Beyond Books Panel Presentation (Thursday, February 8, 12:10-1:25) Outline

EVENT TITLE: Beyond Books: Alternative Careers in Writing

EVENT DESCRIPTION: Many aspire to “the writer’s life”—publishing books, realizing literary fame—an often inaccessible, even exclusionary, ideal. But there is another way: a life in writing. What paths exist for those not seeking agents or haunting literary magazines but whose writing ambitions and accomplishments are just as relevant? A panel of Kansas City writers—an undergraduate, assessment writer, educator/storyteller, and print/radio journalists—discuss their unique experiences embodying a life in writing.

EVENT CATEGORY: Panel Discussions: Professional and Industry

High-Level Outline

1) Welcome & Housekeeping Announcements (1-2 minutes)
2) Opening Remarks—Moderator (2-3 minutes)
3) Introductions and 3-Minute Readings (25 minutes)
4) Moderated Q/A with Panelists, 6-10 questions time permitting (30 minutes)
5) Audience Q/A (15 minutes)

Detailed Outline:

I. Welcome and Housekeeping Announcements (1-2 minutes):

Welcome to Beyond Books: Alternative Careers in Writing. Thank you for taking time during the typical “lunch hour” to attend our presentation. No one judge anyone if you hear their belly grumbling during the next 75 minutes!

A few reminders before we begin:
• For those needing or wishing to follow along to a written text, there are a few printed copies here on the table. Or please raise your hand and one of us will bring you a copy.

• Please make sure that spaces marked for wheelchairs remain clear of chairs or other barriers.

• Please treat service animals as working animals and do not attempt to distract or pet them.

• Be aware of those with chemical sensitivities and refrain from pulling out and using scented products during the presentation.

• Please be aware that your fellow attendees may have invisible disabilities. Do not question anyone’s use of an accommodation while at the conference, including for chairs or spaces reserved for those with disabilities.

II. Opening Remarks by Moderator (2-3 minutes):

At the 2020 AWP in San Antonio, I was in the registration line and began chatting with another attendee. He asked me about my career (assessment writer), where I’d gotten my MFA (I didn’t), and how many books I’d had published (0). Perplexed, he then asked, “So why are you here?” s if he, and by extension the whole AWP conference, dismissed my kind of writing. Astounded, I pondered how the role I fill as a writer fits within society’s perception of the quote-unquote “writing life.” As many writers suffer from the imposter syndrome, you can imagine the mental exercise I went through quickly tallying some of my writing experiences. Let’s see, I won my first short story contest in 3rd grade, hmmm, I had a one-act play produced at a community college when I was in high-school. What else . . . I was a writing lab tutor in college, then I was a newspaper columnist before launching my career as an education assessment writer.

But wait, does my career really count as living the writing life? I write Reading passages and test questions all day. I recruit other writers and edit their work. I curate published literature by authors such as James Baldwin and Rick Bass. I think that counts as a writing career. Oh, and with whatever time I have left, I manage freelance gigs and all manner of creative writing projects. So yes, Mr. Narcissist, I
do have a valid writing life and my attendance at this conference is just as relevant as yours!

Book deals and literary fame are wonderful for some, and are worthwhile aspirations for others, but they aren’t necessary to be a successful and valid writer. We should celebrate the variety of ways we as writers embody a life in writing! To prove this point, I’ve pulled together a varied group of accomplished Kansas City writers who’ve inspired me over the years, each living their own unique life in writing. Together they represent careers in print and radio journalism, playwriting, storytelling, and the intersection of creative writing with visual and performing arts.

So without further ado, I will introduce each panelist, who will then share an excerpt from a recent work. After these short readings, I’ll pepper them with questions about their careers and their philosophies, then open the floor for audience questions near the end.

III. Introductions (read by Moderator) and Short Readings (25 minutes total):

- Barbara Shelly (Panelist): Barbara Shelly is a journalist, writer, and editor based in Kansas City. She has worked for newspapers in three cities, including on the Kansas City Star’s editorial board, and now contributes to multiple publications as a freelance journalist. She also works as a contract editor for independent and public media sites, such as KCUR, Kansas City’s flagship National Public Radio station.
  
  o Barb (3 minutes): My 3-minute reading will be from "The Goodbye Kids," a year-long, multimedia project that I did with KCUR. It documents students moving in and out of two classrooms during a school year as their families face instability due to housing and other issues. The work was sent into the world in multiple forms: talk shows, web stories, a 3-part audio story at the end of the school year and finally a long narrative piece, which is available at this link: https://express.adobe.com/page/iZ1M3UnRwZAnZ/
• **Br. John (Panelist):** John "Br. John" Anderson—is an award-winning Arts Educator in the practice of empowerment humor, motivational storytelling, and cultural history. As a performing artist, musician, and workshop facilitator, he has been featured at venues around the country and has written, produced, and recorded albums of historical storytelling in prose and music. He is the five-time winner of the Best of KC Fring Fest for his one-man performances at the Kansas City’s annual Fringe Festival.

