

Hoffman Center Writing Programs:  
Roads to Imagination  
by Phyllis Mannan 9/28/18

When I was six or seven, my father constructed a ramp to connect our kitchen-family room and bedroom with a room where I would sleep below the level of the rest of the house, a region we called “the down-below.” Covered with a black, grooved runner, this ramp looked like a giant reptile. Later, my father would remove the structure and its lower room to build an addition. But for several years, my two brothers and I searched for nickels or dimes and lost toys in the shadows under its sloping hulk. Sometimes we were lucky enough to find a quarter stuck to a wad of chewing gum. An even greater bonus for me: the ramp led to a place of my own.

My parents encouraged a sense of independence in my new bedroom. Dad made a fold-down desk out of a board fitted with hinges and hung it next to the window. The desk held a Philco radio and became a launching pad for my imagination. Though I was usually expected to eat supper with the family, Mother occasionally let me sit next to the radio to listen to a favorite program. “Father Knows Best,” “Big John and Sparky,” “The Lone Ranger,” “Dragnet,” and “The Shadow” became friends. I leaned my elbows on the desk and listened.

As I see it now, the ramp connected me to worlds of my own making. It allowed me to be near—but not too near—my family and to learn that books, writing, and radio dramas could transport me to a different realm. It conveyed me to a fairytale kingdom of princesses and glass slippers. And it provided a sanctuary where I wrote my first poems and collected and illustrated them for Mother’s Day.

In my early adulthood, imagination took a back seat to college, career, and family. But during the past twenty-five years, I’ve tried to recreate my childhood freedom to daydream by making time to think and write, and by seeking out others who do the same. I’ve taken writing

workshops and belonged to writing groups in Portland and Manzanita, which have helped to affirm the importance of writing and keep it alive in my life. Over the past ten years, I've both participated in and volunteered for several Hoffman Center writing programs: Writers' Series' readings and open mics, the *North Coast Squid* literary journal, PoetryFest weekend, and the Word & Image project. These programs have brought enjoyment and friendship with others who share my interest in reading and writing.

Adults need roads to the imagination as much as children do—perhaps even more. They need off-ramps to possibilities, the rejuvenating influence of daydreams. Creative pursuits help us let go of daily struggles and transcend them. They create new neuro-pathways in the brain. They help us experience a state called “flow,” a sort of creative amnesia in which time and place disappear. They enable us to grow as we create our own reality and access the reality of others, and to overcome affronts to the spirit caused by aging.

The Manzanita Writers' Series and other Hoffman Center writing programs encourage the imagination and offer many ways to celebrate it. In the Writers' Series, we explore different worlds through reading and writing and come together to share those worlds. In the *Squid*, we read others' thoughts and stories and participate in their dreams; in PoetryFest, we discover the joys of image, metaphor, and sound; in Word & Image, we see how visual and language arts can influence one another. All of these programs—as well as the Writing Lounge and traditional and online workshops—provide runways for our spirit.

There are many ways to achieve meaning in life, but for me, writing has been one of the most important. It's allowed me to develop and inhabit my imagination, enhancing my life. When I was young, my family created a space where I could explore other worlds. Now, I look for places like the Hoffman Center writing programs to help me do the same.