

# Pikes Peak Writer

## NewsMagazine

Official Publication of the Pikes Peak Writers



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## Colorado Book Publishers Panel May Write Brain

By Barb Dyess

There are six major publishing houses in New York City at the present. What are your chances of getting a shot with one of them? How well will you get to know your rep at a major house? How much control will you retain as an author?

As writers, we are diverse, but we all agree on the core issues. Get published! Be a success! However, as we learned at the Colorado Book Publishers Panel, there is more than one road to achieving what we each define as "success."

On May 12th, we gathered downstairs in the very atmospheric, pub-style Elbo Room at the Ritz Grill on South Tejon. Our guest panel consisted of five independent, small press publishers, who presented their platforms and answered questions:

- Doris Baker, Filter Press
- David Rosansky, Flying Pen Press
- Katie Raymond, Fulcrum

Publishing

- Charles Kaine, Last Knight

Publishing

- Jessica Dyer, Unbridled Books

Why go with a smaller press? Publishers presented compelling reasons as to why you or your agent should consider doing business with them.

### Advantages of small presses:

- There are more small presses. This increases your probability of being published.

- More personal attention. You can establish a relationship with your editor and publisher, as in "an actual relationship."

- A small press can be a springboard to a bigger publishing house if that is one of your goals. (Baker, Filter Press)

- The author retains more control over their work. This varied between our publishers from "I am the Comma Queen" Ms. Raymond at Fulcrum, to "We allow the author some flexibility if it is justified" at Flying Press.

- They cater to smaller niches, such as Colorado biographies (Baker) and role-playing games. (Rosansky, Flying Pen Press)

- Authors gain a longer period, in general, of marketing time devoted to their releases. "Major houses give you three to six months marketing time, generally. That's it." (Dyer, Unbridled Press)

- Quicker feedback and response is the norm at smaller presses. "I don't like to have my authors yelling at me!"



(Kaine, Last Knight Publishing)

- You may avoid the "death by mid-list" syndrome at the big houses. (Kaine)

- We seek "quality over quantity." (Rosansky)

- An examples of larger-scale successes: The poker book *Ace on the River*, which sold 85,000 copies (Last Knight Publishing). This is successful by all standards of publishing.

### On the other side of the coin, what do our guest publishers want, need, and like to see?

- Simple, declarative sentences. Clear, precise writing and clean prose. A new and interesting factoid or story about the West or Colorado. (Baker, Raymond)

- That the author has researched our company via the Web site and all venues available. Follow our submission

*continued on page 2*

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.” ~Mark Twain

## From the Editor



As you can see from this shared letter from the editors PPW now has an editor-in-waiting. Deb Meldrum has agreed to take over as editor on the next issue and this issue is our collaborative effort. Although I am stepping down as editor, I am doing so to take another position within the Pikes Peak Writers organization as treasurer. My duties will begin in September. I've really enjoyed working with Barb Dyess, Martha Lancaster and all of the outstanding columnists who

contribute to our newsmagazine every two months. In the last year, it has been my pleasure to meet many of you at workshops, Write Brains and at the conference. Your continued successes keep me going when I get discouraged. I hope to meet more of you this summer. PPW has Write Brains and workshops planned throughout July and August including the much anticipated American Icon 3 on August 25th. Check out the Web site at [www.ppwc.net](http://www.ppwc.net) for more details.

Best Wishes,

Pat

## From the Editor-in-Waiting



You may recognize me from The Writer's Life columns. I joined Pikes Peak Writers back in 2001 right after I got back into writing. Like many of you, I started making up stories before I could write them

down and continued creating them all the way through school. But life found a way to intrude, and the stories stayed in my head once again. I can't pinpoint an "aha" moment that brought me back to writing, but I did come back to it.

Through the PPWC and the Colorado Springs Fiction Writer's Group, I met many wonderful writers who have become close friends. With their feedback and encouragement, along with much study of craft, my writing improved. I submitted several short stories and articles. Some were published. Then Bret Wright of *Apollo's Lyre* asked me to take over as their short fiction editor.

I thank everyone who has helped me get to this point. And I thank Chris Mandeville and the Board of Directors for their vote of confidence in me as the incoming *NewsMag* editor. Thank you also go to Pat Kennelly and Martha Lancaster for their help, encouragement and wonderful example.

I look forward to working with everyone involved in the *NewsMag*. I hope that includes you.

Debbie

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guidelines exactly and show that you know about our press, what we are looking for, what we do not accept, format to submit, etc. (All panelists)

- Using the Internet shows the author can use technology and marketing to their advantage. Use it. (Baker, Dyer, Rosansky)

- Treat your submission like a job application. Don't send in hand-written pages on notebook paper. Would you send it out the door in slouchy jeans and a backward ball cap? (Kaine, Baker)

- Don't submit in the first four weeks of the new year. (Kaine)

- Get to know us personally, and we will remember you and work harder for you. Network, meet and greet us at events, talk about your work, and be enthusiastic. (All)

- The Web is a good leveling field. Your Web site can be as great as Stephen King's if you want it to be. (Rosansky)

- Get a buzz going about your book. Attend events such as Mile High Con or those in your genre. (Rosansky)

## Colorado Book Publishers Panel

- Any type of fiction. (Rosansky)
- SF and/or Fantasy. See our Web site. (Kaine)

By the way, answers offered by panelists to the initial questions: 1) About two percent. 2) It depends on how much you can schmooze them. 3) Not that much actually!

### COLORADO PUBLISHERS FACTOIDS:



**Electronic only:** Unbridled Books (all-virtual), [www.unbridledbooks.com](http://www.unbridledbooks.com)



**Regular mail only:** Last Knight Publishing, [www.lastknightpublishing.com](http://www.lastknightpublishing.com)



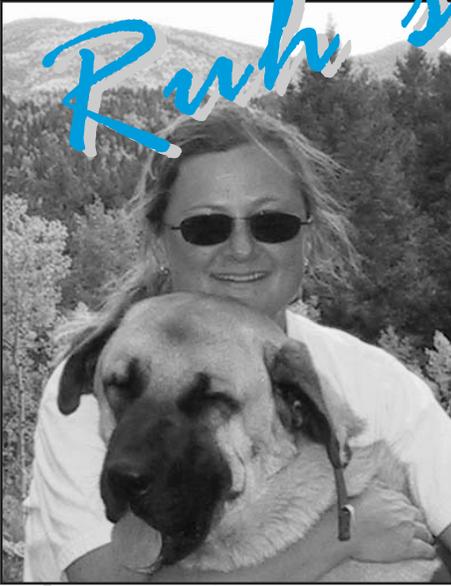
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**Electronic, fax, phone or mail:** Flying Pen Press

(Please research specific guidelines at each publisher's Web site. We can give general info only.)

