

FOR ALL OUR VOICES

Issue No. 8

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HOLDING ON AND LETTING GO

Since I last sent news, mine has been a season of loss. First Jo Carson, playwright, poet, actor, and fiction writer, whose thirty-year friendship was vital to me and whose poem (no. 23 in *Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet*) inspired "Where I'm From," died at 64. Then Ruth Stone, the most amazing poet I have ever known, who led the graduate workshop when I was at Indiana University, and was my friend and word-mother from then on, died at 96.

Both Jo and Ruth changed me profoundly with their great hearts, fierce spirits, and writer's passion. And though I have to let go of them in this realm, I hold on to their words, their courage and laughter. I rejoice in all they gave me.

For more about Jo's life and work, visit her [website](#). You can also watch her read an essay about her near-death experience at the Alternate ROOTS conference:



For the NYT's reflection on Ruth's life and passing, go to: [click here](#). To hear her recite her poems, watch this:



NEWS

As synchronicity - one of Jo's favorite concepts - would have it, my 2012 books follow this theme of holding on and letting go. First is:

Poetry

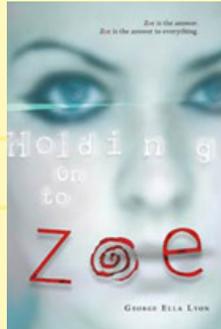
She Let Herself Go: Poems, just out from LSU.



And then, in July:

Fiction

Holding On to Zoe from Farrar, Straus & Giroux.



These books were begun at wildly different times (the first poem in 1994) and I never dreamed they would come out together. But the journeys they embody - holding on and letting go - are like our heartbeat, two aspects of one process we are always working to balance. Here at tax time we might think of income and outflow. What do we do with what we are given? How do we release what is not ours to keep? I don't have answers, but I know life gives us plenty of practice with the questions!

Picture Books

[*All the Water in the World*](#) (illus. Katherine Tillotson), made the Bank Street College Best Books list and has been nominated for several state awards.

[*Which Side Are You On? The Story of a Song*](#) (illus. Christopher Cardinale) is one of 25 titles chosen for the IRA's Notable Books for a Global Society Award and is on the long list for the SIBA Book Award.

Both *Water* and *Which Side?* were named ALA Children's Notable Books and CCBC Choices for 2012.

What Forest Knows has been accepted by Richard Jackson at Atheneum. My thanks to my writers group, my agent Brenda Bowen, and to Dick Jackson, with whom I've been working since he invited me to write for children in 1984.

... and Song

At the end of 2010, I received a songwriting grant from The Kentucky Foundation for Women. Stay tuned! I intend to attach a song to my next newsletter.

QUOTATIONS recently copied into my journal

From feminist scholar Carolyn Hielbrun, author of *Writing a Woman's Life* and *The Last Gift of Time*:

"Women catch courage from the women whose lives and writings they read, and women call the bearer of that courage friend."

"Power consists to a large extent in deciding what stories will be told."

WRITING EXERCISE and POEM

Exercise:

The power Heilbrun refers to is one essential to writers and one which we all take up when we share crucial experiences with a friend.

Let the page itself be your friend and confide something that this paradox of holding on and letting go calls up for you. Perhaps you want to recognize someone who is foundational for you in the way that Jo and Ruth are for me. Perhaps what comes to you is from some other realm altogether. Don't worry about that. Don't worry about the form or the words. Let feeling carry words onto the page in whatever shape, whatever order it will. Then let it rest a day or two. When you return, see what your words say to you, what else they need, what shape might intensify or clarify their revelation.

There's a point in the holding on-letting go continuum when you don't really know what you're doing. You just have to be. That's the moment of this poem:

BOWED HEAD

prays
surrenders
studies floor
dirt

offers nape
so mother
cat of soul
can carry ego
to a new
place

Wishing you healing, humor, and community in the work of holding on and letting go.

Happy National Poetry Month! Happy season of rebirth!

George Ella Lyon