

# THE WRITE PLACE

NEW  
AND  
EXCITING!



## GHOSTWRITING — FEELING YOUR WAY *by K. David Brody*

Here’s a question for those of us who have reached a certain age: who is the most interesting, fascinating and amusing person you know? No doubt about it, you are! That is the assumption that a ghostwriter has to make about his author when setting out to write his or her biography; and biography, rather than the novel, scientific or *how to* books, is probably the most popular domain for ghostwriting.

I was recently requested to write the biographies of two elderly gentlemen, and the above-mentioned assumption reflected reality – both had led fascinating lives, full of colour, adventure and change, change being the secret of a good story. For if we can face and overcome the changes that life throws at us, we become richer and more interesting personalities.

What does it take to be a ghostwriter? I believe three things: being a good listener, patience and having the tact to guide the author in recounting events in a chronological order and in a way that will catch and hold the reader’s attention. The ghostwriter is the conductor while the events in the author’s life are the instruments. Those events must be harmonized to create a composition in both major and minor keys. Challenges and setbacks as well as successes should be described, the whole creating an intriguing and satisfying pattern.

Sometimes, the author considers some experiences not worthy of mention. Yet those very incidents may prove to be of intense interest to the reader. The author cannot be objective, the ghostwriter can. Of course, some of the author’s experiences he may prefer not to reveal.

“I don’t mind telling you yourself,” he might say, “but don’t include this.”

In such cases, the ghostwriter must use his or her discretion as to whether to coax the author to include those incidents or to suppress them. In either case, the ghostwriter cannot betray the author’s confidence and must follow the latter’s wishes. Respecting confidentiality is key in ghostwriting. I came across two concrete examples in this respect: the suicide of one of the author’s close relatives, and the failed marriage of the other.

Varying the writing style can also retain the reader’s attention in a subtle way. Including dialogue, where appropriate, adds a human touch and brings both the author and those he encounters to life. Instead of using reported speech, the ghostwriter can insert dialogue containing what the author was told and his response to it. This sparks the reader’s imagination and creates a scene, rather than merely reporting it. Even visually, the presentation of the printed page makes for less uniformity, making it more interesting.

How should the author’s words be recorded? In physical terms, I prefer typing the story directly on the computer. In spite  
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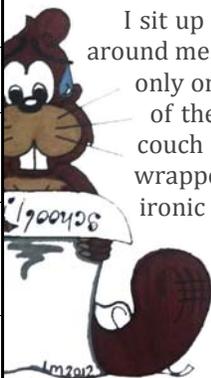
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## THE FIGHTER *by Kris Romaniuk*

I’m lying on the floor with a bloody nose and a black eye, wearing nothing but fighting shorts and hand wraps. If this was a movie, the camera would fade-in to a close up of my face and mislead you into thinking that I’m a prizefighter who’d been knocked out in a bare-knuckles boxing match. But as it panned out, you’d realize that that couldn’t be further from the truth. I’m lying on the floor of last night’s Halloween party, surrounded by beer bottles and cigarette butts. I can’t remember where I got the black eye, but the nosebleed is from doing too much cocaine. I try not to do cocaine too often, but sometimes I slip up.

I sit up and try to figure out where I am but I don’t recognize anything around me. From the looks of it, this was one hell of a party, and I’m not the only one who’s passed out. Bozo the clown is huddled on the other end of the room, using a jacket for a pillow, there’s a dead nurse on the couch who’s showing enough skin to turn on the dead, and a hipster wrapped in garbage bags is sleeping upright in an armchair, looking as ironic as anyone can when stewing in their own juices.

I climb to my feet and the cocaine headache swishes around my skull and settles somewhere around my cerebellum. That’s the problem with cocaine: I can never tell if it’s the drug or all  
*(Continued on page 6)*



## EDITOR'S NOTE by Joseph Richard Mannella

From a young age, I have been in love with the English language and the written word. I excelled at it in school and, despite the real world dropping by to take me away from my studies in the '70s, I returned to university to earn my Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing in 2010.

The Canadian Writers Society became a part of my life in 2004. Rosalie Avigdor and I have been running it together for the last half decade or so, I am honoured to hold the position of Managing Editor for this publication.

This paper was founded on the premise that everyone has a little bit of a writer in them. All authors were unpublished writers, at some point in time, yet they managed to take a chance on their work, or caught a break, or knew someone who knew someone. This paper is for those of you who haven't yet taken that chance. Short stories, poetry, articles of interest to writers... we want to get it all out there, and that's where you, the public, come in.

Get writing. Let your imagination run wild, put down on paper (or online) those great ideas you've been harbouring for decades, and send it in to us. Who knows? You may see your name prominently displayed next to your story in our next issue. Amaze your family and friends! Astound your colleagues! Impress your partner! Frame the paper and place it with your most prized possessions on your mantel. Okay, the framing might be a bit much, but you'll be invigorated and perhaps, one day, you'll think to credit our small paper as the inspiration that got you writing the novel that became a New York Times bestseller and set you up with a hacienda on a private beach in the Caribbean. Weirder things have happened.

