

Volume
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A Newsletter of the Amy Foundation



Where the World Wide Web is Taking Us— *And why writers should care*

Part II

by Sharon Siepel

Blogs, Facebook, websites, forums, discussion boards...What does all this have to do with you as a writer?

In Part I (See *Pen & Sword, Summer 2008*) we looked at five trends in publishing due to the Internet. Now we will look at how writers can harness those trends to connect with their reader and get their message out more effectively.

1. People are researching on the web—so become a resource

Have an area you are passionate about? Show your expertise in that field by creating a website or blog dedicated to that topic.

Examples include author/agent, Terry Whalin, who created **right-writing.com** where he posts numerous resources for writers.

Or Christy Award winning author, Debbie W. Wilson and

her website dedicated to persecuted Christians found at (www.onlyinternet.net/boundtogether/persecution.html).

"Writers who have a presence in online forums, whether column or blogs frequented by a number of viewers, are an attractive asset to acquisition editors," said Bruce Nuffer, Marketing Manager of Barefoot Ministries.

2. Print periodicals are passé. Submit articles to online magazines or news sources.

"Writers need to know that providers of online materials increasingly see and understand online content as intellectual property, and are more comfortable placing a value on it," says Nuffer, meaning you can actually get paid for writing articles for the web.

"We need a lot more writers than those who are printing studies, because we produce so much more," said Johannah Reardon, managing editor of

Christianbiblestudies.com.
3. E-books and downloadable materials are on the rise. Jump on the wagon!

"Free resources remain a major source of marketing to an online environment, and writers who can offer to publishers materials that amplify or enhance their saleable content and can be given away free have an advantage," states Nuffer.

Carol Topp, author of *Homeschool Co-ops, How to Start them and Not Burn Out*, posted a sample chapter of her book on her website to entice buyers. Author/agent Terry Whalin offers a free e-book to those who visit his website, **right-writing.com**. Christian author Ted Dekker's website contains many free downloads including interviews, movie clips, and audio book chapters.

Dennis Hillman, editor at Kregel Press, suggests readers under thirty years old "might like to read a story online, serial style in installments. They may want to comment on the characters and where the story is going

Sharon Siepel (sharonsiepel.com), author of *Essential Survival Guide to Living on Your Own*, (*Howard Books, 2008*) lives in Goshen, OH, with her family. This first article will explore some of the trends that effect publishing and writing. Part two looks at some ways writers can use these trends to their advantage.

Continued on page 2 ➤

World Wide Web

◀ *Continued from Page 1*

in the writing process.”

Creating and posting value-added content to your website is not difficult. Just make sure the content actually has some worth to your readers.

4. Mixture of media on websites. Go ahead, post pictures and include nifty applications!

People want to see more than text on websites. Visuals like photos or videos help the reader connect with you. After watching a video about my book, *Essential Survival Guide to Living on Your Own*, at sharonsiepel.com, a viewer commented that she was excited about getting the book before it was even on the shelves. Shaunti Feldhann, author of *For Women Only*, has a forum for adults and one for teens on her website where readers post their comments.

5. Reverse journalism —is a writer's dream

Have an opinion about a current issue? No longer do you have to submit something to your local newspaper editor. At almost all the online news sources you can post a comment about a story. If these comments are

well written, they will get noticed. During the 2006 election cycle I posted some feedback on the website of our local newspaper. The day before the election I received an email from one of the editors asking me to contribute something on the election results.

Find articles or sites that deal with your particular passion. Submit short, well-written pieces. If you can do this without being caustic, you have the opportunity to shine a light into darkness and reveal the truth.

6. Social networking is a way of life. Get used to it!

Digital natives, those born after 1981, see no difference between their online relationships and those off-line. Facebook is their front porch, where they catch up with friends and family.

Liz Curtis Higgins, Christian author of dozens of books, posts photos from her travels on her Facebook page, giving readers a glimpse into her life. Mary E. DeMuth, author of six books, including *Daisy Chains*, lets readers into her world by blogging regularly on her Shoutlife page.

