Office Hours 21

Jerry Jenkins and David Loy
*The purpose of this transcript is to help you follow along with the lessons in the video. For this reason, the contents have not been extensively edited for grammar and punctuation.*

**David:** Hi, and thanks for joining us. This is The Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild, it is a special extended Office Hours session. For those of you who have read the email, we sent out a couple this morning notifying you of a little bit of a last minute change that took place internally. Jerry, I think the email explained it well, but if you would, take just a second to describe to those who have joined us what happened and what we're doing today.

**Jerry:** Yeah, we were planning to do a point of view workshop, and I still want to do that, we're going to schedule it down the road, but I just didn't feel like we were quite there yet with the kind of quality presentation I want to do. We thought, what could be just as good, and that would be an extended Office Hour session where you can ask any questions you want. Nothing's off limits,
and these are always invigorating sessions for me, and I hope they are for you as well.

**David:** Absolutely, and so many of you have already sent in your questions. Jerry made an offer in the email that we sent out this morning, that you could reply to that email with your questions, which is true. Many of you have done that, but also, as we do in a standard Office Hour session, the chat box that's on your screen is available for you to send questions that way as well. We're going to spend up to 90 minutes today doing nothing but questions and answers, and as Jerry said, nothing's off limits. We're going to try to get to as many as possible. Hopefully, we can get to all of them, but if we don't, the same offer that we do for normal Office Hour session still applies. If we don't get to your question live, we will have a unique thread inside the forum of the guild where you can go type your question again. Then, within the next couple of days, Jerry will provide you an answer in writing. This is our way of doing two things. Number one, it's our way of being flexible to provide you with the greatest value possible, and number two, continue to provide interaction with Jerry and be able to give you some feedback from him on your specific situation.

Jerry, the questions have been flying in this morning via email. They're already starting to come in on the chat box, so if you're ready, let's get started.

**Jerry:** I'm ready.
David: All right, the first one came in from Carmen, and Carmen emailed this, Carmen says, "It seems like the market for YA Christian fiction, especially historical, is dwindling. There are not even that many publishers according to Writer's Digest Writer's Market. What is your take on this?"

Jerry: Well, as usual, with any genre, there are cycles, and it will go ... It will be very popular at some point, and then it might fade. The YA market is so huge in the general trade with Hunger Games and Twilight and all those, that I don't think it's going to go away, and as you've heard me say before, and I'll probably say it many more times again, the key is quality. You write a quality YA novel and you'll find a publisher, because that's what they want. That will trump everything, even if they say, "We're not doing much of this anymore." Some may say they're not doing any for a while, and that's fine, but you'll find a publisher if you do something that is riveting and makes kids want to keep turning the pages.

David: Carmen, thanks for emailing that and kicking us off with a great question. I’m glad you're here with us as always. All right, let's keep going. Karen sent in this question by email. Karen says, "Please, would you talk a bit today about non-fiction where the process is the same as novel writing and where and how it's different." Jerry, that is a fairly common question, I think, we receive from guild members but what are some of the differences that popped to your mind?
Jerry: Well, I'm happy to talk about this because you all know my track record with my 190 plus books, two-thirds of those are fiction, but that means a third are non-fiction, and so that's a lot of books that I've done in that genre. It's timely that you ask this now because I've just got onto a series on Netflix. It's just an eight-part series, and it's a documentary, and I have to say that it's pretty hard-hitting. It's not graphic or offensive, but it's adult. It's called *Death Row Stories*. Now, this is non-fiction, obviously, and they're telling the stories of people who have been sentenced to death row. Some have been there for years, and they talked about how they have been exonerated. Some have been released, others were almost exonerated, and then, information came in and they actually found out that they were guilty after all, and left them there. I thought, this is the perfect example of non-fiction that is done in a fictitious almost way, because they're so careful in how they choose a sequence in which they tell a story.

They are able to plunge their main character into terrible trouble immediately because they tell how they were caught, and sentenced, and in their trial they were found guilty and sent to death row. The way they do this, you don't know if they're really guilty or not, but you hear what it was that convinced the jury, and so they're in this terrible trouble. Then, of course, they do go through all the appeals, which is that second part of the classic story structure, where everything you try to do to fix it actually makes it worse, because they get turned down. They became an irritant to the courts, and to the appellate system,
and because they haven't really presented new evidence, they're just languishing. The more you get into it, the more you take sides and say, "This guy really does sound innocent, and I hope he prevails, and how is this going to work?" The epitome of this is when they get to, and almost everyone does this, they even get to that third part of the classic story structure where it appears hopeless, because all their appeals have been exhausted.

Maybe they've even been to the Supreme Court and been denied, and yet, you still got these people that are fighting for them, so what are they going to do? They have to have new evidence, et cetera, something that makes a difference. Well, to have them win in the end, and sometimes they lose in the end, but it's still a satisfying ending because you find out, "Well, that guy was guilty, and so it's good that he's still there, or she's still there." What's the epitome of this is that because it's on Netflix, they don't show the commercials, so you just get about a 42-minute segment, but they show where they would have had commercials, how they fade and fade back in. Every one of those, I've watched, I think six or seven of these out of the eight that are there so far, every time they go to a break, they leave you at a cliffhanger. They're saying, "Then, the phone call came that changed everything." Or, "I assume that I was just going to be there for the rest of my life."

Those types of things where you can't wait till they come back, and you find out, you get the pay-off of that set-up. That's a
perfect example of non-fiction written as fiction. If you have access to Netflix, look for *Death Row Stories*, and I think you'll see this is a great example.

**David:** *Death Row Stories.* Jerry, I think a lot of people have benefited previously from your recommendations for TV shows that have great story-telling. I know you've talked a lot about *Downton Abbey* before, you've mentioned a couple of others, but I'm writing that one down, because I know that if you enjoy it, and you think the story is good, then I'm probably going to enjoy it as well.

**Jerry:** Yeah, it's really something special.

**David:** It's great. All right, Karen, thank you for that question. The next one, Jerry, comes in from Eric. This is interesting. I don't think we've had a question along these lines before, but Eric says, "Although the majority of Christian authors, artists, and composers, et cetera, receive the full income of proceeds to their vocation, perhaps with tithe paid, a few such as C. S. Lewis, refused to personally benefit from such revenues and rather gave all, or substantially all of their proceeds to charity. Understanding that this is a matter between the author and God, my question is, do you have some thoughts and/or guidance in this matter?" Eric emailed that question. Eric, thanks for sending that. Jerry, what do you say?

**Jerry:** Yeah, thanks for that question, Eric. I really think this is a matter of personal choice, obviously. We've seen excesses,
we've seen people get just ridiculously wealthy on some things, and they did them for the sake of ministry. Then, all these money rolls in, and so, we tend to watch, what are they doing with that money? I tend to be frankly more critical of people who, where part of their ministry is asking for money, where people are donating, and then they wind up living in mansions and driving fancy cars and living the high life. You think, they're really doing this on people's gifts that are intended for this ministry that they've been moved by, and that they want to help encourage. It may sound a little judgmental, but people do watch that. For people who have never asked for money but sell their wares, or their songs, or their books, or whatever, I think it's a little different standard. What they choose to do with their wealth is really up to them. We do look to them to say, are they generous? Are they thinking of others? Are they taking care of their family, et cetera? Or, are they just appearing to do this for the sake of the material success.

