

*Writing*  
IN A CONVERTIBLE  
WITH THE TOP DOWN

A Unique Guide for Writers

BY SHEILA BENDER &  
CHRISTI KILLIEN GLOVER

Copyright © 2015 Sheila Bender and Christi Killien Glover

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.

394 Colman Drive  
Port Townsend WA 9836

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-1-943224-01-2

**Summary:** A fun and practical guide to writing that will help your writing process be as breezy as driving in a convertible on a summer's day. The authors' prompts and personal insights will shift you into creative gear so you can speed successfully on your way to authentic writing. Sheila Bender and Christi Killien Glover offer the right roadmaps for helping you become the writer you know you can be. It's time to go for the green lights in your writing journey.

# Contents

*Note: Each chapter is followed by two short sections summarizing its key point and suggesting writing exercises that apply the lesson.*

introduction		9
one	The Bus: How do we get started writing and keep going?	15
two	Peonies: How do we continue our enthusiasm for writing day after day?	25
three	Garbage: How do we overcome writer's block?	29
four	Molasses: Where does the meaning in a story come from?	35
five	Beach House: How do writers get the conscious mind to meld with the unconscious?	43
six	Cherry Trees: How do we use other people's writing to help ourselves write?	55

seven	The Bridge on the River Kwai: How does a writer visualize the structure of a story?	<b>63</b>
eight	Raspberry Picking: How can writers use readers' responses to refine their perceptions of their own writing?	<b>75</b>
nine	The Dentist: How do we create a good climate for story growing?	<b>83</b>
ten	Airports, Nursing Homes and Cafés: How do writers keep their writing from being boring?	<b>93</b>
eleven	Highway Patrol: How do we help each other as writing partners?	<b>105</b>
twelve	Porcupines: How do we defend our creative process in the face of resistance?	<b>123</b>
thirteen	Freshman: What is the writer's job?	<b>137</b>
fourteen	Garage Sales: Where does the writer discover treasures?	<b>147</b>
	classic books for writers	<b>157</b>
	notes on the authors	<b>165</b>

# chapter one

The Bus:  
How do we get started  
writing and keep going?

APRIL 29

Dear Christi,

Once I dreamt a boyfriend and I were on an English double decker bus. The bus driver spun around in his seat and faced us. He was blind-folded and continued to drive the bus. I was seized with panic.

Waking, I remembered my boyfriend said something the day before about going forward on blind faith. The dream must certainly have expressed my fears about “blind faith.”

Eight years later, urged on by my soon-to-be husband, I took the Parachute Jump at the World Expo in Vancouver,

Tossing zany, or even painful, images around, like the ones you came up with on the bus, is like taking the cap off a full ketchup bottle and turning the bottle upside down.

It's messy, but it's the fastest way. Censoring ideas is like screwing the cap back on and putting the bottle in a deep freeze. Censor one idea and ten others back away from your tongue and your fingers.

Once you have the image, it's your connection to developing the story. The kernel directs the writing. If you stick with it, it becomes a map to a whole new territory of writing possibilities.

Ready for the drive,  
Sheila

## **A KEY: DRIVE YOUR OWN ROUTE**

Driving your own route means following the roads you find yourself on when you set out to write and trusting them to take you somewhere. But lots of times when we want to write, we don't even seem to be able to start the ignition. And then if we can start, we don't know how to keep our gas pedal down. And then if we can keep the pedal down, we may get into some sort of a word fog and not see the road we are driving on.

again. I came into the room just as he set the letters down. This time he said, “They’re so good that I’m inspired to write.”

An hour later he placed this text in my hands:

I am a large man yet I can disappear easily inside the cherry trees in our backyard. The leaves of these trees are thick and heavy and only occasionally betray my presence by a gentle rustling as I move from branch to branch. It’s difficult for a man my size to hide, to escape the sight of others in the world. But in my cherry trees, I disappear into the arms of Eden and am provided for. I have been in the trees, happy and eating the delicious fruit while my wife was in the backyard asking the kids if they had seen me or knew where I was off to. It is a dark pleasure to escape the bonds of care. I imagine Rapture to be this kind of pleasure—to leave the others behind in their world of concerns for the land of heaven.

