

SASHA A. MARTIN

# PENCIL & SPOON

SPRING 2018



## BORNE OF DUST

### Reimagining the Garden

This time of year, Oklahoma is wet and tornadic. Twice, I've woken up to earthquakes shaking the house. These seasonal changes are becoming increasingly violent year-to-year. Coupled with listening to Robin Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* and Dylan Baker's reading of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, I have come to reconsider my back yard and the role it plays in our family's life.

It's a fine yard. Big enough to play tag, small enough to not burden a mower much. It's gold in the winter, while the Bermuda grass lays dormant. It's green in the summer, thick and lush (if a little bumpy from mole tunnels). Until recently, I was happy to leave our little patch of 1950's suburbia relatively untouched.

But I don't want a square of lawn to clip and hedge and row into neat lines any more. I want my little plot of land to feed me and my family. I want my home to be a wild place, a-buzz with pollinators and the mess of

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wildflowers. I want to throw myself into growing experiments: some crops cherished for decades, others torn out for better prospects. I want to work in harmony with the land, not spray it into submission with toxins.

Last year, as summer's heat faded away, we decided to break away from the unwritten rule that states every home needs to sit on a neat square of grass. With the help of local nursery, Grogg's, we came up with a plan to strip off much of our home's green uniform in favor of the lace of wildflowers and ribbons of ivy.

Then winter came, and with it forced time to stare outside at the barren earth and imagine what might be. Gardens are not the only places that benefit from a period of incubation. As I sat in the window, dreaming, my thoughts moved as much to thoughts of personal wellness as they did to matters of the soil.

With the arrival of spring, we began to plant in earnest. On a small hill beneath a maple, we've given home to more than 40 strawberries. Largely focused on perennials, we hope to install a reliable waystation for monarchs and other pollinators. We planted slender mountain mint, echinacea, black-eyed Susan, and ajuga – not to mention milkweed. A host of herbs will go around the bird bath. I'm very excited about the pear espalier we

planted against our south-facing fence. Growing flat helps maximize space.

Working the soil feels good. Every plant might not flourish, but I know that, by investing in our little patch of earth, we're also be investing in our family's wellness. 🌱



## POEMS FOR SPRING: A FACEBOOK LIVE POETRY READING

Friday, May 4, 2018

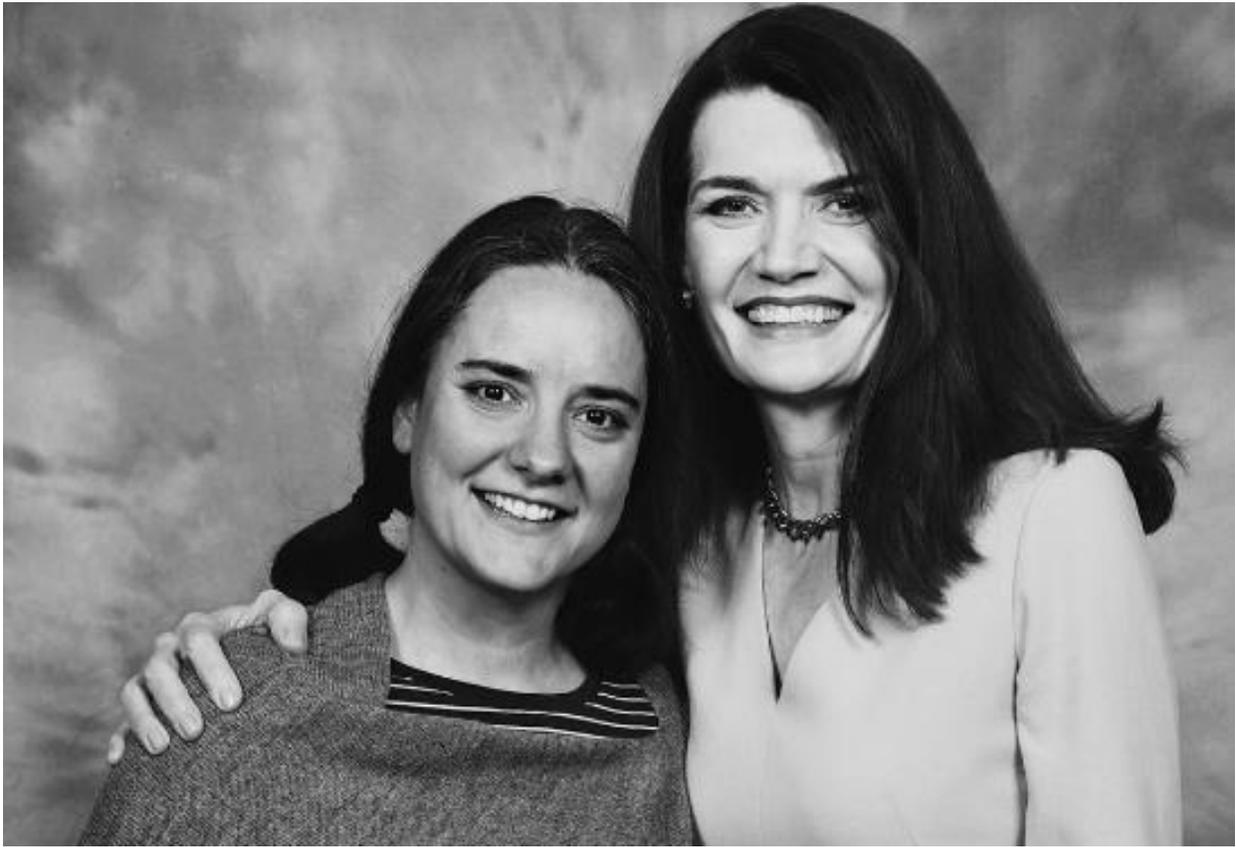
11:00 – 11:30 pm (CST)

Where: Facebook LIVE

([www.facebook.com/globaltableadventure](http://www.facebook.com/globaltableadventure))

Sasha Martin's poetry explores the natural world — the changing seasons, the evolving landscape, the foods we grow. Intertwined with these concrete images are the intangible, spiritual questions nature poses. Sasha will chat & read for approximately thirty minutes.

