

**From the Editor**  
page 2

**The Business of Writing**  
page 3

**Short Story Panel**  
page 4

**Untangling the Web**  
Page 4

**Upcoming Events**  
page 5

**Sweet Success**  
page 6

**Sept.ember Open Critique**  
page 6

**Agent Safari**  
page 7

**Grammar Gremlins**  
page 7

**Hot Topics**  
page 8

**Write Now**  
page 8

VOLUME IV, ISSUE 6  
 November-December  
 2006

# Writing the Extraordinary Magic of Everyday

The following article was first published in the 1997 Fish Anthology; Dog Days and Other Stories.

*Fish Publishing is an independent publishing company based in the West of Ireland. Running writing contests since 1994, Fish publishes writers in anthologies of high production and literary standards.*

*The Fish Anthology is an annual publication of Fish Publishing and includes the winners of the International Fish Short Story Prize, now in its 13th year. For further information visit [www.fishpublishing.com](http://www.fishpublishing.com). This year's competition closes November 30th.*

*One of my favorite short story Web sites has this to say about short stories and the writers who write them.*

**By Joseph O'Connor, Dublin, 1997 (Reprinted with permission)**

What kind of strange creature is a short story writer? I must confess that I don't know. A high priest or priest of art? A wounded soul who can't understand the real world and thus feels a need to re-invent it? A moralist? A Spinner of yarns? An entertainer? A prophet? Probably all of these things. Possibly none.

The single fact I can be sure about is this: writers are watchers. The one and only thing they have in common is an ability to look at the everyday world and be knocked out by it. Stopped in their tracks. Startled. Gobsmecked.

My favourite short story writer, Raymond Carver, has this to say:

Writers don't need tricks or gimmicks, or even necessarily need to be the smartest fellows on the block. At the risk of appearing foolish, a writer sometimes needs to be able to just stand and gape at this or that thing—a sunset, or an old shoe—in absolute and simple amazement.

Another writer I love, Flannery O'Connor, put it even more strongly:

There is a certain grain of stupidity that the writer of fiction can hardly do without, and this is the quality of

having to stare, of not getting the point at once.

There is only one trait that writers have in common and that's it. They watch for the extraordinary magic that lies in the everyday. A writer is always quietly looking and thinking. Not willing inspiration but just being open to the world. This quiet looking and thinking is the imagination. It's letting in ideas. It's trying, I suppose, to make some sense of things.

In that sense, it is important for a writer to be always writing. Even when you're not actually sitting with a pen in your hand. You don't take days off. You don't go on holiday from writing. Sometimes you don't even go to sleep. If you're serious about writing then you're a writer twenty-four hours a day, in the office, in school, doing the dishes and in your dreams.

---

**“The single fact I can be sure about is this: writers are watchers.”**

---

Writers have their eyes open. They keep them open all the time.

Ezra Pound said “fundamental accuracy of statement is the one morality of writing.” Naming things, calling things what they really are. This is all writers can do in an age where language has become debased and sterile.

James Thurber was a full-time writer. His use of his spare time is interesting: I never quite know when I'm not writing. Sometimes my wife comes up to me at a party and says, “Dammit, Thurber, stop writing.” She usually catches me in the middle of a paragraph. Or my daughter will look up from the dinner table and ask, “Is he sick?”

“No,” my wife says, “he's writing something.”

“I learned that you should feel when writing, not like Lord Byron on a mountain top, but like a child stringing beads in kindergarten—happy, absorbed and quietly putting one bead on after another.”

—Brenda Ueland

continued on page 2

## From the Editor



By Pat Kennelly

### *One Thousand Beautiful Things*

I found this book, *One Thousand Beautiful Things*, at a library sale, its pages well worn. Published in 1947, it is a compilation of prose and poetry from the world's best literature. Two years after WWII ended, I imagine it was a popular book in many American family bookcases. Patriotism, as it is today, is a familiar subject throughout the 400 pages.

More than one hundred years after

Longfellow wrote the passage "Indian Summer," I read the words and I am there. That is the power of language. Great language makes the sense of time and place leap from the pages and I am immersed. A good short story, like a good poem, is hard to forget.

