

Pikes Peak Writer

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5 Reasons to Wait for the Big Time

By Fleur Bradley

If you've been at this writing thing for a while like I have, you've probably heard that the odds of getting published by one of the big NY houses are not so great. Dismal, is more like it—and it's just as hard to get an agent to notice you in their giant slush pile (don't you just love that term?). The truth is, there are many, many writers, and not enough slots for us all to get published—even if our books are brilliant. Being good is rarely enough.

I'll share with you my story of still-waiting-to-be-published: I've written five (yes, five) manuscripts. The first two were not good enough—experience has taught me that. The next two were good enough to be published; both got me (different) agents, but neither made it into print. My latest manuscript, a YA suspense, is now almost ready for my new (third) agent to submit.



networking and building a platform. But I'm holding out for the big time, and I'll tell you why:

Respect

I'll be blunt: self-publish, and you'll get no respect in the publishing community. I know there are a host of e-book success stories, but the most successful e-books are written by authors with a very strong (mostly nonfiction) platform, or authors who built a reputation with a traditional publishing house first. Because it's so easy to self-publish, lots (and lots and lots) of people are doing it—so even if your book is

brilliant, it'll be associated with books that, quite frankly, should never have seen daylight. When you mention your book to fellow publishing professionals, mention you published straight to Kindle or with iUniverse. They'll smile, and inwardly dismiss your work, no matter how great it is. I'm being tough here, but it's the truth, so be ready for this if you decide to self-publish.

Advertising Power

You may have heard that big publishing houses do nothing to promote their authors anymore, unless you're Stephen King or J.K. Rowling. Let's say for argument's sake that's true, and assume you get no promotion help from your big NY house because it's just little ol' you. Still, book reviews, bookstore shelf space, bookstore signings, conference panel slots, speaking invitations, teaching opportunities, and interviews—all of these promotional opportunities will be difficult for you to access if you self-publish. And those are all available when you publish with a big house. As an author, you're expected to market your work; the days of hiding in your little writing room are over. If you self-publish, you just make this job much

“Waiting for a big NY publisher to offer me a book contract is the best chance for me to grow into the author I know I want to be, so I'll wait, patiently and persistently.”

Sounds pretty awful, right? Yet I'm still waiting for that publishing contract, even after five manuscripts, three agents, and years of querying. Sure, I could self-publish on Kindle or some other e-book format, and I'd probably make some money since I've spent my share of time

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“In my view, a writer is a writer because even when there is no hope, even when nothing you do shows any sign of promise, you keep writing anyway.” —Junot Diaz

From the Editor



I have this great new idea for a book. It will capitalize on one of my most prolific talents, and I know that I could fill a thick volume with the wealth of material that's swimming around in my head.

I'll call it *Making Excuses: Why I Don't Have Time to Write*. I could follow it up with a sequel: *Why I Have Yet to Sell My Book*.

Call me crazy, but I think the two might be related.

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Oh, I'm a whiz at making excuses: I'm too busy working on various projects (the *NewsMag*; organizing photographs from 12 years ago; trying to earn the Master of Manure ribbon in Farmville). My house is dirty. My kids are off school for the summer, so if I were a good mom, wouldn't I be spending time with them? The World Cup only happens once every four years—how could I possibly miss a game? (Because my watching or not watching has a direct impact on the score. That goal that got called back in the Yanks' match against Slovenia? That was me—I'd gone to the kitchen for another glass of wine.)

Enough already. I'm happy to say that the mere act of editing the articles in this *NewsMag* has kicked my fanny just enough to get me writing again. Regularly—every single day, sitting at the desk that desperately needs dusting, and typing with the

fingers whose nails could use a manicure.

Christian Lyons' "A Tastier Book Tour" inspired me to think toward the future of my writing career—what kind of book tour would I like to have? Once I started thinking about book tours, I realized with startling clarity that I can't have a tour until I have a book to sign. Thanks to the fantastic write-ups on the May and June nonconference events, as well as our "Blast from the Past" piece by Karen Fox, I not only believe it can happen, but I have two fistfuls of tips on how to get there.

So I'll set aside this latest *Excuses* book idea, and get back to the baby I've been raising for over a year now. It's going to be fully grown and ready to introduce to agents at PPWC 2011. You can hold me to that—no excuses.

Mandy

5 Reasons to Wait

continued from page 1

harder, because so many doors are closed to you (see reason #1 for why).

Longevity

I'm in this for the long haul. I hope to write many more books, build my audience, and grow as a writer so I can support myself by writing fiction. It's a lofty goal, I know—and it's one I can't achieve if I self-publish. To promote my work adequately, I need that big publishing house to back me and allow me to launch my career with as many opportunities to find readers as possible. If I self-publish, I will always struggle to grow my career—it's not impossible, but it's a seriously steep uphill climb.

Money

You probably know the odds of getting that six-figure advance are tiny, and I'm certainly not counting on a big advance once a manuscript of mine does make it that far. But you'll still see some sort of book advance if you sign with a big publishing house—money you can use to support your family, or to fund promotional expenses you'll have once the book is published. If you self-publish, you may even have to pay to see your name in print, and you'll certainly not get a check beforehand. Advance money is another opportunity you won't have if you self-publish.

Opportunity to Grow

I'm writing YA now, but I also like to write

short stories, and I'm plotting a middle-grade novel as you read this. If I sign a deal with, say, Random House, I might get the opportunity to be in an anthology, or write a series for one of their houses. If my books sell, this might lead to other book deals. In short, a book contract with a big publishing house can be the foundation for the growth of a great career. If I self-publish, I would have to build my own opportunities, and the odds of being a big-name author in ten years are next to nil.

Don't get me wrong, I don't think self-publishing is evil. I have many author friends who chose to self-publish, or publish with tiny presses that forced them into a position that was just like being self-published: in charge but also responsible for their own success, from the ground up. Self-publishing is a great solution for those with a strong platform (in non-fiction, mostly), or writers who aren't interested in growing a career for personal reasons.

