

Hamilton Mountain Writers' Guild *Newsletter*



November 2024



**“The first draft is black and white.
Editing gives the story colour.”**
- Emma Hill

Welcome to our November Newsletter!

In this issue, Michael Williams shares with us his writing and publishing journey for his new book *The ABCs of Storytelling*, Alexander Stepaniuk gives advice on Non-Fiction Story Writing, Garvin Nunes invites you to meet up for NaNoWriMo 2024, and Sara Mae Conrad has a request in our Member's Corner.

If you would like to contribute to our newsletter, or if you have any comments or suggestions, please email Linda at lindalambert33@gmail.com

Happy writing!

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The Village Behind the Book: Publishing *The ABCs of Storytelling*, by Michael Williams

They say it takes a village to raise a child; it also takes a “village” to publish a book.

I planted the seeds for my book, *The ABCs of Storytelling: Reflections of a Story Coach*, on a dark winter’s day in back 2012 when I was working as a story coach in Scotland, helping young people and adults develop their storytelling skills. I also began writing a series of articles for the Scottish Storytelling Centre’s magazine “Blethers” based on an ABC approach. I envisioned at least 26 articles that would keep me busy. However, after completing my letter F article, the magazine folded. Despite receiving positive feedback for the articles, life led me in different directions and put my writing ambitions on hold.

As my storytelling journey continued, I shifted my focus toward corporate coaching. I also sought opportunities within community organizations that supported individuals battling chronic illnesses like Parkinson’s and cancer. And, while doing this, I taught English at a secondary school in the north of Scotland. With so many commitments, my writing ambitions slipped into the shadows.

In 2017, I moved to Canada, returning to my hometown of Hamilton, a city I left in 1973, swearing I was never coming back. Now here I was, desperate to find other storytellers and writers. My first point of contact was a woman named Debra Pickfield. Debra ran a creative centre outside of Burlington called Thinkspot. She introduced me to other creatives and allowed me to share my passion for storytelling organizing workshops and performances. Soon after, I discovered the Storytellers of Canada, the Burlington Storytellers Guild, and the Hamilton Mountain Writers Guild. Engaging with other writers and storytellers reignited my passion and creativity.

Then, early in 2020, Covid struck, snuffing out all my storytelling gigs. This disruption, however, provided a silver lining: it allowed me to refocus on my writing. I resurrected my ABCs of Storytelling project and spent the next few years completing chapters filled with the insights I’d gathered from my years as a storyteller and coach.

Like many writers, I struggled with self-doubt. Each redraft revealed mistakes, and my inner critic worked to hold me back. At the point where I felt overwhelmed, a friend, Margaret Terry -- an editor and published author -- and June Cupido -- a story coach and theatre director -- offered to help. Margaret’s thorough editing process revealed I had a lot more work ahead of me, but it strengthened the manuscript. June’s suggestions and coaching me to perform my stories in front of a live audience boosted my confidence as a storyteller and writer. With their help, I soon had a completed manuscript.

Having decided from the start to self-publish on Amazon, I faced the daunting task of formatting my manuscript. I approached the task, fully believing in my ability to conquer it with ease. Yet, I soon came to the humbling realization that formatting was not my strong suit. I found it complicated and frustrating. I also had too many other priorities, including finding work to supplement my modest pension. Once again, I needed help.

I found that help on Fiverr, an online platform where freelancers offer various creative services. There, I found Alice, a woman based in Romania who came highly recommended. I discovered she loved formatting manuscripts for Amazon. For less than \$100, she agreed to prepare my manuscript and cover files in less than four days. She responded to all my queries, provided explicit instructions, and offered guidance on obtaining my ISBNs -- another lesson on delegating to creatives who know what they're doing.

Creating the book cover posed another challenge. I had thought about using royalty-free photographs or my own. However, while visiting the Joshua Farm Gallery near Oakville, I discovered the artwork of Tsochoy Go (www.tsochoygo.com). His unique style and powerful sense of storytelling convinced me that I had to meet him. A fortunate encounter with the gallery owner, Sybil Rampen, led to that meeting and subsequent arrangements for the young artist to create the cover.

My journey to publication has been full of obstacles. But along the way, I've learned how important it is not to do everything on your own. I would not have been able to publish the book if I had not reached out to Debra, Margaret, June, Sybil, and Tsochoy. Furthermore, sharing my journey on social media allowed me to find friends who expressed interest in buying the book when it was published.

Believe me, a poor, tormented soul did not create this book in an isolated garret. It took a "village" consisting of family, friends, and colleagues who believed in me to make that happen. My "village" deserves full praise for helping me to the publication phase. Without it, *The ABCs of Storytelling: Reflections of a Story Coach* would never have seen the light of day.

The ABCs of Storytelling: Reflections of a Story Coach by Michael Williams is available in paperback and Kindle on Amazon and can be ordered from your local bookstores. Learn more about Michael at www.michaelwilliamsstoryteller.com ■



The ABCs of Storytelling by Michael Williams is more than just a primer on storytelling; it's a semi-autobiographical account of an intriguing life journey. Interspersed with tales of travel, teaching, and meeting a myriad of people, including mentors and a movie star, Michael covers the essential aspects of successful storytelling. His insights serve as a valuable guide for both storytellers and anyone interested in writing more imaginatively and creatively. The collaboration with Tsochoy Go, a talented young artist who designed the cover and artwork, adds the perfect finishing touch!

