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2003

The 31st

WRITERS RETREAT WORKSHOP

MARYDALE RETREAT CENTER

Erlanger, Kentucky

FRIDAY, MAY 23rd - SUNDAY, JUNE 1st

WRW FAMILY NEWS



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REFLECTIONS

by Gail

I guess it was after Gary's passing in 1995 that I began to work hard to make every moment count. It's become my mantra: *Make every moment count*. It's easier to say than to do, but I've certainly tried. Never more so than with WRW. And because of that I seem to have latched on to another mantra. *Make what you do matter*. Find what's important to you, do it, and do it so that it counts.

For me—with the help of a talented, loving, dedicated staff—I have focused my attention on keeping WRW alive and blossoming. From the first WRW back in 1987 to last year's, it has mattered greatly to me that WRW be all that you, our writers, could hope for. As I reflect now on WRW

'02, however, I am struck by the sense of urgency I felt about that workshop. WRW '02 marked a milestone. It was our thirtieth session, our fifteenth year. I felt this session simply *had* to fulfill the hopes and dreams and expectations of *everyone* involved. Perhaps the uncertainty of our times had corrupted my emotions. In any case, I do know that in moving forward I tried to apply the lesson I'd recently learned.

The lesson came on New Year's Eve, December 31, 2001. Boston. "First Night." I was there with people I love. We, like all the others wandering the city, had come specifically to take advantage of the treasure trove of experiences available to us, all day, all evening

and night, right up to (and beyond) the spectacular harbor-side fireworks at midnight to welcome 2002. On this same day, however, temperatures happened to plummet. By sundown they had fallen to practically unbearable levels. For some brave souls out in the extreme cold, the experience became one of misery, even torture. For others, though, the experience was one of joy, despite the bitter cold, despite the fierce winds. Remarkable!

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In Memory of
**SUSAN ZWIREN
SCHULTZ**

Ah, it became so clear to me that night: *What you see is what you "get."* As I thought about this, it reminded me of a question I'd been asked years before, back in the 80s. Well, let me ask you now. Can you remember your reactions—back then, say, twenty years ago, when you'd see an ambulance or fire engine race by? What did you think? *Oh no! Something terrible has happened. Bad news! Tragic, tragic news!* Or, maybe this: *Someone is in trouble, but other people are rushing to help. Good news! Heart-warming news!*

What we see is what we get. We have the choice. Easy to say. Hard to do. But, we can try. When things are good, we can do our best to relish that moment. A part of us knows it can't last forever. Still, if we work hard at it, we can train ourselves to recognize especially those moments that seem magical, and experience them as exceptional — *right then*. That is exactly what happened for me while I was at WRW '02.

From start to finish—the way I saw it, everything was magical: From Nancy's Opening Talk, "Spinning Straw Into Gold" to the unexpected appearance of a stunning deer just as Closing Night ceremonies ended, and the hard work and tremendous talent and laughter that filled Marydale in between. I believe it would be fair to say that WRW '02 was the happiest experience of my WRW life. I experienced *continuous* joy because I had the good fortune to appreciate fully, *right then*, each exceptional moment, each exceptional participant who created the magic.

And on the last day of WRW '02, when Jason came to me to express how much WRW mattered to him and to so many others, well . . . I no longer feel uncertain about future WRWs. Thank you, Jas. Thank you all. And may you continue to make what matters to you count, in your novels as well as in your life.

— Gail



MESSAGE FROM THE MAJOR

When John Cheever was seven years old he won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Ernest Hemingway was given the Nobel Prize for Literature before he even finished the sixth grade.

"But that's impossible!" you say.

Of course it's impossible. It's foolishness. We all know that children cannot put words together in a way that will earn them prestigious literary prizes or even win them a place on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Yet we also know that in time John Cheever did win a Pulitzer Prize and Ernest Hemingway did get a Nobel. We are left with an inescapable conclusion: Somewhere between their childhoods and the day they won their literary prizes these writers must have *learned* a

few things about writing well.

