

July 2014

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Recommended Citation

Stambaugh, L. (2014). Resources for Oregon writers: Making connections. *OLA Quarterly*, 5(2), 16-19.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.7710/1093-7374.1521>

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OLA Quarterly is an official publication of the Oregon Library Association | ISSN 1093-7374

When I was first approached about writing an article on resources for Oregon writers, I wondered what I could possibly have to offer. Sure, I am a writer, and I happen to be a librarian. But I am not a published author, though that is most definitely my aspiration. On further introspection, I realized that I have been involved in the writing scene in Oregon for quite some time now—about nine years. I am currently finishing my fifth novel (a romantic comedy), with the goal of crossing over into mainstream in my next novel, which I am currently researching. It has taken me many years to absorb and fine-tune the craft of writing. It is not an automatic thing—at least, not for most of us!—and it could not have happened in isolation. So, with that thought in mind, I would like to share some of my experiences for other aspiring writers in our state, be they librarians or library users.

Resources for Oregon Writers:

Making Connections
by Laine Stambaugh
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In this article, I will discuss how I got involved in the Oregon writing scene; my experiences attending local workshops and conferences; the importance of sharing your writing with other writers; and finally, a selected bibliography of writers' resources in Oregon to help you get started.

GETTING STARTED

I have written all my life, as far back as I can remember. My mother even saved those atrocious stories from my elementary school years. You know, like the one about a girl and her horse? Consequently, by the time I was a freshman in college and enrolled in my first official creative writing class, I thought I knew what it was all about—this writer's life. After all, I had written 35 novels by that time (we are not talking quality here). Then I met Elliott, the instructor. I never knew his last name, or if I once did, I have obliterated it from my mind, due to the trauma. The one thing I do remember was that I came to class one day, excited about reading aloud my short story about a not-yet famous tennis player having his racquet stolen by a tennis groupie at Wimbledon. OK, so maybe it wasn't the most scintillating plot, but I couldn't have anticipated the malicious attacks conducted by Elliott and my classmates during the critique process. My masterpiece, my personal pride and joy, was left in shreds, and so was my trust in ever sharing my writing with anyone again. Unfortunately, this experience is not unusual for most beginning writers. We all have our "Elliott" stories.

It was not until many years later that I summoned the confidence to give it another try. Soon after moving to Oregon, I enrolled in a local community college course entitled "It Was a Dark and Stormy

Night," that focused on creating imaginative settings. One component of that course was a weekend retreat at the Oregon coast. OK, so my motives were suspect, but it got me back into the swim of things. Elizabeth Lyon of Lyon's Literary Services in Eugene taught the class. Based on the unconditional support and acceptance of that group, I was off and running, and haven't stopped since. A few more classes under my belt, a few more stories, and eventually Ms. Lyon invited me to join a select professional critique group that she leads one night a week each term. That was in 1990. It is within the confines of this group that I have experienced the sustenance to keep me going all these years—oh, and the deadlines they impose help, too.

WHY A CRITIQUE GROUP?

So, what about critique groups? What's the big deal? Do we sit around and tell each other how wonderful we are? Not entirely. Interestingly enough, Elizabeth Lyon is now writing her third non-fiction book on the craft of writing for Blue Heron Publishing which, coincidentally, focuses on critique groups and their importance to the writer. You may already be familiar with her work, *The Sell-Your-Novel Toolkit: Everything You Need to Know About Queries, Synopses, Marketing & Breaking In*, (1997), which, by the way, contains many quips and quotes from local writers in various stages of their careers. You might keep an eye out for her new book, *Writers Helping Writers: The Power of Community, Critique, and Connections*, due out in April 2000 from Blue Heron Publishing, if you want to discover the real nitty-gritty of critique groups.

It is easy enough for an aspiring author in Oregon to write in isolation, whether you live in Portland, Eugene, or La Grande. But until you share your writing with others, whether they are other writers, family, or friends, you cannot grow and learn. Within a supportive critique group, where ground rules were established at the very beginning, I have had the pleasure of seeing phenomenal growth among the members of my group. We always start out by saying something positive about the individual's reading; then we offer helpful suggestions to make it even better. Our genuine interest in each other's projects builds pride and confidence—sometimes fragile commodities for writers. Each writer's individual success story is a shared celebration for all.

