

# PIKES PEAK WRITERS

official  
publication  
of the  
pikes peak  
writers

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*PPW Second Vice President Karen Fox recently talked with Michael Seidman, acclaimed author and editor who will conduct one-on-one critiques at this year's Pikes Peak Writers Conference.*

### Fox: How has the publishing industry changed since you first started in it?

**Seidman:** When I began, publishing was still the gentleman's business (and that's not a sexist term; for most of my career I reported to women) we've heard about; Maxwell Perkins was still fresh in our minds. Auctions were exciting; there were many more houses, and there were rules. Each bid had to be at least X% higher than the previous one. You could tell from the pace of the auction who you were bidding against. Because there are fewer houses now, and because so many are buying hard/soft, that part of the business is pretty much only a memory.

Of course, the most obvious difference is that the industry wasn't being run by bean counters; it was run by people who cared about books first, who were willing to take risks on new writers because the writing deserved to be out there. Now, the conglomerates come in, buy up companies and then,

## May workshop

# Packaging Your Proposal

**Who:** Presented by Charles Kaine, owner/editor of Last Knight Publishing Co.

**When:** May 7, 2003, 6:30-8:30 p.m.\*

**Where:** St. Moritz Room, Red Lion Hotel (I-25 at Bijou exit #142. See web site for directions.)

**Cost:** \$15 members, \$25 non-members (\$5 discount for PPWC attendees who bring their 2003 PPWC nametags)

Now that you've been to the Pikes Peak Writers Conference, you need to send that manuscript you promised to that editor or agent. Attend this workshop on Packaging Your Proposal to learn about what to say in your cover letter and how to send everything to make the best possible impression.

\*Please join your fellow writers after the workshop for an informal "no host" reception in the bar at the hotel so that folks can get to know each other and ask questions of existing PPW members and board members.

# Lon



with

# Michael Seidman

just like the putative Mob, charge an outlandish vig [amount]. That's a large part of the background story on Anne Godoff's firing at Random House. Bertlesmann [of Random House] told the book people how much they had to make, numbers based on how much they expected to be paid back for acquiring the company in the first place. The numbers were unrealistic, I'd guess, and had nothing to do with books. It is the final reduction

of book to product, of equating books with what Proctor & Gamble produces, an analogy I heard first in 1977. [*Random House is one of the two houses expressing interest in buying the Warner Books operation from AOL-Time Warner. The other is HarperCollins.*]

That also means that far too many of the young editors are looking at manuscripts strictly from the bottom line. The idea of building a writer, of investing time and energy...that's lost. Not completely, no. But rare enough.

### Fox: What's good about the publishing industry?

**Seidman:** That it still exists; that there are new, small houses coming in to either specialize in a category or to publish books that have a meaning and point beyond basic entertainment. That if one goes to Barnes & Noble or Borders, one can find new books by unknown writers. Those Discovery books don't appear for free; the publisher pays for the display in one way or another, so it means that there are books being supported. Whether there are readers to support them is another question.

**"A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us."**

—**Franz Kafka**

*continued on page 4*

## from the editor



Hello, my name is Susan Rust, and I am a sales-pitchaphobic. I've written an incredible creative non-fiction manuscript about breast cancer. Tentatively titled *Flat Landscape*. I considered *The Young and the Breastless*, but I didn't know how that'd go over.

My manuscript is unlike anything you'll find on the bookstore shelf. Countless women, and countless folks who care about them, will be forever changed by the reading of my book. It is a "laugh with a tear in your eye" story of a single woman's journey

through breast cancer and the fellow diagnosee who changes her life.

That said, if my behavior at this year's Pikes Peak Writers Conference is anything like my behavior in previous years, I will not utter a word to any of the editors or agents about my completed manuscript and polished proposal. I will hope, what, that they spot me in the crowd and decide I look like I'm one helluva writer? That they'll approach me and ask if they may have the honor of reading my manuscript?

Well, yeah.

Is this ludicrous? Of course. Do you feel the same way? Quite possibly. Is your book just as riveting and publish-worthy as mine? Most definitely.

