

It's the Journey...

CHRISTINE BROOKS COTE

“This is true happiness: to have no ambition and to work like a horse as if you had every ambition. To live far from men, not to need them and yet to love them. To have the stars above, the land to your left and the sea to your right and to realize of a sudden that in your heart, life has accomplished its final miracle: it has become a fairy tale.”

—Nikos Kazantzakis, *Zorba the Greek*

IT OCCURRED TO ME RECENTLY THAT THE process of producing each issue of this journal is itself a journey. It begins about a year before the issue is released when I land on an idea or object or experience that is broad and complex enough to attract a wide variety of essays, stories, poems, and art. Sometimes themes come to me easily and quickly; sometimes it's a struggle. I want contributors to think about the many layers of a theme and recognize that something they've written or photographed or painted reveals a piece of one of those layers. Themes can neither be too specific nor too all-encompassing. It takes a while, sometimes, to come up with a “good” theme.

I also try not to have any preconceived notions about the specific direction I want to go with a theme once I start making selections. There are usually several ways to present a theme in an issue, and I don't want to decide that too early. But, *like a miracle*, the direction always becomes clear once I start reading submissions and discovering the many extraordinarily unique ways that writers and artists have interpreted the theme. Eventually, the pieces I'm reading reveal certain commonalities, connections, and parallels, and the direction I want to take becomes clear. Then I can start making the final selections with the purpose of having variety and balance in the final presentation.

The direction I wanted to take for this issue became clear very quickly. Together, the pieces selected tell a remarkable story about the journey. What is that story? Life takes us on many journeys. Sometimes we choose them, sometimes they present themselves and we have no choice. Sometimes we travel with companions;

sometimes we travel alone. Sometimes our journeys are sequential, sometimes they overlap. Often we don't recognize the starting or ending points until, some months or even years later, we have time to reflect and process what happened. Only then can we clearly see what we experienced and what it all meant.

Each piece in this issue presents the story of someone's journey—the journey of fighting cancer, forming a friendship, losing a family member, leaving one's country, deciding to transition one's gender, discovering the truth about one's ancestors, and more. In all cases, the author had time—months or even decades—to process what they experienced—its trials and tribulations, suffering and rejoicing—and found the strength and courage to finally tell the story of their journey.

✿

Time gives us the chance to look back on our many journeys, recount our experiences, and absorb their meaning for us. When we have the time and opportunity to look back, we see the connections between journeys we took, how one journey led to or impacted another, and how we got to the very spot we stand on today.

So what did I learn from this journey of preparing this issue?

I learned that our challenge as human beings is to use our gifts of reasoning and introspection to attend to our many journeys; to stand back to recognize and understand the highs and lows, the ups and downs, the pleasure and the pain; and then, to paraphrase Zorba the Greek, *to realize of a sudden that in your heart, life has accomplished its final miracle: it's all about the journey.* ✿

CHRISTINE BROOKS COTE founded Shanti Arts in 2011 to revel in nature, art, and spirit. She has called Maine her home for the last thirty years.

• www.shantiarts.com
• www.christinecotephoto.com