

## ROUGH WRITERS: OUR VISION

### Who We Are

- We are committed to growth as writers.
- We encourage diverse writing styles and genres.
- We provide positive, creative, and supportive feedback.
- We accept that members may have diverse points of view on politics, religion, social, personal, and other issues.
- We respect and support each other as colleagues and friends, even though we may not always agree with each other.

### How We Work

*Sherry Eiselen* – Most of our class time is spent listening to members read their work and discussing it. Group discussion follows each reading. Our practice has always been that we first tell a reader what we like, then ask questions, and only after that make comments on how the writing could be improved, what doesn't work, etc. This model was introduced by our long-time instructor/mentor, Paula Cizmar, when the group first began, and is a major reason that we've all survived being critiqued – and even come to appreciate it.

We also encourage each other to try new ideas. With constructive feedback, many of us who began with only one writing goal have gone on to do other things as well. We hold occasional writing exercises, announce writing contests, and share writing resources and potential publishing venues.

Participation in Rough Writers takes on many forms. Reading aloud is important, but so are constructive comments and questions. Listening carefully helps us become better writers, and as we discuss the reading, we all pick up tips and grow. Over the years, we've had members who came only when they wanted to read. That doesn't meet the standard of participation that we want. We encourage feedback and our readers expect it. Everyone has their own style of complimenting writing, asking questions, or making suggestions, but we all see this as a way of supporting the group. Even when someone makes a comment and others disagree, we all learn something from the exchange. The vitality and strength of Rough Writers comes from participation of all members.

If a potential member is looking for a class with writing lessons rather than a venue for reading one's work, Rough Writers will not be their choice.

*Diane Tappey* – The secret of our success is that we are mutually indulgent of each others' idiosyncrasies.

*Paula's Philosophy* (Professional playwright Paula Cizmar was our group's instructor/mentor for many years. We continue to follow her philosophy and critique style.)

The style I bring to the Rough Writers is more affirmative than critical. Or, to be more accurate, it's just a different approach to what "critical" means. I think that "critical" means providing a writer with analysis and assessment that shows what he or she is doing right and how to grow as a writer. I believe in modeling good writing through the constant discussion of what *is* good writing and questioning writers about their intentions, what they meant to leave the reader with, and so on.

Some people think that "critical" means criticism in the judgment department. My belief is that most people stop writing if you go the judgment route, or if you try to enforce writing "rules," which are the kinds of things that are declared by hacks, but not by people who actually ply the trade. Rather, the affirmative route, as we can see in Rough Writers, causes people to take in information in a way that they can handle intellectually and emotionally ... and grow. Because otherwise, we wouldn't have writers who started off thinking they were going to do just a little bit of sketching of some thoughts and end up with novels.