

The Writers Network News, Happiness, November 2019

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The Writers Network News
No Rules; Just Write!
Editor: Bobbie Christmas

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MEET FELLOW WRITERS

Do you live in or visit metro Atlanta? Sign up for notices of local (but sporadic) meetings today! Send your name and email address to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com).

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Some links in this newsletter may be shortened with help from www.tinyurl.com, a free service that converts long links to short ones.

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Writer's Quote of the Month

You have reached the pinnacle of success as soon as you become uninterested in money, compliments, or publicity. -Thomas Wolfe, novelist

Thomas Clayton Wolfe was an American novelist of the early twentieth century. Wolfe wrote four lengthy novels as well as many short stories, dramatic works, and novellas. He is known for mixing highly original, poetic, rhapsodic, and impressionistic prose with autobiographical writing.

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ONE: FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: HAPPINESS

Dear Fellow Writers:

For decades, now, I've tended to be a happy person. My upbeat default status has gotten me into trouble at times, but I wouldn't change a thing.

Years ago I had a friend who tended to find fault in almost everything. She complained that her employees were stealing from her or not doing their jobs well enough. She moved three times in just a few years, never happy with her living quarters. She broke up with her longtime boyfriend because he wasn't good enough for her and then whined and complained when he met and married someone else. She had a great sense of humor and was a highly intelligent and creative woman, plus we enjoyed working out together, so I continued our friendship regardless of her negativity. Eventually she confronted me and said she felt that I had been lying to her for years. "Lying? About what?" I asked.

She said, "You always act like you're happy. I know you can't be that happy. You never tell me about the bad things in your life."

I tried to explain that I was happy for real and that I don't wish to dwell on the bad things that happen. Yes, I've gone through two divorces and had other relationships that ended. I've had medical challenges. I've lost people who were close to me. I'd rather not concentrate on those things, though, when other things are more cheerful to talk about.

She couldn't accept my attitude, she said, and thus ended a friendship that had lasted about ten years.

Did I grieve over the loss of a friend? No. I have other friends, friends with positive attitudes.

I know someone whose marriage failed, leaving her with a daughter to raise on her own. Although she could land a new job here and there, she never liked her boss or coworkers, and she complained about the work, so none of her jobs lasted long enough for her to dig herself out of her financial quagmire. She's had to rely on support from relatives and friends her entire life, and if one withdraws

financial support, she cuts the person out of her life. Isn't it unsurprising when bad things happen to negative people?

What's my point, you ask, and what has it to do with writing? Alas, until I hit around age forty, I wrote a great deal of poetry, almost always when I was feeling down. Whenever I tried to write happy poetry, it came out pedantic. When I hit around age fifty, though, I stopped writing poetry almost altogether. I had ended an unhappy marriage, left a job bloated with corporate bureaucracy, moved to be nearer family for the first time in decades, and started my own editing business doing what I loved. I had taken control of my life, and happiness prevailed. I had no reason or need to write sad poetry. Who wants to read that stuff anyway?

Along the same lines, no one wants to read a book that has no uplifting point, no happy resolution to a problem, or no redeeming qualities in the main character(s). I once edited a book that was mostly the author's venting about her sad situation in life, but by the end of the book, she still had the same problems and was in the same unsatisfactory situation. She had done nothing to crawl out of her depressing life and make something of herself, but she blamed everything and everyone else for her situation. I had to tell the author that such a book has no market. Who wants to read about people who have not improved their circumstances despite setbacks? Hm. Maybe one person. That friend of mine who found negativity wherever she turned. One reader does not a bestseller make.

Instead of writing sad stories, write stories of struggles that end with the main character overcoming the obstacles. People want to read those stories. We should also live those stories. If you haven't found what you love and what makes you happy by the time you're in your fifties, it's time to search for your passion, find your inner peace, and write your own happy story.

What obstacles have you overcome? Have you thought about writing about them? November is NoMoWriMo, National Novel Writing Month, so get started! (See more information on NoMoWriMo in this newsletter.)

In the meantime, if you like happy stories (and who doesn't?), you'll love the book that just hit the market. It's titled SENIORHOOD ISN'T FOR SISSIES. I have two stories in it myself about funny encounters I've had. To order it see <https://www.acutebydesign.com/product-page/seniorhood-isn-t-for-sissies>.

