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Come in...and be captivated...



### Writers' Craft Box

What this section is intended to do:  
Give writers suggested hints, resources, and advice.

How to use: Pick and choose what you feel is most helpful and derive inspiration from it- most importantly, **HAVE FUN!**

What a Writers' Craft Box is: Say you're doing an art project and you want to spice it up a bit. You reach into a seemingly bottomless box full of colorful art/craft supplies and choose only the things that speak to you. You take only what you need to feel that you've fully expressed yourself. Then, you go about doing your individual project adding just the right amount of everything you've chosen until you reach a product that suits you completely. So, this is on that concept. Reach in, find the things that inspire you, use the tools



"Arts and Crafts" N.M.B Copyright 2008

that get your writing going and see it as fulfilling your self-expression as opposed to following rules.

Writing is art and art is supposed to be fun, relaxing, healing and nurturing. It's all work and it's all play at the same time. A Writers' Craft Box is whatever your imagination needs it to be- a lifeboat, the spark of an idea, a strike of metaphorical lightning, a reminder, or simply the recommendation of a good book. Feel free to sit back and break out the crayons. Coloring outside the lines is heartily encouraged.

## *Q&A with Virginia Franklin Campbell, President of the National League of American Pen Women*



*As the nation celebrates its independence, we celebrate a national organization of independent women. Recognized in the Congressional Record by the House of Representatives last year, the National League of American Pen Women, which is "the oldest women's arts organization in*

*America," holds a pivotal place in the history and future of American art, music, and literature. It is the 120th anniversary of this organization whose members have included legends, leaders, and pioneers such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Maya Angelou, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Pearl S. Buck who was the first woman in the US to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.*

*As we celebrate the anniversary of our women-founded publication, I feel compelled to honor this women-founded organization that has been with me for nearly all the years that the magazine has been in existence. In proximity to the painting of the dove that drove the inception of *The Write Place at the Write Time*, hangs another treasured talisman of my professional journey—my certificate of membership in the NLAPW.*

*I became a Letters member in 2009. I was informed that I was one of the organization's youngest members at that time. In that same conversation with the national headquarters, the woman I was speaking with joked that a significant member benefit was longevity. Turns out, however, that this would appear to be true as I've come to know of a number of lifetime members who are still gloriously, furiously creating past ninety. These women are as vibrant, timeless, and authentic as the jewels mixed into the paints of the artist who first introduced to the League. There's a kind of life force that they possess, fueled by pursuing their passions. The branch I was associated with was three hours away, so I would travel six hours round trip just to be a part of what felt (and feels) more like an identity than a designation of Pen Woman.*

*It is my privilege to discuss with NLAPW President, Virginia Franklin Campbell, all that a Pen Woman embodies, what exciting expansions and changes have taken place, outreach efforts to the community, and educational programs for young readers. Campbell's theme for her administration is "We Are What We Create." It is a timely message for everyone working to shape the world. For all whom this organization positively affects, members and non-members, women, men, and children, it is a chapter in our culture that continues by coming together.*

Q&A with Virginia Franklin Campbell, President of the National League of American Pen Women

by Nicole M. Bouchard

- Who a Pen Woman is

A small sampling of past Pen Women includes the dynamic figures of Eleanor Roosevelt, Pulitzer-prize winning novelist and short story writer Eudora Welty, sculptress Vinnie Ream (most famous for being awarded a commission by Congress at age eighteen for a full-size sculpture of Abraham Lincoln in 1866), and writer Marian Longfellow O'Donoghue (niece of poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and one of “The Dauntless Three” who, foreseeing denial to other professional clubs that were traditionally “men-only,” founded the National League of American Pen Women with Margaret Sullivan Burke and Anna Sanborn Hamilton).

