

The Just Write Life

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President's Article

The Importance of Following Directions

by Ann Gordon

Earlier this month a large writing group contacted me, asking if I would judge for their writing contest again. I was pleased to hear from them and replied that I'd be glad to do it. I believe this will be the eighth year I've judged for this particular contest. Contest judges aren't paid, but they often receive a reduced fee for attending the organization's writing conference. Since I live far away from this group, I've never attended their conference, although I'd like to. I also judge for other national writing contests, but I like the folks who head this organization, and the submissions I read in this contest are great. They inspire me to write better myself.

This is a contest for published or unpublished books. Judging generally takes three grueling weeks of reading, rereading, critiquing, judging, commenting, and scoring a dozen entries. The entries include about 22 pages of text plus an additional two pages for the book summary. The contest heads have designed a great rubric for the judges to fill in. Like most contests, the manuscript submission guidelines are clearly posted on the organization's website, in more than one place. Most authors who enter this contest pay close attention to the guidelines and follow them. Still, some don't.

Sadly, the anxious authors who fail to follow the instructions are penalized for it. The rubric contains over 20 areas the judges need to scrutinize, giving the submission from 1 to 5 points for each. The first question on the rubric asks if the author followed the formatting guidelines. I'm always surprised when an author fails to follow simple instructions, like: "Add a page break between the pages of the novel and the summary."

Everyone who enters the contest receives feedback and a final score. The entries with the highest scores are sent to acquisition agents and editors for consideration. Those who thought it would be "all right" not to follow the formatting rules lose points for that oversight, even if their submission was otherwise superb. To make this part of the judging process especially fair, the submission & formatting guidelines for every entry are judged by the same two people before the entries are sent to the judges (like me). Thus each entry a judge receives already has one score on it: the one for how well the author followed instructions. When judges read a well-written piece they want to give the author high marks, hoping they'll be one of the finalists.

However, we have no input regarding the points the author earns for following the submission guidelines. I encourage all writers to follow every single submission rule and formatting guideline, whether submitting to a contest, literary agent, or publisher – even if you don't agree with the guideline. On the other end, your manuscript will be judged, in part, on how well you followed the contest's instructions.

Keep writing!
~Ann

Upcoming Events



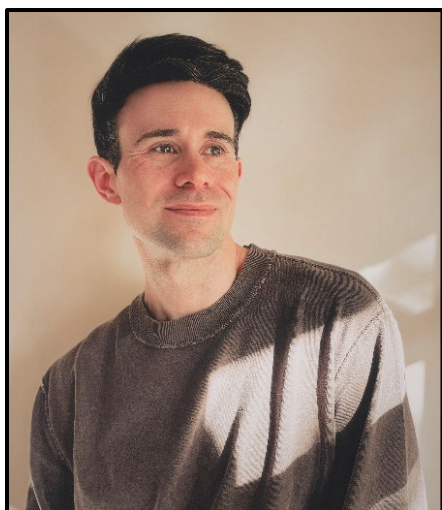
Pre-Quills Conference
Saturday, March 29, 2025

The Quills Conference 2025 – “Creating Hope”
August 7-10, 2025



Member Spotlight

Ted Jackson



Ted Jackson is an amateur novelist and longtime storyteller who has been writing short stories as long as he can remember. Originally from Northern Virginia, Ted has been a Utah native since 2008. After graduating from BYU with a degree in Economics and Public Administration, he entered the nonprofit world as a corporate campaign advisor at the United Way of Salt Lake. In 2018, his father was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, leading Ted to his current role as a Philanthropy Director for the American Cancer Society.

Halloween became his favorite holiday in 2016 when he started a tradition of writing, designing, and hosting custom murder mystery parties with themes ranging from *Harry Potter*, to *Enchanted Forest*, *Barbie*, and *The Wizard of Oz*. When he isn't bringing his graphic design skills to work to bolster mission storytelling, he is chipping away at his first magical novel series.

New Members

Welcome to the following new member of Just Write:

- ❖ Theodore Jackson
- ❖ Hannah Lee
- ❖ Kelley Lindberg
- ❖ Jennifer Monsen



“I don’t ‘write’ my characters. I just watch them do stupid stuff and write up the incident report.”

– Unknown

Member Article

No Man is an Island

by Daniel Gonzalez

John Donne may have been talking about life and death in his poem “For Whom the Bell Tolls” (cue Metallica fans), but the inspiration I’ve drawn from those lines has ever been the importance of community and that whether we actively participate or not, we still contribute. I don’t want to get into the strange, philosophical territory of what *is* a community or a culture, but I do want to focus on the idea that no matter where we are, we’re a part of something, call it what you will.