Yours in writing,

Bobbie Christmas [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [bzebra@aol.com](mailto:bzebra@aol.com)

Author of two editions of WRITE IN STYLE, owner of Zebra Communications, director of The Writers Network, coordinator of the Florida Writers Association Editors Helping Writers service, and senior editor of Enjoy Cherokee Magazine

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TWO: ASK THE BOOK DOCTOR

FEE OR FREE?

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: How can I go from free to fee writing?

A: I could simply say to go from free to fee writing, get work from businesses that pay for writing, but it's not that simple, as you have learned.

Many writers began by writing free articles, but successful writers did it with a purpose in mind. They used those early low-pay and free articles to grow their freelance business into a lucrative one, and I'll tell you how to do the same.

First of all, never feel bad about writing for free or low pay; it's your decision, not your fate. Once you build your reputation, you can turn down free or low-paying jobs if want to, or you can accept them when you have the time and inclination. Like those accomplished writers did, you can accept free or low-pay work with a goal in mind. Handled correctly those jobs not only help you give back to the community, but they also can lead to a well-paying freelance career or even, as was my case, a full-time job writing.

Here's how to start: regardless of whether you write things for free or low pay, retain a copy of everything that gets published, either in print or on the Internet. We call these published pieces "clips," because originally they were clipped out of magazines, although now they may appear on the Internet. Those free and low-paying jobs not only gain you valuable experience, but also they allow you to build a solid portfolio of clips.

When I was in my twenties, I began establishing myself as a writer by writing and editing newsletters for charitable and educational organizations to which I belonged. After I gathered enough clips for a portfolio, I used the portfolio to land a full-time job with a weekly newspaper, without revealing that I had previously written only for free. That fact was not important. The clips were the important thing. They demonstrated my ability to write a good article with a captivating lead, a strong middle, and a satisfying conclusion.

All the years I worked as a journalist at the newspaper and then at progressively better paying jobs, I continued to freelance on the side, using my growing portfolio of clips as proof of my ability to write compelling copy. In this way I used my free work to land a good-paying job and then continued to build a substantial freelance business on the side before I ever left my full-time job to freelance full time. I have therefore supported myself for almost my entire adult life.

When I first tried to land paying freelance jobs, I thought the way to do it was to query publishers with an idea in hopes they would buy it. I quickly learned a more successful method. I developed a personal motto: "I'll write anything for money." With that motto in mind I met with publishers, showed off my portfolio, and said I was willing to write on any subject the publisher wished to assign me. The publishers I worked with tended to have a ready list of articles they wanted to assign, so I often landed one or more assignments on the spot and sometimes started an arrangement that lasted for years. As a result I wrote on the widest variety of subjects that anyone could have imagined, and I learned a great deal about each subject along the way. Forget about "write what you know" when it comes to nonfiction. I've now written about a wide range of subjects about which I knew nothing when I began. If you are willing to write on any subject, you can learn about the subject by researching it on the Internet and interviewing folks familiar with the topic. The Internet has made research much easier than when I began freelancing. I used to have to drive to a library to look up subjects I had been assigned.

Although I have progressed into editing books and magazines and no longer seek freelance writing assignments, I still write a free

article now and then as a way of giving back. Those early free articles led to a satisfying lifetime career, and I'll never regret writing for free.

Getting back to that vital portfolio of clips, nowadays some publishers prefer to see portfolios online, so be sure to have a website that displays some of your best published works. No matter what, websites have become an essential tool for anyone in business, and trust me, freelance writing is a business and a tough one, to boot. You must always treat it like a business. Don't assume the website will generate business for you by itself, though. Use it instead as a web-based portfolio, a place where you can send publishers to view your published works.

When I left the corporate world to freelance full-time starting in 1992, I approached professional newsletter companies and trade magazine publishers with my portfolio and got work immediately from both. The trade magazines paid more per article, but the newsletter companies assigned more articles. The combination kept me fed and sheltered while I worked with the materials I loved the most: words.

