from Adlai Stevenson running for President, and the McCarthy Hearings, and the deaths of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, from Little Rock and Rosa Parks, the Birmingham bombing-death of 4 little girls, and the murders of Micheal Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney in Mississippi,
The assassination of JFK, RFK, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X,
From hearing Robert Frost read poetry, and seeing Martha Graham dance,
From apple pie and "jelly cakes," pot roast and scrambled eggs, cantaloupe with ice-cream, and learning to drink coffee with milk when I was ten,
From apartment buildings, buses (even double-decker) and subways, taxis and my father teaching me to parallel park on 82nd Street,
From Macy's windows, Christmas trees on Park Avenue, the Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty,
From Zelda and Rose, Viola and Harry, Jackie and Pierre, Orvie, Lisette, Lou, Betty and Fay, Sarah, Ray, my cousins Linda, Barry & Gary, and sleeping over at the house of my friend Linda Bloch.
From Miss Dever and Miss Rooney, Miss Czinner and Miss Maybury, the art teacher with her angora sweaters and the principal who collected china cats,
And the dollhouse I had when I was five – the tiny piano a real music box, which I still play.

Ellen S. Jaffe

During the years when I didn't see my mother I kept things that were connected with her. There were the necklaces she gave me. Postcards from cities along the coast of South America, which she mailed on the voyage from Auckland round Cape Horn. The books that she sent for Christmases and birthdays. Photographs in albums, the ones I took with my Brownie box camera or that people took for me, though I don't really count them as mementos. They were for her, not for me.

With the passing of time some of the things lost their magic. When the red beads broke I didn't try to string them together.The books were hard to store and long ago I lost track of many of them. And why did I keep the postcards? They never gave me any pleasure. I put them away in a cardboard box and I have them still, though they aren't with the needle case, the leather bound books by Dickens and the little yellow felt horse. The books are a curiosity, six real books, so tiny I can hardly bear to open them. They intrigued me and they were hers once, but I never longed for them the way I did the needle case. And strictly speaking, the horse isn't a memento of my mother. It's the only thing I ever wanted to keep from my time at boarding school and is connected with someone entirely different.

I have the little horse because I came down with mumps. Three or four of us got the mumps the first winter I became a boarder and because they were infectious we had to report to Miss McClaren, the nurse. She lived in a small, lonely looking house, hidden among trees at the end of a long driveway. That was the sick bay. I was rather afraid of the place. I didn't much like the idea of walking by myself down the driveway, but the house turned out to be nice inside, comfortable and warm, not like the dormitory. Everything in it was painted the colour of cream and Miss McClaren was kind in an impersonal way. It was a relief to be able to stay in bed.

The horse was a present from the headmistress, though I'm not sure that at first I knew who she was. She was quite the strangest person I'd ever seen, very tall, with a gaunt, bony face and straight grey hair cut short, parted on one side and held in place with a bobby pin. She didn't say who she was but came over to us one by one, abruptly, and with a certain shyness thrust out a basket. "Choose one," she said, and when I looked inside there were these little horses. I didn't particularly want one. They weren't pretty, but it would have been rude to refuse. So I picked a yellow one. It had a bridle roughly stitched in brown thread, a black dot of an eye, a tiny black mouth and a lamb's wool mane and tail, the kind of thing you might buy in assorted colours at a church bazaar in aid of some good cause. It must have been Miss Edmunds' way of saying that she was sorry we were sick, though in fact she said no such thing.

She was the last visitor to the sick bay because by that time we were getting better. My mother had come a few days earlier, when both sides of my face were badly swollen. I lay there dazed with pain, not able to say a word, and my mother sat by my bed and smiled at me. Such a strained, unreal, artificial smile. "Why are you smiling like that?" I remember thinking. "You look as if you want to cry." And the contradiction made me cross. I felt exasperated with her. I'd forgotten she was going away.

Later in the same day Aunty Avice came by, but all she did was stand in the doorway and look into the room with its four little beds. She seemed not to notice me and I thought that was odd. Why had she come, if not to see me? She stayed in the doorway long enough for her eyes to sweep round the room, as if she were taking possession of it. And then she left. In the brief moment that she was standing

there, I stared as if seeing her for the first time. My eyes took in the long sun tanned face with the hint of freckles, the piercing blue eyes, the golden brown hair. She wore it in a bun at the nape of her neck and wisps of hair were playing about her face. I couldn't move for the pain in my face but my eyes were thinking. I asked myself in astonishment, "Who is this person?"

She felt like a stranger, she was so different from my mother. Neither was very tall. That was their only point of resemblance. My mother's face was sharp in my mind. I could see the shadows round her dark eyes, her black hair tinged with grey, her silky, olive skin. But it wasn't her different colouring. That was the least of it. What made her different was something strained and sad. She wasn't like Aunty Avice, who'd stood in the doorway with an air of assurance.

It was Aunty Avice who'd told me my mother was going away, but such a long time ago I'd put it out of my mind. Eleanor and I were day girls then and we were all living in the aunts' house at Halsey Avenue. It was a brown house, tucked into a steep hill planted with hydrangeas and fuchsias. A brick path wound up the hill and under an arbour up to the front door. From a tiny hall you went almost straight into the dining room and kitchen. To the right was a hallway papered with marching hollyhocks on a black ground. There was a bathroom and two bedrooms on that side. Aunty Avice had the small dark one with a window that looked into the side of the hill. She always kept the door shut. Eleanor and I and Aunty Kath shared the bedroom that looked out towards the road. My mother and Nancy slept in a glassed-in porch that led off the sitting room on the other side.The sitting room walls were covered with pictures and some of them were photographs of people I didn't know. An upright piano stood against one wall. There were bookcases, a large wind-up gramophone and china cups in a glass cabinet pushed into a corner. The sofa and the chairs looked as if they'd been bought with a larger space in mind.

The house was so crowded that my father slept next door, though by the time I'm talking about he would have left. He didn't believe in saying goodbye to children, so it was a while before I noticed he was gone. I was doing homework at the dining room table and Aunty Avice was in the kitchen stirring something at the stove. She turned her head and raised her voice to make sure I'd hear. "Your mother and Nancy are going to England." That was all she said. I must have stopped what I was doing and looked up. My face must have changed. But something inside me shut down and made me want to pretend I hadn't heard. I went back to my homework, embarrassed, because I didn't know where England was. It was just a name. But I understood the point. It didn't matter where England was. Wherever it was, the point was that Eleanor and I weren't going there.

Aunty Avice never mentioned the subject again and neither did anyone else. But I drew some conclusions. I supposed that England was where my father had gone because at some point I realized that he was no longer there in the evenings listening to the radio, trying to catch the news through the stutter and the crackle. It was 1945. The war in the Pacific was still on, though we'd been rescued from it. The radio stood on the dining room floor. A large, dark, wooden box with a rounded top and dials and a square of cloth out of which came a strange, squawking voice from England. His trying to hear the evening news was the worst moment of the day. Eleanor and Nancy would have to be shushed, and in that little house, if they started to chatter or worse yet, to cry, and they usually did one or the other, he'd barely hold back his anger. It would swell up inside him like a balloon. He wasn't any good with children. Aunty Avice said that once under her breath, many years later, as if thinking out loud, not meaning me to hear. She sounded still incredulous at just how bad he was.

Once when we were visiting people, in the time before he left, I asked what a daisy chain was. I'd been puzzling about this thing that children made, the ones in books. I couldn't imagine what it was. I didn't like not being able to understand what was in a book. So when I saw the daisies in their lawn and asked my question it was as if a mystery were unfolding. You picked a daisy and made a slit at the end of the stem and threaded another daisy through it, and you went on making slits and threading daisies carefully, as many times as you had flowers. And then you linked the ends together. It was a very small chain and it made me happy. I liked having the mystery solved. The problem came when there were no daisies left to make a chain for Eleanor. She looked as if she were going to cry and my father told me I should give her mine. And that made me angry. She didn't care about daisy chains. She hadn't been thinking about them and puzzling over them. He could have said, "Never mind, Eleanor, next time we see some daisies we'll make you one." And in a minute she'd have forgotten about it. I could see what he wanted. He wanted me to behave in front of these people like a good child in a story book. And I wouldn't do it. I was torn, though not because of a need to please him. I resented his interference and thwarting him made me anxious.

From the silence about the business of going to England I understood that my mother didn't want to talk about it. She couldn't. It would upset her. And she hadn't been well. I'd seen her sitting at the dining room table with a blank look on her face, and Aunty Kath was talking to her urgently, in a voice that wasn't her usual voice, insisting that the surgeon had done a wonderful job. I couldn't understand why Aunty Kath kept on repeating herself. How could she be so sure? And what was a surgeon anyway? I wanted to ask. And my mother sat there looking dazed, not saying a word. Afterwards she spent a lot of time in bed. When I came home from school that's where she'd be reading *David Copperfield*. She had a lot of books. They were precious to her and out of them all she chose this one, about the cold, stern Mr. Murdstone, his overbearing sister and his frail wife and his child who was going away to school. She wanted to read some of it to me but I grew impatient. The words were too hard and the sentences were too long and something plaintive about the story didn't please me. "Why should I care about David Copperfield," I said to myself. "He's not real!"

My mother would have denied there was any parallel between Mr. Murdstone and my father. The idea would have shocked her. She didn't think of him as cold. She depended on him too much for that. In her letters she called him 'Dearest One'. The first time I noticed her writing to him and caught sight of the words on the page I was furious. "What a stupid thing to say!" I said. The thought of her clinging to him disgusted me. I poured out my wrath and my contempt, the words tumbling from my mouth, and my mother was taken aback, flustered. She tried to defend herself but she did it lamely, and afterwards I was sorry, not so much for what I'd said, but because I'd attacked her.

