

# The Diamond

## Newsletter of the Ligonier Valley Writers

Winter 2011  
www.LVWonline.org

### Ligonier Valley Writers Celebrates Its Silver Anniversary

The Ligonier Valley Writers began in 1986 as the Friends of Ligonier, who were searching for a way to enhance residents' lives and generate income for local businesses. One of their first projects was a writers' conference. It was so successful that the Friends became the Ligonier Valley Writers.

A look through the clippings of LVW's events and activities for the past 25 years is a reminder of how many people have given of their time and energy to promote the literary arts in southwestern Pennsylvania. Among early board members and officers were Tina Thoburn, Connie Pilz, Bill Stablein, Doris O'Donnell, E. Kay and Gertrude Myers, George Jernstedt, Jim Simons, Lou Steiner, Jim Stroup, Nancy Tondura, Kirk Weixel, Bob Woodall, Richard McNatt, Karen Jurkovic, Linda Keegan, Nancy Tondura, Eve Shelnut, and Mark Shelton.

Those clippings also reveal the many writers in many genres who have shared their knowledge with our group in workshops, programs, and conferences. Among the well-known authors who have spoken at LVW events are historian David McCullough, Oprah Book Club author Tawni O'Dell, science writer Michael Sims, and Newbery Medal-winning novelist E. L. Konigsburg.

In 1991, LVW started its literary journal, *The Loyalhanna Review*, which showcases short stories, essays, and poems and receives submissions from all over the country. Three years ago the *Review* began inviting artists to submit their work and devoting four pages of every issue to full-color artwork. We also added a publication party at which the artists' work is displayed and the authors read from

their work. The *Review* is distributed free throughout southwestern Pennsylvania.

For many years the hot-dog fest was a fundraiser for *The Loyalhanna Review*. The fest always had an entertaining speaker. One year Ralph Kinney Bennett of *Reader's Digest* talked about growing up in Ligonier with a mother who was editor of the *Echo*. Other speakers included Rick Sebak (discussing his PBS program on hot dogs) and Bill Brown, news anchor at WJAC-TV. Each year a Hot Dogger of the Year, a person or group who has promoted hot dog cuisine, received the coveted Golden Fork Award. Over the years winners included Idlewild Park, the Westmoreland County Airshow Committee, Father Tom Devereau from St. Vincent Summer Theatre, and area school district football programs.

Starting in 2008, an interactive murder mystery play replaced the hot-dog fest fundraiser. Each year an original play is written by Mary Ann Mogus and directed by Rebecca Dunn. Many members of the cast and crew are also LVW members. Enthusiastic audiences cross-examine the characters to identify the murderer.

The Flash Fiction Contest began in 2005. Winning stories are performed at Halloween events, so the subjects are always scary. The first year called for ghost stories, the next year vampire stories, and most recently stories about witches, wizards, and warlocks. Dozens of entries come in from all over the United States and Europe.

Encouraging young people to write has always been part of LVW's mission. The poetry contest for students in grades 4 through 12 has grown every year. Since 2006, an awards

ceremony has been held at the Greensburg Barnes & Noble. Proud family members can watch the winners read their poems aloud before they receive cash prizes, certificates, and keepsake booklets of all the winning poems.

The group continues to stage the annual Ligonier Valley Writers' Conference. The 23rd conference in July 2010 featured award-winning writers who are also skilled teachers. Anahita Firouz took students on a whirlwind tour of 20-century literature before working with them on their own manuscripts; Christine O'Toole taught students how to research and write feature articles; Jan Beatty taught poetry; and Greg Joseph of The Clarks taught songwriting.

For several years, LVW has hosted a book fair at Ligonier Valley Library each August. Participants get a chance to talk to more than a dozen local authors about their work – and get a jump on their Christmas shopping for unique gifts. LVW also holds a picnic each September and a Christmas party in early December at St. Michaels of the Valley Church. They feature good food, good conversation, and a chance for attendees to read aloud from their writing to a supportive audience.

LVW helps beginning and experienced writers find critique groups that provide safe places for writers to share their work and solid advice on how to improve it. LVW works with other local cultural institutions, including Ligonier Valley Library, Greensburg Hempfield Area Library, Adams Memorial Library, and the Ligonier Valley YMCA. All LVW events are open to the public; many are free.

