



# STORIES *of* LOVE & FAMILY

DIANE GREENWOOD MUIR



*Bellingwood - Book 47*



# Book Forty-Seven Vignettes

DIANE GREENWOOD MUIR

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, brands, media, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of various products referenced in this work of fiction, which have been used without permission. The publication / use of these trademarks is not authorized, associated with, or sponsored by the trademark owners.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Cover Design Photography: Maxim M. Muir

Copyright © 2024 Diane Greenwood Muir

All rights reserved.

# CONTENTS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Vignette #1 Planning Ahead

Vignette #2 Music History and Future

Vignette #3 History

Vignette #4 Phases

THANK YOU!

## INTRODUCTION

These vignettes originally came about as a way to keep readers engaged while I was writing the next book. Talk about ravenous readers! Each short, short, short story (vignette) is published on either the website ([nammynools.com](http://nammynools.com)) or in the email newsletter that comes out on the twenty-fifth of each month.

Be sure to sign up for the newsletter at my website so you don't miss anything, especially the latest vignette.

I realized how much fun it was to expose little bits of the background stories that happen every day in Bellingwood. Because the Bellingwood books are written from Polly's perspective, unless she is directly involved in the action or with a character, we miss activities in other people's lives. These characters have developed enough that they enjoy telling their own stories, so this is their little bit of fame.

I have compiled the vignettes relating to Book 47 — Stories of Love & Family — into one collection. These four short stories feature different characters from Bellingwood who get an opportunity to offer a little slice of life from their own perspective.



## Vignette #1

### Planning Ahead

"I'm going to the Union," Cathy South said to Rebecca and Andrew, who was on the other end of the video call. "That way the two of you can get smoochy. I'll be home by eleven."

"You don't have to leave," Andrew said. "Not like anything can happen on a video call."

"That's not what I heard," Cathy said with a laugh. "Nevertheless, be good. You never know who is spying on you."

Rebecca shuddered. "Don't say things like that. It's creepy."

"Maybe no one, maybe everyone," Cathy said and left their dorm room.

"That takes all the fun out of flirting with you," Andrew said.

"No kidding. We should talk about the wedding anyway. My mind has been thinking about a million things and it's keeping me awake at night."

"Rebecca," he said with concern. "It's too early for you to start not sleeping. We have months and months."

"And things need to be decided."

"You know that I will be happy with whatever you choose."

"That's not stressful at all. I need you to be part of the decisions. What if you hate something I come up with?"

"What, like Hawaiian shirts for the men and tie-dye linen dresses for the women?"

"That's an idea," Rebecca mused. "It would fit with the whole floral theme. I wonder what a Hawaiian shirt would look like under a tux?"

"Are you joking?"

"I'm thinking out loud."

"You have to be joking. I brought it up as a joke, not something I really want."

"But it would be unique."

"Please be kidding."

"I'm mostly kidding, but it's still a thought."

"Have different thoughts," he said.

"And look, just like that, you're involved in the wedding plans."

"Sorry. I told you I didn't care what you decided."

"I want you to care, Andrew. Think about it. I might be a visual artist, but you're an artist, too. If you were to describe the perfect wedding, you'd know exactly how you wanted to write it."

"Definitely not with Hawaiian shirts and tie-dye."

"Have you decided on your groomsmen yet?"

"How about Jason, Ryan, Barrett, and maybe Noah?" Ryan Myers was Andrew's roommate, and Barrett Evans, the brother of Ella, Heath's new wife, was close friends with both Rebecca and Andrew.

"No one else from high school or the last three years?"

"No one that I would rather have than one of your brothers. I assume Elijah will play the piano."

"Yes. He's excited, and said he's going to write a song just for us."

"That's sweet. I'm not all that close with Hayden or Heath. Eliseo would hate it more than anything, so I won't ask him."

"None of Elva's kids?"

"Not really. We're kind of family, but I'm closer to yours than to Eliseo's. Who are you going to have? I assume Kayla, Cilla, and Cathy. Right?"

"That's right. I think I'm going to ask Beryl. Does that freak you out?"

"That's awesome," he said. "I've never seen her in a dress."

"Then whatever we decide, she'll wear pants. I don't care. I just want her to be up there with me. The two of us are as close as I am with Kayla and Cilla. Cathy knows more about me because we're living together, but Beryl and I have been through some stuff together. Things we promised each other to never tell Polly. And no, I'm not telling you, because I know you."

"What? I keep secrets."

"Not from Polly. The minute she thought you were hiding something from her ... anything, she'd have you confessing to



stealing the Mona Lisa."

He grimaced. "You're probably right. She's a menace."

"That's the perfect word for her."

"Okay, just give me one small secret. Something that wouldn't get you grounded."

"Andrew, I'm twenty-one and planning my wedding. Grounding isn't on the table."

"This is Polly we're talking about."

"She's never grounded me before, she's not about to start."

"But if it's a really dark secret ..."

"None of it's dark, just nothing I wanted Polly to know about. She might have questioned letting me travel with Beryl."

"Like what?"

Rebecca shook her head.

"I thought we didn't have secrets between us."

"This is a secret between me and Beryl. And it's not a big deal."

