

# WORD!

Towson University | PRWR | Newsletter

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## Word! from the Director

by **Geoff Becker**

I work mostly on a desktop computer at home that sits on a very old, very unfancy desk I got for \$50. It's not that comfortable, though, so I'll often move to the bed with a notepad. One of my teachers in graduate school, Frank Conroy, did all his writing that way. I liked Frank, and admired him. Whenever I sit in bed trying to write, I think of Frank. Another writer I admired a great deal was Frederick Busch, whom I got to know when I was teaching at Colgate University in the mid-'90s. Fred had a separate building out behind his house, a kind of shed. Every morning, he'd head out there, only returning to the house for meals. He did all his work on old-fashioned typewriters; he claimed to have worn out quite a

few. I have a two typewriters myself, one a Corona portable from the 1930s that looks great but doesn't work very well, the other a Royal from the 1960s that's perfectly functional but needs a new ribbon. I went through a phase where I wrote on it, but that didn't last so long. I still think about getting it back out, though.

Once, when I was teaching at the Iowa Summer Writing Festival, I was trying to be inspirational to a group of students. "Anything you can do to make this more fun, you should do it," I said. "Go get yourself a really nice pen!" The next day, I did just that—I bought a \$50 fountain pen. I still have it, but I have to say, I never use it. It was kind of leaky. I suspect a really nice fountain pen costs more than \$50.

My friend Steve Rinehart wrote an entire novel on a Palm Pilot. The company was so impressed that they gave him another one. There is apparently a whole genre of writing that originated in Japan called "cell phone novels," but it's unclear to me whether these are actually written on phones, or just intended to be read on them.

When I lived in Atlanta, I used to go and write at a place called Caribou Coffee. It was crowded and noisy, with tiny tables, but for some reason, it worked for me. I finished a novel there. A few years earlier, I'd been allowed to stay at a relative's house on Cape Cod. I had a whole week there, alone, with view of the ocean and my own private

deck. It looked like a scene in a movie about a writer. I probably wrote two pages, total. Mostly I went for walks, drank beer, and ate potato chips.

The thing about writing is that when you're doing it, you're not really where you are; you're someplace else. So it probably doesn't matter what your immediate environment looks like that much. But sometimes a change of scene/routine can really help.

Good writing to you, wherever you find to do your work!

## Reflections on the 2016 Baltimore Writers' Conference

by Shelley DeMarco

On November 12, the Professional Writing Program, along with Towson's English Department and the Masters in Arts in Writing at Johns Hopkins, hosted the 23rd annual Baltimore Writers' Conference.



Linda Pastan gave an exclusive poetry reading the eve of the conference at the Towson Literary Reading Series, and later, in her keynote address, shared insights from her years of writing, including how she sees her poems differently now that she has aged.

The day provided opportunities for writers of all skill-levels to attend sessions on fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Additionally, freelance and

children's writing were offered, and, for the first time at BWC, an introduction to digital storytelling with Patrick Coursey, a TU alumnus. Kenneth Morrison joined fellow poets Celeste Doaks and Thea Brown to discuss the processes of creating spoken-word performances, and many participants took advantage of BWC's quick critiques to gain feedback on a few pages of their work.

Thanks to a grant from the Graduate Student Association which covered their registration fee, PRWR students were able to attend the conference at no-cost to them, enjoying the catered lunch and wine and cheese reception which are always highlights of the day.

With another successful conference over, many writers left inspired and encouraged having networked with one another, eager to return next year for BWC 2017.

## Dr. Lillywhite's *Mindful Writing at Work*

by Shelley DeMarco

PRWR professor Dr. Harvey Lillywhite has a new iBook coming out that will take your writing skills to the next level.

It's called *Mindful Writing at Work* and it's going to get you to think.

Lillywhite identifies mindful writing as "focused on the reader's needs," and the book's 200 pages will teach how to create useful and readable writing through ten lessons with visuals. Those who have taken his Writing for Business class will recognize some of the HOC's and LOC's from his textbook, though *Mindful Writing at Work* is not just for students, it's for the "regular writer," too.

Having practiced zazen meditation for almost 40 years, Dr. Lillywhite considers daily writing to be an opportunity to practice mindfulness which is

“a whole body-and-mind awareness of the present moment” (<http://buddhism.about.com>). Seth Godin’s definition of art as “the human act of choosing to connect” has further influenced the professor who sees an intersection of these ideas through his poetry, daily communications, and mediation.

