

Pikes Peak Writer

NewsMagazine

Official Publication of the Pikes Peak Writers



VOLUME IX, ISSUE 1
January, February 2010

CONTENTS

From the Editor
page 2

NaNoWriMo
page 3

**Do's and Don'ts
of Query Letters**
page 3

**The Business of
Writing**
page 4

**December Write
Brain**
page 5

Two Young Writers
page 5

What You Know
page 6

Write the Fight
page 7

Taming the Beast
page 8

BeckyLand
page 9

To All Members
page 9

Upcoming Events
page 10

Sweet Success
page 11

PPWC 2010
page 11

**Opportunities for
Writers**
page 12

10 Things NOT to do Now That You've Finished NaNoTryMo

By Deb Courtney

At Pikes Peak Writers, our Top 10 lists are typically written in the positive sense...things to do or try. Here's a slightly different tactic, which we hope will help you as you rejoice in your accomplishments post NaNoWri—or—TryMo.

10. Don't...Stop writing because you've earned a break.

Yeah, 50,000 words is a lot to accomplish in 30 days, but you proved you can do it, or come close to it. What do writers do? Write. So use the discipline it took to get through NaNo, and keep going. Set a new goal and knock that one down too.

9. Don't...Take up that other hobby you've been putting off.

Creative people often feel pulled in several directions with regards to expressing themselves. Coming off the high of writing 50,000 words in one month, now is NOT the time to bead that bracelet, or to start that watercolor class...unless you can manage those AND keep up the writing.

8. Don't...Give into family demands to spend more time with them—well, not entirely.

Writing takes some solitude, and chances are you managed to carve some out of your schedule in order to meet the demands of knocking down that hefty NaNoWriMo word count. And it might be that your family "wants you back." Well, to be a successful writer, you need to continue to carve that time out of your life—and maybe out of theirs. This is not always easy, but is definitely worth

it. If this is difficult for you on an ongoing basis because of other commitments, consider what kind of writer you are, and how to meet that need. For some, a few pages every day suffices; for others, several hours in a large chunk are better. Ask your family to support your goals as a writer, even though it may mean some sacrifices for everyone.

7. Don't...Start a new writing project.

So, you have ideas. Lots of them. So many that you're afraid you'll never have time to write them all. Writers Block? Meh. However, do not get sucked into an entirely new writing project now. This is not the time. A bad habit many would-be novelists have is to start a project, then careen on to the next project, and what they end up with is a stack of partially completed projects. You can't get published if you never complete a manuscript. So, stick with this one until you are done. Even if it doesn't get published, you will know what "finishing" feels like. This is a good thing. On the other hand...

6. Don't...Keep yourself from writing notes for future projects.

As a writer, you do not want to be the written equivalent of a "one-hit wonder". Making notes for future projects is part of the business of writing—it is your product development phase. So, while you don't want to distract yourself from completing your current manuscript, do make the time to write notes and capture your ideas for future projects. A "future" file is an important part of being a working author.

5. Don't...Lose momentum.

An object in motion tends to remain in motion unless acted upon by an outside influence. This is a paraphrase

continued on page 2

“A novel rough draft is like bread dough; you need to beat the crap out of it for it to rise.”
—Chris Baty

From the Editor



I'm not entirely sure why, but I seem to view the end of one year and the start of another as a sort of hinge. In truth, of course, New Years Eve is simply one more night of sleep (though perhaps not much of it, depending on your celebration!). It only

really differs from the other 364 because we wake up to fresh numbers at the tail end of the dateline.

But there's something about looking at this time of year as a hinge that encourages

me to take a fresh breath, and pushes me to start something new—or at least restart something old with a bit more gusto.

As you bid farewell to 2009 and look forward to 2010, I hope you'll be ready to tackle something new in your writing, whether it's a brand new idea or a renewed determination to finish and perfect your current manuscript. The wonderful writers of this NewsMag have certainly put together enough tools and inspiration to help you.

Whether or not you participated in NaNoWri- or Try-Mo, you'll enjoy reading about the trials and triumphs of some who did. And please make sure to read (and perhaps memorize) the Top Ten list—what NOT to do now that it's all over.

Fleur Bradley's article on editing tips is

exactly the sort of hands-on tool that I need to push forward with this new year—I have a mess of a manuscript, written largely over the course of the past two NaNoWriMo challenges, and I'm desperate for some help with my second draft.

If what you're really looking for is a bit of hope as you look at the seemingly sad state of publishing today, take a look at Linda Rohrbough's column on how e-books will likely change the industry.

And don't forget to sneak a peek at the fabulous PPW upcoming events—including the 2010 PPWC.

Enjoy this issue, and then get back to it: Happy Writing!

Pikes Peak Writer NewsMagazine

Official Publication of the Pikes Peak Writers

Bimonthly NewsMagazine of the Pikes Peak Writers, a 501(c)3 non-profit with members across the United States

427 E. Colorado Ave. #116
Colorado Springs, CO 80903
(719)531-5723

E-mail: info@pikespeakwriters.com
Web site: www.pikespeakwriters.com

PPW Officers

President
Ron Heimbecher
Vice President of Programming
Barb Nickless

Workshops Director
Maria Faulconer

Secretary
Bonnie Hagan

Treasurer
Charlie Rush

Community Ambassador
Chris Mandeville

Conference Co-Directors
Deb Buckingham
Laura Hayden

Contest Director
Dawn Smit Miller

Faculty Director
Susan Mitchell

Member at Large
Chris Myers

Editor
Mandy Houk

Graphic Design
Martha Lancaster
Contributing Editor
Deb Courtney

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

©2010 Pikes Peak Writers.

Top Ten

continued from page 1

of the Law of Inertia, and it is applicable in many areas of our lives, in a figurative sense as well as a literal, physical one. You spent the entire month of November gaining momentum (even if you are not aware that's what you did); do not let an outside force keep you from maintaining that momentum. Writers write...so keep doing it.

4. Don't...Stop refining your craft/learning new things.

So, one manuscript drafted. Feel good about it. But you are far from an industry professional—now might be a good time for some refreshers on editing, or story arc, or on anything which you know gave you trouble as you were finishing your draft. Anything which will help you in the editing/rewriting/refining process will be a good use of your time right now, as long as you are willing to put what you learn to work on this project.

3. Don't...Think you are done.

Writing a novel is hard work and it takes a long time, and there are several phases between first draft and final version. However, by achieving first draft you have managed something few would-be writers ever will. Celebrate, but be prepared for the rest of the work.

