

SEPTEMBER MUSINGS

SHARON VIRTS



The Art of Questioning

Digging Deeper into the Characters of Our Past

As a historical fiction author, the heart of my craft lies not just in recounting tales from the past but in reviving the characters who lived through these times. Whether I'm weaving narratives of honor and deceit in *Masque of Honor* or exploring themes of murder and mental illness in *Veil of Doubt* and *The Grays of Truth*, the process always begins with one simple yet profound word: Why.

Understanding *the why* behind the decisions and behavior of the real people who inspire my characters often holds the key to unlocking critical elements of a story. For example, during my research for *Masque of Honor*, I learned that Lucinda Lee, who had no inheritance or dowry, rejected Jack's first proposal of marriage. Jack McCarty was handsome, highly intelligent, and one of the wealthiest bachelors in the county. *Why?* I asked myself. Why would she do that when economic security was so important to women of her class? And when I delved into the possible answers, it made for some pretty awesome story telling.

Likewise, in researching *Veil of Doubt*, I discovered that Dr. Mott (Dr. Moore in my story) delivered Emily Lloyd's last child, Maud. During the trial testimony, it was reported that Emily's labor and the child's birth was "uneventful." In that time period in Virginia, nearly every delivery was performed by a midwife unless there were complications. Why would a male doctor deliver the child and not a midwife? Again, the possible answers led me down a very different path from my planned narrative and allowed for some very interesting plot twists.

In *The Grays of Truth*, I had many questions as to why no one investigated the deaths occurring at Hamilton Place, the Baltimore home of Ellen and Hank Wharton. And why would folks keep overnighing at that house considering most who entered didn't leave alive? To reveal the possible answers here might spoil the ending. You'll have to wait until after you read the story (and join one of my book talks) to find out!

When characters are fully realized, as a reader, you engage more deeply. You begin to ask your own "why" questions, piecing together the treachery or mystery alongside the protagonist. This interactive form of reading deepens the story's authenticity. It keeps you turning pages and wanting to know what happens next, and why!

Happy Reading!



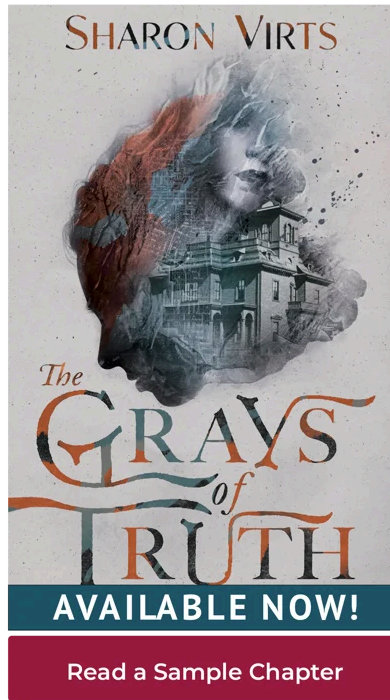
**“I still keep asking these 'how' and 'why' questions.
Occasionally, I find an answer.”**

— *Stephen Hawking*

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The GRAYS OF TRUTH



[Click Here to Read a Chapter](#)

We are just a month away from the release of *The Grays of Truth* and I am thrilled! I know you will be, too, especially after you read the first chapter! Simply follow the link and travel back to 1867 and Washington DC. Daniel Ketchum has arrived on Jane Gray Wharton's doorstep. His mother is gravely ill and Jane must come right away. There's a storm brewing and not just overhead.

"...the half-built Washington Monument thrust into the sky like an accusation, its fragmented summit rising upward as if begging the heavens for its completion. Overhead, dark leaden clouds hung low, ready to unleash a torrent at any moment."

When Jane arrives at the Ketchum house, she finds her sister-in-law, Ellen Wharton, and niece, Octavia, along with General Ketchum's copyist, Eliza Chubb. And Rebecca Ketchum is dying. All sorts of questions remain unanswered. Why does Jane fear Ellen? What happened between Daniel and Octavia? Why is Mrs. Chubb so cold? Did Rebecca take her own life? And if so, why? Somewhere among the answers lies the truth.

Pre-order Grays of Truth Now!

