



The Gabriel Writer

For The San Gabriel Writers' League
www.SGWL.net
June 2010

From Science Fiction to Paranormal

By Robert Fears



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SGWL moves from science fiction, the featured program of our May meeting, to paranormal as the subject for our June meeting. Vallie Fletcher Taylor presents our program in June and her topic is "putting the paranormal into books and stories."

Taylor's ability to deal with paranormal developed during her childhood. She grew up in San Antonio where her family enjoyed repeated visits to wonderful old buildings erected during the Spanish and Mexican eras. The city whispered historic secrets from many different cultures into Taylor's ear from every direction she turned.

Her first stories and poems were dictated to her mother and her initial journalistic efforts were published by the Highland Park Elementary School newspaper in San Antonio. While teaching history for Pasadena Independent School District and raising four children, Taylor wrote freelance for Houston area newspapers. After a move to Lake Jackson, she became a feature writer and columnist for The Brazosport Facts which serves a large segment of the Texas Coastal Region.

Upon relocation to Austin, Taylor worked for two film production companies in the research and development fields. In 1990 she bought a ranch near Hico and moved there with her mother.

"My short stories and poems were published during the early '90s, but it was not until after my mother's death that I was able to sit down long enough to write a book," Taylor states. "Since that time, my non-fiction books *Rebel Private: Front and Rear*, *Spirits of Texas* and *Eyes in the Alley* have been published."

Because of Taylor's background and varied experiences, it is felt that we will have an interesting program in June.



Sylvia dickey Smith wins SAGE Award

by Joan Hall

On Sunday, May 16, Sylvia Dickey Smith accepted the **Barbara Burnett Smith Mentoring Authors Foundation's SAGE Award** for 2010. The award is given annually to one member of Heart of Texas Sisters in Crime for outstanding service to the organization, its members, and aspiring author mentees. The family of Ms. Burnett Smith, a well-known mystery author, gives the award in her honor since her untimely death a few years ago.



Her son, W.D. Smith and grandson Tyler, who just graduated from high school, presented the award and shared memories of Barbara Burnett Smith's life and literary achievements.

The event also included Sylvia's peers "roasting" her, irreverently, as the protagonist of a round-robin type story, entitled "A Murder in Four Parts," written by Dave Ciambon, Jaime Roton, Joan Upton Hall, and Val Taylor. Then, at last, Sylvia herself got a chance to give an inspiring acceptance speech she entitled "The Wild Woman from Pay it Forward".

Minutes for May 2010 meeting

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Regular Board Meetings

are held at the Georgetown Texas Public Library at 6:00 p.m. on the day of the monthly meeting. Members are welcome....

Twenty-three members and five guests attended San Gabriel Writers' League meeting on May 6.

President Sam Holland opened the meeting by remarking on the success of members who attended the Red Poppy Festival. This was the first time SGWL authors have explored this venue.

Helen Nardecchia, treasurer, read the financial report. Carol Menchu urged members to submit their work to the San Gabriel Writer and explained that the newsletter can be accessed online in July. Hard copies will also be available for those who want them. Please let Carol know in what format you'd like to receive the newsletter.

Sylvia Dickey Smith and Joan Hall presented information about critique groups. Prior to the regular meeting, a planning session was held for those interested in forming a group. Participants gave their contact information for Sylvia and Joan to organize and get back with possible groups for meeting times and places.

Member, Jeanell Bolton announced that she had taken first place in a RWA contest in Connecticut.

Robert Fears, program chair, introduced the evening's speaker, Jason Leary. While Mr. Leary authors Science Fiction and Fantasy, his presentation was aimed at writings in all genres. A question and answer session followed his program.

Details on the SGWL regular annual workshop will be announced at a later time. No date has yet been set pending arrangements with the speaker, according to Sam Holland.

Respectfully submitted, June Venable (for Jaime Roton, Secretary)

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Programs: 2010

If You have a topic you would like to hear discussed, please email Robert Fears at Robert-fears@earthlink.net

Date	Subject/title	Speaker
June 3	Putting the Paranormal Into Novels	Vallie Taylor Paranormal Mystery Writer
July 1	TBA	

Have you ever had one of those weeks where no matter how much you planned to write, events seemed to conspire to get in your way? Your schedule, seemingly free in the morning, is suddenly full by day's end. I've had a couple of weeks in a row like that. Add to that an impending deadline on a big project I'm working on and my constant struggle against procrastination; this column did not take the form I had hoped it would. My desire was to pontificate on and on about something that would be both meaningful and inspiring, but I fear that you will be treated to something a bit, shall we say, less. I apologize in advance and ask that you treat this column like the sun- don't stare at it too long for fear of burning a hole in your retinas.

