

# Hamilton Mountain Writer's Guild *Newsletter*



May 2024



“We write to taste life twice,  
in the moment and in retrospect.”  
- Anaïs Nin

Welcome to the first edition of the  
Hamilton Mountain Writers' Guild  
Newsletter, where we will bring you:

- Announcements
- Monthly Schedules
- Upcoming Local Events
- Spotlights for our Writers
- Book Launches
- And anything else you would like to see included that would be of interest to our members!

In this newsletter  
you can expect:

#### **Schedule**

May 2024

#### **Long Form**

Professor Barry  
Gottlieb

Why Do I Have  
To Write?

#### **Update**

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Anthology

#### **Spotlight**

Vincent Kocznur

#### **Long Form**

Linda Lambert

My First  
Rejection Letter!

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Schedule: May 2024		
May 1	Michael Williams	Descriptive Prose
May 15	Anthology Team	First Anthology workshop
May 29	Blair Hurley	Scene Building



## Why Do I Have To Write?, by Professor Barry Gottlieb

The writers Ernest Hemingway and J. D. Salinger were two of my idols for writing when I was much younger. Hemingway had a rule, which was to apply the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair and start writing. However, not all authors can survive with such a simple approach. I can't imagine hanging upside down like the author Dan Brown from the ceiling, or J. K. Rowling has to write in a castle room in Scotland and often takes a bus to places she needs to travel to. I have heard of all kinds of authors who had similar quirks like pulling the shades down and composing with artificial light.

For stimulation, Honoré de Balzac wrote in a monk's costume and drank at least twenty cups of coffee a day, eventually dying of caffeine poisoning. Friedrich Schiller started each of his writing sessions by opening the drawer of his desk and breathing in the fumes of the rotten apples he had stashed there. Victor Hugo went to perhaps the most extreme lengths to ensure his daily output of verbiage and would give all his clothes to his servant with orders that they be returned only after he had finished his day's word quota.

Compared to such strategies, my daily writing regimen is dreadfully normal. Perhaps that is because I write fiction and non-fictional books, "George the Dragon Slayer" and my other three fiction books about George's adventure are a hunter-gatherer of language who records the sounds that escape from the holes in people's faces, leak from their pens and luminance up on their computer screens. I drink too much coffee. Rotten fruit doesn't inspire (literally "breathe into") me. My lifelong heels-over-head love affair with language is my natural caffeine and fructose.

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To be a writer, one must behave as writers behave. They write. And write. And write. The difference between a writer and a wannabe is that a writer is someone who cannot write, while a wannabe says, "One of these days when... then I'll..." Unable not to write, I have written every day since I was in high school writing for the school newspaper. It was then when a teacher informed me so many years ago, that I should write and I had a great imagination. But why dragons?

A grocer doesn't wait to be inspired to go to the store or a banker to go to the bank. I can't afford the luxury of waiting to be inspired before I go to work. It didn't matter if I was the Director of the School, teaching English or Business to my past students was my job, and it happens to be a job that almost nobody gives up on purpose. I loved my job as a teacher and a writer, so I wrote and taught every day that I could.

Long ago, I discovered that I would never become a great Canadian novelist. I stink at cobbling character dialogue, episodes, and settings. A writer has to find out which kind of writer he or she is, and I somehow was born a teacher with the ability to communicate ideas about language and business.

Many writers wrote only in the early morning, or at midday, some at midnight. Early on, I also discovered that I am more lark than owl -- a more morning person than a night person -- and certainly not a bat, one who writes through the night. I am usually up around 6:30 a.m. to take my dog out for his morning walk and banging away at the keyboard within an hour, as I only need to have my three cups of coffee to keep me going.

I write very little on paper, almost everything on my computer. My work possesses an informational density, and the computer allows me to enter all manner of matter onto the hard drive and accumulate that density. Theodore Sturgeon once wrote, "Nine-tenths of everything is crap." The computer allows me to dump crap into the hard drive without the sense of permanence that handwriting or typing on paper used to signify to me. I'm visual and shape my sentences and paragraphs most dexterously on a screen.

