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in  
Crime*™

# HOTSHOTS!

HEART OF TEXAS Chapter  
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## Writing a Novel Series: Tips for Developing Spin-Offs and Sequels

— By Adrienne deWolfe

*(Adrienne Wolfe presented "Bestselling Novels: Turn Sidekicks into Heroes to Write Spinoff Novels." at the January 12, 2014, meeting of HoTxSinC. This article summarizes her presentation.)*

After writing my debut novel, I had the extreme good fortune of talking my Bantam editor into letting me write two spin-offs, based on characters from **Texas Outlaw**.

Last year, the Fates smiled on me again when my ebook publisher approached me with the proposition, "I'll print your two Avon paperbacks as an ebook series if you'll write a third novel."

Why did my publishers single me out to write series rather than single titles?

Well, according to my Bantam editor (who was weeping when she told me never again to kill off a dog on her watch, no matter HOW minor its character,) my characters touch the hearts of readers.

I'll never forget the (now ancient) **U.S. News and World Report** article that quoted  
*continued on page three*

**Sisters in Crime Heart of Texas Chapter meets** at to Recycled Reads (part of the Austin Public Library system). The address is 5335 Burnet Road, Austin, TX 78756 (512) 323-5123. Recycled Reads is located between North Lamar Boulevard and MoPac (Loop 1), near the intersection of Burnet Road and West North Loop Boulevard.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

Sisters in Crime Heart of Texas Chapter's guest presenter at its **February 9, 2014**, meeting will be **Detective Ruben Vasquez** of the Georgetown Police Department--'Murder Investigation Step by Step'.

Georgetown Police Department Criminal Investigations Division (CID) Detective Ruben Vasquez started his law enforcement career in 1992 for the Nueces County Sheriff's Department in Corpus Christi, Texas.



Vasquez is now a major crimes detective and an investigator for sexual and physical child abuse. In addition to his regular duties, he is the lead Hostage Negotiator for the Georgetown P. D. and a mental health officer and instructor.

*Please be advised: This program includes pictures and other content taken from the scene of a real murder. The program was developed for viewing by adults. Content may be upsetting to some viewers.*

At the **March 9 meeting**, **Laura Oles** will speak about Using Photography to Promote Your Book and Brand.

Laura Oles was fortunate enough to have entered the digital photography industry long before Photoshop had become a verb. She is a founding team member of Pixel Magic Imaging, which was purchased by DNP Photo Imaging America in 2006, and has continued to advocate for digital solutions that improve the experience for shooters of all skill levels. She spent over ten years building and leading sales and marketing teams and understands the challenges of helping businesses establish a strong, unique presence in a crowded marketplace.

Laura has published over 200 articles in industry and consumer magazines and has been a columnist for Digital Camera Magazine, Memory Makers Magazine, Picture Business, PhotoInduced, ClubMom (now Cafe Mom) and others. Her book, Digital Photography for Busy Women, was named a photography category finalist in USA Book News.com's 'Best Books' awards. In addition, she has served as an expert speaker for a variety of imaging conferences and conventions across the country. She continues to consult and write for the digital photo industry.

**2014 January - May -**

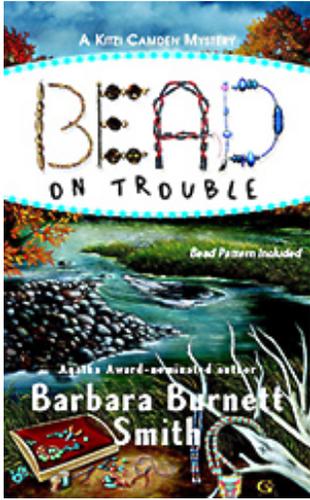
Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Project

**April 13** - Joan Upton Hall and Russ Hall - 'How to Write a Mystery'

**May 18** - Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Event

# Seeking Aspiring Mystery Writers

Sisters in Crime Heart of Texas Chapter (Austin) calls on all unpublished, aspiring writers of cozies, thrillers, true crime, noir, young adult, middle grade, and other mystery genres to submit the first 500 words of his or her mystery manuscript to the Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Project (BBSAWP). Include a brief synopsis. Aspiring writers are chosen and matched with published author-mentors for one-on-one sessions and recognition at the Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Event/BBSAWE on May 18, 2014. The submission deadline is March 31, 2014.



