Section 5: Your First Novel: Fast and Finished!

Write-by-the-Lake Writer's Workshop & Retreat

June 11-15, 2018
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: Kathy Steffen

Writing a novel feels like a daunting task. Sure, you can write anything quickly, but how do you create the fresh, exciting, meaningful fiction today's marketplace demands?

How do you pull together the pieces you already have and build them into a compelling novel?

How do you approach plotting to give your novel a compelling edge? What about enough story strength and momentum to keep your writing from falling apart after the first few chapters?

How do you develop believable, fresh, multi-dimensional characters readers want to follow to the end?

Is there a way to keep your writing on track and not meander off course, wasting your creative time and effort?

The focus this week is to arm you with all the craft, techniques and skills to break through any doubts you have and keep you moving ahead to write with confidence and not only finish your novel, but snag the reader from the start and make it impossible for anyone to put your manuscript down.

By the time this week is concluded, you'll have all the tools you need to move ahead and work on your novel until it is finished. Included all week are lesson/discussion followed by critiquing time and (optional) homework assignments where you will work on your specific story/manuscript. You'll receive worksheets on all topics, either to develop areas you don't yet have or to ramp up and solidify what you have written. We'll take an analytical look at examples from bestselling and award-winning authors to look beneath the surface and see how they create masterpieces of fiction. We'll also talk about creating your own writing process, breaking through when you are stuck, finding your confidence to write, and how to keep excellent story ideas coming.

We will also discuss how to approach the marketing side (including submitting to agents and editors) and all the possibilities available now in publishing. By the end of the week,

you'll know how to create the pieces you'll need to put your book out into the world and have the motivation and confidence to do it!

After the retreat I will critique up to 10 pages to keep you going and help you continue to hone your skills.

Kathy Steffen's novels have won numerous awards, including the CRW Award of Excellence and the Beacon Award for Best Historical Fiction. Her books have been finalists in the IPA Benjamin Franklin Awards and at the London Book Festival. She is the author of the *Spirit of the River Series*: *First, There is a River, Jasper Mountain,* and *Theater of Illusion*. In addition to published articles and essays, Kathy's short fiction appears in anthologies and online. She speaks at writing programs across the country and has taught at AllWriters' Workshops, the University of Wisconsin's Writer's Institute, Weekend with Your Novel, Write by the Lake, Rhinelander School of the Arts, and online at the How to Write Shop. Kathy teaches in person and online with students from across the globe and is currently working on a mystery fiction series as well as a how-to guide to writing a novel.

Monday, June 11th—**Your Master Plan**

For a story to be so meaningful, so compelling that it hooks a reader through 300+ pages (and keeps your writing on track) it must have solid story power. So how do you create such momentum? Today we'll find out how to create a story that won't let your reader (or you!) go.

• Where do I start ?!? This quick-start story guide will give you all your story fundamentals and ensure you have the ***Eight-Pillar Story Superstructure*** in place to keep your story going strong with enough power to succeed from beginning to end.

• Core story conflict: build meaningful conflict in the foundation of your novel for a powerful and sustainable storyline.

• Catapult your story into bestseller and award-winning territory with the three elements of a riveting, cutting edge premise that will keep your story (and writing) going strong and hook the attention of editors, agents and readers.

• The five factors every beginning must have and techniques to capture a reader from page one.

• Identify and use techniques to keep your story focused and on track, yet with enough wiggle-room to include all the exciting, new creative ideas that will come as you write.

• The difference between usable new ideas and your story going off track.

Bonus Marketing Mini Lesson: We'll go over your premise, logline, and short synopsis: how to develop each for the future and use each one to focus as you write.

Tuesday, June 12th—**Create a Memorable Cast of Characters**

Complex, memorable characters are at the heart of all great fiction. Today we'll work on developing characters that will compel your readers to care so much they read through the night to see what happens to them.

• What do you really need to know? Go beyond character profiles and get to the core of your character without spending valuable writing time on a lengthy character dossier.

• Discover how to people your fiction with the characters today's readers crave, characters who are fresh, edgy, compelling…in a word—fascinating.

