



THE WORD WEAVER

Inside

- Board Message/Paeans.....2
- GrammarPuss.....3
- Who's Who.....4
- Odds & Eds.....6
- Challenge Submissions.....8
- 2005/06 WCDR Boarders.....10

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

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Are All Writers Readers?

By Barbara Hunt

We are writers. All day long and, often, late into the night, we play with words. We tinker with phrasing and juxtaposition, always bearing in mind text, context and subtext. Whether it's poetry, fiction or non-fiction, we create prose with the sole purpose of touching an audience—our audience.

Then we search for a publisher who will embrace our work with the same passion that enveloped us during its creation. We reach out to this "ideal reader," attempting to sway him or her in order to cultivate a following—hoping lightning will strike! The manuscript sale! The successful release! The glowing reviews! The book tour! The readings!

Readings? Wouldn't that mean standing before a group of strangers feeling exposed? In short—yes. And who knew that you'd be appraised from the moment you rose to walk to the podium? Who knew that your obvious quaking-in-your-shoes would also make your audience feel uneasy? Or that ill-placed gestures aren't always helpful? And that drawing your voice from a different place in your body can change everything? Well, I think Stuart McLean—a perennial writer-as-reader favourite with his Vinyl Café series tour—might know, and I know that Anna MacKay-Smith definitely does.

In her workshop "Reading Writing by Acting It," MacKay-Smith shared invaluable techniques that actors use to lift words from the page and breathe life into them. But most writers aren't actors. We are simply creators of stories and poetry whose sole purpose is to convey their heartfelt meaning to our audiences. So we writers attended this session in order to "tool up"—to add some new implements to our skill set. After all, these were not someone else's stories we were sharing. These were our own babies! And we wanted others to see them in their

Sunday best, to dote over each word with the same emotional connection we felt when manipulating them.

The full-day workshop taught us to view (and respect) our bodies as necessary instruments. We limbered up each muscle yoga-style, first by ourselves, then in groups, to make the workout stress-free. We followed with deep breathing to expand the lungs and then did operatic vocal warm-up exercises to increase both range and register. Next, we moved on to facial stretches to relax the muscles that normally freeze with fear when facing an audience, and lip-loosening movements that encouraged our jaws, mouths and teeth to perform perfectly under pressure. We finished part one of the workshop with an improv routine that demanded our minds shake off the shackles of restraint just as our bodies had.

In session two, MacKay-Smith had each participant stand at the lectern and deliver a piece of his or her writing. It was obvious that even the most familiar prose appeared foreign to the writer when presented orally. We all knew the importance of eye contact but in our nervousness discovered tendencies to begin speaking too quickly, to pause incorrectly or use inappropriate inflection, to distract with frequent gestures, to apologize, stumble or sway.

As a professional actress, director and instructor, MacKay-Smith impressed upon us the value of comfortable body language, a relaxed facial expression and a long pause to draw an audience's attention before beginning.

"Take time to begin. Look up to deliver your first sentence, and see the images in the work in order to convey them," she told us.

MacKay-Smith suggested we commit our first line or two to memory in order to deliver it vividly and expressively, with eyes raised from the page. That, she told us, builds the strongest connection with our listeners. Also, by observ-

ing such traits as monotonous tone, breaks in rhythm and unappealing posture or mannerisms in our fellow readers, we learned not to simply float over the text but to add colour to both narrative and dialogue. We readily observed the huge difference MacKay-Smith's coaching made to each reading. The positive audience response fuelled and encouraged each writer-as-reader as each took the floor. In true workshop manner, confidence built on confidence.

By taking the plunge ourselves, repeating and mimicking MacKay-Smith-mimicking-us, we heard and felt the improvement that proper stance, controlled breathing, appropriate pacing, strong vocal projection and charismatic emoting lent our work. Not only did we glean such tips as marking or re-spacing the pages (perhaps even re-designing the work for oral delivery) but we learned to neither apologize for stumbles nor thank an audience upon completion of our presentation. In her opinion an audience thanks the performer with its applause. She left these small nuggets of wisdom to our discretion. She was, however, steadfast that her number-one tip—maintaining a level of unbroken concentration on the material—be followed, as it would diminish our nervousness like no other technique. "No one," she said, "can apply themselves to two things at once."

With practice, she assured us, all the mechanics of this process will begin to feel less foreign. "They will fall away invisibly, allowing you as the presenter to grant an audience the experience that is captured in your words—words that you are feeling as you confidently share them."

Barbara Hunt, a mother of four (ranging in age from six to 24), is a dry-eyed nostalgic who delivers contemporary bites of naked truth wrapped in a rich appealing texture. Hunt's work has been published in Canada and the U.S., and she can be reached through www.writersplayground.ca.

A Message from THE BOARD

By Sherry Hinman, WCDR President

I just got off the phone with Marjorie Green, founder and first president of the WCDR. As I prepare to try to fill the shoes of presidents before me, I am humbled by the legacy that I will have to carry on. After talking to Marge, I have a fresh appreciation of our past, and therefore why we exist and, by extension, where we are heading. With this in mind, we have begun discussions on how to capture the history of the WCDR, some of which will appear in the 10th anniversary yearbook this fall.

Speaking of the yearbook, I hope you've already marked your calendars for Saturday, October 29, as we commemorate the WCDR's 10th anniversary with a gala celebration. We've picked the date and the venue—the Claremont Community Centre—but we're still open to your suggestions on how to make this a most memorable night. Everyone is welcome: members, past members, past speakers, everyone who has been touched by the WCDR

over the past 10 years.

