

# The Gabriel Writer

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

May 2012

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## Ann Seaman at the May Meeting

**A brief description of the talk would be that, in both fiction and non-fiction, we collect a lot more information than we can use. But we have to do it, because that's the only way to find the little details that are the storytelling elements—especially in non-fiction. I will also talk about my experiences doing research and interviews.**

Ann Rowe Seaman was born in Austin, Texas in 1946. She began publishing articles in 1973 on a wide variety of topics, starting with the popular music scene in her home town. She has written, edited, and produced materials for magazines and newspapers, and authored TV and film narrations. Her articles and columns on music, film and television, natural history, international business, anthropology, and other subjects have appeared in publications such as the Los Angeles Times and World Trade Magazine. She has served as Public Relations Director for Austin-Travis County MHMR, editor of campus publications at the University of Southern California, freelance editor of fiction and nonfiction books, and editor of TERRA, the magazine of Los Angeles County's Natural History Museum. Her publications and video productions have won national awards, including ones from such organizations as the American Association of Museums and the Broadcasters' Promotion Association. Her 1999 biography of Jimmy Swaggart won the Texas Institute of Letters' Carr P. Collins Award for Best Nonfiction book. Her biography of Madalyn Murray O'Hair was released in summer 2005. She is currently working on several non-fiction projects. A fourth-generation Texan, she holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at Austin and a master's degree from the University of Southern California. She is married with four grown children and divides her time between Austin and Los Angeles.



### Selected Works

True Crime Biography America's Most Hated Woman: The Life and Gruesome Death of Madalyn Murray O'Hair

*"...structured like a movie thriller...well balanced and thoroughly researched biography of a very complex woman."*—Secular Nation Biography

Swaggart: The Unauthorized Biography Of An American Evangelist

*"...remarkable...a mirror on the lurching changes in religion, sex and media in the late 20th century."*—Chicago Tribune

## Oral History Workshop Tuesday, May 7, 2012

**Dr. Stephen Sloan**, a public historical specializing in twentieth-century U.S. history. Environmental history, and community history. He received a bachelor's degree in accounting and a master's degree in history from Baylor, and earned a doctorate in public history and U.S. history from Arizona State University.

**6:30-7:00 p.m.**— Oral History as an Approach  
**7:20-8:20 p.m.**— Oral History Interviewing

**7:00-7:20 p.m.**— Practicing Oral History  
**8:20-8:30 p.m.**— Questions and Answers



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## April 2012 Minutes

The **April 5, 2012** Meeting of the San Gabriel Writers' League was called to order by **President DJ Heinrich** at 7:00 p.m.

**DJ** welcomed attendees and visitors, especially the students and parents attending the Hill Country Book Festival Anthology Rollout.

**Minutes** for the March 1, 2012 meeting were accepted as submitted.

**Treasurer's Report** was given by **Kayla Marnach**.

### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS:

All students participating in the HCBF writing contest are Honorary SGWL members for the next year.

### OLD BUSINESS:

No old business.

### NEW BUSINESS:

**Fall Workshop – DJ Heinrich** said volunteers are needed to help with the workshop.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS AND SUCCESSES:

**Sylvia Dickey Smith's** blog, [www.writingstrongwomen.com](http://www.writingstrongwomen.com), won Best blog 2011 by Press Women of Texas.

**Janet Kilgore** announced an offer from the Writers League of Texas to give SGWL the same discount as WLT members to attend their Agent's Conference in Austin in June. Complete details will be in the May SGWL newsletter

**Kayla Marnach** introduced the stu-

dents who participated in the HCBF writing contest and announced copies of the anthologies containing their work were on sale at the meeting for \$8. Several students read excerpts from their entries. Afterwards, the meeting was opened up to questions on writing from the students. There was good participation on the part of both students and SGWL members, resulting in lively discussion.

**DJ Heinrich** adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Janet L. Kilgore, Secretary

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## Upcoming Meetings

June	Martin Shelton on oral presentations
July	Ginger Mynatt on travel writing
August	Linda Lipscomb on writing children's books
September	Workshop
October	Mike Kearby on westerns for young adults
November	Louis Fairchild on writing oral histories
December	Party

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## News

**June Venable** has a new email address: [jev253@suddenlink.net](mailto:jev253@suddenlink.net)

**Jeanell Bolton** says: "Good news! New York agent Liza Dawson is interested in *Princess of Bosque Bend*. She spent an hour on the phone with me last month and asked me to do some revisions, which I sent off to her in two weeks. Then she asked for further revisions that went deeper into the characters. This time she gave me a page by page written review, which helped a lot. I'm thrilled that she's not asking me to change the story, but make it better. There's no commitment from her yet, but even if she doesn't sign me, I'll have profited from the experience."



