

Words of Paradise

Romance Writers of America ©

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Worth 996 Words by Sally Sorenson

We bought into the dream, or rather the dream vacation. *Conde Nast Traveler* magazine is running a photo contest. Win your dream vacation, worth up to \$25,000. After looking at past winners and making the inevitable comparisons, the conclusion we drew was that we could do as well. Better even. Possibly first place.



We scanned the rules for the usual pitfalls, and yes the contest was still open through July, which gave us two months. No limit on the number of times you could enter, so we started scanning travel photos for “the best of the best.” My hubby is the real photographer, but we picked out one or two that I had taken and could enter under my own name, which would give us more chances. And while he culled favorites and dropped them in a new e-folder for the contest, I kept reading.

The part I liked best was that the entries were judged equally on the quality of the photo and the written explanation. It’s a travel magazine, after all, selling to people who love to visit foreign places. “The evocative appeal of the essay” was weighted 45% of the total score.

What made this moment special? We’ve traveled a lot lately, and my mind skimmed the photos for words that would complete the story. Each photo evoked a particular memory of a beautiful moment. I could take the reader along with us on safari, up the Inca Trail, through the Fiery Furnace of Arches National Park at daybreak. The lions of Africa—well, let me tell you...

Then we read the catch. All entries became property of the promoters to use any way they wish, including altering, for perpetuity. Not just the winners, for whom even runner-up prizes such as camera bags or other big-whoop items would be

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considered compensation, but all entries. Once you upload your image, it's theirs forever. Can you say "intellectual property rights?"

Further Internet search on photography contests revealed that *CN Traveler* isn't alone in its shameless grab for free photos. Blog postings warned about understanding what's at stake. Writers and photographers are sometimes so anxious to see their work in print that they accept a contract or agreement that heavily favors the publisher. It demeans the artist and ultimately the profession.

As the old saw goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Until you count those vital four: READ THE FINE PRINT. Then it's worth nothing.

*Aloha,
Sally*

Aloha Chapter News



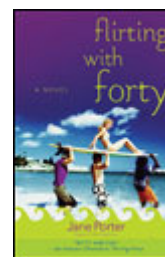
Jane Porter Speaks on July 11

Aloha Chapter welcomes back novelist **Jane Porter** on Saturday morning, July 11 (10 a.m. to noon) at the Aina Haina Library. Jane, an Aloha Chapter member who divides her time

between Hawaii and Washington State, will be speaking about writing and life, and how she manages to do both!



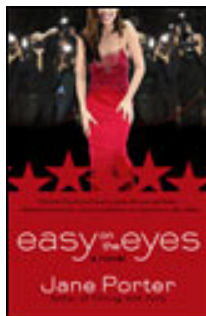
Jane's latest novel, *Easy on the Eyes*, is due out this month, joining a growing line of hits that includes *The Frog Prince* and *Flirting With Forty*. On her website (www.janeporter.com), Jane answers the question "How much of me is in my books?":



"There's a lot of me in *Flirting With Forty*. Like Jackie, after one trip to Hawaii I was hooked. I consider it a second home now and my family and I visit it often.

I love what being in Hawaii does for my soul.

"Like Holly Bishop, my main character in *The Frog Prince*, I grew up in Central California. Unlike Holly, mine was -- as I mention above -- a wonderful, idyllic childhood and I look back on my early years with fondness. Many of my Central California memories made their way into *The Frog Prince*. I invite you to browse a few of these memories.



"Yes, I live in Bellevue. But I am neither Marta (*Odd Mom Out*) or Taylor (*Mrs. Perfect*). I don't own a Harley and I don't live in a house like the one Taylor and Nathan have built. I write fiction. I love writing fiction.



"That said, I do draw a lot from life. Many of the restaurants and shops mentioned in the books are places I like to frequent. The roads Marta and Taylor drive on are the roads in my day to day life. There is some of me in the hopes and dreams of my characters to be sure (and some of their hang-ups, too -- but I'll never tell!) -- but the part of me in these books is really the setting."

