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"Underwater Thing" by Jim Fuess; [www.jimfuessart.com](http://www.jimfuessart.com)

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*over 14 million albums across the globe, enjoying great success and acclaim with gold, platinum and multi-platinum sales awards in fifteen countries. As the head of Quinlan Road, her own internationally successful record label, she puts her creative touches to all aspects of her work. Involved in extensive charity enterprises, she gives back to the world that has so richly embraced her unique brand of cultural storytelling that pours through her hypnotizing voice into her music. The Celtic spirit of capturing the essence of history is apparent in her songs which weave tales of her studies and travels all over the world. We hope you enjoy our talk with the timeless, talented, Loreena McKennitt...*

Interview by Nicole M. Bouchard

1) It has been said of your profession in music, that music chose you, rather than you choosing it. So often the same can be said of many artistic professions including written and visual mediums. How would you describe your draw to music and the circumstances surrounding it; how it was thus acknowledged as a great passion in your eyes?

***I don't know how I'd describe it... music is a fascinating, universal medium over the ages to sustain and evoke emotions. It is like an oral pharmacy... A vehicle through which other things can be explored or expressed...***

***Though I'd initially pursued an agricultural college for the purpose of learning veterinary medicine, each time there would be a path or opportunity to perform, I would always wonder how far I could go into music. At a market in Toronto, I sold the first cassettes of my work in 1985. It was a purely organic, grass roots beginning. I'd characterize my pull toward immersing myself in music as responding to an interest, a demand for what I was doing, rather than pursuing it without cause. My passion is in the performances, the making of music, and I'm grateful for this measure of talent, curiosity and intellect that I possess to pursue this act of self-education. I have the temperment and psychological make-up of a***

*veterinarian which is what I'd initially thought I'd become. I'm not an extrovert and since I'm not quite comfortable performing in public, I'm always framing it in mind that I'm sitting with friends, sharing what I've discovered. It then becomes exciting and fun with a more personal aspect to it.*

2) Having been a long-time fan of your music, I've not only appreciated the melody, but the words themselves. Particularly, as a writer, I see you as a great storyteller, whether you pen your own tales or whether you derive inspiration from works such as "The Lady of Shalott" by Tennyson, William Shakespeare's "The Tempest", or classic songs such as "Greensleeves". Do you feel that it is a part of your ancestry which naturally compels the storyteller behind the music?

*To a modest degree. Intellectually, I respect the role of storytelling to convey information, messages, to impart and pass on wisdom through narrative formats. Personally, I wasn't exposed to much storytelling. I saw it more in my early adult life when traveling through Ireland; sixteen verse poems would come from the mouths of farmers in pubs. They are natural wordsmiths.*

2b) I had the distinct pleasure of seeing you perform live on a U.S. tour. What struck me the most was that the performance was not only stimulating in an entertainment sense, but you also taught your audience through sharing your travels and extensive cultural research. It was such a unique, life-enrichening experience.

On your site, you answered a question with the following: *"This song was an attempt to bring some historical relevance to the present. Many times, as I undertook my research and travels, I was confronted with the questions: "What has history taught us, and do we have the capacity to learn from it? As someone who has simply pursued her muse through an informal excavation of the past, I find that the historical landscape is littered with themes of war, peace, love, self-determination, liberty, identity, home, and cultural, religious and spiritual interactions. This song*

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Do you feel that it is of a particular importance to study our past in order to learn how to deal with the present and presumably the future? Also, through your cultural research, you've spoken of sameness over time and space; what, if any, changes do you think are most prevalent between the past and the modern societal landscape?

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*comprehensible and manageable. There are certainly positive aspects and progression over the centuries, yet the importance of studying and learning from our past is still prudent as we approach the future.*

3) You've performed for royalty, been Grammy-nominated, and your entrancing song "Mummer's Dance" brought further awareness of your brilliant work to mainstream music stations. What has been one of the most rewarding moments, either personally or professionally, during your career?

