

Pikes Peak Writer

NewsMagazine

Official Publication of the Pikes Peak Writers



VOLUME IX, ISSUE 5
September/October 2010

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Pondering Evolution

By Fleur Bradley

If you've been keeping up on publishing trends, you've probably heard the scuffle over the emergence of e-books. Analysts, publishing insiders, and writers all argue about where things will go—is print dead? Will we all be toting e-readers in five years? No one knows, is the honest truth. Time will tell how publishing evolves to meet technology.

I'm resistant to this kind of change—to any change, really. I get upset when they move my favorite TV show to Friday, or when the grocery store shifts stuff around. I like my things the way they are. Change is overrated, I say.

A year or so ago, I talked to my sister, who works for a struggling newspaper on the other side of the world. She's had to change the way she works, providing online content, since that's where things are headed when it comes to the written word. I joked about my resistance to technology, and she responded very seriously that if you don't keep up with the tech, you risk becoming obsolete.

She called me a dinosaur—sisters can get away with that kind of brutal honesty, which is a nice thing. And she was right. For all the writing I did, and stories of mine that had been published on the Web, I was digging my heels in the sand, resisting technology and change. I write for teens—a techie audience if ever there was one—meaning I had to get in the game to reach my audience. Learn the tech, blog, Twitter, social networking, whatever. No excuses.

So I learned. I became a member of various social networking sites, including the ones where teen readers hang out. I subscribed to all the publishing newsletters, like *Publishers Weekly*, *Mediabistro's GalleyCat*, *School Library Journal* and lots of others—which are delightfully free. I started a blog, *YA Sleuth*, where I would report on YA news, particularly the news related to YA mysteries, which is my genre. I joined *Publishers Marketplace*, posted my blog page, and kept on top of the latest in everything publishing, and everything online. I would not become obsolete.

This kind of learning has a way of evolving. My blog gets a healthy amount of traffic now. Some publishing folk,

including agents and editors, know who I am. And among writer friends, I'm the person with information on all things online—who woulda thunk it? Today, I know how to research just about everything, and I've even been able to carve a nice freelance writing career out of this web-savviness. Not bad for a former dinosaur.

So what brought on this bit of philosophical meandering? The *NewsMag* as you know it will be gone after this issue; no more pdf for you and me to download—and it's a change that gives me pause. Since joining PPW, I've spent many an afternoon sitting back to read the great stuff the *NewsMag* brings: informative content, interviews, quotes, and advice. But the best part about this volunteer-driven magazine, I've always found, is how inspiring it is. The *NewsMag* always lifts up the writer in me.

Starting in November, I'll be spearheading the change to an online PPW *NewsMag*, where content will be on the Web, with regular postings during your week. I hope you'll follow me as we evolve. It's new—it's a big change—and change is never easy. But we'll take all the good stuff with us: the reports on Write Brains, the sweet successes, and the great advice—plus you'll see some new features and voices that will keep you motivated, and keep you posted on all the great things happening with Pikes Peak Writers.

I'll miss this version of the *NewsMag*, and I'm sure you will, too. But I hope you'll join us as we go online—I promise, it'll be fun and painless. Even if you're an evolving dinosaur, like me.



“I don't write novels. I'd be too scared. I write two pages a day.”

—Linda Sue Park

From the Editor



Writing the letter from the editor is always a bit of a daunting task for me. How do I capture the essence of the issue, encourage readers to read on, and provide a bit of inspiration, all in such a short space?

This issue is especially daunting—not only is it my last issue as editor, but it's our final *NewsMag* in this format. Fleur's cover article, "Pondering Evolution," explains what's new and what's next.



Bimonthly *NewsMagazine* of the Pikes Peak Writers, a 501(c)3 non-profit with members across the United States

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My first inclination is to be a bit melancholy. I have truly loved my tenure as editor. I have loved working with the PPW legend, Martha (check out her piece in this issue on persistence). Her professionalism, talent, and attitude are unparalleled. And I've gotten to know and work with many other PPW members, all because I settled myself into this editor's chair. I've benefited from their wisdom, enjoyed their humor, and cherished their friendship. So I feel a wee bit pouty that it's all coming to an end.

But then I think of what's next—for me, and for the *NewsMag*'s e-version.

Personally, I'm excited to have more time to focus on polishing my novel, which is just about ready to send out to agents. After all, that's the main reason I decided it was time to get out of the aforementioned chair. I'm happy to say that the *NewsMag* has helped me get as far as I've gotten, and

it's prepared me for what's to come. But at some point, it all comes down to the limited number of hours in the day.

As a PPW member and *NewsMag* reader, I'm excited to see where Fleur takes the e-version. From my conversations with her over the past several weeks as she's been building the framework, I've been impressed with her vision and her passion. I'm convinced that the e-version will make it even easier for PPW members to get up-to-date info on PPW happenings, keep track of trends in the industry, and continue to improve their craft.

And, of course, to get on with pursuing the dream.

Happy Writing!

Mandy

Blaze the Write Trail



**Bonnie Hagan, Pikes Peak Writers
2011 Conference Director**

The Steering Committee is hard at work planning the 2011 Pikes Peak Writers Conference. An enthusiastic group of volunteers is busy reviewing faculty, evaluating programming, and discussing the schedule, all to bring you a jam-packed

adventure in the world of commercial fiction writing. Conference attendees have shared their ideas and the committee is geared up to bring you what you want in new and exciting ways.

Speakers

Some amazing talent is already lined up for the event. Conference goers will hear from several bestselling authors, including mystery sensation John Hart, as well as Linda Lael Miller, the First Lady of the West. Some really fun YA authors will also be on the scene, like David Macinnis Gill, award-winning author of *Soul Enchilada*.

Editors

Editors will be on hand from Viking Children's Books, Tor, Bell Bridge Books and more. A fresh group of acquiring agents will be available for pitches, too.

This year's theme, "Blaze the Write Trail," will get you ready to fire up your writing project and get on the career path you've always wanted. Mark your calendar for April 29, 30, and May 1, 2011, because this is the writer's conference you won't want to miss.

The Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest

By Chris Scena

Looking back over some of the previous years of the contest, the theme seems to be *change*. Change in the rules, change in who is running it, change of dates, even change of format. Well, this year, we're going reverse Obama: no change.

Same dates, same format, same people running it. While Dawn, our illustrious director, will be moving on to other PPW pastures due to term limits, she will still be involved as an advisor.

For those new to the contest, read on to find out the details and how you can enter.

An online contest

The 2011 contest will remain electronic. There were a few snags here and there in 2010, but the overall impression from entrants and judges was positive. All entries will be submitted and returned via e-mail, and the entry form (with instructions) will be online at www.ppwc.net. Our brochure is electronic again this year, though you can still have one delivered to your mailbox if you prefer. Just call (719)244-6220. Otherwise, visit the PPW Web site at www.pikespeak-writers.com/media/2011contest.pdf

We have three ways to track that you have entered. First, when you submit your entry form on the PPW Web site, we'll get an e-mail. Second, when you pay via PayPal, we'll get an e-mail. (If you pay through the mail by check or money order, we'll get a hard copy.) And third, when you send your entry to pgcontest@gmail.com as an attachment, we'll—you guessed it—get an e-mail. On that



last step, you will get a reply within three business days. If you don't, call (719)244-6220 and leave a message so we can double check.

But remember, you can't do any of this until the contest opens, which is...

September 15, 2010

The opening day of the contest remains September 15th. Writers may submit their entries from then until November 15, 2010. Entries received after that date will not be accepted. Qualified entries will be processed and judged over the following four months, with winners announced by early April 2011.

A few tips for entering the contest

Use the checklist found in the brochure to make sure you've done everything.

Submit early. You don't have to submit as early as September, but if you plan to submit a week or two before the deadline, you won't find yourself rushed for time when delays invariably come up.

Double check every page of the manuscript and synopsis or target market to make sure your name does not appear. One past entry had the writer's name in the header on pages 3, 7, and 8.

Read the scoresheet(s) on the Web site for the category or categories you wish to enter.

Come to the Contest Write Brain on Tuesday, September 21. There you can ask specific questions about your entry and hear more tips on how to make this a great contest experience.

If you think your novel or short story is

award quality, or if you want to get impartial feedback on your work, this contest is for you.

—Chris Scena is the Contest Coordinator for the 2011 Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest.

Contest Schedule

September 15: Contest opens

September 21: Contest Write Brain, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

November 15: Last day for entries to be electronically submitted

Mid to late November: Entries are processed

November 26-December 25: Happy Holidays!

Last week of December: Entries are e-mailed to the first-round judges

January 31: First round of judging ends; second round begins

Mid February: Second round of judging ends

Late February: VIP judges receive the finalist entries

March: Entries are returned electronically

Late March/early April: Winners are announced

April 30, 2011: The Paul Gillette Awards banquet at the Pikes Peak Writers Conference

Insights from a Writing Contest Judge

By Robin Widmar

If you've ever entered a writing contest, you know the emotional ride that can accompany the process. You've woven a fabulous story with words, heart, and soul. You passed it around your critique group, edited and re-edited, polished the manuscript until it gleams and your brain has rotted into a clump of mush. After going over the contest submission checklist one last time,

you click the "Send" button, confident that your literary prowess will soon be recognized and rewarded.

Time passes. The contest scores arrive. Moments later, you are either grinning like a Cheshire cat over sky-high scores, or your writing dreams lie crumpled at the bottom of a wastebasket stuffed with coffee grounds and used tissues. In the case of the latter, you may also believe that writing contest judges are nasty ogres who live to crush the hopes and

dreams of aspiring writers everywhere.

My friend, I feel your anguish. I've ridden that horse from the highs of "Fantastic story!" to the lows of "Writer probably shouldn't give up the day job. Ever."

For the same manuscript.

But contrary to what writers may want to believe, the writers, editors and agents who

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By Linda Rohrbough

The Business of Writing: The Big Mistake

You can make a number of mistakes in fiction. I see them in the works of bestselling authors all the time. But the most common misstep writers make, and the one that keeps most from being published, is what I call the Big Mistake. And it's the one that knocks even the most talented writers out of the box for publication.

The Big Mistake is to not have a highly motivated character overcoming obstacles to achieve a goal. This is essentially a storytelling (plotting) problem. And it's a doozy.

What's interesting to me is how simple this sounds. I was one of those people who nodded my head agreeably, yah, yah, yah, about what I thought was a restatement of the obvious. Only I didn't get it either. The feedback I received on my first novel was that after my reader trudged through 50 pages, they couldn't put it down. But that first 50 was a death march.

I tried everything I could think of to fix the beginning: critique groups, contests with feedback, asking bestselling friends, and my own rewrites. An experienced writer advised me to cut the first 50 pages, then sprinkle information from the cut portion into the rest of the book. But it wasn't a plot where I could do that. I thought about shelving the book and writing another, but my readers said the book was too important and needed to be out there. Finally, I got into a workshop where a scriptwriter who became my writing buddy said, "Linda, it's all here. Just rearrange it like this..." And from there, I landed a fiction agent.

But I was still lost because I didn't know why the last rewrite worked. How could I reproduce this success if I didn't know how I got it to begin with? I realized then why so many authors have a pile of books under the bed. Instead of rewriting a book until it works, they write another. And another. At some point, they hit on what works by accident, then go with their instincts.

Which is probably why so many of my

critiquers, including my *New York Times* bestselling friends, couldn't help me. It's like a painter who knows when it feels right, but can't teach anyone else how to paint. Only I'm not the kind of gal who can do hit-or-miss. Those of you who've been in my workshops know I like to work by principles I can apply in any situation.

In those first 50 pages, my character did want something, but I never came out and said what it was. And she wasn't very motivated. I knew enough to throw conflict and obstacles at her, but she was bumping along fine in the beginning. As I think back, I believe I was trying to be subtle, something my university creative writing training instilled in me. (By the way, I have a whopping 40 hours of creative writing education, most of it at a graduate level, with a 4.0 grade point average, and I never learned any of this in those classes.)

