

On April 1, 1948 in Boston, Massachusetts, Eve was born to the parents of Nellie and Victor Bravman. Her mother suffered from a mental illness so it was Eve's father, Victor, who really had an impact on her life as a poet. Victor was both a fabric cutter and an artist and it was he who introduced Eve to the arts by taking her frequently to museums when she was just a child. When Eve was about seven years old, her father took her to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston where she first saw Renoir's painting of Suzanne Valadon. Her father said that Suzanne was a "model with a name" because most models at that time were anonymous whereas Valadon was well known as an artist.

As time passed by, Eve never forgot the image of Suzanne. In doing so, Eve decided that she wanted to research more about the woman in the famous painting. She found out that Suzanne had grown up struggling with finances, had a son when she was nineteen, married twice and she was always very passionate and fond of art. Eve was amazed to find that Suzanne, the woman who captivated Eve's full interest after just one look, had lived a life that closely paralleled her own. This is what really inspired Eve to write a whole chapbook after Suzanne Valadon called *Dear Suzanne*.

Eve grew up in a family with little money in Dorchester, MA where she attended the local Dorchester schools. During the summertime when she was in about fourth or fifth grade, Eve worked at the Dorchester library. She found that it was a not only a great learning experience but also motivated and encouraged her to read. Later on when Eve was thirteen years old, her family decided to move to Canton, MA. In 1965, Eve graduated from Canton High School and she continued her education at Quincy Junior College (currently recognized as Quincy College). However, Eve was unable to complete

her college degree. Rather, at the age of nineteen, she married and changed her name to Eve Sjostedt. On January 8, 1968, she gave birth to her son Colin Sjostedt.

Later on, Eve divorced from her husband and went on welfare for thirteen years. She also decided that she wanted to change her last name and in doing so, Eve changed her last name to Rifkah which means Eve in Hebrew. She continued on by taking various jobs. Eve tried to become a computer test technician but it did not work out so she landed a job as a free-lance reporter at the Montachusset Telegram & Gazette. As a reporter for ten years, Eve was able to broaden her horizons and her interest in writing grew. Eve was also a part-time compositor for seventeen years.

As her pursuit for writing continued, Eve joined the John Hodgen's writing workshop where she completed the optional assignments and worked extensively on her writing for nine to ten years. Then, in 1998, Eve published her first poem in a literary journal called *Discovery* which is a journal written in brail.

Eve's passion for history led her to begin her writing career by composing poems in what is known as documentary poetry. This has directed her to learn about the historic leper colony known as Penikese Island just off of Cape Cod. Eve had watched a PBS program that was about Penikese Island and how it was used as a leper colony. A leper colony generally means that people who were diagnosed with leprosy were sent off to an island away from everyone else. The island contained people from different countries, religions, and backgrounds. As she discovered this information, Eve quickly related this phenomenon to the idea of being isolated and an outsider. By forcing people to move to the island due to a disease they had created the concept that a leper is an outcast to society. This led Eve to read the book *Island of Hope* by T. Buckley in which it gave a

broad understanding of the account of the leper colony, Penikese Island. She was also able to encounter the medical reports of the doctor, Dr. Parker, who treated the patients on the island and the scrapbook his wife had made. After her thorough research, Eve was able to find the names and biographies of the actual patient that lived on the island. In doing so, Eve has written two chapbooks of poems on the disease of leprosy and Penikese Island known as *At the Leprosarium* and *Outcasts*.

As Eve became more involved with her writing, she joined and became a board member of the Worcester County Poetry Association. Through her hunt for literature and writing, Eve attended many poetry readings and was able to meet her current husband, Michael Milligan, who is also a poet. In 1998, both Eve and Michael decided they wanted to create an organization that focused on education and local poets; thus, they formed a non-profit literary association known as Poetry Oasis, Inc. This organization became the stepping stone to the literary journal *Diner*. *Diner* was established in 2001 in which Eve was the editor and Abby Millage was the co-editor. The journal was very successful in which there were 12 issues were produced over a seven year period. During that time, Eve also decided that she would like to go back to school and earn her degree. She applied to the MFA program at Vermont College and was accepted. In 2002, Eve graduated from Vermont College with a MFA.

Eve currently lives in Worcester, MA and is a professor at Fitchburg State College. She has previously taught at Worcester State College and at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

Sources:

Glixman, Elizabeth. "An Interview with Eve Rifkah." Eclectica Magazine.

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Eve Rifkah