

MOONFLAKE
press.

holy

ISSUE #7

Dear readers

This issue is a journey through belief and
faith through the eyes of writers who see the
Holy in the
everyday.

We dive in these pieces with open minds and
longing to understand each other through the
beautiful, painful, mourning words in each
of these divine pieces.

We thank Jessica Nirvana Ram for her help in
curating some of these pieces.

We hope you enjoy your journey

Marcella Haddad

Cyrine Sinti

Fran Fernández Arce

Shayal Kaur

Carolyn Evans

the dragon's throat

The mist wrapped around its glistening body making it seem like landscape, hills that rose at the foot of mountains. The only things to set it apart from the Cholan Ridge it pressed against was the flash of iridescent scales too bright to be a waterfall or ghost-light against the setting sun.

Juan played his flute to keep from screaming as he felt the sting of its breath on his cheeks.

He'd seen the beast fly in and knew how huge it was when it blotted out the whole sky, though home had only a small circle of sky between all the trees. Still, the shadow of those wing, the bright yellow eyes staring down were enough. Someone had to go feed the beast before it ate them all.

Juan, the least among them, was chosen.

Even his parents hadn't protested his choice.

He'd painted family pictures on walls and flowers on shutters and doors. He'd made the chapel bright with stories of the gods and elders and the family trees. He'd decorated the dresses of all the brides they felt beautiful the day of their joining. His work was loved by all, but...

He'd never bear children for none would marry him.

He didn't build or chop or hunt or cook.

He wasn't essential.

They'd turned their backs as he packed up a few things: his flute, a cloak, some rough bread, his paints and brushes, and a few remembrances of sweet moments he'd gathered in his twenty-five summers. When he passed through the two lines of them, he wondered if any of them cried about him walking away to his death. He hadn't looked back as the woods swallowed him up.

Tears or no, he was dead to them.

And they to him.

The path through the forest hadn't been straight and true as the stories said. It wound and dipped and disappeared sometimes. Fay flirted around the ancient trunks. Flowers promised peace

if he'd step off the path and lay in the bed of petals they'd laid. As much as they tempted, as was the nature of forest folk, they too wanted him to, he didn't feed them his life.

He had to find his way into the dragon's throat.

Dragon's fire didn't know the difference between village and wood.

They'd let him pass through and out onto the rocky path that led to the ridge.

Only his flute and his remembrances gave him the strength to keep walking even when the beast's form filled his view. The braided hair bracelet from his little sister gave him strength because she'd called him her protector. The pressed poppies from Lucani, his first kiss, reminded him that he'd been bold asking her to dance at the midsummer moon festival. The painted tiles from his house had been his first gift to his mother. He'd painted each tile with a leaf, flower, or dancing kittens—all things mother loved. All things she'd told him touched her heart.

“Who approaches?” The voice boomed.

His innards rattled and his teeth clacked, but he stood his ground.

“Juan, the painter. I come to feed you, dragon. I come to satisfy your belly...so the rest of the world can live.”

The skip in his voice wasn't brave or bold, but he pressed on.

“Open your mouth and I'll walk down your throat, dragon. I'll walk... down your throat and I'll lay in your belly. Just let them all be.”

The dragon opened his mouth and Juan started to walk, but instead of swallowing him whole, the dragon spoke.

“I heard your flute, little one.”

Such a huge thing shouldn't speak with a soft voice. It shouldn't lull and lilt like a lover's.

It strengthened Juan's knees and his soothed his shivers. What harm would there be in it? He played the song he'd sung the first time he'd painted so well that he'd earned a dinner. The whistles and hums of the flute lulled the dragon's breath. Its eyes closed slowly with a satisfaction, a relaxation that Juan understood. It was how he felt when he saw beauty, especially beauty he'd made or found.

Then the dragon began to sing.

Such a voice it had. Range and deft. Quick high, clicking, lowing, rumbling all in a language beyond Juan's understanding. He still felt it... the dragon's remembrances in each tone and phrase. Joy and loss. Loneliness. Rage. Juan felt those along with the sweet tones of the dragon's throat and his own flute song transformed around it.

He couldn't see past the dragon's snout and teeth and eyes, but he knew the whole world had to be hearing what he and the dragon made. The whole world had to stop and listen.

