

Volume

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A Newsletter of the Amy Foundation



The ABCs of TopNotch Writing

by MaryAnn Diorio, Ph.D.

By nature, I'm a visionary. By nature I'm also an encourager. So it wasn't a surprise to me when I heard God's still, small voice deep within my spirit say, "I want you to start an ezine that equips and encourages My writers to build My Kingdom."

"Yes, Sir!" My usual response to God fell off my lips. "But I'm going to need Your help, Lord."

Twenty-five-plus years as a writer (including several for the AMY Syndicate) had taught me a lot about writing, but only God could give me the wisdom to put together an ezine for His precious writers. Questions like "What should be the focus?" "What should I include?" "How long and how frequent should it be?" bombarded my mind.

But then I heard again, "Make it as simple as ABC."

"Aha! The ABCs of TopNotch Writing. A for Attitude; B for Business; C for Craft."

And so was born **The TopNotch® Writer**, an online magazine targeted to equip the Christian writer for the building of God's Kingdom, a goal that lines up perfectly

with the vision of The AMY Foundation. After only two issues, we are already making an impact for Jesus as writers all across the country—and the world—sign up for their free subscription (TopNotchWriter@aweber.com).

So what are we all about? Well, attitude, business, and craft, with a few extra serendipities thrown in for good measure.

To give you a taste of **The TopNotch® Writer**, let's explore some excerpts from our first issue, the A and C of our equation: Attitude and Craft.

Attitude

In the beginning of all topnotch writing, there is attitude. Attitude is learned behavior. It is a response to a situation based not on the situation itself but on how we perceive the situation.

For instance, two people can be cut off in traffic. One will respond by spewing a few choice words at the culprit, while another will respond by praying for him. In both cases, the situation was the same, but the response to it was different.

As applied to our writing, attitude will often be the deciding factor between whether we succeed or whether we fail.

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Prayer Requests

We believe "The prayers of the righteous availeth much." We invite you to pray with us about various aspects of The Amy Foundation Ministry.

Amy Prayer List:

- That the Internet Syndicate will expand to new outlets so that many more people will be able to access excellent, professionally written columns dealing with today's issues from God's perspective.
- That the Holy Spirit will inspire Internet Syndicate writers.

MaryAnn Diorio, Ph.D. is an award-winning writer of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction whose work has appeared in hundreds of publications, including *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Decision*, and *Human Events*. She is a former AMY Writing Awards Program judge and a former AMY Syndicate columnist.

ABCs of Writing

◀ *Continued from Page 1*

Attitudes are easy to spot in others but usually difficult to spot in ourselves. Here are a few questions to ask ourselves to determine whether we have a positive or a negative attitude about our writing:

- 1) Do I get depressed when I receive a rejection?
- 2) Do I doubt my ability to write?
- 3) Am I jealous of the success of other writers?
- 4) Do I really want to write or do I want to have written?
- 5) Am I willing to pay the price for writing success?

Your answers to the above questions will reveal your attitude. If your answers were less than positive, take heart. Attitudes can be changed. Next time, we'll explore ways to do so.

Meanwhile, remember: It is not what happens to us that

It is not what happens to us that matters; it is how we respond to what happens to us that matters.

matters; it is how we respond to what happens to us that matters.

Craft

Talent is not enough when it comes to writing for God's Kingdom. A writer is born with talent, but that talent must be nurtured through the process of learning the craft. A craft is defined as an occupation requiring special skill or ability. While talent comes from God, craft comes from study.

As writers, we already possess a modicum of talent. But we must now take that talent and learn how to make it effective. In other words, we have to learn how to structure articles and stories,

how to create memorable characters, how to write in various genres.

Craft involves application and discipline. By learning craft, we are obeying God's command to "study to show ourselves approved" (2 Timothy 2:15). Approved by whom? By editors, by readers, and most of all, by God Himself.

One of the chief complaints of the secular publishing world is that Christian writers are mediocre. I don't know about you, but that observation bothers me, not only because it is being made, but also because it is often true. I aim to do my part to correct that view.