Someone once said that life is what happens while you were making other plans. I'm big at making plans. I have a corkboard on the wall above my desk where I pin plot outlines, inspirational quotes and reminders. I like to write them. I like to stare at them while I sit with my fingers on the keys so I don't have to look at the vacuous blank screen in front of me. I know I'm not the only one like this (at least that's what I have to tell myself so I can sleep at night). Whether it's fear, writer's block, a new episode of *30 Rock* or simply an inability to focus, there is a disconnect between the plan and the action.

The aforementioned life has a way of creating obstacles as well. Maybe the lawnmower stopped working and

your backyard is turning into a jungle. Or your child has a birthday party to prepare for. Or you're helping an old friend with a surprise 24th anniversary gift for his wife. When writing is not yet your profession, it tends to take a back seat to these 'here and now' circumstances.

There is no trick, no ritual, no sacred muse that can bridge the gap between plan and action. It's simply making time and putting one word in front of the other.

One of my favorite writers is J. Michael Straczynski. He created the television show *Babylon 5*, writing 92 out of the 110 episodes over its five season run. He also wrote the screenplay to the Angelia Jolie movie *Changing*. He's a legend in the science fiction community. He's said many things that are corkboard worthy, but I have this quote in front of me both at home and at work:

"You must finish what you write. You must stay with it. Find an hour, a minute; write a page a paragraph- however small the investment required to keep the dream alive. Or quite trying to convince us that you're serious about being a writer."

It's a reminder that no short story, novel or screenplay can be either good or bad until it has been completed.

Now that this column is complete, I'll leave the determination on whether it was good or not up to you. But I do thank you for sticking with me until the end, and hope that your retinas are no worse for wear.

Recap: Jason Leary by Robert Fears

Attendees at the SGWL May meeting heard Jason Leary describe how to write science fiction and fantasy. Leary, author of *Harbingers of the Apocalypse* and *Knights Blood: The Hope of Humanity*, distributed hand-outs which contained an outline of his lecture. Using slides to illustrate his lecture, he revealed the secrets of great storytelling to be plot, characters and research.

Leary said that steps in plotting out a story are brainstorming, breaking the back of the story, story structure and outline. He explained each of the steps in detail and then discussed how characters for the story are developed. Value of proper and complete research was stressed and he concluded his presentation by saying,

"Write, Write, Write.

In discussing the writing task Leary emphasized, "Pick a time each day to write and then stick to the schedule. Push through the first draft - then fix it. Don't be afraid to let other people read your work. Don't overlook the tremendous benefits of belonging to a critique group. Then WRITE!!

Jason Leary has four more books in progress and their titles are *Knight's Blood: Alexandra and the Argonauts*, *Poseidon's Eye*, *The Corp* and *Harbingers of the Apocalypse: Rapture*.

Nebraska—What a Place for a Conference by Joan Upton Hall

Talk about a change of scene. When the **Nebraska Writers Guild** asked me to come there from Texas to their Spring Conference, I looked forward to meeting people like **Sally Walker**, the president, and Charley Vogel, the vice president, that I'd conversed with by email. But I underestimated what a fun group I would meet and the unique meeting site. Unlike most state parks which are rustic, the **Mahoney State Park**, out of Omaha, possesses an enormous lodge. It houses a large restaurant (with excellent food), various conference rooms, and guest rooms with sleeping lofts and fireplaces.

The guild members welcomed me with my Texas drawl like a long lost friend. Attentive and scholarly while I was presenting my sessions, several of them loosened up fast to have fun in the evening. After hours we circled

our overstuffed chairs under the soaring vaulted ceiling like scouts around a campfire and took turns telling the personal stories behind what we write.

By the number of that organization who subscribed to **PageTurners**, I expect quite a few will read this article with the rest of you who have been subscribers for a while.



Member websites

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Website: <http://www.annamaebell.com>
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Margie Boyd

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Jamie Roton aka Lillian Grey blog

<http://lilliangrey.wordpress.com/>

Sylvia Dickey Smith:

www.sylviadickeysmith.com

Jane Thompson:

www.aboutbipolarbook.com

Jackie Woolley:

<http://booksbyjackie.com>

A reader's musings by Carol Menchu

I've been thinking about thinking of what to write this month. There is nothing profound or annoying enough to fuss about.



I did read an interesting book by a man called Robert vanGulik—a Dutchman, who translated the Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee, a famous Chinese historical figure Di Renjie (c. 630–c. 700), magistrate and statesman of the Tang court.

During the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) in China, a "folk novel" was written set in former times, but filled with anachronisms.

Van Gulik found in the 18th century Di Gong An ["Cases of Judge Dee"] an original tale dealing with three cases simultaneously, and, which was unusual among Chinese mystery tales, a plot that for the most part lacked an overbearing supernatural element which could alienate Western readers.

He translated it into English and had it published under the title *Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*.

van Gulik went on to write a series of mysteries with Judge Dee as his protagonist, one of which I read a hundred years ago and forgot I have.

