

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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March 2023

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Join us on the last Saturday of every month at the Spencer Road Library Branch from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in room L.

- ◆ Doors open at 10:30 a.m.
- ◆ Creative Salon is from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. in room P (Previously 265)
- ◆ Members are invited to participate via Zoom. The link will be sent out separately.

March 2023 Speaker: Melissa Ridley Elmes, First Lines: Opening your Poem with Intent

We know the first line of a poem is important, and that can be daunting; writers often ask: how do you get it right? What makes a great first line? These questions, though, aren't necessarily the most useful ones to be asking. This hybrid talk and workshop will provide attendees with some concrete ways of approaching the writing of first lines of poetry, the chance to scrutinize some memorable first lines and consider what makes them "work," and an opportunity to generate several lines that could be used to start drafting new poems of your own.

Bio: Melissa Ridley Elmes is a Virginia-born writer currently living in Missouri in an apartment that delightfully approximates a hobbit hole. With an aesthetic

best summed up as "dark and twisty with a dollop of optimism" her writing focuses on the intersections of relationships and cultural and societal expectations; human experiences and emotions; the hidden worlds and dark corners in our minds, and above all the language that we use (and don't use) to try to convey our experiences real and imagined.

Her poetry and fiction have appeared in *Star*Line*, *Eye to the Telescope*, *Haven*, *Spectral Realms*, *Illumen*, *Liquid Imagination*, *Black Fox*, *Reunion: The Dallas Review*, *In Parentheses*, *Gyroscope*, *Thimble*, *Heartwood*, and various other print and web venues.



Her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and the Dwarf Star and Elgin awards presented by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association, and her first book of poetry, *Arthurian Things: A Collection of Poems*, was published by Dark Myth Publications in 2020 after winning the JayZoMon Open Contract Challenge. Melissa is an Associate Professor of English at Lindenwood University.



From the President's Desk

Plot, Character, and Theme

Where does great fiction come from? What makes a good story great? What does all great fiction have in common?

Many authors would say the answer to all these questions is great characters. For a story to be great the reader must identify with the characters. The reader must have an emotional connection to the characters. It may be a deep-felt love, or an intense hatred, but either way the reader must be emotionally connected.

Other authors would say that a great story must have a great plot, action is what is important. A great story takes the reader on an unforgettable journey. Plot can be described as a series of goals, conflicts, and outcomes. You can have a great plot only when that series of events is good enough to keep the reader interested.

But what about theme? Where does theme fit into the creative process? I am of the belief that plot, character, and theme are all

important. In fact, I am willing to go as far as to say that all three are equally important.

Equally important? How can that be? Plot and character sure, but not theme. We never hear much about theme. Theme, if mentioned at all, is pushed to the back and considered a minor player. I think the reason for this is that plot and character are easily understood, while theme is more difficult to grasp. Plot and character are both concrete concepts. Theme, on the other hand, is rather abstract.

In its simplest, and most basic form, we can define plot is what happens in a story, character as who it happens to, and theme as why it happens. Theme is the core message or meaning of a story. All art has a meaning. The artist created the piece for a reason. Sometimes it is obvious what the artist is trying to say and other times the meaning is hidden so deep it may never see the light of day.

Often young writers are taught to avoid theme. "Never write theme on purpose," they are told. "Just let it happen naturally." When an author focusses too much on theme the resulting story often comes across as preachy. So, to avoid this pitfall the advice is to neglect theme altogether, and just let it flow organically. The problem with this approach is that the naturally occurring theme is often weak, disjointed, and confusing. The authors meaning is lost.

Plot, character, and theme should all work together in a perpetual wheel of creativity to build a

memorable story. The beauty of this circular relationship is that an author can start with any one and create the other two. Theme creates character, character creates plot, plot creates theme, theme creates ... ad infinitum.

Start wherever you want: plot, character, or theme. You are free to begin with whatever notion your muse has bestowed upon you. You may have an idea for a great story about a faraway galaxy with a band of rebels fighting with an evil emperor; or a story involving a young boy experiencing the

"Plot, character, and theme should all work together in a perpetual wheel of creativity to build a memorable story."

horrors of war firsthand; or you may feel the need to express your opinions concerning gender equality. The point is, it doesn't matter which comes first, as long as the other two parts are intentionally created and equally developed.

Jeffrey Czuchna – 2023 President

What's the Big Idea?

Bigger and Better

Welcome back!

This year our theme is The Writing Buffet. Our January, Pen and Paint Part One Contest, A Collaboration Among Artists was a huge success.

