

# Author's **BAZAAR** ONLINE

March 2012 ■ No. 14

*Writers  
write*



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# Editor's Note

*Dean Rea, editor*



## Where, when and why

### DO WRITERS WRITE?

Readers often desire to become better acquainted with their favorite authors by learning what motivates them to write and when and where they put words on paper.

Do writers follow a schedule? Do they place a cup of tea or a mug of coffee beside the computer as they begin to write? Or do they write in longhand? How many times do they revise their manuscripts? Do they work in a cozy corner

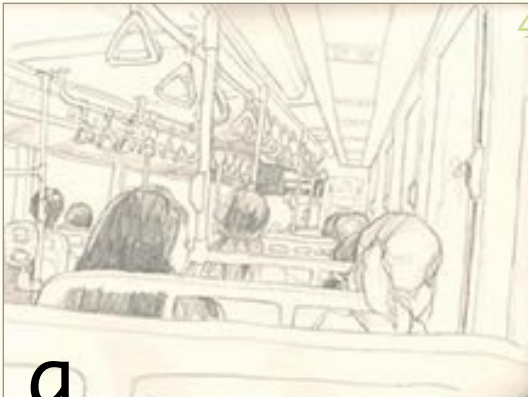
of the house or in an office? How do they cope with interruptions? And what motivates them to write? Fame? Fortune?

Ten American Amateur Press Association members responded to an invitation to explain their writing world in this issue of *Author's Bazaar*.

Three poems written by Sheryl L. Nelms appear among these articles that will help you become better acquainted with several authors whose work you have read in this online journal and in printed journals circulated in the AAPA monthly bundles.

The e-mail address of each author is published so that readers have an opportunity to establish a more personal relationship with someone whose writing they appreciate and/or admire.





a  
working  
writer:  
as  
it  
is

sheryl l. nelms

express bus  
to downtown Ft. Worth  
adjust insurance claims all day

express  
home

eat a Lean Cuisine

watch  
channel five

news  
weather  
sports  
and Inside Edition

read ten pages of *Health Magazine*  
while riding seven miles  
of exercise bicycle

compute two  
poems

address the rejects

shower  
shave the legs  
brush the teeth  
set the alarm

drop into bed  
to sleep

night after night

expressed  
into a vested

interest

# WHEN WRITERS WRITE

A small, vintage-style computer monitor and keyboard are positioned to the left of the large green letter 'W' in the title. The monitor is tilted slightly to the right, and the keyboard is in front of it.

By Lee Kirk

The iconic image of the “writer” (whatever that is) is of a man sitting alone at a desk in front of his typewriter or (more likely these days) computer monitor, staring into space or being encouraged by a diaphanous Muse who hovers over his shoulder. Truth be told, a writer is as likely to be a woman as a man, and while men may have the option of working undisturbed — if only in the evening after the day job — women very often have to wedge writing time in around cooking, housekeeping, child-rearing and sometimes a day job as well.

When I started a modest career as a freelance journal-

ist, my children were school age. We had a small farm with goats, chickens, a horse (for a while), a large garden and some fruit trees. The goats required twice-daily milking, the chickens required feeding and care, barns and coops needed regular cleaning. Gardens needed cultivation, weeding, thinning, harvesting, and the products required canning, drying, freezing, and otherwise preserving. Milk became cheese, fruit became pies or was dried or canned. 4-H projects required meetings, trainings and leadership. There was a house to clean and there were meals to prepare, children to drive to doctors, orthodontists, music lessons and so on. In addition to everything else, I did part-time bookkeeping for a small firm. In other words, there were few minutes in the day for uninterrupted writing.

However, I found minutes here and there — I wrote in the kitchen while waiting for food to cook, in the barn while waiting for the birth of kids, in the car or waiting rooms when the children were at appointments or lessons. Most of all, I wrote at night when everything else was done.

Years later, when my daughters were grown and independent and the farm was in the past, I owned an antique store. That was during the recession of the 1980s, and there were often breaks between customers. I wrote then by hand and typed the manuscript at night. Somehow I completed

a novel in addition to writing regular articles and columns for magazines and newspapers.



I have known many writers, men and women and including some who have become successful enough to earn their living by writing, who wrote late at night and slept through the mornings. I suspect that most of them developed this routine from the habits formed early in their careers.

When I was making most of my living from writing (with a part-time job and some other enterprises thrown in), I had some daily uninterrupted time. This is, perhaps, one of the more difficult times in a writer's life. It takes real discipline to – as we like to recite – “nail the seat of the pants to the chair and sweat blood.”

Of course, a lot depends on what you are writing. Freelance articles require that you familiarize yourself with your intended market, not only targeting it with appropriate material at desired slant and length, but you also have to be aware of the publication's advertisers and basic philosophy and not to antagonize or ignore either. You must learn to query succinctly but vivaciously, outlining your intended piece and writing a lead paragraph that is enticing and convincing. There is a whole subset of rules, such

as using strong verbs, avoiding clichés, varying sentence structure and length to keep a piece lively, finding appropriate anecdotes and quotations, double-checking all facts and using correct grammar and punctuation. Eventually most of that becomes second nature.

