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The Story of Lucy Belmont

by Luisella Traversi Guerra

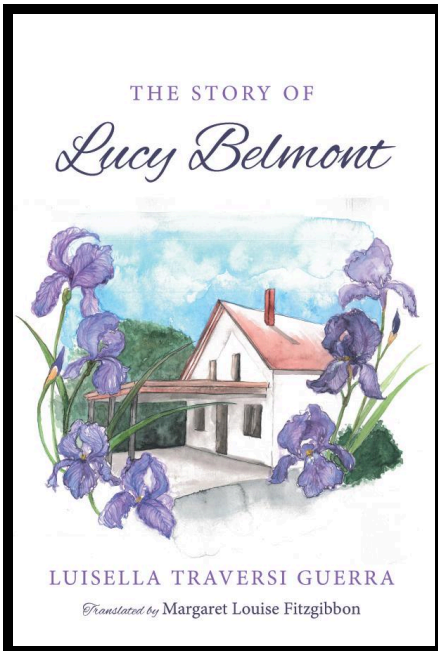
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New Title from Luisella Traversi Guerra *The Story of Lucy Belmont*

Lucy lies dead in her rocker, but her mind is alive and well! Is she really dead after all or will someone come and save her? Suspended in the mysterious void between life and death, Lucy's voice guides us through her ninety-seven years of existence in Evansville, Indiana, watching its transformation from cornfields to metropolis. Her vivacious spirit, dry humor, and dogged perseverance animate this intriguing multigenerational story. Traveling back and forth through time, visit her childhood in the lush Indiana countryside of the early 1900s, then follow her as she builds a home in her beloved Evansville. As she unfolds her story, she shares tall tales, family drama, and gentle lessons on how to live life to the fullest, whatever challenges come along. Her ruminating monologue gradually solidifies into pearls of wisdom for every occasion—how to make a marriage last, age gracefully in mind and body, and discover one's unique destiny. This is a book that soothes the soul whether one is already on the right path or still finding one's way. Rather than a self-help or religious text, this cozy Christian novel works like a puncture repair kit for battered spirits facing the quintessential problems of modern life.



Luisella Traversi Guerra is an Italian author and painter who has already published many children's books and collections of poetry. This is her first novel for an adult public. A mother of five and grandmother of 9, her writing has so far been published only in Italy and France, while her paintings are exhibited widely in America and all around the globe.



Interview with Luisella Traversi Guerra

What was the inspiration for your latest book?

Lucy's story grew out of my fascination with the American way of life, as I watched it unfolding in a special place like Evansville, Indiana. I wondered how its inhabitants had changed over time and I wanted to write a multi-generational tale that would honor those people, showing how Lucy's character is really an interweaving of the individual histories of her family and her ancestors, as well as the natural world that she was born into, and of course the fascinating place she chose to make her home. What were the pillars sustaining the social fabric, stretching across those generations who originally fled from Europe in search of dignity, freedom, and a better future? I wrote this novel when my family and I were settled in Evansville, well over 30 years ago. We had come from Italy to develop our business abroad and acquire a company. And so our American dream came to be - we discovered that the company held an extraordinary patent by Einstein which led us to make a great ecological and technological leap. Evansville also emboldened me both as a painter and a writer, in fact, I've said that Lucy's story practically wrote itself! Another inspiring factor was the wonderful work of some local 5th-grade children, who wrote a book all about their hometown as it sped toward the year 2000; Green River Road – from Cornfields to Concrete. Spurred on by their teacher Mrs. Culliver, the late historian Darrel Bigham, and Evansville journalist Tom Tuley, the children interviewed several centenarian residents and collected stories and images spanning a hundred years of life on Green River Road, where I set Lucy's story. It provided me with a wealth of treasures – letters, report cards, menus, maps, memorabilia; first-hand accounts of daily life in a world that has now all but dissipated, or been transformed into something new.

What about the mysterious house on the book cover – does it really exist?

