

[Sure](#) [1]

May 14, 2014 [Flash Fiction](#) [2]

By Kathryn Gahl

Finalist for the 2013 Talking Writing Prize for Flash Fiction



After he left the family, she took them to London to live with an aunt, drove to Gary where the steel mills were booming, put them on the orphan train and bit her lip. He hit the road to Albuquerque on his Harley, saw his daughter one time across the ball field, took a liking to firearms and nude beaches. Once, she turned on the gas, opened her legs to a realtor promising help, drove deliberately into the lagoon. He chipped his tooth chewing ice, built a back-story about lumberjacking, and felt his hemorrhoids fire up.

Sometimes, she left them alone when the sitter bailed, worked the night shift while they slept, wasted time tracking a deadbeat dad. He allowed no room for indecision, rented a room from a widow, and made a baby with the babe from the bar.

Meanwhile, in Iowa, she took them to Grandma's house, clipped coupons, went off to college and graduated cum laude. He took a job selling used cars in Long Beach, began to see himself as exceptional, said he suffered from

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seasonal affective disorder.

She indulged in hot baths, scoured Goodwill for school clothes, and patched the roof. Every now and then, he adjusted his nuts, his address, his reason. She cracked her knuckles, told the kids to knock it off, and paid the collection agency five dollars a month. Sometimes, she got drunk on screwdrivers. He took up with the priest, stock car racing, and single malt Scotch. Sometimes, he cried in his sleep on Saturday. She lost weight, gained weight, raised African Greys. He basically disappeared, joined the Yacht Club, nearly choked on a chicken bone.

She pawned her wedding ring, nailed a second job at Wal-Mart, suppressed an ugly impulse. Twice, he went to jail, to Miami, to the library. Three times, she went to church, the cop shop, the food pantry. He worked the boats of the Inside Passage, hired out as a hired hand in Montana, lost his thumb at the shoe factory. She got breast cancer, a raise, a refinance. He engaged in conversation about life, literature, and love, underwent a vasectomy, thought he recognized his son going down the escalator.

After he left the family, they saw one another twenty years later and were hard put to remember the exact point in time where the wind shifted, when it put their boat in irons. "Here's something to ponder," she said, reading from her iPad. "*Most of your pain is self-chosen.*"

"Still looking to blame," he said.

"Looking at Gibran."

"LeBron," he retorted.

She was ready to smile, but held back. "LeBron," she said.

"Lebron *James*," he added.

She looked to the lowering sun. "Sure," she said.

Art Information

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Kathryn Gahl loves red lipstick, home cooking, and vintage clothing.

She writes fiction, nonfiction, picture books, novels, and poetry, including *Life Drawing Class*, a poetry and watercolor book. Her stories and poems appear in many journals, including *Margie*, *Salamander*, *The Notre Dame Review*, and *Wisconsin People and Ideas*.

Sure

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Mother to two and Oma to one, she believes in the transcendent power of ballroom dance, which she favors with her second and last husband, Robert.

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