

The Diamond

Newsletter of the Ligonier Valley Writers

Summer 2010

President's Message

July is a month of transition. The second half of the year just began, yet the summer solstice has already passed and the days are growing shorter. Stores are in the process of clearing out summer stock to make way for fall merchandise. Back-to-school sales start soon, though the school year ended only a few weeks ago. The Pirates near the mid-point of the baseball season as the Steelers prepare for their annual training camp at Saint Vincent College and the beginning of another football season.

We at the Ligonier Writers are also caught up in this oddity. We have six more months of activities on this year's schedule, including July's writers' conference and the publication party for *The Loyalhanna Review*. At the same time, we continue to plan the calendar of events for 2011. Our goal is to finalize the calendar in time for our board meeting on July 11, giving us a greater opportunity to promote the organization, its mission, and its programs.

As always, we welcome your input. If you have any suggestions for activities or programs, please contact one of our board members, or send them to me at ronshafer@comcast.net.

Have a wonderful summer.

Ron Shafer

Ligonier YMCA and Ligonier Valley Writers to Present Writer's Voice Workshop: CSI for Kids

Calling all future forensics experts. If you are a kid who wants to grow up to be a police investigator, this is the workshop for you. Experience the intensity of examining fairy tale character crime scenes, finding evidence and clues, and figuring out who the culprits are. Come to the next Ligonier Valley Writers program on **Saturday afternoon, July 17, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Ligonier Valley YMCA.** This workshop is free and open to the public. Parents may accompany children for a fun time. Refreshments will be served and all supplies will be provided. Please call 724-238-7580 to reserve your spot.

The workshop leader will be Marilyn Newcomer, a student in Seton Hill University's MFA program on Writing Popular Fiction. Marilyn is currently working on her master's thesis, a mystery novel set in Western Pennsylvania.

The next Writer's Voice workshop will be Round Robin Storytelling on September 18 from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. at the Ligonier Valley YMCA.

The Ligonier Valley Library will host the LVW Book and Art Fair in the basement meeting room on Saturday, August 7, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. There is no cover charge and it is open to the public.

Call for Authors and Artists — We've expanded our horizons for the annual book fair to include artists and crafters. You do not need to be an LVW member. The restriction is that all crafts or artwork must be created by the artist. All photographs must be the work of the artist. All books for sale must be works by the writer. No resale items allowed. Email jgallagher@lhtot.com if you would like table space and more information on the Book and Art Fair. Each participant will have time to discuss their work.

For the Public — Find out about the work of local authors and artists at Ligonier Valley Writers' second annual Book and Art Fair. Hear authors read from their work. Chat with authors and artists, and browse an assortment of books and handmade art and jewelry. Celebrate the creativity of your neighbors and get a jump on your Christmas shopping with unique gifts you won't find at the mall. Free refreshments will be served.

Memoirist Inspires Workshop Writers

by Nancy A. Clark

Journaling: An invaluable tool used to write memoirs, recording your experiences *every day*, when they are fresh, to ensure accuracy and detail. The backbone of an event, clearly documented.

Memoir: A type of autobiography in which the main interest usually resides in events or persons other than the author, although she or he was a witness to them. An account of history composed from personal experience *as remembered by the writer*. A written record of a person's knowledge of events or of her or his own experiences, recorded from that person's point of view.

Having set the stage with these clear-cut definitions, LVW member and published author Marge Burke launched into the facts and fallacies of journaling and memoir writing. The 17 eager attendees who crowded into a Ligonier YMCA classroom on March 20, ears and notebooks ready to receive, were treated to a well-organized program directed toward developing skills in this timely, popular genre.

Marge engaged her proven literary skills and innate gift of relating to define and to encourage those aspiring to write history as they remember it. Along with anecdotes and personal examples for retrieving memories -- memories that have served as the basis for many of her own published pieces -- Marge cited her mother's decades of daily journaling to backup the benefits and rewards of such a discipline.

"You never know how significant your journaling will be to future generations, to your own descendants or the general populace," Marge told the group. "I encourage each of you to start today. Write it down!"

In memoir, writers examine how they feel about what they remember. "Think about what you were doing, eating, wearing, who was with you, where you were, your feelings regarding all that and what effect it had on you then and possibly continues to have on you. Memoir writing is all about *you*," Marge explained.

The incentives for developing one's memoirs are as varied as the people who write

them. "Publication is not always the goal," Marge said. "Memoir writing is a way to pass on a legacy, experience inner cleansing and self-discovery, exonerate yourself (tell your side of things), share your faith and help others dealing with similar issues."

