



THE WORD WEAVER

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A NEWSLETTER FOR WRITERS AND EDITORS
 PRODUCED BY
 THE WRITERS' CIRCLE OF DURHAM REGION
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Dear Diary, Today I Discovered...

By Kevin Craig

Is writer's block getting you down? Are you working on a story but find that your characters are withholding information about themselves? What's stopping you from getting into their heads, taking hold of the dark and sunny contemplations lurking there and pulling out the ever-illusive back-story?

Knowing your characters is, at times, the hardest part of writing fiction. You can leave them in limbo for days on end as you agonize over their next moves. If they're not willing to open up to you, you're stuck.

But as their creator, you should be omnipotent. It's your right to intrude on their privacy and find out what's under the surface. There's no better way to do this than to take possession of their minds and write their personal diary entries!

One day I was faced with a character I loved, but could find no means to carry him forward into my story. Struggling with his motivations, I couldn't imagine what he'd do next. It was obvious that I didn't really know who he was. That's when I had an idea. Why don't I just step inside his head and find out? He could tell me where he wanted to go.

You might think this sounds crazy. But one of my personal theories about writers is that we're all just a few drops short of a river to begin with (i.e., we're right-brained geniuses who are able to see the world around us as a constantly shifting wonderland filled with endless fictional possibilities).

Maybe this diary entry concept is a writing tool you already employ. But if not, I have a feeling you might be thinking, "Hmmm, sounds like a good idea", especially those of you who have a

minor character haunting your backstage, waiting to be thrust into the limelight of your story.

Diaries don't form who we are, but they're definitely a living record of that forming. You can't read a person's diary without knowing them a whole lot better afterwards. I've been keeping separate diary notebooks for years,

exploring my characters in ways I never before could.

I simply write a character's name and a date at the top of the page, throw myself into that character's headspace and begin writing the entry.

I find that the date I choose is always helpful in this character study. If I choose a date years prior to my story, I can learn things about my character that have helped to form the way he reacts to certain situations.

For instance, if I explore a childhood entry I might find him writing about a traumatic experience and I suddenly understand why he is timid and skittish. Or I may choose a date a week prior to my story and discover why my character is in her present mood. If she writes about losing her job, her true love and her house all in one day, I'm going to understand why, on page two of my story, it makes perfect sense that she's on the subway with unkempt hair, waving a loaded .45.

You can also write an entry that takes place two months after your story ends. Think of the possibilities this opens up! You might learn how to end your story by

knowing what your character is going through in the future.

You're the creator. This makes you the god of the quirky little worlds you create. When writing your story, don't feel the need to trap yourself within its timelines. You have the right to move freely through time - something your characters can't always do themselves.

Sure, you'll feel like you're being intrusive, like you're somehow invading a sacred place. You might even sense people breathing over your shoulder as you write. But don't worry. You'll learn that your characters enjoy writing in their diaries. It gives them the opportunity to stretch their limbs and tell you a little about themselves; maybe they'll even feel more real and validated.

The entries you create will definitely have an impact on your stories, even if what you write never finds its way into your narrative. Consider these entries as getting-to-know-you sessions. Never actually using the material does not make this a futile exercise.

On the contrary, you may find yourself on the fast track with loads of new material to work with. These people will have lives leading up to and away from your stories. You will have to write faster just to keep up with them! Now, where was I?

Oh yeah, 'Dear Diary...'

Kevin Craig has served the WCDR as its secretary for the past year and managed to be a prolific and creative writer at the same time. He keeps his own diary well hidden.



Mapping New Territory

By Gwynn Scheltema

Whether you call it mindmapping, clustering or brainstorming, the label doesn't matter. What does matter is that this visual technique works effectively as a creative tool.

Mindmapping is a graphic, non-linear way of organizing random thoughts without allowing your internal critic to get in the way. The technique enables you to freely and quickly put an infinite number of ideas on paper. At the same time it allows you to link and organize those ideas, so that the finished exercise is something you can work with.

Sound contradictory? Perhaps, but it is based on some interesting studies on the way we think. Ralph Haber's study of memory found that humans have an 85% to 99% success rate when recalling images. Tony Buzan's research into the most effective methods of note-taking concluded that students who took notes using key words learned more effectively. Mindmapping combines keywords and visual representation.

Creating a Mind Map

Start with an open mind and playful attitude. Mindmapping is a "brain dump", so it is expected that many of the ideas you produce will not be useful. That's not important. You can segregate the valuable nuggets later.

The creation of a mind map begins with one central word or concept usually written in the centre of the page. You can put it in a circle or a cloud shape or not enclose it at all (this is a creative process, so there are no rules). Starting in the middle of the page gives the creative right-brain a head start, as our non-creative left-brain is used to starting

in the upper left-hand corner. In the example, I started with the word GERANIUM. (See facing page.)

Your brain works best in short, intensive bursts (five minutes or so), so work fast and write down only key words, symbols or images, not sentences. Strive for an explosion of ideas.