If you order the book before the release and register your purchase, you will qualify to receive some amazing perks. An invitation to the Launch Party at Selma. A personalized bookplate. An in-depth look at the real life characters of the story. A small group discussion with me about the book once you've read it. And a chance to win an all-expense paid trip to Virginia for the Launch Party on November 2.

[To Learn More about Perks](#)

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A Birthday Gift for you: Twelve Book Club Favorites



[Enter Giveaway Here](#)

To celebrate my birthday this month, I want to share some literary joy. This year, I'm giving away twelve of my members favorite books from our #ReadWithSharon book club selections! The contest ends on September 30th. Winner will be announced on October 1st. Don't miss out on the chance to win these incredible books!



Another Year 'Round the Sun

Writing Poetry as an Alternate to Journaling

And yes, I had a birthday this month. (They seem to keep happening which, of course, is a lot better than the alternative!)

I find that a birthday is a good time to reflect on one's goals and priorities, and to do a reset, if necessary. Memorializing these reflections is key to self-improvement, but is often overlooked because, honestly, it's down-right hard! I find poetry to be a more detached way of writing. So if journaling feels too personal, give composing poetry a try. (And no, it doesn't have to rhyme!)

Below is a poem I wrote years ago that summarized where my heart was at that moment in time. Although it is about me, its abstract form is impersonal and allows the sentiment to be applied to most anyone celebrating an autumn birthday. So grab a pen and paper, and try poetry as a means of self-expression.

As September Draws Near

by Sharon Virts

As September draws near, I mark the end
of another summer and the beginning of
my new year.

I wait with anticipation...panic...fear.

As time moves on without word,
doubt turns to acceptance...self-
assurance...growth.

The knowing that whatever the outcome—
win or lose—the lesson remains in the
work itself.

And what if I prevail?

Do the flowers really smell as lovely as
they appear?

Or is the scent, up-close, only bittersweet?

And the seeds they bear, will they grow
greater beauty next season?

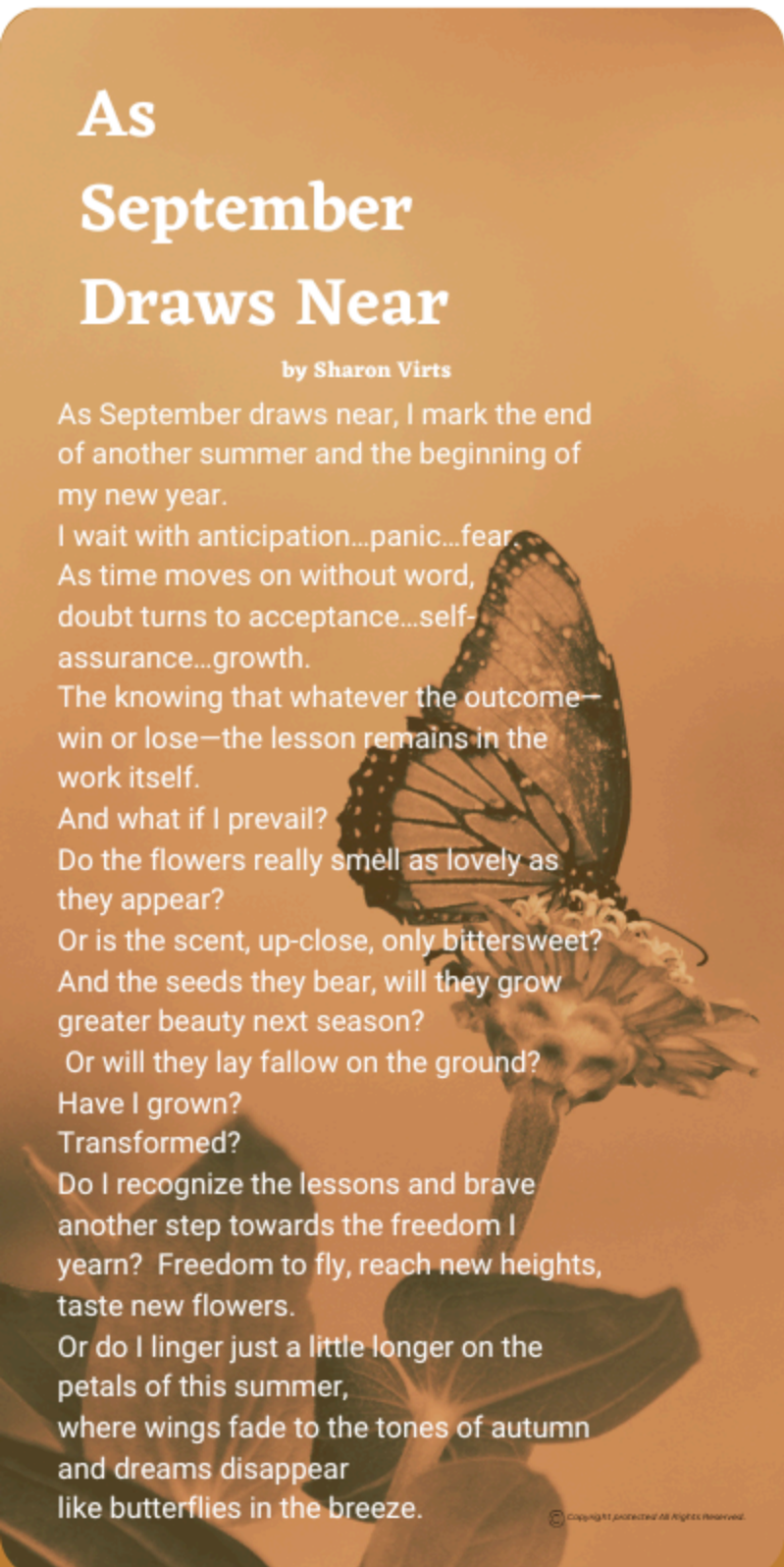
Or will they lay fallow on the ground?

