

Pikes Peak Writer

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The Best of PPWC 2010

By Grant McKenzie

For 18 years, the Pikes Peak Writers Conference has provided an exceptional opportunity for writers from across the nation to hone their craft. This year's faculty and staff consistently exceeded attendees' expectations and put together one of the best conferences to date. As with any event of this magnitude, however, some things stood out as the best of the best.

Best Read & Critique: All writers need feedback, whether they want it or not. PPWC offers ample opportunity, in a variety of formats, for writers to have their opening pages reviewed by top agents, editors, and other published authors. While all these sessions provide great feedback, Caryn Wiseman's session stood out for this year's conference attendees.



Caryn, who is an agent with the Andrea Brown Literary Agency, gave the writers in her session a "much more accurate picture of how to build a great first page." She personalized "detailed feedback that varied for each writer." "Every word was educating" in this session, and attendees learned "how to start a book and really grab the reader's attention." Caryn's "good insights" and "great feedback" provided "a new perspective" for many writers.

Best Friday Session: The opportunity to pitch to agents and editors is a major draw to the PPWC. Scheduled pitches are usually on Saturday, so anything on Friday that helps writers prepare is bound to be a hit. Linda Rohrbough's "Second Log Line" presentation was no exception.



Linda gave attendees

"Courage!" and "A Plan!" for their upcoming pitches. Her presentation created "clarity for preparing for pitch sessions." Many attendees found the "Second Log Line" presentation "tremendously inspiring" and were "SO glad [they] came to this one." PPWC will "definitely bring her back again" for future conferences.

Best Pitch: Seventeen-year-old Kelsie attended PPWC for the first time and decided to pitch one of her



manuscripts. Although nervous going into the pitch session, Kelsie was on "cloud nine" and had "no memory" of the hour or so after the agent requested her manuscript. She credits this success to many things. First, she had a lot of pitch coaching, both in seminar and one-on-one. She specifically credits Linda Rohrbough's "Second Log Line" presentation as being significantly helpful. Kelsie also says she tries to stay focused on a project until it is complete before moving on to a new manuscript. That kind of dedication is what has led to three completed manuscripts. Finally, Kelsie enters as many contests as possible. She says the pressure of a deadline gives her the motivation she needs.

Best Saturday Session: PPWC was honored to welcome Donald Maass and Lisa Rector (Maass) this year. Donald gave the keynote address at Sunday brunch,



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"Whatever you do, or dream you can, begin it! For boldness has genius, power and magic in it."
— Goethe

From the Editor



“You’re not normal.”

Jodi Thomas reminded us of this in her Friday night keynote address at PPWC 2010. As writers, we’ve all had some sense of that fact our entire lives. So it’s likely that Mrs. Thomas’

proclamation was not news.

But here’s why it’s noteworthy: because we’re not normal, we understand each other. We need each other, and we feed off of each other’s similar abnormal-

ities. That’s a large part of what makes conference so invigorating, challenging, and vital to our writing lives.

It’s also what makes PPW membership so important—and, I hope, what makes the *NewsMag* useful and inspiring for its readers. We thrive when we’re encouraged in our common lifelong dream, given permission to pursue it, and equipped with the tools it takes to get us there.

If you were able to attend PPWC, in whole or in part, I know that it made a difference in your writing life. Perhaps you’re one step closer to landing an agent or editor after a triumph in the pitch room. Or you’re on your way to finishing and perfecting that manuscript because of the rich, dynamic content of the workshops. If

you’re already published, I’m sure you found the networking valuable, and learned about new ways to market and promote your work.

If you weren’t able to join us, our goal with this *NewsMag* is to pass on as much of the magic as we possibly can. In fact, there’s so much to share, you’ll be seeing conference-related articles in the late summer issue as well.

So, celebrate your state of not being normal. Let it work to your advantage in your work, and be glad you’re a part of this wonderful community of like-minded, slightly kooky story-tellers.

Happy writing!

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The Best of PPWC 2010

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followed by a four-hour workshop based on his book *The Fire in Fiction*. He also gave a Saturday workshop on creating tension in every level of your work.

Donald’s Saturday session succeeded in its goal of providing “pointers on how to ratchet up the dialogue/action on every page to create a real page-turner.” “It was the most educational and practical of all the lectures,” and was built upon “good audience participation.” Many attendees thought Donald’s presentation would “strengthen [their] fiction” and “improve [their] writing.” One attendee even decided to add the material generated from the workshop lessons to her nonfiction manuscript.

Best Sunday Session: Donald Maass and Lisa Rector make a great team at a conference like PPWC. Their combined consultation and review donated to the silent auction is just one of many examples of their teamwork. Although Donald’s Sunday workshop was an add-on to this year’s conference, Lisa’s Sunday workshop was part of the core conference package and was widely regarded as the best Sunday session.

Building a story can be difficult, but not nearly as difficult as beginning one. Lisa’s presentation on “The First Fifty Pages” was “one of the most informative of the weekend.” Attendees were most impressed with the applicability of the session. Lisa, in her “very positive and passionate” way, gave her audience “lots of thought-provoking

scenarios to apply to writing” and “ways to improve immediately.”

Other Bests from PPWC 2010

Best Queen of the Universe: Laura Hayden

Best Rivalry: Laura Hayden (Bama) & Tim Dorsey (Auburn)

Best Pitch Switcher: Bonnie Hagan

Best Pitch Apprentice: Jen LaPointe

Best Photographer: Jared Hagan

Best Silent Auctioneer: Chris Mandeville

Loudest Silent Auctioneer: Connie McKenzie

Best Pinball Impersonation: Kelsie Baltrush

Best Alter Ego: Trixie

Best Sashay: Todd Fahnestock



Tim Dorsey, Banquet Keynote, Chris Mandeville, and PPW's Best Mascot, Ruh.

