

## [The Write Place at the Write Time](#)

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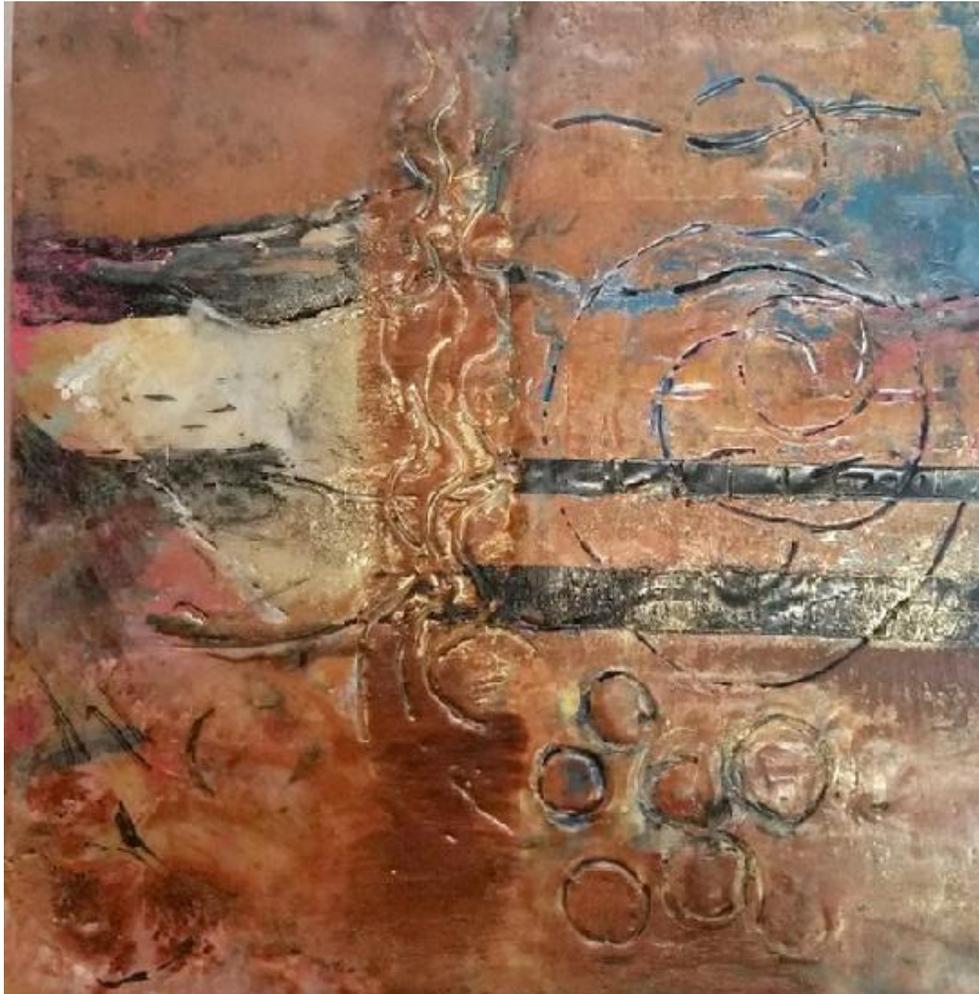
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Come in...and be captivated...

### "Our Stories"

We have decided to devote a portion of our magazine to non-fiction. These are stories of things that have happened serendipitously, being in the right place at the right time or just heartfelt musings, thoughts, and feelings on life. Join us in our non-fiction section. These stories speak to anyone and everyone and are told by anyone and everyone who has a story to tell.



"Antiquities I" by Linda Bigness; <http://www.bignessart.com/>

**About this image:** "The images within the work are part of a series of artworks created to represent ancient places and their secrets revealed in calligraphic lines etched in stone and clay. These marks identify a presence of ancient people and represent a type of written language that maps their existence. In creating these works I strive to show the beauty of the marks through encaustic and archival inks using clay carving tools to etch into the surface the symbolic markings of another time and culture." —Linda Bigness

## *Our Stories non-fiction*

## Flying History

by Barbara Ridley

I never flew in an airplane until I was almost thirty years old. In England in the 50s and early 60s, air travel was expensive and uncommon: no one did it. We traveled by train or car—or boat if crossing the sea to the Continent. When cheaper, charter flights came on the scene in the late 1960s, my parents didn't approve. They considered them unsafe. At the age of fourteen, I was invited to go with some cousins to Greece, but it involved flying on a charter—and my parents refused to give permission.

