

The Woodlands Writers Guild Newsletter

Vol. 2 Issue 2 March/April 2010

QUERY: What's It All About?

The word “query” is a lot like “critique.” It has a linguistic past. It comes from inquiry- but it is not an inquisition. It is merely being inquisitive about something. Query is the formal way of saying, “If you’re interested, ask me.” Some editors know what they want in a query; others don’t. There are also many styles of readers and writers. Just about any personality trait can be found not only in the characters we create but also in literary agents that abound. Some are real. Some are “wanna-bees.” You have to send your query on a wing and a prayer, as it were.

Should you find help writing a query letter? It’s up to you. Be careful of who you esteem “the expert.” Certain people who have sent a successful query letter often assume they are experts and offer to help you- for a fee, usually. If you need someone who will take you through an inquisition-like torture, that personality exists. If you prefer more of a teacher-student interaction, that personality exists as well. But whether you want a mentor to teach you to write a basic query letter or just want to wing it on your own, there are a few guidelines to follow. The most important one is there is not a one-size-fits-all formula. In time, you will find that what works for one editor will not work for another- regardless of who guarantees what. The second guideline is to be short, sweet, and to the point. Include all the necessary information and exclude the rest. Querying is an art form in its own right. And it is learned over time.

Querying a magazine, for example, can be fairly simple, or not. *Men’s Workout*, for example, has a quick and easy “Submissions... must be accompanied by a stamped, (p. 2)

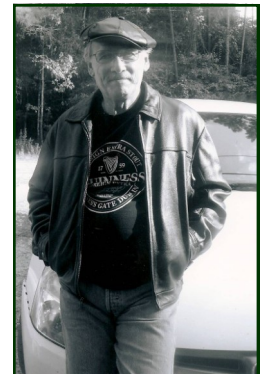
From the desk of...

El Presidente

It’s a New Year, so we need to set some goals. The membership is growing beyond expectation; we have broken the forty plateau, and keep adding new members every month. It is time for the great minds of our organization to begin the process of investigating new venues.

We are presently in good shape at Borders, but it will not be long before its time to move. Any and all suggestions should be addressed to your new secretary, Bob Dailey. He will organize a fact finding group.

It is my desire to promote camaraderie amongst us, and to do so we will have a few social gatherings this year. We just completed the first one, a fun affair at Jim Jones home, on the Del Lago area of Lake Conroe. The cuisine was superb; kudos to Joan Jones for an exotic fare. It was a B.Y.O.B. affair; I must say I’ve never seen so much water, tea, and (p.2)



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From the President (con't)

coffee at a party before. The band did a good job playing soft music, and the reading program and contest was fun and interesting.

Congratulations to Rebecah Bruey for her winning short story, "How to Climb the Column of Shame" had everyone laughing. Anyone willing to host another soiree needs to contact either Bob or myself. The board will meet this month to discuss the opening of our speaker series. If you have a someone in mind, please let Bob know.

We will also discuss the possibility, and the wisdom of putting together a writer's seminar for the general public. It is my belief that the turnout we've been getting (from the membership) to our programs leaves a lot to be desired. We ought to first jell as an organization before we tackle a major, and expensive project. But we will discuss it, and hopefully form a fact-finding committee. Your feelings on the subject are appreciated. Take care.

-Alberto Arcia

Querying depends entirely on the "to whom" you are inquiring about submitting your material to.

Query (con't)

self-addressed envelope." A glance through the magazine tells me it's all about how-to, what-to, when-to, and is chock full of photographs showing all of the above. *VoguePatterns* doesn't seem to accept queries of any kind- unless you create something with the pattern and then you can send a comment to the "Mailbox letter" column. *Western Horseman*, on the other hand, welcomes submissions and asks first-timers to write in to request the editorial guidelines and enclose an SASE (remember those? For the youngsters, it's a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope), and above all do not fax them.

