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CONTENTS

From the Editor
page 2

October Write Brain
page 3

Random Top Ten Places to Write
page 3

The Business of Writing
page 4

BeckyLand
page 5

The Writer's Life
page 5

Lessons Learned from NaNoWriMo
page 6

Engagement for Excellence
page 7

NewsMag Submission
page 7

Analysis of GMC Workshop
page 8

November Write Brain
page 9

Grammar Girl!
page 9

Upcoming Events
page 10

Sweet Success
page 11

PPW Fiction Contest
page 12

PPWC News
page 12

My Best Writing Year Ever



By Bonnie Hagan

Quite honestly, time baffles me. I'm pretty sure that about five minutes after my husband and I shoved our crates of Christmas decorations into the crawl space, we were dragging them back out again. And since time seems to accelerate the

longer I live, I'm certain one year I'm going to get halfway through undecorating and just stop, icicle lights in hand, and start putting everything back up.

It's obvious to me the months don't trickle by lazily. No. They gush past, leaving me shocked while another year bleeds out and expires. So last January when I attended the PPW Write Brain titled "Your Best Writing Year Ever," I felt more than a smidge of desperation. After all, I'd seen enough years roll by, and I'd started to have serious doubts that my annual pep talks were ever going to result in real change.

2008 ended that cycle.

What would be really cool right now is if I said that the Write Brain conducted by the talented Cynthia Morris eliminated my problems and changed me overnight into the most successful writer in the world. Or the country. Or even just Colorado, I'm not picky. That's not even remotely what happened.

I did walk out of the workshop armed with goals and some new ideas. I collected organizational tips and motivational tricks along with all the resources PPW can offer—and let me tell you this group offers a lot! But all the tools

and preparation in the Milky Way weren't going to make me a writer.

So what happened? How did I go from talking to myself about writing and playing around with little projects that never got anywhere to completing my first draft of a novel? How did I manage to meet my goals instead of just wishing I could meet them? Quite simply, I stared at a clock. Seriously.

I highly recommend this activity. Find a clock. Preferably an easy-to-read analog clock with a red second hand like the ones in the classrooms of every school in the nation. Park yourself in front of it and stare. For a few minutes, nothing remarkable happens. You start to tell yourself it's just a clock and you see clocks every day, but after awhile you notice something unsettling about the super-thin second hand. It doesn't stop. It never pauses at the top and says, "Whew! Made it. Now I can take it easy." It measures second after second after second, and there is no end to the seconds. And if you are very still, and you have any kind of imagination whatsoever, you realize your entire existence is subdivided into these ridiculous segments of time. Seconds. Minutes. Hours. Days. Weeks. Months. Years. The only thing keeping them from running together is that thin hand of the clock.

Watching that clock terrified me more than a purple dinosaur singing a catchy song to preternaturally gleeful children. But it also lit my pants on fire and permanently changed my perspective. When Cynthia Morris talked about my best writing year ever, I thought about having the best writing month ever, or the best writing day ever. I evaluated time from a completely different standpoint. A year was just a measure of seconds strung together, and my year was going to precisely consist of what I spent those seconds doing. If I wanted to write, I had to spend some seconds writing. I'm talking a major dedication of seconds. If I spent my seconds elsewhere, then when December

continued on page 2

"I don't know where [my ideas] come from, but I know where they come to: they come to my desk, and if I'm not there, they go away again." —Philip Pullman

Letter from the Editor



Endings can be satisfying...or sad. Beginnings can be exciting...or scary.

I can look back on 2008 with some measure of satisfaction. Beginning my membership with Pikes Peak Writers at the fantastic 2008

conference, where I pitched to an agent and scored a request for a full manuscript. Ending, finally, four years of revisions so that I could get that manuscript into her inbox. Beginning work on my second novel



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with NaNoWriMo. And ending the year with a new role as editor of the *PPW NewsMag*.

Still, if I'm not careful, I can let myself be intimidated by the enormous blank slate that a brand new year brings. What if I slip and can't continue my newfound commitment to daily writing, rekindled by the delicious, crazy pressure of NaNoWriMo? I might finally hear from that agent and not be thrilled with her response (which becomes more and more likely as time stretches on). What if my work-in-progress, which is currently nearing the peak of rising action, collapses at the top, leaving me with nothing more to say?

I can get bogged down with all these what-if's, or I can dig into this information-filled, inspiration-packed *NewsMag* issue and let it propel me forward.

If you dig in too, I think you'll be pleased with what you find. You'll find encouragement from Bonnie Hagan to make this your best writing year ever—she did just that in 2008 with tools she acquired at last January's Write Brain. To help get you started, Deb Buckingham shares her

top ten list of Colorado Springs' writing spots. Linda Rohrbough gives you nitty gritty scene-building advice. Janice Black's "Sweet Success" column will help you see that the dream really is attainable. The recaps of recent Write Brains and the list of upcoming PPW events—including the 2009 conference—will fill your writer's toolbox and leave you (and me) with no more excuses. Even if it takes you until November to get in gear, there's always the next NaNoWriMo—which last year's participants agreed was worth doing, "winners" or no. And our newest columnist, Becky Clark, will make you laugh so hard, you just might start your very own blog.

I hope, no matter how you feel about endings and beginnings, that this New Year *NewsMag* issue will encourage and equip you as you pursue your writing goals in 2009.

Happy
New Year, and
Happy Writing!

Mandy

My Best Writing Year Ever

continued from page 1

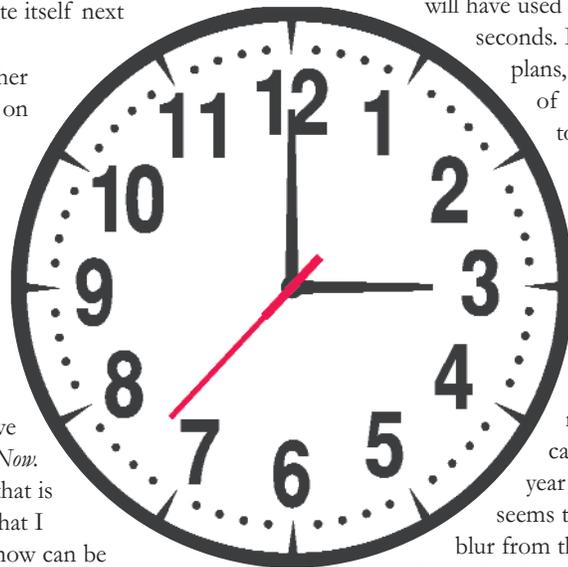
came around, I'd be once more trying to convince myself that the work would magically complete itself next year. Somehow.

