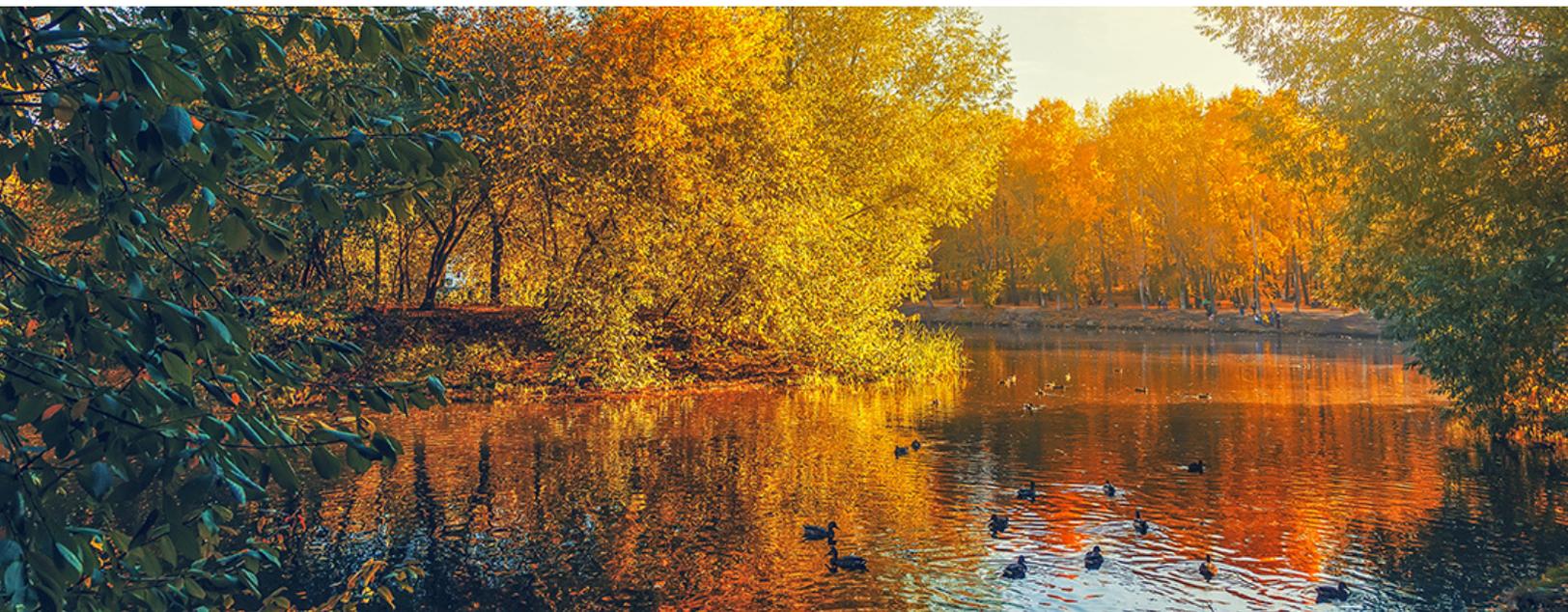


HIDDEN RIVER

Long Live the Tribe of Fatherless Girls meets The Problem With Everything meets This Is The Night Our House Will Catch Fire for women and members of the LGBTQ community.

BY MICHELLE POLLINO



OVERVIEW

Hidden River examines the current divide in the United States through one woman's heartbreaking journey from the streets of Philadelphia to the biggest and most polarizing newsrooms in the country.

This is a story of freedom and love found in the birthplace of our nation. A story of coming out and looking in, *Hidden River* is about searching for oneself in a lifetime of love and loss, in trauma and seeking redemption. For those who have struggled with coming to terms with their greatest fears and got lost looking for the answers. It's the journey of one woman's search for herself in others and finding parts of her soul she left behind. Readers will embark on an exploration of brokenness, fortitude, and repair that will reveal life's greatest gift of all, the love that became the trauma that was turned back into love.

THE FRACTURING IS NECESSARY

Leaving her destroyed me because I loved her so much. Leaving was not who I was. I was true and dedicated, persistent. Here, I was hiding, cheating, immobile, stuck and so the record skipped. I was a coward. But my entire being said to go. And so I did.

Every day, Michelle Pollino talks to millions of listeners on SiriusXM Headlines News, reporting on the entertainment industry for Fox News. But they have never heard her like this before. In her own unique, raw, and vulnerable voice, Michelle takes readers on an intimate journey, one that begins after launching her career in radio in San Diego, when she decides to move back to her hometown of Philadelphia. It's here that she hopes to find her roots and connect with a father she hardly knew. However, her love for her city is soon eclipsed by her newfound love for a woman who changes the very timbre of her being and sets her off in a new direction. But, Michelle's past emerges and changes the fate of their love story, setting her off on uncharted waters where she nearly drowns.

TO FIND THE WHY

There is a knowing in one's being, just below the surface, that appears unreachable. Until that thing that happens, that is so tragic that it makes you search your entire life for the answer. When you finally say it out loud it hurls you into space. It's called the truth.

We all know the stories of our souls even before they are told. And all will rise when needed.

Two decades later, the country is fractured, by the very family she called home for years, the media. Following a series of events, both historical and by happenstance, she would meet up with this women's friend at a Journalism conference. A simple text exchange causes the trauma to rise to the surface.



Then, a global pandemic shuttered the nation's doors. Separation, indignation, loneliness. As fires raged just outside, a phantasmagoria of online reckoning and internal ciphering pushes the voice hidden inside Michelle to the surface. Trying to find out who she is, what her values are, her morality, she realizes she must tell the story that she feared. One she had held inside her for decades, and finally address the wounds like rutilated quartz buried deep in her cells.

With pen to paper and newfound freedom on the page, it unleashes within her an unrelenting drive to repair herself, and the country, now ripped at the seams, by the very media she has been a part of for decades. Here she finds the truth of her soul's purpose and the gift hidden below the surface, that was there all this time.

Hidden River addresses that we are living through extraordinary times and it is getting harder to navigate what is fact and fiction, within ourselves.

WHO TO TRUST

The grand institutions that we've come to rely on are now splintering apart. Media, Journalism, education, banking, our medical institutions, and our government. Our entire society has been split in half. If we are to move forward we cannot keep our backs turned in separate huddles. We must turn towards each other in conversation. We must reflect and debate, not mandate and expect people to goose-step in line.

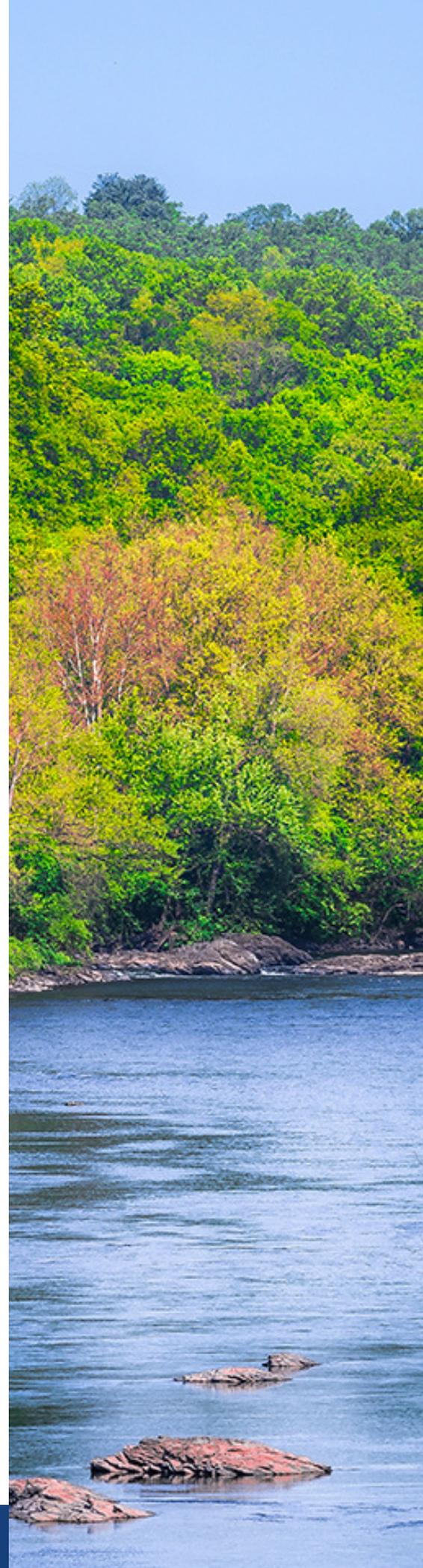
Fracturing has a purpose; it exposes where we need to go and grow.

