

The Writers Studio
South Boston, VA

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Writers Studio
Journal

Editor/Designer
Scott M. Foran

A Writers Studio Auld Lang Syne

by Gene Curtis

There was a man, his name was Lang,
He owned a neon sign;
Now, Mr. Lang was 85,
So they called it old Lang's sign.

--Anonymous

In days gone by--it wasn't so long ago--just over a year, as a matter of fact, that a young man had an idea to start a forum for local writers here in Halifax County, Virginia, where writers could get together to support each other and publicly celebrate their work. From this humble planting of a seed sprouted the veritable garden of talent we know today as the Writers Studio.

Last month marked a milestone in the achievements of the Writers Studio, and in many of our lives as well, with the publishing of our first anthology:

Sweetbay Review: *An Anthology of Southern Virginia.*

Showcasing a treasure-trove of writers and poets, the anthology was widely received with enormous anticipation, pride and a much deserved sense of accomplishment.

It is with those thoughts in mind that I raise my glass in tribute to the Writers

Studio, and in particular to our founder, Scott Foran, the man with the seed. "Here's to the future of the Writers Studio: may mighty oaks grow and new seeds be planted."

With an eye to the future, I'd like to hear from you where you'd like to see the Writers Studio go from here.

"A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam that flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his own thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a sort of alienated majesty."

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson ■



December's unveiling of Sweetbay Review to the Writers Studio.

Award Winning Author (Ah! Wouldn't That Be Great?)

by *Gene Curtis*

I know some of the members of the Writers Studio have already achieved the status of award winning author, but for me, as yet I can only dream.

In pursuing that dream, I came across the Preditors & Editors (misspelling intentional) contest page maintained by David L. Kuzminski in nearby Petersburg, Virginia. "Kuzminski is, among other things, a published writer in the fields of both non-fiction and fiction, both on and off the Internet. He believes strongly in the future of the Internet as the media of choice for future publishing. Having faced the same challenges as others in seeking publication outlets, he created this site as a way of reaching out to other writers with information and words of encouragement." [Excerpted from AnotherRealm.com.]

The Preditors & Editors website is a highly trusted source of information in just about any subject area dealing with getting published: from giving you the lowdown on which publishers are reputable and which are scam artists to information on writing workshops that help whip that manuscript into shape. It also has a fairly large list of writing contests for all types of writing. I just had to check the contests entries out. The list is very long so I picked 3 contests as examples. (I've placed a link to Preditors & Editors on the links page on the Writers Studio website for easy access surfing.)

The first one I visited was from their listing:

"Writers of the Future: A quarterly contest."

It's free, quarterly and devoted to science fiction. That's right up my flight path so I set my sensors to have a look-see. I found that

it's run by L. Ron Hubbard. *Isn't that the guy that used to have the TV commercials about Dianetics?* I did a long-range scan and found that it was the same L. Ron Hubbard of TV fame. I also found an entry in the computer's database about the **2006 Guinness Book of World Records** declaring Hubbard the world's most published and most translated author. I set my phasor on stun. It backfired and I was stunned.

For the "Writers of the Future" contest, cash prizes are up to \$5000.00, and the grand prize is considered as prestigious as the Hugo and Nebula awards. If you write science fiction, this contest is well worth checking out.

The second one I visited was the:

WERGLE FLOMP POETRY CONTEST: "Prizes of \$1,190, \$169, \$60 and 5 honorable mentions of \$38 each. No fee to enter. A humor contest with a special twist."

I think the prize money
Is supposed to be funny,
I just had to alee what doubt
That "special twist" was all about.

The first thing in the rules is:

- "Find a vanity poetry contest, a contest with low standards whose main purpose is to entice poets to buy expensive products like anthologies, chapbooks, CDs, plaques and silver bowls. Vanity contests will often praise remarkably bad poems in their effort to sell as much stuff to as many people as possible."

I feel remarkably qualified to enter this contest. Perhaps with my poetry they'd be impressed.

The third and last contest I'm going to mention is the:

Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest: "An annual writing contest. Loads of fun for writers and readers."

"It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents—except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness." — Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, *Paul Clifford* (1830)

No prize here other than "Woo-Hoo, you're the winner," but it sounds like fun. The rules begin:

- "Each entry must consist of a single sentence but you may submit as many entries as you wish.
- "Sentences may be of any length (though you go beyond 50 or 60 words at your peril), and entries must be "original" (as it were) and previously unpublished."

