

H_(ow) U_(YoU) were *FORMED*

By Susan Josephs

WHY WE LIKE IT: *Sometimes the simplest of situations become the hardest to write. That's because when everything is up front there's nowhere to hide. It's a kind of litmus whereby all the writer's strengths or shortcomings are on view. 'How You Were Formed' is a textbook example of what happens when everything goes right. A casual conversation over lunch between two women at opposite psychological poles gradually deepens into a poignant journey into a past threaded with memories both bittersweet and moving. The tone by turns friendly, terse, bitchy, buoyant, acrimonious and tender is keenly balanced against elegantly structured prose polished to a mirror shine, while nuances of observation and description linger in the mind like falling petals. You will be swept away. Oh, and one last thing. Any story that has a cat named 'Mr. Fleas' (!!!) well...you put that in deliberately, didn't you, Susan...um...you did that on purpose, right?*

Five stars

QUALITY QUOTABLES *(for the love of language...)*

Josie received my Mr. Fleas epiphany with a blank stare. My words ricocheted back into my throat and I felt the familiar depletion of energy that I associated with trying to tell Josie personal things. I could perhaps trace this thing that I did in my 20's to a boyfriend who had seduced me with his relentless quest for enlightenment. After a honeymoon period of about a month, where we abandoned my cramped New York City apartment to visit ashrams and intentional communities and have campground sex, we started fighting constantly. He would accuse me of not showing sufficient remorse and vulnerability and when I would finally break down in tears, he would say, "you're so beautiful when you cry."

"So what are you up to for the rest of the day?" I asked Josie in my brightest and shiniest voice.

...and we descended further into a silence that did not abate, not even when the waitress finally arrived to drop off our processed check. As we signed receipts and put away our credit cards, I felt my recklessness ebb and morph into anxiety, unexpressed

anger and a deeply familiar shame. Who was I to upend our world order that revolved around the vagaries of Josie's moods and the shards of appeasement still deeply embedded in my bones?

How You Were Formed

I had known Josie for 13 years but never connected her to Grandma Edith until I met her for lunch the week before the world changed. At first, the lunch felt almost safe, even ordinary, although we did meet on the afternoon of California's Democratic primary election. We sat outside at Kreation Café's covered patio, where we munched on sustainably sourced salmon sandwiches, sipped room temperature water and mostly talked about Josie's new line of anti-aging, fruit-based facial serums. But then Josie out-of-the-blue asked me if Rachel still cut my hair.

"Rachel?" I froze, a deer in headlights, until my stomach started clenching up and foreshadowing an afternoon of indigestion. I thought about asking Josie what made her think of Rachel but realized that Kreation Café was about a block away from the hole-in-the-wall storefront that Josie once rented to peddle her skin care products and treatments. The storefront was next door to Rachel's salon.

"Do you still see her?" Josie's tone, interrogatory and expectant, should have resulted in me lying to her, as I had learned to do throughout my childhood.

"Yes, I do," I said instead.

Josie performed a singular nod and flagged down our waitress to order a Peaceful Juice to go while I pondered why I told Josie the truth. Was it because we normally never interacted over sober lunches? Ever since we met in 2007 at a street fair where I bought

her homemade, organic eye cream on a whim, we kept our client-vendor-friendship alive through drinking multiple glasses of wine on an exclusively nocturnal basis in Venice Beach bars. We both liked each other better when we could drink.

“I never thought her cuts were that good,” Josie said after about a minute of awkward silence. “And she was such a bitch to me that day.”

I single nodded back, which made me think about my cat Mr. Fleas nodding at me exactly once with an upward tilt of his chin whenever he wanted a treat. My husband and I called it the Frat Boy nod, aka the feline equivalent of “S’up!” This, in turn, reminded me about the epiphany I had about my cat and Grandma Rose two nights ago. And in thinking about Grandma Rose, I of course conjured up Grandma Edith.

“So what happened with that neighbor you started flirting with?” I pushed away my plate with about three bites left to go of a sandwich I could no longer eat.

Josie scowled. “He must have a girlfriend or something. The last time I saw him, he didn’t even say hello. I’m so done with people like him.”

“God, what’s wrong with people?” I exhaled and felt my body relax. It soothed me to inhabit familiar territory, where Josie proclaimed she was done with people and I validated her reality in my bright and shiny you-go-girl voice.