Using a pencil, coloured markers, crayons or whatever helps you feel creative, write down a word associated with the central concept, and then a word associated with that new concept, and so on. Do not judge ideas at this stage, simply write them down.

Put an idea down even if it seems unrelated – your subconscious probably knows more than you do. In my example, I had a branch that said DOCTOR'S OFFICE. What does that have to do with geraniums? Seemingly nothing now, but when I organized the ideas afterwards, the link became clear. (I'll explain later.)

Keep your hand moving. If ideas slow down, take your hand back to the central concept and begin a new branch. Draw empty lines, and your brain will move to fill them automatically; or inject more energy with a different colour.

Eventually you'll have a series of trains of thought, all different from each other, and yet linked by the central concept. You can now organize them to fit your purposes.

Using a Mind Map

Ways to use the ideas you've generated can be as varied as the ideas themselves.

If I'm looking for an idea for a non-fiction article, and my first instinct around the word GERANIUM was to do one on container gardening, I might take a highlighter and emphasize all the ideas that fit in any way with that slant. In the example, I'd highlight: POTS, RED, HANGING, TRAILING, VERANDAH, PATIO, SUMMER, SCENT. Hmmmm..... boring!

But in the process, the word SCENT reminds me that scented geranium leaves can be used to scent and colour

sugar. The mindtrail on HERBS, TEAS, SPA suddenly becomes more interesting. A non-fiction article on "special teas from flowers" suddenly has possibilities. I might do another mindmap now with the word TEA in the centre.

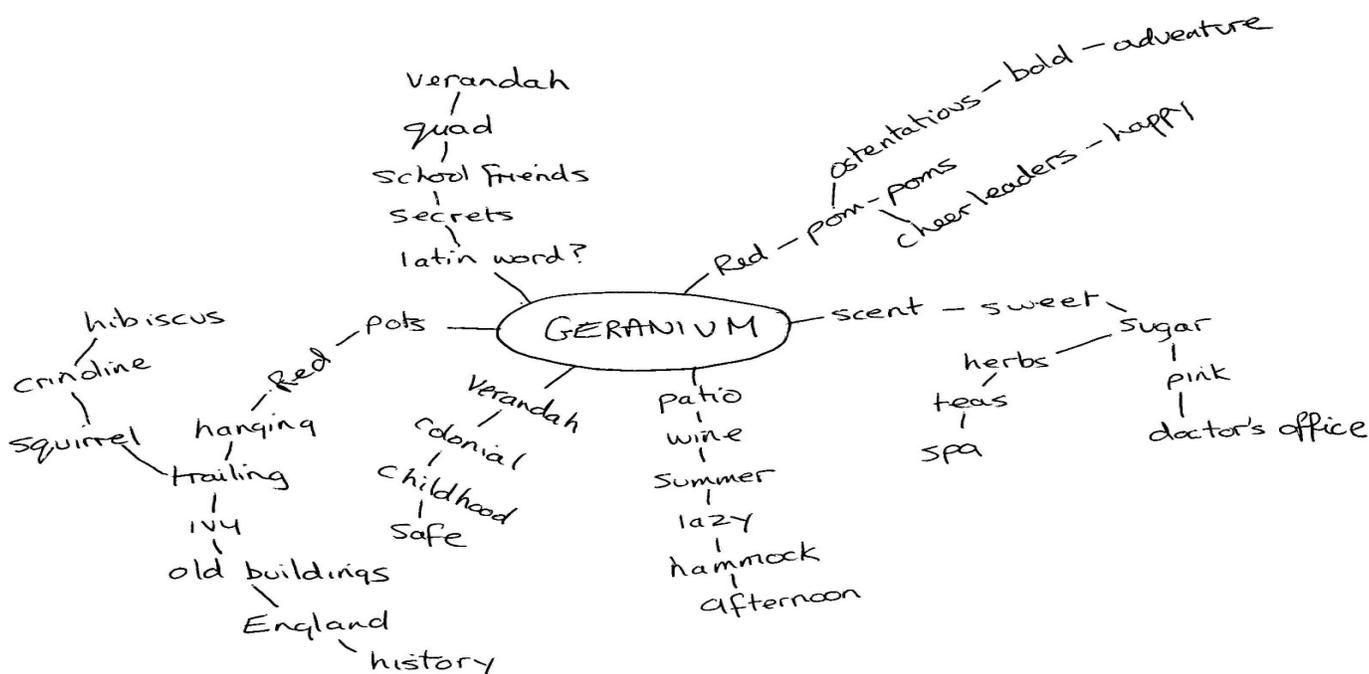
But don't stop there. Your mindmap can be used several times, at different times. The phrase DOCTOR'S OFFICE has me curious. I follow the branch back towards the centre, trying to work out what PINK and SUGAR have to do with it. Then it hits me... when I was a child, our doctor used to hand out tiny cylindrical candies that smelled like scented geraniums. I realize that I haven't seen them in decades. What other sweets from that era are no longer around? Hmmmm..... Another article? A scene for my novel? A short story? Things are brewing now.

