

SouthWest Sage

January 2012 www.southwestwriters.com

Painting Word Pictures

by Rick Reichman

Last month, when I proposed that you should give screenwriting at least a “look over” to improve your prose writing, I left out one of the most vital aspects of what penning a screenplay can teach. It’s what I emphasize with my students. It’s what any good film person will tell you and mean—which is a hard combination to find among the Hollywood crowd. It’s what a lot of folks both writing movies and learning to write movies tend to forget. Film is a visual medium. (Witness all the accolades and awards for this year’s film *The Artist*, a work in which there is practically no dialogue.)



A writer has to paint a picture for the reader to view in his or her own head. But it’s more than that. Each picture rendered must contain a subtle or not so subtle emotional tug that makes your reader respond to the material that is being perused. In other words, for every scene you construct, the writer should know what he/she wants the reader to feel. Is it hate, love, anger, jealousy, humor, sadness, or some other emotion? Is the purpose of the scene to get the audience to laugh, cry, sit on the edge of their seat, hide their eyes, make hearts race or have them break?

As you no doubt realize there’s a lot to accomplish in four to seven screenplay pages, or even in a chapter or section of a book. Yet, it’s adding those necessary brush strokes with a minimal number of words, and making sure those images also have the emotive power to affect the reader in a very substantial way that gives power—and salability—to a

script. It works the same for a novel, a short story or even creative non-fiction.

Since, as a writer, you’ve got to provide the word pictures and you’ve got to make sure they move the reader, how better to learn those techniques than by studying what works for screenwriters?

Going to a one-day conference on screenwriting is not the same as taking a course in screenwriting—though, as I mentioned in my last article, that isn’t a bad idea. But it’s also not spending an exorbitant amount of either time or

\$\$\$\$\$\$\$. And it can be fun. (I know I’ve mentioned that before, but it bears repeating.) Learning film techniques can only enhance your writing by making it livelier and more affecting. It can only be a win/win situation for you.

I would love you to consider setting aside Saturday, February 25, paying the reasonable fee that is being charged, and coming to the Eleganté Hotel for the SWW Screenwriting Conference. If I honestly didn’t think this was for anyone but screenwriters, I wouldn’t be writing these articles. I’ve seen screenwriting lead so many of my students to getting their novels, short stories and even their non-fiction published. Something good happened for them, and it can for you as well. So give it some serious thought. And help give your writing that something extra that could land you the big contract you’ve been dreaming about for ever so long.

SouthWest Writers Conference Screen and Script 2012

Saturday, February 25

8:30 am - 5:00 pm

Keynote Speakers:

Doug Eboch & Miles Swartout

Eleganté Hotel

2020 Menaul NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107

\$150 - Students with current student photo ID

Everyone else except Students:

\$155 - before Feb. 12 \$175 - after Feb. 12

*Critiques available for first fifteen participants,
see registration form on page 13 for details.*

Only 60 registrants accepted • Register today

President's Message *by Kathy Kitts*



The New Year is upon us filled with promise, possibly a hangover or two, and probably several new writing resolutions. Personally, I am not much on resolutions. I only make one per year with that being to make no further resolutions. I am very careful to keep that promise to myself.

Joking aside, as the new President of Southwest Writers, I do have other resolutions to maintain: specifically those mentioned in the SWW Mission Statement as it appears in our by-laws.

"The object and purpose of SWW shall be: to educate in the writing field; to stimulate interest in and an appreciation for the art and craft of writing; to disseminate information concerning publishers, editors, and agents; and to bring together authors, editors and other related professionals for networking purposes."

In order to achieve this, we on the board will need your support. We want to hear from you on how we may accomplish these objectives. I asked the new officers and board members to send me brief biographies so that I might share them with you. This way you will know us and feel comfortable speaking with us. Over the course of the next few months, I will be including these

biographies in this column. I will start by introducing myself.

President: Kathy Kitts

I recently retired as a geology professor who served as a science team member on the NASA Genesis Discovery Mission. Before that, I directed a planetarium for nine years. I have dozens of non-fiction publications encompassing everything from professional papers to general interest articles to textbooks. However, I no longer wish to talk about "what is" but rather "what if" and have moved to writing both short literary and science fiction and novel-length SF.

The biographies of three others are listed on page four. I will be introducing more new board members starting next month. Please let us help you achieve your writing objectives whether they come as New Year resolutions, lifetime goals or experiments in personal growth.

Happy New Year!

Kathy

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*Good writing is
remembering detail.
Most people want to forget.
Don't forget things that were
painful or embarrassing or silly.
Turn them into a story
that tells the truth.
~ Paula Danziger*

SouthWest Sage Advertising Rates Worldwide Internet Circulation

The SWW website receives thousands of page requests every month.

*Business card size: \$20 1/4 page, vertical: \$40 1/3 page, horizontal: \$50
15% discount for 3 mos. 20% discount for 6 mos.*

Deadline: 1st of each month for the following month.
Payment due with camera-ready ad copy in .jpg format.

Annual Membership in SouthWest Writers

Individual: \$60 (\$55 if paid two months in advance)

Student 18 and over: \$40, Under 18: \$25

Requires proof of student status

Outside U. S.: \$65, Lifetime Membership: \$750

Download the *Sage* from www.southwestwriters.com

**Join us first Saturday, 10 AM-Noon and third Tuesday, 7-9 PM
New Life Presbyterian Church, 5540 Eubank NE,
Albuquerque, New Mexico**



SouthWest Sage

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Madge Harrah, A Beacon by Penny Raife Durant

Madge Harrah's accomplishments were many: twelve books, numerous stage plays, radio plays and musicals (music included), articles, illustrations, many awards. She was an early member of SouthWest Writers. She wrote for *Guideposts*, studied with Rod Serling, and was one of very few members of the National League of Pen Women qualified in all three categories of writing, music and art.



Madge Harrah

I'd like to share some of the things that weren't in her obituary.

Madge loved to teach. She and I co-taught eight-week courses in Novel writing. She began her lectures with a deep breath. "Okay. We've got a lot to cover and little time, so here we go." She would then charge through, the rest of us feeling like we'd just covered a semester's curriculum in an hour.

