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A Newsletter of The Amy Foundation



The Wrong Road to the Right Place

By: Alton Gansky

I'm a professional used-to-be. I've held many jobs, almost none of which matched my training and education. Why bring up this personal revelation? Because of something I heard in Bible study last Sunday.

My wife and I attended one of the Sunday school-style Bible studies offered at the church we've been attending. It was our first time in that class. One of our fellow students raised this question: "Is it possible to take the wrong road to the right place?"

My life experience did not lead to an MFA in creative writing, but it did give me a real view of the world.

It doesn't take much to slam my mind's accelerator to the floor. That did it. There is a spiritual application to the question and those were the first thoughts that ricocheted in my skull, but my mind also ran to writing. The statement describes my path to publication. It's odd to think that the guy who directs two writers

conferences and has taught at scores of others never went to a writers conference. (Well, I attended one workshop at the Santa Barbara conference that had to do with writing articles. Naturally I started writing books.)

On my way to becoming a full time writer (from the Latin for "vow of poverty") I . . .

- Worked at a McDonalds doing my part to increase obesity in America,
- Served as a "campus cop" at the university I attended,
- Worked for Bank of America fixing errors made in customer billing,
 - Was a firefighter for a couple of years,
 - Spent 10 years in architecture creating working drawings for room additions, homes, subdivisions, and commercial buildings,
- Worked at a radio station,
- Served as senior pastor in three Baptist churches (some have suggested that I kept three churches from having a pastor).

I have two earned degrees: a Bachelors and a Masters in biblical studies. My Master's thesis was, "A Quantitative Analysis of Southern Baptist

Growth Trends in San Diego." I'll give you a moment to wake up. (My major professor told me the work kept him up late. I suggested it was probably indigestion.) I've been thinking of republishing the thesis and selling it as a sleep aid.

None of this seems like good training for a writing career. Or was it? My life experience did not lead to an MFA in creative writing but it did give me a real

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Announcements for the Amy Writing Awards:

- The Amy Writing Awards received 22 percent more entries for its 2011 contest than the previous year.
- The deadline for publishing articles for the 2012 contest is December 31, 2012. Entries must be postmarked by January 31, 2013.
- We have revised our rules for submitting articles published online. Check our website, www.amyfound.org, for details.

Alton Gansky is an award-winning author of 40 books, and the director for the Blue Ridge Mountain Christian Writers Conference. Alton owns Gansky Communications, a company that provides writing and publishing services. He holds a Masters of Arts in Biblical Studies from California Graduate School of Theology. He and his wife Becky live in central California and have three adult children.

Spread the Word!

The Pen & Sword is now published online only. If you or someone you know would like to receive a notice when the next issue is posted, along with a link to the online edition, send your e-mail address to amyfoundtn@aol.com

Pen & Sword

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► Right Place, cont'd from p.1

view of the world. McDonalds taught me to show up for work whether I wanted to or not. It also taught me that I needed to be intellectually challenged to be happy.

Being a campus cop taught me endurance. I often worked the graveyard shift only to change clothes and go to upper division science classes and struggle to stay awake.

The Bank America division I worked for was in the center of San Francisco. It was there I learned about the diversity of culture. I also learned that banking wasn't for me.

Firefighting meant spending a lot of time with rough-and-tumble men. I learned how such men speak, joke, and deal with a dangerous job. This experience has helped me write about courage and show the depth such men possess.

Architecture opened the doors of creativity. I still love everything about the art and science of architecture. At the heart of building design is the

ability to start with a blank piece of paper and create something that only your mind can see. Sound familiar?

My work at the radio station was primarily sales (which I hated) and some ad writing (which I loved). I learned how to compress a great deal of information into 30 seconds. That taught me there's power in the economy of words.

Writing an academic thesis convinced me I could write a book-length work.

Being a pastor for 22 years gave me depth. I buried young and old alike; I saw the courage faith brings to the terminally ill; I saw the power of spiritual application to human life; I found heroes in every pew.

Is it possible to take the wrong road to the right place in the world of writing? For me, the answer is yes, and I believe the same of you. Life experience makes writers. Craft can be learned; life has to be lived. All you've been

through and are going through is training to be a writer. ◀

This article is reprinted with permission. It originally ran on Alton Gansky's blog at www.altongansky.com

The Amy Writing Awards

Submit Today!

