



Carindale Writers Group newsletter

10 March 2011

Present: Beverley, Rolando, Gary, Jeff, Debby, Maria S, Sandy S, Dawn, Hazel, Marjory, Chip, Brian, Nick, Judith.

Our opening discussion was to select where we would like our writers group to call home for the immediate future. The pros and cons of Capalaba library versus Holland Park library were discussed. They each had good points going for them. On a show of hands of those present, **Holland Park Library** was chosen, primarily as being the closest venue for the greater number of members.

We will have one last meeting in our current accommodation at the Carindale library. That meeting will take place on 24 March. From 7th April 2011 onwards our meetings will be held at Holland Park Library. PLEASE NOTE: Holland Park library does not open till 10am so that is the earliest our meetings can start. The earlier you can arrive, the sooner we can begin. We still hope to conclude our meetings at 1pm, which has long been our established end time even if we've often finished up before then.

We have introduced a slight change to the order of how readers present their work. It was felt that priority on the day should be given to the writer who is featured to read their work aloud. Therefore that person will be the first to take the floor or the lectern, as they wish, after we have dealt with the usual opening business of the day such as broadcasting details of upcoming writing competitions and commending those of our writers who have news of their publications, etc, etc.

Secondly, we are asking members who have written on the suggested exercise to write their name on a list as they arrive for the meeting, along with the title of their article and its word count. That way we will know from the outset how many additional readers we need to accommodate in the limited time available to us.

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Sandy Smareglia was our featured reader for today. She read from her novel called *Eva And The Magic Clasp*. Sandy gave us the opening four thousand words from this work on which she has currently written about 23,000 words. The novel is aimed at young teenagers and realistically proposes a story not so much about time travel as about a parallel world.

One of the queries that came up frequently from the writers around the table was the age of the main character, Eva. At the outset Eva is described as being 'nearly eleven' but some of her thoughts and some of the language used in the writing suggest an older character, perhaps a girl of thirteen. The clincher for Sandy to increase Eva's age may have been when she learnt that children more often read about the adventures of characters older than themselves but they rarely 'read down' to characters younger.

Several suggestions arose about the work. That's what critiques are for, aren't they?!

The protagonist is called Evangeline by her mother but Eva by other people. Perhaps a minor transition could be arranged to explain this. The name of Eva's father, Oscar, needs repetition to enforce it in the reader's mind. A number of us discussed the clasp, central to the story, and what it might be made of. We didn't feel it could be metal but perhaps hard plastic or better yet, ceramic. Even a change from 'clasp' to 'hasp' was suggested.

Just the occasional word was picked upon as requiring alteration for the sensitivity of the story. On page 8 of the draft presented to us, the word 'battered' was felt to be somewhat harsh and could perhaps be replaced by 'worn'? Ultimately, it's Sandy's story and hers to decide exactly which words to use to convey it.

Several of our members complimented Sandy on the good flow of her story. She is conscious to keep view points of different characters quite distinct, to prevent 'head-hopping' for the reader who might get confused with too sudden a change of narrative. Different view points are recommended to maintain the interest of the reader in the various characters.

One member recommended pruning of the work, saying there was too much description. This observation sparked a debate and was disagreed with by other Carindale Writers Group members. The amount of description lent itself, said some, to being the basis for a good script for a movie.

One or two members felt that some of the incidents in the story didn't quite ring true for it to work realistically. Sandy explained something that will become clearer the more we read through *Eva And The Magic Clasp*; that Eva's body is in one world but her mind and spirit are in another, displaying different realities.

Sandy's use of alliteration in her chapter headings was praised, as was her ability to set the era of the part of the story when Eva finds herself in the forest with the knight who rescues her. 'Likeness from portraits' and 'travelling to the edge of the world' evoked a medieval time.

Sandy's use of metaphor also, was admired throughout but the best compliment came when our members said we wanted to read more of the story to find out what happens next.

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Marjory then read aloud a short travelogue called Four Days In Germany which piece had to be carried over from our last meeting when we ran out of time to take in anything that was not on the suggested topic for the day. In brief, she read about travelling in Germany and alluded to some classical history and traditions.

Maria S. had a carry-over article as well, called Creaky, The Door That Couldn't Shut in which she attributed human characteristics and feelings to normally inanimate household objects, causing everyone to have a quiet chuckle.

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Our given topic for the day was FEAR. There were nine participants who wrote about 250 words on the subject.