She was unstinting in her support for other writers. If she saw promise in an idea or piece of writing she let the writer and others know.

She often visited schools in New Mexico and her home state of Missouri. One student said that reading Madge's middle grade novel, *The Nobody Club*, changed her life—the girl once thought she was a nobody, and then she read the book and realized she was somebody. Madge's alma mater, the University of Missouri, realized Madge was somebody and last year gave her a lifetime achievement award.

Madge touched people through her *Guideposts* work. She looked for the take away message in everyday encounters, and lived the life found in them. She was the first to arrive at the house of someone bereaved or ill, toting food and offering practical help. After our son died she called every day for weeks trying to bring some sunshine into the darkness of our grief. When her dear friend had cancer surgery and chemotherapy, Madge organized friends and neighbors to make sure she didn't have to cook a meal the entire time.

Fingers bent forty-five degrees from straight, Madge wrote through the pain of rheumatoid arthritis. Less than a month before a stroke brought her down she told our writing group she knew how to end the book she'd almost finished. "And," she said. "It's going to work."

No doubt it would have.

Madge Harrah died on November 26, 2011 at the age of 80. Learn more about Madge and her accomplishments in writing and art through this obituary: <http://hosting-24467.tributes.com/show/Madge-Harrah-92860382>

A Change in Membership Discount Beginning January 1, 2012

Annual membership will still be \$60, but we are discontinuing the 2 yrs/\$100 and 2 people/\$100.

**In 2012, a new discount will be applied:
When a member renews 2 months in advance,
the cost of membership is reduced to \$55.**

Meet the Southwest Writers 2012 Board of Directors

Vice President: Larry Greenly

In his own words, "Larry Greenly started out as a physics teacher near Philadelphia with a B.S. in Physics/Mathematics and was awarded two National Science Foundation grants during his tenure. In 1971, he and his first wife, Edith, moved to Albuquerque where he earned a Master's Degree in Architecture and a Master's Degree in Civil Engineering at UNM. After several years working in the construction industry and the civil engineering profession, he moved to Minnesota and earned a Doctor of Chiropractic degree from Northwestern University of Health Sciences. Greenly wrote medical columns for 13 years in peer-reviewed international professional journals. In 1991, he and his favorite wife, Edith, moved back to Albuquerque where he soon joined SouthWest Writers, became a board member and rose to the presidency three times. He has been the SWW office manager since 2004. Greenly has written hundreds of articles, has won several awards for both his writing and editing, and has also taught a number of classes and workshops on writing. His narrative nonfiction book on a WWI soldier and aviator has recently been accepted for publication. Greenly enjoys playing the piano and has had a gig at a French restaurant for the past seven years. He's also still married to his first wife."



Secretary: Susan Alexis

In her own words, "Susan Alexis was born and raised in Minnesota, the heart of Swede country. She came to Albuquerque to earn a Master's degree in Spanish, taught in Colorado, lived seventeen years in Mexico, and since returning to Albuquerque in 1995 has traveled as interpreter with thirteen medical missions to Latin America. She has authored various articles for *Guideposts*, *The World & I*, and *Grit* as well as two books on short-term volunteer missions: *Healing the World One by One* and *Caring Hands*. Her introduction to SouthWest Writers came in 1999 when she took a class on book proposals, and she has been an active member ever since. Susan became a Board member in 2011, serving first as historian, then as membership chair."



Try our Google Calendar link and see what's coming up at a glance for each month. Use the link on the SWW website or click here: www.google.com/calendar/embed?src=swwcalendar%40gmail.com&ctz=America/Denver

Treasurer: Terry Civello

Terry has both a BA and Masters Degree and worked as a senior manager for the NYC Government Medicaid Program and a Management and Accounts Receivable Consultant for NY Healthcare Providers. She has served SWW in the following roles: Public Relations May 2010, 2011; Writing Labs Coordinator 2011; and Treasurer starting in April 2011. She is new to writing, but she has already won First Place Memoir Hook in our Bi-Monthly contest, and has been included in two *OASIS* annual anthologies for short fiction and poetry.



Congratulations to the Winners of the Fifth 2011 SWW Bi-Monthly Writing Competition

~ Personal Essay ~

1st Place

Paula Nixon • Santa Fe, NM
"Mom's Pie"

2nd Place

Carola Sena • Albuquerque, NM
"Wartime Wedding"

3rd Place

Don Downey • New Orleans, LA
"Sheet Lightning"

Honorable Mention

Desiree Woodland, Albuquerque, NM
"Writing the Sorrow"

Charles R. Powell, Albuquerque, NM
"I Will Salute No More Forever"

Ruth Friesen, Albuquerque, NM
"Ted's Traveling Circus: Ploesti"

Stephanie Flores, Los Ranchos, NM
"Not That Kind of Clear"

The First Place winning entry is printed on page 14.

Have you ever considered writing a novel in verse? Verse novels are stories told through unrhymed poetry. If the format sounds interesting, here are some things to keep in mind:

Is the subject matter right for poetry?

Some topics lend themselves more easily to poetry than others. Some subjects refuse to be written as prose. While many stories can and will work as poetry, ask yourself if this medium is the best way to tell your story. If not, I'd advise you to take another approach.

Is the protagonist right for poetry?

Often (though not always) verse novels are told from a very close first-person point of view. Such writing calls for a lot of introspection on the protagonist's part. If this isn't your character, it's best, in my opinion, to avoid verse.

Can you sustain the intensity required to write a novel this way?

Sometimes writing in verse feels really natural. Other times the close-to-the-bone nature of poetry is hard to sustain.

If you are someone who can knock off thousands of words at one sitting, verse novels are going to hurt. Word counts will more realistically be in the hundreds. Entire novels are usually under 20,000 words.

Can each poem stand alone?

Each poem in a verse novel must capture one moment, scene, idea, mark of change in your character's life. Poems should also be able to function separately from the rest of the story.

Does each poem contribute to the whole?

