



Hampton Roads Writers Where Characters Connect

February 2015

Looking Backward, Looking Forward



Though the Hampton Roads 6th Annual Writers Conference ended three months ago, it is still fresh in my mind. We had two fabulous keynoters as well as many accomplished workshop presenters, plus several agents. Janet Burroway, Professor Emerita at Florida State University and author of eight novels and writing craft textbooks and Brad Parks, the only author to have won the Shamus, Nero, and Lefty Awards for his Carter Ross mysteries, delivered memorable keynote addresses that

inspired us all to keep writing. Workshops on topics ranging from fictional time travel, flash fiction, plot and point of view to writing the perfect query letter, nailing the ten-minute pitch and self-editing out of the slush pile, were all designed to help writers hone their craft and get published.

How far we've come since 2009 and that first one-day conference held at the public library! We've more than doubled our attendance at this yearly event, changed our venue to an upscale hotel, increased the length of the conference to two full days plus one evening, added a terrific evening social and silent auction, and continued our tradition of getting top keynote speakers and presenters.

Every year I think it can't get any better, and then it does. A large part of that is because of people like you who support Hampton Roads Writers through your membership and attendance at our events, including our yearly conference. As you continue to support us, we want to continue to support you by offering quality workshops and critiqued open mics throughout the year as well as providing information on our website about other writing opportunities and critique groups in the area. Your success as a writer is our success as an organization.

Now it is 2015, January has come and gone, and time is flying by. I've noticed it flies faster and faster the older I get. One of my children sent me a New York Times article about men and women in their 80s and 90s who continue to create something new. Dr. Samuel Johnson wrote to James Boswell in 1777, "Depend upon it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully." Though I don't plan on doing anything worthy of hanging in the near future, I do know the feeling of desperation that can come when what you have dreamed for yourself is far from a reality, largely due to your lack of effort. September's writing conference finally lit a fire under me, and I joined a critique group for the first time. Funny thing about critique groups: they expect you to write so they have something to critique. So, I am writing. And loving it. Well, sort of loving it. Do you know that writing is hard work? Of course you do. You are a writer.

Traveling Pen Series

These 2.5-hour workshop sessions on different aspects of writing are \$10 for HRW members and \$20 for non-members. All workshops are held at the Virginia Beach Tidewater Community College campus in the Blackwater Building, Room CW-134. Here are our offerings for 2015. Go to the HRW website for more details and course descriptions.

- February 7 Heather Hildenbrand: YA fiction
- March 21 Vanessa Barger: Writing paranormal and fantasy
- April 25 Cheryl Tan: PR Matters
- May 23 TBA
- June 27 Princess Perry: Third person limited
- August 1 Patrick Evans, Cookbook writing