Lucy's house really existed, I still have my original snapshot of it, and the cover illustration was drawn from it. They say that intriguing, somewhat dilapidated house was owned by a very old lady, who bravely defended it from the rampant development along Green River Road. Apparently, she'd been offered a lot of money as it was located at a strategic intersection, but as the story goes, she told the developers: "Would you ask an old turtle to give away its shell?", and she stayed in her home as long as she could.

Who is the main character, Lucy Belmont?

Lucy Belmont was born on a farm in Saint Wendel and goes to live in Evansville, where she marries, raises her family, and becomes a schoolteacher. On the surface, she seems ordinary, but she turns out to be quite unusual after all -for one thing, she lives for almost a hundred years! The common denominator in her long life is her value system, which enables her to evolve continually, becoming stronger in mind and body as the years pass. She learns how to nourish her initially fragile self-esteem, and faces her many challenges with faith and grace. Moreover, she remains a disciplined and positive thinker to her final day. Lucy shows us that life is a cognitive and evolutionary path process; a hybrid that continuously transforms what takes place around us. We could take a leaf from her book to attempt to deal with what is happening to us right now, to position ourselves correctly to ride the changes, and to assimilate them.

In Lucy's father, Bernard, we see the experience of European immigrants in America more than a century ago. What does the American dream mean to you?

Mine was the generation of the 60s, driven by new music, the values of freedom and democracy, by futuristic innovation and optimism. My husband and I imagined anything was possible in the United States. Our American dreams came true with the discoveries we made in Evansville, and again when I had the courage to emerge more as an artist and writer there, and to spread my creative wings without the fear of being crushed by criticism.

Speaking of dreams, this story has a very picturesque style – if it became a movie what would your dream cast be?

It is my habit, when I write, to imagine scenes visually. This book is reminiscent of *The Bridges of Madison County*, and Lucy is a mom and housewife, so I have always dreamed of her being played by Meryl Streep! If Marcello Mastroianni were still alive, he would be perfect as Don and ... a French actor for Bernard, like Guillaume Canet, someone with gentle, smiling eyes.

What subjects do you find yourself returning to in your writing, and why?

I am in love with nature, we are in it and of it! The botanical world fascinates me; trees emit sounds, they work with each other, they can even move, and make room for new shoots, and so on. Nature's immense beauty is my teacher. I also often write about heavy topics lightly because, as Federico Faggin says, "the line between life and death is so thin, close, and real, that we needn't fear it." The time is coming when we will realize that matter is energy, that we are nature and energy. We will be amazed by what emerges in these incredible scientific-spiritual areas.

This book has been praised by very diverse figures here in the USA – from the physicist Federico Faggin you mentioned to the pioneering educator Alfonso Montuori. Who do you write for? What will the reader find in this story?

I've had the joy of meeting important people who shared much wisdom with me, and my work and family are my laboratory, where I experiment and uncover things to write about. I write to divulge that knowledge to anyone who senses life's preciousness and strives to comprehend it.

Why did you wait more than two decades to publish *The Story of Lucy Belmont*?

After several attempts, I finally found a person who would translate the novel with passion and who understood the values expressed in it, adding period research and local history, thus amplifying the text and narration. Moreover, the world is going through a real epochal crisis right now, and as a result, the spiritual foundations on which we have built our wonderful modern civilization are in serious peril. I hope that this little book will help awaken the hearts of those who are nostalgic for the values of our past and stir a desire to preserve whatever we can.

An Excerpt from *The Story of Lucy Belmont*

My name is Lucy Belmont, and once upon a time I was a schoolteacher. I'm sorry if I'm repeating myself or talking out of turn. I'm not sure why, but I want you to know that I lived decently and kept up appearances right to the very last moment, in spite of everything. My thoughts come and go now, drifting gently like clouds, then suddenly all those leopard leaves start leaping about in my draughty dappled mind. What am I saying? Are all these rustling syllables my own or am I just reciting something? I've always kept my verses to myself, until now. I did like being around people, and I believed in being generous with my time, but I'm no stranger to solitude. Perhaps I should more rightly say it didn't much bother me until now, not even as a little girl, deep in the wilds of Saint Wendel where I was born.