Once again I feel uniquely qualified to enter this contest, albeit the past has revealed an extraordinary number of entrants thus diminishing my likelihood of triumph such that a scanty lamp flame somewhere on the streets of 1830's London, flickering as the rain falls about it in torrents, pattering on housetops amid gusting wind and shrieking thunder, would have a better chance of lighting the path of a wayward traveler, or surviving 'til morn.

(There's 74 words in that sentence if you're counting, so I've still got to work on it, maybe into the late hours of the night, nose to the keyboard while a scant flame flickers in a lamp somewhere amid a fog shrouded, rain-soaked street littered with old wooden shingles after a storm in far away London, whilst members of the Writers Studio curl up beneath warm blankets with visions of sugar plum awards dancing in their heads.)

Preditors & Editors contests links can be found at:

<http://www.anotherealm.com/prededitors/pubctst.htm> ■

Successful Book-Signing

The Upper Case, the new bookstore located in South Boston's Vintner's Cellar, opened its doors on December 7 to local authors, Larry Aaron and Gene Curtis, for a book-signing.

The evening was a great success, with a number of people showing

up to meet the authors and to purchase books.

Thanks goes out to Peggy Hammond, one of the owners of The Upper Case, who arranged the book-signing, and we eagerly look forward to many more such events in the future. ■



Local Authors: Larry Aaron (left) and Gene Curtis (right).

Stacey Cochran Speaking in January

by *Donna Brauda*

Stacey Cochran will speak at the Writers Studio on January 14 at The Prizery in South Boston. Stacey is a full time author and he teaches writing at North Carolina State University. He has written nine novels and two short story collections. *Amber Page and the Legend of the Coral Stone* and *The Colorado Sequence* are among his most recent works. The topic he plans to discuss will be "Inspire, Encourage, Educate: Getting You Published." Some of the points to be covered are



getting an agent, marketing, promotion, editing, cover art, distribution and setting royalties. He will be available after the meeting to sign copies of his book *Amber Page*. ■

Sweetbay Review a "Sweet" Success



A heartfelt thanks is offered to all of you who made this first anthology project such a grand success. Thanks to the readers for their dedication to the project, the authors for submitting so many wonderful works, to Dianne Hills for letting us use her beautiful

painting as our frontispiece, and to Elizabeth Lovell for the excellent cover she designed for us. Curtis and Donna Brauda also deserve some praise for all of their behind-the-scenes assistance in promotion and logistical support. This has become a magnificent feather in our cap, and I hope you are looking forward to *Sweetbay Review* 2007! ■

Class on Writing Life Stories at SVHEC

by *Barbara Shaver*

Beginning on January 18, 2007, I will facilitate a class on Writing Life Stories at the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center. This six-week workshop (one hour per session) will be offered from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. for those who are age 50 and over and from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. for those under fifty. There will be a minimal charge for the evening class.

Participants in either of these classes will actually write, or in the least, begin writing their life stories. Computers will not be used.

Those who register will need to provide their own writing materials.

Whether you've wanted to write your life story or have never given it any thought but find the idea interesting, this class could be beneficial to you. It is designed to help its participants organize their memories as well as provide help in the actual writing process. Most importantly, it will provide you the opportunity to pass on a written legacy to your descendants. ■

Emyl Jenkins Speaking in March



Emyl Jenkins

My life-long love for antiques began when I was a little girl in Danville, Virginia. My parents loved antiques and they made every piece, whether a desk or a teacup, fascinating. Mother (a history and

English teacher) plied me with history and family lore, while my father (an engineer) showed me how to tell the difference between an 18th- and a 20th-century piece. I must have listened, because one day when a new family was moving in down the street, I reported that they only had “new furniture,” not antiques.

After college and graduate school where I studied my other great love, literature, I became involved in historic restoration projects and, for a couple of years, worked in an antiques shop. That’s when I decided to combine my loves and write about antiques.

Amazingly, my first antiques book, *Why You’re Richer Than You Think*, (later reissued as *Emyl Jenkins’ Appraisal Book*) landed me a 3-day stint on *Good Morning, America*. I followed it up with many non-

fiction books — some about antiques, others like *Southern Christmas* and *Southern Hospitality* about the South, and I even wrote a cookbook, *From Storebought to Homemade*, that was featured on QVC.

