

VIEWPOINTS

All In A Writer's Life

BY PAULA DAMON

In case you haven't noticed, writers are an odd lot. With discerning tendencies, we impulsively detect meanings and construct narratives in literally everything.

Take, for instance, my half-dozen journals chock-full of reflections on topics ranging from the wordless tension of the writing discipline to being in the calming presence of ocean waves.

Our sense of time and place weighs so heavily that we take note of the faintest notions of sounds and textures, like this piece I constructed early one morning...

There is little to be said about this dewy morning, stretching and yawning its way out of deep slumber into a cavernous hollow of humming morning traffic. Shaping the day's agenda, a slight rustling of trees, still drenched with raindrops from last night's storm.

As daybreak wanes into afternoon, the pulsating buzz of locusts do the math, telegraphing what the temperature will be at 5 o'clock when you come back through the threshold of our union and continue to love me forever.

Dedicated daily writing is essential to any writing life. Considered training and practice – it's the due diligence one must endure to sharpen skills, develop endurance. Like an athlete; like exercise, it makes our writing stronger and hopefully better. Here I am reflecting on my resistance to that discipline...

The idea of daily sitting down [or standing up] and writing for an hour is not without its merits. Come what may, I will discover a repository of thoughts, scenarios and encounters scribbled in some form or fashion, only now a promissory note of drips and drabs of its future potential.

My chicken scratch may be illegible or difficult to decipher at best. Although distractions easily take me away from storytelling, preventing me from articulating crushing blows of the heart, whispers of the soul or the burdensome yoke life enigmatically carries around its neck.

Yet, when I collect my thoughts and push this pen across the page (or the other way around), I spot a cohort of sentiment to which I turn for inspiration, guidance and reassurance. Alternatively, I am inclined at times to circle the writing life, like a would-be prize fighter dancing in the ring with fists held tightly to my nose ready for the next one-two punch.

Just about everywhere I go, I carry writing utensils. Like when I traveled to Canon Beach, Oregon, in September. It was a busy time and we were trying to pack it all in, but I confessed I had to sit down on the beach and write this...

The Pacific Ocean, sparkling. A field of glimmering crystal rubbing shoulders with the horizon – tolerant and forgiving. Charging waves roar incessantly, spouting and folding into gurgling curls. At first, ripping rebelliously. Then, rolling compliantly onto the waiting lap of this sandy beach.

People, as seafarers, traipse about like ants in the shoreline's misty haven. While pestering ancient rock formations with cheeky chatter, their cameras capture incidental slices of magnificently luminescent views north, south and west.

Congregating gulls swoop and holler. Swirling waters cluster over history, weathered into a galvanized time capsule buried here.

The finery of blowing sand offers a persistent gritty veil in my eyes; on my pen, over my paper; between my toes; covering the backdrop of this scene – a nuptial image, joyfully frozen in time and space.

The crown jewel of Canon Beach: Haystack Rock, a majestic lava fortress, an ornamental castle not lost on the Pacific Coastline, yearns back in time through the hunting and pecking of hundreds of gulls. Whining seabirds cast enlarged shadows over the beach – a desert dotted with broken dreams.

So goes the writing life – there's always something.

Paula Bosco Damon is a national award-winning writer whose columns appear weekly in regional newspapers in the Upper Midwest. The author conducts readings of her works and writing workshops for beginning writers. For more information, email boscodamon.paula@gmail.com.



Ecocentric And Sustainable Vermillion, South Dakota

Guest Editorial

BY TEERAPHONG (NAT) KUNKLANGDONE

About two months ago, it was a surprise to learn that I would be coming to Vermillion, South Dakota as a part of the Professional Fellows Program hosted by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and Department of State.

Coming from Bangkok, Thailand's capital city and home to more than 8 million people, I am curious to learn how Vermillion takes care of the environment and protects their community.

After two weeks in the United States, I arrived here at this small and charming town, Vermillion surprised and impressed me at the same time.

Bangkok is currently facing many different environmental issues, especially air pollution, water pollution and waste management and these problems pose serious threats to health of those who live in the city. Environmental concerns are still very minimal among Thai people and business owners. We often hear about industrial discharges in industrialized zones or see garbage disposals on streets and waterways.

At my apartment, we are asked to separate recycling items such as plastic and aluminum cans from other general waste. There are good incentives selling recycle items, and from my understanding that my building or the maids would probably make money out of it selling to recycling company. Although there are new initiatives and programs to tackle waste



Teeraphong (Nat) Kunklangdone

management problems, but Bangkok still faces problems of non-waste separation and especially environmental control on landfill operations.