### Making Decisions

If you had a conflict or if you just happened to make the unfortunate decision to forego the April San Gabriel Writers' League Meeting, you missed an incredible evening! The entire room was packed with outstanding young writers who were the winners of the recent Hill Country Book Festival (HCBF) Writing Competition, plus their families, teachers, and friends. Not only did these talented students share some of their considerable writing skills by reading short segments from their essays, but they also directed some very astute questions to our seasoned writers. Our current SGWL Members were kept on their toes, and it wasn't fully clear by the end of the night which group learned the most! During the event, the students affixed their signatures to the anthologies that held their latest work. They were officially Published Authors, something most of us didn't accomplish until, er, later in our lives, if at all!

The 2011 themes for the 3rd–8th Grade and 9th–12th Grade Writing Competition categories respectively were "Making Good Choices" and "The Art of Decision Making." As I was reading through a number of the essays, I was impressed with the insight and maturity expressed by the students regarding the importance of sound decision-making.

In the context of my years of aviation experience and technical research, I found that the critical safety components include, not surprisingly, mechanical flying skills and proper action; constant crew situation awareness (vigilance); and crew resource management/communication. However, the most important element that helps ensure aviation safety and success is appropriate decision-making. In fact, I found in my research that errors in judgment/decision-making to be actually highly *predictive* of aircraft accidents.

It seems obvious that pilots must make accurate decisions in real-world operational settings, adjust their tactics according to scenario demands, and do so without compromising precious seconds that can mean the difference literally between life and death. That's what they're paid to do. Besides, if they're not particularly good at this, there's an excellent chance that they'll be the first ones to the scene of an accident!

But wait a second! In an aircraft emergency, pilots are typically taught to remain calm, take long, deep breaths, and DO NOTHING! Say what? In decision-making—especially those that are emotionally-charged—one of the bright young authors put it this way, "Always stop, assess, and then choose." Indeed! The reason for this, of course, is that more bad things than good can happen if one rushes too much. All of the corporate aircraft that I flew had two engines. If on takeoff, for instance, one of those engines fails or catches fire, one can only compound the situation by reacting too quickly and incorrectly shutting down the good engine. Even though it's usually easy to detect the loss of an engine because of the aircraft yaw, the problem could also be a runaway engine—the "good" engine is delivering too much power. Further, an engine fire light may be an erroneous indication. Long story short, we were taught to wait until at least 400 feet above the ground before addressing the problem. Did this mean that we didn't analyze the situation as best we could by glancing at additional indications and also going through the emergency checklist steps mentally? Of course not! Besides, on takeoff with two engines 400 feet came

quickly!

In today's dynamic and competitive world, one of the most important methods of reacting—or better yet, *pro-acting!*—includes *timely* decision-making. Although *rapid* decision-making can also be valuable, it is obviously more imperative to make the *right* decision. Therefore, it is always advantageous to have a reasonable number of facts before "plunging in."

For those of us who "just have to do something," remember that even indecision is a decision! Sometimes it just makes more sense to decide *not* to decide, at least not until we sufficiently weigh the pros and cons and seek appropriate guidance. At other times, even after we have moved forward, we should take the time to examine our decisions, especially if we find we have strayed from our core values and strengths.

In day-to-day living and its inevitable crossroads, although not all individuals may actually become philosophical, seek out a personal Yoda, and attempt to decipher the "meaning of life," there are certainly times when it helps to return to your roots as it were. Life is less stressful and makes more sense if you have some method of centering yourself when stressed or faced with difficult decisions. Some individuals focus on their religious beliefs, some on family relationships, others simply on returning to their personal core values and integrity of self.

Finally, don't beat yourself up! Often we let our past errors and failures become who we are because we unwittingly allow irrational beliefs about these disappointments compel us to repeat the mistakes of our past. Indeed, if we let them, our worst nightmares actually *become* our goals because of the strong emotions and fear that typically accompany them. If such false beliefs persist in your life, rationally examine their validity, convince yourself of their absurdity, and then toss them out once and for all. Indignation—and even anger!—often helps in allowing you to move past these false ideas or poor past decisions that have been robbing you of your future potential. Take inventory of what you have learned and then let it go!

Once again, great evening! None of this would have happened without the planning and work of several dedicated individuals. Special thanks to **Kayla Marnach** (Chair of the 2011 HCBF Story Writing Competition); **Ann Bell** (President of the HCBF); **Paula Brock** (Georgetown ISD, Secondary Language Arts Coordinator); **Carmen May** (Coordinator, Elementary and Middle School entrants); and **Sherry Adrian, Melissa Balusek, Roger Busfield, Joan Hall, Janet Kilgore, and Artie Stockton** (the Judges)!

Finally, congratulations one more time to the 2011 Writing Competition Winners!!! You are now official Honorary Members of the San Gabriel Writers' League for the coming year. Don't pass up this opportunity! As a newly Published Author, we hope you will continue to grow as a writer by first of all choosing to attend our monthly meetings and workshops—that would be an **excellent decision!**

Decisions ? snoisiceD

Grandma Mattie died last week. Sad. But, not so sad, actually. I hardly knew Grandma Mattie. Only visited her couple of times before mama left. Matilda was her real name, but ever since I can remember, everyone called her “Mattie.” Don’t even know how old she was. Pretty old, I reckon. Don’t know why grandma expired. Probably it was meanness and old age.