In their later years, both my parents became accustomed to flying. My father traveled to South America and Mexico for research. My mother took herself off on jaunts to Iceland and St. Petersburg. They both visited me after I made my home in California. And when my parents were ailing in their eighties, I made the trip across the pond several times a year. I accumulated frequent flyer miles and now, somehow, I have acquired TSA Pre✓ status. I jump on flights as if I were hopping on a bus.

Well, not quite. I do it, but I still don't really understand how it works. How does this huge monster lift up into the sky and travel at such speed high above the ocean? How do those massive wings keep the plane aloft? I always choose a window seat and keep a vigilant eye on takeoff and landing, as if it couldn't manage without me: I have to watch, and will everything to go smoothly, and stroke the magic crystal I keep in my pocket. And the sheer volume of people criss-crossing the globe at any one time; it all seems so improbable.

Once, my mother mentioned the first time she flew—in a very different era. I knew the background story: she was a young woman stuck in Paris in 1940, only a few weeks before the Nazi invasion. And she was Jewish, originally from Czechoslovakia, trying to get a visa to enter Britain. She had friends from Prague who had reached England one way or another, but she was denied multiple times. She eventually made it out—just in time. I grew up knowing this in outline, but she never discussed the details. Most of the family she left behind perished in the Holocaust, and like so many who survived, she never dwelt openly on the emotional impact.

But when I was in my thirties, I wanted to learn more, and on one occasion she agreed to record an oral history. I was amazed to learn that her

friends—fellow refugees who had already reached England before the war started—went to great lengths to try to get her out of Paris, and finally came up with a ruse: a tenuous connection with the Secret Service of the defeated Spanish Republican government, combined with shrewd manipulation of British guilt over the betrayal of Czechoslovakia at Munich. My mother laughed as she told me they persuaded the Foreign Office that she was a Czech secret agent in need of a special entry permit. And an airplane ticket. “The first time I ever flew,” she said with a chuckle.

I had a lot of questions about the espionage connection, but I never asked more about the flight itself. Years later, after her death, when I was working on a novel based on her experiences as a refugee, I wanted to know what kind of aircraft might have brought her to England. Googling this every way I could think of, I came to a dead end. Everywhere, I read that all civilian air travel between France and England was suspended at the outbreak of war in September 1939, and did not resume until after the liberation of France in 1944.

How could this be? My mother told me she arrived in England in March 1940. She could not have been mistaken about the date. Nor her method of travel.

I dug around some more online, but always found the same definitive statement: all passenger air travel was halted.

And then I discovered the British Airways Museum at Heathrow airport. I hit on the “Contact Us” link and sent an email inquiring about civilian flights in March 1940. I received a prompt response, which I opened in eager anticipation. But it was just a friendly invitation to come and visit. The museum was open Tuesday through Thursday 10a.m. to 2p.m. I was due for another visit back home, and my usual flight from San Francisco arrived at 11a.m. I made sure to book mid-week.

This was back in 2008 or 2009. The museum closed soon after that, and I see online now that it has since reopened in spanking new digs, with gleaming counters and a polished hardwood floor. Nothing like the place I visited: cramped and shabby, located in a non-descript, single-story redbrick building at the outer reaches of the airport compound, off a huge roundabout, identified as a museum by only a small plaque on the wall. I had trouble finding it, not made any easier by my jet-lagged state. But once I maneuvered my wheelie-bag around the boxes crowded at the entrance,

and followed the voice of the curator who was welcoming me from the dark inner recesses of the archives, I discovered a hidden gem.

