



The WORD WEAV^{ER}

Inside

- Board Message/Breakfast Reloaded.....3
- Free-for-all Writing Submission....7
- WCDR's Who's Who.....9
- Dream Stealers.....11

A newsletter for writers and editors produced by

The Writers' Circle of Durham Region

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Taxing the Writer

By Rosalyn Cronin

Revue Canada has a special place in its heart, or at least its tax coffers, for artists and writers. It recognizes there is a fine line between hobby and self-employment in the arts in Canada. And it all comes down to “a reasonable expectation of a profit.”

Before you declare your income from the poetry contest you won in the summer, take a look at your overall proceeds from writing. Rarely is income from winning a contest considered business income. If you are in it for fun, dabbling your toes before taking the plunge into freelancing or working on a fictional representation of your Aunt Bessie's strange upbringing, you may not be in a position to declare income and expenses from your writing career. Look forward a few years, know where you are going, and base your decision on your writing plan, maybe setting a goal of having a regular column in the local newspaper.

The advantage of being in business as a writer is the ability to write off your expenses. If you have a job, any losses from your writing business will result in a reduction of all your income. This becomes important when you are working on a major project, like a novel, where you could be writing for two years, searching for an agent for another six months, then waiting a year to be published. All the expenses you have incurred along the way are lost if you have not filed your writing as a business.

Just as a side note, you do not have to register a separate business as a writer, you are free to call yourself by name, use your home address and be considered a business.

Before you decide hobby or business, look at the concept of reasonable expectation of a profit. If you have quit your job and are

writing full-time as a freelancer, then declare yourself a business and write off all expenses you collect in your business. If you write the occasional article, win a contest once and a while, but are still testing the waters for the future, you may still be a business. Revenue Canada understands a writer will take longer to establish a profit, and will allow more leeway than the normal business startup. See IT-504R2 (Consolidated) at www.cra-arc.gc.ca for the details.

The rules are clear—you cannot write off a home office if you are using a corner of your dining room table, or a chair in the family room. Your office must have a door, be separate from other rooms and be used exclusively for business purposes.

If you are working on a book that you plan to distribute to a wide market, again you are in business and may write off expenses incurred, although the profits expected will not occur until the book is in the hands of a publisher. Each situation is open to interpretation, and if you are unsure, check with your accountant.

Okay, you are a business, making money. What can you write off against the income pouring in? Start with your supplies expenses—paper and pencils from Staples, reading and research material, Internet access, website hosting, membership dues, seminars and courses, professional fees, advertising ex-

penses, cellphone and business or fax lines, postage and delivery. If you incur an expense in the pursuit of making income, it is usually an allowable expense. Some expenses are subject to special rules: automobile, meals and home office.

Meals expenses, like the WCDR breakfast, are expensed at 50%, as Revenue Canada takes the position you will also be eating—a personal expense. Meals with editors, publishers, interview subjects and professional consultants are all allowable expenses. Beware of the friend who expects you to pick up the bill, saying, “after all, it is a business write-off.” If you buy a \$30 meal, you expense \$15 and save 30% in taxes, or \$4.50. That business write-off cost you an out-of-pocket \$25.50.

Automobile expenses are determined on the percentage of business over personal use. Keep a mileage log, and note every trip pertaining to your writing business, including driving to the library to pick up books, or to the bank to deposit your cheque from *Homemakers*. Allowable automobile expenses include insurance, licence, repairs and fuel. Toll fares and parking are expenses on your automobile schedule, but are deducted 100%.

Depreciation is taken on your assets through prescribed rates by Canada Revenue Agency. Assets are items that have an expected useful life of longer than one year, and cost more than \$100. Examples are computers, printers and automobiles. Office furniture—your desk, ergonomic chair and file cabinets, has a rate of 20% a year, and a new computer is now at 45%. The first year of possession has an allowable rate of half of the normal rate, to account for having the item in use less than a full year.

Taxing the Writer, continued from page 1

Rates are subject to change, and can be influenced by personal use, year of purchase and changes in regulation. A complete list is available on the CRA website and is usually a built-in component of your software.

Home office expenses are only allowable against net income. If you have a loss in your writing business the unused portions can be carried forward to future, more profitable years. The rules are clear—you cannot write off a home office if you are using a corner of your dining room table, or a chair in the family room. Your office must have a door, be separate from other rooms and be used exclusively for business purposes. The expenses include a portion of your mortgage interest, property taxes, insurance, repairs and maintenance, and utilities. A note of

caution; if you have renovations done to create a home office, this is a structural improvement to your property and writing it off as an expense, or depreciation, will trigger a change of use on your home and you will be subject to capital gains on a portion of the monies received when you sell your home. The one true tax break we receive as Canadians is the ability to create a tax-free profit on our personal residence; be careful not to lose the benefit.

Taxes may be a constant, but the rules are not. It is what you don't know that can cost you legitimate business deductions. According to the CRA "The nature of art and literature is such that a considerable period of time may pass before an artist or writer becomes established and profitable. Although

the existence of a reasonable expectation of profit is relevant in determining the deductibility of losses, in the case of artists and writers, it is recognized that a longer period of time may be required in establishing that such reasonable expectation does exist."

It is always a good idea to speak to a professional accountant, make sure you are taking advantage of the tax rulings, and avoid having to file adjusted tax returns when your novel hits the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Rosalyn Cronin is an accountant, writer and speaker, achieving balance between the practical and the creative. She incorporated The Awesome Bean Counter Company in 2001, and is working on a book about people's relationship with their money. She fills in her spare time creating business plans and producing tax returns.

A Weekend at Wordstock

By Heather M. O'Connor

Be vigilant. You never know when you'll feel "The Hands of Alexandria." I felt them the weekend of October 14 and 15 at Wordstock 2006. Deb Rankine and I ducked out of WCDR's October breakfast to rub elbows with the people who write the news—journalists and writers at Ryerson Journalism Alumni Association's 11th annual writing festival.