# Ruh's Muse of the Month



As told to Chris Mandeville

*Ruh (pronounced "Roo") is a service dog and PPW/C mascot. He likes stories of all kinds, especially those involving good chase scenes. His favorite things are writers, children, his kitten Loki, and Monterey jack cheese.*

Ah, summer. It's finally here. And we all know what that means. Shedding. What, that's not what you were going to say? Were you thinking baseball or vacation or watermelon?

Perhaps you were thinking that it's time to gear up for the 2008 Paul Gillette Writing contest sponsored by PPW. Our fearless leader in all things "contest," **Dawn Smit Miller**, is my muse for June, and she's already preparing for the Paul Gillette entries that will arrive in the PPW mailbox come fall. Will your story be among them? If so, you can rest assured that your "baby" will be in good

hands with my pal Dawn at the helm. She's modernized the way PPW runs the contest, trains the judges, and handles choosing the winners from the finalists. She's been quite an inspiration to me as I've seen her manage hundreds of entries without missing a step or batting an eye. It blows me away how she keeps contestants, judges and volunteers happy with a speedy, fair, efficient system. What impresses the socks off me, though, (have you seen my socks?) is when she applies her professionalism, organization, efficiency and enthusiasm to her writing. I know you'll be impressed too when her next book comes out—she's working with her father, Lou Smit, to tell his stories, and they are doozies. Lou is a retired homicide investigator who worked on a number of high profile cases, including the JonBenet Ramsey case. See? Doozies, I tell you.

Thank you, Dawn, for the inspiration you bring me, the terrific program you bring to our contest entrants, and the stories you bring to all of us. I can't wait to get the inside dirt on some of your dad's cases. I really like dirt. Congratulations, too, on being honored as the 2007 Pikes Peak Writers Volunteer of the Year—I can totally see why you were chosen.

Now on to July. Still summer. Still shedding. But my buddy **Barb Dyess** never seems to mind when I lean on her and get my golden hair all over her jeans. It's no secret how much I like Barb, so it should come as no surprise that she is my muse for July. She always has a smile and a pat for me, no matter how rough her day has been. Sometimes her days can be pretty darn rough because it's her job to recruit writers to report on PPW

events and submit stories to this *NewsMag*. Not an easy task, but Barb brings her great sense of humor, her broad range of life experience, and her own kooky style to bear, and she gets the job done. Every time a *NewsMag* shows up in the mailbox, I applaud Barb's efforts (figuratively, folks). When Barb is not corralling *NewsMag* writers, she is a writer herself. She says she loves to throw together characters with diametrically opposing worldviews and see what happens. Have you heard the one about the atheist doctor and the born-again divorcee? Or the one about a cynical warrior-artist and a faith-filled healer? No, these are not jokes, but examples of Barb's tales. Though she's come to the craft of writing later in life, she has the advantage of bringing to it her ideas, ideals, adventures and experiences. What inspires me most about Barb is how she embraces every opportunity to learn the craft and share in the experience with fellow writers.

Thanks, Barb D., for your dedication to Pikes Peak Writers. You provide an invaluable service to the *NewsMag*, and provide a friendly welcome to all who cross your path. I know I'm not the only one who appreciates what you do. Keep doing it! Keep smiling, writing, experiencing and corralling. You are one awesome, inspiring person, and I'm glad I've got you to lean on.

Anyone looking forward to August? We all know what that means. Yep, shedding. And more inspiration from "Ruh's Muses." Will it be youses?

## Meet the Winners Correction

By Dawn Smit Miller

In last issue's article "Meet the Winners—2007 Paul Gillette Writing Contest," the bio of one winner was mistakenly attributed to another winner. Here are both winners and their bios:

### Tiffany Yates

**First Place, Romance, *Second Chances***

Tiffany Yates left a past existence as a professional actor when she realized not only that the pen was mightier than the sword (or

in this case, the stage), but that southwest Florida was a whole lot warmer than New York City. Yates was coscreenwriter of the award-winning independent film *Back to One*, and is currently the theater reviewer and a freelance features writer for the Scripps-Howard paper the *Naples Daily News*, as well as the entertainment reviewer for its sister paper on Marco Island. She is a monthly contributor to *Gulfshore Business* magazine, and former health reporter for *Gulfshore Life*.

### Lana Williams

**Second Place, Romance, *A Vow to Keep***

I'm so thrilled to have placed second in the romance category of the Paul Gillette Writing Contest! Books have always held a magical appeal for me. They transport you to places you've never been to, introduce you to fascinating characters, and I'm a sucker for happy endings. The process of writing has that same magical appeal. I've been writing for several years and enjoy the challenge of learning the craft. I especially like writing about daily life in medieval times. I live in Colorado Springs with my own true love, my husband, and our two boys and two dogs.

# Agent Search 102

By Robin Searle

When you begin your agent search, you'll find that most of the time the response is pretty straightforward...that's right, welcome to rejection. Unfortunately, rejections are a huge part of the writing business and learning to deal with them and move past them will be vital if you want to succeed. Most of the time rejections will be something along the lines of "Dear Author: Unfortunately we've decided your manuscript doesn't fit our acquisition needs at this time."

Keep in mind that writing is subjective. What one person loves, another may hate. You have to believe—and then keep believing—in your work. When a rejection comes, send out another query as soon as possible and don't forget to keep working on your next project.

What happens when you get that long-awaited request by an agent to read your manuscript? First of all, don't quit querying! A request, even for the entire manuscript, is no guarantee the agent will offer representation. Many times agents will request a partial, even if you've already sent them several pages as part of your query. After reading the partial, they may then request a read of your full manuscript.

Tough questions can arise when an agent asks for an exclusive. Jenna Petersen, a published author with Avon and creator of a site dedicated to writers, *The Passionate Pen* ([www.passionatepen.com](http://www.passionatepen.com)), believes exclusives limit authors due to the time it often takes agents and editors to read the work.

