



THE WORD WEAVERS

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

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Take a Deep Breath. It's Only a Deadline

By Annette McLeod

Whenever someone asks me, "What's the date today?" my stock response is, "I have no idea."

This I blame on having worked for *The Toronto Sun* for 20 years. Today's date is immaterial. Tomorrow's date, Sunday's date, next Wednesday's date are all that count.

My primary duties are to conceive, assign, edit, copy scrub, write headlines and cutlines and generally oversee two weekly products, which run in the paper on Saturday and Sunday, respectively.

For the Sunday product, I get my space allocation (which we call "dummies"—a term that has less to do with my role, presumably, and more to do with the section's having been dummed, i.e. mocked up, in order to let me know how much space I have to fill) on Wednesday afternoon. The product goes "off the floor"—that's down to the compositors for final setup before printing—on Thursday night. It is printed Friday morning and inserted in Sunday's paper.

I get my Saturday dummies on Thursday afternoon, in the midst of the Sunday product mayhem; it goes off the floor Friday night for printing Saturday morning.

What with the Sunday section's being due first, and both sections' being done in advance, you can well imagine how I lost touch with reality where dates are concerned.

(All this frantic back-end-loaded activity means that I loathe Mondays far less than your average Joan. Mondays mean the opportunity to get my hair cut, maybe go out for lunch, return a phone call or two. Bliss!)

This constant adherence to a strict deadline means not just that I never know what day it is, it also means that deadlines hold little terror for me. (Whenever I'm in the weeds, I just

remind myself that I have yet to send out a blank page!)

I can churn out 750 printable words in less than an hour. And I can scour the newswires for copy, find and process art, write a headline and scrub the copy in about the same amount of time. (We're not talking Sistine-Chapel quality here, mind you.)

Working in a world that revolves around tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow has also resulted in the feeling that time is blowing past at an alarming rate, but I suspect as I push 40, I'm not the only one experiencing that.

But working for a daily isn't for everyone.

For some it would prove intolerably stressful. For me it just means that I smoke, overeat, rarely get to the gym and spend 12 hours a day advancing the cause of carpal tunnel syndrome.

You'd think it would necessitate being uber-organized, but I'm not that guy either. My desk overflows with layouts, pictures, submissions, interview notes and half-drunk water bottles. I think the thing of it is to just make sure this week's stuff is on top.

If you haven't ever read Anne Lamott's, *Bird by Bird*, go read it. If you have, you're familiar with the story. The only means of survival in a writing/publishing environment is get through it bird by bird. I make a list every morning of what absolutely must without fail be accomplished that day. Then I do the first thing on the list. Then the second. And so on, until all the items on the list have a slash of pink highlighter through them. Then I go home. Then I go in the next day and do it again. Sometimes it means leaving the office at midnight instead of six p.m., but this is the path I chose, so I don't bitch—

much.

Philosophically, this working environment does have its advantages. A joke I like to make about a section that didn't go well or a story I'm not happy with but don't have time to rewrite is, "Tomorrow's birdcage liner, today." The work is so impermanent that even though I take pride in what I do, I'm also aware that it isn't going to be read a week from now or a month from now or after I'm dead—if it doesn't get read the day it's printed, chances are it's covered in coffee grounds at the bottom of the bin by twilight. While some sensitive souls might find that cold fact disheartening, to me it's always been liberating. Believe me, there is enough impetus to do the best you can knowing that if you screw it up, you'll get angry e-mails from the public and a dressing down from your boss the next day.

The downside is that when I attack my extra-curricular writing, I usually do it with the same fervour and immediacy. I have had to learn that it's OK if a short story takes a month and I've poured over every word. In fact, it'll probably make for a much better story. But it is an adjustment. My writing style is a sprint, not a marathon, and I'm not so very good at pacing myself.

If you are convinced after all this that you want an assignment or a position that involves being a slave to the deadline, more power to you. It's exciting. It's exhilarating. And it does test your writing mettle, albeit in a different way than trying to craft the most perfect prose.

And there are some things you can do to alleviate some of that omnipresent stress.

Story continued on page two.

First, take a deep breath. It's only a deadline. Many people survive them without event every day. But once in a while it can drag you down, knock the wind out of you, and leave you thinking, "Hey, anybody get the licence number of that truck?" You don't want to let it affect the quality of your work, but it does help to bear in mind that it ain't, in fact, the aforementioned Sistine Chapel. Keep it in perspective. Nobody ever died from missing a deadline. Mentally taking the pressure off can go a long way toward avoiding brain lockups and panic attacks (otherwise known as The Screaming Mimis) that can put yet another obstacle in the way of your meeting that deadline.

Stay on task. If the phone rings and you're in the middle of your article, ignore it. That's what voice mail is for.

Make good notes and work from an outline. I know there are people who gasp at the mere word "outline," but it will help speed your work. Know where you want the article to go, then work towards it. And good notes are essential—if you're not vigilant you can waste a lot of valuable time tracking down stray facts.

If you're waiting for a call to be returned from an interview subject or expert, have a fall-back position. Your deadline is not their deadline, and they aren't going to feel the

same urgency. Keep calling other experts. Write a Plan B article if you have to, just in case your No. 1 choice doesn't ever call you back.

