

Pikes Peak Writer

NewsMagazine

Official Publication of the Pikes Peak Writers



VOLUME VII, ISSUE 6
November, December 2008

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Everything I Need to Know About a Book Reading I Learned From Neil Gaiman

By **Debbie Meldrum**

A few weeks ago, several of us were lucky enough to attend a reading of *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman. What might have been a dry “here’s my book” event was instead a fun and exciting time.

Mr. Gaiman is a very popular author. Otherwise, he could not have sold out a venue that seats over seven hundred people. Also, Harper-Collins, his publisher, sponsored the book tour, which would not be the case for most new or mid-list authors.

Still, there were plenty of ideas to take away that any writer can use when doing his own reading.

Make Your Audience Comfortable

How? First, by being comfortable yourself. I’m sure Neil’s poise on stage has grown over the many years he’s been doing this. Practicing can help anyone become more confident in front of others. And you probably won’t have the numbers in attendance he does.

Should make it easier, right?

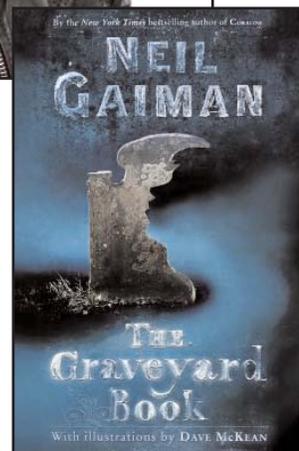
Make The Event Fun

The show—and that’s what it felt like—opened with a recording of *Danse Macabre* performed on the banjo by Bela Fleck. The same tune is used as incidental music on the audio book.

Next, “Vincent Price” introduced Neil from offstage. This had the audience cracking up.



Neil Gaiman
photo by
Sophie Quach



Then the author himself appeared to wildly enthusiastic applause. He spoke for a bit about how the evening would be structured and the tour to that point. At each stop, Neil read one chapter of the book. Except for chapter seven, which is twice as long as the others. The first half had been read in Los Angeles the night before, and we were treated to the second half with appropriate set up.

Practice Your Reading Style

Neil launched into the reading and immediately hooked everyone by providing different and distinct voices for each character. He read with feeling, pausing in just the right spots to build suspense and speeding up to the match the pace of the action.

You can practice with a tape recorder so you can hear how you sound. Find some honest folks (your critique group, maybe) to give you feedback.

Make Q&A Fun

The audience, because of the size, was asked to fill out question cards before the event started. Neil organized them so the most interesting questions were answered first,

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“Tomorrow may be hell, but today was a good writing day, and on the good writing days, nothing else matters.”
— **Neil Gaiman**

from the Editor



By the time this issue comes out, National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) will have started. Several PPWers are taking part this year, including yours truly.

This will be my third attempt at 50,000 words in 30 days. That breaks down to 1,667 words a day or approximately seven pages (figuring an average of 250 words a page). Daunting. But I'm determined to "win" this year.

Our last issue included an article by Ian

Healy on how to survive NaNoWriMo. Let me add some of my strategies to get through it this year.

Buddies. This will be my first time with NaNoWriMo buddies, people who are also participating. We will encourage each other to keep going. And, I'm sure, give virtual swift kicks when necessary.

Be a NaNoWriMo Pirate. I will be attempting to finish a manuscript that I am about halfway through. If I finish before I hit 50k, then I'll start something else. I hear you saying, "But the point is to write a book from scratch." Come on. We know a mainstream adult novel is more than 50,000 words long. So the initial premise is already flawed. And do you really think the NaNo Police will show up and arrest you if you do it your own way? The point, as I see it, is to silence your Inner Heckler by just writing as quickly as possible for 30 days. Use the opportunity to do what is best for you and your writing.

This issue is chock full of information and tips to help you once you get beyond

(or if you decide to ignore) NaNoWriMo. Linda Rohrbough writes about just how long it takes to write a novel. Fleur takes a walk on the sunny side of the street. Brian Enke tells us about why we should think of attending the next Mars Society Conference. Janice brings us news of Sweet Success. And I've jumped in with tips I picked up at a reading by Neil Gaiman. And, as always, there is much more.

And, if you will indulge me a little further, I am announcing my resignation as the *PPW NewsMagazine* Editor. It's been an honor and a privilege working with the Board of Directors and all the wonderful reporters and columnists that make this whole thing possible. But Life sometimes requires tough choices, and this has been one of those.

Thanks for all your kind words and suggestions over the past year. I'm sure we'll run into each other at a Write Brain, workshop or the conference.



Bimonthly NewsMagazine of the Pikes Peak writing community

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Everything I Need to Know About a Book Reading I Learned From Neil Gaiman

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in case time ran out before he could get to them all. One of the most unusual was "What is your perfect breakfast?" Answer: "A cheese omelet that I make myself."

You may have to take any questions you can get directly from the audience. But you can anticipate questions and prepare interesting answers to even mundane queries like "Where do you get your ideas?" or "Are your characters based on real people?"

Give the Audience More Than They Expect

In this case, Neil showed two brief clips from the upcoming animated feature based on his children's book, *Coraline*.

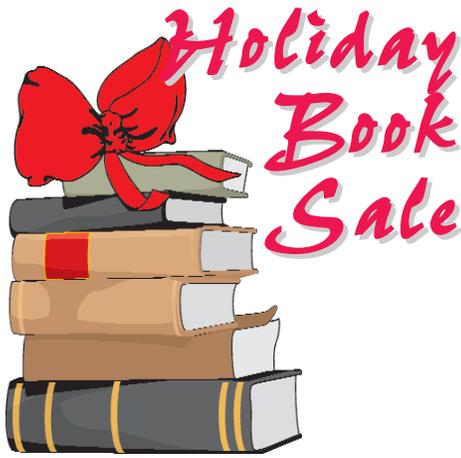
Chances are you won't have a movie coming out in a few months from your book release, but perhaps you could read a snippet from your next book. Buttons with the book cover or quotes from your book are fun, too.

Build Interest Beforehand

Neil talked about writing the book on his blog while he was working on it. Then he put up a countdown clock that built anticipation as the release date neared. Both things you can do—if your process allows you to discuss a book you're working on. If not, don't worry. You can still announce the release date and publish blurbs and positive reviews as they come in.

I guarantee that the next time Neil Gaiman is within driving distance, you can bet I'll show up to hear him read. And I'll be taking more notes on how he does it.

