

Mountain Life

March/April 2003

Creative Living in the Southern High Country \$3.95



Skating through the Darkness

Interview by **Bill Lockett**
Photography by **Cheryl Engledow**

Imagine that you are a poet. Imagine that you have 40 years of poems that you have written both in America and

while traveling through England and Wales and you have kept them hidden in a drawer.

Now, imagine that one day, an angel by the name of Beth Love "features" you and your poetry at her art gallery. At this event, many ask if your work is

available in book form. You say "not at this time" and carry on with your readings. No one knows it, but you have been "working" on a book of art and poetry for several years; but at best, it is still a dream. The next morning you awake with a "sensation" you cannot explain. The time has come to transcend your fears and begin talking to anyone who can help take this dream from fantasy to reality.

First, you search through your poems and pick the ones that will make "all the difference." Then you must find a way to link them so that they tell a story.

Then you talk to your friend, Inna Sandler, a young, beautiful, imaginative artist living in Uzbekistan. You ask her if she will illustrate your poetry and work with you gratis; you cannot afford to pay her. She agrees and, little by little, you see your work come to life in a new form. Her art and your poetry are a "perfect marriage." The public does not know it, but you have never met! Your communications

have always been by email and, on rare occasions, telephone.

Providence then leads you to Benny Tillman and World House Records in Atlanta. Benny is the perfect person to help you create the right background music to compliment your poetry. Providence also leads you to another man, who after reading one of your poetry journals, makes a financial commitment to help sponsor your book and a CD. People are amazing!



A year later, persistence and commitment pay off. Your poetical CD *Shades* is finally produced. People begin to buy and enjoy your art.

This is exactly what happened to Susanne Lee. She made her dream come true. I am going to talk with her at the Seafood Market in Blairsville. Come with me and meet her.

Bill: Where does a gypsy-traveler like you call home?

Susanne: I have lived many places. I counted them one time. I have moved more than 100 times since I was 18 years old. I was born in Buffalo, moved to Florida and Michigan and just about every city along the coast of California. In 1993, my husband Sandy and I moved to Blairsville, Georgia, to be

closer to our parents and escape the sights and sounds of the "big city." When Sandy died in 1996, I decided to make a life-long dream a reality and went to England. I needed to heal from my loss, but also felt it was my destiny to be there. A one-month visit evolved into a three-year stay. I returned to Blairsville in April of 2001.

Far left: Susanne pondering the many paths which have led her to her destiny.

Below: I am as the Sea, by Inna Sandler, Susanne's Uzbekistani, email friend who has illustrated her poems in oil and canvas.



Left: Painting by Inna Sandler titled, A Hint of Certainty. 18" x 21", oil on canvas.

all about wicked stepmothers and stepsisters; fairy godmothers with magic wands, glass slippers, pumpkins turned coach and mice turned footmen; they are about palaces and princes and clocks that strike midnight; they are about pain and heartache and separation; they are about losing and finding love again! I write a lot about pain, loss and finding love; my poems evolve from these elements. However, in the end, they allow you to face things that are much easier to face when you know you are not alone...when you know that someone else has lived in your shoes.

From If:
"...would thy valiant shadow
come to dance with mine?"

From: What is Life:
"It is a child's breath frozen
in the winter sky."

From Imagination:
"She travels the night on wings of wind
that skate through the darkness."

Bill: I have traveled through England myself. It was hard to leave.

Susanne: Yes, indeed. My journey to England was all I imagined it to be. It strengthened me, gave me the courage to come forward and speak openly about my feelings and my poetry, and helped me to move through grief and believe in myself again. It was the best thing I could have done for myself.

My creativity and poetical self blossomed like spring in the North Georgia Mountains. One day, though, I hope to return to Scotland and devote myself to my writing with nothing but the Irish Sea and serenity to inspire me, and a nice coal fire to keep me warm.

