



# THE WRITING LIFE

## FROM OUT OF NOWHERE THE ROOSTER COMES TO CROW

by Bill Studebaker, August 2008 (reprinted from June 2003)

I don't sleep much, but I pretend to. And while I'm pretending, I dream. I make up a poem or I tell myself an interesting story. If the dream makes me laugh or disturbs me, I get up rather than lie in bed, I go to my study to write it down, to play with it. This often happens at 2:28 a.m. or 4:43 a.m. or 7:11 a.m., my normal time.

I also get up because the poem is, as dream, "incompletable"; the story is a mystery. I am stumped, and no matter how many times I replay the circumstances, situations and images in my head, they won't find closure.

In my study, after writing down what I saw or plotted, I search for an ending. Since most of my dreams are sensuous and twisted with fold logic, I compile the pieces and search for a subliminal bit of folk wisdom that can be molded into a tale or verse.

I came to the study a few mornings ago with this conundrum: if I were to show an animal in a beauty contest, which animal would I show? Dog, cat or horse would be too common. Pig? Pig might be good, but pig showing is rather ordinary too. Hum. Stumped. In my dream, girls were showing these ordinary animals. To beat them I had to find an animal suitable to my limited talents. I was stymied. I slumped over my keyboard and thought. Perhaps I was just in another stage of dreaming, but I hit upon it; I'd show a chicken. Hence, a story came into being in which my rooster won. (And as stories go, it had real Idaho Fair Ground stuff and Freudian slips. Ha, ha.)

When restless slumbering fails, I get in my 1987 VW Golf and drive 80-plus miles an hour. No radio, no CDs. Just fast passing open space. My car becomes a space capsule where I am free of all obligations, and after miles, maybe 30 or 40, my left lobe is bored and my right lobe peeks out and I begin to dream unaware of driving or mileage or speed. I just hum through time, nothing to do but entertain myself—and I experiment with word-chord arrangements that might become a full poetic concert, or I follow a plot down the highway.

When I get too much language running through my head, too much to remember, I put my knee under the steering wheel, take out my pad and pen, and I write down as much as I can, hoping I will be able to read it. Each bump in the road causes a pen scratch. Each swerve of the wheel causes a line to bend. Each passing truck causes a momentary panic.

Like my bed dreams, my absent-minded road work, driven by speed and spatial independents, arrives at a partial destination. I have to take my scratches and twisted lines back to the keyboard, decipher them and find a suitable ending.

Writing for me is a drafting of easy images and themes, pulled out of me by the absence of responsibilities, absences during the early morning hours or the impenetrableness of a rocketing car capsule. Then, following the advice of Wordsworth, I

take these extended fragments and reflect upon them in the tranquility of my study. And there, only intention, craftiness and rewriting will win, not unlike a rooster preens before he walks down the ramp.