Best Improv Story:
Corbin Waggoner
Best Mascot:
Ruh
Best Boot Sisters:
Terrie Wolf and Deb Courtney

Best of 2010

continued from page 2

Best Meal: Beef AND Chicken at Saturday Banquet

Best Elevator: 2

Now that the awards have been announced and the conference is done, I think we would all agree with the writer who reviewed Lisa Rector's presentation: "Outstanding! Can't wait to get back to writing."



What not to do with your pitch.



Best Sashay: Todd Fahnestock
But Donald Maass and Jodi Anderson
(aka Trixie) came in a close second.



Conference attendees enjoyed Saturday's book signing.

RIGHT:
Saturday lunch with Kelley Armstrong.



LEFT: Jodi Thomas brought the house down on Friday evening with her funny stories about breaking into writing.

Log Line Part Deux

By Mandy Houk

I had never even heard of a log line until my first Pikes Peak Writers Conference. Suddenly, after two years of writing and rewriting, revising and polishing, I was told to capture the essence of my work in one sentence of 25 words or less.

Let's just say I made good use of contractions.

Thanks to the coaching of Pam McCutcheon, Deb Courtney, and Chris Mandeville, I wound up with a log line that made the agent cock her head, say "Oooh," and ask for the full manuscript.

Since I had apparently mastered the log line, star pupil that I am (cough), I never gave much thought to how to talk *more* about my book. I had the 25-word mantra tucked away, ready to whip out at a moment's notice, preferably near an agent or editor with the power to change my life. What more could I possibly need?

And then I attended Linda Rohrbough's "Second Log Line" workshop at PPWC 2010. Not only did she have a quick trick for testing the logline I already had (thanks to my earlier coaches, it passed!). She also introduced a brand-new concept: *the second log line*. (Go ahead—cock your head and say "oooh.")

First, she took us through the log line test. Each log line should include the following elements, either explicitly or implied:

- Hero*
- Flaw*
- Life-Changing Event*
- Opponent*
- Ally*
- Battle*

To illustrate this, Linda used several popular movies and applied a log line to each. My favorite example should ring a bell (pun intended):

"A boxer with a loser mentality gets a chance to fight for the world title."

But let's carry the concept further—wouldn't you like to be able to concisely sum up the point of the book? The emotional pull? That's why we read, after all: to feel emotions—whether it's joy or sadness, fear or triumph.

To craft a second log line, Linda had us write out the following:

- Identify the character that arcs (changes)*
- Describe that arc*

The second log line that Linda crafted for the earlier example went like this:

"With the help of his girlfriend, he learns to see himself as a winner before he even enters the ring."

Not only do you know exactly what movie these log lines represent (do I really have to say?), but you can see how completely Linda captured the main character, the story, and even hinted at the theme. All in fifty words or less (thirty-five in this case).

If you'd like to spell out the theme, it should follow naturally from the second log line. "Love lifts us up," for this example.

The purpose and the importance of each separate log line was stated succinctly in Linda's workshop handout: "While the log line delivers the essentials of the plot, the second log line focuses on the character arc and delivers a more emotional element. A strong log line followed by a second log line takes into account the major change in the story, allows you to start a dialog, and creates interest and identification in the listener or reader."

Once you've mastered not only the log line but the second log line (let's call it the Linda Line, since she invented it), you're ready to talk about your book to anyone who'll listen. And if it's your dream agent, you might have to get ready for a victory run up those stairs at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. (If you haven't guessed it by now, you need to put *Rocky* on your Netflix queue, stat.)



By Linda Rohrbough

The Business of Writing

Self-Published Novelist Beats the Odds (via Book Clubs and Video Conferencing)

Every once in a while I hear a self-publishing story that gets my attention. Recently, I heard about an author who'd tried to get an agent for about five years, finally self-published her novel, then signed with an agent who took the book to auction. She landed a two-book hardcover deal that made *Publisher's Weekly*. Lots of people self-publish, so what got the attention of the agent and the publishers? I set up an interview to find out. The magic words: book clubs.

The author is Maryann McFadden (<http://www.MaryannMcFadden.com>) and her mainstream novel is *The Richest Season*. Maryann told me she had experience doing article work as a journalist. But when her husband lost his job, she quit writing and went into real estate for ten years.

When she decided to start writing again, she had an idea for a novel which took three and a half years to write. For five years Maryann sent the book to agents and publishers while she carried a three-ring binder with the printed pages for family and friends to read. Everyone was enthusiastic, except the agents and publishing houses. During that period, one agent picked her up, but couldn't make a living and quit.

When she turned fifty, Maryann decided to publish the book herself. She didn't want it to look like a typical POD (print on demand – the publishing industry's term for any book that's self-published), so she avoided Publish America or iUniverse and found a small press in California. She was picky about making sure the cover looked professional, and she had a line edit done of the manuscript. Contacting independent booksellers, she set up signings in a number of states over eight months, promoting heavily in the local media and donating as many as ten copies of the book for the bookstores to raffle, sell, or give away.

But the independents put her on to reader book clubs and that's where she made a splash. Her sister knew webcam technology (this was pre-Skype), so Maryann offered book

clubs either webcam meetings or phone interviews. Her first book club meeting took place via video at an independent bookstore in Florida with Maryann at her sister's Cape Cod cottage, where the opening of the book is set.

