

# The Gabriel Writer

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

July 2011

## Inside this Issue

2  
Minutes  
Programs  
Board Members  
Membership changes  
3  
Here and There  
DJ Heinrich Recap  
4  
The Old Man  
5  
The Old Man continued  
How to Get in  
Amazon.com Top 100  
Member News  
6  
Marketing: The B-Word  
7  
Marketing continued  
Paraprosdokian  
Who Said?  
8  
Amazon.com Reviews  
Killer Product  
Description  
9  
Killer continued  
10  
The Book Doctor  
10 Minute Fixes to 10  
Common Problems  
Answer to Who Said  
11  
SIGs  
Member Websites  
Recycle  
Promote Your Book  
Books by Members  
Promote Yourself  
HCBS  
12  
Demystifying  
Writers' Demons  
Meeting  
Information



## Challenges in the Writing Process

By James Parker

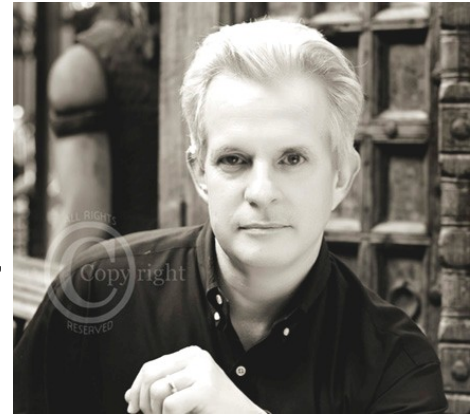
"While I'll certainly talk about my writing, my talk will be more around writing in general and what can influence us as writers.

"When I get the opportunity to address groups such as yours, I like to encourage those in the audience who are either frustrated with their own writing or have yet to get started, but have a book rattling around in their head.

"I grew up in Kentucky and taught riding there for many years. I am a graduate of Eastern Kentucky University, where my training in the field of Criminology has helped me a great deal to bring authenticity to my story-line and characters.

"Professionally I have had a successful career in Telecommunications for the last 28 years.

"My wife, Margaret, along with our daughter, have lived in Austin the last eleven years and we love south Texas!"



You have to love a nation that celebrates its independence every July 4, not with a parade of guns, tanks, and soldiers who file by the White House in a show of strength and muscle, but with family picnics where kids throw Frisbees, the potato salad gets iffy, and the flies die from happiness. You may think you have overeaten, but it is patriotism.  
~Erma Bombeck

Liberty is always dangerous, but it is the safest thing we have.  
~Harry Emerson Fosdick

Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom, must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it. Thomas Paine

This nation will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave.  
Elmer Davis



# Minutes for June 2011 meeting

The June 2, 2011 meeting of the **San Gabriel Writers' League** was called to order by **Vice President Sylvia Dickey Smith**.

**Sylvia** announced that **President Sam Holland** was unable to attend; nor was **David Ciambro** who recently had surgery.

Because **Sam Holland** was not in attendance, **Sylvia** continued his new contest tradition entitled "**Win the President's Stuff**." Accordingly, she gave away two books from her personal library (*Private Eye* and *Whisky and Scotland*) to a couple of lucky winners.

**Kayla Marnach** read the **Treasurer's Report**.

**Sylvia** announced that **Robert Fears** has turned in his resignation, effectively immediately, as **Program Coordinator** because of the increased work load in his job. That office is now open, and members were encouraged to consider serving in that important position.

**Carol Menchu** was not able to attend this month's meeting, but **Sylvia** encouraged the **Membership** to submit their articles for *The Gabriel Writer* newsletter.

## Announcements and Successes

**Suzy Miller** reminded the **Membership** that registrations are still being accepted for author participation in the **Hill Country Book Festival** to be held on August 20, 2011, from 10:00 to 3:00, at the **Georgetown Community Center** in **San Gabriel Park**. This year's event is an expanded festival for all authors and readers of all genres in all reader age groups. Tables are priced at \$30.00 and \$15.00 for a full- or half-table respectively. Lunches can also be reserved at \$10.00 each. **Ann Bell, President** of

the **Hill County Book Festival**, added that grants and sponsorships are also still being accepted as well.

**Jeanell Bolton** has been invited to the 13<sup>th</sup> annual **National Romance Writers Conference** in New York, June 28–July 1, to attend the **Chicago-North Romance Writers of America (RWA)** banquet as a finalist in their **2011 Fire and Ice Contest** for her book *Passion*.

**Addie Busfield** commented about and then led a very enthusiastic round of applause for the great work that **Carol Menchu** has been doing on *The Gabriel Writer* newsletter.

**Neil Newton** has had three articles published in *Sun Rays*, Sun City's monthly magazine, the latest in May (review of the *Café on the Green, Sun City's Community Restaurant*). **Neil** also submitted a short story to the *Writer's Digest (WD)* 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Short Short Story Competition.

## Program

**Sylvia Dickey Smith** introduced guest speaker, author, and 14,000-hour pilot **Dr. Durwood "DJ" Heinrich**, who presented several key principles derived from his book *Attack Out of the Sun*. Specifically, he addressed how one can effectively **engage** or **re-engage** in a goal or project using the important elements of action—*aspire, anticipate, attack, appraise, and appreciate*. His discussion focused on how one can avoid or overcome stagnation, from simple procrastination to writer's block to outright immobility. If you missed his talk, his presentation handouts will be available at the July **San Gabriel Writers' League Meeting**. For more information, visit Dr. Heinrich's website at [www.RedBaronConcepts.com](http://www.RedBaronConcepts.com).