In the instance of, say, Dr. LaHaye and myself, we were active in the Christian ministries and writing, he was writing non-fiction, I was writing fiction mostly, and we were doing okay. Then, Left Behind hit, and it was just such a ridiculous phenomenon, that we really had to struggle because we were both raised in the tradition where you don't do things for money, and you don't do it for the sake of material success. You feel this tremendous responsibility for stewardship of these resources when they come in. I know a lot of people did criticize. They would look and say, "This is so successful. You
must just be doing it for the money." That wasn't our intent at all. Yet, there it was, there was these means. I remember Dr. LaHaye was a great example of mere generosity. He gave lots of money away to several Christian institutions. One of the things that Diana and I did, we recognize that when your income gets to that ridiculous level in this country, you get taxed at a ridiculous level, too. We just felt like God should not be getting less of our gifts from this than the government does. Whatever our tax bracket ... and at a point it was up to near 40% of the income that came in was taxed, and so we made sure that our giving and tithing generosity match that. Now, that still left plenty. You can't gripe even if you're giving 80% of your money in taxes and in gifts, but that's where I am on this. That I just think you need to let your worldview and your view of why you're doing this impact what you do with that income. I've been teaching and writing for more than 20 years, online and everywhere else, and so far, I haven't made any money of that. It's another way to add to its way to give back, and I'm thrilled to be able to pay that forward.

David: Thanks for that question, Eric, and I always enjoy hearing Jerry talk about new topics that maybe we haven't covered before, and certainly a personal question there, but I appreciate your honesty and your candor there, Jerry. That's always useful. For those of you who have joined in the last few minutes, and it's probably about 50 of you who have joined just in about the last five or seven minutes, let me recap as to what we're doing here.
This was originally scheduled to be a live online workshop for the guild. At the last minute, we decided to make a slight change. The presentation that Jerry and our team were preparing wasn't quite ready, and so we made the call knowing that our guild members would understand, and actually in the long term benefit from this change, we made the decision to make a switch and make this an extended Office Hour session, where we're doing nothing but questions and answers with Jerry. So many have already come in by email, the chat box is available as always if you want to type your question there. We're spending the next 75 minutes doing questions and answers.

Thanks for joining us. Thanks for being flexible. Our guild members are just ... They're the best, aren't they, Jerry? They always step up to the plate and over and over again seem to exceed expectations.

Jerry: Yeah, I knew that they would understand, and also, I think appreciate our transparency in just saying, we want this point of view webinar to be the best it can be. When we do get that finished, we're going to be happy to present that as well.

David: Certainly will, We understand that point of view really seems to be an issue overwhelmingly that is prominent in the guild, and writers are asking about that frequently. Because it's a topic that so many people want to hear about, we, and really Jerry led the charge on this, wanted to make sure it's at the
highest quality possible. Thanks for being with us and jump in, jump into the conversations, send us your questions, and we'll get Jerry's thoughts. Let's keep moving. We got a question from Norma via email, and Norma says, "I've been in a funk for a few months so, Jerry, how do I bounce back? I really feel like throwing in the towel, that I'm kidding myself about being a published writer. Do you have any words of wisdom?"

**Jerry:** Well, I've been talking a little bit about this lately, because we're encouraging people to stay at the task and follow proven methods and that type of thing. The big thing is, I think you need to look a little bit differently at how you're feeling. It sounds like you have something that's rooted in fear, fear that you're not good enough, that your writing is not good enough, or that you don't understand the business enough. If you, like you say, you feel like you're kidding yourself about being a published writer. I think it's important to not let that fear hinder you. Now, that's easy to say because if you're afraid, it's not good, then, you don't want to do it, and you don't want to be rejected. If you take a totally different view of that fear and say, "Look, maybe I'm right. Maybe it's valid and legitimate, and I do need to be afraid because the competition is fiercer than it's ever been. It's broader than it's ever been, and I'm probably not good enough to compete here, so what am I going to do with that?"

Turn it into motivation, and say, "I'm going to work harder than I ever have because I need to improve. I need to get to where I
can compete in this marketplace." And how bad do you want it? Believe it or not, I face this fear every time. People think I'm kidding because of all the books I've done, but I'm always afraid to be found out. I'm afraid that my next book, some publisher will say, "Wow, we thought you could write. We assumed you could write, but this is horrible." I sit there and think, I'm not going to do any short cuts. I'm not going to just mail it in because it's got my name on it, and they think because of that visibility it will sell. I want it to be the best it can be. I use that fear, and instead of letting it stop me, I turned it into motivation to do the absolute best work I can do and that leads me to discipline, and to work hard, and that will lead to success. I think it will for you, too, Norma. The very fact that you're worried about this, that you're maybe kidding yourself by being a published writer, I think it can be motivating to make you really do your best work.

David:  Wow, Norma, that gave me excitement, that gave me encouragement listening to Jerry’s answer to you, so I'm sure that that did the same as well. Not only for you but for several other guild members and that's a great opportunity for us to just re-emphasize that the guild is a place where not only can you learn the craft, and be surrounded by others who are learning and improving, you can also come here for encouragement and support. Jerry has been in every situation possible that a writer could be in so that, sometimes, can also include turning that fear into motivation. Thank you for asking that, Norma, we're glad you're here. All right, the next one came
in from Terry via email. Terry says, "The chapters of my book range from 12 to 22 pages, with an average of 15 pages. Is there an optimum number of pages for a novel chapter that readers prefer?"

Jerry: Well, I think because of the way, the kind of generation we're in now, we're in this screen generation, where attention spans are short, we want everything quick and in bullet form, that I do think people prefer shorter chapters. As far as some optimum number, when I'm reading a book, I might peek ... I never read ahead, but I might peek to see where the chapter ends. If it's a 30-page chapter, I might say, "I'm going to not do that until I've got enough time. I'm not going to start reading that before I know I have to run to a meeting, or go to dinner, or whatever." As a writer, I try to keep my chapters fairly short so that people can say, "I'm going to read this one more chapter before I go, and then I'm going to be shameless and leave it with a cliffhanger." They peek ahead and go, "I'm going to sneak one more in." I got a letter from a guy one time who said, "I've got a bone to pick with you." He said, "My wife said she was going to make dinner after the next chapter, it's now 2 a.m., and McDonald's is closed."

That was my goal, to grab people and hold on to them, so I would urge a medium to short range, but then, James Patterson has changed the field for everybody, the great general market novelist. He has chapters as short as one sentence. You turn the page, it says, Chapter 22, and there was a sentence that says
whatever the guy did, and you go, "There's a big space in the bottom." You turn the page, and it's the next chapter. To me, that's very freeing, because you can have chapters any length you want, and you can vary them, too. He might have a long chapter, too, he just does whatever he feels right. I know he is aware that that's quirky to have a chapter that's a sentence long, or a paragraph or two long, but it really has helped me, because I usually shoot for 10 or 15 pages of manuscript. If I've told a gripping scene and feel like it ends at just the right spot, and it's time to move to a new chapter, I might look back and go, "Wow, you've unwritten four or five pages here."

Well, so what? The market has changed in that regard. Nobody is going to say what's wrong with my book. Enjoy that freedom, and do what works best for your book.

**David:** That's a great question, Terry. Thank you for asking that. A lot of people have asked chapter-related questions, and length, and it's always good to get Jerry's perspective there. All right, the next one came in from Kelly, and Kelly says, "Can you tell me what you think of the premise of my novel?" Oh, Kelly taking full advantage of Jerry's offer via email. This is great. "A broken woman abused as a child spends her entire life looking for the one man whose absence forced her into the hands of an evil man. She will stop at nothing to find him."