June marks the beginning of a new board. Most of our faces will be familiar to you, but have a look at pages 10 and 11 to learn more about us. We're fortunate to have five members staying on the board from last year; joining me are Annette McLeod as past president and speaker liaison, Rich Helms as Web liaison, Sue Eaman as events co-ordinator and Barbara Hunt as public relations co-ordinator and vice president.

We also welcome new board members Gladys Farquharson as breakfast/workshop co-ordinator, Thelma Davidson as treasurer, Ruth-Anne Mullan as membership co-ordinator and returning board member Kevin Craig as secretary.

This is also a time to say farewell and a huge thank you to those who've served on the past board, and some for several boards past: Karen Cole, Vicki Pinkerton, Sue Reynolds and Rose Cronin. Rose keeps reminding me

that it's not goodbye and that's true: they have all agreed to mentor the new board members in their roles. This not only makes for a less anxious transition, it also smoothes over some of the bumps so that you don't notice too big a change. And mentoring is woven into the very fabric of this organization.

As I write this message, we are poised for the first meeting of the new board. It's amazing what comes up when you fill a room with creative people. This applies to a room full of board members, a room full of participants at a WCDR breakfast, and a virtual "room" full of WCDR members sitting at home on their computers. Send us your ideas for breakfasts, workshops, contests, the *Word Weaver* and anything else writerly.

It's going to be an incredible year.



P a e a n s

Kudos!

Durham Region Writers Are Winners!

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

Barbara Hunt was thrilled to receive a Write! Canada Award from the Word Guild for her personal essay "The Map," which also aired on CBC Radio One. This story was written as a tribute to the WCDR's very own resident "fairy," Dorothea Helms.

The Periodical Writers Association of Canada (PWAC) honoured **Dorothea Helms** with the first-ever annual Barbara Novak Award for Excellence in Humour and/or Personal Essay Writing. The award was for her essay "The Gift of Words," which appeared in *The Globe and Mail's* Facts & Arguments section in January 2003.

Kristin Barrett and **Catherine Daley** are both contributors to a brand-new national mag-

azine called *Esteem*. The magazine, launched May 2005, is available at Indigo, Chapters and many other bookstores across the country.

Pamela Hamilton is now the new "Women in Business" editor for the online journal "All Things Girl." Among her responsibilities will be contributing articles to the "Women in Business" section.

Catherine Daley now writes for the *North Durham Business News* and had an article accepted for *Homes and Cottages Magazine*. And, as if she isn't already busy enough, she is also teaching a writing course for young adults aged 16–21 at Durham College in the fall of 2005.

Read "In Search of Windmills" by our very own **Jonathan van Bilsen** in the May 2005

issue of *Travelon* magazine, or on-line at www.fotografix.ca.

WCDR founder **Marge Green** had articles published in the spring, summer and fall issues of *The Country Connection* magazine. As well, Marge's how-to-write book, *Spywriter: Licensed to Write*, is now available as a pdf download at www.want-to-write.com.

Nora Rock's essay "On the Near Side" began life as an entry in WCDR's 24-hour Non-fiction contest in the fall of 2004. The *Globe and Mail* has since bought it for its Facts & Arguments page. Way to go, Nora!

Sherry Loeffler's article about the vacation bible school her church conducted last year is posted at www.cook.ca/faithkidz/ministry.asp.

GrammarPuss

There are sets of words that confound even the most accomplished writers. For whatever reason, they just can't remember when to use *emigrate* or *immigrate*, *affect* or *effect*, or who *infers* when you *imply*.

One of the best ways GrammarPuss found to get through tedious memory work—way back when Puss was just a kitten—was mnemonics. These little nuggets were a godsend when it came to getting through music class (**Every Good Boy Deserves Fun**), science (too many **irons** in the **FirE**) and geography (looking for a great body of water—go **HOMES**).

The word *mnemonic* has Greek origins: Mnemosyne was the Titanis-goddess who personified memory in Greek mythology. (In typically convoluted—and occasionally creepy—mythological fashion, Mnemosyne was not only the mother of the nine muses by Zeus, she was also his aunt.)

Simply put, mnemonics are memory devices. They are often used to memorize lists, such as in the example **HOMES** above, which stands for "Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior" and is a boon to young ones trying to remember the Great Lakes. "Every Good Boy Deserves Fun" helps music students remember the order of the treble scale: EGBDF. (If you're on the bass scale, try **Good Boys Deserve Fun Always** and see if it helps.) GrammarPuss has her own dear mother to thank for getting her through the periodic tables. Mum came up with such devices as "too many irons in the fire" to help me remember that the element iron is represented by the letters **FE**. The phrase is a common one meaning there is too much going on, so it was easily remembered. (These days the less imaginative keepers of our language would probably just call it "multi-tasking.") The first and last letters of the word "fire" form the correct atomic symbol for the element iron. GrammarPuss remembers this and others like it clearly, and she hasn't looked at a periodic

table since 1986. "Hey! You! Come back with my gold!" was Mum's way of putting the letters **AU** (which sounds like "Hey! You!"), representing the element gold, into Puss's head for all time.

These devices work because they create an association in our minds that, forever after, is hard to separate from the notion we're trying to remember. Successful networkers use similar methods to remember names and what people do—try that at the next WCDR breakfast! Picture our president sitting in front of a fireplace, writing her magnum opus, and sipping—you guessed it—sherry. Dorothea Helms is a real **FREE** spirit. Bet you won't forget now that Dorothea runs a successful freelance business.