In addition, you must learn to shrug off rejection. You must learn to “kill your darlings” — those lovely quotes, phrases, similes, etc. that don’t quite fit but are too precious to lose. You must revise, rewrite, cut and revise again. You must cheerfully follow any editorial suggestions. Of course, if you find a request objectionable, you can refuse to make changes, realizing that you are killing your relationship with that editor.

People used to ask me how to get published. When I told them, they would more often declared it to be “too much work.” Not infrequently, someone would ask me to write something for free “because it’s so easy for you.” Now and then I would receive a request, or even a manuscript out of the blue, telling me that I needed to get the material published because it was, again, so easy for me. (Those last requests were usually for something that was totally unpublishable.) Once in a while someone would suggest that I “edit” for them. Usually that turned out to be a case where they wanted me to write their book, based on a few

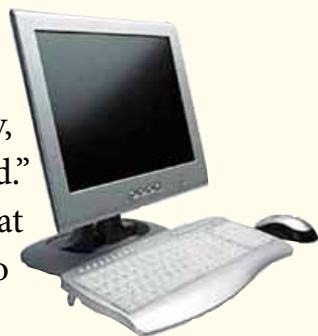


pages of wild ideas or on some verbal meanderings. One friend actually suggested that I co-author the biography of his dog.

Over the years, the magazines I enjoyed writing for folded or changed their slant to something that didn't interest me. It became more and more difficult to find paying markets. Many of them offered to "pay on publication" but would stall and delay payment until they folded without paying their writers. After losing thousands of dollars that way, and for various personal reasons, I stopped doing freelance on a regular basis.

Creative writing is altogether different. You can choose your subject and your writing style and whatever else your muse dictates. You can break rules and make new ones. Creative non-fiction, of course, needs structure and fairly tight composition. Fiction and poetry are less restrictive, although there are plenty of does and don'ts if you expect to publish.

Composing on the computer is fast and easy — too easy really. I have found that for most writing, it pays to print the copy, set it aside and go back and read it "cold." Perhaps the younger generations can look at material on a screen critically enough to do



revisions. My brain is hardwired to print on paper. I need to analyze, jot comments, go back and look at previous sections, sometimes cut and tape pages into more organized form. The final corrections can be applied on the computer.

Poetry is one type of writing that I don't find compatible with composing on a machine. When I write poetry, I do so word-by-word, crossing out words, lines, phrases. I search for one word to take the place of 10, trimming to the essence. I look for words that do multiple duty, words that have resonance to a particular emotion or sensation, words that work in enjambments to change meaning in mid-sentence. Sometimes words or phrases need to whisper softly. Sometime the context requires them to scream and shout. Some poems are crystal clear in intent and meaning. Others are subtle, subdued, hinting at meaning beyond what is on the page.

When a hand-written poem gets too messy, I might type it, print it and start again. But the process of making a poem is much too intimate to trust to a machine. (Perhaps my age and bias are showing again.)

Why writers write has about as many answers as there are writers. Journalists write for money and in the interests of conveying news or information. Columnists express opinions (and are often paid for it). Writing advertising

copy is a job. Fiction writers usually write in hopes of money and recognition. (How many times have I met people who wanted to dig out of a difficult financial situation by writing a best-selling novel?)

Often ego drives the effort — the need to see one's name in print. For others, it's the compulsion to publish a statement in the interests of righting a wrong, urging participation in a group effort, expressing warnings or predictions. Teaching professionals must “publish or perish” to maintain academic status. Some write for private reasons — to preserve family history, for example. Some write for pure pleasure, while others write to vent anger or disapproval. Why anyone writes poetry is a mystery. It is mostly a compulsion to express insights or to create art.

Some writers, such as AAPA journalists, write just to have fun.



Lee Kirk

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>click here<

# The way I write: simple but satisfying

**By James “Jim” Lamanna**

My years as a reporter have had a tremendous influence on how I write: mostly briefly and quickly. My writing habits have never included much in the way of long term planning. A few brief notes in my 3x5 spiral notebooks serve me well.

My subjects are often personal experiences, many of them from past years, and anecdotes about writers and writing. I have a penchant for learning the work habits and the works of authors.

I know a good deal about how writers write...and their often bizarre habits, such as that of the Russian writer, Nabokov, who did much of his writing on 3x5 index cards while stretched out on a couch.

When I get an idea for an item, short essay or short fiction, I move quickly to the computer and begin writing. Much of this outpouring is rather disjointed because my habit is not to write in long stretches, but to work on a piece in snatches of time.

My computer and work area are located in a room next

to a front room in the spacious lower first floor flat in our two-family home. I know most writers prefer quiet and solitude, but I have no problem writing while my wife is in the next room watching TV. I rather like it. Keeps me in touch with the world.

Also, I think working in a noisy, bustling city room of a newspaper taught me long ago to tune out the world when working.

My note-taking is done with a gel pen, recorded in a pocket size notebook. It's not very detailed but it suffices. Much of what I write is in my head. Most of the copy I compose, both for the AAPA and what little freelancing I put forth, is short. Brevity is my comfort level in writing.

