

Ruh's Muse of the Month  
As told to Chris Mandeville

*This is the first installment of a column written by Ruh (pronounced "Roo") as told to his friend and owner, ChrisM, President of PPW and writer of the "Magical Realism" variety of Fantasy. Ruh is a service dog who loves being the PPW/C mascot. He likes stories of all kinds, but particularly enjoys those involving good chase scenes. His favorite things are writers, children, his kitten Loki, and cream cheese.*

If I had thumbs I'd be a writer. How could I not be? I'm surrounded by amazing writers who volunteer for PPW, and they never cease to inspire me. I hang out with my buddy Charlie and get excited about writing historical fiction. Then I pal around with Jen and decide I'll write mystery. But when I hear Chris M2 talking about her latest novel, I can't help but want to write suspense. PPW's dedicated bunch of volunteers is chock full of writing talent, publishing know-how, editorial skill and creative ideas. Their enthusiasm for the craft and business of writing makes me want to write, too. I thought it might inspire you as well, so each month I'll share a mini-profile of a volunteer with you.

For the month of March I couldn't decide which of my friends on the Board of Directors to highlight, so I'm going to tell you about them all. My Muse of the Month for April is none other than Jodi Anderson, our incredibly talented PPWC Emcee. Check back with me next issue to learn about more of our inspiring PPW volunteers. Or when you see me at a PPW event, gimme a scratch behind the ear and tell me about your writing. Who knows, you might just be my next Muse.

**Muses for March 2007:**

**Laura Hayden**, is Conference Director for the umpteenth time this year, as perhaps you already knew. But did you know she was officially crowned "Queen of the Universe" at PPWC 2006? I'm told her reign really began back in PPWC's inaugural year, when she placed first in the Historical Romance category of the Paul Gillette contest. Since then she has volunteered and/or spoken at every PPWC but one. She was also the first president of PPW. Her Majesty has had ten books published in a variety of genres. Currently she's got four proposals in the pipeline, in four different genres, of course. The thing I like best about Laura is that she loves me and isn't afraid to show it. Find me at a PPW workshop and you'll likely see Laura curled up on the floor beside me, crown and all.

**Charles Rush** is currently Member-at-Large on the Board of Directors, as well as serving as the Chair of the Grants Committee. Charlie was instrumental in forming the non-profit Pikes Peak Writers organization based on the highly successful Pikes Peak Writers Conference. He's also been the Vice President, Conference Director, Deputy Director, Volunteer Coordinator, and a member of the Hotel Committee and Strategic Planning Committee. He's the consummate professional, and the Board counts on him to be the voice of reason, to offer common sense solutions to complex problems, and to draft many of our policies. In his fiction writing he has a gift for making Civil War history come

alive, the good, the bad and the very, very bad. I'm sure glad I wasn't a camp dog during the War Between the States. What a life they must have led. Hey, maybe there's a story there....

**Chris Olson** has been with PPWC since its inception. Formerly the PPW Secretary, she is now Faculty Director and Member-at-Large. The BOD depends on her for public relations and marketing information and recommendations. She is also the person responsible for bringing fabulous agents, editors and authors to PPWC. Chris "O" rarely talks about her own stories, but the sparkle of her intelligent eyes hints at the empowering, thought provoking, character driven women's fiction she writes. She is a true caretaker, always ready with a hug and an encouraging word, plus she makes time to write. Now that's inspiring.

**Pat Kennelly** is Editor of the PPW NewsMagazine. I've seen first-hand what an impressive job she's doing as our editor. She's down-to-earth with loads of common sense, plus she's blooming with imaginative ideas. Pat's a natural leader, bringing together people, ideas and words. She writes NewsMag articles and editorials, of course, but she has also written restaurant reviews, poetry, Chick Lit and a variety of short stories, as well as working as a freelance editor. As if that's not enough, she also owns and runs the Mediterranean Café in downtown Colorado Springs. She whips up good food *and* good stories--what more could an aspiring writer dog want?