Still, I was dying to try my hand at fiction. After all, an article in *The Smithsonian* had called me a “Detective of the Decorative Arts.” So I created the protagonist, Sterling Glass, and began working out plot lines. But it took another 20 years for me to finally get up enough nerve to really begin writing *Stealing with Style*.

Could I have done it earlier? Who knows? What I do know is that I’ve never had so much fun. Sterling Glass’s capers and adventures are wild flights of my imagination spurred on by my love for antiques.

These days my husband, Bob Sexton, and our huge Maine Coon cat, Priscilla, live in Richmond, Virginia, where I’m having a ball dreaming up schemes and characters for Sterling to encounter...for as Sterling’s mother tells her (and me) at the end of *Stealing with Style*, “That’s the thing about surprises...they’re so damn surprising.”

You can read more about Emyl’s book on her website, www.emyljenkins.com. Emyl will be speaking on March 11 and will be signing copies of her book, *Stealing with Style*. ■

Meet the Authors Night Coming in May

Southern Virginia Higher Education Center and Friends of the Library present a “Meet the Authors Night.” The event will feature Lee Smith and Hal Crowther and will be held in the Chastain Theatre at the Prizery on May 31, 2007. The evening will be free of charge and will begin promptly at 7:00 PM.

Lee Smith is the author of eleven novels, including *Oral History*, *Saving Grace*, *Fair and Tender Ladies*, and *The Last Girls* (2002 New York Times best-seller and co-winner of the Southern Book Critics Circle Award), Her latest novel, *On Agate Hill*, was published last Fall. A retired professor

of English at North Carolina State University, she received an Academy Award in Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1999.

Her husband, Hal Crowther, formerly wrote for *Time* and *Newsweek* and is a National Book Award finalist. He has won the H.L. Mencken Writing Award, the American Association of Newsweeklies first prize for commentary, and the Russell J. Jandoli Award for Excellence in Journalism. The *Cathedrals of Kudzu*, published in 2000, is one of the New South’s most honored and critically acclaimed works of non-fiction. ■

Book Review: *Sweet Agony II*

by *Scott M. Foran*

Although Gene Olson's *Sweet Agony II* can be difficult to find, I am still going to recommend it as a great resource for authors. This "Writing Book of Sorts" is now out-of-print, I think, although you can still locate reasonably-priced copies at www.alibris.com.

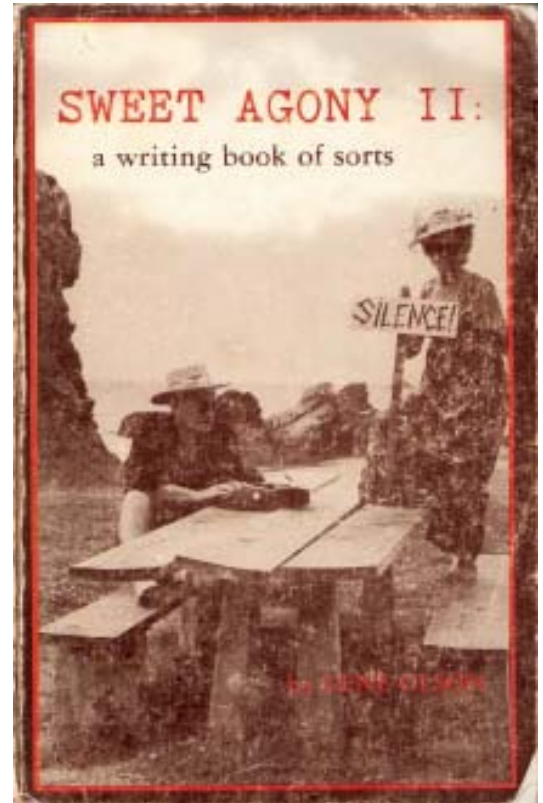
Gene Olson has published an impressive list of fiction and non-fiction works over the years, and he has written for newspapers, magazines, and television. Olson also taught English, creative writing, and journalism in California and Oregon.

