

The Writer's Circle

By Shirley G. Webb

Eleven women sat in a private room in a library on October 26: a student, a lawyer, a teacher, a metaphysical healer, a librarian, a novelist, an environmental researcher, and a few retirees. What did these women have in common? Probably not much! Yet, they *did* have one passion that connected them – *a love of writing*.

As I took a seat, one of the members led a guided visualization to help the group tap into the sub-conscious source of creativity, move beyond blocks, overcome fears, develop insight, and simply relax. I have several books published, and I went to my first meeting with *The Writer's Circle* seeking suggestions for improvements to my current manuscript. I left with so much more.

A newly formed group, *The Writer's Circle* is a supportive community of aspiring and established writers of fiction and creative non-fiction. Karen M. Rider, a CAPA member, started *The Writer's Circle* because of the same desire I had, to get help with her work in progress. Karen described why she chose to start this group just one month before giving birth to her second child.

"Some might say I was nuts to have launched this group one month prior to my due date! I felt called to do this in ways I can't really explain. I began to see a pattern of starting projects and not finishing them; I wondered how I would ever strike a balance between non-fiction and fiction work while embracing the joys and challenges of family life (an infant, a toddler, a spouse and a dog). My intention is to surround myself with like-minded people to create a supportive network for the writing journey. I knew there must be others feeling the same way as I – and the only way to find them was to create something meaningful that we could share as writers."

The response was terrific—Karen had to turn some away or place their name on a waiting list! In fact, a second group was needed and is now meeting in Farmington.

But Karen is far from a novice writer. Her column appears in a regional magazine, *Inner Tapestry Holistic Journal*. She has other published works to her credit, but is working on several short stories and embarking on her first novel.



The Writer's Circle offers inspiration, information and instruction on all aspects of the craft. *Circle* gatherings begin with each member affirming their status as a writer and sharing a challenge or success they experienced since the last meeting. Resource sharing takes place at meetings and between meetings via the members-only blog Karen has set up.

For critiques, members e-mail their submission (1,000 – 1,500 words, 5-12 pages) a few weeks before the actual meeting date. Each member then critiques the submitted works and shares their reaction at the meeting. When members cannot attend a Critique Jam Session, a name Karen coined, they are encouraged to share their critiques with the writer via email.

Additionally, at *Circle* gatherings, writers can expect to participate in unique writing related activities. At the October meeting, a tandem writing exercise, using prompts of “scary things,” was led by a *Circle* member. And that’s another feature of this group: There isn’t one expert, but a group of experts—Karen emphasizes that each member has wisdom to bring to the writing journey, regardless of experience.

When the group participants need more in-depth support, information or instruction, they arrange workshops with established writers. Karen keeps track of the group’s needs with a “Writer’s Wish List.” To this end, Karen has created various activities for *The Circle*, including Writer’s Grand

Rounds, Critique Jam Sessions (C-JAMs), Writer’s Day/Night Out.

While writers are apt to find a writing group most anywhere, in this case, Karen is the reason why members return month after month. Karen is a skilled facilitator, drawing on an array of professional, writing and life experiences to bring individual writers together in such a way that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Her heart and her integrity are evident in the way she plans and organizes *Circle* gatherings, sets group expectations, and helps members hold one another accountable for the success of *the Circle*.

I have only attended two meetings with this group, but even if I have to

cut short my family time on weekends to attend these meeting, I will do so. I was amazed at the members’ zeal and the constructive suggestions for other members’ work. They gently and thoroughly explained what they thought would improve my manuscript.

If you are seeking encouragement toward writing goals, wisdom from experienced writers, or need constructive criticism on works-in-progress, then you should consider joining *The Writer’s Circle* or forming one in your area. For more information, contact Karen: riderkm@cox.net or 860-638-8140.

Visit Shirley G. Webb’s site at <http://www.shirleygwebb.com/home.html>