

# Saturday Writers Newsletter

Saturday  
Writers



Writers Encouraging Writers Since 2002  
A Chapter of the Missouri Writers Guild  
A Nonprofit Organization / Corporation  
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APRIL 2024

## IMPORTANT NOTES

- Join us on the last Saturday of every month at the Kisker Road Library Branch from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in room A & B.
- Doors open at 10:30 a.m.
- Creative Salon is from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. in the Quiet Room.
- Members are invited to participate via Zoom. The link will be sent out separately.

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## April Speaker: Hadara Bar-Nadav, Poetry and Healing

This presentation will focus on the intersection of Poetry and Healing.

Ideas and approaches to writing about illness and healing, including some of the leading writers on this subject will be discussed. Examples of poems that incorporate these themes by authors including poetry by Lucille Clifton, Wisława Szymborska, and others will be examined. Can words really heal? And if so, which ones? How would the healing happen? What would it look like, feel like? Come join us for this presentation, followed by a Q&A.

A National Endowment for the Arts fellow, Hadara Bar-Nadav is the

award-winning author of five books of poetry, including *The Singing Pills*, awarded the Levis Poetry Prize; *The New Nudity*; *Lullaby (with Exit Sign)*, awarded the Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize and a finalist for the Rilke Prize in Poetry; *The Frame Called Ruin*, awarded Editor's Selection/Runner-Up for the Green Rose Prize; and *A Glass of Milk to Kiss Goodnight*, awarded the Margie Book Prize.

She is also the author of two chapbooks: *Fountain and Furnace*, awarded the Sunken Garden Poetry Prize, and *Show*

*Me Yours*, awarded the Midwest Poets Series Prize. In addition, she is co-author of the best-selling textbook *Writing Poems, 8th ed.* Her poetry has appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *The Believer*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The New Republic*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *Tin House*, and elsewhere. Hadara is currently a Professor of English and teaches in the MFA program at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.



# From the President's Desk

## Diminishing Returns

How do you know when a story is finished? Maybe you've been working on a particular piece for a while, say a few weeks, maybe even a month or two, or if it's a longer piece maybe it's been years. You feel inspired, and you've worked hard, you really want this to be your best work. Does any of this sound familiar? If you've been writing for any length of time, you probably have a story like this. I know I do.

I've been working on my first novel for almost five years. Not continuously of course. I started in July of 2019 when I wrote a few pages of a rough idea and then let it sit until January of the following year. I worked on it off and on for most of 2020, adding chapters, developing the characters, and expanding the scope of the plot. Then I got tired and let it sit until July of 2022. I joined a new critique group, resurrected the story, and got serious. Most of my writing time since then has been focused on this one manuscript.

I have shared small pieces of the work with my critique group, and they have provided many much-needed suggestions. Our group meets twice a month and I've been feeding them a chapter at each meeting. Of course, not everyone in the group can attend every meeting, and I have missed my share of meetings too. The process has been long and slow.

Eventually, I came to a point where I felt the manuscript was complete. I

had just added six new chapters and moved a few of the old ones to new positions. I was feeling good and decided it was time to let some beta-readers review the manuscript in its entirety. I asked a few people if they would be interested in being a beta-reader. Most accepted the invitation, and I told them I would send the manuscript in a few weeks, I just needed to make one quick self-editing run through.

I had recently read Nikki Hanna's book *The Path to Authorship, Listen Up, Writer, How Not to Write Like an Amateur* and thought I would apply some of her techniques to my editing process. Nikki's book is filled with great editing tips. One of the most helpful aspects are the lists of words and phrases she provides that can be scanned for. I had no idea my writing was filled with so many adverbs, unneeded dialogue tags, empty words, and grammatical errors. What I thought would take a few weeks turned into almost six months.

When I completed that arduous task, I once again thought I had a manuscript ready for release. Just one last thing to do. I'll print the entire thing and read it out loud to myself. I've never done this before but have heard it can be helpful. Maybe I'll catch a typo or two, I thought. Oh, My Lord! was I mistaken, once again. So far, I have read just the first three chapters out loud and have found the need to rewrite almost every paragraph. Some edits are small, adding or deleting a

word or two, and some are significant, rewriting and rearranging every sentence. I should have read aloud a long time ago.

So, now I find myself amid another editing cycle. When does it end? I think the answer is: Never.

I have come to believe that the editing process is never complete. There is always some word or phrase that can be improved on. However, there does come a time when the amount of effort put into the editing process does not result in a significant enough improvement to justify the effort. Every time a story is reviewed, the resulting changes become less and less significant. There is a point when the energy put in does not equal improvement out. That is the point of diminishing returns.

