

A RANDOM AUTOBIOGRAPH

Sharon Burghard 1992

I was born in November, on tax day, at the very beginning of the baby boom. I spent my summers in a logging camp while my friends stayed home and listened to Elvis. The rest of the time I lived in an Idaho lake resort town where I oogled rich doctors' sons and planned my getaway. For most of my childhood I fought with, loved and hated Tammy Shaw and Boots Reynolds--and I don't even know where they are now. I've gained some knowledge: I can tell autumn's approach from the sound of the crickets' evening song. I know children are brave and honest, until we teach them to be otherwise. The silence when large snowflakes fall is different than the silence of a fine snowfall. I've heard that difference. And I know when snowflakes are ripe for an outstretched tongue--it's during the third snowfall of winter.

John Kennedy died the year I turned seventeen, and I heard that Texas school children cheered while I cried. In college I was courted by a Cuban refugee named Ruben Cedano, who didn't care that I was engaged. Once I stood on four states at one time in Four Corners, New Mexico. For a while I worked in the archives at Stanford. My office was a "gentleman's" library. To go to work there each day, I walked through and with protesting bodies that burned flags and draft cards. I conceived a son in Albuquerque and delivered him in California. He doesn't hold that against me.

I have watched Navajo Indians falling down drunk in Gallup, New Mexico, and have done nothing to help them. I have driven through the pinto bean capitol of the world several times, and I can't remember its name. It's somewhere in Colorado. I got a serious case of chigger bites at Bandelier National Monument, oblivious while I gazed at the ruined remains of a people who lived a thousand years before I was even thought of. I have taken my family to Clatsop Park more than they wanted to go. I walked along the edges of Five Fingers Lake and dipped a toe in every finger. Skipping rocks on mirror smooth lakes is an art I still haven't mastered, but I am working on it.

I spent the last day of May in 1971 at the Albuquerque Zoo and early the next morning gave birth to my daughter. Two margaritas put me under the table once. One summer I was a housemaid for \$15 a week, plus room and board. They called it good experience; I called it slave labor. One winter, I read every book Agatha Christie ever wrote, and I haven't looked at them again.

I have sung *Heartbreak Hotel* to a thousand or more students and they'll probably remember that more than anything else I ever did in the classroom. My brother made me a snake snare one summer, and I found many slithery beauties and held them in my hands, but somewhere along the way, I lost my fearlessness. Now even snakeskin shoes make me shudder.

Poems--I've written several hundred, and a few of them are good. Leo Grogan was my brother's best friend, but one winter evening as we stood by the rock fountain in the park, he gave me my first "real" kiss.

Presidents have lied to me on TV, and one even had my phone bugged. The night Robert Kennedy was assassinated I walked in my sleep, tried to close a banging gate--find some significance there? I can't. Many summers I swam in a mountain beaver pond and felt fish nibble at my feet.

I saw the Pacific Ocean for the first time when I was twenty-one and knew I had been looking for it all my life. The summer after my father died, I planted eight score of roses to ease my pain. His fiddle is silent since he died, and I miss him and the music of his living. Miracles do happen. I have been married for over twenty-five years to the same man, and he is still my best friend.

I've skated on thin ice, and once I walked over a mile in thirty-five degrees below zero weather, but only because I didn't know it was that cold. One year with my family, I followed Chief Joseph's path as he sought and fought for freedom. Soon after our journey, we adopted three wild horses and named one for him.

Marie Ross was my fifth grade teacher. She taught me to believe in myself--that knowledge is power, and then she empowered me. I teach because of her. Falling stars are rare but I have wished on seven. I like kisses best when I am next to a warm fire, but I necked in a snow cave once and thought the experience was wonderful. I best like to breathe air I cannot see, and I miss the snow. I have earned my gray hairs, but I still don't like them. Some days I yell at my children and at other people's children and go to bed feeling guilty.

People have praised me, loved me, respected me, hated me, resented me, teased me, used me, confused me--and I have let them. But there have been moments, a few precious moments, when I have known heaven. It is enough.



