

Saturday Writers Newsletter

July • 2021

Saturday
Writers



Writers Encouraging Writers Since 2002

A Chapter of the Missouri Writers Guild

A Nonprofit Organization / Corporation

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Saturday Writers To Punch It Up with Pauline Baird Jones



Are you having trouble cranking up the action in your novel? Feeling like you and your book have run out of steam before the finale? On July 31, Saturday

Writers will welcome speaker and *USA Today* Bestselling Author Pauline Baird Jones to offer up some tips and techniques for

adding heart-pounding excitement to your work.

Author of *Perilous Pauline's Quickstart Guide to Writing Made-Up Mayhem*, Pauline Baird Jones never liked reality, so she writes books. She likes to wander among the genres, rampaging like Godzilla, because she does love peril mixed in her romance. She also loves chocolate, bacon, flamingoes, and mid-century modern anything.

—Sarah Angleton, Secretary

Cherie Postill Guides Saturday Writers Through Using Beta Readers Effectively

Only beta readers can tell you if your story works.

—Cherie Postill

Novelist and marketing expert Cherie Postill shared her expertise on beta readers. Her background in marketing gives her a unique perspective that includes beta testing, which she has used to create an effective process, along with guidelines to find and use beta readers. She has written a handbook for writers entitled "*How to Train a Beta Reader and Sell More Books*," available on Amazon and at Barnes & Noble.

Cherie says, "Underdeveloped writing is the #1 reason for manuscript rejection and poor sales." Making use of beta readers is the answer. These readers, chosen because they enjoy and are

well-read in the selected genre, can help refine and improve a manuscript making it ready for the public.

What is a beta reader? This is someone who reads an unpublished manuscript, who is in the target market the writer is writing for, who will buy your next book, and who gives feedback from the point-of-view of an average reader.

An important part of Cherie's effective use of beta readers is her tool kit (see box on page 4).

Cherie includes with the tool kit a welcome letter with additional

Continued on p. 4—See Postill



Welcome to Saturday Writers

Due to social distancing, until further notice all meetings and events will be held via Zoom and recorded. Recordings will be provided to members via email.

Join us on the last Saturday of each month, January through September, to hear speakers share their knowledge of all things writing. Membership is \$35.00 per year. **Guests are welcome to attend our virtual meetings for free.**

Zoom Instructions: You can join an online video meeting via Zoom from your smartphone, computer, or tablet. Follow the prompts and allow your device to access your camera and microphone. Click on this link for the meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84805532643>

When the box requesting the password pops up, type in 561472

The meeting ID is 848 0553 2643 if needed.

July 31 Meeting

- 10:00-10:45 a.m.—**Members only** workshop **VIA ZOOM**.

Topic: Sarah Angleton on LUMEN5, a video creation tool

- 11:00-1:00 p.m.—Regular meeting **VIA ZOOM** for business items and our guest speaker.

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From the Vice President's Desk . . .

Enjoy Summer and Relax Your Way to Better Writing

Do you have any vacation plans? Summer is a great time to sit by a pool, near the ocean, or beside a lake (do you sense a theme, here?) and relax with a good book. Don't get me wrong, beach reads are fun, but maybe you should consider adding a volume or two on writing to your overstuffed tote bag.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say there are probably a few hundred tomes that have been published on writing. The choices can be overwhelming, so let me help make the decision a tad easier. Here are a few books I can recommend as enlightening, entertaining, and quite useful. Will any of your favorites make my list?

1. *On Writing* by Stephen King. Don't expect to be scared silly. This isn't horror, it's the Big Kahuna of memoir/writing books. I read *On Writing* years ago and can honestly say King's work is the one that inspired me to believe writing wasn't only a foolish dream. I'm not alone. Published in 2000, this little opus has sold more than 350 million copies. If you haven't read *On Writing* yet, what are you waiting for?

2. *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott. Oh, the angst of writing. Lamott explores the ups and downs that happen to every writer, especially when real life problems get in the way of progress. I recognize myself in many of the topics she tackles, and her talent at turning lemons into lemonade with wry humor is what I love most about reading her work. Be forewarned: Lamott writes in a gritty style and never hesitates to use salty language.

