



THE WORD WEAVER

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

September/October 2005 Vol. 11 No. 5

Listening to My Inner Muse Tick

By Neil Crone

I was asked after a live improv comedy show, “How do you think up all that stuff?” And “Aren’t you terrified you’ll run out of ideas?” I explained that my biggest challenge onstage was not running out of ideas, but choosing from the many ideal prompts thrown my way by my fellow actors. As improvisers, we are trained to accept and run with the first spark of an idea that comes into our heads. We can always switch horses later on, but with a live audience watching, we do not have the luxury (or curse) of time to think about it.

That’s what generally hangs writers up. *The time to think about it.* Mull something over too long and you’ll find lots of ways to hate it or negate it. But jump in and start writing and you may find it takes you somewhere very interesting. I think that’s why a deadline may be a writer’s best friend.

When I first began writing a weekly column—five years and more than 200 pieces ago—I admit I had the odd week when I freaked over what to write about. That sinking “Oh my God! I’ve run out!” feeling, when I’d start madly thrashing through my mind like a tardy prom queen through an underwear drawer, searching for something, anything, to say. The more panicky I got, the lousier each prospective idea seemed. I ended up thinking if it’s not immediate comedic gold or the wisdom of Solomon, what’s the point?

But after a few months and more than a few close deadlines, I began to relax and trust that something would always present itself. And that is exactly what happened. Week by week, if I took a careful, slow look at the latest pages of my life, sure as shootin’, there would be at least one or two

things highlighted in yellow that begged a closer inspection. And, more times than not, they were hardly momentous—the huge glob of toothpaste that mysteriously appeared on the wall, six inches from the ceiling; a nervous visit to the hardware store; the suspect appearance of a new Coke machine outside the seniors’ residence. Not exactly headlines, but very human. I sometimes think I am in the business of making mountains out of molehills. These sometimes microscopic, wonderfully familiar life slices are everywhere, but like bird-watchers, we need to get very still to see them.

I like to write about the human condition and I am forever fascinated by the people who come in and out of my life. I never tire of watching them and they never cease to give me things to write about—especially my own children. The gifts they present me with are twofold: They are spontaneous, wickedly funny little creatures who are constantly offering up new ways to look at the world, and they are oftentimes the hands that lead me happily back into my own childhood. I have yet to venture to that wonderful place and come out empty-handed.

Finally, for a long time, I felt because I wrote a humour column all my pieces had to be...well...humorous. This is usually not a problem (at least in *my* mind), but there are days and weeks when I’m not feeling very funny. Like anyone, there are times when I am terribly sad or angry. I struggled with this for a good while, expending kilojoules of energy trying to put a “happy face” sticker on a life that was sometimes preoccupied with much darker subject matter, until a newspaper friend of mine said, “You know, Neil, they don’t all have to be

funny.” That was terrifically liberating. I began to give myself licence to write about the other side of laughter. And what I found is that very often the greatest laugh lies alongside the biggest tear. By allowing myself to explore the tragic as well as the funny, I exponentially increased the depth of my “idea” well.

Essentially then, for me, it’s all about slowing down. When I sit quietly, my mind clears and my vision sharpens. It’s like putting on writing goggles. You see stuff you missed the first time around, when your mind was busy channel surfing.

Try it and you’ll see what I’m talking about. An enormous amount of things happen to each of us every day. We interact with family members, friends, children, spouses, relatives, co-workers, complete strangers. Information and ideas pour into our minds through radio, newspaper, television, telephone, books, e-mail, the Internet. Have you any idea how many thoughts float through your head in 24 hours? It’s incalculable. Spend some time in that particular sandbox and you’ll very quickly understand the improviser’s conundrum of “How do I possibly choose?”

Neil Crone, a Second City Mainstage alumnus, has been performing improvised and sketch comedy for over 20 years. As well as being an award-winning humour columnist for Metroland newspapers, Neil writes stories for big and little kids. His first children’s book, *I Am Dead at Recess*, published by Tumbleweed Press, is available online at www.childrenselibrary.com.

A Message from THE BOARD

By Sherry Hinman, WCDR President

The sun sets a few minutes earlier each evening now, and there's a mixture of melancholy and anticipation as summer comes to a close and fall activity looms. In some religions, September is the start of the new year, and this seems to be a more apt time for it than the dead of winter. Our physical surroundings change as leaves imperceptibly take on their autumn hue, kids line up at school and a faint chill slips into the air.

Writers are exquisitely tuned to these changes as August turns to September. This seems to be a time to settle down to what we've been planning to do, including a more serious return to writing. It's the time we take that writing workshop or reconnect with friends at a WCDR breakfast, where we encourage each other to begin again, or just to begin.

