

# The Irresistible Teri Hein

Or, the Making of a New Youth Writing Center in Columbia City  
by Christopher Frizzelle

IT'S THE FIRST day of September, and Teri Hein is walking down Rainier Avenue South in Columbia City. She's giving me a tour of the neighborhood. "That store across the street? That's been there for years. Some kind of butcher shop." She points to Bike Works, on South Ferdinand Street. "And there are all these cool social services places, like the Bike Works, where they teach kids to fix bikes." (Outside Bike Works, a car has caught fire. Hein, focused on our walk, hardly notices.) "This barbershop looks like it's been here forever," she says, looking in on a doleful barber. "You have a barbershop like this, and then an alehouse, and then this pizza store here...." Her voice trails off and she turns to survey the historical surroundings. (A young man says, "Damn, that car's on fire.") Hein says to me, "And what I've noticed is that everyone knows what's going on here. It feels like a really tight-knit small town to me, with all of the closeness and some of the inherent tensions."

We decide to cross the street so Hein can show me the empty retail space next door to Pet Elegance that she's been eyeing. She marches into the avenue against traffic. It's not a wide avenue, and we can certainly make it, but in light of the car fire spectacle—there are now several emergency vehicles involved—I hesitate at the corner. Hein sees I'm not with her and shoots me a look. "Oh, we can cross," she says. "The police are busy with the fire."

Anyone who knows Hein will tell you that there is no stopping her. We're on the street where Hein plans to establish a youth writing center called Studio 26, which will be modeled, almost exactly, on 826 Valencia in San Francisco. 826 Valencia offers free writing classes and free after-school tutoring to anyone between the ages of 8 and 18. The organization's model is so strong—the tutors, all writing professionals, are volunteers; the students become involved either through their schools or on a drop-in basis; a third of the operating budget (and a lot of foot traffic) is generated by an otherworldly retail storefront—that 826 Valencia has started actively encouraging others to copy its organizational model. Which is exactly what Hein plans to do in Columbia City.

Hein walks up to the window of the empty retail space next door to Pet Elegance—the former home of an unsuccessful night club—and peers in. "Unfortunately, it looks like they took the disco ball out," she says. "Man, I can smell cigarettes through the window." A wry smile flashes across her face. "The kids would probably like that. That might draw them in."

Hein taught for 20 years at the Hutch School—a specialized school in Seattle for bone-marrow transplant patients and their

siblings—and, in the 1980s, at a public school in California. (She described that year to me as "the worst year of my life.") She has a strong sense of her mission and, blissfully, no patience for bureaucracy. (See her opinion of the year she spent teaching public school.) These are refreshing qualities in a city

where most literary arts organizations are conservative, slow moving, and directionless. To help with the project of launching Studio 26—the business plan is being finalized, contributions have started to come in—Hein has enlisted the help of a small but impressive cast of board members and advisors, including Mary Ingraham (who has 20 years of publishing experience and has done time on several local boards); Sherry Prowda (who founded Seattle Arts & Lectures); Nínive Calegari, director of 826 Valencia, who spent a day with Hein about a year ago in San Francisco, when Hein was starting to get serious about the idea; and Dave Eggers, author and 826 Valencia founder. Eggers turned Hein on to the idea in the first

**She has a strong sense of her mission and, blissfully, no patience for bureaucracy.**

she's clever. She has the energy. She has all the components of being able to make something happen." Ingraham agrees. "And she's got that wicked mouth," Ingraham told me, laughing. "Well, it's not wicked—it's just that she's so quick. She's kind of a live wire."

In addition to being dedicated to teaching children and teenagers to read and write (to help them with school, to help them express themselves formally, to help them find ways to be creative), Hein is completely willing to break the rules. She's been secretly monitoring retail space in Columbia City for months now. As we walk down Rainier Avenue South, she weighs the potential of location after location. (The space she really wants she asks me not to mention, for logistical reasons.) "What I'd really like is the Subway space," she then says, pointing to the chain sandwich shop, "but in light of the fact that they just opened, I don't think they're going to hand it over to us." Several community spaces have offered to house Studio 26, Hein says, naming a community center in

another neighborhood. "And certainly if saving money was our objective we could do it in a church or teen center, but I think ultimately our success is really going to be independent from other institutions."