I'll put it another way. I can't work on my writing yesterday anymore than I can work on my writing tomorrow. All I have is the bizarre point in the space-time continuum that we call the present. *Now*. I have now, and that is the entirety of what I have. Not every now can be about writing, otherwise my husband and I would starve and our clothes would never be washed and don't even get me started on the sleep deprivation. But it turns

out that Benjamin Franklin was right: "Time is the stuff life is made of."

Provided I make it to the end of 2009, I will have used another 31,536,000 seconds. I have my goals, my plans, my little tricks, and of course I have PPW to give me some oomph. But in reality, all I have is now. Was 2008 my best writing year ever? Absolutely. But that's not an ending. The exciting thing for me is that every year can be my best writing year ever. Even if it seems the year passes in a blur from the holidays to the holidays, it still has the same number of seconds as every other year.

So, Happy New Year! Make it your best writing year ever.





Three Approaches to Story Structure featuring Daniel Abraham

By MB Partlow

Why can't you build a good stadium in Poland?

If you missed the October Write Brain with Daniel Abraham, you not only missed a fascinating talk on the subject of plot, but you missed a heck of a good time, too.

Daniel began by telling us that defining plot is like nailing Jello to a two-by-four. Either your definition is specific and precise and smells kind of funny (the order in which the characters experience the events of the story), or it's accurate but so vague as to be useless (what happens in the story).

Stuff happens all the time, we were told. This does not make it plot. Plot moves you toward a particular end. He said, and we made him repeat, "Plot is the dramatized scenes and summarized information delivered in a sequence to create and resolve dramatic tension." When some of us mere mortals said, "Huh?" he simplified: "The stuff you put in to make people care and provide a pay off."

There's no way, in the space available here, to adequately describe the diagrams and lists Daniel put on the white board, or to convey his odd lapses into a Scottish accent, or to retell all of his jokes. The man should be on *Letterman*.

First, Daniel detailed the "punch line model", which compares the plot to a joke. You make a promise (the set-up), and leave it

hanging there until the last line on the last page is read. Tension, Daniel said, is all about withholding. Plot helps you withhold.

As examples, Daniel cited the Kinsey Milhone series (*A is for Alibi* and so on), and two short stories by Stephen King—"Quitters, Inc." and "The Boogeyman." However, many writers include some "falling action" after the punch line so that the plotlines are neatly tied off and tidied.

The other two models build on the punch line model. First is the "fairy tale model," which traditionally involves three trials. Each trial has its own punch line, and ideally the trials get bigger each time. The story opens with an introduction or frame, such as "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away." After the third trial is resolved, you have to touch base with that frame again and show the result of having passed through the trials.

The third model is "nested tales," with the classic example being *Arabian Nights*.

Daniel then got into the nitty gritty of building a plot. The left column of the white board was labeled "Literal Action," and the right column became "Its function in the story." Daniel walked us through an example which would take the rest of the newsletter to duplicate with any clarity.

Basically, you can write the right side of the chart without the story specifics. Step one, introduce the setting and the protagonist. In our example, step two was to display the protagonist's unease with himself, which still leaves you about a skabillion ways to

interpret your story. Is your protagonist a concert pianist struck with stage fright? A plucky

young woman who just lost the family fortune? A minotaur transferring to a new labyrinth who is shy about revealing his lack of horn?

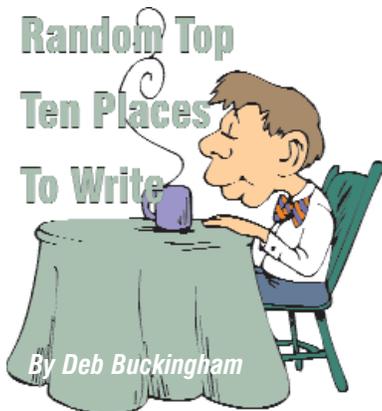
Step three ratchets up the conflict by introducing the love object and the rival. In step four, the rival exposes the protagonist's weakness. Then in step five, a mentor reframes the issue for our hero. This is followed by the love object showing empathy for the hero and dissatisfaction with the rival. Finally, the hero faces down the rival and achieves that ever-elusive prize: self-actualization.

While the example was fun (did you know we were talking about the minotaur?), what Daniel wanted to illustrate was how every scene in your story should support your plot and move your story forward. Clever scenes filled with witty repartee are fine and good, but if they don't serve any purpose, you're cheating your characters as well as your readers. And if you take the time to jot down the point of your scenes and how they move your plot, you can see the pot-holes and dead zones before you start to write.

To me, Daniel's ideas sound dangerously like more-productive writing time. And since he's published seven novels, a couple dozen short stories, and won an International Horror Guild Award, he obviously knows what he's talking about when it comes to plot.

The last thing he told us: You can't build a good stadium in Poland because no matter where you sit, you end up behind a Pole.

Random Top Ten Places To Write



By Deb Buckingham

Ever thought where you might find the perfect place to write? Free from kids, spouses, ringing phones, e-mail, refrigerators, neighbors stopping by, and vacuum cleaners?

Random Top Ten places to write in Colorado Springs are:

10. Ravens Nest

- Location: N. Institute
- No Wi-Fi available
- Open mic nights, live music, and art on the wall make for a creative atmosphere
- Friendly neighborhood place with great service

9. Starbucks

- Several Locations.
- Must spend \$5 a month on your SB card to activate your Internet account
- Fun atmosphere
- Lots of characters (to inspire your writing)
- Best lattes

8. Einstein Bagels

- Location: Centennial
- FREE Wi-Fi
- Calming atmosphere as well as great people, and great bagels

7. It's a Grind

- Several locations
- FREE Wi-Fi
- Quiet atmosphere
- Delicious mocha

6. Montague's Parlor

- Location: S. Tejon
- No Wi-Fi available
- Quaint and comfortable

5. Serrano's Coffee Company

- Location: N. Academy & Monument

continued on page 4



By Linda Rohrbough

The Business of Writing Value Change in a Scene

I spent some time this year working with scriptwriter Eric Adams, whose latest screenplay, *My Suicide*, is in post-production as a feature film for release next year. Our topic was creating memorable scenes. I learned from Eric a concept he calls “value change in a scene”, which I believe will help me consciously take my scenes to the next level. I want to share this concept with you.

As an aside, Eric told me that this information about value change appears in Robert McKee’s book *Story*. But I read *Story*, and I didn’t fully understand the concept until Eric explained it to me. However, if you want more information, *Story* is a place you can look.

Just so we’re tracking together, let me briefly explain the concept of a character arc. Everyone who has been writing fiction for a while knows a character (usually the main character) should go through a major change during the course of a novel. This change is called the “character arc”. Well, think of having a mini character arc in a scene and you’ll have the short explanation for creating a value change in a scene.