Before the rewrite, what my character wanted stayed the same, and stayed hidden, until page 50. Then I finally let the reader see her say, "I'm done crying, I'm going to do something about this crummy situation I'm in." By the way, that's also where the book became much easier to write. Before that, it was torture. The point is, I rewrote the book so that my protagonist was never without clear motivation, clearly shown to the reader.

Now this sounds simple, yes? And obvious. But notice I never said it was EASY. Because it isn't.

This big mistake is no secret. Debra Dixon's *GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict* was one of the books I bought at the bookstore during my first Pikes Peak Writers conference. James N. Frey, author of *How to Write a Damn Good Novel* and one of the keynote speakers at the 2009 conference, talked about writing well-motivated characters overcoming obstacles to achieve a goal. The late Dwight Swain, author of *Techniques of the Selling Writer* asked this question in the 1960's, "What does your character want and what is in the way of them getting it?"

Before that, in the 1940's, there was Lajos Egri's classic, *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, a book Jim Frey said his mentor made him review a whopping 40 times before he got this concept. Jim said he even made a tape recording of himself reading Egri's book and

played it over and over as he drove around doing his day job as an insurance adjuster. Bestselling Western author and two-time Spur award-winner Dusty Richards once told me you cannot remind your reader too many times of your character's goal. I own and have read all the books I've mentioned, but I didn't absorb what they were teaching. I listened to Dusty, but I didn't hear him.

Then I spent eight days last summer in a brutal, intensive, invitation-only workshop with Jim Frey in the California mountains. It was there that I really saw this principle for writing fiction for the first time. I got it on the first day, watching Jim coach other authors. (We spent eight twelve-hour days in a sprawling house isolated on the side of a steep hill, working non-stop the whole time.) I remember Jim fervently complaining that he was tired of "teaching rocks to fly."

Now I am constantly surprised by unpublished but extremely, and I mean mega-talented, writers who make the Big Mistake. They seem to understand the craft. There's a strong sense of place. They have a distinctive voice. I start to get a feel for the characters right away. I can follow what's happening. There are interesting events. Most of these writers can write those one-liners I go back to re-read because of the way they turn a phrase. They've obviously been practicing their craft for a while, but the story isn't going anywhere. Of course, you can tell too much too soon. Brain dumps are to be avoided. But I see very little of that in writers who come to me for coaching.

I tried to explain this to a writer I was coaching on her manuscript. She objected, saying she wanted her wealthy teenage character to be a slacker. I knew then I'd missed the mark. I said sure, have him be a slacker, but have him be a highly motivated slacker, and let the reader see that. How would someone behave who was committed to slacking? What lengths would they go to? Take us there. No reader wants spend the opening pages watching an unmotivated teenage boy eat pizza and talk with a friend about how much he dislikes Dad. But take that same kid and let us see he's going to do as little as possible in order to annoy Dad—now that's interesting.

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Insights from a Writing Contest Judge

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judge writing contests are not monsters of any sort. They may be a little grumpy before they've had their first shot of caffeine (aren't we all?), but they are, in fact, quite human. And they really, really want to see writers succeed.

I've had the privilege of being a contest judge for the annual Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest. Having been on the contestant side of things, and still bearing the bruises of size 12 footprints on my ego, I was hesitant at first to join the judges' pool. I didn't want to be responsible for crushing anyone's hopes, inadvertently or otherwise. Eventually, I mustered the courage to plunge in, and I'm glad I did. The experience has been interesting and enlightening. Here is some of what I've learned:

1. Judging and critiquing someone else's writing is hard. It's not enough to simply say, "I liked this story" or "It didn't work for me." A judge must be able to explain why something worked or didn't work, and do so in a constructive manner. This requires knowledge of story craft as well as tact and diplomacy. One careless criticism, one poorly-chosen turn of phrase in a critique, and a novice writer might give up on *The Dream*.

Or he might become one of those super-villains you see in the movies, and all of humankind will suffer his wrath. It really could go either way.

2. There are some awesome stories under construction out there! The best works are the easiest to score, but are often the most

difficult to critique. How much can you say about something that is quite likely only a submission or three away from publication?

“Writing contests are a great way to get objective feedback about your work.”

3. Along with the good is the not-quite-so-good: stories that may be encircled by orange traffic cones and concrete barricades for a while longer. Evaluating such a story is like holding a fragile egg. With proper care, both egg and story can evolve into something marvelous. Mishandle either one, and you'll have a scrambled yolk—or a fledgling supervillain on your hands (see Number 1 above).

The best part of critiquing these stories, however, is being able to offer encouragement and advice to up-and-coming writers. Many writers have shared their wisdom with me, so I try to pay it forward by providing positive and constructive critiques. Which brings me to...

4. No matter how helpful you try to be, or how tactful your critique, someone will always take exception. Let's face it: Some writers' egos are so intertwined with their story that they cannot—will not—accept that their manuscript still needs work.

Thankfully, they are in the minority. Most writers appreciate honest feedback, listen to

advice, use what works for them, and file the rest for future reference. These folks are already succeeding in their craft and will one day reap the reward of being published.

5. A judge must be aware of his/her own mental state when reading contest entries. All of us are susceptible to fits and snits when our day isn't going well, and it's easy to let frustrations creep into judging comments. When I encounter an entry that makes me want to buy stock in red ink, I step back and ask myself: Was the story that bad? Or was I having a mood? Either way, I set the story aside and come back to it later, after the snit has passed, to make sure I am providing a fair evaluation of the work.

6. Judging, like the decisions made by agents and editors, is subjective. One person may think a story is simply fabulous; another may see it quite differently. Everyone who reads your work has different tastes. Your story may well be *The Next NYT Bestseller*, but some readers will like it and some will not. That's just the way it is.

I can still recall a fantastic story I judged, and the disappointment I felt when it didn't place in the top three of its category. Just because the story didn't place doesn't mean it shouldn't have. Scores can be very close, and placing may hinge on a single point difference.