Michelle was on the front lines of this revolution and watched as voices emerged and were forcibly submerged. She realizes she is again caught in that familiar childhood tunnel as she toggled between two different worlds. Trying to find out who she was in a culture that became demanding, and vicious. She was standing in the eye of the storm. Repeating patterns. Reporting on the #MeToo movement, while also knowing she was one of its victims. Michelle watched her profession decline and a class war emerge. Forcing her past up once again, for an internal reckoning. She had to again search for the truth hidden in the cracks of the lips of the people and the walls of institutions she once cherished. All as freedom slowly slipped through stumbling thumbs. Michelle realized that there is only one way to find it, by finding her courage, and her true voice, the one buried deep within.

This is the only journey that matters.

TAKE THE JOURNEY

The river forgives when the fallen tree changes its course. Because it understands accidents don't happen for unknown reasons, they happen and change its path. Slowly over time it forges a new path because the river understands its purpose on earth. It's the source of connection, of life itself and somewhere along this new path, new bridges will be constructed, and new seeds planted.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Michelle Pollino is an entertainment reporter for Fox News and SiriusXM Fox News Headlines Radio. Michelle grew up in the heart of Philadelphia.

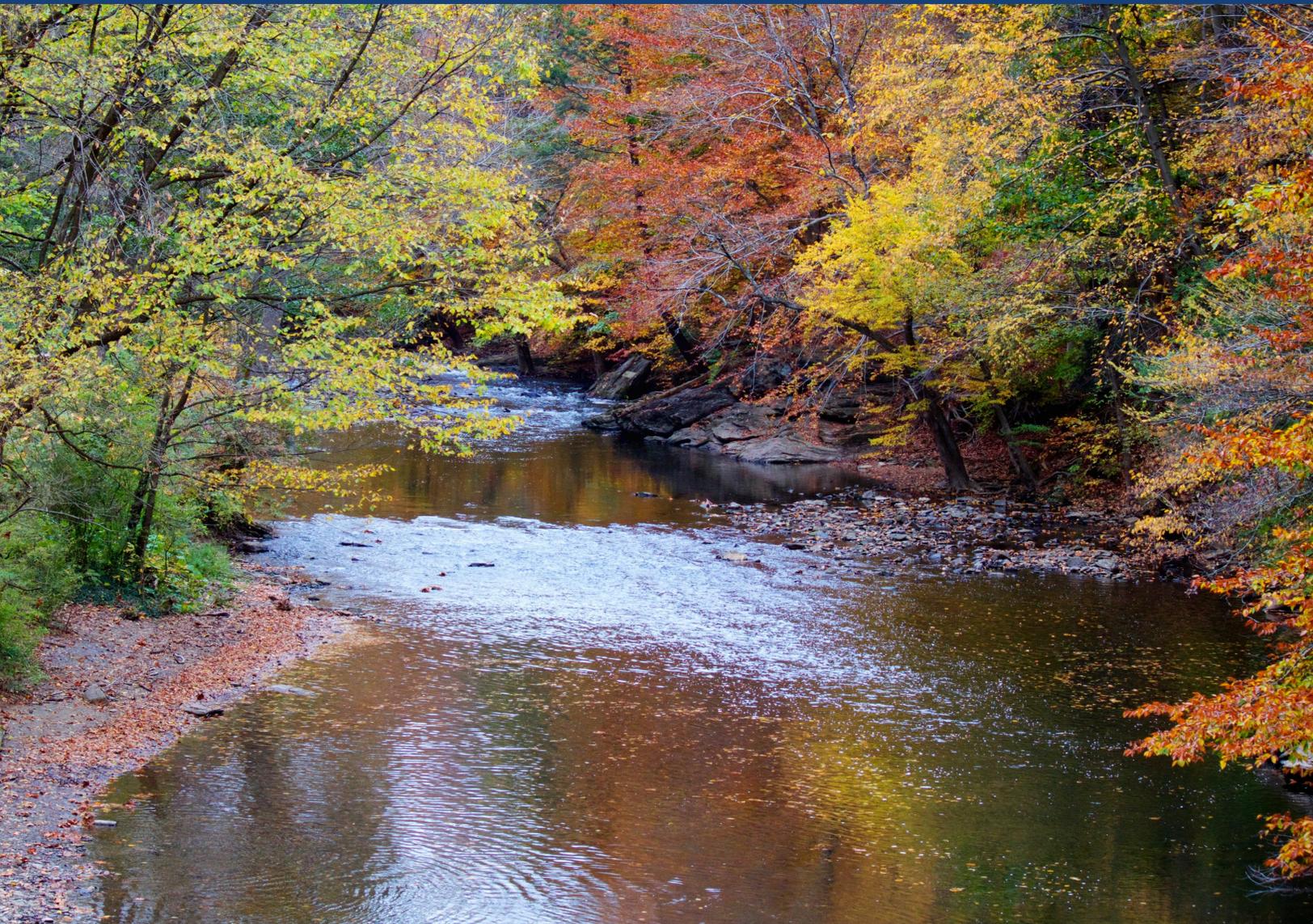
She launched her broadcast career while attending San Diego State University when she got an internship, which led to a job as a traffic reporter. After a year on the air and a near-death experience from an emergency landing in the middle of the I-15 freeway, her hometown of Philadelphia beckoned. There her life as a radio news reporter was born at CBS and NPR. As her broadcast career expanded, she anchored weekend news at NBC's WGAL-TV.

Finding more interest in stories of marginalized voices, Michelle ventured behind the camera to produce for WYBE TV Philadelphia, where she earned an Emmy nomination. Not stopping there, she jumped into reality television, producing and directing more than 250 episodes of both network and cable reality television for NBC, Showtime, TLC, Fox, CBS, A&E, Logo and IFC. Successful shows included Trading Spaces, Ambush Makeover, Searching For and Selling Spelling Mansion.

In the mid 2000's, Michelle plunged into filmmaking by directing and producing. She produced three features, including G.B.F starring Megan Mullally and Natasha Lyonne and the indie family feature Mayor Cupcake, starring Lea Thompson and Judd Nelson.

In 2013, Michelle landed at Fox News, where she combined her love of the entertainment industry and news and is now a critic and entertainment reporter for FOX radio and writes for FOX.com. In her free time she has written and directed three award winning short films as well as several poems and essays.

THE MARKET



HIDDEN RIVER

HIDDEN RIVER

The title will sit very comfortably on the shelves alongside:

Long Live the Tribe of Fatherless Girls by T Kira Madden

(Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019)

A raw and redemptive memoir is about coming of age and reckoning with desire as a queer, biracial teenager amidst the fierce contradictions of Boca Raton, Florida.

Stranger Care: A Memoir of Loving What Isn't Ours by Sarah Sentilles

(Random House, 2021)

The moving story of what one woman learned from fostering a newborn—about injustice, about making mistakes, about how to better love and protect people beyond our immediate kin.