At just \$100 for the weekend, Wordstock gives good value for the dollar. The hardest part is choosing which of the 17 seminars you will attend. With topics that range from copy-editing to beating writer's block to building a good lead, it's like ordering from a five-star restaurant's menu. Thank goodness Wordstock includes a handbook with overviews of the seminars to make the decisions less onerous.

The day opened with a lively debate

on how right- and left-leaning newspapers portray politics in the media. Antonia Zerbisias of the *Toronto Star* and Lorrie Goldstein of the *Toronto Sun* faced off citing the recent conflict between Israel and Lebanon.

Deb and I then parted ways. Deb chose an entertaining session on interviewing techniques with Paul MacLachlan. I'd taken the same session last year; funny anecdotes flew as fast as the interviewing tips.

"It's not about asking questions," McLaughlin says. "It's about following up on answers. Then, let them finish the thought. It's seductive when the interviewer listens hard."

It was a great talk worth repeating but WCDR supporter Paul Lima lured me away. A chance to hear Paul's lecture on conquering corporate markets was too good to pass up. His practical step-by-step presentation outlined how to make money doing what we love.

A lunch break and two further sessions closed the afternoon.

We returned Sunday for talks focused on storytelling. And what a talespinner we heard!

Roy MacGregor of the *Globe and Mail* is the king of "show, don't tell." He held us spellbound, a master storyteller at his craft. He touched us with "The Hands of Alexandria," inviting us aboard the train that bore Pierre Elliott

Trudeau's body home to Montréal from where it had lain in state in Ottawa.

The true story, we learned, was not found in the interviews with the friends and colleagues of the former prime minister subjecting themselves one by one to the journalists in the media car, but outside the windows of the train.

The boot-clad farmer in the middle of his field who saluted the train as it passed told the story. Train platforms lined with medal-bedecked veterans and uniformed hockey teams told the story. So did the hundreds and hundreds of hands touching the train as it passed through the station of Alexandria in their last farewell to a much-beloved prime minister.

Many times, MacGregor told us, the story can be found in the human details. Dig. And keep your eyes and ears open.

Good advice.

Here's my advice: keep your eyes and ears open for Wordstock 2007. The event coincides with homecoming week at Ryerson.

Attend: Your writing will be richer for it.

Heather M. O'Connor is a freelance writer, author and lover of good stories. Visit O'Connor at www.merlinwrites.com

Odds & Eds

broke her pencil but will return next issue with a brand spankin' new HB #2. Until then, enjoy all the terrific reads!

A Message from THE BOARD

By Sherry Hinman

Welcome back! All of us on the WCDR board hope you enjoyed a wonderful holiday and are well rested and ready for all kinds of writerly activities this year.

We have made a change. In December, Brian Baker joined the board as secretary, as Grace Colella had to step down for personal reasons. We thank Grace for her contribution over the first half of the year and offer Brian a hearty welcome to the board!

Changes are afoot on a broader scale as well. With WCDR just passing its 11th anniversary, we thought it was a good time to re-examine our mission and develop some key objectives for the next few years. We recently met with a consultant who spe-

cializes in working with not-for-profit organizations, to begin the strategic planning process and work out the details for a planning day in the next few months.

Members will have an opportunity for input into the planning process. A few members will be invited to participate directly, along with a few stakeholders from the community and from other writers' organizations. Other members may participate through a survey process. As soon as the results from the strategic planning process are available, they will be shared with all members.

The other exciting news is that we are planning a writers' conference. Thank you to those who participated in a survey a few months ago. Members provided us with pages of feedback and suggestions, many of which have already been incorporated into the planning. Please keep the suggestions coming!

We'd like to introduce our conference organizing committee: Jessica Outram and I: co-chairs; Barbara Hunt and Kevin Craig:

Speakers and Schedule; Rose Cronin: Finances; Deb Rankine: Venue, Food and Accommodations; Lana Cutrara: Logistics; Skyla Dawn Cameron: Public Relations; and Janet Boccone: Registration.

Of course it will take more than this small (but feisty!) committee to pull off a successful conference. Each member will not only sit on the organizing committee but will also chair a subcommittee with other volunteers, to accomplish the tasks for which they are responsible. Subcommittee chairs will be recruiting volunteers over the next few months.

We are aiming for an April, or May, 2008 conference, which will probably take place over two days. There are many decisions yet to be made, but we are hard at work and we will announce details as they are firmed up.

Stay tuned for opportunities to have your say and participate in both of these exciting activities for our organization.

Breakfast Reloaded

—Memories, Stories and Songs—

By Fred Ford

Our WCDR reader at the November 2006 breakfast was Collette Yvonne. Since she was a last-minute substitute, she had no time to get stressed-out or buy a new outfit. She didn't need to either. The reading from her novel, *The Queen of Cups*, was so entertaining, no one would've noticed.

Collette introduced us to Pauline Parril, her heroine in the novel who suffers through modern-day melodramas. In this excerpt, Pauline guides a contingent of brownies on a field trip. Anyone who has suffered the horrors of brownies or cub scouts will relate to this chapter, and recognize the imposing figure of "Gestapo Owl"—who commands her little charges to "get out there and have fun." Of course, G-Owl, as she's called for short, never envisioned the titillation that ensues when the brownies witness two teenagers *in flagrante dilecto*. The hapless Pauline's attempts to smooth over the situation prompted much hilarity at the breakfast.

Our guest speaker was Vicki Delany, author of the successful crime novels *Scare the Light Away* and

Burden of Memory. Vicki read a passage from *Burden of Memory* in which her main character remembers a holiday on the Isle of Capri during WWII. Our November breakfast fell on Remembrance Day, so the reading was quite suitable. The Isle of Capri is among the most beautiful spots on earth, but even there the characters find the memories and horrors of war intrude. The reading became like the moment of silence observed earlier; respectful and calm, but filled with the memories of lost ones, and horror at the suffering that continues even today. After reading this powerful passage, Vicki gave us insights into her busy life of systems-analyst-by-day and author-by-night.