But most of my self-published author friends struggle to build a name for themselves, and have often closed the door to traditional publishing. So I'm waiting for the big time, knowing full well that the big time is not glamorous or big-time at all. It'll be just another chapter of hard work and new challenges. But waiting for a big NY publisher to offer me a book contract is the best chance for me to grow into the author I know I want to be, so I'll wait, patiently and persistently. Even if it takes a long time.

Interview with Todd Fahnestock

By Brandy Vallance

I'm sitting next to Todd Fahnestock and, before I've even asked the first question, he's said at least five things of note. A thought flits through my mind: This is going to be the most inspiring interview I've ever done. I hate myself for forgetting my tape recorder, and I try to keep up, hoping my shorthand can cover it all.

He apologizes at one point, afraid that he's talking too much. For me, that's a good thing. I look up and smile. "Sweeping and epic," I tease him, referring to how some have described *The Heartstone Trilogy*, his three book collaboration. How could the author be any different?

"Prolific too," he says as he laughs. And given that those 1,648 pages are not the only pages he's had published, I happily agree.

Todd's devotion to writing is very clear to me. Although he's resting his arm casually on the back of a padded bench, there's a passion in his expression that says he can't wait to get back to the next page, the next story, his next imaginary world.

We talk about discouragement and how writers can overcome it. "My ego's pretty indestructible," he says. "But there are moments...Every time you put your hands to the keyboard, you wonder if it's good enough. You really have to be selective of who you let critique your work. People always want to tell me what I should do with my writing. You have to listen to yourself. If you don't believe in the story, no one else will. Sometimes you have to turn on your blinders and just bull forward."

"What's the best writing advice someone ever gave to you?" I ask.

"That was Donald and Lisa," Todd says, referring to his agent, Donald Maass, and Lisa Rector Maass. "Whatever you're afraid of the most, love the most, fear the most—put that in there. You've got to get over not being daring enough. People don't want perfect novels; they want something that resonates with them. Don't make your story happy all the way through."

We talk about the measure of success and he gives me a good piece of advice from fantasy novelist, Margaret Weis. "Whatever you do, don't listen to the bad reviews. Don't listen to the good reviews either."

"It's all about the stepping stones," he says



Brandy Vallance interviews Todd Fahnestock at the 2010 Pikes Peak Writers Conference.

when asked what advice he would give new writers. "It's important to write really bad stuff so you can look back on it. Put a story down if you've been working on it for more than two years. Donald Maass says that until you've written more novels, you don't really know what's close to your heart...You may want your first novel to be a grand explosion, but it's not very common."

"People always want to tell me what I should do with my writing. You have to listen to yourself. If you don't believe in the story, no one else will."

Todd tells me a little about how he fell in love with sci-fi/fantasy. "My parents divorced and I got lost in reading. I decided that I wanted to do that—create this amazing story that can take you away...Besides," he adds with a laugh, "I'm sort of bent on being 12 years old for the rest of my life."

He answers immediately when I ask about his favorite book in his genre. "*Tigana*, written by Guy Gabrielle Kay. He takes historical

details from real Earth time-periods and weaves them in so perfectly. As far as writing craft books go, I have to say *The Fire in Fiction*—it's amazing. What little down-time I do have, I spend reading *Marvel Comics*."

Then Todd's voice turns serious. "The more I hang out with editors and agents, the more I realize that it's not a one-hit-wonder they're looking for, they want a writer who can write."

He continues. "What I'd like to do is write full-time, but I've got a day job that's 40 to 60 hours per week." Todd's the Director of Special Events at the American Diabetes Association in Denver. "I've had to train myself to write whenever—every spare scrap of time. I've seen so many writers whose personal lives are a mess. For that reason, I share time with my wife, Lara, who's an artist. Mondays and Tuesdays after work are my time to write, and Wednesdays and Thursdays are for her, even if she just wants to go to a coffee house and sit. Fridays are when we're all together—Lara, Me, and our two kids."

I admire Todd for making his family a priority. As for me, I'll keep a teachable spirit, especially in the business of writing. And I'll put my family first. At least that's what Todd told me, and I believe him.



By Linda Rohrbough

The Business of Writing: Want An Endorsement?

A writer who has worked for me was preparing to attend a small luncheon featuring Nicholas Sparks. She asked me if she should give him copies of her three self-published novels. He'll probably dump her books in the nearest trash, she added, "but you never know."

You never know what? Will Nicholas Sparks insist on calling his agent and publisher to tell them about her? Or just give her his card and tell her to contact him for an endorsement?

My writer friend had the right idea in a couple of respects. One, it would help her books to have an endorsement from a successful author in the same genre. And two, it's smart to hang out with people ahead of you in the game. What I don't understand is the sense of entitlement toward established authors. Do established authors want to help other writers? Sure they do. Do they want to help someone who feels entitled to their help? Probably not.

Since I travel with bestselling authors, let's put ourselves in Mr. Sparks' shoes for a moment. He's worked more than 20 years to get where he is now. He's been jostled all morning by fans and hopes to get through this event, then back to a quiet spot to work on the project he's currently under contract for. (He's probably feeling deadline pressure from being behind schedule because he's accepted too many lunch dates already.)

A writer in the long autograph line tells him how much she enjoys his work. She hands him three of her own books, saying they are similar to his. He's lost track of how many times this has happened. The writer looks at him expectantly. The other people waiting start to shuffle their feet, watching him. What would you do?

From my experience, he certainly remembers what it was like to be so desperate and loves books too much to trash these. He either says no thank you and hands the books back, or says thank you and places them in a

box under the table designated for that purpose. If he has time later, he may read the first page of a few novels to see if he can learn anything. But either way, what he will eventually do is hand the box to an assistant with instructions to donate them to a good cause, like a prison or a recycling center.

So, how do you get an endorsement? In my experience, authors who get endorsements build relationships that give them connections by giving of themselves. And they master their craft.