She had a needle case like a tiny book with a few soft cloth pages and a hard cover that gleamed as if it had been varnished. The picture on the cover showed a dark landscape and a pretty woman in an old fashioned dress and bonnet, who looked as if she were laughing or dancing. I liked to hold it in my hand and stare into it until I felt as if I were there, standing beside her in the twilight. The needle case was beautiful and I coveted it because it was hers. But I couldn't just ask for it. It wouldn't be right. She'd already given me things, like her big red beads and a little worn pendant on a silver coloured chain. That was during the war when presents were hard to find. Wanting her needle case was different. It was something she used. So I invented a bargain. If she gave me hers, I'd give her the one I made at school. Looking at mine, I could see what an ugly thing it

was. Cut out of felt with pinking shears. It was rough, crooked. I was terrible at sewing. But I knew she'd accept it. It was my way of saying I Know You Are Going Away without having to put it into words. And after that the subject we never talked about was put aside. Closed almost. And I was distracted by the great flurry of going to boarding school.

Aunty Kath and Aunty Avice said that going to boarding school was a great privilege. I supposed that this had something to do with all the clothes we needed. Not just the tunic with the tie and girdle and the blouses and the hat and gloves and the blazer with the badge, the right coloured cardigan, the indoor shoes, the outdoor shoes, the black running shoes, the white running shoes. We had those already because we'd been day girls. Boarders needed special Sunday clothes. We had to be measured for a black suit with a pleated skirt for going to church and for outings and a blue velveteen dress to wear at dinner. And later on, besides the summer uniform with its straw hat we'd need a white silk dress for Sundays. Special name tapes had to be ordered from Smith and Caughey in Newmarket, and when the package arrived and was opened, I saw two rolls of white tape with the letters of our names in fine, flowing, red embroidery. Seeing the beautiful red names repeated so many times made me feel important. This was about us, me and Eleanor. But the aunts and my mother became preoccupied with sewing. Everything we were taking had to have a name sewn on, down to the last pair of underpants and socks, and they were so engrossed I began to feel they'd forgotten me. They were moving round me, leaving me in a hole, invisible. I felt as if I were disappearing.

I wanted to do what they were doing, so I said I'd put my name on my handkerchiefs. Aunty Avice found me a needle with a large eye and a skein of embroidery thread and I sewed my initials onto six cotton handkerchiefs using a stitch I'd learned at school. She was too busy to check to see how I was managing. I didn't know you could separate the threads. No one told me that, so the initials were very thick, and it took me a long time to finish. But having said I'd do it, I couldn't give up. Sewing on the initials made me feel better.

When we started the term as boarders it didn't feel so different at first, even though, with our suitcases, we took a taxi to get there. Usually we walked. The aunts' house was only ten minutes away. At the entrance to the school grounds we took the same path under the oak trees that led to the classrooms in the junior school. To the left we could look across a familiar lawn to a willow tree, to two enormous Norfolk pines and beyond that to the netball courts. But instead of going to a classroom we came a day early and moved into Cowie House, the building next door. It was a large, rambling, wooden building and in the middle of it was a dormitory with a stone balcony on each side. That was where I met the girls who would be my companions, not the senior girls who moved in later, who were a world apart, whose names I could never remember, but the ones in the junior school.

There were eight of us. Eleanor and Robin were the youngest. They were five and Philippa, with the long braids, would have been seven or eight. The rest were all in my class. That was a surprise. They were in Miss Prothero's class and I hadn't noticed them before.

There was Andrea and Josie and Carol and tall, pale Helen, strangers at first and then familiar, these people whom I hadn't chosen and didn't always like or understand. They were etched into my mind like a family. The times I liked best with them were in the dormitory before lights out. That was when we were gathered together. The bedspreads would be turned down. We'd have finished our baths and brushed our teeth, most of us anyway. Someone would be combing

out her hair. It was a time for confidences, for talking about ourselves, those of us who wanted to.

Almost everyone came from far away, and that interested me. Robin and Philippa were from up north, where there weren't any schools. Andrea came from somewhere so remote in the Tongan Islands that she didn't always go home for the holidays. Her friends among the day girls would invite her to stay with them. Carol came from Wellington, a day's journey away by train. Her mother was an Old Girl and that made the school fees less. Otherwise, she implied, she wouldn't have had to go so far away. Her father was in the army. Her mother was a nurse. I could tell from the sound of her voice and her little, deep set, angry eyes that she didn't like being at boarding school.

Helen had a tall, pale father whom she resembled, who sometimes visited her on Sundays. That meant that her home was in Auckland. She never talked about herself. She lived inside a wall of silence. She might say 'yes' or ‘no’ but only when she had to in answer to a question. What I knew about her came from the other girls. Every so often, as she passed by, someone would say, "Her mother is dead," in a hushed voice, in tones of awe. It was the worst thing that could possibly happen to anyone. Josie's father was dead. He'd been killed in the war, but somehow that was less terrible. Well, it seemed like that to me, and perhaps it did to the others too, though no one would have said so. There was nothing mysterious about Josie. She talked a lot. She kept her story in our minds by going through it each time the term began.

"My father's a soldier but he's dead now," she'd say. "I used to live with my mother and baby brother in the Cook Islands. When the telegram came that said that my father had been killed, my mother was holding my brother. She fainted and someone rushed to catch him. No one paid any attention to me. No one at all."

Her indignation would rise. Her voice would tremble with grievance. "And now, because I'm in the way, I have to go to boarding school."

She wasn't a new boarder, so the other girls and Miss Colebaker had heard the story before. I noticed that no one said anything. The expressions on their faces didn't change. They merely listened and so did I, astonished. Here was someone like me, nine years old, who said out loud that she was being badly treated. I'd never thought about being badly treated, not in that direct way. It was a disturbing possibility. All I could do was hold it in my mind, turning it this way and that. I didn't know what to do with something that didn't fit into my picture of the world.

When I marvelled at her speaking out, at her complaining to the world, there was a tinge of fear in my admiration. And before long, after she'd acquired a stepfather and had said in her emphatic way that they didn't like each other, I began to feel there was something rather shameful about exposing so much unhappiness. I was afraid it might be catching. Mine was over. The war was over. Everything was getting better. That was how I saw things. This new school was better. I liked the large, tree filled grounds and the green, overgrown, shady corners. I liked the teachers and the lessons. I was hungry for information. My mind soaked things up like a sponge. Boarding school in Auckland was better than the Convent in Manila. There were no high walls. We had plenty to eat. We could have three outings a term, *exeats* they were called, and we could go to any number of birthday parties.

My mother came to see us on Sunday afternoons and the idea that she was going away began to fade from my mind. When I'd feel it coming back I'd push it away and hold on to a shred of hope. "Perhaps something has changed," I'd say

to myself. "If I don't ask, maybe it won't happen." She'd never said the words that would have made it true. So after the mumps, when the term was over, and Eleanor and I went back to Halsey Avenue, it was a shock to see that she was really gone. There was a terrible hole in the air where she'd been. In the moment of knowing the truth I felt as if I were standing on the edge of a cliff, that I would tumble down and go on falling for ever. It was a horrible feeling. But it went away and it didn't come back.

She left behind two books, one for each of us. Usually she wrote in books. This time she hadn't and the absence of her writing was a kind of silence. Eleanor's book was a collection of fairy tales by Andrew Lang. I didn't find them interesting and Eleanor never paid any attention to them. Mine was *The Tree that Sat Down* by Beverly Nichols, about a mother and daughter who lived in a large tree that was old and tired and needed a rest. In the years that followed my mother sent a lot of books. The parcel would arrive ahead of time, weeks before our birthdays, weeks before Christmas. It would sit on the shelf above the fireplace in the dining room, wrapped in layers of brown paper, battered at the corners from having been tossed at sea, and I would stare at the edges of the books and think about what they might be. I read them many times but the one I read most was *The Tree that Sat Down*. It gave me a way of thinking about why she'd gone away and hadn't taken me with her. The book was like an explanation, though one nobody wanted to mention. We were too much for her, Eleanor and me. She was like the tree that needed to rest. And I couldn't help thinking that it would have been better had there been no Eleanor. She wouldn't have left me behind then. I wasn't too much trouble.

One by one postcards came addressed to me in her familiar, spiky handwriting. On one side would be a brief, bland message and on the other the black and white photograph of a dull, distant city in a country I'd never heard of. I hated the postcards. What did I care about Valparaíso or Montevideo? And then one day we had a geography lesson. Miss Prothero showed us a globe and she pointed out New Zealand, tucked away at the bottom, like an afterthought. The globe stayed in the classroom and more than once, during recess, I stayed behind to look at it. I saw the Philippines further up on the rounded part of the globe and China, where I'd been born, further on still, as if it were on the other side of a hill. And I began to imagine the size of the world. I remembered voyages. The slow ship from Leyte to Townsville. Days in a train from Townsville to Sydney. Across the Tasman Sea to Wellington and then the train to Auckland. It wasn't even so long ago. Slowly the truth about England dawned on me.

"If I'm in New Zealand," I said to myself, "then England is on the other side of the world, as far away as it can possiby be."

Eve Kliman

The Place I Carry with Me

Is of course New York City…I think of the coincidence of my friend Lil Blume living there now for several months, on 97th Street and Central Park West, only one block away from 96th Street and Central Park West where I grew up.

Begin with the street: the white-spired church on the corner next to my apartment building, with staircases going down below street level, a "found" playground. Lil says the church is still there. I'd like to go to New York to see the neighbourhood again but something holds me back – is it just too little time and too much work, or something else?

Look across from the church, to the corner next to the subway entrance, with the man selling roses wrapped in green tissue paper…the shoeshine booth with pin-up calendars of big-busted women in bathing suits, and the smell of shoe polish…the French bakery down the street with "rainbow" cookies and green marzipan "acorns" dipped in chocolate…the drugstore with a soda fountain where I had my first ice-cream cone (chocolate)…the little grocery stores on Columbus Avenue with their barrels of bagels and pickles, where the owners gave me pieces of bologna and raw string-beans to snack on. All of that gone now.

