



THE WORD WEAVER

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A NEWSLETTER FOR WRITERS AND EDITORS
PRODUCED BY
THE WRITERS' CIRCLE OF DURHAM REGION

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Tracking Your Changes in 2005

By Cathy Witlox

Much to the dismay of many an editor, editing in the 21st century, not unlike the reference sources necessary to the trade, is becoming an electronic task. Fading into oblivion are the red pencils and marked-up manuscript pages.

So how is electronic editing done? This question was put to me recently by my fellow critique group members, who were impressed and enthralled by my typewritten marginal notes and underlined-in-red insertions.

MS Word is my happy place: where I do all my writing and, now, all my editing and critiquing. Because of the "Track Changes" and "Comments" features in Word, my pool of potential clients has expanded exponentially. I have clients as far away as sunny California, and have bid on jobs as remote as India.

Recalling the day I was practically browbeaten to give up banging out newspaper articles on an antiquated manual typewriter in favour of tapping them out on a computer keyboard, I'm surprised at how amenable I've been to taking advantage of the modern conveniences for writing and editing. Microsoft has just made it way too simple to keep up with the times and relinquish pencil and paper to relic-hood.

Word's editing features aren't ideal just for editors, however. As mentioned, I use them for critiquing, as well. For those of you who are no longer fighting the computer invasion, here's how to use "Track Changes" and "Comments." (Note: I'm working in MS Word 2002, so there might be slight variances if you're using a different version.)

1. You might already have Track Changes in your "button menu." The icon looks like a sheet of paper with red underlines, a pencil in the bottom right corner and a starburst in the top left corner. If that icon is already showing, jump to step 4.

2. If Track Changes isn't in your button menu, under View, move your cursor to Toolbars. Click on Reviewing. A checkmark will appear beside it.

3. If Reviewing already has a checkmark beside it, but you don't have the Track Changes icon (or any of the other buttons I mention below) showing, click on the little arrow at the end of the Reviewing toolbar (also consisting of a drop-down menu with the default format of "Final Showing Markup"). Click on Add or Remove Buttons, then on Reviewing. Click to the left of any that don't have checkmarks next to them. New buttons will appear as you do this.

4. Now you can click on the Track Changes button (described in step 1), and the tool is activated. Anything you type will be inserted in a different colour (default is usually red) and underlined; any formatting changes you make will be marked in a bubble in the right margin; any deletions you make will be marked in a bubble in the right margin.

5. To add a comment about part of the text, using your mouse, highlight that text. Click on the button to the left of Track Changes (looks like a Post-it note with a starburst in top left corner). An empty bubble will appear in the right margin with your cursor flashing, ready for you to type in your comment. Like any other function in Word, you can adjust the font and the type size by highlighting the text and making the change.

6. As always, don't forget to save your work! If you want to keep the original intact, on the File drop-down menu, click Save As and rename the file. (I usually rename it with my initials on the end.)

Comments come in particularly handy when you're critiquing, as you'll want to use this feature to remark on the parts you like in the copy and not just submit a critique to the writer with

red marks all over it. In copy editing or proof-reading, the Comment feature is used primarily for queries to the substantive editor.

You might use Track Changes to edit your own work so you can have different versions of the same document and see where you made changes. Or you might receive a written piece from someone who's used Track Changes. In these cases, you'll need to know how to accept or reject the changes:

1. The buttons with the large arrows pointing left and right will guide you through each change individually (backward or forward), which you can then accept or reject.

2. With your cursor on the suggested change (within the document or in the right margin), choose to accept it or reject it by respectively using the checkmark and X buttons. By clicking on the little arrows next to these buttons, you will open a drop-down menu that will allow you to accept all changes or reject all changes.

There are many other features available that will help you maximize your use of Track Changes. These instructions outline the most basic use for the tool and most likely will cover all you'll really need. However, for more information, do a search for "track changes" in your Help menu. You can also customize it through your Options menu.

As easy as that, you're in the 21st century and poised for the next advancement in word processing to simplify even further the task of performing and perfecting your craft.

With more than a decade's experience in the newspaper and book publishing industries, **Cathy Witlox** works as a freelance editor/writer and is a WCDFR-sponsored workshop facilitator/instructor. Visit her in-progress web site at www.WordWitlox.com.

A Message from THE BOARD

I'd put money on it: you're a writer and it's New Year's, ergo write more/better/faster is on your list of resolutions.

Mine too. My resolution is pretty short, actually: write.

Yes, I write all the time, am published often. But because it's on somebody else's dime (and not precisely what I would do for myself), it doesn't qualify (mentally) as real writing.