  o **Br. John (3 minutes):** For my brief, sample piece, I chose an excerpt from my recent "Historical Music Showcase Theater" theme show presented for the 2023 Summer KC Fringe Fest and KC Fringe Fest Fall Encore performances, highlighting works of BIPOC artists. The show, entitled "It's Gonna Be A Lovely Day: A Tribute To The Music Of Bill Withers," tells the personal story of an inquisitive adolescent (myself) struggling with emotional and self-esteem challenges who finds inspiration and life purpose through the prolific music and songs of the award-winning singer/songwriter Bill Withers. The scene is titled: *When I Called My Mama To Tell Her The News.*

• **Brooke Palmer (Moderator):** Brooke Palmer is a career language arts assessment writer, currently for the GED, and a freelance writer. She has written music and nightlife columns, social/cultural editorials, and various articles for the *Kansas City Star, The Pitch Weekly,* the *San Antonio Current,* and others. She currently experiments in horror & supernatural fiction, podcasts, memoirs, and essays, several of which are available on her website: [www.brookepalmer-invasivethoughts.com](http://www.brookepalmer-invasivethoughts.com)

  o **Brooke (3 minutes):** I will be reading a short excerpt from my essay entitled “My Hysterectomy,” about my maternal family history with reproductive health issues, resulting in my own experience grappling with endometriosis and an eventual hysterectomy. This story has not yet been published and I’m looking for the right source that may be interested in an instructive and confessional piece about a common and yet still misunderstood women’s condition. This excerpt is available on my website at this link: [INSERT LINK]

• **Carmen Cantu (Panelist):** Carmen Cantu is a second-year undergraduate student at the Kansas City Art Institute. She was awarded a scholarship for the major/minor program with her major focus in the Creative Writing
department and her minor in Fabrics, and she is currently on the President’s List for high academic performance. While in high school, she competed in a slam poetry group, further solidifying her pursuit in writing and poetry.

- **Carmen (3 minutes):** My short reading is an excerpt taken from an Epic Poem that I was prompted to create my first semester at the Kansas City Art Institute. The poem follows the overarching theme of motherhood through my experience as my mother’s child and my own premonition of motherhood that has followed me my entire life, almost as its own entity. The entire body of work is titled “Primordial Daydreams.”

- **Lewis Duiguid (Panelist):** Lewis W. Diuguid is chair of the political action committee for the National Association for Multicultural Education and worked as a journalist for more than 39 years for *The Kansas City Star*. He is a founding member of the Kansas City Association of Black Journalists. Despite the title of this panel, he is the author of several books, the most recent published in December of 2023, entitled *Exploring Cuba: Erasing Fears Through Multicultural Education*. He is the winner of many awards, including the 2000 Missouri Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism.

- **Lewis (3 minutes):** For my short reading, I will share an excerpt from my new book, "Exploring Cuba: Erasing Fears Through Multicultural Education." In this excerpt, a nighttime walk in Havana’s tropical heat along the Paseo elicits comparisons between Cuba and the United States, specifically cultural differences in race relations and related perceptions of who is safe or unsafe on the streets at night.

### IV. Q/A with Panelists (30 minutes total):

- **Question 1 (1.5-2 minutes each):** [All—start with Lewis, then Carmen, Br. John, Barb] Describe a writing project about which you feel very proud or that fulfilled you in a strong way?

- **Question 2 (2-4 minutes):** [Barb] When/how did you choose your specific career path in writing and do you feel it differs from the idealized "writer’s life"? How does the medium of radio journalism differ from print journalism in your method of reporting and writing pieces?
• **Question 3 (2-4 minutes):** [Br. John] While creating your one-man shows for Fringe, where you take on a character of someone in history, how much of yourself do you put into the story through the character? How important is the initial writing process prior to the performance?

• **Question 4 (2-4 minutes):** [Carmen] As a Creative Writing/Fibers student at the KCAI, what are you learning about the intersection of visual art and Creative Writing? How does the art medium enhance the writing and how does the writing enhance the visual art?

• **Question 5 (2-4 minutes):** [Lewis] How do you use your professional role as a writer to enact social change or advocate for social justice?

• **Question 6 (5 minutes total):** [Open to panelists] As a writer, do you crave a "reader," real or perceived? If real, can this reader be anonymous or do you ultimately desire that interaction with the reader or to know that the reader or audience is moved in some way?

**Extra Questions, Time Permitting:**

• **Question 7 (2-4 minutes):** [Open to panelists] What is your earliest memory of discovering that your writing was effective or powerful in some way?

• **Question 8 (2-4 minutes):** [Open to panelists] How much of writing is about ideas and how much is about craft?

• **Question 9 (2-4 minutes):** [Open to panelists] How would you describe your writing life? What role(s) does writing play in your life?

• **Question 10 (2-4 minutes):** [Open to panelists] How relevant is social media to your career or work as a writer and how do you feel about that? OR How would you describe your relationship with social media as a writer?

V. **Audience Q/A (10-15 minutes)**