



# THE WORD WEAVERS

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

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# M y S e c r e t L o v e

By Heather M. O'Connor

**T**wo months ago my life changed. A friend introduced me to a long lean redhead. He seduced me, drawing me into a close relationship. We spend our days together and sometimes our nights. I think I'm falling in love.

We're perfect for each other. He does whatever I ask. I can talk to him about anything. Our relationship frees my creative energy, allowing me to become a better writer.

It's hard to remember what life was like before he entered my life. He has insinuated himself into everything I do; I'll never leave him.

My husband knows all about our relationship. I've even introduced him to the children. Before you pin a scarlet A on my chest, let me explain.

My new friend is a dragon. Not a real dragon—Dragon NaturallySpeaking voice recognition software.

Some nights, a nightmare jerks me awake to the memory of my life before Dragon. I replay the same scene over and over:

*Play.*

*Tap-tappity-tap.*

*Rewind.*

The tedious process of transcribing. A 10 minute interview consumes 40 minutes.

I blame my youthful arrogance. Convinced a student as brilliant as myself would never need to type — I'd have a staff to do that — I 'fgf'd myself to an embarrassing 51% in Grade nine. Speeds of 100 wpm? Snort! I barely boast 15.

I don't watch the screen when I type, I look at my fingers — well, the two or three that do the lion's share of the work. My eyes squint, my shoulders hunch over the keyboard. My fingers convulse like crippled spiders.

*Painstakingly, I type,*

~~Transcript Transcrit~~

%@\*%&\*!

*Transcript.*

The fingers of others fly across the keyboard—smug Carol Manley, my sister, *my children*. Envy burns within me. Who needs typing

anyway?

I do. I write for a living. Interview transcriptions are the biggest time-gobblers. Forget about a tiger in your tank, fellow writers; put a Dragon in your computer.

It is invaluable for transcribing. With my microphone headset on and an ear bud connecting me to my digital recorder, I listen to my interview and simulcast it, like an interpreter at the United Nations.

If I'm just transcribing notes to myself, like snippets for my novel or comments on a character, I can plug in my recorder and let Dragon do it all.

Dragon NaturallySpeaking types what I say. Every word I speak into the headset tumbles through the air, forming into soldier's ranks on the monitor before my eyes.

*Fascinating Interview with Joe Blow for Cool Magazine.*

*New line.*

*June 27, 2006. New paragraph.*

*Centre that.*

The lines do a quick march to centre.

*Bold that.*

The words stand boldly at attention.

*Left-justify next line. Blah, blah, blah.*

Dragon types as quickly as I can speak. I'm currently working at about 98% accuracy. That translates to only five corrections on an average page of 250 words. I'm shooting for 99%. It's intuitive — the more you use it, the smarter it gets. It learns your voice, the expressions you use, the special words in your vocabulary.

I love the macros I can create, shortcuts for things like e-mail addresses, closings, blank invoices and headings. My personal favourite is the macro I called *submission format*. In two words, I command Dragon to type the sixteen-line heading I put at the top of every article I write, with the correct font, text centred, bolded, capped and underlined.

Dragon works with most Microsoft programs, like Word, PowerPoint, Messenger, Internet Explorer, Outlook and Excel. Most com-

puters purchased in the last five years can handle Dragon's 30,000 word vocabulary.

Most users, however, cannot handle the manufacturer's user's guide. It's not for the faint of heart. And that's where the friend who introduced us enters the picture.

Paul Feldman, an Ajax entrepreneur, distributes and teaches Dragon NaturallySpeaking. He has also written his own manual, one that connects straightforward commands to the actions they perform. He could have entitled it *Dragon NaturallySpeaking for Dummies*.

I rode the superhighway of success by taking Paul's one-on-one training session. He uses the 'Simon Says' method; he speaks the command and the words show up on the screen. Then it's my turn. The training video Paul developed follows the same method. With Paul's help, I avoided the pitfalls, learned good habits and cemented a strong relationship with Dragon.

Dragon frees writers from their keyboards. Kinesthetic writers can stand up and pace around with their characters. Writers with back problems, arthritis or repetitive strain injuries can just lean back and tell a story. Relax — Dragon's a good listener.

Get in touch with my matchmaker Paul. I'll tell him you're coming. A long, lean redhead is just a phone call away.

*Paul Feldman, Computing By Voice*  
(416) 826-6239

[paul@computingbyvoice.com](mailto:paul@computingbyvoice.com)  
[www.computingbyvoice.com](http://www.computingbyvoice.com)

You'll find **Heather M. O'Connor** tethered to her computer by her Dragon headset and Merlin Writes, her freelance writing business that can be accessed via [www.merlinwrites.com](http://www.merlinwrites.com). Heather's work has been featured in *The Toronto Sun*, *Durham Trade and Commerce*, *East of the City* magazine, and *Homes North*.



# Editorial Eyes

By Annette McLeod

## The Purpose for a Scene

**M**ost of us writers are resigned to the fact that a big chunk of our writing efforts must be devoted to re-writing. It would be marvelous if everything we put down on paper were as well crafted as we intended right out of the hop, but it generally isn't. The muse may take us to places we don't expect, show us things we can't imagine, and give us the power to capture them, but most times, once the words are down on paper, she disappears into the mist from which she came, and we're left with a verbose first draft that needs to be carefully pruned.

When it comes to fiction, sometimes what needs to be pruned are not merely words or even paragraphs, but whole scenes.

The hardest cuts to make are when a scene is beautifully written, but doesn't serve a purpose. Diction (the words we choose) and syntax (the order in which the words are placed) are the areas in which writers tend to expend the most energy. We hate to throw away words that flow, impart images, carry us away, even if they don't carry us any place in particular. Ever had one of those moments when you read your own work and think, "Damn! I'm goood!"? They may be rare, but few moments feel better. If we realize later that those pretty words don't actually help our story in any way, we keep them because they're just so darn pretty.

Your writing will be stronger if you require your scenes to actually do something. Every scene needs to be there for a reason; in fact, it will make your work stronger if every scene is there for more than one reason. So what criteria should a scene meet before we let it into the next draft?

