

Saturday Writers Newsletter

Saturday
Writers



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

June 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.
- > There will still be a Zoom option for members who continue to social distance, or can't attend.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE :

June Speaker	1
Book Signing	1
From the President's Desk	2
What's the Big Idea?	3
In Case You Missed It	4
June Contests	5
Upcoming Events	5
New Release	5
April Contest Winners	5

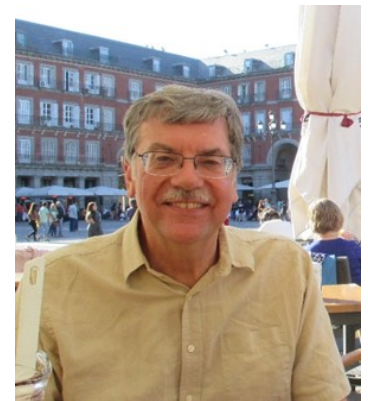
JUNE SPEAKER: STEVE WIEGENSTEIN Tortoises and Hares, Foxes and Hedgehogs, and Other Unsuitable Metaphors for Writing Novels and Short Stories

Steve Wiegenstein has published three novels and a collection of short stories. In this talk he will discuss the process involved in writing each genre, the mental approaches necessary to successfully complete the work, and pitfalls to avoid.

Steve Wiegenstein gained attention in 2012 when his debut novel, *Slant of Light*, was the runner-up for the Langum Prize in American Historical Fiction. He followed up that novel with two

more, *This Old World* and *The Language of Trees*, all set in the nineteenth century in a fictional utopian community in the Missouri Ozarks. Steve is a native of the Ozarks, and he worked there as a newspaper reporter before following a career path in higher education. His most recent book is a collection of short stories called *Scattered Lights*. It was a finalist for

the PEN/Faulkner Award in Fiction in 2021. He has since returned to novel writing, and hopes to have a fourth volume in his historical novel series out soon. Steve is now retired from teaching and lives in



ANTHOLOGY SIGNING: THE SHAPE OF WRITING

Please join us this week for the signing of our annual anthology!

The signing of the 2021 anthology, themed *The Shape of Writing*, will take place at the Spencer Road Branch of the St. Charles City-County Library on Wednesday, June 22 from 6-8 p.m.

The signing will be held in Room 240/243.

It is open to the general public, and in addition to the signing, there will be light refreshments, door prizes, other works by anthology authors available, discussions about works from the anthology, and a Q & A

session.

It will be a night filled with story and celebration.

To buy a copy of the anthology ahead of time, please click [here](#). You can pay via cash, check, or Paypal!

We hope to see you there!

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

ADVANTAGES OF A CRITIQUE GROUP



I think every writer should be part of a critique group. Yes, every writer. That includes the experienced master as well as the new beginner. First, let's define our subject. A critique group is a group of writers who share their work with each other on a regular basis for the purpose of exchanging feedback and improving their craft. The basic idea is that you submit your work to the group, and other members provide comments and suggestions for the purpose of improving your writing.

Let's review some of the advantages of joining such a group. First, and the most obvious, is the evaluation of your work. Other authors read what you have written and tell you what they think. They tell you what is good and what is not. Often making suggestions on ways to improve your work. Sometimes the advice is sound and applicable and sometimes it is not. It's up to you to decide what to do with the suggestions.

The education you receive from being part of a group is invaluable. Reading how-to-write books, listening to author podcasts, and attending conferences are all great ways to learn the craft of writing. But nothing beats the detailed, in-depth feedback from someone who is commenting on your specific piece of work. All other advice is abstract compared to the concrete feedback offered in a critique group.

A writing group can also be an excellent source of ideas. Some ideas come directly from a reviewer as they evaluate your work. But often a good story

idea will come from the group's discussion of another member's work. Inspiration can come from the most unexpected sources.

Motivation and accountability are other advantages. Knowing that other people are counting on me and expecting me to participate and contribute motivates me. It is very easy to get lazy and take time off from writing. A day turns into a week, a week into a month, and the next thing you know three months have passed without any new material. A writing group usually meets once a week or maybe once a month. Having these built-in deadlines helps get me off the recliner and into my writing chair.

Of course, there are a few pitfalls to look for when searching for a critique group. Not all groups are right for all writers. Most groups have a particular genre they focus on. Be sure your group writes and reviews the type of stories you like to write. Also, be sure the emphasis is on constructive criticism. All feedback should be provided in a positive manner with the intention of improving each other's writing. Be sure the members are pulling their weight. If you want others to review your work, then you are expected to review their work—

everyone contributes. I would also suggest you look for a group with a diverse membership. Some of the best feedback comes from people that are not exactly like you.

Maybe the best reason to join a writing group is the unexpected fun of socializing with other writers. I have gotten to know the other members of our group and they have gotten to know me. We are a group of like-minded friends. We share a common love of writing and desire to improve our craft.