2. Don't...Underestimate the value of letting your work steep.

Notwithstanding that this article encourages you to keep going so as not to

lose momentum, some writers need some time away from their work in order to be able to approach the editing process with new eyes. In other words, if you are so close to your own words that you can't bear to part with any of them, it might be time to put the manuscript in a figurative drawer for a few weeks and approach it when you are in a more critical frame of mind. However, beyond making notes for future projects, don't get completely pulled away from this one. Stay with it until you're done.

1. Don't...Send your NaNo project to an agent or editor

You. Are. Not. Done. Yes, you finished NaNoWriMo. You have a manuscript. But the unfortunate fact is: you are not finished writing. For one thing, a typical novel has about 80,000 words, not 50,000. But more than just adding words, you need to edit and refine until you have a tight, gorgeously crafted story. Until you have that, do not send it to an agent or editor. You will likely just get it back, and you may burn your "in" with that publishing industry professional in the process. I have it firsthand that some industry professionals wish December would be designated as NaNoEdMo (National Novel Editing Month), which would help them avoid a desk full of partially completed manuscripts of 51,267 words, and would highlight this important part of the novel writing process.

NaNoWriMo

Ambitious Beginnings and Final Thoughts

By Cathy Dilts

A sea of laptops identifies the NaNoWriMo Write-In at Panera Bread on Powers. It's November 1, the first day of National Novel Writing Month, and enthusiasm rules the day.

Municipal Liaison Kelly asks me, "Do you need an outlet?"

Writers laugh, chat, and share word counts. 1,700 for Diane. Jen started at noon and already has 1,900 words. A phenomenal few have written over 4,000 words.

Helen has had an idea for a Civil War era novel since the 80s. NaNoWriMo inspires her to write it down.

Kristine has written 2,000 words of her novel, and has no name for her main character yet. She's integrating the subject lines of spam e-mails into her story.

Josh could be in the Young Writers Program, but chose to tackle the adult goal of 50,000 words by November 30th. "It's going to be crazy," he says.

Municipal Liaison Sara has participated in NaNoWriMo for six years. Sara says that being in a group of people who are writing novels is motivating.

NaNoWriMo, day one. Everyone seems energetic and confident. We shall see how this grand experiment plays out.

Do's and Don'ts of Query Letters

By Karen Fox

Do not mention who has rejected your book before.

Do not include people's recommendations, such as, "My children loved this story."

Do not discuss rights or payment.

Do not mention more than one project at a time (except when stating you have other finished projects).

Do not give out your social security number.

Do not include superlatives. Editors don't want to be told your book is the greatest ever written. They will judge for themselves.

Do not ramble, prod, or threaten.

Final statistics:

The Colorado Springs NaNoWriMo region included 225 writers who wrote 7,377,838 words for an average of 32,645 per writer. The number of writers for the entire state of Colorado was 1,539. The collective word count for the entire worldwide NaNoWriMo event was an astonishing 2,427,190,537 words.

I encouraged two teens to sign up for the Young Writers Program. Each achieved her goal. Nicole used the NaNoWriMo YWP to complete a creative writing project for school. Christine wrote the first 50,000 words of her first novel.

For those of us with several years of writing experience under our belts, the goals were about more than mere word count. One writer I know used NaNo to successfully jump start his ambition to write a publishable novel. He completed over 68,000 words. I used the month to slam out a rough draft of a murder mystery, instead of taking my usual year or two to draft a novel. Another writer friend worked on finishing her first draft of an in-progress paranormal romance.

Will the next best seller result from all this frantic expenditure of energy? Only time, and a lot of revision, will tell.

Do enclose an SASE

Do be professional.

Do be brief.

Do proofread.

Do ensure you're addressing and sending the letter to a specific individual with the correct title who currently works at that agency/publisher.

Do keep to one page, if possible.

—Karen Fox has always enjoyed adventure and the paranormal, and it shows. Her first two books were futuristic romances for *Leisure—the second, Somewhere My Love*, was a RITA finalist for *Best Paranormal*. She followed these with a contemporary fantasy set of four books for Berkeley and a time-travel romance and historical romance with a hint of paranormal for *Zebra*. Following her *Air Force husband*, she's lived in Tacoma, Charleston, Biloxi and Belgium, while raising three children and

NaNoWriMo— Lessons Learned

By Cathy Dilts

1) Lesson: I do my most productive work in the morning.

Action Item: Buy winning lotto ticket so I can quit my day job.

2) Lesson: Sensory deprivation works.

Action Item: Attend PPW write-in events where the only distractions are the clicking of keys on other writers' laptop keyboards and the gurgling of the coffee pot.

3) Lesson: In the time it takes to do a word count on the NaNoWriMo Web site, I could probably have written two dozen more words.

Action item: quit counting—just keep your head down and your fingers moving.

4) Lesson: Technology happens. At a coffee shop, my laptop power cord was accidentally disconnected, and my laptop battery did not kick in. I lost a couple pages of fresh writing. Two weeks later, my laptop crashed. My husband was able to retrieve the work I had failed to save to my jump drive.

Action Item: Save, save, save, save, save to multiple memory resources.

5) Lesson: Social networking sites can be both a writer's best friend and worst enemy. The encouraging news and messages from other writers can keep you sane, but the Internet can be an evil time-sucking vampire.

Action Item: Set a firm time limit for going online, or better yet, don't jump onto the Internet at all while writing.

working full-time. She has worked on the annual Pikes Peak Writers Conference since its inception and is a member of the Pikes Peak Romance Writers and Pikes Peak Writers. A member of the Romance Writers of America Association, Karen spent four years serving on the National Board of Directors.

This piece originally appeared as part of a larger article in the January, 2003 issue of the *Pikes Peaks Writer NewsMagazine*.



The Business of Writing

E-Books—An Opportunity for Authors, But Not the Way You Think

By Linda Rohrbough

I've heard people say that in ten years we'll all be reading books on e-readers, and paper books will be a thing of the past. Horse hockey. But I will say that e-books are an opportunity for writers. Let me give you a little background, and then I'll tell you where the opportunities are and why.

I have a unique perspective here, which gives me a bit of an advantage. I was a reporter covering technology for an international computer news network when the VCR came out. And all the industry pundits said the VCR spelled the end of the movie theatre. Well, we all know how that came out. If anything, movie theatres are bigger (literally) than ever. What did happen as a result of the VCR is this: an entire market opened up for movies that had never existed before.

All the folks who couldn't get their movies into the traditional movie theater channels started opening small film companies in cities besides Hollywood and producing films aimed at the video (now DVD) market. I've personally met people who own these family-owned film companies and they have investors and make a living just like the big studios, on a smaller scale. And there are a number of Hollywood-produced films that didn't make money in theatres but did make money when they went to the video market.