How I loved the squirrels that played in the trees around my house, and the spotted turtles struggling through the long, wet grass. I loved the wide rivers that flowed through the vast green farmlands, the red and iridescent dusks – the way that hefty evening sun would somehow slip so deftly into undulating argentine waters of the Ohio. I loved the lofty trees reaching up into the clear blue, the lone clouds sailing fast and unfettered in the infinite space above. I was fascinated, and frightened, by the massive storms that came on like stampeding buffalo, threatening disaster. And of course, I loved the delicate wildflowers that magically appeared every May, sprinkling a thousand pretty colors over the fields and along the lanes. I always felt an odd stirring inside me when I saw the ducks in flight, high above me. It was as if their beating wings and hoarse, familiar cries were towing the coming season into being through sheer force, dragging it over my head like a blanket.

Born in such a place, it was natural for me to live in harmony with the changing seasons and their fine parade of colors, scents, and emotions. The sudden release of spring, opening in wonderment, the riotous dancing pulse of summer in the cornfields, the blazing spectacle of the fall foliage. Then came winter, which I loved most because it came so powerfully, imposing the slow steps and ponderous silence of deep snow. I loved to gaze out across the unbroken fields, the white horizon dissolving into the whiter sky, just breathing, and letting that serenity soak into me after one of life's unavoidable storms had passed. How could anyone feel lonely?

I was born on a farm, not much more than a double log cabin and a barn with some livestock near the low rolling hills of Saint Wendel ... have I said that already? Should I tell you about it? We were surrounded by woods of course. I remember like yesterday how my brothers and I used to play among the wide oaks, how we made up secret names for each of them, how we'd pretend we were lost and then ask them to point the way back to the cabin with their branches. Naturally, we were poor, but we didn't have any idea about that and ours was just like all the neighboring farmsteads, no worse, no better. As a matter of fact some backwoods folk didn't even have anything to farm and just got by on game and corndodgers. We wanted for nothing. Our generous land easily contented our little hearts and bellies, though it slowly wore out our parents and grandparents.

Praise for *The Story of Lucy Belmont*

“Luisella Traversi Guerra is a remarkable human being. Her story and her achievements are a testament to her creativity. Now we find in her charming, beautifully written fiction another indication of the depth of her imagination, her vision of life, and her invitation to see the world anew.”

—Alfonso Montuori, professor, California Institute of Integral Studies,
and founder, Center for Creative Futures

“Luisella Traversi Guerra is an artist, a writer, and a manager with highly ethical values, for she also led and successfully implemented an enlightened management philosophy in her husband’s company after his death. A couple of decades ago, Traversi Guerra wrote a novel during her protracted stay in Evansville, Indiana. This lovely novel will delight its readers for its fresh look at American life through the eyes and heart of a keen Italian observer.”

—Federico Faggin, author of
Silicon: From the Invention of the Microprocessor to the New Science of Consciousness

“Lucy Belmont took me on a delightful trip back to my days as a kid, growing up in the 1940s and 1950s in Evansville, Indiana. She took me back to the old Majestic Theatre, a 1920s vaudeville theater which was converted to a downtown movie house, one of the few places you could experience air conditioning at the time; to Serval , a factory where my father worked on the assembly line for over 20 years and sank into a deep depression when it shut down; to the Washington Square Mall, the first enclosed mall in that part of the country; to The Evansville Courier, the daily morning newspaper which years later I would serve as editor; and certainly, to Green River Road. Only a mile or so from my boyhood home at 18 N. Boeke, Green River Road was a one-time cornfield which became a thriving shopping strip and a straight stretch of pavement which we teenagers could “drag” in our jalopies on Friday nights.

—Tom Tuley, artist and writer,
retired editor of *The Evansville Press* and *The Evansville Courier*

