Saturday Writers Newsletter



Writers Encouraging Writers Since 2002 A Chapter of the Missouri Writers Guild

A Nonprofit Organization / Corporation www.saturdaywriters.org • info@saturdaywriters.org Post Office Box 2093 • Saint Peters • Missouri • 63376

End-of-Year 2023

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Join us on the last Saturday of every month at the Kisker Road Library Branch from 11

Doors open at 10:30 a.m.

a.m. to 1 p.m. in room A & B.

- Creative Salon is from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. in a room TBD.
- Members are invited to participate via Zoom. The link will be sent out separately.

New Year, New Location

Spencer Road Library has been host to our meetings since we returned to in-person meetings a couple of years ago. Unfortunately, they are going to be doing construction beginning in January, so we will have to move to a different location until the construction is completed. As of the writing of this newsletter, the construction is planned to last until July, and we will be able to return to Spencer Road. However, we all know that the best laid plans often go awry, and we'll let everyone know as soon as possible when we move back to Spencer Road. In the meantime, we will be at the Kisker Road

Library, located at 1000 Kisker Road in St. Charles. We will be in Rooms A & B. We look forward to seeing you there in January!





2023 in Review

Looking back, I think this past year has been a good one for Saturday Writers. I believe it was a year of fun and education with many of our numbers being up from a year ago. Here is a quick summary.

We ended the year with 113 members, an increase of 7 above the 106 members we ended 2022 with. 95 different people attended at least one meeting, up from 81 the previous year. And our average meeting attendance was 45, up from 40.

We maintained our eight critique groups, and the Saturday afternoon Write-in started again. We now meet most Saturdays from 1:30 to 4:30 at the Spencer Road Library in St. Peters.

We had nine open mic events, four via zoom and five inperson. Our in-person meetings started at the library and ended up at Third Wheel Brewing in October. I expect we will be returning to Third Wheel in 2024.

In May we had a book signing event for our 2022 anthology *A World of Writing*. This was our 16th anthology release.

Again, this year we teamed up with the Saint Peters Cultural Arts

From the President's Desk

Centre for two Pen and Paint contests along with receptions in June and November. Our Astronomy viewing event was in April and our pot-luck picnic was in June.

SW participated in the St. Louis Writers Guild Conference in March, and we sent a carload of representatives to the Missouri Writers Guild Conference in Columbia, MO in September.

We held nine regular monthly meetings and four workshops. Six were via Zoom only, and seven were in-person. We had 11 speakers present a wide range of subjects to our members. Which one was your favorite?

January, Claudia Shelton, Finding Your Writing Niche

February, Nicki Jacobsmeyer, Researching for Fiction and Non-fiction

March, Melissa Ridley Elmes, First Lines: Opening You Poen with Intent

April, George Sirois, Audiobooks, Podcasts, and Audio Dramas

May, Monique Daniels, Self-Format a Professional Quality Book with Atticus

June, Michelle Mason, Brainstorming and Outlining Your Novel

July, Kizzi Roberts, Publish Like a Pro

August, Allie Pleiter, Dynamic Dialogue

September, Tamara Grantham, Deciphering the Fantasy Code

Workshop #1, Melissa Ridley Elmes, Enter the Line: A Poetry Workshop

Workshop #2, Nicki Jacobsmeyer, Kid Lit Bootcamp

Workshop #3, Nikki Hanna,

Capture Life and Create Legacy Through Memoir

Workshop #4, Mary Buckham, Mastering the 10 Universal Hooks

I would like to thank everyone that volunteered their time to help make Saturday Writers the best writer's organization in the St. Louis area. I especially would like to thank vice-president Donna Mork Reed, Treasurer Diane How, and Secretary Holly Elliott. Three other volunteers deserve a special thank you, Beatrice Underwood-Sweet as our newsletter editor, Heather Hartman as our Contest Chair, and Mark Vago as Website Manager. Thank you all for a wonderful 2023.

I would like to recognize two

"This past year has been a good one for Saturday
Writers. It was a year of fun and education."

individuals that have decided to step aside and vacate their position as a Saturday Writer volunteer. A special thank you to Vice-President Donna Mork Reed. Donna has been a tremendous blessing to our organization for the past two years. And thank you to Pat Wahler who will be stepping down from her role as Social Media Chair.