Here at the board, we haven't exactly been idle all summer, as we prepare for a special fall season. We recently held an afternoon-long meeting, graciously hosted by Ruth-Anne Mullan, where we dined on potluck delicacies and brainstormed ideas for the WCDR year.

This fall, we'll provide you with a lineup of top-notch speakers at our breakfasts and workshops; we hope you'll be entertained and enlightened. Our third WCDR online non-fiction contest will take place in November. By the time you read this, we will have hosted our special members-only event, *Would You Turn the Page*, where an agent and an editor will critique the first page of members' work (anonymously) in front of the group. Participants will get a glance into that mysterious world where editors and agents make life-and-death decisions (or so it seems to the authors!) about whether our manuscripts are worthy of publication.

Saving the best for last, if you haven't yet marked your calendar for the evening of Saturday, Oct. 29, do it now! As you know, this is WCDR's 10th anniversary year and we're sending off the year with an evening gala. Everyone is welcome: current and past members, speakers, writing circle participants, library staff, local press, politicians and anyone else who has been touched by WCDR in some way over the past 10 years.

Taking advantage of its proximity to Halloween night, we decided the gala should be a formal masquerade, so hit the dollar store early for your black mask! We'll have a storyteller, unveil the new WCDR logo, and give away door prizes. Bring a pen, so you can fill the signature pages of your WCDR yearbook. There'll be plenty of hors d'oeuvres, wine and a cash bar. Watch your mailbox for your invitation.

One last note before I wrap up this message: just a short commercial about the editor of this newsletter. *The Word Weaver* is gathered, designed, illustrated, published, lovingly cajoled, carefully orchestrated and laboriously mailed by our newsletter editor extraordinaire, Deborah Rankine, who has now entered her second year as captain of this ship. Could we please have a hearty round of applause? Thank you. And thank you, Deborah.

P a e a n s

Kudos!

Durham Region Writers Are Winners!

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

Barbara Hunt was pleased to be included in Hidden Brook Press's *Open Window IV* poetry anthology as a runner-up with her poem "Making Waking Sense Walk."

The CSI: Miami board game is now available in stores. If you purchase one, be sure to open the instruction booklet and look at the credits in the front—two of our members, **Valerie Mutton** and **Dorothea Helms**, are listed as contributing writers.

Graham Ducker was selected to be a poet of the week at www.poetrysuperhighway.com. His work appeared online during the first week of August 2005.

GrammarPuss

Here it is back-to-school and back-to-breakfast time at WCDR, and with the falling of the leaves, so GrammarPuss puts down her pen.

This will be her last column. While the world of grammar holds endless fascination for GrammarPuss, the truth is that it doesn't hold endless topics about which to write. Next issue, GrammarPuss's good friend will begin to write "Editorial Eyes," a column devoted to all those things that might catch the eyes of an editor. It's a much broader topic—while still able to address those niggling grammar and punctuation issues (over which a copy editor might obsess), it opens up vast expanses of new topics on which her good friend may alight.

And so I leave you with a few final grammatical boondoggles that still give GrammarPuss pause, and then I say goodbye.

Gender Neutral Pronouns

Pronouns are those generally little words that substitute for nouns. While some, such as "it" and "their," are already neutral, we seem to always run into a conundrum when it comes to his/her and he/she.

Many people have chosen to avoid having to choose by sticking to "their," which, while it does set Puss's teeth on edge, can be swallowed if it's conceivable that the noun in question is at least plural; for example, "When someone walks into the Ministry of Transportation office to renew their driver's licence, they must have their picture taken." This is bad enough, since clearly we are referring to individuals, but GrammarPuss finds it downright unacceptable when the pronoun patently refers to a single entity: "Because one student was so nervous about it, even the doctor was vaguely uneasy while giving them their shot." In past times, the grammatically correct answer was to use the masculine pronoun—in this case, "give *him* his shot." Although she would argue that it is a matter of form and not of discrimination, Puss does understand the reluctance of some writers to ap-

pear biased. In such cases, Puss would argue for the reconstruction of the entire sentence, eliminating the need for a choice between "his" and "her," "he" and "she," in cases where the masculine or feminine identity of the noun being replaced is not known: "One student was so nervous that even the doctor became uneasy while administering a shot." In cases where the noun being replaced is obviously singular, GrammarPuss begs you to consider sticking with the singular masculine pronoun, even if it means putting one's writerly neck on the line for a grammatical cause. One's writing is not always best served by writing *around* grammar issues, but by having the steely determination to write *through* them.

