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Ann Packer; Photo credit- Elena Seibert

The works of author Ann Packer tackle the complexities of loss, love and friendship in ways that allow the reader the mental pursuit of instinct, the room for subjective, intimate interpretation and the ability to say the

unsaid. Raw truths are written out loud, pain is gently excavated and held to the light for illumination, and there are nearly tangible depictions of feelings collected along necessary emotional journeys. In discussing her books representing unique experiences for different readers, the unveiling of the subconscious through writing and the link of language to an idea's existence, we glimpse the writer behind the words.

We enter the stories much the same way that we would enter a home. We open the book, resting our hands on the pages and take a look around. We cross the threshold and our eyes trace the surfaces for contextual details. We find, to our surprise, that all the doors and windows are open. There is a desire to explore and understand; a desire to connect. Clues about the lives lived within these walls to discover. There are conversations we overhear from other rooms but it's the internal dialogue, their innermost secrets that we're after, to validate or justify something similar or entirely opposite that we'd felt. The scenes change, room after room alters slightly to fit how we personally view our surroundings. The subjects of our observation don't behave as though they know we're there, but they know us, better than we'd care to admit and we know them. The characters possess no more privileged feeling for us than any other reader and are impervious to our opinions.

Yet now, with them, the connection is strong and strikes us as unique though we know we aren't the first to explore these pages and certainly won't be the last. The revelations, the effectual evidence of life, the evocative tokens of description and drawn conclusions are ours to keep long after we leave these works by a writer who throws open doors to invite us in.

Ann Packer is the critically-acclaimed author of [The Dive from Clausen's Pier](#), [Songs Without Words](#), [Mendocino and Other Stories](#) and [Swim Back to Me](#). She attended Yale University and the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Packer has received fellowships from the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, the Michener-Copernicus Society, and the National Endowment for the Arts. [The Dive from Clausen's Pier](#) (2002) won a Great Lakes Book Award, an American Library Association Award and the Kate Chopin Literary Award.

Interview with Ann Packer by Nicole M. Bouchard

1) Throughout your novels and short stories, there are sentences, passages about life that seem to have as solid and necessary a substance as pebbles on a path to show the way home through the darkness when the moon rises. As collectible and concrete as they feel to readers who will gather these insights as they read for later reference or guidance, so too are the nearly tangible manifestations of feelings you describe and the indicative symbols we're made to process through our senses.

"He was in the process of honing his self-pity into a kind of artifact, an arrowhead he could keep in his pocket, its point ever ready." —"Nerves"

"'Lonely is a funny thing,' she said slowly. 'It's almost like another person. After awhile, it'll keep you company if you let it.'" —*The Dive from Clausen's Pier*

"This was creeping paranoia, almost pleasurable. You could lie down in it and never get up." —"Dwell Time"

You've written of the spaces on the wall where pictures should be or the shadow portraits of where they once were, a mother leaving and returning "as true and indifferent as the moon" and the "horrible glow" a person who has endured the unbearable takes on "so that late some night when you are wandering the back pathways of your mind you may stop at the sudden sight of someone up ahead, signaling even now with a faint but terrible light."

When crafting these resonant images or depictions, is their inception triggered solely by the story and the framework of the individual characters' minds or do you call upon a store of personal observations informed by your experiences and views, as they pertain to a given story/character? In other words, in between sitting down and working as a writer and then living your daily life just being a writer (observing, thinking like one), where do you gather the bulk of what you'll apply toward your prose to bring it so alive?

All of the moments/phrases that you mentioned came to me as I was writing, in the context of imagining/creating character. Over the years I've thought of a handful of lines/jokes/turns-of-phrase that I've liked enough to want to put in fiction, but the problem is that you end up with a piece of fiction into which

you've stuffed something external, just because you liked it. It doesn't work very well.

Most of the passages you quoted resonate for me personally—the one from The Dive from Clausen's Pier about loneliness and the one from “Dwell Time” about paranoia, in particular—but I hadn't been conscious of those ideas until I wrote them, and I'm not sure I think ideas exist before you have language for them. It's very rare for me to compose when I'm not at my computer. I don't think much about my work when I'm not writing, and I'm really not a planner; I'm more feeling my way in the dark, and lines like the ones you quoted are no more or less stored up for use in my fiction than are any other aspects of my work.

