



THE WORD WEAVER

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

March/April 2005 Vol. 11 No. 2

On Butterflies and Breath: An Interview with Wayson Choy

By Nancy Del Col

There are lucky red butterflies on the cover of *All That Matters*, Wayson Choy's Giller Prize-nominated sequel to *The Jade Peony*. Gauzy butterflies appear in random pattern on the front pages. A silver butterfly is the gift given to young Kiam-Kim by Stepmother when she arrives in Gold Mountain. Stepmother's name, Siu-Diep, means "little butterfly." And a cut-out silhouette of a butterfly graces Choy's business card. Being a man who believes in omens and signs in his daily life, and who has survived a near-death experience, the butterfly must be a symbol of metamorphosis, new beginnings and rebirth, right?

While pouring tea in his warm, south-facing kitchen, Choy ponders this. It interests him, but he has something else in mind. To him, the butterfly is more a symbol of those moments in life that are like a "flutter"—subtle actions and choices made early on that determine our fates much later. This thought comes from the chaos theory, which says that the flap of a butterfly's wings 2000 miles away can influence the strength and direction of a tornado. The image of a butterfly came to Choy at a level, he says, "below my conscious knowledge." It represents the strength of his characters, decent people who make the best choices they can in difficult times, so that "when the storm hits, those choices move them toward the light, instead of the darkness."

Moving toward the light is not only a theme for Choy's characters, but also in his own life. In August 2001, he suffered an asthma attack so severe he was placed in an induced coma and put on a ventilator. While in the coma, he had three heart attacks. This near-death experience (or "near-life experience," as one of his friends calls it) is the subject of his next book, a work of non-fiction he is currently researching.

Choy attributes his survival and recovery from this trauma to the love of his extended family members, who called his name and touched his hands while he was in the coma. Their voices pulled him back from the "comfortable darkness." When he emerged from the cocoonlike state of the coma, he felt that meaning and time had deepened

for him. "I became more of what I was before." Having come so close to losing it all, each day is now an adventure guided by the mantra: "I could have missed this."

While Choy recovered, so did the characters in *All That Matters*. Before his asthma attack he was about 45 pages from finishing the book (under the working title "The Ten Thousand Things," which, in Chinese mythology, means the countless things in the universe). But afterward, the book wouldn't finish. The characters wouldn't move forward. He couldn't bring the story to closure and had to go back to the beginning, in a sense letting the characters be reborn. His "excellent editor," Martha Kanya-Forstner, aided him in this process. A phrase or a gesture was altered, deepening the characters and the story line. For example, Martha isolated a scene where Kiam-Kim might want to connect with his past and his dead mother. Choy found himself writing one night in a semitrance, a timeless realm, and out of this "the mother sure enough came back," presenting herself through the supernatural gesture of Kiam-Kim knocking on a teapot twice. Poh-Poh, his grandmother, explains to him that his mother used to do this to wake him when he was a baby.

This ghostlike resurrection of characters is prevalent in Choy's novels. Does he believe in ghosts? Although he speaks to those who are gone and they to him, he says this is a natural behaviour. He feels that ghosts are the parts of our brains that remember and keep alive those who have loved, or even abused, us. They operate as living parts of us, hallucinations or images that our minds project in three dimensions into the world. Life is just layers of consciousness—sleeping, dreaming or awake—all real to us because they work through the senses. He says, "The brain is a divine gift for being human, an instrument that we don't control but gives us visions of life."

The character Choy is most proud of giving life to is Poh-Poh, the matriarch of the Chen family. She is the "primal mother spirit" that animates the family with her life force. Her wisdom explains how to behave in this world in order to survive.

Poh-Poh's death in *The Jade Peony* causes the family to hold their breath in suspense, in anticipation of what signs will come next, for, of course, death will not be the end of her. Again, in the beginning of *All That Matters*, it is Poh-Poh who causes Kiam-Kim to hold his breath, when from the deck of the ship that brings his small family to a new life in Canada, she points out the "dragon" train emerging from the depths of Gold Mountain, puffing smoke and snaking down to meet them. She is a character with a life beyond the printed page. "She tells me what she wants," says Choy, clearly delighted by her spunk. Apparently, she wants her own book, a future project for Choy, relating the story of her life before she came to Gold Mountain.

For his current book, a new symbol of life and tireless joy is emerging—the hummingbird. Choy sees this image as having arisen out of his near-death experience, when he tried to lift himself off the hospital bed, beating his arms as though to escape from the darkness. He was attempting to find, again, a living rhythm, not unlike that of the hummingbird, a remarkable creature that moves its wings in a figure-eight pattern (the symbol for infinity), signifying rebirth through one's breath and beating heart.

Butterflies and hummingbirds. Ghosts and breath. Does he believe that death actually happens? He would be delighted if there was such a thing as life after death. But he is pragmatic, calling himself spiritual, not religious. He shares his mentor Carol Shields's belief that heaven and hell are in the here and now, in the choices we make each day. We can choose to have a better day, to be delighted with what life offers us, to leave a glimpse of light behind.

"This is it," he says, "and this is enough."

Nancy Del Col feels lucky to be working at her two loves: teaching (high school English and Writer's Craft) and writing. For the past year she has written a monthly column for *Post City Magazines*, and is currently working on an article for the April issue of *Moxi Femme*. Interviewing Wayson Choy was a delight.

A Message from THE BOARD

It's astonishing that WCDR is now in its 10th year. We've outlasted marriages, dictatorships, small Slavic countries and Andrew Dice Clay's entire career.