Apostrophe Misuse

Apostrophes are used to create possessives (except when it comes to pronouns, which is a good way to remember that the possessive "its" gets no apostrophe), to create contractions and occasionally (Puss repeats this word—occasionally—just to be absolutely clear) to create plurals, when to leave out the apostrophe would confuse the reader. Such a case may be: My daughter gets straight A's at school. If we leave the apostrophe out, we are left with "My daughter gets straight As at school," which could easily cause the reader to have to read the sentence a second or third time, and so it behooves the reader—and therefore the writer—to use the apostrophe. GrammarPuss is alarmed by the rampant misuse of apostrophes to create plurals willy-nilly, particularly on large sandwich boards and such like: Pastrami Sandwich's \$2.50. While GrammarPuss has occasionally been driven to discreetly use her paw to correct such mistakes, it isn't always possible, and so Puss beseeches one to take special care when about to commit this crime oneself.

Commas for Everyone!

This is a modern trend GrammarPuss finds particularly annoying, and yet its popularity seems to grow in direct proportion with the

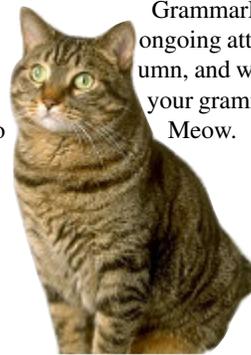
level of Puss's irritation. It would seem that every name, in every purpose, these days deserves to be set off by commas: Gardening expert, Jim Brown, will be appearing at the store. When we use commas to set off a name, it is because the name is extraneous (in that the sentence conveys the meaning with or without the name contained by the commas, such as when only one such person exists: The greatest surrealist of all time, Salvador Dali, appeared at the event) or because the name is appositive, in that it has the same referent as information that came before it (My mother, Moira, was over that day). While one could argue that Dali was not, in fact, the greatest surrealist who ever lived, for grammatical purposes, it serves the point. And one cannot argue that "my mother" and "Moira" are not the same person.

One such criterion for comma use is that we must be able to completely remove the name set off by the commas (and the commas themselves) and at least have the sentence remain grammatically sound: "Gardening expert will be appearing at the store" is sadly lacking an article and is easily spotted as erroneous. This is an excellent way to wage your own war on badly placed commas—if one cannot safely remove the name set off by the commas, one should remove the commas.

There is an argument to be made for leaving the commas off what are referred to as "close appositives" in the interest of narrative flow, and GrammarPuss is inclined to agree. She would forgive you, then, for writing "my brother Jim" even if Jim is your only brother.

GrammarPuss thanks you for your ongoing attention to her little column, and wishes you well with all your grammar issues in the future.

Meow.



Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are unnecessary.

Frank L. Visco—*How to Write Good*

Odds & Eds

By Deborah A. Rankine,
Word Weaver Editor

It's true, the postman does ring twice. That's what mine did this past July. He asked me if I'd been stalking him. I told him that, in fact, I'd been doing just that, and why, and then I apologized.

"Oh," he said, an Oprah light bulb moment sparking his face. "I should have put two and two together. It's July. You're just like my wife." Then he added in his best Cliff Clavin voice, "You know it's not the post office who delivers it, right?"

I didn't have the heart to tell him I'd already figured that one out and had tipped the kid who did the delivery two bucks, so overjoyed was I that my new IKEA catalogue had finally arrived. I said I was sorry a second time and vowed never to stalk him again.

You see, I'm a sucker for anyone or anything that promises me a better, more rewarding life. So, when IKEA touted that, with good planning, I could live large in a small space, craft a perfect POÄNG, and even sleep with (a) SULTAN—though I don't think they meant the one from Brunei—I was putty in their marketing hands.

Armed with my new catalogue and wish list, I headed west (to North York), anxious to *carry out* my new life. I arrived at the store early so I could enjoy the IKEA chef's breakfast. And although I got a lot of bangers for my buck, I must say his home fries couldn't hold a VARDAG to our brekkie tater tots. Maybe I'm biased.

Fortified, I followed the arrows on the floor, backtracking every now and then in a pseudo-Swedish line dance to fancy myself propped up like a queen on an ASPELUND, my SULTAN beneath me. Or, in the dining room display, sitting at the head of my new maximum living, minimum priced MELLA, my guests comfortably flanked at either side on MELKERS, BATTBYs raised, toasting my *joie de vivre*. I smiled wistfully at the image and moved on.