“Blogging and online chat rooms creates accessibility between writer and reader,” said Greg Petree, Vice President of Marketing at Howard Books. That accessibility

FREE Internet Resources

1. Free website and hosting
 - Google sites
 - Wetpaint
 - Yahoo Geocities
2. Social Networking sites
 - Facebook
 - Shoutlife
 - LinkedIn
3. Build a Blog
 - WordPress.com
 - Blogger.com
 - Amazon.com (for published authors)
4. News Sites where you can comment on stories
 - abcnews.go.com
 - usatoday.com
 - newsvine.com

drives loyal fans to look for you online again and again, because it is not just about reading, it's about a relationship.

Harnessing the Internet in order to promote your writing may mean building a simple website, creating a blog or joining Facebook. All the possibilities on the web can overwhelm the average person. Choose one avenue to pursue and ease yourself onto the on-line super highway. ◀

Pen &
Sword

Editors:

Shaunna Howat
Linda Wacyk

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email: amyfoundtn@aol.com

*Have you ordered copies of the Discipled Nation Plan for you and your church?
Free copies are available now! Go to Amyfound.org and place your order.*

Moving is easier with the help of Stonecroft Ministries

By Shirley M. Beckett

Nearly thirty years ago, our family moved 30 miles from Haddon Heights to Tabernacle, New Jersey.

It might as well have been a move clear across country for I was so lonely and everything was so strange to me after living all of my life in the same small town. We did not know anyone in this new area and we got lost every time we ventured out in the car.

We visited a small country United Methodist Church where we met some local residents. A church social—a hayride—was coming up, and we decided to take our children to enjoy the wonderful crisp fall moon-lit evening.

A very talkative young woman in the group was especially friendly to our family. She invited me to a luncheon as her guest. It was

a special group luncheon that is held once a month by the Pinelands Christian Women's club and Stonecroft Ministries at a nice local restaurant.

At the time, I did not know about these groups but wanted to participate with my new friend. I also wanted to learn more about this area and meet some of the local residents.

Stonecroft Ministries offers brunch, luncheon and dinner events for women and couples. Each event includes an entertaining feature and an inspirational speaker who offers insight on coming to know God.

The Pinelands Christian Women's Club is a wonderful organization for discipling women both young and older in their faith. Busy mothers can get a welcome break with the Moms on the Run groups. Children play under supervision nearby and moms hear a Christian message.

Being a guest at this group luncheon was such a wonderful experience for me living in a new and unfamiliar area. I find it difficult to express how much this special time meant to me. Each month, I looked forward to hearing the guest speaker and sitting with new Christian friends.

Before long it was my turn to invite a guest to have lunch with me at the Pinelands Christian Women's Club. I invited my neighbor, and we have now been friends for over 30 years. She became very active in her local church and discipled others on their journey of faith.

I now know that these organizations exist all around the country for friendship and discipling. This is a wonderful way to disciple each other and grow in our Christian love. It's a great way to spread the "Word." ◀

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:

Pen & Sword
Editors,
Amy Foundation,
P.O. Box
16091,
Lansing, MI
48901;

or email
AMYFOUNDTN@
aol.com.

Amy Syndicate News

Looking to 2009 and beyond

As we head into 2009, which promises to be a historic year on several fronts, the Amy Syndicate is thoughtfully taking steps to enhance our outreach to editors of secular media outlets.

First, it is with great pleasure that the Syndicate announces the addition of Stephen Schwambach, Barbara Curtis, Jim Priest, and David Sandford as Amy Foundation Internet Syndicate writers. All are former members and Amy Writing Award winners who have re-joined the Syndicate. Several of their

columns have been downloaded for publication already.

Second, we will be surveying editors of media outlets who use the "Real Answers" columns to better assess their needs and more accurately track our results. We will also be surveying those do not regularly download our columns to determine how we might serve them better.

We believe the Internet Writing Syndicate concept is the wave of the future for many reasons, including the shift in readership from hard-

copy print newspapers and magazines to online versions. Surveys reflect that readership of hard copy news is dropping off precipitously, to the point that many papers are laying off staff and even closing down in many cases.

We urge you to check out the Syndicate columns posted at www.amyfound.org. Please encourage your local editors to access these well-written and timely pieces and share with us their reactions. We welcome your input as we move forward during this historic shift in publishing.

