



The Prompt

Princeton Writes Literary Journal

Introduction

Princeton Writes is pleased to present *The Prompt*, an anthology of writing from members of Writing Space, a group of writers who also happen to be Princeton University employees. Since the fall of 2015, the group has met monthly to write, with the help of prompts and without, and to share their creative efforts with each other. We hail from diverse corners of the University, from the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, to the Pace Center for Civic Engagement, to the Office of Communications.

Our primary purpose is to keep our creative sparks ignited as we go about our lives, to remember to let our writer-selves out to play. We hope this anthology will prompt others to start writing or get back to it, to make room for imagination, invention, creative expression, and, of course, editing in our daily lives. Princeton and we are better for it.

We are open to any University employee who wants to join us, and we are especially pleased to feature the work of 12 talented members of our group, including Kristin Cass, Wendell Collins, Anita Kline, Andrea La Bella, Kelly Lin-Kremer, Gwen McNamara, Maureen Riggi, Jayme Wagner, Jeanne Jackson DeVoe, and group co-founders Jamie Saxon, John Weeren, and Stephanie Whetstone.

Maata Yaga the Witch

Chapter One (Excerpts from a Novel)

Kelly Lin-Kremer

Mikirei shrugged his shoulders in an attempt to readjust the weight of the package strapped to his back. A larger package, brown, unmarked, and wrapped in string, sat in the basket on the front of his bike. Both parcels were destined for Maata *Yaga's* shop for his sister, Aylen. She would have gone herself, but she was busy with a last-minute order for intricate beadwork on a wedding dress, so she told Mikirei to bring her latest work to the *Yaga* instead of delivering it herself.

Don't accept less than two hundred fifty se for this batch, Aylen had told him. I know you're no good at haggling, but the *Yaga* at least doesn't know that. Tell her I spent a whole week working on the purple dress with mirror beads. Don't let her fool you. The *Yaga* can get four times what she pays me for these dresses. She has good contacts in Elbara.

So that was how Mikirei found himself biking toward the town of Kiri, carrying the dresses Aylen had covered with embroidery to Maata *Yaga's* shop, Tights and Things. Even if she hadn't been a *Yaga*, a witch, Mikirei would have hesitated before going to her. Everyone was afraid of her, even Aylen, though she said she wasn't. Aylen always grumbled the shop owners had cheated her on the dresses she embroidered, but never with the *Yaga*. She was afraid Maata *Yaga* would find out and set a curse on her—the *Yaga* had done it to people who had crossed her before.

Mikirei didn't know anyone who could make Aylen tremble the way the *Yaga* could. He wished he could be as brave as his older sister, but he didn't think he had it in him. He'd always been the one who tried to hide in plain sight. Aylen was as flashy as the clothes she made.

The *Yaga's* shop was the perfect match for Aylen's wares. It was one of the few buildings with two stories in Kiri, and it stood just a few paces away from the building that housed most of the town's administrators, who frequently patronized the *Yaga's* store. She didn't just sell merchandise made by local crafters, but also more sophisticated clothing she shipped in from suppliers in Elbara and Gansok. The opportunity to wear the big-city fashions made her store popular with Kiri's wealthy. They liked her, too, because she was known for spells for protection. They

asked her to bespell their mansions and safes, and they even believed that an outfit bought from her came with the added benefit of protecting its wearer from minor scrapes, evil eyes, unlucky bets, and bad weather. Maata *Yaga* did nothing to dispel the speculation over the value added to her goods after she bought them wholesale from her suppliers.

Everyone said Maata *Yaga* lived in a hut that stood on chicken legs, in the woods just outside Kiri. Mikirei had never seen this hut with his own eyes, but everyone talked about it. One day, almost two years ago, the *Yaga* had shown up on the road to Kiri, her house following two steps behind—*tap tap tap*. No one knew why she had chosen to walk outside, if she could just sit comfortably in her house while it did the hard work of moving for her. Some said the house needed her to be its eyes and lead it, like a horse. Others—the really superstitious ones who hung iron horseshoes on their doors—said maybe her magic didn’t work as well inside the house as outside it. Ridiculous, said still others, who prided themselves on being sensible. The *Yaga* had been sitting in her chair, knitting or quilting or whatever it is witches do for fun when she sensed someone was nearby. So she came out of her house to greet the cabbage-seller who was traveling just ahead of her, to find out more about Kiri.

The cabbage-seller almost fainted with fright, and the mayor, when he met her, actually did, and that was how Maata *Yaga* found out Kiri was like every other town to which she’d traveled. In Kiri, the less magic you had, the better.

No one knew why Maata *Yaga* had moved to Kiri. Maybe she was tired of a life of wandering, and she wanted to be able to call a place—not just a house, not even a house that walked on chicken legs—home.

The first and only villager to ask the *Yaga* why she’d moved to Kiri went home to find all her chickens turned to toads, and the eggs they laid that morning jet black and spongy. Jizne sold the eggs as a magical curiosity and made enough money to buy twice as many chickens as she had lost and fix all the leaks in her house, so the *Yaga*’s curse hadn’t been all that wrathful, but everyone said Jizne had gotten off easily. No one asked the *Yaga* personal questions after that, or at least they didn’t own up to it.

A handful of people in Kiri had magic, but it was the rare person who possessed a magic powerful enough to take the title *Yaga*. To live openly as a *Yaga*, knowing you would always be met with hostility—that was an even rarer person.

Aylen had magic. Her talent for joining things together was what made her so good at embroidery. It was how she worked so quickly on even the most intricate designs, not that she’d ever brag about it and get the other, unmagical artisans angry with her. But her magic, like most others’, amounted to a few drops of power. Getting

a few needles to do your bidding was a far cry from the kind of power it took to breathe life into a house.

Magic in Kiri wasn't showy. It was the kind of thing you did behind closed doors. You didn't talk about it, you didn't learn about it in school. Until the *Yaga* arrived, magic didn't have a public face.

Why had she come here, when she could have had her pick of clients in one of the big cities? And why did she run a clothing shop, of all things, when that had nothing to do with magic?

I don't mind the magic, people whispered, but does she need to *flaunt* it so? For shame!

It's all in how you were raised, others whispered back. My family, we're all good, honest folk. None of that sleight-of-hand stuff to make a living, when other people have to work twice as hard to get what comes so easily to *them*. They like to lord it over us plain folk.

Besides, they said, looking over their shoulder to see if anyone else was listening, why does a small town need powerful magic? She's bad news, I tell you. This is a peaceful place, a good place.

They say she's good at protecting things.

We don't need that here. This is a peaceful place, a good place. Who needs protecting?

