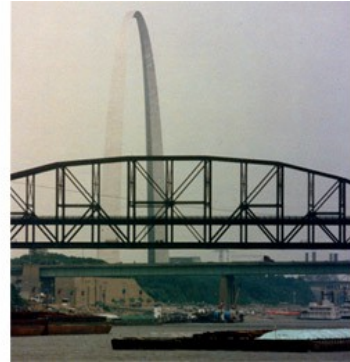


Sandy Reay, Author

November 2023 Newsletter

The word for this month is breathing.

I'm grateful I woke up breathing this morning, and all the other mornings.



Last year, I took a writing class about alternate forms for writing non-fiction. My first use was [Living the Dream](#), from the February 2023 newsletter. It's a list of things that I learned when I lived on a horse ranch in the mountains that implies a story. Another technique was to break a longer story down into flash- or micro-flash stories that tell a bigger story. I dusted off some memories.

Times I Didn't Die: St. Louis, Missouri

1. My company sent me to a computer training class in St. Louis for two weeks. The class was in a tech center with corporate complexes on large areas of lawns, hills and trees. The only motel “within walking distance” was a La Quinta with a Denny's restaurant. Because I could walk to class (about a mile away), the company wouldn't pay for a rental car. After five days of meals at Denny's, food in the vending machine outside the classroom looked better.

By Saturday morning, I wanted to see the Gateway Arch and eat in good restaurants. I rode the free shuttle to the airport and bought a bus ticket to Downtown. Armed with a tourist map of the city, I plopped down on the seat closest to the door for the view out the front and side windows. As we drove, I kept track on the map and read the street signs from the side window, made semi-opaque from chips and scratches. The bus filled up, standing room only, but I focused on the scenery.

Something hissed. I looked around. A small older black woman sat next to me, pointing an umbrella with a sharply-honed tip at the standing people glaring at me.

I hunched my shoulders and thought about getting off the bus. No. That would be more dangerous than staying on. I stared out the side window until we drove through an area of warehouses and empty streets and parking lots. I turned to see the Arch many blocks away. The now-almost-empty bus stopped at a corner.

I stood up and nodded at the woman with the umbrella, “Thank you.”

She glared at me. “You find another way to go home, white girl.”

2. Forcing myself to ignore my fear of heights, I rode to the top of the Gateway Arch and looked out the window. A helicopter flew under the Arch. I managed to get back to the cable car and huddled in it, whimpering, until it took me safely to solid ground again.

I took refuge in the Ladies room until the shaking stopped. I wiped the last tears away and walked to Laclede's Landing. After surviving the bus and the Arch, walking alone in the empty lots and spooky warehouses was a piece of cake.

Laclede's Landing was worth it. I got lunch in a little cafe, gazed at handcrafted and tourist items in shops, and talked to a young man working in one of the shops. I told him about my bus ride and how I wanted to go to the big park and rent a bike the next day.

He shook his head. "Don't go to that park. You were lucky to survive the bus ride." He rang up my small purchase, a souvenir to bring back for a friend. "I get off work at nine. I'll drive you back to your motel. Go to this club." He pointed to a building on my map. "The food and music are great. I'll meet you there."

Around 10 pm, I wondered if he would show up. He did, in time to rescue me from a drunk who had spilled beer on my pale blue suede jacket. We had dinner and listened to the band. My new friend suggested we walk out over the Mississippi River on the Eads Bridge (a 19th century steel truss bridge).

I agreed until I saw it. "I'm afraid of heights." I told him about the Arch and the helicopter.

"They're not supposed to fly under the Arch. It's illegal. Try the bridge. It's not as high and it's a great view."

I trusted him. He was right. Climbing up wasn't a problem. I felt safe to walk out over the water. The view of the river and the lights of the city was magical.

"Why aren't you afraid of this height?"

"Because it's over water." I never said my fears were rational.

The stairs down, over land, were a challenge. He offered to hold my hand, but both fists were clenched on the handrail.

We walked the empty streets of Laclede's Landing back to his car. On the way to my motel, a significant drive northwest, he told me about his fiancée and their plan to camp in the Rocky Mountains for their honeymoon. He mentioned that he lived in a town in Illinois, across the Mississippi River in the opposite direction, a farther distance from Laclede's Landing than my motel. He dropped me off at the front door of the LaQuinta.

"I wish I could do something to thank you."

"You can. Send me lots of information about camping in Colorado." He gave me his name and address.

I sent him a box of all the material I could get from the tourist board and various stores that sold hiking and camping gear. I told my friends back home about my adventure. They convinced me I was lucky my good samaritan was not a serial rapist-killer.

