

meeting a client's needs, and it shows a prospective client that you have done work for others.

• **Business Cards.** It is also a good idea to have some business cards printed with your name and the title "Freelance Copywriter" or "Freelance Commercial Writer." You can obtain business cards reasonably online. Most online sites have templates that enable you to design your own card quickly and easily.

Don't fall into the trap of putting too much information on your card. Some people get double-sided cards that include their name and contact details on one side and all the services they offer on the other. This can make you appear to be a jack-of-all-trades (and master of none). I prefer single-sided cards that refer companies to my website for further information.

• **Useful Books.** At the very least, you'll need a good thesaurus and dictionary to help you find powerful selling words. If you're serious about becoming a copywriter, you should also check out *The Well-Fed Writer* by Peter Bowerman. This is the industry standard on how to become a successful commercial freelancer.

Dawn Copeman is a UK-based freelance writer / educator who has published over 300 articles on travel, cookery, history, health, and writing. An experienced commercial freelancer, Dawn contributed several

chapters on commercial writing to Moira Allen's Starting Your Career as a Freelance Writer (2nd Edition).

FEEDBACK

[RE: WW May/June 24] "All that 'Write Right Now' content in your latest issue worked! I grabbed a pen and a pad, wrote some character reactions to an 'Object' in my latest attempt, then corrected a scene. Then I wrote a parody song in-character for my protagonist's friend. Lit my fire, to say the least. Thanks to one and all for doing so."

—Kiel Stuart, *Stony Creek, NY*

[You are welcome! -- Ed.]

[RE: My article "Isaac Asimov & Me," May/June 24] You mentioned that the word *bofwhig* isn't on Google anywhere. That's probably because I made it up and actually use it on my blog. In short: *bofwhig* is an acronym I made up for "Big Old Fat White Guy." I ONLY apply it to myself, and usually for comic effect (both white people and people of color have found it amusing). So it is 'a self-deprecating acronym.' Just thought I'd let you know!"

-- Guy Stewart, *online*

[Thanks for clearing that up. I thought Google was starting to slip! -- Ed.]

*"It is in the hard rockpile
labour of seeking to win, hold,
or deserve a reader's interest
that the pleasant agony of
writing comes in."*

~~John Mason Brown~~

Getting Away from It All

Let's Go on a Writing Retreat by Barry Lee Thompson

In late 2016 I spent a week in residence at Varuna, the National Writers' House, nestled in the magnificent Blue Mountains of New South Wales in Australia. There were four other writers in residence that week, and we've all kept in touch ever since.

In the last couple of years it's become our custom to rent a house in those same mountains for one week, and to undertake our own retreat. No family or friends are permitted, just us five, so the focus can be solely on writing. The routine during these retreats varies little. Each day after breakfast we work together at the long dining-room table, breaking for morning coffee, then lunch. The setup has the feel of a civilized writers room, and is relaxed and easy.

Occasionally, one or two people might eschew this communal industry, and disappear to their rooms, or take off for a trip into town, go shopping for groceries,

or set off for a ramble through the mountains. These pauses are as important as actually putting words on a page, for it's often in the gaps that solutions to the most pressing literary problems can be found.

Evenings are spent slowly preparing dinner. We take it in turns to cook. After the meal we retire to the living room, where we read our work aloud over coffee and tea and dessert. All in front of a roaring log fire, a focal point of the stays.

My main household responsibility is the building, lighting, and maintenance of the fire. I light up as soon as a chill descends, often in the mornings if it's already cold enough. One morning last year was mild but so wet and dismal that I lit the fire as soon as I woke, to cheer the place. There's something about a crackling fireside that inspires intimate storytelling and confession.

The conversations are a highlight: so many group discussions and one-on-one chats. The breakfast nook is always a good place to shoot the breeze. It must be something about the first cup of coffee, the early energy. You can easily pick up where you left off the night before—a chance to probe, or clarify.

Such continuity is also a feature of the writing groups I'm in, but the duration of a group meeting is limited to a couple of hours. By the time the next meeting rolls around

a fortnight later, or whatever the frequency, the momentum of a topic might have been lost, or it might feel inappropriate to return to it. A dedicated retreat allows you to strike repeatedly while the iron glows red-hot. The focus can be rapier-like and delightfully unwavering.

In the mountains last year my mind was set on forging ahead with my main work-in-progress, a novel which started out as a collection of four longer short-stories—novellas, perhaps—that have slowly merged.

