

The KSW Student View

The most important part of the Kootenay School of Writing is its students.

Dennis Butler, a 37-year old father of two, sits at a table in the KSW's seminar room. He first came to school for sessions of the Blue Pencil Café, a one-to-one manuscript evaluation service, and this fall enrolled in a poetry course.

"The instructors are very accessible," he says. "That's important. The democracy of the school and its non-hierarchical structure appeal to me."

Butler says he took some writing courses through University of British Columbia continuing education but that they didn't suit him. "The classes were too big and the criticism was not very useful," he says.

He has taken Jeff Derksen's Testing poetry course – a follow-up to the New Poetics Colloquium. "Having a follow-up to the Colloquium is an interesting way to put on a course," Butler claims.

"The classes here help point out problems in my writing I can't see myself," he says. "I'm learning techniques and I appreciate the contact with other writers."

Susan Hammond, 37, came to the KSW from the Banff Centre in Alberta where she teaches swimming. Having taken the KSW's Short Fiction course and Directed Studies in Poetry, she says, "The KSW is really alive. Everybody enjoys the writing process and there's none of that feeling of the writer in isolation where the work is soul-wrenching drudgery."

"I first heard of the KSW from Richard Lemm, a teacher in the summer writing program in Banff," she says. Hammond, who is on a leave of absence from her job, needed a school that offered specific courses within a short time frame. "The KSW had exactly what I wanted," she says.

"I appreciate the off-the-wall nature of the place whenever I drop in," she adds.

"Students feel inspired to work. When I leave here I'll have some concrete, finished products that will have gone through all the stages from first draft to final edit," she says.

"Being at the school deepens my understanding of myself as a writer – something I might not have otherwise acknowledged," Hammond says.

But there are some shortcomings to the KSW. "I would love some sort of association with the University of British Columbia library," she says, "And maybe a word-processor rental scheme."

Noreen Howes, 28, works for *Kinesis*, a Vancouver women's magazine, and at Vancouver's Co-Op Radio. She has done KSW's Work Writing course and the Fiction Workshop.

"I like the enthusiasm of the instructors," she says. "and that they are not arrogant. But sometimes I wish they were harder on us because I miss that discipline."

Howes, who moved to Vancouver from Toronto, was in the general B.A. program at the University of Toronto.

"At KSW I feel much more relaxed, much more comfortable. I've learned the mechanics of how to write and what I need to improve," she says.

"The Work Writing course introduced a whole new concept to me," Howes says. "Working people can be writers; they don't have to go to university. A lot of what I write is about my work."

"There is a focus on writing here I don't think you'd get at a university," Howes says. "It's not competitive. At KSW people respect each other."

"And it's fun," Hammond adds. "The KSW has a feeling to it that is somewhere between giddiness and exhilaration. It would be lovely for me to be able to come back every year for three or four months." **WQ**

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