



ALSO BY CHRISTINE LEMMON

*Sanibel Scribbles*

*Portion of the Sea*

*Sand in my Eyes*

W H I S P E R

F R O M   T H E  
O C E A N



C H R I S T I N E   L E M M O N



PENMARK PUBLISHING, LLC

WHISPER FROM THE OCEAN

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For information:  
Penmark Publishing, LLC  
[www.penmarkpublishing.com](http://www.penmarkpublishing.com)

Cover art by Chris Tobias  
Interior art © Paul Moore  
Book Design by Windhaven Press, Auburn, NH

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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*This book is dedicated to my grandmother,  
Marge Tomaskovic,  
And in loving memory of my grandfather,  
Frank E. Tomaskovic (1926–2009)  
Theirs was the most precious of loves,  
binding them together as husband and wife for over sixty years!*

*My grandfather always told us grandchildren how proud he  
was of us. If I could say anything to him, I'd tell him  
I'm so proud of him, of the man he was!*



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I'm often asked how I get ideas for my writing. In attempting to answer that, I laugh and switch the subject. Articulating it is hard, but I know exactly how I get my ideas.

While biking down Sanibel Island's Periwinkle Way with my husband and children, I had a burst of inspiration and ran into a store to ask for pen and paper. Unedited and exactly as I scribbled it on the scrap paper, that burst became one of the epigraphs in *Portion of the Sea*:

*There are those times when a woman fears she is on the brink of extinction or that the dreams and wants she had for her life are endangered. It is then she must declare herself a refuge and take whatever measures to preserve her natural elements.*

When my boys were little, we were sitting near the shore and I was using coquina shells to teach my younger son his colors. As soon as one coquina would surface, my sons would have to shout its color before it shyly disappeared back into the sand. That night, I added to the first line of *Portion*:

*I was shy, too, like those coquina shells.*

Watching a sunset at Blind Pass on Captiva Island, I asked my husband if he saw what I saw, that glistening pathway atop the water, as if you could get up from the sand and walk it. I couldn't stop thinking about the pathway the sun formed on the water. A few days later I learned that mother sea turtles lay their eggs, then follow the light of the moon on the water back out to sea, never to return to their eggs. At first, I struggled with how a mother of any kind could lay her eggs only to abandon them, until one day I learned that the mother sea turtles go out to sea in order to survive! I knew right away what I wanted to write, that no matter the circumstances, when life doesn't go her way and she's feeling down and depressed, there are always those "glistening steps" a woman must take for herself—steps that lead to survival—and it became a major theme in *Portion*.

One morning, while wading in the water at Sanibel's Lighthouse Beach, my older son went too deep and I made him come back closer to the shore. "Why?" he asked, and I told him there were things out there that could hurt him. "What?" he asked, and I told him sharks and things with teeth. "What else is under the water?" he asked and continued asking, and nothing I said satisfied him until I got home, and as all of us modern mothers do when our children ask us things we cannot answer, I went to the Internet and asked "Google" the question: What is found beneath the sea? My son was satisfied with the answer and once he and his brother were fast asleep, I relied on that research and wrote the part in *Portion* where Ava's heart drops into the water:

*. . . disappearing beneath the surface, first struggling in that layer where the sun still penetrates, and soon, traveling*

*down to the dimmer twilight zone, passing by strange and bizarre fish and from there, entering the deep ocean layer where no light goes . . .*

And so on, thanks to the curiosity of my son.

I was writing one night I'll never forget, and I looked up from my computer, glanced out the window and spotted an owl on the branch of the banyan tree, looking directly in at me! The hair on my arms stood and, not wanting to move, not wanting to scare it away, I continued writing—writing him right into my scene, which became about wisdom, how Lydia wanted wisdom:

*To me, Ava is a girl with the world's largest collection of wisdom that she sought and chased after, gathered and caught, as well as inherited, and I wondered how I might go about finding some for myself—whether wisdom sits perched on the branch of some special tree, or in the mind of some older woman I might meet, I need a bit of it right now, at this very age, and not when I am old.*

During the writing of *Sand in My Eyes*, while pregnant, I would take a specific five-mile ride around the island on my “trike” daily, and continued this after my daughter was born, with her sitting on my lap. I would see a morning glory and, knowing very little about them, only that they often open for just one day and then die, I couldn't help but think that, like those morning glories, we don't know which day will be our last, so we may as well make each one spectacular, and I knew I had to write a silly little story about flowers and how the flowers all had something to say to us.

*And the daisies, I always noticed them growing alongside trash cans and ugly parking lots, and thought, even in times of ugliness, there are always glimpses of beauty. If we look for it, we'll spot it (beauty in the world).*

Ideas dropped easily as sea grape leaves from the trees—never forced—and often, on my walks or bike rides, by the time I hit Tarpon Bay Road on my way home, I didn't want more ideas because I'd have to keep them all inside me until after eight o'clock at night when the kids were asleep, and I could write.

There was a bird one day, crossing the road near Bailey's, and cars stopped. This particular day I was feeling down about my writing. A lady in the front car held her head out and, with a chuckle, said to me, "The birds have no fear!" After thinking about it my entire walk, I went home that night and, without fear, started to write. I even put a scene about a bird crossing the road, and moving forward with our life passions despite fear, into the story of *Sand in my Eyes*.

