

FellowScript



NOVEMBER 2020

Inspiring
Christian
Writers
Canadawide

Muster



With Gratitude

InScribe is grateful for the contributions of members who have passed on to their eternal reward in the past year, including Bryan Norford, Patricia Elford, and Elaine Hogg.



Ann & Bryan Norford



Bobbi Junior & Ruth L Snyder

The first time I met Bobbi Junior was at the Fall Conference when she hesitantly raised her hand to volunteer as Treasurer for InScribe. I had the privilege of interacting with Bobbi on the InScribe executive, driving to and from Saskatoon for a writing workshop, at her church, and when I took my children for counselling at Kells. Underneath her introverted exterior shone a true gem. I came to understand this rare diamond had been polished by many trials. I was amazed as she opened up and shared her stories with me. Bobbi became my big sister in the Lord, imparting her wisdom, understanding, and love. She made herself available to listen, bounce ideas off, and pray as I walked through some difficult years. Thanks for being a blessing, Bobbi.

-By Ruth L. Snyder

I met Bobbi Junior at a "Women's Words" writing week at the University of Alberta in June of 2012. She had shared some of her journals that later led to her award-winning book, *The Reluctant Caregiver*. I was struggling that day, but gathered the courage to say hi and encourage her that her readings were the foundation for a good book. I didn't think I would ever see her again because surely we weren't in the same circles. That week I had been brave and shared some of my more visceral writing about a very dark period of my life. They were things I would never had shared in a Christian setting. Imagine my surprise when I later met her at the InScribe Conference that fall. I didn't know her, so I wasn't sure how navigating together in that sphere would work considering what I had shared. Bobbi was, and has been amazing through it all! I have learned through her example that our story is what it is and God will use as He sees fit when we let go of our feelings about what we have gone through. Since that time I have been blessed to work with Bobbi on many projects and have deeply appreciated her simple example and faith. She made InScribe a better place financially and faith wise. She encouraged me without knowing it to be braver about sharing the harder things in life. Bobbi is a true soldier in every sense of the word and a natural mentor without knowing it. Bobbi, for all you have done for FellowScript and myself I am forever grateful to you and your lovely, cohesive, and crazy family.

-By Sheila Webster

**COMING:
MARCH
2021**

Easter

STORIES AND MORE



INSCRIBE CHRISTIAN WRITERS' FELLOWSHIP

**WANTED:
BLOG
WRITERS!**



- Do you have expertise you could share with your fellow writers?
- Are you available to write two related blog posts 2-3 times in the coming year?
- Are you looking for an opportunity to encourage fellow InScribe members?

If you would like to write for the InScribe Professional Blog, please contact Steph Beth Nickel, moderator, at stephbethnickel@gmail.com.

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From the Editor



Muster and Write!

By Sheila Webster

MUSTER – An odd theme at first glance for a conference issue, but perhaps apt and timely.

Muster can mean to assemble troops, people or things. It can also be a muster point to gather in case of emergency. Feelings, attitudes or responses can be mustered as well, and there can be a muster of peacocks!

When we think of assembling together at fall conference, whether in person (in the past) or now via Zoom, we can reflect on why we gather together. Did you gather this fall for encouragement, education, exhortation or out of exhaustion with the hope that the energy of others and synergy of the group could lift you out of where you were?

This past conference once again I had the privilege of speaking about turning our pain into prose for the benefit of others, or for posterity without new problems arising from sharing particular pieces of the narrative. In my spirit I was encouraged through the active listening and sharing of my groups even though we were in a foreign format, in the city of Zoom.

Each day since conference I have contemplated what was shared by myself and collectively. In a moment of sharing I had veered off what I had carefully prepared, onto a very personal journey a couple of people in my family group and I have been on the last two years. It was a moment of sheer panic for myself as I realized I was in deep water, way out of my comfort zone, and knowing I would have to ask the executive to delete that particular workshop because of potential liability. Quickly recalibrating my thoughts through silent prayer, I knew I must continue to share this bizarre slice of life. It came to light in that group someone else was considering writing on a similar theme but had not had clarity on how to proceed. It was another example of allowing God to be the author and editor of our story, rather than hiding it or being ashamed of what I had gone through.

I continue to encourage you, as always to allow God to lift and sift what you consider to be the hidden parts of your story to be used for the education, encouragement and exhortation of others. Do you need to gather your thoughts, muster your courage, meet with others or look at a peacock muster to begin again? The author and finisher of our stories waits for us to pick up our pens and for Him to write through our experiences, but never overrides our will.

Muster your energy, gather your writing tools, assemble your support and WRITE. †

President's Column



The Sport of Writing

By Tracy Krauss, President

By the time this column goes to print, this year's Fall Contest will be a thing of the past. Contestants will have entered and winners will have been announced. Writers will now be sharpening their virtual pencils with Winter Contest in mind. For those who enjoy a 'challenge' of another kind, Word Challenges will also continue, led by our own fearless Glynis Belec. Our organization has lots to offer in regard to writing competitions.

In all honesty, however, I feel ill-equipped to speak to this edition's theme. I've never actually entered a writing contest. Three of my books have been in contests, but someone else entered them on my behalf. I guess I'm just not very competitive.

It's not that I have an aversion to contests or that I think they don't have value. Contests are a wonderful way to get feedback. They force you out of your comfort zone. They encourage you to tighten up and write within the specified word count and theme. They are also a good way to "toughen you up" if and when you don't win, because, let's face it—being a writer isn't for the faint of heart. Rejection and criticism are a reality.

With so many good reasons to enter a writing contest, why haven't I? The truth is, I'm so immersed in my many other writing projects, I don't manage to make time for contests too. I get lots of feedback, criticism, and rejection without them (if those are indeed good reasons to enter) and I'm just too busy writing other stuff. My lack of participation does not mean I can't enjoy the end result or cheer others on. I applaud those who take the time and put themselves out there by entering contests.

A sports analogy comes to mind. I have never been athletic, but the few physical activities that I enjoy participating in tend to be individual and non-competitive, such as golf, cross-country skiing, and swimming. However, I am also a huge football fan. I get very enthusiastic about watching the sport live or on TV, especially when my favourite team is playing! Needless to say, I do not play football, but I still enjoy the game as a spectator.

I don't think there is a simple answer to the question, "Are writing competitions worthwhile?" Some people will find more personal value in them than others. For some, they will be the catalyst to bigger and better things. Others just won't find the time, or may choose not to participate. Either option is the right option depending on who you are. It's a decision that must be made by each individual writer. †

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FellowScript issue deadlines:

- | | |
|------------------|-------------|
| ▪ August issue | May 1 |
| ▪ November issue | September 1 |

PHOTO CREDITS

FellowScript welcomes photos from InScribe members.

Photo on Cover and pages 19 and 27 by Sheila Webster;
Photo on page 6 by Pat Gerbrandt; Photos on page 10 and 11 by Ruth L. Snyder

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FellowScript is published four times a year by InScribe Christian Writers' Fellowship for its members. Subscriptions are also available.

Contributions: Articles, stories, market updates, writer's tips, and other writing-related submissions are welcome. Bylines are given to contributors.

Read the submission guidelines online at:
www.inscribe.org.

Deadlines for submission:

Nov 1, Feb 1, May 1 and August 1

We prefer complete manuscripts emailed to: fellowscripteditor@gmail.com as .doc, .docx or.rtf attachments. *FellowScript* also welcomes letters, feedback, comments, and news about your writing.

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Production Notes: *FellowScript* is produced using Adobe Creative Suite and printed by Page-Master Publication Services Inc., Edmonton, AB

ISSN: 1499-3082

Upcoming Themes:

Jan 2021: Motivation (Inspiration, Audience, History, Legacy, Message)

May 2021: Mosaic (Overlooked Genres, Mentors, Tools)

Aug 2021: Marketing (Social Media, Elevator Pitches, Launches)

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1ST PLACE
DEVOTIONAL

Devotional



MISTY MORNING

By Janey Bordihn

Awake on a summer morning; before the people, the bustle, the noise, even before the birds it seems. Silence is my morning and its allure is found in the shrouded stillness. Fog weaves water and shore into a soft grey blanket around me. My vista is not vibrant with colour but muted into shades of grey. I am unable to see anything except water and sky and the delineation of those imperceptible.

I am quieted. My mind not frenetic but focused. I am hushed by beauty, stilled by tranquility, and filled with awe and reverence. Familiar shapes of trees and islands in front of me are hidden from view and slowly taking shape, like mirages in a desert, before my eyes. I know there is more but I can't see it yet. The cover of mist forces me to attend to nuance in shading, play of wind, and echo of sound—an effort of watching and listening to distinguish what's around me.

In many ways this misty morning represents my world, shades of grey with a slow revelation. This is how God works. He awakens me. He draws my sluggish consciousness into life's complexity and slowly reveals what is right in front of me; enabling me to see Scripture and my world with fresh eyes, ears attuned to Spirit whisper, and mind and heart open to learn and to love. Content in the light or in the mist; it's all part of the day, of life.

God continue the slow revelation. Quiet us by your beauty, still us with your tranquility, illuminate our being and help us respond to the impulses you have stirred in our hearts.

"...the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." (Ephesians 1:17b) †



2ND PLACE
DEVOTIONAL

Bordering on Breakthrough

By Pamela Mytroen

"When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to" (Acts 16:7NIV).

The Apostle Paul and his missionary companions planned on sharing the gospel with the people of Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus blocked them from entering the border of Mysia. Paul wanted these people to know Jesus, but no breakthrough was to happen that day. I wonder if Paul had doubts then. Was God blocking the way because Paul wasn't ready? Because he had failed God? Because God was giving this area to somebody more worthy?

When God doesn't follow our agenda, we begin to doubt. We might wonder if we wandered off course. Thankfully, another door would open soon. The Lord gave Paul a vision that night of a Macedonian man saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9b NIV).

After Paul shared his vision with Silas and Timothy, they abandoned their original plans, obeyed Jesus, and left immediately for Macedonia. Although it wasn't the route they had marked out, they experienced a miraculous outcome. Paul and Silas were thrown in jail by the authorities, an earthquake occurred, and the jailer and his household became believers, plus many others. Are you beginning to tire? You've been skirting the border but your dream is just out of reach? The breakthrough might look differently than you had imagined, but be open to Jesus and He will lead you. Perhaps He will give you a new vision. Listen to His voice, be obedient, and watch His amazing Hand at work all around you.

Thank you Lord that Paul obeyed, and the Macedonian people became believers. Please help me to wait on You, and to know that breakthrough will come in Your timing. †



3RD PLACE
DEVOTIONAL

Hold Me in Your Grip, Lord

By Sylvia Engen-Espe

"Yet I am with you; you hold me by my right hand." Psalm 73:23 (NIV)

I hesitate each time I step on a descending escalator. A frightening moment attacks me, my heart beats faster, and my feet feel immovable. Our three year old daughter, years ago, looked with amazement at moving stairs in a city department store. This was a new sight for a young girl from a small town. She was fascinated with the expectation of riding on steps that would actually move.

I remember tightly clutching my daughter's hand as we hesitantly stepped on to the rushing escalator. Suddenly, a teenager bounded down the steps passed us, oblivious to the child he pushed off balance. God strengthened my right hand, strengthened the grip that kept our child at my side. Steel bars with protruding ridges loomed before me. Those protrusions could have permanently injured our daughter.

My heart filled with thankfulness to a miraculous God who saved our little girl from harm. God gave me sufficient strength to keep Maureen balanced. I was reminded that our Heavenly Father holds us in His grip when we lose our balance. We have the assurance that our Savior is always present to protect us—in the Hudson Bay Store in the city or in our Safeway Store at home.

Though our strength may fail, we can be assured that God is with us to protect us. He holds our right hand whether we be young or old. We are blessed.

Dear Lord, thank you for holding us in your grip. Thank you for the comfort we find in your assurance that You are always with us. Amen †



Virtual Conference—Yes or No?

Virtual Conference—Yes or No?

By Pat Gerbrandt

Robert Stermscheg helps Colleen McCubbin clean up her spilled coffee at our InScribe Fall Conference in September 2019.

