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# The Window

Official Newsletter of Panhandle Professional Writers  
d/b/a Texas High Plains Writers



## HIGH PLAINS WRITERS

March 2016

A Bi-Monthly

Newsletter

## From the President

**Kimberly Black**

This month the Texas High Plains Writers Nominating Committee will be reaching out to our membership and asking for volunteers to help serve our organization. I would ask each of you to consider either holding an office or, at least, serving on a committee to help make decisions for this next year.

I know how tight our schedules are. Most board members have a full-time job, a writing schedule to maintain, and many serve in other (local and national) organizations as well. Without a full Board of Directors, we have members who are doubling up their workload to cover the vacant positions. I cannot stress enough how much more every member will get from the organization when all our members participate.

This group is meant to offer fellowship, connection, and encouragement to writers at whatever stage of the journey to publication they may be. We strive to provide meaningful programs and workshops. We want to serve you, every one of you, where you are. We want to ask and answer questions that lift everyone up a degree or two. We want to encourage young writers to take the hard path because we know it is important to us all.

Writing is difficult. It's even more difficult without support. Whether you are a multi-published author with best-seller credits to your name or you're just starting to share your notes for the first time, you have something to contribute. We have a place for

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For the sake of this great organization and everyone in it, when the nominating committee calls, please answer. It all begins with a yes.

# What's in Your Writing Toolbox?

**Presented by Dusty Richards**

Western author and former president of Western Writers of America Dusty Richards has been in the trenches for 24 years writing and selling stories. It's no surprise that many compare him to Elmer Kelton and Louis L'Amour. We're so excited to have him come and share his expertise on Saturday, March 19.

Writers need more than a desire to write—we need certain tools in order to tell a good story. Before the meeting is over, you'll have a toolbox full of the elements you need and it won't matter what genre you write. These apply to every type of writing.

Dusty will cover among other things:

- Four Crucial Stages to Building a Book
- Scene and Sequel
- Action and Reaction
- How to Craft Gripping Ending Chapter Hooks

Having published his 150<sup>th</sup> book in January, he knows what he's talking about.

Dusty Richards grew up riding horses and watching his western heroes on the big screen. But his lifelong dream was to write the novels he loved. He sat on the stoop of Zane Grey's cabin and promised that he'd get published. In 1992, that promise became a reality when his first book, *Noble's Way*, hit the shelves. Since then, he's won multiple Spur Awards and was inducted into the Arkansas Writers Hall of Fame.

Please join us and learn more about this wonderful craft we love.

You can contact Dusty on [Facebook](#) or on his [website](#).

## Want Good Programs?

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Our organization can receive tax deductible charitable donations. We would greatly appreciate donations to help pay for quality speakers and their travel and hotel expense. You can make a donation by going to our [Payments](#) page and selecting from the drop-down box "General Use Donation" and enter the amount you would like to donate. (We hope to have a "Speaker Donation" option in the near future.) If you'd rather write a check, please make it payable to Panhandle Professional Writers and mail it to P. O. Box 19303, Amarillo, Texas 79114. Please be sure to note on the check that it is a Speaker Donation.

If you make a donation, we will happily recognize you as a speaker sponsor.

## Member Spotlight on . . .

### Marcy McKay

She believes the best four words in the world are, "Once upon a time." Marcy walked into her first Panhandle Professional Writers meeting in 1996 and didn't even know what the word "genre" meant, but by Gawwwd, she knew she wanted to write.

And, she did. Between two part-time jobs, two young children and one husband, Marcy would crawl to her computer each morning by 5 a.m. to write until everyone woke up to begin their busy lives.

It was a slow path to publication, but Marcy became an award-winning copywriter and short-story author, and she has been paid for more magazine articles than she can count for publications like *Writer's Digest*, *Accent West*, and *Roots & Wings*.