*It's tricky to identify one. I'm always surprised and grateful how music works for people: weddings, babies, funerals, healing (its uses on autism or blind women in Verona, Italy) learning to play the harp- the impact of music is always profound. Performing at Radio City in New York and for the Queen are unique milestones for me, each with a unique quality.*

4) Please tell us more about Quinlan Road; its origin, creative freedom and purpose in world music.

*Quinlan Road was initially just a name I used for a so-called "label" when I was recording in 1985- at the time, I lived on Quinlan Road! Our office went to Stratford from the kitchen table. There was creative autonomy 1985-1990 when I was not associated with a major record company. Having my personal touch on the performances and art work was important and as I was still financing things, Warner had no issue with that. It has been a busy four years, catching my breath and as the music industry is shifting, brick & mortar disappearing, we're reconfiguring how we do business.*

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6) What brought about the melding of the Celtic and Middle Eastern sounds in your music, particularly evident in "All Soul's Night"?

***It all began with an exhibition of Celts in Europe and Asia Minor, held in Venice, Italy in the early nineties. It was a revelation about history and the music carries on that knowledge.***

7) Tell us about upcoming projects and your summer 09' Mediterranean tour-

***We have performed in Greece, Turkey, Italy in proximity to sacred, beautiful archaeological settings with diverse groups. The music is connected to the sacred which bridges communication across various languages. The 2009 summer tour includes Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Hungary, Italy and Greece.***

On a personal note, your music helped me to discover a part of my ancestry. I'd always harbored a great love for Ireland in terms of music, lore, history and geography. As there were no known connections to

Ireland for my family, my fascination seemed at first without internal cause. By chance, I discussed your music with a distant relative who described "Mummer's Dance" on the *Book of Secrets* album as hauntingly beautiful. Through the thread of this conversation, I revealed my love for the Emerald Isle and my relative replied that it made sense. An ancestor had traced us all the way back to a county in Ireland, but very few knew of the discovery. Your timeless connections to the past and the history that defines us helped solve a mystery of longing for a place I'd never known. This is what I believe your music and storytelling does for its many charmed audiences.

For more on Loreena and her music, visit <http://www.quinlanroad.com>

*A few months ago, I read **The School of Essential Ingredients**, by Erica Bauermeister (co-author of *500 Great Books by Women: A Readers' Guide* and *Let's Hear it for the Girls: 375 Great Books for Readers 2-14*), and I've been talking about it ever since. In her online bio she talks of wanting to write about the little things. Not only does she accomplish this, but I feel that in doing so, she gets down to the deepest, most important "stuff of life". She gets it all, and she really nails it. This is her first novel and I'm looking forward to reading her work again and again.*

*I was thrilled to be granted an interview by this new and engaging talent. I especially loved her sensory tool for 'getting there' into descriptive mode and I think you will too. Computers aside, I offer her a toast- Here's to a woman who knows my heart. "Let us always get the stuff of life." What follows is a soulful interview between two women who have lived and loved well. Enjoy!*

Interview by Denise Bouchard

1) Your writing is so beautifully descriptive, so sensuous and then you throw in that spark of magic that allows your characters as well as your readers to find their real selves again through a memory; a glimmer of recognition of the soul's true needs. I loved this particular passage: "The hard, round cake of chocolate was wrapped in yellow plastic with red stripes, shiny and dark when she opened it. The chocolate made a rough sound as it brushed across the fine section of

the grate, falling in soft clouds onto the counter, releasing a scent of dusty back rooms filled with bittersweet chocolate and old love letters, the bottom drawers of antique desks and the last leaves of autumn, almonds and cinnamon and sugar." For our writers, talk to us a bit about the power of description—especially your kind of description, where we're remembering and our mouths water. You seem so completely there inside of your book, the way an artist becomes part of his painting. Tell us how you get "there".