Mr. Davis was bent over a box on the counter, and immediately began showing me the treasures it contained, assuming I would share his enthusiasm. I struggled to fight off fatigue from my night in Economy Class as he presented ancient technical manuals, crinkled yellow schedules reeking of mildew, and engraved cuff links, all recently donated by a pilot's widow. My attention wandered to the mannequins in 1950s airline uniforms and the glass cases behind him, displaying models of old airplanes.

"Forgive me," he said, his kind eyes sparkling under bushy eyebrows. "Were you looking for something in particular?"

I explained my interest in flights between Paris and London in March 1940, and the impasse I had reached with my online research. He frowned, looking puzzled. He said he also would have thought that all passenger service was suspended.

For a moment I feared he did not believe me. But he led me over to another section farther back, under large fluorescent lights, one wall filled with a mammoth bookcase extending twelve feet towards the ceiling. "Let me think," he said rubbing his chin, and inviting me to sit on a chair squeezed between storage boxes.

And then he was off, a man on a mission. He rummaged through filing cabinets, flipped through books, examined leather-bound ledgers, and at one point scrambled up a ladder to reach a volume on a top shelf. It didn't take him long to solve the mystery. Winston Bray's "History of the BOAC" provided the key. The British Overseas Airways Corporation, formed by the merger of Imperial Airways and the original British Airways, did indeed initially suspend service to France in September 1939, but when nothing much happened on the Western Front in the early months of the war, flights resumed in October, albeit on a reduced schedule. These continued until the German advance on France in June 1940.

So I had my answer.

But Mr. Davis wasn't done. Further ferreting through papers produced the timetable for the Paris-London route: the Imperial Airways and British

Airways Joint Service between Le Bourget and Croydon. The flight took an hour and a half. I asked what kind of aircraft it would have been.

“Either the Frobisher or the Ensign,” he said without looking up, pointing to a display case behind me while he continued his search. “No, wait.” He had found another reference book. “It says here that when the service resumed in October 1939, it was with the Ensign.”

I studied the model of the Armstrong Whitworth AW27 Ensign and a list of its specifications and statistics, and black and white photographs. The cabin windows were framed with cloth curtains suspended from dainty brass rods. Elegantly dressed passengers sipped champagne from fluted glasses. The women wore pearls and elaborate hats.

I remembered my father telling me about one occasion in the 1930s, when as a young man, he had flown to the Continent. He came from a privileged upper-middle class background, and I am sure he would have been appropriately attired, in a tweed sports jacket, I imagine. But he told me with amusement about the scene in the departure lounge as he waited to cross the tarmac to board. The other passengers were expensively dressed, and clearly all knew each other. He was approached by a man who tipped his hat and exclaimed in mild surprise, “I don’t believe we’ve met!” Imagine my mother on her flight from Paris. How much more bizarre it must have been for her, a penniless refugee.

“Ah ha!” A shout from the filing cabinet brought me back to the present. Mr. Davis wasn’t done. He was extracting large bound notebooks, ledgers of some sort: passenger manifests, he announced. He had found 1939, and was hunting for 1940.

Passenger manifests? My heart pounded in my chest. And for a moment I really thought we might find my mother’s name on a passenger list. But, no. We examined hand-written entries in neat cursive script listing the dozen or so passengers for each flight: the planes were small. But there was nothing after September 1939.

Mr. Davis seemed to share my sense of deflation. He offered me a cup of tea. What better way to cope? So we sat and chatted about the aviation clubs who visit his museum, and the occasional researchers with quirky requests like mine. He kindly photocopied for me the timetable, the page from Bray’s book about the resumption of flights, and photos of the plane,

interior and exterior. I was preparing to take my leave, when he jumped up again, and delved into another drawer.

“The Annual Reports of Imperial Airways,” he said, extracting another bound volume. “I can’t believe we forgot about these.” I smiled at the suggestion that I shared some responsibility for this omission. “They recorded passenger numbers each year, of course.”

Of course.

“Here’s 1940.”

And there we found it. No names, but on Saturday, March 9, 1940, an Imperial Airways Ensign AW27 left Paris Le Bourget at 10:30 a.m. bound for London with ten passengers on board. A chill ran through me. My mother was on that flight. The flight that saved her life.

