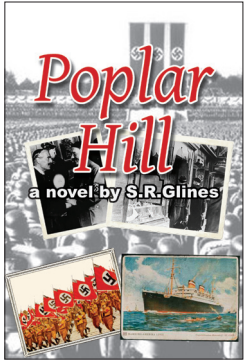


## Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

**Poplar Hill**, a novel by S. R. Glines (105,000 words)



This work began as a non-fiction biography of a remarkable woman named Catherine Van Arnum Stevenson. Through research I discovered that many of Kitty Stevenson's stories were better than those that history recorded while in other cases what history recorded was far more dramatic. In writing this novel I always chose the livelier of the two alternatives. The results are funny, touching and informative.

*Poplar Hill* contains the eccentric characters found only in the rural Canadian Maritime Provinces and superbly illustrated in "*The Shipping News*" by Annie Proulx, the piercing exploration of impending death found in "*Tinkers*" by Paul Harding and all the pre-war excitement and decadence only hinted at in the musical "*Cabaret*."

Two parallel stories take place.

The rural hamlet of Poplar Hill, Nova Scotia, Canada is in the middle of the biggest ice storm in a century and Kitty Stevenson is having a near fatal heart attack. Her friends and neighbors mount an effort to save her. As she wends her way through the medical system, sliding down the "slippery slope," Kitty decides that as long as she has a story to tell she won't die, so she tells the dramatic stories of her life to her best friend and former neighbor Barb. Meanwhile, Mandy Betts, a born-again Christian missionary haunts Kitty with bible thumping ambushes and a never ending stream of Pentecostal preachers bent on a last minute conversion. On her death bed Kitty delivers a parting shot aimed at over zealous preachers everywhere.

Kitty's family were members of the New York City social and financial aristocracy. There was the house near Columbus Circle next to Teddy Roosevelt's, the house in Newport, the one in Bar Harbor and, of course, the one in New Canaan, Connecticut. When Kitty was six she was put in an austere French convent school where she grew up speaking French. Later, The Great Depression impoverished the family to the point where Kitty was told to leave the convent and find her own way home to New Canaan. She arrived on Thanksgiving Day 1933 to an empty mansion with her mother and nanny in the kitchen trying, for the first time in their lives, to cook a turkey. After public high school, Kitty went to Nazi Germany to study opera and spend the money her father had invested in Germany after World War One. Hitler had blocked the Mark. She lived the *Cabaret* lifestyle, she was Sally Bowles but with money. She photographed the Dachau concentration camp as she bicycled past and met Hitler on the eve of "*Kristallnacht*." Later, as thugs broke the windows of Jewish shops, she took in and protected her Jewish neighbors. As one crisis followed another, she found herself on a Jewish refugee boat heading to Palestine, in a Swiss chalet surrounded by the Swiss Army and on a train to Vienna during the Austrian *Anschluss*. Eventually she escaped Germany, just days before Hitler invaded Poland, arriving in New York on a German ship that had been ordered back to Germany by Hitler. Only Kitty's quick thinking convinced the ship's Captain to continue on to New York. The onslaught of the war and Kitty's escape from Germany coincides with her life crisis and it's a race to the end.