***I remember one time, about a week after we had moved to Italy. I had spent the previous six days navigating the needs of my culture-shocked seven and ten-year-old children, attempting to communicate in a language I didn't know, trying to remember new customs like emptying the water out of our tiny foreign dryer every time I used it. On that first Sunday, some new acquaintances took us on a trip out into the countryside, to an outdoor trattoria complete with wooden tables under a wisteria-covered arbor and a view of the valley. At one point we were served a simple mixed salad and, engrossed in trying to follow a conversation awash in accents, I took a bite, unthinking. And stopped. It was just lettuce and tomatoes and olive oil, but it was mind-bendingly sensual. Something in me changed at that moment. I was living with all of my senses engaged.***

***Now, when I want to write descriptions, I try to recreate in myself that feeling of utterly slowing down, of paying attention with your body as much as your mind. My goal in The School of Essential Ingredients was to help people experience that through reading as well as food.***

2) You say that your two years of living in Northern Italy instilled in you a love of slow food and the slow life. I felt that slow style when I was in the Caribbean—everything was gotten to in its own time. No one rushed you nor would they be rushed and the food, well, because it was all made from the island's freshest and most vibrant ingredients, fiery spices and exotic, tropical produce, it made one close their eyes either from the spices which made them water or in thanks for the banana bread that tastes nothing like what we could conjure here on the mainland. Please share with us a few anecdotes on the food, houses and/or the

people of Northern Italy.

***Perhaps the most memorable dinner I had in Italy was one October evening at a friend's grandmother's house. Her kitchen was the inspiration for the one Antonia remembers in The School of Essential Ingredients, the kitchen with the fireplace and the long table for twelve. There was such a gracefulness to the evening – the way these beautiful, tantalizing courses would come out gradually, one at a time, from the tiny kitchen area; the way people lingered and talked about life and politics and food; the way children would get up and go play on the couches that lined the room and then come back to curl up on the knee of a grown-up. It was so effortlessly loving; I remember feeling that that was my first real Thanksgiving, even though it was October and we didn't eat turkey and I was thousands of miles from the United States.***

3) On your website, I was delighted to read that you refer to your children as your greatest inspiration. When my daughter was a baby, I re-learned things about myself that I had forgotten. As we put on plays, wrote poetry, painted and gardened together, I unearthed something that had stagnated in my years of career climbing; and that something was my young, carefree and creative self. There's a Winnie the Pooh quote where Christopher Robin says "As soon as I saw you I knew an adventure was going to happen." Do you feel as I do that in a sense, our children give birth to us as well?

***It's wonderful that you bring up that quote. When my first child was born, I bought a journal with those words on it; it perfectly described my feelings about my daughter. The reality was that because she was such an adventure I never had time to write in the journal, but when I found it a few years ago after she had gone off to college, it made me smile.***

***It's also interesting what you say about the effect your children have on you. In my case, I feel as if my children made me grow up, in a way I had always wanted. I had spent much of my younger life feeling unsettled, wishing I could be a calmer, wiser person. Having an adventurous child and then a cautious one pulled those***

***calmer, wiser parts out of me because my children needed them, and that will always be one of the unexpected gifts of parenthood for me.***

4) You co-authored *375 Great Books for Readers 2-14*. What are a few of your favorites in the 5-9 and 9-12 age groups? Also, is the story of the country bunny with the golden slippers, which you refer to in your book, an actual children's story? The idea of it was a delight.