She lived by herself on a scrubby plot near Vanderpol. About four-miles east. Grandma Mattie was cantankerous to her core. And tight-fisted too. I reckon she had a right to be. Grandpa died in a train wreck near Luling in Caldwell County some years ago. He was the engineer. Soaring Texas heat popped the spikes and the rails spread. His train flipped over and.... The funeral was grand. Mama and I went. Lots of neighbors, piles of food, fancy fiddling, and lots of visiting in this out-of-the-way place. Most folks seem to have a fine time. Grandma Mattie didn’t seem so happy. About the last time I saw her.

Anyway, Sheriff Willard in Bandera County sent me a letter to tell me the sad news. Had the County seal, some Latin words, and other official folderol. He wants me to come down there to make arrangements. I don’t make arrangements. Don’t have the wherewithal or inclination. And I don’t have an automobile or a horse, and the bus doesn’t go that way. Besides, next week I’m working in Mr. Egan’s hardware store. Hunting season starts in a couple of weeks. I sent a letter to Sheriff Willard asking him to bury grandma Mattie in a potter’s grave.

I want you to understand. My home is on a little spread about a mile out of town, my parent’s place. I farm a little on a couple of hardscrabble acres, vegetables mostly. Do odd jobs for folks in town. Hunt for my meat. Lots of game in the hill, wild turkey and deer mostly. Sometimes I land a big-mouth bass in the lake. But that’s almost leisure time.

Some years ago papa vamoosed with that floozy barmaid at the honky-tonk. Her dresses were so tight that her boobs popped. She knew it. And worked it to a fare-thee-well. What she saw in papa I’ll never know. He wasn’t pretty. Drank too much. Had severe body odor. Always was flat broke. And he had a vile temper. I reckon mama and me were better off.

Mama and I got along OK. She worked at the five-and dime six days a week. I worked odd jobs here and there. After a bit mama got sick. A peculiar sort of sickness. She would wander about, miss work, not speak. She didn’t make sense most of the time. I tried to take care of her, but she got worse. One day last July two medical orderlies from our hospital came to our house in an ambulance and took mama away to a sanitarium, a bedlam for all I know. It’s in Langtry over in Val Verde County. Once in a while I would visit mama. Waste of time. She didn’t know me. She did nothing except sit and stare, spittle dripping from her mouth. I reckon that makes me an orphan.

The county tax collector confiscated Grandma Mattie’s house, the land, and all the furniture and stuff inside to pay back property taxes. Left was an old trunk in the attic. Sheriff Willard says not much of anything in it. Nothing of value anyway—a pair of high-top shoes, several granny dresses (I reckon made from flour sacks), two bonnets, unmentionables, a

mother-of-pearl comb, bundle of letters from mama, and an old family Bible. Didn’t want any of grandma’s stuff. Told Sheriff Willard to give it to charity.

I reckon that’s what he did mostly. Anyway, last Tuesday I got the Bible. Sheriff Willard packed it up and mailed it. One of these days I’ll send him a Railway Express check for his expense. I don’t read the Bible much. Last night, while lying in bed, I pop it open to scan the front pages. The Genealogy pages go five or six generations. Never heard of most of these folks. Like most families, I reckon some were righteous and some were blackguards. Don’t know, and don’t much care.

None-the-less, this morning my curiosity about this Bible got the better of me. I started fanning the pages, looking at the pictures. And sure enough it popped open on the New Testament page where Jesus tell the Pharisees, “render therefore to Cesar the things that are Cesar’s.” Staring me in the face was a spanking-new \$10,000 bill. Not just an ordinary \$10,000 bill minds you, but a gold certificate. Numbers emblazoned in gold ink. The reverse entirely in gold. Grasping for breath, I nearly fainted.

Two steaming-hot coffees later, propped on my foot stool, my senses recouped: what was I to do with this largess? I never imagined so much money. I need new boots. Get a horse? How about a tractor? Move to Abilene in Taylor County? Nah. I like it here. How about fixing the roof? Too many decisions. What a quandary.

Later that afternoon, I went to the Post Office. Dropped that gold certificate in a stamped-envelope and sent it to the Salvation Army. They would use it better than I would. I reckon.



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### 3 Science Fiction Book Publishers

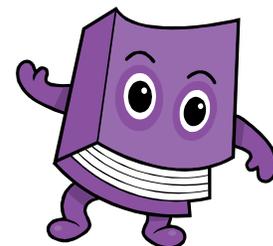
from *Writer’s Market*

WritersMarket.com lists hundreds of book publishers for writers of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, writing for children, and more. Here are three looking for science fiction submissions:

**DAW Books, Inc.**, is one of the few imprints of Penguin that accepts submissions directly from authors. This imprint specializes in science fiction novels—most of their titles have at least 80,000 words. Potential authors should submit their complete manuscript with a cover letter.

