

The Writers' Circle of Durham Region

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The Writers' Circle of Durham Region

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My African Muse

By Nancy Del Col

The French call it “mal d’Afrique,” the disease you catch after going to Africa. It’s not malaria, dengue fever, or even AIDS. It’s the blazing desire to return to this continent of gracious people, red dusty earth, big sky, and bigger hearts. It’s the need to go back to an elemental beginning, where extremes of poverty and joy coexist, where beauty rises out of squalor. Even a short time in Africa reveals it to be a land of contradictions and simple truths, slowly revealed to those who open their senses. Africa strips layers off you. It demands that you be honest and pay attention. I spent two weeks in Kenya this past August, volunteering at the Mully Children’s Family home in Ndalani, a poor and arid farming township two hours by matatu (bus), southeast of Nairobi. This area is so marginalized that it doesn’t appear on most maps of Kenya. There is no phone, no Internet, no way of reaching the buzzing Western world. In our volunteer group of 30, only one cell phone worked, and only if you text messaged while standing under a certain acacia tree, at night, down by the Thika River, with your head tilted toward the Southern Cross.

I told my family, don’t expect to hear from me. At first this made me nervous, but it turned out to be liberating. No one could reach me, and I had no obligation to get in touch. I was single again, childless again, just me interacting with a new world that was also strangely familiar. I hadn’t felt this way since my early twenties, when I ditched my job, my boyfriend, and my family to backpack through Europe for six months. I hadn’t realized how much I needed to do something like that again.

Africa was on my mind for six years before the opportunity arose to go there. It started with two of my students asking for help to start an extracurricular school group called “Helping Hands,” its purpose to raise money for children orphaned by the genocide in Rwanda. I started reading books about Africa (*Land of a Thousand Hills*, *Nowhere in Africa*, *I Dreamed*

of Africa, *Rules of the Wild*), putting each down with reluctance after being transported out of my safe, predictable world. I wanted adventure. I watched *Out of Africa* (again) and wept. I read every news article on AIDS in Africa. I volunteered at the AMREF fundraiser—the famous “Flying Doctors of Africa.” I carried around a deep knowing that I would get there one day.

Then the urge went dormant. The routine of life resumed. I was restless, and didn’t know why. It was a restlessness that settled in the centre of my gut, the churning anxiety that people in love feel, or drug addicts. Serendipity led me to a conference in October 2004 where I met a woman who became the catalyst that rekindled my passion, inspiring me to make this trip to Kenya.

So, in August I packed two hockey bags, mostly filled with school supplies, and Weekender’s fabric for the girls at the orphanage to practice their tailoring skills. The rest of the space was for limited clothing and every possible drug and ointment I might need to cope with the threats of tropical disease and infection. The cashier at Shopper’s Drug Mart eyed me with curiosity when I checked out with laxative, Imodium, Gravol, Monistat, ibuprofen, Tylenol, antihistamines, antibiotics, antacids, hand sanitizer, and latex gloves. I’m not dying, I wanted to say, just afraid of it. Where I was going there was nowhere to get anything, so I was told to bring it all, just in case.

In the end, all I needed was the laxative—which is an apt, though tasteless, metaphor. I was emptied out in Kenya, and then filled up again. I spent my days at a Christian orphanage, home to 650 boys and girls. They told their stories of abuse, of life in the slums of Nairobi and Eldoret, of being raped by the guards in “juvey” (juvenile prison) after their destitute mothers had left them there, unable to feed them. Of losing both parents to AIDS (although there is still a stigma about saying this), and becoming the head of the household

at eight-years old. Of being beaten and starved, kicked out of their homes by relatives. Of finding a Dickensian sort of life in crime and prostitution and drug abuse. Of being rescued by Charles Mulli—their new “Daddy”—and now having food, a home, a new family. Of becoming a lecturer one day, or a politician who could turn this impoverished country around, an accountant, a doctor, an airline pilot. Of being grateful for a bunk bed, their first pair of shoes, safety from assault, an education, and hope.

I barely slept each night, but it wasn’t due to the hard foam mattress on the top bunk, or the dormitory accommodations shared with nine other women. Nor was it the albino geckos skittering up the walls, or listening for the threatening whine of mosquitoes, or the fear that one of the poisonous Australian spiders that arrived on a shipment of used clothing would move indoors for the night. And, it wasn’t the barking of the dogs—those guardian angels that trotted beside us whenever we walked the grounds alone—nor the otherworldly cry of bush babies—crosses between possums and little monkeys—as they argued in the trees at dawn.

I couldn’t sleep because of the whirring inside my head, the electric sparks of thought and feeling acting like caffeine on my body. How did Anastasia survive that brutal beating her mother gave her with a machete heated over the fire? How did George, crawling on the floor with polio, survive the verbal and physical abuse his drunkard parents inflicted on him? How did darling Priscilla, the girl who insisted on washing my laundry by hand, in a little basin and with one bar of soap, forget watching her father beat her mother until he broke her back? How did we live our cozy lives in Canada, not knowing or doing anything about what was happening to these lost children?

Story continued on page 2.

We thought we went to help, and maybe we did. We helped build the foundation for another dormitory, one that will house 100 more homeless boys out of Kenya's one million orphans. There are an incomprehensible 15 million AIDS orphans in Africa—how can they all possibly be saved? Maybe the best help we brought was a little love and friendship, but I know I received far more than I gave. I had some of my layers stripped away, the layers that normally protect me from not having to feel too much or care too much. Because once you feel and care, you can't *not* act.

