



# SouthWest Sage

The Voice of SouthWest Writers

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February 2017

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### You Can Write for SWW Sage.

Members are invited to submit articles and artwork related to writing, and publishing.

Query to: [swwsage@swcp.com](mailto:swwsage@swcp.com).

## SouthWest Sage Writing Competition And the Winners are.....!

The *Sage* arose from the ashes with an explosion of talent as 16 of our talented members sent excellent examples of short story writing. SWW members reading them sent in their votes for which was representative of the best of the storyteller's art.

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## Is Technology an Advance or a Hindrance?

By Sherri Burr

"In our advanced technological age, we are bombarded by the latest gadgets for everything from appliances to voice recording aps, all claiming to make lives more efficient. But do they?"

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## About the Business of Writing Workshop

By Fred A. Aiken

"I learned in that class that any writer who wanted to be a professional writer could use the tax laws to deduct his or her writing expenses from their income taxes, regardless of how much money they had earned in the year."

Continued on Page 9

## Exquisite Corpse

With Joanne Bodin and Jeanne Shannon

"April is poetry month. And what better way to honor the bards and word-weavers, the poets—the mainstay of cultural preservation—than to come to SouthWest Writers for an interactive experience in the poetic tradition of *exquisite corpse*..."

Continued on Page 14

## The President's Corner by Sarah H. Baker

February has always been a favorite of mine. The short month offers crystal-clear days of sunshine and days of clouds that glow scarlet and crimson at sunset, both to be savored in New Mexico's winter. Lines of geese and cranes fill the skies, and coyotes complain of cold after dark. It's also the month we celebrate romantic love. If you look, you'll see romance writers around town giving out chocolates and signing books.

Not "into" romance? That's OK. Tastes vary; I get it. What I don't get is the unkind remarks I often hear about romance books and writers. Romance is a genre of fiction like any other: mystery, sci-fi, horror, or fantasy. All have basic guidelines designed to meet reader expectations. All have examples of amazing writing and examples of not-so-amazing writing, and all are hard to write well.

I challenge all members in this wonderful group to shed any prejudices they may have against any type or genre of writing and the writers who create it. We all work hard at our craft, and we can learn something from every one of our fellow members. I'm no poet, but I've learned much about the value of the right word at the right time from our poets. And I doubt I'll ever write young adult fiction, but young adult writers can help us all learn to identify the important nuggets of our stories. (If you can keep a twelve-year-old engaged, you're a top-notch storyteller and have my admiration.)

Please join me in celebrating the magic of love this month. It really is the thing that gives life meaning. And if you see a romance writer signing at one of our local bookstores, stop, say hello, and ask questions. You may be surprised by how much she knows about writing, selling, and publicizing books. Albuquerque has some remarkable, well-published romance authors. And if you're nice, they may give you chocolate, too. Happy February to you all!



### HOSTED BY

**Jodi Thomas**

NYT and USA TODAY  
best-selling author

**Timothy Lewis**

Random House and Reader's  
Digest select edition author

Register at  
[wtamu.edu/wtwa](http://wtamu.edu/wtwa)  
or call 806.651.2037

## WEST TEXAS WRITERS' ACADEMY

JUNE 5-9

### WEEK-LONG COURSES

**Mastering self-publishing: everything you need to grow and cultivate your own publishing empire**

Bethany Claire | USA TODAY best-selling author

**Master your manuscript: catch and keep readers using the secret of clarity**

Lori Freeland | YA fiction author, writing coach and blogger

**Build your brand through social media management and good design**

Emily Kinsky, Ph.D. | WTAMU Professor social media, advertising and PR

**Write creative non-fiction: sure steps to jump start your memoir**

Rosa Latimer | Non-fiction author of the Harvey House Series

**Advanced fiction writing with deep editing power**

Margie Lawson | Writing coach for more than 20 published authors

**Crime writers' boot camp: deepening your police perspective**

Matt Sherley | Retired Police Lieutenant and author

**Plot your novel in a week: story**

Jolene Navarro | Bestselling hybrid author of contemporary and historical romance  
with guest appearance by Alexandra Sokoloff | Bestselling author



 West Texas A&M  
UNIVERSITY™  
EDUCATION ON DEMAND

***South West Sage***  
**Writing Competition**  
**And the Winners are.....!**

The *Sage* arose from the ashes with an explosion of talent as 16 of our talented members sent excellent examples of short story writing. SWW members reading them sent in their votes for which was representative of the best of the storyteller's art.

The overall talent was such that no story went without at least two people including it in their top three! And when all was said and done, we had TWO TIES!

The original intention was to name a first place, second place and an Honorable Mention. However, the top two stories had an equal number of votes, and the next two stories also had equal votes. In honor of this, two authors received first place and two authors received Honorable Mention at the SWW meeting on Saturday February 4.

**The First Place Winners are:**

***Slippery Slope***

by Evelyn Neil

***Jimmy's Quest***

by Don DeNoon

**Honorable Mention Winners are:**

***Awakening***

by Yvonne Williams Casaus

***Twelve Days in April***

by Su-Ellen Lierz

All four stories are reprinted in this issue along with the bios of the authors and what inspired each of them to write their story.

Our thanks to all who participated not just in the writing but also in the judging. We all grow in our art through giving our talents as authors to each other.



**Upcoming SWW  
Workshops**

More information is available on the SWW website.