Building relationships means that smart new authors do something for established authors. They give favorable reviews, or ask them to speak at a conference where the new author has some influence. Our own Beth Groundwater gets endorsements, and you can read how in her recent blog entry. My only caveat with Beth's blog is that six weeks is a tight lead time for an endorsement. Three to six months is better, considering most selling authors try to sandwich reading into their tight writing schedules.

“So, how do you get an endorsement? In my experience, authors who get endorsements build relationships that give them connections by giving of themselves. And they master their craft.”

Another wrinkle is that writers want to endorse someone who will deliver the goods. Since it can take eight to 16 hours to read a novel, most authors say no to newbies unless they know something about the work. Who wants to spend that much time, only to face the awkwardness of turning the new author down?

What newbies don't know is that bestselling authors read a lot, and they follow new book announcements because it's smart to see what someone else did to break in. If they like a book they've read, they often make a point to tell the author, usually at a

conference. Most new authors don't understand this is an endorsement until their agent or editor tells them it is and coaches them to go back and ask for it in writing. I've heard this story over and over.

I've also heard horror stories where newbies tried to trick a bestselling author into an endorsement. One *New York Times* listed friend told me about a glowing letter received from a new author. She wanted to help. Until she asked around. Turns out the newbie sent the identical letter to several other big names. Guess who they all decided to avoid?

My advice to the writer who asked me what to say to Nicholas Sparks was to go to the luncheon with the goal of learning from Mr. Sparks. Listen to how he talks about his novels, because when he does that, he is pitching—he's using the same words he used to sell the idea to his agent and his publisher. Listen for how he works. If the opportunity presents itself, give him a sincere compliment, like mentioning something gleaned from his talk. Writers never tire of hearing that.

But, I told her, don't go with the idea of using the author. Rather, accept with gratitude what is freely given. The good news is that she took my advice, and she came away from the luncheon energized. That's the real value in going to hear someone who has made it.

—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 Linda's Web site: www.LindaRohrbough.com.

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.

Open Critique

Check the Pikes Peak Writers Web site (www.pikespeakwriters.com/open-critique) for the schedule and new location.

May Open Meeting: Dismembering the Bestseller



By Michael Shepherd

You know what they say about dismemberments. They can be a lot of fun—as long as you don’t lose an arm or a leg in the process.

When faced with an opportunity to dismember the work of bestselling authors at the May Open Meeting, all appendages stayed in place for the PPW members who honed their writing skills with an able assist from author Bonnie Ramthun. Bonnie presented her lecture, “Dismembering The Bestseller,” which provided attendees a clinical approach to identify a story’s beating heart, stressed how to stimulate manuscripts badly in need of resuscitation, and taught how to strengthen cadaverous plots through the use of skeletons—all while having a bloody good time.

Herself a bestselling author, Bonnie explained how writers who struggle with their manuscripts must learn to first identify the heart of the story—the element that keeps it vividly alive—in order to infuse the words with a discernable pulse. She cautioned against forming an attachment to “pretty writing” that serves no value to the story, and encouraged authors to evaluate their own manuscripts to find dead pieces that, while written well enough to make mothers proud

and old people cry, do not connect to the heart of the story.

Noting that every great novel contains a knockout beginning, some sort of turn-around or catalyst, a number of sub-plots, a second catalyst that leads to a climax and then a final plot wrap-up with an exciting conclusion, Bonnie diagrammed a plot line skeleton to help writers develop their work in a similar vein. She reminded listeners that a plot line skeleton is much like a human skeleton: one is hardly discernable from another, and it is the accoutrements humans add that make them unique. Similarly, it is upon the universal plot line skeleton that each writer can hang his or her creative prose to produce a distinctive, one-of-a-kind story.

The placement of pinch points, which are events where a character shows his or her true nature and highlights the psychological underpinning of the story, is crucial. If they occur too early or too late, the story can easily lose its sense of rising excitement and tension. While writers often develop compelling opening scenes and dramatic endings, without well-placed pinch points, the middle of a manuscript may wallow in a veritable Sahara of dryness. To combat this, effective pinch points can serve as a welcome oasis.

Bonnie used multiple examples to reinforce the concept of pinch points. In *Silence of the Lambs*, the first pinch point occurs when Hannibal Lecter gives Clarice the location of a storage facility where she finds the head of one of Buffalo Bill’s victims. In their twisted relationship, this is akin to him giving her a dozen red roses. In the second pinch point, Lecter gives Clarice the map of Buffalo Bill’s murders, which ultimately helps her break the case and find the killer.

In *Where the Wild Things Are*, pinch points center on the monster and boy relationship. In the first pinch point, Max tames the monsters and they make him their king. In the second pinch point, the monsters don’t want to let him go, vowing to eat him up, they love him so!

Finally, in the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, the first pinch point is when Toula and Ian fall in love. The second pinch point is when Ian asks Toula to marry him.

Of course, not every bestselling novel uses Bonnie’s method for success. She highlighted *The DaVinci Code* as one that strayed wildly from the formula. She lamented, “If Dan Brown had only come to one of my classes, he really would have sold a lot of books.”

As a wrap up, Bonnie encouraged authors to spot-check their own writing and compare the ending scene with the opening to ensure they are equally exciting. Authors should critically analyze their work to see if they spend too much time setting the scene of a novel before getting to the heart of the story. She reminded listeners to introduce tension and climax points in the middle of the story, which should be as exciting as the action in opening and closing scenes. Finally, she stressed that in every novel the protagonist should be the character who cracks the case, gets the girl, has the funniest lines, and in some way grows from the journey. If this isn’t true of your manuscript, you might be writing about the wrong character.

Or it may be in dire need of dismemberment.

