

WCA

WORDS



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Issue 6

## **WCA WORDS Committee**

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We are grateful to WCA members **Wendy Israelite**, for designing our wonderful cover and to **Maureen Schaab**, who made WCA WORDS into an online journal. Thank you to WCA President **Patti Boochever**, who was most generous with her time to help make this project a reality.

Welcome to the sixth edition of WCA WORDS. Please consider sending us one of your writing pieces to publish next time. Thanks so much to the WCA members who have contributed to this literary journal. All of the members of the WCA WORDS committee and I'm sure the writers, would appreciate any feedback we can get. Any suggestions are welcome.

Iris Shur

## CONTENTS\*

Why Write?	Dr. Sylvie Heyman
A New Day	Linda Denning
The Bridge	Barbara Lafer
How I Learned Not to Cook	Jackie Sallade

### THE WCA WRITING GROUP SUBMISSIONS

If I Had a Crystal Ball	Louise Orkin
If I Had a Crystal Ball	Jean Erlbaum
If I Had a Crystal Ball	Sara Drogin
If I Had a Crystal Ball	Iris Shur
A Character in Search of Someone or Something	Marilyn Storch
What a Surprise!	Elaine Chase
Guidelines	

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## Why Write?

By Dr. Sylvie Heyman\*

"You write with an accent" the editor of *Critical Care Nurse*, the journal I had submitted my article to a few months ago, told me over the phone.

I was speechless.

I was embarrassed.

I hadn't expected to hear from her, certainly not that soon. In fact, I hadn't expected to hear from her at all by phone. "Thank you for submitting your manuscript. We will notify you by mail one way or another."

That was the letter I had received. Every day for the past 2 months I waited outside my townhouse for the mailman, hoping to get a letter from the publisher. He'd see me from afar and shake his head and I knew that letter had not arrived.

So when I got the phone call, I was stunned. It seemed like an eternity before she went on to say, "It needs some editing, which we will do, but we will accept it".

And that was the beginning of my writing endeavor to contribute professional technical information to fellow nurses. I went on to publish in various peer-reviewed nursing journals but it never occurred to me that I was a writer and it was beyond my imagination that I would one day publish a book that had absolutely nothing to do with nursing.

That "one day" arrived many years later, after I retired from a long career in health care that spanned over a period of more than 40 years. But even after I published my first book, a self-help book about habits, I still didn't identify myself as an author. That came later.

*Make it a HABIT! Creating Health and Happiness for your Body, Mind, and Spirit* was an offshoot of my health care career. I was, and still am, a health coach for people who want to lose weight and be healthier.

When I first moved to New York City I needed to find a way to obtain more clients so I could keep my business going. I approached a local library to see if I could give a talk about obesity and its huge negative impact on health. In spite of my credentials as an RN, a Chiropractor, and a Licensed Acupuncturist, I was ignored. Then, I read Charles Duhigg's book: *The Power of Habits* and I was immediately smitten by it. What if I write a book about habits from a health care perspective, I thought. A book would provide that extra credibility I needed to get into that library. So that's what I did. What I didn't anticipate is, rather than providing a tool to enhance my health coaching career, it opened the door to the agony and the ecstasy of being an author.

Don't get me wrong. I loved all my professions in health care even when the industry became a puppet to the insurance business. But something transpired when I held my published book in my hands. It was like someone had torn into my soul and extracted the writer in me, causing it to bloom.

I still didn't feel like a writer, whatever that's supposed to feel. But I knew that it had changed me or perhaps a better word is that it transformed me. I never took my book to the library to pitch for another chance at giving a talk about obesity and health. I was on a different path at the tender age of 79.

Nothing beats saving a life and I was privileged to have done so even though nurses rarely receive recognition for such godly blessings. That was G-D working through me. I did not need recognition, accolades, or rewards. I was grateful for the privilege.

Publishing a book is another story. I needed all that plus more, like a marketing degree or enough money to invest in someone who had a marketing degree.

I considered traditional publishing, but at my age it didn't make sense knowing that it could take years of submission and rejections until the day it might be accepted. I knew that day would come but wasn't willing to wait that long.