Can you see where I'm going with this when it comes to books and e-readers? I know a gal who started a ghostwriting business who says her clients are publishing e-books, but they're actually making money off the print versions. They give away the entire e-book on their Web site, people read some or all of it, and then they buy the print version. I also recently met a publisher who started a small press based on this same principle. He publishes the e-book and asks for payment after the reader reads the book. He said he's been stunned at how much people pay, as much as \$10 in some cases, after they've already read the book. Then, when the demand is high enough, he goes to press and sells paper copies, often to the same readers.

The book *Still Alice*, a fictional first-person account of someone with Alzheimer's, is the highest profile book demonstrating this new trend. The author, Lisa Genova, went to writers' conferences trying to find an agent and editor through traditional means. Genova had credentials as a neuroscientist, but no one was buying. So she published it herself on iUniverse for about \$400. The book took off, got the attention of an agent who signed her, and then sold the book earlier this year to the Pocket division of Simon & Schuster for a half-million dollar advance.

“E-readers make reading fun and, more importantly for the working writer, they make buying books quick and easy.”

The title just hit the stores in the last couple of months, with a rush printing job that shows. *Publisher's Weekly's* review was not favorable. “Genova's prose style is clumsy and her dialogue heavy-handed. This novel will appeal to those dealing with the disease and may prove helpful, but beyond the heartbreaking record of illness there's little here to remember.” So the publishing experts clearly didn't like the book, but the emotional pull made it sell—no big surprise there. Here's the point: the electronic version made way for the print version. And the print version is selling well.

The rub is that there aren't yet enough readers of e-books. My contention is that once e-readers go to color, you won't be able to keep them on the shelves. My proof is what happened with Apple and the PC in the 1980's. Apple lost market share when Steve Jobs refused to go to color monitors because the resolution was so bad. And it was—CGA resolution was horrible. Until then, the PC and the Mac were neck-and-neck in sales, but when the PC went to color, the Mac lost market share and has yet to get it back. Even now, Macs are at about ten percent of the market.

People love color. Books' pages are not in

color, of course, but their covers certainly are. E-readers are about to come out in color, and it will blow this whole thing wide open.

Fujitsu just announced the Flepia, a \$1,000 color e-book reader. Plastic Logic is about to come out with Que, a color reader, and their black and white version will be sold next to Barnes and Noble's Nook.

E-readers make reading fun and, more importantly for the working writer, they make buying books quick and easy. I have to be careful—I can blow sixty bucks on books with my Kindle without blinking an eye. In a bookstore I might be tempted, but it's more likely that I'll think twice on the long walk up to the register with an armload of hardbacks.

This trend is also going to open doors for small publishers. But don't get fooled by subsidiary presses that want you to pay them and imply you'll get more attention from traditional publishing houses once your book has an ISBN number and a shiny cover. Once you do that, all traditional publishers want to know about are sales. And they can look up sales in a New York minute on Neilson's electronic book sales tracking service BookScan. So if you can't show them sales of 15,000 copies or more, or 7,000 copies sold into book clubs in less than a year, then you've just slammed the door shut on your book.

As they say: when the tide comes in, all the boats go up. And I've always said that where there are problems, there are opportunities. Like video, I believe the demand for books, especially fiction, is about to take off. And that, my writer friends, means opportunity.

Get your books polished up and ready. It's coming.

Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, and has more than 5,000 articles, seven books, and numerous awards for her fiction and non-fiction. Linda's latest book is Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band (Da Capo Lifelong Books, March 2008). Visit her Web site: www.LindaRohrbough.com

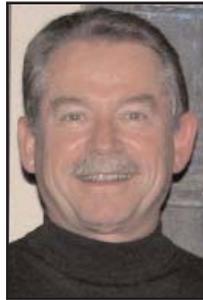
December Write Brain

Can You Feel It? Emotions in Storytelling

By Fleur Bradley

Michael J. Coumatos has held many positions within the military, including naval aviator, test pilot, and ship's captain. He now owns a local business, is the past chair of the Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region (COPPeR), and has written two military futuristic thrillers: *Space Wars* and *Counterspace*. Not a guy you'd imagine would spend a lot of time exploring his feelings, but that was exactly what he was teaching us to do at December's Write Brain.

Despite the busy holiday season, the room was packed with writers—newbies and veterans alike. Michael started the Write Brain session by allowing us to introduce ourselves, explaining what we were writing. He then told us this wasn't going to be a simple lecture; we were going to have to participate, sharing our experiences and feelings. "You have to mine your own emotional core to create



characters," he explained.

Michael suggested journaling as a way writers can connect to their feelings, to use when writing fiction. He went on to explain the importance of understanding a character's emotional core: the cumulative experiences, or memory episodes, that make a person unique. "You can use the emotional core to set your characters, and it helps you decide how they will react to events in the story," Michael said. He explained that the emotional core will lead to a character's feelings in certain situations, causing specific reactions and behaviors, which creates a naturally progressing scene. "The emotional core is stronger than feelings."

We all did an exercise, where we took a recent emotional experience and looked at our

own emotional core to analyze the reactions we had at the time. Michael kept the mood in the room light by joking and encouraging us to participate.

In another exercise, we wrote a short paragraph about one of our characters, set in a crowded room, using the situation to reveal the character's emotional core. Michael suggested we start by finishing the following sentence for our characters: "I struggle with..." and build on that emotional core revelation. "If you are true to your character, that believability will carry through in your story," Michael said, suggesting the story will move readers more that way. "Don't explain your character's feelings, but let them reveal."

After some audience members read their short character sketches, Michael closed the Write Brain session by sharing some of his favorite characters, like Macbeth, Scarlett O'Hara and Captain Kirk—all characters with complex emotional cores. "Character yearning guides the story, allowing the character to advance theme and plot," Michael said, giving us the key to creating character-driven fiction. "It's all about how we can create those words that move people."

Two Young Writers' Thoughts on NaNoWriMo

By Christine Leingang and Nicole Dilts

Hey ... are we on? Okay, here goes!

Salutations to my fellow NaNoWriMo'ers and writers of PPW! My name is Christine, and my pen name is Rahel Bat Obadiah. I'm a home-schooled freshman from Colorado Springs, participating in NaNoWriMo's Young Writer's Program. This is my first year doing NaNoWriMo, and I'm hoping to prove to myself that I can actually do really well at this if I work hard and stay committed. I've found that you truly have to be disciplined if you want to crank out 30- to 50-thousand words in one month. The young writers' NaNoWriMo is similar to the original program in that you must try to reach your word count goal by the end of November. It differs in the fact that the young authors can select their own word count goals.

