

## **“Yes! And...?”**

By Tricia Wagner

The writing retreat hosted by the Writing Gals of Lake Summerset on September 12 offered In Print writers a chance to get alone with their creativity. The event was well-attended, luring writers with the promise of a morning of conversation with Laurie Scheer, writing coach and UW-Madison Writers' Institute Director, followed by a chance to enjoy a warm, late-summer afternoon seated on grassy slopes or floating docks overlooking a shining lake, pen in hand.

Scheer started the day by leading participants in an inspirational dialogue about overcoming the fear of success. Writers sometimes struggle with knowing when a piece is finished, and they may find themselves unsatisfied with what they believe is their best work. Internal negative chatter can be difficult to silence, and authors who don't know how to check the inner critic may find themselves giving up, succumbing to the fear that no one will want to read their creations.

Scheer pointed out that groundless negativity is something that people tolerate without realizing it. She encouraged participants to notice when negativity surfaces in everyday conversations, to pause, and to consider whether the pessimism is warranted. Writers who function in a generally negative environment may drag the habit of jumping to negative conclusions into their writing practice. The fear that a piece will fail can be paralyzing, causing ideas to shrivel and the muse to vanish, and self-doubt can compel a gifted writer to abandon a promising creative endeavor.

To interrupt destructive thought processes, Scheer taught the group a technique that improvisation performers use to keep their creative juices flowing: when ideas emerge and words start dropping onto the page, replace negative thoughts with the response: *Yes! and...?* Doing so suspends the anxiety of not knowing what will come next and allows the writer to keep the pen moving and just have fun.

Scheer salted her presentation with positive perspectives that every writer needs to hear once in a while. She reminded the group that each person's writing is unique, and for that reason alone, a writer should stand by his or her work and send it into the world boldly. "It is essential that you write through your voice," said Scheer, "because there are people who want to hear from you to reason, to relate, to be part of a community."

When ego and the fear of failure are out of the picture, creativity knows no bounds. Scheer used examples from artists in the music industry who enjoyed long and prolific careers and didn't fixate on success as an end. Rush, a Toronto-based band that began making music in the 1970's, has sold over 40 million albums despite the fact that they've never entered the mainstream. "They couldn't not do it," explained Scheer. "It didn't matter to them if they got recognized. They devoted themselves to their art and made the music they loved."

Scheer closed her presentation by encouraging participants to avoid letting the fear of missing the mainstream stifle inspiration. Quoting Rush lead singer and bassist Geddy Lee, Scheer admonished writers, "Create your own stream."

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