

Pikes Peak Writer

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Author Interview: Kat Richardson

By Fleur Bradley

Kat Richardson describes herself as a cross-genre writer, writing Urban Fantasy/Science Fiction Mysteries. Her first novel and beginning of her series featuring PI Harper Blaine, *Greywalker*, was published by Roc in 2006. *Poltergeist* followed, and *Underground* came out in hardcover August 2008.

Did you make a conscious decision to write urban fantasy/science fiction mysteries?

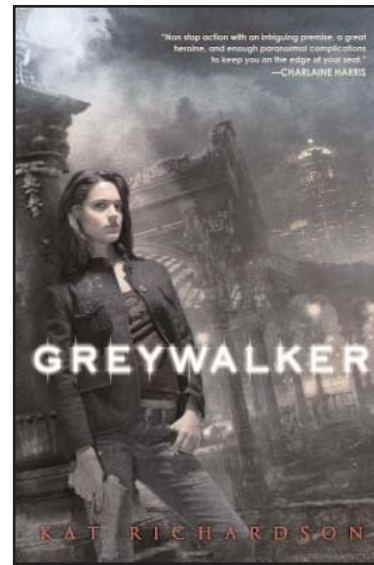
Not really. I just wanted to write a detective novel that happened to have ghosts and monsters intruding on the PI's client list. It never occurred to me that that I'd crossed a genre line or two.

Does straddling genres make the writing harder? Easier?

Both. I can write whatever takes my fancy, but I have to make sure I kept the readers clued-in to the non-traditional parts (be it the mystery elements for fantasy readers or the fantasy elements for mystery readers) and that I always play fair with both. That's a lot of extra work, but it's also a lot of fun and offers a lot of flexibility in the stories.

Take us back to the days before *Greywalker* was published. Was it a long journey?

Oh yes! This wasn't my first novel-length manuscript, just the one I cared enough about to push—I've been writing since I was eight. I wrote the first draft of *Greywalker* in May and June of 2000—the fastest I've ever written any novel-length manuscript—but it didn't find an agent for five years and had to go through six drafts before it was ready for publication. Then it spent 14 months in the publication process. Realistically, that's fast for a first



novel, but it felt like a long slog through a swamp of editorial torment. I did get very lucky every step of the way—nutty as that may sound in light of what I've just said—but I had and still have very good first readers, agents, and editors who helped me improve the first book and keep on going even when it seemed like there was no end in sight.

And my husband who kept saying I should do it even when I wanted to quit and give up this crazy idea that I could write books.

Your novels are very tight, especially in their plotting. Tell us a little about your process. Do you outline?

I'm the Outline Queen. I hate flimsy mystery plots with rabbit-out-of-the-hat solutions, so I'm compelled to get the clues, timing, and details down pat before I start writing. Usually I go through two to five long, detailed outlines—just like the ones you had to submit with term papers in high school and college—with the equivalent of footnotes that include all sorts of additional information that may never appear in the story, but helps me keep track of why something is happening in the story and series and how it

continued on page 2

“When characters are given enough texture and backbone, then lo and behold, they stand on their own.”
—Anne Tyler

Letter from the Editor



By Mandy Houk

The trouble with summer, it seems to me, is one of momentum. Whether you have a year-round job, or—like me—are a teacher with the privilege of summer break, the long sunny days tend to call out a siren song of ease and relaxation.

This is not necessarily conducive to banging out a novel or pursuing publication or marketing your latest book.

One way I've tried to fight back against

the languidness is to require myself to maintain a schedule. This is not always successful, but it's a nice goal to brag about. Er—I mean aspire to. Whatever you do to keep working through the summer, this *NewsMag* should help to erase any excuses for letting your career stall.

Make use of Linda Rohrbough's tips on finding and maintaining relationships with editors and agents. Be inspired and challenged by Fleur Bradley's profile on hard-working author Kat Richardson. Take Ronald Cree's challenge to share your knowledge and experience as a writer with young people right here in our community. Peruse the list of PPW upcoming events and make it a priority to attend as many as possible.

On the other hand, perhaps your creativity could breathe and grow a bit if you'd succumb to the easier rhythm of

summer. Chances are, you'll be going on vacation some time soon. I hope you'll be helped by my list of ten ways to use your vacation in your writing. If you're staying home, Jené Jackson has plenty of diversions for you right here in the Springs—diversions that promise to spark fresh, new ideas in your writing. Of course, if it's pure entertainment you're after, Beckyland's mind-bending column should fill that need and then some.

Whether you decide to resist or surrender, I'm rooting for you—that you'll make all sorts of progress this summer toward the pursuit of your dreams. Have a great summer, filled with happy writing!



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Kat Richardson Interview

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relates to the rest. I start with ideas for scenes, settings, characters, clues, and plot points ... then I start shuffling them around until I have the chronological sequence of every point. Then I start filling in holes and bridging gaps, adding things, taking them out, moving them around, until the whole plot makes sense to me. Usually, I have my agent or (advanced) readers look that over and they catch the remaining holes, slow-downs, logic disconnects, character disappearances, dead ends, bad subplots, and so on and then I do it again, creating a new outline that fixes those problems... Then I write the story. This year I did most of my writing without outlines or with minimal outlines and it was a lot harder and considerably messier than my usual process. I think I'm going back to outlining.

