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Speech by Award-Winning Historical Novelist Richard S. Wheeler at Whitefish, Montana

The following article is a continuation of a speech by award-winning historical novelist, Richard Wheeler, at a Whitefish, Montana writers conference.

PART 2

It is time, I think, to discard these distinctions between the two literary forms. And that is what I wish to bring to you this day. We in American literature are prisoners of some assumptions that aren't really valid. I believe this division of fiction into upper and lower tiers is bad for American literature, bad for publishers, bad for authors, bad for booksellers and wholesalers and the reading public. I believe this distinction between literary and popular fiction is a major reason that fiction is in decline and few important literary figures have emerged for the last several decades.

In a remarkable millennial essay written a few years ago, Jonathan Yardley, the Pulitzer Prize-winning critic of *The Washington Post*, whom I regard as the finest reviewer in the country, noted that American literature is in decline, and no truly grand novelists have emerged for several decades. He further noted that the only vitality and originality on the horizon currently rises from genre fiction, especially mysteries. Think about that.

Something is plenty wrong with American literature just now. I think I know what it is, and what you, who want a literary career, can do about it.

Above all, I want you to expand your horizons and set sail for something bigger and better than either of the current branches of fiction. I want you to write novels that are larger than anything being written today. I want you to write stories that embrace the best of both worlds. I want you to write stories that are accessible by everyone. Do you want to do something for American fiction? Then write novels that weld the broken pieces back together.

“What I propose to you is this: Consider writing stories that embody the best of both literary and commercial fiction.”

I am a veteran reader of genre fiction and have been skeptical of these distinctions for a long time. I am especially skeptical of the idea that literary fiction is innately superior to popular fiction. I have often found imaginative commercial novels that are

superbly crafted in all respects: lyrical language, vivid depictions of life, rich explorations of character, finely chiseled sentences that evoke scenes and moods and understandings. I've come to believe that these distinctions so loved by the critics simply fall apart.

I will surprise you now. I try not to write popular fiction and I try not to write literary fiction. I've written western novels that are published in genre western lines, historical novels published as general fiction, biographical novels also published as popular fiction, and even a contemporary novel set in the west. But not even my genre westerns, pure entertainment fiction you might suppose, really fall into the realm of commercial storytelling. I am always inserting the core values of literary fiction, such as rich characterization and a look at the meaning of what is transpiring, into these stories. Some of my historical novels have a theme, a sure mark of the literary novel. One of them, *Second Lives*, is about people who rebuild their ruined lives in Denver of the 1880s. It was published as “popular” fiction but is really “literary” fiction. It certainly doesn't belong on the western shelves along with Max Brand and Luke Short. Actually, not one of my longer historical novels falls into either

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“ I was not the most talented, not the most hard working, not the one to whom writing mattered most. I succeeded because I was the toughest. ”

— Karen Joy Fowler, *The New York Times*, June 14, 2004

From the Editor



After conference, two words appeared in my notes more than any other ones. And when I discussed the conference with my writing group we kept talking about the same two words. Passion and

Persistence.

In this issue, it's easy to see the passion of our writers. Many of them submitted articles within weeks of the conference and their excitement is evident in every word. But the true test is if you can carry that passion throughout the rest of

the year. Will you still be passionate about your writing projects after the words of our outstanding Keynote speakers are just good memories? I'm sure going to try.

It is hard work to be as disciplined as Eric Maisel suggested in his Keynote speech. Getting up an hour earlier every morning, seven days a week, and hitting the keys. Trying to retrain your fuzzy brain to a morning schedule armed only with a mug of coffee.

It is easy to talk about your work. And many of us spent the conference weekend doing just that. It is hard work to get it on paper and ready for submission. Again and again and again. That's where the persistence kicks in.

For much of my writing life, I have read about writing and I have a library of craft books to show for it. It wasn't until I stopped reading and started writing and

submitting that I saw success. This is not to suggest that reading about craft isn't important. I believe it is. But if you are procrastinating to avoid getting to the real work, how does it help you?

I like the title of Bruce Holland Rogers' book, *Word Work, Surviving and Thriving as a Writer*. And I also recommend the book. Rogers addresses the difficulties in just getting started, dealing with procrastination, *Writer's Block*, which he refers to as the mythical beast and many other writing-related insights. And he ends with several great chapters on celebrating success. The reward for all of your hard work. The reward for passion and persistence.

My advice—read the book at night and hit the keys in the morning.

Best Wishes,

Pat

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4164 Austin Bluffs Pkwy, #246
Colorado Springs, CO 80918
(719)531-5723
E-mail: info@ppwc.net
Web site: www.ppwc.net

PPW Officers

President

Chris Mandeville

Vice President

Beth Groundwater

Secretary

Chris Meyers

Treasurer

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Graphic Design

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The Robert Crais Transmogriifier

By Kenny Golde

"The detective novel is dead." So said the agents and publishers attempting to counsel Robert Crais when he was looking to make the switch from a successful television-writing career to a novelist. Twenty years and eleven acclaimed best-selling Elvis Cole novels later, we're all glad he ignored them. Crais says he made the switch for the freedom "to write what I want, the way I want to write it. To challenge myself in any way I choose." The challenge served him well.

Sitting with Robert Crais in the lobby of the hotel in Colorado Springs, I can't help wonder what he looked like when he was a young television writer. At 53, he is a tall, confident, good-looking man who seems to have remained healthy and happy as much from the artistic freedom that his choice has brought as the financial rewards that came with it. Those rewards did not come with any small risk. "Friends thought I was crazy to give up TV for books," he admits, "but novels were a broader canvas and always a dream."

Several times during the conference, Robert Crais used the word "transmogriification" to describe the writing process. It heralds back to the heyday of "Calvin and Hobbs," but for Crais it represents the process of transforming thoughts and emotions through writing, and it's the key to the success of his first Elvis Cole novel, *Monkey's Raincoat*. "In 1985, my father died in Louisiana. He and my mom had been married forty-five years. She took care of the house

and kids and he did the work and money. When she was left alone she had no life skills, couldn't write checks, didn't have credit. She was like a child. I became the parent and had to teach her how to do things she didn't know how to do to maintain herself." Crais put this topsy-turvy emotional crisis into the transmogrifier and crafted a story where Elvis Cole takes on a client in a similar situation, a woman with a child who wants to find her missing husband not so much out of the oft-seen needs of love or passion, but because she was dependent upon him for the basic needs of living. The novel's resolution has less to do with the case as it does with Cole helping the woman become self-sufficient. The relationship not only parallels the help that Crais gave to his own mother, but palpably highlights the fact that the missing husband in the real life story, his father, would never return.

Crais has written fourteen books since he was told the detective novel was dead, including his latest, *The Watchman*, the first Joe Pike novel for fans of the Elvis Cole universe. All owe their success to the transmogrifier, to Crais' ability to make his characters relatable by exploring his own real-life emotions and experiences. "As long as I continue to grow and change, my characters will continue to grow and change, so there will always be something fresh to write about." That said, he stands, slips on a pair of very cool, darkly tinted, aviator sunglasses that would make Tom Cruise jealous, and heads toward the banquet room to crown Laura Hayden "Queen of the PPWC."