Every day, Lillywhite seeks to learn more about writing so that he may, in return, help others as well, and by the end of the year, he’ll have another book to do just that.



## Shelley DeMarco and *The Offbeat*

by Chase Childress

PRWR student and graduate assistant Shelley DeMarco was a finalist in Michigan State University’s Flash Fiction/Poetry Prose contest and will be published in the spring issue of the university’s literary magazine *The Offbeat*. As the title suggests, the magazine’s interest is in all writings zany, thought-provoking and quirky—and Shelley’s “The Man in the Yellow Hat” certainly fits that bill! A surreal exploration of the relationship between two human characters in *Curious George*, this short story invites us to imagine the lives of the man and the professor beyond the edges of the childhood cartoon.

Brooding and tense, “The Man in the Yellow Hat” is Murakami-esque in its dark considerations of what exists at the fringes—of our childish fantasies, of our conceptions of our relationships, and indeed, of sanity itself. The next deadline to submit for *The Offbeat*’s Flash Fiction/Poetry

Prose contest is August 16. Interested writers may submit their pieces of flash fiction or prose poetry (under 1000 words) at [offbeat.msu.edu](http://offbeat.msu.edu) for the chance to receive a \$150 cash prize and publication in the Fall 2017 print issue of *The Offbeat*.



## Catching Up with Taryn Myers

by Chase Childress

Taryn Myers graduated from the PRWR program in Spring 2012 and is now pursuing a PhD at Howard University. We recently caught up with her and asked a few questions.

*What does work in the nonprofit sector look like? What kind of work did you do?*

I started at Hopkins working for a research program where I managed the budgets then moved on to grant writing for the Baltimore Police Department. Later, I moved on to Grants Management which is the same thing just a fancier title and a dollop more money. My last job was as a Development Officer still doing grant writing, but my main focus was relationship building. (I will be honest with you, a lot of fundraising is about meeting people and getting them to like you. It certainly requires some charm.) As a side hustle, I wrote grants and did some communication management for small nonprofits which is interesting work (it goes hand in hand with fundraising) because it is the best way to increase the nonprofit’s visibility, which in turn increases the chance of getting funded.

*How did your studies in the Professional Writing department impact your work in the nonprofit sector?*

I actually never thought about working in the nonprofit sector until I took an independent study with Dr. Stuckey and learned about grant-writing and fundraising. That experience led to writing grants for the Baltimore Police Department and eventually onto traditional not-for-profit organizations.

*How does your Masters from TU translate to your PhD at Howard? What's similar or different about "Professional Writing" and "Communication" as fields?*

I've only been in the PhD program for about seven weeks so I'm not exactly sure yet how my graduate degree is going to translate, but I will say this: my grad degree helped me step my up my writing tremendously. I think the main difference between my current program and Towson's grad program is the research component. I didn't have to write a final thesis or do any comprehensive research at TU, and my biggest advice to anyone thinking of a doing a PhD program is to take some methodology classes and write a final thesis.

*Do you have any advice for PRWR students interested in working in the nonprofit sector?*

There are so many great benefits to working in the nonprofit sector. It is a more relaxed work environment and it feels like important work, plus, if you have school loans, working for a nonprofit for 10 years will help wipe them out. Try to find a nonprofit that serves the community that interests you. When you write about what you are passionate about, it shows. I think that's why I was successful: I wrote from a place of passion.

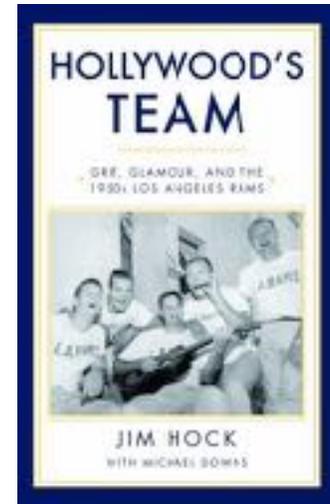
*You're getting your PhD! What's next for your career?*

After I get through this program, my goal is to work in academia. I want to be a professor...of something...

