



LEAGUE OF VERMONT WRITERS, INC

# League Lines

The Newsletter of the League of Vermont Writers



ISSN 2992-9954

2024-No. 3, Special Issue

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## The 2023 Fall 500-Word Challenge

Right after Into the Words at Jerry Johnson’s great schoolhouse home, I issued a writing challenge. Those who responded may have been disappointed that I did not follow up and print the entries. I hope to rectify that now. You may remember, this was the challenge:

“Yep, we finally gathered at Jerry Johnson's beautiful home and grounds to learn more about our beloved craft, writing. SOOOOOOOOOOOOOO now let's WRITE!

I am laying down the challenge gauntlet. Please write 500 words, (not 250, 251, 300 or 1000) about the event if you attended, or about anything else you want if you were unable to attend.”

Six brave souls responded. Kudos! I share them as they were written.

## Betty Warner

### Where Was I

On August 21, 2010, I wrote these words:

“My father’s parents had five children. Tom Brokaw calls them the greatest generation. This weekend was the annual family picnic held, without fail, the third Saturday in August. My father’s remaining siblings, two sisters, were in attendance, as were his and his brothers’ widows. Five octogenarians, five generations, uncounted cousins, second cousins, husbands, wives, and significant others, all were there. While several of the family were absent, folks did come from Arizona, California, South Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Vermont, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Pictures of the newest addition, days old Cimo from southern New Mexico, were available by cell phone.”

I continued:

“Our family is a mixture of lifestyles, religions, political views, skin tones, occupations, and, yes, those so important food and drink preferences. Although we might often seem like strangers to one another, the sense that we are connected is pervasive. I am grateful.”

On August 19, 2023, I attended the reunion instead of the League of Vermont Writers “Into the Words” event. It was a difficult choice. I intended to use the LVW event to renew my commitment to this longstanding call to write. Instead, I joined the family group, smaller this year than in 2010.

The folks were from New Jersey, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts. I still need to meet the now thirteen-year-old Cimo. Four generations of siblings, cousins, second cousins, and a few old friends and neighbors joined. The youngest participant, the newest member of our family, was Clayton, my cousin's easy-going, good-natured 8-month-old grandson.

Among us was my father's one remaining sister, the last of our family's greatest generation, who, at ninety-nine, is failing. There were two octogenarians. One, the soon-to-be eighty-year-old husband of a cousin. The second, astonishingly, me.

As the eldest of my generation, I have my own memories of the caring and generosity of that greatest generation. Those aunts and uncles raised young me. At first, after my mother died following a long illness when I was barely five and my father was twenty-five, he and my grandparents cared for me. At various times, for reasons related to my general health and well-being, I became part of my aunt's and uncle's households and families. I went to live in the home of my aunt and uncle who were in the military. I left their home when they were being transferred abroad and it was clear my father would be marrying my stepmother. Back at my grandparents, worrisome chronic colds led the family to decide it would be best for me to stay at my aunt's home up the street. And off I went. I loved that big, old farmhouse full of nooks, crannies, and surprises, including many exciting people. There I stayed for a few years until I joined my father and stepmother who created their own new household after my half-brother's birth.

Those persistent deep feelings of connection to family that often seem like strangers remain. I am grateful. ~~ Betty Warner

**Linn Aspen**

### **Being**

It's a wonder, isn't it, when you find yourself in a space where your time is your own? I'm newly retired and encounter such a place more often than ever, asking myself questions such as “What tone does this morning hold and where might it lead me?” then, unabashedly, I follow this notion and do only that which resonates—what bliss!

It was on one such day that I came across Jerry Johnson's profile page on Facebook. There was an image of his farm and, clicking on it, information about some writing event or other to take place there. Instantly I knew it was a place where I would be glad to go. Where was it...? Vermont! You have got to be kidding me, only 44 minutes away?! That's practically around the corner. (Besides,

the number four in numerology signifies stability, like a square. It's stable and secure. Four and four is eight and eight stands for inner-wisdom, so this too is good. "870 Creek Road"... eight plus seven is fifteen and one and five is six. Six in numerology is about artistry and creativity. Excellent. Not that I believe in all that stuff, but you know, I'm retired, I'm allowed.

