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From the Editor

Honest, writing about pandemics was not planned because of the days we live in currently. I wrote out a list of A to Z topics last January as I sifted through a notepad filled with copious notes I'd jotted down last fall. And here we are, by the time we get to 'K', I'm writing about pandemics from the past. But, as I mention in the article that follows – Killers of the Stealthy Kind – I'd rather be researching those days, or reading about them, instead of living them.

I hope this finds you all safe and virus free.

There's one thing I won't argue about in these days of 'Stay at Home' quarantine – I'm truly enjoying the extra time to read and write, especially the stack of marvelous historical fiction works that are stacked on my nightstand.

Stay tuned for future issues – Today we have a fascinating interview with Madeline Sharples, and in the weeks ahead we have author interviews coming up with Marion Kummerow, Mary Lingerfelt, Lindsay Downs, Johanna Wittenberg, and more!

Trisha

texastrishafaye@yahoo.com

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Killers of the Stealthy Kind

I made my list of A to Z topics in January, way ahead of when I needed them so I could be working on my posts slowly. Looking for a difficult K word, I came up with this title – intending the post to be about smallpox, influenza, and tuberculosis in a historical sense, since we are thinking about topics in the contest of writing historical fiction.

I did NOT expect to be quarantined under Stay at Home orders because of the Coronavirus by the time I needed to post this K blog! A topic that seemed to be historical in nature is now current daily news.



Jude Knight writes on a post entitled: [The Greatest Killer](#)

For at least 3,000 and perhaps as much as 6,000 years, smallpox was one of the world's deadliest diseases. In countries where it was endemic, it was a disease of childhood, killing up to 80% of children infected. A person fortunate to escape infection in childhood who then caught the virus as an adult, had a 30% chance of dying. Either way, those who survived the disease were left with lifelong scars but also with lifelong immunity, so they could neither catch the disease nor transmit it to others.

Transmission was from person to person, including from droplets in the air from sneezing, coughing, or even breathing. Worse, body fluids on things like clothing or bedding could carry live viruses.

Tuberculosis had its own reign as a killer to be feared. Fortunately, for those of us living today, although the disease does still exist, it is rare and mostly treatable.

History of TB in the 17th Century

Although Tuberculosis was present in Europe in the middle Ages, it was in the seventeenth century that the disease reached astounding epidemic proportions. By the mid seventeenth century it was recorded in the London Bills of Mortality that one in five of the deaths in the city was due to consumption. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in England, like the other great towns and cities of Europe and America, it swept on in a continuing epidemic of such monstrous proportion, the disease was called the White Plague of Europe. But the history of TB is that in the later part of the 17th century Tuberculosis mortality slowly decreased.

In 1650 doubts had been expressed as to the contagiousness of phthisis, by the faculty of Paris. Soon TB spread over Northern Europe. Northern physicians seem to have been led to believe that the disease was due to a constitutional hereditary defect rather than due to contagion by the fact that it was particularly common and severe in certain families.

In 1679 Sylvius de la Boe, an Amsterdam physician, in his work Opera Medica, was probably the first to use the term tubercles in phthisis of the lung which he called tubercula glandulosa. In addition Sylvius described the association between phthisis and a disease of the lymph glands of the neck called scrofula.

When I was researching for [Fat and Sassy](#), I found where the flu epidemic in 1918 closed churches, schools, and libraries. In Glendora, California, all library books returned from infected homes were wrapped and stored for one year without being touched. I thought this was fascinating. I wanted to include it in my book, but my timeline was more 1940s, not 1918. So, I created a scene where my mom's class took a trip to the library. (The joys of the fictional part of historical fiction!) The librarian then mentioned these facts in the talk she gave to the class. ([You can read that snippet on a blog post here.](#))

I have since discovered that while reading about this situation several years ago was fascinating, I'd much rather READ about something like this than to LIVE it.