Short stories are my favorite genre. Authors like Raymond Chandler, Lorrie Moore, Flannery O'Connor, Alice Munro, and Dorothy Parker have inspired me to write in the genre. When I am done reading a good short, I am left with a simplicity and thoroughness that many full-length novels seem to miss. Classic shorts such as Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" and Guy de Maupassant's "The Necklace" seem timeless in their choice of theme.

To study the genre I recommend classic short stories like Ernest Hemingway's "In Another Country" or Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People." Many of the classics can be found online. Poe, Joyce, Hawthorne, Twain and many other early writers all wrote in the short story genre to develop characters, hone their writing, and

enchant their fans. They also had a market that supported their craft. For modern shorts, I like *The Best American Short Stories* collections published every year by Houghton Mifflin Company. These stories are nominated to be in the collection, chosen from award-winning literary magazines and popular magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Harper's* and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Does your writing have all the elements of a good short story? Conflict, plot, language, insight, character, theme and setting are necessary elements. Will your readers get lost in the pages? Are your characters original and fleshed out?

I'm putting *One Thousand Beautiful Things* on my writing reference shelf next to my *Writer's Market*, thesaurus, and dictionary. I hope that it will inspire me to write passages that will transport my readers—from now or in a hundred years—to the place of my words, of my world.

Best wishes,

Pat

Bimonthly NewsMagazine of the Pikes Peak writing community

**PIKES PEAK WRITERS**  
NewsMagazine

4164 Austin Bluffs Pkwy #246  
Colorado Springs, CO 80918  
719.531.5723

E-mail: [info@ppwc.net](mailto:info@ppwc.net)  
Web site:  
[www.ppwc.net](http://www.ppwc.net)

#### PPW Officers

**President**  
Chris Mandeville

**Vice President**  
Beth Groundwater

**Secretary**  
Chris Myers

**Treasurer**  
Jennifer Webster-Valant

**Editor**  
Pat Kennelly

**Graphic Design**  
Martha Lancaster

**Reporter Coordinator**  
Barb Dyess

Pikes Peak Writers operates as a non-profit, tax exempt organization incorporated in November 2001 as the Pikes Peak Writers. *PPW NewsMagazine* is a bimonthly publication serving members of Pikes Peak Writers group. The opinions expressed in *PPW NewsMagazine* don't necessarily reflect those of the editorial staff/board of directors. Articles in *PPW NewsMagazine* may not be reproduced without the written consent of PPW.

## Writing the Extraordinary Magic of Everyday

*continued from page 1*

The short story is one of the greatest, most challenging, most infuriating forms of literature. They look so easy! That's the thing about really good short stories. They don't read like they were written. They read like they simply grew on the page. When we read the work of a short story maestro like Joyce or Frank O'Connor or Richard Ford or Alice Munro or Mary Lavin, we think, yes, there is just a rightness about that sentence, that image, that line of speech. But anyone who has ever tried to write a short story will know just how tough it is to hit that reverberating note, to say something—anything at all—worthwhile about the human condition, in five thousand words or less. It's hard.

A short story is a glance at the miraculous. Joyce used a religious word. He called his stories "epiphanies." A good short story is almost always about a moment of profound realization. Or a hint of that. A quiet bomb. There is a record by the American singer Tori Amos called *Little Earthquakes*. That's a good metaphor for a

short story. Often, a good short story will be a little earthquake.

It is a form that has all the power of the novel—some would say more—but none of the self-importance. A deftly imagined and carefully written short story like Karl Iagnemma's *Dog Days*, or Frank O'Donovan's *Johnny Mok's Universe*, or Anne O'Carroll's *Flame*, by concentrating on the particular, can say a whole lot about the universal.

So let us get idealistic for a second or two. V.S. Pritchett's description of a short story is "something glimpsed from the corner of the eye, in passing." And our task as short story writers is to grab that moment with both hands and invest it with all of the power and humanity and sympathy we can. To develop our skill at language and characterisation and structure and dialogue—our fundamental accuracy—for one reason. To tell the truth. That's what all the hard work comes down to in the end.

If we forget that, we forget everything.

# The Business of Writing

## Creating the “Ah-Ha” Moment For Your Reader

By Linda Rohrbough

I've been studying plot sitting at the feet of current masters, one of whom is *New York Times* best-selling romance author Debbie Macomber. She says if you want to sell as a writer, you need to work on plotting. Her favorite part of plotting is creating “ah-ha” moments for her readers.