To check out Neil Gaiman's blog, go to www.neilgaiman.com. You can see and hear him reading on the book tour at www.mouse-circus.com



Join PPW for two book sales this December and take advantage of unbelievably low prices!

PPW is clearing off the bookshelves to raise funds for 2009 programming, and getting rid of our stock at rock-bottom prices. Every book will be discounted.

We're selling more than 45 nonfiction titles on the business and craft of writing for significantly less than the cover prices.

We're also offering over 50 new fiction titles at discount prices—more than 150 books, 85 of which are on sale for \$5 or less.

In addition, there are hundreds of new or nearly-new books available by donation—that means you name the price.

Get your holiday shopping done and pick up a few titles for yourself, too!

Some of our nonfiction titles:

Self-Editing for Fiction Writers: How to Edit Yourself Into Print
By Renni Browne and Dave King

A thorough guide to improving your writing through specific exercises, checklists, and brilliantly compact lessons.

Characters, Emotion, and Viewpoint
By Nancy Kress

An indispensable tool to crafting unforgettable characters, choosing the perfect point of view, and delivering that over-the-top emotional impact.

Writing the Breakout Novel Workbook
By Donald Maass

A top agent provides insightful instruction and hands-on exercises that show fiction writers on how to raise the stakes and take their work to the next level.

Writing Down the Bones
By Natalie Goldberg

Part Zen, part diary, part writing guide, but a complete classic.

Techniques of the Selling Writer
By Dwight Swain

A down-to-business book detailing the four crucial things every writer needs to know to write great fiction.

bird by bird
By Ann Lamott

Very wise, very funny, and very helpful in dealing with all the demons of writing and the writing life.

The Plot Thickens
By Noah Lukeman

A methodical guide to plot that thoroughly integrates character, suspense, conflict, and transcendence.

How I Write: Secrets of a Best-selling Author
By Janet Evanovich

Fun and funny with a healthy dose of insider insight and advice on topics such as point of view, dialogue, and exposition.

Invitations to the World: Teaching and Writing for the Young
By Richard Peck

Impassioned advice and insights from this Newberry-winning YA author.

So You Want to Write: How to Master the Craft of Writing Fiction and Memoir
By Marge Piercy and Ira Wood

Pithy, touching and warm, this book offers exercises, anecdotes and excerpts, advice and encouragement.

Writer Mama: How to Raise a Writing Career Alongside Your Kids
By Christina Katz

Everything from A to Z that a stay-at-home parent needs to know in order to juggle home life and a successful writing career.

Finding Your Voice: How to Put Personality in Your Writing
By Les Edgerton

Guidelines, exercise and advice that lead a writer to discover his or her own natural style and unique voice.

Story
By Robert McKee

Discover and appreciate the underlying tenets of the art and craft of fiction writing—a classic.

1001 Ways to Market Your Books
By John Kremer

A resource of immense proportion, chock-full of tips, examples and suggestions covering the gamut of marketing strategies, stories, and promotion ideas of all scopes and sizes.

Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction—and Get It Published

By Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato

A how-to for getting scholarly nonfiction in front of a wide audience, covering everything from research to proposal to working with agents and editors.

SALE #1

Cottonwood's Holiday Market

Cottonwood Artists' School

Saturday, December 13th

9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

We're joining many other vendors with fabulous wares for your holiday shopping and enjoyment—artwork by Cottonwood studio artists, wreaths, soaps and lotions, photography, jewelry, and more. Don't miss out on the many unique gift items, the festive community spirit, and great deals on books.

SALE #2

PPW'S December Write Brain

Cottonwood Artists' School

Tuesday, December 16th

6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Sip a hot beverage and munch on holiday goodies while participating in the last Write Brain of the year, then scoop up the last copies of new craft and fiction books priced at our lowest prices ever. Bring a bag and load it up with used books to enjoy during the long winter months—you can take home as many as you want when you make a donation of any amount.

The Business of Writing

Does It Really Take That Long to Get Ready to Write?

By Linda Rohrbough

I had a question from JT Evans, who attended the Write Brain Writer's Toolbox workshop I did in August. He thanked me for the workshop, told me he's using the tools, but then said, "... I've found I'm spending more time 'getting ready to write' rather than writing. Is this normal for a new project?"

The short answer is yes. Here's why.

It is not only normal to spend a lot of time planning a book, for most pros that planning time is a must. Books are often plotted by the pros years in advance of their actually being written. And I know this because I hang out with a couple of *New York Times* best-selling fiction novelists who have collaborated on my work and me on theirs. Most of our collaboration happens once a year. And their books that we worked on together two to three years ago just came out this year. (I'm still working on getting a fiction agent.)

It can be frustrating to new authors to see how prolific some of these established names are. But newbies don't realize how many years of background work went into what appears to be an easy and steady proliferation of titles. Most authors, once they get published, start using their time on the road between book signings and speaking engagements to plot books they've got ideas for so they're ready to pitch. Most work three to six books ahead. And they often turn fun breaks, like hanging out at a mountain condo or a lakeside cabin, into work-out-the-kinks time on new ideas so fresh projects get that essential brain-time needed to "jell."

While I've heard of authors who just sit down and write, it doesn't work that way for



me and it's not that way for most authors I know. For one thing, even established names submit a written proposal for new titles to their publishers.

And while the document may be a synopsis of an entire series described in a few pages, it packs an emotional wallop. That wallop doesn't come without prep time and planning.

"...newbies don't realize how many years of background work went into what appears to be an easy and steady proliferation of titles."

Surprises happen during the course of the work and that's part of the joy of writing. But publishers won't pay an advance for air—they want to know what they're getting. They're more trusting with established authors, but that just means the established author writes a shorter synopsis, not no synopsis at all. This doesn't mean the book, once plotted, is carved in stone but it better closely resemble the pitch or the author will find herself in hot water with both her agent and editor.

The "names" in fiction also work hard at putting themselves in new environments and

new situations so they can get new ideas. While that's part of the fun of fiction writing, it's also a lot of work and takes dedication and discipline. And they know how they work best, which only comes by experimenting with tools and getting a few books under your belt. Scary thought, I know, but isn't that what you're after?

It took me eight years to finish my first novel. I was depressed about that until I ran across a story about an author who took thirty-two years to write a book. Then I felt better. So the next time you walk into a bookstore and see six or seven titles on the shelf by a name brand author and are tempted to compare your time-line to theirs, remind yourself of the years they've put in. And give yourself a break.