Like 826 Valencia, Studio 26's institutional distinction will be defined, to a great degree, by its storefront. (826 Valencia's storefront—a place where kids sign up for their classes and hang out into the evening—is a pirate supply shop that sells planks, glass eyes, and lard. "The fact that it's so playful," explains 826 Valencia's Calegari, "has a really positive impact on our relationship with kids.") Hein still hasn't decided what Studio 26's storefront will be, though over the course of several conversations she's mentioned it possibly being a magic store, a music store, and a scratch-and-sniff wallpaper store. There's a chance it won't be as whimsical as 826 Valencia's store, she says, because the community wants a store that's useful. "And I respect that. I don't want this to just be a vanity project. And I want this place to be popular."

Coming to the end of our walk, just past the local branch of the library, Hein points to the headquarters of South East Effective Development (SEED), in a former church across a giant lawn. There were talks of putting Studio 26 there—SEED had expressed interest in leasing the basement—which Hein says was an appealing offer. "But they would want to have some say over what color to paint the walls," she says, finally. "And I don't want to ask anyone what color to paint the walls." ■



TERI HEIN Completely willing to break the rules.

place—they met through the Hutch School and have known each other for several years—and has offered to be Studio 26's first "founding writer." (One of Hein's fundraising plans is to solicit start-up contributions from writers through what will be called the Founding Writer Fund.)

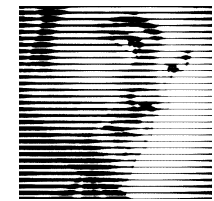
"Teri's irresistible. Who wouldn't want to work with her?" Prowda said the other day. "She's smart, she's funny, she's irreverent,

# Nightstand

Literally Everywhere

by Christopher Frizzelle

The weekend literally began on Friday. Over lunch, a friend who has literally a foot-high pile of hair on his head and always speaks precisely, was bemoaning the **superfluous and incorrect**



intrusion of the world "literally" into everyday speech, and then later that evening, in another crowd entirely, one of my friends said she had to go to an ATM but that it would

"literally take two seconds" and another friend said, "Literally?" and the first girl said, "Literally."

Somewhere in between, literally, I found myself at Richard Hugo House, at a reading and party for Seattle Research Institute's Bookmark Series. "I am one of the researchers for the Seattle Research Institute," Megan Purn said, introducing the event, even though she isn't literally a researcher. (The Seattle Research Institute is literally a couple of writers with some **aggressive ideas** and a robust command of formal rhetoric, but together they indulge in the contrived, slightly twee, and somewhat charming habit of calling themselves "researchers," even though the things they research tend to be, if not literally then at least without exception, the inner guts of their own ideas.)

The Bookmark Series is literally a series of bookmarks—each with a short essay printed inside. Ann Powers wrote one about music and the way it literally helps us remember who we used to be and, not quite as literally, become what we are each becoming. Rebecca Brown wrote one called, quite literally, "Consolation," and Matt Briggs wrote one called "A Declaration of Mindedness." There were 16 bookmarks published in all, and as the prose poet John Olson said at Hugo House before he (along with several other bookmark authors) began reading, they are "wonderfully portable" and "they fit in your pocket like a cigar" (although not literally) and "they work, they actually save your place."

Olson's reading was terrific ("The best way to deal with an abstraction is to further abstract it") and so was Frances McCue's ("I say I'm a flaneur but really I am a woman who tries to wander the city") and so was the first piece Nic Veroli read, about how serial killers are capitalists but not literally ("The problem of the serial killer is that he is a capitalist who has no interest in money, but who remains **compulsively attached to gain**"). Robert Corbett read from his bookmark, "A Wide Margin," which is funny and pretty good, but his reading of it was so bloated and sloppy it literally made at least one other person wish he would stop already. And, after him, Anne Elizabeth Moore read from her bookmark, "Stop Reading This: An Annotated Manifesto of Radical Literacy," an essay that presents an argument in favor of forgoing reading altogether, which is literally stupid. Also stupid was that she inserted the word "literally" into her reading in a sentence that, in the printed bookmark, does not have a "literally," and shouldn't.

The bookmarks are now **on sale everywhere**, although not literally. ■

frizzelle@thestranger.com