Writing contests are a great way to get objective feedback about your work. The comments and critiques you receive are intended to help you learn and grow as a writer. Remember, judges aren't ogres. Keep writing, keep honing your skills, and never give up.

And don't become a super-villain. The path to world domination is overrated.

Business of Writing

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Perhaps the boy could manipulate a poorer friend into spending the last of his cash for pizza, just because he knows it would annoy his father, who isn't even there. You don't have to reveal he's angry with Dad. It's enough to know his goal for the scene.

Goals can start small and change over the course of the novel. Do keep in mind that readers like things to connect, so it's preferable that the opening scene goal relate in some way to the overall story goal.

During a meal at the last conference, I was telling my story about how I got a grasp on this principle to a group of PPW writers. To illustrate, I reached over and picked up a random book off the table. It happened to be

a mystery novel getting "buzz" because it was nominated for a major award. I opened to the first page and started reading. I didn't have to finish the first page to prove my point. In the first THREE sentences I knew what the character wanted badly and what the obstacles were. I saw the light bulb go on for the writers at my table. Of course, when I turned to pick up the book at the end of the meal, it had already been snatched up. (Drat.) I've forgotten the title and the author, but those first three sentences stayed with me.

I hope this rushed treatment of the Big Mistake helps you have your lightbulb moment. From experience, I know it is not easy to grasp the concept of always having the character's goal in front of the reader (especially in the beginning). But once you get that down, your writing will take a quantum leap forward.

Books to Help You Avoid the Big Mistake:

GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict
by Debra Dixon

How to Write a Damn Good Novel
by James N. Frey

Techniques of the Selling Writer
by Dwight V. Swain

The Art of Dramatic Writing
by Lajos Egri

—Linda Robrbough 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.LindaRobrbough.com

July Write Brain

Putting on the Moves: A Writer's Guide to Body Language and Styles

By Cathy Dilts

My good friend Elvis and I attended the July 20 Write Brain, Putting on the Moves: A Writer's Guide to Body Language & Styles. Writers should apply theories about human communication to their fictional characters to bring them to life, sociologist Morgen Leigh Thomas told the audience.

Morgen reminded us to “show, don't tell.” If you rely solely on the words spoken by your character, you're missing out on character development opportunities in your fiction. What our characters say—their words—is a small part of communication. How they say it is more important, while the non-verbal elements such as facial expressions, posture, hand gestures, and the use of personal space account for the lion's share of human communication.

I'd like to write a story about my friend Elvis. If I hadn't heard Morgen's Write Brain talk, I might make the mistake of merely recording his words. This is the “what he says” part of communication.

“Don't you step on my blue suede shoes,” Elvis said.

Boring.

How does Elvis feel? How serious is the perceived threat to the beloved shoes? Just reporting his words doesn't tell the reader much. Only 7%, according to Morgen. I'll try adding the “how he says,” or the delivery.

“Don't you step on my blue suede shoes,” Elvis whimpered.

By adding how he delivered the words, we learn a little more. Elvis is in a state of anxiety and fear.

I might want to spice up his dialogue even more with symbolic gestures. These are one aspect of the non-verbal element of human communication. Symbolic gestures include raising your hand to ask a question, crooking your finger to request that a victim follow you, giving a thumbs up sign to show approval, or flipping a certain finger to indicate disapproval.



Morgen Leigh Thomas

Symbolic gestures are dependent upon a shared cultural understanding. A hand gesture in America may mean something different—or have no meaning—in another country. You can use this to your advantage in your writing. Imagine the possibilities, as characters from different cultures, generations, or planets come into contact.

“Don't you step on my blue suede shoes.” Elvis shook his index finger in warning.

Now Elvis is on the offensive, giving a non-verbal symbolic gesture to warn the potential shoe-stomper.

Body language is another part of non-verbal communication that writers can use to make fictional characters come to life. Unlike symbolic gestures, body language may be unintentional. “We think we are paying attention to our words,” Morgen said, but we might be saying something else with our bodies.

“Don't you step on my blue suede shoes,” Elvis sang, his lip curling in his trademark sneer, and his hips swiveling suggestively.

Now the reader realizes that Elvis is not fearful or angry, nor is he requesting politely that you refrain from treading on his shoes. That's not seriously his concern because he's

clearly in control of the situation. Which brings us to the second half of the Write Brain.

Morgen introduced the Four Styles of Body Usage. People define themselves in terms of their bodies' varying capacities for control.

You may know the Disciplined Style—that annoying friend who would rather go to the gym to lift weights than hang out with friends at the pizza parlor. He is all about routine and regimentation. Athletes aren't the only folks in this category. You'll also find the Disciplined Style in a monastery, where physical deprivation of another sort takes place. Both the jock and the monk are big on self-control.

The Mirroring Style is so named because it reflects the dominant cultural values. The person is concerned with surfaces and appearances, and aligns him or herself with what is desirable in order to be desired. This style includes those struggling to keep up with the Joneses, or starving to fit into size 0 jeans.

The Dominating Style, as might be expected, seeks to subjugate the world around him or her. This style doesn't really exist in the absence of other people to dominate.

The Communicative Style is prevalent in caregivers. This person is a good listener, because he or she is seeking mutual satisfaction in a relationship.

Finally, Morgen reminded us that people—and our characters—don't exist in a vacuum. There is cultural context to consider. The fact that people don't look at the same items the same way can enrich our writing. Is the dandelion a weed, a salad ingredient, wine material, or a pretty flower? The differences in how our characters view the world can lead to compelling conflict.

Don't tell Elvis, but I really think those blue suede shoes are hideous and impractical. And yet Carl Perkins chose to write a song about them, which Elvis made into a huge hit. I suspect it had more to do with the delivery and body language than the words.