2) It's been said that loss in various forms, including positive connotations, is a main theme in your works. I believe in its highest sense that it is not the loss itself but rather what we're left with and what we do with that loss that is conveyed toward the reader's catharsis and inspiration. Whether readers can directly relate to the specific circumstances in a given story or not, the words have the ability to locate and draw out whatever pain might exist of any category in folders stowed away in the cabinets at the back of the mind. Not provoking it, but softly and subtly exploring it until there is an aspect of fullness and beauty to it. Quietly, there is a letting go of the contents as they are assimilated, feeling more connected and alive because everyone has something to ache over. That shared vulnerability and compassion are so essential to survival and the well-felt life.

The stories feel like necessary emotional journeys taken where the focus can be on the unfolding of the journey itself, slowing time in a reflective, sacred way. Part of what feels so authentic and real to me is that a number of the endings have elements of uncertainty and unpredictability, acknowledging that life is changeable, fragile and open with a myriad of possible directions. You've discussed that you work intuitively and feel when a story is ending, having answered questions you'd posed as the author.

In your 2004 *Washington Post* essay “Out in the World” you write of how the readers taught you a lesson in “ownership” by how subjectively they viewed the ending of your first novel according to their lives and views—“as useful a thing to remember as any I know.”

Is it part of the communion between author and readers to leave some doors open in the endings so that, following an intimate emotional journey, the reader can walk inside and feel as if they own some part of the story they've experienced, being able to insert their world views into the fates of the characters they've become invested in?

In my reading, I prefer fiction that leaves doors open and strings untied: fiction that is open to interpretation and therefore requires a reader for meaning to be made. This would be in contrast to fiction in which nothing is ambiguous or open to multiple understandings—in which meaning is in essence pre-constructed. Now that I think about it, this very much parallels my taste in people, or at least my taste in conversations: I don't enjoy listening to someone hold forth, I like an exchange of ideas. With my books, I like to think of each reader having a unique experience—and from there I can almost believe that the book itself differs according to who is reading it.

3) In *Songs Without Words*, Sarabeth, one of the protagonists, reflects on a play: "Flaubert had said it first, but maybe it bore repeating. Mad Septimus Smith and all the characters in all of literature, Anna, Levin, Vronsky: they were their makers, painful parts of their makers. Made to bear too much, but known." In your new novel, *The Children's Crusade*, due out April 7th, 2015, the story spans five decades in the life of the Blair family, measuring the effects, costs and repercussions of the past and the parents' union.

If characters are aspects of their creators, then can it be said, as in the instance of the Blair children, that children as the successive generation, can possess "painful parts" of their makers and can be "made to bear too much, but known," working to redress, reinvent as they forge their own stories? Tell us a bit about the formation of this story and the creative implications of the choice to take on a family saga, a genre of literature that focuses on the interconnectedness of generations, fortunes and the role of history at a personal level.

In the earliest work I did on The Children's Crusade, there was only one generation—an adult brother and sister. They are not the characters I ended up writing about, but there's a structural similarity: in both the early pages and the novel as it now exists, there's a sister who is very settled and pragmatic and a

brother who is on the run from trouble. When I finally abandoned the early stuff, I thought I was abandoning every part of it, but some months after I had begun to write the characters who now populate The Children's Crusade, I came to see parallels and to understand that I'd been unable to let go of that earlier material after all. So I guess what I'm saying is that for me, at least in the early days, the book was much more about siblings than about parents and children.

That said, it is now very much about parents and children AND siblings and specifically addresses the ways in which our parents reappear in us. The Blair family is made up of four children: Robert, Rebecca, Ryan, and James. The parents are Bill, a pediatrician, and Penny, an artist. I'm interested in the psychological concept of internalization and am fascinated by the contrast between identification, in which the child adopts the parent's characteristics as her own, and introjection, in which the experience is of a separate internal authority figure.

