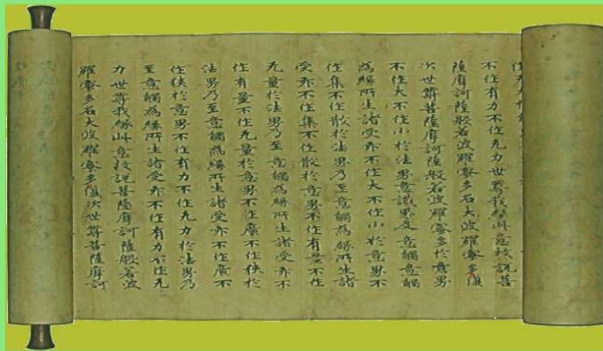


How and Why We Write

Writing It Real Members on the Vocation



A Writing It Real Anthology

Edited by Sheila Bender

Why & How We Write
Writing It Real Members on the Vocation

This anthology's contributors have generously allowed us to peek into their minds, hearts, rooms and relationships. It is with great pleasure that I dedicate this collection of their writings on why and how they write to all Writing It Real members for their own commitment to conjuring and writing words toward understanding and insight.

Sheila Bender, Editor

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With a multitude of thanks to Kurt VanderSluis for taking our Word files and creating this digital anthology.

Virginia Amis — Why I Write

I cannot express myself through dance. I have the music's beat inside me, but my feet and hips don't know how to react to it. I might tap my foot or click my fingers on hearing a tune, but my body betrays me when I try to express the music through it. Harmonies delight, syncopations intrigue. Even drum solos excite, but I can't seem to bring myself to dive inside them. I just look silly.

My inability to draw more than a pig doodle is not in question. There's no point in trying to express any image I envision by laying a pencil against paper. I try for a dog and someone asks if I've drawn a goat. Even if I try to shape something from clay, it's a disaster. When I was a child, I fashioned a woman's head from clay and gave her a flip hairdo. To me, it was my mother. When I gave it to her she complimented me on my skill at sculpting a turtle. Sigh.

Words, though, they beckon me. They invite me to their parties. They want me. How can I resist? In their midst, I am lifted from my brown easy chair onto a blanket in a flowering meadow. Instead of the early morning's darkness, I can feel the gentle sun on my face, watch the river's waters polish large gray boulders, hear an eagle scream. When I rise, I can run faster than my feet really carry me, scale mountains and not feel winded. I can look marvelous even if my hair is mussed.

With words, I command life, not as a despot, but to make it gentler, funnier, less painful. Maybe, make sense. I can take what really happened and shape it into what should have happened. I can make friends forgive me my blunders, erase my mistakes, bring loved ones back to life. Or, keep them close.

There is no waiting with words. At my whim they bring me a pizza and a new dress. They change the seasons, vacuum my floors, fill my bank account. Their power is unquestionable.

Words jostle me from restless waiting at the DMV and point me to notice a woman with spiky hair wearing fishnet stockings with her leather boots. Wouldn't she make the perfect character in your next novel, they tease. Yes. Yes, she would.

Words fill dark voids that threaten to swallow me. If I reach for them, they will pull me from despair, set me straight, give me hope. Though I doubt them sometimes, they never disappoint.

There is no resisting words. I've tried and failed. They will not be ignored.

So, if I want to dance, I'll swirl and twirl on the page. My word drawings will carry me where I never expected, and no one will mistake my sculptures for a turtle, unless that is what I intend. I accept their invitation to dance and create beauty. I can't resist.

I want everyone to come to this party.

That is why I write.

Susie Beal — Why Do I Write?

I write to bring my “me” closer
to unite all the mes that I am.
To make sense of who I am.
To keep going forward with the security
the past close behind.
To show my daughters a path,
my path, their path?
I write prose to share a lifetime of adventures.
I write poetry to be complete,
to discover who I am and what I’ve been.
I write because it keeps me in the moment.
I don’t want to lose these moments.
I write because there is nothing else I can do;
it fills my very bones.

Carol J. Wechsler Blatter — Why I Write

I write because I love to write. I cherish writing. It's my special gift. It is not a gift in a gold foil lined box where I find some glittery small something wrapped inside filmy flimsy pink tissue paper. It's not a thing. It's an experience. It's a gift which embraces my whole being.

I write because my thinking is aroused. Neurons in my brain are firing. My brain is re-wiring as each new word comes to me. All my dormant creative energy is released. Each written word I write is fresh air. I write in order to take a pause, a re-set, a renewal, like going to a spa where I relax as my body is inundated with pulsating splashes of foamy hot waters.

I write for healing during painful periods of grief, of loneliness, of sadness, of regret, of time passing, of missed opportunities, of self-doubt. Writing forgives. Writing befriends. Writing rewards. Writing supports. Writing is the good, nurturing parent, the parent who loves me unconditionally. Writing is the parent who never leaves me.

I write when winter's wrath descends. Five below zero. The streets are ice covered. No cars are on the road. Never mind the weather, no need for a parka, no need for a wool scarf, hat, and gloves, no need for double pairs of wool socks and boots that go up to my knees, I'm inside writing in warmth. I inhale steamy hot chocolate topped with a dollop of whipped cream. I sip it and write. I write when summer's temperature is ninety-five degrees with eighty per cent humidity. I am cool wearing an aqua tank top, white shorts, and sandals. A chilled glass of prickly pear ice tea with a slice of lemon and a long-striped straw inside sits next to my desk. I sip it and write. Writing is for all seasons.

I remember writing a book report in fifth grade about *Little Women*. That was May 18, 1953, sixty-seven years ago. Fortunately, Mother saved it. I see my eleven-year-old handwriting and I smile. I smile because of the words I chose even at that young age.

"I liked this book because it was like any family with its problems, its sadness and happiness. It didn't seem as if I was reading the book at all. It seemed as if I was one of the children."

I knew then that I loved to write. Words became my life teachers.

Now at age seventy-seven, I've discovered that I am a real writer. A published writer. What a surprise! It's been a long journey from then to now, to becoming the writer I am today. I am grateful for all I have learned and continue to learn as my writing grows.

Joan Connor — A Writer's Embrace

We form a relationship – my keyboard, my desires, and you, Dear Reader. As I quietly enter these words on my pristine google doc sheet, my eagerness to see how the process blossoms produces a much-anticipated adrenalin rush. I can delete. I can backspace. I can change my mind.

In what other form of communication do such prerogatives exist?

What other outlet allows me to reevaluate my thoughts, my concerns, my agonies?
Perhaps one – prayer life. Once again, though, I write my prayers so I can revisit them, meditate through each utterance, accept the Answers, and experience the Response. Excluding a few spontaneous outbursts, I write!

Phone or text a friend?

Not on my watch. Once the message "sends" there is no recall. Once the words push their obnoxious selves over my lips there is no recourse. There is no turning back. I trust the paper, the pen, the computer. I don't trust the friends.

I am freer when I write. I chatter along and the letters tumble like Scrabble tiles. My thoughts spill. I am comfortable knowing once it is on the paper I can reread, rethink, reevaluate and reduce. Ah, yes...the reduction in writing is so desirous.