Twenty-five years ago the founders could not have imagined that one day writers and readers from all over the world would be visiting LVW's website for the latest on our workshops and writing contests. To learn more, visit [LVWonline.org](http://LVWonline.org). The anniversary celebration will go on throughout 2011. Ligonier Valley Writers is celebrating 25 years of support from a community that recognizes the deep pleasures of reading and writing.

## LVW Calendar 2011

**As part of our Silver Anniversary Celebration, the annual dues for 2011 are only \$25 per member.**

**February 19, 2-3:30 p.m.** Workshop, "Writing Paranormal Mysteries with Romance Crossover," led by Mary Ann Mogus at Greensburg Hempfield Area Library.

**March 7** Student Poetry Contest (Grades 4-12) submission deadline. Download registration forms from [www.LVWonline.org](http://www.LVWonline.org).

**April 30, 4 p.m.** Student Poetry Awards, Greensburg Barnes & Noble.

**May 1, 2011** *Loyalhanna Review* submission deadline: short stories, poetry, essays. See [www.lvwonline.org/LR2011.html](http://www.lvwonline.org/LR2011.html)

**June 23-26** *In Your Write Mind* Annual Writer's Retreat at Seton Hill University.

**July 15, 2011** *Loyalhanna Review* publication party, Latrobe Art Center.

**July 16, 2011, 8:30 a.m.-6 p.m.** 24th Annual Ligonier Valley Writers' Conference.

**August 13, 2-4 p.m.** Author & Artists Book Fair at Ligonier Valley Library. Readings and refreshments.

**August 14** Deadline for submissions to Flash Fiction Contest (short-short stories about graveyards). See [www.LVWonline.org](http://www.LVWonline.org)

**September 4 OR 11, 3-5 p.m.** Annual LVW Picnic, St. Michael's of the Valley Church, Rector.

**October 22, 1-4 p.m.** Flash Fiction winners will be announced. Flash Fiction readings and workshop, venue TBA.

**October** Auditions in Greensburg for murder mystery play, date TBA.

**October 24** Loony Limerick Contest Deadline.

**November 12, 6:30 p.m., & 13, 2:00 p.m.** LVW's fourth annual interactive murder mystery at First Reformed United Church of Christ, 312 South Maple Avenue, Greensburg.

**December 4, 3-5 p.m.** Annual LVW Christmas Party, St. Michael's of the Valley Church, Rector.

## Romance Makeovers by Barb Miller

If you read a romance novel and the plot sounds familiar, maybe it is. Some current romance and women's fiction novels are modeled on tried and true classics from the genre, classic plots from other genres or even fairy tales. The advantage to updating a classic theme or plotline is that you have a guide to the story arc; you just have to show your readers what this situation yields in your hands with your characters.

That leaves you free to focus on character development to exercise the theme or plot the way you want to, and maybe introduce a new or updated setting. By using fairy tales, and classic romance plays, movies and books, you can experience writing within the plotline of another and add your own creative twist to the story.

How much you follow a classic plot is up to you but you have a built-in platform when describing the work. Sometimes just naming the fairy tale, or classic work is enough to get reader buy-in: Cinderella story with a princess and a plowboy, Romeo and Juliet with a happy ending, Pride and Prejudice with a chick lit twist. If you choose the theme and plot from ones already developed, you have only to devise the characters and setting.

**Themes** are often born out of the internal conflicts and wounds of the characters. The theme should have to do with the arc of at least one character. Sample themes are:

Forgiveness may be possible even if atonement is not.

Redemption is a selfish goal.

Empowerment is the responsibility of anyone with free will.

Even justified anger is a poison to the soul.

Just because one person abandoned you or betrayed does not mean they all will.

Plots are the events of the story. According to some there are only a few that encompass all: a stranger comes to town, the characters go on a journey, a character returns to their hometown, or a combination of the above.

**Seven Basic Plot Archetypes** apply to all genres but the starred ones are a good romance fit for the main plot. The others can be used as subplots in a romance.

Quest – Goal with or without a voyage.

Voyage with Return – It's the journey that matters.

\*Symbolic Death and Rebirth – Characters reinventing themselves.

\*Comedy of errors – Characters trapped by circumstance or conspiracy.

Tragedy – To evoke Pity and Fear.

Vanquishing the Villain – Good vs. evil.

\*Obscurity to Prominence – Or rags to riches. This could be a Cinderella story.

**Classic Romance plot situations that are favorites:** Marriage of Convenience, Secret Baby, Opposites Attract, Rags to Riches or the reverse, Forbidden Love, Trapped Together by Circumstance, Abduction, Amnesia, Culture Clash.