I marvel when I read of the extensive research and polishing of finished copy turned out by successful authors. I suspect this is why I have never, even if I had the talent, been able to turn out the novel I always dreamed about.

But I'm happy. I have had some short fiction published in my lifetime, quite a bit of non-fiction and greeting card copy. And my lifelong interest in being published in the AAPA has served me well and provides all the satisfaction I need.



Jim Lamanna

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# Writing is easy

By David Griffin

All of us writers have no doubt heard the famous quote, “Writing is easy: All you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.” Some have heard it attributed to various authors. (Wiki says it’s by Gene Fowler, journalist and playwright.) But I’ve never had a problem with creative writing and only occasionally with factual writing. Sitting at a keyboard evidently sets up a chain reaction in my brain that leads to sentences coming out my fingers.

I write what I’ve read. Somewhere in my mind, banging around since I first began to read, is no doubt every phrase I ever laid eyes on. I’m just rearranging and repeating them as I type. A lifetime of voracious reading of decent prose has helped my craft immensely.

I remember opening a thin book as I stood in front of my grandmother and proudly declaimed, “See Dick run,” as though I were the town crier with a hot new story. My reading ability happened quickly. Only a few months before I had asked Mom if I were holding the hymnal upside right in church while I pretended to read the lyrics and sing along with the congregation. I was one motivated reader. I am one motivated writer. I want to spill it out.

It doesn’t come out perfectly, of course. There was a time when I hated editing my own work. It felt like I was killing my issue, I guess, because I didn’t want to destroy what to my inner ear sounded so wonderful when it rolled out on paper. Today, I view the process as an opportunity to crisp up my phrasing and smooth out the delivery.

Good writing doesn’t call attention to itself. It goes right down the reader’s gullet, smooth as butter. If I watched his or her eyes, they would not dart back to re-read a phrase or arch an eyebrow to ponder a muddy sentence. I would have scooped her up into my word wagon as I drove by and have her there with me, hearing my writer’s voice, understanding my context and recognizing my metaphors. There would be a glint of expectation in her eyes as she avidly reached for the next sentence, one after another. Such wonderful writing doesn’t come directly out of my

head any more than Premium Hi Test comes right from the ground. The product has to be refined.

Writing is a craft, of course. It doesn't take long to get the basics down, but it is a lifelong process of learning. I can't speak as an expert, but I do have a few opinions on how to go about it. I won't bore you with them here because you may have only a passing interest. I've penned a short article and placed it on my website if you want to pursue my suggestions. It's at <http://www.windsweptpress.com/telstor.pdf>

We all have different ways of approaching our craft. While thinking about a topic, I often wait for a terrific opening phrase to pop into my mind, words I can't wait to get on paper. It's why I always carry paper and a pen. Look hard enough and you'll find other authors writing on napkins in restaurants or on their boarding passes sitting in the corner of the airport bar. (Yes, the latter could be an aluminum salesman figuring his commissions.)



At home, my PC is set up and organized for writing with electronic folders separating my projects into easily accessible categories of “Complete,” “Working” and “Stuff” (thoughts, research, and trial para-



graphs.) Computerized folders hold a variety of writer's tools and resources. I back it all up at least once each week. Immediately, if I've just written a story that will make me as famous as Stephen King.

I publish my short stories are 500 to 2,000 words on the Internet. Thirty or so essays and stories are rolled into a self-published book each year. I seldom have a complete story or idea in my head when sitting down to write. I'm a big fan of the "stream-of-consciousness" method. If I waited for a story to flesh out in my mind, I'd never write it. An early piece, "The Good Shepherd," was in my thoughts for at least 10 years. I became so disgusted bouncing it around in my head that I finally sat down and wrote it so I could forget about it. I might have written the tale a decade earlier and eliminated the time I wasted thinking about how to construct it.

When I feel like writing, I sit and write. About anything. I might open my "Working" file and add a few sentences to a story in progress, get stuck or become tired of it and switch to another piece I began a week or a few years ago. I have more than a hundred "starts" as I call them, most having a few paragraphs, some a few sentences and others a few pages.

When writing, multiple resources are open on my PC,

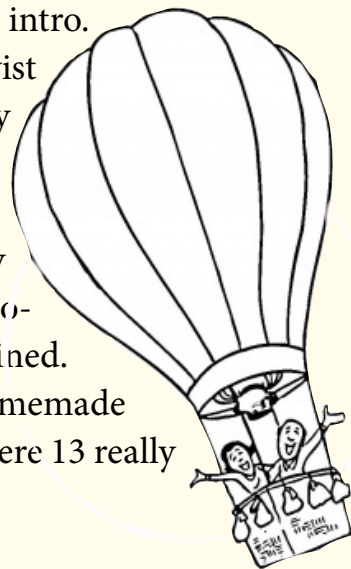
such as Wikipedia, Google and TheFreeDictionary, the latter for use as a word checker and thesaurus. I can't tell you where my paperback thesaurus is in this book-lined room my wife calls my cave. Before we moved to a small modern house, we lived in an old farmhouse, and I wrote in the cellar. My PC was set up among shortwave radios in the former fruit cellar beneath sturdy old floor beams. I could look up and see the joists decorated with cobwebs that were there when we moved in 35 years earlier and were still intact when I left last November. They were probably a hundred years old.

