

# WORKS IN PROGRESS

Non-fiction & Poetry by the S.J.R.J.I. Writers' Group

Second Edition  
November, 2020

## CONTENTS

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<i>Carol Adinolfi</i>	Introduction, Letter of Acknowledgment	1
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### Non-Fiction & Poetry

<i>Geno Clark</i>	Anthem	2
<i>Sheila Grisard</i>	Early Memories	3
<i>Katelin Hoffman</i>	Radio of Life	6
<i>Geno Clark</i>	An Introduction	11
	I Don't Want to Do This	12
	Betrayed Faith	14
<i>Michael Ryan</i>	Orphan	15
	The Chili Contest	16
<i>Debi Ellsworth</i>	The Thought of You	17
	Crowbar	20
	This Sister, This Snake	22
	Mystery of the Human Being	25

### Conversations & Projects

<i>Debi Ellsworth &amp; Carol Adinolfi</i>	On Revision: A Conversation About Process	26
<i>Katelin Hoffman</i>	The Rock Painting & Inscription	27
<i>Katelin Hoffman &amp; Carol Adinolfi</i>	The Rock Project, Talking About Process	28

## Writing Experiments & Tools for Writers

<i>Carol Adinolfi</i>	The Writer's Notebook	29
	The Writer's Notebook Experiment #1: Moments/Memory Fragments	30
<i>Geno Clark, Debi Ellsworth, Sheila Grisard, Katelin Hoffman, Michael Ryan</i>	Group Call and Response	31
	Acknowledgements: To the S.J.R.J.I. Writers' Group	33

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

Works in Progress: Non-Fiction & Poetry, First Edition was a companion text shared with members of the S.J.R.J.I advisory team after they attended an online reading presented by the Writers' Group. The second edition includes more poetry and non-fiction as well as conversations with some of the writers, and photographs. With some examples of the materials we used and experiments we did towards generating the work, we hope to give our readers a glimpse into our workshop process.

## AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT: TO THE S.J.R.J.I WRITERS' GROUP

Many people think of creative writing as a purely joyful easeful activity because of the word *creative*, and it can be all of the above. But creating a strong piece of writing also involves steady application, and the hard work that you've all done in getting your words onto the blank page.

Facing that wide open, unwritten upon space can feel daunting, especially when you're writing about painful, difficult experiences. But the blank page is also a symbol of freedom and possibility. Some of you have written of recent life experiences and made new discoveries during the workshop. There's room for all of it, for all of you, as individuals and as a group.

I know your hope for this anthology is that it will encourage others who have important stories to tell. You've done courageous work and shown the steady commitment that takes one from first drafts to developing, revising, and editing. We've talked about writing taking real grit. The stick-with-it-ness required to shape your thoughts, memories, feelings and ideas into a powerful communication to the world is no small thing.

My hope is that you'll feel gratified in knowing your work will benefit others. Both those who want to use writing as a form of healing, and those who will feel the tremendous impact of hearing your stories that you've crafted into artful writing.

*with deep appreciation,*

Carol Adinolfi  
Workshop Facilitator, Editor

## GENE CLARK

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### **Anthem**

We are the Children of St Joseph's.  
We need our voices to be heard.  
Will you hear all our truths  
And take us at our word?

You didn't believe us then,  
So please believe us now.  
For we'll tell you all our truths  
If you'll just believe somehow.

Your disbelief in us has added to our tears.  
For we've lived with all these truths  
For oh so many years.

We are the Children of St. Joseph's  
We need our voices to be heard.  
Will you hear all our truths  
And take us at our word?

So, we're going to raise our voices  
For everyone to hear, in spite of all your doubts  
In spite of all our fears.

So please believe us now, for our pain is so sincere.  
For we've lived with all this pain  
For oh so many years.

## SHEILA GRISARD

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### Early Memories

In 1962, I was placed at St. Joseph's Orphanage in Burlington, Vermont. My mother, at 29, was a barmaid, and my father, at 43, was the hired help at a dairy farm. Together, they did their best to care for their nine children: six boys and three girls. We were all about one year apart in age. We lived in the main farmhouse. Dad worked hard on the dairy farm. Mom was gone most of the time working in the local town bar. There was a sugar shack on the farm, and during sugar season, Dad would tap the maple trees. I can still see him, smiling, carrying the buckets on a yoke across his shoulders. He would let us take a cup of the syrup. We'd boil it down and pour it over fresh snow for a treat.

