

# The Word Weaver

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A newsletter for writers and editors  
produced by  
The Writers' Circle of Durham Region  
December/January 2003/04 Vol. 9 No. 5

## Going Round in Circles

By Fred Ford

Oddly enough, great writers are the last things you need to form a successful writing group. What you really need are good critics.

Without fair, perceptive and honest criticism, you don't have a writing group: you have a mutual admiration society. You may as well keep to the well-intentioned, if not usually very helpful comments of friends and family.

It doesn't matter if your membership ranges from beginners to published, award-winning writers, because the goal is to increase everyone's literary achievement. Which means the other thing your group needs are people responsive to criticism. That's not always so easy to find.

So how do you go about forming your own writing group?

As they say in real estate, only three things are important. Location. Location. Location. Where you choose to meet will affect the flavour of your group, and its consequent success. You have two choices: a public meeting place, or the homes of your members.

Public meetings can be held at community centres, libraries, church basements, or in the back rooms of pubs. They all work. Unfortunately, public facilities often charge for their use, and while modest dues aren't out of place, you don't want to discourage membership because your group is too expensive.

I strongly recommend against members' houses, except as a last resort. From the beginning, it creates a more relaxed atmosphere, and before long you have a social event masquerading as a writing group.

The homeowner invariably becomes the host, and it's difficult to tell someone

their epic poem on world banking lacks interest when they have just served you truffles and caviar.



In time, too many members regard the meetings merely as a night out. They skip meetings. They come late. They don't even write. I'm not saying homes can't work as meeting places; it's just more difficult to be professional.

So commitment is obviously a factor. I'm assuming you already have prospective members if you're looking to create a writing group. Otherwise you're only looking to join a group. Take a close look at these people, and at yourself.

Is this something you've decided to do for fun? Or is it because you all have a burning desire to write, a desire so strong that you will come to every meeting, rain or shine, and take the worst that your fellow members have to dish out? If so, go for it! If not, you will meet for a time, a season or two perhaps, and then drift apart.

The benefits of a good writing group are not realized instantly, and it must have the full commitment of its members to have any staying power.

That said, life is life, and people will fall by the wayside because of shifting

priorities. You will need to evolve policies for admitting new members, and also for keeping chairs warm for those on sabbatical.

Unfortunately, a strategy might also be necessary for expelling members who threaten the viability of the group, either by not attending, not contributing, or participating solely in vitriolic criticism. You will also need a leader to facilitate the meetings, even if the role is assumed on a rotating basis.

There are many different types of groups. Some concentrate on genres, while others are devoted to specific forms. There are on-the-spot writing groups, technical workshops, and more traditional groups.

I belong to Durham Write-On, where works are read aloud, followed by feedback. Critical Ms., a new group, is devoted purely to criticism. The manuscripts are distributed and read beforehand, allowing longer works to be reviewed in greater depth, and it's not for the faint of heart.

Your work is more vulnerable on the printed page than when read aloud. Even so, the process is immensely rewarding, which should be the case for all writing groups.

To realize these rewards, you need trust between the members. Where you meet must be perceived as a safe place. People are risking their feelings here, and while the rules of constructive criticism must always apply, a good writing group goes beyond that.

Your goal must be to make the writing of your fellow members the best it can possibly be. If you achieve that, then you don't need to worry about membership. People will flock to join you.

## A Message From The **BOARD**

By Annette McLeod, President

It's hard to believe that this board is almost at its halfway point — it feels like we're just getting started! Now that we've settled into our roles, know each other better, and had the pleasure of tossing around many an idea at meetings, it's great to be able to report that we are operating as a cohesive unit and looking forward to the new year.

One of the first things we discussed as a board was what, exactly, we wanted to accomplish. Was a membership drive in order? But we realized that growing the numbers was not as important as serving our current members to the best of our (if I do say so myself) considerable abilities.

And so we've turned our attention to the four pillars that support WCDR: *The Word Weaver*, the Web, breakfast meetings and workshops.

Aprille Janes has taken over as editor of *The Word Weaver*, lending it her distinct personality while maintaining the level of communication members have come to count on.

We've been able to implement some new ideas for breakfasts, including December's don't-miss-it improv and book swap event and an upcoming panel discussion. (Keep your eyes on the Web and the Word Weaver for more details.)

And the lending library continues to be a breakfast bonus we all appreciate.

Members can keep busy every weekend with a comprehensive roster of workshops that delve into short stories, novel writing, general creativity and a host of other topics designed to hone the skills of experienced writers and spark the passions of our novices.

The WCDR website, our face to the



world, is as professional-looking as any I've seen, and offers valuable information on the WCDR itself, as well as CanLit (formerly Smith's List), which draws a worldwide audience to our site.

We've also turned our attention to a few new ventures with the launch of two contests to complement our Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest: a short fiction contest and an online creative non-fiction contest.

While these will be open to Canadians around the globe, they also give members a comfortable venue to try their hand at a contest entry, especially if it's their first.

We've already locked down Gary Dunford, the Toronto Sun's popular curmudgeonly columnist as a judge for our creative non-fiction contest, and are set to announce additional judges soon.

By giving prose writers and essayists the same opportunities our poets enjoy, we hope we've effectively covered the contest circuit — the beauty being that the contests not only encourage writers to get their work out there to be seen, but are also self-supporting.

There are other projects in the hopper — including a second Signatures — but as long as members continue to get the best out of the basics of WCDR membership, it will be a good year indeed.

