

# Saturday Writers Newsletter

May • 2021

Saturday  
Writers



Writers Encouraging Writers Since 2002

A Chapter of the Missouri Writers Guild

A Nonprofit Organization / Corporation

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## Build Your Platform with Award-Winning Publicist Sandra Beckwith at SW Meeting on Saturday, MAY 22

No matter what publishing model you use—traditional, hybrid, or self-publishing—you need an audience waiting to buy your book.

The publishing industry refers to that audience as your “platform.”

In this session, you’ll learn about the many “structural elements” available to you and how to select options that will help you build a strong platform that will reach your book’s target audience.

Sandra Beckwith is an author and national award-winning former publicist who now teaches authors how to save thousands of dollars by doing their own



publicity, promotion, and marketing. You might have seen her on “The Montel Williams Show,” or “CBS This Morning,” or read about her in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, or *USA Today*. Feedspot has ranked her Build Book Buzz website as # 7 among

thousands of book marketing blogs globally; it has also been named a top website for authors and writers seven other times. Go to <https://buildbookbuzz.com> to learn more and subscribe to her free book marketing newsletter.

—Sarah Angleton

### NOTE: Meeting is May 22

This is the fourth Saturday of May, not the last Saturday, which falls on Memorial Day weekend. You are free to enjoy the holiday or polish your entry for the May “-agon” contest.

**May Contest deadline is still May 29**

### 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.

### May 22 Meeting

- 10:00-10:45 a.m.—**Members only** workshop **VIA ZOOM**. Topic: TBD
- 11:00-1:00 p.m.—Regular meeting **VIA ZOOM** for business items and our guest speaker.

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From the President's Desk . . .

## Crime Writers Week and Two Awakenings

I spent the week of April 19 attending a virtual conference put on by the tool ProWritingAid. Speakers on a wide range of topics all focused on the craft of writing crime fiction. Since that's what my pen name is learning to write, I cleared my calendar in order to attend every one of the twenty plus sessions.

I walked away with more thoughts than I could carry, excited to capture words on paper. I'll be sharing a few quippy quotes from various presenters. I walked away with some realizations, which I will also share.

"Don't marry your words. Divorcing your words is very painful. Just live with your words instead so you can move on." Steve Berry. "You want to love what you do, but don't fall in love with anything on the page." Lisa Gardner. New twists on being ready to kill your darlings.

How often do writers, even successful ones, think to themselves—or sometimes express to others—that they feel like frauds? No matter how many articles, essays, short stories, novels, etc., they get published, they still think someone is going to figure out they can't write. Regardless of how successful they were with a novel, the fear that they won't be able to do it again continues.

I had heard of a few renowned writers who claimed to feel that way too, but I hadn't realized how pervasive it is. Then I attended the Thriller Panel, which included multi-published authors Steve Berry, Lisa Gardner, Jennifer Hillier, Ian Rankin, and Karin Slaughter. Since this panel included two of my favorite thriller writers, I couldn't wait to glean their pearls of wisdom. Keep in mind combined sales across these five authors far exceeds 100+ million copies.

One would think with that kind of success the whole "I'm a fraud" or "Can I do it again?" would fade into a distant memory. Nope. To a person, they all expressed some level of hidden fear—except perhaps Karin Slaughter, who was a surprisingly funny and nutty participant—that they wouldn't be able to accomplish great things with the next book and fail to write compelling fiction.

That was my first awakening. Hmm, so the feeling never goes away. Perhaps that's what drives authors to raise the bar on everything they write and continue



to hone their craft. "Honor your reader and write the best book you can." Karin Slaughter.

My second awakening came from this same panel about the whole debate over plotters (aka planners) and pantsers (which the attendees accidentally renamed "panthers" in the chat box and that became our new name for those of us who write by the seat of our pants, aka discovery writers). I had assumed that all multi-million copy authors were plotters who meticulously map out all the details before ever putting words on the page.