Muse of the Month

As told to Chris Mandeville

Rub (pronounced "Roo") is a service dog and PPW/C mascot. He likes stories of all kinds, especially those involving good chase scenes. His favorite things are writers, children, his kitten Loki, and cheddar cheese.

I don't know about you, but I'm still recovering from the Pikes Peak Writers Conference. At PPWC I had tons of fun visiting with old friends and making new ones. In particular it was great hanging out with the beautiful, intelligent and fun Jodi Anderson, PPWC Emcee and my April Muse. Another highlight was spending time at the

pitch room snuggling with agents and editors, and getting pats "for good luck" from the pitchers. I also had a grand time in the Reality Track workshops where I got to pretend to be a police dog for about five seconds—Very Cool. The real police dog, Max, and I said hello when he was in his cruiser, but we couldn't play because, let's just say, playing with Max can be lethal. What a tough dude. Speaking of tough dudes, hanging out with tough guys Bob Crais and Jim Butcher was awesome. I think Jim's wife Shannon has a crush on me, but Jim doesn't seem to mind.

My only regret about PPWC 2007 is that I wasn't able to attend Jim's speech and howl my support when the awards were presented Saturday night. I'm still a puppy (yes, it's true), so I had to go home to bed. Those contest and award winners impress the heck out of me. Talk about inspiring! One winner in particular inspires me on an almost daily basis—

My muse for May is Laura Hayden— 2007 PPWC Volunteer of the Year award.

In addition to being my buddy, Laura is one heck of a volunteer, an impressive writer, and undisputed Queen of the Universe. The award she received was for "going above and beyond in service of PPWC," and that's an understatement. As Conference Director she somehow managed to choreograph all elements of the conference beautifully and

made it look easy. Plus she was the driving force in creating an exciting and memorable 15th anniversary celebration. Can I just say, she wows me?

Unfortunately for me I won't get to see Laura much this summer, but for good reason—she has a contract with Tekno Books for the first two books of a proposed Political Suspense series. The release of the first book, tentatively titled *Unto Caesar*, is set to coincide with the U.S. Primary elections, so Laura doesn't have time to play. The book sounds fascinating, even to an apolitical dog like me. It's about the rise of the first woman president from the unique perspective of her campaign manager who knows where all the bodies are buried, both figuratively and literally. Will someone please volunteer to read it to me when it comes out?

So to Laura Hayden, our first PPW President and the only Queen of the Universe, thanks for inspiring me to be the best pooch I can be. Congratulations and big puppy kisses for your PPWC Volunteer award, your new multi-book contract, and for being my Muse of the Month for May 2007.

Look for "Ruh's News" in the next issue about 2007 Pikes Peak Writers Volunteer of the Year: Dawn Smit Miller.

How to Give a Reading

With Ron Heimbecher, Barb Nickless and Todd Fahnestock

Article by Barb Dyess

"Okay. A wild-eyed rocker in a corduroy-patched jacket, a classy dame in gray jersey, and a pony-tailed earth-boy in a tunic all walk into a bar..."

"Whoa, hold on a sec!" (you say) "I thought I'd read about the March Write Brain Workshop here. You know... PPW's monthly meeting every third Tuesday at Cottonwood Artists' School? Educational? Fun? Drawings for prizes?"

"Yes. And so 'right' you are." (snickers at lame pun)

"Hee hee." (tries to snicker along) "So the Write Brain wasn't really in a bar..."

"Of course not. But you have to admit, it was a catchy hook of a first line." (winks)

I attend Write Brains regularly and they all have their merits. But I didn't expect to laugh

so much in the March meeting with

our three divergent and delightful presenters.

Ron Heimbecher served as our "wild-eyed rocker" who opened the night with "Exorcising the Stage Fright Demon"© Using quirky screen images, interactive handouts and his offbeat sense of humor, he gave professional framework for public speaking. He's sweated and fought stomach flutters on stage as a performing musician, been interviewed on television, and has ventured into another public arena, becoming an author. He fights the Demon each time he gets up before people. Even experienced actors like the great Helen Hayes fought the Demon, ensuring her "special buckets" were in place backstage before going on.

For a writer it may be especially difficult to

speaking or read one's work in public. After all, writing is a solitary activity. How can we turn the Demon into a sort-of friend?

A little nervousness can help you bring realism or emotion to your reading, especially with dialogue, action, or emotional scenes.

The Three P's

Passion. Hey, it's YOUR STUFF! How much more passionate can you get than to have these people show up to hear you read your work? Believe in your words and that you can tell the story like no one else.

Preparation. Know your material inside and out. In a reading, READ. Try to anticipate questions that an agent or editor or your audience might ask.

Practice. Reviewing the material silently is a start, but then comes the part you can't avoid: read it aloud. To living, breathing

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Wheeler Speech

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category, which may make my publishers and reviewers unhappy.

I should add that reviewers don't know how to review my novels because they fit no comfortable niche. But my refusal to live within literary boundaries has enabled me to write a better novel than if I had adhered to the literary forms that critics and publishers impose on us. I begin simply with the idea that a good novel embraces all of the best qualities of literary and commercial fiction, and avoids the weaknesses of either category. I focus on story, and don't care what kind of story or what pigeonhole it might fit into.

This also makes wholesalers and retailers unhappy. How do you categorize a Wheeler novel? Often I find my large-scale historical novels or biographical novels on the same shelves as Louis L'Amour, where they don't belong. I can't help that. As long as American literature remains self-imprisoned by unreal distinctions, and books are shelved according to ironclad categories, there is no help for it. But I think it has been worth the risk, worth the confusion, and I would not go back and write either commercial or literary fiction as they are currently defined. I didn't wholly succeed, and probably hurt my sales by pushing at boundaries and confounding publishing categories, but I have no regrets.

What I propose to you is this: Consider writing stories that embody the best of both literary and commercial fiction. Or to put it another way, see if you can write fiction that avoids the worst of each variety.

Now I will proceed to some of my other bugaboos. I keep coming across authors who ache to be trendy. They want to write a cutting-edge story that heads exactly in the direction of what the Germans call the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit or trend of the times. Perhaps they think this will win them more attention; more acclaim if they plug into the very thing everyone is absorbed with. I don't know. I do know that you are likely to be imitative if you write a trendy book. You will surrender your sovereignty, your uniqueness, if you want to be trendy. Let me put it this way: James Jones didn't write *From Here to Eternity* because he thought that military stories would be hot stuff in the wake of World War Two. He had a searing, unquenchable need to dramatize his brutal military life.

I worry about young people in these times because so many seem too eager to walk

lockstep with their crowd rather than grow in independence. If your wish is to be the acolyte at every altar, then choose another calling. If you are the sort who has a cell phone glued to your ear and a TV turned on wherever you are, you probably should choose another vocation.