“Whatever. It’s LA,” said Josie. She signaled the waitress, asked for the check and reminded her about the juice like a mother telling her child for the fourth time to clean her room.

I bristled like I always did at the way she spoke to anyone in the service industry but kept my mouth shut. As if I could dispense constructive criticism to Josie, who would then receive it with equanimity, gratitude and a multitude of heart emojis.

The waitress promised Josie her pineapple, green apple and mint elixir with a tight-lipped smile while I resolved to extend one more olive branch. “Oh yeah, I also wanted to ask you about those kittens that need a home. Are you going to foster them?”

“No.”

I waited for a further explanation of why Josie wasn't going to foster the kittens but no such luck. Josie checked her phone while I waited for her to ask how my cat was doing, which in my opinion, seemed like a logical next step in the conversation. When she didn't, I did the thing I used to do in my 20's with unsafe people in the quest to win their approval.

“I haven't shared this with anyone because it sounds kind of crazy but I think Mr. Fleas is my reincarnated grandmother. It's something I've kind of joked about to myself, but the other night, I looked into his eyes and I don't know...it was a feeling.”

There I was, sharing with Josie my private, tender and not yet fully formed epiphany about the intertwined souls of Mr. Fleas and Grandma Rose. And by invoking Grandma Rose, I of course conjured up Grandma Edith.

This time, I was reminded of the conversation I had with my husband two weeks ago after picking up eye cream from Josie's apartment and returning home trying for the umpteenth time to parse out something Josie said so that the words would sting less. My husband, a firm believer in logic and reason, has asked me: “And why is this person still in your life?” To which I had answered: “She's a remnant. A remnant from a past life.”

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boyfriend who had seduced me with his relentless quest for enlightenment. After a honeymoon period of about a month, where we abandoned my cramped New York City apartment to visit ashrams and intentional communities and have campground sex, we started fighting constantly. He would accuse me of not showing sufficient remorse and vulnerability and when I would finally break down in tears, he would say, “you’re so beautiful when you cry.”

“Anyway, it was definitely a feeling. So what else have you been up to?” I tried to retract my epiphany, to swallow it hard and digest it along with my lunch. My failure to appease Josie stung especially hard because I knew that she believed in reincarnation. She once told me that her past lives included serving as a 13th century Chinese courtesan, a 19th century truffle expert and a member of the French resistance during World War II who was brutally murdered by the Gestapo. She had shared this with me about five years after we met and about two hours into an epic drinking session at our favorite Venice bar. While sober me might have asked her how she knew all that, I had merely said, “That’s so fucking cool you know all that!”

“Why did you name your cat Mr. Fleas?” Josie glared at me, as if she thought I needed extra cues to decipher the subtext of her accusatory tone.

“I thought I told you that story?” I smiled, prepared as always to gloss over my annoyance with Josie never remembering anything I told her unless it directly concerned her. “He was a feral rescue. We found him eating from the garbage cans in back of my old apartment and he was covered with fleas.”

Josie focused on her phone to respond to a text and did not acknowledge the return of the waitress who dropped off the check and the Peaceful Juice. “Thanks,” I said to the waitress and waited for Josie to stop texting.

Still texting, Josie said, “Why would you name your cat something so negative?”

“Are fleas negative?”

“Weren’t they causing him suffering?”

“Well yeah, but the name fit. And we had no idea at the time that we would adopt him.” I slugged down the rest of my water, extracted a credit card from my purse to pay for my half of the lunch and tried to focus on my breath. I especially hated when I heard myself sounding defensive whenever Josie interpreted my actions as crimes.

“Names can manifest toxicity.” And with that, Josie placed a credit card on top of my credit card and excused herself to use the bathroom.

I watched her exit the patio and felt the absence of alcohol that normally softened the jagged edges of our interactions. The waitress arrived to process our credit cards and as I thanked her, I steeled myself for the return of Josie and simultaneously experienced a brief vision of Grandma Edith trudging up the driveway of my childhood home for the Sunday Afternoon Visit. Grandma Edith faded out before she could knock on our door and I remembered how lunch had been my bright idea, suggested the same day I told my husband that Josie was a remnant. That day, Josie had made some out-of-the-blue comment about how she always seems to be the one to initiate our get-togethers, which was blatantly untrue. I could have confronted Josie with the truth but instead asked the question, “Should we try meeting for lunch?”