Photo by Pat Gerbrandt



At fall conference 2019, those of us who are comfortable with structure were challenged to adapt to Open Space. Little did we know then we'd be given another adaptation lesson in 2020. We've had our first virtual conference, and it was another good one! Is meeting by Zoom better than an in-person event? I found myself pondering this, and came up with a few observations.

Positives

- easier to get there – just wake up, shower, get dressed and sit up!
- equalized travel costs – zero!
- more affordable for more people
- no cost accommodations
- comforts of home – own pillow, own bathroom
- lower food costs
- easier for anyone with food sensitivities or allergies
- no problem having fresh fruit on hand
- no bathroom lineups

- don't have to navigate stairs, lug book bags or suitcases
- no night driving in the rain, as occurred during Edmonton's construction seasons a few years past
- spontaneous demonstration of our mandate
- not as much physical preparation for as many people but...

Not-so-positives

- probably more work for a few—particularly the tech department
- no banquet
- no singing together
- no exploring scenic routes, as when some of us missed the turnoff on #16 and ended up going right through Manitoba's Riding Mountain National Park
- no late-night chats, early-bird breakfast get-togethers or coffee klatches during the day
- no break from food prep
- can't browse book table
- can't have silent auction
- can't have used book table

- have to clean the bathroom, make our own beds
- no chance to play pranks
- difficulty for those whose Internet is unreliable or who simply don't feel comfortable using technology
- less chance of indulging in an audio book while driving
- not as easy to have spontaneous visits
- more challenging to have small prayer groups

+ or -?

- time zone differences mean some have to arrive early while others stay late

It's hard to evaluate, but I'm convinced of this – God smiled on us again, and it is a privilege to be part of the fellowship made possible through InScribe. No matter what challenges come our way, we can stand on the true Word of God and we can count on the care-ful, prayer-ful support our fellow writers offer. With all these supports, we will continue "Writing with Unflinching Boldness" (Acts 28:31).



Beyond the Darkness: A Note to Those Who Grieve



**1ST PLACE
NON-FICTION**

By Barbara Fuller

It was in an isolated rural community in beautiful Nova Scotia 36 years ago that my world, too, was devastated by the pull of a trigger by a man who was not in his right mind. And as the news unfolds day by day of those whose lives have been snuffed out and those who are left in puzzled bewilderment and disbelief, there is a familiar ache that reaches out in longing and sorrow for you who are reeling in shock and grief unimagined.

I'd like to tell you that the pain will go away someday but truly it never does. With loss so deep and sudden and tragic the pain eventually subsides, only to return with a throbbing ache when such news of others' tragedy is shared. Most people won't know, 36 years hence, that you still feel it and weep. But what I can tell you is this: God knows. He will lead you through the deep darkness. And years later – in the face of some new grief or tragedy – God will still send some dear friend to ask how you are, and that fellow-survivor to call and share with you, through tears, the memory and the grief that has resurfaced, if only for a moment.

It's true there are no words adequate to comfort or to explain or to heal or to just make it all go away. How cruel that in these Covid times you cannot even have the comfort of a thousand arms embracing you and a funeral that brings the whole community together in love and grief and solidarity.

Nevertheless, be assured of the heart embrace of so many who grieve with you. Take the words and the candles and the condolences as the hugs you need to hold you up in these days. Let the tears flow freely and the mourning have its process and know that a year from now many might think you are "over it" but you won't be – and that's ok.

Find the person, the people, who you can weep with. May there be at least

one with whom you can move freely from weeping to laughter to tears again.

Find the one or ones whose lives you can invest in, because it's vital to "live for the living" as my late husband said with conviction after he too lost family members to criminal violence.

Yes, it's been 36 years and I still remember the helicopters overhead and the community rushing together in sympathy and the well-intended words and the kitchen full of casseroles and baked goods. But more than that I remember how life continued. How the practical love and



support of my family and my church family made it possible for me to pick up the pieces and find a new direction in life; to raise my orphaned children knowing I was not alone in this world, although there are still lonely times when I long for the love of my life, murdered in his prime.

I remember how the assurance of God's presence with me every step of the way gave me strength and hope that was not of my own making or willpower. For you see, there will be the desire and temptation to blame the killer—not only for your loved one's death, and rightly so—but also for everything else that goes wrong in your life. But hear me. Beyond the necessary and first step of grieving your loss, you will have the work of forgiveness, another difficult journey that is essential for your own freedom

from bitterness and hatred. Because you don't want to live there.

So even now when the grief is so painful like a lead weight on your chest and you have to remind yourself to keep breathing and to just take one step at a time while others hold you up when necessary; even now when you are tempted to look around for someone to blame, look up, breathe in deeply, and breathe out in prayer to God, "Please help me not to be bitter." And know that for this we have Jesus, who also died a violent death, while forgiving the very ones who took his life.

Let God lead you on the path through grief, through forgiveness, and to freedom and love. Be angry. Be sad. Let others be strong for you when you are numb and weak. But don't allow bitterness to define your life. Invest in others with love and kindness and sweetness and caring, all the things opposite to the evil that has tried to destroy you—an evil that may itself have been rooted in bitterness. Believe me, you don't want to go there.

Ask God, who promises to be present with you every step of the way, to help you walk in love and grace. Watch how Jesus, who has defeated death itself, will bring beauty from the ashes of your life, and how—in due time—he will give you eyes to see beyond the darkness of the loss you have experienced to the light and hope of the love that he extends to you in so many ways and unceasingly. O my dear friends, my fellow Nova Scotians, my sisters and brothers in grief, how my heart weeps with you! My tears flow with a thousand others who share your sorrow. And as a fellow-survivor let me reassure you that there is hope and healing and a future for you and those who continue the journey with you. And you are never ever alone.

Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, LORD, for you are with me. (Psalm 23:4)



Meatballs Meets Schnitzel



2ND PLACE
NON-FICTION

By Robert Stermscheg

Life can be full of surprises, and one of these came in the form of an unexpected phone call. My long-time friend Donna, a dear acquaintance, took pity on my prolonged singleness and suggested I should meet a lady friend – a co-worker, in fact – and go out on a date.

My initial inclination was to decline the entreaty, offering the usual excuse: I'm way too busy. After a little prodding on her part, I added that I wasn't really interested in dating, yet. She took it in stride and left it at that, for the time being. But Donna, not willing to give up so easily in her match-making efforts, persisted. She confided that her friend, Toni – short for Antonietta – was Italian and could cook. That captured my interest.

After more persuasion on both sides, we finally ended up meeting in a local coffee shop, Donna playing the part of chaperone. Afterwards, I thought that although the meet and greet went well, Toni wasn't too impressed with me and had merely acted politely. Surprise doesn't quite describe my reaction when Donna called the next day to tell me that Toni had enjoyed the afternoon chat and was willing to meet again.

At the same time, I wondered if my future meetings with Toni were always going to be supervised by a chaperone. Would this dating adventure really work out? But this is where things just got started. Eventually – many dates later – it came time to meet her family.

Toni had warned me that they were loud, boisterous and tended to be opinionated, particularly about sacred things like soccer. Although I had already met Toni's parents, the real test came during the holidays over Christmas Eve dinner.

I was looking forward to meeting her extended family, and was told that we'd be having the meal downstairs. Toni explained that whereas most meals are taken in the upstairs kitchen, in a typical Italian household, family events take place in the basement which is spacious and often equipped with a fully functional kitchen.

We entered via the side door and shed our coats. Venturing down the stairs, we were welcomed by shouts and all sorts of noise, not necessarily directed at us. Several children – Toni's brother's kids and others – were happily playing tag, or hide-and-go-seek; it wasn't clear which. Meanwhile, Toni's mom was in the kitchen with two other women, busying themselves with pans and pots, while putting the finishing touches to the festive meal. I poked my head in and said "hello", and was about to retreat to join the men, when Toni nudged me forward. Just then I recalled that I needed to complete the greeting with a kiss on both cheeks for each smiling face. Curiously, they seemed to be undaunted by the tumult going on around them. The men, oblivious to the rambunctious children, were drinking home-made wine and resting on the couch, motioning for me to join them.

Clearly, they had no intention of interfering with the capocuoco (head chef) in the kitchen. Between hellos and handshakes, a snifter of brandy was thrust into my hand. The next thing I knew, I was seated between Emilio, my future father-in-law, and Jack, my future brother-in-law, fielding probing questions, while the kids ran around as the TV blared loudly with no-one in particular

watching. Finally, the pronouncement was made that all was in readiness.

It was fun watching – not just the children – but the adults, jockeying for position; everyone wanted to sit next to Toni and I. Jack managed to get most people's attention and said an unrehearsed but meaningful grace. Toni disappeared into the kitchen, joined by Sera, Maria and Carmella. Each lady came out carrying a wonderful dish, but with an unexpected twist. It was Christmas Eve and that meant a meatless dinner.

There was ante pasto, baccalà, pasta, rice, shrimp and all sorts of dishes with which I wasn't familiar. But, alas, no meatballs. Fortunately, there was lots of homemade wine to lubricate the palate. After the grand meal, the men settled down for a little rest while watching *It's a Wonderful Life* on TV.

Wanting to leave a good impression, I ventured into the kitchen to thank the ladies for the wonderful meal. I spotted the same four women, Toni included, busy attacking the mound of dishes. Not a single man was in sight. Without being asked, I picked up a tea towel and reached for the closest dinner plate. I got an amused look from Maria. A few minutes later she whispered something to Toni and I was tactfully ushered out of the kitchen.

Later, Toni explained to me that it was customary for the women to clean up while the men relaxed (slept), giving them a chance to catch up on family life. Translation: gossip about the men. I smiled, wiser in the knowledge for next time.

On another 'family' visit (Italians have an extensive community), I was met on the landing by a stern-looking man, Cesare. He looked me over as if I were the pizza delivery boy – late on a delivery – and wasted no time in offering his verdict: "You're not as fat and ugly as I'd heard." It was quite the welcome.

Fortunately, Toni had forewarned me of Cesare's curt and derogatory manner, saying that beneath that abrasive exterior was a man who was generous and loved to entertain. My welcome and initiation into the extended Italian community had begun.

Several weeks later, it was my family's turn. I had advised Toni to expect a more subdued welcome from my parents, Austrian immigrants not known for emotional outbursts and rib-cracking hugs. We were met at the door, not by loud music and fanfare, but with a relative, almost eerie calm. After my father's customary handshake, we were ushered into a quiet room made all the more tranquil by the soothing strains of soft music. Toni glanced around, half-expecting to see more people, but there were only the four of us – a new experience for her.

Later, over a glass of store-bought wine, came a carefully prepared dinner that consisted of wiener schnitzel, spätzle, red cabbage, and of course, apfelstrudel.

What a difference from three weeks ago. It wasn't too difficult for me to identify with the Hollywood movie, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. What I had experienced was remarkably similar, albeit with an Italian twist. It struck me that my future wife's Italian connection was trying to mesh with my Austrian side: meatballs, meet schnitzel. They do say that opposites attract. Perhaps they're right, because we sure are different.

Bon Appétit! †

Encouraging the Next Generation of Writers

Encouraging the Next Generation of Writers

By Sheila Webster

One of the ways of encouraging the next generation of writers is to put on a contest.

Recently I ran such a contest in the communities of Caronport, SK and Caron, SK to promote young writers and good neighbours.

I offered a prize and a deadline on a theme.

This was the winning entry from a broad section of 10-14 year old homeschooled entrants. One of the compelling reasons Keely one was this line - "they can shape your children into who they are today..."

Good Neighbors

By: Keely Smith

It is important in this day and age, to respect and be thankful for our neighbors. Good neighbors are extremely valuable and they should not be taken for granted. Today I am going to talk to you about some experiences that I've had that show perfect examples of good neighbors.

For instance, they can shape your children into who they are today, and add a lot of value to a community. From a personal view, seeing my neighbors' well kept yards inspire me and my family to do better and enjoy our own yards. My one neighbor's father mows their huge yard almost every other day in the summertime.