Here’s how it works. The goal of a scene—any scene—is to move the story forward. So the trend these days is to have the reader enter the scene at the point the character reacts to something that took place off-stage. While this sounds good, it can create a static scene. For example, let’s take a

scene where we come in right after a little girl finds her dog run over by a car. We see her weeping, and at the end of the scene she vows she’ll never get another dog. That’s a static scene. It meets all the requirements for a scene, meaning it moves the story forward, but we don’t see the change, so nothing actually happens. We don’t see the dog get run over (which isn’t necessarily a bad thing). Other than the girl’s tears and her vow, there’s no movement in the scene.

However, if we can see the girl go through the emotional process of grieving her dog that leads to her vow, then we’ve got a value change. She might remember how she always wanted a dog; the day her parents gave her the puppy for her birthday; how the dog woke her up for school each morning by jumping on the bed. Now we see what the dog meant to her. Then she decides that losing the dog is too painful and she won’t let herself ever want another dog. Now there’s movement in the scene. What we’ve created is a mini character arc and that takes us someplace. The scene becomes dynamic and our story gets bumped up a notch.

Many writers make the mistake of assuming that the reader will infer what the character is feeling from a set of events. And it is true that the reader will make inferences. But he will get much more involved in the story if he is allowed to go through the process of actually making the change along with the character. This is what Eric Adams calls the value change in a scene. The character who owns the scene goes through a change in their values, and that makes the scene come alive.

It seems like a simple concept, but a value change in each scene requires additional work on the part of the writer. For one thing, the writer has to know much more about his character. It becomes necessary to get further into the character’s head, understand his background, and reveal specific aspects of his history if this short emotional journey—or mini character arc—is going to ring true. The mini character arc also elevates the importance of the character. If you have a throw-away character you’re only using to move your story forward or reveal information to the reader, it may be necessary to rethink the scene if you don’t want that character to have that much importance.

Can you get away without adding a value change to each scene? Sure. Lots of published writers do it all the time. But I want my work to move above the ordinary. And this tid-bit about value change is the sort of thing I’m looking for.

Let’s face it, there’s lots of competition out there. So I’m after anything I can do to give myself an edge. Writing with the goal of creating a value change in each scene helps me. I hope it will help you, too.

—Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, with more than 5,000 articles, seven books to her credit along with numerous awards for her fiction and non-fiction. Her latest book, co-authored with her doctor, is *Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band from Da Capo Lifelong*. Linda will be presenting a day-long intermediate fiction workshop “Fleshing It Out—Take Your Novel to the Next Level With Tools the Pros Use” on Thursday, April 23rd, the day before the annual conference. Visit her Web site: www.LindaRohrbough.com.

Top Ten Places

continued from page 3

- Wi-Fi hotspot available
 - A kick-your-feet-up kind of place
 - Warm and inviting
- 4. Agia Sophia**
 - Location: Colorado and 30th St
 - FREE Wi-Fi
 - Atmosphere is calming, great place to sit, think, eat or drink
 - 4 Pikes Peak Writer**

- Recommend the hummus and pita bread
- 3. Nemo’s Coffee**
 - Location: Pikes Peak
 - FREE Wi-Fi
 - Music makes the ambience glorious
 - Best white hot chocolate
 - 2. Pikes Perk**
 - Location: North Academy
 - FREE Wi-Fi
 - Ambience is humming with people, but quiet enough to get work done
 - Excellent food for a coffee shop

1. Rico’s Wine and Coffee Bar

- Location: Tejon
- FREE Wi-Fi
- Lots of character makes this place inviting to sit, eat, drink a beverage of your choice, and work
- Fabulous pizza

What are the top ten places to write in your community? Or the top ten reasons to write? Or your top ten writing tips? Submit your top-ten list to editor@pikespeakwriters.com.

BeckyLand



15 Things About Me

By Becky Clark

I finished a young adult manuscript recently and was letting it breathe like fine wine for a few weeks. In that time I e-mailed a friend who said the e-mail was really funny and asked, “Why aren’t you blogging, thus sharing your incredible wit with the rest of humanity?” I might be paraphrasing here.

Coincidentally, I had been toying with the idea of blogging because I’d been looking into Blog Book Tours. You know, for when the cork pops on one of my manuscripts. So that very day I created a free wordpress blog, and used the e-mail to my pal as my second entry. www.beckylant.wordpress.com/2008/08/26/tape-convention

As a not-quite-published novelist, I love the immediacy of blogging. In less than 30 minutes I can write, publish, and have strangers comment on something I’ve written. Much more appealing than waiting for umpteen weeks/months/years for someone to comment on my manuscripts and queries.

Another reason I blog is to attract fans, especially kids involved with marching band and folks who have synesthesia because that’s what my work-in-progress involves. Not only do I want them to tell me their stories, I want them to become excited about mine.

Blogging keeps my writing muscle toned. In the same way I try to hop on the elliptical every day, writing fluffy whatever-I-wants wakes up my brain. (FYI: blogging is easier and more enjoyable than exercising.)

Of course, it’s frosting on the bloggy cake when the editor for the *PPW NewsMag* asks you to be a columnist because of your blog. So here are 15 things it’s imperative to know about me.

1. I think 15 of anything is too many. Except dollars. And Skittles. Taste the rainbow.

2. I love Skittles almost as much as I love dollars.

3. I bought REALLY cheap soap for my shower. It doesn’t lather which makes me wonder if I’m the teensiest bit stinky all the time. Or is lather simply a myth perpetrated upon us by Big Cosmetics? (Similar to Big Oil, but smells more like lilac or citrus.)

4. I have an inappropriate crush on the lead singer from GreenDay.

5. I get this weird, wiry hair growing out of my ear that I have to pluck every so often. I fear I’m gradually turning into my grandfather, but not in any of the good ways.

6. I don’t have a smidge of modesty remaining since the birth of my children and tend to give virtual strangers way too much information. (See numbers 1-5 and 7-15.)

7. My feelings get hurt when people don’t subscribe to my blog or leave comments. I know that makes me seem needy and way too tender-hearted for the bunny-eat-bunny life of a children’s writer, but there it is.

8. I cry at every marching band competition I see. All those fresh-faced, optimistic, talented hard-workers...sniffle, sniff.

9. I’m secretly wearing my daughter’s wool socks.

10. I wish my superpower could be invisibility. So rude, yet so satisfying.

11. I firmly believe if you don’t know any marching band or theatre kids, your life is incomplete and hopelessly boring.

12. I’ve realized I eat too much and hate to exercise. The whole “portion control” theory is completely lost on me. Plus, I loves me my beer. You’re invited to watch me get fat.

