

March 2021 Newsletter

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President's Column

By Leah Hinton

Hello dear writing friends,

I was contemplating the many things that we could talk about this month. And it dawned on me, it's been a year since the quarantine first started in 2020. A year! How different the landscape is a year later.

In that time we've seen forest fires, riots, political division, and unheard-of weather across our country. But we've also had weddings and births, renewals of relationships, and our meme game is on point. Let's not forget the many hilarious virtual meeting mishaps many of us have been party to. As a matter of fact, I've spent more time on Zoom than one would think humanly possible. But I am highly grateful for the platform as it is a means to connect in ways we wouldn't otherwise have. I even have regular Zoom consultations with my physicians. Who knew that would ever be a thing?

I have had food and grocery items delivered. I restrain myself from hugging and handholding and I haven't seen my mother face-to-face since Christmas 2019. Now, on this the anniversary of the initial COVID-19 quarantine for Texas, I ask myself and all of you, are we okay? What are we learning spending so much time with ourselves? What have we artists of this world contributed to our own well-being this last year? Just think of all the opportunities for growth we were extended by the year 2020. Find the good!

Many people have hated 2020, and although it isn't what I would have wished for, when looking back through a lens of truth, I know I've had worse years. (And please, 2021, do not take this as a dare. LOL.)

I find I tend to divide my life into sections of time. There will always and forever, in my mind, be the time before covid. And I assure you, I'm not saying that in a negative way, as I seek to promote joy and happiness even in unpredictable times, but it definitely has been a demarcation line, if you will, between what was and what is. So, rather than have a mind-twisting writing exercise for this month, I've decided to stick with the traditional. I've decided to simply give a writing prompt to usher in this second year of covid differences.

In keeping with my desire to let sunshine lead the way, I am going to suggest we write from the most positive perspective we can possibly muster with regard to this last year. Please put away the negativity, throw out the bitter, and focus on the beauty that can be found in our collective experiences as citizens of this world.

Write about the smallest details which presented themselves in beautiful ways over the last year, like watching our gardens grow, or having children underfoot while trying to manage meetings, but in doing so seeing them grow in ways we would've missed otherwise. Write about the old dog who was loyal and faithful and got to appreciate having you home in the last days of its life. Write about getting to know yourself after all these years. Find the humor in masks, hand sanitizer, toilet paper shortages, frozen pipes and nods from across an apartment courtyard. Find the good. For it is there. It matters not how difficult this time was, truly, because you've learned from it and you will continue learning. And even in the darkest of months, we learned of a particular resilience we found collectively within us.

Write about that.

When our children and our children's children look back on this time with wonder and awe, let them see from our stories that we shone brighter than the grey clouds that hung over us. Let them see our light.

Let them see our LIGHT!

As always, I urge you to send your amazing exercises and responses to prompts to our website email. I'd love to read the wonderful things you all have experienced and the joys that might have otherwise gone unnoticed over the last year.

We have a lot of great things coming up for WGT. I urge you to renew your WGT membership, if you haven't already done so, to continue to support yourself and the art in your community.

Never forget we are artists, and struggle breeds beauty in our creations.

Remember always, you deserve your art.

With great love, respect, and friendship,

Leah

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If you're interested in volunteering, please email us at writersguildtx@gmail.com or ask at the next general meeting!

March General Meeting: Spring Break

As a way to take a breath and relax for once, we are declaring a March break from the regular Writers Guild of Texas monthly meetings. I don't know about you, but I could use the break! Recognition of the stress and hardship of the past year—due not only to Covid but what many of us endured, and are still sorting through, courtesy of the February deep freeze—now seems like a good excuse to sit back, enjoy the spring break the schools are on this week, and just breathe.

Here's wishing you a happy, safe break, and we'll see you again in April!

Gary

Critique Group Update

Throughout the COVID-19 era, a cadre of devotees has met monthly to continue the work of writing, revising, and refining their creative writing against the day when it will be submitted for publication. One might have thought the pandemic would sweep such efforts aside, as people hunkered down, did their best to stay safe, worked out how to remain productive in all aspects of daily life, and just simply got through it. Critique group? Surely that would be among the first activities to go by the wayside amidst the illness, confusion, and angst.

But to no one's surprise, at least among those in the group, we have kept at it—meeting monthly via Zoom and plugging away. Valiantly offering up passages of our works in progress, and lending each other ideas, insights, suggestions about how to make the work that much better, the group has persevered, even flourished.

A second set of eyes, even a third, fourth, fifth? It does really open up new perspectives on issues—those we knew existed but didn't know how to fix, as well as those we hadn't yet noticed—and the possible solutions. All such thoughts offered humbly, with a healthy dollop of encouragement and a we're-all-in-this-together sense of camaraderie.

Herewith, a short testament from Gyorgyi Szebenyi about her experience:

"Story seedlings need readers to grow and flourish and be pruned when they become unwieldy. This critique group has helped me with both.

"The benefits of each critique session start days ahead, when I select pages to be read, and last for weeks after the meeting, when I try to reshape the stories, hoping for more smiles and tears and fewer yawns. In addition, the expert line editing by Gary and Melissa is a perk unparalleled for the price.

"I haven't yet published my work, but this group has helped me to gain more confidence that one day I will. Writing is solitary, but to become writers we must open up to the world; this friendly group is a great place to start sharing."