Neighbors are also friends. My family invites our neighbors over for visits and even holidays and celebrations. We've learned more about each other, and we've established relationships. Earlier this summer we gathered for a bonfire with our neighbor's extended family and following the bonfire, I brought my newly-made friend, their granddaughter, to see my animals. Some of the activities we've done over the years include game night, cattle brandings, and birthday parties.

Another point worth noting is that good neighbors can be resourceful and helpful. Actually, one of my neighbors was cleaning out his water cistern, and he needed a tank to put the water into. My dad gave a good example of being a helpful neighbor when he lent him our portable water tank.

Also, one of my other neighbor's has sheep, and I've found that I've learned a lot more about sheep than I would've had if I lived somewhere else. I think that neighbors contribute to the community because they may have a different animal or plant than you're used to.

Last year, one of my neighbors asked if I could feed their cats while they were away on vacation. Another great point about having good neighbors is that they could be pet-sitters for you, or like my situation, I was a pet-sitter for them. Depending on the person, you might be able to make a little bit of extra cash to fund your interests. Good neighbors are also helpful when it comes to crime watch.

Everybody should work together and look out for each other. If you have an excellent crime watch community, there might only be minimal crimes because of your helpful neighbors.

Another example of a helpful neighbor, is this story. My mom and I were driving home from errands one day and this man was herding a bull. My mom showed that she was a good neighbor and helped to herd the bull back to where it needed to go. The man was very thankful and gave her a big wave when they were through!

If there is a new member to your community, I highly suggest taking them a homemade pie, cookies, or even stop by to ask if they need any help. Of course you don't have to make your sweets yourself, but it does add an extra touch to the package, and it shows you really care. That's what is being a good neighbor is all about! My mom has been a good example to me. For 14 years, my mom would fill a box full of Christmas baking for a local bachelor. As a family, we would deliver it on Christmas morning. He looked forward to it every year.

Since we moved, I've had the idea to deliver baking on Christmas morning to our new neighbors on horseback, but I haven't been able to complete that goal quite yet. I hope I will be able to check it off my bucket list this year!

The Bible says, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). I believe Jesus was a good role model and example that we can live by.

Good neighbors are an excellent addition to your community, and need to be highly respected. I hope this message inspires you to be a better neighbor yourself! †

Farewell, Chiante!

My time as the FellowScript YA editor has come to a bittersweet close. While I am sad to be leaving, I am excited about the journey ahead. I have been a part of the FellowScript editorial team since late 2018. I have enjoyed seeing young people with a passion for writing see their work go through the stages of revision and editing and finally to publication. What an encouragement it was to be a part of the journey for them! And of course, my favourite part was seeing how God was at work through these writers as they told their stories. On August 1st of this year I got married to my love, Dawson, and I became Mrs. Chiante Duncan. As we move into our married life, Dawson will be continuing his Biblical Studies degree and I will be continuing my BA in history and following God's recent call for me to double major in Theology. Our plans for the future are uncertain, so we faithfully follow God in the place he has put us and await his guidance and provision for the next step in our lives.

Thank you, Chiante

Vivid Verses

Without Shoes

*feet bare, hair long
clothing plain
melodious brook
of eloquent words*

wade

*wash over me
yesterday cleanse
hunger quench
edges erode*

yearn

carry away myshoes

holy ground

-D. Bentley

*There was an old fellow in Hull,
Whose footwear was constantly dull.
When they asked, "Why not shine?"
He said, "Cause they're mine."
So they hit him on top of his skull.*

- Bruce Atchison

Clock Talk

*Can't be touched with the hand
or seen with the eye.
As it slips through my fingers
I kiss it good-bye.*

*If I choose to use, not abuse it
I can make it stand still.
I'll have fun! It will fly
without passing me by.*

*But it marches on
soon is gone
waits for no one.
Never will.*

- Irene Lo Scerbo

A Christmas Meditation

*Great angels warriors stilled the fray,
Stood guard where Heaven's Captain lay
So small, all helpless, on the hay.*

*I AM, Almighty God — yet called
To narrow birth; with beasts was stilled;
In measured beads of time was walled.*

*Creation's Voice, in deep, sweet chime
Brought forth earth's beauty; pure, sublime;
Could now but cry in infant rhyme.*

*The One whose power the worlds uphold,
Bent under sorrows, grief untold,
Sore bruised by enemy of old.*

*Light of the World enclosed in womb,
Awaiting deeper dark of tomb
Till resurrection life should bloom,*

*Came as man. Love's wondrous foray
Wrote for us redemption's story:
"Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

- Diane Ablonczy



1ST PLACE
POETRY

Thoughts from a Cancer Clinic Waiting Room



By Sheri Hathaway

We are the "loved ones".
We sit in silence in this waiting room
Avoiding each other.

Through the window trees sway, leaves dance, birds
flutter
But in silence for us.
Thick glass keeps it all away.
We can look – we can't hear or feel the breeze on our
face.

For us, gentle souls in happy scrubs
Smile and walk past on cushioned shoes.
They know they help. Let's not forget them.
The never-ending row of medicines and high-tech
machines
Are what we hate – and love – and love to hate.
They do their work and care not our loathing.

Remember, hope lives here!
There is no talk of death
Though it's closer here than anywhere.
We seek a normal life
Where people work and play, love and laugh.
We yearn – we strive to get back in pace
With those who march by outside that window,
Unaware how blessed they are.
We pray and do our utmost,
Saying thanks a thousand times a day
For all the things done for us – and to us.
We eat, take pills and look again
At what we do – and don't do.

Dear God, it's your choice we're here
But thank You for hope.
What strange roads our lives traverse!
What odd and unplanned journeys!
Here we are, as if on a threshold –
A station, so to speak – unsure of destination,
Hoping You'll send us back and not open death's door
just yet.
We work to heal. We yearn for life renewed.
Thank You for each new day outside that glass.
We hope someday to stay there.

But oh! What new life awaits us through the door?



2ND PLACE
POETRY

From Death...

By Kathleen Friesen

Abandoned
Decaying
An old farmhouse leans
Toward the past

Where children once laughed
Silence echoes
Lonely winds whisper
Of long-ago dreams

But there
By yawning doorway
A nascent lily
Thrusts past withered leaves

To life





Retrieving Dolly Cry

I stood on the gravel road close to, but out of sight from the farm where I grew up and marveled at the beauty of this late September day. In the ditch to my left lay the remains of what used to be a driveway leading to a dilapidated wooden gate. Beyond the gate, a neglected road. My childhood magical Old Road. Excitement I hadn't felt in eons stirred, pushing me forward. Yet dread froze my feet to the road beside my parked car. I steeled against the dread because being this close to my magical old road shattered my determination to stay off it, and like an undisciplined child, I ran across the rocky ditch and climbed through the wobbly gate.

Tall poplars with bright yellow leaves still clinging to them, and flourishing spruce trees hugged the edges of my road, accepting its existence. In front of them, a new generation of plants, oblivious to the road's former boundaries, sunk their roots into its uncrowded soil. A herd of sheep, unwilling to relinquish their rights to the road, converted the grass-covered hump between the ruts into a narrow well-packed trail, which I followed.

Fallen leaves crackled under my feet. Above, squirrels perched on branches, their tails flicking as they chattered and gnawed on pinecones. Discarded pieces dropped onto my wind-blown hair, but I paid no attention, because after forty years, I was entering a world that once held my soul in its hands.

My old road turned to the right but the sheep trail I chose to follow continued straight, meandering between large trees and around brush piles and junipers. The pungent scent of the dew-drenched ground mixed with an intense spruce smell and teased my nostrils.

I wilted onto a weathered brown stump, its center soft from rot and energetic insects. Probably a stump I'd sat on as a child. The thought captivated me and overlooking the danger of exposing my vulnerability to this enchanted world, I allowed myself to muse. To ponder the dreams that haunt and terrified me night after night and to try to understand why the burning need

to discover the origin of my crippling fear fetched me here.

Rising from the stump, I continued down the trail. It ended at a small clearing. The little flat, I'd called my childhood paradise, and it remained unscathed. Tucked on its northern edge stood the old, slab cowshed. Except for a sagging roof, a few missing boards, and the encroaching trees appeared to embrace it a wee bit tighter, it was just as I remembered.

I stepped toward it, and raw fear swept through me, expressing itself in an ear-piercing scream. Falling to the ground, between cow pies and horse piles, I cried for that little girl I once was. My heart pounded against the ground as it did in my childhood, but years and distance had taken away the strength of comfort the earth once offered me. Into the perishing grass, I buried my face, begging to know what brought me back to this place yet begging not to know. My fingers tightened around the sharp grass blades and pulled. Pain shot through them, accelerating the bedlam in my mind. I stared at my appendages as blood ooze from the grass cuts, then dripped into the soil. Bit by bit, a strange new strength seeped into me and I strode across the clearing to the cowshed.

Keeping my back to the wall I stepped around the dung pile spanning the shed's open front. Swarms of flies buzzed above the fibrous, brown floor. Unconcerned with its composition, I sat on the highest part of the pile and wrapped my arms around my knees, allowing a sunbeam to calm my tormented spirit.

As I basked, the northeast corner drew me as iron shavings to a magnet. I crawled to it, and with bare hands, started digging. Deep, into the cattle dung, until my fingernails scraped something hard. Shaking, I removed a rotting box. Its bottom disintegrated, spilling out a silver haired doll. A sharp gasp escaped from between my trembling lips, and I clutched the doll to my chest. "Dolly Cry!"

My surroundings swirled. Years fell away. I was ten years old again, lying on my side where I now sat, my bottom stinging and the lump on my head pounding. I clutched

Dolly Cry, sobbing. "Why does she hate me so much? Why does she keep telling me I know why she is beating me when don't have a clue?"

No answer came, but beyond the walls of my hiding place, the birds shrieked, alerting one another of an approaching invasion. I rose to my knees, my breath coming in short, sharp jerks, and I peeked through a knothole in the wall. Mother strode across my paradise with the black leather strap dangling from her hand. "Who said I was through with you?"

I held Dolly Cry to my chest and ran through the bush to home. Once there, I curled in a ball under my bed, and squeezed my doll tighter, but I no longer held her. Before I had time to consider where I dropped her, iron fingers grasped my ankle, yanking me from my hideout. "I'll teach you to run away from me." Mother ripped off my clothing and thrashed my welted skin, until consciousness faded away.

Sometime later, I awoke, throbbing and cold, lying on the floor in a puddle of pink. I felt my stinging bottom, horrified at the blood clinging to my hand when I pulled it back. Beside me, lay my dress, a big pink



Retrieving Dolly Cry



1ST PLACE
ADULT FICTION

stain on its skirt. I soaked it in the wet on the floor, then rubbed it to remove the pink. "Please help me, God. If I don't get it out, I'll get another strapping!"

The door flung open. My mother strode in, Dolly Cry swinging from her hand. "Get up! And get yourself cleaned before your Dad comes home!"

I reached for Dolly Cry. Mother yanked her away. "Forget it! And pull this off again, you'll lose something else!" She huffed from my room, slamming the door behind her.

"What did I pull off?" I cried at her disappearing back.

Minutes later, the metal lid scraped across the burning barrel behind the house, and I glanced out my window. Mother looked back, Dolly Cry in one hand and the lid in the other. "Please don't!" I screamed. "I'll do anything you want. Just let me keep her!"

A smile stretched my mother's lips and she tossed my beloved doll into the burning barrel with the rest of the trash.

Suppertime never came for me that night. I lay awake until two sets of snores resounded on the other side of my wall. Then I crept outside. After retrieving Dolly Cry from the burning barrel, and a small wooden box from Dad's workshop, I ran through the bush to my magical road, to the little flat, and into the cowshed. The moon shone through the open side of the building creating dark, eerie spots behind the humps. I shivered, and forced thoughts of boogiemen from my mind, then knelt in the northeast corner, digging like a dog after a bone. When the hole was deep enough, I kissed Dolly Cry's forehead, placed her in the box, closed its lid, and laid her tiny coffin in the hole. With each handful of dirt, I dropped on top of it, a bit of me stayed behind. Finally, I stood and dragged myself home. Moonbeams touched dew-drenched leaves all around me, making them sparkle and dance in the slight breeze, but I felt no magic, nor did I ever return to the cowshed.