**Jerry:** Yeah, Kelly, I think clearly there's a big concept here, and also, a fairly common one. I don't say that as a negative, but women,
especially from broken homes and abused, et cetera, tend to grow up with curiosity, and sometimes desperation to find their real fathers, to either confront them or to find out if they still love them or what happened, they're just curious, and stopping at nothing to find, and this ... That makes your book. That's the quest, the journey, and of course, it deserves a big pay-off. I would say, "If you're going to use this as an elevator pitch," and that's the term we use for that one or two sentences, about the length you got here. What if you just happened to run into a publishing executive on an elevator and you've got only the time between when you meet them and the time they'd get off to pitch it, "Would this work?" I would say this would need ... I like the fact that you don't name her, or name the title, or get into anything extraneous because it's the idea that has to work.

You have to pitch an executive on whether this would be gripping and compelling, and possibly sell to a lot of people. I think this is, as I say, the good part of being common, is there's a lot of people in this situation, and the difference, what will make it work or not is how you render it. Can you tell a gripping story that has a really engaging heroine? I would say you might want to be just a little more specific on that last sentence. I'm not saying to tell the story, but maybe instead of, she'll stop at nothing to find him, you might say, this story involves her lifelong search and all the things she had to face to finally confront him or find him. This is not the place to hold back and hint at things, like she'll stop at nothing, or we wonder, did she find this person whose absence forced her into the hands of an
evil man, or who the evil man is. It's not back cover sell copy, it's a little bit of a synopsis to say, "Here's what it's about."

You might even be able to say, word it in such a way that he ... That we know she does find him. You don't have to tell exactly what happens, but it either completes her quest, or the cycle, and it's good, or it's sobering, or whatever. Just a little bit more specific, but not much longer. I do think you've got a good concept here.

David: That's an encouraging word, Kelly, be excited about that. That's terrific. Thank you for jumping in and taking full advantage of Jerry's offer, that nothing's off limits here, so I'm glad you could join in the conversation. All right, the next one, Jerry, came in from Judy. Judy says, "How important is the title of one's book?"

Jerry: I like that question, because I've said in other venues that the titling is the publisher's purview. They will title the book in the end depending on how long you've been in the business. They might give you a little more input, or consider your ideas more, but it's really up to them in the end. However, the point of a title is to attract the reader, and have them wonder, what is this about or think they know what it's about and that's why they want to read it. I always work really hard on titles. I'm one who titles ... I do my title first. I write my book based on the title, and it may change. I might get to the end and think, there's a better title for this, but it helps me to have a title to write to.
Then, I try to have the best, most evocative title I can when I submit it, because I'm trying to gain the attention and the impression of that first reader, my agent, or the acquisitions editor. Even if they're not going to stick with it, even if they change it, it needs to be good enough to get their attention and have them know that you're a thinker, and you're creative. I think what I'm saying is it's pretty important.

**David:** I got that. I gathered that from your answer, so that's good. Thank you, Judy, for asking that question. I'm glad you could participate in the conversation. Jerry, we've got two questions that came in from Bob, and we're going to put both of them up here and address them separately, but I'll go ahead and read both of them. Then, you can take them as you decide. The first question, Bob says, is, "Will the guild continue even with you now having this additional mentoring program?" Then, the second question is, "An agent recently posted that he's looking for people with a large platform. That implied that an author with a mediocre book, but a large platform, may have greater success than an author with little or no platform, but an excellent book." What are your thoughts on that question, Jerry? If you want to address Bob's first one, that's fine also.

**Jerry:** Yeah, let me start with that first one. Yeah, the new big novel writing program is called Your Novel Blueprint, and it's a step by step guide. As you probably know, it's a fairly high ticket item, so it's not going to have thousands of people in it the way that the guild does. I don't see this impacting the guild at all as
far as hampering my time for keeping up with all students, and interacting with you on the forum, and doing these live events, and that type of thing. Yeah, no question about ... The guild is a top priority for me, and I love having that daily access, really. On this other issue about platform, you've really nailed it.

When an agent or a publisher says they're looking for people with large platform, that does imply that the platform is more important than the writing, and that's disappointing to me, and yet, it's the reality of the business. We probably have all seen this, if you see a motivational book by some well-known speaker, or some well-known pastor, or somebody that's got 20,000 people in their church, or hundreds of thousands who listen to them on a radio program, or watch them on television.

The publisher is so interested in that platform, in that audience, because they need to have sales, that they will sometimes say to the guy, "What is it you want to say to your audience, we'll put a writer with you." Because either they know that person is not a writer, or wouldn't have the time, because they've got this big ministry or whatever it is they're doing. We do wind up with books where the platform and the audience seems more important than the writing. It's unfortunate, but it's true. Then, the opposite of that, what you talked about, or the other side of that is that maybe a new writer with a really great idea, concept, and happens to be a great writer is so unknown that the publisher goes, "Well, this is only going to sell a few hundred copies to his friends and neighbors, and loved ones." Now, my
feeling is, I wish that they would go back to the way it was, an old school, the way it was when I started out, where we were all unknown and unpublished. There were a few, I suppose, people that had big platforms, but that wasn't even a term then.

We sent our manuscripts in hoping that our writing and the concept, and the content would get the attention of an agent, or a publisher, and they would see it and see the potential, and take a chance on it, and they would help build that audience, by publishing the book, and by saying, "We've discovered a new author. We think you'll love this story." That's how careers have been made. In fact, most of the main writers you'd name off the top of your head, if you're just naming five of them, say, Stephen King, or John Grisham, or people like that, and in the inspirational market as well, started out with a good book and the ability to write. I guess I'm commiserating with you, that that has changed and so my encouragement would be, if you happen to be one of those unknown writers that has a better book than somebody with a big platform, I wish I could tell you that there would be publishers who would take a chance and recognize that, but to help yourself the most, you do want to start building your platform now.

It may never be as large as somebody, as I say, who has got 20,000 people in their church, or whatever, but you need a blog, and you need a social media presence, and you need to become known as an expert on something, even if it's just fiction that you're writing, or whatever. Start building that tribe
because that is what the publisher is going to ask first thing, is what kind of orbit does this person run in, and is it big enough for us to want to pursue it?

David: Thanks for those two questions, Bob, and again, to reiterate what Jerry already said in the response to that first question, the guild is absolutely continuing. This is, many of you have seen, the Your Novel Blueprint program teasers, or some of the information about that, but that's totally separate, and it is different from the guild, and we're making many, many plans for a lot more to happen within just the Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild. Rest assured this is not going anywhere. Jerry, let me take just a second to remind some folks, we've still had probably another 20 people jump in, but we're about 30 minutes in, just a little bit more than 30 minutes in to our session today. We're doing up to 90 minutes of questions and answers with Jerry. This is a little bit of a shift from the previously scheduled live online workshop on the topic of the point of view, but we will be getting back to that soon, so watch for your standard announcements about when that workshop is going to actually take place.

We're doing questions and answers right now, and we've got a lot of them to get to, so let's jump back to it. The next one, Jerry, came in from Becky. Becky emailed in and said, "I understand good editors are booked months in advance, so when do you
start the process to book them? Maybe you could address the steps from the start of putting words to paper, to the end."