- Linda Lambert

Non-Fiction Story Writing, by Alexander Stepaniuk

While the HMWG anthology focuses on stories, we don't need all story submissions to be fictional. Many of our guild writers are interested in history or memoirs: these are just as viable! Consider the following tips while writing and editing your manuscripts:

Short stories are about moments, not marathons.

Between 2020 and 2022 I visited England, Italy, Switzerland, Qatar, and Sri Lanka. During this time I worked five jobs and visited innumerable cities, temples, and monuments, meeting new people all along the way. I was robbed, got lost, was extorted, involved in two accidents, and a hospital trip. If I wanted to write about the entire trip for the anthology, that would give me roughly 500 words (or less) per country. That is not a lot of space to do justice to these moments, and this was just one year. Imagine trying to condense someone's entire life memoir into 2500 words!

Each new character, place, and conflict in a manuscript costs a number of words to 'make real' to your audience. If you're writing a memoir or history piece, you'll usually only have enough words to focus on one event in enough detail to make your audience care about what's happening. As a rule of thumb you can probably fit up to 4-5 characters/scenes and one conflict into a 2500-word manuscript before it becomes unwieldy.

I might, for example, choose to focus on the time my flight to Canada was cancelled 4 hours before liftoff, my wallet was stolen, and I had to try and figure out how to get home. I, a clerk, and a friend/neighbour are characters, the airport is the location, and me not having a ticket is the conflict.

Stories, whether fiction or nonfiction, need a plot.

No one wants to read a story about that one time you met your neighbour, shook hands, and went home (but otherwise nothing happened). Stories need plots. Consider the SWBS checklist:

- Somebody: Stories need a protagonist
- Wants something: Characters need a motivation and goal
- But: Something is stopping the character from accomplishing their goal: this is the story's conflict
- So: In the face of conflict, your character does _____

Memories on their own don't always constitute stories, but they can be made into stories. Using my aforementioned travel example, I could say that I was the someone, I wanted to go home, but I had no ticket or wallet, and so I had to try to contact someone in Canada for help before the plane left. Now that I've confirmed my event has a plot I can write my nonfiction, memory-based story!

If you're ever unsure about how to steer a non-fiction piece into story-form, don't hesitate to reach out to us at anthologyhmgw@gmail.com, and one of our editors will get back to you as soon as possible. Don't forget to use peers for edits and feedback along the way! ■

NaNoWriMo 2024, by Garvin Nunes

I've been part of Hamilton's NaNoWriMo writing group for a while now. We gather in November, April, and July to focus on writing together. November is our biggest month, as many of us take on the challenge of writing 50,000 words, which works out to about 1,700 words a day. The conversation in these sessions tends to focus on word count and productivity rather than writing craft, with timed writing sprints being a regular activity.

Below is the November 2024 schedule for writing in public spaces. I've extended an invitation to the NaNo community, and anyone interested is welcome to join.

November Writing Schedule

- Friday, November 1 – 7pm at Williams on Discovery Drive for the kick off.
 - Note: Williams closes at 9 pm, so feel free to go earlier if you like.
- Monday mornings – 9 am at Terryberry Library, 2nd Floor
- Thursday evenings – 7 pm at Williams on Discovery Drive
- Wednesdays November 13 and 27 – 8 pm at Terryberry Library
 - Note: From 8 pm onward, the library enforces study hours, so you'll need a library card and ID to stay.

Feel free to organize additional writing times if these don't align with your schedule. These times are based on my own availability.

If you have any questions about NaNoWriMo, don't hesitate to reach out to me at graccus@gmail.com

Looking forward to writing with you soon!
- Garvin Nunes



Member's Corner

Are any romance writers interested in connecting virtually? My name is Sarah Mae, and I write romantic comedy, women's fiction, and stories centred on family and relationships. I'd love to connect with other guild members who enjoy writing or reading romance.

If you're interested in exchanging feedback via email or joining a virtual romance writing discussion, please contact me at sarahmaeconrad@gmail.com ■



Bi-Weekly Recap: October 2024

Last month, we had three bi-weekly meetings.

On October 2nd, Michael Williams provided us with an informative workshop on how to create characters who are believable and relatable through:

- physical description, because a name isn't enough
- the characters relationships to other people
- using the story arc: your character should develop and grow and be different by the end of the story
- how does the character reveal themselves?
- what do other characters say about, and how do they act and react towards the main character?

Michael summed it all up perfectly. "This is what writers do. We pick pieces of all the people we've met, or the experiences we've had. We pick out moments and little quirks someone had or of someone we knew, or we use little bits of our own parents and we put them into these characters. We use our imagination to fill in the missing bits and use these characterization skills to put flesh on the bone and bring them to life."

On October 16th, j. l. oneill ran a line editing workshop. Liam took us through a writing exercise inspired by Ursula K. Le Guin's *Steering the Craft*. He asked us to write one single sentence to fill one page of paper and then to turn the paper over and continue the story using only dialogue and seven-word sentences. The goal was to experience creative flow and it certainly got us all thinking. We exchanged the pages and edited another person's writing, focusing on sentence structure and rhythm. We all got great feedback from our fellow writers. (I won't tell you about crumpling up our writing and then bombarding Liam with our paper missiles. You had to be there!)

On October 30th, we knuckled down as Bob Nothnagel took us through a detailed presentation on how to prepare a Word document for self-publishing with Amazon. It was very educational and I'm going to re-watch the Zoom footage again. Bob has kindly offered to send his PowerPoint notes to the group leaders. Make sure to get a copy, as it will be invaluable for self-publishers!

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