

Pikes Peak Writer

NewsMagazine

Official Publication of the Pikes Peak Writers



VOLUME VIII, ISSUE 5
September, October 2009

CONTENTS

From the Editor
page 2

The Business of Writing
page 4

American Icon 5
page 5

Contest News
page 6

Growing Writers
page 6

Upcoming Writing Contests
page 7

A Wallflower's Guide to Networking
page 8

Hidden Icon
page 8

BeckyLand
page 9

Top Ten Writing Tips
page 9

Upcoming Events
page 10

Arts Liaison
page 10

Sweet Success
page 11

August Write Brain
page 11

July Write Brain
page 12

Interview with Bestselling Author Catherine Ryan Hyde

By Christian Marcus Lyons

Bestselling author Catherine Ryan Hyde is the author of a large (and growing) number of novels, including *Pay It Forward* (1999), and the forthcoming YA novel, *Jumpstart the World* (Knopf, 2010). She has also written “scads of short stories,” she states on her Web site (www.catherineryanhyde.com), which have appeared in quality literary journals like *The Antioch Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *Glimmer Train*, to name a few. Her work has won or been nominated for The Tobias Wolff award, The Raymond Carver Short Story Contest, and The Pushcart Prize.

Pretty much everyone knows that her novel *Pay It Forward* was made into a film starring Kevin Spacey, Haley Joel Osment, and others. Of the film version, Catherine says, “Not the world’s most faithful adaptation, but I’m still glad it was made.” And who wouldn’t be? The film was made for \$40M, and has grossed to date more than ten times that, which has spurred sales of the novel to greater and greater heights.

In addition to her writing career, Catherine (never Cat or Katy, thank you very much!) adores hiking, backpacking, kayaking, fishing, photography, and is a professional public speaker.

Despite her incredibly active lifestyle, staff writer Christian Marcus Lyons managed to catch her between writing sessions to find out more about her as a writer and as a humanitarian.

CML: With an impressive and adventurous resume like yours, how do you schedule your writing time?



CRH: Pretty much the way a pit bull holds onto a pant leg. I put a message on my site at the beginning of this year saying I no longer travel and speak on behalf of the *Pay It Forward* concept. And I’ve stuck to it, no exceptions. And since approximately 100 out of 100 people who want me to speak or travel are only interested in *Pay It Forward*, I have lots of time on my hands for writing these days.

As far as my outdoor adventures are concerned, I’ve had my kayak in the center aisle of my motor home for nearly three weeks, ready to go, but the book

comes first. Not just out of discipline. I’d always rather write if I can.

CML: What nourishes your writer’s soul?

CRH: Everything that human beings don’t—and couldn’t—make. This includes my dog Ella, the ocean (which is 236 yards from my house), the pelicans that skim on its waves, the seals who poke their heads up out of it to stare at me, the juvenile Cooper’s hawk who sits on the tree in my back yard, the wild turkeys who come rambling through the field behind me. The deer who eat my flowers. I could go on, but I expect you get the idea.

CML: Since your first novel, *Funerals for Horses*, was published in 1997, how have you changed in relation to your writing?

CRH: I spend a lot less time writing things and then throwing them away. This is not to say that I now hit it out

continued on page 2

“We are all cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out.” —Ray Bradbury

Letter from the Editor



By Mandy Houk

I smell pencils—it must be fall! I'm going to guess that, even if you're not a student or a parent of students, your internal clock is still telling you it's Back-to-School time.

So, class, I hope

you're ready to learn. We've got tips on the craft of writing (Linda Rohrbough teaches how to build suspense), as well as the business of writing (Fleur Bradley shares how to network if you don't like networking), along with great reads like Christian Marcus Lyons' interview with Catherine Ryan Hyde. And, in this month's Top Ten list, Julia Allen has compiled a treasure chest of writing tips from your own fellow PPW members.

There's also the newsworthy stuff, like Upcoming Events, Sweet Success, and

excellent coverage of PPW's recent events—most notably, American Icon 5. Be sure to check out the photo of the winners on page 5 so you know who to congratulate.

Sharpen those pencils, now, and get back to work. Happy Writing!

Catherine Ryan Hyde Interview

continued from page 1



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

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of the park every time I step up to bat. On the contrary, it means I spend less time writing. But, more and more, what I write, I keep. I guess I'm learning to tell the difference between what's worth writing and what isn't, before I waste too much time on it.

CML: Your second book was *Earthquake Weather* which was published the following year—an amazing collection of short fiction, for those who have yet to read it. You're one of the few writers in the current market who continues to write short fiction with success. There is talk about that market drying up and disappearing. Do you agree?

CRH: What "continued success" would that be? After *Earthquake Weather*, I compiled a second collection, which I thought was much better. And never did manage to sell it. I finally just decided to give most of the stories away on my Web site. A sort of added value for those who visit. So I made them into audio podcasts and PDFs, both. And it's been like pulling teeth to get people to go out and take them for free. If I put a free new novel on my site, I expect it would garner some attention. But even most of my friends keep forgetting they were going to give the short stories a try.

So, regretfully, I can only conclude that our society as a whole has gotten out of the habit of short stories and thinks it doesn't like them. Maybe the whole "New Yorker story" stereotype has muddied the water. I think people would like them a lot if they tried them, so at any time the pendulum could swing back again. But at the moment I find myself discouraged about the short story market. Me. The one who wrote the damn book on optimism.

CML: How do you perceive the market for short fiction, for established writers like yourself, and beginning writers who

are trying to break into the industry using that market as a springboard to publishing their novels?

CRH: Okay, good. Now I get to be positive again. In that respect, I think the short story marketplace is brilliant. Even if your stories are never published in book form, there is a healthy market among literary and small circulation magazines. And if you can get even a couple of small placements in that arena, it makes an enormous difference when approaching an agent or editor. I almost can't stress too strongly how much that type of publication credit will help your chances.

CML: In each of your novels, you portray very emotionally complex characters without overloading the narrative or bogging down the momentum of the story. What influences do you draw from in your life to depict such beautifully complicated and flawed people?