**Jerry:** Well, you're clearly talking about having your book edited by someone before you submit it to an agent or publisher. My goal is to get your writing to the point where you can be a ferocious self-editor and not have to engage an outside editor, because the publisher has its own editors. If they take your book, they're going to edit it anyway. If you do engage an outside editor, and submit the book, then, are they buying your writing or are they buying somebody else's editing? Now, that evades the question. If you do want to book an editor, I think there are a lot of them listed in the writer's guide, and in the inspirational market writer's guide as well. They can be booked a long time in advance, but if you know you're going to finish a manuscript by ... within a certain amount of time, I would say, you might want to start contacting them and saying, "If I have a manuscript ready by August, or March, or whatever, can I get on the docket?" That might help you to be sure to finish your manuscript. Sometimes, it's hard to fulfill our self-imposed deadlines, but if you know that you've gotten on to the schedule of a busy editor, and they will take it at a certain time, then, you're bound to finish.

But do think about the idea that you want to get to where you're submitting stuff that's not been edited by a professional, because you might feel obligated. You aren't, but you might feel obligated to tell the publisher that it's been edited, but that's
going to make them wonder whether this is your quality or the editor's quality. Let's get you to the point where it's your quality. You sent it, and if they like it, it will always still need ... Even my stuff, when I send it in, I know I'm going to be edited by the publisher. They have editors and proofreaders, and they've got what they call substantive editors who look at the whole big picture. They've got line editors who are looking at every line, and word, and bit of punctuation. That's all part of the business. Let them pay for it, instead of you.

David: Thanks, Becky for that question. I'm glad you're here with us, as always. The next one, Jerry, came in from Lynnetta. Lynnetta says, "As I'm learning through the guild, I feel like I started all wrong. I'm halfway through writing my novel, and yet, I just want to scrap the whole thing and start over, but I feel I have already spent so much time on it and I want to see it through to completion. What kind of advice could you give me in this situation?" Jerry, Lynnetta needs some help. What do you have to say to her?

Jerry: Well, usually, my go-to answer is to trust your gut. Now, your gut is telling you two things here. One, you want to scrap it and start over. If that's where you ended your question, I would have said, "Do it." You say, you've already spent so much time, you want to see it through to completion. I think because of what you've learned, and that's one of my goals, is to say to people, I don't know why we all think we can do this. We start something new, and we think we can jump in and just do it, and
we find out, when we really get into the professional area, "Wow, there are a lot of things I didn’t think about and a lot of things I needed to know. Now, I know them, now, I can improve my manuscript." You might try this. Read through what you've got, make some notes, just a few brief outlining type notes. Set it entirely aside so you're not tempted to say, "I'm adding to this, or just fixing it." Start over, and what is the best of what you have written will come back to you, you'll include it.

You also have all these knowledge that you've gained here, and you'll structure it better, you'll outline it better, you put in the things that need to be there, to grab the reader from the get-go and not let go of all those things that maybe you weren’t up to speed on. Now, if you've got certain passages or scenes that you just love and really think they're necessary, you could go ahead and save those somewhere else. When it's time to write that scene, use the original and spruce it up based on what you've learned, but trust your gut. If you feel like you really need to start over, start over. If you've got so much into it that you want to see it through, you may find that frustrating, because trying to fix something based on new knowledge can sometimes ... You just wind up running in circles and saying, "Am I making this better? Am I just making it different?" Some form of starting over, I think, would be probably in order here.

**David:** Lynnetta, I kind of chuckled as I was reading your question. Certainly, I'm not making light of your situation but just feeling the tension that you're going through, and that you were willing
to express here with Jerry and with the entire guild in your question. Jerry, I feel like the guild members that benefit from the most are those like Lynneta, who are willing to be vulnerable, be very honest about their current situation and put the details out there. Those are the ones that seem to really be able to get the most out of your perspective and the guild as a whole, don't you think?

Jerry: Yeah, two things I often say is that, one of the first things you need to do to be a ferocious self-editor is to develop a thick skin, and take input, and take criticism, and that includes from yourself. When you're looking at this and you say, "I'm not sure that it's right." Or, "I don't feel that quite works." You're right, and your reader will feel that 10 times over, so follow your gut. The other thing is, I often say, too, is that we need to allow ourselves to be bad at new things at first. When you were learning to walk, you were toddling, and you fell, and you had to roll over and get up. The same thing with riding a bike, or learning to cook, or learning to dance. We allow ourselves, we cut ourselves some slack in those areas, do it here, too. You like the idea of being a writer, you had some fun with it, you started to tell a story, then, you got into this and said, "Wow, this is not a hobby or a pastime. This is the real deal." Say, "Okay, fine." Maybe that first start was bad. You didn't know any better. You're just trying. Now, you know a lot more, and let's go to the next stage.
**David:** Wow, thank you for being with us, Lynnetta, and for asking that question. I know others have benefited from Jerry's thoughts as well. All right, the next one came in from Audrey. Audrey says, "Is there any benefit to," I believe I made a typo here, so let me just read what it should be, "Is there benefit to be achieved from taking the Your Novel Blueprint program if my only interest is in writing an inspirational memoir as well as other non-fiction?"

**Jerry:** No, probably not. If your only interest is writing a memoir or non-fiction, this is specifically a fiction course. We're taking a deep dive, microscopic look at every aspect and every step from your first word to your last in writing a novel. Now, there are always things, like when we have workshops in the guild, that are talking about novel elements, like conflict and tension, and dialogue, and that type of thing. I think those are valuable to any writer, because as I said earlier ... I don't know if you were with us yet, but I was talking about this *Death Row Stories* on Netflix, where they're non-fiction but they're so gripping because they have those kind of elements, the cliffhangers, and the things to keep your interest. There's benefit, but for the Your Novel Blueprint, that is exclusively getting you from page one to the last page of your novel. As much as I'd love your business, I'd have to say, if you're only interested in non-fiction, that's probably not for you.

**David:** That's something you can always expect from Jerry, is to be very upfront and honest about the specifics of what a specific ...
The specifics of what a specific, how redundant is that? The specifics of what a program or a course is going to include and Jerry is very upfront with people about whose something is for, and who it's not for. I'm glad you asked that question. That does clarify things. We've actually received a few different questions along those same lines, Jerry. We're going to get to another one a little bit later that has a slightly different take, but in the same vein. Audrey, I appreciate you asking that question and hopefully that clears things up. Next, let's go to something that came in from Keith. Keith says, "What is a good method for establishing writing accountability with an online group when everyone is working at different skill levels, writing speed, and phases in their own project?" Then, an additional question, Keith said, "When should a new writer have someone else provide feedback on their work and progress?"

Jerry: Well, I think it's not a problem if everybody's working at different skill levels and speed in their own projects, because accountability is simply you telling them, "Here's what I feel I need to do by next week. Here's how many pages I think I need to produce. I need to finish up my research, or my editing, or whatever." Then, they're going to say, at that time, when that date comes, "How did you do? Did you make it? Did you finish what you needed to do?" Even if they're way ahead of you, or way behind you, you're simply accountable to each other, and maybe they're saying to you the same thing, "I'm almost done. I've got to write my big denouement, my climax, so that I can get to this epic ending." And you ask them that same thing, even
though you may not know how to evaluate it, "Did you make your deadline? Did you do what you plan to do?" That's accountability. As far as when a new writer should have someone else provide feedback on their work and progress, the tricky part here is, who's giving the feedback?

