



September 17, 2015

## It's Not What You Know, It's Who You Know

by Clifford Garstang



While this old saw isn't exactly true for writers—it's still important to write with authority, no matter how well-connected you are—establishing a network of writers and other industry professionals can be crucial to developing your career. The opportunity for networking at writers' conferences should not be overlooked.

I met my agent, Jeff Ourvan of the Jennifer Lyons Literary Agency, at the Hampton Roads Writers' Conference a couple of years ago. I was teaching a few seminars, he was on a panel, and after we'd had a chance to talk briefly about what I was working on, he asked me to send him my manuscript. He liked what he read, and we've been working together for a little over a year.

I've also rubbed shoulders with some of my favorite writers at conferences and have been fortunate that some of them were willing to write blurbs for my two books and letters of recommendation for fellowship applications.

It's not a one-way street, I hasten to add. Writers should be willing to give as well as take. As an editor of *Prime Number Magazine*, I've been in a position to publish writers I've met at conferences. And two years ago when I was putting together an anthology of short fiction, I reached out to several writers I knew through workshops. I've also met critique partners at conferences, writers who are looking for feedback on early drafts of their work.

Conferences can be great learning opportunities. Panel discussions, presentations, and keynote speeches will certainly be edifying. But conferences are also a great way to build a mutually beneficial network.

*Cliff's award-winning collection of linked short stories, **In an Uncharted Country**, was published by Press 53 in 2009. Since then, his second book, **What the Zhang Boys Know**, has been published. His work has appeared in **Bellevue Literary Review**, **Blackbird**, **Virginia Quarterly Review**, **Shenandoah**, **Cream City Review**, **Tampa Review**, **Los Angeles Review**, and elsewhere and has received Distinguished Mention in the Best American Series.*

<http://cliffordgarstang.com>

## HRW Keeps Growing

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

Dr. Dottie Graham  
Victoria Kelly  
James Boyd  
Andrew Boczar  
Karrie McDaniels  
David Carriens  
Nealy Gihan  
Sandra Pierson  
Sherry Carrington  
Dr. Rae Spencer  
Melina Patrick  
Elaine Biech  
John W. Lee  
Grace Shaw  
Ronald Sobel  
Scott Bartow  
Christina Lampkin  
Kathy Oristaglio  
Evelyn Wagoner  
Paula Oliver



*"You have to write the book that wants to be written. And if the book will be too difficult for grown-ups, then you write it for children."*

— *Madeleine L'Engle*

## HRW's COMMUNITY IMPACT

Lauran Strait, president of Hampton Roads Writers, visited a classroom at Larkspur Middle School on June 8. These kids were soon-to-be rising ninth graders in the gifted cluster section. Their teacher, Tracy A. Patterson, wrote this short blogpost on the gifted website blog:

What a treat! Lauran Strait from Hampton Roads Writers came to talk to students in Mrs. Schober's A Day English classes. Lauran is an editor and the president of the organization. She shared with students resources and tips for beginning writers.

Essential items that editors look for when critiquing others were given such as having an effective hook, an effective character arc, believable, three-dimensional characters that think, feel, hear, and speak, appropriate tone, a full narrative arc with a beginning, middle, and end, and the importance of showing, not telling the reader. She answered students' questions from how to overcome writer's block to how to get published. One of the most important tips that she had for students was to just begin writing.

We were left very inspired to write and are so grateful for the time she spent with us. What a great organization for writers of all ages! Check out the great opportunities this organization provides. <http://www.hamptonroadswriters.org>

HRW Board Members are again volunteering to help out new writers from Hampton Roads. On Saturday, June 13th, members from HRW volunteered for the Barnes & Noble's Local Authors Showcase. Lauran Strait, HRW President, and members Lynn Moon and Michael Khandewal, along with MUSE teacher, Kelly Sokol Avery, critiqued the first 25 lines of several new authors' work. Thank you HRW members for donating your time and energy to this exciting event.

## 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. Check out this next one, and check back on the [HRW website](#) soon to see our offerings for the spring.

**Saturday, October 24, 2015, 9:30 a.m. - noon (check-in at 9:15): Self-Editing: What to look for and how to correct amateurish writing errors.** Presented by **Lauran Strait, president and founder of HRW.** The purpose of this workshop is to train writers to see their manuscripts the way editors might see them. Workshop attendees will learn techniques that, if adopted, will brand their manuscripts as the works of a professional writer instead of an amateur. Through discussions about dialogue, mechanics, point of view, interior monologue; the difference between narrative summary and immediate scenes and ways to strike the most effective balance between them; showing versus telling, authorial and narrative intrusion, the fictional dream, and effective ways to achieve immediacy, attendees will learn the craft of self-editing.

**Lauran Strait** has edited close to 175 full-length manuscripts (fiction and nonfiction) in the last 18 years. She taught various writing classes and ran three popular and long-standing writer workshops at the Adult Learning Center in Virginia Beach for seven years.