Was it only two nights ago that you opened the kitchen door for Mr. Fleas and saw your Grandma Rose embedded in his wide green eyes? He looked nervous as he darted into the house, your Creamsicle-colored Mr. Fleas, his expression identical to how Grandma Rose stared at you with flying saucer eyes during car trips to grocery stores. When you visited her in San Diego as a college student on vacation, you always offered to take her shopping and you always drove slightly over the speed limit.

To soothe spirits, you scratched Mr. Fleas under his chin. You promised Grandma Rose that you were a safe driver and slowed down. Mr. Fleas led you to the bedroom for his nighttime cuddle session where he relaxed and purred and when you arrived at the supermarket, Grandma Rose rejoiced and told you that she was the luckiest woman in the world. She showed you how to select the best cucumbers and cantaloupes and sometimes, she bought potatoes to make you latkes so you could relive a major childhood highlight. You can still taste those latkes, still sizzling from the frying pan, crispy on the outside and chewy on the inside. Grandma Rose hand grated her potatoes and had an instinct for frying that you really can't teach.

You spooned Mr. Fleas and crooned into his ear: I love you I love you I love you. He received this with equanimity, gratitude and a multitude of heart emojis. You are so lucky to have a cat that can receive your love and a husband in the next room who understands the importance of these nighttime cuddle sessions. You are so lucky to have spent so much time with Grandma Rose, who was always happy to see you. When you were in your 20's and lived in New York, you'd visit her in San Diego twice a year to play multiple rounds of kaluki, her favorite card game. Sometimes, she made you her famous honey cake and when you asked her how on earth she made it taste so moist, she

would shrug and say, “a little of this and some of that.” Grandma Rose never baked or cooked with recipes and she never asked you pointed questions about careers or weddings or grandchildren. She’d only say: you should enjoy your life.

Mr. Fleas jumped off the bed and guided you to the kitchen, where you gave him salmon flavored dental treats. He tilted his head to the left as he ate, in exactly the same way that Grandma Rose cocked her head when frying potato latkes. Even now, as you remember Grandma Rose, you feel obligated to conjure up Grandma Edith. This is of course Pavlovian. Even now, when you visit your elderly parents and mention Grandma Rose, your father immediately races to his stash of analogue photographs and hastily constructs The Museum of His Family for an audience of one. What about Grandma Edith? Look how radiant she is! And to be fair, Grandma Edith sure was photogenic. Her always glamorous smile evokes Esther Williams on the verge of performing yet another perfect synchronized swimming routine. Her smile seems especially glamorous in the early 1930’s, when she strikes jaunty hands-on-hip poses in front of Brooklyn ice cream parlors with her girlfriends in the years before giving birth to your father. And in your early childhood photos from the 1970’s, her face beams with love and adoration as she poses with her arms around you and your sister. Whenever you peruse these photos, you start to squirm the way you did when you went to visit her in shorts and still had to sit on her plastic covered sofa. You never really learned the lesson about the definition of insanity, about repeating the same actions and hoping for different results. You wouldn’t stop wearing shorts on hot summer days in inland San Diego County and so you collected red marks on your thighs from peeling them off the plastic.

Grandma Edith used to make you Kraft Macaroni & Cheese. You loved this meal slightly dry, dotted with globs of partially mixed processed cheese dust that your childhood palate considered the height of savory and sophisticated deliciousness. Grandma Edith, however, always made it saucy and devoid of cheese bits. Still, you ate this meal because Grandma Edith rewarded you with a bowl of Neapolitan ice cream. She always sat next to you as you ate dessert and tracked how you alternated between the chocolate, vanilla and strawberry flavors. Once, when you were seven, she asked you how the ice cream tasted. You said, “delicious,” and she said, “Why aren’t you offering me any?” And when you said, “Oh, do you want some grandma?” she said, “You know I can’t have any. I have diabetes.”

Once, you discovered a tin of ham in Grandma Edith’s cupboard, which you had never seen before. Your family kept a kosher home and would soon phase out eating Filet o’ Fish at McDonalds because of its alleged relationship with lard and so you reported the offense to your father, who took very seriously his new role as president of a newly built Orthodox synagogue. A terrible telephone fight ensued but because it didn’t sound different from the other fights, you didn’t feel as guilty as you might have for ratting out your grandmother. Your father almost always lost his temper while on the phone with Grandma Edith. “Stop hanging guilt on me!” he would scream and you always struggled to come up with a visual for this. Sometimes, you’d draw stick figures of hangmen juxtaposed with the horses and hippopotami that you usually drew. The hangmen wore square signs around their necks that said “Guilt” on them in block letters and this always reminded you about the Jews having to wear yellow stars in Nazi occupied Europe. You were an expert in Holocaust imagery by age eight but you considered this an asset.