Nothing could be clearer. But still there are people who will persist in telling you that writing can be neither learned nor taught. Writing talent, they hint, is somehow imprinted on the genes. If they are in a religious mood they will tell you that writing talent is a God-given gift.

I won't go so far as to say that these people should be locked up until their senses return, but I want you to know that this business of "you either have it or you don't" is hogwash, and it can be stifling to writing aspirations at any age.

If your writing is not yet what you wish it to be, remember that every working writer in the world is tormented by some secret piece of prose, the sight of which can redden his cheeks with embarrassment. The people who are crafting the prose that sets your soul on fire spent much of their adolescence scratching out scraps of life that

were wordy, ungrammatical, pretentious, sentimental, and unintelligible. In a word: lousy. And though the successful freelance writer dreams of cremating all of this prepubescent prose some moonless night when the family's away, he never does. It is still a part of him. And if the words that are a part of him today are good enough to earn his living and your admiration, then he must have learned something in the meantime.

Of course writing can be learned, just as brain surgery can be learned. But unlike knowledge of brain surgery, knowledge about good writing can be acquired in a variety of ways and places.

—Gary Provost (Excerpted from *The Freelance Writer's Handbook*, New American Library, 1982)

Can Your Novel Pass This Test?

By Elizabeth Lyon

TEST: Answer yes or no to the following questions:

Does your story promise to fulfill a single, fundamental yearning of your protagonist, one that reflects an issue of human need, such as forgiveness, belonging, family unity, redemption, or self-respect? (Resource: *A Story is a Promise* by Bill Johnson)

Is your novel plotted dramatically, not episodically, according to Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey? (Resources: *The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler; *The Key* by Jim Frye)

Does your protagonist pursue a clear-cut story goal, one that only he or she can reach? Is the goal one that readers will care about? (Resource: *How to Tell a Story* by Gary Provost and Peter Rubie)

Do you use your protagonist's strength to advance the plot; do you use the weakness ("fatal flaw") to introduce complications and setbacks? (Resource: *Writing and Selling Your Novel* by Jack Bickham; *Creating Story People* by Dwight Swain)

Have you selected viewpoints consciously, been consistent in their development, changed viewpoint only when you changed scenes or chapters? (Resource: *Characters and Viewpoint* by Orson Scott Card)

Have you deepened your characters by filling out worksheets of character traits and determined which archetypes and metaphors underlie their deepest motivations? (Resources: *The Hero Within* by Carol Pearson; *The Survivor Personality* by Al Siebert, Ph.D.; 45

Master Characters by Victoria Schmidt; *Dynamic Characterization* by Nancy Kress.)

Does your protagonist face ever-greater obstacles to reaching the external story goal and at the "darkest hour" all but lose hope? (Resource: *Story* by Robert McKee)

Do you reveal an unresolved problem from your protagonist's past that is activated by the plot and fits with your theme? (Resources: *Dynamic Characterization* by Nancy Kress; *Characters and Viewpoint* by Orson Scott Card)

Is every page enriched by sounds, touch sensations, smells, and tastes, as well as by sights, all conveyed through the viewpoint character's perceptions? (Resource: *Description* by Monica Wood)

Do you advance your plot using scenes, sequels, and movement that spring from dramatic tension? Do you begin your scenes with clear goals (stated or implied)? Are your sequels rich in emotion? Do you constantly raise questions in the minds of your readers? (Resources: *Scene and Structure* by Jack Bickham; *A Story is a Promise* by Bill Johnson; *Crafting Scenes* by Raymond Obstfeld)

Does the balance of your writing weigh heavily toward showing (about 80 percent) vs. telling (about 20 percent); active verbs (98 percent) vs. passive verbs (2 percent)? (Resources: *Description* by Monica Wood; *Setting* by Jack Bickham)

Does your opening hook your reader with anticipation in the outcome, intrigue your reader with

the originality of the story premise, and move your reader by evoking the unfulfilled yearning at the heart of the story? (Resources: *Beginnings, Middles, and Ends* by Nancy Kress; *A Story is a Promise* by Bill Johnson; *The First Five Pages* by Noah Lukeman)