2024 promises to be even better. If you would like to be more involved in Saturday Writers, please let me know. We can always use fresh ideas. We are looking for volunteers to fill the Social Media Chair and the Hospitality Chair.

Until next year.

Jeffrey Czuchna – 2023 President

What's the Big Idea?

Fading into Fall

Our meetings have ended

Our contests have too

But that doesn't mean

I have nothing for you!



As another season fades away (much like my beloved Cardinals baseball team did this year) so do our monthly meetings, contests, and newsletter articles. It makes me a little sad, but I try to focus on the delightful smell of pumpkin everything, the colorful array of changing leaves, and the anticipation of celebrated holidays.

Before we flip the calendar, let's hear from the August first-place prose and poetry winners.

Buy Me Some Peanuts is a delightful memory from John Marcum's childhood. His persistence supports what has often been said at our meetings, don't give up if you don't succeed the first time.

"It was originally written for the theme "junk food." I usually have difficulty coming up with a story, but themes do help a great deal. In this case the story came to me immediately. Most of what you get at the ballpark is junk food. Of course, there was a point to the story, and "junk food" was just the catalyst that got me started. Once I start a story, especially fiction, something else takes over. It just seems to flow and build on itself. Maybe it's the logical progression leading me down a path. I'm a pantser, especially with short stories. I guess it's because I go where the story leads me. After struggling with the first few lines, I feel like I'm a fly on the wall, "reporting" the action I see unfolding in front of me."

As a member of the SW online critique group, I've seen many of John's stories, including this one place in SW contests. I asked him how the critique group has helped his writing.

"Well, after I get most of the bugs out, I submit to the critique group. They catch all kinds of errors I missed, and they offer great suggestions for strengthening my story line or pointing out flaws in it. It's like having a beta reader. I draw inspiration mostly from my own experiences. Even my fiction is often based on something from my past. The story itself may have little to do with a memory, but that memory acts as a prompt. The "Pen and Paint" images also work as great prompts for me."

John also works on "stories for magazines and other anthologies. Two of my favorites are "The Sun" magazine and "Chicken Soup for the Soul." I've had two stories published in The Sun and one soon to be published in Chicken Soup. I just submitted stories to Writer's Digest and Fractured Literature magazine this week. I'm anxious for the 2024 Saturday Writer's season to begin."

It's exciting to hear of John's successes. The encouragement he offers to other writers is immeasurable. Thanks, John. I'm sure we'll see your name here again soon.

The poetry judge found Debbie Hedges' poem Just Too Busy worthing of first place. Debbie's title says it all. Her roles include housekeeper, chef, dog walker, shopper, gardener, photographer, but most important of all, she's a mother.

Debbie shared with me that she likes writing both prose and poetry but she "seems to gravitate back to writing more poetry. The why is a mystery. I would certainly like to write a great mystery."

With all those roles to fill, I wondered how she squeezed in time for writing. "Finding time to write has been a problem for me. I have started to schedule myself into blocks of time for writing, reading, quilting and card making. A lot of days something gets eliminated."

That's a busy schedule! Debbie also says she reads a lot. "I have really started to write down phrases, words, short passages that speak to me. I keep them in a notebook for inspiration."

I hope those notes stir another poem from Debbie and she continues sharing her talent with Saturday Writers. Maybe she'll even start on that great mystery novel.

That's all from me for this year. Wishing you well and hoping you find lots of time to put pen to paper. Until then, be kind and believe.

In Case You Missed It: September's speaker Tamara Grantham, Deciphering the Fantasy Code and October 2023 workshops

Fantasy is a genre that is easy to lose yourself in, but not easy to write.

Tamara Grantham Zoomed in during our September monthly meeting to talk to us about how to improve our fantasy writing.

First, Ms. Grantham defined fantasy for us. It has magical or supernatural elements. It does not rely on history or nature, except for urban fantasy. In the case of urban fantasy, the writer has to get the place right. Fantasy requires world-building.