I yielded to the present when it called me back. Tears for that little girl, and tears for me rolled down my cheeks when I

entered my own time. The daymare I'd just experience had been buried as deep in the corner of the cowshed as Dolly Cry had been. But now it was exposed, showing me the root of my fear and insecurities. My heart begged me to give it to God and let Him heal me, but, I felt cold, deserted by everyone.

I removed my sweater, wrapped it around Dolly Cry, and headed back down my magical Old Road. "It's over," I assured her. "We're all grown up now, and no one can hurt us again." And when I can understand why anyone would treat a child the way I was treated—my thoughts frizzled out. Such a feat was impossible in my human state. Only God can help us out of this mess. And, I explained to my cherished doll, we have good friends, ones who will hold our hands as we heal and walk with us to freedom. I hugged her tighter. No more cowshed burials for you. My bedroom is your home. In a treasured spot only you deserve. †



How to do Things the Takao Way

By Cheyenne Wakulchyk

When I first met Takao, I never imagined the changes that he would make in my life. This is my journey with Takao, the dog who taught me how to let others care for me and not worry about the things I cannot control. I grew up in multiple homes with my two younger siblings. We moved from house to house and each situation got worse and worse. I had to protect them and become their “mother”. This went on until we were adopted when I was ten years old. I was so happy that I finally had a family that I was always thinking of ways to please them and “earn” their love. That is when Takao came into my life.

Takao had his own way of doing things, he wanted everyone to look at him and love him. He was something special, and it showed. Whenever I was feeling upset or down, he crawled into my lap and cuddled with me. I would spend hours on the floor petting him and telling him about my problems or simply how my day went. It was like he was listening, and it told me I had someone I could talk to.

My mom and dad tried to teach me how to let go of the “mother” role and step into being a child. It was hard for me. I did not trust adults because of the neglect and abuse in the other homes I grew up in. I felt like I had to be the “mother” to my sisters.

Takao agreed with my mom and dad because every time I was sad, alone, and hurting he would be there telling me that everything was okay by licking my tears away.

There was a turning point for me as I slowly began to accept the love I was receiving from Takao. I stepped down from the “mother” role and let my parents step into it. I learned that I could not give the same love as a parent because I was not meant to take care of my siblings and give them the things they needed. Takao took care of me the way I always wanted to be; he claimed me as his “puppy”.

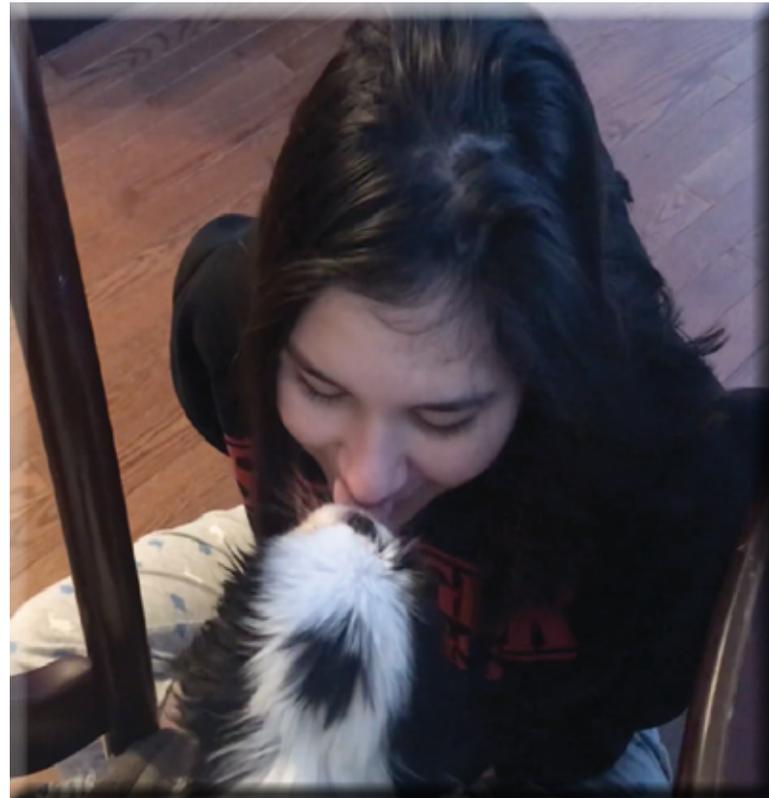
I suffered four years of court against my abuser. Through the whole court process, I slowly became engulfed in shame, fear, and anxiety. I was confused and hurting, but Takao kept me warm, protected, and safe. He licked my face and cuddled with me like he always did, and it felt like it would be okay because he was there. I lost the court case, but Takao stayed with me even as my hurt and trauma spiralled into depression.

During my graduation from middle school, Takao’s health was declining, and my depression was deepening, but even through it all, Takao found a way to keep holding me close, protecting me as he always did.

On his last day on earth, every lesson that Takao taught me became clear. When Takao cuddled me and licked me for hours, I learned it was so that I could feel what it was like to have someone care for me

and love me for me. I learned that it is okay to let others take care of me.

In Takao’s last moments, he had one last thing to teach me. I placed him in my lap and begged him to stay with me. His eyes looked bright for a moment as he licked my tears away and placed his paw over my hand. In that simple action, he told me that I no longer had to worry about things I cannot control and that he will always be taking care of me. He taught me how to do things the Takao way. †



***Cheyenne Wakulchyk** is an aspiring non-status Metis writer from Alberta. She is happily living with her biological sisters, adoptive parents, and three happy little puppies. She hopes to finish high school and make a children’s storybook for her younger cousins and other children alike to enjoy.*



The Power of the Pen

By Lorilee Guenter

The act of writing can be a subversive one. Recorded words convey ideas. They can present truth in a manner that makes the reader pause and consider. Throughout history, people have sought to restrict the creation and dissemination of the written word. They considered certain ideas and truth dangerous, or at least dangerous in the wrong hands.

Spoken words are also considered dangerous and speaking God's truth, in some places, has landed the speaker in prison. However, unlike the written word, conversations are easily distorted. It requires intentionality to accurately pass along information following the oral traditions of some cultures. Any break in the chain of transmission causes the irrecoverable loss of information and ideas. While the written word can be burned or otherwise destroyed by deliberate action, more often their record remains readable by anyone who possesses them.

Because words can hold power, the role of the writer comes with great responsibility. They may entertain or enlighten but, regardless of their purpose, words must be used with care. Deliberate, careful writing can change a society. Consider God created the world using spoken words. Three words, peace be still, spoken by Jesus calmed a storm. We know this because of the written stories of the events. Our words also have power to create change through the Holy Spirit who dwells with us.

The responsibility of the writer includes sharing the written word. The audience may be one person or it may be many. By sharing our writing, our words have power to impact others. We may encourage, challenge, teach, correct, or entertain when we write. Once the ideas held within the essay, story, or poem cause others to stop and think, they become dangerous. At that point, the act of writing becomes a subversive action. †

Lorilee Guenter likes to combine ordinary things in unexpected ways. She enjoys going on hikes with her husband. While hiking she often finds ideas for her writing and other creative pursuits. She is her first audience and finds herself learning as she follows up on these ideas.



Waiting in the Wings

By Marie-Blanche Mitchell

I consider myself the 'Grandma Moses' of Christian writers. Actually, a 'Grandma Moses' waiting to make her debut as a novelist. Anna Mary Robertson Moses began seriously producing paintings of simple country life when she was seventy-eight, although she had practiced drawing from an early age.

I am sixty-four. I do believe I still have time.

The first success I had as a writer, was in grade ten, when one of my works was published in an Alberta anthology of stories for students. In grade eleven, an essay won an award for the RCMP centennial. I have years of half-written works, now languishing on the shelf. Added to the mix are all the scripts I wrote and directed for church dramas, as well as two videos I produced for the Alberta Teachers' Association.

My life as a writer was hampered by teaching duties, plus a family that didn't take my writing seriously. To this day, most of them still consider my writing ventures as a hobby.

Believing that I could develop into a quality novelist was difficult.

In my retirement, I saw an opportunity. My passion to challenge the reader regarding societal issues in story form, while glorifying the Lord, could become reality.

My skills are being honed by participating with organizations such as Inscribe Fellowship, and a recent online conference.

My first novel is being pitched to a publisher who is interested in seeing how I can develop it into a series. In the meantime, I have been blogging weekly since January 2018 and I am working on a second novel, with other projects taking shape.

I may never see success as did Grandma Moses, yet— should my work posthumously bring one person closer to Christ, then I will have made it onstage. †

Marie-Blanche Mitchell has been a storyteller since the age of ten, as she would direct her sisters in skirts. "M.B." was a drama major in Arts and Education, therefore her creativity has extended to filmmaking and musical theatre. She can be found on her soapbox at reflectionsofachristfollower.blog.





Repotting

By Deb Elkind

There is something untimely about the household ficus.

The plant, shaken free of its weary soil, sprawls the length of the Granger farmhouse table at just the right height for Myra to sit and save her back. She snips another finger from the clutch of roots gnarled up at the end of its stem. Yes, a fig tree without figs is like an interrupted promise.

She'd filched the cutting decades ago during an agricultural bus tour to California from the shadowed limbs of a leafy grove polka-dotted in red-orange fruit. She'd smuggled the slip back north across the Canadian border, roots soaking in a plastic bag stashed beneath her underwear on the bottom of her valise, startled that her temerity eclipsed both honesty and modesty. Not even the commercial greenhouses in Medicine Hat imported such exotics back then, their faith only as warm as the worst Alberta winter. Myra coddled the twig until it sent out delicate filaments—now such woody knuckles!—and then tucked the embryonic tree directly into its pot. The sapling had flourished, shooting up so that before long it was tall as a toddler and then as a teen, and suddenly was brushing the ceiling as it reached for the sun.

The rooting, the branching, but never any figs, expectation disappointing memory.

Myra has a green thumb. She used to coax asparagus from the hardened garden dirt beside the machine shop and to ripen peppers on the vine even at this latitude. She'd likewise babied her tree, nourishing it with fertilizer, keeping to a rigorous watering schedule, checking often for aphids and scale before eventually—when she moved from the farm—turning its daily care over to her daughter-in-law.

But the ficus benjamina can be tricky. Jostle it and a leaf yellows. What damage is Myra doing today, laying its corpus out like a surgeon, like a mortician?

She scoops some humus from its bag, moist shreds clinging to her cuticles, the smell pleasing though born in the rot of mossy peat bogs. Decomposition feeds new life.

It wasn't so difficult for her to leave behind the vegetable patch when their only child, Teddy—then newly married—took over the place after his father's accident. But Myra—then newly widowed—lamented over the town condo's shallow sills and poor exposure. And so the fig tree remained here at the homestead, outgrowing its cradle of the old clay crock.

"It needs attention," she'd said this morning as Teddy and Dor were preparing to leave for their reprieve from Theo. The fig loves to be root bound, loves to press up snugly against the sides of the vessel until its soil is salt saturated and its boughs unruly. But this plant has been too long in the pot. Before the door had closed on the half-ton, her daughter-in-law was fretting. "Are you sure you can manage?" Surely she wasn't really talking about managing the unwieldy fig; the girl needed a break from her death vigil. Myra, who'd move back home in a moment if asked, came yesterday to provide respite.

"The heavy lifting's already done,"

Myra'd said from the entry steps. Teddy had carried the pot from the living room after breakfast. "The morning's half gone; you'll miss your lunch reservation."

"But you'll need sand."

"I know where to find it. You two go on." So she'd fetched a pail and headed through the thistles to the sandbox, built by a grandfather for his sole grandchild. The sandbox Theo abandoned only at adolescence—only a few years ago. Myra'd hurried back to the gloom of the porch and carelessly let the screen door slip from her

grip to slap shut behind her. Motionless, she'd strained to listen for any lag in Theo's rhythmic breathing, the tempo that these days sets the pace for all the family undertakings.

