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2002

The 30th

**WRITERS RETREAT
WORKSHOP**

MARYDALE RETREAT CENTER

Erlanger, Kentucky

FRIDAY, MAY 24th - SUNDAY, JUNE 2nd

WRW FAMILY NEWS

A Publication of Write It/Sell It® Seminars and Workshops ■ January, 2002

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REFLECTIONS

by Gail

A voice urges me: "Go directly to WRW 2001." So I try. But you know what? It doesn't work. (The voice is not my own, I suppose.) I listen again and this time hear what my heart and the smoldering wounds of September 11th have to say: Reflect in haste on happy memories? Impossible.

Blocking the way are not only visions, but also feelings that run so deep they have *become* us. We are emotions erupting, spirits diving, hearts breaking. Forever changed, our collective memories hold enduring images and feelings of terror. Unimaginable horror. Paralyzing fear. Grief. Helplessness. Rage. We see heroes, though; not *only* villains.

Gary's WRW Plot List takes on new meaning perhaps as we witness stakes rising, war raging, and experience tension as never before. Because we witness and/or participate in countless acts of compassion, we see and experience beauty. Because of the new world community, we see and experience unity and its amazing power. Because of shared values of what is fair and just and good, we see and experience strength.

With newfound strength we dare to believe that goodness will prevail. And so we journey beneath that long, dark shadow of monstrous acts of terrorism, following the veiled path that leads to happy memories. On the way we notice glimmers of light, feel

the comfort of hope. And we move along. Then, incredibly, the realization: So much of what we know to be "good" is still there to see. It is then that, quite joyfully, WRW 2001 comes into focus.

It was an exceptional workshop. Ideal. Our staff was generous beyond measure, our students as talented and hardworking and "playful" as any group ever assembled.

Some special moments: Agent Don Maass, with twinkling eyes, serving up breakout quality writing tips on *Opening Night*; Elizabeth (of Many Hats) presenting an *Alice In Wonderland* view of the publishing industry; Diagnostic sessions, *everywhere!*

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MESSAGE FROM THE MAJOR

Consider first the spell cast by reading. You're all alone as you read, yet you hear my voice. You don't know me. I don't know you. But we're both acting as if the other were a real individual composed of flesh and bones. The words that I'm addressing to you aren't being uttered now. They were recorded months ago, perhaps years ago. I might be thousands of miles away. I might be dead. (On the other hand, you might not even have been born yet as I write.) All you are really looking at is a bunch of black lines that make noises in your head and create a presence that doesn't really exist. It's magic.

As a writer *you* must try to create and sustain this spell. You must seize the reader's attention and funnel it into your words for the length of your story. You must hypnotize your reader with your action and your information and your style.

Writing works best when you hypnotize the reader quickly and hold him spellbound until you're through with him. You want his attention, and to keep it you must avoid the *distractions* that will cause his attention to wander and the *moments of boredom* that will make him search for more interesting material.

There are words and combinations of words that for various reasons have the effect of reminding the reader that he is reading, that there is a person making an effort to hypnotize him. Just as you sometimes awaken in the morning with the realization "Oh, I was only dreaming," the reader awakens from his spell, saying to himself "Oh, I was only reading." It's the writer's obtrusive presence that does this, just as if he had crept up behind the reader and tapped him on the shoulder. "See, here I am thumbing through my thesaurus"...."Here I am trying to impress you."

Any one reminder that a writer is at work won't be fatal, but each mistake you make is an interruption of that spell. We all can tolerate just so many interruptions before we abandon an endeavor.

When the writer is seen at work, the writing doesn't work.

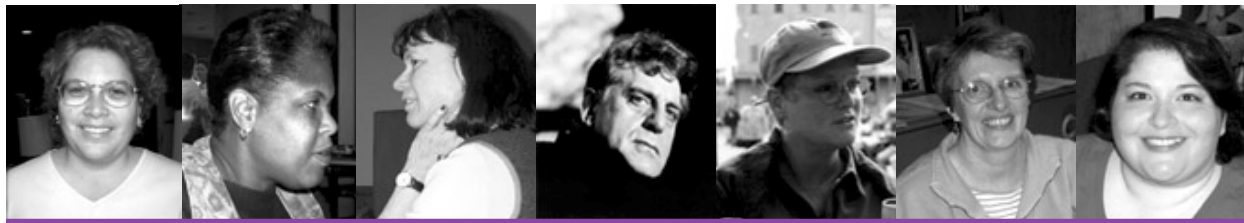
—Gary Provost, a.k.a. Major Garonovitch.
Excerpted from *Make Every Word Count*.

