

The Best of PPWC 2010 by Grant McKenzie

For 18 years, the Pikes Peak Writers Conference has provided an exceptional opportunity for writers from across the nation to hone their craft. This year's faculty and staff consistently exceeded attendees' expectations and put together one of the best conferences to date. As with any event of this magnitude, however, some things stood out as the best of the best.

Best Read & Critique: All writers need feedback, whether they want it or not. PPWC offers ample opportunity, in a variety of formats, for writers to have their opening pages reviewed by top agents, editors, and other published authors. While all these sessions provide great feedback, Caryn Wiseman's session stood out for this year's conference attendees.

Caryn, who is an agent with the Andrea Brown Literary Agency, gave the writers in her session a "*much more accurate picture of how to build a great first page.*" She personalized "*detailed feedback that varied for each writer.*" "*Every word was educating*" in this session, and attendees learned "*how to start a book and really grab the reader's attention.*" Caryn's "*good insights*" and "*great feedback*" provided "*a new perspective*" for many writers.

Best Friday Session: The opportunity to pitch to agents and editors is a major draw to the PPWC. Scheduled pitches are usually on Saturday, so anything on Friday that helps writers prepare is bound to be a hit. Linda Rohrbaugh's "Second Log Line" presentation was no exception.

Linda gave attendees "*Courage!*" and "*A Plan!*" for their upcoming pitches. Her presentation created "*clarity for preparing for pitch sessions.*" Many attendees found the "Second Log Line" presentation "*tremendously inspiring*" and were "*SO glad [they] came to this one.*" PPWC will "*definitely bring her back again*" for future conferences.

Best Pitch: Seventeen-year-old Kelsie attended PPWC for the first time and decided to pitch one of her manuscripts. Although nervous going into the pitch session, Kelsie was on "cloud nine" and had "no memory" of the hour or so after the agent requested her manuscript. She credits this success to many things. First, she had a lot of pitch coaching, both in seminar and one-on-one. She specifically credits Linda Rohrbaugh's "Second Log Line" presentation as being significantly helpful. Kelsie also says she tries to stay focused on a project until it is complete before moving on to a new manuscript. That kind of dedication is what has led to three completed manuscripts. Finally, Kelsie enters as many contests as possible. She says the pressure of a deadline gives her the motivation she needs.

Best Saturday Session: PPWC was honored to welcome Donald Maass and Lisa Rector (Maass) this year. Donald gave the keynote address at Sunday brunch, followed by a 4-

hour workshop based on his book *The Fire in Fiction*. He also gave a Saturday workshop on creating tension in every level of your work.

Donald's Saturday session succeeded in its goal of providing "*pointers on how to ratchet up the dialogue/action on every page to create a real page-turner.*" "*It was the most educational and practical of all the lectures,*" and was built upon "*good audience participation.*" Many attendees thought Donald's presentation would "*strengthen [their] fiction*" and "*improve [their] writing.*" One attendee even decided to add the material generated from the workshop lessons to her non-fiction manuscript.

Best Sunday Session: Donald Maass and Lisa Rector make a great team at a conference like PPWC. Their combined consultation and review donated to the silent auction is just one of many examples of their teamwork. Although Donald's Sunday workshop was an add-on to this year's conference, Lisa's Sunday workshop was part of the core conference package and was widely regarded as the best Sunday session.

Building a story can be difficult, but not nearly as difficult as beginning one. Lisa's presentation on "The First Fifty Pages" was "*one of the most informative of the weekend.*" Attendees were most impressed with the applicability of the session. Lisa, in her "*very positive & passionate*" way, gave her audience "*lots of thought-provoking scenarios to apply to writing*" and "*ways to improve immediately.*"

Other Bests from PPWC 2010

Best Queen of the Universe: Laura Hayden
Best Rivalry: Laura Hayden (Bama) & Tim Dorsey (Auburn)
Best Pitch Switcher: Bonnie Hagan
Best Pitch Apprentice: Jen LaPointe
Best Photographer: Jared Hagan
Best Silent Auctioneer: Chris Mandeville
Loudest Silent Auctioneer: Connie McKenzie
Best Pinball Impersonation: Kelsie Baltrush
Best Alter Ego: Trixie
Best Sashay: Todd Fahnestock
Best Improv Story: Corbin Waggoner
Best Mascot: Ruh
Best Boot Sisters: Terrie Wolf & Deb Courtney
Best Meal: Beef AND Chicken @ Saturday Banquet
Best Elevator: 2

Now that the awards have been announced and the conference is done, I think we would all agree with the writer who reviewed Lisa Rector's presentation: "*Outstanding! Can't wait to get back to writing.*"

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