The one I did read now is really not that different from the mysteries I usually (constantly) read, just set in a different time and certainly with some interesting customs.

The good thing about these stories, is that now I get to go to China, a big change from the British Isles—which is where a good fifty percent of my reading takes place. So, if you try to reach me and the phone rings and rings and rings, I will be in the 600-700s, chasing down criminals with Judge Dee.

7 rules for conscious writing From Fuel@writewellu.com

One of my clients, Laura West, is highly plugged into her creative process, among other things. Managing energy is key for her to run her business at the high level of growth she and her business are experiencing.

It's the same for writing. The more conscious we are of our process, the easier, better, stronger it is. And most of the time we get in our own way. We'd probably be able to create and write more easily if it weren't for our own bad selves.

The following 7 rules for conscious writing are loosely based on what Laura created for her own energy management process. Think about how you can apply it to your writing - and get out of your own way.

- 1. Stop doing what you're doing.** Do you write about the same topic over and over? Do you write with the same sentence structure? Do you start out each writing piece the same? Do you agonize every time that no one will like this? Consider stopping that.
- 2. Do something different.** Try a new technique. Play with a strategy you've never used before. See what happens.
- 3. Do the opposite of what you think you're supposed to do.** First, figure out what you think you're supposed to do, and then do the opposite. I guarantee your writing will be fresher and more powerful as a result.
- 4. Do something crazy, fun, unexpected.** Be outlandish. Take risks. I've found that any time I or any of my students and clients take a risk in their writing, the resulting piece is far and above the best they've ever produced.
- 5. Do what you think you possibly can't do.** This falls in line with rule #4. First, figure out what you think it is you couldn't possibly do, and then... do it! "What if..." your writing and your writing process.

6. Lead. Get out of the mindset that says "You can't do that. People won't like it. Play it safe." Push those voices to the side and be the leader. Do things differently. Write differently. Break rules. Make your own rules. So what if it's never been done. Be the leader.

7. Love yourself. Stop with the whole inner critic thing you've got going on. Love yourself as a writer. And just.... write.

Be aware of your own attitudes in writing and in the creative process. Notice them. Change those that are necessary. And write anyway.

Want to invent the next iPod? Then don't try too hard. We may be able to train our minds to be better at generating ideas, according to recent thinking on how we think, and often the best way to foster a brilliant idea is not to push it.

Nobel laureate physicist Richard Feynman used to visit a topless bar, sip a soda and scribble quantum mechanics on a napkin. Einstein's theory of special relativity came after he imagined himself a child riding on a beam of light.

And Greg Swartz, director of innovation at the golf company Ping, says he has come up with 36 ideas for better tees and loftier drives by looking at the stars. After immersing himself in his subject matter, he'll go to his backyard at night and let his mind settle into what he calls a "hyper state" when it is firing on all cylinders. He says it's as if he can almost feel the rush of gamma rays that are said to emanate from the right hemisphere when an idea is born.

Brain scans have revealed that when you think you're not thinking, your unconscious mind may be doing wind sprints searching for a perfect solution. As a result, answers sometimes seem to appear out of nowhere. In reality, that "nowhere" is beneath your consciousness. In studies, these out-of-the-blue insights are more frequently associated with novel, creative solutions than those derived from concentrating hard, according to cognitive neuroscientist Mark Jung-Beeman, of Northwestern University.

Getting to "aha," according to some theories, is more like a cranial relay race than a light bulb switching on. When you concentrate, you activate the brain's prefrontal lateral areas, which govern analytical thought — the so-called executive network. But more insightful, nuanced answers often come when the baton is passed to the medial area, which is associated with creativity — what used to be called right-brain thinking. For great outside-the-box ideas, you want both networks lit up, says

Kalina Christoff, a neuroscientist at the University of British Columbia. But you don't get to fish in those deeper regions just because you want to. In fact, the more you press for it, the more likely you'll get your boots stuck in the executive mode. The best way to access this state is to let your mind wander freely as you do something repetitive like washing dishes — or playing pingpong, as Google encourages its in-house nerds to do.

The brain has myriad plans bouncing around waiting for an opportunity to get out, explains Jordan Peterson, a University of Toronto professor. But when we concentrate, the brain suppresses territory on our mental map. It stifles sensations like hunger and fatigue, but it also tells all the plans, thoughts and ideas in our subconscious to shut up. That's why we might be our most creative when we're half asleep and "all those little plans get a chance to talk to each other," says Peterson.

Not everyone is convinced by this theory. Jay Walker, founder of Priceline.com, finds it a bit mushy. "I'm reluctant to believe there is a state of mind that's better for ideation or that the subconscious plays a strong role," he says. Walker now heads Walker Digital, a Stamford, Connecticut, research lab specializing in network problems whose members have produced 300 patents to date. Walker Digital's technique, he says, is endlessly asking questions, employing rigorous analysis to narrow down solutions. "The reality is, if you look, you will find solutions," he says.