This Is The Night Our House Will Catch Fire: A Memoir by Nick Flynn

(W.W. Norton, 2020)

A searing memoir from critically acclaimed author Nick Flynn, on how childhood spills into parenthood.

The Problem With Everything: My Journey Through The New Culture Wars by Meghan Daum

(Gallery Books, 2019)

In this gripping work, Meghan examines our country's most intractable problems with clear-eyed honesty instead of exaggerated outrage. With passion, humor, and personal reflection, she tries to make sense of the current landscape—from Donald Trump's presidency to the #MeToo movement and beyond.

PROMOTION & MARKETING



CONNECTIONS

In Hidden River, readers will come to understand how a single heartbreak reveals the patriarchal patterns that run deep in the soul and how love can build a bridge to connect the great divide inside oneself and perhaps those around us.

This book also offers particular relevance for women and members of the LGBTQ community and provides an honest and beautiful reflection of Michelle's life and career as a journalist.

Michelle has:

- Connections to a vast amount of publications across all forms of media: online and print, as well as TV, radio, and in the film industry. They include The New York Post, Substack, and Quillette. Several TV, podcasts, and radio shows including local coverage in Philadelphia as well as FOX, CBS, PBS, and NPR are ready to discuss the book and write about Michelle.
- Currently, there are 11.5 million Americans that identify as LGBT — As a current member of the National LGBT Journalist association, Pollino has exclusive access to journalists and reporters that specifically target these numbers.
- The coverage here alone looks to see sales of up to 80-100 thousand books.
- She is also a member of FAIR (Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism), which has a large contingent of intellectuals, commentators, journalists and authors where she can promote the book. 100 chapters in the US and Canada. 30,000 members, some with millions of social media followers. Among them Journalist Megyn Kelly and Bari Weiss.
- A list of celebrities and noteworthy friends who would be willing to help promote the book include:

Brett Easton Ellis; Marianne Williamson; Meghan Daum; Jill Whelan; Author Alice Dark, Author Sarah Sentilles, Diana Nyad, Russell Brand; Lisa Vanderpump; Cat Cora; Rose McGowan; Sharon Stone, Adam and Tamara Housley

Michelle is a seasoned speaker who has spoken at various women's conferences and seminars. She has hosted her own podcast, Pure Pollino, and is still actively live on the air reporting on entertainment news as well as covering movies, music, television, and awards shows such as The Academy Awards, Grammys, and Emmys.

Additionally, Michelle is actively working on producing her fourth feature film, Miriam, alongside Kevin Sorbo. Based on the Old Testament, Miriam tells the story of the women of the Exodus through the unheralded sister of Moses. The project is currently in development with actress and director Shari Rigby attached to direct.



PRESS & INTERVIEWS

Philadelphia

Local Lesbian Filmmaker Works With Oprah



Philly Filmmaker Woos Holly Bigs, But She Needs Your Help



Query: The Fox News Reporter Answers 20 Gay Questions

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HIDDEN RIVER

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SYNOPSIS

HIDDEN RIVER

Michelle Pollino had finally found her calling as a radio reporter. It's the early 1990's and she's just moved back home to Philadelphia from San Diego, after a short stint at San Diego State University. When she returns home, she dates a guy named **Todd** and starts building and repairing a fraught relationship with her father, **Jack**, a man she never knew as a child. Michelle feels like the pieces of her life are falling into place and she's moving in a good direction. But, inside Michelle knows there is something missing. That is, until she meets **June**.

Working at the radio station on a weekend shift, June, the station's promotion director, also happens to stop by to finish up some paperwork. Michelle feels something extraordinary in her presence. She immediately returns home to Todd and breaks up with him on the spot. The following Wednesday, during a station event, Michelle and June end up at Michelle's apartment. June kisses Michelle and ends up staying the night. The two embark on a whirlwind love affair, while both continue dating other men. The two fall deeply in love with one another but June realizes she cannot keep up this charade and comes out to all her friends. Michelle though can't bring herself to do the same. Her mother denies her gayness and she doesn't even broach her father, who is now overwhelmed by his three teenage sons. Michelle is more and more uncomfortable in the closet, and she vows to seek freedom. She feels she has no choice but to start to find other friends who are gay, to find an outside support system. But this proves to be a fatal mistake.

Michelle recounts her childhood filled with violence and betrayal. In the late 60's and 70's, there was political and social upheaval. Her mother catches her father cheating and leaves him. As a three-year-old, Michelle's world exploded, and she will not see her father again for several years. When she does see him again, he is distant and married to **Stella Marie**, who emotionally tortures Michelle at every turn.

After years of being without kids or responsibility, Michelle's father and stepmom have triplets Jack, whom Michelle believes is a car salesman eventually confesses that he sells weed. Michelle realizes drugs are the main source of her father's income. Jack convinces Michelle to take thousands of dollars to his drug connection in Mexico when she goes to visit her mother who moved to San Diego. Both Jack and Stella Marie are falling into a pill habit, Xanax mostly. She watches as Stellamarie slips deeper into madness, verbally abusing the three boys and Michelle.

Her brothers, **The triplets** are now teenagers and start to fall into drugs, like oxy's and heroin to avoid their abusive household. They are also given money by their parents without having to earn it. The boys are not the only self-destructive siblings in the family. Michelle is madly in love with June but after three years, something in her is pushing her out the door. There is unsteadiness in her, a longing in her soul that she must answer, but she doesn't understand what that is. Michelle cheats on June and leaves her.

June immediately finds someone else to love, a woman named **Brenda**, and Michelle falls apart. She begs her to return, but June turns her back on her, and Michelle is shattered. She tries to kill herself and she fails. She realizes that she must move on and begins a relationship with **Deb**, the woman with whom she cheated on June. Michelle landed in the newsroom in the mid-'90s. She begins her career as a news reporter, working for both CBS and NPR. Michelle starts therapy but nothing seems to live inside her any longer. She pushes the love she had for June deep inside her and pretends everything is okay on the outside. She comes out to everyone. Soon though, betrayal again, Deb cheats on her and she leaves.

She meets **Marissa**, looking for redemption and love begins anew. Meanwhile, her father and Stellamarie's lives continue to fall apart as the boys grow into street thugs, ravaged by poor education, drugs, and lack of discipline. Her brothers are now selling oxy and heroin on the streets. Michael is doing steroids and goes from a skinny kid to Schwarzenegger overnight. He is shot by police after being caught in a drug sting but survives. June returns to Michelle's life, however, she remains with Brenda. They embark on a promised friendship but Michelle pushes her love for her deep within, and it is uncomfortable for everyone. She knows that this is not what their relationship was meant to be.

Marisa cheats on Michelle a second time, so she kicks her out. At this point, Michelle is broke and no longer working in radio or news. She is now a reality show producer but the work is few and far between. One day, she runs into Brenda at a wildlife rehab center. She acknowledges what she knew all along the two will be together forever in this lifetime. She also acknowledges the only reason she stayed in Philadelphia is for June and she must accept that she left her for a reason. She puts her house up for sale and takes off for Los Angeles, in search of the reason.

In Los Angeles, Michelle starts to work on a book trying to understand why she left June; she knows this will reveal her life's work. She meets **Val** at an OUT magazine party at the W Hotel in Hollywood and they embark on a relationship. She is still unemployed and without healthcare. Michelle starts a podcast on her own and soon starts looking for radio jobs. As fate would have it, she winds up back in a newsroom as an entertainment reporter at FOX news, during the most volatile political period in our nation's history—in one of the most hated newsrooms in the country, in one of the most liberal cities.

Michelle toggles between working at FOX and the liberal world she's been entrenched in most of her life, constantly searching for a balance between the two. As the world erupts in chaos and the media transforms, she starts to question who she is and what she believes. Then, her cousin Carmen calls to tell her that her father died. She never once heard from her brothers or her stepmother and decides to not return to Philadelphia for his funeral.