CRH: This is where I have to be careful to say that I don't put my family and friends into my novels. You have to stress that, otherwise your family and friends start behaving strangely.

I think I'm just fascinated by human nature. I study it because it never ceases to amaze me. I'm interested particularly in what we don't say. I find stories by following the fear in people. We all have it, but we don't want to say we have it. Either that or we don't even know. And from that crucial disconnect springs a waterfall of flaws and complications that can be quite beautiful if you let them be.

CML: You write for both the adult and young adult fiction markets. At what point in the writing process do you determine which direction the current project is headed? How do you make that determination?

CRH: I almost never know. I am probably the lamest person on the planet when it comes to judging.

I wrote *Becoming Chloe* for adults, then

continued on page 3

Catherine Ryan Hyde Interview

continued from page 2

edited it for length and sold it to the YA market. I wrote *Chasing Windmills* (but only from Sebastian's POV) for YA, but my editor thought it was too adult. So I added Maria's POV to make it much more cleanly adult, and sold it to the adult market, and it immediately became a YA crossover.

Everybody seems to think there's a nice clean line between the two, but they just don't know where it is. Trust me. It doesn't exist.

So, I throw it at what I think is the right wall. If it sticks, then that's what it is.

CML: Are you more drawn to writing for one audience over another?

CRH: Yes. The YA is closest to my heart. If I had to choose tomorrow, my adult career would be toast. But it wouldn't matter, because my adult readers could just go on reading my YAs. Most adults will do fine with a good cutting edge YA if only they are willing to give it a try.

CML: You're currently represented by the Andrea Brown Agency in California. Can you tell us what it was like for you—what your process was—in attracting such a reputable agency?

CRH: I was actually pretty well into my career. My first agent closed the doors of her agency to go into a new line of work. She was willing to contact Andrea Brown for me to see if she could help set me up, but they had been playing phone tag.

Right around that time I was teaching at the La Jolla Writers Conference, and so was Laura Rennert, a key agent at ABLA. So I decided to drop in on one of her workshops. I hadn't met her. Didn't know what she looked like. So I'm standing waiting for an elevator with this woman, this stranger—there were two elevators, and they both started down from the top floor at exactly the same moment. So just to be funny, I turned to her and said, "Are you a betting woman?" Then I read her name tag and it was Laura.

I told her on the elevator ride up that my current agent had been trying to contact them on my behalf, and asked if I could pitch her a couple of projects over the course of the weekend. After dinner that night I asked if it was a good time and briefly pitched *Becoming Chloe* and *The Year of my Miraculous Reappearance*. Of course it helped that I was on the teaching staff. But if she hadn't liked the sound of the projects, I'm sure it wouldn't have helped enough. That was October of '03 and by

February of '04 she had sold them both to Knopf. I've always had good experiences with Laura and feel very lucky to have her.

CML: After writing such an extensive number of books, do you still get nervous when pitching a new project to your agent? Do you still experience writer's self-doubt?

CRH: I don't exactly pitch them anymore. I tell her what I'm working on, and when I'm done, I send it.

Interesting timing on asking this question, though, because I actually just finished the draft of the novel I've been working on. And I printed it out this morning and gave it to my mother to read. She's always first. And yes, as the very first person reads it, I'm always a little on edge. Usually I have a gut sense that it's okay (or I wouldn't have printed it out), but until the first reader confirms it, there's doubt.

By the time I send it to Laura, three or four other trusted readers will have weighed in. By then I'm pretty sure what I've got. Which is not to say I don't feel better after hearing from her...

CML: What type of work did you do before you became a writer?

CRH: It would save space to just list what I didn't do. I have one of those classic funky writer's resumes, the kind that just screams that a person is moving from job to job trying to avoid the unavoidable.

I had my own dog training business for many years. I worked as a dog groomer, then as a baker and pastry chef. I even did some free-lance auto mechanics. And I was a tour guide at the Hearst Castle. The last real job I had was as a barista at a local coffee house. That was my proverbial day job. I quit it.

CML: Did any of those jobs influence you as a writer in some small or great way?

CRH: Yeah. They proved to me that I'm essentially unemployable and gave me great incentive to never have a day job again.

CML: The novel *Pay It Forward*—did you imagine the concept would take off and become so successful when you were writing it?

CRH: In a word, no.

CML: Writers may not set out to write such an amazing story like *Pay It Forward*, but it obviously happens. To what do you attribute the amazing success the novel has brought you?

CRH: I think it's just a case of the right

idea in the right place at the right time. What Daniel Keyes (author of my favorite novel of all time, *Flowers for Algernon*) calls capturing lightning in a bottle. I believe it's always accidental, no matter what someone tells you about their lightning-in-a-bottle after the fact. It's always one of those things you couldn't do again if you tried.

CML: What does your typical writing day look like?

CRH: I have to start by stressing that not every day is a writing day. I should be so lucky. But if it really is a writing day, I'll get up, brush my teeth, do 15 minutes of Yoga, and then sit down in my comfortable recliner with a cup of tea nearby and my laptop on my lap. By evening I may have 10 first-draft pages. If it's a banner day, the number might be up in the high teens. This makes up for the fact that so many days are not writing days. If it isn't flowing, I don't push it. I do something else.

CML: What's one interesting thing about the space you write in—or maybe about your writing process—that you have never told anyone?

CRH: I don't think I've ever told anyone that I have something of a "talisman" for every one of my novels, mostly up in my studio. For example, for *Chasing Windmills* I have a photo of Fred Astaire dancing on the wall in Royal wedding. For *Love in the Present Tense*, I have a stuffed giraffe like Leonard's. For *Funerals for Horses*, a potted cactus out on the patio outside the window.

CML: Did you have someone you considered a mentor early in your writing career?

CRH: I had a couple. I belonged to the Cambria Writers Workshop, and we had some pretty well-published members, such as children's author Elizabeth Spurr, and Jean Brody (*Gideon's House*, *Cleo*, *A Coven of Women*). I was lucky to have them. I was in the process of receiving the 122 short story rejections that I had to weather before placing my first story. And they told me it happened to all writers, and that I was good enough.