I don't.

I don't.

Magic made everyone in Kiri uneasy, even the wealthy Arjanibs who had bought Jizne's Black Eggs as a show of bravado. But Maata *Yaga* kept mostly to herself, outside of running Tights and Things. T&T, everyone called it. She didn't curse anyone else after Jizne, and her shop became very popular with the wealthier Kirians. So she stayed.

Running Amok with Art

Anita Kline

“Leona,” I say on the phone to my long-distance sister after we’ve both whined about our general malaise these days compared to those earlier decades filled with children, and now with just closets. The closets, particularly, full of left-over art supplies. “I have a theory about why we’re not starting or finishing crafty projects lately.”

The little thoughtful, creative, inexpensive-yet-provocative gifts we would give to nieces or to daughters of old friends, I muse. We used to feel good about pulling out yarn scraps to knit a set of placemats, or to crochet some simple bibs and burp cloths for a new baby. Maybe a dolly-sized crazy quilt with fabric pieces from home-made Halloween costumes. A tiny water color sketch on the edge of a thank-you note. Tuna Surprise casserole for the community pot luck, served in Grandma’s Haviland china dish, the burnt crisp edges blending with the old gold rim. Cupcakes for the Third-Grade classroom, mad dash of sprinkles atop the frosting swirl, abandoning all elementary decorum, yes, but sure to impress the homeroom mom-of-the-day.

Remember the sugar cubes you helped decorate with tiny frosting flowers for Emmy’s wedding reception? Now, *that* was over the top, even for the early 1960s: how the farm ladies took a break during their harvest to take you-the-young-bride-yourself under their wings, knowing, since they couldn’t travel that far, that you and their sugar cubes would represent them well at the event that they would have to miss. Think of that: our middle sister moving away more than two thousand miles, leaving—after all those ladies had done for her—to marry a man who wasn’t even a farmer. Turns out Emmy’s new ocean-side community was impressed, admitting they had had no idea that middle American agrarians would know how to wield such wee brush strokes and vibrant colors for a tea table. Remember how those new neighborhood women scrambled to gather wild flowers off the bluffs for the reception hall and decorate the bare tables with amber glass fishing floats and abalone shells? Your sugar cubes sparkled like diamonds in the sea-tinged light, and your elegant pillbox hat and red lipstick—plus Emmy’s gauzy gown from Chicago, oh my!—announced without a doubt who was setting new standards in *that* town.

But lately, when I’ve wanted to play with art, looking at internet craft sites for ideas to make, say, an interesting hand-made greeting card, I am fully intimidated, faced with instructions first on how to make my own paper. No, really first, I’m linked to a site to learn how to sharpen my own axe to cut the wood—to-mash-the-pulp-

to-gather-the-berries-to-make-the-dye—and then turn to making the paper itself. Home-made pen and ink optional.

If I want to use Mason jars for my backyard picnic hurricane lamps, the craft sites urge me first to clean the jars, of course, of all traces of last season's preserves; drop into each one a candle I've prepared from my own bees' wax and handspun wicks; for hanging the lamps, braid together ivy vines and rope (hemp rope twists well; you know—wink-wink, nudges the internet—where to get the materials for *hemp*).

If I wanted today to recreate Emmy's ocean-front wedding, I'd be instructed to scour the beaches after storms for alluring flotsam to decorate the drift wood tables, which I will be shown how to build ([click here for directions](#)), to bake clams, steam crabs and fashion flower vessels from their shells. Your sugar cubes (yes, I know you still have some in Aunt Daisy's old tin) would be allowed to encircle the display of honey combs on the beverage table. The astute host will also have found patterns for knitting wraps from kelp for each one in attendance, to hold the ocean breeze at bay.

The diamond ring, though, and the dress: do you think they would be vintage, or maybe just the vows, full shine and shimmer, the promise of eternal glow enticing us all?

But back to my own recent itch to create: I do have guests virtually at the door. I'll light the lamps, spread the picnic table with one of Grandma's quilts (maybe the Wedding Ring pattern), drape clusters of freshly bloomed heliotropes down the middle, make room for the shared covered dishes, pour a bit of Uncle Milie's annual brew, and then—we deserve it, right?—we'll “go and smoke now, those that smoke.”

Post projects, post party, I'll call you again. We'll catch up on The Kids' lives, compare the linings of each other's empty nests. Now I'll let you go. Before bed, though, remember to soothe your hands with hemp butter. I'll text you the recipe.

Riding Lessons

Andrea La Bella

I helped the nurse transfer my mother-in-law from the wheelchair to her hospital bed, which took up most of the space in the small living room. Saturdays, the home-health people cared for Connie; it was my day to do whatever I wanted.

Sitting in the food court at the mall for the third Saturday this month, I started to shake and cry. Watching Connie's world shrink to the size of a hospital bed as the cancer consumed her bones scared the hell out of me. Not because it was ugly or messy; of course it was. I knew that part. What I found so jarring was the absolute certainty that the topography of her life would never again be of her own making. This once vibrant, cranky, beautiful, independent woman was now held captive by her own body. This fact burned a hole in my gut. It filled me with a desperate rush to live my life. Now!

But how? What? My insides churned. I racked my brain thinking of meaningful things to do, or significant connections that could be rekindled, but nothing came. Certainly, nothing hefty enough to quell the urgency for a fulfilling life. I left the food court with no clear direction forward, only fear and anxiety pushing me on.

Then I saw it; it was on a calendar or maybe a movie poster: an image of a young girl astride a white horse riding through an open field of tall, wheat-colored grass. I don't know how long I stood staring at it. I may have swooned, because I swear, I could hear hoofbeats in rhythmic foot falls over hard ground.

Falling deeper into the image of the horse and rider jogged my insides, and then it hit me; my whole life I dreamed of riding horses. I was certain that anyone who could ride a horse was brave, confident, relaxed, and in control. I was none of those things. I stood there, staring, my mouth agape.

I was in my mid-forties, spectacularly out of shape, and I decided to take riding lessons.

I was introduced to my lesson horse, Chico, and trainer, Lisa. Two spirit guides in the flesh to lead me to my expansive new life, despite my fears and aged hips.

Lisa was agile and confident. As she walked toward me, her nimble grace left out all extraneous movement making her athleticism at once understated and intimidating.

She used her strong, quiet hands to gently prepare the leather and metal puzzle called a bridle for use on Chico.

