

Splash of Red Archive

Non-Fiction

Advice From My Muse

March 19, 2010

By: Kathy Curto

Kathy Curto lives in Cold Spring, New York with her husband, their four children and one big dog. Her work has been featured on NPR, MOM WOW, in live performances of The Art Garden and Letters to Our Ancestors, and in Lumina, The Beacon Dispatch and The Journal News. Kathy is a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and Hunter School of Social Work and in 2006 she was awarded the Kathryn Gurfein Writing Fellowship of Sarah Lawrence College. She is a member of the Millrock Writers in New Paltz, New York and an Adjunct Professor of Sociology at St. Thomas Aquinas College.

When you try too hard it shows. If you don't believe me dig up those old photos from 1973 of your mother and father posing in front of the entrance to the dining room at Mount Airy Lodge. Or the one of you at the Lisa Gianetti's Sweet Sixteen Party.

Light a candle after mass and pray for peace.

Cook a big, cheap, heavy meal that takes a long time to eat and wear your mother's apron while doing it. Don't forget the meal will taste different now than when she cooked it. *You* set this table. But wipe your soiled hands across the front of the apron in the most respectful fashion and straighten the bow in the back anyway. Touch up your lipstick.

If the act churns out the stickiest of memories, unleashes dreams you never knew you had, causes your heart to race, and your body to fall limp upon the revolutionary discovery of a deeper valley inside of your soul that you never knew you had pull yourself together and keep writing. Or go make love.

Give the lady digging through the garbage at Grand Central the Styrofoam container you carried all the way from that swanky place on Mercer. Don't analyze why you feel shitty. Just feel shitty.

Keep drinking coffee. Don't get fancy with cinnamon hazelnut or flavors that have accent marks in the title. Just regular coffee will do. Drink it frequently and in a variety of places. Diners with paper placemats and bowls of pastel butter mints next to the cashier work best but small round kitchen tables, the passenger seat of your brother's car and The Vince Lombardi Rest Area off the NJ Turnpike just before the GW Bridge are good spots, too. Take notes. Fantasize about the people around you the stories they are telling over their cups of coffee. Watch the way they finger their cup handles, make shredded paper piles of napkins and sugar packets, and fiddle with the steering wheel. Coffee breeds story. Remember you have one. Eat a box of Cracker Jacks and suck on the black Necco Wafers until your tongue burns. Vote.

Keep dreaming about what it would be like to eat Chinese food in bed on a rainy Sunday afternoon with your lover. Sinatra or Muddy Waters or Santana playing in the background, soft white flannel sheets with sky blue piping and seven or eight more pillows on the bed than any normal person needs. Keep dreaming the dream but don't let it get in the way of everyday love.

Stay the course and be reminded of how critical good stamina is.

Pay close attention to how people behave at cocktail parties. It could very well hold the key to most of life's mysteries.

When you feel yourself heading into the darkness-the wrath of worry and fear, a really, really bad decision, a disingenuous life-start carrying a flashlight everywhere you go. If that doesn't work wake up early enough to watch the sunrise. And *really* watch it rise-don't just say you did. Wear red shoes until the bitter end.