

WRITER'S INK

THE WRITER'S WORKSHOP OF BLOOMINGDALE



MARCH 2011

MARCH WORKSHOPS

Our March workshops will be on March 12 and March 26 from 9:00 a.m. until noon.

Format rules are: Minimum, 12-pt. Times New Roman font and double spaced with one-inch margins on all sides. 4 pages maximum.

COLUMN 2 PERSONALS

Member Marilyn Donovan, was February "Artist of the Month" at the Bloomingdale Public Library. Her artwork was displayed in the stairwell down to the basement at the library.

(Please share your writing or other artistic adventures in the April newsletter.)

IN THIS MONTH'S NEWSLETTER

This month's newsletter is devoted to member reviews of various writing-related events. The free "Inside Writing and Publishing" seminars were held in January and February at area libraries and featured various topics led by Chicago-area authors. Special thanks to Mary Ann Fristoe and Sue Wells for contributing their reviews. Pitchapalooza was held in January and I thank Marjorie Lee for her review.

(Please send reviews of any writing-related events you've attended.)

HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY

INSIDE WRITING AND PUBLISHING SEMINAR REVIEWS

RISKY BUSINESS: WRITING ABOUT LITERARY ICONS

by Mary Ann Fristoe

On January 15, 2011, the Glen Ellyn Public Library hosted a free seminar entitled: Risky Business: Writing about Literary Icons; in other words, the special challenges of incorporating literary icons in fiction. The speakers were Melanie Benjamin and Kelly O'Connor. The presenters gave their biographical history, gave advice, and answered questions from the audience.

Melanie Benjamin

Melanie Benjamin's background involves being a great reader and liking to tell a great story. Her first three novels were not published. She gained a two-book contract with Penguin, with an option book after the contract ended. She averred that it was more painful to remain unpublished than to initially get published. Her Penguin efforts were not well-received.

Melanie was inspired to incorporate Lewis Carroll's "acquaintance" Alice Liddell in her novel after a trip to the Chicago Art Institute, where there was a Lewis Carroll photo exhibit. She completed the book in six months and signed a two-book contract with Random House. Melanie considers "Alice I have been" to be a historical novel, where she blends Alice into the novel. As an author, Melanie considers herself to be a literary detective and asks herself, "Why did Alice make these decisions?" She labels herself as a novelist, not a researcher. She does not read biographies of her literary icons because she believes that would influence her and stifle her creativity. She only conducts enough research to springboard her imagination and does not want to get bogged down with details.

Ms. Benjamin advised the audience to tell a good story; and in your letter to a prospective agent, point out where you took the greatest liberties, where you stayed true, et cetera. (Do not just summarize!) She also confessed that even reviewers will complain that the author ruined their ideal of the icon for them. However, these literary icons are in the public domain. She believes a fictional account of a literary icon will "bring more readers to the table" and increase the icon's appeal. Melanie believes the success of her book was aided by online purchasing where there is a statement on the order sheet: People who bought this book, also bought this book. That creates a greater marketing channel for authors.

Publishers attempt to tie a book to something larger, such as a popular movie. For instance, Tim Burton's movie "Alice in Wonderland" opened months after "Alice I have been" was published. This movie-opening moved Melanie's book to the front of the store, where booksellers set up Alice-themed tables. She stated it is hard to get your book to the front of the store, and hers was there twice.

RISKY BUSINESS: WRITING ABOUT LITERARY ICONS (CONTINUED)

Kelly O'Connor

Kelly O'Connor wrote about a summer in Louisa May Alcott's life that is not as well-documented as most of her history. She read letters and journals of Louisa May Alcott (LMA). Kelly realizes that fans consider LMA sacred and do not want authors speculating about their icon. Kelly took on the responsibility to treat Louisa and her values seriously in Kelly's fictional work. During the writing process, she would put an "X" where she needed to go back and research data.

Ms. O'Connor stressed the importance of having a good agent (they are mostly in New York) and keeping that relationship on a business level. An ethical agent will never ask for money up front, she advised. She also advised not to jump on a popular bandwagon. For instance, just because vampire lore is all the rage; if that is not what inspires you, avoid it and write about your passion. Consider the types of books you read, that is where your passion lies. Her closing thought was, "Write about what you want to know, not what you know."

Audience's Questions

As usual, the question-and-answer part of the program was rife with the same questions asked at each seminar I have attended for the last three years. However, there were interesting questions about publishing terms and agents.