Later, it strikes me as interesting that I have two trails that contain the word VERANDAH, and I'm drawn to the references to LATIN WORD; SECRETS; SCHOOL FRIENDS; IVY; OLD BUILDINGS; ENGLAND. I think I feel a poem emerging.....

Even the trail that started out with the boring POTS; RED, ended with SQUIRREL; CRINOLINE; HIBISCUS. Now that's a story about a little critter that came to my garden last year. He loved hibiscus shoots, and ...



Through her business, *The Write Connection*, Gwynn Scheltema earns a living as a freelance writer/editor. In spare moments she writes what she enjoys – fiction and poetry.



The newest computer can merely compound, at speed, the oldest problem in the relations between human beings, and in the end the communicator will be confronted with the old problem, of what to say and how to say it. - Edward R. Murrow

Odds & Eds

By Aprille Janes, Word Weaver Editor

The theme of our June/July issue is *Tools of the Trade*. There are so many things out there to help us on our creative journey that I've only been able to include a small sample. So next month we'll continue in the same vein and look at *Nuts and Bolts*.

Speaking of nuts, isn't Kevin Craig's idea of character diaries great? Can you see explaining to your significant other if they find the entry about the loaded .45?

Mind maps, using other creative outlets and the meeting of great minds are all ways to enhance your writing. And don't forget to check out the clever want ads that our Challengers submitted.

One of the best tools for writers is right here in Durham Region - our own WCDR. If you haven't taken advantage of a workshop, breakfast or any of the

other benefits of your membership then there's no time like the present. Check out what's coming up on our calendar and make plans to be there.



Everyone loves a bargain so let me share some freebies to really rev up your writing.

First, check out some of the writing tools you see advertised in magazines such as *The Writer's Digest*. If the company lists a website in its ad then surf on over and read all about it.

Many of them offer trial versions of their software that you can download for free. Some work only for a limited time while others work indefinitely with limited features. You will need to purchase a license eventually if you want to access all the features but it's not often you can get a true try-before-you-buy deal.

There are also databases on the Internet to which you can subscribe when you want to do research for your next article or book. These databases are a more reliable source of information than your random Google search.

Imagine being able to view old newspapers and see the headlines and what the fashions were worn during your character's life. Or maybe you just want to know the statistics on worm farming for your *Organic Gardening* article.

The drawback to these databases was always the cost. No longer.

Get yourself over to the Whitby Public Library. Armed with a library card from WPL you can visit its website at <http://www.whitbylibrary.on.ca/> and use its Information Centre Database. You now have access to nine large databases, including *The Toronto Star*.

Just what was the world doing on your birthday anyway?

A Message From THE BOARD

By Annette McLeod, President

I've been with you for a year now so I guess it's time I came completely clean: I'm green as spring and this job has a big learning curve. I think I've done well making people comfortable at breakfast, keeping a diverse group of boarders fairly friendly and coming up with some creative ideas. As for being proactive, organized and diplomatic — well, let's just say that's where the curve is the steepest.

Ethereal Sue made some comments to me about leadership, and when cut-to-the-chase Rose echoed them later, I figured they must have something to them. I've gone to Dorothea for, and gotten, good advice. I've yakked to laid-

back Rich about cars until the others are ready to slap us and enjoyed a couple of off-colour jokes with introverted (right, Anna?) Kevin.

Thanks to Anna, I have a better understanding of the difference between shy and introverted. I've come to like and respect the always-cheerful Sherry, whom I barely knew before. And I've enjoyed another year of learning (and teaching, just maybe) with Aprille, your complex and dedicated past-president and *Word Weaver* editor.

All in all, I've enjoyed it thoroughly and am profoundly grateful to and impressed by all of them.

Dan Sullivan continues to grow and is rapidly becoming a must-enter for poets across the country. Words in Whitby celebrated its fifth anniversary and the WCDR once again trekked west for Toronto's *Word on the Street* festival.

Our short story and online contests were, at the end of the day, limited successes. Successful because they

were well-run, honestly executed and expanded awareness of the WCDR and its cause in far-reaching places. Limited because not as many people entered as we'd hoped (since we're being completely honest), but Heaven knows life gets in the way. (If you want to get heavily into the honesty stuff, I didn't even quite get around to entering the short story contest, so shame on me.)

The bottom line is that my goals are set: to grow as a leader (tough for me because I don't quite take myself seriously as a "leader," and you have to be very careful not to irritate volunteers); to be more conscious of the feelings of others, to be proactive and follow through.

By the time you read this, your new board may be in place and the process of getting to know each other and figure out how to make the WCDR machine hum together begins again.

I can't wait.

WCDR Who's Who : Thelma Davidson

by Philippa Schmiegelow

"I learned my writing at MacLaren Advertising typing speeches and writing press releases."

Desperate for work that paid more than the PR department of the CNIB where she was already working, Thelma conned her way into a job with the largest advertising agency in Canada.

"Do you have a PR department?" she asked, "Do you need anybody?"

She got an interview.