By the way, I'm going to do an entire day intermediate-level hands-on workshop on how to use the fiction writing tools I've learned from my best-selling friends. It's called "Fleshing It Out—Taking Your Story Idea to the Next Level with Tools the Pros Use," and I'll be presenting on Thursday, April 23, the day before the annual conference. If I'd had the information I'll teach you when I started my fiction, I'm convinced it would have shaved years off my novel development learning curve. I hope it'll do the same for you. I'm looking forward to seeing you in the Spring.

—Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, has more than 5,000 articles, seven books and numerous awards for her fiction and nonfiction. Linda's new book *Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band: Everything You Need to Know Before and After Surgery to Lose Weight Successfully (Da Capo Lifelong Books, March 2008)* is now available. Visit her Web site for details: www.LindaRohrbough.com.

An Improv Write Brain on Improv Writing

By Beth Groundwater

When our November Write Brain speaker could not make it and had to be rescheduled for the next week, Chris Mandeville presented an impromptu program on Improv Writing to the volunteers and those who did not get the word

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about the cancellation. Chris explained improvisational writing prompts fall into eight types:

- 1) write about a given scenario
- 2) write a story that starts with a given sentence or partial sentence
- 3) write a story that ends with a given sentence
- 4) answer "What if ..."
- 5) write a scene around a line of dialogue

6) include a set of words or objects in a scene

7) write about a visual prompt, such as a photo or painting

8) write about a thought-provoking quote

Chris said that Improv Writing often helps her make discoveries that can be used on her current writing project, even if the prompt has nothing to do with the story she's

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A few months ago, an author asked me why she should attend the 2008 Mars Society conference in Boulder. “No one’s buying science fiction,” Cindy stated quite firmly. “Why should I pay \$200 to attend a space conference?”

Most writers would probably ask the same question. As a science fiction (SF) author, I’ve certainly seen the painful truth in the first part of her statement. Yet the assumption that only SF authors would attend a space conference (and only so they could write and sell books) meant Cindy might miss a golden opportunity to add a new dimension to her writing.

Space conferences emphasize fact over fiction. Sessions offer a unique collision of today with tomorrow, a formula that might intrigue many writers. If you’ve attended SF fan conventions like MileHiCon, expect similar thought-provoking sessions on socially provocative topics but without all the Klingons in the audience. Also expect deeper technical, political, and religious content—again, real world stuff with no direct ties to Star Trek.

So back to Cindy. There I was, fumbling around for a reply that could somehow encapsulate a four-day conference full of worldview-changing possibilities. Fortunately, I like to fling quotes in my writing to get a reader thinking. After pondering a response for a few moments, I recalled the title of this article. “The future ain’t what it used to be.”

Decades ago, hall-of-fame Yankee baseball player Yogi Berra uttered these cryptic words. I absolutely love Yogiisms, as they are called. While I don’t think Yogi has ever attended a Mars Society conference, he would feel right at home. There’s never a dull or predictable

moment at these conferences.

Founded in 1999, the non-profit Mars Society traces its roots to the 1970’s Mars Underground movement at the University of Colorado in Boulder. Their yearly conference travels around the western hemisphere, but to honor the Society’s roots, it returns to Boulder every third year. The people attending each conference come from many countries and all walks of life.

“Space conferences emphasize fact over fiction. Sessions offer a unique collision of today with tomorrow, a formula that might intrigue many writers.”

The Mars Society promotes an optimistic vision of the future broadly centered on the exploration (today) and settlement (tomorrow) of the planet Mars. 76% of the American public supports these goals, and member-volunteers work on various projects to make it all happen; however, the devil is always in the details. Some conference sessions attempt to clarify issues or propose answers to the fundamental questions of space exploration, simply: how, why and when? That’s when the fun begins, along with conflict and paradoxes galore, because the Society’s vision means different things to different people. The details evolve every year as the future changes, sometimes on the back

of a napkin or conference brochure.

So why would a writer want to attend? Here are my Top Ten reasons:

Reason 10: Suspense

A sense of future permeates every fictional story. Readers always want to know what’s going to happen next. From character development to plot progression, suspense drives the page-turning process. Suspense also shapes our efforts every day in all aspects of life. We always want to know which friends we can trust, what investments are best or safest, where we should eat lunch tomorrow, and so on. Attending a space conference is a great way to embrace the future of our society and perhaps bring it into your writing.

Reason 9: Humor

Some day you will look back and laugh at the efforts of today’s futurists. We’re such a naïve group.

Reason 8: Serendipitous Learning

A Mars Society conference attracts more smart people per square meter than most other venues. From high-tech industry leaders to NASA to some free thinkers who are really “out there,” you can strike up a conversation with anyone and learn something interesting in a wide range of fields. For example, I picked up some ideas about deep sea fishing from a tour guide at the Boulder conference.

Reason 7: Career Check

Maybe you should be writing SF! The Harry Potter bubble won’t last forever. Since nonfiction and fantasy sizzle with publishers today, perhaps the next wave will blend them. Closet SF readers abound, but we’re a frustrated group. Have you looked at the SF shelves in your local bookstore lately? Take away the fantasy titles and you’ll find more energy in a mausoleum. My last marketing study for a corporate-sponsored young adult SF anthology found only one close match: a previous anthology written by the same authors. With so little competition out there, the next cycle might create a seller’s market for writers who get their foot in the door early...or at least a few toes.

Reason 6: World Building

Think realistic setting, a goal of most fiction writers. At any space conference, you’ll find master world-builders eager to help you. For example, local author/artist Michael Carroll gave a fantastic plenary talk on

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The Future Ain't What It Used To Be

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volcanoes at the Boulder Mars Society conference. For a good reference book on world building, check out *World-Building* by Stephen L. Gillett.

Reason 5: Character Research

Here's another Yogi Berra quote: "You can observe a lot by just watching." As writers, we already know the importance of observation. Mars Society conferences are great places to watch people. You want an interesting, slightly dysfunctional but endearing character for your next novel? Look no farther.

Reason 4: Bargain Shopping

Most science, engineering, and commercial conferences cost significantly more than the \$210 Mars Society registration fee. The annual National Space Symposium in Colorado Springs costs around \$1500 (unless you weasel a free press pass out of them, but you didn't hear that suggestion from me) and is worth every penny.

