

a view from the loft

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THE
LOFT

You Never Have Nothing

By ROSANNE BANE

I went to the Brave New Workshop for improv classes because a friend told me how much fun she was having in her class. I thought it would be a good way to relax, a legitimate way to play (adults always seem to need special permission to play). I never thought I'd learn powerful lessons that would apply to my writing practice, but I did.

One of the most important lessons I learned in improv was "You never have nothing." The feeling of having nothing is something. There is always a place to start, and it's always where you are.

Recently, one of my coaching clients, Gordy, said he was bored with a piece of writing. "I just have the feeling of 'what are we doing here?' in this scene." As Gordy told me this, the frustration was evident in his voice. But the claim to boredom didn't ring true to my coach's ear. I've worked with Gordy for over a year as his manuscript has grown to more than fifty thousand words, and *bored* just wasn't an emotion that fit. Frustrated, yes, every writer gets frustrated; discovering your path through frustration is a big part of the writer's job.

But bored just wasn't right. Gordy has found a voice for the first-person narrator that is right on target. I've read the manuscript over the year it has been developing, and it's never boring. So I suggested that perhaps the emotion was accurate, but misattributed.

"What if it's not you that's bored, Gordy?" I asked him. "What if it's the narrator who's frustrated and saying, 'What are we doing here?' What would happen if you gave that emotion to your narrator?"

The following week Gordy reported that those questions turned everything around. As soon as he gave the boredom to the narrator, Gordy found renewed energy to write. And he created a scene that accurately illustrates the narrator's ennui without boring the reader.

It will work for you, too, you know. The next time you think you're too tired, bored, depressed, anxious, stressed out, "fill in the uncomfortable emotion of your



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choice" to write, don't go away. Give it away. Give the emotion to a character. Describe it fully, which you'll be able to do exceedingly well because the emotional experience is fresh in your mind. Let the character feel it and react to it, and see where that takes you.

The next time you think you haven't got a thing to write about, pick up an object at random in your office, studio, or home, or in someone else's office, studio, or home. Give that object to a character. Discover the significance of the object as you describe both it and the character's reactions to it.

The next time you can't figure out how you're going to move forward, get up and move your body. Move your arms and legs and feel and head and torso until you find a movement that somehow reflects a character or expresses an emotion. Keep doing that motion until you know what your character is doing. Describe it in the writing and follow the logical consequences of that action.

The next time you feel stuck, simply describe the place where you are. Keep writing until something grabs your attention and follow that for a while.

You may not produce sterling prose, but you will write something. Undoubtedly, you'll need to revise, but at least you've got something to revise. And something, I'm told, is always better than nothing. I wouldn't know myself because, you see, I've learned that I never have nothing.

Rosanne Bane is a creatively coach and author of *Dancing in the Dragon's Den: Rekindling the Creative Fire in Your Shadow*. Rosanne has been teaching creativity for more than fourteen years and is committed to helping others move their inspirations from dream to reality. This summer she returns to the Loft to teach two popular creative process classes, *The Writing Habit and Meditative Writing*; as well as her course titled *Improvitational Fiction*. Additionally, she and Paula Granquist will introduce and co-teach a new class called *The Writer's Workout*. Check out course descriptions and schedules in the summer catalog, or online at www.loft.org. Rosanne's Web site is www.rosannebane.com

Improvitational Fiction

A Loft summer term class
with Rosanne Bane

Thursdays, June 9 - July 28 (8 weeks), 3 - 5 pm

If you wait for inspiration to strike, you can spend a lot more time waiting than you do writing. If you drive yourself to grind out pages anyway, you may drain your creative energy and not produce the sparkle you want. This class will give you



a third alternative. In improvisational fiction, writers don't wait until they know what happens before they write, they discover what happens as they write. We will play some improv games to warm up and inspire the writing. We'll spend most of our time doing in-class writing, generating energy and ideas for both new material and stories you're already working on. You'll share some of your in-class writing, and you'll be given homework assignments to further develop what you start in class.

Other classes with Rosanne this summer include *The Writing Habit*, *Meditative Writing*, and *The Writer's Workout* (copresented with Paula Granquist). For summer complete course listings, visit www.loft.org or call 612-379-8999.

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As this issue of the View goes to press, The Loft Endowment for Writing and Literature is very close to reaching its goal. **Thank You, Everyone!**