December was a very special breakfast. We led off with a reading from WCDR member, Ann Peacock. Ann recently took a course on writing magazine articles with Sherry Hinman, and the result was "Ten Tips for the ABC's of Early Reading." An early love of reading is probably what led most of us to be writers, so we no doubt share an almost evangelical zeal for persuading kids to read. Some of Ann's hints were familiar—things our own parents did unwittingly—while others were strategies we hadn't heard before. Ann approached *Today's Parent* with the article, and while they had already published something similar, they were interested in Ann as a possible columnist. So let's applaud Ann, and wish her luck. It's also a top-notch recommendation for Sherry's course.

One of Ann's hints was to combine reading with other activities, such as singing. Our December guest speaker did just that. Aengus Finnan is a songwriter and folksinger. However he didn't just

entertain us. He first spoke of his youth and the creative impulses that have stayed with him ever since, revealing that while he was not much good at school, he was also born with the "romantic storytelling sensibility." His words reminded me that at the bottom of this urge to write is the old impulse to tell a story. I sometimes think, with so much concern for style, usage and structure, we forget the storytelling.

Aengus shared the genesis of his songs with us. "Rollin' Home" was inspired by a conversation overheard at the Red Rock Husky Truck Stop, a place where after eating the Truck Driver's Special "you don't feel full; you feel different." Aengus overheard a phone call between a trucker and his loved one, waiting for him to come home, and while he was headed for home himself after a road tour, the song revealed an uncanny ability to re-imagine his own feelings from the point of view of others. Aengus told us earlier that "the mechanism can't show: listeners should swim in the story of the song," and that ethic accounts for the sheer honesty of his songs. That honesty was on display in his second song "Ruins," which was the response to meeting an old man at a retirement home; a man who had lost his farm and was going to die wishing he had torched it before it went to auction. Not only did this song display honesty—almost brutal in its directness—but also a deep compassion. Aengus had already spoken of his interest in the underdog, and of finding the challenge and triumph in decline. These concerns were beautifully met in "Ruins," and there were a lot of misty eyes at the breakfast by the time Aengus finished singing.

January/February “Themed” Writing Challenge Submissions

Found Poetry

Word Weaver queried Gwynn Scheltema’s muse...

There was an ad/article about renting original artwork from galleries for condos, and a photo of “The Lovers” was one of the illustrations.

As to crafting the poem, I flipped through the magazine and wrote out snippets of interesting phrases from the ads and the articles. I ended up with about three pages of “bits.” Of course, most of them were to do with “uptown” or “downtown,” and originally I figured my poem would be about a Toronto streetscape, but when I saw the article “Where the Art is” (I also used that line), I thought maybe I could do something about art.

Next I noticed that in my list I had the lines “Uptown girl” and “Downtown queen,” and realized that the phrase “Where the Art is” could be used for its implied meaning of “Where the [he]art is,” and I could contrast the two “women.”

Having chosen the phrases that best fit the theme and discarding the rest, I joined some phrases together, or only used half phrases, to give new meanings, and played with punctuation. For example, “Moonlight washes a glow over snow-blanketed streets” and “artfully ILLUMINATING” (a title for a piece on light fixtures) became “Moonlight washes Artfully illuminating.”

As a note, there are absolutely no added words, and I didn’t rephrase any of the snippets. The magazine is the free one that you pick up from those newspaper boxes at the corner.

Found poetry in the December issue of *The Condo Guide Magazine*

J.T. Winik, “Lovers” oil on canvas

By Gwynn Scheltema

Right downtown Urbanation looks at
Where the Art is

Uptown girl; Silent
Live in the glasshouse
Moonlight washes Artfully illuminating
Finding ways to hide the light
A perfectly proportioned concrete shade
This is your world
Small, unobtrusive; Melody
Bending and refracting
Keyless
Virtual
Do you daydream; Green or grey?
Cool is the underlying theme.

Downtown queen
Heady mix of the creative—SOHO
Rent original art Steps from the Art gallery
Celebration of the urban life on the edge of
the moment
Connecting them
The dust of everyday life; Garden in Red #7
Bliss coming soon; Navy blue
Mixed media

What surrounds you?
Metal and concrete Like islands
A snowball fight on Sunday afternoon
Niches and unused spaces—Intimate
Drawn in by the buzz; Late-nighters and
out-of-towners; Quick move-ins
Dip in the infinity pool; massage rooms
Desire this palette?
Purchase price does not include parking
Get it while it’s hot
Onesherway; immediate possession.

If you think you’ve seen it all, think again
Take an indulgent turn
Perfection consists of doing ordinary things
What are you in the mood for?



J.T. Winik, “Lovers”

A Warm
WCDR Welcome
to Our Newest
Members

Stephanie Curry
Angela Jubenville
Jean Noble
Maaja Wentz

Ian Manson
Erni Vallee
Sally Cooke
Alan Williamson

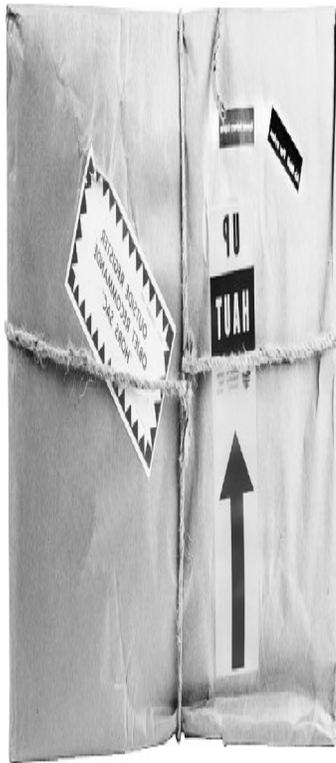


Word Weaver queried Shelagh Damus's "found poetry" muse...

When I translated a letter from friends in Germany it struck me as poetic. This is what I harvested from its content.