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Author Spotlight: Madeline Sharples

Family traditions and stories often play a major factor in works of historical fiction. I always enjoy finding new treasures to read when I hear that they are related to family factual tales from the past. Today Madeline Sharples stops by to share the role that family stories played in her book, *Papa's Shoes*. She also shares a bit about some of her other writing. Come read along and see some of the fascinating tidbits that Madeline shares with us today.



Welcome to Pages of the Past, Madeline. Today you're celebrating the one-year anniversary of *Papa's Shoes*. Your story is about immigration with a feminist and historical bent. It touches on the hopes and dreams of a Polish immigrant shoemaker, and the hopes and dreams of his daughter, who was born in Poland and came to America when she was three years old. Can you share with us a little bit about how this story idea germinated and came to life?

How important were your family stories to this story?

My family stories were very important to this story. Many family members inspired my characters. For example:

- My grandfather and father's family emigrated from a tiny shtetl (village) in Poland to a small town in middle America in the early 1900s. My grandfather, the inspiration for the Ira character, was a shoemaker
- My grandfather and grandmother really lost three of their four sons
- They had another child – a girl – to make up for the lost sons
- They first settled in Danville IL and then moved to Chicago so that their daughter would have a chance to meet a nice Jewish boy – which she did. However, in *Papa's Shoes*, her brother Charles only moves Ava to Chicago. The mama and papa stay in Danville.
- The Charles character was patterned after my father who really went to Chicago's De Paul University night school to get a law degree, then he went into the textile business. In fact, he was the first person in the family to go to college

In the writing and publication of *Papa's Shoes*, has it changed your life or your perceptions at all?

I used a lot of the information from the family history that my husband wrote some twenty-five years before I wrote *Papa's Shoes*. He had interviewed many elders in our family and used the writings of others. I became very intrigued with what my aunt – my father's sister – wrote about her life as a young girl when she was well into her eighties. That she wrote a whole page describing her friendship – as she called it – with a young gentle teacher named Merrill Faulk. He would pick her up at her family home and take her to school plays and concerts and then out for a bite afterward. She also wrote that her brother (my father) objected so strongly that he got the family to move to Chicago to get her away from this man who was not marriage material for an Orthodox Jewish young woman. And that she still even remembered his name and could describe his looks and the way he dressed after 64 years made me think she must have still carried a torch for him. While in real life she met and married a nice Jewish man, had two children,

and lived the rest of her life in Chicago, I decided to write this book and get her together with her true love.

This information definitely changed my perception of what my father's and his sister's lives were really like. I found there was a lot more beneath the surface.

What kinds of things did you need to research in order to bring your story idea to life?

Besides using the material written by my relatives and what I knew about my family history, I did other research – I had two wonderful picture books with photos of the old shtetel life. I developed scenes from then – for example a photo of two children pumping water out of huge water pump, a photo of a crowd of wagons parked at the Farmer's Market, and a photo of a shoemaker working while standing at a fairly low table with all his equipment on it. I also used the internet to research history of the town where they came from and the town where settled, the flapper era and flap talk. And a wonderful book that my mother gave Bob when we first got married called, *The Joy of Yiddish*, was a great resource for Yiddish words in the book. I included a glossary of Yiddish words at the end of the book.

Another bit of research had to do with the barber shop. Since I wanted to write about Ira getting his hair cut, his forelocks cut off, and his face shaved, I convinced Bob to get a shave by a local barber. I sat in the shop while that was happening and took notes.

Although *Papa's Shoes* is your first fictional novel, it's not your first book, nor your first publication. Can you tell us a little bit about your other books and publications?

***Leaving the Hall Light On: A Mother's Memoir of Living with Her Son's Bipolar Disorder and Surviving His Suicide* by Madeline Sharples**

Madeline Sharples offers the story of her son Paul's journey into madness and the life she rebuilt from the rubble of profound sorrow and heartbreak. Sharples describes her grief and the guilt-ridden aftermath, and then moves forward to share with readers how she emerged from a heart-crushing event alive, whole, and productive.

Interspersed with photographs, as well as poems stunning in bare emotion, the book explains what happened in the life of Madeline's family before and after the death of her eldest son, and how Madeline, her husband, and younger son claimed the ability to move forward with their lives – honoring the memory of Paul and facing honestly the toll his mental illness took on their family.