I was delightfully surprised to learn this was a false assumption. I was doubly surprised to learn that Jennifer even writes her chapters and scenes out of order, like I do, and weaves them together. "When I've tried to plot, it got boring." Jennifer Hillier.

"Don't write what you know, write what you love." Steve Berry. "Get the 'vomit draft' out and then try to make sense of it later." Lisa Gardner.

Wow! All this time I thought the scattered way my brain saw a story was an anomaly, possibly even a bad one. It was both refreshing and encouraging to hear from these hugely successful authors that however we each approach story is fine. Of course, upon hearing Jennifer describe her frenzied approach, Karin said she wanted to throw-up. Yes, she is also a pantsier.

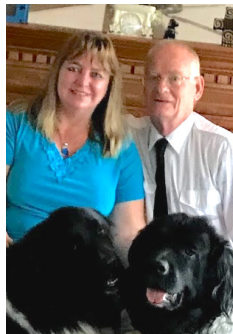
I'll end with two more quotes from Steve Berry we can all take to heart. "Ideas don't come when you're looking for them. They come when you give them space." "Start your novel as close to the end as possible."

That, and a reminder that no matter where you are in your author journey, mega-successful authors still have to put pen to paper, the writer's equivalent of putting their pants on one leg at a time.

—Jeanne Felfe, President

## Congratulations!

**Donna Mork Reed**, frequent winner in SW contests, won first place in *Writer's Digest* Your Story #110 contest. Readers submitted the first line of a story based on a prompt. Donna's sentence was one of twelve selected from 200 entries and voted on by a *WD* forum. Her first place sentence will appear in the September/October issue. You can catch a sneak peek at <https://www.writersdigest.com/your-story-competition/your-story-110>, entry #6. Husband, David Reed, is also a SW member and contest winner. To date, their Newfies haven't won any SW contests.





*What's the Big Idea?*

## Around the Block

The March SW contest challenged writers to incorporate the quadrilateral family into their short stories. I was honored when the judge selected “Debatable Differences” for first place. It is a humorous and true recollection of an on-going discussion between my husband and myself about dandelions. I’ll let you guess who believes it is a flower and who insists it is a weed.

Interviewing myself felt a little foolish—no—downright ridiculous. So instead, I thought I would take this chance to share a few things I’ve learned about writing since joining Saturday Writers a decade ago.

First and foremost, I’ve learned the importance of critiques. Sometimes they hurt a little, sometimes they make me smile, but most importantly, they give me a fresh perspective. Even if I disagree with a critique, it opens my eyes and makes me remember each reader will interpret what I write based on their knowledge, skills, and experiences. I’m always free to accept or reject the opinion, but my best work comes from taking a step back and seeing my story in a different light. If you don’t already belong to a critique group, I strongly recommend you find one and benefit from a second set of eyes.

My second suggestion is to visit your local library



*Diane How*

frequently and discover the wealth of books available for writers. Over the years, my home selection of writing resources has grown significantly. *Bartlett’s Roget’s Thesaurus* maintains a permanent fixture on my desk, but recently, I splurged on seven other thesaurus books. Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi

have created a series of writer’s guides that help me develop deeper characters, incorporate backstory into descriptive scenes, and convey emotions through actions instead of words. Three of my favorites are *The Emotional Wound Thesaurus*, *The Negative Trait Thesaurus*, and *The Urban Setting Thesaurus*. You might want to check them out.

My last suggestion is to hold onto all the stories and poems you write, no matter how poorly written you feel they are. I’ve found stories and poetry written so long ago I forgot I wrote them. A few amazed me, others caused me to laugh at my inexperience, but then I challenged myself to apply what I’ve learned over the years and make them better. Sometimes only a few lines are salvageable. Others have made it into anthologies. It’s a reminder of my passion for writing. Flip through a few of your old spiral binders and see what treasures you can uncover. Whatever you do, keep writing. Till next time.

