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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.



Pongo Teen Writing Project

The Power to Heal- Poetry and The Pongo Teen Writing Project

By Nicole M. Bouchard

As eloquently expressed by poet, Audre Lorde, “. . . poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we can predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.”

It seems only right to begin this piece speaking of the profound importance of poetry when here we are to examine a program that reaches deep through the years and layers of the psyche to heal and to put a voice to that which could never before be expressed. The Pongo Teen Writing Project and its founder, Richard Gold, are getting to the core of the hearts and minds of disadvantaged, troubled youths and through an alchemical process of patience, validation and compassion, spinning pain through the use of words, into healing, hope and strength.

Reaching out to children and young adults in juvenile detention centers, homeless shelters, psychiatric hospitals, and other organizations, Richard and his team of Pongo volunteers use a carefully constructed model to encourage communication that will target those areas which are most affecting the youths' circumstances (early childhood trauma, such as abuse, rape, addiction, death and violence). Made to feel safe in an atmosphere where they are listened to, their words treated as important, the youths begin the journey of expression that helps them to heal themselves and offer a different view of their life in order to move forward. Within fifteen years, “...Pongo has served 5,000 teens, published 12 books, given away 12,500 poetry books to teens, shared youth poetry with 10,000 people in the community, and made its innovative resources available for free on the Pongo web site.” The site teaches others the model so that Pongo programs and activities can be done from anywhere, giving the gift of its benefit to as many people as possible.

In 2010, the Microsoft Alumni Foundation Celebration, where Microsoft alumni who have innovatively and selflessly used their skills and resources to make a difference were honored, Richard Gold was one of three individuals who received a \$25,000 grant in support of his project.

Author/journalist Tom Brokaw and Judith Rodin, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, were amongst the participating judges on the panel.

The KING5 TV's story about Pongo, featured in a clip on Facebook that initially drew us to the project, recently won first place in the quarterly competition of the National Press Photographers Association. The segment portrays the story of Pongo's work in King County juvenile detention in Seattle. "Set in the dramatic context of juvenile detention, the story is all about the youth and the Pongo writing process. It does not make light of the crimes that brought the teens to detention, but it focuses on the childhood traumas that burden these teens, and the role of Pongo writing in healing."

In a recent blog post on the Pongo site blog, entitled "Poetry Saved My Life", (a line excerpted from a fourteen year-old's poignant poem), Gold writes, *"I've seen that life's worst experiences can exist as strangers in us, separate, like people we don't know and don't want to know. Yet these worst experiences remain our passionate life companions.*

I've seen that our emotions after life's worst experiences can be sealed in a variety of containers, some buried, or in a black hole, some that explode unexpectedly, some that exist only in the public realm, some that exist only in private, some that exist in one part of ourselves and not in others.

But I've also seen that through poetry, people can open these containers, and move their contents, these painful emotions, into new frames that are more open and repurposed for a meaningful life."

Below is a q&a with ever-humble and quietly incredible Gold that further examines the impact and inner-workings of this awe-inspiring project that exemplifies the power of the written word.

<http://www.pongoteenwriting.org/pongo-project-blog.html>

<http://www.pongoteenwriting.org/home.html?>

Questions

1) What was it that first inspired you to start the Pongo Project? Can you describe for us some of the internal thought process and external influencing events that transpired while putting the program together with its various techniques and elements? How did you go about developing the

steps of your approach that so carefully consider every behavioral and psychological component of the participants' well-being?

In the late 70's I was volunteering at a special school where I created a poetry program. I didn't know about the circumstances of the teens' lives, until several smiling strangers approached me at the school's Christmas party. These strangers were the teens' therapists. It turned out that half the students at the school were patients at a psychiatric clinic at a teaching hospital. The therapists said that the teens were dealing with issues in their poetry that the youth had had difficulty addressing in therapy. I was hired by the hospital, and became part of a multidisciplinary team, with my degrees in poetry and English. At the hospital, I was a participant in daily meetings, evaluations, and conferences, and came to appreciate the depth and complexity of the teens' hurt and struggles. I ran an expressive therapy class for the entire population. I was made an individual therapist for two young women who were electively mute.

But actually the heart of Pongo is the approach that I developed quite intuitively at the school. I met with youth individually and engaged in a creative collaboration in which I improvised a structure based on a teen's personal interests and needs. For an older teen who was struggling at home, we wrote a letter to her mom. For a younger teen who was preoccupied with fantasy, we imagined a trip he would take to the moon.

It turned out that when I provided the teen with a creative experience that felt personal, safe, and open, the teen would discuss significant challenges in her life, and also feel happy and proud with the creative outcome. It was happy and rewarding work for me. The experience in the psychiatric hospital confirmed the deep healing nature of this writing process, that had always felt right to me.

I went on from the psychiatric hospital to a career in publishing, first in special education and eventually to a role as Managing Editor at Microsoft Press. I retired from Microsoft and founded Pongo.

2) We saw the news segment on your program and watched how deeply it affected its participants to share their innermost thoughts freely in an encouraging environment. Having heard the stories about how difficult their lives were previous to the program, we would love to hear an after-story. Can you share an anecdote about a teen who underwent the Pongo program and subsequently changed their life circumstances for the better? Can you also share a story of a teen that was initially, for whatever reason, reluctant or difficult to reach that ended up experiencing an amazing life impact from their writing?