"Reduce," the teacher instructs, "from 1000 words to 750 to 500."

I shall take out the blabbering, the pitter-patter, the yakkety-yak. It's all there awaiting this preening.

"Cut to the chase" is the demand. Give it to us in five sentences or fewer. I can write many phrases, construct myriad sentences, mull over thoughts, but what happens when I write for the reader?

What happens when it is not my own therapeutic ploy?

It is in my best interests to think of you, Dear Reader, aware that you have a choice to begin reading, to continue reading. What happens as I write for you as I am doing now? I feel responsible yet challenged to create a tantalizing buffet of thoughts unique in presentation. I desire cleverness, humor and yet, a tinge of emotionalism that you will connect with and say, "Get out of my head."

Writing with you in mind generates a desire to mingle with your thoughts. I retain the urge to reveal it all hoping that you will identify or, in the least, be captivated with the topic. It often takes off with a mind of its own and I allow it. And I will allow you to peer into my experiences without the gauzy curtain shielding the actual mess. I write because I can. And it is just this

simple fact that urges me to not give up. We all have desires to express ourselves but the unspeakable “you’re not good enough” will whisper in one’s conscious. Let it whisper.

I think of the most primitive folk art and the intricate beauty found as uninhibited persons share creations of expressions. So it can be with writing. We have primitive forms of artistic expressions in paintings. Let us not be encumbered with sentence structures and perfect punctuation. Let the thoughts flow and gel. The intricacies of presentation come later, even with the help of online tools.

Yes, I write because I can, and the act becomes a source of healing for my flounderings and decisions. I often write to decide. I can see the decision evolve as I write down circumstances and even the hoped-for results. Once I was distraught over the treatment I was receiving from a male friend. I won’t even give him the status of boyfriend. I wrote my heart onto the page, scribbled so fast and the insides of my thoughts took form with pen and paper. When time was up and as my haphazard conclusion flowed, it revealed to me abuse, control and my naivety. Healing began. I gained strength.

Want to know a secret? (And yes, after I write it I can delete this indulgence if I change my mind.) The relationship we have formed, my keyboard, my desires and you, Dear Reader, is growing into a more serious and embraceable familiarity. Commitment is about to begin as my trust builds. I sort, share and sanctify my thoughts, concerns, disenchantments and confessions. I trust my writings. I trust you, Dear Reader.

Shelagh Cosgrove — Mourning Pages

I was putting away the last few things from our Christmas on a high shelf in our hall closet. I had to stand on a stool because of the height, but even then, it was hard to see what was there and how the new stuff could fit in. All of a sudden, something came clattering down, hitting my hand but oh so quickly. I couldn't catch it. Then I saw what it was, in pieces on the floor, our son Peter's Christmas gift to us.

I looked at the broken pieces of Peter's sculpture and shook with grief, despair and helplessness over my son's illness and my own struggles to make a life. Writing is my way to quell the deep sadness.

What lay on the floor was the wooden sculpture Peter had made from wooden blocks of various shapes and sizes, each one painted in a bright primary color and mounted on a dark green block as its base. The red piece looks like a small birdhouse with a circular hole in it from which they could come and go; the blue piece looks like a cubist tree standing close to it; the yellow pieces, one stacked crookedly on top of another, resemble a couple of hay bales. In a very elemental, abstract sort of way, it's a pleasing design and must have taken Pete some time to paint the blocks individually and then assemble them in that configuration.

But in a flash and a crash, I saw the blue piece skittering across the wooden floor, and the tallest, red piece lying under the base instead of proudly standing on it. This was not just pieces of a broken sculpture I had let fall from that height—it was the "pieces" of my broken son, as well.

Pete was diagnosed with schizophrenia when he was nineteen years old (he's in his fifties now) and has had a long struggle with his emotions, medications, and difficult relationships with those who attempt to help him or at least be a friend. I'm just a mother—not a psychiatrist, mental health counselor or any kind of professional who has the expertise with such mental, emotional and physical problems. And he is sometimes very angry and belligerent with me, offering "biting the hand that feeds him" behavior when it comes to my attempts to love him, help him, or just to have time with him as a mother and son.

I've attended workshops on mental illness, been active in some of the stigma-busting activities of the local community where he lives, and I am a member of NAMI (National Association for Mental Illness). I've talked with many people about his condition.

He's a very intelligent man, writing poetry, creating artwork, mastering photography, and doing his best for the community he lives in, such as bringing people together to recycle plastic in creative ways, making art out of it instead of throwing it away. He's a musician, too, and plays the guitar and drums in groups or just for his own amusement. But the ferocious anger he turns towards the people who really do care—his own family—brought things to an all-time low after he got back home from his time with us this Christmas.

A stream of very nasty, hateful and threatening messages came in my phone just six days after I had driven him to the local bus station so he could get the bus back safely to his hometown. I fell

into deep despair about him, myself, and the impossibility of really ever doing anything for him that he can feel as support and love.

We are concerned for Peter's and our welfare when he gets into these states. My husband and I have now had a month of non-communication with him. We enlisted the aid of the police, filing a complaint about the harassment we were both no longer willing to accept. Just who he was calling on his cell phone while out smoking may have triggered something as a set-up for his rage later after he got home. We don't know.

I worry about him not being able to manage his life at all when rage and blame take over. We had the police check on him to be sure he was physically OK. There's no doubt we would drive to his place immediately if his life were in danger.

I wish he were able to trust that regular talk-therapy with an understanding counselor could help him. There are resources and people who could if he chose, but he doesn't choose. His mood-swings will continue to destroy the quality of his life. It is absolutely heartbreaking for me, but while I am "just his mother," I am also a human being with needs and feelings. Because without boundaries, my life will be finished, and that won't help Peter either, writing is my way to begin the process of putting pieces together.

The rest is a matter of time, self-care, and courage.

Debra Gilbreath — How I Write

My writing begins with a cup of tea and my journal, my first engagement with the day. The large kitchen window lets in the light and a garden view. Sometimes I write about the upcoming day or something that is on my mind. I may brainstorm about a current writing project or come up with a new idea, a thread or a storyline. I will slap down a quick draft. I do not concern myself with word choice or sequence or correct punctuation, I simply get my thoughts onto the page. If it is going well, a distinctive voice also arrives. Now I have the clay to work with.

Once I begin this process as a journal entry or a concept map, I often find myself in the flow, enjoying the moment, and I cannot stop writing until the ideas are spent. This can happen in an airport, on a bus, in a coffee shop or at my writing desk. At some point, I close the page or the file to walk away. More often than not I turn right around, open the piece back up and continue adding a new ah-ha.

The ideas can even come as an interruption in the middle of the night, I have to turn on the lamp, locate my glasses and a piece of paper. I am trying to get this urgent idea quickly down so that I can go back to sleep. I had resisted getting up to begin with. So out goes the lamp as I murmur a grateful sigh my head hits the warm pillow. But more often than not another connecting idea pops up, so important as not to be lost, I sit up to begin again. This process can go on for three or four rounds before I am finally left in peace.