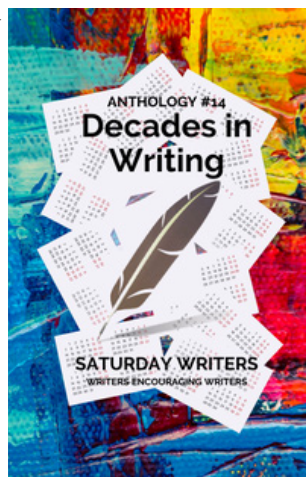
—Diane How

## Decades in the Making, Saturday Writers 2020 Anthology Launches at Last!

No, writing, editing and paging Saturday Writers Anthology #14 did not literally take decades. However, events that inspired the stories, essays, poetry and art spanned decades from 1900 through 2019. On April 10, 2021, we held our first virtual book launch party to celebrate the release of *Decades in Writing*. The book is beautiful, and, as we discovered, a true collaborative effort.

Many thanks to Jeanne Felfe for her opening remarks, to Rose Callahan for the lowdown on her beautiful cover design, and to Brad Watson for sharing the steps that go into compiling and publishing the anthology.

A huge shout-out to the panel: Susan Gore Zahra, Donna Mork Reed, Cathleen Callahan, and Cheri



Remington. They each read one of their prize-winning pieces from the anthology and shared their tips for writing success.

If you missed the event or haven’t yet ordered your copy, *Decades in Writing* is now available through the Saturday Writers website or Amazon. If you wish to pick up your copies from Diane How, SW treasurer, you can order from the SW webpage at <http://saturdaywriters.org/2020-anthology> for the current price of \$20, and contact Diane at [diane.h@saturdaywriters.org](mailto:diane.h@saturdaywriters.org) to arrange pickup time. If you prefer to have your copies delivered, order directly from Amazon by

clicking the tab on our website or at Amazon’s site: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08YL4941V>

—Pat Wahler, Vice President

# Ekta Garg Delivers!



Saturday Writer's members who attended the April 24th zoom meeting were treated to a wonderful workshop on writing short stories, taught by writer/editor Ekta Garg.

Ekta presented short stories as a tool for writers to perfect their craft while providing an entertaining read for people not

wanting to commit to an entire novel. It can be a win-win situation for both writer and reader.

The first thing you need to write a short story is an idea. Luckily, ideas can be found anywhere, and writers are born observers. If you want to write short stories, it is a good idea to keep a small notebook handy. An idea could come from a song lyric, an interesting character, an overheard line of dialogue or a beautiful setting. There are online writing prompts, genre- and non-genre specific. For visual people, there are online virtual museum and garden tours. Newspapers, magazines and social media can spark ideas for a story. You can even do an online search for "writing prompts" and follow the links to pages offering them.

Once you have an idea, what do you do with it? Ekta recommends the 5C Plot Plan by Donald Westlake. The 5 Cs are Character, Conflict, Complication, Climax and Conclusion. Defining these 5Cs gives you the plot plan for your story.

After you have your story, what can you do with it? There are many places to submit short stories, but Ekta recommended two, specifically that you need to check out. The first is [www.One-Story.com](http://www.One-Story.com), a literary magazine publishing 12 issues a year. They are dedicated to the art of the short story. Submitting is free. Her second recommendation was [www.thefirstline.com](http://www.thefirstline.com). At The First Line literary magazine, submissions are also free, but with a twist. Your first line is supplied by their prompt. It must be used verbatim. They publish quarterly and for those of you with an interest in mysteries and thrillers, you will be intrigued by the current first line: "What should we do with the body?" You can find the specific submission guidelines spelled out on either site.

After the break, Ekta invited members to present their short story ideas for workshopping. Under her guidance, a lively chat ensued.

Ekta's blog can be found at <http://thewriteedge.wordpress.com>

—Carol Ann Roberson

# 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.

## May

**Note: Date change for Mini-Workshop and General Meetings!**

### Mini-Workshop:

Saturday, **May 22**, 10:00-10:45 a.m.