Will I go back? Again and again, I hope. Some people wonder why I don't help children at home, in my own backyard. I do my best for my students. I've given my own two

children a great life. My backyard is just bigger now. I will go back to see Priscilla, because she is dear to me. I will go back to smell the red dust, and the spicy leaves of the pepper tree, and the great mass of unwashed skin when the children gather to sing and pray at their devotions. I will even go back to smell the smoldering garbage pit, its smoke sweet as pot. I will go back to taste ugali and kale and lentils, cold sweet water from the borehole, fresh milk collected each morning and pasteurized in a pot on a two burner propane stove. I'll go back to feel the soft fuzz of slim French beans picked warm from the field and cooked with tomatoes for our evening meal. To feel the warm sticky hand of a girl named Jacky, who can't speak English, but can smile bigger than a movie star.

To laugh with the karate boy named Paul, whose shy strength helped me make the last leg of a climb up to Pride Rock, and who said "Sorry" every time I stumbled or caught my clothing on a thorn bush, as though it was his fault that I suffered, this boy who had lived in the slums.

I will go back because I have caught "mal d' Afrique." And I think I need to have more layers stripped away.

Nancy Del Col writes for *Post City Magazines* and *Esteem*. For more information on volunteering for African AIDS orphans, contact Del Col at nancydelcol@rogers.com, or visit www.hopesanddreamsteam.ca or www.mullychildrensfamily.org.



A Warm **WCDR** welcome to Our **Newest Members**

Shirley LaRosa
Heather Tucker
Susan Morton Stewart
Lisa Dost
Brian Stripp
Eleanor Collins
Jeanette McCurdy



Helen Smith
Amanda Walsh
Kimberley Williams
Susan Statham
Rhoda Strong
Kathrine Haugh
Neil McPhee

Editorial Eyes



By Annette McLeod

I haven't ever read a Danielle Steele novel. Not to insult those who enjoy such guilty pleasures—I have, after all, spent lazy hours reading many another “chick lit” authors; I just don't happen to care for her. I can trace a big reason for that back to a magazine excerpt. It came from her *Message From Nam* novel. (We'll overlook for a second, in my opinion, the ill-advised idea of using a controversial, opinion-splitting, large-scale subject like the war in Vietnam as a device in a romantic contrivance such as a Danielle Steele novel.) The excerpt I read started with the unforgettable line, “Her eyes bore into his like two M16 rifles.” After you've wiped away your tears of laughter, consider what this line was presumably intended to convey: intensity, a connection between the heroine and the poor sod into whom she was boring, the heroine's own ferocity.

Imagery in fiction becomes memorable in one of two ways: either it resounds with the reader, calling up the intended image while imbedding it in the character and giving insight into him or her that sticks with the reader, or it is so laughably implausible you just can't get it out of your head. Your goal, of course, is the former. I've wondered ever since reading that particular opener why Ms. Steele, her editorial team, her proofreader, her kids, her husband, her friends and anyone else who read it before print couldn't see how monumentally bad it was. Stinky like week-old trout; scary like root canal; inappropriate like a G-string at a baptism.

Is it just a matter of taste—or lack thereof—or has Ms. Steele's popularity put her above criticism by her intimates? Let's hope we never get *that* popular.

Imagery comes in several forms. Similes, such as this example, use the words “like” or “as” to directly correlate one thing with another. We use these all the time in colloquial speech. Cool as a cucumber. Blind as a bat. Strong like a bull. Metaphors seek to make the same par-

allels, but without “like” or “as.” War is hell. The eyes are the windows to the soul. Analogous imagery needs to be powerful, but it also needs to be believable. (I still can't shake the image of that poor mans brains shooting out the back of his head to splatter on the wall behind him. Ah well, love hurts, I guess.)

While writing this article, I reached into my Goodwill-acquired box of paperbacks I haven't read yet, and plucked out a few, searching for similes and metaphors. It isn't hard—just flip a few pages and you'll come up with one or two. I came up with a book called *Perfidia* by Judith Rossner, and before long my eyes alit on this sentence: “My father requested a quiet table, which was funny, because the whole dining room was cemetery-quiet.”

This metaphor does effectively convey quiet, granted, but do you suppose a cemetery has been used a little too often in that way? It struck me as overused. What's quiet besides cemeteries? My hand next fell upon *Hiding From the Light* by Barbara Erskine, and the line, “The site of the old church lay in the moonlight like a bright tapestry, a quilting of light and shadow, black and grey and deep velvet green.” At first I really liked this imagery: it's original and evocative, which is our goal. However, if I'm being really picky with Ms. Erskine, I would point out that “bright” and “light and shadow” are not reflected in the final phrase, “black and grey and deep velvet green,” which are not bright and not light, but do certainly evoke the shadow imagery.

Would it have been more effective if she'd said, “black and deep velvet green, shot with gold”? The overall tapestry imagery is lovely. The idea here is not to pick on authors who have achieved success; rather, it is to be as good as we can be, and to learn from those who come before.

I know you have a similar pile in your house, so grab a few and flip them open. Skim until

you find one, and read it a few times. Be critical, and don't be afraid to disagree with the author's choice, even if it's an author you admire and enjoy.