Although some of the actual members have changed over the years, our group is now more or less at the same level of expertise and understanding of the craft of writing, which makes it a smoother, more enjoyable process. Not only that, we assist each other with marketing ideas and experiences. Learning to be a good critiquer facilitates the writing process as well. And did I mention the trust factor? There are no "critique piranhas" in our group, and that's what keeps us all writing.

GETTING OUT & ABOUT

So, once you are confident in your writing abilities (or on your way) and want to find out more about the business of writing, where do you go? This may surprise you, but Oregon is a writer's Mecca. At the end of this article you will find a list of writing workshops, conferences, and regional associations. Just to give you an idea of what attending a conference is like, and why you should bother, let me share some of my experiences with you.

I attended the Pacific Northwest Writers Conference in Tacoma, Washington in 1992. One of the keynote speakers was author Craig Lesley, who was beginning to market his new anthology, *Talking Leaves*. Although the workshops and panels of speakers that included agents and editors were extremely valuable, I would say that the highlight of the conference came for me at the very end, when authors sat at tables and signed autographs. I debated about whether or not to make a complete fool of myself, and decided, what the heck. When I handed my copy of *River Song* to Mr. Lesley to sign, I launched into a story about how my Uncle Larry had been one of his high school teachers, and how my uncle ended up being a pallbearer at his Uncle Oscar's funeral. As I spoke, Mr. Lesley nodded politely. At the end, his face lit up and he said, "I remember your uncle!" Of course, he could have just been saying that to be kind to a foolish fan, but I suspect my Uncle Larry and his Uncle Oscar had a lot in common. In any case, here was a wonderful, published writer who was willing to just shoot the breeze with me—something I'll never forget.

There was an informal "chat with the author" scheduled between meetings at that same conference. Writers could just stop by and hang out with the authors, asking questions or listening to what they had to say. I remember approaching romance writer Julie Garwood, who held court in the hotel lobby. Some of the other conference participants were dressed in what I considered romantic, "frou-frou" type dresses, obviously marking them as wanna-be romance writers. My immediate reaction was: "I am not like them! What am I doing here?" I recall wearing something hot pink, so that I could stand out in a crowd. Something modern and "with it." As it turned out, it didn't really matter. You don't need to dress or act a certain way to write a certain way, or be accepted by a specific genre of writers. That day, Ms. Garwood looked directly at me and smiled, and I sank to the floor beside the other writers, soaking up every word (she was talking about how she got her inspiration for the beginning of her current novel at the time, *Saving Grace*). I came away from that very informal gathering with the blessing that I must write what I felt, not what I thought people wanted me to write. I already knew that, of course, but this published author only reinforced my own fledgling instincts.

Several years ago, I attended a local Eugene meeting of the Heart of Oregon Chapter of the Romance

Writers of America (which, unfortunately, no longer exists), where I had the good fortune to meet Dean Wesley Smith and Kristine Kathryn Rusch, two local science fiction/fantasy icons. As I waited for Ms. Rusch to autograph my copy of *White Mists of Power*, I told her how fascinated I was with her complete plot twist at the end—something I had never seen happen in a book before. (I won't give away the ending here, as I tried not to in front of the other local writers, but I did want to express my appreciation of her craft). She beamed back at me in appreciation, obviously pleased that I had picked up on this. If you want to be a writer, you must be a reader. There is no way around that, and any published author will tell you so. Read whatever you can get your hands on that is similar to what you want to write.

The guest speaker at another Heart of Oregon meeting was Frank Ratti, a forensic expert with the local police department. That particular "adventure" resulted in my picture appearing on the front page of the *Eugene Register-Guard* with other writers, our rapt attention glued to the morbid slides Mr. Ratti had brought along—showing scenes such as close-up gun-shot wounds. I sat there wondering why I was there and what it had to do with romance writers. I left, however, thinking that I might indeed someday wish to write a thriller or suspense novel, and would need to do my research thoroughly to make it believable.

At regional conferences, such as the Pacific Northwest Writers Conference (usually held in the Seattle-Tacoma area) or the Willamette Writers Conference (generally held in Portland), there is also the opportunity to meet and talk to agents and editors from many major literary agencies and publishing houses. As part of the conference registration fee, or for a reasonable additional fee, you can often sign up to meet with one or two of these agents or editors. Sometimes these are group meetings, where you sit in a room with several other writers and pitch your story. Other times, you have a separate assigned time slot with an agent or editor to specifically discuss a manuscript you think might be of interest to them. But be forewarned: do your homework before you sign up for one of these! Know who represents or publishes the kind of book you are writing. Otherwise, it can be a waste of your precious time and theirs. Not that they are rude or unkind in their remarks, or that their feedback won't be valuable, but agents are definitely there for a reason: they are looking for new writers that they can sell.

