

WRITER'S VOICE !



"...I recite my composition concerning the king; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer." Psalms 45:1 (NKJV)

Spring 2009

Volume 5, Issue 2

From the Editor ...

Greetings in the mighty name of **Jesus**.

Excitement is stirring. We are finalizing plans for our Thirteenth Annual Santa Barbara Writers Conference, to be held at beautiful Westmont College in the foothills of Montecito. Mark your calendars now so you won't miss a true blessing on October 10, 2009. Our conference theme scripture is:

Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. Proverbs 16:24

Our Keynote Speaker will be Faye Angus from Sierra Madre, California. A steady stream of humor and the Word of God flow from her.

In light of current events and change in our nation and around the world, I believe now is the acceptable time for Christian Writers to flood the whole earth with Words of Hope. Keep writing!

It seems like almost every writer asks about agents and how to get one. Katie Cushman shares a recent interview with her agent, Beth Jusino, on page two. And don't miss Larry Skahill's article on discovering your passion for writing on page four.

Many changes will take place this year in our guild. We are growing so fast, PRAISE the LORD, that we need a larger meeting place for our monthly meetings. We hope to keep the same time and day of the month, but change is inevitable in the world. Keep checking our website, www.CWGSB.com, for up-to-the-minute schedule changes. Isn't it wonderful to be flexible in our work with the Lord?



Opal Mae Dailey
Editor-In-Chief

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Calendar ...

CWGSB Monthly Meeting:

2nd Thursday
12:00 p.m.
IHOP Restaurant
1701 State Street
Santa Barbara, CA

May 15-16, 2009: Antelope Valley
Christian Writers Conference
www.avwriters.com

May 2, 2009: Orange
County Christian
Writers Fellowship
Spring Writer's Day
www.ocwfw.org



September 26-27, 2009: San Diego
CWG Fall Conference
www.sandiegocwg.org

Oct. 10, 2009: 13th Annual Santa
Barbara Christian Writers Confer-
ence at Westmont College
www.cwgsb.com
(805) 682-0316

Agent Interview . . .

Katie Cushman

The following is an interview I conducted for *Writer's Voice!* with my agent, Beth Jusino, of Alive Communications. When I asked her if she would answer some questions for us, she said, "Sure, email me the questions." A few days later, I received her responses, sent from the airport in Washington, D.C., where she was on her third time zone in less than a week. Special thanks to Beth for working us into her travel schedule!

Beth Jusino came to Alive Communications in 2004 with a love for words and a passion for serving a new generation of writers. Before becoming an agent, Beth contributed to dozens of books as a writer and editor, and was widely published in national magazines. She spent six years as the Managing Editor for MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) International and sat on the organization's Publishing Acquisitions Team. She is also the former editor of *MOMSense Magazine*, the most widely-distributed Christian parenting publication in the United States. Beth grew up near the New Jersey shore and earned her BA in political science from Wheaton College, Illinois.

They say you need an agent to get a publisher, but agents want authors with a track record. What is the best way for an unpublished author to approach an agent?

Every agent has different submission guidelines. Some do require a "track record" – either in terms of a great platform or a successful history of previously published work. Others are open to considering debut projects and authors. (These are often, but not always, agents who are just launching their businesses.) Be sure to check an agent's guidelines, which are usually available on their websites, or in the *Writer's Market Guide/Christian Writer's Market Guide*, and follow their requirements. Do they want a query letter, or a proposal? Do they accept only via email, or only via snail mail? Make a good first impression by following their guidelines. And if it's possible for you, the best way to approach an agent is at a writer's conference. The agents who are taking appointments at these events are the ones who are

actively looking for new clients. They wouldn't travel and give up their weekends and business hours if they didn't want to meet the next great client. So again, check their guidelines and prepare your pitch based on who they are and what they're looking for. (If you can't attend a writer's conference, checking the rosters of agents attending is still a great way to identify agents to research and consider pitching.)

Another tip for pitching agents: make sure you know your project inside and out. You have a lot of competition from other writers who want "your" agent to choose their work instead of yours. Know your hook and why this is the right book and why you are the right author. Confidence is contagious, and agents are looking for writers who understand how to sell their work as well as write it. (Note: confidence is not the same as aggression; don't chase an agent into the bathroom at a writer's conference or send a letter that says "you MUST work with me.")

