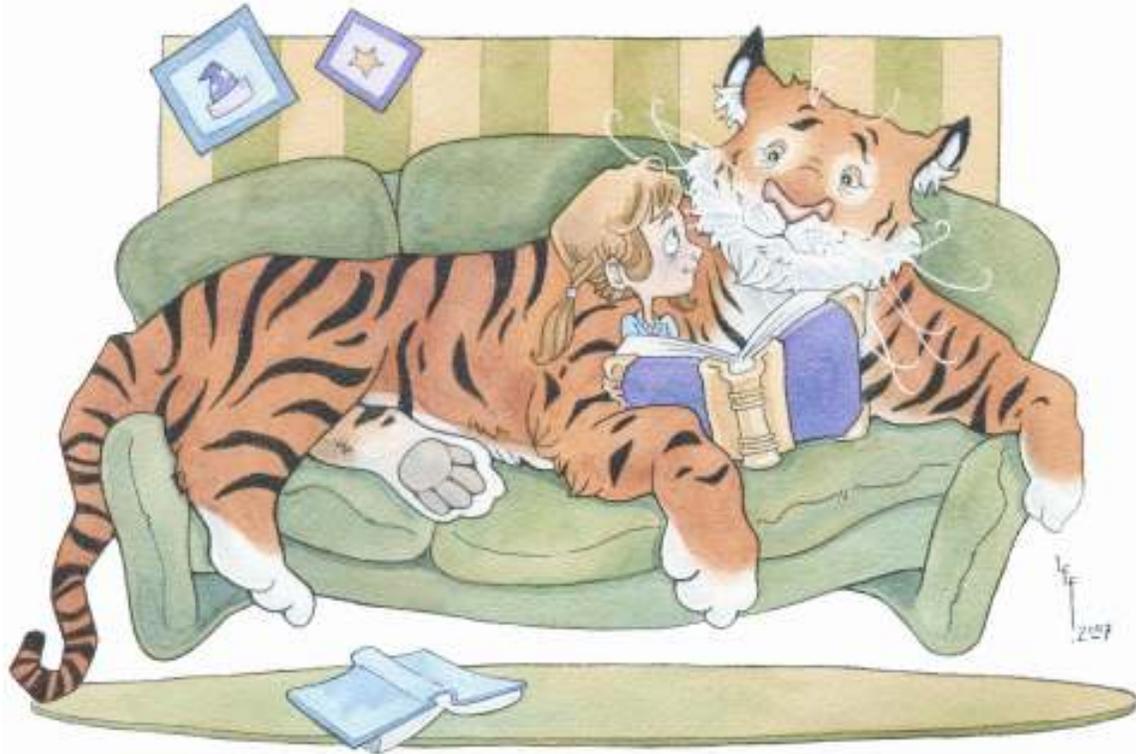


Western Tale Spinner

Spring 2008 Volume Three Number One



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Note from the Editor:

Welcome to our third year of the Western Tale Spinner! I'm delighted with the range of articles and news that each edition contains, especially this one! We are a small but prolific group here in the Western part of Canada. I would be thrilled to see more articles from members in the other provinces. If you have any new ideas or suggestions for our newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact me at dragonfly3@telus.net

Spring seems to have finally arrived at the time of this printing. Our Regional Advisor, Diane Jones, has just returned from a trip to Bologna, Italy, where she participated in the SCBWI conference. We're looking forward to hearing about her trip, hopefully in an article for the next edition of the Western Tale Spinner!

Happy writing! *Loretta Houben*

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Grammatically Speaking

To Boldly Go

By Diane Jones

The trouble with English grammar is that early grammarians and some stubborn old-timers too, applied Latin rules to our Germanic Anglo-Saxon language. The rules don't fit.

English suffers from its love of history. Spelling is difficult because the ghosts of ancient pronunciations haunt current writing. And English grammar continues to bow to ancient Roman conquerors' rules.

In Latin and in her daughter languages of French, Spanish and Italian, etc., an infinitive such as "to go" can never be split as it is in the above title. This is simply because in those languages infinitives are

indivisible words. Take the French "aller" meaning "to go". Even if I knew the French for "boldly" without searching out my dictionary, I could not translate my title word for word. Splitting a French infinitive is impossible, whereas splitting an English infinitive is second nature. Grammarians who were also Trekkies cringed for decades, and I suppose they still do.