## 2011 Programs

**August—Preston Stone**, Hill Country Book Store

**September—Tom Mitchell**— Presenting about BreadBox conference and his attendance and acceptance

**October—Kaye George**—Getting Your Name Out There!

**November—Earl Staggs**— Setting Up and Selling Your Own E-Book (topic still under development)

**December—Christmas Party**

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## Member(s): New and/or Changes

### New Members:

**How do people** name their roads and towns, particularly those of the rural areas? Why, by their particular interests or occasions, of course, unless some person commits a memorable act; then a road (if not a town) receives that citizen's name. Nearer to and in the cities, though, people simply number their roads, and thus we have the highway systems. During a trip from Austin, Texas to Oklahoma City, I was intrigued by the names of the country roads especially, as well as those of the towns. No doubt each state has its own collection, but that of Oklahoma caught my attention. As to where the roads lead (any of them), every person I asked said, "They just go."

Those of particular note were Rattlesnake Hill, 7 (not 6, mind you). Shooter Road, Horseshoe Corner (now a mere four-way stop), Crazy Horse Lane, and Biscuit Hill. These names seem vividly suggestive of what went on there to make the places memorable. Other titles, as those of the counties, did not come off so pictorially, unless to one acquainted with the original language(s) of the people. For instance, there are Wapannocka, Tishamingo, and Chickasaw Counties. Do these not sound like Native American names? Very telling, I'd say, even to the name of the state. Given the apparent penchant for hominative titling, these seem probable, but you can see how the matter raises questions. For a start, which tribe gave its name to which town? And why? No wonder Hollywood turns this way for so many stories.

But what about the Anglo leanings for fictive naming? Not nearly so vivid (though clearly suggestive) are many

names, such as Ada and Elmore, Thackerville, Lone Grove, Lake Murray, and Willshire River. Others seem to indicate some effort toward a bit of fancy, such as Marietta and Scullin and Wynnewood, though some others are plainer, as Pauls Valley and Norman. So we have the mixtures in this land where the horizon lies far (FAR) off.

Back in Texas also, we have such differences, some more lucid than others, of course: Cedar Park, Round Rock (yes, it's there), Big Spring, and Fort Worth declare their ideological origins, whereas others seem merely hinting. For the town of Taylor, one wonders if it was ever spelled with an "I". And was Denton ever called "Dentist's Town"?

Other names are even more conducive to guessing as to origin, such as Seminole, Waco (originally Hueco) Schwertner, and Salado. Did all these terms come from Native Americans? Having frown up in Louisiana and Mississippi, I could come forth with an entire echelon of yet different sources—and their names.

And what about family names? The array of variety to be discovered in anyone's family would keep a researcher busy in several libraries for sever years. Certainly there lies abundant evidence in the basic nomenclature, of the several types of people who have lived in these different parts of the country, of the varied tastes and emphases in their histories, and of their efforts to express or memorialize them. As writers we find such matters feeding our thoughts here and there. Indeed, what would we write about if not people?



## DJ Heinrich Recap by D.J. Heinrich

**Durwood "DJ" Heinrich, Ph.D.**, author, speaker, and 14,000-hour pilot, and Secretary/Historian for the League spoke at the SGWL June meeting. In his presentation, Heinrich addressed five key principles derived from his book *Attack Out of the Sun* that can help us **engage** or **re-engage** effectively in any project or goal that we might choose. These elements and strategies, summarized below, help us to achieve success and overcome stagnation, from simple procrastination to writer's block to outright inertia. If you missed the presentation, his handouts will be available at the July meeting.

### **Aspire – set your sights!**

- ✦ Set explicit S-M-A-R-T G-O-A-L-S (Specific, Measurable, Action Plan, Realistic, Timely), (Grow, Obsess, Align, Lose false beliefs, See victory in your mind)
  - ✦ Monitor progress (enhances motivation)
  - ✦ Pursue YOUR dreams & do so with passion!
  - ✦ Investigate before attempting something new; use common sense
- Know your strengths and weaknesses; don't beat yourself up!

### **Anticipate – prepare & then envision victory!**

- ✦ You are already prepared for success
- ✦ ... but close critical training gaps
- ✦ Consider a mentor; use your support network
- ✦ Toss out negative false-beliefs & discard "barges" impeding success
- ✦ Utilize your experience & make expert decisions

- ✦ Set your environment, establish a routine, and use the right tools
  - ✦ Conduct research, gather material, plan, and outline
  - ✦ Stay prepared; continually look for opportunities
- Visualize success, stay healthy, and have fun!

### **Attack – execute your plan!**

- ✦ Attack! Do It Now! "Ready, fire, aim!" Use Plan-Do-Check-Act (P-D-C-A) model
  - ✦ Don't confuse *readiness* with *action*
  - ✦ Be aggressive; trust your instincts; expect & maintain a sense of control
  - ✦ Empower yourself, utilize your strengths, and develop *FLOW*
  - ✦ Don't let others control your direction or results
- Maintain alignment with yourself (and your customers!)