In addition to the juvenile detention center in Seattle, Pongo's other principal site is the Washington State psychiatric hospital in Tacoma. In April 2008 I was interviewed, along with a psychiatrist from the hospital, on KUOW radio (NPR). [This broadcast is available on the internet.] A teen called in, someone I'd worked with once, seven years before, when he was 13 years old. When asked by the radio host about his poetry experience, the teen said that writing poetry was "like a bomb going off in me." He said he discovered a talent he never knew he had, that he'd been writing ever since. He'd written eulogies after Sept. 11 and for an uncle who died, and been recognized by his school and family. The poem that he and I had written in the psychiatric hospital was about the death of another uncle, and it included the image that grief was like a piece of glass being shattered.

I remember another student at the psychiatric hospital who began working with a Pongo volunteer by picking up a dictionary and dictating from the definitions. But I understood what was going on, that he was checking us out in this process to see how safe we were. In his second writing session the boy dictated a story about discovering the body of a friend who had committed suicide.

The feedback at the psychiatric hospital, where we work currently, parallels the work I did initially at a clinic in the 70's. Therapists tell us that teens are writing about experiences that they have had difficulty talking about in any other context – and that teens are having breakthroughs in treatment after writing poetry.

3) In your two-tiered approach that includes “Accepting Self-Expression and Jumpstarting Creativity”, you make important distinctions about the level of guidance given to prompt creative input and the balance of getting into personally relevant material without going beyond the point of safe distance from the subject. When working with teens on a particularly intimate piece of writing, how does the volunteer know when the subjective content is hitting too close to home for the writer’s psychological/emotional comfort and how do they then steer the writing back on track so the therapeutic element is still intact? How do you train your volunteers so that they are prepared for nearly any situation, as everyone is different and circumstances vary?

A rather remarkable aspect of the Pongo writing process is that the youth are self-regulating. They do not reveal anything that they are not ready to reveal. But on the other hand, these teens, who have suffered traumas such as abuse, have a natural impulse to talk about their experiences in a way that does heal. When the teens feel safe, they are incredibly open.

The Pongo volunteers (mentors) are taught to remove the obstacles that might inhibit self-expression. Chiefly, the mentors are taught to listen, which is a deep and challenging process. The mentors must be present for the teens, attentive and supportive and empathetic. One aspect of listening is that the mentors have to trust in the value of self-expression and accept that they can’t control the teens’ circumstances. The teens’ traumas create a great deal of anxiety in the people who listen to them.

Also, the mentors are taught to discuss their experiences of the Pongo work in meetings with one another, in which they also write and share their own poetry. In other words, the mentors are trained to be present with stories of trauma, which allows the teens to feel safe, but then the mentors are given the opportunity to process their own feelings in response to trauma through their own poetry and with one another.

Practically speaking, the Pongo mentors work in teams under an experienced leader. The projects are set up with contacts among the mental health staff in an agency.

4) Here at our publication, we constantly stress the importance of working closely with our writers to uncover their authentic voice and give feedback in a back and forth exchange that promotes what is hopefully their purest, most powerful writing. In working one on one with youth program participants, what are some of your methods in helping them to discern their voice, when perhaps it is difficult for them to recognize it beneath behavioral or personality traits that are deeply entrenched? It would seem much more difficult to reach the voice of someone who hasn't ever had the opportunity to use it and developed instead, perhaps out of necessity for survival, a voice influenced by the more dominant voices of those surrounding them. Once a writer discovers their voice, how do you get them to step back and let the writing flow naturally (a lesson all writers are faced with when they struggle with their internal censors/editor)?

For Pongo's writers, the secret to finding their voice is the message that someone wants to listen to them, that the teens and their words have value in the world. The teens have learned, through their trauma, that they are terrible people. After abuse and neglect, the children feel ashamed and worthless. So yes, many of our writers begin with a sense of themselves that is highly influenced by others, but that circumstance is a painful adaptation to low self-esteem. As soon as someone communicates to these kids that their words have value, the message is transformative. The teens learn to see themselves as writers. In fact, they see themselves as great writers.

We ask teens to "write from the heart about who you are." We tell them that "honesty is the most important quality of good writing." We tell them that "people who've led difficult lives have important things to say." I think Pongo's writers feel that their creative work makes a difference to themselves and in the world.

5) What was one of your most transforming experiences with your own personal writing?

When I wrote the narrative poems that comprise my book "The Odd Puppet Odyssey," I began each poem with a confusing issue in mind, one that I wanted to learn more about and understand. The issues included questions of masculinity, sexuality, racism,

death. In spite of the seriousness of these questions, I found that I could only approach them through humor (sometimes raw humor) and fantasy. The puppet characters in the poems were like Pinocchio – puppets trying to be human, or trying to be comfortable with their humanity. Writing the poems was a process that included conscious thought about human nature, subconscious accumulations of images, and an application of the writer's craft to unify the whole. So the entire experience was very rich and personal. The project took 2 ½ years. It was in the very last poem, which I wrote sitting on a beach in Mexico, that I learned what the puppets' journey was all about – that they had to be compassionately engaged with the world.

