

WANTED: ONE USED MUSE

Betty Kreinik

Writers' Workshop

It isn't easy to be productive during the daily routine of housekeeping. The sounds of the washer and dryer pull attention from the task. I sit at the typewriter, apron still on, smelling a little of the dough I just made for the dinner rolls. While I kneaded, I thought of the work done last night, the writing required to end this semester. I'm apprehensive about the rolls. If the dough has been affected by my thoughts, it will never rise. Kneading usually makes feel like Mother Earth. I can connect with generations or who have pressed gently, folded, pushed heels of hands, making the dough yield. Today, I feel barren, disconnected. Last night I thought I knew exactly what I wanted to say. Doubt assails me. I am stuck on the word, "creative".

Children hear "creative" in the context of the seven days of the beginning of the world. Later, they hear about creative genius, creative minds, and creative writing. But who are these people who create? The sculptor uses wood or stone and moves the millions of molecules in them to change form. The painter must start with some medium, some material, to place on the canvas to give it form and depth. The musician sits with his instrument and picks at the notes available to him, rearranges, combines. He too, takes what has been and gives it another form. What of thought? I have at my disposal a number of words. I have accumulated numberless ideas with which I use these words. I do not create. I take all these pieces from my brain, select, combine, arrange. I am no different from the others. I do not create. There...I shall never use the phrase "creative writing".

Having disposed of that problem, I'm confronted by another. If I, like the others, cannot create, what am I doing? When, in my past, did I ever assume that I could someday write something "good"? I am no philosopher. I see the same sky, the trees bending the wind, the clouds moving through the sky. I watch the world with eyes that try to look through and around.

I pull the past along with me, sifting through the memories, examining the life I ached and loved through. I am not impressed. There is delight the faces of my children. In their sadness, I am with them, holding the good world for them when they are through with the hurts. And, I am still no

different. I love easily, anger quickly and hate with great difficulty. In times when the answers will not come, I don't look to God. Somehow, I know that the answers are in me. Perhaps, this is a key.

When I was 4 years old, I sat on the front stoop of our house in Brooklyn one day and watched a ladybug. That day, still so clear, was the day I discovered I had peripheral vision. So what? For me, the world expanded in seconds. I delighted in eye games, using this new faculty to play with my world. In my narrow, egocentric microcosm, it was simpler to change perspective. The needs were not great. I dangled from the sofa, head hanging over the side to see the room upside down. Objects could be studied from this angle and games could be made from this "fly on the ceiling" play. Perhaps it all hinges on perception. Is the grownup child still looking for something from another angle? Is this enough to make me special? I really doubt that. A small survey of disturbed people would reveal that they too, in an unacceptable way, see things from different angles. Still I won't discard perception yet.

In the days of educators' arguments for and against progressive education, I started to learn the hundreds of words which were to lead to a fascination for language. I have wonderful words at my fingertips. I can play with them, shade them, choose them purely and respectfully. Not since Poe, has anyone come up with a better word than "phantasmagoria". Unlike Poe, I'll be content to be like the painter who uses primary color. I will use the words I have to explain with vivid description and evocative phrases.

And then there is the need. Most of the world gets by without this overwhelming need to say it another way, to tell the story from another viewpoint, or to see the other side of something. Whether is therapeutic, messianic, or a try at immortality, the need is the driving force that moves writers to a commitment. They take a course or send in a poem or manuscript for publication. In doing either, the commitment is made.

Rejection from publishers can be very discouraging. Of the two approaches, the writing course the easier path. It is the declaration that the writer is ready to learn, to practice the craft, to finally hone the art. The exposure to others in the dilemma gives relief from working in a vacuum. The criticism helps the writer to see exactly where he went blind to his own work. Somewhere along the way, the literary garbage gets sifted

through. With optimism, the writer left with the bits of work to serve as a basis for better writing. If there is little salvaged, perhaps there wasn't enough to start with. So, it's on to something else. If there is enough to pursue writing, it's a long, tough way to go. There are no rewards other than self—appreciation unless the work is published. That's an area I can't fantasize about yet.

I'll take the perception and the words, add experience and people I have known, throw in feeling, and plod ahead. If that elusive thing called talent is somewhere in me, I may someday know that I can write.

Dinner rolls be damned. They were lovely and delicious and didn't reveal a thing about writing. I'm still sifting garbage.