Bio: Barbara Ridley was born in England, but has now lived in California for over 30 years. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Writers Workshop Review*, *Ars Medica*, *The Copperfield Review*, *BLYNKT*, and *Stoneboat*. Her debut novel, *When It’s Over*, (She Writes Press, September 2017) is set in Europe during WWII, and is based on her mother’s story as a Holocaust refugee. Barbara can be followed at: [www.barbararidley.com](http://www.barbararidley.com)

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## Art Appreciation

by Ceri Eagling

I fell in love with paintings as a twelve-year-old in 1960s' Wales, one of five hundred and fifty schoolgirls aged eleven to eighteen. We were a population who covered our books in brown paper, stood when a teacher entered the room, and traveled around the buildings in single file. The unseemly jostling of less well-ordered schools was not our style. And so, the spectacle one morning, of white blouses and navy-blue tunics swarming up and down a hallway near my homeroom, suggested nothing less than anarchy.

Anarchy was certainly involved. Overnight, our landscape of dark green paneled walls, their somber tones barely relieved by framed Old Master prints, had been intruded upon. Like fairy rings on grass, a small, hand-printed white card had sprouted on every picture frame, bringing into focus

objects that up till then, had hovered only dimly at the edge of our consciousness.

*"I washed it last night, now I can't do a thing with it,"* proclaimed the first card I read—a dagger to the heart for girls obsessed with hair. I glanced at the subject of the portrait and at once, a drawbridge shutting this stranger up in dusty history dropped open at my feet. Across the span of centuries, I saw that beneath her stiff, bejeweled gown, she was hardly older than my friends and me. Her frizzed hair, stretched wide on either side of her face, in echo of her monstrously hooped hips, made me flinch in sympathy. That single, pointed sentence served to establish common cause between her and girls like us, who every break-time thronged three-deep in front of the cloakroom mirrors to check our hair. Fashion in our day dictated smooth and glossy. A catastrophe one tenth as bad as hers, and we'd have to stay home.

Next, I studied a woman in flowing robes, slumped with her eyes closed, and a hand pressed to her brow. *"Nothing acts faster than Anadin!"* her card declared. Without this familiar slogan for a headache pill, I would have passed her by without a glance. With it, I saw how her pose, designed to convey some inner turmoil, bore a comic, stagey kinship to a TV ad. She looked the perfect target for a patent remedy.

This witty marriage of popular culture and antique theme excited me beyond measure. We weren't accustomed to public fun at school, let alone public audacity, and this was both. The very thought of tweaking our decorous surroundings felt subversive to me. To smuggle taglines for hair and headache problems into a place that declined to acknowledge such frippery, and then to attach them to *school property*, felt like the height of daring. I read each label, glancing from card to picture in a rush of discovery. A man in a huge lace collar, a black hat, and a handlebar mustache was styled, "A portrait of Uncle Jim T." I didn't get it—and then I did. Mr. Trussler, one of our few male teachers, had a brown mustache and a fresh complexion just like that!

One after another, formerly unregarded characters stepped from their frames and introduced themselves. There must have been landscapes too among the hallway prints, but only the portraits stay in my mind. Perhaps

in reality, only they were labeled, since what could a landscape have to say to us? Perhaps it's why portraits engage me to this day.

I knew nothing about the pictures then, not even the painters' names, let alone their signature effects, but after that day, I knew for sure that they were there. Hindsight tells me that the girl with the massive hair was a Spanish infanta by Velazquez, spending eternity by my classroom door. And although I can't identify the swooning woman—a saint in ecstasy, I assume—Mr. Trussler's doppel-ganger was Frans Hals' *Laughing Cavalier*, without a doubt. He shared his neighborhood by the General Science Lab with Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, and just outside the assembly hall, where we sang our morning hymns, a group of Degas dancers held their ballet class.

I have no idea who conceived, organized and—hardest of all to fathom—executed that morning's enterprise. I'm still astonished by their boldness and invention, given the context, a school so wedded to conformity. Was it a group of older girls, breaking free from enforced docility? Or renegade teachers similarly inspired? Did they choose their comments as a committee? Did they know the pictures already, or just make droll connections? When on earth did they stick the labels on? Truthfully, these are questions I don't want answered. The mystery is part of the magic. What counts for me is that by noticing, they made me notice too, and for that I have been saluting them ever since.