1. Gary's story was called Peddlers of Fear and was centred on a young lad's experience of the preachers at his Sunday School.
2. I read aloud Fear, about a secret agent anticipating death at every moment. The character lived such a high-risk life because at heart she knew that death by boredom was the thing she feared most.
3. Hazel read about refugees, wounded and fleeing from the effects of fire, as they managed to escape in overloaded small boats. The fear of capsizing and drowning was almost as great as fear of the war itself.
4. Maria S. told of the fear she experienced on the occasion of finding a burglar in her room when she was a child.
5. Brian wrote an acrostic (F = , E = , A = , R =) about how humanity is killing planet earth.
6. Chip's short story was on the adrenalin of the burglar as he went about his nefarious business.

7. Nick gave us an excerpt from his book, describing a time when he was mugged at gunpoint in America.
8. Rolando wrote his exercise at the meeting. How much fun is fishing for the fish? Is he frightened of death as he's hooked on the line?
9. Dawn gave us an extract from her book. In it, a young teacher has to confront the parents of a truanting pupil. The child's father is known to be an abusive, threatening man, causing those around him to cower. Dawn wanted ideas from us to properly convey this man's frightening character.

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Suggested topic for the next meeting is *An Unforgettable Character*. If you can limit your word count to about 250, that gives everyone a chance to read their work aloud.

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Our featured writer/reader for our next meeting on 24 March is Hazel Barker. For the following meeting on 7 April, our first in the Holland Park Library, it will be Jeff Matheson.

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Jane suggests the following link for us which offers some great advice on writing from some of the world's most renowned writers. And they should know what they're talking about... visit <http://www.advicetowriters.com/>

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Finally, I would like to wish you all a very Happy St. Patrick's Day. May the luck of the Irish always be with you!

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Chip's Computer Tips

Bring Your Middle Mouse Button to Life

That middle button is often ignored, but you can tap its potential for browsing more efficiently, scrolling quickly, and more...

Take a close look at your mouse. Chances are good it has at least three buttons: left, right, and middle. (Note: Your middle button might be your scroll wheel, which on most mice is clickable.)

Why would I want to do that? Well, I just took an informal poll of about ten people, and guess how many of them actually use that middle button? A grand total of one. One! People, people, people...

Close Browser Tabs Quickly

First up: browser tabs. I routinely have 10-15 tabs open in my browser at any given time. If I want to close a tab, I have to click it, then click the little X that appears on the tab. That's one more click than I prefer, and it brings into focus a tab I'm planning to close. Crazy, right?

If you middle-click any tab in Mozilla Firefox or Microsoft Internet Explorer, boom, it's gone. No need to make it visible first; no need to reach for the X. Just middle-click, boom.

Open Links in New Tabs

When you middle-click a link in Google Chrome, Firefox, or Internet Explorer (not sure about Opera, but I'm guessing so), that link opens immediately in a new tab.

Incidentally, you can accomplish the same thing by holding down the Ctrl key and left-clicking a link. But why bother with that when you can just as easily click the middle mouse button?

Open All Your Oft-Used Sites

Let's say that you use Firefox or Internet Explorer and you've organized a handful of favorite sites--you know, the ones you visit daily--into a folder. Smart move.

Here's an even smarter one: You can instantly open every link in a folder, each in its own tab, by middle-clicking that folder.

This works regardless of where the folder is located: your bookmarks toolbar, your navigation toolbar, even a pull-down menu. One middle-click of a folder and presto: every link therein opens in a new tab.

Scroll In Your Docs

Have you ever wondered what happens when you click and hold the middle mouse button? Glad you asked. This action activates a handy page-scrolling option in applications like Microsoft Word and Excel, Adobe Reader, Firefox, and Internet Explorer.

In other words, when you click and hold the middle mouse button, you can then drag your mouse forward or back to scroll up or down the page, respectively. This feature is intended for folks who don't have a scroll wheel, but it works just as well with scroll wheels--and I know many people who prefer the speed of middle-click scrolling to the slow, steady pace of wheel scrolling.

Customize Your Scroll Speed

After the mouse itself, the mouse wheel is the single greatest navigation tool ever invented. Mine is spinning constantly, especially in Firefox, where I use it to zip up and down Web pages.

By default, however, one "turn" of the mouse wheel scrolls only a few lines at a time--and I want to move faster. Fortunately, there's a fairly easy way to adjust Firefox's scroll speed. Even better, there's a keyboard shortcut that can slow it down again for "precision" scrolling.

Here's how to change the default scroll speed:

1. Open Firefox, then type `about:config` in the address bar and hit Enter.
2. In the Filter box, type `mousewheel.withnokey`.
3. Right-click `mousewheel.withnokey.sysnumlines` and then click Toggle. This should set the value to False.
4. Right-click `mousewheel.withnokey.numlines` and then click Modify. Bump the value to 6 or so, click OK, and then switch to another tab to see if you like the scroll speed. (Thankfully, you don't have to restart Firefox every time you make a change.) If not, experiment a bit until you find a number you like.

FN Karmatz