Your novels are set in Seattle, a real city readers will know. Your research must be thorough.

I try, but I still make mistakes, even though I live here. Things get torn down or I misremember them and then I get notes from locals saying "hey, you got this wrong" and I'm embarrassed. Because it takes about 16 months from the time I start actual writing until the book hits the shelves, things can change and there's nothing I can do about that. Most of the time, however, I'm able to go out and walk around and ask questions about existing things and places. When I'm dealing with historical

events, people, and places, I'm lucky in that Seattle has a lot of good documentation about its past that's easily available online and in the libraries. Of course, it helps that I'm a history fiend and find all that sort of information-digging fascinating.

Harper Blaine is a pretty cool heroine (with an even cooler ferret). Any qualities she has that you wish you had?

I wish I had Harper's patience and cool. I'm a wound-up, fussy, insecure lunatic with a compulsion to do things other people think are totally loopy—like sitting in front of my computer writing for up to 14 hours a day, or reading books about history and physics because they are fun. I mean—really—what normal person does that?

Now that your novels are so successful, what are some of the challenges you face as a writer that are different from when you first started out?

One thing certainly remains the same and is the biggest challenge for any writer: write better. I want each book to be better than the last. I challenge myself to do something new and more difficult each time and I hope I pull it off. Now that the series is established, I have to keep track of everything so details remain consistent over time—fans are much more observant than writers are and they'll catch every discrepancy. And of course, I

May Annual Open Meeting

Secrets to Success: Breaking into Print in Poetry and Fiction



Aaron Anstett
Pikes Peak Poet Laureate



Doris Baker, *Filter Press*



Stephanie G'Schwind, *editor of Colorado Review*



Sue Hamilton
Dialogue Publishing, Inc.

By Brandy Vallance

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

As we mingled and finally settled into our chairs, Aaron Anstett, Pikes Peak Poet Laureate, stepped up to the microphone. He looked like a poet, standing there with perfect posture, dressed in a striped blue shirt and dark jacket. He held his book of poetry open, the pages marked with post-it notes. But he never glanced down as he recited “The Pharmacist,” “Man Saves Own Life,” and “If I Had Another Face.”

When he finished reading, he sat down and joined the rest of the panel: Beth Groundwater (local mystery author), Stephanie G'Schwind (editor of *Colorado Review*), Sue Hamilton (Dialogue Publishing), and Doris Baker (Filter Press).

Here's a sampling of questions from the audience:

What is your best advice for breaking into print?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Doris Baker: Comparing your book unrealistically with others.

Beth Groundwater: When the writer doesn't start the story at the exact moment that the character's life changes forever. When



Beth Groundwater, *Author*

I can't understand the character's emotion. When there's no clear conflict. Wasting words.

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

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

Sue Hamilton: Attend conferences, workshops, enter contests.

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

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

At this point, the crowd gasped in horror as we all pictured our beloved novel manuscripts bursting into flames. Hopefully, by taking the advice of these mentors and by taking advantage of everything Pikes Peak Writers has to offer, none of us will ever see that day.



The Business of Writing

Effective Tips for Working with Agents and Editors

By Linda Rohrbough

Right after a big conference, talk turns to agents. It reminds me of high school dating. I like him but does he like me? Will she call? Should I call? How long should I wait? Here are my tips for working with agents and editors both before and after you have one.

If an agent or editor has expressed interest in your work, then get it to them as quickly as you can. But not before it's ready. I had a friend tell me an agent got excited about her work and asked her to "send it even if it's rough." I advised her not to. Sure enough, she received the work back with a note saying it was too rough. I guess my friend had reason to be upset. But my rule of thumb is: don't send anything you wouldn't be happy to see in print.

The other almost overwhelming temptation for newbies is to send a series of corrected versions of their manuscript. A pro finds errors too, but they grit their teeth, correct them, and save the corrected version for later. Trust me: if someone wants to represent your work or buy it, they always ask for changes. And you'll want to accommodate them so they have some ownership in development of the work.

I know a writer who pitched her book, got an invitation, then learned some valuable information at a conference which took her a year to implement. Since it had been so long, she sent a letter asking the agent if she could still submit. The agent said yes and eventually represented her. Professional courtesy like that goes a long way in this business.

Also, when an agent or editor turned me down, I sent a thank-you note. I've since made

friends with agents and editors who told me they rarely saw someone who could look past their own disappointment long enough to recognize the time and effort they put in.

Further, I found postcards to be invaluable when I was shopping for an agent. When I sent a requested manuscript by snail mail, I included everything they asked for plus a self-addressed stamped postcard. It included the name of the project, my name as author, and these lines: "Received by _____ on _____(date)" and "When may I follow up? _____(date)."

I did this because I found out that Express or Priority mail services are insulting in the book publishing world when querying. It sends the message that you don't respect the agent or editor's time.

"If an agent or editor has expressed interest in your work, then get it to them as quickly as you can. But not before it's ready."

