

## Secrets to Success: Breaking into Print in Poetry and Fiction

May Annual Open Meeting

By Brandy Vallance

At two o' clock in the afternoon, I walked into Cottonwood Center for the Arts and stepped into an atmosphere rich in refinement and creative camaraderie. A long table was overburdened with cucumber sandwiches, tarts, and scones. Wisdom Tea House of Monument served complimentary tea (Gold Tisame, Halamar Assam, and Jasmine Monkey King). The fragrance of these master tea blends wafted up from cups held by writers—all hopeful and full of the stories that only they could tell.

As we mingled and finally settled into our chairs, Aaron Anstett, Pikes Peak Poet Laureate, stepped up to the microphone. He looked like a poet, standing there with perfect posture, dressed in a striped blue shirt and dark jacket. He held his book of poetry open, the pages marked with post-it notes. But he never glanced down as he recited “The Pharmacist,” “Man Saves Own Life,” and “If I Had Another Face.” When he finished reading, he sat down and joined the rest of the panel: Beth Groundwater (local mystery author), Stephanie G'Schwind (editor of Colorado Review), Sue Hamilton (Dialogue Publishing), and Doris Baker (Filter Press).

Here's a sampling of questions from the audience:

*What is your best advice for breaking into print?*

**Sue Hamilton:** Develop the best package you can. I've seen writers work six to ten years on a manuscript and then put no thought into a query or synopsis. You'll be judged in five minutes or less.

**Aaron Anstett:** It's just like applying for a job. You wouldn't send out a resume littered with errors. Editors want to take work but they don't want to waste their time.

*What's a big do and don't for submitting?*

**Beth Groundwater:** Submit. If you never submit, you'll never get published.

**Stephanie G'Schwind:** Don't put it on fancy paper. Don't say you've never been published.

*What makes you want to run screaming when it comes across your desk?*

**Doris Baker:** Comparing your book unrealistically with others.

**Beth Groundwater:** When the writer doesn't start the story at the exact moment that the character's life changes forever. When I can't understand the character's emotion. When there's no clear conflict. Wasting words.

*What's the best way to get work in front of an editor?*

**Beth Groundwater:** Through other published writers. It's not what you know, it's who you know.

**Sue Hamilton:** Attend conferences, workshops, enter contests.

*When do you know when it's time to put the “baby” in the drawer and not open it again?*

**Doris Baker:** Remember when one door closes, another opens. Start something fresh to open a new door. Maybe have a ceremony and burn the “baby.”

At this point, the crowd gasped in horror as we all pictured our beloved novel manuscripts bursting into flames.

Hopefully, by taking the advice of these mentors and by taking advantage of everything Pikes Peak Writers has to offer, none of us will ever see that day.

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