Robert, the oldest Blair child, in adulthood reveals himself to have introjected Bill, the father; Robert imagines Bill's responses to him, and his behavior is influenced by what this internalized father might think. Rebecca, the second oldest, has a smoother internalization of Bill; her siblings think she resembles him. James, the youngest, is quite different from everyone else in the family, and a climactic moment near the end of the book raises the question of his similarity to Penny, the mother, from whom he is estranged.

I didn't think a lot about the family saga as a genre; as always in my work, I'm more concerned with building character, and the rest pretty much falls into place.

4) I loved the heart-wrenching boldness in "Molten" as the mother speaks her truth in the end, contrary to public perception of the event in the newspaper, despite the letter and photo meant to somehow justify or soothe the loss. The reader can feel for everyone in the story but it was the unexpected, raw action to be true to her grief that makes the mother (and the story) unforgettable and loved. You wrote what sentiments would be privately thought but not typically expressed (not just in terms of real life

but rarely in books or films about such circumstances). You have a profound ability to craft characters that do what they need to do regardless of how it might be viewed and still elicit meaningful connections. From Carrie in *The Dive from Clausen's Pier*, to evolutions of Joanie in “Things Said or Done” and even, surprisingly, Matt in “Dwell Time”, we feel because with the way you write them, which seems to stem from a widely empathetic view, no character is just one thing.

In the 2002 *Beatrice* interview with Ron Hogan, there is a portion that discusses the concept delivered by Carrie's mother that people aren't inherently good or bad but that their reactions to events can either be good or bad, and you'd added “those reactions can only be understood in relation to the life that precedes them.”

Understanding that individuals, more so than life in general, are complex, where do you feel the writer's role comes in to convey the raw truths and undermine the constrictive labels we struggle with that are either self or societally imposed? Do you feel that even if a course of action to be true to ourselves conflicts with the wants/needs of those surrounding us, that the cost of not pursuing it is actually higher in the end? Do you feel that labels such as “good” or “bad” make neat and tidy work of tangles of emotions we actually need to address?

There are costs to compliance and costs to compromise—just as there are costs to addressing problems and costs to avoiding them. I tend to write about these costs, but I don't think I have a set of beliefs about the way real people struggle with these issues. Except, maybe, that such struggles are interesting and defining.

5) Whether poetry in the form of Dickinson and Yeats as in “Dwell Time” and “Things Said or Done” or music as in “Molten”, other mediums highlighted aspects of the stories. “Molten” describes a song as a dream: “A song was someone else's dream, and when you listened to it you became part of it, and you were linked to all the other people who had listened to it and all the people who would listen to it in times to come.” Music and poetry are mediums that share a large capacity for interpretation and strong, emotional associations. Just as when a stager helping ready clients to sell their home will instruct them to remove family photos and simplify the rooms so that potential buyers can imagine themselves inserted into the lifestyle of that home, music and poetry have spaces that can be used by

many in many different ways to suit different needs; all the people being connected by having occupied those same spaces.

As you had mentioned that music was not a typical medium that you utilized, what are the mediums outside of fiction that you use (poetry, visual art, etc...) to recharge creatively and personally? Which specific examples of these mediums speak to you most (certain poems, particular paintings, etc...) and why?

It's hard to come up with specific examples, because different poems, paintings, pieces of music, dances, photographs, etc., have influenced or inspired me at different times. I love the poetry of Jane Kenyon and John Berryman, the photographs of Richard Misrach, Mark Morris's dances (especially L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato).

Certain landscapes have great meaning and give great comfort to me: Point Reyes, California, is one; the area near Hanalei, in Kauai County, Hawaii, is another. The Children's Crusade opens with a character accidentally finding and falling in love with a piece of property in Portola Valley, California. It's near where I grew up, but my attachment to it personally was below consciousness until I started writing the book. Once I began writing, though, I discovered a deep attachment to the landscape and an interest in trying to bring it to life.