Rather than telling me, Debbie showed me. So we sat down together and watched *The Replacement Killers*, a pretty violent movie, starring Chow Yun-Fat. I know Debbie well enough to know that isn't her style. But I saw the “ah-ha” moment she was referring to. When the movie was over, I had a few questions.

Before I tell you what I discovered, let me define what I mean. The “ah-ha” moment is a surprise, a plot twist that's plausible but one the reader didn't anticipate. When it comes, the surprise enhances our enjoyment of the story. In a short story, the craftsmanship of the “ah-ha” moment has to be even more painstaking than in a novel because there's less wiggle room.

An element of this process is to keep the reader with you and that means each move leading up to the surprise has to be believable. Debbie figures out an interesting situation and works backwards to find a likely but surprising way to create it.

Since I've already mentioned *The Replacement Killers*, I'll use it to illustrate. John Lee, played by Chow Yun-Fat, is a Chinese Mafia hit man. The movie opens with him in unhesitating, ruthless action.

In a seemingly unrelated scene, a police detective makes a bust and a young Chinese man tries to get away. Despite the detective's efforts, the young Chinese man is shot and killed. Turns out the young man is the son of John Lee's boss.

Later, Lee is in a sniper position watching the detective play basketball at home with his wife and young son. He has several clear shots, but hesitates and puts the rifle down. Now Lee has put himself in jeopardy from his Mafia boss and the chase begins. Lee ends up running away with a

beautiful woman passport counterfeiter who inadvertently gets involved when the Mafia comes after Lee. During the chase it is revealed Lee's mother and sister are the leverage the Chinese Mafia boss uses to make Lee work for him. The “ah-ha” moment comes when Lee confesses he wasn't sent to kill the detective, but the detective's son.

That revelation changes my view of Lee. I remembered Lee had a clear shot of the detective and his son and assumed the detective was the target. I learned he justified his work because the people he was sent after were doing bad things to others. But he couldn't justify harming the boy. Now, to save his family, Lee has to take out the Mafia boss, which he eventually does.

I'm sure the writer of this story worked backwards to create the “ah-ha” moment for the reader. And a good “ah-ha” moment not only surprises the reader, it reveals a part of the hero's character. To accomplish the revelation, it doesn't matter if you start with the situation you want to get to or with an interesting character. Either way, you want to end up with a situation where the character's values are challenged.

---

**“The “ah-ha” moment is a surprise, a plot twist that's plausible but one the reader didn't anticipate.”**

---

Another important consideration in creating the “ah-ha” moment is choosing a point of view that gives the most advantage to create questions and conflict. O'Henry was a master at this. In the Christmas story “The Gift of the Magi,” the story is from Della's viewpoint. This allows us to go down the road with this young wife into several misunderstandings. An important one is when Jim comes home and she is already worried he won't like how she looks with short hair. Seeing his reaction makes us

wonder if her worst fears have been realized. And her viewpoint keeps us in suspense until the very end. If the story had been told from his viewpoint, it would be flat.

It's wise to do research into writing mysteries even if you don't plan to write in that genre. I believe every well-crafted story contains elements of mystery writing.

The best book I've seen on the subject is one that's out of print but still available from used booksellers, *Making Crime Pay: A Practical Guide to Mystery Writing* by Stephanie Kay Bendel. A critical point Bendel makes is resolution of the story's conflict must come about by the actions of the protagonist, and not by chance, if the ending is to be satisfying.

And that is the point. Readers love to be fooled in a clever way. Those “ah-ha” moments stay with us and that experience is what readers are looking for in a good story.

### Tips for Creating “Ah-Ha” Moments Readers Love

1. Each move leading up to the “ah-ha” moment has to be plausible.
2. Create a conflicted character or situation and work backwards.
3. Choose point of view carefully.
4. The surprise moment must come about from actions of the hero and not by accident.
5. Study mystery genre writing.

Award-winning author Linda Rohrbough has been writing about the computer industry since 1989 and has more than 5,000 articles and seven books to her credit. Her latest book, *Stepping Out of the Shadow of Obesity: The Comprehensive Guide to the Adjustable Gastric Band*, co-authored with Robert Sewell, M.D., will be published by Marlowe & Company in Spring 2007. She has completed her first techno-thriller novel and is working on a romantic suspense. Visit her Web site [www.PCbios.com](http://www.PCbios.com).

