

A much-needed rainstorm threatened to intrude on this year's writing marathon at the Benedictine Retreat Center near Schuyler, Nebraska. The magic of the marathon worked its way into the day. The skies cleared to a gorgeous blue and a cool breeze urged board members to allow their pens to become their guide in this landscape.

Groups ventured out to find inspiration in places such as a welcoming monastery, the click of shoes in downtown Schuyler, a spray-painted house, and a conversation held with a monk in his newly constructed vestment workshop. Their stories translated to words into laughter and reflection filling the room as they were shared. Bringing us back to the business at hand, creating and developing an ongoing community as writers.

The next writing marathon is September 21 at Platte River State Park. For more information about the marathon see the Nebraska Writing Projects home page.

Writing from the 2013 Summer Board Retreat Writing Marathon



“May God bless this house...”
above the doorway at St. Benedictine Retreat Center

Listening to the priest's explanation of the history behind the letters stamped on the wide, wooden doors of the chapel immediately calms me. This place always has that effect on me-- instantaneous detoxification of the outside world. The to-do lists, the worries, the concerns of the impending school year and the mountains of perpetual laundry at home all seem to drift and flutter away on the cool, post-rainy breeze that we are experiencing this morning. The priest's words, slanted with a discernible German accent are punctuated with a kind smile and perpetual patience as he has probably explained this answer numerous times to visitors. It is his calming voice that puts one at ease, that invites me to retreat beyond the vocations of home--

wife, teacher, sister to a newly-married bride, daughter and, of course, the 24 hour/365 day role of mother to an active two-year-old and a constantly famished three-month old.

It is here that I feel like Paula and that by simply walking through those doors, I am blessed. I am reminded of the serene, pure joy of silence and solitude. I am blessed because I can write again, and I feel like my pen can't move quickly enough to keep up with all that has accumulated in my mind over the past several months--months that have primarily been exempt of all reading and writing.

But, I am blessed beyond measure as I cross this threshold and feel transformed---a change in me as I build camaraderie with my fellow writers and am reminded of my love of writing, it comes back...rusty, I'll grant, but, gradually the wheels start to turn, and I feel that I can honestly say again---

“I am a writer.”



Clicking Shoes

By Evi Wusk

Green and white tiles remind me of my grandmother or some old church basement. Each tile is clean, but worn-dingy from shoes squeaking today and clacking through yesterdays. I wonder at the lines for DRIVER'S LICENSE EXAMINER, written in block letters that scream authority. Maybe a woman sat there, like me, scared to enter new territory, scared to show what might set her apart in a world of same after same. We both sense a calling. She wonders, maybe it would be simpler to just stay in the passenger seat. Surely her mother had done so and been happy, but the tug between peace and a desire to do more looms, pulled taut. Could she be both today? Could she sit up straight in her chair and her own skin? Later in life, the driver's license examiner sign screaming authority in capital letters just whispers, faded and forgotten, eclipsed by roads taken. As her country daughter sits in those same seats somehow thinking of grandma, she easily slips her feet into the fear forged footprints. She sits next to girl friends, who drove to volleyball camp this morning in cheap cars fueled on giggles and dad's corn payment. They lean into the center girl, somehow the leader, all unaware of the courageous steps that marked their way, now mere echoes of shoes clicking, as sneakers squeak on green and white tiles.

The Secret Room by Jeff Grinvalds

Every Sunday my father would emerge from a narrow door next to the altar of St. John's Lutheran church in Yutan, Nebraska. The church was ancient by my childish standards, built in 1927 after the original building was ripped apart by a tornado.

Somehow, he was transformed--transfigured--between leaving the house a few blocks up the hill to that magical door, he became holy. Dressed in his shiny white surplice, the perfectly tied rope cincture, and his colorful stole, all covering his black shirt and clerical collar. Hands clasped confidently, silver cross hanging from his neck, his voice filled the cavernous space with a polite but commanding, "Good morning."