***The Country Bunny and The Little Gold Shoes, as Told to Jennifer (Du Bose Heyward) was a story my mother used to read to me when I was little. It wasn't until I was a mother myself and reading it to my own children that I realized what a startlingly feminist story it was, particularly for something written in 1939.***

***Writing Let's Hear It For The Girls: 375 Great Books for Readers 2-14 allowed me to revisit those old favorites and find new ones, full of images of strong girls and women. And while I wrote the book with my daughter in mind, it was my son, who was still young enough to sit on my lap and listen, who read many of them. He's turned into a wonderful man.***

***A few of my favorites? Well, that could take a while. I do love the classics – Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House series, Mary Poppins, Ramona the Pest, Harriet the Spy, Anne of Green Gables. I adored reading the Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle series with my children (her parenting advice, while unorthodox, was hilarious and often spot-on). And ever since I read From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler I have fantasized about spending the night in a museum.***

***More recent favorites (particularly in that 8-12 year-old category) would include the clever and resourceful heroines from Daughter of the Mountains, Seven Daughters and Seven Sons, Shabanu, Alanna, Ruby in the Smoke, Words by Heart, Letters From Rifka, Fog Magic, The Wizard in the Tree, and The Forestwife.***

***I learned while writing, Let's Hear It For the Girls, however, that it is truly difficult to determine what books are appropriate for what ages. Each child reads and comprehends at her or his own level and the age at which they are ready to listen to or read a book varies widely. I realize this paragraph sounds like a parental advisory – but I suppose that's what parental advisories are for...***

Claire's truth is in having had children. It was said by poet, Muriel Rukeyser, that if one woman told the truth about her life, the world would split apart. You tell the truth of what its really like to go through childbirth; not the pain or even the emotions but it's like going through a door, as in initially feeling like you're not the same person who was pregnant. As time goes on she becomes stronger but still different until she remembers something as she eats the crab... and the pieces of her meld. She becomes warm, golden, and complete. I won't ask you how you know that one. I know too. This isn't a question, but rather something I wish to thank you for expressing that which many women cannot or will not put into words.

5) I loved Abuelita, who in the most simple & loving way, offered great words of wisdom and just the right ingredients when needed. We all need this kind of awakening at different points in our lives. "Because to be a part of this world, we need more than safety. Your mother needs to remember what she lost and want it again." Was her character a compilation of different people or did you have an Abuelita who influenced you in your life? Let's raise our glasses in a toast to remembering what we need!

***I often get asked if various characters in the book are people I know, and the truthful answer is no – usually the characters begin with feelings and turn into living and breathing people who often surprise me in their complexity. Abuelita came from that feeling that happens when someone truly sees you. It can be (and often is) an unlikely person – a stranger on the bus, the mother of a friend, a teacher – a person who says the thing you need to hear even though you can't imagine how they know it.***

***I remember once being in a bar up at a ski lodge (which was odd in itself. because I don't aenerallu ao to bars or ski). Bu chance. I saw***

*...they, because I don't generally go to bars or clubs. By chance, I saw a remodeling contractor I knew and met his wife for the first time. She and I had only been talking for five minutes when she looked at me and asked "What do you do that makes you happy?" It was an unexpected question, and the effect it had upon me was profound. That question worked its way into Claire's story, but Helen's and Abuelita's and Lillian's ability to ask the right question, to see what needs to be said, comes from moments such as those.*

6) My favorite character was Antonia who makes over a 70's style kitchen and saves it from becoming another ultra-modern cliché. I'm swooning and I want to shout "Yes! She gets it!" Let's put writing aside here for a moment and just pretend we're all having late afternoon tea together in the room which Antonia (and you as the author) created. "The linoleum in the room in front of them had been ripped up, revealing a fir floor underneath, splotted with glue, but a warm red-gold all the same. A small table covered with a yellow provincial tablecloth was set like a secret in the bay window; an iron tablecloth was set like a secret in the bay window; an iron pot full of water boiled cheerfully on the huge black stove. In the center of the room the wooden prep table was covered with a snowstorm of flour and a series of red ceramic bowls, and in the fireplace, on a grill sat over a glowing bed of fragrant sticks, marinated chicken and eggplant sizzled and cooked." Do you actually cook like this and feel this way about old houses in your own life?

