Announcements:

Syracuse Stage Reading
June 2nd reading: 1:00-2:00 p.m. Pete, Ginger, Bob, Andrew, Ralph, Jennifer, and Basil will be reading at Syracuse Stage prior to the 2:00 p.m. showing of An Iliad. The official check-in time for the reception prior to the reading is 12:30 p.m. If you are interested in complimentary tickets for the play for you or your family, you can go online to request those tickets: http://syracuse-stage.org/bluestar.php and fill out the form for tickets. You will need to request tickets for the June 2nd performance if you want to attend. You must request these tickets by May 28th. Readers in the series are guaranteed 7 tickets. Our group members should be able to get complimentary tickets, but make the request as early as you can. And let me know if you are having trouble getting tickets.

Cazenovia Counterpoint Reading
Our group has been invited by Phil Memmer of the Downtown Writers’ Center to give a reading as part of the Cazenovia Counterpoint Arts Festival (art music, writing) series this summer. The date would be Saturday, July 13th, most likely at 3:00. The venue is a little up in the air at this point, but it would most likely be at St. Peter’s out in Cazenovia. We would have room for around 6 readers, 5-6 minutes of material or if there are fewer readers, longer pieces can be read. Pete McShane and Ivy Kleinbart will serve as the contact persons for this reading (Eileen is going to be out of town running a race that weekend).

Today’s schedule:

10:00-10:25 Introductions, Announcements, Writing Assignments, Group Assignments
10:30-11:00 Small Group Workshop I
11:00-11:10 Break
11:10-11:40 Small Group Workshop II
11:40-12:00 Open reading time

Writing Assignments for June:

Flash Nonfiction Scene: 101 words

When writers have to limit their work to a certain word count for publication, the limitation forces an awareness of diction and syntax that might not otherwise be obvious. The writer begins to notice new possibilities for making each sentence more compact and economical. Weak language must be trimmed away and sentences rewritten.

This assignment asks you to write a scene in exactly 101 words. Think about not only getting your point across, but also which words matter most and why. Here are two examples:

NAPKINS
By Emily Luther

Applebees was busy as we ordered baskets of chicken wings. We made small talk.
The waitress brought our wings and chirped, “We’re out of napkins tonight, but you are welcome to use the restroom sink if you’d like,” and trotted off. I surveyed the scene. Customers at the bar chatted, occasionally using the bar sink to wash their wing-sauced hands. Others used the bathroom sink. I envisioned entering the poopandcrotch smelling bathroom to cleanse between wings. The thought was sickening…

I woke to morning sunshine and turned over to my husband. “How can a restaurant run out of napkins?” I asked.

PRETTY IN PURPLE
By Ivy Kleinbart

He was sleeping on his side, one hand resting on the cat’s back and one lying free. Early shapes of light reached in the rented room. When I sat on the bed’s edge to paint my toenails, he didn’t stir. Brushing on the plum-colored polish, I glanced over and was struck with the most devilish idea. It was that hand! I couldn’t help but imagine how disorienting it would be when he finally woke and, adjusting his eyes, discovered his fingernails glistening purple in cuts of sunlight. I’d be gone by then, but he’d laugh at my antics in my absence.

In just 101 words, both of these pieces manage to introduce setting, characters, dialogue, and a sense of conflict and resolution. Notice the power that’s achieved through the use of occasional short sentences, and the use of active verbs.

Perhaps the hardest part of writing a 101 word flash nonfiction piece is that you’re forced to make hard choices about which words and ideas comprise your most vital content. Obviously, you’ll have to trim unnecessary language in order to meet the requirements of the assignment, but you must also work to add language that elicits strong responses from the reader. Since you have so few words with which to produce your desired effect, you have to make every word count.

Try composing anywhere from 3-10 of these 101 word essays. Start by composing a scene that’s about 7-10 sentences in length. Then, use the “word count” feature of MS Word (under “Review”) to test how many words you’ve written, and continue to adjust the length of your piece as needed.

Women in Combat Roles

This week was the deadline for the various services to forward their plans to the pentagon indicating how they would integrate women into combat positions. Write a perspective piece explaining your view of this development and reasons for thinking as you do. If you have reservations about women serving in combat roles, what are they?