Petersen teaches a course titled "The Great Agent Search," and she strongly suggests putting a time limit of no more than a couple of weeks on the agent for any exclusive you decide to grant. "Also, if you already have the book out elsewhere," Petersen said, "I would probably call or e-mail and just say that the book is already out so you can't offer them an exclusive, but would still like to send the manuscript. More often than not, the answer will be yes."

Another sticky situation can arise when an agent requests revisions with no firm offer of representation. What should you do? According to Petersen, "It depends on the writer, the agent, and the revisions." She suggests setting up a phone call to discuss the potential revisions and then determine how you feel about both the changes and the agent. If you feel the revisions will make your book stronger and possibly land you representation, it may well be worth pursuing. Keep in mind that, even if you complete the revisions, the agent is committing only to reconsidering your work so it's important to continue the query process while you're working on revisions.

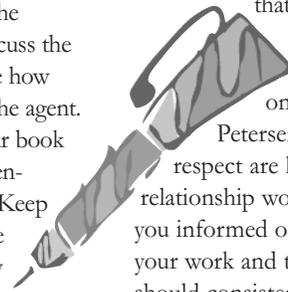
At last! You get a call or e-mail from an agent offering to represent your work. "Before you sign, ask questions," said Petersen. For local mystery author Barb Nickless, important topics included fees and percentages, how the agency was run, and most importantly whether the agent shared Nickless's vision for her career. "I wanted to know that she was passionate about my work," Nickless said. Additional questions she asked were what the agent saw as target

markets for her book, how the agent would position her book, and how communication would be handled. For a more comprehensive list of questions, see Petersen's article on her *Passionate Pen* Web site titled "Agent Q & A."

Once you've gotten your essential questions answered, the ball is in your court. Do you have to accept the offer right then and there? No. You can thank the agent and let them know you'd like to think about the offer. This is completely acceptable and won't jeopardize your chances with the agent. Once you've decided to sign with an agent and have a contract in hand, Nickless emphasizes it's considered professional courtesy to notify all other agents currently considering your work. "Don't let someone spend time on something that is no longer available."

After signing that coveted contract, the journey has only begun. According to Petersen, communication, trust, and respect are key aspects to making the relationship work. Your agent should keep you informed of where she's submitting your work and the status. In return, you should consistently be professional...meet deadlines, be willing to listen to editorial input, and trust that your agent is going to advocate your work in the best way possible. In an ideal situation you'll find, as Nickless did, that your agent loves your writing and is one of your greatest cheerleaders. In a business filled with rejections, a supporter and ally is exactly what every writer needs.

*Since writing the first article in this series, Robin Searle signed with agent Kevan Lyon of the Sandra Dijkstra agency. Her romantic suspense, Chasing Dreams, is currently in the submission process.*



## Untangling the Web

By Lauri Griffin

Writers need to have fun in the summer, too. So below you'll find not only links for research, but links for radio shows featuring authors, some quick lists for building characters, and a laugh or two.

🔗 [www.usnpl.com](http://www.usnpl.com)

Links to online newspapers from all 50 states. Great for research, getting a feel for different cities, and for inspiration. From huge dailies to local weekly papers.

🔗 [www.timelines.info/](http://www.timelines.info/)

Hundreds of searchable timelines of

different empires, wars, and history

🔗 [www.kimnormanbooks.com/Editor.html](http://www.kimnormanbooks.com/Editor.html)

What writer hasn't experienced self-doubt and that nagging Internal Editor? If you need a laugh, look at these pictures of one author's Internal Editor

🔗 [www.artofthesong.org/](http://www.artofthesong.org/)

Inspiration for any writer, with fun music.

🔗 [www.writersfm.com/](http://www.writersfm.com/)

A radio station for writers with interviews and music.

🔗 [www.momwriterstalkradio.com/](http://www.momwriterstalkradio.com/)

A talk show featuring authors who share their secrets for balancing family and writing

🔗 [www.mantex.co.uk/samples/rules.htm](http://www.mantex.co.uk/samples/rules.htm)

A humorous list of writing rules that makes it point by making the mistakes: "Don't abbrev"

🔗 [www.americanstate.org/vonnegut.html](http://www.americanstate.org/vonnegut.html)

Kurt Vonnegut's rules of writing.

🔗 [www.janeyolen.com/forwrtrs.html](http://www.janeyolen.com/forwrtrs.html)

Inspiring advice from author Jane Yolen.

🔗 [www.charlottedillon.com/characters.html](http://www.charlottedillon.com/characters.html)

A large collection of links for character-building worksheets and naming.

🔗 [www.bookslut.com](http://www.bookslut.com)

Great interviews, reading lists, columns, and more.

🔗 [www.writingnag.blogspot.com](http://www.writingnag.blogspot.com)

Quotes, inspiration, and advice. Now get back to work!

# The Business of Writing

## How to Make, and Keep, Promises to Your Reader

By Linda Rohrbough

One of the things I learned in forty-five hours of creative writing classes was how to make and break promises to my readers. We called it being “realistic” or “literary.” Since then I’ve learned from authors who make a seven-figure living at writing popular fiction how to recognize a promise, keep it, and put a twist on it that’s both satisfying and interesting.

Let’s define what I mean. Everyone who writes fiction makes a promise to the reader. When you put in a hook, you’ve set an expectation on the part of that reader. Usually keeping that promise means delivering the opposite of whatever starts the story.

It’s easier to see it with the classic comedy technique of working in threes that I learned from Bonnie Orr, a Hollywood scriptwriter. Let’s use an example of an old lady walking down the street toward a banana peel on the sidewalk. The viewer knows an accident is waiting to happen. But instead of slipping, to make the gag work, twice our lady misses the accident at the last minute due to a noise or distraction. The third time she hobbles along, the peel is still in place and the viewer is primed. If she slips, you’ll get a laugh. That’s what my college English Literature instructors hated, with good reason. It’s corny and boring.

The trick in good fiction is keeping the commitment in a way the reader doesn’t expect. Maybe the third time a painter on a scaffold loses control and blue paint cascades all over the old lady. This is still *Mad Magazine* corny, but it illustrates a twist on the accident that delivers on the promise and still gets the laugh.

Here’s another example from a new Jodi Thomas historical romance, *Texas Rain*. The hero, a single Texas Ranger, takes his sister to a dance in town by driving a buckboard with a team of specially trained horses. Promise one: we know he’s going to meet a woman at the dance. And he does, by backing into her accidentally while both try to keep a low profile in the dance hall. Promise delivered, but in a way we didn’t expect.