Do you know your theme; can you articulate it as a pitch that unites theme with characterization and plot? (Resources: *Theme and Strategy* by Ron Tobias; *Stein on Writing* by Sol Stein; *The Career Novelist* by Donald Maass)

Have you written a working synopsis that you can later revise into a two or three-page marketing synopsis? Have you drafted a five-paragraph query letter? (Resource: *The Sell Your Novel Tool Kit* by Elizabeth Lyon)

SCORING: If you answered yes to 12 or more of the above questions, your novel could be ready for final editing and revision. You can reasonably expect to find representation by a literary agent or interest by an appropriate publisher. If you checked fewer than 12 items, don't feel badly. Even experienced, sometimes professional, novelists, fall short of a perfect score in early drafts of their novels (or sometimes in later drafts!). If many of your answers were no or "I don't know," your manuscript is not ready to compete in today's difficult marketplace. You will benefit by reading the above resources, taking a workshop like the WRW, or hiring a professional editor when you have done everything you can on your own. Good luck!

Don't Settle for First Thoughts

by Jason Sitzes

One weekend in late November I took myself on an "artist's date." (Popular phrase used by writing motivators such as Julia Cameron. Essentially, you take yourself someplace you wouldn't normally go for the purpose of enriching the artist within.) My weekend excursion was to Asheville, NC, a city I'd heard much about but never really explored. A town of around 70,000 folks, nestled between the Great Smoky Mountains and the Blue Ridge Mountains. Coffee shops can be found on every other block; warm cafés line the town square; pubs belt out bluegrass until wee morning hours. Over one hundred crafts, arts, and eclectic shops sit side by side along the streets; at the end of each street, mountains outline the horizon.

These things were the reasons I'd visited, along with a desire for people-watching, writing time, story inspiration, and mind rest.

Across from my downtown hotel stood a home that had recently suffered major fire damage. I passed the two-story, picket-fenced, white-shingled home several times, wondering about the stories of one-time inhabitants. Who sat on the rocker out front? Did they get a kick out of the hotel raised in front of their porch? Was it a dropped cigarette, space heater, shoddy wiring whose flames ate away at the frame?

My final day began with a walk that wound down one road and up another and across and through until I stood in front of the Thomas Wolfe Memorial Visitors Center. The author was born in Asheville and in this town wrote *Look Homeward, Angel*.

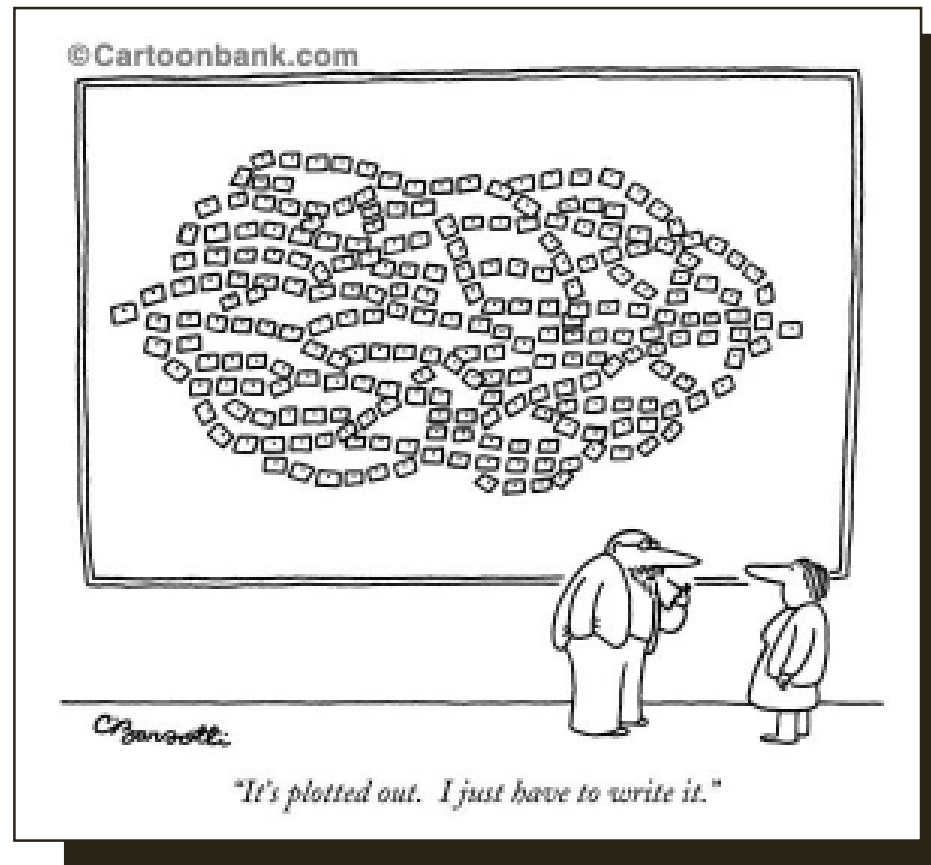
The visitors center was closed, but I walked around back to see what was memorialized and there stood the burnt white home surrounded by scaffolding and planks of wood. A sign explained that the restoration was moving slowly due to state funding cuts. But what struck me was my lack of observation. In the yard a sign explained this was the