"The club had dinner and snacks that revolved around the book, including a chocolate turtle dessert. We toasted each other on-screen."

Word-of-mouth helped and in an eight-month period she did twenty-five independent bookstore signings on-site, and appearances with over forty reader book clubs. She made sure each book club appearance was coordinated through the independent booksellers.

Exhausted, but with two thousand books sold, she went home with the advice from a bookstore owner still ringing in her ears: start writing again. She did, and also got restarted on the agent route. "I felt like I'd proven my book had a market."

Several agents did contact Maryann. "One wanted me to add humor and make it Chick Lit. Another wanted me to pull a character entirely out." Agent Victoria Sanders was interested and asked for a six-week exclusive to consider the book. Of course, she ended up taking two months, then asked Maryann to add some material to the beginning. Maryann already had the same feedback from the book clubs, so she agreed to the changes, and Sanders not only represented Maryann but took the book to auction.

The suddenness of it felt surreal to Maryann, even though this was exactly what she'd been working for. The agent sent out copies to publishing houses on a Thursday in the Spring of 2007 and they had several offers on Tuesday when the auction rolled around. Hyperion won.

The trade paperback version of *The Richest Season* is out now, along with Maryann's second hardcover, *So Happy Together*. Her first book has been translated into Italian and German, and a Spanish translation is in the works. Plus she's under contract for a third book.

Believing in herself was paramount. "I can't tell you how close I came to giving up. When I wrote my first book, I had no vacations." When Maryann sent the

manuscript out, "The responses got me so excited and the rejections got me so frustrated. I'd go to book signings, buy the author's book and give them a copy of mine, asking them to read it. My secret dream was that someone would notice it."

When none of that worked, Maryann took stock. "I had to ask myself, what did I really want?" One writer's blog said she won the "literary lottery." But Maryann laughs and says it was all about hard work. Fortunately, it's hard work any writer—self-published or not—can learn from.

—Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, and has more than 5,000 articles, seven books, and numerous awards for her fiction and non-fiction. Linda's latest book is *Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band (Da Capo Lifelong Books, March 2008)*. Visit Linda's Web site: www.LindaRohrbough.com.

Resources

1. Detailed instructions for authors on how to set up video conference with Skype. (Some of this is a restatement of the obvious, but it makes for a good checklist): **children's book author Kate Messener blogs about video via Skype:** (www.donnagephart.blogspot.com/2010/03/skype-with-kate-messner-top-6-12-list.html) and **Darcy Pattison talks about setting up lighting and makeup.** (www.darcypattison.com/marketing/skype-tips-be-prepared/)
2. Web sites to sign up to be a Skype author, mostly aimed at schools and libraries (some of these offer payment for visiting authors, others are volunteer): **Skype An Author Network** (www.skypeanauthor.wetpaint.com/) **Visiting Authors** (www.visitingauthors.com/) **Linda Lowery and Richard Keep** (www.lindalowery.com/content/blogcategory/24/17/) **Connecting Authors** (www.connectingauthors.com/)
3. Don't forget to use search engines such as Google (www.google.com) to find book clubs and author video conference opportunities.

2010 PPWC Workshop Recap: From Here to There: An Alternative to Outlining with Carol Berg



Robin Widmar

By

There are many ways to plot a story: detailed synopses, scene by scene outlines, chapter by chapter outlines, using note cards on a wall, preparing exhaustive character biographies. Many writers have a need to know the whole story before they first set pen to paper or fingers to keyboard. Others are overwhelmed by the prospect of trying to figure out a mountain of details before they can begin writing. No two writers are alike, and every writer develops his or her favorite method for plotting. In this workshop, acclaimed fantasy author Carol Berg shared what works for her.

Carol believes that tight and well-plotted novels can be written without knowing every detail, every character or every scene in the entire story before the writing starts. She prefers to live the events of the story with her characters, experiencing events as they happen and seeing the world through their eyes. This helps her develop characters that live and breathe on the page, and settings that become integral parts of the story. Action progresses logically from the events of the story and the interaction of the characters with their settings.

That doesn't mean that Carol doesn't do any planning at all before she starts to create

a story; she simply prefers "not to have planned out too much." She advises that there is a minimum of information to know before you start writing your story, or else you'll "wander all over the place and have no idea where you're going, and it's going to be frustrating." Carol identifies a minimum of four need-to-know elements before she starts writing: a character, point of view, a "here," and a "there."

“Carol believes that tight and well-plotted novels can be written without knowing every detail, every character or every scene in the entire story before the writing starts.”

1. A character. “You have to have somebody to start out with on page one. It may not be your principal character, but it probably should be a character that we’re going to care about.” A character is a being, human or otherwise, complete with a goal, a motivation and a conflict. Characters don’t have to be good, or even likeable, but the reader needs to identify with them. Carol notes that if your main character doesn’t appear on page one, then he or she had better show up somewhere in the first few pages!

2. Point of view. This doesn’t mean the first-person or third-person way of telling the story, but rather the perspective from which the story is told. The reader will see the story’s world and events through someone’s eyes—often the main character, or perhaps a

secondary character. Point of view characters can change throughout a story. Who will your point of view character(s) be?

3. “Here” is the time and place the story happens. It is also an event, often described as “the moment when everything changes.” Time, place, and the event that is happening when the story opens all should appear on page one.

4. “There” is the overall story arc, which Carol defines as “a series of actions or scenes of rising tension that eventually arrive at a climax.” Novels are actually made of multiple arcs that provide twists, revelations, changes of story direction, and mid-point resolutions. Determining the all-encompassing arc that goes from the beginning to the story’s end will give you direction. And knowing your story’s direction will keep you from straying too far from the story you want to tell.

