

March 2020 Newsletter

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President's Column

By Leah Hinton

Hello fellow writers,

Are these crazy times or what? Every day I am amazed at how so much seems to be so wrong, then I am blissfully pleased to see people work together to take care of each other and my faith in humanity is reaffirmed.

I'm disheartened that our current social climate requires us to be away from each other when we get so much out of seeing each other month to month. I know our

simple WGT meetings are something we all look forward to. And I know you paid your hard-earned money to be a part of a group from which you can learn. The WGT Board members and I don't take that lightly. We appreciate your support and have been working to ensure you don't miss the valuable lessons/programs we strive to bring you each month.

Here at WGT, we are tackling social distancing issues with modern technology. Like so many other organizations, we are moving our programming to an online format for the time being. We will also be opening our Facebook page to everyone so you can invite your friends to join us in discussions on the craft of writing.

With this new format came new obstacles so the order we originally planned our programs in has changed a bit, but the quality is there, and if we've learned anything in the last few weeks it is how to adapt and overcome.

For our March program, we have a fabulous lesson from an extremely talented and passionate slam-poet, Danny Dunn. Details on how to watch the poetry program are listed in this newsletter. Don't tune out thinking you aren't a "poetry" person. Poetry adds a dimension to all writing, and in understanding poetry you can create beautiful prose. Poetry gifts you with the tools you need to explore language and story. It will serve you well. And slam-poetry is a performance art so you will be entertained.

Monthly Challenge: I urge you all to play with words this month. Write three sentences, complex and simple. Then rewrite each sentence three times, and in each new version, look for ways to make your work more poetic, or more verbose, or use new words to say the same thing. If you are naturally long-winded, learn the art of brevity and how to be succinct in your message. Get out your thesaurus (many free versions online) and learn different ways to say the same things.

Now, chances are your final product may be a bit of a mess, and that's okay. This is an exercise in learning your options and employing those options well. Take your most convoluted sentence from this exercise and strip it down, saving

different elements till you get a pleasing version—different from what you started with. It is amazing how much we can say, the different tones and inflections we can inject, with word choice alone.

Use this time of quarantine to read more, write more, listen more, and make joyful reflection over the good you see in your day-to-day. It is said that Shakespeare wrote King Lear whilst in quarantine. (I was talking about Shakespeare, so I had to throw in a “whilst.”) You can create masterpieces! And remember, you *deserve* your art!

Now, I’m writing more today than I usually do. Normally I would have ended my message with the previous paragraph, but I do want to take a bit more of your time to address something we should all be concerned with. Social distancing means extensive isolation for many who live alone. Isolation can exacerbate depression and anxiety. The world situation and general unease can make it very hard for some members of our friend, neighbor, and family groups. We don’t want to lose people to the emotional side effects of COVID-19.

I urge you to take the time each day to call someone in your groups – perhaps someone you don’t speak with often but are fond of. Or even someone you don’t know well. Sometimes a reassuring voice can do wonders. It’s like a sincere smile at the end of a hard day.

Please, if you are having a hard time, reach out. It doesn’t even have to be to someone you know well. If you need assistance getting what you need in this time, perhaps I or one of the WGT board can help or at least direct you to someone who can give you the assistance you need. I know we are each ready with a smile and a virtual hug to help us all get through this. You can email me at authorlmhinton@gmail.com or text me at 214-507-4555.

Now go wash your hands and write on!

Leah

WGT Board Members

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If you're interested in volunteering, please email us at writersguildtx@gmail.com or ask at the next general meeting!

Online Meeting Reminder



Join us April 27, 7:00pm, on the WGT Facebook Page for a Facebook Live Presentation.

"The Montpelier Job: A Study in Heist Novels": by Lauren Vanderburg.