Human communication is:

7% words

38% delivery—how those words are spoken

55% non-verbal—symbolic gestures and body language

10 Ways to Make the Internet Work for You

By Fleur Bradley

You've worked on your craft, edited your manuscript, and polished it to a shine. Maybe you've attended PPW Conference (fun, huh?), and worked on your pitch or query letter. As much dedication as all those things take, your work as a future author is far from done. Today, agents and publishers expect you to know your way around the Web—and it can help you in ways you may not have thought of. Here are 10 ways you can get the Internet to work for you:

Research Agents and Publishers

If you're ready to query agents or publishers, the Web is your best friend. Web sites like Agentquery.com, Preditors and Editors (to find those bad apples in the bunch), Writers Digest, and Publishers Marketplace are your best sources of information. You can find query preferences, clients, projects sold—whatever data might help you narrow your search for the right home for your manuscript. And don't forget to simply Google an agent or editor's name; there are often blogger interviews you can read to get a better idea of the individual's personality and reading preferences.

Build a Resume

So maybe that gorgeous manuscript you wrote is all you've got. Think of short stories you might be able to write to get a few publishing credits; you could use one of the characters from your latest work as a lead, if you're unsure of what to write. Or maybe there's an excerpt of your novel that stands alone that might make a good short story. Look at Duotrope.com or Ralan.com for markets to submit to. Check the publication out before submitting, to make sure it matches the image you want to project to the publishing world.

Keep Up with the Latest

Are you up-to-date with the latest developments in your genre, and publishing in general? You should be—once you sign with an agent, you should know who different publishing houses represent and what they're about, so you'll understand where your manuscript is going. *Publishers Weekly*, *Mediabistro's GalleyCat*, and *Writers Digest* are good places to start; these sources all have free newsletters you can sign up for to keep up with the latest news. There are also genre-specific organizations that have free

newsletters, like Thriller Writers of America, as well as genre-specific blogs—I keep track of YA news on mine, for instance.

Find Your Home

Do you know where your book might go on the bookstore shelf? You should—agents and publishers expect you to know your competition. Try to fill in this blank: "readers of _____ will likely enjoy my novel." Search Amazon, B&N and Borders online to get an idea of where you might fit in.

Get Your Records Straight

Chances are that you already use an e-mail account, but that Yahoo or Google inbox can double as a handy filing system. Keep copies of those query letters, submissions, and follow-up e-mails in separate folders. You may think you'll remember those dozen queries you sent last week, but they'll be a faded memory a year from now. Let the net help you keep your office clutter-free (but do back those files up, just in case).

"The Web can be the best (nearly free) resource you have as a writer, so look at it as an opportunity rather than something that intimidates you."

Get a Job

Maybe you've never thought of finding freelance work, but you should if you're looking for some credits on your resume (and extra income). There are a host of opportunities for writers with some experience (writing for the *NewsMag* can be a great credit) online. Craigslist.com, journalismjobs.com, and About.com's freelance writing gigs listings are a great place to start—just make sure you understand the tax implications and job expectations before you dive in.

Get a Web site

Want to show that agent or editor that you're serious about this writing thing? Get yourself a Web site. You don't have to spend much; many Web hosting providers also have Web site templates to make the job pretty painless. A Web site, even a simple one (with Web sites, clean and simple rule), shows agents and editors that you're a professional.

And you'll need one anyway once you sign that book contract!

Make a Friend

Writing can be a lonely job, sitting behind your computer for hours and hours. The Web can be a great place to make friends. Try Facebook, Twitter, and Yahoo groups to find people with the same interests. Read some blogs that fit your interests. You don't have to be very active or spend hours on the Internet; just check to see which of these social networking opportunities work for you. Don't spend too much time promoting yourself; just be nice, and you may find you'll have a host of friends to support you once your book comes out.

Build a Platform

A platform is like stage: a place where you have followers who want to hear what you have to say. Platform used to be the buzzword for nonfiction writers, but fiction folk are now expected to build a platform too. You can stop sweating—it's easier than it seems. Think of what your book is about: does it have a magical component, or does it have a strong (e.g. Colorado) locale? Find something you're excited about that relates to your novel, and gives readers valuable information. You can blog about that, or write a newsletter if you don't feel you have enough content to keep a blog updated. Read others' blogs and post comments to build a presence. Platforms take time to grow, which is why it's better to work on it now, before you sign that book deal.

Go Google Yourself

Ever Google yourself? You should—editors and agents will before they commit to your manuscript. Even if you think there's nothing out there about you, check anyway. You might be surprised to find that someone met you at a conference and blogged about it. Google even lets you set up alert notifications. They'll send you an e-mail when your name pops up on the Web—a great way to find out where you are.

The Web can be the best (nearly free) resource you have as a writer, so look at it as an opportunity rather than something that intimidates you. If you're a bit of a dinosaur or are strapped for time, try committing yourself to improving just one Web-component a week or month. Before you know it, you'll be that Web-savvy writer everyone looks to for information and advice.

The Smokin' Hotness of American Icon 6



Barb Nickless, VP of Programming, Judges Ange Tysdal, Carolyn Sobczak, Trai Cartwright, and Workshops Director, Maria Faulconer

By Barb Dyess

Were you one of the 19 contestants who chose to stand up with knocking knees before an audience and read aloud from your written work for two whole minutes—and then endure comments given by three professionals in the writing business? If so, kudos to you!

Our judges, Trai Cartwright, Ange Tysdal, and Carolyn Sobczak, offered their impressions with big-hearted and upbeat doses of skill, intelligence, and insight. All three judges reported later that they were very pleased with the quality of work seen at Icon.

“And now I want to know: what about the firewood?”

“The internal life of men is always interesting...”

“Multi-Dimensional is going to be everywhere in the next few years. I mean, it is going to be hot.”

“Cannibalism is hard to sell. People don't like to read about eating other people, but personally...I love it!”

“Easily-read sentences mean the writing is good.”

Emcee Jodi Anderson offered her usual quirky charm, and M.B. Partlow's cowbell kept the contestants on schedule. The range of material covered multiple genres; the range of the writers was even more diverse. An added bonus was that about one-third of the readers—several of whom won prizes for their jaw-dropping talent—were younger writers.

“Jumping right into the story/action gives you a ton of leeway; to go forward in thought, to go back in remembering.”