Try to craft metaphors and similes that both call up the imagery you're looking for and avoid clichés that have been done before. Look around the room and pick out five objects. A clock, for example, or a flower. Beside each item, make a list of a few words that describe that object. Now think about what imagery the object calls up. A clock could be used to signify urgency. A flower freshness. (Fresh as a daisy? Now where have I heard that before?) OK, so perhaps the flower is a little passed its prime. A wilting flower could signify melancholy. Now, beside all your adjectives, try coming up with verbs. A clock could be ticking, but it could also be whispering, or rushing, or, without a second hand, hanging suspended between moments. Taking everyday objects and looking at them in new ways will help you come up with new imagery to liven up your stories. Now, have a look at your work in progress, whether it's a poem, a short story, memoir, whatever. Think about your characters. What situation are they in? What mood do you mean to convey? Try putting these things together, coming up with five solid similes or metaphors, as long or short as you need to make your point.

“Her skin, once as soft as the velvet petal of a newly picked rose, had begun to dry around the edges, as if left too long in the arid desert air.” You get the idea.

I was once hit with the image of dolphins swimming, playing beside a ship. It was a simile I jotted down and used in a story much later, to describe active children swirling around their exhausted parents. The verb I used was “cavorting,” and I'm still happy with it months later. Tuck your list into your ideas folder, and the next time you're stuck for a phrase, give it a look.

The palest ink is better than the best memory.

—Chinese Proverb—

A Message from THE BOARD

Busy, busy time! If you're like most of us, these last few months have been hectic, and we hope you find time to sneak down (up?) to the computer early in the morning or late at night, or whenever the muse takes you, to write. Writing for pleasure is often the one activity that gets shuffled to the bottom of the pile, and, when we get back to it, we remember how refreshing it can be.

WCDR would like to help pump the writing life back into you if you've gotten away from it. As you know, you can safely mark your calendar for the second Saturday of every month for our fabulous breakfasts. Although we were sorry to have to cancel Barry Dempster's talk in October, due to his last minute emergency, it seems attendees were pretty happy with our impromptu mini-workshops on short story writing, query letter writing and poetry writing and Internet security. And Barry Dempster is already booked to come to a breakfast in the spring.

Until then, we have a fantastic lineup of

speakers from broadcaster, historian, writer and WCDR member (that's all one person!) Ted Barris, to comic performers and writers Adam Risbridger and Byron Laviolette, and that's just this fall. As well, we continue to offer you top-notch workshop speakers, including a poetry boot camp with Stuart Ross. Some members will remember Stuart as our writer-in-residence a few years ago. As you read this, we will already be looking back on our 10th anniversary gala. It's hard to imagine that it will have come and gone, as the gala has been occupying our minds for the last few months, with all the planning, invitations, food, and entertainment.

Gala attendees received a copy of the WCDR 10th Anniversary Yearbook as part of the price of admission. Copies of the yearbook, filled with member pictures and memorabilia, a history of the WCDR, member musings on writing and on the WCDR, and a couple of pages to fill with your fellow members' signatures, will be available for purchase to

those who were unable to attend the gala for just \$3 (\$5 for 2).

If you see a new face on the board, it's because we've made a switch. Ruth-Anne Mullan stepped down from the board for personal reasons, and we welcome Connie Jamieson as our new membership co-ordinator. Thanks, Ruth-Anne, for all your hard work. The September/October issue of the *Word Weaver* marked the last issue to be copy edited by member Cathy Witlox. Copy editing is the kind of job that only becomes apparent when it isn't done well. Thanks to Cathy, you didn't even know she was there. Cathy carefully chipped away at all our misplaced commas and run-on sentences, making us look good. Now she needs to devote this time to her business, www.wordwitlox.com, so we say thank you, Cathy, for your hard work on the *Word Weaver* over the past year. We couldn't have done it without you.

Odds & Eds

By Deborah A. Rankine,
Word Weaver Editor

A few weeks back I wowed my best friend by showing her how to fix her three toilets—each one having its own unique problem. Armed with my Google search “how-to” printout, my vice grips and set of box wrenches, I broke down each dilemma into manageable steps—I divided, I conquered. The sense of accomplishment was incredibly euphoric. I had entered a domain foreign to most women (well, foreign in a way that excluded toilet bowl cleaning) and had arose the victor. “With the right tools,” I mentored, “anyone can do it.”

On the drive back home from Oakville, I realized that writing-from-scratch is no different than repairing a leaky loo. One must identify the problem (I have nothing to write about/What can I write about?), get the right tools for the job (a quiet place, computer, thesaurus/dictionary, paper, pen) and just go for it. And, if at first you don't succeed, what's the worst that can happen? You may have to try a different approach? So what. Or, you may have

to get more tools to finish the job? Stop whining and go get them. Writing isn't easy and trust me, neither is fixing a toilet, but with a little homework, the right/write tools and some confidence, you too can be the master of your own prose (and plumbing).

In the January/February 2006 *Word Weaver* issue we will be focusing on tools of the writing trade. Most tools you will no doubt already be using, but we will introduce you to some new ones as well.

So, your “**themed**” writing challenge for this upcoming issue is to write an essay on the writing tool or tools that best serves you. Be creative. In past *Word Weavers* we've had tools-of-the-trade suggestions like having each character in your work-in-progress novel keep a diary. Another member said she carried index cards in her purse to catch stray words—in clusters or in isolation—that track her down and demand that they be crafted into poems.

