

WRITER'S ALLIANCE  
OF GAINESVILLE

SPECIAL  
POINTS OF  
INTEREST:

- Speaker's Series announced
- Self-publishing on the rise

INSIDE  
THIS ISSUE:

Giving Good Critique	2
Pod Information	3
Self-Publishing	6

# The WAG Digest

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

FEBRUARY 15, 2009

## Writers Alliance of Gainesville (WAG) Launches Speaker Series

The inaugural meeting of the Writers Alliance of Gainesville was a huge success. You're receiving this newsletter because you are a member of the newest writing organization in Gainesville. We want to meet your needs. Please let us know what we can do to help you become a better writer. E-mail us at

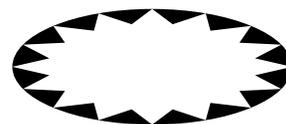
[wagmail@cox.net](mailto:wagmail@cox.net).

And don't forget that local poet Lola Haskins will be our speaker for the next WAG meeting, Sunday, Feb. 22, 2009, at the Tower Road branch of the Alachua County Library at 2:30. Lola's book on writing, *Not Feathers Yet*, will be available for sale after the talk.



In March, stay tuned for speaker Rik Feeney. Rik will give a speech entitled, "How to Write a Book in 60 Days." Visit Riki's web site at:

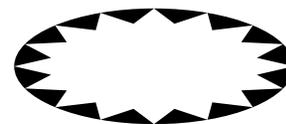
<http://www.isthereabookinsideyou.com/index.html>.



## Pod Formation

One of the most important benefits of membership is the ability to join small, genre-specific critique pods. We are pleased to provide information about the various pods that will form soon. See page 3 for potential pod hosts and participants.

After the Feb. 22 meeting, pod hosts will meet with interested members to decide when and where they will meet. We are very excited about this great critique opportunity. In this newsletter, we've included a brief article on what makes good critique.



# How to Give Good Critique

February 5, 2008 · Written by Melissa Donovan



**“Generally, it’s a bad idea to sound off on a writer’s work unless you are invited to do so.”**



As a writer, you have to be thick-skinned. It’s a highly competitive and saturated field where criticism is omnipresent for two important reasons: 1) It’s the most efficient way for a writer to increase in skill, and 2) Written work is often positioned to receive much criticism upon publication. And guess what? Everyone’s a critic — because everyone has an opinion. Anyone can read a piece of writing and opine that it was good or bad, weak or strong, or that it succeeded or failed.

There’s a definite art to providing well constructed and thoughtful criticism, which is designed to help a writer improve, and which recognizes the fine line between personal preference and quality.

*Don’t crash the party*

Generally, it’s a bad idea to sound off on a writer’s work unless you are invited to do so. Professional critics are of course exempt from this rule. There are a few writers who can’t handle feedback, and often these are the ones who won’t ask for it. Chances are, they’re just going to defend their work to the bitter end so your feedback will be little more than a waste of time. Other writers will openly declare that feedback is always welcome. It is here that you should focus your efforts, assuming your goal as a critic is to

help people, and not to make them feel inferior or feeble.

*R.S.V.P. with care*

Some writers ask for feedback, but what they really want to hear is how great they are. These are the narcissistic types who write more for their own ego than for the sake of the craft itself. It takes a little intuition to figure out which writers really want you to weed out all the flaws in their work, and which are just looking for praise.

Case in point: A few months ago, a young writer asked me for feedback on her poetry. I was hesitant, because my gut told me she was only interested in hearing that it was wonderful, but she insisted — she wanted to know how her poems could be better, or so she said. I told her what was working, and then explained that writing poetry in all caps and ending every line with an ellipses was overshadowing the words and the language, creating a visual obstacle that did little more than turn a reader away before they even had a chance to appreciate the poem itself, which was actually quite good. She asserted that this was her style. All caps and ellipses were going to be her trademark. I responded, “That’s exactly why I didn’t want to give you a critique. I knew you wouldn’t accept it.” Next time, I’ll listen to my gut.