In December 2015, SkipJack Publishing released her debut novel, [Pennies from Burger Heaven](#), that the *Amarillo Globe News* calls, "A disturbing tale ... a story to be read, savored, and then reread." Marcy feels grateful she stuck to her dream and never gave up.

## Dinner Theatre Fundraiser and Silent Auction

[Buy your tickets now](#) and mark your calendar for April 30. This year's fundraising event is the play *Love & Marriage* written by our very own Mike Akins and Ryan McSwain. Your meal is included in the price of the ticket. You don't want to miss THPW's fundraising event of the year.

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day, April 15.

# Take the Muddle Out of Your Middle

**Linda Broday**

Almost every writer experiences a sagging middle, the halfway point in a book when you don't know where to go. You lose traction or lose the excitement that you had at the beginning. If so, you need a big change, something to shift the story and turn it. One fix might be to add a new complication, but here are some other suggestions to jumpstart your writing:

- Have a character make a wrong assumption that has serious consequences.
- Introduce new information that changes things.
- Block a route of escape or set a play awry.
- Make your character choose between two things he wants.
- Someone can die or someone thought to be missing shows up.
- A lie can be discovered.
- Have something stolen that would've helped your character reach his goal.
- If a character is bluffing, call his bluff.
- Have a friend turn against your character.
- Think of the one thing your character would not do and have him do it.

## Facebook

We have a new Facebook page. Go [join](#) the group!

## Link Up

### Links to Members' Websites

This will be an ongoing article that, hopefully, will grow with each newsletter. If you would like your website "linked up" in our next newsletter, email us your website address along with any special information about the site.

**Kim Black**

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Kim? Find out by going to her [website](#) and reading what she writes.

### Dianne Sagan

Dianne's [website](#) has a free newsletter to announce new books, recipes, contests, and giveaways. You can also find her [Book Club-in-a-Box](#) on her website. Dianne's other [website](#) has a membership section and offers a free newsletter.

### Vicki Schoen

Would you like to include Vicki in your [book discussion group](#)? You can sign up for Vicki's [mailing list](#) and you can read her [blog](#).

### Ryan McSwain

You can get a [signed copy](#) of Ryan's book *Monsters All The Way Down* on his [website](#). You can join his mailing list and get access to free short stories by going to his "[All My Stuff](#)" page.

### Linda Broday

Visit Linda's [website](#) and sign up for her newsletter and check out her blog and booklist. You can also find information about her book that is being released in October. Interested in a trip to Las Vegas? Meet Linda there April 12-17.

### Natalie Bright

Learn about Natalie and the books she's written by visiting her [website](#).

### Phyliss Miranda

Discovery Phyliss's books, what her favorite links are, and check out her new contest [here](#).

### Marcy McKay

Learn more about Marcy McKay and what she writes [here](#).

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## Memberships

### Molly McKnight

It is so great to see our attendance numbers creeping back up!

Linda Broday, our Program Director, has booked some awesome speakers and the variety in writing tips has been extremely helpful.

If you missed the January deadline for old payment dues, it will certainly be worth your effort to go ahead and join at the new \$36 rate. You will more than recover the cost in strong speakers!

I hope to see you at the March 19 meeting. If you have books to sell, be sure and bring some. Our new "involvement" is spreading out to all areas! Come join us for a strong speaker, purchase a box lunch if you want to, and stay for afternoon critique.

Looking forward to seeing you.

## Rising to Meet a Challenge

### Kimberly Black

Have you ever participated in a writing challenge? Not just a contest against other writers, but a push-yourself-beyond-your-comfort-zone challenge where you pit yourself against your own will and natural inclinations? You should.

When you compete against time, procrastination, wordiness, fear, and self-doubt, you will find a place of respect and confidence just on the other side. Whatever obstacle you face and conquer becomes a building block for your next success. I know it sounds hokey, but it's true.

Do you struggle with writing every day? Set a writing goal of a specific number of words per day or a set amount of time or even just filling one page before bedtime.