Mind you, I'm fully prepared to hit the ground running when my pages come rolling off the press. I'll go to the ends of the earth to promote it, market it, sell it, and give talks about it. None of this intimidates me in the slightest. It's just the live "sell" that sends me to my corner.

So here's the deal: Let's promise ourselves, you and I, that we'll approach at least two agents or editors this conference. We'll respectfully pitch, very briefly, our project. We'll let the agents and editors eat their meals and drink their coffee. We promise not to follow them into the restroom. But we'll take advantage of the read-alouds and pitch sessions to kindly ask if we might send our proposals/queries/synopses for consideration.

To you editors and agents who've been invited to this year's PPWC: Please help us as we skate on this literary thin ice. Please realize we won't hog tie you and force you to listen to a 45-minute used-car-salesman speech. Please hear our words, and if you'd like, we'll be happy to send you our manuscripts.

Deal?

See you at the conference. I'll be the nervous-looking geezer-broad with a mug of coffee permanently attached to her fingers.

We'll share the biscotti.

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## Conference Clips

By Jude Willhoff

Eileen Dreyer, popular writer of romance and suspense novels, is the keynote speaker at this year's PPWC, April 25-27. Dreyer is author of 20 romance novels published by Silhouette and 5 suspense novels published by Harper Paperbacks. Her latest book, *With a Vengeance*, was published this spring by St. Martin's Press.

*With a Vengeance* features Maggie O'Brien, St. Louis's first female SWAT Medic. Eileen uses her extensive professional background as a trauma nurse at large hospitals to make the plot authentic. Nursing in trauma centers is "Great fun, high burn-out, lots of life lessons to write about," she says.

Eileen began writing as a child. When she ran out of Nancy Drew books, she wrote her own. She became interested in publishing when a nurse friend introduced her to romance novels at a time when she was burning out as a nurse. She liked the happy endings that were missing in hospital work. Five years later she was published.

### Handling Rejection

Eileen admits to having enough rejection letters to paper a bathroom. "I swear I got the one that said, 'Please lose our address.' I actually sold the second book I wrote, and then sold the first right after." Eileen studied

the market carefully, before she found RWA, or any other writer's group, and decided she could sell to category romance without an agent. "I decided to try and sell my first two or three and then approach somebody on that strength, which actually worked. I made a list of five possibles, from the least agent I'd accept to the "what the heck" candidate. I'm still amazed that it was the 'what the heck' candidate, Steve Axelrod, who called me back."

### Working with Editors

As for editors, the hardest lesson Eileen has learned in this business is one told to her by Jayne Ann Krentz. "Jayne said, 'The most important asset a writer has in this business, is also going to be her biggest problem. That's her voice. If her voice is unique enough to make her a bestseller, it's also going to be a voice that only certain editors respond to.' To me, it's like a key in a lock. If an editor doesn't get what you're trying to do, both of you will lose your way. I've actually bought books back because of this. I've had terrible trouble changing houses,



Eileen Dreyer

# Making the Most of Your Writing Space

Second in a three-part series on Making the Most of Your Writing

By Maggie Mae Sharp

So, what's your writing style? Are you a Slovenly Sloucher, or a Neatnick? Are you an Organizer or a Chaotic Deadliner? And what is your preferred writing habitat? Do you need absolute silence or Moody Blues blasting at 3 decibels above the threshold of pain? Since it doesn't really matter to anyone (except you), you may wonder why identifying your writing style and preferred creative habitat could be helpful to you as a writer. Because it could, that's why. Let's review a few styles.

The Slovenly Sloucher only uses a laptop, slouches around in most unladylike positions on any available piece of furniture or floor, wears ghastly-looking but decadently-comfortable sweats and white socks, and frequently shares bowls of cereal and cold Starbucks coffee with a cat.

The Chaotic Deadliner always, ALWAYS waits until the last minute to write a 1000-word article or chapter assigned three weeks prior (okay, that's me, I'm guilty, it's 12:03 am), needs timeline pressure to incubate and hatch best ideas, rarely edits, considers self to be most brilliant when just about in trouble with editor.