The heartbeat of the Granger home has always been the tick-tock of the wall clock, in Myra's day orchestrating her work—the metronomic beat directing her kneading of bread dough at this table, her sweeping of floor in this kitchen. She looks up from her pruning at the clock, hanging where it has hung since she brought it out of her prairie schoolhouse when she retired from the classroom into marriage and motherhood—and mourning.

It's an eight-day clock. Her groom would wind it after a long day on the tractor, when its movement had gradually slowed until, suddenly, they'd be aware of silence, of cessation. He'd insert the tarnished key into the brass-ringed hole and crank it counterclockwise, winding against time



in a sort of mutiny. Helping to set it had become their son's first childhood chore, even before Teddy could feed the chickens. His dad would grin down at him and ask, "Ready?" and boost him, giggling, high in the air until he could reach the pendulum and bump it into motion, starting time again.

The rites of passage paralleled their son's maturing responsibilities: Teddy began collecting eggs at the same age he was learning to tell time; summer-fallowing at thirteen meant that every Saturday he polished the hinged glass pane; running the

Repotting

2ND PLACE
ADULT FICTION

baler and taking over the winding signaled culmination. So when grandson Theo in his turn announced his intention to remain on the farm after graduation last year, clock-winding privileges were formally declared his.

But Teddy has now resumed the task. He's wound it, say, a dozen times since Theo's diagnosis—and always on the seventh day. As Myra mixes up the earth in a battered basin, the breath of the boy in the next room and the beat of the clock on the kitchen wall pulse in collaboration.

What would happen if the clock stopped?

They'd set up the hospice bed in the living room to face the dawn filtering through the fig. For the first month, before the fatigue consumed Theo, he would wish aloud for the pleasure of tramping through the morning dew in the field beyond. But he's lost his sight at this point, so Myra has no reason to put off the pruning any longer. He's lost the ability to watch day breaking through the curtain of foliage—the sun swelling out of the ground, its color staining the horizon, blood seeping up into the hem of the sky. Theo's darkness is dense. Whom is he seeing when, dozing, his countenance lights up with inner radiance? When his lips twitch, to whom does he speak? He has lost his sight, yet he listens to time passing.

"Tell me about the clock again," he'd sleep-whispered to her yesterday, fitful.

So she'd reminded him that it came a century ago from a workshop down east, brought out by his grandpa's ancestors, and she described for Theo the grain of the wooden case crafted from hardwood forests and stained dark brown. But her heart whispers now that they build coffins out of oak, too. And in her teacher voice, she'd instructed Theo that an analogue timepiece illustrates the revolutions and rotations of celestial bodies through space, picturing for him its spherical dial, its circle of twelve Roman numerals broken into sixty one-minute marks, broken into three thousand six hundred seconds, broken.

And she knows the face of that clock is a tyranny.

Myra dips a handful of the sand from the bucket, ready to stir it into the potting mix but letting it sift away instead through the hourglass of her fist clenched against the caprice of mortality.

Theo's interest in history had been sparked by his mother. Dor appreciated the heirloom even as a bride, when her city taste for antiques sent her scavenging the local dumpsite and buying junk at neighboring auctions. She'd resurrected the framed images of the Granger forebears from the mildew of their cellar and asked Myra for background on the settlers.

"They came west with the Canadian Pacific Railroad and stayed for the industrial boom," Myra had explained. The following generations were born on the clay banks of the river. As for Myra's side, all his life Dad had labored at the Potteries, casting jugs for wine-making and pickling, working the jigger machine, firing



stoneware in the hell-hot natural gas kilns, and bringing home grit in his pockets and ears and beneath his nails so that, all her life, Myra has craved the feel of dirt.

She lowers herself onto knees once accustomed to weeding and still familiar with pleading, to bow over the five-gallon crock on the floorboards of the kitchen. She lines it with fresh gravel and trowels in some loam. The clay pot has held the tree since its propagation—mineral sustaining vegetable, an earthen jar containing the treasure of life. She slides the trunk along the table's surface and settles the root-ball into its bed, pressing the soil like a blanket folded in around a young man dying. Only now does she let a silent tear streak her dirt-smear hand.

The weeping fig trembles and drops another leaf. Maybe this year it will produce. †

What Exactly is a Beta Reader, Anyway?

By Deb Elkind

I'm not offering an answer in this short article: It's an honest question. I get that it's not a first-draft reader, a critique partner, or a fact checker—all of which are traditionally valuable. But beta reader? Even its name is trendy.

I hadn't yet heard the term when my second novel was contracted with a literary agent. I'd asked a few people to check out the manuscript of *The Red Journal* (2019), but I didn't take their "bit of feedback" as prescriptive, depending instead on my professional editor to catch what I'd missed. My first novel (*The Third Grace*, 2011) had been taken on by a publisher who explicitly told me to ignore any comments by pre-readers; his were the only opinions I should heed because he knew the market (although I refused to "put a bonnet on it" to catch his hoped-for Amish audience).

Yes, come to think of it, that's what I'd been calling them: "pre-readers." And even my publisher had disparaged them.

So when a friend a few years ago asked me to beta read her manuscript, I scratched my head and felt overly responsible. Since then I've continued to find the process . . . difficult, mostly because my editorial eye distracts me from substantive content to focus on formatting issues: typos, inconsistent commas, misplaced modifiers. Even worse is my impulse to rewrite, as though my own style should replace authorial voice.

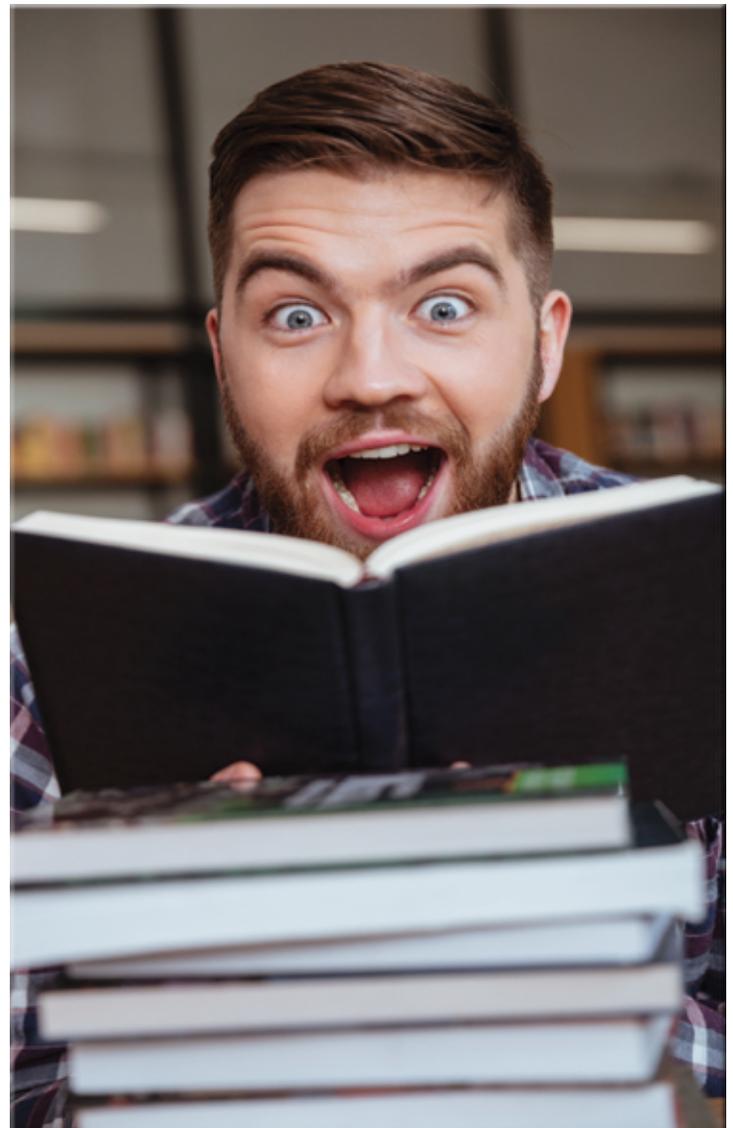
All this is to say that I feel, as a beta reader, unhelpful—or too helpful in the wrong way—and, as a writer, uncooperative being beta read by others.

What are the seeds of my resistance to beta reading? Perhaps it's the lesson I took from my elementary school teachers who, in that past era, didn't want parents checking homework but acted as unquestioned, standardized authority passing or failing based solely on student aptitude. Or maybe it's my perfectionistic self-defence against possible censure by friends (let some faceless editor reject my piece privately—or accept it and surprise us all).

Then again, my discomfort might stem from my 2001 graduate studies, when an extremely literate academic advisor oversaw my thesis (*Roots and Branches: The Symbol of the Tree in the Imagination of G.K. Chesterton*, subsequently picked up and published for a general audience). During his seminary mentorship, the prof walked beside me as I researched and crafted every paragraph and point of argument, leading me with an expertise no casual reader could approach and setting my writing standards—for not only nonfiction but fiction—at a scholarly level. (My novels and short stories still suffer stuffiness because of it.)

Yes, possibly my graduate experience is at the crux of my hesitation to endorse beta reading if defined as broad, contemporary assessment meant to curb a writer's free-thinking audacity. I'm stuck on the old-fashioned literature of the many Christian novelists I cited in my studies who courageously bore full responsibility for their bold, often shocking, declarations exposing uncommon ideas. Did Dante have someone vet his *Divine Comedy*? Was Bunyan open to pre-pub critique of *Pilgrim's Progress*? Who was the beta reader for Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* or Dafoe's scandalous *Moll Flanders*?

Of course, I'm no classic author—just a little-known contemporary writer skeptical about the enduring purpose of today's beta-reading vogue. †



The Essential Beta Reader?

By Eleanor Bertin

If the Lone Ranger needs a Tonto and if Sherlock must have his Watson, then every writer needs a beta reader or two to offer feedback, critique, and yes, even correction. Whether for fiction or non-fiction, a second set of eyes is essential.

Beta is the second letter of the Greek alphabet. It follows alpha. Sorry to state the obvious, but you can only have a beta reader *after* your alpha reader – you, the writer – has picked through your manuscript repeatedly, revising, rewriting, and in general, taking the role of your worst critic. Comb through your work with the utmost care, use spelling and grammar checks and references, flounce off in disgust and swear off writing forever, ruminate day and night on how best to convey your thoughts and finally, return to repair and rewrite. Only after you have gone through these harrowing steps are you ready for beta readers to put you through it once again.

We writers can get so immersed in our stories we forget to refer to our outline, timeline, or cheat sheet of character details. We may make assumptions about setting and characters, forgetting to include the details for readers who are not picturing them the way we do. Our writing schedule may not be sequential, with later scenes written before earlier ones thus leading to inconsistencies.

Even the most scrupulous grammarian knows how easily typos and punctuation errors can creep into a text. In non-fiction, undocumented assumptions and factual errors also may sneak in. It's surprising and embarrassing the kind of plot, character and timing inconsistencies that can appear. Say you've created

an experienced house renovating character, yet when she arrives at a new fixer-upper, she doesn't know how to get the power turned on. Saved by a beta reader. A widowed character contemplates her forty-six-year marriage, but later we're told she has recently celebrated her fiftieth anniversary? Beta reader to the rescue. A thoughtful beta may suggest your main character is unlikable, or that your hook lacks action and dialogue. Even better, they may offer simple fixes. A good beta reader offers words of praise and encouragement, too, so there's no need to fear the brutal red pencil.

How do I find a beta reader, you ask? In my experience, friends who are avid readers with a sound grasp of the English language make good ones. They love reading a good story and will flag whatever brings that story to a skidding halt – awkward sentence structure, pretentious vocabulary, or plot gaps like the ones mentioned above. Fellow writers are another precious source of beta readers. If they're not too busy with their own projects, their analytical skills and knowledge of what constitutes good literature, cohesive plot or premise, and the mechanics of writing can be invaluable in polishing your manuscript. Simply by asking, I've swapped manuscripts with other writers through Inscribe and even social media writing groups on LinkedIn and Twitter.