I don't remember much about the apartment building itself (7 West 96th Street) – we lived in 7-C, a corner apartment. I remember looking out the windows, wishing on the first star, and the Persian carpet in my bedroom. The family down the hall, the Gordons, had two cocker spaniels, black and honey-coloured (perhaps one after the other, not at the same time). At seven, desperately wanting a dog of my own, I loved these dogs as vicarious substitutes, and cried when one of them died while the Gordons were on vacation. I was told the elevator man was supposed to feed him, and he wouldn't eat. I had begged to feed the dog myself but no one listened to me – and who really knows if the story about not eating was what really happened. I have vague memories of the Gordons' teenage son Roger (tall and pimply) – who knows what happened with him, either? I recently asked my 88-year-old mother, whose memory remains sharp and clear about most things past and present, what she recalled about the Gordons, their dogs, and their son. She drew a blank. Nothing (although she remembered another neighbour who had the first heart by-pass operation; he was treated by my father, a cardiologist). "I guess it just wasn't important to me," she said, not demeaning my memories but simply stating a fact.

I remember a birthday party with green-iced cake my mother had made, where all the guests received a pet turtle as a souvenir, each person's name painted on the turtle's shell with red nail-polish. Now we know that nail-polish could hurt the turtles, and that the animals themselves carry salmonella.

There was yellow forsythia in Central Park in spring, a hill to roll down that seemed big as a mountain, and two playgrounds near the 96th Street entrance to the park. Just behind the fence surrounding one of the playgrounds was a small wooded area with a white birch tree which split into four subsidiary trunks. There was a little niche in the middle, where the trunks separated, at just the right height for me to climb up there. I would sit there in this "lap" for hours, pretending it was my treehouse or my nest. When I got down and explored further, I discovered worms lived under the rocks around the fence.

Begin with the street.

Ellen S. Jaffe

Triplets Poem

Ultrasound Picture

My three grandkiddies in their shrouds
nod bob and nudge
in aqueous oceans.

Peas in a pod?
No, more like whales
who sing their songs through water
to please their playmates in antipodes.

When Birth shall rip them out to loneliness,
will they recall
the songs they sang
before they learned our language?
        Will they be pals?
Philippa, Charlotte and Oscar,
I wish you well.

Nursery

I think the neonatal nursery
is the only sane place left
on the planet.

Look: here are nine doctors
each working eight-hour shifts
to watch three babies.
Their field: Resuscitation.

Facts climb the walls in jagged steps,
pass through the monitors and out.
And buzzers buzz at every twitch.
No TV here.
But step outside, turn on the switch
of any set,
and you may see
        the Brass discuss
        sustainable losses.

Pippi

Pippi, my granddaughter,
would rather sleep than eat.
They pat her back
and flick the sunrise-rosy
soles of her feet with their fingers.
It doesn't work.
She'll just drop off again.
Through her nostril,
which is the size of a seed pearl,
they've pushed a wire for food.
Force-feeding you, my wee refusenik.

I know she feels short-changed.
She had two months' nirvana coming
before they snatched her out at 30 weeks.
It's worse than kidnap.

Her twin sister and her twin brother
went home a week ago,
already riding high on parents' shoulders
in back-packs.

They've seen the aisles of Joy and Duz,
and now they're in the parking lot at Sears
buying a triple-infant carseat.

But Philippa Flip says, no, no, no.
She's like the Infant of Sagantum
who couldn't bear the threat of war.

Irene Orgel

Consideration Tarts

I imagine my Grandmother Tola,
a young woman in Michigan
teaching her daughters, Bessie, Hattie and Lucille,
to make the Christmas tarts.

Not only at Christmas,
but always at Christmas,
syrupy, runny, no raisins or nuts.

The girls, now women
bake the same tarts in their kitchens
teaching their children
girls and boys.

Where did they get their funny name?
One rotund friend when offered another
said, "Well, I've had three
but I will consider one more."
So then they were consideration tarts.

I remember one hectic Christmas eve,
still baking the tarts,
as I listened to midnight mass
broadcast from the Cathedral.

My daughter bakes the tarts
in an old Ontario farmhouse
while beef cattle and horses
remind her of the first Christmas.

A great grandson starts a new tradition.
He bakes dozens every year
for a big party at the Vancouver Planetarium.

From Michigan to Ontario,
to Vancouver and Halifax,
wherever you visit
aunts, cousins and grandchildren,
always at Christmas,
Consideration tarts.

Naomi Wingfield

1 cup corn syrup
1/4 cup brown sugar
2 eggs
butter the size of a walnut
pinch of salt
1 teaspoon vanilla or nutmeg
Put in unbaked tart shells

Bake 10 minutes at 450F
Reduce heat to 350F and bake 5 more minutes

Women Writing Together
Theme III:

--Growing Up--

For Heather

When you were only two
and could read *Noisy Nora* aloud,
you were like Nora
coming and going
with a monumental crash.

Now you are twenty-two,
married and trying to conceive,
and I dream of babies
fragrant from their bath
swaddled in blankets I've knit
looking through surprised blue eyes
when the tall tree in the house
is streaming with tinsel.

I dream for you
(as if your own dreams weren't enough)
a two-year old beside you on the piano bench,
banging away as you did
and singing in tune, *All Through the Night,*
or another lullaby just before sleep.

I'll tell you – listen!
the sweetest dream:
that you will teach and be a potter,
raise cockatiels, your children all agog
when the bird babies come.
You will live with Jonathan
in a house with an aviary attached,
something we took you to see
at Dundurn Castle when you were small.

Springboard: ***The Dream Of The Rood*** is an anonymous poem of the eighth century. It begins, "Listen! I'll tell you the sweetest dream". These are only a few of the poems we write in response to that line.

The sweetest dream
is the times you will have us come –
your father and I –
we'll be old then –
and you'll cook and sing
and make us laugh,
give us Gwendolyn from Wilde,
or Shirley Valentine, the speech
that won the prize at our Thanksgiving dinner
for the most inappropriate word of the day.

Listen! I'll dream you the sweetest dream
and never miss you because you'll be near,
and never speak in anger or judgement;
I'll be the perfect mother,
and you, the perfect daughter.

Paula Papky

The Sweetest Dream

always, always go back to the street
where you lived when your first two kids were little
recognize the dream when it begins
and tell yourself, "Enjoy this!", because you
know what's coming.

Sam, crawling around on the floor
with a bib tied around his neck
or else he's sitting up in his stroller watching
while you hang out the washing
(there never was a clothes line when you lived there,
but it's part of the dream anyway)
little overalls, jackets, dresses with smocked yokes
it's spring and the day is moist, not really
overcast but not sunny either

and Susannah is five, coming home from kindergarten
hair like corn silk, and eyes like morning
"Enjoy this!", tell yourself again
the tiny undershirts, pyjama tops, sweaters that
button at the shoulder, hand knit pink
and yellow and blue
flap in the
sweetest breeze and Susannah deliberates
through mud puddles in her
rubber boots

you rock the fat pod of your baby's flesh, he
breathes the sweetest breath,
you wrap him in the softest
towel and you sing to him the sweetest song
you crowd them both onto your lap and
sniff the hollows of their
unbent necks

in that place
forever the sweetest dream

Constance Wesley

Listen: I'll Tell You the Sweetest Dream

We were back at school living in a small
apartment
Sleeping together in a single bed.
Our love was young and fresh and idealistic,
oblivious to the pain ahead.
The efforts you made to see me -
hitchhiking from Oshawa to Toronto
train to Hamilton
bus up the Mountain.
Arriving breathless, so excited to be with me.
We were so intense, so focused on each other,
so accepting , so in love.

We dreaded leaving each other on Sunday night
dragging "goodbye" out as long as we could.
It's years since then,
now we're together most of the time.
And still, there's the touch of your hand
in bed at night,
your foot reaching for mine,
your body curled around me.
You're here, you're my sweet love
And we'll make it through December.

Barbara Ormond

The Bad Boy on the Warehouse Roof

The bad boy on the warehouse roof,
blowing blue smoke rings
dancing the hootchie-kootchie
in the accidental heat at the end of September
that rains rattling yellow,
only waits for the police
so he can run away laughing.

And later:
when he has eluded them and you
and hovers at the edge of town
in the spare hour neither night nor day.
Is he hitch-hiking or
is his thumb the shill
for picking brown-eyed Susans
in the ditch.

And later: on the dock
and he is undercover
too late for anyone to look for him anyway
when the geese cut

a delicate, brutal wedge through
the moon's full extravagance
there is no waiting
no beginning, no end to that story.
Lavender mist rises quietly.

Margaret Ormond

Springboard: *The Boy With His Mother Inside Him*, by Kelle Groom, we found in ***The New Yorker*.** That day we had a guest join our group, Margaret (Twinkle) Ormond, who wrote the evocative poem on the left. Ellen Ryan wrote from the same springboard but beginning with that image, "the night like a big hat on my head".

Dancing at Nightfall

I dance across the dunes
in silvery moonlight,
down to the waves for memory's
gentle blessings.

Moon slipping behind a cloud,
night settles like a big hat on my head,
images shimmering
just beyond the slide of my eyes.

Dad's hat flopping over my ears,
full of words to look up and ideas to share,
I turn to see you, Mom,
in your wide-brimmed hat of mid-century splash.

Your joy for life,
the light you brought to every conversation,
your vibrant touch again on my shoulders
all nurture, yet nudge my return to the dance.

Ellen B. Ryan

Sunday

When I was growing up, Sunday was a special day. The day would begin busily and noisily as my sisters and I dressed for nine o'clock Mass. Polished shoes and good dresses, our best coats and always a hat and gloves. Mom would check her hat and makeup in the mirror in the front hall;
Dad would put his overcoat over his good suit and don his fedora. Then, we'd all pile in the car - four of us in the back and often a toddler on Mom's lap in the front.