My brothers and sisters were always around. We'd play hide and seek in the haystacks and tease the bull until it chased us to the safety of our big front porch. We lived in front of the railroad tracks. We'd put our ears to the track to listen for the rumble and to feel the vibration of an oncoming train. As it got closer, we'd place pennies on the track and watch the train flatten them. My sister Cheryl, who was one year older than me, would drop a sheet down a hole through the second story floor, where a stove pipe had once been. She'd tie the sheet to the bed and throw it down the pipe hole and we'd slide down the sheet and land on the floor.

Raspberry picking with my dad was my favorite event. As we crossed the trestle, I felt safe riding on his foot clutching onto his leg so that I wouldn't fall through the cracks into the muddy waters below. We'd bring big buckets that had once held peanut butter; we'd fill them with plump, juicy raspberries.

I don't remember any fighting, shouting or bad feelings with my brothers and sisters. At night, we were never tucked in. Instead, we all jumped into one big bed wearing the same clothes we'd worn all day.

SHEILA GRISARD

*Early Memories*

My sister Linda stopped attending school at 13 so that she could stay home to care for us. She'd help us catch frogs by the pond. In the evening, she would prepare delicious frogs' legs, cook beans in a big pot, and serve those along with our favorite snack: bread with butter and sugar.

We were free to roam the countryside that surrounded the farm. Often, we would visit an elderly man who lived in a little shack down the road. He had severe scoliosis, which caused his spine to curve to the side. He limped, using a cane, and moved awkwardly about in his tiny space. He would take advantage of my older sister and myself. He bribed us with food. We took turns watching out the window for anyone who might come near. I had the sense that this was wrong. But I never knew who to tell.

Our house was quarantined once, during a scarlet fever outbreak. My brother Douglas was very red and sick. Local farmers and town folk brought us groceries and left them outside the door. My oldest brother Tommy, 14 at the time, was considered old enough to care for himself. So, many nights, he'd stay with friends from school. Sometimes he'd wait all night in Mom's car, so he could drive her home from the bar.

I remember a day in late fall, just after my brother Lonny was born. Three families were having their ninth child in close proximity, and the order of sequence was exactly the same in each family. A local reporter thought this would make an interesting story. For the momentous occasion of his visit to our home, my sister and I had our waist long hair cut to chin length. My brothers all had their hair neatly trimmed. The photographer organized us in two rows, according to age. Mom and Dad sat together holding baby Lonny and toddler Stephen. Cheryl and Tim sat beside me in the front, and Terry, Douglas, Linda, and Tom stood in the back. This was the only photo ever taken of my family. Soon after this day, my life on the farm would be over.

One morning, my mother came home with new shiny black shoes for my sister and me. Holding our new shoes in our laps, we went for an hour-long ride in the car to a place I knew would be filled with fun. We arrived at an enormous mansion with a 10-foot statue of a man with a long beard and a robe draped down to his bare feet. His hands were stretched out to

Sheila Grisard

*Early Memories*

the sky. With excitement I turned to the playground on the side where a large crowd of children were playing near the biggest swing-set I had ever seen. As my mother let us go, we ran to the wooden swings and hopped on. It took a long time to get up into the air, but once I did, I remembered the wonderful feeling of freedom. I tried to touch the sky with my feet. I started to sing a song quite loudly.

As I looked up to find my mother, I saw her drive away. I was not worried or afraid. My seven-year-old sister had followed me to the swings. She was also trying to touch the sky with her feet. I don't remember my mother saying goodbye or providing any explanation. I was six years old. I would remain at the orphanage for eight years, until I entered the ninth grade and at that time I was moved to a foster home.



Sheila at four (second from left) and her family, 1958



## KATELIN HOFFMAN

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### Radio of Life

#### I. INTRODUCTION

I read and I listened to the radio a lot before entering the orphanage, so it's not surprising that these became my main survival tools while I was there. Books offered an escape, whereas with songs I made connections. The words often reminded me of people, places and things. This story of my life is an example of how song lyrics, woven into my memories, represent my thoughts and feelings. My story shows how a little transistor radio became my "Radio of Life".

#### II. FIRST LESSON: BE LIKE SPOCK

The first lesson I learned upon entering the orphanage was that...