3. *Naked, Drunk, and Writing* by Adair Lara. The title alone was enough to sell me on this one, and clearly shows Lara has a great sense of humor. This book helped me learn to think about essays in ways I hadn't considered before. For anyone interested in writing memoir or personal essay, this is a most worthwhile read.

4. *Super Structure* by James Scott Bell. I am a definite planner, and I merrily underlined many of Bell's suggestions. He claims his method of structuring works equally well for plotters (like me) as well as pantsers (those who like to write by the seat of their pants). Bell has written a number of craft books, but this one is by far my favorite.

5. *Self-Publisher's Legal Handbook* by Helen Sedwick. While not quite as entertaining as some



Pat Wahler

of my other choices, this is a must-have if you are considering self-publishing. Sedwick has over thirty years of legal experience, and although laws in each state are different, she does an excellent job at giving an overall view of items such as copyright, taxes, collaborations, and dealing with contractors. She also writes in a down-to-earth way that is highly readable.

6. Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi's *Thesaurus* series. Ackerman and Puglisi have created a fabulous library of books that are indispensable for writers. Do you need ideas on how to show your character is frightened? Check out *The Emotion Thesaurus*. Want to realistically paint a country scene? Try *The Rural Setting Thesaurus*. How can you add a few flaws to a character? Check out *The Negative Trait Thesaurus*. There are seven books in the series, and guess what? I own every one of them.

Now that I've given you a few starter ideas, don't procrastinate. Grab a book that adds to your knowledge base, layer on the sunblock, and read while you sip a margarita. Doesn't that sound like a delightful way for any writer to launch summer?

—Pat Wahler, Vice-President

Upcoming Events

Watch your email for instructions about how to participate, whether as reader at an Open Mic or as attentive audience in the comfort of your own home.

July

Open Mic:

Thursday, July 22, 7-9 p.m. via Zoom

Mini-Workshop:

Saturday, July 31, 10:00-10:45 a.m.

General Meeting:

Saturday, July 31, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

August

Open Mic:

TBA

Mini-Workshop:

Saturday, August 28, 10:00-10:45 a.m.

General Meeting:

Saturday, August 28, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

September

Open Mic:

TBA

Mini-Workshop:

Saturday, September 25, 10:00-10:45 a.m.

General Meeting:

Saturday, September 25, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

What's the Big Idea?

Reclaiming Lost Inspiration

Writers often insert bits and pieces of their souls into their stories, whether it is intentional or not. When Marilyn O'Neill wrote her SW May winning prose entry, "Morgan's Ring," she knowingly shared tidbits of information about herself within the fictional story.

"The octagon shape reminded me of a faceted gem, in particular the diamond in my mother's engagement ring. The Grandma character is based on my mom, who loved to go to the mall back in the '90s. Dealing with a walker and wheelchair was part of our weekly shopping jaunt. I exhaled a sigh of relief every time we successfully made the trip from the car to the mall doors. She always waited inside while I parked the car."

Marilyn also discretely shared her sense of humor, her kindness toward her mother's needs, and a hint of enjoyment for pranks and revenge. When a grandmother who enjoys eavesdropping witnesses a crime, her story takes an unexpected twist. The funny ending reassures the reader the whole scene was an improv meant to dole out some karma. You'll want to be sure to read it.

Writing can be a chore at times, and this seems to be true for Marilyn right now. Yet, she hadn't lost her sense of humor when I asked her if she writes daily. "I don't write nearly often enough for my own good. I recently hit a patch of writer's block and composing this story just about killed me. I felt like I should use the wringer cycle on my washing machine to squeeze out anything interesting from my brain. My WIP group helped tremendously, as they always do. I'm very appreciative of their support."

It's always interesting to hear about what inspires other writers. For Marilyn, she draws motivation from simple conversations with others. "It's interesting that you would ask me about inspiration on this particular day. This morning I had a conversation with a woman who keeps a Gratitude List. In spite of a difficult year of health problems, she is determined to be thankful for a myriad of little things. Her list includes grandchildren, the chirping birds in her yard, and music. In her case inspiration is all around her. In my case, maybe my writers block will wane if I'm more in tune with whatever surrounds me at the moment."

