



Creative Wordshops

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Writing Letter

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re-story, re-create, re-
imagine you

for this letter, a weekly story
and ongoing opportunities -
dorianhaarhoffblog.co.za

Dear writer, storyteller, reader, lover of words, images, silences

Story stones along the path

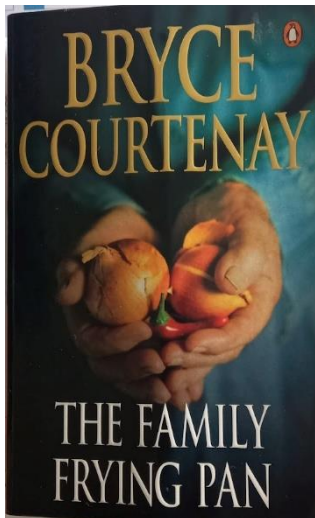
*Still 'round the corner there may wait
A new road or secret gate...
A day will come at last when I
Shall take the hidden paths that run
West of the Moon, East of the Sun. (Tolkien)*

I love the sub-genre within travel writing where characters en route to a shrine, hiking remote nature trails or escaping terror, strew the path with Babushka dolls - stories within stories. Within the slow timeless time of traveling, life stories insert themselves as fellow pilgrims engage with their pasts and step into their future.

In Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1387 -1400) pilgrims ride to Canterbury Cathedral to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket. They gather at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, nine and twenty travelers. As the Host observes, riding 'dumb as a stone' is no fun, so the travelers amuse themselves through stories. The host promising the winner a free supper. Here's the Wife of Bath:

*Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse...
Allas! Allas! Tat evere love was synne!
I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
By vertu of my constellacioun.*

In Bryce Courtenay's novel, *The Family Frying Pan* set in Tsarist Russia, 'Mrs Moses', a sixteen-year-old servant, sole survivor of a pogrom in her shtetl, leads a group of refugees. She escapes carrying on her back a



cast iron frying pan 'blessed with a Russian soul' found in the ruins of a Rabbi's house.

Each night the sizzling pan with its meager fare is present in the story telling, often of exotic foods, for as Barry Lopez in *Crow and Weasel* reminds us, 'sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.' In a raid as she runs away, the striking sword snaps against the frying pan and the Cossack rider falls and breaks his neck.

The interwoven stories bear exotic titles such as *The Blacksmith, with a Beluga Tongue, Miss Showbuzz and the Death of Count Tolstoy and Cleopatra's Cat*, and the *Letters from Egypt* where Mrs Shibaldin tells this story of her husband sent to Siberia. They tell their daughters that he has gone on a special mission to Cleopatra in Egypt with a ginger cat who writes letters to the children. The fabrication sustains them:

Siberia, if you say it slowly, is a malicious word, like a blunt knife put slowly into the stomach....the landscape filled with dread, a howling gale in the Russian imagination. It is the foul breath of the universe, an endless stretch of dark landscape and permafrost where there is no joy, no warm blood. No kind of earth nor sun for the spawning of happiness. Siberia is where the air itself is the prison guard. It has long been the place the size of scent Russia's so-called enemies, the land where the secret police bury their victims alive in the remorseless tundra and so turn good strong men into the Walking Dead.



Youngest and old oldest pilgrim with the troll. Dovre is a 160 km mountain range

In July 2014 I walked St Olaff's Way pilgrim path on the cusp of turning 70. My role was to tell a story every morning and for us to walk with that story, unpacking it as we as we edged up the Norwegian spine. One of our number, a young opera singer, entertained us with *Nella Fantasia* (Ennio Morricone's *The Mission* score). One mid-afternoon, we arrived to over-night near a railway station. A handsome

athletic Canadian was there, waiting for the midnight train. Like a clap of thunder the two of them met for some seven hours - instant connection.

Some ten of us sit in the tent that evening. I tell Oom Schalk Louwrens' *Ox Wagons on Trek*, about a love encounter that cannot last. The knowledge of the story shines in the eyes of the two before the train chugs him away.

On another night at an inn, we gather in an ancient room with a mighty fireplace in one corner and a grandfather's chair opposite it. Storytime. Suddenly the story asking to be told arrives. A woman on her violin accompanies the story, *House of the Fathers* There is something in the eyes of my fellow pilgrims and the locals as they listen- recognition. "That is one of our Norwegian stories." I did not know that. Synchronicity grins again.

The story road is ever within us, as in this poem written roads ago:

The Road to Enlightenment

the story might be that we won't
arrive at Nirvana City ever
unlike Christian in Pilgrim's Progress.
for it's always the road
through valley across mountains
the city lights dazzling
their mirage far in the distance.
the shadow falls ahead of us
as the sun swoops behind our backs.
we arrive at twilight at the lakeside inn
where attachment catches us
by the coat tails and sleeves.
the eyes of the waitress hold us
as she serves the roast pork platter
and pours low cut the jug of red wine.
the night cool on our skins
we sit and sip on our stoep
under a moon enchanter
next to the dark water.
we'll never plumb its depths
nor descend with the lock monster
for we seek surface fearing the bends.
tonight we'll dream of a bird
escaping a cage to flit into

a larger cage than one larger than that
hopefully with thinner mesh. ad infinitum.
certain of uncertainty we leave at first bird
find our staff which the innkeeper hid
in some understair broom cupboard.
dragging dream-infused a dawn shadow
we learn light of step to love
the lore of the endless road.

May your stories pile up as cairns along your road
Dorian

Writing Retreat Radar - Winter into Spring 2024

detailed flyers on request

1. Magic Carpet Writers (Somerset West)

last Wed of the month writeaway

a fun-loving supportive thinking/being group of aspirant writers.

2. Accra Ghana Storyshop for Authentic leadership 13 Aug

3

Writing Workshop
part of FFC Festival
Somerset West
join the conversation
beginners & writers welcome



FRINGE FIRESIDE CHATS
INDIE AUTHORS RISE UP

Thurs 8 Aug
14.00-16.30

find your voice
with writer
& mentor
Dorian




R290

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4

**Writer's Retreat
writeaway in
Pringle Bay**



23-25 Aug
swim in
a sea
of words
only 4
places left

with writer & mentor
Dorian
R990

082 873 6802 for flyer

5 BRC Ixopo

Fri 13 - Sun 15 Sep Thoughts, Words, Breath And Blood - A Writing Retreat

Sun 15 - Tue 17 Sep Write Away At The BRC

6 ZenPen Retreat (Groot Marico)

20=25 Oct 2024 **Writing, Being & Meditation**

<https://tararokpacentre.co.za/event/zenpen-writing-being-and-meditation/>

014 503 8901

7. Mentoring: ongoing one-on-one attention

You help me to sound like myself (numerous clients)

Like a pair of sandals we walk this road together. Taking in the view. Mentoring involves finding out where you want to go with your writing/story telling/work/life and encouraging you get to there