

## [The Write Place At the Write Time](#)

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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



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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.

Ms. Momyer has an MFA in fiction, a Ph.D. in literature, and reads fiction for Hotel Amerika. She teaches writing and literature and has work appearing in 'Exquisite Corpse,' 'Infinity's Kitchen,' 'Record Magazine,' 'Fiction at Work,' and 'The Southwestern Review.'

Writing the Real: Creating Compelling Fiction and Nonfiction with Truth

By Heather Momyer

“But that’s how it really happened—this is true!”

Of course writers often use personal experience in varying degrees to come up with their narratives. They steal bits of dialogue. Items that belong to friends are developed into key images. Even the writer who has managed to create a fictional world without any details recognizable to the real world writes from

fictional world without any details recognizable to the real world writes from experience. Who we are and the lives we lead shape our writing because writing comes from within.

It is, then, an interesting situation when a fiction writer uses autobiography and real-world events and is suddenly facing some of the harshest criticisms of the writing workshop. “I don’t believe this would happen this way,” one peer might say. “I’m not buying the dialogue,” another says. At this point, the writer breaks the workshop rules and suddenly speaks up – “But, he really said that. That’s exactly what happened!”

Suddenly, there is a problem between truth and believability. Or rather, there is a problem between truth and dramatic effect. If the writer says the event is true, I have no reason to doubt that, despite the lack of credibility within the constructed, artificial narrative that makes the story. But, simply put, not all real events make good stories. However, most real events can make good stories if told well.

First and foremost, narratives are dramatic constructions, and truth does not inherently create a dramatic story. Dramatic stories must be shaped. As with any other more fictional narrative, stories are created by the careful selection of details, images, and word choice. For this reason, there are many creative nonfiction writers who argue that their mode of writing is the most difficult. To call work “nonfiction,” writers enter an agreement with readers and suggest that the details and facts of the story are true, for the most part. Yet, these writers still need to construct a dramatic and compelling narrative without the luxury of making up helpful details. To tell the truth is not enough. The development of the art is still required.

For example, Ms X writes a story about a girl who wants a puppy. The man in the story is her “lover” and she uses that term for dramatic purposes. In real life, she calls him her “husband.” When the female character first suggests the prospect of getting a puppy, her lover is visibly distressed. “Hell, no, we’re not getting a dog,” he says. “They’re too much work.”

“But, I’ll take care of it,” the woman promises. “I’ll take him to obedience school,” she says.

“No, absolutely not.” The lover stands firm. No puppies in the house, because in reality, the man was bitten by a dog as a child and has a deep psychological fear of animals. But, the woman does not know this. Nor does the story tell its readers, as it is in the woman’s point of view.

So, the narrative continues and the woman goes to work where she is busy with clients who call nonstop. The day is very stressful, but when it is over she gets home to her lover who says, “Darling, of course you can have a puppy. I love you.” Because that’s the way it really happened.

Wait. What?

Perhaps this is the way things happen, but this isn’t the way stories happen. The story is not about a woman who gets to have a dog after a bad day of work. The story is about a man who comes to terms with his fear of dogs and changed himself, and, as a reader, I don’t know anything about how that happened. I don’t believe he just changed his mind that day. He was adamant. What happened? What caused this change in him?

Well, in this case, the lover is a very modern, sophisticated man who tries to be in touch with his emotions and he happens to have an appointment with his therapist that day. Naturally, he mentions the puppy that the woman wanted, and eventually, he gets around to mentioning the mean dog who bit him when he was 7 years old. He remembers it clearly. He was seven, playing soldier with his stick and the dog was the enemy so he cracked the dog in the face with a stick. After discussing the incident, the man who is reasonable, determines that if he doesn’t hit the new puppy in the face with a stick, it might not bite him. And the woman is taking it to obedience school and will be responsible for it. Maybe they could try the dog after all. And that’s what really happened,

But an important issue remains. Readers do not read fiction to discover interesting and true facts. They read fiction to discover interesting and true ideas about the world, and possibly about themselves. This is “fictional truth.” The specifics of the story may have been imagined by an author, but the story speaks on the nature of humanity in a way that feels true to the reader. There is something that is recognized, and there is something in the moment of the story that the reader already knows and can relate to. The reader identifies with the

that the reader already knows and can relate to. The reader identifies with the character or the situation.

