

Women on Writing: 1st Place: Ashley Memory
Asheboro, North Carolina
Congratulations, Ashley!



Ashley finds inspiration in the ancient Uwharrie mountains surrounding her home in rural Randolph, County, N.C. She enjoys preserving what she grows in the garden she tends with her husband Johnpaul. She's learned the hard way about wearing gloves when making jalapeno pickles!

Ashley's poetry and prose have recently appeared in *The Birds We Piled Loosely*, *Gyroscope Review*, *The Ginger Collect's 2018 Halloween Mini-Magazine* and numerous other literary journals and anthologies. New work is forthcoming in *Okay Donkey* and *Coffin Bell*. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and a two-time recipient of the Doris Betts Fiction Prize sponsored by the N.C. Writers' Network. A previous story, "Eula Dare Hampton Agrees to Edit the Quaker Ladies' Cookbook," earned honorable mention in the WOW! Winter 2018 Flash Fiction Contest.

Ashley loves sharing what she's learned as a part-time instructor for [Central Carolina Community College's Creative Writing Program](#) in Pittsboro, N.C. Follow Ashley on Twitter [@memoryashley](#) or visit her fruit-inspired blog at [ashley-memory.com](#).

Dear Derinda

By Ashley Memory

I know people don't write letters these days, but since you've ignored my calls I had no choice. Especially now that you and Skeeter put a gate in front of your house so I can't just walk up there like I used to do and shout, *Yoo hoo, Derinda! It's me, Iris!*

As you know, when that sleazy Ray Speers from Infinity Communications showed up at my house, you were the first person I called. Yes, I was tempted. Who wouldn't be by the idea of an easy twenty grand and then \$500 a month for the next ten years for letting Infinity install a cell tower on our property? You know how much I've always wanted to cruise the Caribbean. And how Bobby drools over that new Dodge Ram pickup with 4-wheel drive. We probably would've used the money to send Brittany to college but it never hurts to dream, does it?

What kind of people would we be if we didn't ask your opinion, along with the Flynts, Callicuts, Moodys, Loftins, and the Tarrs? We all met about it, remember? And the bottom line was that nobody out here in Bayberry Fire District wanted a 200-foot tower lording over us. The way it looks is one thing, spoiling our view and the reason we all live in the boondocks, but you were the one who brought up the point that somebody else, maybe even the government, might be able to hear and see everything we do. And how you and Skeeter like to skinny dip in your hot tub from time to time. The truth is that me and Bobby like to do that, too.

(Now that we're confessing, I want to remind you that I'm the one who didn't laugh her ass off when you changed your tampon without washing your hands after making jalapeno pickles. Instead I brought you a cold pack from my own freezer because I felt sorry for you! And remember how I forgave you after you admitted to kissing Bobby at the Fourth of July pig-picking five years ago? I wasn't mad for too long—I just sulked for a few weeks to make you and Bobby feel bad. What you don't know is that me and Skeeter met at your place to get even. And I wasn't just going to kiss him. I was going to sleep with him! But something about being on your bed and seeing that little pillow that I cross-stitched for you that says *My Best Friend Brings Out the Best in Me* just ruined the moment. And Skeeter, if we had gone through with it, would have cried like a baby afterwards because he loves you so much.)

Imagine how shocked I was when less than one week after we all met and agreed, as a group, to say NO to Infinity, I watched those bloodsuckers build that blasted tower on YOUR land. Yes, you double-crossed us, yes, you took the money and ran, but maybe you really did need it worse than any of us. But that's okay. What I can't get over is how, out of guilt I guess, you just wrote me out of your life.

Nobody but you and me have the memories we do. Remember the time we drove all the way to Greensboro to take that meditation class from the Buddhist monk but got bored and skipped out to Bojangles? Will you ever forget the time we found an afternoon broadcast of *Jeopardy* on another channel, then watched the same show at 7:30 on WTXY in front of Bobby and Skeeter and got all the questions right, even the ones on opera? But most of all, Derinda, I remember how you helped me when I lost my daddy. While everybody else kept saying that at least he went the way he wanted to go, falling over in his tomato garden like that, you were the only one who said, *It still hurts like hell, doesn't it?*

I think that once you get this you'll stew on it for a while but I'm hoping, maybe by the time the lightning bugs come back, you'll get a hankering for my watermelon margaritas. And when you do, you don't have to say anything, no apology, you don't even have to mention this letter, just show up like you always do with your homemade mango salsa and chips and with God as my witness, I swear, we'll go on like nothing ever happened.

Iris

What Ashley Won:

- \$400.00 Cash Prize
- \$25 Amazon Gift Card
- Publication of winning story on WOW-WomenOnWriting.com website
- Interview on WOW!'s blog [The Muffin](#)