"Did you like, get drunk while you were in Paris? Is that your deep dark secret?"

"Not only in Paris," Rebecca said with a laugh. "The thing is, I didn't really like it. Beryl did, which meant that after the first time in Paris, I stopped drinking. When we did it together, we were so sloppy-drunk, I had to hail a cab to take us five blocks to our hotel. We couldn't walk to save our lives. I know I totally overtipped the driver. At least I think I did. I hope I didn't undertip him, but he was laughing when we got out. Just two more ugly Americans."

"Wine or something else?"

"Totally wine. We swore we would never do that again and we swore to never tell Polly. But then we got to London and Beryl wanted to go to a pub not far from the hotel. She started drinking wine again. I only drank one glass. Beryl had a lot more than that. She gets really silly when she's drunk. She flirted with everyone in the pub. It didn't matter if they were male or female, alone or with a date. She kept trying to pull off a British accent. Since it was Beryl, how could I even be embarrassed? She'd do most of that whether or not she was drunk."

"Did you have to call a taxi again to get her back to the hotel?"

"Yep. At least this time I was able to keep my wits about me. She passed out on my bed when we got upstairs. I should have opened her room first and have no idea why I didn't."

"Was she at least embarrassed that you saw her drunk like that?"

"No. That's what's so wonderful about Beryl. She's unapologetic for her actions."

"Except you swore to not tell Polly."

"Because we didn't want Polly to decide I shouldn't travel with her. We were always close to our hotel and I don't care if Beryl drinks too much once in a while. She never does it while she's here. It's like she lets loose when we travel."

"Like she's so uptight here. No one is as loose as that woman," Andrew said.

"That's true to a certain extent. Beryl is always conscious of what people think of her. She's established a personality that runs on the edge of crazy, but it's acceptable, especially to her friends. I experience a different person when we're away from Bellingwood. It's like her personality is more Beryl than anyone knows. She still worries about her brother taking her out for something she might do. She worries that Andy and Lydia will scold her for being outrageous."

"Do they?"

"Sometimes. It's not really scolding, but they let her know that she's gone *too far*." Rebecca held up quote fingers for the last two words.

"Beryl talks about these things with you?"

"Mostly when she's drunk, which is one reason I let her go. She needs to get those things out."

"Does she remember telling you after she sobers up?"

"I don't know if she does or not, but I usually try to bring the subject back up so she can set me straight if she was just blowing off steam."

"I had no idea. I tell you what, I'll never try to horn in on your trips with her. It sounds like she needs you worse than I need to travel with the two of you."

Rebecca smiled at him. "I love you. Is Jason going to be your best

man?"

"Yeah. He's my brother. I wouldn't want anyone else."

She wrote more in the notebook in front of her. "Do you think I should involve Charlie? I don't want her to feel left out."

The four of them met whenever they could find time for supper or lunch on a weekend. It had felt strange in the beginning to do things together without any of their family involved. Like they were all adults or something.

"Don't worry about Charlie. She'll be fine."

"I want her to be better than fine. I don't want more than four attendants. Maybe we should only have three. That way you don't have to ask Noah."

"Whatever you want, Rebecca. You know Beryl isn't even thinking that you'll ask her."

"Do you not want to ask Noah?"

"That's not what I said. I want you to be comfortable with the day."

"I want everyone involved. I already know what I want to do with everyone that Polly brought into the family along the way."

"Really? Are you going to tell me?"

"Now, that I might keep as a surprise until the rehearsal - even from you. Polly will help me organize it. It's a cool idea."

"You're better at secrets than I thought. I can't keep anything from you."

"Nothing? Really?"

"If you don't know something, it's only because I haven't remembered to tell you. Did I tell you that I've had both my tonsils and adenoids out?"

Rebecca laughed. "No, you haven't told me that. I get it. You're an open book."

"Which is why you didn't tell me about the drunken nights in Europe." Andrew looked up from the book in front of him. "Did you get drunk when you were in Boston with Drea and Chloe?"

"No!" Rebecca said.

"Because they'd tell Polly."

"No, silly. Because I wasn't legal. Europe's legal age is different

than America's."

"I didn't think about that. So, it won't be the worst thing if I lose myself and tell Polly?"

"It will be the worst. I don't want her to think less of Beryl."

"She wouldn't."

"Let's not put that to the test, okay?"

"Okay. Are we done with wedding planning for the night?"

Rebecca laughed. "Got it. I'll just pull out a little piece every few days and before long, you'll have helped me plan the whole thing."

"What about Polly?"

"Don't think for a minute that I don't go over everything with her. I'm even going to bring up the Hawaiian shirts and tie-dye dresses, if only to mess with her brain."

"You're mean."

"And you love me."

"More than I'll ever have words to express."

## **Vignette #2**

### **Music History and Future**

"Mr. Herman!"

Jay Herman, the music teacher at Bellingwood Elementary looked for the source of the voice.

"Mr. Herman!"

He finally figured out who was calling his name. "Good morning, David."

The fourth grader held out a plastic grocery sack. "This is for you."

"What is it?"

"Mom said you should have it."

"What have we here?" Jay took the bag and opened it, only to find a leather portfolio. He withdrew the portfolio from the bag and opened it, revealing a stack of ancient-looking sheet music. "This is fun," he said. "Where did your mother find it?"