In the second setup he finds himself thinking about the woman he just met and decides to watch her. She’s trying to steal a horse and lets all the horses tied up outside the dance hall loose so she can spook them

all at once into running away. Her plan is to take one and by the time everyone figures out it’s missing, she’ll be long gone. When she gets to her destination, she plans to let the horse go to find its way back home. Our hero sees what she’s doing and in the dark ties the horses back up. She sees the hero at the last moment when a group of cowhands walk up. Worried he’ll get blamed for letting the horse loose, she creates a distraction then discovers it wasn’t necessary after all.

When she figures out the horses were tied back up, she takes a single horse from one of the buckboard teams. Guess what team of horses she takes one from? You got it, our hero’s team. The twist is our hero tells his family he gave the horse away, which gets him into trouble. Promise kept in a way we didn’t expect. This escalates the action and creates another commitment because we anticipate the hero and horse-stealing beauty will meet again.

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**“In any good tale there are a series of promises kept, both big and small. The big one is the story problem. The smaller ones are the obstacles and circumstances along the way.”**

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It’s important to note a promise not kept frustrates. I attended a small workshop in 2005 taught by Chris Vogler, author of *The Hero’s Journey* and known in Hollywood for work with Disney. He said Disney was particular about making and keeping promises in their classic films. Chris talked about the movie *Kingdom of Heaven* as an instance of a story that breaks commitments to the viewer over and over. The result: a depressing experience.

I remember hearing TV producers talk about *Petrocelli*, a 70’s series featuring a Harvard-educated Italian lawyer who relocates to a small Western town. In the discussion about fan mail, a viewer expressed disappointment about a “realistic” episode where Petrocelli loses at the end of the show. The

viewer said if he wanted to watch a lawyer lose, he’d go watch his own lawyer.

In any good tale there are a series of promises kept, both big and small. The big one is the story problem. The smaller ones are the obstacles and circumstances along the way. If a novelist does the work correctly, the resolution of one problem will lead to a bigger one. This keeps the action interesting and the story tension escalating.

One mistake beginning fiction writers make is trying to surprise the reader all the time. That’s not necessary and it can create a lot of work for the reader. You can lose your audience that way. I think it’s clever and interesting to use the reader’s expectations by delivering what’s expected in an unexpected way. But whatever you do, keep your promises. That’s the ticket to best-selling fiction.

—Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, has more than 5,000 articles, seven books and awards for her fiction and non-fiction. Her latest non-fiction book, *Stepping Out of the Shadow of Obesity: The Comprehensive Guide to the Adjustable Gastric Band* will be released from Marlowe & Company this fall. Visit her updated Web site: [www.LindaRohrbough.com](http://www.LindaRohrbough.com).



### Grammar Gremlins

By Pam McCutcheon

**Problem sentence:** *The subject peaked her curiosity.*

Though “peak” means to come to the topmost point and sounds correct in this context, it isn’t quite right. The subject isn’t bringing her curiosity to a point. Instead, her curiosity is being aroused or stimulated, which means you should use the French word “pique.”

So, the correct way to say this is: *The subject piqued her curiosity.*

# Conference 2007

## Unguarded Moments with Editors, Agents and Authors

By Margaret Brettschneider

While on the Garden of the Gods tour, our guests expressed collectively that they liked our conference better than any other because it's the only one where they can get out of the hotel and see something of the area. They enjoyed hiking a bit, taking pictures and playing tourist.

They were willing to share some of their views and opinions on lighter subjects, too. Asked for her most outrageous moment as an agent, Kristin Nelson told of the woman who tried to deliver her query letter in person. "When she was refused on the phone from the security door, she waited until someone was leaving the office and slipped in to accost me personally, insisting she just had to present the query herself. Obviously, I wasn't pleased with her, or her work, though I could understand her trying to be aggressive. It just was not a nice situation for me to give her the attention she wanted." Kristin also shared the fact that though she may cry easily at a movie, the only book that has ever made her cry was *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Debra Dixon, after a tremendously fast-



paced rendition of a two-hour "Black Moment" workshop, confided that her real preferences of all writing are stories of the Regency and Medieval periods.

The best advice may have come from Mary Jo Putney who wanted us all to have the "fire" or passion to "...help the

reader imagine vivid worlds of their own." But she added that we must also "...balance the muse and the marketplace." That can be tough news for writers who usually prefer writing to marketing.

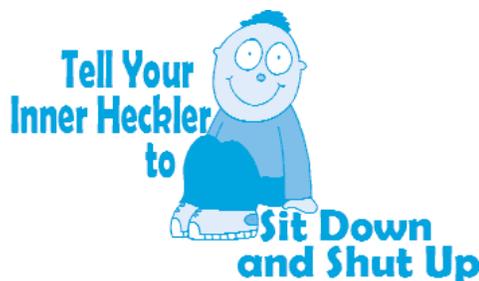
John Shors said to keep your publisher's publicity department informed about any new successes you have with your book. In fact, he said you should be in contact with your publisher at least once a month and visit the publishing offices once a quarter.

Talking about their best moments as agents, most cited selling a book to a big publishing house for the first time. I suppose that is about the same as an author selling his first book or perhaps finding their first agent.

Another outrageous submission came

from Dan Lazar of Writer's House during the Garden of the Gods tour. He told us about getting a small picture book in the mail called *Cleavage*. It had pages and pages of photos of cleavage: deep, close, flabby, and even hairy. It took a while to realize *Cleavage* wasn't about breasts. It was the other type of cleavage. "Needless to say," said Dan, "though I could appreciate the intense dedication it must have taken to get all those photos, it wasn't something I wanted to try to sell to a publisher with my name on it."

One of the craziest quotes of the conference, however, came not from an agent, but from the audience at the Editorial Board role-playing game of "Buy This Book." When the role players of the Editorial Board didn't like Laura Harvey's title for her fantasy fairy romance, *The Changeling* since it had already been used, several offered suggestions for a different title. But the one that brought the whole game to an uproarious halt was shouted from the rear of the room. How about *Getting Some Fairy Tail*? Laura carried the moment off with grace and poise. Everyone else in the room had difficulty getting back on task, though.



By Debbie Meldrum

### What's an Inner Heckler?

You sit down to write. You've got an idea. A little voice starts in the back of your mind. "It's not a very original idea." "That character name is stupid." "Nobody will want to read about that." "Mom/Dad/Auntie/The-Kid-Who-Sat-Behind-You-In-Fourth-Grade will be mad at you for talking about that." And possibly the worst of all—"What makes you think you can write?"