As the year draws to a close, I'm happy to have this opportunity to wish you and yours a fun and healthy holiday season, and all the very best in 2004.

## Odds & Eds

By Aprille Janes, Word Weaver Editor

When I put out that first call for submissions I must admit I held my breath. Not because I thought there weren't good writers out there but because so many of us suffer from the 'Who me?' syndrome.

It's scary to expose your thoughts on the page. It feels doubly daunting knowing your fellow writers will be viewing them.

But trust me when I say this is the most supportive community you could be involved in. Your fellow members all understand that heart-in-the-throat feeling.

To help you get over that block, our

columnists this month discuss ways to get more out of your commitment to the writing life.

Can't find a writing group in your area that fits your time or interest? Read Fred Ford's comments on starting your own. And if you do, be sure to let *The Word Weaver* know about it so it gets included in our listings.

Once you create a new circle or find an existing one you're comfortable with, how do you survive that great feedback? We all know it can be a little overwhelming at times. Check out Barbara Hunt's story. She searched high and low to bring you a range of good advice.

Then, to steal an over-used advertising slogan, Just Do It. Valerie

Poulin and Judy Bagshaw share some of their experiences.

Finally, as you look for a home for your precious words check out the three contests the WCDR now sponsors.

Talk about a plethora of potential! Enter one or all three. Let the world know you're ready to be heard.

And, oh, yes. Don't forget to watch for *The Word Weaver's* call for queries. The next issue will focus on creativity. And I have it on good authority that you're a creative bunch. So flaunt it!



# Feedback 101

By Barbara Hunt

Picture this – the Humber School for Writers Summer Program at the Lakeshore Campus. In Cottage 'J', a renovated psychiatric hospital dormitory, a submission is being discussed. The group gathered has finished commenting.

"I can't even comment," says the mentor, hands flung into the air.

I smile. Remember to breathe. Quiet that voice in my head that's tabulating what this is costing in planning and dollars and cents. Faced with the ultimate test of my recently acquired critiquing skills, I pray.

This professional's tongue was held for fear of an ungracious reaction to criticism. Critiquing is an art to be learned and exercised.

Whether one on one or in a group, the process starts with respectful listening or reading and should end with what Ruth Walker, an editor of *lichen* literary magazine, calls "a professional response."

The giver needs to focus on the work, not the writer. It's essential to listen in an open-minded manner. To share tangible details that resonate from the work, the nuances that breathe life into the piece. To impart its merits, especially if the material is still raw and unrefined.

This may help the writer "edit their piece with a direction in mind," explains Aprille Janes, writer and teacher. Or, be encouraged by "it's terrific and that really keeps you going!"

"Feedback comes in many forms," says Ruth, "a simple comment from an editor is enough to inspire me to rewrite a whole piece. The same comment from a family member may stop me cold."

Lucky is the writer like Richard Scrimger, whose wife is his trusted first reader. She's "a huge fan and an honest critic."

Writer Alan Cumyn explains that those close to him are "good general readers" of early drafts, because they give him a sense of whether a manuscript is "working on a basic level."

Most writers would agree with freelance writer and instructor, Dorothea Helms', philosophy: "Friends and family may say you've produced the best thing



ever written and it's not, or that it's the worst thing ever written, and it's not!"

Feedback like that comes from "emotions rather than logic" explains Tina Ivany, writer. She covets input from other writers, because they know "what to listen for and can pinpoint obvious flaws."

Aprille comments that other writers' insights into perspective, continuity, grammar, etc., can be "invaluable with the final polish" a piece needs before submission.

Kevin Craig, writer and WCDR board member, shares that his "best constructive criticism" came in the form of a rejection letter. "They went out of their way to not only tell me what worked with my piece, but also what did not work." This form of feedback should be delivered with honesty and consideration.

Dorothea says that "the advice may often be conflicting" making things rougher rather than smoother. But, she believes "that accepting editing and critiquing is a sign of a professional writer."

Receiving criticism has responsibilities too. The receiver should listen. As Aprille points out, "If four out of five fellow

writers tell you there's a problem, then it bears consideration."

Richard Grove, Canadian Poetry Association president, finds workshoping material in a classroom environment and taking notes most useful. "I always change my poem for the better," he explains.

Writer and teacher, Sue Reynolds, explains that she gets the most from the circles that review in manuscript form. She suggests that "reading...in their own voices, in their own head...uncoloured by [her] interpretation and inflection...makes a huge difference."

And Ruth finds she gains "a richer understanding of [her] work" each time which has "helped her become a better writer." The receiver should always acknowledge the gift with a thank you – heartfelt or not.

If you don't have that perfect reader living in your hip pocket (or your house!) then writers' circles may be the answer. Even a writer such as Nancy Rogers who relies heavily on "the people she works for" (i.e. editors), finds circles "invaluable...to get the truth".

Groups on the WCDR website ([www.wcdr.org](http://www.wcdr.org)) can be what Tina calls a "lifeline." Some deal with on-the-spot writing and others help polish work-in-progress. Some groups are large and well established. Others are small and relatively informal.

Listings of Toronto groups can be found in WORD ([www.insomniac.com](http://www.insomniac.com)). Associations such as the Canadian Authors, Canadian Poetry, Playwriters Guild or Children's Writers, Illustrators and Performers are rich sources for peer review.

In the end, it's up to the writer whether to apply the feedback or not. "Sometimes you have to trust in your voice, characters and subject matter," says Dorothea, "Bbeing open to it, however, is a great attitude to have."