### **Appraise – evaluate progress & battles won!**

- ✦ Measure results (dynamic environment) and attack again
  - ✦ Or, if appropriate, allow time for actions to take effect; Relax!
  - ✦ Re-evaluate; don't hesitate to abandon an attack if conditions warrant
  - ✦ Guard against chronic stress
- Appreciate – value family, friends, life, and your success!**
- ✦ Celebrate Success! Welcome new challenges!
  - ✦ Call it a day when you're most excited
- Laugh, enjoy life, and cultivate self-esteem & self-efficacy

## The Old Man by Kori Isbell

Writer-at-Large

I sat alone in the local coffee shop hoping to find a little peace and serenity. Something about the aroma of coffee puts my mind at ease. My small booth sat in a dim corner facing the semi-busy little shop. The thick, dark-red drapes that hung elegantly across the way blended so well with all the brown shades of the coffee decor. Each table had been meticulously placed to create a private area for each customer. The sales counter was stocked with a variety of chocolate treats and on each end of the counters sat large barrels of coffee beans. Such an enticing area. A soft saxophone melody filled my ear as I sat lost in random, meaningless thought.

The ringing of the front door bell threw me back into reality as it announced the next customer's arrival. He was an elderly man. And by the looks of him, not in very good health. His broad shoulders slightly slumped forward and he carried a round belly that hung over his belt. His steps were careful as if he walked in pain. He was in no hurry; had nowhere he needed to be. I studied this man more carefully as he approached the counter. His skin looked rough and dark like a rhinos' armor. Tattoos of his former military days hung down from under the sleeves of his shirt. I took careful notice of the scars on his hands and face. The wedding band on his finger had long ago lost its shine. His expression was hard and his mouth seemed to have a permanent frown. The old man turned his head far enough so that I could get a glimpse of his eyes and to my surprise I saw something unexpected. I didn't see anger or bitterness like I thought I would find, but instead I saw a hint of sadness; of longing and maybe even loneliness.

I felt God leading me to say something to him. "But what, God", I thought. What do I have to say to a man three times my age? He knows more about life than I could even begin to tell him." So I sat and drank my coffee and tried to ignore this task God had given me. As hard as I tried, I simply could not get back to my place of peace. I kept thinking of excuse after excuse as to why I couldn't (and probably shouldn't) speak to this stranger. "He probably is hard of hearing so what's the point. Maybe I'll offend him and I wouldn't want to be disrespectful to my elders." But God still kept whispering "Go to him."

I guess I sat still too long because I didn't have to go to him at all. Of all the empty tables in the shop this elderly gentleman chose to sit at the only table next to me. "Go figure", I thought. And with a polite semi-smile and a nod of my head I greeted the man with a ginger lift of my fingers, not really taking my hand off from around my cup to give a full wave, and looked back down into my coffee. He responded with a nod of his head as he drank the first sip of his coffee.

It wasn't long until the awkward silence was broken when the man cleared his throat and began to speak. He looked down into his cup and with a harsh, smoker's voice said, "I don't know why I'm here, but for some reason I just felt like having a cup of coffee in the middle of the afternoon. Not something I would normally do." And he gave a slight chuckle. "Ah, no better time like the present" I responded in cordial conversation. More awkward silence lingered in the

air between our tables. He slowly ran his unsteady finger around the rim of his cup and the sadness in his face seemed to grow.

"Are you from this area? Don't think I've seen you around before?" I asked, desperate to break the odd silence. He sat quietly for a few seconds, staring into his coffee. He seemed to be thinking about how he should answer. His thick, white eyebrows came down over his eyes and a single tear rolled down his cheek. "No" he answered still looking into his coffee. "No I'm not from around here. I...uh....I came into town for some...uh...personal business." And he wiped away his tear.

"Gees", I thought. "This guys having a tough time." I didn't know what to say. I've never seen an old man cry. And as if God himself opened my mouth, without even thinking I said "Sir, I hate to be intrusive, but is there something you want to talk about?" As if he had been waiting for years for someone, anyone, to ask that very question, he immediately began to speak.

Tears filled both of his eyes and rolled uncontrollably down his cheeks. His large, wrinkled fingers brushed tears off his face and he reminded me of an innocent little child. Chills ran throughout my body as he spoke, "I buried my daughter today." He stopped for a while to let that statement sink in; tears still flooding his face. "I haven't really said it out loud yet." He took out his handkerchief and began to wipe away his tears and continued, "I think she was 52. I'm

not really sure how old she was. To tell you the truth, I don't really know anything about her. She was 6 when I left." He stopped for a moment to clear his face from all the tears. "I met my grand kids at her funeral. Two of the sweetest young ladies I've ever met." The old man blew his nose and wiped away more tears. My heart broke into a thousand pieces for this man. The guilt and sorrow he has carried for decades has brought this man to his knees right in front of my very eyes!

