

Learning Your Character's Personality

By Debbie Meldrum

After several years studying the craft of writing, I have attended more than one workshop on characterization. I have interviewed my protagonists and antagonists and created detailed backstories for them. I have read *The Hero's Journey*, *The Writer's Journey* and *45 Master Characters*.

So why did I attend the November 5th workshop by Becky Martinez and Sue Vidars? To be honest, I was looking for a plausible excuse to avoid both housework and actual writing. Besides, there was this character who was too much like my last protagonist no matter how much I interviewed her. I could hardly tell them apart. How would a reader?

Becky and Sue helped me find a new take on my heroine. Based on their books, *10 Steps to Creating Memorable Characters* and *The Complete Writer's Guide to Heroes and Heroines*, they led the group step by step through the process of building a three-dimensional character. From physical description to a full emotional, mental and spiritual background, we delved into what makes this fictional person tick.

“And I now have a character unlike any I’ve written about before, thanks to Becky Martinez and Sue Vidars.”

Their list of archetypes goes well beyond anything I have seen before. Instead of overarching mythic types, they have identified characters from real life (see following list). The examples are from popular movies and television shows. And there are female as well as male archetypes. These are broken down further for an even more granular view of each one.

Another innovation from Martinez and Vidars is their diamond to track each character's motivational arc throughout the story. The internal and

external Crusade, Cause, Complication and Change are all defined for the character. The presenters gave us a new way to look at what motivates each character and why.

But Becky and Sue were not quite finished. We were allowed to play their card game, *Deal A Story*. The noise level and laughter in the room increased exponentially as each table created a story in three minutes using six cards with suggested Genre, Plot, Hero, Heroine, Villain, and Flaw. It was a fun way to end an informative workshop.

And I now have a character unlike any I've written about before, thanks to Becky Martinez and Sue Vidars.

The Female Archetypes and Their Individual Styles

- The **BOSS**—A real go-getter, she climbs the ladder of success (Lucy—*The Peanuts* comic strip)
- The **SEDUCTRESS**—An enchantress, she gets her way (Lolita—*Lolita*)
- The **SPUNKY KID**—Gutsy and true, she is loyal to the end (Sister Mary Clarence—*Sister Act*)
- The **FREE SPIRIT**—An eternal optimist, she dances to unheard tune (Mame—*Auntie Mame*)
- The **WAIF**—A distressed damsel, she bends in the wind (Molly Jensen—*Ghost*)
- The **LIBRARIAN**—Controlled and clever, she holds back (Joan Wilder—*Romancing the Stone*)
- The **CRUSADER**—A dedicated fighter, she meets her commitments (Ripley—*Aliens*)
- The **NURTURER**—Serene and capable, she nourishes the spirit (Claire Huxtable—*The Cosby Show*)

The Male Archetypes

- The **CHIEF**—A dynamic leader, he has time for nothing by work (James T. Kirk—*Star Trek*)
- The **BAD BOY**—Dangerous to know, he walks on the wild side (Jim Stark—*Rebel Without A Cause*)
- The **BEST FRIEND**—Sweet and safe, he never lets anyone down (George Bailey—*It's A Wonderful Life*)
- The **LOST SOUL**—A tormented being, he lives in solitude (Ronny Cammaren—*Moonstruck*)
- The **CHARMER**—A smooth talker, he creates fantasies (Axel Foley—*Beverly Hills Cop*)
- The **PROFESSOR**—Coolly analytical, he knows every answer (Mr. Spock—*Star Trek*)
- The **SWASHBUCKLER**—Mr. Excitement, he's an adventurer (Agent J—*Men In Black*)
- The **WARRIOR**—A noble champion, he acts with honor (Clark Kent—*Superman*)

“A word is not the same with one writer as with another. One tears it from his guts. The other pulls it out of his overcoat pocket.”

—Charles Peguy

From the Editor



By Pat Kennelly

I'm writing this letter on December 21st, the first day of winter and the second day of "The Holiday Blizzard of 2006." I'm grateful to have a "found" day to

get caught up on my writing projects, that I'm not stuck at the airport or on the freeway, and that my shopping, mailing, and card writing is complete. I am fortunate to be here and warm, madly trying to finish my writing goals for 2006.

Author and editor William Arthur Ward writes, "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and

not giving it." How many times in 2006 have you thought that you should write a real, handwritten, thank-you note instead of sending another quick e-mail? Have you thanked your writing mentors, your critique group, and your family for their words of encouragement when you felt like giving up? If published, did you remember to thank your editor, your agent, your fans?

