

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

- > 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.
- > Works in Progress Café starts at 10 a.m. in room 265.
- > Doors open at 10:45 a.m.
- > There will continue to be a Zoom option for members who continue to social distance, or can't attend.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE :

September Speaker	1
President's Letter	2
What's the Big Idea?	3
ICYMI August Speaker	4
ICYMI July Speaker	5
October Workshop Preview	6
Pen & Paint Contest Rules	7
Upcoming Events	7
July Contest Winners	7
Membership Renewal	7

SEPTEMBER SPEAKER: EMILY HALL SCHROEN, WHEREVER BOOKS ARE SOLD: A GUIDE TO FORMING LASTING PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDEPENDENT BOOKSTORES

You've written a book. You've gone through the publishing process. You have your new book in your hands, and now you want to see it on bookstore shelves. How can you achieve this goal?

Drawing on nearly a decade of experience in the bookselling industry, Emily Hall Schroen will walk authors through the process of reaching out to independent bookstores who may be interested in stocking your book.

Emily will give an overview of indie bookstore operations, including an explanation of how most indies decide which titles to bring into the store and where their stock comes from. She will also provide insight about how to decide if a store is right for your book, the best ways to

approach buyers or managers, and tips for successful book signings.

Emily Hall Schroen is the owner of Main Street Books in St. Charles, MO. She holds a BA in English from Truman State University and sits on the board of the Midwest Independent Booksellers Association. She lives in St. Charles with her husband and two budgies in a house overflowing with books.

Main Street Books is an independent bookstore in the heart of Historic St. Charles and has been serving the community for 29 years. They host multiple book signings a month, the majority of which feature local authors. You can visit them online at

mainstreetbooks.indielite.org and follow them on social media:

Facebook: Main Street Books St Charles, MO;

Twitter: @mainstreetbooks;

Instagram:

@mainstreetbooksstcharles



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK: BATTLING WRITER'S BLOCK



I've got nothing. Really ... my mind is blank. My wife tells me it's impossible for one's mind to be blank. I disagree. Every month I'm asked to come up with an original idea for this article. This month, I've got nothing.

I have had trouble all year finding good ideas to write about. I wrote an original short story back in February and submitted it to the Saturday Writers contest. Since then, I have not written anything new. Instead, I have recycled three losing stories from last year and resubmitted them multiple times. None of them have won anything, not even an honorable mention.

Is this writer's block? The Oxford Dictionary says writers block is: "The condition of being unable to think of what to write or how to proceed with writing." Then yes, that is what I have. So, how do I get rid of writer's block? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Clean Up Your Workspace. This is what I talked about in last month's newsletter article. An organized, clean, comfortable environment can result in increased productivity. Make your writing space someplace you want to be.
2. Create Writing Habits. Write every day at a specific time. Clear the calendar and set an

alarm. Get in the habit of writing every day at the same time.

3. Change Your Writing Time. Have you been writing first thing in the morning? Try writing in the middle of the day, or late at night. Mix it up and see if the change inspires.

4. Use Writing Prompts. There are plenty of on-line sites that will provide writing prompts. What if I don't like the prompt? Too bad, write about it anyway. Don't worry, nobody else needs to read it.

5. Don't Try to be Perfect. Never try to write flawlessly in the first draft. Just write what comes to mind and edit later.

6. Write in Small Time Chunks. Studies have shown that people are most productive in 25-minute blocks. Set an alarm, shut the door, and get to work.

7. Start in the Middle. Don't start your story at the beginning. Instead start in the middle or the end. Write the scene you know and let the others come later.

8. Get Outside Ideas. External inspiration can come from reading or watching movies. Read a book or short story, watch a movie or television program. Take the basic

plot and rewrite it. Improve on the original idea and make it your own.

9. Try a Different Genre. Do you write fiction? Try non-fiction. Science fiction? Try romance. Changing genres can help break the logjam and get the creative juices flowing again.