There are many subgenres of fantasy. There's the high or epic fantasy, which require building an entire world. Portal fantasy involves a gateway to another world with elements of the real world still included. Low or Magical Realism is set in the real world with unexpected magical elements. Urban fantasy is set in contemporary modern times, and the supernatural or magical elements coexist with modern technology. Dark Fantasy has a horror-like setting. Fairytale is inspired by fairy tales, myths or legends. Heroic Fantasy is set in a medieval or ancient setting. Finally, science fantasy combines elements of different types of fantasy. For example, time travel and alien worlds with magic are considered science fantasy.

As you can see, there is a type of fantasy to interest every writer.

Next, we got into the meat of the writing. Before ever beginning to write the actual book, write the description, history, and magical system of your world and set those aside. Weave that information in during the writing of your piece. Using the basic plot structure of beginning, middle, and

end, her advice was that the beginning and end should be the shortest, and the middle should be the longest.

In your beginning, you need to introduce an immediate form of antagonist. This can be a secondary character, or in the form of a flashback. Bring in scene action and a conflict, but also plant hints for later. Sprinkle small hooks throughout your writing.

She mentioned some hooks that are good to use in your writing.

Some of those were raising a question, using unpredictability, and changing circumstances. You can also create imminent danger or utilize a sinister atmosphere.

The next important element of your fantasy writing is characters. Ms. Grantham said that they should be likeable, but not too boring or predictable. She recommended the book *The Fantasy Fiction Formula* by Deborah Chester. This book has many cheat sheets for writing characters and world-building.

If you think that you might be interested in writing fantasy, check out the replay of September's speaker, Tamara Grantham.

-Beatrice Underwood-Sweet

Enter the Line Melissa Ridley Elmes

Poetry Even the seasoned writer sometimes finds it challenging to conquer that creative wall. Maybe the muse offers a first or second draft, but the words don't match how your gut or heart feels it. Or perhaps you're looking to create

a collection of writings but can't decide on a theme.

On October 5th, Melissa Ridley Elmes, Associate Professor at Lindenwood University, introduced us to a technique she finds helpful in tackling each barrier, a technique she calls "Enter the Line." I found this approach a bit like Amish Friendship Bread – tasty and fun! (Not familiar with Amish Friendship Bread? It's a starter-based bread, with starts typically passed on to one or more friends, who can then later delight in the freshly baked essence.)

Whether you're looking to revamp a poem you've already started or hope to build a series for publication, the approach is simple: Start by choosing a line from your original poem. Now zero in on a specific word or phrase within that line. (You might even use two or more words to create a new, unrelated phrase.) Now, incorporate your chosen word or phrase into the first line of your next or new creation. For a poetry compilation, you can work your way down the original piece, line by line, with each now serving as a springboard for a new story or thought.

Developing a final, polished piece or a grouping that neatly ties everything together can still be challenging.

However, those of us at the workshop felt this was an excellent approach to creative brainstorming.

If you're looking to try your hand at a poetry collection, I encourage you to consider purchasing the workshop replay!

—Holly Elliott

<u>Kid Lit Bootcamp</u> <u>Nicki Jacobsmeyer</u>

Longtime Saturday Writers member and successfully published author, Nicki Jacobsmeyer presented a KidLit bootcamp as a Fall workshop. She took participants through a course that started out with getting the lay of the land by defining the world of kid lit, moving through the obstacles of polishing a completed manuscript, the hurdle of query and submission, the challenges of working with agents and publishers, and onto the finish line of the follow up steps to selling or self-publishing. It was a dash through but gave us glimpses into the writer's journey beyond the creation of a winning manuscript. This presentation was packed with so much usable information this write-up is just the highlights.

Nicki defined seven literary types that comprise children's literature. They are Board Books, Picture Books, Early Reader Books, Chapter Books, Middle Grade Books, Young Adult Books, and Graphic Novels. Books written for the youngest children must appeal to care givers as well as children and are meant to be read aloud. For older children, the text of books can be measured on a Lexile scale that matches readability with readers. For a manuscript, the Lexile measures readability, but readers are measured for comprehension that

coordinates with these Lexiles so that a comfortable and successful match can be made between readers and books.

Learn about Lexile and look up a book's Lexile using resources at https://lexile.com.

You can also check the readability of your manuscript using MS Word. Go to File > Settings > Readability and you'll access an evaluation of your manuscript that includes the reading grade level. (If your version of Word varies, you can search online for the steps.)