A lot of what went into *Sand in My Eyes* did come to me while in the midst of my mornings juggling three children, as well as the humdrum of life. I have notes scribbled on coloring pages, in crayon, on construction paper. I jotted ideas down on receipts—anything I could find to write on in the moment. I went through a phase where I liked to play Mozart every morning, and I would stand on my front porch with coffee in one hand and a baby on my hip, listening to Mozart and to the osprey in its nest outside my front door, thinking how important it is to live a beautiful life, to do little things, like play beautiful music and stand outside listening to the birds, and that I might not be

as professionally productive as I once was, or thought I might be, but it didn't matter to me as much as living a beautiful life and having beautiful thoughts and a beautiful state of mind. In a roundabout way, I put all of that into my novel.

I could go on and on describing how I got ideas for this paragraph, or that sentence, or why in *Sand in my Eyes* I wrote one scene to take place at Ding Darling's Red Mangrove Overlook, but I won't. I will say that my ideas do *not* come to me because I live on a barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico. They do *not* come because I live a bike ride away from the beach and have the pleasure of watching sunsets frequently, or because I live in what people the world over call "paradise."

Ideas come to me because somewhere in my life, a long time ago, I learned how to listen to silent moments, how to be receptive. I learned how to cherish moments of contemplation, reflection and prayer, and realized that time spent alone with myself doesn't have to be boring or lonely; that within me—within all of us—are creative ideas as infinite as the waves of the whispering sea.

*Sometimes ideas fall on me like little drops of water, but still, I pay attention to the small ideas, storing them away as if I had a pail on the beach for collecting things. Often, it's not until months after getting the ideas, when I am on my hands and knees in the sand, trying to build a castle, trying to write a novel, that I need those drops of water, and see at last how they are a part of the sea.*

Even when in the midst of chaos, or in the company of others, I have learned how to tap into my innermost depths. But

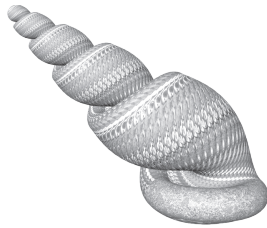
always I start with prayer! For this reason, to me, inspiration is spiritual.

And usually, if my mind is clear and free of debris, it doesn't matter where I am, or what I am doing: changing a dirty diaper; making dinner for my family; carrying groceries up the stairs to my little house on stilts; or walking on the beach. I can do it! I can spot a creative moment as clearly as one spots a seashell, picks it up and, holding it to the ear, stops and listens. And that is my secret—I stop and listen. At first I always hear what sounds like just a whisper from the ocean. But then I hear more!

When asked how I get the ideas for my writing, that is what I really want to say to my readers. That is how I feel.

QUOTES FROM

PORTION OF  
THE SEA







## EXTINCTION (SURVIVAL)

*There is a beginning, middle and end to every woman's life. But once a woman arrives at what she thinks might be her end, all she must do is reach deep down into her innermost depths and there she will find a new beginning. A woman is hardy as a perennial flower and deep as the sea.*

*There are those times when a woman fears she is on the brink of extinction or that the dreams and wants she had for her life are endangered. It is then that she must declare herself a refuge and take whatever measures to preserve her natural elements.*

*A strong woman knows what to do. She must pick up the paddles and with all her courage row out there, to her very own portion of the sea. She may have to row around in circles a bit, or dive down some, but soon she will spot them either bobbing in the water or resting on the floor of the sea, the treasures she thought she had lost for good.*

Whether a heart full of love, or a soul that once prayed or a mind that loved learning, or the body that felt better, they are still her treasures and are waiting to be reclaimed.

So many steps a woman takes in her life will not be remembered. And most of her tracks will be erased. But there will always be those certain steps she'll never regret, the ones she'll never forget—those glistening steps she took for herself.

I think of the mother sea turtles and the steps they take in the darkness that lead them out to sea and I know there are steps we can take, too, no matter how dark life gets, steps that will lead us to survival.

Even in a mud puddle one might catch a glimpse of the moon glistening across the water.

Joy is an abundant and limitless natural resource within every woman and whenever it feels scarce, all she must do is tap into it.

It isn't fair to think that soon I'll be gone from the island like a living seashell yanked off the beach. It's as wrong as picking a sea oat and bothering a resting or nesting bird and littering on the beach and there should be laws against these sorts of things, and of taking a woman away from the one place she wants to be, the place she belongs. Life is brittle. It can be going along beautifully and all of a sudden a branch breaks and everything you are sitting on collapses to the ground.

*There are certain circumstances, when put together all at the same time, that make a woman lose her mind, even those who haven't a history of mindlessness in their families.*

*It's okay for women to do that, to fall down from time to time.*

*I thought for a moment about all the impossibilities in the world. A manatee can't survive in cold water. A starfish can't move as fast as a shark. An osprey might look the part but can never turn into a bald eagle. And life can't always go the way we want.*

*It's sad when life becomes so busy that we touch our feet to the floor each morning, no longer noticing the birds singing outside our window. And birds sing everywhere—not just on some island.*