I've heard it called an Inner Critic or Inner Editor. However, I think both of those can

be helpful to writers at certain points in the creative process. The Critic can help assess ideas and evaluate your writing. Once the first draft is done, the Editor makes corrections and tightens the work. The Heckler serves no useful purpose. He sits in the corner and hurls insults.

The good news is you can do something about it.

You'll need a quiet place, at least 15 to 20 minutes, and something to write with. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Then write a dialogue between your Heckler and The Writer Inside. Start with the most recent heckle. Then have The Writer answer. Keep going back and forth until they have nothing more to say.

The result could be the Writer wins the argument, the Heckler wins, or it's a draw between the two. Any of those are okay. You've taken the first step.

The next step is to think about the Heckler's voice. Was it male or female? This can be a good clue as to where the Heckler comes from. Maybe you recognized the voice.

Even better. Now you can think about anything that person may have said to make you doubt yourself as a writer. Is it your third grade teacher who ragged on you about your spelling and margins? Did a parent tell you to follow a more practical path in life? Now you can address those particular comments directly in your next dialogue.

The bad news is even when you've identified the Heckler and won the argument, she will still come back or another one will take her place. But now you know how to deal with her.

So, go write something. If you write, then you're already a writer. Your ideas are just as good as anyone's. You can do it, and your word processing program will take care of those margins and most spelling problems for you.

For more involved work dealing with Inner Hecklers, look at *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg and *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron.

**Editors Note:** Inner Heckler was previously printed in *Apollo's Lyre Ezine*.

# The Writer's Life

## The Dreaded Query Letter

By Debbie Meldrum

Eventually, every writer has to face this fact: to get an agent, you need to write a query letter. It is, after all, just writing. That's what you do. Look at it as a creative exercise. With some rules.

If you don't already know what genre your manuscript is, decide now. It isn't a romantic, science fiction, mystery with humorous overtones. Trust me on this one. Pick one that fits it best.

Research agents before you send. Any of the guides are a place to start. Check out who is looking for your genre. Then look them up online for more recent information. See what they are currently accepting. This may be different than what the books show. They should state somewhere what they want in a query and whether or not they want a synopsis or initial pages. Send only what they specify.

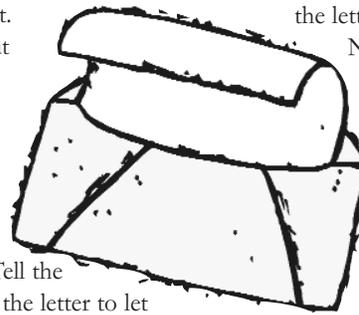
Triple check the spelling of the agent's name. Find out if Chris is a man or a woman.

Use the appropriate title in the salutation.

In the first paragraph, give the title of your manuscript, the genre and why it's a good fit for that agent. This shows her that you have done some research. Some agents seem baffled by word count, but you're probably better off giving it. Use round numbers. "About 90,000" is preferable to "88,765."

Summarize the primary plotline in the second paragraph. Talk about the main character(s) only and show what the conflict is. Tell the ending. This is the point in the letter to let your creativity show. Use the same style and voice that you use in the manuscript. Make it interesting to read.

List any publishing credits or experience in the final paragraph. Don't worry if you don't have any. You can simply state that this is your first novel. Most agents will now Google any credits you list so it's not a good idea to



fudge on this one. Be sure to thank her for her time.

Sign off. A simple "Sincerely, Jane Doe" works just fine.

Check for spelling and punctuation errors. Several times. Have someone else proofread it. It's also not a bad idea to let your critique group take a look.

Sounds simple when I put it like this, doesn't it? No, I didn't think so either. But it does get easier with practice. And you should get plenty, because you'll need to customize the letter for each and every agent.

Not all of it each time, but enough that you'll feel it.

There are Web sites and books that can help you.

Kristin Nelson's agency site, [www.nelsonagency.com](http://www.nelsonagency.com), has a sample query. *How to Write Attention-Grabbing Query & Cover Letters* by John Wood is another source. For a laugh and to see how one, albeit warped, editor's mind works, check out Evil Editor at [www.evileditor.blogspot.com](http://www.evileditor.blogspot.com).

Take a deep breath and plunge in. Practice, practice, practice. It can make perfect. And get you a request for pages.

## Pitch Perfect

By Tafari Lumumba

Some say pitching a book at age twenty-three is an accomplishment. I call it a rite of passage, an initiation, an introduction with a pinch of hazing. A sailor's first voyage. A boy walking on hot coals. It's kissing a cute baby eagle on the beak, and then chucking his furry butt off a cliff.

My friends suffered the most. Trapped with me on the way to La Junta, a co-worker listened to one sentence of my pitch for an hour.

"A real cool bee with a funky fresh name. A funky fresh bee with a real cool name. A real cool name with a funky fresh bee."

Pitch-practice continued at the Holiday Inn Express outside Lamar.

"It's A Bug's Life meets Boys in the Hood."

And at the Hog's Breath Saloon near Rocky Ford.

"The book's for Sebrina with an E and

not an A, for Zarina with a Z and not an S. It's for kids who will spell their names six times when ordering a pizza."

On the way back, while passing through Pueblo, I switched gears. No more pitching.

Read and Critique was just as important. I always struggle reading dialogue aloud. Never know whether to use different voices for the characters. I'm left with the dreadful choice between having everyone sound like Ben Stein or Nathan Lane.

"Sounds good." My co-worker nodded. He turned on National Public Radio and the car lurched forward.

The Pitch Session waiting room felt like a landing craft at Omaha Beach. Most reviewed their notes carefully. Some looked so calm I felt suicidal. The woman next to me did a strange deep breathing exercise. Sounded like some kind of crazed mental yoga, or throat singing.

"Tafari Lumumba!"

The correct and expeditious pronunciation of my name was always good luck.

I reached for my PPWC tote bag. Suddenly, I felt very naked when I saw my pitch cheat sheet was missing. Notes, contact

information, everything I'd prepared for the agent...gone.

I tried making conversation.

Have you been to Pikes Peak? Yeah, it's hard to breathe up here. Elevation. Lord knows it's so very hard to breathe...Well, yes, this is my first conference. And yup, you guessed it. First pitch too. Oh, you don't do children's books with animals. Well—the bumblebee is really more of a metaphor—funky fresh.