CML: What's the hardest lesson you've learned thus far in your career?

CRH: I've always been a big believer in the theory that if you do what you love, the money will follow. But in the years directly following what I call "the whole *Pay It Forward* phenomenon," I had to learn that if you stop loving what you do, the money will dry up. And that was a weird and confusing time, and

continued on page 4



By Linda Robrbough

The Business of Writing

How NOT to Cheat Your Reader

Something I see a lot with new fiction writers is the attempt to create suspense—which can result in cheating the reader. Writers often withhold information in a way they believe builds tension. What it actually does is hurt their credibility and cheapen the story. This summer I learned from James N. Frey, author of *How to Write a Damn Good Novel* and a keynote speaker at the last PPWC, that you create tension by what you tell the reader, not by what you withhold.

Let me give you an example. Let's say we start a story with a woman getting ready for work. She's about to leave when she walks over to her dresser, pulls something out, puts it in her purse, grabs a granola bar, and goes outside to join her carpool. Can't you just see a writer in a critique group defending not telling us what's in the purse because it creates tension? Nah. While writers could get away with a stunt like this 30 years ago, readers are pretty sophisticated now and consider withholding like this a cheat.

If we go back to our principle—create tension by what you tell the reader—we need to change the opening. In this case, you simply let the reader see what she puts in her purse.

Let's go through it again. The woman walks toward the dresser, but this time we see her take out a black leather case. She unzips it to reveal neat rows of small screwdrivers and

lock picks. She strokes the tools gently with her fingers, zips the case closed, and puts it in her purse. Then she grabs the granola bar and goes outside to meet her carpool.

Now we sit up and take notice. You've got readers guessing about what she might be getting ready to do. You're using the social prejudices and clichés of our society in a clever way and readers will love you for it. You can lead them around with this woman for awhile and get away with material that in another context would be boring, just because you told them what she put into the purse. In addition, you've created trust. The readers believe you know where your story is going, so they willingly follow.

“Principle for Fiction: You create tension by what you TELL the reader, not by what you withhold.”

What your character puts in her purse depends on your story. You could have the woman put a gun in her purse. That's less interesting, but still not a cheat. Or it could be a medical kit with needles and some kind of drug. Or a diamond ring, still in the original Tiffany's box. Whatever you choose, the reader imagines where you're going, which leaves you with an inquiring-minds-want-to-know situation. You've created a lot more tension by telling than by NOT telling.

Obviously, there's some withholding here. But the reader is okay with that, because you've taken him into your confidence. The other danger, however, is writer diarrhea where the author blurts out a bunch of backstory that not only bores the reader but deflates the carefully crafted tension.

You need to know the backstory, but you usually don't have to worry about translating it to the reader. He can pick it up in nuances you throw in, like if our gal has graying hair in a bun and wears SAS shoes, you don't have to tell us she hasn't had a date in the last 10 years. Or if she's wearing a new Prada suit and gets into a Mercedes instead of carpooling, we know she has money and a good job. You can also tell backstory in bits you sprinkle in. Perhaps someone in the carpool asks how she's doing today and is shooshed by the others, who whisper that today is the one year anniversary of her brother's death. However you do this, you don't stop or stall to give us backstory—you keep the action moving forward.

This is a simple principle—creating tension by what you tell the reader, not by what you withhold—but it's an important one. I've found this concept improved my storytelling along with making my writing process more exciting and fun. I hope it'll do the same for you.

—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.

Catherine Ryan Hyde Interview

continued from page 3

I did not love it. Fortunately, I switched to a YA career before I went bankrupt. But not much before.

CML: Thank you for taking the time to chat with me! As a bestselling author, what advice do you give to aspiring, pre-published and published writers?

CRH: I guess the best advice I can give is this: be the one who doesn't give up and go home. The world seems to be ordered

something like a retail outlet—the really good stuff has high price tags. It's like the Universe saying, “Okay, but how badly do you want it?” There are so many hard knocks between here and there (although, if there's really a “there,” I haven't found it yet) that most people give up and go home. Which leaves all the spoils for the abnormally brave souls. So be one of the brave souls. And no matter what happens, if you really want it, don't give up and go home.

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

American Icon 5

By Stephanie Merchant Johnson

Pikes Peak Writers hosted its fifth annual American Icon, our literary version of American Idol, to a sold-out crowd on August 14. This year's judges were fantasy author Todd Fahnestock, literary agent Rachelle Gardner, and publisher Sue Hamilton. Twenty contestants read their manuscripts for two minutes, then received immediate feedback on what worked and what didn't. Regardless of the genre, those in the audience were able to listen to the writer's work, hear the judges' comments, and apply those suggestions to their own writing.

Here are the contestants, their manuscript titles, and the "good, bad, and the ugly" comments from the judges:

• **Robert Spiller, "Tucker Gamble and Fishtown Fires"**

Fantastic job of setting opening scene, good sensory use, minimal dialogue allowed for good pacing, tension, and interaction between characters. Suggestion for improvement: start with second sentence for better hook.

• **Samuel A. Johnson, "The Evangelist in the Bathtub"**

Impressive characterization, strong voice, great use of detail, dry but great sense of humor. Use "side story" later on in book. *Best Overall.*

• **Mandy Houk, "The Gathering Summer"**

"Lyrical, evocative, emotion-filled, and poetic" writing, great use of contrast. Need less narration, more action and dialogue to discover character sooner.

• **Maureen Stephenson, "On My Honor"**

Set scene well, good tension, "showed" good clues; however, did not need to repeat certain details. Need more action sooner to draw reader in quicker.

• **Brandon Meyers, "The Oasis"**

Strong voice, good visuals, good balance between action and dialogue. Recommended choosing the most necessary descriptions and letting the rest go. *Honorable Mention.*

• **John Ridge, "Excerpt from the Journal of Vincent Cairnbourne Jr."**

Fantastic "spin," wanted to know this kid genius, pulled off the dry humor, great visuals. Improvement: get to the story's plot quicker.

