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PEN IN HAND

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE MARYLAND WRITERS' ASSOCIATION

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MWA is a non-profit association dedicated to the art, craft and business of writing for professional and aspiring writers.

Announcing Two New Chapters of the Maryland Writers' Association

By Scott D. Morrow

MWA is pleased to announce that it has granted charters for the Frederick Chapter and the Howard County Chapter.

The Frederick Chapter grew out of the Maryland Writers Guild, which came together many years ago as a loose-knit writing group led by a local newspaper reporter. The group met almost every month, primarily to critique members' work. It has gone through several incarnations since then, evolving from a fledgling bunch of writers looking for the company of other writers to what is now a solid and growing chapter of the Maryland Writers' Association.

The Frederick Chapter is led by President Linda Alexander, Vice President Gary Brosch, Secretary Teresa Hearl, and Treasurer Bob Hilton. The group plans to serve the Frederick area and upper Montgomery County by helping new writers and supporting established writers in their efforts to grow and excel at their craft. They meet once a month, currently alternating between the C. Burr Artz Public Library and Joanie's Carroll Street Café in downtown Frederick.

The Howard County Chapter was organized by a dedicated core of MWA members who live in the area. Their organizational meeting attracted about fifty people to fill a meeting room at the Miller Branch of the Howard County Public Library. Their officers are

Acting President Nicole Schultheis, Treasurer Edith Goldman, and Secretary Eileen Haavik McIntire. Their monthly meetings have alternated between branches of the Howard County Public Library and area coffee houses.

We welcome our new chapters to the MWA community and thank them for helping us extend services over a broader region. With three chapters now in place – our Baltimore chapter has been running strong for over a year – MWA members have even more programming available to them, in addition to the general MWA meetings at the Chesapeake Arts Center on the second Wednesday of each month and the MWAB meetings on the fourth Monday of every month. Though members might associate themselves with a particular chapter, they may attend any or all chapter meetings.

All MWA and MWA chapter events are listed in *Pen In Hand*, in the MWA E-Newswire, and posted on the MWA website (marylandwriters.org).

Scott D. Morrow is a screenwriter, playwright, songwriter, and musician. He lives in Baltimore City.

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WRITERS'
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PEN IN HAND

Submission Guidelines

Topics: Writing, publishing tips, or experiences that would benefit other members; "how-to" advice for writers; interviews with MWA guest speakers; short-short stories; poetry; articles regarding upcoming events of interest to our members.

Word limit: Up to 150 for events; 300-750 for all others.

Payment: Your story in print.

Editing: PIH reserves the right to edit for length, grammar and spelling as appropriate. Publication depends on timeliness, professionalism and space.

Submission Requirements:

You must be an MWA member. Put your unformatted text in the body of an email message. Add a brief bio. Put "PIH" in the subject line and send to: anngf@hotmail.com

Submissions and questions are accepted on an ongoing basis.

Your Feedback Is Welcome

Speak up. Tell us if *Pen in Hand* articles are helpful to you. Send a letter to the Editor, or write a short article of your own.

Our goal is to match *Pen in Hand* to the needs and interests of our members. If you'd like us to explore a particular theme, let us know.

Editor: Nancy O. Greene
anngf@hotmail.com

P.S. If your e-mail message doesn't say "PIH" or "MWA" in the subject line, it will probably be deleted unread. ;-)

How to Start a Chapter of the Maryland Writers' Association

By Paul Lagasse

Maryland has a really odd shape. And as many members living outside the MWA's historical center of gravity in the Ann Arundel-Baltimore region have rightly concluded, it's a shape that's not conducive to frequent get-togethers. Once a year for the Annual Conference, sure, but to drive all the way from Frostburg to Glen Burnie every month just to hear someone talk for a couple hours? I'll stay home and write, thanks.

The MWA Board has decided to address this topographical conundrum by encouraging the launching of regional chapters as a way for members to connect locally. The wonderfully rectilinear goal of chapters, according to the MWA website, is "to bring local communities of writers together through regular meetings, programs, and events of interest -- along with the benefits of the well-established larger organization."

