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By *Stephanie R. Johnson*

It's that time again! The Pikes Peak Writers Conference is being held April 23-26, 2009—have you registered yet? If not, what are you waiting for? Here are 10 great things you can get out of attending this fantastic conference:

1. *Abbondanza!*

From mystery to mainstream, suspense to short stories, historical fiction to science fiction, there's something for everyone. Not only will you discover what your genre is (if you don't already know), but you'll be able to talk shop with many others who share your passion. There will be plenty of literary agents, acquiring editors, authors, and specialists to speak on dozens of topics.

2. *Brain Pickees*

What better brain to pick than someone who wrote the book (pun intended) on the questions you have? Whether it's screenwriting, magazine articles, proposal writing, or plotting, you won't find better sources anywhere, and they're all in one place.

3. *Creativity*

Staring at a blank screen? You can't go wrong with workshops like these: writing in a conversational tone to

engage your reader; shaping and structuring your story; using a lowlife informant in your mystery novel to get information to your reader; expressing a theme without getting preachy; and much, much more. You can kiss writer's block goodbye!

4. *Do or Die*

You might be thinking, "I would rather die a slow death than pitch my book to an agent." The Read & Critique and Speed Pitching sessions are a great way to overcome your fears, tighten your manuscript, and fine-tune your pitch. Don't worry, you'll survive just fine, even if you do break out in a cold sweat. You won't find a safer environment anywhere else.

5. *Elbows and Expo*

This year's PPWC features a new Trade Exposition for vendors, companies, and organizations that support the writing community (check the PPW Web site for participants and details). Elbow rubbing can occur at the book signing on Saturday, where speakers and PPW authors attending the conference will be more than happy to autograph your purchases.

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“The refusal to rest content, the willingness to risk excess on behalf of one's obsessions, is what distinguishes artists from entertainers, and what makes some artists adventurers on behalf of us all.”

—John Updike: 1932-2009

Letter from the Editor



By Mandy Houk

Anyone who's been writing long can tell you that pursuing this dream requires a seemingly contradictory mix of talents: the creativity of an artist, with the nonstop effort of a workhorse; the ability to invent unique characters and intriguing settings, along with the skill to network and market your masterpiece. Writing requires isolation; improving your writing and getting it sold requires intensive interaction with other writers and industry professionals.

In this *NewsMag*, you'll be encouraged to continue to love your chosen profession. As our departing columnist, Fleur Bradley, describes it, "keep that glint in your eye." But it can't end there. You have to put in the time—10,000 hours or so, according to Becky Clark's column. And don't expect success to come overnight. It certainly didn't work that way for *New York Times* bestselling novelist Chris Bohjalian. Our own Deb Courtney shares his story in her interview.

If you could use even more inspiration—more reasons to keep plugging away—more tools to make your writing better—more writing friends and more elbow-rubbing with industry professionals (who doesn't need it all?), then you know what you have to do. You

have to come to conference. Not convinced? Stephanie Johnson gives you ten compelling reasons in our cover story. And Frank Dorchak tells the story of his one big reason: he found his agent at last year's conference! Read about it in his article, "Welcome to the Jungle."

Once you've registered (you know you will), and once you've finished reading this *NewsMag* cover to cover (you know you will), get back to work. Hey, you have a conference to get ready for.

Happy writing!



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Ten Great Things

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6. Friendships

Being around like-minded people who live, eat, and breathe writing is what an author needs to be successful. The people I've befriended at writers' conferences have told me about workshops, social events, writers' groups, and critique sessions, where I made even more networking connections. There's much truth in the phrase, "It's not what you know, but who you know," and it especially applies to every person you meet at conference—you might even meet your future agent or editor!

7. Guidance

The keynote speakers, agents, and editors aren't the only ones who want to see you succeed. There are other authors, published and aspiring, who want to see you make the bestseller list too. So if you can benefit from learning the essential elements to writing a novel that editors want to buy; are looking for an accountability partner; have questions about marketing; or haven't a clue about where to start, someone at this conference can definitely point you in the right direction.

8. "High Attitude Writing: Cut to the Craft"

This year's theme says it all, and you will enjoy the keynote presentations: "The Most Important Elements of Success...", "The Trick is to Keep Breathing", "...A Humorous Look at Becoming a Novelist," and "Keeping

the Magic in Your Writing." Special add-on workshops on Thursday include "Thinking it Through", "Fleshing it Out," and "Giving it Wings."

9. Invitation

These agents and editors are looking for their next bestseller, so imagine the euphoria you'll feel when one of them (or more!) extends a personal invitation for you to send your manuscript. Take my word for it, this is a rare opportunity. Even if your work isn't quite submittible, they can provide the feedback you need to get it there. Many agents and editors rely heavily on these conferences to find new authors, but you can't be invited if you don't attend.

10. Just Do It

Is money holding you back from attending this conference? In this recession, it will be hard for many of us to scrape together the registration fee (PPW members get a discount), but don't forget there's a limited scholarship fund available (deadline is February 28th). Is time your issue? If you can't call in sick, then call in dead. Or is it fear? Get over it! My point is, do whatever it takes to go to this conference.

Not only will you get all this from attending the Pikes Peak Writers Conference, but you'll also have a great time, you'll get to stay up late to fraternize, and you'll eat fabulous meals with others in the writing industry. It doesn't get any better than this! Register today at www.pikespeakwriters.com.

Reserved?



By Ruh as told to Chris Mandeville

You may be wondering what all those pesky “Reserved” signs are doing on the PPWC banquet tables. You might be saying to yourself, “Who are those seats reserved for? And how do I get one?”

Well, as PPW’s Ambassador of Goodwill and honorary Banquet Security Patrol, it falls to me to answer these questions.

First and foremost, seats are always reserved for the table host. Yes, we try to herd the guests of honor (i.e. those faculty members you want to talk to) into the banquet hall early to take their seats, but sometimes that’s just not possible. Like when one of them has a booksigning, is grabbing a quick beverage at the bar, or is out chasing squirrels.

Oh, wait. That’s me.

Anyway, you get the idea. Believe it or not, on occasion a table host arrives at his/her table and all the seats are full. To avoid his/her embarrassment, the disappointment of the attendees at the table, and the inconveniencing of the Marriott staff, we’ve devised this nifty technique of placing a “Reserved” sign at the table host’s place.