When I worked through my own verse novel, I kept a quilt in mind, treating each poem like its own square of fabric. Each

patch had to be able to function separately while at the same time contribute to the whole. I trusted that if certain patterns and shades in my story quilt were repeated (think themes or story strands), eventually the interconnectedness would surface—a much more organic approach than is normally taken with prose.

Vary the length of poems

Some scenes flow, some end abruptly. Some thoughts wander, some jab. Use this knowledge to your advantage in composing your poetry.

Vary the length of lines

Are there key phrases or

words at the heart of your poem? Play with the way you arrange words on the page to determine what look best "speaks" the poem.

Within your poem, group similar ideas as stanzas or allow key lines to stand alone.

Structure

Because poetry is both visual and aural, let the structure of your work communicate to your reader your protagonist's emotional state.

Is she frightened? Think of how this feeling looks structurally (little punctuation? words tightly packed together?).

Is he in a hurry? How can you express this on the page?

You can also use specific types of poetry (sonnets, for example), as Pat Brisson did with her book, *The Best and Hardest Thing*. In writing about Sylvia Plath (*Your Own, Sylvia*), author Stephanie Hemphill chose to mirror several of Plath's poems, giving her readers a sense of the poet's style, subject matter, intensity, and character.

A sample poem from *May B*.

I play a game inside my head,¹
counting plum trees that dot a creek bed,²
rabbits that scatter at the sound of wagon wheels,
clouds that skirt the sky.
For hours, that is all
and grass
always grass³
in different shades and textures⁴
like the braids in a rag rug.

Miss Sanders told us that lines never end,
and numbers go on forever.

Here,⁵
in short-grass country,
I understand infinity.^{6,7}

Verse novels aren't books with strange line breaks. They are stories best communicated through the language, rhythm, imagery and structure of poetry. Don't be afraid to experiment to see if your story might work within this unique genre.

¹Much of the story is told through thought, not dialogue. We have a real sense of May's internal life.

²Verse allows for the opportunity to play with language. Here's a bit of rhyme.

³Repetition for emphasis.

⁴Poetry should be visual and figurative language fresh, even unexpected.

⁵Line break for emphasis.

⁶The two stanzas mirror each other in appearance, reinforcing the visual aspect of experiencing poetry.

⁷Notice the poem is about place and uses measurements/counting as a way to make sense of things. The few trees and rabbits are a contrast to infinity. The poem fits into the overall story—May leaving for a new place—but can also stand alone as a poem about the short-grass Kansas prairie.



Caroline Starr Rose is a former middle school English and social studies teacher. Her middle-grade novel, *May B*, a historical novel-in-verse, releases January 10, 2012 (Schwartz and Wade/Random House Children's Books). Visit her website at carolinebyline.blogspot.com/

I didn't know it at the time, but the first real novel I ever wrote was a premise novel. I had a cool idea, and the entire book was about illustrating that cool idea. Because of that I had no solid protagonist, no narrative drive, no personal stakes, and no chance at selling that book.

Because premise novels are not stories.

I don't think my experience is uncommon. I read a lot of queries that describe an idea, but there's no sense of a protagonist doing anything to solve a personal problem. Often, these novels are a lost cause because they're too inherently flawed to fix. But sometimes, it's just a matter of finding the story within your premise.

What is a premise novel?

A premise novel is one where the idea is what's driving the story, not a character with a problem. It often has multiple POVs (and a lot of them) because you're trying to show all the various aspects of this idea. The stakes *feel* high, usually a "save the world" type, but when you look at the characters, none of them really have anything to lose except maybe die. But *everyone* has that same stake, so it really doesn't feel important. Plus, the stakes never escalate. They start out life and death and stay life and death the entire time. Since odds are you're not going to kill off everyone, those "high stakes" aren't high at all. The reader knows they won't happen.

Think of it like a blowout sporting event. One team dominates the other, and even though there are people scoring left and right, and all this excitement on the field, fans know how it's going to turn out and they're leaving before the end of the game so they don't get stuck in traffic. They stay until they get bored, or it's not worth their time and then go home. You don't want that for your book. You want readers to salivate over knowing how it all turns out.

How can you tell if you *have* a premise novel?

If you can't describe what your novel is about in one sentence (even a bad sentence) using the standard "protagonist has X problem and he needs to do Y to win Z or A happens," then you might have a premise novel. Or if you describe your

novel by talking about the idea behind it, and not any one or two characters who are driving it. Or you describe it by the theme alone. (Literary novels are okay here, that's normal for them.)

How do you fix it?

First, find yourself a core conflict. You probably already have a good idea, since the idea is what excited you in the first place. Look for something tangible that has to be done to prevent/trigger/avoid whatever this idea is about. What thing is going wrong in this story?

Next, pick a protagonist. Someone in your story is in a position to solve this problem. Better still, they're personally involved so that solving it matters to them. Something bad will happen if they don't solve it. Lots of smaller bad things will happen to them along the way to solving it. If they act, they can solve it, but if they don't act, it will happen (or not happen if that's the case).

Now, pick an antagonist. Who is standing in the way of your protagonist solving this problem? Someone that has something to gain by making this happen? Or someone who has their own agenda about this problem that is at odds with the protagonist's goal?

The story will unfold as the protagonist tries to solve the problem and the antagonist keeps getting in the way. Two personal forces clashing against each other. Both will have things to lose if they lose. Both will have things to win if they win. If you took both out of the story, the story would fall apart.

That's key. A premise novel is often one where you can take the hero out, and the story still happens, often with little or no change.

Now, look at your story and adjust your plot so the protagonist is trying to solve their problem.

Reasons You Might Resist This

1. I'll have to cut so much!

Probably. Premise novels have tons of extra stuff in them. But think of it as research. You did a lot of background to understand your story and now you'll be able to pinpoint exactly the best stuff in it. Plus, any scenes you truly love can be salvaged with your protagonist or antagonist. Just rework them so they fit the story and not just the idea.

2. I'll have to rewrite most of it!

Maybe. But a lot can still be used. And with a solid protagonist and clear goals, the rewriting will go much easier.