Sadly, even the process of revising after beta readers have offered their comments can result in inadvertent mistakes. Nothing can take the place of that final essential read-through, but a team of readers who are dedicated to helping you make your writing the best it can be are the Tontos and Watsons of the literary life. †





When Love is on the Line

By Pamela Mytroen

Stefano's fingers shook as he plucked note number ten from a white dress on the clothesline. "Final note" said the folded paper. Stefano's heart thudded in tandem with three peals of the Cantini bell tower. The ten notes had to be from Alessa, his former fiancé. He slapped the railing of his fifth floor terrace. He longed to see her and though he didn't want the notes to end, he knew their relationship was as good as dead. Finito. Though he was recovering from his gambling addiction, he would never be good enough for Alessa. Why would she keep silent for years, then move into a cramped apartment across from him, and send cryptic notes on a rickety clothesline, when she could reside in her father's villa? He exhaled and stepped back inside his small flat.

He gathered her other nine messages. They had curled up at the edges as they dried, like crisp Frappe cookies. Stefano pictured Alessa in that white dress from the clothesline. She would look stunning in it, especially against her dark skin. Or even the pink dress with yellow buttons down the back. She would expect wealth and he had nothing to offer but a ruined life. The flashing lights of the casino had lured him into debt and the loss of his career in architecture. Prison followed and then house arrest. He frowned at his worn furniture and chipped plaster walls.

Stefano reached for note number one. "Per favore, we have unfinished business."

Stefano had dismissed it as a stranger's private correspondence. But the second note had made him wonder. "All the day, I think about you" – lyrics he and Alessa had sung whenever they had driven around Lake Como, where her parents had owned a lavish summerhouse. The wealthy Alessa he knew wouldn't do her own laundry, and yet the notes carried her voice.

He unfolded the final paper, blinked at the words, and landed on a



wooden chair when he read "Loaf, olive oil, garlic" – a poor man's grocery list. Either she was mocking him, or the notes were just a stranger's scrawl after all. He began to ball the note in his hand, but noticed the next two ingredients – "goat cheese", and "tomato-pear chutney". Sounds like a crostini appetizer, thought Stefano. He jumped up, sending the chair crashing to the tile floor. "Let's live on appetizers," Alessa had often said. The tomato-pear chutney was her favourite. He flew out the door, glancing back at the clothesline. Empty. Praying that his probation officer would be late for their weekly appointment, Stefano ran down the cobblestone street, turned the corner, and skidded into an open-air market. He slipped into the shadows, and gazed over the crowd. Some drank coffee beneath umbrellas, while others ordered cheeses and salamis. A woman wearing the pink dress with yellow buttons stood at the coffee bar. Only patrons wanting to pay less than table price would stand at the bar. It couldn't be Alessa. With her parent's money, she would pay the table price and order an expensive drink, whereas this woman just held a small glass of espresso. He turned to leave before the woman caught him – a prisoner – staring at her. Alessa's fifth and sixth notes – I've spent my life looking for you and Near, find me while I'm near, echoed in his ears. She

would finish the espresso in three sips. He darted through crowded tables, both hoping and fearing it was Alessa. Stefano tripped on a pastry cart. He apologized to the owner, and when he looked up the woman was gone. He twisted around, searching.

"Stefano."

He turned. The woman in pink removed her sun hat, and long black curls tumbled over her shoulders. Stefano reached for a chair to steady himself. She still took his breath away. "This was a mistake."

"Finally getting you to notice me? A mistake?" She folded her arms.

"No, Alessa. Please understand. I don't want to drag you into my prison."

"Too late for that." Tears pooled in her dark eyes. "I've been there too."

"What happened?" Stefano cupped her elbow.

"After you broke our engagement I followed you." Alessa looked up at the Bell Tower over the rooftops. "Your renovation of the Tower? You should have gone with vintage white instead of grey."

Stefano frowned. "What?"

"I was the paint consultant. Just like I was the parking attendant at the casino, the clerk at the jail, and the custodian at your apartment."

"Why didn't you talk to me?"

"I did. But you were too caught up in your winnings, and then in your losing. You never recognized me."

When Love is on the Line



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ADULT FICTION

"So now you send coded notes on a clothesline?"

"Coded? Every word is true, Stefano. It worked, didn't it?" She stepped in and tucked her head under his chin. "Finally. Together again."

He wove a long silky curl through his fingers. "Alessa, why would you lower yourself to the dirt of my life?" Shame hovered over his heart. "You need to go back to your summerhouse and live the way you were meant to." Stefano stiffened when he thought of why he'd come. "I've racked up so much debt." He took a breath. "I came to say good-bye."

She glanced up at him, wide-eyed. "So? I'm broke too. Don't let your debt stand between us."

"My wages will be garnished for the rest of my life." Stefano squeezed her hand when he saw the SUV drive past. "My probation officer." His chest ached, and he shuddered at losing Alessa again. He kissed her on each cheek and turned from her pleading eyes. I never should've come. Leaving her the second time is worse than the first.

"Stefano," called Alessa. "Did you buy the groceries?"

Stefano never looked back. He pushed his leaden feet towards home. After his check-in with the officer, Stefano prepared to write a good-bye note to Alessa. He stacked her ten notes together in order and flipped through them once more. Astounded at what he saw at a different angle, he pounded his fist into the wall, staggered and fell, a broken man.

Stefano struggled all afternoon. If he didn't accept her plan, he would always be a prisoner to his own mistakes, and always mourn what he'd lost. But if he did accept – no, he couldn't sink that low. He abandoned his supper pizette and paced the floor, searching for the strength to let go. Finally, he had his answer.

I don't deserve your love, Alessa.... After several drafts, he finished, tied his note to the line, and zipped it across to her. Exhausted from the heart-wrenching battle, Stefano slumped onto the terrace and fell asleep. He awakened at the squeal of the clothesline and the sun on his face. His note flapped overhead in the morning breeze. She rejected my message? Just then a knock sounded. He backtracked through his apartment and opened the door to see Alessa wearing her white dress with a wreath of tiny red flowers braided into her hair.

"Did you read my message?" Stefano asked.

"We need to talk." Alessa walked past him. "There's something you forgot."

"First, come with me." He guided her to the terrace, unclipped the note, and knelt before her. "Dear Alessa, I owe my creditors millions," he read. "I would be enslaved to my dying day.

I always wanted to be free of this heavy load, but it was a struggle to surrender it. To do nothing except take your grace is the hardest thing I've ever done." He touched her face. "I can never repay you, Amore Mio." His voice faded. "The message hidden in your notes exposed the depth of my darkness. It angered me - Paid in Full -



but I know I could never pay my own way. You are my only hope." Stefano flipped through her notes again. "I am humbled to accept your ransom. I assume you used your inheritance to restore me." Alessa blushed. "And so much more. You're my inheritance now." "Will you marry me?" Stefano's voice cracked. "I cannot promise you an elegant life, but I will cherish you above all else." "That's all?" She tugged on his shirt and brought him up to her face. "There's still something you're forgetting, Stefano." "Our wedding songs? We'll use Forever Together and U-N-Me from your notes seven and eight." "And?" She pulled him to his feet. "Our honeymoon? How about six months of house arrest together?" "There's nothing I'd like better." She winked. "That, and a life-sentence of appetizers. Did you get the groceries?" "No. One look at you yesterday and I completely forgot." He encircled her waist and pulled her close. "Should I write you another list?" "Not now. But never stop writing me." He kissed her then, surrounded by an ancient grace whispering across the lines, until the bells rang a midnight benediction and the stars over Venice sang along to the sweet, sweet sound of forever promises.



Breathings of My Heart

"Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart."

-William Wordsworth

Simply Story

By Belinda Burston

England in January, the year of my father's last illness, was bitterly cold. We flew from Canada after doctors warned that his health was declining, and he had little time left. The winter daylight hours were short and we went in the gloomy-grey afternoons to the hospital, finding our way to the ICU where the equipment beeped a sad, rhythmic tune. We were shocked at first to see my once strong and fiercely independent father, immobilized and unconscious, with tubes inserted in his neck, throat and nose. Although he tried, when conscious, he was unable to communicate with me. I still have the scrap of paper on which he tried to write, managing only a few spidery, and incomprehensible words. During this bleak time I found an old letter among his precious things. By then, it was forty-seven years old and the once white paper had aged to pale cream. After he died, my mother gave it to me.

The four-page letter, in impeccable English and neat script, dated January 1956 was from a man whom my father met in 1946 when he was a member of the British Army of the Rhine in post-war Germany, and with whom he had been trying to reconnect. The writer's name was Ernst Moller, designing engineer, who helped rebuild the Hamburg docks after the war ended.

On this past Father's Day, I thought about the letter addressed to, "My

dear Christopher," by Ernst, who was seventeen years his senior. I had written a blog post about it in 2006, and prompted by curiosity, I searched for it. What struck me, with the benefit of hindsight, was that I had done far too much explaining and not enough taking the reader into the story—doing more telling and not enough showing. What I saw in the story then was not what I saw in the letter on this Father's Day.

The letter could be the springboard for many stories told from different angles: the lost art of letter-writing; cross-cultural relationships during wartime; the aftermath of war; family relationships; fathers and father figures, to name a few, but writers need skill in framing the story so it isn't overwhelmed by a meaning we insert.

At a recent writers' group meeting, we discussed telling the story and allowing the reader to discover its layers. One of our members had recently solicited feedback on her writing from various sources and humbly shared what she had learned. She said that often readers want to say to writers, "We get it." Writers who are Christians may find it especially tempting to expand on the spiritual lesson they want to get across in a story. Still, if we let them, readers will find the meaning in the story that is helpful to them, and sometimes it is one that is surprising.

I attended a workshop with author James Schaap in which he described readers hanging "their laundry on your line," and how a man once approached him with gratitude for something he had written, which had helped him deal with his son's addiction issues. It surprised James Schaap and wasn't his intention in the story.

If God gives us a story, perhaps our role is to write it as well as we can so that the reader feels immersed in it. We then surrender it to the world and to God, who can use it in unique ways with each person who reads it. A story in itself is a beautiful thing. †



Belinda Burston retired from a fulfilling career in social services in 2015. She now devotes time to two creative passions: a small pie business and writing. Belinda is a member of InScribe Christian Writers' Fellowship and The Word Guild. She hosts the monthly meeting of The Writers' Nest, which offers encouragement to fellow writers.

www.whateverhesays.blogspot.com



Fearless Freelancing

Six Tips for Flawless Copy

By Ann-Margret Hovsepian

Writing is a craft that, like any other skill, you must learn well and get better at. Yes, natural talent and creativity play a part, but if you want people to take your writing seriously and if you want to get published, you also have to pursue excellence in your craft. Here are my top tips for submitting a polished manuscript every time.

1. Zero in on content

Resist the urge to copy edit until after your piece is completely written. Refine the content as you go, but don't waste time correcting sentences or paragraphs you might later delete.

2. Relax your grip

When you're ready to edit, put aside any affection you have for your manuscript. Don't keep a sentence or paragraph just because you think it's brilliant or it took you hours to write. If it doesn't fit in, take it out. Read your work with the eyes and ears of a stranger.

3. Fact-check

Then double-check your fact-checking. Editors don't like finding out they published incorrect information. Save everyone embarrassment and frustration by checking numbers, geography, name spellings, titles, dates, and references.

4. Eliminate weak writing

Common foibles include (but are not limited to):

- Meaningless words and phrases – Instead of “At this point in time,” say “now.” You can almost always delete these words: really, very, actually, suddenly, currently, and that.
- Redundant phrases – For example, “catastrophic disaster,” “close proximity” and “plan in advance.”
- Superfluous words – For example, “He shrugged his shoulders” or “He nodded his head.” Only shoulders can shrug and only heads can nod.
- Ambiguous writing – For example, “Child killers should be locked up.” Are you talking about children who kill or people who kill children?
- Wrong verbs – In *Words Fail Me*, Patricia T. O'Connor writes: “Find an interesting verb and the rest of the sentence will practically take care of itself.” Avoid:
- Passive verbs – Instead of “That car was bought by Janice,” write “Janice bought that car.”
- Equating verbs – Instead of “This action is a denial of human rights,” write “This action denies human rights.”
- “Making” verbs – Instead of “That experience made me a stronger person,” write “That experience strengthened me.”