Ideas come from everywhere. I believe a writer can write about anything. I approach all of my subjects as stories. In each piece, whether it's fiction or factual, I try to form a "story arc" and also put a hook in the intro.

Finding an opportunity to include a twist or two to surprise the reader in a way that brings a chuckle is another goal.

With memoirs I embellish, believing the story trumps the facts (and I freely admit it.) I'm a storyteller, not an historian, and my reader wants to be entertained.

The reader doesn't care whether the homemade balloon a friend and I made when we were 13 really



rose high enough to fly me over my hometown. The reader just wants to soar with my imagination over the neighborhoods and downtown buildings and to land safely in a cornfield on the other side of town.

When I get a story on paper and edited, it's no more than a vision typed out from my head. I need another person to read it and to tell me if the words mean anything. Before I bother my wife for her impression, I always read the article aloud. (Later versions of Adobe Reader will do that for you.) It's a great way to catch mistakes and awkward phrasing.

Next, I change the font and arrange the printing of the piece to somewhat resemble a magazine article. I often use a Caslon face and narrow columns to simulate *The New Yorker*. I find that reading the piece in that mock environment puts my brain in a highly critical mode where my expectations easily recognize poor writing. Grammatical mistakes and muddy sentences stand out sharply on this stage.

Posting my stories on the Internet and self-publishing via PrintOnDemand allow changes to the copy at any time. I constantly read and re-read my work and make minor changes. To me it's not a chore. I feel the way a sculptor might after discovering a burr on the smooth surface of

the work and carefully rubs it away to make the piece even more finished.

Input from others is essential. Probably the most helpful feedback on my writing in recent years has come from the bloody streets of Internet critique groups. Don't go there if you're thin skinned. I'm sure a few nascent authors have given up writing after suffering a beating or two from some of the nastier critics who inhabit these forums.

The worst offender in one group I belonged to (the group I was proudly kicked out of, frankly) had never had even a single story published. But as vicious as the remarks could be, many of the group members writing insights were right on and I learned a lot. If you do join a tough group, just be careful. Don't believe everything you're told. Internet writing groups can get sidetracked on one aspect of writing and will begin to concentrate on it to the exclusion of all the good things in your prose. Some Internet writing critics would have scolded Thomas Jefferson for his lack of a hook, and a story arc in the Declaration of Independence.

I wish I had begun an organized program of creative writing long before I retired. Today I'd know more about the craft and my writing would now be more efficient. I don't know why I didn't start, except time was always in short supply and my story ideas didn't appear to form

complete plots. How was I to know the best way to solve a plot problem (for me, at least) is to sit down and write it out. And if it doesn't make sense, change it. I've learned creativity doesn't happen when I'm thinking about a potential story. It takes place while I'm writing or in the midst of solving a writing problem.

Just because drops of blood don't form on my forehead as I write doesn't mean the effort isn't work. I spend quite a bit of time on it. But I figure that it's what I'm meant to do at this stage of my life. And if all the hours I put into writing were not enjoyable, I'd be fishing instead. Come to think of it. I do need to get some flies tied for spring.

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Dave Griffin

EMAIL DAVE  
>[click here](#)<

# Still a writer. *Sort of.*

**By Al Hutchison**

Sometimes I tell myself I'm a writer. But it's a stretch. I got my first newspaper job, as a copy boy at the old Hollywood *Citizen-News* in California when I was 21, and although I spent the rest of my career in journalism, the writing part of it almost always took a back seat to reporting, editing and, for a while, publishing.

I retired in 1999, soon after my 65th birthday, mostly because the new technology too often left me embarrassingly dependent on the help of much younger people to get out of computer-related jams. I'd been in charge for so long that I found it dispiriting to so often be turning to much younger people to overcome my all-too-painful shortcomings.

Yet, it is that very same computer technology that enables me to do the writing that so pleases me in my retirement. Without it, I'd have to find far less rewarding endeavors to fill my days. Take away the Internet, and my

writing activities would consist only of my daily journal (one meager page), a weekly letter I email to my three children up north and occasional diatribes to friends.

But at least once a week, and often twice, an editor at a far-away newspaper will ask me to write an editorial for the next day's issue (and sometimes for the sister newspaper in another city in the same state). In today's economy, editors tend to welcome relatively inexpensive sources of content and if a couple of them have come to depend on me, at regular intervals, to fill the space set aside for their newspaper's opinion on current events, then that's fine with me.

Because I don't live in the state where these editorials are



published, I rarely write about local subjects. My specialties are national and international affairs. I was born and reared in Scotland, and I've traveled quite a lot in Canada and Europe, and maybe that at least partly explains why I've always maintained a strong interest in developments on the national and world stages. In fact, even if I weren't writing editorials, I'd be reading foreign and national newspapers online. My daily diet includes regular doses of *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, both published in the United Kingdom, as well as *The New York Times* (I subscribe to the print edition, too), *The Washington Post* and various online news sources that I respect.