Although the goal with daily print copy is usually to write linearly, don't wait until you have crafted the perfect lead to get going. Just plunge in and start writing. Often, the lead will come to you when you're half finished. And you can always go back to the top and shape the lead later, once you figure out what the heck the article is actually about. If you are writing on one topic often (such as cars, in my case), keep an idea file. Write down interesting tidbits you pick up in your workaday travel; write down quotes from experts you read somewhere; print off statistics that may come in handy. Anything that will make it easier to get the job done when the time comes.

If you can actually hear the banshee wail of the deadline whooshing up behind you, skip the colour and stick to the basics: who, what, where, when, why and how. And even "why" can go by the wayside in a pinch. Who knows why Chrysler announced another rate cut. That's for the analysts to figure out. For my purposes, sometimes it only matters that they did. Don't get stuck. Keep writing. Pretend it's for a newswire and not for some foo-foo publication. Most editors

would rather have something that is clean, concise, accurate and informative but perhaps doesn't contain the personality they had hoped for, than a piece that is beautifully written but only three paragraphs long. Answer the questions you would have if you were the reader. Don't get caught up in details most people don't give a hang about.

If your editor said have it in her hands by five, don't wait until 4:59 p.m. to send it. Give yourself ample time in case your e-mail isn't working or your carrier pigeon just flopped over on its back with its feet in the air.

Reread it half a dozen times before you send it, too. If you're anything like me, you'll find some tiny booboo with every reading. But once you have read it numerous times, let it go. Send it out into the world with a wish and a prayer and get on to the next deadline. By nightfall, it'll be a landing pad for budgie poop, anyway. And trust me, sometimes that's the best darn thing about this whole gig.

Annette McLeod has been on deadline since 1986 when she first joined the staff at *The Toronto Sun*. She copes by obsessing about hyphenation.

A Message from THE BOARD

By Sherry Hinman, WCDR President

Wouldn't you just love to meet with dozens of other writers without having to brush your hair and drag yourself out on a cold night? You might want a bit of advice, or maybe you want to exchange thoughts about your latest work. Or maybe you just feel like ranting. I recently joined Joy Writing, an online writing forum created by a few WCDR members, and I have to say, it's been a real joy.

You don't have to be a WCDR member to join, though most of the members are. And I've found it a terrific way to see another side of my fellow WCDR members. For instance, how else could I have discovered just how many other writers have incredibly messy desks?

Not all the topics are trivial (if that's how you'd classify desk neatness). Members have

posted requests for help on such diverse topics as naming your characters, how to make time for writing every day and the elements of excellence in writing for young children.

It's one thing to ask this kind of question of a fellow writer. But when you post a question for comments in a writing forum, it's not unusual to get five or 10 people weighing in. There's humour (a huge dollop of it, actually), tips, contests, opportunities, and just about anything else you can think of related to writing.

For those who obsess on commas, there's a topic or two on editing. I was stuck on an editing question, posted it, and got nearly instant advice from two editors I know and whose expertise I trust. Some people post their poetry or short fiction for feedback and

there's always someone who writes back with kudos and suggestions. You can join a hot debate on the meaning of truth in memoir, or just sit back and enjoy the rollicking humour of writers let loose.

Hats off to WCDR members Annette McLeod, site administrator, and Kevin Craig and Skyla Dawn Cameron, moderators, for seeing a need and filling it. If you haven't visited yet, why not take Joy Writing out for a test drive, at joywriting.forumup.org (no www). It's free, and it takes a minute to register. (Click on Register at the top). You can share as little or as much about yourself as you want to. If you've never been part of a forum before, read the Guidelines for Posting near the top. Then comment on a topic or start one of your own. Hope to see you there.

Odds & Eds

By Deborah A. Rankine,
Word Weaver Editor

None, nodda, zilch, zip, zero. That's how many **members-only** submissions I received in response to *Word Weaver's* January/February 2006 "themed" writing challenge.

How can that be? I thought to myself. A "pictorial" writing gig that allowed one to pick one's own muse? This was a dream assignment (or so I thought). One that would surely flood my e-mail box with thousands of brilliant, shining, thought-provoking words penned by our brilliant, shining, thought-provoking members. Not.

So, with spring just around the corner, perhaps it's time to do a little *Word Weaver* housekeeping. For example, did you know that every published "themed" writing challenge submission is a PAID submission? That as well as complementing your portfolio and receiving a small honorarium you'll have bragging rights to those who still refer to your writer's life as a *hobby*? Don't get me wrong; being published in the pages of *Word Weaver* is no easy feat. Just ask any of the writers who have graced its pages with their work. There's no hall pass simply because you're a nice person, or have an active WCDR membership, or don't hog all the tater tots at our monthly breakfast meetings. *Word Weaver* editors know how hard it is to get one's work published (let alone get paid for it) and are willing to work with each writer to ensure his or her words are reader-worthy. That means NOT sending in your first or second draft. Do your homework. Check for lazy typos, run-on sentences and, for goodness sake, use a thesaurus; it can make an enormous difference between prose that lays flat on the page and a spit-and-polished heartfelt story whose words ignite the soul.

And speaking of writing prompts, I thought last issue's free-for-all writing challenge, creating your worst poem, Vagonstyle, was the most difficult writing dare *Word Weaver* has ever assigned. Thanks to those who sent in their really, really bad poetry: It was so bad it was great!