# Short Story Panel Offers Nuggets of Wisdom

By *Jené Jackson Hanna*  
Your PPW Member Liaison



Short stories have always eluded me. An anthology of the best American short stories waits on my nightstand, but I never seem to find the time to read, let alone write them. An idea takes root in my mind but

then sprouts runners until the plot is so complex it's a novel. Since I barely have time to write current projects, the idea dies a quiet death.

But at the PPW Short Story Panel on September 12th, I came away with a new perspective on the joys and uses of short stories. Nuggets of wisdom from the lively discussion on writing and selling short stories led by Beth Groundwater, Carol Hightshoe, R.T. Lawton, and Bret Wright follow.

## Writing Short Stories

**Experiment.** Use short stories to try out those ideas kicking around in your head. Just write what comes. Use first person, then try third person, and let the character decide which tells the story best. Change the setting, mood, narrator. Inject humor. Go hog wild!

**Quick Gratification.** Short stories are

perfect for those with little writing time and publishing ambitions. Use waiting time to write. It's much easier to keep a short story in your head in the few minutes before a doctor's appointment than it is a novel.

**Novel Help.** If you are writing a novel, use short stories to explore new avenues for your novel without affecting the flow. What would your character do in this situation? Bret Wright interviews his characters and, often through that process, a short story happens. What would they do, say, or be, then plunk them in a situation to see what happens and if it works for the novel.

**Polish.** After you've written your masterpiece, edit and proofread it. Find a critique group of fellow writers of short stories and see what they think of your story. Be careful not to edit the life out of it. Not editing or proofreading, however, is like rejecting your story before you submit it.

## Selling Short Stories

**Market first, or story?** Whether you write what's in your head and try to find a market for it or target a market with a story, all agreed that you must submit, submit, submit. Don't stop after the first or thirtieth rejection. Read target publications extensively to see what current editors like and how your writing fits in or how you need to modify it. Go for your top markets, but if you get rejected, go for secondary markets, too.

**Genre.** Short story publications abound in every genre. Listed below are Internet sites that list markets, courtesy of Beth

Groundwater and R.T. Lawton. Don't ignore literary journals, either. They often publish multiple genres and care only about the caliber of the writing.

**Beginning vs. experienced markets.** Many e-zines cater to new and intermediate writers, and you never know who might be on their mailing lists, ready to give your career a leg up. Online and smaller publications often don't pay much, but you can use them to build name recognition and hone your craft. Literary contests, anthologies, and college publications are also worth your time. Check out your local bookstore for how to submit to them, as well as online resources. Aim high. Don't reject your story before they do by not submitting to the top markets. Just don't forget the other markets.

**Submission Process.** With short stories, the queries are shorter, as is turnaround time. Research the guidelines and submission style before sending your work. Manuscript format is different for magazines and e-zines. The submission process can be the first line of rejection, so make sure you get it right!

So the PPW Short Story Panel blew the doors off of my misconceptions. Short stories are useful, career-building, and, most importantly, fun!

### Internet Sites that List Short Story Markets

<http://ralan.com>

<http://www.duotrope.com/index.aspx>

<http://storypilot.com>

# Untangling the Web

By *Lauri Griffin*

◆ [www.duotrope.com](http://www.duotrope.com)

Duotrope's digest is a free online updated daily database of over 1,325 current markets for short fiction and poetry. You can search by genre, length, theme, payscale and more. They also keep a linked calendar of upcoming themes and deadlines.

◆ [www.wordspy.com](http://www.wordspy.com)

Know what "flat daddy" or "Christmas creep" means? How about to "get doored"?

Word Spy scouts out words used in new ways. They provide definitions and reference sources. You can search by subjects like computers, science, culture, even insults. Great for dialogue, humor writing and poetry.

◆ [www.artellawordsandart.com/free.html](http://www.artellawordsandart.com/free.html)

Artella is a marvelous site for creative spirits. Their free "creativity seeds" include art projects, e-cards, poetry contests, classes, readings, and inspiration.

◆ [www.onesentence.org](http://www.onesentence.org)

How many words does it take to tell a story? Here are true stories, told in one sentence. Great story ideas here!

