



A note from our president, Gina Nelson

July 2010

"Planning to write is not writing. Outlining, researching, talking to people about what you're doing, none of that is writing. Writing is writing." ~ E.L. Doctorow

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This month I'm writing my column from my parents' home in Pensacola, Florida. Through the plantation shutters next to my desk, I spy many of the things that represent home to me: white rocking chairs on an expansive screened porch, healthy ferns and blooming palm trees, ducks waddling on the boat dock my children painted last summer, and a canal filled with an array of boats.

If you'll pardon the vacation analogy, I can't help but think of the writers in our chapter as I gaze at the different boats docked along our canal. The folks across the water have a power cruiser--feisty, quick, equipped with a small cabin for brief respites from the sun; further down there's a party boat--comfortable, unhurried, perfect for a sunset on the bay; another canal neighbor owns a fishing boat with a tall tower--aggressive, fast, no shade provided 'cause it's all about the catch; and way down the channel rests a sailboat with a forty foot mast--majestic, powerful, outfitted with luxurious accommodations for far-flung adventures.

It's easy for me to admire each vessel because I can clearly see how the differences in their structure and appearance fulfill the needs of their owners. Too bad I can't always do the same with my writing. Often I compare my skill, voice, and genre with those of my friends, critique partners, and the published authors in our chapter--even though I know that's creative suicide. As much as I'd like my voice to growl with no-holds-barred aggression, I'm aware that it merely barks with Southern cynicism. Believe me, I don't consciously strive to write like someone else; but I am guilty of writing stories I think are marketable to the point that I edit out my own voice. And has anyone else out there started writing a manuscript you thought was stark and literary, say something like "Girl with a Pearl Earring," only to realize that, in fact, you've written something that resembles "Fried Green Tomatoes" instead?

Perhaps the salt air has cleared my head. Whatever the reason, I've started my vacation with a change in attitude. I still aspire to write with a fresh, no-holds-barred style; but I've made myself a few promises. I will continue to hone my skills and voice. I will bring to my writing what only I can bring--my history, experience, and point of view. And, finally, I will enjoy the writing, 'cause that's what the ride is all about.

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"When genuine passion moves you, say what you've got to say, and say it hot." ~ D.H. Lawrence