

# The Gabriel Writer

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

July 2012

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## On Writing an Oral History with Louis Fairchild

Louis Fairchild's parents were both born in Orange, Texas and though they lived in other town in other states, they returned to Orange so their son could be born in their hometown, but lived in Orange just long enough to finish first grade.

He became very interested in his hometown years later when as a professor of psychology at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Texas he began to wonder what sort of effect the population explosion of Orange during the WWII war years had on the population that had been so invaded by so many newcomers.

Fairchild had moved around and lived in several Southeast Texas towns due to his father's employment with Shell Pipeline Co. None of the towns he lived in had had the same experience with those war years as Orange.

He had earned several degrees, including a doctorate in psychology and was the head of the psychology department at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, Texas, when he finally made the first moves toward finding out about wartime Orange.

Conducting personal interviews was his chosen method. He started with 11 pilot interviews in 1986, and by the time he finished the interview stage of his project he had interviewed nearly 200 residents of wartime Orange.



### *They Called it the War Effort: Oral Histories from World War II Orange, Texas*

Over the course of World War II, Orange, Texas's easternmost city, went from a sleepy southern town of 7,500 inhabitants to a bustling industrial city of 60,000. The bayou community on the Sabine became one of the nation's preeminent ship-building centers. In *They Called It the War Effort*, Louis Fairchild details the explosive transformation of his native city in the words of the people who lived through it. Some residents who lived in the town before the war speak of nostalgia for the time when Orange was a small, close-knit community and regret for the loss of social cohesiveness of former days, while others speak of the exciting new opportunities and interesting new people that came. Interviewees tell how newcomers from rural areas in Louisiana and East Texas tried to adjust to a new life in close living quarters and to new amenities—like indoor toilets. People from all walks of life talk of the economic shift from the cash and job shortages of Depression era to a war era when these things were in abundance, but they also tell of how wartime rationing made items like Coca-Cola treasured luxuries. Fairchild deftly draws on a wide array of secondary sources in psychology and history to tie together and broaden the perspectives offered by World War II Orangeites. The second edition of this justly praised book features more interviews with non-white residents of Orange, as Japanese Americans and especially African Americans speak not only of the challenges of wartime economic dislocations, but also of living in a southern town where Jim Crow still reigned.

### *The Lonesome Plains: Death and Revival on an American Frontier*

Loneliness pervaded the lives of pioneers on the American plains, including the empty expanses of West Texas. Most settlers lived in isolation broken only by occasional community gatherings such as funerals and religious revivals. In *The Lonesome Plains*, Louis Fairchild mines the letters and journals of West Texas settlers, as well as contemporary fiction and poetry, to record the emotions attending solitude and the ways people sought relief.



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## June 2012 Minutes

The **June 7, 2012** meeting of the **San Gabriel Writers' League** was called to order by **President DJ Heinrich** at 7:00 PM.

**DJ** welcomed guest **Pat Owens** and also **Taylor Conrad** who is one of our recent **HCBF Writing Competition** winners and newest members.

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

### Announcements and Successes:

**Carol "Send-me-your-words!" Menchu** announced that all three volumes of **Jason Temujin Minor's *Fables for Japan*** are now available at [www.fables4japan.com](http://www.fables4japan.com). *Fables for Japan* is a series of 3 anthology e-books created by over 86 renowned writers and artists, as well as rising new talent, from all over the world. This exquisite collection of folktales, comic book stories, and poetry is beautifully illustrated and connected by the theme of Japanese folklore. All proceeds go the victims of Japan's March 11, 2011, earthquake. The specific charity is the **International Medical Corps**, an organization that works directly with partners in Japan to provide general health care, with a focus on addressing the psychological needs of the survivors. They are also working to treat and relocate the thousands left homeless due to the Exclusion Zone around the Fukushima power plant. All three volumes are now available for only \$3.95 each.

**DJ** announced that **2012 Sage award Winner Joan Upton Hall** will be presenting at a **Free Writing Workshop at Book People** on June 16th from 9:30 AM – 6:00 PM. The Seventh Annual "How to Write a Mystery" workshop is co-sponsored by **Sisters in Crime**, Heart of Texas Chapter, and **Book People** bookstore. The event is free and open to the public. **Book People** is located at 603 N. Lamar Blvd., Austin, 78703. Each year the late mystery writer Barbara Burnett Smith is memorialized when **Sisters in Crime** and the **Barbara Burnett Smith Mentoring Authors Foundation** present the **Sage Award**. The award goes to a writer who has mentored others in a program for aspiring writers.

**DJ** reminded the **Membership** that **Jonathon "JB" Bradford** is looking for **SGWL** author's books to review (reviews by **Kelly Luse**) in his **GTFE Magazine** (Georgetown Fun and Events Magazine). If you will turn your books in to **Sylvia, Joan, or DJ**, they will be happy to get them to **JB**. **Sylvia's** review came out last week (Volume 4, No.1). Sorry, your book will not be returned.

**DJ** announced that the **Coalition of Texans with Disabilities** is conducting its 3rd year of the **Pen 2 Paper Creative Writing Competition**. Whether or not you have experience as a creative writer or have a disability, they want to hear from you. Until August 20th, 2012, they are collecting stories, perspectives, fears, and discoveries about disability. See their website at [www.cotwd.org/pen2paper.html](http://www.cotwd.org/pen2paper.html). **Jason Minor** won the contest two years ago.

**Wayne Dawson** asked the **Membership** to assist him in choosing a title for his new book and distributed a list of titles that he is considering. Those present eagerly selected their favorite or suggested an alternative title.

