



The Leap over the Canal

by Devon Ellington

As soon as I cross the Sagamore Bridge onto the Cape, I know I'm home.

I felt that way for years before I actually moved here. I can barely remember a time I didn't want to live here.

I believe we can have strong connections to certain places, and the Cape was a place I felt I belonged for many years. But it's a long commute to Broadway, and while I worked on Broadway, I had to live near enough to commute. Eight shows a week/nights/weekends/holidays means one has to live a reasonable travel distance.

I finally hit a point, working two full-time jobs (theatre and writing) where I felt like I had a Volkswagen strapped to each foot, barreling down the highway, and they were about to take different exits. I had to make a decision.

I chose writing.

I chose the Cape.

Looking out the window at grass and trees makes a big difference when I write. Instead of a tiny desk in a corner of a cramped NY apartment, I have an entire room for books and writing with beautiful natural light. I live on a small street with only seven houses on it.

I can watch neighbors walk their dogs or work in the garden (and get inspired). The cats can watch the murder of seven crows who visit the front yard every morning, bringing news, and who warn me when the Fed Ex truck's turned into the street to drop off my next assignment or next order of plants.

My black kitten can watch, fascinated, as the black Maine Coon five times her size saunters across the street to doze under our rose bushes. The neighborhood dogs, whom I've nicknamed "The Hounds of the Baskervilles," take up the cry when sirens roar past.

I can open the windows in summer, letting a breeze blow through the house. I can take my work and sit on the covered deck in nice weather, watching the antics of the backyard wildlife, or just look at the flower, herb, and vegetable beds I'm learning to tend.

I can walk Craigville Beach or Sandy Hook or the National Seashore or even go all the way down to Race Point, one of my favorite places as a child. I can walk Ashumet Holly Sanctuary (now that I've become obsessed with hollies) or Long Pasture or Skunknet.

It's quite different from living one block from Times Square, where plants on the windowsill died from overexposure to the bus fumes from Port Authority, and there was construction noise 24/7.

Writers often joke about how they're staring at the wall, and someone asks, "What are you doing?" and the reply is, "Working." But it's true.

We need mental space to form our stories. Then, of course, we have to apply butt to chair and write them, or all that percolation time is just another procrastination tool. "Walking and muttering" is a big part of the process.

On the Cape, there are many beautiful places in which to walk and mutter. Not only has my productivity increased on the quantity side of the scale, the quality is better.

And there's so much to do!

Yoga on the beach in Chatham, pottery classes at various studios (still looking for a class that focuses on slab and pinch pot rather than wheel, but I'll find it, I'm sure), a wealth of meditation groups, readings and lectures and music and theatre and... it goes on and on.

I could pack every single day, from dawn to dusk and beyond, with fun things to do that have nothing to do with writing.

I have to pick and choose. I was lucky enough to find the National Marine Life Center in Buzzards Bay before I relocated. I was enchanted by their facility, and in awe of the passion of the staff. Being local, I can now regularly pitch in to help on their projects, and I'm more in awe of them than ever.

I'm learning to garden, and working with a local organization that maintains public space in my community. I found yoga and meditation spaces that make me feel welcome. I plan to train more intensely in the use of medicinal herbs, building on my years of work in that area with more formal training.

I learn about local flora and fauna at Mass Audubon events, and the Cape Cod Writers Center is one of the most dynamic, inspiring, and intelligent groups of people I've had the luck to encounter. I have lovely neighbors, and we all watch out for each other, without messing in each other's business. I may have "washed ashore" here, but I'm finding a warm welcome.

Since setting is such an important part of my work (I teach a class called "Setting as Character"), more of the pieces I write are now set here. I'm still finishing off a roster of projects whose primary location is New York, but the dynamic shifts. Many of my characters visited the Cape in previous work, and had that perspective; now more of them are living here.

I'm stretching geography and making up towns to fit within the actual boundaries in order to give me the flexibility I need in fiction, but I'm also using real locations as touchstones. As I learn the difference in emotional geography between visiting the Cape and living on it, so do my characters.



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My novel ASSUMPTION OF RIGHT takes place mostly in New York; but when Morag, my protagonist, needs to heal, she comes to the Cape, to the house her family has cherished for years.

The two primary protagonists in the Jain Lazarus Adventures live in Massachusetts, and the second book in the series, OLD-FASHIONED DETECTIVE WORK, takes place mostly off the shores of Cape Cod and the North Shore.

Several of my characters come here to make a fresh start, much as I did. All of us discover that we love living here even more than visiting.



Devon Ellington is a full-time writer, publishing under a half a dozen names in both fiction and nonfiction. HEX BREAKER, the first Jain Lazarus Adventure, will be released by [Solstice Publishing](#) later this year.

Her romantic suspense novel, ASSUMPTION OF RIGHT (as Annabel Aidan), was released last summer from Champagne Books, and is available both digitally and in print.

She writes articles, short stories, business-related materials, and is included in several anthologies. Her plays are produced in New York, London, Edinburgh, and Australia. She teaches writing regularly both online and in person.

Visit her blog on the writing life, [Ink in My Coffee](#), and her main website: www.devonellingtonwork.com