Bonnie says: “I’ve talked to many writers whose driving goal becomes whether or not they’ll be published by a big New York house. They feel this will validate them, and anything less is considered a failure. When I think about writing, I equate it to fly fishing. Every bit of the event has something to be valued. From the beauty of the mountains and the smell of the trees to the crispness of the air and the sound of the rushing water to a perfect cast—all of those things are integral to the fly fishing experience. If you only focus on whether or not you catch a fish, you’ll likely miss out on the true enjoyment of what you’re doing.”

June Write Brain: Diet Fiction



By **Connie McKenzie**

Is your manuscript flabby, out of shape, and unfit? If so, Linda Berry's Write Brain taught the liposuction techniques you need to know.

Linda described flabby writing as any writing that does not get the job done or slows the reader down. If the word, sentence, paragraph, or chapter does not move the plot forward, it is full of empty calories you don't need. Cutting it out will make a slimmer, more attractive manuscript.

Linda gave us several ways to tighten our narrative belts while still keeping our story healthy. She suggested getting rid of subplots that don't contribute to the main story. Anything that makes the reader wonder why it's there is unnecessary and only confuses the main story you are telling.

We have all heard the advice, "Show, don't tell." But Linda added, "Don't show AND tell." Once the action has occurred, it is unnecessary to explain to the reader what he has just read.

Get rid of adverbs; use strong verbs instead. Strong verbs drive the story and make it more powerful, while excessive adverbs weaken the sentence structure.

Combine scenes whenever possible. For example, if your character is drinking coffee in her kitchen and thinking about a murder, and later drives to the store, change things up a bit: have her think about the murder and stop at Starbucks on the way to the store. It makes the story more concise and active. Narratives are sometimes necessary, but if possible, dramatize the narrative for a faster paced story. Action and drama are far more

interesting to most readers than descriptive narratives. Instead of a scene full of verbose descriptions that do not matter in the context of the story, summarize the scene and move on. A short, snappy scene will keep the reader's attention better than a long, complex, drawn-out scene

Linda also talked about avoiding clichés and needless repetition. While it might be okay for your main character to use a cliché in dialogue, you should avoid them in your more literary narrative voice. Also avoid needlessly repetitive phrases, such as "another alternative," "more additions," and "free gift." Expanded acronyms, such as "HIV virus," "PIN number," and "NHL league," are other examples of needless repetition.

Linda cautioned us to be careful about "common knowledge." For example, it is not necessary to say, "the famous painting, the 'Mona Lisa,'" as most people are already familiar with it. However, if you are using specialized language, such as "BOLO," which means "Be On the Look-Out," it may be necessary to find a way to define it.

"Action and drama are far more interesting to most readers than descriptive narratives."

Most of us, as writers, are familiar with being "in the zone"—that magical time when the words just flow out of our pens or keyboards with barely any effort. Most writers cherish those rare occurrences. Linda warned us to be wary of those times, as most flabby writing happens when the prose is pouring out.

In the last part of the evening, Linda had us exercise our newfound skills by editing writing samples and cutting out the fat and flab. Working in groups, we ruthlessly attacked and slashed the samples, making them into much more svelte and readable versions of their former selves.

Linda summarized her advice by telling us to write in an active voice, remember that longer words are not necessarily better, and, most of all, avoid repetition. By following these few pieces of advice, your fiction will lose the unsightly flab and be slimmer, healthier, and much more likely to be picked up in a bar by an editor or agent.

A Message from Your Executive Director

Well, it's officially the dog days of summer. The time when the heat and bright sun may sap energy and distract a writer from their words. We all have times and things that distract us from our passion. What is important is to have a support system that will gently keep you focused, offer resources when you need them, and just understand what being a writer means.

We hope that Pikes Peak Writers is that for you. A place where you can be inspired, encouraged, educated, and have fun. Make the time to attend a Write Brain, read the wonderful *NewsMag* and attend our annual American Icon event this summer.

Honor your need to write. Make time for it. Schedule it if that helps to make it happen. Spend time with people who support your passion for the written word, who encourage you in whatever way works for you. In case anyone wonders, a writer's retreat in the mountains would really encourage me. Actually, it's even simpler than that. For me, when I spend time with fellow writers and work on my craft I am encouraged and eager to make the time to write.

Prioritize your life so that your writing is closer to the top of the list rather than a passing wistful thought as you fall exhausted into bed at the end of each day. By making writing a priority, you show others in your life that it is important to you. Reach out to Pikes Peak Writers if you have a question or are not sure how to locate a resource.

As we look ahead to Fall, begin to think about how you might become more involved in PPW. Do you have a special skill or talent that would help us to help others? Do you have a couple of hours a month to give to encourage a fellow writer or to help at an event? No contribution or effort is too small, we need you. Think about how you would like to help and contact me or e-mail our Volunteer Director, Christian Lyons, via the Web site. Let's talk and find the place where you will be the happiest and can make the biggest difference to our members and future members.

This is an organization driven by volunteers who are passionate about PPW.

Now, get back out there and enjoy your summer and make time to write. Careful not to get sunscreen on your laptops.

—Jodi Anderson, Executive Director



BLAST FROM THE PAST...

Enjoy this timeless advice from PPW's own Karen Fox.

10 Easy Steps to Publication and other fairy tales...

By Karen Fox

Now that I've finally sold my first book, a futuristic to Leisure Love Spell, *Sword of MacLeod*, a January 1997 release, I'm surprised how some people think I suddenly know more than I did before I sold or that I have access to a magic formula. I have no formula, but I can list 10 rules I followed as I worked toward publication and hope they'll help you, too.

1. Write every day. It sounds easy, but it's not. Family, extracurricular events, work, and a dirty house tend to eat away at valuable writing time. The trick is to set a realistic daily goal and stick to it. After I attended the first Pikes Peak Writers Conference in 1993, I resolved to write two pages a day and I did. Some days when the muse was with me, those two pages stretched into six or more. Other days I struggled to complete two. But I wrote and before I knew it, I had a book completed, which leads me to...

