NEW LITERARY SOCIETY



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All photos of D. Denise Dianaty and her work are © 2025 D. Denise Dianaty and used with permission.

All photos of JP Sclafani and his work are © 2025 JP Sclafani and used with permission.

NEW LITERARY SOCIETY



CELEBRATING OUR WRITERS: MEMOIRS & BEYOND

AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT: D. DENISE DIANATY

MEMOIR CONTEST 2024: THE WINNERS (MEET ALL

THE WINNERS AND READ FIVE SELECTED MEMOIRS)

AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT: JP SCLAFANI

FEATURED STORY BY JP SCLAFANI

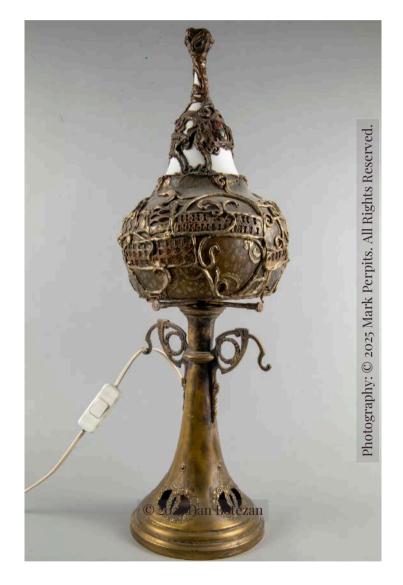
MEMOIRS: A NOVEL EXCERPT BY JULIA KALMAN

ARTSY BOOKISH MOMENTS AND CONTEST DIPLOMAS

EXCITING NEW RELEASES (WITH QR CODES)

COMING NEXT ISSUE: WHAT'S AHEAD IN MAY 2025

ISSUE 4- APRIL 2025

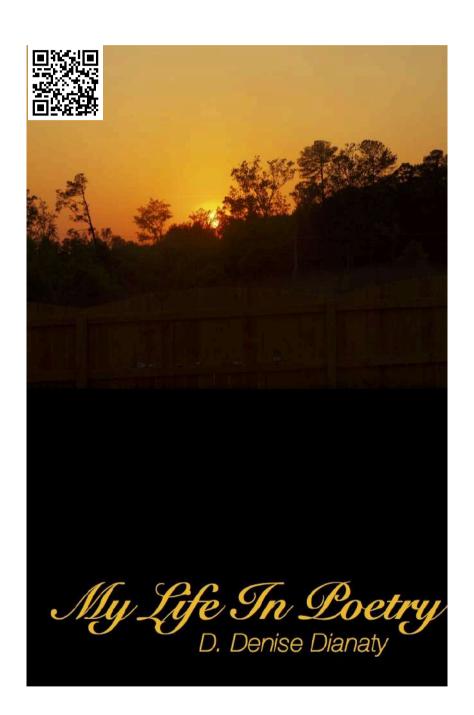


"Illuminating Object", by Dan Botezan

Meet D. Denise Dianaty

Exploring Her Journey

Book Photography



Meet D. Denise Dianaty



D. Denise Dianaty is an artist, art photographer, poet, writer-activist, and editor for several publications.

Much of her poetry is autobiographical or writer-activism. The majority of her essays are writer-activism.

Denise's first published work is an ebook of poetry entitled, My Life In Poetry.

She has a second published work, also an ebook entitled, <u>The Dance Plays On...</u> — which is a short romance novelette of paranormal fiction.

In her fiction, **Denise** has a penchant for "beautiful tragedy."

Available on Medium, <u>The Dance Plays On...</u> is "a delicately sad tale of transcendent love, a perfect kiss, and haunting, beautiful tragedy." Further examples may be found in her short stories, "<u>Why Am I Alone?</u>" (an existential soulmate fiction) and "<u>Tragic Child</u>"

Denise considers herself a writing activist for a just and equitable society.

As a photographer drawn to the dichotomy of decay being overtaken by new life in the form of natural growth, she gravitates to rural scenes of old and/or abandoned structures.

She tries to capture something more quintessential in human or animal photography than just another portrait.

Meet D. Denise Dianaty

She says, "I may not always be successful, but I try to come from a perspective of compassion, humility, and kindness; this is how I believe I may demonstrate the image of God in the world."

Her early life was full of pain and heartache. Yet, she did more than survive. **Denise** overcame with the help of truly good and decent human people — people of varied beliefs and non-beliefs, people of varied orientations and gender identities. From among such people as these, she created and grew her own family beyond blood ties.

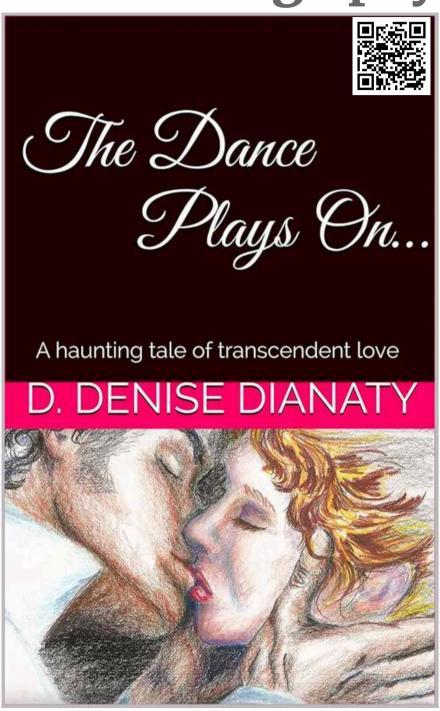
Denise has built a life rich in love and the loyalty of friends and the family she built for herself. She is a devoted mother to an amazing son with a heart of giving and empathy.

For more than thirty years, she has been married to a Persian immigrant whom she describes as "the kindest, most gentle and loving husband and father for whom I could ever have hoped... just a bone-deep decent human being."

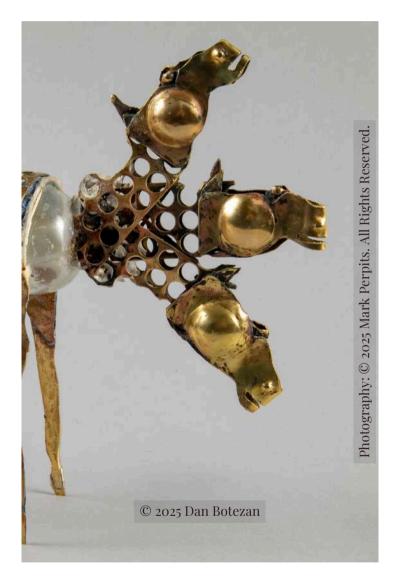
Embrace the Joy!

D. Denise Dianaty won the **2024 NLS Popularity Prize** for her memoir, *The Best Grandfather Imaginable*. You can read her story in the pages that follow.

Book Photography



Fine Art Photography



"Cerberus", by Dan Botezan

Best of Memoir 2024

Moments That Made Us

Fine Art Photography



"Horse", by Dan Botezan

Memoir Spotlight 2024: Voices That Stay With Us

Popularity Prize: D. Denise Dianaty

"For her heartfelt tribute to family bonds and cherished memories."

For the memoir: The Best Grandfather Imaginable.

🕎 New Literary Society Prize: Martino Sacchi

"For his exploration of self-discovery and the transformative power of education."

For the memoir:: A Teacher is Born... Or Not?

Thonorable Mention: Miguel Santiago

"For his deep dive into mental anguish and human experience." For the memoir: Solitary Confinement: 60.737.040.000 Seconds

Thonorable Mention: Zizi Majid

"For illuminating the profound interplay of joy and sorrow in life's transformative moments."

For the memoir: How Could I Forget That Moment?

Thonorable Mention: Grant Tate

"For evoking nostalgia and the weight of lasting friendship." For the memoir: A Sad Evening in Montesson

Thonorable Mention: Trish Church

"For portraying healing and the journey to start anew."
For: Trapped by Memories: My Journey from a House to a Home.

Memoir Spotlight 2024: Voices That Stay With Us

🕎 Honorable Mention: Katie Moore

"For her inspiring reflection on personal growth and renewal." For the memoir: How a Victory Garden Mentality Helped Me Mentally Fight a Loved One's Cancer War

🕎 Honorable Mention: Shayla Renee

"For her relatable themes of motherhood and resilience."
For the memoir: The Moment That Changed My Life: Going Back
Was Not an Option

Thonorable Mention: J & J (Jessica & Joshua J. Lyon)

"For their heartfelt portrayal of love, partnership, and redefining masculinity in family life."

For the memoir: The Sexiest Male Quality According to My Wife

Memoir Spotlight 2024: Voices That Stay With Us

As we look ahead to the **2025 Memoir Contest**, we revisit five standout stories from last year's edition—memoirs that continue to resonate with depth, emotion, and honesty.

Meet the winning authors and step into their unforgettable pieces. More coming next month. And don't forget to follow our publication on Medium and join this year's contest, starting in July. We can't wait to hear your stories!

Featured Authors from the 2024 Memoir Contest:

D. Denise Dianaty



• Grant Tate



• Trish Church



• Miguel Santiago



Zizi Majid



2024 POPULARITY PRIZE

MEMOTIR CONTEST

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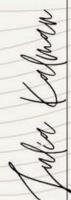
D. DENISE DIANATY

FOR HER HEARTFELT TRIBUTE TO FAMILY BONDS AND CHERISHED MEMORIES. THIS CERTIFICATE IS GIVEN TO D. DENISE DIANATY

OCTOBER, 16, 2024

Sal Gallaber

EDITOR NUS



OWNERNIS

HOSTED ON MEDIUM

Popularity Prize: D. Denise Dianaty

"For her heartfelt tribute to family bonds and cherished memories."

The Best Grandfather Imaginable

After a disastrous 2006 of mounting financial difficulties, we lost everything in Missouri. We had to sell up and move. In February of 2007, with our three-year-old son, Gray, we moved back to North Carolina, where I'm from, and where most of my immediate kin were living.