"To", being a preposition, is companion to a host of other little words known as prepositions. What a misnomer that is, in English! In Romance languages, i.e., those of Latin origin, prepositions are always pre-positioned in relation to their objects. In English, however, it isn't necessarily so.

Let me remind you of a famous story about Sir Winston Churchill. Not only a successful politician and renowned orator, he was also a prolific artist and author.

As authors, you will sympathize with him when he sent his manuscript to his publisher and awaited his letter of acceptance. Unlike most of us, he was unaccustomed to getting rejections. So, imagine his shock when that was what he got! Sir Winston Churchill received a rejection letter from his publisher. Actually, it was from a junior editor who had been given the great man's

manuscript to simply rubber stamp. (Please note here that I have a split infinitive.)

The editor, being new to the job, took the task very seriously and studied the manuscript carefully. Then, what happened? Gleefully, he spotted AN ERROR. Gleefully, he packed up the manuscript and sent it back to Sir Winston with the error circled and a note that the author should check his grammar. Churchill had ended a sentence with a preposition.

Churchill, being an unsurpassed master of the English language, did what any red-blooded Englishman would do. He bowed to no Latin grammar rules. (In fact, when he was a schoolboy he refused to do Latin homework or learn the language of anyone who spoke to tables, protesting the declension of "table" to include "O Table".) Churchill used and wrote the English language as she is spoke. So, not to be cowed into submitting to the once great Caesars of Rome who had invaded and then abandoned his beloved homeland, he sent the uncorrected manuscript back to the novice editor with this note: "This is the sort of nonsense up with which I will not put." Correct Latin that may well be, but it is terrible English. Rewritten as we would naturally say it would require ending the sentence with not just one preposition, but with TWO!

So, take my advice: Go ahead, to boldly write as native speakers of English. Nonsense is not to be put up with! Split infinitives are good enough for Trekkies and prepositions go wherever you think they should. Write carefully and grammatically but not slavishly. Use this beautiful and complex language in such a way that your readers will fall in love with it and with your work.

GOOD NEWS

Compiled by Joan Winter

Congratulations to all members who had this Good News to report:

Gladys's Swedak (Vancouver) is delighted that her poem, "Love" won the Editors Choice Award at Poetry.com for year 2007. It is also going to be included in a deluxe edition of poems published by that company.

Also, two of Gladys's stories, about her

toy poodle, Muffin, and Princess, a longhaired tabby Camping Cat, are to be published in *Crossing the Rainbow Bridge*.

Well done, Gladys! Congratulations!

Gabrielle Goldstone (Winnipeg) has this excellent news:

Carus Publishing (parent company of the Bugs, Cricket and Spider Group), have accepted no less than **three** of Gabe's articles for publication in

Ladybug magazine. (WOW!)
Finally -- 2 years after the company restructure, and the loss of Editor Paula Morrow. Gabe is very pleased her articles did not get lost in the reshuffle.

Also, Gabe has recently returned from the TLA (Texas Library Association) annual conference, where she was fortunate enough to be a speaker on a cultural diversity panel - promoting her upcoming mid grade novel *The Kulak's Daughter*, with Blooming Tree Press. AND, her panel got invited back for NEXT year's conference in Houston. Gabe says, "I'm just thrilled. Texas would have been the last place I'd have imagined talking about my writing".

That's doubly exciting news, Gabe. Congratulations on both counts.

Gloria Blanchard (Vancouver) has good news, too. After a lengthy, 15-month wait for a response (due to company re-structuring), Gloria heard that *Cricket* magazine is considering one of her articles, subject to revision.

Excellent news, Gloria—and good luck with the revision!

I, Joan Winter (Vancouver), have several items of Good News to report:

1. A children's article has been accepted, but not yet published, by Skipton Castle, in Yorkshire, England.
2. *New Moon* magazine accepted a girl's adventure story

(publishing date unknown).

3. *Zamoof* magazine accepted a story for publication in Jan, 2010 .

4. In April, 2008, I was surprised and pleased to hear that again *New Moon had* sold for reprint my story "The Trouble with Jo" to the Minnesota Department of Education, for use in *Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment II, Reading Grade 7*. This is the third time this story has been reprinted for reading assessment—twice in Minnesota and once in North Carolina.

5. A change of pace from writing. In January 2008, I was delighted to be asked to speak to a group of grade 5/6 students at a Burnaby Elementary School about writing and publishing for children's magazines. It was a new and exciting experience for me; and one I hope to repeat next year.