Next, I spied a portal to a new world—the kids' department. I say "new world" only because I never had access to IKEA's products during my children's formative years. I wondered, *Would I have been a better mother if I had? Would they have been different kids? But, still, I did have two young nephews to spoil who, at the ages of six and four, already spoke three languages: English, broken Italian and Gameboyerm.* Here were a couple of 21st-century prodigies who deserved a little something special. I trod softly into the unknown, carrying a body-hugging, promising-yellow IKEA shop-

ping bag, my pencil at the ready and my list with ample room at the bottom for add-ons.

I held a flat, black disc in front of the lone sales associate's nose. "What is this?" I asked, ignoring the queue before me. "How does it work?"

"That's-our-PS-FÄNGST-stor-age-u-nit," she said slowly, as though speaking pig Latin and, no doubt, feeling I needed time to catch up. "It's-three-dol-lars-off."

I rephrased the question. "But what does it do?"

"It holds toys, and the fastening opens if the kid tries to climb up the net," she huffed, all in one breath.

"Oh!" I said, as though I'd experienced an epiphany. I returned the whatcha-ma-call-it to the wire bin and moved on to more familiar territory. (Sorry, boys.)

Back on track, I landed smoothly in the lighting department, the possibilities—to say the least—illuminating. Who knew that four MELODIs over my faux butcher block kitchen counter, a KNAPPA brightening my harvest-gold Arborite table, and a KORSBY at either end of my lumpy sofa would add to the atmosphere and usefulness of my space! I soldiered to the warehouse/checkout area, so overjoyed was I by the life-altering possibilities now within my reach.

Too soon I became frustrated at not being able to locate my dream items that I had to enlist the assistance of the warehouse guy. "Where do you keep your ASPELUNDs and SULTANs? I've looked twice in the aisle they're supposed to be in. They're not there."

The warehouse guy motioned for me to follow him. From five paces behind—I swear—he looked beheaded.

"That's them there," he said, pointing to an eye-level shelf in the aisle from which I'd just come.

"But, that can't be my ASPELUND! It's flat as a pancake!"

"You know most of our stuff is RA, right?" he asked, sounding strangely like my postman.

"RA?" I repeated.

"Requires Assembly."

"OH! Oh? Oh," I said, deflated. "But it's too big! It'll never fit in my car."

"We offer delivery and assembly, but they're extra."

"You do know Leon's delivers for free, right?" I asked, fighting fire with fire.

"Well, yeah. But we let ya take your sofa home on the bus," Mr. Warehouse Man challenged.

I handed him my empty IKEA bag, thanked him for his time and left with my dream life still on paper.

IKEA was right; I should have planned better.

One's writing muse can be found in the "nothing specials" of everyday life—while walking the dog or watching kids navigate a playground. Even a trip to a home furnishings store can tickle one's writing fancy.

I used to think that sitting idle, be it in front of my blank computer screen or on a park bench, was a waste of my precious writing time, but that was because I wasn't savvy enough to understand that sitting quietly was part of the writing process. That's the trick to finding things to write about—stopping long enough to listen to your muse whispering megatons of ideas into your ear.

So, your "themed" writing challenge for the November/December issue of the *Word Weaver* is to milk your muse for all it's worth. Take a stroll around your block on blue box night and inventory the contents of your neighbours' recycling. Then ask yourself how on earth old widow Clark could have eaten 37 cans of tuna in a two-week period. Or why there are back issues of *Playboy* in Reverend Smith's box. And if you sit quietly for a while before the outing, you'll discover that you can take the journey without leaving your house.

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

wordweaver@wcd.org

Maximum word count: 800

Deadline: October 20, 2005



November/December Challenge

Start your story/poem with this:

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

Word Count: 400 maximum **Deadline:** October 20, 2005

Send your submission in the body of your e-mail to:

wordweaver@wcdr.org.

Writer Beware

By Marjorie Ludlow Green

Recently, I received a call from a man—a professional workshop leader and speaker—searching for someone to write a web page and flyer. He was pleasant, his references excellent, but something he said started alarm bells ringing. “Writers will usually give me the first piece as a sample of their work,” he said casually. “Then, if I like it, I’ll pay for all the work that comes after.”

Is this a neat scam or what! Give the guy a freebie and hope it results in paid work. If the first piece is great, he scores a two for one; if he says it’s crap, who would know if he uses it anyway. Either way, he cannot lose! And this “usually” works for him.

I had no intention of following his pattern, of course, but I promised to look at his website. He had expressed dissatisfaction with its lack of “uniformity.” And when I saw it, being an editor, I knew exactly what the problem was.

How many different “voices” spoke to me on all those pages? Novices or professionals, how many writers had contributed—paid or unpaid—to this site?