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I think you'll enjoy this issue. We have some great fiction by Kris Romaniuk, with *"The Fighter"*, a first-person recounting of a day in the life of a web page designer, Anne J. Fotheringham's *"Lifecycle of a Bestseller"*, a look at the life of a book from its own point-of-view, and a postcard piece I wrote, of grisly proportions, *"Obsidian"*. Ilona Martonfi is back with some wonderful poetry, with *"My Sister Ibolya Eva"* and *"The Wedding Dress"*, as is Rosalie Avigdor, with *"Memories"*. We have very helpful articles by K. David Brody, with *"Ghostwriting - Feeling Your Way"* and Christina Manolescu, the founder of Invisible Cities online, with *"Writing Your Novel With the Aid of 21st Century Software"*, as well as a truly insightful piece by our own Rosalie Avigdor, with *"Being Sociable on Social Media"*. Finally, we have some Côte-St-Luc community news from Mike Cohen, with *"A Cat's Committee is Born"*, a list of Kudos to those people who have supported us during our first year of operation, and some greatly appreciated Letters to the Editor.



We'd like to thank the Councillors of the City of Côte St-Luc for all their endeavors on our behalf. We are grateful to have been able to hold our Canadian Writers Society meetings, originally in the Chalet in Trudeau park, now in the beautiful Aquatic Centre (congratulations on the opening of the Aqua Café). We are very proud to be a part of the City of Côte St Luc recreation department. There are too many individuals with whom we have dealt in the past to name them all. We simply want to say 'Thank You' to the all the staff and workers who have helped us along the way and continue to do so. We hope to expand and nurture this relationship for many years to come!

Laura Mannella deserves props for her wonderful artwork that graces these pages, as does Steven Manners for his continued, much-appreciated support in the production of this paper.

Special thanks to: Steven Manners, Julie-Anne Cardella and Ann Fotheringham for their informative round table discussion on *The Future of Libraries In Our Technical World*, which took place on Thursday evening, November 1st, at the Westmount YMCA. Proceeds from the event went to The Westmount YMCA Strong Kids Campaign.

## THE WRITE PLACE

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# Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor,

I wanted to say how much I enjoyed the wonderfully written article "The Write Person" that Rosalie Avigdor wrote in the Spring Summer 2012 edition of The Write Place. It was all about my Montreal Scrabble club and how I had started it back in 1978. She covered everything I wanted her to write and arranged it in such a way that made it most interesting.

It was a very nice article that really humbled me the way she wrote about my accomplishments.

Thank you Rosalie.

Bernard Gotlieb

Dear Editor,

Just finished reading the story "The Antique " by Andrea Bassel (*editor's note: Spring Summer 2012 edition*). Great story, which I really enjoyed.

Here is my question : if the story is true, what is the title of the sheet of music ? If it's just a story, please make up a title from real music which I could look up on the internet. Strange request I know but . . .

Thank you for your time

Regards

Micheline Gamache



*Andrea Bassel answers:*

*"The story is a true one. Although the music was just a line or two, I would like to say it was "Sicilienne" for cello and piano, Opus 78, by Gabriel Fauré."*

*We hope this answers the question to your satisfaction.*

## Submission Guidelines

An eight- to twelve-page B&W news magazine, dedicated to the English-language community of the Greater Montreal Area, will be published every three months. Submissions for entry into the paper will be accepted from any writer, with preference given to those resident in the Greater Montreal Area.

There will be no compensation to the writer for any work that we might publish. All submissions will be reviewed by our team of editors. There is no guarantee that any submission will be accepted for publication, nor that any accepted submission will be published. Submissions can be made a number of ways:

by e-mail : the.write.place@hotmail.com (subject line: Submission)  
 by fax : (514) 383-6683 (with a cover page)  
 by snail mail : The Write Place, C/O 9770, boulevard Saint-Laurent, Montreal, Quebec H3L 2N3

Please include, with your submission, your name, an e-mail address where we can contact you, and a short bio that we might include with your story, if it is accepted. If you have a picture, please feel free to include it. If you want your snail mail submission returned, please enclose a SASE with sufficient postage. Any submission you provide should try to stay within a reasonable limit of these word count guidelines:

|                                      |                                               |                       |               |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Short story :                        | 500-2000 words                                | Postcard story :      | 250-500 words |
| Poetry :                             | 3-50 lines                                    | Book reviews :        | 500-525 words |
| Articles (by experts in the field) : | 500-1000 words                                | Letters to the Editor | 50-250 words  |
| Advertisements:                      | increments of 1/8 page (contact us for rates) |                       |               |

*(Ghostwriting — Feeling Your Way ... Continued from page 1)*

of my four-finger typing technique, I can keep up with the author very well, especially using my own particular brand of shorthand in some cases. However, others may prefer to use a recording device for greater accuracy. For me, that represents double work in spite of the need for revision. Furthermore, after every session with the author, I made sure to submit that part of the story to him to check that I had my facts straight. There were very few corrections I needed to make.

While dealing with the straight facts, it should be mentioned that the ghostwriter does have some latitude in adding colour to the tale. In one case, my author described how he came under enemy fire in wartime. He stated, in passing, that he was *scared*. I put myself in his position and added feelings of utter terror that the author must have experienced at his close encounter with death. When he reread my version of the incident, he raised no objection to my embellishment.

I call this *window dressing*. I'd even go as far as to say that telling a good story depends on window dressing. The straight facts are often boring. Setting the scene, depicting the surroundings, physically describing a character, even talking about the weather to create a mood stimulates the reader's curiosity and paints a more detailed picture for his or her imagination. None of this window dressing need be true. It's the packaging around the present that creates the excitement. This, of course, does not apply only to ghostwriting but to any writing beyond the minutes of a meeting or a report on a scientific experiment.

I was obliged to face one reversal in the course of ghostwriting for one of my authors. He described in technical detail his transfers to various army bases and the courses he took. Nothing actually happened. It was boring. My powers of persuasion were not sufficient to convince him to summarize the process, which was of significance to him alone. I failed. On the positive side, that section of his life story consisted of a mere half-page. Everything else was fascinating. So perhaps leaving that section untouched made the rest of his history even more fascinating.

