

BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / Personal Memoir

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LOVE IS THE THREAD

centers on the friendship between two women, one snared in a lifelong struggle with bipolar disorder & battling breast cancer, the other reweaving her life after an abusive relationship. Through spirituality, encounters with nature, & vacations on the Delaware shore Kristine—an artist, knitter & wise soul—and the author form a friendship as varied & closely knit as the stitches in a handmade sweater. As Kristine teaches Leslie to knit she weaves in lessons about the many faces of reality, the messy grace of all human relationships, & the gift of true self-acceptance. From the discovery of hidden colors in fresh snow to the satisfaction of creating a first knitted garment, *Love is the Thread* savors life's small glories, ultimate challenges, & all the moments of humor & tenderness in between.

Love is the Thread

A Knitting Friendship

Leslie Moïse, Ph.D.

P.O. Box 58065 | NASHVILLE, TN

Telephone: 615-356-5188 | Toll-free: 1-866-4-A-PEARL

Fax: 615-352-4222 | contact@pearlsong.com | Peggy Elam

www.pearlsong.com | www.pearlsongpress.com



Praise for *Love is the Thread*

“*Love is the Thread* is a heartfelt exploration of both the power of knitting & the power of friendship to bring together new stitches throughout a life. If you enjoy examining the connections between what our hands do & how our minds work, you’ll love this book.”

SHANNON OKEY
Knit designer

“Many people experience strong friendships. Few people have the context to understand the profound teachings & varied gifts that friends can give when ‘love is the thread’ that knits the friendship together....this book provides that insight. *Love is the Thread* is beautifully written, chock full of wisdom & humor, & a nakedly honest & human memoir. It’s a GREAT read!”

BARBARA BLOECHER
Shamanic Practitioner & Teacher

Suggested Interview Questions

Why did you write *Love is the Thread*?

What is the most important lesson you realized about friendship from writing the memoir?

What authors have most influenced you?

Do you find writing easy or difficult?

Describe your strangest experience as a writer.



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Media Contacts:

Peggy Elam | 615-356-5188

peggyelam@pearlsong.com

Leslie Moïse | 502-265-6831 | lesliemoise@gmail.com

Nancy Moïse Haws, Esq | 502-509-6644 | nancy@nancyesq.com

*Kentucky author helps readers appreciate
the priceless gift of friendship*

NASHVILLE, TN—Budgets for holiday gift-giving may be tight, but Kentucky author Leslie Moïse is help-ing readers discover a gift that has no price tag.

In challenging times, the gift of true friendship can heal woes as diverse as illness, emotional loss or fear. In clear, easy steps Moïse describes how friendship strengthens and warms us even during the coldest seasons of life. A single close relationship with another human being can alter every other facet of a person's existence, from his or her inner experience to family kinship, even to spirituality or religion.

Moïse contemplates the meaning of friendship in *Love is the Thread*, available December 1, 2011 from Pearlson Press. The memoir traces the connection between two women broken by life's challenges. One suffers from bipolar disorder, the other is recovering from an abusive relationship. United by a love for creativity and knitting, the friends' bond deepens over time and across many years—and ultimately across the greatest divide of all.

Moïse has a Ph.D. in folklore, nineteenth century British literature, and women's fairy tales from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, and a master's degree in humanities from the University of Louisville. Her articles, stories and poetry have been published in the U.S., Canada & Great Britain in publications as diverse as *Science of Mind*, *The Ecozoic Reader*, *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, *Southwestern Review*, *Radiance*, *Horses All*, *The Chronicle of the Horse*, *Jefferson Review*, and *Light Horse*.

She has served as editor, assistant editor or on the editorial board of the *MSCTDA Newsletter*, *Jefferson Review*, *Thinker*, *Welcome to Greater Louisville* and *Southwestern Review*. She worked as a staff writer at *The Cumberland Times*, and her play *The One-Eyed* was performed at Jefferson Community College. Her novel-in-progress, *Judith*, received a Kentucky Foundation for Women grant in 2011.

Moïse lives in Kentucky with a whippet who thinks he's more intimidating than a Doberman and a bay mare who considered herself a lap pony. Visit her on the web at www.lesliemoise.com.