But still, having no proof that he wasn’t an honest man, I e-mailed my CV, including references and websites where he could view my work. I made it clear, diplomatically, that as a professional, my time is money. And that having received ample proof of my ability, he could expect no freebies from me.

The outcome was what I’d expected: I did not hear from the man again. But I’m certain that if I had, I would have lost him just as quickly—the moment I asked for my “usual” retainer. (Would I otherwise be paid for a first piece?)

The sad part is this person is still out there and (I’m being generous here) may not realize the damage he is doing. After all, writers are “a dime a dozen,” aren’t they? We just do this in our spare time, don’t we? And he can always find another. Well, can’t he?

My point in writing this is not to send out the alarm that a fox is at work in the hen house. This man may be on the up-and-up. But as a “professional,” he should know enough to show some respect for the writing profession.

I suppose there will always be writers willing to give away their work or cheapen their product to beat the competition. But each time one of us—novice or professional—sells out in any way, we need to realize exactly what we are doing. And that how we conduct our business will affect all our fellow writers—especially those who are trying (and too often, failing) to earn a decent living. And thus we continue to impact an entire industry.

So the moral of the story is: As much as you and I need to beware of the fox, more often, we need to be aware of personal greed. As Pogo the Possum (remember him?) once said, “I have seen the enemy, and they is us.”

If you can’t annoy somebody, there’s little point in writing.

Kingsley Amis

September/October “Themed” Challenge Submission... Riding the Emotionator

Afterglow

By Ruth E. Johnson

It was one of those hot, sticky summer cottage nights; my bedtime lengthened in hopes of a cool breeze—Mother Nature taking a different path and, finally, having her crickets sing me off to sleep. And on the edge of slaying dragons, I heard a rustling and then soft-spoken words. “Shhh, quiet, come with me. There’s something I want you to see,” Dad whispered.

My footsteps were muted by the pine needles carpeting the trail as I followed the shadow of my father down to the water’s edge. “Get in, son, and put on a life jacket.” I crept catlike over the side of the dock and into the boat. With the motor softly humming, we glided out

into the middle of the lake and stopped. Stillness, and then silence, surrounded us.

“Look up,” said Dad.

I turned my eyes starward and became aware of a strange glow in the air around me. It shimmered like a tide of moving green water, hugging me in its ebb and flow.

Dad answered my unspoken question. “Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights.”

Those were the last words spoken for the next half hour as I stretched out on the bow of the boat, my eyes glued to the night sky—light arcing and swirling and dancing to the music of the heavens. I was an eyewitness to this silent symphony, this chorus of colour swaying its way through the blackness. Time stood still. And then the lights dimmed and the concert ended.

Slowly, I became aware again of the gentle

rocking of the boat and the drifting night sounds of the lake, and I was once more becoming part of the real world. Moon glow lit our way back toward the shore, and I knew I had left a little piece of my childhood out there between the water and the sky.



Ruth E. Johnson was born in Northern Ontario, and eventually moved to Pickering, Ontario, where she raised a family while pursuing her artistic interests in painting, poetry and music. Ruth’s poem “Memories of Old” was published in the anthology *Signatures*.

September/October Writing Challenge Submissions: Wickedly Creative Similes

To continue an argument with your wife is like persisting in climbing a cactus. Once you reach the top, you will wonder if the climb was worth the effort.

GRAHAM DUCKER

Ideas and thoughts were zinging through her head like the lights and sounds of a pinball machine.

ANNE NIELSEN

Her blood was warm like bath water and he enjoyed watching it saturate her hair, colouring the edges red like the tops of 100 paintbrushes.

PAMELA HAMILTON

Her cries escaped through sobs like bubbles rising to the surface of water that’s about to boil, finally roiling into one loud, continuous scream.

PAMELA HAMILTON

2005 Professional Development

The Writing Fairy Humour Writing Workshop

By Dorothea Helms

Saturday, September 24, 2005, 10 a.m. (Registration starts at 9:30 a.m.) to 4 p.m.
Pickering Central Library Auditorium

She's back from the Humber Comedy School Summer Workshop with a revamped day of fun for those who want to write humour and comedy, or simply inject some lightness into traditional writing. Dorothea Helms, The Writing Fairy, will lead you through wacky creative exercises used by professionals who have to be funny on demand—exercises that will literally bring out the clown in you. She also shares some realities of the humour- and comedy-writing world.