In hindsight, perhaps some members were inhibited from responding to either writing challenge because it involved logging on to the Internet. For many years I too was road kill on the information highway. So many buttons, shortcuts, so many ways of doing the same darn thing: It's overwhelming. But today's competitive writing world demands one learn how to create and send word documents electronically. It's hard going, I know. But like most things, the more you do them the easier they become. And the sense of accomplishment one gets when one receives confirmation of receipt from the person at "the other end" is euphoric. For those of you who embrace traditional writing ways, please never, never let a stupid computer get in your way of sharing your words with others. On the back page of *Word Weaver* is our mailing address.

Okay, the editorial house is almost spic and span—just two more things. *Word Weaver* tries its best to acknowledge receipt of every submission. If you send in your work and do not receive confirmation within one week, please send a query to wordweaver@wcdr.org or call WCDR at 905-686-0211 and leave a message. Lastly, *Word Weaver* is always on the hunt for fresh, new voices and ideas and welcomes your comments and pitches.

As always, it is my honour and privilege to read your work.

Your May/June 2006 *Word Weaver* "themed" writing challenge: Another "pictorial." This time we're giving you the face of your muse.

Deadline: May 20, 2006

Maximum word count: 800

Paste your submission in the **body** of your e-mail if *not* a MS Word doc file and send to wordweaver@wcdr.org.



Art attracts us only by what it reveals of our most secret self.

Jean-Luc Godard

Editorial Eyes



The Art of the Interview

Anyone who's had a conversation should, one might think, be a halfway decent interviewer, but I'm always amazed when watching some of the world's supposedly best go at it for big money. "How was it working with so-and-so?" A question like that might fly with someone who is used to being interviewed but from an inexperienced subject could elicit a response like, "It was fine."

Interviewing well is a craft and like any craft should be learned before being unleashed on an unsuspecting public.

The first step in giving a good interview is to do your research. Know the subject. This way, if the subject goes off on a tangent (which is better than saying "uh huh" but can still be problematic) you'll know whether to follow them and lead them in that new direction, or rein them back.

Outline the questions you plan to ask but be flexible. Often the subject's answer will lead to its own line of questioning that may be more revealing than what you had in mind.

The biggest mistake rookie interviewers make is asking yes or no questions. Avoid questions that start with "did" or "do." Subjects respond best to open-ended questions, like those that start "what" and "how."

Remember that not every subject is going to be comfortable being interviewed, even if they have a product to push or a point to make. Sometimes it's like pulling teeth. This is where having done your research will be invaluable. This is the one time I might ask a yes or no question: Would you say that your experience was enhanced by your own childhood experiences? That way, when the subject says, "Why, yes, fabulous interviewer, it was," you can use it in your article.

This is probably a good time to talk briefly about attribution. Only direct quotes should be in quotation marks, but you can paraphrase a subject and write, "So and so agreed that his experience was enhanced by such-and-such." If you're going to paraphrase, just make darn sure

you understand what the subject was saying and keep it in context.

Once your interview is complete and it's time to write your article, a good place to start is by picking out those quotes that either support your angle, or that lead you to an appropriate angle, and work your article around them.

And practice. Interview your mom, your brother, your girlfriend. Interviewing is a craft that will serve you well, not only when it comes to writing non-fiction, but fiction as well. If you have no clue about gardening but want your main character to be growing a beautiful zen space, having the confidence and the ability to call up a nursery and find out what you need to know will often help you write prose that rings truer than something you read in a book.

Just remember: everyone has a story to tell. It's the storyteller's job to drag it out of them.

A Warm WCDR Welcome to Our Newest Members

Terri Lynn Hinkley
Warren McCarthy
David Chisling
Marina Seguin
Marilyn Holatko
Pam Garfield
Iwona Krynski
Brian Peters



Betty Dubeau
Cheryl R Cowtan
Dorothy Knight
Ray Williams
Carol Gabourie Cooper
Jessie Louise Best
Amy Caughlin
Ruth Hansen
Valerie Faulkner

March/April Free-for-all Writing Challenge Submissions...

Your worst poetry “Vogon-style”

A Urination Furpithing Phantom of the Operathon By CreativeJames

Pssss hillbilly barge complete as glove
 perfect as Shakenbaken in love
 won't fit me I say prithe wait!
 Pass wine easily - gallstones raptured
 as plintersnifel drip, oh drip small thing
 drip to the music of the night I sing as ugly as Glugthpoltle cheese,
 drip wee Scotipisser, wait! Yet another verse? ANOTHER FLASK!
 Could we bear spishsplash splishplish! NOT!
 Shoot me! Scream Pitter Patter Pus - Wait!
 SHOOT ME Pitter Patter Pus,
 just one wee bullet morsel -
 Thy pale flesh reacheth from,
 methinks too much of too little. Wait!
 Not, A target in sight ...ARRGGGGHHH!
 TOO LATE! Alas SweetPee.. gone so quickly
 'way from me. I flushtilmorning open one swollen eye,
 See thee still hanging there! ARRGGHHHH. no
 more music of the night. ARRGGHHHHHH!!!

Poet's lament: I was forced (?) last night to watch The Phantom of the Opera, which I had never seen before. Reminded of the excruciating elements of Vogon torture, I wrote this as my most humble homage, methinks, to an intermission. CJ

Fescennine Verse (or worse) By Suzanne Robinson

When she vividly viewed his visage
 Her febrile feelings flew
 From feculent to fecund
 And sequaciously overthrew
 Her superior frontal gyrus
 And her central sulcus too.