Some readers have asked us recently, "How did Pen & Sword get started?"

The editors offer a brief history.

Pen & Sword approaches age 14

Pen & Sword began as a bi-monthly publication in 1995 in response to the Amy Foundation's desire to encourage and support the work of Church Writing Groups.

It's the story of bringing the mission of the Amy Writing Awards (which largely targeted journalists and professional writers) to the latent writers of the church. The belief was that if you could write a letter to the editor, you could disciple the people in your community through the local secular media.

To that end, Church Writing Groups welcomed "every-day" people who had an interest in writing as a means of discipling.

The groups took the form of Sunday School classes, mid-week meetings, or even "virtual" groups, who communicated primarily via e-mail

and phone calls. The goal was to provide instruction to budding writers as well as positive critique to sharpen each writer's work and improve the chances of publication by local editors.

Early articles included news about Church Writing Groups around the nation; practical and inspirational advice for amateur writers; and reflections by Amy Foundation president W. James Russell.

Pen & Sword also served as a place to excerpt the letters to the editor and opinion pieces of our "Lambs Who Are Roaring," which was an award program created in response to the challenges presented by Bob Briner in his book "Roaring Lambs."

In its first years, Pen & Sword served as a vehicle to publish the Church Writing Group curriculum, which was included one lesson at a time

through 1998.

This curriculum is still available, and can serve as a valuable guide to individual writers or to churches seeking to start writing groups with the goal of discipling through the secular media.

The format and design of the newsletter evolved over time, and its mission evolved as well. The newsletter became a vehicle through which to report the news and projects of the Amy Foundation as a whole. The newsletter now includes information about the Discipled Nation Plan, Amy Syndicate, pastor's awards, and news about the Amy Foundation Board and its partners.

Finally, in order to expand the reach of the discipling messages of our Amy Writing Award winners, the newsletter now includes excerpts of the top winning articles. ◀

Order Today!

Resources Available from The Amy Foundation: For individuals, small groups or Christian education classes

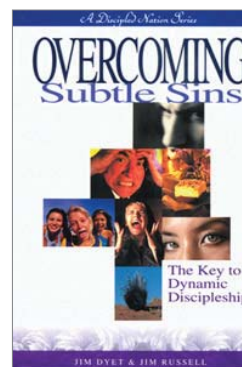
Overcoming Subtle Sins

"Powerful, Perceptive, Practical: what every Christian must do to survive and make disciples in these uncertain days."

Dr. Ralph S. Bell, Associate Evangelist (retired), the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

With God's help you can overcome the "subtle sins" in life and learn to live the joy-filled life God intends for each of us. This book is a great resource for individual and small group study with 16 short, digestible chapters and 10 engaging questions for each chapter.

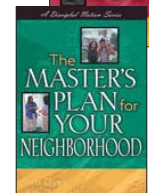
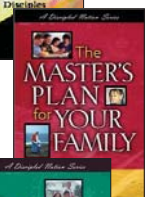
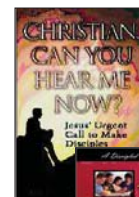
www.amyfound.org



Order Information

Title: *Overcoming Subtle Sins*
Author: Dr. Jim Dyet & Jim Russell

This book, and other discipling materials published by The Amy Foundation can be purchased at: www.amyfound.org



Research in the 21st century

Part II

by Tyler Howat

As a double-major in both English and History, I measured my life while in college by the all-too-short times from paper to paper. Hence, it did not take long for me to weed out the unnecessary and unreliable sources of information and hone in on those which glean the best data.

Interestingly enough, websites such as **Google** and **Wikipedia** have burst into the mainstream as the default resources for the average writer. They are great points to start research, generating copious sources to spark your through processes.

Wikipedia is becoming more stringent with their screening process, demanding citations of sources throughout their articles.

Generally, I like to weed out websites with flat, bright backgrounds and text that

make your eyes hurt as soon as they load. It should also go without saying that any web search that comes up with "Bubba's Web Site" or "Joe's World War Two History Page" should be avoided like the plague.

Sites which end with **".edu"** are the websites of educational institutions and must sit at the top of your list. At the same time, **".org"** sites are generally just as good because they may be historical organizations or research institutions; they rank just after the educational sites on your list of possibilities.