The computer has not only trebled my output. It has made me a more joyful, liberated and better writer. Genetic and environmental roulette has allowed me to be able to work in a silent or noisy environment. In the past, working mostly in a university in Canada or China, phone calls and e-mail messages and all the Chinese and Canadian staff and students chirp and hum and buzz in my office room. As the Program Director, I often have to answer them during those precious morning hours before my classes begin.

That's all right with me. Factionalists live with their characters, who get skittish and may flee a noisy room. As I had to correct my student's essays or next class lessons my readers and students are my covenants, and they will usually stay through outer worldly intrusions.

Besides, the business of writing gives me the privilege of being a professor, I consider writing only about half of my job. Writers don't make a comfortable living, writing books. They can make a better living, by selling books. After all, I do have to support my writing habit. When you are heels over head in love with what you do, you never work a day. That's me -- butt over tea kettle in love in the past with being an English teacher and a program director-writer -- a job that nobody who works at it would give up on purpose.

***Imagine a job that nobody wants to leave, or a book unwritten!***

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# NEIGHBOUR

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# NEIGHBOUR

## Update: “Neighbours” – Volume VII: Short Story Anthology

Inspired by our local non-profit charity, Neighbour to Neighbour, we are happy to tentatively announce the theme for our next anthology and optional writing contest, “Neighbours”.

The word neighbours can mean so many different things and evoke a diverse range of characters and emotions. It may be the sweet little old lady next door who bakes you brownies, although she may have an ulterior motive, and just what is in those brownies? A neighbour can be kind, evil, weird, mysterious. Someone sitting next to you on a bus, in a theatre, on an airplane. In another street, town or country. Even “in a galaxy far far away” (thank you George Lucas!)

We hope you find some inspiration in these suggestions. Meanwhile, the anthology team is working with the board to finalize submission requirements and we will announce everything formally as soon as we are able!

We are also planning a series of writing workshops.

In order to help us plan, could you please respond to this newsletter and let us know if you are interested in submitting, or not, no commitment necessary!

Thank you from the Volume VII anthology team:

- Alexander Stepaniuk
- Liam O’Neill
- Karen Wood
- Linda Lambert

## Local Spotlight: Vincent Kocznur

Congratulations to our own Vincent Kocznur! His poem, LEECHES (or, Landlord don’t shoot me) was published in Hamilton Arts and Letters Issue 17.2.1. Last October he was a guest speaker at our Wednesday night meeting and took us through his experience of creating an audio drama. It was informative and entertaining and was thoroughly enjoyed by us all!


*Vincent Alastair is the proud recipient of the Hamilton Mountain Writer’s Guild Award for Best Short Story of 2018. His original audio drama script for ‘Red Odyssey’ took home the Silver Davey Award for Best Writing. His short story, ‘Delta IV’, was shortlisted for the 2022 gritLIT short story contest. His original audio dramas have been produced and broadcast internationally. He is a moka (and cezve) coffee enthusiast. He is a very proud Hamiltonian.*

### **LEECHES (Or, Landlord Don’t Shoot Me)**

My mouldy house has leeches  
They’re all over the place  
Crawling squirming biting  
Eating, breeding  
Mountains of leeches in the kitcehn  
Leeches in my bathtub  
In my bed, in my hair  
Leeches leeches leeches  
What can I do about all these leeches?  
Sucking all my blood  
They won’t stop til I’m bone white  
Suck and suck and suck  
Til there’s no more red  
We’ll have a bone white maple  
On a bone white flag  
The leeches have my mouldy house

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# Rejected

## My First Rejection Letter!, by Linda Lambert

I've entered a few writing and poetry contests over the years, and only after scanning the list of winners, multiple times, it finally sinks in I didn't win. However, one contest actually took the time to write me a wonderful, kind, and informative rejection letter. Thank you so much GritLIT! I'm posting it and hope that it offers some explanation and help and encouragement to anyone who has been rejected!