Ghostwriting is a one-sided relationship. The writer has to do more than show interest in the author's life. He has to cajole the author into remembering and recounting incidents from his past, and translating them into enthralling anecdotes for the reader's attention and entertainment. Readers will never know the author personally but, through the ghostwriter's talent, should be made to feel as if they do. The ghostwriter has no opinion to express on what he is writing. The author's life experiences are what matter; the ghostwriter is the mouthpiece and must remain invisible. A comparison may be drawn with a constitutional monarch – a bit of a stretch, I admit. The monarch, like the ghostwriter, can advise and influence, but the author is the prime minister and, alone, is responsible for making decisions on content.

The aftermath – sad. As a ghostwriter, I learned and indirectly experienced the intimate details of two fascinating gentlemen. Neither of them passed their life in one place. Both had the courage to see and seize opportunities that presented themselves. They can look back with pride and satisfaction on the way they comported themselves in difficult and trying times. I wish them both contentment and good health in the future.




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## **LIFECYCLE OF A BESTSELLER** by Anne J. Fotheringham

I began my life as a hint of an idea, a tiny tremor in the brain of my creator Amelia D. Barnes. Amelia was usually a deep sleeper but she was having a hard time settling down one Sunday night. Her husband Henry had flown out that afternoon to attend a conference and a thunderstorm was raging overhead. She would just start to drift off when a gust of wind rattled the house or rain spattered loudly against the window. When she got up to go to the bathroom at 4 a.m., something that had been percolating deep in her synapses boiled through to the surface.

"Goodness," Amelia said. "That's not bad, not bad at all. If I could develop that plotline and ..."

Mumbling to herself Amelia trekked downstairs to the kitchen and put the coffeemaker on. Armed with a steaming mug full of the dark liquid and a cheese Danish leftover from Sunday brunch, she padded back upstairs to her little office in the back bedroom to fire up her laptop. Meanwhile, I was growing inside her brain from a glimmer to a full-blown idea and developing a fledgling plot with some tentative characters who needed some work.

Amelia lost all sense of time as she worked. She wrote steadily hour by hour until her stomach clock finally got her attention around 2 p.m. She had not seen the dawn, heard the newspaper hit the front door or the telephone ringing when her husband tried to reach her. He spoke briefly with the answering machine and hung up.

Amelia paused for a light lunch and read what she had written. She was excited. The story was going well. I now had form, substance, a full cast of characters, dialogue, setting, a plotline with an impending arc and denouement all planned and, best of all, a heroine who could inspire readers.

As the days and weeks rolled by, Amelia crafted me from a rough draft into a full-blown, edited novel of some 75,000

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*(Lifecycle of a Bestseller ... Continued from page 4)*

words. She toted parts of me to her writers' group meetings and workshopped me through readings and discussion sessions. The hype was already starting. Her fellow writers were in love with my heroine, enthralled by my plot and excited that one of their own had finally broken through to write what everyone felt was a national bestseller.

One day, Amelia printed out several copies of my first three chapters and began stuffing me in brown envelopes. I didn't really like those envelopes. I was tossed around and dropped and bounced around all over the place. When the envelopes were opened, it was even worse. Someone would just peek inside and then toss me into a bin. At other times, I sat on the corner of a desk for a while and then got tipped into the bin. My heroine was getting impatient. She knew she needed to see the light of day. Why couldn't these beings with the large eyeballs set her free? One day, one of the envelopes was turned upside down and my first chapters, heroine and all, slid onto a smooth desk. A pair of eyes looked us over critically, then began to read, bringing me to life, letting my heroine do her thing.

Abruptly, the eyes stopped reading. I was placed in a file folder and left to slumber until, joy and rapture, sometime later the rest of my chapters turned up to join us. My heroine was particularly happy to see them as she had missed my hero and his sensual kisses very much.

Soon, we were sent to the printer. I was frightened at first by the process, but my heroine was very determined that I be published. She was crowing with delight at the prospect of becoming a real printed book – and who was I to deny my heroine?

I didn't spend much time on the bookstore shelves. The clerks kept telling people they were "sold out" of this bestseller. More copies of me were on the way, they said. I have to admit I enjoyed all the attention. My heroine was now a household word and she was extremely gratified to learn that none other than Veronica Divine was going to play her in the movie version.

I stayed in hardback for several months and then, suddenly, began appearing in paperback. I moved off the shelves even faster. Amelia would often come to the bookstores and hold me while she read to my fans. My heroine would preen and posture as they applauded. Amelia was very happy. She would sign her name inside me with a flourish and the fans would walk away clutching me to their chests as if I were the greatest treasure in the world.

It couldn't last of course. Nothing is forever – especially in the publishing business. I rode the crest of the movie premiere and its few weeks of popularity but then HE came along. HIM. That other book. The one with the larger-than-life-hero-who-saves-the-world. Readers loved his take-charge attitude, his ability to detect terrorist conspiracies and defeat them. My heroine and her story paled by comparison. Within a few weeks, there were less copies of the paperback me on the shelves and the hardcover version had been moved—oh the shame of it—to the discount book section of the major bookstores.

It has been several months now. I'm still lingering on the lower shelves of some bookstores. The hardcover copies have been remaindered. My heroine has gone sulky on me. When some readers do reach down and pick me up, she turns her back and refuses to have any interaction with them. Disinterested, readers place me back on the shelf and turn their attention to the other books on the special rack nearby, the one they keep the bestsellers on, the one I used to dominate.