"You see", he continued, "I took a wrong turn several years ago and left my family. I thought I had more important things to do. I turned my back on everything God had given me. I divorced my wife after 15 years of marriage. I gave her the divorce papers; she just cried. She told me she would pray for me and I knew that she meant it. Never once did she remarry after I left. I broke her heart and I knew it, but I was too self-centered to care." The old man stopped for a bit to gain control of his emotions. "The regret I have carried for over 40 years has become heavy." I lost the love of my life. I lost my daughter. But more importantly, in the attempt to find myself, I ended up losing myself." The old man grew quiet as he dried his face and dobed the last of his tears. God told me to keep my mouth shut, so I did. The old man took a sip of his coffee and continued on with his story. "She died about 10 years ago. I started wearing my wedding band again after that. I guess I felt like I owed it to her." The old man turned his wedding band back & forth around his finger and let out an unsteady sigh.

continued



## Continued . . .

The cup of coffee sitting on my table didn't seem so important now. I sat, fixated on every story this man had to tell me. I hung on every word and felt every emotion. All the appointments and obligations I had for that day became obsolete. The old man & I sat for hours as he talked and as I listened. He certainly lived a full life. I heard more stories about his past mistakes and regrets, but he also told stories of WWII and the Great Depression that I would've never heard on any history channel or read in a history book. We had some good laughs in our conversation. He described the roaring 20s like nothing I'd ever heard before. He smiled as he told me about his first car. It was a 1925 model car that I had never heard of. I looked at the old man as he spoke and I realized that God never intended me to go to him, but instead, God had sent him to speak to me.

The sun was setting outside our coffee shop window. Both of our coffees had lost their steam. The old man apologized for keeping me and thanked me for listening to him. We exchanged names and as he stood up he shook my hand. Before he walked away he held my left hand in his, and put his index finger firmly on my wedding band. With a solid look into my eyes and in a steady tone he said "Don't let this get away from you. One day he might just be all you have left." And with that, he slowly shuffled his way out the door.

I sat stunned for a few seconds as the bell on the shop door rang at his exit. I realized then that my priorities had just been changed. My life was saved without me realizing it needed saving. I haven't lived the same since. And not a day goes by that I don't think about the old man in the coffee shop and thank my God for using his life to change mine.

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## How to Get in Amazon.com Top 100 by Sidney W. Frost

**As I write this**, the Kindle Edition of my book, *Where Love Once Lived*, is in the top ten as rated by Amazon customers. Here's the announcement which is posted with the print edition and the Kindle edition:

#6 Top Rated in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Fiction > Religious Fiction > Romance

### What Amazon's "Top Rated" Means

*Amazon Top Rated products are identified based on factors that have been carefully chosen to help give customers the best shopping experience. Factors considered include Amazon customer review star ratings, the number of customer reviews a product has received, and the timing of those reviews. Reviews that don't meet our Community Guidelines may be excluded from consideration or subject to other corrective action.*

### Changing Your Book's Category

If you want your book ranked in the top 100, the first step is to pick the right category. The category, or categories are posted near the bottom of Amazon's book page. Clicking on a category takes you to a page showing the top 100 books in that category. At the top of the page you will see the category and subcategory. Click on the category to see a list of subcategories and how many books are in each. The easiest way to change your book's category is to call Amazon. Go to Author Central, select Contact, select My Books, select Phone and click the submit button. Sometimes multiple calls are required. Be nice, but persistent.

### Reviews Matter

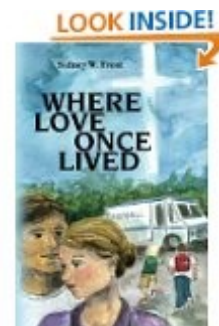
When my book first appeared in the top 10, the #1 ranked book in the subcategory had 871 reviews and 5 customer

discussions. However, #5 on the list had only 14 reviews. My book had 11 reviews, 10 of which were 5 stars. Most of the other books in the top 100 had more reviews than mine, but my average star rating was higher than most. Checking the **Yes** button to answer **Was this review helpful to you?** seems to affect a book's rating as well, and I've been successful with that.

For more positive reviews, ask your friends and writing buddies. Trade reviews with each other. Send review copies of your book to bloggers. After the review is published, ask people to read it and, if they agree, click the Yes button. I'm not sure, but I suspect the Like button at the top of each book's page also affects this ranking. Also, Amazon may consider how long reviews have been there, so you may not see instant results.

Now, go to Amazon.com, search for *Where Love Once Lived*, click Liked, read reviews, click Yes (or No), and I'll let you know if it helps. You can also read the book and write a review.

For more information, see: <http://christianbookmobile.blogspot.com/2011/06/where-love-once-lived-kindle-top-rated.html>. Good luck. If you try this for your own books, I would love to hear how it worked for you.



**Sylvia Dickey Smith** tells us her book, *A War of Her Own*, placed Second at the National Federation Of Presswomen's annual contest.

**Recently, I did** an interview on the blog of Larry Brooks at <http://www.StoryFix.com>. One of the questions he asked was this one:

If you had an elevator ride with an aspiring writer who recognized you, what would you tell him is either the biggest and costliest mistake newer writers make ... or the best thing they can do for their skill-set and career ... or both?

That really got my neurons firing. Here's the answer I gave:

New writers often fail to understand the importance of branding. When you attach your name to a novel and publish it, that's an implicit contract you're making with your reader: "I promise to produce more fiction like this in the future."

If you violate that contract, then your reader feels cheated. Even if your next book is fantastic, it's not what the reader was expecting.

This has nothing to do with being "typecast" as an author. It has everything to do with setting expectations and then meeting those expectations.

