

Hamilton Mountain Writer's Guild *Newsletter*



June 2024



“Get it down. Take chances. It may be bad, but it’s the only way you can do anything really good.”

- William Faulkner

Welcome to our June Newsletter!

I was excited to learn more about our Writing Teams, and I hope you will be too. They are all different and unique, but with the common goal of helping each other on their writing journeys. Read the comments and descriptions from the team leaders of what goes on at their meetings and if you’re interested in joining a particular group, contact information is provided.

This past May, we were fortunate to have three wonderful guest speakers at our bi-weekly meetings. If you missed the meetings, you can read about them now!

Also, in this edition, the Anthology Team has answered some FAQs, we congratulate one of our favourite members, and we have the schedule for June.

Happy writing!

In this newsletter you can expect:

Schedule June 2024
Writing Teams Who are we?
Anthology VII FAQs
Spotlight Professor Barry Gottlieb
Long Form Blair Hurley Writing 'The Devoted'
Bi-Weekly Recap

Schedule: June 2024		
June 12	Vincent Kocznur	Audio Dramas
June 26	Mark Leslie Lefebvre	Haunted Hamilton



Writing Teams

Team 1 comprises seven women with a variety of writing styles and projects. We write fiction, memoirs, poetry, and songs, in a broad range of genres. We meet every two weeks by Zoom, currently at 11 am on a Thursday. We submit written work to other members for critique over the week we do not meet. We have a few hard and fast rules: the main principle of the group is that members critique the work submitted. Submissions are limited to 10 pages, double-spaced, normal font. There is no requirement to submit work every cycle. We probably average three submissions per cycle. Our meetings are quite informal, sometimes focused on the work submitted by those present, and sometimes focused on the craft of writing and publication (with a little bit of social chit-chat thrown in). Our fiction includes genres such as thriller, mystery, satire, supernatural, science fiction, and fantasy, and some write for children and young adults. We very much try to be supportive and constructive in our critiques, and each brings different life experiences that broaden the perspective of the group as a whole. We are all (ahem) mature women, about half of us being retired. Several of us have self-published, and some are interested in pursuing traditional publishing.

Susan Adams
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Hello from **Team 2!** We are approximately a dozen strong, so there's always interesting discussion and sharing when we meet. We gather once a month, usually on a Wednesday from 1 pm to 3 pm, at the Turner Park Library. In the good weather, we've been known to meet outside and use Zoom during the winter. We start our sessions with a check-in for announcements and celebrations before getting down to responding to some creative writing prompts to warm us up. Most of us are working on memoir pieces or other personal writing, but all genres are welcome. We frequently reserve time to listen to one or two longer pieces and feedback is always constructive and positive.

Michael Williams
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Team 3 runs the gamut in terms of experience. We have a former professor who has a great deal of experience with writing and publishing fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. We have a young woman who works as a writer and is quite active with writing contests. We have a teammate who has self-published a series of her own children's picture books. Then there is another teammate and myself who just began writing a few years ago. We've written pieces on fiction, non-fiction, science-fiction, flash fiction, poetry, memoir, horror, etc. You can see we cover the spectrum. We meet on Zoom every other Thursday night.

Michael J. Wagstaffe
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Team 4 is one of the first teams started when the Writers' Guild was formed. Six of us were on the team and we creatively changed our name to the Wordsillies, implying that we write, but we still have fun. Two of our original members have self-published books. Ginelle, a founding member has published over ten books under a pseudonym and is successfully making writing her career. Three of the women on the Team joined forces and wrote two anthologies together. We keep an open mind to what our members want to do and need help with. We are currently meeting on Saturday afternoons at William's Cafe, at 1:00 pm, but are looking at changing this to accommodate the needs of the team. We are looking for a venue on the mountain. We have attended street functions and The Cotton Factory to attract attention to our writing.