3. I'll have to get rid of half my characters!

Yes, but that's a good thing. Too many characters, especially POV characters, dilute the story and make it hard for the



Janice Hardy always wondered about the darker side of healing. For her fantasy trilogy The Healing Wars, she tapped into her own dark side to create a world where healing was dangerous, and those with the best intentions often made the worst choices. Her books include The Shifter, Blue Fire, and Darkfall from Balzer+Bray/Harper Collins. You can visit her at www.janicehardy.com or chat with her about writing on her blog, The Other Side of the Story at blog.janicehardy.com.

(Continued on page 14)

Meetings

Program Location: New Life Presbyterian Church, 5540 Eubank NE, Albuquerque

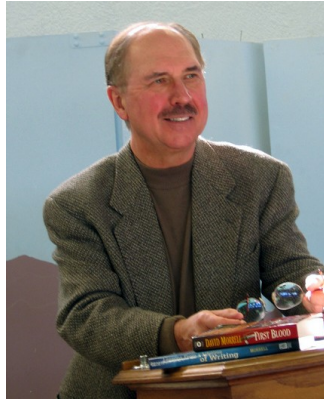
Saturday, January 7
10:00 a.m. to noon
Members free, guests \$5

The Current State of Publishing

David Morrell

David Morrell has seen numerous changes in publishing in the last four decades, but none as dramatic and rapid as happened in the past few years. Morrell will discuss those changes, including the rise of e-books, the Borders bankruptcy, self-publishing, and new royalty models, among various topics. This will be a lively session, so bring your questions. Copies of Morrell's writing book, *The Successful Novelist: A Lifetime of Lessons About Writing and Publishing*, will be for sale at the meeting.

New Mexico resident David Morrell created Rambo in his debut novel, *First Blood*. His other bestselling novels include *The Brotherhood of the Rose*, the basis for the only TV miniseries to be broadcast after a Super Bowl. Several of his books, including *Extreme Denial* and *The Spy Who Came for Christmas* are set in Santa Fe, where he lives. The upcoming year, 2012, will be David's 40th year as a published author, an eternity when most careers last 15 or 20 years.



Tuesday, January 17
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Members free, guests \$5

Ghostwriting for Nonfiction and Fiction

Loretta Hall

People with important stories to write sometimes can't write them themselves. Perhaps they are too busy, or they don't have good enough writing skills. These people—or their employers—may be willing to pay you to do the writing for them. Writer and occasional ghostwriter Loretta Hall will explain how ghostwriting works and how to do it effectively.

Loretta Hall has five nonfiction books in print. The lessons she has learned from experiences with several publishers will give you a head start with your sales efforts. Although her personal experience is in the nonfiction realm, her tips for thinking like a publisher can be useful to novelists as well. Hall served on the SouthWest Writers board for four years and received the 2007 Parris Award.



 * **Food at SWW meetings is provided by attendees.** *
 * **If you'd like to have snacks to munch, please contribute.** *

Saturday, February 4
10:00 a.m. to noon

Topic TBA

Speaker: Cherie Burns

Tuesday, February 21
7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Topic TBA

Speaker: Gail Carr Feldman

Watch for e-lert updates or check the SWW website at southwestwriters.com for more details on upcoming speakers/topics.

***Welcome
 New
 Southwest
 Writers
 Members***

John Ashbaugh
 Linda J. Elliott
 Sabrina Ezzell
 Catherine P. Garcia
 Janet Greger
 Laura Heermann
 Carolyn Lemmerman-
 Reynolds
 Kelly McMullen
 Vivian Nesbitt

Laura Nitsos
 Max Oliver
 Lisa Sharp
 Gene Taylor
 Megan Theiss
 Kit Turpen
 Patricia K. Williams
 Yoko Yamamoto
 Steve Yochim

January/February Classes

CREATIVE MARKETING FOR AUTHORS

By Loretta Hall

January 21, 28, February 4, 11, 2 pm - 4:00 pm

\$160 members and \$190 non-members

Whether your book is self-published or produced by a publishing company, you will be its primary marketer. Learn a variety of strategies and techniques to market your book.

Loretta Hall is the author of five nonfiction books, two of which she actively markets. Only 30 percent of published books earn back their advance, and Loretta's book, *Underground Buildings: More than Meets the Eye*, is about to achieve that milestone. *Out of this World: New Mexico's Contributions to Space Travel*, published in 2011, appeals to a very different audience, but she is adapting the strategies she learned with the earlier book, adding some new twists.

SURFING YOUR ENTHUSIASM: Make Writing Goals Work

By Sue Sullivan

January 23 and 30 and February 6, 6 pm - 7:30 pm

\$90 members and \$120 non-members

Do you get enthusiastic and determined to write, but you aren't writing anywhere near as much as you'd like? Or have you done a lot of writing in the past, but you don't actually finish the work? In this class you'll work with writing goals that support you in developing your internal motivation so you don't have to force yourself to sit down to write.

Sue Sullivan has been actively involved in personal development for nearly 30 years. At one point, she found she hardly wrote any more and couldn't find the motivation to continue. She explored what was happening and discovered the underlying issues. She now enjoys writing again and is excited about where her writing is leading her. Visit her blog at: www.surfingyourenthusiasm.com/blog/

DAZZLING DESCRIPTION: How to Show-Not-Tell

By Chris Eboch

January 24 and 31, 2 pm - 4 pm

\$80 members and \$110 non-members

You've been told, "Show, Don't Tell." Now learn how. Learn Chris' secrets in this fun, hands-on-pen workshop. We'll discuss facts versus opinions, sense data, body language, showing through dialog, and what point of view really means.

Workshop And Class Refund Policy

If you cancel one week before the workshop or class beginning date you will receive a full refund. Cancellations less than one week prior up to 24 hours prior to the beginning of the workshop/class will receive a credit toward a future workshop/class of your choice. If you don't cancel or don't show up for the workshop/class you will receive no refund and no credit. For multi-session classes, if you miss a class, you receive no refund. We pay our instructors based on how many students enroll, so you are part of that roll count if you don't cancel as detailed above.