Saturday February 4th

**How to Create a Scene Without Getting Arrested**

Presented by Melody Groves

Saturday March 4th

**Myth in Writing**

Presented by Shari Tarbet

Tuesday April 18

**Exquisite Corpse? A unique Poetic tradition**

Presented by Joanne Bodin and Jeanne Shannon

Saturday May 6th

**Niche Markets: Multiple Streams of Income**

Presented by Rose Marie Kern

**SWW CLASSES**

**How to Write Your First Play**

A 4-week class by Dr. Richard Peck

Monday Evenings beginning Feb. 6th

**Writing for Magazines: Bagging Your First Magazine Assignment**

A 2-week class with Melody Groves

Saturdays beginning March 18th

**The Business of Writing**

A 3-week class with CPA Fred Aiken

Thursdays beginning March 9th

# First Place Winner



## Slippery Slope

By Evelyn M. Neil

Walt moved into the downstairs bedroom last night; downstairs to sleep in the new Select Comfort bed. The head could be raised to ease his breathing difficulties caused by advanced emphysema. The foot, when elevated, relieved the swelling in his ankles and took pressure off his arthritis-racked lower back. The nights of the previous month had been spent trying to sleep propped up on pillows. Laying flat, even with the assist of three liters of oxygen, gave him a drowning sensation.

Surrounded by pillows, I was left alone to toss and turn in the cold king-sized bed in the master bedroom upstairs where we had slept, made love and talked our way through more than fifty-eight years. Laying wide eyed in the deafening silence, I realized how dependent I had become on the white noise of the oxygen concentrator and Walt's snoring to lull me to sleep. The worst kind of loneliness gripped me.

I lay still, barely breathing, and listened to the sounds of the night; sounds I rarely noticed. The pyracantha branches scraped across the stucco, pine cones scurried across the roof in an attempt to outrun the wind, coyotes yipped and barked in celebration of a newly harvested meal. Our life together had begun to be whittled away one piece at a time. Like a slow amputation.

The high-tech bed with the remote control was an immediate hit with Walt. Everyone who came to the house, including the young man who came to wash windows, was dragged downstairs for show and tell.

"See, it has a blue night light that shines underneath the bed and out the sides. This button on the remote turns on the bedside lamp," Walt demonstrated. "Here, lie down. Feel the massage. Do you want full body, lower body, upper body or wave?"

Walt assured me he was sleeping better. "And," he said. "I don't have to climb those damned stairs to go to bed or use the bathroom. I can watch my movies here in the den any time of day or night."

But for all this, he still retained fluid. His skin stretched ever tighter over his expanding belly. His once slender legs looked like shapeless stumps.

I finally persuaded him to see his long-time cardiologist, Bob Gray, the savior who performed the angiogram and angioplasty procedures in 1991 following the first heart attack. He oversaw Walt's recovery following bypass surgery and threaded stents into his clogged arteries after each subsequent heart attack, in 2000, 2006 and 2011. Not only was he Walt's doctor, but his friend.

One week later when I drove Walt to his north valley appointment, several brightly-colored hot air balloons hovered in the azure October sky over the brilliant gold cottonwoods along the Rio Grande. No other patients were in the waiting room so Heather, Dr. Gray's nurse, immediately escorted us to an examining room, weighed Walt and took his vitals.

Upon entering the room, Dr. Gray patted Walt's arm. "Well, old buddy, it is what it is, the beginning of congestive heart failure. Your damaged lungs aren't providing your heart with the oxygen it needs to work properly. Your body is retaining fluid. I can only imagine you feel like your head is in a bucket of water."

I grasped Walt's hand. Neither of us spoke. We had begun the long slide down a slippery slope with no return.

Finally, Walt, who never let bad news interfere with his zest for life, stood and leaned on his cane, "Doc, I wish you could have seen the deer at our water trough this morning. Two does with five spotted fawns."

"Five babies from two does?" the doctor asked.

"Yeah. One had twins and the other triplets."

Dr. Gray buttoned Walt's shirt, pulled up his suspenders and put his arm around his shoulders. "You're going to be fine, my friend. Mind your diet. Put your feet up and enjoy your deer."

Walt adjusted the shoulder strap on his oxygen bottle and picked up his cane. “Come, sweetheart, let’s go to the Daily Grind. A Chicken Panini would taste good about now.”

I walked slowly by my husband’s side and held the door while he made his way painfully out of the doctor’s office to our car. After helping him into the passenger seat and hooking his seat belt, I settled behind the wheel, fastened my seat belt and adjusted the rear-view mirror. What day had I become the driver?



### Do You Have a Published Book?

The SouthWest Writers Website scrolls member book covers across the Home page. If you’d like us to add yours to the group, feel free to send it to [swwsage@swcp.com](mailto:swwsage@swcp.com). No more than one book cover per author. Can be updated as your next book comes out. Send a small picture file .jpg no more than 140dpi. The book covers will be a bit larger than icon sized. Webmaster reserves the right to edit to fit.

*Send your successes and announcements to the SouthWest Sage Editor at [swwsage@swcp.com](mailto:swwsage@swcp.com).*

### Place Your Ad Here

Advertise your writing-related products and services.

**Business Card Size only \$20.00**

1/4 page, vertical: \$40 ! 1/3 page, horizontal: \$50  
15% discount for 3 months/20% discount for 6 months

### Story Inspiration

*Slippery Slope* is an excerpt from my Memoir, *Hanging On*, which recounts the heart-wrenching process of acceptance and reinvention of my life following the untimely death of my husband of 58 years on St Patrick’s Day, 2015.