I read, read, read, listening to suggestions from writing teachers and successful authors. As I write I hear them whisper phrases and insights. It is as if their cadence becomes mine and I can march forward with a more secure footing and a willingness to try something new. I can hear these authors encouraging me to keep going word after word.

I rely on plenty of revision. With some form, any form of rough draft in front of me I can comb through for improvements, cleaning things up to create a clearer picture. I read the piece over and over, rearranging sentences to make them more efficient, considering different vocabulary and constantly cutting excess words. The writing piece begins to take shape, I begin to feel more grounded and I cannot wait to find out where this process will take me.

Karin Goldberg — Why I Write

I write because I can't play the clarinet anymore. I miss the feeling of filling my lungs with air and having the sound come out as dark and velvety. Words will have to take its place. And that is where the difficulty lies.

How can I put into words what my life is like when it is all a song without words? When I go to an opera, there are surtitles projected above the stage translating what the Italian or German or even English is saying.

This long-standing practice of giving patrons the words to understand the opera in real-time makes the opera accessible to more people.

During the first part of my professional career, I often thought that I was toodling while Rome burned. Making music was not enough to assuage my moral convictions. I felt that I was not making a difference in the world.

How wrong that attitude was can only be seen through the lens of time. I know the power of music now. But it is too late for me to participate. I need words.

In the '90s, when I started to play and teach again, I had my music studio in the same room as my writing room. Sometimes, I would sit at my teak desk and write in my journal and then I would look over at my music stand with the etude I had been practicing. It was seamless, looking over from English to the language of music.

But now, I only have this one language. I do not feel proficient enough to write my deepest thoughts.

I remember an exceptional performance by Leontyne Price, the famous American soprano. She sang with our orchestra for Valentine's day performance. I was so fortunate to be sitting on stage in the orchestra. After she sang the famous aria from Madame Butterfly "Un Bel Di," there was a pause before the audience started to applaud. My friend and colleague Kerry, turned around to look at me; we both had tears in our eyes.

What else can move a person like this? What else can feel like love from notes on a page?

Words can. If only I can learn to sit and revel in the sound of the words. The sound of the keys, the sound of the pencil on paper, the sound of the red pen making corrections, the sound of the paper being ripped up, rewritten, resounds in finishing for now what I need to convey.

Cassandra Hamilton — Advice to the Undone Writer

- 1) There are points when working on a sizable piece like a book when you crack from the pressure of your efforts. You might recoil or float to another piece or seek to do anything other than create. You might even stop creating altogether. Don't. The key is to lean into the crack. Lean into your unexpected, irrepressible unfolding.
- 2) You've got to ride this thing you're creating like a bucking bronco. You're not after the eight second win. You're after riding the bronco until it surrenders its *soul*.
- 3) How brave are you? How tightly are you clinging to the story you tell yourself about yourself? Are you willing to face any rupture in your foundation? Can you brave stepping into its cracks? Are you willing to create from that unknowing?
- 4) See, it all begins with the heart. From there you may travel upon seemingly twisted roads, through fog and darkness ... even through patches of seeming clear blue skies. In the end, you'll find your winding path has been a straight trajectory toward home.
- 5) Of course, along the way it helps to have structure support your work and thematic boundaries to limit the content. Your creation will absorb these configurations. When done, none will know you used structure and boundaries as barriers for your soul to rebel upon, push back, bang against, crash down and burst through.
- 6) Redact or cut that which you consider too risky, if you must. But try to brave releasing your perilous thoughts for all to consider.
- 7) Remember: it's not the *whole* world considering your work. At best, only a few ten million or so readers will find your writings – if you're really, really lucky.
- 8) Did you notice how you didn't write a word while you fantasized of your success?
- 9) Write something now. Save yourself!
- 10) Sweetie, your creation grows via two things: persistence and following your heart. The first keeps you traveling your unique path and the second *carves* the path.
- 11) As you work perspective shifts. Embrace it. Use it. Manipulate it. Bow to it.
- 12) Make craft your bitch.
- 13) Making art is a series of disconnected, serious, heavy, sobbing, uproarious and cathartic planned accidents.
- 14) There comes a point when one needs to break away from the crowd to do what the soul insists needs doing.
- 15) There will come a day when you know *exactly* where you're headed with your creation. Then you will be less worried.
- 16) Leave fretting to taxmen and cubicle workers.
- 17) Remember: you must face the dark places in your life in order to embrace the light spaces. And, if you believe in Love, you must trust that in the end these things will work out.

J.K. Hayward-Trout — It's Puzzling

For me, a first draft of a new story is like breaking the seal on a brand-new box of a 1,000-piece puzzle. It's fun to shift through the shapes of my thoughts. I can usually write a few paragraphs down quickly without too much effort. I'm positively assured it will be easier to complete this task each time because I have a few years of experience putting things together now, but it is never cake for me.

I am always wrestling with grammar, not to mention how horrible I am at spelling, and I rarely ever write sequentially. So, I must spend time flipping the words, phrases and ideas face up so I may study them and move them around on the page. After I have color categorized and separated out all the edge pieces, it's time to start the real work of writing. It is a great feeling to see the shape of what has possibilities as I "write in" the corners that become an outline, and the outline becomes the frame.

Of course, during this process, I will remember little random thoughts, and I get excited that these little random(s) may fit in somewhere, and even though I'm never one hundred percent sure I will be able to retrieve those bits on my laptop, and I am also concerned that I will end up with too many pieces, I continually collect and try to place them. There is a small jolt-of-joy when I find those extra pieces correctly filed in a logical category on my computer, and somehow they magically snap into place.

Sometimes, I get lucky and I pull out a cluster of paragraphs that work seamlessly, like puzzle pieces that have not been separated because the jigsaw blade was too dull to sever the image, or more likely, I didn't take the time to break them apart fully before throwing everything back in the box. Either way I am grateful for the find.

There are times when I wish I could just write fluidly like I have seen other writers do when they are sitting right next to me in a Writing It Real seminar. And, I would like to say it's not discouraging to witness that, but that would be a lie. However, I am getting better with the tools I do have, so I am still in the game of becoming a better puzzle-master.

Sometimes, I feel I'm making progress when all the pieces are talking to me at the same time. Some are asking me to be: funny but righteous, intelligent but warm, badass but authentic. When I'm in this phase, I am at most risk for going rogue. My flight or fight kicks in. *Will she force herself to unleash a defensive action, or will she run like Alice's rabbit down an Etsy, Facebook or Pinterest hole? Stay tuned to find out.* Goodness writing can be challenging, and the thing that keeps me in this battle is I am riddled with curiosity, which is my only real weapon.

If I get past this point, there is one more obstacle I must overcome: the vortex of anxiety where pieces of thoughts are hurling at me, smacking me around, and causing me to spin and change direction only to find myself back at the start of the maze again. If I let this get to me for too long I go silent. I start to wonder if this is just a waste of time for me. I'm not unique, and frankly, who do I think I am? What if I can't finish it? What if it's already been done? And, it has already

been done; so much so that this sentence is a redundant catchphrase from the oldest, best-selling books in recorded history like the Tanakh and Bible.