EXPLORE INDIE PUBLISHING:

Develop Your Own Business Plan

By Chris Eboch

January 24 and 31, 6 pm - 8 pm

\$80 members and \$110 non-members

You've heard the buzz about self-publishing. But is it right for you? And if so, how do you make it happen? We'll discuss who should and shouldn't self-publish (and why), explore the pros and cons, and study an overview of the process. Then we'll develop step-by-step business plans with timelines. You'll receive resources for editing, proofreading, cover art, and more, plus information on how to get the word out about your book.

Chris Eboch teaches writing workshops around the world. Her book *Advanced Plotting* helps writers fine-tune their plots and her *Write Like a Pro!* blog offers free writing advice at <http://chriseboch.blogspot.com>. Chris is the author of 13 books for young people (www.chriseboch.com) and writes for adults as Kris Bock (www.krisbock.com). She has 12 traditionally published books and two self-published books, with one more of each on the way.

X-RAY, MACHETE AND SCALPEL: Shaping the Novel

By Betsy James

February 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 & March 7, 14, 21, 6 - 8:30 pm

\$320 members and \$370 non-members

You've got a draft. What now? This class will help you whip that puppy into shape. With a focus on structure, we'll use respectful peer critique to consider aspects of the novel such as plot and pacing, characterization, dialogue, word-pruning, and the infamous "show, don't tell." For special requirements for Betsy's class, go to the SWW website at www.southwestwriters.com.

Betsy James is the author of sixteen books and many short stories for adults, young adults and children. Her most recent title, *Listening at the Gate* (Atheneum 2006), is a James Tiptree Honor Book and a New York Public Library Best Book for the Teen Age; her short stories appear in *Realms of Fantasy*. Visit her at www.listeningatthegate.com (adult) or www.betsyjames.com (juvenile).

HOW TO WRITE FOR MAGAZINES:

How You Can Bag Your First Magazine Assignment

By Melody Groves

Mondays, 6-8:00 pm, beginning late February

Exact Dates and Cost TBA

In four short weeks we'll cover finding your story, finding the market, tweaking the same idea for different magazines, photo requirements, and approaching an editor. And that's just for starters.

For more information or to register for classes & workshops, sign up at SWW meetings, register online at www.southwestwriters.com or call the SWW office at 265-9485

My dramatic writing teacher Digby Wolfe frequently discussed the importance of taking readers and audiences into a dream from which they did not wish to emerge until the article, book, play or movie was finished. One exercise he had us do was called “Truth or Fiction.” We had to write a scene, which other class members would stage, and then the remainder of the class would guess whether it was truth or fiction. The goal was that a truthful event had to be written to enthrall in the manner of good fiction and that good fiction had to be written so well that it could be true. If the reader or audience member paused or started shaking their heads, then the writer has thrown them out of the dreamscape.

I wrote two different scenes that were rejected before I stumbled upon the winning combination. The first scene was rejected because the entire conversation occurred over the telephone. Professor Wolfe said that doesn’t work for contained dramatic scenes because one member of the two-way communication could effectively hang up, and thus end the interaction. A second was rejected because it took place in the context of a self-defense class. As the semester was winding down, I went on a bad date where the guy stripped as I was driving along the freeway in my tiny convertible. As I dropped him off, I said I was going to use this experience in my dramatic writing class. He didn’t object, so I went home and wrote the scene.

The next Monday, two classmates staged the scene, and half the class voted it fiction because “Nothing like that could ever happen to Sherri” and the other half voted it true because “Something like this could only happen to Sherri.” The Professor declared the scene a success because I had stumped the class.

For writers, our challenge is to pen stories—be they articles, books, plays or movies—so that our audiences are so enticed that if it’s fiction they want to believe it’s true and if it’s true, they believe it’s so incredible the author must have made it up. One way is to write so cleanly and have it staged so well that the reader or audience member doesn’t want the experience to end.

This calls for writers to cut down on mistakes. Typographical and grammatical errors give readers pause. We can do our best to proofread and inevitably after the article or book has gone to print, we find one or two more mistakes. Before throwing your publication against the wall, remember that this also happens to top flight writers. I’ve observed errors in John Grisham’s books, and my first thought was how did this happen? He must have a team of proofreaders.



One recommendation before you turn anything in is to read it out loud. This can be to family members, a critique group or just yourself. After you correct any mistakes, consider reading your work backward sentence by sentence and paragraph by paragraph. This keeps you from automatically correcting the error with your mind’s eye. Most readers do this automatically; they will correct a few mistakes for the author. It’s only when the mistakes are profound that they are thrown out of the dreamscape.

For example, while watching the Broadway extravaganza *Spiderman: Turn Off the Dark*, I was amazed at the number of production errors. It became clear early on that the actor playing Peter Parker was not always Spiderman because you could see two different Spidermans waiting in the wings. A careful director would have had the actors far from the sides where the audience could not observe them. At another time, Spiderman was seen beating up a giant monster. The monster was a blow-up doll and you could see two men holding it up from behind.

Similarly, in a James Bond film, the editor accidentally left in images of the long-legged stuntman with balding black hair on the wings of the plane so it became immediately evident that James Bond was not fighting the villain but the stunt man. Mistakes like this cause the audience to stop observing the musical or movie and start thinking about them as productions.

As writers, we must strive for flow in our stories. Tell them with the consistency of a smooth river and lure readers to take a ride with you. The journey may make them laugh, cry and grimace as they observe a range of scenes. Ultimately, the ride could remind them of their humanity and why they are happy to live on this planet at this time.

So take your readers into a dream from which they have no desire to escape until they have read the last word.

*People do not spring forth out of the blue,
fully formed—they become themselves slowly,
day by day, starting from babyhood.
They are the result of both environment
and heredity, and your fictional characters,
in order to be believable, must be also.*

~ Lois Duncan

Since writing the article “Are You Ready to Write a Novel in November?” for October’s issue of *SWW Sage*, much—or, as you will read, little—has happened. In October, I was overcome with enthusiasm for writing fiction: the planning, the wordsmithing, the self-congratulating. I even read all of my back issues of *Writer’s Digest*. Oh, October was a gloriously productive month!

As November 1 approached and the 50,000 word goal loomed on the horizon, I bolstered my courage—as I do every year—with the mantra, “I’ve done it before, I can do it again. After all, I am a novelist.”