Once you've figured out your target audience, genre, format and literary type, you're ready to write, then polish your manuscript. This is where the support and input of a critique group comes in. You benefit from the fresh eyes and varied experience of other members of the group. There are other resources such as the SCBWI (Society of Childrens Book Writers and Illustrators) (<u>www.scbwi.org</u>) and the 12 X 12 Challenge (https://www.12x12challenge.com/) that provide resources, challenges and a supportive community to accompany you on your writing journey. You're the final polisher of your manuscript and it helps to see it in new ways. Change the font, color or size, read it aloud, or have someone read it aloud to you. Nicki

also shared a couple of other

resources such as the Picture Book

Dummy

(https://taralazar.com/2009/02/22/pict ure-book-construction-know-your-layout/) which allows you to lay your picture book out to get a feel for how it will look, and Kate Messner's Big-Picture Revision Chart (https://katemessner.com/countdown-to-breakout-the-big-picture-revision-chart/) These both allow you to take your edits to a higher level. Kate's chart is a favorite of Nicki's. She said it's a great tool that can be used for adults, too.

Once the writing is done, make sure your document is formatted correctly. The industry standard is $8-1/2 \times 11$, white paper, black ink. It should be 12-point Arial or Times New Roman, double spaced with pages numbered consecutively. Be sure to use the default margins. In the header list your title in all caps, then underscore, First Initial and last name. Always pay attention to submission guidelines and follow them closely.

There are three routes to publishing and Nicki went into each in great detail. These are Self-Publishing, Using an Agent, and going through a Publishing House. With self-publishing, there are costs up front for editors, illustrators, design, production and licensing. Promotion is all done by the author.

When using an agent, there are many factors to take into consideration that involve research to find a good fit. The cost of an agent may be 15% of the book's earnings. If you're going to use

an agent, it's a good idea to have three or four manuscripts polished and ready to go in case they ask for more.

Going through a Publishing
House will most likely involve an
agent. You'll also have to
research publishers to know
what they publish, then submit a
query. If they ask for your
manuscript and like it, they may
ask you to revise and resubmit.
The final decision to select your
book will come after this.

Your personal goals will also inform the path you choose. If your goal is to publish something for your grandkids, self-publishing may be the best choice for you. If you're on board to begin a career as a children's author, you may want to invest the time and research into agents and publishers. It is up to you!

Remember that professional organizations such as Saturday Writers and SCBWI are great resources. Nicki also recommended taking advantage of critique groups to help with manuscripts as well as queries and synopsis. Nicki also has an exciting project in the works that can be a great resource. It's an online writers' community called Way-Word Writers where you will find a podcast, webinars, retreats and more! Take a sneak peek at https://wavwordwriters.godaddysites.com/

It will be ready in early 2024, so keep checking back.

—Cheri Remington

Capture Life Through Memoir Nikki Hannah

I never considered writing a memoir until I heard Nikki speak. Her genuine, funny, and spunky personality kept me engaged throughout her presentation even when she lost her train of thought or meandered a bit. Her innate humor came across in every topic she addressed, and this article covers only a fragment of those. It's important to note that she loves Winnie the Pooh guotes which she feels are for both adults and children, and I agree. Nikki loves to teach and coach writers in finding joy and purpose in writing.

What Is a Memoir?

According to Nikki, it's a mechanism to perform a life review, the path to self-awareness, a device for performing, entertaining, and sharing wisdom. An opportunity to seek answers, interpret information, and fill in the blanks. A chance to learn how to turn life experiences into stories; an effort to discern the essence of a person and to share it with others. It's a love letter to children, grandchildren, relatives, friends, and future generations.

Benefits of Writing Your Story

Nikki did a great job of sharing some of the many, unexpected benefits of writing her memoir, which you may too. Here are a few:

 Forgiveness towards her parents

- Joy in sharing her legacy with her grandchildren.
- Increased connection with family members and renewed childhood friends.
- A deeper understanding and appreciation of who she was as a child and who she is today.
- Shared enjoyment with her family, their surprising reactions, and rekindling of childhood friendships.
 Nikki mentioned that she became very popular at her family reunion and her relatives were really interested in her story.
- Cathartic healing.
- Satisfaction in recording family stories that no one else knew about, such as her uncle who had been in three big battles in WWII.