Working on a novel, short story or poetry is no different. Sometimes we need to take a break and do something else, like do something childlike—color in a coloring book, plant a garden, wash dishes, go for a walk, go fishing or some other completely different activity and let your subconscious mind work on your ideas or problem with your writing. Usually, when you least expect it, you will get the "aha moment." Be sure to have your notebook or tape recorder handy at all times, just in time for that "aha moment."

Poppy festival plants seeds of interest

by Joan Upton Hall

Led by our **President, Sam Holland**, eight intrepid authors from **San Gabriel Writers' League: Ann Bell, Margie Boyd, Julie Hannah, Helen Nardecchia, William Russeth, Sylvia Dickey Smith, June Venable**, and I, **Joan Upton Hall**, held up a booth at the Georgetown, Texas annual Poppy Festival. And "held up" is exactly what I mean, considering the way the wind blew those two days.

In the process though, the tent as a whole sold over 75 books and handed out over 100 brochures, bookmarks and flyers for the organization, not to mention each individual author's handouts. It surprised us how many people didn't know San Gabriel Writers League from a rat-catchers' union.

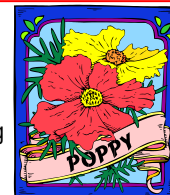
We also confirmed a few things some of us either knew or suspected: (1) More than one author at a signing can generate friendly conversation with the audience better than one and thus stimulate sales. (2) When a customer expresses interest in a certain topic, and one writer recommends another, everybody benefits. (3) An attitude of camaraderie not only attracts visitors to the tent, but also encourages people to buy.

Besides all that, as the old saying goes, "Time flies when

you're having fun."

It always surprises me how far something can spread from a conversation without your realizing the other person cared much. I enjoyed talking with a young Baylor University student and seeing his interest in my two nonfiction historical books, *Grand Old Texas Theaters That Won't Quit* and *Just Visitin' Old Texas Jails*. But when the young man, **Jeremy Rinard**, contacted me later to say he wanted to feature both titles in his final journalism project, the first issue of a monthly newsletter called **Texas Back Roads** that he has now launched, I felt honored and amazed. (He's just getting started, but you can email him at Jeremy_Rinard@Texas-Back-Roads.com if you like.)

I'm sure each of my fellow SGWL members have stories to tell about connections made. For me, it was cool to have two former classmates from Llano High School stop by. Another surprise was a woman with the last name of "Upton" who made it a point to find me and compare genealogy with me. We didn't find any long-lost connections, but who knows?



1. Can Writers Get Creative With Facts? From WritersDigest.com by Art Spikol

Is it ever OK to get creative with the facts in nonfiction?

If you think honesty's the only policy, here are some gray areas to consider.

When a congressman shouted "You lie" during a nationally televised speech by President Obama in September, the gasp was heard around the globe. That phrase is an insult. And because it is, the verb lie is commonly replaced by *misspeak*, *exaggerate*, *inflate*, *mislead*, *misrepresent*, *twist*, *obfuscate*, *make excuses*, *commit perjury* and, the latest way of saying it, *spin*.

Everybody lies. Hardly anybody admits it, which is more lying. But lying comes in many guises, ranging from the polite "I love your hat," to the carefully worded "I did not have sex with that woman," to the blatant "It's not a Ponzi scheme."

I once got a call from a guy I'd interviewed for a magazine article. He told me he'd just been hired (after two years of unemployment) by the very company he'd criticized in the interview. My article-in-progress quoted him, but he explained that if his words appeared in print, he'd surely be fired. He didn't want to change his opinion; he just wanted to never have given it. He was almost in tears.

Talk about material for The Ethicist. I weighed what I'd been asked to do. The easier solution was to print the comment, let the chips fall and hope the piece would be another step on my way to becoming editor of The New York Times. On the other hand, the guy had a family and his back was against the wall, and while his quote was provocative, it was not essential to my story.

A good test for dilemmas like this is to ask yourself how your decision would affect your article, your readers and your sleep (and how you'll feel when you wake up). So, I pulled the quote. I've never regretted it.

But what I did was tantamount to lying. And I never wondered, until now, whether my source had lied to me in that game-changing phone call.

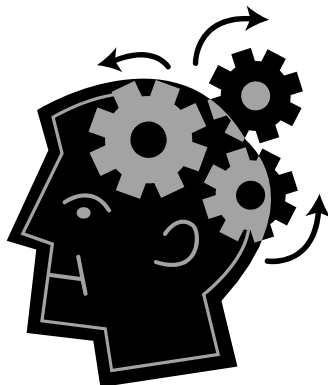
When you exaggerate on your résumé, that's another kind of lie. You might say that putting your best (or, more grammatically correct, better) foot forward is the same as not mentioning the missing toes on the other foot. In fact, the recent economic climate has created a growth in outright lies. An article in the *Philadelphia Business Journal* recently reported that Know It All Background Research Services, a Bensalem, Pa. company that investigates such things, found twice as many discrepancies in employment applications in 2009 than 2008.