And, what if it isn't even physically possible to do? With the last puzzle I tried to put together my cat stole several pieces right off the table-top and chewed them up until they were almost indiscernible from her Meow Mix, although a slightly lighter grey. And I did not find these missing links under the couch until after I had thrown the rest of the box away.

But despite all the uncomfortable that I am learning to be more comfortable with, I am still compelled to seek and explore life's mysteries through writing. I can't help but think what if I do discover something new? What if I find out a little bit more of who I am? *Yikes!* And, where I might, actually, belong? What happens if I discover the shock of how *I am impossibly unique* and the awe of how I am not so much so? What if the image on the puzzle box I thought was one thing turned out to be a misprint and I was a part of uncovering that happy mistake? What if it turned out to be maybe even something meaningful? Or, beautiful.

Toke Hoppenbrouwers — Writing Exemplifies the Varying Balance Between Control and Surrender Exquisitely

To try to catch my thoughts when I'm between sleep and wakefulness is as futile as catching birds. Yet I sense that this is the time when one thought may unexpectedly rub against another and provide insight. This is the time that my analytical boundaries become porous; I may hit an unexpected association. At the very least, this is the time I allow illogical thoughts into my consciousness, as well as ideas about how events, be they fortuitous or painful, may serve a purpose. At such times I allow a larger force, an unknown Self to entertain the idea that such events are opportunities to grow

I write a sentence; what I write speaks to me and I listen. I answer sometimes, and I can be moved; I cry and I may argue as well. We have a truce. I begin listening again and my writing resumes the talking. After a while we rest. Until a thought comes up and I share it with my writing and my writing is reminded of something similar, is surprised, is rebellious and refuses. And I nudge it, I beseech it to listen and we proceed together. We hack away at the underbrush, walk through dense woods, embrace each other. Feeling secure together, my writing and I, we cover ground; the moving feels good. The terrain is new and we both want more.

David D. Horowitz — Dusk, Crows, and Wine

August 1974. I will soon begin my sophomore year at the University of Washington as a philosophy major. I dabble in poetry, though. I keep a notebook in which I jot down phrases, especially after returning from solo bicycle meanderings through Seattle neighborhoods, such as Ballard, Magnolia, Greenwood, Wallingford, and Queen Anne. My scribblings are clichés: “waves shine like diamonds in the bay” and “breezes blow through the leaves.” But... for three consecutive weeks the sunsets are a fabulous concoction of red, orange, pink, purple, cirrus wisps and veils and shadows, and below shine newly lit lamps against darkening hillsides. Fabulous! I must do this beauty honor! “Red-orange-purple beauty!” Well, that feels too long, hyphenated, and inexact. “Smoky red orange pink peach...” Okay, but still: it’s too long. And then, one evening late in the month, after watching the sunsets each evening for three weeks from a vantage point near the house where I live at North 45th Street and Greenwood Avenue North: “SALMON!”

Yes, “salmon” perfectly describes the color and resonates with compatible Northwest connotations—in one word. One word! I race back home to tell my mother of my discovery, and I immediately write “salmon dusk” in my notebook and begin writing poems (long ago forgotten) using phrases like “salmon light” and “salmon twilight.” I’ve got a long way to go, but here’s a breakthrough! The perfect descriptive word. I must experience this excitement again!

And since then I have focused my richest life energy on finding the right word, phrase, sentence rhythm, line break, rhyme scheme, tone—honoring beauty, character, landscape, and virtue, and sometimes skewering pretension or my own foibles. I still thrill, though, to find a word or phrase that simply feels right. And I do recall some of these moments. For example, for years when I walked about the University of Washington campus, above and around me hundreds of crows would sometimes comment in cacophonous raucous chatter. But, again, I was haunted by the impulse to describe their sound. “Crows cackle,” “crows chatter,” “crows argue,” “crows threaten.” No, no: inexact or clichéd or too abstract, not vivid and immediate. And, then, again, after perhaps five years of occasionally trying to find the right phrase, a phrase struck me one evening as I walked on a campus path below a crow-noisy elm: crows jeer. Yes, “jeer”! How vivid, authentic, concise: just right!

And at sixty-four I still find such discoveries thrilling. Now, as a formal poet, I am concerned with far more than one phrase. Indeed, a good formal poem is like a snowflake in words, and each detail must effectively cohere with the others. But vivid physical descriptions are wonderful building blocks with which to construct a poem that not only fits a pattern but resonates with people, and inspires them to a moment of new empathy, insight, appreciation, or love. So, here’s to salmon sunsets and jeering crows! And, of course, here’s to the joyful, humbling challenge of trying to write pieces that move and inspire others.

A last note. I aspire to and respect the skill inherent in writing a good epigram. When I was a literary novice I wrote hundreds of bad or not-quite-there epigrams. In the early 1990s, though, my work on them improved. Here is perhaps the first epigram I wrote that I genuinely feel resonated in a way that tells me: *Yes, that’s it!*

Note to a Cynic

A grape in brine
Cannot yield wine.

Gary Langford — Professor Pencil

I started as an oral storyteller (including when I was head talker or prefect as my schools called this), which taught me how to write and tell stories in tight structures from responses in body language, such as my audience looking at their watches or their eyes drifting away or dozing off! If so, I tended to round my stories off on the promise of “better for your audience to want more than less” and this permeated all my work, from fiction to poetry to plays to non-fiction, including when I edited and directed other writers in performances, usually selecting poetry before fiction, whether individually or in groups. Even my radio stories of around 2,000 words took an actor 13-15 minutes to read, which for a writer may feel longer, especially if you are not used to performing and lose your audience in drifting air.

My oral start, then, contributed to my stories being published in a city newspaper when I was still a boy on a bike, as the oral taught me how to write in a traditional structure of attention, development to reach a crisis point, then a resolution, which I use in much of my work, including poetry.

Writing before any performance is how most writers do it, just as becoming a teacher writer rather than a commercial writer enabled me to write on what I wished to. I taught mostly at a tertiary campus, Sydney, Australia, in my thirty years as Professor Pencil, a term of endearment in a formal ceremony by my Creative Writing students, as I encouraged them to write on one of the five most important things in their lives at the time. My editorial suggestions were in pencil or the equivalent on a computer, so they used them or rubbed them out if they wished, whether in the CW major in a BA through to a doctorate.

Marks might not change but it was still their work, often personal, in the writing journey.

I have two peak periods as a teacher writer. The first was when I founded and ran a theatre at my campus. My fiction and poetry continued but I also directed many shows, including writing drama sketches and five musicals to help finance the theatre. Why? I brought my daughter up, bringing her to weekend rehearsals, just as she later performed in a few shows and was a dance choreographer. Then came the Creative Writing major I founded, where I ran the Masters of Arts in Creative Writing for a decade, writing my least books in this period, due to editing around two million words a year, mostly in the major project in the MA in CW, where students had a minimum of two drafts with many giving me three drafts to edit, notably the fiction and poetry collections that were published. More than half of the students that did this degree were my BA students out of many applicants each year that turned into zero when I left, showing that much in the creative field is built around one or two people.