"I'd like to hire you but I don't have any place for you," she was told. "I don't have a desk for you."

"I'll sit on a stool or on the floor," she replied.

She was frizzy-haired, 18, didn't fit in with the glamour in the office but she was funny. She was hired. A little table and a comfy chair was what she got.

"I never learned the glamour," she adds.

Glamour or not, Thelma Davidson had chutzpah. She'd longed to go to university but her father had pulled her out of Collegiate School and entered her in the Central High School of Commerce.



"It's a waste of time...you're a girl...you'll get married", he'd said. She wept buckets.

Trudeau-mania finally got her to university. Official bilingualism had come to Canada. In her late 40s, Thelma registered at York University's Glendon Campus. Four years later, she graduated with a BA in English and

French. A year or two after that, she started her MA on Toronto's Russian immigrants.

"Who are these people I see around me?" she'd ask, "and why the signs in Russian in the shop windows?"

She talked to the old people in Yiddish, and to others in English and French. One copy of her thesis, *Former Soviet Jews in Toronto: Post-collapse of the Soviet Union*, went to the Jewish Aid Society, two to Trent University's data library, two to the National Library. This was her favourite writing project and she proofread it herself.

"The interviewees were so happy someone was interested in their stories," Thelma told me, "and thrilled that they were going into a book."

From typing speeches and writing press releases to a written record of a people's journey. And now, bittersweet, funny poetry for WCDR's Newcastle Poetry Group.

Chutzpah Lady, you've come a long way!

Professional Development Summer/Fall 2004

For More Information Check Out www.wcdr.org
To Register
Contact workshops@wcdr.org or 905-686-0211

July 19 to 23
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
3802 Rundle Rd, Bowmanville
Write-Up Writing Camp
Lynda Allison
Fee: \$150

Early Registration by June 19th-\$25 off
Early arrival 8 am/late pick up 5 pm-\$25

Write-Up Writing Services, Clarington/Whitby Community Churches and The Writers' Circle of Durham Region present Write-Up Writing Camp, a summer writing adventure for grades three to 12. Summer days are the perfect time for young people to explore the writing process. The Write-Up philosophy of facilitating writing is about creating an environment and inspiration for creativity to flourish. Through creative activities, writing exercises, sharing and critiquing of work in a positive atmosphere, children and teens learn how to access their writing potential. Facilitators and guests will soon be announced on the website: www.writeup.ca

To Register Contact:

Lynda Allison
905.623.0365



September-October 2004
Course is delivered via email
6 Sessions
Make It Work On-line!
Editing for Writers
Susana Gomes
Fee: \$60

Tired of hearing that your fiction doesn't "work"? Fed up with rejection letters from editors who claim to like your writing but aren't willing to buy it?

Make your writing work for you! Learn how to substantively edit your own writing with an eye to improving readability and sellability.

This course shows you how to

- Objectively read your own writing
- Identify areas for improvement
- Substantively edit your pieces
- Evaluate your own writing

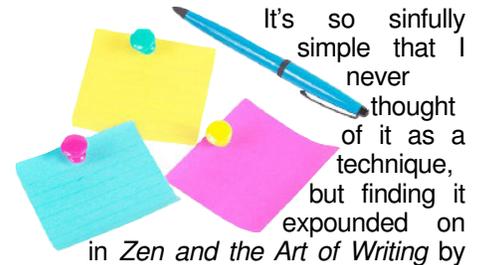
Pick up editing tips on

- voice
- tense
- cliché
- point of view
- fact checking
- words you should never use

Susana Gomes, an editor and indexer, is a member of the Editor's Association of Canada and the Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada.

You can reach Susana at editingink@rogers.com.

Writing Zen



It's so sinfully simple that I never thought of it as a technique, but finding it expounded on in *Zen and the Art of Writing* by Ray Bradbury (no less) has given my list-writing habit considerable validation. My lists have come light-years from the narrow scraps of paper that my Oma jotted grocery items on (then forgot at home).

I carry index cards in my purse, loose leaf paper in my glovebox and a journal in my portfolio to catch stray words for poems. I have lined Staples pads in every room of my home, because I never know when words will well up in me and overflow. Many of those utensils go to the cottage or on vacation with me. Words - in clusters or in isolation - track me down no matter how far I travel. I've been known to scratch snippets on gum wrappers or write long streams on the back of library slips as I read.

I'm captured by the texture of the word; the turn of the phrase; the flow of the sentence and the need to note the coupling of the ideas they hold. I store stacks of random lists in a small wooden chest for future use.

I can revisit this collection that I've dredged from the real world or my lopsided brain at any time and with fresh eyes discover patterns, consistent or inconsistent. Like breadcrumbs on water, they ripple my imagination, so I list them. Days, weeks, months, years later, they may echo through me like stones dropped down a well and stir new responses.

Bradbury cites his 50 years of listing word abstractions as one of his most fruitful practices. He might even have used them for chores and groceries like the rest of us!

Barbara Hunt

NEW WORKSHOP POLICY!

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

June/July Challenge

Welcome to our Literary Yard Sale.