They're very useful little things, to be sure. Of course, they will work best when the associations are something to which you already connect. If you don't remember the mnemonic, you're not going to remember that of which it's supposed to remind you. It's worth trying to come up with your own. GrammarPuss offers these to think about in the meantime:

Emigrate vs. immigrate: One emigrates from somewhere and immigrates to somewhere else. Try thinking about coming "imm" (which sounds enough like "in" to make it useful as a mnemonic device) to a country to remember *immigrate*, and that "e" is also the first letter of "exit" to remember *emigrate*.

Accept vs. except (to receive vs. to leave out): I give you an "A" for being so accepting of me. I take exception to your reading all the books **EXCEPT** mine.

Affect vs. effect (most commonly, *affect* is a verb meaning to influence, and *effect* is a noun meaning result, although *effect* can also be used as a verb meaning to accomplish; *effect* used as a verb is results-oriented, as in, "I'm doing everything I can to effect change." GrammarPuss has not yet come up with a mnemonic device to help

you with that one.) Try remembering that All Areas Are Affected by Adverse Anomalies (that should stick that "A" in there!).

Principle vs. principal (tenet vs. main):

PLEASE give me the chance to **PLEASE** my principles. If you'll make me one of the principals in your life, I'll be your **PAL**. (Remember that the person who heads up your school should also be your **PAL**.)

Illusion vs. allusion (a false reality vs. an indirect reference): **ALL** good writing uses allusions here and there. (True or not, it's just meant to help you remember which is which.)

Ascent vs. assent (climb vs. agreement): There is a "c" only in the word meaning "climb" (which, to point out the obvious, starts with "c"), so *ascent*, meaning to climb, is the one with the "c."

Breath vs. breathe (noun vs. verb): Just remember the phrase "breathe easy." *Easy* starts with "e"; *breathe* (the verb) ends in "e." Or, remember the phrase "short of breath." "Breath" is a shorter word than "breathe."

Prospective vs. perspective (likely in the future vs. point of view, among other meanings): If you're my prospective new employee, you're going to have to act like a real **PRO**.

Compliment vs. complement (praise vs. something that completes): "You have beautiful I's" (eyes—GrammarPuss will admit that this one works better orally) is one of our mating rituals' most common compliments.

Elicit vs. illicit (to draw out vs. unlawful): Breaking the law makes me **ILL**.

Hopefully, GrammarPuss's mnemonics will inspire you to try out some mind games of your own to help you keep track of all those pesky words that are vexing you!



A Warm WCDR Welcome to Our Newest Members

David McKay
Pat McMahon
Mike Zaver
Susan English
Brian Baker
Maureen Curry

Barb Ewanckek
Elise Kubsch
Virginia Winters
Barry Knibbs
Michael Khashmanian
Michelle Zarins
John Sjöholm

Ann Peacock
Diane Skeet
Natalie Anderson
Roland Rochette
Merle Amodeo
Norman Johnston

Who's Who: Dorothy Sjöholm

By Nancy Del Col

You probably know Dorothy as the smiling face behind this year's Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest, working behind the scenes on the considerable detail involved in making that contest happen. But it was also the DSMP contest that brought Dorothy to us. Five years ago she entered a poem in the contest and it took second place. She was so impressed by the WCDR that she joined.

Since retiring from teaching high school English, Dorothy has received other awards and recognitions for her poetry, most notably from the Ontario Poetry Society. She has also been short-listed this year in *LICHEN Arts & Letters Preview's* "Tracking a Serial Poet" contest. The past five years have seen a number of kudos come her way, but 35 years of grading student essays, planning lessons and producing musicals did not leave much time for her own creativity. Dorothy often wrote poems that would end up stuck in the drawer of her teacher's desk. Retirement has brought those poems, and Dorothy's talent, out of hiding.

Word Weaver: What do you like to write?

Dorothy Sjöholm: Mostly free verse poetry, but I've been experimenting with more traditional poetic forms. I also write short stories and personal essays, but less frequently.

WW: What are some of your writing accomplishments?

DS: My work has appeared in quite a few anthologies and several small press publications, plus a number of community newspapers. In 2000, I self-published *Holding the Mirror*, a book of poems and short stories. I learned so much from this undertaking! This book was used as a fundraiser for "Out of the Cold," a program for homeless people, and I was really pleased with the results.

WW: Any current or future projects?

DS: I was a contributing editor involved in *Renaissance Conspiracy*, an anthology of poems by members of the Toronto chapter of the Canadian Poetry Association. I no longer organize my life around projects and schedules. (Ah, the joys of retirement!) I've been toying with the idea of self-publishing another book of stories and poems about Dee and Cassie, the two sisters who appeared in *Holding the Mirror*.

WW: When did you first realize you were a writer?

DS: The first writing contest I remember winning was an essay contest run by the I.O.D.E. [Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire]—"Why I

Am Proud to Be a Part of the British Commonwealth." I was 11 years old. I won a copy of *Lost in the Barrens*. But I can't say at that point I thought, "Wow! I'm a writer!" In fact, last month I had a poem appear in *Aesthetica*, a British publication—it was my first international publication, and I wrote to a friend that I was beginning to think that I might be a writer.

WW: Describe your writing work space.

DS: My computer is where I do most of my writing. Lots of books and papers around me—not exactly an image of organization. Hanging on the wall to my right is a large poster of Leonard Cohen and the letter he sent me in 2000 when I asked for permission to use a quotation from *Suzanne* in the foreword to *Holding the Mirror*. Leonard is a major source of inspiration. I often ask his photo for guidance (just kidding!).

Behind me are two large bookshelves filled with books. My house is full of books—mostly poetry and novels, but I always keep the *Oxford Dictionary*, *Roget's Thesaurus*, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* and the Bible close at hand. Hey, it can't hurt to seek a little divine guidance.

WW: How do you get started on your writing?

