

POTPOURRI

March, 2016

SIGNS OF SPRING: *Photos around my house*

Front yard



Sidewalk



Back deck



Trail behind my house



ARKANSAS BIRDS

The plumage of most male birds brightens in breeding season, but goldfinches win the prize for drama. The first picture is winter males. The second, a spring male. Right now I'm enjoying watching the transition. Goldfinches are common in my neck of the woods in winter and fairly common during spring and summer. But they disappear in fall—to an unknown destination.



WHAT I'M READING: *MY STROKE OF INSIGHT: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*
by Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D (Penguin Publishing, 2009)

A friend recommended this book because of Taylor's easy-to-understand description of how the human brain works, especially how the left hemisphere and right hemispheres function together. Taylor, a brain researcher and one of *Time Magazine's* 100 Most Influential People in the World, 2008, experienced a massive stroke that severely damaged the left hemisphere of her brain when she was 37. At the end of the four hours her brain hemorrhaged, Dr. Taylor could not walk, talk, read, write, or remember her life. But she was still conscious. Her mind was quiet and peaceful, but highly sensitive to emotions—both hers and other people's. Because of her academic background, she watched everything that was happening to her from the first moment of her stroke through the eight years of healing with interest rather than with panic.

My Stroke of Insight taught me useful facts to store in the left hemisphere of my own brain to understand how Multiple Sclerosis has damaged my brain. More importantly, the book created a path of gratitude through the right hemisphere of my brain for the amazing adaptations my brain has made to MS. I wasn't surprised when I discovered Bolte's book won the National MS Society *Books for a Better Life* award. I highly recommend *My Stroke of Insight* for its treasure trove of information, its engaging voice, and its beautiful picture of the gift of a human brain.



A COOKING TIP: *The Many Uses of Broccoli Slaw*

If you haven't discovered broccoli slaw, the next time you're in the grocery store, go to the refrigerator section where you find bags of prepared salad and fresh coleslaw and look for it. Six or twelve ounces, the bag contains slivers of fresh broccoli, carrots, and red cabbage. I've used it as the base of quick stir-fry for a couple of years. I add some combination of peanuts, sesame seeds, coleslaw, and chopped chicken or turkey kielbasa.

Last night I used it as the veggies for Shepherd's Pie. After browning ground turkey with a yellow onion, I dumped in a bag of broccoli slaw and cooked it over low heat while I made mashed potatoes from a left-over baked potato. When the veggie/meat mixture was done, I topped it with mashed potatoes and had a yummy, easy meal.



MY WRITING LIFE: *The Joy of Revision*

About three weeks ago, I received a positive response to my revised synopsis for *Guardians of the Canyon* from an editor at Love-Inspired-Suspense. Not offering *carte blanche* approval, she issued a specific challenge: get the story to the turning point in chapter nine by the end of chapter three. My first reaction was “Can’t be done!” My next reaction was “This editor is a pro—figure it out.”

The good news about this scenario is that revision is my strong suit. My first drafts are agony. They take me weeks and weeks to write, and the results are a disaster—characters are either cardboard cutouts or depressed; plot lines meander; setting takes center stage too often. But when I get to a second draft, I have a story to work with. I thoroughly enjoy re-imagining characters, interviewing them, and doing research on their jobs and hobbies. I like reworking plots, starting from the ending and working back. I even find cutting long descriptions down to a sentence or two rewarding.

So my second drafts are better than my first. Still, I don't show anyone my writing until it's gone through at least three or even four revisions. When Jim Hart took me on as a client, I told him the reason I needed an agent was that I had taken my writing as far as I could on my own with the help of friends—I needed a professional editor to help me reach the next level of writing. Of course, as the old adage goes, “Be careful what you wish for.” With this editor's challenge, I got

exactly what I'd told Jim I wanted. To be honest, it took me a week to remember this is what I wanted.

Now for the best news: I've figured out how to get to that turning point by the end of chapter three. I've got it about half written, and guess what? The editor is right. The story will be a lot more exciting starting this way. Of course, the middle has disappeared, but that gives me more time to invent disasters. So, even if you're one of my faithful readers, expect a better book by the time this editor gets done with *Guardians*.

IN MEMORIAM



Whisper Gabby Russian-Blue
born? died 3/5/16

A victim of feline leukemia, Gabby (aka Whisper) passed peacefully from this life to the Rainbow Bridge on Monday March 5. Cremation arrangements were handled by Waggin' Wheel Veterinarian Services, Hot Springs Village, Arkansas.

Gabby is survived by her loving full-time staff, Suzanne, her part-time staff Joretta and Jennifer, as well as neighbors Joyce and Brian whose yards Gabby regularly visited. A feral cat who had obviously known better times, Gabby hired Suzanne to make a happy home for her in early January, 2012 after a series of snowstorms in Payson, Arizona. Wisely keeping her own counsel as she trained her new staff, Gabby was first named Whisper, for her sweet silent ways.

Once the pair moved to Arkansas and Gabby was sure Suzanne was a keeper, she allowed her true personality to emerge. Excited about her new surroundings and the exotic wildlife visible through the low cat-friendly windows, Gabby began talking constantly, eventually teaching Suzanne to carry on intelligible conversations. Suzanne promptly gave Gabby her correct name. Gabby and Suzanne went on to have a series of contests, beginning with whether Gabby was going to be an indoor cat or not. Gabby won, paws down.

Miss Gabs will be sorely missed for her joy in living and for the inexhaustible supply of surprises she kept tucked away in her nimble mind.