Will you? ▶

Pen &
Sword

Editors:

Shaunna Howat
Linda Wacyk

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Amy Syndicate News

Jim Jackson, Syndicate Editor

In an effort to expand our pool of news outlets, the Amy Syndicate team will mail a postcard (see sample page 4) to **18,746** news agencies throughout the U.S. and Canada.

I thank God for the Amy Foundation staff for completing this massive undertaking. They will also compile email lists of the editors and publishers of these outlets and send updated information and notices to them periodically.

This means we will have a multitude of news outlets potentially looking at our work on a daily basis! **Syndi-**

cate writers will be working hard to provide "fresh" columns regularly, which we hope will greatly increase our opportunities to get morally-based, biblically-founded columns into print.

As you may have heard, print news media is in serious decline, while the Internet is quickly increasing as the major source of news for most people today. I believe we are on the cutting edge of this new, exciting media realm. I believe our Syndicate has entered into a new and exciting era, and I thank the Lord for each columnist and our Foundation.

Pen & Sword readers can help support the Amy Internet Syndicate in a number of ways:

- Visit the Amy Syndicate website at www.amyfound.org and read what the service has to offer.
- Talk to your local editors, show them the ad on this page, and ask them to consider using the Syndicate columns.
- Pray for God's divine inspiration for the Syndicate writers, and for receptiveness on the part of editors.

Operation Timothy

by Gilbert A. Jacobs

A little over twenty-one years ago, God answered my prayers for help.

I was training Army Reserve and National Guard units in Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia. My wife had recently divorced me and was living with another man. I was really struggling. I recall praying in Church one Sunday and asking God for help.

The next day, I received a phone call from a man named Charlie Fox, who was an executive at Westinghouse; Charlie invited me to lunch with him on Tuesday at a very nice restaurant. He did not state the purpose of inviting me to lunch; I assumed he was recruiting employees for Westinghouse and knew of my pending retirement from the Army.

I did not connect the invitation to lunch with my prayer, until about halfway through the meal, when I asked

Charlie why he invited me to lunch. He responded that he invited me to lunch because the Lord had laid me on his heart. After getting over my surprise at this statement, I told him of my prayer in Church on Sunday.

Charlie then indicated Christian Business Men's Committee (CBMC) had a discipleship program called "Operation Timothy" and he would be happy to go over it with me.

Although I had accepted Jesus Christ as my savior many years before, I was under the misunderstanding that only priests, pastors, and missionaries made Christ Lord of their lives. Going through CBMC's Operation Timothy changed that misperception.

I asked Christ to be my Lord as well as my savior. As I grew in this new relationship with God, I began to experience the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, as described in Galatians 5:22-23.

Ever since my experience with Charlie Fox, I have been involved in discipling men. It seems that every time I complete the discipling process with a man, God brings along another man, who wants to be discipled.

Over the last 20 plus years, I have been privileged to experience God as I join Him in His work in men's lives. ◀

To learn more about Operation Timothy, visit www.cbmc.com/resources/operationtimothy.aspx

After retiring from the Army, Gil Jacobs enjoyed a 14-year career in industry as a CPA. Currently he teaches part-time at Mercyhurst College and continues to experience God's amazing grace as he disciples men through Operation Timothy.

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 16901,
Lansing, MI 48901;

or email
AMYFOUNDTN@aol.com.

Congratulations 2007 Amy Writing Awards Winners

Watch for excerpts of the winning articles starting next issue



Tom Flannery

Jeff Jacoby
Gordon Dalbey
Rev. Raymundo J. Pena
Roy Borges
Dr. Delvyn Case
Roger Richards
ChristyAnne Dickson
Kendall Wingrove
Linda White
Gene Fant
Hal Tarleton
Chelsey Ponce
Rachel C. Coleman
Bill Ellis

Carbondale (PA) News

Boston Sunday Globe
Santa Barbara News-Press
Brownsville (TX) Herald
Inside Journal
Portland (ME) Press Herald
Adirondack (NY) Journal
The Post (Texas City, TX)
The Towne Courier (East Lansing, MI)
The Free Lance-Star (Fredericksburg, VA)
The Jackson Sun
The Wilson Daily Times (Wilson, NC)
Marion Chronicle-Tribune (Marion, IN)
Southwest Daily Times (Liberal, KS)
Herald & Review (Decatur, IL)

Meet the Amy Foundation Board

Introducing Charlie Mack

Charlie is the Michigan State Director for Christian Leadership Ministries, the Faculty Ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ.