### Character:

Does your scene further the reader's knowledge of the personality, background or motivation of a character? Are you introducing a new character? (And while we're on the subject of serving a purpose, does that new character have a reason to be?) Does the scene demonstrate how a character caused or reacts to certain events? Character development is a great reason to keep a scene, but don't be fooled. It's not enough to impart information; the information we impart must also be meaningful.

### Setting:

Does your scene reveal information about the setting that further develops characters or plot, or creates ambiance? Does the setting reveal something about the culture in which your story is set, which in turn further reveals something about those all-important characters? Is the setting or culture important in creating who your characters are or will become? Location is often a big contributor towards creating values in a person.

### Plot:

Does the scene move your plot forward? Is the tension escalating? The suspense growing? Are you introducing a subplot, and does that subplot enhance the story? Does the scene help advance—or, often just as good, hinder—the protagonist in his quest?

### Foreshadowing:

Does your scene introduce a story element that will be required later on? Does it allow the reader to begin to anticipate the solution to a problem? Or even divert the reader's attention from the solution, while still showing it so they can have one of those great "a ha!" moments later? Foreshadowing can be an important element in a story, but it's equally important that it appear naturally. If the purpose of your scene is to foreshadow, it's a good idea to make sure it also serves at least one other purpose—it'll help make sure the scene seems organic, and not like a plant.

Try making a list of all the legitimate reasons you can think of for a scene to be kept. And the next time you're tempted to let it slip by just because you're fond of it, make yourself run down the list. If the scene doesn't meet at least one, or still better, two or three of your criteria, out it goes. Just slip a copy of it into your night stand drawer so that every once in a while you can take it out, read it over, and say to yourself, "Damn! I'm goood!"

## A Warm WCDR Welcome to Our Newest Members

Deanne Puder  
Kathy Bales  
Cathy Minz  
Krista Jorgensen  
Vicki Samson



Bob Larocque  
Reta Stickwood  
Patricia Cota  
Enna Judd  
Nan McKenzie Kosowan

## A Message from THE BOARD

By Sherry Hinman, WCDR President

**S**o far so good. Our new board has been in place for three weeks as I write this message and, while you've been packing trunks to head off to cottages and beaches (after attending the July breakfast, of course!), we've been busy passing batons, not to mention file folders, boxes, loose papers and other paraphernalia, as we say farewell to those leaving the board and welcome those who've just joined us.

Our gratitude goes out to those board members who are saying farewell after their year—and sometimes years—on the board: Annette McLeod, Connie Jamieson, Sue Eaman, Kevin Craig and Glady Farquharson. Each of you has made your mark on WCDR in some way and we are a better organization for it.

Please help me welcome newcomers to the WCDR board Jessica Outram as events co-

ordinator, Kate Moore as breakfast/workshop logistics co-ordinator, Lana Cutrara as membership co-ordinator and Grace Colella as secretary; a special welcome back goes to Sue Reynolds, public relations co-ordinator. Those who return to the board, like Sue, and Kevin Craig before her, bring with them that perfect blend of history and fresh ideas, so we are especially fortunate to have Sue back.

Speaking of the old—I say that facetiously, old-time fellow board members—we are also thrilled to have the experienced contributions of Barbara Hunt, Thelma Davidson, Rich Helms and might I humbly add myself to that list, for another year. In addition to her role as vice president, Barbara is also our speaker “wrangler” and is busy roping in (sorry; it's the best pun I could come up with to go with the wrangler concept) a lineup of fabulous

and varied speakers for the upcoming year. The rest of us old folks return in our previous roles, Thelma as treasurer, Rich as web liaison, and I will continue to humbly serve as president for another year.

And a great year it will be! Look out for news on our three contests, a wonderful Chapbook Fair in October, more fabulous speakers, more workshops, more opportunities for writers, more breakfasts, more events, and more tater tots (that one's for you, Glady!).

From the WCDR board to you and your families, have a wonderful summer and we look forward to seeing you on the second Saturday in September.

Okay, now you can get back to packing your trunk.

## Odds & Eds

By Deborah A. Rankine,  
Word Weaver Editor

**W**hile waiting for my great Canadian novel to be discovered by a visionary publisher or talent-seeing literary agent, I discovered the joy of writing for magazines. Out of the gate, I was fortunate to work for a nurturing editor who spoiled me rotten with words of encouragement and kudos. Naïvely, I thought all editors would be as generous and kind, until, of course, I received the worst rejection of my writing career; no, scratch that, of my life!

I pitched a story to a small Ontario-based magazine who agreed to buy it for their Autumn 2005 issue. The pay was \$10 upon publication—perhaps not worthy of my time or gas to bank it, but it *was* a publishing credit and I could add “work featured locally *and* regionally” to my c.v. Then something devastating happened within this family-run magazine and they never published the issue. Several months later the editor asked if the story was still for sale. As luck would have it, it was not. Feeling cocky (having had a few paid

magazines articles now under my belt), I pitched him “Autumn time and the Wheelin' is Breezy.” My story would follow four retired couples—rebels without a pause—who discover the back roads, bogs and the occasional bear on their daytime treks through Algonquin Park. I'd feature them stopping for a knapsack potluck lunch set out along the length of a fallen tree, enjoying the unspoiled beauty of the Canadian Shield and warm conversations in the crisp fall air.

The editor's response: I am not interested in a piece about four wheelers in the park or anywhere else for that matter. I didn't know they even allowed those hideous things into the park in the first place. How can you portray the Canadian Shield as “unspoiled beauty” with those machines in the mix? To tell you the truth, most of my readership would be repulsed at the idea of this story.

Ouch!

Well, *he* told *me*, didn't he? But he also

taught me a very important lesson; always read **several** back issues of a publication you're pitching to get a *real* sense of who they are and who they represent. I'd read only one of their current issues; I thought I'd done my homework. I surmised the magazine's demographic was cottage country, rural readers, persons over 50. Had I *read further* I would have discovered it also voiced environmental concerns too.

Lesson learned, I hope.

Okay, enough sour grapes, here's your “**themed**” writing challenge for the September/October issue of *The Word Weaver*: Pen a book review of your favourite summer read. Make your commentary so compelling your reader is forced to pay full hardcover price.

