

Greetings From Vermont

by Sarah Bracey White

It is day four in Montpelier where I'm attending a workshop with Baron Wormser, the man who edited my first memoir "Primary Lessons." In this valley nestled among Vermont's giant, green mountains, I have changed - found my rhythm. Cut off from all the things I used to distract myself from "knowing" myself, I feel a sense of peace.

Evenings find me sequestered in an old motel which has no outward-facing windows. It's clean, has a firm bed with soft sheets, hot water on-demand to fill the tub, and thick white towels to blot the dampness before I climb under the covers seeking solace inside, not outside.

Fledging self-discovery is enticing. It makes me wonder what else hides below my surface. I need no companion on this journey. I am enough. After the daily workshop sessions end, I have little desire for anything except writing, eating (which isn't often), forays into a warm bath, or excursions to look at the mountains.

This afternoon, I visited the gold-domed Capital Building on State Street to repeat a similar visit I made there 52 years ago while working as a cook's helper at a rich girls' camp on the shores of nearby Lake Ely. I'm surprised when my tour guide repeats the same tidbit I'd heard when I was 17. "The marble tiles in this building were quarried in Great Barrington, from stone formed thousands of years ago under the pressure of gigantic glaciers passing through this area." He pauses just off the rotunda and draws our eyes to one gray/black tile on the floor. "If you look closely, you can see the fossilized snail captured for eternity in this tile." At times, I fear that things I talk about in my memoir are products of my imagination, since there is no one left to verify my early memories. The tile stares up at me - concrete proof that my recollection of its existence is factual. This makes me trust my memory more.

After the tour, I chance upon an outdoor concert by a local band composed of classical musicians playing John Philip Souza marches. They each look like they've found their bliss here in Montpelier and make music to speak their satisfaction. Is that the thing that draws people to a place like this where the urgency and excitement of big-city life are muted by nature's anthems? Is it why rich parents, all those years ago, sent their young daughters to Camp Beenaweedin to discover themselves beneath nature's canopy? Back then, I was too busy working, and grieving, to make self-discoveries. Time has set me free from both. And circumstance has gifted me with opportunity.

The locals say it was an endless winter this year. "Snow and ice kept everyone housebound!" I wish for such a thing, when survival consumes only enough hours to make one seek distraction: first, reading; then, writing until sleep pulls one through the window of the soul, where dreams entice. I come late to the charms of these green mountains, but they work their magic, all the same.

Thank you, Vermont