REFLECTIONS, continued...

Arthur Golden's "visit"; Campfire sessions with Roman, John, and Cal; Frank's bluesy sessions in the lounge; Student Readings on the final day; Nushka's secret session with "potential" graduates and their "hats"; Doc's Box of Treats for one and all; New-student hosts Judith and Tom, and their *Best of Show* awards; Jason's farewell video presentation for Doc, starring the impish Lorin (with Roman, Eric, and Tom in supporting roles); *The Party*: Tanya's balloon dance, the guys' (almost) *Full Monty* performance, and the amazing hula-hoop marathon by agent Michelle Brummer; and for Lance and me the wondrous pleasure of knowing that old friendships had been renewed and new friendships forged.

To our WRW Family: I congratulate you for your steadfast dedication to your craft. May you continue the good fight, as novelists *and* as loving citizens of this planet.

May you make every word count; make every moment count.



KUDOS AND CONGRATULATIONS TO...

Debbie Boucher, whose essay appears in "The World of Teaching," published by Greenwood Press.

Janet Chapman, who inked a three-book deal with Pocket Books in 2001, with the help of her new agent, Grace Morgan.

Sydney Day, whose WRW novel is being represented by Gail Hochman, agent to Pulitzer-prize winning author Michael Cunningham, Scott Turow, and Ursula Heigi (of Oprah Book fame).

Alice Fried, who signed with "blockbuster" agent, Al Zuckerman, to represent her book: *Menopause, Sisterhood and Tennis, How to Get New Life While Making the Change*.

Chris Goff, who signed an additional two-book contract with Berkley for her highly-successful Birdwatcher's Mystery series.

Elizabeth Lyon, who signed a four-book contract with Perigee to re-release her nationally-acclaimed *Nonfiction Book Proposals Anyone Can Write* and *The Sell-Your-Novel-Toolkit* and to publish the first two books in her Writer's Compass Series.

Lorin Oberweger, whose story "Blue Elephant" was chosen for inclusion in *French Quarter Fiction*, a literary anthology due to be published in Spring, 2002. Lorin's stories, "The Barn," "Alphabits," "Forget-Me-Not," and "Clean" were also accepted for publication in 2001, and her poem, "Born," is featured on the website for the prestigious *Montserrat Review*.

Michael Palmer, whose next novel, *Fatal*, is due out from Bantam in May, 2002. Michael's

work is also featured in *Natural Suspects*, edited by Bill Bernhardt.

Roz Phillips, who won First Place in the Young Adults, First Chapter category of the Focus on Writers Contest (Sacramento Friends of the Library), for *VICTORY RUN*, the novel she workshopped at the 2001 WRW.

Jane Tesh, whose mystery novel is with agent Irene Kraas. Also, one of Jane's plays was published by Harcourt Brace.

Angela Zeman, whose WRW mystery (cozy) novel, *The Witch and the Borscht Pearl*, was published by Pendulum Press in October.

"I've been writing practically nonstop for twelve years. I've completed three novels, none of which have attracted the interest of an agent or publisher. I've read dozens of books on writing, taken writing courses, gone to conferences and workshops, even hired a couple of big name NY editors, and I just haven't been able to pull it off.

The WRW I attended in May was a turning point for me. I learned the single most important lesson in my twelve years of struggling to become published: story is everything. And my stories have sucked. That's why I'm not published, and that's what I've got to correct. I will come up with a breakout story, and it will be published. And what I learned at WRW will be the reason for it."

-- Cal Rogers, WRW 2001

THE ABC'S OF WRW

by Roz Phillips

To capture WRW and what it has meant for me personally, I have adapted Gary Provost's "Writing Alphabet."

A is for New York AGENTS. Don Maass started things off with a dynamite mini-workshop meant to launch us on the path toward writing "break-out" novels. Michelle Brummer's "candid agent" routine for the graduation party videotape revealed what we've all suspected lurks behind the phrase, "Sorry, this isn't right for our list."