Each chapter is in effect a "mini-MWA," with its own elected officers, venues for monthly meetings, programs of interest to members and local writers, and partnerships with community organizations such as libraries, civic groups, and art and literary societies. The state organization, in turn, extends its nonprofit status to the chapter, sets up a bank account and provides seed money and speaker stipends, and will even host your website.

Having absolutely no prior experience as a volunteer leader of anything, but having lived more than half my life in sensibly shaped states, I decided to raise my hand to start a chapter for the Baltimore area. Turns out that the MWA Baltimore Chapter (MWAB) was the first to launch, and over the past three years it has become a thriving community that offers many fun ways for members to grow as writers. Now, the Frederick Chapter has just launched, and an Annapolis Chapter is in the earliest stages of forming.

"Starting a chapter and keeping it going has been one of the most rewarding things I have done as a writer ..."

The process of getting a chapter started is reassuringly straightforward, and it's also covered in the free brochure "So You Want to Start a Chapter: A Slightly Irreverent Guide to Launching a Chapter of the Maryland Writers' Association," which you can download from the MWA website's "Chapters" page (www.marylandwriters.org/chapters.html). Begin by dropping the MWA Vice President an e-mail proposing the geographic area you'd like to serve. Gary will send you a

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Chapter

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copy of the MWA Chapter Guidelines, which cover all the requirements and responsibilities for the chapter and MWA.

The MWA VP can also put you in touch with nearby MWA members. That's important because MWA requires chapters to have at least five dues-paying members, four of whom are officers (president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer). Five people is also the minimum number required for a really good party when the Board awards your charter. Trust me, getting five members won't be as hard as you think.

One of the key factors in MWAB's success was obtaining the co-sponsorship of two great local writing organizations: the CityLit Project (www.citylitproject.org) and the Write Here, Write Now workshop (www.whwnwriters.com). Their support -- and connections and clout -- opened a lot of doors for us. If you're thinking of starting a chapter, look around your community for established arts and literary organizations, and approach them with the idea of becoming co-sponsors or partners. They can advertise your meetings, help you find speakers for monthly meetings, and let you set up tables at their events.

The other key element for success is a good meeting venue (or two). The Baltimore Chapter tried several locations -- libraries, pubs with meeting rooms, bookstores, coffee shops -- before settling on two cozy independent bookstores, one in the city and one in the county. We did that for two reasons: 1) we serve a big area, and for many people one or the other of the locations is out of their way, and 2) there's no such thing as too many bookstores knowing who you are. Approach bookstore managers and ask them if they have a space you can use for meetings. If their response is lukewarm, don't be afraid to look elsewhere. Guaranteed there's another bookstore out there that wants the business and the publicity in these times.

Starting a chapter and keeping it going has been one of the most rewarding things I have done as a writer, and certainly one of the most rewarding things I could ever expect to do in my life, period. I encourage you to try your

hand at reshaping your own corner of Maryland. I think you'll enjoy it too.

Paul Lagasse is an award-winning freelance writer and author living in Baltimore City. Visit his web sites at www.avvwrites.com and www.seeingthroughclouds.com.

MWA Yahoo Announcements and Discussion Groups

MWA recently set up two Yahoo! groups as a way to share timely information with members. The kinks have been worked out and now MWA members and non-member supporters are encouraged to join!

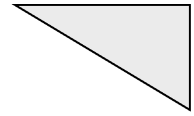
For those unfamiliar with Yahoo! groups, they let you send and receive messages via e-mail. Sending an e-mail to the group address sends it to all the members at once. Yahoo! groups are "opt-in," and there's no requirement for members to join. You can unsubscribe at any time. You can also adjust your subscriptions to receive individual messages as they are sent, or daily or weekly digests of messages, or even no messages at all (say, when you go away on vacation and won't be checking e-mail for a while).

The MWA-Announcements list is a statewide version of this list. MWAB events are posted there, so if you subscribe to it you'll get some duplication there, but you'll also get notices about events that pertain to the rest of the state. The posting policy is the same as the MWAB list: please keep it short, no soliciting, and keep it focused on meetings and events, readings and signings, and so on. To sign up, visit www.groups.yahoo.com/group/mwa_announcements.

