

## Upcoming GWA Events

- ◆ Saturday, March 16: *The Truth About Butterflies*, Nancy Stephan, 2012 GAYA award winner.
- ◆ Saturday, April 20: *A History of Nursing*, Ann Webster, Celebrated poet and memoirist.
- ◆ Saturday, June 15: Georgia Author of the Year Awards banquet and ceremony, KSU Center in Kennesaw.



Did you know that GWA offers a free poetry workshop after each monthly event for its members? Attendees exchange poems in advance in order to prepare for the workshop and discuss poets, poetry genres, publication, and poetic devices. Please contact JoAnn Dropp for further information at [JLDropp@yahoo.com](mailto:JLDropp@yahoo.com).

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# The Georgia Authority

Monthly Memos from the Georgia Writers Association

Volume 2 Issue 2

March 2013

## Ferrol Sams: A Last Look Back

by H. M. Cauley

In our high-tech age, it's common to conduct interviews over the phone, or in more desperate moments, through e-mails. But last spring, when I was sent to interview noted Southern writer Ferrol Sams, he insisted that nothing but in-person would do.

For four hours, Sams and I sat on his shaded flagstone porch, sipping iced teas and inhaling the aroma of giant gardenias as he gave one of his last interviews. He died January 29, 2013, leaving a legacy of novels and short stories that capture a slice of Southern life.

Though barely able to walk and bound to an oxygen tank, Sams became an animated young man when recounting, in frequently salty terms, how he blossomed from a sharecropper's son into a writer read round the world.

"Reading was an important part of our family life," he recalled. "We always had books and read every-

thing we could get our hands on. The day I learned to read to myself was an escape that put me in another world."

When Sams wasn't reading stories, he was listening to them. "There was no TV, no radio—just long summer nights on the front porch with my grandfather telling us what life used to be like. I loved to hear him talk. I got some of that; in school, I got all A's except in deportment because I talked too much."

As a student at Mercer University in the 1930s, Sams took a writing class and learned the lessons he followed for a lifetime. "Dr. Jones told us, 'Don't write about the streets of Paris if you've never been out of Valdosta. Be clear. Don't use clichés.' Every Monday, we turned in 1,500 words, and a comma fault meant an F. But he set me on fire."

Drawing on a wealth of experiences, Sams started writing seriously in



Photo courtesy of H. M. Cauley

his late 50s. He recalled the Jim Crow era and an eight-year-old black boy who was his best friend. "His children called me their 'white daddy' in a way Northerners don't understand," he said. Despite those close connections, race relations were a source of regret: "I knew the way we were treating blacks was wrong, but I didn't do a damn thing about it."

Sams left his medical studies at Emory and became a medic during World War II, arriving in Normandy  
*(Continued on page 3)*

## One More for the Writer's Toolbox

by Brenda Wilson

Should the narration of a fictional story be in first or third person point-of-view? If third, will it be omniscient, limited omniscient, or objective? Is it necessary to really know the character before the writer starts writing? Does including the five senses create a more intimate and detailed work? The answers and much more can be found in *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* by Janet Burroway and Elizabeth and Ned Stuckey-French.

Every writer needs a toolbox; something to turn to when in doubt. To understand the art of fictional narration, *Writing Fiction* is a book that fiction writers will find extensive in scope. The book explains the literary devices that an author must use to create a complete work of fiction and includes three short stories and writing exercises at the end of each chapter.

### Some steps to creativity from *Writing Fiction*:

**Solitude:** Some writers are quickly inspired, and that is a gift. Most need solitude and "inner stillness" to develop characters. "Toni Morrison has said that she will frequently rewrite a passage eight times, simply to create the impression of an unbroken, inspired flow" and to do that, you need solitude.

*(Continued on page 2)*

**Red Clay Writers Conference** has been postponed.

Please join our mailing list to receive important updates:  
<http://bit.ly/WGnyG0>.

*Jessica Dugger is a junior at Kennesaw State University where she is currently studying English. This is her first internship with the Georgia Writers Association.*

*Brenda Wilson is a graduate student at Kennesaw State University majoring in creative writing in the Master of Arts in Professional Writing program. She hopes to graduate in May, 2014.*

## March Workshop Preview

### Nancy Stephan: The Truth about Sharing Your Story

by Jessica Dugger

Nancy Stephan's *The Truth About Butterflies: A Memoir* tells the story of how she dealt with an unimaginable loss and found her road to recovery. She received the 2012 Georgia Author of the Year Award (GAYA) for her memoir, and this year her collection of poems, *A Gary Girl's Guide to Good*, has been nominated for a GAYA in poetry. Come join Nancy on March 16 as she talks about the power of healing through storytelling and how important it is to share your story with others.



**Q. What made you want to write your memoir? What inspiration was there for you to tell your story?**

A. I wrote my memoir out of absolute necessity. My only child had died, and I felt like I was dying. Writing about it helped (and is helping) me heal.

**Q. What inspired you to become a writer? Did you have any other life plans before you made that decision?**

A. Writing is something that I've always done very well. I won my first

major writing award when I was in fifth grade, but I didn't know I could write as a career. So even though I continued to write as a hobby, I went into nursing right out of high school and worked as a Licensed Practical Nurse for eighteen years before going back to school and changing careers.