I don't believe I've reached that point in my current work. I still think my edits are important enough to justify continuing. So, how will I know when I reach the point of diminishing returns? I don't know for sure. Hopefully I'll recognize it when it happens. But for now, I'm sure that I'm not there yet.

Until next time, never give up, and be sure to write something every day.

Jeffrey Czuchna – 2024  
President



Jeffrey Czuchna,  
2024 President

*"I have come to believe that the editing process is never complete. There is always some word or phrase that can be improved on."*

# What's the Big Idea?

## April Showers Bring More Time for Writing!

Our generous judges awarded thirteen winning entries from the President and Poet Laureate contests. Here's a few words from the the top four.

Billie Holladay Skelley, a seasoned SW member, related to the theme of the Poet Laureate contest with her poem Time for Change. "My poem was inspired by the song "Turn! Turn! Turn!"—written by Pete Seeger and performed by the Byrds. When I was in college, I saw Pete Seeger perform live, and the prompt for this contest immediately took me back to my college days. I had a close friend back then who was in an abusive relationship, and the song "spoke to her," as it did to many people at the time. It inspired my friend to escape her situation, and my poem was written as a reflection on her journey to independence."

Billie also mentioned her most important benefit of being a long time SW member. "Saturday Writers has allowed me to become acquainted with some of the most talented and successful authors in the country, and I have benefited enormously from their wisdom, guidance, and friendship."

Sherry Cerrano secured first place for her Drabble entry Path to World Domination. In exactly 100 words, she told a thought-provoking

story about artificial intelligence.

"Since Artificial Intelligence has been in the news all the time, I have questions. How will it improve our lives? Who's putting needed restrictions on its power? If A.I. becomes sentient, will it take over? If it does, will it begin in an infantile state? In the drabble, the computer mimics childlike behavior. A.I. throwing a tantrum was the inspiration. I love writing drabbles because they are like solving puzzles to get to exactly 100 words."

She added some exciting news. "I will be presenting my medical thriller Cursed by Athena to the Books and Brews Book Club on May 29th. After attending the book club and at the urging of friends, I realized it is something good for authors to do. My novel was published January 2020. The pandemic made it impossible to launch my book. What I could do was write a second book. I recently finished writing a mystery called The Dead Keep Secrets."

For those who haven't heard about it, Books and Brews is a club devoted to novels by local authors. They meet at 7:00 p.m. the fourth Wednesday of each month at Third Wheel Brewery in St. Peters.

Robert Weismiller claimed first place in prose for his story Gene-Editing-R-Us. The playful title conveys the topic perfectly.

"I read an article about inserting certain genes from a famous athlete into someone else, hoping that subject would have the characteristics and

abilities from that athlete.

However, I've always had the thought that it takes more than genes to make someone special - like lots of repeated practice and a willingness to succeed."

Robert is proof persistence is important. "This is the third time I've submitted this story. I've always tried to improve the latest version from the previous submission. Paying for the critiques has paid off."

Congratulations, Robert. You're an inspiration!

One of our newest members, Laurie Alberswerth, was awarded first place in Flash Fiction for her entry The Great Ducky Debacle. What was Laurie's reaction when she heard the news?

"Elated shock! As a SW newbie, I worried my humorous take on the contest might seem less than literary. Since I felt/looked like a NyQuil ad on March's meeting day, I kept my camera off—a fortunate move, because I spent all remaining energy on a couch-bound happy dance at my name's announcement."

"I chose my birthday's Rubber Ducky theme for its melodramatic potential. Playing the frivolous as traumatic seemed funny, and apparently, it worked!"

Laurie also shared this: "I've loved writing since early grade school. To this day, my biggest high is seeing/hearing my audience react exactly where and how I'd hoped."

Wishing Laurie, Robert, Sherry, and Billie continued success. I hope their words have inspired a poem or prose from you for our next contest. Remember, a blank page can't be edited. Get writing!



Diane How,  
2024 Treasurer

*"It takes a lot of effort to succeed. Anyone who has submitted to a SW contest and not won can relate to that."*

## ICYMI: Estelle Erasmus, Finding your Writer's Voice

A quick shift at the last minute from an in-person to a Zoom meeting due to technical difficulties heralded Estelle Erasmus's workshop last month. We appreciate everyone's flexibility, and we're glad that we've gotten the problem solved so that we're back to an in-person meeting again this month.

If you've been struggling to find what makes you unique as a writer, what you sound like on a page, this workshop was for you. Estelle Erasmus, a former editor, current writing teacher and successful freelance writer joined us to talk about how to find your voice as a writer.