Let's say you go to a Chinese restaurant and order their "Buddha's Delight Vegi Plate." The meal is amazing. You tell all your friends about it. You come back a month later with your buddy and . . . that plate is no longer on the menu. In fact, all the Chinese food items are gone. Instead, you've got a choice between an incredibly tempting "Eggplant Parmesan" or an equally inviting "Chile Relleno."

Those are great dishes, both of them. But you came to the restaurant to have Chinese food! And that's exactly what you didn't get. No matter how good the actual menu is, the restaurant violated its implicit contract with you. And you're mad as heck. Rightly so. You won't go back to that place and you'll tell all your friends to give it a skip.

Consistency matters. Quality and consistency.

When we talk about an author's brand, we mean the set of expectations the reader has when they see your name on the cover.

If you don't want to meet those expectations, that's fine. Do the right thing and use a different pen name for that new, cool category you want to write.

Treat your readers the way you want to be treated. They'll reward you for it.

That's a pretty long answer. Many authors hate the "B-word" – branding – because they don't want to be "typecast."

That's understandable. That's common, in fact.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tried to kill off Sherlock Holmes because he felt that his "literary energies should not be directed too much into one channel."

Eventually, public clamor forced him to bring Sherlock back for many more adventures.

Conan Doyle worried that the time he spent writing the Holmes mysteries "may perhaps have stood a little in the way of the recognition of my more serious literary work."

Can anyone remember what that more serious literary work actually was? Sherlock Holmes has trained several generations of young people to think logically. What could be more serious than that?

But what if you really can't be bottled up in one single brand? Then what do you do? Are you doomed?

Not at all. If you're running a successful Chinese restaurant and you desperately want to start cooking Italian food, the solution is simple: Open an Italian restaurant under a different name and sell some pasta. Ditto if you want to open a Mexican restaurant.

The one thing you don't want to do is call them all the same thing. "Lotus Garden" would be a fine name for a Chinese restaurant. Not so much for Italian or Mexican.

A brand is a fairly squishy thing, but I like to think of it as a combination of three things:

- \* Your name.
- \* The associations people think of when they hear your name.
- \* The advance decision your fans make that "I want that author's next book, whatever it is" COMBINED with the advance decision your non-fans make that "I have read that author's work and I won't buy it again because it's just not for me."

If people don't know your name, then you have a weak brand.

If people know your name, but they really don't have any strong associations with it, then you have a weak

brand.

If people know your name and if when they see your name on the cover of a book, they INSTANTLY know what that book is going to be about AND they know whether they want that book or not, then you have a strong brand.

So if you want to split your brand, the simple solution is to write under one or more pen names. You can make a big secret out of this or you can be totally open. Either way, nobody will really care.

What your readers care about is that when they see your name on the cover, they know right away whether they want the book or not. Life demands enormous numbers of decisions from us every day. A strong brand is one fewer decision that your fans have to make.

If you write under multiple names, this will certainly mean that some of your fans are going to LOVE one of your names and HATE one of your others.

This is good. This means that you won't lose readers who don't happen to like everything you write. Your separate brands may lead to widely separate fan bases.

Have you defined your brand (or brands) yet? If not, you can



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## Continued:

get started right now. Bear in mind that branding is a life-long process, so you'll never really finish, but it's one of the most important things you can do in your writing career.

Here's how to start. For each category of fiction that you want to write, answer these questions:

\* What author name will I use for books in this category? \*  
How many books do I intend to write in this category? \*  
What three things do I want people to think INSTANTLY when they see this author name in large letters on the cover of a book?

I strongly recommend that you use a different author name for each category.

The number of books that you intend to write in a given category will determine how much work you want to put into promoting the brand for that category.

The associations that you want people to make with your author name will define the length of your books, the quality of your writing, the type of art on your covers, and the publishers you choose to work with.

Branding is a painful process. It forces you to examine yourself closely, and that can be scary.

You can always soothe the pain of that self-scrutiny by going out to eat at your favorite Chinese-Italian- Mexican restaurant.

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## Paraprosdokian Sentences From Sue Tome

**A paraprosdokian is a figure of speech in which the latter part of a sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected in a way that causes the reader or listener to reframe or reinterpret the first part.**

- ∅ Do not argue with an idiot. He will drag you down to his level and beat you with experience.
- ∅ I want to die peacefully in my sleep, like my grandfather. Not screaming and yelling like the passengers in his car.
- ∅ The last thing I want to do is hurt you. But it's still on the list.
- ∅ Light travels faster than sound. This is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak.
- ∅ If I agreed with you we'd both be wrong.
- ∅ We never really grow up, we only learn how to act in public.
- ∅ War does not determine who is right – only who is left.
- ∅ Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.
- ∅ The early bird might get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.
- ∅ Evening news is where they begin with 'Good evening', and then proceed to tell you why it isn't.
- ∅ To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism. To steal from many is research.
- ∅ Some people are like Slinkies ... not really good for anything, but you can't help smiling when you see one tumble down the stairs.
- ∅ When tempted to fight fire with fire, remember that the Fire Department usually uses water.
- ∅ Nostalgia isn't what it used to be.
- ∅ I thought I wanted a career, turns out I just wanted pay

checks.