We all have symbols in our lives and work. One of mine is fifty-six when I returned to being a full-time writer as it was the age my mother and a playwright friend were when they passed away. I changed from being a teacher writer to a painter writer as I still am. Why? My granddaughters. I taught them how to paint, from sketches to acrylic and oil paintings, even if they now mostly do digital art, including my youngest granddaughter producing a digital film, *Gary Langford's Story*, where she interviews me as the author of 42 books, along with half of

these using my paintings as illustrations, wherever the publisher may be. Still a teenager, she won an award for the film, just as her paintings have and sold. She's a youngster I'm rather fond of.

My best novel on women is *Vanities*, based on my daughter growing up, where she trusted me, as her daughters do, and my students did, knowing I was able to protect the personal in creative arts to ensure it was nearly all doing art, not analysis, other than on their own work.

Words liberate us all. Sylvia Plath may have been young when her life ended, but imagine if she had NOT been a poet?

We can challenge ourselves if we wish to in anything that we write. My latest book of poetry is *100 Tiny Poems* where half of the poems are one to three lines, with the longest being seven poems of seven lines each in the final section. The less the language, the harder it is to write effectively. I had to get shorter after *The Best Sonnets of Gary Langford!* The tinys were a challenge, so here's a tiny to end on for you: Look wise in case language lets you down.

Wynne Leon — Go Forward

My daughter's co-op preschool had little road signs that the kids played with on the playground – **STOP, GO, ONE WAY, DO NOT ENTER**. My daughter had just turned three when the signs first appeared and the kids loved them, maybe because it was a race to get one, possibly because they were easy to wield but primarily because they conferred power onto the sign holder. Then I watched them evolve with the signs as they started to read and understand the real-world order that the signs represented. They began to create their own games to play with each other using the signs.

Power. Order. Connection. Just like with the kids and their signs, this is what words do for me. When I use my words, I have power to alter, even if just slightly, the experience of others, hopefully without beating them about the head. And the exercise of finding the right words to communicate brings order to my inner experience as it forces me to do the work of sorting through my sensations and memories to find the authentic narrative. When I do that to the best of my ability, I build a bridge to others so that even if we aren't connected in time and space, we are connected by words.

I recently crossed that bridge of words when I happened upon an email from my dad that he sent 11 months before he died suddenly in a bike accident. There wasn't anything of import in the email, just chit chat about everyday news and then he ended his email:

So, Wynne, have a good week. Work hard enough to be faithful to your clients and keep on making good and healthy space for yourself along the way! With much love. Dad
PS I am going to send you a text pic of what I look at every day that is right alongside my desk chair ... at one end of my family-picture-wall. It is one of my favorite pictures of you and me ever and makes me smile just to look at it!

Reading this, I feel wrapped once again in his warmth and love even though he's been gone for more than five years. I write because someday I want those I love to feel me walking with them, even when I'm no longer present. I write because I want my words to be signs to them: **STOP** worrying. **GO** forward with confidence. **ONE WAY** to achieve your dreams is to always keep trying. **DO NOT ENTERTAIN** any doubts that I am still with you and love you.

Dami Roelse — Why I Write

I write my story. A story that will connect me with you, the reader, your questions, and our collective purpose. I tell my story to find out what lives deep inside me and let you see what I see. I want to light up your eyes with images that connect with dreams in your mind and your body. I write so you too will step out and go on your journey. Somehow, somewhere our journeys intersect. Your journey brings life to mine. It is only in journeying together that we will live our oneness.

Dorothy Ross — Why Do I Write?

I write because I can. I'm not much of a public speaker. I get tongue-tied in front of an audience, but words flow easily when I'm at my keyboard.

An early riser, I sit at the kitchen table with my steaming coffee mug and my laptop. I pull up the New York Times, my primary source for news and current events. Although the *Times* can no longer boast of providing "all the news that's fit to print," I like to think they strive to remain objective. Do I agree with the editors' perspective on the issue of the day or do I reject their assessments? I write to find out.

When I'm writing, I'm talking to myself, testing my feelings about the day's most controversial news story, which could be anything from human causes of killer wildfires to unprovoked attacks on terrorist strongholds. Most often my mental debates take an epistolary form. My file of letters to editors is bulging with opinion pieces, most of which will never be mailed.

It's alone at the kitchen table that I occasionally indulge in an "I should have said" rant. This morning, punching the keys for emphasis, I composed a brilliant retort to my neighbor's blustery insistence on his constitutional right to bear arms. I'm a second amendment abolitionist.

In these confusing political times my morning notes address problems like impeachment and the presidential primaries. But not always. Today a fat gray squirrel scampering up a tree trunk, bushy tail aloft, defying gravity, left me feeling old and awkward. Shaking off that self-pitying stance, I switched files and typed a mea culpa into my gratitude journal. I reminded myself how lucky I am to have a nice home, a loving husband, two devoted daughters—and freedom of speech. Thanks to the Bill of Rights, I can say or write whatever I wish.

Barbara Simmons — When Silence Gives Way to Sound

Some days I feel most creative when I'm not writing, but thinking about what I want to write about, letting everything that my eyes gaze upon become beautiful possibilities for *soundscape*s that might appear days or weeks or months later. My process recoils from a "poem-in-a-box" definition; I rather think my "how" as a writer is best described by the many small journals, notepads, personal folders on my computer, filled with comments like the one from February 2017: *A new year – new writings – new/old me – entry for today is 'lose control' per Natalie Goldberg, and yet, for me, much of my life, I believe has been without control – no sense of direction unless someone else was giving it to me, and me with a pseudo-sense of a path. New year, new directions – we'll see!* And then, I take off – the censor gone, the paths open before me, not trying too hard to find the right metaphor or analogy, but feeling my way towards a true center. I keep a finger labyrinth on my desk, reminding me of the many paths that thinking, often followed by writing, will take me – reminding me not to worry about the center at the beginning, but to feel the gentle boundaries of the many paths that lead not to emptiness, but to other ways in.

Guided by the paths set forth in old entries, my writer's self takes off in many directions, starting with a thought, like a journal entry, or something I'll read by someone else, like this year's January 5th 2020 reading of Wendell Berry's poem, "How to be a Poet (to remind myself)", which I found on Maria Popova's *Brainpickings* weekly web message. Here, the final stanza reminds me to listen deeply, to write simply, to channel into meaning what may have lain in chaos.

*Accept what comes from silence.
Make the best you can of it.
Of the little words that come
out of the silence, like prayers
prayed back to the one who prays,
make a poem that does not disturb
the silence from which it came.*

Perhaps it is the reminder that what possesses me is what I will write about. The memories that enfold me and mystify me. The stories that were never uttered to me, but hinted at. The moments hidden from me to protect me and ultimately bind me – this is what writing frees. Relationships that hurt rather than healed gave rise to words that could begin mending. The aloneness that battens and lines my life celebrates solitude and doesn't fear it: the writer's moments as pre-writing gives way to whispering, then writing, and, maybe, illumination. Finitude, which becomes more poignant as I age, is easier a companion than I had imagined because of my writing. My words have become agents for eternity. It's all in the thinking, the taking of a turn of phrase: who might be the voice-over for my life, what is a 'sketch artist,' why did my dream last night take me in high heels down a climbing wall – getting to another level – deeper into what my dream might actually mean?

