

Brazos Writers News

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Next Meeting

7 p.m. Wednesday, July 11
P. David Romei Arts Center

“Writing Across Texas” video:
Interview with **Bebe Moore Campbell**,
author of three *New York Times* bestsellers

From the President

Roland Schweitzer

Summer reading lists are popping up everywhere. The venerable National Public Radio has an entire Web site devoted to the topic. Other big media outlets are touting their choices in print and on the air. Ordinary folks like you and me are also cranking out lists via their blogs and water cooler conversations.

I’m pointedly ignoring them all. I don’t lack for ideas on what to read. I’ve joked, as other have too, that if my pile of “to read” books tipped over I’d be killed in the avalanche. For a few years I kept a strict rotation of non-fiction book, followed by a work of classic literature, followed in turn by a popular novel. Now I’ve even thrown out that restriction. I’ve been happily following my whims.

Most recently, some random event reminded of a young adult novel, *Sophie’s World*. First published in English in 1994, it’s not on anybody’s list of recommended summer reading, but I dashed out to the library and checked it out that very afternoon. It was an

interesting read, both for the subject matter and for the layered construction of the novel.

In addition to reading, summer is a good time for a renewed commitment to writing. I used to think of winter with long dark evenings spent cozy inside a warm house as an ideal time for writing. Since moving to Texas, I find that a few hours at the keyboard with the air conditioning blasting is good way to escape the summer heat.

I don’t know if she retreated from the heat to write during her childhood in Philadelphia. Or if she hid from the dessert summer to write during her adulthood in Los Angeles, but **Bebe Moore Campbell** got a lot of writing done in her too-short life. Ms. Campbell is the featured guest for this month’s episode of “Writing Across Texas.” Come join us for what is sure to be a lively discussion.

Whatever you’re reading and whatever you’re writing I hope it’s going well for you. Please let me know if you have any suggestions for what Brazos Writers can do to make either of those things more pleasant and productive for you. And next time we meet tell me what’s on your summer reading list, but please don’t be offended if I seem to be ignoring you. ■

“Discipline is the servant of inspiration.”
—*Bebe Moore Campbell*

About Bebe Moore Campbell

Bebe Moore Campbell was the author of three *New York Times* bestsellers: *Brothers and Sisters*, *Singing in the Comeback Choir*, and *What You Owe Me*, which was also a *Los Angeles Times* “Best Book of 2001.”

Her other works include the novel *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, which was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year and the winner of the NAACP Image Award for Literature; her memoir, *Sweet Summer, Growing Up With and Without My Dad*; and her first nonfiction book, *Successful Women, Angry Men: Backlash in the Two-Career Marriage*. Her essays, articles, and excerpts appear in many anthologies.

Campbell's interest in mental health was the catalyst for her first children's book, *Sometimes My Mommy Gets Angry*, which was published in September 2003. This book won the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) Outstanding Literature Award for 2003. The book tells the story of how a little girl copes with being reared by her mentally ill mother. Campbell was a member of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and a founding member of NAMI-Inglewood. Her book *72 Hour Hold* also deals with mental illness.

Campbell's play, *Even with the Madness*, debuted in New York in June 2003. This work revisited the theme of mental illness and the family.

As a journalist, Campbell wrote articles for *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Essence*, *Ebony*, *Black Enterprise*, as well as other publications. She was a regular commentator for *Morning Edition* a program on National Public Radio.

Campbell was born and reared in Philadelphia. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education from the University of Pittsburgh.

She lived in Los Angeles with her husband, Ellis Gordon Jr., and had a son, Ellis Gordon III, and a daughter, actress Maia Campbell, who is best known for playing Tiffany on *In the House*. Campbell died in 2006 at the age of 56 from brain cancer.

The Wired Writer

Mark Troy

The “Pod People”

Last month we met Grammar Girl, one of a new breed of media stars, the podcasters. Don't know what a podcast is? Podcasts are audio and video shows delivered free to your computer or iPod, from iTunes. iTunes itself is a free download from www.apple.com that runs on both PC and Mac.

Now meet a few of the “pod people” who discuss the craft of writing.

Want to hear interviews with writers, agents, editors and publishers? Then check out Barbara DeMarco Barrett's WRITERS ON WRITING, the weekly, hour-long podcast of her Orange County, California, radio show. On the lighter side, Paula Berinstein interviews less established writers on THE WRITING SHOW, a weekly podcast that's both informational and inspirational.

Want help with the craft of writing? Give a listen to Tom Occhipinti's witty and insightful show, AMERICAN WRITERS.COM, in which he discusses characterization, plot, dialogue and other elements of fiction interspersed with quick writing tips.