If you need encouragement, show it to your mom, or to your favorite aunt, or whoever, some loved one who loves you. If you really want critical input, find somebody who's been published, and who has been edited and knows the business. Now, that's not always your writing critique groups, those are good, usually, what we have in writing critique groups too often is everybody is a beginner. They either like everything that anybody else writes, or they hate everything that somebody else writes. Both of those extremes are not helpful. It doesn't help you to go to 10 people that are all hoping to be published and have them tell you, "That's fantastic. It's fantastic." Then, you're not able to sell it because it's not fantastic, and a professional could tell you that. Again, those two things, if you want encouragement, there are plenty of people who'll encourage you. If you want some real hard input, you might go to a friend you trust and say, "Look, be honest with me, with this script, would you really read this? I know you're not a professional in the business, but as a reader, does this compare with stuff that you like to buy and read?"

A true friend will tell you the truth, but again, if you can find ... We try to provide that in the forum on the guild and other
venues, where somebody who's ahead of you and who does know the business can give you solid input on what's working and what's not.

David: Thanks, Keith, for those questions. I appreciate you being here and participating in the conversation. Jerry, Lynn sent in the next question. This was both by email, and then also on the chat box. We're going to get to this one next. Lynn says, "Are there writers whose works you recommend for reading and study within the genre of Christian non-fiction, especially in the categories of lifestyle, spirituality, and inspirational writing? Also, is there a Biblically credible Christian fiction writer who handles the supernatural will?" A couple of different questions there from Lynn.

Jerry: Yeah, if I was to just limit it to two or three names, as far as Christian non-fiction, I don't think you can do better than Philip Yancey, for one. Max Lucado is another ... Just brilliant. There aren't too many pastors who really are good writers. They often have ghost writers, but Max is, himself, a writer, and an award winner, and a best seller, so that's a good one. Philip Yancey has been described as the thinker who writes. He's going to be a little more academic, but really deep stuff and really thoughtful stuff. That'd be a good place to look. Then, the Biblically credible Christian fiction writer who handles supernatural will, a lot of people like Ted Dekker in this area, and of course, Frank Peretti from way back, with This Present Darkness. I'm not quite sure what you mean by, handles the
supernatural will. Some people think that both of these guys were too speculative, and were assuming what supernatural things would look like, and whether they had Biblical basis for that, they probably did, and could tell you, but they don't tell you in the novel, they just write it.

Those are two popular ones, if you're not familiar with them. There's, her name is escaping me, but look up ... If you look up Ted Dekker, you'll see that he wrote a couple of books. I think, or at least one ... Her first name Tosca, is it Tosca Lee. Anyway, I'm pretty sure the first name is Tosca. She's really well-thought-of in this area as well, and a very creative writer, so there's a few to look at.

David: I was on mute again. Sorry, Jerry. I started responding and then realized nobody could hear me. Those are great suggestions as always. I think you're right, though, Tosca, I don't know how you pronounce the first name. Tosca, Tosca, but you're right, Tosca Lee. That could be a great one to check out. I'm always excited to hear Jerry's recommendations. You know that those are well-vetted and that you'll enjoy it. Thanks, Lynn, for those questions. All right, let's go to a question that came in from Mary. Mary says, "Since I plan to write topic sequels for my non-fiction book, I like the idea of trademark incorporating the four topics of my book. I know of a local non-professional artist who wants to work the idea with me. Jerry would you recommend creating a trademark for blogging pre-publicity and getting it registered on my own, and what is
expected in remuneration to the artist? Or, should I wait, submit suggestions to a publisher, seek their approval, and give them the opportunity to handle the idea?" Several different things there from Mary, as I struggled to read it out loud, but Jerry, what comes to mind here?

Jerry: Yeah, I think I would lean towards the latter, and if you get accepted by a publisher, and it's a series, and is topical, they might let you trademark a name for it. You can't trademark or copyright titles of individual book. You could write a book and title it *Gone With the Wind* if you wanted to, it would be silly, but you could do that. Now, on the other hand, like with the *Left Behind* series, our individual titles could be copied and some have, there are other books called *The Mark* and *Armageddon* and things like that, but Tyndale House Publishers trademarked the term, *The Left Behind Series*, because they wanted to identify with what that means, that means the books in that series and all the ancillary things that go with it. As far as, if you do your own trademark and have an artist, remuneration really is based on how well-known that artist is and how busy. You could go to an agency and they could charge you a lot of money for a trademark icon of some sort. You'd get somebody who's just a great artist and student, and friend, and they might do it very inexpensively.

That's going to depend on who you go to. It's often seen as a sort of amateur's move to a publisher when beginning writers or unpublished writers come to them with something that has
their own artwork or a friend's artwork in it, is trademarked or copyrighted. They get the impressions that this person's afraid somebody is going to steal this. It's so rare that that happens. Also, you need to know that anything you write is automatically copyrighted when you write it, and you can put a copyright sign on it yourself, but as far as trademark, that's a little different and I would lean toward the end that, that let the publisher do it. Because as was the case with Tyndale, they wrote the phrase, but they wanted that trademarked, and so it's always rendered the same way, and they took responsibility for registering that and we didn't have to do anything.

**David:** Thanks, Mary, for those questions. Glad to have you here with us. Jerry, we've got a few more that came in by email. Then, we're going to jump to some to others that have come in to the chat box, the question box, since we've been live here. Let's go to one that came in from Donna, Dr. Donna, actually. She says, "Have you considered marketing Your Novel Blueprint course to non-fiction writers? Multiple references focused on non-fiction writing suggest using techniques from fiction. I've jumped into your course as a non-fiction guinea pig, perhaps you should grab a few of ... Grab a drift of us as research piglets." Jerry, we addressed a question from Audrey earlier, kind of in the same vein, but what are you thinking in terms of what Donna is asking?

**Jerry:** Yeah, I actually was almost hesitant to turn down a non-fiction writer, except that she specified that she only plans to write a
memoir and other non-fiction. My feeling is, this is so heavily concentrated. It just is. It's 100% concentrated on you writing a novel. We had another little piece of promotion that we sent out, where we said, fiction writers only. My first response was, "Well, I don't want to limit it. If a non-fiction writer wants to write a novel, they should be encouraged to do that." As we talked it through, we realized that if, say you were the target market there, if you saw something that said fiction writers only, and it's called Your Novel Blueprint. That didn't seem like that would stop you. You're a non-fiction writer and you're saying, "I'll take a peek." My hope is that if you're in there, you're going to say, "Well, I'm going to try this. I'm going to write a novel." Now, there is plenty of stuff in there, I should said, that does ... It will impact non-fiction, because if you write non-fiction in such a way that you have the drama and the dialogue, and all that tension and everything, that helps.

This is so concentrated that if you weren't planning on ever writing fiction, I would say, you might be able to get that stuff elsewhere. I love to have non-fiction people do it. In fact, we often talk about the number of books I have written. My first 17 books were non-fiction, and I had thoughts about writing a novel someday, and thinking about it, because there's a little bit of glamour to it. You think, that's one thing to be an author, but to be a novelist, that's a whole different kettle of fish. Sure enough, one of my former editors was editing a series of novels, and he needed one more for his package. He called me and he said, "You've talked about writing a novel, but you haven't ever
done it. Would you like to try one?” I loved that idea. I was a non-fiction writer. I might not have bought a novel writing course at that time, but on the other hand, I might have, even though I had this track record as a non-fiction writer, because I want to learn everything I could before I wrote that novel. For me, it worked out, and there aren't too many people that write both non-fiction and fiction, or at least successfully, but if you can, it's a lot of fun.