What do you look for in a query letter? Anything that immediately turns you off?

I look for a writer who understands what their book is about and how to sell it. A query doesn't give you much space to explain your Big Idea – but that's the point. What's the hook? Can I grasp it in 10 seconds or less? If so, then chances are I can get a publisher to understand it as well. When you think about the hook, think about the back-cover copy that is on published books. Those are written to draw a reader in with just enough information to make them interested, without giving away the whole story.

What turns me off: queries that are obviously written for multiple submissions (addressing it "Dear Agent" is a bad sign); if the author didn't do their homework to know who I am and what I represent, why should I invest the time to read and consider their proposal? Also, queries that mistake aggression for confidence – I do not want to be told what to do; I want to be convinced. And of course, poor writing. If there are typos or passive sentences or incorrect grammar in your letter, I have no confidence that your manuscript won't need significant editorial work.

Why does an author need an agent?

The simplest way I can explain it is this: most people wouldn't dream of selling or buying a home without a Realtor®. They rely on that professional expertise to guide them through a complex and life-altering process. The Realtor's® job is to know everything about houses – from how to evaluate them to how to legally transfer them from one name to the other. Sure, in some cases people work without that guidance and save themselves some commission fees, but there's always that question of whether they got the best deal, and whether all the paperwork was handled correctly. A literary agent is the Realtor® of the book world. My job is to advise my clients in the preparation of their proposal, then shop and market it until someone buys it, and then provide the expertise to negotiate the contractual details to transfer certain rights related to the intellectual property from the owner to the buyer. And then I stick around to make sure it all runs smoothly. And I do all of that for no money up front, and only a small commission percentage of the overall sale price. In those terms, why wouldn't an author want an agent?

If an author chooses to self-publish, what are some pitfalls he should look for in the publishing contract?

I'll start by saying that I haven't spent a lot of time looking at self-publishing contracts. Self-publishing is a changing avenue for authors; for years it was called "vanity publishing" because of the stigma. Now, with sales opportunities online and success stories like *The Shack*, the attitude is different. But I still don't do much in the area. With that caveat, I would say the author should understand what rights they are giving to the company who will produce the book, and how those rights are reverted back if the author chooses to go a different route a few years down the way. Also, understand how you're being compensated for books sold, if that's applicable – how much per book, how often are checks cut, etc. Are you responsible for typesetting and cover design? †

Editor's Note: Many thanks to Beth Jusino for contributing answers to Katie Cushman's ques-

tions. I would like to add to her comments on self-publishing.

Self-publishing is now accepted by the book industry. The cautions Beth mentioned are very relevant to the uncertainties in the marketplace today, and the examples she alluded to are just a sample of a complex evolving industry. The explosive popularity of the Internet has changed the whole publishing world, be it traditional or self-publishing.

My journey in self-publishing started in 1996 with a free one-hour class presented by Dan Poynter, that led me to his three day weekend seminar and workshop. Dan publishes his *Self-Publishing Manual* approximately every two years to keep it up to date. First published in 1979, you can buy his manual at most bookstores. Checkout Dan's website at www.parapublishing.com for more information.

My journey continues to take me to new discoveries in the marketplace. Mark Victor Hansen of *Chicken Soup* fame does a Mega Book Marketing Weekend annually. www.markvictorhansen.com

Another option is **Christian Writers Guild of Santa Barbara's Thirteenth Annual Writers Conference** on October 10, 2009. I will be offering a **Marketing** keynote delivery, as well as two workshops with Cory Abele titled, "Right on Track—the Basics from A to Z." We will take you from conception [idea] to completion [sold]. †

COMING SOON!

13th annual Santa Barbara Christian Writers Conference

October 10, 2009

Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bone.

Proverb 16:24

Watch for additional information in your email and on our new website www.CWGsb.com that is currently under construction. Conference information will be available by May 15.

Discover Your Passion and Mission . . .