On day one of the retreat I dove right into a section of the narrative whose beginning I'd been struggling with. I chose a particularly dramatic episode, and then began to write forwards and backwards from that starting point. Though I'm used to workshopping my writing on a regular basis, this plunge into the deep, and subsequent sharing of the work that night, was briefly discomfiting, though the response showed that I was on the right track.

A retreat can be a solo affair. For a month in 2016, using some of the money I won in a short-story competition, I went to live in a homestay in Ubud on the Indonesian island of Bali. I wanted to use my prize in a distinctive and productive way, rather than for just paying the rent and bills at home. While away, I'd work on my short-fiction collection.

I'd visited Ubud several times

already for its literary festival, and was keen to experience it in a different season. My room overlooked the rice fields of Jalan Bisma. The main streets were a short walk away. Breakfast and unlimited coffee was included, and there was a swimming pool in the grounds. I spent the first few days shaping a daily routine, and shaking off a faint anxiety around doing the usual visitor activities. My main requirement was that my keyboard clacked and my pencil scratched and my mind whirled for just a few hours each day.

A common feature of all these retreats is the extraordinary quiet and the slow pace—not in terms of actual noise or activities, but a lack of pressure to do anything or be anywhere. It represents the simplicity of a blank diary page, one of my favorite things. My mind and body shift to a lower gear, and my heartbeat slows and steadies. The dictionary defines "retreat" as a withdrawal, a pulling away, a seclusion. It's a verb and a noun. And this is what it feels like, and is why it feels so regenerative.

I'm by nature a bit of a retreator anyway, more than happy to spend days and weeks on end in my own company. But going away is valuable because it offers opportunities to gain fresh perspectives on your work. It might even present an epiphany or revelation, literary or otherwise. At the very least, it's a working holiday for the mind, and offers a chance to contemplate quietly, whether alone or in the company of other writers.

I never fail to feel enlightened and broadened by the experience. It's always good to arrive home, though. There's no place quite like it.

Barry Lee Thompson is the author of *Broken Rules and Other Stories* (Transit Lounge, 2020), a finalist in the Queensland Literary Awards. He holds a fellowship from Varuna, the National Writers' House in Australia. His award-winning fiction appears in literary journals and anthologies in Australia, the UK, and the US. Visit Barry at barryleethompson.com.

[I'm still thinking about the rice fields of Bali . . . -- Ed.]

Words That Need to Be Retired Permanently

"-OTUS"

We are drowning in a sea of tiresome acronyms. A couple issues ago, we banished GOAT ("Greatest of All Time"), which has become ubiquitous but annoying. Now it's time to retire all those snarky -OTUS words ("Of The U. S."), including POTUS, FLOTUS, and SCOTUS. Isn't it easier to just say President, First Lady, and Supreme Court?

--Abecedarian Corner--

*Inspiration and advice
for aspiring scribes*

Maybe You SHOULD Give Up

by Patricia Fry

I meet and hear from many authors who are on the verge of quitting—giving up on their book.

"It's too hard."

"I've done everything I possibly can and my book's still not selling."

"I don't want to go out and talk about my book, commit to a blog, and all that."

Generally, I try to help these authors by teaching basic book marketing concepts—helping them adopt a more realistic perspective about book promotion, identifying their audience, and finding ways to approach them. I encourage authors to keep on keeping on. But I wonder if this is always wise.

I've spent decades trying to reach authors before they make the huge publishing commitment. I've spoken to them at numerous writers conferences and I've produced several books and written hundreds and hundreds of articles for the magazines and newsletters they should be reading prior to entering into the highly competitive business of publishing. Some hopeful authors refuse to believe what I and others tell them and they forge ahead anyway, thinking their

experience will be different.

Most authors today fail. They come out of the starting gate gung-ho, focused on winning the race, but soon learn that they haven't brought their best game. They may know the rules, but choose not to follow them. They are focused on one thing—the prize—the end result of their dreams. But they neglect to do the work and gain the knowledge they need in order to make it happen. They end up with a contender that isn't up to the competition and unrealistic expectations. Of course, their plan fizzles.

This doesn't have to be the end of the story for these authors. They can definitely redeem themselves. If they have the courage and the stamina, they can stop their forward motion, put the book on the shelf for a while, and go back to square one. Study the publishing industry. Learn the important first steps to a successful product:

- Write the right book for the right audience—a book that is wanted or needed by a segment of people. This means identify your audience.
- Think about your readers while writing the book. Write promotion into it.
- Early on, study the concept of book promotion and start making a plan—the best methods of reaching and engaging your particular audience.
- Hire a qualified editor before turning loose of your book.