Of course, this is not to say that these techniques are new. In fact, some oldies but goodies are falling by the wayside as times change. I heard about one writer who

used to use a pay phone to land tough interviews: When the subject said "hello," he'd dump a bunch of quarters into the slot, and after all those dings the subject wouldn't have the heart to hang up. Lying, no, but misleading nonetheless.

Salespeople lie. Lawyers lie. No surprises there. Then there's sex: If nobody lied, no one would ever get laid, let alone married. (And, of course, no one would stay married. But don't get me started.)

Without lies, narcs couldn't infiltrate and writers couldn't write exposés. Or restaurant reviews. Or much else with an edge.



Woodward lied. Bernstein lied. But not to their readers. They broke what was probably the biggest story of all time, and probably lied every day to do it—about what they knew, when they knew it and who they learned it from. But what finally appeared in print was worth it. That is known as the end that justifies the means: the public's right to know.

Before we get too far along, let me stress that as a writer—unless you're writing fiction—you have no business distorting the truth, calling fiction truth or misleading your readers. Writers caught doing so have left an embarrassing trail of high-profile evidence in their wake. Take former *Washington Post* staffer Janet Cooke, who famously was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for a fabricated story about an **8-year-old drug addict who turned out not to exist**. The Pulitzer was subsequently withdrawn, but the damage was done.

Then, of course, there's former *New York Times* writer Jayson Blair, who **falsified and plagiarized in dozens of pieces**—destroying his career, causing heads to roll at the paper and giving it a once-in-a-lifetime black eye.

These stories should be enough to keep anyone honest. It's easy enough to do: Tell the truth, hang a "BE FAIR" sign above your keyboard, listen to your gut and check your facts. But in my decades of reporting, I've seen plenty of instances that prove that's easier said than done. So, here are some gray areas I'd advise writers to contemplate.

Next month: # 2

Using composites; Being subjective vs being objective; Finding a way to say what nobody's saying; Shielding your sources; Paraphrasing

Next next month: # 3

Getting the interview you need to pitch the story; Working under cover; Interpreting the facts; Being paid to lie; One last word.



Who said ... "Learn as much by writing as by reading."

Answer on page 10

The impact echoed in Penn's hollow chamber. He had never been in a fight before, not really, and he never thought that his first real fight would be with his best friend.

Penn fell to the ground but sprang up swinging his pencil thin arms at Calbert Caliber. There was surprising fury in his blows, but it had an unsurprising effect. A pen with pencil thin arms isn't going to do much damage to a letter opener.

"We don't have time for this!" Cal yelled as he blocked another of Penn's furiously feeble blows. "We've got to get out of here!"

Cal's ex wife, Marcy, lay unconscious at his feet. They had followed a tip from the Lady of the Cake and found Marcy embedded in a stone deep in the spine of *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Once Marcy was freed, the trio was surrounded by jumbled ring of mismatched words that disappeared once they formed sentences, squeezing in ever tighter. Each word spoke its name, filling the air with confusion. Cal had deduced the only way out was to kill the English language, a plan with which Penn took umbrage.

It also probably didn't help that they entered through *Macbeth*.

"They're just words, Cal, just tools. They have no mind of their own. Whoever is manipulating them is the true villain," Penn said. "We can't kill innocent words, there's got to be another way!"

Cal slapped Penn a couple of times with the flat of his blade. "We're in trouble, Penn, and you can't write your way out of this; there is no other way, *period*."

From the jumbling mumbling cacophony of words, there came a faint "Nancy jumped to," and then the three words fell.

Realization washed over Penn's face like the approaching dawn. When Cal said 'period' it prematurely ended a forming sentence, which meant that there was a way out after all. "Punctuation!" he said. "That's the answer!"

Before Cal could ask what he meant, Penn shouted, "[]!" A group of words in front of him stopped, frozen within the spinning ring of words, trapped in a parenthetical snare.

"Grab Marcy and follow me!" Penn said. Cal lifted his wife over his shoulder and watched as Penn made a path through the words.

";! [] :!" he said. Amid the punctuation, a gap formed, and Penn and Cal dove through it. Once free, they continued to run, out of the spine, out from between the pages of *Macbeth*, and out onto the bookshelf. They both wheezed as they tried to catch their breath. Marcy stirred as Cal placed her on a bookend. "Cal? Is that

you? What are you doing here?"

Before Cal could answer, Penn asked "Do you have the key?"

"Penn," Cal said. "That's rude. Are you alright?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so. A bit dizzy."

