

Starting Over

Gazing at the view from my deck of the ocean and beach, the forest and hills beyond, I think, “I am home. This is my place.”

“Oh yeah?” Another voice says, “What were you thinking? Move to Manzanita? Permanently? You don’t know a soul, what are you going to do? You can’t stare at the view or walk the beach all day.”

Ok, I’m going into the unfamiliar where nobody knows me. That’s just it, I can be a different me; new, exotic, exciting. Who, what I can be . . .

Well, nuts. Trying to remember the lies that would take? I’d forget and blow my cover. Besides, I’m used to this me, we get along.

OK, I don’t have to be the same me though, do I? There are things I once did like the Creative Writing Course I took so many years ago. I got encouragement and enjoyed the craft. Could the new me be an author? Starting over? The thought scares me, I don’t know how to write, forgot everything I ever learned, the doubts pile up.

Then, a notice in the local newspaper: “Writers! The Hoffman Center is starting a new program this week just for you: Writing Lounge. You are invited to spend an uninterrupted morning once a week writing with others.”

OK! Push the doubts aside and test this new me. The next week, nervous and apprehensive, I venture in with my laptop. “Hello, and welcome!” a woman greets me. “Will you sign in, please? Rules are: no talking, just write. Near the end will be time to share what you are working on or not as you choose.”

I take a place at a table in the middle of a small room, where a man and two women are setting up. They nod and smile in my direction. Others sit in easy chairs around the periphery. Laptops are positioned, others use pens and paper. I set up my laptop, and haltingly start typing. Soon, the cacophony of other keyboards fills the room. The staccato sounds are intimidating. How can they think that fast? The scratch of pens adds to the sound of writers venting their creativity. These are serious writers, who know what they are doing. How will I measure up? Somehow, the words pour out. The leader announces the end of our time, and I glance down at the word count. One thousand! I can’t believe it. Maybe I can do something with this.

The leader asks how I did.

“More writing than I thought I had in me.”

“Do you want to share?” she asks.

“No, it’s too raw, but I’ll be back. Thank you.”

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Struggling to learn the rules of writing, I attend workshops at the Writing Lounge, buy instruction books, resurrect manuals from that long ago course. The critiquing from the more experienced writers give me encouragement. They are generous in giving me tips, ideas to improve my writing. Stories abound; Fourth of July Parade (small town exuberance), strangers rescue me, a small girl has a commercial venture. Even buying a Christmas tree is an adventure. That piece got me a speaking engagement at a Christmas Tea. Wow! Maybe there is an author in me.

“Hey, Kay, why don’t you read this at Open Mic?” Molly from Writing Lounge asks. Open Mic, where writers read their pieces to an audience. It intimidates me. It isn’t the same as in front of a group at a Tea. Somehow, more serious. On a stage? It’s frightening. The doubts talk to me. Then I tell myself. If you can’t do this, well? I love it, reacting to the audience and their reacting to me. Heady stuff.

However, getting published, that’s the real test. There’s a coastal magazine asking for stories submitted online, and I email a story. Then the wait begins. I hear of writers papering their bathrooms with rejection letters. I wouldn’t get a letter, but the worry is there. I hope, I pray, and watch my inbox. Then it comes. Yes! They accepted! I’m a writer! Doubts still surface, but with the encouragement and critiques from the other writers, I expand my skills. And continue exploring my craft. My craft: think of that. And only here.