

"Swept Away"

By, Kristine Cosgrove

No one imagines that they'll end up in prison when they're young. Little girls dream of being and doing all kinds of important things but not being a prisoner. When I was young, I wanted to be a writer. I think I'd read all the Laura Ingalls books by the time I was 8 or 9 years old, and then I'd moved onto My Side of The Mountain by Jean Craighead George, The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, Witch, and the Wardrobe, and eventually I worked my way up to The Catcher in The Rye by J.D. Salinger.

I was very poor growing up but I didn't know it. My mom worked at cleaning houses so I could have clothes on my back, food, and lunch money for school. She was never home because of it. When we moved to the *Blue House* in Tacoma, I remember being so excited that I'd finally have my own room. My mom painted it pink, and sewed this pink frilly bedspread, and a pink bedskirt. You could probably say my mom was the original Martha Stewart. I had these French Windows too that opened up, and hung in a way that looked kind of European. She sewed pink curtains with tulle fabric, and bows that pulled them in at the center. It looked like a Princess lived in that room. And that's where you could find me most of the time. Laying on my bed with my nose inside a book. I was so happy to live in a world that swept me away from my isolation, and loneliness. The characters in those books comforted me, and words became my friends.

I'll need to fill you in on a not so big secret; I was a funny little girl. I started to imagine what it would be like to be a famous novelist, and travel the world signing books. So I started writing these "time capsule" notes to myself, and shoving them into the knotted holes inside my bedroom closet. I never thought for one moment that our house would be torn down, and that it wouldn't be standing in the next 20 years. I imagined I would be that famous writer, and climb up those creaking stairs when I was 30 something to find those notes. I imagined unfolding the crinkled paper, and reading the scrawling note written in a 9 year old hand, full of hope, promise, and adventure.

I never imagined that I would spend my time in prison. That thought never entered my mind. And yet, this is where I find myself today. Somehow I lost my way. I forgot what it was I wanted to be when I was all grown up. I've never forgotten about those notes I wrote to myself. A kind of time capsule that I tucked away inside my closet.

My life has not turned out the way I had imagined it would be, but neither has the world in which we live in today. The world has been in prison with me. Covid hit when I was three years into my sentence. I've been living in a cocoon of sorts. Isolated from the craziness that's been taking place in the world of politics, social uprisings, random violence, mass shootings. I wonder sometimes who feels more protected right now from the outside world. Me, or the poor soul that's of Asian descent minding his or her own business, and suddenly getting knocked down onto the pavement by some crazy person behind them onto the sidewalk. The whole planet seems to have imploded while I've been incarcerated.

We do have television inside prison. I watched with horror with the rest of the world at what took place on January 6th, and the insurrection upon our nation's capital. It will be up to those of us with the foresight, and imagination to envision a world in which we can live peacefully together. We must unite ourselves as a country, and as a human race. We are all standing at the crossroads of the correct path to take. The way home has never been easy. The road can get rocky, and people get lost, either by giving up, or just losing faith. But this happens more when we don't have a vision of what is possible. Hope and courage is possible. We must all reach for it, though.

The *Blue House* that I grew up in has long since been torn down. My dreams of one day being a writer that is traveling the world and living her best life have never been swept away. Not inside. Somehow there's still a part of that 8 year old little girl who always knew she would find her way home. I've discovered that my home rests in my heart, and in all the undiscovered imaginary places I have yet to invent. They are all waiting to be born; like stars in the sky.