

SCRATCHPAD

Writing and reading as acts of love

By **ERICK BENDEL**
COAST WEEKEND

When I need a reminder of why I got into the business of storytelling, the candid, confessional, two-hour discussion among Get Lit at the Beach's guest authors is like a call from mission control.

As usual, local bestselling fantasist Terry Brooks, author of the "Shannara" series, moderated the Sunday panel at the Coaster Theatre, the closing event of the Cannon Beach book fest. This year's lineup of Pacific Northwest writ-

ers: Pierce Brown, Deb Caletti, Carol Cassella, Sophia Shalmiyev and Leni Zumas.

At one point, Brooks posed a question meant to hit bedrock: What exactly do the authors get out of writing? Catharsis? Validation? A challenge to overcome?

Closest to my heart was Cassella's response:

"What really gets to my soul when I read ... is just the lyricism, the beauty of what words can do when they are put together in the right way," she said. "To read language that is used at its most supreme is really a joy to me, and

I think, from a very young age, I just thought, 'I wonder if I could do that — I want to do that.'"

Given that the human condition, Cassella said, is often one of loneliness, of failed attempts to be understood, writing is how she tries to "break through that and connect to other people."

I've often found comfort in the fact that, as we wander through periods of darkness and discontent, confusion and alienation, it's comforting to know that such feelings have long been expressed and validated through stories. For solace, we need only seek them

out. The writers we value most are the ones that do this best.

Such lofty literary considerations are easy to forget in the grimy pressure cooker of a newsroom. This is especially true on those days when everyone is strung out on stress and sleeplessness, when all you can discern through the fog of fatigue is your stunted social life, your teeth slowly dissolving in a never-ending acid wash of Folgers, and your next career-threatening deadline.

But there are rewards.

Now and then, you make a sentence appear that, despite the

odds against it, somehow succeeds in mapping a region of the soul; to paraphrase Caletti, you've found the words for a feeling you didn't know there are words for. You've become a cartographer of the inner world we all have in common.

In this way, two people who want nothing more than to be understood — the writer and the reader — make a connection. It feels less like a professional feat or artistic achievement and more like a spontaneous act of love, as they try to make sense of this befuddling, terrifying, lovely terrain together.

Writers, in the end, are simply fools for this kind of love. As far as "whys" go, this is my bedrock. **CV**

coast weekend

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