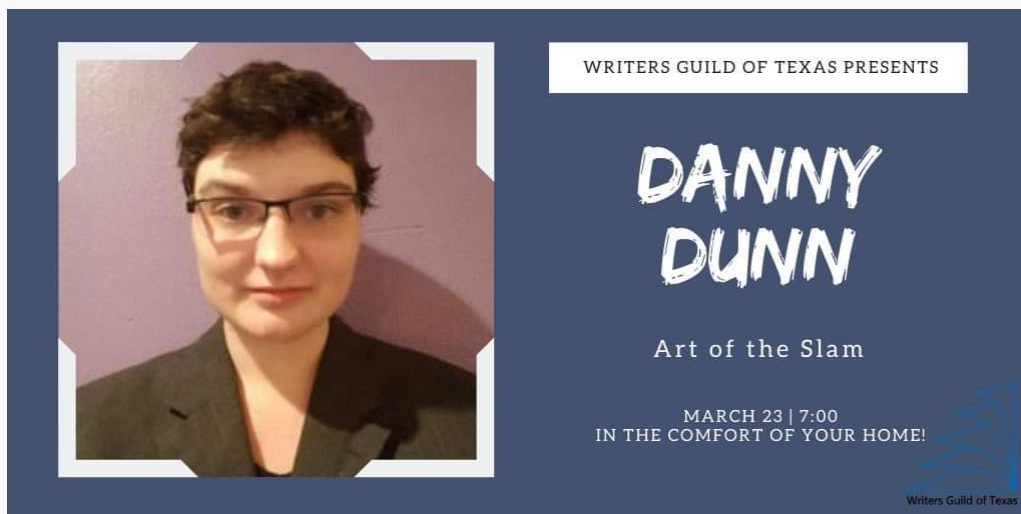
What makes a heist novel tick? What turns all those moving parts into a rollicking adventure where you root for the bad guys to score the loot? We'll explore what a heist novel is and what a compelling crew should look like.

Lauren Vanderburg earned her MFA in Writing for Children and Young Adults at Vermont College of Fine Arts. She is currently working on her very own heist novel, and she lives in Arlington with her wife and seven kids.

Join us for the second in our series of exciting, intellectually stimulating, socially distant virtual monthly meetings!

We'll be looking for you!

March Virtual Meeting "Art of the Slam" with Danny Dunn



March's monthly meeting, which took place March 23, inaugurated what will become a series of virtual monthly meetings as we weather the coronavirus pandemic.

If you haven't seen it already, head over to Facebook and our Writers Guild of Texas Facebook Page, which is now open to the public. There you'll find Danny Dunn's captivating "Art of the Slam" presentation on the new and exciting art form, slam poetry. Danny does a fantastic job of communicating the essentials of writing and performing slam. Also participating: our own Leah Hinton and JoAnne Turner. You'll enjoy it as much as those of us who took part or looked on live!

February Meeting Recap

On February 24, David Douglas presented a hands-on session, "Playwriting." David Douglas began writing seriously in 2014, and he turned to playwriting not long after. In 2017 he rewrote his first play, Fire Lake, as RailBird, which had a reading by local theatre company OurProductions.

David also started a Dallas organization that serves to support playwrights in their craft. Called Stage Writers, the group meets monthly at Picasso's Pizza. The group holds an annual playwriting contest and festival. You can learn more about the group at stagewriters.com.

In his presentation, David spoke of the types of play encountered in modern theatre, loosely categorized as drama, comedy, and the musical. Contemporary plays can be further divided in terms of length. Short plays are presented in one act and typically range from 10 minutes to 60 minutes in length. Full-length plays are typically two-act plays which run about 90 minutes long with one intermission or sometimes none, or three-act plays, covering roughly two hours and usually with two intermissions.

David then covered a subject relevant to all of us as writers: our rights. The key takeaways for playwrights are as follows:

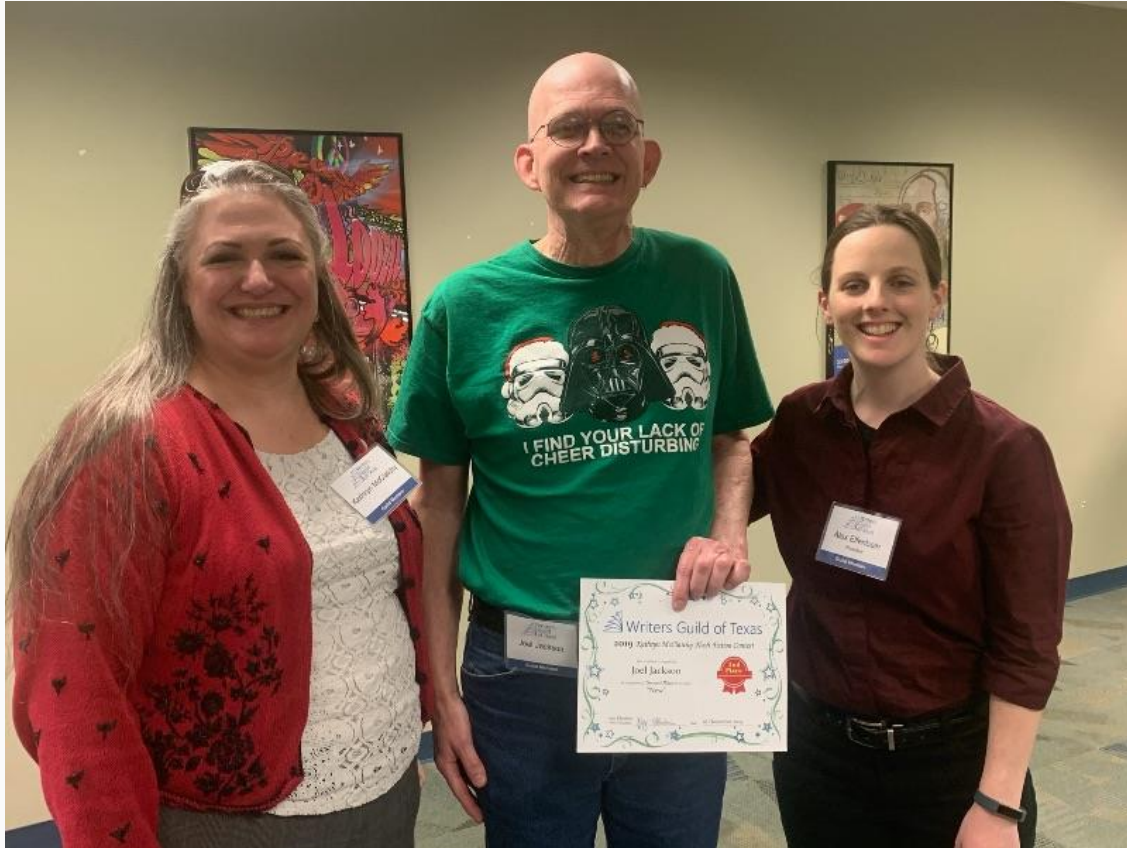
1. No one can change the direction, title, or dialogue of your play without your consent.
2. You own the copyright to your play. There is no giving away or selling of rights as with film scripts.
3. If your play is produced, you have the right to co-select (with the producer) the actors, director, and designers who make your play happen.
4. Whenever a theatre company wants to mount a production of your play, you license them the right to do so for a finite period.
5. You also own the right to license your play in different markets and theaters, and across different types of media.

David strongly recommended that you register your work as a playwright with the U.S. Copyright Office. Generally, a play should be copyrighted: 1) when you submit

it for consideration, 2) when it is considered final after changes have been made/agreed to, and 3) at publication. The publisher takes care of the last copyright submission.

Among David's pointers for playwriting, he recommended developing your characters through the dialog you write for them, and by trusting the actor to convey the emotion of your words. You can give actors directions ("angrily," "playfully"), but remember that the audience can't see what you've written on the page — only what the actors show through their actions and your dialogue. David provided plenty of details on page setup, and how to write and format the different parts of a play, from the title page to the cast of characters to the body of the play itself. Finally, David gave the group the opportunity to literally act out what we had learned, using several acting/reading exercises to demonstrate key aspects of good playwriting (and acting) practice. We thank David Douglas for the excellent presentation, and especially for the fun, revealing, and thought-provoking exercises!

Flash Fiction Contest
Second Place Winner - Joel Jackson
"New"



Arthur stared at the olive floating among the ice in his margarita. *What the hell is an olive doing in a margarita?* Oh, well. It was symbolic of the confusion he generally felt when trying to have a serious conversation with her. His mind was struggling to stay focused on its primary assignment of deciphering her cryptic language, a dialect he had dubbed “relationship prattle.”

Unfortunately, the few incompetent neurons he had managed to relegate to this task were proving woefully inadequate. They were apparently the same neurons that had once convinced him that mascara on his chest hair would give him that sexy open-shirt look that women simply can’t resist.

It didn’t. And they can.

At the moment, his small remaining group of reliable brain cells—those that hadn’t already drifted lazily over the slight margarita waterfall beginning to form in his head—seemed irretrievably distracted by the olive conundrum. *Maybe it’s a new Generation X, Y, or Z thing.*

Lifting his eyes from the olive, Arthur focused once more on Mae's face, staring at him from across the divide of the table. Her jet-black eyebrows were raised and her perfectly red lips slightly open as if trying to prompt him for a response. He reluctantly recognized the familiar, though infrequent, sign that it was his turn.

"I don't know..." he offered.

Although intended as an answer, it could just as easily have applied to the question, which at some point had apparently crept into his ears, slipped stealthily past his consciousness, and quietly joined the drifting neurons. The situation wasn't a new one: Mae would ramble at length about...well, something...something she had likely talked about endlessly before...and Arthur would provide an occasional appropriate response. At least, as appropriate as he could conjure without actually listening, which meant it was often limited to what he deemed an "empathic grunt."

This time "I don't know" seemed the safest answer in his admittedly limited repertoire. Watching her quizzical face quickly harden to stone—eyebrows collapsing and lips tensing into a straight line—he realized it wasn't.