Janet Shitabata's Good News

Aloha Chapter member **Janet Shitabata** shares her latest good news below. Congratulations, Janet!

“My short short (1,000 words) story ‘Defined by the Clock’ appears in the July issue of *Mature Living*, a Baptist magazine aimed for seniors 55 and older. And here’s how it happened.

“Olivet Baptist Church purchases about 30 magazines for the seniors every month. I happened to pick up an issue about two years ago and discovered that it had a fiction short story. It also published articles covering travel, financial and medical advice, retirement activities, hobbies, cooking, etc.—the typical senior reader stuff, but with a Christian viewpoint.

“I read the issues ‘religiously’ for about a year before I submitted a short story. It didn’t take. I continued to read the fiction selections every month to ‘get the feel’ of what the editor(s) wanted. I submitted another manuscript. After almost a year, the editors bought it. The editorial staff at *Mature Living* has been cooperative, encouraging, and professional.

“We’ve all heard of the importance of researching and knowing a publication before submission. Now, I believe.”

Schedule of Meetings for 2009

Aloha Chapter meets at the Aina Haina Library in Honolulu, on a Saturday from 10 a.m. to noon.

January 10 - “Firing Up Our Muse” Aloha Chapter’s January meeting will include a Query Letter Contest and a Finish the Book Contest. Also, a chance for all members to read aloud some of their writing.

February 7 - “Reading at Kapolei Library” Two Cowboys, a Lawyer, and a Poet! Featuring five writers from Aloha Chapter: **Carol Catanzariti, Leslee Ellenson, Lynde Lakes, Michael Little, and Madalyn Purcell.** Reading begins at 10:30 a.m.



March 7 - “Writer’s Workshop: Finding Your Voice” Workshop leader: **Michael Little.** Writers hear voices! A discussion of the writer’s voice, the narrator’s voice, and the character’s voice. Will include a special section on book design with graphic artist **Stephanie Chang:** imagining your book and matching design with voice.

April 18 - “The Art of Story” Guest speaker: **Margaret South,** teacher and film producer. South has developed television and feature-film projects, including Bette Midler’s *Beaches*. She also teaches “The Art of Story” master writing classes and founded “Kids Talk Story,” a program offered in schools in Hawaii and nationwide.

May 9 - “What an Editor Looks For” Guest speaker: **Frank Stewart,** editor of *Manoa* magazine.

June 6 - “Marriage and Divorce: an Attorney’s View” Guest speaker: **Madalyn Purcell.**

July 11 - “Jane Porter!” Guest speaker: Aloha chapter member **Jane Porter,** author of *Flirting With Forty.*

August 1 - Susan Schultz, founder and editor of *Tinfish,* will be our guest speaker. A non-profit organization founded in 1995, Tinfish Press publishes a journal of experimental poetry from the Pacific, including Hawai`i, New Zealand/Aotearoa, Australia, California, and western Canada. The press also produces books and chap-books of poetry and experimental prose, some of it written in Hawai`i Creole English (Pidgin).

September 12 - Victoria Kneubuhl, acclaimed local playwright and novelist (*Murder Casts a Shadow*), will be our guest speaker.

October 3 - “Mystery!” Guest speaker: Mystery writer **Chip Hughes** returns!

November 14 - Annual Luncheon at the Hale Koa.

How to Use Everything in Your Life (Even Your Profession) to Build Emotion and Realism in Your Fiction

by Lynde Lakes

A number of bestselling writers, like John Grisham, hit the sought-after top lists because they used facts and knowledge from their profession. **The key is to change everything but the main issue and the emotion. Grab facts and then modify them beyond recognition.**



Change men to women, Latinos to Caucasians and heterosexuals to homosexuals. Add a murder or jealousy, or both. Then change the motive of revenge to greed. Make blondes, blonds, (i.e. females to males). Change the sexes and number of the children involved. If possible, move the location, Hawaii to the Philippines or Bahamas, or Los Angeles to New York. Use the key issue and write down how it played out—then change everything else, including the resolution.