It didn't feed anyone.

It didn't build or chop or hunt.

And it wouldn't ever lead to new life...

"Ah, Juan. There you are wrong." The dragon's eyes shone as they gazed at him. "Feed me your remembrances. Sacrifice them so I'll know you."

He nodded and dropped the bracelet, the poppies, and the painted tiles into the dragon's mouth. He gave the paints and the brushes he'd treasured for so long. The dragon sighed and moaned at the deliciousness of his memories and his treasures. Juan didn't explain them. He didn't have to.

Something deeper than thought or memory flowed between them. Something bigger than all the things he'd ever done. It was like seeing a whole painting at once or finally hearing notes strung together.

Bliss.

And it had a name.

A name he'd never say with his clumsy human tongue, but one he longed to sing.

"I love you," he told it. Though the dragon was an it no longer. The dragon was them. All things humans could think or try or be and more... that what they were.

"Will you come to me, Juan. Be mine? I will show you such wonders."

When he reached out and touched their lip, shining and warm as it was, he could almost see the things they wanted to share. Almost. It was this damned body. He'd always known it.

Spindly hands that barely answered his mind's ideas when he'd paint. Arms that tired just as his art took shape. Sore legs, failing eyes, and death in the future. A short life. A life of almosts and not quites.

Juan laughed.

Why had he been afraid?

He clutched his flute and stepped through the maw and into the dragon's throat. He walked on his own into the darkness. He lay down in the heat of their stomach and smiled as the flaming acid washed up over him, melting his flesh and bones.

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"Wake up little one." Mother flicked their tongue across his head knocking the eggshell away. His eyes opened and the color of them washed over his mind. He trilled and it sounded like a flute. His old name grew into something bigger, though he still remembered what he'd been.

He squawked, then when they corrected him, he thought to them, "Do dragon's paint?"

They smiled. Their iridescent scales shifted colors until they shone with the pattern of the tiles he'd painted for his first mother. They pointed their snout to sky where other dragons flew, wrapping clouds around the sun so they burned with bright flaming colors—the biggest idea made real on the canvas of the sky.

"Soon," Mother said, wrapping him up in the coil of their tail so he could dream. "Soon, my little Juan."

Donna J. W. Munro

Pleasant Paresthesia

This is a sensation I've hungered for since the beginning of me. Almost always skipped over for a sleek-er, more manageable being. I found an accomplice in the girl next to me and from 9am until 3pm we would trace pencils in a slow rhythm on skin and through tiny pieces of hair, the micro attention prickling just behind my skull. The euphoric tingles would enrapture me and spindle their way through my nose and face, and eventually - to paraphrase Mrs Woolf - would rasp my spine deliciously and overpower my brain waves. In these moments, I become a grovelling, needy mess of a human. Emaciated and malnourished, longing for this sweet numbness.

As an adult I'm forced to quell the demand for this mild electrical current. But in you my Love, I can again experience bubbles in a bath. A physical grooming almost akin to our primal sense. You once thought this bond was erotic:

Nose, scalp, curls, shoulders, spine, knees, toes, slow, slow, slow.

I can see where you went wrong, I think it was the rhythm of it that confused you because to you skin on skin meant more - it's all you'd known. With you Darling, the sea passes through my mouth and solitary waves beat the back of my skull, debris sticking and fizzing between my teeth, the sea foam soaking a pillowcase. You are the smell of a freshly tarred road and a deep inhale of diesel or laughing gas. Your altruistic attention increased as you learned my needs, the absolute calm of the process, swinging me to and fro, up and down. I tick closer and closer to what I've always held in high regard, almost sacred, since the beginning of me.

Slow, slow, slow, sleep.

Elizabeth McConnon

Beads

But every day is this – a living stone,
quite cold, until curated in the hand,

and carved, as either scar or subtlety
with its cross, that is to say, your very own.

And as you let it slip along the thread
of your fine-woven life, utter a prayer

in silence, or the lisped whispering
of those who sit, unsettled, in the night

in vigil with each rolling bead of grace
its own warm witness you are not alone.

Sarah Law

Voice - February 20

in the winter morning,

i wanna hear your voice.

being cocooned in the scent of a cup of sugarless coffee,

i wanna hear your voice.

