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The Genre Hurdle

By Linda Rohrbough



Recently, a number of relatively new novelists I know had the following experiences: One pitched her book as fantasy and the agent said it didn't work for her as fantasy, but if certain changes were made, she could love it as a paranormal romance. Another pitched a book as mainstream and a rejection came back saying that, while the author was quite talented, the agent didn't represent romantic suspense.

It sounds as if the agents and authors are speaking two different languages, doesn't it? So what gives? There are several problems here. One, writers are encouraged to ignore genre when they start writing, and instead, to write the book they feel passionate about. Two, genre terminology is confusing. And three—fed by problems one and two—once the book of your heart is written, how do you figure out what genre to label it?

Starting with problem one, novelists often follow popular advice in answer to the question of genre choice. Here's an excerpt from Writers' Digest Web site question-and-answer archives: "Before looking into which markets are easiest to

break into, I would encourage you to first consider what you enjoy reading, and what you write well. I would encourage you first to write what you love, and write the best book you can, and worry about publication later." This is the "write the book of your heart" advice. The theory is if you have passion about the work, the reader will, also.

A number of successful authors followed a different career path. They chose a popular genre, established themselves, then moved to a more popular genre with the attention and cooperation of their agent and their publisher. For example, Michael Crichton wrote westerns under a pseudonym while at Harvard Medical School, then he made a splash with his first medical thriller *The Andromeda Strain*. He's been called the father of the techno-thriller genre and his most popular work in that genre is *Jurassic Park*.

The second problem is that genre is a moving target. While it may seem that genre lines are hard and unmoving, there's a lot of room for interpretation and opinion. New authors come along and create genre categories or subcategories. Helen Fielding is credited with creating chick lit, a subcategory

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Novelist Judith Guest Discusses Success

By Chris Olson

Before Judith Guest gained fame as the author of the *New York Times* best-selling novel *Ordinary People*, she was a teacher and a newspaper reporter. She still teaches, passing on encouraging words of wisdom to writers, in partnership with Rebecca Hill, her friend and writing collaborator on the novel *Killing Time in St. Cloud*.

Born in Detroit, Guest graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelor's degree in education. She currently divides her time between Minnesota and Michigan. Michigan is also the setting for her most recent novel, *The Tarnished Eye*, a suspense novel based on a real-life string of grisly murders.

I telephoned the author to ask if she would join the faculty for Pikes Peak Writers Conference, April 22-24. She had been warned through mutual friends that I planned to invite her, so she was prepared for my question. Of course she would come, she said, even though the conference happened to fall during a hectic week.

For this article, I interviewed Guest via e-mail, hoping to learn something new about the craft of writing. I was also dying to find out just why a nice woman from the Midwest is so obsessed with murder. She never answered that question during our interview, but she promised to talk about it during her keynote speech. (I should have known this would happen when I interviewed a suspense novelist.) Here's what we talked about in our interview.

Olson: Recently, *Slate* magazine picked you as one of its fifty prominent American novelists. Your books have been described as modern

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“If you would understand your own age, read the works of fiction produced in it. People in disguise speak freely.”

— Arthur Helps

From the Editor



This is the month we welcome hundreds of writers, agents, editors and publishers to the Pikes Peak Writers Conference. Past comments from those who attend many similar con-

ferences make us believe we have one of the best organized and most efficiently run writers' programs in the country. If you attend this year, take time to thank those in charge for the voluntary work they perform

in order to make it happen.

Our associate editor, Karen Jenista, is one of those planners. You'll find her at the pitch table upstairs. While she's been working to coordinate schedules for pitches, she took leave from editing the NewsMag for both the March and April/May issues. We missed her, but fortunately another volunteer, Susan Rust, came to the rescue. You'll remember Susan as the talented first editor

of the NewsMag. Can't tell you how much we appreciate your help, Susan.

We hope attendees will take time to have fun at the conference. Set goals for getting on a first-name basis with other writers, agents, editors, and publishers. It's a great way to further your career and to become part of the community of PPW.

Judith Guest

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classics. Yet, I understand writing was not your first career. You were a newspaper reporter and a teacher before you sold your first book. What made you decide to be a novelist?

Guest: Oh, I think I always wanted to be one, either published or unpublished, although I love teaching and still do it. But newspaper reporting was never my thing. It was too confining as far as length and timing was concerned. And I never liked telling tales on people who, many times, much preferred not being in the papers.

Olson: Your first book, *Ordinary People*, was discovered by a slush-pile editor at Viking. Can you tell me about that experience?

Guest: Yes. It was discovered by a young woman named Mimi Jones, who went on to be a fiction editor at *Redbook*. She now works for *Readers Digest* and is still a good friend of mine. She fished it out of the slush pile and pushed and pushed it for five months at Viking until she got a senior editor to read it. So I owe her a lot. And that's what I remind people who are trying to get their manuscripts read: If someone turns you down, remember that it's only one person. And one person's opinion isn't enough for you to throw your manuscript in a drawer and decide it's no good.

Olson: I think it is amazing to have a first book become so wildly successful. Your book got published without an agent—and the story gets even better. After your book was published, you received a letter from "R. Redford," but you didn't think that Robert Redford sent it until you opened it. What was it like to have him direct the movie version of *Ordinary People*?

Guest: It was simply the best there is. He's smart and nice and a good listener and a great director. He paid attention to my input.

And when we didn't agree, he explained his position—why he thought it would work—and I usually agreed with him.

Olson: I know you're working on a sequel to *Second Heaven* and a follow-up to *The Tarnished Eye*, centering on the character of Sheriff DeWitt. What makes DeWitt a character you want to keep writing about?

Guest: Hugh DeWitt was a character I needed in order to solve the murders in *The Tarnished Eye*, and after I invented him, I fell hard for him. He's funny and smart and compassionate and flawed—the kind of person I know I'd like—and I am as interested in how he's conducting his personal life as I am in having him solve crimes. I always like mysteries with more to them than "just figure out who murdered who and why," and this gives me a chance to tell someone else's personal story at the same time.

Olson: When you begin writing a novel, what do you think about? Do you write an outline, or do you let the story unfold as you tell it?