Despite my misgivings about sharing my writing with others for fear of critiques (I have a laundry list of what I’m afraid people will tell me about my writing, but none of it ever actually happens. You’d think that would make me less afraid, but I just think if it didn’t happen this time, it probably will next time), as part of my Master’s program, we were required to share our writings with others, usually a group of ten or so. The worst part was that we would spend time in class *gasp* talking about what we wrote and what we liked and didn’t like!

Feedback? In this day and age? Yet the more I participated, the more I realized that this kind of communication and active participation not only helped me to see how incredible those around me were, it helped me to see that they wanted me to succeed as much as I did. It helped me to identify what parts of my writing style worked and what didn’t, to recognize the importance of sentence flow, to put into practice all of the techniques I was learning. Above all, it helped me to see that there was a living, breathing writing community right there, and all I had to do to get involved was to ask.

Fast forward to the end of the program and I was back at home in Utah, wondering if Utah had a writing scene as active and engaging as that of Belfast, or if that was just a one-off deal. Quelle surprise, but only after inquiring for a week or two, I found the League of Utah Writers. It was a place with writers from all over the state, meeting on a frequent basis to give feedback, critiques, inform of contests, provide conferences, and contact with people who were as passionate about writing as I am.

All of this is to say that if you’re reading this newsletter, you’re in the right place. I’ve already begun to establish friendships with writers who are at various levels of the process: those who want to be published, those who have been published a time or two, and those who frequently publish their writing. Individuals with experience who aren’t trying to keep you from finishing your work, but people who will cheer you on and provide meaningful, insightful feedback.

Good writing requires good reading, and what better way to engage with that maxim than by reading the work of people just like you?

“A frog decided to reach the top of the tree. All frogs shouted, ‘It’s impossible, it’s impossible!’ Still, the frog reaches the top. How? Because he was deaf. He thought everyone was encouraging him. Be deaf to negative thoughts if your aim is to reach your goal.”

– Beautiful Words

Who's Penned What

Haley Cavanagh's *Shadowed Skies* is a YA Dystopian Fantasy Romance coming out on March 25th with Our Street Books.



River - He's the last of his kind, a winged warrior hidden in the mountains. He has lost his sanctuary, the only shield from a world that fears and hunts him. When Delene, another of his kind, crash-lands into his life, wounded and on the run, his solitude is shattered.

Delene - She's a fugitive with a secret, escaping the clutches of dark forces that took everything from her. Delene Fairborne's flight to freedom leads her to River and the spark of a bond neither can deny.

In a landscape scarred by betrayal and danger, River and Delene must navigate their growing feelings and the sinister scientist who will stop at nothing to harness their power. *Shadowed Skies* is where love takes wing, hope soars, and destiny entwines.

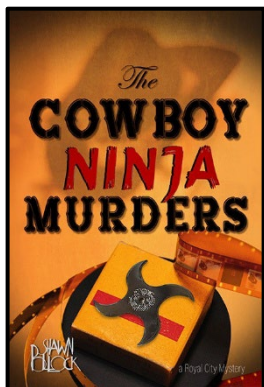
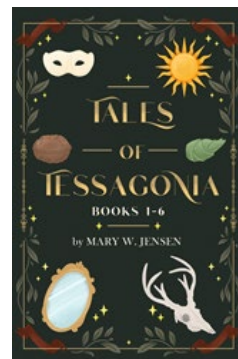
[Purchase on Amazon.](#)

Mary Jensen's new book. *Tales of Tessagonia: Books 1-6* came out February 18, 2025.

Tales of Tessagonia: Books 1-6 is a compilation of the first six titles in the Tales of Tessagonia series. These standalone fairytale retellings all take place within the world of Tessagonia. You may hear the echo of familiar stories from our own lands. Curses, romance, magical gifts, and gods both light and dark.

Genre: fairytale fantasy

[Purchase here.](#)



Shawn Pollock has published his mystery novel, *The Cowboy Ninja Murders*.

Charlie Cranston is not sure his friend John's death is an accident. With the help of reporter Andra Liefssen and ex-cop Tom Guidry, he'll work to uncover the truth even as he takes John's place in a Z-grade movie called "Cowboy Ninja."

[Purchase on Amazon.](#)

Linda Smith's short story "The Ham Sandwich" which won second place in literary/general fiction last year will be published in the LUW Anthology (best of 2025).

"It is perfectly okay to write garbage—as long as you edit brilliantly."

— C.J. Cherryh

Member Article

The Only Thing That Is Constant Is...Change. Embrace it!

by Nicole Klunder

Change. What a crazy process. Change has been proven to be inevitable at some point in all our lives. We go through moments, experiences, and phases but essentially they create change. Change at that moment and shortly afterward. Change within yourself. Good or bad. Overall, this is quite a journey to reflect on.



