



# The Muse Messenger

The Newsletter of the Alabama State Poetry Society

June, 2016

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## Musings from the Editors

Things in Alabama tend to slow down during the summer months. The weather is beautiful, the kids are out of school, people are planning vacations, and the beach is calling, calling, calling.

Although some groups don't meet during the summer, there's no shortage of opportunities for poets and writers. Two of those opportunities come immediately to mind. The Southern Christian Writers Conference will take place in Tuscaloosa on June 17 to 18, and the Alabama Writers Conclave will take place in Birmingham on July 15 to 17.

The *Muse Messenger* will be going out every month this summer too, and it will keep you up to date about which groups (like Writers Anonymous and Gifts of a Wordsmith) are still meeting and where and when.

In this month's *Muse Messenger*, Rita finishes her three-part series on "Contesting," and Barb Blanks adds some tips that will help improve your chances of having your poems place in any contests you choose to enter.

In "Tips of the Trade," Barry Marks has suggested a way to do a "mini-workshop" in your own home and at your own convenience. We like the idea so well, we may make it a regular feature of the *Muse Messenger*. Let us know what you think of it.

Each writing group has its own personality. Harry's article about Writers Anonymous gives you an "inside look" at what happens at one writing group and how that has impacted the people from that group and the poems they write. Write up something about your writing group, and send it to us. We'd love to see it in a future *Muse Messenger*.

Mike Wahl's brief article about why he writes poetry is also a "must read," and I hope it motivates you to both write more poetry and to submit an article for a future *Muse Messenger*. If it's important enough for you to write about, it would probably be a good read for other writers and poets. Put it together and send it to us. If it's a fit, we'll use it!

"Sneak Peek" at next month's *Muse Messenger*: Next month, we will be "raising the bar" a little when we include an article by Russell Strauss on how he judges contests. His article will help you improve your poetry, but it might also motivate you to offer your skills as a judge. If you have judged contests before, share your experience with us. Maybe we'll be able to use it next month as well.

Some people, who do not have or are not comfortable using email, have not been able to submit to the various features in the *Muse Messenger* or even to send us their "Member News." If you are one of those people, you may send snail mail to:

**Muse Messenger, P.O. Box 763, Pell City, AL 35125.**

Enjoy the beautiful month of June and write some poetry.

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## 5 Simple Tips to Improve Your Chances of Winning - Plus 2 Bonus Tips

~ Barbara Blanks, Garland, TX.

(Barbara Blanks is an out-of-state member of ASPS. She is also a gifted poet, who wins more contests than any other person we have ever known. We asked her to "let us in on her magic," and she kindly shared the tips below.)

**1. Don't give up.** I've heard some people say they don't enter contests because the same people win all the time. The reason "the same people win all the time" is that they enter all the time. If you don't enter, you can't win. Don't let NOT winning discourage you because so much depends on the judge, the category, the number of entries, and the quality of the other entries.

**2. You have to work hard at it**—really hard. Challenge yourself to learn different forms. When you learn to write different forms, you have to really think about what you're writing. If it's a rhymed form like a sonnet, you need to find a way to say something without throwing off the meter or inverting the rhyme. I repeat—it's work. It's hard work. Lazy poems generally don't win.

**3. Follow the rules of the contest.**

**4. Comply with each category requirement.** Don't send a rondeau if it asks for free verse or a pantoum. Don't send a poem about love if the theme is "Elephants." Don't send a poem with 40 lines if the line limit is 36. If the rules limit line length to 56 characters, don't send poems with more than 56 characters.

**5. Send your entries before the deadline.** Double and triple check to be sure you have enclosed everything you're supposed to. Type category number and name and your ID where it's supposed to be.

I know the last three sound obvious. However, I've judged and/or processed a lot of contest entries, and you would be surprised at how often people don't follow the basic rules. Not following the rules means your entry is immediately excluded.

And here are two bonus tips:

**6. Spell the category name correctly**—especially if it is sponsored as a memorial to someone.

**7. Proofread *after* you print** out your poem and before you put it in the envelope. You may spot errors that weren't obvious on your monitor screen.