Ultimately, it is not the plausibility of the events, or that the events did indeed occur in the writer's life, that matter to the reader. What matters is that the reader feels a connection to the character. What matters is that the reader identifies with the character's mentality or action, and in order to connect or identify with a character, we must understand those thoughts and actions.



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In Praise of Clipboards

by Noelle Sterne

Clipboards? Those remnants of the writer's Stone Tablet Age? How can I be serious, you're thinking, in this explosive Age of PCs, laptops, palm pilots, Internet-calling cell phones, and watches that email your editor and remind him to send the check?

Whether you're a professional writer too, a social writer, or anything in between, you're probably wired, with at least a PC and daily cravings for upgrades. And you're wondering how anyone cannot covet the Crossgalaxy 99110XZG Word Chomper, with the reams it stores and light-years it saves. And how anyone cannot pant for the speed and convenience of the L542MVX 8-drive, multiport combination CD burner and toast-burner, the digitronic Gigabuster, with its built-in ionic megabarks, pential phonophonic DVDs and BVDs, and 9.90 quadruple ZZZs of amplified rambamblam.

You don't have to crow that you can be connected anywhere. I know--you can palm your pilot on the ATM line, open wide your computer notebook in the dentist's waiting room, and cradle your laptop in your lap at the park, sitting under a tree and saving paper.

But my clipboard is no less portable. It goes with me to the electronic superstore, while my husband valiantly tries to master the connection between gigabytes and RAM. The clipboard sets up quickly on camping trips, while my husband wrestles with the preprogrammed, surefire guaranteed-to-open tent. The clipboard rides to the car repair shop, where my husband gazes bewildered and fearful at the mechanic's dazzling electronic diagnostic panel.

Wherever I travel, my clipboard fits easily into a tote, with no need for batteries, cards, cables, adapters, chargers, plugs, back-up disks, motherboards, sibling boards, or chairman boards. The clipboard automatically accompanies me to the coffee shop, library, restaurant, and park. It's with me on the subway, the Sunday drive to relatives', and the eternal supermarket line. During any wait, expected or not, while others nearby fidget, bite their lips, or stare wastefully into space, I'm clutching my clipboard and efficiently, importantly, blissfully writing.

My clipboard also inoculates me against electronic anxiety disorder (EAD).

I harbor no looming fears of crashing hard drives, suffer no spiraling panic at power spikes, or dread the spread of pernicious viruses. My clipboard never displays puzzling sluggishness, sudden dips in energy, or heart-stopping flutters, gasps, or crackling noises.

And the clipboard is instantly available. At the flip of a pen top, it's booted up and ready to roll. We go to the mall, and I sit in the courtyard watching the parade of bare midriffs, tight jeans, and high wedge sandals. Then my clipboard nudges me, and I get down to the next scene in my current short story.

We go camping, and I curl into a canvas chair, a thermos of cappuccino propped nearby in the grass. With the clipboard cozily against my knees, I survey the lush forest and settle into the setting of my novel's next chapter.

Back home after the weekend, I board the crowded subway for an errand downtown. Squeezed among alien elbows, I press the clipboard against a pole, and before lurching to my stop, I manage to scribble out a few almost legible lines of my latest poem.

Granted—handwriting has its drawbacks. It doesn't store your body of work, rough as it may be, for later major surgery. It doesn't show off sixty-five alternates for the precise word that maddeningly eludes you. And it doesn't deliver the mouse-clicking, Windows-opening flashes that speed rewriting, revising, and editing.

Nevertheless, I defend the clipboard's virtues. For one thing, to arrive at the right word isn't like choosing from a Chinese menu. Often you must stop, probe deep inside, and ask yourself pointed questions ("How would she really feel?"). Only as you quiet down and listen does the right word emerge from your own internal databank.