Recent studies by Dr. Michael McCollough and Dr. Robert Emmons have found that people who are grateful have "higher reported levels of alertness, enthusiasm, determination, optimism and energy." All of these qualities are much admired in a writer, beginning or published. If that's all it takes, for 2007, my first goal is to express more gratitude.

I love the line in Laura Pellerin's article in this issue that says "don't forget to thank your (critique) group when you get published." I'm thanking mine before my work is published. The critique group I'm involved with (made up of extremely talented PPW members) thanks each other

formally once a year with a celebration dinner. This is our chance to review last year's goals, successes and disappointments and to say "thank you" for the writing support throughout the year.

Like we help each other monthly, attending one of PPW's Open Critique Sessions this year could help you through the rough parts of your novel, short story or nonfiction piece. Don't miss out on the exciting Write Brain Sessions in the next two months, either. Remember that these sessions are FREE for PPW members. And don't forget to register early for the 2007 Pikes Peak Writers Conference. This year marks PPW's Fifteenth Anniversary. Early registration for members starts January 1st. You'll be thankful that you did. On that grateful note, thank you for making PPW richer and more successful.

I look forward to hearing about your writing successes this year!

Best Wishes,

Pat

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Journey of a First (Published) Novel November WB, Featuring Denise Vega

By Debbie Meldrum



At the November Write Brain session, Denise Vega shared her exciting and somewhat daunting journey from initial story idea to holding a published novel in her hand. The entire process took more than three years.

The idea for her book, *Click Here (To Find Out How I Survived Seventh Grade)*, came to Denise in the summer of 2001 after attending The Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators (SCBWI) conference. She wrote and then rewrote the book, getting feedback from her critique group and others. A member of her group offered to recommend Denise to her agent and editor.

In March of 2003, Denise submitted the

manuscript to Little, Brown and Company. One month later she received an offer. Revisions continued through two different editors until the book was finally released in April of 2005.

Denise stressed the importance of persistence in all phases of the writing process. Be willing to revise an idea until it works. Critique groups can be invaluable to help hone the writer's skills. She also shared the fact that five other books preceded *Click Here* but are now sitting in a drawer.

Another piece of sage advice was to research the target market. Look at the trends impacting your readers. Subscribe to magazines aimed at your audience. Know what they are reading now.

But the most important thing is to keep writing.

The Business of Writing

Four Principles for a Successful Nonfiction Proposal

by Linda Rohrbough

For me, writing fiction is the Holy Grail, but nonfiction offers a lot of benefits. Nonfiction books are easier to sell and usually garner higher advances for beginning writers. Here are four principles for success along with resources for how to write a nonfiction proposal.

The proposal is just what it sounds like: a marketing tool to get a commitment from a publisher and, consequently, money on the table in the form of an advance without writing the entire book first. The best outline for a proposal I've ever seen is on the McGraw-Hill Web site under the heading "Project Submission Guidelines." Since we have limited space, I'm going to let you read over McGraw-Hill's guidelines for yourself and just hit the high points.

My first principle is writing the proposal the way you plan to write the book. If your project is not aimed at intellectuals, then modify your proposal headings appropriately. For example, I recently used the heading "Why This Book?" instead of "Rationale" because the book is aimed at a general audience.

New authors often ask me if they can just write their nonfiction book and skip the "boring" proposal. Think about this for a minute. Boring proposal, interesting book—is that real? My opinion is if you can't write a compelling proposal, then you're not likely to write a book that will sell.

My nonfiction agent recommended: *Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction—and Get It Published* by Susan Rabiner. While I disagree with portions of the book, it does provide excellent examples.

Some parts of the proposal are only interesting to the editors whose job is to sell the book to their publishing committee, which brings me to the competing titles section of the proposal and principle number two. Never say, "There's nothing on the market like this book." That'll scare a publisher because it's an indication similar books have failed. It's your job to



show them a waiting market exists. You want to compare your book to a handful that are doing well, but also point out how yours is different enough to find a niche. Do list the retail price, page count and size (known as trim size) of competing titles. By the way, Amazon.com is your best friend when it comes to this task.