*Peter Franklin teaches English and Creative Writing at Swampscott High School (Swampscott, MA). Peter received a BA in English & Creative Writing from the University of California, Davis, and a Juris Doctor degree from Concord Law School. Peter has been published in *The Write Place At The Write Time*, *The Camel Saloon*, and *A Long Story Short*. He has penned one anthology of poetry, *Quiet River*, available as a chapbook, and is working on a food-related collection of ekphrastic poetry, *Eating With Your Eyes*. Peter resides in Marblehead with his wife, two children, and Zorro, a dog of many talents.*

Ekphrastic Poetry – The Key to Unlock the Door

By Peter Franklin

Ekphrasis is the creation of an artistic work that is in a different medium than the one that inspired it; for example, *The Girl With the Pearl Earring* is a novel based upon a painting. The product is a different take on the essence of the original work. Ekphrastic Poetry, poetry written about art, allows the reader to envision the particular piece of art through the medium of words, as though the subject truly existed. This form of ekphrasis allows the writer to describe and envision the story behind the artwork- a true description of the creative imagination and skill of the writer. A well-known example would be W. H. Auden's poem, "Musee des Beaux Arts", based on the painting entitled "Icarus" by Peter Breughel.

The process of ekphrastic poetry generally unfolds in this manner:

The writer/author is presented with a particular piece of artwork. It may be any form or genre; it may be of the writer's interest, or not. The writer then studies the piece, gazing into and through the piece, to discern what story might be told that brought the original artist to the point of creating the piece of work.

Then the fun begins.

The writer crafts the "story," as s/he sees it...creating a parallel visual and sensory experience for the reader.

I began working with ekphrasis at the high school level with creative writers almost two years ago. My first objective was to break up the flow of my creative writing workshops by giving an actual assignment with specific parameters attached. Put simply, it was a means of adding a spark into the curriculum.

What I discovered in the process was that virtually all students embraced the project, very much enjoying the process of creating a story with a specific visual prompt, rather than wrestling with the proverbial blank piece of paper (the sometimes daunting clean slate).

The first piece I gave my students was Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks". It is a piece with which my students have become familiar, as I have a poster print of the image hanging in my classroom. The instructions were simple: Through a well-crafted poem, tell the story that led Mr. Hopper to this exact point when he codified the setting/people in this painting. Be creative. Be imaginative. Be Edward Hopper.

The Nighthawks' Last Dinner

*The crowd diminishes to just us three and the waiter.
The gears of reality begin to churn
And I know
The time is coming.
Months of undercover devotion are finally paying off.
The climax of my career is almost here.
But I have to keep cool,
The night is not over yet.
I pick up my glass of ale
And finish its contents.*

*The brim of my hat casts a shadow over my eyes so
The couple across from me can't tell exactly where I'm looking.
The Jones' don't realize my vision has been plastered to them the entire
time I've been here.
They look like an innocuous pair of beings,
Just grabbing a bite to eat after a late night of dancing.
The faces of their victims flash through my mind
And their sweet façade is instantly gone.
The eerie silence of the diner is overwhelming.
I can't take it for much longer.
When will he arrive?
It only takes a few moments
For a police car to pull up outside.
I pretend not to know the officer as he casually enters the diner.
For an instant we make purposeful eye contact.
I nod towards the couple sitting across from me.
Her fiery hair was still in my vision as I pushed through the door and
entered the empty street.
The door closed in a particularly slow way behind me.
It was as if the door wanted to stay open
Just long enough for me to hear the words:
"Mr. and Mrs. Jones please come with me, you're under arrest."*

Image link~

<http://artchive.com/artchive/h/hopper/nighthwk.jpg.html>

This poem is an example from one of my students. She very nicely captures the "story" behind the painting- highlighting the drama and secrecy inherent in the scene through the inner-thoughts of the agent. The reader is now able to feel the pulse of the diner, the tension, and the resolution.

This past spring, I had my advanced Creative Writing students tackle Ekphrastic Poetry from a unique angle- that of food. Their assignment was, again, simple and straightforward. Find a picture of food, or of a food-related theme, and create the story behind the picture. The results were introspective, reflective, and often humorous. It's interesting to get into the minds of this age group when it comes to food. Having a teenager at home, I often wonder about his thoughts on all things food...other than as a means

of quelling the pangs that come with a seemingly never-ending growth spurt.

The class having completed this exercise, I feel I now have a bit more insight into the inner-workings of the teen mind in relation to this part of their everyday lives.

We Simmer on Down

*We remember the days of warm cookies
And the frostings on the cakes
The sweetness of fudge we used to love
But now we simmer on down*

*We remember the greasy pizza
And the crunchiness of fries
The sticky sauce on chicken wings, and so many other things
But now we simmer on down*

*We remember the giant turkey on Thanksgiving
And my mothers recipe for stuffing
From apples pies to twisted lies
Now we simmer on down*

*Now it's only an apple here
And some lonely lettuce there
We eat alone because we like our bones
As we simmer on down
To nothing*

Image Example link~

<http://mplcatseyeview.blogspot.com/2011/11/my-winged-thanksgiving-dinner.html>

The class thoroughly enjoyed workshopping this assignment as it left room for plenty of interpretation, nuance, and metaphor.

