Message From the Board

Writing Past, Present and Future

This year marks the WCDR’s 20th anniversary. A long line of past presidents brought us to this milestone, and a long line of future presidents will carry us forward.

As my term as president of the WCDR draws to a close, I reflect on the accomplishments of our members. So many of you have advanced your writing, found agents, self-published, attended conferences, honed your craft, signed publishing contracts, and launched your novels or collections of stories and poems. It’s wonderful to see your books spread out at our RoundTables, Bookapalooza and other events.

Through our many WCDR events, we have drawn in new members with promises of mentorship, support and friendship.

The WCDR is quite simply the best writing collective I have ever encountered. The fellowship, the opportunities, the support are all incredible, and in a very tangible way, have put this region on the map for fostering recognizable talent. That this organization runs almost entirely on volunteer support is an amazing fact.

Our new board will have a strong foundation to work from as our 20th season begins. Of course, we are planning a gala party! There is much to celebrate, and as we move forward with confidence and enthusiasm, we can be sure of one marvellous thing: our fellow WCDR members will be there to support us and celebrate our success!
Since claiming *The Word Weaver* editor reins, I have yet to write my greeting before I’ve read all the features, waiting instead to see what our contributors are thinking and feeling. I also do not read the articles individually, but rather as a collective. Following my first read-through this morning, I am once again struck by how regularly a theme rises to the top. In this issue, you will find Kevin Craig and Mimi Jones-Taylor grappling with the universal questions, “When and why do I write?” As always we have informative features about craft. Heidi Croot and Laure Baudot provide concrete How-To tips to help you write better, while our regular columnists, Dorothea Helms and Barb Hunt, demonstrate the importance of believing your words matter and you can even be paid for them.

So, now the wheels are churning – can you hear them? No, not that screeching sound – that’s the shot fan belt on my 11-year-old Hyundai. That noise beneath, that subtle sound, that incessant whisper plaguing me wherever I go. You know, those merry-go-round thoughts that harass every writer. Why can’t I get my butt in the chair? Why can’t I keep my butt in the chair? Why do I keep putting myself out there? What if I finish this novel and it sells and becomes a success and then people will expect me to do it again? What if it doesn’t sell and no one gives a damn if I ever write another word?

Okay – stop the madness. Some days the voices are easier to ignore than other days, but in the end, I welcome them and then purposely shove them to the side as I get on with the business of writing. I’ve come to the realization that writing is like a fantastic lover when it is going well, and like the most rebellious teenager, no three rebellious teenagers, living in your house when it isn’t going well. But, take it or leave it, it’s who we are, what we do, and it matters, if to no one else but ourselves, that we arrive at our desk and WRITE.

Sincerely,

Sharon Overend, Editor
Earlier this year, I just didn’t want to write.

My writer friends and the WCDR have always encouraged me, especially when I’ve been at low points, but this time, I just didn’t have it in me to put pen to page. This period of non-writing arrived in my life just as many of my fellow authors had a great project, a piece that was being published or read aloud in public, and they were reaching the apexes of their creativity.

All I wanted to do was watch Netflix, eat chocolate and drink red wine.

People asked me over and over what I was working on. I forced myself to write a blog to say I didn’t want to write just so they would leave me alone.

Not wanting to write when you’re a writer doesn’t feel crippling or agonizing. Those feelings mean there’s still something in you that wants to be communicated. Not wanting to write feels like...well, nothing. Your creativity is numbed. You have no motivation to get your own words out.

I knew I would come back to the page when I was ready. I wasn’t going to rush or put pressure on myself. Anyone who has gone through depression will tell you those things just don’t work.

Then one night, I was chatting with my music producer friends, when one of them had this idea that the four of us should collaborate on a track.

“What would I do?” I asked, not being a composer, musician, or producer.

“You’d write lyrics,” he declared.

Great. Of all the times to make that suggestion. Upset by his enthusiasm, I excused myself from the chat and went for a walk. An angry walk.

Suddenly (and yes that melodramatically), with each step I took, words began to flood my brain. I never write on my phone, but I had to get those words down, and it was all I had. I opened my free mobile Office app, and started typing. My fingers couldn’t keep up with my thoughts arriving in a short, sweet, pop culture AA-BB rhyming pattern. Lyrics. Not my writing style at all. I could feel each of those 53 words break through all the walls I had put up inside of myself.

That walk and that song eventually pulled me back to the piece I was working on before my non-writing winter, bringing fresh eyes and full thoughts to my draft.