I've had authors ask me if they should suggest a retail price for their book. Absolutely not. You'll look like the worst kind of amateur. However, you do want to follow principle three which is propose a book similar in length to the ones on the market. The rule of thumb is 250 words to a page, so a book that is 320 pages equals 80,000 words. You can violate this principle if you have a good reason, but make sure you state it in the proposal.

Also, defining the book's potential market size is another area where writers get hung up. Many authors want to skip this part. But if you don't know who your book is aimed at and how many of those folks exist, how can you expect it to sell? (Getting the answers to those questions is also an excellent exercise for fiction writers.) As a brief example, in the proposal my agent sold last year, among other sources I listed the American Obesity Association asserting the number of citizens who are one hundred pounds or more overweight is nine million—more than twice the number of people in the U.S. who suffer from Alzheimer's disease; the Center for Disease Control saying obesity is disease escalating at an alarming rate; and *USA Today* who claims wealth is no longer a deterrent and the disease is growing fastest in those making sixty thousand or more a year.

Where do you get this information? I always check with a reference librarian, do a search on the Internet, and browse recent copies of the magazine *American Demographics*. Another great resource is *The Statistical Abstract of the United States*, a thick book put out by the government with everything from the number of people in

the U.S. to the number of television sets. All of these resources can be found at most public libraries.

Also, analysts are another source. I watch for analysts and when I'm working on a proposal, visit their Web sites looking for past press releases. So the fourth principle is define your market and provide the size based on credible sources.

Nonfiction proposal writing can be fun and it helps sharpen your business sense about publishing. Most importantly, it can give you a jingle in your jeans while you're working on your fiction career. Good luck!

Resources:

Project Submission Guidelines Web site from McGraw-Hill: http://books.mcgraw-hill.com/getpage.php?page=author_submission_centercontent.php&template=authors

Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction—and Get It Published by Susan Rabiner

Four principles for a successful nonfiction proposal.

- Write the proposal the way you plan to write the book. (If you can't write a compelling proposal, then you're not likely to write a book that will sell.)
- Compare your book to ones doing well, but make sure you point out how yours is different enough to be worth publishing.
- Propose a book similar in length to ones on the market.
- Make sure you define your market and provide size estimates based on credible sources.

—Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989. She has more than 5,000 articles, seven books, and three national awards to her credit. Her latest book, *Stepping Out of the Shadow of Obesity: The Comprehensive Guide to the Adjustable Gastric Band*, with co-author Dr. Robert Sewell, will be published by Marlowe & Company in 2007. She completed her first techno-thriller novel and is working on a romantic suspense. Visit her Web site: www.PCbios.com.

The Gentle Art of the Critique

By Laura Pellerin

The “Art of the Critique” allows a writer to see what works and to see what doesn’t in a written piece. A good critique will highlight the writer’s strengths as well as their weaknesses while helping improve the overall story.

It is important for a writer to listen to the whole critique. When the speakers are through commenting on the piece, the writer can then ask questions or explain their thoughts about their piece.

What is a critique?

A critique is merely a reader’s opinion that is based upon a personal range of reading and writing experiences. The “critiquer” will bring their knowledge of plot, characterization, language and writing techniques to the writer for their consideration.

The writer can choose not to take the constructive criticism or can take the advice and rewrite in words that their target audience can understand. It’s important to go into a critique with an open mind and leave your expectations at the door.

The Pikes Peak Writers’ Open Critique sessions give writers a chance to expose their work to be critiqued. It is also a chance for PPW writers to practice the art of critiquing with the works of their fellow writers. The end purpose of these sessions is to let writers connect with fellow writers in pursuit of the same goal. We all want to be published.

“A good critique will highlight the writer’s strengths as well as their weaknesses while helping improve the overall story.”

Listen to your fellow writers as they critique your work. Choose which one among them you think will be helpful to you in your quest as a writer. Let them help you translate that kernel of truth that lies within your story to the reading public.

And then don’t forget to thank your group once an editor buys your manuscript for publication.

Does a writer need a critique group to get published?

“I strongly advocate finding a critique partner or group who can serve as your sounding board as you work on your books. How do you find one? They say birds of a feather...”

—Children’s Author Cynthia Liu, represented by the Andrea Brown Literary Agency

“Editors and publishers know the value of critique groups... Without critique groups, most of what arrives in Evil Editor’s in-box would be even crappier...”

—Evil Editor Q&A 44 Critique Groups
www.evileditor.blogspot.com

Take this opportunity to listen to what other writers say about your work. Tell them what you would want others to tell you. Treat your fellow writers by the Golden Rule (Treat others as you want to be treated).