Love is the Thread is available in original trade paperback and ebook from your favorite online books-tores as well as directly from the Pearlson Press website at www.pearlsong.com.

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The Women & the Story Behind the Story

LESLIE MOÏSE DECIDED TO BECOME A WRITER at age nine when she bought the first “grown up book” she ever read, *Little Women*. Before she finished reading the book (for the first of several thousand times), Moïse recognized that while Louisa May Alcott and her creation, Jo March, were not one and the same, the urge the author and her character felt to write and create united them. Moïse decided she wanted to write as well. Though she had no old tin kitchen, sofa with a round cushion, or pet rat like Jo, the little girl made do with the corner of the family's sun room. There she sat down with a notebook and pencil to write a rhyming poem, fortunately lost to posterity.

As an adult Moïse continued to hone her craft at writers conferences and retreats as varied as the Sandhills Writers Conference in Augusta, GA and a delightful two weeks at the Irish Writers Center in Dublin, Ireland. Between conferences she was sustained by the Louisville Writers' Club meetings every other week. Moïse earned her bachelor's degree in liberal studies with a focus on writing and culture, and returned to the University of Louisville in her early thirties for her master's degree in humanities. Her doctorate from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette centered on folklore, nineteenth century British literature, and women's fairy tales—a background that served her well during the creation of her young adult novel *Selkie Song*, set on Maryland's Eastern shore.

Though her fascination with folklore and fairy tales informs the novel, so did a friendship with former long distance ocean swimmer and Baltimore resident **Kristine Rasmussen**. Once a dweller on the Chesapeake Bay, Rasmussen guided Moïse in her choice of the novel's setting and its development. Attending a SCBWI retreat with Louise Haws further sparked the novel's development.

Moïse moved a great deal over the following years, with time spent in the Pennsylvania mountains, the Blue Ridge of Virginia, and Cajun country. She and Rasmussen remained good friends in spite of the years and distance between them. After Moïse graduated with her Ph.D. she joined Rasmussen and a group of women friends every summer on the Delaware shore, where Rasmussen taught her to knit.

When Kristine died of breast cancer, Moïse jotted down memories from the friendship, certain she would never forget Kristine, but afraid that she might forget some of the little moments that form the foundation of true friendships. She intended to email copies of certain anecdotes to some of Kristine's other friends, but several months into the exercise Moïse looked at the inch-high stack of manuscript. She recognized her jotted memories as a work in progress—a memoir. Though she had never intended to write a work of nonfiction, Moïse contemplated how the vignettes fit together and developed the narrative arc of what became her first published book, *Love is the Thread* (Pearlsong Press, December 2011).

Moïse's historical novel, *Judith*, based on one of the books in the Apocrypha, won a grant from the Kentucky Foundation for Women in 2010. Moïse's articles, stories and poetry have been published in the U.S., Canada and Great Britain in publications as diverse as *Science of Mind*, *Odyssey*, *The Ecozoic Reader*, *The Charles Lamb Bulletin*, *Southwestern Review*, *Radiance*, *Horses All*, *The Chronicle of the Horse*, *Jefferson Review*, and *Light Horse*. She has served as editor, assistant editor or on the editorial board of the *MSCTDA Newsletter*, *Jefferson Review*, *Thinker*, *Welcome to Greater Louisville* and *Southwestern Review*. She worked as a staff writer at *The Cumberland Times*, and her play *The One-Eyed* was performed at Jefferson Community College.

An excerpt from

Love is the Thread

Preface

I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD WRITE A WORK OF NON-FICTION. I certainly never intended to write a memoir. Then one day about six months after my friend Kristine Rasmussen died, I sat and knitted while memories of her drifted through my mind. First came our last phone conversation, mainly about two of my nephews and knitting, then my strange introduction to Kristine more than a decade before, followed by a funny thing my friend had often said.

I need to write these memories down before I forget, I thought. Not Kristine. How could I ever forget her? But the amusing or wise things she said, the little moments that are the reality of human connection? Those I might lose.