Bill: It took a lot of "screwing your courage to the sticking place" to start from scratch and bring your idea to fruition. It must be a good feeling.

Susanne: Yes, it is! I have always felt that a person is most alive when they have a dream, but I could not have done this without the help of others.

Bill: Your poems are sensual, romantic and frequently about relationships with others. You have this talent for taking the reader on mental journey that allows them the perception of reflecting on their own life, while at the same time experiencing yours.

Susanne: People tell me that all the time and, each time, it overwhelms me.

I am a "romantic." My poems are like little fairytales. Like "Cinderella," they are not just stories about a young girl buying a dress and high heels, going to a dance in a taxicab and meeting the man of her dreams. They are

Bill: Is all of your CD and book about your husband?

Susanne: Most people think it is, but the truth is *Shades* is a little about him, and a lot about life and feelings. I did very little writing when he was alive. Sandy was a miracle that walked into my life and grounded my restless spirit. He believed I only wrote when I was in pain. I guess that is true.

Bill: What do you think it is that compels you to write poems?

Susanne: Well, I think imagination is a human gift that allows poets, or all people for that matter, the ability to get back up after life knocks us down. Sometimes, it is a way to turn a negative into a beautiful positive and sometimes, it records an experience you never want to lose.

Skating the Day

Imagination and poetry are my way of being in the world and absorbing what is around me. Every life occurrence, whether imagined or real, is a potential poem.

"Imagination," in fact, is one of my favorite poems.

Bill: Here (on pages 19 and 20) are some lines from your poems that struck me between the eyes like a pure diamond bullet.

Susanne: You really did read my poems (smiling).

Bill: (laughing). Yes, and several inspired me to write some poems myself.

Susanne: I thank you for appreciating the power and uniqueness of my words.

Bill: You have given us much to think about and we thank you.

From *Alone*: "...why does this silence always feel so loud?"

From *Wind Warrior*: "A flicker of light caught your lips as they slowly curved into a soft smile and I wondered....were you now dreaming of me?"

From *Star Crossed*: "A lone gull cries out through the grey-red sunset tipping its wing in a silent salute to the night."

From *Lady in Blue*: "She is a gypsy rose... whose fragrant petals open slowly to the fresh moist kiss of early dew."



Top: Painting by Inna Sandler titled, *Star Crossed*, oil on canvas.

Below: Susanne Lee's CD of her poems read to music.

Susanne's CD, "SHADES," can be found at the Ooukshaw Gallery and Memories Once Again, in Young Harris, Georgia; Mountain Heritage Gift Store in Highlands, North Carolina; Malaprops Café and Book Store in Asheville, North Carolina; Tower Records in Atlanta and online at

<http://www.cdbaby.com/susannelee>.

You can visit her website, which is under construction, at: <http://www.geerose.com>.

You will also want to keep your eye out for her book, also titled *Shades*, which is due out in the very near future.



I AM AS THE SEA

I am not as the Mountain
Roots firmly planted
Furrowing deeply into the Universe...
I cannot be climbed or conquered
I am as the Sea
Running wide and free and deep...
An abstruse ribbon of Blue Diamonds
Flowing freely
through the night!
I am not close to "There"
Wherever it may be
I cannot touch the sky but only glimpse it.

I am as the Sea
Running wide and deep and free...
I promise nothing
But that which I can keep.
And keep only that which is given me...
For only I know what I need.
I have had it all...and would not change it.

I am as the Sea
Running deep and free and wide...
I remember everything I keep it all inside
Yet I hide nothing! I am as the Sea
I lead to everywhere but go nowhere...
Hope flows through me
and Dreams are awakened
when I touch your shore
and ebb back into myself again...
But no one dares to swim my depths
I am uncertainty.

I am not a river that runs shallow
Or a Wind that can be touched
I am as the Sea...
Dark, mysterious and hungry...
I carry the Vestiges of Time
Like grains of silk sand
And place them at your feet
It is my gift to you
And you are my gift to me.