Create more critique groups and submit manuscripts!

Upcoming Events: January, February, March

January All-Day Workshop

Crime Scene Investigation II

Featuring Colleen Collins,

Tim Hightshoe, Chris Herndon, Shaun Kaufman, Jeff Nohr, John San Agustin
Sat., Jan. 27, 2007, 8:30 a.m.-4:45 p.m.

Location: Wyndham Hotel,

5550 Tech Center Drive, Colorado Springs

Cost: \$65 for PPW members, \$85 others

In a follow-on to our widely-acclaimed CSI I workshop held in January, 2004, Pikes Peak Writers brings together a suite of law enforcement experts to help you write more realistic crime/mystery/suspense/ thriller fiction or ANY story that includes a crime.



Learn directly from the experts how a crime scene is deconstructed.

Colleen Collins, PI and Author, How a Private Investigator Works, and Workshop Facilitator.

Colleen is a PI by day, a multi-published author by night. Her articles on private investigations have appeared on various sites on the Internet as well as in *PI Magazine*. She’s written 20 novels and anthologies for both Harlequin and Dorchester. With her investigative business partner, she also teaches online writing courses: “Writing PIs in Novels” and “Writing Trials in Novels.”

Chris Herndon, Deputy Coroner/Investigator, “People Are Just Dying To See Me.”

She began her career in death investigation as a Park County Deputy Coroner 25 years ago. She is a certified medicolegal death investigator in Colorado and is one of 18 in Colorado who are certified through the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators.

Tim Hightshoe, Certified Firearms Instructor, Firearms Familiarization.

Tim is a 22-year veteran of the U.S. Air Force and the Colorado Air National Guard. A Life Member of the NRA, he has



been shooting for over 35 years, 20 of those in competitive combat shooting. Tim is currently serving in the Colorado National Guard

as the senior combat arms instructor and is also a state certified handgun instructor for P.O.S.T. and an active DeHLTA instructor.

Shaun Kaufman, Retired Lawyer and PI, Testifying about Investigations in Court.



Shaun has worked in and around the criminal justice field for nearly 25 years, as a former trial attorney and a current investigator. He’s published articles in *PI Magazine*, the *Denver Law Review*, and authored numerous briefs for the Colorado Courts. He is an instructor for the online writing courses “Writing PIs in Novels” and “Writing Trials in Novels.”

Upcoming Events—Continued



Jeff Nohr, El Paso County Sheriff's Office Detective, Homicide Investigations

Detective Jeff Nohr, a 27-year veteran of Colorado law enforcement, is currently assigned as the Cold Case Investigator for the El Paso County Sheriff's Office in Colorado Springs, CO. Jeff is also a retired Chief of Police for the city of Manitou Springs, CO and a police academy instructor.

John San Agustin, Crime Scene Re-enactment.

After graduating with a BS in Electrical Engineering, John's interests have led him to a career working in a high-tech corner of law enforcement. As a former crime multimedia specialist (now an inspector with the Sheriff's Office), Mr. San Agustin developed a unique approach using special software that streamlines the process of developing compelling digital courtroom presentations. He's been involved with several well-known cases such as the Columbine re-investigations, the JonBenet Ramsey murder, and the Laci Peterson murder trial.

Watch the Web site at www.ppwc.net/workshops.html for additional information.

January Write Brain

Subjected, Rejected, Dejected OR The Writer's Survival Guide

Featuring Cindi Myers and Lynda Sandoval
Tuesday, January 16, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
Cottonwood Artists' School

Tired of submitting and being rejected, even as other writers are garnering agent contracts, publication and selling movie rights? Can't get that novel finished because you're bogged down, blocked, depressed, or your characters refuse to talk? How does a writer—published or not—keep going on those days when cleaning up road-kill looks like a viable career option? Our speakers will tell you how they did it, why they did it, and what kept them going in the face of disgruntled family, stories that refused to end, obnoxious editors and uninterested agents.



Cindi Myers became one of the most popular people in eighth grade when she and her best friend wrote a torrid historical romance and circulated it among their peers. Fame was short-lived, however; the English teacher confiscated the

manuscript and advised her to concentrate on learning to properly diagram a sentence. From this humbling beginning, she has gone on to write nonfiction for national and regional publications ranging from *Ladies' Home Journal* to *Popular Mechanics*, but she never got rid of the fiction bug. Her books have been Waldenbooks bestsellers and have been praised for their emotion, humor and sensuality. She writes stories about relationships that matter, whether the subject is female friendship, families, or the love between a man and a woman.