Querying depends entirely on the "to whom" you are inquiring about submitting your material to. Publishing houses, magazines, editors, literary agents- the list goes on- all have different ideas of what they want in the query and sent along with the query. Some want the first chapter. Some want a synopsis. Some want the entire work. Before you query, do a little background research on the company, the agent, or magazine. Saving yourself time and effort will pay off in the long run. From experience, I queried a magazine on a whim. I didn't offer to write the article, I offered three areas I saw that were not being addressed and merely suggested that someone write about them. I got the job to write the articles. The checks in the mail were sweet, but it was sweeter to be asked to write them out of the blue. Another article I wrote came about because the person I was going to interview had just sent in the photographs of her work (unbeknownst to me). My query letter and her photos ended up on the editor's desk at the same time. I got the job. A fluke? Maybe. But I just started sending out queries- and didn't worry about the rest.

I did a bit of nosing about to find some material on the internet. (Resources on P. 10)



Fractured Facts–

Ray Fitzgerald

Is the Gerund Obsolete– Or Hiding in Drag?

Guest-written by Rebecca Harkins

For the sake of argument, I will assume that most people reading this article have heard of a gerund (JER-und) and know that it has to do with grammar. Beyond that, so what, who cares? If you read the last column, Grammar in Drag (see Jan/Feb 2010 issue), you will recall that words tend to deviate from the norm causing confusion and, for the unlucky few who are required to diagram a sentence, downright panic and chaos. Not to worry, though– we have uncovered the gerund.

Grammar is a way of explaining how words are put together. A grammar of any language helps us to understand it. French grammar (among others) has gender issues, Chinese has inflection issues, and so on. Grammar helps explain this. Dialectal differences are sometimes based on words and their meanings; but sometimes are just grammar differences. Grammar categorizes language just as the periodic table of elements categorizes scientific elements (such as oxygen and phosphorus in their weight, atom counts, etc). Mineralogy has its own rules. Quartz crystals, for example, are made up of silica in various angles, faces, and numbers of sides. In grammar, sentences are made up of words placed in various kinds of positions. The exact naming of the word in its place is called grammar. Grammar, in summary, is the science that deals with the classification of words (parts of speech), inflection of words (doctor + s (pl) vs doctor + 's (ps)), and syntax (word order).



A verb with “ing” is not usually the noun or subject of the sentence.

On to the gerund! The gerund is a verb which uses “-ing” and acts like a noun. This is another example of grammar in drag. Example: *His coming was expected*. “His” is a pronoun acting as an adjective (modifying the “noun”), “coming” is in the noun position (verb with “ing”), “was” is the verb, and “expected” is the adjective modifying the noun “coming” (Sentence pattern 1: N be Aj).

What throws us off, at first, is the “-ing” on the end of the verb. A verb with “-ing” is not usually the noun or subject of the sentence. Other places the “-ing” verb acting as noun can be found is the object of a verb, object of a preposition, and so on. Note the use of the gerund **fishing** in the following sentences:

Examples:*

Gerund as subject of verb:	<u>Fishing</u> is tiresome.
Gerund as object of verb:	I hate <u>fishing</u> .
Object of a preposition:	I have an aversion to <u>fishing</u> .
A predicate noun:	What I most detest is <u>fishing</u> .
An appositive:	That detestable amusement, <u>fishing</u> , I cannot endure.
Absolute noun:	<u>Fishing</u> being my aversion, let us not fish.

Don't worry about the ‘technical’ descriptions, the point is that fishing is a gerund and as such is a verb in drag.

*1907 Handbook of Composition A Compendium of Rules by Edwin C. Woolley, Ph.D.

The Inside Track

Topics in Writing

Priming the Pump



What happens when you pick up pen and paper and either nothing flows or what does come out is drips and dribbles? The next step is called priming the pump. Back when it took more than turning on the faucet to get water, if you weren't lucky enough to have to carry buckets of water from either the well or the nearest stream, you maybe had a pump. This nifty contraption works on a system of levers running from your shoulder, down your arm, connecting to the pump handle and disappearing down into the pump (the last leg is called a sucker rod). The only way the pump works is by priming it. You pull up and down on the handle a few times and if all goes well, water will be flowing into the bucket. If you stop, the water flow stops. If it doesn't flow, there may be something wrong with the rod or the seal. Basically, it takes action to prime the pump. When you have "writer's block," you need to prime the pump. It takes work, but it can be overcome.

Suggestions for priming the pump:

1. Freewriting. Write fast and furiously for 5 minutes— even if you repeat yourself.
2. Get up and do something else. Exercise, play an instrument, make coffee.
3. Pay bills. Nothing cures writers block like the reason for your writing.
4. Browse a library. Either your own collection or the local public library— books have a tendency to stimulate the brain cells.