For another, sometimes speed is the last thing you want. You need to sit, stare, ruminate, groan a little, and chew on the pen top. At your computer you can sit and stare. but how can you chew on a keyboard. and who wants to chew on a

mouse?

For yet another, when you use a clipboard, much of the pleasure springs from the sheer physical act of forming the letters. As I write, watching the words become real on paper, the process, like drawing, carries an irreplaceable sensuality.

And the pens provide no small part of the pleasure. They alone deserve a dissertation. My favorites are felt-tipped, always stashed in my tote in a delicious assortment of colors, like freshly showered fruits at the outdoor market. In comparison, sterile typewriter keys, soundless and fleet as they may be, are like canned spray cheese to aged Vermont cheddar.

Lest you think I'm the only throwback to the AnteDell-uvian Age, I must assure you I'm not alone in my praise of handwriting. Listen to the peerless writing guru Natalie Goldberg, in her classic *Writing Down the Bones* (1986, Shambhala):

"Writing is physical and is affected by the equipment you use. In typing, your fingers hit keys and the result is block, black letters. Handwriting is more connected to the movement of the heart. . . .

You are physically engaged with the pen, and your hand, connected to your arm, is pouring out the record of your senses." (pp. 6, 7, 50)

And read the poet Pablo Neruda on his own creative process: "The typewriter separates me from the deeper intimacy with poetry, and my hand brings me closer to that intimacy again" (in Jill Krementz, *The Writer's Desk*, 1997, Random House).

Prolific writer and attorney Peter J. Riga writes eloquently of handwriting:

"When I have an idea and begin to write, more ideas flow until I have an article, a chapter, a book. That never happens with a computer. . . . The physical act of writing with pen or pencil on paper excites the mind in ways no other instrument can. Writing by hand is thinking in mind." (New York Times Editorials, Letters, August 26, 2002)

Multi-award-winning mystery writer Phyllis A. Whitney, who died recently (February 2008) at 104 and published her last book at 93, agreed: "I believe there's a connection between the brain and the fingers, and there should be as little interference between the two as possible" ("Tools of the Writer's Trade," *The Writer*, August 1992, p. 29).

This sensitivity is also recognized by creativity expert Julia Cameron in *The Artist's Way* (1992, Tarcher). In her practical and heady book, Cameron helps us break through blocks and self-censoring by prescribing the "morning pages . . . three pages of longhand writing" daily (p. 9).

The morning pages must be done by hand. When one attempts to "cheat" with a word processor or computer, as Cameron herself admits she tried for years, the pages do not reach the same depth, honesty, or level of self-awareness.

This visceral connection is at the core of creativity. Having done the morning pages for several years, I can attest that they've often produced startling results. Many entries which started out as whining catharsis have ended up as essays, stories, and, in three cases, children's book manuscripts.

But a notching of completed pieces is not the point. Whether I'm dutifully logging in the morning pages or working on a current project, when I've finally settled down with my clipboard and the writing begins to flow from heart to arm to pen to page, a sigh escapes. I taste the truth of Goldberg's words: "just writing is heaven" (p. 110).

Despite this paean, though, I cannot deny the merits of today's technological marvels. Handwriting addict that I am, even I use the computer for after-first drafts. Many writers, and you may be among them, have successfully weathered the fearsome ocean from the safe harbor of pen and paper to the wilds of unknown electronic shores. Both have their place in our navigation of creativity's fickle waters.

Nevertheless, my devotion to clipboards remains steadfast. Doubtless part of a fast-vanishing breed, I'm still in excellent company. Who else writes with clipboards, or at least by hand, on stalwart, reliable yellow pads? The distinctive roster snarks confidence--to name only a few Jackie Collins Toni Morrison

Robert Spurr, Cormac McCarthy, John Grisham, Tom Hanks, William Styron, Henry Kissinger, J. K. Rowling.

So, if you're a closet clipboardholic, whenever you find yourself gaped at, giggled at, noticeably avoided by other writers, or feeling inexplicably guilty, remember that you belong to a proud elite. Ride out the ridicule, stand tall, look 'em in the Webcam, and flourish your pen in praise of clipboards.