And what about your writing habitat? Do you write best when surrounded by posters of rock stars or half-naked men or cute bunnies or heaven help us, images from the world of Martha Stewart? Do you feel most comfortable in your own secluded den with signed contracts and your first payment for an article neatly framed on the walls; or does your style lean more toward a formal office full of leather-bound chairs, ceiling-to-floor shelves full of expensive, musty books, and several small but valuable pieces of real art? Doesn't matter. What matters is how your habitat and your style fits you and your writing style.

It's terribly important for your writing habitat to be just that—yours. Take some time to really think about what makes you feel comfortable, productive, creative. Okay, maybe you'd love the leather-bound chairs and real art, but since you haven't yet sold the great American novel, you need to downscale a bit and perhaps shop second hand. It can be done.

Just make your writing space feel good to you. Jean M. Auel wrote *Clan of the Cave Bear*

with an old clunky typewriter atop her kitchen table and she moved on up from there. There are authors who will never touch a computer; there are those who will always write longhand and let someone else transcribe; there are others who only dictate on tape. I've heard tell of authors who buy a new computer for each new book, and others who can only write on a laptop while in a bubble bath or hot tub. The list of eccentricities is virtually endless.

Personally, I'm a Slovenly Chaotic Deadliner writing in a Bird Sanctuary & Botanical Habitat. When my husband and I found this house, we discovered a ceiling-to-floor window overlooking a woodland full of huge Ponderosa Pines and scads of little wild birds. We love wild birds. Envisioning me seat-

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**“The Chaotic Deadliner always, ALWAYS waits until the last minute to write a 1000-word article or chapter assigned three weeks prior.”**

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ed at my desk in front of that window where I could soak up all the nature it had to offer—that was it, I had to have this house.

When creating my optimal creative writing habitat, we positioned bird feeders and bird baths just outside that wonderful window, and all around my desk inside live lots of happy, green plants. I used to keep a pot full of tea handy, but found that since I'm a Chaotic, I needed regular breaks to go upstairs for tea and snacks.

I write and design greeting cards, so we set all the shelves with the cards there in my “studio” where they continue to provide me with inspiration and a necessary sense of pride. On the walls are framed, pressed wildflowers from our gardens. Oh, and a description of my habitat would not be complete without mentioning the resident house cat who appears periodically throughout the



**Maggie Sharp has blended a warm ambiance and practical usability in her inviting writing space.**

workday to perch on my lap or perhaps molest her favorite mouse-du-jour just to provide me with a little break.

Surrounding my peaceful writing perimeter are my necessary “piles” of past/present/future creativity, but I made sure that I can't see them unless I really want to. Chaotics are generally also Pilers. Word to the wise: the well-meaning friend or relative who spends a Saturday “filing” all the piles into what s/he perceives to be a logical, orderly fashion will send a confirmed Piler into a panic. We know exactly what is in every pile and usually in what order, so if you “file” it, we will have no earthly idea how to retrieve it and our creativity will be temporarily extinguished. Bummer.

So, my parting shot? Fan those creative flames of yours and put some effort into figuring out what it is that makes your creative juices flow. Then “make it so.” But don't waste time trying to change yourself into someone with a different writing style—after all, it took your entire life to become who you are. You are creative, adventurous in your own way, and destined to reach your goals if you want them bad enough.

—Maggie Mae Sharp is President and CEO of Maggie's Quill, Inc. She may be reached at [huntress@firstworld.net](mailto:huntress@firstworld.net).

**Next Issue:**

**Michael Waite's Making the Most of Your Writing Career**

# One-on-One with Michael Seidman

continued from page 1

**Fox:** What's bad about it?

**Seidman:** The shrinkage. The concentration on money. The nonsense about editors not editing. The scammers-agents and publishers-taking advantage of the unknowing. The plethora of writers concentrating on discovering what's hot, rather than what they should be writing because it is what they believe in and understand and want to write. Guidelines and rules, rather than the freedom to experiment and stretch your authorial wings. One of the worst things is the lowest common denominator approach; K.I.S.S. makes sense, keeping it simple. But it's being practiced to an obscene degree. During my last year or so on a payroll, I was bored silly, didn't enjoy what I was doing the way I should have. And I had a good job; I was one of the few who wasn't looking for a job.