Once you have identified these four elements for your own story, start writing. Let the story generate questions, and ask yourself how each scene would play differently if you change the situation leading up to it. Be prepared to throw out what doesn’t work. See where the story takes you.

There may be more you want to know about your story before you start writing it, but at least you now have a direction. You will be able to feel when you start to wander away from the story. Carol likens this writing process to driving in fog. “Your story is out there in the fog, and you can only see the road just in front of you, and a maybe little bit to either side, but you know that you’re heading for Kansas. And as you drive, the fog starts to thin out a little bit, and you start seeing road signs...and the farther you go, the more things appear from the fog.”



LEFT: Faculty members, Kelley Armstrong and Betsy Mitchell, were escorted by Chris Myers to Garden of the Gods on Friday morning.



LEFT: Kristin Nelson listens and gives comments at her Saturday workshop, An Agent Reads from the Slushpile. Chris Mandeville reads from the first page.

2010 Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest

Winners List

Children's (for ages 8-12)

First place:

Kimberly Ann Piddington, Ozark, MO
The Summer of 1925

Second place:

Cindy Mae Strandvold, Loveland, CO
The Secret of the Legacy

Third place:

Victoria A. Rotton, Kenmore, WA
The Secret Tribe

Historical Fiction

First place:

Cristin Colleen Bruggeman, Kailua-Kona, HI
The Heir of Artasbad

Second place:

Ashlee Cowles, Colorado Springs, CO
To the Ends of the Earth

Third place:

Cynthia Schaible Boyll, Colorado Springs, CO
Unexpected Riches

Mainstream

First place:

Brenda Smith Warren, Woodbridge, VA
Nettle Creek

Second place:

Charlie Hanline, Pueblo, CO
Sarafina

Third place:

Tiffany Yates, Austin, TX
The Breakup Doctor

Mystery/Suspense/Intrigue

First place:

Michael Shepherd, Colorado Springs, CO
Easy Street

Second place:

Deborah Gengler-Dunn, Fort Collins, CO
Coming On Night

Third place:

William E. Mason, Monument, CO
Chloe

Romance

First place:

Michelle Mason White, Highlands Ranch, CO
Prickly Pair

Second place:

Laura Ann Burdette, Ozark, MO
Family Business

Third place:

Monica Peters, Leeper, PA
Moon Child

Science Fiction/Fantasy/Horror

First place:

Julie A. Kazimer, Westminster, CO
F%#ed Up Fairytale*

Second place:

Carrie Seidel, Arvada, CO
Ghostscape Park

Third place:

Martha G. Verlander, Raytown, MO
Legend of the Black Diamond

Short Stories

First place:

Sharon McClure Scarborough, Austin, TX
The Stealing

Second place:

Cynthia S. Becker, Pueblo, CO
Considering

Third place:

Charlie Hanline, Pueblo, CO
Snakes and Other Friends

Young Adult (for ages 12-18)

First place:

Patti J. Kurtz, Minot, ND
Worth The Risk

Second place:

Abigail Hing Wen, Palo Alto, CA
Ambassador

Third place:

Melissa McInerney, Evergreen, CO
Scar Tissue



Pictured are the contest finalists who attended the conference. Front row seated is Dawn Smit Miller, Contest Director, and Chris Scena, 2010 Contest Coordinator.

Meet the Winners

By Chris Scena

It may have taken our illustrious Director's words too close to heart in editing this year's bios (trying to stick to a fifty word limit). However, the silver lining is that we will have room for more entrants' information, presented below in no particular order.

Please join me in congratulating this year's finalists.

Cynthia Becker
Second Place, Short Story
Considering

Author of eight nonfiction books, Cynthia Becker first explored short story writing in the 2006 PPWC flash fiction workshop. She expanded to longer works and placed first in the 2009 Women Writing the West short story contest. Historical research tidbits and lives of Kentucky ancestors spark many of her stories.

Brenda Smith Warren
First Place, Mainstream
Nettle Creek

Brenda Smith Warren, an Ohio State Graduate, former teacher and military wife, has lived and worked in many parts of the world. She has recently completed her first novel, *Nettle Creek*. She currently lives in Northern Virginia with her husband, two dogs, and two cats.

Cynthia Schaible Boyll
Third Place, Historical Fiction
Unexpected Riches

Cynthia Schaible Boyll (byline—C.S. Boyll), Colorado Springs, has been creating stories since she was a child. She has made a living as a reporter and magazine editor, and now has a small writing/editing business called Aeryscribe Services. Her historical novel, *Unexpected Riches*, is her first adult book.

Patti Kurtz
First Place, Young Adult
Worth the Risk

Patti Kurtz teaches writing at Minot State University, where her students are her best critics. She is an avid fan of auto racing, and loves creating strong female characters who do things she wishes she'd done when she

was sixteen. She lives in Minot with her husband and two dogs.

Cindy Strandvold
Second Place, Children's
The Secret of the Legacy

Cindy Strandvold was born with her nose stuck in a book. For the last eleven years she's worked at writing one. Cindy lives with her family in a 113-year-old house in Loveland, CO. She thanks her three cats for regularly supervising her writing from their vantage point on her lap.

Kim Piddington
First Place, Children's
The Summer of 1925

Kim Piddington is a recent transplant to Missouri from Southern California. She decided to investigate local folklore to help deal with her culture shock, and *The Summer of 1925* was born. A teacher by day, she spends her evenings baking, gardening, riding her horses, thinking about going to the gym, and writing.

