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VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1
FEBRUARY 2002

covered, however, that I had left behind the wealth of writers groups, seminars, and classes that characterized Southern California. I found relatively little here to improve my skills in commercial fiction.

UCCS had a writers program that I hoped would be akin to the magnificent program of weekly seminars at UCLA. Unfortunately the UCCS program was in decline and disappeared a few years later. I came across one or two independent writers groups, but they didn't approach the level of career information I'd left behind. Pikes Peak Romance Writers was just getting started. Even though they've become a highly successful group that now proudly claims to be the starting point of many published authors, I was quite certain my future didn't include success as a romance writer. As it turns out, many more writers reside in the Pikes Peak Region than I would have guessed in 1991.



Attendance at the inaugural PPWC in 1993 numbered about 175, and I believe the mailing list built up to about 700 that first year. I organized the conference format around programs I believed would help writers build their skills.

We started with the theme, Useful Tips for Writing Commercial Fiction.

Now as we approach our 10th PPWC, we have many accomplishments to be proud of. In 2000 we were delighted to find ourselves on the *Writer's Digest* list of the top 10 Writers Conferences in the nation. I've lost count of the number of our contest winners and other participants who now are published authors. Editors consistently tell our staff that the PPWC participants demonstrate a higher level of skill than is found at most conferences these editors attend.

Elizabeth James, who has served in national positions with Mystery Writers of America and the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, characterized the PPWC as a teaching conference. She pointed out that in contrast to many conferences she attends, the halls at the PPWC empty when the classes start. We are proud to offer to serious writers such a great learning opportunity every year.

Our current PPWC mailing list includes about 3,000 names, and approximately 2,000 are local writing enthusiasts. Indeed, the Pikes Peak Region has a much stronger community of writers than I envisioned in 1991.

Now those of us who have operated the PPWC over the years are establishing
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The Butler Did It!

Highly successful PPWC springboards PPW

Jimmie H. Butler, PPWC Founder, looks back, and to the future

When I moved to Colorado Springs in 1991, I was glad to leave behind the smog, traffic, high crime rates, and earthquakes of Los Angeles. I soon dis-

In 1992 when I began to put together the first Pikes Peak Writers Conference under the sponsorship of the Friends of the Pikes Peak Library District, interested writers seemed to come out of the woodwork.



PPW to offer year-round program

By Laura Hayden, PPW president

The Pikes Peak Writers Conference has built its reputation for success over the past nine years by presenting annual conferences that consistently bring together highly professional indus-

try experts, a host of experienced authors, and a hungry audience of writers who want to perfect their craft and find success placing their works. Our organization has grown in stature and in ability and now, in our 10th year, we've taken the next step. We've formed Pikes Peak Writers and our purpose is to serve the Front Range area, acting as a centralized clearinghouse of information about



all aspects of the writing community.

What do you get for your dues? This newsmagazine is just one of the benefits you'll get from membership. In addition, we'll have quarterly programming — everything from writing instructors to high-profile authors to industry professionals. Some programs will be interactive; others will be lecture-style. We'll alternate between half-day programming and evening programming. Think of it as a mini-conference every two months!

We have a highly skilled and experienced board of directors that will handle PPW's year-round program. To sweeten
continued on page 4

“Description is the thing that makes what's happening more vivid; description should never be the thing that's happening.”

— Gary Provost

from the editor



Welcome to the premier issue of *PPW News-Magazine!* This is your sampler, your first look at the Pikes Peak Writer bimonthly publication dedicated to serving you, the aspiring writer. You,

the published writer. You, the somewhere in-between writer.

PPW's offerings include fantastic features and captivating columns designed to light a fire under your creativity, answer your burning questions, and lead you in just the direction you need to go.

As a writer, you're busy. You may be a full-time wordsmith, or you may have a day job. We at PPW understand. We know how difficult it is to sneak in sometimes no more than 15 minutes to devote to reading about

writing. That's why every issue of *Pikes Peak Writer* will be jam-packed with precisely what you want, and not one comma more.