**Q. What advice would you give to young writers who are wanting to publish their works?**

A. Don't believe the hype. If you want to publish your work, just do it.

**Q. How much work went into writing your memoir? What kind of challenges did you face?**

A. My biggest challenge was reliving the horror. At certain times during the writing process, I was re-traumatized and would have to stop writing, sometimes for months. My second biggest challenge was self-exposure. Once I published this thing, there'd be no taking it back. I wrestled greatly with what details to share.

**Q. What do you hope people will take away from your workshop?**

A. Enthusiasm and confidence to tell their stories

**Q. What genre do you enjoy reading most? Why?**

A. I'm always on the grab for poetry because I myself am a poet, but I love a good story. Two of my recent favorites are *The Road* by Cormack McCarthy and *The Thirteenth Tale* by Diane Setterfield.

In anticipation of her workshop, Stephan's memoir, *The Truth About Butterflies*, will be made available free of charge for Kindle on March 9-10.

## One More for the Writer's Toolbox (continued from page 1)

**Freewriting:** Practice makes perfect and freewriting helps the writer dig deeper. It's "...the literary equivalent of scales at the piano." If the critic inside your mind appears, tell it to go away and keep writing! When you're still groggy in the morning, grab the pen and paper on your night stand and start scribbling. That's your subconscious on the page.

**Some elements of a story from *Writing Fiction*:**

**The character:** The writer needs to create characters readers find "interesting, believable, and we must care about what happens to them." Six methods of character presentation are: "dialogue, appearance, action, thought, authorial interpretation and

interpretation by another character." A short, short story that is an excellent example of characterization is "Following the Notes" by Pia Z. Ehrhardt.

**The setting:** The reader needs to know in "...what atmosphere the character operates in order to understand the significance of the actions." Burroway wonders, "Who would Scarlet be without her plantation? Who would Dorothy be without The Land of Oz? An excellent example of setting is demonstrated in the short story "The Sea Fairies" by Maura Stanton.

**The plot:** Fiction must have "conflict, crisis, and resolution." The arc of the story, patterns of power, and connec-

tion and disconnection are explained as elements that drive the plot. A short-story example of plot development can be found in "Everything That Rises Must Converge" by Flannery O'Connor.

The pages of my copy of *Writing Fiction* are curled at the corners and are dripping in blue and black with a dash of purple ink. Stars are in the margins. It's an important addition to my toolbox, and I hope you will consider it one, too.



**Ferrol Sams: A Last Look Back (continued from page 1)**

a month after D-Day. “I had to go to prove I wasn’t a coward—which I was,” he admitted. “It became the defining moment of my life. Years later, I visited the American Cemetery and walked from one end of the field to the other, then gave the smartest salute. I cried the entire time.”

After years of writing “nothing but prescriptions” in his Fayetteville medical practice, Sams noticed a part of the South disappearing. “Fayetteville wasn’t a little town anymore,” he said. “Peachtree City had been formed and was full of New York sophisticates on their third wives. I suddenly realized that nobody was chronicling the old stories.”

Sams, writing at his kitchen table before heading to work, channeled Dr.

Jones. “Those rules came rushing back; I had to write what I knew,” he said. “But my first stab was so bad, I tore it up. I finally taught myself how to write when I realized what the last words would be. From then on, writing became a compulsion. I’d get up at two or three in the morning and write.”

Sams handed his first effort to friend and then-editor of the Atlanta Journal Constitution, Jim Minter. “He later told me he thought it would be awful,” said Sams with a grin. “But he came back two nights later and said, ‘You’ve got a real son of a bitch here.’ Every atom in me flushed.” The book, *Run with the Horsemen*, was published in 1982, but it wasn’t his favorite. The short story “The Widow’s Mite” was “the strongest thing I’ve ever written.”

The lessons Sams learned as a fledgling author are still important today. As a writing teacher, I implore students to keep to the truths they know—and what a daunting task that is at any age. As Sams learned, truth is the one thing writers cannot fake, and readers know it. In the end, truth transformed his simple stories into tales that still resonate with readers today.

“People say I’ve become an iconic Southern writer,” he said. “And I guess I am. I’d rather think I’m the richest man you’ve ever met. I’ve spent all the money—that’s long gone. The richness is in all the people I’ve met.”

And of course, in all the stories he told.

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Have writer’s block? Need a literary pick-me-up? Check out *Six Word Stories* for a little inspiration.