So anyway... so I contact Amy to find out more about the event and she tells me they're looking for presenters and might I be interested in doing a presentation? Well, obviously not—so, right away, I said yes. This is a habit of mine. It is such a habit (and I was not aware of this) that when I mentioned to my neighbor Janet that they were looking and I didn't wanna do it, she casually replied "So, you said yes, then." She didn't even bother to state it as a question.

Growing up I was terribly shy. I remember my grandmother telling me about a conversation she had with a young customer (she was a seamstress). The two of them got to talking and it turned out that the young woman went to the same school as me so my grandmother asked if she knew me. "Nope, not that she could think of." A lot of references went back and forth until the missus exclaimed "Oh, the quiet one!" Was that how I was seen? And more importantly, was that how I wanted to live my life? Of course not. I love connecting with people and hearing their stories. This would not do and, in short, that's why I left Sweden and came to America. Truth be told, getting on a plane, by yourself, and going to a foreign country where you don't know anyone is a wonderful way to get over any and all awkwardness in talking to strangers.

And how did the presentation go? Because of the loveliness of the land and the people attending, the trust was instant and the stories told by the participants quickly became brand new treasures. Such is life, isn't it; never about the doing, always about the being. ~~ Linn Aspen

## Celia Ryker

### Into the Words

The League of Vermont Writers got together in August at Jerry Johnson's lovely complex. I have attended many writing seminars over the years and each one leaves me feeling inspired to do more and do it better. We all write alone and sitting at my desk, knowing that there are so many of you out there doing the same thing, presses me on.

The first LVW meeting I attended, years ago, was a Writers Meet Agents seminar. I had been writing for most of my life but hadn't even begun to write a book and the League members made me feel at home; I was one of them. It was at this meeting that I heard, from two speakers, that writers who are not working with a writer's group are working at a disadvantage. I had just begun working with Joni B. Cole and The White River Writer's Group. I felt a little smug thinking that I had accidentally done something right.

Amy had asked me to be at the August LVW meeting early to help check attendees in. This gave me time to get a tour of Jerry's fabulous schoolhouse. It's better than the pictures I had seen and the classroom area has a raised stage, a great place for a speaker. The barn and sugar house were set up for our event and there was plenty of room to move around and display books. Having three buildings makes it possible to have three

speakers going at once without sound interference. Over the years I have attended many seminars and The League meetings have always been so friendly. Kudos to Jerry for having everything set up so nicely.

This was the first time I was able to attend this particular LVW seminar. Living between Michigan and Vermont left me in the wrong place each time this meeting came up. I was glad that I had timed my Vermont stay correctly to attend this year when Amy asked me to be a speaker.

My topic was Revision. Maybe I shouldn't admit it but I enjoy the revision process and I hope I shared some ideas that make it a little easier for fellow writers. Exchanging ideas after the talk, felt like a group of writing friends sitting around chatting about their craft. This is one of the things I love about the League; writers meeting, exchanging ideas and forming friendships.

The League of Vermont Writers and Joni's writing group are both responsible, in part, for the fact that I have two published books, with a third coming in 2023, and another heading for the editor.

I can't believe that I published my first book, *Walking Home: Trail Stories*, a memoir about hiking Vermont's Long Trail, at the age of seventy-one. My age may have led some to believe that I could scratch *writing a book* off of my bucket list. Now I have my first novel, *Augusta*, out there and another coming out in 2023, with three more in the works.

Thank you to the members of the League of Vermont Writers for making me feel so at home the first time I met you. ~~Celia Ryker

## Stephen Kastner

### Into the Words

In my first Into the Words session, "Creative Research: A Full-Body Approach to Writing Historical Fiction and Family History," Ellie Bryant asked us to listen and respond to our heart by writing about it:

"Inside outside the skin sack, the envelope, which contains a colony of mutual dependency fuel by the steady and vital beat. Sometimes, when I press my ear to the pillow I can hear it. So loud I have to turn my head to silence the distraction."

She asked us if we listen to music while we write. Of course, anything with song lyrics was considered a distraction by most participants, and I mentioned that I always listen to classical music as I work on writing a historical novel and screenplay about my Quaker ancestor Thomas Maule. He was persecuted during the Puritan trials for defending the wise women of Salem accused of witchcraft in 1692. Not only did Ellie inspire me to persevere in my effort, but she guided me to consider immersing myself deeper into the 17th Century by listening to the music of the times.