Reason 3: Education

The saying goes that if you write for pre-teen markets, "it's all about dinosaurs and astronauts." You'll satisfy both at a Mars

Society conference. Astronauts are plentiful. In fact, I enjoyed several lengthy one-on-one discussions with Apollo 7 astronaut Walt Cunningham at the 2008 Mars Society conference. Dinosaurs take the form of fossils, geology, and the search for life on Mars—all topics covered in exhausting detail. I'm one of those annoying "give back to society" authors who believe we caretakers of the written word have an obligation to educate the next generation. Part of our job is to distill the cool technical stuff into a form young readers can digest.

Reason 2: Sales and Promotion

Mars Society conference goesers are ravenous readers, and the Society offers free display tables to authors! If your topic somehow relates to space exploration (which includes SF/fantasy, medicine, geology, sociology, technology, climatology, psychology, or any other "ology"), you can sell your books at the conference with a minimum of bureaucracy. The Mars Society collects the local sales taxes, and they request a modest donation (tax-deductable) of 10% of your sales. The rest is yours.

Reason 1: Motivation

Since Mars Society members love to read,

they also love to chat with authors. I return from the conference every year with a renewed sense of connection to my SF readers, which include professionals who are actually doing the stuff I write about! Their feedback is honest, valuable, and best of all, free. Being asked a hundred times, "Is your sequel done yet?" also motivates me to get on my butt and write.

The 2008 conference in Boulder is over, done, history. But there's always next year. Yogi's title quote reminds authors that the future is always fertile ground for fresh thought and innovative writing. Nothing brings it all together quite like a Mars Society conference.

I'll leave you with a final quote, this one by Eleanor Roosevelt: "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." How appropriate!

Note: If you want to attend a Mars Society conference before the next Boulder conference in 2011, you can travel to Washington DC next August. Mark your calendars and check the Web site next spring (www.marssociety.org). Register early for the cheapest travel, hotel, and admission prices. I'll also post some reminders to the on-line PPW newsgroup.

The Writer's Life: Sunshine



By Fleur Bradley

It's Fall. Well, not yet, not really. Not if you step outside. As I'm writing this, it's the end of September, and temperatures are in the eighties. My flowers are blooming, trees are still green. Fall is light years away.

Or so it seems. See, I've lived in Colorado long enough to know the weather can change on you as you're standing outside, admiring your flowers. We can go from sunshine to blizzard in a matter of hours.

So instead of enjoying this weather, I winterize my lawn. I gather all the kids' toys, I blow out the sprinkler system. I plant bulbs. It's coming, that snow. Might even be tomorrow.

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I'm not a negative person—even if it kind of sounds that way. I've just been caught by surprise before. Last year, my sprinkler system froze and busted. Toys have been snowed in too. Not cool, if you'll excuse the pun.

In my writing career, it's been much the same story. I've been rejected enough times, I've come to expect it now. You lift that SASE as it comes in the mail, and if it feels light, you don't even need to open it. "Although blah-di-blah, we regret blah-di-blah, publishing is subjective." Or just a simple, "Thanks, but not for us." Expecting that rejection is a way to protect yourself from the sting. And I've had so much sting, I joke that I have rhino skin, like the Tom Petty song.

My rejections have come in threes: three manuscripts, 300+ queries and rejections, three winters. With lots of snow, I might add.

But then why still send out those submissions, those queries? Like my husband once said, "I don't know how you do it." I know why, and I bet many of you do too. I do it because deep down under that rhino skin, I

know that without a submission, there can be no acceptance. Like planting bulbs: you hope that at the end of the long winter, there will be a daffodil there to surprise you. And I've had those daffodils, those acceptances, and they're so worth the wait.

A few weeks ago, I received one of the best acceptances: I got an agent. After all those skimpy envelopes and the rewrites, I could hardly believe it. I shared my good news with my writer friends, lowering my enthusiasm by arguing that I may have an agent, but what if she can't sell the manuscript? What if she changes her mind? What if...?

One of my best writing friends looked at me and with a very stern look, said, "Enjoy this." And she was right, of course. I worked really hard to get here. Instead of looking for that snowstorm, I should be appreciating the sun while it's here.

So I decided to spend an afternoon sitting on my deck in the sunshine, soaking up the rays before the Peak is white again. Right after I finish those manuscript revisions for my agent, that is.

Grammar Girl!

10 Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me About Writing

Many years ago I set out to support myself as a freelance writer. I didn't know any other freelance writers, so I was kind of winging it. Here are the top 10 things I wish someone had told me before I started.

1) Set Specific Goals

Saying "I will publish something in a magazine," is not setting a specific goal. Rather, decide to publish a specific article or type of piece in a targeted publication, within a certain timeframe. Set this goal after researching the target. If you aspire to write book reviews (a great way to get clips and to exercise your fiction critiquing muscles), find out which editor handles book reviews at the publication. Find out if they use freelance work. Ask questions about format, length, style, etc., and try to understand the editor's personal preferences. I work with an editor who is extremely easygoing, as long as her reviewers hold to one rule...only pick up books on Monday mornings between 10 am and noon. Finding out this stuff will allow you to set goals that are achievable.

2) Expand Your Writing Ability

If you only write fiction, and only try to publish fiction, it may be a long time before you see your name in print. An editor likes to see clips, even if they are only peripherally related to what you will do for him or her. It lets them see someone has taken a chance on you before, and that you have delivered. So, write an op-ed, a letter to the editor, find out if any local nonprofit organizations need newsletter articles. Even if you have to practically give your skills away, the clips you receive in return are invaluable.

3) Take Yourself Seriously

This doesn't mean be arrogant about your skill. Rather, work as if your goal will be achieved, and do everything within your power to achieve it. This includes setting regular work hours, printing business cards if necessary, and learning not to look away, drop your voice or otherwise be embarrassed or apologetic when you describe yourself as a writer. If you don't take yourself seriously, no one else will.

4) Learn That Your Way Is Not Always the Right Way

I have gotten referral jobs, where one editor has referred another to me, because I am an "easy edit." This doesn't mean that you should not be vested in your work, but that you should realize that others can sometimes see our work more clearly than we ourselves can, and that we need to listen to them (especially if they are paying), and know the difference between fighting for your word preference and fighting for clarity or correctness. By the same token, editors themselves are not always right and ought to listen to you if you have a valid point about a change they made. Don't be afraid to stand up for your work, as long as it is for the right reason.