From epiglottis to epigastrium
 A serpiginous sensation streamed
 Arousing her lazing libido
 In wanton ways she had but dreamed.

In a fervour of facetious facetiae
 She made her gnawings known,
 And he cast her a “come slither” look
 That melted her morals of stone.

Fond friends fraudtly flew
 To dissuade her
 With cries of “licentious
 Libidinous, lewd!”

But she tossed her raven tresses
 And her rulebook on chastity too,
 Said “he may be a porcine porbeagle,
 But my scruples have been overthrew.”

I won't dwell on her dreadful downfall
 Let it be sufficient to state
 Ladies, *if* you frequent a singles bar
 Be sure you take your own date!

We know the truth, not only by the reason, but also by the heart.

Blaise Pascal—*Thoughts*, Chap. x. 1., Translated by O. W. Wight

2006 Professional Development Workshops

The Writers' Circle of Durham Region Presents Poetry Boot Camp with Stuart Ross

Saturday, March 4, 2006,
Noon to 5 p.m.,
Pickering Public Library,
1 The Esplanade, Pickering, ON.

Cost: WCDR Members, \$55
Non-members, \$60

Registration is on a first-come, first served basis and is limited to 12 participants. Register via PayPal at www.wcdr.org.

Stuart Ross offers his popular intensive one-day workshop for beginning poets, experienced poets, stalled poets, and haikuists who want to get beyond three lines.

Poetry Boot Camp focuses on the pleasures of poetry and the riches that spontaneity brings, through lively directed projects and relevant readings from the works of poets from Canada and abroad. Stuart also touches on revision, collaboration, and publication. Arrive with an open mind, and leave with a heap of new poems!

Stuart Ross was the 2002 writer-in-residence for the WCDR. A writer, teacher, and small-press activist, he is co-founder of the Toronto Small Press Book Fair. His most recent books are the acclaimed

Confessions of a Small Press Racketeer (Anvil Press, 2005) and *Hey, Crumbling Balcony! Poems New & Selected* (ECW, 2003), and he is the editor of *Surreal Estate: 13 Canadian Poets Under the Influence* (The Mercury Press, 2004). Stuart has published several literary magazines, including *Mondo Hunkamooga*, *Who Torched Rancho Diablo?*, and *Syd & Shirley*, and is the Poetry & Fiction Editor for *This Magazine*. He teaches creative writing to teens and adults at schools, libraries, and literary festivals. As well, Stuart conducted the two-week workshop "What Becomes a Poem" at Los Parronales Writers' Retreat in Chile.

Stuart's online home is www.hunkamooga.com.

Independent Publishing: Is it for you?

Saturday, March 18, 2006,
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.,
(plenty of breaks throughout the day),
Oakville Central Library,
120 Navy Street, Oakville, ON.

Cost: WCDR members if pre-registered \$31.50,
\$36 at the door.

Register: info@ianoneill.ca

With sales by smaller independent publishers increasing yearly while sales of the top ten publishers

are in decline, more writers are turning to independent publishing than ever before. However, many dive into the pool too early. Before taking the plunge prematurely, committing the finances and resources necessary, you owe yourself the chance to learn from my experiences. My full day workshop will help prepare any writer for independent publishing.

The workshop is split into three sections: Before you decide (everything you need to know about independent publishing), Writing/Editing, and finally, Marketing (what to expect after your book is printed). Plus a half hour Discussion/Q&A after the morning and afternoon sessions.

Topics covered will include:
Choices— POD vs. Vanity Press vs. Printers

ISBN (International Standard Book Number) and Barcodes

Targeting your market
Promotions
Effective book signings, and much more.

It is not my intention to convince anyone to independently publish their work. My goal is to inform. When you leave my workshop, you will be armed with enough information to make an informed decision regarding your publishing future. If you choose to independently publish, I've done my job. If you choose not to independently publish, I've done my job.

For more information please visit my website:
www.ianoneill.ca.

THE WRITING FAIRY™ WORKSHOP FOR CLOSET WRITERS

By Dorothea Helms

Saturday, April 1, 2006,
10 a.m. to 4 p.m.,
(Registration starts at 9:30 a.m.),
Newmarket Public Library,
Newmarket, ON.

Cost: \$125 (\$110 for WCDR, HHWEN and WEN members)
BY PRE-REGISTRATION ONLY: Deadline for registering is Monday, March 27th.

Mail cheque made out to "The Writing Fairy" to: Dorothea Helms,
S10895 Sideroad 17 RR #1,
Sunderland, ON L0C 1H0.

Contact: Dorothea Helms 905-852-9294
fairy@thewritingfairy.com

This workshop is for adults who aren't quite sure they're ready to call themselves writers, but who are compelled to arrange letters and words on print surfaces or computer screens to tell stories and share opinions. In other words, closet writers. During the day, participants will share their feelings about writing and explore a number of possibilities for realizing their passion more fully. A series of in-

teractive exercises will help them recognize the uniqueness of their voices, and unleash the magic that only they can conjure up through their use of words. Oh, and with Dorothea at the helm, there will be way too much laughter during this inspiring day!

As "The Writing Fairy," Dorothea Helms has inspired thousands of writers over the years through her articles, courses, workshops, keynote speeches, television appearances, writers' circles, mentoring—and now through her book: *The Writing Fairy™ Guide to Calling Yourself a Writer*. So, if you kind of, sort of, maybe think you might be a writer and might maybe, sort of, kind of, like to find out—this is the workshop for you!