And then I gave them one of my own:

Peach

*Sultry night embalms me in stickiness...
 No comfort from the slow fan...languidly singing in the dark...
 Barely disturbing the air around it.
 Sludge-like...thick and viscous...clinging heavily to everything.
 I am draped in a heavy overcoat of cloying heat.*

*There is no breeze, no rescue, no comfortable spot to find.
 Miserable. Thrashing at the covers...claustrophobic midnight epileptic fit.
 Barely disturbing the air around me.*

*I smile. Ironic.
 For in the morning, I know that the peach that I pluck off
 The tree out back will be heat-warmed by the early morning sun, residual
 fire from
 Tonight's balmy opera...
 Ripe and succulent,
 The hedonism of the juices trickling from lips to shirt front...
 Carnal sensuality,
 And I've forgotten everything that plagued me in the night.*

Image Example link~

http://www.statesymbolsusa.org/Georgia/fruit_peach.html

* * *

The discussions that result from the reading and review of the ekphrastic pieces lead to even more creativity, more ideas, more imagination. Even the most reluctant writers in my classes seem to find valuable words when inspired by the ekphrastic muse.

One of the great and accessible features of ekphrastic poetry is that it is quite relevant to all age groups. This format has been quite successful at the college level, and with adults.

And now, ***it's your turn!***

Take a good look at the painting below ("Unfinished Portrait of Art School Model" by Ellen Hirsh-Norton). Study it. Notice the facial expression, the mood, the colors, the nuances of the painting. Now, create a poem or other piece that tells the back story...those moments, thoughts and events that led

up to the moment the artist captured this portrait. Take your reader behind the scenes!



Unfinished Portrait of Art School Model (Oil - Ellen Hirsh-Norton 1986)

"Unfinished Portrait of Art School Model" by Ellen Hirsh-Norton

Felice Aull, Ph.D., M.A. Since high school, Felice Aull has juggled interests in biology and literature. Ultimately she incorporated both in her

professional life, starting as a medical scientist at New York University School of Medicine and later developing and teaching seminars for medical and premedical students in the new field of Literature and Medicine. In 1993 she founded an online resource for teaching and scholarship, the NYU Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database, which she edited for 15 years; she is now editor emerita and semi-retired. After going "back to school" to obtain an MA in humanities and social thought (2001), she started writing poetry. She has poems in this issue of Write Place At the Write Time; Poet Lore, Margie, Ekphrasis, The Mom Egg, and elsewhere.

*See her webpage at the Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database site:
<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/User?action=viewEditor&id=1>*

Learn about the field of Literature and Medicine, and the Database in this essay.

The Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database:
Resource for a New Paradigm in Training Doctors

By Felice Aull

Introduction

Doctors traditionally have been taught that their interactions with patients should be strictly objective, concerned but detached. This view is currently being challenged with an emerging new paradigm. In this new model, engagement - emotional and intellectual - is valued and encouraged. Understanding the context in which individual illness occurs, and the meaning of illness in a person's life-world are recognized as being necessary for accurate diagnosis and successful treatment. It is increasingly understood that healthcare workers must be aware of their biases and preconceptions to avoid making judgment errors, and that they must deal creatively with the ambiguities inherent in their work. When working with patients, they must also be aware of their own fears and anxieties and learn to develop emotional resilience. One could say therefore that a paradigm of detached concern is being replaced by one of engagement, affiliation, reflective practice, and emotional resilience (for articles and books that discuss these concepts see references 1-5).

As educators develop methods to teach and promulgate the new paradigm for healthcare practice, literature and the arts are increasingly being enlisted in this endeavor. This essay will describe the background for this development, and then discuss the founding and use of a key resource, The Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database <<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/>>, which is the major component of the NYU Medical Humanities website <<http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/>>. I will also reference relevant essays from the Literature, Arts, and Medicine blog site <<http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/blog/>>.

An Interdisciplinary Field

The centrality of story in the medical encounter has long been acknowledged. In the 1960s a field of scholarship and teaching developed - Literature and Medicine -that uses precepts of literary analysis and focuses on a range of literature relevant to the illness experience. This field officially became an academic discipline in 1972 when a professor of English literature, Joanne Trautmann [Banks], was appointed to the faculty of a medical school (Pennsylvania State University College of Medicine). By 1995, at least one third of US medical schools offered courses in literature and medicine and in 2012 most medical schools in this country either require or offer as electives, courses that incorporate literature, film, and art to address the many facets of illness experience and of caregiver experience that are outside the field of medical science. To reflect the expansion beyond just literature to include other humanities, visual and performing arts, and social sciences as they are brought to bear on healthcare training, the term, 'Medical Humanities', came into common use. Although this field originated in the USA, its interface with healthcare education has spread to many other countries – even as far away as Nepal! (see "Medical Humanities: Sowing the Seeds in the Himalayan Country of Nepal." <<http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/blog/?p=113>>)

While it is still relatively rare to find humanities scholars on the faculty of medical schools, increasingly there is collaboration and consultation between arts and sciences and medical school campuses, and some medical schools have appointed "artists in residence" and "writers in residence." Outside of the education setting, Literature and Medicine has entered community hospitals. For example, The Maine Humanities Council initiated a national reading and discussion program for hospital-based staff, "Literature & Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Healthcare." This program has reached at least 25 states in the US.