### Author

**Evelyn Neil** began writing following retirement from a career as a small business owner/accountant/financial advisor. She writes creative non-fiction stories based on childhood memories of growing up during WWII on the wind-swept prairies of Wyoming and arriving in New Mexico sixty years ago as a new bride. She is a member of Southwest Writers and The Write Stuff. She attends Creative Writing classes at UNM and has recently been published in the first edition of the *American Family Military History Project Anthology*.

### The Big Wheel

By Scott Archer Jones



Robko Zlata is careening across America with a call girl—his ex-wife. Robko stole the wrong thing, a device that guarantees immortality. His wrathful target, a corrupt billionaire, wants the world’s greatest technology back. Robko’s new worst enemy unleashes his fortune in unrelenting pursuit. Throw in the underground world of drugs and punk clubs, five-star hotels and cheap motels and Robko is in for one hell of a crash.

[www.scottarcherjones.com](http://www.scottarcherjones.com)

### 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

1/2 page horizontal \$75

15% discount for 3 mos.

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**Deadline:** 15th of each month for the following month.  
Payment due with camera-ready ad copy in .jpg format.

# First Place Winner



## Jimmy's Quest

By Don DeNoon

**“Go** north on Fourth to the 200 block. Then west on Cherry. You’ll see a big red sign that says EATS. Go in. Look for Maizie. She’ll be the waitress with the red frizzy hair and emerald eyes. Tell her Jacki sent you.”

Jimmy dutifully followed the instructions.

EATS was a rundown diner smelling of burnt bacon and stale coffee. Customers sat on chrome chairs with plum-red vinyl seats next to gray formica tables. Backless stools at the counter were also plum-red and chrome which showed years of abuse with the vinyl torn where redness and chrome came together.

Jimmy looked around and smiled to himself because customers looked like characters in an old black and white movie. Disheveled men with scruffy beards, muddy boots and dirty overalls who resembled poor farmers. Plain faced women with no-makeup-before-breakfast had wispy, unkempt hair could be seeking parts as witches .

Maizie stood behind the counter with her red frizzy hair pulled under a sparkly white hair net. She was pouring coffee into a mug in front of a man whose rear end was so big it extended over the sides of the stool like a muffin whose batter had overflowed its baking tin.

As she finished pouring his coffee, Maizie said, “Haven’t seen you in a while Johnny, what’s you been doin’?”

“Just got back from Derby. Lotsa people hurtin’ over there after the tornado.”

Johnny took a quick sip of coffee and continued, “I reckon there’s twenty or more been taken to the hospital in New Castle. I helped clear Main Street so’s rescue crews could get to them that was hurt.”

Maizie gently patted Johnny’s hand and said, “Derby’s a sweet little town. So sad.”

Jimmy made his way to the counter and sat two stools away from Johnny so he wouldn’t accidentally bump into that overhanging butt.

Maizie placed a mug in front of Jimmy. “You havin’ coffee this mornin’, honey?”

Jimmy didn’t like being called “honey” by a woman he hadn’t even met. He made no eye contact with her and just stared at the empty mug. “Uh. Well, sure, ma’am. With cream please.”

“Here’s your coffee and the cream’s right next to your elbow there.” Maizie took a moment and then asked, “Have you been in here before, honey? You look sorta familiar.”

There was that honey word again. Jimmy kept his eyes focused on his coffee mug and felt his cheeks begin to flush. “No ma’am, I haven’t.”

After stirring cream into his coffee, Jimmy slowly looked up at Maizie. “Your friend Jacki told me about this place. Said to tell you she sent me.”

A knowing smile brightened Maizie’s face as her emerald eyes scanned Jimmy’s cheeks. They had turned to the adorable shade of an over-ripe peach. With all the weight of a chicken feather she stroked his hand and said, “It’ll be all right now. Maizie’s here and she’s gonna take good care of you.”

Jimmy was glad she didn’t call him honey again, because he really didn’t want to be her honey. But he did hope, as Jacki assured him, Maizie would provide him the contact he was looking for.

He finished his coffee and reached for his wallet.

“It’s just a cup of coffee, honey. And it’s on me this time. Now, let me tell you about Cathy. I think you two are gonna have a lot of fun together.”



**More about Jimmy's Quest on next page.**

## What was the Inspiration for *Jimmy's Quest*?

"As strange as it sounds, inspiration for *Jimmy's Quest* happened four years ago when I took a graduate level poetry class at UNM. It was there I read a novel written in verse, *Autobiography of Red*, by Anne Carson. Initially *J.Q.* was written in verse, but when the "Beginnings" contest was announced, I decided to convert the story to prose and submit it. What was my inspiration? I would say Ann Carson."

Author **Donald DeNoon** hails from Indiana where he received his BA from University of Evansville. An army enlistment delayed his graduate studies at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. But he moved on from there to share his professional skills, starting as pastor (Indiana and Missouri), then as campus minister (Missouri and Nevada), and finally as counselor (New Mexico). Elementary school was where Don discovered poetry and began writing verse. But in college, a course titled *The Novel* introduced the beauty of another form. By entering The SWW "Beginnings" contest Don says he took a chance to expose his prose.