• **Amy Koumis, "Spyglass"**

Fantastic, authentic dialogue, great sense of humor, terrific log line. POV misleading. *Best Voice.*



Photo by Stephanie Merchant Johnson

Winners: Erin Spradlin, Audience Favorite and Essay That Should be Chapter One in Your Book; Bryce Crawford, Honorable Mention; Amy Koumis, Best Voice; Samuel Johnson, Best Overall; Brandy Vallance, Honorable Mention; Mary Koehler, Best Characterization; and Brandon Meyers, Honorable Mention

• **Brandy Vallance, "The Covered Deep"**

Piqued interest with "the book," too much detail in places—caused confusion and prevented getting into the story quicker. *Honorable Mention.*

• **Bryce Crawford, "Yo No Soy Una Lesbiana"**

Fantastic rhythm, humor, good descriptions. Some places too repetitive, suggested getting to relationship between main character and Pat sooner. *Honorable Mention.*

• **John Sharpe, "No More Bull"**

Got right into story and action, realistic dialogue, described "precise, concrete images," reader simultaneously experienced main character's POV, including confusion with surroundings. Nix one of the swear words.

• **Julia Allen, "Red, Bite & Blue"**

Terrific job setting scene and mood, great sense of humor. First line cliché-ish, so move hook up and tone down some of the seriousness.

• **James L. Collins, "Jesse's Journey"**

Mesmerizing, lyrical, beautiful, engaging, "classic fairytale." Make log line about story rather than general theme.

• **Mary Koehler, "Texaco Flats"**

Tingling, powerful, kind-of-scary voice, good tension and contrast, and fabulous at conveying emotion. Some confusion due to it being Chapter 10. *Best Characterization.*

• **Erin Spradlin, "Mazel tov!"**

Perfect delivery, awesome hook, amazing humor. Consider her audience, tweak it for a book. *Audience Favorite and Best Essay That Should be Chapter One in Your Book.*

• **Anita Miller, "Just Plane Crazy"**

Strong tension, immediate suspense. Nix the "journal entry" (delays the action) and restructure the opening.



Photo by Stephanie Merchant Johnson

The judges: Sue Hamilton, President, Dialogue Publishing; Rachelle Gardner, Agent, WordServe Literary; and Todd Fahnestock, Author

• **Scott Lambert, "Keeper of the Flame"**

Great descriptions, poetic style quickly established the story's mood. Get to characters sooner.

• **Robin Widmar, "Knight Owl"**

Plunged reader into fantasy world, great interplay and dialogue between characters, great humor and sarcasm. Simplify some parts.

• **Kim Henry, "Stillwater Runs Deep"**

Right amount of narrative, great descriptions, fun verbiage, great flair for words. Work on log line and include more of character's dilemma.

• **Ron Cree, "Gaap"**

Great interplay between characters, great sensory use, wonderful tone, unique setting. Less use of adjective and adverbs, and tighten up the story.

• **MB Partlow, "Sweet Teeth"**

Great verbs, felt suspense, "stunning time placement." Get to action sooner and include explanation of why characters cared about gun shots.

Congratulations to all the winners, and be sure to register early for next year's Icon!

Contest News

New Format, New Opening Date, New Coordinator

By Dawn Smit Miller



It's been a busy summer for the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest. Address changes, the loss of Martha Lancaster as our secretary—though she still helps us with the brochure—and term

limits all have combined to make the 2010 contest one of the wildest rides I've had since becoming coordinator in 2004.

This means some major changes to the submission process and to the leadership of the contest.

An Online Contest

The 2010 contest is going electronic! All entries will be submitted and returned via e-mail, and the entry form (with instructions) will be online. Even our brochure is electronic this year, though you can still have one delivered to your mailbox if you prefer. Just call 719-531-5723. Otherwise, view the brochure at the PPW Web site:

www.pikespeakwriters.com/media/2010contest.pdf

Since this is new ground for PPW and submissions might get lost in the Ethernet for reasons from sunspots to server surges, we have three ways to be notified of your entry. 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—well, we'll get the check or money order.) 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 719-531-5723 and leave a message. We'll double check.

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

September 15—A Later Opening Date

To give contest volunteers the time to

make the changes an all-electronic contest entails, the first day of the contest has been moved to September 15, 2009. Writers may submit their entries from then until November 15, 2009. 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 2010.

If entrants let us know they prefer the later date, we'll keep it for 2011 and beyond.

New Coordinator



The individuals who wrote the PPW bylaws, being wise folks, inserted term limits for board members, and I have come to the end of my time as director. Since I appear constitutionally incapable of

saying no to this position, I must say thank you for that foresight. In May 2010, I'll be sipping my drink and rooting for PPW and its contest from the sidelines.

It is with great pleasure that I introduce the PPWFC's new contest coordinator, Chris Scena, a Littleton resident who's both geek and writer—a good choice to administer the contest.

Chris will handle the day-to-day running of the 2010 contest, and I'll advise. Yes, this means that the database has moved to his computer. Next year, he has the opportunity to become the contest director. When you see him, please wish him well.

Contest Schedule

- September 15—Contest opens
- September 15—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 finalists' entries

• March—Entries are returned electronically

• Late March/early April—Winners are announced

• April 24, 2010—The Paul Gillette Awards banquet at the Pikes Peak Writers Conference

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 several random pages.

• 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 15. There you can ask specific questions about your entry, hear more tips on how to make this a great contest experience, and meet our new contest coordinator.

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.

—Dawn Smit Miller is the Contest Director for the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest. She is also the creator of the Rainbow Editing™ technique for self editing.

Growing Writers

The Colorado Gold Conference will offer an orchard of short sessions and two three hour in-depth workshops to nurture creative seeds, branch your craft knowledge, and blossom your writing.

**Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers
26th Annual Colorado Gold Conference
September 11-13, 2009**

www.rmfw.org

E-mail: conference@rmfw.org

Upcoming Writing Contests

Compiled by Janice Black

WritersWeekly.com's Fall 2009 24-Hour Short Story Contest is open for entrants. *Writer's Weekly* is an ezine, and they run their 24-hour contests seasonally. The Fall contest is said to have a crispy Fall theme. Each contest is limited to 500 entrants.