Our goal was to be near my grandparents. We moved to Fayetteville, into Gran's house. Gran had already been in the nursing home for almost a decade. But, we moved in to live with Grandpa Jack while our house in Missouri was for sale. What we expected to be a month or so stretched into well over a year.

Looking back now, I simply cannot express how grateful I am. Grandpa welcomed my husband, Hamid, like his very own son. And, oh my goodness... he loved our boy. He spent every second he could with Gray. My heart still swells remembering how much he loved Gray.

Grandpa Jack even taught Gray to read with the newspaper.

He would sit at the kitchen table, with Gray on his lap, while reading the paper with his morning coffee.

Because we'd had to leave most of our things, including Gray's little library, packed away, Jack didn't read children's books to Gray. Instead, he read aloud from the paper for Gray and pointed to the words on the page as he read.

After just a few weeks, three-year-old Gray spontaneously started pointing to the words in the headlines, he recognized and reading

Popularity Prize: D. Denise Dianaty

"For her heartfelt tribute to family bonds and cherished memories."

The Best Grandfather Imaginable

them out to Grandpa Jack.

He never really read any of the articles back then. However, it wasn't long before Gray was reading and explaining headlines on his own before he was four years old.

Sitting at the table reading the newspaper became their morning ritual. Grandpa Jack would settle at the table with his paper and his coffee. Gray would climb up on his knee. Then, he'd hand Gray one of the inner sections of the paper.

When Jack finished his "A" section of the paper, he'd ask Gray to tell him about whatever section he'd been looking at. With great seriousness, he'd point to each headline and read it out, then tell his great-grandpa what he thought it was saying. Grandpa would listen with equal seriousness and discuss it with him for all the world as if Gray was the wisest of sages.

Jack never talked down to Gray. He never used baby talk like all my other kin. Grandpa Jack gave Gray more than just time... He gave him deep and focused attention. He'd even tell any adults who barged in talking over "the baby" to hush and let him finish.

Sadly, Gray only had around a year and half with Jack. Grandpa passed away in September of 2008. But, Grandpa Jack really was the best grandfather imaginable for my son. Gray may not have a whole childhood of memories with him as I did, but he carries an imprint of what family should be and how they should love one another, from his great-grandfather.

Fine Art Photography



"Horse", by Dan Botezan

2024 HONORABLE MENTION

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PROUDLY PRESENTED TO

TRISH CHURCH

"FOR PORTRAYING HEALING AND THE JOURNEY TO START ANEW THIS CERTIFICATE IS GIVEN TO TRISH CHURCH OCTOBER 16, 2024

Sal Gallaber

EDITOR NUS

Tulia Kalman

OWNER NLS

HOSTED ON MEDIUM

Honorable Mention: Trish Church

"For portraying healing and the journey to start anew."

Trapped by Memories: My Journey from a House to a Home

I entered like a zombie.

This is not my home; this is a house.

I walked to my favorite chair and collapsed in it.

That's where I spent the next two weeks staring at the television without actually watching it.

I slept in that chair and ate in it on the rare occasion I felt like eating. I had no appetite.

The chair was holding me prisoner.

Despite the warmth and charm the house once radiated, I felt lost in its confines.

Something was wrong with the air in the house.

I couldn't breathe.

The air lacked oxygen.

The house had lost its spirit, and so had I.

After two weeks, I was finally able to leave the chair.

My legs felt weak.

I wandered through the house like a stranger in a strange land.

Nothing felt familiar.

Why was I here?

One rainy afternoon, I sat by the large bay window in the living room, watching the raindrops race down the glass.

The house was eerily quiet, the kind of quiet that presses in on you from all sides.

I could hear the faint ticking of the clock on the dining room wall.

A sound that once provided comfort but now felt like a reminder of

Honorable Mention: Trish Church

"For portraying healing and the journey to start anew."

Trapped by Memories: My Journey from a House to a Home

time slipping away.

I decided to explore the house, hoping to reconnect with it somehow. I moved from room to room; memories flooded back. I felt like an outsider peering in on someone else's life.

That night, I sat by the bay window again.

The rain was still falling softly outside, but I felt a sense of peace. I knew what I had to do.

This was our home, not my home. It would never be the same without him.

I looked around the room at everything I used to treasure. It was meaningless now.

That's when I made my decision.

I would spend the next year gradually selling all these possessions and getting ready to downsize.

I had no family here.

I had some wonderful friends but nothing to keep me in the area.

This occurred in 2020, and I knew I needed a fresh start after my husband passed.

I was scared but knew I couldn't stay in that house.

By 2022, I had sold everything and moved to North Carolina alone. It was a scary move but a wise decision.

I've been healing and making a new life for myself.

Fine Art Photography



"Unicorn", by Dan Botezan

2024 HONORABLE MENTION

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PROUDLY PRESENTED TO

ZIZI MAJID

FOR ILLUMINATING THE PROFOUND INTERPLAY OF JOY AND SORROW IN LIFE'S TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENTS THIS CERTIFICATE IS GIVEN TO ZIZI MAIID OCTOBER 16, 2024

Sal Gallaber

EDITOR NUS

Tulia Kalman

OWNER NIS

HOSTED ON MEDIUM

Honorable Mention: Zizi Majid

"For illuminating the interplay of joy and sorrow in life's transformative moments."

How Could I Forget That Moment?

How do you define that moment, or can one define it? I kept thinking about my life and hoped, the moment might jump out and make my task easier. It didn't, and so, I traveled back in time.

I smiled as I thought of all those moments that could have been. My father's deep and unconditional love, my wedding day, my children's birthdays. The first day at my boutique, my challenge and my pride, and my joy. The long-awaited weddings of my two daughters. The list can go on forever, and as I am writing and thinking about all that I was blessed with, I am grateful for having experienced all that good in my life.

Then, I started frowning when memories popped up of the moments that had challenged me, hurt and bruised my soul to the extent that it still hurts to think about them. Losing my father and not being there to say goodbye to him one last time. The day I boarded a plane to meet an almost stranger that I married, leaving my family, friends, and all I loved and cherished behind. The day my one-year-old daughter was diagnosed with Type I diabetes, and the day my youngest daughter at eleven years old was diagnosed with Type I diabetes. The day I rushed to the hospital where my son was fighting for his life after suffering a traumatic brain injury.

This list could go on forever as well. But these were not the defining moments. Though I treasure them all, some gave me happiness beyond words and others tore me apart in pieces nearly destroying

Honorable Mention: Zizi Majid

"For illuminating the interplay of joy and sorrow in life's transformative moments."

How Could I Forget That Moment?

me, and threatening my very existence.

Water and nature inspire and get my creative juices flowing. I am sitting in a park with a lake in front of me, and all the memories spent lazing by the water come rushing back. By the pool or the ocean, enjoying the calm and peace seemed to say that was the treasure. I treasure those moments of happy times, but these didn't change me or my life for the better. All the moments I have mentioned, the good and the not-so-good, were there, passed and we moved on.

You must be wondering what that moment was.

The day I remember clearly when the neurologist diagnosed my husband with Dementia/Alzheimer's and said to me in a stark, matter-of-fact way, "He can no longer practice and no longer drive. He will probably need assistance doing everything." I sat there dumbfounded, scared, unable to fathom a life without him in charge. He had always been my anchor, my rock.

That moment changed me and I decided it was time to transform myself and turn my life around and to do it with grace and gratitude. The courage, strength, and fortitude that had just entered my body and soul told me that I would be okay and that everything would work out.

That is the moment I will treasure for the rest of my life because it made me into who I am today.

Fine Art Photography



"Bollywood", by Dan Botezan

2024 HONORABLE MENTION

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PROUDLY PRESENTED TO

GRANT TATE

FOR EVOKING NOSTALGIA AND THE WEIGHT OF LASTING FRIENDSHIP THIS CERTIFICATE IS GIVEN TO GRANT TATE OCTOBER 16, 2024

Sal Gallahea

EDITOR NUS

Tulia Kalman

OWNER NIS

HOSTED ON MEDIUM

Honorable Mention: Grant Tate

"For evoking nostalgia and the weight of lasting friendship."

A Sad Evening in Montesson

It's a calm evening in Montesson. The Bastille Day fireworks have been spent, and the rain clouds have moved on toward Eastern Europe. The sun is setting over the hill on the far side of the Seine a little sooner than yesterday. Summer is over, and autumn is arriving.

My environment is so different from six months ago — another continent, a different job, new vistas opening.

But some bad news arrived last night. My friend and colleague from IBM days, Leo Kilcoyne, died in a tragic car accident.

It's hard to imagine the U.S. without Leo in it. Good, solid, steady Leo has been in my life since 1965 — almost thirty years.

I remember when Leo and I first met. I was among the first people to arrive in Boulder, CO, where we were starting a new manufacturing plant. I had moved fast to claim an office in our temporary building before others arrived from our locations in Poughkeepsie and Kingston. I took the nameplate from my briefcase and posted it on the door.

A few days later, Leo saw the name, and stuck his head in.

"Hi, I'm Leo Kilcoyne. I guess we'll be working together."

"Yep, I've heard of you," I replied.

We chatted for a while, and I remember thinking he was different from the other Kingston crowd I knew. He was warm, easygoing.

Honorable Mention: Grant Tate

"For evoking nostalgia and the weight of lasting friendship."

A Sad Evening in Montesson

Through the years, my respect for Leo grew as we worked together. He knew how to hold the team together when the environment was difficult. When the vultures from headquarters arrived, he knew how to talk to them. He was a symbol of stability.

Being in Europe reminds me of him. As far as I know, some laundry still has the underwear he left in Stuttgart. Leo always arrived at the plane at the last minute. So, he probably thought that he would have plenty of time to stop by the laundry on the way to the airport. But, as usual, he was talking until it was too late.