A group of artists from St. Peters Cultural Arts Centre selected these five poetry entries and five short stories to be interpreted and painted:

Donna Mork Reed for *Memories of Mother's Vegetable Garden*

M. L. Stiehl for *A Mouse Looks Out*

Freda J. Moriarty for *Littlest Cowgirl*

Sherry Cerrano for *Sand Surfer*

Carol Roberson for *Daisy*

Denise Scott for *Windows of the World*

R. G. Weismiller for *One Last Float*

Cheri Remington for *What Librarians Know*

John Marcum for *Wild and Beautiful*

Sherry Copeland for *The Struggle was Real*

The winning entries will be shown with the inspired art work at The 4 Elements Art Show at the St. Peters Cultural Art Center from May 30 until July 23. A reception is scheduled for June 1, 2023 at the same location.

As always, all ten entries and the related art work will be included in the next Saturday Writers anthology.

Next month we will announce the winners of the President and Poet Laureate contests. We are excited to announce the prize money has increased. \$30 first place, \$20 second place, \$10 first place.

Keep those fingers tapping on those keyboards!

—Diane How



In Case You Missed It: Nicki Jacobsmeyer, How to Research On and Off the Road for Fiction and Nonfiction.



Nicki's PowerPoint presentation provided a wonderful analogy to taking a road trip and was jam packed with humor, resources, and candid experiences. Her roadmap highlighted all of the steps she takes when writing and researching her book and created a easy to follow structure throughout the presentation. She assured us that by staying focused on your roadmap, you can achieve you goal of writing authentic, marketable books that sell plus have fun along the way.

Nicki enthusiastically shared that she loves to write and equally loves to research. She began writing about 9 years ago and loves the Saturday Writer's group because she has always learned a lot from members and enjoyed the friendships and camaraderie. She graciously provided a wealth of resources and encouraged everyone, including the Zoomers, to share any other resources that they have discovered.

Nicki relies on her roadmap and publisher/editor to keep her on track. She stressed that it's important to plan your trip to ensure that you stay focused, avoid pitfalls along your journey, and reach your final destination (finishing your book). She also encouraged us to rely on critique groups or other trustworthy colleagues to nudge us back to writing.

Before you begin your trip, finish your first draft – even if it's crappy. This is your first step along your roadmap. Write your questions in a separate notebook so thoughts and ideas are all in one place, not scattered.

Your next step is "Chair Research" also known as "sit your butt in the chair." You'll discover what information is available and what isn't. Be clear about citing credible resources. Remember who the target audience is and what they want. This drives what the reader wants, the type of pictures, and how the story ends. Remembering your audience should help you to research the right information that fits or you'll use in the

book. Ask others such as your children or teachers for their opinion. Asking questions can help you find holes in your research. Research also helps you to sound credible by learning the proper jargon and terms, e.g. musher, before you seek out experts in that field. Don't get crabby, be diligent as you're researching, and don't plagiarize.

Step #3 on the roadmap is "Locations & Events." Research your story's setting and time period so you can get into the mindset of the characters and learn how they would behave. Settings are so important, they should propel the characters. Find photos of the location, e.g. Nicki's picture of old Chesterfield; they can help you travel there mentally and will help you ask more questions to get the details needed to create a rich and realistic story. If you don't know the details of the setting, your readers will call you out!

Nicki emphasized the importance of contacting people (roadmap step #4) before traveling. Always call ahead to get permission to meet them or make an appointment. Introduce yourself, explain what you're researching, why, and how they can help — most people are really happy to help! Set expectations ahead of time, such as the amount of time you might need. Once you meet them, be respectful of their time and ask if they would suggest any other contacts who could provide more information or a different perspective. Ask if you can take pictures with the person you met with or interviewed.

Go on the research trip (Step #5)! It really pays off traveling to your story's location. She always gets the chills when she's on site because she can feel the character's emotions and brings the story alive. Combine your trip with an historical event, if possible, and make it a business / personal trip to get the most out of your trip. Keep all receipts! Get a

traveling friend so you can get their perspective and share expenses.

When you interview people, always get permission from them to use their stories and give them a business card. Use a recorder and take lots of notes. Ask if you can contact them in the future. Keep a list of people who have really helped you so you can include them on your book's acknowledgements page. People like to know they were appreciated.

After you return home from your road trip, organize your office (Step #6 on the roadmap). Nicki always has an explosion of paper, and experiences exhaustion, excitement and thoughts scattered all over the place.