This month's book review is Stein on Writing, by Sol Stein. The author is a very successful writer and a rather famous editor. This book shows up on many lists of suggested books on how-to-write. It is recognized as one of the better books on the subject, and it truly is informative. The author covers both fiction and non-fiction and uses plenty of examples to illustrate his points. However, the reading does get a bit dry in places and I had trouble staying focused. I give it three stars out of five.

Until next month, consider joining a critique group and of course, write, write, write, and keep writing.

Jeffrey Czuchna – 2022 President

“Nothing beats the detailed, in-depth feedback from someone who is commenting on **your** specific piece of work. All other advice is abstract compared to the **concrete feedback** offered in a critique group.”

What's the Big Idea?

—DIANE HOW



Once a month I preview the first-place winning entries for the Saturday Writing contests in order to write this column. It's a privilege to read those stories and poems a year in advance of our published anthology. It's also exciting to share bits of information from the contributors regarding their writing processes.

April's prose winning entry, *Smaller Lights, Brighter Hope*, was sent in by Susan Gore Zahra. This heart-warming tale is about a young woman determined to leave behind an uncomfortable family situation and build a better life for her future. Her survival story fills the reader with hope and encouragement.

I asked Susan where the idea for the story originated and she shared this:

"The basement/cellar prompt for the 2019 anthology, *The House That Writing Built*, brought to mind a root cellar or bomb shelter, with lots of creepy possibilities. I wrote all of one paragraph about Mikayla heading off on her own, with the vague idea that she would stop somewhere in Kansas on a farm with a cellar. This year, the plains prompt triggered more of the setting, and my imaginary friend told me more of her story. (Yes, I have imaginary friends—doesn't everyone? Or at least, every fiction writer?) This year's prompts triggered all kinds of outdoor ideas, especially related to

weather, and storm cellars."

Susan's choice of titles and names fascinated me and I wanted to know more about how she chose them. "Mikayla came from baby name research for a name that fit the general time frame of the story. The Kansas characters' names sounded well-grounded, stable. Her family situation was neither, so what she called them reflects her feelings: Bio-Dad, who had nothing to do with her until her mother died; Step-Mamba, who did not want a teenager to deal with; and Letch-Dad, whose behavior, in some way, disgusted her. The story title is always hard for me. After my critique friends tossed around a few things, "Smaller Lights, Brighter Hope" emerged."

When asked what one piece of advice Susan had for other writers, the response was positive and encouraging. "Keep those bits and pieces that don't seem to be going anywhere and those "rejects." My poem, "Kansas Snapshots," was rejected at least three times before placing second in this contest. One paragraph sitting in my "potential" folder turned into a first-place prose piece. The contest judge said it was a great first chapter to a novel and offered advice on

how to keep going. You never know what might become a something down the road."

What do writers do with all their winning entries? They compile them into a novella—at least that is Susan's plan. I know I'd read it, for sure. Best of luck, Susan!

April's contest also included a first-place poetry winner. Robert Walton won with his twelve-line poem, *Caesura*. This brief verse journeys from burgundy October memories to hopeful emerald May eyes. I was surprised when Robert said he doesn't write poetry. What????

Then he explained, "I never write poetry. Poetry writes me. An image or a thought seizes me unbidden and leads to the beginnings of a poem. That's not to say that craft doesn't enter in while I'm trying to find the poem's truest shape." Now that is poetic.

His journey of explanation regarding where the inspiration came from is a story in itself. "One of the inspiring things about parenthood is that it never ends. Eldest son Jeremy was winding up his research project for the Max Planck Institute last autumn. He needed to move his stuff out of both his office and a pied-a-terre flat in

Goettingen, Germany. Everything (a lot, believe me! Jeremy collects vinyl!) had to go from there to his family home in Zagreb, Croatia. He drafted me to help with packing and moving. In between the packing and toting sessions, he had professional responsibilities to fulfill. Pop had to stay out of the way and amuse himself. I often did so in the garden behind Max Planck's HQ, a lovely wooded place, good for reading while listening to the fountain and its brook. Ah, the fountain!"

Robert's simple advice to other writers is brief and powerful much like his poem. "Keep your eyes wide open — always!"

And there you have it, folks. Keep your eyes open and your pen or laptop ready. Inspiration surrounds us. Now it's your turn to write a winning entry and I can't wait to read it!

In case you Missed it: May Speaker C. Hope Clark:

Contests, an Overlooked Stepping Stone

Author Clark gives us hope!

Our May speaker was C. Hope Clark and she filled us with hope (pun intended) in a talk she titled, "Contests, an Overlooked Stepping Stone." She publishes a writers' blog which includes information about writing contests (www.fundsforwriters.com) and she recommends other sites as well; WinningWriters.com, NewPages.com, PW.org, and PublishedtoDeath.blogspot.com. For aspiring authors wishing to get their work published, entering writing contests can be both profitable and enjoyable.