◆ [www.fsu.edu/%7Ebutler](http://www.fsu.edu/%7Ebutler)

If you've ever wished you could watch someone's creation process, this site is for you. Pulitzer Prize winning author Robert Owen Butler shares his short story creation and revision process in 17 online sessions.

—Lauri Griffin is a fiction writer who spends way too much time online. Please send interesting sites to her at [lauri\\_grif@earthlink.net](mailto:lauri_grif@earthlink.net) and visit her blog for more great links at [www.laurireflections.blogspot.com](http://www.laurireflections.blogspot.com).

# Upcoming Events:

## November, December, January

### November Workshop

#### The Overnight Guest: Learning Your Character's Personality

Featuring Becky Martinez and Sue Vidars  
COST: \$35 Members, \$45 Nonmembers  
Bring a friend and get half off for yourself.  
Sat., November 4, 8:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.  
Cottonwood Artists' School

The purpose of this four-hour workshop will be to help all levels of writers create unforgettable characters for their fiction novels. This is an INTERACTIVE workshop. You will be encouraged to work on a character during the day, either a new one or a troublesome one you've already started but can't quite get to come "alive." All participants are encouraged to share their thoughts and comments.

After defining the necessary building blocks of your character, such as looks, history, etc., we will develop an interesting personality by deciding what kind of "flaws" to give your character. If your character has nothing to change or modify during the story, the book will be boring. We'll discuss how this character fits into various universal archetypes, and at the end of the workshop we will play an interactive brain-storming card game. You will take home a fully developed and memorable character to work with plus the knowledge of how to create other interesting characters. The workshop is based on the forthcoming book, *Ten Steps to Creating Memorable Characters* due out in December. You may either bring a sack lunch or bring cash to order from Lettuce Head Restaurant in the morning.

Sue Vidars is the author of over 20 books and an international art marketing consultant. Her last book, *Heroes and Heroines, Sixteen Master Archetypes*, is now being followed by *Ten Steps to Creating Memorable Characters*, due out this December. Vidars teaches workshops across the country and is currently developing a brainstorming card game for writers, *Deal a Story*, available in 2007.



Becky Martinez is an award-winning former journalist who spent more than 30 years as a TV news writer and news producer. She has also taught classes to writing groups and has conducted online writing workshops. She has three published

romance novels. With Sue Vidars, she has recently completed *Ten Steps to Creating Memorable Characters*.

### November Write Brain

#### Journey of a First (Published) Novel

Featuring Denise Vega  
November 14, 2006, 6:30-8:30 p.m.  
Cottonwood Artists' School

Walk through the evolution of a first published children's novel from idea to manuscript to finished book, including editorial letters for revision, copyedited pages and galleys. The workshop will include why the author believes this book sold and the five novels before that did not and what it means to persevere for a dozen years to make that first novel sale.

Denise Vega's first novel, *Click Here (to find out how I survived seventh grade)*, was acquired by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers shortly before placing third in the 2003 Paul Gillette Writing Contest. It was selected for the New York Public Library's Books for the Teen Age and won the Colorado Book Award for YA Fiction. She has two multicultural toddler books coming out with Scholastic and a picture book from Little, Brown. She is the outgoing Co-Regional Advisor for the Rocky Mountain Chapter of SCBWI, and her stories, articles, poems and activities have appeared in *Newfangled Fairy Tales*, The Discovery Channel's *Discovery Files* series of science books, as well as *Pockets*, *Highlights*, *Spider* and *Cricket* magazines.



### December Write Brain

#### Make 'em Laugh

Featuring Leslie O'Kane aka Leslie Caine  
December 14, 2006, 6:30-8:30 p.m.  
Cottonwood Artists' School

The last thing you want to hear from your critique group is, "Oh, was that supposed to be funny?" At the same time, making an editor or an agent laugh from your character's antics or witty dialogue greatly increases your chances of making a sale. Leslie will discuss the nature of humor,

which techniques work well in fiction and which do not, and how to kick-start your humor when you're sitting at the keyboard. Regardless of your fiction genre, this speaker will show you how to infuse humor in your writing, which, as Martha Stewart would say, is "a good thing."