"My grandma had it and we had to clean out her house. Mom said you'd know what to do with it."

"Do you know anything else about the music?"

"Mom said that you'd know who the guy was. Jazz? Her great uncle played in his band or something?"

"Was he famous?"

"Not her uncle. But the band was? I don't know." David shook his head. "I told her I wouldn't remember anything. The name was weird. I can't say it."

Jay knew he should remember when David's classroom would come to music class, but his mind wasn't focused on that, so he asked. "When do you have music?"

"I don't know," David said, looking around.

"I'll try to find out more information before I see you again."

The boy shrugged. "All I was supposed to do was give it to you. See ya."

Jay watched him run off, and stared at the music in front of him.

When he'd first seen how old it was, he didn't think much about it, but maybe he should give it more of his attention.

"What's that?" Cat Harvey stopped in front of him.

"I'm not sure. David Anson just handed it to me. His mother sent it with him."

Cat grinned. "The Ansons have been trying to get rid of things from her mother's house before they end up taking it all to the thrift shop. So far, it's interesting things. She found old bottles in the basement that had come from The Bell House back when it was a hotel."

"That *is* interesting. Maybe this is something. David said something about jazz, but he didn't know anything else."

"David Anson was in my classroom," Cat said. "He's a bit of a flake. Do you have his mother's phone number?"

"I can get it."

"You should call her." Cat pointed at the bag. "There's something else in there. Did you see it?"

"I'm going to dig into this back in my room," he said.

"But now I'm curious."

"Don't you have kids showing up any minute?"

Cat flattened her lips at him. "Fine. I'll go to my classroom and let you dig into your mystery. Hey, are you still going out with Tiana?"

"Not really."

"She was a nice girl."

"There were three or four guys who thought the same thing. I don't have time for that."

"I'm sorry," Cat said, frowning. "I didn't know."

Jay shrugged. "No big deal."

"You know that means I'm going to have my eye out. I'll tell Hayden to ..."

"Stop it. You don't need to play matchmaker. I can find my own dates."

"Really," Cat said. "That's how you want to play this? A perfectly nice co-worker and her husband want to hook you up with nice girls and you reject our offer?"

"It's not really a rejection," he protested. "It's more of a safety thing."

She laughed. "Chicken."

"Baww, baww, baww. Why do you even care?"

"Because I like you. The kids like you. That means we want you to stick around. Single teachers our age don't last long in small towns because they go elsewhere to find someone to fall in love with. And then they move away and we start all over with someone new."

"That's a convoluted way of telling me that you think I should stay in Bellingwood."

"Like I said ..." Cat shook her head. "You haven't been here very long and already the town likes you. Polly and Rebecca talked all summer about how well you did with the community band. It only took two summers for you to bring it back together again. That's impressive. No one wants you to take off."

"So it's not about being nice to me, it's about what's good for Bellingwood."

"It can be both." Cat looked up at the large clock on the wall. "I need to go. Let me know what you find out about that music."

Jay didn't have kids in his room until later in the morning, so he headed there to figure out exactly what he held in his hands. His luck, it would be nothing important, but Mrs. Anson had wanted him to have it. He'd need to tell her something.

He sat down at a table and reached back into the bag. Cat saw something else in there. Mrs. Anson had dropped a notecard in. He opened it and read, *"Mr. Herman. I'm confident that Davey will have forgotten everything I told him about this music. He wasn't really listening. My only hope is that he put it in your hands before running off with his friends. Did you learn about Iowa's jazz man - Bix Beiderbecke - when you were in college? I'm sure you did.*

*"My great-uncle played with him for a short time and this music was from that time. I wish there was more for you, but thought maybe you'd know what to do with it. I considered contacting the Bix Beiderbecke Society in Davenport, but then I thought it might be more fun for Bellingwood to have this. No one really knows who he is any longer. After*

*a hundred years, people won't remember me either. But then, I won't have a society to keep my memory alive.*

*"If you want to contact them, that's fine with me. If you want to keep this music yourself, that's fine, too. If you want to frame it or burn it or tear it into small pieces, that's fine. It's out of my hands now. Thank you."*

Jay set the note down on the table beside the leather portfolio. He did remember learning about Bix Beiderbecke. The man had died at a young age, so he hadn't had as big an impact on the jazz scene of the 1920s as some others did, but he was an amazing musician.

As he gently sorted through the sheet music, he landed on a piece called *In A Mist*. It looked like a piano solo. He did a quick online search and discovered it had been written by Beiderbecke. Walking over to the piano, he set it up and then sat down. Jay wasn't a jazz pianist by any means, but he could get through most music. He started playing the notes, disgusted at the fact that he wasn't good enough to sightread it well.

Back he went to his laptop and pulled up a recording. He listened to it while following along with the sheet music, and wondered if anyone in town could pull this off.

He'd met Len Specek several times and heard him play before. Len had been here at the beginning of the school year to tune the piano. Nice guy. If Len couldn't play this, he'd know who could. It was too early in the day to call the music store, but he wanted to know more.

"Mr. Herman?" A timid voice came from the door to his room. He smiled at Teresa Ricker.

