

Looking Back, Looking Forward
By Jeanetta Chrystie, OCACW President
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I drove past a church sign last week that read “Practice Makes Perfect, Be Careful What You Practice.” Good advice. At the beginning of each year, many people make resolutions to change, improve, or add to their habits – to “practice” what they want to become. Good idea. At our January meeting we enjoyed our first annual *Lightning Writing Challenge*, in which we provided seven starter phrases to all members and four visitors.

Everyone wrote in private for about an hour, in any genre they wanted. After our fellowship break (delicious snacks, tea, & coffee provided by our Hospitality Coordinator), we enjoyed listening to each other’s creative efforts. Our writers; yes, I said “writers” crafted a wide range of topics from the seven starter phrases and reported “it felt fulfilling to just sit and free-flow write.” Good practice.

“So, what were those seven starter phrases,” you ask? Perhaps you would like to start a regular habit to sit and free-flow write on a weekly basis. You could make an appointment with yourself, choose a place and time, and begin a new habit. Free-flow writing practice will improve your ability to write quickly as ideas flow, jotting “rabbit trail” thoughts in the margin. I have several journals that I’ve collected, and at least partially filled over the years. Some are reserved only for poetry, others for specific topics, a few only for ideas. I enjoy handling and writing in a lovely journal. Occasionally I practice free-flow journaling on my laptop, password protected of course. Practice Makes Perfect. Let’s all regularly practice writing, whether you are a published author or a “want to be” writer. **Here are the seven starter phrases from our January *Lightning Writing Contest*.**

1. There was a young lad/lass from Nevada ...
2. The first time I understood Love ...
3. I thought I knew ...
4. I had a dream to _____ that I gave up because ...
5. If I could re-live one day of my life again ...
6. ‘Twas a dark and stormy night ...
7. An unreached goal is only a ...

As we look toward our Ozark Chapter of American Christian Writers’ events for 2008, we are beginning a new meeting agenda item. For the next seven meetings, February through May and September through November, we will have a 15-20 minute lesson from the “**Seven Steps to A Published Magazine Article**” during the first half of our meeting (before fellowship break and our keynote speaker). Included topics will be:

February – Idea Generation: where do you find ideas, & idea mapping techniques

March – Query Letters: interest an editor in your manuscript before you spend time polishing it

April – Market Research: find markets to match your topic, style, & experience level

May – Types of Articles: how to, personal experience, & 10 more – with different markets

September – Article Organization: different article types have different writing expectations

October – Rights: copyrights, permissions, & selling rights (1st NAS, electronic. reprint)

November – The Business End: follow-up “rules,” record keeping, & tax considerations

Bring a 3-hole-folder and ink pens to each meeting. “Seven Step” handouts will be provided at each of the next seven meetings, complete with writing exercises you may want to try during your recently scheduled weekly free-flow writing time. Grab your calendar now and reserve the second Saturday of each of these months for joining together with like-minded Christian writers for information, encouragement, fellowship, networking, and inspiration. You won’t want to miss a single meeting!