"October; South Cape Beach" by Jan Collins Selman; www.jancollinsselman.com

Joan Anderson is the NYT best-selling author of [A Year by the Sea](#), [An Unfinished Marriage](#), [A Walk on the Beach](#), [A Weekend to Change Your Life](#) and [The Second Journey](#). She has conducted workshops for women around the world.

Joan is a connoisseur of living the independent life, being a part of the world, but not lost by its rules. She is a mid-wife birthing our generation of women into mid-life, as conscious and intentional beings. Joan has learned to live in flow to the point where she attracts what she needs like a spiritual magnet. Her solo adventures on the beaches of Cape Cod, MA led her to a chance encounter with Joan Erickson, wife of world-renowned psychologist, Eric Erickson, who would help Anderson excavate her life to a far deeper level. As she in turn helped Erickson live out her last days in wisdom and joy.

In her books, Joan shares her musings on love, marriage, getting older, caring for aging parents, and spirituality as she aids readers in finding peace and inspiration within their lives. She is a guide for the kind of women who do not want to be stagnant but generative instead.

I had originally interviewed Joan in the autumn of 2009. In my last interview with her, we explored her chance encounter with Joan Erickson in the mists on one of the beaches of Cape Cod. Joan was having an identity crisis and came into contact with the person whose husband coined the phrase and in their astonishing friendship, they came to influence one another's growth. We also talked of Iona, a healing island in the mystical Hebrides and the importance of time alone with oneself. You will read excerpts taken from that interview below.

*I recently caught up with Joan again and it seems she's been very busy. The reason? A movie of her book is on the horizon. It will incorporate both *A Year By the Sea*, when she struck out on her own and *A Walk On the Beach*, when she met Erickson.*

This new interview below the original excerpts, like the movie, recaps the two books and as in any great recipe, folds in new and exciting ingredients such as how serendipity again walked in the door for Joan when famed producer Alexander Janko found Joan's book on his counter. It also contains some bitter ingredients as real life will sometimes send our way and she talks of how to navigate your way through the sea of treacherous but inevitable change to a calmer port after the storm.

Excerpts from the 2009 Interview:

1) During your year by the sea you had a powerful epiphany that was a message to women worldwide. That "we are all as unfinished as the shoreline along the beach." You refer to Clarissa Pinkola Estes who wrote, *Women who Run with Wolves*, and she talks about how in this stage, ages 49-56, we desire to live without rules and go away until finally we have the chance to find our individual reason for being. It is after that, Estes states, that we truly become who we are. I'm there, but what is this need to run? I know for me, that between taking care of my family, my mother, and one thousand other details, I feel as though I can't even think at times. I know it's not just wanderlust, because then, as always, I'd take everyone along. It's more that I have this unfinished manuscript which I feel that I just can't

get to that needs to be born and I have an inkling that I need to go away alone in order to accomplish this.

JA- In Greek, “alone”, comes from all-one. You need time to stop and be alone. You need to hear what your heart has to say without distraction. In my weekend seminars, I take out an hour glass, and I tell women we can’t see the time passing. We need to become intentional about our lives. We as women are the carriers of culture and we can’t carry meaning until we really know who we are. I advocate becoming a scholar of self and soul. I don’t want to get to the coffin not knowing who I really was. In our patriarchal society, we’re always expected to do more rather than be more.

2) When we go away, need it be arduous, physical, and out in nature?

JA- We’ve all become so domesticated, staying inside for the most part. Rarely embracing the wild and natural. I felt it was time to look inside myself and unleash that which is untamed.

DB- Do you think in a controlled atmosphere, say a four-star hotel instead of nature, one could illicit as much change?..

JA- NO! (We both laugh) The call of the wild urges freedom over fear and after any time away in natural surroundings, we go from being careful and appropriate to daring and abandoned. Out of your very undoing, you’ll experience a myriad of breakthroughs.

3) Mid-life also seems to be an age when you question all that has come before. But I do feel that I got the important things right.

JA- In the life-cycle chart, in early childhood, you need to overcome shame with autonomy as a goal; in much the same way, it circles around again near the age of 50. Let go of anything and everyone who ever misunderstood you and become your true self. The strength gained from this is a strong will, with autonomy still being your goal. Be yourself and leave behind who’s watching.