*I have to admit to a certain obsession with food – something that has been passed on to my children, who have been known to call me from college and recite the menus of every restaurant they go to, or tell me about the latest culinary extravaganza they have managed to pull off in a dormitory kitchen. For me, food is art, community, sensuality, all in one. I'd say that was efficient, if the effect was not so completely and wonderfully the opposite.*

*I am also a complete sucker for old houses, and the worse shape they are in, the more I seem drawn to them. Some day I hope to write about an old four-square house we renovated in a Victorian seaport outside of Seattle. It had a rotten foundation, a worse roof, and someone had grounded the electrical to the plumbing so you risked being shocked when you turned on the water. We hauled out*

*I never really checked when you turned on the water. We hauled out six and a half tons of trash before we could even start renovation. But the lines of the house were beautiful, and now it is clean and strong and the sun pours through its windows and when I sit in my big writing chair and look out at that extraordinary view of the town and the bay I wonder how I ever got so lucky.*

*But if there is one thing I've learned through my experiences with Italy and food and houses, it is that things become more beautiful – both literally and in a more elusive, emotional way – the more you take care of them.*

For more on Erica and her work, visit <http://www.ericabauermeister.com>

\*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

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*A few months ago, I read **The School of Essential Ingredients**, by Erica Bauermeister (co-author of *500 Great Books by Women: A Readers' Guide* and *Let's Hear it for the Girls: 375 Great Books for Readers 2-14*), and I've been talking about it ever since. In her online bio she talks of wanting to write about the little things. Not only does she accomplish this, but I feel that in doing so, she gets down to the deepest, most important "stuff of life". She gets it all, and she really nails it. This is her first novel and I'm looking forward to reading her work again and again.*

*I was thrilled to be granted an interview by this new and engaging talent. I especially loved her sensory tool for 'getting there' into descriptive mode and I think you will too. Computers aside, I offer her a toast- Here's to a woman who knows my heart. "Let us always get the stuff of life." What follows is a soulful interview between two women who have lived and loved well. Enjoy!*

Interview by Denise Bouchard

1) Your writing is so beautifully descriptive, so sensuous and then you throw in that spark of magic that allows your characters as well as your readers to find their real selves again through a memory; a glimmer of recognition of the soul's true needs. I loved this particular passage: "The hard, round cake of chocolate was wrapped in yellow plastic with red stripes, shiny and dark when she opened it. The chocolate made a rough sound as it brushed across the fine section of

the grate, falling in soft clouds onto the counter, releasing a scent of dusty back rooms filled with bittersweet chocolate and old love letters, the bottom drawers of antique desks and the last leaves of autumn, almonds and cinnamon and sugar." For our writers, talk to us a bit about the power of description—especially your kind of description, where we're remembering and our mouths water. You seem so completely there inside of your book, the way an artist becomes part of his painting. Tell us how you get "there".

***I remember one time, about a week after we had moved to Italy. I had spent the previous six days navigating the needs of my culture-shocked seven and ten-year-old children, attempting to communicate in a language I didn't know, trying to remember new customs like emptying the water out of our tiny foreign dryer every time I used it. On that first Sunday, some new acquaintances took us on a trip out into the countryside, to an outdoor trattoria complete with wooden tables under a wisteria-covered arbor and a view of the valley. At one point we were served a simple mixed salad and, engrossed in trying to follow a conversation awash in accents, I took a bite, unthinking. And stopped. It was just lettuce and tomatoes and olive oil, but it was mind-bendingly sensual. Something in me changed at that moment. I was living with all of my senses engaged.***

***Now, when I want to write descriptions, I try to recreate in myself that feeling of utterly slowing down, of paying attention with your body as much as your mind. My goal in The School of Essential Ingredients was to help people experience that through reading as well as food.***

2) You say that your two years of living in Northern Italy instilled in you a love of slow food and the slow life. I felt that slow style when I was in the Caribbean—everything was gotten to in its own time. No one rushed you nor would they be rushed and the food, well, because it was all made from the island's freshest and most vibrant ingredients, fiery spices and exotic, tropical produce, it made one close their eyes either from the spices which made them water or in thanks for the banana bread that tastes nothing like what we could conjure here on the mainland. Please share with us a few anecdotes on the food, houses and/or the

people of Northern Italy.