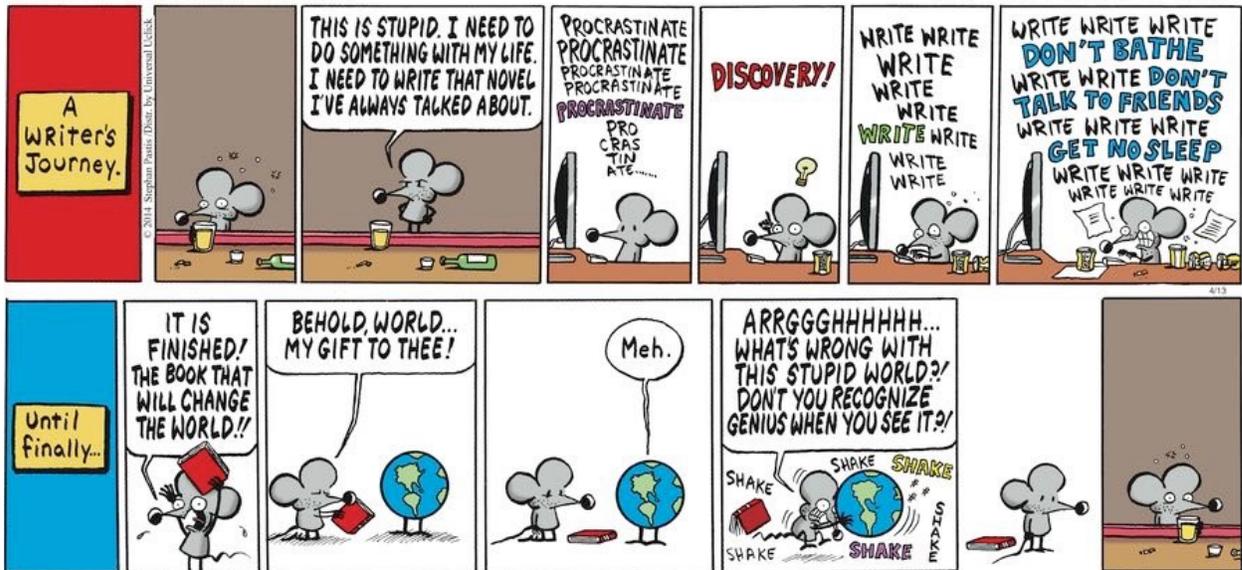
Buying amazon.com books and other products sold on the amazon.com site (including gift cards) through our HRW website is a quick and painless way to financially support HRW. For each sale, our group earns a 4-6.5% referral fee. The more products sold through a referral from the HRW page, the higher the 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. Don't forget to tell your friends and family about our link to Amazon!

“You must stay drunk on writing so reality cannot destroy you.”

— Ray Bradbury, *Zen in the Art of Writing*

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

BY STEPHAN PASTIS



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HRW Keeps Growing

Hampton Roads Writers welcomes the following new members who have joined since the last newsletter:

Norah Firestone
Kristine Bauer
Rick Eley
Nealy Gihan
Kelley McGee-Sousa
Chandler Story-Dennis
Lee Ann Douglas
Monica Leftwich
Dr. Annette Davis
Nigel Sellars
Donna Richardson
Mary Kay Valkuchak
Beth Cardier
Kaitlin Jones
Ashley Woodland
Sandra Brown Rarey
Judith Johonnot Fowler
Blair Jackson
Vanessa Edwards
Sandra Rarey
Deborah Newell
Blair Jackson
Judith Fowler
Latoya DeBardelaben
Jeanne Johansen
Lucretia Walton

Show and Grow Your Prose with Professional Critique

Take advantage of these opportunities to read ten minutes of your prose (short story, memoir, or novel chapter only) in front of a very accepting audience of your peers, followed by a brief professional critique by our guest critiquer and by the moderator (usually Lauran Strait, founder and president of HRW), all without removing even a penny from your pocket. Even if you don't want to read a piece, sitting in the audience and listening to the critique can help you with your own writing.

We only have time for six or seven readings per session, so go to our website for detailed information on how to share your work. Registration is required for those who wish to read, and as you will see on our webpage, you will need to format and email us your submission in time for us to prepare it for the session. Readers will be chosen on a first come, first served basis. Here are our 2015 dates.

March 14 Dr. Dennis Bounds critiques

April 4 Michael Khandelwal critiques

May 9 Ginger Marcinkowski critiques

June 6 TBA

July 18 John Mack critiques

August 15 Michael Khandelwal critiques

October 10 Bill Ruehlmann critiques

ISN'T THAT OUR
HUMAN'S MANUSCRIPT?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

WISHING I HAD OPPOSABLE
THUMBS AND A RED PEN.



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"I'm not a very good writer,
but I'm an excellent rewriter."

~James Michener

What Is “Good” Literature?

by Cecelia Cronan Robbins

As I was tasked by my critique group with finding a definition of 'good' literature, I've been rummaging through my collection of literature books. I've come to the conclusion that there is no end-all, defining statement of such, but that time is the major determinant of 'good', ie., lasting works. Many of the major writers taught in schools today were maligned in their own time, but have had a lasting effect in the world of literature.