Over to you, Nicole...

Hello, my name is Nicole Dilts. I am 17 years old, and I go to Littleton High School. My pen name on NaNoWriMo is duckyperson. I am also trying out the NaNoWriMo program for the first time this year, and it's not easy to balance school, studying for finals, and—on top of that—writing 50,000 words. But with this program I think that I just might make it out alive. I love to write, but typing is not my specialty, and NaNoWriMo is helping me get over my fear of typing, even if it's a small step. I love all the books I've ever written on note paper, but never before have I had enough patience to type it all out. I want this book to be my first ... I want to know that I can do it.

Obviously, though, NaNoWriMo is not all about typing. There are many activities on the Web site, such as "word wars" and other games that help you to develop better characteriza-

tions. Other interesting things on the site allow you to challenge fellow writers to add unusual things to their stories. I saw one challenge to add hot dogs, jelly, and a happy ending!

I also think it's nice that you can upload a mock-up book cover, and put excerpts and a summary of your book online so that others can see what fresh thoughts you have. That's another thing: you and your novel are totally safe on the site, and the blogs are monitored too. You can have fun without worrying about the immaturity of others.

Summing things up...

We both found that we enjoyed the adventure of NaNoWriMo, though it was hard to find time during the busy month of November. Of course, everybody feels this way about National Novel Writing month, even the editors! But we're glad that this opportunity has opened our minds to what we thought could be impossible for young people like us. It could also be a tool that we may use later on in our lives. We're looking forward to next year's NaNoWriMo with you all.

Over and out!

Nicole and Christine are pleased to report that they both achieved their goals for NaNoWriMo 2009.

What You Know Can Kill You

By Ron Heimbecher

When Sloane arrived at the scene of the 211, the LAPD radio code for armed robbery, he immediately deduced from the size and profile of the bank robber's rifle that it was one of the many cheap AR-15 knock-offs available in the Central Los Angeles neighborhood. The veteran LAPD officer knew the muzzle velocity of the weapon was 3,200 feet per second. Was it the standard .223 caliber or the NATO 5.56 millimeter? The difference could mean whether or not the round could penetrate his vest. The point turned out to be moot. As Sloane contemplated all of this, a hardened slug entered the center of his forehead.

Buzzzzzzt. It sucks to be Sloan. Replay.

Officer Sloane jinked right when he saw the puff off smoke above the trunk of a Chrysler sedan parked in front of the Bank of Los Angeles. The six-inch wooden beam behind him splayed with a thunderclap and splinters pierced his left cheek. Adrenalin pumped through his arteries. No time for pain now. He returned fire, aiming his Glock at the Chrysler's gas tank.

Is one of these examples better than the other? It depends. Depends on what?

The simple answer is that it depends on the reader's expectations. A Clancy or Cornwell fan might prefer the details in the first example, while another reader may choose the relative simplicity of the second. Expectations also depend on the genre of the story. Is it a thriller, a police procedural, mystery, cozy, suspense?

Can it also depend on the writer? Is the writer a cop? A systems analyst? A librarian? The guy with the low-slung jeans who fixes the broken pipe things underneath your kitchen sink? Does the writer's background make a difference? Raise your hand if you know the answer.

OK, you—the one with the netbook and the latté foam on your upper lip. Yes, you're right: Again, *it depends*.

Is a small town cop who spent her entire career working speed traps automatically better qualified to be the author of our story of a Los Angeles bank robbery?

Here we go—yet one more take on the dreaded “Write What You Know” discussion. But with a twist.

Google tells us there are over 130,000 blog posts and other articles related to “Write What You Know” and another 22 million-plus related to “Write *About* What You Know” on the Internet. Why? Because these two topics go to the heart of a writer's insecurities. Which of us hasn't faced a blank page thinking, “Do I know enough to write this story?” Or, “What uniquely qualifies me to tell this tale?”

Two topics? Yup. “Write What You Know” and “Write *About* What You Know” are not the same.

“Expectations also depend on the genre of the story. Is it a thriller, a police procedural, mystery, cozy, suspense?”

Consider the example paragraphs at the beginning of this article. The first, full of facts and details, is more closely defined by “Write What You Know.” Whether learned by experience or research, those facts and details are known quantities. The second example, on the other hand, is **about** the rush of adrenalin. It's **about** the shattering of a piece of wood. It's **about** experiencing pain. These are senses, feelings and emotions that all of us, whether ex-policemen or plumbers, have genuinely experienced as human beings.

Writing what you know has potential pratfalls. The writer, if too experienced in the subject matter, can fall into jargon the reader doesn't understand, or provide so many details that the tension dies. The too-experienced writer can also leave the reader high and dry by assuming the reader knows everything the writer knows. A novel that reads like an autobiography, or a forensics textbook, can be a painful experience for the reader. A thirty-year big city cop, wrapped in the details of his experience, might ignore Elmore Leonard's advice to “leave out the parts that people skip.”

A focus on *writing what you know* can also lead to research paralysis, right up there with Facebook for procrastination. Who among us has not frittered away half a day or more jumping from one link to another on Google, Wikipedia, Ask.com and a

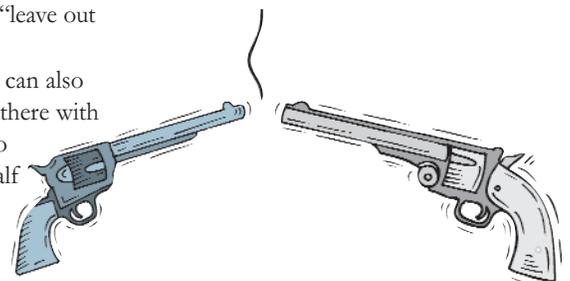
bazillion other sites, all the while justifying it as a search for that one final piece to the puzzle? We could easily add a hundred words or more to our first example paragraph with details about the seventeen-shot clip, the Parabellum rounds for hydrostatic shock effect, and the New York trigger on Sloane's 9mm Glock 22 automatic pistol. Would it have made the story more interesting? It's up to the reader.

This doesn't mean that research is unimportant. Jeffery Deaver spends eight months researching his thrillers, but as he says in a 2004 interview with Bookreporter.com, he works to “incorporate only those facts that move the story along.” The learning process can be energizing, exciting, and fun.

John Grisham and Michael Palmer have done well writing what they know. But you can't let the fact that you've never walked a moonlit beach with Fabio, or carried a detective's shield, or raised a child alone, stop you from writing the story that's in your mind and heart.