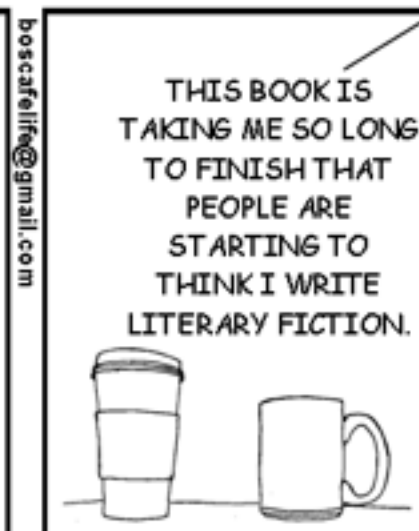
## Show and Grow Your Prose with Professional Critique

Take advantage of this last opportunity of the year 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 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 have time for only 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 is the schedule for the final session of 2014, held at Meyera Oberndorf Central Library in Virginia Beach from 9:15 to noon.

**October 11, 2014:** Author and educator **Dr. Bill Ruehlmann** will offer the professional critique.

### BO'S CAFÉ LIFE





## BILL RUEHLMANN ON BOOKS

Susan Okaty, HRW's newsletter editor, has asked me to write a column about writing columns. Since I have been doing them about books regularly in *The Virginian-Pilot* for a quarter-century, and irregularly for a lot longer than that, she thought I should know something about it.

Well, only this little bit: I begin with somebody else's book.

It does not have to be great literature, bestselling or even improving. It must be a book recently printed or reprinted, which makes it news. Whether or not I like the book isn't the point; it has to be a book that I think I can say something interesting about.

Basically, I'm sharing what I read with a smart friend.

I try to vary my pitch: fact, fiction, suspense, fantasy, SF, sports. I want at least one direct quote in evidence that the author of the book is good at what he or she does—or, more rarely, not. But why should I fill up my space and your time trying to stop you from reading anything?

The Sunday Book Page is an American billboard, not a tombstone.

Over the last few weeks the good stuff hasn't been that hard to find and celebrate: *Jumbo: The Unauthorized Biography of a Victorian Sensation* by John Sutherland; *Even This I Get to Experience* by Norman Lear; *The Getaway Car: A Donald Westlake Nonfiction Miscellany*; *Dancing Dogs* by John Katz (you read that right); *Essays After Eighty* by Donald Hall.

No clinkers there.

My last move is always an attempt to beat my reader to the end.

*Dr. William (Bill) Ruehlmann is a retired educator, an award-winning journalist, and the author of three books, **Saint With a Gun: The Unlawful American Private Eye, Stalking the Feature Story** and **The Feature Story Strikes Back**. For 18 years, he was a professor at Virginia Wesleyan College, where he taught young people how to contribute to the world through writing and reporting. He also was the guiding force behind the university's award-winning newspaper, **The Marlin Chronicle**, and was a longtime national leader in the Society for Collegiate Journalists. Bill currently writes **The Virginian-Pilot's** Sunday book column and is on the board of Hampton Roads Writers.*

# The Value of Writers

by Elephantine Publishing

As writers, there are many tools at our disposal to help us perfect our craft (spellcheck, anyone?). But there is an invaluable resource that many of us, especially beginners, tend to overlook—other writers. Seriously, they're the very best tools for improving your prose, overcoming your blocks, and gathering inspiration for new projects.

Let's face it; our words become our babies. We made them. We're proud of them. We think they're perfect just the way they are. Often, we're too close to a manuscript to see its flaws, and many of us are reluctant to share an unfinished work because we fear criticism. Trouble is, constructive criticism is how we improve and grow as authors. But let's say we finally let Susan from accounting read the manuscript and she tells us that she doesn't like scene A, or that plot point B confused her. How often do we give in to the knee-jerk defense mechanism "Well, Susan isn't a writer. She doesn't understand the craftsmanship that went into scene A." Now, imagine the same critique coming from George R. R. Martin. You'd take it a little more seriously, wouldn't you?

Criticism always seems more valid when it comes from someone who loves words like you do and understands what goes into pouring your imagination out into the physical world. If the critic is a friend, you know that the advice is meant to help you, not to tear you down. And if you're familiar with and enjoy your critic's work, you're going to take that advice to heart and look at your manuscript with new eyes.

It's easy to set a goal for yourself with your work, but once you hit that first difficult plot point or string of dialog, it can be just as easy to put writing off and switch on the T.V. But what if you're meeting your writing buddy tomorrow to go over the scene that you just don't feel like writing at the moment? It becomes a little harder to set the project aside when you have someone keeping you accountable, and a fellow writer is less likely to take "writer's block" as an acceptable excuse for not working through your snags.

And speaking of writer's block, no one understands it better than writers. Who better to help you work through it than someone who knows what you're going through? Every writer has a tip for overcoming a block, whether it's as elaborate as a trip to Europe, or as simple as switching up the spot you typically write in.

Writers are resources. A strong community of writers is a vital asset that will motivate and inspire you to be better.

<http://www.elephantinepublishing.com>



# Grammar School with Bernadette: Lay Versus Lie

I try to review more common mistakes regularly. Recently, three people asked me to explain the difference between lay and lie. So here goes.

