

My Writing Life

August 2008

Dear Friends,

I hope you've had a lovely spring and are enjoying a languid summer!

It's been awhile since I last wrote, so I wanted to bring you up to date on what's been keeping me busy in the last several months—both with my writing and my life. As ever, I'm continuing to balance the demands of putting words on the page with getting the word out about my books. But added to the mix this spring was a milestone event in my personal life—our 25th wedding anniversary!



12 June 1983

Celebrating a Marriage

One Saturday morning, in a moment of irrational abandon, my dear husband and I decided to celebrate our 25th anniversary by recreating the ceremony and party we had thrown for ourselves in 1983, gathering as many of the original participants as we could convince to make the trek to our New England garden. Six weeks later, on a blisteringly hot Sunday afternoon in June, we stood before family and friends to renew our vows and then enjoy, as we described on the invitation,

*"Great friends and music
Fantastic food with
A continuously full punch bowl"*

As has been our custom throughout our wonderful marriage, my husband and I each took on our accustomed roles in planning the party. The music was his; the food was mine; and the punch was the masterful invention of one of our original wedding guests.

Let me set the stage for you. The location was our backyard, where for weeks before my energetic eighty-five-year-old mother-in-law had weeded and cultivated the flower beds until they were worthy of a *Better Homes and Gardens* cover. The purple irises cooperated by blooming in time for the party and the flower shop in our local supermarket put roses in all sizes and colors on sale that week.

Under a white tent we had rows of chairs set up for the vows ceremony and on the patio facing the tent was the sound equipment for the musicians.

The musicians! They were extraordinary and very special to us in different ways. Before the ceremony a mother-daughter duet played viola and cello. The violist was our dear friend Laurie Brown Kennedy, <http://www.portlandsymphony.com/module-People-display-sid-93.html>, principal for the Portland Symphony. Laurie had played at our wedding and we were thrilled when she agreed to come from Maine to join us again and see for herself that the wine glasses she had given us as a wedding present were still intact! Laurie's daughter Katie had been a toddler at the wedding, but she has blossomed into a lovely young woman and musician in her own right. Katie's cello sent mellifluous notes across the garden before we stepped in front of our guests to renew our vows.

After the ceremony we were entertained by two creative and inventive Canadians—the soulful violinist Chris Church, <http://www.chrischurch.ca> and guitarist Kevin Laliberté, <http://www.kevinlaliberte.com/index.html>, whose style has been described as “gypsy-jazz-flamenco-fusion.” We had met Chris last year when he played violin with Jesse Cook, another Canadian flamenco guitarist, at my book launch for DANCING ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS. Both my husband and I agree that the violin is the sexiest of instruments, and Chris does not disappoint. Both he and Kevin brought a passionate and evanescent quality to our celebration.

The Menu

Assorted cheeses (Brie, Jarlsberg, Cheddar, Manchego; goat cheese with garlic and lemon peel)

Crudité with spinach and artichoke dip

Farfalle with Peas and Pine Nuts in a Pesto Sauce

Boneless Chicken Breasts stuffed with Spinach and Ricotta

Baked Ham

Salad of Baby Greens

Wedding Cake

Italian Cookies and Pizzelle



Chris Church, Laurie Kennedy and Kevin Laliberté jamming at the end of the day.

Another important contributor to the event was Steve Brown, a long-time friend of my husband who has shared a number of adventures with him. It was he who created, and then recreated, the punch—an extraordinary mixture of grapefruit and pineapple juices, strawberries and peaches marinated in port wine, and—oh, yes—ice cold vodka. Steve is also the mayor of his town in Maine, so he “officiated” at the renewal of our vows.

Many other hands came together to make our day memorable. Our three wonderful children, who converged at home the day before to set up the tent, make the pesto, arrange for a keg, pick up the wedding cake that our local Italian bakery had recreated from a photograph, and then, during the ceremony, join us on the patio for the exchange of rings. Friends of our children, who did everything from sweep the patio to arrange the centerpieces. Friends of ours, who loaned us punch bowls and coffee pots and gorgeous Italian ceramic serving dishes, and kept us sane as the guest list kept growing and the temperature kept climbing. And all the folks who came from distant states or around the corner to wish us joy and another twenty-five years.



What else I've been up to . . .

