Section 1, Break Through the Competition: Hands-On Workshop to Make Your Novel Pop to the Top

Write-by-the-Lake Writer’s Workshop & Retreat
June 13-17, 2016
9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. each day
Pyle Center, 702 Langdon St., Madison

UW-Madison Continuing Studies & UW-Madison Dept. of English

Instructor: Lori Devoti

You’ve taken writing classes, read articles, and you’ve even written your book, or most of it, but you aren’t getting the reactions you want from agents and editors. Instead you’re hearing things like, “The writing is strong, but it didn’t pique my interest.” Or “You have a nice concept, but I’m just not enthusiastic enough about this work.”

What’s wrong? What more can you do? What does it take to get a book from “good” to “outstanding”?

In this week long, hands-on workshop, we’ll roll up our sleeves and really dig into what makes a book special: to agents, to editors and to readers. We’ll look for layers, in your characters and your plot. We’ll check to make sure you are using hooks to pull readers along from first lines to last. Is your voice coming through? Is the point of view clear and right for your story? Does your story have highs and lows? Does it elicit emotion and hit a chord?

We’ll look at all of this and more. We’ll make sure your story has the spark that will make it stand out from the clutter on editors’ desks and stores’ bookshelves.

Come, challenge yourself and see what you and your book can become.

For an added fee, add on a full read of your manuscript by Lori. (Limited to first five requests.)

Lori Devoti is the multi-published, multi-genre author of urban fantasy, cozy mystery, young adult, paranormal romance and romantic comedy novels. She is a member of Novelist Inc., a group exclusive to professional writers and is owner of the How to Write Shop, an online source of articles on the craft and business of writing. Lori has had over a dozen works published by major publishers, and is also pursuing the new avenues open to authors in today’s digital world. Lori is the recipient of the Romantic Times Reviewers’ Choice Award for The Witch Thief, the Best Harlequin Nocturne of 2012.
Monday: Main Characters

Creating Protagonists We Cheer For:

Have you ever read a book that featured a character you didn’t like? Did you read the whole book? Chances are unless you were forced to keep reading, you didn’t.

This doesn’t, however, mean creating perfect characters. Perfect characters are boring.

Monday we will check those main characters.

- How do we feel about them when we first meet them? Is there something in that very first meet that makes us root for them?

- What about after we spend some time with them, do we discover that they have layers?

- Once we like your character and he has layers, is that enough? Of course not.

- This is story and in story, characters change. Does yours? Is there something driving him through the book? Some goal that he may not even realize? Some hole in himself that he just can’t seem to fill?

- Next we will look at ways to Amp Up Your Protagonist. Do you worry about making your characters real? You should, but you also need them to be more than just real. You want them amped up, special, protagonists we can’t stop ourselves from admiring. You need them to do the things we all wish we had done in the same situations.

- As I mentioned before, perfect characters are boring. Characters whose troubles all come from outside forces are just as boring. Let’s take a look at your characters, find their warts and get them out there for everyone to see. Yes, we want them to have Trouble Traits and a Fatal Flaw.

- What about the flip side? Who does your character admire? And why? This may tell you more about your character and where your book needs to go than you realize.

Tuesday: What About the Other Guys
• **Finding Your Antagonist** – Do you know who your antagonist is? Does he/she/it have flaws and redeeming qualities? In other words, is he more than a cardboard cutout?

• **How About a Second Helping of Antagonist?** – You may think that a protagonist can only have one antagonist, but this isn’t always true. What are the benefits of having more than one? Should your story have more? If so who/what?

• **Is Your Antagonist Pulling His Weight?** – Your antagonist is half your story. He is what gets in your hero’s way. Without him, you have nothing. Make sure he is doing his job.

• **Secondary Characters** - One of my favorite aspects of the TV show Law & Order is the secondary characters. They don’t just step on the site, deliver their line and leave. In a few short seconds, you know something about that character and based on how whichever primary character interacts with them, you know more about them too. It adds layers that a simple walk-on could never supply. Do your secondary characters do that?

• **A Cast of Too Many** – Too many characters in a story is like playing ping pong with extra balls. And with ping pong you only have to hit the ball. You don’t have to know which ball is which. Stories with too many characters are confusing… is that the best friend or the cousin? Wait, was it the vegetarian who freed the test monkeys or the Humane Society worker? And with too many characters you run the risk of no one getting the space they deserve to grow. They are each just an unsatisfactory snip dropped in for one purpose, rather than a fully functioning character that we might come to love, hate… feel something for. Does your story have two or even three characters who should be compressed into one?

**Wednesday: Where Character Meets Plot**

• **External Goal & Upping the Stakes**- A character’s goal drives story. Without it or with one that is too weak, your character and story will meander. We’ll take a look at yours and make sure it’s pushing your character and story as hard as it can.

• **Inner Conflict/Internal Goal**- Even with the most action-driven of action adventure movies, the best protagonist do more than hunt down the killer or save the world. They learn something about themselves. They change. Change doesn’t come cost free. You don’t wake up one morning and realize you need to be a new person and your character shouldn’t either. There has to be conflict: hard-to-accept, internal conflict.
• **Core Need** – Now you know your character’s fear and you know his goal, but do you know what he really needs? Does he get it? Is he the same person on the first page as he is as the last? Did he learn something in this journey? Has he arched? And does that arch make sense? If you want readers to close your book with a smile, these things need to happen. If you want them to leave feeling something else… well, we can do that too.

**Thursday: Plot**

No matter how character-driven your story, it still needs ups and downs, setbacks and advances, twists and turns. Does yours have enough? Does it have any? We’ll check to see with special attention to a few key scenes such as:

- The Problem
- The Protagonist Engages
- The Antagonist Bites Back
- The Point of No Return
- The Crisis
- The Dark Moment
- The Climax
- The Resolution

While looking at each of these we’ll also address adding plot layers, weaving subplots into your story, and making sure the stakes are as high as they can be for your character.

**Friday: Everything Else and Some Stuff Just for Fun… or Let’s Experiment**

Backstory, flashbacks, point of view, distancing words, motivation/reaction units, even tense & temporal point of telling can make or break your book. We’ll look at all of them,

Then just for fun we’ll….

• **Flip it!** – Writing a book is a lot of work and it takes a lot of time. And sometimes, just sometimes, we get complacent. We choose the path of least resistance when writing a scene, choose the path most traveled… or any other cliché of your
choosing. But we don’t have to. Have you done that? Could you look at a scene in a new way and take it from serviceable to fantastic?

- **How about a little something extra?** Are you using any symbols as you tell your tale? Many colors, animals, and images have meanings that are so deeply rooted in the human experience they relay feelings and moods without saying anything at all. Are you using any? Should you?

And finally… **theme.** What is the take away from your book? Even the lightest of romantic comedies should leave you with some message. What is yours?

Plus, each day, critiques! Come prepared to share and learn.

**Credit Option:** Participants earn 1 credit by attending class and completing the assigned work for the week: daily reading, writing at least five pages of original work, and critiquing of own and others’ work. To earn 2 credits, participants submit an additional five pages of their work. Participants earning 3 credits complete all of the above requirements supplemented by another five to 10 pages of creative work or a short paper synthesizing how the material covered during the week applies to their own creative projects and/or teaching. The work must be handed in within two weeks of final class date.