B is for BACK PORCH, a popular place to hang out before and after dinner to chat and enjoy the BEAUTY of the lake and rolling hills. B is also for numerous BRAINSTORMING opportunities, and a BONFIRE complete with s'mores.

C is for the CONSTANT support and enCOURAGEMENT offered by both staff and participants. And, C is for the CHOCOLATE that appeared on the snack table in the lounge every afternoon.

D is for DREAMS shared and nurtured.

E is for an ENSEMBLE staff that worked so well together. There were no

"stars" or big egos—just a dedicated cast of writers, editors, and teachers who shared the commitment to help each of us achieve our writing goals and dreams.

F is for FAMILY, in the fullest and best sense of the word. It is also for FEEDBACK, continuing FRIENDSHIPS, and FIREFLIES at dusk.

G is for the GEESE that live at Marydale. G also stands for GUITAR, GENEROUS and GENTLE spirit, GIFTS at GRADUATION, and "GEE, I'm GLAD I was there this year."

H is for "HAND me a tissue—I'm laughing so hard, I'm crying." It is also for innumerable and invaluable HANDOUTS.

I is for IN-DEPTH INSTRUCTION, and INSPIRATION.

J is for the hero's JOURNEY.

K is for KENTUCKY Brown sandwiches, other regional comfort foods, and just plain good cooking offered by Marydale's KITCHEN staff.

L is for Gary Provost's LEGACY. It is also for LONG walks after dinner, LAUGHTER, LAVENDER butterflies with wings the size of dimes, and the

LOUNGE with its comfortable chairs and view of the LAKE.

M is for MARYDALE. Just as story grows out of setting, so does any MEMORABLE experience. With its gently rolling hills, lake, wildlife, and scenic stone bridge, Marydale provided the perfect natural background.

N is for "a story is a NET, NOT a string of lights," and other NUMEROUS words of writing wisdom freely distributed throughout the ten days.

O is for ONE-ON-ONES with the OUTSTANDING staff. O is also for "How could I learn so much in ONLY ten days?"

P is for PROMISES kept. Before the workshop began, Gail PLEDGED that "each staff member is dedicated to offering as much instruction, advice, and feedback as conceivably POSSIBLE in order to help transform your dream into a reality."

Q is for QUICK wit, QUIRKY characters, and QUINTESSENTIAL camaraderie.

R is for the musical REVEILLE broadcast over the hall speakers every morning. R is also for the total REWRITE that

inevitably follows so much feedback.

S is for SCENE cards and SYNERGY.

T is for TEN days packed with learning and writing and not nearly enough TIME to do everything.

U is for UNCEASING support and UNDERSTANDING.

V is for the VARIETY of VIDEOS used to teach VARIOUS aspects of writing. The tapes were also available in the evening for VIEWING by those lucky souls who didn't have a re-write due the next day.

W is for the talented WRITERS who showed up to learn more about their craft with a minimum of WHINING and a great deal of WILLINGNESS.

X is for the XCITEMENT that I still feel after all these months, and for the XPECTATION that great things are yet to come out of this XPERIENCE.

Y is for WHY go anywhere else?

And **Z** is for Z best writer's workshop imaginable. I have never before laughed so much, learned so much, and felt so supported, all at the same time.

SALADS AND STRAIGHT JACKETS

by Roman White

I could not imagine how much my life would change when I drove into the Marydale parking lot four years ago. I thought it was going to be just another workshop where people sat around talking about how fabulous their books were and how close they were to being millionaires on the best seller list. Of course, I had the same aspirations. I was under the assumption that I'd mastered the craft and was working

on the next BIG book, but after experiencing my first WRW I learned how wrong I was and so much more.

The first few days felt like years. I was overwhelmed with folders, handouts, assignments, and more salad than any one human being should be forced to eat in a lifetime. It was like being thrown in a blender with one hundred writing books



and fifty-five heads of lettuce. It was a recipe for madness, but I forged on, waiting for the gods of writing to enlighten me.