Before you start reviewing, rewriting, and revising (Steps #7-8), reward yourself with a pit stop. Take a break — absolutely no writing. Nicki takes about a week off. And of course you can have a pit stop anywhere you want along your road trip.

After your pit stop, write down all the things you want to do, even if you can't achieve it right now. Don't forget to write "Thank you" cards and reference how much they helped you specifically. Let them know that they made a difference!

Once you jump into making revisions/rewriting, stop researching until all revisions are made! Re-vision your story and let it naturally morph into something more or different than what you originally planned. It's part of the creation process. Your word choice should be better, and you may have to repeat some or all of the road map steps to complete your book.

Nicki wrapped up by saying that you should celebrate all of your achievements —it's affirming. Celebrate your 1st draft, celebrate your 1st, 2nd, and 3rd rejections, because writing is a special craft. If you didn't attend this meeting, you missed a fun, buoyant, information-packed presentation

—Denise Wilson

From the Poet Laureate: Never Forget the Reader

Verse or Light Poetry entertains and/or distracts the reader. For the most part this will be about poetry that informs the reader about themselves. I have defined poetry as that which touches the soul. It must touch the soul of both the poet and the reader to be effective.

Taken as a given that certain forms of poetry lend themselves to presentation in unique ways, I prefer to stress content over technical artistry. That is to say content over craft. For fear of being misunderstood I shall elaborate. Craft is important. It should not overshadow content but enhance it.

In a poem, the tools used in its creation should not be overly apparent to a reader who is not analyzing it in order to see how authors are plying their trade. Rhyme, rhythm, meter, etc. are best when subtle, unless the form or poem call for it to be otherwise. We no longer have need for aids in memorization for example and heavy end rhyme is now associated with children's or humorous poetry. Words, similes, and metaphors lose power over time. A poet should avoid ones that have been overused. Look for fresh and novel ways of expression.

To me form follows function in poetry. Necessity and simplicity create an elegance that is to be desired. Decorative adjectives and adverbs should be used sparingly, if at all. Leave these to writers of prose.

Always remember rule #1. These are my personal

preferences. I am sure that there are many examples that make mockery of my ideas. I claim godhood only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

Some writers attempt to guard against the reader being allowed a different interpretation of the meaning of a line other than a very narrow one intended by the poet. I also at times attempt this. This is not a common or general rule I adhere to. Ambiguity is one of the tools I prefer to use. One of the reasons that punctuation is missing in many of my poems is that it allows the reader to decide on reading my lines as end stopped or enjambed with the next or preceding line.

This allows the reader multiple interpretations of lines and poem. All are valid as far as I am concerned. I normally attempt to put as many different layers of meaning into a poem as I am capable of. It is my job to create and then hand over the poem to its new mate the reader. Their relationship is no longer in my purview. You must still make these multiple directions concrete and in no way vague or you will run the risk of becoming obscure and quickly losing your reader.

You will still need surgical precision with your word choice, no matter your preference of literary attacks. For what it is worth my advice is to use one or the other, but not try to merge both in the same poem. Only one interpretation possible or multiple translations possible. It

is up to you and your poem's dictates.

Since this year's Anthology has a food theme I am including eleven prompts that you might find useful.

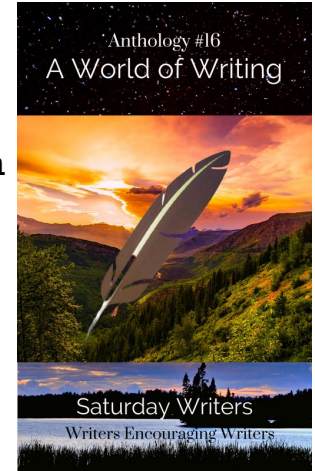
1. Trying something unusual to eat (Lavender Ice Cream.)
2. First time you tried something.
3. Healing factors of your favorite spices and foods.
4. A meal with someone departed.
5. Perfect last meal.
6. What you would serve someone you wanted to impress.
7. Comfort food.
8. Guilty feeling foods.
9. Abecedarian.
10. Poetry Comic (This only works for the anything goes contest).
11. Childhood food.