OK, it wasn't all partying. I finished two books (ACROSS THE TABLE and A DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY). More about them both later in the newsletter.

Part of my winter and spring was spent doing readings and signings, from bookstore events at Barnes and Nobles in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and Newburgh, New York, to library readings in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, and Montrose, New York. One of the most interesting opportunities was a panel discussion for book clubs at Bay Path College. I was one of four authors who read from our work and answered questions about our writing journeys. We also shared lists of our favorite books. (See mine at the right.) It was a lively afternoon with a roomful of avid readers.



Signing at Barnes & Noble in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

Some of My Favorite Books

The Handmaid's Tale, Margaret Atwood
The Mists of Avalon, Marion Zimmer Bradley
In the Company of the Courtesan, Sarah Dunant
Middlesex, Jeffrey Eugenides
Bird by Bird, Ann Lamott
A Wrinkle in Time, Madeleine L'Engle
The Four-Gated City, Doris Lessing
Angle of Repose, Wallace Stegner
Orlando, Virginia Woolf

I had the opportunity, as well, to participate in several Romance Writers of America chapter events. I gave a workshop on synopsis writing at the New England Chapter's 2008 Conference, *Let Your Imagination Take Flight: Come to the Edge*. For those of you at a point in your own writing where you are ready to tackle this essential in the writer's toolbox, a CD of the workshop is available from Fleetwood Onsite Conference Recording:
http://www.fleetwoodonsite.com/product_info.php?cPath=31_138&products_id=3852

I also took part in two events for the Charter Oak chapter—a presentation on my own writing history, from the seeds for DANCING ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS until its publication; and a Q & A with other published members of the chapter on navigating the publishing world.



Accolades and Upcoming Appearances

I'm honored to report that I'm a finalist in the Maggie Award for Excellence for DANCING ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS.

I've already begun booking appearances for Spring 2009:

April 20

International Women's Club
Springfield, Massachusetts



May 13

Foster Church
Springfield, Massachusetts

New Work

Exciting news! *ACROSS THE TABLE*, my tale of pivotal Thanksgiving dinners at a family-run restaurant in Boston's North End, will be published in October 2009 along with a reissue of *DANCING ON SUNDAY AFTERNOONS*. The two books will be published together in a two-in-one trade paperback.

Here's a tiny "bite" from *ACROSS THE TABLE* to tease your appetite:

My mother, Toni, is Paradiso's weekend hostess. During the day she usually wears jeans and a Cape Cod sweatshirt picked up in Orleans during the two weeks in the summer when the restaurant closes and we all go down the Cape to the same cottage we've rented since I was a baby. But in the evenings, when Paradiso opens for dinner, my mother puts on a black, V-necked sequined sweater, a tight-fitting black skirt, high heels and make-up.

Watching my mother get dressed late every Friday afternoon was my first lesson in transformation. She might have been scrubbing the toilet or making my brother Joe sit at the kitchen table and do his algebra homework in the afternoon, but when she puts on those clothes, her mascara

and her Estee Lauder #148 "Hot Kiss" lipstick and goes downstairs, she's like an actress stepping out of a limousine onto the red carpet.

She's the first impression people have when they walk into Paradiso. She greets everyone with a voice that flows over them and makes them feel like she's been waiting all night for them to arrive and she saved the best table just for them.

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The other book I finished this summer is a novella that will appear in the anthology *A MOTHER'S HEART* just in time for Mother's Day 2009. The story, called *A DAUGHTER'S JOURNEY*, opens in Vietnam in the spring of 1975 as Saigon is about to fall. Mel Ames, a young journalist, responds to the plea of Anh, a Vietnamese bar girl who had once saved her life, to find a way to get Anh's baby daughter out of the country. When she discovers the plight of the thousands of orphans in the country, Mel writes an article that sparks an outpouring of concern that evolves into frantic efforts to airlift the children to safety. As Saigon descends into chaos, Mel faces the losses of her own childhood and adopts Anh's daughter as her own.

Thirty years later, Mel and her daughter return to Vietnam to find Anh. During their search, Mel encounters the ex-Marine physician who had cared for the orphans of Saigon and whom Mel had found both challenging and compelling—someone to resist in more ways than one. When Mel's newspaper asks her to interview him, she comes to a new understanding of who he is and what he has given up in his life to serve a humanitarian cause.

Look for it in stores in April 2009!