"Great," Cal said. "Can we have the key?"

"What key? She asked.

"Y'know, The one that will open anything; the Outline Key."

"What do you want that thing for? I'm afraid I don't have it. It was stolen months ago"

"WHAT? What are we going to do now?" Penn asked. "The Post It Scroll with the Notes of Need said that we need a *key to an entrance not remembered*."

"Calm down, Penn," Cal said.

"Hey, guys?" Marcy said, trying to get their attention.

"I can't calm down! I'll be trashed for sure!"

Marcy tried again. "Guys, are you seeing what I'm seeing...?"

"It's not like all hope is lost..."

"Hello? I'm talking over here."

"All hope is lost!"

"HEY!" Marcy yelled, which got their attention. "Could that be what you're looking for?" Penn and Cal followed where Marcy was pointing, toward a softcover copy of Alexander Keys' *The Forgotten Door*.

Penn stood in silence for a moment. "Huh," he said. "Clever."



Next: Through the Forgotten Door!

All that has come before
Is written down and posted at
www.samholland.com/penn

A Presidential haiku by Sam Holland



school daze are over
now time for summer reading
and summer writing





Special Interest Groups

Story Spinners critique group is now closed to membership. When a spot becomes available, we will again have information in *The Gabriel Writer*.

The Williamson County Coroners is a mystery/suspense group and participants must have novels in progress. The meetings are held at the 10:30 a.m. at the Red Poppy Café in the George-town Library.

Last Writes Critique Group—FULL

Meets (usually) at 7 PM, 2nd & 4th Wed. each month, at Oaks at Wildwood Clubhouse. Novels in progress, varied genres. Membership currently full. Contact: JmuHall@aol.com

Novel Crafters is Full right now, but welcomes a Waiting List

Meets every other Thursday on the second floor of the George-town Library in a private room. Contact is Mary Stafford at marylynn@mstafford.net

Quixotic Quills critique group represents varied interests. Our group writes historical novels, short stories and memoirs. Meetings are usually on the second and fourth Thursday of each month unless we reschedule because of holidays. We meet at 7:00 p.m. at the Monument Café. Contact is Sharon Lyle, 512-639-1162, iwritecozies@gmail.com. Currently, we are closed to new members.

If you are interested in joining a critique group, contact Joan Upton Hall (jmuhall@aol.com) or Sylvia Dickey Smith (sds@suddenlink.com)

What should fiction writers blog about?

By Jane Friedman from Writer's Digest

I often receive the following question at conferences and via e-mail and blog comments:

It seems easier for nonfiction writers to offer free content through their blogs (e.g. how-to tips). Could you share tips on how fiction writers can make that work?

There are many ways to approach this, which ought to be guided by your own interests, strengths, and eccentricities, but here are a few things to think about.

1. Serialize your work—which can be done in many mediums, not just a blog. [Scott Sigler](#) and [Seth Harwood](#) are the most well-known models when it comes to audio serialization.

2. Share interesting information or thoughts related to research or themes in your work. Writers, by their very nature, usually read, observe, and discuss some very fascinating topics. You can blog about these things.

3. Be creative in how you present information related to yourself or your characters. For example, YA author Megan McCafferty started a blog based on her own diaries from when she was a teenager. She calls it the [\[retro\]blog](#). Another YA author, [John Green](#), has a YouTube video series that's wildly popular (but not necessarily about his fiction work).

4. Write book reviews or do interviews with other writers about their work, the writing process, etc.

5. Partner with other authors for a group blog. Here's an example of a good one: [The Whine Sisters](#)

I'm sure I don't have the best list, though—I'm always searching for novelists as well as aspiring writers who are doing something interesting online.

What novelists or aspiring fiction writer blogs do you follow? Have you seen anyone with a ground-breaking strategy? Who would you like to see interviewed here on their blogging strategy?

In these later years ... by Neil Greene

Now and then we fan the flame,
Of love that we once knew.
I can hardly climb the mountain,
Seldom swim the blue,
But when you lend a helping hand,
That seems to pull us through.

In these later years,,,
I'm just holding on to loving you.

And if by chance we might be granted,
One more year or two,
And if we can just keep the spark,
Of love that's kept us true,
Without you here beside me,
I don't know what I would do

But, in these later years,,,
I'm just holding on and loving you.

Most of all I thank you,
For the faith that pulled us through,
I'll be more than happy if,

We have another year or two.
We know we can't relive the past,
It's not what we should do.

So throughout these later years,,,
I'll just keep on loving you.

Throughout the years that we have left,,,
I'll just keep on loving you



There were many wonderful comments here last week that I plan to address. The first comes from Linda Adams, on [The Essential Components of an \(Unpublished\) Author's Website](#):

I should note though that there's a difference between a non-fiction writer and a fiction writer. When I started seeing terms like platform, my first thought was, "What about the novelists?" A novel often doesn't have a platform. The advice in the post seems more suited to non-fiction authors.