## Speakers and Topics for Upcoming SWW Meetings

### Saturday, February 4, 10:00am-Noon

5 Things I Wish I'd Known  
Before Starting my Career

**Melody Groves**

### Tuesday, February 21, 7pm-9pm

Writing: An Activist's Guide

**Dede Feldman**

### Saturday, March 4, 10:00am-Noon

Topic TBD

**Lynn Miller**

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**More information available on the SWW website:** [www.southwestwriters.com](http://www.southwestwriters.com)

## SOUTHWEST WRITERS CRITIQUE SERVICE

An experienced critiquer, picked from a panel of professional writers and editors, will be matched with your genre and will critique your manuscript for a reasonable price below the usual market rate.

*The SWW Critique Service accepts all genres, including:*

- Query letters
- Synopses
- Articles
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- Book proposals
- Short Stories
- Mainstream/literary fiction
- Genre fiction
- Children's
- Middle-grade
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### COST

- \$15 - Poetry of no more than 3 pages
- \$15 - Query letter of no more than 3 pages
- \$25 - Synopsis of up to 3 pages
  - additional pages are \$3.50/page
- \$35 - Minimum charge for up to 10 double-spaced manuscript pages
  - additional pages are \$3.50/page

SWW critiquers follow genre-specific guidelines. But feel free to include specific questions you want answered and any points you want the critique to focus on (such as point of view, plot structure, etc.). Go to [SouthWestWriters.com](http://SouthWestWriters.com) for guidelines and information on submitting your manuscript to our critique service.

# Honorable Mention

## Awakening

By Yvonne Williams Casaus

The light was so bright; I strained to open my eyes. I thought, *Is this heaven?* The glow all around me was blinding. A snowflake landed on my eyelash. As I strained to look down I saw a giant rock, more like a boulder on me.

I started screaming. Footsteps came crunching through the snow. A flushed face gasped, “oh my God!” I couldn’t move. I began to panic; my body was frozen like ice. Another teenage girl appeared. Somehow they got the giant boulder off of me. Before the world started spinning I saw the car teetering over me.

I strained to open my eyes. The sky glowed nearly orange, from the sparkling snow on the ground. *I must have blacked out.* I tried to sit up, but two kind green eyes came into view. A voice gently said, “You’ve been in an accident.” He took a deep breath, “your friends went to get help, try not to move”. With calm affect he added, “Don’t try to move, I don’t know how badly you’re injured”. I thought I should panic, yet somehow I felt safe. It was nearly euphoric.

He continued, “It was snowing pretty hard, it might take a minute. Your car spun on the bridge.” His eyes widened, “it’s amazing what adrenaline can do. Your friends got that gigantic boulder off of you.”

“I am sure your friends are okay”, he said to convince himself more than me; “they went with a trucker for help. I offered to stay in case you woke up.” With hesitation he added, “I didn’t want your friend to go with the trucker alone. I thought they’d be safer together”.

*Am I dreaming?* I thought, and then memories started flooding me. I had fought with my mom, I had tried to beat curfew. There were sirens, then the roar of a diesel. I turned towards my new friend, my guardian angel. As I lifted my head, it throbbed unbearably. Then the world went black again.

I heard beeping. I fought to open my heavy eyes. A shadow, then a face started to form. “She’s awake!” I tried to focus on the face and the familiar voice. “Oh Thank God!” My mom started kissing

and hugging me. “I’m so glad you are okay!” I remembered our fight, the screaming and yelling, the mean things I said. “Oh mom, I am so sorry.” I said sheepishly, “I didn’t mean what I said, I love you so much”.

Tears poured from her eyes, “Oh honey, I know. I love you. Always know how much I love you. I am so grateful you are okay.”

“The car!” I started to panic.

She shushed me, “cars can be replaced. You cannot”. She continued, “You truly are protected by angels”. She looked at me sternly, “Listen to me. You have been given a second chance. There is no way you should be sitting here in this bed with only a broken arm and a bruised leg.” She looked up towards the ceiling, “God must have great plans for you”.

*Green eyes!* My guardian angel popped in my mind. “Mom, what about that guy that waited with me?” She looked at me with concern, “I’m not sure sweetheart. We got there after the ambulance. Did someone wait with you?”

“Well, now I’m not sure... maybe I dreamed it”. Those eyes stayed in the back of my mind. My friends later said someone offered to stay with me while they went looking for help. In the chaos they didn’t remember his name. He left when the ambulance arrived. I was disappointed, but there was nothing I could do.

A few weeks later, I went back to high school. I had a new determination. I no longer wanted to skate through my classes. This accident was a wake-up call. I had a second chance at life. As the snow melted, I connected with the new blossoms breaking through the hard ground. Like the seeds sprouting with new life and purpose, I grew and embraced the future. I no longer feared it. My mom was right. Surviving that night was a miracle. I had another chance. I could not waste it. I had to live purposely.

The rest of the year I really focused on my schoolwork. I got straight A’s for the first time in my life. One day in a small bookstore, I turned quickly and knocked a book out of a handsome



young man's hands. I picked up the book with embarrassment and glanced up into his eyes. My breath caught in my throat, my heart skipped a beat. It was him. *Green eyes!* I nearly yelled, but no words would come out. He smiled, I felt butterflies. "It's you", we said in unison.



## Awakening Author

**Yvonne Williams Casaus** is a Mom, Wife, Author, Counselor, and Play Therapist. She is an independently licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor (LPCC), a Registered Play Therapist (RPT), and is certified in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy. She specializes in Depression, Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). She has a private practice in New Mexico and has been helping adults, children, adolescents, and families for over eleven years.