**Maximum word count:** 600

**Deadline:** August 20, 2006

Send your submissions to:

**wordweaver@wcdrr.org.**

## July/August “Themed” Writing Challenge Submissions...

# Writers’ Quest

### Awake—Not A Wake

By Heather Tucker

Beyond living and dreaming there is something more important: waking up.

— Michado—

**T**hey say Sleeping Beauty was 50 when she woke up. I don’t know who “they” are, and I have no idea how these *fairy-tailologists* came to this startling discovery, but I like what their research uncovered. I will definitely buy the book when it comes out.

We all know that panicked hurry when we realize we’ve slept in and there’s an important appointment we have to get to. Well, I woke up very late and the urgent meeting was with my writing life. I decided I had to go big. Forget the bus. I was taking the Concord. I re-enrolled at U of T.

Confused expressions spread across the scrubbed young faces at the admissions office when this ancient science major came sniffing and begging around the English department. There was a creative writing course with a well known author and I wanted in. They punched in my student number and the system crashed, “Ma’am, this can’t be right, the number has to start with nine or zero.”

I sighed, “If you graduated in the seventies it starts with a seven.”

“The seventies!” He studied my face, trying to comprehend why I wasn’t dead yet or at least knitting somewhere in Florida.

Next, came the terrifying requirement of submitting a portfolio. I carried it around for weeks, unable to drop through the mail slot what felt like naked pictures of me (insert very scary visual here). Spurred on by the words of a wise woman, oh let’s hypothetically call her

Ruth Walker, “Get naked girl and let the epiphanies fall where they may,” I leapt. I landed in a class of fresh, creative minds, most of them younger than my children. Fear abated when I discovered I was with a group who did not measure me by years, but by wisdom and experience. I was a fierce dragon sitting on a literal (or perhaps literary) mountain of treasure: my life.

One night, a delightful, ambitious young writer escorted me to my car, insisting that I needed help carrying my coffee mug and two books. He gave me a wonderful gift on the walk. “I love your stories. Your first one made me laugh out loud. Your last one made me cry. I never cry. I only imagine the ocean, you’ve swum in it. Don’t stop writing, I want to read it.”

I dare say I’ve had a great deal more than a swim in this great ocean: I’ve floated, struggled against the current, drifted, treaded water, played, been sucked under—chest crushed by the pressure—and pulled to the surface by grace. These are my stories, and I am soaking wet with them.

There were times during the course when I questioned my sanity. After all, I could have opted for the session at my local college: When Life Unravels, Learn to Knit, 101. One night, after a particularly brutal critique had left my work in a ravaged heap on the floor, I considered switching my major to flower arranging or Tai Chi. I came to realize that as much as praise is silver, criticism can be gold. My professor said to me, “I may have been too hard on you. I wouldn’t have been with anyone else in the class. I just believe there’s more in you, something beyond what you gave me.” He was right, there was something more, something deeper, and he made me reach for

it.

I believe his comment is true for every writer. There is more depth, more magic, more power in all of us. We just have to be fearless and leap, surrounding ourselves with a cheering section that shouts, “Jump! Jump! Jump!” and refusing admission to those who don’t.

I took the course wanting to learn how to improve my writing, and I think I succeeded. However, improved skill made up only an inch or so of the mile I gained. The greatest discovery was that my life, with all its ragged edges, failures, griefs, wrong turns, right turns, joys, disappointments...every last scrap of heavy metal, is gold—even the years barely breathing, pockets leaded, submersed in black water. Once sunlight pierced the depths and my eyes adjusted I discovered things in the cold, dark places that could never be seen from the surface.

I’m learning to let go of the regret of waiting so long to take up my pen and write. Instead I’m congratulating myself on conducting 50 years of brilliant, intensive research. I expressed to my professor my fear that I’d waited too long to start my creative writing journey. He said, “You can never start writing too late. Some start too early, but it is never too late to begin.”

**Heather E. Tucker** is an Ajax resident who has recently discovered playing with words is a lot more fun than working with them. As a responsible adult, she develops health education resources; as a newbie to writing *play* she spends her spare time fostering relationships with some fascinating imaginary friends.

**Writing can teach us the dignity of speaking the truth.**

~Natalie Goldberg~

## Getting There

By Ingrid Ruthig

To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive.

—Robert Louis Stevenson, *El Dorado*

In February, 2006, word comes that I'm to receive one of the UK's 2005 Petra Kenney Awards for poetry at an awards ceremony in London, England. I confirm that I will attend. But a schedule jam-packed with family and work obligations doesn't allow me much time to plan or anticipate the event. So when May arrives abruptly, I find myself seated on a jet bound overseas, with the good wishes of friends and family clinging to me like optimistic baggage tags. I have no clear plans—only that, in two days, I'm to accept the award and read my work at Canada House on Trafalgar Square. The rest, I hope, will prove to be a good adventure.

Not quite halfway across the Atlantic, night comes on early, and in that disconcerting atmosphere that airplanes conjure from dimmed lights, movie flicker, hushed baby-fuss, and the semi-doze of passengers, I can't settle down. It's been 17 years since my last visit to the UK; I wonder how much it has changed.

Antsy, and without really thinking I'll see anything in the darkness, I raise the sliding blind on my window. Nothing but black. Or so it seems at first.

The thick porthole, protecting me against a frigid outside, faces north. The stars are abundant and brighter than usual. From 39,000 feet up, they should, given the lessened effects of light and air pollution. It strikes me then, as we skim just under the atmosphere's top, that this is probably the closest I'll ever get to space. There are those who

claim that planets like Earth exist elsewhere. But even as that thought spins off into others, I know I'll never venture farther out than this. This tentative nearness to a bigger equation is enough for me.

I try to see what's below us—as much as I can with my nose pressed to glass—still not expecting anything. Past the wing, past its contrail, I find a distant cluster of pinprick lights. It's the sea-going version of a constellation. It's no bear or hunter; rather, the shape suggests a ship, maybe a freighter full of cargo heading east, or west. And although, this far from land, it's hard to think of what else it might be, it seems there are other night travellers like us out here.