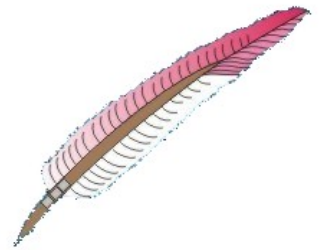
Here are a few of the many concrete suggestions Marge offered to jump-start your recollection of people, places and things that comprise the bedrock of your personal history:

1. Set the stage for your mind to perform on. Make a visual prop like a storyboard or a timeline.
2. Sketch out the neighborhood where you grew up or spent vacations. Write in the names of buildings, families, specific areas (like your own backyard).
3. Visit places, touch objects, interview people, recreate fragrances and music, study photos. To illustrate this one, Marge shared her phone ringtone, a Beach Boys song that was the soundtrack to her sixteenth summer.
4. Organize your thoughts (notecards, computer, notebook).
5. Allow yourself a comfortable time and place to roam physically and mentally.
6. Be descriptive. Use dialogue. Show, don't tell.
7. Dig deep into your cranial vault to retrieve memories. Play word association games.
8. Read other memoirs to learn style and technique, but remember that the content is all yours. Great stories are within you.

Marge's final workshop advice: WRITE IT DOWN.

A group of smiling adults left the building that day and walked out into an atypically warm March afternoon, each one prodded by a bulging notebook. My memoir will record that these newly baptized authors were heading to a comfortable place where they could dig deep into their cranial vaults to retrieve those great stories just itching to come out.

That's my story, and I'm sticking to it.



Tawnie O'Dell, a Hometown Author
By Barb Miller

Around sixty people attended Tawnie O'Dell's talk at Westmoreland County Community College. Though not shy, Tawnie is still very humble about her success and her craft. She is always surprised when she finishes a book and claims not to have a writing process even though that is what she came to talk about.

She loves everything other writers love: books, language, information, the world and making up stories. She doesn't get ideas and doesn't base characters on real people. Yet her writing is filled with ideas and characters too unique not to be real for the reader.

Tawnie trained as a journalist at Northwestern University just in case she could not make a living as a writer. She didn't fit in there, regarding herself as the hick from PA, which was disturbing since a writer must be able to move comfortably in all levels of society. But journalism was just a fallback plan because she wanted to make up the stories. While raising her children she got the chance to write and she still has the box of negative rejections from that period.

She was first published at the age of 35 which was a relief since she has no choice but to write fiction. It's the only way to get the characters out of her head. One thing she is sure of is that you must write from your heart, not for the market. *Back Roads* first came to her when she was walking down a back road in Indiana. The resultant bidding war and the Oprah invitation is now a legend since she assumed "the call" was a joke and informed the person on the line that she did not even sound like Oprah.

Even though Oprah gets you known and paves the way to publication, it does not solve any of your writing problems. Tawnie actually had to move back to Pennsylvania to finish her second book, *Coal Run*, proving that you can "love a place you still hate" even as you "can

respect people you also feel sorry for." What she later discovered is that she has problems writing when she is not miserable.

By the time she started her third novel she had nothing to prove but the story came no easier because she picked the wrong protagonist and the wrong plot. With her current release *Fragile Beasts* she is planning a European book tour since one of the settings is Spain.

Tawnie talked about the culture clash of inviting her New York editor to her home territory. The same editor who asserted that people do not burn couches on their front lawns. Tawnie disagreed and got the couch burning left in. Sure enough they encountered a burning sofa and the editor had to get out and take pictures. Tawnie happened to know the residents.

"So, Earl. I see you're burning another couch."

"Yeah, we got tired of this one."

No one can make up stuff like this. If Tawnie ever gets tired of writing she can always tour as a standup comedian. The audience didn't want her to stop but finally filed out for punch and cookies and a book signing that lasted till most of the books were gone.

Her advice to aspiring writers is to read, write, live and listen to the voices in your head because no one can teach you how to create characters.

David Morrell and Rambo
Notes from a Lecture Delivered at
Seton Hill University in June 2010
By Barb Miller

David Morrell describes his creation of the remarkable Rambo character as a way to deal with his quest for a father figure. Abandoned at an orphanage at the age of three, he only got to return to his mother once she married an abusive man. In order to sleep at night, the

child David put pillows under his blankets to fake being in bed, and slept under the bed. "Nancy Drew rescued me. She was far better than the Hardy Boys."

David's real father was a pilot in WWII and David never knew him. Years later he wondered if that's why he became a pilot as well. His early inspiration for writing were the *Route 66* characters who were both orphans. Stirling Silliphant, the author of the dark, realistic stories became his hero. David decided to write action adventure thrillers because that's what real men read. Under a thriller plot he can hide literary themes he wants to explore. This gives him appeal to both audiences.