"One minute!"

At that point I lost time—kind of blacked out. Don't know exactly what I said in that last minute, but somehow I pitched two books and a screenplay in a span of sixty seconds. Between funky insects, a romantic comedy, and a coming of age story about a black kid in Mexico, I heard those words, "Send it to me."

I was a good minute over time. No cattle prods were brandished. No men in black coats dragged me away. People were so very kind. I got to the bar less than five minutes later. At the bottom of every cliff there's a beer for baby eagles.

# June Write Brain with Kathryn Black: Writing a Life, The Art and Craft of Writing a Memoir



**Kathryn Black**

**By Linda Gorney Crume and Laura Pellerin  
Photo by Linda Gorney Crume  
(Edited by Barb Dyess)**

On last week's list of bestselling paperback fiction from the *New York Times*, 10 books out of 15 listed were memoirs! But how do you go through the process of writing your life story—or that of someone else—and getting it published?

Kathryn Black has published two memoirs: *Mothering Without a Map*, which explores being a motherless mother; and *In the Shadow of Polio*, which deals with the American polio epidemic and its consequences on her family. Her research into the lives and events of her family was important for her own edification, and even, as she found, necessary for her spiritual growth.

While an autobiography covers the entire (or nearly so) history of a person's life, Kathryn explained that a memoir seeks to interpret and illuminate specific parts of a person's history that enriched and defined their life. It is a focused narrative in a context of theme, time, place or social events.

Maybe it's a memory you've mulled over

for a while. Maybe it's a story you've shared with friends who've all said, "Wow, you need to write that down." Kathryn explained that a memoir is like a slice of life.

"And how you slice it," she explained, "makes all the difference in the world."

Kathryn coached workshop attendees to thoughtfully consider "What is the story I really want to tell?" She encouraged us to find our passion, to listen to our muse, to find the universal message in the memoir. To choose the voice or viewpoint from which to tell the story, to trust your intuition and to tell it with courage.

Softly but expressively, Kathryn explained the finer points of memoir and led us through multiple writing exercises. She suggested that memoir writers focus on structure, incorporate plenty of detail, thoroughly describe the context, and find our theme. She recommended we read a lot of memoirs to get a true sense of the genre. She then led our discussions on facts vs. truth; on telling the truth even when it may hurt us—and on telling the truth when it may hurt others.

Kathryn's insider knowledge of the publishing industry underscored her advice on writing a memoir book proposal, and of the marketing aspects. She advised us to think about our reading audience. But sometimes, she said, just write the memoir for the pure pleasure of it.

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**"...a memoir seeks to interpret and illuminate specific parts of a person's history that enriched and defined their life."**

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To further encourage us, Kathryn shared a piece of advice that an editor once shared with her. "There is always room for a good story." She then sent us off with handouts, Web site recommendations, and a three-paragraph assignment. Attendees, are you writing yet?

Kathryn Black is presently studying for her psychology degree and has taught classes in

writing memoirs at University of Colorado Boulder. For more, visit [www.kathrynblack.com](http://www.kathrynblack.com)

## An Idiosyncratic List of Memoirs

*In the Shadow of Polio: A Personal and Social History* by Kathryn Black

*Autobiography of a Face* by Lucy Grealy

*Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight: An African Childhood* by Alexandra Fuller

*Are You Somebody?* by Nuala O'Faolain

*Almost There: The Onward Journey of a Dublin Woman* by Nuala O'Faolain

*Through the Narrow Gate: A Memoir of Spiritual Discovery* by Karen Armstrong

*The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness* by Karen Armstrong

*Running in the Family* by Michael Ondaatje

*Girl Meets God: On the Path to a Spiritual Life* by Lauren F. Winner

*The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion

*Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place* by Terry Tempest Williams

*A Village in the Vineyards* by Thomas Matthews

*An American Childhood* by Annie Dillard

*Heart Earth* by Ivan Doig

*In Love with Daylight: A Memoir of Recovery* by Wilfred Sheed

*Night* by Elie Wiesel

*The Mother Knot* by Jane Lazarre

*Breast Cancer Journal* by Juliet Wittman

*Paula* by Isabel Allende

*Gift from the Sea* by Anne Morrow Lindberg

*Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo* by Zlata Filipovic

*The Liar's Club* by Mary Karr

*Plain and Simple: A Woman's Journey to the Amish* by Sue Bender

# An Idiosyncratic List of Memoirs

continued from page 8

*Drumming at the Edge of Magic* by Mickey Hart

*Under the Tuscan Sun* by Frances Mayes

*Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom

*A Year in Provence* by Peter Mayle

*Traveling Mercies* by Anne Lamott

*Operating Instructions* by Anne Lamott

*Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith* by Anne Lamott

*A Slant of Sun* by Beth Kephart

*The Color of Water* by James McBride

*Road Song* by Natalie Kusz

*The Kiss* by Kathryn Harrison

*All Over but the Shoutin'* by Rick Bragg

*An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness* by Kay Redfield Jamison

*Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCort

*Blackbird: A Childhood Lost and Found* by Jennifer Lauck

*On Writing* by Stephen King

*Where is the Mango Princess?* by Cathy Crimmins

*Looking for Mary or The Blessed Mother and Me* by Beverly Donofino

*Ithaka: A Daughter's Memoir of Being Found* by Sarah Saffian

*Augusta, Gone* by Martha Tod Dudman

*Expecting Adam: A True Story of Birth, Rebirth, and Everyday Magic* by Martha Beck

*Neither Here Nor There* by Bill Bryson

*A Life's Work or Becoming a Mother* by Rachel Cusk

*A Graceful Passage: Notes on the Freedom to Live or Die* by Arnold R. Beisser, M.D.