**Fox:** Where do you think the industry will be five years from now?

**Seidman:** Still in New York City, mostly. Beyond that? I don't know. I think, though, that there are going to be publishers trying some new things. There may also be a major fallout if the conglomerates and land grabbers finally realize that books aren't cereals and that they can't be sold the same way, that the profits they expected aren't going to be there. I just can't imagine who'll come in and take on the job of bringing it back to where it once belonged. But if I knew anything about that, had any real sense of what will happen, I'd sell off my portfolio before the economy eats it up and invest in a publishing house.

**Fox:** What do you see as the future of e-publishing, print on demand and small presses?

**Seidman:** I have a lot of confidence in small presses, believe in them and think they'll prosper...at least until some big company buys them because they're doing well, and starts the downward spiral again. As to POD and e-publishing, I have no idea. The potential probably hasn't been realized yet, but the telling thing to me is that authors who've gone one or the other route continue to submit their books either for reprint or as a way of introducing themselves for the next book.

**Fox:** What mistake do you see most often in submissions?

**Seidman:** Just one? You don't make this easy,

Karen. I guess the answer would have to be not keeping me interested, a dependence on the formula for a type of book (and every book is a type of book) rather than on making the story interesting, different, compelling. I've spent the last 15 or 20 years working almost only in mystery fiction and what I looked for were manuscripts that I thought every other house would turn down, not because they're badly written but because the author flaunted the rules. Bill Pronzini's *A Wasteland of Strangers* is one example, the novels of James Sallis are another. I would've named them "best manuscript," as asked before, but the manuscripts arrived after lots of conversation... they weren't really serendipitous, which is how I interpreted the question.

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**"When I ask what a manuscript is about, I don't want the storyline, I want the characters and what happens to them."**

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**Fox:** What subject matter do you never want to see again?

**Seidman:** Two: the killer who was an abused child, and drug lords/drug wars.

**Fox:** What would you like to see more of?

**Seidman:** Novels about people, not about events. Even within the mystery, which I'll continue to work with, I want stories about the people involved, how the crime impacts them, what is put into motion by the central event. I want the characters to be different at the end of the book, I want them changed. As far as I'm concerned, if they're not, then nothing happened. And that's an admonition that crosses genres. Let me put it this way: when I ask what a manuscript is about, I don't want the storyline, I want the characters and what happens to them. Plot is overrated; life isn't about plots unless you're paranoid. I want novels about a life lived.

**Fox:** Where are you working now? Doing what?

**Seidman:** I have two consultancies, one with Forge and one with Walker, and I'm working with individuals, something I particularly enjoy. And I've just signed on with a new

company, one that's bringing a radically different approach to acquisition, royalties, and the writer's contract. More on that when the announcement is ready.

**Fox:** Do you have any writing books that you recommend?

**Seidman:** *Bird by Bird*, for the writing information, particularly the "shitty first draft," something I have to remind myself about on a daily basis. And selfishly, my two books. I may soon be adding Norman Mailer's *The Spooky Art* to the list, but I haven't finished it yet.

**Fox:** What is your stance on agents? Are they necessary? Helpful? A waste of 15%?

**Seidman:** Given the nature of the business today, the agent is probably necessary; too many houses simply won't look at work that is unagented, won't even solicit it. Agents are wonderful intermediaries between the publisher and the author; they know who is looking for what, have a firmer grasp of an editor's tastes...and these days, with so many of them being editors made redundant, they can offer editorial judgments that may prove useful. The catch? All of that presupposes that the agent is one who is respected. Just as agents rank houses, editors rank agents. Bottom line is that, while I have lots of contacts after all these years, I have an agent to represent me.

**Fox:** Last, but not least, can you help settle a point of contention on our PPW loop? What is the preferred manuscript format for submission?