If only your voice is floating,

this world is absolutely pure and beautiful.

it's like blue that Yves Klein drew.

if this world is full of your voice,

i can live eternally,

i can endure the winter morning.

Yuu Ikeda

Water

We are water.

We are born in

water. When we

die we are carried

out to sea like

heroes of old, whose

eyes were this deep.

Corey Mesler

the Lynx and the Lark

If there's a God, and I doubt there is,
(I hear my father, who created all this?),
maybe God is the wish of all wishes.
the abstract noun of abstract nouns,
opposed to bruise, matchstick, and lynx.

I can see a black eye, but God's face
isn't Walt Whitman's or Emily Dickinson's.

Faith is doubt's opposite, certainty,
to be sure. One is either sure or unsure.
Maybe faith is the other side of doubt.

A book on my shelf, Human Wishes
I can pull down, open, read, and some day
won't have the strength to reach.
I wonder does the lynx as it hunts wish?
does the lark? Only the human.

Standing on my side of the river I look
across at the other side's willow tree.
Some day it won't there, in its place walls
built by humans, who'll have the capacity
to destroy the walls, as they did the tree.

Maybe the other side of the river isn't walls
but God's house, which we'll see.

We'll get there, enter, and dwell in forever.

With the lark and the lynx, I wonder.

Will beauty then be continuous as opposed

to the continual mortal beauty:

seeing the lynx, hearing the lark? Some
wish for life eternal, others for extinction.

"I wish not to be" I don't understand.

I hear my father's "who created?" No one.

I'm unsure. There's as much strength
in doubt as there is in certainty. Either way
we wish for something, a sip of water,
a sapphire ring, to look into a familiar face,
to hear at daybreak the lark.

As for who created, just as there's one
wish greater than all others, that's personal,
maybe there's an "is" that knows no "was."

My father wore an onyx ring
till one day he didn't. Of that I'm sure.

(Escape)

Like the landing of yellow leaves

Sadness sits in my eyes

Pain explores my being

And the wounds get hot

I am full of escape

Full of longing that takes root in me

I take the suitcase

I give my heart to the rounds

The anger of the sky bursts on my face

My eyes tremble

I repeat in my mind

Someone will find me from the trail of tears...

Sophia Jamali Soufi

your own private purgatory

you exist in the between, browning in the
metaphorical bardo. where nothing / everything

is real. like how you (transgressive you) dodged
the auto-da-fé some might say you deserved.

the sinner-cum-saint, purified, “discovered
and brought to light.” you’ve become undone.

you tell me you’re an atheist most days, and
agnostic when you’re feeling sentimental.

what were you when you built that prayer
garden? the one with bed of crushed white rock,

three benches, cross for contemplation,
and dry-stacked stone of retaining

wall. did you believe in the sacrament of
redemption? did you dare step across that

holy threshold to behold the presence of a god
you don’t believe in? to bear witness as the pastor

performed the eucharist, spoke the words, “this is
my body, broken for you. this is my blood, shed

for you.” you could write a book about the body and
the blood, the way it’s broken and the way it’s shed.

Natalye Childress

Umbrella. Found

We had a wonderful vacation in Manhattan. We saw remarkable theater and beautiful art. We visited our son and our nieces and went to a brand new Museum. We saw old friends, we walked and dined and drank and looked at things. We went to bars and restaurants, we ate cupcakes and pastrami, we took trains and mostly we walked.

By the end of that week, the rainstorms that had been predicted for days finally came. My son had generously lent us an umbrella that he didn't want back. It worked well until the winds came and tore off whatever those nubs are called that hold the material on and by Monday morning it only covered about two-thirds of its span. We were peckish and exhausted and broke and wet and almost every joint in our hungover bodies, but especially those in our feet, were screaming in pain.

I was determined not to waste the few precious hours left to us in one of my favorite places on earth and decided to look at an older and more genteel section of town, what I call the O. Henry section, near Gramercy Park. We hobbled over to the train, which was actually the wrong train, then hobbled back over to the right one. Got lost trying to find the National Art Club which it turns out, website to the contrary, does not allow non-members to view its collection. My husband was crabby and kept holding the umbrella up unfairly, I thought, but wouldn't surrender it. I misdirected us to another monument, closed for repairs, got a text stating that our flight would be delayed because of lightning storms in the Midwest, then a later text stating it would be delayed still further.