5) In Iona, an island in the Hebrides off the coast of Scotland, you found exactly what and whom you needed at just the right moment. The

serendipity you experienced there seemed like something right out of *The Celestine Prophecy*; only what you experienced was real. I loved reading about the rocks and the sacredness of this place. Were the island's effects on you lasting and tangible?

JA- *It is the only place in the Northern Hemisphere that never came under attack. It's geologically mystical...a sacred place on earth. First of all, it's so difficult to even get to. It takes plane, bus and boat. You spiral in, learn what you need here and hold it, then spiral out. I did work here to uncover the next stage. Many journeys are accidental and what happens there are just accidents. When I went to Iona, however, I had a sacred restlessness within me and so what I came away with was spiritually significant and lasting. In this kind of journey, it's important to use your body, senses, mind and hands. I walked the directions of the cross—North, South, East and West; they all brought me something different, such as patience, healing, clarity. I learned that I needed to become more attuned to the feminine...to accept and receive what comes from Spirit.*

8) Joan Erickson was quoted in your book, *A Walk on the Beach*, as saying, "The great joy is when something happens serendipitously, like an unexpected breeze, or finding this boat out here today. I never feel as though I am living unless I am making contact with the world like we're doing now." I really believe in serendipity and I've even walked some of the same beaches you do. There's always something interesting that happens down the Cape—even if I'm only there for the day. But what an extraordinarily fortuitous meeting with Joan Erickson—she was exactly who you needed at that time in your life and so much more. And it was of course, reciprocal. Do you believe as I do, that when the student is ready, the teacher appears?

JA- *Yes, imagine—I was having an identity crisis and I came into contact with the person whose husband coined the phrase. She stood immersed in the fog. I wasn't looking to meet anyone on that day and there she was, following me! (Laughs) I remember she used to call me and say, "Do you want to get in some trouble today?", at ninety! And at day's end, she would ask, "What moments did you collect today?" I remember her playful ways such as when I would turn around and she'd have seaweed plopped on her head like a mermaid.*

DB- I also loved this, taken from early accounts of her life: “In my youth, I would walk the streets of New York and smell the neighborhoods, all the cooking aromas of people from different places, or walk across the great bridge with rain-soaked hair with the wind on my skin or go to museums where I would get so close to a painting that I could smell the oils.” A similar message conveyed by Erickson elaborated on the importance of such experiences: “We’re taught early on, to stop sensing the world. Parents say ‘no’ to their toddlers all the time when all the child wants to do is sense the world around him. Pity, isn’t it! Overdose on the senses is what I say, all the way through life.”

JA- Yes, she felt strongly about this.

DB- I think I really identified with this because my major in college was Early Childhood Education with an emphasis on psychology. I was taught to help a child experience life by using tactile senses through art. I always encouraged my daughter to draw outside the lines. I’d say, ‘use any colors you wish’, ‘draw on the kitchen counters with Reddi Wip’... I think, however, that we also need to remind ourselves as adults to keep seeing, feeling, playing...

JA- I think, go with your own sense of adventure. There’s a saying: “The habit of deference can grow like a cancer on the soul of a woman.” Don’t defer!

DB- Don’t worry, Joan. It’s all about reciprocity in my life relationships.

JA- (Laughing) You’ll never grow old then!

New Interview 2014:

1) I hear that congratulations are in order. This is so exciting and I know how hard you worked to make the movie, *A Year By the Sea* a reality. In our last interview we talked about what it takes to get a book out there today but getting the movie made initially seemed a herculean task that ended in great triumph. I loved how the producer, Alexander Janko, first found your book on his kitchen counter and after reading it, immediately sought you out and started writing the screenplay. What do you think personally moved him and drew him into this story?

JA- Well, he had a personal tragedy in the form of a terrible loss, so he took some time away. He also needed to get away from real life and contemplate like I did. That's why the book so deeply resonated with him. Sometimes it's necessary to leave the family to confront what has happened. He's actually here for a few months right now on the Cape and we're still in the middle of negotiations.