Second and secondmost, we try to accom-

modate the requests of our faculty when possible. This means that if an agent wants to sit next to a client or a significant other, we reserve a seat for that person when possible. Also, when the faculty member is the Keynote Speaker for the meal, we will sometimes reserve their whole table,

ensuring that the guest is

able to eat quickly without trying to chat with attendees. Trust me, it’s never pretty to see a Keynote trying to talk with their mouth full, or having the Keynote’s stomach growling into the microphone while they’re delivering their speech.

Thirdly—and this is where your ears should perk up—some seats are reserved for ATTENDEES who earn this privilege through volunteering. For example, if we send a willing attendee on an errand (like to the airport or a copy place) that person will return to a reserved seat at a table of their choice. Likewise, volunteers who moderate at least two sessions get a handy “Reserved” sign at a meal. And sometimes we have volunteers who are working hard to make your conference experience amazing, which makes it impossible for them to stand in line waiting for the banquet doors to open so they can make a mad dash for the table of their choice. Those folks sometimes get “Reserved” signs, too. Really, it’s for the safety of us all. And my tail. Dashing isn’t good, except when chasing squirrels.

Fourthly (is that a word?), at the Awards Banquet on Saturday night, you’ll see lots of “Reserved” signs. This is because winners of the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest must

be seated near the front in order to make the award-giving go more smoothly. And those winners usually have significant others, friends, family, and cheerleaders who want to sit with them. You know that if/when you win the contest, you’ll want to be surrounded by your significant others, friends, family, and cheerleaders, so please don’t begrudge them their “Reserved” signs.

By now you might be thinking that it’s going to be impossible to sit with the faculty member of your choice because there are so many “Reserved” signs out there and none of them are for you. But don’t worry—our conference staff is very good about making sure not to fill up a whole table with reserved signs, unless it’s for the contest winners’ or Keynote’s tables. And if you’re still not convinced you’ll be able to sit where you want, how about earning a “Reserved” sign for yourself? Like I mentioned, you can win the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest, or be selected as a Faculty member. If that’s not on your agenda for this year, you can check with our lovely Volunteer Coordinator, Sharon Williams (volunteers@pikespeakwriters.com), to see if there are any volunteer jobs available that would qualify you for your own “Reserved” sign.

I know it’s especially annoying when the dreaded “Reserved” sign has rendered off-limits the very seat you want to occupy. But please remember it’s there for a good reason. If you don’t remember, and you just happen to move it, hide it, eat it or use it as a paper airplane, I’m afraid I’ll have to put on my Security hat and have a word with you. Nobody wants that. Least of all me. I look silly in hats.

See you in the PPWC Banquet Hall! (Oh—and please leave your squirrels at the door. I promise I’ll look after them.)

Want a “Reserved” sign of your own, plus a bag o’ other PPW goodies?

There are two opportunities coming up for you to win just that! We’re giving away two VIP prize packages consisting of a Pikes Peak Writers t-shirt, a PPWC zippered notebook, a “Reserved” sign to be placed at the table of your choice at the 2009 PPWC, and an invitation for two to the PPWC Faculty-Staff

Only Mixer, all contained in a nifty PPWC messenger bag.

One VIP prize package 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

March 15. E-mail your answer to winstuff@pikespeakwriters.com.

The other VIP package will be awarded as a doorprize to an attendee at the April Write Brain.

Good luck!



By Linda Rohrbough

The Business of Writing The Right Agent

In November of 2004, I wrote an article with a bunch of horror stories and solid how-to tips to check agents. That piece is still viable and you can find it on the PPW Web site. I have since discovered there's even more to hiring an agent than getting someone to send your work out. I've discovered that you can talk an agent into representing you who isn't the right agent. What do I mean by the "right" agent?

For one thing, the right agent will like your work as much, if not more, than you do. And that's worth something. At one of the first PPW conferences I attended, I met an editor for a major publisher. I introduced myself as an author of nonfiction for the same house, and told her my editor's name. I had a novel to pitch, and since I knew she only accepted agented work, I asked if she'd recommend someone. She wouldn't. Instead, she insisted I find an agent who loved my work and would fight for it.

I knew you could get an agent through a referral from an editor because it had happened to me: an editor of mine referred a nonfiction agent to me. This agent pursued me and even offered to fly halfway across the country to meet. But when I checked him out, he had different values than I did. For one thing, several of the titles he represented were porn. Not a good fit.

When I finally realized I needed representation, it took me about a year to find my nonfiction agent. We don't talk a lot, but when we do, we finish each others' sentences, have the same sense of humor, and she truly loves my work.

But a fiction agent—that was much harder to find. My nonfiction agent doesn't represent fiction. And every fiction agent she's recommended turned me down in a New York minute. If you know much about this business, you know getting a rejection the same day you put in a query is a compliment, even if it stings.

“You may have to kiss a lot of frogs, but you'll find your prince—the right agent—if you'll stay with it.”

I go to a lot of conferences and have become friends with a number of fiction agents. One particular agent, who rejected my work but whose husband is a writing buddy of mine, said she was reconsidering representing my novel because her husband likes my work so much. I thought for awhile that might work. Now I don't think so. When an agent picks up writers because they like them, but not because they like the work, those writers wind up getting dropped. And if you think it's humiliating to be rejected by an agent, try being accepted but later dropped because the agent couldn't sell your writing.

Some of my *New York Times* bestselling author friends put in a word for me with agents they knew. Sometimes the agents rejected me. Sometimes I did the rejecting. I spent an entire evening with an agent introduced to me by a close writer friend. She was a Harvard graduate and she was selling. But she was born overseas, and I couldn't get the

hang of her accent. I figured if I had that much trouble understanding her in person, how would it work long distance?

At one conference last year, my pitch appointment got shifted due to the agent's slip up, and I was assigned to another. This agent—whom I'll call M—interrupted me, then shot-gunned me with questions. When it somehow came up that I teach pitching workshops, she laughed in my face. Since I got my appointment with her in a weird way and we were the only two in the pitching room, I suspect M thought I'd snuck in and she was going to make sure I never did so again.

The next pitching appointment I had was one table over from M. Since she had no one to talk to, she didn't even try to hide she was listening. I was nervous but went ahead anyway. The new agent liked my pitch and got right away what I was going for. And now he's representing me. I'm so grateful I didn't give up.