A big thank you to everyone who sent in an ad for their favorite character or author. Now - how many do you recognize?



Yard Sale
Various items along with 20 cans white wash, 35 picket fence pieces - would make excellent river raft.

Directions: Exit 401 @ Huckleberry Junction- Take the Lazy River down the hill, turn left past Tom Sawyer Park.

Anne Nielsen

Good rural homes wanted for one antelope and one bird which provided inspiration to Toronto-based writer in recent novel.

City neighbours concerned about sharp horns of antelope and complain about bird's early morning croaks.

If you have a fenced pasture for one oryx and if the croakings of one crane won't offend,

Please call: M. Atwood (416) 911-2084

Elizabeth Le Ber

For Sale
Used bricks suitable for privacy wall. Owner had unfortunate fall. Drop in to see them at:
1 Cracked Shell Lane and ask for H. Dumpty or email: twelvescrambled@eggs.ca

Anne Nielsen



For Sale:
One stunning pea-green, clothbound copy of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, once coveted by overzealous baby sister. (Incidentally, it travels well in pretentious little white handbags.) Also, one dull razor, used (without permission, I might add) on the spindly legs of a two-pack-a-day, fat old Druid given to outbursts of pretentious hyper-tense Irish monologues. (Her uniform of choice, if you can believe this, is a hoary midnight blue Japanese kimono.)
Zoocy Glass, 555-6754

Kevin Craig

THE KING OF ALL TAG SALES
47 W. Broadway, Bangor
(Hammond to Broadway, turn right, 6th house on left)
8 a.m. June 19th

on offer...

Several lengths of custom wrought iron fence, many with bat motifs intact
'99 Dodge Caravan, AS IS, (Paid 1500.00) good for parts only-B.O.
"SIGNED" First Edition Books
Vintage Hampden Academy Jacket
Used eyeglasses, free to charity
Baseball Cards
Stuffed animal collectibles including "Spruce the Tabby"

Deborah A. Rankine



Shoe For Sale
Overrun with children- Mother has so many children she doesn't know what to do

Anne Nielsen

For Sale
Used wardrobe trunk, complete with fur pieces, feather boas and an armful of swanky dresses. Contains inner-drawer with a fistful of jewelry including rhinestone tiara. Previous owner's no longer in need of trunk. (Not where she's going!)
Trying to get back what's rightfully mine! See Stanley K. (Take the streetcar Desire, transfer to Cemeteries, and ride 6 blocks to Elysian Fields. I'm at 632, downstairs apartment.

If not home, give Stella a shout.

Kevin Craig



Grammar Puss



GrammarPuss is annoyed. Just as she was beginning to notice a decline in the appalling recent over- and misuse of “literally,” another heinous modern habit has caught her attention.

Commas have specific purposes. One of the most common is to set off appositive phrases. Appositives are words or phrases that reference a previously mentioned noun. For example: The green house, the one with the grey roof, is the last on our street. In this sentence, “the green house” and

“the one with the grey roof” both reference the same house. If you removed the appositive phrase — “the one with the grey roof” — the sentence is still complete and the information is still valid. This goes for titles and people too, of course. “This year’s best picture, *The Return of the King*, was about hobbits.” (A gross understatement, but GrammarPuss uses it for merely illustrative purposes.)

“My brother, John, is older than I” has a slightly different connotation than “My brother John is older than I” because in the first instance, John is appositive. We can assume therefore that the author has only one brother and his name is John. In the second example, we can’t tell how many brothers the author has because we can’t safely mentally eliminate “John” from the sentence.

(Although at first resistant, GrammarPuss has come to see the sense of leaving the comma out of so-called “close appositives” such as “my husband Jim” and “my girlfriend Brenda” because implicit in words such as “husband” and “girlfriend” is the idea that there is only one.)

Which brings GrammarPuss to the habit to which she referred earlier:

She has begun to notice a gross overuse of the comma thusly: “Noted dog trainer, Sam Pooperscooper is in town to promote his book.” “Our guest next month is famous film director,

Steven Spielberg.

Now what, GrammarPuss wonders, is that lonely comma doing there? The information isn’t appositive. One must assume there is more than one noted dog trainer, as certainly there is more than one famous film director. When used to bracket names such as in these examples, commas must come in pairs. If the name is the last part of the sentence, one must be able to remove it without affecting the information in the sentence.

Therefore: “Our guest next month is the famous film director of such hits as ET, Steven Spielberg.” is correct, as is “Noted dog trainer Sam Pooperscooper is in town to promote his book.”

Mastery of the comma is an important step in making sure one’s writing is clear. When one can no longer tell if information is appositive, one risks writing or reading misleading or fuzzy information.

If together we can spread the word about this comma abuse, perhaps we can stop this habit in its tracks. GrammarPuss, for one, intends to try.