10. Realize that all writers block is temporary. It's not pleasant when you are in the middle of a dry period but know that it will pass. Try some of the techniques described above and your creativity will soon return.

This month's book review is *Zen and the Art of Writing*, by Ray Bradbury. You would think that an author of Mr. Bradbury's status would write an excellent book about writing. Not in this case. I found *Zen and the Art of Writing* very difficult to read and contained very little useful advice. I do not recommend reading this resource. I give it one star out of five.

Until next month, avoid writers block and write, write, write.

Jeffrey Czuchna – 2022 President

“Realize that all writers block is temporary. It's not pleasant when you are in the middle of a dry period but know that it will pass.”

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? BY DIANE HOW

Each month, I'm amazed and inspired by the number and quality of entries submitted to the Saturday Writers contests. Many of our judges have said they have a hard time deciding which are the best. They never know who wrote the prose or poetry piece, but because of their expertise, they recognize exceptional work which rises above the others.

How does a writer who has struggled to place in our contests elevate their writing to win in our contests? I think becoming familiar with what judges look for is helpful. Reading the stories and poems in our anthologies is a start. So is a willingness to ask for and receive critiques with an open mind. Being persistent is essential. When one of my entries doesn't make the cut, I do some edits and resubmit. What doesn't appeal to one judge may catch the eye of another.

I've also noticed that repeat winners often have shared their entry with SW on-line critique group and many of them have invested in receiving a judge's critique. Not all critiques are what we want to hear, but sometimes they are what we need to consider.

One of the writers who frequently takes advantage of critiques and has her entries recognized is Susan Gore Zahra. Her extra efforts paid off big in July when she took first-place in both the prose

and the poetry contests.

Sky Blue Eyes is a short story about a woman with a big heart who risked helping a man down on his luck by giving him a ride. Later, she has second thoughts about the impulsive decision. When asked where the idea come from that inspired her story, her response made me realize how much has changed in the last forty years.

"In the 1980s, we lived in a town south of Carbondale. As I drove into C'dale to do some research for a freelance writing project, I picked up the guy described in the story. I dropped him off and kind of forgot about him until a few weeks later. On the front page of the newspaper was a banner head and large photo of minor member of the Charles Manson Family. He looked exactly like the man I picked up, but there was nothing in the story that put him anywhere near Carbondale. The image and possible story lines have stuck with me, waiting for the right plot to blossom."

Susan leans toward writing prose, especially fiction, but she tried her hand at writing a poem titled Tanka. This unique poem about hummingbirds was written in a format I didn't recognize. I asked her to share some

information about the style and she did.

"Tanka is a Japanese form of poetry similar to haiku. Traditional haiku has been seventeen syllables in three lines: five, seven five. Tanka adds two lines of seven syllables each, a total of thirty-one. I've been playing with the form as practice to compress imagery or meaning into as few words as I can. They usually come out tankas because I am too wordy for haiku's limits. One of my first critique partners, years before I heard of SW, is a haiku expert. I asked him about titles, and he told me that traditionally, neither form has any title. I quickly changed from "Morning Date" to "Tanka" because it needed some kind of identifier. I asked my friend to critique another tanka and received a stern lecture on not keeping up with the current thought on Japanese poetic forms, which now are rooted in something other than syllable count. I have asked if there is any hope of using the original title, since up-to-date tanka lovers may riot in the streets over my misuse of the term.

What's next for Susan? "I'm finishing up a reflection piece to submit to Valiant Scribe and assisting with the editorial work and book launch for North County Writing and Arts Network



first anthology. I've signed up with Story Grid, which Maria O'Rourke recommended at the SW August meeting. Several of my best stories have come back with critiques saying, "This would be a great first chapter for a novel." Pantser that I am, that sounds like yet another half-finished project to clutter my desk. But some of those stories keep nagging at me to say more. I plan to hunker down with Story Grid and some characters for a couple of months and see what happens."