Dear gritLIT 2024 Short Story Contest Entrant,

If you are reading this, I regret to say that we did not include your story in our longlist this year.

In respect for the time and energy you have spent preparing your entry, as well as the support you have contributed to our festival, I would like to thank you by explaining how we came to this decision. This year we received seventy entries, which is no small task to read for our small team of volunteers. Many of these entries came from local Hamilton, Ontario writers, though some applicants wrote to us from across Canada, and a few from Canadians living abroad.

This year's "Milestones" theme was met with extraordinary creativity, exploring not just births, deaths, and journeys beyond the familiar, but also delving into the complexities of absent fathers, the nuanced tapestry of loss and ambiguity, and the rich dynamics of parent-child relationships. Your stories adeptly navigated emotional landscapes, with an increased suspense through clever narrative techniques like time-skips and selective omissions, you challenged our readers to engage deeply. Themes of grief, sexual abuse, liminal moments on distant voyages, and the intricacies of neurodivergences and mental illness were explored with sensitivity and depth, adding profound layers to our understanding of milestones. The varied submissions captivated and moved us, highlighting both the joy and sorrow of crossing life's significant thresholds, even as we made the difficult decisions during the final cuts.

You may be thinking to yourself—Paige, you've made a mistake. My story was amazing, everyone has said so. Can you describe the mistakes you noticed while reading this year?

Some mistakes I see every year: Writers engage in 'throat clearing,' needing to 'set the scene,' or overexplain before diving into the exciting portion of their narratives. If possible, cut that out, dive in, and hook your reader. Start with a provocative line of dialogue, or even a confusing statement that might inspire the reader's curiosity. And almost as important as the beginning, we need you to tie everything up neatly at the close of your story.

As far as the selection process itself, I want to be as transparent as possible. As an author, I all too well understand the sting of rejection. When I see a letter like this, I can't help but doubt myself—just a little. I don't want this for you. Even though the logical part of my mind informs me that authors must be prepared for endless rejections—far more rejections than are ever accepted if personal experience can be used as a yardstick (even once we've made names for ourselves.) Even so, when I receive a letter like the one I am writing you today, my mind wanders to dark places. I think, did I get the theme wrong? Do they think I cheated with AI? Did I make a spelling mistake somewhere? Were the judges biased? Was my piece misrepresented? And more, sometimes late into the night.

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To (hopefully) set your mind at ease, I'm going to detail our selection process for you.

- When I received your story, I immediately placed both your cover letter and story in a folder, then I assigned a number to your submission and logged it on a spreadsheet.
- Once the submission deadline had passed, a member of our staff anonymized your entry by removing identifying details and then created a 'reading package,' which included both your inspiration blurb and the story itself.
- I then randomly assigned your story to a series of folders.
- Those folders were then assigned to members of our diverse reading team. The team itself comprises casual readers, literary academic professionals, and fellow authors.
- Each story was read by at least two of our readers. Some were read by more, as time allowed.
- Each member of the reading team pre-selected their top three stories privately, and everyone revealed them at a meeting. Where favourites overlapped, those stories moved ahead, while those that did not were reviewed by the group until we settled on a longlist of 17 entries which you will be able to see by clicking here. I know... 17? We aimed for 15 but there were a few that were too close to call, and so we pushed them ahead to be judged for the shortlist.

Next week these 17 entries will be narrowed to a shortlist of 10, and then our contest judge will select one winner, and two runners up from those before the festival begins.

I believe many of your entries may go on to win awards in other contests or might be selected for magazine publication. I truly hope that you take the time to review and polish your entry, and then consider pursuing these opportunities.

Finally, I hope this email may have taken a little of the sting out of this regrettable part of contest submission, and you will consider submitting again next year.

Be well, and keep writing,  
Paige V. Maylott  
Contest Manager  
[www.gritlit.ca](http://www.gritlit.ca)



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