Also for the serious writer is SF/F author Michael A Stackpole's, THE SECRETS PODCAST FOR WRITERS.

For really wacky, entertaining, yet inspiring listening, spend some time with Samantha Graves and Lani Diane Rich, two award-winning novelists who drink and podcast (and get tipsy) on WILL WRITE FOR WINE, a show about wine and writing. If you want a view of the writing life from Wannabe Street, tune into Mur Lafferty's delightful, I SHOULD BE WRITING.

As broadcast media, podcasting is in its infancy and the quality is uneven, but these are people who are in love with the business and the craft of writing. That germ of inspiration or spark of motivation you've been seeking might be waiting in a podcast. ■

So You Want to Write a Book . . . *Robyn Jenkins*

So you want to write a book. Well, why not? So does about 80 percent of the United States population according to a survey by the Jenkins Group. Anyone who has ever tried to find an agent or get a manuscript accepted by a publisher knows what a tough business writing is. Even if you do get your book published, there's no guarantee anyone will buy it.

The following statistics about book publishing and reading were found on www.parapub.com, the Web site of self-publishing guru Dan Poynter. They'll give you an idea of what you're up against if you want to write books for a living.

One third of high school graduates never read another book for the rest of their lives. Forty-two percent of college graduates never read another book after college.

Eighty percent of U.S. families did not buy or read a book last year.

Seventy percent of U.S. adults have not been in a bookstore in the last five years.

Fifty-seven percent of new books are not read to completion.

Seventy percent of books published do not earn back their advance.

Seventy percent of the books published do not make a profit. (*Source: Jerold Jenkins, www.JenkinsGroupInc.com*)

Fifty-three percent read fiction, 43 percent read nonfiction. The favorite fiction category is mystery and suspense, at 19 percent.

Fifty-five percent of fiction is bought by women, 45 percent by men. (*Source: Publishers Weekly*)

About 120,000 books are published each year in the U.S. (*Source: www.bookwire.com*)

A successful fiction book sells 5,000 copies. A successful nonfiction book sells 7,500 copies. (*Source: Authors Guild, authorsguild.org*)

On average, a bookstore browser spends eight seconds looking at a book's front cover and 15 seconds looking at the back cover. (*Source: Para Publishing, parapub.com*)

Each day in the U.S., people spend four hours watching TV, three hours listening to the radio and 14 minutes reading magazines. (*Source: Veronis, Suhler & Associates investment banker*)

Statistics can be manipulated, and these paint a fairly bleak picture, but don't give up. Write that novel, pitch that nonfiction book idea to a publisher. Follow your dream. Just don't kid yourself about how easy it will be to get published. Sure, a lot of crap gets published, but the better your manuscript is, the likelier you'll be to see it in print.

One of the keys to publishing success is to target your audience. Notice what's on the best seller lists. All those John Grisham mysteries and Nora Roberts romances and the like tell you what people are reading.

Publishing is a business, and publishers want books that fit neatly into a genre because they know there's a huge audience for mysteries and romances, even cook-books. Books that don't fit into a genre will have a harder time finding a publisher, no matter how good they might be. It's all about money, honey. ■

Paying Markets, Courtesy of WritersWeekly

WritersWeekly.com only features original market listings, received from and approved by the editors at each publication.

Current: The Newspaper About Public Television and Radio

Current needs: "Insightful features and news about producers, public broadcasting stations and others outside of Washington who are working in public TV and radio. Rates are negotiable, but these have been our usual payments: Moderate-length articles (about 600 words) - \$400; Features (1,500 to 2,000 words) - \$700. Pay is based more on complexity than length. Articles range between 400 and 2400 words.

Golf Event

Current needs: "Topics may include, but are not limited to, sponsorship sales; ways to attract players to your event; proper etiquette; gifts and awards; outsourcing; staffing and volunteers; event add-ons; and negotiating course contracts. Event profiles are always of interest and must include photos. We are particularly open to writers who can come up with a different angle on a common topic." Features pay \$400-\$500; departments pay \$300. "Departments are typically 700 to 900 words; features 1,200 to 1,700 words; with one larger feature in each issue that is 2,000 to 2,500 words."

Just Labs

Current needs: "More factual articles (not reflective stories of life with a particular Labrador retriever) that will help readers get the most out of their dog—health articles, training articles, fun things people can do with their Labs, etc." Pays flat fee of \$300-\$400 for features of 1,000-1,800 words, depending on word length and photos.

Keynoter

Current needs: "General interest, service-related, and leadership articles aimed at high school students." Pays flat fee of \$150-\$400 for about 1,000 words.

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