

Saturday Writers Newsletter

Saturday
Writers



Writers Encouraging Writers Since 2002

A Chapter of the Missouri Writers Guild

A Nonprofit Organization / Corporation

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July 2022

- > Welcome to Saturday Writers
- > We're excited to be meeting in person on the last Saturday of each month at the Spencer Road Library, Room 240.
- > Doors open at 10:45 a.m.
- > Works in Progress Café starts at 10 a.m. in room 265.
- > There will still be a Zoom option for members who continue to social distance, or can't attend.

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JULY SPEAKER: JODY FELDMAN—BEYOND NAME, AGE, AND SIBLING NUMBER: USING THEME (AND OTHER TRICKS) TO UNLEASH THE FULL POTENTIAL OF YOUR CHARACTERS

Even if you've identified a unique trait or two, do you really know your characters beyond their physical attributes? Beyond the standard character questionnaires? Beyond their purpose in your story? This workshop will take you beyond the expected by not only suggesting tips and techniques, but by working with you to generate thematic ideas, by further developing them to exploit their power, and by giving your characters—and the entirety of your creative work—more depth than ever.

You may want to come to this creative session prepared with a

work-in-progress or an idea you'd like to explore.

Jody Feldman blames her 7th grade English teacher (justly or not) for turning her away from writing, yet the world mysteriously led her back. Through a series of happenstances, she enrolled in the Mizzou School of Journalism and discovered she really could write. Her middle grade novels—*The Seventh Level* and *The Gollywhopper Games* series (HarperCollins/Greenwillow) have won a number of honors, including the Georgia Children's Book Award and the Grand Canyon Readers Award, and have

appeared on 26 state reading lists. Her latest, *No Way Home* (Sourcebooks), a YA thriller, hits shelves on August 2, 2022. Jody lives and writes in St. Louis, Missouri.

You can find more about her at her website:
www.jodyfeldman.com



President's Contest Winners:

Drabble:

First Place: Mark Vago for *Chapter One*

Second Place: Donna Mork Reed for *Extinction Event*

Third Place: Donna Mork Reed for *One Order of Earth, To Go*

Essay:

First Place: John Marcum for *The Final Frontier*

Second Place: David Reed for *The Search for Another Earth*

Third Place: Wesley Ginther *Daydreaming*

Flash:

First Place: Cheri Remington for *Uninvited Guest*

Second Place: Donna Volkenannt for *Mercury in Retrograde*

Third Place: Heather Hartmann for *Soccer Ball*

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK: READING TO WRITE



All good writers are avid readers. Stephen King famously said, "If you want to be a writer, you must do two things above all others: read a lot and write a lot." If a musician listens to music, and an artist attends art galleries, then an author should read other people's work.

Reading will improve your writing. That makes sense, right? There is something intuitively obvious about that statement. But let's take a closer look at why it's true. What exactly is it about reading that improves one's writing? Or to flip the question, what is it about one's writing that will improve by reading more?

Maybe the most obvious reason to read is to expand your vocabulary. There are approximately 171,000 words currently in use in the English language, with some counts as high as 1 million total words available. However, the average person only uses about 20,000. That's a lot of unused words. Those surplus words all have specific meanings and one of them is probably the perfect word you are looking for in your latest work. Expanding your vocabulary will sharpen your writing.

A second advantage to reading more is that it will improve your understanding of grammar. I know we all learned basic grammar in school. But that was a long time ago and

some of us haven't used those skills in a long time. Reading a grammar textbook can help but nothing is as good as learning grammar in context in an interesting story.

Reading will help you develop critical thinking skills. You can't help but ask the questions: Is this good writing? Why is this good writing? Is this the kind of writing I want to do? All important questions that only you can answer. The more you read the clearer the answer to these questions will become.

Reading more will also introduce you to a variety of writing styles. If you read enough of a given genre you will soon recognize patterns and begin to understand the mechanics of that genre. This in turn will help you discover your voice and develop your own writing style.

Maybe most importantly, reading will expose you to new ideas. It's important that we, as authors, be constantly exposed to new material. If we don't, our story ideas dry up and our writing becomes boring. Reading fuels our writing motivation and keeps us connected to a modern audience.

In conclusion, if you truly want to be a successful author, then it

is vitally important to create the daily habit of reading and writing. Set aside time every day to read and to write. How much time? Well, even ten minutes is better than no minutes. But the optimum time for reading is at least an hour a day. Find a time that works best for you. Find a comfortable place with no distractions. Set a timer if you must and read for sixty minutes, every day. No excuses, just do it.

