WTB Monthly Meeting December 14, 2014 Jowonio School

Past President Gay Montague opened the meeting at 3:15 pm. She warmly welcomed a group of about 30 women, and especially Jennifer Jeffery, who graciously agreed to present today's program on "Intersections of Spirituality, Creativity and Poetry." Gay publically thanked the WTB program committee (Danya Wellmon, Daryl Files, and Shirley Wells) for their excellent work this year. After our Mission Statement and Safe Place Declaration were read, announcements were made:

* Gay announced the next Schmai will be January 13th at Secret Garden Korean restaurant on Erie Blvd East.
* After January 1, 2015 WTB meetings will be held at Interfaith Works, 1010 James St. We will no longer meet at Jowonio.
* Daryl Files spoke about the fifth annual Interfaith Harmony Day to be held February 8th, from 3 to 5 pm at St. Paul's Episcopal Church downtown. The theme this year is "Commonalities Within Our Diversities;" two different faith communities will pair and present something together. WTB members will be responsible for bringing refreshments; a signup sheet was available. Penny Hart is co-chairing the event.
* Jennifer Crittenden invited everyone to attend the next meeting of WTB Book Club, January 26th at 7 pm. The book is God is Not One by Stephen Prothero which discusses Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Confucianism, Yoruba Religion, Daoism, and Atheism in an insightful and readable way.
* Lisa Warnecke announced (at the end of the meeting) that Bhutanese community is sponsoring a group to support high school seniors transitioning to college or work. Those interested in mentoring or helping in other ways can attend a meeting Dec. 30, noon-1pm, at White Branch library or contact Lisa.

Gay then turned the meeting over to Shirley Wells, who introduced local poet Jennifer Jeffery and welcomed her back to WTB after being part of last April's inspirational Women's Poetry Day. Jennifer is willing to lead a WTB Poetry Writing Group which would meet once a month. Today she will talk about what she does, give us some ideas, and structure opportunities for of us to write from our own experience. After Jennifer shares some ideas about writing poetry, we will take a snack break and then participate in two writing activities.

To begin, Jennifer explained that she sees her writing as a journey--her way into poetry and spirituality. Poetry is inherently spiritual because you can't write poetry unless it comes from yourself and your faith tradition. She advised us to search the internet for poems in our faith tradition or area of interest; poets are not highly paid so a lot of wonderful poetry is free and easily accessed.

Jennifer sees two parts to writing poetry-- the craft and the mystical element. The written part is the craft---she is not focusing on that today; there are many classes one can take and books one can consult to help with writing technique. The mystical part will be today's topic--How do you find your way into writing poetry? Jennifer's recommendation is to get something down on the page first even if it is not "perfect"--poems go through many revisions before they are complete. Today, Jennifer is going to suggest some avenues into writing poetry while sharing some poems that speak to her.

1) Start with either a big concept or a small moment. Jennifer read Khalil Gibran 's "Reflection on Death" which deals with "big" concepts -- the cycle of life/death and family relationships. She also read Robert Frost's "Fire and Ice" to illustrate that it can be a little thought that starts one into a poem. She advises to write that little thought down and then play around with it to make it more metaphorical.

2) Play around with a favorite story as a way into poetry. Begin with a well known story--just change some of the details. To illustrate Jennifer shared Louise Gluck's poem "Gretel in Darkness" in which familiar imagery from "Hansel and Gretel" is transformed into a dark first person poem about death and moral regret. She also referenced the tale of La Llorona in which a woman drowns herself and her children in a river to keep them from the Conquistadores. Jennifer shared "Of Children and Wolves," a poem she is in the process of writing which transforms this to express how the killing of all wild things deeply disturbs her.

3) Listen to the world outside and incorporate the speech and rhythms you hear. Brian Turner, an Iraq War poet, listens to peoples' speech patterns and uses them in his work. One of Jennifer's favorite poems is Robert Burns' "A Red, Red Rose" because of the way he captures the rhythm of Scottish speech. Jennifer advises to ALWAYS read your poetry out loud to pick up where your rhythms are working or not working.

4) Edit your poetry with a "scalpel" rather than a "hatchet." Jennifer read "The Fish," which took poet Elizabeth Bishop 13 years to write. Jennifer noted how very precise her language is. Poetry is a way to get down the essence of what you think. A lot of emotion and thought goes into poetry.

5) Poetry is a way to help is process things. Jennifer shared parts of her poem "Blue 8/12" which helped her work through the grief she felt when her mother died 2 years ago. It is an epistolary poem (written as a series of letters) inspired by jar of her mother's homemade jam labeled "Blue 8/12" that stayed in the refrigerator; no one wanted to consume the last thing that her mother had made. "Blue 8/12" is really a prose poem and EVERYONE can write these.

6) Pick one of your favorite poems and write it out several times out to get the rhythm. Then try writing one like it on your own subject.

7) Begin by asking a question ...then answer it or reflect on it. (This came up in the sharing activity later in the meeting.)

A question was asked: How do you differentiate prose from poetry? Jennifer said it was primarily the poetic voice--the use of metaphor (you don't directly state something), the use of imagery and having a rhythm to the words.

Jennifer then introduced our first activity: a ten minute free write about "your spirituality and creativity and how they intersect. How does your creative self connect with your spiritual self?" After writing for 10 minutes, we shared what we had written with a partner before breaking for snack.

After the break we had a fifteen minute poetry writing opportunity. Jennifer provided two prompts. One was to write a poem about where you are from using your senses, cultural references, traditions using "Where I'm From" by George Ella Lyon as a prompt. The second was to explore the concept of reflection (either self-reflection or reflective surfaces) using "Back to the Moon & Stars" by Jennifer Jeffery as a prompt. After we had written for 15 minutes, there would be a voluntary "read around." Jennifer assured us, "You'll write something..trust me because I've seen this process before and it will be interesting." She was right. About a dozen women shared poems during the read around and each was unique, revealing, moving, and greeted by spontaneous appreciative applause! Jennifer closed by reminding us, "You can always learn the craft, but to access poetry you have to spiritually give it time."

Shirley Wells thanked Jennifer and invited us to be part of a WTB poetry and writing group, stressing that while Jennifer will lead this group we will all teach each other. Inspired and reassured by our experience today, many of us look forward to expressing our creativity and sharing our truths as part of this group.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Bova,

WTB Sunday Secretary