"Teresa, how can I help you?"

"I ... I ..." She stammered and then turned away. "It's nothing. I'll come back later."

"No, wait," he said, standing up. He walked to the door. "What is it?"

"You don't know my brother, Elijah," she said quietly. "He told me I should talk to you and when I asked my teacher if I could, she sent me to see you."

"I've heard about Elijah. He's a good piano player."



"He's really good."

"Why did he want you to talk to me?"

"I'm embarrassed. It's no big deal." She turned as if to walk away.

"Stop, Teresa. Tell me what's going on."

"I didn't want to talk to you, but if Elijah asks me one more time and I didn't, he's going to come see you himself."

Jay laughed. "So you're embarrassed to talk to me, but you'll be in trouble with your brother if you don't. Is that right?"

"He also threatened to tell Cat. I mean, Mrs. Harvey."

"That's right," Jay said, nodding. "She's part of your family. Like an aunt, right?" He had some understanding of the relationships that grew from the Sturtz family, though it was hard to keep them all straight. "Tell me really fast what Elijah wants me to know. Then it will be over."

Teresa took a deep breath and then, as if her tongue was a spinning top, she flung out a slew of words. "Elijah's been giving me piano lessons and he says that I'm good enough to play in public and I don't want to, but he says that the more I do it, the better I'll get, and I'm supposed to tell you so that if you want me to ever play for a program or something, you'll ask me and then I'll have to say yes and ..." She took another breath. "And now I want to go back to my classroom and never talk to you again. I'm sorry."

Before she could race away, he stepped into the doorway, blocking her exit. "You play the piano too? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I'm not that good."

"If your brother insists that you tell me, I'm guessing you're better than you think."

"Elijah is just being nice to me."

"Do you need to hurry back to your classroom?"

"No." She bowed her head. "Why?"

"Come on over to the piano. What have you been practicing for your lessons with Elijah?"

"I don't know."

He pulled out the piano bench. "Yes, you do. What's the name of one song?"

"*Secret Garden*? We just started working on that."

"Can you play any of it for me?"

Teresa shrugged. "I know some of it."

"Will you play it for me?"

"Do I have to?"

"Give it a try."

"I shouldn't have come here," she said.

"Sometimes it's hard to be a performer, isn't it?" he asked.

"Especially when you don't see yourself that way."

"Elijah is. I'm not."

"Think of all the people who love music and can't play an instrument. They want nothing more than to hear someone play the songs they love. When you're a musician, playing those songs brings joy to other people. Please play a few measures."

Teresa closed her eyes. Then she put her hands on the piano, finding where she wanted to start. When the first strains of the song came from the keyboard, Jay smiled. The girl could play. Her brother had seen a talent in her and rather than stifle it for his own ego, showed her how to bring it to life.

She continued to play through the song, having memorized quite a bit of it. When she stopped, he held his breath.

"That's all I remember."

"Teresa, that was beautiful. I'm glad you came to see me. Would you consider playing for our holiday concert?"

"A solo?" The panicked look on her face struck him hard.

"Not if you don't want to. If I gave you music that you could prepare and accompany some of the classes, would you consider that? Maybe even just one?"

"I don't know."

"I won't pressure you, but I would encourage you to try something new. That's why your brother ..." He paused when it hit him. "Elijah works at the music store on the weekends, doesn't he."

Teresa nodded. "He loves it there. He and Mr. Specek are always playing the pianos."

"Come over here," Jay said and led her to the table where he'd spread out the sheet music. "This is a very old copy of a piano solo written by a famous jazz musician who grew up in Iowa. I am going

to show it to Mr. Specek this weekend. Tell me what you think when you look at it."

"That's a lot of notes," she said. "It's famous?"

"I think so. I just tried to play it and did a very bad job. Would you like to hear me try it again?"

"Yes."

He took the music back to the piano and sat down. When he started to play, he glanced at Teresa, who was following the music on the page. His fingers stuttered and he missed notes. He finally pulled his hands back from the keyboard.

"Why did you stop?" she asked.

"Because I was massacring the song. Someone who is a better pianist than me should play this song."

"Like Elijah?"

"Maybe. What I wanted you to see, though, was that I tried it in front of you even knowing how bad I was going to be. Teresa, you're a musician. You understand in your heart what music should sound like. I wasn't very good, was I."

"But it was your first time. You have to practice."

"It would take a lot of practice for me to be any good at this song. Now, there are other songs that I can play well, but I'm at my best when I play the trumpet."

"Really?"

"I tell you what. I want to have a conversation with your teacher, and then I want to talk to your parents."

"Am I in trouble?"

"Not at all. I want to talk to your teacher about you coming down whenever you have time during the week. I'll introduce you to everything I can about music. I'd like to talk to your parents about expanding what you play."

"Like what?"

"Like a band instrument. You've been hiding from me."

She smiled. "Okay."

"Go on back to your classroom. You and me? We're just starting this conversation. And you tell Elijah that I look forward to talking to him at the music store this weekend. I want to tell him thank you

for sending you to me."

"He's never going to let me forget this," she said.

"Good." He walked Teresa back to the door. "I'll see you in music class."

"Tomorrow," she said.

"Good enough."

