



Detroit Working Writers

## DWW Member Profile

*Cindy La Ferle has a degree in English literature with a concentration in journalism studies from Michigan State University. She worked for several years in the promotion and production departments of Gale Research, before it became Thomson Gale. Following that, she was a travel magazine editor, and a freelance arts/theater reviewer for The Metro Times, The Daily Tribune and other local papers. During the past 12 years, La Ferle was a weekly columnist for several newspapers. Now she is focusing her efforts on books and literary projects, ultimately phasing out of journalism. Visit her Web site, Cindy's Home Office [www.laferle.com](http://www.laferle.com), for more information.*

### **Why do you love being a writer?**

Writing helps me make sense of my experience, and I feel lucky that I've been able to practice it daily. Writing forces me to pay closer attention to everything around me – details and sensations; the beauty and poignancy in every moment. I also love being able to teach writing, especially memoir writing, to help others validate their own experience through the written word.

### **What writers have helped you become a better writer?**

I am an avid reader -- and I like to believe that reading impacts our writing! Anne Lamott, Madeleine L'Engle, Ernest Hemingway, Sue Monk Kidd (I love her nonfiction best), Anna Quindlen, Natalie Goldberg, Louise Erdrich, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, May Sarton, are just a few I can think of offhand. Also, I have to mention that William Zinsser, the renowned nonfiction author and writing professor, has really helped improve and simplify my writing, thanks to his landmark book, ON WRITING WELL. I recommend it to everyone who takes my writing workshops.

### **What are your top three to five tips to help writers hone their ability?**

Voraciously read the genre you want to work in. If you want to write novels and memoirs, read great novelists and memoirists. Follow the writers that appeal to you. Study what they do, how they work, and so on.

Learn to trim, edit and clean up your own work. Be crisp. A lot of editors tell me that readers have less time to read now and have incredibly short attention spans – which is a shame – but that means we writers have to be more concise than ever, if we want to get published. It used to be, for example, that magazines would publish longer features and essays, say, up to 3,000 words. But these days, they expect you to stay well under 900 words. Most newspaper columns and essays run even shorter. So you must learn to be a haiku master and quit rambling!

Give yourself permission to make mistakes and keep going. Writer's block comes from the awful need to be perfect.

### **What attributes do you think are absolutely essential for writers to have?**

First, I think it's essential for writers to have confidence in their unique view of the world. Without that, they'll never have the courage to put pen to paper. They must also have the soul of a poet – even if they don't write poetry – in order to make their ideas fly.

### **You have used your writing background in a variety of ways (teaching, journalism, etc.)...which one has been the most satisfying for you?**

The answer changes from time to time. Sometimes I most enjoy getting OUT from behind my desk and helping other people get on with their writing. Teaching really provides a wonderful balance for me in that way, because I get crabby when I live "inside my head" and work too long

on a writing project. Mostly, though, I would have to say the reward for me is when someone reads one of my essays and tells me that they share a similar emotion or experience. That's when I am reminded that writing really isn't a solitary experience. Writing connects us to other people, and that's what I really love.

**Where/how do you like to write (on a computer, longhand on tablets, with music, with snacks?)**

I write on a computer, most of the time, because it's so much easier now. But I carry notebooks with me all the time. On vacation this week, for example, I purposely didn't bring my computer, but still jotted some ideas in my notebook. When I do write longhand, which is a nice change, I like to use Cross rollerball gel pens – very smooth!

**What are your current and upcoming writing projects?**

Right now, I have to spend a lot of time marketing my new essay collection, *Writing Home*. I am amazed at how much work must go into promoting a book to keep it in the stores and of interest to new readers. In addition, I was recently invited by a publisher to submit a proposal for a new book on a midlife women's issue – so I am busy working on that, too.

*Web posted by Bethany Broadwell on Aug. 19, 2005.*