***The Emerging Goddess* with poetry by Madeline Sharples and photography by Paul Blieden**

The theme of the book is the joy of life and the awakening of the soul, the untapped potential of women, and the untapped awareness of women to their power. It purports a premise that the goddesses among us are destined to rule and provide wisdom to the world. This book of images and poetry provides an impetus for us to grow, to be nurtured by our innate wisdom, and enable us to take control of our destiny. *The Emerging Goddess* is dedicated to all women, to all women who have the power to excel – and that includes ALL women – to move beyond themselves and into a realm of power and beauty because all women are beautiful.

***Blue Collar Women: Trailblazing Women Take On Men-Only Jobs* by Trudi Ferguson and Madeline Sharples**

In this book, women who have broken with accepted societal roles and now enjoy careers in formerly male worlds share their experiences of accomplishment and frustration. They have made inroads with job salary, promotions, hiring policies, and training. However, sexual harassment, lack of acceptance from older male colleagues, and animosity from coworkers' wives, even inadequate bathroom and changing facilities are issues some of these women still face. It offers blue collar women or women thinking of pursuing nontraditional careers vital information about many issues, including self-esteem, practical approaches to on-the-job differences, filing discrimination suits, and seeking support.

After writing poetry and a memoir, what did you find was different when you tackled a historical fiction writing project?

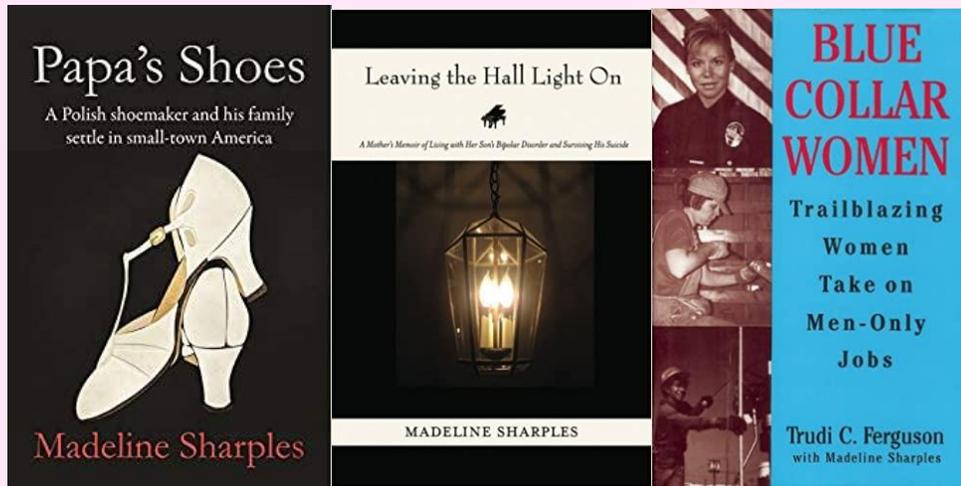
I think the biggest difference was that I had to learn to write in a whole new genre. I had written so little fiction – maybe a few short stories – that I was at quite a loss as to how to even begin. But I ventured forth full force by taking a four-day workshop called “How to Write Your First Novel.” That got me going with a lot of good pointers and encouragement. I took a more advanced fiction class and a novel revision class later on. Also, I had several rounds of beta readers help at different points in my revision process. Neither my poetry or my memoir ever got that much attention.

Your memoir, *Leaving the Hall Light On*, isn't historical fiction. It deals with the difficulties of having a child diagnosed as manic depressive and the grief following his suicide in 1999. But, we never know when other authors and readers are dealing with the same issues. We lost my stepson to cancer and I know how the death of a child can turn a parent's life upside down. How did writing help you through this dark valley?

I decided against going into therapy because I believed a therapist couldn't help me unless that person had been through a loss like mine. So, I turned to writing. Writing became my healing balm; I learned how to put my pain on the page. I started out with journaling every day, which I still do, and then poetry and then the memoir. It was like talking to a therapist. I could write anything, and it wouldn't be considered wrong or too much information. I write about that process and how it helped in *Leaving the Hall Light On*.

