

## [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



"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.

## *Special Feature*

***Craft Box Contributor Bio-*** New Jersey resident Bill Mesce, Jr. is an award-winning author, screenwriter, and playwright. He also spent 27 years in various positions in the Corporate Communications division of pay-TV giant Home Box Office. Since 2010, he has taught as an adjunct instructor at several colleges and universities in New Jersey. His most recent work was the short story collection *Precis* (2012, Stephen F. Austin University Press), and this year will see the publication of *Reel Change: The Changing Nature of Hollywood, Hollywood Movies, And the People Who Go to See Them* from Bear Manor Media.

### *Editor's Introduction*

*In this edition of Writers' Craft Box, we are pleased to present a piece that is a journey in and of itself. Naturally, it is outside the norm for a lit mag editor to relish the chance to publish/edit a nearly forty-five page essay (albeit double-spaced), but from when I first read it, I realized that there*

*was something unique and essential about this documented perspective of going through these ten days of an in-depth Creative Writing MFA program. In this journal of sorts, writer Bill Mesce enlists us as his confidants from the beginning with his wry humor and conversational tone, sharing the pivotal transition moment that brought him to a crossroads in his life—necessity having "become the mother of reinvention." We get to learn and grow right along with him as he undertakes his odyssey which dispels preconceived notions/expectations, examines the light and shadow of the writer's life, stresses balance, introduces varied forms and philosophies and finally, most importantly, reminds us of that fundamental passion which is the very reason why we writers do what we do.*

*Mesce explains of the Fairleigh Dickinson University program, "It was going to be writers teaching writers in a way that writers thought would work for writers." When speaking of the predominant philosophy, he quotes poet and faculty member, Renee Ashley: "'We don't teach you how to write,' she said. 'We teach you how to think differently than you did before...It's called 'brain mobility'...You have to travel some roads you don't know. You have to learn to play again...You have to learn to read as a writer.'"*

*A light, often funny, easy read, it is also informative, touching, thoughtful and inspirational. One might read it in three different sittings, or, finding themselves drawn in, be surprised to discover that they've read it all through in one.*

*For both the aspiring and the seasoned writer, this piece is a distilled rite of passage that encompasses an experience we should all be so lucky to find the like of.*

### **Brief Excerpt:**

When I'd first learned of the FDU residency, I'd had visions of a bunch of artsy literary types tossing literary esoterica back and forth in terms so arcane I probably would've thought I must've had a stroke because I'd know they were speaking English but still couldn't understand a word they were saying. And, yeah, I'd be lying if I didn't admit there is some of that both among the faculty and some of the students.

But [Thomas E. Kennedy] and his lecture—“How James Joyce Changed My Life as a Person and as a Writer”—was the flip side.

Critical aesthetic analysis, close reading, all of that heady academic stuff that can scare off the not-particularly-academic writer (like me), is (and I admit this reluctantly, but knowing the truth of it) a part of any serious development as a serious writer. You can't be good at this—I mean really good—without doing that due diligence.

But that's only half of it. What Tom Kennedy talked about was the other, equally necessary part: the passion—what it is the heart responds to on the page; what it is the heart wants to express on the page. That was what Kennedy brought to the party.

A mustachioed leprechaun of a guy in his 60s, Kennedy—disillusioned with the country's misadventure in Vietnam, feeling suffocated by the tangled web of family as well as their blind fealty to Catholicism—had moved to Copenhagen in the late '60s where he still lives for part of the year and makes his living as a writer (Kennedy has over 30 books to his credit ranging from novels to short stories and travel writing to studies of literature; Kennedy's honors include the O. Henry Award and the Pushcart Prize).

By his own admission, this wasn't to be an academic, analytic lecture; it was something personal, and so it was. He spoke about his father, a wannabe poet who submitted poems most of his life but only managed to get two into print. His father worked to instill his own love of books in his children. Kennedy told how, when he'd been a child, his father would read to him and his siblings every night telling them they were committed to hearing at least six pages, but could punch out after that. Every night, as his father got to the top of page seven, he'd ask: “Do you want me to go on?” And they did.

I have my own father issues, and they're connected to loss and writing as well, so maybe I was already predisposed to being exceptionally open to what Kennedy had to say. But we shared more than that.

Tom Kennedy's young life had been filled with books (he'd decided on being a writer after wading through Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, pushed into his hands by his father), and he realized early on, “The authors of those books could be better friends to me than my friends...” Unlike the friends and family in his real life, these writers “...let me into their minds...

[they] didn't hide things from me, or deceive me, and if they did, I could figure it out."

In this, what he had found in reading—and later in his writing—was much of what I'd found as a book-loving youth; what I think most find who eventually venture into writing.

Kennedy developed a particular relationship with James Joyce, whose work had a profound impact on his sense of himself as a person and as a writer. On reading Joyce's *Ulysses*, Kennedy said the novel provided him with "... an x-ray of human thought...[freed] me of the fear of looking into my own mind." "It is essential," Kennedy went on to say, "for a writer not to be afraid of his mind."

It was such an affecting talk that afterward I went up to him and tried to express what his piece had meant to me. I found myself having to cut myself short because in another few seconds I was going to start bawling. Sue me; I may not have an artist's talent, but I have an artist's soft, mushy heart.



[Writer's Boot Camp](#)

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