-Rebecca Harkins, Ed.

Frank Bayer is a complex tapestry of poignant truths...

Interview— Frank Bayer

What do historical linguistics, mountain climbing, James Dickey, and selling cars have in common? They are some of the events in the life of Frank Bayer which have guided him to where he is today. Bayer is a complex tapestry of poignant truths, once you spend time looking for them. The overall picture is impressive, but those small comments, while seemingly vague or of little importance, are bits of mineral ore. It is up to us to clean, shine, and use the gem. For example, when asked what advice he had for a new writer, Bayer replied, "Sell cars." At first glance, this bit of wisdom seems odd from a renown writer. However, a gem has the following characteristics: splendor, durability, rarity, fashion, portability. This bit of wisdom, "sell cars," offers us durability (a practical job keeps us through the dry spells), rarity (simple, but effective truth), fashion (influenced by events around us), portability (not limited geographically), and splendor (effectiveness). Practically speaking, car salesmen see hundreds of characters streaming through their doors. Stories, plots, and images are all there. If not cars, sell something else. Put yourself where you can see and observe. One acquaintance says of Frank Bayer, "He is one who speaks in footnotes." Today, while Frank focuses on the Indian Medicine Wheel and alternative medicine, linguistics is still one of his intellectual challenges and I'd say one of his first loves. *-R. Harkins, Ed.*

Book-to-Market

Jennifer Blanchard

An Intro to Twitter: What, Why, How

Jennifer's
website:Using Twitter to
promote a blog:[www.twitter.com/
ProcrastWriter](http://www.twitter.com/ProcrastWriter)

Social media is EVERYWHERE! And for those of you who haven't yet jumped on the bandwagon—or for those of you who have—here's a good place to start:

Twitter

Twitter is a micro-blogging/public instant messaging platform where a person has 140 characters (about the length of a text message) to get their message across.

Here are some Twitter terms you need to be familiar with:

- **Tweet**—a “tweet” is essentially anything you post on your Twitter page. The Twitter name for a post is a “tweet.”
- **Retweet**—a “retweet” happens when someone reposts something you posted, either by copying and pasting your message into their message box and adding: “RT @username” or by writing their own version of your message and then adding: (via @username).
- **Followers**—when someone finds your page on Twitter, they can choose to “follow you,” which means all your posts will show up on their Twitter home page so they can keep up with what you're posting. “Following” someone on Twitter is very similar to subscribing to a blog using an RSS feed.

Here are some reasons you need to join Twitter:

- Each day, 5,000 to 10,000 new people join Twitter, according to the
- [State of the Twittersphere Report](#).
- You can get direct access to high-profile people you would normally never have access to (such as publishers, agents, other publishing professionals, etc).
- You get great insights from your followers when you pose questions.
- Traffic to your author Web site!!
- You can build a network of followers who like your company and/or use your products/services. This helps with getting positive third-party testimonials, as well.
- You can share information about yourself, your book(s), any author news, book signings, sales...the possibilities are endless.
- People will spread your thoughts/ideas/products to new places by “retweeting” your posts.

See **sidebar** for link to show the “how to”...

...Twitter terms you
need to be familiar
with...



About Us

The Woodlands Writers Guild is a group of writers who gather together to motivate each other to write something— anything. The main unifying theme is that we write— some of us to the point of living and breathing words and all things lexical.

Board of Directors:

- President (Alberto Arcia),
- Secretary (Bob Dailey),
- Vice President (Allan Liu),
- Treasurer (Ray Fitzgerald),
- Marketing Director (Jennifer Blanchard)

Informally, we have the Guild Elder (currently Frank Bayer; appointment made by the current President of any given term) and Newsletter Editor (Rebecca Harkins). The Guild Elder is chosen based on respect, accomplishment, and age (wisdom of the ages). Newsletter Editor is a volunteer position.

Keep in mind: **2011 elections will need President and Treasurer** (who will be withdrawing from future elections), so we will be looking for suitable replacements. The Scholarship Committee should have something to tell us this year. Please participate, we are here to help each other.

March & April Challenges

Monthly Writing Challenge

Back when I was quilting, we had monthly “challenges”- based on color themes, patterns, or a workshop. For the Woodlands Writers Guild, these challenges will be easier— like mini-contests; but simpler.