Writing **about** what you know is the process of instilling emotion into your characters and stories. Translate the terror you feel when you see a mouse to your character's reaction to a sound in the darkness. Translate the exhaustion you feel at the end of a five-mile run to your character who just completed her first day of Marine basic training. Translate your frustration in dealing with two teenagers to your lawyer in the middle of a difficult cross-examination. Pain, sorrow, joy, fear, sadness, love. At some point in your life, you've placed each of these into your writer's toolbox. Human emotions are universal. Only the triggers and reactions vary.

The next time you ask yourself, “How can I write this, and sell this? I'm not a (fill in the blank),” take a moment to remind yourself of a former advertising executive named James Patterson.



Write the Fight

opponent's collarbone notch—the notch itself, but the

By Marti Verlander

“Sure, I’ll give a woman a black belt. I’ll throw it on her grave after she’s dead.”

I heard this as a new student of martial arts. The quote was attributed to the grandmaster Seiyu Oyata. Fortunately for me, he adapted to American ways, and I eventually earned a 5th-degree black belt from him, as the first woman accepted as his personal student. For 18 years, I studied and taught RyuTe Karate®, including eight years in my own dojo. What I learned during those years, I can share to help any writer create a more vivid and realistic fight scene.

Details make scenes come alive, but if a writer doesn’t know fighting and its body language, he may skip details and write in generalities.

Consider the effectiveness of the following passages:

Geoff sized up his opponent carefully, trying to look larger and meaner than he was, dreading the battle ahead of him. Then his enemy charged.

or

Geoff watched the way his opponent leaned forward, slightly off-balance. The too-wide stance favored Geoff, too. Anger snarled the man’s face. Geoff relaxed his own muscles, settled into calmness, his feet squarely under his shoulders. He widened his eyes under lowered brows. Then his enemy charged.

As brief as the second paragraph is, each detail represents a specific principle of effective fighting technique.

In classical martial arts, two masters could never fight, because neither would make the initial move. Both know that he who moves first, loses. Each desires the other to commit first. When his opponent’s foot moves, the warrior attacks the weight-bearing leg with lightning-swift reflexes to destroy balance, and the fight will end quickly.

Balance is necessary for good technique. A top warrior will be relaxed, feet squarely under his shoulders, knees flexed rather than locked. His weight shifts slightly forward, but his body doesn’t lean. Arms remain loose at his sides, because from there they can reach anywhere within his body space. An opponent must invade that zone to hurt him, so he doesn’t reach outside it to defend himself. He thereby conserves energy without putting balance at risk.

He watches the area in front of his

air a little in front of it. Watching a specific place will fixate him, causing him to miss peripheral movement. His awareness encompasses all of his opponent.

To intimidate, he displays erect, confident posture. He is relaxed, because tight muscles move more slowly than loose ones. He doesn’t squint to appear ferocious but widens his eyes without lifting his eyebrows, like a madman. Light tension radiates out from his center.

A trained warrior knows how to use space to his advantage. Stepping closer to an opponent invades his personal space and applies psychological pressure. His strides do not mince, nor do they stretch. His arms swing naturally from the shoulder to take up space, to command the area and make him appear larger. He moves all-of-a-piece, smoothly and in perfect control. His head doesn’t swivel as he walks; that would appear fearful and unsure. His glances are natural and unafraid.

“Details make scenes come alive, but if a writer doesn’t know fighting and its body language, he may skip details and write in generalities.”

The master consciously observes everything around him to watch for trouble, scout terrain advantages and disadvantages, and search for whatever can help or hinder him. He prefers to observe potential conflict from far away first.

If the warrior must choose between speed and power, he will choose speed. A mighty blow from his enemy may kill him, but not if his own strike lands first. He knows that an open hand is faster than a closed fist, because energy feeds out through the fingertips. He wants it not to flow back into his own body, but outward, into his opponent.

The open hand’s striking surface is not the edge of the hand itself, but the bone below it, or the wrist bone, for greater penetration and more painful strikes to nerve points. He twists his hand at the instant of impact, also to increase penetration.

If the warrior chooses to use a fist, he closes his hand only as it makes contact, to maximize speed and power. Again, he twists

on impact.

As with any weapon, he uses all surfaces of his hand, not just the obvious ones—palm, knuckles, wrist edge, back wrist edge, fingertips, thumb—each for its own purpose and effect.

Timing is also critical, but he does not confuse it with speed. A perfect parry thrown a half-second too fast misses the incoming fist. If that happens, the warrior is not too good for his own good; he is not good enough. He must match his opponent’s timing, even if that means he must slow his own reflexes.

The warrior uses eye contact effectively. To be polite, he will hold another’s gaze for three or four seconds only. To challenge, he will hold it longer, knowing the other will either submit or start a fight. When he ends the eye contact, he looks away, but not down; he’s not submitting.

The warrior controls himself, inside and out, the result of long hours over many years spent training and fighting. He does not brag or boast or swagger or threaten. He need not. His opponent may speak as he wishes, and the warrior will ignore him. The mouth cannot harm him physically, nor does it change what is true. He wastes no energy on such things, but he doesn’t mind if his opponent does. His own message is in his technique, not in his mouth.

A warrior carries himself with pride and confidence, with power and fluidity, but without tension. His general appearance and the way he moves are warning enough, to anyone who knows the language, that he is dangerous, that they would do better to seek their prey elsewhere. And so he rarely needs to fight.

For writers, none of these details is “right” or “wrong.” Their usage depends on the character and circumstances.

If the hero isn’t a highly trained fighter, maybe he’ll narrow his eyes and frown in concentration, rather than using the “mad man” look. That doesn’t mean he’ll lose the fight; the wide-eyed look is more effective, but it’s only one detail in a complex “dance” between opponents.

Every detail given here can be topsy-turried for a character who’s untrained. Maybe the hero stands with his feet too far apart, making him slower and easier to unbalance. Maybe he’ll defend a swing that wouldn’t have hit him anyway, and feel foolish for it. Maybe he’ll throw a wild punch, rather than a straight and direct one.

The goal, no matter how apt or inept the character, is to portray action with the kind of detail that creates a gripping, authentic sequence.

Taming the Beast:

Eight Steps to Editing Your First Draft

By Fleur Bradley

You've finished the first draft of your novel—congratulations! Maybe you wrote it NaNo-style in one month, or maybe it took nine months (or more) to grow your baby. Whichever the case, you knew this day would come: first draft editing time. Suddenly, that baby you thought was so beautiful turns out to be more of a beast—a screaming, red-faced Cyclops of a baby that you would rather toss in the drawer than look at again.