That small door was the secret to his transformation. That space that was reserved for only him and the acolytes. Someday I would explore that room to learn its secrets.



Falling By Diana Weis

Cascading down the steep cliff in a perfect second-base slide, my only thought was how fascinating it seemed that wet leaves could so easily become a skateboard. A quick and unexpected 180 degree twist and a hard slap of my hand on a rock brought me to a halt and began the swelling blackness and dull pain that has shadowed my summer.

Falling, it's this summer's theme, not always me but falling water, falling rain, and lots and lots of waterfalls. Small ones. Cascading ones and even a blow-your-hat-off make-you-gasp-for-breath one. Though they all did that in their own right as water falling always seems to stop the world for a time for some reason or another, each worth the journey, each worth remembering.

ART

By Mary Collier

The small chapel is ornate
Marble floors and stained glass
Light streaming through windows
In the empty silence.



People come to meditate
And stare at the frescos of the virgin and the baby
Confess sins under tapestries of crosses radiating
Be filled by bronze busts of saints long dead

What pulls me the most
Is the piano in the corner
Pulls me past the paintings
The fresh flower bouquet and
The flickering candle in the vase
Music from its keys is in my ears
In this silent room

Like an old friend, I'm pulled
Toward memories of our last conversation
The last time we played together
The last time its keys and notes filled my veins
This art Gift from God
Feeds and fills my soul.

Small Town

By Amy Tasich

I'm a proponent of small towns. My parent's farm. I went to a small school and I have actively worked in my marriage to convince my husband this is what we want for our kids. People know each other. Kids have the chance to be involved in school and activities. There's room to breathe.

And yet, sometimes they make me sad. Looking down this street there are a number of unopened businesses and boarded up windows. There's a house with the word HOTEL proclaimed across the top. Is it a joke? Is it functioning? The boarded up and broken windows next to it suggest it isn't "high end." As I wander, I wonder if I would feel safe here at night. Maybe you only feel safe if it's your small town, where you can explain the broken window and you know the crazy story behind the HOTEL sign from last year's family reunion.

The silence on the street beckons me. Turning, I think, "Is the small town dying?" For my children's sake, I hope not.

Connecting through Writing by Brenda Larabee

Inside the chapel, we sit as a group, but individually. In silence, we observe and write. The cross that hangs as the centerpiece is far more beautiful than the two toothpicks I joined together as a representation of the cross during my childhood days of Vacation Bible School. The crown of thorns adorned with jewels is much more elegant than those small toothpicks. Proportionately the body on this cross seems terribly undersized. It does give a sense of the enormous weight of the object as it was sacrificially carried by Jesus.

The cut flowers at the altar are wilting a bit, showing their age. I feel that too. A bit of dehydration and tiredness causing that same droop in me as I near the end of my “energizer bunny weeks.” Happy that for me there will be a short hibernation and then vibrancy again - unlike the flowers which have given their lives for the pleasure of us as humans. Paralleling the giving of life by Christ Jesus - all for us as humans.

Behind the secret walls of the church I attend are prayer warriors. I question what might be behind these concrete walls. Noticing the padded rails for kneeling, I realize I associate the thud and clamor of the wooden pieces being lowered and raised with Catholicism. And then it strikes me, that sound can only come from the world of privilege where we reside. Many kneel without a sound other than their creaking bones.

How far we have come in these two thousand years from that tiny manger and our Savior nailed upon the cross. How far we have come, and yet how far we have yet to go. As we finish the time of reflection and writing, I feel a tear fall onto my cheek. It comes as a longing for the intimacy of days gone by, and the hope that once again I can reclaim that deep spiritual connection.

We move as individuals to form a group in a nearby area, seat ourselves on the floor, and share our writing. Amazement fills my mind as I listen to others speak of the same longings, for solitude and a reconnection, for peace and happiness, for family healing. This special chapel has allowed each of us to observe, write, and speak as individuals, but at the same time solidified us as a group, a group of spiritually connected writers.

