

## FIND YOURSELF

## A GOOD WRITING FRIEND

BY DANNY HEITMAN, *FORUM* EDITOR

For much of my writing work, I can depend on professional editors to tell me if I've done a decent job and give me direction if something needs improvement.

But not all of us have such an editor around when we need a second pair of eyes to review what we've written. This kind of feedback is important because writing is supposed to carry observations, stories, and ideas from one mind to another. If that first reader of our work finds it lacking, there's a good chance that other readers will find it lacking, too.

Writing often means spending time alone as we string together words for a poem, essay, story, or novel. That solitude can help us think more clearly, but it carries an occupational hazard. Over time, we can become captive to our own perspective. Getting an outside opinion is a great way to test your assumptions. An external reader might also be more alert to mistakes you've missed because you were too close to a text.

That's why I suggest that every writer have at least one writing friend. A writing friend is someone who can read a term paper before you hand it in for a grade. You'll feel better if there's a writing friend around to read an important business letter you've written. And if a writing friend reviews that make-or-break presentation you've created as an office project, you'll feel more confident that it's in good shape before your boss sees it.

A diligent writing friend can help you take your poem, play, or novel out for a spin, too, giving it the kind of test drive that will show whether what you've

written will go where you want it to go.

For starters, a writing friend should be a strong reader and a decent writer – a person skilled enough with language to provide useful insights about your work. Not all or even most of our friends will fit the bill.

Writing friends will work out best for you when they're kind but honest. Many of us have friends we love because they're tirelessly enthusiastic about everything we do, and we all need cheerleaders in our lives. But if a writing friend offers nothing but flattery, you won't grow in your work.

I'm fortunate to know other writers who can give me these kinds of insights about my work, and they sometimes ask me to return the favor by closely reviewing what they've written to offer an honest critique. To have writing friends, it's good to be a writing friend.

Writing groups in your community offer a great way to find writing friends. I work across the street from a public library that hosts about half a dozen of these writing groups – all free, and all open to anyone.

To truly benefit from a writing friend, you should be open to constructive criticism, which is how any writer learns how to be better. That's another topic I'll plan to write about soon.



university students.

*Forum* editor **DANNY HEITMAN** has written about the writing craft for numerous publications, including *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and he's taught writing to

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volunteer in numerous other civic endeavors. "She took simple pleasures in many things, including a love for the outdoors," a local obituary noted.

**ALLAN P. SHUMOFFSKY**

(University of Bridgeport), who died Oct. 17, 2022, at 79, was a lifelong learner whose early career involved working with his father and grandfather in the family business, Bamby Bakery. He later earned a degree in industrial engineering and a Master of Business Administration from University of Bridgeport, then later became a CPA. "Through his life, he exhibited the wonderful traits your organization and his university instilled in him," his wife told Phi Kappa Phi.

**DONALD THOMAS SORLIE** (North

Dakota State University) grew up on a farm, earned a degree in agricultural engineering, served in the U.S. Air Force, and spent his career in product design and development for the farm machinery industry. Sorlie, who died Oct. 30 at 91, was remembered in a local obituary as "a kindhearted and generous man."