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Writing Through it All: Roselee Blooston



By Vincent Nugent

She considers herself a born writer, but, as a young person, Roselee Blooston never saw writing as a career; she was “enamored with acting.” Born in Washington, DC, she is the oldest of three. “My father was an attorney ... and my mother was an artist and a housewife, so she painted on the side. She raised us all with a tremendous reverence for the arts ... always thought that was the highest thing to aspire to.” Her admiration for artistic expression led Roselee to spend her senior year of high school at Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan. “That kind of transformed me because I really got my footing in theater ... I wanted to be an actress my whole life, but I didn’t really have the right outlets.”

After graduating from Vassar in three years with a drama degree (1973), Roselee pursued her MFA at the Dallas Theater Center, where she had a fellowship. She then returned to DC for one year to act and teach theater to children at the Smithsonian, as well as Shakespeare to adult acting students; but she was lured back to Texas, where



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she taught voice, acting, and speech at the University of Texas, Austin. During these three years in the Lone Star State, Roselee began writing plays, mostly to perform herself. “I wrote a one-person play on someone I idolize --- Edna St. Vincent Millay.” Not long after receiving her Actors’ Equity card and performing

at the Austin Dinner Theater, she went straight to New York City, continuing to teach and write.

“I wrote this play about a Texas girl coming to the city ... Texas chic was going on; for a very limited time Texas was hip in New York ... bars with Texas themes. That didn’t



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last very long, but just long enough for me to do my thing." She plied her comedic talent for a year with a stand-up routine at such notable comedy clubs as The Improv, Catch A Rising Star, and The Comic Strip. Waiting for a bus across the street from The Comic Strip one night, Roselee met the man who would become her husband. "I was in my cowgirl getup and he said, 'Been waiting long?'; we exchanged names, not a lot of information. The next day he calls The Comic Strip and asks for the number of the cowgirl comic ... they give him my number!" A few years later, she and Jerry Mosier were married at the same bus stop.

After 10 years in New York City, they moved to Montclair, New Jersey. "We just wanted the way we grew up --- slightly suburban." Jerry was an advertising writer, so creativity was rampant in their household. Roselee continued acting and

writing. "I did a show called *Mad Moms*, where I played multiple parts, kind of the way Lily Tomlin would do a show ... I kept thinking I would get discovered and it never really occurred." She then began creating for other people, writing herself out of acting with a show called *Rehearsing for Oscar*. 25 years later the show was revived at the Center for Performing Arts last year. "I had given up the theater but then met Lou Trapani at Rhinebeck Rotary ... so I was brought back to theater through that connection."

A few months ago, Lou Trapani produced the world premiere of another Roselee Blooston play. With a Jewish background, Roselee, who, like her mother, also enjoys Christmas, explained the overall themes of *Tikkun* --- assimilation, intermarriage, spiritual repair. "We had a very confused childhood and then I married a non-Jew, so that was

complicated, too ... all of that is in there."

Roselee's life took a tragic turn when, in 2008, her husband passed away while in Dubai. He was working as a media consultant for Al Arabiya, a more moderate counter to El Jazeera. "I did not want to live there for a couple of reasons ... I just thought it was a crazy place; and my son, Oliver, was going to be a freshman at University of Chicago ... somebody had to be stateside." The plan was for Jerry, who had been returning home every few weeks, to finish his stint around the time their son graduated from college. *Dying in Dubai*, Roselee's award-winning memoir, recounts how she and their son managed Jerry's dying and death from a brain aneurysm during Oliver's final college semester. "Jerry

STORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 8



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didn't actually die for five days, but he was on life support, and then I got to see the underbelly of Dubai, and that's what the book is all about."

Yet, Roselee's return to Dutchess County in 2013, settling in a house along Shooks Pond in Red Hook, has been rejuvenating. "This whole area has been a real flowering for me." After her work in theater, Roselee founded a non-profit writers' organization, Tunnel Vision Writers' Project, Inc. in Montclair, New Jersey, but eventually realized she was not giving herself enough time to write. After *Dying in Dubai* was published in 2016, she returned her attention to a novel she had been writing around the time of her husband's death, *Trial by*

Family, which was published this past fall. Like the memoir, *Trial by Family* was launched at Oblong Books in Rhinebeck and recently was honored with a gold medal from the Independent Publishers Book Awards. Both of her books were published by Apprentice House Press, Loyola University MD.

"Oddly, everything I've done --- my acting career, my teaching career, my writing career --- has come together here in this beautiful way." After the publication of *Dying in Dubai*, Roselee was asked by Northern Dutchess Hospital to conduct a memoir-writing workshop as part of their wellness program. "So, I have this wonderful class once a month; writing has been one thing after another, and

then theater came back to me --- as a playwright, which is exactly the way I want to be known." She also has a private editing and coaching service for writers.

Roselee is not sure if she can see acting in her future. "I'm deeply satisfied by sitting in the audience and watching my play and hearing people respond to it; it's just so satisfying, not as exhausting as acting ... [but] one should never say never." Upon reflection, Roselee noted that writing has been the constant creative vein of her life. "I was writing to act and then I decided to just write; I started writing stories and they got published, I worked for magazines ... and then the books --- it just evolved for me."

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Roselee's process of writing is varied; sometimes she starts with a title, like *Mad Moms*, and develops her piece from there. Other works spring from an experience, as with the tragic loss of her husband. "Everything is different. I try to work six days a week on a first draft to get something down and not edit anything." She encourages the same process with her students, putting everything down without concern for spelling or punctuation. "Just tell the story and then go back and edit." Roselee recognizes the importance of allowing a piece to steep, particularly a traumatic experience, in order to provide the writer with some perspective. "The Dubai book took eight years to write; once a year in the spring I'd take it out and do another draft ... I kept refining it with distance and time."

If she stalls in her process or seeks

inspiration, Roselee finds the best solution is physical movement, like a long walk around Shooks Pond. She also turns to T'ai Chi Chih (TCC), a meditative practice "focused on the development of an intrinsic energy called Chi." An instructor in TCC, Roselee uses the practice's 19 movements as a release from writing difficulties. "When you're trying too hard to fix all the problems as a writer, it's best to let it go and it will come to you ... a good idea will not go away."

Roselee has fallen in love with Rhinebeck and surrounding towns. Since she moved to the area, Roselee declares joining Rhinebeck Rotary to be the most important decision she has made. "It gave me a sense of community instantly, and literally everything good here in my life has come somehow through the Rhinebeck Rotary. It's just such a great

group of people, and it's so wonderful to be able to give back." Roselee has served on the organization's PR committee, as a Rotary Marshal for the Sinterklaas parade, as co-chair for the Service Above Self Awards Dinner committee, and on the Rhinebeck Rotary Board.

Commenting on her current station in life, Roselee exclaimed, "I think I've gotten out of my own way, finally." She's living life with open arms and an open mind. "Say 'yes' to what comes to you, be grateful for what comes to you and give back when you can." Roselee reflects on the twists and turns that brought her to the beautiful Hudson Valley and how she's been writing through it all. "You are where you are ... are you at peace with it, are you okay with that? I am." ■

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