It's to our credit that, except for our founder, Marge, who is geographically less available, all our past-presidents remain members. In Marge's footsteps, Ruth, Aprille, Lynda and I have followed, and each of us has added our own flavour to this potent WCDR brew.

Monthly breakfasts remain almost unbelievably well attended. Our *Word Weaver*—thank you, Deb—continues to be a highlight in every member mailbox, whether real or virtual, and workshops are still going strong, strengthening the skills and confidence of all of us to be better writers.

The Dan Sullivan poetry contest was joined by an on-line non-fiction contest—which saw a huge leap in entrants this year—and our short fiction contest.

But this is a particularly special year, so to celebrate this milestone, as a board we're agreed that a party is in order.

We're looking at the end of October and including in the plans some storytelling, some great food and invitations that will go out to everyone who has spoken at our monthly breakfasts, as well as, of course, our members, who comprise the entire reason WCDR continues to thrive.

Start thinking now about who your best-loved literary figure (real or fiction) is, because a great costume is going to be in order.

We've also got a "would you turn the page" event in the simmering stages for September, during which members will be given an opportunity to find out from industry professionals whether the first page of their long work would compel a reading of the second—a vital step on the road to publication.

At our last meeting, we had to start talking about who will be back next year—a year goes by so quickly! And although we are losing a couple (some who have been on the board a couple of times and keep coming back, another testament to the group), several key players and our newest addition, New Sue/Sue Too Eaman, are in

it for another go-round.

It's a good time to start making some new plans; to consider where you want to be 10 years from now. As all the pop-psychologists would tell you, those 10 years are going to go by one way or the other, so we may as well all use the tools and resources at our disposal through WCDR to make sure that in 10 years, we're happier, stronger, more prolific and enjoying our writing lives even more than we do now.

It isn't as far off as you think.



P a e a n s

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

Rich Helms had an article in *The Toronto Sun* Drive section on Feb 12, 2005 entitled "Smart in Town and Unique in Country" on his owning a Smart car.

Dorothea Helms had a feature article in the current issue of *Canadian Homes and Cottages*. It's an interesting piece on fractional ownership of vacation property. Dorothea is pleased to have an article that goes on for five pages. She was heard to have said, "Who says size doesn't count?"

Graham Ducker, a member of the Canadian Federation of Poets, was the group's featured poet for February 2005, showcasing his recently published book *Don't Wake the Teacher*. For information, log on to www.grahamducker.com or www.federationofpoets.com.

Pamela Hamilton's story "In Sickness and in Health" was featured in the poetry and prose section of the February/March 2005 issue of *All Things Girl*, an online journal. The story may be read at www.allthingsgirl.com.

Barbara Hunt's poem "Making Waking Senses Walk" was selected as a runner-up in Hiddenbrook Press's **Open Window Poetry Contest**.

Dorothy Sjöholm won third place plus an honourable mention in the Ontario Poetry Society's **Simply Good Poetry Competition**.

GrammarPuss

In any creative endeavour, it's possible to completely ignore the rules and, in spite of that (or because of it), meet with wild success. If Picasso hadn't decided that trying to portray a three-dimensional world in a two-dimensional medium wasn't patently ridiculous, we wouldn't have cubism. If James Joyce had stuck to the words he already had, we wouldn't have *Finnegan's Wake* (although GrammarPuss would argue that the world wouldn't suffer much for the loss). Salvador Dali melted clocks because he chose to, not because he couldn't draw a clock.

Examples of the artistically inclined taking liberties with spectacular results abound; however, what GrammarPuss would argue these brave souls have in common is a sound knowledge of the rules, then a conscious decision to ignore them. One mustn't assume that because he chose not to, Picasso could not have made representational art. If Joyce hadn't had a firm command of the language as it was, he would not have had the skill to twist it as he did.

While she would certainly never presume to tell an artist how to ply his art, GrammarPuss believes there are certain mistakes writers make that, unlike these examples, don't lead to a vanguard, but rather to a stack of rejection letters and many tears.

Here are GrammarPuss's Top 10 Mistakes Writers Make. Ignore them at your peril.

1. Lacking the basics

This is a natural start to GrammarPuss's list: not having a sound knowledge of grammar and punctuation *marks* a writer as an amateur, and it's a hard impression to overcome. Otherwise creative, flowing text can be brought to a screeching halt in the eyes of a canny editor or publisher by a misplaced "it's" instead of "its" or a blatant misuse of semicolons. While the great Margaret Atwood herself has proven that it's possible to write an entire novel—including dialogue—without using even one quotation mark, you can bet she knows where

they go.

2. Succumbing to ego

Even if you're the afore-exalted Atwood, not every word you put down on paper is going to be gold. When an editor, trusted reader, significant other—whomever—tells you that some part of your work isn't, well, working, be at least open minded enough to entertain the idea that they may, just may, have a point.

3. Not having a clear purpose

It's sorely tempting to add a few more words to pad our writing when we're not entirely sure what a particular piece is trying to say. Often, putting it aside, having a good ponder, and going back to it will help.

4. Carrying linguistic baggage

GrammarPuss has made the point many times that language is dynamic. While it may be appropriate, occasionally, to hang on to your grammar school rules, one must remain open to modern usage. This rule also applies to hanging on to bad grammatical habits—just because it seems that everyone else is generating heaps of comma splices doesn't make it OK to do so, and just because everyone on TV seems to be saying "just between you and I" doesn't make it correct.