*A Thousand Days in Venice: An Unexpected Romance* by Martena de Blasi

*The Cloister Walk* by Kathleen Norris

*Rolling Nonbere* by Ted Conover

*Night Studio: A Memoir of Philip Guston* by Musa Mayer

*Fierce Attachments: A Memoir* by Vivian Gornick

*Orphans: Real and Imaginary* by Eileen Simpson

*A Wider World: Portraits in an Adolescence* by Kate Simon

*My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and of Healing* by Sylvia Fraser

*On Gold Mountain: The One-Hundred-Year Odyssey of a Chinese-American Family* by Lisa See

*Womenfolks: Growing Up Down South* by Shirley Abbott

*Midstream: The Story of a Mother's Death and a Daughter's Renewal* by LeAnne Schreiber

*The Shadow Man: A Daughter's Search for Her Father* by Mary Gordon

*Class: The Wreckage of an American Family* by Geoffrey Douglas

*A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey

*The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls

## Upcoming PPW Events August, September

### August Write Brain

**Spinning Your Web: Internet Self-Promotion for Writers, Authors, and Other Regular Folk**  
Featuring Christian Lyons

Tuesday, August 21, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Location: Cottonwood Artists' School

- World Wide Web presence: Is it for everyone?
- What type of site is best for you?
- Quick, Easy, and Inexpensive sites
- Web site 101 For Dummies, Idiots, and JURPs (Just Us Regular People)
- Arm and a Leg: How not to overpay for a site
- Making a site work for your wants/needs/desires
- Start Me Up!: Getting started with your site
- Traffic Cop: How to direct traffic to your site
- Your Web site as calling card and resume
- Other marketing tools you can use

- It's A Jingle Out There!: The importance of self-promotion for yourself and your writing



#### Christian Lyons:

Christian Marcus Lyons spent 25 years marketing everything from fitness (for Nike, Reebok, and AMF), to night clubs, to exotic dancers before turning that experience to writers, artists, and musicians. He designs Web sites for the government when he's not writing novels and screenplays.

Founder and facilitator of the successful "Writers Salon" ongoing workshop, "Writers On The Verge," and "Writing Fabulous Fiction!," Christian thoroughly enjoys sharing his knowledge and experience with others.

### American Icon 3

Featuring "Celebrity" guest judges Carol Berg, Charles Kaine, and Barbara Samuel, with MC Laura Hayden  
Saturday, August 25th, 6:30 - 9:30 p.m.

Location: Cottonwood Artists' School  
Aspiring novelists are invited to read short excerpts from their original work in any genre. A panel of "Celebrity Judges" featuring Carol Berg, Charles Kaine, and Barbara Samuel will give off-the-cuff comments and suggestions and award prizes in various categories. Drinks and desserts will be provided.



**Carol Berg:** Former software engineer Carol Berg is the author of nine epic fantasy novels. *Daughter of Ancients* won the 2006 Prism Award for best romantic fantasy. *Transformation* won the

2005 Geffen Award for best translated fantasy. *Song of the Beast* won the 2004

# Upcoming PPW Events

## August, September

*Continued from previous page*

Colorado Book Award for genre fiction. All amazing for one who majored in math and computer science to avoid writing papers. Carol lives and writes in Colorado. Her newest novel is *Flesh and Spirit*, released in May 2007.



### **Charles Kaine:**

Charles Kaine graduated from Colorado State University in 1996 with a B.A. in English with Teacher's Certification. Armed with the sure

knowledge that he knew what was best, he set out to change the world, not necessarily get a job. A semester of teaching in the public sector brought several things to light; things that he had been shielded from standing behind the high walls of higher education.

First, changing the world is more difficult than he initially thought and second, the pay sucks. He took his skills to the private sector where his skills as a presenter were sharpened to a fine edge. Professionally, he became a quality process manager for a custom print house. He learned the requirements to create a book. Privately, he became an editor of books and newsletters as well as writing brochures, press releases and newsletters for local designers. Combining the two things he loved most, editing and presenting, he created Last Knight Publishing.



### **Barbara Samuel:**

Barbara Samuel (aka Ruth Wind) is a multiple RITA award-winning author with more than 25 books to her credit, both historical and contemporary romances

and women's fiction. She has made her way by writing since she was 18, penning newspaper and magazine articles, columns and opinion, before settling in with an ancient IBM typewriter and even more ancient house, rescued from the wrecking ball, to write fiction. Her work has captured a plethora of awards, including four RITAs; the Colorado Center for the Book Award

(twice); Favorite Book of the Year from Romance Writers of America, and the Library Journal's list of Best Genre Fiction of the year, among many others. She now writes women's fiction for Ballantine, romances for Silhouette, and columns for her Web site and Novelist's Ink. Visit Barbara's Web site.

**See page 11 for American Icon 3 registration form.**

## September Write Brain

### **What Literary Agents Want**

**Featuring Literary Agents Sandra Bond and Anita Kushen**

**Tuesday, September 18th, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.**

**Location: Cottonwood Artists' School**

Two Colorado-based literary agents will discuss what makes a submittal shine, be it a query letter, a nonfiction proposal, or a requested manuscript. The agents will talk about what's hot in the marketplace, what they're looking for, and what you should never do when submitting. They'll give us the inside scoop on a day in the life of a literary agent and why authors need literary agents. The agents have agreed to answer audience questions, but no pitching of particular projects will be allowed.

**Sandra Bond:** She heads her own agency in Denver, which she started in late 1998. After working as an assistant to prominent agent Jody Rein, who primarily represents nonfiction, she started her agency in order to concentrate on adult literary and commercial fiction and young adult fiction. She has been working to attract and develop a small but select list of clients, many of whom are first-time authors, and her clients now include writers of various genres of fiction and nonfiction. In addition to working as an agent, Sandra is the Program Administrator for the Publishing Institute at the University of Denver. Before deciding to pursue her lifelong dream of a career in publishing, she was a film and television script analyst in Los Angeles, and an editor and production manager for a socioeconomic research foundation in Boulder. Sandra has a Bachelor's degree in Microbiology from the University of

Colorado, is a Colorado native, and has two grown sons.



### **Anita Kushen:**

Anita vetted manuscripts for new authors in her spare time for almost 20 years while she owned and ran three businesses, taught ESL for the US Army and the state

of Texas, worked as a makeup person for Summer Stock and manned Rape Crisis and Suicide Hotlines. She slowed down long enough to have two beautiful sons and raised them while teaching at Mile High Academy in Denver and Arapahoe Community College in Littleton, Colorado. One day she awoke to two grown boys with lives of their own and asked herself...."now what?" and AKA Anita Kushen & Associates, Inc. was born. She represents new and established authors in the areas of romance, fantasy, mystery, mainstream and nonfiction (especially historical nonfiction). She reminds everyone: NEVER let anyone tell you that your dreams are unrealistic or that you cannot do something. Only you can make your dreams come true.