With the ascent of Donald Trump, the ground splits open, and the country's collective trauma fractures. Michelle innately connects this to her childhood and the loss of June. After four years at FOX, Michelle realizes that they are not the evil empire she was told it was. She begins to understand the damage the mainstream media is doing and has done, and starts to dig deep into her own soul to once again search for the reasons she left June. She goes to New Orleans for a gay journalist conference and runs into June's friend, **Carol**. They meet for drinks. June texts Carol as soon as they sit down, which prompts Carol to ask Michelle if she would like to be friends with June. Michelle says "of course, she is the love of her life" which causes a fracturing of her soul and her feelings are forced to the surface. Suddenly she is reliving the trauma of the loss. Something she has pushed down, deep into the belly of the beast. Carol and June text back and forth for two hours while Michelle pretends not to care. Carol eventually tells Michelle that June says, "tell her I'm living my best life."

This forces Michelle to address the trauma that was always there just below the surface.

Michelle realizes the love and loss of June was exactly what she needed for her to crack open. The reason she kept running farther away and why June turned her back on her was not because they didn't love one another it was because they did. Michelle knew her journey was to be here in California and June's back in Philadelphia beside Brenda. Though they had to separate to learn different lessons in this lifetime they would always remain tied to the love they once had. The love that gave them the freedom to become who they were.

Michelle realized It was the love that she had inside her, hidden that pushed her forward to finding the truth. That is the journey that we are all on, every day looking for the truth in our world and the only way to get there is through conversation and self-reflection. This is her journey and in accepting the hero's journey and all that came in-between she has come home to herself and found that love, when true, always remains

MANUSCRIPT

HIDDEN RIVER

Philadelphia

I have two families that separated shortly after my birth. They were all born in Philadelphia. It's a complicated city filled with complex people. It's where the declaration of independence was signed. It's also where Gary Heidnick lived. Heidnick kidnapped women, tortured and murdered them in his rowhome basement. I was 12 years old in 1976. I wore my Bi-centennial red white and blue striped sweat socks. The tri-colored stripes fell right below my knee and partially covered a rough scab that traveled up to the middle of my thigh. At night I would run my fingers up and down the 12-inch scab. I would press on its edges. I liked to feel the sting and would watch as the blood seeped out the corners, first the clear liquid, then the dark stuff. That's when I stopped, and stared at the dark stuff, the stuff that emerges from below the surface.

My dad got me a mini-bike that year, a red Yamaha 70, I liked red. I took a spill that stopped cars mid-stride. Strangers flung open doors hurtling forward to help. The spill caused the 12-inch cut. The scab looked like a map in science class, but not green, it was dark, rusted red, and parts of it were close to black. The blood smelled like my bike's fenders. It was familiar, that smell. Philadelphia was a big deal that year. Our Mayor was Frank Rizzo. He was a hero to my dad's side of the family because he was Italian. That seemed to be the only reason. My dad's skinny tanned legs floated in his shorts. Sinewy muscles were covered by tiny coarse curls of jet-black hair. He had a leg tattoo of a piece of lightning, with the letters TCB, taking care of business. It seemed to me that my dad moved with the rhythm of the city. If he got a parking ticket, he put it in his glove compartment, swallowed by his metal companion. He got a speeding ticket, no problem, he'd give it to his lawyer Lou Shapiro, he'll take care of it. He parked on sidewalks and double-parked in front of small brick row houses and would walk out with wads of rolled-up cash, stuffing it into his loose pockets, shorts billowed, balls grabbed. My father loved his city. And make no mistake it was his. Pigeons flew out his way, doors opened for him.

"You need anything, you get in any kind of trouble, Chelle, you tell me I'll take care of it," he said to me. I stared. This is what I did.

It was half true. His wife StellaMarie called me clear-headed, because I never said much, but watched everything. Stella Marie was like the drip of a leaky faucet in a hollow tin barrel.

Constant.

Eventually, all that swam in her head came out of her red-stained mouth.

"Your mother's a real winner, what's wrong with her?" Looked directly at me sizing up my tiny body.

"Where does she buy your clothes? You look like a boy." If my father Jack was nearby, he swung his hand hard across her face.

She would shriek, "What did I say, Jack?" He never answered her, just snarled like an animal.

It was as if I was watching his favorite black and white comedies Abbott and Costello, or the Three Stooges. It was a phantasmagoria of comedy and horror. Smack!

"Keep your mouth shut!" Particles of spit and flesh flew. Her head cut to the side, frosted blonde hair parted in the middle with dark roots bounced, eyes slanted, cowering. Like pages from a comic book. The particles of spit settled on my shoulders. I never flinched but kept my head just looking forward or down at my favorite pair of light blue Nike's. I liked blue too. I read once that my birthstone was aquamarine, like the sea. The house became quiet, but it didn't last long, the drip started again, in pieces. Until my dad had to leave. That's what he did.

"Come on, Chelle," he said, "Let's get away from this creep." I half liked that statement, but I knew I shouldn't. Leaving stopped the drip.

My father roamed the streets of Philadelphia, stalking his prey, blonde Farrah Fawcett-looking women, speaking through horns and hair flips. The morse code mating call of men in South Philadelphia.

Sometimes he would take me with him.

"She's your cousin," he said after the honk when he caught me looking at him. He smiled. He was telling me something, who he was and I heard it loud and clear, that was the only way we spoke to one another.

I watched for everything just below the surface, it told me what was real.

The city is beautiful in the fall with its glittering skyscrapers bouncing light from the sky into its dark alleys that become arteries of dirty water to your heart. Along the banks of the Schuylkill river, sunlit rows of gold and auburn Hawthorne, Sycamore and Beech trees, reflect in the water. I loved that river with its beautiful folds of cut silk glass rushing towards the heart center, like some Picasso painting. Along the banks, the sides of the river told you what time of year it was, muddy and brown in winter. In summer turtles soaked in green algae, lay on broken tree limbs sunning. The Mallards and Swans that occupied the top, cut through the algae-filled banks spotted with plastic water bottles and flattened paper cups as you made it closer to the city. Shad and perch below. Further west the marsh and overgrown foliage made it impossible to reach. In some parts you never knew when the marsh ended and the river began. Like me and the city. You walk too close you could easily be swallowed up, never to be seen again. The original inhabitants of the Schuylkill were The Leni Lenape. The Lenape called the river the Ganshowahanna, which loosely translated in one of the native Algonquian languages to hideout creek. The Dutch came in and renamed the river Schuylkill meaning hidden river.

That river carried life and death. In the early 90s that river carried me back from a four-year stay in San Diego for a college degree I never finished, to Philadelphia.

Home. This must be the place.

All The Feels

I had recently turned 31, the hair was slightly big, the jeans were a bit torn, vests and t-shirts were the new thing. We all looked like we walked out of the movie Singles. I had been with Todd for two and a half years now. Most of my friends were getting married. I wasn't as ready as they were. That much was made clear after an event at work. I had been noticing a new coworker, an almost imperceptible pull towards her. It had been coming for weeks. A simple rose was placed on her desk. A seed planted, at first, subtle.

But then, something.

I was working mornings doing news and traffic at a radio station, and I had to do one weekend shift on Sunday afternoons. The radio station on the weekends; when nobody was there, all alone, talking to thousands upon thousands of people in my city was like sitting on the edge of a cliff at sunset. It was mid-July, and on this Sunday, I came out of the studio and June was in the corridor.

"Is there a station event today?"

"I am just wrapping up loose-ends from yesterday." She was the Promotions director.

"You got some sun, girly," she said.

"Way too much sun, no sunscreen, a stupid move," I said. Which prompted me to lift-up the back of my shirt to show her the burn marks.

"Ouch. I should get some cream for you," she offered. I laughed. "I'm good," I said.

