

My Writing Life



June 2014

Dear Friends,

It's been a busy month in my writing life--pushing forward toward the completion of Mae Keaney's story in *First Light*; bringing together the final elements of Sharon Wright's debut novel, *Running to Stay Upright*; and completing the first phase of planning for my new publishing venture, Bellastoria Press, with my partner, Ann DeFee. More about each of the past month's activities below, so please read on!

Linda

Spiderwort; the Oldest Native American Church; and Wampanoag Burial Practices

Part of the writer's responsibility in bringing a story to life is what Strunk and White advised in their classic *The Elements of Style*:

"The surest way to arouse and hold the attention of the reader is by being specific, definite and concrete."

Over the course of my writing life, I've found the most effective way to create the "telling detail" is research, research, research. I admit, I can sometimes get lost in the thicket and need to remind myself to get back to writing the book! But I've often stumbled with serendipity upon the unexpected in my wandering, and the hours of combing through pages of some dry academic tome offer up a jewel of an image that becomes a centerpiece to an aspect of my story. I present, as examples, the three seemingly disparate items in the headline to this article.

SPIDERWORT is the delicate, purple-blossomed plant pictured above in the opening image. It has grown wild in my garden for years, its flowers opening in the morning and then closing up tight into green, nut-shaped buds in the afternoon. I blithely and ignorantly enjoyed it, not realizing what a treasure I had spilling over the brick path that winds its way through my garden.

And then, a curious friend who admired it one day took it upon herself to look it up and sent me the following:

"It is a Virginia Spiderwort (Latin *transcantia*) flowering April to July. American Indians made tea from it to cure kidney and stomach problems. Plants were crushed and applied to insect bites and stings..."

Her note led me to explore more about the plant, both in books and with my own experiments. As a result, the mother of my Wampanoag hero has developed more fully into a healer, and uses the plant in mixing her remedies.

THE OLDEST NATIVE AMERICAN CHURCH is the Gay Head Community Baptist Church. I had a funeral to plan for the father of my hero and I wanted to describe a church, both outside and in, where the tribe gathers to mourn him. I started out simply looking for photographs of churches on Martha's Vineyard. Although I'd been to the Aquinnah Cultural Center on the island, the museum of the Wampanoag, it was a few years ago and before the episode of the funeral had formed in my head, and I had not particularly sought out churches when doing my early



research. As I delved into possibilities for where Tobias would bury his father, I discovered the Gay Head Community Baptist Church. It has both a simplicity of structure and a richness of history and tradition for the Wampanoag that made it the only place I could have chosen, as Tobias does, to bury his father, the tribe's sôtyum (chief).

WAMPANOAG BURIAL PRACTICES brought me into the realm of anthropology. This was one of those times where I had to wade through the kind of detail Strunk and White strongly advise against. I am neither a scholar nor a historian; I'm a storyteller. I have attempted to distill the painstaking work of others (to whom I am VERY grateful) to weave an emotional and personal account of the burial of one particular Wampanoag. Here is what resulted. The narrator is Mae Keaney, Tobias' lover and the daughter of Irish immigrants.

The thin November light filtered through the rectangular, unadorned windows of the church. Despite its simplicity and barrenness by the Catholic standard of gilded saints and stained glass that had surrounded me as a child, I felt at home there amidst this community that had come together to see Josiah home with genuine affection.

When the service ended I waited in the last row. Tobias, supporting his mother with a protective arm, met my eyes as he walked past me behind his father's coffin.

I followed the cortege to the cemetery, a small plot with scattered headstones. It was there, on a hillside where the rough grass had already turned brown, that I sensed a shift from the traditional Christian rite that the congregation had been observing within the walls of the simple white church. The mourners parted for an elderly man, his black suit now covered with a worn deerskin mantle that flowed over his back as if molded to him. A beaver fur was draped across his shoulders. He began a chant as he circled the grave, first in the Wampanoag tongue and then in English.

"Our brother Josiah has entered into the cycle of life. We commend his body to the earth as we plant our seeds, knowing that his spirit will find renewal in the afterlife just as our corn rises up in the spring after the death of winter."

Before the coffin was lowered into the ground, Tobias handed his mother a fishing rod, a tackle box and a canvas knapsack, and she knelt to place them on the simple pine box. Beyond the grave was a pile of

dry kindling and driftwood. Lying on top were a collection of tools and a feathered headdress. At the foot of the pyre was a thick branch topped with an oil-soaked rag.