Story and Medicine

Fiction, memoir, poetry, and other genres often bring powerful stories to readers. These genres engage the emotions and expose readers to worlds outside their own experience. Such worlds may be those of illness or caregiving, but may also highlight issues of ethnicity, gender, power relations, socioeconomic status, etc. Literature requires us to attend to plot, relationship between characters, language, metaphor, gaps in the narrative. "Literature teaches us in unique ways to imagine the other, to use the imagination as an instrument of compassion, to tolerate ambiguity, to dwell in paradox, to consider multiple points of view." (6) There is usually no single "correct answer" in its interpretation. Notes physician-writer Jay Baruch, who recently helped develop "Integrated Clinical Arts," a required medical humanities curriculum at Brown University's medical school: "reductionist thinking" is pervasive in medical education but "the challenge in medicine is dealing with messiness and nuance." (7)

During the last 10 years, the turn to narrative has had a large impact on medical humanities, pioneered by Rita Charon, who is trained in both medicine and literature. She coined the term "narrative medicine" and her Narrative Medicine Program <<http://www.narrativemedicine.org/>> at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons trains others to teach and practice this approach to healthcare education. (8) A faculty member on her team, Maura Spiegel, writes, "A premise of Narrative Medicine is that attentiveness to how stories are told can make you better at considering a patient's story -or another caregiver's story or your own. It can help you identify what pieces of the story might be missing, what more you'd like to know, or what doesn't seem to fit. Notice[ing] where a story begins and ends, who's included in the story, whether or not it runs along a familiar plot line, how the teller's affect changes in the course of the telling." ("Teaching Film: A Perspective From Narrative Medicine" <<http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/blog/?p=121>>)

Arts and Medicine

Visual arts have more recently entered medical humanities training. Often the focus is on developing better observational and interpretive skills, but also recognized is the power of visual arts to elicit an emotional response in the observer. Bringing all of these together is the goal of numerous art-and-medicine classes, which often take place in museums and may be led by

museum educators or those trained by museum educators. For example, Florence Gelo, faculty at Drexel University College of Medicine, describes how she brings doctors in a Family Medicine residency training program to Philadelphia art museums and encourages them to describe to each other their emotional responses to a painting, to notice details, to interpret. See annotation of "The HeART of Empathy: Using the Visual Arts in Medical Education" <<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=12975>>and its accompanying online video in the Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database.

Performing arts, particularly film and television series, are commonly part of a medical humanities curriculum. Film clips are popular in medical ethics classes, and full-length films that provide insight into the history of medicine are common. Consideration of full-length films can proceed in a way similar to consideration of literary works, emphasizing either topical content or narrative analysis. Maura Spiegel, who teaches both literature and film in the Narrative Medicine Program at Columbia, writes about teaching the film, "The Doctor" from both a "topical" and a "narrative" perspective. Her blog essay is well worth reading ("Teaching Film: A Perspective From Narrative Medicine"). <<http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/blog/?p=121>> For further discussion of use of film and theater in medical humanities, see references 9 and 10, respectively.

Expressive Arts and Medicine

Medical Humanities is now bringing the active arts into curricula and programs. Drawing, as well as creative and reflective writing have been incorporated into optional or required healthcare training. These provide opportunities for creative expression and foster observation and self-analysis. Often they are group activities whose creative products are shared and discussed among participants. Sessions may be led by professional artists and writers. See, for example, the description of a craft of writing workshop at Yale University School of Medicine (Anna Reisman. "The Craft of Writing: A Workshop for Doctors- in- training" <<http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/blog/?p=43>>) and an essay on how a creative writing project for doctors in Nebraska provides professional inspiration and prevents burnout (Steve Langan. "The Seven Doctors Project: Creative Writing As Inspiration And Intervention." <<http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/blog/?m=200811>>).

Reflective writing is a required curricular element in some medical schools. Students and resident physicians may be asked to write a reflective, self-analytic piece about an experience with a patient or patient's family. Poetry may be a form of expression in certain programs. Johanna Shapiro, Director of the Medical Humanities Program at University of California Irvine School of Medicine, collected and analyzed more than 500 poems by medical students from different institutions. She developed categories that describe what students expressed in their poems. Among these were chaos, journey, and witnessing. (11)

At New York University School of Medicine, artist Laura Ferguson <<http://www.lauraferguson.net/artist-residency/>> teaches anatomy drawing to interested students and works on her own drawings as she observes dissections in the student anatomy lab and incorporates 3-D images of her own body into her work. A Family Medicine residency program at McGill University offers trainees an interdisciplinary art project, to fulfill a research requirement. Participants are expected to meet specific goals within stated learning objectives. They have created films, sculpture, poetry, and other products. (See blog essay by the project's creator, Dr. Maureen Rappaport, "Interdisciplinary Arts Project in a Family Medicine Residency Training Program." <<http://medhum.med.nyu.edu/blog/?p=748>>)

Performance studies methodology is currently under consideration to help teach students and physicians "how to interact with patients in a compassionate and empathetic manner . . . Performance studies offers a paradigm for teaching doctors to identify and critique the professional roles that they play daily and to choose their words and gestures deliberately so that their interactions with patients become more empathetic, compassionate, and thoughtful." (12)

The Literature, Arts, and Medicine Database: Development and Uses

Literature and medicine as a field for healthcare training was beginning to take hold in the early 1990s but there were few resources for instructors. Widely used at the time was an annotated bibliography by the pioneering scholar, Joanne Trautmann [Banks]. (14) First published in 1978 and last revised in 1982, it was no longer up to date in the early 90's. The early 90s

was also the period when the World Wide Web was introduced and coming into widespread use.