“It's mimetic for me.”

“Transcendence is memoir, which also

needs a ‘story conceit.’”

“Your descriptions are kind of Virginia Woolf-y...”

Lynde Iozzo, an English teacher and first-time contestant, was thrilled to “get comments live and in-person” since she lives in a remote locale and has limited access to critiquing. Dylan Thompson thought the judges were “a little too nice,” and wanted to hear more of what was wrong with his work. A happy Anita Romero said it was “an incredible difference” from her Icon feedback of four years ago.

“You write physicality very well!”

“Dystopian worlds fascinate me...”

“Intriguing logline...loved your Voice...pacing is just right.”

“I don't mind a slow build, if the voice intrigues me and the writing is good.”

While the judges conferred, departing PPW President Rom Heimbecher was honored for his many contributions to the organization. The winning contestants then scored big in generous prizes, including a free night's hotel stay, gift certificates, a “hot” paid admission to Mile High Con, and coveted professional critiques.

A few more intriguing questions:

- How can one best schmooze a judge?
- What on earth does “mimetic” mean?
- If a judge laughs so hard that she must cover her mouth, is it good/bad?
- What “dirty little secrets” did Jodi reveal about the judges?*

*Answers:

- Buy them their favorite drink.
- Look it up! (thanks to Ange Tysdal for the word)
- Good, in this case.
- Wouldn't you like to know? Let's just say ‘any kind of fish.’



These brave readers entertained us



And the winners were ...

American Icon 6 Winners

- Audience Favorite: *Easy Street*, Michael Shepherd
- Best Overall: *Easy Street*, Michael Shepherd
- Best First Line and Best New Voice: *Inbale. Exbale.*, Michon Lartique
- Best Use of Humor: *My So-Called Unlife*, Lynde Iozzo
- Best Opening Scene: *Apex Predator*, Matt Bille
- Most Promising Concept: *Queen of Fly Island*, Chris Kobayashi
- Best Forward-Looking Concept: *The Marc-Paul View*, John Lewis
- Best Logline: *Flight*, Kaleena Kovach
- Best Imagery: *The Things We Leave Behind*, Mandy Houk
- Best Voice and Title: *Anonymous Pranks the Boards*, Dylan P. Thompson
- Best Showmanship: *Angel King*, Oliver Brainerd

—Barbara Dyess writes multiple-genre fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction, with a white dog near her feet and plenty of tea and chocolate at hand. She enjoys mentoring and teaching, and stories featuring unforgettable love relationships against impossible odds.



By **Becky Clark**

Of Library Cards and Furtive Glances

September is Library Card Sign Up Month, and it reminded me of my early library adventures. My dad took us almost every Saturday to the downtown branch of the Colorado Springs public library. If he was feeling the love, he'd also let us play on the big orange slippery lump a few blocks away. I lived a full life back then.

But this particular branch had the children's section upstairs, so I always headed up there. With my new library card I was allowed to check out five books at a time, which I always finished by the end of the week. My selections leaned heavily toward Nancy Drew mysteries, and everything

written by Beverly Cleary and Judy Blume.

One day, however, when backs were turned, I snuck downstairs and found secret delights everywhere. A cornucopia! A treasure trove! A buttload of good reading!

After several stealthy Saturday visits, I finally screwed up the courage to pluck one of these adult treasures off the shelf. I shoved it in the middle of my four children's titles and hurried to the check-out desk.

Sweat trickled the length of my spine. My hands shook as the librarian took the Nancy Drew mystery on top and opened it. I wiped a sweaty palm as she inked her rubber stamp, rocking it back and forth for optimum inky coverage, then smacked it—hard—on the white slip glued inside the cover.

I trembled as she set it aside and picked up the next Nancy Drew. Down went the rubber stamper with a wet smack.

Uh oh. The forbidden book was next. Are you there, God? It's me, Becky. I licked my lips and glanced at the glass doors. It was simply a matter of time before burly security guards rushed through, weapons drawn, shoving me against a wall yelling, "Hold it right there, Missy! This book is not from the children's section! That's a clear violation of Public Library Code 82-954/29B. Take her away, boys, lest she ever make a mockery of library rules again!"

Smack, smack, smack.

"See you next week. Enjoy your books," the librarian chirped. Yes. She actually chirped.

What?! I did it? I got away with it? Oh, how I relished that book. It emboldened me and I did the same thing the next week and

the next. It wasn't long before I snuck two books from the adult section in between a Nancy Drew and a Beverly Cleary. And I got away with THAT too!

O frabjous day.

It solidified a life-long love of libraries that I've passed along to my kids. My only requirement for them to receive their library cards was the ability to sign their names neatly.

Yes, I had ulterior motives. In the same way that I told them they had to be potty-trained to go play at their friends' houses. Because all the toys at our house sucked, it took them about eight seconds to gain control over their bodily functions. I'm a very practical mom.

They practiced writing their names until they were issued their very own library cards, long before they were anywhere near school age. They were proud and delighted with their newfound status. I remember one of them rushing home from school to inform me that several kids in their class didn't even have library cards! They were as incredulous as if they had discovered that some parents didn't allow their children to eat breakfast.

So, don't let overzealous readers like my kids pity your poor, deprived non-library-card kids. Get them a library card. They're free, they're portable, and they open minds.

And let 'em check out what they want. They'll think they're getting away with something.

<http://beckyland.wordpress.com>

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

Lucky Lady

By **Michael Shepherd**



It's not often that a woman begins a conversation with, "So, you wanna get lucky?" It's even less frequent that she encourages audience participation. Yet for a standing-room-only crowd of Pikes Peak Writers at the August Write Brain session, Deborah Coonts, author of the breakout novel, *Wanna Get Lucky?*, did exactly that—to thunderous applause.

A longtime friend of many Pikes Peak Writers members, Deb focused her lecture on helping writers discover their own writing styles. She outlined her personal writer's journey, bouncing from genre to genre, looking for the story she wanted to tell. Along the way, her first manuscript, an international espionage thriller with a splash of romance, never made it past her desk drawer and, in her heart, it will never leave there. As

she stated, "I would rather have naked pictures of myself on the Internet than have anyone read it." Contrary to this proclama-tion, she politely declined all photographic requests.

