



## **BECOMING A WRITER BY BEING A READER** **by Bill Haney**

Everybody has a story. Not everybody gets a chance to tell it.

That's a shame because every person is unique and so is the story they would like to share. Some dream of seeing their story become a best-selling book, an Oscar-winning feature film. Odds are better of winning a mega-millions lottery. Most people are more realistic and would be quite content to get their life story down for their descendants and for posterity. Others write simply for their own satisfaction, knowing that the process itself will rekindle long-dormant memories.

Regardless of what drives them, few actually get the opportunity to become a published author of a book.

For ten self-proclaimed "geezers" in a north Oakland County town, the dream recently became the reality.

Two years ago, none of the ten women and men gathering each week for coffee at Brioni's cafe in Clarkston had any thoughts of writing a chapter for a book. They all knew they had stories that could be interesting, entertaining and perhaps inspiring to readers, but they never expected the chance to tell their personal story in a book.

But that is just what happened with the very successful launch of *ONE CUP AT A TIME: Why a Gaggle of Geezers Gathers Every Monday Morning to Solve the World's Problems*.

How they managed to get their stories published as a high-quality hard-cover book is itself an unusual story, one that is intertwined with the mission of Reading Works - Detroit.

As they worked on their manuscripts, these writers began to see how fortunate they were that they could read and write, skills they had long taken for granted. After all, those abilities had been learned in early childhood, so what's the big deal? But as they put their own stories on paper, as they worked to find just the right words, they came to appreciate that for many men and women, it wasn't just difficult to put those words on paper, it was impossible. That's because they had the most basic barrier to surmount—illiteracy. Simply put, you can't write the words if you yourself can't read the words.

As the authors of the *ONE CUP* book talked about their manuscript drafts with each other, they grew to appreciate their own abilities to write their own thoughts, to read the ideas of others. They saw that although literacy was something they had had since their earliest days, once they began telling their own stories they saw with fresh eyes how very different their own lives would have been had they not been able to read and write.

No surprise, then, that they voted unanimously to dedicate a portion of proceeds from each sale of their *ONE CUP* book to Reading Works. In that way, they could help pass along to others the gift of literacy.

Although in our society the ability to read and write is often assumed, the consequences and benefits to society that flow from being literate are not fully recognized. The impact cascades far beyond just one person—it ripples endlessly outward. In ways that can't be predicted, our abilities to understand and communicate inevitably touches positively the lives of countless others. Each story in the book is an example of how this happens.

Mel Vaara was a prominent educator for decades, teaching, coaching, and then administering in many schools and institutions in Clarkston and southeast Michigan. This man who learned to read in a small northern Michigan school went on to develop students and proteges who have become leaders in diverse settings. Many of his students are now influential educators, coaches, and mentors for succeeding generations.

Bob McGowan has spent a lifetime honing his skills as an author and a poet, even while serving as an executive in a Detroit-area marketing company. The countless books he has read helped prepare and inspire him to author three books, and those books have in turn have inspired other readers.

As Carole Cotter Bodner worked in fields where accuracy in communications

is essential, she combined her technical expertise with her high standards for precision in language. That fusion of skills was crucial as she implemented sophisticated system software conversions in military and technology settings.

Judge Gerald McNally was a voracious reader across a broad spectrum of subjects while on military service in Greenland, as a crewman on Great Lakes ore carriers, while a University of Michigan law student, and throughout his thirty-four year tenure as a District Court judge. After a distinguished career on the bench, he continues to always have a book, or two, or three at hand because he knows reading continues to enrich a person throughout life.

Whether they were involved in business or organic farming, manufacturing or ranching, whether they became inventors or city officials, store owners or publishers, the men and women who contributed chapters to *ONE CUP AT A TIME* had in common one appetite that could never be fully satisfied: they each had to read to learn and then keep reading to stay informed about what was going on in their field. No surprise that they also had to write clearly enough to communicate with others.

Even after retirement from their “straight jobs,” all of the book’s authors have continued to consume books, magazines, newspapers and other publications—whether in print or online. They know that reading is essential to keep themselves informed and to constantly expand their own horizons with new information, fresh stimulation, and different ways of looking at the world.

While they may call themselves geezers, they stay young at heart through reading.

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*Order your copy of “One Cup at a Time” at [www.readingworksdetroit.org](http://www.readingworksdetroit.org).*

*A portion of the sales of each book supports the Reading Works mission to improve adult literacy in metro Detroit.*

*Reading Works thanks Bill and the authors of “One Cup” for sharing their memories, their lessons on life, and their love of reading.*