David: Thank you, Dr. Donna, for that question, for being with us, and for being willing to test it out. Interested to hear your thoughts and your feedback on the Your Novel Blueprint Program. Tina asked the next question. Tina wrote in in response to our email this morning, Jerry. Tina said, "One thing I would like help with is writing a book proposal for a memoir. I have information on writing a non-fiction book proposal, but it seems like it wouldn't fit into that formula."

Jerry: Yeah, that is a bit of a hole in the market, I think. I assumed that you've done an Internet search and just said book proposal for memoir. There has to be something there. That would help if you haven't done that, and somebody has to have dealt with that. I do like the non-fiction book proposal suggestions from Terry Whalin, W-H-A-L-I-N. I don't recall specifically if he deals with memoirs, but the big difference, as you know, is that a memoir is going to be written in first person. It's going to be your stories, but it needs to be theme-oriented. Rather than just, "Here are the highlights of my life." It's not just an
autobiography that starts from birth to present, you want to say, "In essence, this story, this memoir is about how I overcame this, or how I dealt with this or that." Then, the anecdotes you choose fit that theme. That's really all that a publisher is looking for when you're proposing a memoir. The fact that, if you were a household name, they would need a paragraph. Do you want a memoir from Britney Spears or Harry Connick Jr., or somebody that's famous, and how they got into the business, or how they ... before they were well-known.

The publisher goes, "Sure, I would." Let's do it. Find a writer. Get it done. If you're writing your memoir and it is theme-oriented, that's what's going to be key to them, is what is the theme, what are you saying? What can we learn from this person when we don't have that built-in curiosity, where they're saying, "Oh, I've heard of her, so I want to know what her life is all about." The big key is transferable principle, so if you overcame abuse, or if you overcame addiction, or if you were raised in a blended family, and you have lots of anecdotes that fit that and that can be transferred to the reader. The big difference between a memoir and fiction, in fact, the big difference between non-fiction and fiction is that, I should not ... I guess, I shouldn't have said there was a difference. We always want to think the reader first, but really, I think the mistake people make with memoirs is they think it's about them.
A memoir really needs to be about the reader. The reader wants to read about themselves. Now, you don't know them, you don't know their story, so you tell stories from your own life that you know that will resonate with them and they can say, "Well, I never had it that bad, but I'm facing this. This is what happened to her, so this is going to be good for me." If you pepper your proposal with things like that, that are clearly universal truths and will transfer, that will attract the interest of an editor, I think.

David: Thanks, Tina, for the question. I know that there's many memoir writers here as a part of the guild, so I'm sure that's going to be useful information for them as well, and keep us posted on how you progressed in the project. All right, let's move to a question that came in from Jeffrey, and I'm laughing because Jeffrey says, "Hey, coach," at the beginning. We haven't heard people refer to you as that Jerry, but I like it. Maybe we'll start doing that more. Jeffrey says, "Hey, coach, no worries about the change. Thanks for your patience today, Jerry, and flexibility." He goes on to say, "When do you know when you're done revising a novel? Is it good instinct, feedback, or something else?"

Jerry: That's a good question, because it is good instinct and it's what makes you a novelist, and it's not easy. I've often used the metaphor, or at least compared it to what happened to me as a child. My parents had four sons, and so when it came time for chores, we would rotate. One day, I would do the dishes, and
my brother would dry, and the other one put them away. The, next day, we'd switch, but somebody's day always included clearing the table and then wiping it off with a rag. I was the worst at that for some reason, and my mother would tease me. She'd say, "You don't really clean it as much as you rearrange what's there." I've seen myself do that with manuscripts, where I'm editing, and I want to change. I know it isn't right the way it is, so I change it, it isn't any better, it's just different. When I got to the point where I recognized when the best change had come about, that's when I realized that I was a novelist, and so, if that's what it's going to take ... You need to look in the mirror ... I would say, "Just think of the reader first."

Well, you're the first reader. You're writing stuff that you would want to read and just say, "Does this work for me? Which one is the best version?" Then, just trust yourself, and I think that will work for you.

**David:** Thanks for that response, Coach. I appreciate your honesty there. Jeffrey may be starting a trend here. What do you say?

**Jerry:** I was going to say, there are other names people could call me, so I'll live with coach.

**David:** That's true. We'll keep all of the good ones. That's good. Thank you, Jeffrey, for being here. The next question is from Lewis, and I know we're not doing an entire workshop on point of view, but Lewis wants to cover the topic a little bit anyway. Lewis says, "I'm looking forward to the point of view webinar,
but I always enjoy the question and answers. I do have a point of view question. My protagonist is the point of view character for the entire novel, with the exception of two chapters near the beginning, which I’ve intentionally put in the point of view of the antagonist, to be able to get into her mind. In the following chapters, the two interact but the story is always through the protagonist's point of view. Can this work?"

**Jerry:** It can work, and I like the idea that when they're together, it's true, just the protagonist's point of view. The fact that only two chapters are from the point of view of the antagonist might be an issue. I would challenge you to see if you can do those, still through the protagonist's point of view. It's not easy, but it can be done. My latest novel is called *The Valley of the Dry Bones* and I have the same point of view character throughout, and yet, he's living with a group of people. There are a total of 16 of them that have to live underground in this post-apocalyptic setting. Obviously, I want the reader to know something about all those people, and it all comes through his perspective, how they talk to him, what each says about the other. Somebody might be flattering him, or trying to make him feel good about something, and then, he talks to somebody else and finds out what they really said, or what they really feel. Then, he goes back to them to confront them on that, and then you see how they respond. Do they come clean? Are they still deceptive? People say one thing and do something else.
It's almost like if you only do the two chapters that way, it almost looks like you took the easy way out because you want the reader to really get to know the antagonist, but only for that brief section, and then, that should color the rest of the story. See if you can do it without taking the point of view of the antagonist. Another option is to use the antagonist point of view more than that. Sprinkle it throughout. In *Left Behind* I used two POV characters and I alternated between them. I would get one of them into a predicament where the readers wants to know what happens, and then I'd switch to the other one. I've talked about this before, but you always want to make it crystal clear whose point of view you're in. Don't have the reader wonder, "Where are now and who is this now?" There should be a clear break and a clear identification of whose point of view you're in. Depending on how intriguing your antagonist is, it might work to have the two share the load more equally.

**David:** Thanks, Lewis, for the question. I'm glad we could cover point of view just a little bit. We might get to a couple of other questions about that topic before we wrap up our session today, but I'm glad we could at least address your question, Lewis. Thanks for being here. Jerry, Greg wrote the next question and I believe he did it in response to an earlier question we addressed, where a member got your feedback on the premise of their book. Greg is taking advantage of the opportunity as well. Greg says, well, premise question, so here is his premise. "In an effort to frame the U.S., North Korea takes over millions of poorly built Internet-connected U.S. security cameras and
uses those to cyber-attack China's banking system. Only Jerry Barkley stands in the way and as usual, nobody believes him."
Does that, as a premise, stand out to you, Jerry?

Jerry: It's a big concept, which publishers do like. It'd be difficult, I think, in this context and in the amount of time I have for me to speak specifically to the details of it, but one thing you want to make sure of is that anything you propose like this, even though it's fiction, has to be absolutely possible, credible, doable, so that the reader buys the premise. If the idea of North Korea taking over millions of poorly built Internet-connected U.S. security cameras has any flaw to it, like reasons why that could never happen, or why it wouldn't make sense, that could ruin the whole thing. Make sure that when it's a big concept, that those details are feasible. Once they've bought your premise, you can go a lot of directions. It's just like the Star Wars. We know that it's fiction, and we know that's set in a galaxy far, far away, and so you just settle in and say, "Okay, I'm buying this. This is, in essence, a comic book story.