### The Block Writer's Want

by Nicole M. Bouchard

Sometimes when we fall out of our writing groove, dangerously attracted to the stress and entreaties of everyday life, we need to find a way to keep ourselves tied to our craft. Yet forcing ourselves to sit down and work on a large project often isn't the answer. It is by doing the unusual, breaking routine and reacting to new, short pulses of stimulation to keep our skills polished- thus, the benefit of the writing exercise. These serve not only to keep us in check, but they can also be the seed of a novel or a fantastic notion for a chapter that goes and contradicts everything. It seems as though we ourselves often get in the way of our own wildly spontaneous creativity. A small provocation of an idea or a bull-dozer, whichever is needed, can help us to move again.

In dire times of drought (writing is associated with the element of water in Feng Shui), a tool that I've found useful is a writer's block. That in itself sounds contradictory, but this is a literal block. It is a block-shaped book entitled, "The Writer's Block: 786 Ideas to Jump-start your Imagination" by Jason Rekulak. With mini photographs, phrases, exercises or words of wisdom by past and present greats such as Mark Twain and Amy Tan, this book hardly takes up much room, but it can fill your mind with inspiration. Typically, I use the tool for writing exercises alone, unassociated with my major projects, as those take a deeper level of concentration and commitment. The beauty of a tool like this is that you can use it for

whatever purpose serves you best and you can surprise yourself when you let go and don't guide the pen. One exercise in particular, freed my mind to explore darker aspects of life. Though the exercise was written for personal use initially, it helped me get down to a deeper level which led to where I was later, writing a new short story. I could still develop the exercise or draw from it. Either way it was a great way to challenge myself.

The page I drew the exercise from in the book instructed the following: "Trace the journey of a five dollar bill through the lives of five different owners. What was exchanged during the transactions? How much or how little did the transaction mean to each of the people involved?"

As an example, this is what I came up with a few years ago and at the time it wasn't like any other piece I'd written:

*She sauntered over with the sway she was taught to adopt as a way to live in this new life. Alighting lightly on his knee, she gazed emotionlessly into his glazed alcoholic stare. Throwing his limp arm around her like a heavy winter shawl in mid-August heat, he garbled, "Cheers, baby. Sex and money. We both play everyone for fools and leave 'em with nothing..." He was a disenchanted young business man locked into a scheme cheating the unsavvy buyer, locked into an entire life, that he found impossible to break out of. It was an insult he aimlessly threw at her, but it really was meant for himself. The five dollar bill he'd tucked into her lacy black bra would have to suffice for the night. She was in desperate need, but she wouldn't sleep with a man who thought his disillusioned moral degradation was equal to hers.*

*"We're not the same... I had very little choice, but this doesn't change who I am..."*

*In his stupor, he didn't seem to hear her, but no matter... she'd made her point though she knew it would cost her.*

*On her way home she fantasized about a warm BLT... with cheese, she thought. Hoping the diner would still be open, she wiped her peach-stained lips with the back of her hand to take off some of the make-up. Her steps quickened with urgency. One more corner, just one, almost there..*

*A man was curled up into the fetal position on the ground in the womb of night, yet instead of birth, he longed for the opposite transformation, hungering for death. She almost tripped over him, her dainty sandals with the daisies on them barely covered the bright pink toenails that peered out at him from beneath a shadow. After the initial wave of fear passed, she knelt down. Still a pulse... just asleep.*

*She moved on toward the diner. Five dollars bought the BLT with cheese, a knock-off cup of Cambell's soup, and a chocolate milkshake (minus the whip cream which would've cost her twenty more cents than she had). The florescent lighting, the crowded tables and her empty stomach were starting to give her a headache.*

*She wouldn't eat tonight, but he would, and he would wake to find a reason to go on living for another day. That was what it was all about wasn't it? Just one more day at a time, always searching for the one reason to get up and try again. She placed the paper bag down neatly on the sidewalk beside him. Narrowly opening his eyes without her notice, he caught a glimpse of her as she smiled tenderly and walked away.*

