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Once in
a Blue Moon

"It is a delicious thing to write, to be no longer yourself but to become Gustave Flaubert that was passed out during the initial meeting with Scott Evans, a writing instructor at the University of the Pacific (UCOP) that collaborating with a group of writers would help keep him more professional experience than an informal group, Scott joined UOP in May of 2007.

The group's second meeting was held during the second full moon. Thinking, "Talent like this only comes together once in a blue moon as a formal class, the chemistry clicked so well that they still

Currently, the members are as follows: Will Albrecht, Donna



Scott Evans, a writing instructor at the University of the Pacific, is the

Holmes, Monica Williams, Meera Klein, Karen Levy, Marti Schoen, Jenna Kutzleb, and husband and wife Kathy and Richard Williams. Former member Doug Hodell recently moved to Sacramento and may come back in the spring, and devoted member Anna Levine recently moved back to Israel but plans to visit whenever she can, especially in the spring while she is on her book-signing tour.

Scott strives for the success of the group as a whole. "My goal is to promote art, creative energy and good writing," he says, and the other members find themselves affected by this attitude. Marti notices, "His passion for writing is infectious. His support for guild writers provides solid ground for the group to stand on." Says Kathy, "He has this driving personality, this force that we're going to be successful. He's the 18-wheeler of writers."

Scott's philosophy about teaching has created a very unique and positive workshop experience. He explains, "On the first night, I explained that I wanted a true writers' workshop where we would help and encourage one another, not compete and put on airs. In some writers' groups, people act pretentious and try to undermine one another's efforts, and I'm just not interested in that approach." Rather than looking at each other as competition, these writers truly enjoy one another's company. Says Marti, "An essential



Meera Klein (right) and Karen Levy enjoy one of the group's discussions.

factor of the viability of a group is the ability to critique well. That, like writing, is an art." Says Kyle, "This group has an inspiring level of talent that brings us back simply for the entertainment value, but we also have a respect and appreciation for one another that makes the meetings feel like a get-together of old friends." This positive feedback is something that is taken for granted by many writing groups. Kathy is a member of another group that offers much stronger criticism. "The other group has surgical knives," she laughs.

Kathy shares a statistic that people in writer's groups publish 5 times the amount of people who are not in writer's groups, and the most beneficial part of being a member of a writing group is it motivates you to continue writing. "I write because there are deadlines," Kathy says. This seems to be a shared agreement among the members. Karen feels that being in a group "forces your hand to produce material." As much as it is an enjoyable activity, writing is still a chore much of the time, just like any other job. "You don't wait for the muse," Kyle says. "Every single word is work. Type one word, then type another."

The second benefit that comes from being in a writing group is the feedback the writers receive on a regular basis. "No matter what you're writing, you need input," Will explains. Because all of these



The group includes (from left) Richard Williams, Kathryn Williams, William Albrecht, Scott Evans, Karen Levy, Meera Klein, Monica Williams and Marti Schoen (not pictured).

individuals understand the sweat and blood the others are putting into their writing, a shared understanding of the process is formed. Monica shares that, "the feedback I get on every piece I bring is insightful, encouraging, and helps me to see bigger aspects of my work that I wouldn't have thought of before." She loves that "after leaving each meeting I can't wait to go home and write. The creative atmosphere fosters a feeling that anything is possible as long as you sit down and pour your thoughts onto the page." Being surrounded by a community of other writers is truly a gift.

Amazingly, most of the members write almost daily. Anna says she is very disciplined about writing everyday. "Even now, while on vacation, my family knows that I need a few hours on my own, and I search out a quaint café." Will's theory is what he calls "baby steps," which means he writes at least 100 to 200 words a day, and sometimes more when he is feeling really inspired. "Its like an addiction - you don't feel right if you don't," Karen explains. This addiction can take the place of all regular responsibilities in life, as Marti often finds: "When I'm on a roll, the writing takes over. It can easily keep me up all night, and I won't feel tired until the next day. This can go on for days or weeks until I succumb to the pressures to respond to my family and the disarray that results from ignoring housework and routine commitments."

The group members are diverse in their writing backgrounds. There are those who have been writing for most of their lives,



Monica discusses one of the group's writing pieces.

and those who have only just begun. And this has little to do with age. Will, a recent high school graduate, has been writing since the age of 3 or 4. "It's been my dream to be a writer forever," he says. Karen has been an avid reader all her life, and at age 10 or 11 started writing. "I loved to read, so I thought there would be nothing better than creating." Richard has only been writing fiction for about five years now. "One day I got this idea and I sat down and started writing it," he says. Now that he has recently retired, he hopes to continue writing on a more regular basis. Monica remembers writing in grade school, but took a long hiatus. Then, after taking a creative writing class at a community college, she became hooked. "It was so much fun that I couldn't stop writing. That class reminded me of my childhood love of writing and I've been writing steadily ever since."