6. Also, as a change from writing for children, my fourth article, a travel piece, will be published in *Senior Living* magazine, July/August, 2008.

Keep up the good work everyone.
Happy writing!

A Canadian Wizard in Korea

By Lee Fodi

As the author and illustrator of *The Chronicles of Kendra Kandlestar*, I have toured many schools and bookstores throughout Canada and the US. This past February, I took the Kendra Kandlestar overseas on a whirl-wind trip to South Korea.

On February 16, I appeared at Kids Books Sejong just outside of Seoul with fellow British Columbian writer James McCann, author of such teen titles as *Pyre* and *Rancour*. James and I each did a twenty-minute presentation, followed by a book signing and photograph session at this store that specializes in English language books. Even though James and I both have a great deal of experience in speaking at schools and stores throughout North America, this presentation was unlike any other. The Korean culture is one in which a great deal of respect and deference is shown to people older than yourself (even the difference of one year demands a level of respect!). As such, we found that there was no laughter or reaction during our presentations, even when we really craved it!



Lee Fodi, bookstore owner, and James McCann

I thought that we were both a flop until the presentation ended and we were suddenly swarmed by all the attendees. I have to say we then felt like a pair of kings, with kids and parents lined up out the doorway to get their pictures taken with us—and, of course, their very own autographed copies of our books.

A big thanks goes to the store for hosting us and, in particular, to Joon-Hyung Park, who helped arrange the visit.

Creative Writing Camp in Korea

By Lee Fodi



Speaking of Joon, he is the person with whom I started The Creative Writing Society for Children (CWC) four years ago. CWC is a program in which we help kids write, illustrate, and desktop publish their own books. The program has become a huge success in Vancouver and the other reason for our trip to Korea was to our host our second-ever overseas young author's camp.

The last camp was in summer, so I can tell you that it was quite a bit colder this time! It's a lucky thing I brought a toque and scarf (I needed them)!

This intensive six-day camp was attended by nineteen young writers, aged 9-15, and taught by myself and James McCann, with some much needed help delivered by Bo-Hyea Ok, who flew in from Australia. I would call Bo our "wrangler." It's hard to teach a large class, and Bo helped both James and I by giving some extra attention to individual students when we could not.

The theme of this writing camp was "adventure," and our young authors did a wonderful job of crafting exciting tales filled with mysterious plots, brave heroes, diabolical villains, and plenty of riddles and secret codes.

I think the highlight of the week was when James, Bo and I created a treasure hunt for the students. In this activity, the kids broke into teams and had to chase clues around the campus, much in the spirit of the movies *Indiana Jones* and *National Treasure*. I don't think anyone realized how excited the kids would get during this hunt. Not only did their brains get a real workout as they tried to crack our riddles, codes and mind-benders, but their legs were burning afterwards too (apparently one must run a lot during a treasure hunt, even if one does not know exactly where one is headed to next).

After a week in Korea, James and I found ourselves in Los Angeles. I guess we hadn't had enough of kids yet, so we went to Disneyland where we relished every second of the Indiana Jones ride. We also wanted to train in Disneyland's Jedi Training Program, but were disappointed to find out that it was for six-year-olds. Nonetheless, we enjoyed watching younger nerds try their light saber skills against arch-villains Darth Vader and Darth Maul. Finally, we went to a Medieval-themed restaurant where we had to eat with our hands and were able to watch knights in full apparel joust each other from real horses. Apparently, Los Angeles is a good place to go if you're a geek in need of some inspiration for your next *Kendra Kandlestar* book.

Event Horizon

By Ken Kilback

Author Visits

Lois Lowry, author of such acclaimed novels as *The Giver*, *Number the Stars*, and *Gossamer* appeared at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School on March 12, courtesy of Vancouver Kidsbooks. Lowry was in town to promote her new, wonderfully weird book, *The Willoughbys*, in which four siblings want to become orphans and their parents want to become childless.

Born in Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii in 1937 (before Hawaii became a state), Lowry wrote her first book, "A Dog Named Lucky," at the age of ten. She never actually finished the novel, although she did get up to—appropriately enough—Chapter 13. However, years later, *Stay!* was published. This novel is her only book so far that follows a non-human point of view, and of course it features a dog named Lucky.