I had started to use literature in seminars with pre-medical and medical students at NYU, exploring the illness experience and experiences of doctors-in-training. As I attended workshops and professional meetings where such teaching was discussed, an idea germinated: those teaching literature and medicine could combine forces and together contribute to a Web-based annotated bibliography. We (NYU) would make this available on the Internet freely so that those interested would have easy access, and so that the field might be promoted and spread. Multiple contributors from different institutions and with varied interests would bring a range of perspectives and literary works. The Web format allows for frequent updates so that the material could be kept current. So, in 1993 the Literature and Medicine Database was established at NYU with four of us in the initial group of editor-annotators. Gradually I recruited additional individuals, resulting in approximately 20 editor-annotators from all over North America. Some have left the project and new ones have joined, but turnover is low. As the field developed to include art and film, the database expanded to include those genres as well.

Currently the Database holds more than 2500 annotations, primarily in literary genres, but also several hundred in art and film. It is searchable by keyword, genre, author, and several other categories as well as with an internal Google search engine that can search for any word or phrase (Free Text Search). There are extensive internal hyperlinks (cross-referencing) and links to external online texts, artworks, film trailers, author and artist homepages. The site gets more than 4000 page views per day and is used to create courses in medical humanities; by students at all levels - graduate, undergraduate, high-school, medical, nursing--for thesis and other academic work; by scholars and writers doing research; by patients and reading groups; by libraries; and by others.

The Search and Examples

How might a user find annotations for a specific purpose, and what might be found? One way to get started is to view the list of keywords, in order to see the topics covered in the database, or to get ideas for course topics, essay topics, etc. Database topics are, however, not confined to those listed as keywords – many other themes are included and can be searched for with the Google engine. Having picked a topic, the user might then decide

to limit the search, for example, to poems or short stories, or to art. Perhaps the user wants only to read annotations with online links to the text or art in question. Below are six examples of searches, with highlights of the results.

1. Keyword: Patient Experience

Genre: Poem

This search can be done quickly with the "Annotation Search" function, which has a pull-down menu for all the literary genres in the database. The results can be sorted by title or by author; both are displayed. More than 100 results are available – I choose the annotation of L. E. Sissman's poem, "Homage to Clotho: A Hospital Suite."

<<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=105>>

Writes the annotator, "Keen observation and carefully clever metaphors make poetry his best defense against his own impending death from Hodgkin's disease." "Empathy is a major theme of the poem."

2. Keyword: Doctor-Patient Relationship

Genre: Poem

Additional feature: on-line text of poem

Since there are now three search criteria, an internal Google search (Free Text Search) of linked terms is best. A search for doctor-patient AND poem AND on-line yields as the first result, "The Distant Moon"

<<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=731>> by

Rafael Campo.

In this case the search result link is to the audio and text of Campo's own commentary and

reading<<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/poems/the.distant.moon.rc.html>>,

which are linked to the annotation. Campo tells us that the poem is about a patient he had and "how much our patients actually care for us . . ." The annotator notes that the poem is "a fine evocation of the tension between clinical distance and emotional attachment." (One can find the annotation using Annotation Search for the title, or from the Author list to see the works by that author annotated in the database.)

3. Keyword: Illness and the Family

Genre: Poem

Additional feature: on-line

The free text search yields annotations of more than 30 poems. Suppose we select the annotation of Tony Hoagland's poem, "Lucky," <<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=1375>> about caring for his dying mother. The annotator notes that "this is caregiving with a twist – the mother is likened to a weakened enemy". The poem is "deeply unsettling" but brings out the conflicting emotions in such a situation. Other works that could be compared with the poem are suggested. Hoagland's audio commentary, reading, and text are linked to the annotation.

4. Keyword: Cross-Cultural Issues

Genre: Short Story

Using the Annotation Search function, more than 25 results are displayed. Selecting Toni Morrison's story, "Recitatif," <<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=11854>>, we learn that "The story is a wonderful classroom tool for discussing stereotypes of embodied differences like race, class, and disability."

5. Keyword: Power Relations

Art, on-line

With Free Text Search we find an annotation of the painting by Degas, "Interior." <<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=10415>> The annotator writes, "Degas' brilliant rendering of perspective pulls the viewer into the mystery of what has taken place/is taking place in this room. We don't know how to look at this scene, much less how to interpret it." "The human drive to narrativize and seek meaning in what is seen (and experienced) can lead to misinterpretation." Other paintings of psychological exploration and social commentary are mentioned and an article that discusses the painting is referenced.

6. Keyword: Physician Experience

Film

The Son's Room. <<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=10152>>

This film, concerns the death of a psychoanalyst's young son. The annotator writes: "We, the audience, need to process our own loss of the character and our identification with Giovanni's grief, and instead we are forced, with him, to listen to the anxieties of his patients, which suddenly seem almost outrageously petty and selfish. The challenges of empathy and of professionalism in the face of personal agony has surely seldom been so vividly presented."

The above annotations discuss topic but also comment on form and narrative approach.

There are several database annotations of works that focus on activities, for example Gillie Bolton's books, *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development* <<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=11800>> and *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing: Writing Myself*. <<http://litmed.med.nyu.edu/Annotation?action=view&annid=11769>>

And now, please browse and search the Database!