**Edge Science Fiction & Fantasy Publishing** accepts novels of 75,000-100,000 words on average. Extensive submission guidelines can be found on the Edge website, but they include the first three chapters, a synopsis, a cover letter, and other extras.

**TOR Books** considers submissions from writers as well. Length guidelines are not provided, but submission preferences are, including the first three chapters, a synopsis, and more.



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## A Memory for Mother's Day by Kayla J. W. Marnach

**Train tracks ran** through the back part of the pasture behind our house at the edge of Weatherford, Texas. A grove of trees where we played during the day was a gathering place for hobos at night during the 1950's evidenced by liquor bottles my sisters and I found.

I have vivid memories of them coming to our back door and my mother or Granny giving them food from our previous meal. Always polite, always thankful, they would take the plate and sit on the steps of our back porch.

Mother once asked why they always came to our home and was told hobos had a way of marking an area where food could be found. Our home was a safe place...for all of us.



## Encounter

Last house on the left,  
a safe haven for three girls  
and hobos.

Fed with love and leftovers,  
no one is left wanting.

Distant whistle draws the encounter to a close.  
Lives touched...

Memories spawned...

kindness reflected  
in the love of

a woman and mother.

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## Special Offer to Members of the San Gabriel Writers' League

The Writers' League of Texas is gearing up for its annual Agents Conference June 22-24 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Austin.

This event draws hundreds of authors and aspiring writers each year and 2012 promises to be one of the best conferences yet. Attendees will have access to 13 agents, four editors and three experts in book promotion and film production.

Included will be more than 24 panels on writing and the ever-changing publishing industry. A total of 15 published authors will be on hand to lend their expertise.

As a special promotion, the Writers' League of Texas is offering members of the San Gabriel Writers' League the WLT member registration rate for the conference. This discounted rate will

be honored through June 10.

Registration is at <http://www.writersleague.org/75/Registration-Information>

Special note: SGWL members will need to register as a non-member, then email WLT Program Director Jennifer Ziegler [Jennifer@writersleague.org](mailto:Jennifer@writersleague.org) and ask for the discounted rate. She will credit your account. Be sure to mention that you are an SGWL member.

You may also call 499-8914 and ask for the discounted rate. The WLT office will refund the difference. Be sure to tell the office staff that you are a member of SGWL.

See you in June!

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## I Would Rather Be The Wind by Pat McNeeley

I would rather be the wind than be me –  
Blowing through the sky, wild and free –  
Ruffling the land, dancing on the sea –

I would rather be the sun, bright on high–  
Flirting with the moon and stars in the sky  
Playing with the night birds passing by–

I would rather be the sea, rolling to the shore,  
Listening to the gulls, the wind, and more–  
Whisp'ring of Love – that I'd adore –

I'd rather be a gull, riding high in the cloud  
Far, far above the streets and the crowd –  
Free with the wind, wild and proud –

I'd rather be a flower, hiding in the grass,  
Perfuming the air about me for those that pass,  
Picked by lovers, lad and lass –

I'd rather be a mountain rising oh so high –  
Praying there and reaching up to the sky  
Where God is watching and eagles fly –

I'd rather be a spirit none could see –  
Bring happiness and joy, laughter, glee –



I would, O yes,  
I would rather be the wind than to  
just be me.



### who "said"

"I've always believed in writing without a collaborator, because where two people are writing the same book, each believes he gets all the worries and only half the royalties."

Answer on page 9

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## Five Government Websites Every Writer Should Know About

From Sidney W. Frost

### **Popular Baby Names – <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/>**

I use this Social Security site when looking for a name for a character. You can see what the most popular male and female names were by year.

### **U.S. Copyright Office – <http://www.copyright.gov/records/>**

You can search for information about copyrighted material here. There are also links to information about copyright law.

### **Library of Congress – <http://www.loc.gov/index.html>**

The Library's mission is to make its resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people and to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations.

### **American Memory – <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>**

American Memory from the Library of Congress provides free and open access through the Internet to written and spoken words, sound recordings, still and moving images, prints, maps, and sheet music that document the American experience.

### **American Fact Finder – <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>**

The U.S. Census Bureau provides this Website. It offers information about population and much more that could be useful when researching a book. You can type in a city and find breakdowns by gender, age, race, income, education, etc.

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## Six Websites to Help Your Writing

### **Free Dictionary – <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/>**

Definitions and pronunciation.

### **Bartleby.com – <http://www.bartleby.com/>**

Online publisher of literature, references, and verse.

### **Common Errors in English – <http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html#errors>**

The author, Dr. Brians, is an English Professor at Washington State University. I ran across this online source of information while checking out every day vs. everyday.

### **Alt.usage.english newsgroup – <http://alt-usage-english.org/index.shtml>**

This is one of my favorite sources of information about the English language.

### **National Punctuation Day – <http://www.nationalpunctuationday.com/>**

Started and used by children, adults will also find excellent help on the use of punctuation. National Punctuation Day is September 24, but the website is available all year.

