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Sunday Writers Group



MAPW alumni--(front) Brenda Ledford, Sussan Sutphen;
(back) Saul Adler and Todd Campbell

By Sussan Sutphen

Early in the beginning of Tony Grooms' Advanced Creative Writing class, he advised the students to get into a critique group or form one because feedback from critical readers outside of class is "invaluable." As I looked around the table at the other students, I thought, isn't everyone here enough?

Rather, than forming a new group, I set about finding one. I didn't have to look far. After class, Saul Alder invited me to join Brenda Ledford and Todd Campbell in their critique group formed a few years earlier. I could get a feel for how the group worked and, after a few sessions, if I felt it would be helpful, bring a piece for critique and "see how it goes."

That was roughly ten years ago, and the Sunday Writers Group continues to meet and critique. The group has shrunk and enlarged over the years as we have extended that same invitation to others, but Saul, Todd, Brenda and I continue to work together. We no longer meet every other Sunday, life intervenes, but we manage to get together every four to six weeks.

A good critique group has rules. We set a meeting date and designate who will produce work to critique. The new story or novel excerpt is sent out by email at least a week before the meeting date. Sometimes the piece is a revised version of a previously critiqued manuscript. These are the most fun, because we see how the story reads after our suggestions or edits are incorporated. Of course, the final decision is up to the author. Dates are not changed except for emergencies and only with the agreement of

every member. Not wanting to disappoint the group often provides the needed incentive to sit down at the keyboard!

The critique consists of a type written summary of the reader's overall impression of the story, followed by a high level view of positives and negatives (always positives first), then a line by line list of edits to consider. At the meeting, each member goes through each manuscript page by page pointing out issues. Occasionally, we discover a learning opportunity, often with supporting information from texts or the Internet. The author saves comments to the end, but sometimes an extended discussion of a particular point is warranted. Favorites for prolonged discussion are artistic choices such as point of view, narrator intrusion, gratuitous or narrative dialogue or the authenticity of a character's behavior.

Critique has forced us to be productive. Brenda has written and self-published a trilogy under the pen name Lorraine Tate – *Going Home*, *Love Among Enemies*, and *Steam Dreamers*, set in Civil War Georgia. Her current work in progress is set in World War II. Saul has written two novels, *Revenge* and *Catch and Release*. He is co-author of a self published non-fiction book, *Your Doctors' Manners Matter: Better Health through Civility in the Doctor's Office and in the Hospital*. His current novel is set in a future California. Todd has written three novels, *Death by Fiction*, *Sweet Juicy Baby*, and *First Immortal*. And I have written one novella, "Guardian Angel," and one novel, *Everything Moves to Light* and am working on a third, a murder mystery.

We've also tried our hand at group writing. The result are two screenplays, "Outrageous," a comedy set in

an assisted living community and “Going Home,” the screenplay version of Brenda’s novel. Both were written over a week while on a working retreat in log cabins in the North Carolina and Georgia mountains. Group writing is easier and harder. Ideas get bounced off one another until everyone says “Aha!” A fun experience overall. We have also self-published a collection of our short stories, *Borderlines*. We chose the stories, edited them, had professional editing done, chose the story order, the cover artist and design, found a publisher, selected paper and font, Todd put up a website and, we marketed the book.

Most importantly, the critique group has kept us writing and in the writing we have become better at our craft. The goal is for every story to be the best it can be. From Brenda, “I most love that my talented colleagues are pulling for me to be the best writer I can be. My work is made stronger by their knowledgeable suggestions and, yes, corrections.”

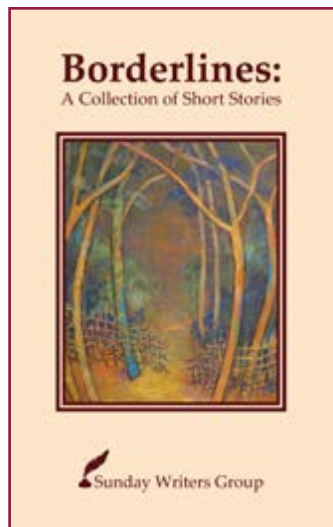
Todd says, “I have a greater audience than myself. On one level, writers write for themselves, explore preferred themes and convey ideas, yet we need an audience to embrace, terrify, and comfort. A critique group provides

readers and an informed audience of unique perspective, backgrounds and points of attention.”

And from Saul, “A critique group can analyze a story and offer opinions as to whether the choices the author has made contribute to its success. In the final analysis, the author makes the decision to use or not use the advice of the critique group, but that’s okay because, once established, the members respect and support each other.”

So when Tony Grooms or any other professor says, “Find a critique group.” Do it. It’s one of the best ways a writer can improve their writing.

Borderlines: A Collection of Short Stories



Saul Adler, MD is a retired fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics. He writes short stories, screenplays and novels informed by his medical experiences. He has had several previously critiqued short stories published in literary magazines. His book is available through Amazon and BookLogix.

Todd Campbell is Director of Interdisciplinary Studies and University Studies at University of North Georgia. He has had a poem, “First Snow” published in *The Peacock’s Feet*, a literary journal. His short story “Trails End” was first published in *The Signature Series: Golden Short Stories Volume 1*.

Brenda Ledford’s books are available through BookLogix and Amazon or at her website, Lorraine-Tate.com.

Sussan Sutphen, MD is a medical writer and physician with several non-fiction medical articles published on *Medscape*. She has had a short story, “Delivery” published in *Atlanta Medicine*. She writes a blog when the spirit moves her at SussanKaye.com.

*Book available through Amazon and BookLogix.