5) Family Members Are Not Good Editors

Don't depend on your friends or family to edit your work, unless you know they are prepared to be brutally honest with you. An editor who does nothing more than pat you on the back and give you an ego boost is not an editor who will help you. Better to form a loose/reciprocating arrangement with another writer you trust and work on each other's stuff—honestly.

6) Good Enough Is Never Good Enough

Never settle for "good enough" when you are putting together a piece, whether fiction or non-fiction. If you think that something is merely "good enough," chances are you have not spent enough time on it. Your work needs to be as perfect as is humanly possible before an editor sees it. For every error or weak spot you are aware of, a good editor will probably find two (at least). By the same token, do not over-edit. There is a point when a piece is "done." That means you cannot find any errors, no one else can find errors and you're down to tinkering with word choice and tweaking sentence structure. At this point, you are too close to your own work to see it objectively. If you over-edit, you may ruin a great piece. Stop. Set it aside. If you have any doubts, leave it alone for a few days then give it one last pass. Then no more.

7) Understand the Business of Writing

If you understand the creative side, but have no handle on the business side of writing, you will undervalue or overvalue your time/work, you will sound apologetic every time you give a quote, you won't know if an editor is offering you a fair price for

your work. Even fiction writers need to know what to expect by way of compensation in any given market. If you are writing a novel, a book publisher recently told me that few authors understand how books are marketed and that publishing houses need authors who are a part of the sales team, not sitting in an ivory tower waiting to sell a million copies.

8) Learn Everything Again

Realize that you can always learn more about any given subject. There is no point at which you can say I know all there is to know about X type of writing. Continue to study and hone your craft. Read, read, read and learn to read as a writer, not just a reader. You might find you no longer will tolerate many stories/articles/books, but that's a good thing. It means you have learned to read with a critical eye, and that you are learning more and more.

9) Formalize Your Procedures

If you write articles, realize what routine works best for you, then stick to it while retaining the ability to be flexible. I have a checklist for press releases and, even though I practically know the list by heart, I still run down it before sending a release out for client approval. Why? Because I get involved in deadlines, rush and forget stuff. Formal procedures, even if just sticking to scheduled writing time or lining your pens and paper up just so or journaling or running through a checklist; all these legitimize your work, help you take it more seriously and streamline some of the less fun parts of writing.

10) Learn to "Log Line"

In screenwriting, writers have to describe projects with log lines, a one or two line sentence that fully captures the entirety of their projects. Learn to do this for all your projects. Editors and agents need you to express yourself clearly and concisely. Why? It means that you, yourself, have a full understanding of what you are doing. When you ask someone what a project entails and they fumble for words, it means they are not all that sure themselves what they are doing (and even if they are, it leaves the listener with that impression). Summing up is a necessary part of the pitch process and, if you want to continue marketing yourself as a writer, you'd better be fully prepared to pitch.

Article first printed on the Colorado Springs Fiction Writers' Group Web site (www.coloradospringsfictionwritersgroup.org)

The Random Muse

The Art of Avoidance

By Deb Courtney Bertha

I need to write. I really want to write. When I actually write, I seem fairly skilled; at the very least, I don't suck. All that much. I take great satisfaction in writing and doing it well. Ish. Yet, frequently, I will do anything to avoid the physical act of it. And I'm gonna go out on a limb and guess I'm not the only one with this problem.

In the interest of assisting you with your own avoidance tactics, some sharing is in order. In theory, you may watch for these behaviors and take appropriate steps to guard against them. In practice, you may want to execute your own versions.

Top Eight Things I Have Done to Avoid Writing

1. Phone calls to people I don't really want to talk to after I've phoned all the people to whom I actually have anything to say.

2. Clean the refrigerator. Anyone who knows me knows that this act is so clearly out of character that it must be born of desperation. Ditto to voluntarily vacuuming, ironing and washing windows. Though truthfully, I don't do windows even if the task seems like a good form of procrastination. Once you start doing windows, it's all downhill from there.

3. Shop. Well, okay, I'd do that anyway, but some Saturday mornings, when the empty page is taunting me, I swear I can hear on-

sale shoes calling me from far away. It's definitely hard to get used to hearing shoes speak, but when Prada calls my name, I believe I am obligated to answer. It'd be rude not to, right?

4. Surf the Internet. So, this isn't exactly absurd, until I assess what I am spending my time actually reading while I surf. Britney has Multiple Personality Disorder. Or Bipolar. The LD50 for alcohol is .38, but some people can survive up to .91. There is a disorder which may be psychiatric, or may be organic, which causes lesions on the body out of which grow strange fibers. There is a fungus which infects the bodies of certain caterpillars, grows off their innards and finally kills them as it sprouts into a long brown finger-like thing, which certain cultures dry, grind and mix into tea. I am fairly certain no one needs to know all these things at one time.

5. Get a new hobby. Over the last year, I have taken up (in no particular order): loom knitting, oil pastels, tarot, homemade beauty products, raising herbs, jewelry making, sewing, sketching, beer-making, canning, and probably a half-dozen other things. To show for this effort, I have three scarves, a hat, two drawings (stuffed in a drawer), a deck of cards that has disappeared, 4,000 pounds of lemon-mint lip balm, dried herbs (it's amazing—you let the plants die and they turn right into the crumbled little bits that come in the jars at the

grocery store), three necklaces, a sewing machine, six empty beer bottles and a broken pickle jar. Apparently, I need a 12-step program for hobbies, but I'm afraid the program would become just another method of procrastination. I have managed to resist so far.

6. Get involved in someone else's life and problems. Turns out I am a great giver of advice, and love nothing more than to sagely interpret the psychological underpinnings of Other People's Problems. Oh, the things I can solve. For other people. Usually over lunch. Or martinis. Or both.

7. Scavenger hunt. Typically this begins with an Instant Messaging session with a friend and ends in an odd bet with a time limit placed on producing results. Best ones yet: Bet you can't find the personal phone number of an acquisitions editor for a major publishing house (she did, in just under two hours, promises were made all around to never use the information and to generally reserve our powers for good) and Bet you can't get the personal phone number for Matthew McConaghey's assistant (I managed a home phone number in just under an hour). Also addictive.

8. The number one way in which I avoid writing is by...writing. Yes, yes, I know this sounds weird, but it's actually very simple. I set a specific writing goal for one of my many, varied and unfinished projects, sit myself down, psych myself up and proceed to write...something else. Entirely.