This is a fairy tale, and I'll buy that there's the resistance against the evil government, and then, anything goes. They've got all kinds of characters and caricatures, and creatures, and we buy it all, because we've bought the premise. Be careful of that, and I say, publishers like big concept fiction, and that's what this would be.
David: Thanks, Greg. Thanks for sending that in. It's always good to hear what people are working on, and to get that real-time feedback, so thanks for putting that out there, Greg. We've got just about 25 minutes left in our session today. More questions have come in. I can already tell you that we're not going to be able to get to you live, but as I mentioned at the beginning, we're treating this just like a standard Office Hour session. Meaning, at the very end, we're going to place a link into the box on your screen, for those of you who did not get your question answered live, you'll be able to click on that, log into the guild, type your question again, and then within the next couple of days, Jerry will give you an answer. I want to guarantee that everybody gets their question answered. One question per person as we always do, but I just wanted to preface that. We're going to get to several more in the next 25 minutes or so, but we're not going to be able to get to all of them, so watch out for that link as we wrap up here shortly.

All right, let's keep getting to as many as we can though. The next one came in from Natalie. Natalie says, “How is the book cover chosen? Do I hire an artist or is that something the publishers do?”

Jerry: Well, the big question here is whether you are going for a traditional book publishing deal or you’re self-publishing. If you self-publish, you’re the publisher, so you do everything and that’s one of the reasons that I urge writers, even new writers, to work hard at your craft, get your writings to a place where
you can compete it for the traditional book deal and you can move to self-publishing if you can ... if you just can’t land a traditional book deal. On a traditional book deal, they pay you for everything, and they ... because they’ve invested in it, they’re going to pay for printing and binding, and shipping, and marketing, and advertising, and all that stuff, editing, proofreading, they’re going to choose the book cover, and they’re going to hire the artist. Now, they might, and you’d want to do this when you send in your manuscript, you could have a half page that says, “Here’s what I see on the cover,” and describe it. They don’t have to, obviously, it’s their purview, so they don’t have to take it but that might help.

The best that you can do as far as negotiating how much input ... Even my publishers don’t give me the right of refusal where I can say, “I don’t like that one. Don’t do it. Let’s do something else.” Now, if I said that, they’d probably capitulate because they want me to be happy and they want to have a successful book, but technically, legally, what I’ve ... What I’m able to negotiate is, meaningful input, I think is how they word it. They don’t often offer that to new writers. They basically say, “Stay out of this. This is our business. We’ll do that.” No, don’t hire ... If you’re looking for a traditional book deal, don’t hire an artist and count on the publishers to do that and just ... The friendlier you are with your editor and within your relationships there, the more inclined they’ll be to say, “We’ll show you what we’re thinking about. What do you think? Is there anything that is ... that doesn’t work here, that would just
be the wrong thing to show on the cover?” That’s a fun part of the process, too, but yeah, let the publisher do that.

David: Thanks, Natalie. Thanks for that question. We’re going to move on to one that came in from Susie. Susie says, “When we are planning deadlines for our book, which can vary by thousands of words depending on the category, should we estimate the highest possible word and page count?”

Jerry: Yeah, I think that’s a good idea because if you go the other way, you’re going to be off-base. If you go this way and you wind up with a shorter book, you can finish it faster, and that’s great. Yeah, I always would estimate on the high end.

David: Excuse me. That’s great, Susie, thank you for asking that. We just decided to put a different question up on the screen, so as Matt is putting that on the slide for everyone to see here momentarily, let me start to read this question that came in from David. David is looking for some feedback, Jerry, on what he’s working on. David says, “I feel the need to start a novel portraying the backstory of the antagonist. He will eventually destroy the life of the protagonist’s father, this will create the inciting incident that drives the story forward, but my fears are all ... my fears are, all the experts say, start the drama with the protagonist, do not story with backstory or flashbacks. The antagonist has to be the bad guy, don’t be kind to him. My bad guy is egotistical. He has redeeming qualities but he’s driven by ambition, greed, and status. What is your advice, Jerry? What
is your advice, suggestions, or condolences?” I like how he phrases that, “And many thanks for this enlightening opportunity to finally complete my novel.” David, thank you for sending in that question. Jerry, what do you say?

Jerry: Well, a couple of things jump out of me. The first is, apart that I disagree with other experts. If they’ve told you the antagonist has to be the bad guy, don’t be kind to him. I know what they’re driving at there, but I think it’s interesting, always, to be kind to the antagonist or at least, to be sympathetic. If the reader can at least understand why the antagonist is doing what he or she is doing, that makes for a very interesting book. Now, usually, because there’s a villain, they overdo it. Maybe they’ve got what they feel is the right motive but they cause ... or they wreak havoc and cause destruction. You want the bad guy to be, in the end, hated or at least have people say, “I really want to see him get what’s coming to him.” But you also want to really develop his motivation, so it makes sense, at least to the antagonist. We don’t want villains to just have black hats and curly mustaches, and black capes, and they’re bad because they’re the bad guy. That’s not going to work.

Now the idea of starting with the antagonist’s story to set something up, it is going to be confusing because people will assume that’s the protagonist. If that works, and what you’re doing ... If it’s good to have that surprise, and then they get to Chapter 2 or whatever, and realize, he’s not the good guy, he’s the bad guy, it’s possible that could work. I would urge you to
try to start with your protagonist and have the trouble that he’s in ... Let’s see, what did you say he ... He destroys the life of the protagonist’s father, that is some deep trouble for the protagonist, and can easily be hinted at through dialogue without doing the whole flashback type of thing. The protagonist, from his perspective, whatever he’s doing, it’s all predicated on either the death of his father or the ruining of his reputation, whatever it was that the antagonist did. That’s a good way to introduce the antagonist without starting with him and confusing the reader.

Various possibilities there and ... but I like the way you’re thinking that your bad guy does have redeeming qualities and you know what drives him. That needs to become clear to the reader as well, and if they can resonate with him and identify with him, that makes for an even better villain.

David: Thanks, David, for that question, and excited to hear how that progresses for you as well. Brian wrote the next question and let me read this to you as Matt puts it up on the screen. Brian says, “One of the genres I want to write in are; detective, fiction, mystery stories. The story I’m currently writing is a murder in retrospect that is taking a look into a murder that occurred many years in the past. I want to write the story in a way that will be faithful to the conventions of writing such a situation, while at the same time, not boring my readers and keeping them on their toes. I’m even wondering if such a story would even appeal to a generation of people that desires heavy action
and fast paced scenes, because the story will involve a newlywed couple looking into a murder that occurred in their new house and some scenes will involve some back and forth conversations from a witness ... from witnesses from the past.” Jerry, it sounds like Brian has got a great concept here but also questioning whether there is an audience for it. What do you have to say?