—R.R. J. Sebacher, SW Poet Laureate

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Anthology Pre-Orders

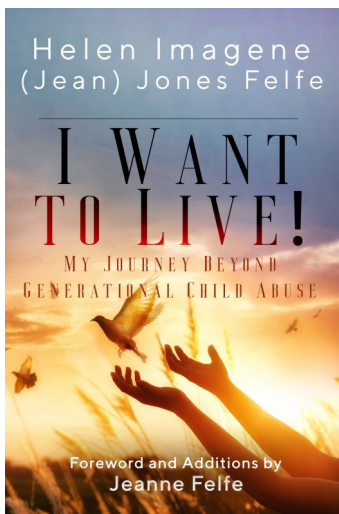
The anthology is here! Get it while it's hot! The 2022 Anthology, *The Shape of Writing* is in production and will be available at the signing on May 31st. You can pre-order our 16th anthology for a discount and pay by cash, check, or PayPal, or you can wait until the release party to purchase. Pre-orders are available at \$10 for contributors and \$14 for everyone else. Pre-ordering will be available until April 30th, at which point the price goes up to \$18. You can find the link for ordering and more information [here](#).



The release party and book signing will be on Wednesday, May 31st at the Spencer Road Library Branch. We look forward to seeing you there!

Book Releases

We have two members who have book releases to celebrate this month! Join us in congratulating Pat Wahler and Jeanne Felfe on their releases.



Jeanne Felfe has released her book on February 25, 2023 to honor what would have been her mother's 90th birthday

From the author:

Sometimes a book shouts, "Write

Me!" I am finally writing it all down for many reasons. I write because: I was a victim of child abuse who grew up and somehow miraculously survived the physical torture to my body; I grew up and became an emotional and verbal child abuser; And most importantly, I write to help eradicate the child abuse that passes from one generation to another unless the cycle is broken.--Helen Imagene (Jean) Jones Felfe

While I was in my late 20s, I rescued my mother's life's work—her memoir about surviving child abuse, motherhood, and her mental illness. She was going to burn her book and all of her writing because a publisher told her that "wanting to prevent child abuse was a poor reason for writing a book." It has taken me more than 40 years to resurrect her story and bring it to life.--Daughter, Jeanne Felfe

You can order [here](#) or find it on Kindle Unlimited.

Pat Wahler has also released *The Rose of Washington Square: A Novel of Rose O'Neill, Creator of the Kewpie Doll*. You can purchase the book at <https://books2read.com/u/mZ0aN2>

Mark your calendars: There will be a formal launch and signing celebration at Main Street Books in St. Charles. Everyone is invited!

Date: Saturday, April 8, 2023 from 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.



Pen and Paint Contest Winners

POETRY:

Donna Mork Reed for *Memories of Mother's Vegetable Garden*

M. L. Stiehl for *A Mouse Looks Out*

Freda J. Moriarty for *Littlest Cowgirl*

Sherry Cerrano for *Sand Surfer*

Carol Roberson for *Daisy*

PROSE:

Denise Scott for *Windows of the World*

R. G. Weismiller for *One Last Float*

Cheri Remington for *What Librarians Know*

John Marcum for *Wild and Beautiful*

Sherry Copeland for *The Struggle was Real*

March Contest Rules

Theme: Appetizers

Prose: 2023-word limit

Poetry: 50-line limit

Begins: 2/24/23

Prose Deadline: 3/25/23

Poetry Deadline: 4/29/23

For more information, visit our website [here](#).

For submissions, visit this [page](#).

Upcoming Events

March Meeting: March 25th, Melissa Ridley Elmes, First Lines: Opening your Poems with Intent

April Social Activity: April 7th, Astronomy Night at Brommelsiek Park, 7:30 p.m.

April Open Mic: In person on Wednesday, April 12 at Spencer Road Library Branch Room D from 6-8 p.m.

April Meeting: April 29th, George Sirois

May Open Mic: Zoom only. May 18

May 31st: Anthology Signing at Spencer Road Library Room L, 6-8 p.m.

June Social Activity: June 10th, Potluck Picnic at Brommelsiek Park

Officers and Volunteers

President: Jeffrey Czuchna
president@saturdaywriters.org

Vice President: Donna Mork Reed
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Secretary: Holly Elliott
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Treasurer: Diane How
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Assistant Treasurer: Alice Vierck

Volunteers/Chair Positions

Directors: Brad Watson, Jennifer Hasheider

Speaker/Workshop Chair: Jeffrey Czuchna

Contest Chair: Heather Hartmann

Newsletter Editor: Beatrice Underwood-Sweet

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Membership Assistant: Denise Wilson

Anthology Chair: Brad Watson

Social Media Chair: Pat Wahler

Publicity Chairs: Pat Wahler

Hospitality Chair: Bob Weismiller

Hospitality Assistant: David Reed

Holiday Party Chair: Donna Mork Reed

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: Brad Watson