With **".net"** and **".com,"** greater discernment must be used. Read all the information carefully and corroborate all of it with other sources before using it.

The internet is not something to be feared, but utilized. Use your judgment, and do not be afraid to ask for help.

www.wikipedia.org (Can be unreliable, but good to begin with)

www.google.com (Great for getting an idea and narrowing your topic)

www.bartleby.com ("The preeminent Internet publisher of literature, reference and verse providing students, researchers and the intellectually curious with unlimited access to books and information on the web, free of charge)

www.reference.com (This searches many encyclopedias and also includes options to search a thesaurus and a dictionary—excellent!)

www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html (The CIA World Factbook is filled with information on every country throughout the world, complete with maps and charts, excellent for writers to quickly find reference information) ◀

Seeking more research help?

If you have a favorite internet research tool or writing resource you would like to share with your fellow writers, send us some information!

We'd like to see what you use, what search tools you have on your computer, or what books you have picked up and found useful.

Email us at amyfoundtn@aol.com.

NEW Amy Writing Award Rules

We have new guidelines that now include submissions of articles published electronically!

You can read the new rules for the Amy Writing Awards on the Amy Foundation Website. Check them out on the Writing Awards page at www.amyfound.org.

Tyler Howat is a recent college graduate with a BA in History and English Literature. Tyler teaches writing and literature to homeschool students and works as a member of the Information and Teen Services Department at a public library in the Cincinnati area.

Street Gangs and Sons of Our Society: A Cry for Daddy

by Gordon Dalbey
Excerpt

Third Prize — \$4,000

The recent deadly State Street gang fight begs the lesson of a *Los Angeles Times Magazine* cover story entitled “Mothers, Sons and the Gangs,” in which several mothers of young gang members pondered sadly why their sons had gone astray. As a man, I was startled by what they didn’t say. “I don’t understand why he goes out on the streets,” was the gist of each woman’s grief. “I’m a good mother.”

No matter how righteous and fine a homemaker his mother may be, a boy is drawn to the gang by the innate male longing and need to break away from the mother, bond to the father, and be joined thereby to the company of men. Without the father to engineer that process, the choice for a young male is ominous: either join a gang and get killed or go to prison, or stay with Mom and starve in a cell of femininity.

Certainly, these are good mothers...I suspect their sons genuinely know that. But these mothers are not fathers, nor can they be. The finest woman’s best is not good enough to usher a boy into manhood. Our “modern” civilization has forgotten that this is men’s work, properly done by the father and the community of men.

Ancient civilizations knew this. In the last two verses of the Hebrew bible, God promises to “turn the hearts of the

fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:6 NIV). Jews not only understood this precept, but practice it today in the Bar Mitzvah rite of passage for boys. After two years of studying his heritage at the feet of his father and older men, the boy stands at last before his congregation and declares, “Today, I am a man.”

The gangs are surrogate fathers, and their violence is a misdirected vengeance against males/fathers who have abandoned them and a society which has misled them.

No doubt, in days to come, we will hear much official rhetoric about getting tough on gangs and the violence they often stir. But restricting behavior, while at times necessary, is not sufficient to heal the heart. Gangs, that is, are symptoms of a deeper disease among us.

This disease is the curse of fatherlessness. We will not likely hear so much about that, however, because so few men today have dared face this awful emptiness in our masculine souls. Much as an alcoholic uses a drink, often we use the police and courts to avoid facing our own problem.

You don’t have to be young and poor to understand what drives a gang. You just have to be real.

Let’s do our part to uproot the cause of gangs. Let’s get real together as fellow men and confess at last our common longing for fathers. Let’s learn to support, encourage, and hold each other accountable. That is, let’s begin together to father ourselves and thereby prepare a community of real men to invite boys into.

Gordon Dalbey is the author of Healing the Masculine Soul (W Publishing, 1988, 2003) and No Small Snakes: A Journey into Spiritual Warfare (Thomas Nelson, 2008). A former news reporter (The Charlotte NC News), Peace Corps Volunteer, high school teacher, and pastor, he now writes at home and speaks internationally at conferences. Gordon lives with his wife and son in Santa Barbara, CA, and can be reached at www.abbafather.com.

