

Since I'm on sabbatical this semester, I've been spending most of my days at my desk here at home, working on book projects. It's pretty wonderful, but well... sometimes, I get a bit lonesome for young people.

So today was a specially happy day for me since I was invited to speak to Sabine Walser's Creative Non-Fiction class at Marianopolis College (where I teach when I'm not on sabbatical). Oh it was fun to be in front of a class again! In fact, when class ended at 3:55, I wished I could have made the students stay longer!!

Sabine asked me to speak about writing book reviews since her students have to write their own 500-word book reviews for next Thursday. I told them everything I know about the book-reviewing business: always read the entire book, trust your feelings about the book, back up your points with examples from the text, and only include yourself in the review if it's relevant.

A student named Philippe spoke about how much he loves writing. He was clearly passionate about the subject -- and that impressed me. He wanted to know how to deal with the difficult feelings that come up when he writes (things like self-doubt and insecurity). I told him: "Welcome to the club. You sound like a real writer! Real writers feel self-doubt and insecurity all the time... but they keep writing through it!!"

And a student sitting at the front of the room, Mina, reminded me that I had promised to tell a painful story about a book review. So, because I believe in keeping promises, I told the group how much I suffered when a book I'd written that meant a lot to me was panned in the Montreal newspaper. It was such an awful review that my husband insisted we leave town the weekend the review was published. The book went on to win a major award -- and I learned an important lesson: you need to be tough if you want to be a writer!!

Thanks Sabine for sharing your students with me today -- and thanks to the students for being so open and lively! Great to meet all of you!!