Writers often think words will just flood through your hands when you go back to the page after a hiatus/blockage/vacation. Not always. You might not write 400 pages in two hours. You may write ten words. Or 53. All that matters is that, even if those few words are the lies of fiction, they should still ring true inside your writer’s soul.

And then you will know that you’ve come back.
It’s been ages since I’ve had a daily writing regime. I was fanatic about my sacred hour of writing before the rooster crowed. Then life changed. Drastically. I came down with a debilitating Crisis of Happiness™.

I write from darkness. I’m a writer because of my misery-laden psyche. From darkness comes creativity. Remove darkness, and the urgency to write evaporates. Happiness equals a dry well.

While on my recent vacation to China and Hong Kong, I planned to reinstitute my early-morning writing hour. I thought it’d be easier to get back into my regime while vacationing. But Beijing was breathtakingly beautiful. This made for great writing fodder, but also ramped up my Crisis of Happiness™.

We travelled almost every day. We went from Beijing to Shanghai to Suzhou to Hangzhou to Wuxi to Shanghai to Hong Kong. Most mornings I awoke in a different hotel room than the morning before. With 14 days to re-establish my habit, I persevered.

Writing is a discipline. We must take it seriously in order for it to have importance in our lives. I had been using it as a crutch to prop up the rest of my life. One early morning in Shanghai, I considered a change of perspective. Write from a place of joy. Such an easy concept. If I could write from a wounded psyche, I could also write from joy. I embraced the pre-dawn vista of Shanghai spread out before me like a frenetic wonderland and I picked up my pen. I wrote. I was back.

I can’t, however, write about the place I’m in. Amid the unsurpassed beauty of Suzhou—Venice of the East—I wrote about how, atop the Eiffel Tower, the blinding Paris sunsets distort the views of the beautiful city below. Having spent the previous day boating through Suzhou’s beautiful canals, I happily wrote about Paris sunsets.

This morning, I awoke with a vivid memory of a tipsy evening in a restaurant atop the peak overlooking Hong Kong’s Victoria Harbour. I wrote about being down in the harbour earlier that day, and how water lapped at the hulls of the ancient heritage boats precisely the same way it lapped at new boats. The ancient ones were festooned with Chinese lanterns and decorous accoutrements, but their seaworthiness seemed questionable. The powerful new motorboats were sleek, sexy, and clearly capable of seafaring adventures.

I wrote about how perspective changes a person. I used to be one of those rickety old boats swaying in the wake of the newer models, always fearing that today is the day I sink. Oh, how I tried to write my way out of sinking. But I realized one need not be the shiny new boat to stay afloat. One need only move the pen across the page. Writers are witnesses not only on the days we’re miserable and tired. We must also be witnesses on the days we’re overcome with joie de vivre. We must bear witness every day.

It’s 5:00 a.m. Can I get a witness…

Kevin Craig is a novelist and playwright. His most recent novels are the young adult titles Burn Baby Burn Baby and Half Dead & Fully Broken. He is unbroken.
Market to Your Existing Clients

by Dorothea Helms

A lot of my Word Weaver columns have to do with freelancing, because most of the questions I field from other writers are about making money. In 1994, I took part in a 42-week entrepreneurship program that I believe gave me a tremendous competitive edge over other freelance writers out there. I remember the first day, when the instructors asked each participant to estimate how much money we thought we could make per year, and I mumbled, “Maybe $7,000?” They laughed and laughed, because they saw in me the potential to make that much a month. They were right.

One of the items they covered during the program was the old rule that 80% of your business will come from 20% of your clients. Cliché, maybe, but in my case, true. We also learned that marketing to existing clients can be more lucrative than finding new ones. Again, I find this accurate. Your existing clients already know and appreciate your work — that’s why they’re existing clients. Your job is to plant the seeds of possibility to encourage them to hire you for expanded services.

Let me tell you about my first cold call. In the late 1990s, my husband Rich was one of the first computer gurus to tackle creating websites and FTPing (remember that?) them to the web. He wanted to produce websites as part of my business, and I figured why not approach new home builders? That industry was, and remains, my main niche, and at that time, hardly any builders had websites. I decided to try my hand at cold calling.

I started with the A’s. The first builder was enthusiastic about my offer, but his son was into website creation. He wished me well. I called the second builder on my list, suggested that he might like a website and that Rich was providing that service. He said, “Sure. I’ve been thinking about that. Can you two meet with me tomorrow morning?” Men rarely leave me speechless, but I responded with a couple seconds of stunned silence. We did meet, and to this day, Rich still does his website.

