

When It's My Turn to Give a Topic

By Marilyn Reeves

Since I joined the Windsor Gardens Writers Group in September of 2009 – eleven years (or approximately 578 weeks) ago – I have written on as many topics, most of them thankfully suggested by other members. Back in the days before our in-person meetings were shut down by the Covid pandemic, I would often get a flash of an idea the moment a topic was suggested, and would start 'writing' it in my head on my walk back home from the Aspen Room. Then, after I dwelled on it for a couple more hours, I'd sit down at my computer and the real writing process would begin.

My first draft would be extremely rough – I'd simply let my ideas flow without concern about paragraph or sentence structure or the number of words I was writing. The second day, I would come back to it and start making edits. If my piece was over 600 words, the first task would be to eliminate lines and paragraphs that didn't apply directly to the topic, but tangent thoughts I had expressed during the initial writing process. Sometimes those were the lines I was most reluctant to part with, as they were often the ones I was the most pleased with, but they simply had to go. Then I would take a look at my word and sentence structure. Were some of them repetitive? Could I express what I was trying to say using fewer words?

If I wrote poetry, I'd read it aloud to myself numerous times, making sure the words flowed smoothly, trying to come up with better rhymes. I would go back to my piece again and again over the following days until I was satisfied I had said what I meant to say, using the best sounding words and phrases I could render. Then I'd simply let it rest until the following Sunday when I'd study the piece a final time before printing, so it would be ready to present at the Monday morning meeting. Once in a while I'd be truly proud of what I had written; at other times, lacking genuine inspiration, whatever I managed to come up with would simply have to do.

Now that we're sharing pieces 'virtually' and no longer meeting in person, I still go through the same basic process. But I sorely miss seeing the other members' faces and that Monday morning walk back home from the Aspen Room when I started writing my piece in my head.

But oh, how I have struggled to come up with an idea for a new topic whenever my turn rolls around! I used to be a more optimistic person, but since the pandemic, my thoughts are often sad and somewhat negative. So it's hard for me to come up with something when it's my turn to suggest a topic. It needs to be both positive and flexible – something the other writers can interpret in a variety of ways. After having written on so many topics over a span of eleven years, that's getting harder and harder for me to do.