Michael Shepherd
First Place, Mystery/Suspense/Intrigue
Easy Street

A recently retired Air Force member, Michael Shepherd's writing has appeared in numerous military magazines and newspapers. He also authored a weekly column and feature articles for a local newspaper. He is currently applying the finishing touches to two novels, a mystery and a western.

Cristin Bruggeman
First Place, Historical Fiction
The Heir of Artashad

Cristin Bruggeman studied writing at the University of the Nations, graduating with a B.A. in Communication Arts and Media. In the past seven years she visited more than two dozen countries on five continents, and now resides in Kona, Hawaii, with her husband and two young daughters.

Carrie Seidel
Second Place, Science Fiction/Fantasy/Horror
Ghostscape Park

Carrie Seidel is thrilled the PPW writing contest affirmed that she's not just a keyboard-pecking, pajama-wearing nut case

with a rat on her shoulder overseeing each novel. *Thank God* not only does her husband support her dream job, but the voices in her head simply won't shut up.

Deb Gengler-Dunn
Second Place, Mystery/Suspense/
Intrigue
Coming on Night

A New York to Colorado transplant, Deb Gengler-Dunn was teaching college writing and research when a near fatal rollover twisted her Nissan, straightened her priorities, and smacked her with an idea for a paranormal mystery/suspense. Deb has a PhD in the same field as her shadow-sighted visual-behavioral analyst protagonist.

Laura Burdette
Second Place, Romance
Family Business

Laura Burdette lives in Missouri with two daughters, a tolerant husband, a paint pony, a Havanese, and an unnamed barn cat. Unlike her protagonist, Laura wasn't fired from the family business, but she did marry the company's manager; and, once, gun drawn like James Bond, they foiled a robbery.

Michelle White
First Place, Romance
Prickly Pair

As a mom to two boys and a newly adopted daughter from Ethiopia, Michelle White can't find the time to check her e-mail, let alone write. She's hoping that winning this contest will motivate her to crawl out of bed an hour earlier each morning and get writing again. Starting tomorrow.

Abigail Wen
Second Place, Young Adult
Ambassador

Since Abigail Wen's journal-keeping days as a little girl, no day has felt complete until she's put pen to paper. Her young adult novel *Ambassador* is strongly influenced by her travels (21 countries and counting) as well as by her studies in international relations and work in the U.S. government.

Opening Your Story with Power

By Bonnie M. Hagan

Anticipating a stellar workshop, the PPW members buzzed around the hotel meeting room sipping the nectar of coffee and nibbling on croissants. I nudged my laptop awake and leaned back, ready to be bored.

Story openings. Done that. I'd read books about openings. Worked with my critique group on openings. Gone to conference and listened to other people read their openings, and of course, I'd read my own, too. I chewed a muffin and waited for the old familiar words I'd heard a thousand times.

When will I ever learn? Within minutes of the PPW Spring Workshop starting, I was bent over my keyboard feverishly trying to get every tip, trick, note, and lesson into a Word document. This stuff was gold.

Michelle Major, Annie MacFarlane, and Lana Williams taught this light-speed course with an effortless ease that was more dance than lecture, one instructor stepping in just as another stepped back.

Michelle started off with a word about circadian rhythms. Your peak creative time is likely the eight (or fewer) hours diametrically opposite the hours you spend sleeping. Annie spoke about *The Writer's Journey* by Chris Vogler which started her thinking about story structure and tracking her own journey. Lana discussed the necessity of having an immediate hook, and from there the trio launched into an activity designed to reveal your character's true self. This was the meatiest work on characterization I'd done in a long time. All thirty-eight participants began exploring their character's desire, tragic flaw, protective belief, fear, false front, need, and finally, true self. Each of these traits dovetails into the next and creates the core of your character as well as a development path for growth. This exercise surpassed many other characterization techniques I've heard which inevitably begin with the disappointing, "Describe how your character looks physically."



Annie MacFarlane, Michelle Major, and Lana Williams taught this light-speed course with an effortless ease that was more dance than lecture, one instructor stepping in just as another stepped back.

Not everything at the workshop was new to me. Some of the solid rocks of writing were also brought up, such as knowing your backstory and communicating it, not by information dump, but by carefully layering it throughout the opening chapters. The instructors talked about setting up your log line and beginning your story with the inciting incident. All of which are tips I'd picked up long ago, but what was impressive was that Lana, Michelle, and Annie didn't dwell on these classic nuggets but instead touched on them as essential points and kept the workshop trucking right along to more complex and fascinating tools.

After a break, we started working on those crucial first 120 words. This segment took the workshop over the top. I never realized the "opening" could be viewed not as a chapter or a few pages or even the first page, but the first couple paragraphs—120 words to be exact. Lana, Michelle, and Annie gave examples of openings from fantastic novels that were unforgettable, and through this process I realized that I'd only just begun to get the right elements, the right words, and the right polish into my manuscript openings.

This workshop introduced the concept that an opening has to do a much bigger job than simply start with an exciting piece of action. The opening must build reader empathy. This

can be accomplished by making the reader become the hero on a psychological level. Our instructors presented us with a list of devices for introducing the hero, stating that a strong opening uses at least two of these devices. They include: creating sympathy for the hero, putting the hero in jeopardy, making the hero likable, making the reader laugh, making the hero

powerful, and giving the hero strong ethics and honor.

For the closing segment, many participants shared the first 120 words of their manuscripts and solicited feedback from Michelle, Annie, and Lana. It amazed me how much story can be conveyed in such a small number of words. Do you doubt that an opening can really convey so much and hook a reader that quickly? Go back and read the first 120 words of this article. It was constructed from the very principles I learned at the workshop, and hey, if you're still reading, then the hook worked.