Read whatever interests you. Read the good stuff and the bad stuff. Take notes and highlight specific passages. What is good about this phrase? What is bad about that paragraph? Read with a purpose. Study the story structure, how the author forms each paragraph and each sentence, and how he handles dialogue. You get the idea. Relax, learning to write can be fun.

This month's review of a how-to-write book is *Writing for Story* by Jon Franklin. This is one of the better books on writing. As a two-time Pulitzer Prize winning author, Franklin knows what he is talking about. The focus of the book is on dramatic nonfiction but just about everything he says is applicable to fiction writing as well. I give it four stars out of five.

Until next month, keep reading and of course, write, write, write, and keep writing.

Jeffrey Czuchna – 2022 President

"If you read enough of a given genre you will soon recognize patterns and begin to understand the mechanics of that genre. This in turn will help you discover your voice and develop your own writing style."

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? BY DIANE HOW

May proved to be another exciting month for Saturday Writer contests. Pens flowed, fingers tapped, and entries were judged, some were critiqued. The results: fifteen more pieces were selected for our next anthology! A Big Hooray for all those who entered with a drabble, essay, flash, or prose and to those who placed.

Our first-place prose entry, *Flying the Appellations*, was sent in by David Reed who is a retired pilot. His story maneuvers us over the mountains with no radar or navigation radio. Turbulent thunderstorms, eerie black night skies, and wind currents which challenged his control of every rise and fall of the plane, made this an exciting and unforgettable read.

David says his biggest challenge in writing a story is "finding the right subject. I have to be excited by it if I'm going to be passionate about it." He certainly found the passion for this story and many others which he posts in his blog called "Cockpit Chronicles." I asked when he decided to start blogging. "I have had an interesting career, so one day as new writer I thought I'd write about one such adventure. Then

another, and another. Today it has fifty-one stories. The challenge was to write these true stories, and try to make them interesting, for autobiography-type stories can be quite center-focused, interesting only to the writer himself. I try to give the reader the same thought process I had at the time. Fifty-one stories, every one of them very true." Wow. I know I'll be reading more of them.

Envision being at the altar, prepared to say "I do" and someone halts the ceremony with "I object." Cheri Remington imagined it in her first-place flash fiction entry, *Uninvited Guest*. As whispers ascend through the people-filled pews, Cheri keeps the reader in suspense as to who the interloper is until the end of this short-short story.

Surprise ending are great, but Cheri warns, "I LOVE them, but they only work in certain stories. It feels good when I'm able to carry one off...and maybe I did that in

Uninvited Guest."

Squeezing all the essential parts of a story into five hundred words or less is challenging, especially finding a balance with description and dialogue. When asked which Cheri prefers to write, she responded, "I would have to say that I enjoy writing dialog more than description. It is faster, more dynamic and it lets the characters shine through. It also dishes up some surprises now and then. New information comes to light, the story takes an unexpected turn, or a character reveals something I didn't know." So true, Cheri!

John Marcum secured first place with his essay, *The Final Frontier*. This science fiction accounting takes us on a journey from the infancy of the US space program during the '60s to the possibility of future interstellar space travel. That's a lot of space to cover!

I asked John to share some thoughts on essay writing. He said, "Of the three elements in an essay, I guess the body, or supporting



evidence for the essay's premise or opinion is the hardest. It's easy to get off-topic and miss the central point of the essay. When editing I have to keep asking myself if each paragraph supports the main argument or purpose of the essay." Job well done, John.

Writing a nail-biting, one-hundred-word story sounds nearly impossible, but that's exactly what Mark Vago did with his drabble, Chapter One. This disturbing story reminds the reader that a restraining order is nothing more than a piece of paper—when an ex wants revenge. But there's no such thing as a perfect murder and Mark provided a little karma at the end.

Mark began writing in college as a Secondary Education English and Math major before electing a path in business. His life goal is to finish one mystery novel. Sounds like he's well on the way.

Till next month! Keep the ink flowing and the fingers tapping on those keyboards.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT: JUNE SPEAKER STEVE
WIEGENSTEIN: TORTOISES AND HARES, FOXES AND HEDGEHOGS, AND
OTHER UNSUITABLE METAPHORS FOR WRITING NOVELS AND SHORT
STORIES

Most writers have a preferred format they like to write in, be it poetry, drabble, short fiction, creative nonfiction, or novel-length works. On June 25th, Steve Wiegenstein joined us to discuss the difference between writing two of these formats: short stories and novels.

First, ideas. Every writer has struggled with writer's block at some time, and every published writer gets asked at some point how they came up with their ideas. Steve suggests becoming an eavesdropper. You can do this at your local coffee shop, at the library, waiting in line, or in the park. If you're at the coffee shop or library, hit the bulletin boards at the same time to see if there is anything that sparks a story, something he learned as a writer for a small town newspaper. Basically, he says, open yourself up as much as possible and become a living sponge, soaking up all the ideas that you can.