So, here's how it works: An editor sends me an e-mail asking if I can contribute an editorial for the next day's edition, or for some edition in the very near future. Invariably I reply in the affirmative. The editor never assigns a topic, and in fact I seldom have any further contact with him until he tells me he has received it (as an e-mail attachment). The choice of topic is entirely mine.

Fortunately, my personal editorial leanings are identical to those of the two newspapers, which are owned by the same family. The editors know that I'm not going to jolt them with an editorial that clashes with anything they've previously published in either tone or content. And they've



never rejected one of my editorials. I'm very happy about that.

On the days that I write editorials, I wake up thinking about the task ahead: What's the buzz today? I don't watch morning television, but my wife does – Jackie favors C-Span and MSNBC – and at breakfast I'll ask her if there's a particularly hot subject being bandied about that might become my topic. In the meantime, I'll have read *The Tampa Bay Times* (until recently it was called *The St. Petersburg Times*) and *The New York Times*, preferably on the back porch, weather permitting.

After breakfast, I'll spend some time on my computer and within an hour, at the most, I'll have chosen a topic. I then start jotting notes and highlighting quotes (I always make sure I credit the sources, by the way, so that in reading one of my editorials you might come across a phrase such as “according to a report in yesterday's *Washington Post* ....”) and putting them off to one side for future reference. And, yes, I sip black coffee (no sugar, please).

I am allotted 580 words, but in the first draft I may go far above that total. I actually love the part where I have to edit sharply to eliminate the excess. Writing is the hard part, editing is the enjoyable part. And when I edit, I do so as much with my ears as my eyes. I “listen” carefully to

what I've written, and I work assiduously to rid my copy of any clanking sounds so that, when it is finished, the editorial has a rhythm not unlike that of a musical composition.

(Years ago, when I was a fulltime editorial writer, it would infuriate me when another editor – my boss, so I couldn't say much – would alter my writing in such a way that the flow, or rhythm, was interrupted. To me, it was akin to hearing a sour note in a symphony.)

Finally, the editorial is exactly where I want it: Ready to be proof-read by my wife. She'll often spot minor mistakes of spelling or grammar, and I'm always grateful. Every writer needs an editor, and Jackie's my first editor.

Even after she gives it the green light, however, I may make some changes, usually to improve the flow or the tone. And then I send it, via e-mail, to its destination. That's the magic part. In the old days, when I was roaming around Florida covering state politics, I'd tote a portable typewriter, a supply of paper and knowledge of where to find the nearest Western Union office.

Once, back in 1970, I had an exclusive interview with a candidate for governor and telegraphed my story early in the day to my editors. While my competitors were busy taking notes the rest of the day, I loafed. But the next morning I picked up the newspaper and found my byline on a

story I hadn't written. I called the office and was told my story had vanished between the desk and the composing room and, desperate, they'd slapped my byline on a wire service story about the same candidate.

Years later, when the newspaper office was torn down, my story was found in an old vacuum tube. A copy boy had somehow contrived to stick it in an obsolete tube that went nowhere. That's a story from another time, and while I have always thought that was a good time, I now know better.

Computers may have accelerated my retirement plans, but I also recognize that they've made my retirement a genuine pleasure. I'm still a writer. Sort of.



Al Hutchison

EMAIL AL  
>[click here](#)<



# Food For Thought

Sheryl L. Nelms

I write them

poem  
after poem  
after  
poem

pages and pages

until my office  
is full

drawers won't shut  
shelves spill  
over

with a waterfall  
of words

I tape them on the walls  
and windows

spread them out  
on the kitchen  
cupboards  
to dry

wrap them around leftovers

eat them scrambled  
for breakfast  
with bacon



## Why Wisconsin writers write

Wisconsin has long, long hard winters with snow, sleet and ice. Granted, snow plows, snow blowers and shovels clean driveways and paths, but it is still dangerous to walk and exercise outside. Dashing to automobiles for necessary trips to town is the extent of our time spent outdoors.

There are just so many cable television shows and books to read as we hunker down for the long hard winter season.

So, we sit in front of the computer, reading and writing e-mails, doing weekly family newsletters, checking obits, historical web sites. Sometimes the computer crashes and puts us out of business for a few days. We are not real savvy when it comes to mechanical contraptions. We would rather it be summer when we can ride our lawn mower, bale hay and work in the garden. But alas, it is winter in Wisconsin.

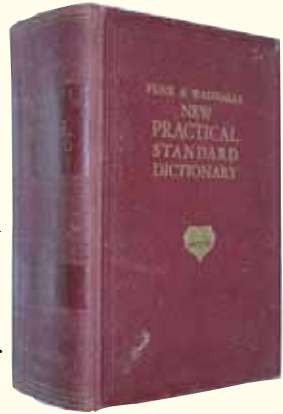
Dabbling into genealogy. A local weekly newspaper editor invites columnists to submit articles for publication, we do it monthly, and he does a half-page layout and spread, including pictures. No fame or fortune only the satisfaction of seeing our names in print. Dave Griffin does post our articles on his web site.

