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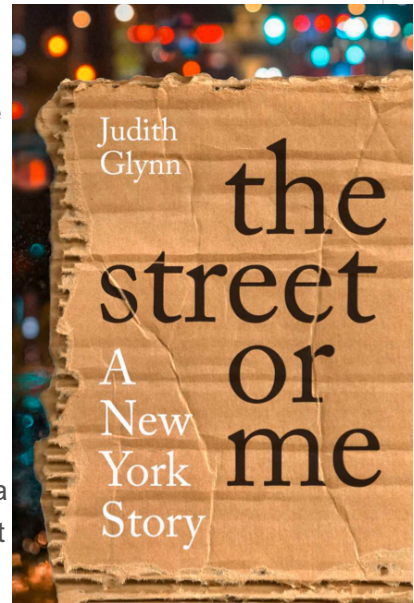


Waiting list

- **Romance-contemp.**(5073) -- 77
- **Romance-erotic** (3996) -- 60
- **Thrillers** (6455) -- 38
- **Young adult** (5147) -- 33
- **Romance-suspense**(4306) -- 28
- **Mysteries** (7438) -- 30
- **Science fiction** (5957) -- 27
- **Romance-paranormal**(3983) -- 26
- **Fantasy-epic** (4290) --26
- **Historical fiction** (7100) -- 24
- **Romance-historical**(4244) -- 21
- **Literary fiction** (6778) -- 17
- **Children/middle grade**(1873) - 16
- **Women's fiction** (5580) -- 15
- **Fantasy-urban** (3797) -- 13

The Fussy Newsletter

It was 1989 when Judith Glynn first noticed Michelle Browning as the short, drunk homeless woman raging at the security guards at the Hearst Building in Midtown Manhattan. There was something about Michelle that stuck with Judith, a struggling, divorced woman raising a child in a 400-square foot studio in Hell's Kitchen.



Everyone else was all too willing to forget Michelle, which is what makes Judith's memoir "The Street or Me: A New York Story" both remarkable and, at the same time, a little sad that it's remarkable. The United States may be one of the most charitable nations on the planet, but when it comes to the homeless we look the other way — even now despite the scientific research that shows alcoholism and addiction is a disease and not a lifestyle choice. The reality is we are all one bad gene away from an uncontrollable downward spiral that could destroy our lives.

Judith and I talk about her decision to help Michelle, the challenges of memoir writing, and why it sat on a shelf for 20 years before she finally got the courage to publish it.

- **Biography/memoir**(5732) -- 11
- **Mystery-cozy** (3361) -- 10
- **Suspense** (4898) -- 8
- **Horror** (2921) -- 8
- **Religious fiction** (1896) -- 7
- **Romance-western**(1547) -- 6
- **Mystery-female sleuths** (3843) -- 5
- **Action-adventure**(3699) -- 4
- **Police procedural**(3963) -- 4
- **Health and diet** (2616) -- 3
- **Romance comedy**(3964) -- 3
- **Fantasy/steampunk**(4306) -- 3
- **Business** (1753) -- 3
- **Inspirational/devotional**(2585) -- 2
- **Humor** (5526) -- 2
- **How-to** (2825) -- 1
- **African-American / multicultural** (1229)-- 1
- **Mystery-British Detective** (4469) -- 1
- **General nonfiction**(2962) -- 2
- **Gay/lesbian** (1246) -- 2
- **Cooking and food**(3680) -- 1
- **History** (4617) -- 0
- **Science** (2611) -- 0
- **Sports** (762) -- 0
- **Tech** (2180) -- 0

(Number of subscribers in parenthesis.
Subscriber data from June 29.)

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10

Subscribers

14,379

JEFFREY: Let's talk first about your decision to help Michelle. New York is a city with many, many homeless people. You probably see someone who is homeless all the time. What was the thing that made you stop to talk to her?