The MWA-Discussion list is wide-open to discussions about any and all aspects of writing, from grammar advice to looking for writer-friendly coffee shops, to frustration with editors and agents. To sign up, visit www.groups.yahoo.com/group/mwa_discussion.

I'm the nominal moderator of both groups. I don't plan to be an overly aggressive one. My experience with the MWAB list has me confident that writers can be an effectively self-policing group with no need for strict controls. That being said, public-pool rules apply -- horseplay is OK but if you're hurting someone, then you're outta the pool.

E-mail Paul Lagasse at plagasse@avvwrites.com for more information.



Fictoir: When Lies Pass for Truth

By Lauren Beth Eisenberg

In the beginning, I naively believed that the biggest legal issue facing memoirists was prudent decision-making regarding what to say about other people. The rest, I thought, from a legal perspective, was easy – it’s your life. After all, who is a better expert on a person’s life than that person?

The critically acclaimed author Vivian Gornick told a group of students at a writing seminar two years ago that personal narrative is not a literal transcription of what happened; it’s not a confession or police report. It’s a composed work based on actuality. Memoir, she said, is not the events themselves, it’s what you do with the raw material. But where does an author draw the line in adjusting truth for literary purposes? Ms. Gornick answered this question with the cryptic statement: “There is a difference between literary fraud and not telling the truth, or even giving the facts and not telling the truth.”

Enter James Frey, whose blockbuster memoir *A Million Little Pieces* turned out to be exaggerated, embellished — containing episodes that never happened. The memoir had turned into fictoir.

Two more memoirs were exposed as falsified in recent months: Margaret Jones’ *Love and Consequences: A Memoir of Hope and Survival*, and Misha Defonseca’s *Misha: A Memoire of the Holocaust Years*. These latest offenders have caused James Frey to pale by comparison — because their stories are completely fabricated.

The spate of incidents regarding dishonesty in memoirs paints an uncertain landscape for the genre. Will the recent violations of the premise of memoir as nonfiction thwart worthy efforts by other writers? Dedicated writers still have personal stories to bring to the reading public, not as an act of ego-stoking, but as an act of social conscience. Will such memoirs be met by

increasing suspicion among both consumers and the publishing industry, squelching the marriage of truth and art that the genre represents? Where does the burden of proof lie at this point? What happens when the memoirist chronicles a story for which there is no immutable evidence? An author can prove official legal events, life-cycle events in the family, academic and professional credentials, but not behavior behind closed doors — which is often the crux of a landmark memoir.

Pulitzer Prize winning memoirist Frank McCourt said, at a recent appearance in Baltimore, that the author chooses how to tell the story, and often writers choose not to tell the whole story, in order to cast themselves in a favorable light. Yet that fails to address the inverse problem of providing parts of the story that never actually happened, and the question persists: What unattainable demands may be levied against aspiring memoirists in the future? And how do we balance that against the need to separate truth from fiction, and eliminate the trend toward fictoir?

Nan Talese, publisher of Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces*, says that there is no reliable method of proof in dealing with memoirs, because they are works composed of unverifiable memories. But she warns that writers should put forth their best efforts to be true in their portrayal of events. “The lies one tells most often bring harm to the teller, not the reader.”



Lauren Beth Eisenberg is coordinator of the MWA Creative Nonfiction Critique Group, and the author of a memoir-in-progress on abuse in middle-class American families.

To NaNo or Not to NaNo ...

By Mary Stojak



National Novel Writing Month

"To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time."

--Leonard Bernstein

www.nanowrimo.org

Every November, a wild group of wannabe writers—and real writers—take up the NaNoWriMo gauntlet. Can they write a 50,000 word novel in thirty days? That's the question posed by the Office of Letters and Lights, a non-profit located in Oakland, California that's been hosting National Novel Writing Month for ten years.