Setting the Tone

Ask yourself, what's my focus or what is my motivation? It's important to know what your book is about since it sets the tone and should guide your theme throughout the story. Nikki's focus was her grandchildren and writing a story where they would discover that she was cooler than they had thought. She strongly emphasized that you should avoid using a victim tone and persecuting others. Be very sensitive about what you share in your story; not everything that happened is your story to tell. You can write about the hard times and challenges you experienced, however, don't hurt others with the words you use. As Winnie the Pooh's friend, Eeyore said, "A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference." Share how you overcame the hardships, the lessons you learned, so that the reader learns that you are a winner.

Content

Start your first draft by writing about everything you can remember. Approach it as a free flowing exercise -- don't try to write it chronologically, just write about memories as they come to you. You can try different topics to help to recall memories. For example she tried recalling her childhood bedroom and she was amazed at how much detail came up with after so many years.

She stressed the importance of interviewing your family members and don't wait! There's a lot of information available on how to conduct an interview effectively which she used to record an amazing story from her uncle. While he was on hospice, she sat at the foot of his bed to create a casual setting. He opened up and shared stories about how he was in three major battles in WWII, which no one else in the family knew! Include family photos since everyone enjoys looking at their ancestors.

Your memoir is story-like and should only include certain portions of your life that's most interesting. Disclose only some of your story from the past and where you are today. Here's a summary of what a memoir isn't:

It's not fiction – tell the truth! It's not chronological or comprehensive (like biographies).

It's not a diary or journal; not daily events.

It's not an opportunity to brag, express personal glorification.

Not a vehicle for venting, revenge, retaliation, or pay back.

Not preachy or an attempt to convert someone to your beliefs. If you want to write a manifesto, write it.

A big element in writing your memoir effectively is by sharing your feelings about your life's experiences. It's imperative that you learn how to describe emotions and your feelings -be a concierge of feelings and how to express them. Nikki emphasized that you must be honest with your emotions and experiences in order to keep the reader engaged. This reminded me of Brene Brown's book, "Daring Greatly," where she explains that we must learn to be vulnerable and put ourselves there in order to make connections with people. Nikki also stressed other story elements such as "Show, don't tell," the importance of using an active voice versus passive voice, and character development. Every character in the story should have a redeeming quality, even the villain. Don't be trite or state the obvious, emphasize emotions and don't write facts.

Structuring Your Book

your book into parts, similar to scenes in a play. For example,
"Part 1: The Fall," and "Part 2: The Rally" which can help you structure and organize your book. Every chapter should have a unique title and subtitle which will hook the reader into reading more. Start each chapter with a strong first sentence that grabs the reader, and then follow up with a second sentence that explains more

about the first sentence. Each chapter

should have a beginning, middle, and

Nikki recommends that you divide

ending. Sprinkle quotes throughout your book if possible since they're a powerful, colorful, and intriguing way to keep the reader engaged. Weave in global historical events, if possible, into your story to make connections to your family's experiences.

Formatting & Editing Your Manuscript

Nikki shared that formatting used to be her least favorite part of writing because of the technology, but now admits that "it's better than diabetes!" Formatting entails headers and footer, page numbers, widow, and orphan lines, spacing between words, etc. In addition to formatting your story, edit your story ruthlessly, check spelling, punctuation, and grammar to earn the respect of editors.

Conclusion

Nikki assured us that anyone can write their memoir and should start today if they want to capture their life's story. It's an adventure about self-discovery, uncovering family treasures, retrieving memories long forgotten that bring joy and perspective; it's a journey in forgiveness, an opportunity to fall in love with yourself as you were as a child, and for who you are today. Mostly, it's a gift of love to your family, friends, and community. As Winnie the Pooh said, "If there ever comes a day when we can't be together, keep me in your heart. I'll stay there forever." Don't wait to begin-- the best time to write

your story is today.

-Denise Wilson

Mastering the 10 Universal Hooks

Mary Buckham

We last had Mary Buckham speak to us during our workshops in 2020. We were so impressed that we brought her back! This time, she talked to us about hooks.

