

CREATIVE NONFICTION X 2

By Amanda Maphies

WHY WE LIKE IT:

A quip we sometimes throw into our submission call ads runs: if your mother likes your writing we probably won't. But like any truism there are exceptions and we love (sort of) to be proved wrong. These two models of CNF—which the author's mother liked—proved us wrong. It also proved the wise old adage teachers of writing have been screaming at students of writing since literary realism first stepped onto the page with Flaubert and Zola in the mid 19th Century... 'Write about what you know!' (unless you're Dante). We were at once taken in by the unpretentious but targeted prose and the simple unaffected but fully invested way the author approaches her subjects. There are a few bumps here and there but they are easily forgiven when the voice is this honest and the writing is so richly plain, so plainly accessible and heartfelt. Nothing fancy, just home grown 'slices of life' by a writer who is comfortable in her own skin. In the wide spectrum of publishing there's always a place for this kind of storytelling. Or there should be.

Halftime Debate: J-Lo and Shakira

Halftime Debate. (Like anyone really wants my opinion). However, 99.9% of the time I have no more clue what will come out of my mouth than the person I am conversing with, so this will be a surprise for all of us.....

First, J-Lo and Shakira aren't really my thing to begin with. I would have preferred a repeat performance by Adam Levine, The Rolling Stones.....or someone like Chris Stapleton, Kip Moore or Cody Jinks. Only because my musical genre fancy would be more tickled (except for Adam...I just think he's hot). I personally spent more time re-watching the groundhog commercial with Bill Murray and the Doritos commercial with Sam Elliott; so I can't really give the halftime show an honest review. That being said, sure the girls looked awesome! Am I jealous J-Lo has more assets to shake at 50 than I do at 40? Yah, a little. (In all fairness, the girl works alot harder at it than I do, so she deserves it). Could I have done without the pole, twerking and crotch shots? Definitely. Did I feel my kids were forever scarred because they saw these things? Not really. They see it everyday; sometimes I am aware. Sometimes not. Do I feel there's a double-standard between calling J-Lo/Shakira out and not calling out Adam Levine's half-naked fully-tatted torso or the scantily-clad football cheerleaders? Sure. It's obvious there's a double standard. I don't think anyone is debating that. Do I think I'm a prude or appear 'Amish' for not being particularly entertained by the halftime show? Not really. Do I find the comparison between Shakira and the goat humorous? I do....

So basically, was it the best halftime show? I don't think so. Was it the worst? Need I remind you of the infamous 'wardrobe malfunction' with Janet and Justin? So....'no' to that too. Was it a surprise? Not especially. (When the entertainers were announced, we all knew what was in store). I don't think it was anymore controversial than watching a musical awards show (including the CMA's, these days). Do I think it's devastating that the halftime show has garnered nearly as many facebook posts as the historically monumental Super Bowl win by the Chiefs? Nah. (I'm entertained by the drama or I wouldn't be adding to it). Do I have better things to do than add to the controversial dramatic display of social media hypocrisy and opinionated feminist jet fuel? Yes. Yet, I sit here and add to the controversial dramatic display of social media hypocrisy and opinionated feminist jet fuel.

So there you have it. My two cents (more like twenty-five cents) on an irrelevant, unimportant, non-life-changing/threatening event that is but a minor insignificant blip on the societal radar of import.

The Water Boy I didn't Know I Knew

It all started nearly six years ago when I began a new job at a local university. I convinced my boss that we needed a water cooler (just outside my office for convenient access). He reluctantly agreed and allowed me to set up an account with the local water company, Chesapeake Water Valley. We were assigned a delivery expert (*water boy*, as I tongue-in-cheek refer to him) that came every other Thursday: rain, sleet, snow or hail, as religious as the mail service, to deliver three to five water coolers. Since the cooler was right outside my office, I was the point of contact for this water connoisseur.

I have to say, the *water boy* (we'll call him *Bobby* because I can't seem to utter the term *water boy* without thinking of Adam Sandler as Bobby Boucher in the epic cinematic 1998 (ironically the year of my graduation; you will see why that is ironic in approximately three paragraphs) movie, *Waterboy*. Unlike Bobby in *Waterboy*, MY *water boy* is a glorious human being. He is tall, lean, has amazingly toned legs (he wears shorts nine months of the year; not that I'm counting), piercing brown eyes and dark, spiked hair that I would love nothing more than to run my fingers through.