When it was time to follow up, I used a postcard as well. It had my contact information, thanked them for looking over my material, reminded them I had their permission to follow up by this date, and asked if there was anything else they needed. Postcards have a number of advantages. They don't have to be opened, they're easy to handle and quick to read. Since I have lousy handwriting, I buy printable ones. I also use a particular font for my name, so I'm always branding.

When asked to use e-mail, I never set the software to ask for a delivery or read receipt.

That says, "I don't trust you." Instead, in the text of the e-mail ask the agent or editor to let you know when they've received it, and to give you a follow-up time frame. I still do that now with my fiction and nonfiction agents.

I had a guy tell me he had an agent, but the agent died and none of the other agents in the office took him on. As I talked to him further, I discovered why. He told me he and his agent had pleasant conversations every week for over a year about the status of his manuscript when he called. Mistake. I'm sure his agent was kind to him, but no agent or editor wants to hold the hand of a new author every week.

One way I stay in contact with my agents is when I publish an article or do a workshop that's particularly successful, either my intern or I send my agents an e-mail about it. I also send that information to the publicists at my publishing houses. I do this regularly enough that they get something every month or so. Otherwise, I don't bug them unless there's something to bug them about. This sends a couple of messages. The first is that I'm working, and the second is that I trust them to get back to me on new work when they have something. And they always do.

You've heard a lot of tips at the PPWC. I hope you can use these tips as well to put you in a better position with editors and agents.

—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

Hidden Icon Prize

One prize will be awarded to a *NewsMag* reader who correctly identifies the hidden icon in this issue. The winner's name will be randomly selected from all correct answers submitted by July 15. E-mail your answer to winstuff@pikespeakwriters.com.

The winner of the drawing gets to browse the very cool PPW store (accessible through our Web site) and pick out any item worth up to \$30—we'll pay shipping, too!

Growing Writers

The Colorado Gold Conference will offer an orchard of short sessions and two three hour in-depth workshops to nurture creative seeds, branch your craft knowledge, and blossom your writing.

**Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers
26th Annual Colorado Gold Conference
September 11-13, 2009**

www.rmfw.org

E-mail: conference@rmfw.org

May Fundraiser and Booksigning

By DeAnna Knippling

I wasn't sure what to expect at the May 30–31 bookfair and signing at the Briargate Barnes and Noble store, it being my first time on the other side of the signing table, so to speak. To be honest, I have a hard time talking to strangers, so I was hoping for a mind-control device we could use to summon readers.

Day one: Beth Groundwater turned the signing table into a rhapsody in blue for the release of *To Hell in a Handbasket*, with blue tablecloth, blue book covers, blue balloons, and blue cookies. She even brought along a miniature, complete with trees, a handbasket with a gun and other goodies, and tiny copies of her books, built by Margaret Grace (author of the *Miniature Mysteries* series).

As it turns out, cookies make great mind-control devices.

I had a second table with Pikes Peak Writers membership materials, including

copies of the *NewsMagazine* and flyers for the summer Write Brains. I learned more people are interested in buying books than writing them. On the one hand, this is encouraging for sales; on the other, by the end of the day I was nearly desperate enough to ask people if they didn't have 17 cousins, twice removed, who might be interested in writing something. Anything. Like a grocery list.

I did speak to several people who were interested in the summer Write Brains, including several younger authors (from eight to fourteen). Fortunately, we have a great summer Write Brain program lined up, and I was able to entice them with flyers. Just say "Hi" if you see any new faces; I kept telling people we were "really nice and hardly critiqued each other at all."

Day two: Laura Reeve and Barbara (Samuel) O'Neal signed copies of *Peacekeeper* and *The Last Recipe for Happiness*, respectively, which gave us a one-two punch of science and women's fiction. I was lucky to be a fly on the wall as the two women discussed the

publishing industry, sales, etc.*

Chris Mandeville and Ruh helped draw in readers, too. While a few people seemed startled to see Ruh in front of the writers' table, most people gravitated toward him like ball bearings to a thousand-watt electromagnet. We should have a contest at the next booksigning that Ruh attends—"Guess what kind of dog Ruh is** and win a free copy of the book!" From the guesses we heard, we'd be way ahead of the game.

In the end, while none of the authors sold out, we did make a tidy amount at the bookfair, generating \$1,369.30 in sales and raising \$136.93 in funds for PPW. Thanks to Barbara, Beth, and Laura, and to all PPW members and friends who attended. It was great seeing you all!

*They tell me Target is a stellar market for women's fiction. Who knew? I think it's all those endcaps.

**He's actually an Anatolian Shepherd. Definitely not a pony.

June Write Brain

By Grant McKenzie

In today's fiction market, you have to get your reader's attention—especially when that reader is an agent or editor—by the end of page one. As Chris Mandeville explained at June's Write Brain, this can be done by forcing the reader to connect with and begin to understand your character from the very first sentence.

In the past, as Chris illustrated, chapter one was used for setting the scene or giving a sense of the vastness in which the characters lived. Today, chapter one is devoted to introducing the world through the restricted view of the character, allowing the vastness to be revealed as the plot develops.

Sticking with this theme, Chris first had us do an exercise that revealed the intimate nature of our character when chapter one begins. We were asked to "analyze" our character by answering straightforward questions like the character's age and gender, as well as deeper questions such as the character's motivation and conflicts. This allowed us to understand how our characters see their world.

