IWOSC OC Satellite Meeting Notes April 6, 2016

Independent Writers of Southern California (IWOSC) [www.iwosc.org](http://www.iwosc.org)

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EVENTS/NEWS

1. LA Times Festival of Books, April 9-10, Booth #148
2. Flo Selfman’s Grammar for Grownups, Saturday April 16, 10-1
3. IWOSC AGENTS PANEL: Monday, April 18, 7:30 PM
4. PALA Telephone Seminar with Neal Thompson of Amazon, April 19 at 7:00 PM
5. Special IWOSC Event: An Evening with Marvin Wolf, April 27, 7:30 PM

BETA READERS

1. Purpose: to get feedback from a typical reader about your story
2. Where to find them
   1. Online critique groups
      1. Scribofile: <http://www.scribophile.com>
      2. Wattpad: <https://www.wattpad.com>
      3. <http://betareadershub.tumblr.com>
      4. <http://www.worldliterarycafe.com/forum/125>
   2. Goodreads
      1. <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/52389-editors-and-writers>
      2. <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/110240-haaave-ya-met>
      3. <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/88011-read-indies---discover-the-best-in-indie-publishing>
   3. Your mailing list
   4. Social media (FB, Twitter, LinkedIn)
   5. Friends/family – not the best choices. They may not be honest.
   6. Other authors
   7. Paid services (Google beta reading or manuscript critique)
3. What to look for in a beta reader
   1. Willingness to give honest feedback
   2. Agreement to complete the read by a deadline
   3. Familiarity with your genre
4. Working with beta readers
   1. Agree on a deadline upfront, but don’t be surprised if someone doesn’t respond.
   2. Give them a finished manuscript, the best you can make it. They may tell others about your book. And is it polite to give them an MS riddled with errors?
   3. Ask them what file type they prefer. Make it as easy as possible for them.
   4. If you’re paying them, agree on a sum upfront, and pay promptly when they finish.
   5. Give them a checklist of things to look for.
      1. They are not editors.
      2. Some will correct grammar/punctuation as they go, but you want them focusing on big-picture issues.
      3. Pacing and flow (What are the slow parts of the book? Awkward or out-of-place parts? Parts that go too fast or are confusing?)
      4. Plot (Is it interesting and well-developed?)
      5. Characters (Believable? Sympathetic? Relatable?)
      6. Plot holes, issues with timeline
      7. Good hook, satisfying ending?
      8. Are you hitting the tropes/expectations of readers of the genre?
      9. Dialogue
   6. If you are trading manuscripts, fulfill your end of the bargain promptly.
   7. Put them in your Acknowledgments.
   8. Don’t argue about the feedback, and don’t explain or justify unless you are asked a direct question. Just thank them and move on.
5. What to do with the feedback?
   1. If something is mentioned by more than one reader, it’s worth considering.
   2. It’s your book. You don’t have to take every piece of advice given.
   3. The goal is to improve the book. Always keep this in mind.
   4. Listen to your gut.
   5. If you don’t understand a comment, ask for clarification (without justifying yourself or arguing).

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT EXERCISES (some of these are from author Sandra Miller)

1. Write a scene where you meet your character for dinner. What restaurant do they choose? What do they order? What do you talk about?
2. Write a singles’ ad for your character. How would they present themselves?
3. Write a scene where your character gets fired. How do they handle it?
4. Write two letters, one from your protag and one from antag, each describing the other.
5. Write about your character going on vacation. Where do they go and what do they do?
6. Write about the character going grocery shopping. How do they approach it? What do they buy?
7. Pick a few words or key phrases that your character uses frequently.
8. Go shopping and pick out an outfit your character would wear.
9. Write the recurring dreams of your character.
10. Choose a mannerism that distinguishes your character from others.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: INTEGRATING BACKSTORY

1. Backstory is the characters’ histories, or the things that happened prior to the situation in your book.
2. Don’t start with backstory! Let it unfold over the course of the novel.
3. Tell a story from the past as its own chapter. Make sure you have a lead-in at the end of the previous chapter.
4. Character musings or recollections – a little at a time.
5. Give clues. If the backstory is that a character almost drowned at a child, have her shudder when her boyfriend suggests they go for a swim.
6. Watch for proper verb tense and shifts.