I never considered the value of sound in the writing of this story. So, I started digging, doing the research. One might assume the Puritans didn't approve of enjoying music. Wrong!

I discovered a controversy among historians, several of whom argued that English Puritans approved of secular social music and thus the Massachusetts Bay Colonists would too. In an article (<https://www.colonialsociety.org/node/2024>) by Barbara Lambert, published by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, she says, "Their only real objection was to elaborate church music which included the use of instruments. They felt it distracted the congregation from the religious content of the service and of the psalms."

Now, I listen to a collection of more than 250 pieces of 17th and 18th Century American Colonial Music on Spotify while I write. This alone would make the day worth attending, but there was more.

In Linn Aspen's "How to Conjure up the Muse by Accessing Your Subconscious Mind and Muse," she asked everyone to name their favorite season, then write about it:

"He's coming in slow study steps, tainting the green with blood, a few drops here, a splash there, slowly breathing out a mist of warning that all this will soon pass and vanish only to leave the bony skeletal fingers, clutching for the stars. Safety beckons."

"Improvisation for Writers" with J. S. Grant was totally refreshing, a chance to get up, move about, and play with friends. She led us to conjure up a lot of laughs and surprises as only improvisation can.

"Nature Journaling Informs Craft" with Amy Braun got us outside. She gave each of us a blank notebook with unlined pages and asked us to draw something we remember from outside. Then, we were invited to go outside and find it to compare memory to reality. This session was all about stopping to pay attention to details. I continue to draw and write from nature as she counseled. ~ ~ Stephen Kastner

## Susan Winter Smith

### 500 words

How hard can that be? 500 words? How do I find the right words, the meaningful words? Always the writer's dilemma. Why is dilemma spelled that way? The English language was created by demons. Watch out for the idioms if you want your book to go international. Those commas? Really? What font to use? What is the point of Old English text? **How about Mystical Woods Script?** Well, that's 67 right there.

Seriously, there's so much for a writer to think about. How do you find your genre? How do you get your book printed? Do you self-publish? How do you market this book you just finished? Oh, you need a website, and you need to be on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and you need a blog. Ai, ai, ai. I'm mind-boggled already.

Sometimes you just have to jump right into that ice cold Vermont mountain stream and see where it takes you.

I am a Vermonter. I was born near Boston only because my parents hadn't yet realized that they belonged in Vermont where all their ancestors were from. Good grief, my people were some of the original Cabot families. Our blood runs with milk and maple, not clam chowder.

Of course they soon got a home in Vermont where they belonged, and where I was blessed to grow up fishing in the pond, swimming in the brook and swinging on the trapeze in the hay loft. I managed to break my leg sliding, survive appendicitis and being a polio pioneer. There is no greater blessing for a child than to grow up in Vermont. Vermont grows in your heart and soul and you know it is home.

However, I met my husband at UVM, was lured away, becoming exiled to CT for marrying a flatlander. We had three awesome kids, two grandkids, and took in a few strays. We lived by Vermont hospitality. If someone shows up for dinner, you just *scooch on over*. (also scoot or scootch).

Now I've been here 53 years with the same Physics teacher husband, who is known as Mr. Fixit, and is cerebral where I am emotional, but it's not a bad balance. (360 words and counting), People who know me know that Vermont is my home and always will be.

I've been a member of LVW for a few years, maybe 10, not always keeping up. Between aging (now 76), medical issues, covid shutdowns and family craziness, I'm just now getting back to visiting Vermont family more often and writing a book of Vermont Short Stories. I have self-published two Vermont *Cozy Mysteries*, which did alright in Vermont, but now I know that the mystery is not my genre (too easy to solve).

I self-published two children's books, two poetry books and a humor book, *Senior Frenzy*, and do book talks at Senior Centers.

I still take writing and editing classes at our community college, have found an exceptional teacher and have recently had several of my newer poems published.