This is normal, because of course your first draft is not a baby, but a work you'll have to mold, starting with the second draft. It can be daunting to edit, even for those of us who've been there before. Before you begin, remember this: **second drafts are for big-picture editing.** The biggest mistake beginning (and even veteran) writers make is to dive into their manuscript and get lost in the language, the spelling, the punctuation. This type of polish is for third (and consequent) drafts. Second drafts are all about making sure that the scenes are in the right order, plot/character arcs are there, and the ideas are strong and in the right place. The big stuff. It's like remodeling a house: you have to make sure the walls are in the right place before you start painting them.

Here's a quick guide to get you on your way:

1. Make a chapter-by-chapter outline of what your first draft looks like, if you haven't done this already. Use only a paragraph to describe what happens in each chapter. This step will provide you with a clear overview of what you have (and will come in handy when you have to write a synopsis).

2. Write down your logline and theme/message. This is your **plotline**, the yellow line on the road that is your novel. Now write down your protagonist's name, and answer this question: how does he/she change over the course of your story? This is your **character arc**. Keep the plotline and character arc nearby as you edit: they're the focus of your novel. If your novel has subplots, write these down as "subplot 1," "subplot 2," etc., with a brief description.

3. Using your chapter outline from step one, start breaking your novel into three

parts: **Part I**, where you introduce character, plot, and problem, **Part II** (also known as the chunky middle) where plot gets more complicated, and **Part III**, the climax of your story. Don't worry too much about where these breaks are exactly; chances are that your three acts flow into one another. Just find where these three parts roughly are—we just break them up so you can easily oversee your editing process. Part I and III each make up about ¼ of your manuscript; Part II makes up about half.

4. Now that you have your novel's plotline(s) and character arc defined, and have split your novel into manageable chunks, it's time to edit Part I. This part of your novel needs to get a lot done, and in only ¼ of your manuscript. Part I needs to introduce your character, his/her arc, plot question (think: "Will Detective Bob find the killer?"), and subplots. At the end of part I, your character needs to be fully invested in his/her quest, with no turning back. Ask yourself if all the components are there, and what might be missing. Make notes about scenes to add, and ones to delete or move. Part I is all about establishing what your book is about; it's the foundation on which Part II will be built.

"Suddenly, that baby you thought was so beautiful turns out to be more of a beast—a screaming, red-faced Cyclops of a baby that you would rather toss in the drawer than look at again."

5. Part II is your middle, and should comprise about half of your manuscript. This is where Detective Bob makes a plan to find the killer. He interviews witnesses, checks out leads. Whatever your genre, the first half of your middle is where you build on Part I: complicating the plot, subplots, and allowing your protagonist to struggle with his inner life (that's the character arc we established in step 2). By the middle of Part II, you may want to add a pivot—a point where things change.



Maybe Bob's partner gets hurt or killed, or maybe the investigation reveals there are two killers instead of one. Whatever your plot, it'll help you if around the middle of Part II, you have something of a turning point. This way you'll have a mini climax to work toward during the first part of the middle.

6. The second half of Part II will ramp up the complications you've created in your plotline and character arc. This is where you push your protagonist to his/her limits, and beyond them, to add extra drama. By the end of Part II, you should have wrapped up your subplots, and your main character should be nearing the end of his character arc. In Bob's case, maybe he realized that he really wants to be a good father more than he wants to be a cop. If you have a mystery in the works, this should be the point where your sleuth figures out who the killer is. For literary works, the end of Part II will be all about that aha moment your character has about his/her arc.

7. Part III is your climax, where your protagonist plans his final steps to get what he/she wants. This is what you've been working toward, so it is usually not too difficult to write. However, a common flaw in first draft climaxes is writer fatigue: you just wanted to get this thing over with, so you rushed to the finish line. Look over this part to see how you may be able to milk it for all it's worth. Add build-up, expand what happens—you've worked hard to get to this point, so make it count.

8. Once you've made notes to add or delete scenes, look at your current chapter outline. Are there parts where you drop a subplot? Does your character change gradually throughout the manuscript, or abruptly so that it's not believable? Now is the time to move scenes around, and get the bones of your manuscript right.

This is a basic approach to second draft editing, and I definitely recommend that you read more reference manuals on editing fiction, if you haven't done so already. Expect this process to take at least as long as it took you to write the first draft, and likely a lot longer.

Remember: writing is silver, editing is gold. Or platinum, even.



By *Becky Clark*

The Zen of Stupidity

Normally I'd waste this space with my self-described hilarious bloggy antics, but I've decided to try something different this time. I'm going to waste this space with a hilarious story about my extreme stupidity.

Let you worry about my self-esteem, rest assured I am intact. Gorged and oozing, in fact, with self-esteem. I shouldn't be, but there it is. One of life's many mysteries.

I did something recently that is quite possibly the dumbest thing I've ever done, as long as we agree to overlook the 10th grade perm and the red pleather coat I begged my mother to buy me. (That's when I learned that despite its delightfully shiny redness, pleather coats consistently fail to keep the Wyoming chill from blowing right through a skinny girl. At least I was smart enough not to complain to my mother who was itching to launch a well-deserved "told you so.")

The perm and the coat don't rise to the top of my Stupidity Scale, though, because I

didn't know any better. But I do know that hard drives crash and one should obsessively back up all computer data.

Duh. I know that. Third graders know that. Heck, even the squirrel on my deck knows that. Why else would he be twitching his tail in that holier-than-thou manner?

Do you see where this is going?

Did I obsessively back up all my files? No. No, I did not. Old stuff, yes. But newer stuff? Not so much despite the fact I have—and use—an FTP site ... I have a million little USB drives ... I e-mail things to myself.

I know better, but I've never had a computer problem. so I became complacent.

My husband recently bought me an external hard drive so I could start using Time Machine which automatically backs up stuff every eight seconds or something. But here's the kicker, no pun intended. If the Broncos would have played at 2:00 instead of 11:00 that fateful Sunday then I might have dodged this bullet. We would have set it up in the morning instead of waiting until after the game.

Guess when it crashed.

The stages of grief whooshed through my psyche at warp speed, so I was fairly calm by Monday morning. Waiting to talk to the Geniuses at the Apple Store was nerve-racking, until they told me it was hopeless and sent me home with a new computer for free. (Note to self: Apple Care ROCKS!) They even gave me my old hard drive and the name of a local data recovery place, Datatech Labs.