Send your grammar, punctuation and style questions

to GrammarPuss at wordweaver@wcdcr.org

Collette Yvonne is thrilled that her short story “Scarlet Runners” is one step closer to being made into a short film by Toronto filmmaker Teresa Hannigan. On May 15, Hannigan’s screenplay, based on “Scarlet Runners” won the Screenplay Giveaway contest at the Worldwide Short Film Festival in Toronto.

Barbara Hunt has just had her poem “Mama Don’t” published in the labour relations magazine *Our Times*.

Heather O’Connor’s article about the Durham Region Soccer Association’s innovative Referee Academy appears in *Inside Soccer*, a national magazine. Entitled “The Sky’s The Limit,” you can read it online at www.drcdurham.ca/pdf/academy_inside_soccer.pdf

Paeans



Skyla Dawn Cameron just received acceptance from Mundania Press for her novel *River*. This is the first time Skyla has submitted a novel for publication, and she is insanely excited about this news.

Judy Bagshaw is really on a roll. In the last two months she has been offered a contract for the re-release of her YA romantic suspense novel *Love By The Pound*.

TreeSide Press, the new all Canadian imprint of Electric eBook Publishing, will carry the book in ebook and trade paperback. It is scheduled to be released within three months. In addition, New Age Dimensions Publishing has offered her a contract for her collection of short stories entitled *At Long Last, Love*. The book will be available in ebook format and should be released by the summer 2004. And last but not least, Judy’s novel *Lady Blue* got a great review. Part of what the reviewer had to say: “...I feel this book deserves more than a five-star rating! This tops my list of favorite books written in 2003.” The full review can be read at www.loveromances.com/ladyblue_angie.html

A Brush with Greatness

By Birgitta MacLeod

It kept happening to me. Unbidden, images from television, newspapers and the world around me were translating themselves not into poetry or prose, but paint. I couldn't help myself. I kept imagining how I might collect the right colour, plump my brush with paint and create a visual masterpiece. In my mind's eye I was layering pigments and possibilities, crafting subtle variations with intellect and artistic poise. My painting would be rich with meaning, a glorious visual odyssey, a treat for the eye, mind and spirit.

It all started last February when, during a week-long retreat, I came to realize that my life is really about creating, that writing is just one avenue for me to be my whole creative self.

So, what to do now that a painter's spirit has moved into my body with enough luggage for an extended stay? I supposed I could pick up a brush and just do it, but I hadn't painted since my first year in university, a stint that I realized was – gasp – almost 20 years behind me. I needed to get a grip on the basics again, I figured.

I signed up for a night class in acrylic painting at Durham College. After the first night I knew this spirit had found a home. As directed, I went out shopping for the only pigments I'd need to mix any colour I wanted: phthalo blue, quinacridone red, cadmium yellow light and titanium white. I am an alchemist as well as a writer.

By the third lesson I'd learned all I'd come to learn, or so I thought. I'd re-discovered how to concoct different hues and tones, what brush to use and how to apply the paint. The instructor showed us how to look at objects and the world around us with new eyes, to see shape and shadows in ways that go unnoticed to the untuned eye, to see them for what they really are.

I began to see parallels between visual art and writing. Soon there was row upon row of them. For starters, writers too see the world in a different way. We catch phrases, see singular moments with mindful clarity, discern their contours, then



preserve them with words.

Our instructor Andrew taught us to start a painting with the thing you see first, the most obvious, or, when these options are dubious, smack in the middle of the canvas. Just start, he said. Writing's like that too: spend too much time at the starting gate and you never get in the race.

Nevertheless I felt myself slogging through the course at the mid-way point. "You're spending a lot of time on that painting," Andrew said one night. He was right. It seemed to be taking me forever. I was getting bogged down in detail and how I ought to be painting. He suggested I take out a clean sheet and just play around. So I did. I globbed on my favourite shade of Siberian-iris-blue, pressed it smack in the middle of the page and in an instant was set free. For the rest of the night I swooped and dabbed, mixed and swirled. Time flew by. Finally it was time to clean up. I stepped out of my reverie, away from the canvas,

and was astonished at what I'd done. Another lesson: trust my inner voice and go with my gut. Stop thinking.

The next week I started a new painting. From the get-go, this one was different: bolder, more personal, reflective of my own painterly voice. I shook my head at my naïve assumption that I'd had enough instruction after three weeks. It was another lesson reinforced. When I think I'm done, been there and bought the T-shirt, or feel empty of ideas and can't go further, that's the time to push on. That's when great moments occur, when I push past the boundaries of my comfort zone and in doing so, redefine them. Until the next time.

A friend told me that painting lessons would enrich my writing. She was right in so many ways. Besides expanding my perception of colour and form, the experience reinforced for me how creativity is brought to life. Letting go of assumptions, fears and inner criticism and learning new ways of looking at the world has freed me both as a painter and as a writer. Creativity is often about taking risks, challenging myself to explore further, to open the door to a greatness that's inside each of us, to replace "I can't" with "I haven't learned yet."

Now my resume declares that besides being a writer, editor and poet, I'm also a painter, an artist. I do therefore I am.

Did I ever tell you I can't sing... yet?