With a dozen unfinished writing projects, Marilyn is struggling but hasn't given up, evidenced by her winning entry. "After a couple of very impressive paragraphs, perhaps even with a modicum of



Diane How

comprehensibility, the story stops in its tracks. I imagine the main characters looking at me and shrugging. 'We don't know what happens next either. Go take a nap.' It's frustrating, but I've decided not to let it bother me too much. After all – fiddle dee dee! Tomorrow is another day!"

Marilyn's advice to other writers is simple. "Hang in there and keep trying, something I've heard many times from my Wednesday WIP group and other friends as well. I know there are a lot of stories yet to be written. Perhaps your next inspiration, and mine as well, is right before our eyes, waiting to be noticed." What a great attitude. I hope the ink starts flowing again, Marilyn. We could use another one of your light-hearted stories.

For all those asking themselves if they should write and fear sharing, remember this: we never know when our words touch another person and give them hope or inspiration. Listen, write, and submit. There's only a few more contests left this year. We want to read your best effort!

—*Diane How*

June Contest Winners

First Place: Marilyn O'Neill for "Morgan's Ring"

Second Place: Larry Duerbeck for "The Lottery"

Third Place: Cheri Remington for "Wards Don't Fail Me Now"

Honorable Mention: Heather Hartmann for "Elevator Ride"

Honorable Mention: Heather Hartmann for "Failure to Stop"

DEADLINE SATURDAY July 31

2021 Contest Theme: Shapes

Prose: 2021-word limit

Poetry: 50-line limit

Begins: 4/24/21

Prose Deadline: 5/29/21

Poetry Deadline: 7/31/21

July Theme

Solid Shapes: Cone, cube, sphere, cylinder, pyramid, prisms, etc. Give your story a solid foundation. Stack blocks of characters, action, plots in 2021 words or less.

Postill—Continued from p. 1

information and a note of thanks. She instructs her readers to go over the questions on the Beta Reader Questionnaire and have them in mind while reading. She asks if they would write a review, if the book reminds them of any others they've read, and if they know anyone else who would enjoy being a beta reader. In addition, she asks them to follow her on Amazon.

Beta readers provide an actionable critique. They locate dropped characters, confusion, plot holes or bad dialogue. They can also save an author embarrassment over situations like a character jumping off the Gateway Arch into the river, ordering a Whopper at a McDonalds, or taking the safety off a Glock.

An important aspect of beta readers' input is that it validates the manuscript's strengths. Did they find it engaging? Were they thrilled with its plot twists? Did they fall in love with the characters? How did the story make them feel? Were they satisfied with the ending?

The final step in this process is wielding the feedback. Each critique is unique and subjective but can be part of a bigger picture. Looking for commonalities among responses will yield useful points.

Where do you find beta readers? Cherie suggests writers' organizations, social media, and websites. She has left cards in waiting rooms, left her books on waiting room bookshelves, and has been known

Beta Reader Tool Kit

1. Printed manuscript – not easily forgotten, easier to interact with
2. Mechanical pencil – no pencil sharpener needed. Cherie instructs them to read with this in their hand
3. Highlighter – good for larger swaths of text
4. Sticky flags
5. Sticky notes
6. Red pencil – optional for suggested edits
7. Beta Reader Questionnaire (available on Cherie's website as a PDF or, email her for a Word document)
8. Postage paid return envelope
9. Agreed upon deadline

to strike up a conversation if the situation presents itself. Check out the recording of the June 26 meeting for a list of potential sources of beta readers.

Cherie also provided a list of marketing tips: Keep it simple and realistic. Be consistent and follow your plan. Make adjustments such as editing your book description on Amazon every 30 days and your bio every 90 days to wake up the Amazon algorithm. If you write a newsletter, be consistent.

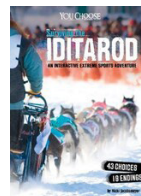
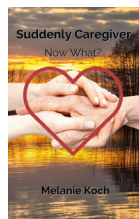
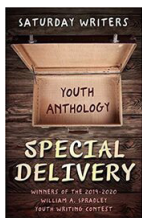
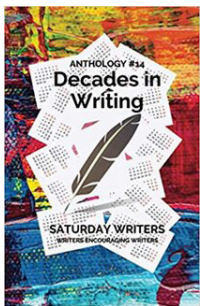
Check out Cherie's website at <https://clpostill.com> or contact her by email at cherie@clpostill.com.

