

Sandy Reay, Author

February 2024 Newsletter

The word for this month is love.

Lost love: Leo, my old Collie boy. New love: Baby Girl, terrier mix.

I rescued her. And she rescued me.



Times I Didn't Die: Rafting

1. JR was 6'6" tall. I met him when I helped a friend move. He was carrying a refrigerator down a flight of stairs, holding it under one arm.

JR's annual July 4th weekend party near Penrose CO. He invited me to run the lower Arkansas River. I'd been on one raft trip and couldn't wait to do more.

Signs warned rafters to stay out of the flood-stage water. JR asked if we still wanted to go. Three of us said, "Yes." I wanted to be in the front of the raft.

JR put me in the middle of the raft, the safest place. Big John and Moose rode up front, to help hold the nose down. The two aptly-named men blocked my view.

We hit a huge wave. The front end flipped up and tossed the two men into the center of the raft. On top of me. A forearm larger than my thigh came at me. Daylight disappeared. Red and yellow pain flashed in my eyes. And brain. I couldn't breathe.

JR kept the raft off the boulders and walls of the canyon. Moose and Big John clawed their way to the front of the raft. One man apologized for hitting me. As if he could have prevented it.

A bandana soaked in snow-melt water on my broken nose helped keep the swelling down. And waves washed off my blood.

2. JR, his girlfriend, and I took a day off to float down the Colorado River from Hot Sulphur Springs to State Bridge. It was scenic and an easy day trip—perfect for beginners—but not the day we chose. The river flooded both banks.

JR set up his oar boat. We loaded it with a cooler, tarps to throw on the ground for a picnic lunch, sun screen, hats, and—just in case—plastic raincoats and ponchos. No rubber boots to wade through the flooded field. Just tennis shoes.

The high fast water through the canyon kept JR busy. But, he pulled over when people on a bank in the canyon yelled and waved. A friend of theirs had crashed his kayak in a curve down river and was injured. They hoped JR could rescue him. Other rafts queued up in case JR couldn't do it.

JR tried, but the turn was too tight, and the current swept us away.

The canyon widened. We pulled over to a high dry spot for lunch. Clouds rolled in. A few raindrops fell. We loaded up and headed for State Bridge, hoping for a brief storm, a warm meal, and a colorful sunset.

Lightning and thunder. We put on raincoats and ponchos. The sky filled with thick dark clouds. Light rain became a torrent. We huddled under layers of tarps while lightning struck the water around us. We peeked out to spot a familiar building, hoping we wouldn't find ourselves miles past the takeout. Or get struck by lightning loading out.

3. “Have you ever rafted the Platte River, through Denver?” Only JR would start a phone call like that.

“No. Why?”

“Record high water. It's the first time we could raft it from the Douglas County Line to North Denver.”

“I'm in.” No portaging a raft to avoid dams that tore up rubber rafts going over them.

We set out Saturday morning, and floated through Littleton and Englewood. JR pulled into an eddy and threw a loop around a tree trunk. “You want to get out now?”

“Why?”

“Because dead dog dam is right up there. And a guy drowned trying to go over it two days ago. I'll pick you up on the other side.”

“No.”

Compared to our previous raft trips, running dams was child's play. Past the dams, JR let me steer to the takeout. He lazed in the boat smoking a cigar.

4. My boyfriend and I ran the Salmon River, Idaho, in his oar-driven raft. We had to run a chute on the near side of a high waterfall. Armed with my new camera, I squeezed behind his seat to take pictures of the chute.

“That's the worst place to be if I miss the chute. You'll be thrown out of the raft.”

“Don't miss the chute.”

He missed the chute. The current dragged us over the waterfall down into a hole. The raft folded like a taco. Water swirled back into the hole, pushing the water-logged boat back into the waterfall.

My friend threw himself forward to put more weight on the front of the raft, yelling, "High side." His order to join him.

Still clutching the back of his chair, I swung around, and an oar slammed into my head. I fell into the seat and grabbed the oars to keep them from swinging around again. And pulled on them. A reflex. It helped move the raft forward. I pulled harder, and the raft made it up and out of the hole. I steered us to the river bank. My head throbbed. Details were fuzzy.

My boyfriend jumped out, tied up the boat, and climbed up a rock to pose. I stood up. Dizzy. One finger hurt. Blood dripped into the water.

Our friends floated by and yelled, "Are you okay?"

My friend waved. "We're good."

"Sandy, are you okay?" A voice from the river.

"I think I broke a fingernail."

My boyfriend climbed back down to the boat. "You 'broke a fingernail?' That's the epitome of cool."

I showed him my finger (the one missing a fingernail) and the lump on the side of my head. He showed me his first aid skills.

If I had been in my “safe place” in the front of the boat when we went over the falls, I would have fallen out, and the boat would have landed on me. PS. My camera was undamaged. And I didn't get any pictures.

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. The protagonist is going to have a lot of soul-searching to do, and choices to make: the dark night of the soul. In her case, she has to choose, and one of her options is not what you might expect. I didn't see it coming until two weeks ago.

I admire people who can outline the details of the plot before they write. If I did that, I would be too bored to write the story. This way, I'm open to new ideas that are prompted by dreams and memes. Like my prospective reader (I hope), I'm surprised by what happens next.

Monthly email.

Theoretically, I'm working on [The Sinister Umbrella](#) and Version 12 of my memoir, [You Are the Road That Led Me Home](#). I keep taking online classes to learn how to revise both the novel and my memoir. I leave micro-memoirs out of this newsletter because I'm using them in the full-size memoir, in a chapter titled "Time My Father Tried to Kill Me."

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, but I'll try for St. Patrick's Day. Maybe I'll write a micro-memoir that isn't related to dying. Like a micro-memoir about doughnuts ... and a cop.

If you want to read past newsletters, check out [Archives](#). I can't see old newsletters on my Google phone because they're posted using PDFs. I found a work around, but it will take time to fix. Please let me know if you want to read old micro-memoirs and other babble. If so, I'll prioritize the fix. Note: [Times I Didn't Die](#) has its own page, with some incidents that weren't included in newsletters. The other micro-memoirs from the newsletters are posted on the [Inspiration](#) page.

Necessary blah blah

I add content to my author website when the inspiration strikes (usually "monthly") and mention what's new on the home page. 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

[AcousticByLines](#) – when and where you can hear supportive musicians, co-writers, and find me sometimes (when I'm not hibernating or self-quarantining)

[Sandy Reay and Friends' songs and poems on YouTube](#)

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