

Pikes Peak Writer

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Pikes Peak Writers Invites You to TRY Your Hand at Writing a Novel with NaNoTRYmo

a free, light-hearted approach to "National Novel Writing Month"

Did you know that November is National Novel Writing Month? Thanks to author Chris Baty (No Plot? No Problem!), writers around the world celebrate the art of writing a novel during the month of November. Baty's program "NaNoWriMo" (for National Novel Writing Month) began in 1999 with 21 people each setting out to write a 50,000 word novel in a mere 30 days. Now, 10 years later, participating "WriMos" number over 100,000 per year.

NaNoWriMo is a frenzy-palooza of word-slinging. It's all about flying by the seat of your pants and writing, writing, writing, without regard to form, format or detail. The focus is on the quantity, not the quality of writing. And editing is banished completely for those delirious, delicious, debilitating 30 days. It's an incredible experience.

But what if you can't commit to writing 50,000 words in a single month, much less the month of November, when feasting, family and football are beckoning at every turn? For you, Pikes Peak Writers has developed a program where you can try your hand at this "NaNo" business without the requirement to produce a set number of words: NaNoTRYmo.

All month long, PPW is hosting events to support, encourage and facilitate your writing: weekly write-ins, one full-day write-a-thon, a half-day "fight to the finish" opportunity, plus a "TGIO" (Thank God It's Over) party. All are free and open to the public.

But that's not all.



At each of PPW's NaNo events, seasoned writers will be on hand to answer questions, provide guidance, and help you start writing and keep writing.

THE RULES SUGGESTIONS:

1. There are no rules. Each writer decides for him/herself how to celebrate National Novel Writing

Month.

2. We suggest that participants set personal writing goals for the month. If a "word count" goal works for you, you can commit to a certain number of words per day, week and/or month. You can even set the "WriMo" goal of 50,000 words. Alternately, consider setting your sights on completing your novel (an existing work-in-progress or a new one), regardless of how many words it takes. Or, instead of writing, make a plan to outline or revise. However you define your intentions, articulating your writing goal can help you stay focused and motivated.

3. If you set a goal, write it down. It makes it more real. PPW will provide a "goals worksheet" (available for download at pikespeakwriters.com) that can serve as your contract with yourself. Keep it in your wallet, post it in your writing space, or share it with a friend or critique group. Recording your goal helps you feel accountable for making progress toward that goal. You're held even more accountable if you've made that goal "public" in some way.

4. Write with others. Writing alongside fellow writers can

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“The writer must believe that what he is doing is the most important thing in the world. And he must hold to this illusion even when he knows it is not true.”

—John Steinbeck

From the Editor



Motivation is a slippery little thing. It hides behind excuses and chores. Submerges itself in a sea of busyness, is easily overpowered by fatigue, and disappears in even the most delightful of distractions.

So let's work together and hunt this critter down. Throughout the month of November, you'll have the opportunity to try NaNoWriMo

(don't tell Yoda), with PPW-sponsored events known as NaNoTRYmo. All the juicy details are in Chris Mandeville's cover story.

Never tried a critique group? Maybe that's just the motivation you need. Jodi Anderson certainly thinks so. Or perhaps quitting your critique group, as Deb Buckingham did, will be the boost you need. Check out both sides in the first installment of our new recurring feature, "That's Debatable."

For a real kick in the pants, take MB Partlow's lead ("Tough Crowd") and get out there—share what you know about writing with others, even if they're quite a bit

shorter than you are.

Or read about how other writers get it done—with Christian Marcus Lyons' interview with best-selling author Joseph Finder, or the Sweet Successes of your fellow PPW members.

Once you've found the elusive creature, hold him down and pick a contest or publication opportunity from Janice Black's column, "Opportunities for Writers."

Whatever you do, don't loosen your grip. Hold on tight, and get the job done.

Happy Writing!

NaNoTRYmo

continued from page 1

lift you up when you're feeling low, and can inspire you if you're feeling stuck or unmotivated, so come to as many of PPW's NaNoTRYmo writing events as you can. If you can't make it to the official get-togethers, you can still "play along" by setting a goal, writing a contract with yourself, and participating in discussions on PPW's NaNoTRYmo Yahoo loop (to join, Yahoo loop and/or Facebook group, see contact information below). In addition, you can find or make a group to write with for the month. Crash a WriMo "write-in" in your local area—most cities have them, and the attendees won't know if you're an official WriMo or not. Or consider hosting your own gathering.

5. Do what works for you. Participate in TRYmo as an alternative to WriMo, or use it to augment the WriMo program. Set a goal or don't. Write in a group or on your own. Take November to celebrate the art of novel writing in your own way. But however you do it, regardless of the where, when, and how often, make a commitment to write.

Join us at these PPW NaNoTRYmo events:

Friday, October 30th, 5 to 8 p.m.

Deb Courtney presided over the official kick-off of NaNoTRYMo, in conjunction with Cottonwood's "Day of the Dead" celebration and art exhibit. If you couldn't make it, contact the PPW studio to ask about getting your Welcome Packet.

Every Tuesday in November, 4 to 8 p.m.

Attend write-ins with fellow TRYmos. Seasoned writers will be available for help and

encouragement. PPW will provide water, coffee, hot tea and hot chocolate, as well as a "share table" where attendees can deposit snacks to share pot-luck style. Help us GO GREEN by bringing your own water bottle and/or coffee mug.

Saturday, November 21, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.

A full-day write-a-thon! Come for the entire time or drop in when you can. PPW will provide bottomless hot beverages. Again, bring some snacks to share (if you choose), as well as your water bottle and coffee cup. Feel free to bring a sack lunch.

Sunday, November 29, 1 to 7 p.m.

"Fight to the Finish" in the company of other frantic finishers. Bring a drinking vessel—you know the drill.

Monday, November 30, 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Revel in the aftermath with fellow writers at a TGIO (Thank God It's Over!) party location to be determined. If you're feeling good about going "green," you can still bring your own mug, but no outside food, please.

All NaNoTRYmo events—except for the TGIO party—will be held at Cottonwood Center for the Arts, located at 427 E. Colorado in downtown Colorado Springs.

And all NaNoTRYmo events are free and open to the public.

Let's get writing!