So grab your mocha latté, kick off your shoes, call dibs on the wicker sofa, and sink into the next 15 minutes. It's all for you, the writer.

Susan Rust has 13 years experience in journalism, with 30 writing and photography awards to her credit. A writer/editor in Colorado Springs, she is finishing her first book, and currently freelances on both the local and national level.

Get Good Enough

The Right Side of the Point

By Michael Waite



As we worked to shape the direction and content of this newsmagazine, the question was posed: what would the readers of the mag — the majority who are aspiring writers —

most want to know? The answer was simple enough: how to get published. Problem is, that question wears two faces. It's a want vs. need thing. What aspiring writers want is to type a novel and get discovered. What they need is to learn to write great fiction. How to get published? Get good at writing fiction. Most who aspire to publication are not.

You've heard the tales — tottering piles of manuscripts piled in corners and hallways of publishing houses waiting for a read, with thousands more gushing in each month. Whole bathrooms wallpapered with rejection notices. Editors talking smack about how they can decide if a submission is worth reading in just three paragraphs. Why? How can it be? It can be because the vast majority of the stuff that comes in is junk. Unpublishable.

But too often, the aspiring writer hears such stories and despairs. After all, he's been reading for years, and there is no way his unpublished story is any worse than some of the stuff that sees ink. Why is the publishing industry against the new writer? How can an editor be so arrogant as to reject a story after three paragraphs? Holy glue pot, are they all idiots? Surely somebody in some publishing house somewhere will recognize

his genius. All he has to do is get in. Somehow learn the secret handshake, find the VIP entrance, sneak past the gatekeeper, get lucky, get discovered.



That kind of thinking is on the wrong side of the

point. It's not about storming the fortress, it's about learning the craft. The front door to publication is open . . . if you're good enough. Simple. Not easy, but simple.

When asked why getting published was so hard, Gary Provost said, "It's not. The most important thing I've learned is that getting published is easy. Writing well is what's hard. Writing well is so damned hard that your writing may not yet be good enough. If you can accept that fact, then you will probably succeed as a writer."

So put your focus and energy where it belongs — on growing your skill and knowledge of the storytelling craft. Your fight is against your own ignorance, not against the publishing world.

It's tough, writing great fiction. The difficulty lies in its very nature as a subjective art form. Great fiction requires hundreds upon thousands of strategic decisions wisely made on both a micro and a macro level — decisions that can only be made correctly when you know your way around the craft. And knowing your way around the craft requires not only knowing the how, but the why, the when and the where on the hundreds of aspects and elements of storytelling.

"It's not about storming the fortress, it's about learning the craft."

That's exactly the kind of savvy you'll find in the pages of the *Pikes Peak Writer* . . . tips and tactics, techniques and devices, rules of thumb and accepted conventions . . . all for this single purpose: to help you get good enough. And if we help you get good enough, we'll have taught you how to get published.

Michael is the past director of the Pikes Peak Writers Conference and co-author of The Writer's Brainstorming Kit, available from Gryphon Books for Writers.

Gryphon books for writers.com

Bimonthly NewsMagazine of the Pikes Peak writing community

PIKES PEAK
Writer
official publication of the pikes peak writers

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Pikes Peak Writers operates as a non-profit, tax exempt organization incorporated in November 2001 as the Pikes Peak Writers. *PPW NewsMagazine* is a bimonthly publication serving members of Pikes Peak Writers group. First year membership rates are \$25. The opinions expressed in *PPW NewsMagazine* don't necessarily reflect those of the editorial staff/board of directors. Articles in *PPW NewsMagazine* may not be reproduced without the written consent of PPW.

Bookmarks

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT . . .

. . . *ensuring my characters are interesting*



✦ In *Beginnings, Middles and Ends* (pages 81-85), Nancy Kress discusses ensuring interest by working with complex motivations, which lead to unexpected actions, which generate interesting story events — and how to do it all so the reader buys it.

✦ Donna Levin, in her book *Get That Novel Written* (pages 18-19), looks at why stereotypes are a quick and certain way

to kill the reader's interest. She goes on to detail how and when to use recognizable character types and how to choose strong, unique particulars to flesh out your characters. Later, (pages 24-30) she discusses in depth three qualities that ensure interest in a character: complexity, stature, and a strong goal, including the ability to act upon it.

✦ Leonard Bishop writes in *Dare to be a Great Writer* that interesting characters are motivated by universal feelings that gain reader empathy and interest. He goes on to define what those universal feelings are (pages 32-33). He also suggests that characters can be made more interesting by using inner contradictory conflicts (pages 224-225).

✦ In his book, *The 38 Most Common Fiction Writing Mistakes*, Jack Bickham defines interesting characters as those who are active risk takers — highly motivated toward a goal (page 21).

✦ Anne Lamott, in *Bird by Bird* explores what makes a person — a character — likable and interesting (pages 49-52).

PPW NewsMag Contest

To make the *Pikes Peak Writers NewsMagazine* as useful as possible, we're asking our members to share practical tips and other lessons learned on the road to becoming a better writer. We offer the possibility of seeing your words in print (a great resumé builder), a bit of publicity about your writing efforts, and a gift certificate to the PPWC bookstore.

Based on the quality of the articles and the overall interest of our membership, the PPW NewsMag editor will select a number of submissions for publication. Members of the PPW Board/Staff will judge all contest submissions postmarked by March 15, 2003 for recognition and contest prizes. If we receive more great tips than can fit in our bimonthly PPW NewsMag, we may combine some submissions into a booklet of tips to be distributed at the 2003 Pikes Peak Writers Conference and on the PPW Website.

We will award prizes in two categories (look for prize list in our next issue). Articles eligible for the contests should not have been published previously.

Category I: Contest for authors published in novel-length fiction: Article length up to 900 words. Include a bio of up to 40 addi-

tional words about the author and recent/upcoming publications.

Category II: Contest for authors not published in novel-length fiction: Article length up to 500 words. Up to 40 additional words about the author and writing interests/projects.

Please specify which category your submission should be judged in. **NOTE:** Submissions that meet the requirements for recurring columns, such as *Things I Learned in Getting a First Novel Published*, *Nailing Down POV*, etc., also will be considered during the contest judging. So, put on your thinking cap, put your nose to the grindstone, be happy, live and learn, remember, what goes around comes around, and come up with a good topic, such as *How I Improved my Writing by Avoiding Worn-out Clichés*. After all, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

What an untangled Web We Weave ... for you

Great online finds for the writing mind

<http://www.crimelibrary.com/>

A treasure trove of information and potential story ideas for mystery writers. Articles on trace evidence, forensic art, crime scene investigation, criminal profiling, etc., and in-depth stories about notorious criminals.

Ask the Staff

Question: I've had 10 non-fiction books and more than 100 articles published, but want to try my hand at fiction. I know that agents and publishers typically want to see a completed manuscript, but since I already have so many publishing credits, can I just submit a synopsis and the first few chapters?

— Sharon Carmack, Simla, Colorado

Answer: You can certainly try to go the proposal route, but it's good to be aware of why most new writers are asked to write the entire manuscript. With the possible exception of biography/memoirs or true crime, most non-fiction books don't tell a complete fiction-like story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. They're made of sections — such as a medical advice book addressing various aspects of the human body — skin diseases, what to ask your doctor during a physical, gender specific concerns, etc. It requires research and organization but you're not telling the story of a person, a place or a thing that has to keep the reader's interest for 70,000 plus words.