13. I’m fairly certain I have one of the most unphotogenic faces in history. In my defense, it’s because I’m very animated, which is good in real life, but not so much for photos. If I wasn’t so darned vain I’d post a couple to prove it. Don’t be fooled by the one here. It took an excruciatingly long time to capture, so I’ll be using it for the next 87 years.

14. People have every right to laugh at the fact I wake up, take off my jammies to shower, then put them right back on afterward. And I have every right to respond, “Pffft.”

15. You might know me as Becky Cornwell, but I’m transitioning to my maiden name that I’m writing under now: Becky Clark. Kind of an homage to my Dad, who has always been my biggest fan and who wanted to be a writer himself but couldn’t because of all his damn kids.

So that’s me. Let me get to know you too. It’s one big party in *BeckyLand* where you’ll find posts about writing and publishing, my kids, marching band, synesthesia...and other shiny things that distract me for a bit! I hope you’ll find something useful, thought-provoking or just entertaining.

Writer’s Life: Waiting



By Fleur Bradley

I have a confession: I’m not a patient person. Sure, having kids helped me grow some patience. Nothing like watching a four-year-old tying her shoes to

increase your tolerance for waiting. But I’m still not very good at it.

I don’t like waiting for the new episode of *Fringe*. To be continued? Hate it. With a passion.

The worst has to be sitting in my doctor’s examination room in that cotton gown with only a 2006 edition of *Good Housekeeping* to read. Freezing. Watching the clock. Not fun.

But I’ve gotten smart about my tactics. Now, I bring a book everywhere I go. That way, if I have to wait somewhere (DMV anyone?), I’m armed with my favorite escape mechanism.

Of course, some waiting can’t be helped. Especially for us writers. When you start writing and submitting, the one piece of advice you always get is to have patience and be persistent. I can handle the persistence part, no problem. But I really hate the patience thing. I’ve waited for more than a year for a response to a submission. Two years for a magazine to come out with my story in it, only to have it fold (not cool, let me tell you). Sitting around, waiting, doing nothing will stop your writing in its tracks if

continued on page 11

Lessons Learned from NaNoWriMo

By Mandy Houk

Could you hear it? The flurry of keystrokes all November long as determined, caffeine-fueled, slightly crazy writers attempted to pound out 50,000 words in thirty days?

As we announced in the previous issue of the *NewsMag*, several of your fellow Pikes Peak Writers signed up for the challenge of National Novel Writing Month 2008. Once they'd had a couple of weeks to catch up on laundry and sleep, I invited them to share, along with me, what they took away from the experience—NaNo “winner” or not. Perhaps our words will encourage you to jump into the fray along with us this November.

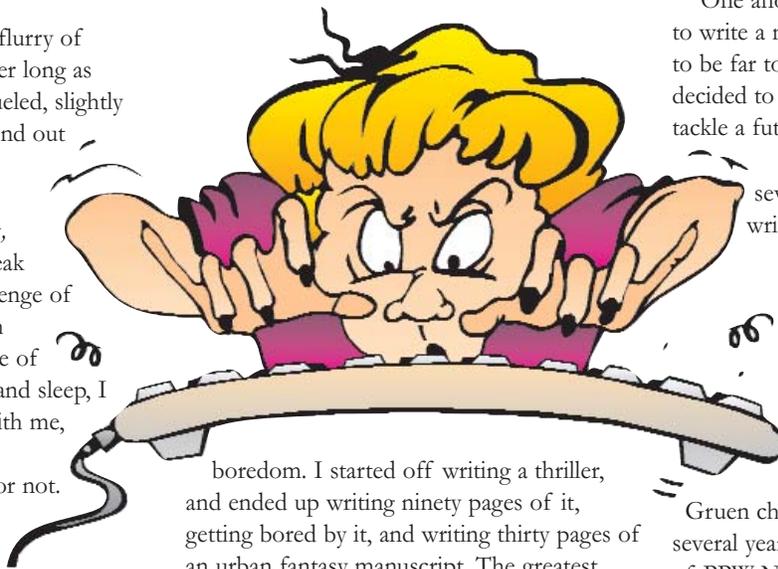
Ian Healy: I learned that the fifth time winning NaNo is equally as thrilling as the first. Can't wait to find out what I write next year!

Bob Spiller: I did finish 31,000 words but never crossed the finish line. That said, I have a youth writing group at Lewis Palmer Middle School. Four of them were winners and we had a party to celebrate. I passed out noise-makers, “you're a winner” erasers and pencils and then we turned out the lights and broke out the glow sticks. Even the writers who didn't win were excited.

Debbie Buckingham: I was one of them who signed up but never got started... to be honest, I have been working on my manuscript and that has taken all my time. I really wasn't willing to commit myself to the challenge. I do, however, regret that I didn't do it. I will DEFINITELY do it next year.

Laura Deal: I had never done NaNoWriMo before, because I already have a hefty stack of manuscripts in first draft, but I decided to this year just to see if it could jar me out of a rut. The camaraderie I found on the Web site and with my local groups energized the process. I met the word count challenge and finished the whole draft in exactly thirty days. It was a magical, mysterious process and I will absolutely do it again.

Julie Kazimer: After a 20,000 word start in week one, I felt confident about completing the NaNoWriMo challenge. What a fool I was. My problem was two-fold: a loss of my laptop (stupid t key broke and we all know you can't write without t's), and



boredom. I started off writing a thriller, and ended up writing ninety pages of it, getting bored by it, and writing thirty pages of an urban fantasy manuscript. The greatest lesson of the month was: focus. But on the plus side, I have two manuscripts to work on in the upcoming month. I'll just reset all my calendars and clocks and call this month November/December and eventually (probably sometime in November/March) I'll have two completed manuscripts. Just in time for the Pikes Peak Conference.

“If there's one thing I've learned from running NaNoWriMo, it's this: Whatever you think you are, you are more than that.”

Margaret Brettschneider (aka author M.J. Brett): I'm pleased I tried NaNoWriMo for the first time and completed the challenge. I'll probably do it again. The best things are: 1) realizing you can do it, and 2) having a story well underway that you can flesh out in the coming months. I'm wondering how our region fared in the national count. (Editor's note: according to stats on the Web site, the Colorado Springs region logged over 5 million words in the 2008 challenge! Collective stats for all NaNo participants totaled 1,643,343,993 words.)

Debbie Meldrum: I was so proud of winning NaNoWriMo this year (my third attempt), and it made me realize that I could write much more in any given month than I have been.

One anonymous PPW NaNo'er attempted to write a memoir, but discovered the process to be far too intense and emotional. She's decided to stick with fiction if she decides to tackle a future NaNoWriMo.