Letter from Lutz By Shelagh Damus

Here, at the beginning of December,
the world stands on its head.
It grows in nature and flower.
Lilies of the valley sprout from the soil.
Rosenknospen show up everywhere.
The trees new impulses gotten.
In my memory
it was, in such a manner,
never before a long time so warm
Seldom sinks the thermometer
below six at the night.
Nearly envious, we watch, in shirt
sleeves,
snow falling in America.
How is it with you?
Carry for it trunks or winter coat?
I must again to an attendance away
and want then, since for the moment
the sun of a radiating blue sky laughs,
before the evening consulting hour
mow the grown lawn.



Shelagh Damus lives in Uxbridge, Ontario, where she is a full-time mom, a part-time freelance writer and a one-time published poet. She can be reached at damus@powergate.ca.

The things that get
bumped
in the
write...

That's correct folks; you heard it here first!
Word Weaver's bumped its honorarium a
whopping **100%!**

All published "themed"
writing challenge submissions will now
be granted a \$50 honorarium.

So, what the heck are you waiting for?

Send your words to:

wordweaver@wcdr.org

Breakfast info...

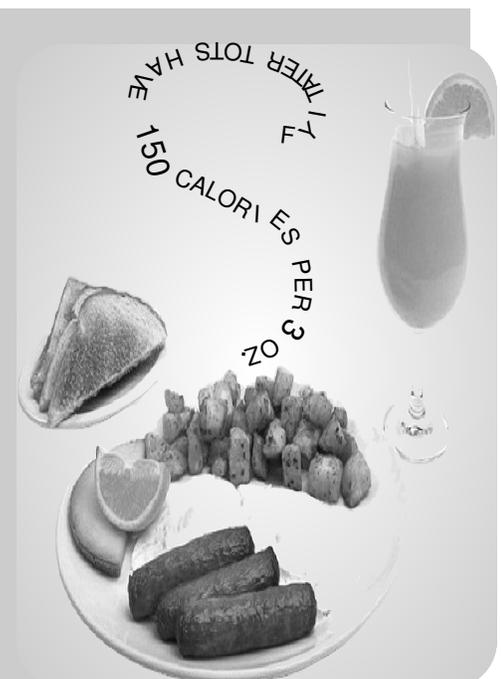
Jan 13... Katherine Barber

Katherine Barber is not called "Canada's Word Lady" for nothing. Born in Cambridgeshire, England, Barber grew up in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she obtained her BA at the University of Winnipeg. Moving east, Barber received her MA in 1990 from the University of Ottawa where she also lectured in the School of Translation & Interpretation. This made her a natural fit as the principal reviser on the Bilingual Canadian Dictionary project at the university. Barber joined Oxford University Press in 1991 where she currently holds the position of Editor-in-Chief of the Canadian dictionary department
Barber can be seen and heard on CBC

television and radio discussing matters of language and Canadian English. Her new book, *Six Words You Never Knew Had Something to Do with Pigs*, is a lively romp through the history of the English language and spent 14 weeks on *Maclean's* bestseller list.

Feb 10... Susanna Kearsley

Susanna Kearsley lives in Whitby, Ontario, and is a longtime friend of the WCDR. Kearsley's novels—a combination of contemporary suspense with a hint of the paranormal—have been widely translated and selected by book clubs on both sides of the Atlantic. Her ninth book, *Every Secret Thing*, has just been released under her new thriller-writing alias, "Emma Cole." As a full-time writer and stay-at-home mom, Kearsley will share with us advice and encouragement based on her own 13-years experience as a professional writer.



The Circumference of a Circle

By Kevin Craig

I recently discovered I was a winner in the WCDR's 24-hour non-fiction contest. I know what you're thinking, but really, I did win...in a way. You see, one can't lose when one spreads the word about an organization that continually strives to support writers everywhere!

Since joining the WCDR, my life has changed drastically: It's been a wonderful blessing to my writing life and I'm driven to share this good fortune with others. Promotion of WCDR-sponsored contests is a great way to do this. With reasonable entry fees, exceptional prizes and, thanks to the vision of its webmaster, Rich Helms, ease of submitting online, WCDR has eliminated all one's excuses for not entering!

Now, I won't say I wasn't disappointed I didn't make the finalist list but, at the same time, I was excited for those whose names I recognized. And I was happy to see names from outside Durham Region, too. I secretly hoped those people heard about the contest through one of my posted announcements.

Enter the Absolute Write Water Cooler—an online meeting place for writers (Picture a WCDR breakfast meeting without the tater tots). Whenever WCDR has a contest running, I announce it around the cooler and encourage writers there to enter. I do this to help support the WCDR contests, but also to encourage writers to send their work into the great wide world beyond themselves.

After WCDR announced the top 10 finalists, I received the following message through www.absolutewrite.com:

Kevin, you've made a huge difference in my life. Let me tell you why. My husband is a hugely talented writer. He comes from a very difficult childhood, though, and has tremendous self-doubts. For the nine years

we've been married, I've tried to get him to write and finish something—anything—but that inner voice that says "No you can't" always wins. When I showed him your post, he entered the 24-hour contest on a whim. 10 bucks isn't a fortune, but it's a commitment for us. Once he paid, he knew he had to finish. AND HE'S A FINALIST! I'm so very sorry you didn't place, but he and I both wanted you to know that you made a difference in somebody's life. A HUGE difference, because now he's ready to write some more. So I'm sending thanks from him and thanks from me. It's important you know that to us you're THE WINNER.

God bless.

Bill & Amy Mullis (South Carolina, U.S.A.)

I immediately recognized Bill's struggle. I recalled the years of frustration my own wife felt before I took the plunge and joined the WCDR. My spreading the word about the WCDR has always been about reaching out to other self-doubters. Amy's message bears witness that the WCDR's reach encompasses the globe! You don't have to live in Durham Region to reap its benefits.

I also wanted to learn more about Bill's writing struggles. So, I contacted him. When I asked him how he finally made the leap of faith needed to enter the contest, he told me he had to credit (blame) his wife, who is also a writer. He shared their conversation—

Bill: "Go ahead and enter."

Amy: "It costs 10 dollars!"

