

Connie Langhorst: Our August Featured Author

(Interview originally published by Durham Editing and E-books)

We are pleased to introduce Connie Langhorst as our Featured Author for the month of August. Connie's essay, "The Age of Boxing and Bedwetting," appeared in *Aspiring to Inspire*, an anthology of women writers that was released by Durham Editing and E-books in April 2014. Her memoir, *Finding Happy*, was published by AuthorHouse in 2006. Langhorst's works have appeared in various publications and literary journals, including *The Scarab* and *Eckerd Review*. Her essay, "Lost and Found," is slated to appear in the August issue of *Animal, A Beast of a Literary Magazine*, and an essay she wrote on teaching in a nontraditional setting is scheduled to appear in a pedagogy textbook (pending release by an international publisher in 2015).



Connie while visiting the Grand Canyon.

Connie is a military veteran and currently resides in Tierra Verde, Florida. In addition to teaching and writing, Connie works as a realtor and has served the Pinellas Realtor Organization as a blogger and feature writer. She completed her MFA in Creative Writing from the Red Earth Low-Residency Creative Writing Program at Oklahoma City University in January 2014 and earned a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing from Eckerd College in 2009. Connie has twice been invited to attend Writers in Paradise hosted by Dennis Lehane (author of *Mystic River*). She is a member of/affiliated with Anarchist Writers Group of St. Petersburg at Eckerd College, Writers in Paradise Alumni Group, WordSmitten, Binders Full of Women, and is a Red Earth MFA in Creative Writing Alumni.

We were able to catch up with Connie this past month and talk with her about her personal inspirations for writing, her memoir, and how a dog can make a good lumbar pillow.

When did you first start writing?

In junior high school, I began submitting greeting card ideas, written by hand on index

cards, to Gibson Greeting Card Company (now American Greeting). To my surprise; checks, in payment for my ideas, began arriving. For this, I was smitten (or maybe *bitten* by the writing bug).

Where did you grow up, and how did it influence your writing?

I was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. This was my home from 1955 to 2002. I was raised by my mother and maternal grandparents on the “West Side” of town, which means something to Cincinnatians.

Where do you write? Describe this area for us.

I write in my office, usually when I have time alone. I put my cellphone on mute for an hour or two (that is, after all, what voicemail is for). The space is organized. There is a big window to let my thoughts escape. I am surrounded by style books and, for inspiration, some of my favorite books. I keep the lighting subdued. To be truly inspired, however, our dog has to be “in position,” stretched out on a pillow behind my back on my desk chair. (He does not realize it, but he provides excellent lumbar support.)



Connie in her writing area holding her copy of Aspiring to Inspire.

When you are not writing, how do you spend your time?

My husband and I have the good fortune to live in a place that we refer to as “paradise found.” Tierra Verde is an island at the southernmost tip of Pinellas County, Florida. The community has a Key West vibe and is home to approximately 5,000 year-round and seasonal residents. We enjoy Tampa Bay sunrises to the east and Gulf of Mexico sunsets to the West. Tierra Verde is home to historic and pristine Ft. De Soto Park. Surrounded by white sand beaches, the park represents Mother Nature in all of her divine glory. My husband and I enjoy biking, kayaking, walking, bird watching, sunning, and sailing. We share a passion for photography, reading, and traveling. Aside from writing, I serve the

South Gulf Beaches as a Realtor with Wave Realty of Tampa Bay and am a substitute adjunct professor at St. Petersburg Collegiate High School. A military veteran, I am a member of Veterans of Southern Pinellas County and serve as a member of the board of directors for Media Heritage, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of big band era music and history.



A photo Connie took going over the Tierra Verde Bridge at sunset.

What inspires you to get out of bed each morning?

My husband, Thomas, and our shelter-adopted miniature Dachshund, Moby, tend to rally me with patronizing whines (intended to lure me out of bed to fetch breakfast). It is, however, great to wake up and see their faces. They are, in equal measure, my inspiration. Thanks to them, most days start with a laugh. *Who could ask for more?*



Thomas and Moby watching Dog TV. Connie says she doesn't know who is enjoying this more.

What are your five favorite books, and why?

Wow. I am not sure that I can answer this. This question is akin to asking a mother to pick her favorite child! I became interested in words on the page and was inspired by children's literature at an early age, so I have to start with two of Maurice Sendak's books, *Where the Wild Things Are* and *In the Night Kitchen*. I absolutely adore Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*. Essays and stories by Jamaica Kincaid, Alice Walker, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, and Barbara Kingsolver, as well as Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, are all favorites. I have a new appreciation for young adult literature, having read two stellar examples—John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (please be sure to read this book before seeing the movie) and Aryn Kyle's *The God*

of Animals. I could go on and on, across time and space and all genres, but will stop here.
Tough question to ask a writer!