***Perhaps the most memorable dinner I had in Italy was one October evening at a friend's grandmother's house. Her kitchen was the inspiration for the one Antonia remembers in The School of Essential Ingredients, the kitchen with the fireplace and the long table for twelve. There was such a gracefulness to the evening – the way these beautiful, tantalizing courses would come out gradually, one at a time, from the tiny kitchen area; the way people lingered and talked about life and politics and food; the way children would get up and go play on the couches that lined the room and then come back to curl up on the knee of a grown-up. It was so effortlessly loving; I remember feeling that that was my first real Thanksgiving, even though it was October and we didn't eat turkey and I was thousands of miles from the United States.***

3) On your website, I was delighted to read that you refer to your children as your greatest inspiration. When my daughter was a baby, I re-learned things about myself that I had forgotten. As we put on plays, wrote poetry, painted and gardened together, I unearthed something that had stagnated in my years of career climbing; and that something was my young, carefree and creative self. There's a Winnie the Pooh quote where Christopher Robin says "As soon as I saw you I knew an adventure was going to happen." Do you feel as I do that in a sense, our children give birth to us as well?

***It's wonderful that you bring up that quote. When my first child was born, I bought a journal with those words on it; it perfectly described my feelings about my daughter. The reality was that because she was such an adventure I never had time to write in the journal, but when I found it a few years ago after she had gone off to college, it made me smile.***

***It's also interesting what you say about the effect your children have on you. In my case, I feel as if my children made me grow up, in a way I had always wanted. I had spent much of my younger life feeling unsettled, wishing I could be a calmer, wiser person. Having an adventurous child and then a cautious one pulled those***

***calmer, wiser parts out of me because my children needed them, and that will always be one of the unexpected gifts of parenthood for me.***

4) You co-authored *375 Great Books for Readers 2-14*. What are a few of your favorites in the 5-9 and 9-12 age groups? Also, is the story of the country bunny with the golden slippers, which you refer to in your book, an actual children's story? The idea of it was a delight.

***The Country Bunny and The Little Gold Shoes, as Told to Jennifer (Du Bose Heyward) was a story my mother used to read to me when I was little. It wasn't until I was a mother myself and reading it to my own children that I realized what a startlingly feminist story it was, particularly for something written in 1939.***

***Writing Let's Hear It For The Girls: 375 Great Books for Readers 2-14 allowed me to revisit those old favorites and find new ones, full of images of strong girls and women. And while I wrote the book with my daughter in mind, it was my son, who was still young enough to sit on my lap and listen, who read many of them. He's turned into a wonderful man.***

***A few of my favorites? Well, that could take a while. I do love the classics – Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House series, Mary Poppins, Ramona the Pest, Harriet the Spy, Anne of Green Gables. I adored reading the Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle series with my children (her parenting advice, while unorthodox, was hilarious and often spot-on). And ever since I read From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler I have fantasized about spending the night in a museum.***

***More recent favorites (particularly in that 8-12 year-old category) would include the clever and resourceful heroines from Daughter of the Mountains, Seven Daughters and Seven Sons, Shabanu, Alanna, Ruby in the Smoke, Words by Heart, Letters From Rifka, Fog Magic, The Wizard in the Tree, and The Forestwife.***

***I learned while writing, Let's Hear It For the Girls, however, that it is truly difficult to determine what books are appropriate for what ages. Each child reads and comprehends at her or his own level and the age at which they are ready to listen to or read a book varies widely. I realize this paragraph sounds like a parental advisory – but I suppose that's what parental advisories are for...***

Claire's truth is in having had children. It was said by poet, Muriel Rukeyser, that if one woman told the truth about her life, the world would split apart. You tell the truth of what it's really like to go through childbirth; not the pain or even the emotions but it's like going through a door, as in initially feeling like you're not the same person who was pregnant. As time goes on she becomes stronger but still different until she remembers something as she eats the crab... and the pieces of her meld. She becomes warm, golden, and complete. I won't ask you how you know that one. I know too. This isn't a question, but rather something I wish to thank you for expressing that which many women cannot or will not put into words.