2. Complete a book. In order to be taken seriously by any editor or agent, you must finish a manuscript. Editors don't want to make an offer on a proposal without some guarantee that they'll finally get a book. I'm well aware how another story starts whispering in your mind when you're halfway through your current manuscript. What I do is jot enough of the new idea down to remember the facts, then press on with my story in progress. Usually the act of writing down the new idea is enough to quiet the whispers until I call for them again.

3. Attend conferences. If you can only attend one a year, then do so. Not only do the workshops inspire you to write, write, write, but the contacts made and information passed through casual conversation at these gatherings are invaluable. Study the conferences available to see which offers what will do you the most good. Now that the national RWA conference has only group appointments for editors and agents, you might want to target a conference with individual appointments. Some conferences are casual while others are more formal. Some conferences offer multi-genre workshops and

authors. Others have a more specific focus. Ask other writers which conferences they recommend and why.

4. Participate in a critique group. Almost every published author I know belongs to a critique group and meets regularly. That isn't to say you must have a published member in your group. The Wyrld Sisters, a critique group in Colorado Springs, started with four unpublished writers who wrote unusual romances. With my sale, these original four are now all published. We learned, we grew, and most importantly, we critiqued. We brought stuff to every session and provided feedback on what we were given. The trick to a good critique group is finding the right mix of people. Sometimes it takes a while, but it's well worth the effort. In the Wyrld Sisters, each member has a different strength and weakness. We complement each other and force growth at the same time.

“...I'm surprised how some people think I suddenly know more than I did before I sold or that I have access to a magic formula.”

5. Join PPW or Romance Writers of America, or another writing-oriented organization. By becoming a member, you have access to information not always readily available or not known. I was truly naive before I joined my RWA chapter. When the *Writer's Market* said send an outline of the story, I sent an outline. Yep, Roman number I, II, etc. I still blush to think about it. Most organizations offer a variety of workshops from the basics of writing to promotional opportunities. Take advantage of these workshops. They also provide the support every writer—published or not—needs. Encouraging words for finishing a chapter may be enough to make someone continue on to the next chapter. Special tributes for a

first sale make a wonderful time even more heartwarming. Attending someone's book signing not only makes the author feel appreciated, but gives the attendee a chance to learn how it's done. After all, you may be there someday, too.

6. Learn from others' mistakes. This could probably constitute another reason to join a writing organization, but not necessarily. Read the Romance Writer's Report and other publications to see what authors are doing right...and wrong. Lorna Tedder's *Spilled Candy* dedicated one issue to tips from writers on what not to do. That's one issue I intend to keep close at hand. I also had the advantage—though I didn't think so at the time—of being the last of the original four Wyrld Sisters to sell a book. I saw my fellow critiquers through their problems and worries with agents, covers, publication dates and subsequent sales. That's doesn't mean I won't make any mistakes, but I feel better prepared to deal with the publishing business because of watching them.

7. Enter contests. I can say with certainty that if I hadn't entered *Sword of MacLeod* in the Pikes Peak Writers Conference Contest in 1995 that I never would have sold it. In fact, I'd stopped writing it as I'd heard there was no market for futuristics, but the story kept calling to me. I decided to enter the contest to see what kind of feedback it received and use that as an indicator on whether I should finish the book or not. I received one perfect score from a published author, who went on to offer her assistance to me personally. Through her, I met my agent. Because of this author's encouragement, I went on to finish *Sword of MacLeod* and sold it. This is just one instance of wonderful contest feedback. RWA offers a multitude of contests and you should read the criteria carefully to discern which one best suits your needs. Many contests offer editors as finalist judges. This is a great way to get your manuscript in front of an editor. If she's interested, she will probably request the entire thing. Most contests offer a critique, either as a part of entering or an extra option. Having a fresh pair of eyes examine your entry is invaluable as this unbiased judge can catch things your critique group, who have lived with this story for a while, have missed. Some contests, such as the Golden Heart, Silver Heart, and Maggie, hold a certain prestige by becoming a winner. I once had an agent ask to see my manuscript simply because it was a

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A Tastier Book Tour



By Christian Marcus Lyons

It's really no secret to many authors that the oft-undertaken task of participating in book signings does not markedly increase sales of the books being offered. When you're a newly published author, though, how do you make it work for you?

This past winter, authors Janet Fogg, Shannon Baker, and bestselling author and PPWC alum Carol Berg decided to make their newly released books and the accompanying tour anything but ordinary. Along with long-time PPW members Karen Lin and Julie Kaewert, the group of friends, who first met at a writer's conference in the mid-'90s, created a unique book signing experience that celebrated their newfound (and in the case of Berg, ongoing) successes as authors.

"The idea," said Lin, an author, gourmet chef, and screenwriter, "was to offer something other than just a reading and signing. Julie and I wanted to make it a celebration." She added, "We're SO gonna throw a party!"

And that's exactly what they did. The authors weren't the only attraction at the events. Champagne, finger foods and scrumptious desserts rounded out this unique twist on book signings.

The idea took shape when the three authors' books released within a three month span: Janet Fogg's *Soliloquy* (Wild Rose Press), a time-travel romance, came out in December 2009; Shannon Baker's *Ashes of the Red Heifer* (L & L Dreamspell), a thriller, was published

in January 2010; and Carol Berg's latest fantasy, *The Spirit Lens: A Novel of the Collegia Magica* (Roc Trade), was released in February 2010.

Berg said, "I had done one joint signing before and it was great fun, so when I heard that Janet and Shannon both had books coming out right close to *The Spirit Lens*' release, I tossed up the idea. It worked out wonderfully well."

Everyone agreed that putting together a three-author tour was much more complicated, and that there was quite a bit of organizational stuff to do. Lin said, "But it was also a lot more fun."

The tour included a number of retail bookstores in Colorado, ranging from Fort Collins to Colorado Springs. Fogg prepared



the events by handling the marketing and promotional aspects of the tour ahead of time. Kaewert, herself an experienced author, said, "One of [Janet's] creations was a flyer/poster tying all three authors' books into one design, with a posting of the dates and times of the signings. This made the perfect



jumping off point for a party invitation, and the authors simply e-mailed the invitation to their own contact lists."