And, at Humber College as I nodded and initiated a discussion around the work, I watched the tension ease and I was grateful for my solid training. I could relax into a new learning experience, experiment and not regret the cost.

# Workshops Etc.

## Saturday, Dec 6

Tell Me a Story:

Exploring Elements of Short Fiction

Ruth Walker

10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Northview Branch of the Oshawa

Public Library

250 Beatrice St., Oshawa

## Two Saturdays, Jan 31 & Feb. 7

Write for Your Life!

Memoir writing

Susan Lynn Reynolds

12:30 to 4:30

Stouffville Public Library

## Sunday Feb 15

Tasting the Page:

Use of the Sensuous and the Sensual

In Your Writing

Gwynn Scheltema & Susan Lynn

Reynolds

10:30 to 4:30

Location: TBA

## Saturday, Jan 24

Telling Lies Creatively:

Intensive Fiction Writing

Paul Lima

10:30 to 4:30

Northview Branch, Oshawa Public

Library

## Saturday, Feb 7

Putting Flesh on the Bones:

How to Breathe Life Into

Your Characters

Ruth Walker

10:00 to 4:00

Location: TBA

## Two Tuesdays, Feb 16 & 23

Powertools for Writers : MS WORD

Aprille Janes

6:30 to 8:30

Pickering Public Library

Computer Lab

Maximum 10 Students

For More Information Check Out Our Website at [www.wcdr.org](http://www.wcdr.org)  
To Register - Contact [workshops@wcdr.org](mailto:workshops@wcdr.org) or Leave a Message at  
905-259-6520

## Saturday Feb. 22

Poetry Boot Camp

Stuart Ross

10:30 to 4:30

Location: TBA

## Saturday, March 6

The Business of Writing

Dorothea Helms

Location & Times: TBA

## Saturday, April 17

Writing from the Core

Vicki Pinkerton

10:30 to 4:30

Location: TBA

## Saturday, Feb. 29

Non-Fiction Workshop

Karen Stiller

10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Location: TBA

## Saturday, March 21

It's Not What You Earn

It's What You Keep

Taxation Tips for Writers

Gwynn Scheltema

Location & Times: TBA

## Saturday April 24

Healing Writing

Martin Avery

10:30 to 4:30

Location: TBA

## Saturday, Feb. 29

Textures of the Storytellers Mosaic:

Workshops in Appreciation

of Oral Literature

Heather Whaley, Diane Chandler,

Sharon Henry, George Blake,

Micki Beck, Sher Latooze

9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Location: TBA

## Saturday, March 27

Conducting Effective Interviews &

Writing Inspired Leads

Paul Lima

10:30 to 4:30

Location: TBA

## Saturday, May 1

Conquering Corporate Markets

Paul Lima

10:30 to 4:30

Location: TBA

# Living the Writing Life: Electronically

By Judy Bagshaw

In 1999, I had two books accepted by a royalty-paying electronic publisher. A year later, she went out of business. So did my second publisher. Although I have a new publisher for my current book, my first two efforts are still orphaned. Yet I retain my desire to be part of this quicksand-riddled industry.

Could I be some kind of misguided masochist? I don't believe so. I see myself more as a pioneer participating in the exciting, often frustrating, always interesting electronic publishing industry.

E-publishing is in its infancy. There is tremendous excitement in being part of its development, but there are also risks, disappointments, and uncertainty. The trick is learning how to survive the growing pains until the industry has grown into the thriving business it is destined to become.

And the industry is growing. Open eBook Forum, an international trade and standards organization for the electronic publishing industries, reported in September that in the first six months of 2003, sales of ebooks had increased 60% over the same period in 2002, numbers of titles published had increased 45%, and sales revenues had increased 29%. It is clear that the industry is slowly solving problems that have held it back.

Two major difficulties have been the lack of a standardized format in which ebooks are published, and the lack of an ebook device that is inexpensive and practical. Another problem is security of ebook content: curbing piracy.

Consider also that most e-publishers are running very small operations, often just a publisher and an editor. Some companies tried to grow too fast and died a quick death. Others were run by scam artists who cheated their authors. Some started with good intentions, but weren't skilled enough to keep a business going.

But there are many e-publishers who started small, built their companies



carefully, kept high standards, formed strong connections with their authors, read the marketplace well, and are thriving. These are the ones that are in for the long haul, and carry pioneering writers along with them. Very few are making much money right now but the potential is there.

The market is still small, but as problems of software and hardware are solved, ebooks will become more widely used. Patience and persistence are the keys for surviving these growing pains.

So one might wonder what advantages there are in choosing e-publishing.

- If you are someone who writes outside the box, then chances are you will find acceptance. Most e-publishers actively seek work that is exciting and fresh.

-Turnaround times are quicker. Responses to queries and submissions are generally in weeks.

-Contracts are author friendly. Many of the publishers post a sample contract on their site.

-You have more control over your books with regards to cover design, title, blurbs, marketing, and promotion.

-Writing cross-genre or multiple genres is acceptable.

-You don't need an agent to sell an ebook.

-E-publishing doesn't have borders. Books are available 24 hours a day, anywhere in the world. Readers can sit at home, browse, and buy.

-Your books can be available forever if desired. Availability is not dependent on high sales or bestseller status.

-You can develop a close working relationship with your publisher, working in partnership for your success. And the ebook community as a whole shares a pioneer spirit and experience that bonds it together.