Mandy Houk: As for me, for several years I had watched my writing friends sign up for NaNoWriMo and summarily disappear for the entire month. I swore I would never subject myself to that kind of torture. Then I discovered that one of my favorite novels, *Water for Elephants*, was born when Sara

Gruen challenged herself in a NaNoWriMo several years ago. And I saw the enthusiasm of PPW NaNo'ers in their notes on the loop. And I wanted to set a good example for my Creative Writing students. So I signed up. Since I had family coming for Thanksgiving on November 22nd, I had to complete the challenge by November 21st. I have a lot of editing to do, and my story arc is far from complete, but I did, in fact, break the tape at the finish line. It was wonderful to get the story out of my head, where it had been living for nearly two years, and onto the virtual page. More than that, I have proven to myself indisputably that I really do have time to write. Not at a sustained pace of 2,500 words a day, of course. But never again can I tell myself I'm just too busy.

If all of our personal stories aren't enough to inspire you, maybe this pep talk from NaNoWriMo founder Chris Baty will.

“If there's one thing I've learned from running NaNoWriMo, it's this: Whatever you think you are, you are more than that. You possess a fearsome array of skills and abilities, and the most satisfying of these may be completely unknown to you now. Your curiosity is a dependable guide; follow it. Put yourself in unfamiliar places. Kindle passions. Savor the raw joy of making things, and then remake the best of those things until they take someone's breath away. Wrestle bears.

Actually, skip the bear-wrestling.

But do keep trying big things, okay? Sometimes we can wait so long for a clear sign that it's time to begin, that the opportunity sails right past us.

Life is so short. Adventures beckon. Let's get packed and head out on a new one today. I think it's time.”

Engagement for Excellence or What the Heck is a Web Troller?

By Ron Heimbecher, President

This is my first “official” communication through the *NewsMag* and you might even think of it as a State of the Org message. We don’t have to look far to see that the world around us and our own community will be facing a number of challenges over the next several months. In the face of job losses, a lack of consumer confidence, and general economic woes, many experts predict a difficult and perhaps dismal year for non-profit organizations. Resources will be stretched thin, and benefactors will be forced with difficult decisions.

That said, Pikes Peak Writers is in a stable financial position for 2009. Karen Fox and Pam McCutcheon have assembled an exciting faculty for our craft-driven 2009 conference. Barb Nickless and Maria Faulconer are working hard to bring you more award-winning non-conference activities. Our Community Ambassador, Chris Mandeville, is currently pulling double duty as our treasurer. I can’t begin to express my gratitude to Chris for the budget pounding and contract negotiating effort she’s put in since September.

Something we have going for us, the wind in our sails as we enter the choppy waters of 2009, is that our board of directors and volunteer staff to a person are engaged in the steps necessary for a winning year. I am on a quest to make that engagement contagious.

Thirty-one months ago my wife, Monica, and I sat in a back corner at the Saturday night dinner for the 2006 PPWC, my very

first writers’ conference. At a round table near the dais, a group of people sat with the keynote speaker, Dan Simmons. We whispered that perhaps some day we might even get to know some of those people. The thing that struck me most about that conference was the passion of engagement in the conference staff, faculty, and attendees. Getting to know these people throughout the weekend and in the weeks that followed made a difference in my direction, in my life. When the lady with the big yellow dog asked me if I wanted to help out with the 2007 conference, how could I say anything but, “what do you want me to do?”

One of our strategies for facing the—I had a boss who loved to call them “opportunities”—of the coming year is to expand our presence and relationships with a wide array of resources. We want to expand the awareness and solid reputation of our organization and our conference into the writing community, ensuring the ability to bring in top-notch talent while maintaining the value of our memberships and conference attendance costs. As you browse through the 2009 conference brochure and, when the time comes, renew your PPW membership, note that despite the crazy economic roller-coaster, our conference and membership fees have not increased since last year. Maintaining this value takes a lot of work. It’s an enormous amount of effort for a few people, but it becomes reasonable, manageable, and fun when spread among a wider group.

Our value strategy means maintaining



relationships with organizations that are in a position to help non-profit groups. Our value strategy means getting the word out to local businesses that might be able to

contribute door prizes, conference supplies and the like. Our value strategy means attracting more attendees to our conference, providing us with the leverage to keep costs lower for everyone. Perhaps more than any time in our history, we depend on the efforts of engaged volunteers.

Could you attend one meeting a month? Could you get donations of cookies and drinks for Write Brains? How about setting up chairs and tables? Do you spend a lot of time on the net? Do you spend time in forums? (This one, by the way, is what a Web troller does). Can you post events on Web site calendars, including our own? Get the word out about pikespeakwriters.com and our blog events?

Do you know Microsoft Access? Quick Books? Would you like to set up book signings and other events for our published authors? The list goes on ad infinitum. If you have a skill we can use, or even think we can use, for an hour a week, a couple of hours a month, one day a quarter, let us know about it. Fill out our volunteer application form, tell us what you can do, what you like to do, and maybe key us in to something we haven’t thought of. Once we’ve processed your application, we’ll invite you to the volunteers’ e-mail loop for notices and events.

Engage. With passion. Be that person who makes a difference.

NewsMag Submission Guidelines

Want to have your writing published in the PPW NewsMagazine? Our staff is always looking for well-written articles of interest to writers of commercial fiction. Please review past copies to find whether your idea is unique, or to determine a new slant to an old subject. We do not accept fiction or poetry. Articles are typically eight hundred to nine hundred words in length, but shorter articles are welcome

and we consider longer articles. Editors follow the Chicago Style Manual’s suggestions for commas, etc., and love writers who send printer-ready copy.

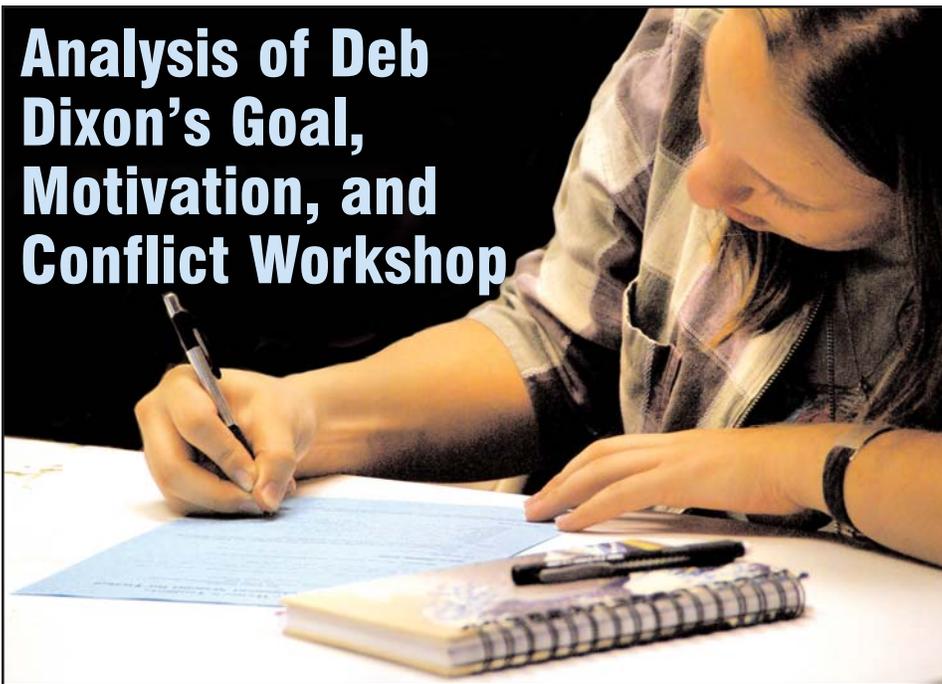
Submission guidelines for *NewsMagazine* Articles