Standing next to Chico had a dizzying effect. I didn't anticipate how uncontrollably fearful I would be. I smelled his earthiness and felt the heft behind his soft liquid eyes. I leaned against his warm, muscled flesh to steady myself. Then I remembered: horses sense fear. I took a breath, and just as my insides began to settle, Lisa mentioned that falling off your horse is part of riding. She even mentioned an old saying, something about falling off your horse ten times before you become a "real rider." (Mentioned! Ten Times!) My stomach dropped. I don't bounce, most of me jiggles, but none of me bounces.

Moments passed as a lifetime of anxieties began rearing up. I was a worried child, an exasperated teen, and a stricken adult, but horses brought it all up to new levels.

Lisa instructed me to lift Chico's leg to clean the bottom of his hoof. Feeling the strength of Chico's leg and the hardness of his hooves made me so scared I wanted to cry. I forced myself to think of Connie in the living room on her hospital bed, and the inspirational poster of the horse and rider I inhaled at the mall, and all the other reasons I wanted to do this, but nothing stopped the fear rushing up from stomach to my throat.

Then Chico took a step toward me and began rubbing his soft, sensitive muzzle on my shoulder. Lisa said, "He likes you." My body softened, and I caught my breath. I interpreted his nuzzling as, well, encouragement. And he wasn't the only one; other horses, in nearby stalls, were nickering and making soft comforting noises in my direction. It was like a chorus of horses urging me on. I believed they were telling me that everything would be okay. "Don't be afraid," they said. "Let's move forward through the fear, through the darkness; we will carry you smoothly over the hard ground."

Cancer held Connie hostage for two more months before she was released from her burdens.

I continued taking riding lessons every Saturday. I was never a brave rider. I was more nervous than I wanted to be, and it was harder than I expected. Especially scary, for me, was asking for the canter. The canter is the first step in a horse's flight response. So, "the ask" must be strong enough to indicate direction, but light enough so it doesn't frighten the horse into a headlong gallop. It's a delicate balance and far too nuanced for this beginner. So, we did a lot of walking and trotting in the first lessons.

I did fall off Chico, several times, but each time it hurt less, and I gained more confidence. I also learned the secret to Chico's success as a lesson horse. Chico had

the big beefy body of a horse but set upon the legs of a small pony. So, when I fell off, it was almost like rolling out of bed. (Almost.)

Months passed; I managed my anxieties and slowly (painfully) I became a rider. I formed bonds with people and horses in a community based on trust and respect; it was the kinship I needed to get through hard times.

Chico is gone now, and Lisa moved to a bigger barn, more suited to her talent. I still ride, but all these years later the canter “ask” still doesn’t come easy. I fret over my hand position, worry too much about the reins, then get mad at myself for being distracted. But now I know how to break the cycle of anxiety—I focus on connecting with my horse. I remember Lisa and me carefully working on each skill required for a light and nuanced canter ask: eyes up, shoulders back, hands down, heels down, inside leg stays at the girth, outside leg slides back and gently touches your horse just behind the girth.

I can still hear the confidence in her voice across time: “Don’t over-think it,” she’d shout from across the ring. “Just sit and ask.” I feel a twinge in the pit of my stomach, but I know what to do. And then, just like a that, we are cantering around the field as light as air, as if in a movie (poster).

When I ride horses, I am no longer bound by the traumas of my past. I am whole. I am not a bird with a broken wing. I take flight. I remember how lucky I am to be alive and in the company of these wonderful creatures willing to carry us on their backs. When I get frustrated with my slow progress, or when I am tired from too much hard work, I think of loved ones who are gone from this Earth. I remember that AIDS, cancer, dementia, and addiction came to my house and left with someone I love. Riding lessons have taught me that forward is more than a direction; it’s an intention. It is a life-affirming and optimistic way of being in the world and in the moment.

I am honored to be in the community of riders. I still get scared when I ride, especially when asking for the canter, but I keep moving forward through the darkness and fear, carried smoothly over the hard ground.

For I Will Consider My Dog Diego

(Inspired by Christopher Smart)

Jamie Saxon

For that face, those ears

For his beautiful beagle soul

For 12 1/2 years of unconditional love

For the bagel dance, his habit when he was a puppy of laying prostrate before a piece of bagel proffered to him, then leaping up and around the bagel, often making up to seven circles around the bagel, in a kind of ritual, then pouncing upon the bagel and running into the yard or the living room or just away to eat his bagel piece, in peace

For pressing his warm beagle body on top of the bed covers, against my legs, and breathing slow, deep beagle breaths, which calmed me and quite literally saved my life through bouts of insomnia that I thought would undo me

For loving every sentient creature, human and otherwise, who bent down to pet him or acknowledge his existence in any tiny way

For being the embodiment of joy to all who knew or encountered him

For howling at the moon so magisterially that no neighbors ever complained

For getting me out into nature to take him for walks—on trails both familiar and unfamiliar, and in the park near our house; I would hum a song in my head over and over, a different little piece of music or song on each walk and take note of the pine needles on the trees, or the puddles near my feet or the birdsong around me and breathe deeply

For charging at the deer who came into the yard and running them off, because he was king and ruler of our property, make no mistake about it

For never complaining, even when his back gave out and we had to carry him up and down the stairs and in and out of the house to pee in the yard—for eight weeks

For being the yin to our other beagle Lily's yang, both literally, when curled up, the two of them together, making a complete beagle circle in front of the wood stove or on the bed or on the couch; and figuratively, a deeply calming force to Lily's natural high-strung skittishness, panting and uncontrollable shaking that came out at every thunderstorm, gunshot in the woods or fireworks within 10 miles

For masking what surely must have been excruciating disappointment and fear, when he got that terrible weird condition, mega-esophagus, and had to eat his meals and drink water while placing his paws on a chair and eating or drinking from a bowl, so that the food and water would go down to his tummy; and he couldn't take walks anymore

For relishing every morsel of that cardboard container of fudge that I accidentally left just days before Christmas in my tote bag on the kitchen floor, which he found when all of us were out at the movie theater watching *It's a Wonderful Life*, and he ate all that fudge and got so very sick that he got pneumonia and had to be admitted into the ICU at the animal hospital, and oh my gosh how scary that must that have been, when really he was just having his own fudge version of *It's a Wonderful Life*. It was an awesome last supper, for a beagle, my husband would say, much later

For his warm but spent body, which we held in our laps in the family room at the hospital to say goodbye, the embodiment of peace and beauty

For absorbing our falling tears into his soft fur and our last strokes behind his ears and under his neck and our hands that lay still against the now-ancient, earthy breaths, his last, we knew, for when we called in the doctor, and she came in with those two shots, those unmistakably Diego beagle breaths would truly be his last

For letting us put his body in the wooden box that David made with his own two hands, carefully, lovingly, painstakingly in the woodshop, and for letting us wrap him in his favorite brown fuzzy blanket and tuck him in with his favorite blue elephant toy, a bone and photos of us to keep him company

For letting us bury the box in the woods of our property, deep down in the welcoming earth, the earth which let us dig a new home for him to be near all of nature—the trees, the birds, the deer, the little scurrying animals that live in the woods; there he is now, tucked away and surrounded by the earth that will always hug him, because now we can't

For being all the joy in the world, how can that be possible, all the joy in the world, in one solitary beagle. It is possible.