15 writers will receive \$34,000 in cash prizes, including a \$10,000 first prize.

Entries must be post-marked on or before January 31, 2013 to qualify for the 2012 awards.

Congratulations to the 2011 Amy Writing Award Winners

You can read the full text of all 15 winning entries for 2011 at www.amyfound.org.

Christina Ryan Claypool	Finding Forgiveness	<i>The Lima News</i> ; Lima, OH
Alicea L. Jones	Greater Than Willpower	<i>Georgetown View Magazine</i> ; TX http://dailycaller.com
Kendall Wingrove	How Unemployment Can Be Rewarding	<i>The Register Guard</i> ; Eugene, OR www.americandaily.com
Shelley L. Houston	Warming Center Puts Life in Perspective	<i>Portland Press Herald</i> ; Portland, ME
Leah Shearer	Loving Love	<i>The Benicia Herald</i> ; Benicia, CA
Delvyn C. Case	Reveling in Present Puts Suffering In Its Place	<i>The Carbondale News</i> ; Carbondale, PA
Robert Michaels	Mickey Cohen's Twistian Faith	<i>Sunday News</i> ; Lancaster, PA
Tom Flannery	Ricky, Don't Lose His Number	<i>Camden News</i> ; Camden, AR
Steve Cornell	What's Love Got To Do With It?	<i>The News Herald</i> ; Morganton, NC
Richard Lee Foster	Is Jesus Christ a Liberal or a Conservative?	<i>Arizona Literary Magazine</i>
Taryn Hutchison	Evangelism: The Latest Cool Thing	<i>Leader & Times</i> ; Liberal, KS
Diana L. Keathley	A Father's Answer	<i>The Paper</i> ; Montgomery, AL www.americandaily.com
Rachel Coleman	Sounds Like a Plan	
Michael Helms	Keeping Success in Perspective	
Rusty Wright	Evangelicals' Image Problem	

What's in a pronoun?

By: Janie B. Cheaney

About 20 years ago, when I self-published my first book, I had to make a stylistic choice. Wordsmith is a creative writing workbook, accompanied by a teacher's guide with helpful tips for directing the student. "The student" is understood to be either a girl or a boy. I had to use a lot of personal pronouns, or else resort to clumsy synonyms, as did one author who felt compelled to use a rotating series of designations in her book about raising preschoolers: youngster, toddler, and (ugh) moppet. So in my introduction to the teacher's guide, I explained why he would be used as a generic pronoun: "simply because it's easier and more resonant than the awkward compounds he/she or himself/herself. Style won over social conscience." I never received any complaints.

Elsewhere, though, social conscience is clobbering style, while the methods have changed. From awkward compounds like s/he, we went through a phase of grammatical disagreement (e.g., The student may argue over

their grade), which is thankfully declining. But what I see more of is an abandonment of compromise—many writers are throwing out he altogether and using the feminine form almost exclusively. The own author's gender doesn't seem to matter—male writers do this as often as female, older as well as younger.

Many writers are throwing out he altogether and using the feminine form almost exclusively.

As a solution to a perceived problem, it creates more problems than it solves. The pronoun she automatically excludes. For centuries, he has been understood as generic in certain contexts, like man and mankind. The Bible even makes this clear in Genesis 1:27: "in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The substitution of she introduces a jarring distinction—whereas

the masculine pronoun doesn't necessarily summon a masculine image, the feminine does.

Which seems to defeat the purpose of "gender-inclusive" language. Words like wife, mankind, spokesman, etc., are assumed to slant perception in favor of the male at the expense of the female. According to theory, only when such distinctions are eliminated, or at least sharply reduced, can true equality exist. I think this was the idea behind the Bolsheviks' insistence that everyone be addressed as "Comrade." Pages, the word-processing program

from Apple, frustrates columnist Mona Charen because it "seems to have been designed and programmed by the women's studies department at Cupertino Community College." Pages flags every noun it sees as too specific, and suggests alternatives (spouse, person, etc.) that either don't fit the context or stomp on style.