Charlie has been a disciple of Christ for 45 years. He and his wife Chrissie attend Trinity Church in Lansing. They have three daughters, Catherine, Heather and Chelsea; one son-in-law, Juan; and a cat named Sherlock.

Charlie points to Pat Burroughs, Campus Crusade Staff Member, as a key discipling relationship for 11 years after Charlie met the Lord.

"I don't really remember anyone actively discipling me before that," Charlie said.

At present, Charlie is actively engaged in discipling relationships with college professors and graduate students in Michigan.

Charlie has served on the Amy Foundation Board for 16 years, joining at the prompting of Amy Foundation founder, Jim Russell, Sr.

"Mr. Russell asked me out to lunch and asked me to prayerfully consider joining the Board and reading the entries for the Amy Writing Awards," he recalls.

"I pray that we will see more qualified entries and that Christian writers will be enthusiastically writing Biblical truth in secular language. I also hope we see another Great Awakening in America as Christians take seriously the command to make disciples by teaching them to OBEY everything that Jesus Christ taught us."

About the Amy Foundation

The Amy Foundation, founded in 1976 by W. James Russell and his wife Phyllis, was named after their daughter. The Foundation is best known for its Amy Writing Awards, which is a call to present biblical truth reinforced with scripture in secular, non-religious publications. It is acclaimed as the most popular journalism contest in the nation.

All Amy Foundation programs are designed to encourage and equip professional and non-professional writers to develop and use their skills to the reclaiming of America. We hope that you will use its resources to participate in fulfilling Jesus' final instructions as stated in The Great Commission.



Amy Internet Syndicate

Free - Fresh Commentary and Ideas
just a CLICK away!

Real Answers™, a variety of editorial page opinion columns, are now available for your use simply by downloading them from **The Amy Foundation Internet Syndicate**.

- The columns are free. We do ask you to identify your publication, city and state.
- New columns appear weekly. We suggest you publish **Real Answers™** on a regular basis so your readers will anticipate finding this informed commentary on the same days and at the same place each week.
- Should you need to do minor editing, please do not remove either the publication credits at the end of the column or the biblical references within the text.

Visit www.amysyndicate.org or call 877-727-4262.

 The Amy Foundation
Discipling Our Nation in this Generation

Improve Your Writing in Four “Easy” Steps

By Shaunna Howat

Wouldn't it be great to find the formula for becoming a better writer? If there were, I'd be the first to buy it. But I do know of some ways to improve your writing, bit by bit, through regular application.

1. Read.

Reading not only opens the imagination to places and ideas, it also enlarges the vocabulary. A writer should expose himself to a variety of good writing, both past and present, of many genres and styles.

Choose a book from the bestseller list, then read something that has existed on a classic list for decades or centuries.

A well-read person will choose from a history, then a philosophy, then a fiction, and a nonfiction, and so forth. The variety of authors and genres will expose a writer to an ocean of ideas, words, and writing styles.

An awakened and challenged mind has a wide variety of topics upon which to draw.

2. Write.

As difficult as that may sound, every writer must start somewhere. Get into the habit of setting aside time to write each week. Set a writing goal and stick to it.

Begin by writing a daily journal, and then focus on writing for an audience. Decide what you want to write most: articles, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, devotionals, sermons, fiction, nonfiction, poetry. Then begin

by jotting ideas and a rough outline of how it will flow.

Have in mind a beginning and an end (often, depending on the type of writing, keep your “so-what”—your thesis—in mind and write to that thesis).

3. Join a writer's group.

The writer who wants to grow will bring his writing to other writers for critique. He should find at this encounter the opportunity to learn about the art of writing.

This is the place to hear from other writers about their experiences and to learn from one another.

As iron sharpens iron, so will a writer sharpen another in a collaborative or critique atmosphere.

4. Take a writing class.

Find an online writing class or one in a nearby community. For a small fee you can find a class at a local community center or junior college in writing.