The cherries appear every year around the 4th of July. They are the dark sweet kind, the kind that are used for exquisite chocolate covered cherries, not the frivolous maraschino cherries that decorate sundaes. I love to climb these trees and lie in their branches and eat the

sweet flesh of that fruit. The larger tree ripens about two weeks before the smaller one, giving a “cherry season” of about three weeks. But in these arms, I imagine that it lasts all year long. I am Adam before the fall, living in the beauty of the earth and eating God’s gifts without thought of toil and trouble. I reflect on how easy life can be. My wife and I hardly think of these trees the rest of the year. We don’t spray them or fertilize or water them, yet they provide this crimson bounty for us year after year. I want life to be easy, and for three weeks a year, I can convince myself that it is.

I have no idea where the “bowl of cherries” metaphor comes from. I don’t want a bowl of cherries. I want trees of cherries. Cherries in a bowl will only last a day or two—trees of cherries last for years. My wife and I have disagreements about how the cherries should be eaten. She likes to make pies and cobbler and I only want to gobble them as I pick them. Since she is so short, she depends on me to pick them for her desserts. There’s nothing wrong with cherry cobbler, except that you have to pick the cherries, take the pits out, get all the pots and pans out, mix the batter and bake them. You



usually make more than one mealtime's dessert in a recipe, so until it's eaten, you have this large baking pan of syrupy cherries and cherry soaked crumbs decorating your kitchen counter. How much better to pick the cherries, pop them in your mouth, spit the pits onto the ground and eat until you are satisfied. Then when you are hungry again, you climb the tree and there are more cherries still fresh and beautiful, hanging from the branches.

This is making something new from the same old ingredients. *Voilà*. Somehow the river starts flowing beneath the next person, too!

Paddling downstream,  
Sheila

JULY 20

Dear Christi,

My daughter Emily saw Kurt's piece of writing lying on the butcher block in the kitchen. She read it and asked to read our letters. So we went out to the Honey Bear Café, drank steamed milk and *au laits*. She began reading our correspondence exclaiming, "Oh, my friend Airi would like this. My English teacher, Mr. Williams, would like to read this. He'd fill up a big mug with coffee early in September and sit in an armchair and

## **A KEY: LINK TO THE LANDSCAPE**

Link to the landscape means immerse yourself in a landscape and its people and they will feed you with images, bits of conversation, remembered events, everything you need to write with fresh images. One thing that gets in the way of us allowing ourselves to experience what is out there is the number of clichés we are accustomed to hearing and using without thinking. We may experience the landscape as nothing special because we can't see past the "Oh, isn't this pretty?" and the "Oh, wouldn't Aunt Dorothy love this" and the "Having a great time, wish you were here" language that clogs our minds.

## **TAKE IT FOR A SPIN**

Clichés are overused words and phrases that have lost their connection to experience. They are words the brain interprets but not the heart. "Having a great time" means everything's cool, but it doesn't relate experience that can be enjoyed through the senses, or experience that evokes the very nature of where one is, both physically and emotionally.

Here is a list of clichés you have probably heard:

Don't talk about religion or politics.

Don't feed the animals.

Who wants to go to a cocktail party with people who have steel armor for skin and porcupine mantles for hearts?

Looking forward to the tones  
we help others create,  
Sheila

## **A KEY: DISCOVER WHERE THE BURR STICKS AND WHY YOU CAN'T JUST BRUSH IT OFF**

In our chapter “Cherry Trees” Christi mentions the young adult novel *The Pinballs* by Betsy Byars. This book comes to mind again when we deal with criticism. Thirteen-year-old Harvey has won third prize in an essay contest. The night of the awards dinner, Harvey’s father is surprised, not at finding Harvey in his first tie ever, but at finding him in the car at all. His father is rushing off to a poker game and has no time to even drop Harvey off, let alone go to the dinner. Harvey’s father pushes Harvey out of the car, throws the gear stick into forward instead of reverse and runs over both of Harvey’s legs.

That is what criticism about one’s writing can feel like—somebody you expect to come with you, instead runs your legs over on their way to somewhere else and tells you you’re in the wrong.

If you take the blame, criticism can indeed cripple you. In order to stay on your feet, you must look not only at the