That House

Jayne Wagner

In a city about 45 miles south of Salt Lake that most people haven't heard of unless they've lived, gone to school, or have family who have lived in Utah, there's a house. It doesn't look especially significant from the outside – a front window and door, the garage on the left at a right angle to the front door. Grayish in color, on a corner lot. Curved driveway that is so difficult to back out of without running over flowers or the mailbox. Beautiful, lush grass that once won a yard contest. Garden in the back, behind the garage – a garden so stunning and productive that everyone admires it as they walk by on their way to church every week – the dream of every gardener and the guide for what to plant and when. An immense peach tree in the middle of the backyard and a patio.

This house on the corner is known in the neighborhood as “The Lasson House,” though to us it is Grandma and Grandpa Lasson's house, for all of my life and longer. Significant and seemingly insignificant life events have happened here: Mom and Dad's wedding reception; Grandma babysitting me while Mom attended her college classes; countless bridal and baby showers of extended family (don't spill anything on the white carpet or leave a drink that will make a ring on the coffee table!). It was a destination: every few summers, we would drive out from Wisconsin or Maryland or Connecticut, up to six kids, two parents, and a dog in one vehicle, and arrive at that house.

Those summers in that house! The house where, as the saying goes, “cousins go to become friends.” This is where we got to know and love our aunts and uncles and cousins. Playing games, watching cable TV cartoons we couldn't watch at home, rolling down the small hills in the front yard. Where family gatherings were always HUGE and often involved Belgian waffles or crepes with strawberry jam and whipped cream. Grandpa sat at the table in the kitchen, a humongous bowl of batter and two waffle irons next to him. He kept cranking out waffles while eating his own – enough food to feed an army, and the cousins took full advantage. Limitless eating contests, and somehow there would still be leftovers.

The basement, where we'd have cousin sleepovers. The goofing around on the banana chairs – the most entertaining furniture in the house. Who could rock all the way back? No, all the way to the floor? Standing up to “surf” on them as they rocked back and forth, adults telling us to cut it out or we might break them (or get hurt).

The house where we stayed when we were between houses. Where I stayed when my family moved into the house in Connecticut, leaving me in Utah because the fall semester would begin soon. Where I wondered what the house and town and people in Connecticut were like.

The office, where I found my sister's pros and cons list for whether or not to run away. The list I held onto until it seemed safe to throw away, unbeknownst to me on the day she actually did run away.

The house where I lived between college graduation and finding my first job. The house I left when I finally got that first job in a little town I knew nothing about, where my apartment was unfurnished and had windows that didn't lock. My grandparents dropped off me and my meager belongings, bought dowels for the windows, inflated my air mattress, and then drove the four and a half hours back to that house.

This house is a constant – the house I go to no matter where I live. Wisconsin, Maryland, Connecticut, Colorado, New Jersey, Florida, Ohio ... The house where Grandma would stand at the door and wave until she couldn't see you anymore, even after my parents moved exactly one block away from them.

The house from which Grandpa would start walking when he was recovering from his heart attack. The house where his physical therapist urged him to complete his exercises after his back surgery. The house where he struggled to finish his physical therapy after receiving radiation treatments for his cancer.

The house where he had trouble walking up the steps after completing his radiation treatments. Where Mom helped him, and Grandma insisted on trying to help. The steps where he accidentally knocked over both of them when he fell and then couldn't get up to help them. The house where he decided he didn't want to be a burden anymore. Where he stopped eating. Where he went on hospice. Where I sat with him and held his hand. I should have held it longer. Who needs a drink of water when you don't know how much longer he'll be able to hold your hand?

The house where his breathing became raspy and loud. Where, even though he wasn't talking much, he looked at my aunt's torn jeans, waved her over, and asked her in a gruff whisper if she needed money to buy some new pants. The house where his breathing got slower and slower and slower – where we almost missed his last breath because we were in the other room. Where we sat as we waited to see if he would breathe again. Where the family came to see him and say goodbye before the funeral home took him with them. The last place I saw him since I couldn't stay for his funeral.

Not long after the funeral, Grandma got sick. She'd been so focused on Grandpa, on keeping him around, on convincing him to stay, on making sure he had what he

needed, on letting him go, that she hadn't noticed her own health until then. Her grief, so consuming, moved seamlessly into issues with breathing. Congestive heart failure, we were told. People can live with that for a long time if they take care of themselves. Would Grandma? Without Grandpa, her husband and partner of 58 years, would she try?

For a month we weren't sure, and neither was she.

In that house, she made a decision. She decided to try, but she knew it couldn't be in that house. There were too many memories, too much sadness, too many reminders of her other half, her other self.

She took some things from the house with her to her new abode and opened the rest up to her children and then grandchildren. Portable memories from that house spreading out across the country to live on shelves and be shared with another generation – the great-grandchildren who won't have these memories in that house and may not remember their Great-Grandpa at all.

The legendary garden – a source of pride for my grandfather – is reduced to a dirt plot. The once lively and crowded house is now empty, the last few things sitting in boxes. Slowly being emptied of its memories.

Getting ready to be that house for someone else.

The Roof

Kristin Cass

In 1989, my parents put an addition on our house, which meant new bedrooms for my brothers and me. Bedecked in mauve carpeting with matching paint of my choosing, I finally had a space of my own. Not only was I gifted the warmest room in the house, but, with three windows, it was always beautifully bright during the day and glowing with lunar ambiance at night.

In addition to the bedrooms, the old dining room, which sat below my new space, was converted to a breakfast room, and a new dining room was added adjacent to the old one. This meant something magical for me. Just outside two of my windows now sat a roof, perfect for climbing on. The pitch was slight and the roof was wide and my little eight-year-old body investigated every inch of it. The sandpapery shingles felt rough under my hands and bare feet. The warmth of the day radiated out onto my shoulders and the backs of my thighs. While the bedroom was made for me, this roof was my true sanctuary. At night I would head up to my room and, leaving the lights off, climb out onto the angled surface, lying down between the two skylights.

