Dear readers, we were so happy to receive over 200 submissions in our Annual Writing Contest. We are thrilled to announce the winners and commend all who submitted their work. The contest featured three categories: Fiction, Creative Nonfiction/Memoir, and Poetry. We want to thank our esteemed judges—Amy jellicoe Rana for Fiction, Diane Kraynak for Creative Nonfiction/Memoir, and Vicki DeArmon for Poetry—for their time and discerning eyes.

In the Fiction category, the Honorable Mention is Luanne Belkin’s “The Almost But Not Quite T士兵.” Luanne’s powerful work explores themes of family, memory, and the intricacies of human relationships.

In the Creative Nonfiction/Memoir category, the Honorable Mention goes to Carol Ann Restoration’s “Herb, the Great Escape.” Carol Ann’s narrative is a testament to resilience and the indomitable spirit of those who fight against the odds.

In the Poetry category, the Honorable Mention is Valerie Tomaselli’s “Tilting: The Nearly True.” Valerie’s poem is a masterful exploration of loss, love, and the mechanics of the human heart.

Congratulations to all our winners and to those whose work was included in this year’s contest. We look forward to reading more from you in the future.

Sincerely,
Annual Writing Contest Chair
Laura Ruth Loomis is a social worker in the San Francisco area. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *Writer's Digest*, *Phone Fiction*, and *On the Premises*, among others.


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You don't believe in ghosts, obviously. You were probably glad to get the house at such a bargain price. There's a reason for it.

Their names were Jason and Cindy. He was forty, she was thirty-five. They bought the house twelve years ago, in a brand-new development, the same time I bought mine. I've never been inside theirs, but I can tell you what it looked like, four bedrooms in one of three standard floor plans. The pale gray outside went with the other houses in pale yellow or pale tan. I didn't know them well. We said hello and chatted in passing. They were sociable, outgoing people who organized a block party for the neighbors every Fourth of July. The street would be effectively blocked off as people brought out their camp chairs and barbecue grills. It was, ironically, not the only time they caused the street to be blocked off.

The economic good times seem so long ago. We bought our house for under $200,000, right before prices started going up. We refinanced once or twice, pulling out a little cash along the way. Jason and Cindy did too. I don't know what they used the money for. Maybe it was something important, like a college education, or medical bills. Maybe it was something frivolous. Some of it must have gone to landscaping: the Greek goddess fountain in the front yard is still running.

Back then a house seemed like a source of infinite wealth, a private ATM. When prices in our neighborhood hit half a million, I wrote in my journal that, "In another year or two we'll be millionaires on paper."

Except, not.

Read the entire story here.

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