Bio: Ceri Eagling grew up in Wales, has spent several years in France, and is a long-time resident of the United States.

Her work has appeared in *The Writer*, *LIT*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Antiphon*, and *The Billfold*.

## Silence

by Susan P. Blevins

Silence is more than the absence of sound. It has its own identity, its own plenitude, and its own gifts. But in these days of constant noise coming at us from all directions, it is almost a foreign concept. We live in a world of noise and movement, TVs, radios, cell phones, loud music in restaurants,

road traffic, air traffic, sirens, bells, constantly, twenty-four hours a day. Silence has to be a personal choice, a decision to go without constant news and stimulation, electing from time to time a digital detox, for the computer's words, though mute, still scream at us from the screen.

Why do so many people fear silence? People are afraid to be in a room in silence, alone with their thoughts, listening inwardly instead of outwardly. Are they afraid of what they'll find when they look inside? Or perhaps they fear there is nothing there at all. Without our times of silence how can we possibly reach wise decisions, cultivate our spirits, sort out our lives? We complain that we have no time for silence, and blame the outer world for our inner impoverishment. Yet all the great religions speak of going into the desert alone in order to become who we fully are. Moses went up the mountain to meet God. Jesus went into the desert for forty days and also to the Mount of Transfiguration, the place where temporal meets eternal, with Jesus himself the bridge between the two. Mohammad received the teaching of the Qur'an from the archangel Gabriel, in a cave named Mount Hira. It is a long-held tradition that revelations are given to men and women who seek the seclusion of mountaintop or cave.

We are not all called to be prophets, but I do believe we are called to go within and get to know ourselves. Such silence bestows peace upon us, and once I'd tasted it, I hungered for more, for the enjoyment it brought was so rewarding and fulfilling at a fundamental level of being. I once experienced this kind of profound silence when swimming deep underwater for as long as my breath held. I was swimming at quite a depth in the Indian Ocean in a sort of exalted trance, feeling a oneness with God and with all creation, when three sharks swam close by, eyeing me curiously. I gazed at them and embraced them in the love I was feeling at that moment, feeling no fear. In that moment I knew it to be true that love is the opposite of fear. Where there is love there can be no fear, and in that moment I embraced my possible death. They just swam on and left me unmolested. And alive!

On another occasion I was high above the Swiss alps, in a glider, snowy white mountains and deep blue sky laid out beneath me, the sound of silence filling me with love and the oneness of all creation, feeling again a union with all.

However, there is another kind of silence, also deep, but very different. That is the unequivocal, inexorable silence that follows death. Too often, already,

have I experienced that immense silence, perhaps the most overwhelming being after my husband's death. He had lived through the night, I in a chair next to him, listening to his struggling, noisy breathing, until 7 a.m., when I greeted him and the new day with relief. In that instant he exhaled the longest, deepest, most powerful and noisy breath I have heard in my whole life, as though he was exhaling his whole life in one long breath. And then nothing. Silence. The contrast and the finality were unbearable and unbelievable. I tried in vain to bring him back, but he had left on his journey and I could not hold him back.

Contrasting with my husband's death was the silent slipping away of the brother of my heart last year. One minute he was there, breathing quietly, and the next, like a bird fluttering up and away, his soul departed and silence reigned. The silence in both cases underscored the absolute finality of death, the great transition from life to death, from individual identity to a merging with the eternal and the universal. In my brother's case, he had asked to be laid out for three days in observance of a Tibetan ritual, and the fact of having him there in the house, being able to go in and sit in silence with him and commune on another level, was very comforting, though deeply sad because the dead cannot respond. When they are gone they are gone from us forever in this lifetime.

But silence among the living can communicate a great deal. In the past, I went on silent retreats with members of my church, and it never ceased to amaze me how much we still communicated with each other without words, more on a vibrational level of our being. I understand well how monks and nuns who are cloistered can influence the vibrations of the world through their prayers and intentions. Experiments along these lines have been conducted also. I forget the details, but for several days people in a city troubled by violence were asked to pray and meditate for peace. The astounding upshot of this was that during the days of prayers for peace, the violence in that city abated almost completely.