Guest: No, I never use an outline. I think if I did, I wouldn't need to write the novel. It unfolds as I work, and that's the way I like it to happen. Sort of like it does in real life.

Olson: You wrote the forward to Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones*. How has she influenced your writing?

Guest: Natalie's way of working is very freeing, and that's one of the most important tools one needs in order to write. If the editor in you is sitting too close and critiquing every sentence you put down, you'll never be able to write a decent sentence. I think that's what Natalie is best at teaching people.

Olson: You teach creative writing workshops with Rebecca Hill. You also are on the faculty of the 2005 PPWC. In your opinion, how can a writer's workshop help a writer?

Guest: For the above reason (Natalie's techniques of freeing up the writer in you) and for helping people with the "craft" of writing—

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Meet the Winners of PPW Contest

By Dawn Smit Miller

As contest coordinator for this year's Paul Gillette Memorial Writing Contest, I had the honor and pleasure of calling winners with the good news of their win—which led to some excellent conversations. Here is a bit of what I learned about some of these talented people.

Candace Paugh First place, Children's *Zeke in Command*

This is not Candace's first contest win. Last year, her entry *The Audacious Apothecary* placed first in the Young Adult category. She's currently working on her next draft of *Zeke*.

Karen Albright Lin First place, Creative Nonfiction "American Moon"

First place, Screenplay,
Knock on Wood

First place, Short Story
"Sushi in Bed"

Second place, Mainstream
Hot Flash

As this list shows, Karen is prolific, writes in many genres, and hopes to have an agent by the end of this year's conference. She's been a member of Pikes Peak Writers since its inception, attended many of its conferences, and entered and placed in four previous contests. She's also a world traveler and food scholar/cookbook author. She's earned numerous awards and is now seeking representation. (Agents, take note.)
www.karenalbrightlin.com

Lisa Stormes Hawker First Place, Mainstream *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*

I'll just quote her directly: "This is incredible. Thank you so much. This is one of the best days of my life!"

Lisa was at the conference two years ago and just loved it, but this is the first time she's entered the contest. All thanks to her writers' group, the Highland Ranch Fiction Writers.

Tanya Holmes First Place, Romance *Shadow of the Butcher Boy*

Tanya has just been named a finalist in the prestigious Romance Writers of America Golden Heart Contest for unpublished writers in the contemporary romance category. The GH contest maxed out this year with 1,000 entries, so their finalists, including our winner, are truly the *crème de la crème* of the unpublished entries.

Elizabeth Roadifer Second Place, Mystery/ Suspense/Intrigue *Oracle*

This is the first in a series of suspense novels that Elizabeth has completed. Yes, a series completed, which will hopefully impress agents. She has published numerous nonfiction articles in magazines and newspapers and was a market columnist for a writers' newsletter for several years.

Christopher Boswell Second Place, Mystery/ Suspense/Intrigue *White Bird*

The Friday before he got the good news, Chris was considering letting his novel-writing dream go in order to apply his energies and time to other ventures with more immediate feedback and gratification. However, Sunday found him sneaking peeks at his laptop and he finally caved in and wrote nine pages on his latest manuscript. Then the call came. Ah, encouragement.

Olgy Gary Second Place, Young Adult *Island of my Heart*

Olgy brought this manuscript with her to the 2004 conference and even got an agent to say, "Send it." Then she attended Donald Maass's workshop, "Writing the Breakout Novel," and went back to the drawing board. Though Olgy has been published in nonfiction, she wanted help with her first attempt at fiction writing and entered the contest to get feedback before she sent it to the waiting agent. She got that and more.

Ellen Campbell Third Place, Short Story "Fall Foliage Princess"

Ellen wrote this story in the winter of 2004 based on a festival in the town of Bedford in the Allegheny Mountains. As with many traditions, this one is fading away; 2004 was the last year the town crowned a fall foliage queen.

Judith Guest

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which is something that can be taught. How to create tension, how to pace your work, how to write in a way that stimulates others and makes them passionate about what it is that you're telling them. What can't be taught, of course, is the drive that makes writers do what they do; also, the level of endurance needed to complete a piece of

work. That, you either have inside you or you don't. I've run across many people in this world who are good writers, but they don't have this passion to record, to expound, to tell others what they've discovered. And that's okay, too. There isn't a published writer working today who just does it for fun. It's too hard a job to do it for fun.

Olson: One final question: What's something you wish you could impart to all writers?

Guest: I think the most important advice anyone can give a would-be writer is to

write. What else is there? How else do you learn to improve? Write, write, and then write some more. That's my best message.

—Chris Olson, a former book and magazine editor, is the 2005 PPWC faculty coordinator and member of PPW board of directors. She is the owner of COCO Media, a creative agency specializing in advertising and public relations. She may be reached at Chricococmedia.aol.com.

The Genre Hurdle

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of romance, with her novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Table Four on page five gives you the most commonly discussed genres and a definition for each. This is by no means an all-inclusive list.

Some genres fall into subcategories. For example, speculative fiction encompasses the genres of science fiction, fantasy and horror. Table One sidebar shows how genres stack up in sales in the overall marketplace. Clearly romance leads the pack with more than a billion dollars in sales every year.

Table One

Genre Popularity by Category

- **Romance:** 33.8 percent (over \$1 billion in sales annually)
- **Mystery:** 25.6 percent
- **Mainstream** (or General): 24.9 percent
- **Science Fiction:** 6 percent
- **Other Fiction:** 9.7 percent (western, adventure, male, history, movie tie-ins)*

* Source Romance Writers of America, Inc., www.rwanational.org

(Note: RWA is slicing up the genres to show a comparison with Romance. This is not intended to show how genres are divided.)

If you want to know more about a specific genre, there are places to do research. PPWC is a great place to begin. I've provided other resources, such as national groups that also have local chapters that focus on each genre listed in Table Two. However, you can learn a lot about a genre by perusing the Web site of the national group. Table Four is a list of books that deal with the boundaries and reader expectations for each genre in more detail.