This is not a contest – there is no judging and no fee. It is a wonderful

opportunity for writers unpublished in the mystery field to be mentored by published authors and recognized by the Sisters in Crime Heart of Texas Chapter. All aspiring writers MUST attend the Barbara Burnett Smith Aspiring Writers Event to be held Sunday, May 18, 2014, in Austin, Texas, at 2 p.m. at Recycled Reads, 5335 Burnet Rd., Austin, TX 78756.

Please e-mail entries to Project Coordinator Gale Albright at [bbshotsinc@hotmail.com](mailto:bbshotsinc@hotmail.com)

If you have questions about submission guidelines or other concerns, please contact Gale Albright at [bbshotsinc@hotmail.com](mailto:bbshotsinc@hotmail.com).



## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

1. Unpublished writers submit by e-mail a 100 word (maximum) synopsis and the first 500 words of a mystery short story or novel.
2. Entries should be in standard submission format: 12 point Times New Roman or Courier New font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins.
3. Attach Word file document with the synopsis (100 word max) on first page. Please put your name, e-mail address, phone number, and title of story or novel in the top left-hand corner of first page. Start story/novel 500-word submission on second page. Put name, title, and page number on all pages.
4. E-mail subject line: BBSAWP ENTRY
5. One submission per person
6. E-mail entries to [bbshotsinc@hotmail.com](mailto:bbshotsinc@hotmail.com)
7. Submission deadline is March 31, 2014

# Creative-Thinking Crashes Without This Characteristic

by Robert Evans Wilson, Jr

## Exposure to Experience is the Source-Code for Creativity

Last Spring my dog, Buddy, started chasing chipmunks. They would quickly escape into one of their holes in the ground, where he would dig for a few minutes, then give up. One day, a chipmunk ran into the mouth of the corrugated plastic pipe that carries excess rain water away from my

backyard. Unlike the extensive tunnels and multiple exits of the ground squirrel's burrow, this pipe had only one way out. The rodent was safe, but trapped. Nevertheless, Buddy was determined to get him. By the time I noticed, he had dug up 20 feet of pipe which had been buried several inches underground.

The pipes were ruined, as was a good section of

*continued on page five*

## Spin-Offs from page one

American literary agent Ethan Ellenberg. Since I was unpublished at the time, his words of wisdom were fire-etched into my brain: "If you move people emotionally, you sell books."

However, many factors make a reader rush to her favorite retailer to purchase your spin-off or sequel. Some of these factors (like market trends, cover art, or your book's position on your publisher's list) may be completely out of your control.

Let's look at a few factors that an author can control:

### Don't Dawdle

As any professional publicist will tell you, Joe Public has a short memory. Readers are easily distracted by the bazillions of titles that retailers throw at them. You're not going to do your career (or bank account) any favors by waiting more than a year to release your next book.

Sure, some authors' careers survive lengthy dry spells, but that's only because those authors had a mega following before they went on hiatus.

My ebook publisher, ePublishing Works, tells me that ebook readers want to download a series of books rather than a single title. I'm acquainted with several rising Indie stars who are writing 200+ page books every two months (despite full-time day jobs and a house full of children.)

So in this age of digital publishing, learn to write short and fast. Otherwise, those precious spots on your publisher's list will go to the up-and-comers, who are far more prolific than you.

### Develop Fascinating Sidekicks

My first writing mentor, now a #1 NYT bestselling Romance novelist, used to counsel us wide-eyed newbies, "Nobody loves a protagonist who is cowardly or stupid. Let your sidekicks and villains fill that role."