Wait....sort of like I've done here....sigh.

And that's just enough avoidance for one day. Write well, and have fun doing it. As for me? I think I hear a shoe sale calling my name.

An Improv Write Brain on Improve Writing

continued from page 4

working on. I've been outlining a new mystery novel manuscript. I didn't know much of the back story of my sleuth's best friend (Cynthia, a bartender) yet, so I decided that I would use her as the main character in my responses to the example prompts Chris gave us.

The first prompt was a partial sentence to complete, "The dark never fails to" I wrote: ... *Cynthia bares her face to the evening sky, holds out her arms for the embrace and breathes deeply, once, twice, and a third time until the stillness creeps into her heart and says "you'll be okay for another day."* So, I learned that Cynthia feels troubled and needs assurance, and that she's not afraid of the dark, but actually finds comfort there. Maybe this is because the night is her milieu, when she

works, or maybe when she was in trouble in her past, the dark protected her. Hmm. Lots of interesting material to work with here!

The second prompt was a line of dialogue, "Are you allowed to do that?" In my response, I wrote: *Cynthia finished shaking the stainless steel martini shaker...then leaned over the glass and daintily spit into it. As she stirred the small cloud into the clear gin, George came up behind her and whispered, "Are you allowed to do that?" ... Without looking at George, she said under her breath, "You are if the guy drinking it deserves to die."*

Well, even more interesting characterization here! Cynthia despises the guy whose drink she's preparing, but she doesn't feel confident in confronting him directly, such as refusing to serve him. Instead, she resorts to this subtle

way to show her hatred. Because of these two simple exercises, a door has opened into Cynthia's psyche, and I mean to explore further the dark corridors of her mind.

The small group made it easier for us shy writers to share what we had written, and I was amazed by the creativity shown in the responses. Everyone got something out of the exercises, if only to flex their writing muscles a little. One attendee who came with a friend said she was "just a reader." Her writing responses were very provocative, though, and after the meeting, she contacted Chris by e-mail and wrote, "...But now with your prompts, I am going to work at this and just see what I can do." Another fledgling writer has been born!

See the September/October issue of the *NewsMagazine* for more on Improv Writing.

August Write Brain Tools and Tips

Featuring Linda Rohrbough

By Bonnie Hagan

I'd never seen a more crowded Write Brain. Forty-seven eager writers crowded into the classroom at Cottonwood Artists' School hoping to pick up some of the Novel Development tools promised by Linda Rohrbough, regular *PPW NewsMagazine* columnist. They didn't leave disappointed.

Linda filled the night with energy, a contagious sense of fun and more information than most of us could keep up with. (Fortunately, she provided a detailed hand-out.) Our speaker's first words to us that night were, "I'm Linda Rohrbough. That's roar like a lion, baa like a lamb." From that moment, we were completely in her hands.

Before opining on all manner of writing resources, Linda started by laying down the law. Three laws, to be exact. She called them her principles for successful writing. If anyone was expecting unoriginality, they were sadly disappointed. The first law stunned me into a fit of mental gymnastics. Linda asserted that "even a poor plan, properly executed will work. It's all in the execution."

I started to rebel. Everyone knows you have to find the perfect plan. Apparently Linda didn't get that memo. She gave the example of taking the long way around to get to a friend's house. Just because she didn't know all the shortcuts to get to her friend's house quickly doesn't mean she never got there. It just took a bit longer. So what's that got to do with writing? Everything! Even if the particular plan you've settled on seems to be taking the tortoise approach rather than the hare's, stick with it. You'll get there. Eventually.

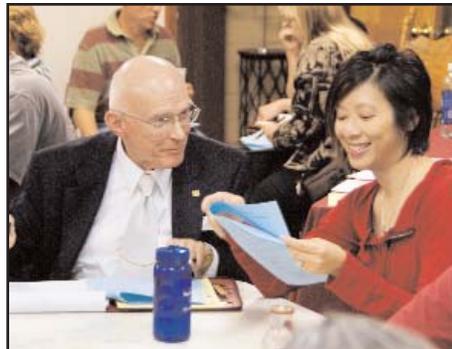
If I thought the first law was difficult to take, that was nothing compared to the second. Linda stated, "If you're a good writer, you can do anything you want. If you're not, you better follow the rules." I could hear the crowd tittering as the same idea occurred over and over. Everyone was thinking that if you ever dared to break one of the rules of writing, you were saying to the universe at large, "Don't worry. I'm a good writer. And I know it."

Anticipating the twist that was giving our collective brain, Linda illustrated this principle by speaking about the movie *The Fugitive* and

how the antagonist (delightfully played by Tommy Lee Jones) breaks the rules of his role.

He arrives later in the picture than the villain is supposed to, and then he passes the role of the antagonist off to someone else in the end. These things aren't part of the 'canon' behavior of an antagonist, but the film makers got away with it. Why? Because they were good. An audience or a reader or an editor can forgive rule-breaking if the product is stellar. Otherwise, breaking the rules is best left to the experts.

I began to see it even though I didn't want to. Still the uneasiness inside me because of the first two laws was nothing compared to that caused by law number three. Linda's final law simply states, "Nothing can change while you're comfortable." Uh-oh. I knew we were in for it then. Linda decided to prove this point by asking everyone to sit in a completely different spot next to people they didn't know.



Good natured grumbling abounded, but in a few short minutes we were all resettled beside virtual strangers. Linda talked about our mental state and asserted that as long as we are comfortable with ourselves, we don't push. We don't try to attain a new level, we don't struggle to succeed. Instead we remain complacent. Much as it kills me to admit it, it's absolutely true. As a writer, I push things off, content to let them sit until my internal editor or an external deadline (usually the latter) demands that I take action.

All right. It took some work, but I accepted everything to that point, and I was ready for the detail work. After all, I was attending a workshop on the Writer's Toolbox. Give me some tools, I silently cried. In moments, I had more tools than I knew what to do with and not of the mere hammer and nails variety.



Linda broke out the super rechargeable cordless power tools.

First up was plot. After briefly defining basic plot terms for the purpose of clarity, Linda started in on the resources. She mentioned software like *MindManager* and *Electric Note Cards*, which help the writer get all those crucial notes and brainstorming sessions out of her head and into the one place she needs them most—her computer. Both of these software options work with MS Word which makes them even more attractive. Linda came armed not only with their prices and the Web site addresses where they can be obtained, but also the pros and cons of their knockoffs including the price differential.