I published that book and a subsequent one, a memoir, which was well received and tremendously rewarding.

I now do feel like a writer and I'm working on my third book. Perhaps I was a late bloomer or maybe G-D just decided that's the way things should develop.

Author of:

- *Make it a Habit : Creating Health and Happiness for your Body, Mind and Spirit*
- *Beyond the Holocaust: An Immigrant's Search for Identity*

By Linda Denning

Good morning, Dread

I didn't expect to see you so early

Did you spend the night lurking,

Waiting to terrorize me?

Where do you come from and what are you doing here?

If you came to steal my hope, you almost succeeded

There wasn't much left, but I'm stocking up again

If you came to steal my joy,

You would have to capture the yellow butterfly flitting in my garden

And the blooming lipstick tree whose pink blossoms cascade over the  
concrete bench,

creating a private hideaway

and the now wild orchids that burst into white or fiery orange blooms  
unexpectedly

and the children and grandchildren whose lights glow and reflect from their  
multiple facets

and my love when he's playful,

and family and friends who offer laughter and support and model lives  
well-lived.

If you have come to steal, take my perfectionism, my shoulds, oughts, and  
have tos, my pessimism and worry

Here – I'll package them up for you! They're all yours!!

After all, it's a new day



The sun is up  
I can count on that  
I am putting one foot in front of the other, moving forward  
Seeking beauty, focusing on the good,  
Knowing this day is fleeting and I best make the most of it,  
So, Dread, you can come around but you will not conquer me,  
not now, not ever!

## THE BRIDGE

By Barbara Lafer

Since I had never before been across the bridge, I hesitated, took a deep breath and stepped firmly onto the wooden boards. This foot bridge was the border between my town, Hewlett, and the next, Gibson, on Long Island. I was nervous, but excited because I was going to see my new friend Valerie from second grade. She had invited me to come play with her after school. She said she lived just on the other side of the bridge and Mom let me go because it was so close.

As I got to the middle of the bridge, a tall boy approached frowning, walking fast. "Go back" he shouted. "Go back where you belong!"

I froze, then turned around and ran home. I burst into tears in my mother's arms.

"What happened?" asked my 17-year-old brother who came running when he heard my cries. I told my story between sobs and shivers. My mother and brother glanced at each other.

"Don't worry," mother said "You did nothing wrong. It's just that Jews can't live in Gibson". My brother paced back and forth. "What did he look like?" he asked angrily. I said that he was tall, had blond hair and was mean looking. With that he stomped out and headed for the bridge. He was back in one-half hour. "He won't bother you again" he said.

The following week, Valerie invited me to come play again. She said that she and her mother would keep an eye out for me. When they could see me on the bridge, they would come out and escort me to their house. That eased my worries a lot and reassured my mother that I would be safe. On the play day, I approached the bridge, heart pounding, turning my head from side to side searching for that mean boy. He never appeared. I got halfway across the bridge and saw Valerie waving her arms at me. I made it!

I continued to cross that bridge to visit my friend. She came over to play at my house also. It seems that Valerie and I built a bridge of our own.

## How I Learned Not to Cook

By Jackie Sallade

This is a subset of a much bigger story. My mom was a Jewish diva child prodigy pianist in Russia during the Russian Revolution. She and her grandparents, mother and three uncles had to get out of Russia quickly. They left wealth behind and stuffed jewels and papers into my mother's little panties and drove their big Mercedes sedan all the way to Berlin.

There, the uncles set up their business as diamond brokers and my great-grandparents, mother and her young mother had a maid and a cook. She grew up believing that that she was somehow too special to cook or clean. She studied piano at conservatory from a young age and did well in school.

Fast forward to Nazi times. By then, the grandparents had passed. The new stepfather left and the uncles had emigrated to New York. Again, my mother and her mother left wealth behind and fled to relatives in Belgium and then France, staying ahead of the Nazis. She still didn't cook. Her aunts' maids and hired help did it. In 1942, my mother and grandmother boarded a boat in Nice to New York. She met a beau on that boat, who later became her husband and my Dad.

In the US, they had a small apartment and no servants. They went to delis. But when she married my Dad, she figured out how to make some chicken with a ketchup topping, a roast, and fish sticks.