### Program:

**DJ** introduced guest speaker **Martin Shelton** who spoke about "**The Art of Oral Presentation**." In his excellent presentation, **Marty** reminded authors that, sooner or later, they would be required to speak to audiences to promote their books or themselves. He noted that it's imperative that if our oral presentations are to be successful, we must project professionalism, speak clearly with coherence, and leave the audience wanting more. **Marty's** book, *Communicating Ideas with Film, Video, and Multimedia* won the **Best of Show Award** in the Society for Technical Communication, Southern California *Spotlight Award Publishing Competition*.

Respectfully submitted by DJ for  
**Janet Kilgore, Secretary**

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## Upcoming Meetings

August	Linda Lipscomb on writing children's books
September	Workshop
October	Mike Kearby on westerns for young adults
November	To be decided
December	Party

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## New Member



**Tracy L Simpson**  
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**tracylynnsimpson@yahoo.com**

## Writer's Digest Competition—Deadline July 15, 2012

Everyone's got a summer story—get it published!

Ah, summer ... can you smell it, taste it, hear it? Summer's definitely here and we can't wait to read your fun summer short stories. Enter [Write It Your Way](http://www.writersdigest.com/competitions/write-it-your-way), a short story competition brought to you by *Writer's Digest* magazine, and you could find your short summer story published on [WritersDigest.com](http://WritersDigest.com)!

[http://www.writersdigest.com/competitions/write-it-your-way?et\\_mid=562309&rid=2679721](http://www.writersdigest.com/competitions/write-it-your-way?et_mid=562309&rid=2679721)

**Check out** their popular fiction competition, deadline Sept 14, 2012 and **Check out** their short story competition deadline November 15, 2012

### So What's the Deal with the Number 6?

Yesterday, by coincidence I suppose, on the **sixth** day of this the **sixth** month, I was reading Jane Thompson's excellent article in June's *The Gabriel Writer* about her uncle Peter who was a navigator in WWII. Following a close encounter with a piece of shrapnel that tore through the aircraft, Peter vowed to henceforth assist the pilot in searching the skies for enemy aircraft. For any pilot, it is important to continually scan the skies for collision threats—even though most modern aircraft are under radar control. But for fighters and bombers in hostile skies it's critical, especially to counter threats from the vulnerable **six** o'clock (directly aft) position. Hence the fighter pilot term used by a lead's wingman "Check your **six**!"

The number **six** has always fascinated me perhaps in part because when I was young child my dad always got up promptly at **6:00** AM to prepare for his workday. Even though that hour seemed dreadfully early to me at the time, his morning ritual of turning on the ol' Stromberg-Carlson console radio for the news and noisily preparing breakfast was somewhat comforting. I liked the predictability and the feeling that everything was in order.

Later, when I was in college, I became obsessed when an older student bragged about having obtained his pilot's license in only **six** weeks of flying. Although I suspect that he had stretched the truth, my stubborn nature led me to match that feat, despite the fact that I was carrying a full engineering course load and was holding two university part-time jobs to cover tuition expenses. Incidentally, the number of fundamental flight instruments grouped together on the cockpit display was—wait for it!—**six**. Even though this "**six-pack**" arrangement later changed when the radio compass replaced the turn and bank indicator, modern aircraft today still display essentially the same grouped information but in "glass cockpit" format.

Here are some things you may or may not know—or may not care to know—about the number **six**.

Because **six** equals the sum of the proper divisors 1, 2 and 3, it is the smallest "perfect number." It is the only number that is both the sum and the product of three consecutive positive numbers.

**Six** same-radius coins can be positioned around a seventh such that each coin makes contact with the central one and also touches both its neighbors leaving no gaps (yep, I tried it).

The cells of a beehive honeycomb are **6**-sided. Man-made honeycomb structures provide high strength-to-weight ratios and have been used in aircraft, rockets, sporting goods, and packaging materials.

**Six** is considered a lucky number in Chinese culture (fluidity, blessing, responsibility, happiness). Extra-sensory perception (ESP) or intuition is sometimes called the "**sixth** sense."

Our typical storage capacity for short-term memory is around **six** items.

If you are convinced that we are all connected, you might recall that the concept of "**six** degrees of separation" refers to the concept that everyone is on average simply some **six** "friend of a friend" iterations away from everyone else.

**Great!** So are there any practical applications?

Actually, yes!

For instance, teams or committees are more productive if they consist of **six** members. In meetings with large numbers of participants, there are fewer opportunities for individuals to speak, some members begin to coast ("social loafing"), factions tend to form (each with their own agenda), and consensus becomes increasingly difficult. Further, it's usually not practical for any team to attempt to tackle more than **six** problems at once. Priorities should be established so that adequate focus is possible and resources are not so easily exhausted.

There are also a number of "Rules of **Six**" that can be applied to various endeavors or domains. For instance, Thomas R. Hoerr (*Intelligence Connections*) suggests that all communication takes place within the context of relationships. To build supportive relationships, he recommends that we give the other individual at least **six** positive comments for every negative one. According to Salesforce Search, unless potential employers invest sufficient time in hiring the best available candidates, they will spend **six** times the time, aggravation, and money to rectify their mistakes ([www.salesforcerearch.com/](http://www.salesforcerearch.com/)).

Paula Underwood (*Three Strands in the Braid: A Guide for Enablers of Learning*) suggests that for every perceivable phenomena we should devise at least **six** explanations that explain the phenomena. This process prevents us from being too rigid in our thinking.

The Rule of **Six** can also be used for designing presentation slides ([www.ehow.com/](http://www.ehow.com/)). Don't use more than **six** words per line on a slide. Long, wordy points and sentences are difficult for the audience to read. Use a maximum of **six** bullet points per slide. For example, if addressing the benefits of a program, list **six** benefits in a clear, large font. If too many bullet points are included on each slide, they will jumble together in the audience's mind.

