

# The Hidden Gifts of Books

by Laura Dorsey

**B**ookstores are a favorite pastime of mine and have been for years. This is particularly true in the “new normal” life since the economic crisis began in the fall of 2008. Although fascinated one afternoon while watching a lady at the airport read away on her Kindle, I am somehow comforted and blessed holding an actual book. Thus, one of my favorite pastimes is wandering around and through used bookstores. I love the environment, the people, the search, the discovery of books I would never have known, and the delight of purchase. Filled with energy, I head home with the anticipation of an afternoon or evening in front of the fire and the potential of new relationships all around me.

Granted, I have stacks still to read, but two finds captured my attention. I read them at about the same time. They are small books that barely caught my eye in the store. I reflect from a Jungian perspective how the symbolic nature of the stories continues to nurture. *A Fish Caught in Time: The Search for the Coelacanth* by Samantha Weinberg is a marvelous tale first published in 1968. This bizarre creature, five feet long, with luminescent eyes, and presumed to be extinct, was discovered off the coast of South Africa in 1938 by an amateur ichthyologist, who recognized it from fossils dating back 400 million years. Until then, we thought this link had been lost to us forever. It was only through Teutonic submariners, British adventurers, and a series of political and environmental imbroglios over many years, that they were able to locate, engage and befriend this “living fossil.” A timeline, map of sightings, reward posters, the first photo of a live coelacanth (see-lo-canth), a fisherman at sunset, and a film of swimming with the coelacanth, brought to light for me the depths of the searches, the persistence of those involved, and the rewards and benefits discovered over time.

The second publication, *Two Old Women: An Alaska*

*Legend of Betrayal, Courage and Survival* by Velma Wallis, published in 1993, came next. According to the book jacket, it is based on an Athabaskan Indian legend that has passed from mothers to daughters for many generations on the upper Yukon River in Alaska. Granted, I’m on up in years but still working full time with five grandchildren to keep me young; so it might have been the title that brought a grin, or perhaps reading one of the quotes about the book that caused me to buy it: “Velma Wallis provides the reader with a lasting experience. Myth takes hold of us; we become old and abandoned, and we have a friend who says, ‘We will die trying.’ And the world hears this voice of confidence. Wherever we are—in the city, in the village, in the bush—we need this tale of isolation and the power to define a vision of human integrity.” I suddenly become immersed in a tale of relationships, choices, grief, skills, knowledge of the land and the seasons. I am participating in the journey even as I put another log on the fire here at home. Hidden gifts are somehow awakened and transformed and the stillness is broken.

Usually our book views are conversations with the authors. In this case, I am simply sharing a window on my life and interest. Normally the books are readily available as new publications; however, I really have no idea whether either of these books is still in print. I do know, though, that for me, they have emphasized new ways of the inward and outward journey of life. I am reminded of what it entails to work with the unconscious to rediscover what I thought was lost and of what a challenge it is to envision another way of being in this world. As I gaze out the window, I see the yellow buds of the forsythia out front. It is closer to spring than I realized.

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Laura Dorsey's Home, photo by Don Huntley