

## WRITING ABOUT WRITING

by Fred Hobbs

Professional writers...novelists, poets, biographers, historians, journalists, and even creators of advertising copy often share a common affliction. Unlike hives and the “heartbreak of psoriasis”, which are unattractive and painful visible conditions of the skin, the distressing malady referred to here gets *under* the skin. It is called Writer’s Block.

Can’t think of an idea? Having trouble putting words on the paper or more likely on the computer screen? Boggled down in the process of producing the “Great American Novel”? Or, even: Drawing a blank on how tactfully to compose a “Dear John” letter? (Actually, most of us either wrote or received one of those years ago.) If you answer “yes” to any of those questions, you are suffering from Writer’s Block.

Science fiction writer and novelist Charlie Jane Anders proclaims that there is no such thing as Writer’s Block. In an article on the subject, she observes: “Treating a broad range of creative slowdowns as a single ailment just creates something monolithic and huge.” Makes a lot of sense until you notice the title of her treatise, “Ten Types of Writer’s Block and How to Overcome Them”.

Writer Anders’ suggestions are pretty basic and obvious; for example “some writers work well with an outline, some don’t.” You can read her full article on “Google” if you want more, but you’d be hard pressed to find a writer who wouldn’t agree that blocks frequently turn up on the bumpy road to creative success.

If you’re not writing a piece with a complicated plot and dozens of characters, but a much shorter missive for quick public consumption, the blocks in your way are more likely issues of time constraints and brevity. Examples: an important letter, a “breaking” news story, a print or broadcast advertisement, or a speech at an upcoming event.

When writing about writing, an intriguing question surfaces. Which manifestation of Writer’s Block is more challenging to conquer? Or, more simply put: Is it easier to write a ‘Russian Novel’ or a 100 word commercial or broadcast news story? Clearly, more *time* will be needed to create a long-winded tome. But a good case can be made that boiling down the essence of an idea into 100 words (approximately 60 seconds when read aloud) is not an easy task. This can result in a different kind of Writer’s Block, experienced under the pressures of the short time available to create and the necessarily limited time allotted to deliver the message.

Dealing with Writer’s Block is not only an occasion to practice mental gymnastics, but a physically exhausting exercise. The late Gene Amole, longtime columnist for Denver’s now-defunct *Rocky Mountain News* fretted openly about the torture involved in creating his columns, which almost always turned out to be journalistic gems.

A writer of unnamed works, Charles Bukowski, gets credit for exclaiming: “Writing about Writer’s Block is better than not writing at all.” And Don Roff is listed as the writer of this delightfully whimsical closing take on the subject: “Nothing’s a better cure for Writer’s Block than to eat ice cream right out of the carton.”