Provide no more than **six** rows or **six** columns of data when using tables. Too much data in a table will confuse the audience rather than support the presentation. If it is necessary to provide more information in tables or charts, prepare a handout that the attendees can take home or study later. Limit the discussion of each slide to **six** minutes or less. Lingering too long over a slide or a topic will lose the audience's attention. Keep everything short and to the point for the best results.

Speaking of educating, Jim Norwood (*The Rule of 6: How to Teach With an iPad*) suggests **six** processes to use when teaching with an iPad: gather, organize, transform, format, transmit, and collaborate.

Children's book author Melissa Wiley (*The Prairie Thief, Fox and Crow are NOT Friends, Inch and Roly Make a Wish*) offers her Rule of **Six** for children's activities: good books, imaginative play, encounters with beauty, ideas to ponder and discuss, prayer, and meaningful work.

Obviously, this could go on and on, so I'm just going to make sure this discussion is buried for now—i.e., in the grave, on ice, pushing up daisies, done for, gone to Davy Jones's locker, deep-**sixed**!

*St. Elizabeth's Academy for Young Ladies, Peiping, China. 10 March 1917. Morning recess.*

Yen Hei-lan slaps the little girl hard in the face, knocking her to the ground. A large red welt begins to form on the girl's cheek. Yen, with her legs spread apart and arms akimbo, stands over the crying girl demanding that she take the ethnic slur back. Yen proclaims in an imperious voice, "Madeleine, get this through your malignant French soul, I am Chinese! Not a 'Chink'. I am not a 'slope-eye Chink'. Especially, I am not a French colonial vassal. It is you, the pale-skinned round-eye that is the alien in the Middle Kingdom."

Yen glares at the sobbing child. Occidental imperialism fuels her rage to point that she has no voice. Screaming in her brain are the Western rapes of her China: unequal treaties forced on us at gunpoint. Trade concessions stifle our coastal cities. Your gunboats patrol the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers. Christian missionaries prostitute our ancient Confucian religion. Your opium is despoiling our society. Grasping for breath Yen continues in a near shout, "We were a great civilization while your ancestors lived in trees. Get out of my county. My China! Get out now."

Yen Hei-lan is thirteen years old and enrolled in the exclusive St. Elizabeth's Academy for Young Ladies. She is a beautiful woman-child with large black, daring eyes. Already her tall feminine body is nearly fully developed. Learned and capable far beyond her years, she is fluent in Mandarin, English, Russian, French, and Japanese. Her classmates are children who come predominantly from the Western embassies and legations. They regard Yen Hei-lan as a loner, selfish, aggressive, and unscrupulous. Nonetheless, she is the champion athlete of the Academy—a three-goal soccer player and the captain of the tennis team. Her only friend is an attractive sixteen-year old Persian. The rumor among her classmates is that the Persian and Yen have a relationship that is something more intimate than just friends.

Several years ago in Kansu Province, Yen's parents were killed in the crossfire of a battle between the troops of the warlord, Marshal Chang Hsueh-liang, and Colonel Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists soldiers. Colonel Chiang had just launched his Northwest Campaign to rout out wardlordism in China. Now, Yen Hei-lan is the ward of her uncle, Wuhan Wei-kuo, who is the premier antique dealer in Peking.

Sister Mary Beatrice O'Hare, of the order of the Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth, rushes to the aid of the fallen child. O'Hare is short and dumpy, and yet she moves with speed and grace. Her rosy cheeks, deep blue-eyes, and heavy brogue signal her Irish heritage. Her large white habit flaps in the wind and her long full skirt swishes loudly. She helps the fallen Madeleine to stand, wipes her tears, and consoles her with sympathetic assurances and an old-fashioned hug. She tells Madeleine, "Go to the bathroom and clean yourself. Then go to the kitchen and ask the Cook to make an ice pack for you cheek. I will visit with you shortly."

She turns to Yen Hei-lan. "Miss Yen, your conduct is unacceptable. I'm appalled at your behavior. Young ladies of St. Elizabeth's do not strike anyone, no matter the provocation. We do not harangue our fellow students. We do not engage in politics.

Here, we are all equally committed to academic scholarship, the social graces, and chivalrous sportsmanship. Have not these three tenets been the hallmark of your education at St. Elizabeth's?"

Yen recovers quickly from her outrage. Knowing that she must be demure because to be expelled would bring shame on her uncle and her, and would ruin this singular and expensive opportunity for a nonpareil education. She feigns humility and contrition to answer Sister O'Hare's reproof. "You are correct, reverend Sister. I am shamed by my ill-advised conduct. May I suggest, however, Sister Mary Beatrice, that I was deeply wounded by the racist slur 'slope-eyed Chink' spoken by a person who just a few decades ago my ancestors would have considered a barbarian."

"Yen, be quiet. You have done enough, and said enough. I empathize with your hurt. Madeleine's insult is appalling and not in keeping with our protocols. I shall speak to her—quite sternly. Yet no matter the provocations, our young ladies always keep self-control. We assiduously practice the etiquette of the polite and genteel society—no matter the circumstances.

At all times we gracefully maintain the conventions expected of us as students and graduates of St. Elizabeth's. Every semester is that not what we have taught and demanded of you, and all our young ladies?"

Seething inside, yet under complete external control, Yen responds, "Yes, Sister. You are correct. I have failed in my obligations to you and this esteemed school. May I beg your forgiveness?"

In a more conciliatory tone, Sister Mary Beatrice says, "My dear Miss Yen, I do not have the power to forgive. Only a priest in the confessional, through Christ, can forgive. But I must say that I am bitterly disappointed at your behavior today. You are the brightest student in our school. You are a champion athlete, a natural leader, and mature far beyond your years. Please understand, Hei-lan, that your moral and corporal destiny will be decided by your forbearance of others, and those that offend you, and those that are not as accomplished as you in intelligence, industry, comeliness, and position. Compassion must be your counsel. Lock these prescriptions in your heart and follow them always. Is that unequivocally clear?"