In it's widest sense, literature includes just about anything written—from ads to handbills to graffiti on a wall. But what sets 'good' or 'great' literature apart from, say, 'light' reading—romances, he-man action-adventure novels, chick-lit, most sci-fi, mysteries, etc.? All of these provide enjoyable reading. I'm not knocking any of these genres—I write in a few of them—but most are not 'great' literature, and will be dated and not read much in fifty or a hundred years (lucky the writer when their audience lasts half that long), whereas Shakespeare, Milton, and a raft of other such writers from the distant past are endlessly studied and read. So what sets these works apart?

"Literature.. stands the test of time..." "...enlarges the possibilities of human growth."

"Good literature best reflects the human condition."

"Good fiction can fulfill a deep moral need for the reader."

The McGraw-Hill Introduction to Literature,

Among the questions I might ask myself as I read a novel: does this book matter, or help in my knowledge of people—their lives, motivations, meanings? Does it touch my heart, expand my understanding, enlarge my sympathies? But still, evoking such doesn't necessarily make for good, lasting literature. To a degree, 'light' literature—mystery, romance, detective, best-selling adventure—might all contribute toward understanding motive and character, yet, to me, few of these delve deeply into the heart of the character. Not in the way that works by Faulkner, Mansfield, Tolstoy, Chekhov, etc., do.

I think “good” writers endeavor, like Prometheus, to steal fire from the gods. I've probably stolen that remark from someone who is a much better writer than I—it popped into my head much too fluidly. And it may be so over-used that it is trite.

At any rate, perhaps “good” or “great” literature is writing that won't go out of style, or fashion: literature that won't be dated by it's content, by the manner in which it is written. But doesn't that description eliminate Shakespeare?

How can we tell if what we write will last long enough to be studied in textbooks, or by scholars?

We can't. Much work that is now regarded as indispensable was, at the time of publication, severely dismissed as trash by critics and literary high-brow types. A writer never knows if her/his work will survive.

I believe our work has a greater chance of lasting if it speaks to the human condition, if it helps us, in our blind fumbings, to understand our fellow creatures. Write your best, your deepest, your most heart-felt truths and knowledge. Then let the critics duke it out, because only time will tell.

The Telephone Number of the Muse by Donald Justice

Sleepily, the muse to me: “Let us be friends.
Good friends, but only friends. You understand.”
And yawned. And kissed, for the last time, my ear.
Who earlier, weeping at my touch, had whispered:
“I loved you once.” And: “No, I don't love him,
Not after everything he did.” Later,
Rebuttoning her nightgown with my help:
“Sorry, I just have no desire, it seems.”
Sighing: “For you, I mean.” Long silence. Then:
“You always were so serious.” At which
I smiled, darkly. And that was how I came
To sleep beside, not with her; without dreams.

I call her up sometimes, long distance now.
And she still knows my voice, but I can hear,
Beyond the music of her phonograph,
The laughter of the young men with their keys.

I have the number written down somewhere.



Grammar School with Bernadette: A First Draft Is Rarely Perfect

Whether you're writing an autobiography, a complaint about too much pulp in your orange juice, a Dear John letter or a job application, you can afford to revise.

Ask yourself a few questions: Is this the best way to start this paper? Does the rest of what I've written support my premise?

Could this sentence be written in active voice instead of passive? Why did I write "the" twice? Can I use a better verb here? Can I use a better transition there? Do I have enough information?

Do I really need this sentence? What words can I cut out? Is this a cliché? Is this paragraph clear? Am I repeating things? Have I checked the grammar, punctuation and spelling?

Then, guess what? You need to ask yourself all those questions again.

Ernest Hemingway explained his iceberg method of writing. "There is seven-eighths of it under the water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg."

Whenever you can, give yourself some breathing room before you rewrite. If something needs to be finished on Wednesday morning, try to complete it by Monday. Then wait a day before you look at it again. You may be surprised at what jumps out at you. (When you're just starting out, you may need safety goggles.)