Sharon L. Burghard 1946-2009

After a courageous fight for over 12 years, the loving, brilliant, charming and caring Sharon L. Burghard of Aloha, OR lost her battle with cancer on Jan. 4, 2009. She was born on Nov. 15, 1946 to Vernon (deceased) and Lillian White in Lewiston, ID and grew up in Spirit Lake, ID with her Mom, stepfather John Laws (deceased) and bother Vernon (Lenny) White, who lives with his wife Sharon in AR. When she was 15, the family moved to Thompson Falls, MT where she met her husband-to-be Ron Burghard and where her mother still lives. They have two children, John and Melody, and have been blessed with four wonderful granddaughters (Kaytee and Charlette from John and Orissa Burghard living in Vernonia, OR and Lily and Iris from Brian and Melody Emerick living in Portland, OR).

Sharon obtained degrees in English from Montana State University (B.A.) and Idaho State University (M.A and Doctorate). She taught English at J. B. Thomas Jr. High, Hillsboro, OR, becoming a US West Oregon Outstanding Teaching Finalist 1989. In recent years she focused on writing, until the cancer took its toll. She has lived throughout the West with most of her last 31 years in Oregon.

Her life in her words:

Sharon L. Burghard
Vita, Still in Progress

“NO sun, NO fun, NOVember” goes the old saying, but for me
November is a good month, heralding three celebrations:
the first snows of winter, my birthday, and Thanksgiving.
All three give me joy.

For years I grappled with my past, looked through smoking mirrors
at a child who impossibly became the woman I am.

And I still continue to learn:
loving must be given to be gotten,
grandchildren know places of the heart shut to everyone else,
some memories are best served by being forgotten,
and time, healing or not, passes, accelerating with each new year.
I know the impossible happens:
planes fly in thin air, trees and bulbs carry spring in their hearts
through winter,
people can be both friends and lovers,
and everything that seems to end appears anew, unanticipated,
in unexpected places.

I have always hated stories that end with “and then I woke up
and it was all a dream,”
but sometimes I wonder if that’s what happens when we die?

For two-thirds of my life I have been in-between--
daughter but not wise,
mother but not wild--
Now I am a seer, a keeper of family and myth,
my first grandchild gave that gift to me.

I still don’t like to breathe air I can see or drink water I can chew,
but I know for certain that chocolate is a primary food group.

I am many people, some of whom are loved and some of whom are abhorred,
yet I protect with words and ciphers the person I may actually be.

Words can make me cry and laugh and think--
not for me a belief in “Sticks and stones may break my bones,
but words will never hurt me,”
I know the power of words, yet I often spent them foolishly, thoughtlessly,
stealing bad from good.

Since suffering a couple of series of “small” strokes, I have found them
less easily retrieved, no longer can I facilely grab words and stick them in place.
With this word failure, however, the words I excavate and keep now
are more treasured, more likely to shine through space and time.

Every time I lose someone important to me, I find them somewhere else.
I believe we live forever through deeds we do today,
still, I have trouble with the concept of a supreme being and of eternity.
If there is a god who watches and counts and punishes our missteps,
then I refuse to empower him with my belief.

I’ve left my mark on classroom chalkboards and in students’ minds.

They say a person is rich in this world who has one true friend,
so I must be wealthy beyond ken, since I have had four.

Our children reflect the best and worst of Ron and me,
they make me proud and happy, yet I can’t always show it.
I knew when I gave birth to them that we must raise them to go away.
That leaving has not always been easy, yet the paths they forge
shine with promise and hope.
From them, from my parents, from Ron’s parents, from my grandchildren
I gain a sense of cumulative soul--this, then, is what it is all about.

What doctors term depression, I call arsenic days
and I have had and continue to have more than my share.
The good thing is they pass.
The bad thing is they sometimes return when I least expect or can handle them.

I know that my body is not me, that the essential person I am is unbounded
by physical limitations, yet I constantly count my own self worth in
how much I weigh and how I look.
Worse--I see that same assessment in other people’s eyes.

There are some things you can only see if you don’t look straight at them;
the tapestry of life’s pattern is only clear when the weaving is completely done.
I ask myself and others to remember that when we look at each other.

My world shifts and shimmers--a changing in a place
where ancestry is regarded as truth.
If one day my world is Pocatello and the next day Spirit Lake and the
next day any place where my grandchildren breathe and laugh,
what world is truly mine? How can I ever be sure?

Instead I feel the sands shifting, the earth moving,
never sure of where I have been, let alone where I am going
and positive of only one thing

I will take the journey.

Sharon L. Burghard, 1995