Every character has a:
surface desire
tragic flaw
protective belief
deep fear
false front
ultimate need
true self

Mark Your Calendars

2011 Pikes Peak Writers Conference: April 29 - May 1



BeckyLand

By Becky Clark

Proofreading

Raise your hand if you think proofreading is a dying art.

- ACTUAL HEADLINES ...**
- **Man Kills Self Before Shooting Wife and Daughter ...** that is one talented murderer.
 - **Something Went Wrong in Jet Crash, Expert Says ...** good thing they called in an expert.
 - **Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers ...** that'll stop 'em.
 - **Panda Mating Fails; Veterinarian Takes Over ...** very noble of him.
 - **Juvenile Court to Try Shooting Defendant ...** well, if Scared Straight doesn't work, then they are just about out of options.
 - **War Dims Hope for Peace ...** such Negative Nellies.
 - **If Strike Isn't Settled Quickly, It May Last Awhile ...** yes, I think that might be correct.
 - **Cold Wave Linked to Temperatures ...** those crazy global warming nutjobs are at it again.

- **Enfield (London) Couple Slain; Police Suspect Homicide ...** or was it Colonel Mustard?
- **Red Tape Holds Up New Bridges ...** must be some kind of Super Duct Tape—and it comes in designer colors. Sweet!
- **New Study of Obesity Looks for Larger Test Group ...** weren't they fat enough?
- **Astronaut Takes Blame for Gas in Spacecraft ...** if he dealt it, then he should!
- **Kids Make Nutritious Snacks ...** do they taste like chicken?
- **Local High School Dropouts Cut in Half ...** they are strict there!
- **Hospitals are sued by 7 Foot Doctors ...** because the ceilings were too low?
- **Typhoon Rips Through Cemetery; Hundreds Dead ...** Wait. What?

<http://beckyland.wordpress.com>

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

One Volunteer's Story

By Ellen Phillips

It was just over a year ago that I had a fateful conversation with Pikes Peak Writers President, Ron Heimbecher. Sitting at the bar at the Colorado Springs Marriott, enjoying a night of socializing after two whirlwind days at my first Pikes Peak Writers Conference and feeling triumphant from my first successful pitch with a New York agent, I decided I wanted more. Bounding over to our unsuspecting leader, I boldly announced that I wanted to work my way up in the organization and asked if there were any opportunities for volunteering in which I could get involved.

Well, needless to say, that was just the beginning. Over the last year, I have been involved with PPW as the Non-Conference Events Coordinator—scary title, right?

Actually, it has been a lot of fun. Although there are many ways to volunteer within our organization, my role involved working at the Write Brain seminars each month and the annual American Icon competition. I prepared the paperwork, helped with the set-up prior to the event, and followed up on any loose ends the next day. This, I found, was a great starting point for someone new to the organization as it offered me the chance to meet every single person who walked through our doors. After my very first event, I had met a wonderful group of new friends and made contact with great writers, many of whom boast long and successful resumes. In a matter of months, I was able to catapult myself from being a nameless face in the crowd to becoming a person that other writers rely on to meet their needs and answer their questions—not that I always had an answer, but I could always smile and do my best to help. The give-and-take has been

beyond my expectations.

That seems to be the bottom line with this organization: writers helping writers. If you have just returned from conference and found yourself feeling as though you were a “nameless face in the crowd,” perhaps volunteering is for you. Our volunteer coordinator, Christian Lyons, currently has several open positions and is actively looking for new writers to fill those roles. If you are longing to get out there and get involved, this is a great time to speak up!

Oh, and did I mention the other perks of volunteering within Pikes Peak Writers? Some may find that connecting with people is the biggest benefit of volunteering, but there is much more waiting for you than just making some new friends. Working together with other writers can offer a world of insight into this industry. As a PPW volunteer, you may also find the opportunity to have face-to-face meetings with industry professionals, or the first pick at coveted appointments as a little thank you for your time and effort. How awesome is that?

For me, volunteering is a little more personal. I love this organization and I don't want to see it fail. Without volunteers working diligently behind the scenes, there is really no way for it to survive and grow. If you feel the passion to get involved, accept this as your invitation to speak up and pick your position within the best writing organization in the country. It's right here waiting for you!

Volunteer Honors at PPWC



Awards presented to conference and Pikes Peak Writers staff include (from left to right): Laura Hayden, Lifetime Achievement Award, Susan Mitchell, PPWC Volunteer of the Year, Bonnie Hagan, PPW Volunteer of the Year, and Martha Lancaster, The Martha Award.

Upcoming PPW Events

May, June

May Open Meeting

Saturday, May 22, 1-4 p.m.

Bonnie Ramthun will be presenting her workshop, *Dismembering the Best-Seller*, from 1 to 3 p.m., and a social hour will follow.

Bring friends and family along, whether they are PPW members or not. This event is 100% free and 100% open to the public.

Dismembering the Bestseller

How do best selling novelists construct their stories? Discover how a bestselling novel is put together by taking it apart. Bestsellers such as *The Silence of the Lambs* and *The DaVinci Code* will be dismembered and their secrets revealed. You will learn how to critically examine novels and understand the strategies that are common to bestsellers, and how to use their strategies in your own writing to create a more powerful novel. Fast-paced, humorous and informative, this workshop will give you some delightfully sharp instruments for your writer's toolbox.