5. Failing to solicit feedback

Writing is most often performed in solitary; often, we need to be alone with our thoughts and our pens to have the courage to write at all. But if your intention is publication, it is of great advantage to offer your work to peers, friends or colleagues before sending it out. An objective eye can see things we simply can't.

6. Failing back on your crutches

Just about every writer has a favourite word, phrase or pattern they fall back on repeatedly. It often becomes such second nature to them, they can't see it anymore. Try to see your work with fresh eyes or, better yet, refer to No. 6, above.

7. Overuse of adverbs

Adverbs have very little place in creative writing. Words such as "very" and "really"

are especially offensive to experienced editors, but almost all adverb/verb combination can better be expressed by a single, more powerful verb. Words that attempt emphasis—constantly, literally, incredibly, absolutely—very often have the opposite effect, rendering sentences virtually, if you catch GrammarPuss's drift, meaningless.

8. Phony dialogue

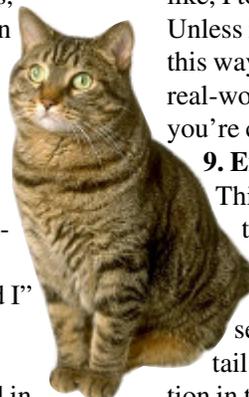
Good dialogue is imperative to most works of fiction, as it breathes life into a narrative. Even in non-fiction, a few well-placed quotes can liven up a piece. But dialogue must ring true. Trying to impart information through dialogue ("Hey, Sue, did I tell you about the time when I was six and my father threw me into the deep end?") is transparent to readers. Also, many of our real-life conversations are fraught with phrases we wouldn't want to use in our writing: "So, like, I totally told him to shove off, eh?" Unless it's essential that your character talk this way, try for a happy medium between real-world speech and the literary voice you're creating.

9. Expository writing

This is often expressed as "show, don't tell" and is perhaps the biggest mistake beginner—and not-so-beginner—writers make. Let the reader see your literary world through its details. Don't pepper him with information in the form of, well, information.

10. Trying too hard

Not every sentence needs to have a different structure from every other; in fact, parallel construction is a big part of being effective, from a grammatical standpoint. Awkwardness can often be created, too, when writers try to come up with a different word for the same concept repeatedly. This is perhaps best illustrated in dialogue: most often, a well placed "he said" or "she said" will do the trick. If your writing uses a different verb for each attribution ("The heck I will!" he screamed. "You will if I say you will!" she bellowed. "I swear I won't!" he ejaculated.), you may be guilty of trying too hard.



Honest criticism is hard to take, particularly from a relative,
a friend,
an acquaintance, or a stranger.

Franklin P. Jones

Everybody Wins

By Susana Gomes

I won the first writing contest I ever entered. I was in high school. It was the grade 10 poetry contest. The *Grand Prize* was a certificate, a silver pen engraved with “creative writer,” and “publication” on the bulletin boards in the library and outside the English office. It was fantastic. Every time I passed those sheets with my name faintly printed in purple mimeograph ink, I became giddy with delight and pride. Me a first place winner! My poem on display! I AM A WRITER!

By the time I graduated, I had won first place in every school writing contest I entered. And it felt great every time. But the pens shining in the cup on my desk looked a little sad, and I couldn't sell them for cigarette money—which I was in dire need of.

In university, my creative writing professor brought in a copy of *The Writer's Market* and told us to pick five short story contests and enter them. I thought, Wow! Five contests all at once! Why didn't I think of this before! I don't remember how many pages of short story contests there were, but there were lots and lots. I was a kid in a candy store... until I read more closely. Entry fee: \$5; \$10; \$20. Submit 2 copies. Send an SASE for a list of winners. And each submission would cost at least a buck in postage.

Could I even afford the capital to become a writer?

Needless to say, the university diet of cigs and stouts won out over the entry fees and I submitted stories to contests that weren't trying

to 'mine' my pockets. As a student, I was indignant that someone would not only decline to pay me for my writing but would ask me to pay them to look at my writing. I consoled myself that at least I'd get a publishing credit—still blissfully unaware that not all publishing credits are equal.

I didn't win any of those contests. (Stories about the ennui of sexually confused goth 20-some-things still aren't as popular as they might be.) And I didn't win any of the dozens of others I entered in the years following. But I thought I was doing pretty well appearing in small literary magazines. If I could only convince my landlord to accept contributors' copies instead of cheques.

I gave up on writing contests. And not long after, I gave up on literary magazines. I'd continue writing for pleasure, but I'd save those stamps for love letters.

Then I joined the WCDR. Then I started volunteering for things. Then I had a dramatic revelation: It costs money to run a writing contest. I could hardly believe it! Of course, that's what the entry fee was for! Not everyone was getting grants from arts councils. And even for those who were, the grant givers actually expected the contest runners to generate at least some of the money to fund the contests. Unlike the fairies who do my laundry, there are no magical behind-the-scenes nymphs panning gold to provide prizes for contests. It's up to us, the writers.

I'm converted. Instead of thinking of writing contests as money-grubbing machines endeavouring to separate me from my small luxuries, I now see them as an expression of support between writers. My entry fee enables a writer to renew a subscription to that literary magazine that published me last year; to purchase a novel written by a member of my writing group; to attend a poetry reading featuring a poet from my writing class.

That winner could be me!

At the WCDR we're lucky to have three excellent writing contests: **The Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest**, the **24-hr On-line Non-fiction Contest** and the **Short Fiction Contest**. All the contests are run by dedicated WCDR members who volunteer their time and expertise to support other writers. Each of these contests offers generous cash prizes as well as an on-line publishing credit.

