

The Writers Network News, End of an Era, January 2020

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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

"Proust took months to write one sentence, and he's unreadable. Joyce didn't use punctuation, and he's unreadable. Don't kid yourself. You can be unreadable a lot easier than that." —Alan Weiss

Alan Weiss's prolific publishing includes over five hundred articles and sixty books, including his bestseller, *Million Dollar Consulting* (from McGraw-Hill) now in its 25th year and fifth edition. His newest is *Threescore and More: Applying the Assets of Maturity, Wisdom, and Experience for Personal and Professional Success* (Routledge, 2018). His books have been on the curricula at Villanova, Temple University, and the Wharton School of Business, and have been translated into fifteen languages.

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One: From the Editor's Desk: END OF AN ERA

Dear Fellow Writers:

I could state the obvious, that the new year is the end of a decade and a beginning of a new one, but that's not what today's message is about. It's about something much more personal. For the first time in a quarter of a century I did not give a party for my family on Christmas Day.

When I moved into my current house twenty-five or twenty-six years ago, I started a new tradition for my family and called it Christmas Day at the Christmas House. My decision to give a family party came about from an unfortunate circumstance. Although we might have gathered at my father's house, after he had been married to his second wife for a few years, the woman who never let us call her our stepmother refused to let the family gather at what she considered her house. Undaunted by her coldness, I took it upon myself to give the annual gathering, and although I always invited her, she never came. I considered it her loss; our family was large and loving. Year after year family members traveled from across the country and sometimes from as far as Australia to be present for Christmas Day at the Christmas House.

As a single woman I schlepped all the holiday decorations and serving pieces out of storage, up the stairs, and into the living room. I rearranged furniture. I cooked a turkey and side dishes. I bought a large ham too. I also prepared copious snacks, appetizers, hot apple cider, and two kinds of tea—sweet and unsweetened, and much more. It took two or three days of preparation and one or two days of recovery afterward, but whenever I saw my siblings, cousins, and friends enjoying each other, the warmth in my heart made me forget the exhaustion in my feet.

This year, though, I'm in my third quarter of life. I've endured medical challenges that have left me less capable than I used to be. I don't have the energy I used to have. Nevertheless I sent out invitations, planning to undertake the entire event once again. My sister responded right away that she would be here, but she was the only one. I sent invitations to friends and family members numbering in the dozens, and only one person said she would definitely be here. I assume that the day had lost its charm for others. Many now travel elsewhere over the holidays. Many can no longer travel the way they used to. Some might have been waiting to see if something better

came along. I had to cancel the event. A family tradition died. The end of an era.

I have mixed emotions. I know how exhausting and expensive the event was for me. Still, what will bring my family together? I don't know. I just know that it's up to a younger person now. I was only forty-nine or fifty, a spring chicken, when I took on the duties. I hope some young adult in the family starts a new tradition. In the meantime, I had a relaxing, quiet Christmas Day. I did a good bit of editing, but I balanced the day with a Vietnamese lunch, some TV, a short nap, and playtime with my dog; not a bad tradition to start. It's the end of an era, but it's the beginning of a new one.

Happy New Year, Ya'll!

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

ALL ABOUT BALANCE

By Bobbie Christmas

Q: What is the necessary balance between dialogue (that shows) and exposition (that tells but advances the story)?

A: Exposition is usually background information and rarely advances a story; it halts it. Perhaps you mean narrative that advances the story. If that's the intention of your question, then if your novel is about 70 percent dialogue, 20 percent narrative, and 10 percent exposition, you'll be on the right track for keeping contemporary publishers and readers happy.

Q: I'm working on a novel in which the characters travel to a country where they do not speak the language, so they hire a guide/translator. I want to show the experience through the eyes of a foreigner and have it ring true, but obviously I don't want the reader to get bored by my constantly describing an action or tone of a speaker and then having it translated by the guide/translator character. I feel like I'm finding a good balance and keeping it readable, but I would really love any advice on how best to handle this issue.

A: You're on the right track to think in terms of moderation and balance. An occasional foreign word or phrase that the translator explains would be interesting, but giving the foreign sentence and English translation every time would bore readers. I like the idea of the native performing the action and the translator explaining. I'd be captivated, for example if a scene showed a native waving his hands and pointing and the translator saying, "He says we can't catch a taxi here; we have to walk down to the next corner." As a creative writer, though, I would not use the same method of showing the speaker's action and telling the translation every time. Always avoid patterns and look for balance in the use of each method. Sometimes the foreigner can try to guess what the speaker is trying to say. Sometimes the translation can be given in narrative. Sometimes it should be word for word and at other times paraphrased. Vary the techniques, use a comfortable balance, and the content will stay interesting to readers.