On another occasion at another conference, I was standing around waiting for lunch. Right next to me stood Amy Tan's (*The Joy Luck Club*) agent, Sandra Dyckstra. Even though I didn't have an appointment with Ms. Dyckstra, a very high profile, high-power agent, I approached her and casually pitched my story. She was very polite, even seemed interested, and invited me to send her a query and sample chapters. The feedback you receive can be worth its

weight in gold, whether or not the agent or editor asks to see the whole manuscript (and they often do not). Your job is to keep on writing.

One of the greatest benefits you can receive by attending a conference is not only mingling with other writers, agents, and editors, but coming away with a solid go-ahead to submit your material in a way that guarantees it will not end up in a slush pile somewhere. The first time I was able to put "solicited material" on the outside of my envelope, I thought I had arrived. Well, I had arrived at the dock, perhaps, but not on the boat. The journey continues. And to arrive at that destination, like any other writer who succeeds, I must get out and about-right here in Oregon. Right here in my own community, every chance that I can.

CONCLUSION

So, in conclusion, look around you. Read your local newspaper for writers' groups or book-signings, workshops, conferences, or contests. Being a contest winner may gain you the attention of a publisher or agent, who might otherwise have overlooked you among the mass mailings of manuscripts they regularly receive. If you're not currently in a critique group, put an ad in the newspaper and see if you can find other writers like yourself willing to establish one. Or take a class and get a critique group started from there. Pull yourself away from that computer screen or typewriter and get involved in the local writing community. If you live in a remote location, hook up to the Internet. There is a rich, wide world out there, full of resources for you to tap into. Check out local affiliates of Romance Writers of America, Science Fiction Writers of America, Mystery Writers of America, and so forth. Writers supporting writers are your greatest resource of all. **Q**

SELECTED RESOURCES FOR OREGON WRITERS

A sampling of local workshops, conferences, and associations.

WORKSHOPS:

Fishtrap Gathering

P. O. Box 38
Enterprise, OR 97828
(541) 426-3623
www.fishtrap.org

Summer and winter gatherings at Wallowa Lake feature outstanding Western writers addressing the pressing issues of writing and living in the West.

Flight of the Mind
622 SE 29th Avenue
Portland, OR 97214

Email: soapston@teleport.com
www.teleport.com/%7Esoapston/flight
Summer writing workshops for women in a camp-like setting, held at St. Benedict's retreat center on the McKenzie River. Workshop leaders bring a feminist philosophy to their work

as writers and teachers and encourage the creation of a cohesive and supportive group.

Haystack Writing Program

Cannon Beach, OR
(503) 725-4027 or (800) 547-8887, ext. 4027

Email: summer@ses.pdx.edu

www.haystack.pdx.edu

Weeklong and weekend summer workshops in Cannon Beach, taught by distinguished Northwest writers. Organized by the Portland State University School of Extended Studies; PSU credit is available for many classes.

Mountain Writers Series

3624 SE Milwaukie Avenue
Portland, OR 97202

(503) 236-4854

Email: pdxmws@aracnet.com

www.aracnet.com/~pdxmws

A comprehensive program featuring authors of regional, national, and international reputation presenting readings, lectures, discussion sessions and workshops in a variety of locations throughout the region.

Neahkahnie Institute

P. O. Box 447
Manzanita, OR 97130
(503) 368-7878

Oregon Writers Colony

P. O. Box 15200
Portland, OR 97293-5200
(503) 827-8072

www.teleport.com/~witch/owc/owc.htm

A non-profit literary organization, dedicated to nurturing the writing skills of its membership, OWC maintains a house in Rockaway Beach as a haven for writers and sponsors workshops, conferences, contests, and a list of resources for writers.

Oregon Writing Project

(contact information varies by campus)

www.gse.berkeley.edu/research/NWP/States/Oregon.html

A collaborative effort by Oregon schools, colleges, and private foundations to improve the teaching of writing and literacy at all grade levels throughout the state. Intensive summer workshops are available at five campuses: University of Oregon, Lewis & Clark College, Willamette University, Southern Oregon University, and Eastern Oregon University.