Some vernaculars assign gender to inanimate objects—see Mark Twain's "The Awful German Language" for the most hilarious takedown. I presume this is not considered subversive in Germany, and what that says about German culture I'm not qualified to guess. What the current pronoun quandary suggests about our culture is that we're very confused. ◀

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Writing Resources

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>) provides free writing resources and instructional material to students, members of the community, and users worldwide. Teachers and trainers may use this material for in-class and out-of-class instruction.

Help on the Web

- Writers who want to develop a presence on the web can visit www.authormedia.com/blog for tips on using the Internet to market their work.
- Need a handy list of transition words? Go to www.smart-words.org/transition-words.html for a comprehensive list.
- Learn more about how to get published and write professionally from Christian writer Mary Demuth at her blog www.writeuncaged.com.
- Build your vocabulary with "A Word A Day" at www.wordsmith.org. Subscribe for free and receive a new word each day in your inbox with its definition, usage, etymology, and more. Words are usually selected around a theme every week.

Tell Us a
Discipling
Story

Do you have an interesting discipling story to tell? Send a vignette (200-400 words) about a situation or interaction that led to your discipling another person—or group of people—in an unusual or unexpected way. How was God faithful in supporting, reinforcing or extending your obedient actions?

Send stories to:
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Life-giving Food

By: Darlene Stern

Often I hear how simple things like smiling at a stranger or helping someone in need can radically change a person's life—and your own. A few years ago, I experienced this for myself.

One spring, an older gentleman named Elmer came over to collect parts for children's bicycles. When he found out we had children, he began to bring a chocolate bar for each child every time he came. With a strong Slavic accent, he divulged that as a World War II soldier conscripted into Hitler's army, he valued chocolate bars as a special treat. Our kids enjoyed them too. Every time Elmer drove up on his BMW motorcycle saying, "Hoy, hoy!" they raced to see who could get to him first. He loved it!

A few months passed, and Elmer stopped coming. Soon I began wondering whether he survived the winter. No one could tell me anything about him. One day, when I was traveling in his direction, I stopped to find out for myself. He was so happy to see me and invited me in. The elation on his face made up for our language barrier.

Interestingly, during our conversation, Elmer asked whether I had any salt at home. His butcher-cut meat just didn't taste good without salt, he said. But he didn't want just any salt. I told him I had three kinds of salt at home he could choose from. He decided to come home with me to take a look. The first two he rejected, but the third, a canning salt I stored in a separate container, he pronounced, "Is good!" Then, "I take, OK?" In addition to the salt, I gave Elmer some other food, for which he

insisted to pay me. He left a happy man.

A week later, Elmer returned for more eggs saying, "You have given me a life! I tell you, you have given me a life!" I couldn't fathom what he meant. Perhaps it was his salt-renewed taste buds.

The next week Elmer returned for more eggs, again saying, "I tell you, you have given me a life! I eat three [eggs] every day!" I pulled more food from our storage cellar. Elated, he kissed my forehead and hand.

On his way out, Elmer confessed he'd been depressed and nearly suicidal. But he said, "I know Jesus say no." He demonstrated the action of putting a gun to his head and pulling the trigger. He added, "I want to go to heaven, not to hell. I tell you, you give me a life!"

Elmer soon divulged that a host of fears kept him from grocery stores. He felt judged by people who heard his Slavic accent and thought he was a Nazi. He felt isolated: No one spoke any of the four languages he was fluent in, while he knew little English or the locally predominant German. Also, grocers often assumed he was a thief because of how

he looked and smelled—like an eighty-year-old bum (Elmer lived in a sportsman's club and washed his clothes out by hand). He expressed fear of news reports about old people being murdered in their homes. To top it all off, the only "good" food he found was meat from a butcher shop.

At our home, Elmer found life-giving food, but more importantly, he found acceptance.

In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus taught His followers the eternal rewards of feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, and taking in strangers saying, "Assuredly, I say to you inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."

Through Elmer, the Lord showed me the meaning of this teaching. By obeying, I had been able to enrich the life of a lonely old man, who is equally precious to God as any king. God's purposes had been served: Elmer found life, and so did I. ◀

This article originally appeared online at MTL Magazine. Darlene Stern is a mother of nine who enjoys her family, writing, and traveling on short term international mission trips.

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