You want to be a novelist. But why? Have you anything to say? The ultimate futility is to write when you have nothing to say.

I know of only two good reasons to write fiction. One is money. Those who say they don't write for money usually aren't able to sell what they write. If someone tells me he or she wants to write fiction to make a lot of money, I will think that is commendable, but naive. This writer will at least work on projects intended to please an editor and win a readership.

“Really good stories involve a dilemma that tests the character of the protagonist, that challenges the beliefs of people, that probes right and wrong, good and evil”

Publishable writing is wrought by hard work—often difficult, usually time-consuming. It requires a real mastery of art and craft that can't be won overnight. It takes trial and error. There will be disappointments. If you aspire to the role of a professional writer, your intent is to reach a wide audience, and the only way to do this is through publishing what you have written. But remember this: publishers of books and periodicals also aspire to success. Your publishers want your novel to sell well; that is how they make money, and how they pay you royalties. Sales are the acid test: if your book sells well, it usually means you have written something commendable. That is not always true; junk stories sometimes sell. But you would be wise to write for money and hope for good sales and to consider your literary vocation a business like any other business. A good sale says a great deal about the merit of your work.

You need to have something to say and something worth saying. If you tell me you simply want to be a writer but give me no rationale for your ambition, I will think your chances of success are poor. But if you tell me you are passionately interested in, say, the

history of Montana ranching, and want to get your ideas and research into readable book form, I will think your chances of becoming a writer are excellent.

How do you know whether you have anything to say? The best clue is your curiosity. If you are naturally curious about the world, curious about how things work, how things happen, how anything came into being, then the chances are that you have something within you to write about. If you absorb the world as it is and ask few questions and never let your mind roam toward answers, chances are you have little to say. If your mind is the sort that pursues questions, then your odds of becoming a successful writer are very good indeed.

Let me turn now to the single most important element of any novel. When people ask me what makes a good or even great novel, or a marketable novel, I tell them three things: story, story, and story. My idea of a great story may not be your idea of one so I won't list examples. Instead, I will suggest what great stories have within them. You have heard that stories must have conflict in them, but that old cliché is inadequate. Stories are about dilemma. Your protagonist has a dilemma to resolve, and sometimes that multiplies into many dilemmas. Really good stories involve a dilemma that tests the character of the protagonist, that challenges the beliefs of people, that probes right and wrong, good and evil. Because good stories pose dilemmas, they must also pose a resolution to the dilemma. In other words, a good novel has an ending, even if a tragic ending. Great stories are set in moral contexts; a story built on nihilist premises usually falls flat. Great stories are magical.

Here I can go no further. I can't tell you how to write great stories. I really don't know how myself. But your future as a novelist depends on your ability to spin a magical story. Not on your basic writing skills, not on your dialogue or characterization, not on your vocabulary, not on your sophistication. But on the magical power and grace of your stories.

To sum up: write something that won't fit into the pigeonholes of literature imposed by reviewers and critics. Write for money. Write because you have something to say, and not because you want to be a writer. Avoid the trendy, choosing instead to follow your own counsel. And focus on story above all else. None of this will guarantee you success, but all of it will improve your chances.

Thank you.

The Business of Writing

The Second Log Line

By Linda Rohrbough

I realize the conference is over. But what most writers don't know is agents and editors spend until the end of July trolling for new work they can hopefully present to the New York publishing market for the fall buying season that starts after Labor Day. That means even if you didn't get to talk to the agent or editor you wanted, you can still query them by mail. The second log line is a useful tool I've uncovered that no one else is talking about and here's how you can turn it to your advantage in this post-conference window of opportunity.

Let's back up a little and cover some ground for people who maybe didn't get to attend the conference or the pre-conference pitching workshops. Learning to talk about your work is an entirely different skill set than actually writing the work. It's the old "can't see the forest for the trees" syndrome. The best tool for this talent, known as pitching in the "biz," is the log line, a single sentence or two that gives the gist of your book's plot.

This one or two sentence overview describes the main part of the action or plot of the book. It consists of the following elements (but not necessarily in this order): hero, flaw, life-changing event, opponent, ally and opposition/battle. Here's an example from a movie:

A New York writer with obsessive-compulsive disorder ends up taking care of his gay neighbor's dog, a move that thrusts him into the world of relationships.

Like all good log lines, you probably know the movie title before I tell you, but here it is: *As Good As It Gets*. The **hero** is the NY writer; his **flaw** is the obsessive-compulsive disorder; the **life-changing event** is caring for the neighbor's dog; **opponent** is implied but it's the disorder and the gay neighbor; **ally** is the dog; and the **battle** is the hero's struggle with relationships.

Now that we're clear on the log line, let me explain the second log line. Once you've delivered your first log line, it's useful to have a second to reel them in while they're still digesting the first one. To make this happen, it's important to focus on the conflict in the

main part of the story. (Note I said the main part of the story. Now is not the time to drift off into subplots.)

Let me show you how Romance Writers Hall of Fame inductee Jodi Thomas works with a second log line. When she talks about *The Texan's Wager*, the first book in her wife lottery historical romance series, she starts with: *A man raised by a deaf mother who was killed by Indians puts his name in a wife lottery for one of three women*. If she's talking to you, Jodi then waits for you to respond, because speaking to someone you don't know about your work is not a monolog, it's a dialog.

Once she gets a response (usually "oh" or "really") she offers her second log line. *But later he wants to take his name out of the Sheriff's hat, because he realizes if he gets a wife, he'll have to talk to her*.

Gotcha. Notice how your mind races ahead, seeing possibilities for the story. The second log line has several of the same elements as the initial log line but with one critical difference: more emotion. And the conflict or obstacle is tied to the heightened emotional element.

“Learning to talk about your work is an entirely different skill set than actually writing the work.”

Let's go back to the movie *As Good As It Gets* and look at this second log line: *The writer has to enlist the help of his gay neighbor to win the woman he loves, a waitress in his favorite coffee shop who knows his compulsive side all too well*. Can you see how a second log line creates a compelling emotional element that's familiar enough to be understood, but it also creates curiosity?

If you've been paying attention, you've heard me say the secret to transitioning from a pre-published writer to a published writer is learning to talk in an interesting way about your work to people you don't know. When you're new to the game, those people will be agents and editors. But later the people you don't know will be potential book buyers:

from people at your book signing to people seeking a speaker for their next event.

In other words, this is a lifelong skill and a tool in your career arsenal. And now that the conference is over, those of you who were asked to send in manuscripts can make use of the concept of the second log line to add an interesting angle to your synopsis or cover letter. I'd suggest you find a writing buddy or a small group and practice on them until you get something compelling.

Of course, if you didn't get to talk to the agent or editor you'd hoped for, you can still make it to the top of the incoming mail with a query letter marked on the outside of the envelope with "Pikes Peak Writers Conference." Mention in the letter that while you didn't get a chance to talk to them, you found their listing in the conference brochure or what they said during a presentation attractive and then say why. You can't go wrong with a sincere compliment at this stage.