Group home page:

To join the TRYmo Yahoo group, go to http://groups.yahoo.com/group/PPW_NaNoTRYmo

Group e-mail address:

For the TRYmo Facebook group, log in to your account and enter "nanotrymo" in the search box.

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That's Debatable: Critique Groups

Critique Groups: The Support You Need

By Jodi Anderson

To critique group or not to critique group? In my opinion, the right fit in a critique group (much like a well-fitting brassiere) can be not only helpful, but uplifting as well. It can be the most important step a writer takes to improve his work.

As a writer we often find ourselves blurry-eyed from multiple readings of our work in order to tighten, correct and fill the plot holes. This can also lead to head injuries because of the banging of our forehead against the keyboard or nearest wall because of the inability to edit further. So, what is a bruised and half-blind writer to do? Why, find a critique group that is a professional mix of

the editing your work needs to take it to the next level, and a sympathetic support system, of course!

While your friends and family may mean well, they are not writers (well, unless they are) and often want to spare your feelings. If you find the right critique group/partner they will share with you the things you need to do to improve your manuscript, and hopefully they will do it in a respectful manner. The key is to be part of a group that offers useful,

uplifting advice that helps all the members hone their skills as writers. Oftentimes, it is easier for us to see mistakes in the work of others. Looking critically at



someone else's manuscript may help you start to see and correct similar flaws in your own. You will grow exponentially in learning about what works and what doesn't.

In setting up a critique group, make sure you set guidelines and boundaries that will help this be a productive endeavor. Getting the most from your time is important. Your first attempt at a critique group or partner may not be the right fit. When you realize this, be honest and move on to find one that is beneficial to you and the others.

A supportive, productive, and constructive critique group can make all the difference in your manuscript. But, just as importantly, they will offer the support only another writer can offer. And isn't that something we can all use? I know I can, and I get it from my critique group.

Say NO to Critique Groups

By Deb Buckingham

Okay, this comes from an unpublished author of one brilliant book yet-to-be-picked-up by one brilliant agent; however, I know how to write and use words to get my story across. The use of critique groups is not something I want to entertain.

Here's my story.

I began writing a year and a half ago and finished a novel in nine months, taking the next three months to do edits with the help of one fabulous editor.

I found myself lurking in critique groups to see what all the hype was about, when I heard them criticize the work of those yet to find their voice. I want those who critique me

to be somewhat above my level of writing or, at the very least, where I currently am. How can I "trust" those that critique to know what they're talking about? How can I take what they say and change everything they suggest only to find that my voice is gone, and everything I thought I knew about my story is now something completely different? I'm a good writer, dang it!

Critique groups are just that: a place for people to be taken down a peg—criticized for the work they created. Okay, maybe it's not that bad, but people definitely walk away feeling like what they wrote wasn't good enough. Not that I'm perfect, because God knows I'm not. I'm just sayin'.

It's hard to find a group where writing level, focus, and critiquing philosophy is the

same. And then there are the groups that make you take the work home with you. Now you have 10 stories to critique—where do you fit that in with your own writing timelines? I found myself procrastinating, and then ranting and raving because I did just that.

My other concern is that critique groups can be out of tune with each others' genre. I write romance/mom-lit, something kind of new to the writing world. Something a bit more humorous than your typical romance, consisting of a 40-year-old wife and mother trying to find herself in the rut of everyday life. I never ran across anyone who wrote that, so when they (those who signed up to be in this critique group) honed in on my work, they just plain didn't get it. That was hard for me to explain, so I just stopped. "You don't get it," is all I kept saying. If I could find a group that was made up of published writers in my genre, I might consider it, if the levels matched, and the philosophies matched...and...and...

With all that said, it is my opinion, and only one opinion. You have to decide what works for you and if you're willing to put yourself out there. I, on the other hand, would prefer not to. I say, "Say NO to Critique Groups."

Deb Courtney, PPW Writer-in-Residence???

For those of you wondering what in the world a "Writer-in-Residence" is and why you hadn't heard that PPW has one...well, it's because this is a brand-spanking new program.

In the Writer-in-Residence program, a proven, dedicated PPW volunteer is allowed use of the PPW studio at Cottonwood Center for the Arts to write, write, write. In exchange, the WIR holds office hours in the PPW studio for members who call or drop by to tend to administrative matters. Also, the WIR agrees to work a number of special programs for PPW during his/her tenure. Deb's first project was coordinating author readings at the "Dia de los Muertos" (Day of the Dead) event on 10-30-09. That night also marked the launch of her next project: NaNoTRYmo. Stop by Cottonwood to say hello and welcome Deb in her new role.



By Linda Rohrbough

The Business of Writing

In Plotting Popular Fiction, Figure Out Your Bad Guy First

At the risk of sounding redundant, I learned another critical tip for writing popular fiction from Jim Frey, author of *How to Write a Damn Good Novel*, that I'd like to share with you. It's about creating plot by figuring out the antagonist first.

I spent a couple of hours every afternoon for about eight days working on various plots with a group of 15 writers, about half of whom were published in fiction. Led by Jim Frey, this was an invitation-only workshop and intense doesn't begin to describe it. We worked over 80 hours and spent easily 20 hours just on plotting. And I can tell you that the plots we consistently got hung up on were the ones where the writers didn't understand their antagonists—their bad guys.

Now you'd think it would be just the opposite: that if you have your protagonist (your hero or your good guy) all figured out—especially what he is afraid of and what his strengths and weaknesses are—you could then figure out your bad guy and your plot. And I've worked with writers who plot that way, especially when it comes to romance novels. But Jim told us that figuring out the bad guy was the critical piece. And every time we started working on a plot and the writer didn't know enough about the bad guy, we got hung up. Actually, hung up was an understatement. We got short circuited. We floundered around for about 15 minutes as a group, throwing out useless ideas that got shot down one after another, until a heavy silence settled over the group. Then we'd table that discussion and go on to someone

else's plot. The feeling was the same kind of frustration I've undergone while working alone—that tightness in my chest and a sense of hopelessness like, "I'm never, ever going to figure this out." Ever suffer through that?

Well, here's a news flash. If you're writing popular fiction, and you've got a bad guy, you need to figure him out first. This is because the bad guy drives the plot for quite a while. And your hero or heroine is reacting, at least in the beginning, to the problems the bad guy is causing. A major part of the fun for a reader is unraveling this puzzle you've created. But if you don't know the whole picture of the bad guy going in, how are you going to lead the reader? You can't.