The response to her novel, *A Summer to Die* (based on Lowry's own sister dying at a young age) is what made Lowry decide to write for children, because she realized how much kids can be impacted by a book. One of her most intriguing stories, though, was of her as a young child living in Japan after the war. Normally confined to an American compound, Lowry took her bike outside the compound and rode around. She stopped outside a Japanese school, and there saw a young boy about the same age as her. They never spoke to one another, but only stared at each other, and for a long time Lowry thought about him. Many years later, when Lowry was speaking at a writers' conference, she discovered the boy's identity. That little boy had been Allen Say, award-winning illustrator and author of such books as *Grandfather's Journey*, *The Inn-Keeper's Apprentice*, *Alison*, and *Trees of Cranes*.

And for those of you who have been waiting for this announcement: Lowry told us that *The Giver* is now in the works as a movie.

Other upcoming author visits sponsored by Kidsbooks are:

1. Mo Willems, author/illustrator of such kids books as *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*, *Knuffle Bunny*, and *Leonardo the Terrible Monster*. He will be appearing Friday April 25 at 6:30 p.m. at Our Lady of Perpetual Help School. Tickets are \$5 each and count towards the purchase of a book at Vancouver Kidsbooks.
2. Erin Hunter, author of the *Warrior* series and also of the new *Seekers* series. She will be appearing in town Thursday May 8 and Friday May 9. See the events page at www.kidsbooks.ca for more details as the event gets closer.
3. Melanie Watt, author/illustrator of such books as *Chester*, *Leon the Chameleon*, *Augustine*, and *Scaredy Squirrel*. She will be appearing in Surrey Wednesday May 28 and in Vancouver Thursday May 29. See the events page at www.kidsbooks.ca for more details as the event gets closer.

Conferences

The 17th Annual Writing & Illustrating for Children Conference is a huge event hosted by SCBWI-Western Washington. It will be held at the Meydenbauer Center in Bellevue, Washington. A number of presenters will be there including: authors and/or illustrators such as Mo Willems, Margaret Lippert, Susan Patron, Cynthia Lord, and Chris Crutcher; editors such as Liesa Abrams (Senior Editor, Aladdin Paperbacks/

Simon & Schuster), Jessica Garrison (Editor, Dial Books for Young Readers), Randi Rivers (Associate Editor, Charlesbridge), and Arthur Levine (VP and Editorial Director, Arthur A. Levine Books); and agents such as Stephen Barbara (Donald Maass Literary Agency) and Rosemary Stimola (Stimola Literary Studio). This event takes place on Saturday April 26 and Sunday April 27, and costs \$260 for SCBWI members and \$280 for non-members. A limited number of spaces are available for manuscript consultations and first-page submissions for editorials critique panels (and for an extra cost). Go to www.scbwi-washington.org for more details.

There's another event happening this year that only occurs once every four years—and it's not the Olympics. It's the Kaleidoscope Children's Literature Conference, which is an Alberta School Library Council Conference. Every four years, this conference brings people together to celebrate "literature created for children and young adults and the interpretation of this literature through media, performance, and illustration" and also to "heighten the awareness and appreciation of the creative processes through interaction with authors, illustrators, publishers, producers and performers." Kaleidoscope is taking place November 6 through November 8 at the TELUS Convention Centre in downtown Calgary. Elizabeth Bicknell, Editor at Candlewick Press, will be there, in addition to a number of authors and illustrators, including Janell Cannon, Wallace Edwards, Robert Heidbreder, Julie Lawson, Lois Lowry, Allen Say, Melanie Watt, Ted and Betsey Lewin, George Littlechild, Beverley Naidoo, Bill Slavin, Janet Stevens, Shaun Tan, and Werner Zimmerman. If you register by April 30, the cost of the event is \$376.95, including taxes; after that, the cost is \$408.45, including taxes. Go to www.kaleidoscopeconference.ca for more details.

Workshop

From July 14 through 18, the Oregon Coast Children's Book Writers is offering their 6th Annual intensive writers' workshop, which is designed for beginning, intermediate, and advanced writers. The six-hour days are divided into lecture sessions, writing sessions, and sharing sessions. There will also be daily opportunities for intensive consultations with instructors. The list of instructors includes such authors as David Greenberg, David Gifaldi, Esther Hershenson, Mel Boring, and Tim Birdseye; freelance editorial consultant Harold Underdown, who is also the author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Children's Book Publishing* and creator of the Purple Crayon website (www.underdown.org); editor Stacy Graham O'Connell, of what was once called Houghton-Mifflin and has now merged with Harcourt; and agent Susan Cohen, of Writers House. This workshop is in the isolated coastal town of Oceanside, Oregon (90 miles from Portland). The cost of this workshop is US \$745 and does not include accommodations. For an extra \$30, an editor from the children's division of Little, Brown & Co will do a professional critique of your manuscript. Go to www.occbww.com for more details.