Q: How can I get away from factual writing and make it humorous?

A: You might still be able to write about facts that are funny. Logic may have no place in humor, but illogical situations that are real can be hilarious.

On the other hand, if you want to move away from the factual, the issue may be one of balancing between the right brain and the left brain. The right side of our brain is allegedly the creative side and is spontaneous and clever, likely to find humor in things. The left side of our brains supposedly thinks in a more organized, linear fashion, wanting to make logic out of everything and sometimes fill in all the details.

When we talk spontaneously, we generally draw on the right side of our brain, but when we write, we have to think of all the details that go into writing, such as sentence structure, paragraph structure, grammar, punctuation, word choice, word order, and so forth. Humor, on the other hand, requires setup, timing, and initiation. It spurns wordiness, metaphors, similes, adjectives, and adverbs. When we write, though, we want to add all those things. For that reason, try dictating your stories, rather than writing them.

Use a digital recorder or voice-to-text and record yourself speaking as if you were telling your humorous stories to your friends. When you analyze the results afterward, you may find you have captured the perfect balance and an original humorous tone without the wordiness.

CORRECTION

Several people wrote to me and took exception to the following item I had in a previous "Ask the Book Doctor" column:

Q: How do I write Biology 101 in dialogue?

A: Here's an example: "Jerry, what time does biology one oh one start?" Note that biology is capitalized only if it is the first word in the sentence.

Whoops! Folks reminded me that Biology 101 is the title of a course and should be capitalized. I was concentrating on the one-oh-one aspect, which should be written out, and I failed to realize my own error. Okay, here goes, folks. The course description, biology, is not usually capitalized in running copy. Titles of courses, however, would be. Here are some correct examples: "What time does Biology one oh one start?" The biology class starts at ten o'clock. The Biology 101 class starts at ten o'clock.

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

#### EDITING TIP: POSSESSIVES: PROPER NOUNS

Chicago style, the style used in books, differs from the style we see in newspapers and magazines, especially when it comes to the use of possessive proper nouns.

The general CMOS rule (adding 's to create a single possessive or adding an apostrophe to create a plural possessive) covers proper names as well as common names, including most names of any length ending in sibilants (s or sh sounds): Burns's poems, Marx's theories, Berlioz's opera, the Rosses' and the Williamses' lands, General Nogu's troops, Jefferson Davis's home, Dickens's novels, the Joneses' reputation

THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE reversed its position on what used to be exceptions to this rule, so it now advocates the use of Jesus's and Moses's for possessive. It also prefers the consistency of using the same general rule for names ending in unpronounced s sounds as well. The marquis's mother, Albert Camus's novels

Chicago no longer recommends exceptions for proper classical names of two or more syllables that end in an eez sound. Now it's correct to use Euripides's tragedies, the Ganges's source, and Xerxes's armies.

Yes, you will see in newspapers and even magazines the use of s' alone, as in James' guitar or Jesus' prayers. Those periodicals follow AP style, which differs from Chicago style. If you write books, you should follow Chicago style.

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

#### ~~~~~ MERRIAM-WEBSTER'S WORD OF THE YEAR IS A STEP TOWARD AFFIRMING EQUALITY

Language is here to serve all of us, according to Merriam-Webster's word of the year.

#### <https://tinyurl.com/veslfav> ~~~~~ 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>.

#### ~~~~~ GOODREADS CHOICE AWARDS

The winners of the 11th Annual Goodreads Choice Awards, the only major book awards decided by readers, can be seen here:  
<https://tinyurl.com/tq69ryk>.

#### ~~~~~ IMPEACHMENT SPARKS WORD WAR

Quartz reports that the impeachment debate has sparked a linguistic war over the word "irregardless." See the link below, but despite what the article says, Merriam-Webster actually says the following about the word "irregardless." "Its reputation has not risen over the years, and it is still a long way from general acceptance. Use regardless instead."

#### <https://tinyurl.com/wg9pws8> ~~~~~ BE MY FRIEND ON FACEBOOK

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#### ~~~~~ CMOS ONLINE Q&A

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

Q. Is it appropriate to use 's for "is"? For example: John's running every day.

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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MANUSLIP TIME: KEEP THOSE EYES IN THOSE HEADS!