We were barely speaking to each other when we walked over to Broadway to try and get to a historic pub we like for lunch. On the way I saw the steps to a beautiful church, Grace Church, that, although I knew nothing about it, I was extremely glad to see with its promise of open doors and warm dry pews and my husband dragged himself in petulantly for the same reasons.

I simply had to get off my aching feet and after a cursory walk around the beautifully designed sanctuary I slipped into a pew about half way down the aisle.

I have visited many religious structures in my life, although not many recently. I was very religious as a little girl and when I attended Saturday school at a reform synagogue in Los Angeles, I always thought of the sanctuary as being 'God's House'. I'm sure other children do that, too, it's probably something our teachers told us. I understood the concept that God was everywhere, within and without us, but He seemed to be especially 'there' in the sanctuary. The Temple we belonged to had a large, very airy sanctuary with beautiful abstract stained glass windows and simple wooden ornamentation. I believed that the modest 'eternal lamp' that hung between the altar and the Bima where the Torah was held, was magically eternal and I was disappointed to learn, a few years later, that it was actually maintained by mere human beings, such as myself. Every Saturday, after Shabbat services were over, we students would come in and have a few brief moments with one of the Rabbis. The air in the vast, dark room was cool and still and it smelled good. We went in quietly and the silence was awe-filled, special. I credited that in part to the holy thoughts and prayers that were said there, along with the songs and hymns and even the whispery scratching of the Rabbi's gold headed pointer as it swept the wrong way over beautiful characters that I could read only very few of. Mostly, though, I attributed it to the invisible presence of the Almighty. Even the dust motes falling seemed inhabited and purposeful. I always tried to think my best thoughts there, to pray for others not just myself and to sincerely thank God for everyone and everything. I was overwhelmed by the special presence of the Eternal. I was into it.

Later I found that I felt that same specialness in Buddhist temples and Moslem Mosques, in Shinto shrines and in the presence of statues of saints and goddesses, cemeteries, churches and meditation halls. Those feelings, which Freud called 'oceanic', and which he also ascribed to human orgasms, always swept over me in places of worship and I liked that sense of spiritual connection to the ineffable, eternal Other. It centered me and I left feeling lifted away from my smallest self into a larger one. I have experienced those same feelings often in nature, and sometimes in love, but those sanctuaries, 'God's Houses' were reliably transcendent for me.

Until they weren't.

At some point between childhood and middle-age I started to have less reverence first for religion, then for spirituality, psychic phenomena, past life regressions, numerology, palm readings, astrology, karma and all things magic. I have no feelings about other people's religious beliefs, although I'm not particularly interested in hearing about them and I do not, under any circumstances, think those beliefs should hold the power to determine my personal life choices or those of anyone except themselves.

I enjoy reading sacred texts from time to time. They have beautiful language and imagery, some good advice and evocative, resonant stories that draw from the common wellspring of human experience. But I no longer seek out an imaginary friend when I need succor or luck and I can't seem to frame 'god' otherwise. Maybe that makes me a sadder, lonelier person. I do not know.

Grace Church, where we were on that sodden day, is one of James Renwick's earliest designs. It is beautifully proportioned and creates a haven of harmony and stillness in a busy city. It is not an immense cathedral, its warm brownstone construction comforts rather than stuns. It is homey, human, perfect. I was admiring its loveliness and reflecting on how grateful I was to have landed there when I found myself uttering the faintest of sighs. I had, I supposed, a momentary nostalgia for the feeling of grace, itself. But it was lovely and warm and dry and I was content with that.

A few minutes later my husband, a lifelong atheist, took a seat two rows ahead of me and began to rustle around. I understood why he wasn't sitting with me, we were irritated with each other at that point, but what I didn't understand was the futzing around in the pew. Was he looking for a prayer in particular? Had he dropped his glasses?

He got up a few second later, smiled affectionately, and gestured for me to follow him out the door. As we were walking out he took something from under his elbow and said, "Look what I found". It was an umbrella, a brown, leopard skin print umbrella, neatly wrapped up, with a fake red jewel on the handle.

I immediately said, "You can't take that!"

And he said, "Why not?"

"Because it belongs to someone," I said.

“Not anymore,” he said. “They left it”.