My biggest problem pursuing my real writing is just getting my butt in the chair and doing it, so that's my goal this year: bum in seat. I believe wholeheartedly, rightly or not, that it's my lack of diligence, rather than lack of craftsmanship or talent, that keep my fiction unpublished. Even if that's a little lie, it's an easy one to tell myself with no evidence to the contrary.

And therein, for many a writer, lies the rub: I'll wager that getting published is high up on many of your lists.

For those of you with such notions, remember that rejection slips are not a rejection of self; they are badges of honour. They mean that at least you're in the battle. Like the lottery, you can't win if you don't buy a ticket.

In the words of Barbara Kingsolver (and she should know!), "This manuscript of yours that has just come back from another editor is a precious

package. Don't consider it rejected. Consider that you've addressed it to 'the editor who can appreciate my work' And it has simply come back stamped 'not at this address'."

Don't make it your goal to be published — make it your goal to be read. Wear every rejection slip proudly, and learn from each one. Many a well-known author didn't go right from blank page to literary glory in one easy step. C.S. Lewis suffered 800 (800!) rejections before he made a sale, as did Ray Bradbury. *Gone With the Wind* was turned down by more than 20 publishers. An editor once told F. Scott Fitzgerald he'd have a decent book if he'd only get rid of that Gatsby character.

In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Dear to us are those who love us ... but dearer are those who reject us as unworthy, for they add another life; they build a heaven before us whereof we had not dreamed, and thereby supply to us new powers out of the recesses of the spirit, and urge us to new and unattempted performances.

Happy New Year, and Happy Writing.

The WCDR celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2005, and as a board we — well, we don't know what we're doing about it. This is your organization and the board exists only to make your experience with WCDR as enjoyable, educational and

affirmational as possible. So what do you want to do? We've kicked around some party ideas, but maybe you'd prefer a picnic. Or a retreat. Or a hoe-down. Our ideas, much as we love them, are not always completely embraced by the membership, so we might as well find out first — tell us how you want to celebrate 10 years of the Writers' Circle of Durham Region by writing (or talking) to any board member. You'll find our e-mail addresses on the back of *The Word Weaver*. (Caveat: my e-mail has a way of devouring messages unread, so you would do better to corner me in person.)

We don't have anything radical on the books for spring. Breakfasts, *Word Weavers*, workshops — all the good stuff you've come to expect. The Dan Sullivan Contest deadline is looming and the short story contest is still in the organizational stages. The creative online non-fiction contest went off wonderfully, with almost 100 entrants. There won't be an April breakfast this year, as Words in Whitby takes place on the second Saturday of the month. But if there are ideas percolating in the back of your mind, tell a boarder and we'll see what we can do. If 10 years of this group has proven anything, it's that anything is possible.

Paeans... Durham Region is on a roll! Congratulations go out to:

Kevin Craig's story, "The Wedding Date", was featured at *INDOLink!* The story may be read at www.indolink.com

Graham Ducker's new book, *Don't Wake The Teacher*, is the true memoir and account of events at the Morson School over a period of ten years. Secluded against the edge of the forest, the two-room Morson Public School was set-aside specifically for Kindergarten and Grade One, and the school drew its students from the small surrounding communities and two First Nations Reserves.

Tom Easthorpe was on CHEX TV Monday, December 13, 2004 where he addressed the issues of loss and grief over the holiday season. He also had an article in the December 19, 2005 issue of *Oshawa* entitled "Holiday Hints", which is an excerpt from his book, *Teach Me How To Lose*.

Kevin Craig's poem, "Searching", was chosen to appear in *Poetry Canada Magazine's* December/January/February 2005 issue, which was released in mid December.

Judy Bagshaw is pleased to announce the publication of *Love at Large*, a seven author anthology from the BBW Romance Writing Yahoo Group. Included in this book is her short story, "Work of Art". *Love at Large* is published in ebook and trade paperback by Draumr Publishing www.draumrpublishing.com. *Love At Large* is a courageous book of charming romantic stories; each one a celebration of the lives and loves of full-figured women."

Rose Cronin, WCDR's amazing treasurer, had her article, "Mind Your Money", published in *Moxi Femme*. "Mind Your Money" is a humorous, punchy article filled with sound financial advice. You can read it online at www.moxifemme.com

Pamela Hamilton is pleased to share the news that her piece, "Overheard at Playgroup", will be published in the January 2005 edition of the on-line journal *Literary Mama*. You can read her article at www.literarymama.com

Rich Helms' article on the Mercedes smart car, "One Custom(er)s Experience, Speaking of Bespoke...", appeared in the Toronto Sun Drive section.

Kevin Craig's poem, "Any Other Day", has been accepted for a future issue of *Jones Av. Poetry Quarterly*.