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## **Tips and Tools of the Trade: A Daily Workshop**

~ Barry Marks

This column will propose "workshops" you can do all by your lonesome, in the privacy of your own home. Most will take no more than an hour, and all can be done daily, weekly or whenever you can...remember that a little self-discipline goes a long way!

### *Verbs*

Every day, think of a verb that is active, exciting, descriptive, interesting, suggestive or just different from normal speech. You can start stockpiling those you come across reading or start with something you are doing and grab a thesaurus (no, that isn't cheating!).

For example, as you walk to the refrigerator, think about whether you tread, amble, sashay, stalk, tromp, trudge, slide, slither, skip, traipse, shuffle...I'm not suggesting any of these are very interesting, but they beat walk.

For each verb you select, try to find two or three alternatives, perhaps ones that suggest the same physical action but with very different connotations.

Now use that verb in a sentence. Try expanding that sentence into a few lines of poetry or a short paragraph. Don't focus on the form; you aren't writing a poem, just an exercise. Then, switch the verb to another of your alternatives and see how the poetry or paragraph takes another direction. Verbs are powerful, aren't they?

Do this exercise every day for a week or two. You'll notice it gets easier, and, after a few times, that one word opens up all kinds of possibilities. You might or might not get a poem out of it, but relax. The idea is to get a couple of lines and become comfortable with active verbs.

Now, the next time you use a tired, plain, homely old verb like walk, slap yourself on the wrist and take the time to find the word you really mean.

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## **Why Didn't My Poem Win?**

~ Rita Aiken Moritz

*(This is the third and last part of Rita's article on contests.)*

You've been reading the articles about "contesting," and you decided to enter some of the contests listed in your monthly *Muse Messenger*. You wrote your heart out, carefully printed and collated your poems, and sent them in only to be disappointed when they don't win. And you want to know why.

The following list contains several reasons your poem might not have won:

● **Didn't Follow Submission Instructions.**

Contests have specific guidelines for submitting, including page set up, fonts and where to put your personal information. Submissions that don't follow the rules never get to the judges.

● **Received After Deadline.** Contests have submission deadlines, and it's not always the "postmark by" date. It might be a "received by" date or a range of dates (Example: 6/1 to 7/31). Late (or early) submissions also never get to the judges.

● **Didn't Follow Category Guidelines.** Barb Blanks said this in her article, but it bears repeating. Carefully read the category requirements. Write poems for the categories that ask for a form or topic you're familiar with first. Then stretch yourself by trying some new forms and topics. But be painstaking about following *all* the category guidelines.

● **Forced Rhyme and Inversions.** Writing with a specific rhyme scheme can be a challenge, and poets sometimes force rhyme by using bad inversions. That means the poet has changed the natural sequence of a sentence to force the rhyme or meter. It is painful to write, and it's even more painful to read as in this couplet:

**Get a clue...  
Don't. It. Do!**

● **Didn't Follow Other Form Rules.** Even free verse, blank verse, and prose poems have guidelines. For example, did you know prose poems should be right margin justified? Neither did I. Learn the rules for each poem and then follow those rules.

● **It's Not Your Best Work.** Ouch! That one pinches, doesn't it? Paul Valery said, "A poem is never finished, only abandoned." If we used

Valery's definition, however, our poems would never be submitted. Having said that, don't be surprised if your "first draft" doesn't win. Critique your poem, cut, edit, rewrite, and make it the best it can possibly be before you submit.

● **Judges' Subjective Preference.** Once a judge has chosen the best poems from all of the entries, he or she has the hard job of choosing the "best of the best" in order to choose the winners. Enjoyment of a poem is subjective, and, at some point, it comes down to the judge's preference among equally good poems.

I've listed several valid reasons your poem might not win, but the final reason is the most important one. You gave up too soon. I've learned more from the contests I didn't win than from the ones I did, and I've both won and lost several. And the more contests I entered, the more I learned what judges look for and the more my poetry improved. Every time one of my poems doesn't place, I take a long, hard look at it. Then I work to improve it. And I refuse to give up.