**Chris Myers**, also known as "Chris M2," holds the office of Secretary. In addition she has been training and coordinating our moderators and monitors for the last few conferences, and this year brings her skills and insight to the "Reality Track" programming for PPWC. Last year she won first place in the Paul Gillette contest for her Mainstream entry "Born to Kill." Currently she is making final revisions to her Suspense novel, "Offshored." I admire how she writes every single day, and is always striving to hone her craft and improve her stories through reading, workshops, critique and research. Plus she's a cool cat.

**Dawn Smit Miller**, our Contest Director and new member of the Board, has systemized, organized and revolutionized the Paul Gillette contest. Her talent for creating order through systemization is also showcased in her non-fiction craft book, Rainbow Editing. She's presented workshops on this innovative editing tool to individuals and groups across the Front Range. As for fiction, Dawn has the amazing ability to dream novels. (No fair---I just dream about chasing squirrels.) In addition to Through Spiral Eyes, her first published novel, she's got more than eighty complete books in her head. She recently put aside a Science Fiction story to work on an exciting new project. I'm not allowed to reveal what it is yet, but I can say it involves a well-known retired Colorado Springs homicide detective and a request from a New York literary agent. Keep your ears perked for exciting updates.

**Jennifer Webster Valant** is the PPW Treasurer, and a treasure, too. Kind-hearted and friendly, brilliant yet humble, she does her job quietly, professionally and accurately. As for her writing, Jen's talents span the gamut of the mystery genre, from straight mystery

to psychological thriller to suspense. Her favorite writers are Anne Rice and Jodi Picoult, but Jen's writing style is all her own. I don't know how she puts words together so beautifully and manages to handle numbers so well, too. My kitten says Jen must be cookin' with both sides of her brain, but that's a story for another day.

**Beth Groundwater** is our recently elected Vice President. She brings her logic, tenacity and level-headedness to PPW non-conference events, and I know I can always count on her for a calming pat in a stressful situation. Beth's been a participant in PPWC since 1997, and last year--after selling her first novel--was on the faculty. Her mystery, [A Real Basket Case](#), just came out in hardcover from Five Star Publishing. A promotional wizard, watch for her whirlwind book tour this Spring. Amidst it all Beth is writing, writing, writing. Currently she's working on stories starring a female river ranger, so hold on tight for the whitewater ride of your life.

**Barb Nickless**, Workshops Director, handles her duties with calm and charm. No matter the challenge, she is poised and put-together. She looks like a high-powered executive or evening news anchor, so I'd never expect to find her in the morgue, but sure enough that's where she went to do research for her books. Her writing has taken first place in the Mystery category of both the Colorado Gold and the Paul Gillette contests. She's now busy revising her latest book, a tantalizing "literary mystery," as her agent calls it. I wish I could read because I bet her stories are as captivating as she is. To see grace under pressure, come to any of the PPW non-conference events. She welcomes all with sincere warmth, fixes glitches without batting an eye, and doesn't ever seem to mind when I shed on her suit.

#### **Muse of the Month – April 2007:**

**Jodi Anderson**, who writes as Jodi Dawson, is my Muse of the Month for April. She inspires me every time I see her, and I'm fortunate to see her often during April since she is Deputy Director and Emcee for PPWC. Jodi always has a smile on her face and a positive thing to say. She's a genuinely kind, caring and generous human, and I know if she had a tail she'd be wagging it more often than not. She imbues the characters in her novels with those same endearing qualities, so you root for them and hurt for them, laugh and cry with them. She has the special gift of being able to make people (and dogs) feel good about who they are, and it comes across in person and on the page. The most inspiring thing about Jodi is how she makes you believe that your writing project is awesome and you have the obligation to work diligently to get it out for others to enjoy. She gives writers a kick in the pants in the nicest possible way. I know if I had pants (and thumbs) I'd be a more confident, dedicated writer for having spent a few minutes with Jodi.