Annual WGT Writer’s Read-In

Our annual Writers’ Read-In will be held on Monday, June 20 at 7 pm at the Richardson Public Library. This is your opportunity to bring us into the world you are creating through your writing.

WGT Vice President Julie Mendel will be chairing the event again. Seven writers will present their original work. Reading time is limited to a maximum of six minutes, which is approximately 1,000 - 1,200 words. Members can read their own work, appoint someone to read their work, or ask a WGT Board member to read it for you. (Should you want a Board member to read, you must provide it to that Board member no later than Monday, June 13).

Presented materials will be critiqued by the members and guests of the Writers Guild of Texas and will be evaluated on the following three areas: (1) What worked well? (2) What could use more development? and (3) Overall impression. To take advantage of this opportunity, email Julie at julie.s.mendel@gmail.com. Remember, we have seven spots available, and they tend to fill up quickly!

In the Trenches with Author C.L. Stegall

Local author C.L. Stegall was the guest speaker at the March 21 WGT meeting. He addressed the techniques of plotting, explaining that basically the plot is the road map that a writer uses to take the story from Point A to Point B.

He suggested that you take the story in your head and write down keystone events; those events that if not included would cause the plot to fall down “like a tent without its poles.” Next, as every writer understands, all stories have a beginning, middle and an end. When creating his plot, he writes three paragraphs detailing the three acts. He also gave an example of a mind map.

As a plotter, C.L. starts with a one or two-line summary of the chapter by chapter story. He determines the kind of story he’s writing, the theme, where the story is taking place, who the story is about, what the main points/events are he wants to get across to the reader and in what order.

When considering plot, Stegall suggests the writer consider the order of events. What presents the most opportunity for drama and conflict, for a slow reveal of truth and detail? How best to build up emotions and create a powerful climatic scene.

He reminded members that what matters most is connecting with your readers. Create and solve conflict, then build as you go to create even more conflict. Keep a tight emotional reign on the characters, but let the story drive itself, using your story’s prerequisites.

“The more detail you have in your back pocket,” Stegall said, “the more you can use to pull in your readers.” However, he also stressed not to waste too much time on the backstory before writing your actual tale.

For more information, visit C.L.’s website at http://www.clstegall.com. There you can visit his writing blog for free stories, reference material, and the latest information on upcoming events and book releases.

Photo by Gary Bowers
Word Choice, Word Order Matter

Writer, educator, editor and designer, Joe Milazzo is multi-talented. Speaking at the April 18 WGT meeting, Milazzo shared techniques on how writers in all genres can add suppleness and variety to their sentences.

Using examples and encouraging member participation, he showed the power of rhythm in prose. “Every sentence has a musical quality to it,” Milazzo said. By improving sentences and having a sense of voice, the writer can take the musical quality of poetry and improve their writing.

Suggested readings include Virginia Tufte’s Artful Sentences, a guide for improving sentences and sense of voice, and Robert Pinsky’s The Sounds of Poetry.

For more information, please visit Joe Milazzo’s website at http://www.slowstudies.net/jmilazzo/.

Mark the Date – Upcoming Events
(Meetings held Third Monday of the Month)

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“Now, Ms. Rawling. We think your book may find a few readers, but ‘Harry Potter’? That title will never sell!” —Buffy Andrews

“‘Weiss-Cracking’” by Jerry Weiss

The Board of the Writers Guild of Texas 2016-2017

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Always Something
By Scott Bell
Honorable Mention, WGT Flash Fiction Contest

I meant to give it back.

At least, I think I did. But maybe I didn’t. Some decisions start out in the brain’s basement, right? That nasty-dark cellar of the mind, crawling with spiders and stinking of all the dead bodies buried there. When the dusty overhead light sputters out, bad notions slither around, evil shit you’d never in a million years let crawl up into the kitchen and see the sunlight. Sometimes these things—these ideas—they thump on the door and you can hear them, trying to get in, itching to take over and make you do the stupid things you know you shouldn’t.

There was a bank bag, partly hidden near the front tire of my ten-year-old Suburbavan, aka Honda Odyssey, like it was kicked there. It looked like a lady’s evening purse, except with a zipper instead of a clasp.

And it was stuffed.

