

# **Writers, Authors & Dream-Weavers:**

*I Heard Your Call for HELP!*

*How to Write Non-Fiction, Fiction,  
Poetry & Memoirs*

**Carol Adler, MFA**



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## A Blessing

May you awaken to the mystery of being here and enter the quiet immensity of your own presence.

May you have joy and peace in the temple of your senses.

May you receive great encouragement when new frontiers beckon.

May you respond to the call of your gift and find the courage to follow its path.

May the flame of anger free you from falsity.

May warmth of heart keep your presence aflame and may anxiety never linger about you.

May your outer dignity mirror an inner dignity of soul.

May you take time to celebrate the quiet miracles that seek no attention.

May you be consoled in the secret symmetry of your soul.

May you experience each day as a sacred gift woven around the heart of wonder.

—John O'Donohue

# Preface

*When genuine passion moves you, say what you've got to say,  
and say it hot.*

--D.H. Lawrence

The Good Life starts with a dream, and if your dream is to become a successful published author, I'm here to celebrate and support you.

As a professional ghost writer, "book doctor," editor and publisher, I have spent many years "weaving the dreams" of others and serving as a midwife for the birth of some of the world's most precious "children."

This book is a compilation of writing tips and techniques that I'm eager to share with you because I know they work. I sincerely hope this information will encourage you to take your writing to the next level—and let me say that even for a seasoned professional writer, there's always a "next level."

May this book also motivate you to try many different types of writing in addition to those with which you are already familiar.

Take risks. Grow wings. All types of writing are related, and learning how to write for each targeted readership is a magical way to sharpen your technique and broaden your income base.

I encourage you, above all, to hold the vision of being a professional. Cherish your dreams. Know that you are on the success path if you are focused on your goal, willing to listening to advice, open to accepting criticism without taking it personally, and impassioned about producing your very best written work at all times.

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# Introduction

## Writing is My Business – and My Passion

*Real writers are those who want to write, need to write, have to write.*

—Robert Penn Warren

As a child, when adults asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” if you answered, as I did, without a moment’s hesitation, “A writer,” another question would inevitably follow:

“What do you want to write about?”

In your earliest years, you would simply answer, “I don’t know. I just want to write”; or... you’d simply start writing—anything. For me, at age six, it was a monthly newsletter for my family-- *The Monthly Moon*-- which I pecked out on an Underwood typewriter that my father had refurbished for me.

I had a great curiosity to know as much as possible about everything. I also wanted to capture with a pen and paper everything I saw and felt. I was an avid reader and loved word games and crossword puzzles. I was “literally” in love with words. Often I used big words I didn’t understand; my family found this amusing and of course, I didn’t!

If you find yourself anywhere in this description, you *know*, ***you just know with every bone in your body, with your whole heart and soul, that more than anything else in the world, your passion is to write and become a professional writer.***

If you want to start to publish your work, or if you are already a published writer and wish to improve your skills or try new types and styles of writing, I would like to congratulate you for choosing to work with an expert.

How do I know I'm an expert? Because I've made every mistake in the book and often paid the price!

At some point along the way, I've done it all: news and feature articles, press releases, academic theses on every topic imaginable, books, novels, ad copy, newspaper reviews, poems... and although I still consider myself a student because I'm still learning new techniques myself, I'm also a veteran. I've learned a great deal over the past 40+ years, and I'm eager to pass on that knowledge and experience to you.

Say yes to every opportunity and let life's circumstances do the rest. You may not believe it, but I can tell you from my own experience that there is a direct correlation between writing ad copy and writing a poem.

What in the world would these two types of writing have in common, especially when most people who read or see ads don't read poetry--and most people who appreciate poetry usually consider advertising an inferior or commercial form of writing?

*The goal of every work we write is 1) to communicate, 2) to give the reader an experience, and 3) to express ourselves.*

- We write to communicate, or deliver a message.

- We develop written material in order to give the reader an experience, even if it's only a rush of excitement about trying a new laundry detergent.

Words are living, breathing entities, just like you and me. They reside in many dimensions and have all the same characteristics as human beings. If you give them too much freedom or if you don't monitor them carefully, they'll end up doing all kinds of unpredictable things, just like a two-year-old... trust me; I know!

Words think, talk, move, talk back, and feel... deeply. Have you noticed that once you type them out or jot them down, they start to have a mind of their own? They love to pounce on you just when you've taken off your shoes and settled back for a snooze... "Surprise!" they shout, marching you to the computer and forcing you to sit there until they've finished telling you how *they* and not *you* want that sentence or paragraph to read.

They also like to keep secrets from you... hiding their meaning and driving you crazy until you finally uncover it somewhere in the back of the linen closet or behind the bag of bird seed in the tool shed... Words can be jealous, hateful, spiteful, resentful, depressed, bored... they possess the full range of emotions that all humans are born with and often spend entire lifetimes trying to tame.

Be aware: when you use words, they will use you in return. It's a "give and take," so for that reason, I like to think of them as one of my closest friends because their love is unconditional. This is both good and bad(!).

The most important reason why words and I have some great times together is because I want whatever I write to ***be engaging, and deliver something in a way that it has never been delivered before.***

No stale words ever lie around on my desktops or kitchen counters, and no one will ever raid the cupboards for someone else's munchies when *my* words are around. Vibrant, imaginative, and fun, they're always ready to embark on another adventure, whether it means trying out a new plot or entering into a different, maybe outrageous and even absurd dialogue with memorable characters.

If words and I are working together on an article, I let them lead the way: showing me how to state the facts clearly and succinctly and how to support those facts with solid evidence. Whenever possible, they urge me to get a scoop: information not yet been published or publicly known. Censored information is the juiciest and most impudent of all.

You see what I mean? Words are always wandering off with their own agenda. So I think it's time to nail them down and move on to Chapter One.

# 1

## Falling in Love with the Muse

*A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions: 1) What am I trying to say? 2) What words will express it? 3) What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4) Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?*

--George Orwell (1903 - 1950), "Politics and the English Language," 1946

So you love to write... emails, letters to friends and family... You're a great blogger and *you're* always the one who's asked to develop a newsletter because people know you're so good at it. If you are a student, you enjoy every assignment that involves writing and research--even organizing ideas, making outlines, etc.

Regardless of your profession or lifestyle, you're always looking for a few moments to sit down in front of the computer--not to go shopping, write emails or just browse--*but to write*. Writing is as natural to you as breathing, eating, walking, talking and sleeping, and no flame burns brighter or with greater intensity than **your passion to write**.

### THAT SPECIAL 'CLICK' THAT MEANS LOVE

So there I was, sitting cozy and comfy in one of those large leather college dormitory lounge chairs with a list of next semester's courses and a pad of paper balancing on my lap (this was BPCs & LTs, or "Before PCs and

Laptops"). Leafing through the English courses, I noted that a famous novelist would be giving a creative writing course for beginners.

My eyes lit up. *Should I?* Should I follow my passion and simply dump the extra philosophy course (picking it up some other time) and *enroll in that writing class?!!* Why not?

The professor and Best-Selling Published Author strode to the front of the room (tweed jacket with leather-patches on the elbows and Meerschaum pipe tucked into his pocket; beard, with hair graying at the temples) and glared at all thirty of us as if we'd just stolen his best excuse for being alive.

"So you want to write?" was his accusation. "WHY?"

I was so shocked I just sat there and let that BIG WHY drip slowly into my psyche like a gutter so imploded with dirty rainwater, it had no other choice than to dump. All I could hear was the echo of this man's pain, loneliness, frustration and fear that the Next Book would not be a Best Seller.

*Are you crazy?* he was asking. *Why do you want to put yourself through the hell of a high-risk life with few rewards and dubious returns* (how many authors really do make the Best Seller List)? Why would anyone want to deal with the agony and ecstasy of 1) writer's block, 2) jealous colleagues, and 3) pandering fans?

My answer came back loud and clear... in fact so loud and clear, I've never forgotten that classroom moment nor the dreamy "lounge chair visionary" experience that preceded it. Here is my response to the big WHY:

## **Because I cannot not write.**

Incidentally, this creative writing professor never met the class again after that first session—which ended as soon as he'd volleyed his two questions. Out the door he walked and was unavailable thereafter either for class or office hours.

I didn't mind. He'd had served his purpose simply by delivering that all important "WHY?" question that motivated me to ask "Why not?"

I had fallen in love with the Muse and knew from that time on that *I was going to become a professional writer.*

## **WRITE WITH A PASSION... READ WITH A PASSION, AND AVOID 'ANALYSIS PARALYSIS'**

Do you know the fastest way to get a monkey to sit on your back and start criticizing every idea, every word you put down on paper? Enroll in a literature course. Literary analysis is the most effective way I know for drying up the creative juices and terrifying the living bejeebies out of any creative germ that has ever had a desire to worm its way into your psyche.

Although I was always a voracious reader, I found no value in conducting autopsies and examining cadavers. Literature for me was always a living experience. Literary academia seemed to start with the premise that we're dealing with a corpse, something dead that had to be dissected and analyzed in order to find out—what? How it compared to another work? What great ideas could be extracted from it in order to expound on a related thesis? All

of these seemed like nothing more than intellectual exercise, and as a philosophy major, I was getting my fill of that.

Clearly, one of the basic goals of education is to teach a person how to think: how to receive, absorb, process and use information. Therefore, I did have compassion for those students who had not yet been saturated by the pincer-and-pound process of giving professors something to grade and get paid for.

I also recognize and support the value of learning how to think, reflect, research and respond, so I don't want to totally dismiss this factory approach to opening the mind. If these exercises have an after-life beyond the degree-awarding ceremony, then they prove their worth.

Possibly it is this partial approach to learning that is the reason for its ineffectiveness when walked out the door of academia and applied to the real world of living, breathing people and their problems. What was obvious to anyone with a creative bent was the fact that a logical "left-brained" robotic method of education served a full course of tools and techniques for objective analysis, but the meal was dry and tasteless because the chef had failed to season with feeling.

During those 4-10 or more years, we learn how to be objective, how to remove "the personal" from class discussions, papers and examinations. Any statement that begins with, "I think," or "I've personally experienced...," or "I feel..." is *verboten* and considered sissy or feminine. Perhaps this is because only recently has academia accepted women students; rules and regulations for the learning process are still rooted in the masculine. Women feel and have babies. Men think and hunt.

Objectivity has its place. Would you like to have a surgeon standing over you on the operating table who is reminiscing about last night's dinner party, or about how surprised his wife will be next week when he drives home in her new (birthday present) Lexus? There's a time and place for everything.

**The time and place for feeling is when you wish to give or receive a more insightful, pleasurable experience.**

When I feel, I want to feel because I feel. I don't want someone to ask me to prove it or talk about what made the author tick. Was it not enough that the author made *me* tick? Was it not more than enough that I plunged into the novel, article, poem or short story with such enthusiasm and zest, I couldn't put it down... and found myself reading and re-reading it? Isn't that enough proof that it is a great work?

## **ANALYZE FOR TECHNIQUE ONLY**

A few more words to support my bias about feeling vs. thinking: I'm all for dissecting literature to learn better techniques from the masters. In fact, I so support this method of learning, I based my entire graduate program in creative writing/poetry on analysis and invented a process that I named "imitative analysis." I studied master poets and imitated their poems at the same time I analyzed their techniques. What a great learning experience! In fact, I so believe in literary dissection, I include several analyses with accompanying exercises as part of my online writing course. Analysis in order to sharpen one's technique is invaluable for writers at all stages of development.

Let me also be clear that I fully support careful and thoughtful review and discussion of written works for the purpose of asking my favorite “So what?” question and other related ones: What is the message of the book? Is it successful in its delivery? Why? Why not? What did I, the reader, come away with? How did I personally identify with the characters, plot, story development, etc.? What did I like or not like about the work?

My point is: “there’s more to it” than objective analysis... so much more. Unfortunately, this is where most writing courses and instructors stop. Therefore, it is at this place where I will begin.

Reading literature, the activity of reading in general, is one of the best ways to learn more about ourselves. Every avid reader will be quick to agree that this type of nourishment feeds the soul, providing us another opportunity to think and grow. Reading is also one of the best ways to learn how to write. I do not know many accomplished writers who are not avid readers. They spend their working hours writing, and their leisure hours reading or enjoying other forms of media that feed their creative energy. When they’re writing, they’re reading and when they’re reading, they are already mentally creating their next plot or outlining a new article. The two activities are married to each other.

I am grateful to those inspired humanities professors who loved to read and write for their own enrichment. These wisdom keepers taught me how to build bridges and make connections, and they also taught me the brave new world of creating my own metaphors and analogies.

I made a point of never reading anyone else’s literary analysis unless it unlocked some of the secrets of a new way of viewing themselves and the

world. Then it became autobiography and philosophy, both of which have always fascinated me because I love people. I never want to have a love affair with a corpse, nor do I even want to have a cup of coffee with one.

Literature is a living experience and the end result of any book review or report is to critique that book. Sometimes it's important to spend time reading books and articles that you consider mediocre to determine how you would improve them. Be patient; sometimes this exercise can tend to be boring, but you'll find it's like sitting through a mediocre film. You'll know exactly what *not* to do when you sit down to write your own novel.

I'm a time management freak. I love to save time and I even have a pet peeve about wasting it. Maybe that's why I became a professional writer. I wanted to spend as many hours of every day doing what I love best-- writing. I have arranged my lifestyle to fit that goal.

Long lunches at the club or afternoons on the golf course may be fun once in awhile... to celebrate the completion of a work... but not when you're in the midst of writing it!

I would like to end this chapter with a story that was sent to me recently by an internet friend.

## **Aim For The Heart**

"People are like sticks of dynamite. The power is on the inside, but nothing happens until the fuse gets lit." What a great quote, and every leader should take it to heart.

Deep inside we all want people in our lives who will help to make us all we can be. You can be that person for the members of your team. Providing timely encouragement, recognition and support will help to light the fuse...and, in many instances, unleash their emotional energy.

I recently read a wonderful story about a young man who played for the legendary Alabama football coach, Bear Bryant. Bear had a third stringer on this team named Henry Peterson. Henry had never gotten to play, and just before the Alabama-Auburn Game, Bryant got a call from Henry. He said, "Coach, my Dad died and I won't be able to make it to the game on Saturday." Bear said, "No problem, son, you should be with your family." However, the next day Bear got another call from Henry, and he said, "Coach, I got to thinking about it and I don't want to let the team down. I'm going to be there." Sure enough on Saturday, Henry was dressed and ready to play.

Just before the game he walked over to the Bear and said, "Coach, I want you to start me today." Bear said, "Son, are you nuts? This is the Alabama-Auburn game, and you've never played." Well, Henry persisted, and Bryant, never knowing why, said, "Okay, I'll put you in on the first play."

Henry Peterson scored three touchdowns in the first half...he almost beat Auburn by himself. Bear, at halftime, walked over and said, "Son, I don't know whether to kiss you or kill you. Why haven't you shown me you can play football like that?"

Henry said, "Coach, did you ever see me walking around the campus with my Dad?" Bear said, "Yes, I have seen you." Henry then said, "Coach, my Dad was blind and today is the first day he ever got to watch me play football."

--Tom Mathews

The final line in this story was: "As a leader, you can never underestimate the power of emotional energy." I would like to change the word "leader" to "writer." Let that statement be a watchword for writing dynamic works:

**As a *writer*, you can never underestimate the power of emotional energy.**

# 2

## What Shall I Write About?

\*\*\*\*\*

*A writer lives, at least, in a state of astonishment. Beneath any feeling he has of the good or evil of the world lies a deeper one of wonder at it all. To transmit that feeling, he writes.*

--William Sansom

One more question emerged from the Famous Published Author before he stalked out of the classroom on that illustrious first and last day of my college creative writing course. Fired into the silence after the big WHY question was: **“So, what are you going to write about?”**

Like the rest of the aspiring best-selling authors seated before this man of Great Wisdom and Fame, I was clueless. At age eighteen, my playing field was, well... limited. Boy-girl relationships, parental challenges, teachers and school, trips, summer camp, sports competitions...

That was about it.

So... what was I going to write about? Everything I had just listed to myself sounded as dull as dishwater.

Adding to my frustration was a piece of advice that I had continued to discard as corny that had popped into my head at just that moment when my mind went blank and was unable to respond to the professor’s “What” question.