*... smiling faces sometimes don't tell the truth.  
They show no traces of the evil that lurks within.*

As Sister Julianne led me to my dormitory, I could see the signs:

*Signs, everywhere a sign. Do this. Don't do that.  
Can't you read the signs?*

In my imagination I saw another sign, one that read, "Do Not Feel." In order to survive, I needed to be like Spock from Star Trek. I needed to cut myself off from my emotions.

*Any smile on my face is only there trying to fool the public.  
Really, I'm sad. I'm sadder than sad. And I'm hurting so bad*

Katelin Hoffman

*Radio of Life*

### III. MAN IN THE MOON

Waking up to the screams of children: little girls being literally dragged out of bed from their slumber and beaten by two nuns was traumatic and terrifying. I never let myself fall asleep until I was certain the nuns had already gone to bed. One night I snuck into the bathroom and wrote this poem, to the Man in the Moon:

Shine on Man in the Moon for your light will shine  
and never cease.  
Your world is lonely, cold and barren  
yet you have learned to cope.  
You get to watch over everyone here on earth  
without being a part of us  
and without knowing the feelings of being alive.  
Help me Man in the Moon. Please help me.  
Help me to be like you are.  
To just watch but not know or feel what is happening.

### IV. ALL THE SORROWS...

*... sad tomorrows, take me back to my own home.  
The world is a bad place, a sad place, a terrible place to live,  
but I don't want to die.*

Until I did.

Katelin Hoffman

*Radio of Life*

*A long, long time ago I can still remember how the music  
used to make me smile. I knew if I had my chance...*

I was being accused of planning to run away again. I'd been staying by myself to keep anyone else from getting in trouble. When Rosie and Amy asked to listen my radio, I thought they would be safe because they were only eleven. I was wrong. I knew then that because of me, they would be hurt by the nuns.

*... something touched me deep inside and I knew  
this will be the day that I die...*

These were the last lyrics I heard before I cut my wrist.

#### V. ON A WINTER'S DAY

I was placed on the adult psychiatric ward of the hospital, where for the first month I'd...

*... sit alone gazing from my window to the street below...*

... as I listened to my radio.

*I've built walls, a fortress deep and mighty that none may penetrate.*

Libby, one of the nurses, said that I reminded her of the song "I am a Rock".

*I have my books and my poetry to protect me. Hiding in my room,  
I touch no one and no one touches me...*

... until Linda, one of the nurses, who was hugging the one other girl on the ward while I was nearby, thought to hug me too. My family had not been affectionate, so I only knew to stand there like a wooden log as she threw her arms around me. She asked me if I knew how

to hug. When I didn't answer, she took my arms and placed them around her waist. From then on, the nurses gave me hugs and even tucked me into bed at night.

I'd been warned by the nuns not to talk, so I could not say

*Doctor my eyes have seen the years  
and a slow parade of fears without crying.  
Now I want to understand. I saw the evil.  
Where's the good? Help me if you can.*

Unfortunately, I was not helped while on the ward, other than learning what it was like to receive affection.

I never returned to the orphanage. Because of my psychiatric hospitalization, I was deemed "not foster home material," The state had to find a place for me to go. That place was The Elizabeth Lund Home for Unwed Mothers.

## VII. A GOOD KID

ELH staff were instructed by my social worker not to give me attention. Her concern was that by engaging with me, they would worsen my struggles with self-harm and suicidal thoughts. So, again, I did everything alone. I got up to the radio playing the Lone Ranger's "William Tell Overture." I went to school, did homework, chores, laundry and kept my room clean.

When I sprained my ankle and was on crutches, I threw the pillows I was using to elevate my leg down the stairs from the second floor to the basement. I had no idea, when it came time to go to bed, how to get everything back up. A group supervisor came into the basement. I asked her if I could ride up in the elevator. I was deeply hurt when she said no.

Katelin Hoffman

*Radio of Life*

I had no one to ...  
*give me love, give me hope nor help me cope.*  
If I was loved would I grow?  
*Would I blossom,*  
would life flow?  
*In the sun, the rain, the snow,*  
if  
*love is lovely,*  
will I ever know?  
Seeds are planted, nourished and helped to grow.  
What about a child?

#### VIII. STILL STANDING

*I always seemed to lose what I thought was mine...*

including my name.