**Seidman:** Double-spaced and a readable, serif typeface (Times or Courier) at a readable size. I have never counted lines, measured margins. Common sense is all that's necessary. If a writer has to be told how to format a page, what size font to use, I realize one important thing: that writer is not printing out the manuscript and editing it by hand. If s/he were, s/he'd know how much room is necessary. A caveat: if a house or magazine states they want this and not that, follow the guideline. Otherwise, that standard one-inch margin is fine. To tell you the truth, I have no idea what settings I use for my own manuscript template. I just know it's comfortable to work on.

# Nit-Noids . . .

## NOT!

By Jim Roper

Everyone has a story, and 20 million people have found time to write manuscripts. But only a few writers realize completing a manuscript brings them to the starting line—the place where critical work begins.

If this elevated plateau describes your situation, you may need expert help. Your mother may tell you to keep your day job, but she won't tell you that you've dangled your modifiers and poached your POV. You may benefit from joining a critique group. Twelve starving writers can polish rough edges from your best work like fine emery paper and push you along the road to publishing success.

First, you must grow thick skin. Prepare yourself for psychological trauma. Realizing the initial draft—your baby—has fatal flaws represents an obstacle that impales even modest egos. Some writers never return to the bright lights after only a few frank sessions. For others, recovering from a bad night at the critique group requires a five-step program. And if all your colleagues say, "Start over," you may not be ready for 400-grit editing.

But the serious goal of being published will draw you back to the flame. Break out of the denial phase and drive on. You'll grow and change from the expertise a critique group offers. After showing your group the funniest misplaced modifier of the evening, you'll welcome the energy peer pressure brings to preparing for the next session. You may do strange things like searching eBay for your own copy of the *Chicago Manual of Style* and becoming the group's expert on the care and feeding of the ellipsis. And you'll blast back at those SOBs. An effective critique group should add fun and growth to your writing life.

Go slowly at first. Genuine change takes time. Use special care in responding to criticism. Don't replace old problems with new ones.

Almost never blow off inputs from anyone in your critique circle. If troublesome words stop a critique member, they will stop an editor or agent. Repeat this sentence: You can always find a

better way to show readers a scene. Good writers make good critiquers, and the best critiques usually suggest better words to use.

While editing other members' inputs, you may want to read a document quickly to appreciate the story. Then, drop three gears and read it again. Dig into each sentence, word-by-word.

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### **"For some, recovering from a bad night at the critique group requires a five-step program."**

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Don't worry if your initial editing skills aren't broad and deep. You will learn higher editing points on the job. Compare writing compelling scenes to hitting a golf ball 300 yards down the middle of the fairway. In both situations, you have to do 17 things correctly at the same time. Most humans are more prone to hitting the ball (editing the manuscript) 17 times. Below lie some fundamentals that might go a long way for you.

First, take a swing at your verbs. Read your work looking only at verbs. Change all verbs to active and direct forms or have a good reason not to. Writing dialogue offers one small exception to these editing tips. Your story's characters might say things that good writers never offer in narrative passages.

Replace Tell verbs with Show verbs. (*Went* is Tell. *Staggered* is Show.) If your computer has a grammar-checker, reduce passive voice to a statistical zero. Again, dialogue passages may contain a few passive verbs.

After you capture nirvana with your verbs, you should then dispatch most of your adverbs. Otherwise, ask yourself why you need to modify your verbs. Over-qualifying (excessively) (usually) weakens (almost all) writing (greatly).

Bring technology to the adverb quest. Tell your computer to do a Search and Destroy for *ly*. Develop a bevy of qualifiers, clichés, and "tell" words on your Search and Destroy hit list. Some favorite targets are There is and It was—a pronoun without an antecedent followed by a passive verb. Those little words hit your readers like speedbumps on the freeway. Avoid them even in dialogue.

If you don't have a hit list, start one. Taking a writing course such as Jimmie Butler's powerful sessions can add a page of Search and Destroy ammo to your editing arsenal.

A long string of prepositional phrases can stop the action. Scan your sentences for multiple prepositions.

*The Writers Journey* by Christopher Vogler infers that readers of commercial fiction prefer a roller coaster ride with awesome highs and deep lows. This construct should shine in your mind as you edit. And here's where the nits begin to loom large. How sympathetic your characters emerge and how tightly your plot turns may hinge on the relatively small issue of verb choice. Tiny changes can polish your writing into a smooth fast read.