"Yes, Sister. I understand and in future I will uphold the highest time-honored conventions of St. Elizabeth's."

"Very well, Hei-lan. I accept your assurances. But there must be atonement to ease my disappointment, to make amends to Madeleine, and to reaffirm your commitment to our ideals." Known for her scholarship, Sister O'Hara commands, "For your punishment for today's misconduct, you must write a letter of apology to the wounded child, and write it in French. I will review it, and if satisfactory will return it to you so that you may deliver it personally to Madeleine and make appropriate verbal atonement. Additionally, next Monday you will hand me a five-thousand-word essay, written in Russian that discusses the border dispute between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Republic of China over Inner Mongolia. Include such themes as the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Japanese influence in Manchuria, and warlordism in the northwestern provinces."



*continued*

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## Continued

"Yes, Sister. Such an assignment is appropriate for my wanton misconduct. You will have both documents Monday morning as you require." Her thoughts, however, rage with controlled anger. Yen Hei-lan does not capitulate to officious occidentals. "These barbarians underestimate me," Hei-lan thinks to herself.

*15 July, 1917,  
His Royal Britannic Majesty's embassy, Peking.*

The military attaché, Brigadier Sir Malcolm Stanford-Brownworth, VC, GBE, hero of the Battle of the Somme, reads the *Times*, Hong Kong edition. In the obituary column he reads that, "Mother Superior Sister Mary Beatrice O'Hare, order of the Sisters of Charity, and Rector of Saint Elizabeth's Academy,

has died of a mysterious illness. The physicians at St. Alphonse's Catholic Infirmary cannot diagnose the infection or explain the rapid progression of the disease. Sister O'Hara expired within two days after complaining of severe headaches. An autopsy is pending."

Indeed unfortunate, he muses. His youngest daughter, Marbella, attended St. Elizabeth's Academy and spoke highly of Sister O'Hare. On page seven there is a small item that notes, "The eleven-year-old daughter of the French Chargé d'affaires, Madeleine de Boise, is missing. Chief Inspector Malcolm Bernard-Smythe, lead homicide detective of the International Police Force, says that there are no clues regarding her disappearance. However, from experience he suspects foul play. Investigations are to continue."

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## Dear Texas Writers

[laura.perna@gmail.com](mailto:laura.perna@gmail.com) [<mailto:laura.perna@gmail.com>] **On Behalf Of** Laura Perna

Dear Texas writers,

I'm getting in touch today to announce the 3rd annual Pen 2 Paper creative writing contest.

You may recall this event from years past, and I hope you're still interested in what we're doing! To refresh your memory, **Pen 2 Paper is a Texas-wide contest** that encourages writers of all ages and writing levels to share their written work on the topic of disability.

The contest accepts works of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and graphic narrative, is **free to enter, and has a deadline of August 20, 2012**. Grand prize is

\$500, and division winners will receive gift cards and other in-kind prizes.

Pen 2 Paper is hosted by the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, an advocacy organization based in Austin with a strong commitment to producing disability-focused arts events.

In an effort to reach as many Texans as possible, I ask for your help in promoting Pen 2 Paper among the writers in your communities and groups. Promotion might include making flyers available at meetings and events, posting a link to the contest web page on your own websites, networking through social media, or posting a blurb in your newsletter.

As far as materials, I have a flyer, a blurb, and a list of prompts specific to the contest that I'll be happy to share. In addition, I would be pleased to cross-promote your group on our Facebook page.

**It may be of interest that for the first year of Pen 2 Paper, the grand prize winner learned about the contest through the San Gabriel Writers' League in Georgetown!** We look forward to receiving many more top notch entries from members of Texas writers' groups this year.

Thanks kindly, Laura & Susie

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## A True Story

by Helen Nardecchia

Years come and go and exact dates get away from us, but in looking back, I remember an incident that's remained in my mind for some time. We lived in Palatine, a small suburb of Chicago, Illinois, and I'd guess the year might be 1985. I was driving down Rolling Road on my way to a favorite shopping center. The radio played and I hummed.

A tiny speck caught my eye going across the road. As I drew closer, I realized it was a child dragging a stuffed animal behind. She could not have been more than three or four years old. I pulled over to the curb and parked the car. To this day, I am thankful there was no traffic or cars coming in the opposite direction. Running as fast as I could, I grabbed her hand and pulled her to the side of the street. She looked up at me and smiled. Her blue eyes showed no fear and she allowed me to walk her to the other side of the road as I looked back and forth for traffic.

At first, I didn't know where to take

her. There were several houses on a side street, and it was then I noticed a little boy playing in a sand box. Continuing to hold her hand, I walked the little girl about a block down the street to the boy. He looked up at me, but didn't speak.

"Do you know where this little girl lives?" I asked.

"She's my sister," he answered. He could not have been more than six years old himself. I turned to see a row of apartments behind me, all on a first floor.

"Could you tell me which one is your house?" He pointed to the door just steps behind him. The little girl clung to my hand as I walked to the door and rang the doorbell. The door cracked open and a woman stuck her head out. She had a stern look on her face, and said nothing.

"I understand this is your little girl. She was crossing Rolling Road and could have been killed easily. Luckily, there wasn't any traffic and I was driving slowly

when I spotted her."

She turned to the little boy and firmly said, "I told you to watch her."

He stood frozen on the porch, knowing what would come later when he got into the house. There was no conversation between us. She reached out of the cracked door, pulled the little girl away from me and slammed the door.

As I walked the block back to my car, wishing there had been a happier ending to this whole incident, I looked to the positive side and said a prayer of thanks that the darling little girl wasn't killed on the wide sprawling street of Rowling Road where cars zoomed by at top speed. Driving slowly on my mission to the shopping center, I wondered why a mother would place such heavy responsibility on the shoulders of another child. The house had no fence or gate to protect them from harm.