Bonnie Ramthun lives in Erie, Colorado



with her husband Bill, and their four children. In Bonnie's first three novels, Colorado Springs homicide detective Eileen Reed and her handsome partner Joe Tanner, a war gamer, solve murders and save the world in *Ground*

Zero, *Earthquake Games* and *The Thirteenth Skull*. *Earthquake Games* was a finalist for Colorado Book of the Year in 2000. Her new novel, *The White Gates*, is a middle grade mystery introducing Torin Sinclair, a young snowboarder who must discover the modern secret behind an ancient curse (Random House). *The White Gates* was named a Junior Library Guild Premiere selection for 2008. Visit Bonnie's Web site at www.bonnie-ramthun.com.

June Write Brain

Physical Fitness for Flabby Fiction

Tuesday, June 15, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

In June's Write Brain we'll join author Linda Berry as she shows us how to energize our prose. We'll eliminate sloppy and redundant language, develop weight-bearing metaphors and strong similes, improve overall tone, and pack power into every word. (Muscle takes up less space than fat, after all, and carries more weight.) Using guidelines in the handout, "Flee Flabby Formulations," we'll edit and improve a sample of really bad writing.



Linda Berry's first published fiction was a children's story in a Sunday school handout magazine, for which she was paid a half cent per word. Since then she's published more short fiction for

children and adults, plays, poetry, preschool curricula, craft articles, a newspaper entertainment column, and six Trudy Roundtree Mysteries. She's a member of Colorado Dramatists, the Denver Woman's Press Club, Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers, and Sisters in Crime. She lives in Aurora with her husband, Jerry, and describes herself as an arts activist who tries to organize her life around theatre tickets. Check her Web site at www.ogeechee.avigne.org (or google her).

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

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

If you would like to participate in any Write Brain session, **PLEASE RSVP AND INCLUDE YOUR DAYTIME CONTACT INFORMATION.** This does not commit you to attending, but enables us to prepare enough materials for expected attendees, and importantly, it gives us a way to contact you if

we have an emergency change to the Write Brain session, such as a postponement due to weather. We will make every attempt to post changes to the PPW Yahoo loop and our Web site, but to be ensured of notification you must RSVP to rsvp@pikespeakwriters.com.

PPW Members Night

Monday, May 24 and June 27 at 6:30 p.m.

(Fourth Monday of month)

Location: Poor Richards Bookstore
320 N. Tejon, Colorado Springs

Come and hang out with other writers and bring friends interested in PPW. We eat, we drink, and we talk about the writing life.

Open Critique Returns!

After a brief hiatus, Pikes Peak Writers Open Critique is back.

Free to PPW members, Open Critique is a monthly forum which offers writers the opportunity to have several pages of their work critiqued by a guest critiquer. Typically the guest is a published author, or someone with extensive experience with critiquing and critique groups.

This is a great way to gain valuable insight into what works and how you can improve your craft. You also get to meet your peers in Pikes Peak Writers, and learn critique group etiquette. Writers bring several pages of their work, which is read by the entire group, and then the month's guest responds. This is a safe environment, where the focus is on craft as opposed to personality, and most participants find the process beneficial.

If you don't currently have a workshop or critique group, prep some pages and join us. Though spots for critiques will be limited each month due to time constraints, anyone can sit in and listen, so join us even if you are not ready for a critique.

PPW thanks members Laura Pellerin and Laura Harvey for all their hard work growing this program, and is pleased to welcome Deb Courtney as your new host. Check the Pikes Peak Writers Web site (<http://pikespeakwriters.com/open-critique>) for the schedule and new location.

Do Tell!

We want to hear your Conference Kudos! If you have something wonderful to share about one of our faculty or staff, or even a fellow attendee, please send it to editor@pikespeakwriters.com. We'll be sharing the cream of the crop in upcoming NewsMag issues.

Sweet Success

Rod Summitt's fourth novel, *Return to Paradise*, will be released in June of this year by Multi-Media Publications (Crystal Dreams Division). And his fifth, *New Beginnings*, is scheduled for early to mid-2011. Check out Rod's previous novels: www.rodsummitt.com.

Jamie Lisa Forbes' debut novel of family ranching, *Unbroken*, was accepted for publication in December by Pronghorn Press. It will be released in May of 2010, and Jamie will embark on her two-month book tour through Wyoming and Colorado in June. Visit Jamie's Web site, www.jamielisaforbes.com for additional information.

Beth Groundwater received a welcome phone call from Lori Consentino of the Colorado Romance Writers, informing her that her mystery, *To Hell in a Handbasket*, is a finalist in the "Mainstream with Romantic Elements" category of the Colorado Romance Writers' Award of Excellence

Contest. To see the full list of finalist titles in all the categories, go to: <http://coloradoromancewriters.org/aoe/aoe-finalist2010.html> For more about Beth, visit <http://bethgroundwater.com/>.

Karen Albright Lin's *Mu Shu Mac-N-Cheese* has just gone to the quarterfinals in Amazon.com's ABNA contest. She will receive a *Publishers Weekly* review, and can receive reviews of her excerpt from readers on Amazon. If you'd like to add your (rave) review, contact Karen for instructions: karenalin@comcast.net. Learn more about Karen at <http://www.karenalbrightlin.com>.

March Write Brain: Writing Better Action Scenes

By Brandy Vallance

"Technology hates me," Marc MacYoung said as he slammed down the lid to his virus infected laptop. "Die, Vista! Die!" As the colors on the projector screen faded into white, Marc abandoned his slide presentation to tell us about time-tested conflict patterns, and how we could use them in our writing. Marc would know. He's a leading expert on how to survive high-risk situations, and teaches personal defensive strategies to military and law enforcement personnel, among others. Marc opened by telling us, "Every night you go to bed with a human, a monkey, and a lizard. The human brain is the logical side of you, the monkey brain is the emotion, and the lizard brain is pure survival. All three follow a script, and, as a writer, you have to know the scripts." He went on to say that during violence, all three parts are fighting to "drive the bus," meaning that each wants control over the situation.