In order to understand how our characters

interact with their world, we were next asked to give them a hobby. This "accessorizing" included determining how the character obtained the hobby and how it has affected them over the course of their lives.

The most intimate look into our characters and their motivations came with the third exercise of the evening. We were asked to "traumatize" our characters, or write about a trauma that occurred in their lives prior to their appearance in chapter one. A traumatic event in anyone's life will affect that person's personality. In the same way, our character's traits should be defined by past trauma. One writer present explained that his character was a vegetarian due to the death and roasting of a pet lamb in the character's childhood. Chris pointed out that you can start with a trauma to get to a trait or start with a trait and figure out



Chris Mandeville

what trauma caused it.

Chris introduced the final exercise by explaining a writer's conundrum: our characters must be relatable, but they must also be unique. To visualize this, Chris had us "eulogize" our characters. Ideally, a eulogy should be given by someone in the character's world and should include the highlights of the character's life. It is difficult, however, to consider the death of some of our characters, so the exercise allows the use of an award presentation or other similar

event where the life of the character would be highlighted and praised. This accentuates the things that make the character unique.

By analyzing, accessorizing, traumatizing, and eulogizing your character, you can get to know your character more intimately, making it much easier to write a rich introduction to your story. Adding other exercises like the ones Chris gave as a parting gift, such as planning a vacation or figuring out your character's ideal last meal, will only make your character more relatable—and more extraordinary.

Top Ten Ways to Use Your Summer Vacation in Your Writing

By Mandy Houk

I realize that, technically, I'm recommending a working vacation. But we're writers—are we ever really off-duty?

Here are some things I gleaned from my recent nine-day, ten-state, 2,500-mile road trip. (Aside from stiff legs, six pounds, and an impressive mountain of laundry.)

1. Give yourself permission to daydream.

You have no deadlines for your day job, no dishes to wash, beds to make, or errands to run. Breathe in, breathe out, and let your mind wander.

2. Ask yourself how your characters would react to the travel nightmares you encounter.

When the fire alarm went off in our hotel, I got dressed, brushed my hair, and called the front desk to see if it was the real deal. It wasn't. But this made me wonder—which of my characters would react as I did (like a blooming idiot), and which would leap out of bed and flee down the staircase without giving a thought to the sad state of their pajamas? Would one of them sniff for smoke and listen for sirens, while the other jumped out the window screaming? This can be a great exercise in figuring out characters; or it might be worth including in your storyline.

3. Collect new characters.

I know, we do this anyway. But it's easier to notice the quirky grocery store bagger when you've got no schedule to follow than when you're late for an orthodontist appointment.

4. Collect new settings.

Before we left on our road trip, my manuscript—an odyssey of sorts—was set in Georgia and South Carolina, since I've lived in both states and thought I could describe them easily. But our road trip took us through steamy Missouri and seedy Memphis and bright, cow-filled Oklahoma. I took notes all along the way, even selecting specific stretches of road and certain landmarks. I'm more excited about the book now, with its sense of newness.

5. Collect region-specific dialog.

Again, many of us do this already. Heck, Deb Courtney has a dedicated dialog notebook. But if you haven't tried it yet, a road trip is the perfect opportunity. And if you're in a region you'd like to think about including as a setting, or as a hometown for a character, it can be especially useful to nail down the colloquialisms.

6. Collect quirky details.

At a Mexican restaurant, you get chips and salsa. No surprise there. But at a fish place in Omaha, when our waitress approached, she had a curious little plate on her arm. "Here's the bread and pickles for ya." And that's exactly what it was: a stack of dry rye bread, and a saucer overflowing with sliced dill pickles. Will I ever write a book where that might come up? I don't know. But it's in my writing notebook, alongside my notes about pickups backed up to roadside ponds in Missouri, fathers and sons fishing straight from the tailgate. And the astonishing quantity of armadillo roadkill in Arkansas. And the Queen Anne's Lace dotting the sides of the highway through Oklahoma. And the awe-inspiring formations of Kansas clouds.

7. Collect names.

Names of waitresses (we had one named Mirth). Stores ("Quicker Liquor"). Or collect slogans. My favorite, hanging in front of a bar: "Not here for a long time—just a good time."

8. Research for historical fiction—or get new ideas.

I'd never considered writing historical fiction until we spent time at a Civil War cemetery in Keokuk, Iowa. Both Union and Confederate soldiers are buried there, since the hospital in Keokuk was open to both. The hospital itself sparked my imagination. But later, as I aimed my camera at a beautiful, crumbling tombstone, I realized it was the grave of a female who'd served with the

army. Once I started looking, I found several more women buried there. Many nurses, but several soldiers. Historical fiction? Could be interesting.

