

# EVERY WRITER NEEDS A TRIBE

## *Writing In Community*

*Women Writing the West 20th Conference • October 18, 2014*

*“Writing and reading decrease our sense of isolation. They deepen and widen and expand our sense of life: they feed the soul.”*

*—Anne Lamott, Bird By Bird*

We say that writing is a solitary act, and that’s true. But we also need a tribe—whether a writer’s group, a workshop, a retreat, or just a loose association of fellow writers to help keep our voices strong and lively, creative and true.

How do you find your tribe?

Look for other writers, writing groups, workshops and opportunities for writing retreats through professional organizations like WWW, through libraries and bookstores, in writing magazines and online, through writing programs, and by asking other writers who they hang out with and where they go for community.

### **Some Types of Communities:**

- **WRITING GROUPS:** These can be informal or formal, and work best if there are some simple ground rules about sharing work. Here are the rules I use in my writing workshops:

*Be courteous*—listen to whomever is reading or speaking

*Comment constructively* and in detail (Not just “I loved it,” but “I loved it because....”)

*Do the work*—write and contribute

*Ensure privacy:* What’s talked about in the group stays there and isn’t shared outside the group, except by permission.

Remember: A writing “group” can be as small as one or two writing friends. It can also be as simple as telling another writer you’ll email her to check in periodically.

- **LISTSERVs/FACEBOOK GROUPS/TWITTER**

Look for groups that are actively talking and doing writing. And consider privacy before

sharing work. A listserv can be private enough to share work if the membership is limited; Facebook groups and Twitter feeds are better for sharing tips and knowledge, along with your good news and publications. Social media can be surprisingly warm and friendly in the right group.

Remember: Always know where your posts are going and who is reading them.

- **WORKSHOPS & CONFERENCES:** The people you meet can become the nexus of a writing community. Small-group workshops can lead to writing groups, either via email or in person.

Remember: Look for groups and people who resonate with your writing, your needs, and your style. Don't be afraid to invite people to stay in touch and join your writing community. Avoid people who don't listen, aren't respectful and take up all the air in a room. Trust your gut!

- **WRITER'S RESIDENCIES:** Programs like Jentel in Wyoming, Hedgebrook in Washington state, Mesa Refuge in California, and others that offer places to take a "time out" for a week or a month or more and focus on your work. Although the writing time itself is solitary, most programs include shared evening meals and time to get to know other residents. I've formed lasting writing friendships and connections through residency programs, a wonderful bonus added to the huge gift of uninterrupted time to write!

Finding time to write is critical. So is finding a supportive community (or communities) to nourish your writing and your voice. Good writing and tribe-finding!

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