Bill: So? I'll pay for it."

Amy: "So why don't you enter?"

Bill: "Shut up."

After painting himself into a corner, with what he thought was an "I will if you will" deal, Bill found himself registered. (The victim of feminine wiles?)

What advice would Bill give to others considering entering a writing contest? While he was struggling through his own 24-hour entry, his wife told him, "The people on the other side of the screen can't see you." This freed him to reveal a defining

moment that was otherwise hard to share. He suggested writers "start with their worst memory...the most embarrassing, most terrifying moment of [their] life. If you can write that memory, you can write anything."

How did making the short list change Bill? For one, he has more confidence. "I have written the single most troubling memory of my childhood. I copied it into a Web form and clicked on a submit button to send that memory to actual real-life people, knowing that somebody there would read it. If I can do that, I can write anything and send it anywhere. That doesn't mean I'm not still scared. In fact, I think I'm more scared now than I was before. Now I don't have any more excuses."

"As far as I'm concerned," he continued, "I won the battle when I clicked the button. Placing in the contest is a fine confirmation, and I'm thrilled, but it's really more gravy than anything else. I've already submitted my next piece, and I'm working on the next one. It's just something I'm gonna have to keep doing."

I was glad to share the impetus that kick-started my own writing life. That's what the WCDR is about. Support. Bill, whose personal demons lead him to "commit a few words, look at it, and decide it was all crap," is now writing. You couldn't ask for a better result from a writing contest. I'm thrilled Bill found solace within our circle.

It's great to see someone who is normally reluctant to share their gifts finally escape from the walls that imprison them. It's great to know that Bill, and others like him, can benefit from the warmth and kinship found under our organization's nurturing umbrella. His entry, by the way, went on to take 2nd place. I know he said placing was just gravy, but I sincerely hope his win helps him to further enjoy his metamorphosis!

Kevin Craig is grateful for the support of The Writers' Circle of Durham Region. Joining the organization gave him permission to be a writer. He is eager to share their many gifts with others.

"What is The Subconscious to every other man, in its creative aspect becomes, for writers, The Muse."

~Ray Bradbury~

January/February **Free-for-all**

Writing Challenge Submission... Plotting your escape.

What would MacGyver do?

By **Brian Baker**

In some ordinary part of the world, a man sits in his recliner with robe wide open revealing a yawning expanse of chest hair and unearthly beer gut. One paw scratches the belly making sandpaper sounds as dead skin is raked away, while the other paw is wrapped around the remote control, flipping through the television stations like a real estate agent through a Rolodex.

I, on the third hand, am stuck in my own hotel bathroom at the Raffles L'Hermitage Beverly Hills. At present, I would rather be that ursine man sitting in front of the boob tube eating a bag of pork rinds.

Here I am, stuck in the most cliché of predicaments, expected to give a reaction speech to having my epic novel trilogy made into the next string of blockbuster films by producer Jerry Bruckheimer and director Tony Scott.

Admittedly, I couldn't be stuck in a nicer bathroom, but I am not stuck in it with Daniela Pestova, who is nestled at her dinner table downstairs wearing a nice little Italian designer number that fits tighter to her

body than skin to an apple.

It's not every day that a guy gets to sit at the same table as the woman he spent his day-dreaming university years pining for. It's also not every day that a Canadian hosts such a dinner.

I came into the bathroom with purpose, to do a manly trio of deeds—shit, shower and shave—and depart without disheveling my cool exterior. Now, it appears, I have locked myself in the bathroom with no explainable reason; left only with my meandering thoughts.

So, what of this epic novel trilogy that is to be made into a trilogy by the producer of *CSI* and the director of *Top Gun*?

I could spend hours discussing the complex plot I developed back in my third year at the University of Toronto, a style that could only be described as typically me. The novel is an apocalyptic tale taking advantage of Christian mythology set in the modern world. Many famous demons and angels make their cameos, but the most important part is the seven former mortals who become "powers" and try to protect heaven during Armageddon.

I took some liberties with Christian lore, most of which were contested by the Religious Right in America. But nowadays, there's not a single person who doesn't meow about

something in the media.

I had a man from Arkansas berate me in a letter about how humans can never be angels. He also criticized my nation of origin, Canada, as being too secular and running with the devil. I believe that Mr. Arkansas is the prime reason why humans can never be angels. His choice of words was quite obviously the reason. Phew, does that man actually pray to God with that mouth?

You meet all sorts when you are a writer. I was always drawn to writing because people will remember you for your words and not what you look like. I even have a fan club back in Canada that I hear from on a regular basis, which tells me people like what I write about.

Now, if only Daniela Pestova could be the president of the fan club. I'm sure the Canadians would accept a Czech-born, American-residing 30-something-year-old as their president. And of course I would be more than happy to acknowledge that.

Nonetheless, I find myself thinking too much and not being proactive. What would MacGyver do in this situation? All I have on me is my cell phone, watch, keys, cufflinks, suit, my wallet with an array of ID and my shoes.

Wait—cell phone. What a novel concept?

March/April Free-for-all Writing Challenge What's Your Point?

Write from the
point of view
of a branch
with a
bird perched
upon it

Maximum word count: **700**

Deadline: **February 20, 2007**

Send your submission to:
wordweaver@wcd.org

Connecting at the Columbus Writers Conference

By Dorothea Helms

Last August, I packed up my little car and drove to Ohio to attend the Columbus Writers Conference. The reason for my trip had to do with a lot more than the fact that I'm a writers conference junkie. My 81-year-old mother-in-law Laura told me in the spring that she's always wanted to attend one of these conferences with me. She is an avid letter-writer to family and friends and has dabbled with the idea for a children's story—but I never knew she had an interest in writing beyond that. I had promised her a "girl" trip for just the two of us and was willing to take her anywhere in North America. Who knew she'd choose Columbus over the Grand Canyon?