Send your event information to me at kenkilback@shaw.ca for inclusion in this column, or write about it yourself as a separate article for this newsletter.

From the Arcane to the Ridiculous: The risks of research
By Lois Peterson

I'll write a picture book story about pigs, I thought.

So on a walk around the block with my husband we mentally storyboarded it and came up with almost the entire plot for *Monsieur Le Porc*, a story that involves an ancient French law and five pigs called Napoleon and one who went *oui oui oui* all the way home.

D. came home to get back to the book he was reading. I retreated to the study to avoid the book I should be writing. And instead, went online to see what I could find out about pigs.

I stumbled across ***Porkopolis*** – *Considering the pig — a single-minded bestiary* (<http://www.porkopolis.org/lib/lb-index.htm>). It's a trial writing for children, I thought after an hour exploring all its links. I'm off to raise a bunch of the darling little porkers, so interesting are they, steeped in myth and significance. And so many people have so much to say about them, what could I add?

Ditto when I started research into the Shetland Islands after catching the germ of an idea of a children's novel. (I learned that all boys on those bleak islands would once have had to learn to knit in school and what if a boy come to the islands in the care of a forbidding Victorian father who does not allow such things from his son and so prevents the boy from fitting in with his peers?)

Better learn something about the Shetlands, I thought. At least where they are, which seems a good place to start. As well as discovering that they are closer to Norway than to England, I also learned that the islands have an online

encyclopedia all their own (<http://shetlopedia.com/>) with wonderful links and useful information. And, would you believe, there's even an online dictionary of Shetland vocabulary www.shetlanddictionary.com/ so I can learn to get along with the natives pretty quickly.

Now I'm all set to go in search of a little booty on Fair Isle, and spend the rest of my days wandering the windy beaches looking for rare birds and the remains of shipwrecks.

Don't let them tell you that you don't need to do research if you're writing fiction. Do it anyway. It can lead to specks of information that give your work the ring of authenticity, help people your stories with credible lives rather than just fictionalized biography, provide you with metaphor that gives your writing resonance, and throw detail your way to give your stories colour and flair.

And if all else fails and your SASEs never come back, or the agent never replies or your editor fails to call, you can take up piggery or tatting or become an expert in the history of costume or how all kinds of things are made... or just spend your time researching the arcane and the ridiculous until a new idea comes your way, and you're off and writing all over again.

If you're short of ideas right now, try one of these sites below, a mere smattering of those I've stumbled across lately, that I'm sure to go back to sooner or later, especially if/when *Monsieur Le Porc* does not work out:

- **AlternatTime**
Timelines of all kinds: <http://www3.canisius.edu/~emeryg/time.html>
- **Hold onto Your Hats**
Fashion, history, photos...
<http://www.civilization.ca/hist/hats/hat00eng.html>

- **Your Dictionary**
My favourite section: Industry specific dictionaries
<http://www.yourdictionary.com/specialty.html>
- **The Invention of Photography**
(In French, English or Italian) <http://www.niepce.com/home-us.html>
- **Virtual Library Museums Page**
Museums almost anywhere: <http://icom.museum/vlmp/>
- **Ice Cream**
Probably more than you'll ever want to know
<http://www.foodsci.uoquelph.ca/dairyedu/icecream.html>
- **How to Do Things**
<http://www.howtotothings.com/>

Lois Peterson's pursuit of information about just about anything was nurtured by thirty years of working in libraries and answering all kinds of silly – and not so silly – questions from the public. Having published essays, short stories and articles for twenty years plus, she's been writing for children since Jan 2007. Her first kids' novel Meeting Miss 405 will be published by Orca Book Publishers in the fall.

Of Oysters and Pearls:
An Experiment in Creativity

By Ken Kilback

It couldn't possibly work!

That's what I thought, anyway.

What I said was, "Sure, okay. When do you want to start this?"