The bottom line? This isn't an easy process. It took me much longer to find fiction representation than nonfiction. It was tempting to make a compromise, but I didn't do it. And I'd advise you not to either. You may have to kiss a lot of frogs, but you'll find your prince—the right agent—if you'll stay with it.

—Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989. She has published more than 5,000 articles and seven books, and won numerous awards for her fiction and nonfiction. Linda's newest book is *Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band: Everything You Need to Know Before and After Surgery to Lose Weight Successfully (Da Capo, March 2008)*. Visit her Web site for details: www.LindaRohrbough.com. Her article, "Don't Be Conned by Agents", is available on the PPW Web site at: pikespeakwriters.com/media/Nov_04_5.pdf.

Conference Pitching

By Pam McCutcheon

Pitching your story to an editor or agent at the Pikes Peak Writers Conference doesn't have to be an ordeal. The past several years, we've held a Write Brain session in April in addition to a session at the PPWC

that not only explained how to make a pitch, but allowed you to practice that pitch.

This year, we're doing it a little differently. We'll still have a Write Brain session in April, but it will only explain how to pitch—no practice time. We'll repeat that session at the Thursday pre-conference. Then, conference attendees can practice their pitch Friday

afternoon in our new speed-pitching session.

Instead of breaking up into small groups as we've done at previous April Write Brains, we'll have a line-up of writers who are willing to listen to your pitch and give you feedback. Get in a line, pitch your story, get feedback. Then get back in line, move on to someone else, and try again!

We're excited about trying this new method, so let us know how it works!



Welcome to the Jungle

By F. P. Dorchak

It took me 42 years and 17 conferences to snag an agent, but I finally signed on with the Cherry Weiner Literary Agency this past December. How'd I do it?

You have to write something, and you have to pitch it. I've done this for 21 years. I've had varying degrees of success in the short field, but none in novel length. I've heard it all but mostly "not for me," or "don't know how to market." Perhaps that's evil agent-speak for "you suck," but I prefer to take those statements on face value, you know? Easier on the soul.

Okay, enough whining.

I went to the 2008 PPWC ready to rock. I had two manuscripts to push. One, my new UFO story; the other, a gritty supernatural tale. When the agent and editor list came out, I researched everyone. Found out who might best suit my work Attempted to psychically connect with each "target." Then I worked my pitch. To death. In my sleep. In restroom stalls. Memorized it until I bled. Then, as I have for the past umpteen years, I volunteered to help out at the conference. I've done everything from gophering to presenting, but I prefer chauffeuring—driving our VIPs to and from the airport. Besides the obvious, I like to learn about these VIPs as people.

So, you get these name cards, and you go to the airport and stand around like a totem

pole holding your sign up with your insanely huge (hopefully charming and sincere) grin. Usually I'm met by tired individuals who've already put in a full day's work. But this time I'm met by the whirling twister known as Cherry Weiner.

Oy!

It was like she'd just woken up and downed a pot of espresso! Mind you, at around 11 p.m.! That impressed me.

So, we're driving to the hotel, merrily talking away, me listening to her conversation and running my pitch over and over in my head. Don't get me wrong, I was listening to her every word—you certainly don't wanna sound like an insensitive jerk by answering "Sure! Love to!" to her statement about just having lost her beloved dog of 15 years—but I'm a whiz at multitasking. Then—I don't know exactly how she did it—she slyly and très slickly weasels into our conversation the question of what my book's about. It's not the standard, "Yo, Upstart, why am I here?," but it totally takes me off-guard and puts me at ease. Pitch flies out the window. Now, I'm just talking about my story, as if I were talking about someone else's book or movie.

The other thing I really like about Cherry is her flat-out spunk. Her energy. It's not that wired, ADD, caffeine-fueled fury that passes for lively vigor these days. She doesn't act jaded or disaffected. No, Cherry has an internal drive. A passion. She seems to really care about people and sincerely wants to find good stuff. I've met lots of agents and editors over the years, and I never hit it off with them like I did with her. We just got along great, and I hoped it wouldn't end too soon or ignominiously.

I've been dealing with Cherry since that conference, and I like how she worked with me along the way. She read, gave great comments, and took it back for another read. Then asked if I would be interested in taking her on.

But I wasn't through with her yet. No, not that easy.

You see, something many fail to realize first time in is that we—us Upstart Writers—are actually hiring an employee. Okay, it's actually more like we're both interviewing each other, but you get the point.

I e-mailed her a list (well, two lists) of questions. Twenty-four to be exact.

The reason for the e-mail was that I happened to be sick and didn't really want to be on the phone that long writing out her answers while dealing with bodily fluids and all. Cherry was so dang gracious (and I'd already asked her if an e-mail would be all right and explained why I was doing it), she responded THAT DAY. I, sick or no, immediately gave her a call.

The long and the short of it is...I like her experience, her responses to my grilling, her personality, and the way we get along. Now, the rubber meets the road—we'll see if she can convince others I'm worth the investment.

But none of this—none of it—would have been possible had I not attended the PPWC and gotten involved. Felt that "click" or "skip" that only occurs with live contact. It's good to get out of our comfort zones every now and then, out from behind our desks. Go meet other animals like ourselves—and, eventually, become part of that predatory food chain. That is the goal, right?

Welcome to the jungle, Baby.

Web Guide to Agent Research

By Fleur Bradley

Researching agents? Here are some helpful sites.

Agentquery.com: Large database of agents, including agency Web sites, contact info and preference, and projects represented. You can search by genre, contact preference, etc. Also has lots of info on submission etiquette and publishing houses (big and small). For industry latest, check out their blog roll—a great way to waste an afternoon.

Publishermarketplace.com: The place for all things publishing. Agents with pages

control their own content, so it's a good place to get a feel for their personalities. Sign up for the free daily newsletter to keep informed on publishing business deals and other industry news. A good source for the latest agency moves and start-ups. For a monthly fee, you get an expanded newsletter and access to their deals database.

Preditors and Editors: The watchdogs. Check the agent you're about to query here—if there's any dirt, these guys will have it. Remember: no agent at all is better than an agent who's a crook.

Litmatch.net: Another database of agents, including more international agencies. There's also a response time and submission tracker. You have to become a member, but it's free.