—Cheri Remington

Looking for a Cool Read for a Hot Summer?

Check out Saturday Writers Member Bookstore. Here is a sample of what's available, from SW 2020 anthology, *Decades in Writing*, going back to 2015, *Under the Surface*, to our first youth anthology, *Special Delivery*, to members' individual works of fiction and nonfiction. Here is a small sample of what you can find at <http://saturdaywriters.org/member-bookstore.html>.

Are you a member who has published a book? Click on the Member Bookstore Form on the webpage to upload the cover for your masterpiece and create a link to your next sale.



The Power of Story

Authors love to write stories, and readers of all ages love to hear or read stories. Thanks to scientists in Brazil, we now have proof that stories are powerful. It might interest children's authors to know that the subjects were young patients age two to seven who were hospitalized in the ICU. Half the children chose a book that an adult read to them for about thirty minutes. The children in the control group worked with an adult for the same amount of time to solve amusing riddles.

Storytelling transported the young patients from the hospital to a place of adventure. It decreased the stress-related hormone cortisol and increased the empathy-linked hormone oxytocin, resulting in more positive associations with doctors, nurses, and medicine. Residents of our communities could use a dose of empathy! The most amazing result of all—pain relief! For those of you who hate leaving puzzles or mysteries unsolved, the riddles helped, but the stories won the day with double the benefit.¹

Narratives engage the hearts and minds of the elderly, too. During the pandemic, I entertained my mother and her neighbor by reading them two stories from Saturday Writers' thirteenth anthology, *The House that Writing Built*. We weren't in pain but longed to shrug off stress and boredom and be transported to places we could not travel to. Like the sick children, we didn't know when things would get better. Unfolding lawn chairs on the driveway and grabbing drinks, we savored Billie Holladay Skelley's "From Weeding to Wisdom" and Sherry McMurphy's "Cemetery No Place for Lively Spirits." Contributors, you never know who your stories will reach.

—Denise Scott

¹St. Louis Post-dispatch, June 6, 2021, "Prescription for pain relief: Read kids a story," Amina Khan.

How To Join Saturday Writers

Joining Saturday Writers is quite simple. All that is required is a love of writing and an annual membership fee of \$35. Publishing credits are not required, (but feel free to brag about them on your Member Bio if you have them).

Not ready to join? Visit our virtual meetings for free until we are able to gather together again. Please email Jeanne.F@saturdaywriters.org for access information. We host special youth events from time to time; otherwise our group is intended for writers 18 years or older. (16 + with special approval.)

Contact us at: membership@saturdaywriters.org.



Come Write In

Writing doesn't have to be a solitary act. You can NaNoWriMo all year round. The library will provide plenty of comfortable space and power outlets for your laptops. Come share the experience!

SW member Cheri Remington will resume holding write-ins at Samuel C. Sachs Branch, St. Louis County Library, in September (date to come, check website). "Some members might appreciate getting out of the house to write. This isn't any sort of class or critique group. This is just people coming together to write in the company of others."

Samuel C. Sachs Branch is located at 16400 Burkhardt Place, Chesterfield, MO 63017. Phone number is 314-994-3300. Write-ins will usually be held once a month at 6 p.m. unless otherwise noted. The schedule for the remainder of 2021 is: 10/4, 11/1, 11/15, 11/22, 11/29, 11/30 (Tue), 12/6.

NaNoWriMo fans, note those extra gatherings in November to get your novel off to a flying start.

Many Thanks!



Saturday Writers could not exist without the efforts of all our volunteers. From board members and officers who do all the planning behind the scenes to members who contribute their ideas and when we met in person, their food! Ah, for those good old days!

My special gratitude goes to every contributor to the newsletter. Whether they commit to a monthly column, an occasional piece of writing wisdom, news about their latest project releases, or recaps of monthly meetings, they make our newsletter happen. This year, several brave souls volunteered to share their talents for the first time and did a splendid job. Thanks again!