### About the Business of Writing Workshop

By Fred A. Aiken

When I moved to Albuquerque in July 1996, I saw an announcement about SWW's Annual Writing Conference. I sent in my registration and joined SWW in order to get the lowest registration rate. The conference was very educational. The first class that I registered for was a class on deducting your writing expenses on your income tax return taught by Ted Lynn of Silver City, NM. I learned in that class that any writer who wanted to be a professional writer could use the tax laws to deduct his or her writing expenses from their income taxes, regardless of how much money they had earned in the year. You did not have to make money from your writing to qualify for this privilege. Thus, beginning writers at this stage of their careers will find that a large chunk of their income comes from the benefits of the Federal Tax Code, as long as they operate their writing businesses in a professional manner.

Becoming a professional writer is simple. All you have to do is to self-declare yourself one and operate your business in a professional manner. In the world that the IRS lives in, there are only two types of writers: Professional Writers and Hobbyists. Why writers write is the difference between the two types. Hobbyists write for enjoyment. Professional Writers also write for enjoyment but also write to earn money from their writing. That profit incentive is the true difference between the two types of writers. You repeatedly hear writers at SWW meeting categorically state the Writing is a Business. That's true. The Professional Writer treats his or her endeavors in a businesslike manner. This workshop will teach you how to operate your writing business in a businesslike manner. It will help you to clarify the tax code by interpreting the terminology used in the US Tax Code, improve your knowledge of accounting systems and the terminology used by those engaged in business accounting and finance, what are the allowable deductions for you to take, how to prove yourself to the IRS that you indeed are a professional writer through the preponderance of evidence rule.

The Business of Writing Workshop is designed to help writers demonstrate that they are indeed professional writers who are entitled to the benefits that the tax code provides. The Workshop is designed to teach any writer regardless of her/his stage in their career how to operate their business in a professional manner and how to avail themselves of all the tax benefits allowed by law.

The class will be held on three consecutive Thursday nights (March 9, 16 and 24) from 6:30 to 8:30 PM at the SWW Offices. Cost is \$99 for SWW members, \$104 for Osher Members, and \$109 for nonmembers. Cost is tax deductible. In this class, the participants will:

- ◆ Learn the IRS requirement for a professional writer to deduct his/her writing related expenses from their income tax.
- ◆ Understand the record keeping requirements, the meaning of the vocabulary employed by tax professionals, and how the tax forms should be filled out.
- ◆ Discover the myriad of legal tax deductions available to the profession writer.
- ◆ How a Business Plan for their writing business helps to prove that they are entitled to be considered a professional in their industry.
- ◆ How to manage cash flow from their writing and maximize profits.

For more information about this class or to ask questions about it, email Fred A. Aiken at [FAAiken@aol.com](mailto:FAAiken@aol.com). Visit his website at [www.FredAAikenWriter.com](http://www.FredAAikenWriter.com) and read his two blogs: Thoughts for Tuesday which is posted weekly and Friday "Fruit for Thought", which is posted every first, third and fifth Fridays. Fred can usually be found at the registration table in the back of the room nearly every SWW meeting. [www.southwestwriters.com](http://www.southwestwriters.com).

# Honorable Mention

## Twelve Days in April

By Su-Ellen Lierz

I was less than a month into my new job when word got around. People were reluctant to say anything. I was grateful. What would I tell them anyway? How could I put into words something there were no words for? Smiles were kind, gestures polite, but for the majority, it seemed business as usual. For our family, there was nothing usual about the minutes ticking by.

Sooner than expected, someone approached my desk as I was getting ready to head home. A stocky man, with a cowboy hat and pleated jeans, stood in front of my desk during the quiet hours of the late afternoon, and said, "I'm sorry for your loss." *Words of sympathy*, I thought, *expressed by well-meaning people, when nothing else could be said*. "But I'd like to share something with you."

I was grateful he didn't say, "I know exactly how you feel," because, how can we? Loss is such an individual process. Instead, he said, "My wife and I lost two of our three children due to...."

That captured my attention.

My husband and I were privileged to be present for the birth of four grandchildren. We knew this baby was a girl; she even had a nickname - Ginger, short for Virginia, her paternal great-grandmother's namesake. Our daughter and son-in-law were pros, and by now, we knew the drill, too. When the evening proved lengthy, we were told we could go home and wait for a call, which we did. Sometime after midnight we got a call to return to the hospital. It was a 15 minute drive. Shortly after we arrived, Virginia was born.

When the nurse held her, she let out a strong, healthy cry. She was laid in the transparent hospital bassinet. The nurse checked her vitals, and after a few minutes she was whisked away. Nothing seemed out of place. The hour was early. Adrenaline—theirs and ours—took the place of caffeine, and we knew there were tests they performed on newborns. It wasn't until our daughter said, "I want to hold my baby. How come they haven't given her to me yet?" that we took note of her lengthy absence.

We left the room to inquire. It was quiet minus our steps toward the nursery. We stood at the window. Blinds closed. A seam between the white blind and the window casing provided just enough view into a dim room, where we witnessed three people standing next to an infant. One person rhythmically squeezed their fingers in and out against a blue bulbous handheld ventilator pressed against a baby's face.

Medical personnel approached us and said an ambulance was en route from UNM Children's Hospital. Virginia had aspirated meconium (her first stool) deep into her lungs, when she took her first cry. She was unable to breath on her own.

The next 12 days were arduous.