In between work on my latest novel, I jotted my memories, some only a few pages long. Six weeks later, I stared in shock at the heap of pages. *This is a manuscript in the making,* I realized. How to structure such a book? The logical choice, chronologically, didn't work for me. Memory isn't tidy. It moves back and forth, with images, dialogue and scenes overlapped like a pile of old-fashioned photo negatives.

The closer I came to the end of the work, the more I noticed the way knitting and spiritual metaphors linked certain chapters. But the memories came first, the stories, not the plan. Like friendships, like all human relationships, where I wound up—with a memoir—is not where I expected to be. My “memory negatives” differ from others' experiences with Kristine; that's part of relationships, too. It takes many people together to see the truth about anyone.

I hope this story—about knitting and friendship, failure and family, death, loss and love—helps you glimpse not only part of my truth, but your own.

Chapter One

The Other Side of the Door

A CAR SLOWED IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE, AND I DROPPED my book and stumbled to the picture window. I lifted the edge of the drapes to stare at the road, only to have the fabric slip out of my fingers at sight of a neighbor pulling into her driveway. It wasn't him, wasn't my ex, come to drag me back to Louisville.

I tottered to the chaise and stooped for my fallen book, then let it thud to the floor when the phone rang in my cousin's office at the back of the house. I whirled toward the noise, my pulse hummingbird quick. Of course—he would phone first, make sure I was here before he drove

all the way from Louisville to Baltimore.

And he would do that if he knew I was here. *"I believe in happily ever after."* How many times had he told me so? *"The only way for you to leave me is to die."*

Now the receiver tinged into its cradle. My cousin Lora—no, Sadhya. Why couldn't I remember the spiritual name bestowed by her guru? Sadhya whipped into the living room, caught one heel on a corner of the white throw rug, and tumbled into the nearest armchair. Its wooden legs screeched against the polished floorboards, and her two dogs erupted from their favorite spot on the sofa in the family room. I cowered from their barking.

Sadhya's wide mouth moved, but I couldn't hear above the yaps from Ears the terrier and Chessie the beagle's howls. At last my cousin stomped on the floor. The echo rippled up my trembling legs, loosened them so I flopped onto the chaise.

Still the dogs barked. Sadhya tilted her chin toward the ceiling and sucked in a breath that rose all the way from her belly. "Will you two shut up? Everything's fine."

Everything's fine. It would take more than the two days since my arrival for me to believe that. Just an hour ago, Ellsworth, Sadhya's lanky musician husband, had asked me to run to the grocery with him. He might as well have proposed an expedition to the Amazon.

When I shook my head, then kept shaking it, he leaned down to hug me gently. "Maybe tomorrow, then." With a wave and a grin, he left by himself.

Now Sadhya bellowed one last time. "I. Said. Quiet!" Chessie slunk back down the hall to hide behind the family room sofa. Ears gave a final growl, just to inform everyone of his position as ruler of the household, before he trotted after his pack mate. At roughly five pounds, the beige dustmop's claws made barely a sound on the hardwood, but I still winced as if from a fist hammering on the door.

Sadhya shook her head. "Better make this quick before a leaf falls off a tree and Ears decides to announce it to the world. That was Kristine, a friend of mine from the meditation center. She's going through a bad stretch right now. Want to help her out?"

Help someone else? All I'd done so far today was shower, make my bed and eat breakfast. Oh, yeah, and rush to check the door locks every time Ears barked at a passing car or Chessie growled at a squirrel through the back window. With less than an hour before lunch, I hadn't managed to find the energy to brush my hair.

When I didn't answer, just slumped lower on the chaise, she continued in her usual brisk tone. "Kristine's badly depressed and can't cook for herself. If you'd just double a vegetarian recipe you like and drop it off at her place—"

Drop it off—she expected me to drive? But Sadhya had promised to let me stay with them for three months while I got my life together. I needed time to gather the scattered pieces of myself before I thought about someone else. When I swallowed, my cousin's forehead crinkled in the way I remembered from childhood. "What's wrong?"

"Where—where does she live?" And how far? What if I got lost, mugged, worse?

"She's on the edge of Towson, only a few miles away. Nice neighborhood, and her building's easy to find." Sadhya gabbled directions I barely heard. "Knock to let Kristine know you're there. I doubt she'll come to the door. Just leave the casserole in the hall and she'll bring it inside when she can."