In addition to being a graphic artist, my friend A.W. is also a musician—well, aspiring musician, he'd say. He plays bass guitar for a recently-formed band. While the band plays original songs, A.W. is not part of the songwriting process. However, he wants to practice writing his own songs.

A.W. told me about something he'd read about, a process targeted for musicians that supposedly helps them release their true creative potential. The idea is fairly simple:

separate yourself from all distracting influences for a twelve-hour period and do nothing but write music. Don't worry about finishing any particular song; and most importantly, don't change anything once you've written it down. Just write. Whatever snippets of verses or choruses you produce are welcomed but never altered in any way during the process.

The belief is that the longer you write, the more tired you will become; and the more tired you become, the more likely it is that your inhibitions, frustrations and other barriers to creativity will be broken down to the point that you won't be thinking about how to write or what to write. Instead, you will simply be writing in a free-flowing manner, thereby opening the door to creating something truly creative and special.

At the end of the twelve hours, you get together with one or more partners to share what each of you have created. This part of the process is simply that: a sharing experience, not a critique session. The full development and rewrites of the snippets you've created come after you've shared your material with others. And critiques, of course, come when you actually have something more substantial to share with a critique group.

A.W., it turned out, wanted a partner for this process. So he asked me.

It couldn't possibly work!

I'm a children's writer, not a musician.

I use a pen, not an instrument.

I gotta work, so does he.

Did I mention the twelve hours??!!

But he asked me, and I agreed.

Neither of us could conceive of following the twelve-hour format AND meeting one another for at least an hour of sharing time. So we decided to write for two hours instead, and then meet to share what we'd done. And we'd do this once a month. I found

it difficult—due to work—to do the writing and the sharing on the same day (which is the suggested format of the process). I decided to do my writing the evening before the sharing session, with the promise that I wouldn't change anything or even read what I'd written for the next 24 hours.

A.W. started calling these writing and sharing sessions our pearl sessions, the inspiring thought being that out of all the garbage we are likely to write—or oysters we are likely to find—during these time periods we are bound to find a few things worth saving, things that are truly pearls and therefore worth all the effort it took us in finding them.

We've only been doing our pearl sessions since January of this year. The first evening I did my writing I was extremely tired and ended up napping the first half hour! When I woke up, I got to work, but my brain was quite sluggish, foggy, and heavy, and otherwise devoid of ideas. Nevertheless, I managed to write four pieces of varying lengths, all of them essentially opening scenes to different picture book manuscripts. In the second month, more prepared for the session in terms of wakefulness, I wrote ten opening scenes of varying lengths, all for picture book stories.

I was still worried about the sharing part, though. I'm so tone deaf that I'm as likely to dance to fingernails scratching on a blackboard as to anything else. What help could I possibly offer my friend? However, I had to remind myself that the sharing session is not to be used as a critique session but as a sharing opportunity. You can say general stuff like, "I think you should explore this one more" or "I really like this one that you did" but nothing else beyond that. It is strictly sharing and valuing, even if all you can share are the empty oyster shells you picked up off the beach.

The sharing sessions have gone particularly well. I've had many story ideas for some time now, but hadn't written them down in any form until these pearl sessions. And now that I have these opening scenes, I'm not sure I like some of the ideas anymore. So

I'm eager to develop some of the scenes into complete story drafts, while I'm willing to leave others in the oyster bucket for now.

Despite valuing what we've done so far, A.W. has proposed another change to our pearl sessions. While he has been productive in coming up with 15 snippets of songs, he hasn't developed any of them into a complete song. Remember, he wants to write songs, not just snippets. I, on the other hand, have a number of other stories that I've developed over the past few years and have already started submitting to publishers. What I've been bad at is daily writing, keeping up the practice of writing on a regular basis. Usually I work on my stories as I "find" the time, which is not a good habit for a writer.

A.W.'s proposal was this: If he feels the creative urge to do so, he will develop some of his snippets into complete drafts of songs and share those with me at our next session. If not, then he will follow our usual process and share whatever snippets he can produce. Since this process is a good writing exercise for writers and since I don't usually do something like this, I will likely continue writing scenes for different stories. However, if I develop one of the scenes from our previous sessions into a complete story draft, then I will share that with A.W. at our next meeting.