**All Write Brains are FREE for PPW Members! Nonmembers may attend one Write Brain session for free. For more information and a map, go to [ppwc.net](http://ppwc.net).**

**The meetings are held at Cottonwood Artists' School, 25 Cimino Drive, Colorado Springs, Colorado.**

If you would like to participate in any Write Brain session, PLEASE RSVP AND INCLUDE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION. This does not commit you to attending, but enables us to prepare enough materials for expected attendees, and importantly, it gives us a way to contact you if we have an emergency change to the Write Brain session, such as a postponement due to weather. We will make every attempt to post changes to the PPW Yahoo loop and this Web site, but to be ensured of notification you must RSVP to [rsvp@ppwc.net](mailto:rsvp@ppwc.net).



# PPW Presents: American Icon 3

Back by popular demand, PPW hosts "American Icon," a writing contest in the spirit of American Idol™. **American Icon 3** will be held at the Cottonwood Artists' School in Colorado Springs on Saturday, August 25, 2007 from 6:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m. Prizes will be awarded for "Audience Favorite" entry, "Best Overall," and several other categories.

Our "Celebrity Judges" this year are Carol Berg, Charles Kaine, and Barbara Samuel.

Reservations are being accepted now for both contestants and audience members. We will only register the first 20 contestants who sign up. After that we will start a waiting list.

**Register at [www: ppwc.net](http://www.ppwc.net) to reserve your space:**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Contestant: Yes  No  Number of Attendees: \_\_\_\_ (do NOT include contestant) Additional attendees can pay at the door. \_\_\_\_\_ CONTESTANTS at \$20 each = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(MEMBERS FREE, NONMEMBER ATTENDEE(S) at \$5 each = \$ \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

METHOD OF PAYMENT:  Visa •  MasterCard •  Check •  Cash •  PayPal at [www.ppwc.net](http://www.ppwc.net)

(If paying by credit card, please call 719-531-5723 or send by snail mail to the address below.)

**Mail to PPW, 4164 Austin Bluffs Pkwy #246, Colorado Springs, CO 80918**

## Prizes for American Icon 3 include:

- Review and critique of a partial manuscript by agent Kristin Nelson of the Nelson Literary Agency
- Review and critique of a partial manuscript by Anita Kushen, literary agent.
- Review and critique of a partial manuscript by Alex Cole, Senior Editor of Capital Crime Press
- One hour one-on-one consultation and professional editing of five pages by writer/editor Laurie Wagner Buyer
- Review and critique of synopsis by Pam McCutcheon, author of *Writing the Fiction Synopsis: A Step-by-Step Approach*
- A critique of a five-page synopsis and 30-page manuscript excerpt by Steve Saffel.
- Gift certificates from local bookstores and more.

## FOR CONTESTANTS ONLY:

TITLE OF ENTRY: \_\_\_\_\_

GENRE: \_\_\_\_\_ (Provide your best guess—changes are permitted prior to the event.)

PUBLISHED IN NOVEL LENGTH: Yes  No

CURRENTLY REPRESENTED BY A LITERARY AGENT: Yes  No

(Note that answering 'yes' to either of these questions does not eliminate you from participating in the event, but limits your eligibility for certain prizes.)

**RULES:** Contestants will each read aloud for two minutes from their original works of fiction in any genre and a panel of three judges will provide brief verbal critiques in front of an audience. Entries must not have been previously published. Materials presented should not exceed the equivalent of a movie "R" rating. Winners will be determined by the three-judge panel. Judges' decisions will be overseen by a member of the Board of Directors of Pikes Peak Writers. Decisions are final. Pikes Peak Writers reserves the right to publish winners' names, prizes and titles of works for use in publicity and other materials. Prizes are subject to change without notice. Contestants and attendees must be 18 years of age or older, unless parental consent is verified by PPW. All contestants must sign an affirmation of eligibility and a publicity release form at the event.

**For more information please visit [www.ppwc.net](http://www.ppwc.net) or e-mail [Workshops@ppwc.net](mailto:Workshops@ppwc.net).**



PIKES PEAK WRITERS  
4164 Austin Bluffs Parkway 246  
Colorado Springs, CO 80918

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## Sweet Success

By Janice Black



Todd Fahnestock reports on the “Sweet Success” for *Mistress of Winter*, the second book in *The Heartstone Trilogy* by Giles Carwyn and Todd (the first book in the series is *Heir of Autumn*). They had a fantastic book signing at The Tattered Cover on June 6th, with around 30 people showing up to support them.

Also, the following day, they invited all of their out-of-state friends, family and fans to buy the book on Amazon.com at the same time to see what it would do to the sales ranking. They are happy to say that it was a

**12 Pikes Peak Writer**

smashing success, sending *Mistress of Winter* to #49 on Amazon.com’s bestseller list for Epic Fantasy.

And to top it off, this weekend in the June 17th Sunday edition of the *Denver Post*, *Mistress of Winter* was #4 on the local bestseller list.

Ahhhh, sweet success...

Beth Groundwater’s *A Real Basket Case* mystery novel has gone into its third printing, and she just sent the sequel manuscript in to the acquisition editor. Beth is slowing down on her promotion events after the end of June, but you can still catch her on Saturday, August 11th (featuring cake for her birthday!) from 2-4 p.m. with the Five Stars from Five Star panel at the Barnes & Noble Booksellers Centerra store near Loveland, Colorado.

Pat Kennelly now has an online column on [www.gardenandhearth.com](http://www.gardenandhearth.com). The direct link is [www.gardenandhearth.com/Italian-Cooking.htm](http://www.gardenandhearth.com/Italian-Cooking.htm). She will add new Italian recipes monthly.

## Hot Topics

### 2007 PPWC CDs

CDs for the 2007 Pikes Peak Writers Conference are still available through National Conference Recording Services, Inc.

The order link for the conference workshop audio CDs is [www.ncrsusa.com/cgi-bin/store/main-pikes.html](http://www.ncrsusa.com/cgi-bin/store/main-pikes.html)

If you have any questions, please contact Tim Skurdahl at 303-807-1404.

Charlie Rush will be signing his new Civil War novel, *One Turn of the Cards*, at the Covered Treasures Bookstore in Monument, 5-8 p.m., Thursday, August 16. Monument celebrates the World of Art every third Thursday evening of the month by opening their shops and offering free snacks and drinks. Place August 16 on your calendar and bring family and friends

### PPW Open Critique Group Schedule:

August 29: Barb Nickless

September 26: Karin Huxman