And that's the second log line and how to use it, in a nutshell. Remember, while it's harder than it looks, and requires a different set of skills than actually writing the book, this is a skill you'll be using your entire career. And there's no time like the present to start preparing for success.

—Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, and has more than 5,000 articles, seven books and three national awards for her work. Her agent sold her latest book to Marlowe & Company, a division of Avalon Publishing, for release in Fall 2007. Visit her Website: www.PCbios.com.



Agent Search 101

By Robin Searle

It may happen when you've finished your first book or your fifth, but at some point in your career you'll have a gut feeling that "this" is the one. After editing and polishing, the time comes for what many writers consider the toughest aspect of this business—marketing your book to agents.

Where do you start? According to *NYT* best-selling author Allison Brennan, it all begins with research. Lots of it. Brennan first looked for agents who were interested in romantic suspense or who represented authors she felt wrote in a similar tone to her. "I prioritized them into the 'A' list—top agents who had a solid list, recent sales, and either a bestselling author on their list or with a larger agency who had bestselling authors. And the 'B' list—agents with a good reputation who had recent sales but might be with a smaller agency, or a new agent with an established agency."

Brennan recommends two Web sites for doing preliminary research: Preditors and Editors at www.anotherealm.com/preditors and Agent Query at www.agentquery.com. Both sites provide information that can alert you to unscrupulous agents or those with complaints against them. She also searched the Internet, *Publishers Weekly*, and other trade magazines for any interviews or articles by agents she was interested in. She ended up with ten A list and ten B list agents to target.

Another excellent way to find an agent is through personal recommendations. That's why networking, both online and at confer-

ences, is so important. Lori Stacy, who writes historical romance as Lori Dillon, landed an agent when a published author friend recommended her agent take a look at Stacy's manuscript. The agent happened to be one of Stacy's top choices based on his reputation and the fact that many of his authors have been with him for 10 or more years.

Next comes more research to learn what to send as part of your query. Many agents have Web sites that explain their preferences. Other resources include Jeff Herman's *Guide to Book Publishers, Editors, and Literary Agents* and industry organizations such as Mystery Writers of America and Romance Writers of America. You'll find the submission requirements vary widely for different agents. Be sure to follow each agent's guidelines.

There's always the question among new writers on whether they should send one query at a time or multiple queries. After you've sent a few query letters out and waited, sometimes several months, for a reply, this is an easy question to answer. If you want an agent anytime soon, sending multiple queries to your target agents is the only way to go.

It's very scary to put your work out there and even harder when the rejections start pouring in. Beth Groundwater, local mystery author, tried to keep at least five queries out at a time. For every rejection she got, she immediately sent out another query. Set a similar goal for yourself so that you immediately take a positive action when you receive a rejection. In order to keep your spirits up during this process, find another writer who is actively querying and provide each other emotional support and encouragement.

Have a plan to stay organized. Set up a

spreadsheet or file system where you keep track of when you sent what to whom. Log in any rejections or requests along with any comments from the agents.

Your research will ultimately pay off when an offer of representation is made. If you've done a good job, you won't have to worry if the agent is reputable. You'll know, as Brennan did, that every agent she queried was one she'd be happy to have represent her. "The only unknown was the 'personal' factor," she said. Brennan had a list of questions to ask but feels the most important was whether the agent would read her other works in progress. Her agent was happy to read anything, even if it wasn't complete, and provide the career direction Brennan was looking for.

For Groundwater, talking one on one with her agent at a conference was a big deciding factor in her decision to accept his offer. From discussing career aspirations to communication styles, having a good conversation can be very revealing about how your relationship as agent and author will likely develop.

When you're finally ready to look for an agent, remember to do your research first, write the best query letter possible, follow the agency guidelines, keep track of your submissions, and think about what questions you want answered when you finally get that long awaited call.

Robin Searle has been writing for six years and is currently searching for an agent. After a stack of rejections, she recently received requests for two fulls and hopes her agent search will have a happy ending soon.

Editor's Note: On May 3rd, Robin Searle signed with an agent. Congrats, Robin!

Gazing at the Stars

By Kathleen Simpson

According to my horoscope, January 29th was an excellent day for creativity and success. With destiny as my guide, I wrote my first picture book manuscript. Months passed. My horoscope mentioned nothing about my publishing career. I longed for direction. A sign appeared. A neighbor asked me to sign up for a children's book writing class at a local college. The instructor asked us to submit a writing sample and I eagerly submitted a version of my manuscript.

"Needs more action, especially in the beginning to grab the reader's attention, needs more dialogue, is too preachy, consider joining a critique group to further develop the story."

And the instructor mentioned the PPWC as a good place to learn more, circulate with other writers, and get in touch with editors and critique groups.

I found PPW had an upcoming conference and they were offering scholarships. I submitted a one-page letter and a writing sample and was shocked to receive an e-mail saying that I had won.

Two weeks later I am off to the conference with two complete manuscripts. I am nervous, excited, and dreaming of destiny. The people at the check-in table are warm and welcoming, they give me my conference materials and direct me upstairs where I am reading with a group to an editor from Viking Books.

The session begins and the talented participants take turns reading. It is a remarkable process. They read and the editor instantly

critiques. "I think you need more character development, the voice is real, this is very good, keep working on it." At this point, I have changed my mind. I am way out of my league here. I no longer want destiny or success.

Most of the writers are reading chapters from their young adult manuscripts, incredible stuff, historical fiction, coming of age, mysteries. Before my turn, the editor takes a moment. She shares some personal information including the fact that she hates rhyming books. Hates rhyming books? I cannot do this. Somehow I manage to stand up. I consider switching to my non-rhyming story, but the editor is already scanning my hated rhyming manuscript. My hands are shaking so violently I can hardly read. The voice that comes from my throat is not mine.

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Gazing at the Stars

continued from previous page

The reading is a blur, I lose my place and skip a line, I hear some laughter, but mostly it feels as if I'm frozen in time. I would prefer to be standing naked in the room and have the editor critique my body. "The saddle bags need some work, breasts are small too and should be higher and well, your belly button seems to be frowning." The story I have created feels more personal and private than anything else about me.

When I finish reading, the people in the room are clapping. "This is exactly the kind of story I would take to an editor meeting. Have you published this?"

"No," I reply and manage to add, "you're more than welcome to take it to your next editor meeting." She suggests I work on the ending and hands me her business card.

I am walking on a cloud. I call everyone I know and tell them Viking wants my story and then I head to the bar for happy hour. I meet amazing writers. I decide to never return to my old life as a struggling single mom and saleswoman. I drink celebratory glasses of

wine with my new band of gypsy-writing friends. I spend the next two days listening to editor and agent panels and sessions on what to do when your book is published. I have a new sense of purpose and belonging.

When I return home I work on my ending. I stare at my story every day and scribble things on scraps of paper for weeks until I decide to just eliminate the ending. No ending is like a new ending, right? I send the manuscript to the editor and an agent and begin my next manuscript.