The WCDR 2005 Short Fiction Contest is open NOW! Deadline: April 30, 2005. Maximum word count: 2,500. Prizes: 1st place, \$500; 2nd place, \$300; 3rd place, \$200; Honourable Mentions at judges' discretion. Entry fee: \$10. Visit www.wcdr.org for full contest details and to enter on-line.

In addition to inviting submissions from the writers of Durham Region, the 2005 Short Fiction Contest invites submissions from writers across Canada and international writers.

WCDR Members Early Bird Draw: Open to WCDR members only. Submit your story by March 11, 2005 (hard copy submissions accepted at the March 12 breakfast meeting before the draw) and be entered in a draw to win one of three great prizes: \$50 gift card to Staples Business Depot; 1-year WCDR membership; 1-year subscription to *Lichen* and a copy of *The Writing Fairy Guide to Calling Yourself a Writer*.

Susana Gomes is an editor and writer. Since stopping her compulsive purchasing of lottery tickets, Susana is able to finance entries to at least four writing contests per year. She has been overheard saying of contests, "Risk it! Something great could happen!"

A Warm WCDR Welcome

Our newest members

January 2005:

Lesley Luke

Mary K. Anderson

Mary Jackiw Smith

Margaret Crammond



February 2005:

Pauline Kiely

Libbie Danyluk

Barb Lilley

Professional Development Spring 2005

ACTive Writing - NOTE THE DATE
CHANGE ON THIS WORKSHOP
By Anna Mackay-Smith and Dorothea Helms

**Saturday, April 16, 2005 from 9:30 a.m. to
4:00 p.m.**

Location: TBA

Event fee: \$150 (\$135 for WCDR members)

Event Register: Pre-register by April 8 with
Dorothea at 905-852-9294 or email
fairy@thewritingfairy.com

This one-day workshop marries the magic of spoken and written words.

Does your creativity need a kick in the butt? Anna Mackay-Smith and Dorothea Helms are wacky artistic dominatri who made up the plural of dominatrix, and who would love to beat some creativity into you with a series of acting/writing exercises.

Discover a different way of looking at your writing by allowing yourself to "act out" and not only get away with it but be praised for it. During this exciting day you will be expected to take part in acting exercises followed by on-the-spot writing and the sharing of your images and ideas. This workshop is the perfect venue for some creativity ass-kicking, and Anna and Dorothea are just the bossy women to get the job done.

Anna is an actor/ director and acting teacher who has performed in theatres across Canada including the Stratford Festival. She has a BA and an MFA in Theatre, and studied at the Drama Centre in London, England. She is founder and artistic director of The Players Academy since 1996. She is also the artistic director and founder of The Motley Theatre Company, a professional play reading company in Uxbridge, and Home Theatre, which offers play readings in private venues. Anna has developed a professional relationship with Teatro Escambray, Cuba as a teacher and actor. She has taught at CAST, York University, Randolph Academy for Performing Arts, The Actors Workshop, Canadian Film Centre and Theatre Ontario. She's

also friggig funny. (Whoops, was that our out-loud pen?) Anna is positively riveting on stage, whether she is starring in a drama or comedy.

Dorothea Helms is the self-proclaimed Writing Fairy whose recently published book, *The Writing Fairy Guide to Calling Yourself a Writer*, has been well received by closet writers in Canada and the U.S. Dorothea is an internationally published magazine and newspaper writer, and is certified in the Amherst Writers & Artists Workshop Method of writing instruction. Her popular creative writing course is a favourite at Durham College each fall, and she is known for her use of humour in just about everything she does. She has served on the faculty of a humour writing conference in Broken Bow, Nebraska, and one of her comedy skits was performed in a comedy show in Omaha last year. Says Dorothea, "Let's face it, once you've been a hit in Nebraska, you've made it, baby." She is also a published, award-winning poet, and is working on a best-selling novel.

Watch for more workshop details at www.wcdr.org (Workshops).

Write With the Five Senses: A Sensual Scavenger Hunt

By Ruth E. Walker

**Sunday, May 15, 2005 from 9:30 a.m. to
4:00 p.m.**

Location: TBA

Event fee: \$100 (\$90 for WCDR members)
includes workshop, lunch and snacks.

Event Register: Registration in **advance**;
deadline Monday, May 9, 2005
Contact: Ruth Walker 905-728-7823 or at
walkwrite@sympatico.ca or Sue Reynolds at
wcdrworkshops@wcdr.org

Sign up for a six-hour immersion into the senses. Stretch your imagination and explore your sensual self. Discover what happens when you include the power of sensual elements in your creative work. Join award-winning writer Ruth E. Walker for a one-day workshop.

Bring your notepad, dress comfortably and be prepared to lose yourself in an exploration of sight, sound, taste, touch and scent. Combine the fun of a scavenger hunt with the energy of a daylong creative space.

Enhance works in progress or begin a completely new project. Non-fiction writers can play with their creative selves and enrich their prose. Fiction writers can uncover down-to-Mother-Earth techniques to enhance character and setting. Poets and songwriters can up-end overused ideas.

In-class writing exercises throughout the day will build on the senses explored during the opening scavenger hunt (rain or shine, you're going out-

side). Sharing and discussion will spark excitement and ideas.

Tucked away in a private setting on several acres west of Port Perry near Utica, between Highway 12 and Lakeridge Road, this day promises all the elements of a great retreat: exploration, inspiration and relaxation.