As he watched her walk away, he leaned against the door frame. Cat Harvey was wrong. He didn't need to find a woman to love in order to stay in Bellingwood. He'd been looking for a purpose beyond teaching music to kids who had little to no interest. Teresa Ricker was in sixth grade. He had two and a half years to inspire her to become greater than her fears. That was worth it.

## Vignette #3

### History

Cat Harvey waved good-bye to the last of her children after school let out for the day. When she turned to head back to her classroom, she heard a child's voice call her name, and saw Kestra Ricker sitting on a bench outside the office.

Kestra had been in her classroom last year after joining Polly's family. The girl was the sweetest thing ever, even after all the changes she'd been through in her young life.

"Honey, what are you doing here?" Cat asked. "Aren't you supposed to walk home with your brothers and sisters?"

"I told them that I needed to stay. Can I talk to you?"

"Of course. Is something wrong?"

Kestra's eyes filled. Cat sat down beside her and pulled the little girl into her arms. "Oh, honey. What's going on?"

"I don't know what to do."

"With what?"

"I'm supposed to come up with a project about my family. I don't know my old family, and Amalee is too busy to spend time with me. If I do it about my new family, do they count?"

"Of course they count." Cat racked her brain trying to remember what project this was. She was generally aware of what kids in other grades were learning, but Kestra's tears had thrown her off. It must be a social studies project. "How can I help you?"

"Will you tell me about my family?"

"Of course I will, but isn't the project also about you asking questions?"

Kestra nodded shyly. "I thought I'd surprise them. And you're my family, aren't you?"

Well, that nearly wiped Cat out. Of course they were family. "What a good idea. I would love to tell you what I know. We could call Grandma Marie and ask her some questions too."

"Really?" Kestra's eyes lit up.

"Do you know that the house you're living in used to be a hotel?" Cat asked. "Have they told you why that tunnel exists?"

"Something about smugglers?" Kestra asked. "I don't know what all that means."

"The house is also part of Bellingwood's history."

"I could tell that story too?"

"I think you should. They discovered the tunnel because Polly fell into it."

"No way. Did she hurt herself?"

"Not too badly. After that, Henry made sure that the tunnel was safe, and he built up the walls in that room so no one would hurt themselves again. The old office that's down there was blocked off, which meant that no one knew it was there. What happened was that nearly a hundred years ago, the United States government outlawed alcohol."

Kestra nodded as she listened.

"Many people didn't like that so they opened secret bars called speakeasies. There were also people who brewed illegal alcohol called moonshine."

"I've heard of moonshine," Kestra said. "It was illegal?"

"Moonshine is still the word they use for illegal alcohol. It was made in secret, and then it was transported secretly to places like the Bellingwood hotel where it was sold in the speakeasy or to people who wanted a bottle of their own. In fact, Polly found some of those old bottles."

"I didn't know all that," Kestra said.

"Why don't you come back to my classroom and we'll talk while I pack up my things. I'll call Polly to let her know that I will make sure you get home. Maybe you can take a few notes so when it comes time to do your project, you don't forget things."

Cat and Kestra walked down the hall together and before they got too far, Kestra slipped her hand into Cat's. "Is this okay?" Kestra asked, looking up at her with wide eyes.

"Of course it is, honey. After school, everything is okay. You can even call me Cat now."

"Sometimes it's hard to remember who you are. It was easier

when I was in your room every day."

"That's funny. Now, tell me. What would you like to know about Polly and Henry?"

"Do you know how they met?"

"I've heard stories. I didn't meet them until after they'd been married a few years, but it sounds like Henry had a lot of work to do to get Polly to agree to marry him. He fell in love with her the first time they met."

"When was that?"

"Do you know that Sycamore House used to be an old school building?"

"Really? My family has a lot of history in it, doesn't it."

"It does. Polly had been living in Boston and she wanted to move back to Iowa. When her father died, he left her a nice inheritance, so after looking around, she found the old school building in Bellingwood and bought it. The first place she lived in Bellingwood was in an apartment they created from classrooms upstairs."

"Rebecca showed me around up there. That was Polly's first home? Did Henry live with her?"

"Not at first. He was the person who renovated the building for her though. While they worked on the renovation, he kept asking her out on dates. Polly had been in a very bad relationship before she came to Bellingwood and wasn't ready to trust anyone yet."

"But Henry didn't give up, right?"

"He knew that she was supposed to be his wife. He wasn't giving up," Cat said with a smile. "Oh! You know Mrs. Specek, right?"

Kestra nodded. "She lives by the cemetery. I see her all the time at the library."

"Mrs. Specek used to be a high school English teacher. She taught at the Sycamore House building before they closed the school and moved all the high schoolers to Boone. Henry went to school in that building and so did Mrs. Donovan."

"Wow," Kestra said. "That's cool."

"I'm sure a lot of others went to school in that building, but those are the people that both you and I know about."

"What about Mrs. Merritt? And Mrs. Watson? Did they go to

school there?"

"You know what?" Cat said. "They probably did. I don't think I've ever talked to them about it. It was hard on Bellingwood when the school closed."

"Why?"