It was fine with me, because I'd rather go to a writing-related event than anywhere else in the world, except of course, Paris. I worried that she'd be bored... that she'd find some of the workshop presenters and speakers disappointing... that she'd feel like a fish out of water among 120 writers pursuing publication. Turns out, I was the one who was bored and disappointed with the conference during the early part of that weekend. Laura was enthusiastic, open minded and positive—and seeing the event through her eyes helped me realize just how burnt out I've been lately.

Once I allowed myself to relax, I enjoyed everything. Many high-profile agents were on hand for workshops and panel discussions. In a nutshell, here's what I learned about agents:

An agent's priorities in order of importance are: ongoing projects, projects he/she is

querying to editors, current clients who have written new material, partial manuscripts he/she has requested, queries from new clients. So if it's your first book, your query may not be looked at for months.

Editors' personal interests may have an impact on the types of books they agree to represent. Agents spend a lot of time on the phone and having lunch with editors to get to know them better. This helps the agents zero in on the appropriate editors for particular manuscripts.

At times, the writer may be asked to attend a meeting with the agent and potential editor to find out whether there's "chemistry" that bodes well for a future relationship. Agents and editors work long, frantic hours and are not keen to work with "needy" writers who balk at every suggestion for improving their work. The professionals on the panels stressed that publishing is a team effort. They want to work with good writers who see themselves as part of the team, not as individual tyrants.

Agents also read a lot, referee bidding wars for hot manuscripts and spend time negotiating the best deals possible for the authors. After all, the more the writer makes, the more the agent pulls in.

Conference attendees were offered the opportunity to schedule a six-minute, one-on-one meeting with an agent. I pitched my novel to Ben Salmon of Rights Unlimited Literary Agency in New York. He said that he's interested, and to contact him when the draft is finished and polished—even if it takes another year. I have his business card taped to the front of my computer as a constant reminder to get to work on my fiction.

In a workshop about writing for children, R. Schuyler Hooke of Random House Books for

Young Readers offered the following advice:

- Make sure your cover letter is short, well written and free of typos and poor grammar.
- Explain why you wrote the book and why it's different and interesting.
- How does the book fit in to current trends?

Remember that publishing works 18 months to two years ahead.

- Read *Billboard* magazine. Perhaps your book could be published when a movie on a related topic is slated to be released.

The trend in children's literature is for "quieter" novels such as *The Penwicks* by Elizabeth Enright.

- If you query non-fiction, explain why you are passionate about the topic, and mention whether your book fits in with school curricula.

- For fiction, include a synopsis of the book (ONE SENTENCE TO ONE PARAGRAPH) and include a chapter (or the whole manuscript if the book is short).

We also enjoyed the workshop by Ted Kooser, United States poet laureate, 2004-2006. He led us through a nifty poetry exercise and stressed the fact that in order to write poetry well you have to read a lot of it. From the editing panel, I learned that great fiction is BOTH character and story driven. In non-fiction, focus on story, structure, substance and style.

All in all, Laura and I had a blast chatting with people from all over the U.S. and spending quality "girl" time together. Thank you, Mother, for opening my eyes.

Dorothea Helms is the owner of The Writing Fairy (www.thewritingfairy.com) and Write Stuff Writing Services (www.wsws.ca). She has won awards for personal essays and poetry, and is currently working on a novel and several short stories. Dorothea is also a popular creative writing instructor and keynote speaker.

Attention Writers' Circles...

Word Weaver will no longer be publishing a writers' circles page. Kindly log onto

www.wcdr.org

and click on "writing circles"

for up-to-date writers' circle information.

Additionally, kindly forward your writing circle **updates** to

webmaster@wcdr.org.

Tell me
and I'll forget;
show me
and I may remember;
involve me
and I'll understand.

WCDR's
Who's Who

Featuring...

Skyla Dawn Cameron

By Nancy Del Col

Despite being in the middle of a house move and temporarily cut off from the world by Bell Canada, Skyla graciously made herself available for an interview.

The writing life has been good to her lately. Her urban fantasy novel, *River* (Mundania Press), featuring a female werewolf protagonist, just won the 2007 ARIANA Best in Category eBook Award for cover design, and is also a 2007 EPIE Finalist in the fantasy category. On March 10, 2007 the winner will be announced at the eighth annual EPIE awards banquet in Virginia Beach. *Wolfe*, the sequel to *River*, is now in its second "painful" draft, which Skyla often works on in the most fitting hours of the day for a werewolf fantasy—between midnight and four a.m.

WORDWEAVER: Congratulations on your recent nomination and award for *River*. Tell us more about it.

SKYLA DAWN CAMERON: Thanks. *River* is about a wolf—the alpha female of her pack—that was bitten by a human werewolf and transformed into a human herself, then left to deal with this "affliction" on her own. The book takes place three years later, when River Wolfe is a 15-year-old girl living in foster care, and she discovers the human that bit her. Essentially, wackiness and angst ensue.

WW: What exactly is "urban fantasy"?

SDC: Essentially it's contemporary fantasy, so while there are elements of magic or fantastical creatures in it, it takes place in a contemporary setting.

WW: Fantasy seems to be your genre. Why is this?

SDC: I really enjoy urban fantasy. I think it's because it requires less work on my part—I don't have to invent an entire world, just tweak it to my liking. My first love is horror, however, and humour is a must in everything I do as well. I write dark moments followed by a joke.

WW: What's the funniest thing you've ever written?

SDC: An as yet unfinished romantic horror

comedy called *Asha's Guide to Zombie Dating Etiquette*.

WW: You have a vampire thriller coming out this year with Mundania Press. What's the attraction to vampires?

SDC: While *River* was about reinventing the wheel and being as unique as possible, *Bloodlines* is what happens when my creative pendulum swings the other way: Sex, violence, and mindless entertainment. I wanted to start a new urban fantasy series, and vampires are an easy in.

WW: *River* is both a print book and an e-publication. What are the advantages and disadvantages of e-publishing?