Award-winning author Lynda Sandoval is a former police officer-turned fiction writer with 14 book sales to her credit. She lives in Denver with the world's coolest Cairn Terrier, Smidgey (who is immortal—he might even be a wizard!). Lynda writes women's fiction for HarperCollins Rayo; romance for Silhouette Special Edition; romantic suspense for Silhouette Intimate Moments; and young adult novels for Simon & Schuster. She has also written award-winning books for Kensington Bouquet and Pinnacle Encanto, and her popular nonfiction text published by Gryphon Books for Writers, *True Blue: An Insider's Guide to Street Cops—For Writers*, is still selling strong. In her spare time (HA!), she works as an emergency medical dispatcher for the fire department.

February Write Brain

The Novel Plotter's Toolbox: 101 simple tricks, effective techniques and classical templates to increase the pace and tension in your stories

Featuring Giles Carwyn
Tuesday, February 20, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

An advanced class for those looking to take their writing to the next level, especially those who approach stories through an idea or character and are never quite sure what needs to happen next. Topics to be covered include: Classic three-act structure, bridging conflict, maintaining tension, misdirection, revelation management, anticipatory transitions, highlighting character through conflict, injecting hope and fear into every scene, creating emotional resonance, and the art of the setup and payoff.



Giles Carwyn: Giles dropped out of college in his sophomore year determined to write a story that would change the course of human evolution. He only completed

three chapters that somehow managed to be pretentious and juvenile at the same time. Despite such humbling beginnings, he never gave up on his goal of spending his life telling stories. Over the next 15 years he continued writing novels, short stories and screenplays. The highlight of his writing career came when his wife, Tanya, proposed to him the day she read his first screenplay. Giles' debut novel, *Heir of Autumn*, (co-written with his long time writing partner, Todd Fahnestock) was published in hardback by the Eos imprint at HarperCollins in February of 2006. The follow up novel, *Mistress of Winter*, is scheduled for release in early 2007. He currently lives one hundred blocks too far from the mountains in Littleton, Colorado with his wife and two daughters, Liefke and Luna.

March Write Brain

How to Do a Reading

Featuring Todd Fahnestock, Ron Heimbecher, and Barb Nickless
Tuesday, January 20, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.
Cottonwood Artists' School



It's happened! Someone has asked you to read your work before a real, live audience. Before you panic, come hear our experts talk about voice and stage presence, handling stage fright, selecting your material, and how to make sure an audience will be there when you start to read. If you're planning on pitching to editors and agents at the PPWC, then this is the event for you.



All Write Brain Sessions are FREE for PPW Members. The meetings are held at Cottonwood Artists' School, 25 Cimino Drive, Colorado Springs

If you would like to participate in any Write Brain session, PLEASE RSVP AND INCLUDE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION. Note that this does not commit you to attending, but does enable 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

Sweet Success

Compiled by Janice Black

WOW! What a line-up for this issue. And these are only the success stories I captured. Be sure to proudly announce any accomplishments in The Loop, or send them to the Sweet Success Editor at sweetsuccess@ppwc.net to be sure I get the story right.

Denise Vega: This November Write Brain speaker was awarded the Colorado Book Award in the Young Adult category for her book, *Click Here (To Find Out How I Survived the Seventh Grade)* In October.



Margaret Coel: This former PPWC faculty member won the Colorado Book Award for Popular Fiction.



Laurie Wagner Buyer: Included in the Colorado Book Award-winning Anthology/Collection, *Comeback Wolves*, is this writer's compelling essay "Where There Are Wolves."



Laurie Wagner Buyer

Laura Hayden: KRDO radio stations News FM 105.5 with Lee Richards and 1240 AM broadcast an

interview with our own Laura Hayden. (Give a big cheer for Sue Goldstein who was responsible for getting this on the air.)

Laura Harvey: "It's less than 1,000 words, it's unpaid, and it's not even technically 'in print'," but she reports that she was still pleased as punch when her flash fiction piece, "Lifetime Guarantee," appeared in October's edition of *Apollo's Lyre*, an e-zine. Hooray!

But that's not all: She has also been offered a contract with an agent for her book, *The Snowglobe*.