He could write about Rambo until he reached a turning point in his own life that completely changed his focus. His 17-year old son died of bone cancer. Suddenly the only stories he could write were those about a father seeking his child. David says you must find your base emotion and write something that exercises it every day. Otherwise your writing skills will atrophy and you will lose your way in your quest.

His first novel was 600 pages and he decided if he was going to get published he was going to have to figure out what was wrong with it. When he took out all the parts that didn't matter he had 300 pages of tight story based on compelling characters and it sold.

"Time is the only currency that matters." David encourages research. Not only does it guarantee you bring your readers something fresh, you expand your own talents and interests as well. Plus you don't make mistakes like thinking shooting a gas tank will blow it up, or that cops doing a drug bust taste the cocaine, or that attorneys get anywhere near the witnesses or jury in a courtroom. In fact David now makes writing a book the excuse to learn to do something new, including survival training and defensive driving school.

You may not know your mission going into a book but you must by the time you get to the end. Rambo always hated himself because the

only thing he was good at was killing. You must love your characters no matter what they are like because "you have to live with them a long time."

eBooks Are Slowly Gaining on Print M. A. Mogus

Yes, eBooks are creeping up in sales and new software will soon be available that may make some of the eReaders obsolete. Free software called Blio is to be released soon that will reproduce the actual hard copy book page in color, not just the text as in an eBook format. Blio has partnered with Baker and Taylor, a major book distributor, to distribute eBooks. Check out www.blioreader.com/about.html to see what the hype is about. And it isn't all hype especially since this software will support PDF. That means **any document** can be converted to PDF format and read by this software in any of the supported platforms (windows, mac, linux, android, symbian, windows mobile, iphone.)

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Though 90% of books are still published and marketed through traditional publishers, digital publishing is gaining ground. This need not be a bad thing for authors, but it does require that authors become savvy in this new technology. This is no easy task since eReaders have begun to proliferate. Not just the usual ones such as Kindle (Amazon), Nook (Barnes & Noble), and Sony eReaders, but Copia (just search the word) for a social media reader, and Border's announced Kobe Reader. eReaders do not do well with science text, or cook books or travel guides or anything with images. Blio software reproduces the original format.

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This is especially true when it comes to digital rights in a contract. These rights may soon become more important than print especially to midlist authors. EBooks can be a way to build an audience if an author plans to go with self-publishing. This requires the author to do a lot of marketing (especially online) but publishers already expect authors to do much of their own marketing. There are online companies that you can hire that will do marketing for you, at a price of course.

Not only will authors have to be creative in writing a novel, authors will be required to be creative it getting it out to the public, with or without help from a traditional publisher. EBooks may be a way to publish, but competition is fierce and cleverness the rule in digital publishing. While it is easy to display a hardback or paperback at a book event, how do you display your eBook? You bring your own eReader, of course, or your laptop with the cute

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If your manuscript was done by one of the online self-publishing places not affiliated with any publisher - such as Lulu and Smashwords - you might bring DVDs or flash drives with an electronic format to sell. This method cannot be used if you signed an agreement with a publisher. They always retain the electronic rights. But remember, if you sell the book in this manner, it can be easily pirated unless you have some way to block it, or don't really care.

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A good source for information is www.hipers.com/publishing.html. This is Piers Anthony's site and he has recent information on the publishers, contracts and author complaints. Also check www.sfw.org for electronic publishing and Absolute Write for the information located on the water cooler section.



Don't forget
the LVW
Conference
July 17

Ligonier Valley Writer Calendar for 2010

July 17, 2-4 p.m.: Hands-On CSI for Kids workshop at Ligonier YMCA. Instructor is Marilyn Newcomer. This workshop is free and open to the public. Parents may accompany children for a fun time. Refreshments will be served and all supplies will be provided. Please call 724-238-7580 to reserve your spot.

July 17, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.: 23rd Annual LVW Writers' Conference. jgallagher@lhtot.com

August 7, 1-4 p.m.: Book and Art Fair at Ligonier Valley Library. Email jgallagher@lhtot.com to reserve a place to sell your books, art, and crafts.

August 14: Deadline for submissions to Flash Fiction Contest (short-short stories about witches, warlocks, and wizards).

September 12, 3-5 p.m.: Annual picnic at St. Michael's Church, Rector.

September 18, 2-4 p.m.: Round Robin Storytelling for adults and teens at Ligonier YMCA.

October 2: Flash Fiction readings and workshop at Greensburg Hempfield Area Library. Time to be announced.

October ?: Flash Fiction readings at Barnes & Noble. Date to be announced.

December 5, 3-5 p.m.: Annual Christmas Party, St. Michael's Church, Rector.

*Check www.LVWonline.org
for updates and more information
means date/time to be announced

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