Developing Confidence in the Writing, Editing and Public Performance of Poetry with James Dewar

Saturday, April 22, 2006,
9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.,
Pickering Public Library,
1 The Esplanade, Pickering, ON.

Cost: \$75.00 (\$60.00 for WCDR members)
Register: Via the workshop tab at www.creativejames.com or email james@creativejames.com.

Poets today need to develop three fundamental skills to ensure they understand the artistic process and the joyful elements needed to create and present good, publishable poetry.

The first skill is identifying and enjoying inspiration. How do we develop a relationship with our muse? Learn techniques that keep inspiration coming, that help nurture a writing lifestyle and turn what is oftentimes a stylized diary of "diamonds in the rough" into sparkling gems.

The second skill is making inspiration understandable. Learn the craft of artful translation. Editing may be considered a bad word, but it is a crucial part of the

artistic process. What is essential in learning and applying that much used word, "craft?"

The third major skill is delivering poetry art to the world. Learn about submitting poems for publication, performing live in front of audiences (practice with the microphone will be part of the workshop), and self-publishing as a way to facilitate networking in the art community.

If your goal is to eventually publish a book of poetry, fulfilling that aspiration will involve mastering and enjoying these vital elements.

For a complete outline of this workshop, visit www.wcdr.org and click on "Workshops."

The Great Canadian Novel Marathon

By Kevin Craig

Nobody told me it would be so grueling.

I spent the entire weekend of Feb. 17–19 holed up in the Pickering Public Library. I was doing this little thing called the Great Canadian Winter Novel Marathon, along with 14 other adventurous writers.

It was a journey I will never forget!

During the marathon, I wasn't thinking too much about what I was doing. I just sat and typed. (Apparently resembling a monkey while doing so—Thank you, Sue Kenney, for pointing that out.) It was during the down-times that I realized how exhausting the marathon writing process was. I'll admit there were times when I just wanted to make a run for it! But then I would pause a moment to think about the cause, look around the room and see all the other persevering writers, and I would somehow find the willpower to continue, pretending not to be utterly exhausted.

This three-day writing frenzy was the brain-child of Martin Avery, the library's writer-in-residence. Martin is also the organizer of the annual Muskoka Novel Marathon, which takes place every July in the Huntsville area. He is a seasoned veteran of the marathon-writing concept, which may partly explain why he looked so damned relaxed all weekend! (Though he does give off the aura of one who is not easily fazed.)

Martin's marathon was a fundraiser to raise money and awareness for Herizon House, a local shelter for abused women and their children. With the help of Amy Caughlin, branch librarian and hostess extraordinaire, Martin pulled off what he set out to do. (Kudos to Amy for getting Starbucks to supply the java!) The marathoners raised over \$2000 in pledges; some writers cleverly promising to include such things as a Latvian dog, gerbils, a cat named Bogey, and several other characters in their works for big-dollar donations.

As for raising awareness, the *Toronto Star* interviewed marathoners Friday morning and ran the story in their Saturday edition. Come Saturday morning, we had a visit from CTV. By six p.m. we had gone national twice. On

Sunday morning we all paused long enough to gather around the library's TV and watch ourselves on a taped copy of the newscast. Soon, news of the event ran across the AFP newswire and was picked up in the U.S., Australia, India and London.

Christie May, manager of development for Herizon House, paid us a brief visit Saturday morning. After offering up her gratitude, she gave a short talk on the shelter's history, bringing home to each of us the significance of the fundraiser. By the time she finished telling us about the tragic June 2000 murder of Gillian Hadley, there was hardly a dry eye in the house. We were infused with a new sense of purpose. You can learn more about the shelter by visiting their online presence at www.herizonhouse.com. For those interested, there is a donation link on the site.

To fully comprehend what goes on at a novel marathon, you have to participate in one. This being my first, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I discovered that people actually do co-author books. As foreign a concept as this was to me, there were two co-writing duos present! Lois Gordon and Gail McKay (Thank you Gail for coming through with free East Side Mario's pizza!) were in one corner, mysteriously co-mingling their words to form one cohesive story, while Sue Kenney (author of *My Camino*) and Bruce Pirrie were in another, doing the exact same thing. Judging by the laughter coming from the Kenney/Pirrie camp, I would say Bruce was using some of the comedic magic he had mastered during his tenure with *Second City* and *The Red Green Show*.

Winner of last year's "Muskoka" Novel Marathon, Peter Brandt, showed up early with an entire office in tow. Instantly intimidating me and my little laptop, he set up his workspace, slipped into a comfortable pair of Homer Simpson slippers and went to work on his comedic novel. Next to him was Fred Ford. What can I say about Phred Phord (you had to be there!)? Fred had his trusty outline, his assembled tarot cards and personal stereo

handy. Obviously he had done this before! During a Saturday evening reading of our works in progress, Fred thrilled us with a sampling of his novel about a Toronto psychic who receives a visit from Death, leaving us hungry for more. I believe Fred was the only one to type -30- at the end of his three-day odyssey.

If you caught the newscast, you would have seen Ruth Walker dancing while blowing the "10-page" horn. Ruth wowed us all by taking a one-page story idea, handed in by a walk-in sponsor, and creating a fabulous on-the-spot story. In keeping with these brief little moments of celebration, we had little gifts like the one Amy Caughlin gave us when she picked up an acoustic guitar and serenaded us with song.

