

Preface for CDP

When I met Suzanne Nielsen in a fiction writing class, I knew that she was very, very cool. She was the one who brought plastic spiders and jack-o-lantern cookies to class on her favorite holiday, Halloween. Doris Day made unapologetic appearances in the draft of her novel in progress. The Wisconsin Dells showed up in that manuscript, too, several years before they surfaced again in "Tommy Bartlett: When You Die You to the Dells." Suzanne was cool all right, she liked spooky things, so I shouldn't have been surprised when dead people began to populate her writing. Dead people, very, very cool ones.

Suzanne has a knack for finding these wandering souls in unexpected places. There are, of course, the literary folks from Hart Crane to Edgar Lee Masters, who wrote about some cool dead people of his own, not to mention Mary Shelley and Vachel Lindsay. But Suzanne Nielsen's literary queendom is a very democratic place. You can also find Taylor Caldwell and Grace Matalious.

With a knack for seeing dead people in her everyday life, she invites movie stars and musicians, denizens of Tinsel Town like Marie Dressler and Chuck Jones, revealing their cool and quirky secret lives. Suzanne moves from listening to the radio to a meditation on "The Percussion Artistry of Chick Webb" as spirits flit through her everyday life. Like Doug Henning, she sees "Magic in the Air."

As we read her essays, we begin to see it, too, all around us. So hang on, and enjoy the journey.

---Donna Blacker