Her mother, my grandmother, visited us in Philadelphia where we moved. She cooked such awful things as tough liver, making sure I ate every disgusting bite, one piece in honor of every relative we had, when I was three. When we had moved from Philadelphia to York, PA, I showed grandma just what I thought of the liver by giving her a piece of chewed and spit-out-liver in a napkin, as if it were a gift. Unfortunately, she died a week later so I never had a chance to apologize

By that time, my mother had a routine of serving steak, peas and a baked potato every night for dinner. So, when she went to New York and left me alone with my Dad for over three weeks to help one of her ailing uncles,

every day after school, I made steak (7 min on broil for each side), canned peas and a baked potato. Sadly, when I needed to bake cookies for my Brownie troop, she gave me store brand name cookies to hand in, so humiliating!

After elementary school, our meal switched to the chicken topped with ketchup, cauliflower (frozen), and a baked potato. No one seemed to notice or care when I quit drinking milk and substituted diet soda instead. We ate out a lot. Mom always took ketchup packets home and even meat wrapped in napkins and stuffed into her purse from buffets. (A leftover of living through war?)

As an adult, that has been my signature dish but I add lots of spices and marinate and bake well and it's actually good. That said, I rarely cook. My son grew up getting tired of chicken sticks, pizza bites and take-out, so he learned to cook well at an early age. My husband got used to sandwiches.

Eventually, after my father died, my mother was an old lady. On the verge of dementia, she stuffed her purse with restaurant food. In the back of my car, I smelled it and saw her eating fish from her purse. When I asked whether she was defying my request not to dirty the car with her messy eating, she said, "I'm not!"

By the time her dementia progressed, she couldn't swallow enough to eat much solid food and my husband and I brought her to our house, hired an aide, and fed her milk shakes.

So, now we're old, too. We eat out a lot.

## The WCA Creative Writing Group

The WCA Creative Writing Group meets once a month. We had our first in person meeting in February, 2022. after many meetings over the past two years on zoom. In this particular group we write on the spot. There are usually two writing prompts per session. The following are examples of our output. Remember, we wrote these in twenty minutes!! What is fascinating is how each writer approaches the same topic in a very different manner. You can see that from the following essays titled "If I Had a Crystal Ball." The other two pieces were also written in the group for other topics.

## If I had a Crystal Ball

By Louise Orkin

If I had a crystal ball I would have known that my life was going to be upended in March of 2020 and that nothing was going to be normal for years. I would have known that even today, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, life would still be insecure and uncertain.

But what would I have done about it? Now, I'm not really a very adventurous person so I would not have packed up and moved away, and, anyway, where would I have gone? And what would I have done?

Would I have decided to ignore the dangers and just gone on with my life; going to movies, shows and concerts, taking trips, meeting friends in groups? Would I have avoided the 3 Cs: closed spaces, crowded places and close contact settings? That's a fantasy! Nothing was open, no one would have joined me and I would probably been shunned by all and sundry—at least by those I cared about and admired.

Having a crystal ball, it appears, would not have helped me have a more social or happier life, so what would that ball have done for me? There are some who would have seen the amazing growth of the stock market and invested madly. I might have thought of that but is having lots of money a good substitute for friends and family? For some, maybe, but I doubt it would have substituted for a full and rewarding social and artistic life. Maybe I'd have seen the solution to the Covid pandemic and told the powers that be how to end it.

Now, that would have been wonderful! A great result of having a crystal ball. It's too bad I didn't have one. I'm hoping that someone out there does.

Oh!!!! someone does! It's the Scientists who tell Americans to get vaccinated, wear masks, get booster shots and avoid crowded venues in order to get the United States to herd immunity. Why don't the anti-vaxxers listen to the solution that has been shouted from the rooftops?

Freedom? Independence? What is that worth when you're dead or your spouse or child is gone?

I don't have answers. It is beyond my pay grade. The solution to this devastating virus has been known for over a year. It is the vaccination, masks, booster shots and avoidance of the three C's. Will we ever be free of this or will we be living in the shadow of illness and death forever?

Now, having a Crystal Ball would really come in handy.