I'd been hoping Amelia would turn up and do something about the situation, shake up my heroine, do a little marketing. But no. Not a word from her. Now I know why. Today they put up a new poster in the store announcing the launch of Amelia's newest book would take place the next day. My heart sank. No wonder she hadn't been around. Her attention had been on another story, another "bestseller." I sighed. I figured I was destined for the discount bin.

But no, this afternoon a miracle occurred. Suddenly the store clerks dragged extra copies of me out of a box and put me on a display rack on one side of an empty table. "We'll put the new book on the rack on the other side when it arrives in the morning," one of the clerks said. "Perhaps we'll get lucky and clear out the rest of these paperbacks."

I've shaken my heroine out of her lethargy by telling her about the reading. She's a little miffed she'll be sharing the lime-light with another book, but she's been so neglected, she'll take any publicity she can get. She's busy preparing for the event. I've shaken my pages out and given my plotline a jiggle. I'm ready for tomorrow.

When the new book arrives it will be full of itself, sure of his success. My heroine will court him, wanting, needing to be part of the buying frenzy. I'm happy she will have another chance. I'll just be glad to see my creator, Amelia, again, to have her hold me in her hands and remember how I was born on the night she couldn't sleep, the night when the wind blew and the rain fell, the night a tiny glimmer became an idea, an idea that changed her world and gave me life.

*Anne J. Fotheringham is a professional writer/editor whose poetry, short stories and a children's book have been published in Canada and the United States. She has edited and published three short story anthologies for local writers. She also has nonfiction publishing and book editing credits. She has a B.A. from McGill University and an M.A. in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University. Her latest publication is This Jagged Winter, a book of poetry published by Shoreline Press.*

*(The Fighter ... Continued from page 1)*



the booze I end up drinking when I'm on it, but my head always hurts the next day.

I walk to the fridge and find a bottle of blue Gatorade. I don't know why, or how I knew it was there, but I did. I drink half of it and then shuffle to the washroom to take my morning piss.

There's a condom still clinging to my flaccid but I can't remember why. I'm sure it'll come back to me eventually but, for the meantime, at least I know that I was safe, so I try not to worry about it.

I consider washing the blood off my face, but I leave it because I think it looks bad ass and I have to walk home in costume anyway. Then I find my hoodie on the floor and let myself out after I steal one more glimpse of the nurse's ass cheek dimples hanging out the bottom of her skirt.

I'm dreading the walk home, a walk of shame, but when I step outside I realize that I'm just across the street from my place. I can vaguely recall meeting Dorothy from the *Wizard of Oz* and Alex from *A Clockwork Orange* on my way home, and them inviting me upstairs to do cocaine with them. I went along with them hoping that maybe Alex wanted to cross swords with me over Dorothy, and for all I know, I did, but I still can't remember much after that.

I cross the street toward my place and notice a black sedan parked out front and a large man in a leather jacket leaning on it, waiting for me. It's Vlad and I must still be a little high because I'm not afraid.

"Vlad, what a surprise," I hear myself say. "What are you doing here?"

"I was in neighborhood and thought I'd stop by," he says in his thick Russian accent. "I tried calling first, but you no answer phone."

"Yeah, I think I lost my phone last night."

"That's not all you lose," he observes, examining my face.

"You should see the other guy," I jest.

"We need to talk business, Carl," he digresses.

"Yes, we do," I assure him. "Why don't you come in for a coffee, Vlad? We can talk inside. I don't want the neighbors seeing me like this," I explain.

Vlad chuckles and slaps me on the back as I lead the way. Yeah, I must still be high because I'm inviting Vlad into the privacy of my home where there are no witnesses and there's nowhere to run, and I'm not that worried about it.

Inside, I put on a pot of coffee and start cutting the tape from my hands. Worse case scenario, I can always try stabbing Vlad in the neck with the scissors, I think to myself.

"So, Carl" Vlad begins. "It's been three months and I'm still not number one on Google. I'm beginning to lose patience."

This what I do for a living: I help make businesses more popular on the internet. I work for myself and it's an easy lifestyle. I spend just as much time in front of a computer as anyone else with an office job, but I don't have to put on pants or leave my apartment most of the time. It can get lonely, but it's the perfect setup for someone who drinks as much as I do. I keep late nights, working and drinking, and often spend the first half of the day hung over.

Vlad is a client I regret taking on. I met him through a friend named Jake that I don't know that well. Jake called me up one day and asked me if I had time for a beer. He wanted to discuss hiring me for a job. We met at a local dive bar around the corner and he told me how he was opening an escort agency.

Jake didn't really strike me as the pimping type, but Vlad was his business partner and he had experience running this kind of thing. Jake had met Vlad in that same dive bar a few weeks earlier. They shared a drinking problem and a sense of humor and quickly became good friends, and Vlad invited Jake in on his new venture. He needed someone who knew the city and who he could trust, and who could drive the girls around, and he'd mistaken their shared sense of humor for shared values. A few months in, Vlad got fed up with how Jake handled the girls. He was too soft on them and Vlad pushed him out.

That's how I got pulled into this mess. Jake is a nice guy, the kind of guy you could trust. So when he wanted to hire me, I didn't think to consider the kind of company you have to keep to get an operation like that off the ground. Now Jake was gone and I was left to deal with Vlad on my own. He's not exactly the kind of client you can fire. In just three months, I'd taken their site from nothing and put it somewhere in the top five search results for a bunch of relevant keywords. Their traffic kept climbing and the calls were pouring in, but that wasn't good enough for Vlad. He was paying me for number one and he wasn't settling for anything less, no matter how good the return on his investment was.