3. With my plan to bike in the big park shot down, I decided to walk around the empty corporate park. Flowers bloomed. A stream meandered through lawns dotted with ponds and decorative rocks, shrubbery, and trees. I took photographs and let my thoughts wander. I found the back of a sign that said, "No trespassing."

I walked out of the restricted area to a paved drive. I grew up knowing mountains are West. Where are they when you really need them? Using the sign with the street number to find my location on my map, and my memory of the way I'd gotten there, I plotted an alternate way back to the motel.

Two armed security guards caught me. The tall older man unfolded from the security car. "What are you doing here?" He was perfectly cast: short hair, narrow eyes, permanent scowl, and a large gun on one hip.

Me, wearing cut-off jeans, a t-shirt with flowers, running shoes, and a camera hanging from my neck: "Taking a computer class." I smiled.

"No. What were you doing on property with signs that say, 'No Trespassing'?"

"I was walking on the grass, following the stream, and didn't see a sign until that one." I pointed to the offending sign. "I didn't even see a building."

The two men looked at each other. Tall man: "We could call the police and have you arrested."

"Why not? I almost started a race riot on the bus yesterday. And I had to hitchhike back from LaCledes Landing late last night."

With encouragement, I told them about the bus ride (stares and shaking heads), the helicopter under the Gateway Arch ("It's illegal." "You saw that?"), and my ride at midnight with a total stranger ("You didn't know that guy. You coulda been killed." "Where are you from?").

"Denver, Colorado." Hanging my head as if my home town was something to be ashamed of.

"We're gonna let you go." The tall man returned to the car to call someone. The other smiled and whispered. "We watched you on the cameras. We knew you weren't a spy."

"What is this place?" Duh. No spy career for me.

He rolled his eyes. "I can't tell you that. Just stay on the roads. Okay?"

The Sinister Umbrella

I'm still writing the first-draft of [The Sinister Umbrella](#), a novel about a young woman whose life is destroyed in a car accident and her struggle to build a new life. It's a young-adult horror story, with a touch of humor and a twist (or three). If you want to know more, click on the link. If all goes well this month, I should have a complete second draft. Or a complete breakdown. I'd say the odds were 50:50, but I'm an optimist.

Part of the feedback I got on [The Sinister Umbrella](#) included advice to ground my story: show the time frame (current) and the location. I spent most of my life along the front range in Colorado. Two of my first attempts at novels are set in Denver or a rural area east of Denver. I wanted to do something different, so I chose St. Louis for [The Sinister Umbrella](#). Zezanie, the protagonist, lives in a high-rise with a view of the Gateway Arch and LaCledes Landing. FYI, I lived in St. Louis for nine months.

Monthly email.

I'm working on [The Sinister Umbrella](#) and Version 12 of my memoir, [You Are the Road That Led Me Home](#). I like to cook Thanksgiving dinner early Thursday am, and use the rest of the 4-day weekend to work on a project. It's also close to the end of NaNoWriMo (National Novel

Writing Month), a voluntary exercise for writers to complete a first draft of a 50,000 word novel in 30 days. “They” suggest we write 1,667 words per day. Last year I kept a spreadsheet and wrote most of my 50K words over Thanksgiving weekend and the night of Nov. 30. Sandy time: It's still Nov. 30 until I go to sleep, no matter when that is. Does this newsletter count as words written?

If you wish to unsubscribe, please reply and put “unsubscribe” in the subject or text. I won't send another. Unless you reply after the next monthly email. I have no idea when that will be.

If you want to read past newsletters, check out [Archives](#).

Necessary blah blah

I add content to my author website when the inspiration strikes and mention what's new on the home page. These days, inspiration strikes monthly. For those of you who are worried about the “Not Secure” message at the top of my website: that means I didn't pay for a certificate because I don't do online commerce. All my websites display information. I don't collect or save your information **unless you choose to email me**. (I've been building web sites since 1998; I keep 'em simple and watch out for suspicious files on my server.) You could follow me on Facebook. I post there more often.

[Sandy Reay, Author](#) – ideas to encourage creativity, where to find inspiration, short stories, micro & flash fiction, true stories, and a memoir (in progress for a decade—don't hold your breath)

[Colorado Sandstorm Music](#) – songs and poems written and co-written by Sandy Reay and Friends, and an online Cowboy Poetry Book: [Another Horse to Saddle](#)

[Colorado Sandstorm Productions](#) – info about all the other websites plus concerts and songwriting workshops by national touring songwriters

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