And, finally, it's the sitting, the introspecting of self, the awareness of all who will accompany me when I begin to write – whether they are physically present or not – that taps into the both

desert and lake, that forms the piece. The statement. The utterance that will not disturb though perhaps born of distress. The soul's appearance as a poem.

Nancy Smiler Levinson — Creating a Revised Writing Self

I began my writing journey penciling adolescent musings on a “Big Red Notebook” purchased for a nickel at Woolworth’s Five and Dime. In time I went on to reporting for newspapers and magazines, then researched and wrote nonfiction and historical fiction books for young readers. Never once, throughout those years, did I ever attempt to pen a poem.

I neither mimicked A.A. Milne, despite having put *Wheezles and Sneezles* to memory, nor scribbled words rhythmically like Robert Louis Stevenson’s swing soaring *up in the air so blue*. I had not even tried to write a poem as short as William Carlos Williams’ poignant plum-eating twelve lines.

When I reached my mid-sixties, my husband, Irwin, a decade older, was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. He had been a loving husband, devoted father, and “by trade” an internist and cardiologist.

I, a loving wife, also became a devoted caregiver over an inordinately long time. Accepting and adjusting to new *normalcy* meant continual new *normal* with his increasing decline.

Limited time and energy robbed my writing life. How could I awaken and breathe the morning air each day without going into my home office and sitting down to write?

“Are you journaling?” friends asked about our situation. “Taking notes? Keeping a diary?”

A diary? Like – Monday: hard day; went to neurologist this morning; husband refused to speak to him. Tuesday: he lost the car at the mall. Wednesday: Thinking of attending a support group.

No. The tedium of such would have crushed me further. Along with the daily and nightly dealings with dementia, I was unable to research and work on a history book, leaving me to feel empty and anxious. I had nothing to hold onto for myself. But I knew that to keep upright and take on the role of caregiving I had to write.

I don’t recall ever having had serious “writer’s block.” But I’d heard teachers advise the stymied to sit down and just start writing. *Anything*. Are you hungry? Thirsty? What do you see out your window? Even if you repeatedly type, “I don’t know what to write,” that sentence can begin to morph into something else.

So, I sat down and started typing. *Anything*. How I surprised myself! Suddenly I was in the present tense, second person. I was *speaking* to my husband. I had no instruction, no guide other than poetry I’d read in literature classes. Moreover, I could never have imagined that “pouring my heart out” eventually would become a book of poetic narrative.

I wrote as I lived our heartbreaking lives, the story as we stumbled and struggled, wept, laughed, loved, and kept going. I didn’t write daily, and I didn’t blather the mundane, but selected events, incidents, and feelings, and the manuscript grew, becoming a meaningful ongoing project.

Indeed, I wrote throughout a decade. Imagine the stacks of disorganized work on the floor! What to do? A stroke of fortune led me to Writing It Real and the writing community founder/poet/teacher, Sheila Bender. Fortune struck a second time with Sheila's wise suggestions: deleting repetition, restructuring my narrative, tightening, focusing on events within that structure, such as dealing with the driving issue (Not), hospital ER visits, family gatherings, evacuation during a threatening fire nearby. This guidance was invaluable.

Of course, working on completing this project also was a great help after my husband's death, during my immediate time of grief.

Here is the beginning when I sat down writing just "anything."

*I love you with a passion and respect
as I never imagined to exist in my adolescent
reveries long ago:
your keen mind,
your intelligence, wit,
your curiosity
about the immense
and the microscopic
your compassion
and sensitivity,
the curve of your crooked smile,
your touch, your embrace —
endear me so that I am often breathless
at the thought of you,
as every evening when you came home
I stirred at the sound of your key.*

*Once you were a physician,
mending the lives of others,
but there are no cures for you.
Once you were a teacher,
sharing your knowledge,
but you are the small student again
needing the most rudimentary of lessons.
Once you were a sailor,
adept with a boat and its tangled riggings;
you knew the warning signs of a storm,
how to take shelter in a cove.
There is no lifesaving float to be tossed,
no inlet to tie up to.
Denial is your marina for a while.*

From *Moments of Dawn: A Poetic Memoir of Love & Family, Affliction & Affirmation*

Judith Sornberger — Avoidance and Writing: The Roberta Mickel Method

You would not believe how many things I've done today to avoid beginning this essay. (Except, if you're a writer, you probably would.) I say writing means more to me than just about anything, but I would do almost anything some days to postpone putting pen to paper (including going shopping for a new, magic pen), especially when it comes to breaking the ice on a new writing project. This morning, for instance, I called a friend to commiserate on how little we've been writing. Then I scrubbed a pan that had soaked overnight in the sink, grocery shopped, stopped in at my local bookstore to check on a book I'd ordered (knowing full well it couldn't have arrived yet) and, of course, had to browse. Then I went through my closet, wondering if it might be time to donate everything below size sixteen, my current size, which caused me to go for a power walk.

Usually, I procrastinate until the need to write becomes stronger than my fear and consequent resistance, which can take days or even weeks. But today I suddenly remembered the Roberta Mickel Method, named—by my sister and me—after our mother, its first practitioner. Mom worked half-time as a bookkeeper, a job she loved. One reason she enjoyed it was that working outside the home two-and-a-half days made the other two-and-a-half weekdays at home especially precious. Nevertheless, on those at-home days, there were plenty of at-home tasks she didn't particularly enjoy. That was where her genius came in. After making her to-do list, she would choose the least appealing task, let's say cleaning bathrooms, and tell herself she only had to work on it for half an hour. Then she could do whatever she pleased for half—or sometimes even a whole—hour. In summer that might mean sitting on the patio with a cigarette and a Diet Pepsi, tilting her head back so the sun bathed her face. In winter it might be tucking her feet beneath her as she read on her gold velvet couch.

Before retirement, I delighted in almost every aspect of college teaching—dreaming up exciting new courses, choosing textbooks, planning class sessions, and especially interacting with students in the classroom. But I constantly bemoaned my lack of writing time. And I hated grading papers, putting off starting to read a batch until the students began timidly asking when I might return them. I usually claimed to be reading them very closely, when the truth was that I hadn't been able to bear removing them from my briefcase.

Wish I could say that I was writing instead of grading. But mostly I was puttering around the house, cruising Facebook, or deciding tonight was the perfect time to try that new and complicated recipe for paella, necessitating a two-hour round trip to a store that carried fresh mussels. At least I later wrote a poem about making that paella.

Then I would agonize on the phone to my sister who would remind me of the Roberta Mickel Method. By that time, I'd have collected so many papers that thirty minutes of grading wouldn't have made a dent. So I'd set a timer for an hour, grade like a madwoman, and, when it buzzed, I'd go for a walk, read, or maybe even begin a poem. Since writing wasn't my most loathsome chore, it rose to the category of reward.

Yet it feels wrong that I would use the same method to get going on a piece of writing that I've used for grading, especially since, once I get started, I love to write (some days more than others). Mom's method provides a doorway into the place where writing can become absolute bliss. I tell myself all I have to do is buckle myself into my writing chair and work for half an hour, and, most days, I'm still spreading ink across the page an hour or two later. For to begin, whether you're cleaning bathrooms or writing, is always the hardest part. As Goethe (second only to my mother in the wisdom department) famously wrote: "Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it."