Of course, the goal of any writer is to keep the reader interested, so using hooks is one of the best tools in a writer's toolbox. Ms. Buckham has them distilled down to the top ten to use, and she explained both what they are and when to use them in her workshop on October 23rd.

The first hook she started with was the Danger or Action hook. You can use danger to the character, or a dangerous situation. The danger can be immediate or prolonged.

The next hook was Overpowering Emotions, which Ms. Buckham said that she thought was one of the most difficult hooks. She called this the "Kill the baby" hook. In this case, the context of the book matters, and makes it the right hook for your situation.

Then we looked at the Surprising Situation hook. This situation can be a surprise to the character, but it can also be a surprise to reader.

The fourth hook was the Evocative hook. This is a subjective hook, and can be interpreted differently by different readers. It has a wow! factor. This hook is hinged upon

making the usual unusual, and it's something that has to continue throughout your book.

Next was Unique Characters.

These are characters that don't fit the scene. This character or characters don't have to remain unique throughout the book, however.

On to Foreshadowing. This can include warning or not. A warning can make the foreshadowing stronger. Surprising or Shocking Dialogue hooks deal with either internal or external dialogue. This hook can be combined with other hooks. This hook depends on context.

We then moved on to the Totally Unexpected hook. This takes that surprising situation to the next level.

Finally, there was the Questions
Raised and Humor hooks. In a
Questions Raised hook, Ms.
Buckham advised to only raise one
question at a time. She says that in
Humor, even a hint of it helps the
reader relate to the characters
more. Humor can be a funny line,
something leading up the line, or
the action after the line is funny.

The last part of our workshop focused on where and when to use these hooks. I was surprised to see how often she recommended using hooks.

Start out with a hook in the first sentence of your book or story. Then the end of both the opening paragraph and opening page should have a hook. Then use a hook on the third page. Every scene opening and ending should have a hook. The next big hook should come at the end of the third chapter. Opening and chapter and ending a chapter are prime places for hooks. If you are writing a series, you should have a hook close to the last sentence. This hook should not be a cliffhanger, but you want to sustain the reader's interest over into your next book.

It seems to me like your book should be as much hook as it is dialogue. I know I'll be looking to include some of these hooks in my next book.

-Beatrice Underwood-Sweet



January Contest Rules

Pen and Paint 1

Theme: Anything goes

Deadline: January 27th, 11:59 p.m.

Prose: 1,000 word limit

Poetry: 50 line limit

Cost: FREE to members (If you're not a member yet, it's not too late

to join!)

Check out the full rules and guidelines here

Upcoming Events

Annual Holiday Party: December 2nd, 11 a.m. at Third Wheel Brewing.

January Monthly Meeting: January 27, 11 a.m. Speaker TBA.

February Monthly Meeting: February 24, 11 a.m. Speaker TBA

Saturday Writers Needs YOU!

We're looking for a few good men or women. There are several positions we need to fill. We need people with many different talents.

We always need writers for the newsletter to share a summary of what our monthly speakers had to say. If you are interested, please email newsletter@saturdaywriters.org

We are also in need of someone to be our hospitality chair. If you like snacks and want to be the one that makes that happen, please email president@Saturdaywriters.org

Finally, we need someone to serve as our publicity & social media chairs. If you like talking about Saturday Writers, and what it's done for you, or if you love social media, this is the position for you. If you are interested, email president@saturdaywriters.org

Volunteering for Saturday Writers only makes us better!

Officers and Volunteers

President: Jeffrey Czuchna president@saturdaywriters.org

Vice President: Bob Weismiller vicepresident@saturdaywriters.org

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Directors: Brad Watson, Jennifer

Hasheider

Speaker/Workshop Chair: Jeffrey

Czuchna

Contest Chair: Heather Hartmann

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Sweet

Website Chair: Mark Vago

Membership Chair: Diane How

Membership Assistant: Denise Wilson

Anthology Chair: Brad Watson
Social Media Chair: Open
Publicity Chair: Open
Hospitality Chair: Open

Hospitality Assistant: David Reed
Holiday Party Chair: Bob Weismiller
Poet Laureate: Robert Sebacher

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: Heather

Hartmann

Pre-Meeting Saturday WIP Cafe & Creative Writing Salon: Robert Sebacher

Write-In Chair: Terry Moreland