"Fine," she said. "Just fine."

In case I harbored any notion that what she really meant was "Fine—plus some other stuff." Having hoped that Mae's reply would provide a clue to the nature of the question—and perhaps even suggest a non-incendiary answer—Arthur sighed under his breath. This seemingly physical impossibility was nonetheless a skill he had mastered as a necessary survival technique in this relationship. He began to poke at the olive with the small plastic sword upon which it had previously been impaled. This was going to be a long evening—no doubt about it.

Has it always been like this? he wondered as he poked. *It seems to me that once upon a time she was more...interesting. Now she seems to be satisfied having the same conversation, day after day, ad infinitum.*

Arthur waited another moment for some subtle hint from Mae to reveal the response she wanted. Her continued silence and granite face gave him nothing.

With no better answer to offer, his mind decided to abandon this not-quite-conversation and return to its habitual to-and-fro wanderlust.

Since they were seated in their usual booth—*Of course! Only with sentimental tradition—meaning monotonous repetition—can a relationship flourish*—everything in sight was almost depressingly familiar. The large pot with fake cactus to his left, one cactus sporting a dilapidated straw flower—*like a small, fuchsia alien is bursting out through the skin, leaving a trail of hot-glue innards*. A crudely plain and perilously tilting hat stand just back of Mae's left elbow—*because so many people wear hats these days*—a comment Mae had called “snide” when he had voiced it aloud much earlier in their attachment. The stained glass light shade at the next booth, which a year ago would keep him occupied trying to decide if its designer had been trying to combine inspiration from a Salvador Dali painting and Frank Lloyd Wright window—*and failed miserably on both counts*. And, of course, the booth's table itself: a wobbly wooden derelict with a thick lacquer top covering the business cards and advertisements of companies that had likely ceased to exist years ago—*an attempt at “shabby chic,” I guess*.

Drat! They had been coming here far too long. Even his easily-entertained curiosity could find nothing in the bland familiarity that hadn't already served its purpose too often. He wished they would try eating at different restaurants but Mae was too much a creature of habit, he supposed—not drawn to adventure and change as he was.

Arthur's futile catalog of the surrounding decor faded abruptly when a rogue neuron, which contrary to instructions was apparently still attending to Mae, alarmed the rest that something new was happening. He refocused on her monologue just in time to hear:

“...and then maybe we can each find someone more...more fitting.”

“Uh...what? I don't think I heard you,” Arthur said.

“Exactly.”

Arthur waited, but there was no more. Trying to plug the gaps of what he'd missed, Arthur asked, “Um, are you...upset?”

“No. Not anymore.”

It was true, Mae did appear thoroughly—and surprisingly—calm.

“It doesn’t do any good for me to get mad anyway—you don’t notice. Or when I’m sad. Or excited. Or...anything. For someone who gets distracted by every bright shiny object around, you sure don’t notice much.”

As Mae, her face softening slightly, quietly stood and gathered her purse and coat, Arthur thought, *I should say something.*

But the something must have been lost somewhere in that pool of margarita still swirling in his head, so he just sat with his mind moving and his lips still. Watching her walk out of the restaurant his puzzled gaze was captured by the waist-high wooden table next to the entry door. Repurposed from an old baptismal font, the polished silver bowl embedded into its top now held dinner mints in lieu of holy water.

Well, that’s definitely new.

Cartoon - Jerry Weiss

Jerry Weiss's cartoons have been an integral part of the WGT newsletter for years. Unfortunately this month, due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, we aren't able to bring you Jerry's latest cartoon. Thanks, Jerry, for supplying us with much-needed humor so consistently over the years. We will get back on track with that feature of the newsletter very soon.

Notes From the Editor

Just a couple of quick notes before closing out this month's edition of the WGT newsletter.

First, the past month has been more than a little crazy for many of us, no doubt for you too. We hope you are faring well. The Board has worked hard in recent days to steer the WGT Ship of State on a straight course. We hope you'll bear with us as

we do our best to keep the Writers Guild of Texas a stable presence in your life.

In a similar vein, as editor, I'll be working to get the publication of the newsletter back onto a regular, predictable track.

Finally, as with the monthly meetings, the WGT Critique Group will be moving online too. Stay in touch with us via the WGT Facebook Page, where we'll deliver instructions for how to join the online meetings. Critique will not be a Facebook event—we'll only use FB as a way for you to indicate your wish to participate. Instead we'll use one of the popular web-based meeting applications. You won't have to download an app or go to any more trouble than have your reading available in electronic format—PDF, Word, or whatever you wish. Hope to see you there!

Until next time, stay safe.

—Gary