Remember that as a freelance writer you must constantly market yourself, because almost no client lasts forever. Editors change, publications close down, and work dries up, so if you are not always looking for new clients, you will eventually find yourself out of work. To get leads, research the Internet for local opportunities, subscribe to newsletters that lists markets, or view websites that list jobs for freelance writers. Some sites let you bid on jobs, but those sites lead to low-paying jobs. If you have an opening in your schedule, though, take those low-paying jobs until you get higher-paying ones.

Even though printed periodicals have dwindled in number, other opportunities have arisen. Companies need copy for their websites. (Learn about Search Engine Optimization—SEO—if you want to write Web copy). Businesses and organizations need essays and blogs to post on their websites. Query all the websites, periodicals, and other paying markets that appeal to you. Never stop looking. If you hone your writing skills, remain flexible about the subject material, and approach publishers in a professional manner, you will soon go from free to fee.

As an added piece of information, you may need to use your negotiating skills, especially with companies that do not already have a set price per word, hour, or piece. Going from free to fee is one thing, but getting paid a fee that's worthy of your time is more important than merely getting paid. Fee negotiation is a detailed subject I may address in a future column.

Even when you are accustomed to getting paid for your work, though, you may find times when you want to charge less or work for free, perhaps to help a nonprofit that speaks to your heart. Don't hesitate to charge less or work for free when you are following your passion and helping people and organizations that make the world a better place.

Bobbie Christmas, book editor, author of *Write In Style: Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing*, and owner of Zebra Communications, will answer your questions, too. Send them to [Bobbie@zebraeditor.com](mailto:Bobbie@zebraeditor.com) or [BZebra@aol.com](mailto:BZebra@aol.com). Read Bobbie's Zebra Communications blog at <https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/>.

For much more information on these subjects and hundreds of others of vital importance to writers, order *PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS*, a Book Doctor's Desk Reference Book at <http://tinyurl.com/4ptjnr>.

Bobbie Christmas's award-winning second edition of *WRITE IN STYLE: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing* is available from Amazon at <https://tinyurl.com/y7ppcdkd> or buy it directly at <https://tinyurl.com/y7p9xkbb>.  
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### THREE: SUBJECTS OF INTEREST TO WRITERS

#### MEMBERS WRITE

Aw, guys, thank you for all the praise. Look at the nice things readers have said this month:

"I love reading your newsletter. Thank you so much. I realize it takes time to put it together, just for us readers." –Rosemarie Perry

"I've been a subscriber since I met Mary Ellen [Gavin]. She said that I needed to 'hang on your every word'...so I have for the last three years now! Thanks for providing such a great service! –Cathy Oasheim

"Excellent newsletter," Richard Prescott wrote, and he added, "I have some thoughts on our egos [mentioned in the October newsletter], so please step aside and let me on the soap box." He listed the following:

1. Ego also comes into play when I submit a piece to a critique group and have not built up the calluses needed to handle critiques. It hurts my ego, but when I have made the suggested changes and see the improvement, I learn that other people's "eyes" can be helpful.
2. When people critique a piece and suggest many changes and then tell you to start over, I think it is the ego of the person giving the critique that gets in the way. This actually happened to me on Scribophile. I learned nothing from one person's critique. Fortunately Scribophile gives writers the ability to block others, and I took advantage of that ability.
3. I always heard news reporters should never make the story about themselves and that their opinions do not matter in a strict news piece. I see that rule/guide constantly broken on both sides of the fence. I find this tendency very annoying and do not rely on certain outlets for news, because they contain a lot of opinion.

Also on the subject of ego, Renea Winchester responded to my comment, "Why bother to write, if you don't want anyone else to read your work?" She said, "I literally shouted: YES! Preach it." She added, "This is why I have stepped away from trying to help fledgling self-published authors, because they just don't understand the community of writing, because they don't reciprocate any goodwill gifted them, and because their ego is way more than I, or any reader, can tolerate."

I responded, "Thank you for your comment, Renea. Before I started my editing business thirty years ago, I critiqued and edited friends' work for free. Few of them wanted to listen to what I had to say, even after asking for my opinion. I learned my lesson. What I found was that when people pay me, they listen to me. Now I work with many folks who want to self-publish, and most do want to learn, so they pay me for my decades of experience and knowledge."

On a different subject, Natalie Reid wrote, "One small correction to your list of U.S./UK spelling variants. My expert on UK English—a man who won the Whitbread Prize for his first novel and who for years was the assistant editor of the Evening Standard (London)—says that both 'amongst' and 'amidst' are now outdated. Only older academics now use them. I thought you'd like to know."