I believe that hours, and days, of selective silence are needed for our own sanity and as an antidote to the insanity of the world we live in. People may consider us crazy when we elect to stay at home alone, but such hours of beautiful peace bring balance in an unbalanced world, and those of us who are called to retreat into our "cave" regularly, do it not just for ourselves and the health of our spirit, but for society in general.

Not for nothing is the age-old aphorism often quoted that "speech is silver, but silence is golden."

I propose that we start practicing for the great, final silence now, during our lifetime, in all its beauty and peace, because in the end, when we shed our bodies, all we are left with is silence.

Bio: Susan P. Blevins, an ex-pat Brit, lived in Italy for twenty-six years, traveled the world extensively, and has now settled in Houston, Texas, where she is enjoying writing stories based on her travels and adventures. She had a weekly column on food in a European newspaper while living in Rome, and published various articles on gardens and gardening when she lived in northern New Mexico, before moving to Houston. Her passions are classical music, gardening, nature, animals (cats in particular), reading and of course, writing. She has written a journal since she was about nine.

## Travelers

by Toti O'Brien

He brings a whole cucumber to the dinner table, sets it to the left of his plate. Does he need a small cutting board, the lady of the house inquires. He doesn't. The suggestion surprises him. Maybe (for sure) he isn't used to a tablecloth that greenish spills could stain. Maybe (for sure) he is used to eating on metal, plastic, bare wood. He cuts thick slices with a large knife, chopping them with a snappy motion, rubbing them with salt then gobbling them in one bite—cleaning his palate between courses, or before drinking wine. Where did he learn?

Of his South-American years (Brazil then Argentina, where two daughters were born) he speaks about *maté*—another green thing, thick and muddy. He talks about it with longing, as if speaking of a dear friend he has lost. Maté is grass soaking at the bottom of a tall mug, a thin straw slowing down the sipping, stretching out the pleasure.

Then he talks of Africa and the first thing he mentions is *karkadé*—a concoction made of hibiscus flowers. Its intense red hue, I notice, is the perfect complement to *maté*'s green shade. In North Africa, where he traveled extensively, Grandpa always refreshed himself with karkadé. He also gives us a terrifying tale of tropical flies entering human brains by the ear, eating up a tunnel then exiting by the nose, having in the meanwhile

destroyed cerebral tissues. We are shaken, appalled. He laughs at our sensitivity. Is it a true story?

Hard to say. Grandpa's Africa is just as blurred as his South America—both magnetic, enthralling in their fabulous vagueness. Did he bring back from overseas his love for large birds? The raven, the cockatoos he feeds amorously, calling them with exotic first names.

When I traveled for work to Brazil in my thirties I went to a market, in Rio, where people sold hammocks, wooden artifacts, metalware, farm machinery, produce, woven cloth. That fair, I learned, had been going on for a century at least, unchanged. Very old, traditional, poor. Suddenly I realized my grandfather must have been there, weekend after weekend, selling his copperware. Things must have looked to him just like they looked to me. He must have smelled meat broiled on wood fire as I did. Like me he must have danced the rhythms of *forró*—which, according to one theory, means “for all,” borrowing its name from English-speaking invaders. Colonizers.

At his side—intimidated by such a boisterous father, yet reassured by the same loud boldness—my father would have been a child, thin and dark, afraid of the tall stilts-walkers during carnival season, deafened by the shrilling drums of the samba. What did Father recall of Brazil? Nothing but a sense of terrified awe—and a longing for coconut sweets.

When I lived in Brazil, sometimes I went for walks with a colleague who translated Strindberg from Swedish. “Have you been to Sweden?” I asked once. “No,” he answered. He had never been out of the country, certainly not overseas. “I haven't been to Sweden,” he muttered, “but they say it exists.” I smiled. I could have said the same about Grandpa's remote, fabulous exiles—until I took a plane and went to verify one of them, stunned at the beauty of the Pao de Acucar, Copacabana, Ipanema. Thus the world he described existed.