After Mass, we'd go to a store across the Third Street bridge where the floor was tiled in large red and black squares. While we chose the flavour of ice-cream we wanted, Dad would unlock one of the squares with a key, lift the tile and take out frozen packages of meat from the freezer in the floor. Then he would pay for our ice-cream and buy himself a maple walnut.

In the afternoon, Dad would sleep on the living room couch; the roast was in the oven. The house was quiet and the afternoon stretched endlessly, it seemed, until it was time for dinner.

In the early years, before there were too many children, Grandpa and Beulah would come for dinner - turnip and mashed potatoes, a roast and sometimes Yorkshire pudding. Apple crisp for dessert or pineapple whip. If we didn't have company, we would talk. Sometimes, Helen and I would tease Margaret Anne. Sometimes, we would laugh and tell jokes. It was a happy time!

When we were older, our girlfriends and then later, our boyfriends would come for Sunday dinner. Dad would always encourage the boys to eat more. "Have some more potatoes", he would say. " Put some meat on your bones, John."

"Dad!", one of us would say, "his name is Mike, not John."

"I can't keep all you guys straight", he would answer.

Once we were in bed, an unusual serenity lulled us to sleep. The sound of Dad's snoring would reassure us and we felt safe. On Sunday night, we could sleep peacefully and wake in the morning ready for the week ahead.

Barbara Ormond

Pépère's Skating Pond

The backyard depression
came to life each December
(one year it was November)
while Pépère puffed on his pipe
and watched over us
trooping from all directions
to his winter-only pond,
like glass in that lucky month
before we banked deep snow
to keep the puck in play.

Ellen B. Ryan

I would like to meet Emily D

I would like to meet Emily D
-- to talk of the feather of hope
and dwelling in possibility,
and dying everyday to be ready for the real
thing and to be open to living.
-- to look over her packets of poems,
neatly tied for whom? for what?

Would Emily care about Reverse the Curse,
and the World Series win?
Did Amherst feel inferior disdain
for Boston back then too - like my native
Granby in the countryside over the Notch?

Would we talk about our neighbor Mr. D,
descendant of her relatives?
What did he think of his famous 'ancestor'?
Did he know how like her in solitude he was?
Did he play with words in the quiet of his fields,
deliberately distanced from his social whirl wife?

How did Mr. D view our sledding gang,
filing over stone walls to Dickinson Hill?
The toboggan - the jumps - building them up -
modest in today's skateboard standards,
but a great leap for sleds -
Watch your face on a sled!
Watch your seat on a toboggan!
Jump off in time before the trees!

Did Emily watch sledding kids
from her upstairs window?
Did she write about the excitement of racing
down life's adventures with abandon,
sledding (in the driver's seat)
or tobogganing (being blindly carried off)?

Would she like my Escher dream of sliding --
after a long day of trudging
up the hill time after time
when Donnie had tired of pulling my sled --
sliding down a square perimeter of hills
and arriving at the top on the fourth downhill?

Ellen B. Ryan

Springboard: *The Sky Is Full of Blue and Full of the Mind of God*, by Kathleen Norris, begins with the words her student wrote out of her loneliness and roams from there to a bus trip, to dancing to a jukebox, to the holy, the "Sanctus". Each of us tried to picture a moment from the past and describe it in words to appeal to all the senses. This is good writing practice no matter what the springboard. It yields luscious, sensuous writing.

"The Sky is Full of Blue and the Mind of God"

This quote led me to connect and juxtapose two people: one, Roy, an actual person, a friend who recently passed away, a man who used to play Santa Claus during the Christmas season; the other a fictional character, the young boy Ben, who figures prominently in my novel for young adults, ***Feast of Lights*** *(Toronto: Sumach Press, 2006). Even though he has died before the novel opens, he appears in his sister's memories and recollections. Ben is Jewish, but often thought about Christmas.*

I can see Roy in his Santa Claus outfit, sleigh bells jingling and tingling, sitting on the hospital bed of Ben, a character I have created, who is six years old, Jewish, and dying of leukemia. Never mind the difference of religion, or that one character is "fictional" and the other "real": what is reality, anyway? And what is Santa Claus, fact or imagination?
I can see Ben watching his parents light the Hanukkah menorah ("More light, more light" said Goethe as he was dying), singing "Happy Birthday" to the colourful candles – and showing the menorah proudly to Santa, who looks at it with interest and with love.
At the same time, Ben loved the Christmas Wish Book catalogue, and made so many wishes. I can see him curling up in Santa/Roy's warm lap, held firmly in his arms, touching his (real) white beard, Roy's eyes really twinkling – the way they do in the poem "The Night Before Christmas" – like blue stars. Ben is saying "I'm so tired, Santa," and Roy answers "Shhh, it will be all right, everyone loves you, tell old Santa what you'd like."
And I can see Ben's sister Sarah standing at the doorway of that white, clean, bright hospital room, wishing she too could cuddle in that wide lap. She finds, instead, her great-great-grandfather Wolf, his hair and beard red like Roy's used to be, playing his harmonica on the rocking (not sinking) ship crossing the ocean, lulling the children to sleep with music about raisins and almonds. And she finds her great-great-grandmother Anna tearing her hair for her lost child, then nursing another infant in her arms. Sarah knows this new baby will become her great-grandmother Ruth
whose menorah and candles
shine
with the light
of the world.

Roy and Ben, Rest in Peace.
May your memory be a blessing.

Ellen S. Jaffe

Car Talk

Alone with you at last in the coppertone Chevy --

After months away from home,
I had lost my certainty,
at age 18, was not sure,
needed you to make things right.

You had always been there for the answers:
first skate on double blades,
hitting the ball farther,
tough math problems,
unusual word meanings.

"I'm not so sure, Dad, about this religious dogma
or that, not so sure we Catholics
have all the truth,
nor we Americans.

Can you put me back where I was,
lift me back to my comfortable seat
in the car, heading toward the future,
show me which route to take?"

"Thank God," I heard. "You are beginning
to grow up now. So bright and yet
I questioned would you ever learn
to navigate the roads of life."

"But I've lost my destination."

"No, you have just changed to a map
of another scale. Now you will steer
beyond the black and white
of well-posted highways."

Looking back from this crossroads,
I wonder why
I was taken aback to hear
you too had doubts,
doubts were OK.
I wonder how
many times before
you had tried to get me to turn
on the lights.
I wonder how
you knew to idle
later on when my doubts
led to Vietnam protests,
views crashing with your own.

And I wonder how I knew --

Driving on,
I would find direction
from moment to moment,
my compass set true
by this talk
in the car.

Ellen B. Ryan

On Days Like This

On days like this
childhood comes like wildflowers
its bright colours and shapes
the scent of wild roses from ditches
the tall white fragrance of sweet clover
and every good thing
I ever did as a child
is present, falls into my lap like stars:
the blue purey marble
I lost one recess
lurks in a forgotten drawer,
its sapphire eye winking,
waiting to be held in a hot hand.
The little chains we used for hopscotch,
our breath held as we tossed
and watched it land perfectly
in square number nine,
watched ourselves gracefully skip
and land and turn inside the lines.

Hours and hours flew by in summer,
a ball thrown against the house,
the chanting of skipping songs,
the whispered dirty jokes,
the plays we put on
for captive audiences,
the weekly arrival of the Bookmobile,
our brains like furnaces stoked
with Nancy Drew and Mazo de la Roche
and fairy tales in which
the ugly duckling showed us patience
and the sleeping beauty
the restorative power of a kiss.
There was the long slide
into sleep on hot nights
and when I couldn't sleep
sometimes my father would come
and rub my back for me,
a poem I haven't mentioned,
what it has meant
to feel his touch,
to hear him sing,
to sit in a rowboat with him
and whisper so as
not to disturb the world.

Paula Papky

Springboard: Bronwen Wallace's poem, *Appeal*, is a memory of a summer night in her childhood. Towards the end of the poem she writes, "A night I offer you". We began there, and the poem that follows begins, "I give you a summer in 1956".

I give you a summer

I give you a summer
in 1956 or maybe '58,
at Aunt Thelma and Uncle Bill's cottage
on Dorrie Lake
the water lilies,
the lake bottom squishy and brown,
and always the possibility
of your leg emerging
festooned with leeches –
blood-suckers, we called them –
running, screaming, over the sand
to an aunt or uncle
for salt to loosen the leeches' hold
or if that failed, a cigarette,
to torture the things
until they curled up and died.

All the days
are one long sunny day:
the shriek of oars as we rowed,
as far out as the rope allowed,
the stench of clamshells
left in the sun on the dock,
their gelatinous insides rotting,
the leaping of green frogs,
and Uncle Harry paying
a nickel a pair
for frogs as bait,
and watching as he slicked the hook
through the frog's lip
and cast far out in the lake
to pull in a catfish
or yellow sunfish with sharp fins.

I remember the dinner table
with four kids and perhaps ten adults,
my parents the young ones then,
my father with his skinny legs,
my mother slender and white,
trying to tan, the bands
of her bathing suit pale
against sunburned flesh.
The time the women lay,
straps of their tops undone,
and one of the uncles threw
a handful of ice cubes
to see them leap up.

.....→

There were always words
I didn't know:
get laid, hair of the dog,
cathouse, going to the throne.
There was poison ivy
on the path to the outhouse.
The well water we carried
from Scheineman's farm
sat in a pot with a ladle,
tasted of iron.
I give you
that moment when great uncle Bill
with his glass eye
would distract me,
point to some marvel out on the lake
and when I looked back
my potato would be gone
or my pork chop
or my slice of white bread
spread with margarine.

Later, the dark and the mosquitoes,
my sister, my aunt who was ten also,
and I tried to sleep
in a sagging double bed,
spent the night rolling
down into the hollow.