Guidetoliteraryagents.com: The Web site to go with the *Writer's Digest* print version. Sign up for their free e-mail newsletter, which features interviews and agent updates.

AAR: Association of Authors' Representatives. You can search their database.

Beware of the services and Web sites who charge to "help" you in your agent hunt. Don't pay! There is plenty of free information on the Web at the sites above.

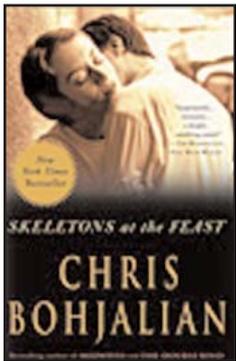
Interview with Chris Bohjalian

By Deb Courtney

With 11 successful novels under his belt, several of which were bestsellers, Chris Bohjalian no longer wonders if he is a professional writer.

"I've been full-time, nothing but a novelist for 16 to 17 years," he said in a recent phone interview. "But I didn't know for sure I would be a professional writer until after my third novel was published and was in production to be a Hallmark movie."

Indeed, having received more than 250 rejections before making his first sale, the articulate Vermont resident understands the persistence required to make the transition from writer to author.



"Plan A was not working, so I considered Plan B. Cosmo was still publishing fiction at that time. I gathered a lot of them and tried to understand what constituted Cosmo fiction—then wrote that."

For Bohjalian, that Cosmo sale started him down the right track. His 11th novel, *Skeletons at the Feast*, is just out in paperback. Perhaps his best known work, *Midwives*, was an Oprah Book Club pick and a Hallmark movie starring Sissy Spacek.

Has being a novelist been a breeze since that third book? Not so much. Though his work has been translated into 25 languages, and sold more than 3.5 million copies worldwide, writing is still a job, like any other.

"I don't have writers block," he says. "Not because I'm so talented. Because I found long ago that if a scene isn't working, it's because I don't know enough. So, I go speak with people, conduct whatever research is necessary."

Bohjalian starts his workday at 5:30-6 a.m. He writes fiction until 10:30-11 a.m. "On good days I focus on the work," he says. "No Facebook or e-mail." From around 10:30-2 p.m. he conducts research—maybe lunch with a victim's advocate, or lunch with an EMT, or simply reading secondary materials.

His writing day ends around 2:30-3 p.m.,

after which he goes to the gym or for a bike ride. In the evenings he catches up on e-mails, does interviews, and works on whatever digital marketing his books demand.

This scheduled approach works in part because his books have long lead-in periods, and typically are research-intensive.

"A book like *Midwives* gestated for six months before I wrote a single word—in that six months I did a lot of research. Interviewed moms and dads, midwives. Other books demand little before I start, but lots as the book moves along. An example would be *The Buffalo Soldier*. This is a 'he said, she said' story of loss and grief. As I was writing, it began to change a little, and I did more research into foster care and biracial adoptions."

While his process has remained much the same over the course of his career, Bohjalian has seen a number of changes in the publishing industry.

In 1988, when Bohjalian's first novel was published, his publisher put together signings, a small tour, took out ads in targeted publications, and sent out books for review, hoping it was widely and well-reviewed.

"In this day and age newspapers have shrunk so dramatically and readership has shrunk horrifically," he says. "You can't count on a tour to be especially helpful. Publishers are really trying to figure out how to sell books online. What is the best way to use the Internet? A lot of my time is spent online, publicizing my books."

"Here's the great gift of the digital age to the novelist: when I started 20 years ago, the author was a two-dimensional disembodied photo at the back of the book. Now, readers have the opportunity to connect with authors one-on-one on the Internet, and authors have the opportunity to connect with our readers in ways that were impossible 20 years ago."

He notes having 1,500 "friends" on Facebook, of whom he might personally know 100.

"It's one of the ways my life has changed. All of a sudden I am trying to become accessible to all these wonderful readers."

However, he does not confuse being accessible to readers with celebrity of any sort.

"If Angelina [Jolie] walks into a library, the earth is going to tremble. If Margaret Atwood walks into the Cineplex, no one will notice. Novelists aren't celebrities in the way we think of the term celebrity. There's nothing especially glamorous about who we are or what we do."

Writing for Bohjalian is far less about glamour and far more about hard work, and with no guaranteed results. "A book like *Skeletons* I knew right away the voice, but had no idea how it would end. The characters take me by the hand and lead me through the dark of the story."

With this process comes a certain amount of false starts and dead ends. He has at least five manuscripts between 20 and 500 pages that exist only in that form in his archives, because he realized that each project was not a book that needed to be finished. He is comfortable letting go.

"Entrepreneurs talk with great eloquence about having to fish or cut bait on a project. If it isn't working, let it go. Publishing a bad book does no one any good. Doesn't benefit readers, and denigrates my legacy—whatever that is."

While he is comfortable letting go of manuscripts, he is definitely interested in staying connected to his readers. You can find him on Facebook and MySpace and follow his exploits in small-town Vermont in his weekly column for the *Burlington Free Press* at www.burlingtonfreepress.com/section/COLUMNISTS03.



Facts About the Author

- Rejections before first sale: 250
- Title of an unsuccessful story: *The Corned Beef Who Talked to God*
- Favorite book not written by self: *The Reader* by Bernhard Schlink
- Pizza Topping: onion and peppers
- Vacation spot: Motisi, Italy
- Preferred physical activity: biking

Grammar Girl® Too Tense

Dear Grammar Girl,

I am in college, and every time I turn a research paper in, I get it back with the word “tense” written all over it. Every professor I ask to explain this to me gives me an evil look, and suggests I get help. Are they all in a bad mood? If so, can I, as a paying student, withhold some of their salary until they get an attitude adjustment?

*Carma,
Neirleigh University*

Dear Carma,

Without having more information than provided in your brief letter, I can only surmise a few things for which I may be able to offer some assistance.

1. Have your name changed immediately. It is possible that your name itself is causing flashbacks to sit-ins and other anti-war related demonstrations in which it is almost a sure bet your professors participated (I would guess they also participated in a few things that might cause flashbacks without any assistance or prompting from you, but that is a matter for Law Enforcement, not the Grammar Police). I suggest something innocuous, such as *Maisy*, or *Heather*, *Typhani*, which will still confuse your professors, but in a much more acceptable fashion.