I hear nothing from the publisher. I get no direction from my horoscope. I produce no new manuscripts. I write on and recycle most of the paper in my house.

Finally, I hear back from Viking. They have taken the story to an editor meeting and rejected it, stating it may be better suited as children's poetry. I hear from the agent. She wants me to rewrite the story in prose. Not even agents like rhyming books.

I can do this. I am a writer.

Except who knew rhyming was a sickness. Almost immediately after being asked to write in prose, my brain can do nothing but rhyme. At first I think it's funny, but day after day, week after week, all I can do is rhyme. Dr.

Seuss has moved into my head and won't leave. Six months later, I have no prose book, no rhyming books, no book tour, and nothing in the stars.

It's clear my future is not in writing. I can't complete the simple exercise of a rewrite, and I never sent PPW the article I promised. I may never show my face there. Ditto for my agent. Unable to produce my rhyming book in prose, I am too embarrassed to contact her.

This past summer I Googled a writer from Boulder I had heard speak to see if she would be willing to mentor me. Much to my surprise, she was happy to meet me for coffee.

We have been meeting ever since, and although she claims she gets as much from our meetings as I do, I can't imagine why she keeps meeting me.

Now I get up almost every morning at 5:30 and write. I am learning to not open my e-mail during this time, check on work stuff, read my horoscope, or Google anyone. I am submitting my work to different editors with a range of successes.

And because I submitted this article to PPW, I can show my face there again. And I'm looking forward to it.

How to Give a Reading

continued from page 3

human beings. Even video yourself for true shock value, er, feedback.

- Drink room temp water to keep your throat from closing up.
- Don't overeat. Enough said.
- Dark clothing shows perspiration less than light colors.
- Don't hunch over or you'll compress your lungs.

Next up, our original classy dame, Barb Nickless, shared her unique take. Bring along a bio in case they ask. As a reminder on her notes, Barb draws "little eyes" for eye contact and "breathe!" Barb shared an article by Jim C. Hines called "Ten Tips for a Successful Reading." She found Hines' tips saved her from reinventing the wheel. She embellished the basics he gives with her own, funny experiences.

Publicity. Get friends, family, anyone supportive to attend your public readings. For one, you won't feel so alone—and just in case no one else shows, you'll have an audience! Two glasses of wine before a reading may be a bit much, however... .

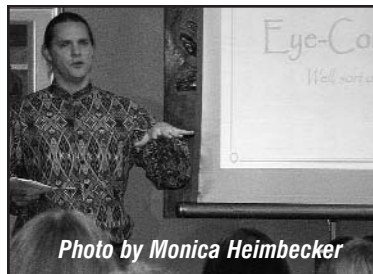
Check copyright details. If asked to sign an "Author's Agreement," even if it seems

innocent, look carefully at what they want "rights" to. Remember that if your work is made

available on the Internet, it's considered published. Read aloud to practice. Allow about one minute per printed page. Show up early to acquaint yourself with the place—especially the restrooms, just in case. Choose action or high-emotion scenes to read. If you can manage it, sex scenes are especially popular. Thank your audience and organizers. Then celebrate—you survived!

The "guy in the batik tunic" finished the workshop. Earthy but suave Todd Fahnestock claims he hated being in the limelight in high school, nearly hiding in the back of the room. Somewhere along the way, he discovered his other ego: a ham! With ease and the ability to laugh at himself, he took us through his own tips sheet.

Read at the right level. Too soft and you look inexperienced: people will sleep. Too loud and they will wince. Vary your pitch, intonation, and speed to match what you are



reading. Be unique and sell yourself. Live your characters as you read them. Don't overdo it, but talk like they would.

Focus inward, project outward. Read as if you were in the audience. Hook people with your interest, your passion. Give yourself the approval you need.

Eye contact...sort of. It's okay to look in their general direction. Create the illusion of connection without freaking yourself out by staring into eyes. Glance around to check reactions, if you can.

SLOW DOWN. Pace yourself, it is so easy to read too fast. Sell the piece.

Several PPW members were itching to read aloud. Todd gave constructive feedback. The grand finale gave us Todd reading from the opening chapter of his and partner Giles' second book in their fantasy trilogy, *Mistress of Winter*, to show how it's done.

Two guys, a dame, and room full of writers. Good stuff.

For a copy of Ron's handout, contact him at: ron@chalicemedia.com

See Jim's Web site at www.jimchines.com.

—Barb Dyess writes her version of reality from her home in the Springs and is published in creative nonfiction. Her first novel, a fantasy-romance-inspirational, is almost polished and ready to pitch to a live, breathing literary agent.

PPWC—A Beacon Like a Lighthouse Beam that Led Ships Through Hungry Currents of Doom

By Christine (“Sunny”) Weber,
Conference Attendee

2005: My beloved Australian Shepherd died in my arms after a year of round-the-clock nursing. Two weeks later, my diabetic Poodle mix passed away, alone in the middle of the night, unable to face life without him.

2006: My bi-lateral hip replacement revision surgery resulted in four complications, which required hospitalizations.

2007: In January my elderly Maltese dog died. One week later, my fourteen-year-old Manx cat suffered kidney failure.

In financial and emotional debt, sunk in a morass of depression, I gave up on my book after seven years of writing and twenty generic rejections. Each isolating snowfall, each short and dark day, sucked me deeper into a whirlpool of despair.

I fiddled on the Internet one February day in a desperate attempt to distract myself from self-pity. Never an adept “surfer,” I fell upon the Pikes Peak Writers’ site and the link for 2007’s conference. The conference became a beacon, like the lighthouse beam that led

ships through hungry currents of doom.

Myopically, I aimed my life at the weekend of April 20, 21, and 22nd. Feverishly, I prepared, anally placing each class, event, and set of downloaded instructions in folders with color-coded labels.

The entire conference weekend proved phenomenally positive, from the drive to the comfort of my enormous bed. I met warm, helpful people, and felt like I fit in immediately. I met writers I’d admired for years, learned what “log line” and “platform” meant, soaked up new information in classes, and ate like a pig.

Joy returned to my psyche when my Friday Read and Critique agent, Anita Kushen, liked my story and was kind enough to say so. My Saturday pitch with Krista Marino of Random House ended with her request for my manuscript. Laurie Wagner Buyer heaped compliments and sound advice on my needy soul during Sunday’s manuscript evaluation.

Officers and members of Pikes Peak Writers deluged me with beneficial introductions and ever-patient advice. Chris Mandeville led me to Olgy Gary who spent

an hour Friday evening in the hallway helping me understand how to pitch my book. I had such an adrenaline rush by then I stayed up late re-doing my pitch sheet (thank goodness I’d brought my laptop and printer with plenty of paper!) as per her instructions.

Chris Meyers arranged for me to sit next to Krista Marino for Saturday lunch and we compared notes on personal and professional items. PPW people I’d shared emails with prior to the conference introduced themselves.