It has been my experience in meeting and befriending Pen Women from various branches, that you would know a Pen Woman in a crowd. She might be the one in brightly-colored, flowing scarves that moves and speaks as a living piece of art enhancing the room. She might be seated at the front or center, holding court with a strong voice, strong opinions, and a cosmopolitan sense of style and story that tells of having traveled the world. She might be the one who quietly sits beside you to say something profound about who you are, truly seeing you, the first time you meet. These women are so often trailblazers, founders, barrier-breakers, and whatever their age, they are evergreen—I’ve known a few women to host great book signings after transitioning to nursing homes because a Pen Woman never stops creating. She couldn’t. It’s a part of who she is.

Taking into account the legacies of past and present Pen Women, as the current president of the League, what would you say to and about the kind of woman that belongs with the NLAPW—the type the League would look for, the type who would find a sense of creative community within it? What are some of your most memorable encounters with members or personal experiences with what it means to be a member that define your idea of the women the League symbolically represents?

**What you say about Pen Women is accurate, they are a very special set of women who thrive on listening to their creative spirit and proactively pursue their passions. The three-pronged thrust—art, letters, and music, makes us unique and adds great dimension to our organization. We are all creatives, and we all face the same dilemmas, the same joys, and the same**

**frustrations. We join together to form a strong bond of women engaged in adding to the beauty of the world around us through writing, art, and music. We are the oldest women's arts organization in America and we celebrate our uniqueness in America's culture.**

**We attract women who seek camaraderie while pursuing their endeavors. The single most important reason women want to be Pen Women, and stay on as Pen Women, is the mutual support we are able to give each other. The branches are superb in providing that to their members, but the Members-at-Large often miss out on that immediate interaction, so we are introducing ways in which members who are more isolated can share their most recent trials and achievements by connecting through the internet with all members of this sisterhood.**

**When I first became a Pen Woman, I was attending a branch meeting, and, as usual, we were sharing our professional achievements, when one of the most esteemed members in the branch announced that she had once again received a refusal on a book she wanted published before she died. She was so discouraged that I spoke up and said that I had had five musical compositions rejected for publication recently. She looked up with a brighter face and said, "You mean musicians get that same rejection?" She knew that we do, but I thought it was what being a Pen Woman is all about, encouraging our sisters along their journey.**

**Recently I was visiting a branch in my role as President, and we broke the meeting for lunch. I was having a conversation with a member as she helped an older woman navigate the buffet line, carrying her plate, and getting her comfortably situated, all the while continuing the conversation with me. As I observed this kindness unfolding, I said to myself, "That is a Pen Woman." Helping and encouraging others, whether it be addressing struggles with the latest painting or writing, or assisting them in some manner to be more comfortable, are hallmarks of our calling.**

- Changes and Growth in Over a Century

This summer marks the 120th anniversary of the NLAPW. There has been prolific parallel change and growth in the country and the organization. From seventeen women in a room in 1897 hoping to discover “mutual aid, advice, and future development” from their unification, to a League that has been home to over fifty-five thousand members, this fruitful vision has undoubtedly yielded pivotal contributions to shaping the evolving national panorama of women in the arts and vice versa.

a) Talk to us about some of the most recent changes and their importance in expanding our perceptions of artistic influence, such as adding “Allied Professional” as a membership option for those associated with the arts (curators, gallery owners, art history teachers...) and updating the process for active and associate contemporary composer membership, etc.

**I am incredibly excited about our new category “Allied Professional.” I have been advocating for this for more than 15 years—it had to be and it has finally happened. We have essentially expanded our opportunities for membership 100%. Allowing the performer, the actress, the art, music, and literary teachers, and a host of other allied participants in the arts to join is thrilling. We are finally recognizing creatives across the broad spectrum of the arts. Composers of music must have the performer to interpret their compositions, the playwright was accepted, but heretofore not the woman who actually told the story through her talent. This opens up broader visions for the organization, and with the expanded options for composers, it brings us into the 21st century.**

**I feel our charter members were strong women seeking recognition in a world that wanted to keep them down, but they rose up and said, “Hey, male-dominated society, take note, we are here, too!” I believe that now, 120 years later, we are doing the same thing, realizing that society and culture have changed, and we need to include these creative women. I am particularly gratified that we have enlarged our vision of what constitutes musical composition. We will always honor and appreciate the woman who crafts a score for a chamber ensemble, symphony orchestra, or mixed voice choral group, but the person inspired to write a captivating melody and add her selected chord symbols to it has a place at the table, too. The latter is a fact of**