**(Continued page 4)**

<http://www.writingforward.com/writing-tips-tricks/how-to-give-good-critique>

# Pod Infomation

First Name	Last Name	Genre	Time re- quested	Host	Genre - Location
Susie	Baxter	Memoir	weekends		Southwest
Linda	Becnel	non-fiction	weekdays		Southwest
Judy	Bernard	short fiction	weekdays		
Pranada	Comtois				
Phaladya	Dean	Short fiction/Plays	weekends		
Rbin	Ecker	novel/short fiction/poetry (in that order)	weekdays	Will Host	Southwest
Judy	Etzler	poetry	weekends		Micanopy
Perky	Granger	Fiction, non-fiction, women's	Weekdays or Sunday	May host	Trenton
Alisa	Guthrie	Nonfiction, Social Critique, Feminism	weekdays		
Sara	Long	memoir, short fiction, poetry	weekends		Alachua
David	Maas	poetry	anytime	Will Host	poetry - Central Gainesville
Michal	Meyer	short fiction, novels			
Jean	Michelson	memoir-non-fiction	anytime	May host	Southwest
Liz	Mulhol- land	memoir, short fiction	weekends or weekdays before 6 pm		Southwest
I Gillis	Murray	poetry, children's literature	weekdays		Southwest
Mary	Opel	memoir, novel	weekends		Southwest
Kal	Rosenberg	fiction	anytime		Gainesville Mall area
Joan Sawyer	Sawyer	novel			NE Waldo Road
Stephanie	Seguin	memoir, non-fiction		Will host	Northwest
Jani Sherrard	Sherrard	poetry/non-fiction	weekends		Southwest
Dorothy	Staley	novel		Will Host	Waldo
Teresa	Sze	children's literature			Northeast
Wendy	Thornton	Fiction, non-fiction	weekends	Will Host	short fiction - Millhopper
Eldon	Turner	poetry	monthly	Will Host	
Greg	Turner	fiction/novel, other			

# Good Critique (Continued)



THE WAG  
DIGEST

## Bring something to the party

If you're giving a critique, whether in a writer's group, a workshop, online, or with a friend, you should take the time to really read a piece before you give your feedback. Read it carefully, and make notes, mark it up as you go, and then jot down your thoughts when you've finished reading. If time and the length of the piece allow, give it a second reading, because that's often where things really click or stick out. Otherwise you're showing up empty handed. There's nothing worse than receiving half-baked feedback. It's totally useless, and most writers will know when you're not putting some thought and effort into your critique.

## Devour the food, not the hostess

Whatever you do or say during your critique, your feedback should be directed at the writing, not the writer. Don't start your comments with the word "you" — ever. Always refer to the piece, the sentence, the paragraph, the character. You are judging the work, not the individual who produced it, and though compliments aimed at the writer might be well received, there's a subtle but significant difference between pointing out flaws in the piece versus the person.

## Let the good times roll

When you take the podium, always start by emphasizing the good. This

is the cardinal rule of good critiquing, and I cannot emphasize this enough: always start by telling the writer what works and where the strengths lie. By doing this, you're kicking things off on a positive note. Also, it's much easier for a writer to hear where they have failed after they hear where they've succeeded. Here are your two scenarios:

1. The language is effective, with strong, colorful images. I can really see this in my mind, quite vividly. However, some of the wording sounds cliché, so one way to make this even stronger would be to come up with alternatives to the more commonly used phrases, like...

2. Well, there are a lot of clichés. You should have tried to use more original word choices. But your imagery is good; I can visualize what the piece is communicating.

It's much easier to let a little air out of an inflated balloon than to blow up a deflated one. It's especially easier on the person who is on the receiving end of your feedback.

## Try to have fun even if it's not your scene

Some people hate stories written in third person, but that doesn't make a piece written in third person bad, it just makes it less appealing to the person who is turned off by it. Know the difference between your own personal preferences in terms of writing styles, and try to separate these from your criticism.



# Good Critique (Continued)



Help clean up the mess

Eventually, you'll have to tell the writer where the piece falls short. Do this with grace. Avoid using strong negative language. Don't say things like "this is weak," "you're using the wrong words," or "it's boring." Instead, use positive language and phrase your comments as suggestions for improvement:

- This would be stronger if...
- A better word choice would be...
- This could be more compelling or exciting by...

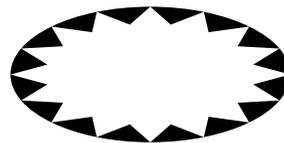
Remember, you're there to help, not to destroy. If someone appreciates your opinion enough to ask for it, then provide it a manner that is conducive to learning, and supportive of the writer's efforts to improve.

Nurse the hangover

There's a good chance that no matter how gentle you are, your writer friend will feel a bit downtrodden after hearing that their piece still needs a lot of work. Many writers are tempted at this point to give up on a piece, while very few will be motivated and inspired by the feedback. After you've given a critique, check back with the writer and ask how the piece is coming along. Inquire as to whether your comments were useful, and offer to read the piece again after it's revised.