I give you the times
when my father let me row him
far from shore
so he could fish for bass
and how he'd say
it's mind over matter
if he caught me shivering
and how I learned
not to feel the cold,
not to complain,
so that he'd take me again
to the place where we'd speak
in whispers,
where the water dripped off the oars,
where the water lilies
gave off their sweet scent
and laid down memories
of deep black lakes
and cobalt skies.

Paula Papky

Women Writing Together
Theme IV:

--Losses--

Journey

From my slow cruise on the Styx
I've been vouchsafed a side trip.

There are few bipeds where I live.
Everyone moves on wheels or sticks,
and here's a man who poses as a teapot.
The ghouls and gargoyles meet to eat
by candlelight. It's called
Gracious Living in Retirement.

They've wheeled my wheelchair down the plank
and through the streets, across the town,
depositing me at the door of the neonatal nursery.

Is the way near? Or is it far?
Tough questions for ephemera
to answer.
I only know the emmet's inch,
the eagle's mile,
are just a joke
to make us smile.

Irene Orgel

Cycles and Circles

My mother was eight years old
the morning she came down the stairs
to find her mother was gone.
The kitchen was dark and empty.
She couldn't smell toast and coffee.
She couldn't hear music playing on the radio
Nor could she hear
the soft lilt of her mother's voice
"Where's Mother?", she asked her father.
"She's gone away," he said.

The sting of that morning would not go away.
There was no salve to cure
the pain of missing her mother.
A two week visit in the summer did not erase the hurt;
the bruise of her abandonment was deep;
no one knew it was there.

She yearned
for someone to fill
that sore hole in her heart
to help recapture
the love she once felt.
She found love but not the kind she had lost.
It wasn't complete or selfless like a mother's love.
It was a love fraught with grief and loneliness;
a see-saw love, a roller coaster ride
that lasted for fifty-two years.

The motherless child
became a mother to seven of us.
She fed us, washed our clothes,
attended our recitals and plays,
talked to our teachers,
protected us and worried about us.
She taught us "This Little Piggy",
kissed us and said "up's a daisy"
when she lifted us from the high chair.
She read to us
and sewed pretty little dresses for Easter.

Sometimes the sorrow of her childhood
seeped through
clouding ours.
She rocked and cradled the little ones,
asked the older ones to be mothers too.
Didn't know how to help us
when we were sad or confused.
Didn't praise us or hug us when we did well.
Nor did she ever demean or ridicule us.
She loved us the best she could.

I think of cycles and circles
when I think of my mother.
That sense of abandonment was always with her.
She could have bruised us bitterly with her loss-
by leaving us, by neglecting us,
by abusing us with words or actions.
Instead she did her best,
with the resources she had,
to be a good mother.

•••••••➤

When my grandmother was found
confused, ill and destitute
on a park bench in Toronto,
Mom brought her home to live with us
until grandma died.

That's what I mean about cycles and circles.
Mom looked after her mother
even though she had not been raised by her.
She taught us a lesson
of respect and responsibility and love.

Love came full circle when Mom got cancer.
During the last two years of her life,
we took turns spending time with her.
Those times with Mom remain
the happiest of memories.
Watching old Doris Day movies
on Saturday night.
Ordering dinner from Rossini's,
taking a drive around the old River Road, having
breakfast in our robes,

Reading the Sunday papers in the den,
talking about ordinary things and sometimes
about her pain
and her feelings about dying.

She knew she was loved
by her children and by her friends
and she gave us all the greatest gift
by allowing us to care for her
and to love her.

Barbara Ormond

Bio

I am a child of exile and of voyages,
of diverse nationhoods and languages.
When I awakened in the last century
I experienced difficulty
in getting my bearings
between two wars

and even now in age
I have not found a mooring.

Irene Orgel

To Lyle

I sit and hold your hand.
These quiet times,
these precious times,
I sit and hold your hand.

I see your younger hands,
planting the pansies,
stirring the chili,
steering the boat,
baiting the hooks,
netting the fish,
docking the boat.

I feel your hands,
cupping my breast,
stroking my thigh,
touching my face.

I imagine your hands,
tickling a baby,
building a house,
making furniture,
dealing cards.

I will hold your hand
as long as I can.
I will love you forever.

Naomi Wingfield

Sleepless

Sleepless
I count a thousand sheep
and sip warm cocoa.
My run-away mind
still gallops in circles.

And then,
your arm across my body,
drawing me close
your thigh against mine,
your soft breath,
gentles my mind
and I find peace
or passion.

If you go
will I count sheep again?
Sip more cocoa?
Read until three?
Don't go.

Naomi Wingfield

The Loved

it is so complicated

your parents who were strong and once meant
everything to you
are weak and frail

you spend the afternoon in a cancer clinic
with your mother
you notice when she stands on the clinic scales
that her shoes are frayed at the heel
you need new shoes mom, you tell her
yes, she agrees tiredly, but
nothing feels right anymore.
and you know what she means
the tatteredness of it all pains you
pierces your everyday worries and preoccupations
and settles in you
a heartweight
a stone

and your children who were once frail and weak
are grown now, unwieldy
too big for the clothes you once dressed them in
flailing out into the world
in a stubborn panic
you watch, your hand goes out to stop their falling
but they fall anyway

and you fly a little more undone

you soak your aching bones in a hot bath
outside the rain sings and the moon
orbits on forever

it is so complicated

Constance Wesley

I'm Glad You Won't Be There

I'm glad you won't be there.
I don't intend attending that affair myself.

Death, said my father,
is a pagan superstition
    I don't believe in.

And with that
He vanished in the tree trunk
    like the Cheshire cat.

Irene Orgel

Dreaming

When I am dying
and the nights are long,
I'll spread my legs
and feel your loving body there
I'll part my lips
and feel your mouth on mine,
I'll feel your fingers
in my hair.
Memories will hold me fast,
and I'll let go
with peace at last.

Naomi Wingfield

Springboard: Sheamus Heaney's ***Digging*** encouraged us to think of gardens but also of digging for meaning in simple tasks. Begin with an experience of digging and see what meaning pops out.

Planting Bulbs for Heather's Grandmother

Planting daffodil bulbs
in memory of Heather's grandmother,
on a sunny Sunday in November,
two days before Remembrance Day,
the day before the anniversary of *Kristallnacht* –
planting flowers for a woman of 98, who died in her sleep,
still reading, almost to the end
of the story…
a woman I did not know
but who makes me remember Rose and Mary,
Sarah and Zelda, Betty and Fay,
my grandmothers and aunts who've passed away,
wintering over in the depths of my mind,
gone but not quite lost.

And that evening, the phone call rips through space,
my friend Liz, barely fifty, hurt, her neck crushed
in a car accident,
now wrapped in intensive care,
a delicate plant we will to live through frost.

Why do we do all this,
dig and plant,
believe, hope, embrace –
one more time, and yet once more,
each yellow flower dreaming of love
in its pale bulb-heart,
reaching out, teaching us of grace

until the final snow drifts in
to bury us all –
like bulbs deep underground.

Ellen S. Jaffe

Springboard: *When Something Different Crosses the Threshold* is a line from the poem **"Maybe**" by **Mary Oliver**, one of our group's favourite poets. The opening line becomes a wonderful springboard in these next two poems.

When something different crosses the threshhold

When something different crosses the threshhold,
It shakes me, rattles me, invades me, involves me.
It enters every pore of my body.
I'm like a sponge - soaked, sopping with
the newness, strangeness, scariness of it.
I'm worn down by the weight
of the heavy stone on my shoulder and the ice block
in my heart.
My jaw tenses in frightful fear;
but, I'm ready to fight.
My thoughts are muddled, muddied,
mangled and mixed up.
What if? What now? When?
Why me? Why not me?

Barbara Ormond

When something different crosses the threshold

and the world unsettles
its dimensions split and fragment like a prism
come to pieces in your hands

there is no mending, no going back
a time of desolation
a flat plain of desert
the sand burning under your feet
the hot sun of despair

and you plod on
your destination lost to you
because this unwelcome thing has entered
has made its way into the heart of you

the something different
that worries at you, a burr in your sandal
a stone in your soul

you turn it over, you rearrange it
you look at it again from every angle
you examine its planes and rough, unfamiliar surfaces

Take it into your unwilling mouth
and work away at it, soften it with your saliva
hone its sharp edges with your weary tongue
suck the strangeness from it

until the day comes when finally you
recognize it as your own.

Constance Wesley

September 11, 2001

Poem I

It's MIDNIGHT,

Stunning words

Come to mind. But

Are they true? Will they

Reconcile the dead, the horror

I have seen?

Poem II

I look out the window

A tall tree fills the space

No leaves are stirring

It's quiet out there –

But what of New York –

Where is the quiet in Manhattan?

Claire Ridker

Going To Spirit

For Rosalie, Barbara, and Martin -- July 2006

My friend bill talks about people "gone to spirit"
and Roger says we're all camping out here, one way
or another. This steamy July day,
with day-lilies, roses, snap-dragons
clamouring at our senses in delight,
it's hard to picture another world, another dimension,
so different from this,
where our spirits might dance or glisten
in the light of distant stars,
or simply weep
away the cares of this life.
We are all dancing on the strings
of eleven dimensions, maybe more,
in galaxies shifting this way and that
toward places without name,
without form, empty and full at once.
Rosalie, little Rose, fragrant and bright through many seasons,
Barbara of the long hair and passionate travels,
and Martin listening to measured music –
now it's time
to begin your next journey
into sacred space,
make your own discoveries
as you shuttle into spirit.

Here, we light candles,
pray whatever words we can.

Ellen S. Jaffe

Women Writing Together
Theme V:

--Seasons--

Springboard: I have often introduced high school students to Wallace Stevens' poem, ***Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird***. It is a terrific springboard for writing about something from various points of view.

Thirteen Ways of Living in a Garden (Excerpt)

That first place, Eden,
whole and holy place,
ourselves green and growing
limitless, watching
for openings, for thresholds
under an emerald canopy.