Our son-in-law kept a daily journal, something to share with Virginia when she was older. It detailed their daily discussions with her doctors, progress reports, setbacks, and information about the equipment used to sustain her. Every day brought new developments: some good, some bad, but we remained encouraged by the positives. Our daughter continued to pump breast milk, so when Virginia was taken off life support she would have the natural nourishment she needed.

One week, that was the initial goal. Every day past the first seven days increased her chance of survival. But on day 11 they detected bleeding in her brain, and that evening when they operated to alleviate the pressure, it proved too much.

As parents and grandparents, our grief was two-fold. Not that it was greater, it couldn't be. We had never lost a child. We didn't know or understand how that might feel. We all grappled with the sorrow of what would never be. But our grief held an extra component, that of watching our children and grandchildren suffer as they came to terms with the unexpected.

Yes, loss is an individual experience. But there was nothing individual about the people who surrounded Virginia. There was nothing individual about the support extended to our family. For those 12 days in April, people had collectively, if not knowingly, put

themselves in our family's place, some recalling their own loss—not on a selfish level but on a conscious one—to help us deal with ours.

As for the gentleman in the cowboy hat? Well, he and his wife lost two of their three daughters. And even though each loss is separate, what they did know is that all any of us can do is to start each day, and begin again.



Story inspiration:

In 2005 our oldest daughter, Michelle, and her husband, Jody, had their third child, Virginia. There were complications. Virginia would be 12 this coming April, so it took 12 years to write *Twelve Days in April*. Bits and pieces of this experience have been written down but nothing cohesive. Maybe I was afraid to revisit the topic. When SWW offered the Sage contest about "Beginnings," the conversation with the gentleman who wore the cowboy hat sprung to mind. What was discovered during the process of writing this short piece is that it's doable. It is my tribute to Virginia, her parents, her siblings, and to those who offered their support.

**Su-Ellen Lierz** has been a member of SouthWest Writers for almost four years and has participated in various writing groups. She writes speculative fiction, short story fiction, personal essays and memoir. She attends writing classes at SWW, UNM Continuing Education, and The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). When not writing, working, or taking classes, she enjoys being with her family and friends, and traveling with her husband, Dennis. Currently, she works for a research and development company and resides in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

## Upcoming Events and Contests

### **PINE WRITING WEEKEND**

*For Fiction and Nonfiction Writers*

February 17-19, 2017 5659 Chaparal Lane, Pine Arizona 85544 details at <http://annleemiller.com>

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### **Wild West Literary Contest**

Silver Creek Writers Residency and Storyfort Boise want to know: *What's Your Wild West?* Whether it's your contemplation of wilderness landscapes, or your characters living wildly in the new urban West, or a lyrical ride into the sunset of an open road, we leave the interpretation up to you. Take your literary license and drive.

Three separate contests: Short fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Winners will be invited and expected to attend and read their work at Boise's Storyfort, the friendliest lit fest in the West. Storyfort is one of the many "forts" of Boise, Idaho's hip and Huge Treefort Music Fest, March 22-26, 2017.

Winners also receive: \$300 cash prize **DEADLINE: 2/15/17. WINNERS ANNOUNCED: Late February. Submissions must be made through [Submittable.com](http://Submittable.com) at [Silvercreekwr.org](http://Silvercreekwr.org).**

[Silvercreekwr.org](http://Silvercreekwr.org) for further contest details

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**Writer Advice** seeks flash memoir (750 words or less). Dazzle, delight, and entice us. Winners receive cash prizes and are published. Low fee for solid feedback. Deadline: 03/01/17. Fee and details:

[www.writeradvice.com](http://www.writeradvice.com).

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The **Desert Nights, Rising Stars Writers Conference** is an annual creative writing conference at Arizona State University that brings together writers, readers, and lovers of literature for three days of instruction, inspiration, and community.

Thursday, February 16 - Saturday, February 18, 2017  
<https://piper.asu.edu/conference>.

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# The Writing Life



## Is Technology an Advance or a Hindrance?

By Sherri Burr

In our advanced technological age, we are bombarded by the latest gadgets for everything from appliances to voice recording apps, all claiming to make lives more efficient. But do they?

This question occurred to me after two home appliances broke and I replaced them with “high efficiency” models. The new washing machine included a sensing device that calculated the amount of water it needed. Since it had a glass top, I watched the machine twist the load back and forth before turning on the water. Although I had piled in clothes to reach the top of the tub, the machine added in water to fill only about a quarter of its capacity. Eighty minutes later a load was finished, yet several items had dry spots. A load of whites took two hours, and I tricked the machine into filling up the tub by first bleaching clothes in a bucket, which made them heavier.

My initial reaction was astonishment. The machine took nearly three times as long to wash loads, and it didn’t get them as clean as my 1989 Kenmore machine that went to washing machine heaven after three attempts to fix failed to produce a functional apparatus. I questioned the term “high efficiency,” and realized it only referred to the machine’s miserly water use. When it came to electricity, my bill would go up because it now took nearly all day to wash four loads of laundry, instead of two hours. When I went back to the store, the clerk questioned whether I had loaded the ma-

chine correctly. I thought that, given the cost, the machine should have loaded itself. I requested the store pick up the machine and return my money before purchasing a non-high efficiency machine that allowed me to set water levels, and clean loads in half the time.