Thomas Wolfe home, and I'd missed it no less than four times. Granted, the sign also listed the names of the restoration architects, construction crew, etc. But I'd missed the real significance.

Then I wondered if I in fact hadn't 'missed.' If at first I'd known it was the Wolfe home, I might not have thought of a child sitting in the rocker, lost in mountain thoughts. I would have transitioned to thoughts of a successful writer struggling with his words. In fiction, there is always more to our initially defined details.

Literary agent Donald Maass suggests our first idea or reaction to a story angle probably isn't the best we can do. Dig deeper.

In life, this concept is a constant. First impressions often prove false. A year of marriage reveals more than the surface euphoria. Fiction is no exception, perhaps more so than real life. Look deeper, investigate your ideas, your plot twists, your character motives. Find what the construction of your story frame is really about, not simply what you initially assumed.



KUDOS AND CONGRATULATIONS TO...

Alice Fried, whose book, *MENOPAUSE, SISTERHOOD* and *TENNIS* sold to Basic Health Publishers and will be released in September.

Angela Zeman, whose news includes a piece in *THE WORLD'S FINEST MYSTERY AND CRIME STORIES*; a suspense story ("Green Heat"), in the anthology, *HOT AND SULTRY NIGHTS*; and another story, "Lah Tee Dah," which will be included in a show business-themed anthology, due out in 2004. Angela also signed with a new agent: Tony Seidl, of T. D. Media, Inc.

Carol Grier, whose new book *SECRETS: A MEMOIR*, was published by PublishAmerica.

Chris Fletcher, who signed with agent, Jessica Faust of BookEnds.

Christine Goff, whose second novel, *DEATH OF A SONGBIRD*, has been named Willa Literary Award finalist for Best Original Paperback 2002. *A NEST IN THE ASHES*, her third novel, was released on November 5th, and she is currently working on book four in the series, *DEATH TAKES A GANDER*, due out in the Fall of 2003.

Chuck Avery, whose piece, "My Dog Shemp" was awarded First Place in Commentary by Public Radio News Directors, Inc. Chuck is heard over Miami University NPR station WMUB (88.5) in Oxford, OH.

Elizabeth Lyon, whose news includes a feature article on marketing, published by *THE WRITER* magazine. *THE WRITER* has also invited Elizabeth to contribute articles as one of their guest columnists and is featuring her editorial services and copies of her books as prizes in their annual sweepstakes. Her first two books--*THE SELL-YOUR-NOVEL TOOL KIT* and *NONFICTION BOOK PROPOSALS*

ANYONE CAN WRITE--are scheduled for re-release in December, and her new book, *A WRITER'S GUIDE TO NONFICTION* will be released by Perigee in March.