2. As to the word “tense” written on your papers...all I can really do is explain the Theory of linear Time. Some scientists have theorized that time is linear in nature, which is to say that it has a starting point, and events occur along it, each subsequent to the previous, progressing in an orderly fashion right up to the present, which means the actual instance in which you are now living. Like this one. No, this one. Well, this one is probably...well, this is about where the theory

breaks down, but as I am merely a maven of grammar and not versed in things like *The Existence of ParaSeconds in a Sub Quantum World*, I shall leave that part up to the geeks. I mean scientists, of course.

What, you might ask, does the Theory of Linear Time have to do with “tense” being scrawled all over your papers? I’d really need to see the papers in question to give a specific answer, but I am thinking that you have either never learned the basics of Linear Time Theory, or have *Got Them All Screwed Up*.

In order to know which time-place along the linear continuum is being referenced by some third party (say, the writers of your course materials, or by your professor), there are certain code words grammarians have all agreed to. When these code words are used properly, the time-place is clear, as long as you, too, can interpret a code (which is the topic of my next book, *“The Sky is Falling: A Meta-linguistic Conversation Regarding The Mis- and Over-use of Seen in place of Saw, and the Para-quantum Ramifications Thereof*, co-authored by Steven Hawkings,” available at all major booksellers for \$29.95). The code, to be more explicative, is a method by which we use any form of the infinitive “to be,” with or without an added infinitive conjugated so as to be complementary to the selected form of “to be.” (This, by the way, has nothing to do with Hamlet, though if infinitives are giving you trouble, please refer back to my column on infinitives published in the January, February issue of this *NewsMag*).

Thus, let us look at an example or two, to give a better idea. Take, for instance, the “to be” form “am,” such as in “I am.” If we add the word “insane,” we have the simplest construction possible, “this is that,” implying no action, but merely a state of events

happening in the current instance on the time-place continuum.

Let’s complicate it a bit. “I am going insane.” Now, on the time place continuum, the first example suggests a status of events that has been completed at some time and still remains a constant. The second suggests an action which began sometime in the past, but which is not yet complete (i.e., I still have some sanity left). Tossing a new wrench in the works, let’s say “I went insane.” This clearly implies that in some time in the past, I began, went through, and finished the process known as going insane. There is some implication that I might still be insane, but is unclear to that point, and would require additional textual context to become defined. Now, I could say (and many have), that, “I am going to go insane.” This is a much more complex sentence structure, implying that at some unspecified time I will lose my marbles, and continue to lose my marbles until I have no marbles left to speak of (though if anyone takes my Aggie, I’ll hunt them down.)

What is probably happening with your papers is that you haven’t got a clue as to how the code words give you a defined time-place relationship in the reader writer contract. I have given some simple applications above; I expect it is your poorly executed attempts to use more complex forms that is making your professors tense.

Or, it could be that they are underpaid, untenured ivory-tower academics who hate their jobs and think their time would be better spent writing monographs on “The Anti-Feminist Implications of the Word Justice, as found in Shakespeare, Dickens and Dave Barry,” in which case it’s no wonder they’re tense.

Yours in good grammar, Grammar Girl

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

What Agents and Editors Want at the 2009 PPWC

Agent	Genre	Pitch Preference	Contact
Sandra Bond Bond Lit. Agency	Mystery, Juvenile, Literary Nonfiction	First five pages	www.publishers-marketplace.com/
Nathan Bransford Curtis Brown	Hist. Fiction, Literary, SF/F, Mystery, Christian, Sports, YA, Thrillers/Suspense, Short stories, Multi-cultural, Nonfiction		
Ginger Clark Curtis Brown	Science Fiction Fantasy	Attendee Preference	www.curtisbrown.com
Kirby Kim Endeavor	Children’s	First five pages	N/A
Kevan Lyon Dijkstra Lit. Agency	Women’s Fiction	First five pages	www.dijkstraagency.com/
Natanya Wheeler Lowenstein-Yost	Mystery	No Materials/ Verbal	www.lowenstein-yost.com/

Editor	Genre	Pitch Preference	Contact
Kate Harrison Penguin	YA, Children’s	First Page	www.us.penguin-group.com/
Jennifer Pooley, HarperCollins	Mainstream, Literary	First five pages	www.harpercollins.com
Annette Rogers, Poisoned Pen Press	Mystery Suspense	First 1-2 pages	www.poisoned-penpress.com
Shelly Shapiro, Random House	Science Fiction, Fantasy	First page	www.random-house.com
Leslie Wainger, Harlequin/Silhouette	Women’s Fiction	Verbal Pitch	www.lesliewainger-bookdoctor.com

January Write Brain

From Inspiration to Mainstream

With Donita K. Paul and Kacy Barnett-Gramckow

By Cathy Dilts

There is Christian fiction, and then there is fiction with a Christian worldview. Donita K. Paul and Kacy Barnett-Gramckow defined the difference between the two at the January Write Brain.

“Writers of inspirational fiction may not know where they fall at first,” Kacy said. “Are you a CBA (Christian Booksellers Association) writer, or a secular writer? Does your fiction belong in a Christian bookstore, a secular bookstore, or both?”

Kacy used Jan Karon’s *Mitford* series as an example. Karon could not find a Christian publisher because the inspirational message is submerged in the story. Yet Karon’s series about a small-town Episcopal priest became a best-seller in the secular market, which has fewer constraints on subject matter and language.

Both Kacy and Donita write for the CBA market, which follows specific guidelines for content and language. “Still, inspirational fiction should never be preachy,” Kacy said. “The message should be a natural part of the story.”

Kacy’s first publication came in a breakout devotional, *A Moment a Day*, followed by her historical fiction series, *The Genesis Trilogy*.

Donita is the award-winning author of *The DragonKeeper Chronicles*, a five-book Christian fantasy series, as well as multiple Christian romance novels and novellas.

Donita shared some of her trials and tribulations on the road to publication. “If anyone ever tells you your first book will never sell, they’re right!” She thanks God that her initial foray into the world of fiction writing—a romance novel—was never published.

Donita’s advice is to write what you enjoy reading. She began writing fantasy after her son gave her several novels by Robert Jordan. It was the first fantasy literature she’d read, and she was hooked. She said, “My first book, *Dragonspell*, was easy. It just poured out. The next four were harder and harder.”

