# WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY?

## **I. SCENE**

## **II. PLOT**

## **III. CHARACTERS**

## **THE ROAD TO WRITING – PART TWO**

# REVIEW OF HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT WRITING?

## THE TOOLS OF THE ROAD

##  PENCIL-PAPER- INK CARTRIDGES-MICROSOFT WORD- THE INTERNET

##  TIME-DISCIPLINE-PATIENCE – FRIENDS

## THE GREASE FOR THE WHEEL

##  WRITE-READ - EDIT - READ ALOUD- EDIT – EDIT - EDIT

##  READ TO A FRIEND-EDIT-READ AGAIN TO A FRIENDS – EDIT AGAIN

## WRITING PROMPTS-JUMP STARTS

##  PAY ATTENTION-READ A BOOK- TAKE NOTES- EXERCISE

## DESTINATIONS

##  BOOKS-BLOGS-POETRY-ARTICLES

# REVIEW OF HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT WRITING? - CONTINUED

## THE TEN MINUTE WRITING EXERCISE

## HELPFUL WEBSITES

## CLUBS, ORGANIZATIONS AND WRITING GROUPS

## THE WORLD OF PUBLISHING

##  AGENTS-PUBLISHERS-SELF-PUBLISHING SERVICES

## MARKETING

##  BLOGGING-TWITTERING -FACEBOOK

##  BOOK SIGNINGS

##  CONTESTS-MAGAZINES

# What Makes A good Story?

## **Story is NOT about what happens.**

#####  A natural disaster, a crime, a miracle

## **Story is about people.**

##### The people in the town

#####  The victims, the criminals

#####  The people who need a miracle

## **Story is about what people do when something happens.**

##### Do they rally together?

##### Do they fall apart, grow bitter?

##### Do they deny what happened?

# Our Minds Are Geared For Story

## **Our minds are geared to predict what will happen in the future.**

###### This is a survival technique

###### As early as the stone age, we wanted to know what was behind every tree, every rock (and today, every alley, and every stranger’s motive)

###### Why? Because that is where danger lurks. (lions and bears, and today, car jackers and rapists.)

###### Our military and police are trained to sharpen this instinct by simulating a threatening event.

###### **Remember this critical piece of information about the mind:**

###### **If the mind finds nothing behind that tree or in that alley, it will announce, “Clear!” and move on to the next tree or alley to search for something that might be a threat in the future.**

# Our minds are geared for story (cont’d.)

#### **Our minds constantly gather information and process it.**

###### When something bad happens to our cave man (or to us today), our mind records every detail and stores it.

###### The military and police train their recruit’s minds to process and react precisely to the information of a bad event.

###### Everyone remembers where they were, what they were doing, every detail of that fateful day of 9-11, or when Kennedy was shot (if you were old enough).

# Our minds are geared for story (cont’d.)

####  **So, why does the mind do this?**

For survival

If another event occurs with the same criteria as the last threatening event, (It was a dark and stormy night) - our mind alerts us and we react instantly.

 Without having to process the information, seconds are saved that could mean life or death.

Our mind’s function is to keep us safe.

#  What Does all This Have To Do With A Good Story?

## **When we read, our mind is geared to predict what will happen next.**

#### Indicators of danger: a dark and stormy night, a shadowy figure, sets off our brain’s alarm.

#### Our mind is looking for something to happen.

#### Our mind searches for information (clues, hints) that suggest something is going to happen in the next scene or the next chapter.