We spent the majority of the time discussing the monkey brain, since it's the instigator. Marc said the monkey brain equates social violence to physical death and used gang violence as an example. Gang members are often so afraid of humiliation that they'll kill someone over simple disrespect. Meanwhile, the lizard brain is usually shouting, "Run!" and the human brain is just trying to figure it all out.

To illustrate how the monkey brain works, Marc called up an older gentleman and asked him to stand at the front of the room. Marc walked about seven feet away and proceeded to cuss him out and make threatening gestures. "Did you feel threatened?" Marc asked when he was done.



"No," the man answered. "You were posturing."

"Don't write about the action itself; write about the emotion behind it."

Marc smiled. "I was doing a threat display," he explained. "Most people are looking for a way out of violence." "Writing about real violence is boring," Marc said. In real life, "it happens so fast that you don't remember it." A person's first encounter with violence is particularly overwhelming, and he likens it to a room full of TVs. "When somebody's trying to kill you, all the TVs come on at once. The 70th time somebody tries to kill you, they all come on but you've learned how to focus on just a few or one. The reason people freeze during violence is that all three brains scream, 'I'm in charge!'"

When you're writing an action or violence scene, remember that ninety-nine percent of

it is in the buildup. "Very few people can go from zero to one hundred with violence," Marc said. Don't write about the action itself; write about the emotion behind it.

When you're writing your antagonist, don't make him a "mustache twirler." To be believable, Marc said, "Your bad guy has to do something he thinks is right and justifiable."

As for our heroes, Marc told us to identify our hero's "monkey trap": What is the one thing that would make your character say, "I can't walk away"? If you can figure that out, you've got a conflict, and if you've got a conflict, then you've got a story. But be careful, because "if you break the (natural) patterns of conflict, people won't tolerate it."

Marc told a story about a movie director who was approached by someone who'd noticed that the wallpaper on the set had been hung upside down. The director replied, "If people are looking at the wallpaper, there's something wrong with the movie." It's the same with writing action scenes or violence, Marc said. "Nobody's going to notice when you do it right."

Marc MacYoung's *Six Things That Will Happen When Someone Tries to Kill You*:

1. You die.
2. You spend a long time in the hospital.
3. You run away. (It's hard to get raped, robbed, or murdered when you're not there.)
4. You shoot back.
5. Somebody else shoots back.
6. In the rarest case, the attacker snaps out of their state of mind and the attack stops.



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The Fire in Fiction Workshop

By Fleur Bradley

After PPWC ended on Sunday, one room was buzzing with tired but eager people, all looking forward to what agent Donald Maass, author of *The Fire in Fiction*, had to say. Some attendees had pitched and gotten manuscript requests during the conference, and were now wondering: Is my manuscript really the best it can be?

Donald Maass got his workshop started quickly, challenging us to look at our opening pages. Does the protagonist demonstrate strength, humanity or hope right away? He explained that no matter the type of fiction you're writing, it's important to find a way for readers to connect to the lead character early on—in the first five pages, or earlier if possible. Maass challenged us to mine our own experiences, and look at people we admire for examples of desirable traits in a protagonist. "Make your character human and real right away," he said.

"The things that are hardest to do in your edits are the things you need to do most."

Next, Maass had us work on ways to add inner conflict by making the protagonist's quest as difficult as possible. "How can your

character give up for good?" he asked, challenging us to build our stories to a moment where the protagonist could logically surrender. Maass then had us explore extreme ways for our characters to throw in the towel. "Inner conflict makes characters more memorable," he said. "Take your character all the way out there and let it be."

"Who's the big bad guy?" Maass asked next, sharing some stories about the cardboard villains his agency sees a lot in manuscript submissions. He then explained the importance of developing the antagonist, and making sure he or she is as three-dimensional as possible. Maass suggested we look at our stories from the antagonist's perspective, and connect the bad guy to the protagonist in new ways. "Find a reason your antagonist wants to know your protagonist," he said. As an exercise, we all wrote down some stereotypes related to our antagonists, and found ways to go against these predictable qualities. "Find a way your antagonist can be sympathetic," Maass suggested. He added that often-times, the antagonist doesn't appear active in the story. He suggested we find four new ways for the protagonist and antagonist to cross paths, to add conflict and depth to the story.

During the last segment of the workshop, we looked at scenes in our manuscripts that didn't really work, to deconstruct them with Maass' help. He asked us to look at the purpose of each scene, and how it has changed the story or protagonist. "Mark this moment with more definition," he said of this changing point. Then he gave us several minutes to rewrite the scenes. Maass



suggested that we step away from the words we already wrote, and instead try to recreate what happened with new writing.

Even though the workshop lasted more than four hours, time seemed to fly as we explored exciting new ways to bring our manuscripts to life. "Are you going to use what you came up with?" Donald Maass asked us with a smile. Throughout the room, weary but excited writers nodded—we all knew we would be dissecting our manuscripts based on what we'd just learned. He urged us to press on when we feel resistant to changes, or when we feel reluctance over the challenges the protagonist is up against with plot changes we make. "Why do we do this?" he asked. "Because we're storytellers."

As Donald Maass said more than once during his great workshop, "The things that are hardest to do in your edits are the things you need to do most."