Donita also spoke about the author-reader relationship. “The reader may be on a spiritual journey, and your book has an impact.”

Kacy began her writing career in non-fiction when her sister-in-law asked her to write a devotional. Her first published book paid her three copies, with the option to buy extra copies at a discount. Even though *A Moment a Day* sold 250,000 copies, which was phenomenal for a devotional, Kacy’s first fiction didn’t sell for several years.

Donita and Kacy were encouraging, in spite of the global economic downturn affecting the publishing industry. After

detailing the horror stories of authors having their series cut, and contracts being canceled, Donita and Kacy offered advice for writers looking to break in.

Kacy suggested that publishers are still looking for stories that present hope to the reader. Don’t write stories with downer endings. In hard times, people want upbeat, uplifting stories that leave the reader feeling good.

Donita told the audience to “take advantage of the lull.” Finish your book. Polish your work. Both agreed that you need to be ready when the market picks up again, because publishers “will want stuff fast.”

Whether you’re a secular writer with a Christian worldview, or a Christian writer fitting into the CBA mold, Donita and Kacy urged the audience to seek the rewards unique to inspirational writing. Kacy stated that knowing your book touches someone’s life “is more important than a royalty check.”

Donita and Kacy agree with C. S. Lewis who said, “We don’t need more Christian writers. We need more great writers who are Christian.”

Recommended books:

- *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Writing Christian Fiction* by Ron Benrey
- *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Christian Mysteries* by Ron Benrey
- *The Little Handbook to Perfecting the Art of Christian Writing: Getting Your Foot in the Publisher’s Door* by Leonard G. Goss and Don M. Aycock
- *The Key: How to Write Damn Good Fiction Using the Power of Myth* by James N. Frey



Beckyland 10,000 Hours

By Becky Clark

The November 24, 2008, issue of *Time Magazine* included an article about Malcolm Gladwell. He’s a brainiac who has written his third book, *Outliers*, which *Time* describes as “a frontal assault on the great American myth of the self-made man.” It’s a book about exceptional people who “operate at the extreme outer edge of what is statistically possible.”

He’s a remarkable man, and the book sounds like a good read. But I was stopped short when I read about Gladwell’s 10,000-Hour Rule. He says the key to success in any field takes simple practice. 10,000 hours of it. Twenty hours a week for 10 years, regardless of talent. (In case you think The Rule is all a bunch of hooy, there are studies documenting the truth of it.)

I read the paragraph three times because I’ve heard for many years—since I’ve become serious about writing—that only those who persevere will have a career as an author. I’ve

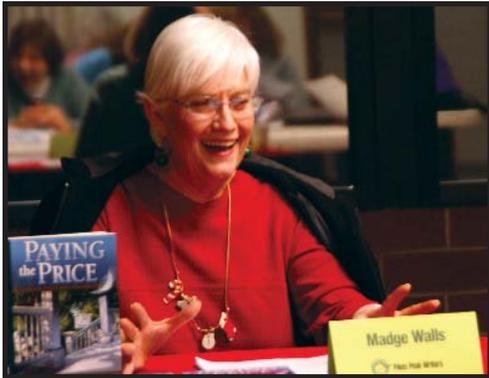
heard a million stories, give or take 200,000, about authors who took 10 years to become “overnight successes” because that’s the industry average. I know mediocre writers who are quite successful. Why? Because they don’t quit, and they learn everything there is to know about the publishing industry. I also know excellent, make-your-heart-leap-into-your-throat writers who will never get published. Why? Because they give up or refuse to learn about the industry.

Soon after I read about Malcolm Gladwell, I read an article in the December issue of *The Writer* about William McGonagall (1825-1902), the world’s worst poet, whose “confidence far surpassed his talent.” Chuck Leddy, the author of the article, maintains that “to persist in the face of hurled insults and howling laughter is a unique sort of genius that remains worthy of celebration.”

I wholeheartedly agree. In fact, if I had my

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December Write Brain Learning How to Kill



By: Kirk Farber

In December, Madge Walls and Beth Groundwater joined forces to present the Write Brain event “How to Have a Killer Book Signing.”

Madge is the author of *Paying the Price*, a novel set in Florida about a real estate deal gone bad. Beth is the author of the mystery *A Real Basket Case* and the upcoming *To Hell in a Handbasket*.

Right from the beginning, Madge and Beth let us know they are two very different personalities. Madge is a real estate agent, used to “making the sale” by good old-fashioned handshakes and conversation. And Beth is a self-described obsessive compulsive organizer due to her former career as a computer programmer. Both have found successful ways to have a killer book signing and were happy to share them with us.

Beth’s first bit of advice was—make your book signing an event. Ever the organizer, Beth’s first signing at a Barnes & Noble had a great turnout, because she literally called everyone she personally knew. She handed out 150 flyers. She brought cookies, and there happened to be live music there the same day. People were bustling about, which attracted

more people, and the buzz was undeniable.

Beth also recommended bringing in an interesting display or relevant costume to help draw attention. For example, a medieval suit of armor if it fits your book’s genre, which might also allow for fun photo opportunities.

Madge, on the other hand, prefers a more subtle approach. She said she likes to keep things less theatrical in favor of a simple soft-sell approach.

She shared with us her basic pitch which she’s found to be very effective. Simply stand next to your table of books (preferably positioned near the front door) and warmly greet customers. “Hi, I’m Madge Walls, and I’m signing books today. Would you like a book mark?” If they accept, you’re 95% there, because you’re giving them something of value, and they will inevitably ask “What’s your book about?” And you tell them, in a very brief way. “It’s about Hawaii,” Marge says. And now you’ve got something to talk about.

Something both Madge and Beth emphasized was that you must talk to people—get up and greet people. Sitting behind your table of books hoping for the best is not enough. And how important it is to have a sightline to the front door. You don’t want to be stuck in

a back corner where nobody can see you.

A surprising fact that both authors shared is how few copies you need to sell for it to be considered a success. Madge said if you sell 8-10 copies, the bookstores are very happy. And Beth added that if you sell 15, they will have you back again really quick! The point being that bookstores want to sell books too, and they don’t lose anything by having you come in for a signing.

