

By Jane E. Martin, *Résonance* Fiction Editor

January, 2020

My mother loved short stories and novels, and occasionally, if the selection was apt, poetry too. (I remember she found Mary Oliver’s “University Hospital, Boston” to be particularly moving just following my father’s death.) She also read at least two newspapers a day—one of these not long after she woke up, so that she could quickly pass the paper on to her little sister three houses down, my Aunt Lou—and was drawn to certain regular columnists (Norman Beaupré, for example, *Résonance* issue one contributor).

My mother was the perfect reader. Not so long ago, I lived with her for two years. I remember a certain week when she began a new novel: late morning, as I left to teach my class in Creative Writing at the University of Southern Maine, I found her with a blueberry muffin in her green recliner on the enclosed porch finishing one chapter. “See you later, Jane,” she said, a little less interested in me than usual. Later that afternoon, when I’d returned from Portland, she was in the living room in a wicker chair, blinds from her sliding door raised a bit so she could read her novel with the sun on her back. If I remember correctly, she did not miss her favorite show, that evening, *Wheel of Fortune*—our affections may rank themselves under pressure (which is why none of us, her five children, dared call our otherwise selfless mother between 7:00 and 7:30pm, when the show ran)—but by the time I came downstairs to visit her mid-evening, she was under her covers in bed, reading once more. I backed away without being detected, sensing that something powerful was happening. Yet by midnight, I was willing to rival any competitor for my mother’s attention. Neither one of us slept before at least 1:00 or 2:00am, and we typically chatted late at night, my mother in bed, me in a wooden chair in the corner of her bedroom. I came downstairs resolute, a touch indignant.

The book was closed on my mother’s stomach, and my mother lay there looking at nothing in particular. She was crying. “Mom?” I said quietly, a bit nervous. “Oh, Jane, the ending was so sad.” I remember sitting in her bedroom that night, discussing the book with the attention and earnestness a notable life occurrence deserves.

If my mother loved you, whether you were her child or a masterful book, you became her preoccupation. She would think of you over her morning muffin or cereal and as the afternoon sun made its descent for the day. She would conjure an image of you from the empty space before her.

Along with prominent eyes and long, slender hands, I inherited my mother’s love for good writing, too. Several months ago, when I accepted Emilie-Noelle Provost’s piece, “The Dinner Party,” for this issue of

*Résonance*, I was drawn to the narrator's whimsical private thoughts during a dinner with her husband and daughter. This mother has a palpable sense of self at the same time that she finds herself absorbed by both the banal and disorderly details of her daughter's life. (Love between a mother and child is like that, isn't it? We can't but walk forward together, though we may not always find the other to be a particularly captivating companion, though we know that whatever terrible thing lies ahead for the other will consume us, too.) Today, just two months following my mother's death, particular lines from "The Dinner Party" swell as I read: "Sometimes the forces against you can seem too enormous to bear, but you can beat them. You really can," the mother wishes she could tell her daughter.

The different speech patterns between family members in "Cajun Crabs" caught my attention late in our reading period. Eamon speaks, perhaps, a sort of Anglophone joul, and his sister Caitlyn speaks more standardized English. And Franco-Americans *are* familiar with this phenomenon, aren't we? Our *mémères* and *pépères*, for example, may have accents that we don't. After eight years in Québec, I could understand my mother perfectly when she spoke French, her native language; and she couldn't understand a word I said when I responded in French, me and my big Anglophone accent. "Mom!" I remember saying incredulously over the phone from my apartment in Montréal, a mile or two from the nursing school she attended as a young woman. You *really* don't understand me when I say that I had *aiglefin* for supper?" (Or *poulet* or *pâtes* or *steak*.)

And the names in these works: "Muriel" (my mother's name) from "Mariage dans les nuages," and "Lucille" (my Aunt Lou's name) from "La Lutte Finale de Lucille LeBlanc." When our parents and grandparents, *nos tantes* and *nos oncles*, pronounce these names, we feel the pull of a particular culture, *ragoût de boulettes*, *le réveillon*, schools attached to churches, and servile deference to authority. We understand more perfectly who we are. A young Québécoise woman immerses herself in an American Francophone culture in "From Arnaudville to New Orleans." As she crosses a "high rise bridge" early in the piece, we sense a path, *un chemin*, being more thoroughly cleared between Franco America and Québec.

And that's not even mentioning the poetry, the essays, the other genres in this issue.

A word about Melissa Pelletier Provencher, the artist for issue two: Melissa was my friend in high school, and I remember her drawing in a notebook each day at the cafeteria table, as mentioned in my interview with her. Melissa and I became friends again during my two years with my mother in Biddeford. Then, and since, on my visits from Montréal, Melissa visited us at the house, often bringing an art project with her. My mother truly admired her work. "Boy, that girl is talented," my mother said again this last spring, after Melissa had left the

house. (A few months later, Melissa and I would pick raspberries for my mother on Melissa's land.) My mother loved birds and the ocean and Maine, all things Melissa so carefully focuses on in her art. What a stroke of fortune to have her as the artist for this issue, the issue dedicated to my mother.

My mother was loveliness and gentleness and beautiful prose. Something else the narrator of "The Dinner Party" says sticks with me today: "It's funny how a person can have their life completely upended and find their way back to normalcy, even happiness, in a relatively short time." This line is one my mother, in all her resilience and simple joys, would have enjoyed reading.