#### If our mind finds nothing imminent or threatening for it to process?

####  It will want to search elsewhere ….another book?

## **Your story must begin with an opening that alerts the mind and promises something important will happen on the next page.**

# What Does all This Have To Do With A Good Story?

#### What if our mind finds nothing imminent or threatening for it to process?

####  **It will want to search elsewhere …**

#### **Another book?**

## **Your story must begin with an opening that alerts the mind and promises something important will happen on the next page.**

# SCENE

# Before the beginning

## Before the reader even cracks open a book he reads the back or dust cover to find out what the story is about.

## In one sentence describe what your book is about.

## In one paragraph convey to the reader who the protagonist is and what conflict he faces..

## The potential reader must care about your character and his conflict enough in that first paragraph to open the book and read…

## **The opening scene.**

##

#  Best opening lines

#### “Buck did not read the newspapers or he would have known that trouble was brewing.” ***The Call Of The Wild – Jack London***

#### “The child with only thirty-six years to live is being hunted.” ***Killing Jesus – Bill O’Reilly***

#### “Gestures are all I have; sometimes they have to be grand in nature.” ***The Art Of Dancing In The Rain – Garth Stein***

#### “She lay on the hardwood floor next to Lance Corporal Alexander March, USMC, as he slept in the dark.***” Masada’s Marine – Judy Howard***

# Best opening paragraphs

## *She lay on the hardwood floor next to Lance Corporal Alexander March, USMC, as he slept in the dark. An astringent odor mixed in the autumn air drifted down to her nose. She lay still, but opened her eyes. The bedside clock cast shadows across the gold oak floor. She squinted at its green glow and listened to the Marine’s breathing- the only sound – air escaping in jagged puffs from his lungs. The patio door in the room allowed light from a flickering streetlamp to beat against the wadded bed sheets. She jerked her head up, ears pointed, just before the Marine’s flailing arms and legs rustled the covers and his cries**pierced her ears. The stinging smells of panic signaled her to action and twenty months of intensive training kicked in.*

##  *Her name was Masada. She was an American Service Dog. She was a professional.*

##  *She stood ready and would never quit. She would never leave her comrade’s side.* ***MASADA’S MARINE by Judy Howard***

# Elements of an opening scene

##  **Conflict**

##### Establish a problem

##### Or hint of a problem

##### *An astringent odor, wadded bed sheets*

##  **Action**

##### Establish a goal for your hero to achieve.

##### What is the character doing? *flailing arms and legs*

##### What is happening? *stinging smells of panic signaled her to action and twenty months of intensive training kicked in.*

##### **Suspense**

##### Suggest reasons or hint at the reasons the hero might fail to meet the challenge

# More elements of scenes

#### **Avoid abstract words**

##### Instead of pretty, ugly, love, hate…

##### Show these through actions, dress, habits…

##### Pretty is in the eyes of the beholder so be specific.

#### **Use the senses**

##### Instead of the house smelled good.

##### Say, “The scent of pine tingled his nostrils as he entered.”

##### Describe the smell, the sound, the weather and how your character reacts to it.

#####

# More elements of scenes

####  **Use active verbs**

####  Instead of, “She walked to the store…,”

####  Say she trod, plodded, or skipped to the store.

#### **Avoid passive verbs**

#### Such as was, is, been, etc.

####  Instead of “She was a good employee.”

####  Say, “She arrive on time ate her lunch at her desk…”

# EVEN MORE Elements of an opening scene (cont’d.)

## **Sense of characters**

#### Describe the character’s traits

#### How do they react to a problem, a place and other characters in the scene?

## **Imagery**

#### Describe the place

#### Use the five senses …. And the sixth?

## **Dialogue**

#### Conversations bring the reader into the story and makes him want to sit down and join in.

#### You want your reader to ask - Could this happen to me? What would I do?

# More elements of an opening scene

##  **Avoid saying -** He felt angry.

#### **Instead,** “–”His blood pulsed, he slammed the door

#### **Avoid saying -** He saw the accident.

####  **Instead,** “His mouth dropped open, he ran towards the twisted pile of metal.”

#### **Avoid saying -** He thought about …

####  **Instead,** use dialogue to find out what your character is thinking.

# PLOT

#  PLOT - the character’s progression toward a goal or a desire.

## **The Progression or Plot occurs during three Acts and is a series of conflicts.**

###### 1. **Inner Conflict**-Dealing with the character’s wants and desires.

 I am unhappy in my relationship

I hate my boss

I want to be a journalist but my parents want me to go to medical school.

