

Belinda is a social science graduate, self-employed as a life coach and master practitioner/trainer of Neuro-Linguistic Programming. While her passion is working with people, Belinda finds her inspiration in creative writing.

She says writing for the advertising, entertainment, film/TV sectors of the communication industry in South Africa and the U.S., “...*inspired my belief in the extraordinary power of effective communication and the magic of creative expression.*”

Belinda and her husband, Bruce, love traveling and share a keen interest in cultural diversity. Their journeys and careers have taken them through large parts of Southern Africa, America, Europe, Canada, and the Middle East, and to exotic islands such as Mauritius, Phuket, The Comores, St. Thomas, and St. John.

An excerpt from one of her travel stories, “Pass the rum punch, please!” speaks for itself:

As avid travelers, my husband and I constantly suffer from the need to get away. Escapism was one of our reasons for relocating from South Africa to California in 2001, to upstate New York in 2003, and then to North Carolina in 2005. We agreed, as long as the U.S. was “home” to us, we’d cover as much distance in our host country as possible.

Early on, in those flat-wallet days, road trips were a favorite touring option, allowing us to crisscross the West and East Coasts from north to south. Our adventures were only flawed by the occasional bad night’s sleep in a cheap motel.

“What’s with the cardboard-thin walls?” I would whine, my face blushing, ears ringing, hoping we hadn’t scandalized ourselves as much as the neighbors had.

“Oh God, another stale donut stuck in the poop chute,” my husband would grunt.

Traveling on America’s roads with a sense of self-determination was well worth the humble beginnings—relaxed muscles, an unclenched jaw, and a normal heart rate were qualities of life that could not be taken for granted in South Africa’s troubled socio-political climate. A road trip in a country where criminal elements flourished in a lawless society ... well, that was as good as a coach ride in the Wild West, never knowing if you should keep a watch out for the lawbreakers or the lawmakers.

Since then, our oops bank balance has shown some aha potential, and in 2005 my husband suggested the Caribbean as our next holiday destination. He used the word “paradise” repeatedly, so I started dreaming of sipping cocktails on a white beach under a tropical sky next to a blue ocean.

Belinda is currently working on a memoir about life transitions and the difficulty of trans-cultural orientation. She also writes fiction. Her essays on life coaching and Neuro-Linguistic Programming have been published in *The Healing Springs Journal*, and she has appeared as guest on Beverly Kehoe Shea's TV show, "Health Connections" (SACC-TV Ch. 16, Schenectady). Check out her web site: www.belindanlpcoach.com.

Below are some excerpts from her memoir (title currently confidential):

Set in South Africa

There was another angle to the socio-political upheaval in South Africa—the hypocritical World Powers were faced with a dilemma: how to protect their economic and strategic interests in South Africa under the present government without alienating the liberation forces who might become the government of tomorrow. They employed the typical strong-arm, easy-out remedy for Third World socio-political problems—they slapped sanctions against our country to exclude us from the benefits of global economics and ban us from international sport and cultural arenas, thus forcing the obstinate politicians into transformation.

"We're screwed," my oldest brother said.

"We're doubly screwed because we're Afrikaans," another brother said.

"I'm screwed; I'll never be able to travel the world," said yet another.

There were four of them, sandwiched between my sister, the eldest sibling, and I, the youngest.

"Screw them," said my father, who was in denial, "they should leave us to solve our own problems. This will always be the best country in the world."

Set in San Francisco

Driving from San Francisco International airport, we approached the city from its orphan side, which is deprived of the exquisite views I had been promised.

"But love, it looks like an urban squatter camp," I whispered to shield the cab driver from my dismay, careful not to display bad manners by appearing unappreciative of my host country.

The dense jumble of suburban houses and apartments reminded me somehow of my country's black townships where hundreds of poor people lived in shacks, built from scraps of whatever building material they could lay their hands on.

"Wait sweets, the best is to come," Bruce said.

The only thing that rolled into view within the next few minutes, though, was the thick, legendary blanket of fog. The haze remained on the meteorology calendar

for an entire week, preventing even a glimpse of the so-called glorious San Francisco.

I had no idea it would hang around my soul for a long, long time.

Set in Saratoga Springs

Arriving weak-kneed at Albany airport, we must have looked like Dumb and Dumber when we read the advisory pamphlets with tips on how to stay alive in sub-zero temperatures.

“Jesus, this must be some kind of sick joke,” Bruce said.

We quickly learned what Yankee endurance really meant. As we stepped outside, the shock of the intense cold immobilized our brains—Bruce could not remember where to find the rental car, and I forgot how to use my legs for walking. Within minutes we ached all over. Bruce looked like a three-year old who had lost his mother in a shopping mall; my shoes froze to the cement floor; tears turned to icicles half-way down my cheeks.

“Hijack any unlocked car,” Bruce shouted.

I was about to beg shelter from two Mexican gentlemen who had just started up their big, black American truck, when he spotted our car in the rental section. Never before had I been so glad to be the weaker sex. I jumped into the car, leaving my frosty husband to break the ice off the trunk and load our luggage.

Set in North Carolina

The introductions played out like an identity parade; soon faces became characters. I discovered most writers belonged to a number of genre-specific networks simultaneously.

Despite the poor turnout, we managed to generate sufficient excitement and creative energy to reinforce the belief that we really were real writers. The Pina Coladas and Mojitos blissfully induced a who-the-hell-needs-publishers bravado, which was quickly extrapolated into advice on “do it yourself” tricks-of-the-trade.

I loved witnessing the all-round passion for writing, a fond reminder of the time I owned Talents Galore in South Africa—most of my actors would have prostituted themselves for a voice-over in a suppository ad for they surely loved acting more than they cared about their reputation.

I was touched by everyone’s willingness to exchange ideas, information and tips, almost with an attitude of naiveté.

I realized I needed to outgrow my suspicious nature; I was safely outside the corporate hunting ground now.

One of Belinda’s writing goals is to create an anthology about the agony and joy of expatriation. She would love to receive contributions! Her email address is bbnicoll@earthlink.net.