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Random Notes for the Beginning Poetry Writer

By Vince Corvaia

Let's begin with the master. Richard Hugo wrote that music must never conform to truth, but that truth should conform to music. That simply means that the poet has no allegiance to facts when writing a poem. Facts and truth are not the same thing, and as long as you're adhering to truth, you can change details to suit the poem's rhythm, structure, or even rhyme. In "Daddy," writing of her father's death, Sylvia Plath says, "I was ten when they buried you. / At twenty I tried to die / And get back, back, back to

you.” Well, Plath was eight when her father died. But there's a symmetry between “I was ten” and “At twenty” that just works better. Plath isn't lying. The persona in the poem isn't Plath per se, anyway. Don't confuse the voice of your poem with your real voice. It isn't “you” telling the story or setting the scene. It's your persona, your poetic identity for the duration of the poem.

You've heard the adage, “Write what you know.” In poetry, you can write anything you want. “What you know” is the human condition, what Faulkner called “the verities of the human heart.” If you're writing from the heart about the way you truly feel about your place in the universe, your persona can be a fledgling poet or an armadillo. Don't restrict yourself.

Pablo Neruda wrote in a poem called “Return to a city,” “It is dangerous / to wander backwards, / because all of a sudden / the past turns into a prison.” I have found that some aspects of my past are unreconciled to the point where trying to write about them only upsets me and destroys what should be a poem's objective tone. I'm not saying to avoid your unreconciled past. Some great poems (I think again of Plath's “Daddy”) are about just that. (Some would say that Plath, in writing, “Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through,” is reconciling her past. Discuss among yourselves.) I'm just saying, for your own sake, don't go so far backwards that you end up in Neruda's prison. No poem is worth hurting yourself.

*

Speaking (earlier) of Richard Hugo, run out right now and get a copy of his handbook for poets, *The Triggering Town*. I'll wait.

Did you get it? Good. This is the wisest and most practical book on poetry writing I can recommend. If you read it and want to investigate Hugo further, I recommend his collections *The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir* and *31 Letters and 13 Dreams*.

Don't just read Hugo's poems. Read all the poems you can get hold of. Read, read, read. Every poet has his or her favorite writers. I could tell you to read Stephen Dunn, William Matthews, Louis Simpson, Albert Goldbarth, Marilyn Hacker, Billy Collins, and other contemporary American poets (and I am telling you to read them), but you must also discover poets for yourself. Anthologies are good for this. There's nothing like the thrill of discovery. I'll never forget my undergraduate professor of

Irish poetry telling her class, “How I wish I were you, about to read Yeats for the first time.” You have to read voraciously. Not just contemporary poetry, but the masters. Any good poetry anthology will introduce you to your poetic ancestors. One of the very best poetry textbooks that is instructive as well as a good introductory anthology is *Understanding Poetry*, by Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks. I envy you if you're about to read it for the first time.

*

Now, all the time you're reading other poets, you should be writing your own poems. A funny thing will happen, especially if you're reading someone you admire. Your poetry will start to resemble that poet's work. I remember reading T.S. Eliot for the first time. Every poem I wrote for weeks resembled a third-rate “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” But that was OK. I was a beginning writer, and I hadn't yet found my voice, or style. I was feeling my way through the voices of other poets. Read enough poets, write enough derivative poems, and eventually, gradually, you will write a poem that is exclusively yours. It might take months. It might take years. But when it happens, you'll know, and there's nothing like it (literally—it will be your poem, in your voice, and there will be nothing else like it in the world).

*

As a poet, be a seeker, not a preacher. Don't impart your wisdom to the masses. (I can do that here because this is an essay in the “Writers' Craft Box,” but a poem is a different animal.) You're a human being, just like the reader, on a journey through this thing called life, and your poems should be bulletins that share what you find as you go on your way. Don't be didactic. The fact is that you don't know everything. But share what you're learning from a position of humility. The best poets do this.

*

It seems that every poet starting out has to write a poem about the seasons to get it out of his or her system, especially spring. Spring just brings out the verbosity in poets. Do you want your springtime ode to stand apart from most of the other beginning poems? Be sure to include yourself in it. Don't just write about the trees that blossom from the tops down. Write about

your reaction to them. Put yourself or someone you know in the poem. Personalize it.

*

When you finish drafting a poem, do not show it to anyone. Put it in a drawer overnight and don't look at it until the next day. You might even give it two days. When you take it out, you should be over the love-at-first-sight stage and be able to examine it more objectively. Remember that when you're drafting a poem, no one is looking over your shoulder. Write it down, no matter how foolish. One bad line might spark the idea that leads to a not-so-bad line, and so on. You have a unique freedom as a writer. You can say whatever you like. Don't be your own censor. Read Gregory Corso's "Marriage" and just imagine him sitting with his pad and his pencil, throwing the proverbial caution to the wind, and coming up with lines and phrases that a constipated brain could never have dreamed up. Let "Penguin dust!" be your creed.

There's nothing wrong with composing poems on a computer. But just know that the Delete key is not your friend. Don't delete. Print and save in a file marked "For Future Ruminations." Check the file periodically and see if there's anything you can use. If you cut something because it stands out, it might be perfect for a future poem that's even better than the one you're writing now.

*

I could double or even triple the length of this column writing about what to do when you're ready to publish. I'll leave that for someone else to cover. But I do recommend that before you seek out a publication, you solicit feedback on your work from other poets in a controlled environment where there is no wailing and gnashing of teeth. That would be a poetry workshop, either in a community or college setting. Let people you don't know but who are equally dedicated to their craft give you objective feedback on your work. Likewise, you will also learn and grow by reading and critiquing the work of others. Although the ideal poetry workshop should be free of egos, you're inevitably going to encounter them. Just be sure to leave yours at the door. After all, you're not there because you think you're great. You're there because you admit you have a lot to learn, and the more you learn, the more you'll have to impart.

