



# The Inkwell



## *A Writers Guild Christmas*

Above: On December 15, 2009 guild members gathered at the Howard House in Madisonville for the Annual Christmas Social. Many thanks to hostess **Toni Hardy** (back row, fourth from left) for her continued gracious hospitality. Adding to the established traditions of Louisiana gumbo prepared by Writers Guild Founder **Burke Landry** (not-pictured) and the after-dinner-sing-a-long, members offered readings of original Christmas stories.

Below: An Honorary Lifetime Membership in the Madison County Writers Guild was awarded to member **Rosa Allphin**. President M. Elizabeth Gage presented Allphin with a framed certificate beautifully inscribed by Guild Historian and calligrapher Rita Fannin Spencer.



## *The President's Message*

Ann Patchett, best selling novelist and essayist, learned something profound in 2009. If, as her good friend Bethany's yogi taught, a person does something with "thoughtful consistency" for 32 days, the course of the entire year is set. Taking this adage to heart, Patchett decided to work on her then un-started novel for 1 hour each day for the first 32 days of 2009. The result: by December 2009 she was much further along than she would have anticipated a year ago.

In her *Washington Post* essay *Resolved: Writing is a Job*, Patchett shares her success with the 32-day principle and ties in another: the Edgar Principle, named for bassoonist Edgar Meyer. The more time you work at something, the more work you produce.

Simple enough. Yet, often writing is at the bottom of my never-ending "to-do" list. This year started no differently, but with the teenagers back to campus and the house quieted down, I intend to try my own 32-day experiment - a modest 2 hours daily of reading, study, and writing. And a change of mindset.

"The trick, after all," Patchett writes, "is not to convince the rest of the world I need to be working. The trick is to convince myself."

*M. Elizabeth Gage*

## Writers Guild Shorts

A special welcome to new member **Lloyd Perry** of Bedias. Lloyd is the author of *A Lasting Impression: Cowboying Around* written to give his grandchildren a glimpse of the west of Perry's youth.

Welcome to new member **Terry Keeling** of Leona. Terry is the author of *The Little Church in the Wildwood* and *When I Get to Be King*.

**Cherylynn MacGregor's** essay "Life or Death" has been published in *Final Acts: Death, Dying, and the Choices We Make* edited by Nan Bauer-Maglin and Donna Perry, published by Rutgers University Press. Prof. MacGregor has several essays on seasonal, and cultural themes published in the *Centerville News*.

Members **M. Elizabeth Gage** and **Judy Johnson** are collaborating as writer and illustrator for *Earth Bright Kids*, newspaper fun pages for young readers. The duo hopes to extend the production into coloring book formats and themed booklets for budding naturalists.

**M. Elizabeth Gage** has been accepted to the Institute of Children's Literature. Gage has been paired with award winning writer Michael L. Cooper. Cooper received the Golden Kite Award for Best Nonfiction Children's Book of 2004 from the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators for *Dust to Eat*:

*Drought and Depression in the 1930s* (Clarion/ Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

## Brazos Valley Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

### 2010 Monthly Schmooze Schedule

- Jan. 27 One Word at A Time
- Feb. 24 "Talk!" she said. The Art of Dialogue
- Mar. 31 New in Children's Books
- Apr. 28 Conveying Authentic Emotion in Writing
- May 26 Picture Book Use in the Classroom
- Jun. 30 Writing from Platforms: It Ain't Yo Mama's Shoes
- Jul. 28 TBA
- Aug. 25 What is an Essential Book?
- Sept. 29 Friending, Tweeting and Blogging Your Writing Life
- Oct. 27 Setting Priorities

Meetings are held in the College Station Barnes & Noble in the art corner at 10 a.m. Open critique time follows each meeting. See website for guidelines.

## SCBWI

### Brazos Valley Workshops

#### Not-For-Beginners Picture Book Author and Illustrator Workshop

June 25-27, 2010

Enrollment: 30

Registration: Spring 2010

Faculty—Kelly Bennett, and Terri Murphy, will guide attendees through an intensive exploration of picture books to uncover what makes them successful and how

we can make our stories irresistible. Hands-on workshop sessions will focus on: Adding that "extra something" to our work; Honing words and pictures with an eye to publication; and polishing and submitting art and stories. Attendees will be asked to submit one picture book manuscript and/or illustration samples prior to the workshop.

#### Novel Revision Retreat with Darcy Pattison--

[www.darcypattison.com](http://www.darcypattison.com)

November 12-14, 2010

LaSalle Hotel, Bryan, Texas

Enrollment limited to 24.

To attend the Novel Revision Retreat, writers must have a completed draft of a novel. The length may vary according to each writer's work. Participants must agree to read three other manuscripts before the retreat and be ready to discuss them.

## BRAZOS WRITERS WRITING CONTEST SHOW US YOUR BEST WRITING

DEADLINE MARCH 31, 2010

#### Categories:

1. Nonfiction: Memoirs/Personal Essay, not to exceed 2000 words.
2. Fiction: Short Story, not to exceed 4,000 words
3. Rhyming Poem/Non-rhyming Poem: 32 lines maximum.

For contest rules, information on judging and prizes, and an entry form visit Brazos Writers' web site <http://brazoswriters.org>



## Recommended Reading

In the August 2009 issue of *The Writer* magazine contributing editor Chuck Leddy, whose book reviews appear regularly in *The Boston Globe*, recommends the following guides to help writers become experts on the rules of grammar and style, so you'll "know when to follow them - and when to break them."