- Verbs that need nouns – Instead of “He gained entrance,” write “He entered.”
- Verbs that need adverbs – Instead of “He ran quickly,” write “He sprinted.”
- Awkward dialogue: People cannot snort, laugh or grimace words. Use “said” whenever possible because it fades into the background and doesn't jar the reader.
- Telling and explaining instead of showing – Show a character's emotions by his actions instead of telling the reader how he feels or relying on adjectives. Instead of “Roger was very, very angry,” say, “Roger slammed his palm onto the table. The coffee mug fell off the edge and shattered. He didn't notice.” Just don't dramatize more than necessary.

5. Watch sentence and paragraph lengths

If a sentence takes up more than two lines of type, shorten it. It should not contain more than one idea. Express the central idea first. If necessary, use separate sentences to include other significant points. Paragraphs are visual punctuation. Your paragraphs should not look bigger than a hamburger. Don't make them too short or too long and try to vary their lengths to avoid monotony.

6. Crosscheck before take-off

Read through your story one last time while comparing it to the details laid out in your assignment or contract. Tie up loose ends, submit your manuscript to God and then submit it to your editor. (On time!) †



Ann-Margret Hovsepian lives in Montreal and has been freelancing for about 25 years. She has had hundreds of articles published in a wide variety of (mainly Christian) magazines and is the author and/or illustrator of several books. She serves as managing editor of the *Christian Freelance Writers Network* blog.



Appearing

By Deb Elkink

The large toe on Dale's right foot is throbbing already, on the 8:10 bus to work. Because of the new shoes, partially.

"It hurts to be pretty," her mother used to say as she'd rake a comb through the tangles, parting Dale's hair evenly, pulling elastics over her dreary tresses. The pain would be bearable if the effects were more noticeable.

Dale shifts her foot away from the thick boots of her seatmate, hooks it in behind her ankle, and keeps her gaze focused on the tree-lined route beyond her reflection—on the bare, dawn-dipped branches awaiting spring.

Why do we hunger for beauty so much?

The bus skids a little as she waits for the door to open, and she steps gingerly onto the snowpack, into crispness and her own cloud of breath. Twenty-six steps to the threshold of the shop, thirteen little jabs by her vanity to her humanity. Fallen flesh. Yesterday, to add insult to the injury, she'd slipped on the icy walk before the salt had been spread and stubbed the new-shoed toe on the cornerstone of the doorsill.

"Hurry up," her workmate says, leaning against the bricks and flicking her smoldering cigarette at the aesthetician's sign painted on the glass—Tiffany—while Dale fumbles for the keys. "I don't know why Tiff gave you the second set, anyway."

Lucinda is as fiery as her name, with long curls bottle stained Cinnabar or sometimes Poisonberry. Even at her day job in front of women she flirts with her hair. Dale can only imagine it cascading over stripped shoulders, instead of today's winter collar, as she cavorts on her nighttime stage.

Warm pungency swells out to engulf them as they enter the parlor, a mirror framing them—one squat and blocky, the other voluptuous. Dale looks away from the contrast. But even the fashion posters, like handwriting on the wall, doom her with their message of unattainable standards.

"That old-lady-perm smell gags me," Luci says, heading straight for the till to check the float—by rights, Dale's job. Luci shrugs off her jacket, kicks her bag beneath the front desk, and snatches the most expensive fragrance off the perfume shelf. She sprays it liberally, throwing her arm in regal arches, infusing the atmosphere with a shower of micro-droplets.

Lucinda is the princess of the power of the air.

By the time Tiffany arrives and sets up her mani-pedi station behind the drapery room divider in the daylight of the front window, all five stylists are busy with clients, and Dale is sweeping piles of shorn locks in the shadows between their chairs. She tries to balance her weight on her left foot without leaning on the broom.

"Didn't you like the makeover I gave you last night?" Luci narrows her eyes at Dale, whose color-and-cut swivels her head to squint in judgment, too. Dale's cheeks burn and she tips her head down, hoping the chatter in the room swallows the question before it reaches Tiffany, a curtain's thickness away. "I thought I'd convinced you at least to use a bit of gloss."

Why bother? Dale bends to whisk up the hair and deposit it in the trash. But, yes, the transformation had truly been startling.

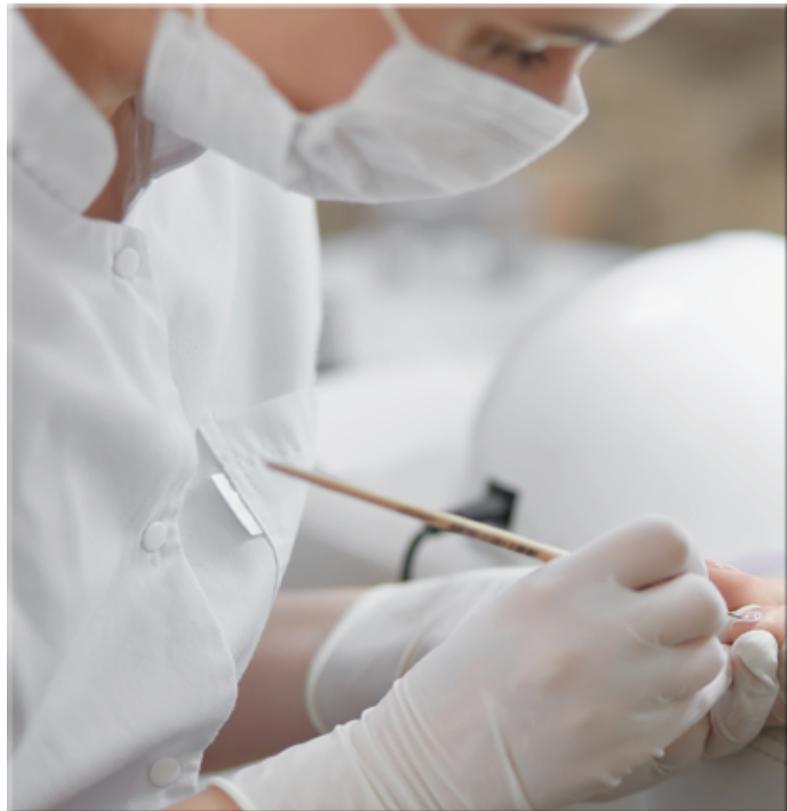
It was just after closing yesterday, when the others had left for home on that first evening Tiffany trusted her to close the till. Luci'd snorted and said, "We have got to do something about your presentation, girl." She'd wheeled a stool into the center of the room, where the faces of the shop mirrors converge, and flipped on the photographic lamp used for bridal makeup, blinding Dale momentarily. Luci smeared Dale's skin with foundation before she could demur and, when she tried, Luci dusted her mouth shut with a voluminous, soft brush.

"It's no wonder you're invisible." Luci daubed on shadow. "A bit of definition around the eyes will open them up. Touch of blush. Maybe that's what got you hired in the first place—great cheekbones beneath the baby fat. Did Tiff really say we couldn't use these samples?"

Luci hadn't listened to Dale's protest, consumed as she was with her artistry and the canvas of Dale's face. The glaring light shattered the image within the mirrors, a gyrating confusion of haloed Lucindas, flying arms. She's so sure of herself.

And the gossip surrounding Luci's employment last spring? The way Dale heard it, Luci had no intention of staying in this small town—her taste for the fast life spoiling her into pomposity. Hired as the second nail tech, she didn't seem humiliated when customers demanded the owner instead; she had greater plans for herself.

"How the mighty are fallen," Luci would hiss. She'd snicker



Appearing

FC

behind her hand when Tiffany sat low in the storefront cubbyhole while she, mighty Lucinda, strutted her stuff at the front desk, leaving her own hair station unattended. "As for me, I'm on my way to the top. I will make something of myself."

Last night, while penciling lip liner on Dale, Luci had asked, "Hasn't Tiff come down in the world?" Dale supposes so, supposes that Tiffany's exodus from the metropolitan modeling agency to the desert of this community proves she doesn't consider high glamor worth grasping after—unlike adversarial Luci. "Even if she did walk the runway, Tiff is nothing special to look at. And she's getting too old for the business."

When Luci had finished Dale's treatment, she reveled some more in the legion of her own flamboyant image reflected back in multiplicity—or duplicity. "Got to run—late for the club!" She'd smacked on some lipstick and dashed for the door, slipping her hand into the till for a twenty and winking at Dale. "I'll replace it in the morning." Arriving back at her apartment last night, Dale had peered into the mirror above the bathroom sink, seeing Lucinda instead. She washed off the mask with some hesitation. Whatever had attracted a drudge like herself to the industry in the first place? Perhaps it was spite—she'd show them!—or maybe envy.

Now a gust of wind lifts the clippings from

Dale's dustpan and sets the shop chimes jingling. Ruddy-skinned farmers come into Tiffany's all the time seeking jewelry for their women, but the boss always remains in her curtained cubicle by the window and lets Luci explain the name mix-up as though she's the proprietor. Today, poking fun at the elderly man's ignorance, Luci presses him. "No brooches, but perhaps we can fit you in next week Friday for hair extensions?" He shrinks onto the street again before she can start into her routine about available facials.

"Why do you tease them?" Tiffany asks it from her nook. She tips back for eye contact, the blue linen of the privacy curtain a veil brushing the skin of her cheek.

"They're idiots." Luci files down a corner of her gelled pinkie, then snorts. "Looking for the pearl of great price—in a salon, of all places!"

Why doesn't Tiffany fire her, for all her verve? Lucinda brings chaos to cosmetology.

There's a lull just before noon. Dale grabs her sandwich and takes her break early in the vacant coffee room, eager to kick off her Mary Janes. The ragged toenail has ruptured a hole in her tights and she peels them off, preferring nakedness to the ladder climbing her calf. She rubs the bruised nail. It's worse today.

"Disgusting." Luci stands in the doorway, lip curled at Dale. The whole shop must be able to hear her strident pronouncement. "Have you got a fungal infection? For God's sake, Dale, cover it up!" She tosses over a bottle of demo polish—fig leaf green—and smirks when someone behind her titters. A hellish heat rushes to Dale's face.

Abruptly, out of sight, the metal rings clatter over the rod of Tiffany's dividing curtain. The boss's heels clack a rhythmic applause across the studio floor. Dale jams on her shoes.

"Girls, take your lunch, please." The command from the adjacent room is brusque, authoritative, and moving closer. "Lucinda, leave early today."

"I'm not done rescheduling the cancellations."

"I'll finish those up."

"You're the boss." Luci's voice is full of pout.

"I am."

How can two words carry so much weight?

Tiffany continues into the lunch room and draws Dale away from her unwrapped ham-and-cheese. "I noticed you limping this morning. Let's take a peek at that." She leads the way to the front, then motions up towards her empty pedicure chair, preparing an alcohol wipe while Dale removes her shoes as though on holy ground. Dale tries to conjure some justification for the ugliness of her toenail, expecting repulsion or at least a raised brow. But her employer's kindly expression doesn't change. Instead Tiffany fills the footbath and hums a gentle tune, stooping to the task. She adds a drop of oil to the warm baptismal, her mercy soothing away Dale's pain before she even dips her foot. †



In Pursuit of Justice

By Sandi Somers

"A drop of ink may make a million think."
-Lord Byron

The unjust death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, and the "Black Lives Matter" movement are dominating the news as I write this article. These events have brought to our attention that we can advocate for those of other ethnic backgrounds. However, we may wonder: What can I do? I'm just one person. How can my voice be heard in this worldwide turmoil?

Our Opportunity

As writers, we are in a unique position to write for justice and influence public opinion. Novelist and essayist James Baldwin brought this truth close to home when he said: You write in order to change the world, knowing perfectly well that you probably can't, but also knowing that literature is indispensable to the world... The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter, even but a millimeter the way people look at reality, then you can change it.¹

As Christ followers, John Stott challenged to become ethical apologists who will argue the truth of the gospel and God's moral law:

We need more Christian thinkers who will use their minds for Jesus Christ, who will speak and write and broadcast and televise in order to influence public opinion.²

Our Process

Our call to action and our writing, however, should not be "a knee-jerk reaction," said N.T. Wright. We must first "spend time prayerfully in...lament, in reflecting on the fact of how helpless we are."³ Our lament also involves self-examination—owning our stereotypes and prejudices, and confessing how we and our culture have contributed, if even mentally, to marginalizing others.