Hovering over the horizon—detectable as the faint curve dividing dark Earth and starry sky—I picture the North Pole in its silence. But before my mind can grasp the image fully, movement distracts me. A long way off in the northeast, from beyond the curve, soft, pale-yellow flares waver into sky. A checklist skitters across my mind—lighthouse, city, spotlights, oil rigs, ships?—and peters out. Those faint beacons ebb and flow in a fashion that isn't man-made.

The aurora borealis.

Here I am, at cruising altitude, perhaps the only person watching and understanding.

Awestruck.

The plane touches down in London a few hours later, its travellers arriving, groggy, at a new day before the old one has really ended. The city, in built form, is as I remember, and the map of its streets remains relatively unchanged. But it has undergone other, less obvious alterations—accented voices from all over Europe and beyond occupy its squares, streets, restaurants, and shops. It is now peopled with faces that are at the same time strange and familiar, because everywhere, in

urban hubs around the world, the local and the global have mixed.

Once I get my bearings, the days fill with discoveries. The awards ceremony and readings are great fun, I meet the Deputy High Commissioner of Canada, and a few esteemed British poets chat with me. While I don't land a glamorous UK book deal, the weather remains warm and sunny, and I have a few days to walk the city and absorb its energy. It's what I look forward to most.

For those of us lucky enough to live in this country, the journey home holds its own pleasure. Now I've settled back into the solitude of punching away at the keyboard here in my study, knowing that no matter how hard some days are, and while editors might accept or reject my work, some of my poems will continue to find their way into various publications.

Although the words don't show up everyday as I'd like them to—as perfectly timed arrivals to gather up—when the elements decide, the words are there. Eventually I send them off on their own again, acknowledging that sometimes they return too soon, and sometimes, if all goes well, they reach their destination.

Each day offers small journeys that a writer can choose to make. I sit down at my desk again, after stumbling along past words too many times these last weeks, and am happy at how easily these ones come to meet me today.

**Ingrid Ruthig** has poetry appearing or forthcoming in *The Malahat Review*, *Descant*, *Prism International*, and a review in *Books in Canada*. Her first manuscript of poetry is currently under consideration with a publisher, while an essay collection she is editing, on the work of poet Richard Outram, will be published in 2007-08.

**Asking a working writer what he thinks about critics is like asking a lamppost how it feels about dogs.**

—Christopher Hampton—

## My Eyes are Green

By Karen L. Cole

**M**y driver's license indicates that my eyes are brown. But whenever WCDR announces kudos, the monster in me secretes a pool of bile which turns my irises green.

Although I'm always proud of and happy for my colleagues when I read of their successes, I long to be among their number.

Yes, once last year I had a story published in *The Word Weaver*. I was thrilled. I got paid. My husband framed the page. And my short play *Rum Runners in Whitby* was performed last year for Whitby's sesquicentennial.

These credits only stir the craving for greater success—getting one of my books published.

In the fall of 2001, I began writing a memoir of my years in the convent. Friends read it and encouraged me. An excellent editor from the WCDR meticulously examined it and gave me many suggestions to improve the manuscript. I took "The Business of Writing" workshop and learned how to write a dynamite query letter. It worked. In September 2004, Seraphim Editions in Hamilton asked to see my entire manuscript, *Lifting the Veil*. I was thrilled! I notified my personal fan club of the possibility of publication.

Months passed with no word from Seraphim. I had heard about the glacial pace

of getting a book published, so I tried not to be anxious.

After months of wondering, I e-mailed Seraphim asking whether anyone had read my manuscript. More months passed. Finally, the publisher wrote, apologizing for the delay. She said they were waiting for word on a grant application before they could plan their next publishing budget. That sounded hopeful. Plus, a friend who'd been published by Seraphim told me she knew people within the publishing house who'd read my book and liked it. At seven o'clock on a perfect July morning, a courier unceremoniously dumped my baby on the doorstep. A kind, encouraging rejection letter accompanied it.

I cried, of course.

After a month of feeling hopeless, I sent out more queries. Few publishers want the work of a near neophyte like me, even though I could be the next James Frey. Some allowed me to send a sample of 40 pages, and they would reply within three months. They didn't.

In October, 2005, Spinsters Ink in Florida responded to a short sample I'd sent. They wanted the rest of the manuscript. Whoopee! Hope springs eternal!

My friends, have you seen my name in the Paean's! Kudos! column of *The Word Weaver* recently? Has Spinsters Ink called, written, e-mailed to say they wanted to publish my book? Maybe the Bush administration will not allow communications from Florida to get

through because they think I'm a risk to homeland security.

Undaunted, I've begun writing a novel based on my teaching experiences in Jamaica. It's over 400 pages now. In my small writing circle, I am getting invaluable and encouraging feedback. I've submitted my entry to WCDR's 2006 short story contest. I've written a non-fiction story for the *Diaspora Dialogues*. And the other day, a Winnipeg publisher asked to see the complete manuscript of *Lifting the Veil*.

Maybe something good is out there on the horizon. Maybe one day a smiling picture of me will appear on a book jacket with my brown eyes gleaming. Until then, when the honours are announced, my eyes are green.

**Karen L. Cole** is a retired English and drama teacher. Born in Wisconsin, Cole came to Ontario in 1975 with her Canadian husband whom she met in Jamaica. Cole spends her time reading, writing, driving for Community Care, doing aquafit, bicycling, gardening, travelling, and relaxing with her husband and dog.

## 2006 Professional Development Workshops

### Write-UP Writing Camp

July 10–14, 2006

Grades 3–10, days, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Grades 11–adult, evenings, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Ritson Road Alliance Church  
(Ritson/Rossland), Oshawa

Friday night reading. 6 p.m.

**EVENT REGISTER:** Lynda Allison,  
(905) 623-0365 [lallison@durham.net](mailto:lallison@durham.net)

**COST:** Youth \$150 (siblings \$100)  
Adults \$100 (WCDR members  
and their children receive a 10%  
discount.)

**Limit:** 8 children grades 3–4,  
8 children grades 5–6,  
12 teens grades 7–10  
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Limit:** 12 persons grade 11 to adult  
6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

**DESCRIPTION:** A unique opportunity for writers to explore and hone their writing skills through a concentrated time of creative activities and writing exercises under the facilitation of published authors. Child and teen facilitators, Judy Bagshaw and Skyla Dawn Cameron. Adult facilitator is Ruth Walker. 2006 guest authors Ted Staunton, Wendy Lewis and Kathy Kacer.