*The woman behind the counter who hadn't bothered to speak to the young woman, deemed her a slut on sight- zeroing in on the smeared lipstick, sad eyes and messy red hair. The term "trash" crossed her mind. Folding the five dollar bill, she tucked it into her work apron, casting a glance around to make sure no one was looking. No one had noticed yet and so what- a few dollars? Who really gave a f#\$% with the business they did in there? A few more minutes and she was out of there for the night. She hoped he*

*wouldn't be late again. She hated hoisting her uniform and cramming her ass onto the back of his motorcycle when he'd forget to pick up the car from her brother's house.*

*"You get anythin' tonight?" he asked, trying to sound nonchalant.*

*"Five bucks."*

*That did it. "That it?! Same small-time shit!"*

*"Can't do it a lot Jimmy, you want me to lose that job?"*

*He inhaled deeply from his cigarette. She cringed. It was like she could feel the poison filling his lungs.*

*"Well, fork it over."*

*"Alright," she said with the seductive wish barely concealed in her voice as she lifted the uniform to her thigh and climbed on the motorcycle, looping her arms around his waist.*

*Pulling on his ripped jeans in the early morning mustard-yellow light, he felt for the five dollar bill. Still there. Shit, he didn't come this far to lose cash. The gesture of tugging on his pocket caused him to fall forward and bump his knee on the foot of the bed. He swore, but she didn't wake up. He stared at her for a moment... she looking lazy and far too round in the yellowed slip. The door slammed behind him.*

*He knew it hadn't been a good start to the morning. When had she gained all that weight? When had she aged? Overnight? The image of disappointment lying there in the bed plagued him*



**Additional recommended reading: *wua mina* by Natalie Goldberg**

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For example, Ms X writes a story about a girl who wants a puppy. The man in the story is her “lover” and she uses that term for dramatic purposes. In real life, she calls him her “husband.” When the female character first suggests the prospect of getting a puppy, her lover is visibly distressed. “Hell, no, we’re not getting a dog,” he says. “They’re too much work.”

“But, I’ll take care of it,” the woman promises. “I’ll take him to obedience school,” she says.

“No, absolutely not.” The lover stands firm. No puppies in the house, because in reality, the man was bitten by a dog as a child and has a deep psychological fear of animals. But, the woman does not know this. Nor does the story tell its readers, as it is in the woman’s point of view.

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Well, in this case, the lover is a very modern, sophisticated man who tries to be in touch with his emotions and he happens to have an appointment with his therapist that day. Naturally, he mentions the puppy that the woman wanted, and eventually, he gets around to mentioning the mean dog who bit him when he was 7 years old. He remembers it clearly. He was seven, playing soldier with his stick and the dog was the enemy so he cracked the dog in the face with a stick. After discussing the incident, the man who is reasonable, determines that if he doesn’t hit the new puppy in the face with a stick, it might not bite him. And the woman is taking it to obedience school and will be responsible for it. Maybe they could try the dog after all. And that’s what really happened,

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Whether you're a professional writer too, a social writer, or anything in between, you're probably wired, with at least a PC and daily cravings for upgrades. And you're wondering how anyone cannot covet the Crossgalaxy 99110XZG Word Chomper, with the reams it stores and light-years it saves. And how anyone cannot pant for the speed and convenience of the L542MVX 8-drive, multiport combination CD burner and toast-burner, the digitronic Gigabuster, with its built-in ionic megabarks, pential phonophonic DVDs and BVDs, and 9.90 quadruple ZZZs of amplified rambamblam.

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My clipboard also inoculates me against electronic anxiety disorder (EAD).

I harbor no looming fears of crashing hard drives, suffer no spiraling panic at power spikes, or dread the spread of pernicious viruses. My clipboard never displays puzzling sluggishness, sudden dips in energy, or heart-stopping flutters, gasps, or crackling noises.

And the clipboard is instantly available. At the flip of a pen top, it's booted up and ready to roll. We go to the mall, and I sit in the courtyard watching the parade of bare midriffs, tight jeans, and high wedge sandals. Then my clipboard nudges me, and I get down to the next scene in my current short story.