“Lay” shows action, the acting of placing something someplace.  
*I will lay the pie on the counter. Don't eat it, please.*

“Lie” just means to recline.  
*After binge-watching “Orange is the New Black,” I had to lie down.*

“Lay” is often put in the wrong place.  
Wrong: *She lays on the beach until the sunscreen runs out.*  
Right: *She lies on the beach until the sunscreen runs out.*

A child's prayer might add some confusion. It starts out, “*Now I lay me down to sleep.*” Unless a kid has extra, independent appendages, placing oneself down to sleep is incredibly difficult. But poetic license allows for deviation.

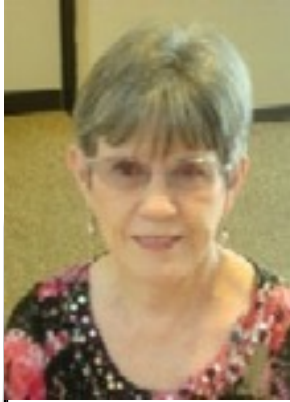
Now, just to make things even more difficult, I have to add that the past tense of lie is lay.  
Right: *He lay in wait for the PopTarts to pop out of the toaster.*

*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 print portions of your column.*

“If there's a book you really want  
to read but it hasn't been written  
yet, then you must write it.”

~Toni Morrison

Book Quotes Rock! [parajunkee.com](http://parajunkee.com)



## Billboards for History

by Anne Meek

You know those historical markers along the roadsides? You see about 40 words on a couple square feet and maybe a state seal—and you’re supposed to understand what Bunker Hill means in U.S. history? *Sure.*

On the other hand, the standard billboard takes up maybe 240 square feet and conveys 3-10 words in big letters you can read without trying, plus logos, cartoon characters, brand names—all of which you can see while you’re driving way above posted limits. And if at first you don’t get the message, another billboard just like it will soon show up. *Cool.*

This comparison explains why our youngsters are making a poor showing in history yet performing strongly as consumers. Billboards are trendy, in-your-face, and big. Historical markers are unfashionable, dull, and small. *Hello.* Why don’t we make it just as easy for kids to become consumers of history as they are of Tommy Hilfiger, Nike, pizza, and whoever makes those low-slung pants?

See why I’m recommending billboards for history? We can turn our teens into history buffs. Or we could just change the tests. If the tests asked about Disney, X-Box, U.S. Polo Assn, Nascar, Adidas, they’d have no problem scoring well—much higher than the scholars. We’d all be proud of their test scores. We might never stop to think how our remarkable country has made its children into a market instead of well-informed citizens. But I’m not ready to give up. How about billboards for history?

*Dr. Anne Meek is on the board of HRW and a former managing editor for **Educational Leadership**.*

*“The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt.”*

— Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*





# 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.

**Michael Rigg:** Lawyer by day, mystery writer in spare time, Michael is currently focused on a hybrid mystery-thriller with series potential. He strives to perfect his work and has joined HRW to build writing connections, find an agent and, of course, get published. When you have a chance to meet him, instead of asking for legal advice, ask him how he found out about Hampton Roads Writers in Los Angeles, CA.

**Vanessa Barger:** Vanessa found HRW at a local author event at the Central Library and joined because she loves to write, do workshops and author events full-time. Her favorite genre is currently YA/MG Paranormal and Fantasy. Check out her work in *A Whispered Darkness* (Month9Books). She has another one coming out in the Fall from Tantrum Books. She also has two epublished books: *Steaming* and *Slack Tide*.

**Lisa Anderson:** She never imagined herself a writer, but then a story came pouring out of her. As a conduit, scraps of scribbled paper became her life. She attended the HRW conference and met like-minded people and found encouragement. An active illustrator, she favors children's literature and currently has a YA manuscript, MG manuscript and three picture books in the works.

**Deborah Newell:** She is in the throes of editing her first manuscript based on how to survive the grieving process. After the completion of this manuscript, she may add a devotional for women going through tough situations. Since giving life to such a heavy topic, she's looking forward to trying her hand at a fictional piece, hopefully developing a series based on life in a small town.

**LaToya DeBardelaben:** Serving our country with pride. LaToya is transitioning out of the military and is exploring the writing world. She's trying her hand at several genres. She has written one urban fiction ebook, *Kissn below the Belt*. Additionally, she writes children's literature under the pen name L.A. Murray and has an ebook, *Isabell in Candyland* and another book currently in illustration titled, *Be a Buddy not a Bully*.

**Lori Hendricks:** Lori moved from screenplay writing to author after taking the 2013 NaNoWriMo challenge and falling in love with everything about the process. Her first novel, *Half Breed Queen* (Book 1 of the Skatia Narratives) can be found on Amazon. She's currently splitting her time between the second book in the Skatia Narratives series and a romance novel she can't seem to shake from her mind.

**Lucretia Walton:** A writer at heart, she put writing aside to raise her family. Back in the flow of writing, she has created 50 poems (some of which are published in digests and anthologies), a couple of short stories, and she's working on a series of children's books. Her grandchildren inspire her writing. She wants to leave something behind for them so they can always hold on to a piece of her.

**Thanks to Sherrie Pilkington for obtaining these short bios.**