Did it? After I left I started doubting it. I remembered it—though the memory, as years went by, became both blurred and increasingly psychedelic. The hibiscus flowers (weren't they also in North Africa?) were more scarlet and bigger. The lagoon more intensely cobalt. The *macumba* and *capoŕra* wilder. Sometimes I thought they might be fruits of my imagination, though they had been real once. Too briefly.

Grandpa—what about you? What happens to a dear one when he's long gone? He becomes a kind of abstract painting, an old map from which all writing is blotted—and it fades into patches of color—muddy green, blood red. Lovely, yet more and more undefined.

Bio: Toti O'Brien is the Italian Accordionist with the Irish last name. She was born in Rome then moved to Los Angeles, where she makes a living as a self-employed artist, performing musician and professional dancer. Her work has most recently appeared in *Wild in the House*, *JMWW*, *Colorado Boulevard*, and *Ruminations*.

## Yoga, Barney, Jamyang, and Geshe-La (Made Me a Buddhist)

by Ginger Peters

### Yoga

This is something I had always heard about and watched people do on television, but never had experienced. However, yoga became a cause and condition toward my movement into Buddhism. I grew up in western Texas, and there wasn't a yoga class within a 100-mile radius of my house. In this area I lived in, many folks related yoga only with people who were part of cults or worse, so no one taught it or attempted to teach it. I've lived away from that part of Texas for 9 years, so things have changed. I'm so glad. Yoga was my first introduction to meditation. I had and have a wonderful teacher, Viktoria, that taught me how to clear my mind for just one hour. I learned to get rid of that negativity and all the obstructions. I tried to feel only peace, breathe, and move with the yoga exercises so that I might feel better and have less symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis. It did end up having a positive impact upon my health. At the same time yoga was a huge benefit for my mind and my body, as karma would have it, we suddenly had a huge problem with our dog, Barney.

### Barney

Our 100-pound Golden Retriever, with a great big head and mouth, is quite a bit older now and is somewhat calmer than he used to be. But, he is instrumental to my spiritual journey of Buddhism. I consider him the second Dharma seed that was sewn in my mind, yoga being the first. There

might have been other seeds, I just don't recall them as much as I do this old dog. Barney was a fun-loving happy Golden Retriever at one time. He was a bit hyper and full of energy, but sweet. One day he encountered a very aggressive dog on a hike with my husband. He was pinned in the corner by this dog and nearly torn apart. We were not very skillful about these kind of things, my husband and I, and we kept thinking that he would forget and grow out of his fear from the attack, but he didn't. Suddenly, he began to rare up and bark at other dogs when he would see them. We didn't know it at first, but he was trying to make all dogs think he was mean and tough, so that they would go away and leave him alone.

Finally, after a few months we realized he wasn't going to change his behavior, so we hired an animal therapist/dog trainer and she began to work with Barney. But, after a couple of lessons, she finally said, "Stop, Ginger! What are you afraid of?" I asked her what she meant by that and she responded. "Well, you are holding Barney's leash very tightly, you are constantly looking from left to right and behind you. So, what are you afraid of?" I stood there a moment thinking and wondering about what she was asking and finally, it hit me. Fifteen years ago, I was walking up the driveway of a friend's house to visit her family. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I caught a glimpse of a huge black figure on the right side of my vision coming after me. The black thing pinned me down to the ground and had his teeth around my throat. It was approximately a 120 pound Rottweiler, and to be honest, I wet my pants. I just knew I was going to die, because this dog had teeth the size of a mountain lion. I realized in a split second he could sever my jugular vein and that would be that. But, the owner called him off and I finally was able to get up, get in my car, drive home, shaking all the way.

After Barney was attacked, this memory was suddenly with me again. I realized that I was not only afraid for Barney when we went for walks or hikes, but I was afraid for myself. Barney was feeding off of my fear and I was feeding off of Barney's fear. It was a vicious cycle!