Sidekicks, with their broad range of personalities, are a fertile breeding ground for spin-offs. The caution, here, is that not all sidekicks are hero material.

Why?

Because you have a lot more latitude to create "gray" personalities with sidekicks than protagonists.

In my case, I didn't plan on elevating the villain from *His Wicked Dream* (Book 2, *Velvet Lies*) to hero status in *Seduced By An Angel* (Book 3), but I started playing with the idea of a love triangle. By Chapter 2, my "villain's" sense of humor had charmed me. Suddenly, I was staring down the barrel of a real dilemma (as we Western writers like to say.)

My brain wouldn't let me kill Cass. The only solution I could bear was to redeem Cass's dastardly ways, but that meant stripping him entirely out of Book 2 – without creating a major plot revision.

Moral of this story?

Don't let secondary characters run your life!

Seriously: a lot of things you wouldn't dream of doing in paperback are now possible in ebook. However, I wouldn't recommend your going through my labors to redeem a villain in mid-series. (Too time consuming.) Choose a less dastardly secondary character to elevate to hero status.

If you choose to ignore this sage advice (masochist!), keep in mind that some crimes can't be forgiven by some readers. In a Romance novel, for instance, rape is taboo. Few Romance readers will buy a spin-off in which the rapist is featured as the "hero."

### Raise the Stakes in Every Novel

Think of Book One as the "egg" from which the rest of the series must logically develop. Your protagonist must show growth over a lot of pages, so it's wise to make his growth slow. Keep a few of his key conflicts unresolved so you have a plot thread to start the next book.

In one fantasy series that I was following, I couldn't help but notice that the characters started to stagnate. The author was rehashing Book One's conflicts in Book Three. The ending of Book Four had a "race to the finish line" feel, as if the author had shoved a ton of plot resolutions into the last 20 pages.



*continued on page four*

## Spin-Offs from page three

I learned later that this author's sales had dropped dramatically (presumably due to the plodding story arc.) Her publisher refused to pick up the last book in the series. As a reader, I could tell something was amiss, but nothing in that series was as disappointing as the "stampede ending," necessitated by the publisher.

So do yourself a favor: don't keep throwing the same plot problems – with new names – at your protagonist. Pit your protagonist against increasingly more daunting odds. If you have trouble thinking broadly enough to develop storylines for a multi-book series, recruit other writers (or beta readers) to help you brainstorm.

### Avoid Unnecessary Complications

You gave the heroine a five-year-old ward in Book One to demonstrate her protective nature. You're currently writing Book Three. What are you going to do with the brat now? Can you really drag him through another 400 pages without inventing some really macabre (and satisfying) way of getting him whacked?

My point is that series writers are stuck with the same fictional folks for a long time -- 10 years is not inconceivable. During that time, you're going to grow as a writer and as a human being. Characters that appealed to you during your divorce, might be tough to revisit while you're deliriously in love.

My advice? Don't burden your characters with kids, pets, physical disabilities, or other material complications that you have to account for logistically in scene after scene, unless you have a solid plan for turning that "shackle" into a catalyst in each book.

If you're looking for additional help, check out my "Create Colorful Characters Worksheets," <http://writingnovelsthatsell.com/character-worksheets-for-genre-fiction/> which will help you go in-depth to create a mystery-genre protagonist, villain, sidekick, and "ensemble cast." The worksheets also

feature bonus material on how to make men "sound" like men and women "sound" like women.

### About Adrienne deWolfe

Adrienne deWolfe is a #1 best-selling author and the recipient of 48 writing awards, including the Best Historical Romance of the Year. She enjoys mentoring aspiring authors and is proud to say that two of her Indie students ranked #1 on Amazon this past year. She offers professional story critiques with her book coaching services.