- Send to editor@pikespeakwriters.com
- If you are not already part of the reporter pool, please submit article in the body of your email. Attachments from unknown submitters will not be opened.
- Include title and name of author at top of article.
- For event reporting, check with Coordinator of Reporter Pool first.
- If covering a non-PPW event, include

the name of the event, the date, sponsor, name of presenter(s) and topic(s) in a brief summary before the article.

- For potential recurring column, please query queryeditor@pikespeakwriters.com with a standard format query. Include title, topic, your name, relevant publishing credits and explanation of why you are qualified to write on this topic.
- Please submit your best work. Proofread and polish before submitting.
- Articles may be edited for grammar, punctuation and content. Author may or may not be notified in advance of publication.

Analysis of Deb Dixon's Goal, Motivation, and Conflict Workshop



By Angel and Joseph Smits

Joe: Mom, you've been to a lot of different workshops, conferences, and all sorts of stuff. Why would you go to a workshop on character building instead of something professionally oriented?

Angel: First off, Deb Dixon is a dynamic speaker. Second, every time I hear her speak I learn something new from her or other audience members. I'm curious, Joe. As a new writer, what was your reason for going to this workshop?

Joe: It was mainly the topic, because it helped me look at my characters better. I can now see them as three dimensional people instead of actors on a stage. Instead of just going through a journey, they have reasons for why they do things, why they have conflicts, be they good or bad.

Angel: So you're saying that Deb's talk—which joined the *Hero's Journey* with her Goal-Motivation-Conflict method—gave you better insight into characters you're already working with?

Joe: Yeah, but it also helped develop characters I hadn't looked at as closely before. I was at an earlier stage in their development, so writing later will likely seem easier.

Angel: You know, I've used *GMC* for my other stories, but being there at the

workshop with you and using it when we brainstormed later really made sense. I suppose we should stop using Deb's grid when we're watching a movie though, huh?

Joe: Dad does seem to get a little bothered when we point those things out in the theater. But once you know it, it's so easy to see. And besides, it's so much fun to apply. And speaking of that, when you said you'd used *GMC* before, where did you find it most useful when writing different types of stories?

Angel: I've got these people in my head and scenes, but *GMC* has always been a great tool to use to make sure the characters are fleshed out. For example, if one of my heroines gets angry with the hero for leaving his clothes all over the place (sorry, I write romance—what can I say?), my *GMC* chart would tell me she doesn't like stuff all over the floor because if she has to get up in the middle of the night to let her cat in, she doesn't want to trip (Goal) because one time she fell and broke her arm and her mother had to come and stay with her for weeks to help out. She was miserable (Motivation), it totally ruined her love life, and she doesn't want to lose this guy. Hey, why are your eyes glazed over son?

Joe: Uh...sorry. I was distracted by thoughts of *GMC* for my own characters and their *Hero's Journeys*. Like if a dragon owned a coffee shop

but was allergic to coffee, his main journey might simply be getting through his day. But in that day he might step out of his Ordinary World of the coffee shop and have his allergies act up for his Call To Adventure. He might deny the flare-up to his wife the gargoyless, an Ally, because the business needs to stay open for when the health inspection gnome—the Antagonist—shows up...

Angel: Oh, I get it. You're saying that his goal is to keep his business open to support his family, since he's been starving before and had to live on the streets, where his allergies were so irritated that he burned down a whole town in one breath. What great motivation to keep him on his journey to find relief for his allergies. Talk about your inmost cave—he does have a cave, right? Does he leave his clothes on the floor? Oh, never mind.

Joe: Yeah, he has a cave. But that just adds to his motivation. Mortgages on caves cost a lot. Um...do you think Bonnie had this in mind when she asked us to analyze this class? Oh, and the dragon's behind on payments, too, to add to the tension and conflict.

Angel: Bonnie had no clue. But I think that's another great lesson we got from the class: *GMC* is useful for brainstorming. What a great class that was. Think they'll let us in another one after this article?

Joe: I hope so, but they might not let us have coffee if they do.

—Angel Smits is the author of paranormal-romance books for Imajinn Books and her work has received Romance Writers of America's Golden Heart award. Her son, Joseph, recently graduated from Collins College with a BA in Video Game Design. Together they participate in Writers Improv on a regular basis, where anything is possible.



November Write Brain

Your Words, Their Story: Collaborative Writing with Celebrities, Experts and Just Plain Folk

By Fleur Bradley

It was an impressive panel of authors at the November Write Brain on collaborative writing. We had Pam Novotny, with her background in journalism and a line-up of nonfiction books under her own name as well as a ghostwritten project; Suzanne Proulx, an accomplished mystery writer with a background in ghostwriting both fiction and nonfiction; Pam McCutcheon, a fiction and nonfiction writer with extensive knowledge regarding editing projects and contracts; and as a last-minute addition, local author Cicily Janus, who has written novels as well as nonfiction project *The New Face of Jazz*.

The panel discussions were casual. All authors were forthcoming in sharing their experiences—both good and bad. Suzanne Proulx recalled a project she worked on with a celebrity: after she'd spent a great deal of time and frustration trying to gather information, the author backed out of the project. "My rule in working with celebrities: get the money up

front, and get a lot of it," she said with a smile. Ms. Proulx has since worked on a fiction project that did work out. She received an outline, chapter by chapter, which made the project easy. "That was a great experience."

Pam Novotny shared her experience writing a nonfiction project with Jane Seymour. When asked what Jane Seymour was like to work with, she said, "You really work with the editor rather than the author." Fortunately, she added, "I had a wonderful editor."