## IF I HAD A CRYSTAL BALL

By Jean Erlbaum

If I had a Crystal Ball, I would know the path of this Corona virus. I would know if we should go to the wedding in Miami next weekend, if I can start teaching in-person classes in February, if our kids can safely fly here next month. If I had a crystal ball, I would know how and when I will die, how and when my husband will die, if my daughter Libby will find a partner and have children. I would know the ups and downs of the stock market and the real estate market. Maybe with that crystal ball I could plan a little better and worry less about my family, my work, our social life and finances.

But really, I am not so sure I want to know the future. I have trained myself so thoroughly to know I can't predict or count on anything going as planned that I sort of enjoy this surrender to the ride, being ongoingly surprised by life. That does, of course, mean that I sometimes get caught off guard, unprepared, clumsy and occasionally pissy about how things play out. But I think I would trade in the stability and boredom of knowing what is going to happen for the excitement of waking up each day to the adventure that is my life.



## If I Had a Crystal Ball

By Sara Drogin

"If I had a crystal ball," Nadine said, "I'd hurl it against the wall."

"Why?" her sole friend asked.

"Why would I want to know the future? Isn't life more fun, more interesting, if it's unpredictable? Spontaneous?"

But was it? she asked herself, as she reflected on some of the impulsive decisions she'd made over her 40 years. Would a crystal ball have informed her actions and changed some of them?

There was the running away from home at age 15 in quest of freedom from her parents' stringent rules and from the cruelty of her peers. How did that play out? Not well, if she were honest, recalling the man who'd picked her up as she had tried to hitchhike her way out of town...well, best not to think about that.

Then there was her decision to take that tiny pill offered to her by the cutest boy at the bar. She woke up 24 hours later in an unfamiliar bed. She quickly buried thoughts of that experience.

Nadine turned her mind to recalling some serendipitous, positive events that she could not have anticipated, that had made her life better. Well, there was the encounter with the woman who saw her taking photographs with her cell phone from unusual angles as dusk fell on a mostly deserted urban park. That was ten years ago when she had a part-time job and a phone.

"You have a keen eye for photography," the woman had remarked. Nadine had shown her some of her photographs, which had led to drinks, conversation, and the promise of a job for a small newspaper. Nadine hadn't followed through.

Would that crystal ball have predicted her three marriages, all ill-advised she now knew, or the fact that she now subsisted on welfare checks and

the kindness of strangers?

No, Nadine reflected, it was far better that she had no inkling of how her life would unfurl.

"I'd love a crystal ball." Her friend's remark intruded on her memories. "Maybe I could see some better times ahead for me. Wouldn't that be great?"

Nadine turned her back on her friend and walked away. Magic had never been part of her life, and it never would.

## If I Had a Crystal Ball

By Iris Shur

Trudging down the narrow hallway I was glad I was wearing a mask to avoid the very pungent smells that surrounded me. The hallway was dark and the flooring was sketchy with large chunks missing here and there. I had to watch my footing carefully. "201, 203, 205," I muttered to myself. "Oh, here, 207." I knocked on the door. A silky voice from within said, "the door is open, come in." So I did.

Madame Rossini sat at a small round table with a large crystal ball sitting on top. She wore a red turban and a voluminous black robe. In fact she was the stereotypical fortune teller plucked right out of a "B" movie.

She motioned for me to sit down opposite her. The chair's cushion was ripped, the chair was flimsy and uncomfortable but sit I did.

"You are here," she said, "to find out if you will have a child." I gulped. How did she know? She continued, "You have been trying for three years with no success. OMG! Did she talk to my husband? Of course not. This was other worldly. I could barely utter the word, "yes." I was so overtaken with disbelief that she had this information.

"Let's see what we can find out," she said, as she waved her hands over the crystal ball. I leaned forward to see what she was seeing but all I saw were swirling clouds. She twisted and turned in her chair as she studied the globe. Finally she spoke, "you will have a child but he will not be your own. That will be one hundred dollars, cash only."

My whole body sagged as she put out her hand for payment with no explanation of her cryptic finding. Not my own? Adopted? Someone else's sperm? A surrogate? But she put her fingers up to her lips to indicate that no answers were forthcoming. I was left to pick up my purse from the floor, find my wallet and count out five \$20 bills. "Goodbye," she said.