Then a green apple, jealousy,
because we could not swallow everything,
because we wanted to be free,
open and solitary
in our skins.
We wanted to stay in the garden
but make our own way.

2

Yesterday, the delphiniums,
their long clusters of blossoms
staked against the storm,
glistened electric blue
after the rain.
Today, the Fairy,
a froth of pink roses
dances over the walk.
Way at the edge
a creamy New Dawn
climbs the turquoise trellis.

4

I carefully balance my first cup of coffee,
a stack of cushions and a magazine,
ease myself into a chair
and overlook my estate.
Yes, the pale pink impatients
around the dark cedar works.
The shock of blue lobelia
in the window box filled with fuchsia
is just about heaven.

My coffee cup left behind,
I leap up to water the window box.
Sit. Forgot to deadhead the campanula.
Done. What is that wrapping around
the pink hydrangeas? Bindweed.
Illicit pink flowers masquerading
as tiny morning glories.
I dig out the root and climbing stems
that wrap around everything.
Oh, no. A huge thistle.
Out to the shed for gloves,
taking a sip of cold coffee on the way.

5

Carrying my infant grandchildren
round the garden,
whispering the names of plants,
leaning into linden blossoms,
touching the red velvet of Mister Lincoln roses,
wandering past beauty bush and daphne,
red and pink wigiela, pink lupins –
when you touch a blossom
it opens and a sharp pistil appears.

Paula Papky

The Four Seasons of the Sun

The sap rises
in impatient April.
In the brisk breezes
shadows of the trees grow sharp on the sidewalk.

Midsummer sun, you rise early,
a pale disc in the north-east behind the trees.
Hold your fire, sun, for a few hours,
Don't banish me!
And the sun says,
You're nothing to me.
This is the home of the toad,
The chipmunk and the butterfly,
and birds who shout in the moist morning.

Leaden skies
and the sombre red and orange of late October.
Silver sheets of rain.
In a corner of the garden
the burning bush sings
among slug-eaten leaves.

Where do you go in winter, sap of my soul?
The wind blows through me.
The sun shines and doesn't warm me.

Eve Kliman

The greedy squirrels
gobble the seeds for tiny birds
who come back later.

Naomi Wingfield

For Barbara R.

I want to remember
all the summer days
you pulled up to the kerb
in your red convertible,
stepping through my gate
in your cream linen trousers
and a pristine t-shirt,
sleeves rolled just a little
to show your thin brown arms,
your small gold watch.
Your hair fuzzy and blonde
from driving the back roads.
Your laugh immediate and loud.
Your sentences sprinkled with
"Jesus" and "God damn it",
spoken with energy and a sense
of putting things in their place.
Every day in June,
you drove the Mineral Springs Road
on your way to school
just to see the horses in the pasture
around that hairpin bend.

And the man who loves you
Is full of hope and holding you up
for what will come:
the surgeon's knife
through your small breast.
On the phone you said,
"I told the doctor,
Jesus! I finally got up to a 34B
and now this."

I know this is a beginning
of a new kind of life for you
and I want to keep before me
the image of you
napping on your wicker chaise
on the cool veranda,
a stack of cooking magazines at arm's length,
the pale green of porch roof,
the cool pinks of hydrangeas,
the David Austen roses in their patch of sky,
and your eyes just fluttering
with a dream
of the sea and fields of pink lupins
and the day you paddled
to the edge and back.

Paula Papky

Winter Ice

Ice,
you are a white tiger,
crouching, waiting
to pounce on me.
I am afraid of you.

I walk like a duck,
hoping you won't notice,
antique hips, fragile wrists.
I feel your danger.
I am afraid of you.

But Ice
you are an artist.
You frost each branch,
each blade of grass.
A fairie land in sunshine
and in moonlight.

Snuggled before a fire
I rejoice in winter's beauty
and dream of daffodils.

Naomi Wingfield

Weathering Wind

Branches swing, rattle windows with gusty rushes
Feather-duster willow trunks sway
as if swishing water over elephant babies

Oak and beech press rain into slanted sheets
Shrubs beside the house do their share
with lusty shivers

Power rises from roots deep beneath
Strength to hold the maples tall
as they toss gray tufts to the horizon

Storm over, glistening limbs still
Trees at ease
salute the grateful sun

Ellen B. Ryan

Inanna at Mount Carmel

In the green heat of summer
I descend into the underworld
of the barren meeting room under the chapel
with companions of my spirit
to patiently sit in profound stillness.
Surrendering my wilfulness,
watching my mind toss up stories—illusions and regrets—
over and over naming them, accepting and letting be.
Returning again and again to be fully aware
of now
and in this remembering, moving into willingness,
allowing my ego to be dismembered,
trusting that this is a way to deeper wisdom and to communion
–an encounter with Mystery.

Like the rhythm of the inbreath and the outbreath
—the anchor for my mindwork—
the rhythm of the day offers me times
for emergence into the surrounding open green
for movement, with total presence,
bringing awareness to the connectedness of my being
with the energy of wind, birds—all growing things.
This movement into spaciousness—
both a release and a grounding.

The bell chimes me back to my cushion
in the silent cool twilight of the sacred space underground.
And when I finally do return to the reality of my home space,
of this I can be certain:
I will have been nudged in the direction of change.
My faithfulness to the rhythms of this place and time
will be rewarded far beyond any anticipation.
As I descend, I wonder: what unfolding will begin?
What questions will emerge?
What will be the inevitable surprise?
From what will I find a glimmer of freedom?
Who or what will I recognize as Dumuzi?

Ramona Carbotte

Springboard: May Sarton's poem, ***March Mad***, ends, "when we have had enough of reason". Sometimes a last line can become the first line of a new poem, as it does with this next piece.

This Spring I've had enough of reason

This spring
I've had enough of reason.
I've tried to restrain
my body and my appetite
but it's not working;
it has its own rhythm
and right now it's gaining
like a greyhound.
I keep looking over my shoulder,
and yes, still gaining.

I've tried to reason
with my brain's refusal
to throw out lines of stories.
I've cajoled and written scraps
of stories by moonlight
but my imagination's had enough
of reason as well.
It's hungry for the world of the senses
not the world making sense.
I crave the calling of cardinals
high on a bare branch,
the scarlet scrap of a bird.

I want unreason,
the unreasonable transformation
of a dormant garden
into a living landscape,
the unreasonable joy

of rubber boots, garden gloves,
rich compost and newly seeded beds.

I want a season of unreason,
of taking a bus somewhere
just so I can write what I see:
the tree alive, the green parasol,
the shadow on shadow,
all of it happening
when we are not there,
when we are mired in the mud
like school children taking a short cut.

It's as if the wind
that has stayed in its place until now
has begun to stir
and the shape of the day becomes clearer
and the sense that there is only this day,
this day in which to notice,
to pick up a pen
and write whatever comes.
To pray without ceasing,
to worship the wind's first beats,
to worship the shadow cast
by a vase of yellow tulips,
to cast aside cares and just now
to pay attention,
to notice the need of our soul
to breathe freely, to expand and take in,
and hold on and let go,
to know what it means
to be holy and whole.

Paula Papky

Surprised by Spring

as by a lover
The exuberant pink blossoming,
dazzling yellows, dappled greens.
What is this taking
that is not invading,
this penetration
of beauty into beauty,
this welcoming
of desire
Each year, winter
leaves us flattened,
grey with fear

spring comes
springing and bursting
reflowering the world
filling us into overflow
taking us
    by fragrant storm
    and by surprise.

Ellen S. Jaffe

Tick Tock

She half-dozes as she proudly watches
daughters, sons' wives and granddaughters
prepare the Christmas dinner.
Is she asleep?
She is softly remembering
rushing home and making dinner
for hungry sons, a husband, a daughter.
Remembering her first cook book
the biscuits with too much salt.
She is a young girl, skipping breakfast,
toasting marshmallows on a stick.
She is a small, shy child
passing cookies to her mother's friends.
How did it happen?
Now she is the old grandmother,
rocking, rocking.

Naomi Wingfield

Chili Sauce

I remember the smell of chili sauce in my mother's kitchen. In late August or early September, my Dad would bring home one or two bushels of tomatoes from Aunt Laura's farm and put them in the hall inside the side door.

We would all help Mom make the chili sauce. Some years, Grandma McClure would come and peel the tomatoes. My sisters and I would chop the onions while holding wooden matches in our mouths so we wouldn't cry.

Green peppers and red peppers, a cheesecloth bag full of spices, Crown glass canning jars with glass tops and rubber rings boiling in large pans. Huge pots of the bright, boiling, bubbling mixture steaming on the stove.

The smell. Fresh, sweet and spicy —a fall smell. A smell that had hints of the start of school—crisp new clothes, fresh scribblers and full-length sharpened pencils. The time for farmers to load the trucks with sugar beets and line up along King Street and deliver them to C and D Sugar. Uncle J. would be there in a huge truck filled to the brim and we'd run down to visit him. He'd smile and ruffle our hair and say, "Here are my girls". And sometimes, we'd climb into the cab of his truck and he would share his lunch with us.

The air on King Street smelled like my mother's kitchen—chili sauce and ketchup smells coming from the Libby's factory a few blocks away.

Now, the approach of autumn brings back the memories of those canning days in the steamy kitchen on Phyllis Avenue and thoughts of preparing for the winter. Long rows of chili sauce, pickles, beets, peaches and pears lined up on the freshly prepared shelves in the fruit cellar and thoughts of my Dad saying. "Where's the chili sauce?" at almost every breakfast, lunch and dinner.

My mother gave me some of her jars when she stopped canning. I fill them with cranberry sauce, mincemeat, nuts, raisins and candied ginger, but never with chili sauce.