Constructive criticism involves a little compassion. If someone cares enough about their work to show it around and invite feedback, then it's probably something in which they are emotionally invested. If you are the person they feel is qualified to provide that feedback, then embrace the invitation as an honor, and approach it with care.

*"There's a good chance that no matter how gentle you are, your writer friend will feel a bit downtrodden after hearing that their piece still needs a lot of work."*





*“Even if you’re sitting at a dinner party, if you ask how many people want to write a book, everyone will say, ‘I’ve got a book or two in me.’”*



## Self-Publishers Flourish as Writers Pay the Tab

By [MOTOKO RICH](#)

Published: January 27, 2009 – NEW YORK TIMES – [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

The point may soon come when there are more people who want to write books than there are people who want to read them.

At least, that is what the evidence suggests. Booksellers, hobbled by the economic crisis, are struggling to lure readers. Almost all of the New York publishing houses are laying off editors and pinching pennies. Small bookstores are closing. Big chains are laying people off or exploring bankruptcy.

A recently released study by the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) found that while more people are reading literary fiction, fewer of them are reading books.

Meanwhile, there is one segment of the industry that is actually flourishing: capitalizing on the dream of would-be authors to see their work between covers, companies that charge writers and photographers to publish are growing rapidly at a time when many mainstream publishers are losing ground.

Credit for the self-publishing boomlet goes to authors like Jim Bendat, whose book “Democracy’s Big Day,” a collection of historical vignettes about presidential [inaugurations](#), enjoyed a modest burst in sales in the hoopla surrounding [President Obama](#)’s swearing-in.

After failing to secure a traditional publishing deal in 2000, Mr. Bendat, a public defender in Los Angeles, paid \$99 to publish the first edition of his book with iUniverse, a print-on-demand company. He updated the book in 2004 and 2008, and has sold more than 2,500 copies. IUniverse takes a large cut of each sale of the book, currently on [Amazon.com](#) for \$11.66.

As traditional publishers look to prune their booklists and rely increasingly on blockbuster best sellers, self-publishing companies are ramping up their title

counts and making money on books that sell as few as five copies, in part because the author, rather than the publisher, pays for things like cover design and printing costs.

In 2008, Author Solutions, which is based in Bloomington, Ind., and operates iUniverse as well as other print-on-demand imprints including AuthorHouse and Wordclay, published 13,000 titles, up 12 percent from the previous year.

This month, the company, which is owned by Bertram Capital, a private equity firm, bought a rival, Xlibris, expanding its profile in the fast-growing market. The combined company represented 19,000 titles in 2008, nearly six times more than [Random House](#), the world’s largest publisher of consumer books, released last year.

In 2008, nearly 480,000 books were published or distributed in the United States, up from close to 375,000 in 2007, according to the industry tracker Bowker. The company attributed a significant proportion of that rise to an increase in the number of print-on-demand books.

“Even if you’re sitting at a dinner party, if you ask how many people want to write a book, everyone will say, ‘I’ve got a book or two in me,’” said Kevin Weiss, chief executive of Author Solutions. “We don’t see a letup in the number of people who are interested in writing.”

The trend is also driven by professionals who want to use a book as an enhanced business card as well as by people who are creating books as gifts for family and friends.

“It used to be an elite few,” said Eileen Gittins, chief executive of Blurb, a print-on-demand company whose revenue has grown to \$30 million, from \$1 million, in just two years and which published more than 300,000 titles last year. Many of those were personal books bought only by the author. “Now anyone can make a book, and it looks just like a book that you buy at the bookstore.”

## Self-Publishers (Continued)

To be sure, self-publishing is still a fraction of the wider publishing industry. Author Solutions, for example, sold a total of 2.5 million copies last year. Little, Brown sold more than that many copies of “Twilight” by Stephenie Meyer just in the last two months of 2008.

But in an era when anyone can create a blog or post musings on [Facebook](#) or [MySpace](#), people still seem to want the tangible validation of a printed book.

“I wanted the satisfaction of holding the book in my hands,” Mr. Bendat said.

As a result of his iUniverse book, the British news channel Sky News asked Mr. Bendat to provide live commentary on Inauguration Day. A group of Washington hotels ordered 500 copies to give to guests who were in town for the event.

“O.K., it’s not a best seller,” Mr. Bendat said, “but I’m happy for what’s happening.”

Vanity presses have existed for decades, but technology has made it much easier for aspiring authors to publish without hefty upfront costs. Gone are the days when self-publishing meant paying a printer to produce hundreds of copies that then languished in a garage.