JUDITH: I'm sure I passed her many times in my Hell's Kitchen neighborhood and without a glance. One day, however, she was excessively disruptive outside the Hearst Building near my building. I stopped to watch the spectacle. I noticed she was pretty, probably in her thirties, white and had a foreign accent. She was also half-animal, half-woman by then and I'd learn later she'd been on the streets for six years. Once noticed, I'd find myself spying on her when I'd leave my apartment. My guess is we were destined to meet but curiosity began it for me. She was different than most homeless I'd seen. (Right: Michelle, 1991.)



JEFFREY: This isn't a 28-day-and-done process, either, where everything is all wonderful and happy after a month. It's a long, hard, frustrating battle -- two years in your case. What made you stick with it? What made Michelle stick with it?

JUDITH: After our first hello, my involvement with Michelle grew incrementally. I loved her smile when I'd approach her on the sidewalk. Sometimes I'd buy her food; sometimes I'd bring clothing. I'd tell her stories about my family and she'd tell me hers. Tragically, she was a former beauty queen from a small town in Italy before coming to America. Her family did not know about her homeless condition. I met her husband, also homeless, and the gang they hung out with. In an



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odd way, Michelle and I became good friends. She trusted me because I never lied to her; never let her down and I consistently talked to her about dying with dignity and not in the gutter whenever she'd tell me she wouldn't make it through the winter. We grew to love one another, which kept her redemption alive for both of us. (Right: Michelle, 1978.)

JEFFREY: The biggest temptation would be to bring the person home -- give them shelter, provide them food. But you didn't do that. Why?

JUDITH: Bringing Michelle into my home was not going to happen as long as she was a street person, drunk and perhaps carrying lice. Would she get violent? She never asked to come home with me either. We both knew that wouldn't happen. I believed, deeply, that action was only a Band-Aid. What would I do after she slept in a warm bed and ate a hot meal? Send her back to the street in the morning? To me, that was cruelty. She'd have to earn the right to come into my home.

JEFFREY: At one point you called upon one of your sons, Dean Albanese (right), who lives in Rhode Island, to come to New York to help you with Michelle. Why did you do that?



JUDITH: My street life with Michelle grew incrementally; rescuing a homeless woman wasn't something I had planned. At the final stages of her rescue and return to Italy and as Michelle's addiction pulled her back and forth with a decision to go home and with me weary of the responsibility and the long trip with her, I asked Dean to help. He didn't hesitate and came to the city about a week before we departed. Without him, I doubt the trip would have been successful. Michelle was beaten two days before departure. Dean sat at her bedside. He guided her

through the airport and onto the plane, which were mammoth acts of kindness and tact. He was present at the reunion in Italy and, by then, a mainstay with my relationship with Michelle. And at 23, I think his actions were remarkably brave and effective.

JEFFREY: So how long afterwards was it before you decided this would make a good memoir?

JUDITH: It was difficult for most people to comprehend my odd, yet wonderful, friendship with a homeless person so I wrote it as it happened and for my eyes only. Mainly it was for me to release the story. I never planned to write a memoir about it, although I did write a short article for the Providence Journal since one of my sons from Rhode Island came to NYC to help me take Michelle home.

JEFFREY: Why did you decide to put the manuscript away in a box?

JUDITH: Befriending Michelle wasn't easy. It was often dangerous and fraught with her failure to stop drinking. After I succeeded in getting her off the street and home to her family, I went back to writing freelance travel and working on my many eclectic projects in NYC. I'd never written a book and the long-term investment didn't interest me. Also, I'd grown weary and tired of the Michelle saga. The so-called manuscript was put in a box and in a closet along with photos and letters between Michelle and me. It stayed there for 20 years. (Right: Michelle, 1995.)



JEFFREY: And what was the thing that made you dust it off and self-publish it?

JUDITH: Several years ago, I wrote my first book, a novel

called "A Collector of Affections: Tales from a Woman's Heart," based on a few true events in my life. I enjoyed the challenge of a longer work but was not prepared for the loss I felt when I released the book.