### General Meeting:

Saturday, **May 22**, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

### Open Mic:

Monday, May 24, 7-9 p.m.

## June

### Open Mic:

Monday, June 14, 7-9 p.m.

### Mini-Workshop:

Saturday, June 26, 10:00-10:45 a.m.

### General Meeting:

Saturday, June 26, 11 a.m.-1 p.m.

## July

### Open Mic:

TBA

### 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.

## One more time . . .

May meeting date is the

4th Saturday, May 22.

Contest deadline remains

May 29.

## Piecing Things Together

For the past ten years, I have been hand-sewing blocks for a quilt top as an act of meditation. As I piece together the last block, I realize that my approach to constructing the quilt is similar to my approach to constructing stories and poems.

**Gathering material.** Some fabric for the quilt came from scraps of previous sewing projects, both my own and my mother's. Other material was purchased as souvenirs when we traveled. I have dragged my poor husband through shops in search of batiks in Hawaii and calicos in the National Quilt Museum in Paducah. There used to be a shop in South St. Louis where I could barter fabric, art supplies, wine bottles and their corks for cloth of a color or pattern to fit a troublesome spot. When necessary, I even went to a local fabric store for the right shade of purple or green, maybe something more stripey than flowery.

Material for writing comes from scraps of my memory or stories I heard from family and friends. Travel, trips to local museums and walks in parks, even doing yardwork, allow me to experience different views, sounds, and feelings. I write some of these in one of my notebooks, but subtleties sometimes sneak into a corner of my memory to surprise me later. When none of my stashes of words or images yields what I need, I search the library or internet for background info on the right hat, tool, car or whatever to fit the time and place of the story.

**Putting the pieces together.** Whether I'm writing or putting together this quilt, I am a pantsner. Once the top is assembled, it will resemble a rainbow floating in a cloudy sky. I began each color of the rainbow by placing pieces of cloth side-by-side until I had the right shades and textures together. I had a terrible time distinguishing between shades of green, turquoise and blue, so I asked an artist friend for her opinion. Then, I cut and sewed. A few times when I saw a part of a square completed, I hated it, ripped the seams, and tried again. After wrestling the first couple of rows together, I realized I was lining up seams the wrong way. Rather than starting over, I named my quilt "Learning Process" and continued the right way. Who will see the back side of the top once I get all the layers stitched together, anyway?

Sometimes, I have a vague idea about how a story should go. Other times, I have nothing more than a flash of a situation. Mining my memories, notebooks and research sources provide pieces of dialogue or narrative. I put the pieces together in different orders until I get something resembling a story. When I have a problem, I ask my wonderful critique partners for their input.

There are some differences between creating my quilt and creating my stories. About 90% of my quilt will be done the old-fashioned way—by hand. As for my stories, only the snippets in my notebooks are done by handwriting. The rest is on my laptop. The end goal for a quilt is snuggling, while for a story it's publication. Different goals, different expectations to be met.

As for calling any of mistake-riddled stories "Learning Process" and plowing ahead? My critique partners would never let me get away with that.

—Susan Gore Zahra, Editor

## March Contest Winners

**First Place:** Diane How for "Debatable Differences"

**Second Place:** John Marcum for "An Active Imagination"

**Third Place:** Cheri Remington for "Misfits"

**Honorable Mention:** R. G. Weismiller for "The Four Leaf Clover Tattoo"

**Honorable Mention:** F. J. Moriarty for "He Knows My Every Need"

**Honorable Mention:** Joan Leotta for "The Rembrandt Box"

# DEADLINE SATURDAY May 29!

**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

### May Theme

The "-agons": pentagon, hexagon, heptagon, octagon, etc. Did circles and two- and three-sided shapes pen in your imagination too much? Go wild with -agons having any number and configuration your heart desires.



On the Back Page with Tammy . . .

## The Perfect Pitch Yields a Grand Slam!

Skimming the pages of your favorite writing magazine, you see an advertisement for a writing conference with awesome workshops and scheduled agents seeking your particular genre. You whip out your credit card faster than a gunslinger at high noon and book the conference and hotel room.