This excerpt is reprinted with permission from *Santa Barbara (CA) News-Press*.

Mother Teresa's Dark Night of Faith

Fourth Prize —\$3,000

by Bishop Raymundo J. Peña
Excerpt

Many were surprised by the recent disclosure of private correspondence by Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta to a spiritual confidant, in which she revealed an inner darkness and emptiness. At one point, she speaks of Jesus and writes, "As for me, the silence and the emptiness is so great, that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear; the tongue moves (in prayer) but does not speak..." Elsewhere she states, "In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not existing."

Some commentators have mistakenly interpreted her revelations as admissions of a loss of faith, but I must hasten to point out that, at least in the portions of her private correspondence that have been disclosed so far, she never speaks of a loss of faith, but only of intensely painful feelings in her soul. Feelings and faith are two different matters.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of darkness in the soul, and careful spiritual discernment is needed to know which kind is being suffered. First is the darkness that results from sin. Grave sin destroys God's life in us, and his absence may cause the soul to suffer the acute pain of loss.

When no serious sin is present, however, and espe-

cially when all the evidence indicates a desire to know and love God more, and when there is daily prayer practice of self-control and of charity, then the darkness is what some mystic saints have called the dark night of faith, or the dark night of the soul. This darkness is produced not by God's absence, but by his immediate presence.

How can this be? It is simple to explain. Have you ever been momentarily blinded by the snapshot of a camera with a flash attachment? Have you ever walked out of a darkened movie theater into the bright daylight? We all know what happens. We are blinded by the light until our eyes adjust.

Paradoxically, when God reveals himself in a dramatic and immediate way, the soul is blinded by the light and so experiences God's manifestation as darkness. That, I am convinced, is what happened to Mother Teresa, because in spite of dark night, she continued to pray and to serve the most abandoned in society. We should see the darkness she experienced as additional evidence of her holiness and closeness to God.

Our senses and emotions are no safe guide to judging God's presence. So long as we are not living in grave sin, we can be confident that the

Lord is with us. In the normal course of spiritual growth, God provides moments of consolation, and allows long periods of desolation in order to purify us and perfect our faith.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus told his followers, "You are the light of the world" (Matt 5:14). The closer one draws to Jesus, the more does his light enter the world through us. If Mother Teresa was looking for the light of Christ and couldn't find it, it is because she was so close to him that she had become his light!

Bishop Peña serves in Brownsville, Texas, where he writes a weekly column that is published in several local newspapers.

This excerpt is reprinted with permission of the *Brownsville (TX) Herald*.

**You can read the full text of all 15 winning entries for 2007 at www.amyfound.org.
Watch for more Prize-Winners in future issues of
Pen & Sword.**



THE AMY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2009



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Amy Foundation Board

Forrest Lewis

Meet the Amy Foundation Advisory Board

Forrest Lewis has served on the Amy Foundation Board for about 11 years,

He is a tax CPA living in the Lansing area with his wife, Kay, and a dog who now gets a lot of attention since his two grown children have left home. Forrest has been a disciple of Jesus Christ for 21 years, and is a member of his local Roman Catholic Church. As a new Christian, Forrest was disciplined by his wife, his mother-in-law, and a co-worker named Roger Imeson.

In addition to volunteering in his church and community, Forrest currently is engaged

in discipling efforts. He has taken over the co-leadership of a 30-year-old Bible Study that was led by Roger Imeson before his death. Today, the weekly Bible Study includes a group of about 12 men; about 7-8 show up every week.

Forrest joined the Amy Foundation Board at the invitation of its founder, W. James "Jim" Russell. He looks forward to a future of continued public impact through the media, whether that involves written press, online publications, or new communication tools yet to be created.

Prayer Requests

We invite you to pray with us about various aspects of The Amy Foundation Ministry.

Amy Prayer List:

- Praise....that the Internet Syndicate has expanded to new outlets, exposing many more people to professionally written columns dealing with today's issues from God's perspective.
- That the Holy Spirit will inspire Internet Syndicate writers and free their time to write to meet the demand of these new editors.