I decided to do something I had never done before. I decided to order a self-help book on fear. After seeing millions of books on Amazon.com, I finally chose a book titled, *Th□Plac□ That Scar□You*, by Pema Chodron. I didn't even realize she was a Buddhist nun until I got the book and read about her on the back cover. I read the book in 3 days. The only other author I had ever read that fast was Stephen King, which happened to be my favorite author until I discovered Buddhism. It was amazing. I even talked my

husband into reading it, even though he was in the midst of reading a Jon Krakauer book, which happened to be by his favorite author. He stopped and read the Pema Chodron book and suddenly, we ordered every book she ever penned. We loved them. They hit home and called to us in a mindful type of way.

### Jamyang

During the time we were reading all the books by Pema Chodron, we also were noticing something else, very important. Jamyang. He had been our grocery checker every Sunday morning when we went to get groceries for almost 9 years. He was different. He had a light, a certain kind of light. Believe me, I wasn't versed on auras, but I knew he had a good one. A white, glowing light, full of kindness, love, and compassion. You could see it in his eyes, his smile, his whole persona. He was special. He wasn't a monk or anything famous, just a grocery clerk at the store. But, to me he was special. I kept telling my husband when we'd leave the store, "I want to be like him."

Finally, after some time we got to know each other and began discussing Buddhism and books. He told us about Thubten Norbu Ling in Santa Fe and books written by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche and His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. Soon my husband and I became like sponges. We couldn't get enough of the Dharma "word" and we eventually went to the center and began with guided meditation. After that, we became braver and decided to go to the teachings. We were and are so fortunate to live in Santa Fe. We have an American guy named Don Handrick that teaches approximately 6 months out of the year. He is not a monk, but just an average American man that decided to go to a monastery in Italy, so he could learn and teach Buddhism.

### Geshe-La

Then, there's this monk named Geshe-La Thubten Sherab. He teaches the other 6 months out of the year. Well, there were some members building him a casita behind their house. The casita was not quite finished, so he needed a place to stay for a couple of weeks. My husband and I talked about it. We heard he loved nature, outdoor, walks, and animals. So, because we lived 8 miles south of town and had dogs and tons of walking paths and nature, we volunteered to have him stay with us. I figured it was a long shot, because we had not been members of the center that long, so I

thought for sure he would stay with someone else. The center called me the week before he arrived and said, "You are on." In other words, the monk was going to stay with us.

I started towards town that day to go pick up the monk and I kept thinking, What are we doing? We don't even know this guy. He's from Nepal and what if he doesn't like it here or what if we can't understand him or what if, what if, what if? I was creating story lines in my head about the way this situation would be. Well, as it turned out, he was funny, he teased my husband a lot, he laughed, he taught us about Buddhism, and we all hit it off very well. Plus, he cooked, and seemed to enjoy the hell out of staying with us. He ended up being in our home several weeks until the casita was completely ready. We learned so much and it was an experience of a lifetime.

We ended up taking our "Refuge Vows" from Geshe-La Sherab, which are: "To avoid killing," "To avoid taking what has not been given," "To avoid sexual misconduct," "To avoid telling lies," and "To avoid being intoxicated." All of these things are elemental rules for good conduct and a better state of mind.

Yoga, Barney, Jamyang, and Geshe-La are all the reasons we turned to Buddhism. The main goal of Buddhism is to gain more wisdom and compassion, especially compassion for others, more than yourself. When you cherish others more than you do yourself, your life is way better, way more simple, and way more beneficial.

I applaud all these seeds that led me to a lifelong spiritual commitment of cherishing others, compassion, love, kindness, and less stress and less delusions. It has been a blessing and the karmic seeds that have been planted in my mind and heart will never fade. I feel so very fortunate to have more awareness of my mind and heart, to have more skillful speech and body, and to be more aware of reality, with less obscuration. This is what Buddhism is about.

Bio: Ginger Peters is a freelance poet and writer living in Santa Fe, NM. She has sold poetry and non-fiction to a variety of magazines over the past twenty-five years. She enjoys family, friends, walking, yoga, and is a member of the Thubten Norbu Ling Buddhist Center in Santa Fe. She tries to live by the philosophy of loving kindness, compassion, and growing in wisdom.

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