Your heart performed song and dance numbers worthy of uplifting Broadway musicals when your mother dropped you off to spend a summer's day with Grandma Rose, who either took you out for lunch at a kosher-style deli for bagels and lox or made you latkes and told you stories about growing up in Poland. Your stomach clenched as you watched Grandma Edith trudge up your driveway for another Sunday afternoon visit and wondered what she would say next. During one of her visits, she proclaimed in front of your parents that you, at age 12, still had a flat chest while your 15-year-old sister was "so very well developed." Almost always, she would ask you a question that you did not answer to her satisfaction and you would spend the rest of the day fumbling to grasp the true nature of your alleged crimes.

Sometimes after these visits, your father would remind you and your sister that your grandmother led "a hard life." He would begin with the tragedy of losing her younger brother to polio and relatives to pogroms and segue into them having no money during the Depression and losing relatives to Hitler. Inevitably, he would include a vignette or two about how Grandma Edith's sisters escaped from Brooklyn to Manhattan by marrying wealthier men than your Grandpa Morris and how his aunts snubbed his family for appearing "lower class." You don't yet understand what happens to facts in un-narratives crafted by your grandmother to hang guilt on your father. You only know that you are supposed to feel sorry for Grandma Edith so that you will love her even more.

If you visited Grandma Rose, then you also had to visit Grandma Edith. There was a one to one ratio policy that also extended to thank-you notes, phone calls, family photographs and hugs. When you visited Grandma Edith, she would ask you when you last saw Grandma Rose and what type of interaction that entailed and you learned how to

lie and withhold information even though it never did you much good. You were supposed to love them in equal amounts and so the guilt hung over you, taking the form of low lying clouds that never really dissipated as you made your way through life trying to love other people in exactly the way you felt it.

When Grandma Rose passed away, you flew from New York to San Diego in time to deliver a eulogy about unconditional love. When Grandma Edith died, you were traveling in Thailand with limited access to email and so you missed her funeral. When you returned to visit your parents and belatedly mourn your grandmother's death, you discovered that your father had redecorated the house. Everywhere, you saw black and white and Technicolor photographs of his beloved mother. She was so photogenic, your Grandma Edith, and for decades you did not understand that when you were drawing all those hangmen pictures, you were really drawing yourself.

When Josie returned to our table, she was smiling and humming an unrecognizable tune. I studied her face, now adorned with a thick coat of lilac lipstick, and immediately understood that I was the recipient of a sudden Josie mood shift. I could feel my muscles relax, as if I had drunk a glass of wine and I remembered how I sometimes really liked Josie. She could be especially amusing and charismatic after a glass or two of wine and when she talked about her political activism or donating to this or that charity, I would tell myself: *She's a good person.*

Two years ago, we had talked about Rachel over a glass or two of wine. I could have ended the friendship right there and then by confessing to Josie that we disagreed on the definitions of loyalty and betrayal. But enveloped in the warm glow of my

Tempranillo buzz, it seemed essential to lie and withhold information so that our friendship could continue. “Rachel feels really bad about the way she screamed at you,” I had said. “She’s truly sorry.”

“So what are you up to for the rest of the day?” I asked Josie in my brightest and shiniest voice.

“I’m off to go vote,” she said.

“Cool. I voted earlier,” I said, immediately realizing my mistake.

“Who did you vote for?”

Does Rachel still cut your hair?

“Elizabeth Warren,” I said to Josie, a rabid Bernie Sanders fan. I detached from my body and hovered above it, waiting.

“Why did you vote for her?” Josie took out a compact mirror and smacked her lilac lips several times.

“I know she won’t win but I think she’s the best candidate.”

Josie shook her head and closed her compact mirror with an extra hard snap. In awkward silence, we waited for the waitress to bring back our credit cards and receipts. I had done it again, telling Josie something she didn’t want to hear and I felt uncharacteristically reckless.

“Is this about Rachel?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why did you ask if I still see her?”

Josie shrugged. “I just don’t get it. Why do you want shitty haircuts?”

“I like her haircuts.”