Janet Chapman, whose novel, *CHARMING THE HIGHLANDER* is due for release in February by Pocket Books. Doubleday Book Club bought both *CHARMING THE HIGHLANDER* and *LOVING THE HIGHLANDER*, the second book in the series, for their romance line, Rhapsody. The first is being offered as a featured alternate, and they'll showcase the second in their regular club in May as well as in Rhapsody. Janet's third book, *WEDDING THE HIGHLANDER*, is due out in October.

John Francois, whose novel, *CAJUN FIRE*, was picked up by Gardenia Press with an anticipated release date of June, 2004.

Lorin Oberweger, whose short story, "Blue Elephant" appears in the literary anthology, *FRENCH QUARTER FICTION*, published by Light of New Orleans Press. The anthology will begin its national distribution in March.

Rob MacGregor, whose novel, *CRYSTAL SKULL*, has been re-released as an e-book via fictionwise.com.

Roger Cain, whose short story, "Gina In Me," now appears in the award-winning e-zine, *moxiemag.com*. Additionally, his story, "Soldier," now appears on *anotherrealm.com*; his story, "Butterbone Goes To Sweetdream," will appear in a 2003 issue of *The Storyteller*; and his story, "Your Lying Eyes," will appear in the May 2003 issue of the *ravenelectrick.com* e-zine.

Photos, from left to right: Janet Chapman, Rob MacGregor, Christine Goff, Alice Fried, Elizabeth Lyon, Chuck Avery

CLASS OF ONE: A Returning Student's Perspective

by Jo Kohn


While organizing the computer files I needed for the May 2002 Writers Retreat Workshop, I happened upon an old floppy disk of archived letters. One was a teary plea dated May 25, 1992. I'd just finished Gary's, "Make Your Words Work" and was so taken with his common sense approach that I signed up for the summer WRW. It didn't matter that my money had dwindled to a memory, my leave from teaching nearly kaput and fresh ideas on my novel were fading like ghosts into the sunrise. I was going to study with this genius. Then Gail called to tell me in her angel voice that the summer workshop was cancelled. I poured myself a cup of coffee and wept over my non-refundable airline ticket. So I wrote begging for some kind of barter. Far beyond what I envisioned, Gary and Gail opened their hearts and their home to do a class of one.

For me. People often ask what it was like. It was inspiring to hear Gary read pages from his current project. There was a sense of awe that came from being in the presence of Gary and the other "real" published writers who came to visit and didn't laugh when I read. Overwhelming is the word that comes to mind with the amount of information he taught and how there never were enough hours to get it done before we met again. Gary never lost patience with my questions. He always found something positive in my work. I felt like a chunk of marble, sculpted slowly over the week by the hands of a Michelangelo who gently chiseled away at my

illusions and confusion. I ached with gratitude for the countless kindnesses.

And the experience ten years later, you ask? Magical. Transformative. A writer's greatest gift. Inspiration from hearing other writer's who read their pages on Saturday. Talking with Nancy Pickard and Trish MacGregor still left me with a sense of awe. And yes, there was

still overwhelm with the amount of information and too little time to make all the changes but that didn't come until Wednesday. The feeling of gratitude that went to Gary now goes to Lorin and Elizabeth who work their magic on the worst of scenes. Will I wait another ten years before attending again? Not on your life! My "Leave Without Pay" slip is awaiting approval!



Congratulations to DENNIS BOUNDS,
our 2003 GARY PROVOST SCHOLARSHIP recipient!

An excerpt from his novel, *DARKWALKER*, a suspense thriller about a cop who gets drawn into a battle between current government and former-government agents.

:

Yancy draped the tie over his shoulder and walked back to his room. "I love you, Molly-girl," he said without looking back. "I know," she said softly.

Once in his room, Yancy shut his door. He reached inside the closet and pulled out his blazer and straightened it out on his bed. He smoothed the sleeves and the lapels before positioning the tie on it. He stepped back and held up his hands, thumbs together, palms outstretched, and looked at his jacket through the ersatz box in what he assumed was the pose of an artist.

"Did you eat well, William?"

Yancy froze at the words. His hands were still framing the coat. He felt his shoulders tighten and knew he could hear his neck muscles creak as he slowly turned his head to look over his shoulder.