Tobias moved to the stacked wood. He picked up the branch, lit the rag and moved around the pyre, setting it ablaze. He stood back from the flames, but they cast a glow on his face that accentuated the planes of his high, chiseled cheekbones. Pinpoints of light from the mounting flames were reflected in his dark eyes. He was not dressed as the shaman in deerskin; he wore no feathers in the leather thong that held back his hair. But there was no mistaking that the man who stood over his father's grave and before the bonfire consuming the symbols of his father's life, was a Wampanoag honoring a sacred tradition.

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From Pen to Publisher: Two Writers Make an Audacious Foray to Print the Stories We Want to Read



Books that nurture the soul

When my good friend and sister award-winning author Ann DeFee and I stood on the edge of the chasm that was 21st - century publishing, we didn't retreat to our garrets, burning manuscripts to keep warm. We decided to confront the industry upheaval facing writers by founding our own publishing company, Bellastoria Press (bellastoriapress.com).

"Linda Cardillo and Ann DeFee are writers whose stories will amaze, entertain and provide a touchstone," said *USA Today* bestselling author Judith Arnold, "They know there are readers--women like themselves--who are hungry for stories they can delve into, question and laugh with."

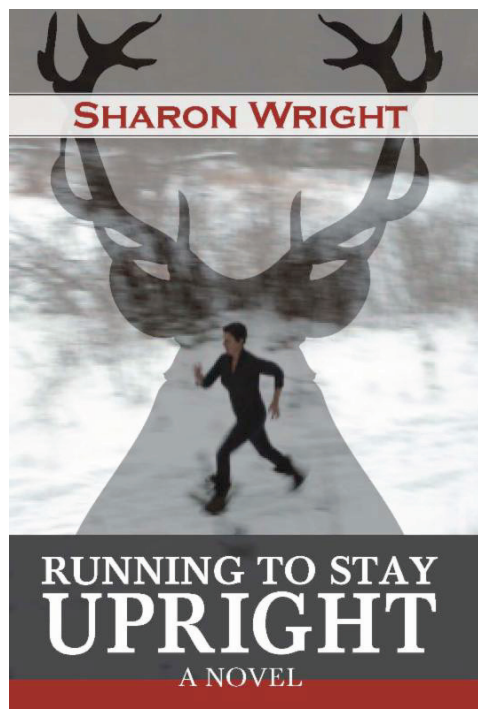
Bellastoria Press books will explore the varied experiences of women's lives and loves, told with compassion and humor.

Bellastoria Press had an early release of its first novel on June 20 (see below) and will officially launch in early fall, with the publication of *A Popsicle World* by Annaliese Darr and my own *First Light*. All the books in the Bellastoria Press catalog are intended to spark lively discussions in book clubs and readers' circles, and include reader's guides with provocative questions as well as opportunities to interact directly with authors.

We hope to bring stories that we love to readers who love books. I'll keep you posted as the Bellastoria launch approaches!

Summer has arrived...it's time to read on the beach!

A Life Spinning Out of Control



Introducing Sharon Wright's Debut Novel, *Running to Stay Upright*

Liz Burgess wakes up one morning to realize she is about to lose everything-and it's all her fault.

Her husband's love and trust; her daughter's innocence; her family's cherished home; and her own sense of safety and control are spinning with alarming speed beyond her reach.

Her struggle to heal long-buried fears and rebuild her family's shattered dreams takes her on a journey of hope and discovery that will touch anyone who has experienced loss and climbed back to a new understanding of what is important in life.

Available now at Amazon, Barnes & Noble, the Apple iTunes store and Kobo, as well as at local independent bookstores.

I am thrilled to announce the publication of *Running to Stay Upright*, the first novel from Bellastoria Press. Sharon Wright, a life coach and cancer survivor, wrote the story of a wife and mother about to lose everything as a way of offering hope that one can climb back from failure to a new understanding of what is important in life.

The book launched on June 20 at Jabberwocky Bookshop in Newburyport, Massachusetts, at an overflow reception.



Sharon Wright regales her audience with excerpts from *Running to Stay Upright* and the story of her journey to write it over thirteen years.

Visit Sharon's website at sharonwrightbooks.com

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