*Sometimes I saw my life just falling apart and all the rejection  
tearing at my heart. But deep inside hope was still alive*

Now I feel...

*... it's really great for me to be here...*

... working together with all of you. We've become a team, a force, working to hold accountable those who caused us harm. Every time we share our stories, we tell the stories of hundreds of other children. When we achieve justice for ourselves, we will have achieved justice for them as well.

## GENO CLARK

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### An Introduction

From 1964 through 1965, my siblings and I lived at St Joseph's Child Center on North Avenue in Burlington Vt. On September 10, 2018, Vermont Attorney General T. J. Donovan announced the creation of a task force to investigate claims of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and yes, even murder, at the former child center.

I was one of the children who was sexually and physically abused at St. Joseph's. I've carried the emotional scars of those horrible experiences with me all my life. For decades, I kept silent about the embarrassing details of my abuse. However, with the report from the Vermont Attorney General's office due to come out shortly, I hope my truths will no longer have to stand alone. With this report, the wrongdoing, on a massive scale, at the hands of nuns and priests, will no longer be so easily denied.

For many years, I've gone from therapist to therapist. None of this did much good. That was until I met my last therapist. She knew that I was a singer/songwriter, and she suggested that I write about my experiences in song form. As a child I was very religious; I loved singing in God's name. But the abuses I endured at St. Joseph's made me lose all faith in God. I've tried over the years to regain that faith, but it seems it's lost forever.

One of the songs describes the very moment I remember losing the last piece of my faith. Another has helped me in a battle I've fought for over 50 years. Every single day, the refrain, "I don't want to do this! I don't want to do this!" has played over and over in my mind. Writing about the events where that refrain began, in lyric form, has showed me that my songwriting is a process that is both artistic and therapeutic. It helps me to reclaim, in some way, aspects of myself that I have lost. Several of my song lyrics are included in a video I recently produced. I would love to share that video with you. At this time, It is available on my Facebook page.

Geno Clark

*I Don't Want to Do This*

***I Don't Want to Do This***

It happened a long time ago  
But it still bothers him so.  
It happened every Friday night  
And the food was a frightening sight.

"I don't want to do this,  
I don't want to do this."  
He cried, oh, so...many times  
For surely this, this must be a crime.

"Please, Please, don't make me do this."

Blood sausage is what they called it.  
The very smell would made him sick.  
It was dark red, and full of blood.  
"Clean off your plate," she said.  
"You don't need taste buds."

"I don't want to do this,  
I don't want to do this."  
He cried, oh, so...many times  
For surely, this, this must be a crime.

"Please, Please, don't make me do this."

When he couldn't eat it, he got a paddle to the head.  
He faced Friday nights with so much dread.  
He choked it down, and it came right back up.  
Then, forced to his knees to eat what he just threw up.

Geno Clark

*I Don't Want to Do This*

"I don't want to do this,  
I don't want to do this."  
He cried, oh, so...many times.  
For surely, this, must be a crime.

"Please, Please, don't make me do this  
Please, Please, don't make me do this."



Geno Clark

*Betrayed Faith*

### **Betrayed Faith**

He didn't know what was going on.  
All he knew, it was oh...so wrong.  
Covered his eyes, when she dropped to her knees,  
As she took him, just as she pleased.

She betrayed her Faith, destroyed his as well.  
But he didn't know who he could tell.  
Would anyone believe that betrayal he was dealt?  
For he lost all...his Faith, that day as she knelt.

Swallowed up by her Veil, his Faith so betrayed.  
His innocence lost, his childhood delayed.  
His Faith in God went up in a flame.  
For how could he let her do this in His name?

She betrayed her Faith, and destroyed his as well.  
But he didn't know who he could tell.  
Would anyone believe that betrayal he was dealt?  
For he lost all...his Faith, that day as she knelt.

He said "Please, I am clean."  
She said "no, you need more scrubbing."  
Those days in the shower,  
Were more than just troubling.  
So, he covered his eyes, and let her have her way,  
It still haunts him, to this very day.

She betrayed her faith and destroyed his as well.  
But he didn't know who he could tell.  
Would anyone believe that betrayal he was dealt?  
For he lost all...his Faith, that day as she knelt.

