

Fatima and Philly

Written by Administrator
Saturday, 24 May 2014 12:13 -

Today I find myself as a guest of the Tunkhannock Writer's Group, at the Fatima Retreat Center in Dalton, PA. I'm here for a writer's retreat that offers a good number of very comfortable rooms in which to work (one of which is a library) breakfast, lunch and dinner, and the option of overnight accommodations.

Most importantly, it offers the chance to be around other writers. If you need to get into the mood for writing, the fastest method is to walk into a room with people who want to write. I'll let sociologists worry about why this is effective. I can tell you from personal experience it works.

My last such experience was the Philadelphia Writer's Conference held last June. You would think that charged up by such an event, I would be able to knock out a blog entry about it before the end of July. Those creative juices were spent working on my book—as was the first two hours here I might add—so I'm just getting around to writing about my experiences in Philly.

So with the first and last chapters of *Tales of the Black Knight: The Orphan's Search* freshly re-written, I can take a break and ponder June's event.

The seminars at the Philadelphia event have yet to disappoint. They've all been delivered by successful authors who not only know what they're doing, but can share the craft with you in a way that isn't like eating saltines with no butter. We're talking dynamic personalities with great knowledge and experience to share.

The Workshop on Novel: Plot by Lauren B. Davis inspired much of my current re-writing efforts. I realized I needed to build the plot more tightly around the main character, and re-wrote the opening chapters as a result. I got to speak with her after class, and she advised me to give more closure to the ending of the book. Even if I hope to do more books, the reader should feel that they've gotten a complete story from the first one.

Interestingly, this had a huge impact on what happens to the characters going forward, and actually gave me better footing should the opportunity for a sequel arise.

Solomon Jones took us through the Novel: Character workshop with riveting examples from own work, while challenging us with exercises throughout. By the end of the course you could tell the room got it. We knew what was needed to develop a character and bring him or her to life.

For both the Novel workshops, I submitted samples of my work for critique. I still can't believe that such an opportunity exists, but through the Philly workshops, you can have authors like Lauren and Solomon critique your work. If I don't get published soon, the acknowledgment pages will double the size of the book. In the meantime, to Lauren and Solomon, thank you so much for your efforts. They are greatly appreciated.

I'd also like to extend thanks to Jonathan Maberry, Cardiad Pinero, and Merry Jones for their critiques at last year's event. (Google all these people, then buy their books.)

Speaking of Mr. Maberry, he presented two classes this year, both related to the business aspects of writing. This is the kind of stuff that baffles most people when they try to get into writing. His class on Query Letters armed me with exactly the information I needed, and in true Maberry fashion, was full of humor and candid detail about the business. It was a hell of a lot of fun. His other class was on "Acting Like a Writer." I just deleted the first draft of this paragraph, because I started retelling the whole class. It was that much fun and that much insightful. I will give you two insights to what it was he described. First, I discovered that developing the Shuta Multimedia Vlog was a great primer for any future I have as a writer. I developed a genuine delivery that is 100% me while still meeting the needs of my audience. Second, if you want an even better hint at how to be a writer, walk up to Mr. Maberry any time you see him. Make notes about the encounter. Heck if people responded that way to every encounter we'd have a much more peaceful and happy society.

Keith Strunk delivered my selected Master Class on Screenwriting. From Keith I learned that as a novel writer, I will almost certainly never do the screenplay for my work. This was a shocking revelation to me, and in some ways a great relief, because before this class I knew nothing of screenplays.

In case you think that meant I thanked him, stood up and asked for my money back, let me continue. Keith is a professional actor as well as a writer, and his delivery is matched by his insight. Not only did I learn about screenplays, but I was given a window in the world of the actor. This had a huge influence because an actor requires a certain freedom to interpret the

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character. When you think about it, so does the reader. The reader needs some freedom to build the story as well, and I'm trying to work that into my own work.

Also, we had another fascinating discussion of personality traits and a reinterpretation of an approach very similar to the "Social Styles" training I received years ago at Lockheed Martin. Keith offered us suggestions for using that method for creating consistent characters, and in the process actually gave me more insights into the personality types than I received from the expert hired by L-M. Keith has a fantastic grasp of the human equation.

Oh and did I mention his class was a lot of fun too?

At the banquet, the food was excellent, as was the Speaker, George Anastasia. George only recently retired from covering Mob news for the Inquirer, and has published several books on the subject. He gave us a behind-the-scenes look into what goes into investigative reporting, including insight into one of the most dastardly murder cases on the mid-Atlantic coast. He also shared his concerns with how investigative reporting is changing. It was a gripping and at times very humorous speech, and again gave us all more insight into the publishing world.

Every year there is so much going on that you can't physically get to everything. Classes overlap, bus schedules conflict, so if something wasn't mentioned—such as Ed Rendell's opening speech—it's probably because I didn't see it.

The best advice I can give you if you're a writer of any experience level—even if you're just thinking about trying it—is to go to this event. You will get a real understanding of the world of writing and you will enjoy every minute of it.