I think the thing I like the most about *Sweet Agony II* is Olson's offbeat sense of humor. Many writing texts can be--well, dry--but this book is anything but! To give you just a sense of what I mean, here are some of the chapter titles: Creativity and Other Diseases, Blood on the Walls, An Ode to the Filthy Rich, The Mechanical Jungle, and About Rules and Rubbish. Olson offers valuable advice for real-life writers, but he does so in such a way that you feel entertained, and then you realize that you just learned something.

I was first introduced to this book while taking an undergraduate creative writing class, and I can honestly say that it has proven to be one of the most helpful assigned readings I ever completed. It is both easy to read and practical.

I will leave you with Gene Olson's Writing Commandments (which I had to memorize for a final exam--don't worry, though, you won't be tested--just read the book!):

I. Find a private place in which to write and guard it with your life; words abhor crowds.



II. Write regularly; don't wait for the crack of the whip.

III. Tell your story only once...and tell it on paper.

IV. When writing a first draft, don't let yourself get bogged down in picky details.

V. Whenever possible, write about subjects which truly interest you; bored writers produce bored readers.

VI. Revise for specific purposes.

VII. Never use two long words when a short one will do.

VIII. Use rules as yardsticks, not as crutches.

IX. Remember that getting started is half the battle.

X. Remember that getting started is half the battle. ■

“You can't clobber any reader while he's looking.

You divert his attention, then you clobber him and he never knows what hit him.”

--Flannery O'Connor

Family
GOD'S Gift to me
 by Nellie Saur

I got some Gifts from GOD above,
 That filled my Life and Heart with Love.
 He gave me three Daughters and a Son
 And made my Life a happy one.
 Then came along some Son-in-Laws,
 That added to my List of Stars.
 As years went by He continued on,
 To fill my Life and Heart with song.
 And when I thought my world was full,
 He decided I needed another role.
 He gave to me three Loving Granddaughters,
 And made me into a Grandmother.
 GOD gave me such a Loving brood,
 They Love their GOD and all that's good.
 I give Him praise and thank Him so,
 And Love Him for allowing me to grow.
 To see this wonderful Family of mine,
 That He has given me to shine.
 And worship Him for all to know,
 That they Love Him with a happy glow.
 And sing His praises far and near,
 So everyone that listens can hear.
 Thank You GOD for my Family bright,
 And keep them in Your Loving Sight.

I Am a Woman of Hope
 by Jeannine Hall

When I am overcome with grief and pain
 And doubts assail like torrents of rain.
 I look up in Faith to see God's Face
 He fills my heart with Peace and Grace.
 In His love I more than cope.
 I believe His Word and that makes me a woman of Hope.

THE BOMB
 by Shirley Mandel

When my brother died
 it was like an atom bomb
 went off in me.
 My heart was lost
 in a mushroom cloud
 of radiation and dust,
 and the landscape in me
 was parched and empty.
 For nights and nights
 it was total devastation.
 But in due time
 God sent the warm, cleansing
 rains from heaven
 to heal my contaminated earth.
 Call on me, he said,
 and I will forgive you
 and heal your barren land.
 Flowers will bloom
 where there were once charred ruins,
 and grasses will grow
 at the edge of a deep crater.

**We are always open to submissions
 for the quarterly newsletter.
 If you would like us to consider
 your poem, fiction, or non-fiction,
 please email us a copy: inkwrit@yahoo.com.**

Finding the Rhythm

by *Melissa Elmes*

Poetry \ˈpō-ə-trē, -i-trē *also* ˈpó(-)i-trē\ n(14c) **1a** : metrical writing : VERSE **b** : the productions of a poet : POEMS **2** : writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound and rhythm **3a** : something likened to poetry, esp. in beauty of expression **b**: poetic quality or aspect....¹

The above is the “official” definition of poetry. An alternate definition of poetry might be derived from the comments of writers who have never tried it for one reason or another:

Poetry \ˈpō-ə-trē, -i-trē *also* ˈpó(-)i-trē\ n(14c) **1a** : Really scary, intimidating form of writing **b** : the productions of real poets as opposed to amateurs like me **2** : writing style requiring rules, abilities and techniques far beyond my ability to master or even comprehend **3a** : something much better than I am capable of producing...