**life in contemporary musical circles, and we needed to embrace that.**

b) The NLAPW site talks about the gains made as well as the challenges yet to be overcome. In researching the history of women in the 20th century for this Q&A, I came across a webpage from the early 2000s under the title “Women in the Twentieth Century and Beyond,” by Kimberly M. Radek, a Women in Literature instructor at Illinois Valley Community College, about the strides and setbacks of the different decades—how there seemed to be a pattern of two steps forward, one step back (particularly in times of national upheaval or uncertainty). There are current issues for the arts and for women that would seem to belong to the struggle of previous generations, arising again. In our last issue, as part of her commentary for our Insights page, best-selling author Erica Bauermeister wrote: “And to those who say they are tired, that we’ve fought this battle before, I say that’s what the words are for. Because you never stop fighting, or writing. We always build on the words that came before us, just as our words will provide the foundation for the future.”

Through its outreach education efforts for the classroom, for preservation and heightened awareness of the arts, for the empowerment and advancement of generations of professional women, what are some of the ways the League keeps true to the words of its mission and why do you feel it is more relevant now than ever to “build on the words that came before us” and steer our future?

**One of the subjects always on my mind is our outreach efforts in the community to assist others in inspiring and developing their own talents, because our mission has ordained that this is what we are called to do. Branches who thrive are out in the community DOING SOMETHING. It is what keeps the branches and the League alive.**

**We are introducing a new outreach program we are calling EARS, *Engaging All Readers for Success*. It is a very simple program and can be done by all our members, including the Members-at-Large—it is simply making contact with a local elementary school and volunteering to sit and listen to children read. It is a marvelous program because we are all aware that reading is a key to success in life. This will encourage children to want to read aloud, and can significantly affect their success in**

**developing that skill. In essence, we are building on the words that came before us, and instilling those words in young students, many of whom may be eligible to be Pen Women someday, for a lifetime. We have many other outreach programs in place, and all of these efforts are truly the keys to validating our existence.**

- Personal Favorite and Future Vision

With diverse member and non-member offerings of workshops, seminars, publications, and national events, what is one of your favorite things that NLAPW has to offer to enrich our enjoyment of art, music, and letters? What plans are on the horizon?

**Outreach is the element that must be ever-present in order for our League to continue and be here in another 120 years. We must be in the community wearing our badge of creativity, or we will lose our focus. I helped design a program in my own branch, Pikes Peak Branch in Colorado Springs, to take poetry into the schools and teach second graders who were, for the most part, from economically challenged environments that didn't have the support and nurturing that would be optimal. As a teacher and as a Pen Woman, it was exhilarating to see how boys and girls alike were able to create their little masterpieces. To see their smiles and their excitement was so inspiring, and I felt that we were definitely making a difference in those young lives. We were broadening their horizons and opening up their minds to something new, something lasting.**

**My theme for my administration [as NLAPW President] is "We Are What We Create," and I believe that if each Pen Women imagines that daily as she works with her art, we will be a vibrant League and will continue to thrive for decades to come.**

To learn more about the National League of American Pen Women and ways to get involved, visit:  
<http://www.nlapw.org/>



## *Essay*

*Editor's Note: One of the things I've loved over the years about being the editor of this magazine has been connecting with my contributors. The vast collection of long, profound conversations in my memory is something I cherish. For this issue alone, I can think of at least a half dozen such conversations where a contributor and I spoke of life, craft, shared interests or beliefs. One of these talks translated into the essay you're about to read.*

*There was a recurrent theme I was noticing amongst writers I'd worked with either through the magazine or my separate content editing and coaching practice for manuscripts. Feeling it was significant, I wanted to shed some light on it in the empowerment issue. I wanted various minds to weigh in, and I obtained the added benefit of a balance of male and female points-of-view with how it is tackled here and in the interview section. In both spaces, I wanted to explore a phenomenon of what I call "achievement amnesia." I decided that the first method of investigation would be an essay in the Craft Box. I immediately thought of who I would recruit to do some theoretical excavation on this.*