Let's remember our children are "children," and not given to us to take on our responsibilities.

## Cloelia

by Alli Jones, honorary member

Cloelia is a semi- legendary woman from the early history of ancient Rome written about in Livy's, *History of Rome*



Cloelia was a maiden brave  
Many Roman women she did save  
Against all odds she did pursue  
And swam through a river as arrows flew

Cloelia's story is of honor and truth  
And an example to me and you  
As she led the women to safety  
Very boldly and very bravely

She gathered the women in the middle of the night  
And they decided to take flight  
Lars Porsenna did not know  
About the women running to Rome

However Lars Porsenna eventually discovered  
The missing women and his lookout's blunder  
He sent a party to chase them down  
Meanwhile Cloelia was crossing the river without a sound

The soldiers were fast and found them first  
They shot their arrows at the women from a hilltop perch  
But Cloelia would not just stop now  
She knew they had to get across somehow

So they dived under water and swam across  
And their great effort was not a loss  
For Cloelia had led the women home  
Cloelia had led the women back to Rome

## In the Song of the Bird

by Pat McNeeley

In the night, I sat pondering,  
Gazing at the red-gold tinted moon  
Thinking of all the mistakes I made –  
Relationships ended, gone too soon.  
Thinking of the silence surrounding me  
Like a downy coat  
And wondering why, somehow, tonight  
God seemed so remote.



The beauty of His Heavens arched  
In star-filled splendor there  
And the moon's rays, golden shining  
Fell about as if His Hair.  
There seemed to be a smile somehow  
In the sky and on His part –  
But I – I sat a-wondering why tears rained  
In my lone and sorrowing heart –

Then soft breeze brushed my cheek – a kiss –  
And from afar there came  
The thrilling sound of the night lark trill  
Resounding with His name,  
And resounding within my very soul  
As if in some great dream,  
Came the thought, whispered soft and low,  
"Things are not as bad, sad as they may seem."

For God sitting in His Heaven  
Gathering hearts from near and far,  
Reminds of His Son's loss and pain –  
How small our worries are!  
So raise your hearts with love and joy  
And like the singing bird  
Take heart, hold peace forevermore  
In the Living, Breathing Word.



The best way to  
become acquainted  
with a subject is to  
write a book about



**Deadline is  
ALWAYS ONE WEEK  
after a meeting.**

**SEND ME YOUR WORDS**

**Contributions are published  
in order of receipt.  
Excess is carried over until the  
next month where they are at head  
of the procession.**

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## Boring Stories By Jane Thompson

**When we were teenagers** we were subjected to the most boring and long-winded recitations; we would roll our eyes at each other and sigh, not believing that we had to listen, again, to what it was like for my grandmother when she was our age.

It couldn't possibly have any relevance to our lives and didn't hold any interest for us, but there we were, prisoners at the dinner table, and we had to listen again to what it was like for a sixteen-year-old bride on the prairie who had to keep house in a sod hut.

She told us what it was like to have to feed her family on only black-eyed peas and sparse game because the first crop to go in after the sod was busted had to be a legume to fix nitrogen in the soil. (Hence, you must eat black-eyed peas on New Year's Day to ensure good crops in the future.)

She described her struggles to keep herself, her clothes, and her kitchen clean in a house made of dirt when she had to haul water a half mile, and it was more sensible to hang the frying pan on the wash line and let the maddening and ubiquitous wind scour it than to waste water on it.

She told of the Indians who would stop in and demand that she cook for them. Sometimes it took all the food she had in the house to feed them, but she was afraid, with her husband in the fields or in town, to refuse them anything. After all, she represented those who took their lands, killed the buffalo, and left them unable to feed themselves or their children. They left her without a word, never harming her, but always in fear.

First, they took part in the lottery that was the Cherokee Strip lane run. After two years of isolation, plowing, (which is a tame word for breaking the virgin sod), building a shelter, performing incredible toil in the fields, hauling water, burning dried buffalo dung for fuel, starving, broiling in the sun, freezing in the winter, and living with the ever-present and infuriating wind, it did not rain, of course, when it had to and the wheat failed. With no other choice, my pregnant grandmother and her husband—not my grandfather, for he came later, moved to Oklahoma City, where he could hope his dreams of fortune would not be so subject to the vagaries of fortune.

For he was a dreamer, with big dreams, first, of a homestead that would bring him fortune as a wheat farmer, then, in the city, with various schemes that would bring him vast wealth. Instead of wealth, he had a wife who was just a child but who could sew dresses for ladies as fine as anything they could buy back East. She became the seamstress for those who had made their fortunes.

She worked out of her home and became as much of a success as a woman could then, in the 1890s, with all of the rich ladies in town as her customers.

He was known all over the city for his charm; everyone liked him and thought him a great guy. It was just too bad that he couldn't seem to find a way to support his wife and, by now, their three children. And, you know, *sotto voce*, he did drink too much. My grandmother, who was raised in Kentucky with all the baggage of the Southern belle—and with all the strength of the

true Southern lady—kept her head up and her shoulder to the wheel, paid the rent, and kept up appearances. She didn't have any other choice. That is, until one day he simply pushed her too far and found the steel underneath the ladylike exterior.

He took her last \$10 to town to buy groceries—when he didn't return in a reasonable amount of time, she knew he had taken the money she had given him for food for the children and gone on a bender. That sweet Southern belle snapped. She knew just where to find him.

She went to the Hotel Black—the nicest hotel in Oklahoma City, where members of the territorial legislature were ensconced. She found him with three members of the legislature finishing a steak dinner, which he had bought with her hard-earned dollars. She proceeded to give those hail-fellows-well-met a piece of her mind, telling them that they knew what kind of a man he was, that they knew they were eating food bought with her money, that her children would now go hungry because of them. Furthermore, she expected them to file a bill of divorce in the territorial legislature and to get it passed for her.