∅ Whenever I fill out an application, in the part that says "If an emergency, notify:" I put "DOCTOR".

∅ I didn't say it was your fault, I said I was blaming you.

∅ I saw a woman wearing a sweat shirt with "Guess" on it...so I said "Implants?"

∅ Why does someone believe you when you say there are four billion stars, but check when you say the paint is wet?

∅ Women will never be equal to men until they can walk down the street with a bald head and a beer gut, and still think they are sexy.

∅ A clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.

∅ The voices in my head may not be real, but they have some good ideas!

∅ Always borrow money from a pessimist. She won't expect it back.

∅ Hospitality: making your guests feel like they're at home, even if you wish they were.

∅ I discovered I scream the same way whether I'm about to be devoured by a great white shark or if a piece of seaweed touches my foot.

∅ Some cause happiness wherever they go. Others whenever they go.

∅ There's a fine line between cuddling and holding someone down so they can't get away.

∅ I used to be indecisive. Now I'm not sure.

∅ I always take life with a grain of salt, plus a slice of lemon, and a shot of tequila.



"Fame lasts perhaps two thousand years. And what are two thousand years? What, indeed, if you look from a mountain top down the long wastes of the ages? The very stone one kicks with one's boot will outlive Shakespeare."

**When I look at** a book on Amazon.com with few or no reviews, I wonder if the book is worth reading. I know many authors have other sales channels, but Amazon is where many readers turn to research a book even if they don't buy it there. Take advantage of it by getting more reviews posted.

How can you use reviews to sell books?

**Get more reviews.** Even if it is not necessarily true, a higher number of reviews implies a higher number of sales. A potential buyer would think books with more reviews are more popular and therefore, must be good. Karen Kingsbury's *Leaving*, published by Zondervan less than two months ago has 355 reviews.

**Get a balanced rating for your reviews.** Amazon reviews are rated with 1-5 stars, with 5 being the best. If all reviews are fours or fives, a potential buyer might think the reviews are written by the publisher or friends of the author and therefore not as reliable as books with some lower-rated reviews. Of the 355 reviews, Kingsbury's *Leaving* has 302 five stars, 31 four stars, 13 three stars, 5 two stars, and 4 one stars. That's a good mix. Remember, ratings are very subjective. Some readers save their five-star ratings for Pulitzer Prize winning books, while others will give a one star to a book just because the author changed her genre since the last book. You can't control what your reviewers do, but don't worry when the ratings are not all fives.

**Get more helpful review votes.** At the end of each review is this question: **Was this review helpful to you?** This is followed by a **Yes** button and a **No** button. When checked, the results are tallied and presented at the beginning of each review in the form of **x of y people found the following review helpful**: As you might think, even these x and y numbers may affect book sales. What this implies to the potential buyer is that x + y people are so interested in the book they read and commented on the review. Authors should click the Yes and No buttons of reviews for their books to increase the numbers.



How do you get reviews?

To get reviews on Amazon, start with your friends. They're going to buy books anyway, or perhaps you've given them a complimentary copy because they helped you with the book by being an early reader. If your friends are not familiar with writing or posting reviews, teach them. Tell them to rate the book honestly.

Next, find bloggers who write reviews for free copies of books. There are many of them, myself included. Most of us stay busy and will not take on more than we can handle, so you may need to look around to find the right person at the time you need the review. Also, these reviewers tend to specialize in what they review so that the book matches the blog goals. Recent laws have made it necessary for

reviewers who receive free books to say so. However, I don't feel this takes away from the review since they are not obligated to give a good review.

Writing book reviews helps publicize your book.

If you haven't already done so, you may want to review books you have read to get a feel for how it works and to get your name out there on the Internet more. If you bought the book through Amazon.com, be sure to go to the edition you purchased

before submitting your review. Why? Because Amazon will say your review is based on a verified purchase and that will add credibility. I recently reviewed *Already Home* by Susan Mallery and forgot to switch to the Kindle edition before posting my review, so, even though I had paid for the book, the review doesn't include the verified purchase message.

Another benefit of writing reviews for Amazon is that you can post the same review elsewhere. I use Goodreads and Shelfari. This gives you more hits on your name when someone Google's you. That, in turn, leads to more book sales.

You can see sample book reviews and other information about reviews on my blog: <http://christianbookmobile.blogspot.com/>.

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## Marketing: Writing a Killer Product Description

By Randy Ingermanson of Advanced Fiction Writing E-zine

**So far this year**, more than 25 percent of the e-books on Amazon's Kindle Top 100 list have been self-published. That's a remarkable percentage, and it means that writers now have a shot at the big time without needing a major publisher to take them there.

If you want to make that Top 100 list, you're going to face stiff competition. Every part of your book needs to work. Your writing needs to be top notch. You need a great cover. You need to price your book competitively.

Let me give you my own thoughts on what makes a killer Product Description. I've identified four basic principles that can guide you. These aren't strict rules that you must follow to succeed. They're rules of thumb.

**The first principle** is that less is more. You only have a few paragraphs to catch the interest of your reader. Keep them short, and pack the good stuff up near the top.

If you summarize your story in a sentence or two, you might want to lead off with that. Here's an example from the Product Description for Amanda Hocking's novel *Switched*.