“Principle for Popular Fiction: Figure out the back story, goals, motivation and conflicts for your bad guy first. It makes plotting a novel a whole lot easier.”

What struck me as interesting was that in each one of these difficult cases, the writer knew the protagonist through and through. Every goal, motivation, and conflict was neatly mapped out. But we still got stalled until we turned the tables and figured out the bad guy. What was his back story? What did he want? What happened? And what was he covering up? When we had that, everything else slid neatly into place like it was meant to be there.

I've also talked in past columns about the

trend toward two antagonists: a “good bad guy” and a “bad bad guy.” The “good bad guy” is the character your hero is up against, but he is just trying to do his job—like a cop who is trying to solve the crime. The “good bad guy” is an adversary for the protagonist as much or more than the actual bad guy who is making the mess to begin with. In that case, I'd encourage you to figure out the back story, goals, motivations, and conflicts for both your antagonist characters.

If you haven't figured it out already, fiction is complicated. I'm not suggesting a totally linear process here, where you do one thing, like figure out your bad guy, and then move on and never revisit or modify the bad guy again. It isn't like that. But it surprised me how much easier and better the flow of plotting became when we knew as much about the antagonist going in as we expected to know about the protagonist.

I don't know that I've heard anyone say this but I'm coming to the conclusion that you write a book before the book. I have had award-winning novelists admit to me that they write a book, delete it, start over, and the second book is the one they publish. I do think fiction writing means that you have to know several stories in order to write just one. The bottom line, as my gift to you this month, is this tip: figure out your bad guy's story first. It'll make your writing life easier in the long run.

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

Top Five Reasons to “Try” NaNoTRYmo

Contributed by Deb Courtney, PPW's “Writer-in-Residence”

1. Whatever your goal, daily writing creates excellent habits for writers...write something every day

for a month and you will find it easier to write something every day for a year.

2. Participating in Pikes Peak Writers events builds writing community and accountability.

3. Where else will you find coaches ready to assist you through the tough spots?

4. The feeling of completing your writing goal, whatever it is, is unparalleled and will motivate you further.

5. Because writers write!

September Write Brain

All One Document

By Cathy Dilts

Writers planning to enter the 2010 PPW Fiction Contest received insider tips at the September Write Brain. Contest director Dawn Smit Miller hammered home the importance of submitting “all one document.”

For the first time, the contest has gone entirely electronic, partly to save postage and paper costs. Dawn also cited past instances where hardcopies went astray in the postal system.

Judges will receive only electronic copies, and will mark manuscripts using computer editing and mark-up features. Send your synopsis and manuscript as a single attached RTF document, NOT as separate files—all one document.

Page count no longer matters, but if you go over the word count there may be dire consequences, including chopping off your entry mid-sentence.

If you plan to labor feverishly on your submission until the wee hours of November 14, think again. There are incentives for entering before the deadline!

“If you get your contest entry in seven days before the deadline,” Dawn told the audience, “we will check your entry.” Time permitting, she and Chris will notify entrants of basic errors they can correct that might otherwise disqualify them from the contest, such as leaving your name on your manuscript.

Dawn handed out blank judging score sheets and reviewed each category in detail. She shared advice she gives the judges for scoring manuscripts, then gave a mini-workshop on fiction writing techniques.

Dawn’s advice on writing The Dreaded Synopsis was to tell someone your story in ten minutes. “Then tell it in five, and tape it.” The synopsis is not an outline and should not be told chapter by chapter. It’s a narrative, and includes “not just what happened, but why.”

Chris Scena, contest coordinator, said the contest judges are not just “pulled off the street.” They meet criteria such as a demonstrated ability to critique. An effort is made to have one published author judge each entry, and finalists will be judged by VIP judges—agents and editors. If you have an issue with a judge, Chris asked that you let him know as soon as possible.

Entering a fiction contest is fraught with emotional turmoil. M.B. Paltrow closed the workshop with advice about dealing with contest results and judges’ comments. “Set it aside for six months,” then review it again. Time puts things in perspective.

The rules, entry form, timeline, and more are available on the PPW Web site. Chris encouraged writers to use the helpful checklist. “If you’re not sure,” Chris said, “ask!”

Resources:

- Contest questions? Contact Dawn or Chris at pgcontest@gmail.com
- *Writing the Fiction Synopsis* by Pam McCutcheon
- *GMC: Goal, Motivation, and Conflict* by Debra Dixon

Tips:

- Thank-you notes may be e-mailed to your judges.
- Read the rules. Follow the rules.
- Use the checklist.
- Send your entry seven days before the deadline and Dawn or Chris will check it for basic errors.
- “All one document”: Send your manuscript and synopsis as one RTF document.
- Stay within the word count!

Dear Grammar Girl,

My question today is: How many adjectives are politically correct in front of a proper noun, i.e. a person’s name?

I have to write a two-sentence blurb about myself—so can one sup the adjectives, or is it improper to have two sentences with x amount of adjectives?

Please reply in a way that addresses my learning style: two parts auditory, three parts visual, on Mondays tactile, and on the last Wednesday of the month—which isn’t today—olfactory.

Thanks, Ellen

Dear Ellen,

Take two adverbs and call me in the...

Oops. Wrong e-mail. Ehem.Um.

Adjectives are tricky little cusses. If you want to say, for instance, “The amazing, stupendous, talented and unsurpassably correct Deb Courtney”, then I suggest you stand up and say it loudly, making sure your entire office hears...

Really, Ellen, I’d have to see the adjectives

Grammar Girl

in question. Though there is an obscure and highly secret equation you can use to test the efficacy of your adjective usage.

1. Count the number of words in the sentence.
2. Divide by pi.
3. Add to that the square root of the actual number of adjectives (a) minus 1 (e.g., the square root of (a - 1)).
4. Multiply the answer by 2, 43.5, 104, and 3,245,361/2 respectively.
5. Place each answer at the corner of an Aristotelian logic square, beginning at the top left corner and progressing around clockwise.
6. Figure the inverse implication for each corner, then add the top left and bottom right corners, and the top right and bottom left corners.
7. Divide the second sum by the first sum
8. Take the square root of your answer
9. If the answer has more than a single digit, add the digits together starting from the

left, continuing this process until you are left with a single digit.

