

# Hampton Roads Writers Where Characters Connect

August 2012

## Writers' Conference Countdown

1 evening plus 2 full days of workshops, 2 best-selling keynoters, 2 first ten-lines critique sessions, 29 workshops/breakout sessions, ten-minute agent pitches, and cash prize contests for short fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Workshops covering fiction, screenplay writing, juvenile fiction, journalism, freelancing, humor writing, poetry and the business of getting published. A book shop, book signings, and many opportunities to network with other writers, agents, and editors. All this awaits you at our fourth annual Writers' Conference taking place September 20-22 in Virginia Beach at the Doubletree Hotel.

Our keynote speakers are award-winning authors, thriller writer Rick Mofina, and juvenile fiction writer Patricia Hermes. Other outstanding writers and presenters include fiction writers C.L. Beville, Alma Katsu, and John DeKakis, journalists Kerry Dougherty and Bill Ruehlmann, agents Molly Jaffa, Rachel Dugas, and Brooks Sherman, poets Shonda Buchanan and Annmarie Lockhart, and Regent University Professor of

Screenwriting, Dr. Dennis Bounds.

Multiple-day writing conferences like this usually cost several hundred dollars to attend, but we offer ours for just \$150 for HRW members and \$190 for non-members. With the price of membership only \$35, why not join Hampton Roads Writers at the same time you register for the conference? Membership will allow you to attend other HRW events, such as our Traveling Pen series, at a discount, too.

Time is running out on this great opportunity. If you've never attended a writers' conference before, why not make this your first one? And if you are an experienced writers' conference attendee, you already know what a great one this one promises to be. Hope to see you all in September!

For more information on the conference as well as a registration form, visit our website, [hamptonroadswriters.org](http://hamptonroadswriters.org), or call 757-589-0796.

### Traveling Pen Series

These 2-hour workshop sessions on different aspects of writing are \$10 for HRW members and \$20 for non-members. Check out one or more of the upcoming ones:

**Saturday, August 18, 2012, 10 a.m.—12:00 noon**  
**Making a Scene: Snappy Dialogue meets Concrete Detail** presented by Valerie Wilkinson. The class will include lecture, brief writing exercises, and group discussion.

**Saturday, October 13, 2012, 10 a.m. — 12:00 noon**  
**Writing Poetry About War** presented by Shonda Buchanan, English professor at Hampton University.

**Saturday, November 3, 2012, 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon**  
**Healing with Language**, presented by Shonda Buchanan

All workshops are held at the Virginia Beach Tidewater Community College campus, in the Blackwater Building, room CW-134.

For more detailed information about these workshops, please visit our [website](http://hamptonroadswriters.org).

### Open Mic Schedule

Only one **short form** (poetry or prose, 3-5 minutes long) left for the summer:

**August 21, 2012 Tuesday 6-8:30**

Central Library Emcee: Shonda Buchanan

Please bring 3-5 minutes of material to share. These open mics are open to everyone, readers and listeners alike.

**Show and Grow**, prose reading with professional critique session (short story, memoir, or novel chapter reading of no more than 10 minutes):

**Saturday, September 8, 9:30 a.m. – 12:00** at the Meyera Oberndorf Central Library

Please go to our [HRW website](http://hamptonroadswriters.org) for more information on this longer session, including the protocol for being a presenter.

## Grammar Lesson With Bernadette

### Who versus Whom

This one is often a struggle for people. When you're trying to decide whether to use "who" or "whom," ask yourself whether the answer to the question would be "he" or "him." That's the trick: if you can answer the question with him, then use whom. I remember it because him and whom both end in "m." (The answer could be "she" or "her" for women with no helpful "m.") So, let's say you're trying to ask, "Who (or whom) do you love? The answer would be "I love him." So that question needs "whom." But if you're trying to ask, "Who (or whom) is the boss?" the answer would be "She is the boss." So it's who.

### That versus Which

The word "that" introduces an essential clause, and it doesn't have commas associated with it. The word "which" introduces a nonessential clause and it has commas around it. The nonessential clause can be left out without changing the meaning of a sentence. That's how you know it is nonessential. My old copy editing professor Buck Ryan taught us that if you can say that clause in a lower voice, that signals it's nonessential, so you need to use "which."