**Classic Fairy Tales with remakes:**

*Beauty and the Beast* TV series. Plus all the *King Kong* movies and *Might Joe Young*.

*Cinderella - Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* by Gregory McGuire.

*Mulan* – The Disney movie version.

*Sleeping Beauty* – Gregory McGuire's *Mirror, Mirror*.

*The Frog Prince* – The Disney movie version.

*Ugly Duckling* – *Ugly Betty* TV series.

*Rapunzel -Tangle*, the Disney movie.

*Wizard of Oz* – , McGuire's *Wicked*, *Son of a Witch*, *A Lion among Men*, and *Out of Oz*.

Sometimes you can mix two classic references into a successful hybrid. The first *Shrek* started as a *Sleeping Beauty* plot, then turned to *Beauty and the Beast*. Generally speaking, the *Shrek* movies are rife with nursery rhyme and fairy tales references which add to the humor.

Other classic sources for makeovers include Shakespeare:

*Romeo and Juliet* – In the *West Side Story* version only one dies. Can you reinvent it so they both live? *Shakespeare in Love* (2000) does but not together. On request Will's original acting company would do *Romeo and Juliet* with a happy ending, where their plans succeed and they both live happily ever after.

*The Taming of the Shrew* – a battle of the sexes where the hero and heroine fight until he wins her by exhausting her. Updated as *Kiss Me Kate*. The plotline also used in *McLintock* and *Bronco Billy*, as well as many other works.

*Cerano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand has often been used as a plotline. The poet Cyrano, with an immense nose, woos Roxanne for Christian, who is killed in battle. Roxanne retreats to a nunnery, not realizing till the end of Cyrano's life that he was the one she loved. Updated as *Roxanne* where C. D. Bailes does win Roxanne Kowalsky.

W. S. Gilbert's *Pygmalion and Galatea* (1871), about an Athenian sculptor whose statue comes to life, inspired *Pygmalion* (1912) by George Bernard Shaw about a linguistics expert who transforms a flower girl into a lady but in so doing frees her. She marries Freddy. The *Pygmalion* film of 1939 has Eliza come back to Higgins. This was redone as the movie *My Fair Lady* (1964) where Eliza stays with Henry Higgins (causing Shaw to spin in his grave.)

*An Affair to Remember* (1957) has lovers who are to meet at the top of the empire State building, inspiring *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993).

*Casablanca*, where the hero sacrifices his escape to save the woman he loves and her noble husband, is similar to *Hanover Street*.

**Character Archetypes** such as **leader, entertainer, intellectual, warrior** for heroes and **nurturer, wise woman, crusader or seductress** for heroines may be useful for determining the most prominent trait of a character, and how to use that to bring the hero and heroine into conflict. But a character built only one facet is flat. Real people are a combination of many

traits. Men can be nurturing as well as women. Women can be warriors as well as men. Concentrate on the qualities of your characters that will both bring them into conflict and eventually fit them together as lovers.

The trick is to invent compelling characters and then see what they bring or add to a classic plot and theme. You get audience recognition of the classic fairy tale, play, movie, or novel, then surprise the crowd with a new twist on the plot based on the motivations of the unique characters you created.

## Some Research Notes By Mary Ann Mogus

If you need research information and use the internet, one of the best sites to consider is the Library of Congress. There are a number of online collections that are available to writers. Some of these are photographic collections others are primary source text materials.

Online Digital Collections:

[www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html](http://www.loc.gov/library/libarch-digital.html)

Prints and Photographs:

[www.loc.gov/pictures](http://www.loc.gov/pictures)

American History and Creativity collections:

[www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html](http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html)

Newspapers Chronicling America:

[www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov](http://www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov)

Federal Legislative Information:

[www.thomas.loc.gov](http://www.thomas.loc.gov)

American Folklife Center:

[www.loc.gov/folklife/onlinecollections.html](http://www.loc.gov/folklife/onlinecollections.html)

Webcasts from the Library:

[www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/index.php](http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/index.php)

Full Text Materials:

[www.archive.org/details/sloan](http://www.archive.org/details/sloan)

These and other sources were listed in an article in the Sisters in Crime Newsletter. I have also used local state archives, but for these you need to do a web search for the state archive you want to access.