This single digit is the number of adjectives your sentence can appropriately hold without causing all life as we know it to abruptly and permanently cease. Or something like that.

By the way, having been inducted into the select cadre of People Who Know, you must now swear never to reveal this secret. If you do, you are destined to spend the rest of eternity performing sentence diagramming on the complete works of Faulkner.

I hope this finds you on your visual day, as I am at a loss as to how I ought to communicate grammar as scent (though it is certainly a fact that much grammar usage carries with it the distinctive odor of—ahem—solid waste).

*Yours in good grammar,
Grammar Girl*

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Article obtained from the Colorado Springs Fiction Writer’s Group (www.coloradospringsfictionwritersgroup.org)

October Write Brain

Keep 'Em Guessing

By Laura Pellerin

Our speaker for October's Write Brain, Kim Bjorndahl, spent the last 15 years at the Colorado Springs Police Department in Metro Forensics. Colorado Springs has around 25-30 homicides per year; El Paso County's yearly homicides exceed 40. Some of them are so "un-newsworthy," they are not even reported in *The Gazette*.

Our job as writers is to get even jaded readers interested. Kim likes suspense novels, but like most readers, she reads the first page before she buys the book. She says we have to engage our audience right away.

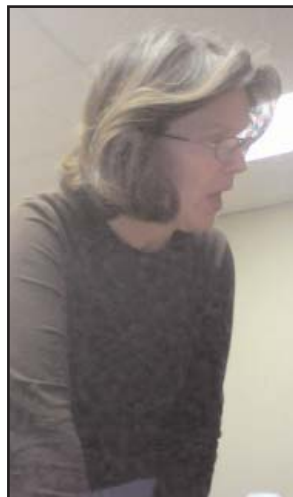
She shows us her first picture: something is buried in the snow. Something with blood on it. The setting is obviously a dark, snowy winter's night. We can see tire tracks. What are the possibilities for a writer's first page?

In another photo, we see the same snow-covered bundle in an open field, and a footprint. (But wait—if you say "footprint," a forensics investigator will assume the person was barefoot. We need to call it a "shoe imprint.")

Can we tell if there is a crime yet? Can we tell if the body is a female? Is she partially clothed? We can see that something was dragged in the snow.

Kim explains that these photographs are used by the prosecution to tell a story. In a court of law, between the defense and the prosecution, the best storyteller wins the case.

Thick and fast, surmises come from various attendees: if the tire tracks don't continue off to the right, she might have been offloaded from the back of a pick-up or an SUV. Looking at statistics, it's sexual assault. Pants are pulled down from the body. A suggestion from Kim leads us to the possibility that "she" might have been discovered by a date to be a "he", which leads to a discussion as to whether or not a cross-dresser would wear a bra. Now we're calling the body a "he". It looks like a tire track runs across "his" head. One female attendee participates with an, "Oooooo."



Another photo reveals that nobody tried to bury the body. We still think the body was dragged by a car. The sparkly top indicates the victim wasn't dressed for an evening in the field, so our guess is that the body was transported from somewhere else.

Kim shows us a photo of the face, and we all agree: it's a guy—a baby-faced one—wearing a padded bra. It looks like rope is trailing from the wrist. His hair doesn't look natural. What is that injury to the neck—rope burn? "Oh, my gosh. Look there on his abdomen..."

What type of crime do we have? It's looking more like gay bashing, or a sex-related crime. The next photo is of the wound on the neck. What caused it? A blunt object, an axe, an ice pick? No, an ice pick would be too small.

"Kim's point in using this intriguing exercise was that, as mystery writers, we lead the readers down the path of the story we want to tell, but we have to pique their interest enough to get them to go in the direction we are leading them."

"What are your thoughts?" Kim asks. The Write Brainers have many and toss them out, faster than I can take them down: it's a bashing crime, with more than one perpetrator; barbed wire fencing; a vampire; could the body have been dumped and then attacked by animals? But animals would have left more blood. Could be a disagreement between two transvestites, which is why someone made it look like a hate crime; if more than one person dragged the victim,

they would have picked the body up and carried it, leaving no trail; the body must have been pulled by a vehicle instead of a person.

Just when we thought we knew what happened that dismal night, Kim shows us a picture of the cleaned-up female corpse. Now we see the flesh-slicing injury to the neck. The audience reaction comes swiftly.

Q: What kind of weapon causes injuries to the neck? A handgun?

Q: Why was no blood visible in the snow?

Kim: It started snowing after she bled out.

Kim: What crime(s) were committed—if any?

A: Homicide, murder, sexual attack, manslaughter.

Kim: Ideas? So what's going on?

A: She was killed, dumped, then dragged. Maybe they were trying to remove tattoos, or it was an explosion, or...

But it wasn't any of these. The last photo revealed the culprits, shot and laid out in the back of a pickup truck: two loose wolf hybrids. The victim had been caring for them as a favor to a friend and hadn't secured them properly. Despite all our wild imaginings, there'd been no crime at all.

Kim's point in using this intriguing exercise was that, as mystery writers, we lead the readers down the path of the story we want to tell, but we have to pique their interest enough to get them to go in the direction we are leading them. Basically, her whole presentation did just that. She led us down a lot of dead ends by giving us false clues, and then shocked us with the twist at the end.

After the break, we got our hands dirty. We watched one participant take a dental stone casting of another participant's shoe imprint. Groups of seven tested cards with different stains to find traces of blood. We collected the samples with a Q-tip dampened with phenolphthalein and hydroxide. If the blood test stick turned green within a second or two, the presumptive test is positive for blood. (Kim confessed later that the "cards" we'd used were paint chip samples from a local hardware store.)

Kim shared lots of other tips (including this advice: based on what she's seen in her work, don't sleep on top of motel bedspreads!). But the most useful take-away was simple, and clearly demonstrated with those photographs: keep your reader guessing, and he'll keep reading.

Interview With Author Joseph Finder

By Christian Marcus Lyons

N*ew York Times* bestselling author Joseph Finder is a scary man. Not Bela Lugosi scary, perhaps, but the sheer volume of his knowledge about espionage and national intelligence is enough to make the most secure person keep at least one eye looking over his shoulder.

Finder began life as a world traveler—his first language was Farsi—and he later became a Harvard professor before being recruited by the CIA. His books tackle corporate espionage and the often underhanded tactics overly ambitious men and women utilize to further their own agendas. But for all that focus on paranoia and intrigue, he is refreshingly open about himself, his writing process, and the world around him.

