

Sample Author Interview Q & A (Elizabeth “Liz” Gauffreau)

Q: How long have you been writing?

A: I first became interested in literary fiction in the ninth grade when the teacher assigned William Faulkner’s “Barn Burning—so that would make it fifty years or so. Throughout high school, I wrote bad poetry as a rite-of-passage, of course. It was a natural progression from there to earn a BA in English/Creative Writing from Old Dominion University and an MA in English/Fiction Writing from the University of New Hampshire. I’ve been writing full-time since 2021, when I retired from nontraditional higher education.

Q : What is your writing process? Do you have a favorite time of day to write? Location?

A: I could talk about the writing process for hours—but I won’t!

When I first started out writing fiction, I used the “Mopping the Floor” method of writing a complete draft from beginning to end and then revising it in a series of complete drafts. I’d write the draft in longhand, then type the completed draft to work on the revisions. (I couldn’t compose on the typewriter because the noise of the keys was too distracting.)

Once I started composing on a computer, my entire approach to writing fiction changed. I no longer take a draft from beginning to end before working on revisions. I start drafting and keep going until the story starts to feel unfocused; then I go back and work on the beginning to bring the story into clearer focus. I repeat that process until I have a completed draft. Next, I let it rest for a week or so and start working on revisions. I don’t plot out fiction in advance. I start with a character, a snatch of conversation, an intriguing situation, an emotion, and write to see where it wants to go.

As for poetry, I’ve had no formal education in writing it, so I pretty much write it by ear and hope for the best!

I tend to write fiction in the morning and poetry at bedtime. I write in my study at my late father’s big, battered battleship of a desk.

Q: Where do you find inspiration?

A: I find a lot of inspiration in my family history. Trying to get at the emotional truth of these people I’m tied to by blood and love is endlessly fascinating to me. In addition, I have derived inspiration from my hometown of Enosburg Falls, Vermont for years, returning to that well again and again.

For the past several years, I have taken inspiration from the blogging community in ways that would never have occurred to me otherwise. For example, I read an account on a family history blog of a woman who had died of morphine addiction and starvation, estranged from her family. I was so intrigued by her death certificate that I researched 19th century accounts of morphine addiction in Internet Archive. I then wrote a story that took the form of a family's diary entries as they struggled to help their addicted wife and mother.

Q: What was your inspiration for *The Weight of Snow and Regret*?

A: After finishing my debut novel, *Telling Sonny*, I didn't intend to write another novel right away. I fully intended to return to the short story collection I'd been working on. Then I read an article in the Spring 1990 issue of *Vermont Life Magazine*: "Over the Hill to the Poor Farm: How an Era Ended Quietly on a Back Road in Sheldon Springs" by Steve Young.

Seeing the photographs and reading the history of the place, I was struck by the fact that while I was growing up, I'd lived only seven miles from the Sheldon Poor Farm—yet I knew nothing about it. I'd been by the poorhouse building once in the early 1970s, but it didn't register with me that it had ceased being a poorhouse only a few short years before. I had to know more.

Around the time I read the *Vermont Life* article, I'd also been toying with the idea of a woman running away from her family with a blues musician, so I thought I'd combine the two ideas. It would be a lark, something fun before I went back to the short story collection. Little did I know where this idea would lead me!

Q: What do you hope readers will take away from *The Weight of Snow and Regret*?

A: What I hope readers will take away from *The Weight of Snow and Regret* is that every person has a story, regardless of their circumstances, and every person's story is important.

Q: Have you written any other books?

A: I've written another twentieth-century historical novel, *Telling Sonny: The Story of a Girl Who Once Loved the Vaudeville Show*. The inspiration for the novel was a cryptic note from my mother when I was working on my late father's biography for the family: "Elliott I. committed suicide and had a sister Dorothy."

My second book was a collection of tanka poetry and family photographs, *Grief Songs: Poems of Love & Remembrance*, which I created in 2022 after I became the only surviving member of my immediate family.

My third book was another unanticipated collection of poetry and photographs, *Simple Pleasures: Haiku from the Place Just Right*, documenting my stalking-the-wild-haiku jaunts with my husband through northern New England.

Q: Both of your novels are twentieth-century historical fiction. What kind of research do you do, and how much time do you spend on research before beginning to write the book?

A: I try as much as possible to use primary sources for my research to ensure I understand the feeling of that time period, as well as historical accuracy. I had a difficult time finding primary sources for my first novel, *Telling Sonny: The Story of a Girl Who Once Loved the Vaudeville Show* because most of the sources focused on Big-Time vaudeville, and I was after Small-Time. The autobiographies of Gypsy Rose Lee and Ed Lowry were a big help in learning the nitty-gritty details of playing the Small-Time circuits.

For my current novel, *The Weight of Snow and Regret*, the majority of my research came from digitized local newspapers, as well as photographs digitized by the Library of Congress and the Vermont Historical Society. I was surprised at just how much information about the Sheldon Springs Poor Farm I was able to find in those local newspapers: news articles, human interest stories, classified ads, letters to the editor and exposés!

Q: Are you working on a new project?

A: Yes, I'm working on the short story collection I'd started before I got sidetracked by *Telling Sonny*, *Grief Songs*, *Simple Pleasures*, and *The Weight of Snow and Regret*. The stories have already been written, and most have been published in literary magazines, so it's a matter of putting them together as a collection titled *Enosburg Stories*.

(Right after I graduated from high school, I took it into my head that I could be the Sherwood Anderson of Enosburg Falls, Vermont because no other writer had given the village a voice. Then, many years later, I discovered writer Hildreth Wriston, who had been born there. Well! She wrote children's books, however, so I'm telling myself I can still be the Sherwood Anderson of Enosburg Falls, Vermont. Youthful illusions aside die hard!)

Q: What advice would you give to new writers just starting out?

A: I would give them the same advice I received from my first creative writing professor, Tony Ardizzone: don't think about publishing until you've mastered your craft. (It's a new world now with the self-publishing revolution, but the advice is still valid.)

5/28/25