Thank you, Trisha, for inviting me to appear in this interview for Pages of the Past. I feel very honored to be here.

Also, I am proud to add that my memoir *Leaving the Hall Light On* was on a list compiled by Erin Burba of BookRiot of the 100 Must-Read Biographies and Memoirs of Remarkable Women. This list included memoirs written by Mary Karr, Joan Didion, Cheryl Strayed, Sonia Sotomayor, Madeleine Albright, Maya Angelou, Anais Nin, Malala Yousafzai, Patti Smith, Katharine Graham, Nora Ephron, and many more.



Where to Buy Leaving the Hall Light On

Amazon
Barnes & Noble
Dream of Things
{Pages} a bookstore

Where to Buy Papa's Shoes

Amazon
Barnes & Noble
Aberdeen Bay
{Pages} a bookstore

You can connect with Marilyn here:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/madeline.t.sharples>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/madeline40>

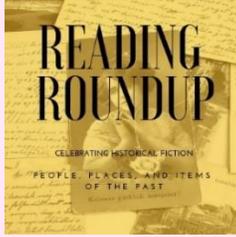
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/madeline40/>

Madeline's [Website](#)

Madeline Sharples is the author of, *Leaving the Hall Light On: A Mother's Memoir of Living with Her Son's Bipolar Disorder and Surviving His Suicide*, in prose and poetry (Dream of Things). She also co-authored *Blue-Collar Women: Trailblazing Women Take on Men-Only Jobs* (New Horizon Press), co-edited the poetry anthology, *The Great American Poetry Show, Volumes 1, 2, and 3*, and wrote the poems for two photography books, *The Emerging Goddess* and *Intimacy* (Paul Blieden, photographer). Aberdeen Bay published her first novel, *Papa's Shoes: A Polish shoemaker and his family settle in small-town America*, in May 2019.

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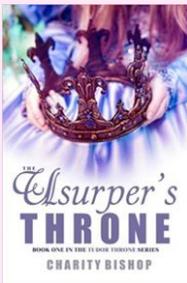
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The 1700s & Before

The Usurper's Throne

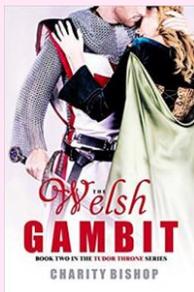
Charity Bishop



Henry VII faces traitors on all sides. In a darkened abbey in Hampshire, a dozen monks conspire against him... In a French garrison, a governor favors his enemies... And one of them holds a secret that may devastate England. Katharine of Aragon arrives in the midst of a storm, bought in a traitor's blood. The death of Edward Plantagenet turned the queen's cousin, the Duke of Suffolk against him. He has since fled to the Netherlands to recruit an invading army. Henry hopes to keep his new daughter in law close, but Suffolk's allies stir corruption in Wales, forcing him to send his son into the north. There, a brutal feud threatens all Prince Arthur holds dear. As his ruthless enforcer, Sir Thomas Lovell, closes in upon his enemies, Henry's last hope lies in his children, and in a dynastic marriage to unite two kingdoms...

The Welsh Gambit

Charity Bishop



Lady Anwen cannot forget, nor her brother forgive. Since she killed Lord Meuric's son in self-defense on a lonely Welsh road, and spent several months imprisoned and mistreated in his castle, Anwen has fought her nightmares. Alone and unable to bear a man's touch, she unites with a local 'witch' to learn how to heal. As Edward Stafford, the Duke of Buckingham, prepares for the autumn joust, he fears escalating tension between the locals and Lord Meuric's brutal overseer, Beynon. His mood worsens when Sir Thomas Lovell, the king's ruthless enforcer, arrives unannounced in search of a traitor. As thousands flock to the tourney, death, superstition, denial, and treason come to a brutal conflict, as a child searches the castle for the bones of a lost maiden and uncovers a terrible secret...

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