Fogg utilized connections to reserve venues like Boulder's Bookend Café to hold the after-signing soiree. She made profile sheets for the books and their authors, then e-mailed a pitch letter to prospective venues and followed up until the locations were set. Berg created and printed 12x6 cards for each event, "...so latecomers could be brought up to speed."

Berg, being the more seasoned participant, acted as Mistress-of-Ceremonies at each event. The authors read selections from their work, talked about their books and characters, and engaged in discussions about themselves and their writing. Berg then brought levity to the events by informally interviewing each person on the panel with a set of questions that she composed ahead of time.

If there was a drawback to putting

together a book signing tour such as this, it was the expense. However, all of the participants said they'd do it again without hesitation. Baker said, "I didn't go into this believing it was going to be a money-maker or a good marketing tool [for my book]. I was just out there to celebrate."

All five women were quite complimentary about the others, but it was "Carol [Berg] as midwife" that really made the entire experience work,

commented Fogg. Baker remarked, "Carol is so encouraging. She's been a huge inspiration forever. Carol is a true artist."

Baker said that her relationship with the others gives her great motivation. "If I didn't write, I'd lose these friendships. There's a lot of accountability with them." When asked how the long-term friendships affected the dynamics of the events themselves, Berg said, "Party!"

We couldn't have said it better ourselves. You can find the authors online at:

- **Carol Berg**—
<http://textcrumbs.blogspot.com/>
- **Karen Albright Lin**—
<http://www.KarenAlbrightLin.com>
- **Shannon Baker**—
<http://shannonbaker.wordpress.com/>
- **Janet Fogg**—<http://www.JanetFogg.com>
- **Julie Kaewert**—<http://JulieKaewert.com/>



By *Becky Clark*

Transportation Slapstick... Or...*Not* Driving Miss Daisy

For PPWC 2010, I was honored with a phone call from the Transportation Chairperson asking if I'd like to pick up an esteemed member of the faculty from the airport.

Would I! I could pick the brain of an über-smart industry professional, do some serious networking, and have a reason to clean my car, which my husband recently pronounced “funky.” And not in a good way. Thank goodness for Febreze.

My peeps teased me when I confessed to a practice airport run, but I like to be prepared, especially when comparisons to the Popemobile were made.

I awoke chipper on Driving Day and looked out the hotel window to find...what's that? I hadn't had my coffee yet, but that sure looked like six inches of snow. I looked again, this time wearing my glasses. Silly me! That wasn't six inches of snow. It was at least eight, with more coming down. Sideways.

Let's jump ahead in the story. Past the hyperventilation, the frantic booting of the computer to check flight status, the harried conversations with transportation veterans and the clothing conundrum.

Cramming my purse with instructions and my sign with the faculty name printed bolder than I felt, I headed out the lobby doors.

In case you don't know, spring snowflakes in Colorado each weigh about four pounds. They're as big as your head and can drown a kitten. You won't be surprised when I say I was drenched before I even saw my car.

The four-pound snowflakes apparently weren't hostile enough, so the wind decided to mock me as well, which I only understood when I was blinded by the ecru muslin of my skirt up over my head. I don't want to say anything more about this. I'm saving it for my therapist. My one consolation was that I figured no one saw. (But if you did, I hope you found some Lysol for your eyes.)

Mind you, I wasn't even at my car yet.

When I finally reached it, I found that the dimwit next to me parked their ginormous SUV so close I couldn't open my driver side door. I popped my trunk, grabbed my fleece jacket and heavy-duty snow scraper. Those are two separate things, btw.

I threw the jacket in the car and started pushing eight inches of cement snow off my car. When I hurry, I'm not as careful as I should be. Did I mention the idiot who parked next to me? Yeah. As I tried to clear the snow, I planted my entire ecru muslin butt up against the ginormous SUV.

Here's a funny image for you. Picture me soaked, Ed Grimley hair shellacked on my head, twirling around like a dog chasing her ecru muslin tail to see if there was a big mud stain on it. You're welcome.

I cleared my car everywhere I could reach then hopped in the passenger side, breathless with exertion and anxiety. The car fogged up immediately and completely. I assessed my situation. I sat shrouded in fog, finally able to muster empathy with the Golden Gate Bridge. Outside, half the car remained entombed. Snowmelt dripped off every inch of me, soaking the future seat of my esteemed passenger. I glanced in the mirror. Not pretty.

Accepting the fact that I couldn't drive from the passenger seat, I began the wiggle I hoped would eventually propel me into the driver's seat. I drive with my seat pretty close to the steering wheel, so it took a lot of wiggling. When I finally got there, I turned the key.

How funny would it be if it didn't start?

Fooled you. It's a Toyota. Starts every time. I blasted the defogger and sat, becoming quite claustrophobic. I know...I'll roll down the window so I can see. You're smarter than I am, so you already know I spent the next few minutes brushing an avalanche off my lap.

I drove to some empty parking spots where I could finally open the door and clear the rest of my car. I don't like to close the door while my car is running—probably some childhood trauma perpetuated upon me by older siblings—so, again, you already know

what I wasn't able to foresee at the time. A seatful of snow.

Trouper that I am, I drove to the airport in the blinding sideways snow. (At this point—since I couldn't see any road signs—I knew my practice run was an inspired decision, so “pfftt” to all who teased me.) I parked, readied my umbrella, and stepped from the car. Immediately it was yanked from my grip. I'm a multi-tasker though, so I restrained my billowing skirt while chasing the umbrella across the parking lot like some demented, hunchbacked Mary Poppins. I caught it, flung it in the trunk, tied my jacket around my waist and lurched across the parking lot like a soggy tumbleweed, embattled but not defeated.

