

Mary Ann Moore:



riting warrior

by David Morrison

As I tap away at the keyboard this grey winter day, around me all is quiet. There is little audible evidence of human presence in the vicinity. Other than my own keystrokes the only sounds I hear are the occasional crow caw and my cat snoring on the sofa bed. It is times like this, with only my feline companion as muse or critic, that writing as a solitary pursuit comes into sharp focus. And when this piece is finished I will release it to the world via this esteemed publication, then wonder what happens next. Will readers find it interesting and/or entertaining? Did I serve its subject well?

As a self-taught writer with no formal training in the discipline, insecurities as to the quality and worth of my work are natural. This said, even as a regularly published writer there is always professional guidance and mentorship available to me if required. There are also situations where, albeit in a different context, I can break the solitude and write in company, as offered in a 'circle' format by such as the Nanaimo-based poet, Mary Ann Moore.

Moore started her writing circles (think: small group workshops) in the living room of her Toronto home in 1997, bringing her skills and knowledge to Vancouver Island when relocating to the Hub City in 2005. Her journey to becoming a valued member of our creative community began when she started to become interested in writing and all things literary at a very young age.

"I was living with my grandparents in the Ottawa Valley when I was nine-years-old," she



Mary Ann Moore • a Lance Sullivan photo

begins. "As an only child I was developing my imagination. I have loved books since I can remember, and always got excited going to the library and being shown the new books by the librarian. Other writing came first, though we did have to write poetry at school, but it was mostly composition."

It was at this juncture in our conversation I was surprised to learn that, like myself,

Moore drifted into a writing career untrained. "In the seventies I started writing for the local newspaper. I didn't have any formal training, so just wrote, and that's the way it started professionally, writing about all sorts of community events. And I wrote about local history; I was very interested in the history of the little town where we

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lived, Bowmanville. It wasn't really until the nineties that I started writing poetry; something came to me that needed to be expressed in a poem."

Since that pivotal moment for Moore there has been no going back. In 1999, when living in Guelph, she self-released a CD of poetry, entitled *When My Heart is Open*, and has since produced chapbooks of her work, both independently and through Leaf Press in Lantzville. (In May, Leaf will be publishing a full-length book of Moore's poetry, called *Fishing for Mermaids*.)

As for Moore's writing circles, in an atmosphere conducive to creativity, the format and process sound fascinating. Although she has conducted workshops for men and women, especially at Vancouver Island University, the writing circles in Moore's home are exclusively for women writers. One workshop offered is the six-week Writing Life circle, but on the weekend of January 25-26 Moore will be hosting her Words in Progress for Writing Warriors circle, aimed at encouraging and offering support to women already in a stream of creativity. As Moore explains:

"In the Writing Life circle we write while we're together, and I offer prompts. There's poetry as inspiration, but it doesn't mean that the women need to write poetry. I always open with some form of inspirational reading, usually a poem, so poetry is always part of it. They can write in whatever form; it's writing in the moment to prompts I offer, and when the woman reads what she's written she's never heard it before herself, and we just echo back words and phrases that resonate with us. There's no critiquing of any sort, and then they might go on to do something with that, or it's just for that moment! But In the Writing Warriors circles, women have already done some writing, so this is to offer support to one another and support for putting those pieces out into the world.

In the Writing Life circle it is mainly women who want to write as a way of self-expression, but in Writing Warriors they want to take the next step, perhaps to be published in one form or another. I was amazed at the latest poetry retreat I attended to meet people there, mostly women, who had written for a long time but did not know where to send their stuff, or about the literary journals in Canada and that sort of thing. I also provide all of this information in the Writing Warriors."

It must be a lovely experience indeed to write in this way, absorbing and sparking off the creative energies of others, reacting to the catalytic prompting of such a nurturing teacher. Moore is a natural writer, one who writes every single day, so regarding her craft has much wisdom and methodology to share. On her website, of Writing Warriors she states: "I see this circle as a way to give voice to our desires rather than hiding our projects on our laptops and in our journals or on scraps of paper hidden behind the blender. The process is all-important to me but there comes a time to share those stories with others. This won't be a critique group as such but you may ask for what sort of feedback you would like. That way you can receive ideas and suggestions related to your particular concerns about your words in progress."