There, nestled between the frames, I stared into the vastness of space and pondered what it was to be human in this life. I was a child who created worlds in drawings and in words. I played with people who no one else could see. Even with two brothers, I was alone most of the time, left to my thoughts. I had friends, but I felt as though I were an outsider desperately trying to figure out how to navigate fitting in without giving up my sense of self.

For years, I took solace in my nighttime meetings with the sky. I silently whispered my secrets, my sadness, and my joy to the Moon, and she listened with what felt like a melancholic love. Lying on that small rectangular piece of roof, I was the most honest version of myself I have ever been.

I think we all often find ourselves in a moment in time where no one else seems to see us and that loneliness created by this becomes a barrier to being free. Being human is a struggle between our natural instinct to survive and our most human asset, to truly experience life. I have spent years surviving, hiding behind that barrier trying to blend in and grappling with whom I let people see. Even now, though, I still look up at the Moon in search of her love and remind myself to live.

A Marriage of Convenience Becomes True Love

Jeanne Jackson DeVoe

I married my husband for love, but my relationship with Princeton began as a marriage of convenience. I would not yield my heart to its green leafy streets. I was unmoved by the spires and towers of Princeton University behind the black iron gates. The charming downtown left me cold.

You see, I had been in love before, and I doubted I could love again. There was the breakup with my hometown on Long Island. I had fled the waterfront charms of the village of Freeport for the buzz and energy of Manhattan and never looked back. I fell hard for New York City where I could find an adventure on every walk, go to any movie I wanted, and find a cup of coffee or a cab at 2 a.m. But I had to let go of that relationship for a job in New Jersey. I nursed that heartbreak for many years. Then I was swept away by the Victorian charm and beaches of a tiny town on the Jersey Shore called Ocean Grove.

So when I married my husband, I simply wasn't ready for another relationship. Sure, I was willing to make the move to Princeton for practical reasons. I was renting the second floor of a tiny house with a box-sized patch of dirt in front. My husband had inherited his grandparents' 1950s-era California ranch in Princeton, with a huge backyard perfect for raising kids. It was a no-brainer.

My cold heart thawed a bit, at least towards our own patch of Princeton, when we held our wedding reception in that large yard. But I still wasn't committing. I commuted to my job in Freehold, New Jersey, Bruce Springsteen's hometown. I left Princeton any chance I could get to visit my old haunts on the Jersey Shore, New York and Long Island. I just wasn't ready.

I didn't feel firmly planted in Princeton until I became a mother. I quit my job to stay home with my first child, and it was in many ways a dream come true. But I wasn't prepared for the loneliness of being home with no adult companionship for hours on end. I wandered the streets with only my infant son as my companion. I would look wistfully at mothers pushing babies in strollers and think, "That woman has a baby! Maybe she and I could be friends."

I realized I would have to force myself to get out of the house to keep my sanity. I joined any activity where I could talk to adults: a newcomer's club, a book club, a writing class. But they left me feeling exhausted and strangely unsatisfied. I didn't want small talk. I wanted friends to whom I could bare my soul.

Finally, a friendly mom in my writing class invited me to her children's play group, and one day I found myself knocking on a stranger's door on Chestnut Street. I was greeted by a smiling, frazzled mom who gave me a cup of tea and ushered me and my son into a chaotic living room. There, I witnessed a bunch of mothers who managed to feed and burp their babies and bounce them up and down when they cried, all the while chatting about politics, books and motherhood. I had finally found my people in Princeton.

We pushed each other's kids on the swings, dispensed snacks and potty-training advice, and held secret cocktail parties in the park. We celebrated the birth of my younger son and other new babies. And we all gathered for a weepy lunch when our older children went off to kindergarten.

Somewhere along the way, without me even noticing it, Princeton began to feel like home. Now I knew which park had the best sandbox. (Hands down, Marquand Park, where generations of parents have left behind bulldozers and sand buckets.) I discovered that my husband and I had the best dates at McCarter Theatre because even the occasional bad shows were a fun night out. I learned that the fountain outside Robertson Hall on Washington Road could provide blessed relief to sweaty children on a hot summer night.

As my children grew up, I made the transition from a cookie-baking class mom who worked part-time to a full-time professional. In what now seems like a blink of an eye, my two little boys became tall young men and were off to college. I barely had time to catch my breath and realize that somewhere along the way I had fallen in love with the town I had once hardened my heart against.

Mind you, my love for Princeton isn't blind. There is a dark side to Princeton's wealth and privilege. The drive to succeed means there is unceasing pressure on our kids to go to the best schools and get the best jobs. Acquaintances insist on stopping me in the grocery store to brag about the Ivy League schools their children are attending. The first questions over cocktails at social gatherings are what you do professionally and where you went to college. I have fallen prey to this myself—trotting out my graduate school bona fides to prove my worth. There is a fair amount of smugness and entitlement and insularity here in Princeton. We live in a bubble that can blur our vision and prevent us seeing some of the problems lurking beneath the surface.

I've also been saddened to see some of the trees that create those green leafy streets disappearing. The few remaining wooded lots are sprouting developments as smaller homes make way for much larger, brand new houses. They stand out in my neighborhood like castles among the serfs' cottages. It is hard to remember what came before them. And I know some day my house will probably be bulldozed and forgotten as well. All this makes the price of living here so high that I fear the day will come when I can no longer call this town home.

In the end, as in any successful marriage, I've had to come to terms with what I can change and what I can accept. And, as one does in a long relationship, I remind myself why I stay. Much of this has to do with the roots I've put down here: the happy family memories and the dear friends. But there are also the things unique to Princeton that I cherish. I love the interesting mix of people from all over the world drawn to Princeton. I love the unusually rich diet of music, theater, and art that is far beyond the bland fare of most small towns. I love the Princeton Library. (Who doesn't?) And I love the fact that so many Princetonians are politically engaged and ready to fight the good fight on countless issues.

And sure, I've come to treasure those green leafy streets. I've learned to savor the beauty of the University's campus and appreciate the charms of the downtown. But Princeton isn't and never will be just another pretty face. Despite its flaws, I love the very soul of Princeton. And this one just might be for keeps.

A Picture's Thousand Words

Gwen McNamara

It's often said that a picture is worth a thousand words. Sometimes, though, we encounter an image that not only speaks to us, but begs us to unravel its story – to tell its thousand words. This is the story of one such picture.

I'm drawn to a small boy. In black and white and gray he stands, hands tucked in the back pockets of his overalls, a rumpled white collared shirt peeking over the straps. With short, close-cropped hair, he smiles, leaning back slightly, his stance confidently wide. Beside him in the grass sits an equally small dog, fluffy with a white snout, spotted complexion, and pert half-flopped ears. There's a curiousness to this boy's gaze, part joy, part mischief, somehow familiar. What trouble were he and his furry friend just getting into? Were they playing in the yard? Whom does he belong to?