I saw his point – it had been raining for hours; if the person had left it that day, they would have remembered and come back for it. But I felt spookily uncomfortable.

“You can’t steal from a church!” I said, filled with moral outrage.

“What are you talking about?” He said. “I’m not stealing. Someone left it here. And we need it.”

I stopped talking because I realized that I was weirdly overreacting, even for me. I was behaving not only as if God was actually in that church, but also as if ‘He’ was specifically watching us, and not in a fun way.

I doubt very much that I would have objected to my husband taking an umbrella left on the train, or a park bench, or a taxi or anywhere else on earth and I was surprised by this vestige of my childhood faith, of belief that a stone building can be changed by prayer or intent into a holy, sacred place. Could I really be keeping a belief in the supernaturalness of God’s House while not believing there to be a God? Did I still, in some small way, believe? Or was it just childhood nostalgia?

I honestly don’t know, but I did feel something in that church. It was sort of like seeing an old friend again after a great remove; a friend who may not have been 100% reliable in the past, but who probably still believes in you as they always did, maybe even a little bit more.

My God is Better Than Your God

The God wars terrify me. We've got conservatives stoking up the Evangelical rabble on the right. God is here. God is with us. God is on our side. God is on my side. Only my God is the true God. Unfortunately, Muslims seem to feel the same way about Allah. A day doesn't go by when I don't shudder as scenes of Armageddon fill my brain. (Mine come mainly from Mad Max movies, not the Bible).

I was born and baptized Lutheran. There was an old stone Lutheran church about two miles from my house when we lived in Montclair, New Jersey. The only time anyone in my family ever stepped inside a church was for a wedding, a funeral, or a baptism. My parents however, felt that a religious education was necessary for me. I don't know where that idea came from. There was no real religious life no talk of spirituality or even philosophical reflection by anyone in my family, ever, as far back as my memory can take me. My gram was the most outspoken. She would declare that as far as she was concerned there was no such thing as "God". She thought God was an idea invented by weak people. I wasn't with her on her deathbed, so I don't know if she changed her mind at the last minute.

Getting up in the pitch dark on cold, winter Sunday mornings was obligatory for me. My mother would haul me out of bed, making sure I had some decent clothes on (I was about 8 or 9 years old) give me money for the collection plate and send me off to Sunday school with instructions to stay on for the church service afterward. I had to walk the whole way while she crawled back into bed with my dad. The hypocrisy of this struck me even then. My resentment fomented. Sunday school was held in the basement of the church. The walls were stark and unadorned. The neon lights were blinding when you first came in on a dark winter morning. Stern, thin lipped, grey-haired folks taught Sunday school. I went a few times and felt like a foreigner who didn't speak their language.

Reluctantly, I would leave the house, dawdling along until it was too late to make the service. I'd stop off at the local pharmacy that also sold the Sunday paper.

They had a soda fountain with about six stools. I'd hang out there, spend my collection money, and when church let out, I'd walk home. No one ever checked on me, so this strategy worked for a long time. At some point, someone who knew my parents told on me. There was a small scene, not bad. Their heart wasn't in it. That ended my religious period.

A Death in the Family

It was my 14th birthday. Mom had fixed one of those perfect family meals straight from the pages of *Good Housekeeping*, beginning with one of her new favorites, tomato aspic and ending with my grandpa's favorite, coconut cream pie. Dad was in the garage tinkering with the car. Mom, gramps, and gram were sitting around the living room trying to digest their dinner. The TV was on in the corner, but no one was watching, and I was sitting at my great grandma Cook's feet. She was a quiet, sweet woman who still looked damn good for someone in their 90s. The flowery print cushions of her favorite wing chair enveloped her in a pastel haze. I could feel her bird-like bones as my back rested against her legs. A pleasant buzz of conversation about nothing in particular swirled in the air. Then sudden silence. The atmosphere turned tense. My mother ordered me to my room. No explanation just ordered me to my room. Confused I stood wavering like a deer caught in the headlights. Usually, I questioned everything my parents said or asked, but this time I obeyed and headed towards my room. My mother warned me not to dare come out. Were aliens landing and I'm the last to know? I had no idea what had happened or what was going to happen but whatever it was I knew it wasn't good.