9. Reminisce.

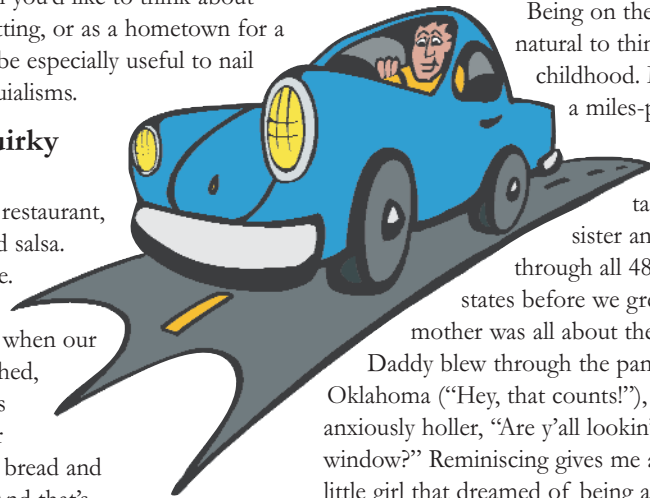
Being on the road, it was natural to think of my childhood. My dad had a miles-per-day goal, as well as the goal of taking my sister and me through all 48 contiguous states before we grew up. My mother was all about the scenery. As

Daddy blew through the panhandle of Oklahoma ("Hey, that counts!"), Mom would anxiously holler, "Are y'all lookin' out the window?" Reminiscing gives me access to that little girl that dreamed of being a writer in the first place. And I'm no brain surgeon, but I'm guessing that our memories are stored fairly close to our imaginings. One often leads to the other.

10. Write!

Whether you're in the passenger seat with a notebook, or in the hotel with a laptop after the kids drop off to sleep, take advantage of the loose schedule and fill it with words. Descriptive passages. Expanded passages of dialogue, inspired by something you overheard in a diner that morning. Character sketches based on the screaming family at the gas station. Or write something totally unrelated to your trip—just write.

And enjoy the ride.





On-Site Flash Fiction Contest for the 2009 PPWC

By Bret Wright

You would think that at a writer's conference, one might expect to find authors diligently plying their trade in nooks and crannies, and on any available surface that might hold a laptop or pad of paper. Although many people do avail themselves of the opportunity to write, most attendees prefer to take in the classes and forums, and then socialize and network...or prepare their pitches for meetings with editors and agents. There are a lot of things going through the average conference-goer's head, and sometimes what he or she may need is some time to practice the craft, even if only for a little while.

For several years, the PPWC has offered attendees the opportunity to participate in an on-site flash fiction contest. Its goal: Poke that writing bug and see where it scurries! Participants are given a prompt, a word count, and a deadline. The rest is up to the writers' imaginations.

This year's prompt was, "Functionally, it's exactly the same." As you can imagine, some of the results were...interesting, to say the least.

But why flash fiction? What's the point of it? Like a good song or an effective poem, flash tells an entire story in a few words. It has the big three: Goal, Motivation, and Conflict. It's a form that is easy to learn, but can take years to master. The compact nature of flash fiction allows writers to practice tight writing. Once a writer gets in the habit of writing this way, it bleeds over into longer works, into compact, hard-hitting scenes, and into soft, gentle narrative that allows readers to wander through a story and imagine. That's flash.

The winners of this year's PPWC on-site flash contest each received prizes, with the first place winner landing a gift basket worth about one thousand dollars, donated by Writing Away Retreats.

Third place was awarded to the group effort of Brian Mandabach's Friday night table and was chosen for its novelty in presentation:

"On Friday night we were served fortune cookies. Our table added the phrase 'in bed' to each one. The funny thing is, *functionally they were exactly the same.*"

Lotus blossoms smell better
when you stop. ~
in bed.

Do what you wish, as long as it
does not harm anyone. ~
in bed.

Old friends
make best friends. ~
in bed

Keep true to the
dreams of your youth. ~
in bed.

Keep your goals away
from the trolls. ~
in bed.

Stand tall!
Don't look down upon yourself. ~
in bed.

Nine tenths of education
is encouragement.
in bed.

See what I mean?

Second Place: "The Chair" by Charlie Hanline

Functionally, it's exactly the same chair as the one in the other corner; however, nobody uses this one. It's strange how something as insignificant as a chair could have that effect on us. My son, my daughters, my grandchildren, even I have avoided it for the last two months since my father's funeral.

Today, I have no choice. All the other seats are taken. I sigh as I ease into it and in an instant the mythical patriarchal torch passes from father to son by the simplest of acts—sitting.

First Place: "Cracked" by Wendy Burt-Thomas

"*Functionally, it's exactly the same.*" He slid the invoice across the counter. "But cosmetically...well, that was no Bambi you hit."

She felt the panic flush her face. "Sorry?" "New bumper, new windshield, new hood," he counted on his fingers. "Musta been a buck. Not even sure how you drove it here."

Her muscles relaxed. "Me neither." She scribbled a name on the invoice and handed him a wad of cash.

"Probably could've brought him home and butchered him."

He handed her the truck keys. "Bet your husband's pissed you didn't stop."

Finally—a smile. "I'm sure he was."

," he said.

