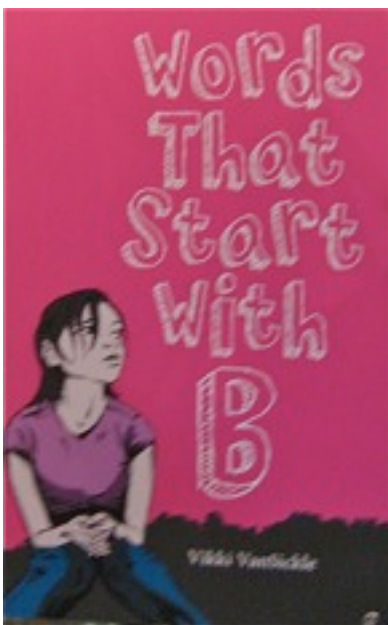


NEWSLETTER

Introducing VIKKI VANSICKLE and *Words that Start with B*



*a conversation with
former student, Vikki...*

Alison:

In your blog you talk about how when you began to write *Words...* you wanted to "write a contemporary friendship story that kids could relate to." Can you share with us how that process began and progressed? That is, was this idea really the first thought? Or was a character creeping around the perimeter of your mind? Or some visual? Or if the thought was the very first, what followed? And then...? And at what point did you begin to write? Did you start at the beginning of the story, and write in a linear way? Or write in sections? Or...? Re-writing? Did anything change or take a corner in the editing process?

Vikki:

The book began as a number of random scenes between my two main characters, Clarissa and Benji. Clarissa's voice was very clear in my mind and I wanted to give her a friend who was quite different from her in terms of personality. Benji is a composite character of a lot of kids...

con't on page 2...

NEW YEAR COURSES @ WRITERSWEBWORKSHOP.COM

The HOLIDAY MEMOIR/ FICTION workshop has proven to be a huge amount of fun...so much so, that I've decided to offer a **LIFE-WRITING** class in January. Also, **Ria Voros**, who has taught creative writing at Capilano Uni and VCC, will be offering a **POETRY** class, beginning in February (some of you have been asking...so here it is!)

And a new pay-by-the-month **TEEN WORKSHOP**...check out the description. Any questions?

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VIKKI VANSICKLE

...con't from page 1...

I have known (or still know), but I felt was not represented in children's fiction; the quiet, artistic boy who may or may not be struggling with gender roles and restrictions. I believe it's become very acceptable for girls to be 'tomboys' or take on interests and hobbies that were traditionally considered more masculine, but many boys who prefer dance, music, fashion, or drama are ostracized or targeted as odd or weird. The bullying plotline was intentional, but evolved naturally out of Benji's character and the setting, which is small town Ontario. This led to a series of scenes that became backstory to the novel, mostly consisting of dialogue.

A discussion with a friend of mine about her daughter, who refused to fill in a hand out about the female reproduction system, sparked the breast cancer story line. I was fascinated that an otherwise mature, smart, adjusted kid would choose to take a fail rather than write the word 'fallopian' or 'breast' because she was embarrassed. It felt like the sort of thing my character Clarissa would do. Then I wondered, what happens to that kid if her parent develops breast cancer? All of a sudden the stakes went way up and everything fell into place character/plot wise and I was off to the races!

Eventually I had enough scenes and characters that I realized I had the beginnings of a plot, so I reordered the scenes, looked for themes, reoccurring motifs or issues, and started to fill in the plot holes as I came across them. I didn't write from an outline or in chronological order. Instead, I wrote scenes as they came to me and went back and created scenes that lead up to them or resolved them later in the book.

In this way the process feels fresh and exciting and I never felt stalled.

I generally revise as I go. A friend of mine and I have a deal in which we send each other whatever we are working on each month, and so I have mini deadlines to work toward. Near the end of the month I will look back over what I've written, re-order it, edit here and there, and send it off for her to read. Once I feel the book is "complete," I print it off to read in hard copy and make notes to myself as I go along. If I decide to cut a scene, I will cut it and save it in a computer file called 'cut scenes.' This way I don't feel like I have 'lost' anything and I feel better knowing the scene exists somewhere in the world, if not in the world of the final book.

Alison:

Can you share something of your sources of inspiration, for character, plot elements, details...and anything surprising about this?



...con't on page 3...

**Happy Holidays to All!**

...and uh...don't forget to write...

(Note to self: reconsider offering workshops past November 15, as people get busy and disappear... somewhere...not sure where... This year, we hit on the idea of an extra 2 weeks, and up they popped!)