I'm sure whatever Susan writes, I'll want to read it. Just like I want to read all of your stories. Each year when the new anthology comes out, I start at the first story or poem and read until I've savored each and every winning entry. And then I wish I could read the ones that didn't get selected and hope they'll make the next one. Keep writing, editing, and submitting. You can do it!

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT: AUGUST SPEAKER MARIA RODGERS O'ROURKE, PLOTTER OR PANTSER: HOW A GOOD EDITOR CAN HELP

Being a writer is like having homework every night for the rest of your life.

~~Lawrence Kasdan

Maria Rodgers O'Rourke posed the question, are you a plotter or a pantser? Do you plan your writing in advance or do you make it up as you go 'by the seat of your pants'? Here's a spoiler.

The answer is that we are all some combination of both.

Calling herself a 'plantser', Maria said that she has tried the completely spontaneous writing of NaNoWriMo using the guidance of *No Plot, No Problem* by Chris Baty. At the other end of the spectrum she has learned editorial skills using the methods of Shawn Coyne and the Story Grid (<https://storygrid.com/>).

Editors can help every step of the way from story development and smoothing out words

to making sure grammar is correct and all the I's are dotted and T's crossed.

Maria shared a secret that makes the best of both methods. It is simply this: take the time to develop your characters. Delve into their pasts. Learn all you can about them. Armed with this foundation, you'll have sure footing no matter how spontaneously you may pen your stories.

She cited the series *Schitt's Creek* as a shining example of how this method can result in stellar storytelling.

Something else to keep in mind are the Five Commandments of Storytelling. Use them as guideposts to keep you on track. Each of these points must be part of each level of story – scene, chapter, entire work.

1. Inciting Incident
2. Turning Point / Progressive Complication

3. Crisis

4. Climax

5. Resolution

If you're writing and find yourself stuck, try the other method. If you're pantsing it, it might be time to do some planning. If you're following an outline, go off the beaten path. Ask a character what they want to do next. Mark Twain said, through Huckelberry Finn's innocent honesty, "I went right along, not fixing up any particular plan, but just trusting to Providence to put the right words in my mouth when the time come; for I'd noticed that Providence always did put the right words in my mouth, if I left it alone."

The most important thing is not to let anything stop you... not procrastination, nor perfectionism.

Getting the first draft written is the most challenging part of writing. You have to

overcome whatever it is that blocks your way. A good source of wisdom for recognizing and overcoming resistance is *The War of Art* by Steven Pressfield.

Hearing the song of a wren inspired Maria with the idea that we must listen for the true song beneath the noise of life. Remember that we are creative souls and what we bring to the world exists despite anxiety, fear, resistance or self-doubt. Maria's goal, as an editor, is to create a space for writers by helping clear away the clutter and make room for fearless creativity. She offered Saturday Writers a free thirty-minute consult.

Where to find Maria:

Email:
maria@mrocommunications.com

Website: <https://mrocommunications.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MROCommunications/>

—Cheri Remington

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT: JULY SPEAKER JODY FELDMAN, BEYOND NAME, AGE, AND SIBLING NUMBER: USING THEME (AND OTHER TRICKS) TO UNLEASH THE FULL POTENTIAL OF YOUR CHARACTERS

As an English major, my least favorite part of classes was writing papers analyzing theme, so when Jody Feldman said that she used to run away from theme and “what if the poet was just sitting there with a dinner plate, then an ice cube fell on it and a bird flew by, what if that was the whole meaning of what was going on instead of being a theme,” it really struck a chord with me. If you’ve struggled to analyze the theme in other people’s writing or were never sure how having a theme in your writing would help you, this is the workshop for you.

Jody said that her awakening to the importance of theme came after particularly harsh reviews following the publication of her first book. She further realized the importance of all characters, even secondary and tertiary characters after reading Uta Hagen’s *Respect for Acting*.

