



Carindale Writers Group newsletter

21 April 2011

Present: Debby, Jeff M., Heather, Len, Brian, Peter, Jeff P., Wendy, Ed, Annette, Dawn and Judith. Dorothy popped in to drop off the welcome tea-making paraphernalia.

We welcomed two new members today, Margaret and Rebecca. As with all our members we hope to have a long and fruitful association together.

The opening chit-chat at our meeting today covered news of some internationally known writers. Michael Connelly, crime writer and author of *Lincoln Lawyer* (amongst other works), will be visiting Brisbane in mid-May. Ken Follett, author of such historical epics as *Pillars of The Earth*, was recently interviewed by Jennifer Byrne on ABC's First Tuesday Book Club. His down-to-earth honesty was praised when asked what moved him to write. It was not for high ideals or even that he had a burn to write. It was blatantly "for the money!"

Speaking of money, and prize money in particular, members are reminded about the very generous prize pool available in the Premier's Literary Awards. There are many categories where our members might find a winning niche, if you apply in time. The closing date this year for nominations is 6th May. Total prize money available is \$225,000.

I brought up what constitutes a 'short story' depending upon where in the world you live. One third of the main short story competitions in Australia have upper word limits of 2,000 words. At 5,000 words, you breach the 'self-destruction mark,' according to Tasmanian writer Geoffrey Dean, and you have also written yourself out of the scope of many literary magazines. By contrast however, America and Canada have a much longer concept of the short story. The average word count in particular anthologies is 6,300 for the US, and a meatier 8,500 for Canada. The writer Nam Le who has the longest story in Black Inc's *The Best Australian Stories* observes, "Sometimes I still think about word counts the way a general must think about casualties." The article from which this information is drawn, called *Blind test shows the short and short of it*, was written by Matthew Lamb and published in *The Weekend Australian Review* of 9-10 April 2011.

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This newsletter is published on our website www.carindalewritersgroup.org New members and not-so-new members are recommended to visit the site to take a look at the many and varied writing styles and skills of the members of the Carindale Writers Group. And do remember, we are always happy for you to submit any new work to our website.

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Providing encouragement through sharing and discussion

It happened that in Beverley's absence today I defaulted into the role of bell-ringer and whip-cracker. I hope I did a fair job. However, apart from being your regular scribe, I was also the featured reader today. Performing all three roles together make for big boots for any one person to fill. My apologies to all present therefore, if today's meeting felt like a one-woman show.

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Today's featured writer/reader.

The writing of this story began about ten days ago, when I realised I was tired of writing memoir and needing a change. I found it exciting yet challenging to branch out into something that is entirely new for me. *Split Infinitive* is a work of fiction by Debby Raymond.

For the opening 2,000 words or so I wanted to keep the reader guessing about the recent background of our troubled heroine, Fee Constantine. I wanted to keep under wraps, for as long as possible, the type of institution from which she has just been released.

One of our members felt the story began with a great opening sentence, making her want to continue reading to find out more.

One critiquer admired the biblical references with which the story opened and which were further obliquely referred to as the work continued. The slow unfolding of the story appealed to one of our members however, another found the pace too slow. The suspended tension in the work was encouraged although more could be made of it. The dialogue was perfectly in keeping too.

I was told there was good, logical flow throughout the work, which comment I was very grateful for, as being a feature I demand of myself in everything I write. This is the one area where I ardently seek critique from my fellow writers.

It is evident that Fee has some sort of mental issue she is trying to come to terms with. To maintain reader interest, it was suggested I inject the occasional jarring note, to emphasise how out-of-kilter with the world our heroine is feeling. One member thought Fee might have just come out of rehab. If that were the case, Fee would need to come across as more stressed. Another member thought Fee might have a mental disease, but this is not the case either.

As the story progressed, one of our members found the characters were turning out to be different from his initial expectation. If the characters are seen to be evolving, I feel this is a good thing. However, if the characters are showing inconsistent traits, I am very much aware that I, as the writer moulding them, must define them better.

One critique offered was to make the story more immediate by writing it in the first person. I tried to write it in this way at the outset but found myself constantly lapsing back into the third person. Hence I defaulted into writing in the third person as a style that comes more naturally to me.

Other characters to appear so far are Fee's husband Ralph and her mother, Mrs. P. I can do a lot more with them, I was told, as I should do with the vintage Austin Healey car which gets them about town. That could even become a character in itself.

What I read aloud is only the beginning of the story. I was told it reads like the first chapter of a novel. I know this story can run to three or four times what I've written so far.

Providing encouragement through sharing and discussion

A discussion followed on how many words constitute a novel. 70,000 to 90,000 seems to be the minimum for a novel. It appears you'll get away with 25,000 words as a novella.

I am am grateful to all the members of the Carindale Writers Group for your input, many of which suggestions I have now incorporated into the story.

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The exercise suggested for today was *The Art of Conversation*. Either this proved too difficult a subject or people couldn't find the time for it, so no one present had written on the topic. A number of people had written on other topics, which is all to the good. So as to give everyone a chance to read aloud, the readings were prioritised according to length, shortest to longest.

Jeff began with a short 200-word excerpt from his novel, *Fusilier of the Line*. He mentioned how Napoleon was overseeing his troops, 'sitting on his hands on his chestnut.' I inadvertently caused quite a laugh, in which many people joined, when I naively observed that 'chestnut' was a new euphemism to me. Jeff happily pointed out that the chestnut in question was not Napoleon's *derrière* but his horse. Aah, now I get it...!