Maximum word count: 600
Deadline: December 20, 2005

Paste your submission in the body of your e-mail if *NOT* a MS Word doc file and send to:

wordweaver@wcdr.org



November/December Free-for-all Writing Challenge Submissions...

“He touched the little box in his pocket and smiled.”

Point of View

By Frank Young

“He touched the little box in his pocket and smiled”—the title phrase for the November/December 2005 Word Weaver free-for-all writing challenge—struck a chord with me. It reminded me that most men have a relationship with their pockets that women, in general, do not share. When I was a boy, as most boys I suspect, my trouser pockets literally bulged with objects of interest. A dirty hanky, bits of string or rubber bands, in season, a conker or two, marbles, and just about anything that struck my fancy at that moment.

As I grew older the contents changed. During my working years I still carried a hanky—good for staunching blood from the occasional cut or wiping off the grime from my pliers when they got a bit sticky. The odd screw and wire connector often found their way into my pockets along with car keys, coins and the electrical tape I used for all kinds of ongoing repairs. Now, in my dotage, things have not changed appreciably. My pockets still bulge with objects, though now of a different nature; things such as a hearing aid remote control, a nitro spray, pills of various colours and sizes, coins, car keys and the odd screw and wire connector—old habits die hard and one never knows when a #6 wood

screw might come in handy—vie for space. Besides, it is very comforting to be able to jiggle one’s possessions in one’s pocket, somehow giving one a sense of security.

This fictional character who has a little box that pleases him in his pocket could be Everyman. It does not take much to please us. We are not, by and large, complex creatures. Having trousers with pockets in which to put a little box would make any man smile.



In His Pocket

By Ingrid Schmelter

He touched the little box in his pocket and smiled. Arnold kept it close, in his right pant pocket with keys, wrappers, and crumpled blue post-it notes. He’d had it for a long time; ever since he’d wandered alone into Tam’s Trinkets when he was 10.

“How do I know it’s a dragon?”

“Boy, can’t you feel it?”

“Yes.” He could feel it jerking in his hand.

“But if I open the box?”

“There are only two things you can do with a dragon in a box. Keep it closed, or let it go.”

Arnold was 40. He worked in a cubicle farm with a clutch of other office workers. He pecked at a keyboard, shuffled papers and mumbled at a telephone. He was often bored, but none of that mattered—he had a dragon in a box. Sometimes it spoke to him, but only in his dreams. On slow days, his head would gravitate to his desk. The dragon would whisper, free me. Let me go. Then the box in his pocket would bump and wake him.

Sometimes, briefly, he would think, *I’m a loser*, but then he would touch his pocket and remember that he kept a dragon there and everything was fine again.

One day, Arnold was called into his boss’s swanky corner office; he took his usual place by

the window while his manager pontificated on sales figures and the need for increased productivity. As Arnold’s fingers curled around his box, he could feel the dragon’s heartbeat ticking away.

And that’s when he decided.

He pulled the box from his pocket and lifted the lid. The dragon poured out in a river of flame; neither wall nor ceiling could contain it. It filled the room and then the sky outside until it grew so big and spread so thin that it grew invisible in the wind.

Arnold laughed until he cried; his pocket empty of dragons but the world full.

Untitled

By CreativeJames Dewar

He touched the little box in his pocket and smiled. Some of the busy people passing him on the street would smile back instinctively, but most were too involved in conversation with others or trouncing steadily toward important destinations to even notice him on this happy, happy day. There was a certainty in the way the clouds wisped along high above that kept pulling his eyes away from the hectic activity around him and up towards that narrow ribbon of bright afternoon sky. Even as he walked along the sidewalk the rhythmic pace of his new running shoes energized every movement of his body.

“She picked me,” he sighed, “at last.”

He was sure where he was going. Her directions to the restaurant had been so precise that any idiot could have found it.

“Should I e-mail you a map,” she had messaged him.

“No!” he had replied, “See you there at 4:00.”

“I’ll be wearing a white dress and a white jacket,” she had added and attached a picture. She was as pretty as he had imagined. The box, deep in the warmth of his pocket, twirled in his hand, over and over as he paced. He couldn’t wait to finally meet her. He looked up as he turned to cross the intersection with the mob of people waiting impatiently. The sky was clear now. The light turned green and they all surged toward the other side of the street.

His heart started to race even more than it had all morning. He caught his reflection in the store

window. He looked so serious. His mouth changed from clenched teeth to a broad white smile again. A first impression lasts a lifetime, his mother often said. He had not told his mother about her, and a slight hint of regret edged his eyes. But when he arrived at the entrance to the restaurant, his eyes refocused quick and dedicated to his mission.

She was seated at a table in the middle of the huge crowd, her pretty face aimed right at him. She rose to meet him. He inhaled the only scent of her he would ever have. As he felt the soft skin of her lips and cheeks as they kissed each other formally, quickly, she whispered, “I will detonate first. You wait across the street until the police and firemen arrive.”

“See you in Heaven,” he said.

“I’ll be waiting,” she breathed.

November/December “Themed” Writing Challenge Submissions... Milking One’s Muse

The Weighting Room

By Heather E. Tucker

64 tan and pea-green squares make up the waiting room floor—eight across and eight down. There are 32 chairs; all occupied. We could play human chess if we wanted. Though I sense no one here is interested.