*

Be disciplined. Don't wait for inspiration to strike. Commit to an hour or two every single day of brainstorming ideas. Don't let the page remain blank for very long. If a silly thought enters your head, write it down. It might not look half as silly in print. Some of my best poems have come as a result of just letting my imagination simmer before the momentarily blank page. You'll find that it's as if the poem was in there all the time, just waiting for the opportunity to bust loose. That's why discipline is important. You very likely have a poem to write today. You just need to pull out a blank sheet and give your imagination the chance to express itself. Start now.

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Why Do You Write? Honoring Your Writer Self-Image

By Kelly L. Stone

Answer this question: Why do you write?

Whatever your answer is, whether it's to achieve a lifelong dream of seeing your novel on a store bookshelf, to pen your family's memoirs, or for the simple pleasure of capturing an experience on paper, your answer to 'why do I write?' is what I call your 'Burning Desire to Write'. It's the sense of fulfillment you derive from writing. It's that ants-in-the-pants feeling you get when you don't write. It's the deep abiding need that only the act of writing will satisfy. It's what makes you a writer because writers can't not write.

Your Burning Desire to Write is also a manifestation of your self-image, or your self-esteem. When you feel good about yourself you do things on a regular basis, like writing, that reinforce those positive feelings. Even thirty minutes a day spent working toward a goal has been shown to elevate a person's general sense of well-being. This is why writing makes you feel good-- because you accomplished something. You created something. A "thing" that didn't exist before: a book, a song, a sculpture, or a painting, now exists because you created it.

Your self-image as it relates to your writing goals, your answer to "why" you write, also gives you a reason to pursue those goals. It doesn't have to be a lofty reason. Many people write because it brings a solace that nothing else can. Bestselling author CJ Lyons began writing her medical thrillers out of despair when a fellow intern and close friend was murdered.

The reason I write is because working every day toward my goals adds value to my life. I feel like I'm living up to something, and that makes me feel good. Writing helps me understand life and all that living entails: happiness, joy, grief, and loss. My first published essay, "Footsteps", in *Chicken Soup for the Sister's Soul*, was a way for me to deal with my feelings about and to tell the story of my emotional reconnection with my half-sister, from whom I'd been estranged for several years. When that story got accepted for publication, I realized it was because I'd written from the heart, and it showed in the final piece. I'd written from my "why."

Honoring your "why" is the best way to nourish your writer self-image and your Burning Desire to Write; and it's a good way to stick to your goals and keep up the self-fulfillment that writing provides. Try the exercise below to capture thoughts on why you write, and how to build up your own writer self-image.

Exercise: Nourish Your "Why"

Read through the exercise once, then practice.

Find a comfortable place to sit where you won't be disturbed for about 30 minutes. Have a pen and a notepad with you, or a journal, or if you prefer to type a blank page open in your Word files.

Close your eyes and begin to notice your breath. Don't force your breathing, simply watch it. Notice where you find the sensations of breathing the

strongest: is it at your nose, in your chest, or the rise and fall of your stomach? Wherever it is, simply watch it for several minutes. Breathe in. Breathe out. Don't force. Just observe.

Next begin relaxing the major muscle groups in your body. Start with your feet, and imagine that they feel heavy and warm. Then move that heavy warm feeling to your legs, your stomach, your chest, your arms and shoulders, then your back, and end with your head and neck. Between each major muscle group, return to watching your breath for several inhalations. Focus on relaxing. Allow your mind to free fall. When you're done relaxing all the muscle groups sit quietly for a few minutes and enjoy the relaxation. Stay focused on your breathing.

Then turn your focus to this question: why do I write? Allow whatever comes up to rise into your awareness. Keep focusing on the question, why do I write? Notice thoughts, sensations in the body, emotions that arise and pass. Whatever comes, let it rise and pass, like waves on the ocean.

After a few minutes, open your eyes and begin to write about what you experienced in this relaxed state while asking yourself, why do I write? Note/write down the emotional reasons that came to you; perhaps writing makes you feel good about yourself, or it leaves you with a fulfilled feeling. Perhaps, like CJ Lyons, you write to cope with deep feelings of grief, or even happiness. Maybe writing helps you deal with an unresolved matter, like it did with me.

Don't censor yourself while writing, simply put down whatever comes to you in a stream-of-consciousness manner.

Next, write about why all these reasons make you a writer. What does this say about who you are as a writer? Give some thought to your writer self-image, and note/write down all your thoughts and feelings.

When you feel done, get up and stretch, or have a cup of tea, or go for a walk. Allow some time to pass. Then go back and read what you wrote.

Try to refine your "why" from your musings in this exercise. Hone in on what makes you tick as writer. That's where your heart is, where your writer self-image comes from; it's also your Burning Desire to Write. That's what will keep you going on your writing journey.

You might write your "why" on an index card and put it near your writing space so you can see it often. If it's too personal, put this exercise somewhere safe and read it from time to time. Get in touch with your Burning Desire to Write and your writer self-image on a regular basis to stay refreshed and enthused about writing.

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