To attend, go to Sasha's Facebook page at 11:00 a.m. CST (12:00 p.m. Eastern) and click on the live video.



## FINDING GRACE & INSPIRATION

### Thoughts on meeting Jeannette Walls

The human being beside me is as wonderful as you'd imagine. She's gracious and kind and funny. I stand beside her after a day of medical tests for my daughter. I'm exhausted. My hair is unbrushed, my shawl has pulled in it, and my finger is gashed from a mandoline.

I could use a shower.

Isn't that the way of life? We meet our heroes with fragile hope, often at our weakest. If they are as good as we imagine, they see beyond the superficial to greet our humanity with unblinking, unfaltering grace.

Real heroes tower not above us, but stand beside us, cheering

us on. This is what Jeannette Walls did for me. First, through her memoir *The Glass Castle* – I kept her story at my side as I stumbled along, drafting my memoir, *Life from Scratch: A Memoir of Food, Family, and Forgiveness*.

#### WE MEET OUR HEROES WITH FRAGILE HOPE.

Every time I found myself afraid to share some aspect of my story I flipped through her words. She gave me courage then, and spending ten minutes chatting with her last week gives me courage now.

On our second encounter, this time not through the page but through the person, Jeannette stood beside me and cheered me on in all my fragile humanity. Again, she made me feel less alone in my experience. The takeaway from our time together was simple:

We all have stories and we need as many of them shared as possible. You never know what a gift it may be for someone floundering, feeling alone.

Our journeys may be unique, but none of us have to suffer alone.

*Thank goodness for that.* 🙏



## FROM ITALY, WITH LOVE

Frances Mayes in Tulsa

I recently had the opportunity to interview Frances Mayes for the Tulsa Literary Festival. She is the author of the world-wide bestseller, *Under the Tuscan Sun*. She just came out with a new novel, *Women in Sunlight*. Her novel challenges the expectation that anyone over 60 must head out to pasture (a.k.a simplify, quiet down, enter a retirement home). With wit and poetry, Frances weaves together stories of American women looking to reinvent themselves – where else, but in Tuscany!

“THE OUT-OF-NOWHERE IDEA STIRS THEM. A HOUSE IN TUSCANY, WHERE THEY KNOW NO ONE. EVERYTHING OPEN TO REINTERPRETATION.”  
- WOMEN IN SUNLIGHT

There's food, gardening, and a bit of love. Best of all,

## LIVING SHELTER

Before twilight falls:  
What if we find a form  
on which to climb  
- like melon, squash  
or other vine?

What fruit might we bear,  
rooted in messy earth,  
No longer edged in,  
nor hedged in, but with  
tendrils breadth  
to reach and cross  
and cradle?

What living shelter  
might we make  
as we grapple, tangle  
with every crawling,  
stinging, biting thing?

Will we learn before the frost,  
before the end,  
our homes are only  
ever of our growing?

📖 Sasha Martin

the characters model life after loss and, with it, an opportunity for each of the women come into their own. The tableau covers one year in Tuscany – leaving us to imagine what else they might be up to since. The book hit me on a personal level, as I've been thinking quite a bit about the seasons of life. I often need reminding to be brave, bold, and, yes, to live in the sunlight. If you've found yourself thinking about life after, well, anything, this novel might be of interest to you. 📖

## A SOOTHING SPRINGTIME BEVERAGE

### Hot tea worth savoring

I recently enjoyed a meal prepared by Ben Jacobs, Native American chef and co-founder of the successful restaurant *Tocabe* in Denver, Colorado. At the end of the meal, Jacobs served a slump of berries topped with white corn crumble and edible flowers. As good as the crumble was, my favorite part of dessert was the hot mint tea, elevated by the brilliant inclusion of elderflower.

In large quantities, elderflower and mint have medicinal properties. The mixture can be helpful for someone suffering from the flu or a cold. But you don't need to be sick to enjoy it: the combination helped me relax before bedtime.

Peppermint and spearmint grow well in in most gardens. If you don't want mint to take over, try keeping it in a pot, and bury the pot in the flower bed. American elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) grows 10 to 12 feet tall and wide and is hardy in USDA zones 3 to 8. It blooms in late spring. Speak to

an expert before consuming, as parts of the plant are poisonous.

If growing isn't an option, you can find dried elderflower at purveyors of tea, and on some tea aisles at the store. 📖

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### MINT ELDERFLOWER TEA

*To make one serving, steep 1-2 tablespoons fresh herbs (peppermint, spearmint, and elderflower) in one cup of hot water. Play around with how much of each herb to add to give the drink your own signature touch.*

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