INTRODUCTION

The idea for this book occurred to me years ago. One afternoon I was daydreaming. I imagined a nineteen-year-old undergraduate thinking of majoring in English, with an emphasis in creative writing. Throughout her high school years, she has written poetry and short stories, and her friends and family have encouraged her dream of becoming a writer. Yet she's also been told, over and over, that very few people ever make it as writers. If only there were a concise, comprehensive guide to creative writing, she could begin to make an informed decision about her future plans.

Should that student decide to continue on in creative writing, she would face another decision in a few years: what to do after she graduates. Should she try to freelance, or should she go straight into the working world and write on the side? What about graduate programs? What's the difference between an MFA and a PhD with a creative dissertation? (And just what *is* a "creative dissertation"?) Supposing she completed one or even both of these degrees, what would be her chances of finding a job teaching creative writing? Where does she turn?

Then I envisioned that person thirty years older, looking at creative writing from the perspective of a middle-aged adult. Say she's been working and attained success in another field, yet she's always retained her dream of being a writer. Finally, circumstances will allow her to have a few years to herself. As a businessperson, she's used to investigating an opportunity before she makes a definite commitment to it. What are the potential rewards and drawbacks? Who controls the decision-making process and what are the details of that process? What will it take to make it?

And if a student like the one I was picturing would naturally have more questions than her instructors, that doesn't mean that faculty members don't have questions themselves. For the English department chair who specializes in medieval literature in a large midwestern university, creative writing might well be an entirely different discipline for all he knows about it, yet his position as chair would require him to regularly assess the work of the creative writing faculty and, ultimately, to make a recommendation for or against tenure. A handbook of some sort would be indispensable to him, just as it would be useful for the non-English faculty and administrators involved in a tenure decision.

The creative writer herself, even (and perhaps more so) if she is very much in the thick of the scene, will want to compare her own impressions with someone else's. Over time, creative writing instructors come to take certain things for granted. We assume everyone else has pretty much the same assumptions about our discipline, and when we find that's not the case, we're forced to resee the world from a different angle. Whether this re-visioning thrills us, disturbs us, or simply reconfirms what we've held to be true, it is a necessary process for any creative writing teacher who hopes to remain current in the field.

I imagined a book, which I began calling *Keywords in Creative Writing*, that would be useful both in the classroom *and* outside it. Because of its investment in the language and ideas of composition, professors might assign *Keywords* in advanced composition courses or in pedagogy seminars for new writing teachers. Yet readers would not need to encounter the book as part of an assigned curriculum. Picking up the book would be like sitting in on a conversation that was knowledgeable but friendly to newcomers. Ultimately, therefore, *Keywords in Creative Writing* would reach out to several different audiences that might, or might not, at times over-lap. This would be a resource book; not every reader would find every entry necessary, but the book's diversity of subjects and approaches would be one of its chief strengths.

A little research uncovered the fact that I would be following on the heels of several similar books in other areas in English and academic stud-ies: Paul Heilker and Peter Vandenberg's *Keywords in Composition Studies* (1996) and Cary Nelson and Stephen Watt's *Academic Keywords* (1999). These two books, each of which owes something to Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), touch on various areas of concern to creative writers. Heilker and Vandenberg's book, for instance, provides a great deal of useful information about expository writing theory, the sort of information creative writers who teach may find useful in their classes. And Nelson and Watt's book supplies a context for life in American colleges and universities that is especially useful to those in English studies, since both Nelson and Watt are English professors. Cocooned in their own insular world, as they too often are, creative writ-ers are likely to be unaware of the history and structure of higher educa-tion in the United States.

Both of these are admirable volumes, yet it should be said that the writ-ing theory in *Keywords in Composition Studies* is meant mainly for PhDs in rhetoric and composition, and that Cary Nelson, especially, is dismissive

of the demiworld of semirespectability that most creative writers in the academy inhabit. In contrast, I imagined that *Keywords in Creative Writing* would both clarify and complicate the many issues that face American writers (and readers) of imaginative literature. Moreover, it would be written for a much wider audience, one that ranged from undergraduates who are interested in pursuing further study in creative writing to graduate students trying to locate themselves in the field to English faculty trying to situate creative writing within the larger discipline. In addition to the obvious academic audience, the book would also be useful to new writers outside the university: anyone who benefits from journals like *Writer's Digest* and *Poets and Writers Magazine* would also find *Keywords in Creative Writing* helpful in making sense of what can initially seem an overwhelming enterprise.

I puttered around with the idea for several months, then I realized what should have been obvious from the first: I couldn't do the book without turning to my friend Wendy Bishop, the supreme authority on all things creative writing, author of *Released into Language* (1988; second edition 1998), the first book to systematically use the insights of composition and rhetoric to inform the teaching of creative writing. In her usual tornadic fashion, Wendy jumped into the project, writing entries, suggesting new keywords, recommending further research. Soon, the original thirty entries I'd suggested had become sixty-one. However, as we wrote, we realized that terms such as "E-Zine" and "Hypertext" could be collapsed under a single heading, in this case, "Electronic Literature." Similarly, "Race," "Class," and "Gender" became "Identity Politics." On the other hand, some originally separate entries could more profitably be read together—"Image and Metaphor," "Style and Voice," and "Conferences, Colonies, and Residencies" became single chapters.