Finder published his first book at the age of 24, a nonfiction exposé titled *Red Carpet: The Connection Between the Kremlin and America's Most Powerful Businessmen*. Undaunted by threats of a libel suit over the book, Finder told the rest of the story in 1991s novel, *The Moscow Club*, which *Publisher's Weekly* touted as “one of the top ten best spy thrillers of all time.”

Since then, Finder's prolific career has covered the spectrum of societal paranoia, from *The Zero Hour*, *High Crimes* (which became a 2002 Twentieth Century Fox film starring Ashley Judd and Morgan Freeman), to the aptly titled *Paranoia* in 2004, 2005s *Company Man*, and his latest release, *Vanished* (St. Martin's Press, August 2009).

PPW's staff writer Christian Marcus Lyons caught up with him at his home on the Cape, in the midst of Finder's full schedule.

CML: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. If you don't mind, I'm going to jump right in.

We've heard of the sometimes peculiar jobs some authors held before hitting it big in the writing industry, but you originally had the desire to become a spy. How did that early yearning for spyhood translate into a successful writing career?

JF: I learned that the world of intelligence was a lot less exciting than I thought it would be in reality. Fiction tends to intensify the humdrum. Writing about spies and espionage allows me to do what I want to do, and that's turning the dial up to 11. I have lots of contacts in the CIA—all the way to the top—and can call whoever I want for



Photo by Joel Benjamin

information. And because I write fiction, people tend to be more open with me, more willing to talk. So those contacts and what I learned working on the inside provide authenticity to what I write.

CML: Your Web site bio mentions that you're a fan of the late Robert Ludlum's work. Ludlum's writing was influenced by conspiracy theories, much like your writing, and—like Ludlum—your books feature one heroic character fighting the forces of evil. What other authors influenced your writing and your desire to become an author?

JF: Let's see...Frederick Forsythe, John Le Carre, Ken Follett, Len Deighton...and some of the early ones, Eric Ambler...

CML: Did you find that you emulated them?

JF: Writers starting out cannot help emulating other writers. My first couple of novels emulated Ludlum in structure—a building conspiracy—but I was more inspired by Le Carre's prose. But eventually, it's your own voice that comes through.

CML: You released *Paranoia* as a free

download for the Amazon Kindle. How do you perceive the future of the publishing industry in light of electronic advancements?

JF: I'm concerned. Worried. On the one hand—and it wasn't just the Kindle, but also Sony, E-Reader, iTunes audiobooks—it's been great because it's allowed me to reach out to new readers. It's hard to reach the mass market through publishers. They don't have the money to market an author to so many people. But the free thing was great.

E-books will probably become a dominant force. Books won't go away, though. People like the experience, the paper versions. However, e-book sellers will start pressuring publishers to e-publish. And they pay less for an electronic copy of a new novel. Amazon charges \$9.99 per book, and that cost will probably drop as e-readers

become more popular.

That means that writers—who don't make all that much to begin with, except the hugely successful ones—will make less. I don't want them to drive writers out of business.

CML: Your latest thriller, *Vanished*, is the first in a four-book series with recurring character Nick Heller, which I'm sure your

fans are very excited about. I know I am. What was it about the character, or the story, that led to the series?

JF: I've wanted to create a series character for a long time. People at my book signings always ask about the characters... Adam Cassidy (*Paranoia*), Jason Steadman (*Killer Instinct*)...but it didn't make sense to create a series from a standalone. Nick Heller is unique in that he was specially created for the series. I didn't want to duplicate what's already been done, wanted a unique take on the genre.

One day, I met with a CIA friend who'd gone private—doing the same thing he was doing but for private corporations and governments. I realized then that Heller was a private spy.

CML: Kind of like a private eye, only a private spy.

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Interview with Joseph Finder

continued from page 7

JF: Exactly.

CML: How is writing a series different in the way you approached it?

JF: The major difference is character arc, the arc of transformation. A series character cannot transform in any significant way. The vector is not about change, but about revelation to the reader. [Heller] will not transform.

CML: As writers, we're responsible for finding our own motivation and inspiration. What nourishes you as a writer?

JF: I love to write. It is the feeling I get when writing. I love being in that space where I'm creating things. It's not money, not fame—they're great such as they are—but they only support my habit. Bottom line: I love writing.

I don't like getting bad reviews, I don't like the stress of touring, and so I have to remind myself what I'm in it for.

CML: Are you an advocate of outlining novels prior to sitting down to write them?

JF: Yes. The cool thing about writing is that no one tells us how to do it. It's not like driving a car, where there's a specific way to go about it. We can't go around making up our own laws. Writers have to figure it out for themselves. It's scary, but it's also liberating.

I know very few thriller writers who can get away without outlining. Lee Child doesn't

[outline], but he's such a pro, he outlines in his head.

If it's overdone, it kills spontaneity. It gets boring. You have to find that balance in your outline where you know your major plot points, but how you get from point C to point D is purely creative.

CML: What's a typical writing day look like in the life of Joseph Finder?

JF: It's really, really rigid. Far more than most office workers' schedules. I wake up, get my daughter off to school—drive car pool if it's my turn—then head to my office and my assistant around eight a.m. I drink an espresso, fire up my computer, and start with reading a couple lines.

I practice the slow-cooker method—you know, where you put something to cook overnight? I'll read the outline and the next day's notes before going to sleep and often wake up spilling over with ideas. I work all morning, then take a break, work out, have lunch with someone, do business-y stuff in the afternoons. Maybe get a few more hours in the late afternoon. Sometimes, when things are really rolling, I'll write early. Four or five a.m., before my daughter even awakens. That way I can get a couple extra hours in. There's no email, no telephone calls...

CML: You give back to the writing community in many ways. Was there a mentor who influenced your passion to write?

JF: No, no mentor. I feel it's my respon-

sibility. I wished I had a mentor to help me avoid mistakes. I had no idea about agents, publishers, any of that. I figured it out myself.

Now, I'm always giving and getting advice from other bestselling writers, and I feel it's an established writer's job to help the younger writers, help them learn what to do.

CML: Thank you for taking time to meet with me. Do you have any sage advice for the writers who will read this?

JF: This may sound flip or trite, but: Just write.