There are a lot of reasons for entering contests, and only one of them is that you might win. If your only goal or reason for writing poetry is to "win that contest," you're aiming too low. Entering contests can and should motivate you to read more poetry by others and to write more and better poetry yourself. When that happens, it's a win for you whether your poem ever wins an award or not.

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## Synergistic Magic & Writing Groups

~ Harry Moritz

Writers Anonymous started meeting three years ago with four members, only one of whom knew anything about poetry. However, Writers Anonymous has grown both in number and in skill since then, and WA members have brought home more than 50 awards in the last year alone. So what's the magic that made WA and the writers and poets who go there so successful?

There's a special kind of magic that happens when a group "clicks." That synergistic magic encourages growth and sharpens skills. I can't speak for all groups, but this is what we do at WA, and it appears to be working. We usually have

between 18-20 members who come to our monthly meetings.

WA meets monthly for two hours, and we meet at the same time and at the same place every month. It's a non-critical atmosphere where poets are encouraged to take turns reading their poetry. It is not a critique group, and the only feedback given is positive feedback (i.e. good imagery, strong verbs, good use of alliteration, etc.) All of us learn from the praise given to individuals.

Each month, poets are encouraged to suggest a "challenge" for the group to write for or about by the next meeting. Challenges can be brought by anyone, and poets are free to try one, some, all, or none of the monthly challenges. Those challenges are varied and suggested by several different members. So member participation and positive feedback are the two main components. However, the bottom line is that we just like one another. The usual competitive attitudes are absent, and we consider a win for one member to be a win for all.

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## The Poetry of Me

~ Mike Wahl

If you are reading this, then you may be a poet. Who makes the decision of whether or not you are a poet? Who confirms that you fit the definition? Why are we poets, and why do we want to be?

From historical perspectives, some poets wrote from within themselves, only for themselves. Others wrote for posterity, for notoriety, for fame, or for income (but somehow never wealth). Every poet must decide the rationale for which he or she writes each poem.

If my shelf is bare, and I write a poem to fill it, do I necessarily have to define it? I may want to hoard it in a back corner, to pull it out occasionally just to recall the essence of my mind at the time that I wrote it. In such a case, it belongs to no one else.

Or, I might refresh it, polish it, and place it near the shelf's edge for the world to observe. Seeking that acceptance. Hoping that the sharing brings delight to others.

Then there is the whimsical poem, so light it won't even stay on the shelf—is its purpose to elicit the

laughter of another? Perhaps I'll choose to dedicate my time to produce a poem defined by a competition, needing countless repairs and refinements before it can be exposed. Is a particular poem necessary? Absolutely! It is the poetry of me!

Will I reject it someday? Possibly. Shoot from the hip spontaneity, refined discretion, or concentrated dedication—these are all reasons I am a poet, but far from all the reasons. I write the poetry of me.

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## Member News for June

**Jerri Beck** reports that she was an invited participant in Magic City Storytellers, sponsored by InSpero on May 12. The purpose of this annual event is to "invite you into beauty and story entertainment that stretches your soul."

It's been a busy month or two for **Bettye Cannizzo**, who has three things to report. First is that her poem, "Morning Glow" won First Place in the League of Minnesota Poets contest. Secondly, *Reader's Digest* accepted (and paid her for) an item for their "Humor in Uniform" feature. And last (but not least), *Reminisce Magazine* published Bettye's "Our Honeymoon Out West."

**Harry Moritz** reports that there was a good turnout at the Open Mic event at the Birmingham Public Library last month with about 20 people in attendance. He and Rita were invited to tell attendees about ASPS, and several people expressed an interest.

As many of you already know, **Betty Spence** is very ill. She asked us to continue lifting her up in prayer, and I'm sure she would also appreciate cards and/or notes from you. Betty assures me that although she is too ill to write, she still enjoys reading. Her snail mail address is:

**3446 La Coste Rd, Mobile, AL 36618**, or you can email her at: [wordsmitty@bellsouth.net](mailto:wordsmitty@bellsouth.net).