DS: Most of my ideas come to me when I'm sleeping, on one of my morning walks or while browsing through *Bartlett's* or the Bible. I also use little word association games and love the whole freefall writing thing, but I'm really not good at getting started. I lack the discipline to make myself write every day.

WW: Do you know where you're going when you start writing?

DS: Never. Even when I'm writing something as logical and structured as an essay, I seem to have to take that metaphoric leap into darkness. I learned a long time ago that if I try to work from a plan, the work is invariably stillborn. I have heard some writers ridiculed for saying their characters take over as they write, but that concept really rings true for me. I often struggle with poems for days or even weeks, and then for some reason I can't understand, the poem just falls into place. I really don't know how I write, or for that matter, how anyone else does. The whole process is amazing to me.

WW: Name some of your favourite books or writers.

DS: I am a real fan of CanLit—Atwood, Findlay, Laurence, Richler, Cohen, Layton. I also enjoy poets Patrick Lane and Tim Lilburn, and novelists Guy Vanderhaeghe and David Adams Richards.

WW: What are you reading right now?

DS: Just finished a book of poems by Jonathan Bennett, *Here is my street, this tree I planted*. Almost finished *Healing Dreams* by Marc Ian Barasch, and *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson.

WW: Complete this phrase: "The world needs writers because..."

DS: They help us figure things out? Or maybe just because there's an awful lot of blank paper desperately longing for the caressing touch of a pen.

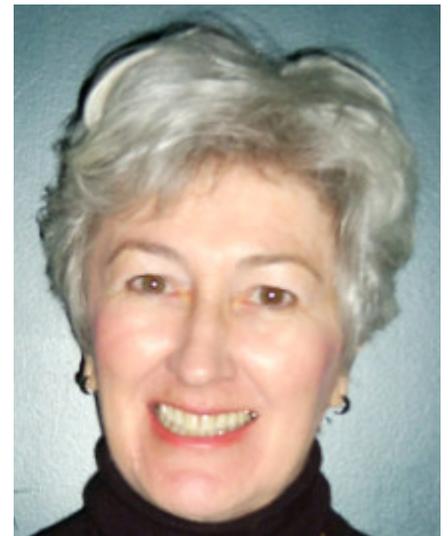
WW: Suggest a short prayer for writers.

DS: Of all the writers' prayers I've ever read, my favourite is "A Writer's Prayer" by Lawrence Block. It begins, "Lord, I hope You've got a few minutes. I've got a whole lot of favors to ask You." It is quite lengthy—talks about comparing ourselves to other writers, and dealing with jealousy over others' successes. It includes the line "When my humility is in good order, both success and failure become easier to take." It's online at BooksandAuthors.net.

WW: After a long session of writing, what drink do you treat yourself to?

DS: Gin and tonic with a slice of lime. Almost perfect any time of year, but especially on a hot summer day.

Thanks for the insights into your writing life, Dorothy—a prayer, a drink and a think.



Nancy Del Col teaches high school English and Writer's Craft in Markham. She writes a monthly column for Post City Magazines. This summer she is teaching at an orphanage in Africa, then taking a five-month sabbatical from work to write (and hopefully complete) a YA novel.

Writer Update: How are our “resolved” prose pushers doing, you asked?

Many of you have inquired as to how those two brave members who took the November/December 2004 *Word Weaver* writer’s life challenge are doing.

Well, your dear editor has been hot on their heels for an update.

I’m sure you’ll agree after reading their articles below that their “secret formulas” have helped them surpass their

initial New Year’s writing resolutions.

I hope having them share their writer’s lives will help you come up with your own formula for writing success.

E=mc²

By Heather M. O'Connor

Eureka! Mine is the joy that Einstein surely felt when discovering his Theory of Relativity. And while my feet dance, my fingers are tapping out chapter after chapter of my novel-in-progress, *Twice a Ghost*, as fast as they can. I have discovered my own theory, though it varies somewhat from Einstein’s. The formula may look the same, $E=mc^2$, but mine is the Theory of *Creativity*.

Every writer seeks that elusive energy: the creativity to write, to see the spark of an idea spontaneously combust into a blaze of connected words. As Einstein teaches, energy, *E*, cannot be created or destroyed, though all too frequently it can disperse and scatter.

My Theory of Creativity channels energy.

For me, the critical element in my theory is an unfinished, yet promising, manuscript, called *m* for short. The goal to finish it by year’s end is a noble one. But, in reality, a busy life, job and family all conspire to sap creative energy. By scattering inspiration and dispersing motivation, the desired reaction may never materialize. In my case, that’s a polished novel ready for market.

The final part of the formula originates in a strong writing group, such as the one to which I belong—The Wordsmiths. The c^2 , in case you hadn’t figured it out, stands for critiquing—from all sides! I assure you that without it, the impetus to produce your best work is missing. Before it’s my turn to be critiqued, I polish each sentence until it shines.

It’s intimidating to expose your heart-chosen words to critique from your peers, but

fear not. Critique is a building process: it develops your writing’s character, cements its structure, smoothes its flaws and enables you to identify imperfections more easily yourself.

Critique also builds trust. I can count on Cathy to discover any errors in point of view or spelling or grammar—*what’s “perfect past tense” anyway?* And leave it to sequencing queen, Deb, to point out that my character couldn’t possibly pat someone’s arm—she’d turned to walk away two paragraphs earlier. I will select, from several writers’ brilliant suggestions, the solution to the awkward turn-of-phrase with which I have grappled for days.

And when the writing’s good, my friends demand the next instalment, driving me back to my computer with renewed energy and purpose: That’s a formula for successful writing.