Dorothea's humorous articles and essays have appeared in numerous magazines and newspapers across North America, including *LICHEN Arts & Letters Preview*, *STITCHES—The Journal of Med-*

ical Humour, *Popular Woodworking*, *Woodworker*, *The Business and Professional Woman*, *Real Estate Magazine*, *Homes Today*, *Homes and Lifestyles*, *Big Buck*, *Writer's Digest*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Sun*, and even *The Other Side of the Ship*, the newsletter of the Klingon Assault Guard of Canada. She also had a humorous personal essay featured on CBC Radio and included in the humour anthology *They Lied! True Tales of Pregnancy, Childbirth and Breastfeeding*.

In 2005, Dorothea published her first book on writing, *The Writing Fairy Guide to Calling Yourself a Writer*, which is a hilarious look at this psychological step in a writer's life. This year, Dorothea also won two awards for humorous personal essays. She was the inaugural recipient of the 2005 Barbara Novak Award For Excellence In Humour and/or Personal Essay Writing presented by the Periodical Writers Association of Canada for her essay "The Gift of Words," which appeared in the January 7, 2003, issue of *The Globe and Mail's*

Facts & Arguments section. She also tied for first place in the non-fiction adult category of The Haliburton Highlands Writers' and Editors' Network and The Agnes Jamieson Gallery 3rd Annual Writing Contest. Dorothea has served on the faculty of a humour-writing conference in Nebraska, and is pretty darned funny most of the time.

Cost: \$110 (\$100 for WCDR, HHWEN and WEN members. Registration includes a free copy of Dorothea's book.

BY PRE-REGISTRATION ONLY: Deadline for registering is September 14th.

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

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

Writing for Magazines

By Sherry Hinman

Tuesday nights, September 27–November 15, 2005, 6:45–8:45 pm
Oshawa Public Library, Northview Branch, 250 Beatrice St. E., Oshawa

Thinking about putting your ideas to work? There are loads of magazines out there just waiting to receive them! Take this eight-week course and learn the entire magazine-writing process, from idea to publication. Whether you've dabbled in magazine writing before or are just thinking about it, this course is for you.

By the end of this course, you'll know: how to find markets, where to get ideas, how magazines work, what are the different types of articles (features, profiles, reviews, how-to articles), how to write a query letter they'll READ, what to do when they say YES, how to research your topic, how to find experts and interview them, how to work with editors, your rights as a writer, how to structure your article, how to edit your own work, how to get paid and other money matters.

Cost: \$225 (\$200 for WCDR members)

Contact: Sherry Hinman
info@thewriteangle.ca
905-666-6615

Sherry Hinman is a freelance writer/editor and owner of The Write Angle. Sherry focuses on health writing but she has had articles published on a broad range of topics in *East of the City*, *ON Site East*, *Durham Trade and Commerce*, *CASLPO Today*, *Healthcare Careers4Ontario Handbook*, *Uxbridge Times-Journal*, *Voice of the Farmer* and *Oshawa/Whitby This Week*. Sherry teaches at Durham College and Oshawa Senior Citizens Centres and provides small business consulting to entrepreneurs through the Ontario Disability Support Program.

The Writing Fairy Workshop for Closet Writers

By Dorothea Helms

Saturday, October 15, 2005, 10 a.m. (Registration starts at 9:30 a.m.) to 4 p.m.
Mississauga location to be announced

This workshop is designed for people who think they sort of, kind of, maybe might like to be a writer, but don't really know what that means or what to do with writing once they've written it. If you love words and have a deep-seated desire to write them as well as read them, you are part of the vast segment of society known as closet writers.

Participants will enjoy a fun-filled, non-threatening day of writing exercises and enlightenment from this popular writing instructor. Dorothea's new book *The Writing Fairy Guide to Calling Yourself a Writer* was published this year, and has already encouraged readers across North America to tap into the passion they have buried deep inside.

Come and let Dorothea dispel some of the writing myths that may have been holding you back. Remember, the magic is in you, and it's up to you to unleash it. Isn't it time to come out of the word closet?

Cost: \$110 (\$100 for WCDR, HHWEN and WEN members. Registration includes a free copy of Dorothea's book.

BY PRE-REGISTRATION ONLY: Deadline for registering is October 5th. Mail cheque made out to "The Writing Fairy" to Dorothea Helms, S10895 Sideroad 17 RR #1, Sunderland, ON L0C 1H0.

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

My Comedic Muse Did It

By Dorothea Helms

In July, I attended the week-long Humber Comedy School Summer Workshop, and the hilarity began within five minutes of my arrival. I checked in at the new residence facility and was surprised to discover that I'd be sharing a two-bedroom suite complete with a kitchen and bathroom. I trotted up to the fourth floor, walked into my suite and met my roommate—a 19-year-old guy named Peter!