"When Wendy Everly was six years old, her mother was convinced she was a monster and tried to kill her. It isn't until eleven years later that Wendy discovers her mother might have been right."

Continued

## Continued

The first sentence jolts the reader with surprise. Is Wendy really a monster? If so, what kind? And . . . how come she's lived to the age of 16 without knowing?

**The second principle** is that you need to lead with your strength. Is your book plot-oriented? Then lead with the plot of your story. If your book is character-oriented, then lead with character.

Here is a plot-oriented lead from the product description for John Locke's novel *Lethal Experiment*:

"What if someone offered you \$100,000 with the only stipulation being that a murderer would be killed if you accept the money? Would you take it? The people who choose to take it are about to find out the ramifications of their decisions to be part of this Lethal Experiment!"

That strong "what if" is intriguing, isn't it? It tells us absolutely nothing about the lead character (Donovan Creed). It tells us only the story premise. That's enough.

Notice that this Product Description simply assumes you'd take the offer. If you wouldn't take the money, then this isn't your kind of book. Then the Product Description sets the hook – apparently, there are "ramifications." If you want to know what they are, you have to buy the book and find out.

Here's a character-oriented lead taken from the author's comments on *The Paris Wife*, a novel about the first wife of Ernest Hemingway:

"Most of us know or think we know who Ernest Hemingway was – a brilliant writer full of macho swagger, driven to take on huge feats of bravery and a pitcher or two of martinis – before lunch. But beneath this man or myth, or some combination of the two, is another Hemingway, one we've never seen before. Hadley Richardson, Hemingway's first wife, is the perfect person to reveal him to us – and also to immerse us in the incredibly exciting and volatile world of Jazz-age Paris."

If you love character-oriented fiction, then this is your book. The above intro tells you nothing about the plot, everything about who the lead character is.

**The third principle** is that your product description should raise a "Story Question."

The Story Question is the question you want to raise in your reader's mind: How will the story end? The ideal Story Question is a "will she or won't she" kind of question. Here's an example from an Editorial Review on the Amazon page for *THE HUNGER GAMES*, by Suzanne Collins:

"Each year, two young representatives from each district are selected by lottery to participate in The Hunger Games. Part entertainment, part brutal intimidation of the subjugated districts, the televised games are broadcasted throughout Panem as the 24 participants are forced to eliminate their competitors, literally, with all citizens required to watch. When 16-year-old Katniss's young sister, Prim, is selected as the mining district's female representative, Katniss volunteers to take her place."

Will Katniss survive, or won't she? That's the Story Question of *THE HUNGER GAMES*. Of course, the book is much deeper than that, but at its core, it's about survival.

A good Story Question is phrased so that the reader knows it'll be answered by the end of the book. The above Story

Question is elemental. Either Katniss will be alive or dead at the end.

**The fourth principle** is to use "social proof" whenever possible.

What is "social proof?" It's any evidence you can give that lots of people think your novel is good. Some examples of "social proof" are the phrases "award-winning author" or "New York Times best-selling novel."

One of the strongest pieces of social proof I've seen is this one, taken from the Amazon page for several of John Locke's novels:

"Every 7 seconds, 24 hours a day, a John Locke novel is downloaded somewhere in the world!"

That's strong social proof. If you do the math, that works out to sales of over 12,000 books per day.

Social proof means that you don't have to decide if the book is good. Somebody else has already figured that out. All you have to decide is whether you like this kind of book. If you do, then you know that it'll be good because all those other people can't be wrong. That's the psychology of social proof.

Now it's your turn. Try your hand at writing a Product Description for your novel. Keep it under 200 words if you can, bearing in mind that many readers aren't going to read more than the first 50.

Remember the four principles that I outlined above:

- Less is more
- Lead with your strength
- Raise a "Story Question"
- Provide "social proof"

It's not as easy as it looks, is it?

Here's a homework assignment for you: Read the Product Descriptions of every self-published novel on the Kindle Top 100 list. You can do it in less than an hour, and you'll learn what you like and what you don't like.

Bear in mind that writing a Product Description is an art, not a science. You'll notice that some of the Product Descriptions on Amazon ignore all the principles I outlined above. Could you write a better one if you tried?

Your mission is to do exactly that for your own book

The reason is simple.

If you self-publish your novel, the job of writing the Product Description falls on you!



## Ask the Book Doctor: POV Terminology

Dear Doc

I just got a reply from a publisher about my young adult novel. She likes the book, thinks I'm a strong writer and have a wonderful message. She says if I make the changes she requires, she wants to see it again. First, I should change my first person point of view to third, cut ten thousand words and "change it to third person past." I know the terms "limited omniscience" or "unlimited omniscience," but I can find nothing that defines "third person past." I assume she means "past tense" since she said I change tenses.

—POV Challenged

**Congratulations, Challenged!**

If a publisher is willing to look at your manuscript again, she must love it. You are correct about her meaning to stay in "past tense" consistently, and third person simply means changing your viewpoint from "I/me" to "he/she." I would bet the third person she wants is "limited omniscient" (meaning only one character's viewpoint at a time) so that readers will still know the thoughts and feelings of your protagonist. But here are your other choices for third person point of view (pov):

- "Omniscient" gets into the thoughts and feelings of all characters at the same time (and most modern editors/readers don't like it—so don't do it).