All four authors agreed on the importance of fostering relationships with editors and agents. Cicily Janus pitched the idea for a nonfiction project on jazz musicians to an editor at Pikes Peak Writers Conference and got a warm response, convincing her to push ahead. "Get your foot in the door with the gatekeepers," she said. "Sell them on the idea." She added that you should be professional in your queries, to avoid coming across as a fan.

For beginning authors interested in breaking into collaborative writing, Pam Novotny suggested starting with an article on the subject of your project. "It gives you information on whether this is going to work." She cautioned writers not to get in over their heads, considering the time

investment that often lasts a year or longer. "Maybe you just want to write an article."

Pam McCutcheon added, "Ask yourself: Is this something you really want to do?" She suggested beginning writers look for ghostwriting projects on online bidding sites like elance.com and guru.com.

Panelists shared stories of the work at hand after doing interviews and gathering information. Pam Novotny explained the difference between your topic, the person you're writing about, and the idea of your project—what it's really about. "What makes this a story?" she said when explaining how to turn a biography into an interesting book. "What is the format of that story that's going to make it compelling?"

Pam McCutcheon added, "It's all about understanding how to structure a book."

All four panelists stressed the importance of getting conditions put into the contract so there are no surprises while you're working. To limit your investment in an unsold project, Pam Novotny suggested starting with a paid contract for a proposal. "That makes it a defined task, and that's all you need to commit to." The panel agreed: make sure you define everyone's role in the project, and get it in writing.

For all the panelists, their projects came from contacts with agents and editors. Like Suzanne Proulx said: "They're all networking-type things."

Grammar Girl! Split Infinitive

Dear Grammar Girl,

I went to the doctor today. He diagnosed me with split infinitive. I want to not have this problem. What should I do?

Signed,
Wanting to not be split,
from Washington.



Dear Wanting,

I am very sorry to tell you, your case is hopeless. I once heard of someone who made a complete recovery, only to stumble over Hamlet's famous soliloquy To be or to not be, that is the question. Alas and alack, that poor soul went on to do the voice over for *Star Trek's* opening credits, before perishing in obscurity in a small Hollywood dive called *The Dangling Participle*.

A sad story indeed.

My advice is to look immediately for work in a non-speaking industry. Perhaps you could do voice overs for the deaf. There are, after all, no split infinitives in American Sign Language. You'll be silent forever, but the world will be a better place for it.

Yours in good grammar,

Grammar Girl

—This article first appeared in the Colorado Springs Fiction Writer's Group
(www.coloradospringsfictionwritersgroup.org).

Upcoming PPW Events

January, February

January Write Brain

Tuesday, January 13th, 6:30-8:30 pm
NOTE: This is a change to the **SECOND** Tuesday instead of the usual meeting on the third Tuesday.

From Inspiration to Mainstream: Two Award-Winning Christian Authors Show Us The Way

with Donita Paul and Kacy Barnett-Gramckow

Critically-acclaimed authors, Donita K Paul (YA) and Kacy Barnett-Gramckow (Mainstream), will give us a behind-the-scenes look at the growing field of inspirational writing—how to break in, how it differs from the secular market, and how to transition from inspirational to secular. Be prepared to be inspired.



Donita retired early from teaching school, but soon got bored! The result: a determination to start a new career. Now she is an award-winning novelist writing Christian romance and fantasy. She says, "I feel blessed to be doing what I like best." She mentors all ages, teaching teenagers and weekly adult writing workshops. Her two grown children make her proud, and her two grandsons make her laugh.



Kacy has written dozens of devotionals published in many books, including the best-seller *A Moment a Day* and the *Women's Devotional Bible*. Kacy also is the author of the *Genesis Trilogy* (*The*

Heavens Before, He Who Lifts the Skies, and A Crown in the Stars).

February Write Brain

Tuesday, February 17, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Humor in Writing: The Art of the Funny Bone

with Bob Spiller



Winter blues got you down? We've got the perfect pick-me-up that's guaranteed to tickle your funny bone: an evening with our very own Robert Spiller, author of the Bonnie Pinkwater mystery series, and all-around funny guy. Sip some hot cocoa and relax as Bob teaches us how to write straight comedy or just add a little humor to our novels. If you'd like, bring a few jokes to share.

Robert is the author of the Bonnie Pinkwater mystery series. A former stand-up comedian and front man for a monumentally horrible rock band, he lives in Colorado Springs with his best friend and wife Barbara. One of the best days of his life was the day his publisher—after reading *The Witch of Agnesi*, the first book in the Bonnie Pinkwater series—said, "I laughed out loud."

All Write Brains are FREE for PPW Members! Nonmembers may attend one Write Brain session for free. Subsequent sessions are \$10. For more information and a map, go to www.pikespeakwriters.com.

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 DAYTIME 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 the Web site, but to be ensured of notification you must RSVP to rsvp@pikespeakwriters.com.

Beginning Writer's Workshop

Saturday, February 7, 1-5 p.m.

Location: Cottonwood Artists' School

Cost: \$25 Members

Note: Nonmembers \$35 or a 2-for-1 deal (Get both the membership and the workshop for \$55. This is a \$15 savings off the membership.)
 with Pam McCutcheon



Have an idea for a story or novel? Don't know where to start? Then this is the perfect class for you. In this half-day workshop, Pam will show you how to start from nothing but an idea and flesh it out until it becomes a fullfledged story. Using the basics of characterization, plotting, and self-editing, you will use a step-by-step approach to develop the outline of a novel or short story, then learn some tips on the business of writing and how to market and sell your work.

Pam is the author of two nonfiction books for writers, 10 novels, and two novellas under her own name, plus four fantasy short stories written as Pamela Luzier and a young adult urban fantasy as Parker Blue. She has taught at numerous writing workshops and conferences and has served on the board of directors of three national and three local writing organizations. In addition, she has judged and/or administered many writing contests and worked as a freelance manuscript consultant. She is employed as an engineer at Fort Carson and is working on more books in her Demon Underground series.

Open Critique

Wednesday, January 28 and
 February 25 at 6:30 p.m.

Location: Cottonwood Artists' School
 (Open critique is usually held the fourth Wednesday of each month.)

Open Critique guests will be announced soon on our Web site.

PPW Members Night

Monday, January 26 and February 23 at
 6:30 p.m. (Fourth Monday of month.)

Location: Poor Richards Bookstore
 320 N. Tejon, Colorado Springs,

Come and hang out with other writers and bring friends interested in PPW. We eat, we drink, and we talk about the writing life.

Sweet Success

Compiled by Janice Black

Thank you to Deb Stover, Chris Mandeville, Robin Widmar, Olgy Gary, Joyce Moore, Kirk Farber, Fleur Bradley, Frank Dorchak, Julia Allen, Laura Reeve and others, for sharing the wonderful success stories for this issue. It is inspiring to read of our friends' achievements. If you get your own taste of sweet success, don't be shy about it—share the good news! If you are modest, ask a friend to applaud you, or do it yourself under a pseudonym.