Even though I was considered a prolific student at Hopkins, I wasn't prepared for the constant pressure of producing day in and day out. Let's see: 50,000 divided by 30 is 1666.6666666666 — hey, let's just say it's 1667 words per day. That's not so much, right? Except the first year I participated, I decided to join NaNoWriMo on October 31, 2007. I had no outline, not a clue on November 1st what I was writing about.

I don't know what you do when creatively you're running

on empty. Me? I surf the web. The obvious place to start was Nanowrimo.org. That's where you set up your user name. They also have numerous blogs. I wasted a fair amount of time perusing the site. But one string of entries made me think about stream of consciousness – you know like Virginia Wolf and Tolstoy. I decided to write the part of a guy in my first NaNoWriMo attempt, although later I switched over to his adversary, the "Terrifying Miss Bascom." That became the title of that book, and I hit my 50,000 word marker after turning my staid Miss Bascom into a flower child. Who would have known?

In 2008, I wasn't going to take any chances. It took me two weeks to get myself in gear the previous year. I would write an outline this time around. What a novel idea! I hadn't written an outline for anything since writing term papers in college. My son had said that he thought I should try a young adult novel this time. The 50,000 word size would accommodate a YA more easily than an adult novel. (I'm still trying to finish *The Terrifying Miss Bascom*.) With the help of the outline I was off to a rip-roaring start, and the writing was more coherent for at least the first third of the book. Then, even though I knew where I wanted the story to go, I kind of dried up until I stumbled past 50,000 words on November 30.

Very stupidly, I'd signed up to have my word count added into a word war between Maryland and Texas for 2008. Every day, I received emails about how I had to write more; 50,000 words wasn't enough. It didn't matter what I wrote because they weren't looking for quality. They had strategies, such as keeping in passages that you'd edited out of the text, and repeating words, including writing that had nothing to do with the book in progress. Although racing the clock was fun, I wasn't happy about the idea of manufacturing word count. The fun went out of the end of the month for me. After all, my goal is to publish books, not just write them.

In 2008 the NaNo writers produced 1,643,343,993 words. It does make you think: How many real draft novels were in those words? Luckily, I think there are more than I'd

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SOLIDARITY SELLS: Enlist Friends to Help Promote Your Book

By Cynthia Polansky

You work together, play together. Why not promote your book together? Friends are often an overlooked and underutilized resource for book promotion. We're often reluctant to impose, and despite sincere offers to help toot their talented friend's horn, they may balk at the reality of time-consuming marketing campaigns. But what if you offered willing friends simple promotional tasks that produce tangible results? Here are ten guilt-free ways to help them board the promotional bandwagon.

Go public: Don't have any librarian friends? Make some! Get to know your local public librarians and enlist their help. Create a postcard message encouraging the recipient to visit the library for the book. Ask check-out librarians to slip a few inside your book whenever it's borrowed. If the library doesn't own your title, submit a press packet – including a handful of postcards – to the acquisitions librarian.

Go virtual: In your e-newsletter, ask recipients to send a "tell a friend" email. Provide text they can copy-and-paste into a new email (e.g., Check out my author friend's new blog, Crossing Polansky. Here's the opt-in link to her mailing list). Email from a known recipient is less likely to end up in someone's spam folder, and a personal recommendation carries more weight than an email blast.

Go home: If any friends sell merchandise at home parties, ask if they'd be willing to insert your bookmarks in the merchandise catalogs. Or put together a promo item – such as a small bag of candy with your book's business card attached – to tuck into each merchandise bag before your friend distributes

the orders. Show your appreciation by offering to host a party at your own home.

Go crazy: You may have a think-tank right in your own backyard. Ask friends over for a brainstorming party – nothing like a little wine to get the ideas flowing! A word of caution: before you solicit their help, take stock of



what's going on in your friends' lives right now. Someone in the midst of a divorce or training for a triathlon has enough on her plate without adding your book promotion. Solid friendships are as precious as a spot on the NY Times bestseller list, and a lot more enduring. Remember to return the favor every chance you get. After all, isn't that what friends are for?

You may have a think-tank right in your own backyard!

An extended version of the article can be found on John Kremer's book promotion site.