**Sue Brannan Walker's** poem, "Beyond Translation" is posted on the Blakeley State Park Blog. <http://blakeleypark.com/blog.asp>.

**Peggy Walls** reports that her new book, *Alabama Gold*, will be released July 11, 2016, by History Press. The first book signing will be July 23 at

Books-a-Million in Tiger Town, Opelika. The title currently is listed and available for pre-ordering in the "coming soon" category at: <http://bit.ly/1UmLZW2>.

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## Call for *Muse Messenger* Submissions

What Can I Submit to the *Muse Messenger*?

Our goal as the Editors of the *Muse Messenger* is to make it a "real" member newsletter. That means we want the content to be focused on, of interest to, and even written by you...the members of ASPS. Here are some of the features that would welcome your submissions:

- **The Monthly Contest.** It's easy to enter, has no entry fee, and is open to ASPS members only. The only requirements are that the poem be unpublished and not have won a prize in any ASPS contest. While there is no monetary prize, the winning poem will be published in the following month's *Muse Messenger*. The complete contest guidelines are online at: <http://bit.ly/1YcG1NI>.
- **Member News.** If you've won a contest, had something accepted for publication, hosted a party or done anything else you want other members to know about, let us know. We love hearing about your success and letting others know about it.
- **What's Happening.** Do you have an event planned? A workshop? A conference? If it has value, share it so other members will know about it.
- **Tips & Tools of the Trade.** What writing prompts work for you? What are some common errors to avoid? Put together three or four tips and send them to us. If we can use them, we'll credit you.
- **Articles.** We're always looking for well-written articles about poetry and writing. Articles should be between 300-600 words and should also be crisp, clean copy. Write it, edit it carefully and send it to us.
- **Fillers.** Fillers should be 100 to 200 words. They can be interesting, informative, or just fun.

All your submissions should be attached as a Word document and sent by email to:

[editor@musemessenger.org](mailto:editor@musemessenger.org). Put the feature you are submitting to in the Subject line (i.e. Article, Tips

and Tools, etc.). If you wish, you may also send your submissions for any section of the *Muse Messenger* using snail mail to:

**Muse Messenger, P.O. Box 763, Pell City, AL 35125.**

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## Monthly Poetry Contest

Congratulations to **Mike Wahl** from Athens, AL, who was the winner of the May *Muse Messenger* Contest. Mike's poem, "What's a Mom to Do?" appears below. Thank you to all who entered.

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### What's a Mom to Do?

You never knew your sister -  
she died when you were two;  
barely six herself, leukemia,  
but what's a mom to do?  
I cried for days, I loved her so,  
but son, so did I, love you.

You never knew those siblings,  
the three that died inside my womb,  
in the years before your sister came -  
I cried then too,  
the tears they could never cry,  
but what's a mom to do?

And then there was your brother,  
killed in battle back in '72;  
they sent his body home with honors,  
but what's a mom to do,  
except to pray that my last son  
would not join the army too?

Please come home my son,  
to see me just a day or two -  
it's not your fault that you alone  
are the only remnant of my youth-  
but when you live so far away,  
what's a mom to do?

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Information for the June contest is as follows:

Topic: **Fathers** (birth or adoptive fathers,  
God as a father, or you as a father)

Form: **Rhyming Couplets**

Line Limit: **32**

You may enter this contest by emailing your poem to: [contest@musemessenger.org](mailto:contest@musemessenger.org) by **June 25th**. Either attach it as a Word document or put it in the body of your email. You may also submit by snail mail to:

**Muse Messenger, P.O. Box 763, Pell City, AL 35125.**

If you have won a 2016 *Muse Messenger* contest, you may not enter another poem in a *Muse Messenger* contest until January, 2017. The complete contest guidelines are online at: <http://bit.ly/1YcG1NI>.

Your poem must not have been published or have won in any ASPS contest. The winning poem will appear in the July *Muse Messenger*.

(Contest judges are qualified poets, who are not a part of or associated in any way with ASPS.)