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

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

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

Sweet Inspirations... Words in Whitby 2005: A Celebration of Authors

By Deborah A. Rankine

The lineup for Words in Whitby 2005: A Celebration of Authors unfolds like a box of Canadian literary *hear-candy*, as you will discover for yourself when attending this year's reading series.

Back for his fifth tour of duty, **Ted Barris**, writer, CBC Radio personality and author of 12 books, including his latest, *Juno, Canadians at D-Day, June 6, 1944*, returns to the Words in Whitby stage for another year of hosting the most engaging author interviews and readings since, well, since Words in Whitby 2004.

Friday, April 8 kicks off Words in Whitby's sixth annual weekend-long event with a Mystery Night, featuring mild-mannered humour writer **Linwood Barclay**, who turned to a fictitious life of murder, mystery and mayhem penning his novel *Bad Move*. Barclay's "partner in crime" that evening is prolific archaeological mystery series author **Lyn Hamilton**, who has thrilled thousands of fans in seven languages with her literary alter ego, Lara McClintock. Stir in a heap of helping of door prizes, decadent refreshments and Silent Auction must-haves, and you have the secret recipe for a night to remember.

Words in Whitby's Saturday morning lineup

features writer **Kim Moritsugu** whose first novel, a romantic comedy entitled *Looks Perfect*, was shortlisted for the City of Toronto Award. Her latest novel, *The Glenwood Treasure*, a literary mystery, was serialized on CBC Radio One's "Between the Covers" program, and was a finalist for the Arthur Ellis Best Crime Novel Award.

Rounding out the morning series is Canada's own **Robert J. Sawyer** whose books are international best-sellers. Robert has been dubbed Canada's Dean of Science Fiction, with standing-room-only appearances throughout North America and overseas. His novel *Hominids* won the Hugo Award for Best Novel of 2002, and *The Terminal Experiment* won the 1995 Nebula Award for Best Novel of the Year. Entertaining, smart and absolutely down-to-earth, Rob Sawyer is a brilliantly successful Canadian literary star!

Paula Todd, co-host of TVO's *Studio 2*, a popular flagship current events program, and host of *Person 2 Person with Paula Todd*, graces the podium as Words in Whitby's Gala Luncheon speaker. Paula's new book, *A Quiet Courage*, examines the lives of "everyday heroes" who not only survive, but thrive.

After lunch, author **Jonathan Bennett** takes the stage for a one-on-one interview with host **Ted Barris**. Bennett's writing credits include the novel *After Battersea Park*; a collection of poetry entitled *Here Is My Street, This Tree I Planted*; and *Verandah People*, a collection of short stories that was runner-up for the Danuta Gleed Literary Award. The Edmonton Journal said it best when it described Bennett's writing style: "Bennett has

a way with a sentence... A minimalist with a deft, sure touch, he does a lot with a little, flinging a swaying bridge between the realm of ordinary prose and incandescent poetry."

Dave Bidini rounds out the afternoon readings at Words in Whitby 2005. Bidini, rhythm guitarist and front man for the popular Canadian indie band Rheostatics, turns his passion for all things sports and music into prose with his works *On a Cold Road*, *Tropic of Hockey*, *Baseballissimo*, and his latest book, *For Those About to Rock*, a guide for musicians chasing their rock-star dreams. Dave also starred in the Gemini Award-winning film *The Hockey Nomad*.

Sunday is "kids' day" at Words in Whitby 2005! Writer, actor and Durham resident **Neil Crone** "enters laughing" as he returns to host Words in Whitby's 2005 Children's Reading Series, featuring kid lit's best-loved authors **Kenneth Oppel** (*Colin's Fantastic Video Adventure*, *Airborn* and 19 more titles to his credit) and **Kathy Kacer** (*The Secret of Gabi's Dresser*, *Clara's War*). Add to this amazing lineup, draws, author book signings and assorted shenanigans, and you have got the magic ingredients for a memorable day you and your children will never forget!

Series tickets can be purchased at all branches of the Whitby Public Library, at the Whitby Information Centre located at 900 Brock Street South or by emailing your ticket order to wiw@whitbylibrary.on.ca. Tickets also available at Blue Heron Books in Uxbridge.



Words in Whitby A Celebration of Authors April 8, 9 & 10, 2005

CENTENNIAL BUILDING
416 CENTRE STREET SOUTH, WHITBY

Friday Night price with coupon \$20
Saturday Readings price with coupon \$15
Sunday Readings with coupon \$4

www.wordsinwhitby.ca

WM@WHITBYLIBRARY.ON.CA • 905.668.6631, EXT. 28

Tickets on sale at all branches of the Whitby Public Library & Blue Heron Books, Uxbridge

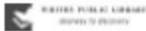


Special Sesquicentennial Coupon

★ \$5 off adult readings ★
(GALA LUNCHEON NOT INCLUDED IN COUPON OFFER)

\$1 off children's program

NO LIMIT!




WW

March/April “Themed” Submissions

Birth/Rebirth

Reborn as a Bride of Christ

By Karen Cole

The day of my reception into the Benedictine community is a perfectly sunny June wedding day, the air fragrant with mock orange blossoms. There is a light breeze. We four postulants look stunning in our shimmering white satin gowns, our slim waists cinched by cummerbunds. On our heads are little crowns with sheer veils attached.