[www.sixwordstories.net](http://www.sixwordstories.net)

**Around Georgia**

- \* March 5, **Paul Pressly**, *On the Rim of the Caribbean: Colonial Georgia and the British Atlantic World*, Jimmy Carter Library. [www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=559](http://www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=559)
- \* March 6, **Poetry Show and Share**, Peach State Bank, Gainesville. [www.negawriters.org/negacalendar](http://www.negawriters.org/negacalendar)
- \* March 9, **Bluegrass Evening**, benefit for DeKalb County Library with readings and music featuring authors Joshilyn Jackson and Karen White, Decatur Library. [www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=557](http://www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=557)
- \* March 11, **Horton’s Palindromin 121st Birthday Celebration**, Georgia’s oldest bookstore celebrates its birthday with words, music and cake, Horton’s Books & Gifts, Carrollton. [www.hortonsbooks.com/calendar.php](http://www.hortonsbooks.com/calendar.php)
- \* March 13, **Michael Shelden**, *Young Titan: The Making of Winston Churchill*, Decatur Library Auditorium. [www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=561](http://www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=561)
- \* March 20, **Tara Conklin**, *The House Girl*, Decatur Library Auditorium. [www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=584](http://www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=584)
- \* March 21, **Ayana Mathis**, *The Twelve Tribes of Hattie*, First Baptist Church, Decatur. [www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=548](http://www.georgiacenterforthebook.org/Events/show.php?id=548)
- \* March 30, **Wendy Wax**, *While We Were Watching Downton Abbey* pre-release party, FoxTale Book Shoppe, Woodstock. [www.foxtalebookshoppe.com/events-new.html](http://www.foxtalebookshoppe.com/events-new.html)

**Get Writing!**

The plane lifts off the runway and into the air. The person next to you turns and quietly whispers in your ear, “I know I’m supposed to keep this a secret, but I absolutely must tell someone.”

.....

It’s time for you and Writer’s Block to part ways. Write a letter breaking up with Writer’s Block, starting out with, “Dear Writer’s Block, it’s not you, it’s me . . . .”

Prompts courtesy of [www.writersdigest.com/prompts](http://www.writersdigest.com/prompts)

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**Submissions**

Please send your member news and events to *The Georgia Authority* editor by the 20th of each month.

If you wish to contribute an article to *The Georgia Authority*, please contact the editor for guidelines.

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**About GWA**

Georgia Writers Association is a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) organization that works across the state to encourage and strengthen the proficiencies of writers in both the creative and the business aspects of the writing life. We do this through an array of speakers and programs at regular meetings. GWA sponsors workshops, conferences, seminars, contests, and other events. We encourage the formation of satellite groups, critique groups, and other writer resource groups. We encourage the funding of guest authors to various Georgia counties. Our online publications are an attempt to educate and inform the diverse literary community of Georgia. Accomplished Georgia writers are recognized through the Georgia Author of the Year Awards.

**Become a member for discounts to workshops & conferences, exclusive online resources, and more!**

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**Accepting Writing Ideas**

by Candi Deal

Writers make connections between unrelated things all the time. If we stay at it long enough, writing weaves its way into everything we do. It becomes a natural process, and staying open to these connections could influence our writing life. It happened to me. During yoga class last week, my brain leaped to writing the moment the melodious voice of the teacher instructed, "Clear the mind and focus on the breath."



We were in Easy Pose. In Easy Pose the legs are crossed with hands resting on the knees, palms turned upward. The open palms symbolize a posture of acceptance, or openness to whatever life brings, the good and the bad. It's a great way to begin or end a yoga practice.

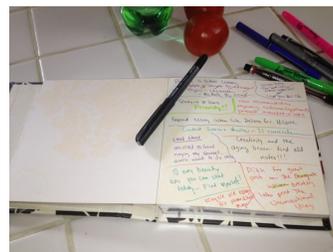
As I sat in the pose trying to ignore the pain in my groin, I thought about the many writing and marketing ideas that flit through my brain on any given day, and how many I reject because they don't float in at

convenient times. I usually continue to the next errand or the next email and hope that I'll recall the idea when needed. And if I don't, well, it probably wasn't such a hot idea anyway. But what if, I asked myself as I inhaled deeply with eyes closed, my half-formed idea became a published article because I accepted it? I squinted at my open hands and wondered if I could apply this same symbolism of acceptance to the harvesting of writing ideas. I could hardly wait to get off my mat.

Once at home, I used Easy Pose as a springboard and placed an opened blank journal on the kitchen counter with colored pens nearby. It's central location makes it easily visible, unlike other journals I keep tucked away. After just a little while, the opened blank page became my Casanova, calling my name time and time again. Now, no matter how insignificant or hare-brained my thoughts seem, I capture them in the open journal. What's more, as I've grown in the habit of jotting down those fleeting ideas, I find that harvesting them begets even more ideas.

My current journal has unlined pages, which encourages more freedom. I feel less inclined to conform to complete sentences and ideas. A sketchpad might be my next option. Both beg for a rainbow of markers—a magnet for my inner child. But a legal pad would work just as well. So would a composition book.

It doesn't matter what shape it takes as long as it's small enough to be easily portable so you can always have it with you—and open—to accept those writing ideas.



I begin each workday by reading through this idea journal and transferring anything that I intend to work on to my daily plan sheet. My open book is a combination of both writing and marketing ideas. Some of the ideas don't fit into plans right away, of course. In this case, I tear the page out and throw it in a bin or file folder so it's there ready for harvesting, sooner or later. If it never produces fruit I still feel good that I at least accepted it and gave it a chance.

*Originally posted on Suite T: The Author's Blog of Southern Writers Magazine at <http://bit.ly/Yx4k5d>.*

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