I search for clues – is the bush behind him the rose bush behind Gram's house? Could the corner of the building at the far edge of the frame be from the farm? Perhaps the milking shed, or the old outhouse? I am surprised I'd never noticed it before. I step back and let my eyes shift to the collage of portraits that surround this one in their antique and faded frames. All of people and places from the past, gathered together as if for some silent reunion on the yellowed velveteen wallpaper.

I'm supposed to be opening presents and turn my head as I'm pulled back to the cacophony of laughter and ripping of giftwrap as my family exchanges Christmas gifts. My glance catches the eye of my grandfather sitting on the fainting couch nearby – the same couch his mother rested on in this very room after giving birth to her son. "Interested in that picture?" he asks. "Yes," I say. "Do you know who he is?" With a mischievous twinkle in his eye and a curious and familiar smile, he replies "Why yes. That's me."

Taking the photo down, we carefully pull back the thick cardstock holding the picture in place. In penciled handwritten script it reads "Raymond C. Runkle, son of Alfred and Hazel Runkle, approx. 5 years of age." This small, smiling, towheaded boy was indeed my grandfather, frozen in time some 90 years ago.

Questions swirl in my mind and come pouring out like a flood. Is that your dog? What was its name? Do you remember when this photo was taken? What was it like growing up? What did you do on the farm? Where did you go to school? Who did you play with?

My grandfather sits back in his recliner. “Ah, that was a long time ago,” he says, letting out a long breath. “I don’t remember that dog’s name, and I don’t remember getting my picture taken, but it sure was a different time then.”

Horses still clip-clopped down a dirt Mt. Airy Harbourn Road and pulled the plow in the field. His family’s farm stood, as it still does today, on one side of the T-intersection that is Mt. Airy, a tiny hamlet in West Amwell Township, NJ. On the other side of the T was, and still is, the Mt. Airy Presbyterian church. A stone’s throw up the hill behind the church sat the one-room schoolhouse where he and boys and girls from miles around would walk to school and get their lessons.

On the farm, my grandfather had dairy cows and chickens, sometimes turkeys and pigs, and without indoor plumbing, enjoyed all the pleasantness of using an outhouse. An only child, he shared tales of baseball games with friends in the field across the street; of the communal task and, yes, celebration of butchering pigs at his cousin’s farm; and of fetching water from the neighbor’s well on school days.

“If you were smart, you’d take a long way back,” he said with a wink.

It was at school that he met my grandmother, from the neighboring Williamson dairy farm. Years later they would marry in the Mt. Airy Presbyterian church and raise three children on his family’s farm, the same place he was born and raised. It boggles my mind how contained, yet rich and full, his life has been; to grow up, find love, raise a family, and live a lifetime in the space of less than a mile; to be tied so tightly to a place that now four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren are also linked by its gravitational pull.

With each reminiscence, the resemblance between my 5-year-old grandfather and my 95-year-old grandfather becomes clearer. False teeth grins on Halloween, corny April Fool’s jokes and pranks, and eye-rolling quips like “Did you have a nice trip? I’ll see you next fall” take on new meaning. He may now need glasses, and wear plaid button-downs and John Deere mesh ball caps instead of overalls, but his playful spirit and impish grin are still the same.

As our conversation winds down, I carefully replace the cardstock backing in the frame and hand the picture to my grandfather. He holds the sturdy oval wooden frame in both hands, hands now wrinkled and speckled from years of farm work in the summer sun. As he looks down at his younger self, my grandfather wistfully wipes a bit of dust from the glass with his thumb, and a curious, part joyful, part mischievous smile spreads across his face – a smile I now know all too well.

Walk of Life

Wendell Collins

The walk starts at La Casita, the former Brown/Simpson and now Kuenne/Jeppsen compound nestled between Charlotte, Vermont's Town Beach and Thompson's Point on lovely Lake Champlain. Leslie and I head up the gravel driveway to tackle the Leslie Loop. Once on the main dirt road, our conversation ensues.

How're you doing? we ask, easing into the cadence of confidence of a 30-year friendship that has weathered the untimely deaths of our best friend Heidi at age 26, of Leslie's five-year-old daughter, of our mothers from ALS and fathers from depression and dementia, my marriage, countless friends' divorces, and other various challenges.

But our friendship held fast, and these 'Mont (our abbreviation of Vermont) walks continued annually for some 20 years. *How are you doing* had so many connotations, so many ways to answer. Our Southern/patrician "I'm fine" reply masked heartache, anxiety, worry, loneliness, ambivalence, boredom, fear—mostly for others, because we were the strong women holding everything together.

We round the bend at the road to the end of the Point, site of the annual July 4 reading of the Declaration of Independence in front of a tattered flag of the Republic, its 48 or so stars showing its age. Then we head slightly uphill to the Northshore loop, passing the ancient clay tennis courts, home of decades of ladies doubles and kids tennis lessons from the "pros" (aka the dads), who now get whooped on the courts by these young upstart athletes in high school and college. Behind the courts stands the wooden headquarters of the Thompson's Point "country club," site of vicious ping pong matches during long bouts of Champlain monsoons and the annual Club suppers for which Leslie somehow annually was tapped chair or co-chair. Seeing the "Club" unearths a random recollection of having to toss gallons of potato salad gone bad and come up with a last-minute replacement to feed 200 hungry Thompson pointers, which Leslie handled with aplomb, as always.

On the north loop, trees shade the brightening sun that seems more intense each year, thanks to global warming heating a glacial lake now plump with algae but still gorgeous and sometimes even cold, just like in the olden days when we had childless couple house parties at the Point, ending with bracing bouts of skinny dipping in the lake on a brisk fall evening.

We chat about friends whom we haven't seen in ages, or sometimes see too much, and how our lives have taken a trajectory we never expected. Me working at Princeton University after starting out in journalism; Leslie leaving genetic counseling for fulltime motherhood after losing her daughter, and eventually working fulltime (but unpaid) as head of McCarter Theatre's Board of Trustees. A stressful but fulfilling gig, one that she shares concerns about being over her head but *she's got this*, just like she's got everything else that life has thrown her way. We talk about ALS and the horrible decline our mothers experienced in the last few months of their lives.

