

## Thank You by Robyn Steely

### An introduction to *Mile Marker*, Write Around Portland's Fall 2014 anthology

Robyn Steely is the Executive Director of Write Around Portland. Fourteen years ago, she was introduced to this organization at a houseparty. She met co-founder Ben Moorad there, wrote a check for \$25 and knew that she had to get involved. The following year, she trained to be a volunteer workshop facilitator. This fall, Robyn facilitated her fourteenth writing workshop in the Multnomah County jail system for men who are incarcerated there. It's the best two hours of her week.



About a year before I joined the staff of Write Around Portland, I starting running. A few months into my new exercise routine, I realized that running wasn't just about getting in shape; it had its own culture of gear, rituals and maxims. I came across one such saying: *Leave some on the road*.

Although I was a fairly new runner, those words resonated. Stop running before you are exhausted. Make your way home before your lungs are screaming and while your legs still have a little pop in them. If you keep going, if you run until you've got nothing left, then you'll be less motivated to go out and do it again the next day. Simply: Finish your run while you're still enjoying it. (For the non-runners, you can think of it as a close cousin to *leave the party while you're still having fun*.)

It's great advice, and I have decided to take it, to leave some on the road. As Write Around Portland celebrates its fifteenth anniversary, and as I close in on my tenth year as Executive Director, it's the right time for change. Soon, I'll be wrapping up and moving on. What drew me to this organization, its foundation of *respect, writing and community*, will continue. With that solid foundation, I know that Write Around Portland will grow and thrive.

Write Around Portland is about writing. But respect and community are just as important. We aren't an organization about individuals writing in isolation. We bring people together to use writing as a tool to build community. We are about people connecting—connecting by participating in our workshops, reading our anthologies, and being the audiences at our readings. Glen, a workshop participant, said it best: *Something about writing connects on a whole deeper level than just conversing with people. It's amazing*.

The people drawn to Write Around Portland are some of the kindest and most compassionate. It has been my honor and a pleasure to work with hundreds of dedicated volunteers and supporters, from workshop facilitators to interns to office volunteers to our generous donors. Precious Bugarin, Ric Van Houten and Lynne Cartwright all contributed to raise the quality of our design, printing and financial operations to be the best among non-profits, and I loved working with them.

It has been a privilege to work with an extraordinary volunteer Board of Directors, including Chairs Vic Trelawny, Kim Carlson and Kari Easton, who provided sound, thoughtful leadership and support. Miriam Sontz, who wrote the other introduction to this book, has been a mentor. She is a model leader, and I am grateful for her generosity and wise counsel.

Throughout my tenure, people have told me Write Around Portland has an amazing staff, the most capable and organized team around. I wholeheartedly agree. Many thanks to my creative and hardworking colleagues over the years: Dawn Thompson, Sara Guest, Thomas Cordova, Devin DiBernardo, Elizebett Eslinger, Brian Benson, Ann-Derrick Gaillot and Jenny Chu. Working with you has been a joy.

And special thanks to Beth White, our Development Director, whose smarts and skills are formidable. I can't imagine spending ten years working this closely with—and four feet away from—anyone else in the world. Write Around Portland certainly wouldn't be the thriving organization we are today without Beth's exceptional talent and big heart.

I extend my deep gratitude to Liza Halley and Ben Moorad who co-founded Write Around Portland in 1999 to ensure that everyone, especially those who are living on a low income or experiencing isolation, has access to the powerful tool of writing in community. Ben and Liza helped change so many lives. They certainly changed mine.

The magic of Write Around Portland is in our workshops, around tables where more than 4,600 participants have been bold and brave, not just writing their stories but sharing them and taking the time to listen to other people's stories. These acts are rare and precious, and our community is better, stronger and more respectful because of them. Thank you to every writer who has taken the courageous step to join our table. I can leave knowing that you will continue to create a space for everyone who needs to write, who needs to connect and who has a story to tell.

Finally, thank you to the writers in the workshops I have facilitated. The hours I have spent with you, many of them at the county jail, have been some of the most creative and profound I've had. You taught me what it means to be a writer and what it means to be human.

*Leave some on the road.* For me, that means making the hard decision to step away from the work I love, full with gratitude and excitement for the next leg of Write Around Portland's run.