From an early age, I had always devoured every book I could get my hands on that had a protagonist who had a passion to become a writer. Usually these young girls and boys had mentors and they all gave one piece of advice to these aspiring writers. How many writing handbooks had I devoured that started and ended with that advice? Tattooed into my brain was the statement:

## **WRITE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE**

If I lacked experience at the young age of 18, wasn't it my responsibility to go collect some? Travel to the Orient, India, South Africa? Back-pack across the Mohave Desert, climb Mount Kilimanjaro... hang out with the aborigines, or get lost in an Amazon rain forest?

I still wasn't getting it because I was looking outside rather than going within, to visit myself at deeper levels. I needed to learn how to dish pan.

## **DISH PANNING FOR GOLD**

Every day I dish pan for gold. Whenever I find a gem of an article, I cut it out--or print it out, if it's on the internet--and place it in my Ideas Dish Pan.

The Ideas Dish Pan can have anything from photos or articles clipped from magazines and newspapers to a scrap of writing I may have found in the parking lot or on the lawn. It could be a notice about a stray pet or flyer for a garage sale, or just the way something worded that catches my eye. It could be a word itself.

Dish Pan Gold could be an article, picture or ad torn from a magazine I've purchased, a catalog that came in the mail or a free handout from some organization that's trying to persuade me to donate or join. It could also be something I overheard or that popped into my head that I jotted down in the notebook that I always carry with me.

This collection of intriguing tidbits is my "dirt" that I pan when I'm looking for an idea. I may not be aware of it, but at the time I collected that scrap, the idea had already popped into my head. In fact, to take it one step farther, it was my mind that had served as the magnet. All that remained was for me to return once more to the idea and start panning.

In addition to my Idea Dishpan, I have two others:

- DISH PAN #2 – Works in progress
- DISH PAN #3 – Drafted works for revision

The Idea Dish Pan reminds me of my childhood days when I had jars filled with fossils and beautiful stones that I'd collected along the shore of Canandaigua Lake or in the Adirondack Mountains in New York State, where I spent my summers. I also collected stamps, trading cards, bubble gum cards, post cards... Each of these items had a story and a memory.

Life is filled with surprises and we can have so much fun just letting ourselves stumble across them; or we can intentionally seek them. Once a week, for example, you could schedule a treasure hunt on the internet or in newspapers and magazines.

You could write a story about a shell you picked up on the beach or in a hobby shop. The inner layers of the shell and its different textures and colors

remind you of the many moods of your friend Sally... how her complexion is colored by her moods. If she's happy, her cheeks are rosy, if she's sad, her face is pale, etc. Each aspect of the story could have a different texture or color, or a different way of unfolding. Maybe you're inspired by the way the shell spirals around itself and the fact that inside that shell at one time there was life. What did that life look like? Your story may construct spirals around its theme like the shell spirals around itself... and so on.

Once it becomes clear that everything in the world is connected, whenever you sit down to write, you will start to go on yet another treasure hunt to seek out those connections. Metaphors and similes will become second nature to you as you get used to creating relationships and finding similarities. Symbols will start to pop into your writing when you see how profoundly you can use them for expressing these magical relationships between words, objects, people, events and circumstances.

Plan a quiet time when you can sit comfortably with a notebook and pen. Jot down whatever enters your mind: phrases, scraps of conversation, ideas for stories, articles, poems, novels...

Tear off these notebook pages and place them in your Idea Dishpan.

If anyone wants to know what abundance is, you can show them your Dishpans! You are just brimming with ideas and material! For you, writer's block is like ice cream on a stick: words melting into your mouth, the chocolate coating breaking loose and slobbering all over your shirt front... Do you remember the first time as a child when you tried to master eating ice cream on a stick? Now there's a story... right?!

Liberate yourself from outlines and plans and all the other formal instructions delivered in “writing courses.” They are useless when you’re first setting out and seeding your garden. Later, when you have an idea that requires form and structure, these tools may come in handy... or maybe not. The goal is to stay fertile, fiery and free—at all costs.

## **A FEW MORE STARTERS**

Do you have a pet? Write about your dog or cat or horse or gerbil. If you watch them long enough and communicate with them, they’ll tell you lots of stories.

Write a story about a good friend. Make that friend the hero or heroine of your story. You can describe them to a ‘T’. If you can memorize geometry theorems, you can surely memorize your friend’s body language, mannerisms, moods, personality, physical description, speaking habits, etc. You can easily create a dialogue between the two of you.

Have you taken a trip somewhere? Do you belong to an organization that plans special events or takes outings? How about family holidays? Favorite and not so favorite relatives? Occasions that were “memorable” for good or bad reasons... Don’t forget to season your writing with humor or dry wit.

Never tell it exactly the way it happened. And here’s the fun. EMBELLISH IT. Have you ever sat around the campfire and told ghost stories? They keep getting more incredible or fantastic... right? Try that with a character description or a plot. Start with something small and keep expanding, embellishing it with interesting, fantastic or incredible details. It doesn’t make any difference if it’s unbelievable. It’s fiction anyway—right?!

When writing non-fiction--articles, essays, research papers--if the choice is yours, i.e., if it's not an assignment or paid work, write *only* about something that turns you on. Writing with a passion usually drives the work home faster than the time it takes to order and pick up a pizza. And why not? You're totally focused on it because it's you and yours.

You may have a cause; it could be saving the trees, or supporting the replacement of fossil fuel with free energy... peace on earth... health care for all. Gather information. Collect as much material as possible. Overwrite (write more pages than necessary) and then cut back. It's better to have extra fat to trim off. Ultimately, less is more, but start with more.

Read the newspaper, feature section... or go to the internet and read feature articles. Read blogs. Read all kinds of material. You'll find dozens of crazy stories and uncanny situations. Use those as the "clothes hangers" for hanging your own "clothes" or life experiences.

*The idea is to get the pencil moving quickly... Once you've got some words looking back at you, you can take two or three--throw them away and look for others.*

--Bernard Malamud

## **STORIES FROM THE PAST**

Some of you may be fortunate to have a relative who used to tell you stories when you were still living at home with your family. Maybe you remember these stories; or maybe they're still alive so you can sit at their feet and

record these stories and then transcribe them. One of our Dandelion Books authors, Laurel Johnson (I am also a publisher; my website addresses are [www.dandelionboks.net](http://www.dandelionboks.net) and [www.dandelion-books.com](http://www.dandelion-books.com)) was inspired to write her grandmother's biography. One of her uncles had made a series of recordings before this extraordinary woman passed away and Laurel used these as the basis for reconstructing her story. This book succeeded in reuniting the entire family. All the cousins, grandchildren, grand-nieces and –nephews came out of the woodwork from all over the U.S. to buy and read the life story of their relative. (The name of the book is *My Name is Esther Clara*, by Laurel Johnson, published by Dandelion Books; also available in other online and brick and mortar bookstores worldwide.)

## **IDEAS FOR POEMS**

One of the best places to find ideas for poems is to go to a collection of good poetry. Yes, I make a distinction between “good” and “bad” poetry.

I dislike forced rhyme or greeting card ditties, and I prefer to stay away from “poor me” victim poetry... lovers dying on the vine, dying from consumption, dying from unpaid bills, dying from loneliness or alcoholism; dying any death except a legitimate one that celebrates life. Granted, poems about death can be masterpieces; I'm referring to the chest-beating moaning-and-groaning ones.

Good poetry has something profound to say, makes a point, has its own internal flow or music and hits the gut. Hard. I'll be talking more about that in my lesson on poetry. Go to a poetry collection and imitate a poem you like very much. Imitate the style, content or energy. This is an excellent way to get the juices running and also “dish pan” some new ideas.

## **IDEAS FOR JUVENILE FICTION**

Do you have children or grandchildren? If so, you surely have photos and videos galore! All the baby teeth, the first hair cut, baby dresses...

Spend some time with these treasures. You'll be amazed how your memory will start to bring forth ideas for children's stories. It will also give you dialogue that you can enter right into your story line. Hang around your grandchildren for awhile, if you have them. If not, ask to visit a local nursery school or kindergarten, or volunteer to be a teachers' aide.

Observe body language; listen to the way the children talk. Learn what they're interested in. Browse through books in their library. Ask the children the names of their favorite books and borrow them yourself from the public library. Study these books and take notes for ideas, story development, plot and character description.

## **IDEAS FOR ARTICLES**

Scour the media extensively: newspapers, internet news stories, blogs, feature articles, stories... anything that interests you. What do you *really* believe in... What turns you on? What opinions do you want to share with others?

Google all the information about those subjects that really get your blood boiling or your pulse racing. Follow the path of your emotions and you'll find more than enough material for writing articles, essays, letters to the editor, internet responses, book reviews, etc. It's all a matter of passion. It always is.

# 3

## “Flying First Class” – Getting Started

*Men are only free when they are doing what their deepest self likes... it takes some diving.*

---D.H. Lawrence

Some of you may be familiar with the story of Scheherazade, author of a collection of short stories titled *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Shahryar (Shah-ry-ar), a king in Central Asia, had fallen in love with a beautiful young woman. In Shahryar’s kingdom, a woman was property and the king’s woman of choice was obliged to be his wife. Case closed.

Unfortunately, this beautiful young woman had a mind of her own and was determined to exercise her right to choose her own partner. Shortly after her marriage to the king, she uh well “transgressed.”

When the king learned of her unfaithfulness, he was enraged. We Commoners know what infidelity feels like, but imagine the wrath of a King who believes he is invested with divine power, which includes the right to control other people’s minds.

This rebellious young woman was probably tortured to death for her disobedience, and from that time forth, King Shahryar determined he would never allow himself to fall in love with another woman. “Never again will I suffer betrayal!” he vowed.

The king's solution was easy. To protect himself from this painful fate of falling in love, directly after the wedding ceremony, the two would retire to the king's chambers to consummate the marriage and then the king would have his bride murdered.

Needless to say, this agenda did not sit so well with parents who had eligible daughters. Anyone who did the math could see that such a rapid turn-over rate would soon destroy most of the kingdom's beautiful young virgins. What the king wanted, the king could have. Any parent who refused to give their daughter in marriage to Shahryar was subject to severe punishment. Most likely their fate would be the same as that rebellious young woman who decided no one was going to tell her what to do—not even a king.

Terror reigned in King Shahryar's kingdom until one day a young woman named Scheherazade, concerned for her father's well-being, sent word to the king's vizier that she would consent to marry the king.

Scheherazade was not only beautiful and clever; she was also gifted as a storyteller. Her stories were filled with magic and mystery and they were also pithy. Scheherazade was wise beyond her years.

Even though Scheherazade's father knew about his daughter's storytelling skills (had he not been her teacher?!), he did have a few pangs of discomfort during the wedding ceremony. Nevertheless, he believed in personal sovereignty and what Scheherazade wished, she should have.

On their wedding night, Scheherazade utilized Shahryar's insomnia as an excuse to tell him a story. Come dawn's light, the tale had not yet ended,

and the king, eager to know the ending of the story, permitted Scheherazade to live one more night so she could complete it.

Early the next evening, not only did Scheherazade finish telling the first story; she also immediately began telling another... and yet another.

And so it went, for a thousand and one nights. During these almost three years, the king fell deeply in love with this amazing woman and she bore him three children. Shahryar was convinced that never before had a man known such happiness, and to immortalize his lady love, he had Scheherazade's stories, known as *The Thousand and One Nights* written down on scrolls, or, as we say today, published. Today, *The Thousand and One Nights* is considered a classic.

What is the golden nugget or kernel of wisdom that this story conveys? "Love conquers all"—yes, well, of course. And....

### ***NEWS BULLETIN: Good writing is a life and death matter!***

The prolific best-selling American author, William Styron, said, "The writer's duty is to keep on writing." I would like to supplement that quote with another: "The writer's duty is to keep the reader turning the page."

***Passion*** - Your passion is the alchemy for generating hot products. Whatever you write has to have sizzle! Your fiction works have to move and be moving--physically, mentally and emotionally--*at all times*. Never let up on this hi-octane energy.

Your non-fiction articles and essays have to be **riveting**; chock full of information and details (well-supported, of course)—and compelling enough to keep your reader from yawning and heading for the fridge.

**Personality** - Your writing also has to have personality and pzazz... and *it has to be authentically YOU*. Even articles that require objectivity without a trace of opinion or personal commentary, must deliver *your* style or method of delivery. The more you write, the more you will be recognized for your voice or style.

**Structure & Organization** - Good writing has to tease or tantalize at the beginning, and it has to keep building. At the end, the reader will be fully satisfied, yet hungry for more (maybe not now but in a few hours after this “full-course writing meal” has been digested!). What is the pulse? Where is the heart of this story? What is the word, phrase or piece of information that almost “writes” the rest of the story?

**Authenticity** - Your writing also has to be authentic. This means that you’re not posturing or trying to develop the material in order to please a writing professor or writing manual. You are also not writing with the intention of telling people how much you know or how brilliant you are.

Scheherazade may have been fair to look upon and sexy in bed, but so are hundreds—thousands--of other women. Anyone can learn the tricks of the trade if they want to...right?!

A hungry reader desperate for a genuine experience will not be easily “tricked.” Also, anyone who is looking for the real thing will be greatly disappointed to discover a manikin instead of flesh and bone. Plastic surgery

and a fake smile don't go very far. Scheherazade was a brilliant young woman who knew how to weave her stories with human insight, compassion and love... love for humanity and for herself.

Without conceit yet fully self-assured that she had the ability to please the king with her stories, she took the ultimate risk, ready to pay the consequences if necessary.

**Focus** - You know what you want to say and how you want to say it. This requires a quiet state of relaxed, controlled concentration. You are fully present during the entire delivery process. When you meet someone and shake their hand or look into their eyes, you can sense if they are sincere.

Likewise, your readers will know from the first lines of your story or article if you are sincerely dedicated to doing your very best to deliver new information or give them a unique and unforgettable reading experience.

**Value** - The *Scheherazade* story delivers another key point: your writing has to have value. If you've ever read *The Thousand and One Nights*, you know each of these stories has human interest or delivers a kernel of wisdom. They are portraits of Scheherazade's inner soul, and it is this beauty, transmitted to the king at the soul level, that caused him to fall passionately in love with her.

**Sustainability** – Your readers are your most important commodity, your “King Shahryars”--although without the agenda to murder you if you don't deliver a page-turner! You want to nurture these Royal Readers and cultivate a relationship with them so they'll keep coming back for more.

## **IT ALL STARTS WITH YOU!**

Who are you? As a publisher, that is one of the first questions I ask my authors when they submit a manuscript. If you go to the Dandelion Books website [www.dandelionbooks.net](http://www.dandelionbooks.net) you will see a page that is devoted to manuscript submission. Each question is important:

- ⇒ What is this book about?
- ⇒ Why did you write it?
- ⇒ What does this book mean to you?
- ⇒ What do you think it would mean to your readers?
- ⇒ Who are your readers; who is your target market?
- ⇒ How would you help to promote the book?
- ⇒ Please write a brief synopsis or overview of the book (2-5 pages).
- ⇒ Please send a brief outline of each chapter.
- ⇒ Please send two sample chapters.
- ⇒ Please send your bio or resume.

By the time our staff finishes reading the answers to these questions, we have an excellent profile of the author and we also know a great deal about the manuscript we will be reviewing.

A person with a clearly identified life purpose and well-defined goals is well on the road to becoming a good communicator. Like building your home, you want your life to rest on a solid foundation. Our purpose or mission in

life, and our goals are the foundations upon which we build our wishes, hopes and dreams. Ultimately our goal is to be at all times a “conscious” human being who knows what we do and why we do it.

Your attitudes and outlooks as well as your feelings, behaviors and actions are the plants that spring up from this fertile soil of well-directed consciousness. These are the seeds that bear the fruits of your labor as a writer. You have something to say and you are eager to say it. Therefore, you will know why you wrote the book that you submitted for publication. Like a website structure that has a “home” or “landing” page, your home page is your life purpose. In “the website of your mind,” your written work will link back to this landing page, with the intention of communicating to your readers who you are and what you value.

One evening several years ago (when I was young and innocent), I was having dinner with a group of fellow poets after attending a reading by a guest poet who had just published a new collection. I did not particularly care for this poet’s work; it seemed to lack depth or substance. The poet seemed too “full of himself” and unconcerned about whether or not anyone understood his work.

We were seated at a lovely dinner; the waiter had just poured the wine and served the salad. We had started discussing the function of poetry and one of the guests asked the poet whether his readership or audience was important to him. Without a moment’s hesitation he responded vehemently, “No! Of course not!”