### **Cliché Finder -- <http://www.westegg.com/cliche/>**

Helps keep your writing free of clichés.

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## Four Websites to Help You Choose Character Names

### **Popular Baby Names -- <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/>**

I use this site when looking for a name for a character. You can see what the most popular male and female names were by year.

### **Etymology of First Names -- <http://www.behindthename.com/>**

What does your character's name mean? This site also provides the history of a name. It includes names from many languages.

### **Fictional Character Name Generator -- <http://www.jimwegryn.com/Names/FictionNames.htm>**

This website is fun to play with. All you have to do is click on the male or female button to get a name, first and last. Here are two examples: Trevin Westfoot and Scarlet Frelfly. It is great for people who want a fictional sounding name.

### **BabyNames.com -- Tips for Writers -- <http://www.babynames.com/character-names.php>**

This site is loaded with useful information that will help you find the perfect name. And, it is easy to read. There are eight short tips plus comments from readers.

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# Organizing: Vision, Strategy, Tactics

By Randy Ingermanson

## The Incredible Power of a Challenge

Can you do 100 pushups in less than 2 minutes?

Can you read 1000 words per minute?

Can you write a novel in 30 days?

Most people can't do any of these things. But quite a few people have found that they can do one or more of them – once they've set a challenge for themselves.

You can do amazing things when you challenge yourself, and when you make a plan to meet that challenge.

On May 25, 1961, John Kennedy announced an ambitious challenge for the US – to put a man on the moon before the end of the decade.

Kennedy had strong reasons for setting this challenge. As he said in a speech at Rice University, "The exploration of space will go ahead, whether we join in it or not, and it is one of the great adventures of all time, and no nation which expects to be the leader of other nations can expect to stay behind in the race for space."

He also knew that it would be hard and expensive. Accepting this challenge meant that other good things would go undone.

So why do it? Part of the answer was that taking on difficult challenges makes you strong. In Kennedy's words, "We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too."

What makes a good challenge? A challenge should be all of the following:

- \* Objective
- \* Worthwhile
- \* Difficult
- \* Possible

Kennedy could have chosen many ways to challenge the US to explore space and to advance technology. Most of those ways would have been difficult to measure or verify.

Putting a man on the moon is objective. You either put footprints in lunar dust or you don't. You can see the results. You can prove you did it. Your vision is clear and focused.

In issuing the challenge, Kennedy made the case that space exploration was worth doing. It would be an adventure. It would establish US leadership. It would advance technology. And it must be done by a nation intent on using space for peaceful purposes, rather than for filling it with weapons of mass destruction.

But Kennedy made it clear that the challenge would be extremely difficult. The US could do it only with a maximum ef-

fort. Half measures would be worse than none at all.

However, Kennedy was confident that it could be done. Humans could walk on the moon – if only they chose to go.

As it turned out, Kennedy was right on all counts. The space program has resulted in massive technological advances. It was hard. But the US did it in the time frame allotted.

A great challenge led to great results.

A bad challenge generally leads nowhere.

If a challenge is subjective, then it's a bad challenge, because you'll never really know if you got there, so you aren't as driven to try.

If a challenge is not worthwhile, then it's a bad challenge, because when the going gets tough, you've got no reason to stay tough and keep going.

If a challenge is not difficult, then it's a bad challenge because it sets the bar too low. Yeah, sure you can challenge yourself to run a 20-minute mile. For most people, that's no challenge at all. A challenge ought to stretch you, to change you, to make you a better person.

If a challenge is impossible, then it's a bad challenge because it's pointless. You can't jump over the moon with muscle power. Trying hard may make you a better jumper, but you won't try nearly as hard as you would if you set the goal to be possible.

In my own experience, I've often found that I could do a lot more when I set myself a challenge. Something objective, worthwhile, difficult, and possible. It's easy to go easy. But going easy usually means not going very far or very fast.

If you're writing a novel and you seem to be spinning your wheels, it may be because you haven't set the task as a challenge. Challenging yourself is fun. It focuses your efforts. It drives out distractions.

What's your current challenge?

- Is it objectively verifiable?
- Is it worth doing?
- Is it difficult enough?
- Is it possible?

A typical challenge for a novelist might be this. "I will have the first draft of my complete novel of at least \_\_\_\_\_ words written by this date \_\_\_\_\_."

If you don't have a challenge, then there's no better time than now to create one for yourself. Once you take on a challenge, you won't be bored.

Stay tuned!

Award-winning novelist Randy Ingermanson, "the Snowflake Guy," publishes the Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine, with more than 29,000 readers, every month. If you want to learn the craft and marketing of fiction, AND make your writing more valuable to editors, AND have FUN doing it, visit <http://www.AdvancedFictionWriting.com>.



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## From Behind the Wall by Gary Clark

It took you twenty-eight years to get this far, just take your time with those last few steps. Not many people around the park at two o'clock in the morning. It's quiet. Just the way you planned it. You've come a long way, brother, and I knew you'd come. That's the sixth cigarette butt you've crushed into the pile beside the tree you're leaning on. Take your time. Don't turn back now.