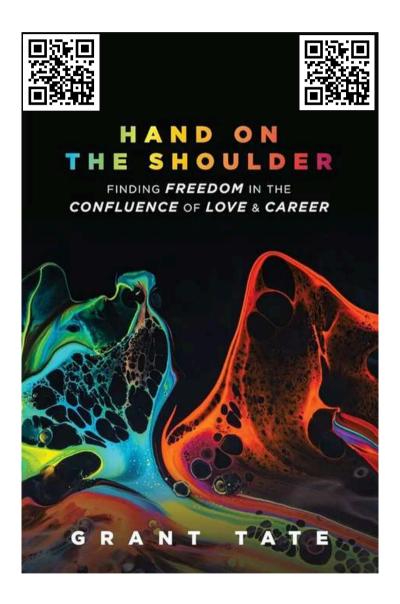
Sometimes, in our quiet moments, we talked about what it would be like after IBM — when we both retired. We imagined sitting on a park bench in Santa Fe, drinking wine and watching the people go by while reminding each other of stories from the past. By the time such a possibility could have become a reality, I was not too fond of IBM, but he seemed to keep enjoying it.

Maybe part of my estrangement from the company was that there were few managers like Leo.

So tonight, I'll grab some cheese, bread, and a bottle of wine and head for the park bench on the lawn. It's a quiet night.

No people are out walking, and Montesson is not Santa Fe, but in my memory and in my soul, Leo and I will have a bottle of wine together.

Book Photography



2024 HONORABLE MENTION

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PROUDLY PRESENTED TO

MIGUELSANTIAGO

"FOR HIS DEEP DIVE INTO MENTAL ANGUISH AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE THIS CERTIFICATE IS GIVEN TO MIGUEL SANTIAGO OCTOBER 16, 2024

Gal Gallaher

EDITOR NUS

Tulia Kalman

HOSTED ON MEDIUM

Honorable Mention: Miguel Santiago

"For his deep dive into mental anguish and human experience."

Solitary Confinement: 60.737.040.000 Seconds

Goodbye, I heard it.

The pioneers of this industry were familiar to the public as they began their journey through the red virgin soil of the anthracite fields.

I kept the streets empty for months while the devil entered one another, so I ran (so far away); when I got back, I was done dying a quiet death in this life.

Flowers blossom while the rain falls on the ground like soil covers the coffin of the fallen dead.

This cow song is doing it again: the ferocious thunder melody may the dark angels murmur to God's ear.

My body is a cage, a beautiful mystery of disgraceful sickness and dark thoughts that once opened up to all of us.

The world retreats, wishing that inside, they would watch it passionately.

At the same time, this horrendous deformity of tearing, somber, menacing, and ominous goes by, disturbing and terrifying those who cannot find themselves shelter in this visual spectacular of abhorrent acts of calamities, and those who were watching passionately are having an excruciating pneumothorax while crimson tears are falling down their eyes.

What a wonderful world, I say to myself, this twisted olive branch tree with broken fingers deliberately planted to fail me, suffering anonymously from chains that are entangled into my body. I seek solitude in my wrecked soul.

Fine Art Photography

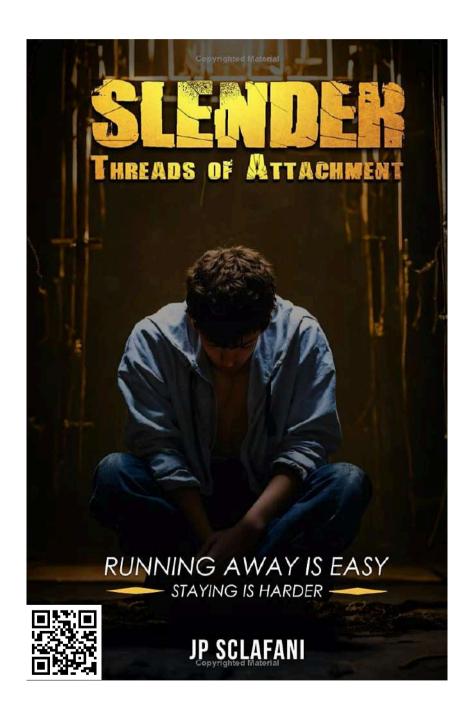


"Unicorn", by Dan Botezan

More Memoir

Meet JP Sclafani and his Works

Book Photography



Meet JP Sclafani and His Works



JP Sclafani was born in New York City and raised on Long Island, New York.

From an early age, he was captivated by the power of storytelling and drawn to writing as both a creative outlet and a personal refuge.

For **Sclafani**, writing has long served as an escape, a stress reliever, and a way to process and navigate life's challenges.

His passion for the craft led him to author three one-act plays, all of which were produced off-off-Broadway to enthusiastic acclaim.

Among them, his personal favorite is *Eva, Waiting for Adolf*, a thought-provoking piece that exemplifies his talent for blending depth with dramatic flair.

Sclafani's 2024 poetry collection, *Slender Threads of Attachment*, has been praised as "absolutely riveting" and "a must-read," with readers drawn to its emotional depth and eager to follow the main character's journey beyond the final page.

In the featured memoir story, **Sclafani** uses his talent for nostalgic storytelling to vividly depict the colorful realm of youthful fantasy. He portrays the pure energy, lighthearted rivalry, and intense friendship of a bygone summer spent erecting forts and engaging in make-believe combat with striking detail and emotional candor. His thoughts demonstrate a profound respect for youth's innocence and memory's enduring power, which makes this coming-of-age story both poignant and classic.

We had the tree to top all trees.

It was a towering old Oak that topped all the other trees in the forest we called the Diggers.

The tree's colossal trunk, sheathed in patches of tawny, coarse bark made climbing an easy chore for a warrior burdened down by armor.

At about ten feet up, three thick, heavy boughs jutted out at right angles.

In the crook of those branches sat our fort, our castle in the sky—a grand box-shaped structure made of aged plywood and scrap lumber.

Two small, barred windows stared out at the surrounding world.

A long, wooden gangplank, the only way up, but not down, led to the heavy wood and steel hinged front door.

A secret trap door led to the sentry post on top of its black plywood roof.

This is where we spent countless hours and days honing our war skills; practicing swordplay and maneuvering techniques, hand to hand combat tactics, and basic soldier camaraderie; all in preparation for a summer of battle.

We stood roughly twenty men strong, from ages 9 to 12.

I was one of the youngest at 9 years old, but I was big and powerful enough to stand my ground with the best of them, shoulder to shoulder.

And maidens - girls from our town, flocked around us; preparing meals, cleaning, nursing our battle wounds, and seeing to the

general welfare of the camp.

As warriors, we were armed with swords of the hardest wood, and metal garbage-can cover shields of the strongest steel.

We walked tall, armed with the knowledge that all twenty of us were together to the end.

Not unlike the musketeers of old, we shouted their motto;

"One for all and all for one!"

Throughout that summer, our little camp thrived, growing stronger and bolder with each victory over rival camps.

We took great pride in our quick, surprise attack tactics - pounce and plunder! Take no prisoners!

We gained quite a reputation, especially when we conquered the school-bleacher camp.

Now that was a battle!

It was an early Saturday afternoon surprise attack.

We caught them completely off guard, playing football.

Their swords and armor lie in a pile off to the side.

With no posted sentries, we came sweeping down from the hill at top speed and devastated them, with only minor injuries to ourselves.

This began a whole summer of fun.

Looking back on those dog days, I can remember how quick I was so to finish my home chores, so I could take my place among my true comrades back at the camp.

At home, I was just another little 9-year-old on summer recess.

But at our forest fort, I was a warrior.

A man among men.

Then, came that terrible, fateful day.

It was a hot, humid, late August afternoon, the kind of lazy summer day just made for doing nothing.

A quiet day with no hint of malice in the air.

The sun's hazy golden rays filtered through the dense forest canopy.

I was sitting in the Treefort, along with two others.

We were drinking cold Orange Crushes, relaxing, chatting about school, girls, and this and that, when, without warning, shouts and screams suddenly shattered the peace.

"Attack! Attack! Kill! Kill!"

The sounds of swords and shields clashing among battle cries, thrust our sleepy little village into chaos.

I ran to the window and peered out frantically at the chaotic scene before me.

We were under siege!

Our camp was under attack!

They caught us off guard, and I was witnessing a terrible battle outside.

We were fighting for our lives.

The odds were against us.

Some of my comrades were weaponless.

Others could only make a feeble attempt at holding the intruders at bay.

We were greatly outnumbered and were overwhelmed.

Suddenly, clamor from below drew my attention.

The enemy had broken through our feeble defenses.

Our sentry let out a thunderous roar as he swung down from above on a rope taking out two of the enemy below, but others kept coming.

They began climbing the tree—yelling bloody murder!

With Excalibur, my trusty sword in hand, I took my place alongside my two remaining comrades and the last defenders of the fort.

"Clang! Bang! Boom!"

The door crashed open, and four invaders rushed us.

We fought bravely! A battle the Sparton's of old would have been proud of....

But it was just a matter of time.

Within minutes, fate had taken its toll.

I lay on the ground outside, battered and broken in both body and spirit.

The pain was intense.

Somehow, in the melee, I had been pushed from the Treefort, injuring my ankle from the ten-foot fall.

I also sported a nasty bump on my head.

How long I lay there sobbing into the grass, I did not know.

All was dead quiet around me.

I feared looking up.

I sat up painfully, viewing the destruction.

The camp was in total ruin — the fort destroyed; walls kicked out, roof caved in, the gangplank tossed aside.

Broken armor, shields, and swords lay scattered about the abandoned site.

My head — and heart — ached.

The end had come, and with it the end of the summer.

With tearful eyes, I glanced at my watch.

I realized I had also missed dinner.

Now I had some real explaining to do.

I hurriedly hobbled home and swore out loud, pumping my fist in the air —

"Just wait till next year. We will build an even bigger and better Treefort!"

The End.

More Memoir

Anti-Memoirs: blending fact, fiction, and reflection.

Author Portrait



Photo of Julia Kalman by Dumitru Antonescu, Camera din Față, 2015.