We go camping, and I curl into a canvas chair, a thermos of cappuccino propped nearby in the grass. With the clipboard cozily against my knees, I survey the lush forest and settle into the setting of my novel's next chapter.

Back home after the weekend, I board the crowded subway for an errand downtown. Squeezed among alien elbows, I press the clipboard against a pole, and before lurching to my stop, I manage to scribble out a few almost legible lines of my latest poem.

Granted—handwriting has its drawbacks. It doesn't store your body of work, rough as it may be, for later major surgery. It doesn't show off sixty-five alternates for the precise word that maddeningly eludes you. And it doesn't deliver the mouse-clicking, Windows-opening flashes that speed rewriting, revising, and editing.

Nevertheless, I defend the clipboard's virtues. For one thing, to arrive at the right word isn't like choosing from a Chinese menu. Often you must stop, probe deep inside, and ask yourself pointed questions ("How would she really feel?"). Only as you quiet down and listen does the right word emerge from your own internal databank.

For another, sometimes speed is the last thing you want. You need to sit, stare, ruminate, groan a little, and chew on the pen top. At your computer you can sit and stare. but how can you chew on a keyboard. and who wants to chew on a

mouse?

For yet another, when you use a clipboard, much of the pleasure springs from the sheer physical act of forming the letters. As I write, watching the words become real on paper, the process, like drawing, carries an irreplaceable sensuality.

And the pens provide no small part of the pleasure. They alone deserve a dissertation. My favorites are felt-tipped, always stashed in my tote in a delicious assortment of colors, like freshly showered fruits at the outdoor market. In comparison, sterile typewriter keys, soundless and fleet as they may be, are like canned spray cheese to aged Vermont cheddar.

Lest you think I'm the only throwback to the AnteDell-uvian Age, I must assure you I'm not alone in my praise of handwriting. Listen to the peerless writing guru Natalie Goldberg, in her classic *Writing Down the Bones* (1986, Shambhala):

"Writing is physical and is affected by the equipment you use. In typing, your fingers hit keys and the result is block, black letters. Handwriting is more connected to the movement of the heart. . . .

You are physically engaged with the pen, and your hand, connected to your arm, is pouring out the record of your senses." (pp. 6, 7, 50)

And read the poet Pablo Neruda on his own creative process: "The typewriter separates me from the deeper intimacy with poetry, and my hand brings me closer to that intimacy again" (in Jill Krementz, *The Writer's Desk*, 1997, Random House).

Prolific writer and attorney Peter J. Riga writes eloquently of handwriting:

"When I have an idea and begin to write, more ideas flow until I have an article, a chapter, a book. That never happens with a computer. . . . The physical act of writing with pen or pencil on paper excites the mind in ways no other instrument can. Writing by hand is thinking in mind." (New York Times Editorials, Letters, August 26, 2002)

Multi-award-winning mystery writer Phyllis A. Whitney, who died recently (February 2008) at 104 and published her last book at 93, agreed: "I believe there's a connection between the brain and the fingers, and there should be as little interference between the two as possible" ("Tools of the Writer's Trade," *The Writer*, August 1992, p. 29).

This sensitivity is also recognized by creativity expert Julia Cameron in *The Artist's Way* (1992, Tarcher). In her practical and heady book, Cameron helps us break through blocks and self-censoring by prescribing the "morning pages . . . three pages of longhand writing" daily (p. 9).

The morning pages must be done by hand. When one attempts to "cheat" with a word processor or computer, as Cameron herself admits she tried for years, the pages do not reach the same depth, honesty, or level of self-awareness.

This visceral connection is at the core of creativity. Having done the morning pages for several years, I can attest that they've often produced startling results. Many entries which started out as whining catharsis have ended up as essays, stories, and, in three cases, children's book manuscripts.

But a notching of completed pieces is not the point. Whether I'm dutifully logging in the morning pages or working on a current project, when I've finally settled down with my clipboard and the writing begins to flow from heart to arm to pen to page, a sigh escapes. I taste the truth of Goldberg's words: "just writing is heaven" (p. 110).