Standing back here, behind the memorial wall, shoulder to shoulder with all 58,209 of our brothers, we watch and pray while you rest behind the tree, facing away from us, rubbing the palms of your hands together, digging deep for the courage to turn around and take those final steps to complete your journey. This monument is like a one-way mirror. We can look out, but on your side all you see is the reflection of your face on the polished black granite between our names. This is a place for you to look back at yourself and heal.

Remember when we were in high school, playing football, basketball, and running track? We never looked past graduation. For us, high school was the world. We drank, partied, raised hell, dated the most popular girls and drove the fastest cars in town. We believed high school would last forever—that we'd be young forever—always be as happy and care-free as we were at eighteen years old. The world was ours.

Then Vietnam came into our lives. We watched while our country split, some of us for the war and some of us against the war. Me and you and our group kept our hair short, wore regular clothes, and stood and put our hand over our hearts and sang when the Star Spangle Banner played. The others retreated into an anti-war world of long hair, colorful clothes, flower power, drugs, rock and roll and free love. They burned their draft cards and the flag we stood for. We hated them, thought they were un-American, laughed in their faces, spat on them, and called them queers. In their drug-induced euphoria, they laughed at us and danced in the park. When we came back from 'Nam, they hated us, called us baby killers, laughed at us and spat on us. Now I'm not sure who was right and who was wrong.

Think back to the night we won the state basketball championship and how our mothers cried after the game because we told them we'd joined the marines. My daddy cried too. He coughed and hid his face trying to keep anyone from seeing him cry. So did yours. But they held back and I think they damn near exploded trying to keep all the fear and emotions inside. They were veterans of the Korea. They knew how war was.

I just saw you turn and try to look this way from behind that tree but then you jerked your head back. It's ok, brother. Take your time. You've been fumbling with that cigarette for ten minutes. Go ahead, light it and don't feel guilty because you're not back here with us. It just wasn't your time.

Remember marine boot camp? Dang, what a trip that was. Growing up I thought my daddy was strict, and then I thought Coach Cole was hard on us, but Gunny was the devil in the flesh. You know, it wasn't until we got to 'Nam that I figured out what all his hollering was about. In all our firefights, above all the noise and confusion, what I heard was Gunny yelling in my ear. I

did exactly what he taught me to do. That's what kept me alive all that time. Gunny's back here with us though. You'll see him too.

You're looking this way again. Go ahead, take that one last drag off your cigarette, stomp it out and come on. One step at a time, brother. Don't give up. It's not as hard as you think it is. Just one foot in front of the other. We always swore we'd be there for each other, no matter what. I'm here, brother. That was our pledge.

I remember that day when we were somewhere out there in the jungle, who the hell knows where we actually were. I think that whole dang country was jungle and it always rained and there were snakes as big as tree trunks and mosquitoes as big as humming birds. But that day we had worse problems than snakes and mosquitoes.

B52s dumped tons of bombs that shook the mud under our feet and our boots sank deeper and deeper in that sticky stuff. Napalm flared all around us. The vapors burned our eyes and cut off our breath. Gunfire and mortars burst our eardrums. Charlie's screams filled the half-second silence between mortar blasts. We were surrounded—nowhere to take cover. Panic set in. Some of the troops went crazy and stood up to holler back at Charlie, then took a quick round to the head or chest. I looked around to see where you were but couldn't find you in all the chaos. Then I got my war face. I yelled and fired blind and crazy into the



jungle like everyone else, hoping I'd hit something or someone.

HQ reported via radioman that MedEvac choppers were half an hour away and until they got there, we were on our own. Rounds were still coming in from all directions and I heard one zing past my right ear and thump into somebody behind me. I never turned around to see who it was. I didn't want to know. Troops were yelling in pain and screaming in fear. They fell, bleeding into the mud.

Then, in a brief second of clarity, I leaned into the noise and listened for Gunny's voice, but he wasn't there anymore. That's when the bright light flashed right in front of me. I felt the concussion from the blast. The heat and mud and shrapnel penetrated my body. I always believed if I got hit it would hurt like hell, but it didn't. I remember it blasted me out of my boots and left them stuck in the mud when I went flying backward and crashed down between two kapok trees. There was no pain. I pulled my arm up to try to wipe the mud off my face, but there wasn't a hand there. I raised up on my elbow and looked down at myself. Bright red blood saturated the mud on my chest, and the red sludge poured off to the side, dripping into the brown water. Even as bad shape as I was in, I felt calm. To me, none of it made any sense anymore. It wasn't real. I tried to call out for you, but I couldn't get any air.

Suddenly out of nowhere you were there, kneeling beside me. You reached down and used your sleeve to brush some of the mud off my face. You looked scared and confused and I tried to tell you it was ok. I moved my lips but nothing came out. You cursed and threw your weapon in the mud. Then sat down beside me, pulled my head in your lap and looked up toward

Continued . . .