Web site:  
[www.spaces.msn.com/stonetable](http://www.spaces.msn.com/stonetable)

## The Writing Life

By Myrna Marcelline

I encountered my Muse this year in Japan. I never had a conversation with her before and assumed she was present when I created a poem, a narrative or an essay. I believed my writing was completely the product of my own creativity and skills.

But I discovered that my Muse is an active participant in my writing life, and not one to be ignored by a pompous writer. Even before I left for Japan, she became a vocal mentor. Armed with my audio taped lessons and two phrase books, I started learning Japanese. But as I mimicked the high-pitched voice on the tape, I felt a tap on my shoulder.

"Hush," said the voice, during my first self-taught lesson. "Listen to the rhythm of this language; every language has its own music."

"What?" I asked.

"Kon-nichi-wa," she whispered. "I am your Muse."

"Kon-nichi-wa." She greeted me again, and her mere "hello" conjured up images of cherry blossoms and petite geishas with obis wrapped around their tiny waists. I thought of English words in my bland vocabulary amassed over a lifetime. They were my servants and I cared little for their music. We writers are often encouraged to read our work aloud. Is it to find the music in our prose or poetry? My Muse had a point there so I filed her instructions for later use.

I landed at Fukuoka Airport after a 14-hour flight, exhausted, but bubbling with excitement, and stood in line for customs declaration. I felt a finger on my shoulder.

"Don't push it," I intoned, wearily. I knew who it was.

"Observe the people," she said with the enthusiasm of a grade school teacher. "They are alive, not fodder for your fiction."

"That's Creative Writing 101," I muttered *sotto voce*, but I knew, as she did, that I needed to note every nuance in a culture so different from that of my stories. I stood behind a young Japanese woman in her early twenties. An overstuffed Louis Vuitton bag hung from her tiny shoulder down to her tweed capri pants. An ecru beret sat rakishly on a mop of her dyed black hair. She balanced herself on stiletto heels of brown, suede designer boots. I observed her most of my 15 minute wait and decided to shelve my Muse's advice.

I waited my turn and, using a collage of Japanese words and comic gestures, I cleared customs. Meiko picked me up at the airport while my son and his girlfriend, Meiko's daughter, took the subway to Tosu. I was starved and rubbed my stomach to show I was hungry.

"Yaki-soba?" Meiko asked, a smile enveloping her face. Before I could open my copy of *Learn Japanese in Seven Days*, we were in the parking lot of a noodle greasy spoon. But as I maneuvered out of the tiny Mitsubishi wagon, I felt another tap on my shoulder and the familiar voice of my Muse.

"Sumimasen!"

"No, you're not excused," I snapped.

"This is your first Japanese meal; eat it like a good writer would," she nagged.

"I'm hungry; talk to me later."

"To write a good story, set in Japan, or anywhere else, I suggest you listen to me."

She sounded like an angry parent.

"I'm going to have a bowl of noodles, for Heaven's sake. Listen, I have been published twice in *The Word Weaver* and you certainly had nothing to do with it. I don't need your advice."

My voice was shrill with rage.

"Savor your yaki-soba: smell its aroma, feel those large noodles slide down your throat, taste the broth with its succulent beef and fresh vegetables." She waxed with the memorable fervor of Julia Child. "And say, loudly enough for your host to hear, 'Oishi, oishi ... delicious, delicious.'"

My first meal in Japan was indeed oishi, oishi. It was also a lesson in the importance of experiencing one's senses as a tool for creating sensuous writing.

For the next ten days my Muse tapped me whenever she found a teaching moment: at the Buddhist shrines and temples in Kyoto, in a crowded shopping mall in Osaka, and even in the soothing Yufuin Hot Springs with majestic snow-capped mountains above. When I stepped on the warm smooth rocks, she nudged me. "Have you ever experienced anything so nakedly breathtaking?"

I frowned on her humour.

"There is poetry in those mountain peaks," she said softly, redeeming herself, as her voice faded.

Soon, I was on my flight to Toronto. I reflected on the encounter with my Muse. I realized that travel experiences can be the content as well as the catalyst that inform a writer's work. To create believable fictional worlds, I needed to tune in to the music of language, to observe the nuances of cultures and people, and to sharpen the use of my own senses.

"Arrigato-gozaïmass, Honourable Muse. Thank you; I'll see you in Spain."

**Myrna Marcelline** is an active member of WCDR. Her short narrative, "Birdsong" was published last year in *The Word Weaver*. Myrna continues to work on a collection of poetry, short stories and essays.

# Breakfast Information

## July 08, 2006, guest speaker... "Politically Correct" with James Wallace

**James Wallace** is a political columnist and Queen's Park bureau chief for Osprey Media, one of the country's leading newspaper chains with 21 daily and 37 non-daily newspapers in small and mid-size communities across Ontario. Osprey Media's local newspapers include many of the oldest and most respected smaller papers in the province including The Kingston Whig-Standard, The St. Catharines Standard, The North Bay Nugget and Peterborough Examiner. Jamie writes a weekly column, news stories and a blog for the chain, covering provincial and national politics. He is an award-winning journalist who covered a variety of beats, from general assignment reporter to city hall bureau chief and investigative reporter for the Brandon Sun, the Toronto Sun and the National Post.

**Remember... No breakfast meeting in August.  
See you all happy and rested at our September 09, 2006, breakfast meeting.  
Have a pleasant, productive, prolific summer.**

# Joy Riding with Bishop

By Annette McLeod

**T**o find passion in your life is a wonderful thing. To find two disparate passions, a way to combine them, and finally to make money from them—it simply doesn't get any better than that.

Ted Bishop is a professor of English at the University of Alberta at Edmonton, where his specialties are Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Few groups will relate to that particular passion more than this one—Ted Bishop loves words.