—Susan Gore Zahra, Editor

Give Pre-Writing a Whirl!



Tammy Lough

Today I broke the chains that bound me to a writing life of laissez-faire and made a decision. My panster days had served me well, but just as easily could have tanked every romance novel I wrote. In the olden days, well, yesterday, I would open my laptop and re-read the last two or three paragraphs written from the day before and continue without so much as an inkling of a plan. My characters loved me for it since every day was like a fly-by-the-seat-of-their-pants senior skip day. When I reined the story back at a point near the happily ever after ending, the editing took twice as long as the spinning of the tale.

One thing I knew for sure: I could never be a plotter or an outliner. But a pre-writer? I knew my writing lacked structure, so I gave pre-writing a whirl and believe I found my happy place. Now, don't assume this means I became an outliner. No how, no way. Let me share the workings behind the curtain and you may become a pre-writing convert, too.

A pre-writer must accomplish four primary tasks:

Pre-Writer Task #1: Write A Premise Sentence

Rather than end up with giant holes near the end of your novel, ask yourself right off the kicker to:

- Identify the **protagonist**.
- Identify the **situation**.
- Identify the **objective**.
- Identify the **opponent**.
- Identify the **disaster** that shakes your protagonist's world upside down.
- Identify the **conflict**.

Now, use your creativity to make a premise sentence from the above answers. Let's say we use the epic, action-packed romance, James Cameron's *Titanic*.

Beautiful, young socialite, Rose DeWitt Bukater (**protagonist**), travels with her fiancé and family on the maiden voyage of the great ship,

Titanic, to begin a new life with which she is highly unimpressed (**situation**). She meets and falls in love with the extraordinarily ordinary Jack

Dawson and gains a new **objective**. When the ship rams an iceberg and sinks (**disaster**), Rose must save Jack who stands chained to a pole in the boiler room (**conflict**) before her fiancé (**opponent**) shoots them or they drown in the freezing water.

Pre-Writing Task #2: Grab a Shovel and Fill Plot Holes

Remember the game Twenty Questions? Grab a piece of paper and jot twenty major plot points about your story.

One at a time, ask yourself any questions that pop into your head about the plot points. Is every scene relevant? Does a particular scene stagnate the flow? Does each scene provide vital information or are there scenes in need of a whack job?

Pre-Writing Task #3: Know Your Character

Backstory: you will not know how your character will act and react unless you know them inside and out. Build a solid backstory and you will never have to wonder how the character will handle any situation. Backstory makes characters real and gives them motive behind their decisions.

Interview: Interview potential characters for a part in your book. Be thorough and cover all the bases. Make certain your character has the traits and tools needed to jump off the page.

Arc: Your main character(s) must begin at Point A of their stories and show real growth and change by Point B, happily ever after.

Pre-Writing Task #4: Don't Be a Settings Slacker

The setting for your romance novel is a powerful choice. Setting dictates the climate, clothing, sights, sounds, smells, habitat, vegetation, etc. Identify and research settings as you would a character in your book. Make a list of potential

settings, collect photos and sketches, bookmark websites and make an informed decision.

I'm giving pre-writing a shot. I love so many aspects of writing, and a favorite is opening my mind to an assortment of creative venues. Writers Write!!!

—Tammy Lough

Thanks to K.M. Weiland for granting permission to paraphrase her October 12, 2015, article, "6 Tasks You'll Love Yourself for Checking Off Your NaNo Pre-Writing."

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Pre-Meeting Saturday

Works-in-Progress Café &

Creative Writing Salon:

R.R.J. Sebacher

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Speaker/Workshop Chair:

Jeanne Felfe

Social Media Chair:

Heather Hartmann

Assistant: Rose Callahan

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Heather Hartmann

Assistant: Rose Callahan

Wednesday Works-in-Progress Café:

Jim Ladendecker

Write-In Chair: Brad Watson

Youth Outreach Chairs:

Nicki Jacobsmeyer & Sue Fritz

Our meetings will be conducted using Zoom until further notice.
For access information, visit SaturdayWriters.org and look under the Meetings tab.