He then proceeded to deliver a diatribe about the fact that he writes poetry for himself. “It is totally irrelevant and unimportant if anyone understands

my work," he proclaimed in a stentorian voice that could be heard throughout the restaurant.

During a brief pause, as he stopped to take a sip of wine, I took a deep breath, poked my hand in the air to attract the great man's attention and innocently asked, "But don't you somehow feel that poetry should communicate?"

The scene that ensued was memorable. Without realizing it, I had hit a raw nerve. Slamming his wine glass on the table, he shouted, "**NO! ABSOLUTELY NOT!!**" Angrily, he waved his hands in the air, tipping over his goblets of wine and water. In the midst of chaos and hasty cleanup, the Poet continued his lecture, his voice rising to a hysterical pitch that caused all heads to turn in the direction of our table. Red-faced, gesticulating wildly, he informed me that surely anyone who ever wrote poetry to communicate was an idiot.

The error was in my favor. From that time on, I realized how important it is not only for poetry but for *all writing* to communicate. His solipsistic attitude—writing (and living) solely for himself--was exactly why I and possibly others, if they wanted to be honest with themselves, couldn't find substance or meat in his works. I'm not sure what happened to this man; he seemed to have disappeared from poetry and other professional writing circles.

There's a difference between being subtle and suggestive, and being deliberately (and self-deniably) abstruse. That difference is "substance"-- something to say.

*The best of a book is not the thought which it contains, but the thought which it suggests; just as the charm of music dwells not in the tone but in the echoes of our hearts.*

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

## **SUMMARY**

A dedicated, impassioned writer creates fiction works that give the reader a new and different experience, and non-fiction works that provide a fresh perspective on issues that are controversial, inspiring, entertaining, uplifting, enlightening or newsworthy.

The keys to quality writing are originality and voice.

Anyone can be original because each of us is unique. We just have to let ourselves go to be who we are: ask, trust, allow and flow!

Consider yourself deeply engaged in relating a story or experience that is so important to you, you cannot *not* tell it to someone else. This passion to deliver the goods introduces you “in the raw” to your reader. Over time, good writers develop their own voice or “signature.” This quality is the mark of a master artist in any area of endeavor.

Quality writing is always about the reader. Detachment is critically important, since most readers are quick to detect posturing, preaching and any other form of self-righteousness or self-importance. As soon as self-aggrandizement is identified, the reader starts to devalue it and lose interest.

Fiction writing also requires a number of acquired techniques that skillfully weave together plot, narrative, character development and story line. In the

process of developing good novels, short stories and short shorts or vignettes, the writer uses every part of the mind and body, including physical gestures, voice inflection and a large palette of colorful words that visually and viscerally “paint” every feeling, every iteration.

Experienced non-fiction writers, e.g., investigative reporters, analysts, reviewers and op-ed writers, are well-trained in basic rules of journalism. The first and most important rule is objectivity. The truth and nothing but the truth... and yes, the truth may hurt, but it will also set you free.

A good writer who consistently produces quality work:

- Communicates clearly
- Is emotionally compelling
- Is eloquent, graceful and flowing, or humorous, cutting and clever, depending on the nature of the material
- Embroiders and embellishes the narrative with subtleties, innuendos, metaphors and similes, etc.
- Avoids pedantry and didacticism like the plague
- Uses humor and a light touch whenever appropriate
- Avoids moralizing
- Charges their work with hi-octane, word for word, page by page
- Avoids being apologetic
- Is an experienced revisionist, fully understanding that revision is a necessary part of the process

# 4

## Separating the Pros from the Cons

*Reality is a staircase going neither up nor down, we don't move, today is today, always is today.*

--Octavio Paz

Have you ever heard the story of the giant ship engine that failed? The ship's owners tried one expert after another, but none of them could figure out how to fix the engine.

Then they brought in an old man who had been fixing ships since he was a youngster.

He carried a large bag of tools with him, and when he arrived, immediately he went to work. He inspected the engine very carefully, top to bottom.

Two of the ship's owners were there, watching this man, hoping he would know what to do. After looking things over, the old man reached into his bag and pulled out a small hammer. He gently tapped something. Instantly, the engine lurched into life.

He carefully put his hammer away. The engine was fixed! A week later, the owners received a bill from the old man for ten thousand dollars.

"What?!" the owners exclaimed. "He hardly did anything!"

So they wrote the old man a note saying, "Please send us an itemized bill."

The man sent a bill that read:

Tapping with a hammer .....	\$	2.00
Knowing where to .....	\$	<u>9998.00</u>

It took that man a lifetime to learn "where to" and that is what his clients were paying for. Considering that a lifetime was involved in learning that skill, the bill was relatively inexpensive!

Professionals have spent years learning, either from others or by practicing the same skills over and over until they become second nature.

Effort is important, but knowing "*where* to tap" or place that effort is the key to "working smart."

That's what experience is all about, and why a professional writer is an expert revisionist and re-writer.

"You'll do it until you get it right" is a way of stating that the real writing experience occurs during the process of revision.

As a publisher, often I receive manuscripts from individuals who tell me their work is "the word of God and is not to be tampered with."

Of course their work is the word of God. All writing is! How could it be otherwise, if you and we and all humans are God's creatures--divine sparks or "part-whole, whole-part of that great Creator of Us All"?

If these writers are attempting to say their work was divinely inspired, I will agree with that statement as well. Creatures who have been created by a divine being will deliver work that is "divinely inspired."

Also, if we take the word "inspired" literally, we are referring to the process of spiritual intake. Breathing is the activity of "in-spiring" or taking in oxygen.

We express ourselves or deliver pictures, thoughts and feelings after we have impressed these energy forms upon our conscious and unconscious minds. We then feel inspired to express these impressions.

The process of being impressed and expressing, or being inspired and delivering our impressions to the external world, is a basic description of the activity of creative writing.

## **HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL WRITER?**

How do you know if you are a professional Anything? I have one major criteria for distinguishing a professional writer from a "Sunday hobbyist."

The professional writer has a full cupboard of elbow grease which they use daily. The person who tells you they received their written work directly from God or from some other higher being and therefore, not one word should

ever be changed, is either afraid of criticism or unwilling to do the necessary work in order to become a professional.

A few rare individuals may have that natural gift for being able to draft an almost perfect story, article or poem without having to go through the revision process. Even the masters will tell you they depend on the “cold storage” process of writing something, putting it aside for awhile and then reviewing it with a fresh eye.

That time period when the work is in the freezer may be many years, or it could be as short as a few hours. An interval has occurred and you will soon be able to gauge how long you need to give yourself before you embark on this revision process.

You must learn how to be a good editor. That is the most important tool you can ever learn. Writing is an art, a craft and a business. The revision process is the craft. The work itself is inspired; it comes from that embryonic part of you that is your creative genius. Of the three aspects, the inspired kernel or outline--and possibly even the draft of a work--is often completed in a split second, a few minutes or an hour or two at most. Then it's time to do the *real work*.

## **SUBSCRIBE TO THE ELBOW GREASE CLUB**

*You only learn to be a better writer by actually writing.*

—Doris Lessing

It is a fact that professional writers are not born; they are made. Anyone who wishes to oppose that fact (the cons) and often the “con artists” who hawk high-ticketed “You Can Become a Best-Selling Author Overnight”

writing kits are either trying to play mind games with your common sense or ask you to support their children's college tuition fund or a new SUV and home in suburbia.

There's a difference between elbow grease and a magic wand (your natural gift). Your talents or natural gifts resonate with desire. I can't imagine anyone wanting to become a professional writer unless they had a passion to write. That passion is integrally related to a natural ability to put words on paper or sit before the computer and verbally express thoughts and feelings.

A professional writer is a re-writer. They've learned the necessity of revision. They've also learned that the mind is a fickle, multi-faceted child with a left and right brain. When the two brains copulate to create a beautiful new mind, the infant that emerges needs a lot of tender loving care during those all-important childhood years. To the uninitiated, the world can be a strange and frightening place.

The mind tends to be wild; it likes to go off on its own. As a creative writer, I support and celebrate that. However, like all children between the ages of one and seven, the untrained mind requires discipline and role models—authority--in order to cultivate basic survival as well as personal growth techniques and strategies. It has to learn how to work efficiently and skillfully, set goals and get the job done. It also has to learn how to become accountable or responsible.

Basic human virtues learned at an early age become the most valuable assets a mind can have:

- Perseverance
- Patience

- Gratitude
- Willingness
- Detachment

All of these virtues are prerequisites for becoming a professional writer.

Stay with it, even if you have to keep revising your material again and yet again. Be your own best critic; keep asking basic questions about your work (see my list in the previous chapter) and make sure you're fully satisfied with the work before you send it to a publisher.

Be patient with yourself. That process of setting aside a manuscript and letting a short period of time lapse before re-viewing it is so important. The mind needs rest and recreation and that pause that refreshes can deliver magical insights. You may even find that earlier versions are better than later ones. If you keep beating a horse to death, the horse will end up being dead.

Be grateful first and foremost for the time and energy to do the work and then be grateful for others' feedback. Be grateful for your talents and skills--and for your understanding of the writing and revision process.

Be willing to listen to others and be ready to make revisions. Attitude is everything. If you become "depressed" about yourself and your work, you will be unable to "express" yourself because you've shifted your gears into reverse. Be careful to keep the Flow on Go.

Stay positive and open, and keep revising or reviewing--seeing things from different angles and considering new possibilities for expressing the same material.

Stay detached and don't take it personally.

If I were to name one virtue that stands out above all others and that separates professional writers from amateurs, it would be detachment. If an editor tells you that you need to revise a work, don't take it personally. You may disagree with them, but be careful before leaping in to counter their opinion. Weigh their opinions and spend time considering their comments. Above all, be grateful that they've taken the time to review your work.

**Remember:**

***DO NOT TAKE IT PERSONALLY!***

Here's the litany. Recite it often:

- ⇒ **Listen to others' opinions... but do not take it personally.**
- ⇒ **Allow others to criticize... but do not take it personally.**
- ⇒ **Write and re-write... do not take it personally.**

The goal is to get the job done and to satisfy your client's wishes and needs. That's what they're paying you to do. They are not asking you to solve the world's problems for them--your way. They are asking you to write a press release for them, or revise an article that will be published in a magazine. Both of these pieces of writing have nothing to do with you and everything

to do with them. Follow their guidelines and save your opinions for your own articles.

A good professional sets goals and projects reasonable time frames for completion. This is an important part of the work process because it automatically triggers the prospect of completion. The professional writer will complete what has been started, without finding a long list of excuses for delays and failure to perform.

When your client asks you how long it will take you to complete the work, if you are uncertain because of the nature of the project, be honest. Tell them you will have an answer for them *after* you have started working on it, and know exactly what is involved. If you can roughly estimate the time frame, add 30 days, just to be on the safe side. You could even add 60 or 90 days if that makes you feel more comfortable.

## **WHEN DO YOU START CHARGING FEES?**

You will know when you are entitled to charge fees, just as you will know when you are qualified to call yourself a professional.

It would be good to complete two large projects in each area (ghostwriting, book doctoring, editing) before you start to charge. Your initial fees will be lower than those you will eventually charge, since you will be adding your experience to the quotient. (Remember the hammer story?!)

Often you will adjust your fees to suit the projects. Flat rates work well, but often you will discover less work may be involved than anticipated, or just the opposite. If the work is highly technical or requires much more than the

usual type of editing, proofing, book doctoring, etc., adjust your fees accordingly.

## **YOUR DIALOGUE WILL BE PROFESSIONAL**

An amateur is apologetic, and the dialogue will go something like this: "I'm so sorry I have to charge for my services, but I do have to put good time into this editing (proofing, book doctoring, ghostwriting, etc.). I hope you understand, and I hope you'll be able to pay me. We can possibly consider a reduced rate if you're short on cash. Or you can contact me at a later time..."

**NO! NO! NO! NEVER!**

Here is your professional script:

"These are my rates and my terms. You can pay me by check, money order, credit card, with processing fee added to my charge, or bank transfer. I divide my payments into three segments: down payment or one-third of the amount at the time we sign our agreement (always present your client with a legal document to countersign), one-third when I have completed the first (round of edits, draft, etc.) and the final third when I have completed the revisions."

If they wish to pay you the full amount at the outset, include a termination clause in your signed agreement, with a statement about a refund or partial payment procedure, based on the amount of work completed at the time of desired termination.

This work is their child. Would they let their child run naked in the streets, or go hungry? If they care enough about this manuscript or project, they will find a way to pay for your services. It is a matter of honor and respect. You know your services are valuable. Therefore, you require an exchange in the form of money or some other agreeable commodity that will equal quality and the nature of your services. Be firm about this. If one door closes, another will open. If that person absolutely cannot afford to pay you, tell them how sorry you are, and wish them luck. Another client will come along.

## **WHAT SHOULD I CHARGE?**

A good professional will have a fee structure document to send or hand deliver to clients. The table of fees is based on:

- The writer's qualifications - Are they a newbie or have they been doing this for several years, with a track record; testimonials (available on request)?
- Estimated time for completing the job

It is best to set flat rates when contracting for writing assignments because some writers work faster than others. Page count is one of the best ways to establish flat rates. To set a fee for editing a manuscript, for example, test yourself by working through a couple pages, and clock that time. Set your fee for your value in terms of your experience and skill. A beginning editor would charge approximately \$30 an hour. That may seem low, but they need the experience and can raise the rate after they've collected some testimonials and have worked with a significant number of clients.

Determine how many pages you can complete in an hour and then divide the total number of pages by that number. Multiply that fee by your hourly rate and add \$50 - \$100 for wiggle room, depending on the size of the work and

your hourly rate. If they pay by credit card or any other fee processing company, add that processing fee to your invoice.

I include office expenses, costs of materials, phone, fax, transcription (if that is required) and other related work fees. Travel expenses (plane, hotel, car rental and per diem) are extra.

If you know a job is going to be difficult, tedious or time-consuming, charge extra for the additional time required.

## **POTENTIAL CLIENT PACKAGE**

Some of these items may not appear in the first package you send, but will be delivered later. It will depend on how far along you are toward closing the deal, and also, what that potential client has requested that you send them.

- Drafted quote (if the potential client has requested this)
- Drafted Memorandum of Understanding for the client to review
- Brief résumé – see my website: [www.write-to-publish-for-profit.com](http://www.write-to-publish-for-profit.com) for résumé writing techniques
- C.V. (Curriculum vita) see Chapter 10 on writing c.v.'s
- Testimonials (Ask permission from your clients to use their names or initials on the document you prepare for potential clients. Also, ask permission to have a potential client call them as a reference.)
- Fee Sheet
- Promotion Pamphlet or flyer that describes your services and gives your contact information
- Business card
- Sample writing in the genre for which your potential client is interested in contracting your services

## **YOUR TO-DO LIST**

### ***Bio (Résumé) and C.V. (Curriculum Vita)***

Develop a brief biographical sketch of yourself. It should be no longer than a page (approximately 250 words). Include all the pertinent information that you want people to know about yourself:

- Contact information
- Education
- Credentials
- Awards
- Memberships
- Accomplishments

Remember, this is a professional document. People won't really care if you have hobbies, pets, a Significant Other or children. They will be paying you to write or edit. How can you show them you have the qualifications to get the job done?

- You will also want to develop a *Curriculum Vita* or chronological list of your positions (title and responsibilities) with the most recent year listed first. (See my website: [www.write-to-publish-for-profit.com](http://www.write-to-publish-for-profit.com) for c.v. writing techniques.)

### ***Writing Samples***

Upon request, you will be able to send many examples or samples of your writing. Include non-fiction—everything from press releases to articles, essays, op-ed pieces, excerpts from books you've written... whatever you've written that will showcase your abilities. However, unless requested, send

only those samples that are relevant to the type of writing your potential client will ask you to perform.

The more clients and experience you have, the more efficiently you will move through the negotiation process. If your potential client tells you they are able to get the same services performed for less, encourage them to use those services. Stay firm with your rates and the value you have set for expenditure of your time, experience and expertise. Chasing clients and pretending not to be desperate when deep down you do in fact have serious monthly payments on the car, the house, your credit cards, etc., will only lead you down a dark alley where you really don't want to go. You will say yes to a project that will be more trouble than it's worth. Everything depends on your attitude and your self-esteem.