Carol Hightshoe: We read on the PPW loop that Carol Hightshoe will be working as an acquisition editor for Flying Pen Press, a brand new small press. She'll be reading primarily for Fantasy, and they'll be looking for Sword and Sorcery type stories. Once she gets a chance, she reports that she will be posting the initial set of Flying Pen's submission guidelines on her site (<http://www.carol-hightshoe.com>) with a link. Feel free to contact her off-list if you are interested in working with a new small press.



Madge Walls: She reports that her novel, *Paying the Price*, received the People's Choice Award at the 2006 Ka Palapala Po'okela Awards ceremony on October 29 in Honolulu. The sponsor is the Hawaii Book Publishers Association.

The People's Choice Award is given annually to the one book among all those nominated that receives the highest

number of votes from the reading public as their "favorite title" of the year. A total of 76 books were nominated for People's Choice in 11 categories, including children's books, photography, literature, natural science and cookbooks. To be eligible, the books must have been published in 2005 in Hawaii or be about Hawaii.

Follow this link to the story: www.honoluluadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20061029/LIFE01/610290335/1081/LIFE

Also, Madge Walls and her publisher, Sue Hamilton of Dialogue Publishing, presented a workshop on "Marketing Matters: Working with an Independent Publisher" at the Great Manhattan Mystery Conclave in Manhattan, Kansas in early November.

Margaret Brettschneider: *Duty and*



Devotion, an unconventional love story within the regulations of the military, came out in November. "(Love) hasn't an easy time of it... 'If the Army wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one,' they

say when you go in...by the time you are higher ranking, it is 'If you can't handle your wife, you can't handle command' so it is a double bind."

Anyway, for the first time in this game, the writer has scores of advance orders ...what a kick!

Untangling the Web

By Lauri Griffin

Here are some links to help get your writing year off to a great start. These sites will help you set goals, give you concrete advice on formatting and submitting, help you find an agent, and most important—encourage you to sit down and write.

❖ www.organizedwriter.com/calendar.htm

A free printable calendar for writers, to help document your goals, submissions, and progress.

❖ www.book-in-a-week.com/

The Butt in Chair, Hands on Keyboard, Typing Away Madly site.

❖ www.willwriteforchocolate.com

Great cartoons for and about writers.

❖ <http://agentquery.com/>

An online database for agents, searchable for genre. Also gives information for formatting a query and the agent's contact preferences.

❖ www.lauralippman.com/

Practical advice from author, on how to get published.

❖ www.jenniferweiner.com/forwriters.htm

More advice on writing and how to get published.

❖ www.readersroom.com

Read interviews from authors, agents and publicists.

❖ www.mslexia.co.uk/

This British literary magazine has inspiring online interviews with writers on their writing methods and challenges.

❖ www.bbc.co.uk/arts/multimedia/dickens/

An online game for Dickens fans. Prowl the dark alleys of Dickensian London, picking pockets, robbing graveyards, and avoiding smallpox as you search for Dickens.

—Lauri Griffin is a fiction writer who spends way too much time online. Please send interesting sites to her at lauri_grif@earthlink.net and visit her blog for more great links at www.laurireflections.blogspot.com.

OUT OF BOOK EXPERIENCE

Books for Writers:

The Forest for the Trees: An Editor's Advice to Writers

by Betsy Lerner

Reviewed by Lisa Silverman



In her lengthy career, Betsy Lerner has been an MFA student, an award-winning poet, a book editor at major publishing houses, and a literary agent. So in her wonderfully insightful book about writers and the business in which they struggle, she provides a myriad of wise and knowledgeable perspectives. Whether you are working on your first novel or your fifth, you'll read Lerner's book and think, she's writing about me.

You may not think so on every page, especially if you have an oversize ego. Lerner shares a wealth of anecdotes and opinions about the essential makeup of writers, not all of them flattering. (Words such as neurotic and insecure come up often.) But, because of her obvious love of writers and books, even the brutally honest stuff doesn't come across as insulting. After all, how insulting can it be to be compared to Philip Roth? Her observations are simply honest, and deeply affectionate. Lerner's stories about the enthusiasm she has felt for particular writers and projects, and for the world of books in general, is infectious.