James Dewar's poem, "Mesa", was published in a new Canadian Magazine out of Vancouver, *Lust, Annual Erotic Magazine* VOL 1, published Oct 2004.

Deborah Lynn's poem, "Submission", was published in a new Canadian Magazine out of Vancouver, *Lust, Annual Erotic Magazine* VOL 1, published Oct 2004, and can be purchased at Chapter's or Indigo.



GrammarPuss

GrammarPuss got her name by being finicky about grammar, naturally, but there is more to good form than grammar, so GrammarPuss finds herself occasionally branching out.

This issue, we'd like to address that most heinous of editorial faux pax, the cliché. Imagine a world where every writer started his article with the same lead. Why, it's every editor's worst nightmare!

(If one doesn't catch the sarcasm in GrammarPuss's references in the above paragraph — illustrating two of the worst offenders, in her opinion — one should read even more carefully from here on in.)

With nearly 700,000 words in the English language, it shouldn't be so difficult to arrange them in such a way as to avoid these crimes, but GrammarPuss understands that busy writers with looming deadlines sometimes fall back on familiar things. But don't. Not only will it make one's editor cross, but it will sully one's reputation for providing original, creative prose.

While the "imagine" and "every so-and-so's worst nightmare" leads are the standouts in GrammarPuss's archive of horrendous overuse, there are so many more, she scarcely has the time or space to warn of them all.

Often metaphors and similes are the worst criminals in the cliché world. Heavy as lead. Black as pitch. At the end of the day. Work like a dog. Yeesh!

Writing is not an easy row to hoe (can you catch all the clichés in this article?) so why put in all that blood, sweat and tears if one's work is not going to emerge clean as a whistle, concise and free of overused phrases that drag it down?

Metaphors and similes are two of the most effective weapons in our arsenals, but to be effective, they mustn't be so familiar to the reader that one can guess how they end before they start. To keep your artistic tricks fresh, try to come up with something that will surprise your reader. What's black besides pitch? Night, yes, but it's been done to death. Spice

things up! Although it's hard for one with GrammarPuss's sensibilities to admit, depending on the market, one may not even be bound by the limits of good taste. Black as a witch's heart, black as a coal miner's lungs, black as the devil's ... well you get the idea.

Sometimes, one can achieve a certain comic or dramatic flare by crafting phrases that fly in the face of conventional wisdom: thunderous silence, overwhelming apathy.

Some clichés are so often used in colloquial speech that we use them without thinking in our writing. But nothing in our writing should ever be done without thinking, and these little nuggets can take an otherwise fine piece and sully it. Don't think your editor won't notice when you slip in an "each and every," "at this point in time" or "in this day and age." There is nothing wrong with a simple "each," "now" or "today." Most times, in fact, the simplest words are the best ones to use.

While GrammarPuss agrees that getting one's thoughts down on paper is the sole aim of the first draft, later revisions should include a ruthless paring of redundancies. Noon is sufficient; one needn't say "12 noon." Some others for which to watch: truly (or any other adjective) unique; close proximity; at about; free gift; new innovations; particular interest; summarize briefly; personal opinion; revert back; period of (insert length of time here); because of the fact that ... There are more, but GrammarPuss hopes one is getting the gist.

Others offend by being mutually exclusive, such as "virtually all." If it's virtually all, it's most, not all.

Finally, words such as "so," "well" and "basically" are filler, and though they might help fill one's word count, they won't impress one's editor. GrammarPuss recommends one watch for such fillers as these also: in the event that (what's wrong with "if"?); for all intents and purposes (probably not necessary at all); by

virtue of (how about "because"?); in the process of (try "while").

If you've heard it before, your reader has too.

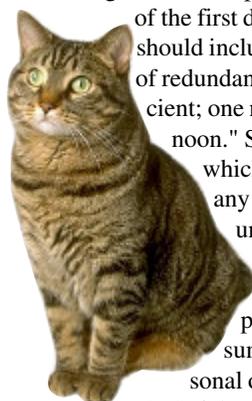
(How many clichés did you catch? In addition to the ones to which she called your attention already — such as the imagine and worst nightmare leads — GrammarPuss is aware of these: row to hoe; blood, sweat and tears; clean as a whistle; weapons in our arsenals; done to death; spice things up; fly in the face; conventional wisdom.)

And just to get this off her chest, GrammarPuss warns: if you don't know how to use the phrase "per se," don't use it! It isn't a synonym for "exactly"; per se is synonymous with "inherent" and "intrinsic."