"I understand," I assure him. "And we're going to get there. It's just that these things take time."

"You know, Carl, many ancient societies did not believe in time. They thought of it as an illusion. And even today, many

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*(The Fighter ... Continued from page 6)*

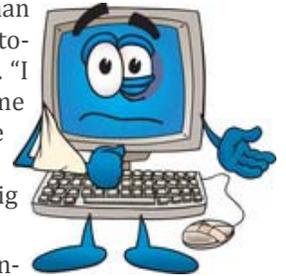
scientists support this belief. They hypothesize that time is just one of many dimensions, and does not exist as a linear construct," he explained. "I am *not* one of these people, Carl. For me, time exists only as I experience it. We are born, we have a limited amount of it, and then we die. It's for this reason that I cherish the time I have in this life," he says, "and choose not waste it. But I'm beginning to wonder," he continues, "if maybe I've been wasting my time on some of the promises you've made."

"Vlad, you have to trust me on this. In only three months we're in the top half of the first page for every keyword we're targeting, we're getting plenty of traffic, and even you said how busy the girls have been."

"Do you understand the true inherent paradox of a free market system?" he asked me.

"That perpetual growth is an unsustainable goal?" I venture.

"No," he says. "That's the growth economy specifically, not the free market system itself -- and that is not a paradox, it's just an unrealistic goal." As if it wasn't bad enough that Vlad is bigger and stronger and more ruthless than me, he has to be smarter than me, too. "The paradox of a free market system is that everyone strives toward an outcome that would put an end to the system itself: monopoly. I am just one man," he goes on. "I could never hope to fulfill the demand for sex of an entire city. Nor would I want to try: there are some strange people out there, Carl, who like some very strange things, and I would not feel comfortable providing those as a service. But I excel in the service I do provide, and while I can't hope to monopolize the market for such services, I can expect to *dominate* it. What I'm saying here, Carl, is that you are a big part of my picture right now, and I am counting on you for a lot to not let me down."



Vlad has remained calm and composed this entire time, but this is only making him seem more menacing. He's the kind of guy who's at ease with whatever sociopathic impulse entices him, and I have trouble reading him so I'm never sure what impulse is going to be from one moment to the next.

"I'm not going to let you down, Vlad. This I promise you. So far, you've more than made back every penny you've spent on me, and over the next few months, you're only going to see an increasing return on your investment," I assure him. "Stay for a coffee," I insist, "and I'll bring you up to speed on what we're doing next."

Vlad smiles. He's enjoying watching me hold my ground and he stays for while and listens to me talk about blogging strategy I'm making up as I go along. By the time he leaves, he's all smiles and chuckles, and he keeps a big arm around my shoulder as I walk him to the door. "Come by the office some night this week," he insisted. "Some of the girls really like a tough guy," he said admiring my black eye. "Let me see how the week goes," I say. "I have a lot to do."

"Okay, Carl," he chuckles, and I shut the door behind him.

Coming off the adrenaline rush, the cocaine headache settles back onto my cerebellum. I'm dehydrated and feeling sick because of it. I find a bottle of Perrier in the fridge and sip it by the window, watching the foot traffic below and wondering how things got this fucked up. Things weren't always this fucked up. I used to have my shit together. I used to be happy. But then it all went away. She took it with her when she left.

It's 10:30am on a Sunday morning and things are moving along steadily on the street below. I think about taking a shower and washing the blood off my face and the film off my dick, but I feel too tired and depressed to bother. Instead, I nod off, sitting upright in the armchair while cigarette butts smolder in the ashtray next to me.

*Kris Romaniuk is a writer of truth and lies who has little patience for the facts in between. He is the author of the satirical travel memoir, Rum Socialism: A Travel Diary of Communist Cuba, and Portraits: Short Stories About No One in Particular.*

*Kris lives in Montreal with his demons and delusions of grandeur. He enjoys drunken walks on the beach, smoking in the boys' room, and the company of pretty strangers.*

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## A CATS COMMITTEE IS BORN *by Mike Cohen*

Last winter, the Côte Saint-Luc Cats Committee, which I proudly founded two years ago, was having a meeting at City Hall when, all of sudden, beautiful sounds started coming from the council chamber. Some of our members walked out, only to see conductor Joseph Milo and The Musicians of the World Symphony Orchestra rehearsing. Cognizant of the fact the city has an agreement whereby the orchestra rehearses at City Hall at no cost and in return performs one benefit, we asked Joseph and his wife Lucy Ravinsky, the orchestra's executive director and general manager, whether they would consider doing so for our Committee.

Fast forward to Tuesday, August 21, at the Giovanni Palatucci Facility (former Wagar High School ) on Parkhaven Avenue. We filled the auditorium with 350 people for the Best of Broadway: The Cat's Meow.

The Musicians of the World Symphony Orchestra was founded in 2006 by Joseph and Lucy when it was discovered that a great pool of professional musicians, recently immigrated to Montreal, had no opportunity to make use of their valuable talent in their new home. The MWSO was created, not only to provide these new Canadians with the opportunity to engage in their main passion, making beautiful music in an orchestral setting, but to give them back the professional dignity they had enjoyed in their homelands and, most especially, to share their wonderful talents with the music lovers of Montreal.