An Excerpt from the Novel

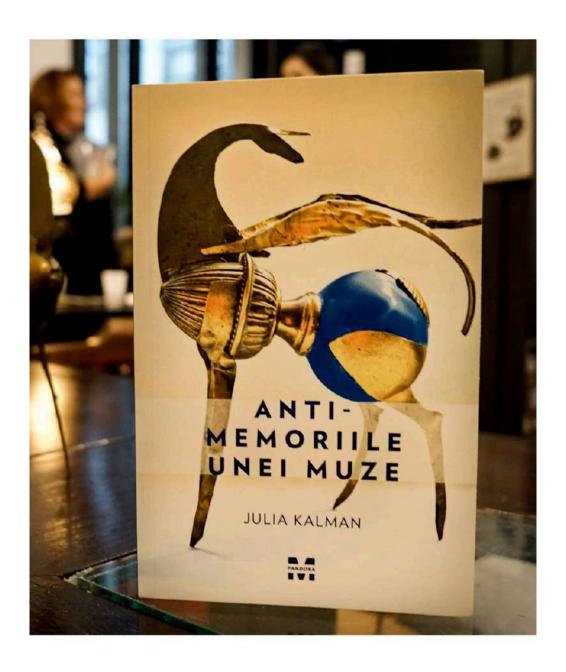
By Julia Kalman

Main Characters

- Dan a fine artist
- Dana artist
- von B fine artist
- Model von B's girlfriend, a model
- Nosy my unexpectedly favorite character in 2025 I can't quite explain why
- Not a watchmaker
- € numismatist, antique dealer, visual artist
- Alfred Regreta's grandfather
- Regreta the muse and storyteller
- Aye-aye our dear one

The Prologue and Epilogue take place in the Old Town around 2020, inside a cake in a jar.

Book Photography



An Excerpt from the Novel

By Julia Kalman

MAKINGOF

2007

That year, I read a lot, and it was also the year I started writing. It was a year marked by the drama of losing one of Dan's dearest friends, who has impressed me since childhood and whose vocal timbre represents for me the voice of conscience. It rained constantly during that time, until the abyss was filled, and the water brought me into the light, like an unpolished stone.

In December of the same year, I was doing nothing—just lying on the cushions of a sofa, head down, blonde curls tousled by the undulations of a scruffy Burmese cat that vibrated seductively with its whiskers. I listened to Led Zepp, Deep Purple & Sopor Aeternus, amidst the screams of the eternally hungry feline that hunted shadows coiled in corners. The rooms were crammed with antiques, books, and toys, the walls paneled with works of art, only the television had a separate opinion, but its dissonance really didn't matter after a few glasses.

For hours on end, I would gaze enchanted at the coffee table in front of me, where everything I could have wished for at the time was in a delightful mess: cups with fruits macerated in vodka, a round bottle of South American vodka, chocolate cream, crumpled books, an old wooden box that spat out cigarettes, nail polish, cheese biscuits, a remote control, crossword puzzles from the eighties discovered by Dan in some attic, and probably the only casserole dish in the house with the

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By Julia Kalman

day's specialty: lasagna, chicken in white sauce, or leeks with rice.

I was living a life as simple and comforting as possible for an introvert: I read, ate, drank, and smoked between two houses, a few workshops, and galleries. I was never talkative, and alcohol made me even more mute; it depressed me. But since time had suddenly become very lenient with me, and the bohemians overwhelmed me with compliments, I lived surrounded by art, like in a kaleidoscope made of seven mirrors, not just two or three.

"This is your writer's pen," Dan told me one day with a wicked smile that boded ill.

Adieu!

At first, my new focus received dubious acceptance, but soon, the artists grew suspicious, fearing I was smarter than I appeared or perhaps even drafting reports about them. As a result, I lost my aura of innocent muse, tarnished my reputation as the ideal woman, and ended my sweet idleness.

I noted everything I heard: stories about well-bred ladies and filthy whores, fortunes, travels, cultural personalities.

Over time, I became more skeptical, and now I no longer believed that Dan had made love all night in the winter chill, in the middle of a field, on a bed of snow, until he was chased away by crows stirred by the sunrise.

"But I didn't write aimlessly; there was a plan. The painfully long sentences were more like transcriptions of reality, but, for better or worse,

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in about a year, I had completed 300 scandalous A4 pages, ending with a Christian poem.

'Palma Christi' was the title."

What was missing?

"You write very well, but the text doesn't come through you. A writer is a reflexive exhibitionist, and you remain a moralist," grumbled Dan.

And he was right.

In fact, I felt guilty for my laziness, for all the pointless adventures and craziness, and I was searching for motivation, a reference point, an explanation, or a conclusion within a traditional framework.

Back then, I had quit smoking, but I was craving everything, no matter when or how much, and beautiful people were everywhere, reflected symmetrically in the mirrors of my lenses.

Their beauty blinded me, then lifted me up.

Seeking to resonate with it, I adopted a neutral gender identity, a personal choice—a denial of sexuality, a total disdain for both instincts and social constraints. And so, I was reborn, nurtured by the dawn in a militant world.

I am, therefore, a child who adores women and admires men with the same passion, without discrimination.

I seek the repressed boy in a woman and the girl hidden in every man; I find myself in them and desire only myself.

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And then?

At our first meeting, there were sparks between Dan and me, though I had no idea where they were coming from. Scandals arose from nothing, the room bows made us reconcile (those are some insects, which we discovered after three days of drinking, I had one in the living room too, which disappeared after painting it). Meanwhile, both his friends and my family hoped to separate us, fearing the intensity of our connection. Why? Because he worked too much, while I dreamed too intensely.

After a few years of heartache, we separated, but that ultimately united us forever. I became dependent on his advice. He became my closest friend. I continued visiting his workshop, surrounded by those bohemian men, and the tension between us became almost unbearable.

He drank, drank, drank, and from the gentlest man, he transformed into an accuser; in those moments, I had to see myself through his eyes, twenty years older, and die. He said I was too hot, and maybe I was, but in those moments, I needed affection so badly that I would have fallen in love with anything—even a broomstick (but not just any broomstick, no, I had my eyes on a rye broom with sequins for young girls I saw on Facebook).

Can a boyfriend become a friend?

He was more like a dementor (for Harry Potter fans), and I called him mentor, uncle; however, from the very beginning, he was my teacher. I exasperated him by reading the same text in various versions, never satisfied with any of them.

Eventually, the novel found its way into more knowledgeable hands.

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What needed to be changed?

The beginning: we needed a shocking situation on the front page, the lengthy sentences had to be shortened, as well as the number of characters.

The end, the title, the atmosphere—my name. Actually, I should have written better children's prose, leaving the novels for later.

Really?

Yes, you were right. I needed to find the right tone. I hadn't succeeded, and I didn't understand why. Now I know: I have always been passionate about dictionaries, encyclopedias, theoretical books, and old literature.

That's where I learned Romanian, and I only picked up colloquial language around the age of thirty in Dan's workshop.

My season

The first book I published brought me about seven extra kilos and D-cup breasts, men bombarded me with hugs, I had never had so much success with them, only they grumbled spitefully. In those tense moments, I associated their reactions with my text. Over time, however, I realized that very few had the patience to actually read it.

And then?

I had stirred in everyone a desire to dominate me. I was largely absent, my soul wandering through virgin glades with my good Wiccan friend, leaving behind a child-woman clutching a doll in her arms. My evident vulnerability stirred intense passions.

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After a horrible night with a man who lacked sensitivity, I rebelled against everyone and stopped working at the workshop.

Depression or revolt?

Perhaps, it was mortification. I don't want to remember it at all. I drank iced tea, swam, became one with the water—it was the only thing that touched me. It washed away sixteen kilos. I had the gentlest friends by my side, to whom I never confessed the fling.

And yet, autumn found me coppery and energetic. I was still receiving intimidating letters and anonymous phone calls from a jealous woman.

Escapism

A wall rose between my so-called bohemian friends and me, over which I stepped until I felt the new ground beneath my feet—a new reality that was solely mine. I admired them, loved them, and hated them with all my heart, regretting my intense, contradictory feelings.

To resolve the conflicts, I took refuge in an imaginary space, and that's how the sci-fi version of the novel was born—"WATCH4."

This sixth version is vastly different from the initial transcripts, with the text undergoing a significant departure from reality. It is a lively and strange text, in my opinion, contrasting the Old City with a fictional New City. It has a cover I'm still very proud of.

With it, a cold analytical detachment settled over me. It's a great blessing that I didn't publish it in this form. And what a stroke of luck.

Author Portrait

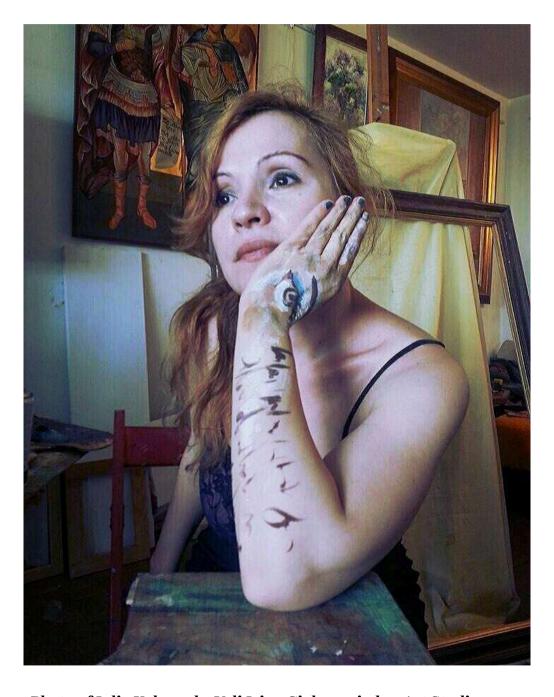


Photo of Julia Kalman by Vali Irina Ciobanu, in her Art Studio, 2015.

Fine Art Photography



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Where had I gone wrong?

Everything seemed perfect until the day I opened a book about 19th-century intimacy. The author's love for the Old City captivated me. Although two hundred years separated me from the characters of that era, I shared their values and hopes. Or maybe the writing seduced me to such an extent that I came to believe it. I don't know.