Despite this paean, though, I cannot deny the merits of today's technological marvels. Handwriting addict that I am, even I use the computer for after-first drafts. Many writers, and you may be among them, have successfully weathered the fearsome ocean from the safe harbor of pen and paper to the wilds of unknown electronic shores. Both have their place in our navigation of creativity's fickle waters.

Nevertheless, my devotion to clipboards remains steadfast. Doubtless part of a fast-vanishing breed, I'm still in excellent company. Who else writes with clipboards, or at least by hand, on stalwart, reliable yellow pads? The distinctive roster snarks confidence--to name only a few Jackie Collins Toni Morrison

Robert Spurr, Cormac McCarthy, John Grisham, Tom Hanks, William Styron, Henry Kissinger, J. K. Rowling.

So, if you're a closet clipboardholic, whenever you find yourself gaped at, giggled at, noticeably avoided by other writers, or feeling inexplicably guilty, remember that you belong to a proud elite. Ride out the ridicule, stand tall, look 'em in the Webcam, and flourish your pen in praise of clipboards.

### The Block Writer's Want

by Nicole M. Bouchard

Sometimes when we fall out of our writing groove, dangerously attracted to the stress and entreaties of everyday life, we need to find a way to keep ourselves tied to our craft. Yet forcing ourselves to sit down and work on a large project often isn't the answer. It is by doing the unusual, breaking routine and reacting to new, short pulses of stimulation to keep our skills polished- thus, the benefit of the writing exercise. These serve not only to keep us in check, but they can also be the seed of a novel or a fantastic notion for a chapter that goes and contradicts everything. It seems as though we ourselves often get in the way of our own wildly spontaneous creativity. A small provocation of an idea or a bull-dozer, whichever is needed, can help us to move again.

In dire times of drought (writing is associated with the element of water in Feng Shui), a tool that I've found useful is a writer's block. That in itself sounds contradictory, but this is a literal block. It is a block-shaped book entitled, "The Writer's Block: 786 Ideas to Jump-start your Imagination" by Jason Rekulak. With mini photographs, phrases, exercises or words of wisdom by past and present greats such as Mark Twain and Amy Tan, this book hardly takes up much room, but it can fill your mind with inspiration. Typically, I use the tool for writing exercises alone, unassociated with my major projects, as those take a deeper level of concentration and commitment. The beauty of a tool like this is that you can use it for

whatever purpose serves you best and you can surprise yourself when you let go and don't guide the pen. One exercise in particular, freed my mind to explore darker aspects of life. Though the exercise was written for personal use initially, it helped me get down to a deeper level which led to where I was later, writing a new short story. I could still develop the exercise or draw from it. Either way it was a great way to challenge myself.

The page I drew the exercise from in the book instructed the following: "Trace the journey of a five dollar bill through the lives of five different owners. What was exchanged during the transactions? How much or how little did the transaction mean to each of the people involved?"

As an example, this is what I came up with a few years ago and at the time it wasn't like any other piece I'd written:

*She sauntered over with the sway she was taught to adopt as a way to live in this new life. Alighting lightly on his knee, she gazed emotionlessly into his glazed alcoholic stare. Throwing his limp arm around her like a heavy winter shawl in mid-August heat, he garbled, "Cheers, baby. Sex and money. We both play everyone for fools and leave 'em with nothing..." He was a disenchanted young business man locked into a scheme cheating the unsavvy buyer, locked into an entire life, that he found impossible to break out of. It was an insult he aimlessly threw at her, but it really was meant for himself. The five dollar bill he'd tucked into her lacy black bra would have to suffice for the night. She was in desperate need, but she wouldn't sleep with a man who thought his disillusioned moral degradation was equal to hers.*

*"We're not the same... I had very little choice, but this doesn't change who I am..."*

*In his stupor, he didn't seem to hear her, but no matter... she'd made her point though she knew it would cost her.*

*On her way home she fantasized about a warm BLT... with cheese, she thought. Hoping the diner would still be open, she wiped her peach-stained lips with the back of her hand to take off some of the make-up. Her steps quickened with urgency. One more corner, just one, almost there..*