# 5

## Be Wary Aware of What You Write and How you Right It!!

*I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back again.*

—Oscar Wilde

Most of you have probably been flooded with emails that point out comical repercussions from innocent usage errors.

The English language has tricky syntax and grammar and incorrect usage often delivers something considerably different from the intended message.

Here are a few examples:

Cocktail lounge, Norway: "LADIES ARE REQUESTED NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN IN THE BAR."

At a Budapest zoo: "PLEASE DO NOT FEED THE ANIMALS. IF YOU HAVE ANY SUITABLE FOOD, GIVE IT TO THE GUARD ON DUTY."

Doctors' office, Rome: "SPECIALIST IN WOMEN AND OTHER DISEASES."

Dry cleaners, Bangkok: "DROP YOUR TROUSERS HERE FOR THE BEST RESULTS."

In a Nairobi restaurant: "CUSTOMERS WHO FIND OUR WAITRESSES RUDE OUGHT TO SEE THE MANAGER."

On an Indian River highway: "TAKE NOTICE - WHEN THIS SIGN IS UNDER WATER, THIS ROAD IS IMPASSABLE."

In a City restaurant: "OPEN SEVEN DAYS A WEEK AND WEEKENDS."

A sign seen on an automatic restroom hand dryer: "DO NOT ACTIVATE WITH WET HANDS."

In a cemetery: "PERSONS ARE PROHIBITED FROM PICKING FLOWERS FROM ANY, BUT THEIR OWN GRAVES."

Tokyo hotel's rules and regulations: "GUESTS ARE REQUESTED NOT TO SMOKE OR DO OTHER DISGUSTING BEHAVIORS IN BED."

On the menu of a Swiss restaurant: "OUR WINES LEAVE YOU NOTHING TO HOPE FOR."

In each of these examples, misplaced words or phrases are the causes for these humorous mis-messages. We can easily avoid these embarrassments by taking time to read and re-read what we write, both to ourselves and out loud. Sometimes the ear picks up what the eye doesn't.

Vernacular that is often loaded with grammatical errors is definitely in order when writing works that include direct quotes. In fiction, for example, a direct quote or dialogue may effectively describe that person. Body language and actual description from the story's narrator may not even be necessary if that character has their own colorful way of expressing themselves. Better than any other technical tool, dialogue can deliver to the reader that character's uniqueness as well as their idiosyncrasies. The poet Robert Frost said, "You can be a little ungrammatical if you come from the right part of the country." In other words, there's a time and place for usage errors.

That time and place, however, is not when developing public signs or writing any form of copy that represents you. You must be as correct as possible without sounding stuffy or stiff. Create a healthy balance between the rule book and your own voice.

Purchase a usage book, or create your own from internet websites. I keep dictionary.com, for example, in my bookmarked Reference list. This website provides definitions, correct spelling, basic grammar information, and also leads to foreign words dictionaries and a thesaurus.

For editing and publishing guidelines, I use *Chicago Manual of Style*. It is considered the bible for many newspaper companies. Use the Table of Contents at the front or index at the back to find what you're looking for and soon you'll discover it's worth the effort to go to the source rather than spending hours poring (not "pouring"!) over heavily abridged versions.

If you are in a hurry and want reassurance that your hasty search will pay off, my favorite "short cut" books are:

- *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White (MacMillan, 1979)
- *The Elements of Grammar*, by Margaret Shetzer (MacMillan, 1986)
- *Punctuate It Right*, by Harry Shaw (Barnes & Noble, 1963)

A reputable college usage textbook will also do the job. If your client has a specific preference or set of guidelines, usually they will tell you in advance. They may even send you a style sheet. It would be good to inquire beforehand if they have any preferences and if so, what they are.

Here are a few writing basics to carry with you:

1. Keep it simple.
2. Less is more. Say what you want to say and be done with it. Don't try to elaborate or embellish unless you're writing a fiction work; even

then, be frugal! Lace doilies went out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century along with thousand-page novels.

3. Tuck it in. If you have a work or clause hanging out at the end, find a way to fold it into the sentence.
4. Think FIRST and then write. If it's clear in your mind, it will be easier to write down.
5. Put the work aside and review. Start the same process all over again and keep refining until your document is tight yet flowing, and concise yet well-packed with whatever the work requires (information, inspiration, entertainment, etc.).

If you feel you need an English usage and grammar tune-up, you may wish to enroll in an English usage and/or grammar course at your local community college course. Or you can enroll in an online distance learning program.

Before taking that step, I will gladly review a writing excerpt, free of charge, and guide you in the right direction. My email is: [info@write-to-publish-for-profit.com](mailto:info@write-to-publish-for-profit.com). Check out my website also: [www.write-to-publish-for-profit.com](http://www.write-to-publish-for-profit.com).

## **WHEN DO YOU THROW THEM OUT?**

I know you've all heard people say there's a time to use them and a time to throw them out. How do we know when it's safe to go out on our own and be inventive?

Every building needs a strong foundation. "Eat your vegetables first and then you can have dessert!" "Do your homework first and then you can go out to play!"

Learn the rules first, and be so familiar with them they become second nature. At that point, you will know exactly when you can dispense with them. Your inner guide is your best pilot. Instinct thrives on integrity, keen understanding of your subject matter, and where you wish to position it.

Stiffness and starchiness are not the objective. It's so easy to detect (and irritating to deal with) writing that is erudite. Now *there's* a ten dollar word for you--"Erudite"! I like to pick on this word because it is an example of many English language challenges.

"Erudite" started out meaning the opposite of its current definition, which is "learned and scholarly." "Rude" is the central part of the word "erudite," which means "raw, or unlearned." If you *draw* out the rawness or rudeness in a person by adding an "e" or "ex," which means in Latin, "to take away," "go out from," or "draw out from," you end up educating or re-finishing the (c)rude. An erudite person is often considered self-important; they like to impress others by eliciting from anyone whom they consider crude, unrefined or lacking education, "class" or "background."

Do you like to "stand tall" by stepping on someone's shoulders, or do you like to do it on your own merit? How do erudite people view their readers?

Erudition is not what we're after when we're looking for a good writing and reading experience! A good writer who may have an expansive vocabulary has learned long ago that it's bad manners to display that vocabulary in public.

Professional writers have learned either from the University of Hard Knocks or on their own, how to effortlessly turn off their self-consciousness and just let the words flow. Long ago they donated that monkey on their backs to the local zoo.

## **FLOW**

Be lucid and loose. I like to tell people to write as if they're talking on the phone, or in today's digital internet world, like we're sending an email to a best buddy. Some people like to call this type of writing "channeling" because they're getting out of the way of themselves. They're turning off that judgmental part that often keeps them from simply jumping off the diving board without looking first.

I strongly advise that before you *do* jump into that pool, you check to see if it's filled with water that's deep enough--but do expect that water to be wet (avoid redundancy and triteness like the plague!!). Getting wet is what life is all about.

Check list for getting it write (right):

1. The tailor's basting chalk doesn't show. It reads well.
2. The writing is customized to fit the reader.
3. Inform, inspire, uplift, enlighten and/or entertain.
4. The reader tells you they're eager for more--and also to tell others what a great reading experience they just had.

Enjoy the process. When a sentence seems too long, snip it. Tuck in the stray clauses. Avoid "there is" like the plague and be wary of the adverb

“that.” This gremlin can sneak into more unwanted places and slow down the reader faster than almost any other word.

“I know **that** she is there.” Get rid of it!

“It would be fine if Harry would join us because everywhere **that** Harry goes, Mary goes.” CUT!

“I see **that** you are right. You are always right. He likes to know.”

Ditch the first “that” and save the second one.

It’s such a sensitive matter to know when to cut and when to let it grow. Use your ear as one of your best barometers (but don’t cut it off!) and practice the rule, “If in doubt, go without.” Use that rule everywhere you can--if rules permit.

## **LESS IS MORE... BUT START WITH MORE**

Give your readers a full-course meal—but don’t invite them to fall asleep at the table with too many facts and too much heavy writing. State your points clearly and simply. Make it as easy as possible for them to understand what you’re saying. Be clear and succinct. Wasting words is worse than wasting toilet paper.

## **HOW WOULD YOU RE-WRITE THE FOLLOWING WANT ADS?**

2 female Boston terrier puppies, 7 wks old, Perfect markings, 555-1234. Leave mess.

Lost: small apricot poodle. Reward. Neutered. Like one of the family.

A superb and inexpensive restaurant. Fine food expertly served by waitresses in appetizing forms.

Dinner Special -- Turkey \$2.35; Chicken or Beef \$2.25; Children \$2.00.

For sale: an antique desk suitable for lady with thick legs and large drawers.

Four-poster bed, 101 years old. Perfect for antique lover.

Now is your chance to have your ears pierced and get an extra pair to take home, too.

Wanted: 50 girls for stripping machine operators in factory.

Wanted: Unmarried girls to pick fresh fruit and produce at night.

We do not tear your clothing with machinery. We do it carefully by hand.

For Sale. Three canaries of undermined sex.

Great Dames for sale.

Have several very old dresses from grandmother in beautiful condition.

Tired of cleaning yourself? Let me do it.

Dog for sale: eats anything and is fond of children.

Vacation Special: have your home exterminated.

If you think you've seen everything in Paris, visit the Pere Lachasis Cemetery. It boasts such immortals as Moliere, Jean de la Fontain, and Chopin.

Mt. Kilimanjaro, the breathtaking backdrop for the Serena Lodge. Swim in the lovely pool while you drink it all in.

The hotel has bowling alleys, tennis courts, comfortable beds, and other athletic facilities.

Get rid of aunts: Zap does the job in 24 hours.

Toaster: A gift that every member of the family appreciates. Automatically burns toast.

Sheer stockings. Designed for fancy dress, but so serviceable that lots of women wear nothing else.

Stock up and save. Limit: one.

We build bodies that last a lifetime.

For Rent: 6-room hated apartment.

Man, honest. Will take anything.

Wanted: chambermaid in rectory. Love in, \$200 a month.  
References required.

Man wanted to work in dynamite factory. Must be willing to travel.

UsedCars: Why go elsewhere to be cheated? Come here first!

Christmans tag-sale. Handmade gifts for the hard-to-find person.

Modular Sofas. Only \$299. For rest or fore play.

Wanted: Hair-cutter. Excellent growth potential.

Wanted. Man to take care of cow that does not smoke or drink.

3-year-old teacher need for pre-school. Experience preferred.

Our experienced Mom will care of your child. Fenced yard, meals, and smacks included.

Our bikinis are exciting. They are simply the tops.

Auto Repair Service. Free pick-up and delivery. Try us once, you'll never go anywhere again.

Holcross pullets. Starting to lay Betty Clayton, Granite 5-6204.

Illiterate? Write today for free help.

Girl wanted to assist magician in cutting-off-head illusion. Blue Cross and salary.

Wanted. Widower with school-age children requires person to assume general housekeeping duties. Must be capable of contributing to growth of family.

Mixing bowl set designed to please a cook with round bottom for efficient beating.

Semi-Annual after-Christmas Sale.

And now, the Superstore--unequaled in size, unmatched in variety, unrivaled inconvenience.

# 6

## The 'So What' Factor: Writing a Good Article

*Planning to write is not writing. Outlining... researching... talking to people about what you're doing, none of that is writing. Writing is writing.*

--E.L. Doctorow

If you've never heard of the "So What" Factor," let me recommend it as one of the best household cleaners on the market.

I highly recommend that you also use the "So What Factor" on your mental (and emotional) self-image daily and create your own private label. On a large piece of paper or cardboard, print these two words

**"SO WHAT?"**

and place this amazing product directly above your computer.

Envision your reading public as a group of over-busy, over-stressed multi-taskers who have only a split second's worth of time between carpooling the kids and getting to the office on time to read your feature article (news article/editorial/press release/book review, blog piece). They will either hungrily devour it like Belgian chocolate, or spit it out with a loud

**"SO WHAT?"**

**"Next!!"**

Face it: you are not the greatest thing since sliced bread. You are just one among several million other amazing people with fingers and a PC and the ability to play the keyboard as if it were a piano. It is not. It does not have its own built-in tones and it cannot make music (create articles) by itself.

Reading your article is competing with getting the laundry done, fueling up the SUVs, driving the kids to soccer practice and putting in job hours at the (office, bank, university or wherever a person parks themselves to make enough money to pay the bills). As a professional writer, your public will be on overstress 24/7.

**Bottom line:** Your article must have value; it must be worth reading.

***Why would anyone want to read this article that you're writing?  
Because:***

1. It delivers new information.
2. It solves a problem or answers a question.
3. It will inspire or motivate a person to do something they've never done before.
4. It will aesthetically or spiritually enrich a person's life.

If this is what you want to deliver to your readers, your first line of business will be to tell them that!

- Tell them what this article is about, but do it with punch and panache!
- Hook the reader to move beyond the first sentence. (Yes, you are a hooker. What are you going to show them?!)

- Next: Tell them why they need to read your article. How will it change their lives?

### **Now, set to work.**

What's the problem you're going to solve for them? What are they lacking that you will give them? What's wrong that you can correct? What have they not witnessed or experienced that you will now show them?

Start with your own experience. It always comes back to you. You are the person who learned something that you want to share with others.

Share your experiences and tell your stories.

Color your article with the flesh and blood of live stories--your own. No one can tell those stories better than you because they come straight from your "pen" (computer), with no intermediaries, translators or interpreters.

The best way to demonstrate a point is to establish rapport with your reader by inviting them to laugh and cry with you: to learn from your mistakes and be enriched by your strange and wonderful encounters. Season and sprinkle with quotes from others; related words of wisdom from notable persons add zest to any written work. Anecdotes you've read or heard from others is another way to season the text and broaden your experience base beyond your own.

If your article is a factual one, support each point with as much evidence as possible.

Footnote everything. Include a bibliography at the end of the article. Footnotes should be as complete as possible. Spend time conducting sufficient research to make sure you give the reader plenty of source material.

If you are delivering opinions, let them be others instead of your own. "It is generally believed that..." or: "Most people would agree that...." or: "According to..." etc.

Don't put your own head on the chopping block. You are representing a broad body of individuals who feel the same way; a consensus of opinion is behind your particular perspective or perception of the issue at hand. Stay away from "I personally think that..."

*On the other hand...* if your mission is to deliver YOUR opinion because you're running for an office or supporting a certain viewpoint by adding your weight to the consensus, by all means, SPEAK UP and don't hesitate to deliver exactly what you stand for. You can't afford to be a mouse if you want backers, fans and a winning team of believers. There's a distinct difference between writing a factual article and a persuasive or political one.

***Remember to:***

- Keep your writing tight and spare.
- Keep it simple.
- Cut whenever you can. Less is more.
- Re-write, re-write and keep re-writing.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Use the right word and not its second cousin.*

-Mark Twain

## **BRAND YOURSELF**

*OUCH!* No, not that kind of branding!

If readers enjoyed your article because the writing is distinctly yours, they will want to read more pieces with your by-line. This is the best way to brand yourself and get your distinctive voice to the marketplace.

But... how do you know that every sentence bears the stamp of who you are and delivers your personality? Because *you* wrote it! You didn't plagiarize from someone else; you loaded it with information, opinions (if appropriate) and energy that bears the stamp of who you are.

## **'THE HOOK' OR OPENING SENTENCE**

A favorite technique for that all-important opener is to ask a question. Usually that question will be your reason for writing your article.

For example: "Should we outlaw capital punishment?"; "How can we make our environment healthier for ourselves and our children?"; "What makes a best-selling book series for children?"; "Why do people like to see violent films?"

The hook leads a reader directly to the issue your article will address. If people are interested in the subject—if they've been asking the same questions, they will immediately identify with you and read on.

## **AFTER THE OPENING STATEMENT**

If the article intends to present a viewpoint, you will state your opinion and support it with examples and illustrations as well as footnoted references. Then you will deliver opposing opinions with examples and illustrations, also well footnoted.

In the next part of the article, you will persuade your reader that they should support your viewpoint or perspective. Write this portion of the article with passion, yet without blaming, criticizing or judging others... and *always* without slinging any mud. This requires skill. Humor works wonders; it is its own magical shorthand.

Provide many examples and argue your point with strong visuals and visceral. Make it so convincing, the reader will put aside the article and say, "Yes! This writer really does have something to say and even if I may not agree with them, they've shown me there's more than one side to this issue. They've also illustrated a whole new way of looking at this matter."