Way too many writers get hung up on marketing. You write a book. Then you write another one. If you publish, write another. Writing can already be so difficult, and many writers spend so much time selling their work and not enough time writing.

The most successful writers aren't the best writers, but the most stubborn.

—Christian Marcus Lyons is a four-time Pikes Peak Writers Conference Fiction Competition award winner in novel-length fiction, short fiction, creative nonfiction, and screenplay. He has also been a finalist in the RMFW Colorado Gold Conference Fiction Contest, Ploughshares Literary Magazine's Award for Emerging New Writers, Glimmer Train's Short Story Award for New Writers, and the Asian International Film Festival. In 2009, he joined the PPWC Fiction Competition judging panel, and is on the judging panel for the Crested Butte "Sandy." He lives in Lafayette, CO, with his three ginormous dogs, where he's at work on his latest novel.

Tough Crowd: One Writer's Experience at "A Writer in Every School"



By M.B. Partlow

I can make small talk with the hears driver from the funeral home. I can make my doctor laugh during the dreaded yearly exam. I can talk zombies with anyone. I've even learned how to speak to my favorite published authors without biting my tongue or sounding like a stalker-in-waiting.

8 Pikes Peak Writer

But the toughest crowd of all? Stand up in front of a room full of fifth graders and tell them what it's like to be a writer.

The pre-puberty crowd doesn't really care how much money you do or don't make. They want to know how you get your ideas, where you get your inspiration, and—in one boy's case—what your favorite quote is.

Note to self: Next time, have some cool quotes written down or memorized.

Fortunately, the fifth graders in Mrs. Law's class at Stratton Elementary are a dedicated and enthusiastic bunch of readers. When I asked them what they like to read, answers ranged from newspapers to the Harry Potter

series to Agatha Christie mysteries to *National Geographic* magazine. They love a good series—one they can sink their teeth into and read book after book.

Naturally, the kids wanted to know about what I'm writing. My book is not one I would consider suitable for my own fifth grader, so I summarized it with, "Sweet Teeth is a book about a vampire who has this incredible sweet tooth. He craves sweets all the time, but he can't have any because he can't eat real food." That satisfied them.

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By **Becky Clark**

Fourteen Reasons Why Being a Blogger is Better Than Being a Logger

- Fewer blisters.
- No slogging through mud to get to work.

All I have to do is kick piles of dirty socks, pizza crusts and newspaper clippings away from my desk chair. I don't even need boots for that, most of the time.

- I'm only responsible for my own limbs.
- I don't have to live up to Paul Bunyan's standards. I only have to keep up with Xia Xue or Dawn Yang. Who? Exactly.
- We both use bull lines, but mine don't hurt my shoulders.
- The only rivers involved in my work are Riverdance, River Phoenix, and YouTube videos of funny ways people fall out of boats.
- Bears don't try to eat me—or my lunch—for lunch.
- I'm not required to wear plaid shirts, which is good as they make my neck look fat.
- No guilty loss of sleep due to clear-cutting virgin old-growth forests.
- I'm not called wood hick, river pig/hog/rat, or catty-man—at least to my face.
- I can work year round rather than seasonally. And if I don't feel like working, I can cruise over to YouTube and find videos of extreme shepherding; I can close my eyes

and memorize a page in my Urban Dictionary; or I can vote on entries from My Life Is Average. (All blog posts I hope you haven't missed!)

- I only have one job title and it's not whistle punk, chaser, high climber, choker-setter or tie hack.
- Blogging isn't voted one of the worst, most dangerous jobs. Although time will tell.
- No scooping up after Babe, the Blue Ox.
- On the other hand, there are no chainsaws, log rolling, or flumes for bloggers. And no BloggerJack Picnics where we compete in various bloggy events. There's no Monty Python song about me, and I've never seen a school Blogger mascot.
- Hmm. Maybe I should look into being a logger instead. After all, they're practically *required* to eat loads of flapjacks and wear those cool suspenders. Besides, I'd probably look awesome in a beard. As long as it's not plaid.

<http://beckyland.wordpress.com>

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

Tough Crowd

continued from page 8

Note to self: Practice log line on fifth graders. If it isn't succinct and doesn't make sense, they'll let you know.

One of the first topics I launched into was how one goes from having an idea for a story to holding a published book in one's hands. This was the part where twenty-odd pairs of eyes began to glass over and I started talking faster and faster. Because ten-year-olds don't really want to hear that once you write a book, you're going to rewrite a lot of it. More than once. Nor do they appreciate the difference between trying to find an agent and trying to find a publisher.

Note to self: Next time, summarize the process better.

After explaining that an agent might ask for some changes and then the publisher might ask for some changes, one boy raised his hand. His question: "If you make all these changes for all these people, it's not really your story anymore, is it?"

Note to self: Don't cry in front of the children.

Moving right along, we talked about where ideas come from. I explained that ideas come from anywhere and everywhere. Dreams, movies, books, magazines, newspapers, songs, overheard conversations, daydreaming, and the all-important "what if." I explained to the

kids that at any given moment, they can stop and ask "what if." What if they could make it stop raining at recess time? What if they could make the cafeteria serve exactly what they wanted for lunch? What if they could get someone else to do their homework? What if their dog or cat could talk? What if the characters of their favorite book lived in a different country or on a different planet?

Ideas were whizzing around the classroom faster than I could write them down.

Then we moved to the part of the presentation the kids like best. Every story, I told them, has the same basic idea. Somebody wants something, but someone or something is in their way. I illustrated what I meant with quick examples from Little Red Riding Hood and Harry Potter. Then it was time for the writing exercise. I don't know if high schoolers might groan at something like this, but the fifth graders tackled it with glee.

First, they wrote down three characters and whether they were male or female. We got Bob the Alien, Capricorn the human, characters from some established book series, and an animated blue puff ball. Next step, write down something these characters want. The results were everything from slaying the evil overlord (no political intrigues here, just straight to killing the bad guy) to eating lunch to getting married. Then the kids listed what stood in the way for their characters. We got a very complicated love triangle that involved Bob the Alien, empty cupboards and a wide

variety of seemingly insurmountable problems. Of course, the final step was surmounting those problems.

Fifth graders, it seems, have no problems blending genres. The love triangle was solved by shooting one character with a laser gun. Another with a distinct fantasy setting was solved with a tactical nuke. We had interplanetary war and assassinations.