Do you run into writer's block? Conduct your own "flash fiction" challenge by choosing five random words, setting a timer for 20 minutes, and writing a short and fast story using all five words. You won't believe how quickly your imagination will kick into high gear.

Do you find yourself writing too much, taking every little rabbit-trail you find until you lose the clear plot of your story? Take the Story in Six Words challenge. Write one

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What about that fear and self-doubt stuff? How do you combat that? Just write, and at the end of every sentence let that little period mark one more sentence of practice and experience. The more you collect, the better you will become. It's true about every other aspect in life. It's true about writing. Today's rough drafts – as terrible as they may seem – become tomorrow's great novels with a little revision and polish.

Get a writing partner and help each other. Take the challenges together. Push each other a little and you'll find accomplishment faster. And you'll have someone there who understand how tough it is, how much you've grown, and how much you need to celebrate.

## The Bragging Box

This is where we brag on our members and their accomplishments. If you know someone we should be bragging about, let us [know](#).

### Dianne Sagan

We are proud to share Dianne's [interview](#) by Kirkus, an American book review magazine founded in 1933. The interview is a great place to get to know Dianne and her writing.

## Youth Writing Contest & Raffle

The submission deadline for the youth writing contest is May 7. Additional information and entry form can be found on our [website](#).

We are raffling a Samsung tablet to help support our youth writing contest. Contact [Janet Taylor](#) to purchase or get tickets to sell. The tickets are \$5 each or six for \$20.

The drawing will be held during the youth writing contest awards ceremony on July 16. Winning ticket holder need not be present to win.

## Member Writing Contests

As mentioned in our February 18 email announcement, the subject matter of our March writing contest is "Spring". Entries must be postmarked by May 2 and can be a short story of any genre or a poem. For details go to our [website](#).

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that the World Wide Web would provide us with writing prompts for our contests.

Below is a list of the rest of this year's writing contest prompts and their postmark deadlines:

- "There are three children sitting on a log near a stream. One of them looks up at the sky and says..." May's contest has a July 1 postmark deadline.
- "A twinkling eye can mean many things. Start with a twinkle in someone's eye and see where it takes you." July's contest has a September 1 postmark deadline
- "Write about something ugly — war, fear, hate, or cruelty—but find the beauty (silver lining) in it." September's contest has a November 1 postmark deadline.
- "He turned the key in the lock and opened the door. To his horror, he saw..." November's contest has a January 3 postmark deadline.

Your entries can be a short story of any genre or a poem. For details go to our [website](#).

## Writing Events

### Our May 21 and September 17 Speakers

Come listen to Dan Brown, certified public accountant, speak at our May 21 meeting about the deductions a writer can take.

Kimberly Willis Holt is slated to speak at our September 17 meeting.

### Inspirational Writers Alive! Spring Writers Conference

The conference is April 2, 2016, at Kingswood United Methodist Church, 4801 South Austin, Amarillo, Texas, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Registration is from 8-8:30 a.m. Lunch is included in the registration fee of \$65 with advance registration (\$35 for university, high school, and home school students). For more more information, go to their [Facebook](#) or [email](#) Karl Smith or call him at 806-336-5164.

### Writing by Writers Workshop

April 8 in Boulder, Colorado. They host multi-day writing workshops for people interested in writing fiction, nonfiction, memoir, and poetry. Details can be found

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## Romantic Times Book Lovers' Convention

April 12-17 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Details can be found [here](#).

## Pikes Peak Writers' Conference

April 15-17 in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Details can be found [here](#).

## Story Circle Network Women's Writing Conference

April 15-17 in Austin, Texas. Details can be found [here](#). **Registration ends soon.**

## DFW Writers Conference

April 23-24 at Fort Worth Convention Center. Details can be found [here](#).

## Nonfiction Writers Conference

May 4-6 via teleseminar. Attendees can participate live via phone or Skype, including Q&A with the speakers, or download recordings and transcripts (depending on your registration option). Details can be found [here](#).