I am not the only woman in the office to take notice of this heavenly specimen. Two of my office mates also think he is a Greek god and we are lucky to be graced by his every-other-week presence. I am somewhat ashamed to admit the things we have said behind *water boy's* back. The catcalls, the whistles, the inappropriate comments about his physique; everything women for centuries have been dealing with from men on the streets of New York by construction workers. (Or any city, town or country; by any man; of any profession, would be more accurate).

The inter-office Skype system we have goes wild on those Thursday mornings. I don't need to tell you exactly what is said; I'm sure you can imagine. Just watch any cheesy feminist chick-flick and you will get an idea (multiply it by ten for a more MA version of our dialogue).

This has gone on for years. Fast forward to a couple months ago. I'm sitting at the Fieldhouse with my boyfriend watching my nine year-old play basketball. Each court is surrounded by glass so spectators can see the game from outside the court. As we are sitting, watching the game, my boyfriend looks outside the court where several parents have gathered waiting for their kids to play the next game.

My boyfriend says: "Hey! There's (insert someone I graduated high school with. Again, we'll call him Bobby) Bobby Boucher!". I follow his line of vision and see an oddly familiar site, but it's certainly not the guy I graduated with; it's my office *water boy*! I told him I didn't see Bobby, but I did see my *water boy*. He says: "You know that Bobby delivers for Chesapeake, right? He's been doing it for years. You didn't know that someone you went to school with for twelve years was the *water boy* you see every other week? C'mon Manndi, I know you're ditzzy, but this is ridiculous!". *Guilty*.

Now that the connection has been made, I do recall thinking at first glance that Bobby looked familiar. However, I never looked at the invoices to verify his name because I didn't have any idea he was someone I went to high school with. Actually, we went through TWELVE years of school and graduated together in the infamous Class of 1998. You might think that's a common oversight, given my large class size. (You would be wrong). I am from a small town where everybody knows everybody. I graduated with 135 people (I think two were sick that day). We all knew each other intimately (some more intimately than others). What happens in a small town stays in a small town (and is KNOWN detail by sordid detail by every single member of said small town).

So, yes. I have known (but not *known*) my *water boy* of nearly six years and never once considered the fact that he was a guy I grew up with. We didn't run in the same circles. Yet, he was an athlete. I was an athlete. He was reasonably smart. I was reasonably smart. We were in classes together. We were in clubs together. He was one of my best friends' cousins, for heaven's sake (still is, by the way). HOW COULD I NOT RECOGNIZE HIM?!

It's not like I've been out of school for 58 years! It's been a mere 25 (twenty, when he started delivering water). Have we both changed so much that neither of us recognize the other? This begs another question: does he know who I am? My name isn't all that common and is hanging outside my office, right next to the water cooler. Did he know who I was, but in an effort not to embarrass me (for obviously not knowing him), decide to play along and feign ignorance? Or, did he REALLY not know me? (I feel a bit offended by the possibility of the latter). Yet, I am guilty of the same! Perhaps we both just blossomed so beautifully that neither of us could wrap

our minds around the possibility that the same gangly, awkward, skinny, short (him, not me) kid from our hometown was this same glorious, graceful (again, him, not me), amazing, professional we encounter every other week in a nearby city less than fifty miles east of our tiny little bedroom hometown?

The last visit my co-worker (who is aware of this whole sordid affair/non-affair) Skyped, saying: "Go Cubbies!". (The Cubs are my hometown mascot). Of course, I received the pop-up message right as *water boy* was standing directly in front of me, asking if we needed more cups. It was all I could do not to: a) turn red (which I did) and b) bust out laughing in my typical high-pitched, wounded-bird-that-needs-to-be-put-out-of-misery laugh.

This brings me to the present. Now that I know who he is (but still have no clue if he knows who I am), do I say something? Do I continue with this charade of strangers in the night (rather strangers that are not strangers in the light of day with one thing in common: water)? My boyfriend thinks I should tell him who I am (or tell him I know who he is). I feel like it's gone on so long that it would be EVEN MORE AWKWARD to mention: "Hey! By the way, did you know we graduated high school together?"! I guess in typical Manndi fashion, I will just continue to do...*nothing*. Maybe one day he will break the ice and introduce himself as my long lost grade school crush. Or perhaps one day when he is delivering water, I will accidentally spill the beans by saying something about his cousin that I still keep in touch with. Who knows? The adventure this whole situation has elicited becomes more suspenseful and awkward with every other Thursday visit.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

*The inspiration for *The Waterboy I Didn't Know I Knew* was two-fold. First, I didn't realize I knew the guy (for SIX years!) and when my boyfriend pointed out that he was someone we both went to high school with, I felt like the biggest jerk ever for not recognizing him. Granted, he has changed a lot (for the better, I must say) since high school. He is one of those lucky few that actually got better with time, rather than being unfairly pulled down by the gravity and monotony of adulting like the rest of us.*