Josie folded her arms and we descended further into a silence that did not abate, not even when the waitress finally arrived to drop off our processed check. As we signed receipts and put away our credit cards, I felt my recklessness ebb and morph into anxiety, unexpressed anger and a deeply familiar shame. Who was I to upend our world order that revolved around the vagaries of Josie's moods and the shards of appeasement still deeply embedded in my bones?

"I forgot to tell you that your latest batch of eye cream is really great. I barely see the circles under my eyes these days." I heard my cheery tone, sounding like a five star Yelp review. About three years ago, Josie had asked me to write a Yelp review about her eye cream. *I tried everything to get rid of the dark circles under my eyes but nothing worked. And then I started using Josie's eye cream, made with ethically sourced honey and goji berries and they just disappeared! I'd give more than five stars if I could!* I suppose that part of me actually believed that I would be lost without Josie's eye cream, because how else to explain all the times during the course of our friendship that I found myself wandering the health and beauty aisles of Sprouts and Whole Foods, perusing but never buying other skin care products? How many times had I tried to break up with Josie by reading the ingredients in a facial elixir and trying to pinpoint when exactly I had become so fearful of the unfamiliar?

Josie stared at me, which made me realize that she had mostly been avoiding eye contact all throughout our lunch. "Huh," she said, not taking her eyes off my face.

"What? Do I have lettuce between my teeth or something?"

"I'm just noticing your frown lines. They're getting really pronounced."

“Oh,” I said, mostly likely engaging in further brow furrowing. The truth was that my brow had been furrowed for years and I sometimes wondered if Josie would ever mention it whenever I stopped by whatever storefront she had rented to purchase her eye cream but not her other skin creams or facial services.

“If you don’t do something about them now, you’ll regret it when you’re older.”

“What do you suggest I do?” I detached yet again from my body and hovered above it.

“Facials. Massage. Creams are not going to solve your problem. It’s a relaxation thing.”

“Oh.”

“You’re neglecting your skin, which is really like the worst -- ”

“I do not neglect my skin Josie!”

There I was, screaming in a public place where people at surrounding tables either stared or tried not to stare as I informed Josie that a) I took care of my skin and b) I’ve had forehead wrinkles since I was around 40 and that I’m not getting Botox just because everyone else is.

“Well, it’s the first time I’ve noticed them so...” Josie trailed off and I saw it then, the shock on her face from my unprecedented behavior. The shock seemed genuine and I could see it so clearly: Josie having lunch or drinks with another client/friend and writing me off as another Rachel. This other client/friend would exclaim, “God, what’s wrong with people?” and Josie would nod and smile, radiant with victimhood.

“Like I said, I’ve had them. For years.” As I said this, I tried to remember word for word what Rachel shared with me about the day she killed her friendship with Josie.

For about a year, Josie had rented that hole-in-the-wall storefront next to her salon and they shared a small parking lot with designated spaces for their clients. One day, Rachel's client had mistakenly parked in one of Josie's reserved parking spaces and Josie had stormed into Rachel's salon demanding that the car be moved ASAP. Josie had said something like, "you're ruining my business," which prompted Rachel to stop cutting her client's hair, usher Josie outside and warn her to never again behave that way in front of one of her clients. "I was screaming at her the way I used to scream at my asshole ex-husband," Rachel had told me. "And when I tried to apologize, she looked at me like I no longer existed."

"You're acting really defensive," Josie said. "I'm only trying to help you."

"It doesn't feel like that." That was the closest I got to what I really wanted to say.

"You yelled at me." Josie then performed a dramatic pause and waited for me to apologize. When I did not, she stalked out of the restaurant without saying goodbye and left the unopened bottle of Peaceful Juice on the table.

You watch her storm out of the restaurant, the reverberations of your screams still ringing in your ears. You had last screamed that way about 23 years ago, when you informed your father that you were not your mother and that he could not yell at you with the same explosive tone that Grandpa Morris used with Grandma Edith. You were 25 years old and hadn't yet grasped the nuances in spousal screaming. You still didn't understand that Grandpa Morris's temperamental lapses from silently tolerating Grandma Edith's modus operandi stemmed from a different impulse than your father's condemnation of your mother's unintentional household mistakes as punishable crimes.

But you could feel the fealty to your family's traditions as a rope around your neck, its dual strands of love and bondage still inseparable. It hurt so much to scream at your father and threaten to cut him out of your life. But you knew that if you didn't, you would choke.