## MICHAEL RYAN

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### ORPHAN

In my life I have survived many types of traumatic experiences. The worst of these occurred at St. Joseph's Orphanage. I suffered physical and sexual abuse there, at the hands of those one should be able to trust the most.

My first memory of the orphanage was when we were surrendered. I watched my sister being marched to another wing. My brother and I held one another's hands. We were told to follow the nun to the boys' dormitory on the other side of the building. We were given numbers, along with a pillow, sheet and blanket. My number was 25. I was placed on the little boys' side. My brother was number 35 and he was placed on the big boys' side. So, we were all separated from one other and alone. That was when I learned how to fear.

The Sisters of Providence, who ordered us around, mostly came from poor and uneducated homes in Canada. They had no special training. From many of them, the best you could hope for was casual indifference. The rest were as mean as a nest of vipers. The breaking of the simplest of rules meant punishment. They liked their little tortures.

Have you ever been made to kneel with a hard bean under each knee? It's not as much fun as it sounds. Five minutes feels like a lifetime. Fifteen minutes later and you don't think you'll ever be able to walk again. Another little pleasantry they enjoyed was forcing you to stand, holding your arms straight out from your sides, with a heavy book in each hand. A nun would eye her pocket-watch. You didn't want to drop the books before the time ran out. If you did, you'd get hit on the back with a teachers' blackboard pointer. You could receive these punishments for as little as failing bunk inspection, running on the stairs, or whispering in church. THAT was a biggie. Before St. Joseph's, I'd never been to church. So, I hadn't known that whispering was against the rules. The nuns were not only creative with their tortures, but with what they deemed a punishable offence. I lived, therefore, in a constate state of fear.

By the time I left the orphanage, my number had been changed to five. I never let the numbers they assigned me define who I am. I think somewhere in their minds that was their intention: to take the only thing we had left, our sense of self... our willpower. But I refused to surrender.

Michael Ryan

*The Chili Contest*

## **The Chili Contest**

As I was shopping for groceries one morning, I saw a flyer advertising a chili cookoff. Well, I said to myself, *I make a good bowl of red chili; why not give it a try, see how it goes?!* So, I filled out an entrance form and got a copy of the rule book to study.

The rules were fairly straightforward: cook your best pot of chili using proper sanitation procedures, and have it judged accordingly. What's so hard about that? There were four prizes: you could win, place, or show.

The night before the chili contest I gathered my Coleman stove, my awning, and all my spices and peppers as well as my secret ingredient! You know all recipes need a secret ingredient. The contest started at ten o'clock, I was ready and set up by nine.

When the whistle was blown to start the contest, I immediately began searing off my cubed tri-tip and hamburger mix with a little olive oil on the bottom of my stock pot. Once that was seared off, I added a couple quarts of beef stock and let it simmer until the beef was tender. The heat beating down on my awning added to the heat from my stove on my face was almost too much, but I came to put up a good showing and that's what I was going to do.

I added the remaining ingredients including my secret ingredient and just let the chili meld together. It was a beautiful thing! The aroma wafting off of the pot was indescribable. Finally, time was called, and the sponsors sent people to pick up bowls of chili for each of the judges.

The sponsors also sold tickets to individual people. One ticket got you a bowl of chili from a booth of your choice. The more tickets I received, the more votes I got. I was doing well; I was out of chili before they called time.

As they announced the winners, I kept hoping to hear my name. Third place! Nope. Second place! Nope. First place? No. Oh well it's been an amazing day. Wait, what's that? People's choice award! They call my name. That's enough to keep me going.

I still do chili cookoffs from time to time, but let's save some stories for another day... I will reveal to you my secret ingredient, though... unsweetened baker's chocolate!

DEBI ELLSWORTH

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**The Thought of You  
A Remembrance of Ronald Paul Gevry**



Debbie Summer of  
Love Ron 1985  
LAKE CONGRAMOND  
MASS

Debi Ellsworth

*The Thought of You*

Ronald Paul Gevry (a.k.a. Ronnie) was born on November 2, 1961. At the age of three, he was placed, along with me and our sister, at St. Joseph's Orphanage. He was to remain there for ten years.

Ronnie's life started out hard, with severe abuse inflicted at the hands of our mother. When he entered the orphanage, he was a frightened toddler. He needed love, hope and kindness and what he received there was just the opposite. It was easy to see the progression of my brother's pain and rage. Each year we were at St. Joseph's it grew.