Take now, for instance. I began scribbling away on this essay at 1pm, telling myself I'd work for half an hour. Now it's 2:30, and I've written, relatively painlessly, and somewhat joyously, an hour longer than planned. If Roberta Mickel were still alive, I think she might be cheering.

Penne Wilson — To Write is to Believe, to Create, and to Grow

I started writing poetry in high school initially as a demand from my mother, who was the chair of the English department, that I write something for the school's literary magazine. My first attempts were expressions of my doubts about my worth and my future. It was freeing to write; others could command, but the words and the images were my own. I wrote as a young woman in love for the first time, I wrote as a wife and a mother, I wrote through his affair and my own. I wrote through divorce and for the passion that I found in a new love. I wrote through depression and joy. I wrote to see my words come to life which helped me to self-analyze and to appreciate my weaknesses and my strengths.

I continue to write to create images to share with others, hoping that I can find the right words, and the form that will help others to see what I see and feel what I feel and perhaps relate to the images blooming in print. Hopefully, my words can give insight and freedom to others. I write to grow as a person; each attempt at a new form, at a new prompt, at the thoughts that wander restlessly through my dreams at night provides a light into my soul.

I do, however, find it much easier to stay on track and focused by using Sheila's classes which provide structure and feedback, both of which I seem to crave. I was also encouraged that I had three poems published in the first literary magazine on the island where I live, so I have submitted more for the next edition. I think I glowed when I was walking into the General Store and a woman stopped me and said, "Oh, I recognize you; you're the poet."

I have created a writing space separate from my workspace and try to do as Sheila says, write at least 10 minutes a day. Those ten minutes usually become much more as once I get started, the words just climb over one another to get out. Beginning with my first poetry reading last year, I have learned much about audience and how my words affect others, which I hope to utilize to find more places to publish. I share my work more often with friends and family and it's always a little surprising who likes and dislikes each piece and why. I have this problem with a fear of rejection so putting my writing, which is an extension of myself, out where others can see and respond is scary. But I am learning that not liking a particular piece doesn't mean that my audience doesn't like me. So all I can say is "Write on!"

Sheila Bender — Acknowledging

That we write because we feel the need,
That we write because we want to reflect on the meaning in our experience,
That we write because we want to get something down for others to read after we are gone,
That we write because we are alive and writing makes us more alive,
That we write because it is a form of play,
That we write because our words bring us to others with whom our hearts and minds resonate,
That we write because it makes us the people we want to be
Means writing is a gift we cannot refuse to accept.

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Virginia Amis is a lawyer and a writer, who spends her days in the courtroom and her nights and weekends writing. A transplant from Pittsburgh to the Pacific Northwest, she writes in that setting, bringing nature and characters to life through her stories. She has written two fiction novels and is working on a third. Her short stories have been published in *Beyond the Norm*, a Scribes Valley Publishing anthology, *Perspectives Magazine*, *Reminisce Extra*, and 101words.com.

Writer and budding poet **Suzy Beal** spent twenty-five years helping seniors put their stories to paper and in 2010 decided it was time to write her own life story. She began studying with Sheila Bender and has finished her memoir. She also writes personal essays and is currently studying poetry. A portion of Suzy's memoir has been published in monthly installments with truestorieswelltold.com for the past year and a half. Suzy's writing has appeared in the Story Circle Network's Journal, 101 Words, and Central Oregon Writer's Guild. She lives and writes from Bend, Oregon.

Port Townsend resident **Sheila Bender** is a poet, essayist, and memoirist. After years of producing books on writing, she founded WritingItReal.com in 2002 as a way to further help those who write from personal experience whatever the genre. She has taught for the Centrum Foundation, The Writers' Workshope, Hugo House, and further from home, The Learning Curve in Tucson, AZ and the Kahini program in Hawaii, as well as Il Chioistro in Tuscany, Italy. She is delighted to be able to produce this anthology with her husband Kurt VanderSluis.

Carol Wechsler Blatter, resident of Tucson, AZ, delights in writing. Her recent publications include a personal essay published in *Chaleur Press*, a story in *Story Circle Network Journal*, a poem in an anthology titled *Real Women Write, Growing Old*. She has also received honorable mention in non-fiction writings for *New Millennium Writings*. Her lyric poem was published in *Covenant of the Generations* by Women of Reform Judaism. She has a long-term career as a psychotherapist in private practice. She is a wife, mother, and grandmother, enjoying all that she learns from her very special, precious granddaughter.

Columbus, Ohio resident, **Shelagh Cosgrove**, taught literature and composition at Ohio University in Athens. On moving to Columbus, she organized journal workshops at Borders Book Shop and Grandview Heights Public Library. Retired, she is enjoying the time and structure to become a writer herself. She has written a number of short memoirs she regularly shares with a writers' group and is currently working on a full-length memoir that focuses on her life growing up in England before emigrating to the United States in 1968. Shelagh finds writing to be wonderfully revelatory of meaning and connection. It provides a sense of purpose in her life, and she enjoys the processes of editing and revision that help to "grow" new drafts. It has become a great joy and preoccupation for her now—her own life and experiences being what she draws on.

As a current student of Lindenwood University, **Joan Connor** is pursuing an MFA in creative writing. She is a retired educator and travels frequently with two dogs and a very tolerant husband in their RV. Her writing endeavors include nonfiction essays, poetry and a recent interest in tanka. Joan divides her time between Coeur d Alene, ID and Kerrville, TX considering

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both spots a “little touch of heaven.” She also divides her time between writing, piano practicing, pursuing the fiddle and vintage trailer shows.

As an educator **Debra Gilbreath** has worked as a Special Education teacher, a classroom teacher, a school librarian, and a Department of Ed Program Manager. She now lives and writes overlooking Discovery Bay on the Olympic Peninsula.

Karin Goldberg is a Canadian writer, living in SW Ontario. She has had essays published in several anthologies and is working on the second draft of a memoir. She played for the Edmonton Symphony in Alberta, taught and played chamber music, and worked as a counsellor for abused women and children. She is proud to be a member of the Writing it Real Community.

Cassandra Hamilton is a disabled artist/writer with traumatic brain injury and loss of central vision in one eye who creates from dreams, shamanic journeys and life. The former theater director has shown her artworks at The Mystic Museum of Art, Marlborough Arts Center, Cromwell Creative District, Prometheus Dreaming, *The Door Opener Magazine* and *MUSED*, a [BellaOnline Literary Review](#). Her writing has appeared in *101 Words*, *The Door Opener Magazine*, *Rivereast News Bulletin* and *The Glastonbury Citizen*. Currently, she teaches Active Dreaming (a synthesis of dreamwork and shamanism) and is writing a memoir while polishing a chapbook of poetry and flash fiction. You can see more of her work and contact her at [BearDog Dreaming](#).