This sounds wonderful, no? Writing is often a lonely vocation, especially when – even for those that do it every day – those words simply will not come. Many a time I have sat agonizingly staring at a blank computer screen with a maelstrom of words and ideas in my brain, but will they form themselves into coherent sentences? No, they will not. And even when they do, is it any good? So, to have a venue of support and the possibility of sympathetic sounding boards such as made available by Moore can only be an invaluable part of the creative process.

For any women already writing and interested in this circle, Moore says: "Writing Warriors is a small group, around seven, so there's time to share. There is no critiquing, it's just about encouragement to come up with a concrete plan to get your healing stories into the world. Focus. Finish. Celebrate. Those are the words I came up with for my own intent for 2014 and they suit the Writing Warriors perfectly! Oh, and If anybody books a place in the circle and tells me they've read this article they can have the early bird price!"

The *Words in Progress for Writing Warriors* circle will be held at the Island Girl Art Studio, 3019 Hammond Bay Road, Nanaimo, on Saturday January 25 (9:00am-5:00pm) and Sunday January 26 (10:00am-4:00pm). For more information about Mary Ann Moore, her poetry and writing circles, please visit www.maryannmoore.ca or email Mary Ann at creativity@maryannmoore.ca.

Out & About

ALPACA QUEST CAFÉ & GIFT SHOP - On less harried days in our production schedule we escape the office in search of a fantastic cup of coffee and comfort food, while we map out our next edition. Locally, we recommend **Alpaca Quest Café** - our quaint little haunt for breakfast and lunch in Qualicum Bay. Drop in to see the results of their recent renovations, discover Chef Ginger's newest additions to the menu, and chat with the charming and stylish Drew, a volunteer WOOFER lending a hand behind the counter. It's the tasty soups, crepes and sweets (including gluten-free options) that keep us coming back for more. Visit our Facebook page to see our "personally tried it and liked it" photos! ~

AMY NEWSOM DESIGNS - We visited with Amy for the first time in December ... and we're going back as soon as we can. Amy's gallery is spectacular – filled with uncommon artwork by local artists, as well as Amy's own stunning one-of-a-kind jewellery pieces. A working-studio is located on site and visitors are invited to see where the magic begins and ends. With its Coffee & Waffle Bar, there's no doubt the gallery is unique! We recommend an Americano and Amy's organic, lactose and gluten-free waffle bar temptations. Waffles made fresh while you browse? Of course! Why not? Find our "Take a Tour" album of **Amy Newsom Design** on our Facebook Page, then plan a trip to the gallery!

HACIENDA MEXICAN IMPORTS is another 'must browse' location for us while we're out on distribution! Owners, Sabine and Colin love everything Mexican ... the colourful glassware, art, jewellery, flavours and furniture. It's all there, artfully presented in their Whiskey Creek warehouse with its majestic mountain backdrop. We're sure you'll find a few "must have" pieces that you can't do without, and we highly recommend the 'Salsa Huichol' Hot Sauce - Linda uses it on everything! Open weekends over the winter months, you can also find our "Take a Tour" album of **Hacienda Mexican Imports** on our Facebook Page! We love the place ... we hope you will too!

THE SHADY WATERFRONT RESTAURANT - In the October edition of *EyesOnBC Magazine*, we introduced you to Andrew McGuire, the talented hands behind some of the restoration work at the new Qualicum Beach Inn. Andy recently started a musically noteworthy venture dubbed the '*Dusty Hand Reggae Band*' and invited us to lunch at The Shady to tell us about it! Not only is the ocean view at **The Shady** arguably one of the best in Oceanside, they also have an exciting menu with delicious choices for every taste. We're particularly impressed by The Shady's mandate to source local food products whenever possible. Visit our Facebook page to see our "personally tried it and liked it" photos, then plan a brunch, lunch or dinner!

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