Now, for as little as \$3, an author can upload a manuscript or collection of photos to a Web site, and order a printed book within an hour. Many books will appear for sale on Amazon.com or the Web site of [Barnes & Noble](#); others are sold through the self-publishing companies’ Web sites. Authors and readers order subsequent copies as needed.

The self-publishing companies generally make their money either by charging author fees — which can range from \$99 to \$100,000 for a variety of services, including custom cover design and marketing and distribution to online retailers, or by taking a portion of book sales, or both.

Some, like Lulu Enterprises and CreateSpace from Amazon.com, allow the author to create the book free, but then make their money on a small printing markup and a profit split with the author.

For some authors, the appeal of self-publishing is that they can put their books on the market much faster than through traditional publishers.

Of course, authors who take this route also give up a lot. Not only do they receive no advance payments, but they also often must pay out of their own pockets before seeing a dime. They do not have the benefit of the marketing acumen of traditional publishers, and have diminished access to the vast bookstore distribution pipeline that big publishers can provide.

Still, many self-publishing companies allow authors to take more than the traditional royalty of 15 percent of the cover price on hardcovers and 10 percent or less on paperbacks.

Michelle L. Long, an accountant who advises small businesses, published “Successful Quick-Books Consulting,” a guide for others who want to help businesses use a software package made by Intuit through CreateSpace a little more than a year ago. She said she had earned 45 to 55 percent of the

cover price on each sale and had made \$22,000 in royalties on the sale of more than 2,000 copies.

During an economic downturn, books tailored to such narrow audiences may fare better than titles from traditional publishers that depend on a more general appeal.

“A lot of this niche content is doing fairly well relative to the rest of the economy because it’s very useful to people who have a very specific need,” said Aaron Martin, director of self-publishing and manufacturing on demand at [Amazon](#).

For many self-published authors, the niche is very small. Mr. Weiss of Author Solutions estimates that the average number of copies sold of titles published through one of its brands is just 150.

Indeed, said Robert Young, chief executive of Lulu Enterprises, based in Raleigh, N.C., a majority of the company’s titles are of little interest to anybody other than the authors and their families. “We have easily published the largest collection of bad poetry in the history of mankind,” Mr. Young said.

**(Continued on page 10)**

“But in an era when anyone can create a blog or post musings on [Facebook](#) or [MySpace](#), people still seem to want the tangible validation of a printed book.”



“To catch the reader's attention, place an interesting sentence or quote from the story here.”



# Contest Information

The Writers Alliance of Gainesville will send members information about writing opportunities and monthly contest deadlines. If you know of an available writing opportunity, send information to [wagmail@cox.net](mailto:wagmail@cox.net).

A tip: Writing contests can be expensive and very competitive. Send your best work and look for contests that offer copies of the journal or subscriptions to the magazine as part of the entry fee.

A great place to find the latest contest information for literary magazines is on the Web site, NewPages.com

<http://www.newpages.com/literary/contests.htm>

## Bellingham Review 2009 Literary Contest

Submissions must be postmarked between December 1, 2008, and March 1, 2009. See details at: <http://www.wvu.edu/bhreview/index.shtml>

Send entries to: Contest Name – Bellingham Review, Mail Stop 9053, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA 98225-9053 - All Entries require an \$18 entry fee (one essay, one short story or up to three poems).

## The 49th Parallel Award for Poetry

**1st Prize: \$1,000**

## The Annie Dillard Award for Creative Nonfiction

**1st Prize: \$1,000**

## The Tobias Wolff Award for Fiction

**1st Prize: \$1,000**

## Colorado Review

Nelligan Prize for Short Fiction  
\$1000 and Publication  
Final Judge: Robert Boswell  
Deadline: Postmark January 12 - March 13, 2009

### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

\$1,000 will be awarded for the best short story, which will be published in the Fall/Winter 2009 issue of Colorado Review.

**This year's final judge is Robert Boswell;** friends and students (current & former) of the judge are not eligible to compete, nor are Colorado State University employees, students, or alumni.

Fee is \$10 per entry, payable to *Colorado Review*; there is no limit on the number of entries you may submit.

Stories must be previously unpublished.  
There are no length or theme restrictions.  
All manuscripts must be typed and double-spaced.  
No submissions via e-mail.

Include two cover sheets: on the first, print your name, address, telephone number, and the story title; on the second, print only the story title. Your name should not appear anywhere else on the manuscript.

Provide SASE for contest results.  
Manuscripts will not be returned.

# Contest Information (Continued)

**Contest opens January 12, 2009.**

**Deadline is the postmark of March 13, 2009.**

**Winner will be announced in July 2009.**

All submissions will be considered for publication.