Research for friends and different branches of our ancestors, copying them into books and distributing to all existing family members, whether they want them or not.

And a small insert for the monthly AAPA bundles.

Recently a friend gave me a 1928 Funk & Wagnalls Practical Standard Dictionary and use it almost every day. Leatherette, gold gilt, thumb index. 1,309 pages of very small print. Even a section on foreign words, phrases current in English literature. 140,000 words and phrases, 2,500 pictorial illustrations. Designed to give orthography, pro-

nunciation, meaning, etymology, synonyms, antonyms, and prepositions. Weighs eight pounds and is three and a half inches thick. Oh, what fancy words we will be able to use from the 1928 Dictionary. Checked cost on Abebooks.com and is worth about \$25. This rests now on the bookshelf along with Roget's New Thesaurus in Dictionary Form, circa 1978.



So, now it is March 2012 and spring is on the way in Wisconsin. Barn swallows arrived from Mexico, grass is green and time to spend outdoors. No more time to write for awhile, have it all taken care of in the long winter months.



Russell & Delores Miller

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# Writing can give you a little bit of



**By Kathleen DesHotel**

Writing is all about control. It has been a useful gift to me ever since I started scribbling to please teachers. When I received comments back from them, in my head I would be amazed at how I could get someone to pay attention to what I had to say. My youthful mind enjoyed this new-found power. This spilled over into times when my parents would discipline me over some indiscretion; I would go to my bedroom as told and write them a letter explaining my side of the situation. Sometimes this worked, and other times it just “ticked them off.”

Still I thought of writing as a wonderful tool. All through school it was my writing that got my point across. Now don't get me wrong; I can also talk and was a verbal child and still am as an adult. The spoken words, while effective,



will simply float into the air; whereas, the written word remains for further contemplation. No one can change the intention or reinterpret the written word because it is visual, solid and endures.

I used my ability to write greatly in college. As a baby boomer, professors never knew our names or our faces. In arena classes of a hundred students, we were all just blurs of



faces. When I got a chance to write, I used the power of the written words in the blue book to grab them and stand out.

From many of those words, professors would ask me to stay after class to expound upon whatever I had written and to discuss my opinions compared with theirs. After that kind of encounter, they knew who I was and couldn't include me in the blur.

Majoring in English literature was the natural choice. Language, its formation and use, led me to also major in French. I continued on to get a masters in English, years

later another in education in curriculum and instruction and then a reading specialist certification. Then, I earned teaching certification in gifted education and eventually took 30 more graduate hours in photography. I love the written and the visual and found the combination to be a great trigger for teaching writing to my favorite groups, at-risk and gifted. They learned to read, think, discuss and “see.” Nothing exists in isolation; everything affects everything else. I taught them that understanding literature, the world and their own hearts and minds would lead to great writing.

After Hurricane Katrina, many people whose homes had been destroyed lived in my home. It took a month before regular mail and newspaper delivery resumed, and my dad found an ad for a writer for the art column. He walked into my teacher’s work hovel and handed me the paper with the ad circled and said, “This is for you. You always said you were a writer. It’s time to prove it.” I hemmed and hawed because my school had just reopened, and I was struggling to keep everything together, being the only person in my home who still had a job.

But, to please Daddy, I wrote and submitted a story about an art teacher at my school from the angle of how hard it is for an artist to express her own art while teach-

ing her students. Good teaching is a demanding job that does not allow for personal expression of gifts. Much to my relief, I did not get a response from the *Times-Picayune*. Then two months later, I got a call and was told that the local editor sent what she considered the best to the editor-in-chief, who chose me.

Since that time I have written a weekly and sometimes twice weekly column that requires research, interviews, attending art openings, thought and passion. I take my own photos that coincide with my articles and laughably make \$45 per article. Yet, I continue because of the caliber of people I meet and get to know in gloriously intense conversations. For the past six and a half years I have offered the best of my talents to the job and have also grown a great fan base.

Regarding where I write, I must say that the spare bedroom is my nest. Not to overwork the word “multi-tasker,” but people with similar *modus operandi* collect business cards and brochures and snippets of information on torn pieces of paper and make a mess in the eyes of others.

My husband is one of those people who does everything lock step: finish one thing before starting another. My parents were the same kind of people. This all proves that opposites really do attract and that two negatives equal a pos-

itive. Math and physics rule. I periodically try to sort and organize the clutter, but this is not possible. Anyway, it all makes sense to me, and I know where everything is.

After 30 years of teaching others to write and read and think logically and analytically, I retired. I loved my career, and I also love retirement and the opportunities to write whenever and however I wish. That is except for my Monday deadline for the following Sunday's article where I still exercise a little power.

Two online sites that carry some of Kathleen's stories:

<http://connect.nola.com/user/kathleendeshotel/posts.html>

<http://www.hurricanearchive.org/browse/?search=deshotel>



Kathleen DesHotel

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# Writing with a full cup

By Hugh Singleton

I may be a bit presumptuous in referring to myself as a “writer” but egos get hungry, too, and a little self-esteem now and then can’t be so bad ... can it?