Barbara Ormond

Mary's Garden

Today is my mother's 93rd birthday. I will always carry with me images of Mary amongst her flowers, but my strongest memory is of Mary's continual busyness—her caring for the conditions that allowed growing things to flourish. In my mind's eye, I see Mary in a background of purple and yellow irises grown from roots from my own garden, blue columbines from my sister's, vivid orange lilies, yellow roses, bleeding hearts—gifts from other gardens, propagated into hers. She has loved working in her garden, out in the cool early hours of the prairie summer, watering, pruning, picking beans, checking for potato bugs or cutworm damage. Did she love the doing of it? Or the being in that quiet space, hers alone? Or was the doing and the being intermingled? Did she notice the bird song, color, shapes, textures, the large open sky above her? Was she in touch with feeling anything—aware of contentment or peace, a pause in her round of daily and weekly chores associated with being a farm-wife?

Only in her 90th year did she begin realistically to downsize her garden plot, no longer preserving for the long winter. She asked my brother to take out the raspberry bushes, but still planted leaf lettuce, carrots, a short row of peas and beans, a dozen potato plants. Still, one recent spring, we delighted in her extravagance in buying 6 tomato plants much more exotic than the reliable, hardy beefsteaks—so as to have an adventure in eating later in the summer as the tomatoes vine-ripened.

Just now her home space is a small but bright room in the village hospital—is she feeling restless and confined, as spring unfolds? Or has she surrendered to the reality of her loss of freedom of movement as her fragile bones mend, as best they can? Is her garden still her garden, when she can't tend it? She still cares enough about her garden plot, that it should not look neglected.

Ramona Carbotte

Strawberries

Strawberry shortcake with biscuit and whipped cream,
strawberries and cream, strawberry mousse,
wild strawberries – Hannah and I found a patch
on a path near the cottage
and ate them as we picked.

Effie brought me a box the summer my father died,
Sally made jam for Jim,
Kay picks them but she can't eat.
Roberta met a bear and her cubs while picking –
she walked backwards very slowly,
her bucket swinging.

The berries are sweeter here because
they come as a surprise,
a gift from friends and neighbours
who love to be in the fields picking
after a long dreary winter
where the ice is still in at the end of April,
the trees still bare on Victoria Day Weekend.

These women are not concerned about spring cleaning
Or weeding the garden.
The sweet, juicy, wild, red berries call
and they answer with joy.

Barbara Ormond

Springboard: *Proximity*, by Deanna Young, begins, "Did you know you can pick your way out of depression?" It also carries the line, "Suck back the joy". It is from these springboard lines that the title for our book comes, in a poem by Barbara Ormond.

Planetary Strawberries

Planting strawberries
for the planets
in inter-galactic space --
red shift, juicy red hearts
moving away and away and away,
falling through sky
into the blue lake of love
or the crimson lake of blood,
curving like the thin red arc
of energy
in Bob Mason's very last painting.
Strawberries wear their seeds on the outside,
their hearts -- and sex -- on their sleeves,
signs of life in the dark snow of anti-matter,
anti-gravity.

Sit. Eat. Enjoy.

Ellen S. Jaffe

Suck Back the Joy

What to do to suck back the joy?

Make love with someone who loves you back.

But first –
pick strawberries, raspberries,
blackberries, blueberries,
red currants that fall in your hands like milk, like silk

swim – as often as possible
in pools, lakes, ocean,
even in cold water

walk on the beach,
gather stones and shells

walk in the woods,
go canoeing, camp overnight
sleep in a tent
look at the stars, in constellations and falling
find Mars, Jupiter, Venus
hold a baby, know a baby
or more than one

keep a cat, or a dog
garden – plant morning glories,
and watch them bloom perfectly for just one day
– plant tomatoes, tie back the stems,
gather the fruit
write, paint, sing, dance, make pottery
listen to jazz
know the colour red, the colour blue

forgive your parents for the things
they did not know
forgive yourself,
for the things you did, knowing and unknowing
forgive life, for not being fair

go outside in the rain

touch your lover's body – elbows, knees, eyes
and be touched
on that interface of body and mind
open like an orange
inside – the heart's sweet juice
not reconstituted

Loving – *suck back the joy.*

Ellen S. Jaffe

Spring Remembered

I remember green.
Sprays of it in April
The glow of it – chartreuse – as May arrives.
New green, fresh, vibrant
As leaves pronounce the sureness of the season.

I remember red.
A glowing fiery red
It must be tulips
The flower of childhood.

I remember blue.
The blue of skies
Clear, deep, expansive blue
No finer backdrop for spring's revelry.

I remember yellow.
Daffodils – spritely, never failing to delight
Tulips soon to follow
A cast in yellow, calling for attention
Ever-present in the spring landscape.

I remember purple
Grape hyacinths, pansies, and soon the lilacs
Purple – not regal this time
But grounding.
Welcome in the technicolor playground of May.

Other colours come to mind
Exquisite white and softest pink
Of magnolia and blossoms and redbud.
But all these,
Green, red, blue, yellow and purple
Will forever be the lead dancers
Beholden only to the choreography of Spring.

Diane Zsepeczky

Spring – The Reveal

The tentative promise of winter's end
An earthy preview – exuberant, fresh,
Nature's marquee daily changing
Welcomed, felt, celebrated – by most.

Others shrink.
The warming sun intrudes, glares,
Nature's rushing pace invades.
Still at home – winter's recluse –
So much life
Requires for them a new protection.

Diane Zsepeczky

Nearness

Go, just go
to the places
where your hands and spirit
can be restored to fruitfulness.
To where the fruit of life hangs
clustered and dripping with ripeness.

I remember that winter,
my mind reeling from angry conversations,
from innuendo and expectation
and assumptions.
I remember you at the big loom,
all that colour spilling from baskets,
spools stacked on the floor
so we could see how colours
blended and complemented.

I remember the complicated work
of winding the warp and putting it on the loom,
three metres and more of dozens of shades,
pulled through tiny eyes
one strand at a time.
And afterwards, we'd sit in the sun room
looking out over the valley,
the snow white and shining,
chickadees and nuthatches gathered at the feeder.
We'd lunch on fresh bread and butter,
little wedges we called apple boats,
and cups of milky tea.

Back to the loom, then,
to watch the shuttle fly,
to hear the wooden pieces
clapping the weft threads close,
to see you straight-backed
and balanced on your bench,
creating a blanket in greens and blues and purples,
or a rug from fabric strips
we had spent hours cutting and pressing.

One whole winter of healing
I spent in your weaving room,
and now when I need to be close
to a bright shining life
I wrap myself in a purple mohair blanket
or a blue silk-and-mohair shawl.
I lay the table with cream coloured
hand-woven placemats,
study the green and blue rug underfoot
and imagine myself as a loom
and you the weaver, who knows
where the frayed and fraying bits are,
who knows how to bring together
the single strands into a strong and lovely whole.

Paula Papky

Springboard: Bronwen Wallace's *What it Comes to Mean* led to a poetic exploration of the steps, forward and back, in healing from depression. The repetition of a line helps in fast writing: it pushes at the boundaries of experience and memories, forcing the writer to go deeper. At the same time, the repetition gives the poem coherence, helps it to "hang together".

What It Comes to Mean

At first I thought
the howling dogs of depression
would never leave me
would bay at the moon of my sheer hope
until it waned into nothingness.

At first I thought
I would never get to the top
of the hill, driving to Kensington,
and thrill to see that bright blue bay,
that green land swooping
down to the red shore.

At first I thought
I could never eat again, taste
the sweetness of strawberries,
biscuits with cream, blueberry pudding,
that the sharp pain in my jaw
would always surprise me
just as I went to eat or speak.

At first I thought depression
was soul-destroying, a blight
that would wither everything
I'd planted and watered faithfully.

Now I know it is no different
from a winter that comes early
while the wool coats are still in storage,
the boots buried in the basement chaos,
a winter that won't let you catch a breath
between storms, that keeps your shoulders
hunched against blizzards, offers
only the barest windbreak or shelter.

Now I know it is no different from
the frozen pond where I skated as a child –
it thaws slowly until
green shoots poke through,
until it becomes one
with the surrounding fields,
the whole thing pulsing with tiny life,
pushing toward the sun, resting at night,
always, always growing toward the day.

Paula Papky

Springboard: Jane Hirschfield's poem, *It Was Like This: You Were Happy* provided us with a writing practice that involved opposites. We remembered times when we were happy and then sad, in love and out of love, in the moment and yet out of it as well. It lets you begin to say something and then pull back, lending a conversational tone the writing.

What We (Think We) Know

It was Tuesday, or maybe it was Wednesday
it was March, or perhaps it was April
anyway, it was snowing – no, it was raining
and I was going to meet you at two – or was it three?
at the Chinese restaurant on Spadina – no, wait,
the Japanese on Bayview,
but you didn't come, and I ate my lunch and wrote
a poem about hockey
or about breast cancer,
or both of them together (improbable as that seems)
– maybe it was about love
every poem is about love, someone said,
or maybe about loneliness,
about life and death,
about longing, losing, finding, keeping, weeping

then it was August, or maybe September
and we did meet (I know that),
made love, played with sex,
and began to touch each other
in ways we'd forgotten, never knew,
and tried to remember, ways that melt the ice,
inviting sun and rain
so sometimes we talk, sometimes we don't,
and our lips keep remembering
how to kiss
and there are these threads connecting us, even if we can't
read the pattern.

Now it is February 2, Groundhog Day:
Wiarton Willie emerges from his den and may
or may not see his shadow blowing like smoke on snow.
And it will be winter for six more weeks
or maybe, before too long, it will be spring.

Ellen S. Jaffe

I think I will live forever

I think I will live forever.
Not really, I just pretend.
The birch tree will always sway in the wind.
The amaryllis will stand straight.
The tulips will come up.
The clouds and sunrise will always be there.

I won't give away
Grandmother's blue bowl,
remembering golden corn steaming in it.
I'll keep the children's drawings.
I won't discard old letters.
I'll cherish them
because I will need them,
because I will live forever.