I crouched in place. "I don't know—how long does it take to drive there?"

"Five minutes, ten at most." My cousin popped out of the chair, frowned at the dog hair that puffed into the air. "Sometimes I wonder why we chose such pale upholstery if we wanted dogs." She shrugged. "Well, help Kristine or stay home, it's up to you. I thought it'd do you good to get out." Her voice softened. "Maybe helping someone else in trouble will help you, too. I'll jot down the directions in case you decide to go. And don't forget you can come straight home again."

I shrank against the cream-and-gray-striped cushions. "I'll—I'll think about it."

"Good. Now I need to revise my research paper. It's due Tuesday." She had already rewritten the grad school assignment four times since my arrival. As the office door slammed, I shook my head.

I didn't comprehend anything about Sadhya's spiritual path, from the hour of chanting and meditation she practiced each morning, to the photos of her guru perched on a chair in every room of this house. But it was my cousin's home, after all—and I did understand that the guru chose accurately when she gave Lora a sacred name that meant "perfection."

That night I cooked dinner for everyone for the first time. *No reason not to choose my favorite vegetarian casserole*, I decided—a baked version of bubble and squeak. *No harm dividing it into two serving dishes*. We finished one for dinner. The next morning I took the extra pan out of the refrigerator a half dozen times, only to immediately tuck it back in again. At last, with the cold container clutched in my even colder arms, I waited for a pause in the flow of notes rising from Ellsworth's studio in the basement of the house.

"Ells? I think maybe I'll—I'll run the bubble and squeak over to Kristine."

He appeared at the foot of the stairs to peer up at me in the first floor hallway, his long blond hair ruffled where he'd dragged his fingers through it in creative frustration. "Good for you, Leslie. You're very brave."

What gave him that idea? I wiggled my shoulders and didn't answer.

"You have the directions? Just turn left at the end of our road, go two miles, then a right at the church and take the second left." He named Kristine's street. "They're the only apartments in the neighborhood. See you at lunch." He smiled, the wide triangular grin of a playful child. "I'll make grilled cheese for us, 'kay?"

"Thanks, Ellsworth." Still I dithered in the foyer, until Ears hopped off the sofa with a growl that made me jump. Again. "Okay, I'm going." I rushed down the walk to my steel gray sedan. With the directions clutched against the steering wheel, I found my way to Kristine's. *Left at the end of the road*—no trouble there. *One mile—a mile and a half*—Had I missed the next turn? No, there was the church, dark stone edged in paler granite. *Then the second left*—and yes, an L-shaped group of brick apartments.

I pulled into a parking space, opened the door, shut it again. Hot with sweat, I scouted the square of grass dotted with oaks that stretched between me in the parking lot and the entrance to Kristine's building. I opened and closed my door twice more before I finally plunged from the car, dodged from tree to tree to doorstep, and into the building to tap on her apartment door.

"Hello? Kristine?" No answer. "I'm Leslie, Lora's—" *No. Sadhya*. "I mean, Sadhya's cousin. Here's some food for you." Could the stranger on the other side of the door even hear my choked whisper?

The building wasn't that big, but the feminine voice that answered sounded far away. "I'll come out for it later, honey. Thank you."

Shoulders hunched, I sped back to the security of my Ford and punched the locks. *There, duty accomplished, promise fulfilled*. Still, I didn't stop shaking until half an hour after I returned to Sadhya's and Ellsworth's. As promised, Ells had a plate of crusty sandwiches dripping orange goo ready in minutes. He urged me to take the last triangle. "Eat up, you need comfort food."

The next evening the phone rang during dinner. My fork tumbled from my fingers to ring against the table as Sadhya bolted to answer. She waggled the receiver at me. "It's for you." I drew back, and she sighed. "Don't worry, it's Kristine."

"Oh." Damp with sweat all over, I took the phone. "Yes?"

The same warm female voice from inside the apartment greeted me. "Thank you for that delicious food. I ate every bite."

Later I learned how rare it was for Kristine to eat much of anything during one of her deep de-

pressions. But now, sensing her smile through the phone, I settled into a kitchen chair and stopped quivering. “You’re welcome.”