As most writers will tell you, it's easy to start a book and you may know exactly how it ends, but it's all that pesky stuff in between that tends to trip up a writer. Even if you have several non-fiction books published, have you proven that you can maintain a story for a very long length of time? That you know how to pace the story? Mete out character growth or deconstruction? Work toward a black moment? Unless you have a non-fiction work that follows the same sort of peaks and valleys that a fictional story creates, you may find agents and editors aren't willing to accept that your proven talents in one area necessarily translate into the guaranteed qualities they need demonstrated for another form of writing. So, be prepared to write the entire thing. You may find it harder than you anticipated based on your previous experience. That's what the agents and editors figure will happen.

— Laura Hayden, author of eight fiction books and one non-fiction

The Butler Did It!

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the Pikes Peak Writers to help provide additional learning opportunities throughout the year. Our plans include a newsmagazine, which will be a useful teaching tool for serious writers. We will offer programs and seminars throughout the year to bring writers together more often than one weekend a year. The more support we receive from the writing community, the richer will be our offerings.

When I was President of the Southwest Manuscripters in Redondo Beach, California, I pointed out to the membership that writers needed to find a balance in the time that

“I’ve lost count of the number of our contest winners and other participants who now are published authors.”

could be devoted to writing. You still have to sit down alone and get words on the page. However, interaction with other writers helps you progress so you won't need to make all the mistakes you'd make if you didn't share the advice of others ahead of you on the difficult

**Pikes Pique, or . . .
choose your words carefully**

“A day without
sunshine is
like, night.”

— Zen thought



path. It has been my experience that writers who meet on a regular basis are inspired to write more than those who don't.

So, I encourage you to join the Pikes Peak Writers and help us make it as successful as the Pikes Peak Writers Conference.

—Jimmie H. Butler

Jimmie H. Butler founded the Pikes Peak Writers Conference in 1993. An award-winning novelist and a highly regarded teacher of commercial fiction, he is proud to have studied under his mentor, Paul Gillette.

PPW to offer year-round program

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the deal to our prospective members, we are giving all charter members/applicants a \$25 discount to this year's conference, which just happens to equal the initial dues for 2002. You can sign up for PPW at the same time you register for the conference. Or, if you aren't able to attend the conference, you can sign up now using the form included in this newsmagazine. One of the benefits to joining PPW will be discounts on the annual conference registration fee.

Join our efforts to unite the writers in our area. By working together, we can utilize this new year-round program to maintain the levels of communication, education, instruction, professional contact and professional camaraderie that we have grown to appreciate each spring.

Award-winning author, Laura Hayden has written eight novels and contributed to three anthologies. Her upcoming works include Double Exposure, the new “First Daughter” mystery series co-authored with real First Daughter, Susan Ford, and The Official Nora Roberts Companion, coming in Oct. 2002.

Out of Book Experience

a PPW Bookshelf Review

The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers by Christopher Vogler

Renowned Hollywood story doctor, Christopher Vogler, understands the interactions of plot and character in stories that work. His plot comments focus



around *The Hero's Journey*, a 12-step story structure that noted anthropologist Joseph Campbell discovered among virtually all tales told by civilizations

around the world. Vogler supplements his insights on plotting with an equally important section on character archetypes, such as the mentor, shapeshifter, trickster, etc. The archetype discussion is important in understanding the underlying functions of the characters in your novel.

What you discover in reading Vogler's book is that you already are using many of the 12 steps of *The Hero's Journey*, and you will recognize some of your characters as generally fitting these archetypes.

The Writer's Journey can be extremely helpful in analyzing problems with your plot and in helping you more fully develop characters to better accomplish the functions you have set before them.

A must-have reference for the bookshelf of any serious novelist or screenwriter.

PIKES PEAK WRITERS REGISTRATION FORM

NOTE: If you can't make the conference, you can still join Pikes Peak Writers. Just photocopy this form and mail to PPW, P.O. 6726, Colorado Springs, CO 80934, along with your check for \$25.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone () _____ E-mail _____