We pass the turnoff for Garden Island, made famous by portly President William Howard Taft's presidential bathtub ensconced in its "big house," and veer right towards the harbor, boats bobbing in the distance. Horses lazily graze in the fields to our left. The Kuenne dogs bark and pull at their leashes, ready to play with newfound equine friends, but the horses will have nothing of it. We laugh, call the dogs, and then cross the main "paved" road to take the harbor loop, passing old boat houses in gentrification mode.

We navigate over decrepit train tracks, for which a nearby historical marker cites The Charlotte Whale, an 11,000-year-old fossil and proof that Lake Champlain was once part of the Paleolithic Atlantic Ocean. Just beyond, we scout out the hilly woods ahead that mark the halfway point of the loop, a trail teaming with roots and rocks that trip those who don't take care. We recall huffing and puffing as we shoved heavy awkward strollers (the stiff metal ones predating the invention of jogging strollers) up that treacherous incline with our daughters—before her daughter died and mine grew up and outlived hers by 20+ years.

This channels us to flashbacks of the good old days of Snugli's and Pack n' Plays and brings us to kid talk. We share about my three girls and her three boys, a veritable Brady Bunch ensconced every July in a renovated Victorian lakehouse in lieu of a split-level ranch, with Nanny Margaret holding down the fort instead of Alice and Sam the butcher boyfriend. We share about our children's hopes and dreams and challenges and joys, or at least the ones we know about so far.

We breach the top of the hill, catch our breath, and head downhill for the southern point loop, saddled by a steep cliff overlook of the choppy harbor, which makes us secretly grateful our long walk is not conflicting with a tubing spree or kayaking expedition.

This final loop takes us by the award-winning gardens of a longtime Point presence, a bachelor with a very green thumb, and Leslie oohs and aahs over his array of botanical wonders. Leslie is the Master Gardener, I the Black Thumb, so I'm always appreciative but somewhat ignorant about the bounty of wisteria, impatiens and hydrangeas before us.

The last hill looms ahead as a neighbor's rowdy dogs greet us with barks and the requisite sniffing; then we walk the last stretch towards La Casita, having covered all bases for this year. We'll do other walks each day of the visit, but those will be quieter, recapping the day's activities or previewing tomorrow's adventures.

The last sport of the day's 'Mont-athalon: Porch-sitting in the white rockers, a glass of wine or Gatorade, with the hazy shadow of the Adirondacks lining the distant New York shore. This porch is the site of decades of puzzles and games, reading and writing, painting and drawing, meals, conversations, and Kuenne-tinis.

Our last Loop together took place in 2016; in 2017 there were too many conflicts to make the annual jaunt work, and last summer Leslie was recovering from emergency surgery and then grueling chemotherapy in her fierce battle with newly discovered Stage 3 Ovarian Cancer.

This past July Leslie walked her last 'Mont loop with her family, with memories of her beloved daughter in the stroller on the hill, whom she would soon join, somewhere over the rainbow.

A Mother's Heart

Maureen Riggi

A mother's heart is a black hole:
a terrifying mass floating in the cosmos
of her body, an entire universe
which sparked life, built a planet within itself,
sent the tender species on to explore
beyond the borders of what was known.

Pennies-a-Pound

Stephanie Whetstone

It is a gorgeous September day, and I have found out that there is a “pennies-a-pound” flying event not too far away in Pennsylvania. I have mentioned this to Jack Henry, asked him if he wants to go with me, to ride in a small plane for the first time for “pennies-a-pound.” “Maybe,” he says, and I scour his vocal tone for the slight uptick to the maybe that means “Yes, that sounds like fun!” or “No. Please stop talking to me.” I think it is the former, but I am not certain. His tonal language is as intricate as Mandarin these days.

Later, when I have all but given up the idea, Jeff tells me that Jack Henry has told him about it. He wants to go. I want this so much, even though I’m not sure why, but I know that the more I say I want it, the more it will become undesirable to a sixteen-year-old. I wait.

The day of the event, I ask Jack Henry again if he wants to go, that I am leaving in thirty minutes. He says yeah without hesitation. This is a huge endorsement.

We drive the hour and fifteen minutes to the Pennsylvania line and then some, along the outer boundaries of Philly, toward hills and past two power stacks, to Pottstown, where the tiny airport sits hidden in a shallow valley.

I am a little nervous, I admit. I have never met these people. I have only ever flown with instructors, my parents, or professional pilots—put my life in their hands. For a minute, I worry that I am leading my child to great danger. But right now, he thinks this is exciting and cool, so I go ahead as if I don’t have a care in the world.

The hangar that usually holds two twin-engine planes is now also full of old white people, mostly women. It is a world I grew up in, but it is not the world Jack Henry knows or expects. He is a little taken aback. This is my 1980s in a nutshell, preserved and aging white feminism. I see my parents in it, and I miss them desperately.

My mother flew, my grandmother flew. My dad flew too, but he didn’t really count. It was my mom’s thing. She was a 99, just like Amelia Earhart. Just as much of a heroine.

When I was sixteen, at my mom’s insistence, I took flying lessons with Mr. Harris, a short, portly, red-faced, gentle soul. He was more patient with me than I deserved.

He treated me like I was an adult, a fully capable pilot. In the late 80s, this was a radical act—Mr. Harris’s respect and my belief in myself. It was my parents’ proudest moment of me. In the pictures of this day, their faces prove it.

After my six months as a pilot, things went south for my parents’ finances. A lot of things went south in their lives. This was the end of my flying career and of their glory days. But still, they had given me a view of the world most people never get to see. It is you and the plane and the sky—minimal and free. It is total control in a new dimension. It is power.

So, Jack Henry and I weigh in. The “pennies a pound” is no longer exactly accurate. We pay dollars, but still, way less than the fuel and maintenance would cost. Way less than a lesson.

Our first pilot is a woman, Linda. She has a newer plane, and she wants to be a mechanic, now that she’s retired. She yells, “clear prop!” turns the key, but the engine flags. She tries two more times—nothing. It is the heat, she says. Fuel injection engines like hers don’t like it. Linda is clearly embarrassed and slips away to find us a new plane and pilot.

She calls on Bob, from Paris, Tennessee. Bob is maybe in his early sixties, thinning hair, wire-rimmed square glasses with sunglass clip-ons, pot belly, tan socks with not quite dress shoes. In short, he is my dad’s doppelganger, accent and all. Same sense of humor that no one laughs at without also cringing.

Bob flies a 1980 Piper Saratoga. This is a twin of the plane my parents would rent to take us on trips when I was a kid. This is almost identical to the plane my sister Jenny threw up in the back of on Easter morning in 1984, after we had eaten our whole basketful of candy and had taken off for Fort Lauderdale. It is hard to separate the smell of vomit from the memory. Still, it is somehow nostalgic, and I am on the verge of tears.