Searching for a new topic, I went to the closet and looked at old papers, finding the Michelle manuscript. When I read it, it made me weep, which told me the story was as fresh and powerful that day as when I wrote it. I enrolled in Charles Salzberg's non-fiction workshops in New York City and polished it off with classmate critiques. I did query several agents with mild success. But I couldn't sit around waiting for answers, plus a longer word count was required. Since I'd already self-published my novel and knew the ropes, I decided to go that route again. It's expensive, for sure, but I own all rights so the profits are better.

JEFFREY: How did you go about filling in the blanks after 20 years? Did you go back to double-check details to make sure your memory was accurate?

JUDITH: My original manuscript was as complete as it could be but it didn't have "me" in it. It was a journalistic approach to what I experienced. Dialogue was fresh and raw because I wrote it as it happened. The graphic scenes were authentic and filled with emotion because they, too, were written a day or so after they occurred. Chapter Three is an intense read since it involves me getting off my couch one winter evening to look for Michelle. I found her at a fifth-floor walkup, drunk and accusing the bizarre man who let her stay in his apartment periodically of stealing her money to pay whores. At one point he walked around the kitchen wearing a cape and a grotesque Batman full mask. Those facts didn't need double-checks. The story is remarkably fresh in my mind.

But I'd lost touch with Michelle when she married an

American serviceman, returned to the States and he sent her back to Italy, drunk again. She stopped writing to me, and I became busy with my own life. When I dusted off the manuscript and had not communicated with her for years, I assumed her death. To be sure, I asked several friends who spoke Italian to contact her family before I made our story public. They confirmed her death in Italy in 1998.

JEFFREY: Writing a memoir is very different than writing a novel. What's the great challenge in writing a compelling memoir?

JUDITH: The biggest challenge was what to put in about myself. How I dealt with Michelle, our dialogue and what we experienced was easy. My NYC workshop classmates wanted more about me. Why did I do this extraordinary deed when the majority of people step over or walk by the homeless. I struggled with that question and couldn't find an exact answer.

Finally, I left it up to the reader to decide for me, which meant I had to put in more details about my life -- alcoholic father who I saw in the gutter; struggles with my own life to change it into a successful one; certainly a love for women and helping them move forward is evident in my book. I have tenacity and it shows. One difficult chapter was the one about my mother, a woman who grew to dislike me at a visceral level. I think she was jealous of the lifestyle I chose and she did not enjoy, mainly due to her strong religious beliefs and the era she lived in. We had a horrendous telephone fight about my helping Michelle. So bad it severed our mother-daughter relationship for many years. That part was hard to put in the memoir but it needed to go in.

JEFFREY: Michelle's story, sadly, did not ultimately have a happy ending. Did you have any regrets, any anger when she did eventually relapse to the point it

took her life? And did your own personal journey and growth make that any easier to handle?

JUDITH: Nothing about knowing Michelle was a negative or a downer. She tried and I tried to overcome her addiction. For a long time, we both won. I never felt true lasting anger with Michelle. She disappointed me and got my temper riled up but deep anger was never there.

We had a good friendship on the streets of NYC. We loved one another, that was a positive. Ultimately, I was a conduit to return her dignity and her to her family in Italy. Once that was complete, my exit was obvious except for letter writing and phone calls.

I'm like many people who do a good deed and say they got more out of the act than the person they helped. Michelle, at her lowest point, showed me the strong survival skills we all possess. She made me fearless, too. She had a deep love of God, despite her plight. She made me stronger and more resilient than I was when I met her. Our legacy has passed down to my children and now my oldest grandchildren who read "The Street or Me." The message is never give up; watch your intake of drugs and/or alcohol should they be offered and you are your brother's keeper, sometimes.

From a social aspect, I hope my reader comes away with a different perspective of that homeless person they pass. A simple hello could lead to a street friendship and beyond. Why let anyone die in the gutter? Dying with dignity is the better choice.

You can visit Judith's website [here](#) and you really should buy a copy of "The Street or Me" [here](#). It's an amazing book.