*The oatmeal raisin cookie that's hidden in the back of the bakery display is the one I want. It's giant!*

*The oatmeal raisin cookie, which is homemade, comes free with dinner.*



Bernadette Kinlaw has been writing for *The Virginian-Pilot* since 1988. Her column, "Grammar School," appears once a week in the Daily Break and online. She may be reached at [bernadette.kinlaw@pilotonline.com](mailto:bernadette.kinlaw@pilotonline.com) Thank you, Bernadette, for allowing us to reprint portions of your column.

## Did You Know?

On our Hampton Roads Writers website, we have a great remedy for writer's block in the form of fun writing prompts and exercises—847 of them, to be exact. These can be used to jump-start your writing or as daily practice sessions to get the creative juices flowing. All you have to do to access them is to go to our homepage and click on [847 Writing Prompts or Exercises](#). One of them might turn into something bigger than you imagined.

*Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can.*

— Matthew Arnold

## Conference Presenter Profile:

### Alma Katsu



"I think one reason that fairy tales continue to resonate with us is because they help us make sense of life. They compel us to do the right thing: We may be confronted with a difficult challenge, but if we're brave and compassionate

and fair, we'll be rewarded in the end." So said author Alma Katsu recently in an interview with Joyce Lamb of *USA Today*. Alma said that the sense of the fairy tale experience pervades her novels, beginning with *The Taker*, followed by its sequel, *The Reckoning*. The third book in the trilogy, *The Descent*, is not out yet.

Her work has been highly praised by authors such as *New York Times* bestselling author Scott Westerfeld (*Leviathan*) and Meg Waite Clayton (*The Wednesday Sisters*), and Keith Donohue (*The Stolen Child*). Westerfeld has called her novel *The Taker*, "a thinking person's guilty pleasure." Her two novels have been described as gothic tales of a supernatural love story, high on suspense, akin to *Interview with the Vampire* and *Twilight*, sans the vampires.

Her debut novel was selected by ALA/Booklist as one of the top ten debut novels of 2011.

## Congratulations to Member Judy Snider



Hampton Roads Writers' member Judy K. Snider won a Silver Mom's Choice Award for her co-authored book, *I Love You, Be Careful*. Amazon.com says, "Lighthearted and sweet, this book would be a lovely addition to any child's library." The Mom's Choice Awards are recognized around the world for their evaluation of family-friendly media, products, and services and setting benchmarks in excellence.

Judy lives in Virginia Beach with her husband, Gil, who is also an author and a member of Hampton Roads Writers. They have two college-aged sons. We are delighted to recognize the success of another one of our members.

## Writers As Readers, Part I by Cecelia Robbins

"Oh, I never read books. I do write, though."

I shied away from the speaker—a young woman—as if what she had was catching. Her attitude struck me as arrogant and insulting, given that my arms were full of books. I was in line at a yard sale, waiting to pay for my haul. An absolute feast, from the series: *Elements of Writing*, published by Writer's Digest. I'd found *Conflict, Action, and Suspense; Characters and Viewpoint; Setting; and Science Fiction and Fantasy*.

"Really," I said frostily.

"Oh, yeah, I have lots of good ideas," she babbled on, but I'd quit listening.

As anyone who has spent any time writing, knows good ideas do not a novel make. Good ideas are a dime an un-hatched novel. Good idea eggs can be cracked ineptly, die still-born, or be cooked up by a chef into a delicious meal.

The second offense was lack of observation. Writers should always be using this. It is called "Powers of Observation" for a reason. And it is powerful, indeed. The woman failed to notice the irony and utter dismissal in my "Really." What sort of characters could she possibly write? She thinks she's going to write the next Great American Novel. Using what? Reverse osmosis?

Writing well is like any other skill you want to acquire. You have to pay your dues. Have you read other writers, studied, and practiced the art of writing for most of your life? Are you now at the point where you realize that writing is not about being on the best-seller list? It's work—hard work. And for me—just when I think I might know something about writing, I realize I need more information—more tips, a fine-tuning. I turn to my writing friends, and I break out the books.

