



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

Number 32, Summer 2009

Should writers tweet, FB, etc?

My writers' group had a discussion about [Twitter](#) just over a month ago. We also talked about the value of social networking sites like [Facebook](#) (FB) to writers. Those of us who use these sites were unanimous in the time they require of us. The debate swirled around. Are they really worth the effort?

I believe they can be, as long as you are strong-willed enough to control your time. Since I joined Twitter, the traffic to my website and blog has more than tripled, which has translated into more book sales. Not a huge amount, but enough to notice. Another author colleague reports the same outcome.

Although my writers' [blog](#) posts are automatically uploaded and displayed on my FB page, I really only use FB to keep in touch with my family and friends. This site has never increased my sales, but has brought my local writing community closer to me.

There are other sites that might work better for writers: [www.kindleboards.com](#) and [www.ebookgab.com](#). (Thanks [Debra Purdy Kong](#), for these suggestions.) However the jury is still out regarding their efficacy.

As these social sites are seriously addictive, how do you prevent them from eating into your writing? I restrict my time. When I am writing, I allow myself about 20 minutes a day and that is after dinner when I'm too tired to do much else. Others do the same.

I vote Twitter as the best return on my involvement and investment. How about you? Tips: use your own name, not an alias. A couple of short posts per day, one with a link to a blog post or your website, and you're done. Remember to post your colleague's websites too. But how much time you devote to reading Tweets and FB is up to you—it's easy to spend all day!

Join me at [www.twitter.com/JulieHFerguson](#)

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From the editor's desk

Two books for your summer reading list:

- *The Reader* by Bernhard Schlink. Also a movie, but read the book first. It is a well-crafted novel in the first person with a moral dilemma as a character. A wonderful read that will haunt you for a long time. The author makes every word count.
- *Manuscript Makeover* by Elizabeth Lyon. This is a book for writers to buy and keep alongside their keyboards. Essential for novelists, I believe every nonfiction writer should follow the revision techniques too. Really excellent!

Another book (CNF) is listed after Joyce Gram's article on p.2.

The older I get the more convinced I am that writers must read more. Read for utter enjoyment, read outside your comfort zone, and read to study the craft.

Give up TV if you have to—there's little worth watching especially in the summer months.

I hope the sun shines on you as you read and write!

Julie H. Ferguson

Creative nonfiction? Isn't that an oxymoron?

By Joyce Gram

In *Tell It Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction*, co-author Brenda Miller imagines being cornered at a party and asked the deceptively simple question, "So, you're a writer. What do you write?" All the possible replies flash through her head: *Essays*—but that sounds too much like academic papers and articles. *Nonfiction*—but her inquirer might think celebrity biographies, cookbooks or historical treatises on World War II. *Autobiography, memoir*—but isn't she too young to write her memoirs? She knows that if she answers with the correct phrase, *creative nonfiction*, she will be in for a long night. She longs to tell her confused companion that she loves writing creative nonfiction precisely because of the ambiguity of this apparent oxymoron, ambiguity that allows her "to straddle a kind of 'borderland' where I can discover new aspects of myself and the world, forge surprising metaphors, and create artistic order out of life's chaos." Instead, she directs her friend's attention to the punch bowl and thereby to the myriad things of this world and thinks "maybe that is the correct answer after all."

The book's title is from a line of poetry by Emily Dickinson, which Miller and co-author Suzanne Paola interpret to mean that truth takes on many guises. The authors felt that the poem aptly described the task of the creative nonfiction writer: "to tell the truth, yes, but to become more than a mere transcriber of life's factual experiences." Every chapter opens with an artful example—just a few paragraphs—of the subject of the chapter: early memory, family, the physical world, spiritual autobiography, gathering history, writing the arts; and even the particular challenges of creative nonfiction and the basics of good writing. Just reading these examples is a revelation in itself: *everything is interesting*—or can be—even the exercise assigned to a group of novice nonfiction writers, to pull out a piece of their own prose and count the number of words in each sentence. "Ohmigod!" said one woman. "All of my sentences are eleven words long!"

Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola, *Tell It Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005.

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Editor: For those who want to read a good example of CNF, literary agent, Cricket Freeman, recommends this book: *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by John Berendt (Vintage 1999). "A true crime murder story and ... a deliciously perverse travelogue" set in Savannah, Georgia.

Adding value for magazine editors

Michael [DeFreitas](#), a professional travel photographer/writer, spoke to the BC Association of Travel Writers' last month and reminded us that **images pay more than words**.

Here's some of what he told us:

- Every writer with a digital camera can take pix that are good enough for print
- Editors prefer not to use stock photos to illustrate your article—they want your pix
- Shoot mostly verticals
- Find "nuggets"—unusual facts or people—that can focus or ground your story
- Know the story before you start shooting and shoot that story
- Shoot with a specific magazine in mind. If it is for seniors, be sure you have older people in your pix
- Shoot outside in the best light, which is before 10am and after 4pm. If you have to shoot at a sunny midday, set your white balance to "cloudy"
- Always set your camera to its highest output. E.g. 10 megapixels.
- Send the editor a selection of images (up to 40!) to choose from, numbered in the sequence that they appear in your story
- Pitch your articles and images all over the world.
Worth a shot!

Winter/spring events for Writers

(for additions, visit www.beaconlit.com/schedule2009.htm regularly)

Sep 12: [Pitching in a Cold Climate](#) for the Whistler Writers' Festival, 8:30-11am, Legends Hotel, Whistler Creekside. Details TBA at www.theviciouscircle.ca

Sep 27: **Word on the Street (Vancouver)** for writers and readers, Vancouver Public Library, 11am-5pm. Click [here](#) for details

Oct 3: [Book Magic: Turning Writers into Published Authors](#) (9am to noon) and [Crafting Irresistible Query Letters](#) (1-4pm) for all fiction and non-fiction writers who want to learn more about getting their books published (unsuitable for poets and screenwriters). VCC downtown campus. Register early [here](#).

Oct 23-26: **The Surrey International Writers' Conference**. Details at www.siwc.ca

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