ASSOCIATIONS:

An Association of Writers

P. O. Box 1101
Winchester, OR 97495
Email: owdykema@mcsi.net
www.oregonwriters.com

Pacific Northwest Writers Association
2608 Third Avenue, Suite B
Seattle, WA 98121
Executive Secretary: (206) 443-3807
www.pnwa.org/opening.htm

Society of Children's Book Writers &
Illustrators, Oregon Chapter
P. O. Box 336, Noti, OR 97461
(541) 935-4589
Contact: Robin Michal Koontz
Email: Robink@rio.com

Willamette Writers Association
9045 SW Barbur Blvd., Suite 5A
Portland, OR 97219-4027
(503) 452-1592
Email: wilwrite@teleport.com
www.teleport.com/~wilwrite

IN PRINT:

Writer's Northwest Handbook: the Market Guide to the Pacific Northwest (6th ed., 1995). Portland: Media Weavers.

READING OREGON

Selected Recent Books with an Oregon Setting or Theme.

LITERARY NON-FICTION:

Carey, Robin. *North Bank: Claiming a Place on the Rogue*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1998. 0-87071-448-1

Drake, Barbara. *Peace at Heart: an Oregon Country Life*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1998. 0-87071-455-4

Lopez, Barry. *About This Life: Journeys on the Threshold of Memory*. New York: Knopf, 1998. 0-679-43454-2

Nordstrom, Lars. *Making it Home*. Portland: Prescott Street Press, 1997. 0-915986-27-2

Paetzel, Mary. *Spirit of the Siskiyou: the Journals of a Mountain Naturalist*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1998. 0-87071-449-X

Ramsey, Jarold. *Reading the Fire: the Traditional Indian Literatures of America*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999. 0295977876

Wollner, Craig and Dillon, Tracy W. *A Richer Harvest: the Literature of Work in the Pacific Northwest*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1999. 0-87071-465-1

REFERENCE & BIOGRAPHY:

Battaile, Connie. *The Oregon Book: Information from A to Z*. Newport, Oregon: Saddle Mountain Press, 1998. 0-9657638-2-X

Drukman, Mason. *Wayne Morse: a Political Biography*. Portland: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1997. 0-87595-263-1

TRAVEL, WITH A DASH OF HISTORY:

Atkeson, Ray. *Oregon, my Oregon*. Portland: Graphic Arts Center in cooperation with the Oregon Historical Society, 1998. 1-55868-321-6

DesCamp, Meg. *Slug Tossing and Other Adventures of a Reluctant Gardener*. Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1998. 1-57061-044-4

Douthit, Nathan. *A Guide to Oregon South Coast history: Traveling the Jedediah Smith Trail*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1999. 0-87071-462-7

Houchen, Amy. *Green Afternoons: Oregon Gardens to Visit*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1998. 0-87071-429-5

Peterson-Nedry, Judy and Robert M. Reynolds. *Oregon Wine Country*. Portland: Graphic Arts, 1998. 1-55868-318-6

Sullivan, William L. *Hiking Oregon's History: the Stories Behind Historic Places You Can Walk & See*. Eugene: Navillus Press, 1999. 0-961815-27-2

Widerhold, Kathleen M. *Exploring Oregon's Historic Courthouses*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1998. 0-87071-436-8

YOUNG ADULT:

Holcomb, Jerry Kimble. *The Chinquapin Tree*. Marshall Cavendish, 1998. 0-7614-5028-9

Olson, Gretchen. *Joyride*. Honesdales: Boyds Mills Press, 1998. 1-56397-687-0

MYSTERIES:

Henry, April. *Circles of Confusion: a Claire Montrose Mystery*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999. 0-06-019204-6

Micheltree, Tom. *Dataman: a Mystery*. Aurora, Colorado: Write Way, 1998. 1-885173-52-0

Thrasher, L. L. *Dogsbody, Inc.* Aurora, Colorado: Write Way, 1999. 1-885173-65-2

Wilhelm, Kate. *The Good Children*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. 0-4499-22556-9

Wilhelm, Kate. *Defense for the Devil*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. 0-312-19854-X

SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT:

Maser, Chris. *Mammals of the Pacific Northwest: from the Coast to the High Cascades*. Corvallis: Oregon Historical Society Press, 1998. 0-87071-438-4

Oregon's Living Landscape: Strategies and Opportunities to Conserve Biodiversity. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1998. 0-926549-01-4