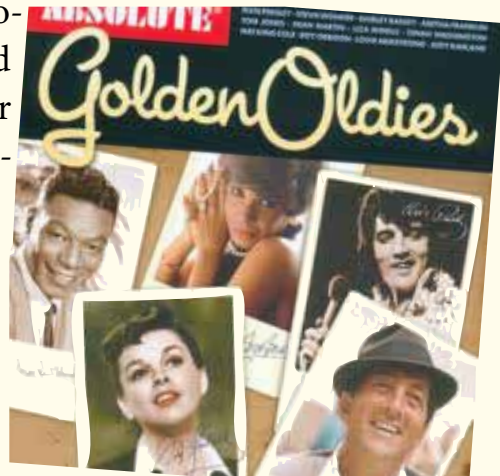
My love of writing began as soon as I learned to read, and by the time I was a senior in high school, those short essays we were required to write in English and literature classes became wonderful opportuni-

ties for expressing the thoughts of a teenager who was rapidly becoming an authority on everything.

Through my years of business college, an enlistment in the U. S. Navy, an abortive try at post graduate work and four years of employment with a doomed business, I was too busy being a husband and father to indulge my yen to write. Later, after joining the best company on earth, I settled into a 34-year career, which I reluctantly ended by retiring at the end of 1993. Now I could think about writing again.

I joined AAPA again, and later UAPA and NAPA and published journals for each group. My writing might not have been so good, but I was certainly prolific and I was enjoying the hobby, which I still do.

I do not write in longhand and any revisions are done as the writing progresses. I use a Dell computer and my preferred software is Microsoft Word although I have used several software programs over the years. I don't have one specific time for writing; I write as much at four o'clock in the morning as I do at four in the afternoon.



I often listen to music when I write, and my choice of music is often to set the mood in which I write. I am partial to music written prior to 1960, and my collection would fit easily under the classification of “oldies.”

I have not written for money and by far, most of what I write is for my own enjoyment or for special friends and family. Most of what I consider my best writing has been in the form of letters to people I love. In another life, perhaps, I would want to write for a living, but here and now it's all for the sheer fun of it.

What inspires me to write? A stormy day or night, a windy day, a deserted beach, a flock of migrating birds, a poem, a song or any event that exercises my emotions. Most often I have either a cup of coffee or a cup of iced tea by my keyboard, and most often when I finish the writing, my cup is still full.



Hugh Singleton

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**Might as well enjoy it,  
You probably won't get rich**

By George Wm. Hamilton

My business card says I'm a journalist. That's easy because I have a press and print my own cards. I could be a writer, I suppose, simply with a different card, but I prefer greater identification and credibility.

Most everyone knows what a journalist is. Newspapers and all that. (I write for the "all that," here meaning publications specialized in particular subjects, not for a newspaper.)

But a writer? What do you write? Novels? Murder mys-



teries? Porn stories? Poetry? Oh, that's nice. (Puzzled look: how does he/she pay the rent from poetry, of all things?) Not exactly a conversation starter. And what a real writer thrives on is conversation. So does a real journalist. That's the source of some of the best ideas, and even if you don't have a super hot idea, a good quote can make the story. Or even a story. The trick is to listen and to ask questions based on what you hear and the story can write itself.

Most employed journalists are fortunate in having regular paychecks, paid holidays and some even with a decent retirement account. Life is far less secure for free-lancers, as I am now. I suggest — probably unjustly — that most independent writers and free-lance journalists are literary whores: They'll write for anyone who pays. Not an easy route to follow.

In past years when I was managing editor of a weekly newsletter and writing for other Business International publications on Eastern Europe, I had the luxury of a comfortable office and a secretary. Administrative duties shared priority with writing. There was seldom enough time to write and often the articles I put together were done in the evening either in a café or at home rather than in the office on the Wang text computer system.

Outside of the office I used pencil (well, ballpoint) and

paper and still do. The office environment helpfully included clippings, files and an archive as well as my staff of country specialists with whom I could discuss points of view or fact. Now I work at home in a far less structured environment, clippings, e-mail printouts and papers all over the place. Some who don't recognize touches of system would call it chaos.

In my work I first query (actually a sales pitch for a story concept) and then file as requested to several biweekly publications of the same publisher (Platts/McGraw-Hill, in London). I usually rewrite my articles for individual editors, angling to suit the specific needs of the separate readerships although the basic topic (say renewable energy from wind) may be the same. Much input material comes from press conferences, seminars, occasional interviews and other sources that I've recorded in longhand notes. Because I've been following energy in Austria now for more than 25 years, I'm something of a specialist, a mental archive that serves me well.

I find working to a deadline is a helpful discipline. Harking back to days when I was involved with broadcast journalism and you either made your deadline or risked the job, I can and often do leave the actual putting-to-paper of an article until near the last moment. But I'll likely have

been thinking about the piece for some days and may even have collected a couple of clippings or relevant notes on scraps of paper.