Fascinated by all things mystical, Adrienne writes a weekly blog about dragons, magic, and the paranormal at <http://MagicMayhemBlog.com> to help her research her Epic YA Fantasy series. She also writes a weekly blog featuring tips about the business of writing at <http://WritingNovelsThatSell.com>.

### Follow Adrienne deWolfe

- Facebook <http://facebook.com/Writing.Novels>
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## ■ Gulf Coast Prizes

The annual Gulf Coast Prizes award \$6,000 in total prize money to poets, essayists, and fiction writers. This year's judges are **Andrea Barrett (Fiction)**, **John D'Agata (Nonfiction)**, and **Rachel Zucker (Poetry)**!

The contest awards publication and **\$1,500 each to the best poem, essay, and short story**, as well as \$250 to two honorable mentions in each genre. The winners will appear in Gulf Coast 27.1, due out in Fall 2014, and all entries will be considered for paid publication on our website as Online Exclusives.

The entry fee includes a year-long subscription to Gulf Coast. **The deadline for submissions is March 15, 2014.** For information on how to enter, please visit- <https://gulfcoastmag.org/contests>

my landscaping. It took me, and my sons, nearly a day to repair. Not wanting a repeat occurrence, I needed a way to seal off the exit hole of the pipe that would block chipmunks, but not water.

As I looked at the open end of the pipe, I thought I could use something like chicken wire to wrap over the end. Then I remembered something I learned while installing gutters on my house. I have a lot of trees, so I get a lot of leaves in my gutter. I have gutter guards, but they can't keep out all the debris. For extra protection, I was advised to install a downspout strainer which is an upside-down metal basket, shaped like a light bulb, that you insert into the top hole of the downspout inside the gutter. I had an idea that one of those might be the perfect answer for my chipmunk (er, dog) problem. With a little manipulation, it was. The downspout strainer is now a ground squirrel gate.

I'm sharing this story of a simple solution to illustrate an important component of innovation. Creative-thinkers have a number of characteristics in common. They have a strong sense of self-efficacy; and they are willing to take risks. Neither of these matter, however, if one other characteristic is missing: they must be open-minded to new experiences.

You see, we generate ideas to solve problems, and most new ideas come from combining or synthesizing two or more existing ideas. Which means that before you can come up with a new idea, you must have a vast and diverse amount of knowledge from which you can draw. And, to acquire all that knowledge, you need to experience many different things. Or as Albert Einstein put it, "The only source of knowledge is experience."

Every time you have a new experience, you generate new information and data that you store in your brain. Each new experience literally opens new neural pathways - electrical connections - between the brain cells. In order to be creative one needs a lexicon of experiences to look up. While we acquire most of our knowledge from reading (which is experience), there is nothing like the act of "doing" that embeds the knowledge deeper and more securely into our brains.

If you have a sense of adventure, then you are

already on the road to becoming an innovator. There is always some level of risk in trying something new. At a minimum, you may not enjoy it. Perhaps we fear, what C.S. Lewis noted in this quote, "Experience is the most brutal of teachers. But, you learn, by God, you learn."

In addition to building your store of knowledge there are many additional benefits to trying new things. One is that it will build your confidence, because every time you take the risk of trying something new you get a little more comfortable with your fear of the unknown. Benjamin Franklin understood this fear when he said, "Experience is the worst teacher. It always gives the test first and the instruction afterward."

Another benefit is that trying something new may challenge your beliefs. While changing your beliefs is not necessarily a goal of the creative-thinking techniques I teach, getting you to view them from a different perspective is.

Frequently, when I'm invited to speak to an organization on creative-thinking and innovation, someone will come up to me and ask, "Are you going to give us lots of ideas today?" My answer is, "No, because I'm not an expert in your industry, and I don't have the wealth of knowledge about your business that you do. Instead of giving you ideas, I will give you techniques that will enable you to generate ideas of your own. I will show you how to get a different perspective on what you already know, and with that perhaps you will come up with a new way of doing things that will make your company more productive and profitable."