After spending a short year participating in a critique group, you will never read anything the same way you did before the experience. You'll wonder how Clancy ever got published. (Perhaps he knew somebody?)

But when a reader tells you, "Yours is the best-written book I have ever read," you'll feel a pride that makes all the groveling worthwhile. Depending on your sales, comments like that may feel better and last longer than a royalty check.

Large success can evolve directly from your knife-fights with the nit-noids.

*—Jim Roper won awards at PPWC before publishing Quoth the Raven. See Sweet Success, page 7.*

## **Pikes Pique, or . . .**

### **. . . Mother Tongue**

- 'Verb' is a noun.
- Two mouses are mice. Two louses are lice. Why aren't two houses hice?
- What's another word for 'synonym'?

- How about a synonym for 'thesaurus'?
- Try making an anagram out of 'anagram.' Go ahead. We'll wait.
- Why do 'fat chance' and 'slim chance' both mean 'no chance'?
- But 'overlook' and 'oversee' mean the opposite?
- And 'cleave' means both split apart and stay together?
- How can something be out of whack? What's a 'whack'?

*As seen everywhere on the Web*

# Conference Clips

continued from page 2

because I kept getting people who said, 'We love your work...if only you'd change it...' That means they don't get it. My criteria for a publishing house is first and foremost hearing from an editor, 'I know just what you're doing, I love it, and I think I can help you do it even better!'"

## Being Successful

When asked what success means to Eileen, she has to think about it. "Success. Hmm. I'm wondering if even Nora Roberts considers herself a success. Because of the nature of the beast, we're at least one book down the line before we get news on the book we've just finished. In my case, if the news on the book is bad, then I know I'm a hack and I've been found out. If it's good, then I know that the book I'm working on now is bad, and then people will find out I'm a hack. I'm always nervous with good news, because I'm not sure I can sustain it. But then I'm not sure if that's because I'm a writer, or because I'm Irish. I have a wonderful wall hanging that says, 'The Irish have an abiding sense of tragedy which sustains them through temporary periods of joy.' I think it's a hoot.

"Actually, I'm just thrilled people who read my books not only enjoy them, but seem to understand what I'm trying to say. That they connect with them, on whatever level they wish. We write to communicate, and it's most satisfying to know I've done my job. At least for that book. I never got into the business to be a star. My goal all along has been to be a writer, and to have people enjoy reading my work until I drop dead over the computer

screen. I have a great family—my own and extended—that definitely keeps me grounded, and lots of other interests and people to keep me happy. And, as I've said often enough, if I lose an argument, or don't do well in this business, nobody dies. They would have in my old job. So everything takes on a more realistic import. After all, I've seen brain surgery. This ain't it."

## Help from Friends

Eileen can't stress enough for new people coming into the business how important it is to build a community of writers around you. "After all, as much as your family and other friends may love you, they simply don't know what goes into the daily grind of writing. I always think of writers like new mothers. You know you've been busy all day, but nobody but another young mother can understand just how much time diapers and tantrum control take. I need my writer friends to be there to hear me yell, 'I figured out why the bad guy did what he did!,' because they'll say, 'Wonderful! Let's have lunch so you can tell me about it,' while my husband, who is immensely and wonderfully supportive will say, 'What else did you do today?' And I have to say, 'No, honey, that's the last three weeks.'

"Also, as you mature in the business, it's wonderful to have people around you who've faced what you have. There's a real security there, in good times and bad. This business is cyclic. So it's good to have friends you can trust who'll be able to ride those ups and downs with you, because you've ridden them, too, and you've been there with them."

## Keeping your Voice

Eileen's advice on the writing life: "Know what works for you. All the rules in the world don't help if they can't get you to put a word

on the screen or find the right agent for you. Know what it is you want to say. It's voice again, and that is the most impossible thing to teach. But you got into the business because you saw the world in a particular light. If you lose that light, all you're going to get from critiquing and contests and editorial comment is a complete loss of the very thing that makes you unique. The most important question I had to answer, several times in my career, is 'What is it you want, and what are you willing to give away for it?'"