Imagine my surprise when the arrival board told me I wasn't late! I held my sign while finger-combing my dripping hair just as travelers began to descend upon baggage claim. I practiced nonchalance to limit guilt on the part of my passenger for my near-drowning. I rehearsed witty responses. I smiled. I searched the faces for my esteemed passenger. And searched. And searched.

This is a small airport. Soon the escalators were empty and all the luggage from carousel two was gone. I stood with three other people near the escalators—one was vacuuming, one was a bored security guard, and the other was a teenager sneaking incredulous glances at me, presumably wondering if my caregiver would show up soon.

Several airport pages and frantic phone calls to the conference were made. I was told a connecting flight was missed and I could come back to the hotel. Mission aborted.

The moral of this story? Heck, I don't know. But clearly there's a link between Febreze and blizzards. I won't make that mistake again.

<http://beckyland.wordpress.com>

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

Upcoming PPW Events

July, August

The Sizzling Summer Series Continues...

July Write Brain

Tuesday, July 20, 6:30 p.m.

Putting on the Moves: A Writer's Guide to Body Language and Styles

Learn all about body language with sociologist and writer Morgen Leigh Thomas. If you're tired of your characters doing nothing but grinning, grimacing and raising their eyebrows, give them something new to do! Join us to uncover a more complete repertoire of human gestures and expressions.



Morgen Leigh began fabricating stories when she was three years old. At the age of six, she began putting her dark flights of fancy down on paper. A voracious reader as a youngster, Morgen spent entirely too much time with her nose stuck in a book and playing with the wooden elves in her expansive backyard. She also enjoyed scaring the hell out of friends and family with her unsettling, dark tales. At the impressionable age of 11, she read *Sybil* and promptly struck out on a quest to learn more

about the human psyche and the darker aspects of human behavior. This quest led her to pursue a double major in psychology and sociology at the University of Colorado, where she obtained a masters degree in sociology with an emphasis in social psychology and deviance. Morgen's fiction and creative non-fiction stories have appeared in *Twilight Times*, *Apollo's Lyre*, *The S'Peaker*, *Lorelei Signal*, and *Mystic Signals*. She is currently finishing a second novel and watching her teenage son eat everything in sight.

August Write Brain

Tuesday, August 16, 6:30 p.m.

Finding Your Own Unique Voice

Sometimes you just have to break the rules. That's what former Colorado resident and first-time author Deborah Coonts discovered on the way to becoming an "overnight success." Join us for our August Write Brain as Deb tells us how she used her own strengths—her wicked humor and off-beat view of the world—to create Lucky O'Toole, the in-charge but vulnerable heroine in her first Las Vegas adventure, *Wanna Get Lucky?* She'll also show us how to find our own unique voices, and once we've found them, how to position our novels in the marketplace.



Deborah Coonts is proof positive that sex sells and persistence pays off. A Texas girl, she spent years being someone else—an accountant, a business owner, a lawyer and a pilot. But through it all, she wrote. After two practice novels and a humor column, she wrote *Wanna Get Lucky?*, the first in a series published by Forge Books—think *Sex in the City* meets Elmore Leonard in Vegas. Sexy, wry, romantic and slightly naughty, mixed with a little mayhem, *Lucky* is taking the publishing world by storm. Watch out, Janet Evanovich!

Nonmembers may attend one Write Brain session for free. Subsequent sessions are \$10.

Write Brain Sessions are held at Cottonwood Center for the Arts, 427 E. Colorado Avenue, Studio A. Visitor's parking is in the large lot on the east side of the Cottonwood building. For more information and a map, go to www.pikespeakwriters.com.

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

Pikes Peak Writers and the Colorado Springs Marriott Present: American Icon 6—2010

Friday, August 6 at 6:30 p.m.

Colorado Springs Marriott,
5580 Tech Center Dr., 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 non-fiction. Three celebrity judges give on-the-spot feedback. Our Icon 6 judges are writer and producer Trai Cartwright, editor Carolyn Sobczak (Fulcrum Publishing), and agent Ange Tysdal (AKA Literary, LLC). Prizes include editor and agent critiques, bookstore certificates, a fabulous hotel stay and more.

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

Cost:

- \$10 for attendees
- \$25 for PPW member contestants
- \$35 for non PPW member contestants

Rules:

Contestants and attendees must be at least 18 years old, unless parental consent is verified. All contestants must sign an affirmation of eligibility and a publicity release form. Previous Audience Favorite and Best Overall award-winning entries are ineligible for Icon 6. Entries must be unpublished and cannot exceed the equivalent of an "R" rating. Winners are determined by the three-judge panel. Deliberating is overseen by a member of the PPW Board of Directors. Decisions are final. PPW reserves the right to publish winners' names, prizes, and titles of works for use in publicity and other materials. Prizes are subject to change without notice.

Deadline for Registration:

Tuesday, August 3rd at 5 p.m. Walk-in registrations will only be accepted if there is room or there are sudden cancellations. Check our Web site for up-to-the-minute details.

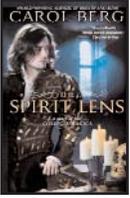
Thinking of entering? Here's what Erin Spradlin, last year's Audience Favorite and winner of a special category, Essay That Should Be Chapter One in Your Book, said about her experience:

"I can't express how good it felt to participate in this event, and that was before I knew I won anything. I learned a lot from standing before my peers, presenting my work and receiving feedback on my writing. Aside from the natural high one gets from taking those steps, I also met and networked with other aspiring writers. I will forever be pleased that I did it and would encourage anyone thinking about it to take the plunge. Terrifying? Yes. Worth it? Definitely."

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

Sweet Success

Carol Berg was happy to learn that *The Spirit Lens* made the Locus Bestseller list for January, 2010. Carol says it's "not NYT, but in the fantasy/sf realm, it's ok." We certainly think so! Congratulations, Carol.