I called Datatech on Monday to tell them my sad story, one I'm sure they've heard a million times. Clearly, these are people who've been trained in grief counseling. They spoke softly. They made no sudden movements. They even offered butterscotch candy and hugs Wait. I might be thinking of my grandmother. But they were very soothing. Never once did they mock or call me stupid.

My new best friend, Stephan, took my

broken and battered hard drive into his softly cupped palms and carried it lovingly to the clean room to check it out. When he came out, he was smiling. "Looks like we can recover all the data."

But then the bad news: \$300 to repair the hard drive enough that they can get the data, then another \$1700 to recover it. But only if they recover it. No charge if they can't get it.

Despite the cost—and my ultimate decision not to pay for the recovery—if you ever find yourself in a similar pickle, you'd do well to call the guys at Datatech. They come highly recommended and they won't mock you. They'd probably even give you a hug if you looked like you needed one.

I'm not really into self-flagellation, but I do think I need to be punished. If you simply throw money at a problem, then you won't really learn anything, right? That might be how Wall Street works, but we're better than that, kids.

Realistically—nobody died, the sun keeps coming up every day, and I didn't lose anything irreplaceable. I am much more fortunate than others. Everything I lost I can recreate. It will be time-consuming, but not impossible. Some of the stuff I probably didn't need anyway. As I tried to list everything I knew I lost, I'm sure I didn't remember half of it. It was there because I had the space for it. So it seems like a good time for a purge.

Less like a tragic house fire, and more like a healthy cleaning of my closets.

But the lesson is important: back up obsessively in several different ways because USBs can fail, external drives can fail, software can fail. And always—always—blame the Broncos.

<http://beckyland.wordpress.com>

I'm Just Sayin—come visit me in BeckyLand. Bring your own coffee.

To All Members

Effective with your renewal in 2010, the following changes go into effect regarding your PPW membership fees:

- 1) The new annual fee is \$40
- 2) In order to receive **paper** copies of the *NewsMagazine*, Conference Information, and Contest Information, there will be a \$10 annual fee, **payable with your membership renewal**.

For members who receive these items electronically, via email or download, the fee does not apply.

The online and paper registration forms will be updated to reflect these changes on January 1.

Have a successful and productive writing year in 2010.

—Ron Heimbecker, President.

Upcoming PPW Events

January, February

January Write Brain

January 12, 6:30-8:30

(Note: Second Tuesday rather than the normal third Tuesday.)

Speeddating Your Ideas: How to Identify “The One”

This will be a great way to kick off your writing New Year! Based on the dating phenomenon, this highly interactive, seriously-fun evening gets everyone involved in evaluating their ideas based on craft, psychological, and commercial traits. Learn what gives an idea “legs,” take advantage of the chance to develop your concept, and find your ideal match! Bring two to four ideas to pitch.



Trai Cartwright is a writer, producer and professional writing coach and teacher. She has consulted on thousands of books and scripts,

produced three independent films and worked as a feature film and online entertainment creative executive for HBO, 20th Century Fox, Universal, New Line, Paramount and Leonardo DiCaprio. She is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing at CSU, and will teach Screenwriting at the Laramie County Community College in Spring 2010. www.craftwrite.com

February Write Brain

February 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
He Said. She Said. Writing in the Voice of the Opposite Sex

You have a brilliant idea for a new character. But the voice that won't be stilled is a member of the opposite sex. How do you pull it off? Don't despair. We've called in the experts: Bonnie Ramthun, whose POV character is 12-year-old Torin Sinclair, in her YA Novel *The White Gates*. And Mark Stevens, whose POV character is Allison Coil, in his mystery novel, *Antler Dust*. Join us for our February Write Brain as these two award-

winning authors give us the inside track on writing the opposite sex.



Bonnie Ramthun lives in Erie, Colorado with her husband Bill, and their four children. In Bonnie's first three novels, Colorado Springs homicide detective Eileen Reed and her handsome partner Joe

Tanner, a war gamer, solve murders and save the world in *Ground Zero*, *Earthquake Games* and *The Thirteenth Skull*. *Earthquake Games* was a finalist for Colorado Book of the Year in 2000. Her new novel, *The White Gates*, is a middle grade mystery introducing Torin Sinclair, a young snowboarder who must discover the modern secret behind an ancient curse (Random House). *The White Gates* was named a Junior Library Guild Premiere selection for 2008. Visit Bonnie's Web site at www.bonnie-ramthun.com.



The son of two librarians, **Mark Stevens** was raised in Lincoln, Massachusetts, and graduated from Principia College in Illinois. He worked as a reporter for *The Christian Science*

Monitor in Boston and Los Angeles, and, following a move to Denver, he worked for *The Rocky Mountain News*, covering City Hall for three years. Stevens was later lucky enough to be invited to join the team on *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*—they were actually looking for somebody with no television experience, which suited him perfectly. For six years, he produced field documentaries across the United States and Latin America. His “master of disaster” title, he was told, referred to the stories he covered, not the quality of the reports. After tending bar for a year on a self-financed sabbatical (and to write fiction), he joined *The Denver Post* to cover education. Those five years of reporting led to a position as Director of

Communications for more than a decade with Denver Public Schools and then for a year with School District 6 in Greeley. Stevens is currently Director of Communications for the Colorado Department of Education. He now lives near Congress Park in beautiful downtown Denver with his wife, Jody Chapel, and two daughters, Ally and Justine.

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.

Write Brain Sessions are held at Cottonwood Center for the Arts, 427 E. Colorado Ave. Visitor's parking is in the large parking lot on the east side of the Cottonwood building. The workshops will be in Studio A adjacent to the new PPW office and bookstore located in Studio 116.

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.

Open Critique

Tuesdays, January 23 and February 19, from 6:30 to 8:30, at Penrose Library on Cascade.

Open Critique guests for November and December to be announced.

PPW Members Night

Monday, January 25 and February 28 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

Nancy Wisgirda is pleased to announce the release of her first novel, *Hawkmoon* (under the pen name Nancy Williams). Nearly a year to the day that she sold the manuscript to Loon In Balloon, Inc., a small Canadian press in Ontario, it came off the presses and is now for sale on Amazon, Chapters, and many retail outlets across Canada. Back in February, LIB sold the movie rights to a film company in Toronto, and they are currently working on a screenplay!

Lynne Bryant's debut novel *Catfish Alley* will be released by NAL/Penguin in the spring of 2011. Making the news even more

exciting: she met her agent, Kevan Lyon, at the 2009 PPWC! Here's Lynne's description of the book: "*Catfish Alley* weaves together historical and contemporary characters in a fictionalized account of places and events in my Mississippi home town." Check out her author bio on the Marsal Lyon Literary Agency's website, listed under commercial fiction: www.marsallyonliteraryagency.com.