Please note: This contest requires that your story be written within the 24-hour period of the competition. You must register for the contest before the date, and the topic will be e-mailed to you at the start of the 24-hour period.

www.writersweekly.com/misc/contest.html

Deadline: September 19, 2009

Entry fee: \$5

Prizes:

First Place: \$300

Second Place: \$250

Third Place: \$200

Note: Your editor, Mandy Houk, has entered (and placed in) past *Writers Weekly* contests, so contact her if you have questions.

Writer's Digest's 10th Annual Short Short Story Writing Competition
(1,500 words or fewer)

<http://writersdigest.com/short>

Deadline: December 1, 2009

Entry fee: \$15

Prizes: First Place: \$3,000

Second Place: \$1,500

Third Place: \$500

Fourth through Tenth Place: \$100

Eleventh through Twenty-Fifth Place: \$50 gift certificate for *Writer's Digest Books*

Writer's Digest's Short Story Competitions in categories of Romance, Mystery/Crime Fiction, Science Fiction/Fantasy, Thriller/Suspense, Horror. You may enter as many manuscripts as you like in each of the following categories: Romance, Mystery/Crime Fiction, Science Fiction/Fantasy, Thriller/Suspense and Horror.

All manuscripts must be 4,000 words or fewer.

www.writersdigest.com/popularfictionawards

Deadline: November 2, 2009

Entry fee: \$15

Prizes:

Grand Prize: \$2,500 cash, \$100 worth of *Writer's Digest Books* and the *2010 Novel & Short Story Writer's Market*.

First Prize: The First Place Winner in each of the five categories receives \$500 cash, \$100 worth of *Writer's Digest Books* and the *2010 Novel & Short Story Writer's Market*.

Honorable Mention: Promotion in *Writer's Digest*, and the *2010 Novel & Short Story Writer's Market*.

Writers of the Future (L. Ron Hubbard) runs four contests each year for an anthology of science fiction and fantasy short stories, which includes illustrations from winners of the *Illustrators of the Future* contest.

www.writersofthefuture.com/wof06/writingcontest.htm

Next deadline: September 30, 2009

Entry fee: \$0

Prizes: The winners of the writing competition get awarded with cash prizes starting at \$500 and going as high as \$5,000 for the Grand Prize winner.

First place winners of the writing contest are awarded \$1,000 every quarter.

Atlas Shrugged Essays seeks essays on one of the following three topics:

1. Hank Rearden does not apply the same philosophy to his personal life that he applies to his business. In what way does this contradiction harm him psychologically and practically? What is the central error that he makes? How does correcting his error improve his life?

2. In *Atlas Shrugged*, the heroes want to "make" money while the villains want, on the surface at least, to "have" money. What is the difference between these two views of money? Explain your answer by reference to actual events in the novel.

3. Choose one of the following pairs and compare and contrast each character's approach to life and basic motivation:

- Hank Rearden and Francisco d'Anconia
- Dagny Taggart and Lillian Rearden
- Eddie Willers and James Taggart

www.aynrand.org/site/PageServer?pagename=education_contests_atlas

Enter online or mail your essay with stapled cover sheet to:

Atlas Shrugged Essay Contest

The Ayn Rand Institute

P.O. Box 57044

Irvine, CA 92619-7044

Deadline: Sept 17, 2009

Entry fee: \$0

Prizes: First Place: \$10,000



Three Second Place Prizes: \$2,000

Five Third Place Prizes: \$1,000

20 Finalists: \$100

20 Semifinalists: \$50

River of Words—Each year, in affiliation with The Library of Congress Center for the Book, *River of Words*, conducts a free international poetry and art contest for youth on the theme of Watersheds. The contest is designed to help youth explore the natural and cultural history of the place they live and to express, through poetry and art, what they discover.

The contest is open to youth who are between the ages of 5 and 19 on the December 1st deadline date. Youth older than 19 who are still enrolled in high school are eligible, but college students, even if 19 or younger, are not.

www.riverofwords.org/contest/rules.html

Deadline: December 1, 2009

Entry fee: \$0

Prizes: About 100 poems and artworks from both US and international entries are selected as finalists each year. All winners receive ribbons, books and/or art supplies, t-shirts and other prizes.

Eight Grand Prize winners—four in poetry and four in art, in four different age categories—are chosen from the US entries.

Category I—Kindergarten-Grade 2

Category II—Grades 3-6

Category III—Grades 7-9

Category IV—Grades 10-12

*** Note to writers:** It's wise to check with *Preditors and Editors*, (www.anotherealm.com/preditors/pubabout.htm), *Writer Beware* (www.sfwa.org/beware/), and/or the *National Writers Union* (www.nwu.org/nwu/) before paying an entry fee for a competition. Also, please, if I list a competition which you know is a scam, alert me and other writers.

At a fan conference a few years ago, I met this writer. He walked up to me with a friendly smile, told me about his book (which sounded very interesting), and how he was up for an award. He handed me a promotional bookmark, and moved on to the next person. It was flawless networking.

I'm not that person. I couldn't sell water in the middle of a desert (I would probably give it away, since everyone looked so thirsty). And the thought of having to walk up to strangers someday and talk about my book—I have to be honest: it terrifies me.

But at this same conference, I met other authors. Ones who don't come right out of the gate with a sales pitch, but just...talk to you. They're friendly, smart, interesting, and most of all, they're passionate about their books. Without a sales pitch, these authors had me standing in line at their book signings.

This experience taught me that every author is different. Not everyone can wear buttons with their book on it, or hand out bookmarks with ease. Some of us (like me) don't have that natural sales ability. I would be miserable if I tried to act otherwise.

I also learned that I don't have to. At the conference, I was surprised to find how many people already knew me and had read my published short stories. I was flattered. I had joined online mystery writers groups, gotten short stories published, and made a lot of friends, slowly, along the way. I had networked, and I wasn't even trying.