Entries must be clearly addressed to:

**Nelligan Prize - Colorado Review**

9105 Campus Delivery

Department of English

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, CO 80523

## Nimrod International

The 31th Nimrod/Hardman Awards

The Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction &

The Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry

\$2k + Trip to Tulsa Awards/1k

Deadline: Postmark January 1 - April 30, 2009

### The 31st Nimrod Awards

The Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction &

The Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry

Founded by Ruth G. Hardman

First Place: \$2,000, publication, and a trip to Tulsa for the Awards Celebration

FIRST PLACE: \$2,000 and PUBLICATION

SECOND PLACE: \$1,000 and PUBLICATION

Contest Rules

Contest Begins: JANUARY 1, 2009

Postmark Deadline: APRIL 30, 2009

Poetry: 3-10 pages of poetry (one long poem or several short poems).

Fiction: 7,500 words maximum.

No previously published works or works accepted for publication elsewhere. Author's name must not appear on the manuscript. Include a cover sheet containing major title and subtitles, author's name, full address, phone & email. "Contest Entry" should be clearly indicated on both the outer envelope and the cover sheet. Manuscripts will not be returned. Nimrod retains the right to publish any submission. Include SASE for results only. If no SASE is sent, no contest results will be sent; however, the results will be posted on Nimrod's Web site. Submitters must have a U.S. address by October of 2008 to enter the contest. Winners will also be brought to Tulsa for the Awards Ceremony in October.

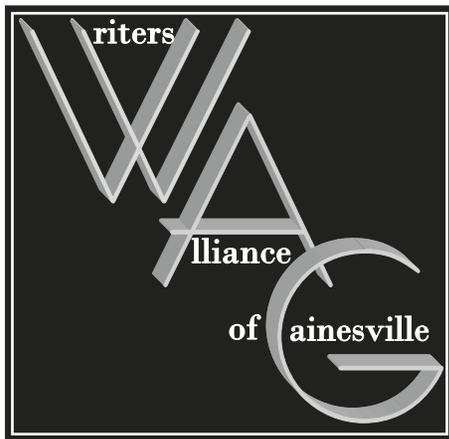
Entry/Subscription Fee: \$20 includes both entry fee & a one-year subscription (two issues). Each entry must each be accompanied by a \$20 fee. Make checks payable to:

NIMROD

Literary Contest--Fiction or Poetry

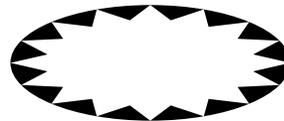
The University of Tulsa, 800 S. Tucker Dr.

Tulsa, OK 74104



**Writer's Alliance of Gainesville**  
*A not-for-profit Florida corporation*  
p.o. box 358396  
[gainesville/florida/32635-8396](mailto:gainesville/florida/32635-8396)  
[352-336-8062/wagmail@cox.net](mailto:352-336-8062/wagmail@cox.net)

**The Writers Alliance of Gainesville (WAG) promotes, encourages and supports aspiring and experienced regional writers. This goal is accomplished via WAG monthly meetings, public readings, ongoing small critique groups, a literary journal, writers' contests, and collaborations with schools and civic organizations to foster creative expression through the written word.**



## Self-Publishers (Continued)

Still, the dream of many self-published authors is that they will be discovered by a mainstream publishing house — and it does happen, however rarely.

When Lisa Genova, a former consultant to pharmaceutical companies, wrote her first novel, “Still Alice,” a story about a woman with Alzheimer’s disease, she was turned down or ignored by 100 literary agents.

Ms. Genova paid \$450 to iUniverse to publish the book and sold copies to independent bookstores. A fellow author discovered the book and introduced Ms. Genova to an agent, and she eventually sold “Still Alice” for a mid-six-figure advance to Pocket Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, which released a new edition this month. It had its debut on the New York Times trade paperback fiction best-seller list on Sunday, at No. 5.

Ms. Genova likened her experience to that of young bands or filmmakers using MySpace or [YouTube](#) to attract a following. “It’s really tough to break into the traditional model of doing things,” she said.

Louise Burke, publisher of Pocket Books, said publishers now trawl for new material by looking at reader comments about self-published books sold online. Self-publishing, she said, is “no longer a dirty word.”

Diamonds in the rough, though, remain the outliers. “For every thousand titles that get self-published, maybe there’s two that should have been published,” said Cathy Langer, lead buyer for the Tattered Cover bookstores in Denver, who said she had been inundated by requests from self-published authors to sell their books. “People think that just because they’ve written something, there’s a market for it. It’s not true.”