If you completed a novel and are now in the "worry about publication later" phase of your career, your next step is to determine the genre. One way is to look at other novels similar to yours and determine their genre. Try not to pick the most popular best sellers because they have a tendency to be labeled mainstream. For example, Stephen King books are considered mainstream, but they're really horror. (By the way, I heard agent Don D'Auria, executive editor at Tor Books say at PPWC two years ago that if you ask people whether they read horror,

Table Two

National Organizations Devoted to Specific Genres with Web sites

- American Crime Writers League, www.acwl.org
- Horror Writers Association, www.horror.org
- Mystery Writers of America, www.mysterywriters.org
- National Association of Science Writers, www.nasw.org
- Romance Writers of America, www.rwanational.com
- Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, www.sfw.org
- Sisters in Crime, www.sistersincrime.org
- Western Writers of America, www.westernwriters.org
- Christian Writers Guild, www.christianwritersguild.com
- Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators, www.scbwi.org

they'll say no. But if you ask them if they read Stephen King, they'll say yes—hence the mainstream designation.)

It can be difficult to be objective about your own work. I have a friend who wrote an adult novel that, for me, is a cross between "Friends" and "The Fugitive," but the main characters are animals. An agent fell in love with the book, decided it was a children's title, and asked my friend to delete the sex scenes between the human characters. The agent has been unsuccessful in placing the book. Part of the problem may be that my friend compares her book to *Watership Down* in her cover letter. I told her an editor set up to expect *Watership Down* will be disappointed when reading this funny, fast-paced, but nonliterary book. It's been a year now and the latest in a stack of rejections came from an editor who liked the book but said it didn't match up to *Watership Down*. I have no doubt my friend's book will get published, but I think comparing her novel to a familiar book in another genre is causing problems.

Another tactic is to ask people who have experience in publishing to help you. Find authors who write books in the genre you hope to break into. But don't expect help for free. Try to arrange an exchange, perhaps trading an area of your expertise for their help. And don't ask for a read of the entire manuscript. Writing pros put together a one-to-five-page synopsis and ask a friend to read it. For this task, a five-page

synopsis is probably better, as it will provide a better feel for how you write in addition to giving more detail about your novel. This exercise will also force you to better define your story. If you need someone to read your book all the way through, form a small, supportive critique group and exchange manuscripts with the other novelists.

One way to look like a writer who just fell off the turnip truck is to claim your novel is a certain genre but then have a word count way outside the boundaries for that genre. An example would be pitching an eighty-thousand word mystery. Mysteries run about sixty thousand. Understand that word count is a marketing problem. A publisher can compensate for two thousand to three thousand words each side of sixty thousand by the font the book is printed in, margins size, and paper thickness. But word count affects the price that the market will bear and bookstore shelfspace. A novel that's too long is going to cost more and take up more shelfspace. On the other hand, a shorter work will have the reader wondering why they paid so much and why they're getting less of a read.

How do you know what word count is

Table Three

Books with Genre Information

- Writer's Market FAQs by Peter Rubie
- *20 Master Plots (And How to Build Them)* by Ronald B. Tobias
 - *The Marshal Plan for Novel Writing* by Evan Marshall
 - *Making Crime Pay: A Practical Guide to Mystery Writing* by Stephanie Bendel
 - *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* by Orson Scott Card
 - *Writing the Modern Mystery* by Barbara Norville
 - *How to Write Horror Fiction* by William Nolan
 - *How to Write Romances* by Phyllis Taylor Pianka
 - *How to Write Western Novels* by Matthew Braun
 - *How to Write Action Adventure Novels* by Michael Newton

expected? That requires research in the genre. The Internet is a great source for this type of research, especially in places where writers post questions and answers. Also, see Table Four on page five at the end of this article.

Samuel Johnson said, "What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure." So hang in there. You can do this.

Table Four

Fiction Genres with Suggested Word Counts*

ADVENTURE: Emphasis is on a plot centered on a chase or retrieval of some object from a hostile environment. **Popular author:** Clive Cussler. Word count: 100,000-140,000.

HISTORICAL: Emphasis is on the setting, which is true to some time in the past, usually 100 years ago or more. **Popular authors:** James Michener, Patrick O'Brien. Word count: 100,000-140,000.

INSPIRATIONAL: Fiction focused on the affect of God and religion on the characters; typical stories include spiritual themes (Christian), the mission of the church, religious prophecy, and spirituality in daily lives. **Popular authors:** Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Word count: 80,000-100,000.

JUVENILE: Fiction written for children and adolescents.

Subgenres:

Middle grade: Aimed at children ages 8-12, about others like themselves who are the hero and the main problem solver in the story. **Popular author:** Gary Paulsen. Word count: 10,000-15,000.

Picture books: Dominated by illustrations with typical themes of family, friendship, animals, and monsters. Aimed at ages birth-eight. **Popular authors:** Bernard Waber, Mem Fox. Word count: 200-800.

Young Adult: Novels written with teenagers as the focus of the story; typical stories deal with adolescent problems, angst, insecurities, and maturing. Aimed at ages 12 and up. **Popular authors:** Laurie Halse Anderson, Judy Blume. Word count: 35,000-50,000.

(Note: See www.scwbi.org for more information since juvenile titles tend to be based on page counts, not word counts, because these books are usually less than the standard 250 words to a page.)

LITERARY: Characterized by an eloquence of expression and a philosophical bent. Stories tend to be about human failings and interaction and are not plot driven. **Popular authors:** John Updike, Joyce Carol Oates. Word count: 100,000-120,000.

MAINSTREAM (GENERAL): Novels about ordinary life written in language that doesn't challenge the reader, novels aimed at

the broadest possible audience, and extremely popular novels. **Popular author:** Jan Karon. Word count: 80,000-120,000.

Subgenres:

Women's Fiction: Dealing with women's issues, like families, sister relationships, etc. **Popular authors:** Alice Walker, Rebecca Wells. Word count: 75,000-90,000.

Chick Lit: Modern, twenty- or thirty-something heroine looking for the perfect relationship, told usually in a sassy, irreverent voice. **Popular authors:** Helen Fielding, Jane Green, Sophie Kinsella. Word count: 65,000-95,000.

A whodunit. Centered on crime, usually murder, it's the author's job to create a puzzle for the reader to solve and not unveil the answer until the end. **Popular author:** Sue Grafton. Word count: 50,000-65,000.