I giggled when women of all ages at my Sunday lunch table began instant salivation when Robert Crais took the podium. I fell victim to the “ahhhh” factor when service dog Ruh begged for twenty bucks, and laughed myself silly when a fellow R&C companion shared three pages of his 1940’s style private investigator story complete with raspy voice and metaphors that compared a gorgeous woman to a snazzy car.

Home again Sunday night, I collapsed, drained of adrenaline and comprehensible cognitive function.

2008: I’ll be-e-e back!!!

The Writer’s Life—What Did I Do With That Spare Hour?

By Debbie Meldrum

“If I just had more time...”

Every writer says it. We all have our time claimed by some combination of family, job, friends, school, housework, volunteer work, etc. So where do you find time to write? It takes a little sleuthing and a lot of preparation.

First, look for those spare minutes. Try keeping track of your activities for a week. Just being aware of how you really spend your time can help you find things to change. Some possibilities are:

1. Cut out just one evening of TV and gain two to three hours of writing time.
2. Combine tasks wherever possible. Set aside one day a week to run errands, grocery shop and fill up the gas tank.
3. Reclaim your lunch hour. Pack your lunch and say you’re working through. Commandeer a conference room for privacy

or eat at a restaurant where you’re unlikely to be interrupted.

4. Ask for help. Family and friends may be able, and willing, to take on a few of “your” chores.

5. Get up an hour earlier or go to bed an hour later. It worked for Stephen King and John Grisham. Why not you?

6. Say “no.” This is a tough one, but it’s essential if you want more time to write. You don’t need to give a reason other than, “I have other plans.” It gets easier with practice.

7. Claim your writing time and protect it. Announce that you are writing from x-y and that you will be unavailable except in case of emergency. Define “emergency” so there isn’t any confusion. If you can’t make yourself off-limits at home, leave. Go to the library, a bookstore or a coffee shop.



Once you find some time and claim it as your own, then be prepared to use it. You may prefer to write for hours at a time, but for most of us those big chunks of free time are rare. If you’re ready to focus, you can make the most of fifteen minutes of down time.

“Prewrite” while you’re doing other things. What’s prewriting? Figuring out what goes next in your story. Plan what the next scene needs to accomplish. Listen to dialogue internally. Map out action.

You can use a notepad or a little recorder to make notes to yourself. There’s nothing worse than coming up with a great line of dialogue only to forget it when you sit down to write.

The best times for prewriting are when you’re doing other things that don’t take a lot of creative thought. Walking, grocery shopping, and cleaning house are all wonderful. Ignore the strange looks when you shout things like, “Nate can hide the body with duct tape!”

So go find those extra minutes, because now you’re ready to use them.

Have you tried looking behind the couch?

OUT OF BOOK EXPERIENCE

Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English

By Patricia T. O'Conner, Reviewed by Linda G. Crume

How can you not love a grammarian who allows us writers to begin a sentence with the word *and* and end it with a preposition. Next time you decide to curl up on the sofa with a good book, do your writing self a favor and make it a good grammar book. Good grammar book? Isn't that an oxymoron? Not if that book is Patricia T. O'Conner's *Woe Is I: The Grammarphobe's Guide to Better English in Plain English*.

The grammar stuff that stumps the beginning writer, its and it's, may be long behind you, but do you know when to use the word *lain*? When is *set*, not *sit*, the right word? Have you written your character as anxious when he is actually eager? The simple grammar rules we remember from junior high are just that, simple, and most of us easily follow them. But knowing when to follow, and when to break, the grammar rules can elevate your writing from unclear, predictable prose to logical, surprising, vivid narrative.

Chapters like Comma Sutra (The Joy of Punctuation), The Living Dead (Let Bygone Rules Be Gone), and Saying is Believing (How to Write What You Mean) teach us grammar lessons with a little tongue in cheek—Ms. O'Conner discusses clichés in Chapter 8, Death Sentence (Do Clichés Deserve to Die).

Tell the truth; don't you secretly wonder when it's grammatically correct to

use a semi-colon? And, aren't there times when, in those moments of grammatical insecurity, you lower your hand to the last row on your keyboard, close your eyes, and dash your finger onto the comma key grimacing with wonder if the comma really goes where you've put it? The guidance you'll find in *Woe Is I* will make you chuckle and—most importantly—help you understand why some of the rules are important. Are dashes appropriate forms of punctuation? See Chapter 6.

Chapter 9, The Living Dead, perhaps my favorite chapter, debunks the harshest grammarian police rules and encourages us scofflaws to split those infinitives and use a preposition to end a sentence. There are some rules that are meant to be played with (such as the taboo to begin a sentence with the word *there*). And, in bold defiance of those grammarian police, she tells us it's okay to start a sentence with the word *and*.

Sure, you need a good old-fashioned grammar tome (I could recommend several) when you just can't remember if your horse-thieving character who is connected to a large oak tree branch by a rope and noose has been hanged or hung. But if you're ready to make the resolution to finally, once and for all, learn that whose is possessive and who's is a contraction, Ms. O'Conner's book is for you.

Ms. O'Conner is a writer and former editor at the *New York Times* Book Review. In *Woe Is I*, she imparts an immense amount of writer-essential information condensed into a readable, 227 page volume. The book also includes an excellent glossary that clarifies all those words and phrases your seventh-grade English teacher introduced you to (I feel a bit freer using that preposition there). The index is thorough and easy-to-use. *Woe Is I* is also available (ah, split that infinitive right in half) in an expanded edition. Ms. O'Conner has two other books that writers may want to peruse (do you really know what peruse means?): *Words Fail Me: What Everyone Who Writes Should Know About Writing and You Send Me: Getting It Right When You Write Online*.

Ms. O'Conner does not just give us the rules, she helps us have fun and break the rules. She actually uses who when the rules dictate she use whom—then she flaunts it by telling us where in her book to find the rule she's breaking! While the lack of use of good grammar won't necessarily get your manuscript or article rejected, good grammar may get you the edge. Good writing is about nuance. The subtleties give your prose fluidity. The basics give your prose clarity. Following Ms. O'Conner's witty, clear guidance on grammar can give your narrative clarity.

Inspired by Clichés

In response to Laura Hayden's posting on clichés on the PPW loop, Ron Heimbecher, writing as Ron Lynch Chalice, submitted this humorous letter on his understanding of clichés.

As luck would have it, I stumbled across your posting on clichés in the nick of time. Being down in the dumps about my latest rejection, I fell off the wagon, and for all intents and purposes, I felt myself behind the eight ball. I'd been burning the candle at both ends on this project, hoping to get the call

that would make my day. Instead, I opened the envelope and extracted a single paragraph. I expected a form letter, the usual blarney; one that the agent had gotten down pat, honed from years of suffering and existential angst. But no, there was an unexpected twist.