Now I sit in the way back of Bob’s plane—the third row in the tail. Jack Henry is in the co-pilot seat and hears everything the tower says. I have my own silent communion in the back seat—my parents are here, they must be; I can smell them in the heated molded plastic; I can see them in the instrument panel, hear them in the sound of the prop. My baby is in a plane with all of us.

Bob flies us past the power plant smoke stacks and through the valley. I feel a bump or two. Jack Henry doesn’t notice the bumps, doesn’t know any different. The sky is bright blue, and it is hot in the plane. Sweat drips down my back. After about twenty minutes across the green hills, we begin to descend. Going into our landing, Bob banks the plane nearly ninety degrees to the right. It feels like the plane is sideways. “Jesus!” I let slip from the way back, unable to restrain my fear, but Bob can’t hear me. We land, and Jack Henry has been bitten. The legacy is

complete. These women pilots who could be his grandmother, Bob, so much like his grandfather, have led us into the sky together. I feel like I have done some duty, that this is a rite.

On the drive home, I think of my mother, what she would have been doing among those women in t-shirts that say “Fly Girls Forever.” I imagine her in the pilot seat, or my father there with Jack Henry as co-pilot. My past lives in the sky. Maybe my future does too.

Dislocation

John Weeren

Travel, we are told, has never been easier. Gone are the days of wagon trains, paddle steamers, and DC-3s. Crossing the Atlantic is now routine, not a cause for Lindbergh-like rejoicing. Yet that doesn't make travel easy—not by a long shot.

To stand in the darkness and stillness of a Scottish night and less than 24 hours—and five time zones—later face the pandemonium of the City That Never Sleeps is to undergo as profound a dislocation as any in the past, made more intense by its abruptness.

Part of us is left behind, along with our cell phone charger, unable to adjust, accept, allow as we force our jetlagged bodies forward, homeward. We long for the emptiness of a one-lane Highland road, right-hand drive and all, as we endure the perils of the Van Wyck Expressway and the Midtown Tunnel. We can still taste the clotted cream and scones that saw us off so many miles ago as we forage in Penn Station for something quick and packaged before our train departs.

We have returned to the familiar, yes, but we are not entirely familiar to ourselves. The part of us we've left behind is not our hearts—the stuff of “Will Ye No Come Back Again?”—but, rather, our old view of the world: the complacent and constricted view that gladly or grudgingly permitted New Jersey to define us, to be “our dukedom large enough,” as Shakespeare's most famous exile, Prospero, might say.

We left that part of us on the Isle of Skye, amid the sheep and crags, and it will take longer—much longer—than the time it takes to reach our destination to get it back, if we ever do. We are not the same, which means that our relationship with home, whatever that might be, is different, too.

Dislocations of this kind are never easy, but then, like travel-stained adventurers of old, who would want it any other way?

Contributors

Sharon Adarlo (cover art) is a writer, artist, illustrator, and maker. She works at the Center for Statistics and Machine Learning and lives in Newark, New Jersey.

Kristin Cass has been telling stories as long as she could hold a pencil properly. From a young age, she liked to write and illustrate books for her family to read. As teenage years hit, she embraced poetry as well as prose as outlets for her creativity. These days, she attempts to keep an online journal and writes stories, albeit sporadically. She also enjoys attending Princeton's Writing Space gatherings.

Wendell Collins has published short fiction, essays, and poetry in US 1 as well as regionally and has participated in writers' workshops at Chautauqua Institution, Princeton, and in New York City. A journalism school graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill (GO HEELS), she grew up in North Carolina and has worked at Princeton's Bendheim Center for Finance for the past 13 years. She and her daughters live in Pennington.

Jeanne Jackson DeVoe is a senior communications associate at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory. She is involved with several community groups and loves reading, storytelling, quilting, singing in the choir, and taking walks with her husband, Syth, occasionally joined by their two adult sons, Ray and Will.

Anita Kline sensed early that her initials A.S.K. spelled a decree, sending her on a quest through writing ever since. While also knitting, quilting, and becoming a grandma of three, she is manager of Princeton's Center for the Study of Religion, where she practices the use of strong verbs every day.

Andrea La Bella is the assistant to the director at the Center for Statistics and Machine Learning. She studied acting in Los Angeles and has recently discovered storytelling, performing at various local venues. Andrea is also an avid horsewoman, dedicated to non-violent, partner-based horsemanship. She lives in Newtown, Pennsylvania, with her husband, Rich.

Kelly Lin-Kremer works in the history department. She is a twin (but not a Gemini). Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Edible Jersey* and *InQluded*. In 2018, she attended the VONA/Voices of Our Nation Writers Workshop for writers of color with Shay Youngblood.

Gwen McNamara is a writer, storyteller, tree hugger, and will always be a journalist at heart. She oversees communications for the Pace Center for Civic Engagement at Princeton and enjoys hitting the nature trail and spending time with her husband, Dennis, and children, Brendan and Madeline.

Maureen Riggi is a poet and student of literature, currently enjoying reading autobiographies and/or memoirs of her favorite comediennes. As for her own writing, Maureen focuses on day-to-day life and ordinary experiences through vivid imagery and stark language.

Jamie Saxon, the arts and humanities writer in Princeton's Office of Communications, considers herself a story hunter, crushing on Maine, ballet, cello, memoirs. She spends her free time practicing mindfulness and yoga and trying to figure out a way to write her own stuff outside of work (not there yet).

Jayme Wagner has a hard time staying in one space for too long. She's lived in nine states (two of them twice) and is hoping to put down roots here in New Jersey. Her interests include reading, knitting, studying music, and writing. When not at work, she can be found studying for her Ph.D. comprehensive oral exam in music theory, watching Netflix, or sleeping.

John Weeren is founding director of *Princeton Writes*, a program established to strengthen the practical communication skills of our University community. Between 2004 and 2013, he served as assistant to and speechwriter for Princeton's 19th president, Shirley M. Tilghman. He is currently writing a book on—what else?—writing and, when time permits, finds a creative outlet in poetry, short fiction, and plays.

Stephanie Whetstone has always loved words. Her fiction has appeared in *Waccamam*, *Waypoints*, *Drafthorse*, the *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, and *Narrative*. She loves to edit stories, too. Luckily, she is the assistant director of *Princeton Writes*, where she gets to help Princeton staff and students hone their writing and speaking skills.



Thank you for reading the work of our Writing Space group. If you would like more information about *Princeton Writes*, please visit pwrites.princeton.edu. To join our creative writing and public speaking groups, please contact pwrites@princeton.edu. You can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

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