Subgenres:

Cozy or Amateur Sleuth: A "traditional" mystery usually in a domestic setting with little violence shown to the reader and solved by an amateur sleuth or eccentric professional. **Popular authors:** Diane Mott Davidson, Agatha Christie. Word count: 60,000-90,000.

Hard-Boiled: Hero is usually a private detective (a loner) solving violent crimes, lots of action. **Popular author:** Robert Crais. Word count: 80,000-100,000

Police Procedural: A team of police officers solve case(s) emphasizing the technical aspects of investigation. Modern police procedurals often develop the characters and interactions of the police in great depth. **Popular author:** Ed McBain. Word count: 60,000-80,000

ROMANCE: A story about a woman and a man overcoming obstacles to end up happily together.

Subgenres:

Romantic Suspense: Mix of romance and suspense with emphasis on romance. **Popular authors:** Anne Solomon, Tami Hoag. Word count: 40,000-120,000.

Historical Romance: Mix of romance and historical with emphasis on romance. **Popular author:** Jodi Thomas. Word Count: 40,000-95,000.

Single Title Contemporary Romance: A romance set in a modern time with

everyday characters, but not part of a series. **Popular author:** Susan Elizabeth Phillips. Word count: 70,000-140,000.

Series Romance: Romance novels that together form a continuing story, such as the marriage of each brother in a family, and usually involves characters who have long-standing relationships. **Popular authors:** Nora Roberts, Joan Johnston. Word Count: 80,000-140,000

Futuristic/Time Travel/Paranormal: Mix of romance and future settings, time travel or paranormal with emphasis on romance. **Popular author:** Jayne Castle. Word count: 80,000-100,000.

Inspirational Romance: Mix of romance and inspirational with emphasis on romance. **Popular author:** Francine Rivers. Word count: 80,000-120,000.

Romantic Comedy: Mix of romance and comedy with emphasis on romance. **Popular authors:** Shari MacDonald, Jennifer Crusie. Word count: 40,000-70,000. (Note: See www.rwanational.com contest category and judging guidelines for more subgenre definitions and word counts.)

SUSPENSE: Plot centers around the commission of a crime and the protagonist struggles against a strong villain and crummy odds to win. **Popular authors:** Patricia Highsmith, Harlan Coben. Word count: 65,000-75,000.

SPECULATIVE FICTION: Fiction built around subjects or settings where there is speculation.

Subgenres:

Science Fiction: Characterized by an emphasis on the future and often on technology. **Popular author:** Frank Herbert. Word count: 80,000-120,000.

Fantasy: Stories with an emphasis on magic, imaginary things, and/or other worlds. **Popular author:** Anne McCaffrey. Word count: 75,000-100,000.

Horror: Dark stories designed to illicit fear, dread and sleepless nights in the reader. **Popular authors:** Stephen King, Dean Koontz. Word count: 100,000-120,000.

Paranormal: Supernatural abilities on the part of the characters, especially the protagonist. **Popular author:** Anne Rice. Word count: 80,000-120,000.

THRILLER: Like suspense, we see the villain at work and the protagonist is up against long odds, but the pace is break-neck

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PPW Revises Bylaws to Improve Operation

By Charles Rush

In January 2005, the Pikes Peak Writers board of directors passed a bylaws revision that changes the operational concept and organization of the Pikes Peak Writers. The catalyst for the changes was a general confusion regarding the organization, with the repeated question, "Who does what to whom?" This blurring of responsibilities goes back to our intentions when we incorporated as a nonprofit to have a board of directors separate from the officers of the corporation. That works fine when you have a mega-organization with lots of people. The concept gets cloudy when you have people who wear two hats—as both board members and officers. So here are the pertinent changes we have made:

The major revision is one of organization. There now is one voting organizational entity called the board of directors, which has a maximum of fifteen (15) voting members. Within the BOD, there are two categories of voting members: "officers" and "other board members." New BOD voting members are elected to two-year terms (normally) by the existing board at a September annual meeting. The bylaws specify that day-to-day business will be conducted by the officers of the corporation, with oversight by the BOD. The board of directors as a whole has the right to approve or disapprove, by majority vote, any

PPW BOARD OF DIRECTORS			
Voting Members		Nonvoting Members	
President	Laura Hayden (2005)	Admin. Dir.	Martha Lancaster (no term limit)
Vice President	Kirsten Akens (2006)	Board Liaison	Jimmie Butler (2006)
Secretary	Paul Carhart (2005)	Board Liaison	Karen Fox (2006)
Treasurer	Jennifer Webster-Valant (2005)	Board Liaison	Jan Jones (2006)
Past President	(unfilled)	Board Liaison	Jim Flynn (2006)
NewsMag Editor	Maxine Davenport (2005)	Contest Chair	Dawn Smit Miller (2005)
Workshop Dir.	Chris M. (2005)	Volunteer Coordinator and Publicity Coordinator	Deborah Courtney (2005)
PPWC 2005 Dir.	Kirsten Akens (2005)		
Board member	Chris Olson (2006)		
Board member	Charles Rush (2006)		

change in the affairs of the corporation. There are also ex-officio nonvoting members of the board of directors. The current board members are listed below with their term expiration dates.

The new PPW bylaws include other revisions as well. We changed a portion of our purpose statement to read "... to provide an educational forum for writers to study the craft of writing..." We wanted to recognize that PPW's focus is on writers. We added a semi-annual meeting of the BOD for April, normally coinciding with the annual Pikes Peak Writers Conference. Finally, and in sum, we gave the president much more authority to run the organization and to

appoint the staff he/she needs to assist in this effort.

The Pikes Peak Writers BOD firmly believes the new bylaws will produce a smoother management of the organization and further the goal of bringing our members more for their money.

A copy of the January 2005 bylaws will be available for attendees at the PPW 2005 conference. The general membership may get a copy online at www.ppwc.net.

—Charles Rush is immediate past vice president of PPW and member of the BOD. He directed the 2004 PPW conference. He writes historical fiction and is working on his third Civil War novel. He has published one novel and three short stories.

Member Meetings Combined with Write Brain Sessions

PPW has meetings and workshops throughout the year and now's your chance to find out what they're all about. On the second Tuesday of every month, we hold member meetings, featuring a variety of interactive activities, guest speakers, discussions, and networking. Our next meeting May 10, is our annual "open" meeting, free to members and nonmembers.