Since short stories and novels are different, our speaker then broke them down and tackled the essential elements one at a time. They are similar for both, but have some significant differences.

In a short story, you need to have interesting characters. These characters need to be relatable. You want to write a character the reader can both connect to and someone they want to know more about. In a novel, on the other hand, you don't just need an interesting character, but you also need a supporting cast. You should have enough characters

that you can have them interact, give them side issues, and come in and out of scenes.

The next essential element in a short story is a problem. The question then becomes how big can that problem be? This is limited by your word count.

A novel should instead have a story. What's the difference? Steve says a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and there are complications along the way.

The final essential element both a novel and a short story need to have is a risk. The size of the risk will change based on your word count. You most likely wouldn't write a life-or-death risk into a short story of one hundred words but you can easily do so in a hundred thousand words.

Mr. Wiegenstein then took us through some technical considerations. One of these was deciding whether to write in first person or third person. In first person, he says, the narrator's voice must be interesting. He pointed out that if the narrator and thus the reader's perception of events overlaps almost completely with the character's, there's no point in writing in first person. However, an unreliable narrator written in first person can provide tension which can improve the right story.

Steve cautions that omniscient point of view is very difficult in a short story due to the fact that you don't have enough time and space to move around into the heads of multiple characters.

He went on to talk about pace, and finally proportion. He advised not to start your short story too far from the

action, so your reader doesn't get bored. Then he said when it comes to proportion, it is important to balance your dialogue with description and your exposition with action.

Finally, our speaker wrapped up by saying that your long-term goal is success. In order to succeed, there are two lines to cross. The first is the Line of Commitment. By crossing this line, you're giving up something else. Hopefully we have all crossed that line as members of Saturday Writers.

The second line is the Line of Pain. This line is when your choices and your commitment affect other people. You have to make a decision then to either persist or stop what you're doing.

In order to succeed, Mr. Wiegenstein says, you also need to do two things. First, manage your expectations. Don't sit down at the keyboard and expect to write 5,000 words every day. Figure out what works for you, which is usually to do a little bit every day. If you write 500 words a day for a week, by the end, you'll have 3,500 words. That's better than no words if you sit down expecting to write that 3,500 all in one sitting!

Second, he said to find and give support. Find a group of writers who will hold you accountable and who you hold accountable. Sometimes even the act of typing the fact that you didn't write anything is motivating. So, keep writing, and keep coming to join us the last Saturday of each month at Saturday Writers!

—Beatrice Underwood-Sweet

UPCOMING EVENTS

August Open Mic: August 17th from 6:00-8:30 p.m. at the Middendorf-Kreddell Branch Library, Room B, 2750 State Hwy K, O'Fallon, MO 63368.

August 27th: Maria O'Rourke: "Are you a plotter, or a pantsers? How a good editor can help."

September 24th: Emily Hall Schroen: "Wherever Books are Sold: A Guide to Forming Lasting Partnerships with Independent Bookstores"

October Workshops:

October 4th on Zoom only, speaker and topic TBA

October 13 at Spencer Road Library, speaker and topic TBA

October 17 on Zoom only, Christina Gant, poetry workshop

October 25 at Spencer Road Library, Jessica Matthews, children's picture books and self-publishing

JULY CONTEST

Theme: Sky - Moon, stars, sun, space, etc

Entry Fee: \$5 for members, \$7 for non-members.

Prose: 2022-word limit

Poetry: 50-line limit

Prose Deadline: 7/30/22

Poetry Deadline: 7/30/22

For contest rules and guidelines, click [here](#)

To submit, click [here](#)

MAY CONTEST WINNERS

Theme: Forest & Desert - rain forest, sand dunes, woods, etc.

First Place: David Reed for *Flying the Appalachians*

Second Place: Susan Gore Zahra for *Sweet, Sweet Water*

Third Place: Donna Mork Reed for *The Secret Door*

Honorable Mention: M. L. Stiehl for *Winter Wonderland*

Honorable Mention: Cheri Remington for *Keep Moving Forward*

Honorable Mention: John Marcum for *The Dunes of Michigan*

Saturday Writers Officers

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Writing/Critique Groups

Members Online Critique: Susan

Moreland

Tuesday Round-Table: Tammy Lough

Wednesday Novel Group: Brad Watson

Wednesday WIP Cafe: Jim Ladendecker

Thursday Novel Group: Bob Crandall

Children's/YA Critique: Sue Fritz

Pre-Meeting Saturday WIP Cafe &

Creative Writing Salon: Robert Sebacher

Write-In Chair: Brad Watson