J.K. Hayward-Trout was born an artist. Even as a toddler she drew on the walls behind her dresser because her mother didn't appreciate her passion. She eventually grew out of bedroom murals and became a graphic artist. Ultimately, she branched out into the fine art's world but, she has always been drawn (pun intended) to write. Recently she has had a few short stories published in: *Perspectives Magazine*, *101 Words*, and *One Book, One Town*. She is now currently finishing up her first novella.

Toke Hoppenbrouwers was born before WWII in the Netherlands. She completed undergraduate work in Psychology at the University of Utrecht. In the 1960's she immigrated to the US and began her studies of Neuroscience and Clinical Psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her scientific focus has been Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) at the University of Southern California where over a forty-year career she published more scientific articles than her age and completed the book *SIDS* with her colleague, Joan Hodgman, M.D. During the past years, she has traveled to Indonesia to study SIDS. In 1996, Her novel *Autumn Sea* received a Small Press Award and her nonfiction pieces have appeared in various literary magazines. During the first month of 2020, she has worked with Sheila Bender on completion of her memoir.

David D. Horowitz founded and manages Rose Alley Press, which primarily publishes books of Pacific Northwest formal poetry. His poems have appeared in *Raven Chronicles*, *Terrain.org*, *The New Formalist*, *The Lyric*, and *Coffee Poems*, and many other journals and anthologies. His essays regularly appear online in *Exterminating Angel Magazine*. Through Rose Alley Press (rosealleypress.com) he has published seventeen titles, including his own latest collection,

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Cathedral and Highrise, and three poetry anthologies. David frequently organizes and hosts poetry readings in and around Seattle.

Melbourne and Christchurch writer, **Gary Langford**, has been a teacher writer for much of his life, even if now a painter writer, showing why 21 of his 42 books use his paintings. He links language with set events, whether in his fiction, textbooks, poetry or plays. All have the simple ethos of telling a story to move people, as do many of his paintings, reflected in the importance of titles and those that use his poetry by hand or clued to the canvass, showing his background in these art forms of serious comedy. Perhaps his lasting piece as a teacher writer is *writing can teach the blind to see and the deaf to hear*.

Pat LaPointe is the editor of *Changes In Life* — a monthly online newsletter for women and is a contributing editor of the anthology: *The Woman I've Become: 37 Women Share Their Journeys From Toxic Relationships to Self-Empowerment*. Pat has counseled women who have been victims of physical, domestic, and sexual abuse. In addition, she facilitates on-site and online women's writing groups. Pat is a past president of the Story Circle Network. Her essays and short stories have been published widely. She is currently working on a novel and an anthology of essays from women having been victims of bullying by other women. www.changesinlife.com

Wynne Leon is an optimist, an enthusiast of endurance sports and a woman intent in charting her own path. Which is a combination that has led to an unconventional life. When she was younger a life of adventure meant climbing mountains, traveling the world and being an entrepreneur. More recently, it's been starting a family as a single parent at age 46, having another child at age 50 and adopting a highly-strung kitten, even though she really is a dog person. But through all phases, she has been an enthusiastic reader and fan of the written word. Her writing projects include technical computer manuals, articles about meditation and parenting, like "[Having Children Didn't Happen the Way I Planned](#)," and a memoir about spirituality, solace and her relationship with her beloved father, [Finding My Father's Faith](#).

Dami Roelse is a published author and certified life coach. Born in Holland, Dami has traveled the world extensively, lived on different continents and has learned to use her travel as inspiration for living. Dami uses long distance hiking and backpacking as a means to deepen her connection with nature and the universe. She writes about the benefits of walking, hiking and backpacking for women50plus. Her book, *Walking Gone Wild, How to lose your age on the trail*, published by Fuze, explores and explains walking, hiking, and backpacking as a means to re-energizing life for women as they age. Her next book, *Fly Free, a memoir about love, loss and walking the path* has been accepted by New Sarum Press and is due out June 1, 2020. You can follow Dami at <http://www.transformation-travel.com>; Facebook pages @dami.roelse and @WalkingWomen50plus; Twitter @dami97520 and Instagram @walkingwoman50plus.

Dorothy Ross has lived in Northern California for most of her adult life. Before retiring, she worked at UC Davis as a writer, editor, and program director. Smitten with personal essays since taking her first memoirs class twenty years ago, Ross has written more than 200 pieces, many of which had their genesis in Sheila Bender's classes. Her work has been published by: the Story Circle Network, the *Fourth & Sycamore* literary journal, *True Stories Well Told*, *Writing It Real*,

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and the *Oasis Journal*. Ross has assembled a collection of fifty personal essays in her recently published memoir, [*Not Just a Secretary*](#). She is thrilled that she will become a great-grandmother in late August.

Bostonian by birth, Californian by residence, **Barbara Simmons** has written poetry and creative non-fiction since she was a young girl. Having retired from her educator's roles as an English teacher, a college admissions officer, and a high school guidance counselor, Barbara includes in her reclaimed time a writing group she formed, GOTS Writers (Gifts of the Spirit); serving as a Stephen Minister (a Christian care ministry); traveling with her husband to see family who live around the world; reading lots; and taking on-line workshops with Sheila Bender (since the early 2000's!) Writing continues to serve her as companion and provocateur, memory-keeper and catapult to as yet un-lived moments. Having works published in online journals as well as print publications (*Hamline LitLink*, *Soul-Lit*, *New Verse News*, *OASIS*, *300 Days of Sun*, among others) helps her share these moments with others.

In most recent years, **Nancy Smiler Levinson** has had poems and creative nonfiction published in numerous literary journals and anthologies, including *Poetica*, *Voice of Eve*, *Jewish Literary Journal*, *The Copperfield Review*, *Burningword*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Constellations*, and elsewhere. One essay, "On Line Dating in the Golden Years," appeared in an anthology with the no-nonsense title, "Getting Old," was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. In past chapters of her life, Nancy published some thirty books for young readers, focusing on a special interest in history, historical fiction, and biography. She lives in Los Angeles, where currently she is fired up writing resistance poetry.

Judith Sornberger's most recent poetry collection *I Call to You from Time* was published in June 2019 by Wipf & Stock, and CavanKerry Press published *Practicing the World* in 2018. Her full-length collection *Open Heart* is from Calyx Books. She is the author of five chapbooks, including the prize-winning *Wal-Mart Orchid* (Evening Street Press). Her memoir *The Accidental Pilgrim: Finding God and His Mother in Tuscany* was published by Shanti Arts in 2015. Sornberger has taught creative writing in many venues, including prisons, colleges, and universities. As Professor of English at Mansfield University, she taught poetry and creative nonfiction writing, as well as creating and teaching in the Women's Studies Program for 25 years. A Nebraska native, Judith now lives on the side of a mountain outside Wellsboro, PA.

After years of living on Colorado's eastern plains and New Mexico's high desert, teacher, poet, and artist, **Penne Wilson** found the magic she always imagined on Anderson Island, WA. Starting as a junior high English teacher in 1970, Penne has taught English from junior high through college. She has built and administered charter schools and curriculum and now teaches English online for a virtual high school in Michigan. Working as an educator has been her life's work, but her passion has always been using words to create images. Last summer, in a workshop with Sheila Bender, she gained the confidence she needed to seek new ways to share her love of writing.