This is business, not personal, but I wouldn't touch this piece with a ten foot pole. This artsy-fartsy same old story about a young and foolish yuppie and his search for the facts of life really gets my goat. Words fail me here, I find it hard to discuss the plot without gilding the lily; and it goes without saying that I could care less about your characters. Better safe than sorry, find

yourself a new career. Read my lips, this manuscript isn't worth the pain and suffering it takes to get through it.

The wolf was at my door. No sense in beating around the bush, I felt my career needed a horse of a different color. The morning after I had two choices. I could go for the hair of the dog, or I could put my nose to the grindstone, my shoulder to the wheel. That agent wasn't the only game in town. After all, that was only my second submission of the piece, and you know what they say—the third time is a charm.

Need more clichés? Check out <http://suspense.net> Left Brain/Right Brain Creativity Program.

Upcoming PPW Events

June, July

2007 Online Course

Getting to Know You: Learning the Ins and Outs of Your Characters

featuring Jodi Anderson

Six week course, starting June 4, 2007

Deadline to Register: June 3, 2007

As a writer, you want your reader to understand the motivations behind your characters and their choices. Until you know your characters, how can you help your reader to know them? Join us as we explore some of the techniques available to help you learn what makes your characters tick. In this class, your talents will be nurtured as you learn the essentials. This course is open to anyone with an interest in fiction writing. No previous fiction writing experience is required.

In this six-week class you will learn:

- 1) Why backstory is important and how to convince your character to reveal it to you.
- 2) How to provide each character with their own compelling traits. No one is perfect—expose their warts.
- 3) How to make certain your characters stay in character. Just say “NO” to overlap.
- 4) Why your character has motives. Help your readers to understand the intentions and choices of your characters.
- 5) What to do if they say, “Hey, you talk funny.” How dialogue can make, break, and define your character.
- 6) How to delve below the surface with your characters. Show their complexity through action, dialogue, and thoughts.

The PPW online classroom has several interactive components:

- Instructors post lectures once a week. You can read them online, print them, or download them at your convenience.
- Students post completed assignments for feedback and discussion by the instructor and class.
- Weekly chats allow your class to get together via our online PPW WriteChat.

Cost: Special introductory pricing for the new online course is \$85 for PPW members and \$100 for nonmembers

Online Course Registration: Class registration is now open.

Pay by PayPal or see registration form for info on how to pay by check or credit card.

- \$85 Class Registration Fee for PPW Members
- \$100 Class Registration Fee for non-members

Guest Instructor: Jodi Anderson: Jodi Anderson (aka Jodi Dawson) is a multi-published romance writer with books in eleven languages. Two of her books, *Her Secret Millionaire* and *Their Miracle Baby*, were finalists in the Romance Writers of America Golden Heart contest. Crediting the Pikes Peak Writers Conference and its prestigious Paul Gillette Writing Contest, as well as the Pikes Peak Romance Writers, with starting her on the path to publication, Jodi now writes novels for Harlequin, teaches full-time, presents workshops on writing, and uses any opportunity to gain control of the microphone in front of a captive audience.

June Write Brain

Writing a Life: The Art and Craft of Memoir

featuring Kathryn Black

Saturday, June 23 (note change in day of the week), 9:00 a.m.-Noon,

Location: TBD

Many writers, both fiction and nonfiction, come to a time in their careers when they want to write from their own experiences. But how does the writer find a focal point and a narrative in the unwieldy tale that is every life? In this workshop we'll examine what defines the memoir genre and take a look at how writers get ideas for their memoirs and how to hone those ideas. We'll also discuss the route a memoir takes from idea through book publication.

Kathryn Black: Kathryn Black is an essayist, lecturer and author. For her most recent book, *Mothering Without a Map: The Search for the Good Mother Within* (Viking Penguin), Kathryn received a recommendation from O: *The Oprah Magazine*, an award from the American Society of Journalists and Authors, and an appearance on the *Today* show. Her book *In the Shadow of Polio: A Personal and Social History* (Perseus) was named by the Boston Globe one of the best nonfiction books of 1996 and won the Colorado Book Award for literary nonfiction

and the June Roth Award for Health and Medical Writing. A former magazine editor, Kathryn has written essays and articles for many national publications including *Child, Psychotherapy Networker, House Beautiful, Yoga Journal, Woman's Day, Chicago Tribune, and McCall's*. She teaches memoir writing, consults with writers working on book proposals and conducts workshops based on *Mothering Without a Map*. In addition to her writing and speaking, Kathryn is a student working toward a PhD in clinical psychology at the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute.

July Write Brain

We Need to Talk: Writing Effective Dialogue

featuring Kay Bergstrom aka Cassie Miles
Tuesday, July 17, 6:30-8:30 p.m.,
Location: TBD

“Can I use dialogue to reveal plot, enhance character, establish the tone and control the pace of my novel?” asked the Writer. “It is so,” replied the Muse. “Should I beware of unintelligible dialect, chit-chat and the dreaded non sequitur?”

“Or,” said the Muse, “you could just shut up.” Let's talk about dialogue. Be prepared for exercises.

Kay Bergstrom: Kay Bergstrom aka Cassie Miles has sold over 50 novels of romance and suspense involving jewel heists, avenging angels, Elvis sightings, true love, serial killers and a rescue dog named Pookie. In addition to Harlequin Intrigue, Kay has published with Harlequin Temptation and American. She has also written for Berkley, Avon, Crown, Zebra, Kismet, Audio Entertainment and Shades of Love video. Her awards include Rocky Mountain Fiction Writer's Writer of the Year in 2003, the Jasmine Award, Colorado Romance Writer of the Year, Waldenbooks Best-seller List, *Affair D'Coeur* Top Ten, *Romantic Times* Career Achievement Award, RT Top Pick, and RT WISH Best Hero. Her teaching experience in creative writing ranges from college level classes to fifth grade show-and-tell. She's been making a living as a fiction writer for many years, including a long stint as a single mother raising two daughters, one of whom is in college. The other is a freelance copy editor/writer living in Brooklyn. Her recent titles are: *Protective Confinement* (Intrigue, 3-07), *Compromised Security* (Intrigue, 4-07) and *Navajo Echoes* (Intrigue, 7-07).

Meet the Winners—2007 Paul Gillette Writing Contest

By Dawn Smit Miller

So what would you submit if asked for a bio after placing in a writing contest? The helpful contest director explains, “Not a formal bio necessarily, just what you would like the reader to know about you. The length? Oh, something between 50 and 100 words.”

Would you a) send your standard bio, quickly and with relief because the bio is ready, it’s good, and it’s relevant; b) modify your standard bio to personalize it for the win; or c) start from scratch, using the inspiration of the moment to whip out a paragraph or two before the procrastination bug hits?

With this year’s Paul Gillette winners, I got to see great examples of all three. What a challenge it was to choose among them!

Elizabeth Ferber Reder Second Place, Mainstream *Shadow Dancing*

The letter informing me that I was a finalist in the Mainstream category arrived during a dry spell. I was discouraged, tired of spending time with myself, and seriously considered Improv Comedy as my next venture. The day the letter arrived, I sat down with an idea that had been rattling around, outed my comic voice for the new book, and made a promise to have a draft by year’s end.