The song was ending and I ran back into the studio. About five minutes later, she returned with cream. She moved closer to me than ever before, inches from my face. Corpuscles began their dance. Like fish started swimming in my bloodstream.

"Here, use this," she said. "I had a little tube in my desk. It'll help." She handed me the small green and white tube and smiled. That night I got home and told Todd.

"I have feelings for a woman I want to explore," I said.

"Go ahead," he said. "I'll be right here, watching."

"No," I said. "That's not what I mean. I ended my relationship with Todd that night."

That Wednesday night after work at an event for our radio station, June and I ended up heading back to my apartment. We drank a Russian River Valley Sonoma Cutrer. We laughed and talked. Then it was late. She looked at me.

"You need to go to bed."

She was right. I had to be at the studio at 4:30 to write the news and create content with my co-host Chris. It was 10pm. I went into my bedroom, and she followed.

"Let me tuck you in," she said.

She sat on my bedside and smiled. She lifted the sheets across my chest. Her arms on either side of my body. I looked in her eyes, propped my torso up on my elbows and smiled.

"You want to kiss me don't you," I said.

"Yes, yes I do," she said.

We looked at each other for a moment and then it was effortless. We kissed. We took off our clothes as if we had studied ballet most of our lives. As if we were swans along the river. But then she stopped, something was wrong.

Like a school-crossing guard she-held up her hand in a stop motion and moved to the light to turn it off. I watched her movements.

Her hands, thin fingered and elegant, an extension of her body that told the air gently here I come, and the air bowed.

"No!" I said and jumped up, both of us almost naked. I turned the light back on. Staring at her, "I want to look at you." She looked at me, smiled hesitatingly. Turning her head, her chin a crescent moon.

"Okay, I said, I'll dim it, a little." Our clothes were off, and then we heard it.

Click, click, click. Todd still had the key.

"Fuck. Shit. Stay there don't you move," I said to June.

"I should go," she said.

"No. Stay right there." I ran naked across the apartment to the front door. He was already inside.

"You have to leave," I screamed.

He smiled, drunk, and said, "I have the key."

"I am not alone."

"Is it June? Is it? Let me watch. I'll hide in the closet."

"Give me the key and go," I said. I pushed him toward the door. I grabbed the key.

"This isn't a joke, Todd." Then shoved him hard, across the threshold, until he was out. I bolted the door. I walked back to the bedroom and heard a scratching sound that didn't stop, that continued across every window.

I returned to the bedroom to find June almost fully clothed.

"I should go," she said. She was buttoning her blouse, but I stopped her midway, and kissed her hands softly.

"No," I said. "We cannot let him take away this moment." I kissed her again and backed away, her lips parted her heart-shaped mouth, I crouched in front of her, watching every detail. Her eyebrow arched, her lips pressed together stretching her cheek, then pop, a small groan escaped, head tilted back-peez-like. She let me slowly take off every piece of her clothes. There was no end until just before daylight, she kissed my eyelids and went home.

The next morning, I was already halfway through my day, when the radio station office staff filed in. The studio door was soundproof like the door to a walk-in freezer. It had a small square window that would give us a view of who was coming in. I searched through the window until I saw her.

There, the creatures inside said.

My heart shifted. She had a hair dryer with her, and she lifted it up to show me, pointed to it, arched her brow, pointed to her hair, then to me. I laughed as she entered the bathroom.

"Who's there?" my co-host Chris asked from across the studio.

"Oh, June did something silly."

"I'm gonna go have a smoke. Can you play the next song," he said.

After the show, I had a public affairs show to record and edit. She found me. She locked the door behind her. I switched the on the air light for privacy. She glides across the wall out of the way of the window area. She wore tan linen wide leg trousers and a white linen blouse to match that fell on her soft rounded shoulders. Her short blonde-brown hair ended just below her face and defined her crescent shaped chin. Her eyes glistened like water running over fresh thin silver-green algae on top of a rock. All I wanted to do was run my finger along the edge of her prominent collarbone which led to an elongated neck that made her movements appear swanlike. June's feathers were rarely if ever ruffled.

Her middle name was Grace.

"How much sleep did you get?" she asked.

"Half-hour maybe," I laughed, "You?"

"None."

I asked about her dog. An awkward moment passed. "So, we should definitely talk about last night," she said.

I took a deep breath. "Yea, yea, probably."

"Maybe have dinner at your place tonight?"

"Sure."

"Is 7pm ok?"

"Yes, perfect, looking forward to it." Then she left. I switched off the on-air light.

Epexegetis

June sat on the couch in my apartment.

"Last night was wonderful," she started and looked at me directly,

"Really fucking amazing."

"Really amazing," I said smiling as I drained the pasta. Gears, slowing jumping. "Wine or beer?"

Hesitating a moment, like she pondered if she should. "Wine." I poured and handed her a glass of Chardonnay. She started again.

"But I think we are both on different paths, and our lives are built in such a way that I don't think this would be sustainable, for either one of us."

My heart switched into first gear. I breathed.

"I get it," I said. "I feel what you are saying." She was dating the Mayor's assistant at the time.

"I am, despite the bumps, happy with Jim at the moment."

"I want you to know June, last night was something I'll never forget," I said and smiled.

"Me either," she said. "And neither will Todd," I added. He keyed the window last night after I kicked him out.

"Ouch," she said.

We laughed. "I think you are an extraordinary woman, June Grace," I said. "Me too you," she said.

"I would like to have a friendship with you. I'm not sure what that means, but we clearly have a connection, so I would like that."

We finished dinner quickly. I gave her a hug. I brushed her cheek, it smelled like buttered French toast. We smiled at one another, and she left. I turned and looked at the dinner table, she didn't touch her wine.

That was Thursday.

Friday. She was not in the office. I went home disappointed that I did not get to see her. A couple of my girlfriends had a house down the shore, and I was invited for the weekend. I grabbed my suitcase and began to pack. I couldn't shake June from my mind; however distraction was an art form in our family. In the course of three weeks, I had an abortion, broke up with my boyfriend of two years and made love with a woman. It was about 5 pm, mid-summer. That time of year when the sky will not rise and rarely falls. The air lay heavy and wet on my skin, the Cicadas were in full pitch outside my square, keyed window. My slim line phone rang. It was June.

"You were off today, divorce stuff?"

"Yes I had some final paperwork to go through."

"All go okay?" "Yes and I am beyond thrilled that this is the end of it," she said emphatically.

Silence.

"I wanted to celebrate, and I was wondering if you had plans tonight?"

"I could be swayed."

I tossed clothes in a suitcase and the cat's food and took off like a tern spotting dinner on the water's edge. In my car Sophie B Hawkins sang. The full moon cut through the night air like an electric current. It lit the road ahead, smoke rose from its fervor, it smelled like burnt cedar, beechwood and asphalt mixed together in some euphoric galaxy. It moved me from Roxborough to the main line. I sang at the top of my lungs.

"Don't say you'll stay cause then you'll go away Damn I wish I was your lover , I'll rock you till the daylight comes make sure you're smiling and warm, I am everything tonight I'll be your mother, do such things to ease your pain, free your mind and you won't feel ashamed!"

Outside her green door I stood, my denim shirt clinging to me, my heart feeding on every breath, increasing. She buzzed me in, two flights up. Green carpet, white walls, maple wood trim staircase. I ran up skipping over every other step. Almost like something else was carrying me up the stairs. Like I was on a string pulled by a giant cloud, pulling me closer to heaven. She opened the door.

"Ha-hulloh," she said, and I repeated it back to her. Already developing signs of our own language.

She pointed her fingers emphatically at me, a signal, morse code. You. Are. Important. To. Me. It was how she moved.

"What, would you like to drink?"

"What are you having?"

"A Sierra Nevada Pale Ale."

"Perfect!"