The altar and celebrants are bedecked in white and gold, for this is a momentous day for the Church as well as for the postulants and their families. Every new servant of Christ is a welcomed addition to God's army. The bishop, complete with cape and mitre, is the major celebrant. He leads the High Mass, surrounded by all the priests that we have invited. My throat grows dry as the time of the offertory approaches, for that is the moment in the Mass when we will be officially welcomed into our new community. As I stand at the altar, memories of old boyfriends compete with my dreams of my future as a nun.

The bishop stands, scissors poised, and it is my time to kneel: I weep silently.

Clip, clip, a few swift snips, and brown curls drop to the floor. Since he has

grabbed the handiest locks, from the crown, I must look weird, like the monks with their tonsures.

“Karen Louise Traynor,” he thunders, “henceforth you will be known in religion as Sister Mary Bridget, OSB.” The bishop hands me the folded habit and veil, and I make my way to the sacristy. Tears of joy and sorrow struggle within me.

Sister Scholastica is waiting to dress me, but first Sister Myra, the novice mistress, is ready with scissors of her own. Like a practiced beautician, the sister deftly envelops me in a large towel. “We’ll just take a little more hair off the sides now, so it doesn’t stick out of your coif, and then we’ll give you a proper haircut tonight,” Sister promises.

Chop, chop! Hack, hack! I watch as more curls, so carefully groomed for this occasion, sully the polished sacristy floor. I should be happy, I justify to myself; but losing my hair—it is too much to bear. Sister Myra takes the towel from my shoulders and Sister Scholastica helps me remove my wedding dress, replacing it with a black habit. It is a simple design, good serge with pleats that fall neatly into place. The sisters and I say a prayer asking God to help me become his temple. A white skullcap is then placed upon my head. It is a good fit. Next, a crisp, pleated coif is pulled on and pinned to the skullcap.

A starched white band crowns my head, then an underveil, followed by a perfectly ironed white veil. I sneak a peek in the sacristy mirror and catch Sister Myra’s eye. “Sister Mary Bridget!” she proclaims. “You are now dead to the world and its vanities.” I nod my understanding.

My three classmates join me in this madcap mixture of tears and joy behind the sacristy. It is a struggle for me to maintain the required sense of decorum.

Finally, four new novices, led by Sister Myra, return to the altar, where the bishop presents us to our guests. What a shock and thrill it must be for our loved ones to see us as nuns, no longer the girls they knew, nor the quasi-brides we’d been only moments before. My stomach is knotted with a mixture of fear and excitement. I breathe deeply. I slide my hands under my scapular, straighten my back and bow my head.

I have been reborn as Christ’s bride.

SEEDED

By Nancy Del Col

**In a desert of broken pavement,
out of a blistering hot asphalt crack filled
with
grit, beetle legs, pollen, peatless earth, axle
grease and crushed bits of dull metal,
a difficult birth.**

**A dusty tuft of green.
It could be city moss,
a broken bit of balloon
(sent heavenward with
someone’s hope attached)
or the stiff thumb of a child’s winter mitten
lost last winter.**

**But no, it has leaves.
Glistening, ruffled ones.**

**The sidewalk is warm against my belly
as I crawl my nose towards it to
smell its green newness.
A tang as exciting as sea air.**

**These leafy veins,
they must pulse with the same human urge
that brings babies out of the darkness.
Life, delivered lush and slick, out of atomic
chaos.
Out of ashes, out of dust.**

**It is the sun this tiny struggler seeks.
And too, perhaps,
my warm mother’s breath.**

Odds & Eds

By Deborah A. Rankine,
Word Weaver Editor

Though I have no recollection of the day I was born, I can recall with complete clarity the exact moment my life as a writer began.

My 'literal' breech birth occurred on Monday, September 23, 2002 at precisely 7 p.m. in room C318.

Luckily, I had the best practitioner in Durham Region, if not in all of Canada. Ruth E. Walker gently ushered me over the threshold, propped me up in the 'write' position and listened compassionately to my groans and grunts, and when they had no effect on her, to my moans and whines, as I laboured to give birth to my first writing assignment—a 25-word writer's bio. In my more lucid moments, I wondered if my middle initial would figure in the total word count. I pushed and pushed and still nothing came out. "I can't do this!" I bellyached. "How can I call myself a writer when I can't even compose a stupid 25-word outline about myself?"

"Take a breath," Ms. Walker whispered, patting my hand. "Now, let it out slowly and begin again. You can do this."

Deborah Rankine, I strained, erring on the side of caution and deciding my blasted software program would indeed count my middle initial as a whole word, *a first-time writer of fiction, has been known locally for her funny and oftentimes biting "Letters to the Editor", and now focuses her pen on the craft of writing fic-*

tion and is a member of the Writ... Damn, too many words! I gripped the sides of my chair for strength.

"Just keep it simple," instructed Ms. Walker calmly.

Deborah Rankine, the self-proclaimed Erma Bombeck of Durham Region lives in Pickering, Ontario, with her husband and two children. I counted the words in my head. Only 19! The pain started to ebb.

"But, my dear, are you a writer?" Ms. Walker asked, handing me back my paper.

"Can I do this next week instead?" I begged.

"You're almost there. Try again."

Deborah A. Rankine writes from Pickering, Ontario, and is a proud member of the Writers' Circle of Durham Region.

And so there it was, plain and simple. I write; therefore, I am a writer. I've been empowered!

Now, two years plus some months later, my bio has grown to 50 words, thanks in no small part to the gentle guidance of my birthing coach, Ruth E. Walker.