The poet Horace recommended that people wait nine years before going back to rewrite. I guess life moved a lot slower in the Roman Empire.

The distance helps you to refocus. When you return to your paper or letter or project, you will look at it with new eyes.

Sometimes printing the story can help you see something that needs fixing. Mark the changes on the printout, then, when you're sure about them, make the changes on the document.

It may be hard to accept that what you wrote wasn't perfect the first time, but do your best.

Prolific writer Roald Dahl said, "By the time I am nearing the end of a story, the first part will have been reread and altered and corrected at least one hundred and fifty times. I am suspicious of both facility and speed. Good writing is essentially rewriting. I am positive of this."

I can't imagine where he found the time.

In researching this column, I found a newspaper story that said John Milton made few big changes to his writing, only tweaks. Now I'm irritated.

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. Thank you, Bernadette, for allowing us to print portions of your column.

Who Are We?

Our members come from all fields and professions. The only things we all have in common is love of the written word and the desire to get better at our craft and help others along the way. Here are snippets about some of our newest members with more to follow in the next newsletter:

Nora Firestone is a professional writer and newspaper reporter. She expresses herself in a variety of genres: plays, screenwriting, fiction, non-fiction and journalistic pieces. She is currently working on two non-fiction books: *Website Course* and *The \$10,000 Apostrophe – How to Avoid Some of the Most Common Errors in Your Public Business Messages*. Nora is also a professional website designer.

Lois Allen is a native of Virginia Beach and worked as a teacher and reading specialist for its school district. Her interest in writing began in childhood, but her interest in writing increased through the Tidewater Writing Project and taking the course, *Writing for Learning Across the Curriculum*. Lois travelled to many foreign countries through the National Writing Project. She has contributed personal essays to *The Virginian Pilot's* column, *A Slice of Life*. Some of her large collection of poetry was put into a self-published chap-book. Presently, she is working on a Romance/Thriller novel for which she completed three years of research.

Randi Sachs moved here from New York two years ago with her husband. She graduated from NYU with a B.A. in journalism. Randi was an assistant editor of periodicals for the American Management Association. This company assigned her the task of writing three books on business management, which were subsequently published. She also wrote articles for a non-profit organization.

Sylvia Lui was an environmental attorney for a decade. She initially entered the field of writing as an illustrator of children's books. Five years ago she began writing picture books for the young. She now is the author of middle school level literature. Winning a contest through a publisher in New York, her entry was chosen by the company for publication. Her aim is to continue writing and to acquire a literary agent.

Vanessa Jones has been teaching for twenty-one years for the Chesapeake school district. For many years, she taught middle school but is now a reading specialist. After collecting research and personal histories over two decades, she is now ready to collate her copious notes regarding the subject of critical thinking skills into a non-fiction book. In the book, she will offer critical thinking strategies. She hopes to bring the book through the complete writing process to fruition and see it published.

Monica Leftwich is more than someone who dallies in writing. As an author, she is filled with purpose and a sense of mission. Her candid memoir recounts her personal struggle with a medical condition that afflicts thousands of women worldwide. She outlines her search for a diagnosis and a treatment for a hormonal imbalance that expresses itself in ways that adversely affect a woman's self-esteem. Her desire is to help women understand hormonal imbalances and their bodies. Her next step will be to sign on with an agent to find a publisher.

Who Are We? (continued from page 6)

Dr. Helene Uhlfelder first began writing books and manuals for her work in family counseling and later as a business management consultant. Moving into creative writing, she authored a historical fiction/mystery novel that she self-published. She has roughed out a sci-fi novel and has a children's book in the works.

Daniel Ford is a self-published author of two books for children. He has finished writing the text for a 3rd book and is seeking an illustrator for it. He has begun the 4th book in the series. All of them are written for 2nd and 3rd grade levels and deal with maintaining sustainability of waterways and protecting the ecosystems. His first two books have been translated into Spanish.