By chance, I discovered a poem dedicated to the princes of the Old Court in an art gallery, and it captured my imagination. It was precisely this world I wanted to depict—or rather, what remains of it today—beyond the unseen curtain that separates authentic bohemia from the uncouth and the wannabes.

So, I decided to rewrite the text and write a novel from the heart.

A new trap, perhaps?

Yes, the novel would have to wait. While browsing the internet, I met Dominique and Anca and fell into the trap of poetry.

OMG, someone (I don't know who) advised me to masturbate in the text, and I did it in a necrophilic manner.

OMG, I lost three kilos in three days, shaking from the impact of the man killed on the pedestrian crossing. He inspired my poetry, and I couldn't forget him. For three months, I fought to escape through metaphor, as if metaphor itself could save me from death.

Here is one of them:

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"Chameleon shifts,
Kaleidoscope's colors burn—
Art's fire consumes him."

Agreed?

From my point of view, it's about mimesis, metamorphosis, and catharsis.

I don't associate it with Satan or fire. To me, it is a fascinating creature that I have only just begun to understand.

And the novel, then?

"The Chameleon" seemed like a good title back then, mainly because it had changed so many times. I kept the cover. The characters will also transform; they will be largely demystified.

The demon may descend from the pedestal, and I will become the madman of the Old Town. The "self" returns in the first-person point of view, and the book will be written from the perspective of Regreta. Will I be the Regreta, or not?

Yes, and no.

And no more sci-fi vibes. Fear the plot's disappearance. I don't know how I'll part with the ending, which has survived for six years. I feel the need for something elevated, beyond immediate reality. Maybe I will manage to get there, without heaven, without hell, and without XTC.

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Recycle-bin

The poem about the chameleon ended up in workshop texts, but the other two about sex & vodka were quite OK, so that's fine.

Brain, heart, and sex

I started writing with my platinum mind. It was very pleasant; it flattered my ego. My friends pointed fingers at me:

"You have no heart!"

I was supposedly always interested in an idea, a project, or an object, but I didn't place enough value on sex & love.

"Herzilein, Herzi, you loved that man. You tortured him for two months with your English lessons, with your stupid German accent, I don't know how he had the patience, and then... boom," a prima ballerina scolded me.

I must admit, I am not good at love. I don't know much about men, but their brains excite me, and I fall in love with my entire being, greedy for self-destruction.

I have loved rarely, and for some time now, I have trained myself to stop before it's too late.

"Write a love story," my dad suggested.

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He meant well, but there is no doubt, my feelings are atrophied, undifferentiated, unlike his. I learned about this from Jung while hunting for subliminal stimuli in the collective unconscious.

The core of my love stories is based on admiration; it's about brain & dream & morbid sensuality. The approach and separation converge towards the end, sometimes unfolding only in fantasy, and the imagined reality then shatters, offering me a stark perspective on the abyss within me.

Conclusion

The 191 pages will turn themselves upside down. I will let go of the ballast. There is a lot of sludge from my unconscious or subconscious—a sad discovery.

And then?

I have a month at my disposal, actually three weeks. The computer is old, it crackles, pops, my eyes turn red after six hours of work, the printer has broken down, I'm between numbers, and I don't have a phone. Until I finish, I won't set foot in the workshops, I won't drink, in fact, I haven't touched a drop since the New Year's party with Alain D, which was over three months ago. Anyway, those gorgeous guys barely let me touch the champagne. At least I danced and flirted with a ballerina—I even pinched her butt. Skinny, snappy, and kind of a snooze... so what?

PS: In just one month, I gave up on a few characters and eliminated another thirty disgusting pages that I wouldn't want to read anywhere. And it would rather find its place in a diary, certainly not in mine. I

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psychoanalyzed the text page by page; it was a torment, followed by the incredible discovery that I had internalized morbid, scatological patterns from the collective unconscious. For a long time, I couldn't even conceive the book without those passages that horrified me, oh, how harshly I judged myself for them, how badly I blamed myself all these years!

"I am an angel!" I told myself just a moment ago, and from that moment on, I started believing in God again.

2014

Seven years had passed since I began working on the novel about artists. Why did it take so long?

First, because it had never crossed my mind that I would finish anything, even a short story. I wrote for the pleasure of better understanding what was happening to me and deciphering the extraordinary people that I had come to know.

The chapters about von B are from that time, and he remains my favorite character (not anymore now, in 2025).

In the seven years I lived and wrote in the artistic environment, I floated among dramas and fantasies that inspired me. I experimented with everything that was offered to me; I had some brief lapses, but I always managed to get back on track with the help of my friends.

I could have finished faster if I were a medium or clairvoyant, or if I had set out to do so from the very beginning. However, I don't think it would have had the same consistency.

Around my birthday, I stumbled upon the Writers' Club and met Erika. Another summer went by, and one day, I found my favorite bookmark

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torn into four pieces.

Who could have torn the little angel icon? Maybe it was me, in a moment of absent-mindedness. But I didn't do the same with the manuscript—I only cut the precious and cumbersome passages.

And when I reached the halfway point, I read a status on Facebook:

"If you give up, you give up. If you don't give up, you're a writer."

Heya... then I felt really bad, and I was about to give up on everything. Especially since I felt I had to change the title and cover again. I didn't give up, even though I really wanted to.

In this seventh version of the novel, Regreta's story serves as a central binding element. She is a strong woman, I would like to be like her, but I wouldn't want to be in her shoes.

The demon is replaced by Alfred—Regreta's grandfather, who is based on the characteristics of several real people.

What book would you buy?

Finally, I decided to conduct a survey to see which title would resonate most.

- The Skyscraper
- Art in a Jar
- And (thus) They Sculpted in My Flesh

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- Sculpture in Flesh
- Earthquake in the Old Town
- 2020 Earthquake in the Old Town
- And that's how I Stole Their Muse
- Cocktail of Muses
- Possessed by the Muse
- ???

Women chose: Art in a Jar and Sculpture in Flesh.

Men preferred: Sculpture in Flesh, Cocktail of Muses, and Possessed by the Muse.

The artists voted for: The Skyscraper and Sculpture in Flesh.

Winner: Sculpture in Flesh.

2015

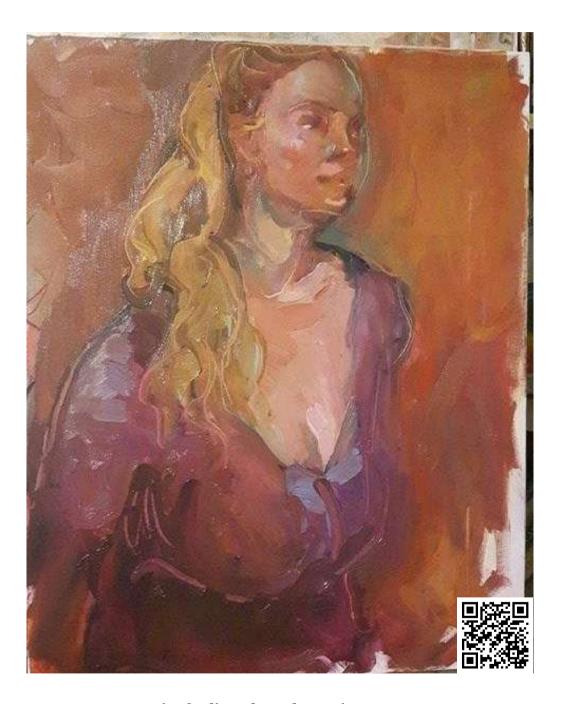
Rereading the text, I realized that the title no longer matched the content, which unfolded like an extended journal.

The novel had drifted far from reality, as had the characters, even though the writing largely reflected the bohemian atmosphere and the artistic creation process.

2025

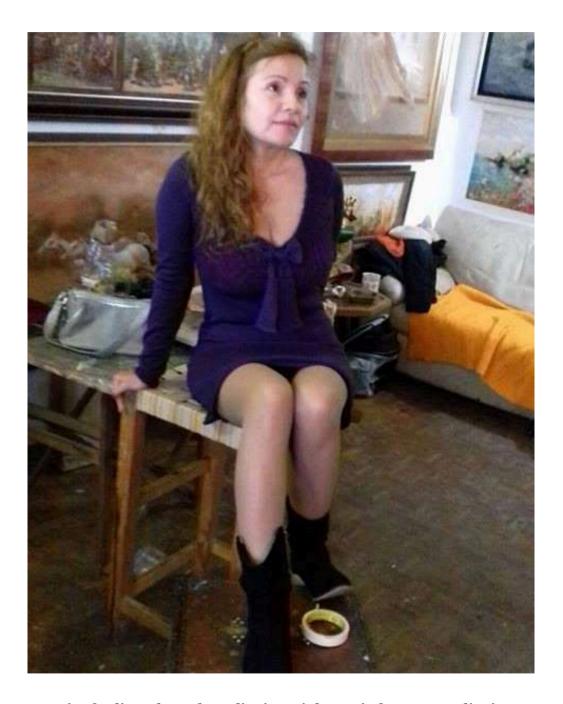
Ten years after finishing *Anti-Memoirs of a Muse*, I wrote a longer reflection on what this book meant to me. The photos tell another story—starting with the 2015 cover shot, ending with the final image, bouquet in hand. However, the mystery will unfold one day...

Author Portrait



Portrait of Julia Kalman by Lucia Juncu, 2016.

Author Portrait



Portrait of Julia Kalman by Vali Irina Ciobanu, in her Art Studio, in 2016



Julia Kalman with Ada Pelin (graphic designer) and Ionela Violeta Anciu (poet) at the same event.



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PROLOGUE

The first wave surprised me right in front of the mosaic, which I saw fissuring, slowly dissolving, the tesserae shifting, a fascinating spectacle; it looked like a quill, a creek, an aquamarine flood, but this was until a man appeared behind me with a wounded face.

"Earthquake," he said, before jumping into the void from the nearest open window.

Everything was falling apart, and my naive thoughts were attempting to conjure up a solution.