Well, perhaps the suicidal man over there, if he thought he might have a chance of being taken out early in the game.

An angry restlessness permeates the room. Light filtering through the louvered blinds falls like prison bars across the inmates. The sign on the wall pronounces “Expected Wait—four hours”: An intolerable sentence for some. But for me, this time, this place is a gift. The pain in my back has eased a little, and I no longer think I’m dying. The faces around the room mirror anguish, despair, frustration, fear...I’m excited. I open my sketch pad, and start to draw.

I’m entranced by a young mother holding her two daughters. One is about three, the other just a baby. The older child is sobbing; her hand wrapped in a towel. The mother coos and whispers in her hair, “Sh-sh-sh, mommy’s here.” The baby starts to scream, demanding food. A man mutters under his breath, “For Christ sake,” and moves across the room. The mother calmly unbuttons her blouse; baby hunts, finds breast; prayers answered. It’s a holy moment; the infant raises a tiny hand in thanksgiving to Mother God.

With one child appeased, the mother turns and comforts her wounded three-year old.

Quiet descends, for a few moments they rest. Soon, too soon, the baby pulls away and starts to cry again; her sister joins the refrain. A

stranger senses the mother’s desperation. She rises and takes the wailing infant.

She’s a pro. A musician with an instrument she knows how to play; she sways, drums back, baby settles. The silence is music, especially to the young mother. She sighs gratefully, “Thank-you.” Then, perhaps hoping for a pardon, she confesses, “I just turned away for a second and my little girl burned her hand on the iron.”

The older woman leans down and whispers, “We learn not to iron dear.” Every woman within hearing nods in agreement. We are all witness to a simple act of human kindness.

A little boy is watching me draw. We exchange smiles. A nurse approaches his mother and announces, “There are no treatment rooms available. I’m going to start his intravenous here.” He looks terrified.

He is holding a giraffe, and I ask, “Can I draw him?” He nods. “Now, watch carefully, make sure I’m doing it right.” I draw an elephant. He says, “No, this,” and raises the giraffe. I draw a dog and a cat; he laughs. The IV is in. Then I draw the giraffe, and give it to him.

I sketch the hysterical teenager with a gash on her chin. She sobs with well-rehearsed drama, “It’s going to scar, I know it!” I want to show her the scar on my forehead, tell her about when I was shot trying to protect my gay roommate. Okay, so it’s from having a mole removed, but the story’s evolving into a really good one. That’s the thing isn’t it? Sometimes we tell the story in a way that makes us feel broken all the time, and sometimes we emerge a hero. Every moment, life unfolds around us in Polaroids, proverbs, treasure maps, and we just toss them aside as useless scraps. Perhaps I am naïve, but don’t assume it’s because I have

never experienced the wait, or the weight.

There is a room behind this one. It has smaller pea-green tiles: seven across and nine down. It is stained by tears and lives ripped open. It’s where you wait when your pain is too great for others to see. Once I came to this place with someone I loved, loved deeply. I waited. “I’m sorry there was nothing we could do.” Life weighted. I left alone.

Now, I am sketching a girl who was attacked by three other girls. Her face reflects fear and betrayal; my chest aches while I draw. A woman watching says, “The light is beautiful.”

I examine the sketch, “Actually, the beauty’s in the shadow, that’s what reflects the light, gives it depth.” I want to tell her not to miss the shadows around her, not to waste them or throw them away. But, it’s not my place.

They call my name. The nurse apologizes for the wait. I say, “No need, I actually had a pretty good time.” She looks at me like I’m delusional or stoned. “Sometimes when we wait, the weighting becomes lighter.”

“Huh?” She checks my chart to verify I’m there to see the kidney doc and not the psychiatrist. “The doctor will be in shortly.”

“No hurry, I can wait.”

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

To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism; to steal from many is research.

Be Your Own Muse

By Kevin Craig

Aoide, Melete, and Mneme were the daughters of Gaea and Uranus. They were also the three original Greek Muses, Aoide being the muse of song, Melete of meditation and Mneme of memory.

Why am I telling you this? These lovely ladies are each instrumental in the creation of *your* poetry. All have something to share and enrich your poems with. All poetry reaches to attain music, or at the very least a lyrical melody. All poetry, either while being written or read, should feel like a meditation. And lastly, all poetry is contingent on the poet being able to capture those initial creative sparks and commit them to memory long enough to work them into their eventual poetic states.

The idea of a creative muse has become something close to cliché these days, but for the sake of this article, let us imagine that there are three omnipotent muses found within each poet. (You're a poet...use your imagination!) Whether you're new to poetry or a seasoned professional, these three aspects of *musedom* can assist you in your poetic quests.