- "Multiple viewpoint" is like limited omniscient except that characters take turns being the viewpoint character in different scenes or chapters. Use it when: (a) your main character is not on the scene, (b) another character has more invested in the scene, or (c) you want to show readers the true thoughts and feelings of that character even if he hides it from other characters.

- Third person can also be "objective" if readers don't get into anyone's thoughts & feelings. Readers only know what is observable by what characters say and do and by their mannerisms. This is sometimes called "dramatic viewpoint" because it resembles watching actors on a stage. (Like omniscient viewpoint, this may distance readers from the characters you want them to care about.)

As for cutting ten thousand words, what a challenge! Think of it as a chance to get rid of wordiness that would bog down your story. For that big a chunk, however, you'll need to rethink which scenes and characters your story can drop.

Good luck on your rewrite.

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Have a question to share in this column? Email me at: [jmuHall@aol.com](mailto:jmuHall@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. To see previous issues, go to: <http://www.ioanuptonhall.com/books.htm>. Scroll past the book covers and click "Ask Doc" Q&A's.

## 10-Minute Fixes to 10 Common Plot Problems

by Elizabeth Sims from [www.writersdigest.com](http://www.writersdigest.com) . . . Continued

Let's look at 10 common plot problems you can tackle in a flash—and then find out how to do it.

### 7. I NEED A BRIDGE BETWEEN TWO SCENES, BUT I'M AT A LOSS.

Transitions can be the bane of fiction writers. I think this goes back to composition teachers in high school, who insist that there "be a link" between every idea. Oh, the contortions we used to go through to satisfy that requirement!

Forget it.

**10-MINUTE SOLUTION:** Insert a chapter break, or use the magic word.

An excellent way to bridge two scenes is to actually separate them. A chapter break can eliminate the need for a bridge altogether. Pick a novel you like and study the last and subsequent first pages of chapters. You'll find that most modern novels freely jump forward (even backward) in time, or sideways in space (from one character's viewpoint to another's, for example), and the overall effect is smooth. Give it a try.

Now, what about this magic word? In olden times, radio westerns provided masterful entertainment, packed with action, sound effects, dialogue and big story. Narrators would routinely say, "Meanwhile, back at the ranch ..."

The magic word is *meanwhile*. Rather than a big-deal transition, *meanwhile* might be all you need.

## Who "said" Answer ... Virginia Woolf in *To The Lighthouse* ...

**Adeline Virginia Woolf** (pronounced /'wɒlf/; 25 January 1882 – 28 March 1941) was an English author, essayist, publisher, and writer of short stories, regarded as one of the foremost modernist literary figures of the twentieth century.

During the interwar period, Woolf was a significant figure in London literary society and a member of the Bloomsbury Group. Her most famous works include the novels *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Orlando* (1928), and the book-length essay *A Room of One's Own*

(1929), with its famous dictum, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."

**Novels:** *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Night and Day* (1919), *Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), *The Waves* (1931), *The Years* (1937), *Between the Acts* (1941)



## 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 George-town Library. **And there is room for one 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

### 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

**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.

**Bard Masters Critique Group** The focus of the critique group is historical fiction and fantasy. Meeting Tuesdays, 6:00 PM at the Georgetown Library. Currently open to a new member with a serious work in progress. Contact: Ross Carnes graphicrex@hotmail.com

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

## Member websites

### Anna M. Bell

Website: <http://www.annamaebell.com>  
Author Blog: <http://annbell.wordpress.com/>  
Educational Technology Blog: <http://annamaebell.wordpress.com/>

### Ross Carnes

<http://webstarts.com/RHCarnesStoryTeller>

### David Ciabrone

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

### Mary Fenoglio

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

### Joan Hall:

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

### Durwood J (DJ) Heinrich:

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

### Sam Holland:

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

### D Alan Johnson

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

### Melissa Leedom:

[www.forgive490.com](http://www.forgive490.com)

### Linda Lipscomb:

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

### Jason Minor:

[www.jason-minor.com](http://www.jason-minor.com)

### Helen Nardecchia

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

### Joy Nord:

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

### Jamie Roton aka Lillian Grey blog

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

### Sylvia Dickey Smith:

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

### SGWL website:

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

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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).

### Flashbacks (effective use)

Whether you're relaying a fiction or nonfiction event, readers can follow most easily if you write the happenings in natural, chronological order. If, however, you want to use a flashback, consider the risks of confusing "real" and "recalled" time for the reader and blocking the forward momentum of your story. The following tips may help:

- Keep the flashback entry and exit clear and short (operative word: "flash").
- Avoid trite entry phrases like, "I remembered when..."
- Trigger the flashback by what someone says or a certain object or sense. Mention the same trigger to bring reader back to "real" time. Sensory appeals make especially good triggers because readers relate to these details on both intellectual and gut levels.
- Time the flashback appropriately. Don't interrupt an action scene with a flashback. If reader needed this information before the action, think of a way to impart it before the action starts.
- Give readers only what they need right now, and don't over-explain. Think like a screenwriter.

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## The Gabriel Writer



the  
July 7  
SGWL meeting  
is at the  
Georgetown Public Library  
N Rock St  
between  
7th and 8th  
gather at 6:30  
meeting  
at 7:00 p.m.

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