I'll make a will
and make arrangements,
and then forget them.
What do they have
to do with me,
because I'll live forever.

I'll buy new books
and keep the old ones.
I'll read as long as I can see.
And when I can't
I'll say to myself,
The Lord is my Shepherd.
I'll try to say
This is the day which the Lord has made
I will rejoice and be glad in it.

I will live, but maybe not forever-.

Naomi Wingfield

May Morning

Pale yellow maple buds
touch, branch ends.
God sees and thinks,
Wouldn't it glow
if the sun touched that tree?
And it did.

Heavy with sadness at much of His world.
The artist God
lifts His spirit
with playful creations,
patterns and colour on woodpeckers
and blue jays,
on leopards and zebras, and overall
the sunshine.

Naomi Wingfield

Youth is a flying horse.
Age slows to a walk on sand.
Now I notice sea shells.

Naomi Wingfield

Sparrows

I take my grandson for a walk.
Before he has words, he laughs
and points to small sparrows
on the road.

I take my mother in her wheelchair to the patio.
She loves the clouds,
then enjoys small sparrows eating crumbs.
I remember my grandmother,
calling sparrows
"God's little chickens".

Bluebirds, finches, cardinals
crowd the garden.
But sparrows are the gentle thread
binding me to
my past and future.

Naomi Wingfield

Garden Happy

Will Naomi's reverent gaze
meet the eyes of
the silver birch?
Will her prayer to the colour creator
reach the ears of
her Mother's Day azaleas?
Will the tulip petals shiver with
her leap of joy?

Ellen Ryan

Appendix: List of Sources

Previously published selections

Ellen S. Jaffe. *Planting Bulbs For Heather's Grandmother.* In *Hammered Out #9,* Hamilton, June 2006. (Reprinted with permission of the author.)

Ellen S. Jaffe. *Surprised by Spring.* In *Hammered Out #9,* Hamilton, June 2006. (Reprinted with permission of the author.)

Ellen S. Jaffe *What (We Think)We Know.* This poem previously appeared in an anthology published by The Ontario Poetry Society (2005); it has been slightly revised. (Reprinted with permission of the author.)

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About the Group

When we began writing together, we had no idea where this activity would lead us. We're into our sixth year of writing together on Thursday mornings and plan to continue forever. We love one another's company, the poems we read, and the scribblings that often turn into poems and stories. Our conversations have been filled with laughter. We loved the story of a great-grandmother who took occasional baths in a tub filled with milk; of a husband who sent his worn pyjamas to a tailor to be patched and mended; of a three-year-old grand-daughter who spent her two-week vacation in Hawaii with a yellow bucket on her head.

Our group is also been about friendship – sharing good times and sad times. We have comforted each other during illnesses and losses and rejoiced with each others' successes and celebrations.

Everyone in our group attempts the fast writing on the subject of the day, but not all read aloud every time. In fact, we joke about having T-shirts made up with the disclaimers we resort to when we'd rather not share what we've written. That way we could just point to the disclaimer of the moment, such as:

This really isn't very good…
It's not for reading out loud…
I got lost in the middle…
It's not on topic…
I'd rather not, it's too private…
I don't think so…
Not today, I'm going to pass…
Nothing of interest here…
I'm just not there right now…
I'm not really a writer…
Well, I'll just read this part in the middle…I can't read my own handwriting…
I don't write as well as you people do…
I forgot my glasses…

Invariably, the reading aloud that begins with a disclaimer is good, honest writing. We are gradually understanding that the writer may not be the best judge of her own work; that it is the listener who creates meaning.

One writer, in describing our group, says she senses something beyond us, bigger than us, emerging and celebrating life. We take chances, trust deeply, honour each other's life through the listening, the savouring of words and phrases. Another member says this is a group where she can forget her years, even rejoice in them. One woman describes our meetings as a place: to listen and share ideas; to sit quietly and not be alone; to be visible; to be invisible; to dig down deep. Another woman experiences the room at Naomi's, where we most often meet, as flooded with light, as surrounding us with the sense of life richly lived. The room itself seems to say, all reside here and are welcome. There is in this room safety and openness, a place of trust and of listening to places in our hearts and spirits and finding peace.

(From left to right) Front: Paula Papky, Irene Orgel.
Back: Eve Kliman, Barbara Ormond, Diane Zsepeczky, Ramona Carbotte, Ellen Jaffe, Constance Wesley, Naomi Wingfield, Ellen Ryan, Rosemary Duffy.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Paula Papky, Editor and Author

Paula Papky is a writer, educator, and visual artist. She has taught creative writing in high schools, in churches, and for adults of all ages and is still intrigued by the process of fast writing as a tool for self-discovery. One of her great joys continues to be the process of writing together, an activity that creates bonds of deep friendship and that allows for remarkable poems and prose to emerge, like the ones in *The Berries Are Sweeter Here.*

Her own stories, poems, hymns and educational articles have appeared in *Canadian Author, Exchange* and *Women's Concerns* (both United Church in Canada publications), *The Hamilton Spectator,* and *The Globe and Mail.* At MacNeill Baptist Church in Hamilton, Ontario, she currently leads workshops in spiritual discovery and fast writing. She lives with her husband, Bruce, in Dundas, Ontario.

Ellen B. Ryan, Series Editor and Author

Ellen Bouchard Ryan is a Professor at McMaster University and former Director of the McMaster Centre for Gerontological Studies. Her psychological research demonstrates how empowering communication fosters personhood and successful aging. She has created the *Writing Down Our Years Series* of publications to highlight the many ways in which writing life stories can benefit older adults and those with whom they share their stories and poems.

Sharing written words with friends has been (en)lightening her walk through later life. A soon-to-be grandmother, she hopes to pass along family memories.

Ann Anas, the design coordinator for this collection, has worked for the last twenty years at McMmaster University as a research assistant and coordinator in the fields of Psychology and Gerontology. She has always been interested in exploring her creative self within interior design, sewing, gardening, sculpting and dance. Now that retirement is fast approaching, she is looking forward to expanding these endeavours and discovering new ones.

Ramona Carbotte took an early retirement from her clinical and academic life as a neuropsychologist with the stated intention of being a peregrinating grandmother. A lifelong learner, she has discovered that writing with others can lead to surprising insights and possibilities for deep sharing.

Rosemary Duffy, a retired teacher, opened her home to our group from the start, encouraging us with tulips and coffee and a view of the Bay.

Ellen Jaffe has been writing since childhood, as a way of discovering both the world and herself, and hopes to continue this all her life; she is also a mother, a teacher and psychotherapist, and a beginning gardener.

Eve Kliman born in Shanghai to parents who were New Zealanders and grew up in a lot of different places. Almost by chance she came to Canada forty-four years ago, and has lived most of that time in Hamilton.

Irene Orgel was born in London, England and was evacuated to North America at the outset of WWII. She wrote early short stories, longing to go back home, but at the end of 7 years she had almost settled down. Her stories were published in a book entitled *The Odd Tales of Irene Orgel* (New York: The Eakins Press, 1949). She was awarded the Chekhov Prize for short fiction. Her day jobs have been teaching English at various colleges. She has worked as poet in the schools in Mississippi and Massachusetts and has been a fellow at Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony.

Barbara Ormond has raised a family and taught English; now, she does what she loves: read, write and bring joy and comfort to those she loves.

Clair Ridker is enjoying being old enough to become the start of four generations of first born women, the latest of whom is beautiful Esmai who will be two years old on Canada Day, July 1st, 2006**.**

Constance Wesley lives and has raised her family in Hamilton.

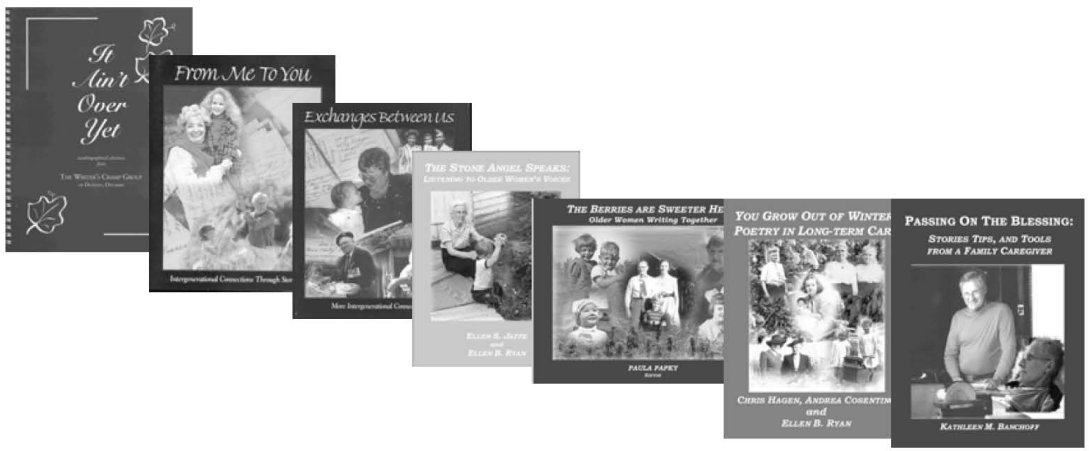
Naomi Wingfield has enjoyed several interesting jobs. None of them define her. She feels relationships tell more about her than any work she has done. She has been a daughter, and a wife, a mother of two sons and a daughter, a grandmother, a sister and a friend. She says “At the same time I have always been me”.

Diane Zsepecsky Diane attended the first meeting of writers in 2001 and was hooked from the outset. Although family circumstances required her to take some time out, her recent return to the group only confirmed the richness of the experience – an inspiring immersion in words and friendship.

WRITING DOWN OUR YEARS SERIES

FROM
MCMASTER CENTRE FOR GERONTOLOGICAL STUDIES

ELLEN B. RYAN, SERIES EDITOR



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