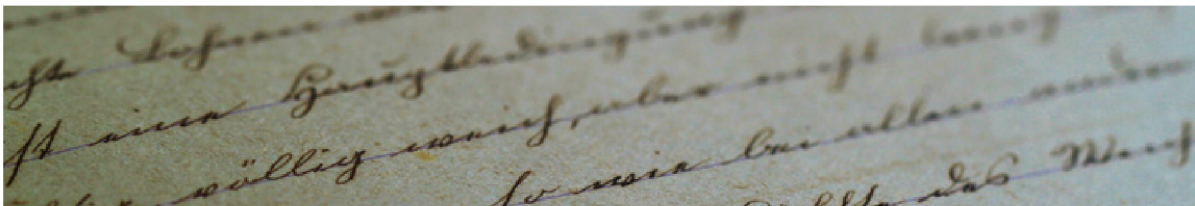
Christine Carleton
rayna55@hotmail.com

Team 5, better known as the Tuesday Night Writer's Group, meets every other Tuesday night via Skype from 7-9 PM. Submissions are turned in on Word by email one week before the meeting. Submissions are limited to 2500 words and we have a limit of 4 submissions per meeting. We use a rotating chair to host each meeting on a volunteer basis. Once the submissions are in, the chair produces an agenda and sends that to the members. All critiques of the submissions should be back to the originator before the meeting. The chair picks the order of critiquers and each member explains their comments on the submitted piece and then we move on to the next submission. Often we will do extra "assignments" for each meeting such as dialogue only, descriptive, different POVs, narrative only, reverse poems, haikus, etc. We've done the same scene from different character's perspectives, passing the piece on to the next member. We've "assigned" longer projects where we will write outside our regular genre, such as Westerns, Hard Boiled Detective, Regency Romance, stories about trials, Movie Scripts, etc. Normally meetings go something like this: Guild announcements, Team announcements, Critiques of submissions, review of any assignments, new assignments if any, and next chair. We also have published our own anthology, *The Stories We Tell*, available on Amazon.

You can learn more about us on our website: tnwg.ca

Bob Nothnagel
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"If you're not writing, you're probably getting into trouble."



Team 6 is a writing team that has agreed to meet in person, because none of us like Zoom calls. We meet at 7 pm on alternating Wednesdays at Williams on Discovery Drive, by the harbour. There are slightly more fantasy writers than anything else, but we are pretty much all over the place in terms of genre fiction. For example, one writer is particularly focused on "magical realism" (which is nothing like fantasy). We are somewhat focused on critiques. We rotate through the group and two people per week can use the time how they feel, but they typically use the time to have their manuscript critiqued. So, naturally, the first requirement to join the group is new members must agree to do critiques. It works out to about one critique of 3000 words per week. New members must also join our Facebook messenger group. We vote to take in new members, but in recent weeks we've been feeling a little full. If you want to join our group, you can email me to see if there is an opening.

Garvin Nunes
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Team 7 has eleven members who keep me busy with their short stories that hopefully will be published for Book 7. I have given them 200 articles that I wrote, borrowed, and used with permission, from published article authors about writing to help my team along. My team consists of writers who write fiction, fantasy, poetry, memoirs, and any other topic or subject that motivates the urge to put pen in hand, or the use of their computer.

"All you have to do is sit and write and keep on writing until you have no more ideas because one idea will always become two or more."

Professor Barry Gottlieb
Professorbarrygottlieb2000@gmail.com

The Green Room is the only writing team that's not a real writing team. Come to think of it, it's neither green, nor a room. Confused yet? The Green Room is just a mailing list for those who are not (yet) on a writing team. We don't meet and we don't critique like the other writing teams do. The Guild has members who only attend Writing Team meetings, or, who only attend the Wednesday night Guild meetings, but some of us do both. Being part of the Green Room is a way to stay in touch with the goings on that are going on at the HMWG.

Are you new to the guild and haven't found a writing team yet? Are you a past member who would like to stay in touch without taking up a spot on a writing team? Or do you just have a fondness for hanging out in imaginary green rooms?

Contact me if you'd like to be on the Green Room List.

Anita Joldersma
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Writing ‘The Devoted’: The Research and Discipline of Stepping into My Novel, by Blair Hurley

I wrote my first novel, *The Devoted*, while still living in my hometown of Boston, fresh out of a grad writing program and keen to tell a story that I felt passionate about. It took four or five years of struggling with scenes and characters and memories from my own childhood, but it didn't really come together as a story until I realized that I had to step into risky, unknown territory, both from my own realm of experience and also beyond it.

The Devoted is inspired by both my Irish Catholic roots and my lifelong interest and research into Buddhism in America, particularly the experience of women exploring Buddhist practice. The novel is about a Boston Irish Catholic woman who, disillusioned by the sexual abuse scandals of the church that broke in the early 2000s, converts to Zen Buddhism. After heartbreak and betrayal, she becomes trapped in a manipulative sexual relationship with her Zen Master. The book raises the question of how the #metoo movement can play out in spiritual spaces, where powerful, respected teachers have abused their authority with vulnerable students seeking a spiritual experience. It also explores the healing and redemptive power that faith, both Catholic and Zen, can bring to our lives.

To write the novel, I had to immerse myself in research about both Catholicism and Zen, reading religious texts, but also Zen poetry, koans, and folktales from Buddhist cultures. I read the fascinating memoirs of medieval Buddhist nuns and was surprised to discover their honest, forthright discussions of the discrimination they encountered. In one Tibetan nun's account, she sings mournfully of how her Master refuses to believe she can achieve the same level of spiritual accomplishment as the monks that surround her; she defiantly declares she will prove him wrong.