*I e-mailed Noelle—a seasoned Craft Box veteran with a signature, engaging style—and arranged a time to talk. Once we had spent some time catching up, sharing thoughts and laughs, we got down to work. I wanted to emphasize the need to reclaim parts of our personal history. There has been a good deal said about rewriting our pasts for empowerment, but I wanted to focus on the raw material we already have that is overlooked fact, parts of the past that are representative bits of golden confidence we're not tapping into. I was thinking about the concept of mining our life stories for those glittering moments we overlook or forget or diminish or ignore out of some societally taught or self-imposed humility that limits how we claim the victories (large and small) that help to define us. Those moments we require to be able to move forward assuredly toward the future.*

*I talked about how we're always told to "own" our decisions, our shortcomings, and mistakes. My questions had to do with why we don't naturally do the same with our triumphs. I touched upon the ever-present warnings out there about over-glorification, and the irony of how those who practice it wouldn't heed the warnings and those who wouldn't*

*presume to even approach it, internalize those warnings, restricting themselves further.*

*Noelle was both absorbing and commenting, offering on-point perspectives and her own anecdotes. As I knew she would, she developed her angle on how she wanted to approach this and particularly took an interest in how it affects women as well as the writing profession. We discussed progress and regression in attitudes regarding gender roles and traded examples. Noelle's conviction is contagious, and I knew the essay I'd receive would, for any reader, female or male, provoke potent responses to the hard questions she'd pose, hitting right at the heart of the matter.*

*It is with great gratitude to Noelle that I introduce the following essay which skillfully explores key elements of the aforementioned phenomenon. I am reminded of this quote by Muriel Rukeyser: "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life? The world would split open." May this essay trigger the start of that beautiful process.*

**Craft Box Contributor Bio:** Author, editor, writing coach, writing workshop leader, and spiritual counselor, Noelle Sterne has published over 400 writing craft articles, personal essays, spiritual pieces, short stories, and poems in print and online magazines and blogs, as well as several columns in writing publications.

Also an academic editor and coach, with a Ph.D. from Columbia University, Noelle helps doctoral students wrestling with their dissertations and publishes articles in several blogs for academics. Her book *Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams* (Unity Books, 2011) contains examples from her practice, writing, and other aspects of life to help readers release regrets, relabel their past, and reach lifelong yearnings. Her *Challenges in Writing Your Dissertation: Coping With the Emotional, Interpersonal, and Spiritual Struggles* (Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2015) further aids doctoral candidates toward their degrees.

Website: <http://www.trustyourlifenow.com/>

Reclaiming Our Blessed Lives

by Noelle Sterne

How often do we remember, much less dwell on, the *good* things in our lives, the things we've done, accomplished, given? How often do we acknowledge and applaud ourselves instead of chronically criticizing and condemning? How often do we recognize or admit how *great* we are?

Answers: Most likely, from never to certainly not enough.

Every writer probably remembers, like branding irons seared on the brain, negative critiques and reviews and flaws pointed out. We hardly give a butterfly's whisper to the praise. And when we sweep over our lives, we somehow "forget" the positive pieces and lose sight of them. We see only the failures, flops, stupidities, misjudgments, inadvertent wrong turns, willful decisions that led to disaster, all the wrongs we committed and successes we didn't achieve.

What about the other things? Our fine decisions, our solid actions, our unselfish helping of others, and our joyful giving to ourselves? If I asked you now, how many of these instances "of golden confidence" [1] could you describe? I bet not many.

### **A Woman's Issue?**

The women I know seem to suffer more from this resolute emphasis on what's-wrong-with-me than the men, not that men don't have it too. But I think it's primarily a woman's lot—with roots in the post-Victorian, 1950s false modesty, seemly humility.