Your article may even convince them to dig deeper and eventually change or expand their perception. That is one of the greatest rewards of good writing.

Believe in what you write. This is easy if you believe in yourself, know what you stand for and give it all you've got. You can never go wrong if you take the greatest risk possible by giving all and expecting nothing in return. Yes, you do have an agenda. We all have agendas or we wouldn't be human. Our agenda may be to simply have a joyous life and be free to do as we choose. Or our agenda may be to get people to vote for a certain candidate for city councilperson in the next election. The word "agenda" gets negative press when it refers to controlling or manipulating others for self-serving purposes.

As with all writing, be natural. I was amused recently when watching a morning news program in which the entire staff, including the two anchor persons, visited five area fitness centers to report on different types of workouts. One of the anchor persons, a young woman, has a very pale complexion with dark hair. She said she sweats a lot when she works out, so she doesn't wear any makeup.

The workout sessions were videotaped and I was shocked and amused to note how different this woman looked without camera makeup! Her face was a total washout and she looked like a teenager. When she was interviewed on camera during the workout, her personality changed as well. The same transformation happened with the men. Their veneer fell away and they were their natural selves.

When you're exercising vigorously, you can't put on any airs. You have to *let go and sweat*.

If you are a female, imagine that you're doing your writing while you're at a fitness center—no make-up, no cameras, just *you in the raw*. If you're a male, imagine that you're in the wilderness, fishing, hunting, hiking... far away from the boardroom or office.

Let people get to know who you are behind the veneer. Create an authentic group of loyal supporters!

## **NOURISHMENT, INTEGRITY AND WISDOM**

Here are three good words to remember:

1. Nourishing

2. Fiber-filled
3. Satisfying

Your articles will nourish people; they will give them food for thought, some “fiber” to chew on. They will be wholesome or “whole” in their presentation, delivering more than just your viewpoint. And you will leave your reader feeling satisfied, yet wanting to dine at your next meal.

Your article will have a beginning, a middle and an end. Each part will be both sequential and holistic, or all-encompassing, so it constantly refers back to the theme.

A simple equation to memorize is:

$$\text{Wisdom} = \text{Knowledge} + \text{Experience}$$

Draw from the wisdom of those who have already collected a few decades of knowledge and experience. Make a practice of sprinkling your articles with relevant quotations from the wisdom-keepers. This builds a bridge between you and individuals whom many people (including you) admire. You’re not just writing off the top of your head; rather, you link your beliefs, feelings and opinions with respected philosophers, researchers, journalists and critics of the past and present. Your reader will appreciate your decision to build your house on a solid foundation.

Be strong and stay strong. Write with self-confidence. If you lack knowledge in your subject, go to the library or the internet and gather more material. In today’s information age, there’s no excuse for ever being a lightweight!

Be generous with facts and references. Give your reader their money's worth, and then some.

## **MAKE YOUR POINT**

Don't forget to add humor, anecdotes, graphics and other spices to the mix of your article. This will give your reader breathing room. If the article is serious and loaded with facts, these interludes will break the tension of trying to absorb too much all at once.

Professional writers rake through their work many times before they're ready to send it off for publication, to make sure:

- it's free of extra words and phrases
- it flows, and it
- delivers the goods as clearly and simply as possible.

Following is an anecdote that was sent to me by email from one of my friends. I don't know where this story came from; if it has a byline I would be happy to give credit to the author if they wish to identify themselves.

I use it here as an excellent example of how to make a point and deliver it with subtlety and humor.

### **The Four Orthodox Rabbis**

So it seems that these four rabbis had a series of theological arguments, and three were always in accord against the fourth.

One day, the odd rabbi out, after the usual "3 to 1, majority rules" statement that signified that he had lost again, decided to appeal to a higher authority.

"Oh, G~d!" he cried. "I know in my heart that I am right and they are wrong! Please give me a sign to prove it to them!"

It was a beautiful, sunny day.

As soon as the rabbi finished his prayer, a storm cloud moved across the sky above the four. It rumbled once and dissolved.

"A sign from G~d! See, I'm right, I knew it!"

But the other three disagreed, pointing out that storm clouds form on hot days.

So the rabbi prayed again: "Oh, G~d, I need a bigger sign to show that I am right and they are wrong. So please, G~d, a bigger sign!"

This time four storm clouds appeared, rushed toward each other to form one big cloud, and a bolt of lightning slammed into a tree on a nearby hill.

"I told you I was right!" cried the rabbi, but his friends insisted that nothing had happened that could not be explained by natural causes.

The rabbi was getting ready to ask for a *\*very big\** sign, but just as he said, "Oh G~d...", the sky turned pitch black, the earth shook, and a deep, booming voice intoned, "HEEEEEEEEE'S RIIIIIIIGHT!"

The rabbi put his hands on his hips, turned to the other three, and said, "Well?"

"So," shrugged one of the other rabbis, "now it's 3 to 2."

The title of this article could be, "Is It Better to Be Right or Happy?" The kernel of understanding is simply that "the odd rabbi out" would *never* be right in the eyes of the other three, even if **God** delivered the verdict. Therefore, the message to the fourth rabbi is, "Why bother trying to 'win' if

it's always going to be 3 against 1, and I will always be the odd person out?  
Be happy and let it be!!"

## **JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM**

News articles or reports have different rules. The writer or reporter is looking for facts, and although these facts may point to certain conclusions, it is the reporter's responsibility to be objective. Personal opinions are a no-no in any type of news article.

If a media organization has an agenda, often they use tried and true techniques to slant a story in order to direct the reader to a certain line of thought.

The most common form of bias is omission. Ignoring a news story or blacklisting it among media conglomerates that share the same position, down-plays its importance and value. Censorship is a common practice in countries whose governments control the media.

Interviewing only those individuals who support the reporter's agenda is another sure-fire way to deliver bias.

Third-person reportage of someone else's opinion is yet another way to slant the news. Usually the reporter or commentator will provide a liberal number of statistics to support their bias. Selective information is a powerful tool that is often used to sway the masses.

It's time to pull out three aphorisms from my pocketful of other people's wisdom:

- The Truth will set us free.

- The Truth hurts.
- Imitation is the highest form of flattery.

We can either choose pain or freedom. If we choose pain and use denial and deception as a means for resisting The Truth because we are afraid to embrace it, we find ourselves in the company of Adolf Hitler and other tyrants of the past. Imitation is the highest form of flattery. Let us not flatter Adolf Hitler in our intentions.

If we oppose The Truth, we are opposing freedom. Who on this planet wishes to say they oppose freedom?

Which side are you on: Self-deception or Truth? Would you be willing to earn the right to be called compassionate?

Are you a truth lover or a lie lover?

## **FEATURE ARTICLES**

Miracles and magic--extraordinary happenings, or stories about amazing people can be as rewarding to the writer as they are to the reader.

Let these stories "write" or "tell" themselves. They will. Listen to the story line and find the kernel of what is heart-warming or amazing, beautiful or endearing. As you develop your article, focus on that feeling.

Be generous with quotes and dialogue, and be just as generous with description. "Tell the picture" by showing the scene as if you were viewing it on TV or on film.

## **BE FREE**

Let yourself go. Come from a place of freedom and flow. You love to tell people interesting stories, and you love to express yourself through your writing. So... just do it! It's really so much fun and becomes even more fun when you approach it that way.

The moment it becomes work, stop. Take a break. Move away from the computer. Take a shower; go for a walk; make a pan of lasagna or some chocolate chip cookies. Do something away from the computer and notepad!

Read a book if that will loosen you up again. Often—especially if you're an avid reader, and what writer isn't?--picking up an article you've been intending to get to for weeks already, is one of the best ways to start the juices flowing.

Always, always, love what you're doing and come from the heart. Even when you are writing reportage that requires "just the facts," give it your all. Over-doing or over-performing is a sure-fire way to reach your audience. If you were a singer performing on stage, you would project your voice over the orchestra or accompanist, reach all the way to the highest balcony and scoop up every single person in the hall.

## **CONCLUDING STATEMENT**

Your conclusion will open with a hook that delivers the answer to your opening question or statement. It will then proceed to give a brief overview of everything you've stated in the article.

Is that difficult to do? You bet it is! Condensing anything requires effort and skill. Eventually it will become easier, but in the beginning you'll struggle and strain to get it just right. And it has to be that: just right. You want your readers to go away with that perfect taste in their mouths.

**Closure should be short and sweet, yet all-inclusive.**

You can end with a famous quotation, a short anecdote that illustrates your point, or just a simple sentence or two that summarizes and/or supports the thesis or theme of your article.

**STOP!**

**Know when to put it aside and start writing something else.**

At a certain point, consider the work finished. You will know when you've arrived at that moment. You've checked and rechecked the spelling and grammar; each sentence is tight; every phrase makes sense; the writing flows with ease; it "spreads like softened butter."

# 7

## Fiction - Write Your Heart Out

*Keep writing. Keep doing it and doing it. Even in the moments when it's so hurtful to think about writing.*

--Heather Armstrong, Keynote Speech, SXSW 2006

To illustrate how important it is to write and live from the heart--regardless of the consequences—I want to share with you an excerpt from *The Woman with Qualities*, a novel I wrote under the pen name of Sarah Daniels. After presenting the excerpt, I will go through it once again to point out several technical devices that I intentionally employed. One of those is a matrix that is often called “a play within a play within a play.”

A good fiction writer uses this device with care. When they are successful, it enriches every aspect of the work and adds another dimension. Use this technique sparingly and make it so inconspicuous, the reader will not even be aware of it. Make your prose seamless and subtle. Stay behind the curtain and whenever possible, let the characters move, speak and do all the performing.

As a bit of background for this excerpt, this novel was written from a personal experience; I used to teach prison workshops in Florida (an example of writing from my experience!). Some of my most profound teaching and learning experiences emerged from those workshops.

The title of this novel, *The Woman with Qualities*, is a reference to a novel by 20<sup>th</sup> century Austrian writer, Robert Musil, whose work, *The Man without Qualities*, is considered a classic.

My title is also a play on the word "quality." The woman in this novel searched all her life to become a person with qualities instead of just another anonymous housewife and mother. The novel is the story of her journey toward self-awareness and personal growth.

Musil's book is a pastiche on middle-class 20<sup>th</sup> century Austrian bourgeoisie society which he viewed as boring and lack-luster, without purpose or "distinctive qualities."

Also playing on the word "quality," Musil compared his picture of Vienna between the Wars—a dead-end existentialism in which life turns in on itself—with the properties of light. Every great German-speaking writer is familiar with the literary works of the German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (best known as the author of *Faust*), who was also a scientist. Goethe discovered that white light or light without quality (lacking color) includes all the other colors of the spectrum when the light is broken apart.

Sigmund Freud's studies of the subconscious were becoming vogue; we were learning that human consciousness was merely a surface appearance or "white light" of that multi-faceted prismic being that dwelled in the subconscious.

Musil's message was profound. What may seem boring and "without color" in broad daylight, may in fact, be exactly the opposite. It's up to the writer to hold the character's (and his own) life up to the magnifying glass in order to

split the psyche wide open and allow it to bleed onto the soul's palette (the writer's notebook) for all to see.

At this time in history, Europe was reaching a zero point or peak of decadence and was about to go to war again. Vienna, city of Romance, Royalty and *haut couture* in every aspect of life—and also the birthplace of Adolf Hitler--was about to be bombed by the Germans and “split wide open.”

The setting for my own novel in 21<sup>st</sup> century America could easily have been 20<sup>th</sup> century Vienna, since it takes place in Palm Beach, Florida, one of the most decadent areas of the U.S. I contrasted this mirage of the bored affluent to “real life” across the Causeway, in West Palm Beach, which at that time was a drug and crime haven. I contrasted the “white light” surface existence of upper crust Palm Beach society (that proved to be otherwise!) with the “colorful” adventures of a woman who decides to break out of her complacency and risk the ultimate.

Another reason for choosing to discuss this novel in a chapter on writing fiction is its focus on the word “quality” in relation to the work itself. I believe good fiction is written with the intention of “having value” or “quality” because it delivers a message to the reader.

A good fiction writer strives to give the reader a profound and memorable experience. The depth of that experience may even be transformative, i.e., it may change the reader's perspective about life or give the reader a deeper, more profound insight about people, places, relationships, beliefs, etc.

Here is the excerpt from *The Woman with Qualities*:

By the time I arrived at the Glades Correctional entrance, the sullen drizzle had turned into a blinding downpour.

"We didn't think you'd come tonight." Bill Williamson, a former journalist, handed me a sheaf of notebook paper.

"I've been working hard this week." Joshua Franklin, a young fellow who was serving forty years, placed his work on top of Bill's. Joshua was a natural, but in school had only gone as far as seventh grade; then he was out on the streets picking up extra cash to support the alcoholic habits of his father, a sick mother and four other siblings.

"And you, Judson?" I nodded at the scrawny dark-haired boy standing apart from the rest.

"I doubt if it's 'creative,'" he sneered. "Furthermore, he added, glancing around at his fellow inmates, "it's all about death, and some of it's pretty gory."

"I've been told I'm crazy." Judson's eyes glittered, "and I've been told I have a death-wish."

"So that's what you're writing about?" I inquired.

"Yes."

"I'd like to see some of your work. Poems? Stories?"

"Are you sure?" He eyed me incredulously. "It's terrible stuff."

"Yes, I'm sure."

Thus far he'd only handed in three innocuous poems about poisoned prison food and one about Jesus' second coming which, he said, was an orgasm; and a ballad about a woman who had drowned her infant son. Then, during the third session suddenly he stood up, strode to the front of the room and delivered the story of his life. He had been an adopted child. At the age of seven he'd been lifted up by his angry stepfather and hurled through a plate glass window while his stepmother passively watched from the other room. In the middle of his story, tears started to roll down his face. By the time he finished, he was crying.

Judson slapped a sheaf of paper on the desk. "Here. This is for you, if you really want to read it and if you don't like it, I don't blame you. No one would ever publish it."

"We'll see," I smiled.

Just as we'd begun to go over some of the papers, a bolt of lightning bounced on the table in front of me. The lights flickered and heavy rain pounded on the roof.

Another bolt raced up and down my spine. I shivered as it spread through my shoulders and back. Instant thunder landed in my stomach. What if the lights went out and didn't come back on? Was the schoolroom building on the main generator, and was there an emergency one? Bravely I continued. "As I've stressed before, and I can't repeat it enough times, if you don't have strong characters, characters you believe in yourself -- real individuals who are gutsy, interesting, exciting -- wrestling with conflicts the reader can identify with -- if you don't have believable, red-blooded characters, your readers are going to yawn and turn on the TV."

More lightning and thunder. This time when the lights flickered they went off for a moment before coming back. "And then love," I faltered, breathing deeply. "And a sense of humor," I continued, feeling a release inside. My voice soared. "If you don't love your characters for who and what they are, regardless of their shortcomings, how can you expect your readers to feel anything at all for them? Let's face it, we were put here on this planet in order to create challenges and then find solutions for them that will prove to us how powerful we are. If you can't laugh and cry and transfer your full range of feelings to your characters -- if you can't transmit this -- your work won't —"

I jumped. The lightning was right here in the room. The lights flickered several times in succession but miraculously held.

No one seemed to notice. All eyes were glued on me. They were hanging on every word I said. "...grip the attention of your readers and hold them spellbound. Yes! You want to cast a spell over your readers," I continued excitedly. "But you have to love yourselves first, before you can begin to love others. You must really love the characters you're developing. Let them live through you. Let them feel your loneliness, despair, desperation, depression... put all your energy into it. Then and only then, will you have the true satisfaction of being a writer."

No one stirred. "Do you think just because you ended up in prison that God and everyone else has given up on you?" I cried, my eyes circling the room. "It isn't true. Don't you dare even let those thoughts enter into your mind anymore. Otherwise you'll never be able to create anything. The creating goes on inside, where there's light and joy and freedom – and hope. This life inside has nothing to do with what's happening anywhere else." The thunder drowned out my words. As I repeated the last statement, they stood to give me a round of applause.

By the end of the session the storm had passed.

Instinctively I knew all was well because my fear had been replaced by love.