Deciding to follow the sage advice "write what you know," she next leaned upon her experience as a tax law attorney and penned a legal thriller. While she was happier with the quality of her second effort, she knew in her heart it wasn't her true calling. It wasn't until she relied on her experience writing a humor column for an aviation magazine that she finally hit her stride—and found her muse in the form of wise-cracking, tough yet vulnerable Lucky O'Toole.

She urged other writers to do the same.

continued on page 10

Lucky Lady

continued from page 9

“Don’t just follow someone else’s guidelines, or what they believe you should write. Learn who you are and know what you’re drawn to, and write that. Find your voice, and tell your story the way you want it told. Then trust your gut—and find a good critique group. With Lucky, when I started writing about her, her voice rang in my ear, and I couldn’t wait to get to the computer every day. Sometimes it even hit in the middle of the night, and I couldn’t help but write when Lucky and the gang whispered to me.”

While crafting Lucky, Deb bound and gagged her inner-critic/editor and threw her in a closet. “I didn’t want to censor myself. I decided to let myself fly and allow my sense of humor to dribble onto the pages. Lucky is a smartass. I like that. She talks to the reader—I like that, too. I have a male romantic lead who wears a dress for a living. For that alone I was sure I would get a lifetime ban from the romance genre, but I guess finding a guy who is all man but who also is sensitive and kind and fluent in Jimmy Choo isn’t only MY fantasy.”

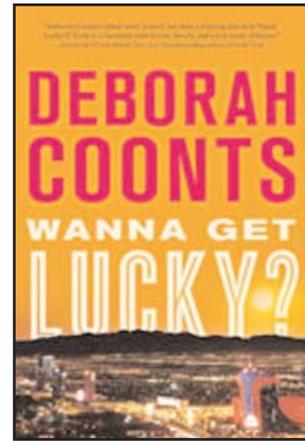
People often ask Deb if she is like Lucky. “I guess we all have had misadventures once we reach a certain age, and Lucky is no different. I find it interesting to dissect

Lucky’s relationships. Obviously, her adventure isn’t mine, nor her friends and lovers patterned after real people. However, some of her thoughts and the choices she makes are based on my experience. In some ways Lucky is who I want to be. She is kind, non-judgmental, hardworking and loyal. However, I don’t want her sex life. Her job maybe, but not her sex life.”

Deb reminded listeners that writing guidelines are really no more than suggestions, and once they understand point of view and basic writing skills, they should throw away the how-to book. “As a writer, all of us started as voracious readers. As such, we have developed an intrinsic understanding of stories, their pacing, when suspense is right, and when the narrative gets in the way of the story. This is how we develop our craft.”

“Don’t just follow someone else’s guidelines, or what they believe you should write. Learn who you are and know what you’re drawn to, and write that.”

As she developed her own craft, she also learned to re-shape her definition of success.



Initially, it was simply stringing a few sentences together into a readable chapter. Subsequently, success became the ability to connect multiple chapters

together. Then she raised the bar to writing a complete novel. The next qualifier became producing a novel others would read without resorting to guilt trips and arm twisting. “Then, finally, I was able to define success by writing a good story in the best way I knew how. When it was done, and I held the manuscript in my hands, I knew I did my best. That was success to me.”

Her hope for her readers is simple. “I want them to have had a fun time. I want their load to be a bit lighter. And I want them to feel they have met some folks and made some friends they would like to spend more time with.”

Given the warm reception she received, the full house at Pikes Peak Writers felt the same way about Deb Coonts.

Upcoming PPW Events September

The Sizzling Summer Series Continues...

September Write Brain

September 21, 6:30 p.m.

Cottonwood Center for the Arts



First Place: Reach for the Heights with Your Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest Entry
PPW Contest Coordinator Chris Scena will talk about contests in general, the rules and guidelines of the PPW

contest, how to make this a successful contest experience, and “judging your judges.”

Chris writes fantasy short stories and novels when not taking care of his three boys, three cats, dog, and loving wife. He lives in Littleton and works as a Technical Analyst by day.

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

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

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

Pikes Peak Writers Night

Monday, September 27 and October 25 at 6:30 p.m. (Fourth Monday of the 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.

Sweet Success

Terry O'Dell has a new release, *Nowhere to Hide*. It's a romantic suspense novel from The Wild Rose Press, and has been getting great reviews.

She also has a short story, "Coping Mechanisms," available at the Kindle store and at Smashwords, featuring the hero and heroine of her Cerridwen Press books, *Finding Sarah* and *Hidden Fire*.

Terry will be presenting her workshop, *Plotting for Non-Plotters*, at the Emerald City Writers Conference, October 1-3, 2010, in Bellevue, Washington.

Visit Terry at her Web site (<http://www.terryodell.com>) or her blog (<http://terryodell.blogspot.com>).

Deb Courtney will be presenting workshops at the Douglas County Libraries' 2010 Writers Conference. The conference is on Saturday, October 2nd, from 8 to 4, at Castle View High School in Castle Rock. Deb's workshops are titled *Flash Fiction* and *The Conversational Shoplifter*. <http://douglas-countylibraries.org/events/2010-writers-conference>

Rod Summitt's fourth novel, *Return to Paradise*, has just been released by Multi-Media Publishers. It is available via their Web site (www.mmpubs.com), via Amazon, or by special order at any bookstore. Rod plans to beat the bushes, pound the pavement, etc., to try and get it into at least a couple of Colorado stores. He's working on a several

signings and will get that info out to the PPW loop if/when that happens.

This is MMP's last fiction release—maybe it will become a collectors item!

Ron Heimbecher is presenting two workshops at the 2010 Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers Colorado Gold Conference, September 10-12, at the Denver Renaissance hotel. The workshops are *Playing Spider: Enticing Your Web Audience* (a previous PPW favorite, updated for modern technologies) and *Lights, Camera, Interview*.