Leslie Caine is the author of five finished and one barely started humorous mystery novels for Bantam/Dell. Before she started dropping syllables and fiddling with spelling



(partially because her new editor wanted her books to be shelved closer to Agatha Christie's), Leslie wrote as Leslie O'Kane and published 10 humorous novels for Ballantine. She gives presentations at conferences across the country, where she often finds herself getting laughs, generally intentionally. The little girl with Leslie is her daughter, now age 20 and in college, yet Leslie claims that she herself hasn't changed a bit.

### January Write Brain

#### Subjected, Rejected, Dejected OR The Writer's Survival Guide

Featuring Cindi Myers and Lynda Sandoval  
January 16, 2007, 6:30-8:30 p.m.  
Cottonwood Artists' School

Tired of submitting and being rejected, even as other writers are garnering agent contracts, publication and selling movie rights? Can't get that novel finished because you're bogged down, blocked, depressed, or your characters refuse to talk? How does a writer—published or not—keep going on those days when cleaning up road-kill looks like a viable career option? Our speakers will tell you how they did it, why they did it, and what kept them going in the face of disgruntled family, stories that refused to end, obnoxious editors and uninterested agents.

All Write Brain Sessions are FREE for PPW Members! If you would like to participate, PLEASE RSVP AND INCLUDE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION. Note that this does not commit you to attending, but does enable us to prepare enough materials for expected attendees, and importantly, it gives us a way to contact you if we have an emergency change to the Write Brain session, such as a postponement due to weather. We will make every attempt to post changes to the PPW Yahoo loop and the Web site, but to be ensured of notification you must RSVP to [rspv@ppwc.net](mailto:rspv@ppwc.net).

# Sweet Success

Compiled by Janice Black



## Laurie Wagner Buyer

Poet Laurie Wagner Buyer received the Addison Trail High School Tradition of Excellence Award for her lifetime achievement as a writer. Laurie will attend a reception in her honor at Addison Trail High School, Addison, Illinois, on November 15th. She will then work with current AT students in their classrooms on November 16th. A National Honor Society Member and one of the founders of the school's literary magazine, *Genesis*, Laurie graduated 22nd in a class of 526 in 1972. Laurie remarked, "Because I was a shy, studious, wallflower type of teenager who really yearned to be a cheerleader or a prom queen, this award means a great deal to me. It goes to show that good things happen to late bloomers, and that artists and writers are rewarded for their creative endeavors."



## Maggie Bonham

A new episode of Maggie's podcast, the Sci Fi Traveling Road Show, is out along with the new promo called "Dagon Haiku." This episode

features a flash fiction piece by David Lee Summers called *Cinnamon Hot Chocolate and Gold*. Episode 9, *Brave Men Run and Golems of Laramie County* is on line and ready for your listening pleasure. Check it out.

The podcast is absolutely free. The RSS feed is [skywarrior.libsyn.com/rss](http://skywarrior.libsyn.com/rss). For information about subscribing, go to [www.scifitravelingroadshow.com](http://www.scifitravelingroadshow.com). This is a paying market now, so contact Maggie regarding your flash fiction at [margaret-bonham@aol.com](mailto:margaret-bonham@aol.com).

One of Maggie's newest novels, *Lachlei*, will be available for preorders with Dragon Moon Press at <http://www.dragoonmoon-press.com/forthcoming.htm#lachlei>.



## Lori Lacefield

Last month Lori Lacefield signed copies of her just released first novel *The Seventh Survivor* at the Briargate Barnes & Noble.

• "In this gripping first novel, Lacefield skillfully draws unsuspecting readers into her web of suspense. For all crime fiction selections." —*Library Journal*

• "A socially oriented crime mystery...a riveting read." —authorsden.com

In this high-tension thriller, mysterious accidents, betrayal, and vengeance make sure that no one plays by the rules in high

society, where extortion, murder, and lovers past and present collide.

## Sandi Sumner

Sandy recently moved to Colorado from Alaska and became a member of PPW. The Lake George Library invited her to give a presentation in October, "Writing and Living in Alaska," based on her book *Women Pilots of Alaska* (book signing included).

The Colorado 99s invited her to attend their meeting in October at Jeffco Airport to give a slide presentation and sign books.

Her current effort, a book about women climbing mountains, is titled, *It's All About The Journey*. For more information see [www.sandisumner.com](http://www.sandisumner.com).