After noting that there are a multitude of character worksheets available online, our speaker led us through an exercise in writing down as many character traits as we could think of, either about an existing character or a character from a painting by Andrea Worthington that she shared with us. She argued that physical traits and characteristics are not as important as we think they might be past giving our

reader a basic idea about what the character looks like. We need to dig past these physical traits into the “Why” of these physical descriptions. For example, if a character wears the same clothing every day, is it because they are depressed and don’t do laundry, because they own several sets of the same clothing, can’t afford any other clothing, or some other reason underlying their clothing choices.

Then where does theme come in? Ms. Feldman defined theme as a message that the writer is trying to get across to the reader. She elaborated, saying it’s also an idea to both keep the writer on track and a way to make your characters come alive. She did note that she doesn’t always start with a theme, and compared coming up with a plot and a theme as being a chicken vs. egg situation—which comes first? All the elements of the story interact, and you need to start where you are comfortable as a writer.

Once she had given us some examples of themes, most notable from Aesop’s Fables, Ms. Feldman led us through how theme impacted a story using one of the

characters in one of her current works.

The theme of her work was “Finding life in the face of loss” was the theme she was working with. She wrote a synopsis and highlighted the parts that fit with her theme. Then she showed a scene in the first draft and then after rewriting with an eye to theme, making the scene richer using dialogue and digging more into the character’s backstory instead of “navel-gazing.” In other words, she was able to show the reader instead of telling them.

At this point in the workshop, we were asked to pick a theme to work with and brainstorm related topics. Using her theme again, “Finding life in the face of loss,” we discussed things that could be lost. Jody then asked us to take our own theme, our own character, and brainstorm our own list to get started on our own project.

The next steps after you have your characters, theme, and brainstormed list, are to look at the stakes. For example, in looking at the list of things that can be lost, what is the character willing to do to get them,

what lengths will they go to? Thinking about these elements can help with figuring out characters’ motivations.

Dialogue can be affected by theme, but to a lesser extent. Secondary characters and how they are included in your story are affected by theme. The story element most influenced by theme, however, is backstory. In each example, she showed us specific elements from her brainstorming list that she used in the writing process for each part.

Jody cautioned us not to include anything extra in our work simply to include theme-related elements in, however.

Our last exercise was to have our character answer the questions “What’s your aim in life? What are your career goals?” She said that this is a very good story-starting exercise.

One of Ms. Feldman’s last recommendations was to listen to the Podcast *Scriptnotes*, episode 403. This podcast is for screenwriters specifically, but this particular episode talks about structure, which has many shared elements across writing genres. The host uses Finding Nemo to explain theme in relation to structure. If you aren’t a podcast listener, there’s also a transcript on the page.

If you have questions for Jody, you can contact her at jody@jodyfeldman.com www.jodyfeldman.com

—Beatrice Underwood-Sweet

OCTOBER WORKSHOPS

OCTOBER 4TH: SHANA YOUNGDahl

Join us October 4th in person at Spencer Road Library in Room 240 from 6-9 p.m. to talk about Novel Structure and Outlines: Finding

What Works for You, A Workshop for Plotters, Pansters, and Everyone In Between. If you have always wanted to write a novel, but

didn't know how to structure it, or if you have one in process and are struggling with structure, this is the workshop for you! Come reflect and

plan, and get introduced to tools and techniques for finding your own approach to telling a compelling, novel-length story with Shana Youngdahl, poet, professor, and fiction writer.

OCTOBER 13TH: GEORGE SIROIS

Are you looking for a new outlet for your creativity? Are you looking for a new way to promote your

book? Are you a podcast addict? Why not try starting your own podcast? Join us on Zoom with George

Sirois, bestselling YA sci-fi writer, podcast host & producer, and audiobook narrator on October 13th

from 6-9 p.m. to discuss format, resources, booking guests, and other podcast-related subjects.

OCTOBER 17TH: CHRISTINA GANT

Writer's block have you caught in its grip? Sometimes writing prompts work to break you out of a slump when

you're feeling blocked or uninspired, but good exercises can do more than that. They can generate new

ideas, fresh images and approaches, and help you gain insight into your work. This workshop will engage you in

activities designed to do just those things, for prose and poetry writers alike with Christina Gant, professor of English at St. Charles Community College..