Larry Skahill

Statistics and trends are discouraging for the unpublished writer. Increasingly, editors, publishers, and agents do not accept unsolicited queries or proposals – not to mention manuscripts. Of those that do accept material from unknown writers, publishers state in various market guides that one to three of every one hundred submissions will make it out of the “slush pile” and into publication. Of these, fifty percent will lose money, thirty to forty percent will break even, and only ten to twenty percent will return a worthwhile profit to the publisher. In the best of circumstances, perhaps six out of a thousand books written will be published *and* make a decent profit in a *good* year.

How can writers overcome these Himalayan obstacles?

The obvious answers are to gain more knowledge, hone your skills, and improve your abilities. For guidance on educating yourself as a writer, please refer to the two-part series, *Educational Options for the Aspiring Writer*, in the Winter and Spring 2008 issues of *Writer's Voice!*

But are education and training enough? Most dieters are aware of their need to lose weight. The most popular New Year's resolution is to lose weight. Yet most dieters fail to achieve their weight-loss goals. However, many of the dieting success stories are people who face debilitating disease and even death, if they don't lose weight. Why? Motivation.

John Maxwell stated “Knowledge must lead to application and that takes motivation.”

It is critical that Christians distinguish between spirit-led, people-led and self-led motivations. Spirit-led motivations will flow from our relationship with Jesus Christ, while people-led and self-led motivations generally come from guilt or a desire to please others or ourselves. Be sure your motivation is God-led.

Asking yourself the following series of questions will help you find your motivations . . . your passions.

- What am I passionate about?
- What do I like to do?
- What are my values and priorities?
- How is God equipping me?
- What challenges in my life shaped me?
- What are my spiritual gifts?
- What are my natural skills and talents?
- How am I unique?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of my personality?
- When I was a child, what did I want to be when I grew up?
- Is there a historical figure whose life story inspires me? Why?
- What are my favorite books and movies? Do they awaken a passion in me?

Clearly understanding your motivations will also give you the ability to come up with a well defined mission statement with regards to your writing.

A favorite movie of many men is “Gladiator.” The favorite scene of most of these men is the same: the hero, Maximus, confronts the evil Roman Emperor, Comidus, who murdered Maximus' family.

“My name is Maximus Decimus Meridias, Commander of the armies of the north, General of the Felix Legions, loyal servant to the true emperor, Marcus Aurelius, husband to a murdered wife, father to a murdered son, and I will have my vengeance in this life or the next.”

Wow! Is that motivation or what? It is also a clear mission statement and a great model for us.

Maximus openly claims his heritage and titles. How fully do you accept that you are a child of the living, creator God? Do you recognize that you are His ambassador to this world? Doesn't that empower you?

Maximus is painfully aware of his enemy's murder of his family. Do you accept that our enemy, Satan, wants to murder your living soul and those of your loved ones as well? Does that stir some-

thing in you?

Maximus is passionate to achieve his mission: The just death of Comidus. Maximus is committed to this goal no matter how long or how much effort it takes. What are you willing to do to accomplish your mission?

Finally, the bible gives us a motivation beyond any this world can come up with: As children of God, we are guaranteed success. "... If God is for us, who can be against us? ... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (Romans 8:31,37)

Find your passion for writing. If you truly have a God-given passion to write, relying on Him while doing your best, you cannot fail.

Now get out there and climb Mount Everest. †

Quotes . . .

God of our life, there are days when the burdens we carry chafe our shoulders and weigh us down; when the road seems dreary and endless, the skies grey and threatening; when our lives have no music in them, and our hearts are lonely, and our souls have lost their courage. Flood the path with light, run our eyes to where the skies are full of promise; tune our hearts to brave music; give us the sense of comradeship with heroes and saints of every age; and so quicken our spirits that we may be able to encourage the souls of all who journey with us on the road of life, to Your honor and glory.

Augustine

Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength.

Corrie Ten Boom

You might as well try to hear without ears or breathe without lungs, as to try to live a Christian life without the Spirit of God in your heart.

D.L. Moody

Spare the rod and spoil the child - that is true. But, beside the rod, keep an apple to give him when he has done well.

Martin Luther

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