The May meeting and Write Brain Session are the perfect opportunity to learn what PPW membership has to offer. We'll discuss the Write Brain sessions and workshops scheduled for 2005, plus reveal exciting opportunities to get involved in the inner workings of PPWC 2006 and PPW year-

round events. The interactive Write Brain portion of the meeting features expert advice on how to make your submission shine and your query letter leap out of the slush pile.

All member meetings are held in the community room at the Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) Falcon Division, 7850 Goddard Street near Chapel Hills Mall—just south of I-25 and west of Academy Boulevard. (Visit www.PPWC.net for a map.) Please park on the street rather than in the CSPD parking lot. Bring photo identification—everyone must sign in and show an I.D. to enter the building. (Note: Other PPW events are held at different venues, so pay attention to announcements and check our Web site frequently for updates.)

UPCOMING MEETINGS

May 10, 6:30 p.m.
"Queries and Submissions," Open Meeting
CSPD Falcon Division

Discover how to make your query letters and submissions polished and professional. You won't want to miss the expert tips, especially if you've met an editor or agent at PPWC who wants to see your manuscript. This meeting is free and open to all. If you're a PPW member, bring a friend. If you're not a PPW member, come to find out what PPW membership has to offer.

June 14, 6:30 p.m.,
"Know Your Market," CSPD Falcon
Division

Writers are always told we should "know our market," but what does that mean? Why is it important? Come to this informative Write Brain session to find out whether your market is mainstream, fantasy, creative nonfiction, mystery, or some other genre. Free, for members only.

Write Brain Sessions Yield Gold Nuggets

There are times when lack of space forces us to leave out reports from past Write Brain sessions. This month's issue of the NewsMag is expanded to twelve pages, which allows us to remind you of two great sessions you may have missed.

Rainbow Edits

At the February 26 workshop, author and freelance editor Dawn Smit demonstrated her Rainbow Editing™ technique to more than thirty people, showing them on their own manuscripts how to find patterns and repeated words that invariably hide from the writer. Rainbow Editing addresses “to be” verbs, -ly adverbs, common adjectives, and other problematic patterns, with an emphasis on computer-aided editing.

Here are a few gold nuggets from the Write Brain Session:

- Use your word processing application's find-and-replace capabilities to turn every “to be” verb bold and red, or blue, or pink. Then you can see how they congregate.
- Does the Rainbow Edit leave your descriptive paragraphs full of color? Replace many of those “to be” verbs with more active verbs. “She was blonde” becomes “She pulled her hair into a ponytail, hunting the elusive blonde strands with her fingers.”
- See groupings of “to be” verbs in dialogue? No surprise there. Dialogue is the “to be” verb's natural habitat. We need them to make the dialogue sound normal. But do we need so many? Probably not.
- Repetition—whether of words, phrases, or even sentence structures—is only stylistic if it's deliberate. Make sure you know your patterns.

First Page Critique

Charles Kaine, editor and owner of Last Knight Publishing Company, presented a hands-on “first page critique” lesson last fall that bears repeating. Using an overhead projector, Kaine reviewed the first pages of members' manuscripts and let us hear what he was thinking as an editor who had just opened our submissions. We learned how and why most manuscripts land in the editor's slush pile. Kaine's advice included:

- Don't use so many pronouns and make sure the antecedent of your pronoun is clear. If you make several pronoun placement errors (or any other grammatical mistakes) on the first page, the editor will assume your entire manuscript is similarly infected and will not read past the first page. Kaine marks errors on the first page as he reads. He considers reading a full manuscript only if the first three pages are perfect.
- Show, don't tell. Kaine will not read past the first page if the writer dumps unnecessary background information into the middle of the action. For example, eliminate explanatory phrases a real character would not be thinking under the circumstances. Let the actor act, period.
- Master the use of point of view. Mistakes on the first page will assure the manuscript lands in the slush pile.
- Don't use the words “suddenly, now or then.” Re-write to create the image you seek to project.
- Don't use passive “had” constructions. Replace abstract “to be” verbs with active verbs. Use your computer to search for “am,” “is,” “was,” “were,” “be,” “being,” and “been.” Replace. [Editor's note: For help, see the article on Rainbow Editing in this issue of the NewsMag.]

Package Yourself as a Business

Debra Courtney-Bertha, Paul Carhart, and Susan Goldstein presented an outstanding, in-depth program at Colorado College on how to market a novel once it is published. These gold nuggets were gleaned from their lectures:

- Have a plan. Create a press kit by putting items in a three-ring binder.
- Use several sources to “build a buzz” about your book, including a professional looking logo, business cards, and letterhead stationary.
- Media coverage should include a basic press release, a 5x7 portrait, a one-page synopsis to give to reviewers, sample interview questions, copies of reviews, extra copies of your book to give to TV stations for giveaways, a track record of who you've contacted and the response.
- Become known by sitting on boards, going to conferences, and appearing on TV and radio programs that interview authors.
- Check community and church calendars for events where you might appear. Cooperate with other authors for joint book signings.
- Prepare a Web site, create a mailing list of people who hit the site, and send notices of events to them. Consider creating your own BLOG line.
- For interviews, practice in front of a mirror to eliminate bad mannerisms. Listen to yourself, relax, prepare concise, stock answers for questions you know you will be asked.
- Keep writing your next book while marketing this one.

PIKES PEAK WRITERS REGISTRATION FORM

Interested in joining us? If you'd like to become a member of the Pikes Peak Writers, just fill out this form and mail it to PPW, 4164 Austin Bluffs Parkway 246, Colorado Springs, CO 80918, along with your membership dues of \$25 for one year.

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Legal Writes



By **Brenda Speer, Esq.**

QUESTION: I'm writing about a woman who develops a relationship with her refrigerator (it can talk), which I identify as an Amana®. Is this okay?

ANSWER: You may use brand names or trademarks in fiction or nonfiction works, provided you use them properly. Before I explain proper usage, and to help you better understand the same, I'll digress and give you a brief primer on trademark law.

The purpose of a trademark is to indicate the source or origin of a good or service. A trademark may be a word, symbol, name, device, or any combination thereof. A trademark owner has the exclusive right to use his trademark in conjunction with his particular goods and services.