Within the first few days I felt like I had aged about twenty years and dealt with the realization that I wasn't a genius by lying on my bed in the fetal position for hours at a time. It was a cold reality, but reality nonetheless. My novel was a piece of shit.

As the week progressed I fell further into despair. I was almost at a breaking point, and it was still early. How the hell was I going to survive this nightmarish boot camp for writers? What had I gotten myself into? Then, during my bleakest moment, a little pixie-like woman danced by, wielding a clipboard and wearing a doctor's coat. It was Gail, Dr. Gail to be precise, and she was on a mission.

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OUR 2002 GARY PROVOST SCHOLARSHIP WINNER



Congratulations to **Brenda Klettke**, our 2002 Gary Provost Scholarship Winner.

Her novel, POINTING TO PRESCOTT is the story of three women whose lives are bound by proximity and loss. When the youngest of the three, still a teenager, becomes pregnant, the struggle for control of her future defines them all. In this excerpt, Heather, the teenager, and Alex, the son of one of the other women, discover that their secret relationship has become further complicated by pregnancy.

The plus sign looked huge, spanning every bit of space allowed. Heather wobbled, then remembered to exhale. She picked up the small white wand and carried it to Alex like an egg on a spoon. His head bounced up at the sound of her. She set the test in front of him and pulled out a chair.

"I assume that means positive?" he said and sighed.

"Yes." Speech took great effort.

"Holy shit." He leaned back and rubbed his forehead. "What are we going to do?"

She pressed taut fingers over her lips and shook her head. The pace of her tears increased. Their salt burned her skin, as if she didn't deserve them. Crying was so out of place with the numbness that stretched across her body.

"I'm sorry, Heather. I should have known better."

"You didn't force me."

"So what do we do?" His knuckles rapped an anxious rhythm on the tabletop.

"Think, I guess."

"I guess."

Silence settled in. They sat, Alex staring, Heather dabbing, with the proof between them. When the tears stopped, she gathered up the test and stood. Even throwing it away was a problem.

Nothing was simple anymore.

TEMPTING TITLES

by Elizabeth Lyon

Titles sell books. “It’s the first thing that draws a person to your work,” says Jessica Faust, editor with Berkley Publishing. “If it doesn’t clearly stand out, it might not be bought. Ask yourself, ‘Would I pick up this novel?’”

You need to know that many, if not most, titles chosen by the author eventually get changed by the editorial committee or the marketing department. “Don’t get too wedded to your title,” says Sarah Pinckney, editor with Simon and Schuster.

Titles cannot be copyrighted. Nothing is stopping you from naming your book *Roots* or *War and Peace*. However, don’t expect to get an openhearted response from agents or editors if you do. On the other hand, identical titles sometimes happen simultaneously, without anyone knowing ahead of time. The result can be confusion, or the promotional efforts can help both books. You can check your titles with *Books in Print*, *Forthcoming Books in Print*, or by going to a site like amazon.com.

So what makes a hot title? “The more visceral the title, the more impact on editors,” one agent told me. Certainly, it’s got to be catchy—*Who Moved My Cheese* (Dr. Spencer Johnson); easy to pronounce—*P is for Peril* (Sue Grafton); evocative of an interesting story—*Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (Rebecca Wells); and/or short—*Riptide* (Catherine Coulter).

Most important, titles must arise from your book and reflect its theme. Titles must come from within rather than from without, from the subject matter and slant in nonfiction and from the theme and story promise in fiction. Jessica Faust recommends authors keep an open mind. “It’s not a bad idea to think of more than one title,” she suggests. “Have four or five titles and run them by other people.”

Some titles contain meanings that trigger deeper emotions and may stir a reader to buy them solely for that reason. For me, titles that do this have included *Dancing in the Light* (Shirley Maclaine),

Misery (Stephen King), *Beloved* (Tony Morrison), and *Real Magic* (Wayne Dyer). Make sure that your title sounds like it matches the kind of book you are writing. It’s difficult, for instance, to include the words “love” or “heart” in a title and not have associations to romance. For nonfiction titles, subject clarity ranks higher on the list than cleverness, and as much thought should be put into your subtitles as into your title. The nonfiction reader responds to titles based on need and interest, so your title should promise to fulfill that need. In short, offer a benefit.