"A lot of changes happened in Bellingwood and people started moving to other towns to find better jobs. You should be proud of your family. I hear a lot of people talk about how Bellingwood started to grow again after Polly bought Sycamore House. Then, she and Henry bought the hotel out on the highway."

"They did?"

Cat didn't realize how little Polly's kids knew about her businesses and all that she'd done in the community. She was going to have to have a conversation with them about that. Rebecca, Heath, and Hayden had been there for many of the changes, but the other kids came into their lives after it was all done.

These things were a big deal and Cat hated the idea that people, especially Polly's own kids, didn't know how important Polly Giller was. She would never talk about herself and when other people did, she downplayed her role.

"Were you going to call Mom?" Kestra asked.

"I forgot," Cat said with a laugh. "I'll do it right now." She sat down at her desk. There were two desks not far from hers. In every class of kids, there were always a few who needed more direct ... ummm ... intervention during the day. It seemed to get worse every year, but she did what she could to ensure the classroom was a safe place for everyone.

"Why don't you get comfortable? Would you like some paper to write on?"

Kestra shrugged. "That's okay. I'll remember enough."

That wasn't true, but Kestra knew where to find Cat if she had more questions or needed a reminder.

Cat picked up her phone and placed the call to Polly.

"Hello there," Polly said. "What's going on with you today?"

"I have one of your youngsters. I'm holding her hostage."

Polly laughed. "What's the ransom? I'll pay it. How about dinner



one of these days?"

"That'll do," Cat said. "I'm helping Kestra with a school project."

"Really. What's the project this week?"

"It's for social studies. She's asking questions about her family's history. So far, we've talked about the Bell House and Prohibition, Sycamore House and the fact that it was an old school building. Then we talked about you and Henry."

"Me and Henry?"

"You're her family."

"Oh my," Polly said. "That's what she said? Such a sweetheart. Did you tell her all the awful things you know about us?"

"That's where I started, and Polly, I have a bone to pick with you."

"Oh no. What did I do this time?"

"You aren't telling your kids about the amazing things you have done for Bellingwood. I'm guessing they don't know about the lives you have saved, those you have changed. You know, like my husband and his brother."

"I don't know if those are good topics for a school project. That's a lot of private information."

"I understand, but your kids need to know. Everyone else does. If you and Henry don't tell the stories, who will?"

"It sounds as if you will."

"I'm going to have to write a book." Cat laughed. "Either that or have a long discussion with Andrew. With your stories, he could write an entire series of books."

"Those would be boring."

"No, Polly. They wouldn't. You know that every family needs to tell its stories over and over. That way your kids know where they come from and why they are important to you."

"Are you lecturing me?" Polly asked.

"Maybe a little bit, but I'm right and you know it. Heath needs to hear the story of how important he was to you. That needs to be anchored in his heart. Hayden's story is so important to him that he tells our kids how you made him part of the family even though he was nothing more than Heath's brother. Rebecca needs to hear you

tell stories about her mother and how Andrew made sure she was safe with you."

"How do you know all these stories?"

"I listen. I'll bet you remember your childhood because of the stories that were told."

"Those stories anchor my memories," Polly said. "It sounds as if we need to be better storytellers when the family is together. Amalee could tell stories about how they grew up. That would help her siblings remember their parents and their grandmother. Okay, okay. You've given me something to think about."

"I'm good at that," Cat said, laughing. "Now, I'm going to spend a few more minutes with your little girl and then I'll bring her home. Should I call Lexi so she doesn't worry?"

"Don't worry. I'm home. I'll let her know that we haven't had another child wander off."

"Another child?"

"Just checking to make sure you were paying attention. Thanks, Cat."

"I'll see you in a bit."

"Talk to your husband about a good day to come for dinner. We'll tell stories. Take care of my girl."

"I will." Cat put her phone back on the desk. "Polly agrees that it's time for you to hear more of your family's stories. I'll bet Amalee has a lot of good stories about when you were a baby."

"She said I cried a lot."

"Big sisters feel like that sometimes. Now, let's talk about Henry. Did you know that Hayden, the kids, and I live in the house where Henry and his sister, Lonnie, grew up?"

"No way."

"Yes, way," Cat said. "Oh, there is so much for you to learn about your family. Maybe you should take notes."

## Vignette #4

### Phases

Kristen buzzed Cilla's phone. She could have gotten up and walked into Cilla's office, but she was tired today. It had been a long weekend. Way too much family, and for some reason, Ava had come home from school on Friday with more attitude than one fifth-grader should have.

"What's up?" Cilla asked.

"Polly's going to Sweet Beans. I asked if she'd bring coffee and food back for us. What do you want? I'll call it in."

"Just a sec." It only took a few seconds before Cilla was sitting in the chair in front of Kristen's desk. "I want coffee. Is she picking up lunch stuff too? I brought a sandwich, but I'd do almost anything for a sandwich and soup from Sweet Beans. And a muffin. And, did I say coffee?"

"You had a long weekend too?"

"Fiona didn't sleep very well, which meant that neither did I. We were up late last night and Saturday night, too."

"Is she okay?"

"No fever. She's eating and pooping and peeing. Everything is normal."

"Is she teething?"

Cilla nodded. "I hate it. When I talked to Grandma, she told me to rub whiskey on Fiona's gums."