Carole Enahoro was the wanderer of our tribe, traveling the library for comfortable little alcoves where she would put pen to paper and flesh out her story. Sunday morning, Sue Reynolds decided it was time to help other marathoners by offering up shoulder massages to the weary. We all died a little when Sue Malarkey had a PC disaster and was unable to retrieve the pages and pages of work she had amassed. Come evening, while others were packing up their belongings, Kathy Himbeault took to the piano and played us to a fitting close.

And when it was over, while walking to my car, I turned to watch a beaming Martin Avery disappearing into the night. There was something very poetic about the way he trailed off, three smiling wooden bear trophies—complete with knitted sweaters—bouncing around in the backpack slung casually over his shoulder. He raised his hand in salutation as he went, brushing aside all offers for a ride home. Perhaps he wanted to be alone, to ponder the success of his master plan to use writing as a way of making the world a slightly better place to live in.

I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent rewriter.

James Michener

Who's Who: Kevin Craig

By Nancy Del Col

Being the humble type, Kevin takes a bit of prodding before he'll reveal the really intimate details of his writing life. But those of us in the know are aware of his talent. His poetry has been widely published; he just released his first chapbook of poetry entitled *The Elephant Keeper & Other Pomes*; and he has been invited to read his work at the Renaissance Café in Toronto on March seventh. By then he will have accomplished something great—a novel amassed in three days at the Great Canadian Winter Novel Marathon. From there, it's only a few more steps to Oprah's couch, Kevin. Or to Ted Barris' armchair.

WORDWEAVER: What kind of training did you do for the novel marathon?

KEVIN CRAIG: None. You can bring an outline, and I've never done an outline, but I did do one and then I lost it. I really went in blind.

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

KC: I have no idea where I'm going. I start with the first word and go from there. Whenever I'm writing I feel like I'm discovering the story as it appears in front of me.

WW: How do you overcome writer's block?

KC: I've never been visited by writer's block. I sometimes pretend that I have it. I feel like I'm missing out on something if I don't. I wrote a poem about it once and it took first place in a contest, but it was all lies. I was feigning knowledge of that cursed illness.

WW: What was the "aha" moment when you realized you were a writer?

KC: In 1971 while I was watching "The Homecoming", the original Walton's movie. I saw John Boy on the screen doing what I did, writing and hiding his work. I felt like I was watching an older version of myself. Before that, though, Roald Dahl pretty much convinced me that it was the best thing in the world to do. As a kid I was eternally lost in Dahl's world.

WW: Yes, why do writers hide their work? Why did you hide yours?

KC: Because it's not seen as something to be taken seriously. A frivolous activity. But I'm opening up to it now.

WW: What encouraged you to join WCDR?

KC: I saw the press releases in the papers for years. I read them and reread them and tried to convince myself I could be part of such a group, even though I had never been published. I was so scared! I felt like I was attempting to penetrate a secret society without the password or handshake. My fears were unfounded. There are so many wonderful, supportive people in the organization.

When I joined the WCDR I heard a click. Something inside me stopped fighting and I was finally granted permission to write. For that reason, I will always be open to giving back to the WCDR, even if the click was internal. The WCDR was the impetus.

WW: Describe your best or worst writing experience.

KC: My worst writing experience took place in Grade 8. My English teacher gave us a project – write a poem and present it orally. I was so excited. I had to pretend I wasn't, but I had been waiting for years for that door to open, for an opportunity to share my words. After I read mine, Mrs. LaFrance walked up to the front of the class, grabbed it from me, ripped it up and threw it in the garbage. She accused me of plagiarism and sequestered me in the library with a pencil and paper. I had to write another poem and I only had 5 minutes to do it. When she came back, she read the new poem, crumpled it up, threw it in the trash and told me to go back to the classroom. I stopped writing for a long time after that. (I was saving this one for Oprah's couch...)

WW: What books, writers, or poets have inspired you most?

KC: I absolutely love J. D. Salinger, Michael Chabon, John Kennedy Toole, and Sylvia Plath. I would highly recommend Michael Chabon as a writer. He wrote *Wonder Boys* and *The Amazing Adventures of Cavalier and Clay*...two flawless books.

As far as poets go, I would list Pablo Neruda, Leonard Cohen, William Carlos Williams, and Jack Kerouac.

I am rereading *Old School* by Tobias Wolff. I often reread. When I find something I love, I find it difficult to let it go. It's time to reread *A Complicated Kindness* by Miriam Toews. That book really took me away.

WW: Share a few lines of your favourite poem.

KC: I don't have a favourite poem. That's not fair. Here are lines from a poem I love today:

"We cannot stop for fear
the silence would kill somehow
because we are, after all
just dancers to the music."

(from *Dancing to the Music* by Owen Neill)

WW: Who is your best cheerleader? Best critic?

KC: My wife Alison has been my biggest cheerleader since day one. I think my best critic is Deb Rankine. She tells me when it's on and when it just isn't working. For that I am extremely grateful.

WW: Complete this phrase: "The last thing I do before I..."

KC: ...die better have something to do with writing.

WW: What's your philosophy for success?

KC: I will let you know as soon as I care about obtaining it.

WW: One word you would use to describe your writing life, and one word you would use to describe yourself?

KC: Breathless. Found.