Peter gave us a song called *Russian Roulette* from the musical he is currently working on. He shared out copies of the libretto so we could see how the lines rhymed. He particularly wanted suggestions on one line in the chorus he was unsure about. Our feedback to Peter told him how perfect we felt the line was; even quite cynical in its way.

Wendy followed with a longer excerpt from her novel *Seasons of Darkness and Light*. This particular segment was several degrees lighter in tone than some other parts of her novel. Her descriptive powers brought the characters' surroundings vividly to life as she described butcher birds singing and grass sparkling. Her characters are so well described that we can see not just their physical infirmities but also their deep-rooted relationships with each other.

Jeff P. read aloud for us his short story called *The Idiot Trip*, a true story based on a shooting expedition out in the bush, involving fathers and sons. They had a run-in with some unexpected wild pigs they came across, when the hunters were only after smaller prey such as rabbits and ducks. The hunting party found that having the correct ammunition in your gun could save your life. All ended well with a good catch, fortunately.

Heather contributed a book review she had been busily writing outside the library as she waited for it to open. *Fat, Forty & Fired* by Nigel Marsh appealed so much to Heather she was keen to pass on to us her enjoyment and reaction to the book.

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Our **next meeting** at the Holland Park Library is on **5 May**. Start time **10am prompt**.

Suggested exercise for next time is **Food Adventures**. The topic was suggested (as *Food Tales*) by Karen Rayment, food and travel writer and member of Carindale Writers Group. If these recipe-related food stories are good enough they can even be posted to the *FoodTales* website. For more information please see <http://foodtales.slq.qld.gov.au>

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Providing encouragement through sharing and discussion

Our featured reader/writer for our meeting on 5 May will be Brian Rowell. For the following meeting on 19 May, Dorothy Vicary will feature her writing. For the meeting after that, 1 June, we will hear from Dawn Johnson.

This is a timely reminder that our meetings in the Holland Park library take place on the first and third Thursdays of every month. We start at 10am and try to finish around 1pm, though it's not a problem for the library if we run beyond that time. We may have the use of the library meeting room until 2pm.

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We are grateful to Jeff Petersen for his donation to our Carindale Writers Group library of the following books: Australian Book Contracts by The Australian Society of Authors; Self-Publishing Made Simple by Euan Mitchell; word for word edited by Hilary Beaton; and editing made easy by Bruce Kaplan. (The titles of these last two books are in lower case as they are presented on their book covers. How they are recorded here are not typographical errors.)

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Chip's Computer Tips

Keep Your PC Insulated from Internet Threats with Free BufferZone Pro

Most security tools leap into action only after they've detected a threat - and sometimes that's too late (especially if the threat is one that's new and unknown).

The only way to really stay safe while you're online is to work inside a virtual environment – a kind of protected bubble (aka "sandbox") that operates on your PC but isn't directly tied to it. Trustware's BufferZone Pro creates exactly that kind of protected bubble, thus offering a unique (and theoretically impenetrable) level of protection.

BufferZone Pro originally sold for \$40, but Trustware has decided to offer the software free to home users.

The software's virtual environment isolates security threats and prevents them from ever touching your PC. With it you can safely download, install, and run any application without worrying about Trojan horses, worms, keyloggers, spyware, Adware, phishing attempts, or other computer-clogging malware.

This newly free Pro version includes support for USB devices (flash drives, etc.), P2P file sharing, all instant-messaging programs, and personal files (which get stored in a confidential folder). And unlike many security tools, BufferZone Pro isn't subscription-based, meaning you won't get hit with a \$40 bill a year from now. It's free, period.

The software is available in 32-bit editions for Windows XP, Vista, and 7; a 64-bit version is in the works and due to be released soon. It's not the most novice-friendly tool I've ever used, but if you've had malware problems in the past or you're concerned about the effectiveness of your security software, I highly recommend taking this freebie for a test-drive.

FN KARMATZ

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Writer's websites

Jane has suggested the following websites as being helpful to writers like us.

<http://bubblecow.co.uk/2011/04/how-to-write-a-better-novel-by-using-an-inciting-incident/>

<http://bubblecow.co.uk/2011/04/publishers-that-accept-writers-without-agents-shortfire-press/>

<http://www.dailywritingtips.com/5-ways-to-work-your-way-around-the-weak-%E2%80%9Cwith%E2%80%9D/>

<http://www.how-to-write-a-book-now.com/plot-outline.html>

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Chambers Good Writing Guide.

Page 264. Variety of sentence structure.

Different types of sentence structure can be used to construct a sentence. Good writers will constantly try out different combinations of clauses, reduce the sentence from two clauses to one, break up a sentence into two shorter ones and so on, until they are happy that the sentence is right. Be aware of the possibilities.

Your aim should be to avoid repeated use of the same patterns:

- Don't always begin sentences in the same way (for example, with a main clause starting with the subject and verb).
- Don't repeat the same pronoun at the start of successive sentences, as in 'He entered... He looked... He ran...'
- Avoid excessive use of the conjunction *and* to join clauses. It is a simple tool for constructing a sentence which can quickly become tedious.

Page 272. Emphatic sentence structure.

You can often engage your readers' attention or focus on a particular word or idea by changing the natural word order.

You can emphasize a key word by making it the first word of the sentence. A natural sentence structure might be: *She would not eat fish.*

But if you want to emphasize the word *fish*, you can rework the sentence like this: *Fish was the one thing she would not eat.*

You can also use the form of a question – even though your readers are not in a position to supply a verbal reply to you – to make them take notice. A natural sentence structure might be: *This did not discourage people from buying it.*

If you want to present this information in a more dramatic fashion, you can turn the statement into a question: *Did this discourage people from buying it? Not at all!*

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