Birgitta MacLeod combines writing, art and teaching into a freelance career that mixes business with pleasure. She exerts her whole creative self in Port Perry and wherever she goes.

August/September Challenge

Writing prompts are always fun. They often spark something totally unexpected and allow the writer to explore new territory. So *Word Weaver's* challenge to you, Dear Member, is to write a poem or short, short story that begins with the phrase

"The last time..."

Keep your poem to 30 lines or less. Your story may be fiction or non-fiction but should not exceed 500 words. Please submit by e-mail only to Wordweaver@wcd.org. We regret that entries received by regular mail cannot be used.



Writers' Circles

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

Christians Who Write

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

Circle for Children's Writers

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

Durham Write-On

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

Markham Village Writers' Group

Monthly
Donna Marrin
donna.marrin@staples.ca

Northword Edition

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

Oshawa Scribes

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

Richard Ferrier Writers' Group

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

Senior Scribes of Uxbridge

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

Word Players

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

Write in Whitby

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



Write Now

A group for on-the-spot writing
Every second Thursday
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Uxbridge Public Library
Vicki Pinkerton, 905-473-1284

Writers' and Editors' Network

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

Words In Whitby

Invisible Tools

Deborah A. Rankine

I caress the hand-rubbed finish on an 18th century cradle in my favourite antique store and know the tools used in its creation. They're the obvious ones - a hammer, chisels, a plane.

But what about the "unseen" tools of the trade? Tools such as confidence, tenacity, blood, sweat and tears. By pushing the invisible toolbox one can see that same labour of love being shaped in a different light...as the craftsperson's hammer and bevel-edged chisel carves the final dovetail joint in the timbered oak. Wind from a twilight snowstorm fingers its way through the crack in the lower pane of the workshop window snuffing out his only source of light - a single candle, the forgotten embers in the fireplace having lost their will to live hours earlier.

He re-lights the candle, unflinchingly rags his bloodied hand, arms the sweat

from his frozen brow and continues feverish to finish in time. Next, my mind's eye meets his eyes; they are moist and smiling as he watches his daughter lay his first grandchild into the cradle. She returns his smile, her own eyes conveying tears of gratitude.

These unseen tools were the same ones revealed to me at Words in Whitby, 2004. As I listened to world-renowned authors recount their journeys in the craft of writing, I realized that the ties that bind us were indeed blood, sweat and many, many tears. When Eric McCormack spoke lightly of sometimes "calling it a day" after completing only one well-crafted paragraph I thought he was joking. But our next glimpse of McCormack spoke of five-year old Eric, and an ill-fated shortcut taken through a Glasgow rail yard with his older brother and a school-mate. After witnessing the

untimely death of that brother and friend, Eric said all he could think of was that now he'd get all his brother's toys. And in that moment I understood why you sometimes have to leave the writing at one well-crafted paragraph. When a writer creates authentic prose, the words bleed on the page, cut so deeply from our subconscious, our individual histories, that they blur our vision. And when the prose is finally revealed an intimacy is created, oftentimes through the tears of the gentle reader. And so it was for all the author readings over this three-day event. They shared, I cried.

I left *Words in Whitby* feeling connected, knowing in my heart that while I still had so many roads of discovery ahead of me, I share the same path with these amazing authors.

"Tool Girl" Offers Her Tools For Success

Kim Carson

I was one of the many people fortunate enough to attend the fifth anniversary of the *Words in Whitby Celebration of Authors*. As in previous years, each author session was engaging and inspiring. One of the highlights of the weekend was the luncheon - an event many attendees look forward to for the company of writers, great food and an entertaining speaker.

This year was no exception. Canada's own quirky "Tool Girl," Mag Ruffman, was the featured presenter.

Mag pens the "Tool Girl" column on home repair for *The Toronto Star* and has recently published a book, *How Hard Can It Be* - a compilation of home repair projects. A syndicated column, a book on home repair: not bad for a woman who blatantly told us she hates writing!

Fortunately, she didn't let that fact stop

her from sharing her story and offering us her tools for writing success.

According to Mag, all her successes have been flukes. From her TV career to carpentry to her newspaper column, Mag has taken on roles that were never planned. This has brought her much of the success she has today because when opportunities come her way, she takes advantage. We can do the same as writers. When we are in a rut, by taking a risk we can create more opportunities for ourselves. Tool #1: Looking outside the boundaries we create can lead us to new places.

Mag also offered advice on a common challenge that plagues many writers: perfection. "Don't expect your first draft to be perfect, it will get you nowhere." We have all experienced the frustration when a brilliant idea doesn't come to fruition when it first hits the page. Tool #2: We need to keep going and let ourselves

make mistakes. The result might not be what we expected but over time something good can come out of it.

Perhaps Mag's strongest advice came at the conclusion of her presentation in one simple statement: "Every brain has many unique thoughts." Our words, our stories, our poems - all have meaning and value. Tool #3: Believe in them. Adopting this attitude gives us confidence as writers. The secret is to be fearless and see where it takes us.