Join us this Wednesday, March 17, for our next online meeting. Reach out to writersguildtx@gmail.com and we'll connect with you.

Flash Fiction Winners

The time has finally come to announce the winners of the 2020 Kathryn McClatchy Flash Fiction Contest!

And the winners are...

First Place: Tiffany Seitz: "The Cape"
Second Place: JoAnne Turner: "Lost In the Stacks"
Third Place: Rhonda Black: "Wise Counsel"
Honorable Mention: Steve McCluer: "Within the Dark"

Congratulations to the winners! And many thanks to all who participated: entrants, judges, and organizers.

Tiffany's entry, "The Cape," is presented below for your reading pleasure.

"The Cape" by Tiffany Seitz

"Marion?"

Her tired eyes lifted from the months-old magazine that she'd been trying unsuccessfully to read. The nurse stood in the doorway, patiently waiting for a success. "I'm here." Marion dragged her car from the uncomfortable, pleather chair and adjusted her cape into a more comfortable position, knowing that others in the waiting room judged her every move. Ignoring the stares wasn't easy, but she followed the nurse into the bowels of the clinic. The rituals of admission were completed: weight—ten pounds too many, temperature—normal-ish, blood pressure—elevated. Questions were answered: "What medications are you taking?" and "What brings you in today?" Satisfied, the nurse left Marion with a promise that the doctor would be in soon.

A knock barely preceded the door opening. "Good afternoon, Marion. What seems to be the problem?"

With a heavy sigh, Marion laid bare her symptoms, "I'm tired, Doc. Everything aches. It takes me forever to get up in the morning, then I crash land by midday. My vision isn't as sharp as it normally is. Instead of helping people, I'm afraid I'll hurt them."

The doctor asked Marion to demonstrate her abilities. She jumped but didn't crash through the ceiling. She flew, but her feet dragged the ground. The trash can smoked under her laser vision, but not enough to trigger a fire alarm. No matter how hard she tried, her superskills weren't super.

The doctor eyed her, "How long have you been a superhero? What have you been doing recently?"

Marion thought back. "I've been saving the world since I left Hero High ten years ago. Last week, I diverted a lava flow away from a village, I flew through a hurricane to save a fisherman and his catch, I pulled a little boy out from in front of a moving train. Oh, and I helped my kids with their math homework and lifted the car so my husband could change the oil. But yesterday, I could barely put out a dumpster fire."

"That's impressive, Marion," The doctor gave her a knowing smile. "I think I know what the problem is."

"Really?! That's great, Doc? What do I need to do?"

"You need to take off the cape."

Marion froze. "I can't do that, Doc! It's part of me. I've never taken it off." The doctor smiled knowingly, "If you want to get better, Marion, you have to remove the cape. I'll leave you to think about it."

Alone, Marion curled into her beloved cape, clinging to its security. She trusted Doc, but she also remembered the promises she had made when she graduated from Hero High. The cape came with a commitment to put others before herself, and her valedictorian speech spoke to the dedication required to be a superhero. She had embraced the challenge before her and welcomed the responsibility of being a superhero, even if it meant she was exhausted from flying from one disaster to another.

Then she remembered the friends who had seen Doc. They seemed so happy and relaxed. She wanted that, too.

Slowly, Marion opened her hands and let the cape fall away. Her fingers fumbled with the buckles, catching a piece of metal as it broke off. When the headmaster had fastened the cape around her shoulders, the brass buckles had sparkled in the sun. The buckle was no longer shiny and strong, but dull and brittle. Just like her.

She removed the rest of the cape and looked it over. The red satin was threadbare around the shoulders and torn in several places. The frayed edges were coated with mud and gunk from disasters past. How had she never noticed its condition?

Her arms grew tired from the weight of the garment. She'd not noticed the heaviness before, but now she did. It smelled of fire, and flood waters, and... was that brimstone? Marion laid the cape onto the examination table, then stepped away. She took a deep breath. Then another.

The doctor walked back in but stopped at the door.

"Congratulations, Marion! I see you're cured. How does it feel to fly without the burdens you've been carrying?"

Confused, Marion spun around. Her feet no longer touched the ground. She was floating. No—she was flying. She had never flown without the cape, but now she was. She was lighter. She could breathe. She felt better.

"I feel free!" Marion exclaimed, "But how do I keep this feeling?"

Doc chuckled, "Remove the cape as much as possible. They get dirty and wear out, not to mention they increase wind drag and weigh you down."

"Can I still be a superhero?" The thought of not doing her job gave Marion pause. "Of course! You don't have to have a cape to be a superhero, Marion," the doctor assured her. "But the cape is a symbol and reminds you of who you are, but it's not meant to be worn all the time. It should be taken off and washed to remove the toxic sludge. When it gets torn, it should be mended. And sometimes a new cape is needed as the old no longer suits the job. Change is good and necessary."

Marion flew from the clinic with an energy she hadn't felt in years. She hefted the bag containing her cape and considered throwing it into a dumpster. Memories of all the good she had done while wearing the cape flooded her mind. She decided to keep the cape and the stories it could tell as a testament to her career. A new cape would be in her future, but she would search for the one that suited her—maybe a little lighter, more aerodynamic.

In the meantime, she had a world to save.