Bishop also loves motorcycles—all motorcycles, but those masterpieces of Italian design, Ducatis, are his favourite.

His writing credentials are impressive. His literary non-fiction has appeared in publications that reflect both those passions—*Prairie Fire and Word Carving: The Craft of Literary Journalism*, also *Cycle Canada and Enroute*. He has twice been nominated for the National Magazine Awards and in 2003 received a CBC Literary Award for his essay "The Motorcycle and the Archive."

An impressive list of achievements to be sure, but perhaps Bishop's most remarkable achievement is surviving a 130 km/hour crash on his girlfriend's BMW motorcycle on a British Columbia highway.

The crash left him with a broken spine, a collapsed lung, and a story to tell.

His travel memoir, *Riding With Rilke*, begins with the crash, and then skips back in time, eventually circling back to end with the crash and its aftermath. The out-of-sequence technique lends his story a certain poignancy: through his literary motorcycle odyssey from Alberta to a Woolf archive in Texas and back (as well as overseas detours including a visit to the home of Ducati), we, as readers, are aware the crash is coming. Bishop, as carefree rider, is not. It's hard to like him so much and know what's in store for him.

Motorcycling has a long and storied history among writers from Joyce to T.E. Lawrence (who died in a motorcycle accident) to Albert Camus. I recently had the pleasure of speaking to this latest literary rider.

**AM:** How do you reconcile the egghead aspect of academia with the rebel aspect of riding?

**TB:** The thing about riding is that it tends to smooth over those distinctions. The first thing you talk to people about is the ride and the bike and the equipment. You can actually talk for quite a long time before you get down to what your job is. The fact that I'm an

English professor can be excused because I'm out there riding. If you're riding, people know you're not local, you're on the road going somewhere, and they're more open to coming up and talking to you. You talk about the bike and the travel, rather than whatever else you're doing. I've had great conversations with all kinds of people from kids to the elderly that I probably wouldn't have otherwise encountered.

**AM:** So, why Rilke? He's pretty far off the beaten track for most. He isn't even mentioned much in the book, and when he is, it's very near the end.

**TB:** My title was *The Motorcycle and the Archive* [the same as his essay in *Word Carving* in which Bishop says he developed the central thesis of the book]. (The people at Penguin said, "Listen, Ted, that will kill it. No one will buy that book.") The last chapter was called "Riding With Rilke," and the head of Penguin suggested we call it that. I kept trying to come up with different titles but I couldn't. The notion of moving through space without a consciousness of death—his idea that only children and animals move about without that consciousness—in a way, that's appropriate to the book as a whole, opening with the crash that hovers over the book ... I was afraid it would put people off. My friend said maybe people would think it was a German motorcycle. A lot of people think Rilke is some friend of mine. I think Steinbeck's *Travels With Charlie* influenced me a bit. I read it in the 12th grade, a hundred years ago, and loved the idea of going off by yourself and rambling around meeting people. Everything can be interesting and exotic if you get close enough to it. I think *Riding With Rilke*, if you don't think about the difficult modernist poet, is just a name, a title that works.

I thought two people would buy it: my brother and my girlfriend. I was just thrilled to be published, and ever since I was 16 I've wanted to write a book with a motorcycle in it and a penguin on it.

**AM:** Why Woolf and Joyce?

**TB:** I stumbled on to them. I was a graduate student and I wrote a paper on Woolf, and I just couldn't figure out what she did with language, how she made it work. I think with really great writers, the meaning lies just on the far side of language—that idea of getting at something that's just out of reach. In a different way, that's what Joyce does too. They're

both trying not to just describe something, but to kind of launch you on your own trip, on your own trajectory.

**AM:** So what's up with Finnegan's Wake?

**TB:** I think it's what it must be like to be an infant and to be read to, and just respond to the sound and the rhythm of the words, even if you don't know what they mean. Different associations, the way little kids will make up their own story from the illustrations. I think what Joyce did for me was take me back to that purity where you just start to respond to language and he makes you aware, especially if you're a pointy-headed English professor, that you just have to give up this search for meaning because you'll just drive yourself crazy. You have to give yourself over to the flow of the book. I read it in 10 or 15-minute chunks in the morning, and it became a wonderful way to start the day. I think it helps with writing because it is just immersing yourself in this slow river of language, then prying yourself away and carry on with your own work. If you read someone who has a really compelling style, the first thing you write after that will be a bad imitation.

**AM:** Then what do you think of the advice most writers give to read everything you can?

**TB:** I think it's important to read tons of stuff, but I won't read someone with a forceful style right before I write my own stuff.

**AM:** In *Riding*, you noted mixing up Bembo, the typeface (in which the book was eventually set), and Brembo, the performance brakes. That's something I've noticed too. Where did that come from?

**TB:** It first started when I handset some type as part of a little field trip over to the design department. Just the feel of the type, the density of the leading, it's the same way poetry makes you slow down and look at individual words—setting type makes you look at individual letters. You can spend all day looking at an "R" or a "Q." Like Bodoni. I found it kind of pointy. The serifs are so thin and before I never thought about it. Now I find it hard to read. There's a kids' book called *Bembo Zoo*, with all these animals made up of Bembo type face. It's wonderful. I now get real pleasure from a book in looking at the page design.

Continued on next page.

**AM:** Do you have any aspirations in fiction?

**TB:** I used to think I wanted to write short stories or something, but more and more I read fiction less and less. What I find really exciting is literary non-fiction. I grew up reading the *New Yorker* when it was less current affairs than it is now. The ideal article was one on a subject in which I had absolutely no interest but I read it anyway because it was so well written and by the end I would have been taken somewhere new. A book I like very much is *The Perfect Storm*. I don't care about fishing or give a hoot about meteorology and I found the whole thing riveting. There's so much great work being done in non-fiction these days, that's what I want to pursue, both as a writer and as a reader.