Wastewater is also one of the major environmental problem in Thailand. Due to rapid population growth in Bangkok and high demand of water, therefore wastewater produced a day in Bangkok has been highly increasing. And not all wastewater has been properly treated before being discharged to natural waterways.

After two weeks in Vermillion, the city is continuing to impress me. In relation to the environmental issues I mentioned, I have had a chance to visit Vermillion's Sanitary Landfill, the city's Missouri Valley Recycling Center, Vermillion Wastewater Treatment

Facility and Water Treatment Plant. I am amazed to see that a small city like Vermillion has all systems in place to take care of their environment and community. Each of the city departments are equipped with high technology and modern equipment, and most importantly, they are well planned and prepared to sustain growth and expansion of the city.

Home to the University of South Dakota, I believe that the university has a big influence on community attitude, values and beliefs. People here have progressive thinking and they care so much about their community.

The most valuable lesson I have learned so far from the City of Vermillion is how they put community and environment as their priority.

"As a small town, you cannot rely on anyone. We have to take care of each other and our own community", said Mark Koller, Light and Power Superintendent.

To the people and city of Vermillion, thank you very much. I have learned so much from you after two short weeks and I look forward to learning more.

Teeraphong (Nat) Kunklangdone is the Communications and Knowledge Management Officer for the USAID supported Mekong Partnership for the Environment project at Pact Thailand. The project is part of the US government's Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) efforts and focuses on improving decision making processes around regional infrastructure projects such as hydropower dams, mines and industrial zones.

You Only Teach By Example

BY RICHARD P. HOLM, MD

This ancient wisdom rings so true, "You only teach by example."

We all have mentors in our lives; people who serve as examples; those whose patterns of living teach us how to face challenges. Of course most of us start out with our parents as mentors, and then look to other relatives, teachers, partners, and heroes in stories worth imitating.

Even before my medical training I watched our family physician, Dr. Bob Bell, from DeSmet. I remember how his interests outside of medicine were very broad, including hunting and fishing, water skiing, sailing, playing cards, singing in the choir, enjoying art, and

the list goes on. Dr. Bell and his wife Phyllis gave me the sense of how a superb physician family can enjoy and savor every moment of life.

I watched Dr. Karl Wegner a Pathologist, lecturer, and the first dean of our South Dakota Medical School whose method of teaching was with empathy. I remember how he made every one of his students feel like he was speaking directly to him or her. Dr. Wegner gave me a sense of how a superb physician values the other guy.

I watched Dr. Joe Hardison, an Internist at the VA hospital in Decatur, Georgia, whose diagnostic acumen and skills were famous among residents. I remember how he cleverly examined and listened to

subtle clues to make the diagnosis. Dr. Hardison gave me a sense of how a superb physician uses her or his senses and brain to make a diagnosis.

I watched Dr. Keller, a cancer specialist at Emory Hospital in Atlanta whose caring way remarkably helped cancer patients deal and cope with very ominous conditions. I remember how he confidently listened and spoke with consoling words and eyes to those with widely spread cancer. Dr. Keller gave me a sense of how a superb physician with compassion for suffering patients gives relief, and exemplifies medical ethics in action.

And I am still watching Dr. Bob Talley, a Cardiologist and former Dean of USD

Sanford School of Medicine, whose concern for students and Residents elevated our Med School into the highest level of training in this country. A specific example is how he helped mold a new method of integrated training in South Dakota about which Harvard has copied, and into which the rest of the country is evolving. Dr. Talley gives me a sense of how a superb physician who concentrates with all his soul on helping young physicians learn, can result in repercussions of caring; caring provided by his students for countless numbers of people throughout the world.

We only learn from and teach by example.

FAIR EDUCATION?

The South Dakota Blue Ribbon Education Taskforce explored ideas for designing a teacher-compensation-based funding formula at its October 1st 2015 meeting.

One area of discussion was whether the funding considerations should be based on a target percentage for instructional vs non-instructional expenditures ("non-instructional services" are commonly referred to as "support services").

The "65 percent principle" was introduced - a suggestion that instructional expenses ideally would represent at least 65 percent of expenditures and non-instructional expenses 35 percent or less.

SD Budget & Policy Institute dug into the most recent US Census Bureau Annual Survey of School System Finance searching for clarifying data on support service expenditures and discovered the following South Dakota specific information.

Currently, instructional teacher salaries and benefits encompass 53 percent of school district expenditures. Another 7 percent goes for "other" instructional expenses (curriculum, supplies, etc.). Central Administration and general administration account for 8 percent of expenditures and Other Current Spending consumes 32 percent of expenditures.

Support services spending per SD pupil lags the region and the nation. See full report for details. Spending on SD k-12 support services

Current spending for other than elementary-secondary education instruction and support services activities. Included in this category are food services, enterprise operations, community services, and adult education expenditure

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