They did.

Which is how my grandmother became the first woman to get a divorce in Oklahoma territory. This was a scandal and put her even further outside respectable society than her status as a working woman had done. Afterwards, she supported her children by herself, probably much better now that she didn't have to support her husband, too.

Later she married my grandfather, who was a widower with three children. So she had seven children to care for, then finally bore my father. Still she had stories to tell of this time, of a tyrannical second husband who had a strange hatred of Catholicism; she was forced to practice her religion in secret and to baptize my father in the dead of night at a stranger's home.

A husband who was so abused as a child that he was denied education and was illiterate, but so proud that no one but her was allowed to know, so she read him every word of the newspaper daily and every paper he needed to sign. Of a husband who periodically disappeared without warning, only to return months later, bearing diamonds as peace offerings. Meanwhile she raised the children and kept the home fires burning, sewing to keep food on the table while he was gone.

All of those children, both her own and her stepchildren alike, adored her. She later bound her daughters-in-law and sons-in-law as closely to her as her children. She died at ninety-three. There were fifty grandchildren and great-grandchildren at her funeral and a half-page obituary in the newspaper; she was one of the best-known ladies in the city.

Well, you can see how her stories just nearly bored us to tears; after all, how would these experiences have anything at all in common with what we might face in our lives? *We* would never make any of the mistakes she made or face any of the hardships she did or wind up alone supporting ourselves.

Proud, now, that I was given her name.

Wish I'd had a tape recorder then.



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## Welcome Author Sylvia Dickey Smith; writing strong women from Brooklyn James' Blog ( with permission)

MONDAY, JUNE 4, 2012

I first stumbled upon Sylvia Dickey Smith in my affiliation with San Gabriel Writer's League of Georgetown, Texas. After visiting her blog, *Writing Strong Women*, my curiosity grew. I wanted to meet this woman who wrote about strong women. Her blog dedicated to honoring strong women through quotes, captions and blog posts with such titles as *The Strongest Woman I Ever Knew*, *Just Say It*, and *The Price Women Pay To Be Loved* (a candid and highly relevant post).

Without further ado, I am thrilled to introduce Sylvia Dickey Smith. Affectionately, *Syl*, to her friends.

**Brooklyn James:** Seems as though Sylvia Dickey Smith wears many hats? Woman, wife, mother, writer, blogger, feminist, sister, philosopher, psychotherapist, educator? Dare I ask, are there more?

**Sylvia Dickey Smith:** Would you believe, all of the above? Plus, great-grandmother, social justice advocate, artist, public speaker.

**Brooklyn James:** Which *hat* do you feel most comfortable in? Essentially, which one fits you the best?

**Sylvia Dickey Smith:** The hat that fits me best is WOMAN. That in itself defines and gives depth and meaning to all the other hats I wear. I laugh when someone calls me a lady, for that is editorializing. It describes our behavior at a certain moment. I can act like a lady, but for only short periods of time. Other times I grow weary of "keeping my knees together." I love to see women comfortable enough with themselves that they don't always have to 'act.' One of my pet peeves is signs on the doors of public restrooms that identify Ladies and Men. Nothing like pressure subconsciously inflicted on women to fit the ascribed role. Why not the equal labels of "Ladies and Gentlemen," or "Women and Men." Okay, off my soapbox!

**Brooklyn James:** Which *hat* is most difficult? Maybe trying, and by the same virtue most challenging?

**Sylvia Dickey Smith:** The most challenging I suppose is writing. The others all come easy for me. Writing—at least writing well—is a challenge. It requires quiet time (which I have a difficult time locating.) It also requires that I write 'without blink-

ing.' In other words, when the writing brings tears to my eyes and I want to back off because I've touched a vulnerable part of myself, that is when I need to keep going, rather than stopping. My writing touches the depth of my soul, therein lies the challenge.

**Brooklyn James:** Speaking of your writing, I LOVE your *Writing Strong Women* blog. What propelled you to start that blog? And how did you come to use *Rosie The Riveter* as the face of that blog? I remember seeing that image as a kid in the window of the local 'Five & Dime.' It inspired me even then!

**Sylvia Dickey Smith:** Thank you! As most things, my theme of writing strong women evolved. When I started writing my first book in what ended up being the Sidra Smart mystery series, I knew I wanted Sidra to be a strong woman who helps two young women heal after horrendous childhoods. Then, along comes my fourth book, a historical novel set during WWII homefront (*A War of Her Own*) This is the story of a weak young woman who faces her own internal crisis while dealing with an unfaithful husband. To survive, she takes a job at the shipyard and becomes Texas' version of Rosie the Riveter, which helps her find her voice. With that, the theme of my writing jumped out at me. I write strong women—or at least they are by the end of the story!

Actually, I have several blogs, but the only one I contribute much to regularly is the Writing Strong Women blog. (<http://www.writingstrongwomen.com>). I do that as a part of my desire to empower and inspire women. The blog is dedicated to all the strong women who inspire, mentor, model, befriend, support, teach, laugh and cry with me, and even to those who sometimes get on my last nerve. (J) The Rosie the Riveter poster was a natural header. I also have two tee shirts with that logo, along with a coffee mug, a sugar bowl, a key chain and a refrigerator magnet. Actually, I sell the latter two, in case anyone would like one of them. (\$3. Ea. Plus postage). I think it is vitally important for women to remember how far we've come, and how far we still have to go.

Another activity is the *Writing Strong Women* blog talk radio program where I interview authors who write strong

women. It is a half hour weekly talk show. This has been my way to give back to other authors. It has also helped me get my name out there.

**Brooklyn James:** Can you give me an outline of your writing career? How you got into it? What inspired the storyteller in you? Your first novel? Do you self-publish? If so, how? And do you have any advice for writers in their path to becoming successful?