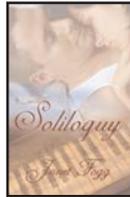
Laura E. Reeve's third novel in the Major Ariane Kedros series, *Pathfinder*, will be released by Roc (NAL/Penguin) on July 6th. Laura will be signing books in the series at the Citadel Barnes & Noble in Colorado Springs on July 24th, at 1 p.m. For further information, see her Web site at www.AncstralStars.com.



Ian Healy sold a third story, "The Steel Soldier's Gambit," to *a thousand faces, the quarterly journal of superhuman fiction* (Issue #11, Winter 2010).

Karin Huxman inked a deal with Apprentice Shop Books. She'll be using her children's/YA author pseudonym, K.D. Huxman, for this YA nonfiction book tentatively titled *The Colorado Coalfield War: Massacre at Ludlow*.

Deb Stover received a call to inform her that *The Gift* was a 2010 Holt Medallion Award of Merit recipient in the Paranormal category. And **Janet Fogg's** *Soliloquy* received an Award of Merit in the Best First Book category. All the winners and Awards of Merit (listed alphabetically) are here: www.virginiaromancewriters.com/Contests/holtwinners.html



If you have your own sweet success story to share, fill in the form on the PPW Web site, or just send an e-mail to editor@pikespeakwriters.com. We want to hear stories of new contracts, upcoming publications, awards, contest wins...whatever feels like sweet success to you!

Get engaged!

We have so many exciting ways for you to volunteer with PPW. Contact our new Volunteer Coordinator, Christian Lyons, via the PPW Web site: www.pikespeak-writers.com/volunteer-opportunities.



Flash Fiction: PPWC 2010

In its fifth year, the Flash Fiction contest was a hit once again at PPWC 2010. The rules: tell a complete story in no more than 100 words, inspired by the prompt provided by contest coordinator, Deb Courtney.

This year's prompt, "It's the economy," brought in more than forty entries. The top two are presented below for your reading pleasure.

1st Place

"Alive"

By **Chris Scena**



The ribs were ready. He'd boiled then smoked them this time, hoping to improve the flavor. He took a bite. Much better than the previous batches he'd made.

He ate in silence. A single bulb illuminated the table. He could barely afford the tasteless bread that went with his meal. Forget paying for extra electricity to power his radio.

Would they find out? If they did, what would they say? Would they call him a monster? At this point he didn't care. He had to eat. If anyone ever asked him why, he'd tell them the truth. It's the economy.

2nd Place

"Danger of Outsourcing"

By **Connie McKenzie**



I woke to a dark figure looming over my bed. I screamed. A fuzzy paw clamped over my mouth.

"Shut up, kid," said a gravelly voice. "I'm just here for your tooth."

I squirmed.

"If you promise not to scream, I'll uncover your mouth." I nodded and he removed his paw.

"Aren't you the Easter Bunny?" I asked. He nodded. "Isn't this the Tooth Fairy's job?"

He shrugged. "I'm subcontracting. Gotta lot of mouths to feed. Have to make money where I can. It's the economy, you know." He held up a pair of pliers. "Now, open wide."

Five Stages of Critique Group Grief

By **Cindi Madsen**

Denial—My stuff is awesome the way it is. They just don't get it.

Anger—I can't believe they're finding problems after all the hard work, heart, and soul I put into this!

Bargaining—But see, if you know this, it makes it all work out. Kind of.

Depression—I give up. Everything sucks, and I worked too hard on it already. I don't think I can look at it again. It's never going to be finished.

Acceptance—Okay, it needs some work. I think—no, I know—I can do better. This is what critique groups are for: to get input and make my book the best it can be. It's going to take some work, but I will fix this!



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COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80903

10 Easy Steps to Publication

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finalist in the Colorado Romance Writer's Heart of the Rockies Contest. You can use these wins in your query letters as additional credentials of your writing. Just entering a contest shows you're willing to learn and grow.

8. Know your market and read. Don't try to send a 50,000 word contemporary to Avon or Berkley. While you have to follow your muse in writing your story, aim for a specific market at the same time. Knowing whether a story is for Harlequin or Avon helps decide the flavor and length of your manuscript. A Silhouette Intimate Moments is not the same as a Harlequin American. You show your professionalism when you submit the proper type of story to each publisher and save time for everyone. As part of knowing the market, I urge you to read...fiction, nonfiction and periodicals. Magazines such as *Romantic Times* indicate what publishers are printing now while chapter newsletters and the RWR keep you up-to-date on market changes. Read books in

the line to which you hope to sell. Study them. Sexy. Sweet. Funny. Solemn. In addition, read nonfiction books on how to write—*The Writer's Journey* by Christopher Vogler, *Self-Editing for Fiction Writers* by Browne and King, *Writer's Digest* series of how-to books on plotting, characterization, and scene and sequel. While it's possible to become too involved in the "proper" way to write, I also believe a person benefits from knowledge. Sometimes I may read an entire nonfiction book and only benefit from one paragraph, but that paragraph helps me grow.

9. Volunteer. I noticed at the Pikes Peak Writers Conference over the past few years that those individuals who placed in the contest were also people who volunteered their time to help. Becoming involved in your chapter or conference broadens your horizons, introduces you to people you might not otherwise meet, and offers a wide spectrum of knowledge. If you want to learn how things operate or perhaps change them, the best way to do so is from within. You'll discover as you learn and grow so does your writing.

10. Finally, but probably the most important—believe in yourself. We've all met those writers who's faith in themselves is unwavering, but I think they're the minority rather than majority. We have to have a certain ego in order to write, but this ego is fragile and easily damaged by rejections from editors and agents or slice and dice by critique groups. It's so tempting to just give up the whole thing. I know. During those two years after the other three members of the Wyrld Sisters had sold and I hadn't, I came close to quitting. But I didn't. The reason why? I asked myself, could I stop creating stories even if I wanted to? And the answer, of course, was no. Even if I never sold a story, I had to tell them. I'd been telling them since I was twelve years old. So I kept on writing, kept on growing, and kept on believing that publication was a possibility and I made it. And if I can make it, so can you.