Only trademarks which are descriptive, suggestive, arbitrary, or fanciful (in order of increasing legal strength of a trademark) are entitled to legal protection. Generic terms (the word for the good or service itself) are not entitled to trademark protection, because these terms must remain available for all to use in identifying their goods or services. Examples of generic terms are telephone, car, dry-cleaning, etc.

A descriptive trademark describes the nature or quality of the goods or services and

is subject to limited legal protection, provided the owner can demonstrate the trademark has secondary meaning, because the public has come to identify the descriptive trademark with a particular source. An example of a descriptive trademark is Half Price Books® for retail store services featuring books.

A suggestive trademark suggests the nature or quality of the goods or services. Examples of suggestive trademarks are Coppertone® suntan oil, Edge® shaving cream and Amana appliances. Relevant trivia: Amana is an Old Testament word meaning "to remain faithful."

An arbitrary trademark applies a term with intrinsic meaning in a different context. Examples are Apple® computers and Palm® PDAs.

A fanciful trademark is coined for use as a trademark. Examples are Exxon® gasoline and Kodak® film.

It is the responsibility of the trademark owner to maintain and enforce his trademark rights. If he doesn't, he risks losing those rights. As a result, owners are particular as to how their trademarks are used, which is why proper use is important in your writing.

There are several factors for proper usage. First, a trademark should always be used as an adjective, never as a noun, verb, plural, or possessive. Trademarks are properly recited as: (Trademark) brand (good or service). In common parlance, the word "brand" may be dropped, but the trademark should still be paired with a noun. For example, you blow your nose into a Kleenex® brand tissue or wear a pair of Levi's® jeans. Conversely, you don't Rollerblade® in the park (misuse as a verb; proper use would be "skating with a pair of Rollerblade in-line skates"), and you don't make a Xerox® of a document (misuse as a noun; proper use would be "making a copy with a Xerox photocopier").

If it's not necessary to use a trademark, it is better to use the generic name. Simply let your heroine cry into a tissue.

Why do trademark owners care whether you use their trademark as an adjective? For an owner to allow otherwise creates the risk of the trademark becoming generic. The classic example of a trademark that became generic is aspirin. Although trademark misuse is common (such as the "No

Rollerblading On Sidewalk" sign posted in front of a local building), it's still not correct and not an excuse for you to use a trademark improperly. Trademark owners do public relations campaigns to educate consumers on proper use of their trademarks to combat genericide. Both Xerox Corporation and Kimberly-Clark Corporation (Kleenex) have conducted such campaigns.

Second, trademarks should be appropriately marked with notice of ownership with either ® (federal trademark registration), or with TM (common law use or state registration). It is acceptable to mark with notice upon the first use of the trademark in a work and to dispense with notice thereafter.

Third, proper acknowledgment of the owner of a trademark used in a work should also be given. This is usually done with a brief attribution and disclaimer statement in the work.

Now, to answer your particular question. Yes, you may indicate the refrigerator in question is an Amana, provided you use the trademark properly. If you mean to name the refrigerator character Amana (use as a proper noun), then this would not be proper, acceptable use and may be called into question by the trademark owner, Amana Company. Misuse as a proper noun would expose Amana Company to possible loss of trademark rights by genericide. However, if you were to obtain permission from Amana Company to use its trademark as the refrigerator character's name, then it would be retaining control over the use of its trademark, which is critical in the eyes of the law in deciding whether genericide has occurred.

A word to the wise: if it's crucial to the story to use a trademark, then prior to publication, a final, legal review is recommended to ensure proper and acceptable use of the trademark.

—Brenda Speer has been practicing law for more than fifteen years serving the arts, entertainment, and technology industries. You may contact her at (719) 381-1708 or brenda@blesspeer.com.

DISCLAIMER: Any material provided herein is for illustrative and educational purposes only and should not be relied upon as legal advice, should not be considered confidential and is not the basis of an attorney-client relationship. Any information and opinions provided by Brenda Speer are solely of her own efforts, making, and responsibility, and are not, nor do they reflect, the work or opinions of PPW.

Self-Editing 101

By Staff Writer

Submitting partials to editors, agents, or contests can be frustrating, maddening, nerve-wracking. How could they possibly evaluate your masterpiece in as few as twenty pages? Here's a scarier thought—it doesn't matter how many pages you send if they won't read past the first one. That's right—imagine you can submit only the first page.

Editors, agents, and judges will tick off numerous reasons a first page can land your manuscript in the slush pile. Point of view mistakes, failure to follow submission/format guidelines, clogging the action with back story, and passive voice are a few examples.

For the purposes of this self-editing column, though, I'll address the most basic element: grammar. The folks evaluating your writing note such mistakes and may assume that grammatical errors riddle the rest of the manuscript. Charles Kaine, editor and owner of Last Knight Publishing Company, told attendees of a Pikes Peak Writers' Write Brain workshop that if there are several mistakes on the first page, he won't read further. He won't consider reading a full manuscript unless the first three pages are perfect. His approach is not unique. Scary stuff.

Grammar rules seem to overwhelm the English language and I couldn't begin to cover the scads of possible missteps. However, there are some common errors and tricky instances that trip up even the best grammarians at times.

- End punctuation is often misused in connection with quotation marks. There are too many variations to list here. If you're not sure what goes inside, check a reliable grammar guide. [Editor's note: "An example here would be nice," said Susan Rust. Not, "An example here would be nice", said Susan Rust.]

- Apostrophes in regard to possessives give many of us headaches. Be aware of whether the noun is singular (boy's, boss's) or plural (boys', bosses') when placing that apostrophe. Note that singular nouns that end in -s almost always use -'s for the possessive. The rare exceptions will be explained in that decent grammar guide you own. And remember that not all plurals become plural with an -s, thus "women".

- Beware of confusing possessive pronouns and contractions.

its/it's

your/you're

whose/who's

Possessive pronouns do not require an apostrophe. If you can correctly replace the one word (you're) with the two (you are), then you need the contraction with its apostrophe.

- Pronouns cause their own trouble. Try to minimize use of pronouns, especially when you're working with more than one character of the same gender. Make sure your antecedents are clear.