## Professor Downs on Ghostwriting

by Chase Childress

With the help of our own Michael Downs, this past year author Jim Hock published *Hollywood's Team: Grit, Glamour, and the 1950s Los Angeles Rams*. We asked Professor Downs to share with us his experience of ghostwriting this unique piece of history—and a bit about ghostwriting as a profession.



*How did this project come to fruition?*

The book got started through a ghostwriting agency called Gotham Ghostwriters out of NYC and it puts writers together with people who want to hire them. It's not actually ghostwriting, because my name is on the book, but collaborative writing has fallen under the umbrella of ghostwriting.

*Do you feel like there is a creative difference between authoring and being a co-author on a book?*

Yeah, definitely! It's primarily teamwork. You're working with someone on a creative project, but you alone don't have final say. So you depend on each other, and it's important to recognize each person's strengths and weaknesses and then work with those.

*What was your favorite part of the book to write?*

The book is really about John Hock, the father

of the author, Jim Hock (Jim Hock is the author and I wrote it with him--that's how ghostwriting works). John Hock isn't a man of many words--he didn't leave behind many diaries, journals or letters that I could borrow from in writing the book, and he was very self-effacing, didn't like to talk much even. So I had to create him as a character out of the memories of his family and the stories they told, out of photographs and lots of research. If there was a time a newspaper ever mentioned or quoted him, I found it. I went to the neighborhood where he grew up, visited the church where he was married, went to the beaches he went to with his wife. I took all of that and tried to use it to create his "character" and put him in scenes without actually knowing what happened in those moments.

One particular moment visiting one of those beaches stands out to me: John really suffered from knee problems, was always putting lotions and ointments on his knees. They were beach people, his wife told me, and I'd never been to a Los Angeles beach. I realized how much better it would be for a guy so big to be standing in salt water, and how good it would feel on his knees. I can't ask him that, but it stands to reason, it's close enough. Writing those kinds of scenes, where I was using both what I know as a fiction writer and a former journalist and putting those together was my favorite part of writing the book. It helped me find out who John Hock really was, come to like him, and really enjoy spending time with him.

*What was the worst part of the book to write?*

HA! There are almost 500 endnotes and 30 pages of source notes. Luckily, working on that book I hired two PRWR students as interns. On the front end, I hired Jason Taylor, now a high school English teacher in Belair, and he was a great help going through a lot of "Sports Illustrateds" and

creating spreadsheets of rosters with interesting facts about the characters.

Athina Koulatsos, also now graduated, was fantastic, and I would never have done the source notes without her help. I wasn't making the source notes as I was putting down the lines because I didn't want to distract myself from the writing. So Athina went page by page, highlighting what needs to be cited and creating the source notes. It was great to work with PRWR students that way. And they both got mentioned in the acknowledgments, too!

To be honest, I don't know if there was actually a least favorite part--toward the end there was a tight deadline, and I spent long hours in my home office and it actually started to smell like a football locker room, I was in there so often.

*What can PRWR students look forward to if they take your Freelance Writing class in the spring?*

We'll practice the kinds of articles that go in magazines and the query letters that go with them. We'll also have a big project at the end of the semester, which a small version, truncated book proposal. It's sort of a big thing. Sometimes I ask students to write their own book and other times I ask them to pitch to write someone else's. There are people out there who have book ideas but don't know how or don't have time to write a book or a book proposal, and you can make money out of it. The class is a way to help people figure out how to make money.

*Do you choose your freelance projects or is it more like you meet the work that's needed? I.e. Do you see yourself seeking out work like this in the future?*

If I see that there are jobs out there that I would like to do, articles to be written, I hear about it and write them. It's also possible to pitch editors cold ideas, and I've done that too. Not too

recently, because I'm a college professor—it's just not my main line of work. Freelance writers are pitching all the time to editors they know. For me, I have grading to do.

*What advice do you have for PRWR students who hope to ghostwrite as a career?*

Take my class, number one. What you have to do is master the craft, you have to be able to write, and write long. You have to build a resume. No one's going to hire someone for ghostwriting who doesn't already have experience in that area. If you want to ghostwrite nonfiction, you have to have experience in nonfiction. Ghostwriting always comes after, it's not the first thing—you've already proven yourself in some way. That said, there are certainly people who have some talent, or know somebody (for example, if their uncle's a bank president and wants someone to write his memoir), but you have to figure out ways to build the resume.