I am always amazed at people’s reactions to the writing of poetry. So many writers that I consider to be highly skilled and capable cringe when faced with the task of writing a poem. Otherwise-competent writers seem to become incapable of stringing together two images when they are asked to produce poetry. Some writers simply refuse to even try. Why is this? A scary high school or college encounter with modern poets? A fear of looking ridiculous in comparison with the “Great Ones”? A concern that one’s work might be called into question if it doesn’t meet the standards set forth in [Princeton’s Dictionary of Poetic Terms](#)? What? What is it that sends so many skilled writers running for cover when it comes to poetry?

As for the first reason - while poetry can certainly be an academic endeavor, I would argue that classroom encounters should be taken with a very big side dash of salt. I remember very vividly my first experience with Eliot’s [The Wasteland](#). I was a freshman in college. The professor talked in circles and made vague references to everything under the sun except what was necessarily found within the poem itself. We then analyzed the poetic techniques used in the poem and “sort of” discussed the themes and subject matter (we only had one class period to devote to the poem, after all.) Naturally, this led to my fervently believing that Eliot was completely beyond my head and that I therefore was decidedly not a poet, or even of a poetic nature. I now teach [The Wasteland](#) in my literature classes, and I do so with relish and joy. It’s an incredible poem. How did I find out? On my own, stumbling across a passage from [the Wasteland](#) used in context within another book. That passage made sense and it was so interestingly incorporated into the novel that I was reading that I decided to take another stab at reading it myself. This time, it made sense. I encourage writers who shy away from reading and writing poetry to revisit the medium on their own steam. Find an anthology of poetry, open it up, delve into it at random. Let your eye wander across pages until it finds something that interests you, inspires you, or excites you. Never mind what your professor said about poems and poets. Come fresh to the medium, with your own responses and reactions.

As for the second reason-nobody is comparing you to, say, “the Crossword Puzzle Six”. The British Romantics were writing in 19th century England during the Industrial Revolution. Naturally, their poetry was slightly different from what is being produced now. Okay, it was vastly different. It’s also what we tend to think of when we are thinking of poetry at all, unless

¹ Definition taken from Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10th Edition.

we happen to love the medium. It can be very intimidating to have studied Keats, Byron and Shelley and then to sit down to write a poem of our own. The thing is – nobody is asking you to be Keats, Byron, or Shelley; nor Wordsworth, Coleridge or Blake, for that matter. In fact, much of the most highly praised poetry being written today, while often influenced by these writers, is in fact very different from what they produced. Finally, something to consider: frequently, during their own time, these poets were severely criticized for their work, which was often considered substandard and/or amateurish in tone and voice; yet now we consider them to be the foremost authors of the British Romantic movement. So - why not take a chance? You might be the founder of a poetic movement of your own!

For the final reason – well, although poetry does require a certain set of conventions, foremost among them a metrical or rhythmic or emotional organization of your material, the simple fact of the matter is that poets experiment with and push the form to its limits regularly. Therefore, your own experimentation in the field need not stand out as being particularly out of sync with poetic conventions. The most basic point of poetry is to paint a picture of something as beautifully or terribly or sadly or [insert emotion here] as possible, using words as the paintbrush. As writers, we use words regularly anyway – why not practice using them more vividly and emotionally through poetry?

Following is a series of activities that can be used by anyone – poetry writers or those who have never written a line of poetry in their lives – in order to jumpstart the poetic muse. By doing these activities over a period of time, writers can approach the writing of poetry in a fun, challenging and meaningful way without necessarily becoming anxious or stressed over the genre itself. These activities can help a regular writer of poetry through a period of writer's block or a slump, and they can help the novice poetry writer find some direction and practice ground for poetry writing. Finally, they are just a lot of fun when you don't have an actual writing project on your plate already!

Activity 1: The Found Poem

A “Found Poem” is just that – a poem that you find. Take any book-length reading you particularly enjoy – I like to do this with novels, but you may prefer nonfiction, how-to manuals – any lengthy prose work will do. Open the book to any page at random. (You may wish to Xerox this page or to copy it out of the book by hand, so as not to mark up your book.) From this page, you now choose words and phrases to create a poem. Rules for this activity: You cannot change the order of the words/phrases as they are found on the page, you cannot change the format of the words as they are found on the page, and you cannot add words that are not on the page. You may arrange the poem visually on your own paper as you like and you may punctuate your poem as you wish. You have, in essence, “found” a poem in the novel! This is a lot of fun in terms of seeing “the bigger picture” of writing, how often we take it for granted that poetry is poetry and prose is prose – and yet, through this activity, I have come to see how frequently the prose I love best is poetic in nature of its own accord!