The moment was a bit awkward for both of us. OH NO, I thought, did I even bring a bathrobe? He must have been thinking something like, OH NO, this will be like rooming with my mother. "I guess things have changed since I was in college 30 years ago," I said. "I'm sure you didn't plan on rooming with a middle-aged, menopausal woman."

A perfect gentleman, Peter said, "Well, really, it's OK. We can figure it out. It'll be fine. Really." I suggested that I might return to the front desk and ask about the arrangements anyway.

"I'm not complaining," I said to the male student working the desk. "You gave me a handsome young man for a roommate—but I wonder if you meant to." He turned pale and said, "NO—we have a strict policy that we never assign a male and female to the same suite." Thus, Peter and I were thrust apart, but in the name of saving my 34-year marriage, it was for the best.

The next few days provided a realistic, and often hilarious, look at the world of professional comedy. I chose the comedy writing stream, while others participated in the stand-up classes, and still others in sketch comedy.

Our comedy writing instructor was Emmy Award-winning Lorne Frohman, who has worked as a writer and producer of feature films, TV specials, variety shows and sitcoms. From the moment Lorne walked into the classroom, I could tell we were in the presence of "Hollywood." His distinguished white hair was

combed straight back, and his clothing reeked of Rodeo Drive. With a voice that made him sound like a cross between Woody Allen and Jerry Seinfeld, he slipped in some teaching amid anecdotes about his experiences in the biz.

Larry Horowitz, director of Humber's Comedy programs, was the instructor for the stand-up students. He has written and performed stand-up comedy for nearly 30 years, and I recognized him as the comic from whom I'd taken an afternoon humour workshop in 1997.

For sketch comedy, students learned from Robin Duke of *Saturday Night Live* and *Women Fully Clothed* fame and David Flaherty, who also has 30 years in the biz and has served as writer/producer on *SCTV* and *Manic Mansion*.

Our week began on Saturday morning, and on Thursday evening we put on a comedy show for a real audience. Throughout the week, we spent part of our time in our classrooms with our instructors, and the rest listening to speakers and panels. On three of the evenings, we were invited to attend comedy shows in Toronto, two of which were at Yuk Yuk's. The comedy club's owner Mark Breslin co-founded the Humber Comedy School with Joe Kertes.

Our final-day treat was to sit in on a taping of *Distinguished Artists*—the television show that features Lorne Frohman interviewing familiar Canadians. Lorne's guest was Scott Thompson, who is well known for his work on *Kids in the Hall*. Scott is as hilarious now as he was back in the show's heyday. He stressed the importance of Canadian comedy performers being proud of their nationality, and he expressed frustration with the Canadian "literary" scene, which he believes ostracizes humour writing from its ranks unjustly—something I've believed for years.

Something I don't believe is a piece of advice that was offered over and over during the week—write what you know. I find that a limiting statement in humour writing for print, and I believe it limits performance comedy, too. If I write a story or skit about a serial killer, I don't intend to go around chopping off people's heads to

discover the character's motivation (as enticing as that may be during a hot flash on a 33-degree humid summer day). Humber experts or not, I believe that comedy writers, and all writers, can write anything we can research or imagine.

These are some of the other things I learned:

- Writing comedy for performance is different from writing humour for print.
- Most successful comedy writers today are also producers.
- Most sitcoms are written by 12 people sitting around a table arguing over plot points and dialogue (a warped form of design-by-committee that explains a lot).
- Many stand-up comedians can't go more than 45 seconds without saying the F-word.
- It's important to be true to your comedic voice, even if the F-word isn't part of it.

You're probably wondering if I were to attend the Humber Comedy Summer Workshop in the future and got a male roommate by mistake, would I fess up again? Of course—but remember, my husband reads this newsletter.



Dorothea Helms, a.k.a. The Writing Fairy, coaxes closet writers to emerge and make their magic known. She operates two successful freelance writing/editing businesses, and is a popular creative writing instructor and workshop leader. Her byline has appeared in publications across North America. Dorothea thrives on connecting people and ideas.

The dubious privilege of a freelance writer is he's given the freedom to starve anywhere.

~ S. J. Perelman

Breakfast Information

September 10, 2005, guest speaker...Priscila Uppal of York University.

Priscila Uppal will talk about an oft-overlooked area for writers: What to do after you've been accepted. Writers concentrate so much of their energy on getting the work done they seldom allow themselves to think beyond that to the magic moment when some smart publisher says, "Yes, we'd love to buy your book." Ms. Uppal will talk about this exciting but stressful time and let us know what to expect after that happy day.

October 8, 2005, guest speaker...Barry Dempster.