The Orchestra was joined by soprano Jennifer Pyra, who is quickly establishing herself as an artist to watch for. She first came to international attention in 2008 when she was awarded the Encouragement Award at the Metropolitan Opera's National Council Audition Regional Finals in Washington, D.C. The following year, she graduated from the *Franz Schubert Institut*. Last May, she was recognized by the Conservatoire de Musique de Montréal, where she graduated with her Masters of Music. This coming fall will see her heading to competitions in France and Spain.

The audience loved every minute of this two set performance. About \$2,500 was raised for the CSLCC and Educhat, the organization run by Shelley Schecter, which spearheads our Trap, Neuter and Release/Adopt efforts. Not everyone on hand was necessarily a cat lover. Some came for the music. What they all got was an education on the lovely feline characters in our community. I wish to applaud our small volunteer committee. It was so nice to see everyone pitch in, selling tickets and getting the word out. When we began this venture, we did not know how many seats would sell. Truthfully, our goal was 200. Thanks to our wonderful staff – Harold Cammy, Regine Banon and the team at our Library – by early August word had spread about the concert and it became the hottest ticket in town. We had significant interest from people outside of our community eager to start such committees in their areas. Thank you Fern Collier- Pereira, who was the first person to step forward to work on this project, to Cynthia Koomas and the Marymount Adult Education Centre for the venue and Norm Zimmerman and Steve's Music Store for their sponsorship.

I could have listened to them all night. Their musical program included *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Tribute to Richard Rodgers*, a *West Side Story* medley, *The Sound of Music*, *Over The Rainbow*, highlights from *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, *I Could Have Danced*, *Themes from 007*, *Summertime*, *The Lion King*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, "*Cats*" the musical-overture, *The Waltzing Cats*, *Memory*, *Fiddler on the Roof* medley and a surprise concluding piece with Pyra and mezzo soprano Anna Levitina singing by only using cat noises. Hats off as well to pianist Maya Rand and Alexandra Cohen, who began the show with two delightful songs.

D'Arcy McGee Liberal MNA Lawrence Bergman joined us and spoke about animal welfare legislation his government adopted. City Councillors Sam Goldbloom and Steven Erdelyi were on hand. Sam became a first-time cat owner last year to Mr. Darcy and subsequently became active with the CSLCC. Sam has a fantastic stage presence, which is one of the reasons I asked him to be a co-emcee. Mayor Anthony Housefather was away on business, but made a generous personal donation of \$118.

Eighteen years ago I met my wife Ilana. When I visited her apartment she introduced me to Buddy, her cat. I must confess that, at that time, I never had much of a passion for cats, but Buddy changed that in a hurry. And so did Toonces, Bobbee and now Cleo.

Just more than two years ago Shelley Schecter came to Côte Saint-Luc City Council to ask for support in regard to the many homeless feral cats in our community. As a devoted cat owner myself, I sought a meeting with Shelley and she proceeded to share the benefits with me about the Trap, Neuter and Release Program. I discussed this further with my own Vet, Dr. Marlene Kalin and then the Director of Animal Welfare for the SPCA. Alanna Devine. When I heard about the staggering number of homeless cats in Côte Saint-Luc alone, I knew we had to act.

It is estimated that, over a period of seven years, two unaltered cats can exponentially create over 400,000 offspring.

An information meeting was called at City Hall and it exceeded our expectations, with a standing-room-only crowd of well over 100. A Committee was born that night.

Soon after, with some financial support from Côte Saint-Luc City Council, the Côte Saint-Luc Cats Committee was estab-

*(Continued on page 9)*

*(A Cats Committee is Born ... Continued from page 8)*

lished in partnership with Shelley Schecter and Educhat. By no means did all of those people who attended our information meeting sign on; only a small fraction did. But what an extraordinary group of people they are. We have devoted most of our attention to Trap, Neuter and Release. This is the only proven humane and effective method to manage feral cat colonies. More recently we have expanded to focus on Trap, Neuter and Adopt. Our volunteers go out and trap feral – or community-cats, bring them to the Vet, and have them spayed or neutered. If at all possible, we try to get them adopted. We have better success lately at getting some of the baby kittens we find adopted.

This is no easy task. We need volunteers to do the trapping. We also require volunteers to house the cats when they are released from the Vet and recovering from surgery. Finding families willing to adopt these cats or simply to foster them while they await a permanent home is a real need.

Our concert was a celebration about cats and what we do! While we are grateful for city council's contribution and some other donations we have received, more funds are always needed.

I ask people to log on to our website, our blog and our Facebook page. You can also call our Cats Hotline at 514-485-6800 extension CATS.

I am very proud to announce that very soon, Côte Saint-Luc will adopt our first ever cat licensing bylaw, directed towards outdoor cats. Neutering of these animals will now become mandatory.

We honoured the Côte Saint-Luc Hospital for Animals following the intermission. Shelley Schecter made a passionate speech about the need to rescue homeless cats. She cited the hours of devotion Dr. Marlene Kalin and her team at the Animal Hospital put in for this cause. Dr. Kalin, Dr. Melanie Cukierman and staff members Margaret Nadler, Beverly Beach and Judy Walsh were there to accept a plaque and the deserving kind words that came with it.

This was a wonderful evening and I thank everyone who made it happen! Now it's back to work, trapping cats and getting as many of them adopted as possible.