-And of course, for the environmentally conscious, ebooks don't kill trees.

Yes, e-publishing is still in its infancy but this infant is growing rapidly. I plan to stick around until we're both old and seasoned.

*Judy Bagshaw is a writer of romantic suspense novels and short stories featuring plus-sized heroines.*

*Judy's website can be found at <http://writerlady.homestead.com/homepage.html>*

## E-Word Weaver

Thanks to those who have opted to receive *The Word Weaver* by e-mail. This helps the WCDR save printing and mailing costs. If you'd like to give it a try, contact Kevin Craig to try the test PDF file (it's in full colour, folks!) and let him know you'd like your name added to the E-Word Weaver mailing list.

# Grammar Puss



Have you ever read a sentence in which the words were fine, but the syntax just seemed wrong? One that, while it contained the information you sought, just left you feeling, well, unsatisfied?

Quite likely the problem lay in parallel construction.

If one's work in progress were a journey, and each sentence a road on that journey, parallel construction gives one a nice, smooth surface on which to travel. If one part of the sentence doesn't quite match another part, it's as if one lane on the road ended abruptly, leaving only a bottleneck of messily congested thought.

William Strunk's *Elements of Style* says: This principle, that of parallel construction, requires that expressions of similar content and function should be outwardly similar.

Certainly, Mr. Strunk. Easy for you to say.

The bottom line is that clarity of thought should always be on one's mind as a writer (and certainly as an editor). More than one thought should share a sentence only if they have reason to; if they're related. So the expression of each thought should reinforce with the reader that they do share some likeness.

Take this sentence: Once upon a time, a princess lived in forest in which an ogre also dwelled. Although technically correct, this sentence gives the impression that the writer either a) lacks confidence or b) is so intent on varying sentence structure, he's gone way too far, into Desperation Territory. Have the courage of your convictions: the princess lived there, and dammit, the ogre lived there too.

Very often, minor offenses just make a writer look sloppy: When I go to Baskin Robbins, I usually have either the strawberry, chocolate or the vanilla. (Truth be told, GrammarPuss is partial to the pralines and cream.) When a preposition or article applies to all of the elements in a series, it must either be repeated for each, or used only once on the first. One could say "strawberry, chocolate or vanilla" or

one could say "the strawberry, the chocolate or the vanilla," just not some icky hybrid of the two. One shouldn't say, "While visiting my hometown, I went to John's, to Ellen's, Cindy's and Lulu's." Rather, "... I went to John's, Ellen's, Cindy's and Lulu's."

Be careful not to confuse a preposition with part of an infinitive verb, and remember that you shouldn't split infinitives. "The goal of this article is to both help you learn grammar and entertain you." Yes, I know I said you could just use a preposition once at the beginning, but "to" in this case is part of infinitive verb: "to help" and "to entertain" should be treated as one word. "The goal of this article is both to help you learn grammar and to entertain you" is the correct structure.

Which brings up conjunctive phrases, such as the "both" and "and" structure used above. Other examples would be not only, but also; not, but; rather, than; either, or, etc. "This is both a long column and tedious" is not only horribly impolite, but also grammatically unsound. "This column is both long and tedious" is far superior.

Other oft-misused candidates for parallel construction are items in a series. "I love playing with my dog, wrestling with my kids, and my wife." Ugh. Two verb phrases followed by a lonesome noun. Bad form.

Verb phrases should also share a structure: no mixing one's infinitive with one's gerund, one's "to" with one's "ing." (GrammarPuss finds this mistake particularly irksome, but then she thrives on her pet peeves. Everybody needs a cause.) Would "To err is human, forgiving is divine" have gone down in the annals of history? One would hope not.

Remember that it's the structure of your entire work that must be varied – not the structure within every sentence.

Bear that in mind, and the road ahead is bound to be pothole free.

Send your grammar, punctuation and style questions to GrammarPuss at [wordweaver@wcdrr.org](mailto:wordweaver@wcdrr.org)

# WCDR Who's Who

By Philippa Schmiegelow

Don't let this gentle lady's looks deceive you! Jean Downing has climbed "Temple1" at Tikal, welcomed the dawn at Machu Picchu, gone on safari in Kenya, seen Russia's Hermitage, visited the Galapagos. In the new millennium Jean began to write about her travels. One of her stories is published in WCDR's anthology, *Signatures*.

Born in Brandon, Manitoba, Jean Downing graduated from Brandon College with a BA Economics during WW II. In 1944-45, she settled in Winnipeg where she became secretary to the economic advisor of the Manitoba government's Planning Board and a member of the post-war restructuring committee for municipalities in the greater Winnipeg area.

In 1949, at a conference on planning organized by her department for the three Prairie Provinces, Jean met the Director of Community Planning for Saskatchewan. In June of that year, she replaced retiring Marion Bryden as secretary of the Economic, Advisory and Planning Board of Tommy Douglas' CCF government in Regina.

As a senior economist, Jean served a term as President of the Saskatchewan Branch of Zonta International, a worldwide service organization dedicated to advancing the status of women.

In 1954, she represented Saskatchewan on the National Community Planning Association of Canada, having held office in the provincial Branch from its inception. Somehow Jean found time to also become Saskatchewan's Provincial Ladies champion in both tennis and badminton.

In 1957, Jean was sent to UBC on a government grant. In 1959, with Eva Lyman, she became one of the first two female Masters students to graduate from the School of Community & Regional Planning (SCARP), making her one of the first female Community & Regional Planners in Canada.

