

The Intake Towers

By Zoe

When you cross the Chain of Rocks Bridge between Madison, IL and St. Louis MO, you will see them. The Intake Towers of the Mississippi River. Two small towers, one of which looks like a miniature castle, standing in the middle of the muddy river as time flows by. Forty year ago, I sat in the backseat of my grandmother navy blue Buick sedan when I first noticed The Towers.

“Mem-Mem....what’s that castle for?”

“It’s where the Princess lives honey.”

“What Princess?”

“The One that makes dreams come true.”

“Why is the river brown?”

“Because it’s made of chocolate milk.”

“When we get to your home can we bake cookies and make chocolate milk?”

“Of course! Did you know that the Princess can make the river run backwards?”

“No! Rivers can’t go backwards! You’re pulling my leg!”

“Yes they can. Especially if a magical Princess uses her magical words.”

“Like ‘please’ and ‘thank-you?’”

“Exactly!”



My grandmother was always a great storyteller with a vivid imagination. I remember some of the imaginary bedtime stories she would tell me about a cowboy that fell in love with a Princess and would gallop to the moon and back because he loved her so much. Goldilocks living with 3 bears because living with Mermaid's and swimming with dolphins was exhausting and always made her fingers pruney. When Mem-Mem was too tired of making up stories, there was always a small pile of books on the bedside table. "Goodnight Moon", "Grandfather Twilight" "Make Way for Ducklings" were some of my favorites. As I grew, the books would change. A small pile of books by Beverly Cleary, Roald Dahl, and Mark Twain would be sitting in a small pile.

Growing up, I could never tell if she was telling the truth or just telling me another imaginary story. It was not until I was doing research about earthquakes in college that I came across the article "Earthquake causes fluvial tsunami in the Mississippi River." The New Madrid earthquakes happened December 16, 1811. They were a series of earthquakes with an estimated 8.6 magnitude causing the Mississippi river to flow backwards for several hours. Mem-Mem was telling the truth!

She told me once her favorite book was Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain. For my 7th birthday, she took me to the Mark Twain Lighthouse in Hannibal Missouri. I had outgrown my princess obsession and had upgraded to a dragon obsession by that time. My favorite movie was Pete's Dragon (the 1977 version). Although the lighthouse was a model and we were not able to go inside, I vividly remember that sunny summer day. We were standing by the metal banister looking out to the Mississippi and Mem-Mem started singing the song "Candle on the Water" by Helen Reddy. We both sang it watching as the Mississippi flowed to the tune of our voices singing together in harmony. I think that was also the day I fell in love with lighthouses, and I have yet to outgrow this obsession.

Mem-Mem died twelve ago. Two years after her passing, I took a "Goodbye Memory Tour" to honor her. Driving by myself over the Chain of Rocks Bridge I glanced out at the Intake Tower's wondering what the magical Princess had been up to while I was away. Early the next morning I drove to the Mark Twain Lighthouse and as I stood against the metal guardrails looking through the trees to the Mississippi, I pulled out my earbuds and played "Candle on the Water" as the river gently flowed by and tears rolled down my cheeks.

I live in Connecticut now with my husband and our 4-year-old son, Finley. From his bedroom window, you can see Morgan Point Light flashing in the distance and hear a deep lazy foghorn and a harbor bell clanging in the distance. A small pile of books sits on Fin's bedside table and I hope he will grow up loving lighthouses like me and will remember the "candle on the water" flashing outside his window.

Zoe has been creative writing for recreational and therapeutic purposes for over 7 years. She has a passion for lighthouses, the Military/First Responders, supporting rural communities, and helping others "find and create their own resiliency". She has had past pieces published in the internal newsletter while she was working for the American Red Cross Services to the Armed Forces (2020-2022). Her lived experiences includes volunteering on crisis hotlines (Veteran and civilian), and supporting survivors from diverse backgrounds/experiences which have all inspired her creative writing pieces. She continues to "nudge" her comfort zone and uses her creative writing like a lighthouse...shining a bright light when other's may be struggling in a wicked dark storm.