*A man was curled up into the fetal position on the ground in the womb of night, yet instead of birth, he longed for the opposite transformation, hungering for death. She almost tripped over him, her dainty sandals with the daisies on them barely covered the bright pink toenails that peered out at him from beneath a shadow. After the initial wave of fear passed, she knelt down. Still a pulse... just asleep.*

*She moved on toward the diner. Five dollars bought the BLT with cheese, a knock-off cup of Cambell's soup, and a chocolate milkshake (minus the whip cream which would've cost her twenty more cents than she had). The florescent lighting, the crowded tables and her empty stomach were starting to give her a headache.*

*She wouldn't eat tonight, but he would, and he would wake to find a reason to go on living for another day. That was what it was all about wasn't it? Just one more day at a time, always searching for the one reason to get up and try again. She placed the paper bag down neatly on the sidewalk beside him. Narrowly opening his eyes without her notice, he caught a glimpse of her as she smiled tenderly and walked away.*

*The woman behind the counter who hadn't bothered to speak to the young woman, deemed her a slut on sight- zeroing in on the smeared lipstick, sad eyes and messy red hair. The term "trash" crossed her mind. Folding the five dollar bill, she tucked it into her work apron, casting a glance around to make sure no one was looking. No one had noticed yet and so what- a few dollars? Who really gave a f#\$% with the business they did in there? A few more minutes and she was out of there for the night. She hoped he*

*wouldn't be late again. She hated hoisting her uniform and cramming her ass onto the back of his motorcycle when he'd forget to pick up the car from her brother's house.*

*"You get anythin' tonight?" he asked, trying to sound nonchalant.*

*"Five bucks."*

*That did it. "That it?! Same small-time shit!"*

*"Can't do it a lot Jimmy, you want me to lose that job?"*

*He inhaled deeply from his cigarette. She cringed. It was like she could feel the poison filling his lungs.*

*"Well, fork it over."*

*"Alright," she said with the seductive wish barely concealed in her voice as she lifted the uniform to her thigh and climbed on the motorcycle, looping her arms around his waist.*

*Pulling on his ripped jeans in the early morning mustard-yellow light, he felt for the five dollar bill. Still there. Shit, he didn't come this far to lose cash. The gesture of tugging on his pocket caused him to fall forward and bump his knee on the foot of the bed. He swore, but she didn't wake up. He stared at her for a moment... she looking lazy and far too round in the yellowed slip. The door slammed behind him.*

*He knew it hadn't been a good start to the morning. When had she gained all that weight? When had she aged? Overnight? The image of disappointment lying there in the bed plagued him*

*disappointment lying there in the sea plagued him.*

*The guys in the bar practically laughed him out of the place when he tried to buy into a bet with his coveted five dollar bill. He owed each of them at least three hundred. He kicked the door on the way out. The five dollar bill glided almost weightlessly down to the green and black diamond linoleum floor unnoticed.*

*A young man, unshaven and fraught with a quiet desperation saw the bar across the street and decided that even this early in the day, a pint wouldn't hurt his quest. At his right, by the door, he saw a five dollar bill. Stooping to retrieve it, he smiled for the first time in months. Five was her lucky number- she was born in May. He had to find her and right things. It wasn't over. He knew that the moment she tore out of the apartment and left for New York. He missed her wild red hair. He missed everything she was and everything he wasn't. Now, as he handed the five dollars to the bartender alongside her picture, he had faith again.*

*"That girl?" the bartender inquired, looking closer at the photograph of the young woman on the beach.*

*"I don't know her, but some homeless guy came in this morning describing a girl that looked like that. Said she left food for him and he wanted to thank her. He typically hangs out near Memphis Ave."*

*The young man avoided buying himself a beer and quickly slid her picture back into the protection of his wallet. He told the bartender to keep the five dollars and dashed out the door as though his feet were aflame.*

*The bartender looked at the money and smiled, pinning it on the outstretched roof of the bar area. What the young man was in search of was priceless.*

**Additional recommended reading: *wua mina* by Natalie Goldberg**

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