Other points they covered included the difference between independent bookstores and chain bookstores, how to coach your family and friends to help you appear more popular while not getting in the way of sales, and the differences between a signing and a reading.

They also shared some important common sense business tips, like calling ahead frequently, all the way up to the day of the event, to make sure everyone knows to expect you.

Some other unique points I took away from the event:

- Madge: If it’s quiet or slow, meet with staff and give them your little pitch so they can repeat it when customers eventually come.
- Beth: Arrive 30 minutes early and talk with staff. Be friendly and approachable because (indies especially) will hand-sell copies for you.
- Have a few phrases or sayings prepared for autographs and keep a pad of paper handy, so you can spell names out before permanently inking them in the customer’s copy.
- Mind your manners. Soft selling is always more effective than hard selling and will get you invited back. Nobody likes an aggressive author.

Lastly, they both followed up with some great advice on your promotion timeline. Strike while the iron is hot, Madge emphasized, getting your promotion out as soon as possible after the publication date. Beth agreed, saying that the first six months is generally your window to have a positive effect on your book sales.

Huge thanks to Madge and Beth for sharing their wisdom and experiences. Hopefully, one day we can all have a Killer Book Signing!

Beckyland

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Wayback Machine all lubed and oiled, I’d buy Mr. McG a Guinness. He obviously dangled his legs off the cliff of talent, but it’s also clear he put in his 10,000 hours. Hey, it’s 2009 and he’s still the subject of magazine articles.

So I started looking at my own personal timeline. I’ve been serious about writing...and

let’s define that using Gladwell’s scale by saying it’s conscientious writing 20 hours a week...since about October 1999, to the best of my recollection. I never seem to do any writing on weekends, so 20 hours a week is four hours per day. If we count reading craft books, reading in our genre, critiquing others’ manuscripts, participating in critique groups, attending conferences, workshops and lectures...well, golly! I’m overdue for my breakout novel, because I’ve put in more than

10,000 hours. And I really hope that “regardless of talent” bit is true.

Even if the 10-year thing has to be part of the equation, I only have another 10 months or so to strengthen my book-signing hand.

Ready when you are, Universe!

Want to spend more time in BeckyLand? Visit Becky’s blog:
<http://beckyland.wordpress.com>.

Upcoming PPW Events

March, April

March Write Brain

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

Improvitational Writing

with Bonnie Hagan and Chris Mandeville

Looking to stoke your creative writing fires? You need the March Write Brain—a workshop on Improvisational Writing. We will discuss the guidelines for a successful improv writing experience and jump right into a series of exercises to get hands-on application. If you bring a notebook, a pen, and yourself, you'll have all you need to launch into a rich and rewarding writing event. If you're doubting that this method would work for you or if the very word "improvitational" gives you the willies, check out our top 10 reasons to attend this Write Brain.

10. A chance to win cool door prizes!
9. Conditions you to produce written material on demand.
8. Allows you to try out new characters, settings, or concepts to see if they work.
7. Rapidly builds your self-confidence.
6. Flexes and tones your writing muscle—a fabulous warm-up.
5. Enables you to explore backstory and delve deeper into your characters.
4. Taps into your vast inner well of creativity.
3. Arms you with techniques to push through Writer's Block.
2. Silences that wicked inner critic.
1. Combines fun, creativity, and productivity—you can't lose!



For the last six years, **Bonnie Hagan** has been a regular participant in a weekly improvisational writing group. In addition to leading improv from time to time, she has also conducted a workshop on the subject. The improv writing process has directly led to the creation of three of her current writing projects.

Bonnie is the proud mother of a YA urban fantasy manuscript and is raising three more novels, despite their rebellious tendencies. When not writing, Bonnie works with her local church, serves on the PPW Board of Directors, and enjoys the outdoor delights of her native Colorado.

10 Pikes Peak Writer



Chris Mandeville grew up in California and is a graduate of University of California, Berkeley. After marrying an Air Force Academy grad, having three kids, and being moved by the Air Force a half-dozen times, she now considers Colorado her permanent home. At present, Chris is Pikes Peak Writers' Immediate Past President and Community Ambassador, and is in her seventh year of service on the Board of Directors. She's taught writing workshops on a variety of subjects including The Writer's Journey, World-Building, Improv Writing, Tools for Character Building, and How to Pitch Your Manuscript. Chris' fantasy manuscript, a coming-of-age adventure that takes place in a mystical alternate reality based on Native American mythology, is currently under consideration as a trilogy. Meanwhile, she's completing a post-apocalyptic called *Seeds*.

April Write Brain

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

How to be a Pitch Perfect, Network Savy, "Send-it-to-me" Star: Your Guide to the PPW Conference

with Pam McCutcheon and Ron Heimbecher

Attending the PPW Conference this April? Not sure how to approach editors and agents? New at networking? Confused about what workshops are right for you? Don't miss this chance to hone your must-have conference skills! Our experts will teach you how to pitch your novel, wow an editor on the elevator with an amazing log line, and find your way around the many events and activities with the greatest of ease. Join us at the April Write Brain and make PPWC 2009 your best conference ever!



Pam McCutcheon is the author of two nonfiction books for writers, 10 novels, and two novellas under her own name, plus four fantasy short stories written as

Pamela Luzier and a young adult urban fantasy as Parker Blue. She has taught at numerous writing workshops and conferences and has served on the board of directors of three national and three local writing organizations. In addition, she has judged and/or administered many writing contests and worked as a freelance manuscript consultant. She is employed as an engineer at Fort Carson and is working on more books in her *Demon Underground* series.



Ron Heimbecher

owns ChaliceMedia LLC, specializing in emerging technology publications across nearly 50 Web sites. Writing as Ron Chalice, he has published an illustrated poetry collection and a suspense novella. In addition to corporate and public sector management careers, he has been a musician/composer, writer/director, and actor. Credits include situation comedy, long-running television ad campaigns, music videos, and leading roles in independent films. Ron is currently president of Pikes Peak Writers.

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

The meetings are held at Cottonwood Artists' School.

PLEASE NOTE: Their new address is 427 E. Colorado Ave. (East of Wahsach St. Park on the east side in the large parking lot. The workshops will be downstairs in Studio A.