Late afternoon light faded to darkness. A siren screeched, piercing the now murky night air. Lights flashing, an ambulance pulled into our driveway. I watched out my bedroom window as two medics rushed into our house with a gurney and an oxygen tank. I heard cries and shuffling and commotion. Unfamiliar voices mixed with muffled fragments of family sounds, then again there was silence. I saw the medics pushing something, someone, out of the house on the gurney. A small mound covered with a white sheet glowed in the damp dark. No one came to get me. I stayed in my

room. I went to bed. I couldn't sleep. Early the next morning mom came in and told me great grand-ma Cook had died. Just died. Right there, comfortable in her wing-backed chair after a big meal, with her family around her, she closed her eyes, her tiny frame sunk and then she stopped breathing.

Since then, there have been other deaths in the family. My grandfather died in his sleep in a very similar way. He went to bed one evening as usual, said goodnight to my gram as she crawled in beside him. In the morning, she got up first, went to the kitchen to make breakfast and when the coffee was ready, she called him, but he didn't answer. He had died peacefully and painlessly, the same way that he had lived. He was the first dead person I ever touched.

My beloved gram lived a long time after his death. My mother (her daughter) complained about her endlessly. As gram aged my life took me in many other directions. She was left to her own daughter to care. My parents wanted to retire to Florida to get away from the cold winters in New York. My dad was tired of having his boat dock frozen and heaved out of the water every winter. So, they put gram in a nursing home on Long Island, not far from where she had lived. They moved to Florida. I was on my own personal odyssey and only visited gram once in the nursing home. She was cheery and seemed lucid when I last saw her. After a half hour of conversation, she asked the same questions all over again. She was cheery and bright and seemed so aware, but nothing hung in there. Her brain was like a hamster on a wheel, going round and round. I wanted to squeeze her and kiss her and take her home and care for her, but at that point I had no place to bring her, nothing permanent. She died alone. My mother and father were in Florida. I was in Europe, living a nomadic life. They found a massive tumor in her body. It was so big when they found it, the size of a grapefruit, there was no hope, no chance. They told my parents an operation at 94 years of age would kill her, let the tumor run its course, just let her die. My parents and I were estranged, so I never knew exactly when it was that she died. As I write this, useless tears of regret fall on my hands. I loved my gram. Did she know she was alone when she died? That seems like a most horrible fate. No one should die alone.

Cynthia Close

Donna J. W. Munro

Donna J. W. Munro teaches high schoolers the slippery truths of government and history at her day job. Her students are her greatest inspiration. She lives with five cats, a cute curly haired dog, a fur covered husband, a sassy septuagenarian Mama, and an encyclopedia son. Her daughter is off saving the world.

Donna's pieces are published in Corvid Queen, Enter the Apocalypse, It Calls from the Forest, Apparition Lit, Pseudopod 752, Shakespeare Unleashed, Novus Monstrum, ParABnormal, and many more. Check out her novels, Revelation: Poppet Cycle Book 1 and Runaway: Poppet Cycle Book 2, and her website for a complete list of works at

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Peter Mladinic

Peter Mladinic's most recent book of poems, *House Sitting*, is available from the Anxiety Press. An animal rights advocate, he lives in Hobbs, New Mexico, United States.

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Born in 2001 , Iran

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The first book published in
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Natalye Childress

Natalye Childress (she/her) is a Berlin-based editor, writer, translator, and sad punk. Her poetry appears or is forthcoming in

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She has an MA in creative writing, and her first book, *The Aftermath of Forever*, was published by Microcosm Publishing.

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Cynthia Close

Laura Fanning lives and writes in the San Francisco Bay Area. Stories of hers have appeared in *The Wondrous Real*, *Cyclamen and Swords*, *The Pagan Anthology* and *Flash Fiction World*, among others. Her one act play "Somewhere Close to Texas" was produced at The Ensemble Studio Theater, Los Angeles and her story "The Brick" won the Winning Writers Tom Howard/John H. Reid Award for Best Short Story of 2015.

Armed with an MFA from Boston University Cynthia plowed her way through several productive careers in the arts including instructor drawing and painting, Dean of Admissions The Art Institute of Boston, founder ARTWORKS Consulting, and president of Documentary Educational Resources - a film distribution company. She now claims to be a writer.

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