I snagged it while my two sons were piling into the back and stuffed it down the center console as they played with their phones. Should I say something or not? Around me, iridescent soccer jerseys pinballed through the gravel parking lot: kids chasing balls and tagging after their moms and dads, who carried coolers and lawn chairs. Nobody gave me a second look. Nobody searched the ground, scrabbling around for a missing bag of money.

Was it money?

Could be a bag full of coupons. I wouldn’t know until I checked. I popped the console long enough to peel back the zipper a bit. Hell to the yes, it was money. A lot of it.

Sixteen thousand dollars, I found out later, after the boys disappeared into their rooms and Alexa zoned into America’s Got Idol Dancing Talent, or whatever. I slipped out to the garage and disappeared into their rooms and Alexa zoned into America’s Got Idol Dancing Talent, or whatever. I slipped out to the garage and searched the ground, scrabbling around for a missing bag of money.

“Where’d you find it?”

“On the way home.”

“Found what?”

“A bank bag. I was hoping to buy something.”

“Like what?”

“A tent. For the kids. I found a good one on the way.”

“Twenty thousand?”

“Eighteen.”

“Wow. Did you know what was in it?”

“No. It was just there. I slid it to the center console.”

“ Didn’t it belong to someone?”

“No. Maybe someone lost it.”

“Why not give it to the police?”

“I thought about it. But who knows, maybe it’s counterfeit and I’ll get arrested just for having it. I held a bill up to the yellowish-tinted dome light. Nope. Not counterfeit.

The battered metal toolkit I’d used throughout high school and college still lived on a bottom shelf in my garage. It had been replaced by a shiny-new Matco chest, but I kept the old one to store oddball nuts and washers and whatnot. I stuffed the money in the box, closed the lid, and shoved it under some spare vinyl tiles.

Truth was, I wanted that money. Make no mistake, I didn’t say it out loud at first, but I wanted it. There’s never enough, is there? The Honda’s brakes squealed like a train sliding to a stop. Cha-ching, Mr. Mechanic, here’s your eight hundred dollars. Built in 1982 of the cheapest materials available, our house wiring was a fire hazard waiting to burn us all to bacon. I’d been meaning to replace it, but there was always something, right?

And now I had a way to tide me over. Smooth out the rough bits. Maybe make some investments, or have some seed money for the kids’ college tuition, which was rising faster than an explosion at a yeast factory.

“Tide you over where?”

“An investment. Maybe make some investments.”

“Like what?”

“A mutual fund. A retirement account.”

“Never heard of it.”

“Never heard of it? Hell, they’re all over the place.”

“Why is it sudden?”

“Serendipity.”

“Serendipity?”

“Sometimes you have to be there.”

“Like you’re a gambler.”

“A gambler?”

“Yeah, like you’re a gambler.”

“I am not a gambler.”

“I know.”

“Why do you say that?”

“I can’t handle it.”

“Can’t handle it?”

“I don’t have the risk tolerance.”

“Risk tolerance?”

“The ability to handle risks without being scared to death.”

“I have that.”

“I don’t.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t like risk.”

“You never do.”

“Why not?”

“Because I hate the stress.”

“Stress?”

“Getting destroyed in the market.”

“I see.”

“Have you heard about the market?”

“No.”

“I should have told you.”

“I’m not interested.”

“Why not?”

“Because I hate risk.”

“Why so secret? I mean, an honest guy all my life, why was I acting like a criminal all of a sudden? I didn’t steal the cash. It was found money. Like the Lotto Fairy left it for me, or I went straight to Go on my personal Monopoly board.

Instead of two hundred dollars, the payday was sixteen large. Inflation, right?

Deep down, I knew if I showed what I had, somebody would take it away. Alexa would make a big stink about it, for sure. Call the cops, she’d say. Maybe it was evidence, like from drug dealers. Hell, she’d say, maybe it’s counterfeit and you’ll get arrested just for having it.

“I held a bill up to the yellowish-tinted dome light. Nope. Not counterfeit.

The battered metal toolkit I’d used throughout high school and college still lived on a bottom shelf in my garage. It had been replaced by a shiny-new Matco chest, but I kept the old one to

AUTHORS ★ WRITERS ★ INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS

The Mentor, April-May 2016
Faces of the Writers Guild of Texas

Photos by Gary Bowers