But I never crossed the 50,000 word finish line. So, what exactly happened? In an attempt to uncover what went wrong, I examined my writing process. Surely it is no different than a million other writers’ and, in many circumstances, these very steps yield New York Times Bestsellers:

Step 1: Prepare

I hit the ground running with this year’s NaNo novel. A compelling main character marched out of the detritus of my brain and demanded to have her story written. Alexandra was flawed and passionate and went about the business of murder with determination and devotion.

In preparation for telling Alexandra’s peculiar story, I devoured books about edible poisons. Mealtime conversations began and ended with me regaling my husband with the innumerable ways I could kill him with carefully concocted culinary delicacies. I cataloged the poisons, made color-coded notecards and pinned them to my bulletin board with care and shiny silver push pins. Then, I drafted the outline: the victims, the motives and the murders.

With my cohesive outline and new-found expertise in killing a man with roots, flowers and berries, I was convinced this would be my best NaNo novel yet. After my meticulous preparation, my *magnum opus* of obsession and retribution would well-nigh write itself.

Step 2: Acquire the Proper Tools

No *magnum opus* is self-written without the proper tools. This particular book demanded a package of blue BIC Triumph 537R Rollerball pens, a new Moleskine notebook, Scrivener writing software and a dark, gothic Pandora station. (The book also requested Red Vines and chocolate-orange Piroulines, but I had to draw the line somewhere.)

Step 3: Brag About Your Derring-Do

If you are going to do something as ridiculous as writing a novel in a month, you might as well invite those around you to gawk. To that end, I told my husband and my parents that I was participating in NaNoWriMo again this year. But, in

light of my brilliant, self-writing novel-to-be, I also took my braggadocio a few steps further by telling my boss and my work colleague. And then I wrote an article about it.

Making these sorts of announcements holds a writer’s feet to the fire: write a novel or eat crow.

Step 4: Brew Many, Many Pots of Tea and Stare Off into the Middle Distance

PG Tips tea is absolutely essential for this step. And a well-chosen writing soundtrack can prove indispensable for world-class, award-winning middle distance staring. (See Step 2)

Step 5: Sit Down and Write

While Steps 1-4 are optional, Step 5 is not.

On November 1, I sat down with my pens, my Moleskine, my Scrivener and my Pandora station and began to write. I managed to knock out the requisite 1,667 words a day for the first week or so. Then life came knocking on my home office door. Illness and family crises forced my novel into the back seat. And my enthusiasm went with it. Copious pots of tea were consumed and the middle distance was masterfully stared off into, but the story stalled at 17,000 words.

Alas, in 2011, I was many things. A novelist was not one of them. However, in my 17,000 words, I set the scene for two murders, wrote the back-story of two unfortunate but likable victims and discovered the tragic reasons for Alexandra’s murderous predilections. The *magnum opus* was neither *magnum* nor *opus*. But it was, ultimately, a start. A fantastic 17,000 word start. And there’s something to be said for that.

Step 6: Bake a Crow Pie

Know any good recipes?

Bentley McGrath begins a monthly column in the Sage starting with this issue.



Bentley McGrath hopes to one day make a career of drinking tea, staring into the middle distance and using phrases such as “derring-do.” You can find her at www.BentleyMcGrath.com.



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on Facebook**

Member Successes

Dodici Azpadu's two poems, "The idea of touching your heart" and "Remedial Science," will be published in *Adobe Walls #4*, due out in March.

Joanne Bodin's novel, *Walking Fish*, was a finalist for the USA Best Book Awards in lesbian/gay fiction. It also won the 2011 New Mexico Book Award in the gay/lesbian fiction category and was a finalist in three other categories (Fiction: Adventure/Drama; Fiction: Other; and First Book Published by Author).

Donald DeNoon's poem "Twister," a villanelle, placed eighth out of the ten top winners in Category #82 (Pearl Stermann Award) of the 2011 Poetry Society of Texas Contest.

Lola R. Eagle has several pieces in Janet K. Brennan's new book *Holiday Word Gifts* published by Casa de Snapdragon LLC: two poems, "Too Much Snow" and "Please Santa, Give Me A Break," and two anecdotes, "HalloGivingMas" and "A Family Tradition."

Dianne Layden's essay on corruption won second place in the Santa Fe Reporter 2011 writing contest. The winners were announced in the November 23 issue. The essay will be published in the December 7 issue. <http://www.sfreporter.com/santafe/article-6436-weight-of-the-word.html>

Call for Workshop Proposals

Are you looking for an exciting way to share your expertise and passion for writing with one of the Rocky Mountain region's largest fiction-writing communities? Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers is now accepting proposals for the 2012 Colorado Gold Conference which will be held September 7-9 at the Renaissance Hotel in Denver. We're requesting proposals for one-, two-, and three-hour workshops on craft, career development, and any other topic of interest to writers of commercial novel-length fiction. We're also requesting proposals for discussion panels and our new four-hour Friday-Morning Master Classes. For more information, contact Workshop Chair Angie Hodapp at angiehodapp@gmail.com. Proposals for master classes are due February 15; proposals for workshops and panels are due March 1, 2012.

John L. Orman placed in the *ABQ Journal's* Photo Caption contest. The competition started on November 15 with winners printed in the *Journal* on November 22.

Correction to the December *Sage* listing of a New Mexico Book Award winner: **Paul Rhetts'** book *The World Comes to Albuquerque* (about the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta) won top honors in Art & Photography and the Best of Show Award, not his other book *Contemporary Hispanic Market* which was just a finalist in the Art & Photography and Multi-cultural categories.

Jeanne Shannon has three poems and an essay in *Shadow and Light: A Literary Anthology on Memory*, published by Monadnock Writers' Group in Peterborough, New Hampshire. She also has a poem in *Bigger Than They Appear: Anthology of Very Short Poems*, published by Accents Publishing in Lexington, Kentucky.