~~Susan Winter Smith

## Jerry Johnson

### The Witness Tree

My friend Ron Bellefeuille attended the INTO THE WORDS conference at my schoolhouse farm in August. One of the oldest and biggest sugar maples in North America is on Ron's property in the Northeast Kingdom. Twenty years ago, I roughly determined the tree's age. Its circumference near its base was 18 – 19 feet. I found a formula to determine the tree's age, based on its species and diameter. Diameter = circumference / pi. The tree's age at that time was somewhere between 330 and 360 years.

That meant that this particular maple was a baby tree between 1650 and 1680. Vermont joined the Union in 1791 as the fourteenth state. This proud maple assuredly lived through and witnessed a lot of history. I was sure this maple had a few stories buried under its thick layer of bark. I wrote "The Witness" to pay homage to this beautiful sugar maple. The poem appears in my *Up the Creek Without a Saddle* book.

During the INTO THE WORDS conference, Ron told me his majestic maple is not doing well. He said it will be cut down this summer or fall. When that happens, he'll let me know. Another poem may come forth.

#### The Witness

O, majestic sugar maple,  
what have you seen throughout your lifetime?  
You have lived through fifteen score or more years  
here in the Kingdom where rivers flow north.  
Immobile you stand on your footing,  
your monolithic roots run haphazardly in all directions,  
your gigantic branches stretch upward to the heavens—  
a witness you have been to a world going by.

What have you been privy too?  
Are your secrets hidden just beneath  
the surface of your thick, gnarly bark,  
or are they buried deep inside,  
bonded to each of your growth rings?

Perhaps ...  
a million tears have been shed  
under your branches

and your comforting canopy of green  
has dried those tears.

Perhaps ...

you held a tree house in your limbs,  
kids in knickerbockers climbed all over you,  
a swing hung from a mammoth branch.

Perhaps ...

shaded by your crown,  
lovers made love on a blanket  
and carved their initials into your bark.  
Perhaps a young soldier and his bride  
made their wedding vows under you.

Perhaps ...

that young soldier was a Green Mountain Boy  
who lost his life in battle,  
leaving his bride to weep under you.

Perhaps ...

you provided cover for deer and catamounts,  
shade for cows and horses,  
a home for a robin or bluebird,  
a refuge for an eagle or hawk.

Perhaps ...

you survived a bolt of lightning,  
a hurricane or tempestuous twister,  
the weight of a snow-dumping winter storm,  
a time of drought.

Perhaps ...

a young lady lay on one of your huge limbs  
as she read *Little Women*.  
Perhaps a young poet positioned himself  
into a crooked crotch and penned his first poem  
and read it aloud to milady.

O, august sugar maple,  
you have so many tales buried beneath  
that thick layer of bark.  
Might I tap into you during the sugaring season  
to let your stories flow freely  
into my story-gathering bucket?

Perhaps, just perhaps, a poem will percolate  
through the layers of my mind  
to be penned on paper—  
a poem I can share with others ...

And then, O dear maple,  
you will rest in peace when your time comes,  
assured and content that your story was told.  
~~ Jerry Johnson

## Gail Wind – Sample 500

I wanted to do a sample 500 words. Having a teaching background, I did a ‘tongue-in-cheek’ piece that I imagine we have all had to do one time or another, most likely in fifth or sixth grade.

### What I Did on My Summer Vacation

I had a mixed vacation. Some of it was very interesting. Some was fun. Some was awful. I don’t think I’d like to repeat this summer next year, well maybe parts of it, but I’m not really sure.

I gardened a lot. I tell people, somewhat jokingly that I have 500 square feet of raised beds so I have an excuse to sit in the garden and read and eat fresh ripe cherry tomatoes off the vine. I do read in the garden, not as much this year because of the rain and because black flies and mosquitos think I am their personal family buffet. Maybe I should put a little screened gazebo next to the garden next year.

I started eviction papers for a long-time (long-time-no-pay) tenant of mine. This is not a fun experience. It stole four of my writing mornings just to understand the process and prepare the paperwork. He is a pretty large person and has been known to have a temper. My next tenant will be over sixty-five!

I missed a wedding I wanted to attend. The reasons are too numerous to list; suffice it to say, “Bummer.” But I am looking forward to the wedding of my grandson in Illinois this fall. This is a ‘come-hell-or-high-water’ commitment. I have my potions, wading boots and ticket ready.