One of my editing clients thought her title, *Don’t Even Try!* did the trick, but what is her book about? *Stop Being Manipulated: How to Neutralize the Bullies, Bosses, and Brutes in Your Life* was, last I checked, still in print as a mass-market self-help book, and it was first published in 1995. I believe its title alone helped keep it going. Study the titles of books in your genre or subject category. You’ll quickly notice that styles differ for each.

Another observation made by one agent about fiction titles is that a great title usually has two or three meanings. Consider Ursula K. LeGuin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* or *White Teeth* (Zadie Smith). Be careful, however, about using foreign words or phrases, since your reader may not share your breadth and exposure to a particular language.

Countless writers, stuck for title inspiration, have turned to the Bible, poetry, famous quotes, Shakespeare, even to clichés and lullabies. Don’t feel stuck with the original; twist it, turn it. Substitute a new word for an old word to get a fresh feeling. *Where Devils Fear to Tread* creeps me out just thinking about it!

Most of the writers I know sweat like a day laborer over their titles, and it’s worth the effort. My computer files show that I’m on the sixteenth revision of the title for my latest proposed book. How do you know when you’re finished? When someone in Jessica Faust’s position says, “Sold!”

WHY WRITE?

by Jason Sitzes

Think of the people in your life who identify themselves as writers. High number? Browse chat rooms and message boards on the Internet, count the number of writing workshops and conferences scattered throughout the country and around the world. Visit the creative writing department of your local college or university. Pay attention to the magazine shelves, and discount bargain bins in your local bookstore. Overwhelmed with the number of writers in your life? Now times that by hundreds (perhaps thousands) and you'll have a somewhat accurate idea of what you're up against as a writer.

Every summer top basketball coaches, broadcasters, and players hit the campus circuit to talk to high school athletes. They tell them there are only so many spots at the top. In a gymnasium of a thousand kids, only one or two can expect to get a shot at the pros. Why even bother?

Likewise, why bother writing? Odds of publication are slim. And the odds of making a living at the game are even bleaker. Near impossible to hit the stratosphere. There simply isn't room for everyone.

Every writer I know struggles with his or her worth as a storyteller. Halfway through the novel it all sounds like a fifth grade essay done two hours before it's due and written in pencil on napkins. Why continue?

If your story has any worth to anyone else, it must have worth to you. I'm learning the value (by rereading books I love) of having a passion for character. Not just the actions of the character, but the guts and brains that define him; what her greatest struggles are, and how she confronts the terrors in her life. In rereading *Rabbit, Run* by John Updike, I'm again cheering for Rabbit Angstrom to successfully leave his wife and child. Not so much because they deserve it, but because Rabbit has something out there he needs, and I want to search with him until he finds it. It's not a moral struggle for me to watch him drive from his home. I'm right there, caring about his yearning for real life and true love.

Forget the numbers and forget the odds. Forget on your first draft the conventions and rules for breaking out and blockbusting anything. Write because you have created a story with characters that have real needs. Only you can take those people where they most need to be. Write because there is no other choice.

Salads and Straight Jackets, continued...

She assured me that my novel wasn't headed for the dumpster, that this happened to everybody and that I too would survive the mid-week madness. I don't know if I believed her, but for some odd reason I felt better. Maybe it was her loving pixie eyes or that sweetie-pie smile that did it. I guess I'll never know, but at that moment I knew Gail was something special.

It was because of her and everybody else that I survived that first WRW. I left, surprisingly, without a straight jacket and took more with me than writing tools. I left with confidence, a deeper passion for writing and, most of all, lifelong friendships. It sounds crazy, but there is something magical about WRW and its people. There is laughter, love, and a true sense of family. I have gone back ever since and, I imagine, will go back for the rest of my life (between book tours and writing commitments of course). I sometimes wonder where I would be if I hadn't taken that first step four years ago. Would I be where I am today as a writer, or would I still be trapped on Fantasy Island where I was perfect? Would I have so many incredible friends? Would I be torturing you all with this article? Hell no.

I wouldn't be where I am today without the magic I found there, and believe it or not, I find more every year. I make new friends. I learn more about the craft. I remember why it is I love to write. But, more than anything, I go home to people I love . . . my family.

"A word after a word after a word is power." -- Margaret Atwood