We talked about fundamental plot structure texts that every writer should have in his library. There is *Three Act Structure* by James Scott Bell. He diagrams classic structure that has been used for centuries to craft effective tales. Linda touched on *Scene and Sequel* and *The Writer's Journey*, pointing out each of their strengths in a nutshell. One handy Web site she mentioned was www.skotos.net/articles/plotstrategies.html in which are descriptions of the Episodic Plot, the Mountain (Escalating) Plot, the W plot and others.

From these generics, Linda moved to more specific types of plots including Dusty Richard's formula regarding the transformation of the protagonist. Also, the mystery plot is mentioned as a vital tool for developing the proper shape for a mystery. Linda rounds off this section with a brief discussion of *Goal, Motivation, and Conflict* along with concrete examples of how these three factors contribute to well-rounded characters and plot.

Minds gleefully spinning with new resources to devour, we let Linda take us on one more tour before the night was done. She concluded the evening with editing tools. Some of these are available in stores, some online and some are even free. Starting with *Rainbow Editing* by PPW's own Dawn Smit Miller, Linda gave us the skinny on several top-notch tools. One that made me absolutely drool is a program called *Read Please*. It's a Windows tool that has the computer read your manuscript to you out loud. Oh, and it's free.

Time and space would fail me if I tried to cover everything Linda said. By the end of the night, I left armed with three new rules (which were growing on me more every minute) and a toolbox stuffed to bursting with resources. If ever a Write Brain had better equipped me for the writing life, I couldn't remember it.

Thank you, Linda Roar-like-a-lion-baa-like-a-lamb!

Upcoming PPW Events

November, December

November Write Brain Your Words, Their Story: Collaborative Writing with Celebrities, Experts, and Just Plain Folk Featuring Pam McCutcheon, Pam Novotny, and Suzanne Proulx

November 18th, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Have you secretly dreamed of co-authoring with a celebrity? Ghostwriting a memoir for a well-known but reclusive public figure? Collaborating with an expert in a field you're passionate about? If so, come on down to our November Write Brain. Our panel of experts—Pam McCutcheon, Pam Novotny, and Suzanne Proulx—will share their experiences in the growing field of collaborative writing, from ghostwriting and book doctoring to working with celebs. They'll demystify the process and show how you can break into this exciting arena.



Pam McCutcheon writes romance and nonfiction under her own name, fantasy short stories under the name Pamela Luzier, Young Adult urban fantasy under the name Parker Blue, and ghostwrites under other authors' names. Her latest release is *Bite Me* by Parker Blue from Bell Bridge Books.



Pam Novotny has been a writer for more than 25 years focusing on parenting, women's health issues, and psychology. Her first book, *The Joy of Twins*, has been followed by several more books on women's health, sexual health, infertility and PMS. *Solve Your Child's School-Related Problems* was written in collaboration with two psychologists from the National Association of School Psychologists.



Suzanne Proulx is the author of four mysteries featuring hospital risk manager Vicky Lucci: *Bad Blood*, *Bad Luck*, *Bad Medicine*, and *Declared Dead*. She lives in Denver and is currently working on another book in the series as well as a historical mystery.

10 Pikes Peak Writer

December Write Brain How to Have a Killer Booksigning Featuring Beth Groundwater and Madge Walls

December 16th, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Most writers hate books signings. They sit there like a blob and therefore don't sell many books. Unless you're Stephen King or Danielle Steele, you won't either—unless you stand up, get close, and get personal!

Since the publication of their first novels, Madge Walls and Beth Groundwater have done dozens of book signings in bookstores across the country. There's rarely a lineup waiting for our dazzling presence, yet we do sell books! We sell them one at a time, as fast as we can. At the end of two hours the book store manager is beaming and wants us back.

Learn the secrets of having a Killer Booksigning from these two experienced authors—who don't always agree.



Beth Groundwater's debut mystery novel, *A Real Basket Case*, was released by Five Star to good reviews from *Booklist*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and other national publications in March, 2007. It

was nominated for a 2007 Best First Novel Agatha Award. *To Hell in a Handbasket*, the second in the Claire Hanover gift basket designer mystery series, will be released in May, 2009. Also, Beth has published eight short stories in various genres, including one in *Wild Blue Yonder*, Frontier Airlines' in-flight magazine, one which was translated into Farsi, and one which was performed in live theatre. Visit Beth's Web site at www.bethgroundwater.com and her blog at www.bethgroundwater.blogspot.com.



Madge Walls was raised in Hilo and Honolulu, Hawaii. She is a graduate of Punahou School and the University of Oregon Honors College, with a B.A. in mathematics. She raised her three sons on Maui, where she was a feature writer for the *Maui News* and director

of public relations for a Wailea resort. She became a licensed Realtor in 1987, taught prelicensing school at Maui Community College, and taught continuing education classes at the Realtors Association of Maui. She holds the professional designation Graduate, Realtor Institute (GRI). Her Hawaii Real Estate Exam Book: *A Study Guide to the State Section of the Hawaii Real Estate Exam* is in its eighth edition.

She currently lives in Colorado Springs, and is employed by a builder of new homes.

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.

The meetings are held at Cottonwood Artists' School, 25 Cimino Drive, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

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

Wednesday, November 26 and
December 17 at 6:30 p.m.

Location: Cottonwood Artists' School
(Open critique is usually held the fourth
Wednesday of each month.)

November and December Open Critique
guests will be announced soon. Watch the
Web site for more information.

PPW Members Night

Monday, November 24 and December 22
at 6:30 p.m. (Fourth Monday of month.)

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

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

Assembled by Janice Black

We industrious writers have been busy as bees on various writing projects and other creative endeavors. Some of us have even gotten to the point of being ready for submission and have taken the crucial steps of seeking publication or entering contests. A few gleaming successes are known to me, typically because of the Pikes Peak Writers loop. I celebrate those! They inspire me and give me hope. However, many announcements slip by me. So, please, if you have a success story to tell, send it to me. To upload a sweet success to the Web site, there is a link on the Members Hideaway menu. Just fill out the form.