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## ***Muse Messenger Archives***

Starting in March, 2016, the *Muse Messenger* will only be sent to active members of ASPS. Archived copies of every 2016 *Muse Messenger* can be found online at: <http://musemessenger.com>. However, you will need a password in order to access that archive. When you go to the website, you will be asked to submit both a User Name and a Password. They are as follows, and "Case" matters:

**User Name = [aspsmember](#)**

**Password = [1Banana2016](#)**

This User Name and Password combination will be used by all paid ASPS members during 2016. The User Name and Password combination will change in January, 2017, and will be sent to members when that change is in place.

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## **What's Happening?**

**June 2: Writers Anonymous** meets the first Thursday of every month from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Pell City Recreation Hall, 411 19th Street South in Pell City, AL. For more information, go to: <http://writersanonymous.us>.

**June 7: Gifts of a Wordsmith**, a poetry workshop for adults, meets on the first Tuesday of each month from 6:00 to 7:45 p.m. at the downtown Birmingham Public Library. Email Haruyo

Miyagawa at: [hm@bham.lib.al.us](mailto:hm@bham.lib.al.us) for more information.

**June 11: Pensters Writing Group** is sponsoring an open mic for members and the public at the Page & Palette Book Cellar, 32 S. Section St., Fairhope, on Saturday, June 11, from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.

**June 17 to 18: Southern Christian Writers Conference.** This affordable two-day writers' conference will take place on the campus of First Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on Friday and Saturday, June 17 to 18. For more information, go to: <http://scwconference.com>.

**July 5: Gifts of a Wordsmith**, a poetry workshop for adults, meets on the first Tuesday of each month from 6:00 to 7:45 p.m. at the downtown Birmingham Public Library. Email Haruyo Miyagawa at: [hm@bham.lib.al.us](mailto:hm@bham.lib.al.us) for more information.

**July 7: Writers Anonymous** meets the first Thursday of every month from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Pell City Recreation Hall, 411 19th Street South in Pell City, AL. For more information, go to: <http://writersanonymous.us>.

**July 15 to 17: The 2016 Alabama Writers' Conclave Conference** will be at the Alabama School of Fine Arts, 1800 Reverend Abraham Woods Jr. Blvd, Birmingham, AL. For more information and to register, go to: <http://alabamawritersconclave.org>.

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## **Contests, Contests, Contests!**

(June/July Contests with Deadlines)

6/10—Guideposts Writers Workshop Contest: <http://bit.ly/1TRPcgK>

6/20—Poetry Society of TN (Members Only)  
Submit by June 20th for July:  
<http://poetrysocietytn.org>

6/25—Saturday Evening Post Limerick Laughs Contest: <http://bit.ly/1p3VXfh>

6/30—Blue Mountain Arts: <http://bit.ly/1SnXflz>

6/30—California: Topic by month and submitted during each month: <http://bit.ly/1LEi3zR>

- 6/30—California: Annual Contest. Submit between 3/1 to 6/30: <http://bit.ly/1LEi3zR>
- 6/30—Kentucky State Poetry Society Adult Contest <http://bit.ly/1X7cp4j>
- 6/30—MSPS Naomi Cherkofsky Memorial Contest <http://bit.ly/1OvutOX>
- 6/30—SPS Studios Biannual Poetry Card Contest (No Entry Fee) <http://bit.ly/1SnXflz>
- 7/1—Arizona Authors Assoc Literary Contest <http://bit.ly/1U48wtA>
- 7/15—Florida State Poets Association Contest <http://bit.ly/1RUtE4d>
- 7/20—Poetry Society of TN (Members Only) Submit by July 20th for August <http://poetrysocietytn.org>
- 7/31—California: Topic by month and submitted during each month. <http://bit.ly/1LEi3zR>
- 7/31—League of Minnesota Poets: <http://mnpoets.com>
- 8/1 (**Received by Date**) Massachusetts State Poetry Society 2016 Contest <http://bit.ly/1U46ZDQ>

## Highlights on State Poetry Societies

In order for a State Poetry Society to be featured, it must have a web presence and allow both out-of-state membership and non-member entries in their contests. Keep in mind that contest deadlines may change. Some may accept outside submissions to their journals.