GrammarPuss ran across an interesting item on the Internet recently. Lake Superior State University in Michigan has published a list of banished words for 2004. These have become so much a part of everyday usage they should be avoided (dare one say like the plague!?) in one's writing. Among GrammarPuss's favourites (and by favourites, she means avoid, avoid, avoid): metrosexual (urban men who like pedicures), bling (those shiny bits on J Lo's hands), embedded journalists (those brave souls in Iraq), shots rang out (as Michael Kinney of Rockville, Maryland, points out, shots don't ring unless you're standing too close to the muzzle, and if that's the case, one hardly needs a reporter to tell one) and captured alive (isn't one's capture sufficient evidence of one's survival?) For the full list, visit

www.lssu.edu/banished/archive/2004.php.

In summary, if one wishes to make one's writing pretty as a picture, one should make it a point of pride (if one isn't blind as a bat and if one desires to pursue writing to a ripe old age) to be aware that clichés can, if left unattended, spread like wildfire, and that cliché one just typed may be the straw that breaks the camel's back. So, take the bull by the horns and keep a stiff upper lip. To make a long story short, one's readers will be happy as larks and think one wise as an owl if, last but not least, one can avoid the pitfalls of clichés.



**Good writing does not come from fancy word processors or expensive typewriters or special pencils or hand-crafted quill pens.
Good writing comes from good thinking.**

Ann Loring

Odds & Eds

By Deborah A. Rankine,
Word Weaver Editor

“Well, how can that be right?” I asked my mirrored twin. I toed the scale to another spot on the bathroom floor, crossed my fingers on the vanity’s surface and stepped back on, first the left, then the right. “Oh, come on! This *can’t* be right!” Shoulders rounded, I uncrossed my fingers and let my arms hang in defeat. I toyed with the idea of repositioning the scale one last time, but knew in my heart there was no way I was going to make a seven pound

lack of willpower disappear.

This is quintessentially *Me*—One step forward, three back. What am I afraid of? That I might fail? Or—an even scarier thought—that I might succeed?

So, with my hat off, I salute those WCDR members who accepted my challenge and put their writers’ lives on display for the rest of us to behold. My only regret, besides not being gutsy enough to take the challenge myself, was that we only had room for two submissions. To those other members who put their hearts on their sleeves, please email me with your progress or, better yet, pen an article and let us know how you’re doing from time to time in 2005.

For our **March/April 2005** issue, hope springs eternal.

Your **‘theme’** challenge is to write a poem or short story about birth or rebirth, as the case may be.

Deadline: February 20, 2005

Word count: 700 words

To: wcdrwordweaver@wcdr.org



January/February

Theme: A Writer’s Life

219 W.P.D.

By Heather M. O’Connor

What if you crawled into a cave and found someone inside? The question intrigued me, and in my mind I immediately slotted in various characters and settings, like a child piecing together a jigsaw puzzle. To my delight, as I tinkered with the idea, a fairy-tale adventure emerged from the cave.

Creating the story was fun initially, until the sobering enormity of its construction meddled with my enjoyment. Building a novel’s settings and characters is hard work, much harder than writing the scenes that the muse bestows with an open hand. I have picked the story up and set it down many times. Like with the reunion of old friends, each time, we earnestly pledge to see more of each other.

Just finish it. Find out how it ends. That force was whetted in no small way by my exposure to other writers and the WCDR. The enthusiasm and support of the Writing for Children and Wordsmiths writing circles has fed my desire and fuelled my inspiration. I boldly confessed to them a secret I’d kept even from myself: my novel would be done within the year. Like the compulsion to feed an urgent hunger

for a favourite author’s latest bestseller, whether in a page or two gobbled between tasks or a bleary-eyed late-night read consuming chapter after chapter, I must see it through to the end.

And so I have resolved to finish, but pitfalls abound. Words sometimes trickle and tease with their plodding gait. Oftentimes I retreat to a comfortable place to reread and self-edit my earlier chapters, shying away from the brave quest for new words. I am intimidated by terra incognita - beyond here, there be dragons.

But no more. My newly sketched outline will set my steps on a firmly charted path and steer me away from temptation. I need only follow the road map.

My resolution is both easy and difficult.

1. Finish my novel *Twice a Ghost* by December 31, 2005. This adds up to a mere 219 words per day.
2. Break the habit of self-editing until the first draft is done.
3. Keep daily track of the number of words I pen to stay on target.
4. Find an editor.
5. Research markets and shortlist a dozen potential publishers to contact.

My goal is reasonable. It’s achievable. And I’m accountable.



Author of three children’s books for Nelson Thompson, Heather M. O’Connor is focusing on finishing a novel for young adults and exploring the path to its publication. She has recently contributed to magazines such as *Inside Soccer* and *Moxi Femme*.

Writing Resolutions 2005

By Suzanne Robinson

I've said it and planned it and even started it many times before, but this is the year I will do it: 2005 is the year I will start writing regularly again. There — this time it's in print and I'm going to stand by it.

That's enough to start up my insomnia again.