In 1969, WCDR member, Jean Downing, was featured in *Marquis*, the Who's Who of American Women and Women in Canada and in 1970 in the *Who's Who of the West*.

We in the WCDR have had the good fortune to meet some truly exceptional people. In future issues we will present the bios of some of these folks who form part of WCDR's history.

# January/February Challenge

Last Month's Challenge was to share a lesson learned with a humorous twist. Congratulations to Jo Sorrill and Kathleen Martin who put a smile on the face of the Ed. Hope they do the same for you.

The January/February issue will focus on creativity. For our challenge this month I'd like to toss out something a little different. It's not really a challenge but rather a chance to share your secrets for adding creativity to life. How do you make time? What do you do that fills your creative well?

Keep your offerings to 75 words so that we can include as many as possible. And if you have more than one good idea then submit a second. And a third...

## THE HARD WAY: Learning by Doing by Kathleen Martin

In 1968, Canadian schools were foreign territory and hallowed places for me, so when asked to be the social convener of a new elementary school, I felt more petrified than flattered. The school's philosophy embraced individual learning styles through an open concept environment, one where walls and doors were limited, and movement from learning station to learning station promoted.

For my first function, the principal asked me to prepare coffee for an open house. He suggested I plan for about four hundred visitors, those included parents, educators and city dignitaries. My stomach churned and my mind raced in circles, for my experience with coffee meant following instructions on a jar of Nescafe, or helping myself from an urn at Tupperware parties.

I arranged with three Dominion stores to borrow eight fifty-cup urns, and bought eleven pounds of coffee (three pounds extra, just to be on the safe side). I met with the janitor to check out the electrical outlets, the water supply and the placement of tables throughout the school. My idea of coffee stations followed the school's free flow atmosphere of visitors helping themselves. I ordered creamers from the milkman, bought Styrofoam cups, wooden stir sticks, doilies, sugar cubes and tongs.

On the evening of the event, I waved goodbye to my family. Shouts of 'good luck' followed me out the front door, as if I were leaving on some humanitarian

mission. I could sense their relief, for I had kept them abreast of each detail of this coffee-making saga through notes stuck to the fridge. I arrived an hour and a half before the event began, and set up each station to serve fifty people. I filled the urns with water, ready just to add the coffee and flick the 'on' switch. All was in place, and I felt prepared.

I poured the first bag of coffee into the basket, expecting to hear the granules hiss as they brushed against the sides of the metal, but instead, dozens of beans bounced and clattered into the basket. I opened a few more bags. Beans and more beans. I clasped my face, feeling the heat rushing to my cheeks. How could I be so naive? How could I fix this mistake? Just then, as if in answer to my dilemma, the principal stopped beside me. Without saying a word he gave me a look that asked, 'Can I help?' Unflustered, he reached in his wallet and asked the janitor to go to the corner store for ground coffee.

During the evening, as I flitted from station to station, I came face to face with the principal. He'd smile, wink, and shuffle his feet as if grinding coffee beans.

When I take myself too seriously, I remember the gentleman, of short stature, who elevated my self-confidence, for I had learned by doing. I learned that my mistakes were of less importance than my intentions and, with a dose of humour, I could laugh at myself.

CREAM PUFFS: A Bride's Story

## CREAM PUFFS: A Bride's Story by Jo Sorrill

None of this would've happened if we hadn't visited friends a few weeks before our wedding and been treated to an absolutely fabulous dessert – delicious home-made cream puffs.

Now my family was coming to our new home for the first time and I wanted to impress them with my recently acquired cooking skills.

"Mary, we really enjoyed those cream puffs. Could you send me the recipe in an office memo?"

It arrived soon after with an attached note. "I can't remember if the ingredients include a teaspoon or a tablespoon of salt, but, if it's a teaspoon, I'll phone you tonight."

No call came, so I set about making them, precisely measuring each

ingredient. When I removed them from the oven, I felt SO proud. They were nicely browned, puffed up and light as a feather. Resisting the urge to try one because I knew there'd be just enough, I arranged them neatly on a plate and put them in the fridge.

Next evening, the time came to serve the refreshments I had prepared for this special occasion. Excusing myself, I headed into the kitchen, filled each puff with freshly whipped cream and poured glasses of gingerale. In my mind, I was already graciously accepting expressions of delight and praise.

To this day I'm not sure what made me take a nibble from one before carrying them into my guests. Much to my horror, they were virtually inedible. Had I poured a tablespoon of salt directly down my throat, I doubt it could've tasted much worse! What was I to do? Being a new bride, I had nothing else in the cupboards, except for a few store-bought cookies that would hardly show off my culinary expertise.

In desperation I finally convinced myself maybe no one would notice. After all, they did LOOK perfect.

I handed out plates, serviettes and LARGE glasses of ice-cold pop first. And then marched gallantly in with my delectable dessert on a silver tray, to the expected accompaniment of oos and aaahhhs.

How can I describe the silence that followed as each person 'savoured' their first bite? That is, everyone but myself, who by now was slowly sipping my drink, not eating, eyes glued to the floor.

When conversation finally resumed, fumbled words of approval filled the room. I could only smile meekly.

After taking what seemed like forever to finish eating one little cream puff and no one asking for a second, (which, needless to say, I didn't offer), they all thanked me, a little too profusely, and left for home.

Could I resist bringing the subject up two days later while visiting my mother? Of course not. Her response? "They did taste a bit salty. But I wouldn't have said anything for the world."