The first thing an author should consider before entering any contest should be, "Why am I doing this? What do I hope to gain?" Entering contests can provide a struggling writer with much needed funds and notoriety and a win can lead to publication or it can catch the eye of a

literary agent. For some writers, it can offer a way to test the quality of their work and help motivate them to write something different or special. Plus, it can be fun and an entertaining diversion. However, one must consider their goals before deciding how much money, time and effort to invest in such an endeavor.

There are an enormous number of writing contests available, and they come in a variety of types. Most (but not all) of them charge entry fees and will treat an artist fairly. There are spoof or novelty contests, and many magazines offer immediate publication. Newspapers use contests to expand their readership and fans of specific literary genres use contests to inspire writers to develop new material geared for them (novels, short stories, poetry, etc.). Some contests are geared toward specific social or political issues while

others are geared toward encouraging writers of a certain ethnic background or nationality. Also, regional preservation groups use contests to advertise their unique history and appeal.

Clark recommended that before entering a contest, you should read the instructions carefully and make sure your entry follows them to the letter. Have you formatted properly? Is it the right genre and within the correct word count range? Submit it precisely as they request and if it is a blind submission, make sure your name does not appear on it. Also, be careful to observe the deadline date and time. Failure to submit your entry properly can get your piece rejected before it gets to the judge and your entry fee is wasted.

Go into a contest with your eyes open and grounded. Winning does not equate with success as a writer, nor does

losing a contest make you a failure.

Be honest with yourself about what you hope to gain from the experience. If you need money, choose only those with large prize amounts.

Serious contests are highly competitive. Don't be afraid to contact the organization to find out former winners and then email them for advice. Hope advised a "25-50-25" game plan where twenty-five percent of your efforts be aimed at contests you could easily win fifty percent at the contests most suited to your ability level and twenty-five percent invested in those you have no realistic hope of winning.

There are a few disreputable groups sponsoring contests, but most are legitimate. Find out what rights you surrender before entering. Beware contests labeled "cost-free." Good judges and fair contests are not cheap.

Contests are only one way to get your work published. Losing a contest doesn't mean you have no talent and winning doesn't mean you will have a successful career. Publication doesn't guarantee sales.

Contests can help you judge when your work is ready for the world.

Saturday Writers offers writing contests to encourage its members to hone their literary skills and improve their work. If you have not yet had the courage to enter your work, I advise you to take a deep breath and submit something. The feedback offered to me personally in the open mic nights and critique groups has been kind, insightful, and surprising and has inspired me to keep trying...rather than making me want to destroy my computer!

—Ken Lee

JUNE CONTESTS

Theme: Caves - underground caverns, canyons, valleys, coves, etc.

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

Prose: 2022-word limit

Poetry: 50-line limit

Prose Deadline: 6/25/22 by midnight

Poetry Deadline: 7/30/22 by midnight

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

To submit, click [here](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 22nd: The Shape of Writing Anthology Signing

July Open Mic: Tuesday, July 19 Via Zoom, 6 to 8:30 p.m.

July 30th: Jody Feldman

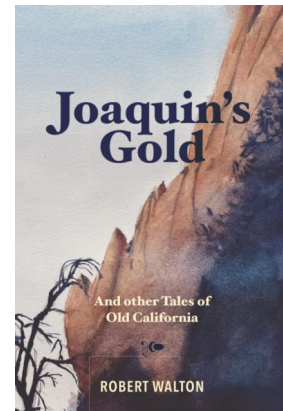
August 27th: Maria O'Rourke: "Are you a plotter, or a pantsner? How a good editor can help."

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

NEW BOOK RELEASE!

From Robert Walton comes **Joquin's Gold** — hidden treasure, bloody bandits, vengeful miners, mad ghosts, shipwrecks, rattlesnakes— all these and more are to be found in my new book about Joquin Murrieta. The individual stories have all been published

separately over the past thirty years or so and several have won awards. They are now available for the first time as both a Kindle e-book and a paperback.



April Prose Contest Winners

Theme: Prairies - grasslands, farmland, bogs, etc.

First Place: Susan Gore Zahra for *Smaller Lights, Brighter Hope*

Second Place: M. L. Stiehl for *Seasons Foretelling*

Third Place: John Marcum for *The Hazards of Farming*

Honorable Mention: Cheri Remington for *Unstoppable*

Honorable Mention: Heather Hartmann for *Cloudless*

February, March & April Poetry Contest Winners

Theme: Mountains, Bodies of Water & Prairies

First Place: Robert Walton for *Caesura*

Second Place: Susan Gore Zahra for *Kansas Snapshots*

Third Place: Billie Holladay Skelley for *Mountain Lovers*

Honorable Mention: Cathleen Callahan for *Letter from the Frontier Prairie*

Honorable Mention: Carol Roberson for *The Church on the Hill*

Honorable Mention: Donna Mork Reed for *Solitary Bird*