I know! When I wake in the small hours with my thoughts roiling like a flock of unruly lambs refusing to go through the gates of my consciousness in an orderly fashion, much less jump over a fence, I won't resort to my usual remedies. I won't count backward from one hundred while practising abdominal breathing. I won't sip hot milk while watching a rerun of *Marcus Welby, M.D.* I'll go to the computer and write. I could just keep my journal by the bed to jot down ideas, but I remember the dream journal workshop incident. I was so excited the first time I woke up and reached for the pencil, but was disillusioned the next morning to see my breakthrough into subconscious thought consisted of the words "Dog! Dogs!!"

This will be different.

Resolution One: I will no longer squander my insomnia time. I will write.

Resolution Two: I will write for at least two hours three mornings a week, because of yoga and babysitting. Is that a non sequitor? I mean that on Tuesday and Wednesday I won't be able to write. I usually wake by 5:30, unless I've had insomnia — but in that case, I'll already have done my writing, so, after I've meditated, written in my journal and had my one and only cup of coffee (insomnia, you know), I will sit down at the computer — and probably get up again to feed the cat. Then I will sit down at the computer — and get up again to brush my teeth. I should have a shower and get dressed, too. I've got to build a businesslike routine here!

What will I write about? Well, there's always Nefertiti the cat and the reason my sister named her that and why I call her "Greedy Gretchen." (The cat, not my sister.) Here comes another idea: how to practise yoga with a dandling baby.

Resolution Three: I will immediately write down all ideas in my journal or hymnbook or GO train ticket or table napkin etc.

Resolution Four: Once a month I will go through old files and choose one story to rewrite and/or submit, or shred if it makes me cringe.

Some of these stories go so far back they were written on a typewriter that was missing the lowercase "a," which had to be printed in with a black-ink pen.

Resolution Five: I will deal with that unfinished novel by September 1. I got stuck trying to decide if it was a coming-of-age (middle age) novel or a mystery, so there it sits in a briefcase whispering, "Let me out." Well, at least I've dumped the first novel I ever started. I was in Grade 6 and reading Mazo de la Roche at the time. By page 44, I was still introducing new characters. I remember the first sentence: "Clarissa Magenta glided swiftly, but gracefully, down the stairs with a long train gliding behind her." Now that's an image that would make anyone glide swiftly, don't you agree? Enough! This should get me writing in 2005.

Originally a Maritimer, Suzanne has lived in Toronto for many years. Since her retirement from teaching, she finds more time for writing and enjoying her five grandchildren. Suzanne's publishing credits include three childrens' stories and two poems, as well as an impressive collection of encouraging rejection letters.

A Warm WCDR Welcome

Our newest members

October

M.J. Jaffray
Melanie Boivin

November

Glady Farquharson
William Marquis
Suzanne Robinson
Sue Eaman
Catherine Brugge



December

Nora Rock
Theresa Dekker
Sue Bergman
Mary Davis
Shelley Kinsman
Pat Meade
Carolyn Cook
Shelagh Damus
Bette Hodgins
Joel Sutherland

@your library®

Taking the Mystery Out of Writing Mysteries

By Donna Bolton-Steel and
Andrea Adair-Tippins

Ever wondered how some people can get away with murder? Ever wonder how you can too?

Of course, we are only talking about the writing kind of murder.

Mysteries are fun to read and even more fun to write. Try your hand at writing one after checking out these titles at the Whitby Public Library.

Axelrod, Alan; Antinozzi, Guy. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Criminal Investigation*

Capponi, Pat. *Bound by Duty: Walking the Beat with Canada's Cops*

Grafton, Sue; Block, Lawrence; Kellerman, Jonathan; et al. *Writing Mysteries: A Handbook by the Mystery Writers of America*

Lee, Henry C.; O'Neil, Thomas W. *Cracking cases: The Science of Solving Crimes*

Lucke, Margaret. *Writing Mysteries*

Newton, Michael. *The Encyclopedia of Robberies, Heists, and Capers*

Newton, Michael. *The Encyclopedia of High-Tech Crime and Crime-Fighting*

Owen, David. *Police Lab: How Forensic Science Tracks Down and Convicts Criminals*

Platt, Richard. *Crime Scene: The Ultimate Guide to Forensic Science*
Pocket Criminal Code of Canada 2004

Roth, Martin; Verdugo, Rey. *The Crime Writer's Reference Guide: 1001 Tips for Writing the Perfect Murder*

Vandor, Les. *Legal Counsel: Frequently Asked Questions about the Law (4 vols.)*

Yogis, John A. *Canadian Law Dictionary*



The library is inhabited by spirits that come out of the pages at night.