Activity 2: The “Word-Bank” poem

Go through any dictionary and randomly copy out words to create a word bank (I like to have about twenty words in my own banks, but you may have more or less as you choose) Then use the words from this bank to create a poem. Rules for this activity: you can order the words however you wish, you can add words to the poem, you can punctuate and arrange the words as you see fit, and you can change the format of the words chosen (e.g. turn a noun form into

a verb form, etc.) This is a good activity for finding ways to make connections between words and to see relationships between words in a different light.

Activity 3: The “Word-Bank from a Poem” poem

Take any longer-length poem (1-2 pages or more in length) and randomly choose words from that poem to create a word bank (again, I like about twenty words, but you can adjust the number as you see fit). Then, without looking at the original poem, use the words you have chosen to write a poem of your own. This activity is best completed using a poem with which you aren’t really familiar, so that you aren’t too influenced by the original within your work. Rules are the same as the rules for the “Word-Bank” poem.

Activity 4: The “Art is Poetry” poem

Find an art image that appeals to you and write a poem that is based on that image but is NOT about the image itself. For example, if you chose Michelangelo’s “David”, you might write about youth, or Biblical events, or the Renaissance, rather than about the statue itself. Or you might choose Picasso’s “Guernica” and write about war, or conflict, or Spain, rather than the image itself. This exercise is excellent for connecting methods of artistic expression – seeing the link between art images and the art of the written word, and how artistic endeavors in various genres can cross-fertilize an artist’s vision.

Activity 5: The “Dream Deferred” poem

Using Langston Hughes’s “A Dream Deferred” poem as the starting point, sit down with a can of Play Doh. Think about your own dreams and hopes. Using the Play Doh, sculpt a physical representation of your dreams and/or hopes. Ponder this image. Then, write a poem based on the format of Hughes’s poem:

What happens to a dream _____?

Does it _____ like _____?

Or _____ and then _____?

Does it _____?

Or _____?

Maybe it just _____.

Or does it _____?

Use this poem and your Play-Doh sculpture as a springboard towards other poetic representations of your hopes and dreams. Additionally, the Play Doh/physical representation of what you want to write about can be a very useful tool in and of itself when you are having trouble conceptualizing a poem.

Using these activities can help a writer train his or her brain towards more abstract, figurative and synthetic thinking, which in turn can lead to an easier time with poetry writing. Perhaps it is true that “anyone can write a poem”; or, perhaps it is true that “only the few have what it takes to be a poet.” I like to think that nobody can tell me what I can and cannot write, and I fervently hope that anyone who has ever thought about writing poetry will find these activities to be a useful starting point or a fun diversion from their ordinary literary endeavors. ■



THE WRITERS STUDIO

Be the writer.

<http://members.gcronline.com/writersstudio/>

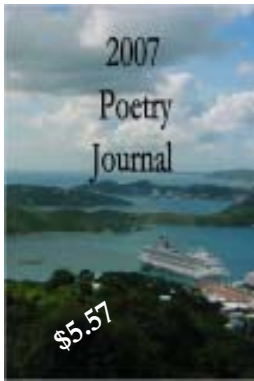


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2007 Poetry Journal



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Announcements & Events

Meetings

The Writers Studio meets on the second Sunday of each month in the CCI Conference Room at the Prizery, South Boston, VA, from 4-6 pm. This is open to all writers, regardless of experience or publishing history.

Writers Studio Guest Speakers:

Stacey Cochran

January 14, 2007

Emyl Jenkins

March 11, 2007

Classes Taught by Writers Studio Members

Writing Life Stories

Instructor: Barbara Shaver

Dates: January 18, 25, February 1, 8, 15, 22

Time: 7-8 PM

Place: SVHEC

Cost: \$35

To Register: 572-5448

Drawing 101

Instructor: Margaret Covington

Dates: April 3, 10, 17, 24

Time: 7-8:30 PM

Place: SVHEC

Cost: \$35

To Register: 572-5448

Meet the Authors Night: Lee Smith and Hal Crowther

Presented by Southern Virginia Higher Education Center and Friends of the Library

Date: May 31, 2007

Time: 7 PM

Place: The Prizery, Chastain Theatre

Cost: Free