## Being Professional

"Also, don't be an amateur. Nobody has time in this business for it. Hone your craft, your writing eye, your individuality. Don't assume the editor will clean up lousy grammar. Remember, the most important thing you have to do is get the words on the page. Don't bother facing an agent or editor until you have at least one entire manuscript under your belt. They don't really want to talk to you until they know you can finish the thing. More importantly, you have to know you can do it. Finishing your first manuscript is the most important step in your career. Showing it to a perfect stranger for the first time is the second."

—Visit Eileen Dreyer at her website: <http://www.eileendreyer.com>.



### Author bio

Jude Willhoff always dreamed of writing, but never had time until a life-threatening event changed her outlook. Today she writes contemporary romance and nonfiction. While working on her sixth novel, she has recently signed with agent, Michelle Grajkowski of the Three Seas Literary Agency, whom she met at last year's Pikes Peak Writers Conference.

"Some on Writing is the best book on writing that I have read. . . . The tips, shortcuts, and plentiful examples of good writing versus bad cannot fail to help every writer, no matter at what stage he finds himself." —Barclay Conrad, author of *Manalor and Learning to Write Fiction from the Masters*

# Stein on Writing

A MASTER EDITOR OF SOME OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL WRITERS OF OUR CENTURY SHARES HIS CRAFT TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

Sol Stein  
Author of *How to Grow a Novel*

6 Pikes Peak Writer

# Out of Book Experience

a PPW Bookshelf Review by Maxine Davenport

## Stein on Writing

Tired of books on the theory of writing? You'll love this book of useable solutions—how to fix writing that is flawed, improve writing that is good, and how to create interesting writing in the first place.

A writer and editor, Sol Stein gives tips, short cuts and clear examples of good writing versus bad. He invites the writer to compete with God in creating interesting characters. He believes the major reason for the rejection of fiction is the writer's failure to understand that fiction evokes emotion, and nonfiction conveys information. When the fiction writer "tells information" he is distracting from the emotion and courting rejection.

# Synopsis workshop



**Pam McCutcheon discusses the fine art of synopsis-writing during the March workshop held at the Red Lion Hotel.**

In case you missed it, here are a few gold nuggets from Pam McCutcheon's March workshop on *Writing the Fiction Synopsis*. All reports indicate a successful, extremely useful workshop.

- If you don't have conflict, you don't have a story.
- You need to know at the end of a synopsis if the characters reach their goals.
- Most characters almost always have more than one goal.

- The biggest problem most writers have is 'sagging middle syndrome.'
- A black moment in a story has: a realization, a decision, and a reward.
- When you write a synopsis, make a list of scenes and boil them down to one sentence—this is an exercise for you to boil it down to the essentials.
- Match the tone of your book to the tone of your synopsis—dark and angsty, or light and fluffy.
- You need to target the publisher. Read their guidelines and read their authors.
- Make your synopsis as long as the publisher wants.
- A synopsis is formatted the same as the manuscript. If two pages or less, single space it.
- The log line talks about character, goal, and conflict—a quick one-liner.

**News Flash**

**The new deadline for the Paul Gillette Memorial Writing Contest is November 1.**



**R**etired Air Force Colonel Jim Roper won awards in the PPWC writing contest with two military memoirs—*Quoth the Raven* (2nd place) in 1998, and *Aardvarks and Rangers* (3rd place) in 2001. In April, 2002, after four years in Jimmie Butler's critique group, he published *Quoth the Raven*, (PublishAmerica.com), a creative nonfiction account of the secret air war over Laos.

Jim is researching a third book, *Flycatcher*, a memoir of Cambodia in 1975. He is currently a military spouse with four sons. He will move from Alabama to northern Virginia this summer and hopes to return to Colorado in a few years.

Congratulations to PPWC alum Jim Roper! Check out his feature article, *Nit Noids*, page 5 in this issue of PPW.