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

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Sweet Success

Compiled by Janice Black



Frank Dorchak has found an agent! Even though her client list is so full that she is not taking on anyone else, Cherry Weiner could not bring herself to pass on

Dorchak's SF manuscript, *ERO* (as in "Exo-atmospheric Reconnaissance Organization"). The manuscript is about a marooned astronaut who gets caught up in the UFO conspiracy machine. It's cool and spooky and black ops and all. So is Dorchak's Web site: www.fpdorchak.com/.

Read more about Frank's great news—and how it all started with last year's PPWC—in the article on page 5 of this issue.



Laura E. Reeve:

Announcing! *Peacekeeper*, Ms. Reeve's first SF novel, is available in bookstores now. Her character, Ariane Kedros, piloted a ship on a mission that necessitated new identities and new

lives for all involved (herself included) for protection from retribution. Read about the background behind the book in an interview with Ms. Reeve posted at <http://us.penguin-group.com/static/pages/specialinterests/scifi/2008/reeve.html>.

More great news for Laura: *Peacekeeper* was the featured book at the Barnes & Noble booksigning in Lone Tree this past January.

After much toiling among the very small market of writers in this niche, **Cicily Janus** is having a great run of recent successes. First, she signed on as a regular contributor for *Downbeat Magazine*. This is the top magazine in the field of jazz journalism; it's a monthly print mag, and Ms. Janus will be a reviewer and features writer. She's terribly geeked about it all—her agent called it



Janus with the legendary saxophone player, Ravi Coltrane, son of John Coltrane.

platformarific. (As our president, Ron, who used to have a lot of Downbeats mixed in with Rolling Stone and Guitar Player says, "Is this like jazz freak's heaven or what? agent who can come up with a word like platformarific is bound to get you sold.")

Then, based on Janus's review of a band, Westword in Denver hired her as a first-call freelance writer for their online and print music columns.

While at the NAMM (Nat'l Association of Music Merchants) show in LA, Janus acquired a corporate sponsor for her book, *The New Face of Jazz*. Samson, a maker of handheld digital recording devices, wants to sponsor the huge interview campaign that Janus is doing for the book.

Finally, Janus has a debut review appearing in an upcoming issue of *The Sun*.



Carol Hightshoe: A new review has been posted on *Call of Chaos* with a four-star rating at Amazon. Harriet Klausner had some nice things to say: "This is an intriguing fantasy thriller

starring a fascinating lead protagonist who would find heaven to be hell. The story line is action-packed," and "fans will enjoy following her adventures across worlds as she is an engaging rebel without a cause."



Snipplits.com chose **Beth Groundwater's** holiday story, "Biscuit Connection," as their free story available for download to members for the week of December 23 to 29. The link is:

www.snipplits.com/.

"The House Beneath Delgany Street," from **Scott Brendel** has been published in a British anthology of slipstream stories titled *Subtle Edens*. The story took third place in the Short Story category in our own 2004 Paul Gillette Writing Contest.

Scott said, "The Pikes Peak Contest gave me good feedback and the confidence that my story was worthy of publication. It took a few years of searching for the right market (and 30 rejections), but the results were worth it."



Some good news from **Maggie Sefton** is that *Fleece Navidad*, the sixth and latest in the KellyFlynn knitting mysteries from Berkley Prime Crime, is now in bookstores and made #8 on the Barnes & Noble Bestsellers Hardcover Mystery list. It has inspired at least one PPW writer to pick up the old knitting needles again.

Who? We're excited that "Into the Deep", a short by one of our members, was accepted for publication in *Ray Gun Revival*, an anthology of thrilling tales from beyond the ether. Now all of us will be dying to check out this eZine (www.raygunrevival.com) to find out who you are.

A direct to consumer paperback edition of **Mike Befeler's** *Retirement Homes Are Murder* has been released by Worldwide Mysteries, a Harlequin imprint. Mike's second Paul Jacobson Geezer-lit Mystery, *Living With Your Kids Is Murder*, will appear in hardcover from Five Star in April and in a large print edition in July. Check out Mike's Blog: <http://mikebefeler.blogspot.com> and his Web site at www.mikebefeler.com.

Upcoming Events

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

Open Critique

Wednesday, March 25 and
April 29 at 6:30 p.m.

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

Open Critique guest for March is Jené Jackson, who is working on a manuscript of the daring things she's done in her life. The critiquer for April is Madge Walls, author of *Paying the Price*.

PPW Members Night

Monday, March 23 and April 27 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
 4164 Austin Bluffs Parkway #246
 Colorado Springs, CO 80918

Writer's Life: Fresh



By Fleur Bradley

It's been a year since I started writing this column. So I thought it was about time for me to pack up my pen and paper and give someone else a

turn at this column stuff. Time for a fresh perspective.

But when it came time to write this particular column, I was a little stumped. I could do a reflective thing, I thought. Or write something inspirational. I can do inspirational, if you give me a few cups of coffee.

But it's all been done. So I pondered some more. Took the dog for a walk. Then I thought: I'll share all the things I've learned as a writer. I'll be profound, helpful. So I

frowned for awhile, thinking up all these Important Things.

Thankfully (because who wants the frown lines?), it was time to teach my class: a novel writing workshop I mentor for a group of freshmen at my local high school. They're a fun bunch, and they were very patient while I told them all about writing, publishing, and how tough things are in this industry. I risked the lines and frowned some more, just to make sure they understood how serious I was.

**"... 'Plotting? Yeah!'
She even had a glint
in her eye."**

When I announced that we were going to start plotting our novels, everyone got excited. One of my students said, "Plotting? Yeah!" She even had a glint in her eye.

And I was immediately humbled, because my class of newbies had just taught me something (isn't that always how it works?). They taught me how important it is to stay excited. Keep it fresh. Have that glint in your eye.

It's easy to get caught up in the tough parts of the writing biz—I've been guilty of my share of whining about how hard things are in publishing, and how unfair. But when it comes down to it, I really love to write. I love getting lost in my story, love daydreaming about what could happen next. Love the surprise that comes with a new character, a new setting, a surprising plot turn.

So I'm abandoning the Things I Learned list. It was kind of boring anyway. Instead, I hope for all of you—

whether you're writing or editing—that you don't forget the exciting part about our jobs.

Keep that glint in your eye. Because we get to make stuff up for a living. Can you think of a cooler gig than that?