## Madge Walls

Colorado Springs author and PPW member Madge Walls signed copies of her debut novel, *Paying the Price*, at the Barnes & Noble at Citadel Mall in September.

In this touching tale of mothers and daughters, Maui Realtor Laura McDaniel sets in motion a real estate deal that goes terribly bad, threatening to wreck the lives of everyone involved. Quirky characters, an exotic Island setting, and heartfelt personal decisions will have you cheering for Laura as she struggles to sort out her difficult family and her all-consuming career.

# Successful September Open Critique

By Beth Groundwater

On Wednesday, September 27, Bob Spiller and Beth Groundwater, mystery author members of PPW and long-time critique partners, team-hosted the Open Critique meeting. Eight PPW members brought manuscripts to be critiqued. Having published six short stories, Beth gathered the four short story writers in her group, and Bob took the remaining writers, who had brought a children's picture book and the first chapters of YA, mystery, and fantasy novels.

Because the groups were small, we had an opportunity to do a more thorough critique. The two separate groups took 10 minutes to silently read each submittal, then each of the five members had two minutes to summarize their critique

comments. A universal comment on the short stories was that they started too slowly, with too much back story in the beginning. With our modern-day TV and video game-raised audience, all fiction, especially short fiction, needs to drop the reader immediately into the action.

The short story writers learned so much from each other's critiques and enjoyed each other's company enough to decide at the end of the evening to form an online critique group. We couldn't ask for a better outcome.

This is a main goal of Open Critique, after all: to help PPW members find critique partners. As you can see from the accompanying photos, everyone, especially Bob and Beth, enjoyed the experience. The two authors volunteered to come back for



future sessions. The next Open Critique will occur in November, so please plan to attend. Your writing will be better for it!

# The Great Agent Safari

## August WB, featuring Deb Stover



By Barb Dyess

So you're ready to get out the big guns and hunt for that agent, that author's representative who will support your goals as a writer? The professional who will help look out for your career and yes, even growl at publishers, editors—and possibly even you—when needed? How does one go about bagging this elusive creature called the literary agent? How can we tell the reputable ones from the not-so?

Author Deb Stover spent the evening sharing her experiences, both good and bad, in the agent realm. Yes, it's really a jungle out there! However, it is possible to find a good author's rep if you are armed (so to speak) with information. Those attending gleaned not only from Deb's knowledge, but also from other PPW authors present who offered caveats and suggestions.

According to Deb, a bad agent is worse than having no agent at all. She recommends searching until the right one offers to represent you. Take time to do your homework on agents and contracts in general, first of all. The best-known standard in the industry is the Association of Author Representatives (AAR). Check their Web site to view the Canon of Ethics, sample contracts and listings of agents and agencies. On the other hand, some agents—especially the fledgling ones—aren't members of the AAR yet, but don't rule them out. Deb suggested that a new agent with a large AAR-listed agency could be a good bet; they are hungry for clients, yet have the umbrella of an established agency with all its valuable resources. Some agents have their own Web sites or blogs. Ask

other authors. Network at conferences where you can meet agents in person, such as our own PPWC—where all attending agents are screened thoroughly beforehand. Anyone can hang up a shingle and call themselves a literary agent, so research is a must.

Of course, a great query letter is a must to get an agent's attention. Learn how to write one. Deb also offered a sizeable list of questions to ask a prospective agent, from tongue-in-cheek to sincere. How do they view your career? Would they work with a publisher they don't like if it's in your best interest? How do they track submissions of your work? What kind of contract do they offer and what are your rights over your work? And would he or she bleed for you?

Written contracts are the rule these days...get one and let a lawyer look it over. Read the fine print! Watch for tricky clauses. What kind of escrow account is set up to handle and distribute your money? What does the contract say about how to terminate a relationship with the agent if needed? All fees, including the percentage of the agent's commission should be precisely and clearly stated.

For further info, check out these Web sites:

**AAR:** [www.aar-online.org](http://www.aar-online.org) (a fee-based service)

**Deb Stover:** [www.debstover.com](http://www.debstover.com)  
[www.agentresearch.com](http://www.agentresearch.com)

**Romance Writers of America:**  
[www.rwanational.org](http://www.rwanational.org)

Now get out there. Find the agent that's right for you!