Here are some noteworthy recent achievements (make sure you visit the Web sites listed—it's well worth your time):

Robert Crais, fantastic writer and great friend of PPW over the years, has provided help and inspiration to many of us. An interview with Robert appeared in the October issue of *Author Magazine*. The interview is posted online at www.author-magazine.org/.

Robin Widmar's short short story "Game of Chance" appeared in the inaugural issue of *Abandoned Towers*. Print and electronic versions of the magazine were released November 1. Poke around www.cyberwizard-productions.com/AbandonedTowers/ for more information and to read excerpts.

Congratulations go to **Olgy Gary** for her induction into the National League of

American Pen Women! Our very own Nancy Bentley, the new President of the Pikes Peak Chapter of NLAPW, officiated. And, to top it off, the luncheon's featured speaker was none other than Beth Groundwater, networker extraordinaire. So that's a double whammy!

New PPW member, **Joyce Moore**, had a double whammy of her own. Her historical romance, *Jeanne of Clairmonde, A Medieval story of A Hundred Years War, a Lifetime of Love* comes out in June 2009 with Wild Rose Press in print and e-book. Also, her unpublished historical novel, *The Tapestry Shop*, was the winner of the 2008 First Coast Novel Contest at the Florida Writers' Conference. After the blurb was read aloud, an agent approached her and asked for the complete manuscript! Visit Joyce's blog and Web site: www.joyce-moorebooks.com.

Kirk Farber's first novel, *Postcards from a Dead Girl*, was recently bought by HarperPerennial, an imprint of HarperCollins! They plan to publish it in March 2010. Kirk expressed his thanks to Pikes Peak Writers for helping him along this journey. American Icon was a huge motivator for him, and also helped when querying his agent, Sandra Bond (whom he met at the Pikes Peak Writers "Agent Q&A" event last fall). Kirk would love to hear anyone's ideas about marketing and networking.

In response to Kirk's request, which he posted on the PPW Loop, Fleur Bradley

wrote: "Check out M.J. Rose's blog: www.mjroseblog.typepad.com/buzz_balls_hype/. She really knows her stuff, has classes, and for a budget option, wrote a downloadable book on author promotion. (Thanks, Fleur!)

Laura Reeve's first novel, titled *Peacekeeper*, was released in December. It's the first of a series from Roc (Penguin) called The Major Ariane Kedros Novels. *Publishers Weekly* calls it a "crisp military SF debut" and writes, "Reeve drives the story at a breakneck pace, providing a fine mix of derring-do, honor and courage, and the familial bickering and affection of a close-knit crew." Laura's been a PPW member for many years and this manuscript won the 2007 Paul Gillette award in the Science Fiction category. Read more about it on www.AncstralStars.com. Want more? An interview with Laura is posted at www.us.penguingroup.com/static/pages/specialinterests/scifi/2008/reeve.html.

In December, **F. P. Dorchak** found representation with the Cherry Weiner Literary Agency for his manuscript *ERO (Exo-Atmospheric Reconnaissance Organization)*. The novel tells the story of a marooned astronaut who gets caught up in the UFO conspiracy machine. Frank met Cherry at the 2007 Pikes Peak Writers Conference in Colorado Springs. (Please note: Cherry has a full client list and is not taking on unsolicited queries, though she will consider work after meeting authors at conferences.)

Mike Befeler signed a contract with Books in Motion for an audio book edition of his geezer-lit mystery, *Retirement Homes Are Murder*.

Writer's Life: Waiting

continued from page 5

you're not careful. So I usually send off a submission and move on to the next thing.

When I finally got an agent, I thought there would be less waiting. Now things will move, I thought.

Yeah.

There is just more waiting. Waiting for her to get her pitch together, waiting for her to send it off, waiting for editors to respond, waiting—well, you get the idea.

I pride myself on being a professional. On not being flaky, dramatic or needy. But

this waiting thing is hard. I feel like I do when I sit in my doctor's office in that flimsy gown, freezing, waiting, and watching the clock. I check my e-mail more times than necessary. Read *Publishers Lunch* and agent blogs.

Anything to help me feel in touch with the book industry from my little office so far, far away from New York. To help me feel like I have some control.

Which is what this is really about, of course. I want control. And unfortunately, when it comes to the selling process, I have little to no control at all.

Thankfully, I've been at this writing gig long enough now to recognize the signs of useless waiting. So I continue with my next novel. I pick up some more freelance work. Although I still watch that clock on occasion, at least I'm wrapped up in my work again.

The truth is, my finished project is out of my hands for now. I have to trust my agent and get my rear in the seat to write my next novel. Because that is the part I can control: the writing.

Waiting stinks. And chances are, you're waiting for something yourself. All writers are. My advice is this: bring a book wherever you go, and keep writing. That's the part you can control. The rest is just clock-watching.



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

Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest

By Dawn Smit Miller

The 2009 Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest (formerly the Paul Gillette Writing Contest) is currently in the first round of judging, with 41 judges looking at 177 entries in eight categories. Here is the contest schedule for the next four months.

Contest Timeline

- January 2009—First round of judging ends, second round begins.
- February 2009—Second round of judging ends, VIP judging begins.
- Early March 2009—Entries are returned.
- Late March 2009—VIP judging ends.
- April 2009—Winners are notified.
- April 25, 2009—The Paul Gillette Awards Banquet at the PPWC honors the winners.

Contest Trivia

This year...

- 30% of entrants are past entrants.
- 12% learned of the contest through the internet.
- 26% are from outside CO.

12 Pikes Peak Writer

Since 2002...

- Entrants have come from every state in the continental US (and Washington, DC) except Mississippi, North Dakota, and Rhode Island.
- After Colorado, the state with the most entrants is California, followed by Texas.
- Entrants have also come from Canada, Guatemala, and the United Kingdom.
- Over 100 volunteers (not including VIP judges) from 18 states have judged entries.
- The median number of entries per judge is 10.
- The largest number of entries for one judge was 38.
- Twelve judges have volunteered for five years, five for six years, three for seven years, and three for all eight years!

—*Dawn Smit Miller is an author and the creator of Rainbow Editing (Teach Your Computer How to Help You Self Edit). This is her fifth year as the director of the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest.*

Pikes Peak Writers Conference News

You should have received the conference brochure by now with its exciting line-up of speakers and activities. After we went to press, we learned that editor Catherine Frank will, unfortunately, not be able to attend. Kate Harrison with Dial Books for Young Readers will be her replacement.