The Forest for the Trees is not a long book, but it covers a lot of territory. The book's first half speaks mainly to the process and the personality of the writer... This is the part that'll make you think she's writing about, or to, you. The chapters are peppered liberally with quotes from Roth, John Updike, Edith Wharton, and dozens of others about what inspired them to begin writing and what prevents them from stopping; about their process; about how they deal with criticism. All writers are different, but you'll identify with much of what you read, whether it's William Styron's comment that "I certainly don't [enjoy writing]. I get a fine warm feeling when I'm doing well, but that pleasure is pretty much negated by the pain of getting started every day," or the story that

Hemingway always needed 20 sharpened pencils on his desk before starting to write. (Gore Vidal's less romantic variation: "First coffee. Then a bowel movement. Then the muse joins me.")

In the book's second half, Lerner turns to more practical matters, pulling back the curtain on what, even if you've been published, may be a world of mystery to you: the publishing house (and, by extension, booksellers, reviewers, etc.). She provides wisdom on dealing with your agent and/or publishers ("Don't make the mistake of writing to publishers in what I call a proposal voice; this isn't a grant you're applying for.") She demystifies what goes on at sales meetings and what makes for a good author/editor relationship. ("Call before sending chunks of manuscript... It's like having out-of-town guests show up uninvited for the weekend.") She explains the importance of the book publicist.

What struck me about *The Forest for the Trees* is that it's not only helpful, not only insightful, but also an engrossing and entertaining read. Lerner is witty and big-hearted, literate without being snobbish, brutally honest without discouraging writers from pursuing a career. It's a book that belongs on the shelves of every writer and every editor (I first read it in a manuscript editing class). I always say that writers should do all the research they can into the book industry before approaching it. This book is a source of knowledge on the book industry, the people who work within it, and, perhaps most important, on the inner life of any writer who ever sat down in front of a blank screen.

—Lisa Silverman is a freelance book editor and works in the copyediting department at one of New York's most prestigious literary publishing houses. She has also worked as a ghostwriter and a literary agent representing both book authors and screenwriters. She founded www.BeYourOwnEditor.com in order to provide writers with free advice on both writing and the publishing business.

Grammar Gremlins

By Pam McCutcheon

Problem sentence: *The boss made him tow the line.* The problem here comes from the fact that people don't understand where this phrase originated. The word "tow" means to pull or drag along behind you, so this line implies that the boss made him haul something on a rope. However, "toe the line" comes from the early 1800s when officials at a foot race required runners to put their toe on the starting line before commencing. Thus, "toe the line" means

conforming to the officials' orders, and came to be used that way for more than just races. So, if you meant that the boss made him obey the rules, the proper way to write this is: *The boss made him toe the line.*

Problem sentence: *She had to reign in her temper.* I've seen this mistake quite a bit lately. To "reign" means to rule or exercise the power of a monarch. So, "to reign in" her temper means she was trying to rule inside it. It almost makes sense, but what you really mean to say is: *She had to rein in her temper.* This, of course, refers to pulling in the reins (as with a horse) to put her

temper in check and control it. That's the correct usage.

Problem sentence: *He was offered the roll of a lifetime.* This mistake conjures up some strange images. What exactly was he offered? A roll in the hay? An awesome dinner roll? Breathtaking acrobatics? "Roll" has several meanings, but none of them fit the context of this sentence without unintended humor. However, "role" means a character, function, or part to play. Therefore, what you should say is: *He was offered the role of a lifetime.*



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Hot Topics

New Offering from PPW! Critique Group Discount for Workshops

Guidelines for discount: A minimum of three people will constitute a critique group, and a minimum of three members must register together to get the discount. Both numbers should be at least three, but they don't have to be the same. To get the discount, the group is required to register and pay as a unit. That is if they're paying ahead, someone needs to collect from the others and send in their payments in one envelope or pay with one check or PayPal payment.

The discount is \$5 per person for half-day workshops and \$10 per person for whole-day for members or nonmembers. Both members and nonmembers get the same discount amount, even though a nonmember will pay more for the workshop.

Reporter's Potluck

January 28, 2007
Mediterranean Café
118 East Kiowa
12 Noon -2 p.m.

If you're curious about writing for the *NewsMagazine* mark your calendar for a meet, eat and greet! Meet PPW's President, Volunteer Coordinator, Reporter Coordinator, and Editor as we brainstorm next year's *NewsMagazine*. Bring a dish to share; we'll provide beverages. Get to know your fellow writers. This bash is also open to those who currently contribute to the *NewsMag*. You must RSVP to the editor by January 26th! kennelly25@msn.com.



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