

CULTURAL ARTS and HERITAGE
Creative Writing Contest – Entries Due to STATE Chairperson by March 1
COVERSHEET • AUTHOR RELEASE FORM

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- Members may submit ONE entry in EACH category
- **Category descriptions are on the next page**
- Entries should not contain words of profanity
- The KEHA Executive Board reserves the right to not print any entry due to content
- Entries should be **typed**, *however*, legible handwritten entries will be accepted if there is no way the entry can be typed; Entries submitted in **electronic format**, preferably in **Microsoft Word**, are **encouraged**
- Entries are not returned; please save a copy of your entry and this page for your records
- Winners will be announced at the State Meeting and winning entries will be posted on the Cultural Arts webpage by July 1
- **1st Place Winners in each category will receive a \$25 gift card at the State Meeting**

**THIS Creative Writing Contest Cover Sheet and Author Release Form
must accompany EACH entry. Entries are due with this sheet by March 1.**

Indicate category of your entry:

_____ **Poetry** (limited to 30 lines)
 X **Memoir** (limited to 2 pages)
_____ **Short Story** (limited to 3000 words)

Please submit to:

Cindy Moore
2707 Sunnyside Road
Eminence, KY 40019
cjrn1@bellsouth.net

Title of Entry: **Winding Bobbins**

Author's name: **M.D. Llewellyn**

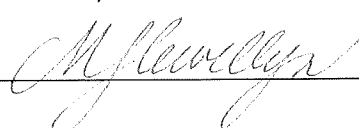
Address: **264 Lexington St.**

City: **Versailles** State: **KY** Zip Code: **40383**

County: **Woodford** AREA: _____

Phone: **(859) 806-6778** Email Address: **mllewellyn@ker.com**

The Kentucky Extension Homemakers Association has my permission to print my creative writing entry, to include my entry in a booklet of all or selected entries, or to read aloud or perform my entry at a public event, such as the KEHA annual meeting.

Signature:  Date: **Feb 12, 2016**

Winding Bobbins

Mother darted and whirled around the three-bedroom ranch on Bedford Road with relentless, quiet competence. She canned jams and jellies, plated meals, and polished hardwood floors with paste wax, never pausing long enough for the house to fall silent. This was long before Martha Stewart packaged domestic life into glossy aspiration, but Mother needed no audience, no how-tos. Except in one area: sewing.

Don't get me wrong: she could reattach buttons, stitch gaping seams, and rescue middle-school home economics projects that lingered unfinished. She crafted simple curtains for kitchen and bathroom windows, hemmed jeans, stitched patches onto my sister's Girl Scout sash. Crafting clothes from tissue templates, those McCall's and Butterick patterns on spinning racks, proved maddening to her. She spent hours huddled over that old Singer, straight pins wedged between pursed lips, hoping for a favorable outcome. I often wondered if she ever got a charley horse in her lips.

Almost every one of Mother's sewing projects required its own bobbin of like-colored thread. Unlike modern sewists who have a plethora of bobbins within reach, Mother had a single steel bobbin, requiring her to wind anew with every project. In these moments—after she had popped the bobbin onto the peg, looped the thread through the guides, and put the pedal to the hardwood—I sometimes found her in a state of reverie, which defied her dervish reputation. One time, with a pair of stonewashed Levi 550s at the ready for hemming—my brother was a stickler for just-right jeans—I caught her in one such moment. She had fixed her gaze on an object across the room, all the while maintaining steady pressure on the foot control, ensuring the bobbin filled evenly. Even with my clumsy adolescent arrival into the sewing room, her reverie remained steadfast, so I asked her what she was thinking about. She turned her head, looked me square in the eye, and simply said, "All the things I have to do today." I concede that she ran circles around my friends' mothers, but I felt, even at twelve years old, her response insincere, perhaps not entirely truthful.

From time to time during my teenage years, I would catch Mother in these states of quietude; sometimes she'd be waiting for the petcock valve on the pressure canner to sing or watching the Rit dye to set on the cotton intended for my brother's latest clown costume. When I came upon her, I would ask simply, "Winding bobbins?" She would smile sweetly at me, understanding the origin of the question, and make the same comment, "All the things I have to do today." Even after my siblings and I moved out and her household chores diminished in volume and intensity, I would occasionally find her in these moments of reflection. She'd always say the same thing. It became, oddly enough, a simple shared experience, one just between us, as if it were a secret handshake or a coded knock for a childhood fort.

In retrospect, I wonder if Mother was trying to tell me something more. She met the silent benchmarks of my father's world: garden-raised vegetables processed into rows of glass jars, crisp lines of ironed shirts, a hot dinner waiting at six o'clock.

Add the darning, washing, tutoring, and her day job, and the message seemed clear—even if it was never spoken. Unlike our bellyaching neighbor Elva Merritt, Mother refused to gripe about her lot; she simply kept the house humming.

As she slid into her sixties and seventies, I would occasionally find her in these moods, predictably amid the hectic atmosphere of a holiday. On Thanksgiving eve, 2020—when I was 48 and Mother was 76—I caught her staring at a grease-smudged index card with the title, scrawled in Grandmother’s spidery hand, “Cynthia’s Coconut Cake.” I did what I always did to break the trance: “Winding bobbins?” This time, there was no sweet smile, only an expression of hopeless frustration. She focused on the stainless-steel mixing bowl that held a pile of dry ingredients, stark white and heaped upon one another, and then looked back at the recipe card. “I can’t remember if I added the baking powder or the salt. It’s all a blank.” Tears wobbled on Mother’s eyelids.

Thoughts ricocheted in my head. This was a recipe Mother mastered and committed to memory in her youth. I recall the day she gave it to me over the phone when I moved into my first apartment. On that faraway day, she didn’t reach for the wooden recipe box; she reached into her memory, found the recipe, and recited it precisely, down to the half teaspoon of salt.

I quickly settled on a course of action. “Now I know you don’t like waste, but when this happens to me, I just start over. But the second time around, I put all the individual ingredients in their own bowls, so I know when I’ve added them.” Exasperation fell from her face, and she agreed to this arrangement. We dumped the contents of the bowl unceremoniously into the waste bin, and we began anew.

Now in her eighties, with memory failing, Mother has altered our ritual slightly. My visits to the mountainous portion of Maryland, where she has lived her entire married life, occur only occasionally. She has outsourced most of her domestic duties. A mother-daughter team vacuums the ranch; a fastidious woman irons the crisp creases Mother once mastered. My brother and sister-in-law oversee larger projects—mowing and landscaping services, appliance repairs, roof replacement.

I don’t find Mother daydreaming these days, as she prefers napping. One day last year, though, I was home to celebrate the high school graduation of my niece, and Mother, as if the hummingbird of my youth had been resuscitated, was in full flight, assigning tasks, taste-testing morsels, staging photographs. At one point during the party, I found her staring out a picture window.

“Winding bobbins?” I asked.

She swiveled her head in my direction, smiled sweetly, and said, “Bobbins? As in sewing?”

I nodded.

“I haven’t sewn in years, dear. You know, I was never particularly good at it.”

She turned back to whatever lay beyond the window, a world I no longer saw.