Playing With Words:

Writer Update

By Suzanne Robinson

I’ve been playing with words and addressing my writing resolutions, and though not totally accomplished, they have been greatly accelerated. I’m at the computer writing more than ever before—something new is in the works and my insomnia has been replaced by “(Writing) Muse Opportunity Time,” or “mot” for short.

Of course I’ve always played with words via journals, poetry writing, cryptic crosswords, Scrabble etc. I received a free CD-ROM Scrabble game in the mail and had to

put myself on a Scrabble-free diet until after 8:00 p.m. in order to accomplish my writing resolutions. Now that’s hard!

The *Reader’s Digest Dictionary* defines *resolution* in some very interesting ways using words like “decomposition: an analysis and conversion into another form.” This certainly fits my resolution of mining old stories for ideas or rewrites (and it gives me a chance to play with words like *azido* and *azide!*). The dictionary further states “the process by which discord is made to pass into concord, and the solving of doubt, problem and question.” This sure sounds like rewriting and editing to me. (Our own *Word Weaver* editor has already put this one into play for me—thanks, Deborah.)

Webster’s New World Dictionary adds: “a

formal statement of opinion or determination adopted by an assembly or other group.” Could this be yet another message from my muse suggesting it’s about high time I joined a writing circle? And I will most likely do so after the summer when I have finished my move to a new home (still in Durham, of course) and have attended Jane Bow’s Creative Writing Course at Haliburton School of the Arts.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines *resolution* as “the quality of being resolute.” My only comment is “Yes, I am working on that.”

My thesaurus has the last defining words for *resolution*: *decision*, *steadfastness* and *courage*, and that I wish for us all.

Odds & Eds

By Deborah A. Rankine,
Word Weaver Editor

As a kid, it was my job to collect the two-quart bottles of homogenized milk from the milk box every day. One morning, anxious for a quick escape to go play with my friends, I miscalculated my hold and both sweating bottles crashed together, slicing wide open the heel on the palm of my left hand. The gash was clean but deep, and there was no pain, but that didn't stop me from screaming bloody murder at the sight of all that blood—my blood—coursing its way down my upright forearm. My mother—always grace under fire—triaged the situation and announced that I would live. She wrapped my hand numb-tight in a tea towel and off we went to Dr. Legget's office on the Danforth.

Dr. Legget was our kindly, old family physician who gave all his young patients suckers if they didn't holler when he gave them their shots; I was confident my injury would net at least three sweets, though why we would go all the way to his office for a silly bandage when we had a medicine cabinet full of them, to me, was a mystery.

We sat in the two worn leather chairs beside

his desk and waited for him to come in, and when he did, he was carrying a small tray with what looked like a linen napkin draped over the top. Dr. Legget unwrapped the tray and solved my mystery—at the age of eight, I was old enough to understand that I was about to get my first-of-many stitches.

"Stop crying," my mother demanded. "It doesn't hurt."

Dr. Legget had yet to administer the freezing, but one look at the tip of the syringe he was holding was all that was needed to put me over the edge.

"Stop it right now! Stop acting like a baby!" Mother yelled over my screams.

Dr. Legget smiled warmly, patting my head. "Now, now, dear. It will be all right. I'll be very careful, but it still may hurt, so you cry all you want."

My mother looked at him in disbelief. "But she's making such a fuss! The entire waiting room can hear her!"

Dr. Legget winked at me. "Well, you'd cry too if you were getting stitches."

I was gob-smacked. That an adult would

allow me to face my fear unashamed and with so much melodramatic flair *and* without repercussion was new to me, and I immediately swiped my tears with the back of my good hand while he expertly mended the other.

So, your "**themed**" writing challenge is to take us for a spin on the "Emotionator." Use your words as a catalyst to spark an empathetic reader reaction. Start by thinking of a strong emotion, such as fear, anger, hope or joy. Write the story of that experience. Let your reader *feel* your heart skipping a beat, taste your bittersweet tears or bathe in your rapture. Don't *talk* about the emotion; *show* it in action.

E-mail your submission to:

wordweaver@wcdr.org.

Maximum word count: 400

Deadline: August 20, 2005

Please **paste** your submission in the **body** of your e-mail if not a **MS Word doc** file.

September/October Writing Challenge

Simile n. 1 a figure of speech involving the explicit comparison of two things, often using the words "like" or "as": e.g., as brave as a lion. 2 the use of such comparison.

Your *Word Weaver* editor's definition: Similes compare two fundamentally unlike things, oftentimes using "like" or "as" in order to emphasize a similarity.

Example: "The sand was as soft as flannel sheets." (Jeremy Maharaj)
"His eyes were dark as bottomless pits." (Nick Panaccio)

Here are a few more...

"Her hair was like gravy, running brown off her head and clumping up on her shoulders." (Author unknown)

"... the laces of her tread-bare Keds were knotted together and draped over her shoulders like a poor lady's stole." (Yours truly)

"... the bottom of the vase struck the top of his head, skipped like a stone on a pond, hit the wall and shattered." (Stephen King)

"I lit a cigarette that tasted like a plumber's handkerchief." (Raymond Chandler)

Your challenge is to come up with several wickedly creative similes.

Deadline: August 20, 2005

Send your submission(s) in the **body** of your e-mail to: **wordweaver@wcdr.org.**

July/August “Themed” Challenge Submissions: It’s a Hard Rock Life!