Andrew Wiggin, as a practicing attorney, has been involved in technical legal writing for the appellate courts for the past twenty-five years. Recently he ventured into creative writing. *A Warm Day at the South Pole* is his first novel and full of adventure. His next novel will involve a courtroom lawsuit. His wife gives her full support of his writing ambition, which already includes plans for eight additional novels. Will Andrew be the next John Grisham?

Shirley Nesbit Sellers has been a board member and belonged to the Poetry Society of Virginia for many decades. In 1989, Shirley's chapbook of poetry came in second place in a national competition. Educated at ODU, she worked as an English teacher in high school. Impressed by the Head Start program, Shirley switched her focus and taught kindergarten students. In her retirement, she completed her first historical novel, based on her remarkable family, which included a grandmother who was an abolitionist.

Bob Young was born in Philadelphia and has been in Virginia since 1970. From 1973 to 1992, he was Associate Professor at the Eastern Virginia Medical School, Department of Psychiatry. His book of poems, *If Not Now, When*, was published in 2011. He won awards from The Poetry Society of Virginia and the Christopher Newport University Writers Conference, as well as being published in *The Poet's Domain*, *In Good Company*, *the Friends Journal*, *The Poetry Society of Virginia's 80th Anniversary Anthology of Poems*, *The Nearest Poem Anthology*, and other publications.

Nealy Gahan is a copy editor and journalist who has worked for newspapers in Nebraska, Chicago, and locally for *The Virginian Pilot*. She has written short stories since she was a child. One of her stories was recently included in the anthology, *Perception*, an Elephantine publication. Her next project will be to write a novel, inspired by a photograph of her friend's wedding dress.

Jane Gardner Birch resides in Maryland. Her professional life involved careers in teaching, real estate, financial service and mortgage lending. She received the National Aviation Hall of Fame's 2007 Combs Gates Award for her non-fiction book, *They Flew Proud*, which relates the story of the Civilian Pilot Training Program that provided pilot power for the United States during WWII. For more information, visit her website, www.theyflewproud.com, for more details. Ms. Birch is working on her second novel, based on a "shunned ancestor."

The President's Corner by Lauran Strait

Bestselling Authors – They don't come cheap

According to the latest figures from the Convention Industry Council, 225 million people attended 1.8 million conferences, conventions, corporate meetings, and trade shows in 2012. Many of you reading this now probably attended one or more of HRW's annual writers' conferences or will in the future.

What would a writing conference be without a keynote speech or two and workshops led by well-known writers?

Ever wonder how much famous writers charge groups such as HRW to come work for a few hours? Keep in mind that in addition to their speaker fees, they also expect the hosting group to cover their airfare—often first class—lodging and food. Below is a short list of some best selling writers whose fees were disclosed by their speaker agents.

- Dave Barry - \$50,000
- Michael Chabon - \$20,000
- Mary Higgins Clark - \$30,000
- John Grisham - \$50,001
- Stephen King - \$50,001
- Dean Koontz - \$50,001

- Anne Lamott - \$25,000
- Dennis Lehane - \$20,000
- Michael Lewis - \$100,000
- Toni Morrison - \$50,001
- Joyce Carol Oates - \$20,000
- Michael Ondaatje - \$20,000
- James Patterson - \$50,001
- Jodi Picoult - \$50,000
- Rick Riordan - \$50,000
- J.K. Rowling - \$50,001
- Alice Sebold - \$15,000
- Jane Smiley - \$20,000
- Nicholas Sparks - \$50,000
- Amy Tan - \$40,000 plus
- Scott Turow - \$20,000
- Alice Walker - \$50,001

In the last five years, most bestselling authors have turned opportunities to network with and help aspiring writers into lucrative sidelines, demanding fees through their speaker bureau agents that far exceed what many people earn in a month or even a year. Personally, I find it hard to imagine that anything any of them could say is worth that kind of money. I'd love to hear your thoughts. Feel free to send them to HRWriters@cox.net

Oddbox by Bob Gonzalez