"She did not," Kristen said.

"She did, but she was only kidding. I have teething rings and all that. Fiona is just plain uncomfortable and I don't blame her for being grumpy, but yowza, I need more sleep."

"We need to call in our order. Polly's going that way." Kristen turned her computer screen. "Chicken salad sandwiches are the special."

"What's their soup?"

Kristen pointed. "Broccoli cheese or chicken tortilla soup."

"Broccoli cheese."

Kristen held up a finger and dialed. She gave them their order and took a breath after she hung up. "There. One decision handled."

"You had a bad weekend too?"

"You think teething is bad? Wait until she's a fifth-grader who is fairly certain she's the smartest person in the room. Oh, and she's arrogant and snotty about it."

"What you're telling me is that I have lots of fun to look forward to," Cilla said with a laugh. "I had two little sisters. Even if I don't remember being all that, I do remember them being awful. Lara was in fourth grade when we moved to Bellingwood. All that stuff happened to me, just about the time she really needed Mom and Dad to pay attention to her. New kids, new school, everything. Abby wasn't so bad. She did fifth grade when I was in college so I didn't have to experience it."

"Not at all?"

"I got to be the cool big sister. Whenever Mom didn't want to deal with her attitude, she told Abby to call me. We talked a lot that year. I talked to Lara a lot too. At least we got to know each other. Before that I was always so busy with high school things, I didn't have time for them."

"You don't talk about them very often ..." Kristen stopped at Cilla's eyeroll. "Is something wrong?"

"Not wrong," Cilla said. "Now they're busy at school. Too busy to want to spend time with me, unless they need something."

"Sounds like Ava. She wants nothing to do with me unless she needs something from me. About the only time she chooses to hang out is when I take her shopping, and then she practically hides in other aisles from where I am. It's ridiculous, but dang, it makes me mad. Everything I do is for her and she treats me like I'm the worst thing in the world."

Cilla nodded. "I was always embarrassed by Mom. She didn't dress like everyone else. She didn't act like my friends. She used to talk to my friends like they were her best friend. I wanted to crawl into a hole when she did that."

"What did your friends think?"

"I don't even want to talk about it," Cilla said with a laugh. "They thought she was cool. But all I could think was that if she was so smart, she'd understand how embarrassed I was by her."

"When did you get over that?"

Cilla frowned in thought. "I think it was when we moved to Bellingwood. Polly was cool and she liked my mom. Rebecca liked Mom. They talked to her like she was a real person."

"She is."

"Right?" Cilla said with a laugh. "I never saw her that way."

"What did you see her as?"

"Mom."

"And she couldn't be both of those things at the same time."

"I guess not."

Polly walked in, carrying a box. She set it on Kristen's desk. "What are you two discussing?"

"Being a mom," Cilla said.

"Are you exhausted?" Polly asked.

"So tired," Cilla replied. "Fiona is teething. Is it evil of me that I'm glad she's with Mom today?"

"Because your mother deserves a grouchy Fiona?"

"Well, yes, that, but for eight hours I don't have to worry about her. She's in good hands and I can relax. If I wasn't so busy, I'd totally take a nap."

"Take the nap," Polly said. "You'll be back here tomorrow. The work won't go away."

"Really?" Cilla looked at Polly as if she'd grown a unicorn horn on her forehead.

Polly shrugged. "Take the nap. Set your alarm, but give yourself some downtime. You certainly aren't going to get it at home tonight."

"No kidding."

"What kind of mothering advice can I give you?" Polly asked Kristen, a grin on her face.

"Ava hates me. She doesn't want to be seen with me. Even if we're out shopping and I'm buying things for her, she acts like I don't exist. When we get to the check-out counter, she bolts for the

front door, hoping no one will see us together."

"She doesn't hate you," Polly said.

"It sure feels like it. When did I turn into an old lady that embarrasses her daughter?"

"The day you gave birth to her," Polly said. "She's going through a phase."

"I hate that word," Kristen said. "How many phases of adolescence do I have to deal with?"

Polly chuckled. "So many. You just need to remember that you are the mama. You brought her into this world and you can take her out. Do you tell Ava that you love her?"

"All the time," Kristen said. "You taught me that. If nothing else, she hears those words from me. But that's one of the things that embarrasses her. She told me that none of her friends' parents tell their kids that they love them."

"That's criminal," Cilla said.

"As long as she knows you love her, the two of you will get through nearly anything," Polly said. "Let me ask you a question. What does Ava do when you show up to her programs at school? Does she look for you?"

That had never occurred to Kristen. "I guess so."

"Think about it," Polly said. "Does she look for you and relax when she finds you in the crowd?"

Kristen's face lit into a smile. "Yes! She does. Two weeks ago when I went to her music concert I was a little late. Ava was so adorable. She'd picked out her own outfit and felt really proud. My mom was there, but that wasn't enough, was it?"

Cilla beamed at her friend. "She looked for you."

"I didn't even think about it. You see those reels where little kids light up when the parent shows up, but I didn't pay attention to Ava. I was busy getting into the seat Mom had saved for me. I gave her a little wave and she smiled at me, but it was a bigger deal than that."

"Like I said. A phase," Polly said. "And to be clear, parents go through them too."