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## ... Continued

heaven. We prayed silently. Looking down at me, you pulled off my helmet, brushed my hair back and just before my eyes closed, you raised your shoulder and wiped away the tear that hung off your cheek then leaned and whispered in my ear, "I'm here, brother."

You're almost here. Just two more steps is all, brother. Take a deep breath and those last steps. I see you digging deep

to find the strength to touch the wall, reaching for my name. My hand is behind my name. Now I feel your cold, sweaty palm pressing against my hand as you stand there quivering from feelings you don't know how to deal with. Lean on me, brother. Those are tears of bravery, not cowardice, let 'em flow.

Leaning with all your weight on the wall, staring at the base of this enormous black granite memorial, I hear you whisper, "I'm here, brother."

Welcome home, brother. I knew you'd come.

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## Conferences: Texas various

[http://www.pw.org/content/poetry\\_at\\_round\\_top\\_festival](http://www.pw.org/content/poetry_at_round_top_festival) **Poetry at Round Top Festival Conference**. Round Top, TX. The 11th annual Poetry at Round Top Festival will be held from May 4 to May 6 on the Round Top Festival Institute campus in Round Top, Texas. The program...Poetry

[http://www.pw.org/content/writers\\_league\\_of\\_texas\\_agents\\_conference](http://www.pw.org/content/writers_league_of_texas_agents_conference) **Writers' League of Texas Agents Conference** **Conference** **Austin**, TX. The 2012 Writers' League of Texas Agents Conference will be held from June 22 to June 24 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Austin, Texas. The conference offers panels, lectures,...Fiction, Creative Nonfiction- No6/22/126/10/12

**DFW Writers' Workshop** [www.dfwcon.org](http://www.dfwcon.org) May 19-20, 2012 Dallas/Fort Worth Texas. More than 40 breakout sessions on the profession and craft of writing. Over a dozen agents and editors for pitching sessions.

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## Hill country Book Festival Writing Competition

By Ann Bell

For those who missed the last San Gabriel Writers League meeting and didn't get to meet the participants of the Hill Country Book Festival Writing Competition, hear them read sections of their entries, or helped answer their many questions, missed a real delight. Kayla did an outstanding job organizing the event and many students were interested in being involved in the League.

Here is a short YouTube video of pictures taken at that evening. <http://youtu.be/kbdOGxsiZ4E>

Anthologies are still available for purchase from Amazon in both print and eBook formats.

Secondary edition [http://www.amazon.com/The-Art-Decision-Making-Competition/dp/0984968415/ref=sr\\_1\\_18?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1334150370&sr=1-18](http://www.amazon.com/The-Art-Decision-Making-Competition/dp/0984968415/ref=sr_1_18?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1334150370&sr=1-18)

Elementary edition [http://www.amazon.com/The-Art-Decision-Making-Competition/dp/0984968423/ref=sr\\_1\\_26?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1334150439&sr=1-26](http://www.amazon.com/The-Art-Decision-Making-Competition/dp/0984968423/ref=sr_1_26?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1334150439&sr=1-26)

Editor's note — the short YouTube video is beautifully done, be sure to check it out and then get yourself a book !!

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## Who "said" Answer ... Agatha Christie

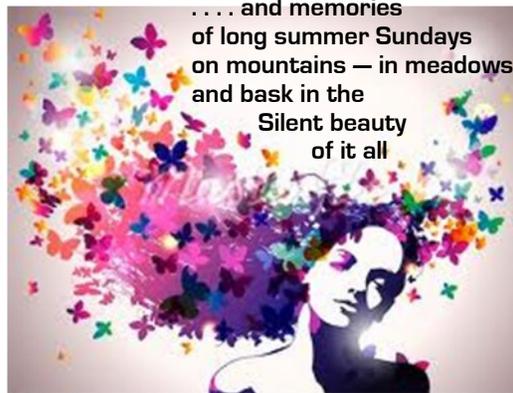
**Dame Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie** DBE (née **Miller**; 15 September 1890 – 12 January 1976) was a British crime writer of novels, short stories, and plays. She also wrote romances under the name **Mary Westmacott**, but she is best remembered for her 66 detective novels and 14 short story collections (especially those featuring Hercule Poirot or Miss Jane Marple), and her successful West End plays.

Christie's stage play *The Mousetrap* holds the record for the longest initial run: it opened at the Ambassadors Theatre in London on 25 November 1952 and as of 2012 is still running after more than 24,600 performances.<sup>[4]</sup> In 1955, Christie was the first recipient of the Mystery Writers of America's highest honour, the Grand Master Award, and in the same year *Witness for the Prosecution* was given an Edgar Award by the MWA for Best Play. Many of her books and short stories have been filmed, some more than once (*Murder on the Orient Express*, *Death on the Nile* and *4.50 from Paddington* for instance), and many have been adapted for television, radio, video games and comics.