**Sylvia Dickey Smith:** I am an example of how an old dog *can* learn new tricks. I started on my first book after I retired. For years I had talked about writing a book but never did anything beyond talk. One day, a friend said, "Sylvia, you keep saying you're going to write a book but you never do. Either sit you butt in the chair and write it, or quite talking about it!" So I did.

By the time I finished the first, *Dance On His Grave*, I felt like I'd used up any creative ability I might have—until my agent asked me to write a synopsis for two more books with the same protagonist. She wanted to sell it as a series. Talk about feeling desperate! But writer friends helped guide me to create two more and I was off and running. Before long, I'd given birth to the Sidra Smart mystery series.

*Dance On His Grave* is inspired by a true story of a client of mine when I was in private practice as a psychotherapist. The other books are all fiction—but of course inspired by life. I would. My inspiration to be a storyteller—or storycatcher, I like to call it—is my father. A man who excelled in storytelling, and his stories were all on himself and the mischief he got into as a boy.

My books are traditionally published with a small independent publisher out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

**Brooklyn James:** Let's talk strong women: Have you always been a strong woman? If so, where did you learn such behavior and pride in yourself? If not, do you remember the point in time/the catalyst that caused you to grow into the strong woman you are today? Can you name 3-women from whom you draw inspiration to be a strong woman? If you could give any woman 3-key points of advice to graduating into the ranks of strong women, what would those 3-points be?

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## ... Continued

**Sylvia Dickey Smith:** Oh boy, I could write a book on that topic—and on second thought, maybe I will!

I spent the first half of my life as anything but a strong woman. Instead, I spent it “doing right and being good.” But then, at midlife, I learned I had the right to fight for what I wanted—to *name it and claim it*. Claim it I did. I fought for my rights as a strong woman, and continue naming and claiming it today. The more I learned to like myself, the stronger I became and the more I found my voice. Writing helped my voice become even stronger.

In contrast, my sister, two years my senior, describes herself as spending her life trying to get along as easily as possible—making the least waves while trying to work her way through the jungle called life without cutting a path. She describes me as searching until I found a machete. Once I did, I cleared that path and laid out my life as a smooth road. I created my place in this world, she says. Whereas, she knew it was going to be hard and didn't want to make it any harder than possible. She wanted life to be as easy, to just get through it. Then life handed her things she couldn't avoid. Afraid to make a wrong move, for too many years she chose to not make any move at all. So, I have this theory worked out. You either mold yourself into a strong woman, or stay passive all your life.

There are many women who set the example to be a strong woman. Hillary Rodham Clinton inspires me greatly. So did Ann Richards, Barbara Jordan, plus, *many* young woman today.

Three key points of advice? Be assertive, speak out and up for women's rights, and demand control of your own body.

**Brooklyn James:** I see you have a *Classy*

*Cajun* cookbook. I am fascinated by Cajun culture. It seems to be one of those cultures that is still very well grounded and defined in a society that often seems to outgrow indigenous cultures. What was it like growing up in a Cajun culture? How did that culture define you as a strong woman? And did Cajun culture inspire your creativity in your writing endeavors?

**Sylvia Dickey Smith:** Southeast Texas is a melting pot of Scots-Irish and Cajun. Orange, Texas is the last get-off on I-10 before crossing in southwestern Louisiana. Hence, the area has a heavy Cajun influence, both in culture, language and food. Folks there are friendly, unique and welcoming. And if you are like me, and are a big fan of the television program *Swamp People* on the History Channel you get a good glimpse of how well grounded the Cajun culture is and the influence it makes on society and the local foods. So much so that crawfish boils, with its spicy seafood, potatoes and corn on the cob is now a nationwide culinary treat. And the culture absolutely, impacts and inspires my writing. It adds color and flavor to both my settings and my characters.

**Brooklyn James:** Yes, I am a fan of *Swamp People*. Love it! Now back to you. Where do you get your sense of humor? And how about your spunk? Your sassiness; where does that come from?

**Sylvia Dickey Smith:** Wow. Tough questions to answer because I don't know the 'where.' One thing I do know—I spent the first half of my life being way too serious. At mid-life, I made a one-eighty and invited more fun into my life. Without laughter, to me, life is not worth living.

I guess my spunk comes from being a middle child. Plus, I was born backwards—feet first and left-handed—and seem to have done most things backwards ever since. (I could make you a list!)

And sassy? Me? I suppose that is what happens when you combine humor with spunk! Life is fun. I want to live it to the fullest—without being bored! Contrary to many people I tend to respond well to change.

**Brooklyn James:** You've very successfully marketed the Sylvia Dickey Smith brand, as both writer and a strong woman. How did you do that? How long did it take to establish yourself? What advice do you have for others' who feel as though they have something to say...how do they go about building their brand recognition?

**Sylvia Dickey Smith:** Actually, the brand *Writing Strong Women* evolved over time and with each book. It only became clear in my mind when my fourth book, *A War Of Her Own*, hit the bookshelves. I knew I wrote strong women, and knew that was the only thing I wanted to write. From that point, I established a blog of the same name, which is thoughts and commentary on being a strong woman, what it takes, and how we get there.

For writers who think they have something to say, I encourage them to go for it. Be patient, expect rejection, and spend time thinking about what it is you want to say. Explore what is out there and how it compares to yours. See how what you write fits in, where it separates, and what it builds on. It takes time to build name recognition. Of course, social media and networking offers opportunity for tons of exposure. But remember, it takes much time and effort.

**Brooklyn James:** Thank you, Syl, for a thoroughly entertaining interview! All the best to you, and I'm sure I'll catch you at an SGWL meeting real soon. I look forward to reading *A War Of Her Own*.