Writers are sponges who soak up their surrounding and then go hunting for more. However, when a writer has spent years in college and elsewhere learning the ins and outs of a field and know the material like the back of their hand, perhaps it would be a wise step to use that professional expertise. An additional reason to use that expertise is to give the story a credibility that it may not otherwise have had. Readers like medical thriller by doctors and court cases by attorneys. They like stories about designers by people who know the business, have lived it, worked in it. They like cop, CIA or FBI stories by the professionals who have put their lives on the line.

To give an example of using the main issue, we had an exercise to show how an attorney might handle a case. I was going through a stressful situation that day and decided to use that emotion to build my scene. My two triggers were trailer and stress. **Nothing else in my scene was true.**

FACT:

Someone had stolen a car in Seattle, then drove to Oregon, and stole my son's trailer and all of his belongings while he was at breakfast. The police found the trailer in Redding, California, abandoned with a flat tire. I had to figure out how to get it back to him before someone vandalized it. (I did, and all is well.) The point is—I used the fact of stress and a trailer and came up with the following scene. (Please pardon the guy's language.)

FICTION:

Attorney Candice Cantrell looked across her clutter-less desk at the big Latino man with his arms crossed as though he were in a police interrogation. She glanced down at her tape recorder. With his permission, which he was hesitant to give, she was taping everything.

However, so far, Dominic had only told her that his marriage was broken and he wanted her to fix it. Thereafter he answered each question with a gruff "I don't know."

Alerted by his brusque answers, flushed face, and a dark shifting gaze that screamed trouble, she decided to backtrack. "Who recommended me?" she asked, hoping that would tell her something useful.

"Pulled your name off the web," he growled.

Not a good start, she thought. She glanced at her watch. "Do you need an intermediary for a possible reconciliation?"

"Hell, no. I want a divorce, child custody, and my damn trailer back!"

Finally, she had something to work with. "Your grounds?"

"My wife is nuts; didn't you get that from the fact that she hired someone to steal my trailer? The bitch already has the house, but she wants to destroy me. She won't let me see my daughter. She lied to cops and sent them to my jobsite to arrest me for slamming her head against the wall."

"Did you do that?"

“Do I look like a guy who would do something like that?”

Actually, he did. Candice scribbled in shorthand that he hadn’t answered the question. She would come back to it later. “I had to ask. You’ve apparently had a lot going on and it’s natural to be stressed.”

“No shit?”

Candice felt the tension in the room soar several notches. To give him a chance to cool down, she decided to collect additional general information—she took down the preliminary information, names, addresses, possible witnesses. All the time he talked, he rattled something in his pocket. It sounded like solid steel juggling against solid steel. Suddenly he shifted and she saw the outline of a gun under his jacket.

Our time was up, so I ended the exercise with the gun. No problem. My point was made—the key to using a writer’s profession is to change everything but the main issue and the emotion. Grab facts and then modify them beyond recognition. Wishing you excitement, emotion, and realism in your writing so you, like Grisham or Gerritsen, can hit the bestsellers list.

*Aloha,
Lynde*

Take Five
Believing the Story
by Michael Little

In the middle of Frank Delaney’s novel *Ireland*, an engaging 560-page narrative about Ireland and Irish storytellers, there’s one paragraph that jumped off the page at me and said “Take me home with you.” Or perhaps it whispered “Kiss me, I’m Irish.” Whatever. But it’s a memorable paragraph for all writers, and readers, and here it is.