It's this open-mindedness and trust-in-yourself attitude that has made Mag the successful person she is today. Her humour and belief that anything she can do, we can do, is what makes her appealing. Whether it is for home repair projects or writing assignments, Mag proves to us that with the right tools, we can do anything.

Nalo and Me

Angela Andrews

I was Nalo Hopkinson's author "wrangler" and I had arranged to pick her up at the Pickering GO station that Saturday morning. I was running behind and ran out of the house, make-up bag in tow to fix my face while I waited for her train to arrive.

I made it to the station before the train (whew!) and watched as it arrived...and then returned west. No Nalo. I tried to phone home and that's when I realized I'd left the house without my purse.

I found a quarter in my jacket pocket. Things were looking up! Inserting my coin into the phone, I dialled, and Bell asked for another \$3.25. Of course. It's long distance to my home from Pickering. I knew that!

OK, what was I going to do? Call collect!

I dialed all the right numbers and heard my youngest pick up the phone and listened as he hung up again! He had never had to deal with an automated operator before. I'd bet he thought it was

a telemarketer!

On the third try, I pushed the buttons to get a live operator and as I explained the situation to her as calmly as my panicky, I-haven't-finished-my-first-coffee-yet self can, a taxi pulled up and out jumped Nalo!

She had been up late and hadn't slept well. Running on about three hours of sleep, she got off at the wrong GO stop and, realizing there wouldn't be another train to get her to Pickering in time, she took a taxi.

Happy that we still had plenty of time, I packed her into my van. We hit it off right away. We liked the same kind of movies (gotta have explosions!), and adaptations of graphic novels. She'd seen *Hellboy* the night before and been disappointed.

Deep into telling her about the novel I'm writing, I ran a red light! Nalo looked up and said, "That's a red light." I couldn't stop, so I sailed right through to the sound of honking horns. She must've

thought I was a madwoman.

We arrived in one piece and I felt like a hero until Nalo announced she hadn't had breakfast and was feeling faint!

Uh-oh. 9:30 a.m. The event starts in half an hour.

I whisked Nalo off to a diner around the corner. There were two families ahead of us to be seated. It's 9:45. While waiting, I introduced Nalo to the people in line, telling them all about *Words In Whitby*. Nalo passed a copy of her book around for folks to look at. Finally we got a seat. 10:00 a.m.

We discussed Rosemary Sullivan and her book *Labyrinth of Desire: Women, Passion, and Romantic Obsession*. I told her about my obsession with the Canadian folk group *Tanglefoot* (and their mandolin player).

I got her back on time, refreshed and well fed, and she gave, in my opinion, the best reading and interview of the series. The rest of the day went as planned with no more unexpected surprises.

I don't wait for moods. You accomplish nothing if you do that. Your mind must know it has got to get down to work. - Pearl S. Buck

Breakfast Info



June 12

Annual General Meeting

EMILY HEARN has written extensively for children, much of it for radio (CBC) and television (TVO) and *Owl* magazine from 1976 until 1991.

Emily will speak on her experiences with young children's writing from the mentoring she does as *Writer In Electronic Residence*.

www.wier.ca/EHearn.html

July 10

Panel Discussion

Bring your questions for the experts. WCDR will host Lorrie Goldstein, *Toronto Sun* Editor, Rosemary Shipton, a partner in Shipton, McDougall Maude, Publishing Consultants and Kathryn Dorrell, Associate Editor, *Homemakers* magazine.

Don't forget we're on summer vacation in August. We'll see you in September.

BREAKFAST MEETINGS RUN FROM 8:30 A.M. TO 11 A.M. AT IROQUOIS PARK SPORTS COMPLEX

50 VICTORIA ST. W. (AT HENRY STREET) IN WHITBY • MEMBERS, \$12; GUESTS, \$15

IF YOU ARE NOT ON THE REGRETS-ONLY LIST, YOUR PLACE MUST BE RESERVED NO LATER THAN THE

WEDNESDAY PRIOR WITH SHERRY HINMAN AT 905-686-0211 OR AT BREAKFAST@WCDR.ORG

It is worth mentioning, for future reference, that the creative power which bubbles so pleasantly in beginning a new book quiets down after a time, and one goes on more steadily. Doubts creep in. Then one becomes resigned. Determination not to give in, and the sense of an impending shape keep one at it more than anything. - Virginia Woolf

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

June 12
Breakfast
Annual General Meeting
 Emily Hearn

July 10
Breakfast
Ask the Experts
 Panel Discussion

July 19
Write-Up Writing
Camp
 Lynda Allison

August
No Breakfast
Summer Break

September 11
Breakfast

**HAVE
 A
 GREAT
 SUMMER!**



FOR WORKSHOP INFORMATION, CONTACT SUE REYNOLDS AT WORKSHOPS@WCDR.ORG
 TO REGISTER FOR BREAKFAST MEETINGS, CONTACT SHERRY HINMAN AT BREAKFAST@WCDR.ORG

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Famous Last Words

Manuscript: something submitted in haste and returned at leisure. Oliver Herford 1863 - 1935