Backstage Pass

By CreativeJames

The band’s lyrics go between my sweet heavy alcohol amp. I wade across the huge stage in sound as thick as Jell-o, stone face lost in the art of staying erect. Fingers slide over the strings and frets in well-practised ease, feet dodging the electric snakes curling over each other on the scuffed, worn surface. Groupies swarm in front of our lead singer, exposing fake breasts and reaching in frantic gulps for a touch of his shoe, a tickle of his pant line; but John likes the little blondes so I lean against him screaming the chorus and wink to the tall brunette a few feet away, smile that rogue bad smile, shake my hair. We jump together, land in time with the explosions while the fans scream in throat-searing voices only they can hear. Our performance oozes its famous spastic blur until we wave goodbye and head backstage. On and on the chants reverb while we snort fresh dope and power chug a few beers, stretching weary fingers, pumping up for the encore.

“That one there,” Johnny says.

“And that one for me.” I point, and our head roadie, Robbie, heads out onto the stage to talk to the lucky girls jammed tight to the wire.

The place goes wild thinking we’re coming back. We laugh while he antics, waves to the crowd and returns with that usual giddy smile from his 30 seconds of fame. The babes are ushered back to the trailers, and the few extra girls for him and the crew, kept under cover for now. We scoop up another snort for luck and head back into the glare of day at night to romp through the finale.

The first of two gigs in the same town cruises to its last big boom. No loading 40 tons of shit onto the trucks, so the roadies are happy. Everyone’s getting laid tonight for a change, so the entire crew pumps up for a good time after nine straight concerts in nine obscure arenas and towns that all look the same—all have the same coffee shops, same dotting followers, same hungry egos looking for a chance to grab our microphones or chop on a mirrorful of free low-carb cocaine.

“The mayor and his wife got backstage passes,” Robbie announces.

We laugh so hard we almost puke.



CreativeJames Dewar is a poet and freelance magazine article and business writer. His poetry can be enjoyed in *Quills*, *Poetry Canada* and the poetry anthologies *Anvil Blood* and *Renaissance Conspiracy*. His new chapbook, *Guys in Garages*, has just been released and is available through his website, www.creativejames.com.

Mack Yagger: Rock Star or Writer?

By Kevin Craig

“I slow dance, smashed on stage, in smelly raucous spandex, screaming, ‘I’m a rock star!’ But that’s just one aspect of me,” infamous bad-boy rocker Mack Yagger informs me, his staccato delivery coming across as more than a little manic. “We’re all made of multiple personas. What I really aspire to be is a writer.”

We’re sitting at a sidewalk café, just outside Boise, Idaho. The tour bus, painted an obscene purple punctuated with explosive hot-pink lips, blocks out the morning sun. We have stopped for coffee. The rest of the band is still sleeping.

This is the best time to interview the *real* Mack. In the morning calm, he can discard the rock-star persona. This is when the truth comes out...these quiet moments when the usually frenetic Yagger settles down and speaks from both the hip and the heart.

“Don’t you consider your lyrics the product of a writer? Surely they bring you to that goal of WRITER?” I ask.

“Well, technically, the moment the words are dropped from my cerebellum to paper, I become WRITER. But I meant it in a more tangible sense. While I’m thrashing around onstage, slamming away at crowd favourites, feeling the pinch of Lycra in places a 37-year-old has no business wearing Lycra, I picture myself at a desk in a mahogany-ensconced, tiffany-lamped study. I imagine myself writing and I race through the set to get offstage and find that mythical writing room.”

“I’m not sure I understand. Are you saying you’re tired of music? Is the end of Onion Tears near?”

“I wouldn’t go that far. But there comes a time when you get tired of singing the same old songs. Sometimes I think, if I hear ‘Finding Shelter’ one more time, I’m gonna kill myself. Then I realize it’s coming out of my mouth! That’s when I want to pack it in and write. I

imagine that writing is less static than being a rock star.

“The other night, for instance, I was so hammered I walked right off the bloody stage! I thought to myself, Why the Christ couldn’t I be Stephen King? Writing has to be easier than getting pinched six ways to sideways in a spandex jumpsuit!”

“Have you tried sitting down and writing?” I ask, offering him a self-deprecating smile.

“Hmm,” Mack says. “That’s not a half-bad idea. You know, I never did get that far. After crawling offstage every night, I usually just lament that I’m not writing. But what a concept! Sit down and write.” He smiles with newfound hope. “That just might work.”

Kevin Craig is currently serving on the WCDR Board of Directors. He is working away on a novel-length manuscript, tentatively titled “Summer on Fire.” He is, however, constantly reminding himself to just sit down and write.

July/August Writing Challenge Submissions: When I Was a Kid...

A Man Named Macho

By Joel A. Sutherland

I often look back on the day the floodgate opened.

I was eight.

I remember it well.

I'll never forget.

My hero, my idol, my god, Macho Man Randy Savage, that pillar of strength, justice and everything that's good in the world, left the lovely Elizabeth for Sensational Sherri and turned on his partner, Hulk Hogan, in *Wrestlemania V*.

My world was shattered, my childlike in-

nocence gone forever. I began to question life; the questions piled up fast:

Why does one sock go missing every time Mom does the laundry?

Why do we park in the driveway, and drive on the parkway?

Why does Wile E. Coyote spend his money on all that Acme junk instead of just buying dinner?

Why do we say "heads up" when we mean to duck?

Why did Yankee Doodle name the feather in his hat Macaroni?

Why do we sing *Take Me Out to the Ball Game* when we're already there?

Why don't you ever see baby pigeons? Why can't they make the whole plane out of the same material as the indestructible black box?

Why doesn't Tarzan have a beard?

Why does my dog get mad when I blow in his face, but as soon as we get in the car, his head is out the window?

Trivial matters, sure, but it wasn't long before I began to question my other heroes: Superman, The Great One and yes, even Santa Claus.

And it's all thanks to a man named Macho.

Thank you, Savage.