The idea is to take one page and write based on the challenge of the month.

Bring them and read them aloud!

MARCH

“How To”

Write a brief, technical how to do something. Include Step 1, step 2, etc. Can someone follow it?

Example:

How to operate a toaster, save a file to Word, estimate words on a page... (handwritten or typed).

APRIL

“Not My Genre”

Try something outside of your genre.

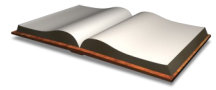
Prose? Try poetry. Short story? Try changing from mystery to comedy, historical fiction to horror— even if it’s only an outline.

Think outside your genre!

*-Rebecca Harkins,
Editor*

Book Review

Bob Dailey

Acadian to Cajun, Transformation of A People, 1803-1877
by Carl A. Brasseaux

“Un peuple sans passé est un peuple sans future.”

(A people without a past is a people without a future.)

Antoine Bourque, acceptance speech, induction into the Ordre des Palmes Academiques,
July 1991

In 1521, a scant 30 years after Columbus completed his first voyage to the New World, several hundred French settlers colonized the area now known as Nova Scotia. Less than 150 years later, at the end of what is known as the French and Indian War, these same French people were driven out of Nova Scotia. Some returned to France. Others settled in the predominantly Catholic colony of Maryland or in the West Indies. Several hundred of these families, known as Acadians, settled in what is now southern Louisiana.

Like most of the colonists in North America at the time, these Acadians were yeoman farmers and ranchers. Their major difference was they spoke French. They maintained their culture for another century and a half, assimilating new colonists from France, Germany, Ireland elsewhere in Europe. They also assimilated a large number of Spanish, who were the original settlers of Louisiana.

In his book, *Acadian to Cajun, Transformation of a People, 1803-1877*, historian Carl Brasseaux traces the Acadians from the Louisiana purchase to the post bellum South. Brasseaux's large collection of data, gleaned from archives, points to a strongly independent, literate people, with a long-standing tradition of non-violence and integrity, brought to their knees by the Civil War, the Reconstruction, floods, economic depression and financial predation.

Brasseaux notes that most of the Acadians refused to be conscripted by the Confederacy during the war. Not owning slaves themselves, they referred to the Civil War as “La Guerre de Confedere,” or War of the Confederates. Most Acadians escaped forced conscription by hiding in the prairies of western Louisiana. Their farms decimated by marauding armies from both sides, the Acadians emerged from the war a changed people. By the last quarter of the 19th century, most Acadians, small landowners for centuries, were reduced to being tenant farmers. In several generations, illiteracy was common, poverty was accepted. “Even the newly emancipated freedmen, who formerly constituted the doormat of local society, quickly emulated their former masters in viewing their Acadian neighbors with derision,” Brasseaux writes. That derision continues today.

Eventually, in the last century, Acadians have reclaimed some of their cultural and economic strength, though Brasseaux writes: “For much of the 20th century, the Acadian/Cajun community would remain a society at war with itself as a result of socioeconomic and cultural changes wrought during the volatile nineteenth century.”

The book is exhaustive in its collection of civil records, federal census reports, ecclesiastical registers, legislative acts and electoral returns which Brasseaux transforms into an ethnohistory of the Acadians.

Brasseaux is a director for the Center for Louisiana Studies and a history professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

...illiteracy was
common, poverty
was accepted.



Bulletin Board

Guild Member Notes and Upcoming Events

Wanted:

Contributors! E-mail techno_pen@yahoo.com (Subject: ATTN Newsletter Editor) (WWG reserves the right to publish– and/or edit all material)

DEADLINE for May/June submissions: April 15, 2010

News of Note: Interested in Screenwriting?

Spring & North Houston Screenwriter's Group March Meetup– See March 4 Below

Meeting Dates: (1st Wed; 3rd Sat)

March	3*	6:30 PM at Borders
March	20*	10 AM at Borders
April	7	6:30 PM at Borders
April	17	10 AM at Borders

* **Speaker**

HELP WANTED– Writer Needed

Gray-haired, fledgling writer of humor has decided to take a stab at writing a novel, but desperately needs a co-author/ authoress to assist in the project. All and any wealth and notoriety resulting from this collaboration will be split 50-50. My schedule is totally flexible and I can be available any time at the discretion of any writing partner.