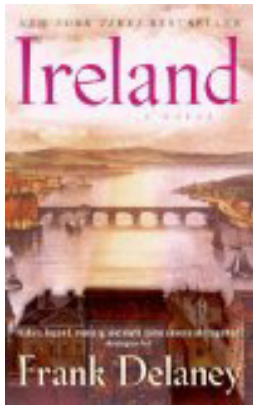
A story has only one master—its narrator; he decides what he wants his story to do. I know, I have always known, what I want my stories to achieve—I want to make people believe. Believe what I tell. Believe in it. Believe me. Belief is the one effect I’m always looking for, and I apply every device, every pause, every gesture, every verbal nuance and twirl, to that end. To achieve it, I myself have to believe; if I don’t, who will? I must believe ancient Ireland was as I describe it. The swords really did ring loudly off the shields. And the armor surely gleamed in the sun.

It’s just one of thousands of paragraphs in a novel chock full of delightful Irish stories-within-the-big-story, but there it is at the top of page 278, like a gold nugget that I discovered when I turned the page.

The paragraph is the beginning of a chapter-long letter written by the master storyteller, an elusive oral storyteller whom our young protagonist pursues around Ireland, telling his own stories along the way. Most of the advice in the letter applies to the oral tradition, but much of it also shines a light into the dark corners of the written story.

The narrator is the master of the story. A fiction writer narrates his story, whether he uses third-person narration or lets one of his characters tell the story first-person. Even in the quiet telling of the written story, the voice of the narrator rings out.

It's almost the first decision I make in creating a story—selecting the point of view. In “Pickles and Shawnilynn and Me at the Mall,” a short story about three 8th-graders who spend an afternoon at Kahala Mall, the voice of Anna, the “Me” of the title, sings from first sentence to last. She is the master of the story, and letting her narrate was the perfect choice, even if it meant much time spent asking friends and strangers about current teenage slang and favorite teenage shops at the mall, and then visiting some of those shops. Just a word of warning—the Hello Kitty shops (Sanrio Surprise at Kahala Mall, in case you want to verify this) are incredibly, and dangerously, pink. Sunglasses would have helped. My eyes were sore for days afterwards.



“I want to make people believe,” Delaney writes. “Believe what I tell. Believe in it. Believe me.” I read the paragraph in *Ireland* long after I wrote the “Pickles” story, but these words describe exactly how I felt about my short story as I was writing it. Part of the believing deal is getting the setting and details right. Yes, Carl’s Jr. is right next to the Kahala Theatre movies at the mall. Yes, you can see school kids sitting there eating their French fries and talking. And yes, you can go to Claire’s and buy blueberry nail polish. After the movie your mom might pick you up in front of Long’s. Easy to believe.

“To achieve it,” Delaney continues, “I myself have to believe; if I don’t, who will?” Absolutely true. The writer is the first reader. He must convince himself first. I carried Anna and her two best friends around in my head for weeks before I wrote a word of their story. And as I began to write the story she became more real.

Then I had a chance to read the “Pickles” story aloud for the first time to a group of writer friends, in a workshop on voice. As I read Anna’s story, she became more real to me than most of the teenagers I’ve met. She was in my head, and I was riding along inside her head, at least for one Saturday afternoon at Kahala Mall, as she and Pickles and Shawnilynn watched the *Ratatouille* movie and Anna told about the big surprise and the super cool stuff that happened at the mall. Of course I believe.

Frank Delaney’s *Ireland* is a hymn to the joy of storytelling. Now there’s a phrase I want to take home with me, “the joy of storytelling.” If the story doesn’t bring me joy, how can I expect it to bring joy to a reader? Or a listener, for now that I think of it, I realize that my favorite stories are also great read-aloud stories. Give me a good narrator, the “master” of the story, let me hear that narrator’s voice as the story spins out, draw me into the story, in from the cold, and I am home free.

For more essays on writing, see my blog for writers, “Our chief weapon is surprise” ... at ourchiefweapon.blogspot.com. “Pickles and Shawnilynn and Me at the Mall” is scheduled for publication in October 2009 in the next collection from Bamboo Ridge Press in Honolulu (Anna’s hometown, by the way, and home to Kahala Mall and the frightening pink shop).

Aloha,

Michael