Then we ask God to fill us with neighbour-love. "Love one another as I have loved you," Jesus said (John 13:34). As we love others as much as possible, we can become God's ambassadors of reconciliation, breaking down the walls between ethnic groups. Bobbi Junior, one of our InScribe writers, spoke for all of us in a recent blog comment:

1 <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/09/23/archives/james-baldwin-writing-and-taking-baldwin-authors-query.html> Accessed July 21, 2020.

2 John R. Stott. "Salt & Light: Four ways Christians can influence the world." In *Christianity Today*. October, 2011. P. 41.

3 N.T. Wright. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7IToM-hFEo>

Christ reconciled us to God by dying on the cross. I have to ask myself, would I, or other whites, consider dying for our Native Canadians? How would that change our relations if we loved them that much?⁴

Our prayer will include seeking God's wisdom as to what and how we can write and speak in the genres most suited to our abilities and interests, whether through our fiction, interviews, devotionals, letters to the editor, or op-ed pieces. This may require intensive prayer to give voice to what is in God's heart. Audre Lorde challenged writers:

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say?... seek those words out...read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives.⁵

Our Challenge

From our prayer and seeking God will come our call to action. God directs us as He did to Saul on the road to Damascus, "Now go, and it shall be told you what you must do" (Acts 9:6). We go in His name and in His power.

As we advocate for justice and reconciliation, we can be leaders and models in empathy, compassion, and understanding. Let's offer ourselves to God, as instruments in his hands—as salt and light in the community.⁶

How and in what areas is God challenging you to advocate for justice? What is your next step of faith to: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it" (Habakkuk 2:2). †

4 <https://inscribewritersonline.blogspot.com/2020/06/writing-our-life-themes-by-sandi-somers.html>

5 <https://electricliterature.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/silenceintoaction.pdf>

6 John R. Stott. P. 42.



Sandi Somers has a passion for people of different cultures. She lived in Colombia, South America for two years, and has engaged in a number of short-term mission trips. As she taught English to immigrants and refugees, her passions led her to focus her MEd program on cross-cultural communication and cultural psychology.

Change Ones Perspective Through Expressive Writing

By Alan Anderson

Our continuation of James Pennebaker's expressive writing strategy refers to the third day of the twenty-minute per day expressive writing exercise.¹ This article will highlight a change in perspective through a consideration of first person to third person point of view. Expressive Writing: Words that Heal notes, "to change one's perspective on a particular upheaval in life shows promise in one's emotional healing."² Sandra Marinella confirms this. "Changing our perspective allows us to shift from the mental trap of rumination—or—ruination—to the empowerment of reflection."³

An exercise in first-person and third-person:

For this exercise, think of a recent upsetting experience in your life. This does not have to be a major upheaval. Set aside ten minutes (a suggestion) and write about your emotions and thoughts regarding this event. Describe the event in the first-person view (your "I" voice). What are your reactions to this upheaval?

The second part of this exercise includes a review of what you wrote in the first ten minutes. For the next ten minutes write

1 Alan Anderson, "Expressive Writing," *FellowScript*, May, 2020, 28

2 James W. Pennebaker, and John F. Evans, *Expressive Writing: Words that Heal*, (Idyll Arbor Inc. 2014), 75.

3 Sandra Marinella, *The Story You Need To Tell*, (New World Library, California, 2017), 171.

about the event in the third-person. Replace your "I" with "she" if you are female or "he" if you are a male. Write about the reactions and responses as if "you were observing everything as an outsider."⁴ Once you have completed the exercise take time to gauge how the third-person perspective compares to the first-person.

You may conclude you are uncertain you like this third-person perspective. Don't give up on it. After a few days try the exercise again with a slight change. Focus on another upsetting experience. Describe the experience in the third-person, then again in first-person. With practice you may find the third-person perspective even more useful in dealing with future emotional upsets.

One point of caution surrounding the use of the third-person is in the context of memoir. Jessica Handler, in her book, *Braving the Fire: A Guide to Writing About Grief and Loss*, notes the following, "That shift in pronoun from "I" to "she" is likely to imply that you've given away the authority to tell your own story."⁵

Author, Sandra Marinella, offers this thought on change of perspective. She states, "But when we give ourselves space from the emotional difficulty and see it from a third-person point of view, the "he or she" voice, we allow our logic to enter into

4 Pennebaker & Evans, 77

5 Handler, Jessica, *Braving the Fire: A Guide to Writing About Grief and Loss*, Saint Martin's Press, New York, 2013), 58

our interpretation of the event."⁶ One may also note a change to third person, "subtly alters the tone of the story," because it is, "more distanced, and from the reader's view, safer."⁷

A traumatic upheaval in a person's life may be too emotional to confront at first. One purpose of the third-person perspective is to allow a more cognitive approach. This will then assist the person to find meaning in the traumatic event—without being fixated on emotions. Indeed, a major point in writing to heal oneself, is to find the meaning in one's story in order to move forward in life.

Column four of "Writing to Heal Yourself," will focus on how people may turn their story into a meaningful one for them. †

6 Marinella, 71.

7 Pennebaker & Evans, 76.



Alan lives in Deroche, B.C. His overall theme is "Touched by grief, held by hope." He is co-author of *Good Grief People* by Angel Hope Publishing, 2017. In November 2018, he had four stories published in *Story by Story: the Power of a Writer, Unstoppable Writers Publishing* and has written articles for *FellowScript*. Alan is the Provincial Rep Liason and BC rep for *InScribe*. His blog: <https://scarredjoy.ca/>



How to Make a Supportive Circle of Friends for Successful Writing

By Susan Harris

In spring our world morphed from accessible physicality to an increasingly sequestered one. At the same time digital platforms broadened their arms to bring together the decentralized scattered in every strata of society. Society has to not only adapt to the challenges of maintaining health, it also has to find creative ways to deliver services.

Writing has long been a tool of communication, and its relevance can only grow in this virtual era. That's the music to the ears of writers. The untuned chord is finding a supportive circle open to similar adaptation. And an overarching question becomes "how to create a supportive circle of friends for successful writing".

Delivering a critique is at best uncomfortable, though it is much more palatable when done face to face where body language can be deciphered. It is naïve to expect that a direct transfer occurs when moving to a different medium of communication. Add to this the acumen and time required (emoji overload don't cut it) or the challenges of setting up conferencing applications, and it becomes clearer how this adaptation injects greater reluctance in the decision to be that supportive circle.

The difference between a supportive friend and a non-supportive friend when it comes to writing is recognizing that both sets of friends play different roles in your life.

A supportive friend has the time to invest in your writing. They want the best for you and will be a regular person in mentoring your creativity.

A "non-supportive friend" is someone who likes you and is vested in you in other ways, but they're not particularly interested in your writing needs. (A wise

individual recognizes the difference and values each accordingly.)

For me it's about trust. I'll quicker jump the Nile than entrust my word-babies to someone who does not have my interest at heart, as a house divided cannot stand.

Over a dozen years of teaching high school, I've used a tool called a Friendship Circle. With a little adjustment this can be tweaked for supportive writing. The diagram is self-explanatory. Simply jot in names and reach out to any whom you might feel comfortable with. There – you've to build your circle.

Personally, I want direct feedback. I prefer to hear it from my friends than to see it in an online review. Give your writing circle the permission to be honest. Often feedback is couched in "softness" that misses the mark. Don't undermine your own success. If your circle are people whom you trust then there ought not to be sensitivity or offence.

The biblical concept of sowing and reaping is time proven (Galatians 6:7). Jesus says it like this: "...For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." (Luke 6:38b NKJV) A few years ago a friend posted on social media that she had signed with an agent. I was wistful. Then the Lord prompted me to be happy for her. I wrote a congratulatory message and followed up with a phone call to pray. Both genuine. A few months later a publisher himself phoned me and I signed for four books.

Jesus' baseline works, and I've built my circle by first building the circles of my friends. If I want support, I should offer support to another writer.

Other practical ways I cheer friends include:

- Attend their book launches
- Read their manuscripts and give feedback



Circle of Supportive Friends for Writing

- Write reviews
- Buy their books
- Subscribe for their newsletters
- Subscribe to their YouTube channels
- Like a page
- Follow them on social media
- Comment favourably on posts and tweets.

My supportive acts for my circle are in effect casting my bread on many waters (Ecclesiastes 11:1a)

Be the friend you want to have. If you say it, do it. Eventually you'll find back the bread that you cast, not just in spring but in any season - a supportive circle of friends for successful writing. †

Styles – tools for consistency

Styles are a thing. They are reflected in how you write, the feeling the writing carries, how easy your readers can understand your message and formatting options. Styles help build communication and ease workflow. On a granular level we depend on consistent use of symbols to derive meaning. On a document level, clear hierarchy through body, subhead and heads organizes sections. Creating or following a content style yields professionalism.

Choosing a content style

English can be expressed in many ways. Like all communication, the main consideration is, “who is the audience?” Choosing American, Canadian or International English should be driven by your market. Canadian English libraries are available for most programs so your spell checker will quit flagging “centre” and help you be more consistent. Style choices are not right/wrong choices, but represent “this is how we do it here”.

If you are writing for a publication, become familiar with their house style. Style books can be helpful in writing for a particular audience and likely the basis of a house style. Styles such as APA, Chicago and MLA are designed for academics. Newspaper styles lean toward fewer commas, shorter paragraphs, embedded attribution and are generally more reader friendly. Style choices can be overwhelming, but in all this, we reduce noise for the reader.

Creating a document style sheet

A document style is similar to creating a dossier for your characters. Creating one

guides the proofreader as well as the creator. Some considerations:

- Define the style basis (house, MLA, CP, The Canadian Style, ...)
- Special words or uses
- Case choice for heads, subheads
- Outline the head, subhead, sub-subhead hierarchy
- The Oxford comma (discouraged unless required for meaning)
- Compound words: which are hyphenated, two words, or one word
- Hyphen between double vowels such as co-op
- Regional language: z or s, double lls, ou, ...
- Which numbers are not typed out: under 10, grades, pages, scores, votes
- Abbreviations: e.g. US or U.S.A., i.e., AI,
- Dashes: em or en? Em dashes with no space are proper but I have always preferred en dashes with spaces on both sides. Hyphens draw, dashes separate.

Styles for consistent formatting

Markups have been with us for centuries. Typesetting required considerable craftsmanship and offered little flexibility once completed. Fonts, leading and typeface were chosen for each element during the design phase and marked up in the manuscript margins. If copy-fitting wasn't accurate, type would have to be reset.

As cold-type driven by computers and film matured in the 80s, markup moved from instructions for the typesetter to instructions for the computer. Markup was used to control the output of size, spacing, leading and typeface. Input code in early word processors such as WordStar and the CSS at the heart of your html display are

basically the same. Paragraph styles are essential for eBooks and the web.

Creating formatting styles

A well designed hierarchy of body, sub-heads and heads creates grouping and helps us understand and organize the presented information.

Paragraph styles affect the entire paragraph and include a number of controls such as indent, space before or after, font style, size and spacing (leading), and keeps (where a paragraph starts or ends). Using pre-defined: Heading 1, 2, 3, 4; Body Text; Quotations; and creating limited styles for other special components is best. You can modify the styles or they will import and can be readily modified in a page layout program. Adjusting a style affects your entire document in a few minutes. There is great flexibility and consistency at the same time.

Manual overrides block the styles from doing their job. Let the computer control spacing and indents instead of inserting leading tabs or spaces to adjust alignment.

Character styles apply to just the selected characters. They are used primarily for hyperlinks and references where text should be different than the regular body.

Tech can be mundane but necessary. “*Master your instrument, master the music, and then forget all that and just play,*” – saxophonist Charlie Parker.



Dale Youngman began his career in printing as a floor compositor in 1976. Twenty years later he launched PageMaster with the purpose of increasing quality and efficiency for independent publishers – a complete Canadian publishing service, championing works of life, diversity and hope.

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