DB- I really admired him in the videos. He seems so grounded, even spiritual. I have such great admiration for his instincts knowing that there is a huge demographic that just thirsts for a better way to navigate this life.

JA- Yes, his male/female attributes are very well balanced which can happen at this age. He's very balanced and that's because he's found his strength through adversity.

DB- Why does it seem that so many people today are so lost at mid-life, more than any other generation?

JA- There are too many choices, too much computer technology, there's not as much face-to-face. People don't know who they are so there's a great loneliness. We need to get away from the machines, the music, the mechanical world, to see what our hearts need to tell us. In mid-life, we need to ask, is there something out there just for me that I'm passionate about? It's important to avoid stagnation vs. being generative.

2) On your blog you had a letter from a former retreat participant who suddenly wasn't able to connect to nature since her husband had retired. In your answer, you suggest that she take at least one day a month to have an adventure and "do something that is out of the ordinary...with art, music, working with your hands, visiting sacred places, sitting in a chapel and walking on a beach she'd never walked on before...then taking pictures of new-found newness...like soaring birds or unusual vegetation. One moment will lead to another and awaken within you something that is longing to be brought forward." I had to laugh because I bought a backpack the night before I read your blog.

Talk to us about serendipity. The camera I bought a year ago sits in a closet unused though I'd had intentions of taking up photography. The picture taking component really interested me. I loved the term "found newness".

Do you feel that the pictures are necessary to serve as evidence that you took the time out and also to preserve the lessons of the day?

JA- Absolutely, we experience so much in life but then the moment is gone. Joan Erickson used to ask me at the end of the day, "What memories did you create today?" Joan also used to say, "Memories are like pearls, finger each pearl and bring that memory back..." It's important to cement the beautiful moments in your brain. I have so many books of photographs, a picture is a keepsake. There's so much beauty down the Cape—a circle dune, lobster traps, driftwood. Also, there are messages everywhere. A piece of driftwood turns into, how far have I drifted? The Cape is full of metaphors.

DB- I think that's how the universe prompts us when we're looking for answers.

JA- Exactly!

3) You asked a craftsman on Iona, "Why does the Celtic cross always have a circle?" and he answered, "it's the place where all opposites come together and there is another thought that it represents the mother—the woman who holds it all together." I loved that, that the woman is the home, the core and that which holds everything together. We need to refill the well more often than we do. Also, you said that integrating the web of family into your world so that family is part of your life but not your entire life is how we should view things. That's a radical thought for me but necessary if I'm to get my novel out there. There's a beauty as well as a heaviness in being at the center though, isn't there?

JA- (She laughs). You're telling me!

DB- With your workshops and your retreats you are again at the center yet this time as a teacher and guide, drawing in your experiences and letting them flow back out into the world. Amidst the locations of your retreats, and the students and people you meet, how do they in turn nourish and teach you, pouring back into that center?

JA- I won't leave them hanging, going home without a concreteness that they can take away with them. As for me, I love the people who have gone through difficulties and share

them; they're always far more generous, deeper and more empathetic. There are people out there that I'm no longer even friends with because they won't even ask me a question. Life is all about curiosity. I hate it when people say, 'Oh, my life is wonderful,' there's no relating, no give and take in that.

DB- I agree, give me people who have been through something. They're always deeper. And it's so important to remain open and curious about people and the world. I think that's what keeps you interesting and young.

JA- ***Yes!***

DB – To get back to the center, it's hard, isn't it, being all things to everyone? Two years ago I had my elderly mother to care for. Writing couldn't be a priority. Now that I've lost my mother (and still miss her incredibly), I need to get back to working on the novel.

JA- ***Oh! You lost your mother and it's only been two years? That's difficult. You shouldn't even be writing at all yet. It is too early. When I was in Africa and someone passed away, their loved ones were told by the elders to mourn at length, and sometimes told to go away and be alone. Here, we get three days.***

DB- Yes, they were very wise.

JA- ***Yes, they were wise in the tribes. They understood that you need to go through the five stages of grief into acceptance. Process the grief that is a partner to change.***

DB- I feel that I've done that work. Now I need to fold in structure. To treat writing like a real job.