Your own inner-muse of song would do well to remember to read aloud everything you write. Don't underestimate how helpful it is to *hear* your poetry. You don't have to jump on stage, microphone in hand, and spout off your words to an assembled audience. What I mean is that you should, while writing, read your words aloud, give them life and listen to the sound their collaborations make. What looks good on paper doesn't necessarily translate harmonically to the ear. A good

poem will always appeal to the ear. You have this muse within you at all times. You need only speak to employ it. It is in the quiet moments of creation that meditation helps breathe life into the poet's work. Do not turn your back on the peace this inner-muse can provide. After a wired day of work, traffic, shopping and family responsibilities, the poet will often sit down to write and be surprised when they come up with nothing. The thoughts racing through your head are only the reminders of tasks undone, deadlines looming and the myriad stresses of your everyday life. It's a good idea to allow your meditation muse a few moments of quiet reflection before attempting the intangible world of poetics. Sit and relax in a quiet inner-sanctuary before you tackle poetry. You will not believe how invigorating it is to just let the day's struggles fall away. Your thoughts will then slowly turn to creativity and you will find yourself slipping into that place of *initial sparks* needed to enter the more calming world of poetry. When you write from a relaxed state of mind your poetry will reflect this harmony and your reader will get a sense of the meditation you employed to create your work. They will find themselves sharing that meditative space with you.

I have long ago realized that, as a creative person, I have absolutely no steadfast hold on my memory. Thoughts blink across the landscape of our minds at an immeasurably alarming rate. When you have a fleeting glimpse at a poetic thought your first reaction is to capture it and put it into words. Here is where the practical muse of memory comes in handy. This muse carries paper and pen with them at all times. Don't trust yourself to

remember a brilliant idea you think can be parlayed into an award-winning poem. The thoughts that race across your mindscape during a hectic day are intangible. You *will* lose the good ones if you don't commit them to memory. Stop what you're doing and jot down the thought. If not, you will have this lingering sensation that a great poetic line has come to you, like a train pulling into a station, and is now slowly fading away behind you. You will see it as it evaporates out of sight and you will sense its greatness, but its essence will leave you completely if you don't map its memory to paper for a future writing session. So be your own memory-muse. Carry pen and paper with you everywhere you go. Don't trust your golden nuggets to be there later, when you're ready to use them. Thoughts don't work that way. To recap, you can ignore the cliché that muses have become. But don't ignore what they initially represented: Song, meditation and memory. These things are all helpful to the process of poetics. Always read your work aloud. Always step into a poetic mind frame gradually, *after* releasing the menacing baggage of your workaday life. And always, always be prepared to jot down those brilliant initial sparks before they fade away. Your inner-poet will thank you for following these three simple rules.

Kevin Craig keeps his muses on a very short leash. Why should they control the pen! Kevin is busy finishing his novel, *Summer on Fire*, hoping to see an end sometime soon. Poetry, though, is a nice distraction from this goal.

Lamentation: Two Editors Overheard

"I've seen it before in others...where a writer thinks the only thing standing between them and a Pulitzer is a stamp and when I read their work the only good thing I could say is that I loved the font they chose.

VACUUM MAN

By Sue Eaman

I recently downsized into a condominium townhouse and although all the rooms in my new place are small, the smallest by far is the furnace room. I actually refer to it as the “furnace closet.” This little space under the stairs houses not only the furnace but the central vacuum as well. On top of that there are all the attachments including the 30-foot central vac hose, some brooms and mops that won’t fit anywhere else, and, oh yeah, the kitty litter too. Quite efficient use of space if you ask me.

Last week, however, the vacuum just up and died. No power, no suction, no cleaning, no nothing. In response to my panicky phone call, the vacuum repairman arrived quickly. He was a tall, dark, good looking young man dressed in a tight black shirt and pants that showed off his lean, fit body. His shirt was opened partway down and revealed a gold chain caught up in his black chest hair. He brought a helper, and after I had emptied the room/closet of everything portable, they performed some interesting gyrations as they climbed into the closet together and took out the machine. As they headed out the door,

Vacuum Man promised to rush the repairs. The next day Vacuum Man called and declared my vacuum ready to be reinstalled. He arrived an hour later and alone. I looked at him, then at the vacuum, and finally at the tiny closet. I asked rather hesitantly, “Do you need some help?” He said if I could just grab hold of his flashlight and get in beside the furnace behind where the vacuum was to go, he could see the job better. It was obvious that I would have to crawl into the space with the flashlight first. I got down on my knees and squeezed in, secretly cursing myself for having dropped out of aerobics class last spring. Vacuum Man scrunched in after me. As I turned around I could see his muscles flexed below his rolled up sleeves as he balanced the machine. Our bodies connected in unexpected places and his day-old stubble rubbed against my arm. *Couldn't he at least have shaved for our date?* I had a really good view of his left ear and saw a hole in the lobe where a stud must have been at one time. It was very quiet except for our heavy breathing and I could smell his deodorant—that new popular Axe brand. Then, as he tightened fittings, another challenge—he dropped his screwdriver between his feet. In our current positions it fell to me to retrieve

it. Slowly twisting closer to the floor, my eyes focused on a small tear in the knee of his pant leg—crudely hand stitched with black thread. I blindly hand searched until I found the screwdriver. Then, terrified I might touch Vacuum Man in inappropriate places, I rose carefully, batoning the screwdriver with the sharp end pointing downward, just like the scissors rule in kindergarten. Oblivious to the danger, he grabbed it and continued working. Finally Vacuum Man heaved a sigh, no doubt relieved that the vacuum installation was complete. Reluctantly I disentangled legs and arms and waited while he backed out of the closet. I followed behind. I paid the bill. And then I said goodbye to the handsome stranger who had, for a few fleeting moments, shared my personal space.

Now I am listening carefully to my furnace and wondering if it needs any new parts.