What is the best writing advice you can give another writer?

I am a short story writer and essayist. There is a quote, attributed to Brian Doyle, which resonates with me. ***“Bad personal essays are about the writer. Good personal essays are about all of us.”*** This is the headspace I like to be in when I begin writing something new. This quote reminds me that the process is as much about my readers as it is about me. Yes, of course, we write for ourselves to satiate our passion for the craft. It helps to remind ourselves that we are writing for our readers, too. Let your reader utilize their mind’s eye to see things. We do not necessarily have to tell them that the car is red or a BMW, if it is the action of the car that matters. Do not slow down your writing with unnecessary details. Be mindful of sensory details—and use all of your senses in your writing (just do not overdo it).

Beyond this, I wish to offer, as advice, the suggestion that any writer who is serious about writing needs to adopt a thick-skinned attitude about the critique process. I value it so much! My friends in writing catch things that I miss and offer ideas worth exploring. As writers, we are overall, gentle (if not fragile) souls. We do not take kindly to anyone who may wish to *kill our darlings* (which is a common literary term for assassinating our characters). In regards to the critique process, I like to say... *take what you need and discard the rest*. Generally, there is a positive takeaway from every critique, something useful. Hold onto it. Mull it over. Play with it. I instruct my students, when *offering* a critique, to begin by offering the writer something positive and specific that they liked about the piece. Bottom line, we all, each of us, own our writing. We should not be so egotistical as to believe it cannot be improved upon in some way. Remember, readers are our friends. They help share the “good word” about our writing. So, be kind to them!

My last bit of advice is to... *read, read, and read!*

Tell us a little about your memoir, *Finding Happy*.

After a devastating tragedy occurred in my life, I was paralyzed by anger and depression. My then-boyfriend (now husband) suggested I should *write through it*. His suggestion was the starting point for my memoir. *Finding Happy*, set in the late 1950s and early 1960s, is a coming-of-age story. The title is a play on words. Everyone, I portend, is on a journey to find happiness. More often than not, it is right in front of us, but we are unable to see the forest for the trees, so-to-speak. In addition, it is about finding a dog, which I named “Happy.” The book is dedicated to my niece, Julie Ann Crawford, who lost her battle with cancer at the age of 21. It details the experiences of my childhood growing up in Cincinnati, Ohio, and features family photographs and local history. *Finding Happy* is a tribute, in part, to Midwestern culture and charm. The book is available online from Amazon and the publisher (www.AuthorHouse.com).



Cover for *Finding Happy*. Photo by Brad Smith

What are you working on now?

I'm working on a manuscript of stories and essays, entitled *Amborella*. Compiling it has been a journey, prompted by two polarizing life events. Getting married (for the first and, hopefully, only time) at age 50 to my husband (and best friend), Thomas, and being told, pretty much simultaneously, by my gynecologist that I was pre-menopausal. The ebb and flow of life, like the ocean tide, is unstoppable. I decided to write through the highs and lows I was experiencing. Thankfully, throughout, my husband saw me as nothing less than beautiful. I did not always see myself this way... and this writing helped empower me to do so.

The collection features personal anecdotes and commentary on aging gracefully (and with good humor), in essay form, along with short stories. Each story features a female protagonist that “blooms and grows” around her life circumstances. Individually, these characters are varied and struggle in some way. They are each beautiful in their own way, and together, as a bouquet, they are radiant. This is the way, I believe, women are in real life, too.

The title was inspired by Charles Darwin's “Abominable Mystery Theory,” which attempts to identify the world's first flowering plant. It was presumably found in New Guinea and named “Amborella.” I believe that women, at all ages of life, are beautiful. It has been fun to play with metaphor and simile with this collection. Beyond this, I am waiting to hear if my personal essay on teaching in a nontraditional environment has been accepted by an international publisher for a forthcoming pedagogical textbook, and I

continue to write, blog, and post about issues and causes that are near and dear to my heart.

Upcoming Releases

“Lost & Found.” Essay. *Animal Literary Magazine*. animalliterarymagazine.com. August 2014.

“First-Timer’s Approach to Teaching in a Non-Traditional Setting.” Essay. *Creative Composition: Inspiration and Techniques for Writing Instruction*. Co-Editors, Lori A. May and Dr. Danita Berg. Editor approved for publication in pedagogy text. Pending Publication. 2015.

You can find out more about Connie and her works at the following links:

Website: www.FindingHappy.com

Amazon: www.amazon.com/Connie-Langhorst/e/B00J5W9LP4

REMFA Program (Accomplishments): www.okcu.edu/english/redearthmfa/student-accomplishments

Smashwords: www.smashwords.com/books/search?query=langhorst%2C+connie

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ConnieLanghorst

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