• Discover how to create a protagonist who goes beyond "good guy" status to reveal layers and depth from all points on the morality scale.

• Antagonists of all types and how to use them to drive your story.

• The five characterization techniques that let you go beneath the surface of your lead characters to develop and deepen them into memorable people your reader will never forget.

• Bland or lazy characters? No more! How to get a sluggish character not only moving, but make him or her dynamic enough to drive your story until it's finished.

• Develop your character's inner dilemmas to add depth and conflict to your writing.

• How to develop strong secondary characters for a cast that won't quit!

• Key tips to characterization including how to keep your characters fresh and from going into stereotypes.

Bonus Marketing Mini Lesson: How to use everything you learn about characters today to help you write a riveting query and synopsis.

Wednesday, June 13th—**Rock Your Story into Page-Turner Status: Getting the Most from Plot Structure, Scene, and Pacing**

Plotter? Pantser? Somewhere in-between? Not sure? No matter. We'll discuss how to develop solid story structures and keep them in the background so your creativity is free to, well, create! You need your time and energy focused on the creative part of writing and everything you learn today will give you that freedom. And what about writing compelling scenes? Don't worry, we'll demystify all of it and when this day is over, you'll be an expert.

• What to do when you get stuck and how to get back on track.

• How to keep your writing organized with a firm grip on your core story so you won't get lost.

• Build your own process! We'll look at ten different approaches to plotting and how to incorporate these techniques (or pieces of them) to create the writing process that will work for you.

• Learn the art of weaving internal (character) and external (action) layers of conflict that play off each other to keep your story going strong.

• The three must-have elements for every scene.

• Finding the "hot spot" in your scene and how to use it for intensity and pacing.

• How to escalate story stakes and hook your reader with each scene.

• Discover how to use POV for ultimate story power and prose strength—which character's POV to use, how to write deep POV and when should you use it.

• Show vs. tell? Scene, sequel, transition? What these mean and when (or why) to use one or the other.

Bonus Marketing Mini Lesson: You'll learn how to use plot structure to write a riveting synopsis—what to keep in, what to leave out, and what parts are an absolute must!

Thursday, June 14th—**The Necessary Pieces that Create a True Experience for the Reader**

Today we'll focus on worldbuilding, dialogue, your voice, and theme—everything you need to take your reader beyond the writing on the page and have a vicarious experience they'll never forget.

• How to build a world that is integral to the story and intensifies conflict, deepens your writing, and reflects the meaning of your story and theme.

• Learn to work beyond surface images to keep your story going strong.

• Time to demystify dialogue! How to write dialogue that goes beyond talk with techniques to move your story forward, reveal emotional subtext, and unmask character.

• Theme—do you begin with it or does it grow organically from the story? How do you discover your theme? How do you strengthen theme throughout your story without getting on a soapbox?

• How to use theme to add significance, meaning, and power to your story.

• Voice tips and techniques to help you write compelling prose. You'll discover and strengthen your own unique voice for one-of-a-kind fiction.

Friday, June 15th—**Finish Your Book, The Art of Revision (what to keep in and what to cut) Increase Pacing and Suspense to Sell, and the Final Frontier: Getting it Sold**

When is your story done? How do you end your book? What about writing an ending that will resonate with your readers long after they finish your book? How do you keep yourself going to finally write "the end" and what about the next step, sending it out into the world? Today is all about a great finish—in every way!

• Astounding endings: the five approaches to endings and ten key pieces to create a memorable story finish.

• The six-step revision plan that allows you to step back for objectivity and see what needs to go and what must stay.

• Revision techniques to sharpen your writing prose, story structure, and pace every aspect and element of your story.

• Moving in close: tips to fine-tune your prose.

• Your plan from here to the end—your process and the steps to put in place to give you direction and inspiration beyond our retreat.

• How to write your query letter (you'll put together pieces from earlier in the week) with specific advice on approaching agents and editors.

• How to keep sane during the submission process.

• The new world of publishing—options for authors.

In addition to all the above, during our sessions we'll cover brainstorming activities and writing prompts pertinent to your novel. Plus we'll talk all week about creating a writing process that is specific to you and your strengths as a writer.

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.