Our goal was to make each of the alphabetically listed entries concise and accessible (that is, relatively jargon-free), with extensive cross-referencing within the entries. Whenever we felt it was appropriate, we cited secondary sources, but the book was meant to be readable and reader-friendly, not a handbook of bland, faceless prose. Although we tried to be fair to our subjects, we made no claim to objectivity. There were times when we disagreed with one another on important issues, times when we felt the need to be outspoken advocates or critics—and rather than stifle our passion, we occasionally allowed it to rise to the surface.

In fact, we wanted to think that our voices would be recognizable to those who know them. *Keywords in Creative Writing* was not meant to

represent a definitive attempt to define and categorize a continually developing discipline; such an effort would be quixotic anyway. Instead, the book would simply be the contribution of two participants among countless others in the centuries-long conversation among those who write, read, argue about, and love literature.

And so we wrote—off more than on—for the next four years. I left one job and started another. Other projects got in the way. In the spring of 2003, we finally seemed to have zeroed in on finishing the book. I would write three more entries; Wendy had ideas for another five. We promised ourselves that we would turn the manuscript over to our long-suffering editor, Michael Spooner, by August.

Then Wendy got sick.

In an e-mail dated 3 May, she complained of "a month of cold/pseudo-sars," but she believed that she was "finally knocking it out with antibiotics." Throughout June and July, she was writing furiously; we both were, with our eyes on the deadline. Then, on August 12, her husband sent a message saying that she was in the hospital, with what turned out to be adult acute lymphoblastic leukemia. He said that the recovery rate was 90 percent.

I was stunned. Two weeks later, Wendy wrote to me. She was brave, but she admitted that there were "scary hours and energy loss and a constant need to work up the courage to fight this." She concluded by saying, "one of my first when i come back to myself projects, of course, is ours. but right now that's a distant month or two away."

In the event, though, that turned out to be an overly optimistic prediction. On November 14, I wrote her an e-mail to ask how she was doing, to let her know how much she meant to her friends. She wrote back the next day, sounding tired but still optimistic, mentioning "our project" several times. "so i'm going to revise and plug on," she wrote, "and hope we still can come out somewhere first draft keyword-ish next year. i'm lucky i had 13 years of sick leave. and whether i can do any of this changes daily. i have more tired days than good days but in three months, almost four, i can see some forward progress. i get info on radiation this week. i think i'm facing some on weeks and off weeks to get strength. the steroids are the very worst—they make me crazy and unhappy but seem to complement the treatments. and i'm tired of these body reports so i'll stop. do think of our key words, poor things." She signed her message, as always, "l, w."

A week later she died of complications caused by the leukemia.

I was lost for a while, I admit, like all her friends. *She* had always been our guidepost, and now she was gone. As far as our book together went, I

had two conflicting impulses. One of them, of course, was that I needed to finish it in Wendy's honor. That was certainly what she would have wanted. On the other hand, I wondered if it was really worth it. After all, in the face of death, what did one more academic book really mean? Shouldn't I turn my attention instead to plays and poems, to my own creative writing, instead of simply commenting on other writers' work and ideas?

I struggled to find focus, to stay on task. It took me six months to write my final two entries. It was a very un-Wendy-like performance. Nevertheless, I finally finished, in large measure out of a desire to see Wendy's intelligence and wit in print one more time. A few months later, the manuscript was returned as incomplete, but now I felt resolved to finish and I pushed on, writing another eighty-five pages, much of that material aimed at providing newcomers with the nuts-and-bolts information necessary to succeed as creative writers. I ended up writing 32 of the 43 entries, so—from page to page—the voice is more often mine than Wendy's. Yet her sense of the *mission* of creative writing remained an inspiration to me throughout the process, and *Keywords* is truly a collaborative project.

Ultimately, five main topic clusters emerged (these groupings can be found in the alternative table of contents). *Academia* covers questions of teaching. Readers will find information on graduate degrees in creative writing (both MFAs and PhDs), analyses of current and future job markets, and discussions of composition, reading and literary theory, and pedagogy as a whole. This is the section for beginning teachers seeking basic information and for their more experienced colleagues who want to refresh their memories. *Publishing* deals with everything from submitting one's work and dealing with the inevitable rejection slips to choosing the right agent and negotiating royalties and permission fees. Here one will find the nitty-gritty of creative writing as a business. *Literary Genres and Terms* contains entries on all four of the major genres—poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and drama (which is included under the heading "Scriptwriting"). This section also examines terms frequently mentioned in creative writing classes, such as "author," "image and metaphor," "postmodernism," and "style and voice." *Writing* discusses issues specific to the actual composition of a work of literature. How does one deal with writer's block and procrastination? What benefits can be derived from collaboration and writing groups? What does "creativity" really mean? Finally, *The Writing Life* looks at professional concerns that fall somewhere between teaching and publication. This grouping evaluates the relative

merits of the Associated Writing Programs; it investigates conferences and colonies, residencies and grants; and it takes a lighthearted look at the necessity of schmoozing with one's peers. Taken altogether, this material provides both an entry into and a refresher course on the field of creative writing.

Of course, a book such as *Keywords in Creative Writing* can never truly be complete. The discipline is always changing and expanding, and throughout the writing and revising of the manuscript, new articles and ideas germane to our areas of interest kept coming across our desks. Sometimes we would incorporate them into our entries; other times we would have to let them go. Yet I offer up these keywords, the "poor things," as a tribute to Wendy Bishop, whose love and knowledge of creative writing were an inspiration to me, and to so many others. This is for you, Wendy.

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