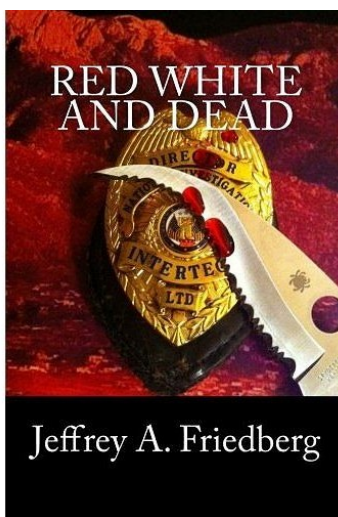
Ron C. Wood's first book, *Vietnam: Remembrances of a Native American Soldier*, has been published by iUniverse and is available on Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, and as an e-book on kindle.com.

If you're a SouthWest Writers member with a success or announcement to include in the *Sage*, send it to Kathy Wagoner, SWW *Sage* Editor, www.justwritesww@gmail.com.

New Mexico private eye Jack Vane had no choice. The Mob decreed either he take the case and succeed in finding the lost treasure of Spanish Conquistador Francisco Coronado, worth billions – and probably only a legend – or Jack dies.

The situation becomes worse when Jack discovers a mysterious international cabal also seeks the treasure with the goal to finance a vast conspiracy to steal New Mexico's energy riches. This scheme will wreak environmental havoc and destroy Indian sacred lands.

Suddenly suffering strange blackouts, Jack is accused of brutal murders. He must find the treasure and the killer – even if it turns out to be himself. The clock is counting down as powerful forces gather in a relentless death-race to destroy him. What path should Jack take?



The Exciting New Prequel To Lost Relic Of The Gods

"An updated, TODAY kind of private eye thriller...Riveting verisimilitude reminiscent of Thomas Harris, Michael Connelly, and Elmore Leonard...plot twists and surprises galore kept me delighted and reading on-ward!" – CJ Cole, WVES AM, 99.3

Available on Amazon
and Barnes & Noble

Announcements

Glimmertrain Press, Inc. is accepting entries for their Fiction Open contest which is open to all writers, all themes. **Deadline: January 2, 2012.** Reading fee is \$18 per story. 1st place wins \$2,000, publication in *Glimmer Train Stories*, and 20 copies of that issue. 2nd-place: \$1,000, 3rd-place: \$600. Go to www.glimmertrain.com, click on Writing Guidelines.

New Mexico Press Women invites entries for the 2012 Excellence in Communications Contest, recognizing excellence in print or electronic media, books, photography, advertising, public relations, graphic arts, blogs/websites, and academic journalism throughout New Mexico. Entries must be **postmarked by Monday, Jan. 9, 2012.** The work must have been distributed, published or broadcast between January 1, 2011 and December 31, 2011. See details at www.NewMexicoPressWomen.org.

Attention women writers in New Mexico! **New Mexico Press Women** is looking for nonfiction books published in 2009, 2010 or 2011 to honor with the Zia Book Award. **Deadline: January 13, 2012.** For more information, visit <http://newmexicopresswomen.org/contests/>.

The prizewinner of the **Colorado Prize for Poetry** receives a \$2,000 honorarium and publication of the winning book-length collection of poems by the Center for Literary Publishing. **Manuscripts accepted until January 14, 2012.** For more information: <http://coloradoreview.colostate.edu/colorado-prize-for-poetry/>

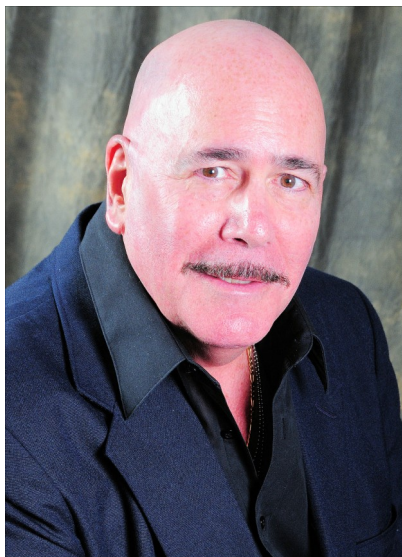
G.S. Charat Chandra Prize for Short Fiction and **The John Ciardi Prize for Poetry** are offered for the best previously unpublished work. The winner of each prize receives \$1,000 and publication by BkMk Press. **Deadline: January 15, 2012.** <http://cas.umkc.edu/bkmk/poetry.html>

Nominations are now being accepted for the **William Saroyan International Prize for Writing**. Two prizes of \$5,000 each are given biennially for works of fiction and nonfiction. The awards are intended to "encourage new or emerging writers and honor the Saroyan legacy of originality, vitality, and stylistic innovation." **Deadline: January 31, 2012.** saroyanprize.stanford.edu

Win a literary agent or acclaimed author's feedback on your unpublished manuscript for young adult or middle grade readers. This is being offered to the six winners of an essay contest recently announced by the literacy charity **Book Wish Foundation**. **Essays are due Feb. 1, 2012.** For details see <http://bookwish.org/contest>

Over \$4,000 in prizes will be awarded in the **International Literary Awards** contest hosted by Salem College. Reynolds Price Short Fiction Award for a short story up to 5000 words; Rita Dove Poetry Award for a poem up to 100 lines; Penelope Niven Creative Nonfiction Award for creative nonfiction, including personal essay and memoir, up to 5000 words. The winner in each genre receives \$1,200. Two honorable mentions in each genre receive \$150. **Deadline: February 3, 2012.** www.salem.edu/go/cww.