The diversity helps rather than hinders the success of the group. Scott explains, "As you might suspect, the physician in the group is writing a medical story that address issues such as health insurance and euthanasia, with characters as rich and dynamic as the docs and nurses in the TV show ER. One of the attorneys is writing a legal mystery with contemporary characters that read like updated versions of wise-cracking detectives like Phillip Marlowe. The sociologist is writing a murder mystery with a



Richard Williams (left) and Marti Schoen examine a writing sample.

with a young female private investigator vacationing - or attempting to vacation - at a resort in Costa Rica near an erupting volcano." Scott's current project is a novel titled *First Folio*, which is centered around the Shakespeare authorship question. The book is meant to be "a little like the *Da Vinci Code*, but less frenzied." Karen is the only person writing an autobiography. She confesses that while the other writers "can hide behind a character, mine is me. That is a little alarming at first." The reaction toward her work, though, has been unanimously positive. "I would die happy if it was published," she admits.

The Blue Moon Literary & Art Review:

The motivation for creating a magazine, according to Scott, was quite simple. "After the second workshop, when I'd read the work of about a dozen members, I knew these were writers who deserved to be heard." The Blue Moon Literary & Art Review is currently available at Avid Reader, Newsbeat and Mishka's Café in downtown Davis. Scott believes Davis to be the perfect town for this type of project, because it is so supportive to local talent. "Mishka's, for example, is one of the other favorite places where some of our members meet to write and chat about literature over a good cup of coffee. And occasionally we do 'Fridays at Fuzio,' where we solve serious literary problems while sipping lemon drop martinis," Scott says.



Karen jots down some notes during the meeting.

When asked what the hardest part about creating the magazine was, almost every member mentioned choosing a piece. Kathy laughs about the internal battle that takes place, constantly thinking, "Oh, that isn't my best story, if you just give me another 18 years.." Once the piece was chosen, the second thing that all members struggled with was deciding when the piece was truly done enough. Marti absolutely hates having to let go of rewrites. "With every reading, I can improve anything I've written, so in reading my published Blue Moon piece, I ached to continue editing and rewriting it, but there it stood...done, done, done.so final!" Karen, who considers herself a very picky editor, says that for her the hardest part was "dealing with me-I'm a perfectionist. My name is on it, so I wanted people to say, 'this is professional.'"

After all the painstaking hours, how did the group feel about the first issue? Scott says, "I need to do a better job as editor to eliminate typos in the second issue - you'll find a few that we missed in the first, but as I told the other editors, "Perfection is an insult to God." In the end, there was a general feeling of amazement surrounding the publication. "It's just marvelous," Kathy says. "Your words are in print. Its huge, no matter what happens."

Scott is optimistic about the future of the magazine. "Grab the first issue, despite its few typos, because it will no doubt become a collector's item," he says.



Meera (right) compares notes with Scott and William.



Scott, leading the discussion with William and Kathryn.

The goal is to publish two issues a year for the next three years, and to then begin publishing quarterly. Scott also mentioned that John Natsoulas' publishing company might soon be involved with the printing, resulting in a much more professionally bound book. It is also a goal to include more poetry, art and photography in future issues, as the first issue was mostly fiction. Marti hopes that by next year the magazine will be able to support itself financially, and that outside writers will submit work as well. "Most of all, (I hope) that the magazine will be known well and read locally at least," she says.

In the coming year, the group also shares a common goal of continuing to publish and improve their own work. Says Kyle, "I hope that my fellow group members complete their works in progress so I can brag about all the published authors I hang out with." Monica is hopeful in this area as well: "With everyone supporting each other, I'm sure we'll have at least one person successfully publish their work by the end of the year." Already, Scott, Monica and Anna are all published authors. The group is also planning a reading at John Natsoulas' Gallery, which should happen sometime in March or April. Additionally, the group has become involved in a unique and exciting project. Scott's oldest son, Sean Evans, works in Hollywood as a promoter, and the group is involved in writing novel versions of several screenplays associated with Patrick Kilpatrick and Uncommon Dialogue Films. The first two novel adaptations will be, as Mr. Kilpatrick describes them, "a contemporary heist film and a naval period piece set in the 1700s."



Richard shares a laugh with Monica. Group members enjoy each other's company, as well as their interest in writing.

The camaraderie and success of this group is certainly as unique as a blue moon. Marti remembers a moment when most of the members realized they wanted to continue meeting as a group: "There was a collective moment. Not just the ready assent, the agreement that like minds wanted to really connect; but a feeling of eating hungrily when you had moments before believed that you weren't hungry."

Hungry for more? Want to submit? The Blue Moon Literary & Art Review is on the Web!

<http://www.geocities.com/bluemoonreview/>

[http://daviswiki.org/Blue_Moon_Literary_&_Art_Review?action=show&redirect=Blue Moon Literary and Art Review](http://daviswiki.org/Blue_Moon_Literary_&_Art_Review?action=show&redirect=Blue+Moon+Literary+and+Art+Review)