Pay attention to case (subjective, objective, possessive) when choosing pronouns.

Subjective: John and he went to the store.

The designers of the building were John and she.

Objective: Mary drove John and them to the store.

Mary took a picture of him and me.

Possessive: My bike is newer than hers.

- Subject-verb agreement, according to C. Edward Good, author of *Who's (...oops!) Whose Grammar Book Is This Anyway?*, is the most prevalent grammatical mistake in the United States. He suggests three easy rules to ensure correct construction:

If the grammatical subject of a sentence is singular, its verb is singular.

If the grammatical subject is plural, its verb is plural.

The grammatical subject always determines the number of the verb.

The biggest trap here is what is referred to as a "false attraction," those nouns other than the subject that get in the way and confuse us.

Incorrect: The color of the walls have changed.

Correct: The color of the walls has changed.

Incorrect: The challenges of financing a college education overwhelms many families.

Correct: The challenges of financing a college education overwhelm many families.

Incorrect: The problem we encountered

were the abuses of power.

Correct: The problem we encountered was the abuses of power.

Be careful with collective nouns. Sometimes they take singular verbs, sometimes plural, depending on whether the group acts as a whole or as individuals. Refer to your grammar guide for those rules.

- Then there are, of course—beyond the ever problematic lie/lay—those pesky words that folks regularly mix up. For example:

1. **There** is a noun, pronoun, or adverb; **their** is a possessive pronoun; and **they're** is a contraction.

2. **Affect** most often as a verb, to influence; also a noun in psychology, feeling or emotion; and **effect**: most often a noun, "result;" also a verb, to bring about.

3. **Bring** means movement only from a farther place to nearer one; and **take** refers to any other movement.

4. **Farther** means additional distance; and **further** means additional time, amount, or other abstract matter.

5. **Fewer** refers to number of things that can be counted (plural nouns); **less** refers to amount—a quantity (singular nouns).

6. **That** always introduces restrictive clauses, and **which** can introduce either restrictive or nonrestrictive clauses; many writers reserve which for nonrestrictive clauses.

7. **Who** as a relative pronoun that refers to persons and animals with names; **which**, a relative pronoun that refers to animals and things, never people; **that** as a relative pronoun that refers to animals and things and occasionally persons when they are collective or anonymous.

8. **Than** is a conjunction used for comparisons, and **then** is an adverb indicating time.

This is just a sampling of the frequently seen mistaken identities. For all these—and the multitude of other grammatical sins—the best defense is a few good reference books. Besides a dictionary, keep handy a thorough grammar guide, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *Who's (...oops!) Whose Grammar Book Is This Anyway?*, or *The Little, Brown Handbook*. Refer to them as often as needed to solve your grammar weak spots.

The Grammatical Sabbatical

By Candace L. Paugh

You've just typed a period to the final sentence of your manuscript. Breathing a sigh of relief, you gaze at your magnum opus, triumphant. Yes, you're finally finished! Now you can ship the manuscript to a publisher or agent.

In a perfect world.

Unless God has gifted you with flawless writing, you've simply reached the next step toward publishing—often the most dreaded step: self-editing. I like to think of this long, tedious endeavor as my Grammatical Sabbatical. It sounds less intimidating, wouldn't you agree? Word processing has made editing much more efficient than in years past, but running the spell and grammar checks won't meet the standard in today's competitive market.

With the tools of craft books and critique groups, your writing will reach new heights.

Despite painstaking efforts, to some of us the Grammatical Sabbatical can seem an endless process. Thankfully, we have resources from which to draw. First, seek out fellow writers willing to help polish the manuscript. A critique group can catch overlooked errors and awkward phrases.

Many experienced writers have refined the editing process into an efficient system, and some have even written books to assist those who struggle. During my Grammatical Sabbaticals, I've studied several of these craft books. I consider them my Writer's Bibles. My most frequently referenced: a lexicon/dictionary, a thesaurus, and grammar and punctuation handbooks. I highly recommend *The Little Brown Handbook* by H. Ramsey Fowler/Jane Aaron.

A dictionary of quotations is useful from time to time, as is a baby name book if your characters' names don't seem to fit once they have developed. Another source for names is babynames.com, and when looking for foreign or unusual names, a Web site search using the name of the country and "names" usually does the trick. I also use

foreign dictionaries to create fictional names of locations.

I own books on formatting, technique, character development, plot development, genre, marketing, and synopsis. All right, I'll admit it. A few of these are borrowed, not owned. While still on the draft of my first book, I mooched from a good friend these helpful books: *Mother Miller's How to Write a Good Book* by Sasha Miller, *Writing the Fiction Synopsis* by Pam McCutcheon, *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy* by Orson Scott Card, and *The Writer's Digest Guide to Manuscript Formats*. Since then, my collection has grown to include *Beginnings, Middles & Ends* by Nancy Kress, *Writing the Breakout Novel* and the companion workbook by Donald Maass, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* by Lynne Truss, and *Rainbow Editing* by Dawn Smit. In addition, because I mainly write children's and young adult fiction, books like Orson Scott Card's *How to Write Science Fiction & Fantasy*, Lee Wyndham's *Writing for Children and Teenagers*, and Harold D. Underdown's and Lynne Rominger's *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Publishing Children's Books* line my shelves.

Attendees of the 2005 Pikes Peak Writers Conference will have several opportunities to purchase craft books at the bookstore. If you've found your Grammatical Sabbaticals in need of inspiration, take a few free moments to peruse the bookstore's selection and find one or two that suit your needs. I know I'll be spending some of my extra time and money there.

With the tools of craft books and critique groups, your writing will reach new heights. While it can be discouraging to discover all the mistakes in your writing, don't give up. Take breaks from your sabbaticals to do what you love: begin a new book, or simply jot down ideas for plots, names, places, or whatever comes to mind. Read for pleasure alone, and spend social time with family and friends before jumping back to the grinding board. Writing is hard work, and it's easy to get burned-out, but completing a manuscript worthy of submission is a reward in itself. With patience and perseverance, you can accomplish more than you ever believed possible. And someday, who knows—you may get that call you've been waiting for, and the world, for you at least, will be a little closer to perfect.

Fiction Genre

continued from page 5

and the stakes are people's lives.