Ronnie tried his hardest to make the best out of life. He was a good student and an excellent athlete. In the right circumstances and with gentle guidance he may have become a good man with morals and values, but that was not to be. Six months after we obtained our freedom from the hellhole of St. Joseph's, Ronnie was placed in a boys' juvenile detention center.

If you followed the slits on his arms you would get an idea of the suffering that he held inside. Cuts so close together they resembled burn marks rather than razor slits. When I was a child, it was hard for me to fathom why he cut and lied and stole and chased me around with bad intent, but I understand now. He lived what he learned.

When Ronnie was 18, he met a girl. She was wonderful and seemed to be just what he needed. They married and had a daughter. It did not take long for his wife to realize she had made a huge mistake, when Ronnie went to jail for the hundredth time. After he was released, he went home to her family. They tried to make it work and in between tries a son was born. The boy was named Ronnie Jr.

After the last separation from his wife, Ronnie drifted from place to place, not knowing where to land. He tried to convince me to allow him into my house. But at this point I had a young daughter to protect. There was no way that my brother was going to get near her. He drifted off to California and that was the last I heard from him until the coroner called.

Debi Ellsworth

*The Thought of You*

My brother passed away at the age of 34, in some halfway house in God knows where, California. I didn't believe the coroner until he described the cuts down Ronnie's arms. At that point there was no denying it was him. My heart broke and I cried for days.

Ronnie was a victim in the purest sense. He sustained abuse at the hands of my mother, the nuns, the priests and a system that was there to protect children.

Today, I have forgiven my brother for the pain he redirected towards me. But I will never forgive the nuns and priests who inflicted so much abuse upon him that he broke. In the end, Ronnie was just an empty shell, living in his own hell. May the Lord hold him forever in his arms and may my brother rest in peace.



---

Cheri, ten, Ronnie, seven, Debi, six

Debi Ellsworth

Crowbar

**Crowbar**

Crowbar, Crowbar  
come pry this out  
there's something in my gut  
and I need help  
so many methods, I've tried in despair  
chatted with many who pretended to care  
I've sat for hours  
with my fingers just right  
I've prayed to God  
well into the night  
yet still it's stuck  
this feeling I've got  
that I'm just not right  
I'm just not right

Crowbar, Crowbar  
you're iron strong  
with your strength, I can't go wrong  
I am useless in this fight  
weak and trembling, I have no might

Crowbar, Crowbar  
use your steel  
dig into the dirt  
expose how I feel  
each day is a struggle  
the demons hover near  
stealing from my life all that I hold dear

Debi Ellsworth

*Crowbar*

Crowbar, Crowbar  
forget what I say  
I will seek a different way  
because I know  
as I grow old  
that each day is a day I can be free  
if I drop the rocks they loaded on me



Debi Ellsworth

*This Sister, This Snake*

**This Sister, This Snake**

Perched upon a wooden pew  
well within my little view  
sat a snake  
tongue lashing its warning  
eyes scanning  
narrow pupils quickly moving  
to-and-fro.

Draped in black and white  
she kept her prey within her sight  
and waited, spring loaded.  
When would she strike?

I peered around the corner  
just to have another look  
that's when I heard the rattle  
that's when my body shook.

Poisonous venom  
ruptured my skin  
millions of tears I held deep within  
but the snake, she grinned  
joyously recording another win

slithered back, a neat little ball  
as if she'd never struck at all.  
But I felt the pain.  
It has yet to wain.

Debi Ellsworth

*This Sister, This Snake*

Jesus, Jesus on the wall  
please save me  
from this evil woman  
who heard your call

The cross that hung on a collared neck  
the one that swung with every step  
did it not remind her  
of her choice  
to walk with the Lord  
to be His voice?

Still her French tongue thrashed  
and her heavy hand bashed  
until I came to believe that  
I was evil  
I was mean.

In the darkness of those days  
she tried her hardest  
to have her way  
to break me down, body and soul  
to make me half not whole.

Instead I chose to seek the light  
to find life's pleasures and its delights.  
I smile when I want to cry.  
I pray to the Lord with all my might.

Debi Ellsworth

*This Sister, This Snake*

I thank Him every day  
that I did not crumble  
I did not break  
beneath the sinister hand of  
this sister  
this snake.