By Laura Hayden

"Oh dear," she exclaimed. "You're looking for a list of substitutions for 'said'?" she questioned. "Do you really need this?" she inquired. "After all, if you use too many dialogue tags," she advised craftily, "you run the risk of the tags overwhelming the dialogue." "But—" he began. "Hey, do you want my advice or not?" she interrupted. "But," he repeated. "What!?!?" she screamed. "I thought people get bored reading 'said, said, said,'" he explained quietly. "Not necessarily," she admitted, calmly. "Rather than tagging your dialogue with verbs of speech, you can tag it with action." She pointed to the computer screen. "See? I just did that with the 'point at the computer screen' line rather than say, 'she said, pointing at the computer screen.' It's just as visual and better writing to boot." She smiled at him. "It's better writing to balance simple verbs of speech, without a lot of ly-adverbs and action tags. I hope that helps." She hit ENTER and then typed, "LauraH"

Opportunities for Writers: the Zeb Pike Youth Correctional Facility

By Ronald Cree

The lady in the red hat looked no different than the other spectators enjoying the Manitou Springs Coffin Races last October.

It was an exceptionally nice day, and I was sitting with my friend Robert Spiller outside Black Cat Books, handing out copies of my mystery novel for teens, *Desert Blood 10pm/9c*.

“Does this contain a lot of sex and violence?” the lady asked, taking in the blood splatters on the book’s front cover.

I assured her the storyline was a tender one involving a young father and his newly adopted son.

Only slightly convinced, she asked me to sign the copy to “The Boys at Zeb Pike”. She then introduced herself as Cheryl Lassota, the principal of the local Juvenile Detention Center. “I’ll read it first,” she said. “If it’s appropriate, I’ll make sure it finds its way into the Center’s library.”

Two days later, I received a phone call. “I couldn’t put it down!” Cheryl exclaimed. “I stayed on the couch all Sunday, reading your book and thinking how much the boys at the Center would relate to it. It was as if you’d written it for them.”

I soon agreed to an author visit later that week, and a donation of a book to every boy in the place. “They’re going to love this,” Cheryl said. Her voice dropped. “Most of the guys are young sex offenders. They come to us having lost much of their family, friends, and support structure. Many have been in the system a long time.”

I was surprised to learn the Center was adjacent to Bear Creek Park. I’d driven by it numerous times, never pausing to question what the grey brick building was, or to consider the lives of those behind the surrounding fence. But now, I wondered what a teenage sex offender would look like. How would they react to me? What questions would they ask? How could my silly little mystery be anything more than something they’d dismiss with an eyeroll and a derisive laugh?

I showed up on time and went through the process for admission: buzzers to push, intercoms to speak into, visitors sheets to sign. Cheryl led me on a quick tour, pointing out classrooms, bare-bones “pods” where the

boys live, recreation areas, and perhaps most surprisingly: a rather full library!

The boys we passed in the hallways were polite and young. Whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics. Each greeted me with a curious stare and a well-mannered “hello.” They were nicely dressed in their school-issued polo shirts and trousers.

“They’ve never met an author before,” Cheryl whispered. “This is a very big deal.”

It was Halloween, and the boys had made and decorated gingerbread haunted houses. I was immediately asked to be a “celebrity judge”. The creative talent in each house was astounding, making the task of selecting the best almost impossible.

“There’s a prize for the winner,” Cheryl informed me, adding to the pressure. “I asked the boys what they’d like to have if they won, and the answer was unanimous: a book or magazine they could own and keep in their room.”

“I stayed on the couch all Sunday, reading your book and thinking how much the boys at the Center would relate to it. It was as if you’d written it for them.”

My appearance was divided into two sessions to accommodate the population of the Center—around 30 boys. Working as a team, the kids converted the cafeteria into a comfortable reading venue with several rows of chairs for the audience.

I took my seat at the front of the room and was taken aback by the wide-eyed, eager faces. I introduced myself and announced that I would do a brief reading followed by questions, answers, and a signing. The usual.

I read a part of Chapter 4, hoping it would be exciting enough to hold their attention. It was. I’ve never had such a spellbound audience. They laughed, squirmed, gasped, and held their breath at all the right places. When I finished, the questions began immediately. These kids were curious—about

the book, about being an author, about what I was going to write next. When Cheryl announced that each of them would be getting a signed copy of their own, the room broke out in enthusiastic cheers.

Reading and signing my novel for the boys at Zeb Pike was one of the most fun, rewarding things I’ve done. No press, no pictures, no announcement in the newspaper. I sold no books, met no other authors, received no free lunch.

I signed 30 books that day. The gratitude on their faces will stay with me forever. I was humbled and touched when the group presented me with a beautiful wooden ink pen engraved with my name—that they’d made in their own workshop!

I’ve returned to Zeb Pike several times. I’ve been interviewed for the boys’ first newsletter. I’ve shared more of my writing and helped them with writing of their own. Their enthusiasm for stories, poetry, and publishing is limitless.

To that end, I’ve invited other Colorado authors to get involved. In March, Julie Anne Peters drove down from Denver and spoke about her books involving gay/lesbian/transgender issues. She wrote of the experience on her Facebook page: “I had a tough day booktalking *Luna* with incarcerated young sex offenders. It’s going to be hard to sleep tonight.” Still, she expressed to me that it was one of the most rewarding visits of her career.

In April, Robert Spiller stopped by and engaged the kids with his trademark humor, sharing lots of jokes, funny stories, and laughter. He gave away copies of his wonderful Bonnie Pinkwater series and promised to return.

With each visit, I feel more like I’m among friends. The boys treat me like a rock star, eager to hear about my writing and excited to tell me about the books they’ve been reading. Seeing the much-read, cherished copies of *Desert Blood 10pm/9c* in their hands is the best feeling in the world.