Freelance writer and editor, Deborah A. Rankine, writes from Pickering, Ontario. Her work has been published in Quills Canadian Poetry Magazine, The Word Weaver, canadian-creative.com and toowrite.com, as well as on CBC Radio's "First Person Singular." She is also a proud member of the Writers' Circle of Durham Region.

As your *Word Weaver* editor, I was overwhelmed by the quality of the submissions I received on the theme of birth/rebirth. The diversity of your work covered the rebirth of a marriage, a lost sisterhood, an inner child. Other submissions celebrated the birth of a new day, a new season, a reconfigured life without one's soul mate. Bravo to all of you! Reading your work was an honour and a privilege.

For the **May/June issue** of *The Word Weaver*, spring is in the air—or should I say on the page. The **themed** writing challenge is to submit a short story about the new season using ALL of the following words:

fresh, spring, wet, budding, growth, beginning, May flowers, green, newborn, untested, explore, measure, renewed.

Try using these words in untraditional ways in your work and see what new beginnings you discover for yourself.

Maximum word count: 400

Deadline: April 20, 2005

Send submissions to:

wcdrwordweaver@wcdr.org

Please note that MS Word document submissions will be accepted as email attachments. All other word-processing files must be pasted in the body of your email.

May/June Writing Challenge

Read the following excerpt from a feature article by Brad Darrach in *Life* magazine's Winter 1977 issue.

The hair was a Vaseline cathedral, the mouth a touchingly uncertain sneer of allure. One, two-wham! Like a berserk blender the lusty young pelvis whirred and the notorious git-tar slammed forward with a jolt that symbolically deflowered a generation of teenagers and knocked chips off 90 million older shoulders.

Can you guess who this article was about? Of course you can!

Your challenge is to submit a famous person profile, be it a glowing review or a diabolical character assignation. *Word Weaver* will publish as many submissions as possible, and list the true identity of each character on the back page of the May/June issue.

Word Count: 50 Deadline: April 20, 2005

Please send your submission in the **body of your email** to: **wcdrwordweaver@wcdr.org**

March/April Writing Challenge Submissions: For Sale...

Fur Coat for Sale

By Joel A. Sutherland

My coat...is out...to get me.

No, really. My coat is out to get me. I don't EVER wear it anymore. When I pass by the closet it's been hastily shoved into, I swear I hear hissing sounds. I'm not crazy. I'm not! If you saw my coat, you'd believe me. You'd see. The coat would probably attack you, too. It's a non-discriminating attacking coat.

Last week I woke up at the normal time on a (seemingly) normal day. I stretched, yawned and proceeded to blink the sleep out of my eyes. And there it was. My coat. AT THE FOOT OF MY BED! I had not left it there. I'd left it in the hall closet, like any other sensible coat-wearing single lady of forty-two. I panicked, screamed and proceeded to beat the liv-

ing H-E-double hockey sticks out of my coat. But it was to no avail. How do you kill a coat? It's been killed once already, or at least the animal from which the coat was made has.

It's made from raccoons, my coat. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe my coat is haunted by dead raccoon souls. I never liked raccoons much. All that sneaking around in the dark; you can't trust 'em. I certainly can't trust my coat!

Come to think of it, the first time I noticed a difference in my coat was during my yearly visit to the Toronto Zoo...walking through the Canada exhibit. They have raccoons there! (Although I don't know why. Who wants to pay to see some stinkin' raccoons?) Yes, as I passed the raccoon cage my coat became noticeably drafty. Chilled, even. Weird...

I've tried to make amends with my coat. I

laid it next to the kitchen trash bin, hoping that would appease its animal sensibilities. "Eat," I encouraged my coat. "Feast on this fine dining." It didn't work. So I tossed it up in the tree in my front yard for the night; the raccoons at the zoo liked oaks, I'd noticed. I was awakened by sounds of scratching, only to find my coat at the front door, a wicked gleam in its... What? Its pocket? Its collar? I don't know.

All I know is I must get rid of my haunted raccoon coat.

Interested?

FUR COAT raccoon, fashionable, ladies', full-length.

Excellent cond. Sz. 8-10. \$3.25 (or best offer). 905-555-5555.

Bathtub, Cast-iron, Claw-foot, Good Condition, \$495.

By Raissa Chernushenko

The movers would be here any minute, but Trudy couldn't get out. She lay on her side, fully clothed, within the womblike walls of the old bathtub, caressing its porcelain surface—still glowing with the love and care of over half a century.

She struck a match and lit the lavender-scented candle Nana had preferred. There had always been candles. Even when there were three sisters splashing and tussling in the bubbles, Nana had insisted that a little ceremony was not out of place.

"It's never too early to learn how to quiet the

mind and feed the soul, my dears. A little light in the darkness reminds us just how small we are and how great the hands that nurture us."

They'd puzzled over her words while trying with mighty puffs of wind to extinguish the light that shone on their soap sliver sailboats so they could imagine what the world was like before the dawn of man.

In her teens, Trudy had visited Nana regularly. The bath had been a refuge where she'd begun to really notice all the treasures Nana had carefully arranged on a little shelf altar in the window nook. Delicate seashells from Italy, where as a young, ripening woman, Nana had spent the first summers of her married life. Coloured glass French perfume bottles and decorative boxes from Greece. Once, idly turning one over in her hands, Trudy had discovered erotic etchings beneath the lid and was awoken

to a startlingly new fantasy that both repulsed and intrigued her.