## The Mystery Reader in 2011 By Mary Ann Mogus

I belong to Sisters in Crime (SinC,) an organization for both writers and readers of mysteries. In 2010 SinC contracted Bowker Pubtrack, a division of Bowker, to do a nationwide survey of mystery readers. The survey was completed and copies sent to members of SinC. I've extracted a few of the final results of the survey for Ligonier Valley Writers. Some of these results are unexpected, at least to me. Some could have been predicted.

For all genres, not just mysteries, women buy the majority of books, and for mysteries women constitute seventy percent of the buyers. Individuals over 45 buy over half of all books sold. Most mysteries are bought in stores followed by borrowing from libraries and in last place buying online. The latter represents the fact that younger readers (under the age of 40) buy more books online and E-books than older readers.

E-book sales are growing but not as rapidly as they would if readers over 40 bought more E-books. The internet use of mystery readers over 40 indicates that such readers do a lot of random surfing and Email, but they seldom read or use online blogs and bulletin boards. Such readers are not influenced by an author's website nor are they easily influenced by recommendations from a television personality. These readers prefer to meet the author. Mystery readers are less likely to participate in social media (Facebook and Twitter.)

More mysteries are purchased by people living in the South and by households without children. Readers under forty like darker suspenseful stories and don't see mysteries as distinct from other genres. All readers enjoy solving the puzzle of the mystery and love surprises, thrills, and suspense.

Readers, especially those over 60, are loyal to an author. Books are purchased because of author recognition and especially if the book is part of a series. The characters and the topic are also of importance. And readers would buy more books if the books were less expensive, or if coupons and two for one deals were offered.

Book covers are part of the appeal as is a preview of some elements of the story. So the book's blurb takes on added importance.

These are just some of the interesting conclusions of the report. Reading this report gave me some insight into writing the mystery novel. Know your audience is one of the keys. And no, even if a good number of readers are from southern states, it's not necessary to set the novel in a southern state. But it is necessary to build a good and likable character, plan a series, and find some really creative way to attract readers to your work. Younger readers may be attracted by social media, but for the older readers you may have to come up with more creative marketing.

The website for Sisters in Crime is [www.sistersincrime.org](http://www.sistersincrime.org) but the report is only available to members. If you write mysteries this is a good organization to consider joining.

Complete this form and mail to: Ligonier Valley Writers, PO Box B, Ligonier PA 15658

2011 Renewal    2011 New Member    New Full-Time Student Member

Member(s) name(s) 1 \_\_\_\_\_  
2 \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Category:  Individual \$25 for 2011    Two at same address \$45/yr.    Full-time student \$15/yr.

I would like to make a donation to help support the programs of the Ligonier Valley Writers.

My check is enclosed for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Silver  
Anniversary  
Dues only \$25!**

## Conferences By Mary Ann Mogus

Of course there is first and foremost the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Ligonier Valley Writers' Conference July 16. This conference is primarily a workshop conference specializing in the craft of Writing.

May 13 to 15 is the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Pennwriters Conference *Craft and Career* held this year at the Pittsburgh Marriot, Pittsburgh, PA. Check out [www.pennwriters.com](http://www.pennwriters.com) for more information and a list of the editors and agents who will be attending.

There is always Malice Domestic in Bethesda, MD, a festival that salutes the traditional mystery. The dates for 2011 are April 29 to May 1. Check [www.malicedomestic.org](http://www.malicedomestic.org) for more information.

Of special interest to writers is the annual Bouchercon, this year in St. Louis, MO September 15 to 18. [www.bouchercon2011.com](http://www.bouchercon2011.com).

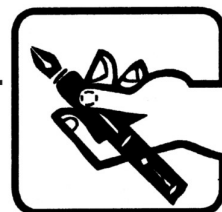
## LVW Workshop on Writing Paranormal Mysteries with Romance Crossover

Paranormal mysteries are hot sellers in today's market. Try your hand at writing one with some help from Mary Ann Mogus and Barb Miller, both published in the paranormal mystery genre. Zombies and vampires may be hot topics, but let's stick to ghosts and psychic powers for this workshop (in the stories, at least). Crossover stories also have tons of appeal. Learn how to cross a mystery or paranormal with a romance and increase your chances for placing a story.

Join us at the Greensburg Hempfield Area Library (237 S. Pennsylvania Ave., Greensburg) on Saturday, February 19, from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. for this free, hands-on writing workshop. Refreshments will be provided. Call (724) 837-5620 to reserve a seat.

Address

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