## Oklahoma Writers Federation, Inc., Conference

May 12-14 in Oklahoma City. Details can be found [here](#).

## West Texas Writing Academy

June 6-10 in Canyon, Texas. Details can be found [here](#).

## Writers' League of Texas Editors & Agents Conference

June 24-26 in Austin, Texas. Details can be found [here](#).

# Volunteers Needed

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organizations can say that? Very few. We need volunteers to be a part of the Centennial Committee. Please [email](#) us if you'd like to participate in such an historic event.

After five years of organizing the Youth Writing Contest, it is time for me to step aside and let someone else take over. If you have considered volunteering in our organization, this is a great, rewarding opportunity for you. Just [email](#) me, Janet Taylor, to let me know you want to keep this great tradition going. I will be happy to share with you my experiences and help you in any way I can.

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## Current Board Members

President: Kimberly Black - [pennie@steepledog.com](mailto:pennie@steepledog.com)

President-Elect: vacant

Secretary: vacant

Treasurer: Karen Gammage - [kgamm@earthlink.net](mailto:kgamm@earthlink.net)

Technical Support: Mike Akins - [mike7166@gmail.com](mailto:mike7166@gmail.com)

Membership: Molly McKnight - [mmc222@ymail.com](mailto:mmc222@ymail.com)

Hospitality: Carol Smith - [carolsnowsmith@gmail.com](mailto:carolsnowsmith@gmail.com)

Publicity and Newsletter: Janet Taylor - [janetcoopertaylor@gmail.com](mailto:janetcoopertaylor@gmail.com)

Conferences and Workshops: vacant

Programs: Linda Broday - [lindabroday@aol.com](mailto:lindabroday@aol.com)

## Critique Session Guidelines

*To participate in the critique session, you do not need to have a piece to be critiqued. The sessions begin at 1 p.m. and, depending on the number of those who have a story or a poem needing to be critiqued, can last up to a couple of hours. We suggest that your material not exceed approximately 750 to 1,000 words. Please bring at about five copies of your story or poem. If possible, it is helpful if you bring a short synopsis of your story so those critiquing have some background. We ask that you format your manuscript as follows:*

1. Use white 8.5 by 11-inch paper.
2. Double space using either Times New Roman 12 or similar font.
3. In the header, give your last name, a slash (/), and a short title on the left and the page number on the right (at the top of each page).
4. Use one-inch margins.
5. Use one side of the paper only.
6. If possible, use line numbering.
7. Note: Your synopsis may be single-spaced.

*Each person, in turn, will read 1,000 words or less (15 to 20 minutes) or the author will read their own writing, based on preference; then, the group facilitator will ask for*

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*The goal of every critique is: "How can we make it better."*

*Meetings are held on the third Saturday in odd-numbered months: January, March, May, July, September, and November.*

*The public and Texas High Plains Writers members are invited to hear speakers on selected writing or related topics.*

*You may order a box lunch from our Hospitality Director between 9:30 and 10:15 or bring a sack lunch. Box lunches are \$10.*

*Unless otherwise specified, meeting location is at Amarillo Senior Citizens Center 1217 S. Tyler Amarillo, Texas (Note: We must occasionally switch our meeting location, or we may need to change the date to avoid conflicts. So, please check the address and date for each meeting.)*

*Our meetings/programs follow this schedule:*

*Check-In and Meet & Greet  
9:30 - 10:00 a.m.*

*Business Meeting  
10:00 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.*

*Program/Presentation  
10:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.*

*Box Lunch  
12:15 - 1 p.m.*

*Critique Session  
1:00 - 3:00 p.m.*

*Need to contact us?  
You can write to us at:  
Texas High Plains Writers  
P. O. Box 19303  
Amarillo, TX 79114  
or email us at:  
[panhandlewriters@gmail.com](mailto:panhandlewriters@gmail.com)*



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