What did I take away from my hour in the fifth grade classroom? It's incredibly energizing to talk to kids about writing because they're so enthusiastic about both reading and writing. But the real benefit came a couple of days later, when my daughter brought home a sack full of thank you notes.

One card contained an illustration, where I'm sitting at a table in a bookstore next to a wall full of my books, and a reader is saying "Wow! This book is really good." Or how about the boy who said, "Now I actually enjoy sitting down to a desk and writing. Although I don't like writing on a prompt, it's still better than grammar [sic]." Best of all, "The activity with the planning was also a lot of fun, and it helped me learn about how to write."

Note to self: Sign up for "Day on Writing" next year.

Oct. 20 was the National Day on Writing, and D11 initiated the program "A Writer in Every School" to celebrate and get kids at all grade levels excited about writing.

Upcoming PPW Events

November, December

November Write Brain

Please note: Our November Write Brain will be replaced by the whirlwind of activity that is NaNoTRYmo. Read more about it on the cover of this issue.

December Write Brain

Can You Feel It? Using Emotions in Storytelling

Featuring Michael J. Coumatos

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

If you're looking for ways to deepen and enrich your fiction, join us for our December Write Brain. Using examples, exercises, and his own experience as a writer, author Mike Coumatos will show us how to capture the emotion at the core of our characters and use it to sharpen their thoughts, strengthen their actions, and create scenes that are certain to wow our readers.

Michael J. Coumatos is a former naval aviator, test pilot, squadron commanding officer, ship's captain, and Commodore of U.S. and coalition naval task groups in Desert Storm, Somalia, and Rwanda. He is a business owner of a



locally headquartered company, and he is also the first Chairman for the non-profit arts organization, the Cultural Office of the Pikes Peak Region (COPPeR). Mike has published two military, futuristic thrillers (*Space Wars* and *Counterspace*), written a final draft teleplay for a television series, and authored numerous articles in professional journals. He lives in Manitou Springs with his wife Susan. He is most proud of his granddaughter, Nicole.

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

Write Brain Sessions are held at Cottonwood Center for the Arts, 427 E. Colorado Ave. Visitor's parking is in the large parking lot on the east side of the Cottonwood building. The workshops will be in Studio A adjacent to the new PPW office and bookstore located in Studio 116.

If you would like to participate in any Write Brain session, **PLEASE RSVP AND INCLUDE YOUR DAYTIME CONTACT INFORMATION.** This does not commit you to attending, but enables us to prepare enough materials for expected attendees, and importantly, it gives us a way to contact you if we have an emergency change to the Write Brain session, such as a postponement due to weather. We will make every attempt to post changes to the PPW Yahoo loop and the Web site, **but to be ensured of notification you must RSVP to rsvp@pikespeakwriters.com.**

Open Critique

Tuesdays, November 24 and December 22, from 6:30 to 8:30, at Pikes Perk (in Erindale Square) 5965 N Academy Blvd.

NOTE NEW LOCATION FOR NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER:

(Open critique is usually held the fourth Wednesday of each month.)

Open Critique guests for November and December to be announced.

PPW Members Night

Monday, November 22 and December 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.

Hidden Icon Prize

One prize will be awarded to a *NewsMag* reader who correctly identifies the hidden icon in this issue. The winner's name will be randomly selected from all correct answers submitted by November 15.

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

The winner of the drawing gets to browse the very cool PPW store (accessible through our Web site) and pick one item up to \$30 in value from the PPW store—we'll pay shipping, too!

A Bit About Believing

By Mandy Houk

My creative writing students are required to write in composition books every day. Often, I find notes to me: "Sorry this is boring," or, "You don't want to read this," or, "I'm lame!"

They're wrong, but I have to laugh,

because of what I'm thinking when words won't flow: "I'm a hack. This will never happen." It's hard to maintain belief in your dreams when the road is so long and curvy and filled with pot-holes of disappointment.

That's what made my latest birthday present from my husband so amazing.

He'd asked a friend of ours—a photographer—to make mock-up book covers for my two novels. Mind you, neither has been published (the second isn't finished). But the book covers are so gorgeous, one guest at my surprise party asked where he could buy the books!

What's truly incredible is what they represent: my husband believes. That there will be real book covers one day, covering real books, filled with words that I wrote in those impossible-feeling moments. When I can't believe in myself, I look at those book covers and let his belief take over.

My students can't wait to open their composition books when I return them. I write notes like, "You're not lame," and, "This isn't boring—I wish you'd kept going."

Find someone who believes in you; and find someone to believe in. It makes a difference—believe me.

Sweet Success

Laura Reeve's second Major Ariane Kedros novel, *Vigilante*, is on the shelves. We hope you were able to join Laura at her release party in October. Visit her Web site at www.AncestralStars.com to learn more about *Vigilante*, and the first book in her series, *Peacekeeper*.

Beth Groundwater's new mystery series has been purchased by Midnight Ink Books, the mystery imprint of Llewellyn Worldwide. Midnight Ink offered a two-book contract with first-refusal rights for subsequent books in the series. The books will be published in trade paperback and electronically. The first book, *Wicked Whitewater*, will be released in the first quarter of 2011. The second book should be released in the first quarter of 2012.

Beth also has a science fiction novella coming out from Virtual Tales in November: <http://www.virtualtales.com/Science-Fiction/Epsilon-Eridani-Alternative.html>

For more about Beth, including upcoming appearances, go to <http://bethgroundwater.com/>

Mandy Houk's nonfiction story, "For Richer, For Poorer," will appear in *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Counting Your Blessings*, to be released on November 3rd. Other stories by Mandy have appeared in two previous editions of *Chicken Soup* (*Chicken Soup for the Adopted Soul* and *Chicken Soup: My Resolutions*). Pretty soon she just might turn into a noodle.

Deb Stover is pleased and relieved that all the advance reviews for *The Gift* (Nov '09) have been positive (so far). "This melting pot of murder mystery, passion and ghosts makes for an outstanding storytelling stew! HOT 4 ½ Stars!" Jill Smith, *RT Book Reviews*.

Laura Hayden is playing ghostwriter again. She's ghostwriting an urban fantasy/paranormal romance series for a Hollywood celebrity. Who? If she tells you, she'll have to kill you.

