



# The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number , Fall 2011

## Breaking in all over again!

I've been practising what I teach over the past 18 months. About three years ago I decided to write for travel markets and assumed with my portfolio of hundreds of non-travel articles it would be easy.

Within a month of first pitching, I got exactly nowhere with editors because I had no proven record in the travel writing business. I was a nobody again. In this highly competitive business, I needed to dig deeper into the field and winkle out the reasons for my inability to break in.

**The bottom line to my failure was that I had no relationships with editors.** Other mistakes adding to that included:

- Initially I was only pitching text and sometimes the wrong text.
- I had little engagement with the travel industry and its writers.
- I expected assignments to fall into my lap without any effort.
- I didn't know my potential markets well enough.

Recovery took the next year and a half as I completed my due diligence and learned patience. I joined two associations for travel writers and developed friendships with some members whom I could call on for guidance. (Huge thank you to Irene and John.) Social media helped me here too. I joined a camera club to improve my skills in photography. I inhaled travel magazines, websites and their blogs, commenting when I could contribute. Next I revised my approach to travel writing and used far more creative nonfiction techniques. Last of all, I targeted my queries with laser-like precision for the differing markets and started small. I didn't seek paying markets early on, only pitching the fee-payers after I had some articles and images published.

My willingness to go back to the beginning was rewarded as assignments began piling up in 2010 for 2011 and now I already have three for 2012. Today editors email *me* and I have made solid connections with a few of the top travel markets in the world by attending two international conferences. I've learned much since 2009 and found this humbling experience a lesson from which all writers can gain. I had forgotten that getting established as a freelancer takes work and persistence, not to mention patience and expertise.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Breaking in all over again! .....	1
From the editor's desk .....	1
Begging the question (Joyce Gram).....	2
Forthcoming events/courses .....	2



Follow me at  
[www.twitter.com/  
BLSJHFerguson](http://www.twitter.com/BLSJHFerguson)



### From the editor's desk

The lousy summer weather on the west coast has some advantages—I learned that many of my writer colleagues have been working hard on their WIPs. Me too, but I'm longing for sunlight to give me that extra boost of energy. The rain makes me want to read a book, not write one.

“Breaking in all over again!” is a reflection on getting started as a freelance writer. I relearned how to do it after a slow start in the travel writing business in 2009-10. My experience will assist emerging freelancers whatever their target markets may be.

*Write on Bowen!* the boutique conference that runs every July was the best yet. Intimate and friendly, there were 16 workshop offerings over the weekend, each of which are kept to 15 participants. Opening night had Annabel Lyon and Tim Taylor reading, which was a great success, and there were panels after lunch each day. The conference venue is excellent and the rest of the island tempts participants to stay longer. My thanks to organizer, Carol Cram, and my friend, Alison Bate, who provides hospitality, her company, and a bed for me every year.

**Julie H. Ferguson**

## Begging the Question of the English Language

By Joyce Gram, writer and editor

Is it my imagination, or are there more people grumbling these days about how English grammar and usage are going to the dogs? CBC Radio recently asked, does grammar matter? and invited listeners to tweet and email the Grammar Police with their pet peeves. They did so, “in droves.” Listening to the [podcast](#) of the Grammar Police Finale, you could be forgiven for thinking the situation is dire.

*Beacon* readers might suppose that because I’m an editor, I’m also a grammar crank, like those school teachers of yore who drummed silly rules into innocent heads, rules that were never rules but became cemented in the brains of otherwise intelligent people. I’ll admit that I used to be a crank—when I was green and editorially uneducated. But I have learned so much about the origins and evolution and elasticity of the English language that I now actually become excited by the changes I see, especially when they are used creatively by writers, and I smile to myself over the sweat people generate at the use of *gonna* and *anyways* and *friending*. Get over it, I think; the language she is ever a-changin’.

But—and isn’t there always a but?—I am saddened when I see a good expression lost through change of usage. Such is the expression *beg the question*. The last time I heard *beg the question* used in its original sense was ... well, I really can’t remember. The expression meant “to assume the truth of the thing that is to be proved”<sup>1</sup> or to argue in a circle. A classic example is, “Reasonable people are those who think and reason intelligently,” which begs the question, what does it mean to think and reason intelligently?<sup>2</sup> Today, almost universally, the expression means “to raise the question” or “to invite an obvious question,” and the original meaning is all but extinct. Which is too bad, because it’s a succinct way to express a difficult concept and there are other, simple ways to express what it has come to mean. I always point this out to my clients who use the expression in their writing. Their speaking I can do nothing about, but to preserve the original in writing is at least something.

(footnotes – see top of right column)

© 2011 Joyce Gram, Gram Editing Services, [www.gramediting.com](http://www.gramediting.com),  
[email@joycegram.com](mailto:email@joycegram.com)

## Events/Courses for Writers

**Sep 19:** The evening **Port Moody Writers' Group** meets on Mondays at 7-9:30pm at Kyle Centre in Port Moody for critique and support. Emerging and experienced writers of all genres are welcome. Register at 604.469.4561 and ask for the Monday "Creative Writing" course. Runs Sep 19 to Dec 5. Investment: approx. \$80 per term. Facilitator: Julie H. Ferguson and occasionally Debra Purdy Kong.

**Oct 21-23:** **Surrey International Writers' Conference** at Guildford Sheraton. One of the best in N. America and in our back yard. Details and reg at [www.siwca.ca](http://www.siwca.ca). Master classes run on Oct 20.

2012

**February 4:** A how-to session on **e-publishing** at Shadbolt Centre for the Arts (Studio 103), 6450 Deer Lake Ave., Burnaby. 1-4pm. Debra Purdy Kong and Julie H. Ferguson. More details later in the Winter *Beacon* and at [www.beaconlit.com/Schedule2011.htm](http://www.beaconlit.com/Schedule2011.htm).

(Cont'd from left column)

<sup>1</sup>*Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>2</sup>Bryan A. Garner, *Garner's Modern American Usage*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

On the evolution of the English language, Joyce recommends Bill Bryson, *Mother Tongue: The English Language*, Harper-Collins, 2001, and [An Appreciation of English: A language in motion](#), by James Harbeck.

\*\*\*\*



Backstage at Cavalia, 2011

Please “like” *The Beacon* Facebook Page for daily round-ups of news and tips:  
[www.facebook.com/beaconliteraryservices](http://www.facebook.com/beaconliteraryservices)

*The Beacon* is published quarterly by Beacon Literary Services and is distributed electronically free of charge to those who are interested. If you do not wish to continue to receive the newsletter, please notify the editor:

Julie H. Ferguson  
#5-300 Maude Road,  
Port Moody, BC  
Canada, V3H 2X6  
P: (604)469-1319  
F: (604)469-1316



[info@beaconlit.com](mailto:info@beaconlit.com)  
[www.beaconlit.com](http://www.beaconlit.com)

© Beacon Literary Services 2011  
All rights reserved