Isabel Allende

**In
the next issue of the
Word Weaver...**

Look for your discount coupon for
Words in Whitby 2005

Professional Development

Winter 2005

Grammar For Writers: The (Almost) Jargon-Free Version

By Cathy Witlox

Saturday, January 22, 2005, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Location: Pickering Central Library (boardroom), 1 The Esplanade, Pickering

Event fee: \$80 (\$70 for WCDR members)

The ability to tell a compelling story is a special talent. The mechanics of the English language, however, can intimidate and undermine the confidence of even the most capable of storytellers. Learn the grammar and self-editing skills necessary to polish your manuscript, tell your story effectively, and impress an editor.

Instructor, **Cathy Witlox**, has been copy editing and proofreading both fiction and non-fiction for more than a decade. Having spent seven years in-house, she has worked on hundreds of novels, novellas, articles, and author interviews and biographies. She's had more than 50 instructional grammar and writing articles published on the web site of a large North American publisher, where she became a familiar online presence under the name "Grammar Girl". Currently, Cathy, a member of the Writers' Circle of Durham Region and the Editors' Association of Canada, is building her own freelance editing business, WordWitlox (www.WordWitlox.com), and writing her first novel.

Event Register: Sue at 905-985-8389 or
e-mail wcdrworkshops@wcdr.org

For more information check out www.wcdr.org
To register contact
wcdrworkshops@wcdr.org OR 905-686-0211

NEW WORKSHOP POLICY!

Workshops will be cancelled 7 days before the start date if registration is insufficient. Payment in full is due upon registration, by cheque or credit card.

WCDR offers an exciting lineup of workshops. The leaders for each workshop are specialists in their fields. We're always looking for ways to better serve our members (and non-members too!). Popular workshop topics span a wide range, from inspiring right-brain creativity, to learning the left-brain nuts and bolts of running a writing business. Whether your interests lie in poetry, short fiction, novel writing, non-fiction or even what writing-related receipts to keep for tax purposes, you'll find workshops that will help you along your literary journey.

For additional information, or to register for any of these workshops, call the **WCDR HOTLINE** at 905-259-6520 and leave a message for our **Workshop Co-ordinator** or send an e-mail to wcdrworkshops@wcdr.org

January/February Challenge

Dear Jane

By Kevin Craig

Dear Jane,
You know I love you more than life itself. I love every little thing about you. So please know that it is not you. It's me. I just can't seem to get around that adorable little wandering eye of yours, Jane. I tried. I understand that it's not your fault you're cross-eyed. It's just that I need to make eye contact with the person I am speaking with. I realize this is a fault of mine, not yours.

I'm sure I could have eventually got over the eye thing. In fact, it was kind of fun at times thinking, Is she looking at me? Where's she looking? I'm over here. I'm sure it was no fun for you whenever I chose to wave you down and force you to hone in on me. I know that would irritate me. Where was I? Oh, yes, I'm sure I could have gotten over that. I mean, you're such a wonderful person. Your personality is easily the nicest I've ever come across. Maybe I just don't deserve you. But, Jane, let's be honest, personality doesn't negate such hair.

I've tried to see past the crinkly, Brillo pad rat's nest you carry around on the top of that lopsided head of yours. Whenever I try to rein in that wandering eye, I suddenly find myself peering into a cloud of frizz and I wonder why you don't just cut it off. I mean, surely you would feel more comfortable with a pixie cut or something less, oh, I don't know, moppy. Jane, Jane. How I love you. But love doesn't outlast bad hair.

Okay, maybe I'm being a bit hard. I just can't put my finger on the real reason this relationship has hit dry land. I don't think I've ever found another human being I felt more compatible with. It's just really hard, Jane, walking down the street with someone who chooses to wear stretch pants and leg warmers. I left the '80s behind for the same reason everybody else did. They weren't pretty, Jane. Your choice of clothing sometimes makes me think you can't really see out of that ping-ponging eye of yours.

As we are going to call it quits anyway, could you just please confide in me one thing? Did you ever consider electrolysis, Jane? I mean even for a fleeting moment? I have to say I didn't really notice the facial hair until we were well along in our relationship. It's just not one of those things you pick up on right away. Or maybe, Jane, and please correct me if I'm wrong, but maybe you just tried harder to look your best when you were reeling me in. Is that it, Jane? Because I have to say, that's just a little bit dishonest. We shouldn't broadcast ourselves as someone we're not just to land a companion, Jane. I don't think I have to tell you that.

In closing, I hope that everything goes well with the liposuction, Jane. It worries me that you would take such drastic measures to carve out a new likeness, but I can't really condemn you for trying. Maybe with the spare tire removed you will find that people won't notice the limp. But, for me, I found the loping way you walked to be quite an endearing quality. I will surely miss it forever.