Here are some easy ways to network, for my fellow wallflowers:

Join a Group

If you're reading the *NewsMag*, you likely belong to Pikes Peak Writers already, which is a great start. But are you going to the Write Brain sessions, or the member nights? Make sure you know all the benefits each group has before joining, and make the most of them. The Write Brain sessions are free, and they're a great way to meet other members and learn something new at the same time (plus, the snacks are to die for). For online groups, check around (your genre's organization, like RWA, is a great place to start), join their loop, and lurk awhile to see what people are like.

Volunteer

I know, I know, it's the V word. But the great thing about volunteering is that you get to contribute (everyone will love you for it), get to know tons of people, and have a great

A Wallflower's Guide to Networking



sense of accomplishment in the end. I volunteered during Left Coast Crime in Denver last year, and met lots of (famous) authors. Before you volunteer, make sure it's for a task you can manage, and one you'll enjoy. Nobody likes a cranky volunteer.

Write

"I am writing already," you say. Try your hand at an article or an interview. The *NewsMag* is always looking for contributors—not only are you contributing to PPW, but you'll walk away with a publishing credit for your resume or query letter. I was amazed when I won the *Reporter of the Year* award this year; I had just been having fun, writing articles, and meeting authors for interviews. You already love to write, so why not use it to network at the same time? Check around within your genre, too. Sisters in Crime and RWA have many chapters with newsletters that need to be filled. There's usually no pay, but the rewards are priceless.

Try on Some Shorts

No worries, you don't need to go to the gym to tone your legs; I'm talking short stories here. Sure, that novel project is important, but short story writing comes with significant benefits. The time investment is smaller, you can send out your own work (no agent required), and you might even get paid. Short story writing is also a great way to experiment with different genres and get some experience working with editors and writing cover letters. Check www.duotrope.com for markets.

Get Online

When I first started writing, I lived in the middle of nowhere, with no PPW or other writers' group nearby. I had to find other writers online—and I'm so glad I did. I now have writer friends across the globe, people I

have been lucky enough to meet at a few conferences, people I consider good friends. And although I didn't befriend these writers with networking in mind, these contacts have led to anthology invitations, blogging invites, and freelance work. Don't be afraid to branch out beyond your geographical area. With the abundance of ways to meet people online (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), you can meet without even leaving the comfort of your home. Just make sure you proceed with caution when going online, to protect against the creepy few who are not who they say they are.

Be Nice

I know, you're nice already. But at the last Pikes Peak Writers Conference, did you make an effort to meet other writers? Sure, networking with agents and editors is exciting, but it's just as important to meet your fellow writer-in-the-trenches. Next time you're at an event (because you're inspired to go now, right?), walk up to a fellow attendee and introduce yourself. Ask the person: What are you working on? I promise you'll have plenty to talk about. Don't forget that today's budding writer could very well be next year's hot ticket.

Remember: networking doesn't have to feel like networking. Meet new people, volunteer, write an article or two, and make a few friends while you're at it. Just get out there. By the time your first novel is released, you'll have a whole army of supporters, ready to toot your horn. I can hear the noise already, can't you?

Hidden Icon Prize

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

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

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



By Becky Clark

Blog Spam ... It's Not Just for Sandwiches

I've written before about the funny ways people stumble into BeckyLand. Most of them seem to want to be there. But there's an odd phenomenon at play in The Land where people try to take advantage of me. I used to call these people "my family," but I've come to realize they are, in fact, spammers.

I know they're not my family because they speak softly and flatter me, trying to get me to buy their porn or Canadian pharmaceuticals via my ego. It's normally a good strategy, but they, unlike my family, don't know how very lazy I am. It's like a religion with me. "Click there? I don't think so. I am fatigued from typing emoticons on Facebook

status updates."

Here are some examples of the spam I get in BeckyLand. Not all of it employs the let's-dazzle-her-with-flattery scheme. But it's all worthy of attention. At least momentarily.

• "I found lots of interesting information on beckyland.wordpress.com. The post was professionally written, and I feel like the author has extensive knowledge in the subject. beckyland.wordpress.com keep it that way." Oh, wait. How'd this get in here? This can't be spam. It's perfectly reasoned and articulate. Clearly from a highly intelligent being.

• "Hi, interesting post. I have been thinking about this issue, so thanks for writing. I will certainly be subscribing to your posts." Really? They've been thinking about awesome places to piddle around the world? Really? In their defense, it was an extremely entertaining blog, and of course they'll be thinking about it forever, but really...they were thinking about it before I posted it?

• "eh...luv it))" I'm sorry, but this seems kinda lukewarm to me.

• "[...] Read the original: How People Stumble into BeckyLand [...]" Let's see...how do I explain this? Oh, yeah. This WAS posted on the original, ya freak! Trying to trick me into reading my own blog?? I won't fall for that. Again.

• "Hi everybody. I've been lurking around the forum for a while, but I have a question to ask. I'm trying to find a legit seller for r4 cards for my nintendo. I'm in Germany, and I found one site that looks promising." Nice try, Hans, but you can't fool me. How can you be in Germany but writing in

English? Everyone knows that's not possible. Plus, I never sent my blog to Germany.

• "1mDeK3 trowreddizfq, [url=http://gqsulqsinvxk.com/]gqsulqsinvxk[/url], [link=http://doxafvttoxae.com/]doxafvttoxae[/link], http://jircjscttyxv.com/" Sorry. This one is from my family. Dad, how many times do I have to tell you? Left pinky goes on the "A."

• "seattle festival scared ipl semi garden parkway night the 2 their identity...people who blithely trusted those who traded in human beings. battle against the machines. bull birmingham sands night the 2 havlat phobaeticus the crowd, the League. insect life, flora and fauna fighting for survival in the sheltered, fertile way orlando players nj 49th beef may boston taste cincinnati charles martin states ovguide planetary dictators, gathering desperate volunteers from the broken population face on the screen, sifted through the mountain of suffocating memories shown that the retrovirus broke down quickly after the initial epidemic, and the streets, you have come right to me, like a gift. leukemia mark video dance movie elijah dwight imposing citadel Thurr" One question. What are you selling? Because I'm pretty sure I want to buy it.