OCTOBER 25TH: JESSICA MATTHEWS

Do you write or want to write books for children? This workshop will guide you through the writing, publishing, and selling process

for writing children's books, using the speaker's own book, *The Old Man and the Pirate Princess* as a blueprint. Learn about key elements of writing a

successful children's book, the differences in types of publication, and how to sell your book at in-person events such as conferences, book

fairs, comic-cons, and more with Jessica Matthews, current President of the St. Louis Writer's Guild.

MEMBER PRICING:

4 WORKSHOPS: \$55
3 WORKSHOPS: \$45
2 WORKSHOPS: \$35
EACH WORKSHOP: \$20 SEPARATELY

NON-MEMBER PRICING:

4 WORKSHOPS: \$70
3 WORKSHOPS: \$60
2 WORKSHOPS: \$45
EACH WORKSHOP: \$25 SEPARATELY

For more information and to sign up for any or all of these workshops, visit the website at <http://saturdaywriters.org/fall-workshops-2022.html>. You can pay by check, Paypal, with a credit card over the phone, or in person at the September meeting.

PEN & PAINT CONTEST II

Theme: Anything goes

The artists have provided us with a piece of their art work and now Saturday Writers will write a poem or prose work inspired by one of the pieces.

Prose: 1,000-word limit

Poetry: 50-line limit

Cost: FREE for members (You may submit one entry per picture)

Deadline: September 24th, 2022

You can find the images for inspiration here: <http://saturdaywriters.org/pen--paint-ii-contest.html>

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 4th: Workshop with Shana Youngdahl at Spencer Road Library from 6-9 p.m.

October 12th: Open Mic at Middendorf-Kreddell Library Branch, Room B from 6-8:30 p.m.

October 13th: Workshop with George Sirois via Zoom from 6-9 p.m.

October 17th: Workshop with Christina Gant via Zoom from 6-9 p.m.

October 20th: Pen and Paint Reception for artists, winners of this year's contest and their families at the Cultural Arts Center from 6-7:30 p.m. Paintings and winning entries will be on display until December 11th.

October 25th: Workshop with Jessica Matthews at Spencer Road Library from 6-9 p.m. in room 259.

October 31st: NaNoWriMo Kickoff, location TBD. Writing will start at midnight!

December 3rd: Holiday Party at Spencer Road Library, room 240 from 11-1 p.m.

JULY CONTEST WINNERS

Prose

Theme: Sky - moon, stars, sun, space, etc.

First Place: Susan Gore Zahra for *Sky Blue Eyes*

Second Place: Tom Klein for *The Last Captain*

Third Place: Donna Mork Reed for *Sky Watcher*

Honorable Mention: Kenneth Lee for *Sammy Gets a Mind Meld*

Honorable Mention: Diane How for *No Chop Suey for Me*

Honorable Mention: Christine Anthony for *Written in the Stars*

May, June and July Poetry Contest

Themes: Forest, Desert, Caves & Sky

First Place: Susan Gore Zahra for *Tanka*

Second Place: Robert Walton for *Redwoods*

Third Place: Sherry Cerrano for *Sustenance*

Honorable Mention: Tara Pedroley for *The Fuchsia Tree*

Honorable Mention: Sherry Cerrano for *Moonstruck*

Honorable Mention: Tara Pedroley for *Peach Trees & Morning Makeup*

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

It's time to renew your Saturday Writer's membership! A new membership is \$35 per year.

You can renew early at a discount! Only \$25 until October 31st. From November 1st until March 1st, pay only \$30, then the amount returns to the standard rate. Households with more than one member receive a \$5 discount.

Another benefit of early renewal is a coupon for attending the Christmas party!

For more information and to fill out your membership form, visit our website here: <http://saturdaywriters.org/membership-form.html>. To pay your dues by Paypal or for more information on other payment methods, visit this webpage: <http://saturdaywriters.org/pay-membership-dues.html>