I share this story to challenge writers to question whether the new technology in their lives is an advance or a hindrance. Are we better off interviewing subjects and typing our notes on our laptop at the same time? Are we better off interviewing subjects and exclusively using our iPhone’s or iPad’s Siri to record the notes?

As someone who has used technology to her detriment in interviews, I submit that both questions must be answered with “no.” I interviewed someone and placed my “iDevice” on the table to record the conversation, while I actively listened and took notes on a paper pad. Thank goodness I did the latter because Siri recorded gibberish. I learned the hard way with voice-recognition software that if it doesn’t recognize the nuances in a person’s speech patterns, it may not accurately translate the person’s sentences.

The other problem I’ve found with recording devices is that subjects are intimidated by them. After getting nothing from a former bachelor from the television show “The Bachelor”, I put away the recording device. He immediately started talking. Since I didn’t want to interrupt the flow of the conversation, I just actively listened. The minute we finished, I ran to my car and wrote everything I could remember. I went to bed that night thinking I had nonsense, but awoke the next morning with a complete story organized in my head. My subconscious had sorted out the text while I slept.

In a law class simulation, I asked four students to role play as clients and lawyers. In the first group, the lawyer wanted to use his iPad to take notes. As the interview progressed, he didn’t use his iPad once. Rather, he focused in on the client’s pre-interview sheet to ask the client questions. Because he was reading from the sheet, he didn’t observe his client. In the second demonstration, the law student used no electronic device and even though he had the client’s pre-interview sheet, he focused on talking and listening to the client. The second interview

## Is Technology an Advance or a Hindrance? - Continued

was more effective.

My final technology concern focuses on studies demonstrating that students who type their lecture notes on computers produce more complete notes but do not process the material as well and do worse on exams. Other studies have proven that reading material on electronic devices leads to less recall of the material learned.

Thus, before you ditch your paper products in favor of electronics, think about whether they will advance or hinder the cause of obtaining effective interviews and learning material. Those who feel listened to tell more. Look directly at interviewees, and actively tune your ears to capture all that you can from them.

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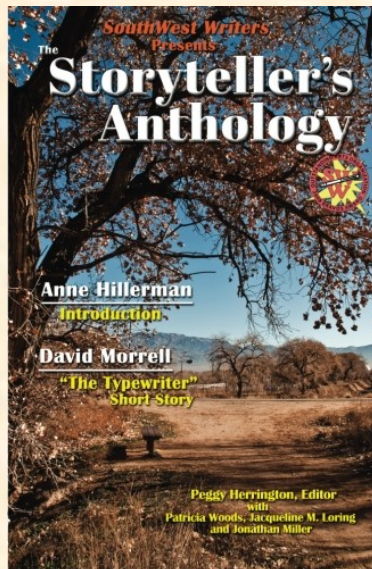


**Sherri Burr** is a Yale Law School-educated law professor at the University of New Mexico. She has received several awards for her interviews, most recently earning First Place in the NM Press Women Contest for Television Talk Show for an ARTS TALK interview she did with Actor John Corbett ("Sex in the City" and "Northern Exposure"). These interviews are available through her website [www.sherriburr.com](http://www.sherriburr.com) and on



### Workshop and Class Refund Policy

Full refund if cancellation is received more than 7 days before class. From one week out to 24 hours before class, participant is entitled to select another class. Inside of 24 hours, participant receives no refund for the class. 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.



### The Storyteller's Anthology

is available to order in paperback on Amazon. A great addition to any library, it exemplifies the diversity of talent we bring to the literary world. Please consider leaving a positive comment on the Review page with a 5-star rating to enhance salability of this excellent example of outstanding authorship by members of SouthWest Writers!

### Upcoming Class

#### How to Write Your First Play

by Dr. Richard Peck

Stage plays of any genre or size—tragedy, drama, comedy, even musicals, whether full length, one-act, or the currently hot ten-minute plays—all employ the same easily learned principles. You'll understand them after the first 1-hour session and practice them (through in-class exercises and brief "homework" assignments) by the second sessions.

By your fourth and final session you'll complete—it's your choice—either (1) a ten-minute play, (2) a summary of a one-act play, or (3) an outline of a full-length play...and have fun doing it. Then it's up to you.

February 6, 13, 20, 27 6-8pm at the SWW office: 3200 Carlisle Blvd NE 830-6034  
\$75 SWW members; \$79 Osher members; \$85 non-members

# APRIL IS POETRY MONTH

## Exquisite Corpse?

Find out about this unique poetic tradition, along with other writing techniques that allow you a glimpse into the world of the poet



Joanne Bodin



Jeanne Shannon

At the Tuesday, April 18, 2017 Meeting  
7 pm to 9 pm

New Life Presbyterian Church

April is poetry month. And what better way to honor the bards and word-weavers, the poets—the mainstay of cultural preservation—than to come to SouthWest Writers for an interactive experience in the poetic tradition of *exquisite corpse*, and other playful poetic writing techniques. Bring pens, pencils, a notebook, and your curiosity as you embark on a fun-filled journey into the world of the poet. You do not need to be a poet to participate.

Jeanne Shannon and Joanne Bodin, both award-winning poets, will facilitate this Tuesday meeting.

Jeanne Shannon's poetry has appeared in numerous small-press and university journals and anthologies, including *Midway Journal*, *Malpais Review*, *Cloudbank*, *Glint Literary Journal* and *Imagine Peace*, an anthology from Bottom Dog Press. She has published four full-length collections of her work and several chapbooks. *In a Rose Wood Wandering* and *At the Horizon Line* were finalists for a New Mexico/Arizona Book Award in poetry, and her 2016 book, *Summoning*, was a winner in that category. She has also published short fiction and memoir essays.

