

Digging Up Bones

by Teresa Cortez

I've recently started a memoir (famous last words), and although things began well, my fingers tapping away like a flurry of hummingbirds, I suddenly came up empty. There were huge gaps in my memory, so my hands went quiet as I tried to squeeze something out of my dry rag of a brain, wringing it 'til my hands bled.

Three years ago I planned to begin the memoir. I'd collected some information that might be helpful - death certificates in murder and suicide cases, interviews of a few craggy alcoholics hanging out in smoke-filled AA clubs who were the last to talk to yet another suicide (yea, this tale isn't of the fairy sort). I took photographs of some of the dilapidated buildings in Houston, TX which were halfway houses to some of my transient family. I toured morgues, borrowed old family photos from my sister, reread old letters I've saved for the past thirty-five years; I took photos of one of the twelve schools I attended growing up and the tiny square of a house where I was born, obtained school and hospital records, autopsy reports, etc. Then I learned I was pregnant and put everything aside. It wasn't time to churn up darkness in my "life-affirming" condition.

Fast forward three years and two kids later. I'm frozen with memory block, second cousin to the "writer's" variety. In memory I'm walking along, picking up this bit and that from the past like daisies along the "yellow brick road" and then I fall into an abyss, like passing out mid-sentence. I call my sister thinking maybe she can help me, pinch my memory. Which she did.

It can be an ugly business, remembering. I buried the past to make room for the present, no ceremony, no headstone. I told no one where I put them - the bones, not even myself. But there is truth there, in the ground, in what I've tried to cover up. Can it really set

us free?

So I'm digging, clawing the black earth, disappearing in its ore and shadow. The air vanishes so I breathe the forgiving soil which drags me under - in and out, in and out, until the quivering balloons in my chest adapt. Just then, my hand touches the first of many cold bones.