Well, the other day I found that same old recipe in my box. And it still reads "one tablespoon of salt".

I guess I'd better change it before I pass it on to my son and daughter.

**Aprille Janes** received her certification in the technique known as The Amherst Writers & Artists Workshop Method developed by Pat Schneider.

Aprille is also thrilled to be the first Canadian affiliate of The Amherst Writers & Artists. She has been invited to conduct two workshops in the Boston area in January.

**Deborah Rankine** received some exciting news. She was accepted into the Humber School for Writers. Deb will be taking its post-graduate course starting in January 2004.

As if this was not exciting enough, Deb's Humber mentor will be renowned Canadian author, David Adams Richards. Congratulations Deb. Take a well deserved bow.

Out of 18,000 entries, **Graham Ducker's** story 'Ship Building' was picked for an honourable mention in the 72nd Annual *Writers Digest* Writing Competition. Awesome! The moment was commemorated for Graham with a great-looking certificate.

Graham also had had a postcard story, Mitten Memories, published in *The Canadian Messenger's* December 2003 issue.

**Sherry Hinman** Community Spotlight feature on Bowmanville. appeared in the premiere edition of *ON Site*, southeastern Ontario's new homes and decor magazine, whose focus is on helping readers relocate to a new community. *ON*

# Paeans



*Site* is an insert in *This Week* newspaper. Thanks go to WCDR's Lynda Allison for helping Sherry with an interview! In the next two issues, Sherry's articles on Oshawa and Whitby/Brooklin appeared.

It was a busy month for **Graham Ducker** whose full-page dissertation entitled 'You Reap What You Sow, Ministry of Education' appeared in the fall edition of the *Renaissance Magazine*. The magazine is published by The Retired teachers of Ontario.

In September, **Ingrid Ruthig**, whose work has appeared in various journals including recent issues of *Other Voices*, *Windsor Review*, *Textbase* (AUS) and *Other Poetry* (UK), read at Edgewood

Camp in Eden Mills where the annual Writers' Festival held its new Saturday event 'Reading, Writing & Rooke'.

Two of her stories were published in the special

*Bad Men Who Love Jesus* issue of *The New Quarterly*, which was guest-edited by Governor General's Award winning author Leon Rooke. She was joined by other *Bad Men* including Rooke, Mark Anthony Jarman, Thomas King, and Janice Kulyk Keefer.

More of Ingrid's poetry is forthcoming in *Event* and *Wascana Review*.

**Dorothea Helms** wrote a comedy skit that is currently part of Mr. Chicago's Skit Comedy Jam at the Anchor Inn in Omaha, Nebraska. Go to [www.misterchicago.com](http://www.misterchicago.com) and click on writers, and you'll see her listed there, along with Durham Region actor/writer Neil Crone.

Also, Dorothea's humorous First Person Singular from 2001, 'Call a Pain a Pain', is one of 50 personal essays chosen from 400 submissions for the upcoming book *They Lied! True Tales of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Breastfeeding*.

**Aprille Janes'** article about her adventure as a lone woman travelling in the Yukon this past summer was the feature article in the November issue of *West of the City* magazine. The article also included some of her photos of the spectacular scenery in the area. Her advice to all writers is to head north and search for the muse. The Yukon is the perfect place for inspiration.



A Picture is Worth ...  
or  
How to Survive  
the Writing Life

By Carl Clark





# A Cornucopia of CONTESTS!



## Short Story

### WCDR Short Fiction

If you love a good short story (and who doesn't?) then here's your chance to strut your stuff!

WCDR is proud to announce a new contest for short fiction.

Stories may be of any subject matter, type or style and must not exceed 2500 words.

Entries must be original, unpublished and not submitted elsewhere for publication or broadcast.

There is no limit to the number of entries you may submit, but each one must be submitted as a separate entry with the appropriate entry fee.

The entry fee is \$20 per submission. Payment must be by cheque or money order, in Canadian funds, payable to The Writers' Circle of Durham Region.

Judging will be blind and based on the quality of the writing and originality. All genres are welcome to enter.

First-place winners will be published in *The Word Weaver* and on our website at [www.wcdr.org](http://www.wcdr.org).

The prizes will be funded by contest entry fees and by the Writers' Circle of Durham Region. Only one major prize will be awarded to each winner, although honourable mentions may be awarded for other works.

For complete contest details go to [www.wcdr.org](http://www.wcdr.org) and click on Contests.

Now go warm up your keyboards and pens. Let's see how your imagination works!

## Creative Non-Fiction

### 24 Hour On-Line

Sharpen up your keyboard and get ready for WCDR's first 24-hour Online Creative Non-Fiction Contest coming in the spring. Those who register ahead to participate will help us usher in spring by logging into the WCDR Web site on Saturday, March 20. At that time participants who have paid the \$10 Canadian registration fee will receive a topic and word count, and will have 24 hours to write a personal non-fiction piece.

We'll be accepting up to 400 entries from eager writers who want a chance at winning big bucks. First prize is \$500, second prize is \$300 and third prize is \$200. Winners will also be published online at [wcdr.org](http://wcdr.org) and in *The Word Weaver*.

First-round judging will be done by a committee of professional writers who are members of WCDR. Final judging will be done by a panel of professional writers who are non-members. Confirmed so far we have *The Toronto Sun's* Gary Dunford and *The Toronto Star's* Linwood Barclay.

Judges will be looking for originality in content and style, excellence in grammar and spelling, adherence to the topic and word length, and that special magic that happens when writers tap into their passion.