***Here is my teaching commentary on this excerpt:***

*By the time I arrived at the Glades Correctional entrance, the sullen drizzle had turned into a blinding downpour.*

The beginning of this chapter—remember to make every chapter a mini-beginning--establishes the “who, what, when and where” of this particular segment of the novel. Obviously, if this were the first chapter of the book, author Daniel would have to explain much more. Most of the “information plants” are already growing because she seeded them at the beginning. Prior to this chapter, the protagonist, Keri Anders, has explained that she is teaching creative writing workshops at a major felony, maximum holding male correctional facility in Belle Glades, Florida.

In Florida it rains a great deal and these torrential downpours are fierce. To set the scene for this prison incident, a storm is brewing; the skies are gray and it’s gloomy outside, like the atmosphere inside a prison. The term “correctional facility” is a misnomer... a prison is a prison. Neglect is blatantly evident. Buildings are ugly and crude, the grounds are unkempt and guards often treat the inmates like animals. One gets the message that U.S. prisons are considered wastelands or dumpsters for humans who are locked up in order to keep them from “contaminating” our “clean” society. They are far from correctional or rehabilitative.

The “curtain” opens with two lines of dialogue from one of the inmates:

*"We didn't think you'd come tonight." Bill Williamson, a former journalist, handed me a sheaf of notebook paper.*

Daniels is delivering social commentary at the same time she advances the story line. Some of the inmates were educated professionals; "Bill Williamson" was a newspaper reporter who for some reason never disclosed to Keri, had landed in the clink. He was a conscientious student who always delivered his assignments on time. Most of the others did also, but Daniels chose to focus on Bill as the curtain-opening dialogue because she wanted to give the reader additional insight about Keri.

This particular inmate would be perceptive enough to know that a single woman driving alone to teach a creative writing course at a prison 40 miles away would have to be dedicated to her work. She would also have to be a caring individual. The prison was located in a third world area of Florida—on almost every corner was at least one bar and almost the entire city could be called a "red light district." Weather forecasters had predicted a severe thunderstorm.

These details set the stage for high risk and also give Daniels an opportunity to describe the protagonist indirectly, through the eyes of one of the minor characters. Bookmark this technique and use it yourself when describing your characters. "Bill" does all the work for Daniels and also delivers the questions a perceptive reader would be asking: Why would a single (divorced) attractive woman in her forties, choose to put her life at risk? Why wouldn't she have called the corrective facility to cancel?

Consider the title of the work, *The Woman with Qualities*: what does that mean? What are those “qualities”? We now have a few more to add to the list.

Also, a bond is created between two professional writers. They both understand what it means to “show up,” or have responsibilities—deadlines, appointments and people depending on them. Bill is a professional journalist. Like Keri, he understands social issues because before he landed in prison, he dealt with them daily. This type of bonding is another excellent way to strengthen the interaction among a novel’s characters at the same time it delivers more information about each of them.

Consider another point as well: the author is a writer and she is teaching creative writing. She is about to teach a creative writing lesson to the inmates (and to the readers). Added to that is the fact that I am using this example to demonstrate various fiction writing techniques to you, the reader of this writing handbook. How many levels of interaction do we now have? Have you lost count?!

*"I've been working hard this week." Joshua Franklin, a young fellow who was serving forty years, placed his work on top of Bill's. Joshua was a natural, but in school had only gone as far as seventh grade; then he was out on the streets picking up extra cash to support the alcoholic habits of his father, a sick mother and four other siblings.*

*"And you, Judson?" I nodded at the scrawny dark-haired boy standing apart from the rest.*

The dialogue from Joshua Franklin conveys Daniels' faith in humanity. Prisoners are not "bad" people, she tells us. In fact, there *are* no "bad" people. There are just people. Notice how subtly an opinion is slipped into this fiction work. Joshua's term is for forty years. Already we can interpret his story. Is there hope for him when he gets out? Forty years is a long time. How old will he be? What shape will he be in after living in a prison for forty years? He came from a dysfunctional family and is often referred to in our society as a "dead end kid."

What was I, the author, saying about society? About The American Dream? Daniels uses one of the characters to drive home a point she wants to make, viz., that many children in this country are not given a fair chance. Often they end up on the streets trying to find a way to survive. At least a prison is a roof over their heads.

The story moves on to describe another inmate; this one provides friction or counterpoint for the unfolding story (and he will return surrealistically later on in the novel). Notice that this inmate (Judson) is standing apart from the rest. With that statement, Daniels is planting the fact that either Judson does not feel that he is a part of this group or he is anti-social... or both:

*"I doubt if it's 'creative,'" he sneered. "Furthermore, he added, glancing around at his fellow inmates, "it's all about death, and some of it's pretty gory."*

*"I've been told I'm crazy." Judson's eyes glittered, "and I've been told I have a death-wish."*

*"So that's what you're writing about?" I inquired.*

"Yes."

*"I'd like to see some of your work. Poems? Stories?"*

*"Are you sure?" He eyed me incredulously. "It's terrible stuff."*

*"Yes, I'm sure."*

*Thus far he'd only handed in three innocuous poems about poisoned prison food and one about Jesus' second coming which, he said, was an orgasm; and a ballad about a woman who had drowned her infant son. Then, during the third session suddenly he stood up, strode to the front of the room and delivered the story of his life. He had been an adopted child. At the age of seven he'd been lifted up by his angry stepfather and hurled through a plate glass window while his stepmother passively watched from the other room. In the middle of his story, tears started to roll down his face. By the time he finished, he was crying.*

This segment is loaded. We have a life story told in a few sentences, with a full character description of a person who feels like an outcast because he was abused as a child. The dialogue describes the character; Daniels requires no other technique for conveying information or character description. This is one of the easiest and best ways to fold dialogue into a fiction work.

Judson feels he has no value, no reason to be alive. Why is he here? Notice again how Daniels' use of the color gray is appropriate for every aspect of

this scene. Hopelessness hangs like a dark cloud over these inmates. One of their only rays of sunlight is the bit of joy and encouragement they may receive from a writing teacher who shows up once a week to spend a couple hours with them.

Notice how Daniels has also neatly slipped another ray of hope into this chapter. Creativity: creating something new and different that a person can be proud of—can provide a reason to live. Circumstances may be horrible right now, but the future could be different... (It's up to us to make them different and to make a difference... that is exactly why Keri felt it was so important to teach these "creative writing" classes.)

Judson finds it hard to believe that someone would care to read something he's written. He acts and feels like a stray cat. No one wants him and yet, more than anything else, he wants to be loved.

*Judson slapped a sheaf of paper on the desk. "Here. This is for you, if you really want to read it and if you don't like it, I don't blame you. No one would ever publish it."*

*"We'll see," I smiled.*

*Just as we'd begun to go over some of the papers, a bolt of lightning bounced on the table in front of me. The lights flickered and heavy rain pounded on the roof.*

Keri gives Judson hope. The internal message is to inspire the reader to have hope. Regardless of the circumstances, don't give up. Find that ray of

sunshine inside, and live there. That light could be imagination or an imaginary friend, as it often is for a child who is lonely and afraid.

And now the weather intervenes. It was Daniels' intention to make this thunderstorm as fierce and frightening as possible. In order to enter the building, Keri has to pass through clearance and she is then locked into the classroom. Only the guards can release her. Did it not cross her mind that the power might go out? If it hadn't occurred to her before now, Daniels builds the tension by adding a few touches, e.g., the flickering of lights to indicate the possibility of a power outage.

*Another bolt raced up and down my spine. I shivered as it spread through my shoulders and back. Instant thunder landed in my stomach. What if the lights went out and didn't come back on? Was the schoolroom building on the main generator, and was there an emergency one? Bravely I continued. "As I've stressed before, and I can't repeat it enough times, if you don't have strong characters, characters you believe in yourself -- real individuals who are gutsy, interesting, exciting -- wrestling with conflicts the reader can identify with -- if you don't have believable, red-blooded characters, your readers are going to yawn and turn on the TV."*

*More lightning and thunder. This time when the lights flickered they went off for a moment before coming back. "And then love," I faltered, breathing deeply. "And a sense of humor," I continued, feeling a release inside. My voice soared. "If you don't love your characters for who and what they are, regardless of their shortcomings, how can you expect your readers to feel anything at all for them? Let's face it, we were put here on this planet in order to create challenges and then*

*find solutions for them that will prove to us how powerful we are. If you can't laugh and cry and transfer your full range of feelings to your characters -- if you can't transmit this -- your work won't —"*

Here, the author uses one of Shakespeare's favorite techniques: a play within a play. Daniels (Keri) delivers a lesson on creative writing at the same time she is experiencing a serious threat to her very existence (another version of the Scheherazade story). Every word you write is life or death. Words have value; everyone (you, the inmates, the author, the protagonist) has value.

Added to this is the larger picture of Keri Anders reaching into her psyche to find value for herself. Thus, from this "web page" of a story, she returns to the "landing page" or home page of her "website"--to her "self"--*The Woman with Qualities*. Daniels portrays a window within a window within a window... ad infinitum. The story moves simultaneously in several dimensions.

The opening sentences of this paragraph are written in first person narrative, using a visceral description in order to transmit the same feeling to the reader: *"Another bolt raced up and down my spine. I shivered as it spread through my shoulders and back. Instant thunder landed in my stomach."*

When you write it, feel it! I (Daniels) experienced a bolt of lightning traveling up my spine when I wrote that passage. I was terrified! (Incidentally, this story is based on a true incident, so I did indeed feel that lightning bolt as I described it, at the particular moment when I was at the prison, teaching in a closed classroom.) The goal of the author is to transmit the full impact of "gut feelings" to the reader.

You will live through every character you write about and develop. They are all versions of you. Remember, a fiction work is just a concoction of words that you cooked up on the computer or on paper, emerging from your imagination. When you feel it at the deepest level, it will fly out from you and land in the solar plexus, heart, mind and soul of your reader.

At the same time Daniels delivers this visceral experience, she moves the story ahead in the mind of the protagonist, who is now very frightened and playing the “what if” game. Tension builds... and that is one of the techniques you will use frequently when developing fiction. Time compression or tension is one of the best ways to keep the reader riveted to the story line.

In the midst of fear and tension, Daniels is also delivering an important message about fiction writing: love your characters. Love your life. Love these inmates. At the same time Keri is terrified out of her mind and imagining the worst: no power, prison riots, rape, murder, etc., etc., she says to the inmates: *“Let's face it, we were put here on this planet in order to create challenges and then find solutions for them. All of this is a test or a way of toughening ourselves up so we will earn our certificate of self-empowerment.”*

This is exactly what Keri is telling herself, and exactly what Daniels wants to convey to the reader.

*“If you can't laugh and cry and transfer your full range of feelings to your characters--if you can't transmit this--your work won't—”*

*I jumped. The lightning was right here in the room. The lights flickered several times in succession but miraculously held.*

*No one seemed to notice. All eyes were glued on me. They were hanging on every word I said. "... grip the attention of your readers and hold them spellbound. Yes! You want to cast a spell over your readers," I continued excitedly. "But you have to love yourselves first, before you can begin to love others. You must really love the characters you're developing. Let them live through you. Let them feel your loneliness, despair, desperation, depression... put all your energy into it. Then and only then, will you have the true satisfaction of being a writer."*

At the point when Keri starts to deliver her soliloquy: *"If you can't laugh and cry and transfer your full range of feelings to your characters-- if you can't transmit this--your work won't —"* the situation becomes a "Scheherazade" moment of life or death.

A terrible storm is brewing outside, but inside, within the prison walls, no one seems to notice. They no longer care if they are behind bars. "Inside" their minds and hearts, all is well. They are liberated by the words of the protagonist, who has transported them somewhere else, away from their misery, away from their grim day-to-day confinement. They now have something to look forward to: mental and emotional liberation and a chance to create something new, every moment, moment by moment.

In this classroom, in the next instant and forever, these inmates *do* have something to look forward to: the next word, the next sentence, the next page of writing.

And then the magic word floats above all other words: **love**. Love conquers all. To be a writer, to love to write, to love to develop characters you love and that you fall in love with--what could be more exhilarating?! ("What does it matter that we are in prison?" And what is "prison" anyway, but a mind state? What does anything matter in that moment? We know what love is!) Daniels' message to the writer and reader of fiction is clear: *love your characters!*

To elaborate further on this message:

Love conquers all--no one can take away your freedom if you live deeply, intensely and passionately. External circumstances are only the backdrop or setting for the play that's going on inside. No one can take away your imagination; you are not a victim. In fact, you're luckier than most because you know how to love and you love the characters you have developed yourself, that belong to you and that live inside you. No one can take away those characters. "My thoughts and feelings and imagination are free!"

Daniels delivers this message through Keri's speech. "You have to love first..."

*No one stirred. "Do you think just because you ended up in prison that God and everyone else has given up on you?" I cried, my eyes circling the room. "It isn't true. Don't you dare even let those thoughts enter into your mind anymore. Otherwise you'll never be able to create anything. The creating goes on inside, where there's light and joy and freedom--and hope. This life inside has nothing to do with what's happening anywhere else." The thunder drowned out my words. As I*

*repeated the last statement, they stood to give me a round of applause.*

*By the end of the session the storm had passed.*

Keri is telling the inmates: Just because you ended up in prison doesn't mean you have to see yourself as a victim or become one. The inner life is always where the action is.

The inner life is what really matters. A good fiction writer knows that.

*Instinctively I knew all was well because my fear had been replaced by love.*

The narrator delivers the final line that summarizes or synthesizes the kernel of wisdom that Daniels illustrates in this chapter.

Then it is time for the curtain to close on this little vignette. "The storm passes" and "all's well that ends well."

\*\*\*\*\*

*Never trust the artist. Trust the tale.*

--D.H. Lawrence

# 8

## Poetry & Roses (Red Ones)

*The moment of change is the only poem.*

--Adrienne Rich

*Writing a poem is discovering.*

-- Robert Frost

*If you know what you are going to write when you're writing a poem, it's going to be average.*

--Derek Walcott

*A poet is someone who stands outside in the rain hoping to be struck by lightning.*

--James Dickey

The title of this chapter is "Poetry & Roses (Red)." It refers to that well-known verse, "Roses are red/violets are blue..." As a publisher I receive many manuscripts consisting of poems that I categorize as verse, or "greeting card rhyme." Some of it may be clever; most of it is mundane and ordinary. If it gives a person pleasure to write it, certainly no one should tell them not to. BUT as a poet myself and as a person who is dedicated to giving readers (and listeners) a nourishing experience--also, because I know how easy it is to write greeting card rhyme compared to writing works that require deep and intense reflection, observation and revision before they are ready to be read by others--let me make the following distinction:

Words that are strung together with the express intention of fitting into a mold or pattern in order to sound sweet and pretty to the ear are "candy"

compared to chicken, rice, vegetables, and salad. This type of sweet writing is not good or bad; it just is.

How does one distinguish between a candy bar and plate of chicken, rice, vegetables, and salad?

***A candy bar is:***

- Sweet
- Delivers temporary satisfaction
- Temporary satisfaction causes our body to crave more substantial nourishment

***Chicken, rice, vegetables, and salad are:***

- Tasty
- Nourishing, i.e., provide nutrients the body (and soul) need for health, and wholesomeness
- Satisfying, long-term; nourishing food builds and repairs body cells

Nourishing poetry transmits energy at the deepest level. It also delivers an electric charge that *pings* the subconscious. Anyone who has ever had that experience knows what I'm talking about.

***Words like to be known for everything they are: free, unfettered, daring and dynamic. They are also multi-dimensional... and that is how your poetry should be.***

When I finally had enough courage to start writing poetry, I turned to the masters to study their works. Rainer Maria Rilke soon became my hero because I felt he understood at the deepest level what went into the making

of a poem. In some of his essays, he likens it to sculpting or painting a great work of art. Rodin was one of *his* heroes, as was the French Impressionist painter, Cezanne. Rilke understood these two artists' yearning to express themselves at the soul level, and it is this bonding with the Source, or Higher Self, that I believe is the goal of every serious artist, regardless of their medium.

Following is an excerpt from Rilke's "Letters to a Young Poet," which has become my guidebook for writing poetry—for writing anything, in fact. I am quoting this passage because it expresses with great eloquence and sensitivity, exactly what I would like to tell you about the writing of poetry and what it involves. I have bold-faced certain passages.