And then came that terrifying roar of the abyss opening deep and the wail of death, which announced the second wave. The piano lost control, crashing against the walls out of tune. As it reached them, they collapsed. *Damn piano*, I told myself, slapping my cheeks to pull myself together. But the floor was pulled from under my feet, and a detached panel fell on me. That was it.

A little later, I pushed the door to leave, and a thick, acrid smoke filled the hallway. It was only five steps to the staircase, but the steps blurred before me, each one stretching into the next. I started to run for real.

Could this have just been a hallucination?

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No, it had really been an earthquake. I kept running, at one point I felt another body next to mine, then another and another, the life within me hurt, I was alive.

"We will all be dead soon," someone screamed as if they had heard my thoughts.

The darkness consumed us between anxieties and phobias, and I heard their voices as if in the final judgment.

I never thought I would live through something like this so soon. I found myself shoved, the bra cracking between my breasts, the left heel creaking loudly from the hook towards the black stockings slipping in search of adhesive lips.

Then I closed my eyes and curled up in a corner, taking deep breaths to suffocate the fear in my stomach, exhaling rhythmically and hotly.

Eventually, I regained my composure and spotted him at the other end of the hallway, behind a desk.

He was a man with a strong frame, a high forehead, and white hair cut to shoulder length.

His exophthalmic eyes shone in the dusty darkness, their silvery white tinged with blue, almost hypnotically drawing me in.

I had a feeling of déjà vu; it reminded me so much of Grandpa Alfred that I wanted to run to him, hug him, and kiss him, just like that, for no reason at all. But I was afraid he would reject me. If even Grandpa couldn't stand my hugs, what would a stranger do? Who knows how he'd react?!

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So, I stayed where I was. It couldn't have been him, and for a very good reason—he was dead.

"Good afternoon, sir. How are you doing?" I asked him.

After quite a long pause, he turned his benthic fish gaze toward me; his pupils had dilated terrifyingly, but I waited in vain for a response. He breathed deeply and calmly.

"I meditate," he said.

And I remembered my grandfather's words: "A man should not be disturbed while meditating."

Intimidated by the memory, I shrank back into myself until the man — who resembled him so closely — handed me a sheet of paper: a contract. Can you believe it? Bureaucracy even in the afterlife, I thought.

I signed it three times and stepped back, casually grabbing an ivory paperweight from the desk.

I took it out of the sheath, caressed the soft edge, it was warm and had rusty spots like blood.

"You are dead. Your human years have come to an end. I'll give you ten more years — a dog's life — and..."

I didn't hear the end of the sentence. In fact, I don't even know if the beginning was ever truly spoken — maybe it just seemed that way.

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Soon, I felt a heavy hand on my forearm, and another hand snatched the knife from me.

I had no idea why he reacted that way. But it was clear that I had stirred his anger and had no business being there anymore.

A few moments later, the streetlight hit me in the chest.

Yes, it had been an earthquake. Outside, there was an agitated crowd.

"I saw the corpses!" shouted the doorman, trying to assert his importance.

"Any familiar face?" someone asked.

"Yes. No. I don't know. The upper floors collapsed."

It was about the Tower Block, which had about twenty floors, and since my friends worked on the first and third floors, this statement had the effect of calming me down.

And yet, I still hadn't learned anything for sure.

Just then, Aye-Aye pushed through the crowd and cried out:

"Silence, darlings! The streets are teeming with tough men and loose women."



At Cărturești Verona Bookstore, during the 2016 launch of Anti-Memoirs of a Muse by Julia Kalman.





At Cărturești Verona Bookstore, during the 2016 launch of Anti-Memoirs of a Muse by Julia Kalman.



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THE OLD TOWN

I lived nearby, half an hour's walk from the Old Town, in a house with a garden that belonged to my parents, and I could never have imagined what it would be like to live in an apartment. What a house! What a family!

My parents seem like ordinary people, with their good and bad sides, unlike me, who lived more in the world of books, so they got used to calling me God's child. I even started to believe I wasn't their child. The distance between us deepened year by year. Every time I ran into my father, who bore little resemblance to Grandpa Alfred and even made an effort to be his exact opposite as if that shame had been fixed in his heart and mind for being the son of a Papist freelancer, my father would smile with his new teeth, gritting that I was a scoundrel. That's exactly how I felt in front of him: a good-for-nothing. Only ruffians, he said, listened to rock music, and only lazy people to symphonies.

"A normal person has an organized life, a set schedule," my mother reads from her favorite magazine.

"I don't care," I replied without being heard...

"Listen to me," continued my mother, "nine hours and fifty minutes of work, two hours and twelve minutes of entertainment, one hour and

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twenty-five minutes of housework, one hour and ten minutes sleep, thirty-two minutes food, twenty-two minutes of internet, fifty-five minutes phone conversations, eight minutes..."

Dad, who was losing his patience, interrupted her:

"You stay locked up in the house for days, it's a mystery to me what a person can do for so long between four walls without a bed, a TV, a washing machine, and a fridge!"

"I'm reading!" I replied.

"This is not serious business, miss," said Mom.

"I'll tell you what you're doing," Dad shouted. "You babble on the phone for hours and listen to that stupid music!" Dad yelled.

"And radio plays," I added.

"If you keep insisting on your nonsense, you'll get nowhere!" added one of them.

"Listen, we want to help you," intervened Mom.

"We'll let you stay, but on one condition," said Dad in a serious tone, "a grandchild!"

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That can't be!"

"You dare to contradict your father, shame on you!" Mom yelled.

"Impossible!"

"Why?" Dad wonders.

"We're not even sleeping together!"

Here, Dad gets really angry and turns as red as a boiled lobster. He roared:

"So Dan comes just to chat with you and waste our money?!"

"And to clean up when you're gone," I added.

Mom jumped up as if burned, getting angry that our little understanding had been exposed. He knew very well that I was tidying up the house every weekend. I never understood why Dad couldn't handle the truth and why Mom had to lie to him every time. She played the role of the overbearing overseer with glassy eyes, and sometimes had the feeling that she was the mother-in-law of my life.

"What are you insinuating? You are being rude, young lady! Apologize!" said Mama.

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Would Grandpa Alfred have understood me better? I lay on the mattress for hours on end, contemplating the differences between us. I knew they would never value me for who I was; they expected results and praise from others. Between me and them was a pot of noble stuffed cabbage; it doesn't awaken my appetite, I consume it out of necessity, with some nostalgia.

We criticized the rest of the world with the same minimalist joy — but that was exactly what made me unhappiest, because I often confused feelings with attachments and love with dependency, meaning I had the impression that love was precisely what was missing from our relationship.

Only much later did I realize that the intensity of the love feeling has nothing to do with the way we know, can, or find it appropriate to express it. Yes, my parents really loved me, and I loved them too, but we only came together at Easter and Christmas dinners; it took a god to bring us together. Only then did they allow themselves to express their unconditional love, but I was always afraid of making an inappropriate remark or uttering a forbidden word. (I could write a horror story about the punishments I received over the years.) That's because my mother only considered the literal meaning of words, and when she didn't know that either, she became even more aggressive.

But this is not the place to recount what happened to me after saying, "I feel like banging my head against the wall."

In other relationships, I was most often very feminine, sometimes I would take the tentacles out from under the slug shell, and then the chicks around me would turn into bitches.

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We loved and hated each other because our hearts were never truly ours. The same goes for Dan, who was the universal friend, the universal lover, and only later *my own* lover.

Although everyone imagined I was a spoiled princess, it wasn't quite like that. I earned my first money at twelve from typing, by sixteen, I was already translating divorce, custody, and adoption files, by nineteen, I had started teaching German, it seemed natural to me, that's how it was in my family, work always came first, then education, and last was entertainment. At one point, I got tired of working for others, just as many abandoned a well-paid job at a multinational company and opted for an artistic occupation.

I would have gone anywhere just to escape that suffocating feeling of home, but the Old Town still lured me in like a forgotten childhood photo album discovered in an abandoned attic; it was the only place where I could truly let loose and indulge in the most refined pleasures while remaining mundane and well-behaved. And so I took refuge in Dan's workshop, where so many surprising characters came, and the habits were so strange that I forgot all the nagging from home.

As for what we ate, we stuffed ourselves with soup made from chicken carcasses, and Dan always ended up with the tart, from which he carved tiny pieces, savored slowly with closed eyes and dramatic sighs. Someone brought us dried fish, which we quickly grew tired of because, alas, it was like old pork rind, which we chewed desperately, and when it softened, smelled strangely musky and sweet, like the aftermath of a love affair.

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There's still a bag full somewhere, someday they will be galvanized, transformed into sculptures.) I know we preferred bacon, spinach, or pretzels, we drank and smoked contraband.

We rode public transport without paying, and that's how we started our collection of fines.

If we hadn't partied from time to time to clear our minds, we would have died sooner.

And the orgies would swell from nothing: mostly expired food, too much drink, and a few tired women — or perhaps just a four-legged illusion.

Men were always in the workshop, and from their confrontations and confessions, we learned too much about the tangled paths of a couple's life.

Sometimes we daydreamed.

To what?

I hoped that the golden fish would grant me the three wishes I made at the age of eight, when I spent my first summer vacation in Cernica, at my good friend's house, who has since emigrated to Switzerland.

Ah, they were, they are, so banal that I don't even know if they are worth mentioning: to have children, to write books, and to end my days in a monastery. Men had not been in the plan; the kings from stories seemed too authoritarian, the warriors too aggressive; I was more interested in the wise men, the masters from Eastern tales, the explorers, the inventors, the madman, and the devil (because he resembled my father); but, over time, I was to find that the world is full of ordinary people who



At Cărturești Verona Bookstore, during the 2016 launch of Anti-Memoirs of a Muse by Julia Kalman.



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appear uninvited and cling to you. And this opinion would not change until I met Dan, who knew more parables than a rabbi and more stories than Scheherazade.