You rise from your chair and that suctioning sensation of leg flesh un-sticking from the furniture, courtesy of your short, age-defying skirt, sends you directly to Grandma Edith's plastic covered couch. You are 48 years old and you have finally discovered the most perfect portal to that couch. Part of you feels slathered in that familiar sludgy mix of anxiety, anger and shame and part of you feels a lightness and giddiness that you associate with the beginnings of vacations that have been divorced from family obligations.

You leave the restaurant with the Peaceful Juice still on the table, your brain crammed with words you did not say, not now and not then. But as you walk down the street, you drift towards visions of Grandma Edith, who has been dead for over 20 years. She always kept a gallon of Neapolitan ice cream in her freezer, special for you. During her Sunday afternoon visits to your house, she sometimes told you that you should be a lawyer when you grew up and maybe even a Supreme Court Justice. She constantly said, "I love you," and showered your face with too many kisses and called you "smart and adorable." You craved such compliments and praise but failed to absorb them because you did not trust their source.

You walk three blocks to your parked car and remember that you need to stop at the pet store. Mr. Fleas needs more grain free bison kibble and salmon flavored dental treats. You love Mr. Fleas with all your heart and you also miss Lavinia, another feral

rescue who died two years ago. Josie had tried to comfort you when she died. You stopped off at her apartment to pick up your eye cream and she immediately asked what was wrong. When you told her, she offered you a homemade chocolate chip cookie, fresh from the oven. Sometimes, when you met Josie for drinks, she would compliment your blouse or the shade of your lipstick, which you could not absorb but nonetheless appreciated. She told stories about bad dates that made you laugh and you sometimes wanted to hug her when she talked about the way she prayed to God. *She's a good person.* For years, you would say this as a benediction and coping device, so you could better understand all the people in your life as a matter of karma and destiny.

You drive to the pet store, still reeling from the encounter. You fantasize about writing Josie an old fashioned letter with all the words you did not say and simultaneously acknowledge the uselessness of the endeavor. You think about how you still have a flat chest, which means your breasts won't sag so as to complement your furrowed brow. You are aging and not aging like the women who came before you and you cannot possibly love them all the same.

You pay for the pet food and dental treats and wonder if the cashier is staring at your forehead and thinking: wow, she's really furrowed! You tell yourself you will not be body shamed, as if that helps. You drive home and hope that Mr. Fleas will feel like a cuddle session. You could really use a cuddle session with Mr. Fleas right about now. He isn't your reincarnated grandma but an epiphany is an epiphany.

You feel slathered in anxiety, anger and shame. You feel light and giddy. You feel grateful to have been formed by more than one grandmother. In another week, the world will change and you will think about how you are already perched on the cusp of

an unfamiliar landscape, willing yourself to accept what is. But for now, you travel from one disparate sensation to the next as you drive home, hoping/praying to land somewhere safe.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *I never planned to write a story inspired by my grandmothers, toxic friendship, the idea of reincarnation and how childhood influences impact adult behavior. But several things happened to me in recent years. I began comparing childhood memories of my grandmothers with my sister; I had a fierce fight with a difficult friend who's no longer in my life and I would joke to myself about how my cat Bam Bam is my reincarnated maternal grandmother, which was my way of meditating on the nature of unconditional love. One night last summer, as I pet Bam Bam (who incidentally bears a striking resemblance to Mr. Fleas), a narrative started forming where strands of thought I initially deemed disparate began to connect.*

I have always been inspired by psychologically acute work. In recent years for example, I devoured the Neapolitan Novels and pretty much read everything else by Elena Ferrante. I am also inspired by authors who manage to create complex, even fantastical worlds while exploring serious themes with undercurrents of dark humor (Margaret Atwood, Haruki Murakami). Overall, I'm pretty omnivorous when it comes to reading fiction and try to keep an open mind if I connect in any way with the writing.

AUTHOR BIO: **Susan Josephs** is a Los Angeles-based writer. A veteran journalist, she spent eight years writing about dance for the Los Angeles Times and her prose has appeared in over a dozen publications including Salon, LA Weekly, The Chicago Tribune and ARTnews. As a playwright, she has written five plays that have either received full productions or staged readings in New York and Los Angeles. Susan has also collaborated with choreographers and performance artists as a dramaturge and her essay about choreographer Rosanna Gamson will be featured in the forthcoming book *Women in Dance, Volume 1* (University of Akron Press).