SDC: My publisher is first and foremost a print publisher. They just happen to also release eBooks and audio books. The most important advantage with both e-publishers and small press publishers is that they are more open to "out of the box" stories, as well as new authors. I don't think *River* ever would have been picked up by a large press company, because it's more literary than genre, and I was 21 years old without an agent and only a small publishing history. There will always be a place for print books, but with younger readers they'll be more likely to buy eBooks.

As for disadvantages, obviously small presses and e-authors are less known by readers, and therefore they have to work harder to be recognized. There is also a lot of prejudice in the author community that somehow indie authors aren't as good, or their publishers don't have the same high standards, though mine accepts less than one per cent of the work submitted to them. Indie bands and films are cool, but apparently not authors.

WW: Describe your writing work space and a typical writing day.

SDC: I have a huge L-shaped desk, with three feet of space on one side and six on the other. I like lots of elbow room! I have about four days' worth of MP3s on my computer, and I must have music on at all times. Each story has its own playlist. It completely depends on the story. Opera, J-pop/rock, alternative, Hindi, hard rock, folk...I'm eclectic.

I also keep several photos of my cat, Hanna, around my desk, and I have a kamidana (a Shinto spiritual shelf) on the north wall.

I wake up sometime in the afternoon, go straight to the computer with my breakfast, then waste a whole lot of time while my brain wakes up. I do my best writing between midnight and about four in the morning—that's when the muse is there—though I write throughout the evening as well. I write full time, although anyone else with this kind of

time would produce a lot more than me.

WW: What is the one thing that can drag you away from writing?

SDC: Television. I will stop in the middle of a sentence for *Veronica Mars*, *The Office*, or *Dexter*.

WW: What books or writers have inspired you?

SDC: My biggest inspiration came in the form of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: I first saw it when I was 14 and something kind of clicked inside my head: It was possible to write the kinds of stories I wanted to. I didn't have to box myself in a particular genre—a scene could be incredibly dark, but also funny. The writing on that show validated my own instincts and natural tendencies as a writer.

WW: What are you currently reading?

SDC: Nothing. I'm not a big reader.

WW: Doesn't this go against most writerly wisdom?

SDC: I used to read a lot when I was in high school, especially Anne Rice. But I'd mimic the style of what I was reading. I had to cut out the reading to find my own voice. It completely flies in the face of all the wisdom.

WW: What one word would you use to describe your writing life?

SDC: "Complete."

WW: Complete some phrases for me.

"When I was a kid I used to pretend..."

SDC: ...I was adopted, and my real parents were rich and would one day come and rescue me. I still think that on occasion."

WW: "The hardest job I ever had..."

SDC: ...picking up grounders at an apple orchard. Seriously, I'm almost six feet tall—why the grounders?"

WW: "The strangest thing you would find in my..."

SDC: ...movie collection is a dozen Chinese romantic comedies."

WW: "I never turn down a chance to"

SDC: ...shamelessly promote my work."

WW: Okay, so let's do that. Give me a tantalizing excerpt from *River* that will make readers want to buy it.

SDC: From Chapter Two of *River*. "*The real me—the wolf me—seems like a dream now. A beautiful, wonderful dream. I like to tell myself that this human life is the actual nightmare, and the wolf life will be waiting for me when I wake up. I'm a terrible liar however. Especially to myself.*"

For more info on Skyla, or to order a copy of *River*, visit www.skyladawncameron.com.

Paeans

WCDR Writers
are on a roll!

Sue Reynolds was delighted to announce that Edward Nixon, host of the Diamond Cherry Reading Series in Toronto, has invited her to feature as a poet on February 21, 2007. The event will be held at the Renaissance Cafe on Danforth, just west of Woodbine, home to the illustrious poets of the Renaissance Conspiracy.

Graham Ducker's poem *Deja Vu Voyage* was selected for inclusion in the *Canada Cuba Literary Alliance Volunteer Anthology* due out at the end of the year.

Yvonne Harriott's short story,

"The Colour of Love," won first prize in The Awaken the Mind Short Story Contest presented by Knowledge Book Store and PoeticSoul, and will be published in the *Poetic Soul Literary Journal* in 2007.

Graham Ducker's story "What If..." was printed in the September–November edition of *The Science Creative Quarterly*. Go to www.scq.ubc.ca/?p=605 to read it.

Skyla Dawn Cameron was absolutely stoked to announce her debut novel *River* is one of three finalists for the 2007 EPPIE Award for best fantasy novel (along with the likes of Piers Anthony to boot!). The winner will be announced at a gala banquet in Virginia Beach this coming March. As well, the cover for *River* won the Ariana award for best in category (fantasy) and will go on to compete for the Quasar award, also to be announced at the banquet. WAY TO GO, SKYLA!

Brian Baker, avid sports nut, had his article "The Saints Go Marching On," about the NFL's battered New Orleans Saints published in the premier issue of *Replay Magazine*.

Aprille Janes received word that she was awarded an honorable mention in the Mainstream/Literary Category of the *Writer's Digest* Short Story Contest for her story "Silk Purse." Along with a lovely letter from the editor of *Writer's Digest*, she also received a certificate which is going into a frame right away. Aprille's flying pretty high—there were close to 19,000 entries this year!



Are
YOU
writing
fiction
that
SELLS
?

If your answer is **NO**, then you've got to check out Barbara Kyle's cover story and terrific offer in the March/April issue of *The Word Weaver*.



January/February Professional Development Workshops



WordPress Workshop

With instructor, **Rich Helms**

Date: Saturday Jan 27, 2007

Location: Uxbridge Durham College
2 Campbell Dr, Uxbridge, ON

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

Cost: \$110 (\$100 for WCDR members) + GST. Cost includes a copy of Helms' *Learning WordPress Workbook*.

Maximum Class Size: 18 students

To register: go to
www.wsws.ca/richhelms/?p=143

Workshop goal:

A blog can serve several purposes. For Helms, it's his website as well as a collection of articles. WordPress is a popular blog engine available in two forms; as a free blog site, and as software to download and install on your website.