Cicily Janus has been named the online editor for *Opium Magazine* and assistant editor for their print magazine as well, and has had a short-short on the cover of said magazine. Cicily also judged in their literary death match in the Big Apple in September. We want to hear more about that, Cicily. If anyone would like to submit, check out www.opium-magazine.com and then go for it with any of your works that might fit. (Think of this as a variation of a “call for submission.”) She is also assistant editor at *Bust Down the Door and Eat All the Chickens*, a magazine for completely different tastes. You can find it at www.absurdistjournal.com. Submissions welcome there too!

Beth Groundwater read and signed her debut mystery, *A Real Basket Case*, at the Covered Treasures Bookstore in Monument during Monument’s Art Hop event. *A Real Basket Case* received good reviews from *Booklist*, *Kirkus Reviews*, and other national publications. Two interviews with Beth Groundwater have been posted online. The first was conducted by Lorie Ham for her “No Name Cafe.” She also posted the review of *A Real Basket Case* done by her reviewer, Cindy Chow. Beth says, “Lorie got me talking about other genres I’ve tried to write besides mysteries, my favorite acceptance stories, themes in my writing, and advice to aspiring authors, among other topics. Reading over the interview, just about everything there is still timely and right on, except my children are a year older.” Here’s the link: www.lorieham.com/groundwater.html. A second interview of Beth was posted on *Suspense Magazine’s* Web site and was conducted by John Raab in July. He got her talking about her biggest inspiration, what kind of music she enjoys and what she likes to do for fun, among other topics. You’ll probably be surprised by her answer to the question, “If you could solve any mystery for yourself, what would it be?” Here’s the link: www.suspensemagazine.com/bethgroundwater.html. Those of you who are published may want to add these sites to your list of possible promotion avenues.

Bob Spiller also participated in the ART HOP celebration. He was signing his new Bonnie Pinkwater mystery, *Irrational Numbers*, the third in the Bonnie Pinkwater mystery series. Time to once again visit East Plains, Colorado. *Irrational Numbers* is a tasty bit of business and will bring a smile to the faces of Bonnie Pinkwater fans everywhere. Please stop by your local bookstore and be edified in heart, soul, mind, and spirit.

Cynthia Becker’s middle grade biography *Chipeta: Ute Peacemaker* will be released in November in the Filter Press Now You Know Bio series. This is a must read for all affectionados of local Pikes Peak region lore.

Chris Myers’ manuscript *Ripsters* was a finalist in the 2008 Colorado Gold Contest. Check out www.RMFW.org for more information. Congratulations, Chris!

Margaret Brettschneider’s newest book, *Street Smart on a Dead End* was officially “launched” with signings and readings at Poor Richard’s in September. This novel is based on the true story of a straight-laced group of teachers who take on a “going-on-thirteen year-old” drug addict and gang member. Plenty of conflict as you can imagine. Some of it is the cultural clash of values and some of it comes from her gang members attacking those whom this child reluctantly comes to love. What can one do when loving is not always enough?

Lynda Hilburn’s second book in her Kismet Knight, Vampire Psychologist series, *Dark Harvest*, was officially released on October 1, 2008. Ask for it in local bookstores.



Featuring Dawn Smit-Miller

By Stephanie A. Dears

Every year about this time, Dawn Smit-Miller, Pikes Peak Writers’ (PPW) Contest

September Write Brain

Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest

Director, shares everything one needs to know to submit to the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest (PPWFC). The September 16, 2008 Write Brain was that day.

I know many of you are scratching your heads at that name. Recently, the PPW Board decided to change the name to Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest, although the winners still receive the Paul Gillette Award.

Submitting to a writing contest can be daunting, especially for new writers. What genre is my work? What if the judges laugh at it? How could I possibly win?

Remember, judges are people, and they are giving their opinion. Take feedback with a

grain of salt, apply what you agree with and ignore what you don’t. Writing is a subjective business. Writers must understand this.

After the contest, when you’ve either won or lost, please send thank-you notes to the judges, especially if you received good feedback. If the judges are nasty, like the one who wrote “You are sick and you need a shrink!” on a submission, notify Ms. Smit-Miller. Comments from judges should be constructive, not destructive.

While not everyone can win the PPWFC nor will all of the winners land an agent and/or a publisher out of it, the contest gives writers submission practice, feedback on their work, and a lesson on how to accept criticism.

Good luck to everyone with the courage to enter!



PIKES PEAK WRITERS
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Prompts for NaNoWriMo and Beyond

There has been much talk over the past few issues about the National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) challenge. While it is highly improbable that any of the participants will have a bookstore-ready novel on November 30th, there may be several manuscripts that could be ready after some more work. The point is to get words down without self-editing. And that can be helpful at any time of the year and for any length of time.

Following are a few favorite prompts to get the juices going. You may be a paragraph or more in before you find the nugget. These are just jumping off points.

"He couldn't know it then, but . . ."

"One wrong turn, and . . ."

"If the sun came up in the morning, she'd never again . . ."

For more prompts, check out "The Untimely Prompt" by Deb Courtney on the Web site. www.pikespeakwriters.com

Good luck to these brave PPWers who

have decided to take on NaNoWriMo and tell their fellow members about it. Now you know why they aren't answering e-mails or cell phones.

Kirsten Akens
Julia Allen
Margaret Brettschneider
Debbie Buckingham
Laura Deal
Stephanie Dears
J.T. Evans
Ian Thomas Healy
Ron Heimbecher
Mandy Houk
DeAnna Knippling
Martha Lancaster
Chris Mandeville
Debbie Meldrum
Julie Kazimer
MB Partlow
Brandon Satrom
Bob Spiller
Marti Verlander

Remembering Tony Hillerman

After more than three decades of critical acclaim and many visits to the best-seller list, well-loved author Tony Hillerman died on October 26, 2008.

His passing is a great loss to the writing world. He was the author of more than 35 books, and the recipient of many awards, including being named Grand Master for lifetime achievement by the Mystery Writers of America. Yet he said the honor that brought him the greatest pleasure was given to him by the Navajo Tribal Council when they named him a Special Friend of the Diné. Hillerman honored the Navajo people in his life and in his fiction, and leaves behind a treasury of books about the peoples of the desert southwest for the world to enjoy.

Mr. Hillerman was remembered this month at the annual Tony Hillerman Writers Conference. We at Pikes Peak Writers have enjoyed a cooperative friendship with the Tony Hillerman Writers Conference for the past few years, and we received word of Mr. Hillerman's passing with great sorrow. PPW sends our heart-felt condolences to his family, and to all those friends, fans, and fellow writers who honor his memory and learn from his legacy.