The only theme I addressed in the piece is that of reverse sexual harassment. While this is a super hot topic in today's society, very rarely do you hear about in reverse form. I certainly do not want to make light of the topic. However, as a woman that doesn't necessarily mind receiving a compliment from a man or even a whistle now and then (as long as there is no aggression or disrespect), I wanted to point out that the way we spoke of our very own resident water boy (behind his back; never to his face!) could possibly be seen as inappropriate and unwelcome in a reverse discrimination situation. Should my anonymous water boy ever see this published work and put two and two together, I hope he is forgiving and doesn't take me to the cleaners in an epic legal suit to rival T-Swift and Kanye's 2009 VMA scandal.

The inspiration for Halftime Debate was the 2020 Superbowl Chiefs versus 49ers game of the century. Being from Missouri, I am a Chiefs fan. This game was monumental in so many ways. 1) The Chiefs made it to the Superbowl. 2) The Chiefs WON the Superbowl! 3) I have never seen the state of Missouri in such an uproar overanything! It was amazing. Seeing red everywhere; the tears, fist bumps, hugs, spilled beers of total strangers all bonding over a hometown football team was sort of touching. While I am not an avid football fan, my boyfriend who passed away unexpectedly two years ago was a HUGE Chiefs fan. So watching them have an insanely amazing season and go all the way to the Superbowl, bringing home the title, was a joy I experienced vicariously through his eyes, which are now in heaven.

That being said, the only thing trending on social media during the game was the infamous halftime show with Shakira and J-Lo! I loved the controversy it brought about. I have friends on both sides of the fence and they were super passionate about the show. I did not necessarily have a dog in either race (speaking of dogs; I was more interested in the Puppy Bowl simultaneously playing on the Animal Planet).

I thought the halftime show debate was an absolute RIOT in that it elicited arguably even more publicity than the historic football game. My post was sort of a sarcastic, tongue-in-cheek calling out of all those that felt so passionately about J-Lo's stripper pole (or was that Shakira? I've already forgotten) and Shakira's twerking. In typical US of A fashion, we Americans get so worked up about the most insignificant events yet conveniently ignore more pressing issues worthy of our attention. Humorous, yes. Sad, also yes. But entertaining, controversial, politically incorrect, dramatic, ridiculous and who the F cares? A resounding HELL YES.

Literary Influences:

My literary influences are Rachel Hollis, author of Girl, Wash Your Face and Girl, Stop Apologizing, Edgar Allen Poe (I know right), Victoria Holt and Philippa Carr (both pseudonyms for Jean Plaidy) . I enjoy reading any works by sarcastic, tongue-in-cheek, yet REAL, tell it like it is, grainy, salty, humorous writers. I try to infuse a bit of humor into each of my posts, no matter how dark or dismal the subject matter may be. We all deal with some serious shit in life and to be able to find the humor in even the worst situations is an artistic feat art worthy of an epic Oscar win.

BIO: *My name is Amannnda Maphies. I have always gone by Manndi; and yes, it has two n's. There is a very good reason for that. But I prefer to remain mysterious and the time has not yet come to reveal why my name appears to be misspelled. It is actually a perfect moniker for me. I am a bit (more than a bit) zany, wacky, crazy and love nothing more than to laugh at myself and share that laughter with others.*

I work fulltime at the UMKC School of Pharmacy. I am not a Pharmacist (there's no way I could be trusted with people's lives). I have two boys, William (9) and Waylan (7). No, they are not named after Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings. Yes, I do like Willie and Waylon's music.

A lot.

My life as a fulltime working single Mom could honestly rival the drama of any soap opera, lifetime original or reality show out there. I have a way of attracting less than normal people and events into my life. And I sort of love that! I also love to write so I recently started posting on Facebook about my daily adventures about everything from being a single mom of two wild and crazy boys to dating after divorce (I would totally write a five volume manuscript on that topic alone) to more serious topics such as the loss of a loved one and suicide awareness.

I have a small but devoted fan base (and no, they are not all related to me. Though most of them are related to me). They encourage me to continue writing and sharing my stories. I try to infuse humor, relatability and a touch of inspiration into each of my pieces. One day, I will compile them for a memoir of my life. My boys will be thrilled beyond words, I am sure. Actually, being my offspring, they are sure to utter, proclaim and broadcast plenty of words.....suitable for a MATURE audiences only.