## Grammar Gremlins

By Pam McCutcheon

**Problem sentence:** *It was enough to wet her appetite.* To “wet” means to make something damp, so this is saying her appetite is er, soggy. However, to “whet” means to sharpen, so if you mean her appetite was sharpened (and you should), you should write it like this: *It was enough to whet her appetite.*

**Problem sentence:** *He could of been a contender.* This is so wrong, I don't understand how it ends up in print, but it often does. All right, I understand that “could've” sounds just like “could of” when you say it aloud. However, “could of” doesn't make any sense grammatically. Write it this way: *He could've been a contender.* Or, even better, use it without the contraction so you don't get confused: *He could have been a contender.*

**Problem sentence:** *He poured over the book, looking for answers.* To “pour” means to dispense liquid. Use it only if she really is pouring fluid over the book to answer her questions. However, to “pore” means to read intently, so it makes more sense to say: *She pored over the book, looking for answers.*

**Problem sentence:** *He used alot of paint.* I see this often, and I'm not sure why. Maybe because the word “alot” is one word, though it has an entirely different meaning: to apportion. “Alot” is not a word, period. In this context, it should always be written this way: *He used a lot of paint.*

**Problem sentence:** *I had my dog spaded.* This sentence says that you allowed someone to use a spade on your dog, which I don't think is your intention (though the poor dog may not be able to tell the difference in the pain level). The confusion arises because the present tense of the verb meaning to neuter a female is “spay.” The past tense is “spayed,” but it sounds like “spade” when we say it out loud, so people seem to want to put an extra “ed” on the end of it when they write it in past tense. Properly written, it would be: *I had my dog spayed.*

**Problem sentence:** *She was renown for her delicate tatting.* This problem comes from the fact that “renown,” which is a noun, looks like the adjective “known,” so it appears correct to write it this way. Unfortunately, it's wrong. You have renown, meaning fame or honor, but you are renowned for what you do. So, the sentence should be written this way: *She was renowned for her delicate tatting.*



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

---

## Hot Topics

### Literary agent Kathleen Anderson

Anderson Grinberg Literary Management (PPWC 2005 faculty) has split into two agencies. Kathleen Anderson leads Anderson Literary Management, joined by associate agent Liz Gately and lecture and nonfiction scout Marcus Silverman. Jill Grinberg is working under the new banner of Jill Grinberg Literary Management, along with associate Kirsten Wolf.

### Write Brain Change

We have been holding Write Brains on the second Tuesday of every month, but in 2007, we will switch to the third Tuesday of the month. Mark your calendars!

## Write Now

This feature is a free-write prompt to access and stretch your right brain—flex your writing muscles. Here's how to do it. Think briefly about this issue's prompt. Set a timer

for about five minutes and start writing. Don't edit or think about punctuation or grammar. Let the thoughts flow and the words go! When the timer beeps, edit as little as needed. Submit your entry to [kennelly25@msn.com](mailto:kennelly25@msn.com) no later than December 1, 2006. We can't offer prizes, but the winning submission will be in an upcoming issue of *PPW NewsMagazine*.

**Rules:** Judging criteria are inventiveness and creativity. Titles recommended, but not necessary. One entry per person allowed. Include your full name with entry. All entries will receive an e-mail confirmation. Entries become the sole property of PPW and all decisions are final. Must be 100 words or less.

**Last Issue's Winning entry submitted by Becki Davis:**

**If only Margaret had thought of a better Halloween costume.**

**When the door opened, the look on Frank's face pierced her heart.**

"Oh, Frank..."

Frank barely managed a ragged croak.

"So sorry, just a minute," Margaret said.

She returned without the elaborate gown and cone-shaped headpiece with the billowing chiffon and was now dressed as a

peasant girl. An elated Frank leapt into her open arms and hopped on her shoulder.

Years of unsuccessful princess kisses hadn't changed Frank at all. And now that Margaret wasn't going to give him false hopes, he felt toadily at ease.

### How well do you know your fellow writers?

"Community—a group of people with a common background or with shared interests within society."

—*Encarta World English Dictionary*

Part of being a member of PPW is being in the presence of a lot of interesting people. But how well do you know your fellow writers? We'd like to know more about our members. Fill in the following sentence. Or submit a starting point. What do you want to know about the members of your writing community?

#### New Prompt:

*The first time someone called me a writer ...*