An example of "fan fiction" is Tim Burton's movie "Alice in Wonderland," where he told a different story than Lewis Carroll did. The definition of "auction" is where different publishers bid on the same book, because the agent submitted to multiple prospects. (This is presently not common practice.)

In answering the questions about agents, Melanie Benjamin revealed that she wrote query letters to agents. She stated it was like sending a resume out. She researched the agent's interests first to ensure a good fit, such as an agent who represents your genre. She advised determining if the agent is actively selling today, not five years ago. Kelly O'Connor suggested compiling a list of books similar to yours and writing a query letter to the agents representing those books.

The authors' books were available for purchase (not at a discount) and signature. The time passed quickly and was very informative and enjoyable.

INSIDE WRITING AND PUBLISHING SEMINAR REVIEWS

SELF-PUBLISHING THROUGH AMAZON: THE STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

by Mary Ann Fristoe

On Saturday, February 5th, the Addison and Villa Park Public Libraries sponsored a free seminar entitled: Self-Publishing through Amazon: The Step-by-Step Process, presented by Barbara Gregorich. Barbara Gregorich chose CreateSpace by Amazon to self-publish because it is free. There are others such as Scribd and Lulu. The seminar was a PowerPoint presentation based on a college course. It was too much information to be covered in this format, even if I were well enough to take copious notes for two hours.

Luckily you can see the entire class on Addisonadvantage.org after February 19th. It was also telecasted for Channel 6 in Addison, although no air times were given. So if you are interested in self-publishing and obtaining an ISBN for free, go to the aforementioned web site and learn it at your leisure.

BREAKING IN: THE BASICS OF WRITING FOR MAGAZINES

By Susan Wells

On February 9, 2011 Kelly James-Enger gave a presentation on Breaking In: The Basics of Writing for Magazines as part of the Inside Writing and Publishing series at the Bloomingdale Public Library. Kelly has 14 years of full time freelancing experience. We need to be more aggressive and savvy now then when she started out in this business.

Kelly told us to pick our market: trade magazines on a particular subject vs. consumer/newsstand vs. controlled which could be trade magazines and custom publications for a specific audience. Writers Market is out of date. She suggested looking at Gale and Bacon which are directories of all magazines. She suggested looking at the magazine's web site. The publication is going to determine what you're going to pitch. She recommended starting with our own life, but make it on a national level or use a current subject of what's happening in the world. For example: the economy right now. Put a new spin on the same subject. Think of ways to do multiple angles. Use your unique perspective. Write down your ideas in one place. Magazines are planning at least six months in advance, so in February they are thinking about what to put into their fall issues.

BREAKING IN: THE BASICS OF WRITING FOR MAGAZINES (CONTINUED)

Kelly explained how to write the all-important query giving examples of letters that have worked for her. Get your foot in the door. Make your query stand out. Serious writers send queries instead of entire articles. Humor and essays can be sent directly. Start with a lead, an attention getter. Sometimes this can be the lead of your story. Tell them what section of the magazine your article will fit, to demonstrate familiarity with their market. Show the editor that you can do the article. Show that you know what you are talking about. Email queries. If they ask for 600 to 1000 word articles, pitch the high amount. They can cut. Quotes can come from the Center for Disease Control or government statistics. Kelly explained when and how to send a follow-up.

When she receives a rejection she resends a slightly different take on her idea within 24 hours. Turn your rejections into opportunities. Kelly explained “on spec” vs. on assignment and selling the rights to your story. She told us where to find experts, ask them before you get the assignment if you can interview them, how to interview like taping them so you can quote them correctly and how to follow up with a thank you. Respect their time by asking if this is a good time to interview them. Ask them if there is anything else they can think of that would be interesting to the readers. Let them know when the article comes out or send them the article. Respect them because you might want to interview them again. Kelly even told us what items should be on the invoice.

EDITING: DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY

by Susan Wells

On Tuesday February 22, 2011 Bob Burham gave a presentation on Editing: Don't Take It Personally as part of the Inside Writing and Publishing series at the Bartlett Public Library. Bob has 13 years of editing experience working for John Wiley & Sons, Addison Wesley & Longman, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. He is currently an editor working for an educational publisher K through 12. Bob has worked in print and on line doing proofreading, content editing, copy editing and production editing . His education is a BS in mathematics and history. He did not go to school to be an editor.