Now, I’m not naïve enough to think that cold calling is always that easy, but I am amazed at how much business I have gotten over the years simply by putting myself out there. Here’s another example. Years ago, I was on the phone with a PR client, and we were chatting about writing marketing materials for a business event. I said, “By the way, if you need me to write a speech for the builder, I offer that service.” As soon as I mentioned “speech,” I could sense the light bulb go on over her head, and she said that was a brilliant idea. I still write speeches for many of her clients.

All of this reminds me of a humorous fortune cookie I wrote 20 years ago. (I got a million of ’em.) If during your entrepreneurial career you can make just one great business deal — you should have kept your day job!
I’ve been writing short stories since I was child, and seriously for the last decade. Through the process, I’ve developed a few insights about the craft.

I always ask myself three main questions, or “informational” queries. The timing of these questions will depend on your individual approach. In addition, by the time you begin to write, you will have already answered some of these questions subconsciously, allowing you to produce a strong first draft. Further answers will arise naturally through the process of writing. I suggest that you ask these questions early on in your process.

My main question is “what do the characters want?” Robert Olen Butler calls this element of fiction “yearning.” Yearning is the element that determines the story’s plot and the mechanism through which the plot is crafted. Olen Butler writes: “It’s the dynamics of desire that is at the heart of narrative and plot.” (From Where You Dream 40) “Yearning” is “what is at stake” for characters.

I always ask myself first what the protagonist wants. The protagonist’s longing will guide his or her interactions with other characters, impact dialogue, and even affect the setting. Charles Baxter notes the interplay between characters and the objects around them: “How a person sees the things that surround him usually tells us more than an explicit description of his mood. The things carry the feeling.”

Once you’ve figured out what the protagonist longs for, don’t stop there. In order to understand the interplay among your characters, as well as how they relate to the fictional world you’ve built, you need to know what every character in your story — not just the protagonist — wants.

My two preferred methods for understanding yearning are writing a monologue in a character’s voice and writing a dialogue between two characters. Sometimes the dialogue makes it into a version of the story, and sometimes it doesn’t. But writing dialogue always serves the purpose of helping me understand a character’s motivations.

The second query addresses the story’s timeframe. A short story, says the writer James Salter, must be “somehow complete.” We writers don’t think enough about where a story should start. There is no single answer to this question, for the demands of each story will determine where you start its narrative. You can start the story with an event that seems initially tangential but eventually reveals itself crucial to a story’s symbolic landscape, as Alice Munro does in her story “Miles City, Montana.” You can start the story with a bang, with a dramatic event. You can start a story slowly, perhaps through a passage of expository writing.

How do you figure out the right beginning? Through experimentation. After writing two or three drafts, read and reread your first page, or your first two pages, and ask yourself if you’ve found the right entry point. The choice of entry is guided by your preliminary question: what does the character long for? Another tip-off: if you’re bored by your first page, if you find yourself thinking, “I can’t wait to get to the next part,” then discard the first page. Cut things out and put other things in, each time starting the story in a new way. Sometimes, you’ll find you want to write an entirely new beginning.

My last major “informational” question involves the issue of perspective, especially regarding the protagonist and the narrator. I ask myself at what point in a character’s lifetime the story takes place. Concerning the narrator, I ask myself not only who is telling the story, but when? The decision you make about when the story is being told will impact every other aspect of the story, from plot, to which tense you choose for your narrative, to the tone of the piece.

For example, let’s take a story in which the narrator and the protagonist are one and the same; that is, the protagonist is telling the story. Whatever knowledge this protagonist has or doesn’t have will influence how he or she reacts to the events of the plot, and how he or she retells the story. A protagonist’s knowledge is shaped by experience, which varies according to where he or she is in his or her life. If you want to write a highly dramatic story whose turning point depends on a character’s naiveté, you may want to write the
story from the character’s present perspective in order to
dramatize fully this turning point. You can, of course, write
a dramatic story from a character’s future point of view, but
the tone will be different from the first one: reflective as well
as reactive.

Laure Baudot is a Toronto writer, editor, and martial
artist. Her work has appeared in several literary journals,
including *The Danforth Review, Found Press,* and
*Prairie Fire: A Canadian Magazine of New Writing,*
among others. She is currently looking for a home for
her manuscript, a collection of short stories entitled *This
One Because of the Dead.*

Who’s Who

by Barb Hunt

Always an avid read, it was the magical confluence of discovering a Young-
Adult novel – the kind that makes you wonder where have these been all my
life – followed by an encouraging email conversation with the author who
advised she “write” that prompted M-E Girard, a full-time nurse, to give
writing a shot in 2010. The rest, as they say, is history.