**Sylvia Dickey Smith...Home:** (<http://www.sylviadickeysmyth.com/>)

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## ? Answer—Benjamin Disraeli

**1st Earl of Beaconsfield**, KG, PC, FRS, (21 December 1804 – 19 April 1881) was a British Prime Minister, parliamentarian, Conservative statesman and literary figure. He served in government for three decades, twice as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Although his father had him baptised to Anglicanism at age 12, he was nonetheless Britain's first and thus far only Prime Minister who was born into a Jewish family—originally from Portugal.<sup>[1]</sup> He played an instrumental role in the creation of the modern Conservative Party after the Corn Laws schism of 1846.

Before and during his political career, Disraeli was well known as a literary and social figure, although his novels are not gener-

ally regarded as a part of the Victorian literary canon. He mainly wrote romances, of which *Sybil* and *Vivian Grey* are perhaps the best-known today. Other works include *Popanilla*, *The Young Duke*, *Contanni Fleming*, *Alroy*, *The Infernal Marriage*, and *Ixion in Heaven*.

He is exceptional among British Prime Ministers for having gained equal social and political renown. He was twice successful as the Glasgow University Conservative Association's candidate for Rector of the University, holding the post for two full terms between 1871 and 1877.



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## Ask the Book Doctor: Networking Newbie by Joan Upton Hall

Dear Doc

I recently read "Networking Tips Using Business Cards" that you referenced in your column. It was excellent and brought to mind a question that may plague other aspiring writers.

Is it appropriate to print up a business card for networking purposes when you aren't yet published? If so, what should the wording be? I don't want to risk seeming either pretentious or uninformed! That's certainly not the impression I'd want to make. —  
Networking Newbie

Dear Newbie,

It's great that you're thinking ahead, and you should have business cards when you're at writing conferences and workshops. As you make new contacts it's good to give those contacts a card to remember you by. You're ahead of many "newbies" in recognizing the importance of a professional looking card.

Your question prompted me to look back at the hundreds of cards I've collected, to see what worked, at least, for me. Yes, some seem pretentious and others shout "amateur!" One even misspelled an ordinary word! Here are a few points to consider:

1. It's tempting to advertise your book in progress, but is that really a good idea? (a) The title will very likely change. (b) Attracting readers, agents, or editors to a book that doesn't yet exist may waste the excitement you'll want them to have later. Agents and editors are too busy with submissions to hold your card indefinitely, or to go out surfing the web looking for talent. (c) By the time your book is ready for release, all that promo may have lost its impact. Even "Coming soon!" notices are risky (as I know from personal experience due to publishing hold-ups).



2. Printing the word "writer" or "author" on your card is a bit redundant when you're networking with others of that ilk, and frankly, it indicates amateur status. (Don't worry, most of us did it ourselves!) Turn this into something informative, such as "writer of biographies, mystery fiction, true crime, short stories" or "travel writer," etc. You may prefer to give yourself a tag-line that indicates the kind of writing you do (for example, mine is: "Joan Upton Hall, delving into the speculative").

3. If you aren't published, just your name and contact information is okay. Think twice about printing your physical address (consider a post office address). Email is a must, and give your website if you have one. The latter will continually grow as you publish books and add services. If you offer writing related services, you may print these on your card, services such as copyediting, manuscript preparation (but be sure you are an expert at whatever you offer).

4. Your card should look professional, but if it's so pricey you hesitate to give one away, you're defeating the purpose. Make your own only if you are good at it. You can order cards free except for shipping & handling from companies which use that service to advertise their other materials. I order mine from [www.vistaprint.com](http://www.vistaprint.com) which offers numerous design choices.

Have fun networking! – Doc Joan

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

### 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, [iwritecozies@gmail.com](mailto:iwritecozies@gmail.com). Currently, we are full.

### Openings

### 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](mailto:graphicrex@hotmail.com)

**Openings Tale Spinners**, return with us to the days of yesteryear where we put some novel twists on old stories. Historical fiction's the name, publication's the fame. Join us now with your work in progress. We have an opening for one new member. We meet on alternate Mondays at 2:30

in the Georgetown Library. Contact Randall Best at [R\\_best@yahoo.com](mailto:R_best@yahoo.com)

**Openings The Coroners**, is open to 2 new members. They meet Wednesdays at 5:30 p.m. in the stacks at the Georgetown Library. Contact Dave Ciabrone, mystery-writer5@msn.com

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If you are interested in joining/forming 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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### Anna M. Bell

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### Ross Carnes

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

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

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<http://www.helennardecchia.wordpress.com>

### Joy Nord:

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

### Jamie Roton aka Lillian Grey blog

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

### Sylvia Dickey Smith:

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

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Columns are 3 and 1/4 inches wide.

If you have illustration, send it and I will try to use it

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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** at: [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 <http://www.joanuptonhall.com/books.htm>.

Demystifying Writers' Demons©

### STYLE—Be verb dependency and passive voice

**Passive voice** means that the subject of the sentence receives the action. Passive voice sets you up for using weak be verbs. Here are the eight be verbs to watch for (and use sparingly):

*be, been, being, am, are, is, was, were.*

"My manuscript was rejected by ninety-nine editors."

"One of Beowulf's men was devoured."

**Active voice** means the subject does the action (stronger).

"Ninety-nine editors rejected my manuscript."

"Grendel devoured one of Beowulf's men."

• **When to avoid passive voice** (active produces stronger, tighter writing; see first examples):

1. You want the subject to control the action.
2. You know who did the action and want the reader to know too.

• **When to keep passive voice** (impersonal; often chosen by journalists; see second examples):

1. You don't want the subject to control the action (a matter of emphasis).
2. You don't know who did the action, or you want to withhold it from the reader.

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# The Gabriel Writer



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the  
July 5



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Gather at 6:30

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See you there!!

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