Bob explained that the genius of the author is the idea. The author submits the original manuscript to the editor. He explained what an editor does and how an editor thinks. An editor wants to get the author's story or book published the best it can be. Successful relationships between editors and authors are based on trust. They become partners. Get to know your editor. Editors know what will sell.

EDITING: DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY (CONTINUED)

Bob explained the basic roles for editors are: proofreaders, copy editors, content editors (what Bob does), production editors, managing editors, and acquisition editors. Proofreaders read slowly giving attention to detail looking for typographical errors, grammatical errors, spelling, punctuation, and check to make sure changes were made. Copy editors are looking to make sure the same tense is used throughout and how well it reads. Content editors are concerned with what the author is trying to say. They are engaged in the creative process and suggest marketing decisions to authors. Production editors are more in-tune with manufacturing. They know how things will look after manufacturing. Managing editors create schedules and watch the budget. If someone misses a deadline, there will be a ripple effect that will cost the publishing company money. Acquisition editors look for someone to write a particular subject.

An editor looks at the quality of the writing asking “Is it good?” The content and facts must be true. Authors should submit their sources because sources are important to editors. An editor thinks about the presentation, outline, and vision of the product or book. They look at the style like Chicago style or Associated Press style, i.e., when do you use bold face? Deadlines usually are not arbitrary.

Editors will give guidelines for the author to follow. A good editor will make sure the author knows what is expected. Expectation must be met on time and within budget. If authors miss their schedules they give the editors a headache, but if the author meets his deadlines he'll have a happy editor. An editor brings ideas that the author might not have thought about. Editors have to balance points of conflict between the publisher and the author.

As an author, know when to pick your battles. Bob told us that it is the authors dream to get published so they should take an editor's advice. Publishers want to make money so they could lose sight of the author's vision. Editors help bring the book to life. They nurse it. Proofreaders and copy editors are used after publications to make reprints.

Bob's email address is r.claire.burnham@gmail.com

PITCHPALOOZA REVIEW

by Marjorie Lee

Pitchpalooza was an interesting presentation at Anderson's Bookstore in Naperville on January 6. The presenters were Arielle Eckstut and David Sterry, authors of the book, *The Essential Guide to Getting Your Book Published*. Assisting them was a panel of three judges, all local area editors with great credentials.

An incredible number of would-be authors arrived to vie for a lottery-type opportunity to make a "pitch" for their written material. Of the 200 or 300 attendees only 25 were selected. Each "pitch" was timed for exactly 60 seconds. The winning contestant received an introduction to an agent.

All attendees who purchased a copy of the authors' book were invited to make an e-mail contact with one of the authors to arrange a free telephone consultation. Apparently this type of event is a major thrust for Eckstut and Sterry, and they are warmly responding to hundreds of callers. The information sharing includes suggestions on improving a "pitch" or a general discussion on any questions raised by the caller. The entire procedure is an interesting experience.

The website for the authors is thebookdoctors.com where quantities of information are available, including their broad range of consultation services and their fees. Purchasing their book is an excellent and inexpensive investment.

COMING EVENTS

BOOK PUBLISHING HELP

The Helen Plum library in Lombard, 110 W. Maple St., is hosting a presentation on Sat., March 12 from 2-4 p.m. on “The Ten Secrets to Getting Your Book Successfully Published” with Brett Nicholaus, author and publisher, and Joe Durepos, agent. Call (630) 627-0316 to register or for info SOON. (Thanks to new member Kris Johnson for sending this entry.)

NEED MORE FEEDBACK?

Bartlett is going to start a creative writers group which is meeting Tuesday May 3rd at 6:30 for the very first time. The library wants the new group to meet on a regular basis to allow aspiring writers to give constructive criticism on one another’s work, support each other through the ups and downs of writing, and to share writing and publishing tips. This initial meeting will be held to gauge the interest, establish guidelines for sharing, reading, critiquing each other’s work, and to plan future meetings. For writers ages 18 and older. No registration required. The location will be in the meeting room. (Thanks to Susan Wells for sending this entry.)

EDITOR’S CORNER

Send your writing and ideas
to:
jspealman@comcast.net



Visit our website at:

www.creativeoptions.com/BWW/index.htm

Writer’s Workshop of Bloomingdale 2007-
2011 all rights reserved. Materials here are
the property of the author(s).