Have I grown?

Transformed?

Do I recognize the lessons and brave
another step towards the freedom I
yearn? Freedom to fly, reach new heights,
taste new flowers.

Or do I linger just a little longer on the
petals of this summer,
where wings fade to the tones of autumn
and dreams disappear
like butterflies in the breeze.

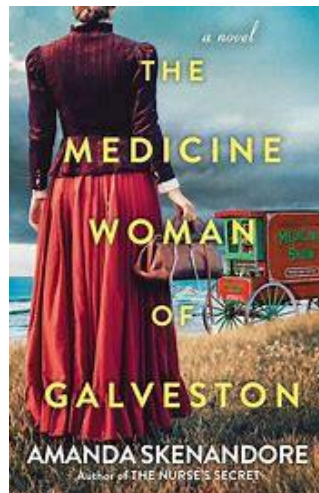
A monarch butterfly is perched on a flower, its wings spread. The background is a warm, orange-brown gradient. The butterfly's wings are dark with white spots and markings. The flower is light-colored with many small petals. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.
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#ReadWithSharon

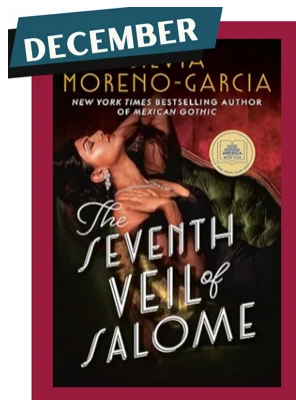
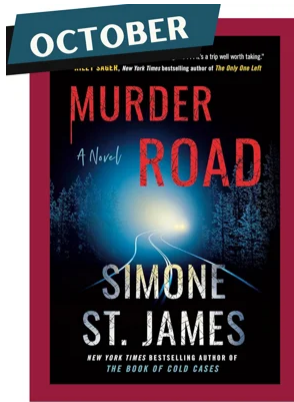
Historical Fiction Book Club

Get ready for an awesome line up in my [#ReadWithSharon](#) book club. On Thursday (tonight) September 26 at 7pm eastern, we will discuss our September read, *The Medicine Woman of Galveston* with author Amanda Skenandore.



The #ReadWithSharon book club only reads current release (within the last year) historical fiction and I do my best to pre-read every selection before making the pick. Most months, the author joins us via zoom and you are able to ask questions during the discussion. Meetings are the fourth Thursday of the month at 7pm eastern, and never go longer than an hour. For meetings you miss, you can access our zoom discussions with the authors on my [YouTube Channel](#).

If you love stories from the past, this club is for you. You can sign up for free [HERE](#)



Gene



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