I did want to know, so thank you, Natalie. I'll update my information for sure.

Moving along, "One specific item I want to address," wrote Pam Rauber, "is to the responses regarding the use of clichés. While I do agree not to use them, I have to disagree with the discussion of the barefoot woman investigating strange noises. You posted: 'Libby wrote, "One cliché that I hate to see is when someone is barefoot, that they padded. "When Mary heard a noise in the garden, she padded down the stairs.'" Of course no book should have a barefoot woman in a nightgown investigating strange noises in the dark. That is a plot cliché.'

"Now if you're commenting on the use of the verb 'padded,' perhaps that may be considered cliché, but I also took your response that the act of investigating was cliché. I'm a mystery/thriller writer. Some time ago I researched this very subject for a scene in one of my books. I asked personal friends and even posted a poll on Facebook. Believe it or not (cliché), there were many responses acknowledging people did get out of bed barefoot and in sleepwear to investigate. Only a couple of women said they would call 911. Many people (I shudder at the thought) actually admitted retrieving a gun from the bedside table. Some grabbed bats. What was sort of surprising was the number of females who reached for a gun. I say 'sort of,' because it's another subject I've researched...women and guns. It's that Women Empowered has now become a fashion statement."

I responded, "Thank you, Pam, for your enlightening information on investigating a possible home invasion after climbing out of bed. We were referring to the use of the term padded, as if that's the only thing people can do in their bare feet. The word is a cliché when linked to walking barefoot."

Another Pam, this one Pam Lord, wrote, "[Your newsletter said,] 'Give your ego free reign.' Errrrr. . .rein' maybe? if I give my ego a kingdom to rule, it will be insufferable! Lol." [See my response below.]

Pam went on to speak of what she called "a bit of online smut that built up lovely tension and passion until the protagonist had a thunderous organism." She adds it was a "hilarious mood killer as I imagined an amoeba quivering in ecstasy."

I responded, "I actually intended 'reign' as a play on words. Let ego rule, indeed, when writing memoirs. Maybe it didn't come off as I intended, though. Phooey. I loved the organism story, though. May we all have rousing organisms!"

Jo Ann Glim writes about her book, "That day started like any other, but by lunchtime I was fighting for my very life. A stroke is like that. You don't see it coming. There was nothing to do but let nature take its course. No guarantee I'd live, much less return to full health. This story is written to offer encouragement to stroke survivors, hope to their family members and caretakers, and understanding to medical professionals or anyone interested in knowing what it's like to be trapped within your own body. Be prepared to travel through the terror and frustration of paralysis to a place of peace and gratitude where life resides with hope. If you know someone who would benefit from this book, order it from booksellers everywhere. Just ask for it by name, TRAPPED WITHIN."

Last but not least, I get to brag. Two of my stories about my funny and odd encounters with men have been accepted for inclusion in SENIORHOOD ISN'T FOR SISSIES. To order the book, go to <https://www.acutebydesign.com/product-page/seniorhood-isn-t-for-sissies>.

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EDITING TIP

Every day/Everyday

Every day: Each day. We milk the cows every day.

Everyday: Ordinary, commonplace, routine. We wear everyday clothes when we perform our chores.

(Excerpt from PURGE YOUR PROSE OF PROBLEMS, a book doctor's desk reference, available only at ZebraEditor.com.)

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The Nobel Prize in Literature 2019 was awarded to Peter Handke "for an influential work that with linguistic ingenuity has explored the periphery and the specificity of human experience." Handke's best-known works include the novel THE GOALKEEPER'S ANXIETY AT THE PENALTY KICK, the play OFFENDING THE AUDIENCE and his screenplay for Wim Wenders' WINGS OF DESIRE.

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EASY ACCESS TO BOBBIE'S BLOGS

Read creative writing tips as well as some of my personal experiences. Access the Write In Style blog here:

<https://www.zebraeditor.com/blog/>

On the other hand, for my relationship-related blog, see my blog titled "Neurotica: Crazy Stories of Love, Lust, and Letting Go." If you like to read about disastrous dates and ridiculous relationships, I've got a ton of them, and they all happened to me. Some are funny, some are a little sexy, some are sad, and all true. My latest addition is a little scary, because it happened when I was only six years old. Read it here: <https://neuroticastories.blogspot.com>.