Conspiracy of Clowns

Time and Setting: Prague, Czechoslovakia,
1942, June July August

Reinhard Heydrich of the Gestapo is assassinated (a real historical event) and the Germans launch an intensive search to locate and execute the assassins. A performer with the traveling Circus Mikovar, is arrested, interrogated, and ultimately executed. Three elderly members of a clown troop and stars of the Circus Mikovar devise a plan of vengeance against the Nazis responsible for their friend's death. The story details what happened. I want the book to be a blend of drama, intrigue and suspense with a sprinkling of humor. Anyone having an interest. Please contact me for further discussion.

Ray Fitzgerald 713-623-1198

fitrl@comcast.net <http://www.shamrockandbarney.com>

EVENTS / SPEAKERS

March 3:

Who: Annie Linnea Sherwood @
WWG Regular Meeting

Topic: Enchanted Writing

Book: *The Journey of The Jewel:
Passageways Through to
the Divine Feminine*

Website: www.jewelbeams.com

March 4:

6 PM Good Books in the Woods
Screen Writing Group

<http://www.meetup.com/springfilmgroup-com>

March 20:

Who: Jean Nelson Erichsen @
WWG Regular Meeting

Topic: publishing world

Book: *My Portable Life*

Website:

www.erichsenbooks.com

And the Winners are... (from December 2009)

The WWG Five-in-One Short Story Contest Winners:

Angostura Tea by **Rebecca Harkins** (Epiphanies)

L'Amour in the First Degree by **Rebecca Harkins** (Romance)

Life Lessons from Jimmy Soul by **Melissa Hance** (Mystery)

Daddy's Promise by **Melissa Hance** (Sci-fi)

Tattooed by **Barry Clark** (Allegory)

The Contest Judges:

Ron McWhorter (Allegory & Sci-fi)

Theresa Lehr (Romance & Epiphanies)

Ray Fitzgerald (Mystery)

In the first December meeting, the WWG Contest Night winners received their awards and read their stories, to the applause and appreciation of all.

Congratulations to the winners and warmest thanks to the judges and to all those who helped to put the contest together. Allan—Contest Coordinator

If you want to read the stories, contact the individual person and request a copy.

Editor's Corner

Ask the Editor

Dear Editor:

I can't make the meetings but I want my stuff critiqued. How do I find out about the "sub-critique groups" meeting within the guild?

Annie Writes-a-lot

Dear Annie:

Ask around. There's no list. Some are formed through pre-existing friendships, some are formed based on type of work or genre. The only rule: you can't be another "Woodlands Writers Guild."

-Editor

Dear Editor:

How did you learn to write?

First-timer

Dear First-timer:

They made me do it in school. Every day. For 13 years. Then it just became a habit.

-Editor



QUERY: Resources

Here are some of the myriad of references that you may want to consider:

<http://www.fundsforwriters.com> Hope Clark Feb. 7, 2010 (ref pitching magazines)

<http://www.worldwidefreelance.com> Worldwide Freelance Writer Vol XI: Issue 8

“The Salesman’s Secret to Writing Incredible Queries” by Beth Ann Erickson

<http://queryshark.blogspot.com/>

<http://jetreidliterary.blogspot.com/> Janet Reid

<http://www.underdown.org/covlettr.htm> (focuses on children’s writing)

The Internet has its good points and bad points when searching for material. Check the bottom of the page (or wherever) and make sure the copyright date is 2010. I’ve seen some 2008 and earlier, and some who’s posts quit in 2006. Try to keep to recent material.

Research, Research, Research!!

-Rebecca Harkins, Editor

**Join
Now**

Dues \$20 annually.

The Woodlands Writers
Guild, P.O. Box 132221,
The Woodlands, TX
77393-2221

Musing

I never heard of a muse until one visited me.
Like the Tooth Fairy in the night, he came (or she?)
Gave me a poem, but took away my tranquility.
Now I lie, waiting for a visit deep in the night.
I wait and I wait and I wait. While waiting, I write.
But the only advice I receive is: “turn out the light!”
There’s no further sign of muses or fairies, so it
Looks like my hopes of ever becoming a poet
Are bleak at best. Sh**! Wouldn’t you know it!

-Paul Bussard