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Sentences Make Sense

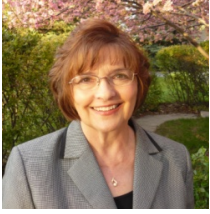
Sheryl Lain

Sentence--
one unit of thought after another
lining up across the page in the book I'm reading at 3:00 a.m.

The doctor sees a black dot,
macular degeneration,
beginning in the middle of my left retina,
a black hole growing larger until the meaning of the sentence is sucked into its vortex,
gone as if it never existed.
Then... what will sustain me
in the darkest hours when my mind swims to the surface gasping for air
and I lie awake listening to a cacophony of thoughts,
free of syntax,
banging into each other, denting their fenders like cars on the Interstate in an ice storm.
Their crashing is quelled, chaos reordered
when I pick up my book and read the sensible sentences
lining up, orderly, across the page.

Thoughts in my head, on the other hand, misbehave.
The dangling modifiers can't begin to find their nouns.
The run-ons careen hopelessly into one another tangling like unspooled thread,
nothing I can do with them now.
Pronouns search for their antecedents but end up lost,
unable to remember what they were referring to.
Copulative verbs try to link with all the wrong nouns,
and subordinate clauses battle with their independent clauses for ascendancy.

Without the comfort of the book with sentences that make sense,
how do I find my way through the jungle of unparsed thoughts?
Tonight, I can sleep and read,
sleep and read,
hoping the black hole grows so, so slowly.



Sheryl Lain began teaching secondary English on the Wind River Indian Reservation and before retiring served as director of the Wyoming Writing Project, national consultant for BER, language arts coordinator at the district level, and instructional leader at the state level. During most of that time, she never stopped teaching, her first love. While with the National Writing Project, Sheryl published a book about building classroom community and school reform entitled *A Poem for Every Student*. Her poems, articles, and chapters have been published in various venues. She can be reached at sheryllain@aol.com