WW: Was writing a part of your childhood?

MG: I often had stories to write, but seldom got past
Chapter One. Somehow they ended there. I’d give up. I
dreamed of going to university to become a writer, but then
went the practical route instead.

WW: But you eventually got there.

MG: I’m a planner by nature, so I made a deal with my-
self to take the time to complete something. My gut told me,
“You can’t just wish yourself to be a writer.” I knew I’d need
craft. You know, a foundation: rules and tools. Lots of prac-
tising. So, I enrolled in George Brown College. Caro Soles,
the mystery writer, taught the course. She’s the founder of
Bloody Words Mystery Conference. See, I do well with as-
signments and deadlines. Just the right amount of pressure.
Critiquing and writing-talk also helped. I naturally went
back to the story I’d been trying to tell; kept characters and
premise. They were strong. I made a fresh start.

WW: When did the WCDR enter the process?

MG: Funny thing. I found them before George Brown,
but thought they must be in the U.S. because everything
looked so impressive. Then in early 2012, I searched again.
There was the word “Pickering.” How crazy was that? This
great resource right in my neighbourhood. When I walked
into that first breakfast meeting in January, I knew no one
and didn’t know what to expect. And people like Dorothea
Helms, Ruth Walker, Tobin Elliott and Noelle Bickle came
to say hi. They asked what I wrote. So supportive. Even if I
didn’t know the speakers, I felt more legit as a writer simply
because I belonged to this organization.

WW: And you joined the Board too?

MG: By June of 2012, I’d made friends and wanted to
get involved. They let me loose on the website and then the RAW site. I wanted the WCDR to build a more engaging online presence, and I was working through the same process personally in my writing career. It was important that writers from far and wide have a place to meet, support each other and exchange ideas. Even if they couldn’t attend a breakfast.

WW: Speaking of your writing career, where are you at right now?

MG: My first novel, Girl, was based on some George Brown material. I knew these characters, their story and the themes really well, although I’d written it from all sorts of angles. When I cold-queried New York agents, it all happened so fast. Girl sold to Katherine Tegen Books, an imprint of Harper Collins U.S., which also publishes the Divergent series. Funny enough, they’re also Canadian YA author Eve Silver’s publisher. So, editing right now with a pub-date of Fall 2016.

WW: Congrats. Very exciting. The edit’s going well?

MG: As I said, I love my characters and story so I welcome fresh eyes. Just tell me and I’ll fix it. Editing will only make it stronger. My aim was to take the traditional path to publishing. To try and see how far I could get. So, I’m beyond thrilled. Busy branding myself as a YA author. My second manuscript is polished, and I have three more stories in the works. All exploring gender, feminism and queerness.

WW: You’re prolific. Maybe that’s the planner in you? Does that make you a “plotter?”

MG: Not really. I’m a total “pantser,” but because I work nights and need to maximize my writing time, I plan. I don’t get full stories. They’re fragments. So, I chart things like character needs, wants and motivations like a road map to follow. My stories are very intuitive. Not plot-driven. I have character and voice. The rest I need to map out then “pantsey” write. No wasted time.

WW: Sounds like it all works well for you.

MG: Ha, ha. My favourite quote is something U.S. YA author Melinda Low says: “Just because I’ve written a novel doesn’t mean I know how to write the next one.”

WW: True. They’re all different. Like children.

MG: For me the most important thing has been and will be growing as a writer.
My writing mentor reads my short story and sends me away to “think deeply about the objective correlative.”

“I mean think about it for a week non-stop,” he says.

Objective what?

A date with Google teaches me that every story, every poem, play, nonfiction narrative, has at least one objective correlative, or should, if the audience is to tingle with emotion.

So what, in the sacred name of Oxford literary terms, is it?

What it is, what it is not

It’s a combination, a system, a collection, of images, objects or descriptions designed to trigger a desired emotion in readers. Think balloons, cake and candles, a performing clown, a tear of gift-opening: these images, when welded into a story, combine to evoke emotions related to a birthday party.

This is not about scattering random images and metaphors on the page like wildflower seeds in soil. Rather, thoughtful writers select a category of imagery; e.g. celebration, nature, machinery, imprisonment—that fits the story they want to tell, vary the images within that category, and carefully plant them throughout the narrative, always letting them work their magic on a subtle, subliminal level.

As an “artistic formula,” the objective correlative trumps such inert statements as, “She felt happy that morning,” or “He felt small and unimportant.” In these two examples, she might be feeling happy, and he unimportant, but the “telling” nature of the prose prevents readers from experiencing those emotions themselves, leading them to say, “So what?”