It is an interesting experiment for me and certainly not one I thought I'd enjoy or even find beneficial. But I was wrong. I also realized how nice it is not only to have a critique group, in which others help you to polish your writing and make it stronger and tighter, but also to have a sharing group, in which others acknowledge and value what you've written and help you to see the glimmer of a pearl where before you couldn't even see the oysters.

It also doesn't escape my notice that we took an idea and made it our own, and that even now we continue to rework it.

But then again, isn't that what writers do?

GROWING WITH THE FLOW: ONE WRITER'S RAMBLINGS

by

Joan W. Winter

“How does one craft the perfect manuscript, one that will get work noticed and sold?” writers often ask. “It’s like asking if we’re any closer to the great mystery of how one paints a portrait or composes a symphony,” says mystery writer Lawrence Sanders. “Most of the arts certainly are extremely difficult, and there are always more people who want to do it than can do it.” (Associated Press. The Boston Globe. March, 25 2008).

But there are many ways writers can help themselves along the road to success. In a recent tip for children’s writers, Andy Gutelle, writer, editor, and editorial consultant, Highlights for Children, says, “Content is king. For today’s kids this includes everything from old standbys like dinosaurs and horses to new passions like cell phones and iPods. Since publishing companies are eager to produce what kids want, it is critical that you stay current on the subject of reader interests.”

And so it is. Adapting to the needs of the marketplace is crucial if writers want their work to be competitive. Sure, there will probably always be a market for well written history books, re-told folk and fairy tales, science fiction and fantasy, but writing about what kids today can relate to, or introducing a story with new information or a *Wow!* factor, is what’s going to get a manuscript noticed by today’s discriminating editors.

Children's magazines, both print and online, come and go. In March 2008, *Kid Magazine Writers* (www.KidMagWriters.com) published a list of twenty-six magazines which have recently folded. Traditional publishing houses are a hard sell. They have a large financial investment in any books they do publish, so they need to be very selective. Obviously, they are going to choose content which will have the most appeal to their clients—kids and their parents.



In 2006, it looked as if my own career as a writer was going downhill. After a promising start five years earlier, I appeared to be losing momentum. Yes, there had been interest in some of my work, a couple of rewrites, an article or two awaiting editorial decision, but not any sales.

Something was definitely wrong. I needed to find a way to jump-start my writing, or look for another vehicle for my creative muse. I decided on the former. Digging out old manuscripts, the ones that had sold, I started looking for clues as to what elements had made them acceptable. Without exception, it was because I had written about a fresh

new subject; or an old one with a different perspective. I dusted off a couple of stories that hadn't sold and dispatched them to new markets--one a Canadian children's magazine which had sprung up unnoticed. Then, I started work on a couple of children's fiction stories with an up-to-date theme.

Perhaps all that was wrong was that I needed to challenge myself and grow as a writer. For fun, I learned how to write limericks (and won an Honourable Mention in a contest). Thinking outside my kid-writer "box," I wrote material for adult magazines too—a suspense story, and an essay for an anthology.

When I was offered a speaking engagement about writing and publishing to a group of grade 5/6 school kids, I felt very apprehensive. Public speaking has never been my strong suit and twelve-year-olds can be very astute. But, as I was into accepting all types of writing-related challenges, I decided to go for it. It went very well and I was asked by the teacher if I would return to speak to her class next year.

By e-mail and regular mail, I sent out queries, and soon was offered an assignment to write and photograph an article for a senior magazine. This led to two additional assignments. I was delighted when, two out of three months, my work was chosen as the feature cover story. Additional fun was developing "reporter" skills and travelling to different parts of the Lower Mainland of Vancouver to do interviews. I learned how to write a profile, conduct interviews (a new direction for me), and much about the people and organizations I was writing about.

Meanwhile, two of my children's stories sold, and one is pending a decision. I'm excited again -- on a writing roll. Growing by expanding my knowledge and experience has been

an exciting time for me.

If your writing needs a jump-start, maybe growing with the flow can help you too.

Our local critique group for SCBWI members and non-members in the Vancouver BC area meets monthly. Please contact Diane Jones at angelslodge@yahoo.com for more info. Our next meeting is on Sat. May 24th 1:30 – 3:30 in Ken's home.

Are you interested in becoming a member of SCBWI, the Society for Children's Book Writers and Illustrators? Please visit the SCBWI website at www.scbwi.org for further information. Join the fun, you won't regret it!

Please visit our own website at: <http://scbwicanda.org/west/> to learn more about our Canadian West group.