*Oh, I'm just a...*

*It was only a...*

*It was nothing.*

*My mother and aunt and grandmother do it all the time.*

*Thanks, but I had a lot of help.*

Such reticent declarations, as if our chromosomes dictate that we always bow and step to the background, do nothing less than wipe us out,

eviscerate us, flatten us.

Our selves shrink back, shrivel, fade, all but vanish. What remains is shadow, an almost-apparition going through the motions of being a good little girl, lady, wife, mother, nurse...never taking credit for that *other*, and major, magnificent part of ourselves. In our underestimation and trivialization, we remain half of our whole selves.

And worse. The more we practice this minimizing, the easier and more natural it gets. It seems so—*right*. Well, isn't that what everyone does? Isn't that what everyone says? Isn't that what's expected?

If you're reluctantly nodding in the affirmative, ask next, At what cost? To ourselves, our self-esteem, our balance, our place in the world, and our desires for what we know is in us to do and give?

Answer again: At all costs. We wipe the floor with ourselves, just as we bend automatically to wipe up every floor.

Our betrayal of ourselves escalates and can lodge in anxiety, overeating, overshopping, overdrinking, other escapes, illnesses, depression, even suicidal thoughts. We know something's wrong at the base and yet, supported by society's approval of our shadow-self, we cannot reach far enough inside to fix it.

### **The Paradox**

Why are women especially so reticent? Do we not have a grand heritage? Look at the Mother Earth myths of all cultures, Gaia, woman/mother mysterious seat of generativity and creativity, powerful object of awe and worship. Sadly, our individual experiences and unshakable feelings of smallness belie those great myths.

But today—hurrah!—more women work, more women are CEOs, more women are having children when they choose (at earlier or later ages) or choosing whether or not to have children. More women are astronauts, generals, horse racers, drag racers, engineers, astrophysicists, electricians, cops, welders, judges, senators, even admittedly less-than-rapturous mothers. And yet...

Despite all the advances, the mindset prevails for women: back to the kitchen, the nursery, the church, the sexual object. Back to the overgiving and doing everything for others, clenched jaw blocking *No* and bobble-head nodding *Yes*. Recently, in 2017, incredibly, a U.S. senator defended the North Dakota “blue laws,” commenting that wives should spend Sundays catering to their husbands, “[m]aking him breakfast, bringing it to him in bed and then after that go [to] take your kids for a walk.”[2]

How far have we really come?

### **Why Are We So Reticent to Credit Ourselves?**

Self-deprecation is certainly learned and unthinking behavior, from one female generation to the next and lurking in all women we know and meet. Our lockstep diffidence is complicated by guilts and fears. If we do accept and acknowledge ourselves, we feel (a) we won’t be able to repeat the good thing (fluke mentality), (b) something bad will happen, and (c) it’s not seemly, comely, ladylike, modest. Too, our minus-ing of ourselves, I maintain, is unfortunately supported by religion. The Christian/Jewish/Muslim views of women appear only somewhat enlightened even today and are still represented by the head coverings of modesty and humility, bowing before the Lord and lord. If we show unseemly hubris, like Oedipus and Jesus we will eventually be struck down.

### **The Impostress Syndrome**

You may have heard of the impostor syndrome, or may be living it without the label. The impostor syndrome is the persistent nagging that, despite our accomplishments and kudos from others, we are really a fake, a fraud, and terrified “everyone” will find out. A poignant and almost unbelievable example: Maya Angelou said, “I have written 11 books, but each time I think, ‘Uh oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody, and they’re going to find me out.’” [3]

Researchers earlier assumed that the impostor syndrome is more prevalent in women, especially high-achieving women, than men, but more recent studies indicate that it strikes both genders regularly. I have two writer friends. Elizabeth is an extremely high-achieving woman, having recently received her *second* doctorate, with over a dozen published articles in scholarly journals, and about to accept a top post at a national university.

James is an extremely high-achieving man, a writer who just sealed a three-book contract with a major house.