Please remember, dear Jane, that it is not you. It's me. It is most definitely my fault that I can't get past these little imperfections that I'm sure your next lover will cherish forever. Goodbye, sweet Jane. Loving you was a pleasure I will carry with me forever.



Imagination is more important than knowledge.

Albert Einstein

Dear John

By Shelagh Damus

Dear John,

Last night you spoke of your intention to make plans for Valentine's Day and I got to thinking about the origin of Cupid's special day. Did you know it began as the Festival of Lupercalia?

Back in Roman times, boys and girls were kept apart from one another most of the time. On the eve of the festival, each boy drew a piece of paper inscribed with the name of a single girl to be his partner, kind of like our modern-day key parties. That's when it hit me. What a great way to celebrate Valentine's Day. Invite all of our single friends and even some family members (your cousin Brad comes to mind), and host our own Festival of Lupercalia.

It will mean a sacrifice on our part. You see, for authenticity, we, being a girl and a boy, must distance ourselves from one another until the party. But with two months until Valentine's Day, the opportunity exists for you to tackle those back burner projects you've been sitting on for a while now.

Remember planning our vacation to the Dominican last year, and you wanted to bring your mother along? Well, you would be able to go,

just the two of you. Wouldn't it be great? All that time together to wax nostalgic about the year you played the Christmas goose in your fifth-grade pageant, or how you would have been a lawyer had they not made a mistake grading your LSAT. Just thinking about all the times I've heard those stories brings tears to my eyes. Come to think of it, maybe you could use the time to rewrite that silly old test and show the world you were meant to be a lawyer, just like your mother always says.

When you're not studying, you could enlist the services of a real estate agent to help you find a place of your own. It must be difficult to store 38 years of stuff into a single room in your parents' home, and, delightful as it is, I suspect even you have tired of the fire-engine-themed wallpaper.

Now don't fret - I've thought about that one niggling little detail and, yes, it would be awful if you accidentally extracted Lilly's name. Although, I will have to invite the poor nearsighted thing; so devoted to those cats, she almost never gets out. So, on your turn, comb through the jar until you find the one name on a slip of homemade paper. Seize it, and you'll make me the happiest girl in the room.

Please don't worry about the party details. It

will be my pleasure to do all the preparations on my own. Consider it my Valentine's present to you.

Till February 14 then, I remain, albeit from a distance, yours,

Jane

P.S. Maybe you could email Brad's address, so I can be sure to invite him.



March/April Challenge

Rainy Day Make-believe

Scan a buy and sell newspaper, pick an interesting item for sale, and create its backstory. Who made it, who bought it, who used it, and why is it up for sale?

Word count: 400

Deadline: February 20, 2005

To: wcdrwordweaver@wcdr.org

Writers' Circles

To join one of the circles below, please call the contact.

Christians Who Write

The second Saturday of each month after the breakfast meeting
Call for location
Sherry Loeffler
905-640-6315

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

Markham Village Writers' Group

Monthly
Donna Marrin
donna.marrin@staples.ca

Northword Edition

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

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
Marion Owen 905-852-3204

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
Vicki Pinkerton, 905-473-1284

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

The Wordsmiths of Ajax/Pickering

Every third Tuesday 7p.m. to 9 p.m. Free-fall writing exercises and critiquing. Meeting location varies.
Cathy Witlox
cathy_witlox@editors.ca

The Tale Spinners

The Tale Spinners are aged 55+ and meet every Thursday in Oshawa to write memoirs, fiction and poetry.
Barkley Fletcher: 905-571-1348

Writes of Passage

Group serves Whitby/Brooklin area. Focus includes writing exercises, feedback, and Q & A's regarding writing life. Group meets second Monday of each month. Everyone welcome.
Jan Seppala
jseppala@rogers.com

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

Note to circle leaders:

The Word Weaver wants to know changes to meeting times/venues etc.

Please send to
wcdrwordweaver@wcdr.org

I write about personal questions and issues and situations, but writing creates a fictional safety net that allows me to take greater risks and come a lot closer to the truth.

Amy Tan

Breakfast Information

January 08, 2005 guest speaker... Renate Weiler: Surviving the Odds.

Renate Weiler was a survivor, long before "a survivor" meant being part of a hit television series. At the age of 21, after only six weeks in Canada, Renate found herself stranded for 3 days on a deserted island. When she realized that she and her friends were not going to be rescued, she decided to swim for help. But, half-way across the storm-tossed lake, she felt like giving up. Just as she was about to let go, she thought, *I'm only 21, I have hopes and dreams!* She felt her fatigue ebb but, instead of giving up, she picked a spot on the shore and focused all her attention and energy on getting to that point, one stroke at a time.