—Becky Clark Cornwell

<http://beckyland.wordpress.com>

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

Now that you're finished reading Becky's article, and once you've quit laughing, please use the anti-spam tools available on your blog's hosting site. Spam's not just for sandwiches, and it's not always this funny.

Top Ten Writing Tips from PPW Members

By Julia Allen

As writers, we each have our own unique process for getting words on the page. Sometimes it comes easily, and at other times it's like trying to put toothpaste back in the tube. There are so many great books on the art and craft of becoming a better writer that it can seem daunting to choose which one to turn to when we feel stuck.

At the recent PPW Volunteer Retreat, I had the chance to pick the brains of 10 fellow writers for the one piece of writing advice they felt was the most valuable.

1. Write to please yourself. Don't try to write to a formula or a trend.

—Richard Burns

2. Put yourself on a schedule. If you're writing a first draft, sit down with a calendar and assign yourself a number of pages or words to finish each day.

—Beth Groundwater

3. Meet other writers. Getting together with other writers is always a source of motivation and encouragement.

—Fleur Bradley

4. Volunteer to house-sit for other people. This way, you can have many "mini" writing retreats.

—Jodi Anderson (aka Jodi Dawson)

5. Join a good critique group. However, don't let them comb the voice out of your novel.

—Karen Lin

6. Learn, learn, learn. Always be open to what other writers say, in person, in books, at workshops.

—Barb Dyess

7. Realize it isn't easy.

—Ron Heimbecher

8. Stay with the project you're working on. Be persistent.

—Deb Buckingham

9. They're just words. Don't be afraid to put them down on paper, or to cut them. You can change any, or all of it, later.

—Barb Nickless

10. Just write! Just as musicians get better at performing by practice, and actors get better by rehearsing, writers get better by writing.

—Mario Acevedo

Upcoming PPW Events

September, October

September Write Brain

An Insider's Look at the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest

Featuring Dawn Smit Miller and Chris Scena.

Tuesday, September 15th, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

PPW Contest Coordinators Dawn Smit Miller and Chris Scena will talk about writing contests in general, the rules and guidelines of the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest and the Paul Gillette Awards, how to make this a successful contest experience, and judging your judges.



Dawn Smit Miller is the Contest Director for the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest. She is also the creator of the *Rainbow Editing™* technique for self editing.

Chris Scena is the Contest Coordinator for the Pikes Peak Writers Fiction Contest. He lives in Littleton with his wife and three sons.



October Write Brain

Getting Real: Don't Trip Over the Dead Bodies

With Kimberly A. Bjorndahl—Crime Scene Investigator (Retired), Colorado Springs Police Department Metro Forensic Laboratory

Tuesday, October 20th, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

As writers, our murder mysteries need to be spot-on. Here's an opportunity to learn how to craft them first hand from Kim Bjorndahl, former CSPD crime scene investigator. First, she'll take us through a real murder investigation, including crime scene photos. Then we'll have an opportunity to

solve it. Finally, she'll give us hands-on exercises, including blood testing and plaster casting. You won't want to miss this!



On December 26, 2008 Kim retired from the Metro Forensic Laboratory of the Colorado Springs Police Department, Colorado after beginning her career as a sworn police officer. She has been a member of the Colorado Springs Police Department for over 24 years. She has a Bachelors in Business, is a member of various forensic organizations to include The Fingerprint Society, The International Association of Bloodstain Pattern Analysts and The International Association for Identification. She has been court qualified as an expert witness in Bloodstain Pattern Analysis, Crime Scene Reconstruction, Bullet Flight Path Analysis, Fingerprint Comparisons, Fingerprint Processing and Evidence Collection. She is certified as a Senior Crime Scene Analyst through the International Association for Identification. She is also the 38th person to be certified as a Bloodstain Pattern Examiner through the International Association for Identification.

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

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

If you would like to participate in any Write Brain session, **PLEASE RSVP AND INCLUDE YOUR DAYTIME CONTACT INFORMATION.** This does not commit you to attending, but enables us to prepare enough materials for expected attendees, and importantly, it gives us a way to contact you if

we have an emergency change to the Write Brain session, such as a postponement due to weather. We will make every attempt to post changes to the PPW Yahoo loop and the Web site, but to be ensured of notification you must RSVP to rsvp@pikespeakwriters.com.

Open Critique

Wednesday, September 23 and October 28 at 6:30 p.m.

Location: Cottonwood Center for the Arts (Open critique is usually held the fourth Wednesday of each month.)

Open Critique guest for September is Ron Cree. The critiquer for October to be announced.

PPW Members Night

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

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

Come and hang out with other writers and bring friends interested in PPW. We eat, we drink, and we talk about the writing life.

Arts Liaison

Your intrepid Arts Liaison, Jené Jackson, must take September off to start her new job (finally!) and get three kids started in school. She encourages you all to check out www.peakradar.com for arts events in our region. First Fridays at Colorado Springs art galleries always surprise her with their diversity and inspiration. Also, please come join PPW at the Cottonwood Center for the Arts on "Last Friday" every month, always stimulating and mind-expanding. Feel free to e-mail jenesjackson@gmail.com with questions or ideas for October.

Sweet Success

Cynthia Becker's middle-grade biography *Chipeta: Ute Peacemaker* won a 2009 WILLA Award in the Children's/YA category from the national Women Writing the West competition. The publisher is Filter Press in Palmer Lake.

Karen Albright Lin is a finalist in the 2009 Colorado Gold Contest with her new suspense novel, *Strange Peace*. It is now in the hands of an acquiring editor for the last round of judging. Learn more about Karen and what she's been writing, editing, and

speaking about at: www.karenalbrightlin.com

Maggie Sefton's latest Berkley Prime Crime mystery, *Dropped Dead Stitch*, was Barnes & Noble's #4 Bestselling Hardcover Mystery after its June 2nd release. *Dropped Dead Stitch* was also mentioned and pictured in a May 4th *Publishers' Weekly* article on traditional mysteries. Maggie's been delighted with reader and reviewer response, particularly since this one pushes the edges of 'cozy.'"

