

A Note From the Guy With the Prompts by Stacy Brewster

An introduction to Write Around Portland's Spring 2011 anthology, *Moving or Still/En movimiento o quieto*

Stacy Brewster is a writer, photographer, and artist. He earned his BFA in film and television production from NYU and worked as a producer for several years before moving to Portland to focus on fiction writing. Stacy has been volunteering with Write Around Portland since 2007 and has facilitated writing workshops for burn and trauma survivors as well as adults living on low incomes and with physical or mental disabilities and our *Prompt* workshop at Powell's City of Books. He is currently at work on two novels and several short stories.



Think of a word. Write it on a blank piece of paper. Lined or unlined, it doesn't matter. Make your word stand tall. Make it look sharp. Fancy is okay but better to misspell it than to look like a show-off. Now draw an oval around your word to protect it. Remember: this is *your* word. Start here.

Take your word in its fierce little oval and draw out spokes in all directions. There's power running through those lines, an acrid taste of electricity you feel deep in your throat. You have to use this power or it will scorch your insides.

You know what comes next. On instinct, you write a new word at the end of each spoke, something related to the first but different. One by one, you add words, honoring each with a sense of adventure, of play. Surprise yourself. Write words you don't quite grasp, others borrowed from the lips of neighbors and strangers. Skim them off the surface of memories long disappeared. Keep writing.

Draw spoke after spoke, word after word in all directions until your words have filled up all the dead space. Keep going until they spill out from the first page and onto the next, until your journal is filled up and you start writing them on your desk and on your chair, on the floor beneath your feet and on every last thing, every last wall that surrounds you.

Now take a breath. Listen. On the air are whispers of doubt and shame. These will never go away. They may even grow louder, but you must choose to ignore them.

As much as you want to stop, as much as you might like to corral them back into a soft quiet space to rest, don't. The words will keep multiplying. They'll smother you in your room unless you let them out somehow. Let them race back up your arm and burrow themselves into your heart, pulsing there for a beat or two before diving out your mouth. Start speaking your words aloud. Release them. It will feel strange, but this is okay. The people sitting next to you want to hear them. We all want to hear your poem, your story and all of the tricks of life's beauty that only you can paint for us.

It may sound easy, but it never is. If you read the work in this book, you'll know that every piece, every collection of words, is a trick that has willed itself to play here with you. They've made it to the playground and words don't make it here often. For every poem in this book, there are a hundred others undreamt and unwritten, hidden away or ripped apart on their journey to us.

For many, Write Around Portland is the force field that keeps all the bad forces out long enough for the words to find their way to us. In a workshop, at a public reading and in the pages of this book, the words make it. They survive.

Take it from a guy with a few simple prompts: what starts with just one word goes far if you let it do its thing and keep it safe. Writers and readers, my fellow travelers, bear witness to the words that are within these pages. They've come a great distance, but they're not tired. They want to play. Let them.