

Writers from page 9A

with tap shoes," Abulnir said. "I don't like 'submit.'" Sally Davis of West Bloomfield said, "It's too harsh, formal."

It's bowing to a higher power, submitting to nature, Abulnir said.

The last two lines sound like they would really be beautiful at the beginning," Stretten said.

"That's good, a good suggestion," said Betty Monson, a Farmington Hills resident and director of the group.

"You could move 'night's peace' all the way down to the end," said Gail Felker of Farmington Hills.

"Yeah, I like that," Monson said.

After all the changes, Abulnir read the revised version. Monson then suggested she submit it to the Housewife-Writers' Forum magazine.

And that's the goal of these writers, to find a publication that will publish their work. Being published is not a requirement to be a member of the group, but some members have moved on to join the Detroit Women Writers, which does require publication.

After almost 20 years, about 100 writers have passed through the group, which has had several, in a way, revivals. It started as an offshoot of a 1976 creative writing class taught by Sandra Sunderland at the Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills. The name Ridgewriters stems from the Orchard Ridge Campus name. The first two Ridgewriters groups folded. This is the third time the group has formed, but this time it has lasted for about 15 years. Members meet at the Visitors Center in Heritage Park on Fridays from noon to 2 p.m., except for the first week of the month when they meet from 7:30-9:30 p.m. on Wednesday.

Six members have moved on to Detroit Women Writers; 21 have been published for money.

Thirty-four members are on the roster now. The number who attend the weekly meeting varies.

Part of the benefit of joining the group is the lending library of writers books. There are also sample copies and guidelines for all of the Sunday magazines in the United States.

People can attend their first meeting for free; dues are \$3 per meeting attended after that. The money buys textbooks and other supplies as well as the occasional small stipend to attend a workshop. Some of the books available include: "Writer's Digest," "The Literary Agent and the Writer" by Diane Cleevers, "The Writer's Essential Desk Reference" by Sue Young, and "Little Magazines and Small Presses." Thirty-four references are available in all.

Members live all over the area, including Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield, Birmingham, Westland, Bingham Farms, Livonia and Southfield.

They also keep each other up-to-date on writing seminars, contests, publication deadlines and ideas for other creative endeavors, such as designing crossword puzzles.

Davis, who describes herself as a complete fanatic with crossword puzzles, wondered if others in the group were interested in designing them.

To design them, she said with a laugh, "You have to be extremely erudite and know everything there is to know about everything."

As the readings continued around the table, Scholchit read a humorous essay about migraine headaches, and member Joan Wilder read a short piece called "Be Careful What You Sport," about emphysema, which she plans to submit to Mature Outlook magazine.

"Is it too morbid to start out with?" she asked the group. "I don't want it to sound too weird." No, the others assured her, it's fine.

Maude B. Reid of Inkster read a haiku and members helped her come up with other descriptive words that would fit.

Stretten read "Weft of Worry," which she said is how she felt. "It's me; I want to fly away. I don't want to be enmeshed in all these worries," she said.

"I think that's thought-provoking," Monson said of the work.

Debbie Lampi of Farmington Hills read part of the first chapter of a book she's working on called "A Most Heinous Act." After a lot of questioning and suggestions for plot lines, the group assured her she's heading in the right direction.

Felker's humorous poem, about being stuck on hold on the telephone, gave the group a good laugh. Others suggested she submit it for publication.

As Monson said, "The idea of the group is to get published."

Call Betty Monson at (810) 851-6730 for information on Ridgewriters.

Group's leader is a lady of letters

BY JOAN WILDER
SPECIAL WRITER

Betty Monson recently led the Ridgewriters from the Community Center to the refurbished Spicer House (the Visitors Center) in Farmington Hills.

Every Friday at noon the shiny sunlit room, overlooking Heritage Park, becomes a literary salon with Monson as the lady in charge. The creative writers struggle to find perfection in words and then an appreciative audience.



SHARON LAMICUS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Righting writing: Joan Wilder of Farmington Hills takes some constructive criticism on her work from other Ridgewriters.

The original group began in 1976 as an offshoot of creative writing class taught by Sandra Sunderland at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College.

During a typical meeting, Betty marks out her space at the end of a long table. She greets the group, passes out name tags, introduces newcomers, reads the previous week's minutes, while a cohort collects the dues.

"Business end of the way," Betty says, "Who is going to read?"

The first volunteer passes out copies and begins.

The writings come in every shape from haiku to novels and cover every subject from birth to death with humor or pathos.

She consoles newcomers, "Don't hesitate to read your work for critique. We never leave anyone bleeding."

Each listener is encouraged to offer suggestions and they do. But, Betty says, "One time a male writer was accused of being a male chauvinist. An argument ensued. The voices raised to such a peak, I suggested they take the debate outside." She admits there have been heated discussions about everything from Christmas decorations to Pearl Harbor, but usually disagreements are headed off when she says, "Hold that thought," or "We're here to critique not to rewrite."

Some writings may be legitimately earthy or controversial and Betty chuckles as she says, "We're not into censorship, but please warn us ahead, so easily offended members may leave early if they wish."

She never says "never," even to the tasteless and tacky one does she push over the Shakespeare; but edit she does.

With a kind smile in a dulcet voice she says, "On page two, paragraph four you lapsed into the passive voice." "On page three, paragraph one, show, don't tell, the hero's anger." "Look up

tutelage," she says as she shoves the dictionary toward the middle of the table.

People come and go from the group, adding interest like new flavor in the stew. Several have gained professional status, but many just seek to capture life's mysteries on a page.

From dues collected over the years Betty has built a

Ridgewriter library to answer writers' questions: What is a sonnet? Where do you put commas? Who will buy my short story? How do you write a query letter? How do you get an agent?

She has systematically catalogued back issues of Writer's Digest and guidelines from small publications, to circulate among the members.

Betty is well-qualified to be the Ridgewriters' director. From the College of Mount St. Joseph in Cincinnati, she received her bachelor of arts in education, with a major in art and minor in English. Before she married her husband Norb, who is an accountant with Ford Motor, she worked as an editorial assistant/artist for AT&T's in-house publication, C.A.L.L. Magazine.

After her marriage she stayed home to mother six children and become a household engineer. She continued to attend writing classes, and became a columnist for the St. Edith church paper of Livonia. When she moved to Farmington Hills she became the volunteer-editor for the weekly newspaper of Our Lady of Sorrows.

She has freelanced: humor, news, profiles, feature stories in various newspapers and magazines.

Betty continues to write and sometimes asks the Ridgewriters to critique her work. As one of her associates said, "She accepts criticism very well... an exceptional quality for a published writer."

Betty Monson, as leader of the Ridgewriters, has given positive, unselfish and good-humored encouragement to the writers of the Farmington area. She says, "My greatest satisfaction (besides getting a check for a freelance piece), is watching a writer develop. It's like a time-lapse film of a butterfly emerging from the chrysalis."

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