The apartment had three rooms, a large living room, which also housed a small dining room. A box kitchen and a bedroom. An impermanent space. Her furniture from her divorce from Bob took over rooms. I sat on the couch and she handed me the beer. My body was vibrating, my hands were visibly shaking. She noticed and slid her fingers over my hand and squeezed, pursing her lips, tiny lines burrowed on top of the divot in her nose. I watched her thin fingers move over mine. Movements. Skin. Touch. Beckoning everything inside me to the surface.

"Could I have a glass for my beer?"

We moved together towards the kitchen. The small quarters of the area forced our bodies closer. We inched in, my hands seem to slip, softly around her waist and pull towards her warm body. She swayed and arched easily in my arms and moved me to shut the lights. The window gave way to the moonlight. We kissed, sweetly. Observant.

The unease with what we were unsure of, fell off to the power of the possibility that was there, in the room. In the galaxy.

The cicadas sang loudly outside the open window filling the apartment.

Moonlight and locusts and cedar and beechwood.

I turned the light on and smirked and looked in her eyes. The olive -green glint and the light goes off again. She won. We moved together to the dining room table. She puts on Joni Mitchell's Court and Spark, on an old school brown plastic record player. The music overtook the cicadas. I watched her move, caress the room with her body, like she was painting me a picture, unlike anything I'd ever seen before. Her femininity and the ease in which her body sang, unspoken, inviting me onto a foreign land, her oasis. There was an element of danger in the air. She sang to me and I watched her risqué heart-shaped mouth.

"Help me, I think I'm falling in love again." She kissed me again across the table.

Gentleness, sweetness, femininity was not my world. It had never been in my world. We, as a people were rough, and tough, guarded. Throughout my life I moved with aposematic air, warning off predators and foes alike that I would not go down without a fight. Yet this woman slipped inside my denim shirt, stroked and gently urged this being out of me, that I was afraid to let out in the world. I gently took her to the floor where she topped me. She kept singing.

"He makes friends easily, he's not like me, I watch for judgment anxiously, now where in the city could that boy be."

"You know I like this friendship thing," I said. We both laughed. Joni led us into the night, into the weekend.

We made our way into the bedroom, and that is where we spent the next two days. A blur of white cotton sheets, sweetness and sweat. Moments of tenderness and heat, bled into fuzzy particles caught in the beams of sunlight, that slipped out into the world swept through nearby Sycamore trees, carried by the winds, haunting the nearby woods, evermore. They would forever speak our names.

Me gazing upon her ruddy, brown-speckled flesh, like some map to a future I felt compelled to explore. We had touched down on a new land. Treasure was found in the curve of her hip, the slight dent at the tip of her nose. The particle of dust caught laughing in the sunlight that landed gently on her now rust-colored cheek.

That Sunday morning, we lay naked in her bed, she sat up, the sheet fell, her skin aglow, and without words, with just a glint in her eye she turned to me and told me she felt loved. I had never been spoken to like that before, without words directly from her soul to mine.

It all happened in the course of five days, a point of no return.

I was in love twice before her, with Steve and then Todd, but this was felt in my cells. It was nearing the end of summer and the fall approached, that beautiful kiss of autumn when the sun loses its grip on the trees and leaves begin to tell us what the sun already knows, change is upon us. Those first few days with her extended to weeks then months She moved into a house she recently bought. We both still dated men, but that started to fall away to what was happening. I would steal away and go to her house after nights out in our separate camps. She would run down her steps to greet me, I could hardly wait to smell her buttery, campfire-soaked skin, to sink into her femininity, something I wasn't allowed to feel. With her though, I would move in close to her face, brush her skin with mine and just linger there and breathe her into me, it was like breathing for the first time. To look into her eyes, see her desire and to kiss her, now I knew why poets lingered and lovers whispered and wept. I knew in this instant why the world spun on its axis.

She became my axis.

But this was a woman. I hadn't expected this and mostly feared this.

Words Submerged

In the summer of 1976, Toby and I meandering through alleyways in 69th street came across a boarded-up doorway. This only beckons us. We peer in between the thrown up slabs of birchwood. There seems to be some sort of red drape and maybe a stage. This is what we will do today. We run back to the house and grab some flashlights from the garage where Mark and Andrew Logue are talking about the upcoming Flyers season.

"What are you two up to," Andrew said.

"No good as always," states Mark.

"I think we found some type of abandoned theatre," I said.

"Where are the flashlights?" Toby asks. Mark grabs two from the workbench. "We are coming with you guys," he said.

"Our find, we get the flashlights." Toby grabs both and hands me one. We head towards our archeological site. We each take turns doing our best to kick the boards and Andrew who's by far the tallest in the bunch gets it in one swift shot. We climb, splinters be damned. Once inside we see it is a stage, and we are standing backstage looking at a red drape hanging by its gold-tassel thread, its last gasp for life. Toby and I look at each other, grab it and start swinging.

"Let's go," he said. We run to the front, hop off the stage and go towards the front of the building. Mark and Andrew playing out Shakespeare on stage follow. Rats scurry on the sticky blackened-carpeted floor. In the lobby through the front doors we see a light shining on what looks to be a descending tiled floor. I noticed across the floors are shops.

"Yo this must be the old 69th street terminal. There are a bunch of stores out there," I said.

"Holy shit you guys this is fucking amazing," Mark chimed in. "Good find."

"Let's find the old train tracks," Andrew said. We opened the doors and pigeons flew out of our way, to the left, birchwood planks on the entrance smiled to guide us down. As we walked past hat and sewing stores long abandoned the rats scurrying out of our way. Then as we rounded the corner I saw it as if it were calling to me. A typewriter store. I stopped and was still in the window, and as if illuminated by a light unseen, a black corona typewriter. Left behind, as if it was not needed, abandoned, this object that turned thoughts to words. That created connections and correspondence and united long lost lovers. I wondered what men and women in sharp cloth jackets and pill hats and gloves walked by this in the past. Who touched it's keys. Why did they leave it behind?

Words submerged beneath the surface, that no one will hear.

Alone, stuck, abandoned.

"Chelle, let's go."

You Survived

You survived because she was the one. You survived because she wasn't the one. Because there was no other way forward, no way back. Because it was what all who came before you did.

You survived because of the scabbed knee, the honking horn, the laughing stepmother. The sparks that flew 1800 feet above the river, and then bounced off the rail. The supple sweet body that was used as a Kleenex. The iron fence that almost took out your eye. The fathers betrayal. The taxi ride. The blood-soaked rag. The mother's duty-filled approach. The cheating that killed your spirit, and the love that you rallied to save.

You survived because this life is what you expected and now what do you do with the worn-out shoes, the socks with holes. The octopus pot. The left-over ache. The trustworthy soul. You tell the truth. You seek guidance. You ask questions and you offer hope. Because you learned love. You learned love and this is beautiful.

Because of past mistakes, because of the present and because of the future.

Because.

-

Letter to June

*When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;
W.B. Yeats*

I was not sure how to start this letter. I can only tell you how I feel without hesitation writing it. A mix of joy, that I'm able to talk to you again, vulnerability and repair. I am about to publish my memoir. You, of course, play a significant role.

All the names are changed, but the love remains.

You told me once being in a relationship teaches us everything we need to know about ourselves, and what we need to do in this life, and that this, was very important to you. This was a guiding light for me, you ended up being my inner Sirius. The Dog Star, the brightest light in the universe.

The catalyst for this began one warm August Sunday afternoon in New Orleans, of all places. Pre-pandemic. In a dark, beer-drenched bar when I sat down with your friend Carol, and you entered the room, immediately. I was not expecting you, but then again I was.

That's twice now.