Sue Eaman has been a writer ever since grade eight when she edited the class yearbook. She writes humorous articles and essays. When not writing Eaman is the principal at Yorkdale Adult Learning Centre where she promotes literacy as the key to student academic success. Sue joined the board of WCDR last year as special events co-ordinator.

January/February Free-for-all Writing Challenge

Idiom:

A manner of speaking that is natural to native speakers of a language.

Examples like:

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.

Don't be ungrateful when given something. By counting the teeth you can tell the age of a horse. Checking whether a present of a horse was old was considered rude.

Or

High on the hog.

This saying denotes one who is affluent and well fed, like the upper region of the hog's body which is considered the tastiest and most costly part.

So, “go out on a limb” and “go the extra mile.” “Get your mojo working” to create idioms of your own and send them to:

wordweaver@wcd.org

By December 20, 2005.

P a e a n s

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

Aprille Janes, former president of WCDR and world traveller, was a contributor to the new women's anthology *Outside of Ordinary: Women's Travel Stories*, published by Second Story Press.

Susan Lynn Reynolds, author of the award winning novel *Strandia*, is a poet as well. Sue's two poems "Leaving Your Mark" and "It's Been Three Weeks Since You've Seen Him and It's Friday Night and You're Buying Groceries For His Imminent Arrival" were included in the new anthology *Poetry Night In Muskoka*.

Rich Helms' cover story for the Oct 29, 2005 issue of *The Toronto Sun's* "Autonet Drive" section highlighted his travels in his smart car.

Graham Ducker received a certificate and honourable mention for his story "Ship Building" in the 74th *Writer's Digest* Writing Competition—in which there were about 18,000 entries. Way to go, Graham!

Martin Avery had eight articles published in *North Country Business*, two in *Muskoka Today*, one in *Muskoka Magazine* and one in *Toronto Luxury Living Report*. And, as if he wasn't already busy enough, Martin recently completed editing the poetry anthology *Poetry Night In Canada*, which was published by the Bracebridge Public Library. To top off his wildly successful run, Martin will facilitate a creativity workshop at the Pickering Public Library in November 2005. The PPL is also hosting The Great Canadian Winter Novel Marathon. Check out the library website for details at www.picnet.org.

Sue Reynolds had her article, "Faith: How I know what I know," published by *Timeless Spirit Magazine* online at:

www.timelessspirit.com/NOV05/sue.shtml

Yours truly (a.k.a. **Deborah A. Rankine**) had her poem "Death Watch" published in the Fall 2005 issue of *Quills Canadian Poetry Magazine*.

Dylan Robertson was invited to join *The Catholic Register* (newspaper) to participate in a one-year training program as well as a youth speak news reporter. This newspaper is affiliated with Salt & Light Television, and Dylan hopes there will be an opportunity for him to learn about script writing and other aspects of the media too.

Dorothy Sjoholm had her poem "The Other Voice" accepted for publication by Jones Av.

Ingrid Ruthig has cause to celebrate. Not only is she featured to read at one of the GTA's premier literary venues, but Ingrid also took first place in the Eden Mills Writers' Festival literary contest. Her set of poems "Rumours of Sky" netted her an enthusiastic nod from judges Emma Donoghue, Susan Hancock and Randa Wright, along with a first place prize of \$500. Congratulations, Ingrid!

A favourite short story, written by **Jo Sorrill** after a trip to Newfoundland, was published in the great new Canadian magazine *Our Canada*, along with a couple of her personal photographs.

Barbara Hunt had a poem accepted for publication in the premier edition of *Ascent Aspirations Magazine*. Bravo Barbara!

Martin Avery won a writing award from *The Muskokan's* "Best of Muskoka" contest for his non-fiction piece about the best Muskoka canoe routes. He also won The Spirit Award from the Muskoka Novel Marathon this year. and is now the writer-in-residence at the Pickering Public Library, where he is planning, among other things, to organize a novel marathon in February 2006.

WCDR member **Susan Lynn Reynolds** was awarded an Honourable Mention as well as a cash prize in this year's Timothy Findley Creative Writing Prize from Trent University for her two short stories, "Kite Flying" and "A Good Sport." The awards committee included Governor General's Award winner Julie Johnson, English chair Beth Popham, and past English chair James Neurfeld.



And, because the holidays are just around the corner, remember this...

An unbreakable toy is useful for breaking other toys.

(This has nothing whatsoever to do with writing but it tickled my funny bone and I'm the editor.)

2005 Professional Development

PORT PERRY FREEFALL WRITING WORKSHOP

By Barbara Turner-Vesselago

Wednesday evenings, 7–9:30 pm.
from **November 9 to December 15, 2005**
at the Epsom United Church,
16532 Marsh Hill Road, Epsom.

Cost: \$310, (\$285 for WCDR members)

Contact: Barbara Hunt, **905-985-4409**
hipoint.manor@sympatico.ca
or Suzanne Edwards
suzedwards@rogers.com

Internationally-reknown writing teacher Barbara Turner-Vesselago will again be conducting a six-week session this fall in the Port Perry/Uxbridge area. The program consists of writing exercises, submissions and discussions. Two and a half hours each week provides ample opportunity for the constructive exchange of experience within the group as well as discussion of the freefall techniques that W.O. Mitchell used at the Banff School for the Arts.



THE WRITING FAIRY BUSINESS OF WRITING WORKSHOP

By Dorothea Helms

Saturday, November 19, 2005,
10:00 a.m. (Registration starts at
9:30 a.m.) to 4:00 p.m.

