



**2008 My Next Chapter First Prize Winner
Sheila Raeschild**

"The Next Chapter"

The next chapter begins with an old photograph of a young girl, maybe ten, standing next to her shiny new red Schwinn bike. She has braids on each side of her goofy smiling face. She is me.

The next chapter time travels from that girl to the woman I am now. I hold that photograph in my seventy year old hands. I envision the next chapter as a weaving of three interlinked strands just like her braids.

The first strand concentrates on aspects of my INTERNAL LIFE with a focus on wide-ranging reading and the delight of spiritual explorations.

The second strand gives attention to the EXTERNAL LIFE including a variety of social connections with family and friends, contributions to the community's needs, and also attention to my own physical existence with delight in walking and other forms of exercise.

The third strand, though, is the one that links and unites the others and that is WORK. By work I mean whatever it is that one chooses to do in order to make life a meaningful whole. For me, it is writing -poems, short stories, novels, journals, and bits and pieces of memories crafted into new patterns. I consider my writing to be a means of expressing and sharing the vision of how I see the world that is and the world that might be including both its possible splendor and its inevitable pain.

In the next chapter of the book of my life I see a woman walking ahead of me on an unknown path. She has a lovely silver braid down her back. She is me. I can't wait to see what it is that she sees, to go wherever it is that she is going, to do what new things she is about to do.

I can't wait to read the next chapter.