JA- ***Yes, the fall is a good time for that—read my blog on fall. Also make a bucket list for the soul. Go somewhere one or two hours a few times a week by yourself. It's like exercise. You may not even like being alone at first, but it will change you and you'll feel good for having done something for yourself. Connect with nature and you'll return restored.***

4) The call to a second journey usually commences when unexpected change is thrust upon you causing a crisis of feeling so great, that you are

stopped in your tracks. Such personal events as betrayal, a bad diagnosis, the death of a loved one, loss of self esteem, a fall from power, are only a few of the catalysts. For my husband and I, it was the elimination of his position in the corporate world. It has been two years and he has yet to replace the six-figure income which our house and lifestyle demands. We're under the gun and yet we don't seem to know which direction to go in. Any thoughts?

JA- *Each person needs to go off and have solitude in order to be there for the other person. The loss of a job is a death too. Build your own strengths in your own time and I think that having something tangible at the end of the day works towards the solution. You need to ask each other daily, how do we downsize, how do we go from a bigger house to smaller one? You need time away alone to process this. Go away from each other to each experience your own dark night of the soul. Staying together in the same circle is only going to pull you both down and is not really conducive to taking action. Will and empowerment come from conquering adversity and it's important to know you can rely on yourself.*

DB- I know I should view this loss as an adventure but it doesn't feel that way.

JA- *In the word "adventure" in the word "advent" meaning the beginning of something new. The advent of new life.*

DB- Right now, I'd like to stay right where I am and just finish my novel.

JA- *I know, but I have a feeling that in the end you'll be where you're supposed to be.*

5) On your blog, you say, "In a recent devotional I read a line that hit me...'be free in your spirit'...'do not waste your time attaching yourself to hurt and pain'." You go on to say, "I was struck by the word attached...something that denotes clinging and holding on to rather than simply letting go of that which is simply not serving me." I also found this interesting. I needed to really think about that. It's almost implying that we choose to linger in hurt and pain. I've heard a quote by the Dali Lama that goes so far as to say that what people say about you is none of your business. I think it's easier said than done though, being detached from

external painful stimuli that you may not be able to remove yourself from completely or right away. How do we insulate ourselves?

JA- *When shells attach to one another on the beach, there is such a stench created there. These are called toenail shells and the stench will kill you. Disengage from these shells. I love conch shells. There is an unbreakable core. You can see right through them, they're washed clean. They may be broken inside but you can see the whole way through to new life. Wash yourself clean of unwanted influences.*

DB- Disengage from it all; that sounds good.

JA- *I know it sounds simplistic but it's what's needed here. You need to insulate yourself by freeing yourself from them. DISENGAGE and find new shells!*

DB- The metaphor of the shells actually hits the mark perfectly. We really do need to baptize ourselves into a new life.

JA- *Yes, definitely!*

DB- Thank you Joan for your profound insights.

JA- *Thank you, Denise for thinking of me again. Let's talk a third time—around the time when the movie is coming out.*

DB- I'd love that!

We'd like to conclude with a symbolic poem from one of our poets that fits the interview themes:

Other Shell

by Nels Hanson

*The question cast the shadow
of its answer, bivalve mussel's
one Delft-blue shell we chose
from papery sand crab husks*

*and sand dollars' five-pointed
stars, ghost hands of starfish,
plain scallops pilgrims wore,
clams' white shards of heavy*

*pottery, banded curlew feather,
brown-green ropes of kelp for
scaling drowned citadels, razor
shark's incisor. Wet, dry, dark,*

*light, running wave, still beach,
moon, sun, chill, hot, salt, sand,
lost, home. Where water touches
land these contrarities appear,*

*echoing paired opposites. Leave,
stay, no, yes, death, love. Waves
fall, lift as footprints a high tide
erased discover the ocean floor.*

See the poet's bio and another of their works on the Poetry page.

*Here we would like to thank featured past and present authors for permitting us to interview them. It was an honor to be able to discuss the craft of writing with them.

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