State:	Dues:	Contest Deadlines:
<b>Oregon:</b>	\$17/\$27	9/1 and 3/1
Inet: <a href="http://www.oregonpoets.org">http://www.oregonpoets.org</a>		
Facebook: <a href="http://on.fb.me/1OcTocE">http://on.fb.me/1OcTocE</a>		
<b>Pennsylvania:</b>	\$20	1/1
Inet: <a href="http://www.nfsp.com/pa/">http://www.nfsp.com/pa/</a>		
<b>South Carolina:</b>	\$25	11/15 & 5/15
Inet: <a href="http://www.poetrysocietysc.org">www.poetrysocietysc.org</a>		
Facebook: <a href="http://on.fb.me/1RbkJfv">http://on.fb.me/1RbkJfv</a>		

## Publishers and Journals Accepting Submissions

The following publishers and journals are now open for submissions. Be sure to read and follow the submission guidelines provided on each website. Only your very best work should be submitted.

*The Birmingham Arts Journal:*  
<http://birminghamartsjournal.com>

*Haiku Journal:*  
<http://bit.ly/22JMYpt>

*Kudzu House Quarterly:*  
<http://kudzuhouse.org>

*Mayfly*  
<http://bit.ly/1Zs4e0w>

Negative Capability Press:  
<http://negativecapabilitypress.org>

*Penny Magazine:*  
<http://youfoundpenny.com>

*Reader's Digest* 100-word True Story:  
<http://rd.com/100-word-stories-submissions>

Tell Us a Story: <http://dfwcon.org>

The Poetry Foundation:  
<http://poetryfoundation.org>

**Please Note:** The following have deadlines:

June 15: *The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts*  
<http://matterpress.com/submissions>

June 30: *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Curvy & Confident.* <http://chickensoup.com>

June 30: *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Stories about Teachers & Teaching.* <http://chickensoup.com>

June 30: *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Blended Families.* <http://chickensoup.com>

Be sure to check the website for submission guidelines before submitting to any of these.

If you know of publishers or journals that are accepting submissions, please let us know so they can be included in the *March Muse Messenger*.

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**2016 Alabama Writers Conclave Writing Conference  
Workshops and Speakers  
July 15 to 17  
Birmingham, Alabama**

The Alabama Writers Conclave is one of America's oldest writing conferences, offering education and community to writers of poetry and prose since 1923. All Poets and Writers are invited to this year's gathering in Birmingham. The conference lineup includes workshops in poetry, memoir, creative non-fiction, web building, writing for children and teens, and much more. *Be sure and enter the ASPS Poetry contest and have your narrative fiction professionally critiqued by author and actress, Barbara Kyle.*

<http://alabamawritersconclave.org>

**Scene Stealers: Secrets to Creating Powerful Scenes** (Barbara Kyle)  
**A Time To Blog** (Javacia Browser Harris)  
**Demystifying The Mystery Genre** (Kaye George)  
**Telling The Truth With A Twist** (Joey Kennedy)  
**Poets Without Borders: Writing Without Restraint** (Barry Marks)  
**There's More Than "Me" To Memoir** (Jessica Handler)  
**Your Website: Build It So They Will Come** (Megan Cary)  
**The Alpha & Omega of Stories: Why Beginnings & Endings Are So Important** (T.J. Beitelman)  
**Stop Dreaming, Start Doing: Writing for Children & Teens** (Irene Latham)  
**Writing Historical Persona Poetry** (Jeanie Thompson)  
**How Not To Be Published** (Reed, Latham, Sue B. Walker)  
**Romancing The Book: The Birth, Life, & Rebirth Of Your Literary Masterpiece** (Jim Reed)  
**Editing & Revision: You Gotta Be Crazy!** (Barry Marks)  
**Not Your Grandmother's Writer Or How To Write Environmental Fiction** (Clair Datnow)  
**All the World's A Stage: The Actor Inside the Writer** (Barbara Kyle)