Deb Stover's got good news to share, too—her ghost story/suspense novel *The Gift* has gone into a second printing.

Beth Groundwater is very pleased to announce that seven years after writing the first draft, her science fiction thriller novella, *The Epsilon Eridani*, has been released in eBook and paperback by Virtual Tales (www.virtualtales.com/).

Carol Berg has been named the winner of the 2009 Mythopoeic Fantasy Award for Adult Literature, for her two-book epic

fantasy series *Flesh and Spirit and Breath and Bone* (New American Library/Roc Books 2007, 2008). The Mythopoeic Society, an international literary society, gives the award for "the fantasy novel, multi-volume novel, or single-author story collection for adults published during the previous year that best exemplifies 'the spirit of the Inklings'." More information on the Mythopoeic Society and the Mythopoeic Fantasy Award can be found at <http://www.mythsoc.org>.

More good news for Carol: her new novel, *The Spirit Lens*, will be released January 5th in trade paperback from New American Library/Roc Books. It's the first of a new three-book series. Learn more at Carol's Web site: www.carolberg.com.

Have your own Sweet Success to share? Fill out the form on the PPW Web site, or send a note to editor@pikespeakwriters.com.

PPWC 2010 The Write Stuff, Write Now! April 23-25

You wrote...we read! Your ideas helped shape this year's conference.

Experience a revamped schedule including Add-On Thursday programs, an earlier start Friday, and a NEW Sunday Brunch.

Keynote Presenters Include:



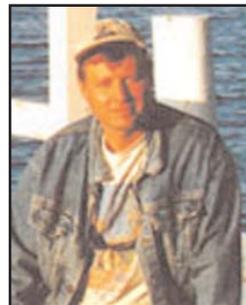
Donald Maass

His agency sells more than 150 novels every year to major publishers in the U.S. and overseas. He is the author of *The Career Novelist* (1996), *Writing the Breakout Novel* (2001), *Writing the Breakout Novel Workbook* (2004) and *The Fire in Fiction* (2009).



Kelley Armstrong

Kelley Armstrong spins tales of ghosts and demons and werewolves, while safely locked away in her basement writing dungeon. She's the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the "Darkest Powers" young adult urban fantasy trilogy, the "Women of the Otherworld" paranormal suspense series, and Nadia Stafford crime series.



Tim Dorsey

Tim Dorsey has published eleven novels in several languages: *Florida Roadkill*, *Hammerhead Ranch Motel*, *Orange Crush*, *Triggerfish Twist*, *The Stingray Shuffle*, *Cadillac Beach*, *Torpedo Juice*, *The Big Bamboo*, *Hurricane Punch*, *Atomic Lobster and Nuclear Jellyfish*. His newest novel, *Gator A-Go-Go*, will be released Jan. 26, 2010.



Jodi Thomas

Jodi Thomas is the author of over 25 novels. *Finding Mary Blaine* (2004), won the National Readers' Choice Award. *The Texan's Reward* (2005) was awarded Thomas's third RITA, allowing her to be inducted in the RWA Hall of Fame in 2006. In 2009, Jodi received the National Reader's Choice Award for two of her books: *Twisted Creek* (2008) and *Tall, Dark and Texan* (2008).



Plus...

Linda Rohrbough

Best-Selling Author Linda Rohrbough is presenting a Special Add-On Pitch Workshop Thursday!



PIKES PEAK WRITERS
427 E. COLORADO #116
COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80903

Opportunities for Writers

Dear Fellow Writers,

Thanks to Mandy's invitation for me to troll the writers' loops and in other ways gather calls-for-submissions, it seems that every tidbit that I come up with encourages me to polish my own work and submit!

Such as my manuscript, *Shadow of Norad*, which some of my critique group partners (who have been gracious enough to suffer through portions of it with me for the last couple of years) would just as soon I leave in the shadows. However, in the Old Colorado City branch of the library earlier this year, I happened upon a marvelous book: *Sharp Teeth* by Toby Barlow—a horror thriller told in verse (lonely dog catcher, werewolves, LA street gangs). Then I read the historical novel, *Ludlow*, by Dave Mason, also told in verse (the National Guard fires on an encampment of striking miners' families). I had found the form for my story! And a good many of my agonies in writing *Shadow of Norad* were rendered obsolete with one fell-swoop decision and overhaul.

In whittling down the opportunities I would share with writers here, I found a possibility for my verse novel. The AWP (Association of Writers and Writing

Programs) is running a competition for book-length manuscripts from January 1-February 28, 2010. For poetry they are asking for 48 pages: perfect for *Shadow of Norad* in its sparkling new format. AWP is also looking for short story collections and creative nonfiction, 150-200 pages; and novels of at least 60,000 words. The details are posted here: www.awpwriter.org/contests/series.htm

I never miss the Pikes Peak Writers Conference. And there are so many other outstanding conferences, colonies, and festivals for writers that I would love to go to. But frankly, my dears, with the cost of gas going up, I have a hard time budgeting for the travel. But, heck, if the event is listed at <http://writersconf.org/>, perhaps I can win a scholarship worth \$500. I can submit a short story up to 25 pages long, a novel excerpt, or 10 pages of poetry. Guess I'll navigate to www.awpwriter.org/contests/wccscholarship.htm for the submission instructions. It's got to be postmarked by March 30, 2010. And hurrah! Looks like the AWP conference in 2010 is happening April 7-10 in Denver at the Hyatt Regency and the Colorado Convention Center. Want to carpool?

I don't know about you, but my characters need work. Lucky us! FanStory.com has a

fantastic FREE contest with a deadline coming up the end of January. They are looking for 700-7,000 word stories about a character in a photograph posted on their Web site. A great opportunity to work on character-building.

In case you missed it, our own Beth Groundwater sent around an e-mail about another great opportunity: "Amazon.com and Penguin Group are sponsoring the third annual Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award, and this time the competition will feature two grand prizes: one for general fiction and one for best young adult novel. In addition, the 2010 contest will be open to previously self-published novels. Writers with an English-language novel manuscript can submit their work between January 25 and February 7 at www.amazon.com/abna (go there for the official contest rules). The two winners, who will each receive a publishing contract with Penguin and \$15,000 advance, will be named June 14, 2010." Thanks, Beth.

Here's hoping that these opportunities will spark your imagination and get you eager to submit, the way they have for me.

—Janice Black