## Join Us!

The Pikes Peak Writers organization is growing by leaps and bounds, and we'd love to have you join us! Just so happens now's the perfect time to become a PPW member, because membership runs from June 1 through May 31. Join now and get the month of May, 2003 free!

What does your annual \$25 get you? For starters, sizeable discounts on all PPW workshops. PPW presents both two-hour

and all-day workshops throughout the year, covering everything from Creativity to Writing a Fiction Synopsis.

Your membership also buys you a year's subscription to PPW NewsMagazine. Take a good look at this issue and you'll get a good idea of the offering of columns and features designed to help you, the writer, on your journey.

As a PPW member, you'll qualify for a special discount on the annual Pikes Peak Writers Conference held in Colorado Springs

every spring. PPWC was voted a top ten national writers conference by *Writer's Digest*, so you'll know you're in good company.

Simply fill out the form below and mail in your check. For more information or to pay by credit card, visit [www.pikespeakwriters.org](http://www.pikespeakwriters.org). And if you'd like to stay up-to-date on the latest news and happenings of the Pikes Peak Writers and the conference, join the PPWC announcement e-mail loop by sending an e-mail to [ppwc-announce-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:ppwc-announce-subscribe@yahoo.com).

## PIKES PEAK WRITERS REGISTRATION FORM

Interested in joining us? If you'd like to become a member of the Pikes Peak Writers, just fill out this form and mail it to PPW, P.O. Box 6726, Colorado Springs, CO 80934, along with your membership dues of \$25 good through May 31, 2004. For more information, visit [www.pikespeakwriters.org](http://www.pikespeakwriters.org).

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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## Hot Topics

### New Staff

Please welcome Jennifer Webster-Valant, PPW's new Transportation Chairperson. Jennifer is in charge of making the arrangements to get conference faculty members to and from the airport and for setting up a tour of Garden of the Gods for interested faculty.

Jennifer and her husband, Jason, are native Coloradoans and have lived in Colorado Springs for 2 1/2 years. Jennifer is a member of PPW, Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers, a critique group, and a weekly improvisational writing organization. Jennifer also judges entries for the Paul Gillette Memorial Writing Contest. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, with an emphasis on Creative Writing from The Colorado College. Currently, Jennifer is seeking an agent for her recently completed mystery titled *Under Duress*, the first in a series, and *A Wrong Number*, a psychological suspense novel.

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### Credit Cards

In order to better serve our members, we are happy to announce that we are now able to accept Visa, Mastercard, Discover, and American Express for all your Pikes Peak Writers needs: registration, dues, workshops, bookstore, etc.

### Booksignings

In celebration of its first year anniversary, *Author, Author!* bookstore is hosting a booksigning with two romance authors on Saturday, May 10, 12-2 p.m. at 5975 N. Academy. Jodi Dawson (aka Jodi Beyes) will sign her debut novel, *Her Secret Millionaire*, and Karen Fox will sign the latest in her funny fae series, *Impractical Magic*.

### Writers Class

Pam McCutcheon will offer her popular six-week course, Beginning Writers Workshop, from May 15 - June 19. Visit <http://www.pammm.com/Class.htm> for more details.

### Writers Supporting Readers

Start saving and collecting books for donation while in attendance at this year's Pikes Peak Writers Conference. Donated books will be distributed to many appreciative school libraries and civic groups in need.

Collection receptacles will be available for all age groups. To help make our job more efficient and effective, please sort and group "in good condition" books for children (elementary), youth (junior high-middle school), young adults (high school), and adults.

### Operation Paperback

In addition to collecting books for local libraries and civic groups, we will be collecting books at the conference for Operation Paperback. Operation Paperback is a program started on the Internet to send paperbacks to our troops overseas. Since they are often stationed in remote areas with little entertainment, the contribution of reading material will give them something to look forward to at the end of the day. In support of this effort, the Pikes Peak Writers Conference will collect your gently used fiction paperbacks at the conference, package them, and mail them to one or more of the addresses on Operation Paperback's list. So, please remember to bring your fiction paperbacks and donate them to the cause! For more information about Operation Paperback, go to <http://oppaperback.virtualave.net>.