**AM:** What is your writing process?

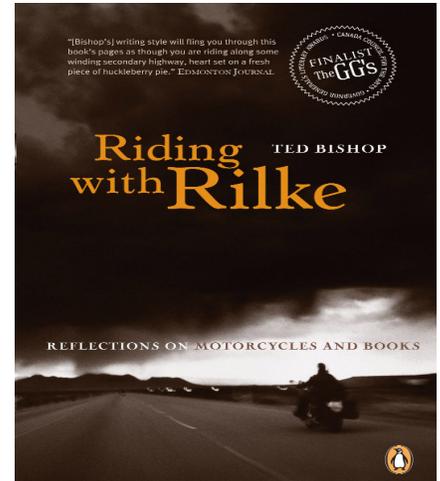
**TB:** One thing I learned in Grade 11 is that you have to make an outline and write everything down and stick to it, and that never, ever worked for me. Even if I think I'm starting at the beginning, it always turns out to be the middle—very often in the middle of a paragraph, not just the work. I go backwards and finish from that. My brain only works from

eight a.m. to about 11:30. I can push it to about one p.m. if it's really going well. Anything after one o'clock is an abuse of trees.

I try to write something every morning, but I've found the only kind of writing that works for me is playing hooky. A lot of this book took shape because I was supposed to be finishing an academic project, and when I finally had to finish this book, the academic article was of enormous attraction to me. I learned something about myself ages ago: I have no terror of the blank page; I'm petrified of the published page. My first article for *Cycle Canada*, I put it in an envelope and put the stamps on it, and walked by it on my front hall table every day for a couple of weeks. I finally just grabbed myself by the scruff of the neck and put it in the mail.

I hadn't realized until then just how acute this affliction was, this reluctance to let it go. As a writer, you want to keep tinkering. There are always possibilities. It's a bit sad to let go of a project. I loved this book, this feeling that, oh my God, I'm never going to write anything this good ever again, but there's nothing worse than writing that isn't going well.

But when it's going well, it's better than morphine.



**Annette McLeod** is the automotive editor at *The Toronto Sun*. She rides an old Honda 450 and doesn't even pretend to appreciate Joyce.

## WCDR CHAPBOOK FAIR— A Sneak Preview

**W**hat are you doing this summer? Working on your chapbook, we hope! Though we haven't battened down all the hatches yet, plans for the First Annual (I always wanted to say that) WCDR Chapbook Fair are underway! Here's what we know so far:

**WHEN:** Saturday, October 14, 2006 (afternoon of the WCDR breakfast), 1-4 pm

**WHERE:** TBA

**WHAT IS IT?** Our vision for the Chapbook Fair is an event where you can do pretty well anything you want to, related to chapbooks. Don't know what a chapbook is? Come to the fair to learn what they are and how to make one.

Started a chapbook and need advice on how to put it together? Come to the fair to learn how. Have a chapbook already made? Bring copies to the fair and sell them.

**WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?** We envision

a room full of tables and booths, where you can circulate and take advantage of any part of the process you're interested in. Here's a taste of what the committee has been cooking up:

Sit at an activity table and decorate your chapbook; long-armed stapler on hand

Listen to readings by registered sellers of chapbooks (see below)

Enjoy refreshments

Visit the WCDR booth where friends and family can sign up to become members or buy our WCDR *How to write a Chapbook* Chapbook

Talk to Lauren Sachs, designer (morning breakfast speaker), who will be on hand to answer design-related questions

Buy chapbooks from fellow members (just in time for the holidays!)

Win door prize(s)

Listen to presentations throughout the afternoon by...none other than...Stuart Ross, our chapbook inspiration!

Have drawings/caricatures made for your chapbook—artists will be available

**WHOM IS IT FOR?** The Chapbook Fair is open to the public, but the focus will be on creating a fun event for our members. What better

activity for your seniors groups, critiquing circles, writing classes or any other writing groups you belong to than compiling a chapbook that represents your group, and selling it to the rest of us?

**HOW MUCH?** There will be no admission charge. There may be a small fee for services at certain booths. Prices for chapbooks will be set by the sellers.

**HOW CAN YOU SELL YOUR CHAPBOOKS?** In order to sell your chapbooks at the fair, you must be registered. Registration details to follow.

**WHAT SHOULD YOU BE DOING OVER THE SUMMER?** Why, writing your chapbook, of course! Present your family with your memoirs, write a book of poetry for friends, or create a book of business advice for your colleagues. A chapbook can be in any format, in any style or genre, and can contain whatever you want it to. It can be typed or handwritten, illustrated or not, on any type of paper or other materials.

See you at the fair!

# Don't Be a Paeon in the Butt!

**R**ecognizing that writing can sometimes be a lonely art, part of the WCDR's mission is to "provide moral support to writers." One of the ways we do this is through the "Paeans! Kudos!"—those announcements that mark special occasions in the growth of a writer's craft. Our members are becoming so widely published, however, that it's time to clarify some guidelines for those announcements.

A Paeon is issued when something significant has happened. This may be a writer's very first print publication. Or perhaps they are well published but have cracked the market for a different genre for the first time. Maybe they have won an award. These are all worth sharing!

If you have news, here are some guidelines to make sure your Paeon gets announced:

- write it in third person
- carefully check all spelling, grammar and facts like dates of publication (Paeans usually go out immediately and we do not issue errata notices)
- keep it short and to the point—50 to 75 words
- make the announcement's primary focus about writing (not that you are performing in local theatre)
- announce your news upon publication of your piece—not upon acceptance
- ensure the publication is bona fide—vanity press publication, either in print or on the In-

ternet, is not a reason to make an announcement

- ensure that this is a significant publication for you—if you are constantly publishing freelance articles, there is no need to send out a notice for yet another one.
- provide your email address at the top of the Paeon for people to send their congratulations. The line should read something like: "Please don't hit reply; direct any responses to my email@address.com. If you have a website, provide the link to it."

When your announcement is perfect, submit it to [webmaster@wcd.org](mailto:webmaster@wcd.org) and then sit back and wait for the congratulations to come rolling into your e-inbox!

**T**he next issue of *The Word Weaver* will be delayed by two weeks due to circumstances totally within your editor's control—the broad's abroad on a Euro-Irish culinary caravan until mid-September.

Look for your September/October 2006 copy on/about September 25th in your inbox or your mailbox.