Paeans

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

Congratulations to the three WCDR members who won the awards at The Great Canadian Winter Novel Marathon, a special event fundraiser for Herizon House, held at the Pickering Public Library February 17–19, 2006. The Philanthropist Award went to **Ruth Walker**, who inspired the largest sum of donations to Herizon House. The Spirit Award was bestowed to **Amy Caughlin**, who arranged so many creature comforts for the writers over the weekend, including keeping them supplied with coffee and a multitude of treats. And, finally, the Most Prolific Writer trophy went to **Kevin Craig**, who honked the “10-pages” horn more often than anyone else.

Kevin Craig had his poem “Reaching Higher” published in the new *The Future Looks Bright* anthology.

Catherine Daley's article “Vinifera—The Inn on Winery Row” was published in *Homes and Cottages*.

WCDR members, **Catherine Daley**, **Kristen Barrett**, **Nancy Del Col**, and **Sheila Reesor** all had articles published in *Esteem* magazine.

Ruth Walker and **Graham Ducker**'s poems, “This All Started Last Week I Think” and “What Would Happen?”, respectively, were published in the Canadian Federation of Poets anthology, *The Future Looks Bright*.

WCDR member and *LICHEN* poetry editor **Ingrid Ruthig** was awarded third prize in the annual Petra Kenney Poetry competition for her poem, “Lily”. Ingrid will be presented this prestigious award on May 12th during an elegant afternoon reception among other winners, dignitaries and literary luminaries at Canada House in London, England.

Collette Yvonne was elated to see “Snapshots for Henry”—a short film based on her story “Scarlet Runners”—launched at a cast and crew screening hosted by the NFB. For more information log on to www.snapshotsforhenry.ca.

Brian Baker was recently hired on as an associate editor with toronto.com. He will be writing profiles on the GTA's finest watering holes and night clubs.

Sheila Reesor had an article published in *New Dreamhomes Magazine*, entitled “The Trend for Designer Doors.” As it turns out, size is important, but it isn't everything when it comes to doors!

Nora Rock's story “Vicarious” (published under pen name Lee Skinner) was included in Cleis Press' *Best Women's Erotica 2006* anthology.

Rich Helms had a full-page technical article on CVT transmissions in the Jan 14, 2006, issue

of *The Toronto Sun*.

Judy Bagshaw was pleased to announce the release of her latest romantic suspense novel, *BIG FAT LIES*, from New Age Dimensions Publishing. Full-figured teacher Sofie Peterson discovers that a cruise gets complicated when you start it with a big fat lie!

Catherine Daley had an article on careers in musical theatre in *Career Choices 2006* magazine which was inserted in Metroland papers in February.

Barbara Hunt was pleased to see the piece she wrote last summer on the passing of her Uncle Kurt in the “Lives Lived” section on the “Facts & Arguments” page of the January 4th edition of *The Globe and Mail*.

Cheryl Cowtan's poem, “The Interior Yellow” was accepted for *Heritage Writer*'s January 2006 issue.

Lucy Brennan's short one-act play “Other-worlds” has been accepted for the Mid-American Theatre Festival in Chicago in early March. It was written under pressure at a playwrights intensive in Kansas City last September.

Kevin Craig sold his poem “Reflections of Auld Lang Syne” to *Holistics Today*, a Kentucky based publication.

May/June Free-for-all Writing Challenge: **Breathing new life into an old yawn.**

It's time to clean out your personal “slush” drawer.

You know?

The one that's brimming with story ideas, character profiles and a prologue or three?

Word Weaver wants you to mine a story from your writerly archive and chip away at it to discover the gem hidden within.

After you have really polished it, send it to wordweaver@wcdr.org and we'll publish your “diamond in the rough” original story **and** your sparkling new gem.

Deadline: May 20, 2006.

Maximum word count: 800

Breakfast Information

March 11, 2006, guest speaker...Lessons Learned with Barry Dempster.

Barry Dempster is the author of a novel, *The Ascension of Jesse Rapture*, two volumes of short stories, a children's book and nine collections of poetry, the most recent of which, *The Burning Alphabet*, was recently nominated for a Governor General's Award. Dempster is also an editor at Brick Books.

As writer-in-residence at the Richmond Hill Library, Barry is poised to talk about his experiences regarding both craft and career.

April 08, 2006, guest speaker...Cracking Niche Markets with I.J. Schecter.

I.J. Schecter's fiction, articles and essays have appeared in a wide range of top publications throughout the world, from *Maxim* to *Men's Exercise*, *Shutterbug* to *Writer's Digest*, *Today's Bride* to *Today's Parent*. He is the author of an acclaimed short story collection, *The Bottom of the Mug*, as well as the ghostwriter of *Championship Selling: A Blueprint for Winning with Today's Customer*, the lead business title in John Wiley & Sons' fall 2005 catalogue. Schecter's columns have included the "Just a Thought" page for *Golf Monthly*, Europe's leading golf title, and the "Final Rep" column for *Beyond Fitness*. His awards range from a National Magazine Award for an essay about watching his son sleep to first prize at a local Erotica Night for his poem "Accidentally Considering My Penis."

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

Cost: WCDR members \$13; guests \$16

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

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

Words in Whiby 2006: A Celebration of Authors

By Ruth E. Walker

2006 Words in Whitby has scored big time: Celebrated novelist and television personality David Gilmour, the 2005 Governor General's fiction-winner for "A Perfect Night to Go to China," will join Catherine Gildiner, acclaimed author of "Too Close to the Falls" and "Seduction" on Friday, April 7.