Sometimes, I reflect on the fact that we meet people for reasons unknown to us at first, then sometimes as time goes on, we don't stay in touch with some of them or maybe connect online occasionally. And that's ok! There are always reasons that lie there, whether it is for you or the other person. Perhaps both.

The fact that change always shows up makes you wonder, do we say it is the energy in the universe? Science? Astrology? Spiritual forces? Or just the timing of everything?

I believe in the power of connections and reflection.

Whether it is a good conversation with one other person you just met or a quick chuckle or smile in the store with a couple of strangers you've never seen before. You always walk away...feeling...*Something*.

The power of connection. It's authentic. Sometimes you realize later why the exchange was necessary and why it even happened at all. This might take some time, but it always reveals itself at some point, you might not see it yet, but it will come to you.

So, you're probably thinking, how does this relate to the **WRITING PROCESS**?

It means...that sentence another writer types out in their email, ending with "keep writing." That quick reminder we can all relate to. Or that smile and initial reaction and applause at a critique session that fills you up and changes you. It saves you and you genuinely can move forward on your journey.

Keep on keeping on. Your mindset flips 180. Your perspective changes altogether.

It means showing up for yourself because there would be no progress within yourself. It means putting aside that crippling fear and anxiety to share the writing work that you had all to yourself for some time. Putting it into the world feels...different.

It hits you differently, feeling...*Exposed*. I think this affects my writing because you must be in a place where your mindset is ready to share your work, the change, moving forward to get to where you need to be eventually, but enjoying the journey of it at the same time. It also provides some reading material for others' enjoyment so they can get something out of it. All the words we love and crave deep within our souls.

This is empowering, rewarding, and the feeling of being proud of yourself is amazing. You then become proud of others' wins too! You find yourself cheering them on! It means participating and showing up in anything you can, so you don't have regrets based off fear and anxiety. This creates fulfillment, satisfaction, and success. It means so many things!

Embrace those connections and feelings. Always. Then, embrace the change. Head on! Give yourself time to recognize all of it.

Then, just keep going! Never give up.

You got this!

Website Author Bios

Just Write Members: Please check out your website bio page and let Ann, David, or Nancy know if you would like any changes to your writing bio. <http://justwritechapter.org/MemberBios.html>

If your bio isn't on the website, and you want it to be included, send Nancy or Ann a picture of yourself and an author bio no greater than 125 words. Questions you could answer include:

- When did you realize you wanted to write? At what time in your life, etc.
- What genres do you like to read?
- What are you currently working on?
- Do you have a writing schedule? If so, what's that like?
- Links to social media.

Critique Sessions and Submission Guidelines

Critique sessions run twice a month. Invitation emails are usually sent the first and sixteenth of each month; these invitations include an RSVP deadline. Once the deadline has passed, the spreadsheet with current group information is sent. Each session is generally divided into two or three groups with three to six participants each, depending on how many members participate.

Submissions are then emailed to each member of the participant's group and returned by the end-of-session deadline, usually the fifteenth or the last day of the month. If you want to read a submission from someone in a different group in addition to those in your own group, you may request their work, but please do not expect them to read yours in return.

Fiction and non-fiction chapters, short stories, articles, and poems are all welcome in our critique sessions...query letters too.

Submission Guidelines

- 3,200 words or less (not including any synopses at the beginning)
- Include a synopsis if there are chapters/ sections prior to your current submission
- 12-point or larger serif font (such as Times New Roman or Cambria)
- Double or 1.5 spaced lines
- Word document format (.doc, .docx)
- Include your name or initials in the filename
- Submit within three days of receiving the group spreadsheet

Critiquing Guidelines

- Please make at least six suggestions or comments in your reviews (AI grammar programs should not be used)
- Be honest, kind, and encouraging
- Corrections and comments are made using the "Track Changes" and "New Comment" features under the "Review" tab in Word
- Include a note at the end of the document or in the email with an overall review or comment
- Ideally, return your reviews by the last day of the session

Chapter Officers

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|--|--|
| ▪ Ann Gordon, President
(ann@gordoncomputer.com) | ▪ Critique Session Facilitator, Michelle Backman
(mlbackman67@gmail.com) |
| ▪ Tim Keller, PR and Voting Proxy | ▪ Website: Ann Gordon |
| ▪ Nancy Roe, Newsletter Editor
(Newsletter.JustWriteChapter@gmail.com) | ▪ Assistant Webmaster: David Armstrong
(lineuponline.dc98.12@gmail.com) |

“How to write ‘I changed a light bulb.’ Single-handedly managed the successful upgrade and deployment of new environmental illumination system with zero cost overruns and zero safety incidents.”
– Unknown