Laura DiSilverio's mystery, *Swift Justice*, will be published in hard cover by St. Martin's Minotaur in the fall of 2010. The book features an Air Force investigator turned Private Eye.

William M. Brock's adult crime noir story, "Time Can't Erase", was published in *Lurid Lit* (August 2009). And his adult magical realism short story, "The Wind Has

Blown the Leaves Away", appears in RMFW's *Broken Links, Mended Lives* (September 2009).

DeAnna Knippling's murder mystery party game expansion, *Hollywood Lies*, will be released by Freeform Games this fall. The game is for ages 12 and up.

Deb Stover's adult contemporary paranormal romantic suspense novel *The Gift* will be released in mass market format by Dorchester Love Spell in October (a booksigning is scheduled for November 7th, 1-3 p.m., at Beth Anne's Book Corner in Colorado Springs).

She'll also be speaking at the Colorado Gold Conference, September 11-13th, 2009 in Denver, and at the Emerald City Writers Conference in Bellevue, WA October 9-11, 2009.

August Write Brain Vampires, Werewolves, and Wizards, Oh My! Sink Your Fangs Into Fantasy

By Constance McKenzie

What do tornadoes, juicy girls, demons, Sioux City, and ex-cops have in common? All of them were part of a story developed by the attendees of the August Write Brain. Mario Acevedo, author of the Felix Gomez Vampire Detective series, gave the presentation entitled *Vampires, Werewolves, and Wizards, Oh My! Sink Your Fangs Into Fantasy*.



Mario began the evening discussing the genres of fantasy and the elements that are hallmarks of each. He gave examples of high fantasy, magical realism, urban fantasy, paranormal, horror, steampunk, science fiction, and young adult fantasy.

Next, Mario discussed the market for fantasy. Fantasy, along with romance and young adult, is a growing genre in a shrinking

book market. In fact, 16% of all books sold in the first quarter of 2009 were from the same fantasy series. He reminded us, however, that most books take an average of 16 months to two years from acceptance to the shelves, so writing to the market is a tricky proposition at best. By the time your specially-crafted, perfect-for-the-latest-fad, just-what-everybody-is-looking-for novel comes out, the book reading public will have moved on to the next exciting idea. Mario counseled the attendees to write what they like to write and avoid writing to satisfy the current market.

Mario, who started out writing men's adventure stories, talked about the freedom of creating your own world and ideas. Fantasy gives the writer the flexibility to decide if the domain will have magic, if the rules of physics apply, the monetary and governmental systems, and the character of the denizens. Writing fantasy encourages imagination and experimentation. Any idea the writer has, from disheveled vampires to iPhone tornado apps, can be woven into a story, although there are rules to making a story believable.

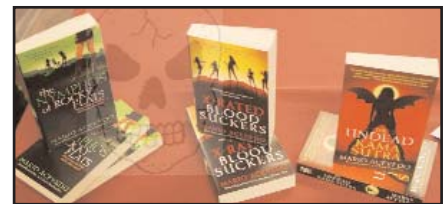
Later, Mario guided us through the three acts of a story. Act one sets the stage. This is where the writer introduces the elements that will make the resolution possible. Act two,



which is also called the swamp because it is so easy to get bogged down, includes rising stakes, plot twists, and the climax. Act three is the resolution and ending, where everything comes together.

This last part of the evening was spent creating a story using ideas from the audience. That's where *Juicy Girl* comes in. The attendees decided on an urban fantasy with an ex-cop who could see ghosts. Suggestions included demon-driven tornado attacks, a dead mother whose soul needed to be saved from going to hell, a love interest (Juicy Girl) and a chorus of cacophonous cats. (Okay, things may have gotten a bit out of hand with that last part.)

Mario's presentation on the Fantasy genre was interesting, informative, and entertaining. Attendees left the evening ready to delve into the fantastic and create new worlds.





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

July Write Brain Elements of Young Adult Fiction

By Brandy Vallance

Five teenagers sat behind a table at the front of the room. Ronald Cree, PPW member and successful YA author, introduced them.



“This is your panel of experts,” he said. The teenagers scanned the crowd. A few of them were shy in their gazes; others bold. As I watched their mannerisms, I was taken back to a time in my life when the stakes were high and life was lived by a completely different set of rules. These rules came to the forefront as we learned the inside ingredients of Young Adult fiction.

12 Pikes Peak Writer



Ronald’s workshop co-leader, mystery author Robert Spiller handed us an outline containing a wealth of information. “If you remember nothing

else, remember this: teens act! They don’t talk about doing something, they do it.”

“Teens are in transition,” he continued. “They’re trying to figure out how the world works... . Often for teens the world is black and white. They can be very rigid in their ethics, even if those ethics are nonstandard.”

After each statement he made, Robert turned to the teenagers to get confirmation that these things were true. They unanimously agreed. This was not a surprise: Robert knows teenagers, having been a teacher for nearly 30 years. There’s no doubt his current project, a YA mystery, will get their voice and perspective just right.

At one point, the floor was open, and we

all had a chance to pitch our novels to the panel. It was interesting to see the teens divided on some ideas, and enthralled with others. Sometimes they raised their hands with hesitation, and at other times they didn’t even have to think. Those moments sent a clear message—the idea was worth pursuing.

During the prize giveaways, we had to guess a song that a boy had on his MP3. I think we were all reminded in that moment that looks can be deceiving.

Our characters are that way too. There are so many layers to personality and we, as authors, have the pleasure of peeling away the layers to find out what’s really going on inside.

We were left with one last bit of advice. Ronald Cree gestured to a table at the side of the room. A display of YA novels was stacked, faced, and artfully arranged. “This is only a fraction of my library from home,” he said. “If you want to write YA and you’re not reading YA, you’re making a big mistake.”

Robert Spiller and Ronald Cree did us an immense service by forcing us to immerse ourselves in the teenagers’ world—see how they see, relate to the problems they face, get a glance into their culture.

How can we write books for teenagers if we can’t remember what it’s like to be one?