Following yet another article acceptance, Elizabeth whispered to me, “They didn’t find out this time, but I’m sure they will next time. I really don’t know how to do scholarship.” Soon after James told me his great news, he said, “How the hell am I going to keep up the whole thing? They’ll find out I really can’t write.”

And what do we writers always say, a contagious meme, when someone compliments our writing? “Thank you for your kind words.” *Kind?* What the hell does that mean? The people who compliment us aren’t being kind. They’re being honest, admiring, maybe a little jealous.

What does our response really say? It goes way beyond modesty or shyness, I think. Our almost rote response says we’re stepping back back back, curtsying, deferring to what we think is the other person’s charity at (they assume) some effortless production. As if we didn’t agonize over the words, squeeze them out (maybe with intermittent heavenly flowing), suffer poisonous doubts and despairs, torture ourselves questioning the value of what we wrote. As if (a total fiction) we hardly care.

Instead, when someone compliments us, our response should be, as spiritual teacher and leader Louise Hay counsels, “Just smile and say ‘Thank You.’” [4]

### **The Difference Between Hubris and Wholesome Credit**

Maybe we’re afraid that, if we accept the compliment without disclaimer (“Oh, this old thing!”), we’ll be accused of hubris, or worse. Too much pride, too much confidence. Look what happened to Oedipus, who was sure he outwitted his “fate.” Do we feel that our fate is accepting our retiring, blushing, protesting-greatness stance? Does accepting the compliment telegraph inordinate egotism, overglorification of ourselves?

I firmly believe not.

If, on the other hand, we’re tempted to take in compliments too easily, we can rest in the knowledge that, as writers, nothing is guaranteed. The success of one piece doesn’t assure the success of the next, even without impostor symptoms or overblown pride in a particular production. Each

new work is a new test, a new forging, a new discovery and demand to trust. When we remember the cursed-blessed process, we may accept compliments without that obsequious disclaimer and with only smiles and genuine thanks.

### **Why Accept—or Rebuff—the Praise?**

To accept the compliments gracefully means more than a learned response. Acceptance means we feel and know that we deserve the praise. Ah, there's the rub. Having been conditioned to demean, detract, undeserve, how do we change our entire frame of reference?

Psychologist and personal growth specialist Gay Hendricks offers insight. In *The Big Leap*, he points out that we all have borders, boundaries of joy, like pain, an “upper limit.” [5] He says, “Each of us has an inner thermostat setting that determines how much love, success and creativity we allow ourselves to enjoy.” That thermostat “holds us back from enjoying all . . . that's rightfully ours.” [6] We feel and fear that by giving to ourselves we are taking from others their resources and glories. So we hold ourselves back.

With such deep-seated (and irrational) bases, and our unconscious roiling like a typhoon-ridden ocean, we cover over, tamp ourselves down, minimize, and divorce ourselves from enjoying, even conceding, our successes.

### **How to Reframe and Reclaim**

Is there hope? Of course. We must ask ourselves, in strong, commanding voices, Whose life are we living? Are such tyrannies and knotty psychological explanations only excuses or reasons to squelch ourselves, our accomplishments, and our talents? To identify and admit our barriers paradoxically serves us, not so we can wallow in them but recognize and definitively deny them, reject them, and gain courage from the dismissals.

Hendricks and others suggest that we use our magnificent writers' imaginations to write ourselves a new story, or as life teacher Wayne Dyer puts it, give our lives “a new job description.” [7] We are not weak but strong, not reticent but bold, not pushing down our victories but claiming and celebrating them for all to see. And these declarations mean both the small and large ones: “I got up early. Stayed in bed later. Held a door for

someone. Refused the brownie. Called the editor. Finished the story. Got the award.”

Our victories, as much as, or more than, our failures, are integral to us and even define us.

Maybe we're afraid to own our triumphs, not from Hendricks' explanations but another. As spiritual teacher Marianne Williamson suggests, maybe we fear our incredible beauty and power:

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? [8]*

And Williamson asks the final, self-accepting question: "Actually, who are you *not* to be?" [9]

Does this question—and your answer—help you claim and reclaim yourself? If we don't own our successes, beauty, greatness, we're buying into the assumption that we must be less than who we really are. Such an assumption denies the path to who we can fully be, in our writing and our lives. Let us not cut down, inhibit, abort our true potential and who we deserve to be.