I gingerly made my way back down the bleak hallway as my brain was peppered with unanswered questions. I was glad to leave the decrepit building and reach the sunlight and my car. Next to my car was a cardboard

box. Inside was a newborn baby boy. I almost fainted. A note pinned on the blue blanket said, "please take care of me."

## A Character In Search of Something or Someone

By Marilyn Storch

Thirteen year old Terry finally got his COVID two shots. He felt he could now go out and explore the world. His mother, Dora, who was thrilled for Terry told him she had a surprise for him. He would find it if he demonstrated three characteristics and not before then.

He had to:

- Be Kind
- Be Charitable
- Be Appreciative

So Terry went into his neighborhood. He thought he might find his surprise at his aunt's house, across the street. He expected a new video game system.

He knocked on Aunt Trudy's door. Do you have my gift? I want it now. I've waited two years during COVID. Give it to me!

Trudy was puzzled and sighed. "There is no surprise for you here, but I need your help. My cat, Polly, is laying on the floor and has no energy. I need to call the Vet. Can you stay with Polly and keep her company while I am gone?" Reluctantly, Terry sat down on the floor with Polly. He began stroking her soft fur and he began to sing to her. "Do you remember the kind of September..." Polly opened her gray green eyes and began a soft purr. Terry tickled Polly under her white and beige chin and Polly sat up.

Aunt Trudy returned and thanked Terry. She gave him some sweet marshmallows and some tangy lemonade, but this is not what Terry wanted. He wanted his mother's surprise. He downed his refreshment and said he had to leave.

He next went to an elderly woman's house next door. The woman had been like family and often treated Terry and his family to warm baked pies and multi-layered cakes. When he knocked on her door – he called her Aunt Mildred – there was no answer. Aunt Mildred was always at home. He was sure his mother had left the surprise with her. With no answer to knocking and ringing the doorbell, he found a man working in the yard. He told the man he was concerned for Aunt Mildred. The man made some phone calls and reached Mildred's housekeeper. The result was finding a frail but dehydrated Aunt Mildred lying on her bed. After being revived, she offered Terry a cash reward. Terry turned it down and asked her to give it to a charity. Mildred told Terry to choose the charity. He thought of his recent caring for Polly, Aunt Trudy's cat. He said he would like to give the reward to the local animal shelter. Aunt Mildred agreed and asked Terry to take the money to the shelter.

Walking slowly – and wondering what his mother's surprise would be – he arrived at the animal shelter. As he entered the lobby, he could see how busy all the employees were, shuffling one way and scurrying another. Terry was amazed they didn't run into each other.

He saw a boy about his age carrying buckets back and forth. He asked the boy what he was doing. The young boy said he worked there a few hours a week to help the staff.

When a working adult appeared, Terry approached him and presented the cash donation. He asked if they need more workers and if he would be eligible. The employee, Jose, thanked Terry and said they certainly could use some help, maybe as a volunteer first and then possibly as an after school and weekend helper.

Terry took an application home and got approval from his mother for no more than five hours a week. Terry was hired and soon was on the payroll. His job was loading dog and cat food into the proper bowls. He cleaned up after the pets and watched them in their small open area where they could play. Terry noticed a small black dog – a mutt really – who seemed scared and shy. Terry warmed up to him and found out his name was Blacky. A

relationship grew. Upon arrival at the shelter, Terry always checked in on Blacky first.

Realizing this was an animal pound and adoptions were possible, Terry asked his mom if he could adopt Blacky.

She asked "have you achieved the three goals I set out for you?"

"Were you nice?" "Yes, mom, I was nice to Aunt Trudy's cat, Polly."

"Were you charitable?" "I gave money to the animal shelter."

"Were you appreciative?" "I saw how hard the employees and volunteers worked at the animal shelter. I appreciated the animals had a place to be."

Terry's mom smiled and said "yes, Terry, you can bring Blacky home. That is your surprise. You went through all the steps I laid out for you and you, yourself created your surprise." Terry was thrilled.

