

Sandy Reay, Author

June 2024 Newsletter

The word for this month is surprise.

**My new housemate gives me great ideas for cleaning out the house.
And she surprised me by replanting the flower beds.**



Times I Didn't Die: Walking at Night (Before Cell Phones)

1. My second training trip to St. Louis lasted five days. I thought I could stay out of trouble. One of my classmates was a woman from Toronto whose company, like mine, didn't provide her with a car or money for taxis. Our choice was one restaurant at the motel or vending machines.

We decided to walk to a “real” restaurant for dinner. In those days, pedestrian safety was not a visible priority in that part of St. Louis. Busy streets had no sidewalks. Residential neighborhoods had one or two ways in and out to reduce traffic, and side streets did not connect to other neighborhoods. The lack of street lights discouraged foot traffic.

We had to cross a busy highway. The only traffic light on our way to the restaurant was close to the restaurant. Walking there, we faced traffic. Going back, we crossed with the light and walked the same direction as traffic, on a gravel shoulder next to the paved road. Cars raced by.

As we approached an exit ramp to a road below, an old large sedan slowed as it passed us. The driver, a man, turned to look at us. He slowed to a crawl and stopped, blocking our access to a concrete curb across the bridge. One misstep squeezing past the car and we'd slide down the steep slope to the ramp and road below. Or we could walk out in traffic to get around the car.

The driver stared at us through the back window. I shivered, in spite of the St. Louis heat. A few feet

from the ramp, I stopped walking. My new friend continued her story about a strange computer glitch she'd solved. At the end of her story, she looked around. "Why are we stopped here?"

"That guy in the car checked us out and stopped. He cut off our access to the bridge. We either have to squeeze through single file to get to the bridge or walk in traffic to get around him."

"Are you worried about getting dirty if you walk too close to his car?"

I pointed to the car. A car racing up behind us lit up the interior of the car that had stopped. "Watch the driver. He's talking to someone we can't see. Maybe someone in the back seat who can open the back door and grab us when we get close to the car."

"Should we go down the ramp and cross the street down there?"

"There's no traffic light to cross the street down there. I'm hoping he'll drive away. Let's stare at him."

After several minutes, which seemed like hours, the parked car's back-up lights lit up. Cars drove past us and turned down the ramp, honking at the driver who tried to back toward them. The driver gave up and drove away. When the traffic cleared, we crossed the bridge and made it back to our motel.

2. I worked in downtown Denver. I was on-call days, nights, and weekends, and frequently worked late to fix problems. I parked across the street from my building, but the closest entrance to the parking garage was down a high roofed gallery, which was not well-lit after the auditorium and theater shut down. The tunnel from the gallery into the parking garage was dark.

One late night, I walked across the street toward the gallery and heard male voices behind me. Two men headed my way. I speed-walked through the gallery and tunnel. The voices behind me grew too loud too soon. The parking level around me was empty. I could see my car, but I couldn't race there in the high-heels my company dress-code required.

I stood with my back against a large concrete support post facing the tunnel, pulled my key ring from my purse, and made a fist with the keys sticking out.

The two men stopped at the mouth of the tunnel. One whispered something. The other mumbled. Showdown at the parking garage.

Maybe they were good guys, but why had they run after me? If they were just headed for their car, why didn't they say something and/or walk away? I forced myself to take slow, deep breaths.

After what seemed like an hour, they turned and disappeared in the tunnel. Their voices faded. I waited until I was sure they weren't coming back. And my knees stopped shaking. Note to self: bring tennis shoes to wear at night.

3. My date and I walked back from a late dinner toward the parking garage. We chose a shorter path back to our car, on a street that had very little traffic and empty sidewalks. A few young men followed us. Their voices and footsteps sounded loud on the empty sidewalks. I glanced back. Street lights revealed they weren't dressed like office workers or people out on dates.

I led my date across the street. The group of men crossed, too. Ahead was a large square fountain. We speeded walked to the far end of the fountain and stopped. I turned to watch the group of men approach. They stopped at the opposite end of the fountain and stared back.

My date interrupted his story. “Why are we stopped?”

“Those guys have been following us since we left the restaurant.”

“Oh. What do we do now?”

“We wait.”

“For what?”

I tilted my head at the group of men. “For them to make the next move.” Showdown at the fountain.

We stood up taller and straightened our shoulders. Stone-faced. Resolute. Well, I was.

The men huddled. Shaking heads outvoted the shaking fists. They turned and retraced their footsteps to the nearest cross street and disappeared.

The Sinister Umbrella

[The Sinister Umbrella](#) is a young-adult horror novel, with a touch of humor and a twist (or three) about a young woman (modern-day Rapunzel) whose life and looks are destroyed in a car crash (Frankenstein's monster). If you want to know more, click on the link.

Last month, I announced that the first draft is finished. Wrong. I sat in on a how-to-get-published three-hour Zoom session. After two hours, I was ready to quit. That's when they got to the good stuff: what to give potential publishers.

One short writing exercise showed me what I needed: the turning point after the dark night of the soul. Until this point, my passive protagonist did what she was told by her parents and friends. This was the point where she needed to make a proactive decision and take action.

I didn't give her that. I saved my answers to the questions and went to sleep, focused on cleaning, laundry, accounting, and welcoming a new housemate.

One night, I woke up at 2:30 a.m. and rewrote the last chapter. And a few nights after that, I made notes to rewrite what I had written, turning my pathetic passive victim into a proactive positive protagonist. (I also attended another Zoom class on writing alliterative prose.)

Monthly email.

Last month I wrote, “Now I can spend more time on Version 12 of my memoir, [You Are the Road That Led Me Home](#).” Yeah. No. My yard is overgrown already. My handyman quit to

move to Virginia, leaving me with a large number of unfinished projects. Emotionally, I'm ready to finish this ten-plus-year-old project. And that, too, is progress. I have to rewrite my poor pitiful passive protagonist's progress from page one. In both books.

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, which might come out on July 15.

If you want to read past newsletters, check out [Archives](#). If you can't see the old newsletters and want to, please email me. I found a work around, but it will take time to fix. [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. Re: the “Not Secure” message at the top of my website. That means I didn't pay for an SSL certificate because I don't do online commerce. All my websites display information. (I've been building web sites since 1998; I keep 'em simple and watch out for suspicious files on my server.) I don't collect or save your information **unless you choose to email me**. All I save is your name and email.

[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

[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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