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NaNoWriMo: National Novel Writing Month

<https://www.nanowrimo.org>

National Novel Writing Month began in 1999 as a daunting but straightforward challenge: to write 50,000 words of a novel during the thirty days of November.

Now, each year on November 1, hundreds of thousands of people around the world begin to write, determined to end the month with 50,000 words of a brand-new novel. You may know this mass creative explosion by the name National Novel Writing Month, or NaNoWriMo—but that's not all that NaNoWriMo is. NaNoWriMo is a nonprofit organization that supports writing fluency and education. But it's also a social network for writers like LinkedIn is for job professionals.

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Follow my adventures, opinions, and observations: <http://www.facebook.com/bobbie.christmas>

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Get news, writing-related cartoons, immediate updates, and other good stuff for writers. Like and follow Zebra Communications at <https://tinyurl.com/ydyn3pcu>.

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CMOS ONLINE Q&A

This month someone posed the following question to The Chicago Manual of Style Online:

Q. Does Chicago style capitalize animal breeds such as "pit bull" and "goldendoodle?"

To get the answer to this question and many more based on Chicago style, go to <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/latest.html>.

THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE sets the standard in book publishing for issues such as punctuation, capitalization, and much more. If you write fiction or nonfiction books, you will want to know about Chicago style or be sure to use a professional book editor intimately familiar with Chicago style.

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BOBBIE'S TEN COMMANDMENTS OF CREATIVITY

New report available! If you want a copy, send me an email: bzebra@aol.com.

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Do you think you are good at fact-checking? Test yourself and learn more about what happens when we fact-check material. <https://tinyurl.com/y3gam9fq>

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FOUR: CONTESTS, AGENTS, AND MARKETS

RE:FICTION MAGAZINE  
<https://refiction.com/>

Re:Fiction Magazine runs monthly writing contests that give a \$50 prize to the winner. It also features interviews and featured authors and pays writers for articles. See the website for details.

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MENTAL HEALTH STORIES

OC87RecoveryDiaries.org can be a place to share your mental health recovery story to inspire and connect you with others who might learn from your experience.

If you have a story to tell and don't know how to share it, a great place to start is by commenting on the different entries already on our website and social media channels. Share your mental health recovery story. Talk to the community. Brainstorm ideas. Make connections. That's what this website is all about. Please send all inquiries to our team at submissions@oc87recoverydiaries.org. All content must be original and unpublished anywhere else, including personal blogs. We offer a \$250 honorarium for accepted posts, payable upon publication. Authors are paid via check. For complete information see <https://oc87recoverydiaries.org/your-story/>.

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AGENT SEEKS CLIENTS

Ann Leslie Tuttle joined Dystel, Goderich & Bourret in 2017 after working for twenty years at Harlequin Books, where she worked on an extensive and varied list of bestselling and award-winning titles in romance and women's fiction. Helping to grow the careers of established and debut writers has always been Ann Leslie's passion. Ann Leslie is especially seeking women's fiction (e.g. relationships, family sagas, historical fiction and psychological thrillers) romance (e.g. romantic comedies, medical romance and contemporaries) and Southern Gothics on the adult fiction side as well as Middle Grade fiction and narrative nonfiction. To reach Ann, send a query letter to [atuttle@dystel.com](mailto:atuttle@dystel.com), and include the full query in the body of the email, not as an attachment. Including a sample of the first twenty-five pages of your manuscript (or the closest chapter break) in the body of the email, below your query letter.

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BOOK PUBLISHER OPEN TO SUBMISSIONS
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Please submit your work by clicking the Submittable button on our website. To avoid immediate rejection, read the information about what to submit and in what format.

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Do YOU have news for The Writers Network News? Send it in the body of an email to Bobbie@zebraeditor.com or bzebra@aol.com.

Deadline: 18th of each month.

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Send a copy of this newsletter to all your writing friends. Tell them to join The Writers Network F-R-E-E by visiting

<https://www.zebraeditor.com/> and signing up for The Writers Network News.

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The Writers Network News: a newsletter for writers everywhere. No Rules; Just Write!

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