*Mike Cohen is a Côte Saint-Luc city councillor, a columnist for The Suburban newspaper and half a dozen other publications, and the communications and marketing specialist for the English Montreal School Board.*



**OBSIDIAN** by Joseph Richard Mannella

She removed the ebony knife from its case and placed it gently upon the felt cloth spread out on the table. Ten inches long from hilt to tip, its surface was polished to a mirror shine, sparkling softly beneath the overhead light. *"And this is the last. Her name is 'Midnight'."* Running her fingers lovingly along its razor-sharp edge, she smiled at the small group seated before her. *"She's my favourite of the whole collection."* She feigned amazement at the wide-eyed expressions on their faces. *"You're surprised I call it 'she'? Knives have a gender, you know. All blades do."* She lowered her eyes and fiddled with the eight blades laid out on the cloth before her, making sure to adjust the position of each just so. She looked up over her spectacles to link eyes with her captive audience. *"The Japanese consider them male, but devotees everywhere else think of them as beautiful, deadly females."* She shivered as she ran her fingers over its smooth surface.

*"Not made of metal like my other blades, she's actually made from obsidian, rapidly-cooled lava hardened to a volcanic glass."* She lifted it by its haft and held it for them to examine. *"Her edge is many times sharper than that of the other blades I've shown you here. I have to be very careful how I hold her."* She weighed the dark blade with her hand. *"Perfect heft."* She deftly flipped it into the air and caught it by its handle. *"Perfect balance."* Her eyes glazed over as a painful memory enveloped her.

Shaking her head violently, she came back to the present and replaced the blade on the cloth, embarrassed. *"Perhaps we should start."*

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

She wiped dark stains from the raven blade carefully, wrapping it in its cloth and laying it gently within her case. A flip of her fingers sealed it firmly shut. Removing her coat from the back of a chair and draping it over her left arm, she lifted the knife case with her right hand. *"I've enjoyed myself today. Thank you for your time and your cooperation."* Nodding her head, she strode slowly toward the front door of the mansion, weaving her way carefully between the sumptuous leather couches and marble-inlaid coffee tables, avoiding the pools of blood that had long since stopped spreading across the floor. Vacant eyes stared soullessly at her passing.

## WRITING YOUR NOVEL, WITH THE AID OF 21st CENTURY SOFTWARE *by Christina Manolescu*

### How do I begin to write my novel?

Greetings, fellow writers. As we speak, I am toiling away at the sequel to my novel, *Baglady*, provisionally entitled *Flying solo: Baglady at Large*. Now, since I am just setting out, I can't be sure whether all the chaotic elements swarming around in my mind will ever gel together as a coherent novel. (Without *wanting to sound grandiose*, I think fondly of Marcel Proust when he was creating his seemingly plotless, formless, labyrinthine multi-sequel classic: *A la recherche du Temps Perdu / Remembrance of things past*.) As everyone knows, the mere act of starting, let alone completing a novel involves a calculated risk of precious time. Not a decision to be taken lightly. However, once the compulsion takes hold, a writer will mostly likely just forge ahead.

In this instance, I began by entering text: disjointed fragments describing ideas, themes, events and landscapes, as well as character sketches, pieces of dialogue, potential storylines and plots, whether from memory, the imagination, or even personal letters and scrappy journals collected over the years. At the same time, I'm arranging a framework of chapters each containing interrelated scenes, as though I were creating a stage play. These scenes, *I hope and trust*, will eventually support and flesh out the plot of the story, the details of which I am working out (using rough notes as a guide) *before* I commit myself to writing the actual body of the novel itself.

Having tinkered around with potential plot scenarios, I judged that the disparate elements would be too unwieldy to handle in one novel alone. Therefore I split the prospective plot up into two parts, and assigned a provisional 'space-time' framework each section: that is, **where** (geographically) and **when** (what calendar year) does each novel begin and end? Having determined this for both novels, I am now working at 2 successive *Baglady* sequels concurrently.

### How do I control a massive project such as a novel?

This might sound like a recipe for catastrophic failure, except that for the first time I am using a novel writing software which works beautifully and, best of all, free. I find that it really helps get a big project under control. It's called Ywriter5 novel writing software. Using this free program, you can easily input text into separate scenes and then shift these scenes around; you can also rename and renumber the chapters as you go along. It means that you don't necessarily need to work through the novel in chronological order. You can build pieces of it, as though it were a jigsaw puzzle or an architectural structure—which it is.

The Ywriter5 program also helps you to keep track of character descriptions, point of view, notes on chapters, daily word count progress, total word count, and more. It displays the scenes in order on a graphic timeline, as well. When you download this free software from the web, you will be invited to make a donation through PAYPAL if you choose to. I did, but only once I tested out how good it was. Go to: <http://www.spacejock.com/yWriter5.html>

### What about the actually typing of the novel?

The next electronic aid that I recommend a low-cost software called *Dragon Dictate*. With the help of a combination headset/microphone, this program allows you to dictate your ideas as live text directly into MS Word and other programs, including YWriter5 novel writing software. *Dragon Dictate* is not capable of perfect work recognition, so you will have to correct certain words as you go along, but the program does tend to improve its performance with habitual use. It's worth using as a practical aid, especially when you get inspired in your writing and prefer to dictate your thoughts quickly rather than write longhand or type. Go to: <http://www.nuance.com/dragon/index.htm>

### Why should I even contemplate such a massive undertaking? Will any one even read it? Does anyone care?

Of course, you will need to face down, again and again, that lingering demon of self-doubt. I would say: If the spirit moves you, go ahead and aspire to become a creator as well as a consumer. Oftentimes a writer won't be able to control or even know what happens to his/her work once it's released out into the wild to seek its fame and fortune. But the one thing a writer *can* control is the creation and completion of the work itself.

I have read a lot of advice, advocating the contrary. Writers may be told to 'create buzz' by setting up advance web sites and developing fan-bases across multiple social media outlets before even embarking on the writing itself. For all I know, in our brave new cyber-connected world, this may be sensible advice. However, I continue to believe that the bedrock challenge for a writer is to create an authentic work, worthy of publication, and then 'put it out there' for the world at large.