- It's true that nonfiction writers are different from novelists when it comes to pitching your work. Nonfiction writers almost always have to prove that they have authority/credentials, as well as a platform, that will help them market and promote the book effectively to a target audience. Nonfiction writers essentially put forth a business plan explaining the market need for the book. Novelists don't do this at the outset; the decision usually comes down to the quality of the writing and the storytelling.

However, what separates successful writers from NOT-successful writers (no matter what the genre), is platform, or visibility to a readership. If a novelist is unable or unwilling to develop a platform for his writing career, he will find that his books don't sell and the publishers lose interest fast. A novelist should never rely on the publisher to make his book sell.

Here are a few ways that fiction writers need to start targeting their audience and developing a platform. (And all of these are discussed in [Get Known Before the Book Deal](#) by Christina Katz, which has a special chapter on fiction-writing platforms.)

Look at how and where you write. How have you developed your fiction-writing chops? Through critique groups? Online workshops? Creative writing programs? Lounging at Starbucks? Whatever writing community you participate in, that leads to a part of your platform. For example, if you are a graduate of an MFA program, that makes you part of the MFA community, and gives you a way to build visibility with that community. If you are an expert critiquer in online workshop settings, and word spreads about you, then you're building a platform. Think about your interactions with other writers and how you

network. These can provide the seeds.

- **Community/regional presence.** Also think about your interactions within your community or region, which may or may not be connected to writing. Can you establish programs relating to reading, writing, or the themes in your work? Most writers are passionate about something connected to words; are you involved in your community, work for a greater cause, and have visibility that way? Usually the passions in our life come out in our writing, and vice versa.



- **Special relationships.** Maybe you were mentored or coached by a notable writer or someone in the community. Or you have connections with people in the media (whether family or friends or colleagues), or with other influencers and tastemakers. While I don't suggest you take advantage of such relationships, having them can greatly help you when it comes time to think of your platform and spreading the word about your work. Who do you think will be willing to help you? And how can you offer something in return?

- **Look to your work.** What themes, topics, or things are explored in your work? It's likely you will return to the same themes or topics throughout your writing career. (E.g., if you write about small-town life today, it's likely you'll still be writing about small-town life in a few years.) Becoming known as someone who explores certain themes or topics in life can make you interesting and visible to particular audiences. And that's what platform-building is all about: Knowing what audiences will be most interested in your work, and always thinking about how you can be more visible to them, and reach out to them in meaningful ways.

I would love to hear from aspiring and established novelists about what platform-building strategies have worked for you. MJ Rose (a columnist for WD magazine) often says that successful marketing strategies all depend on you and your book, and I agree. Some things that work for one author may not work for another. But it's helpful to see what's being done, to help spark new ideas, and to better understand your own position and strengths.

Even more bizarre packaging warnings again from Sam Holland

On a can of air freshener:
For use by trained personnel only.

On a bottle of baby lotion:
Keep away from children.

On a pair of socks bought in Egypt:
Do not wash.

On a birthday card for a one year old:
Not suitable for children aged under 36 months or less.

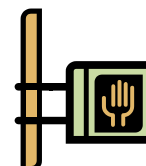
On a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle:
Some assembly required.

Directions for mosquito repellent:
Replacing battery: replace old battery with a new one.

On a can of pepper spray used for self defense:
May irritate eyes.

On a packet of cashew nut pieces:
Warning: This product may contain residue of nuts.

On a Frisbee:
Warning: may contain small parts.



Ask the Book Doctor: Flabby middles



Note about this issue of the Book Doctor: I thoroughly enjoyed Jason Leary's presentation at our meeting May 6th. When talked about story structure at our last meeting, he recommended Joseph Campbell's book, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. That's great, but may I suggest starting with a book that is more user-friendly to a modern audience, and more exactly tuned to writers. In his book, *The Writer's Journey*, Christopher Vogler applies Campbell's principles as they apply to novels and screenplays and gives a wealth of familiar examples.

I also offer the following short advice that I once gave to a writer asking about "flabby middles," the most common place a story is likely to break down.

Dear Doc,

Some of us in my critique group have flabby middles—in our novels, that is. We have no trouble hooking our readers and setting up conflict. We can even create endings readers will cheer for. You'll be flying through the first 50 pages or so, and then you start to think that it would be more fun cleaning the fridge.

We have seen the same problem even in a few published books, though it's hard to explain why. The story is still moving all right, but you really don't care until it starts picking up speed again close to the end.

Any ideas about how we can tone up our middles—without cutting all the boring parts and making the book too skinny to call it a novel?