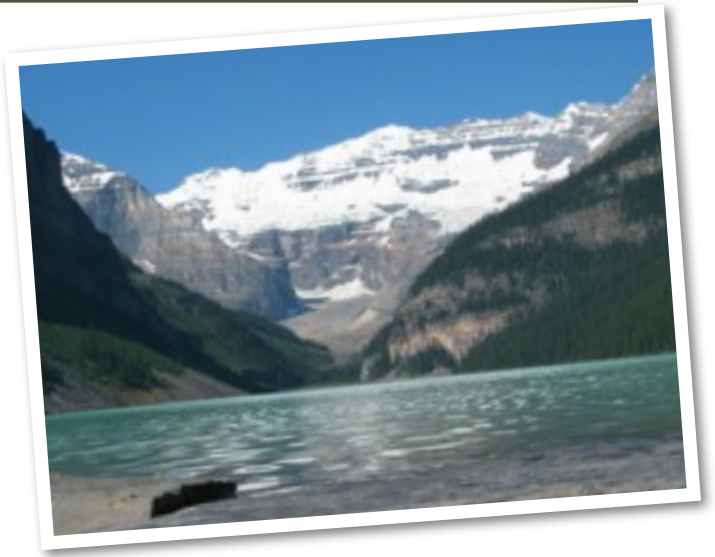
See you in the New Year!



LANDSCAPE WRITING

For years I've heard my dad complain about the photos people bring home from vacations. "Mountains," he says, "and lakes...who hasn't seen a lake? Seen one, seen 'em all, and they'll all look the same in a billion years." That's what he says. Then: "Just put a person in it; that's what a photo's about."

Recently, my folks decided it's time to take all those old, faded slides (remember those?) from the 50s and 60s, and have them reformatted to digital. And when they considered the price, they decided to toss the "landscape" photos. Surprise! **Lake Louise** looks the same in 2010 as it did in 1968. My mom doesn't. And neither do I.



...con't on page 4...

VIKKI VANSICKLE

...con't from page 2...

Vikki:

I am inspired by bits of conversation or anecdotes that come my way through eavesdropping, conversation, or stories that I've been told. I generally start from character, which I believe comes from the fact that my background is in theatre. In theatre I learned the importance of developing character, including dialect, intonation, how they stand, what they wear, etc, etc, until you feel like you can inhabit them fully. I bring this to my writing and almost always write in first person. I am just as interested in WHO tells the story, and what it means to them and their perspective of events, as to what the content of story is. I am interested in emotional authenticity and creating something that resonates with readers. At the heart of all my work is people, regardless of how fantastic or literary or stylistic the work is.

Alison:

You have an advanced degree in Children's Literature. And you review books regularly. What is the role of your studies and reading in your writing process?

Vikki:

My degree in children's literature exposed me to all sorts of trends, issues, and academic theory about children's books. All of a sudden I was reading more, and thinking critically about what I read, but at the heart of it all was a love and respect for children. Here was a whole world dedicated to creating and promoting reading material for young people during the most formative years of their lives. It made me feel like I was fighting the good fight, and doing something worthwhile. I got to witness passion in action and I wanted to be a part of that.

I also believe that you are what you read. If you want to be a writer, you must, must, must read, particularly within your genre. Reading is the best way to absorb structure, language, and other tools that can take years to learn and understand. My degree exposed me to new genres and writers, all of whom have had some effect on my own writing.

CHECK OUT VIKKI'S blog:

www.vikkivansickle.wordpress.com
and find out what she's reading!

Thanks, Vikki!

My dad, my older brother, Louise, and me, 1968



LANDSCAPE...

...con't from page 3...

Writing can be something like “landscape pictures.” That is, it can be lengthy descriptions that feel as if they are places you’ve seen before, and places that, just a bit farther down the road, you’ll see again. Or you can stop the car, get out, put your friend in the picture, put yourself in the picture, find the roaming bear—put him in the picture...find *something* that isn’t a mountain and a lake. There’s your picture, and your story. Explore, ask questions.

Then...take another look at the lake and the mountain. Do they look different now with your new element/s in the picture? How have they changed?

Early in a beginners’ art class, your teacher might hand you two pieces of card, both shaped like an L, and show you how to put these together to form a square—a square that you can adjust as a view-finder, from a very small pin-hole, to

larger. You can use this as a frame to re-view parts of your world. As a writer, you might think of this as moving from the general to the specific. Use your view-finder in your written work.

Try this, in viewing the “landscape” of your story. How much of the story is telling the reader about the mountains? Are you allowing your reader the opportunity to discover the paths by the lakeshore—the ones tucked away in the trees, the ones you can’t see in the photograph? Where is the person, the people, in the picture? Are they in the middle? off to the side? somewhere in the view-finder?

Description and descriptive language are encouraged and praised in young, school-aged writers, I’ve noticed...much to my dismay. The results are usually about Abstracts Ideas or Things. Yet children are not only able to cut to the heart of a story, they find unique and authentic ways to voice it...

Calendar

January 2011

Writing for Children

Novel Writing

*Teen Workshop - NEW

*Life-Writing - NEW

Joan Dempsey - LITERARY LIVING starts www.literaryliving.com

February 2011

*Poetry - NEW

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perhaps in part because they’ve read less, and absorbed less cliché than us oldies. I’m not saying “read less!” But am suggesting we try to see the world new. (Read writers who do the same, and absorb the ‘how’ not ‘what.’)

Behind, or among, the trees and mountains, what’s the heart of your story? (Or who needs to get their butt out of the car?)

Re-think, re-vision, your landscape. What happens when you do?