I’d encourage any writer (published or unpublished) who wishes to get involved to contact me and set up a visit of your own. You’ll be glad you did.

Upcoming PPW Events

July, August

We started our Sizzling Summer Series with Chris Mandeville's June Write Brain. If you missed it, you can pretend you were there by reading Grant McKenzie's article on page 5.

But summer's just getting started—here's what's still to come:

July Write Brain

YA 4 U: How to Write a Totally Epic Teen Novel

Tuesday, July 21 at 6:30 p.m.

With Ron Cree and Robert Spiller

Teens can spot a phony a mile away. So writing an authentic, pitch-perfect YA novel can be tricky. But help is at hand! Authors Ronald Cree and Robert Spiller know the secret handshake, and they're willing to share.

Join us for an awesome evening as our speakers tap into the mysterious world of writing the YA novel, sharing tips on everything from voice to plot.

August Write Brain

Vampires, Werewolves, and Wizards, Oh My! Sink Your Fangs into Fantasy

Tuesday, August 21, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

With Mario Acevedo

The fantasy market is big and getting bigger. Readers can't get enough of zombies, shape shifters, ghosts, dragons, and of course, vampires. In this workshop we'll review the many fantasy genres to include: paranormal romance, urban fantasy, magical realism, and steampunk. What's the difference and who is the market?

We'll discuss world-building, making rules to keep the story believable, and how to keep your reader engaged. The workshop will include an exercise where we'll create characters and plot a fantasy story.

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.

Write Brain Sessions are held at Cottonwood Center for the Arts.

PLEASE NOTE: Their new address is 427 E. Colorado Ave. Visitors 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

Wednesday, July 29 and Aug. 26 at 6:30 p.m.

Location: Cottonwood Center for the Arts at their new location. (Open critique is usually held the fourth Wednesday of each month.)

Open Critique guest for July is Dawn Smit Miller. The critiquer for August is Cicily Janus.

PPW Members Night

Monday, July 26 and August 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.

Pikes Peak Writers and the Colorado Springs Marriott Present: American Icon 2009

Friday evening, August 14 at 6:30
Colorado Springs Marriott, 5580 Tech Center Drive, Colorado Springs

American Icon is our literary version of American Idol. Contestants (limited to the first 20 who sign up) have two minutes to read from their work of fiction or nonfiction. A panel of three celebrity judges then gives on-the-spot feedback to the contestant. This year our judges are fantasy author Todd Fahnestock, publisher Sue Hamilton, and literary agent Rachele Gardner.

It's a glitzy evening of laughter, excitement, and wonderful desserts. Join in the fun! Enter to win acclaim and great prizes or come to support your favorite authors and

enjoy an evening guaranteed to entertain.

Prizes Include (but are not limited to):

—Partial manuscript critique (proposal and 10 ms pages with a 20-minute phone consult) by Sara Megibow, associate literary agent with Nelson Literary Agency, LLC.

—Partial manuscript critique and advice (25 ms pages) by Sue Hamilton, president Dialogue Publishing, Inc.

—Partial manuscript critique (nonfiction book proposal or first 20 pages of a novel) by Rachele Gardner, literary agent, WordServe Literary Group.

—Partial manuscript critique by Steve Saffel.

—A night's stay at the Colorado Springs Marriott.

Thinking of entering? Here's what Jené

Jackson, our 2008 Icon winner for Audience Favorite and Best Overall, had to say about her experience:

"I go to my musician friends' shows all the time. They came to American Icon—my 'gig!'—and were overwhelmed with the fun and drama of the night. As readers, they felt lucky to hear great writers before publication. As a writer, I got to test my chops with my peers in a way I hope to do all the time someday. With only two minutes to impress, it becomes crystal clear which words matter and how quickly you can have that crowd eating out of your hand. American Icon is worth every minute."

To register or for more information, go to www.pikespeakwriters.com.

Sweet Success

We've got several exciting success stories to share in this issue. If you have some sweet success of your own to share, please follow the submission instructions at the end of this column. It's a great source of inspiration and encouragement to the rest of us!

Ian Healy's success story is a perfect illustration of "persistence pays off." Ian pitched to an agent at the 2007 PPWC, but—as often happens in this industry—things stalled. When Ian ran into the same agent at the 2008 PPWC, she urged him to resubmit—which he did. Finally, right before the 2009 PPWC this past April, Ian received the agent's offer of representation. Ian says, "Publishing operates at the speed of slow!" But we're guessing he's still pleased with the final result.

Deb Buckingham scored her first paid gig when, in early May, her article "To Be or Not to Be" was published in the online ezine, *Vision: A Resource for Writers*. Check it out here: www.lazette.net/vision/.

Margaret Brettschneider (a.k.a. M.J. Brett) is celebrating the June 22 release of her newest book, a comedy entitled *Mama Told Me Not to Come*. She'll be traveling to Philadelphia, Las Vegas, and St. Paul, for signings through the end of July. If you want to know more about this book, go to the PPW Web site and check out Margaret's interview with Deb Courtney.