Joanne Bodin Ph.D., is an award-winning author, poet, and retired educator. Her book of poetry, *Piggybacked*, was a finalist in the New Mexico Book Awards. Her novel, *Walking Fish*, won the New Mexico Book Award and the International Book Award in gay/lesbian fiction. She is past vice president of the New Mexico State Poetry Society, and is on the boards of SouthWest Writers and the New Mexico Orchid Guild. Her poetry has appeared in numerous poetry anthologies and literary journals. Her new novel, *Orchid of the Night*, is a dark psychological thriller about a man running from his troubled past, who finds solace in the gay sanctuary of Ixtlan. All books available on Amazon. Her new website is [www.joannebodin.com](http://www.joannebodin.com).

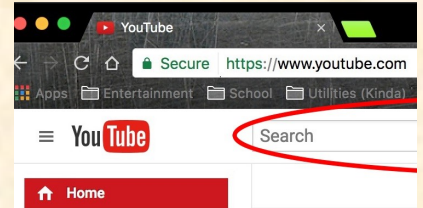
# SWW is on YOUTUBE!

## Enjoy SWW Meetings Anytime, Anywhere with Our YouTube Channel!

Have you ever missed a SouthWest Writers meeting you wanted to attend? Do you ever wish you could go back and listen to your favorite speaker again? Are you a devoted member who just can't make it to Albuquerque twice a month?

If you've said yes to any of the above, you'll be happy to hear that we now record our meetings and put them on YouTube for you to enjoy—for free!

All you need is internet access. Your first step will be to get to the YouTube homepage ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)). Once you're there, go to the search box at the top and type in "SouthWest Writers." You'll get a page with search results, some of which will be recordings of past meetings, and one of which will be the channel itself. The channel will have the SWW pen logo.

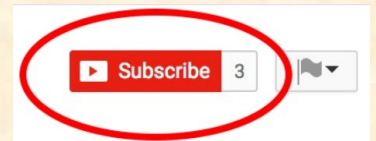


Click on that, and you'll get to the **SouthWest Writers YouTube homepage**.

Here, you'll want to look in the upper right corner for a **red button that says "Subscribe"**. If you click that, SWW will be added to your list of subscribed channels—this means you can easily find our videos at any time using the Subscriptions box on the left. Once you've subscribed, you can also tell YouTube to email you any time we upload a new video. Simply **click the bell icon to the right of the now gray box** that says, "Subscribed." This will open a small window with a checkbox. Check that, and you'll be notified every time we add new videos to the page.



It'll take you less than five minutes to subscribe to us on YouTube and have unlimited access to our growing archive of recorded meetings. See you online!



**Annual Membership in  
SouthWest Writers  
Individual: \$70  
(\$65 renewal if paid two months in advance)  
Student: \$25  
Requires proof of student status  
Outside U.S.: \$75,  
Lifetime Membership: \$750 Download the  
Sage from [www.southwestwriters.com](http://www.southwestwriters.com)**

### STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

SouthWest Writers is seeking deserving high school and college students for one-year scholarship memberships in our organization. To be eligible, an applicant must be enrolled in high school or college. If you know someone with the interest and desire to pursue a writing career or if you wish to apply yourself, contact the SWW office at

[swwriters@juno.com](mailto:swwriters@juno.com)..



## **SouthWest Sage**

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## **SOUTHWEST WRITERS MONTHLY MEETINGS**

are held at  
New Life Presbyterian Church  
5540 Eubank NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87111  
*For more information, call the SWW of-  
fice at 505-830-6034.*

*To register for classes and workshops:  
sign up at SWW meetings or register  
online at [www.southwestwriters.com](http://www.southwestwriters.com)*

Member meetings are held on the 1st Saturday of the month from 10am to noon, and on the 3rd Tuesday of the month from 7 to 9pm. There are nearly 350 members, all of whom are encouraged to come together in celebration of the art of writing. At each meeting, many members announce their recent successes and have an opportunity to network with other writers. Most meetings feature prominent speakers who bring their expertise in the arts of writing, publication, editing, and many other topics of interest to those in the profession.

Frequently after the Saturday meeting, an additional workshop session is held to provide members with training in a variety of areas.

#### *SWW Office:*

*3200 Carlisle Blvd NE, Suite 114*

*Albuquerque, NM 87110*

*phone: (505) 830-6034 e*

*-mail: [SWWriters@juno.com](mailto:SWWriters@juno.com)*

*website: [www.southwestwriters.com](http://www.southwestwriters.com)*

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## **You Can Write for SouthWest Sage**

Want to add a byline to your portfolio? We welcome submissions focusing on all aspects of researching, writing, and publishing any genre. See past issues of *SouthWest Sage* for the types of articles we publish.

Payment is in bylines and clips. Deadline is the 15th of the month prior to the next issue. Article lengths from 300-1000 words. Submissions may be edited for accuracy, readability and length.

Please send all submissions as either standard text in an email or in a Word document with Times New Roman or Calibri font in 12pt. size. Do not get fancy with formatting or fonts—the more difficult it is for me to set it into the newsletter, the less likely I am to print it.

Send questions or submissions to Rose Kern, *SouthWest Sage* Editor, [swwsage@swcp.com](mailto:swwsage@swcp.com).