Weeks later, Terry and Blacky had settled in at home. Terry still wanted the video game system. But now, he was saving the money he earned at the animal shelter and when he has saved enough, he will buy it himself.

What a surprise!

By Elaine Chase

So what do you do when it seems like all is lost? When the loneliness, the problems, the overwhelming darkness is closing in, surrounding, almost suffocating you?

I had just returned from my stepdad's hospital bed. It was clear he was very ill, unlikely to recover. It had been an intense few days. Driving into my garage, I felt the darkness closing in. Of course loss is inevitable. But that doesn't make it any easier.

Entering the lobby, I hear Greek music coming from the social room. I don't even remember that there is a party tonight, a Greek night, complete with Greek music and special food. There is no way I plan to attend.

But then a strange mood overtakes me. "What the hell?" I think. Followed by, "why not?"

I approach the organizer, exchange a couple of whispers, and ride the elevator up to my apartment.

Once there, I head to the closet, pulling out items I hadn't worn in literally years. Could I do it? Could I throw together a costume, throw caution and natural shyness to the winds, and ....

Yes, I decide. I can. And I will.

Quickly I change out of my driving clothes. Not all the pieces I pulled out of the closet still fit. (That does happen as the years pass). But I am able to improvise, to discard one piece, choose another, and put myself together somehow. Add makeup, long dangly earrings and a glitter necklace, and I am ready.

As I head back out to the elevator, I am surprised to notice I am in a totally different space. It's almost as if a stranger has taken over my body, replacing the sad, worn out being that had come into my building with a "I don't give a damn. I am going to do this" person I barely recognize.



Downstairs, people are at tables, sharing drinks and chatter. I tap on the window, see the organizer. Her face absolutely lights up with surprise and delight when she sees me in my costume. She claps to get everyone's attention, and then makes an announcement:

"Listen up, everyone. Do I have a surprise for you!"

The music is turned way up...and to the clatter of drums, the beat of middle eastern music, I sway and dance my way into the room, hips gliding side to side, arms fluid and alive, zills (yes zills) clanging....and a belly dancer is born!

That was literally 14 years ago. And my building still talks about it. The day conservative, kind-of-quiet Elaine turned into a vivid, animated and absolutely beautiful middle eastern dancer and enthralled her audience, wrapping some of them in her veils, allowing others to tuck dollar bills in her skirt. A dancer a million miles away from the weary, sad person who had entered that very same building a mere 45 minutes ago.

Yes, it was certainly a surprise. And not only for my friends and neighbors, who learned a side of me they had never met before. But also for me...who learned how much power I actually have to influence and change my experiential reality by the actions I take and the thoughts I bring to the forefront.

My stepdad died a week later. My love for him remains fully intact. I think he would have rejoiced for me in those found moments of relief and respite. As I do.

## **GUIDELINES for WCA WORDS**

### **What is WCA WORDS?**

WCA WORDS is a literary journal open to any WCA member and will be published approximately once a month. Our goal is to provide a publishing platform for members who like to write.

### **How do I submit a piece for publication?**

- Your submission must be your original work. It can be poetry, fiction, or non-fiction of 750 words or less. A submission should not be an announcement of events or book or movie reviews.
- A submission should have a title and be typed in a format (not PDF) that can be edited for spelling, punctuation, and typo corrections. We will contact you if any substantive corrections need to be made.
- Submissions are sent to Iris Shur (irisjimshur@aol.com).

### **What are the Publication Policies?**

- Proofreading and determination of appropriateness for publication will be done by a committee chaired by Iris Shur. Publication is also subject to review by the WCA Board.
- Per Jewish Federation of Greater Naples (JFGN) guidelines, "Items of controversial opinions and points of view about political issues will not be accepted for publication." Please keep your language and subject matter appropriate for the WCA audience.
  - It will be clearly stated that the opinions and viewpoints of the author do not reflect the opinions of WCA or JFGN.
  - Work that you have previously published elsewhere will be accepted, so long as you have permission to do so.
  - Writers will need to agree to a release form before the work can be published. The form will be emailed to you after receipt of your submission.
    - Although writers may submit multiple items, only one submission per member will be selected for publication in any given month.