Take advantage of the opportunity to learn from the professional who teaches it. Listen to the comments the teacher makes to fellow students. Listen to the questions your classmates ask. Learn from one another how to improve your writing. Ask questions; welcome the critique and the comments about your own writing. ◀

Check your facts

Election season provides a great opportunity for Christian writers to bring a Biblical perspective to the press.

One tool that might help is the Annenberg Political Fact Check, a project of the **Annenberg Public Policy Center** of the University of Pennsylvania.

This nonpartisan, nonprofit, “consumer advocate” for voters monitors the factual accuracy of what is said by major U.S. political players. Their goal is “to apply the best practices of both journalism and scholarship, and to increase public knowledge and understanding.”

Check it out *before* you quote a candidate!

www.factcheck.org/

Online writing classes

Just a “google” away, these are some online writing courses that come up on a simple internet search. We haven't personally tried any of these, so we cannot endorse any one of them. If you have experience with online writing courses, good or bad, please let us know!

Universal Class

www.universalclass.com/i/subjects/writing-genre.htm

Gotham Writer's Workshop

www.writingclasses.com

Online instruction in: Fiction, Business of writing, Grammar, Composition, Poetry

www.writersonlineworkshops.com/

Others

www.writers.com

<http://distancelearn.about.com/od/isitforyou/a/WritingClass.htm>

A Glad Father Enjoys the Fruit of His Labor

Award of Outstanding Merit — \$1,000

Excerpt

by J. Mark Fox

Last week I had the opportunity to spend the better part of an afternoon with a good friend of mine. I was flying to Kenya and had a 6-hour layover in Detroit. So, my friend came and picked me up at the airport, we found a little cafe close by, and had a pleasant lunch together. Then we asked directions to the nearest Starbucks, and spent another two hours there, enjoying the fact that neither one of us had to be anywhere that afternoon, there was nothing pressing us, and we could simply enjoy the company, the wonderful smell of coffee brewing, and the laughter of good friends.

We talked easily of old times, swapped stories, joked around, and just enjoyed being together. I reflected later on the plane how much I love this friend of mine, and look forward to the next time we can be together. The funny thing is, though we have known each other for 21 years, our relationship has changed drastically in the last two.

You see, this friend is also my oldest son. Micah attends college about an hour from Detroit, and was able to come down and hang out with his Dad for half a day. We talked about the courses he is taking

in college and the things he is learning about life. We discussed the job offer he has waiting for him after he graduates this May. We laughed about college pranks, and we agonized together about the Panthers' loss to Seattle. We talked about theology and about career choices and about marriage.

When Micah dropped me off at the airport and we hugged, it felt as natural and as easy to say "I love you" to my son as anything I have ever done.

What a blessing! I felt like I was sitting down to a banquet of fresh fruits and vegetables that my wife and I had planted in a different season. All of the agony of back-breaking toil in the hot sun was forgotten because the harvest was in and the feast was prepared. The labor was eclipsed by the sweet reward. The fruit was delicious and satisfying.

I am not writing this to point to myself as a good father. Believe me when I say that I have made as many mistakes as anyone. I remember a basketball game that almost came to blows because of my own pride and stubborn competitiveness. Micah's cooler head prevailed, and we were spared what

could have been a devastating blow to our relationship.

I remember many times when I disciplined in anger.

I remember several years of awkward embarrassment between us as he grew into manhood and the hugs were fewer than they should have been, the expressions of love forced at times, absent at others.

I remember the times I didn't do the thing my son needed and the times I did or said the wrong thing. But I am eternally grateful and I give praise to the one who is able to take my meager efforts and my mistakes and redeem them for his own glorious purposes. He has certainly done that in my relationship with Micah. And I trust God will do the same with each of my children.

The Bible says, "A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother."

This is one glad father.

J. Mark Fox is the pastor of Antioch Community Church in Elon, NC. He writes a weekly column for the Times-News in Burlington, NC, and has published articles in The Teaching Home, Home School Digest, and The Greenhouse Report. His book, Family-Integrated Church, was published in 2006. Mark has won Amy Awards in 2004 and 2005.

You can read the full text of all 15 winning entries for 2006 at www.amyfound.org.