Topping the List of essential guides [The Elements of Style: Fiftieth Anniversary Edition](#)

by *William Strunk and E. B. White*. Longman, 128 pages, Hard cover, \$19.95. First published in 1939 this classic is still the most popular writing reference book on the market.

[Woe is I: The Grammarphobes Guide to Better English in Plain English](#)

by *Patricia T. O'Conner*. Riverhead, 240 pages, Paper, \$14.

[On Writing Well: the Classic Guide to Writing Non-fiction](#)

by *William Zinsser*. Collins, 336 pages, Paper, \$14.95

[Eats, Shoots and Leaves: Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation](#)

by *Lynne Truss*. Gotham, 240 pages, Paper, \$12.

[The Sound on the Page: Great Writers Talk About Style and Voice in Writing](#)

by *Ben Yagoda*. Collins, 304 pages, Paper \$14.99.

[A Pocket Style Manual](#)

by *Dian Hacker*. Bedford/ St. Martin's, 272 pages, Paper, \$25.75.

[Spunk & Bite: A Writer's Guide to Punchier, More Engaging Language & Style](#)

by *Arthur Plotnki*. Random house, 272 pages, Paper, \$16.95. A member of *The Writer's* editorial board takes a fresh, loose approach to *Elements of Style*.

[A Dictionary of Modern English Usage](#)

by *H. W. Fowler*, Oxford, 832 pages, Paper, \$29.95.

[Grammar Girls's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing](#)

by *Mignon Fogarty*. Holt, 240 pages, Paper, \$14. Not for the grammar purist.

[The Chicago Manual of Style](#)

*The University of Chicago Press*, 957 pages, Hardcover, \$55.

For the complete article, and reviews of each title, see the August 2009 issue of *The Writer* available on the Writers Guild Bookshelf.

## Common Writing Mistakes

Professor and editor Michael LaRocca points out "Most books aren't rejected because the stories are "bad." They're rejected because they're not "ready to read." In short, minor stuff like typos, grammar, spelling, etc." Fixing common errors before you submit your

manuscript to a publisher, will dramatically increase your chance of publication.

LaRocca recommends two valuable lists online at the following websites to aid writers in checking their manuscripts.

Common Errors in English <http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors>

Words That Are Often Confused

<http://lbarker.orcon.net.nz/words.html>

Mistakes that LaRocca often finds include:

Dialogue where everyone speaks in perfect English

Misuse of contractions when a possessive is needed (it's instead of its)

Misuse of apostrophes

Inclusion of worthless words and phrases: who, which, that.

Other sources list: just, so, such, very, really, even, at all, certainly, definitely, began to, started to, maybe, quite, almost, a little, needless to say, the fact is that, sort of...

Verb tense changes

Subject word agreement

Asking a single sentence to do too much work or advance the action too much.

Redundancy



*Guidelines and Deadlines for Submissions to the 2010 anthology*

Theme: *Summer*

Maximum word length: 2500

Restrictions: no obscenity, vulgarity or erotica

Standard manuscript preparation with submission via email preferred by February 1

Returned manuscripts must be resubmitted to the committee by February 15, 2010.

An Anthology Submission Author's Agreement must be completed. Contracts are available on the bookshelf.

**Mistakes**

continued from page 3  
Use of an objective case pronoun when a nominative case is needed and vice versa

Overuse of dialog tags

"Should of, would of, could of." Wrong! It's "should have, would have, could have". Or maybe the contractions: "should've, would've, could've."

Take the time to correct your manuscript and "should've, would've, could've" won't have to be part of your writing vocabulary.

*Calendar*

**Membership Meeting**

January 19, 2010  
Student Contest Closes  
STC Chapter 4: Repetition  
Anthology Submissions due

**Membership Meeting**

February 16, 2010  
STC Chapter 5: Adjective an Adverb

**Special Event**

February 20, 2010  
Texas Writers Books Signing and Sale  
Kimbrow Center 10:00 - 2:00

**Student Contest Award Ceremony**

March 6, 2010  
2010 Anthology *Summer* debuts  
MCAC Annual Dinner

**Membership Meeting**

March 16, 2010  
STC Chapter 6: Pronoun and Verb

**Special Event**

April 10, 2010  
Writers Workshop

**Membership Meeting**

April 20, 2010  
Annual Report to Membership  
Nomination of Officers  
STC Chapter 7: POV and Voice

**Membership Meeting**

May 18, 2010  
Election of Officer  
Spring Social with guest author  
Guild Choice Awards



*Writers Guild Meetings*

*The Writers Guild meets on the 3rd Tuesday of each month from September through May at 6:30 PM in the small annex building behind the Madison County Library. Annual dues are individuals \$20, families \$25, and students \$10.*

**WRITERS JOURNAL SHORT STORY CONTEST**

DEADLINE: MAY 30  
Reading Fee: \$10/entry

1st Prize \$350  
2nd Prize \$125  
3rd Prize \$75  
Honorable Mentions

for guidelines and rules visit the *Writers Journal* website

*2009-2010 Officers*

President	M.Elizabeth Gage
Vice President	Kimberly Davis
Treasurer	M. Elizabeth Gage
Secretary	Jim Daspit
Historian	Rita Spencer
President Emeritus	Burke Landry