## I walk into my meadow

awash with flowered color  
fluttered by butterflies

... and memories  
of long summer Sundays  
on mountains — in meadows  
and bask in the  
Silent beauty  
of it all



By Carol Menchu

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## Ask the Book Doctor: Skunked Terms & Hypercorrection by Joan Upton Hall

Dear Doc Joan,

Our critique group gets into hot debates over whether certain expressions are correct or incorrect. What worries me is that, even after we come to an agreement, won't readers also stumble over a perceived mistake?

Here are examples we've debated:

"A number of his fans (was, were) of fended."

"She wrote to Jim and (I, me, myself)."

"Scientific data (show, shows) an increase..."

"The virus totally (decimated, obliterated) the population."

What should we do? – Critical in West Texas

Dear Critical,

No wonder these examples have raised questions. They involve "skunked terms" and "hypercorrection." Both problems arise from evolving usage, and whatever you choose may raise the hackles of either Reader A (who's hide-bound to traditional usage) or Reader B (who accepts new usage as it becomes common). Worse is Reader C who, without any valid reason, thinks he knows. I advise that you change a questionable wording unless it's either necessary or in a character's dialogue. Thus you can avoid interrupting the reader's involvement in your story or article. And isn't that your aim more than teaching grammar?

Hypercorrection (as in 1 & 2) occurs when people, striving to use correct grammar, apply mistaken notions about it.

1. "A number of his fans (was, were) offended." Technically speaking, the singular subject-verb would be "number was." However, according to Bryan Garner's *Dictionary of Modern American Usage*, "a number of" has come to be paired with the plural noun closest to the verb. This follows the linguistic princi-



ple, SYNESIS (pronounced: SIN-uh-sis), grammatical agreement according to meaning rather than strict syntax. Suggestion: rather than explaining this to your reader, change the sentence to read something that will go down smoothly like, "Several of his fans were offended," or better in active voice, "This offended several of his fans."

"She wrote to Jim and (I, me, myself)." You need

the objective case pronoun here

for the object of a preposition ("to me"). Many a hypercorrector would choose "Jim and I," or if they recognized that used the nominative case wrongly, would erroneously use "myself," a reflexive pronoun, to avoid choosing. Suggestion: Go ahead and write the correct choice. Informed readers will approve. The error comes chiefly when the uninformed grow self-conscious while speaking. It's time they get used to hearing it correctly.

Skunked Terms (as in 3 & 4) come about while terminology is in transition. Give it 10 to 100 years to settle into agreed usage. In the meantime, avoid terms that make either Reader A or B hold her nose unless you're prepared to defend your case.

"Scientific data (show, shows) an increase..." Technically plural, "data" is more and more commonly being considered a mass noun requiring a singular verb form.

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Have a question to share in this column? Email me at: [jmu-hall@aol.com](mailto:jmu-hall@aol.com) with "Ask the Book Doctor" as your subject line. If you want to remain anonymous, I'll address you by whatever pseudonym you sign.

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## Special Interest Groups

**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 Georgetown Library. **And there is room for two more !!**

### 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](mailto:jmuHall@aol.com)

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

Meets every other Thursday on the second floor of the Georgetown Library in a private room. Contact is Mary Stafford at [marylynn@mstafford.net](mailto: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, [iwriteco-zies@gmail.com](mailto:iwriteco-zies@gmail.com). Currently, we are **full**.

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

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### Jamie Roton aka Lillian Grey blog

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

### Sylvia Dickey Smith:

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

### SGWL website:

[www.sgwl.net](http://www.sgwl.net)

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**Preston Stone**, Owner of **Hill Country Bookstore**,

is giving all members of the San Gabriel Writers' League a 10% discount on all purchases!



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## Demystifying Writers' Demons One at a Time by Joan Upton Hall

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](mailto: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](http://www.JoanUptonHall.com).

Demystifying Writers' Demons©

### Credible/ credulous & related words

- **Credible** (adjective); **credibility** (noun) Means plausible; believable; deserving confidence or describes a statement or situation.
- **Credulous** (adjective) Means gullible; easily fooled describes a person.
- **Credulity** (noun form of credulous) Means plausibility; believability

#### Opposite meaning words:

- **Incredible** Means hard to believe; astonishing; extraordinary and describes a statement or situation.
- **Incredulous** Means skeptical; disbelieving and describes a person.

#### Examples:

"The witness reported the credible statement that Oscar walked away. Other testimony, that Oscar vanished into thin air, seemed incredible to most jurors."

"Some jurors were credulous about the alleged vanishing act. Most, however, were incredulous."

"A conscientious lawyer would seek the testimony of credible witnesses. A conniving lawyer would use unreliable witnesses and hope for credulous jurors.

"While a statement may be either credible or incredible, a judgment depends on the credulity of the listener. Extraordinary happenings, strain most listeners' credulity."

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# The Gabriel Writer



the  
May 3  
SGWL Meeting  
is at the  
Georgetown Public Library  
Gather at 6:30  
Meeting at 7:00  
See you there!!

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*The Write place for the writer in you!*