A pause, a giggle. “What was that stuff, anyway?”

“Baked bubble and squeak. Basically it’s cabbage, onion and potato casserole. Sadhya said you’re a vegetarian.”

“I am. But I’ll never remember the name.” Another giggle. “Quibble and quart?”

For the first time since I ran away from Kentucky, I laughed. “Close enough.”

After that I cooked for Kristine several times a week. Over time, I quit darting to and from her building, stopped peeking behind trees for my ex. Though Kristine and I never saw each other, she called me every few days, whenever she finished my latest offering. We discussed recipes. Talk of food shifted into shared memories of favorite meals. Remembered meals grew into conversations about places we loved. Both of us adored the ocean, and when Kristine discovered that our birthdays were a week apart she chuckled.

“No wonder we get along so well. We’re both water babies, both Pisces.” Our conversations deepened, until she knew all about the frightening circumstances behind my flight to Baltimore, and I had heard the long tale of her mental illness. Her voice became a nightly feature of my life. My care for this invisible, tender spirit grew with each passing day.

By the time we met four months later, at a joint birthday party held in our honor, only her appearance remained unknown to me. Kristine swept into Sadhya’s house, dark-haired and more than six feet tall. She weighed more than three hundred pounds, and moved with the powerful grace of the long distance ocean swimmer she once had been. After months saturated in the warmth of her voice, the compassion of her spirit, I knew I’d never met anyone so lovely.

One crooked front tooth made her smile even more engaging as she opened her arms to welcome me. “Hello, Leslie. I’m Kristine, the person you’ve been feeding all these months. It’s good to meet you at last.”

“Meet you? No, it’s just good to finally see you.” We hugged as we had talked for so long, heart to heart, warm and at ease.

For the rest of my time in Baltimore, we got together almost every day. Our friendship endured my moves to Pennsylvania, Virginia, Louisiana, and eventually back to Kentucky. Late one evening ten years after our first meeting, my phone rang. It was a few days before our usual call, and I greeted Kristine with startled joy.

For the first time ever, she interrupted me. “I have cancer.”

The world went white. I couldn’t speak.

“It’s going to be all right, honey.” Oh, god—why was *she* comforting *me*? “I’m going to fight. I’m going to laugh myself well.”

“You’re—” I tried again. “You’re going to live.” *Please let her live.* But she already sounded far away; farther than the first time I heard her voice through the apartment door, when I offered gifts to a woman whose face I couldn’t see.

Now she stands on the other side of a different door, and offers the same.





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Media Contacts:

Peggy Elam | 615-356-5188

peggyelam@pearlsong.com

Leslie Moïse | 502-265-6831 | lesliemoise@gmail.com

Nancy Moïse Haws, Esq | 502-509-6644 | nancy@nancyesq.com

3 Ways Friendship Warms Us Through Winter

from Leslie Moïse, Ph.D.

author of

Love is the Thread: A Knitting Friendship

www.lesliemoise.com

1. Shared memories remind us of good times, and how and why we became friends in the first place.
2. Mutual support during the darkest time of the year comforts and encourages us to keep going; a difficult day becomes a little brighter.
3. When we make plans with a friend, whether for next week or next summer, we feel excited and inspired.

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Media Contacts:

Peggy Elam | 615-356-5188

peggyelam@pearlsong.com

Leslie Moïse | 502-265-6831 | lesliemoise@gmail.com

Nancy Moïse Haws, Esq | 502-509-6644 | nancy@nanciesq.com

3 Tips for Giving the Gift of Friendship

from Leslie Moïse, Ph.D.

author of

Love is the Thread: A Knitting Friendship

www.lesliemoise.com

1. **Choose to stay connected.** You and your friend may live far apart from each other and lead busy lives. Email each other often and talk on the phone. Share the day by day details of your lives, your hopes and fears, and simply the sound of your voices.
2. **Spend time together.** Schedule a couple of hours together once a week, once a month, even once a year if you live far apart. Try not to schedule lots of things to do; the point is to be present with your friend so you give each other the gift of your presence. Recall your mutual past and plan your shared future.
3. **Accept your differences.** Even the closest friends look on the world from different points of view. When you accept those variations and each other, you grow closer together.

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