**A**nd, speaking of the next issue, polish your reading glasses because *The Word Weaver* is featuring a "pictorial" centre-fold!

**T**hat award-winning author and poet and kind friend to the WCDR, Barry Dempster, has invited members to register for his "Re-Awakening the Creative Spirit" weekend writing retreat, November 10 to 12, 2006, at the King View Retreat and Conference Centre west of Aurora, in King Township. Costs range from \$480 to \$510 plus taxes and gratuities. (More details to follow in the next issue of *The Word Weaver*.) In the meantime, for further information or to reserve your spot, contact Barry Dempster at: [dempster@passport.ca](mailto:dempster@passport.ca).

## FYI

from your  
*Word Weaver*  
editor.

**A**nd, last but not least, our very own Cathy Witlox (you'll remember her as one of *Word Weaver's* masterful past copy editors) is conducting her wildly popular "Grammar for Writers: The (Almost) Jargon Free Version" on September 16, 2006, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Yours truly took this workshop the first time Cathy offered it and I can tell you, it was like composition liposuction. Now my copy is tighter, more expressive, and my disconcerting participles no longer dangle. For complete details, visit Cathy at:

[www.wordwitlox.com/workshops.htm](http://www.wordwitlox.com/workshops.htm). Or, log on to [www.wcd.org](http://www.wcd.org) and click on "workshops".

What's that? You're asking why this workshop isn't shown on the professional development page of this issue? Well, that's because it's a September workshop and this is our July/August issue. Plus, this workshop will be yesterday's news by the time you receive your next installment of *Word Weaver*.

Well, kids, that's it for now. Have a great summer and don't forget to play in your writerly sandbox every day.

**Ta-ta.**

## Paeans

### Durham Region's Writers are on a roll! Congratulations go out to:

**Adele Simmons'** article was accepted for publication in the July issue of *mc2*, the monthly Mensa Canada magazine. Theme: Response to "Nobless Oblige" by Frank Luger.

Graham Ducker is one of this year's semi-finalists in the WriteMovies Competition.

*Bread 'n Molasses* magazine published **Cheryl Cowtan's** poems, "Once You're Country" and "Come Out and Ripple Fair" in their May 2006 issue.

**Rich Helms** was given a "Volunteer Recognition" award and jacket from the Town of Uxbridge for his website work supporting the three Uxbridge arts organizations.

**Gladly Farquharson** was thrilled to have her article "Replacing a Rotting Garage Foundation" coming out in the spring issue of *Canadian Homes and Cottages*. Way to go, Gladly!

**Kevin Craig** was thrilled to announce his poem, "Madelaine Ave, Circa '75" won 2nd place in the quarterly "Poetic Idol" poetry contest at *Artella Words and Art!*

**Heather M. O'Connor** announced with delight that she snagged a biweekly column with *The Toronto Sun* on home staging; the art of preparing a home for sale. Catch Heather's insightful tips every second Friday in the real estate section of the newspaper. Heather thanks

WCDR member, Devorah Garland, for saying "Go for it!" and paving the way with the editor.

**Adele Simmons'** song "Let Me Leave it With You" (Extended Version, released in 2005) was shortlisted by The Word Guild 2006 Canadian Writing Awards in the Song Lyrics Category.

**Ruth E. Walker** had two poems accepted by University of British Columbia's online literary journals, *The Science Creative Quarterly* and its sister magazine *Terry*..

"Natural Disaster" can be read online at [www.terry.ubc.ca](http://www.terry.ubc.ca), and "Lucy's Bones from Afar" is upcoming at [www.scq.ubc.ca](http://www.scq.ubc.ca).

Ever imagine what it would have been like to have Ms. Havisham for a mother? That's what **Kevin Craig** had in mind when he wrote the poem "Putting Mother to Bed." The poem's a little tawdry and not much a nod to motherhood, but it just took 2nd place in *Absolute Write's* Mother's Day Poetry Contest.

**Grace Colella** had a piece picked up by the Ontario Music Educators' Association for their quarterly journal. Her first publication ever—Perfect Pitch—is a poem on early memories of

musical tone development and will appear in their next issue.

**Skyla Dawn Cameron** appeared Rogers Television's morning talk show "Daytime" to talk about her new novel, *RIVER*.

**Barbara Hunt** was pleased to be writing features for a new magazine-style publication in North Durham called *Focus on Scugog*. Barbara was also invited to conduct her POEM-MANIA workshop for 75 Durham school-children as part of the Historical Foundation's event at the Scugog Shores Museum in Port Perry.



## September/October "Free-for-all" Writing Challenge...

### Take me out to the ball park.

Write a short story that takes place on the baseball field from the point of view of the umpire behind home plate.

**Deadline:** August 20, 2006

**Maximum word count:** 500

Send your submissions to [wordweaver@wcdr.org](mailto:wordweaver@wcdr.org)

# 2006/2007 NEW WCDR Board of Directors

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Events Co-ordinator  
[events@wcdr.org](mailto:events@wcdr.org)

For complete boarder bios log on to [www.wcdr.org](http://www.wcdr.org).

## WHAT'S HAPPENING?

### CONTESTS:

WCDR Short Fiction Contest: At this writing, we are completing the first phase of judging for the short fiction contest. Final judging will take place over the summer and winners will be announced at the September breakfast. A huge thank you to all of our first-tier readers!

WCDR 24-hour Online Non-fiction Contest: Starting in early fall, keep your eyes and ears open for announcements about our next 24-hour online non-fiction contest, which will begin on the afternoon of the November breakfast. Rich is working on improvements to the contest submission procedure at this very moment!

### CHAPBOOK FAIR

Mark your calendars for the afternoon of our October breakfast, October 14<sup>th</sup>, for the Chapbook Festival. See page 7 of this issue of *The Word Weaver* for more details.

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

There are still a few stragglers who have not renewed their memberships. Renew online by PayPal, by cheque through the mail, or at the next breakfast.

## 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 reserve the right to edit or reject submissions at our discretion.

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Deborah A. Rankine

### Copy Editor

Sherry Hinman

### We welcome your input!

Send comments to

[wordweaver@wcdr.org](mailto:wordweaver@wcdr.org)

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