You ask whether your verses are any good. You ask me. You have asked others before this. You send them to magazines. You compare them with other poems, and you are upset when certain editors reject your work. Now (since you have said you want my advice) I beg you to stop doing that sort of thing. You are looking outside, and that is what you should most avoid right now. No one can advise or help you--no one. **There is only one thing you should do. Go into yourself. Find out the reason that commands you to write; see whether it has spread its roots into the very depths of your heart; confess to yourself whether you would have to die if you were forbidden to write.** This most of all: ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night: **must I write?** Dig into yourself for a deep answer. And if this answer rings out in assent, if you meet this solemn question with a strong, simple "I must," then build your life in accordance with this necessity; your whole life, even into its humblest and most indifferent hour, must become a sign and witness to this impulse.

The urgency to write poetry is not just a whimsical pastime or a hobby; *it is a calling of your soul*. For that reason, I like to call poetry the “inner dance of the soul.”

Rilke is right. You can only go inside in order to write your poems. You will not find your inner expression outside; this is another paradox. Just as I have advised that you write from your experience, you will write your poetry from your inner life--from your deepest feelings and your special relationship with the words you choose. You have chosen those words because they have special meaning for you; they live in your memories, dreams and visions. Throughout your waking and sleeping life, they dance in your conscious and subconscious minds and are romanced by your soul. Whenever used in the writing of poetry, they unite in an orgasmic explosion of feeling and thought.

## **WHAT SHALL I WRITE ABOUT?**

How do we find material for good poems? First and foremost, I'd like to say that WE are the best material for our poems... but people get tired listening to us if we're not writing about anything except how terrible our wonderful life is. Even ecstasy and joy become boring if they're not connected to experiences and our relationship with them.

We do need *something* to think about, admire, chew on or simply enjoy for what it is. I mentioned in Chapter Two that the poet, William Stafford loved to keep a notebook as well as a scrapbook for his collected tidbits. Whenever anyone said something that “clicked” inside or that he felt would be good material for a poem, he wrote it down in his notebook or on a scrap of paper. If he came across a phrase or sentence that struck his fancy, he would copy it or clip it out and paste it in his scrapbook.

I keep a dishpan just for poetry ideas. It's amazing how quickly these "clicks" run away from us unless we take time to write them down.

Listen to yourself. Work at capturing your thoughts. Keep a notebook and pen by every chair in your home. Carry paper and a pen with you wherever you go. If you use a handheld (PDA) and it has "Documents to go," use the keyboard to poke out your thoughts with a stylus. Then when you return to your computer, "sync" them into a special folder that can be called your Computer Dishpan Idea collection.

Use paintings for inspiration. Choose one that you like and sit in front of it for a long period of time. Let the painter's energy and inspiration engage you. Immerse yourself in the colors, movements, rhythms and themes. Then, using all of your senses, write a poem. Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," and John Ashbery's "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," are two of the best-known examples of poems inspired by paintings.

Start a postcard collection of paintings, or print out graphics and photos from the internet. Keep these in a folder and view them often.

Listen to a favorite musical composition not once, but many times. Feel it deeply and then write a poem from those feelings.

Here's what Rilke says about poetry subject matter:

Then come close to Nature. Then, as if no one had ever tried before, **try to say what you see and feel and love and lose.** Don't write love poems; avoid those forms that are too facile and ordinary: they are the hardest to work with, and it takes great, fully ripened power to create something

individual where good, even glorious, traditions exist in abundance. So rescue yourself from these general themes and **write about what your everyday life offers you; describe your sorrows and desires, the thoughts that pass through your mind and your belief in some kind of beauty**--describe all these with heartfelt, silent, humble sincerity and, **when you express yourself, use the Things around you, the images from your dreams, and the objects that you remember.**

Mary Oliver is one of my favorite "nature poets." Spend time in nature. Let your senses enjoy everything they experience. Study the works of many poets; steep yourself in poetry.

American poet Hart Crane writes:

One must be drenched with words, literally soaked in them, to have the right one form themselves into the proper pattern at the right moment. Poetry needs "an extraordinary capacity for surrender. ("Republic of Dreams")

Avoid at all costs, any form of pedantry! We don't need to know how brilliant and well-read you are! We're looking for *an experience!*

Also, you do not have to suffer or "die of consumption" in order to become a famous poet. You can live a perfectly normal life and even be an insurance agent, like 20<sup>th</sup> century American poet, Wallace Stevens.

"Getting in the mood" does not have to mean getting drunk or drugged. Addictions are a habit-forming method of medicating pain. The pain of writing (or not being able to write) poetry is so great for some poets, they may feel the need to escape. Often this medicated journey puts them into such a stupor, they lose all ability to do anything except go to sleep and wake up with a hangover.

Since these side effects have proven to be debilitating and often life-threatening, many artists have found other methods for tapping into their subconscious and turning off the outside world. One of those is light-sound, neurotechnology, or hemi-sync. These are names for tools and technologies that use specifically engineered devices for regulating brain frequencies. This is a way of controlling our energy states and performance potential.

We create and do our best thinking when we are relaxed, or functioning in brain wave frequencies of what are known as "alpha." When we sleep, we are functioning in "delta"; "theta" is excellent for deeper forms of relaxation and for accessing the subconscious. During our waking hours of driving the car pool, making school lunches, chairing board meetings, writing articles, teaching classes, working with a client, etc., we are functioning in "beta."

For more information about brain wave performance, google the Monroe Institute, and also, check out the *Tools for Wellness* catalog.

Suicide poetry—writing about killing oneself—is another popular category for poets who needed to suffer or feel victimized. I would like to honor those gifted poets who chose to take their lives, and be grateful for the works they left behind.

I turn to Rilke who, once again states better than anyone else, that you don't have to destroy yourself physically in order to find something to write about:

If your everyday life seems poor, don't blame it; blame yourself; admit to yourself that you are not enough of a poet to call forth its riches; because for the creator there is not poverty and no poor, indifferent place. And even if

you found yourself in some prison, whose walls let in none of the world's sounds --wouldn't you still have your childhood, that jewel beyond all price, that treasure house of memories? Turn your attentions to it. Try to raise up the sunken feelings of this enormous past; your personality will grow stronger, your solitude will expand and become a place where you can live in the twilight, where the noise of other people passes by, far in the distance.

Rilke has struck a tender chord: go to your childhood and write from these memories. You will be amazed how rich and fertile these years can be when you start to mine your memories. Rilke is right. We cannot blame life for being impoverished. It is only we who haven't tapped deeply enough into our memory bank. Or, we may not be looking hard enough at life around us. Make a ritual or habit of sitting still and just *thinking* and *feeling* deeply. You'll be amazed where your inner journey will take you.

## **WEB IT!**

Sitting quietly is different from meditation, which strives to block out consciousness; and prayer, which is a form of communication with God or your Higher Self. Sitting quietly is a process of letting your thoughts and feelings travel freely through your mind. Some people like to map or "web" this process on a piece of paper. Start with a thought and place it in the middle. Draw a circle around it. Then let yourself wander. Whatever words pop into your mind will become spider webs that you will link to that core word. Draw a circle around each of these words and then focus on them; draw spider webs with attached words to each of these secondary "webbed" words. Soon you will have more than enough material for at least one poem.

I've used this method successfully in the classroom when teaching poetry to children. "Webbing it" seems more like a game.

One of my favorite lines from this section of *Letters to a Young Poet* is: "A work of art is good if it has arisen out of necessity. That is the only way one can judge it."

If you are passionate about something, if you must write about it, you know you will produce a work that is worthy of your efforts. That is the magical part of writing. When you *cannot not write it*, when you *cannot not express yourself*, the magic starts to happen.

I will end this part of my discussion about the art of writing poetry with a final segment from Rilke that is self-explanatory:

So, dear Sir, I can't give you any advice but this: to go into yourself and see how deep the place is from which your life flows; at its source you will find the answer to the question whether you must create. Accept that answer, just as it is given to you, without trying to interpret it. Perhaps you will discover that you are called to be an artist. Then take the destiny upon yourself, and bear it, its burden and its greatness, without ever asking what reward might come from outside. For the creator must be a world for himself and must find everything in himself and in Nature, to whom his whole life is devoted.

The following is my "To Do List" for anyone who aspires to write poetry:

1. Learn how to write prose--all forms, formats and genres.
2. Enjoy words. Read books about words. Have fun with them.
3. Read, read, read poetry. Listen to poetry. Steep yourself in it.
4. Imitate poems you admire, and imitate different poets' styles.
5. Let yourself go, and flow.
6. Create an imaginary audience and "read" to that audience.

7. Attend poetry readings.
8. Attend lectures and classes about poetry if they are available.

Solitude is the most precious commodity for an artist. A serious poet understands this well.

One other point that Rilke makes that I would also like to emphasize:

“...keep growing, silently and earnestly, through your whole development; you couldn't disturb it any more violently than by looking outside and waiting for outside answers to questions that only your innermost feeling, in your quietest hour, can perhaps answer.

--“Letters to a Young Poet,” by Rainer Maria Rilke  
(Stephen Mitchell translation)

As with all writing, give your poems time and space to grow. Write a poem and put it aside for awhile. Then go back to it and start the revision process.

Steep yourself in the following poems. Let them work their way into every conscious and unconscious “cell” of your psyche. Then write your own poems based on what you thought and felt.

## **GRATITUDE**

What did you notice?

The dew snail;  
the low-flying sparrow;  
the bat, on the wind, in the dark;  
big-chested geese, in the V of sleekest performance;  
the soft toad, patient in the hot sand;  
the sweet-hungry ants;  
the uproar of mice in the empty house;  
the tin music of the cricket's body;

the blouse of the goldenrod.

What did you hear?

The thrush greeting the morning;  
the little bluebirds in their hot box;  
the salty talk of the wren,  
then the deep cup of the hour of silence.

What did you admire?

The oaks, letting down their dark and hairy fruit;  
the carrot, rising in its elongated waist;  
the onion, sheet after sheet, curved inward to the  
pale green wand;  
at the end of summer the brassy dust, the almost liquid  
beauty of the flowers;  
then the ferns, scrawned black by the frost.

What astonished you?

The swallows making their dip and turn over the water.

What would you like to see again?

My dog: her energy and exuberance, her willingness,  
her language beyond all nimbleness of tongue, her  
recklessness, her loyalty, her sweetness, her  
sturdy legs, her curled black lip, her snap.

What was most tender?

Queen Anne's lace, with its parsnip root;  
the everlasting in its bonnets of wool;  
the kinks and turns of the tupelo's body;  
the tall, blank banks of sand;  
the clam, clamped down.

What was most wonderful?

The sea, and its wide shoulders;  
the sea and its triangles;  
the sea lying back on its long athlete's spine.

What did you think was happening?

The green breast of the hummingbird;  
the eye of the pond;

the wet face of the lily;  
the bright, puckered knee of the broken oak;  
the red tulip of the fox's mouth;  
the up-swing, the down-pour, the frayed sleeve  
of the first snow—

so the gods shake us from our sleep.

--Mary Oliver

## **THE WAKING (1953)**

I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I feel my fate in what I cannot fear.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

We think by feeling. What is there to know?  
I hear my being dance from ear to ear.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Of those so close beside me, which are you?  
God bless the Ground! I shall walk softly there,  
And learn by going where I have to go.

Light takes the Tree; but who can tell us how?  
The lowly worm climbs up a winding stair;  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Great Nature has another thing to do  
To you and me, so take the lively air,  
And, lovely, learn by going where to go.

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.  
What falls away is always. And is near.  
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.  
I learn by going where I have to go.

--Theodore Roethke (1953)

# 9

## The Story of My Life – Writing Your Autobiography

*Write what should not be forgotten...*

--Isabel Allende

“ME? My life? Important? Ha!”

I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve heard those words uttered in the many “Writing Your Memoirs” workshops I’ve taught. By the time we finished our set of classes for the season, most of these people would find it hard to believe they felt at one time they had nothing to write about that anyone else would consider important.

Tears flowed and the room rocked with laughter as the group set to work, creating small vignettes about canning tomatoes, the day my dog died, my mother’s illness and what it taught me, how my granddaughter saved her mother’s life, how I won a Purple Heart in the Air Force, my experiences as a nursing home caregiver... In each of these stories, the authors found a pulse or emotional trigger, and a kernel of wisdom.

**News Bulletin:** Every one of our lives is important because WE are important. We DO have stories to share with others. We DO have something

to write about that others would want to read. In these workshops we certainly proved that point. In fact, at the end of each set of sessions, we had enough stories that were good enough to be printed and spiral-bound as a book. This was before digital printing and print on demand; today we would have self-published these books and sold them on the internet.

In the introductory session of a “Memoirs” writing workshop, I demonstrate how to make writing into a habit or ritual. You will need:

- ⇒ a special place in your living quarters (private, where you will be able to write undisturbed)
- ⇒ proper equipment (most attendees had electronic typewriters, which eventually were replaced with computers)
- ⇒ a set period of time (I advise new writers to start with 10-20 minute segments; this is long enough to get used to the habit)

Soon this ritual, reinforced by mindset and intention, starts to produce results. Workshop members are amazed to discover that relatives and friends understand and respect this new schedule. I encourage them to keep expanding their established writing time and as this procedure starts to become habitual, they find themselves staying even longer and writing more. Then one day they will bring in the draft of an entire story. Staying focused on this one piece of writing, I show them how to make revisions.

## **STARTING YOUR MEMOIRS**

- Keep a notebook on every table in your living quarters.
- Jot down everything you remember about your past, even if it may seem trivial.

- Spend quiet time remembering the “who, what, where, when and how” of stories and details from your past. This will include names, places, events, relationships, etc.
- Jot down even small details about a house you lived in, or your favorite birthday present (what color was the dress, or, what did your puppy look like and what was its name?), etc.
- If you have a long-term marriage, how did you meet your partner?
- If you’ve had many rock’n’ roll relationships, ask yourself what you learned from each; tell the story with all its bitter-sweet details. Use all the writing techniques you’ve gleaned from other chapters in this book: character, setting, plot, dialogue, body language description, gestures, etc.
- Describe family holidays.
- DO NOT start your memoirs with: “I was born on (date) in (location). Please do not start at the beginning! If you want to bore your readers, be chronological and take them through all the details of your first baby tooth, first haircut, first baby portrait... NO! NO! That is NOT the way to write a memoir!

## **TURN ON THE JUICE!**

Start with a juicy story. Is it wicked? I hope so! Maybe you want to tell the story about that time you stole the family car to meet your girlfriend and you got caught by your dad...

Is your story about the time you thought you’d never make the cheerleading squad because of the braces on your teeth, and you discovered that six other contestants also wore braces?

Or is it about that stormy night in Michigan when your car got stuck in a snowdrift and the man who came to help shovel you out became your future husband?

Maybe it's about the first time you picked up the violin bow and knew, just knew you were going to be a violinist...

Go to the pulse; always write from the pulse. The heart of the story is what really turns you on... and if YOU are excited about it, everyone else will be, too.

Here are some suggested highlights that could trigger great memories for that opening chapter:

- A birthday party... something humorous or magical that happened
- Your first date
- The first time you were kissed or you kissed a boy or girl
- The proudest moments in your life
- Tragedies that provided motivation and inspiration
- Pet peeves and why
- Passions
- Greatest achievements
- Greatest lessons learned
- Family vacations
- Travels
- Humorous school experiences, including bloopers
- Family relatives... some of their idiosyncrasies
- Self-portrait at different ages and stages of development

From this list you should have a general idea of how to proceed.

*Write in recollection and amazement for yourself.*

--Jack Kerouac

## **PRETEND YOU'RE A WRITER... AND BEGIN**

Write as if your reader is sitting across from you. Or maybe you're having coffee together. They are your best friend, someone you can easily talk to. Or, maybe you have grandchildren and you're writing these memoirs for them. Pretend you're seated on a comfy sofa in front of the fireplace and all six of them are cuddled around you, waiting for you to begin. They can't wait to hear those amazing stories from your past!

Don't be concerned about grammar, usage, spelling... just get it down in a drafted document on the computer. Or if you write by hand or on a typewriter, that's okay, too. Just get it down somewhere so it can be saved in a file. You can even use a recorder, if that's easier, and have someone transcribe the sessions onto the computer.

Enjoy laughing out loud, or keep a box of tissues handy when you feel like crying. These emotional barometers are signals that you're hitting home with who you are and what you really want to convey.

## **ADD GRAPHICS, PHOTOS... SPRUCE UP YOUR MEMOIRS!**

Be creative. Choose photos from your albums, for example, and tell their stories. Today, using digital technologies, photos can easily be embedded in text and printed digitally. You can choose to have a full-color or black-and-

white interior. Anything is possible and it can be extremely cost effective, since you can print copies as you go.