5) I loved Abuelita, who in the most simple & loving way, offered great words of wisdom and just the right ingredients when needed. We all need this kind of awakening at different points in our lives. "Because to be a part of this world, we need more than safety. Your mother needs to remember what she lost and want it again." Was her character a compilation of different people or did you have an Abuelita who influenced you in your life? Let's raise our glasses in a toast to remembering what we need!

***I often get asked if various characters in the book are people I know, and the truthful answer is no – usually the characters begin with feelings and turn into living and breathing people who often surprise me in their complexity. Abuelita came from that feeling that happens when someone truly sees you. It can be (and often is) an unlikely person – a stranger on the bus, the mother of a friend, a teacher – a person who says the thing you need to hear even though you can't imagine how they know it.***

***I remember once being in a bar up at a ski lodge (which was odd in itself. because I don't generally go to bars or ski). By chance. I saw***

*...they, because I don't generally go to bars or clubs. By chance, I saw a remodeling contractor I knew and met his wife for the first time. She and I had only been talking for five minutes when she looked at me and asked "What do you do that makes you happy?" It was an unexpected question, and the effect it had upon me was profound. That question worked its way into Claire's story, but Helen's and Abuelita's and Lillian's ability to ask the right question, to see what needs to be said, comes from moments such as those.*

6) My favorite character was Antonia who makes over a 70's style kitchen and saves it from becoming another ultra-modern cliché. I'm swooning and I want to shout "Yes! She gets it!" Let's put writing aside here for a moment and just pretend we're all having late afternoon tea together in the room which Antonia (and you as the author) created. "The linoleum in the room in front of them had been ripped up, revealing a fir floor underneath, splotted with glue, but a warm red-gold all the same. A small table covered with a yellow provincial tablecloth was set like a secret in the bay window; an iron tablecloth was set like a secret in the bay window; an iron pot full of water boiled cheerfully on the huge black stove. In the center of the room the wooden prep table was covered with a snowstorm of flour and a series of red ceramic bowls, and in the fireplace, on a grill sat over a glowing bed of fragrant sticks, marinated chicken and eggplant sizzled and cooked." Do you actually cook like this and feel this way about old houses in your own life?

*I have to admit to a certain obsession with food – something that has been passed on to my children, who have been known to call me from college and recite the menus of every restaurant they go to, or tell me about the latest culinary extravaganza they have managed to pull off in a dormitory kitchen. For me, food is art, community, sensuality, all in one. I'd say that was efficient, if the effect was not so completely and wonderfully the opposite.*

*I am also a complete sucker for old houses, and the worse shape they are in, the more I seem drawn to them. Some day I hope to write about an old four-square house we renovated in a Victorian seaport outside of Seattle. It had a rotten foundation, a worse roof, and someone had grounded the electrical to the plumbing so you risked being shocked when you turned on the water. We hauled out*

*I never really checked when you turned on the water. We hauled out six and a half tons of trash before we could even start renovation. But the lines of the house were beautiful, and now it is clean and strong and the sun pours through its windows and when I sit in my big writing chair and look out at that extraordinary view of the town and the bay I wonder how I ever got so lucky.*

*But if there is one thing I've learned through my experiences with Italy and food and houses, it is that things become more beautiful – both literally and in a more elusive, emotional way – the more you take care of them.*

For more on Erica and her work, visit <http://www.ericabauermeister.com>

\*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

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