The voice was the same one that had come to him the night before. The face was in the wall again, at a higher level this time, just about eye-level where Yancy stood. The yellow and pink pattern of the wallpaper formed the skin of the face again. The eyes were open and looked Yancy up and down.

"You did believe I was coming back? I remember distinctly telling you. Don't you believe me, my new best friend?"

On Fate and Hyperbole

by Melissa Chipman



Everything happens for a reason. I'm a New Englander. That phrase is as much a part of my family's vocabulary as "Hello." But, I never had any use for it. Couldn't abide by the fact that Fate's fickle finger digs around in my pudding. It's hubris, perhaps, but I like to think that when things in my life fall into place with nice, solid clicks, it's my doing, not Fate's.

And I'm not saying that my experience at WRW has altered my perspective entirely—haven't quite given up the idea that I am the "captain of my soul"—but WRW was part of a domino-effect that changed my life so utterly, I have to give a nod to the beneficent powers-that-be.

I came to WRW believing that other people were writers. Special people. Lucky people. People who were not me. I was a teacher. Writing was a "hobby." It didn't matter that I'd been writing voraciously for more than half my life, didn't matter that I'd published a book when I was in my mid-twenties. It wasn't a "real book." It was a YA series book. My name wasn't even on the cover.

On that first day, as I walked into the retreat center in the middle of dinner, I felt like an imposter.

What changed my life wasn't just learning the tools I needed to transform my decent story into a book that's attracted more than passing notice from agents. What set the dominoes ablaze were the little things. It was meeting thirty

special people who had the faith and confidence that I lacked, people who took time out of their own experiences to encourage me. It was long walks. It was laughing harder than I'd laughed in years.

And it was a six-word Gary-ism on a handout. The moment I read it, it was like my own personal spheres converged. A great cosmic hum. *"It might as well be me."*

Everything fell into place. Click. And one thing leads to another. They say marriages between two people of strong religious conviction are more likely to last. Once you have faith in one thing, it's easier to have faith in others. That's why I think Fate had

her digits in my pudding. She knew all I needed was that one thing to believe in—in this case, my writing—and everything else would follow.

And it did.

The literature for WRW 2002 included the quote: "The ten most important days of a novelist's career." When I first read it, I thought it was hyperbole, something like "World's Best BBQ" or "America's Favorite Toothpaste." But, six months after my stay at WRW, I can add my own intensifier to the hyperbolic marketing. WRW was ten of the most important days of my life.

An excerpt from Melissa's novel, *BANE*:

Edward and Colleen Collins were overjoyed the day that the Bundle of Joy Adoption Agency called to say that a bundle of joy—a female bundle—was ready and waiting for them. The Collinses—Edward and Colleen, and Grandma Jean and Grandpa Ed—piled into their Volvo Station Wagon, drove the five hours into the countryside of Louisiana to the BOJAA.

When they arrived, Nurse Nathalie, a lovely plump woman with pink carnation cheeks and blue tourmaline eyes, met them at the top of the stone staircase. In her arms she held a little pink thing swaddled in a little pink blanket.

"Well, hello y'all. Did you have a nice drive?" she said, the words dripping off her lips like ice cream off a cone in summer.

The Collinses didn't seem to hear her; they froze at the bottom of the stairs, staring with forgivable greed at the living package in her arms.

Nathalie continued, "Y'all must be the Collinses. This here is your very own bundle of joy—a female bundle. We've been calling her Evangeline, on account of the old Cajun story, but I'm quite sure you still have time to rename the little princess. She'll take to just about anything. At this age, they're like puppies, babies are. You can call them 'Sit Yerself Down,' and they don't mind one bit."

Colleen Collins was the first to start up the stone stairs. As she climbed, Colleen cocked her head to get a better look at the baby in Nathalie's arms. As soon as she reached the landing and laid her eyes upon the Baby Evangeline, she began to weep. After years and years of wanting and trying and crying and doctor visits and prayers and more prayers, she finally had a daughter.