Signed—Flabby Middle

Dear Middle:

You're not alone. This is one of the most common failure points in a novel or screenplay. To your audience, it's like trying to wade through cold molasses, and when it happens during a movie, the sale of popcorn goes up. My best recommendation is for each of your writing buddies to buy a copy of Christopher Vogler's *Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screen Writers*. I'll give you a few of the main ideas, but to make the concept your own, you'll need to read the book, apply it, and analyze each other's work by it.

Think of your novel as these parts: Act I sets up the story and initiates the main action; Act II shows a chain of scenes building up tension to a crisis; and Act III shows the climax and ending.

Too often writers seem to think the middle (about half the length of the whole book) only needs to fill up space, but please notice I didn't say a "series or string of events" (a flaw called "episodic" scenes). In a well-crafted story, each scene builds on the last, raising the stakes up to the end.

Every story needs to keep up tension, even if it's in a character's head. Vogler offers a wealth of examples and covers variations for specific genres. He says, "The placement of the crisis or Supreme Ordeal depends on the needs of the story and the tastes of the storyteller."

Good luck in tightening that middle—Doc Joan

Who said ... answer Lord Acton



John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, 1st Baron Acton, KCVO, DL (10 January 1834 – 19 June 1902), known as **Sir John Dalberg-Acton, 8th Bt** from 1837 to 1869 and usually referred to simply as **Lord Acton**, was an English historian, the only son of Sir Ferdinand Dalberg-Acton, 7th Baronet⁽¹⁾ and grandson of the Neapolitan admiral, Sir John Acton, 6th Baronet. He was born in Naples.

Although not a notable traveller, Acton spent much time in the chief intellectual centres of Europe and in the United States and numbered among his friends such men as Montalembert, Tocqueville, Fustel de Coulanges, Bluntschli, von Sybel and Ranke. In 1855, he was appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Salop.⁽¹⁾ A year later, he was attached to Lord Granville's mission to Moscow as British representative at the coronation of Alexander II of Russia.

Acton took a great interest in America, considering its Federal structure the perfect guarantor of individual

liberties. During the American Civil War, his sympathies lay entirely with the Confederacy, for their defense of States' Rights against a centralized government that, by all historical precedent, would inevitably turn tyrannical. His notes to Gladstone on the subject helped sway many in the British government to sympathize with the South. After the South's surrender, he wrote to Robert E. Lee that "I mourn for the stake which was lost at Richmond more deeply than I rejoice over that which was saved at Waterloo."

Lord Acton became ill in 1901 and died on 19 June 1902 in Tegernsee. He was succeeded in the title by his son, Richard Lyon-Dalberg-Acton, 2nd Baron Acton. His extensive library, formed for use and not for display and composed largely of books full of his own annotations, was bought immediately after his death by Andrew Carnegie and presented to John Morley, who forthwith gave it to the University of Cambridge.

Contests

Spring Story Contest: <http://www.narrativemagazine.com/node/86956>

Houston Writers Guild: <http://www.houstonwritersguild.org/Contests.htm>

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- Any awards this book has won?
- (up to 100 words) Description or synopsis OR blurbs from other writers, publishers, reviewers, etc., and remember to credit these quotes.

If you are interested in joining a critique group, contact Joan Upton Hall (jmuHall@aol.com) or Sylvia Dickey Smith (sds@suddenlink.com)

The first meeting demonstrated how many people are looking for a critique group. By the end of the meeting, the possibility of the immediate formation of three new groups was recognized. Organizational Meetings have been set for May 19th and May 20th at the Georgetown Library and interested writers have been notified.

Do demons bedevil your writing? Similar, confusing words? Grammar, punctuation, or capitalization rules? "The Demystifier" will clear up the mystery (primary reference unless otherwise noted: Garner, Bryan A. *Dictionary of Modern American Usage*. N.Y.: Oxford University Press). Address questions and comments to freelance editor, **Joan Upton Hall, PO Box 179, Hutto, TX 78634**, or email: jmuHall@aol.com. More problems like the one above are demystified in the booklet, *50 Writers' Tips*. Find a few of them at "books, etc." on website: www.JoanUptonHall.com.

Demystifying Writers' Demons©

Commas with adjectives - when?

When two or more adjectives modify the same noun, separate with a comma.

"When I heard of his ill-fortune, an ugly, vengeful delight struck me." (The delight is both ugly and vengeful.)

"A kinder, more generous man than Mr. Kincaid I have never met." (The man is both kinder and generous, but the word "more" modifies "generous"-hence no comma there.)

When the adjectives don't modify the noun in the same way, they don't need a comma.

"A famous rock star registered at our hotel." (The star is a rock star and also famous, but he's not "a famous and rock star.")

"She wore a pale pink dress to the show." (The word "pale" qualifies "pink" rather than the noun "dress.") (See how the next example works in a similar way?)

"He chose a large geometric print tie." (The tie is not large or geometric; the



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June 3
SGWL meeting
is at the

Georgetown
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gather at 6:30
meeting
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