Renate, a much sought-after, inspiring professional speaker, founder of Executive Mentors, and the founding executive director of eWomen-Network in Canada, has dedicated her life to inspiring others to recognize and embrace their own vision of success by accepting their authentic self, living their lives with passion, and achieving their goals, *one stroke at a time*.

Her book, *Get a Grip—A Journey Towards Inner Strength*, has helped countless individuals find their path to success and personal fulfillment.

February 12, 2005 guest speaker... Edo van Belkom: A Man of Many Talents.

Edo van Belkom is the author and editor of more than 25 books and 200 stories of horror, science fiction, fantasy and mystery. In addition to winning the 1997 Stoker Award from the Horror Writers Association for *Rat Food* (co-authored with David Nickle), he's been honored with two Aurora Awards (Canada's top prize for speculative writing): one in 1999 for the short story, *Hockey's Night in Canada*, and one in 2003 for editing, *Be Very Afraid!*

His novels include *Lord Soth*, *Teeth*, *Martyrs*, *Scream Queen* and *Blood Road*. His non-fiction book titles are *Northern Dreamers: Interviews with Famous Authors of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror*, *Writing Horror*, and *Writing Erotica*. As an editor, he has four anthologies to his credit. His first young adult novel, *Wolf Pack*, was published in October 2004, and a sequel, *Lone Wolf*, is scheduled for publication in October 2005. Edo van Belkom authors "Mark Dalton: Owner/Operator," an ongoing adventure serial published monthly in *Truck News* since 1999.

Edo's short stories have appeared in numerous publications such as *Cemetery Dance*, *Storyteller*, and *On Spec*, and the anthologies, *Northern Frights 1, 2, 3, 4*, *Shock Rock 2*, *Fear Itself*, *Hot Blood 4, 6, 11*, *Star Colonies*, *Crossing the Line*, *Truth Until Paradox*, *Alternate Tyrants*, *The Conspiracy Files*, *Brothers of the Night*, *Robert Bloch's Psychos*, *Year's Best Horror Stories 20*, and *Best American Erotica 1999*.

Born in Toronto in 1962, Edo graduated from York University with an honours degree in creative writing. He worked as a daily newspaper sports and police reporter for five years before becoming a full-time freelance writer in 1992. Since then he has done a wide variety of writing-related work, ranging from trivia questions to book reviews, opinion pieces on professional wrestling to speeches and special letters for Toronto mayor Mel Lastman.

As a teacher, he has taught short story writing for the Peel Board of Education, been an instructor at Sheridan College, and has lectured on horror and fantasy writing at the University of Toronto and Ryerson Polytechnic University. He has appeared on countless television and radio shows, including *Open Mike*, *Off the Record*, *Book Television*, *Imprint*, and *Metro Morning*, and was the first movie host on *SCREAM*, Canada's all-horror television channel. A frequent guest speaker and panelist at writing conferences and conventions in Canada and the United States, Edo was Toastmaster of the 1997 World Horror Convention in Niagara Falls, New York, and co-host of the 2001 Bram Stoker Awards in Seattle, Washington.

He lives in Brampton, Ontario, with his wife, Roberta, and son, Luke.

Visit Edo's web page at www.vanbelkom.com.

Breakfast meetings run from **8:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.** at the **Sports Garden Café** in the Iroquois Park Sports Centre, intersection of Victoria and Henry Streets.

Whitby

Cost: WCDR members \$13, Guest \$16

If you are not on the '**Regrets-only**' list, your place **must** be reserved no later than the **Wednesday prior** to the next meeting.

Contact **Karen Cole** at **905-686-0211** OR at wcdrbreakfast@wcdr.org

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Upcoming Events

WCDR's Annual Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry contest

This Writers' Circle of Durham Region (WCDR) sponsored contest honours Durham poet and member, Dan Sullivan, who passed away at the inaugural Poets in the Pub night on March 13, 1995. This contest is a tribute to a poet, friend, and man of many accomplishments. Categories include adult, youth (under 18), and children (under 12). Winners will be honoured at the WCDR June 2005 breakfast meeting, and receive publication in the *Word Weaver* and on the WCDR website, www.wcdr.org.

Final judges for 2005 will be teacher, editor and independent scholar Rachele Lerner, poet and winner of the Mississauga Arts Award for Writing, Keith Garebian and founding member of the Art Bar Poetry Readings, Allan Briesmaster. The youth category will be judged by poet, writer and WCDR member, Gwynn Scheltema and the children's by poet and writer Loris Lesynski.

Guidelines and further information on the Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest can be found on our website, www.wcdr.org. Submissions and entry fees may be made on-line this year.

The Word Weaver

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, ON L1S 3C5
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We reserve the right to edit or reject submissions at our discretion.

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