In subtle and evocative ways, Trudy was compelled to glean the details of the romance that had always been much more than just Nana's ticket out of England. She was determined to know the grandfather who, as a most devoted lover, displayed such attentive detail to the worship of his bride. As a birthday gift he had imported for her a cast-iron, claw-foot bathtub from his native Italy, with the provision that it should always be he who washed her hair.

After his passing, it had been Trudy who'd combed out Nana's silver hair. Within the liberating waters of her daily bath, Nana had once confided her pride in this one possession. "Always make time for a bath, my dear. You see, in here, I am both ageless and priceless."

Good Riddance

By Birgitta MacLeod

CURTAINS - brand new, unusual, ready to hand, from \$100 to \$250.

"Ready to hand?" Lorraine said to the almost empty room. "Great, a typo in my ad. Figures." This whole thing had gone wrong from the beginning. It had been Tim's idea, but he was gone now. The drapes—excuse me—window treatments, were the last thing left and time was up for them too.

Lorraine surveyed the room. It was better now. The couch was back against the far wall and the smell of paint was beginning to fade. She'd made a pretty good buck from the garage sale on Saturday, but the curtains remained; still heaped in the

corner. No surprise there. She'd thought about ditching them in the Salvation Army bin out behind the grocery store but figured she had nothing to lose trying to pawn them off to some nut through the classifieds. Maybe someone who'd seen the show would want them, green and yellow fringes and all.

"I don't get it. It just doesn't seem fair," she'd told her friend, Susan. "I watch that show all the time and everybody's rooms look great when they're done. Mine looked like shit. No, worse than shit. Like some Cirque du Soleil backdrop but with half the budget and none of the inspiration. All that was missing were the acrobats."

"Not if you count Todd the carpenter," said Susan.

"Oh God, don't remind me." She didn't want to think about him or that floozy who "hosted" the

show. Parading around in her skimpy outfit, her tits bouncing around the apartment, her little tush sashaying this way and that whenever Tim was in the room.

Lorraine clipped out her ad and stuck it on her fridge with a pink flower-power magnet, one of the few things she'd decided to keep from the made-over. Everything else went. The orange walls, the purple and gold throw cushions, the fuchsia slipcover, the collection of vases shaped like fruits and vegetables, the three dozen scented candles, the coffee table made from recycling boxes and an old door, the carpet made from patches of chenille bedspreads. She even got rid of Tim, told him to take his wandering eyes and wander off to some other pad.

Hands on her hips, she glared at the mound of curtains. "You're next."

Breakfast Information

March 12, 2005 guest speaker... Neil Crone: "Enters Laughing."

Neil Crone is an actor and writer who lives with his wonderful wife, two little boys and one neurotic dog, in a town so small everybody knows where everyone else's birthmarks are. He has performed in dozens of television and radio commercials, TV shows, and is the voice of numerous cartoon characters every Saturday morning. His most recent feature film roles include *Jasper Texas*, with Jon Voight, *Against the Ropes*, with Meg Ryan, and *The Recruit*, with Al Pacino. Currently Neil can be seen as hockey coach "Muck Munroe" in YTV's kids' mystery/adventure series *Screech Owls*, the warmly psychotic "Harry Strand" on CTV's *Power Play*, and most recently as "Ed" in YTV's hilarious family comedy *I Love Mummy*. Also, look for Neil in Disney's upcoming movie of the week *Beautiful Girl*. A Second City veteran improviser, host and stand-up comic, Neil also loves to write poems and stories for "big and little kids". His first book, *I Am Dead at Recess*, is currently published on the internet. Neil is an award-winning humour columnist for the Metroland Papers and is a contributing writer for CBC Radio's new *Real Life Chronicles* program. Neil feels once he meets Don Knotts and Dick Van Dyke, he can die.

April 09, 2005... **No breakfast meeting.** But we hope to see you all at Words in Whitby!

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

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

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

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

Writers' Circles

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

Christians Who Write

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

Circle for Children's Writers

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

Durham Write-On

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

Markham Village Writers' Group

Monthly
Donna Marrin
donna.marrin@staples.ca

Northword Edition

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

Richard Ferrier Writers' Group

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

Senior Scribes of Uxbridge

Second and fourth Friday of each month
1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Township Hall, Uxbridge
Marion Owen 905-852-3204

Word Players

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

Write in Whitby

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

Write Now

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

Writers' and Editors' Network

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

The Wordsmiths of Ajax/Pickering

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

The Tale Spinners

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

Writes of Passage

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

Oshawa Scribes

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

Note to circle leaders:

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

Please send to
wcdwordweaver@wcd.org

I love deadlines. I especially love the whooshing sound they make as they fly by.

Douglas Adams, Author, *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

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Upcoming Events

2005 WCDR Short Fiction Contest

Deadline: Entries must be postmarked no later than **April 30, 2005**.

Entry fee: \$10 per submission.

Open to: All writers (Canadian and International) 18 years of age and older. Contest is not open to contest judges and their immediate families.

Prizes: First \$500; Second: \$300; Third: \$200

Honourable Mentions to be awarded per WCDR discretion

Guidelines and further information regarding the **WCDR Short Fiction Contest** can be found on our website,

www.wcdr.org.

The Word Weaver

The *Word Weaver* is published by the Writers' Circle of Durham Region as a service to its members and other interested parties. No one should act upon advice given without considering the facts of specific situations and/or consulting appropriate professional advisors. Publications are invited to quote from *The Word Weaver* upon obtaining written permission from the President, The Writers' Circle of Durham Region, P.O. Box 323, Ajax, ON L1S 3C5
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We reserve the right to edit or reject submissions at our discretion.

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