I lost another dear friend, very unexpectedly. This is never a good part of anyone’s summer. Covid took its rotten toll on my circle of friends and family. I was hoping for a breather. Nyet! But we soldier on. As an elderly gent in the line behind me in the grocery store said, “Any day you wake up on this side of the dirt is a chance to have a good day.”

My summer brought me some good stuff too. My garden, being of the raised- bed variety, is doing fairly well. As usual, some surprises – tons of Swiss Chard. No carrots? But the garden is very photo-worthy this year.

A sister-in-law sent me two excellent books. *Where the Crawdads Sing* is now on my favorites shelf. The other book, *One Italian Summer* was my garden read and it ‘took me away from it all’ for a bit.

I read (again) Stephen King’s book *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* to prepare for Shawn Anderson’s book discussion group, (happening tomorrow night 6:00 pm)

At the LVW summer event, Into the Words I learned a lot. First, my flashback novel, *Abigail’s ETA* isn’t breaking any rules. Second, the first page of my novel *The Missing Mile* needs revision. Third, I can’t be discouraged just because I have thirty-two rejections. I really need to pin down the genre for *Mile*. 2016 meets 1816 – but no one falls in love across the ages. They just ‘meet and have a mystery to solve.

The day, the weather, the friends and speakers at Into the Words were all top-notch. Ultimately, a good summer. ~~Gail Wind

## Submit to this Newsletter

### LVW Encourages Its Friends and Members To Submit Articles for The League Lines.

Articles should be:

- Less than 1000 words please.
- Well edited! Ask a friend or two to proofread for you.
- Pertinent to the craft of writing, i.e., book reviews, writing event reviews, recaps of LVW events, publication credits, speaking engagements – past or upcoming.
- Word documents please. (This helps in formatting for the newsletter)
- LVW particularly invites its members to reviews books published by other members.



Reviewing one another's books is one of the best ways to support each other! Please send any submissions to Gail Wind at [gailinvermont@outlook.com](mailto:gailinvermont@outlook.com). Subject: "League Lines"

## Contribute to the LVW Community

### Editor's note: League of Vermont Writers is alive and well.

HOWEVER, the League is nothing if not a social creature, and so we have been sponsoring more in-person events. Some have asked for them to be on Zoom, or hybrid and we are looking into it, but that takes personnel to pull off. We are short on volunteers.

Our open mic nights and book club evenings are still on Zoom. To keep our 95-year-old organization heading to its Diamond Anniversary in 5 short years, we need your help.

- ♥ [Read the League emails and League lines.](#)
- ♥ [Attend the events.](#)
- ♥ [Join the book club.](#)
- ♥ [Submit articles to the Newsletter.](#)
- ♥ [Volunteer when you can.](#)
- ♥ [Communicate with fellow members.](#)
- ♥ [Present at open mic.](#)
- ♥ [Read books published by members and send us a review. This helps authors get "noticed."](#)

#### LVW Board:

- President, Caryn Connolly
- Vice President, Jon Meyer
- Secretary, Gail E. Wind
- Treasurer, Melinda Meyer
- Immediate Past President, Amy Braun
- Board Members at Large:
  - Cindy Hill – two years left
  - Pat Goudy O'Brien- three years
  - Jeniah Johnson- two years left
  - Caryn Connolly

#### Spread the word:

Do you have a personal website or Facebook page?

→Tell your friends about the league!  
It's easy. Just copy and paste this:

Check out the League of Vermont Writers at <https://leagueofvermontwriters.org/>  
And, here's the link to our [Newsletters](#)

- Please send t League Lines questions, corrections or contribution, information about your recent publication successes, upcoming or recently past public readings or any writing awards you might receiver to [gailinvermont@outlook.com](mailto:gailinvermont@outlook.com)
- For general questions, contact the League at: [lvw@leagueofvermontwriters.org](mailto:lvw@leagueofvermontwriters.org)
- For membership questions, please contact Tommy Walz at: [twalz@aol.com](mailto:twalz@aol.com)
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- General Mail to: LVW ~ PO Box 3251 ~ Burlington, VT 05408
- Find us on the web at: [www.leagueofvermontwriters.org](http://www.leagueofvermontwriters.org)

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All donations are tax deductible.

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