

Featured Writer Melody Chord

Melody is a Montana native who loves pink flamingos. She had security clearance in the military while serving as a journalist, and can be found in clown makeup and a pink tutu riding a bike through the streets in the Portland Rose Festival Parade. She keeps a clown nose with her at all times, along with a stash of her favorite pink pens, just in case.

Montana Moment

Melody Chord

I feel most alive while walking
alone in gently falling snow, in the
early morning hours.

One has the illusion of being the only
person on the planet.

All is calm when the world is covered
in a layer of silence.

Snow absorbs and buffers disturbances
within and around me.

Snow allows time and space to think,
to imagine, to hope and commune
with nature.

Upon returning to the warmth of home,
cozied into my down-filled comforter
and sipping tea, I uncap my shiny
pink pen and begin to write.

Rejuvenated, inspired and freed while
dancing with the snow,

I am released, to let me be me.

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Interview with Featured Writer Melody Chord

Interviewed by a Write Around Portland volunteer

Tell me about your history as a writer.

I wrote on the school paper in Junior high and high school and college. Then I joined the military as a journalist, as a photojournalist. Then I became kind of a media person, so I wrote for the military papers and I wrote propaganda for the military and I also then got into radio and television writing with the military. So I had actually a really fun job in the military. I got to fly out in helicopters out into the field, do a story and then get flown back. So yeah, I liked my job in the military.

Then I started doing more personal writing, just for myself, when I got out of the military. I didn't go into that field, it wasn't as easy then for women to get into the field of journalistic writing or being on the radio or on television. It was pretty much dominated by men.

I was in two car accidents. And after the second car accident, I started writing poetry. Which is weird, but that's what happened. I hadn't written poetry before then at all. This is how I feel about my poetry. I feel like it's a portal. After this accident, it was like there was a portal to this other dimension that was open to me. And poems just come rushing at me and something will happen or some small thing will spark a poem and I have to sit down and write a poem right then or it just passes me by. My family has gotten used to me saying, "A poem is coming," and they'll leave me alone and I'll write out my poem. I have hundreds of poems in this bag in my house, waiting for something, I'm not really sure yet. I don't really know what to do with them.

What was your first experience like at a Write Around workshop?

I was excited about writing, because I loved to write, but I had never done anything that was so free. Because whenever I'd written in any kind of group setting, it was an educational setting, so there was always the pressure of deadlines and grades, or I was writing for a newspaper which also had deadlines.

It was just, write your stuff and then put it out. That was very different. It was very different also that you are putting it out in front of these people that over time you got to know. So like, even with this group, the first day, I wasn't honest with my first response, I pulled it back and just wrote something else, because I didn't have the trust in the room yet. I said, "I don't know these people, I can't write that." You build a trust because there are people who are confident enough to go deep and they share and you're just so moved when they read their writing. They are inspirational that it's okay to be truthful or honest or even playful and silly. You're gonna be fine. You're not gonna be judged. We all just appreciated each other's work.

It does open you up. It's a very different way of writing. Because any other group experience, you're a little bit fearful afterwards when you share because you know that someone's gonna turn around and say "Well..." That never happens. And you don't have to worry about being perfect. Perfection doesn't exist in this room. And yet, it does. Because it's not expected. It exists. I really think that, you know.

In this room we ebbed and flowed with one another. The people were very diverse and the writing was very diverse. So I could give all of myself to that person at that moment and try to really hear whatever it was they were trying to say. I learned a lot because of the differences in the writing and the differences in experience that people shared. I really respected the people's willingness to tell their truth because they were powerful truths, but also those truths helped me see the world in a different

way. And also, I was very joyful for some of them, for what they'd been through and how they'd come out the other side. I had no idea what a wonderful experience I had ahead of me. And sad that it's over. I'm so happy that I got to be a part of these people's lives for that short period of time.

How do you feel like your experiences with Write Around have effected you personally?

The impetus to write seriously in my own personal life is definitely alive.

What do you mean by seriously?

Seriously I guess. When I took a class or when I was a journalist. The assignment is what made it serious. But when it's in my own life, it was easier to write and then leave it in a notebook. And I've had so many unique experiences that I can write about and then also on top of it, the research of all these very interesting people in my family. So if I take it seriously for myself, for my own life, then I'll give my own self an assignment. So a little bit like here, where we're getting many assignments. Here's a sentence. Finish it. Or here's two sentences, pick one and finish it. Well, that's a little mini assignment and you have to have it done in five minutes. That's a short time to write something. And it's like, we succeed.

I hadn't thought about that until just now. You succeed over and over again. Because you're given these different assignments throughout the time you're here; and then, over time, as you're participating, you just keep succeeding and succeeding and there is no failure of any kind when you come to these groups, because whatever you write is good enough. Always. Always.

I never thought about that, how that is such a wonderful experience in life in general. We love to succeed. And to succeed so often. So many times within two hours. That is a gift that you get from taking these or being a part of these groups. So I'm ready to succeed some more on a personal level, but also, I want to keep having that experience of succeeding in a group.

The community is a wonderful experience. I think it holds you. We hold each other while we're in here. And so when I think of this community as I'm writing on my own somewhere else, I can also have that feeling of being held. It's odd, but I still can. Particularly with this group of people and with our facilitator, Hope. I think her name was perfect for this particular group of people. We all had Hope. Because a lot of people here had been through some stuff. And here was Hope. We created such a bond as a group.

Can you tell me about the experience of reading your work in front of a group of people?

I read my poem, which is just a simple poem about walking in the snow in Montana. But right before me, two women had read about their parents who had dementia and Alzheimers, and my father is going through that. So I was just, I was crying inside. I didn't know I was gonna be next to read, so I'm still dealing with that emotion. And I'd practiced my poem at home, to try to mark up my paper so I can read it properly, and then I hit the word "home" and I started crying. I wasn't crying about my own poetry. I was crying at the depth of the feeling that these two women had brought out with their poetry.

There were just some beautiful expressions that evening. It was a lovely evening to just be hearing these people. And I loved the variety. I'm reliving it as I'm sitting her saying it. I don't remember the exact words, but I remember the person that was speaking and how I felt as they're walking away from the podium. You think, "Thank you for that."

And how does it feel to have your work published in this anthology?

I think it's fun to send these books to my family. They see not only my work, but they see these other people's work. But I guess for myself I think of the other people that I was moved by that evening, that they're in there. So it's a gift not just of my poem, but it's a gift of these other people's lives, that they were more brave than I was.

Has your experience in Write Around workshops effected the personal writing that you do?

This one has me feeling differently about my writing. I've always been a writer and I've always been writing, but it made me feel stronger about putting my work out into the public. I thought, I could just start blogging, and putting my poems out through a blog. It came to me to be shared in the world and they're in a bag. So why not just start putting them out there. I just read this article about blogging. That I need to get my work out. And not just keep writing and writing and it's in a bag, or it's in notebooks, you know?

Yes, I do know.

In this new world that we have. We don't have to wait for someone else to publish us. But I forget that because that isn't the world that I grew up in. So I'm not really used to this new idea that "Oh, I don't have to ask permission. I can just put it out there and people can read it or not" So it did make me start rethinking getting that stuff out of the bag and into the world.