Maybe, someday, we'll get lucky, or be persistent enough to be on the best-seller list. But right now, it's all about the work. The work should contain a peculiar sort of pleasure, and the work should include reading. Reading for pleasure. Reading to understand how good writers construct sentences, paragraphs, chapters, novels. Reading to learn how to write better, how to think better, how to express exactly what you mean: how to, in the end, be saleable.

Are you a reader?

Inspired Ink writers' workshop has room for a few new members. They support emerging writers on their path to publication via technical instruction, guest speakers and community. Positive writers of all genres are welcome. Join them the first Saturday of the month from 10:30-12:30 at the Churchland Library in Portsmouth, 4934 High Street West.

Contact: 717-0628 or [pamelawrites@hotmail.com](mailto:pamelawrites@hotmail.com)

### Literary Trivia

What Irish playwright when stopped by U.S. customs in New York, proclaimed, "I have nothing to declare except my genius"?

*Answer on last page of newsletter.*

# Martha's Grits

By Cecilia Robbins

My mother-in-law, Martha, is picking through the cardboard container of dry Texas breakfast grits, coarse grains of inedible sand, looking for minute bits of dark hulls. She carefully removes and discards the flecks. This obsessive attention to the purity of white grits is troublesome. Watching her, I think that she's run out of house-wifely things to do, and is—as if she needs to—justifying her existence.

When she cooks and serves the porridge, we sprinkle coarse-ground black pepper over the bowlful. The perfection she creates is short-lived. The time she spends achieving it, wasted. That she does this with so many things is strange.

She once crafted poetry. Does she lament not having the time or energy to write? Does she realize what the trade-off is? The normal drudge of housework doesn't eat up enough of her day?

Later, when the clock of her life has been turned over to the quick, relentless destruction of Lou Gehrig's disease, she shows me her writing. Secreted in the back of her closet are yellowing reams of paper. With wistful bitterness, she thumbs through the pages: poetry, the beginnings of stories. She won't permit me to read anything.

For all I know, they died with her, buried or burned at her request. No one ever recorded her speaking. No stories are told, no memories re-lived. Her voice is forever stilled.

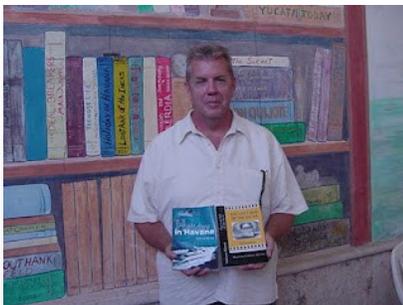
What bitter pebbles did she carry in her mouth? Her joys seemed narrow and circumscribed: once-a-year visits from her son, and culling grits.

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How will you, as a writer, be remembered? Our stories, our memories, can out-live us. You say you don't have time to write? How much TV do you watch? What useless activities do you indulge in?

Stop culling grits. Write.

## New Member Spotlight:



### Malcom Massey

Hampton Roads Writers welcomes new member Malcom Massey to its Board of Directors as one of its advisors. Malcom hails to us from

Mexico, but he is a hometown boy. He was raised in Norfolk and attended Norfolk Christian High, graduated from Maury High School, and earned a degree in business administration from Old Dominion University.

Malcom has several published books to his credit, *Holiday in Havana*, *The Lost Ark of the Incas*, and *The Lost Calendar of the Maya*. All three are action-adventure fiction from his Martin Culver series. We are pleased to have Malcom as a new addition to our organization and board.



Buying Amazon.com books and other products sold on the Amazon.com site (including gift cards) through our HRW website is a quick and painless way to financially support HRW. For each sale, our group earns a 4 -6.5% referral fee. Last year we earned over **\$300** with 201 items sold at a total retail value of \$5,333.74. The more products sold through a referral from the HRW page, the higher the percentage referral we receive. You pay no more going through our site than you would if you went directly to Amazon.com. Look for the Amazon link on our HRW home page and start shopping today. Why not start by purchasing a book or two written by one of our conference presenters, then bring them to the conference and get them signed! Oh, and tell your friends and family about our link to Amazon!

Answer to Literary Trivia question: Oscar Wilde