Debi Ellsworth

*Mystery of the Human Being*

### **Mystery of the Human Being**

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us be glad and rejoice in it.

The birds feel no need to recite these verses, for upon the branches they sit and sing to the early morning sun as the dew evaporates from the grass. The world goes around in such a regular way. Each day seems to duplicate the next but in the tiny details, things change. From tiny they become big, huge even, and not a notice is taken until it is just too plain to see.

Do the birds notice their aging as they fly from tree to fence post, to nest? Do they distinguish one year from the next? Why has God saddled humans with the knowledge of existence? It's a wonder to watch nature and in turn to watch humans as they interact within it. Why the anger, the sadness, the need to constantly be at odds with one another and the natural world? Did God not place peace into the heart of man? It is so easy to conjure up feelings of envy, hatred, wishes for revenge. Yet, how far we must dig to find contentment, kindness and understanding for our fellow man.

Sacred temples and ancient cathedrals seem to hold the blessing in a bubble. As if every human being that ever laid a brick, painted a wall, placed a candle or held another's hand in prayer had added a special kind of oxygen. An atmosphere in which the next visitor could breathe and find peace. Could the entire earth be a temple?

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#### ON REVISION: AN INTERVIEW ABOUT PROCESS WITH DEBI ELLSWORTH

Q: Can you talk a little bit about the process of developing and revising “This Sister, This Snake?”

A: I liked the way this grew through nine revisions. One of the things we learned was that we should save every draft. And I found that very useful. I would have a new idea or find a new direction. Then I’d read through my previous drafts. The first draft was very tight.

Q: I remember your saying that the draft was *taut*. I found that quality a powerful one in relation to the occasion of the poem. Can you describe what you mean by the poem being *very tight*?

A: There were sections I could expand, and I’d work with one section at a time, changing a couple of words here and there. That became Draft II. It was almost like hopscotch.

Q: An Interesting image for the revision process! I notice that you changed the end a lot.

A: When I got to the end, I was having a problem with how hurried it felt. I realized that I’d rushed through rather than diving into it. So, I talked to my husband and he said, “Why don’t you make it a victorious ending...leave the poem on a high?” I sat with what he’d said for a while, two days. Then I just kept making more and more and more revisions. The process was amazing. Like when you write a story and you don’t know where the characters came from. It’s as if they’ve come out of the air. I knew the ending had to be victorious, that it somehow had to say, “I’m not going to let them win.” It was cool to watch. Like watching a flower.

--Debi Ellsworth and Carol Adinolfi in conversation

KATELIN HOFFMAN

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### The Rock Painting and Inscription



Rock Painting, Katelin Hoffman

### Rock Inscription

*In God's world, everyone has a place and is valued. Children were not meant to be hurt, regardless of whether they have families to love and protect them. I wish that the Sisters of Providence and the Catholic Charities had known this. Maybe some of the pain and suffering that occurred so needlessly and senselessly wouldn't have happened. What child can understand the value of her own life when those who claim to represent God hurt her so viciously, sometimes without even breaking a rule? How can nuns and priests taunt innocent children with such intensity and to such an extreme that they take away those children's dignity, self-esteem, and perhaps even their desire to continue to live? To whom could those children turn if the only adults in their lives acted as if it were God's will that they be raped, molested, beaten, and humiliated? This is the story of the lives of the children at St. Joseph's Orphanage/Child Center.*

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## THE ROCK PROJECT: TALKING ABOUT PROCESS, WITH KATELIN HOFFMAN

C: How did the rock paintings and inscriptions come about?

K: I did the writing first. I believe it was in 1996. Former children of St. Joseph's Debbie, Dane and Donna Cote went for a tour of the orphanage. As they walked out behind the building to where the beach was, they spotted a seven-foot marble slab. Donna took out a magic marker, and at the very top, she wrote down their names and the numbers they'd been assigned while in the orphanage. She also wrote *In God We Trusted*. This was thirty years later for them, and twenty-four for me.

Debbie asked if I could write something on the rock as well. So, one day, I visited the site and walked down to the rock to see what they'd written. Underneath their words, I started writing. I also had only a magic marker at the time.

C: You've said you have a lot of photos of the rock in various stages of your artwork. How did your documentation of the project begin?