Many of my readers assume that I'm more familiar with the Catholic portions of the story, but even though my family has Irish Catholic history, I was raised without any particular religious affiliation, free to explore and visit religious spaces without any sort of official allegiance. To write my character's strict Catholic upbringing, I had to dive deep into Catholic stories, songs, and doctrine, questioning my family about their own memories and jokes and superstitions. When writing scenes set both in Catholic churches and Buddhist Zendos, I felt as much of an outsider as my character, stepping tentatively inside the temple for the first time. What if I got some crucial points of doctrine or ritual wrong? What if I inadvertently disrespected someone else's sacred space? For the early drafts of my writing, I hovered nervously on the edges of writing these scenes, afraid to offend or to misrepresent, afraid that I didn't have what it took to write the scene authentically. Writers often struggle with this question of authenticity — do I dare tell this story? Is it my story to tell? Can I do this story justice?

For me, the line came when I realized I had written cautiously around the edges of the real issues I wanted to address. To really show my character's experience on the page — with her family, with her Zen Master, singing in church and running away from it, fighting with her brother and falling in love and betraying people all on her messy quest for personal grace — I had to walk into those rooms with her. I had to do my homework, get the research right, walk into those spaces myself whenever I could, and in my imagination when I couldn't. I visited Zen and Tibetan temples, and wandered in and out of Catholic churches; I read and listened; and at some point, when I had done the work, I had to sit down at my desk, take a deep breath, and begin.

Blair Hurley is the author of *The Devoted* published by W.W. Norton and Penguin Random House Canada. The novel was longlisted for *The Center for Fiction's First Novel Prize*. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Electric Literature*, *The Georgia Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Guernica*, *Paris Review Daily*, *West Branch*, and elsewhere. She received a 2018 Pushcart Prize and scholarships from Bread Loaf, Hawthornden Castle, and the Ontario Arts Council.

Volume VII: Short Story Anthology - Questions

Have you started work on your story? If you haven't, consider this quotation from Jodi Picoult: "You can always edit a bad page. You can't edit a blank page." It's never too early to get started. You have a lot of help at your disposal, including the anthology workshops, your writing team and the many wonderful writers that make up The Hamilton Mountain Writers Guild!

FAQs

- How long can my submission be?
 - Submissions can be up to 2500 words

- When are submissions open?
 - People can start writing whenever they want, and are encouraged to do so alongside our various workshops. You can finish your manuscript whenever you want, but we won't be accepting them until the end of the year, likely December.

- Am I going to be forced to make changes to my manuscript during the editing process?
 - Our goal is to produce a high-quality product, and help one another grow and build as writers with an involved, collaborative editing process. To that end, be open to making changes, even if you think your manuscript is flawless.

- What's the deal with swearing?
 - Swearing is not explicitly banned, however we don't want this book to malign the reputation of any of our writers. A curse word (used well) can add emphasis to a powerful moment. If every other sentence has swearing and it's affecting the quality of your work, we're going to ask you to edit them out.

- I'm not sure about something. Who do I talk to?
 - Direct your questions to the Anthology Team and we will get back to you.
 - alexander.stepaniuk@hotmail.com
 - this.is.liam@hotmail.com
 - al.karen@sympatico.ca
 - lindalambert33@gmail.com

Local Spotlight: Professor Barry Gottlieb

Congratulations to Professor Barry Gottlieb! His book, *My Country, Canada*, is going to be sold to students in China, where he was a University Director for 18 years, alongside his *Dragon Stories*, by Beijing Press. He has also been contacted by the Philippine Canadian Immigration department in Hamilton to arrange for publication in the Philippines.

Well done, Barry!

Bi-Weekly Recap: May 2024

Last month, we had three bi-weekly meetings!

On May 1st, Michael Williams addressed the importance of setting in our writing by expanding on these steps:

1. Try setting the scene by showing scale
2. Show what is surprising or strange
3. Introduce emotional qualities of place
4. Give immersive details
5. Establish a time period or time frame
6. Show characters interacting with their surroundings

He put it all together by giving us examples from famous novels, and finally, several members read their writing from the prompts he suggested. It was an informative and interesting evening. Thank you Michael!

On May 15th, Alexander Stepaniuk, gave the first of several workshops, designed to help everyone with their submission to be included in Anthology VII. He did a great presentation on the MICE method of writing, which is an organizational theory developed by Orsen Scott Card, an American author. The acronym stands for "milieu, inquiry, character, and event" -- the four elements that determine structure in a story. If you want more information on Alexander's presentation and the MICE method, go to Hamilton Mountain Writer's Guild member page on Facebook, where Alexander has kindly provided a link to his notes.

On May 29th, Blair Hurley, an award winning novelist, experienced creative writing instructor, and freelance editor talked to us about endings, especially endings that reverberate with the reader. It was another very informative presentation and I wasn't the only one fervently taking notes! She graciously gave us permission to reprint an article she wrote.

Hamilton Mountain Writers' Guild



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