A Summer

By Bonnie Stewart

Distressed at the talk of war and the possibility of her grandchildren signing up—the same way her children in that other earlier war had—Grandma fretted herself into a stroke and passed away. I was inconsolable.

"She's old," they said, and talked to me of heaven. But it was no good, so my wise parents persuaded me that country cousin Marj—an only child—might like a friend for the summer. True enough, Marj was

happy to see me and in no time she jollied me out of my tears and we embraced summer with enthusiasm. We soaked up the days half naked, showing off to visiting city cousins who wore shoes, hats and other constrictions.

Auntie and Uncle, subdued, distracted, went about their chores, listening to the radio newscasts with worried faces. Unfettered, we scampered to our own tunes.

With discarded boards from the pig pen and stolen nails, we launched a raft in the nearby creek, built a tree house, unsafe, exciting. No thought of our gender, as Tom

and Huckleberry, we played barefoot. Hide-and-seek in the cornfield, bug-eyed witness to snakes shedding skins, newly born kittens found in the barn, then late afternoons hearing the lead cow belling the way home.

Summer's end, home in the city, school days, dresses, shoes, rules.

Fresh morning sounds on our street, wagons passing. I heard the milkman call out, "We're in it."

"Yes," the bread man answered.

It was September 10, 1939.

Tampering

By Breda Rooney

The baby lambs were frisking their way across the sunny fields that rolled away from the schoolhouse window. I desperately wanted to run with them, but I was trapped at a desk, charged with ridding myself of a "defect" in my nature—my sinister preference for writing with my left hand.

Under the stifling nearness of the authority figure of the day, my right hand painful-

ly steered the unruly pencil up and down between the lines, wrestling it around the curves and peaks. My betrayed left hand lay idly by, witnessing a process it had successfully mastered.

On the sidelines, the wall-clock hand crawled in the direction of the noon hour. The air was punctuated with coughs, sighs, shuffles, page-flutters, whispers and hints of bread, cheese and tomato sneaking out from lunch boxes. When a face glanced around at me, I wondered whether it was in pity, ridicule or relief that I was keeping at-

attention away from the rest of class.

This scene played out every morning until I eventually made it into the right-hander club.

At the age of seven, in 1953, I didn't wonder whether such interference might tangle any wires in my psycho-system or wrench me away from my true essence. I was persuaded that something had to be fixed so that I could be on a level playing field with everyone else. Celebrating instinctive traits was for the lambs.

2005 Professional Development Workshops

Writing for Magazines

By Sherry Hinman

September 27–November 15/05
Tuesday evenings, 6:45–8:45 p.m.
Oshawa Public Library,
Northview Branch
 250 Beatrice St. E., Oshawa.

Cost: \$225 (\$200 for WCDR members)

Contact: Sherry Hinman
 905-666-6615
info@thewriteangle.ca

Thinking about putting your ideas to work? There are loads of magazines out there just waiting to receive them! Take this eight-week course and learn the entire magazine writing process, from idea to publication. Whether you've dabbled in magazine writing before or are just thinking about it, this course is for you.

By the end of this course, you'll know: how to find markets, where to get ideas, how magazines work, what the different types of articles (features, profiles, reviews, how-to articles) are, how to write a query letter they'll READ, what to do when they say YES, how to research your topic, how to find experts and interview them, how to work with editors, your rights as a

writer, how to structure your article, how to edit your own work, how to get paid and other money matters.

Sherry Hinman is a freelance writer/editor and owner of The Write Angle. Sherry has been published in *East of the City*, *ON Site East*, *Durham Trade and Commerce*, *CASLPO Today*, *Healthcare Careers4Ontario Handbook*, *Uxbridge Times-Journal*, *Voice of the Farmer* and *Oshawa/Whitby This Week*. As well, Sherry teaches at Durham College and Oshawa Senior Citizens Centres and she also provides small business consulting to entrepreneurs through the Ontario Disability Support Program.

The Writer's Balancing Act

By Dorothea Helms and Ruth E. Walker

November 4 to 6, 2005

Three-Day Creative Writing Workshop.

Join award-winning writers Dorothea Helms, a.k.a. The Writing Fairy, and Ruth E. Walker, founding editor of the Canadian journal *lichen*, for a weekend immersion in the craft of writing. Stretch your creative abilities, and add to your writer's toolkit of narrative skills, editing knowledge and the bu\$ine\$\$ aspects of writing. Helms and Walker offer a professional "tough love" approach to producing quality non-fiction, fiction and poetry. Many of their students are now successful, published writers.

The Workshop:

Friday—7 to 9 p.m.
 Orientation, personal writing goals.

Saturday—9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.
 Intense exercises heighten lateral thinking and explore the balance between creativity and the facts. Discover markets.

Sunday—10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
 Learn to balance critical feedback with praise in a Writers' Circle tutorial.

Attendance by pre-registration only.

Location: Golden Pathways Retreat
 (www.goldenpathways.ca), Peterborough.
 Accommodations available at additional cost.

Workshop registration fee:
 \$325 / \$300 if paid by **October 14, 2005**
 Includes Saturday lunch, workshop refreshments, handouts, editing follow-up by Dorothea or Ruth of work in progress (max. 3,000 words).



B r e a k f a s t I n f o r m a t i o n

July 9, 2005 Breakfast Meeting

And now for something completely different...

Historically, July's breakfasts have not been as well attended as those in other months, since many members have activities that take over in the summer—this gives us the perfect opportunity to experiment with something new. The WCDR board is hosting an event designed to give you the impetus you need to carry you through a breakfast-less August and spark your mental engines to

keep your writing running until September. Members of the WCDR board will present some of their favourite creativity exercises, including (but not limited to) writing on the spot. Attendees will be challenged, entertained and informed, and will take away with them some extra tools to ensure their writing is fresh and timely. You will not be hauled up in front of the group against your will, but you will be asked to participate in whatever way makes you feel good. Come to the feel-good event of the summer in July—get to know your new board a little better and get those creative juices flowing.