# The plot (cont’d.)

###### 2. **Personal Conflict**– (Pretty Woman) Dealing with character’s values

I’m in love with my best friend’s wife.

My bank teller salary won’t pay for my daughter’s medical treatments.

I’m the only jurist voting “Not Guilty,” and I need to be with my son who is dying in a military hospital.

# The plot (cont’d.)

###### 3**. External** – (Jaws) Dealing with a car crash, war, or loss of job.

Surviving a car crash gives the protagonist a different outlook on life

The loss of a job causes depression or self-assessment.

The protagonist must deal with the effects of war.

# Results of conflict

## **The protagonist must attempt to overcome the conflict.**

##### The protagonist is so worried about losing his job he tries too hard and can’t concentrate.

##### The protagonist ‘s jealousy drives her husband into her girl friends arms.

## **The first attempt makes the conflict worse.**

##### The protagonist makes more serious mistakes at work because of his stress.

##### The protagonist has an affair too to make her husband jealous.

# Results of conflict (cont’d.)

## **The protagonist makes another attempt to solve the problem.**

##### Does each twist of the plot force the protagonist to deal with his inner issues, his flaws?

## **Each attempt alters or improves the character.**

## Has the protagonist changed? Does he see things differently

## Why did he make the decision to change? Especially if his reasoning is flawed.

## **Each significant event has to be more significant than the last.**

# More about conflict

## **Conflict must be gradual.**

###### Begin with a sense of unease.

###### First the protagonist sees her husband at lunch with her girlfriend.

## **As events happen, the sense of unease increases.**

## Then she sees them sitting too close together in a cab.

# THE ANTAGONIST – THE BAD GUY- THE VILLIAN

## **The antagonist must always have the advantage.**

##### The more powerful the antagonist, the more tension.

## **The antagonist must construct obstacles in the hero’s path.**

##### The worst that can happen to the hero happens.

## **The antagonist must annoy the hero.**

##### The antagonists must test the hero’s values and morals.

## **The antagonist should be aware of the hero’s flaws.**

#### Thus giving the antagonist the advantage by knowing things about the hero that the hero may not know or admit to himself

#  The ANtagonist (cont’d.)

## **The antagonist must push the hero - force the hero to overcome and face his flaws that are preventing him from achieving his goal and solving the problem.**

#### The hero’s fear of snakes has to be overcome to rescue the damsel who is thrashing in the murky swamp.

## **The antagonist must seem normal, even likable.**

#### He must not be entirely evil.

#### The reader must have an understanding of why he is evil. A horrible accident on Christmas eve killed his family and that is why he wants to abolish Christmas.

#### He should be normal with a hint of abnormality. He likes Dalmatian puppies, but later the reader finds out why.

# THE PROTAGONIST – THE GOOD GUY – THE HERO

## **The protagonist must have a goal.**

#### Whatever the protagonist wants dictates how he will react to everything that happens to him.

#### The reader must know why the protagonist wants what he wants, what it means to him and what getting it will cost him.