"No kidding," Cilla said. "It's a good thing I drop Fiona off at her

house or I don't think I'd ever see Mom."

"She's working through stuff," Polly said. "Since your family came to Bellingwood, your mom has had a lot going on. She still worries about your dad. She worries about you."

"She doesn't act like she worries about me."

"Really?" Polly lifted an eyebrow. "Would she let anyone else babysit Fiona during the day?"

"Well, no."

"Because she wants to stay close to you as much as you want to be close to her. You two have things to work out. It will happen when one or the other of you decides that you can be humble enough to apologize."

"I'm not going to do that. I didn't do anything wrong," Cilla said. Kristen chuckled.

"What?" Cilla asked.

"Methinks thou dost protest too much." Kristen looked at Polly. "That's the quote, right?"

"Close enough," Polly said. "It's from Hamlet."

"But I didn't," Cilla said. "She's the one who kicked me out."

"Phases," Polly said. "You both are great mothers. Parenting isn't ever easy, but when you love unconditionally, you will find that it is the best thing you can do. When it comes to your child, you'll find that their ugly stuff is rarely about you. Separate yourself from their anger and you'll find out what's really going on." Polly picked up the mostly-emptied box. "Sal is waiting for coffee. I'd better hurry or she'll lose her mind."

"She always makes me feel better," Kristen said, after Polly was gone.

"Not me." Cilla shook her head. "I feel like a heel. Am I supposed to be the one to make up with my mom?"

Kristen shrugged. "That's up to you and her, I guess."

"I'm not ready, though."

"Then it's enough that you see her every day when you drop Fiona off." Kristen took a long drink of her coffee. "I needed that. Who knows what will happen in the future? Maybe your mom will figure it out."

"I hope so." Cilla pursed her lips. "I kind of miss her."

~~~

*(Turn the page for links and more information.  
You know you want to.)*

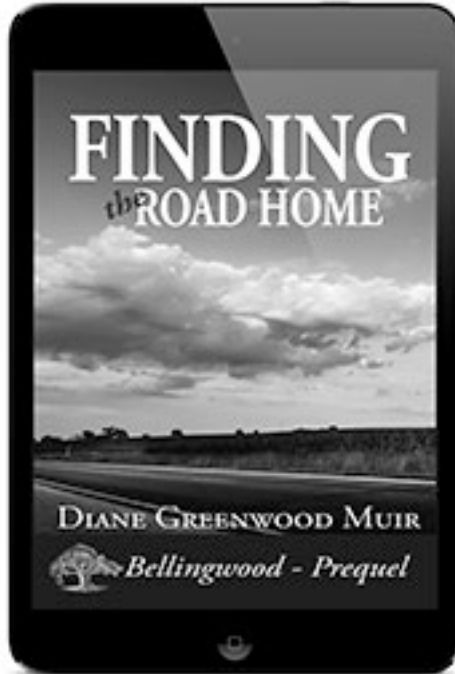


Meet Polly Giller before she arrives in Bellingwood.

FREE novella.

Click on the image or go to

<http://nammynools.com/bellingwood-prequel/>



*(Keep going, there's more.)*

*Don't miss any books in Diane Greenwood Muir's*

## Bellingwood Series

Diane publishes new Bellingwood books and shorts regularly. Vignettes are published in the newsletters and on the website.

Sign up for the newsletter by clicking on this [LINK](#).

You can find a list of all published works at [nammynools.com](http://nammynools.com)

The first nine books, plus short stories, are published to Kindle in three boxed sets: [Books 1-3](#), [Books 4-6](#), [Books 7-9](#)

## Nammynools Tales

Collections of short stories in multiple genres

[Nammynools Tales – Book 1](#)

## Mage's Odyssey

[Book 1 – Mage Reborn](#)

[Book 2 – Mage Renewed](#)

## Journals

(Paperback only)

[Find Joy: A Gratitude Journal](#) - [Books are Life: A Reading Journal](#)

[Creative Journaling – A One Year Memory Keeper](#)

[One Line a Day – Five Year Memory Book](#)

## Abide With Me

[Abide With Me](#) – Four stories of faith, redemption, and love

*Abiding Love* - the story of Ruth, *Abiding Grace* - the story of the Prodigal Son, *Abiding Hope* – the story of the Good Samaritan,  
*Abiding Joy* – Joy comes in the morning

*(Turn one more page!)*

# THANK YOU!



I'm so glad you enjoy these stories about Polly Giller and her friends. There are many ways to stay in touch with Diane and the Bellingwood community.

You can find more details about Sycamore House and Bellingwood at the website: <http://nammynools.com/>  
Be sure to sign up for the monthly newsletter.

For news about upcoming books:  
<https://www.facebook.com/pollygiller>

There's a community for you!  
[Bellingwood Readalong](#) for discussions about the books  
[Bellingwood Cooking & Recipes](#) (free recipe book PDF download)

Watch for new releases at Diane's [Amazon Author Page](#).

Recipes and decorating ideas found in the books can often be found on Pinterest at: <http://pinterest.com/nammynools/>

And if you are looking for Bellingwood swag,  
<https://www.zazzle.com/store/bellingwood>

*Finis*