For complete contest details go to [www.wcdr.org](http://www.wcdr.org) and click on Contests.



## Poetry

### Dan Sullivan

Once again, our Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest is up and running. Dan was a poet and member of WCDR who gave his first public reading at a pub in Pickering in March 1995, acknowledged the applause, then died. This contest was created to honour his memory.

Submissions to the contest can be made in three categories: Adult, Youth (18 and under as of Feb 15/04) and Children (12 and under as of Feb 15/04).

Poems can be on any theme or subject, but cannot exceed 30 lines in length. You can enter as often as you wish, but each entry must be accompanied by a separate entry fee (\$10 for adult, \$5 for youth and children).

The final deadline for submission is February 15, 2004. Entries should be mailed to Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest, Category Adult/ Youth/ Children, P.O. Box 323, Ajax, ON L1S 3C5. Full entry guidelines are available at [www.wcdr.org](http://www.wcdr.org).

We have an exciting lineup of judges.

First round Adult judges: WCDR's own Lucy Brennan, Caroline Davidson and Dorothy Sjolholm. Second round Adult judges: Poets Nik Beat, Lolette Kuby, Bernice Lever. Youth judges: WCDR's Gwynn Scheltema, poet Jenny Sacco. Children's judge: WCDR member and storyteller Heather Whaley.

This year's Dan Sullivan committee consists of Nancy Del Col, Nora Landry, Gwynn Scheltema and Dorothy Sjolholm. Please contact Nancy at [nancdelc@enoreo.on.ca](mailto:nancdelc@enoreo.on.ca) if you have any questions regarding the contest. Happy composing!

# Just Doing It

By Valerie Poulin

After almost eight years of freelance work, my friends and family congratulated me on finding the stability and security of a permanent job, a “real” job. Living right-brained in a left-brained family isn’t easy. They may crave stability and security, but I thrive on unemployment.

We all recognize the need for a steady income. We can choose the type of work that pays our bills. As poet Wislawa Szymborska points out, “Most of the earth’s inhabitant’s work to get by. They work because they have to.” I finally found a good balance between working for a living and pursuing my passion for writing.

I first experienced the joys of unemployment shortly after I gave up a good corporate gig to work with a former employer, a talent agent. My salary was halved, but the job enabled me to collect information for a how-to book I was writing for aspiring actors. I completed the first draft while on maternity leave, rewrote it while I simultaneously switched to a technical writing career, and spent months revising it when the company was subsequently downsized.

Out of work and in need of an income, I shopped the manuscript around for a publisher. This was my big break. I felt I could launch a full-time writing career and took creative writing courses, read books of poetry and wrote every day.

But query letters failed to grab the attention of conventional publishers, so I self-published the book and returned to the corporate world, this time as a documentation specialist.

I hated having to market my business skills instead of developing my creative writing muscles. Within weeks of a 9-5 routine I was miserable. My business mind was cluttered with work-related deadlines, presentations, and staffing issues; I was exhausted from workload overload and a 10-hour weekly commute. I was unable to switch easily to a creative mindset and by the time I was ready to write, the weekend was over.

To write best, I needed a clean slate. Joblessness seemed the only answer because, as Barbara Gowdy has put it, writers need “acres of time.” I decided it

was best to accept only short-term writing assignments. By doing this, I reasoned, I would exercise my left-brain, thus starving the right (write). It worked.

I would do this for months at a time and each time a contract ended, ideas, scenes, and lines for poems rushed to the page. Some writers find housework, carpentry or a good long walk has the same effect.

Wow! I thought. Unemployment really suits me. It not only allowed me to find my creative writing process, but also to quickly focus on works in progress without have to spend days trying to get back into the groove. Yet, every time I stepped away from my personal work for technical writing contract, I became bad-tempered, discontented, glum.

Redemption came in the form of permanent part-time work. I managed to seal a deal for a third go-round with a Toronto talent agency, after two years of negotiations. Now I spend 15 hours a week interacting with creative people – actors, writers, directors, producers.

With four consecutive days off, I’m able to focus on producing the written word. In my attempt to make a career of writing, I discovered that I needed a day job to make me hungry for creative work by forcing me into a regular schedule. Schedules, it seems, are a leftover habit cultivated by almost twenty years in the business world. My new arrangement offers some serious satisfaction in terms of both productivity and creativity. And it allows me to pay a few bills along the way.

Ironically, this was my horoscope in last Sunday’s *Toronto Star*: “From an early age, we are told that this is a practical world and you must be practical. Conventional routine is essential to provide food, shelter and clothes for yourself and your family. That’s true, but don’t let your imagination languish.”

*Valerie Poulin is a reformed technical writer who now works at a talent agency. She has written for community newspapers and magazines and self-published a book for aspiring performers. Seeking Representation enjoyed a five-year run at TheatreBooks and is scheduled to make a return engagement later this year.*

# Breakfast Info

**December 13**

Featured Guest: **Brian Smith**  
Improv

Our December breakfast speaker will provide a holiday gift of laughter. In a departure from our usual format, we have booked a rollicking improv session with Brian Smith, filmmaker, writer and educator specializing in comedy. An award-winning alumnus of Toronto’s ‘The Second City’, Brian now teaches improv and uses the art form liberally in his productions.

He has produced short films, television, theatre, and multi-media in Canada and the Caribbean and is director of ‘You and Media’, a creative production company in Toronto.