What is voice in a writer? Estelle explained that it was your way of seeing the world. You also have different ways of writing for different genres of writing. A writer for a magazine is going to write much differently than a fiction writer, for example. She first shared some different types of voices that a writer could choose; a funny voice, an optimistic, or wise voice. She shared some examples of voice from

both her writing and from the writing of her students. So what makes your voice unique? Our speaker maintains that it's two different things: Specificity and Sensory details. Specificity is what details you use in order to create a picture for your reader. The details you choose to include say something about the person or character you are writing about. Sensory details should be self-explanatory to any writer—your five senses. What can you tell the reader to bring them into your narrative through sensory details? What should your reader see, smell, taste, hear, or touch?

In order to further investigate our voice, we had two different exercises that we worked on during the meeting. First, she asked that we write a turning point or a vivid moment. This could be in your life or in the life of one of your characters. Then, select a few sentences that you've written and add in sensory details. Once we had written that, she said to add what we had wished we knew in order to add an emotional aspect.

We were asked to check for anything we had written that might be too broad. For example, if you wrote "I was happy," you're missing the because, the reason. Estelle says that this is where your voice is: in the because.

The second exercise was to write the three most prominent character traits of yours or of one of your characters. These are a touchstone, something to refer to while you're writing. When you really want to ensure that your voice is apparent, look back at these traits and ensure that your voice is shining through in your writing.

For more tips and tricks from our speaker, pick up her newest book, *Writing that Gets Noticed*.

—Beatrice Underwood-Sweet

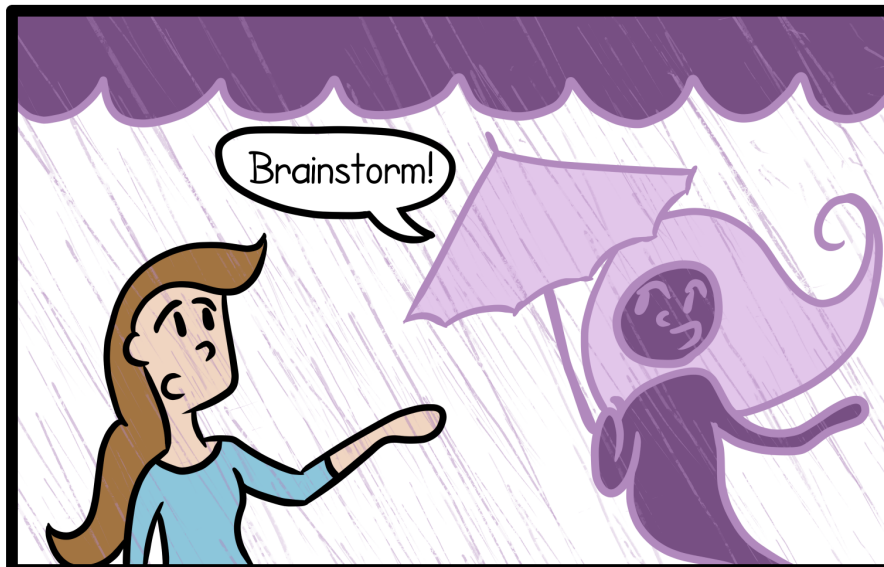
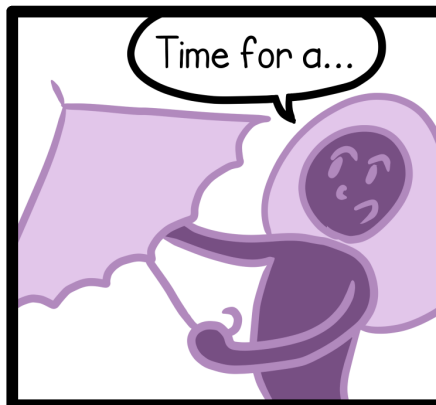
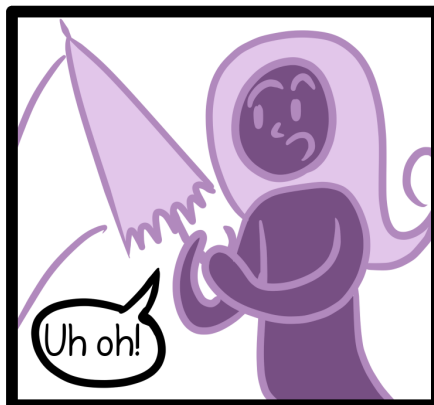
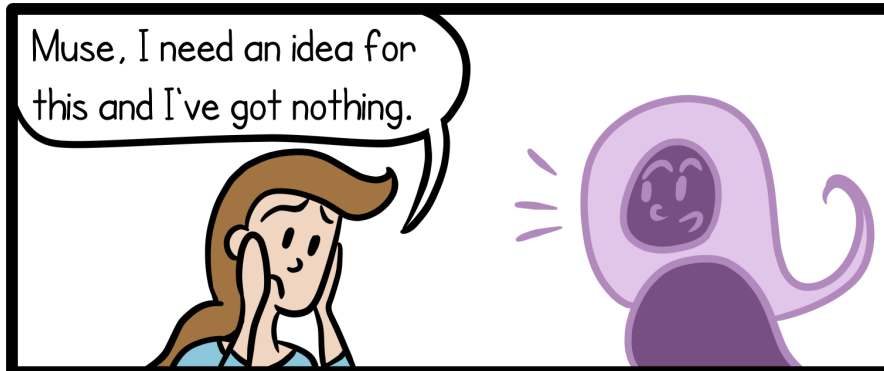
*"The details you choose to include say something about the person or character you are writing about."*



