

The Orlando Writer

The newsletter of the Florida Writers Association's Orlando Chapter

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Robert Newton Peck talks fiction-writing like a pro

"You're my replacements," Robert Newton Peck told a gathering of about thirty-five of FWA's members and friends in April. But he emphasized that the mantle of writing success would not be passed automatically. "If you tell a story, you're gonna starve," said the acclaimed author of *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. "But if you show a story, you're gonna be me. And I ain't starvin'." The event was organized by New and Beginning Writers Group leader Mike Whisenant, and brought together his group with the FWA's Orlando Chapter.

Peck, whose latest book is *HOW to Write Fiction Like a Pro*, dealt with some of the most basic ideas about fiction writing, but he managed to do it in a fresh and engaging way. "You're in the picture business," he said, elaborating on the old show-don't-tell idea. "Write what can be photographed."

Among the many other experienced observations Peck made was that outlining is just as tedious an exercise for a novelist as it is for a school kid. "Don't worry about plot," he said. "You're not making those decisions." He believes that the most important thing about a piece of fiction is who's in it. His approach is to write down everything about the five major characters of a novel before beginning the book. Once the characters are brought to life in that way, they'll determine the plot all by themselves.

Like every writer, Peck made mistakes along the way in his career. One of his biggest was writing about stuff he didn't know. As a boy, he palled around with the younger brother of Sloan Wilson. He also palled around some with Sloan, who later wrote *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Influenced partly by that relationship, Peck tried to write about sophisticated people like bankers and lawyers, but his efforts didn't amount to much. Eventually, turning to his own life for inspiration, he decided to write a book about a boy and his dad raising a pig on a farm. He called the book, *A Day No Pigs Would Die*.

That effort worked out pretty well for him, even if his method of submission was unorthodox. He was working in advertising in New York at the time. One day, during lunch, he carried the manuscript up the street to Random House, handed it to a receptionist, and asked her to show it to somebody who might be interested.

Peck by the numbers

- ❖ Two and a half: Weeks he spent writing *A Day No Pigs Would Die*.
- ❖ One: Drafts he wrote before submitting it.
- ❖ Ten: Hours between submission and being notified that Random House wanted to publish it.
- ❖ Three: Words his editor changed.
- ❖ Thirty-four: Years it's been in print.
- ❖ Five: Number of cents by which



hardcover price exceeds that of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Perhaps Robert Newton Peck's greatest lesson is the one he teaches by example: a clear vision of your craft and goals, and a knowledge of the strength that lies in being yourself can take you where you want to go as a writer.

What's been missing in your life?

If you haven't been attending the monthly meeting of FWA's Orlando Chapter, here are the great presenters you've missed recently.

Terrie Jordan, Barnes & Noble community relations manager, January 2005

Lisa Miscione, mystery novelist, former publishing industry publicist, February 2005

Richard B. Weinblatt, author, law enforcement professional, March 2005

Jamie Morris, poet, Amherst Writers and Artists Workshop leader, April 2005

Suzu Spraker, short story writer, UCF creative writing teacher, May 2005

Angie Kiesling, author, Xulon Press editorial director, July 2005

Catherine Kean, romance novelist, August 2005

A. Wayne Carter, screenwriter, September 2005

Gary S. Roen, book reviewer, October 2005

Summer Rodman, small press publisher, poet, November 2005

Rik Feeney, ghostwriter, author, December 2005

Bob Morris, Edgar Award nominated mystery novelist, January 2006

Bob Friel, editor-in-chief of *Caribbean Travel & Life*, February 2006

Ed L'Heureux, Jr., self-publishing fiction writer, March 2006

Robert Newton Peck, acclaimed novelist, April 2006

This month, our tradition of great presenters continues with **Margaret Andersen**, owner and publisher of *Maggie May Magazine*.

More topnotch events are coming up. Join us and be enlightened and entertained, make friends, network, and be part of Orlando's wonderful writing community.

Dan Poynter events in Orlando

July 14-16. ORLANDO. Mark Victor Hansen hosts his legendary MEGA Book Marketing University. Speakers on book promotion, Dan Poynter on creating the book. For more info, contact: Michelle Adams: Michelle@MarkVictorHansen.com, <http://MarkVictorHansen.com>.

July 18: ORLANDO. Writing & Publishing Your Nonfiction Book, a seminar by Dan Poynter at the Knowledge Shop. Books 101: The full New Book Model program. 6:27 to 10:00 PM. For more info, contact: Heidi Walker: 407-671-9505, <http://www.TheKnowledgeShop.us>.

July 19: ORLANDO. So You Want to Write seminar. Dan Poynter on writing. 1:00 PM. For more info, contact: Ann McIndoo: AnnMcIndoo@aol.com, 760-771-8940, <http://SoYouWantToWrite.com>.

New Regional Director named

A.J. Robinson has accepted the position of FWA's Regional Director for Greater Orlando. He will support local chapter activities, local and regional special events, and will be the link between local members and state-level leaders.

A civil engineer by trade, Robinson has managed to find plenty of spare time to write. He's completed a dozen screenplays, the first of which, *Wiccan's Lair*, was produced by PC Productions, a local indie company. He has also written a mystery novel that's waiting to find a home, and the first two

novels of a young adult sci-fi series currently under consideration by agents. He was the head writer on the TV show, *The Green Room*.

Perhaps reflecting his devotion to, and admiration for, his wife and daughter, his stories feature strong female characters.

Robinson replaces outgoing RD Paul Nutcher, who is stepping down to attend to his multiplying professional and family obligations. Nutcher's accomplishments as RD include the organization of the highly successful annual Orlando Writers Conference. He continues to chair the OWC Organizing Committee as the conference moves into its third year.

"FWA Days" volunteers sought

The Florida Writers Association has established *FWA Days*, an event designed to increase community awareness of the organization and to promote its fifth annual statewide conference, to be held November 10 – 12 at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort. The FWA's Orlando Chapter needs volunteers to set up a table outside a local bookstore or library and hand out brochures about the organization and the conference. Ideally, the event will take place before July 15, since discounted early bird conference registration ends on July 31. This is a great opportunity to hang out with a fellow FWA member or two and meet other interested writers in the community. For more information, contact Orlando Chapter Leader Tom Wallace at tommyflorida@earthlink.net, or at 407-332-0122.

Don Schyberg at book event

On Thursday, May 11, beginning at 5:00 PM, Don Schyberg will be at the Maya Bookstore, 205-A East First Street in Sanford with his new book, *Little Man, You've Had a Busy Day*. The book tells Schyberg's own story of his experiences in the Korean War, and how the Marine spirit of courage and innovation has carried him through life's many challenges. The event is part of Sanford's monthly Sidewalk Festival.

If you have questions about the Florida Writers Association or its Orlando Chapter, or would like to receive e-mails about upcoming events and activities in the Orlando area, please contact me at tommyflorida@earthlink.net, or at 407-332-0122. Visit FWA on the web at www.floridawriters.net

Tom Wallace, editor