This great pairing of talented personalities promises to bring the Words in Whitby audience a memorable night of interviews and readings. Plus the organizers have pulled out all the stops to make literary magic.

Begin Words in Whitby at 6:30 p.m. with a charming cocktail reception in the Regal Room at the historic Centennial Building, 416 Centre Street South. The evening will tantalize your taste buds with fabulous hors d'oeuvres and a divine dessert. Ticket holders enjoy a glass of wine, beer, or juice, and a selection of hot & cold appetizers. Top it all off with succulent strawberries and other fruit pieces, phyllo straws, angel cake, and shortbreads—all to dip into a cascading fountain of Belgian chocolate. Yum!

At 8:00 pm, move downstairs to the Court-house Theatre where the incomparable Ted Barris, author of 12 books, including his latest, *Juno, Canadians at D-Day, June 6, 1944*, will keep you entertained as he chats with the 2006 Words in Whitby authors. Long-time fans know that authors enjoy their time with Ted as much as audience members enjoy "listening in" to a brilliant conversation. Remember Pierre Berton's electrifying passion for Canada? David Adams Richards was wonderful; Charlotte Gray wowed us with her intelligence and warmth; Robert J. Sawyer inspired us with his optimism and joy of writing. Can you ever forget Wayson Choy moving us to tears with the tender story of his personal journey?

Ted has the gift of allowing his guests to have their full voice on the Words in Whitby stage. Don't miss out on your chance to be in the audience in 2006. Friday night is the one and only Words in Whitby adult venue for this year and will be the hot topic at next day's WCDR breakfast meeting.

Meet the authors, purchase copies of their

books from the Blue Heron Books sales table, get your copies signed, and end the night with coffee/tea and sweets.

Don't delay: seating is limited. Each \$25 ticket includes the cocktail reception, theatre admission to the author readings, coffee and dessert afterwards and a chance at wonderful door prizes.

And check out our fabulous Children's Reading Series on Sunday, April 9th, 1 to 3 p.m., at www.whitbylibrary.on.ca/wiw.php, featuring writer/actor and big kid himself, Neil Crone, as he returns to host writers Sharon Jennings and Liam O'Donnell. Tickets are only \$3 each for both adults and children. Tickets will be sold at WCDR's March breakfast: **Cash or cheque** only.

Tickets are also available at all branches of the Whitby Public Library. Need more info? Log on to: www.whitbylibrary.on.ca/wiw.php or contact Ruth Walker at: walkwrite@sympatico.ca.

Writers' Circles

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

Christians Who Write

The second Saturday of each month following the WCDR breakfast meeting.
Call for location.
Sherry Loeffler, 905-640-6315

Circle for Children's Writers

First Wednesday of each month
7 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 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 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 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

Write in Whitby

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

Word Players

Meets at St Stephen's United Church (on the corner of Simcoe and Taunton in Oshawa) on alternate Mondays for critiques of member's writings followed by friendly conversation. Currently open to new members.
David William McKay
dwmckay@sympatico.ca

Write Now

A group for on-the-spot writing
Every second Thursday
7 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

Third Tuesday of every month, 7 to 9 p.m.
Free-fall writing exercises and critiquing.
Meetings at Papps Restaurant, Pickering
Patricia Smith
the.wordsmith@sympatico.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

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

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

Oshawa Young Writers (Ages 13–19)

Oshawa Library, McLaughlin Branch
65 Bagot Street, Oshawa
Call/e-mail for dates and times
Nicole Patterson, 905-579-6111, ext #221
npatterson@oshawalibrary.on.ca

Inkspot

On-the-spot-writing and writing exercises
Every second Thursday
7 to 9 p.m.
Golden Griddle in the Oshawa Centre
Carole Enahoro
cenahoro@sympatico.ca

Note to Circle Leaders:

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

Please send your updates to:
wordweaver@wcdr.org.

What we want is a story that starts with an earthquake and builds to a climax.

Samuel Goldwyn

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

Now Open! The 2006 WCDR Short Story

CONTEST CLOSSES: June 1, 2006
 (Entries must be received by midnight.)

LENGTH: 1200 words

OPEN TO: All writers, 18 years and over.
 International.

SUBJECT: Stories may be of any subject
 matter, type or style.

FEE: \$10 Canadian.

ENTRIES: Online submission only.

Please send your entries to:

shortstory@wcdr.org.

No limit to number of entries, but each must
 be submitted separately with appropriate
 entry fee. Entries will be judged on their origi-
 nality and sense of craft in the work.

PRIZES: Awarded based on a percentage of
 entry fees collected, so the more entries, the
 bigger the prizes! Winners will be published in

a special contest edition of WCDR's newslet-
 ter, *The Word Weaver*, and on our website at
www.wcdr.org. Winners may be invited to
 read their story at future WCDR events.

For complete details, or to read last year's
 winning entries, go to **www.wcdr.org**.

Questions? Contact Sherry Hinman,
president@wcdr.org or Barbara Hunt,
vp@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, Bayly Postal Outlet, Health Rite Pharmacy, P.O. Box 14558, 75 Bayly Street West, Ajax, ON L1S 7K7.

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We welcome your input!

Send comments to
wordweaver@wcdr.org
 or

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