No breakfast meeting in August.

Have a wonderful, safe summer. See you all at the **next breakfast meeting on Saturday, September 10, 2005.**

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; guests \$16

If you are **not** on the **Regrets-only** list, you **must** reserve a spot no later than the **Wednesday** prior to the next meeting.

Contact Gladys Farquharson—breakfast2005@wcdr.org or at 905-686-0211

Presenting

your

2005–2006 WCDR

Board of Directors



President—**Sherry Hinman**—president@wcdr.org

Sherry has been writing since she was old enough to hold a pencil but she only decided to turn her hobby into a serious pursuit in 2002, when she began operating her freelance writing/editing business, The Write Angle.

When she's not writing or editing, Sherry teaches at Durham College and Oshawa Senior Citizens Centres and she also provides small business consulting to entrepreneurs through the Ontario Disability Support Program.

Sherry is thrilled to be part of such a dedicated team that supports over 250 writers and editors in Durham Region and beyond.

Past President/Speaker Liaison—**Annette McLeod** pastpresident@wcdr.org or speaker@wcdr.org

Annette's first published work, a poem, came at age 14 in the anthology *Celebrate Our City*, published by McClelland and Stewart in honour of Toronto's sesquicentennial. She is a 16-year veteran of the *Toronto Sun*, where she currently holds the post of senior writer/editor in the special sections department.

She is currently working on a short story and a novel. When not writing, she enjoys arts and crafts, time spent with friends, video games and obsessing about hyphenation.



Vice President/Public Relations—**Barbara Hunt**—vp@wcdr.org or pr@wcdr.org

Barbara has written all of her life—while working on an Honours B.A. in literature, acquiring a fashion design degree and raising four children—but came to her passion seriously in 2002. Her work has been published in Canada and the U.S.

She is letting her friendships at the WCDR blossom into activity on the board.

Secretary—**Kevin Craig**—secretary@wcdr.org

Kevin has been writing for most of his life. His first stories, written some 30 years ago, centred around decapitated heads on platters in basement refrigerators. These were the bedtime stories he shared with his first captive audience, his older brother. Kevin now focuses on writing fiction, non-fiction and poetry.

He is currently working on a coming-of-age novel, and is thrilled to be returning to the WCDR board for its 10th anniversary year.





Treasurer—Thelma Davidson—treasurer@wcdr.org

Thelma writes poetry and funny letters. She enjoys the world of money, food, movies, theatre, literature, grandkids, kids, politics—in that order.
Thelma is looking forward to *figuring* out her new position and making new pals within the WCDR.

Web Liaison—Rich Helms—webmaster@wcdr.org

Rich's articles have appeared in a range of publications from *Engineering Dimensions* and the *IBM Systems Journal*, to the *Toronto Sun*. He is also well versed in writing computer languages and programs. Rich learned his first computer language in 1966 and designed his first computer language for IBM in 1980. He holds five U.S. and Canadian patents. He invented CARES, the computer system for aging missing kids that was used by Metro Toronto Police for 11 years, and was recognized with a Metro Toronto Police Appreciation Award. His Learning C++ CD-ROM was recognized with the Society for Technical Communications Distinguished Publication Award.

Rich's passion in life is using complex computer technologies to make tasks easier.

Rich does long-distance bicycle riding and is currently building his first bicycle from scratch.



**Breakfast/Workshop Co-ordinator—Glady Farquharson
breakfast2005@wcdr.org or workshop@wcdr.org**

Glady Farquharson, fiction and inspirational journalling writer from Oshawa, networks with colleagues, advises friends, teaches workshops and loves exploring new worlds through writing.

Membership Co-ordinator—Ruth-Anne Mullan—membership@wcdr.org

Ruth-Anne Mullan didn't know that she could write until she was 60 and took a writing course. Now she belongs to the Oshawa Scribes Writing Circle and is on the executive at Toastmasters International. Ruth-Anne is also an on-call chaplain at Lakeridge Health in Oshawa, Ontario.

Ruth-Anne is looking forward to a rewarding term as membership co-ordinator this year.



Special Events Co-ordinator—Sue Eaman—events@wcdr.org

Sue Eaman, in addition to writing, WCDR event planning and changing homes, is currently rifling through hundreds of moving boxes in search of her bio.

For complete **boarder bios**, log on to **www.wcdr.org**.

WCDR Board of Directors

and their **NEW** e-mail addresses

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Upcoming Events at the WCDR

“Would You Turn the Page?” Panel Critique

The Writers' Circle of Durham Region proudly presents “Would You Turn the Page?”—your opportunity to watch a literary agent and a book editor at work, critiquing the first page of your manuscript!

REGISTRATION: Beginning August 1, 2005, registration will open for this WCDR **members-only** event. Registration is limited to the first 45 applicants and will be through the WCDR website only. Details will follow. The fee is \$35 and includes a boxed lunch. All registrants will be invited to submit the first page of a manuscript, though there may not be time for all submissions to be evaluated. Please watch your e-mail for further details, as we get closer to the date.

THE EVENT: Judges will select as many submissions as time permits, and display and critique them (anonymously). This event will take place on Saturday, September 10, 2005, from 1-4 p.m. at the NEW Whitby Public Library, 405 Dundas Street West.

Questions? Contact Sue Eaman, WCDR events co-ordinator, at **905-686-0211** or at events@wcdr.org.

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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