With him, I had returned to the past, I had a new family – my artistic family, many uncles, a few aunts, and new cousins for whom culture was not a taboo subject, who did not curse the libraries crammed with dusty, forgotten books that seemed ready to fall on your head, who did not incriminate contemplation, art, and creation, people for whom time wasn't measured in gym packages, designer clothes, or luxury cruises. In his workshop, men could be nonconformists and nothing more, and women could be cats; no one asked you to prove anything, it was enough to exist, to be yourself, you didn't have to remain silent in the face of money, in the face of grammatical, logical, and moral mistakes. But I continued to remain silent, because that is how I was taught, to hide what I know, what I am.

Well, when I first entered the workshop, I had a folder under my arm with a text I was writing on commission for my parents' colleagues, a text on silkworms, global warming, or even eco-friendly manure stoves, so, the people in the workshop told me I was a professional writer, and I found that very amusing. Me, a writer?!

One morning, while I was returning from a party, I noticed one of my friends on Academy Street. It was Aye-aye, a madman by all accounts, although some claimed he was pretending for money and simply liked to live freely, beyond the constraints that a house, a family, or a job would

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impose on him. He was suspiciously ubiquitous, so you saw him everywhere.

That day, in front of Aye-aye, a veiled bride jumped out. Someone shouted from behind, others whistled from across the street, and the drivers honked. The ethereal beauty froze for a few minutes next to him. Aye-aye stared at her like a Spanish ham.

She bit her lips, smiled at him, and handed him a hundred-dollar bill. He grabbed it quickly, spat it into his palm, and slicked his hair back with it.

The bride sneezed. She was barefoot.

"What's your name, girl?" asked Aye-aye.

"Modela," she replied, jumping into his arms.

He kissed her lightly, careful not to crush the delicate fabric against her body as if he'd gone any harder. She responded sweetly to his kisses — after all, she was just a top-tier freeloader.

"Miss, I feel like I know you from somewhere... Hmm, I have some small white shoes... want some?" croaked Aye-aye, admiring her chubby toes and nails smudged as if dipped in chocolate-stained nails.

"You surely know me," Modela whispered, holding him to her chest.

"Oh, really?" Aye-aye exclaimed in surprise.

An Excerpt from the Novel

By Julia Kalman

"They want to cut me, save me," she added.

"But what did you do to make them so angry?! What's with all this money?" wondered Aye-aye, seeing the dozens of banknotes stuffed into the neckline of the dress and the gaping purse.

"I ran away with the wedding money," Modela explained.

Love wasn't what it used to be, and an unemployed woman couldn't afford to waste time.

In the afternoons, a girl like her would lounge on a terrace, drinking and drinking, savoring a steak paid for by some fool's money. By evening, she'd be on the hunt for her next target—which explained her loud laughter and high spirits. That's how she saved a few hundred a month... or even more. She was smart, earned money modeling, hustled in the markets, and, when needed, video chatted or got married, as in this case.

I was tipsy, I would have gladly sipped from a glass of vodka, slowly, with a straw, to wake up to reality, to forget about myself, to wash away my sins, I had only read about, now taking frighteningly real shapes.

Yesss, nothing is more delightful than a life of idleness after so many years of struggle. And until then, I had entertained myself quite well, but only within the bars of some cage, supervised by some idiot who counted my glasses and decided when I could breathe. I'm joking, I've had the best men, to whom I dedicated a year, five, ten, but who couldn't subdue

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me, and maybe that's why I should ask them for forgiveness for all my whims. When they least expected it, I would give them money to go to prostitutes, because I had better things to do, like reading an essay on the beach. That's how I am: I flee from routine, and no leash has been found (so far) that matches my desires.

Dan was the first man who never asked me for anything; he placed a mirror in front of my eyes, helping me discover my ugliness, my imperfections, and the beauty of the world.

Until him, I had believed that love was a pretense, a parade where you offered everything you had to give.

Of course, I fell in love before, but everything ended abruptly each time. How could I forget the moment I jumped to defend my husband and then the moment I woke up in the hospital a few days later? When the doctors told me they would amputate my right arm, I didn't freak out as they expected; the statue of Venus must have consoled me, so I quickly asked them if I would still be able to sunbathe topless. And they laughed. Under the bandages, I discovered a body marked by scars, which I adored more because it no longer felt like mine, I was fascinated especially by the rosy stitch on the collarbone, which did not want to be protected, on the contrary, it whispered to me that I had torn myself from an invisible, karmic chain, and the detachment needed to be finalized legally.

(And that's how I decided to get a divorce.)

A few years later, I lived in apparent calm, in a false trance, often so

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present in my body due to the excruciating pain that I would slam against the furniture in the house until I managed to synchronize my movements. What I hated the most was hearing the foreign blood flowing heavily like syrup through me, falling into the trap of unconsciousness. I was always on high alert, battling dizziness — that pleasant, almost orgasmic languor. That is why I elevated fainting to the rank of sin, for it is, after all, the first step towards death.

It was the right time for an initiation because that's how Dan's love was. But, while I was diligently studying treatises and aesthetics in that sordid workshop filled with antiques and bohemian friends, I received an anonymous SMS from Germany. The text was very short: "Pussy cat, I'm coming back in winter." And I had no idea who it could be, but those were definitely not an artist's words.

It was summer, and the statues in the center danced wildly, raising tornadoes of rustling debris into the immediate sky, bored bookworms stared at their books without reading, the rabbit seller clucked, the accordionist endlessly played Zaraza, a cowboy strummed his guitar – that's where I got that crooked-brimmed leather hat, the tin man collected cardboard, I really like him, he comes from Oz, otherwise his strange helmet, the carts full of cardboard, and his smile wouldn't make sense, and of course, the tourists, artists, loafers, and hangers-on, elegance & laziness.

A woman with a sparse beard had risen from the rotten mattress propped against the University wall and was walking her little white dog

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with black spots – I heard she was a writer. If someone had told me then that I would end up a homeless person, it wouldn't have surprised me, it seemed more plausible to me than the hope on the other side of the glass.

I was never going to be a true writer. But I had a sense of observation. A burned and emaciated man was sleeping on the sidewalk, hiding his face under the black sweatshirt of his tracksuit, five men were waiting in line at the pretzel shop, others were competing, a mother with three children was begging in front of the pastry shop, they lay on the greasy sidewalk like scraps that no one wants, fragile bundles of skin stitched loosely over bones. It was enough to look at them, and my wounds would open greedily, then I would cry all day inside, but my face would smile, and people would see only a beautiful mask.

"Would you like a masseur, miss?" shouted a man with coppery curls. Look me in the eye: I love you to death.

"Then die, girl," I replied, handing him a business card.

That simple gesture made my right forearm numb, followed by a sharp stab on my back, and my blood suddenly froze. I left, trying to smile at the guardian angel through the silvery mist, and stopped in the old square on a bench. Someone was already sitting there, hunched over. I could have asked for their help, but I preferred to look for my lighter. The flame quickly embraced my finger, dispersing the veil of fog; the new pain had driven away the first one. I breathed deeply for a while with my



Vali Irina Ciobanu, esteemed fine artist, painting live at the event.



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eyes closed, without thinking about anything, then I lit a cigarette. If you want to forget the pain within you, think about the suffering of others. My vision had cleared, and I was so fond of seeing the person next to me. The homeless man snored gently, and this made me fall in love with the world, with him, even a little with myself.

Several dozen pairs of vigilant eyes crossed paths in the square. They were gendarmes, police officers, and the bodyguards of banks and nightclubs. From there, narrow streets slithered like serpents, winding past the Suṭu Palace, the Stock Exchange Palace, the National Bank, and the Marmorosch Blank Bank, leading toward the old center of the city. Driving there was forbidden — the old streets had banished machines long ago. I wandered through the Old Town, day by day, slipping deeper into its unnoticed wrinkles, as if I were walking into myself, observing the medieval ruins hidden in catacombs or behind newer buildings, the churches, the shadows, sensing the dramas that took place there. I was born nearby, I loved the Old Town, I believe we all love it, even the foreigners who set foot in the city for the first time are drawn to its magic. It presented itself differently every time.

The unpaved streets had carved deep trenches, where wooden planks and beams groaned above the void.

"This isn't a construction site, I'm telling you. Look for treasures," Aye-aye said.

Pedestrians walked up and down, through potholes, garbage, and packs of dogs.

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By Julia Kalman

Only the whistles of the men would wake me up, and then I would quicken my pace. I wasn't interested in them, I knew that if I had asked them, they wouldn't have had a clue about where they were, about their history, and I didn't understand how I could awaken more interest in them than the beautiful facades. Some, you see, hung tattered over the sidewalk, others, renovated, housed luxury shops. You could buy anything, from eccentric perfumes to engines, second-hand wedding dresses, cardboard funeral shoes that fell apart after the first use, rare counterfeit coins, candlesticks, watches, women, boys, spoiled food, or delicious French bread and beer, lots of beer. I would lift my leg and climb onto a beam, then place my foot next to the other, trying not to fall into a ditch; being drunk made it even harder. On the left were the walls of the houses, on the right, across the ditches, terraces with exorbitant prices had risen, where it was very hard to find a spot because they were (and still are) very fashionable, having dethroned the cafes in Dorobanţi. More foreigners were bustling around here than anywhere else in the city, and it was here that teenagers smoked their first joints, and the overdressed provincials flaunted themselves. This is where I worked. This is where I lived when my parents kicked me out of the house.

The beer was seven lei upstairs and three downstairs, the same beer, still stolen. I had my first pint there. I was amused by the spectacle; it was much more interesting than any show, and among the characters, I preferred the locals and the artists, especially the latter, who could turn a few sticks into a miracle. Moreover, I was surrounded by a lot of affection, and it wasn't just their art objects that impressed me; no, I was interested in their very different perspectives, their eccentricity, and their ideas

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caught my attention and kept it alive. Without realizing it, I began to build a bridge towards an unknown direction."

"But whenever I started to tire from the pain, I let my heart run free. I knew that I would encounter something nearby, even a little girl or a kitten, and that would save me."