You are at the conference and next in line to pitch your book. You've got this. Why? You read the list of attending agents and visited their websites, read every word thrice and paid attention to her bio, acquisition interests, her page of authors and the type of publications she agents. You checked to see if she maintains a Facebook page or a Twitter account. You became an agent info-junkie.

Do not be late for your appointment. Step forward and make eye contact. Introduce yourself and know the correct pronunciation of her name. You are a professional writer and this agent wants the full package: a client who makes appointments on time, dresses appropriately for meetings and interviews, and is polite and confident.

You memorized your pitch until you can project it like you're talking with a best friend. Tell her the title of your book, the genre, setting, and protagonist and antagonist in one to two sentences. Just the facts. Then, go into greater detail and talk about the conflicts, setting, tone, and demographics of your projected reader base. Emphasize **you** are the writer for this book and how it is unique from similar books of the genre. Talk about your platform on social media, writing groups and professional affiliations you



Tammy Lough

belong to, and any blogs or newsletters you write. Finish by asking if she has any questions.

It is not imperative that you bring a proposal, but nice if the agent asks to see one and you are able to hand her a neatly typed, crisp copy of your proposal in a presentation binder. She may hand it back, give you her business card, and ask you to email a copy as an attachment. At least you have it with you and she can take a quick peek, but she may not want to pack forty binders to take home in her suitcase. If she is not interested, perhaps she offered suggestions for changes to make your story more sellable. Learn from the experience.

A pitching **proposal** consists of the title page with subtitle if used, author name, genre and final word count, plus contact information. Next, a page to describe where your book fits in the market, the demographics, and mention the target audience and manuscript status. These days agents want completed manuscripts, but you may say the manuscript will be complete thirty days after signing a contract. Ensure the plot and structure are tight with no dangling ends throughout. A professional edit is preferable, but at a minimum have it proofread by three to five writers, preferably one or two outside of your genre. Add previously published material and color photos of the front and back of your book covers to your portfolio. List awards you have received, and if a book won an award, mention this fact. Finish with a summary of the main characters, central story, conflict, and the cliffhanger. Next, include a single-spaced one- to two-page

synopsis in present tense. Finally, add three sample chapters.

You are now prepared for your first face-to-face pitch. You can and will succeed. Positive thinking and preparedness will get you everywhere. Go Get 'Em!!!

Writers Write!

—Tammy Lough

### Saturday Writers Officers

**President:**

Jeanne Felfe

[jeanne.f@saturdaywriters.org](mailto:jeanne.f@saturdaywriters.org)

**Vice President:**

Pat Wahler

[pat.w@saturdaywriters.org](mailto:pat.w@saturdaywriters.org)

**Secretary:**

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[sarah.a@saturdaywriters.org](mailto:sarah.a@saturdaywriters.org)

**Treasurer:**

Diane How

[diane.h@saturdaywriters.org](mailto:diane.h@saturdaywriters.org)

### Volunteers/ Chair Positions

Assistant Treasurer: Denise Scott  
Children's/YA Author Critique:

Sue Fritz

Christmas Party Chair:

TBD

Contest Chair: Heather Hartmann

Hospitality Chair: Bob Weismiller

Assistants: Diane How &

Ryan Cort

Information Table: Tammy Lough

Membership Chair: Denise Wilson

Members Online Critique:

Susan Moreland

Newsletter Editor:

Susan Gore Zahra

Newsletter Assistant:

Sherry Cerrano

Pre-Meeting Saturday

Works-in-Progress Café &

Creative Writing Salon:

R.R.J. Sebacher

Publicity Chairs:

Rose Callahan

Speaker/Workshop Chair:

Jeanne Felfe

Social Media Chair:

Heather Hartmann

Assistant: Rose Callahan

Website Maintenance:

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](http://SaturdayWriters.org) and look under the Meetings tab.