# The PROtagonist – the GOOD guy – the HERO

## **In order for the protagonist to become a hero there must be a tragedy.**

#### The protagonist must have a deep burning desire to solve the tragedy.

## **He must risk something.**

#### The risk can be financial, emotional, or moral.

## **He must have flaws that prevent him from solving the tragedy.**

#### His pride prevents him from making an apology to his wife that might save his marriage.

#### A drinking or drug problem prevents him from helping his wife deal with a cancer diagnosis.

## **He must react to the antagonist in a way that the reader can understand and relate.**

#### Everything the protagonist experiences creates an emotion. His reactions to the antagonist must be believable.

## **The reader must think, “This could happen to me.”**

#### What would I do?

# BUILDING CHARACTER

##  **All books are about people.**

## **A character is:**

#### What he says.

#### Who he says it to.

#### And how he says it.

#### Dialogue brings the character alive.

# Who is your character?

## Name your character

##  The name must match his nationality, age, etc.

##  Avoid names that start with the same letter. It confuses the reader.

## Show your character in a classic moment

##  waking up in the morning

##  waiting in a long line

# What’s your character like?

## Show your character’s attitude

### A woman in a good marriage sees a couple in a park in a loving embrace as romantic.

### Another woman sees the same scene as a man sneaking around on his wife because she suspects her husband of cheating.

### A character’s fearful or hateful reaction to a dog or people.

###

### A character rescues a dog or gives money to a homeless man.

##

# The characters work for you

## A Character is your employee.

##  Offer him a position in your story.

##  Is he an antagonist or protagonist?

##  What is his personality?

##  Interview the character

## If the character doesn’t do his job, if he is not essential to your story, get rid of him.

## Every character, even walk on characters like a waiter can interact with an essential character to enhance the scene, if that doesn’t happen then fire him.

# The character’s job

## What is the job of your character?

## To fall in love with the high school sweetheart?

## To solve a crime?

## To overcome a great injustice?

## To be a boss, a parent, a pet, or an aggressor?

## To rob a bank, assassinate the president?

# More about character building

###### Make your character vulnerable.

A disability

Be afraid of something

Just suffered a great injustice

###### Make them stop and think.

Why am I here?

Should I do this?

###### Give them strong opinions

Father hates gays

###### Pit them against each other

They both want the same girl, job, etc.

###### Make one character sacrifice or risk something for another

Misplaced loyalty to a job.

Should I lie to save the program?

# Characteristics of the character

## **The character must have characteristics of his job.**

#### A cop: eats donuts, sits with his back to the wall.

#### A boss: long hours, better car, confident.

#### A pet: dig holes, chews, bite.

## **Let them explore beyond their jobs.**

#### The boss has to solve the crime

#### The dog becomes a police dog.

# THE BEGINNING OF THE END

# In summary

## **Story is about people.**

#### People = character

## **Story is about what people do.**

####  Action = plot

## **A good story = a good plot**

## **A good plot =**

#### Descriptive scenes

#### Believable characters

#### Action and suspense.

# So what makes a good story?

## **An opening scene that hooks the reader**

##  **Conflict** with action and suspense

##  **Imagery** that pulls the reader into the scene

##  **Characters** that the reader cares about

## **A plot that continues to keep the reader engaged by**

## Continuing **action** and suspense

##  Detailed **descriptions** that keep the reader lost in the complexity of the characters’ dilemmas.

##  Trying to imagine, “What would I do if I were the character?

##  Rooting for the characters who struggle and should be struggling in every chapter.

# And finally, a conclusion

# That makes the reader feel good that he has stood by the characters, like a good friend.

## That makes the reader feel enlightened that he has stood by through the characters’ struggles in life.

## That makes the reader cheer for the characters who overcame their flaws, evolved, and reached their goals.

## **What do you want your reader to learn from your characters?**

## **What do you want your reader to feel from experiencing the characters’ lives through their eyes?**

## **What do you want your reader to think differently about?**

# THE POWER OF THE WRITER

## A writer can change the way people think by giving the reader a glimpse of life through the character’s eyes.

## A writer allows the reader to imagine how it would feel to see life through the character’s eyes.

## As a writer, what message do you want your readers to walk with?

# REFERENCES

# Books and websites

## **WIRED FOR STORY BY LISA CRON The writers' guide to using brain science to hook readers from the very first sentence.**

#### **STRUCTURING YOUR NOVEL BY K.M. WEILAND** Essential Keys for Writing an Outstanding Story. Weiland has an informative blog and website. Be sure to follow her at

#### <http://www.helpingwritersbecomeauthors..com/>

#### **SANTA BARBARA WRITERS’ CONFERENCES -2012 and 2013 – The conference is a wealth of information on all aspects of writing.**

## **THE WAY OF THE STORY BY CATHERINE ANN JONES the craft and soul of writing. Jones is an award winning screenwriter whose credits include “The Christmas Wife” and “Touched By An Angel.”**

## **STORY ENGINEERING BY LARRY BROOKS Mastering the six core competencies of successful writing.**

## **DAILY WRITING TIPS http://www.dailywritingtips.**