In addition, we will be hosting a holiday book swap. Check the website for more details.



**January 10**

Featured Guest: **Ann Douglas**  
Freelance Writer

Ann Douglas is a successful freelance non-fiction writer. She has written 24 books on pregnancy, childbirth, parenting, etc. and *The Idiot’s Guide to Canadian History*.

**Breakfast meetings run from 8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. at Iroquois Park Sports Complex 50 Victoria St. W. (at Henry Street) in Whitby • Members, \$12; guests, \$15**  
**If you are not on the regrets-only list, your place must be reserved no later than the Wednesday prior with Sherry Hinman at 905-259-6520 or at breakfast@wcd.org**



# Writers' Circles

To join one of the circles below, please call the contact person indicated. Group leaders, please notify *The Word Weaver* editor of changes to times or locations.

## Christians Who Write

The second Saturday of each month  
after the breakfast meeting  
Call for location  
*Caroline Davidson*  
905-683-4854

## Circle for Children's Writers

First Wednesday of each month  
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
Oshawa Public Library  
Northview Branch  
250 Beatrice St. E., Oshawa  
*Mike Ward*  
wardswords@hotmail.com

## Durham Write-On

Tuesdays, every other week  
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
Call for location  
*Cynthia Green*  
cynwriter@rogers.com

## Inkwell

Formerly Bowmanville Writers' Group  
Third Tuesday of each month  
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
Coffee Time Donuts  
Liberty Street and Baseline Road  
Bowmanville  
*susana gomes,*  
editingink@rogers.com

## Markham Village Writers' Group

Monthly  
*Donna Marrin*  
donna.marrin@staples.ca

## Newcastle Poetry Club

Third Monday of each month  
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
Call for Location  
*Philippa Schmiegelow, 905-982-1012*

## Northword Edition

Tuesdays, every two weeks  
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
Uxbridge Public Library  
*Dorothea Helms, 905-852-9294*

## Oshawa Scribes

First and third Tuesday of each month  
1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
Oshawa Library, Northview Branch  
250 Beatrice St. E., Oshawa  
*Grace Stevenson, 905-725-0760*

## Richard Ferrier Writers' Group

Formerly Volume Two  
Third Tuesday of each month  
2 p.m. to 4 p.m.  
History Room at Pickering Central  
Library  
*Tina Ivany, 905-427-1270*  
or *tdivany@sympatico.ca*  
*Ron Dixon, 416-284-5673*  
or *retro@pathcom.com*

## Senior Scribes of Uxbridge

Second and fourth  
Friday of each month  
1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
Township Hall, Uxbridge  
*Joyce Whitney, 905-852-3414*

## Word Players

Every second Tuesday  
7 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.  
Oshawa Public Library, Northview  
Branch  
*Mike Ward, wardswords@hotmail.com*

## Write in Whitby

Second and fourth Tuesday of each  
month  
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
Whitby Public Library  
*Lloyd Blair, 905-430-0075*

## Write Now

A group for on-the-spot writing  
Every second Thursday  
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
Uxbridge Public Library  
*Sue Reynolds, 905-985-1962*

## Writers' and Editors' Network

Breakfast meeting  
Third Saturday of each month  
9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.  
Canadiana Restaurant and Banquet  
Hall  
5230 Dundas St. W.  
Six Points Plaza  
Toronto  
*Mickey Turnbull*  
905-824-5035  
or *mickeytc@ica.net*



# Calendar<sup>of</sup> events

December 6  
**Workshop**  
**Tell Me a Story**  
Ruth Walker

December 13  
**Breakfast**  
**Brian Smith**  
Improv

January 10  
**Breakfast**  
**Ann Douglas**  
Freelance Writer

January 24  
**Workshop**  
**Telling Lies Creatively**  
Paul Lima

January 31/Feb 7  
**Workshop**  
**Memoir Writing**  
Sue Reynolds

February 7  
**Workshop**  
**Characters**  
Ruth Walker

February 14  
**Breakfast**  
**Birgit Davis-Todd**

February 15  
**Workshop**  
**Tasting the Page**  
Gwynn Scheltema  
Sue Reynolds

February 16 & 23  
**Workshop**  
**Power Tools for Writers**  
Aprille Janes



For workshop information, contact Sue Reynolds at [workshops@wcdr.org](mailto:workshops@wcdr.org)  
To register for breakfast meetings, contact Sherry Hinman at [breakfast@wcdr.org](mailto:breakfast@wcdr.org)

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## the Word Weaver

[www.wcdr.org](http://www.wcdr.org)

*The Word Weaver* is published by The Writers' Circle of Durham Region as a service to its members and other interested parties. No one should act upon advice given without considering the facts of specific situations and/or consulting appropriate professional advisors.

Publications are invited to quote from *The Word Weaver* upon obtaining written permission from the President, The Writers' Circle of Durham Region, P.O. Box 323, Ajax, Ont., L1S 3C5  
Phone 905-259-6520. Web address: [www.wcdr.org](http://www.wcdr.org)

Word Weaver subscription: \$12/year (6 issues); WCDR membership: \$40/year, \$35/renewal

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**We welcome your input**  
Send comments and submissions to [word-weaver@wcdr.org](mailto:word-weaver@wcdr.org) or  
c/o WCDR, P.O. Box 323  
Ajax, Ont. L1S 3C5

We reserve the right to edit or reject submissions at our discretion

### Famous Last Words

You have to know how to accept rejection and reject acceptance.

Ray Bradbury (1920 - )