She looked at her text and asked if we were friends and I said no. She asked if I'd like to be friends and I became unsteady. Bats entered the cave. Sediment rose. I blurted out "Of course, she is the love of my life." The room swallowed me whole, I did not expect that. Years of therapy slipped into a knot. The noose fell. Rings rippled in the still water. For two hours I watched it swing in anticipation and bloviated uncomfortably as the two of you texted. I said things blindly, my mind unreachable. Watching her hands holding her phone and you on the other side. I was in the dark, alone again. You, somewhere unknown. A tightness fixed itself in the center of my chest and rose up to my throat. Texting continued. Then she said it, in a second-hand text "Tell her I'm living my best life." and the floor dropped out from under me. My feet, wiper blades.

I went back to the hotel. trembling, chastising myself. No "tell her, hello, or I hope she's well nothing." I poured it out on paper, a tangled mess of roots and leaves, dreams, seeds and soil, fishing and guitar wire onto a page. It ended up as the beginning of my first really shitty draft. (Thanks, Anne Lamott)

And now it's being published.

It's one of the most beautiful things I've ever created, except for the times that I spent with you. The ones that are forever etched in the bones that line the inside of my chest. I took great care and compassion writing you as if I was touching your skin. I did the same for Brenda. I wrote this with great love, I had to. Then I didn't have to.

There is a knowing in one's being, just below the surface, that appears unreachable. Until that thing that happens, that is so tragic that it makes you search your entire life for the answer. When you finally say it out loud it hurls you into space.

It's called the truth.

We all know the stories of our souls even before they are told. And after the great fall, we will rise to meet them.

I chose you to be that one unforgettable love for me. And I gave you my all, everything in me and you met me there. I also knew I had a different journey. I was a creature of habit, baptized in betrayal and sentenced to the solitude of longing, of pushing a voice inside me so deep that it penetrated the core of the earth. Secreted away in the still of the night. Invasion of the body snatchers. The care the circumstances called for, didn't arrive in me soon enough. I knew I had to go find it. And I picked the worst exit possible. I thought I could return though. I thought love can do that. And it can, but it takes many forms and different lives.

And when she came, I knew I had to let you go. I knew it like it was my job, because it was.

Knowing one thing and wanting something different is truly the darkest night of the soul.

Every woman who has lost a child understands this.

This much I know is true.

How does one transform heartbreak into joy. How does one forgive the loss. This happens to be one and the same.

Forgiveness comes when you find yourself in an empty room with a thousand doors and you've opened all but one. That one door that you've turned away from again and again, you slathered it with mud. Blocked it with furniture, beautiful impressionists paintings. A photo from an old newspaper your ex had framed for you. But still it beckons. And finally you step forward and turn the knob. A gust of wind knocks you over. You shimmy on your elbows and look down to see that you've written the last page in your journal upside down. You turn it around and it reads, "Get up, get up and walk out the door and look at the beauty of life.

Love always remains, because it's the one thing that is true.

I am truly happy you are living your best life, I know you are. You've always uttered the most perfect sentences. The structure, the brilliance of your honest thought escaping your lips, seems a magical art form that you do with ease. I used to love to watch you talk, the sheer wind-blown scarf, the red poppy pedal in the wind. I know exactly what you said to me is perfect. I know it because I believe every word and I remember every syllable, every murmur whispered in my ear. I know you are living the life you're meant to live, With the person you are supposed to. This makes my skin smile.

But also slices at parts of my soul like the winter wind through an old, ill-shaped cabin, deep in the woods. A place once warm and inhabited with friends around a table in front of a fire, now long gone, forgotten.

Both of those can happen all at once and separately. A muesli.

I wanted the farm, the pigs, the goats, the dogs, and you. Yet I had a different path, and so did you. I looked in your eyes, then across the slope of your right shoulder, he appeared. I saw the devil in my own barn, pacing. I knew I had to go and open those heavy doors, and fight for my life. To become the warrior I knew I was meant to be, the one that my father failed to be. I just didn't want to accept that you had a different path, with a different person. I needed 23 years and 3000 miles to understand. Because the hurt ran deep under the rocks in the hidden river, behind the cabin.

Because.

We are complicated beings. It's complicated when the soul tells you to turn right and you want to desperately turn left with every fiber. I know you know this, I do. In case you are wondering, I am living a pretty good life. It's not my best yet but it's pretty damn close. I'm pretty sure this book has brought a healing that I still haven't comprehended. At times I had to take months away from the world, because the fermented coils rose effortlessly to the surface and were again so powerful and raw, they flowed easily downstream. The hardest part was finding my way back to solid ground, without drowning, hands grabbing rocks, branches, gnarled roots, clumps of St. Augustine grass. Searching for my breath.

The pandemic was perfect timing.

I shuttered myself along the California coast as the colors dripped from the sky, then under a desert moon and stars, waiting for them to fall. I re-read books, googled pictures of you, which are hard to come by I might add, I know this is purposeful. I still love your heart-shaped smile. I am sorry about your parents. I still see your dad's kind eyes, toothy grin, and love how he added a Y to the end of your name. I cried in my partner's arms more than once, more than I'm comfortable ever admitting to anyone, ever. And I'm grateful, for everything she has pushed me to accomplish, which would've never been possible with anyone else. I know this to be true. I belong here.

It's where I get to kiss a sunset pig.

I

It's these moments I've realized are the lessons that we all come for. The truly life altering moments of deep profound brokenness and forgiveness that connects us all, it brings to us a humility we can see in another, regardless of skin color or gender or ideology. Finding our truth and standing by it, despite the sacrifice. This is what breaks us and re-makes us. Stare deeply into another persons eyes and you will see a reflection of yourself. You are supposed to. Repair is our work as humans. Both together and alone, but always connected, and always in conversation. Its finding beauty and grace on your way through, picking up the seeds after the storm, even when you are the storm. Planting in your octopus pot and standing waiting for the sun. Knowing it will arrive again one day.

I had to learn to separate the love from the pain, to divorce myself from one part and covet the other. To know even a broke neck bird can fly. To dig up the past, understand the dirt underneath my fingernails was not my father but me. I was just looking for my shattered pieces to put together a better more loving future for myself and my partner, and the world.

I am that digger, that excavator of one's soul. Thats what I am, a writer. A seeker and a truth-teller. Reconciler of words and wounds. A soul plumber and my words are my weeping. I'm a master class on humans. One that actively and with purpose chooses to sit in the middle of the bridge anchored by the roots of 500 year old trees and balance both love and pain, paradox and ambiguity, past and present and then look to the future. And I will rise and walk towards the love, against the wind with our ancestors. To a better place.

A shift of perception and I find that place. Heartbreak is just love forcing hearts to open wider than you ever thought possible, so more people can fit in. And now you live there and so does Brenda, separately and then together in that order. Another shift, and I reach for my pen. But, there is trade-off, I have to leave ego behind.

Because it's Ego that holds you back, it holds onto the pain, justifies it like a guard, a keeper of a dark covenant. A talisman. It fuels resentment and anger and lies as a cover-up to what is true.

But without the pain we are never aware of what we need to examine and what is a life unexamined, but a blank page.

What I have uncovered is a love letter to you. To me, to my grandmother to my mother to Marissa to Val, and yes to Brenda. To nature, to this country, and to the greatest Mother of all, earth.

Our roots are twisted, touch them they recoil and sometimes they bleed. It's clear when I write about you, how you changed me, the molecules in my body shifted under your touch. You are seen in the reflection of my cells. Your love forged me, and that break-up shattered me. You saw me, and I saw you. And then we had to set each other free

But the fracturing was necessary, purposeful, it's what was supposed to happen because it was my way in. And it was your way to her.

I used to think it would be the death of me, but it was meant for so much more. For so many years I was fearful of letting my love for you shine, because of its immense power, ever since I was a child I felt my love was a burden, a cross to bear. One to put into a container and hang on a windowsill. I am saddened we do not know each other today. I wish we could, but I kept running because I knew where I had to go. This is why I left and stayed away, and it was every minute that I was away that felt like a sledgehammer against my chest. And yet I kept pushing myself further, swinging the sledgehammer until I couldn't lift it any longer. And here is where I am.

