

## Afterword

I wrote a lot of this book on the islands that are home to me, where much of my family lives. My favorite writing haven is the smallest island, a place of frigate birds, a single store, and a population of 150 souls, none faint of heart. One morning, as the sun rose over the sea grape trees and I sat down to write, I got a call from my 85-year-old second mom, Suzy.

*The wind!* She breathed into the phone. *It's a beautiful wind. Can you come over for a sail?*

There is no saying no to Suzy, not really, and I hopped on a bicycle to ride down the quiet road toward her house, startling a night heron on the way.

When I arrived, Suzy was standing outside in a hot pink bathing suit and yellow latex kitchen gloves. *Do you like my sailing gloves?*, she laughed, and we made our way slowly over the pocky sand to the dock. Tied to the dock and floating several feet beneath it was the sunfish boat we would take. I looked for a way Suzy could get in without bending her knees and heard a thump. She had dropped herself down on the dock and was scooting on her behind toward the boat.

Once on our way, Suzy wrapped the mast line around her kitchen glove, stared in peaceful concentration at the sail, and caught the wind. With a low chuckle, she told me she hoped I wasn't concerned when she scooted on her behind: She had had to do a lot of scooting when she had polio at 12, and she was good at it. Then, as we sailed, Suzy alternately prayed, cooed, and cursed the sail, keeping it a shallow bowl of light and air. At one point, I made a mistake, and Suzy and I laughed, real belly laughing, before we moved on.

When we finished, we walked up the sand to my bicycle, so that I could get back to writing. Suzy asked a passing question about the book, and I said: *I'm writing about how schools and tests don't capture what writing is ... they tell people they are dumb, or not good writers, when writing, and writers, are a lot more than that.*

Suzy became very still then, her expression serious. *Those tests told me I was an idiot*, she said, her tone quiet and bitter.

After a long moment, she went on. *I was so afraid my kids would inherit something from me, that they wouldn't be smart. I wasn't good at*

*tests. Said I was an idiot.* I never knew this about Suzy, only that she is a force on the islands, known for successfully running businesses, editing books that document island history and cuisine, and generally getting her way.

Shame on those tests, for never capturing a fraction of Suzy's ability. Shame on us, if we don't learn something different.