**Watch for more Prize-Winners
in future issues of
Pen & Sword.**

The Silence of God

Award of Outstanding Merit —\$1,000

Excerpt

by Jeff Jacoby

"Where was God in those days?" asked Pope Benedict XVI as he stood in Auschwitz last week. "Why was he silent? How could he permit this endless slaughter, this triumph of evil?"

It is the inevitable question in Auschwitz, that vast factory of death where the Nazis tortured, starved, shot, and gassed to death as many as a million and a half innocent human beings, most of them Jews. "In a place like this, words fail," Benedict said. "In the end, there can be only a dread silence, a silence which itself is a heartfelt cry to God: Why, Lord, did *you* remain silent?"

News reports emphasized the pope's question. Every story noted that the man who voiced it was, as he put it, "a son of the German people." No one missed the intense historical significance of a German pope, on a pilgrimage to Poland, beseeching God for answers at the slaughterhouse where just 60 years ago Germans broke every record for shedding Jewish blood.

And yet some commentators accused Benedict of skirting the issue of anti-Semitism. ...In truth, the pope not only acknowledged the reality of Jew-hatred, he explained the pathology that underlies it. Anti-Semites are driven by hostility not just toward Jews, he said, but toward the message of God-based ethics they first brought to the world. ...

The Nazis' ultimate goal, Benedict argued, was to rip out Christian morality by its Jewish roots, replacing it with "a faith of their own invention: faith in the rule of man, the rule of the powerful." Hitler knew that his will to power could triumph only if he first destroyed Judeo-Christian values. In the Thousand-Year Reich, God and his moral code would be wiped out. Man, unencumbered by conscience, would reign in his place. It is the oldest of temptations, and Auschwitz is what it leads to.

"Where was God in those days?" asked the pope. How could a just and loving Creator have allowed trainload after trainload of human beings to be murdered at Auschwitz? But why ask such a question only in Auschwitz? Where, after all, was God in the Gulag? Where was God when the Khmer Rouge slaughtered 1.7 million Cambodians? Where was God during the Armenian holocaust? Where was God in Rwanda? Where is God in Darfur?

For that matter, where is God when even one innocent victim is being murdered or raped or abused?

The answer, though the pope didn't say so clearly, is that a world in which God always intervened to prevent cruelty and violence would be a world without freedom—and life without freedom would be meaningless. God endows human beings with the power to choose between good and evil. Some choose to help

their neighbor; others choose to hurt him.

The God "who spoke on Sinai" was not addressing himself to angels or robots who could do no wrong even if they wanted to. He was speaking to real people with real choices to make, and real consequences that flow from those choices. Auschwitz wasn't God's fault. He didn't build the place. And only by changing those who did build it from free moral agents into puppets could he have stopped them from committing their horrific crimes.

It is not God who fails when human beings do barbaric things to other human beings. Auschwitz is not what happens when the God who says "Thou shalt not murder" and "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is silent. It is what happens when men and women refuse to listen.

Jeff Jacoby has been an op-ed columnist for the Boston Globe since February 1994. Seeking a conservative voice to balance its famously liberal roster of commentators, the Globe hired him away from the Boston Herald, where he had been chief editorial writer since 1987. In 2004, he received the Thomas Paine Award of the Institute of Justice, an award presented to journalists "who dedicate their work to the preservation and championing of individual liberty." He and his wife, Laura, live in Brookline, MA with their sons.



THE AMY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

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Winning Strategies

The Michigan Prayer Breakfast

*will be held
Thursday,*

May 22, 2008,
7:30-9:00 a.m.

at the

*Kellogg Center,
East Lansing, MI.*

Tickets: \$16 each

*For reservations,
call*

517/323-6233.

*Simple tips from winning authors for turning
your writing into more powerful discipling
experiences.*

- Document thoroughly. Don't just state opinion and analysis. Present strong research. Let facts speak for themselves.
- Christian writers must biblically re-think all of their assumptions concerning their craft. A "biblical world view" is the most crucial element in any kind of salt and light to the darkness.
- Learn to write to both a Christian and a secular audience in an acceptable style.
- BE the message you proclaim.
- Acquire knowledge of history and philosophy. Both inspire the intellect.
- Be non-threatening. Use a sense of humor.