Location to be announced

Cost: \$110 (\$100 for WCDR,
HHWEN and WEN members) (reg-
istration includes a free copy of
Dorothea's book on writing.)

BY PRE-REGISTRATION ONLY:

Deadline for registering is Novem-
ber 9th. Make cheque payable to
"The Writing Fairy" and mail to:
Dorothea Helms,
S10895 Sideroad 17, RR #1,
Sunderland, ON L0C 1H0.

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



Do you believe that it's impossible for writers to make a good living in Canada today? Did you work a tremendous number of hours last year writing for little money? Have you ever heard, "Oh, you're a writer, but what's your REAL job?"

If you answered "Yes" to any or all of the above, you need this workshop. A natural choice for a home-based business, writing can be a fulfilling and lucrative career, *if* approached as an entrepreneurial venture. The demand for freelance writing and editing services stems from a wide variety of clients. This workshop provides an overview of what is involved in starting up a writing business—from motivation, to targeting markets, approaching editors and keeping pertinent receipts and records. Learn how to avoid the common mistakes writers make and how to charge for various jobs.

Workshop leader Dorothea Helms is owner of Write Stuff Writing Services, a thriving home-based writing/editing business. She is also a business trainer, and has helped dozens of entrepreneurs start their own businesses. Since 2000, her freelance business has pulled in more than \$100,000 in revenue per year, and in 2000 was nominated for a prestigious Rotman Canadian Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

Some things to ponder, until we meet again...

If a word is misspelled in the dictionary, how would we ever know?

If Webster wrote the first dictionary, where did he find the words?

Why do "overlook" and "oversee" mean opposite things?

B r e a k f a s t I n f o r m a t i o n

November 12, 2005, guest speaker...Ted Barris.

Ted Barris, multi-faceted author, broadcaster and columnist, will be our guest speaker in November. His most recent book is *Days of Victory*. Barris will give us the inside scoop on the process of writing historical/literary non-fiction. He will look at such things as: where to start; how to focus an idea; what publishers and editors look for; how to pitch a subject (query letters); the do's and don'ts of interviewing; and methods for organizing, sorting and framing the writing. Barris has been teaching journalism at Centennial College for five years now. Says Barris, "Communicating these sorts of concepts is an important part of my attention and livelihood. I will talk not so much about the stories I gather, but about the art of making those stories leap off the page and get noticed by those who make publishing decisions."

December 10, 2005, guest speakers...Adam Risbridger and Byron Laviolette.

In December, two vibrant young performers and writers will present a fun, interactive experience that will offer insights into how to write funny, as well as how to go about performing your own work.

Adam Risbridger and **Byron Laviolette** have been writing and performing together for eight years. The pair met in the Arts York program at Unionville High School in 1996 and have performed in over 100 shows together. They are both members of the Canadian Improv Showcase where they get to travel around the world introducing the art of improvisational comedy to anyone who will bear witness. For complete Risbridger and Laviolette bios visit www.wcdr.org.

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

F.Y.I.

- Tickets for Steve Martin's play "Picasso at the Lapin Agile" will be on sale at WCDR's November breakfast meeting. This Tuesday, November 15, 2005 performance by the Whitby Court house Theatre will benefit **Words in Whitby 2006**. Tickets are \$10 each, general admission.
- Quick! Check out WCDR's Online 24-hour Non-fiction Contest Saturday November 12, 2005 at www.wcdr.org.
- Look in the pages of the upcoming January/February 2006 *Word Weaver* issue for highlights from WCDR's 10th anniversary gala!
- Read Nancy Del Col's "Who's Who" interview with WCDR member **Heather Whaley** in the next issue of *Word Weaver*.

WCDR Board of Directors

and their e-mail addresses

Sherry Hinman
President
president@wcdr.org

Barbara Hunt
Vice President/Public Relations
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pr@wcdr.org

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speaker@wcdr.org

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breakfast2005@wcdr.org
workshop@wcdr.org

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

WCDR's Annual Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest

This Writers' Circle of Durham Region sponsored contest honours Durham poet and member, Dan Sullivan, who passed away at the inaugural Poets in the Pub night on March 13, 1995. This contest is a tribute to a poet, friend and man of many accomplishments. Categories include adult, youth (under 18) and children (under 12). Winners will be honoured at the WCDR June 2006 breakfast meeting.

Entry fee is \$15.00 for Adults and Free to Children and Youth. Adult prizes are: First Place \$300, Second Place \$200 and Third Place \$100. Children and Youth prizes are: First Place \$25, Second Place \$15 and Third Place \$10. Up to three poems can be submitted, on any theme or subject, but the total cannot exceed 30 lines in length.

Guidelines and further information on the contest may 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, Bayly Postal Outlet, Health Rite Pharmacy, P.O. Box 14558, 75 Bayly Street West, Ajax, ON L1S 7K7.

Phone 905-686-0211. Web address: www.wcdr.org

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

Editor/Desktop Publishing
Deborah A. Rankine

Copy Editor
Sherry Hinman

We welcome your input!

Send comments to

wordweaver@wcdr.org

or

The *Word Weaver*, c/o WCDR
Bayly Postal Outlet, Health Rite Pharmacy
P.O. Box 14558, 75 Bayly Street West
Ajax, ON L1S 7K7