# Writer and Muse

Writer and Muse: Brainstorming

by Emma Vogt



Emma Vogt

See more of Emma's  
comics at [Writer and  
Muse](#)

## April Contest

**April Theme:** Cold Seasons

**Word limit:** 2024 words

**Poem Line Limit:** 50 Lines

**Prose Deadline:** April 27, 2024

**Poetry Deadline:** April 27, 2024

**Member Fee:** \$5

**Non-Member Fee:** \$10

**Optional Critique:** \$10

Check out the full rules and guidelines [here](#)

Submit [here](#)

## February Contest Winners

### Prose:

1st: R. G. Weismiller  
for *Gene-Editing-R-Us*

2nd: Christine Anthony  
for *Frozen*

3rd: Heather Hartmann  
for *The Only Way Out*

### Flash:

1st: Laurie Alberswerth  
for *The Great Ducky  
Debacle*

2nd: John Marcum  
for *Roller Coaster Day*

3rd: Christine Anthony  
for *Cheers*

### Drabble:

1st: Sherry Cerrano  
for *Path to World  
Domination*

2nd: Marilyn O'Neill  
for *Talk Like a Pirate Day*

3rd: Jessica Marie  
Baumgartner for *Dad's  
Making Hot Sauce Again*

### Poetry:

1st: Billie Holladay Skelley  
for *Time for Change*

2nd: Carol Roberson  
for *Urban Serengeti*

3rd: Susan Gore Zahra  
for *One Step*

3rd: Mark Vago for *I*

*Swear It's Not Too Late*

HM: Sherry Cerrano  
for *Fathoms of Possibilities*

HM: Kenneth Lee  
for *Mister Polyester*

HM: Carol Roberson  
for *Second Chance*

HM: Sarah Richardson  
for *After Giacometti*

HM: Carol Roberson  
for *The Rose*

### Officers and Volunteers

**President:** Jeffrey Czuchna  
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**Vice President:** Bob Weismiller  
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**Secretary:** Holly Elliott  
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**Treasurer:** Diane How  
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### Volunteers/Chair Positions

**Directors:** Tom Klein

**Speaker/Workshop Chair:** Jeffrey Czuchna

**Contest Chair:** Heather Hartmann

**Newsletter Editor:** Beatrice Underwood-Sweet

**Website Chair:** Mark Vago

**Membership Chair:** Diane How

**Membership Assistant:** Denise Wilson

**Anthology Chair:** Brad Watson

**Social Media Chair:** Holly Elliott

**Publicity Chair:** Holly Elliott

**Holiday Party Chair:** Bob Weismiller

**Poet Laureate:** Robert Sebacher

### Writing/Critique Groups

**Members Online Critique:** Susan Moreland

**Tuesday Round-Table:** Tammy Lough

**Wednesday Novel Group:** Brad Watson

**Wednesday WIP Cafe:** Jim Ladendecker

**Thursday Novel Group:** Bob Crandall

**Children's/YA Critique:** Heather Hartmann

**Pre-Meeting Saturday WIP Cafe & Creative  
Writing Salon:** Robert Sebacher

**Write-In Chair:** Terry Moreland

## Upcoming Events

**April Monthly Meeting:** April 27, 11 a.m. Hadara Bar-Nadav,  
Poetry

**May Open Mic:** May 13, 6:30 p.m. on Zoom

**May Monthly Meeting:** May 25, 11 a.m.

**Potluck Picnic TBA**