We writers all make mistakes, but when I find funny errors in manuscripts I'm editing, I save them and call them manuslips. WRITE IN STYLE uses many manuslips, and here's another one:

Jan's house was only a short walk away, and her eyes darted around as they made their way there. (As written, her eyes not only took trips darting all around but her eyes also made their way to the house.)

The corrected version might go something like this: Her house was only a short walk away, and Jan's attention darted around as the two women made their way there.

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END OF A PERIOD

Newsweek announced that the Apostrophe Protection Society has shut down. The organization would send lengthy and often comical letters scolding business owners for their improper use of English—urging them to fix the error in question to avoid further embarrassment. Its website also archived pictures of the most egregious offenders. Read the full article here:

<https://tinyurl.com/u4rjtkl>.

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WRITE IN STYLE: How to Use Your Computer to Improve Your Writing

Five-time-award-winning WRITE IN STYLE leaves grammar to the grammarians. Instead it uses humor and expertise to show writers how to strengthen their writing style and create a fresh voice. Available as an e-book or printed.

Order your copy today at <https://tinyurl.com/y8fp5nym>.

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Four: Contests, Agents, and Markets

CURIOSITIES WANTS YOUR PUNK SHORT STORIES

Submit your stories between January 1 and January 31, 2020, only!

This project is a comfortable two-headed beast at play in the curious and often dark corners of retropunk fiction. That means steampunk, dieselpunk, dreadpunk, bronzepunk, others that haven't even been invented yet punk ... but not atompunk. Sorry, space fans, we draw our line at Sputnik. About 2/3 of rejections are for "bad fit." We buy nonexclusive rights for fiction, cover & interior art, music & sound effects usage, and narration services.

Curiosities, a short story collection, is published two or three times a year and is available in digital and print on demand format

We buy original (4 cents/word) and reprint (penny/word) short stories.

Length up to 7,500 words.

We read blind. Anonymize your manuscript before sending it to [curiousgallery@gmail.com](mailto:curiousgallery@gmail.com) as a docx, or rtf. Remove headers and/or footers.

Use the format SUBMISSION: Your Story Title in the title bar of your email or it gets lost.

For detailed instructions see <https://gallerycurious.com/fiction/>.

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GEORGIA AUTHOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS (GAYA)

Nomination Fee

\$60 per nomination (Yes, you can nominate your own book)

Deadline

January 31, 2020

Eligibility

-Chapbooks and books published within the 2019 calendar year (January 1 to December 31). Reprints and second editions are not eligible.

-Books that underwent a selection process with the publisher, in which the author was subject to acceptance or rejection.

-Books that were professionally edited during the publication process and the book did not require the author to pay for the publication. Electronically published books on a major platform (Kindle, Nook, or iPad) are also eligible. For electronic books, a URL and ISBN must be provided as well as one print copy of the text for judges to review.

Books will not be considered nominated if any of these guidelines are not met and materials and payment are not postmarked by January 31, 2020. First- and second-place winners will be announced at the Georgia Author of the Year (GAYA) ceremony on June 13, 2020.

For full information see https://georgiawritersassociation.submittable.com/submit/152465/2020-georgia-author-of-the-year-awards-nomination-form?mc_cid=2dac55152e&mc_eid=3d20d50c69

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24-HOUR SHORT STORY CONTEST

Please note: You must be entered in the contest before the topic is posted in order to submit your story. You cannot write your story first and then enter the contest.

Your state may prohibit your participation in skills-based contests that have an entry fee. VOID WHERE PROHIBITED.

24-Hour Short Story Contest! - \$5.00

Select this to register for the Winter, 2020 24-Hour Short Story Contest. Start time is Saturday, January 11, 2020 at 12:00 p.m. (noon) central time. Held quarterly and limited to 500 entrants. Don't miss out on the ultimate source for creative stress...and tons of fun! More

than 85 prizes! (When you purchase this, you'll download a PDF file of the guidelines. There is also a link to them in the email receipt.)  
For full information and to enter go to <https://24hourshortstorycontest.com/>

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An independent publisher that has been around for many years, Seven Stories Press accepts unagented books and pays royalties the same as a traditional publisher would. It even has distribution to bookstores and libraries.

Please send a cover letter and two sample chapters, with a SASE or prepaid postcard for reply, to:

Acquisitions
Seven Stories Press
140 Watts Street
New York, NY 10013

If you would like your submission materials returned to you, please include sufficient postage as well. No email submissions will be read.

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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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