

from *Open Roads*, July 2008, by Becky Allen

*"Words that arise with coherence and beauty on the page, that's the holy mystery I serve. Like the nuns devoted to God, on my best days writing lets me serve something larger than myself: human self-expression that occasionally touches someone else's heart and brings us closer together." Barbara Stahura*

In her first collection of personal essays titled "What I Thought I Knew," Barbara Stahura raises the bar for essay writers and readers alike. Her voice is clear, her writing clean and tight, and downright elegant. Stahura has years of interview experience with the likes of Deepak Chopra, Wayne Dyer, Don Miguel Ruiz, Louise Hay, biologist Bruce Lipton, and artist Valarie James (to name but a few.) She's no stranger to provocative questions and digging deep for answers.

It appears as though Stahura knows how to use those same tools to explore her own psyche and life experiences, deftly crafting pieces in which she generously shares her insights, her feelings, and her transformational shifts. An excellent essay lays track for the reader to appreciate from an observer point of view as well as inspiring the reader to self-exploration. These are excellent essays. The light Stahura shines on her interior processes shines through her work. Regardless of the genre, when a writer risks the deep honesty Stahura works from, an authentic connection is bound to happen.

Here's the bottom line: when I started reading this book I just didn't want to stop. Whether Stahura is describing her relationship with her father, her Catholic school experience, her quantum leap from certain death looming in the corporate world to finding her soul's calling, or the "tectonic" shift in her life when beloved husband Ken suffered severe brain trauma from a hit-and-run motorcycle accident, she never leaves her reader. We may not have covered the literal territories she describes, but we've all experienced the same very human emotions. She writes for herself and she writes for us; the result is our joining in a deeply satisfying seamless encounter.

In her own words: "Sometimes, I wake up early in my grown-up bed, windows open around it, and hear the distant whistles of trains. It is then I remember that little girl who did not yet know the most important thing her grown-up self would learn: Life is all about choices. Learning how to change your mind, when the moment is right, is often the best gift you can give yourself."

The second best gift you can give yourself is this book.