"Here is the advice I received from some homeless people who knew me by sight:"

"Leave the cat. It doesn't even have eyes. It'll be dead by tomorrow!"

"I always choose the blind ones; it's like with women!" explains the broom seller.

"No, those are good mute!"

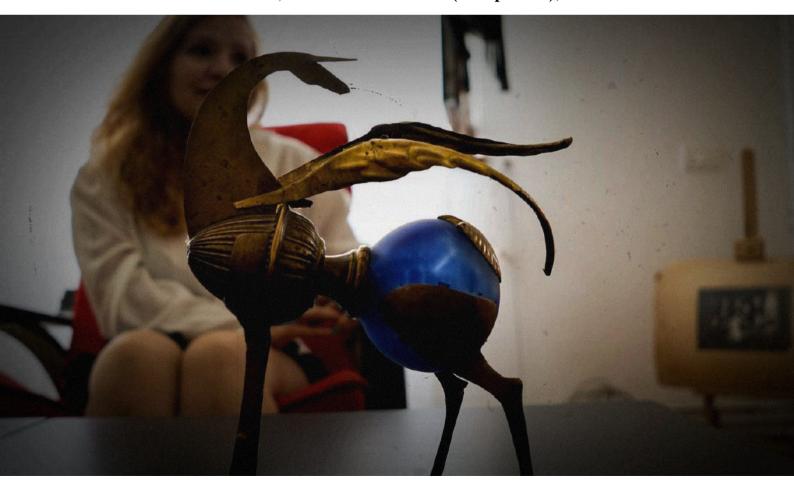
"Mute and many," added the one-dollar beggar, who was rummaging through the pile in front of the antique shop.

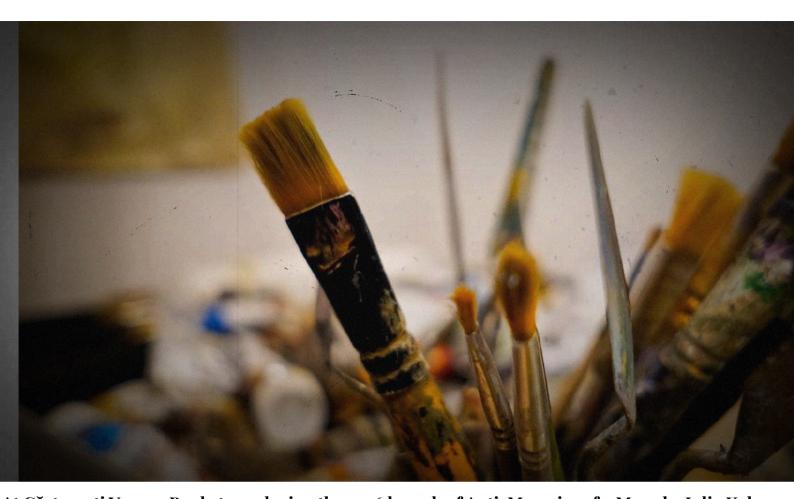
He was a handsome young boy, and he was trembling. He grimaced with laughter while discovering some old books. He opened them like wafers, but inside... nothing; the brittle pages scattered across the street.

"Are you writing literature again?" Aye-aye asked him.



Smaranda Milu Nemethi, renowned fine artist (now passed), at the 2016 launch.





At Cărturești Verona Bookstore, during the 2016 launch of Anti-Memoirs of a Muse by Julia Kalman.



Fine Art Photography



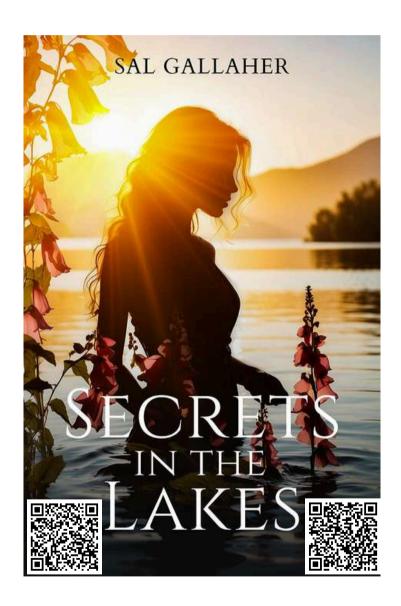
"Unicorn", by Dan Botezan

Exciting New Releases by Our Writers

New books, new worlds—crafted with passion.

The book photos are presented in chronological order of their publication.

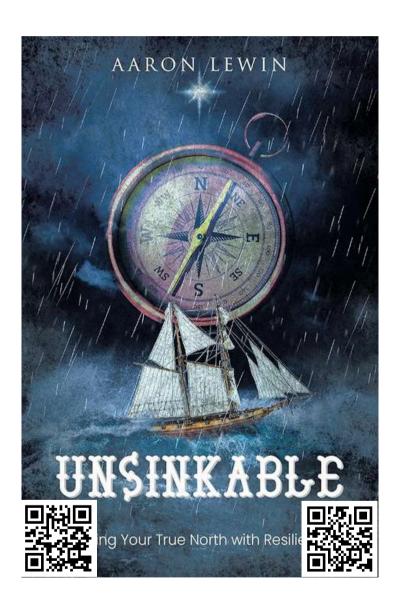
Secrets in the Lakes, by Sal Gallaher



"It's official — I'm out. There's no retracting the words now. It's all over social media, and so many people have read it."

The book photos are presented in chronological order of their publication.

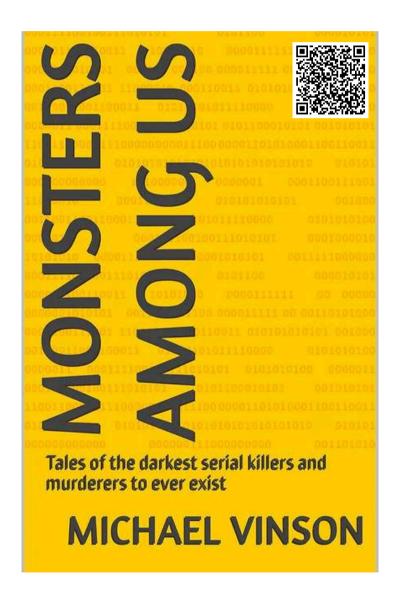
Unsinkable, by Aaron Lewin



"You can't change the direction of the wind, but you can adjust the sails to always reach your destination."

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Monsters Among Us, by Michael Vinson

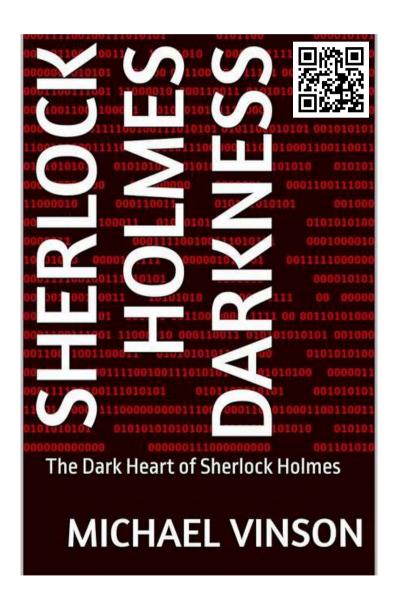


"Public reaction to Ramirez's crimes was intense, evoking a mix of horror, disgust, and fascination. The media sensationalized the story, often focusing on the gruesome details of the murders and the cannibalistic elements."

— Michael Vinson

The book photos are presented in chronological order of their publication.

Monsters Among Us, by Michael Vinson

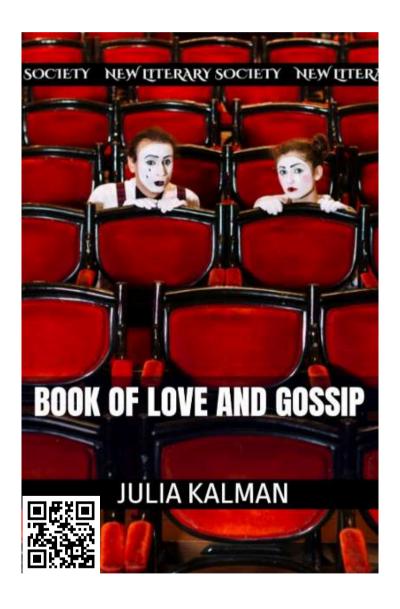


"Witness the unraveling of mysteries that twist the mind and chill the spine, where the true murderer lurks in plain sight—Sherlock Holmes himself."

— Michael Vinson

The book photos are presented in chronological order of their publication.

Book of Love and Gossip, by Julia Kalman



"This version of the book is the closest to me—I created the cover, selected the illustrations, and even translated it. It survived ten years of rewriting, public readings, and a pandemic."

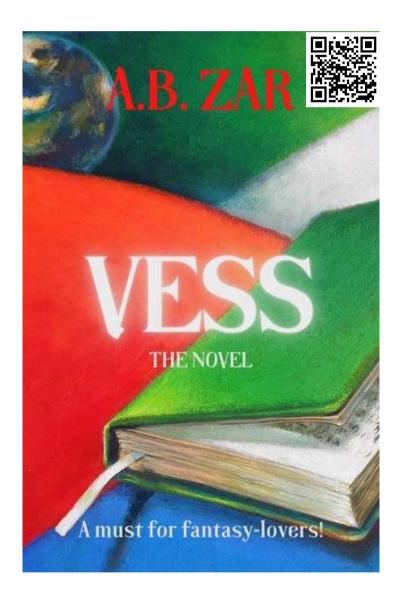
Author Portrait



"There's more of me in this book than I find in myself... Honestly, writing it made me feel younger—or maybe Jungian(er)? Reading it might do the same for you—but no promises..."

The book photos are presented in chronological order of their publication.

VESS, by A.B. ZAR



[&]quot;Publishing one's first book needs courage and an openness to criticism, which promotes growth and improvement."

Author Portrait



https://valiirinaciobanuart.com/

"i eagerly anticipate your feedback on VESS, hoping it offers you joy and leaves you feeling empowered, energized, and possibly needing more."

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