Laura DiSilverio recently signed a three-book contract with Berkley Prime Crime (a Penguin subsidiary). The mystery series, which is set in a beauty parlor in small town Georgia, begins with *Tressed to Kill*, scheduled to hit the bookstores in June 2010.

Submit your own: Log on to the Pikes Peak Writers Web site (www.pikespeakwriters.com) and click on "Sweet Success" in the Welcome box on the left hand side. Then, in the Members Hideaway box on the left, click "Submit Sweet Success." Entries must be received at least 20 days prior to the next NewsMagazine release date to be included in that issue.

Elsewhere in the Arts

By **Jené Jackson**, PPW Arts and Member Liaison

We are writers. And writers write, right? But sometimes we need to leave the computer to become better writers, to find new creative energy. Where do you run into your muse? Television? Cleaning your bathroom? Taking out the dog? I'll bet you do run into your muse every now and then in everyday life, but sometimes it requires more of a jolt. For those times, I'd like to recommend you explore other Art, things you've never seen or done before. It just might shake loose your muse and jump-start your writing heart.

So, every month I'm going to lead a PPW Field Trip to an arts event in our region. It won't cut into your writing time much, but it will pay off in a big way. These will mostly be on the weekends, and I will clue you in to a few other enriching opportunities to see and hear good stuff. Come play! (Then get back to work.) Feel free to e-mail me at liaison@pikespeakwriters.com with questions.

July

July 11, Saturday, 11 a.m. The Baroque World of Fernando Botero

Meet me at the Colorado Fine Arts Center to see The Baroque World of Fernando Botero! Fifteen bucks for admission is a stretch for me, too, but this is a rare chance to see world-class art right here. People are coming from all over the region to see it. If anyone wants to grab lunch afterwards, we can discuss thoughts about the exhibit. Check it out at www.csfineartscenter.org/Botero.asp.

"The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center is pleased to present, *The Baroque World of Fernando Botero*, the artist's first American retrospective in over 30 years. The unforgettable works of the Colombian painter, sculptor, and draftsman resonate with thought-provoking political and social commentary. His exaggeratedly rounded forms depict the comedy of human life—moving or wry, baroque in expression, sometimes with a mocking observation, sometimes with a deep, elementary emotion. The Fine Arts Center is the only Colorado museum to host this exhibition, one on a

very limited nationwide tour."

FAC Members FREE, Non-members: Adults \$15, Seniors (62+) \$12.75, Students with ID and youth 5-17 \$12.75

July 17, 7 p.m. FREE Pikes Peak Library District World Music Series: La Fanfare du Belgistan

"Colorado College Summer Festival of the Arts: Hailing from the fictional Belgistan region of Eastern Belgium, La Fanfare du Belgistan creates tantalizing music using a variety of classic and exotic instruments, from trumpets to karbakas. Inspired by Arab and Gypsy music, La Fanfare updates diverse traditional forms by incorporating elements of trance, dance, and jazz music. Sponsored by the CC Summer Festival of the Arts, the World Music Series of Pikes Peak Library District, and KRCC Concerts." Check www.peakradar.com/event/detail/35675 for directions and info.

Other July Shouldn't-Miss-Thems: (It's a great summer for music!)

3-5 Pikes Peak Arts Fest at America the Beautiful Park: www.peakradar.com/event/detail/36125

16 Studio Bee Showcase at the Pikes Peak Center with *Edith Makes a Paperchain* and *The Electric Illuminati*: www.peakradar.com/event/detail/32689

24-25 Blues Under the Bridge: www.peakradar.com/event/detail/36127

August Possibilities:

6 Pikes Peak Library District World Music Series: Issa Bagayogo www.peakradar.com/event/detail/35735

All month (and summer) Farmer's Markets. Go and people-watch! www.peakradar.com/event/cat/food



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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 800 to 900 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 (note: some of these are updated!):

- Query first, to editor@pikespeakwriters.com. Please submit your query in the body of the e-mail, not as an attachment.
- Once your query has been accepted and a word count has been agreed upon, you may submit your article as an attachment or within

the body of the e-mail. If you submit it as an attachment, please use the title of the article as the name of the document. We get a lot of “NewsMagArticle.doc” and the like, which gets confusing.

- Include title and name of author at top of your article.
- 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 a potential recurring column, please query editor@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 of changes in advance of publication.
- Deadlines are on the first day of each even month; *NewsMag* release dates are the

first day of each odd month. (The exception is for the reporter of the Write Brain just prior to the release date; this article should be received by the editor no later than one week after the event.)

Future opportunities:

One great way to get regular writing credits is to join our reporter pool. Please contact Bonnie Hagan, our reporter coordinator, at reporters@pikespeakwriters.com.

Our Top Ten list is a regular column with rotating bylines, edited by Deb Courtney. If you have an idea for a future installment of this column, query Deb at grammargirl@pikespeakwriters.com.

We're exploring the possibility of a recurring column entitled “That's Debatable.” This column will highlight a specific topic of debate in either the publishing industry (self-publishing vs. traditional publishing) or the craft itself (outlining vs. free-writing). Each column will present both sides, requiring two different writers. If you have an idea for a future column, please send your idea to editor@pikespeakwriters.com. If you are interested in writing one side of the column yourself, please indicate in your query which side you would like to cover.