Author, J.K. Rowling, when embarking as a novice on her first *Harry Potter* novel, asked herself what was the worst that could happen. Answer: the rejection of her manuscript by every publishing house on the planet. Big deal! She decided that she had nothing to lose—and everything to gain—if she tried.

*Christina Manolescu is the founder of Prince Chameleon Press: [www.princechameleon.com](http://www.princechameleon.com). She has written, designed, and published children's fantasy fiction and two novels, *Baglady* and *Waldensong Saturnalia*. Excerpts from both these novels were short-listed for the Eastside Stories Competition in London, U.K. She has also undertaken translation, ghostwriting, editorial revision, book design and print management for various clients, one of whose self-published books won a silver Ippy Award in 2009. She founded **Invisible Cities Network** in 2001 to support and showcase the work of independent artists and self-publishers: [www.InvisibleCitiesNetwork.org](http://www.InvisibleCitiesNetwork.org)*



### MY SISTER IBOLYA EVA by Ilona Martonfi

Blind eyes wide open and sleeping.  
 Shared room in a nursing home.  
 Curtain enclosed, half-lit hospital bed.

My sister will not become an old woman:

Body in diabetic atrophy.  
 She can't use her hands anymore.

Mind locked in.

She speaks with difficulty.  
 "I am scared," she tells her daughter.

Cries and screams in the night.

"Confusion," the doctor says.  
 "End-stage heart failure.  
 Let nature take its course."

A sister's sudden blindness four years earlier.

"Give me kisses," she says.

Snow falling on Lake Erie.

Leafless catalpa tree.  
 Grating call of a black crow

trailing off to a sigh:

Ibolya Eva will not become an old woman  
 and wear cranberry taffeta.

—Call me on my birthday.



### THE WEDDING DRESS by Ilona Martonfi

i.  
 Your silk taffeta dress I hoard.  
 On this fine summer day —  
 your nine-year old plays the bride.

Her brother, handsome groom.  
 Older sister, the pretty bridesmaid.  
 And this photograph  
 of a magical day:  
 supervised visitation with your children.

Long white silk taffeta wedding dress.

ii.  
 Daughter, I will not let you disappear —  
 Walking corridors:  
 Family meetings,  
 alone in outpatient psychiatric ward.

Wheezing, dry cough, chronic sarcoid.  
 You play your boombox. Acoustic guitar.

### MEMORIES by Rosalie Avigdor

How long do we keep our memories  
 of all the years gone by?  
 How long do we save our memories  
 not even realizing why.

How long do we keep each letter and card  
 of a time so long ago?  
 When is the time for keeping  
 or the time to start letting go?

When is enough of saving keepsakes  
 with meanings only to you?  
 When is the time to say to yourself,  
 "to thine own self be true."

When is the time to be able to look at pictures,  
 and be able to say goodbye?

Only when you can look at your memories  
 and not begin to cry!

## BEING SOCIABLE ON SOCIAL MEDIA *by Rosalie Avigdor*

I have so many ideas that I want to put on paper, but I don't. I want to express myself in writing and have this need for all the world to know what I think and feel. Why?

I start debates on Facebook and goad my "invisible friends" into a frenzy about their upcoming elections. Then, when things get out of hand, I disappear, just to recharge and start all over again.

Think about all the writers and artists around the world who are being given this unique opportunity to share, through social media, all kinds of things that might not even matter to anyone. For instance, if our "friends" love buttermilk pancakes and their gorgeous husband served them breakfast in bed that morning, do we really care? Then there are those who are ill and ask for prayers, which most of us, caught up in the moment, will gladly comply. Why do "friends" post photos of their vacations or their wedding pictures or their grandkids biking up a mountain road? We click on the "like" button to be polite or comment in the box, saying how great they look and that we just loved their pictures. Why? We don't really know each other, have never met and probably never will.

Lately, I've been receiving religious posts. Click "like" if you love Jesus. I simply write back that Jesus did not have a computer and I really don't think the posts on religion have any place on Facebook. They still keep coming though . . .

So, the questions are: How social should we be on social media? Why do we spend hours communicating with pictures of people we've never met but still call "friends"? We save animals from shelters. We post and help find missing children. We expose pedophiles and animal cruelty. We give recipes, prayers, compliments, birthday wishes and sympathy to total strangers to whom, strangely enough, we have become very attached. We poke each other. Whose needs are being fulfilled here online?

Is this our new writing world? After all, a posted story or poem renders one published. Are you a writer or are you deemed to be an author by virtue of having your book self published on an e-reader?

It is now 1:00 am and my computer is more exhausted than I am. It is grunting and trying to tell me to stop. I think I heard a bit of snoring but that might be the dog. So I will take my meds, say goodnight to my good "friends", try to go to sleep and hope to see everyone all over again in the morning.

*Note to self . . . one of the happiest moments in my life was when I met the late Michael Hanna Fein and his soulmate and life partner Arnold in person at our CWS meeting, after communicating on FB for a year. We became great real life friends and both got involved in this project we call The Write Place. Michael is very much missed but Arnold is still helping with our paper. After all this ranting, I want to say that invisible might be good, but visible is so much better.*

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We look forward to receiving your Christmas-themed SUBMISSIONS . . . short stories, poems, articles, book or movie reviews, letters to the editor. We know you can do it. Let's get your name, and your work, out there for the public to enjoy! Be a part of our new and exciting plans!