Popular author: Patricia Cornwell.

Word count: 80,000-120,000.

Subgenres:

Medical Thriller: Thrillers where the crime is medical in nature.

Popular authors: Tess Gerritsen, Michael Crichton. Word count: 80,000-120,000.

Legal Thriller: Thrillers where the crime is legal in nature and involves lawyers and the courts. **Popular authors:** John Grisham, David Baldacci, Scott Turow. Word count: 80,000-120,000.

WESTERN: Emphasis is on the setting in the American West, usually in the past. **Popular authors:** Richard S. Wheeler, Elmer Kelton, Louis L'Amour. Word count: 65,000-75,000.

*Genres are in alphabetical order, not order of popularity. This is by no means a comprehensive list. And these are general definitions based on research; individual opinions of authors, agents, editors and publishers can and will vary.

*Author's acknowledgment: Many thanks go to Pam McCutcheon and Laura Hayden for their time and expertise in contributing to this table.

—Linda Rohrbough has been writing about the computer industry since 1989 with more than 5,000 articles and five books to her credit. Her work was honored three times by the Computer Press Association. She is working on her second techno-thriller. Email Linda at Linda@PCbios.com or visit her website www.PCbios.com.

The deadline for submitting copy for the July issue of Pikes Peak Writers Newsmagazine is June 1, 2005.

Sweet Success

PPWC Attendance and Contest Winning Lead to Success

You may recall the story of Giles Carwyn and Todd Fahnestock's book sale following their unscheduled meeting with an agent at last year's PPW conference. Their story caused us to seek other happy endings from our members. We discovered that PPW also launched writing careers for Jim Duffy and Jeff Shelby. Their personal sagas follow:

Paul Duffy



"In 2002, I entered my manuscript, *Sand of the Arena*, in your Paul Gillette Memorial Writing Contest. Because it was my first-ever novel, I was shocked to learn that it had placed third in the historical fiction category. The editor's critique, which came as part of the award, went very well. Patrick LoBrutto loved the first few chapters and asked to see the rest of the novel. He worked with me to fine-tune the manuscript. I mentioned to him that I had been getting the usual rejects from agents. He recommended an agent/friend of his, Loretta Barrett, who immediately signed me.

"A few months ago, while on vacation in Yellowstone National Park, I received the phone call that every aspiring author dreams about. Loretta called to inform me that not only did she receive an offer on my book, but the publisher, McBooks Press (a leading historical fiction press), wanted to sign me for a two-book deal. The publishing contract was negotiated and signed this week. *Sands of the Arena* will be on the

shelves in the fall of 2005. The publisher sees the book as the launch of a new historical adventure series set in ancient Rome, which we've titled *Gladiators of the Empire*. I'm now beginning work on book two, *The Battle for Rome*, to be released in the fall of 2006, in conjunction with the paperback version of book one.

"I think it's safe to say that the 2002 Pikes Peak conference will always hold a special place in my heart. Not only did I learn a great deal from your seminars, but it literally helped launch my writing career. I can't thank you enough."

Jeff Shelby. "My manuscript, *Caught in the Current*, won the Paul Gillette Memorial Contest mystery category in 2003. After winning and mentioning the award in my query letter, I started getting some requests to see the manuscript from agencies. I signed with my agent in June 2003. We worked on the manuscript over the summer and she sent it to eight houses in the middle of September. I signed a two-book deal with Dutton on October 7, 2003. The book, now titled, *Killer Swell: A Noah Braddock Mystery*, will be released in hardcover on June 27, 2005.

"Winning the Paul Gillette Memorial Contest really was the start to all of this. I was able to quit my job, stay home with my daughter, write full-time and now I'm doing surreal things like visiting New York City, planning a book tour, etc. Many thanks to PPW."

Beth Groundwater's humorous mystery short story "Flamingo Fatality" has been accepted into the *Manhattan Mysteries Anthology* to be published this fall, debuting at the Great Manhattan Mystery Conclave in Manhattan, Kansas, September 30. This is Groundwater's third short story publica-

tion. Her first published story "New Zealand" placed first in the Paul Gillette Memorial Contest in 2003 and was anthologized by the RMFW's *Dry Spell: Tales of Thirst and Longing*. Her second story winner "Global Domination" appears in April in the *Words out of the Flatlands* anthology from the Kansas Writers Association. Groundwater will be signing two of the anthologies at PPWC.

Bev Walton-Porter has signed a contract with F+W Publications, Inc. to publish her first book, *Sun Signs for Writers*, in August 2006. The book marries two unlikely subjects—astrology and writing—and will offer writer-sign profiles as well as tips for developing fictional characters according to each zodiac sign's characteristics. Walton-Porter is represented by the Meredith Bernstein Literary Agency in New York City.

F. P. (Frank) Dorchak has been



notified that his short story "Tick, Tick, Tick, Tock" will be published in *Black Sheep*, a metaphysical publication. Dorchak had a book signing for his novel *Sleepwalkers* at Beth Anne's Book Corner on April 9.

The novel is about journeys into probable realities and conscious dreams. Frank can be reached at oversoul1@juno.com.

Donnell Bell was a double finalist in the Colorado Romance Writers Heart of the Rockies contest in the romantic suspense category for her manuscripts *Walk Away Joe* and *Bad Timing*.



Opening remarks by Charles Rush, director of PPWC 2004

A Look Back at PPWC 2004



Winners of the 2004 Paul Gillette Writing Contest



Donald Maass with Laura Hayden, Charles Rush, and Karen Fox

OUT OF BOOK EXPERIENCE

Rainbow Editing

By Dawn Smit

Rainbow Editing introduces a colorful new weapon in the war against sloppy writing and the eternal editing cycle. Whether a writer is on the fourth, fourteenth, or fortieth draft, Rainbow Editing™ can find the unintentional patterns that bog down writing.

Using a slew of colors on the computer, writers will learn how to highlight patterns in their manuscripts so that they practically jump off the page. “To be” verbs, adverbs, adjectives—they’re all targeted and can be revised where necessary.

Dawn Smit is a writer and freelance editor who has been refining her Rainbow Editing™ techniques for many years. To find out more about her book, visit www.dawnsmit.com.