The New Face of Jazz, by Cicily Janus, is available for preorder on Amazon. It will be released on July 13, 2010. Nothing like getting a publisher excited about selling your work! Be one of the first to order:

www.amazon.com/New-Face-Jazz-Intimate-Tomorrow/dp/0823000656/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1256694117&sr=8-2

Elsewhere in the Arts

By Jené Jackson
PPW Arts and Member Liaison

It's the busiest time of the year, right? But in the last few months, I've noticed that when I don't make the time for activities or events that may seem superfluous (not "on-task" or "working toward writing goals"), my creative drive wanes. I start looking at doing what I love—writing!—as more like drudgery than as being a vital part of a thriving artistic community.

Move outside your social boundaries. Tell another artist that you're a wordsmith. Ingest live music and craft you can touch. Here are just a few opportunities:

Pikes Peak Studio Tour
November 14-November 15, 2009
Saturday 10-5; Sunday 11-4
10 Studios—Artists—2 Days
www.pikespeakstudiotour.com/

The Colorado Springs area is home to many nationally known artists. On November 14 and 15, nine studios will be open to the community for a unique opportunity to view and purchase work by 15 artists. The artwork will include paintings, drawings, prints, jewelry, metal sculpture, ceramics, clay sculpture, weaving, mixed media and photography.

This annual event allows the public to meet the artists and tour private, unique working spaces, many in the artist's home. See demonstrations of diverse media and styles and purchase original art. Come visit 15 artists in 10 studio locations! Join the festivities and get a rare view of the creative working environment of the artists. Each studio will hold a drawing for a free work of art.

Showcase at Studio Bee: Tom Taylor and the Needlewood Orchestra and Jason Bennett
November 12, 2009 at 6 p.m.
(doors open at 5:30)

Studio Bee at the Pikes Peak Center
190 S. Cascade Ave., Colorado Springs
FREE! Concessions and a cash bar will be available.

Thanks to KRCC, COPPeR, *The Gazette*, the *Independent*, Independent Records and the Pikes Peak Center, the Showcase at Studio

Bee features some of the best in local musical talent. All artists included in the Showcase are from the counties of El Paso, Teller, or Pueblo counties, and all have written and recorded their own music.

Photography by Diego Lama
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center
30 W. Dale St., Colorado Springs
Open Tuesday-Sunday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Tickets: Free for FAC Members
Non-members: Adults: \$10; Seniors (62+), Students (with ID) & Youth: \$8.50; Children 4 and under: free.

Info: (719)634-5583

You could write myriads of stories just from looking at these photos. In fact, write a short story inspired by them, and submit it to the NewsMag!

This series of six panoramic photographs from Peruvian artist Diego Lama were taken in Lima in 2007. The large format works featuring dramatic, theatrical atmospheres emphasize a contrast between the bodies and the perfectly organized spaces. Solitary figures seem out of place in various stylized areas. Lama describes the series as a testimony about the cultural politics in Peru. come see why they've been voted Best Live Comedy Group in Colorado Springs.

Stick Horses in Pants—Improv Comedy
November 14, December 5 & 19
Broadmoor Hotel Theater
1 Lake Ave., Colorado Springs
7:30 p.m. tickets on sale and doors open;
8 p.m. Showtime

Tickets (available at the box office on the night of the show—cash or check only):
\$8 adults, \$5 students/senior/military.
Contact: (719)332-4816

Laughter is good for you and your writing! Enjoy family-friendly improvisational comedy, and see why come see why Stick Horses in Pants has been voted Best Live Comedy Group in Colorado Springs.

The arts community of the Pikes Peak region wants to welcome you with open arms. Embrace it!

Thank you to www.peakradar.com and event Web sites for the descriptions of these events.



PIKES PEAK WRITERS
427 E. COLORADO #116
COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80903

Opportunities for Writers

Compiled by Janice Black

Whether you are writing Science Fiction, Romance, Mystery, or any other category of fiction, submitting your work to a contest is a courageous act! You polish your manuscript and take the plunge. It's hard to know which competitions to enter: is this one a scam? Do I have a chance here? Is the entry fee just money down the drain?

I always look for free contests or highly reputable ones, and I keep an eye out for competitions in a variety of genres. So here's what I have to share with you today:

1. If murder or serious crime is at the heart of your novel, then enter it into the **St. Martin's Minotaur/Mystery Writers of America First Crime Novel Competition**. The Competition is open to any writer, regardless of nationality, who has never been the author of a published novel, and there is no entry fee.

Your entry must be postmarked no later than November 30, 2009, and received by

judges no later than December 15, 2009. For entry guidelines, go to www.mysterywriters.org/?q=Contests-Writers.

2. For romance writers with a published book out there, the next **Golden Heart Contest** deadline is November 16, 2009. "The purpose of RWA's Golden Heart contest is to promote excellence in the romance genre by recognizing outstanding romance manuscripts." To enter on www.rwanational.org, go to My Account Profile, select My Contests, and click the 2010 Golden Heart Contest Entry Form link. There are several categories, including "Novel with Strong Romantic Elements," "Paranormal Romance," and more. There is an entry fee.

3. Science Fiction writers! **The Writers of the Future** contest deadline is December 13, 2009. Your novelette or short story might be the winner. Or one of the winners. There is no entry fee. Submission guidelines are posted at www.writersofthefuture.com/rules.htm

4. Are you 16 years of age or older? Do you have a fictionalized story about your

family with no crime, violence, or derogatory humor? Keep it under 750 words and enter it in the **Highlights Fiction Contest**. Get ready for the upcoming deadline. Entries must be postmarked between January 1 and January 31, 2010. You may win one of three prizes of \$1,000 or tuition for the Highlights Foundation Writers Workshop at Chautauqua. No fee is required. Details are posted at www.highlights.com/highlights-fiction-contest.

5. The **University of Alabama** (Huntsville English Department) is looking for unpublished manuscripts of up to 5,000 words. Competition entry fees of \$15 benefit the Ruth Hindman Foundation, a philanthropic institution which awards scholarships nationwide to undergraduate and graduate students. Details are posted at www.uah.edu/colleges/liberal/english/hefranciscontest/.

6. **Reader's Digest** wants your funny quote, joke, or true story. They'll pay you \$100 to \$300 if they publish it. The entry form is posted at www.rd.com/submitjoke.do?lid=12.