How it works its magic

Working instead with an objective correlative, perhaps one inspired by nature, you’d let the happy protagonist wake up to bright sun and blue sky, notice dewdrops glittering on the petals of yellow day lilies, hear “Walking on Sunshine.”

How should writers come up with objective correlatives for their work? Write your first draft with reckless creativity and without reference to any image system. Often the right objective correlative will arrive organically. If it does, identify it, and then, says McKee, “devise variations and quietly embroider them into the story.” If nothing arrives organically, invent one: “The audience won’t care how we do it; it only wants the story to work.”

A Rose by Any Other Name

Brittany LeClerc examined the objective correlative in her WCDR mini-workshop on “Art and Literature” on March 14, 2015, without ever calling it by that name.

“Descriptions are not jewellery,” she said. Don’t tack them on. Make them work, make them tell the story, and let them make impressions on the reader.

“And don’t bog down with endless similes,” she reminded us. “Just show the important things, the iconic principles. Direct the visuals into a seamless reality.”

It’s the objective correlative she was describing, near as damn it.

If you’re working within a category of imagery, your visuals, objects and descriptions will align, and will inspire the right emotion in your reader. All of art works this way, as composers know how to choose motifs for their symphony, and as painters know who select colours, scenes and innuendo for their canvas.
Wild Algonquin

by Jason Forbes

Faster, faster! Screams the devil’s face,
Apply the whips, hasten the snail’s pace!
Sell your soul, a false prize to win.
Stumble away from the cliff of sin,
Find redemption in wild Algonquin.

Deafened to the rush and roar,
Of anxious snakes and poverty abhorred.
Rather, turn your path, alter your course,
Follow clean air into the north,
Wild salvation is the only recourse.

See in mind’s eye, a clear, starry sky,
Placid shores that slowly glide by.
Stirring bays and raging rivers,
Sights to set your soul aquiver,
This and more, the wild delivers.

The plaintive call of the loon,
Wolves howling at the moon;
Feel alive in a dangerous crowd.
Come the dawn, the lake in shroud,
Songbirds sing, their hearts so proud.

Wandering amongst the scrub and spruce,
A stately and majestic moose.
Stop and stare, completely aware,
Brazen, impetuous and ill-prepared,
For the vast wilderness you have dared.

While black crows caw and cavort,
Hawks soar for their sport.
And wheel upon a wisp of breeze,
Against skies that hurt to see;
Visions to set your soul at ease.

Now comes the dreadful close,
A frontier trek, that glorious rose.
Return to Hell and the need to win,
Courage, stout heart, not chagrin,
Ramble again in wild Algonquin.
Where Ever I Go

*by John Jansen in de Wal*

Wherever I go, it will follow me.
For my dog and I must together be.
We wander this marvellous world of ours,
take rests and sleep under nature’s lush bowers.
   We travel creation’s wonders to see.

Sky blue and flowers and trees are marquee for Hansel the dog and this retiree.
Who walk e’vry day for hours and hours.
   Where ever I go . . .

Whenever we sit and rest under tree, my dear companion will sit at my knee.
Hansel and I in clean rivers take showers.
His fine fur I part for his fleas are ours.
since they house also in my fine goatee
   Where ever I go . . .

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**CHALLENGE for the July/August 2015 Issue**

“There are no secrets that time does not reveal.”
Jean Racine

Secrets. We all have them and we all have been affected by them. In 500 words or less tell us about a secret.

**Deadline for submissions is June 15th**
Limit 500 words per entry
wcdrwordweaver@wcdr.org
WCDR Members, Welcome!

RETURNING MEMBERS
Lori Chown
Lori Lane Murphy
Gail Mercer-MacKay

NEW MEMBERS
Christine Albert
Jackie Brown
Larry Busch
Aly Coy
Mary Newman
Barbara Wade Rose

We welcome your input!
Send questions/comments/article ideas to:
wcdrwordweaver@wcdr.org

No one should act upon advice given without considering the facts of specific situations and/or consulting appropriate professional advisors. Please note: Submission does not guarantee publication. We reserve the right to edit submissions at our discretion.

Just finished your workout at the gym? Grab a healthy fresh fruit smoothie for the ride home.

Make it family night at Debbie’s. A chai or cappuccino for mom & dad and a hot chocolate for the kids.

Work outside of the office. Enjoy a latte, espresso or tea while staying connected with free wireless access.

There’s something for everyone at Debbie’s Boutique Café

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