If you need another reason, here it is. As we unearth and begin (gently, if need be) to acknowledge and publicize our victories, we also help others. Our self-conquerings and acknowledgments inspire. Details may be different, and gender hardly matters, but the feel, the tone, the tenor of our firm and joyous self-recognition, are what others relate to and gain sustenance and courage from.

In a self-affirming circle, the more we courageously step forward and unabashedly embrace our positives, the more we help others to do the same, and the more we internalize that strength and courage.

So, let us throw out those old parental and other should-ing voices. Those voices, from their own hollow sense of inadequacy and bitterness, echoed down our years and polluted them. We no longer need the draining messages. Let our own voices supplant them and ring out. Let us claim and embrace with complete deserving our successes, achievements, and full



selves. We are wholly worthy to take in and live all the good and joy of our world.

#### ENDNOTES

[1] Nicole M. Bouchard, personal communication, June 1, 2017.

[2] Jenavieve Hatch, "Lawmaker Wants Women to Spend Sundays Making Husbands Breakfast In Bed," *Huffington Post*, February 6, 2017, [www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lawmaker-wants-women-to-spend-sundays-making-husbands-breakfast-in-bed\\_us\\_5898816ce4b040613137c57c](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lawmaker-wants-women-to-spend-sundays-making-husbands-breakfast-in-bed_us_5898816ce4b040613137c57c).

[3] Carl Richards, "Learning to Deal With the Impostor Syndrome," *New York Times*, October 26, 2015, [www.nytimes.com/2015/10/26/your-money/learning-to-deal-with-the-impostor-syndrome.html? r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/26/your-money/learning-to-deal-with-the-impostor-syndrome.html? r=0)

[4] Louise L. Hay, *You Can Heal Your Life* (2nd ed., Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 1984), p. 115.

[5] Gay Hendricks, *The Big Leap: Conquer Your Hidden Fear and Take Life to the Next Level* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010), p. 2.

[6] Hendricks, p. 20.

[7] Wayne Dyer, *10 Secrets for Success and Inner Peace* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2001), p. 75.

[8] Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), p. 190. For women especially, see also LiYana Silver, *Feminine Genius: The Provocative Path to Waking Up and Turning On the Wisdom of Being a Woman* (Louisville, CO: Sounds True, 2017).

[9] Williamson, p. 190.

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***Writers' Challenge!***

From the Editor:

This Writers' Challenge gave credence to its name. It proved a "challenge" indeed, yet not in the way we might have imagined.

Using the three provided sources of inspiration, entrants were to craft a poem, short story, painting, collage, photo, or short film about transformations and new beginnings. There were words from Rilke about starts, dreams, and becoming "a beginner." There was discussion of the spring equinox and its 2017 theme of transformation. Finally, there was a line provided that was to be incorporated into the entry (whether in full or broken up into segments and phrases).

The magazine, very much alive and full of its own opinions and ideas about direction, speaks volumes. It chatters in our editorial minds *all the time* and orchestrates things we may or may not have planned on. Sometimes, we'd like it to be quiet, to slow down, and just go with the flow so we can feel we exerted some measure of control. The magazine answers that it feels the same way about us. It's been an exhausting, albeit enlightening education in humbleness to stand still and listen—truly listen to one another. But we do. That's how we're able to accomplish things far beyond us. The magazine communicates intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. The fact that there are thousands of voices within its one voice is what gives the imparted messages such importance.

Regarding this edition of Writers' Challenge, the first thing we "heard" was a stunning silence. This was an instance of *be careful what you wish for* because we didn't want quiet and certainly didn't expect to get it. The early deadline came and went. For the first time ever, not a single entry. The contest inbox echoed its emptiness. Agonizing over the details of the contest, we considered whether we hadn't explained it well enough or whether the line provided was too long, too abstract, too something that restricted creativity. We extended the deadline and thought surely, *surely*, we'd get enthusiastic entries pouring in bountifully as always.