Everything you did fit my soul's purpose. Where I was supposed to go and what I was supposed to do. We are all just working out patterns, narratives forged early on in our heads. Pathways in the brain like rivers. Souls crossing thresholds.

There is freedom that comes with distance, both physical and mental. It was always uncomfortable trying to contain my love for you. Suppressing something that is beautiful, pushing it down is what created the trauma. But now as I separate from the pain, I find the love remains and it emanates from my being, shining like gold, free to roam the earth.

Love without any attachments is where it does the most good. In its' purest form it exists as an offering. And that's called gratitude.

I do hope I get to see you again before I die, just once. Both of us set each other off on our journeys and have honored them, knowing they would be different, with different people, this is the greatest gift, one that is both beauty and beast

But if I don't see you, I am content knowing you are living your best life, and as you might suspect, that means everything to me. Of course parts of you remain. You have found lodging beneath my pen, and It has filled me with astonishment and joy. This is the gift and legacy of love. That all-consuming love, where new language and worlds are created. Right before I left, you told me this kind of love is too much, but I have to disagree, Its exactly what I needed, it's exactly what you needed, and what the world needs more of. I think it is the greatest gift you are given and the greatest gift to offer the world. And that's what this is, an offering.

I will be forever grateful that you were born in that beautiful small Pennsylvania town. That you entered me and never really left.

This is what I meant to say to Carol. But I got distracted. By all that texting. And I had to write a book And now that it's done I hope you don't mind that I put down in words. How wonderful life is that you were in my world.

You reached beneath my denim shirt touched my soul and made it sing and this book is just the beginning of its song.

All we can give to the world is our story. Thank you for being such a significant part of mine. When they dig up my bones they will find your name on several, and they should.

I've learned if we look at something long enough with love, you will be forever changed.

You have changed me, J.

But I know you change everyone you look at, Brenda knows this to be true.

With All My Octopus pot heart, that has tripled in size and then some. I'll see you both again I have no doubt, if not in this life in the next.

The Schuyl River (Hidden River)

"Take me to your river I wanna know, Take me to your river I wanna go" Leon Bridges

A river cannot keep secrets, it provides testimony. Although it cannot see, it reflects. It knows who peers across its lips, what kind of person they are, what deeds they are constructing. It smiles at the fisherman and woman who tosses back its shad and perch. It answers back the slap of the oars, soon after it's silky morning blanket lifts. It separates and comes back together after The hull of the boat slices its' fresh skin. It giggles at the touch of the fox's tongue on its bank. It is the source for every living thing.

As each one of us is too.

Scientists say the Schuyl was started after a giant glacial melted, its formation beginning as a trickle in the Appalachian mountains. The water-carrying tons of Anthracite rushed in fast and furious, the force of the water cracking the ground open. The fracturing, a necessary wound. The water settled and what a gift that river became to the burgeoning communities all the way from Pottsville to Philadelphia. It formed a pattern. That pattern became entrenched and solidified until something came along to disturb it. A tree falling from a storm. A beavers dam. Man. Woman. Another split. From there it takes time but slowly the river will begin to change its shape, but it will continue to flow because it always remembers.

We can never hide from our destiny, we cannot reconcile it, bend it so it fits some twisted narrative. We must take responsibility for every step and that includes missteps. Misdeeds. Hurts, disappointments, betrayals. It always rises to the surface as beautiful lessons that have gifts once a person offers testimony through self-reflection. The same can be said about this country and its current fracturing.

The grand institutions that we've come to rely on are now splintering apart. Media, Journalism, education, banking, our medical institutions, and our government. Our entire society has been split in half. If we are to move forward we cannot keep our backs turned in separate huddles. We must turn towards each other in conversation. We must reflect and debate, not mandate solutions and expect people to goose-step in line. Fracturing has a purpose; it exposes where we need to grow.

Society moves forward when the rules of the game are clear, true progress only comes when people are accountable for their behaviors. No one should get a pass because they are on the right team or the right color. And no one should be penalized for words. Books should not be banned to teach us where we came from, we must learn from our mistakes, write them down, say them out loud, and be humbled by the lesson. Where does humility or forgiveness enter if the door is constantly moved, meanings of words constantly changed?

If we cannot see our differences and celebrate them. If we cannot agree to disagree, but always return to the table to break bread.

We are exiting the technological age and entering the Information age. Information cannot be hidden, it must exist above the surface. It must be debated openly and honestly and then transformed into useful dialogue to take our kids into the next unfolding chapter in our globe.

That is true progress.

The river forgives when the fallen tree changes its course. Because it understands accidents don't happen for unknown reasons, they happen for a reason. Slowly over time, it forges a new path because the river understands its purpose on earth. It's the source of connection, of life itself and somewhere along this new path, new bridges will be constructed, and new seeds planted.

San Diego 1989

My voice opened doors in San Diego. At San Diego State University at my very first internship at KCQB radio, they hired me as soon as I opened that microphone. From there, I joined a traffic reporting company called Metro Traffic and I boarded an airplane twice daily to report on bottlenecks, and cattle shoots of red lights along the I-5. I took off from Miramar airport, hot on Tom Cruise's tail. My pilot was a certified instructor. He gave me the helm. I sat in the cockpit and lifted the plane in the air, I was learning to fly. I met a guy. Then another. But, something spoke to me back east. I missed my friends. I wanted to know my father and my brothers. I wished they knew me.

A few high school friends who moved out to Oceanside called and said they were driving back to Philly. I decided to join them on a whim. I packed my clothes, put my cat and her litter in the backseat of my maroon Volkswagen Fox.

"I need to go back mom; I can't settle down here. Not now. All my friends are getting married and having babies, I want to be with them," I said.

"I get it, go, do your thing," She said.

"I'll be back though Mom when I'm ready."

"I know you'll be back Michelle, this is where you found your career," she said.

"Actually, this is where it found me, mom." I drove off, following the boys of summer. Watching the Boston cream pie settle in my rear view behind the ever-moving mound of grey and black that was my cat laying on the back windowsill. Elton John's Philadelphia Freedom and Billy Joel's New York State of Mind took turns on the cassette player. Speeding through Arizona, and Shamrock Texas. The Oklahoma pan handle. St Louis Missouri. We spent the night in a motel in Ohio. Three days in, we hit Wheeling, West Virginia, I saw snow for the first time in years. I lost the boys as we crossed the state line on day three.

Alone now, dusk settled in a curve on the back window, and darkness rolled in behind just past King of Prussia. It was here that I caught her scent, murky and muddy. I rolled down the window as I saw signs for Conshohocken and rounded the curve. The cold air slapped my face. It was December and I got to see glimpses of her choppy thoughts through the bare trees. The ghost-like Sycamores crowd her shores. She was stirring the river.

I thought I was going back to create some relationship with my father. But something else was waiting for me. Something I never dreamed of. This journey was the destination.

Then I saw the Christmas tree that sits atop the water tower on the lip of Manayunk. It was here that a rise began inside me. Galaxies appeared in my eyes and ran down my creamy wind-stung face. Twisting and turning the streetlamps and melted ice on my windshield into stars. This rise was of something known and unknown, it tasted like freedom and smelled like home. Freedom and security. Both comforting and uncomfortable. I imagine this is what our founders saw in this new world. I imagined this is what the Leni Lenape felt under their feet as they made their way through the Wissahickon, guided by the light of Sirius. To live with both is where you can plant the seed, where true growth is possible. Right there in the center that's the truth. I came back to find these things, to find me, to give voice to this stirring inside me, this stirring that began at the river's edge. This stirring was love. That was mine to give. After all, isn't that the only thing that matters in the end.

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