## **TEST THE WATERS**

If you want to have some fun, test your writing by reading it aloud to someone who doesn't know you well. Do NOT read it to family members or close friends. They'll always tell you it's great.

Choose someone who loves to read and who would enjoy hearing this excerpt. Tell them beforehand that this is just a draft, nothing finished. You're just asking them to be a barometer for you. Is your instinct correct that this is as funny as you think it is? Is it as strong as you believe, or can you make it stronger? Do you need more description? Do you need more facts?

AND.... do they want to read more?! That is the real litmus test.

## **USE GHOSTWRITERS, BOOK DOCTORS AND EDITORS**

If you are thoroughly enjoying the process of writing your memoirs but feel you would like to have some professional help—great!! I share your enthusiasm and would love to help you achieve your goals.

Whether you wish to publish your memoirs or simply put them in the best possible form for friends and family to enjoy as your gift to them, I can help you.

This important step may give you a huge sense of relief. Ahhh! Good! Now that load is taken off your shoulders! You will have a book that is professionally written and it will still be yours. Some of the best writers in the business—professional writers who are top-selling authors—use ghostwriters, book doctors or editors.

You may already have learned that the Harry Potter books are not the total product of their author. They are, in fact, a corporate board room project. JK Rowling does write a draft of the book and then a board of professional editors and ghostwriters embellishes and polishes it.

The reason why I mention this is to make sure you do not feel any guilt or shame in using professional writers to complete your work.

The other option is of course, to work closely with a book coach or tutor, who will show you how to make the changes yourself and guide you through the entire process. Many writers achieve great satisfaction in working with a tutor or writing coach.

However you choose to complete your book of memoirs, let me reassure you that it is well worth the effort. "Your Story" is an important legacy for the generations to follow.

Whatever you do, enjoy it! And know that I'm here to help you, every step of the way.

# About the Author

**Carol Adler, MFA** is an entrepreneur, professional writer, editor and teacher of English and creative writing. She is President of Dandelion Books, LLC, [www.dandelionbooks.net](http://www.dandelionbooks.net) of Tempe, Arizona; a full service publishing company that markets its “uncensored nonfiction, conscious solutions and unfettered fiction” using the latest production and delivery technologies, including on-demand dot.com networking.

Adler’s business experience includes co-ownership of a Palm Beach, FL public relations company and executive management positions in two U.S. rejuvenation and mind/body wellness corporations for which she founded publishing divisions.

Her publications include four books of poetry, well over two hundred poems and several fiction and non-fiction works. She publishes her fiction under a pseudonym. As a ghost writer, she developed and written manuscripts for a number of professionals in the health care and human potential industries. These include: a holistic medical book, *Why Am I Still Addicted? A Holistic Approach to Recovery* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), for Richard Plagenhoef, M.D., *The Six Steps to the Fountain of Youth: How to Slay the Dragons of Aging Without Drawing the Sword* (Belleair Bluffs, FL: TriNeuroGenics, Inc., 1997) for 59-year-old world karate champion, Dennis Kelly; *The Human Body Owner’s Manual for Optimal Performance*, for Guy DeLuliis, vice president of Optimal Human Performance, Inc., and *Answers to the Top 10 Health Challenges*, for Sheryl Simpson, ND, MH, LMT (TriNeuroGenics, Inc., 1998).

Adler has served as editor of several poetry and literary magazines, and her career includes extensive teaching of college English poetry, fiction, non-fiction and business writing, and conducting of writing workshops in Florida and New York State prisons, libraries, elementary, junior and high schools, and senior citizen centers. She has a B. A. in philosophy and English from the U. of Michigan, and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Vermont College.

Currently, Adler is developing a large ecommerce books and music enterprise that utilizes customized Web 2.0 technologies for structuring innovative marketing and promotion capabilities. Also incorporating the latest digital production and delivery technologies, Adler predicts this enterprise will “evolutionize” the book and music industries.

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URLS – <http://www.write-to-publish-for-profit.com> ,  
<http://www.dandelionbooks.net>

# Testimonials from Carol Adler's Clients

**From:** Tjpublish@aol.com  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 09, 2007 2:42 PM  
**To:** bigshotgregg@hotmail.com  
**Subject:** Re: Dandelion Books

I have published three books with Dandelion Books (*Living with Soul*, volumes 1 & 2, and *It's All About Control*) and am delighted with their professionalism, attention to detail and willingness to work with authors. Carol Adler, the publisher, is a very easy person to work with and is dedicated to showcasing her authors' work on the Dandelion and other web sites, through book wholesalers and via a program of press releases.

Dandelion also uses cutting edge technology to present authors' works as e-books and is currently ramping up to a whole new set of e-book formats and outlets.

As with any publisher, a book's success depends partly on the author's efforts, too, and you will find Dandelion very supportive of your promotional activities. If you have any specific questions, please feel free to contact me by email.

[In the interests of full disclosure, I am a freelance editor and book designer, and on occasion do contract work for Dandelion.]

---

**Tony Stubbs**

For full-service publishing consulting, editing and book design, see [www.tjpublish.com](http://www.tjpublish.com)

~ooOoo~

**From:** sheila [sheila542@cox.net]  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 31, 2007 11:25 AM  
**To:** Carol Adler  
**Subject:** Thank you

**For the birthday dinner, your willingness to listen and all of your support.**

**You have guided me to where I am today. One of these days I will discipline myself to really watch my punctuation.  
Don't give up on me. I WILL get around to it eventually!**

**Keep in touch. Carol I have never met anyone quite like you. You are truly unique.**

**I meant to say this last night.**

**It is true that the nurse / patient relationship is close but it never crosses the line. It is important for the wives to understand this.**

**The nurse provides comfort, empathy, teaching and care hopefully for the whole family. Although this doesn't sound glamorous, the nurse fulfilling is her responsibility.**  
**Sheila.**

~ooOOoo~

**From:** beckyruff1952@aol.com  
**Sent:** Friday, May 11, 2007 6:56 AM  
**To:** bigshotgregg@hotmail.com  
**Cc:** dandelionbooks@cox.net  
**Subject:** Hello...my experiences with Dandelion Press

I'd like to share my wonderful experience with Dandelion Press. I was referred to Carol Adler by Peter Shepherd of [www.trans4mind](http://www.trans4mind). He is a European psychiatrist/therapist who runs several publications as well as a private practice and creating wellness and self help programs. Because I had come to respect him so immensely, I chose to contact Carol when I was ready to self-publish.

Carol is not only exceptionally well educated but reads people very well. Her writing expertise and business sense provided a marvelous backdrop for my first experience in this realm. An avid reader and publisher of a few short articles, I was a "babe in the woods" regarding the publishing arena. It's obvious that Carol has tremendous experiences in this arena.

Her marketing sense helped to hone my writings. hahah! Even though it's at times difficult to release the "baby" for suggestions by others, her ideas and rewrites - always with my permission - made my book most enjoyable and readable. My original drafts were a bit "haughty" and that wasn't my intention in communicating. Carol was able to "see" me and my personality...and when I felt a need to change things to be a bit more myself, she was super. I don't know how she manages to keep her own ego at bay - because of her tremendous skill and love of her field - but she does it with class!

Carol is a writer and I've read two of her novels. There is an ease in her style of writing...and that carries over to her dealings with people. She has depth of spirit, an uncanny awareness of humanity, and the ability to be generous. Carol is a true professional and today that is such a joy!

I have to admit that Carol's suggestions were the parts most enjoyed by friends, neighbors, and family with whom I shared (hahahah! "pushed") my work.

It has been such a grand feeling to have something of myself in written form in hardcopy. My daughters have enjoyed my humor, small takes on wisdom, and "hopeful" stance in my book. I would tell you quite candidly and with much enthusiasm that Carol Adler with her publishing house will be a wonderful step for you in fulfilling your own personal goals.

It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I wish you joy, challenge, and success in being you.

-Becky Reed (just married)  
[www.ruffpersonalassistant.com](http://www.ruffpersonalassistant.com)

~ooOOoo~

-----Original Message-----

From: Carol Adler

To: normasuper3@aol.com

Sent: Sun, 24 Jun 2007 1:31 pm

Subject: RE: MOU

As you must know the word Cromaat was and is the word that the mystery schools use to seal a wish or any thing that was done...I always use it.. I use it like I use so mot it be!! or is done!!!

At the moment I signed the agreement, I used it to seal my wish. I asked God and to the greatest intelligence with whom we work to make a better world, to guide you and me and help us to make the best of my little story. I asked God To bestow you with the greatest creativity, to increase your grace, intelligence and wisdom to inspire you, To make you see very clear my intentions and the purity of my heart to make this story shine...

I know you were chosen to help me. I don't think, there are to many people in the publishing business who have the spiritual awareness that I can feel you have..That fact makes me feel good because I know you will enhance my story and not butcher it just because you don't have the understanding... I want the language describing the story to be simple and easy to read. A simple way that all the children and even the adults can read with out difficulties..

The greatest disappointment for me when I read a book is to see that it is written in such a way that makes it hard for the reader to read. With books like that I put them down and don't touch them again... The other day I so a book with a gorgeous cover, to tell you the truth, I felt compelled to read it just because the cover was so inviting. However when I started to read the book, the way these ladies wrote that book only had a purpose. First to show how well they were able to expressed using the most intricate words and using a great deal of quotes in foreign languages. The little that I read of that book was so boring that I lost total interest. I understood then, that no body should judge a book just by the look of its cover...

That experience inspired me to understand once more, that simplicity is the language of God!!.

I have placed my trust in you and I know that you will do a great job. Not only because you are an experience professional in these matters but also because I think you feel the same way I do. I am not perfect but I am a perfectionist. My teachers always tell me DO IT WELL AND BE POSITIVE!!! When we meet we will talk about some of these experiences, I know that will help us to work with this story with a very especial understanding.

I thank God for letting me to meet you, I would not feel comfortable If I had to be working with my story with some one else...

**THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME, YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW YOU WILL BE COMPENSATED. TRUST ME!! JUST LIKE WHEN I SAID TO YOU. "THIS PROJECT IS IN GODS HANDS AND HE WILL GIVE US THE MEANS OR OPEN THE DOORS TO GET IT DONE"...THE MOST IMPORTANT IS TO KEEP THE PURITY AND SINCERITY.**

**GOD BLESS YOU.**

**Norma Pastor**

**Second Testimonial from Norma Pastor:**

-----  
From: normasuper3@aol.com [mailto:normasuper3@aol.com]  
Sent: Monday, July 16, 2007 6:44 AM  
To: dandelionbooks@cox.net  
Subject: Forgot.

Dear Carol. I forgot to mention that I have been reading the books you gave me... I want to tell you that I love the way you write.

the easy way of expression in your narrations.. I trust that you will use that beautiful fluent language that describes every thing so clearly and fun to read in my fictional story. I love it... I know my little story is in the best hands. With your wonderful artistic writing you will make it shine... I thank God for choosing you to do this job.

Love you.

Norma

~ooOoo~

From: Dolores Proiette [dolore664@hotmail.com]  
Sent: Wednesday, May 09, 2007 4:24 PM  
To: bigshotgregg@hotmail.com  
Subject: Dandelion Publishing

I understand you are considering having your book published by Dandelion. I checked with several self-publishing companies prior to signing with Dandelion Books. Since signing, I have been very pleased with Dandelion and Carol Adler in particular. She is honest, has been very helpful whenever I have questions, is always available, and has helped advertise my book. Since my book has been published, Feb. 2007, I have placed three orders which arrive within 7-10 days. A nice convenience is that I can order as many or as few books as I need. I would highly recommend Dandelion Books.

~ooOoo~

Carol...this is it. I know that God is in charge of Marrisingle, and you too....there isn't a day that goes by that I don't thank God for the opportunity to meet you. Even if we only sell one copy, the journey has been so worth it.

Wishing you the warmest blessing over Easter, love you, Brenda

### **Stretching the Wings of Change**

I saw myself as a bird; my wings were ready to test the strongest wind now! One afternoon while reading the newspaper, my (third eye) picked out an announcement about a writing and publishing seminar that as to be given in the Phoenix area. "What do you think?" I turned to Randy, who was seated next to me, reading another section of the paper, "You know it always means something when a newspaper article pops right out at me! Should I take that *Marrisingle Journal* to this seminar and see if it's worth pursuing? Get a professional opinion?"

Embracing my excitement, Randy encouraged me, "Yes, yes. Go, Brenda!"

### **Pulling into the parking lot, there it was again, that magical feeling of excitement that I was connecting with someone or something very special.**

Three women introduced themselves and one in particular caught my eye. Shivers ran down my spine, with goose bumps quickly forming; *I knew it was the connection to her.* After a break in the presentation, I went outside and grabbed my typed manuscript. Before going inside again, I spoke to God: *Well, here it is God, you've been pushing me, nagging me for awhile to get on with this, here I am, right where I am suppose to be, and I am giving to the right One. So I know from here, you'll take it where it's suppose to be, no hard feelings God, if it was just to reach me, I am ok with that too!*

Eagerly I gave it over to the One. Smiling, I approached her, petite and very pretty, and she stood ready with a warm smile and outreached hand. "Hello, I'm Carol Alder, Dandelion Books."

It was if she was waiting for me. I introduced myself, explained the contents of my manuscript and where I was at, and asked if she would mind giving me her professional opinion.

Within several days, Carol called me back and we met. She told me how important Marrisingle could be, how helpful this book could be others. She urged me to tell my story because it would be valuable for others to know about my journey.

--Brenda Frantz

Carol... this is it. I know that God is in charge of Marrisingle, and you too....there isn't a day that goes by that I don't thank God for the opportunity to meet you. Even if we only sell one copy, the journey has been so worth it.

Wishing you the warmest blessing over Easter, love you, Brenda (Frantz)

\*\*\*\*\*

From: ronna@warmlava.com  
Sent: Sunday, April 29, 2007 12:14 PM  
To: Carol Adler

Subject: Re: FW: #1 Detroit Tiger Fan

Carol,

You are so special, everything that I have read so far is spot on. Wow! I love the intro. The ice cream truck and fruit cart were reversed that's all.

I doubt that there will be that much to change. You have captured my words, my heart and it has brought tears to my eyes. You are an artist and I am in awe of your gifts!

Ronna

More from Ronna:

Date: Sat, September 8, 2007 9:40 am

From: ronna@warmlava.com

You always make it fun for me and help me to relax and I am in awe of your gift.

\*\*\*\*\*

Wednesday, October 3, 2007

Dear Mr. F.,

Carol will be publishing my first hard copy book on XXXXX as well as helping me publish an e-book called XXXXX . . . . Carol has been working fiercely for her whole life for a free press and freedom of speech . . .

Thank you for all your hard work and your bravery,  
S.F.

\*\*\*\*\*

The multi-talented Carol Adler, President of Dandelion Books, is so highly respected, gifted and knowledgeable that when I put a manuscript in her hands I know it will come back in ready to go condition. As a Professional Author of twelve books and counting with a busy speaking, training and writing career, I confess I don't have time for the painstaking wordsmithing or the patience to go over every little edit. With my work in Carol's capable hands I don't have to! I can confidently trust that my work (to the word!) will be perfectly turned out and polished to a very high standard. And that leaves me free to create the content I am purposeful and passionate about.

--Patricia Chamberlin  
SuccessKey Publications, [www.successkey.com](http://www.successkey.com)

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*Realizing a New Culture, Realizing a New America and a New World*, by Norman Livergood & Michelle Mairesse... "Worldwide, thinking people are faced with the terror of the demonic cabal controlling America and the world. This cabal has corrupted and contaminated the old culture to the point that if we locate our primary being in that culture we'll become as insane and corrupt as they. We have no other recourse than to realize a new culture composed of new physical, psychological, and metaphysical principles and structures. (ISBN 978-0-9789611-5-2)

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*Unveil the Past: Heal the Future through Hypnotherapy*, by Doris Small Proiette, DCH, Ph.D.... Amazing stories from Dr. Proiette's clinical records about the healing power of past life regression that reaffirms the power of the mind and the ability for every human being to release themselves from unwanted feelings and belief systems. Dr. Proiette's books supports statistics that show Hypnotherapy as the leading technology for helping people heal their issues of dis-ease and dysfunction. (ISBN 1-893302-96-2)

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