This was when we started hearing, receiving, and translating faint indications of why this contest had not produced the response of the others. Ultimately, we did receive a trickle of entries—nowhere near usual volumes—and though the writing itself was of a fine caliber, these few entries departed from the qualifying contest parameters and its intended

themes. They carried the weight of the conflicts and complexities we're all seeing, learning about, living at this time. There are the issues going on around us and as though the outside world is being reflected in our inner worlds, many of us are facing our own obstacles during this period. A creative celebration of beginnings and transformative possibilities seemed elusive. We understood.

The Challenge told entrants: "Create what you wish to see." The hard part is that people are having difficulty seeing what they wish, seeing instead, from both sides of the fence, things they can't believe. This is why the winter-spring issue was a response, a vehicle of expression, a call to inspiration, a message of comfort in togetherness. This is why the current anniversary issue is about empowerment, choice, change, and self-nurturing to be able to better nurture others in turn. It's a prescription of care for ills few of us in our shared humanity are immune to.

So what to do about the Challenge? Its prize is about giving back to the causes and charities that give so many tangible and intangible gifts to our existence. What better way to do this than to do it together? Instead of one person "winning" and deciding the cause or charity we at the magazine are going to donate \$50 to, how about *everyone* "wins" by everyone getting a vote in how we donate? In our last issue, we extended our hand to you, holding strong in these uncertain days. In this issue, using your free hand, reach out to someone or something else and keep extending that circle.

We'd like to decide soon where our donation will go, so please send your votes about great causes and charities you passionately believe in by 8/1 to our submissions e-mail address: submissions (at) thewriteplaceatthewritetime.org.

In dedication to all of us experiencing these changes on deep empathetic and personal levels, to all of us aspiring to discover the transformative opportunities in this time, I crafted a basic, humble example of what the original intention for the contest had been, utilizing the too long, too abstract, too something line we'd provided broken up into parts. The inspiration came by way of transforming my perceptions. Instead of seeing the plague of gypsy moth caterpillars that has descended upon certain areas of New England, causing these areas to look like locations from a Stephen King novel this summer, I used the word "caterpillar" as a spark and researched butterfly caterpillars instead. I hadn't expected that what started

out as a siege of my yard would later inspire something holding the metaphors I wasn't even entirely aware I was seeking.

I read about how the butterfly has a heart the length of its body. I read about how caterpillars have six pairs of eyes yet can only sense amounts of light, and cannot form a clear picture of what they are perceiving. I read about how the caterpillar stops eating to prepare to go into the cocoon state. I thought about the concept of spiritual retreat. I thought about the need to have some time removed from the everyday modern "more" culture of hyperconsumerism and digital devices and "social" platforms that tend to further distance us from one another. It brought to mind mentalities of feeding our internal hungers with figurative fast-food fixes. I thought about ownership of opportunity in obstacles and how a liberating, higher perspective begins with taking a moment to glance up from the day to day, breaking from the limited plane of vision.

This poem isn't about an individual, but rather any and everyone who is striving for wings right now, acknowledging the challenges, and seeking answers. I share it with gratitude because the results of the contest told me what I needed to know to better build this empowerment issue. What I learn from my cherished readers, writers, and artists is essential for the evolving soul of the magazine and helps me to be the editor the publication needs. Here's to flight for us all:

I've been suspended in a gossamer shell—  
Inverted, isolated, incubating  
I hear nothing but the body-length heartbeat  
Of every dynamic dream  
Dreaming me into being

When I emerge from this  
Wearing the colors of where I've been  
They will say it was chaos  
That forged this new incarnation  
I prefer to lay claim to circumstance

I will say there was choice in favor of change  
With too many eyes I could see nothing  
With too many limbs I was earthbound  
I consumed all I could  
Until the *all* was consuming me

I need wings for this world  
One day I will be seen  
Flying banners baptized by the light  
They will look up from their lives  
I will ask them to join me

Poem by Nicole M. B.



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