Cynthia Polansky is the author of two novels and four nonfiction books (written as Cynthia P. Gallagher). She has terrific friends who continue to provide support while she works on her next book, WHIFF: Human Aroma Through the Ages. Visit her websites at www.cynthiapolansky.com, www.crossingpolansky.blogspot.com, and www.cynthiapolansky.com

Borderlands Press Boot Camp for Short Fiction and Novels

By Nancy O. Greene

Borderlands Press Boot Camp, founded by Thomas F. Monteleone and Elizabeth Monteleone, is a weekend writing workshop that takes place in Towson, Maryland every year. I attended the boot camp this past January along with several other MWA members, among them Paul Lagasse; Edith Goldman; and Lauren B. Davis.

As writers we sometimes need another pair of eyes— or two or 20! — to help us get to the core of our work. Sometimes we may focus too much on one thing or another, and Borderlands is a no nonsense workshop designed to get to the meat of a writer's abilities and weaknesses in telling his or her stories. The instructors are well-known authors, editors, and publishers, primarily from the fields of horror and science fiction. The workshop leaders for the January 2009 session were Thomas F. Monteleone, Mort Castle, Gary Braunbeck, F. Paul Wilson, Elizabeth Massie, Doug Winter, Ginjer Buchanan, Jamie Levine, and weekend assistant Norman Prentiss.

Prior to the boot camp, each attendee receives several stories or first chapters to critique, depending upon to which session they have applied.

Feedback I received from the workshop was indispensable, and other participants expressed the same sentiment. Aside from the workshops, we were also treated to a Friday night session in which all of the instructors introduced themselves and laid out their views about the publishing industry.

Borderlands Press Boot Camp is open to applicants interested in any genre, and the instructors focus on the craft of writing and getting published. Writers of speculative fiction will especially gain insight from the experiences of the teachers in their respective fields.

The next Boot Camp will be in January of 2010. Applications are currently being accepted. Borderlands has also started a brand new workshop for high school students. Young writers wanting to hone their skills at the early stages of their talent are encouraged to apply.

If anyone has their doubts about the extensive benefits of a weekend workshop, it's worth noting that past participants have gone on to publish short stories and novels in a wide variety of fields. It also offers a wonderful chance to network and make new friends in a stimulating environment. To find out more, visit www.borderlandspress.com.

To NaNo or Not to NaNo

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imagined. Ally Peltier sent me an email during November about people who had their NaNo novels published. The blogs were buzzing about Sarah Gruen, a writer who'd started a national bestseller, *Water for Elephants*, during NaNoWriMo. There's a list of NaNo writers who have had their NaNoWriMo novels published. Something like 29 of them. I wouldn't mind being number 30.

Using the structure of NaNoWriMo is like using many of

the other tools that we have: write-ins for new ideas; talks about marketing and websites to help us create those platforms that everybody seems to be talking about; contests to encourage us. I'll be smarter in 2009 — I won't get sidetracked. At least I'll try not to get side-tracked. Okay, so I'll probably get side-tracked, but I can't think of a better way to jump-start my old lady creative engine. There's something about a ticking clock.....

Mary Stojak is steadily working on her next novel.



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MWA is a non-profit association dedicated to the art, craft and business of writing. Both professionals and aspiring writers are welcome. Annual dues are \$35; student \$25. Published items remain property of the author. MWA also publishes e-Newswire, a compilation of opportunities and achievements of interest to writers.

MWA Meetings, Events and Announcements

Wednesday, July 8, 7:30-9:30

The Maryland Writers' Association presents poet and travel writer Karen Swenson speaking on "Tibet in Prose & Poetry."

In the annex building at the rear of the Chesapeake Arts Center, 194 Hammonds Lane, Brooklyn Park, MD 21225.

Tuesday, July 14, 6:30

The Annapolis Chapter invites writers and would-be writers in Annapolis and Anne Arundel County to join them at their first monthly meeting. Program to be announced (check the MWA website for updates). At Ahh, Coffee!, 1015 Bay Ridge Ave, Eastport Shopping Center, Annapolis 21403, 410-990- 9111.