Gaining new experience can be as simple as taking a new route to work, or listening to a new type of music on the radio while you drive. In an earlier article for this column, titled Change Please, I share a number of ways one can acclimate themselves to trying new things. Make sure you are continuing to build your store of knowledge by exposing yourself to new stimuli daily.

*Robert Evans Wilson, Jr. is an author, humorist and innovation consultant. He works with companies that want to be more competitive and with people who want to think like innovators. Robert is also the author of the humorous children's book: The Annoying Ghost Kid. For more information on Robert, please visit <http://www.jumpstartyourmeeting.com>*

# MURDER AT BOOK PEOPLE

*Sunday, Feb 16 at 3PM*

## **MysteryPeople Presents Acclaimed Author HARRY HUNSICKER speaking & signing *The Contractors***

*Harry Hunsicker, novelist and former executive vice-president of the Mystery Writers of America, returns with his fourth novel, about a disgraced ex-cop turned private military contractor patrolling one of the busiest drug-hubs in the country: Dallas, Texas. This heart-stopping thriller takes readers deep into a strange underworld where the lines between government officials and mercenaries blur.*

Private military contractors. They're not just for foreign wars anymore. Jon Cantrell, a disgraced ex-cop, works for one such company. He's a DEA agent paid on a commission basis, patrolling one of the busiest drug-hubs in the country: Dallas, Texas. When Cantrell confiscates the wrong shipment of drugs, he finds himself in possession of a star witness in a cartel trial that could destroy the largest criminal organization in the hemisphere. To turn a profit, all he has to do is deliver the witness to the US Attorney in a tiny town called Marfa on the other side of the state. An easy trip, except a group of competing DEA contractors and a corrupt Dallas cop want everybody involved dead. This heart-stopping thriller takes readers deep into a strange underworld where the lines between government officials and mercenaries blur. In this complex network of drug traffickers, cartels, politicians, and police, no one's hands are clean.

HARRY HUNSICKER lives in Dallas, the fourth generation of his family to call the city home. When he's not penning the next Lee Henry Oswald mystery, he works as a commercial real estate appraiser and speaks on creative writing.

*BookPeople • 603 N. Lamar Blvd • Austin, TX 78703 • 512-472-5050 ext. 404*

# MURDER AT BARNES AND NOBLE

*Wednesday, February 12th, 7:30 p.m.*

The Mystery Book Discussion Group meets in our store monthly to discuss great selections in the genre. This month's selection is *Murder for Choir* by Joelle Charbonneau. Join us as we discuss the first book in the 'Glee Club Mystery' series.

*Saturday, February 15th, 2:00 p.m.*

Join us for a meet-and-greet and book signing with David Beckett for his new novel, *The Cana Mystery*. An MIT grad student and expert in ancient languages is asked by an old friend to travel to Yemen to decode a mysterious, possibly biblical, find. So begins a deadly global chase to uncover the truth of *The Cana Mystery*. David Beckett studied English, German and philosophy at the University of Texas in Austin and at the Julius-Maximilians-Universität in Würzburg before attaining his doctorate in jurisprudence. He received the Willie Morris Award for Editorial Excellence in 1997.

Barnes & Noble Arboretum is located at 10,000 Research Boulevard, Austin, TX 78759. For information on these and other events, call 512-418-8985

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*Sisters in Crime is an international organization of women and men whose purpose is to support women mystery writers, and combat discrimination against them. Speakers include published mystery authors and technical experts who help writers craft better mysteries and readers enjoy what they read. Meetings are free and open to all. For more information, check out the Sisters in Crime Heart of Texas Chapter website at [www.hotxsinc.org](http://www.hotxsinc.org).*

**For more information on the Heart of Texas Chapter contact- [hotxsinc@yahoo.com](mailto:hotxsinc@yahoo.com)**

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