Laura E. Reeve First Place, Science Fiction/ Fantasy/Horror *Crew Tempo*

Laura has learned, the slow way, that once you get an agent, you’re not necessarily on the smooth road to publication. She pitched her fantasy novel to Jennifer Jackson at the 2003 PPWC and after reviewing the manuscript, Jennifer offered to represent her. However, many rejections later, Jennifer delicately asked if she had any other material. Laura shelved her fantasies and finished *Crew Tempo*, a science fiction novel loosely based on her military experience escorting USSR weapons inspectors. Try, try, try again...

David Erickson Second Place, Mystery/Suspense/Intrigue, *The Hermit*

David is a former advertising copywriter, accustomed to writing little three and four-word sentences. He’s been working on *The*

Hermit for five years, and has rewritten it six or eight times. Maybe more.

He lives in Denver and is an avid backpacker. Inspiration for *The Hermit* came on a summer night when a crazed old mountain man with a rifle chased him through the trees. “I was just trying to find a campsite,” Dave says. “I shivered under a tree for three hours before I felt it was safe enough to go back and retrieve my backpack.”

Tiffany Yates First Place, Romance, Second Chances

I’m so thrilled to have placed second in the romance category of the Paul Gillette Writing Contest! Books have always held a magical appeal for me. They transport you to places you’ve never been to, introduce you to fascinating characters, and I’m a sucker for happy endings. The process of writing has that same magical appeal. I’ve been writing for several years and enjoy the challenge of learning the craft. I especially like writing about daily life in medieval times. I live in Colorado Springs with my own true love, my husband, and our two boys and two dogs.

Coleen DeGross First Place, Young Adult *Liberty Bells and the Suburb of Doom*

A New Jersey native, Coleen grew up sporting a sickly pallor due to all the time she spent indoors reading. Her parents used to throw her outside to play as punishment. She never imagined that her tortured school years as an uncoordinated, socially inept, mammarily stunted freak of nature held the key to her success. Her winning YA manuscript also placed first in the San Francisco Writers Contest in February. Coleen is represented by Caryn Wiseman of the Andrea Brown Literary Agency. She lives in Western Pennsylvania with her husband and two sons.

Cheryl M Reifsnyder First Place, Children’s *The Last Violin*

I live in Boulder, CO with my husband, two energetic boys, two bouncy dogs, and a small mammal menagerie. I wrote my first picture book at age four, but pursued work more practical than writing until about ten years ago. *The Last Violin* began as an experiment to see if I still loved to write. I did! Since then, I’ve had stories, articles, and

crafts published in magazines such as *Highlights for Children*, *Cricket*, and *Spider Magazine*. When not writing, I spend my time gardening and acting in “Rush Hour,” a church program for children and parents.

Debra S. Fromen Second Place, Historical Fiction, *The Serpent and the Cross*

The road to writing fiction is often long, bumpy and full of twisting turns. I come to it from a background with a B.A. in Foreign Languages and International Business, followed by nearly ten years of work in advertising. Then children arrived, and I found that by staying home I could return to my first love—reading. Reading to my children, and reading for pleasure, allowed me to see that writing is the best way to connect with all the things that matter in life and to express them back out into the world.

Sharon Gillespie Third Place, Historical Fiction *Captive*

Sharon holds a B.A. in English and history, a Master of Arts in English, and a Doctor of Jurisprudence. After a career as a practicing attorney, she became a novelist and screenwriter in Austin, Texas, where she teaches law part time.

She recently completed her first novel, *Captive*, an adaptation of her screenplay with the same name. The screenplay and novel have placed in two dozen competitions. Currently, Sharon is plotting her next novel, entitled *No Songbird Sings*, and researching *Three Red Blankets*, the sequel to *Captive*.

Ceil Boyles Second Place, Children’s *Sincerely Yours*

I feel extremely honored to have a third win in the Paul Gillette Contest, but I must confess, I’ll feel even more honored when I no longer qualify to enter the contest. In *Sincerely Yours*, an eleven-year-old girl goes to live with a grandfather she doesn’t know and who is losing his eyesight. I firmly believe that personal experience lends truth to your story. I watched my own father battle macular degeneration. While heart-wrenching in life, the experience was instrumental in understanding the challenges this condition poses. I think it’s important to let your reality bring life to your fiction.



PIKES PEAK WRITERS
4164 Austin Bluffs Parkway 246
Colorado Springs, CO 80918

Sweet Success

By Janice Black

Since the PPW Conference, many of us have been reformatting our synopses to conform to requested lengths, tweaking our characters, filling gaps in our plots and writing cover letters. By the next issue I'm sure I will be sifting through a stack of reports from PPW members and PPWC attendees whose manuscripts have been sold. So send your announcements to the loop and hopefully I'll be quick enough to snag them, or preferably email them directly to me at SweetSuccess@ppwc.net. And while you're at it, please attach a current photo.

For this issue, I have a collection of reports from some familiar writers and a new face. Read on, be encouraged, and celebrate the talent and diligence among us.

Catherine Leonard Dilts: (C.A. Dilts) Look for her article "The Accomplishment," in the March edition of the local running magazine, *The Long Run*.

Beth Groundwater: Beth Groundwater's
12 Pikes Peak Writer



debut mystery novel, *A Real Basket Case*, was released in hardcover on March 21st. Beth will be signing books and be part of a panel on Saturday, May 19th at Beth

Anne's Book Corner in Colorado Springs. She has many appearances scheduled throughout the summer at various locations. Visit her Web site at www.bethgroundwater.com for more details.

Pam McCutcheon: The board of Romance Writers of America has honored Pam with a National Service Award.



Another honor—Pam was asked to write an essay titled "Stephanie Plum's Trenton:

A Great Place for the Family?" The essay is included in the upcoming popular culture book from BenBella: *Perfectly Plum: On the Life, Loves and Other Disasters of Stephanie Plum, Trenton Bounty Hunter*. Watch for it in June of 2007. For more, visit her Web site at www.pammm.com.

Charles Rush announced that his historical novel, *One Turn of the Cards*, will be published July-August 2007. The story



centers on the Confederate Cavalry regiment, the Terry's Texas Rangers, during the Civil War. Charlie, former Director of the PPWC and Vice President of the PPW,

is currently on the PPW Board of Directors.

Maggie Sefton: The latest in Maggie



Sefton's best-selling Berkley Prime Crime mystery series, *A Killer Stitch*, was released in hardcover on May 1st.

Maggie will be signing books and presenting workshops at various Colorado locations as well as in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Milwaukee/Madison/Chicago, and Washington, DC areas throughout April, May, and June. Visit her Web site at www.maggiesefton.com for dates and locations.

Last but not least, myself: **Janice Black:** I



wrote, compiled and edited articles for *Speak Out*, a statewide newsletter put out by Peak Parent Center, advocates for people who have developmental disabilities.