Brevity publishes well-known and emerging writers working in the extremely brief (750 words or less) essay form. We are currently reading for both our regular issues and our themed issue—*Ceiling or Sky: Female Nonfictions after the VIDA Count* (a special issue guest-edited by Susanne Antonetta, Barrie Jean Borich, and Joy Castro). Submissions **accepted until May 1, 2012**, authors will be paid a \$45 honorarium for work selected. To submit, go to: <http://brevity.submishmash.com/submit>



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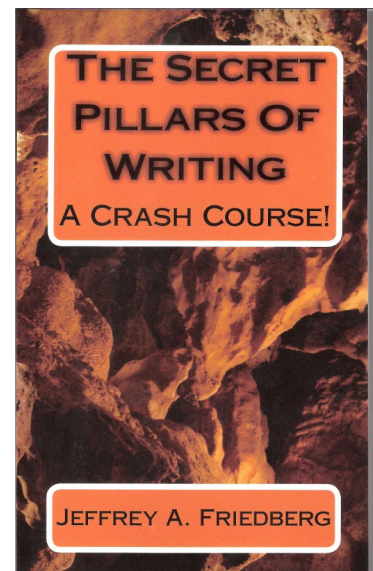
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Quite bluntly, Friedberg's book stands heads and shoulders over Elmore Leonard's...If you want to be a writer. Read this book. -- Saint Dubricius Reviews

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Registration Form for the SouthWest Writers Conference

SCREEN AND SCRIPT 2012

Saturday, February 25, 2012

MCM Eleganté • 2020 Menaul NE • Albuquerque, New Mexico 87107

Registration includes Saturday's conference presentations, critique of first 5 screenplay pages (see requirements below*), light breakfast, buffet lunch and refreshments during the day.

Conference times: Check in from 7:30-8:30 Saturday morning.
Conference from 8:30 AM - 5:00 PM.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____

PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

Are you a member of SouthWest Writers? _____ YES _____ NO

How did you learn about this conference? _____

Conference Cost:

_____ @ \$155.00 Early Bird Price* with critique of first 5 screenplay pages, limited to 15 registrants, send screenplay pages with registration form, postdate no later than FEBRUARY 12, 2012 = \$ _____

_____ @ \$150.00 Student with current ID (photocopy included) = \$ _____

_____ @ \$175.00 after FEBRUARY 12, 2012 or at the door = \$ _____

Indicate method of payment (the only credit cards we accept are MasterCard and Visa)

- ____ Check or money order (made out to SouthWest Writers)
____ MasterCard
____ Visa

If paying by credit card:

Cardholder Name: _____

Card Number: _____

Security Code: _____ (the last 3 digits of the number near your signature)

Expiration Date: _____

Billing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail (SWWriters@juno.com) or mail this form with payment to:
SWW, 3721 Morris NE, Suite A, Albuquerque, NM 87111

For an update on speakers, check out our website: www.southwestwriters.com

We look forward to seeing you at the conference!

The smell of chocolate with a hint of toasted marshmallow wafted through the small house on Fairview Street. Bursting through the front door after school, three hungry kids stampeded the kitchen clamoring for pie. Mom offered us bits of warm dough sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon, but she was firm—no pie until after dinner. We devoured the treat, watching as she put away the pastry blender and measuring cups, hoping for a change of heart.

Mom's chocolate pie starts with a flaky, melt-in-your-mouth crust, baked and then filled with chocolate custard rich with egg yolks. She tops it with a fluffy, egg-white meringue and tucks miniature marshmallows in its peaks and valleys before popping it in the oven. The wait is worth it. It tastes like a s'more made by God.

Growing up in Topeka, Kansas, Mom watched her mother and grandmother roll out countless crusts for pies: apple, mincemeat, lemon meringue, and her favorite, chocolate cream. She continued her education with a degree in Foods and Nutrition from Kansas State University. By the time I went away to college I had forsaken birthday cake in favor of Mom's pie, especially chocolate.

A few years ago I realized I was the only one likely to continue our pie-making tradition. So one summer evening when Mom was visiting, I opened my grandmother's tattered, red and white plaid *Better Homes and Gardens Cookbook* to the "Pastry and Pies" section. We debated the use of

shortening versus butter in the crust and opted for the family custom of shortening.

Mom cut Crisco into the flour with two knives while I measured milk, separated eggs, and shaved chocolate. After she rolled out the crust, Mom draped the delicate sheet of pastry over the pie pan assuring me that it was very forgiving. Her hands flew around the circumference pinching the dough with her left hand and using her right forefinger to create the perfect fluted edge. She watched while I whipped the egg whites into stiff peaks.

We pulled the golden confection out of the oven two hours after we began. This time we didn't wait until after dinner. We cut a tiny slice to share and declared it perfect.

After my lesson with Mom, I started baking more pies. Apple is my specialty: Newtown pippins, thinly sliced, sprinkled with sugar and Vietnamese cinnamon, and tucked between two layers of my butter and shortening crust. I make pies for birthdays, dinner parties, and as condolences. With each pie I bake I feel a connection to my mother and grandmothers. They knew everyone's favorite flavor and got out their rolling pins for church potlucks, neighbors with new babies and, sometimes, just to make a middle-of-the-week dinner special.

Last month I drove to Denver to see Mom. While I was there I baked a pie to celebrate her birthday: chocolate cream flavored with espresso and topped with whipped cream.

Getting From Premise to Plot

(Continued from page 6)

reader to connect to any one person. If they don't connect, they don't care, and if they don't care, they don't read.

I know, it'll take a ton of work. It'll require you to trash maybe the whole thing. You'll have to get rid of characters, or POVs of subplots. It'll be *hard*. But in the end, you'll have a much better (and more sellable) novel, and isn't that the goal?

Ideas are the hard part of writing. They're the things no one can teach you how to do. You either come up with something or you don't. I can tell you ways to trigger your creativity all day, but there's no guarantee any of them will work for you, or that you'll come up with anything good even if they do. So a premise novel kinda gets the hard stuff out of the way. You *have* the idea already, and probably a pretty darned fleshed out one at that. Now it's just a matter of training yourself to think in terms of story and work on your plotting skills.

And that you *can* learn.

2012 First Bi-Monthly Writing Contest

A Personal Essay About Animals

A short, personal essay about an animal of any species, whether it's your pet dog or parakeet, an animal in a zoo or preserve, or an animal you photographed, observed or bagged in the wild. In other words, the sky's the limit on writing about any critter on Earth. Just make sure there's some form of personal interaction. 750 word limit. **Postmark deadline: February 29, 2012.** Please include your contact information (address, phone and email) and permission to publish or not on a separate sheet. Do not include any identifying information on the manuscript itself. All entries \$10. Prizes: \$150/1st prize; \$50/2nd prize; \$25/3rd prize. Mail entries to SWW Bi-monthly Contest, 3721 Morris NE, Suite A, Albuquerque, NM 87111.