I work out of my head without an outline unless it involves critical questions for an interview, which ought to follow a logical sequence and cover specific bases. Once an article is done, I usually print it out, preferring to edit a print page rather than on the screen. I may shift a sentence or even a paragraph to create better flow of thoughts although this generally applies more to an article than it does to a brief news story.

The approach to news coverage is changing as more publishers go electronic. Some have given up the printed form altogether. The idea is speed, alas to the detriment of accuracy and style. I leave the instant laptop reporting to others...

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**"I leave the instant laptop reporting to others..."**

ers; I want more time to analyze the key points of a story and to get it into a frame of reference useful to the reader. I want sufficient overview to spot trends or inconsistencies. Not all publishers share my viewpoint and increasingly subscribers/readers too apparently want the "quick news fix" even when many hasty stories subsequently require a

follow-up disclaimer or correction that they may overlook.

Some writing I've done required an unusually long perspective. For some years I wrote and revised several volumes of the Fodor's travel guide series, handling the Austria and Vienna books and chapters on East Germany, East Berlin, Budget Austria and a few others. Copy had to be in New York by May or so for books that would be printed in the fall to appear on the market around the end of the year or start of the next — for the travel season a year after I had reviewed hotels and restaurants. That meant not only trying to propel one's self into the role of a tourist a year hence, but also to consider that the books would be on sale for at least a year, sometimes two, before the next updated edition appeared. Would the restaurant still be there? With the same basic cuisine? Would a hotel have been refurbished and rates drastically increased? All questions that put the writer very much on the spot.

Keeping up with technology has been one of the greatest challenges I've encountered. When at Business International in about 1982, we moved from typewriters and transmission via post, fax or even teletype into the electronic era with the Wang word processing system, which took our finished copy in Vienna and instantly transmitted it to our publishing office in Geneva. We were ahead of the curve.

I agreed to be among the first in the office to take the four-day Wang training course, reluctantly convinced that there was no use resisting. When I went independent in 1991, I had acquired a primitive desktop computer beyond the Commodore level, printer and fax. The successor to that setup I still have and use, Bill Gates and Microsoft technical wonders notwithstanding. Indeed, this article is being written using MS-DOS and Word Perfect 5.1, which suits me just fine. To get the text to *Author's Bazaar*, I'll make a 3.5-inch floppy copy, transfer that into my considerably newer Windows XP system, which will automatically convert the text to Word and even package it and send it off to Oregon, theoretically without a whimper. (Editor's note: It arrived without a whimper.)

My Epson dot-matrix printer still works with the equally ancient computer. No bells and whistles, just good old-fashioned stone-age word processing, far easier (for me, anyway) than to learn the tricks of a new Windows program each time a Microsoft engineer has a brainstorm. I've a couple of laptops but they have later Windows on them and are barely used.

I still find it easier to take hand-written notes at a press conference than to be distracted by laptop technology. Interpreting the notes at home offers the environmental ad-

vantage of an outstanding sound system and a collection of some 1,500 CDs (mainly but hardly limited to Viennese music and classics) to set the mood.

How long will I continue to write? Probably until I run out of ideas and enthusiasm and see my pine box from the inside. To be truthful, the need regularly to change electronic technologies to meet publisher's (not my!) requirements is a discouraging factor. I write because I enjoy it.

My work in Austria puts and keeps me in touch with top government officials, ministers, state secretaries and the like, and the heads of the major businesses, banks and institutions. I'm still at it after many of them have retired. We greet each other when we meet on the street or at special events. We're on a



Heldenplatz Square, Vienna — dedicated to the victory over Napoleon

first-name basis, a pleasant relationship and highly useful for a journalist who needs the inside touch for an exclusive story. A modestly large fish in a fairly small pond, as my

Hungarian aunt puts it, and she's right. Does it pay? On a cash basis, definitely not. In intangibles, most definitely.

My family continually hounds me to write my autobiography, including the exotic experiences (such as being taken hostage by rebels in Jordan or at 2 a.m. witnessing from the eastern side the dismantling of the Berlin Wall) from the parts of the globe I've visited or where I have lived. Maybe it will get done, maybe not. Or perhaps as a collection of shorter pieces. And as a humbling reminder if not an ultimate fallback position against Bill Gates and contemporary writing technology, next to my desk is my trusty 35-year-old Smith-Corona electric. It is always plugged in and still ready to go as needed!



George Hamilton

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# The Writing Life As It Should Be

By Sheryl Nelms



Sheryl L. Nelms

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every morning

I lounge  
in a white velour robe

at my Chippendale table  
spread with yellow damask

sun glinting in  
through the French doors  
reflects off of my Olympic-size pool

shines on red geraniums  
blooming in terra cotta pots  
along the cypress deck

I eat a slice  
of English muffin  
spread with cream cheese  
and Smuckers raspberry preserves

sip coconut coffee  
from a Noritake Adelph cup

nibble ripe strawberries  
dipped in whipped cream

read all of *The New York Times*

take a sumptuous  
bubble bath

towel dry  
with my Ralph Lauren Royal Velvet  
slip into a Dior gown

then boot up  
my IMB PC

for the next chapter