K: I took a picture of what I'd written so that I could show it to Debbie. She really liked it, and she said it should be the prologue of the book she wanted me to write. Later that summer, I returned to the rock. It was a private beach, all quiet, so, I thought, *Well how about I draw a picture of the orphanage and a few figures, of Debbie, Dane and Donna?*

C: It's so moving and inspiring to hear about your process. How did the other images come to life?

K: I also painted a picture of the orphanage. Then I made a tiny self-portrait at the end of the first piece. I kept going back. I added the poem and the picture of an angel... I stuck the kids below the angel... Finally, I decided to paint the whole rock. At the end of the angel poem, I painted a tiny figure of myself after I tried to kill myself.

C: What did it feel like to paint that?

K: It was empowering. Because it was my truth. It sums it all up.

--Katelin Hoffman and Carol Adinolfi in conversation

Carol Adinolfi

### **The Writer's Notebook as a Tool for Generating Material**

Think of the Writer's Notebook as a place where you can collect all different types of writing. Some examples:

- pieces of writing by writers who you admire and whose writing inspires you.
- dreams
- letters you will never send
- ideas
- hopes
- ticket stubs from movies, train-rides, etc.
- photographs
- sketches
- observations
- journal entries

The Writer's Notebook is a kind of living reminder that your writing can take many forms. It is a kind of container where you can collect:

- fragments of writing of any size
- writing that may (or may not be) seeds, starting places, for larger pieces you can develop



Carol Adinolfi

### **The Writer's Notebook Experiment #1: Moments/Memory Fragments**

#### **PART ONE:**

- Put on some music that you love, preferably instrumental.
- Make a list of short memories, whatever comes to mind: joyous, difficult, recent (including yesterday!), or memories from a few years ago, or from many years ago.
- *Short* is the operative word: a moment, an afternoon, a breakfast, walking your dog, etc.
- Try not to think too hard, or on any one aspect of your life. Just see what comes to mind. Allow yourself to be surprised.
- Write without stopping, preferably longhand. Just short descriptions, a few words, for each memory.

#### **PART TWO:**

- Once you've collected some memories, anywhere from 5 or 6 or more, look over what you've got, and work on what we'll call memory fragments.
- These fragments can be of any length: a few words, a sentence, a paragraph.
- The idea of this experiment is that down the line these may (or may not be) developed.
- It's best to aim here not to create a perfect piece of writing; you are simply collecting memories.
- The beauty of this exercise is that it allows you to linger on a single moment and bring it to life.

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## THE S.J.R.J.I. WRITERS' GROUP

### **Collaborative Call and Response Writing Experiment**

Our aim in this experiment was to use a call and response as a way into generating some writing. This can be an energy-filled way to begin to look at revision and editing. By cutting the “call” sections of the call and response, we were able to think about non-essential and essential parts of the first draft, which was spoken. And to craft that spoken word into writing.

### **Draft I/Part I/Spoken**

C: With my writing I would like to...

R: ...bring attention to the issues that we're working with...i think the biggest issue is that people don't believe... It's just too hard for people to believe...instead of “our story”...we should call this “our truths”

C: With my writing I would like to...

R: ...express my desires and feelings about things that are important to me...such as coming to terms with my past...

C: With my writing I would like to...

R:...heal my wounded heart

C: With my writing I would like to...

R: ...help my children to have an understanding of who i am and who i was and why i am the way i am

C: With my writing I would like to...

... help people not only envision but also feel what it was like to be at the orphanage

**PART II/Spoken**

C: With my writing I have already begun to...

R: ... heal

C: With my writing I have already begun to...

R: ... learn so much about myself

C: With my writing I have already begun to...

R: ... realize how deep the damage is done

C: With my writing I have already begun to...

... understand who i am and accept my idiosyncrasies...

**Draft II: Cutting Non-Essential Words, Bringing Out What is Essential****OUR WRITING**

to bring attention to the issues that we're working with  
 to express our desires and feelings about what's important to us  
 to come to terms with the past  
 to heal our wounded hearts  
 to give our children an understanding  
 of who we are and who we were  
 and why we are the way we are  
 to help people not only envision  
 but also feel  
 what it was like to be at the orphanage

**BEGINNING**

I have already begun to heal.  
 I have learned so much about myself.  
 I have realized how deep the damage is that has been done.  
 I have come to accept my idiosyncrasies.  
 I have come to understand who I am.