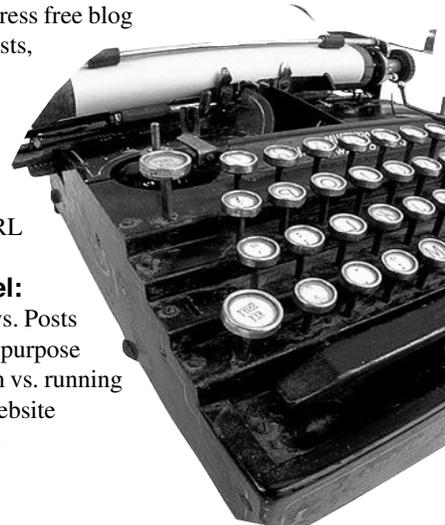
During this six-hour workshop, each student will sign up for a free WordPress.com blog and create a basic site. The course includes a copy of Helms' *Learning WordPress Workbook*. This workbook will walk you through the steps of creating and designing your site based on your site goal. Your workbook serves as a reference and worksheet for your site design and implementation.

Students will:

- Sign up for a WordPress free blog
- Learn categories, posts, pages and links
- Select a template
- Add images
- Manage comments
- Post-date a post
- Set up a personal URL

On a design level:

- When to use Pages vs. Posts
- Site philosophy and purpose
- Free WordPress.com vs. running WordPress on your website
- Promoting your site.



Dream Stealers

—Avoiding Publishing Scams—

By Kevin Craig

As I see it, writers are one of the more preyed upon demographics in existence. Scam artists have learned that the scam works best when targeted at those who dare to dream. If you want something badly enough, scammers are happy to supply you with the means to make you *think* you can obtain it. Writers have a deep desire to be published. This desire has spawned a multitude of questionable organizations. These organizations make large promises and dangle many carrots in front of unsuspecting writers' noses.

Over the next few months I hope to arm you with the information you will need before seeking publication. You should know that, aside from being a competitive market, the writing world is rife with sharks.

Beware of online publishers who happily welcome all writers with open arms. Statements like, "If you are determined to see your words become a book, your search is over," is not the way major publishing houses do business. Beware of claims that the books they publish are available at bookstores across the country when they don't divulge the names of said bookstores. Same holds true for literary agents who say they've brokered publishing deals for many of their writers but do not proudly post a roster of their published authors' names. Be cautious even if the publisher does promote their authors and the titles they've

published. Google the book title and the author's name and see what you find. I tried it out with one publisher who stated on their website that one of their author's books had been made into a feature-length film starring the sister of an iconic country music singer. I found nothing to this effect on the website of the sister of the famous country music star. I did, however, find a notation on the company producing the film that it was "in production" and not already made into a feature length film. Makes you wonder, doesn't it. I also found ample "threads of controversy" at websites such as www.absolutewrite.com about this book-come-movie. I know it's all hearsay and one mustn't believe everything one reads on the Internet but, again, it does raise questions. Perhaps the publisher was simply overzealous and misspoke.

Publishing scams appear in many forms. Be wary of suspicious contests created to bilk writers, including the increasingly popular "drive-by" postings you can find in writing forums on the web. People post contest information to several different forums at once, hoping to find a few gullible entrants from each site before their posts are either deleted or outed by the more knowledgeable, scam-savvy members of the community.

Here's one example of a writing contest I found at an online forum. Let's see if there are any telltale signs of a scam.

Submission Period: Entries accepted January 1 – August 31 (Postmark dates). Early submission is encouraged.

What to Submit: Short stories, essays or other works of prose, up to 5,000 words each. There are no restrictions on style or theme. You may submit the same work simultaneously to this contest and to others, and you may submit works that have been published or won prizes elsewhere.

Prizes: First Prize: \$1,000.

Second Prize: \$600. Third Prize: \$200.

Entry Fee: The reading fee is \$15 per entry. This covers your submission of one short story or prose work of up to 5,000 words. Contestants may submit as many entries as they like.

Deadline: August 31, 2007.

Entry must be postmarked or submitted by this date.

How to Submit: Transfer the entry fee to e-gold account number: *****. Fill in the memo field with your valid e-mail address. Submit your writing to [*E-mail Address Deleted*] as an attachment file. All e-mail [sic] that did not pay the entry fee will be automatically deleted.

Announcement of Results: Winners will receive an e-mail notification on September 15th, 2007.

At first glance, this announcement looks fairly innocuous. Now, look closer. Though it mentions postmarked entries, there is no mailing address given. There's no mention of where, if anywhere, the winning entries will be published, and it asked writers to transfer money into an online account as soon as possible. There are many red flags, including the fact that this was this member's first posting at this forum. A drive-by posting is (generally) made by someone unknown to the forum community and it's been my experience that most drive-by posters won't respond to e-mails from other suspicious forum members who ask for clarity.

When entering writing contests, you should research their legitimacy prior to sending cash. Otherwise, you may just be throwing money away on a non-existent contest. Always, at the very least, Google any contests, publishers or agents before you submit. You will thank yourself for taking the extra time to ensure your dreams are placed in the hands of reputable markets.

March/April "themed" writing challenge...

Create
a poem
using
Emily Dickinson's

"Bring me
the
sunset
in a
cup"

as your
opening line

Maximum word count: **200**
Deadline: **February 20, 2007**

Send your submission to:

wordweaver@wcdr.org

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WHAT'S HAPPENING?**Feb 15, 2007 –The Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest**

2007 contest details:

Categories: CHILDREN (under age 12); YOUTH (under age 18); ADULTS

Open to: Writers from all countries (English poems only)

Prizes: ADULT - \$300, 200, 100 - CHILDREN/YOUTH - \$45, 35, 25

Complete details online at www.wcdr.org and in the upcoming January/February 2007 issue of *The Word Weaver*.

Criteria: All judging is blind and the decision of the judges is final.

Entries are judged on originality and the sense of craft of poetry shown in the work.

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, Bayly Postal Outlet, Health Rite Pharmacy, P.O. Box 14558, 75 Bayly Street West, Ajax, ON L1S 7K7.

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We welcome your input!

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