Proficient in many genres, **Barry Dempster** can lend a master's touch to the work of any writer. Dempster's writing career had a strong beginning with a 1982 Governor General's Award nomination for his book of poetry, *Fables for Isolated Men*. In the last 20 years, he has published seven more volumes of poetry, two collections of short fiction, a children's book and a novel. For six years, he was Poetry and Reviews Editor for Poetry Canada. In 1999, Dempster was invited by internationally known poet Don McKay to join Brick Book as an editor and has since been entrusted as the acquisitions editor for Brick. Equally comfortable with poetry and prose, Dempster also has extensive experience as a creative writing instructor. In the spring of 2005, he took the position of writer-in-residence at the Richmond Hill Public Library, Central Branch, conducting critiquing interviews, writing workshops and organizing two poetry events.

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

• **THE WCDR is moving! Don't panic—we've just moved our post office box, as the current post office is closing. Please make note of the new address, effective immediately. (P.S. If you've mailed something to us recently, don't worry—the former post office will forward our mail for the next few months.)**

**The Writers' Circle of Durham Region
Bayly Postal Outlet, Health Rite Pharmacy
P.O. Box 14558, 75 Bayly Street West
Ajax, ON L1S 7K7**

• **Look for a *Word Weaver* "Special Edition" before year's end celebrating the winners of the 2005 WCDR-sponsored writing contests—24-hour Online Non-fiction Contest, The Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest and Short Fiction Contest.**

• **Tickets for Steve Martin's play "Picasso at the Lapin" will go on sale at WCDR's October/November breakfast meetings. The Tuesday, November 15, 2005, performance by the Whitby Courthouse Theatre will benefit Words in Whitby 2006. Tickets are \$10 each, general admission.**

WCDR-sponsored Contest Winners for 2005

24-Hour Online Non-fiction Contest—"Horizons" 600-Word Maximum

- First Place:** "Horizons"—Connie Jamieson
Second Place: "The Line of Sight"—Margret (Zelia) Belchior
Third Place: "HORIZONS"—Megan Newlove
Honourable Mention: "I Can See Clearly"—Nancy Del Col

The Dan Sullivan Memorial Poetry Contest

Children's Category

- First Place:** "The Unfortunate Ones"—Michael J. Bradley (Mississauga)
Second Place: "Notebook"—Courtney Hamel (Markham)
Third Place: "Black Shoes"—Melisa Chiu (North Vancouver)

Youth Category

- First Place:** "The Füsenslanker"—Justin Antoniewicz (Chateauguy)
Second Place: "A New Kind of Bliss"—Heather J. Matthews (Scarborough)
Third Place: "The Cliff"—Amanda Franco-Rooks (Cannington)

Adult Category:

- First Place:** "That Far to Recllet Falls"—Ruth Walker (Whitby)
Second Place: "Microcosm"—Suzanne Robinson (Scarborough)
Third Place: "Harbour"—Vicki Goodfellow-Duke (Calgary)

Short Fiction Contest

- First Place:** "Whores and Hockey Players"—Penny-Anne Beaudoin
Second Place: "Why Waste Good Beer"—Janice Macdonald
Third Place: "The Whole Map of the World"—Li Robbins
Honourable Mentions: "Extinction"—Fred Ford
"Mr. Singh"—Manini Sheker

Publication of all winning entries will be featured in the upcoming "Special Edition" of the *Word Weaver*

Writers' Circles

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

Christians Who Write

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

Circle for Children's Writers

First Wednesday of each month
7 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

Senior Scribes of Uxbridge

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

Word Players

Every other Wednesday in members' homes.
7 to 8:45 p.m. for free-fall and critique.
David William McKay: dwmckay@sympatico.ca
Currently not seeking new members.

Write in Whitby

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

Write Now

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

Writers' and Editors' Network

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

The Wordsmiths of Ajax/Pickering

Every third Tuesday 7 to 9 p.m.
Free-fall writing exercises and critiquing. Meeting location varies.
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

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/email 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 9:15 p.m.
Velvet Elvis (coffee lounge in downtown Oshawa)
Carole Enahoro
cenahoro@sympatico.ca

Note to Circle Leaders:

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

Please send to:

wordweaver@wcdr.org.

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

~ Mark Twain

WCDR Board of Directors

and their **NEW** e-mail addresses

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

The WCDR Turns 10!

Join your fellow WCDR members and invited guests for our
Gala Anniversary Celebration.

On **October 29, 7 pm.** at the
Claremont Community Centre.

For more information contact **Sue Eaman** at
events@wcdr.org or call **905-686-0211.**

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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