DeAnna Knippling will have *Choose Your Doom: Zombie Apocalypse* (Doom Press, League Entertainment), a comedic choose-your-favorite-death book for teens and (somewhat immature) adults, published on October 26, 2010.

Bonus zombie question: What kind of underwear do zombies wear? Haaaaanes.

MY LIFE AS A WRITER (Or My Persistence Until I Am One)

By **Martha Lancaster**

Graphic design has been my profession for the past 25 years. It's just as formidable as becoming a published author.

My story: At age 37, I was tired of boring secretarial positions and needed to use my creative mind to finally be happy at a job. When my kids were in elementary school, I waded through college catalogs to decide on a more interesting career. I enrolled in a local community college, and between taking the kids to their sports events and school, holding down a part-time job, and being a loyal wife, I managed to come away with all A's in the field of graphic design. I left the last day of my classes in tears, thinking that no one would hire a 40-year-old in this very competitive field. But three months later, with my past experience as a secretary and my newly acquired Associates Degree, I landed the perfect job. I was hired to work in a Christian organization's advertising department as a secretary/production artist. The organization held annual bookselling conventions around the country and was attended by thousands of booksellers and artists, publishers, and gift companies in the Christian industry. A couple of years into the job, I was asked to create the cover for their convention-issue magazine that would be given to attendees in Washington, DC. The illustration was a cut-

paper interpretation of the capital building, and I still have it hanging in my home office. I'll never forget the feeling of accomplishment when I walked around that convention hotel and noticed so many people carrying the magazine with my art on the cover. I was so proud.

I tell this story to emphasize the most important lesson I've learned in my 18 years of association with Pikes Peak Writers: persistence. I've had numerous opportunities to rub shoulders with many highly successful writers, and I've come away with the determination that I, too, can be a successful writer.

A few years back, my hero, Rupert Holmes, was the opening speaker at PPWC. I was in awe of him, because I loved the song that made him famous, *Escape (The Pina Colada Song)*. For some reason, it always made me cry. He explained how this silly little song came about, and that it was the one recording that he was remembered for, even though he'd written music for the widescreen and Barbara Streisand. His message that evening before he entertained us with his famous song in the Great Ballroom at the Marriott, was PERSISTENCE. He shared this quote from President Calvin Coolidge: "Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb."

Holmes went on to say that the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan "Press on" has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race. He also said that a writer should say 'yes' to every writing opportunity. "Try to do something different, even if you might look foolish. And when you say 'yes' to anything, do every job as if it's important."

At this point, my writing life has consisted of creating catchy headlines, writing photo captions, and editing lots of *NewsMags* before they hit your mailbox (after all the other editors have done their jobs). I also write a small article of encouragement for a senior social group's newsletter and edit lots of write-ups for their monthly activities.

But I've worked long and hard for PPW, volunteering in many behind-the-scenes, thankless jobs, and what an education it's been. I hope now that I've retired, I can see my little middle-grade action adventure novel finished. This story has been stewing long enough, and now it needs to be served or it's going to burn.

I'm a little sad that this is the last issue of the PPW *NewsMag* that I'll be involved with, but folks, it's been my favorite project ever! And now I'll retire to my computer for another reason—that persistent, nagging story that is begging to come alive on the page.

PERSISTENCE—remember that absolutely nothing can take its place.



PIKES PEAK WRITERS
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Happy Trails Time

By Ron Heimbecher

The past four years has been a great ride, but it's time to put away the saddle for a while. I've really enjoyed my leadership positions in PPW, and I hope that I've been able to give as much as I've gotten back. As I wrote earlier this month on the PPW blog (<http://blog.pikespeakwriters.com/?p=147>), the American Icon contest brought me full circle within the organization.

For the next year, I'll be around in a consigliere capacity as Immediate Past President. Meanwhile, I'll turn my focus to a number of projects that have floundered for a while. Who knows what might happen within the next year? I could even be—like the little girl in *Poltergeist* says—“baa-a-a-ack.”

Write often, write copiously, and write well. By the end of each and every day, may something exist that never was before.

Easy Street

Enjoy the following excerpt from PPW member Michael Shepherd's novel, Easy Street. This excerpt won Best Overall and Audience Favorite at American Icon 6.

When I was a kid my Ma always told me, “Wear clean underwear, Paul. You never know when you're going to get hit by a car or something.” I always figured if I got hit by a car, the cleanliness of my underwear would be the least of my problems. But it was one of her rules to live by.

And that's how we attempt to get through our days unscathed. By following freaking rules.

Usually someone else's.

Stop here. Stay off the grass. Pay your delinquent taxes. And could you just one time put the toilet seat down when you're done?

Rules. Everybody's got 'em.

But not everybody follows 'em. Like me. Today. In a fit of unrivaled brilliance, I chose to ignore Paul Doyle's Third Rule For Being a Successful Private Investigator: never let yourself get shot in the butt by a pissed off client.

As it is with most epic failures, it's easy, in hindsight no less, to find the tipping point just preceding said event and say, That's the moment right there. That's when I zigged

when I should have zagged, and look where it got me. Shot.

Embarking on this happy trip down Insightful Lane, I quickly realized I also violated my Fifth Key to Surviving A Mentally Unstable Client: never show him photos of his wife fooling around with his brother, especially if he's a crazy bastard like Frenchy Paquette.

Don't get me wrong, I'm one tough SOB. I can live with getting yelled at, spit on, flipped off and cried to, but oh, this ducking lead stuff got my goat.

Yet that's where I found myself as Frenchy kept throwing lead my way, cowering behind my beat up Nova and shaking like a schoolgirl on her first trip to second base.

Now, any other nut job pulled a gun on me, I'd have popped him in the chops and made him eat teeth for the fun of it. But it was my old buddy Frenchy. Shoot, I had my first drink with him at fifteen when he came by the house with a bottle of Mad Dog under his coat and two more in the car. Later I puked my guts out while he laughed his ass off, and how the hell can you bust up a guy like that?

Apparently he didn't hold me in the same high regard.