Jerry: I feel your angst about the generation of readers who might want heavy action and fast paced scenes, and if that’s not your wheelhouse, don’t worry about that market. If that’s all they want, yours won’t be the one that they want to read but write to you and your ... and people who identify with you, and I kind of do. This idea of cold case files, and in this sense, it’s not professionals looking at your cold case files but a newlywed couple looking into something they’ve learned happened in their house. When you’ve got conversations with witnesses from the past, the key there is, people often say, you know what, it’s just dialogue. The pace has so much changed that you don’t have tension anymore, and you need the tension. Where will that come from? In my mind, in a situation like this, the witnesses can disagree with each other. Maybe they talked to somebody who was there and says something and just remembers this like it’s clear as day, and you talk to the next person who has every bit as much credibility, and they didn’t see it that way.
They saw it some other way. They’re trying to reconcile this, so that’s tension, and the reader will be saying, “There’s a set-up,” subconsciously, they’ll say, “There’s a set-up. This is going to have to be paid off. We’re going to have to find out who is right about this.” The couple, when they discuss it, they’re trying to figure out how two people could have this ... have such differing views of the same thing, and in their investigation, they find out there’s a reason these people would oppose each other, and that becomes a sub-plot. What do these people have against each other, and did they have anything to do this, et cetera? That’s the way to maintain tension. It doesn’t always have to be fight scenes and chases, and shoot-them-ups. You can maintain tension simply by setting up things that need to be resolved, and so that could be a lot of fun. Yeah, I agree that it’s a good concept.

David: Thanks, Brian, for jumping into the conversation here. Jerry, the next one comes in from Evelyn. This is kind of a process question about the guild and some behind the scenes stuff, but I think this might be of use and benefit to several members. Evelyn says, “This question is about the way you choose manuscript first pages for critiquing. I was in the first group of the guild and mine has not been chosen yet. I understand you can’t choose everyone’s submission, but my question is, is there still a chance that mine will be chosen since a new group of people have come into the guild, or should I submit it again?”
Jerry, do you want to explain a little bit about our process there?

**Jerry:** Yeah. It is tricky and frankly, it’s probably more than I expected it to be. We have so many submissions that we’re choosing such a small percentage and ... I haven’t discussed this with the team but actually, if I were a member and knew what I know as owner of the guild, I think I would submit again because ... We look over some and we pick a few for what I’m doing, and as I’ve said, not always by quality but by what would communicate most, and the most common problems, but the idea that we might go all the way back to the beginning, several months or more than a year, et cetera, before, is probably unlikely. We clearly probably saw yours and maybe it didn’t communicate but ... If there’s something different or if you just ... If you want, submit a new piece of writing, you probably would have a better chance to have it be chosen if it was something that’s coming in new.

**David:** I agree with-

**Jerry:** I’m sorry, David.

**David:** Go ahead.

**Jerry:** I was going to say that we’re trying to figure out a solution to this, because we’re trying to do more of the manuscript repair and re-write sessions in different formats. I don’t only do them in those sessions that are recorded and then posted. I’ve done
them as live online workshops. Sometimes we’ll do four or six, trying to get more of them in there but ... We’ve even toyed with the idea of having some of my trusted colleagues that I have worked with for years do either abbreviated versions of these, just look them over, so that everybody gets something. You either get a note back that tells what they feel about the concept, or if it’s a line or two. It does bother me to have this many people submitting and, obviously hoping they’ll be chosen and critiqued. These do take time. As you notice, I can rarely do one page and less than 10 minutes of explanation, and it takes me a lot longer than that to edit it beforehand and decide what I’m going to say.

It’s a labor-intensive process, and I don’t want to feel like I’m overpromising, that everybody should submit because someday you’ll be chosen. It’s a tough thing, but we are working on that and ... In answer to your question, I don’t think you should hesitate to submit something again.

**David:** That’s exactly what I was going to say, Jerry. Evelyn, we would definitely encourage you to submit your work again and we’ll see what happens from there. One of the other assumptions here, Jerry, is that the longer a guild member is involved with the group and the more teaching that they attend, and the more of your perspective and experience, and knowledge that they apply to their work, the more that their writing will change. That leads me to think that the work will have changed every several months. I don’t want to put a specific timeline on it, but
my assumption, Evelyn, is that you’re a different writer today than you were at day one of the guild, so this would definitely be a time to re-submit and it might be an updated piece, for sure. That would be worth your time in doing. All right, let’s go to the question that came in from Linda. Linda says, “I know fiction should start with a crisis. Does the same apply to non-fiction, such as Inspirational Christian living? If so, is an anecdote a good way to do so? What other suggestions do you have?”

Jerry: Actually, you’re right on the money, Linda. It does apply to non-fiction. It doesn’t have to be the same kind of crisis that comes up in a novel where whoever is the main character ... In an inspirational Christian living book, if you’re writing it, you sort of are the main character, I assume you’re writing in the first person and telling something you’ve learned or something you want to pass on. An anecdote is a good way to start. What you’re looking for in non-fiction is pain points. We often refer to that in marketing where we’re trying to satisfy somebody’s problem. It’s the same way in a book like this. If you’re writing a book about how to have a better prayer life or how to be better in your quiet time or whatever, you want to start by saying, in essence, “I know where you’re coming ... ” You don’t even have to refer to the reader, but you can say, “I struggled with my prayer life for many years until I discovered certain things.”

You can even tell an anecdote about when you were frustrated or ready to give up, and regardless of what the problem was, if
it’s something the reader can identify with, that’s what you want, and starting with an anecdote is a great way to do it, yup.

**David:** Thanks, Linda, for submitting that question. It sounds like you’re on the right track there. Jerry, the next question came in from Kim and it’s kind of a business process, behind the scenes question about publishers, so, interested to hear your thoughts. Kim says, “Would you discuss the publishing decision-making process? My agent submitted my book to 12 publishers about three and a half months ago, about four declined, one expressed interest in the licensing opportunity, what is that? One said they will consider for next year as they are full this year, and the others have not responded, and I’m not sure how to interpret all this. How long do publishers normally take to respond? Does taking this long likely mean no interest?” Kim is in the middle of it here, Jerry, with the situation. What’s been your experience and what’s your knowledge about that situation?

**Jerry:** Yeah, the fact that you landed an agent is the best ... is the most encouraging part of this, so somebody in the business, a professional, saw value and thought that it was publishable, commercial, and would work, sent to 12 publishers, and you’ve got ... At least three and a half months ago, as far as the answer to the question, how long does that take, how long do publishers take, they take forever. The fact that you’ve already got four who declined, that means they did read it and instead of saying, “If you don’t hear from us, that means we’re not ...
and maybe this is because you have an agent, they want to treat the agent right because the agents are eventually going to bring them successful stuff. One expressed interest in a licensing opportunity, it sounds like, if I had to guess, that whatever your book is about, they see a way to maximize that and sell a product that’s associated with it. If they’re talking about licensing opportunity, I hope that’s not a self-publisher where you have to pay something and they, virtually on consignment, I wouldn’t go that route, and I doubt your agent would want that either.

But if a publisher is interested in licensing your characters or your premise, or something like that, that could be very interesting. One that said they would consider it next year as they’re full this year, that seems a little naïve because it came to them from an agent. They can’t think an agent is just going to say, “Okay, fine. We’ll wait a year.” That agent is going to be shopping that thing, but I would say, if you don’t move it by next year, your agent should go back to that publisher and say, “All right, how does your list look now?” The ones who have not responded, there are still publishers who will say, “We get so many submissions. We can’t respond to them, so if we don’t ... If you don’t hear from us, we’re not interested.” I hate that, and especially if something came to them from an agent. That’s no way to treat an agent, it’s really no way to treat a writer either. In this day and age of technology, how much does it take to copy
a boilerplate paragraph that says, “Thanks so much for thinking of us. It doesn’t work for our list. Good luck.”

It’s the same thing as saying no, but it’s not ignoring the person. They’re making them wonder if they ever got it. Taking this long mean no interest. No, it doesn’t necessarily mean that. Inside a publishing house, it can be a very complex operation. A lot of stuff that comes in is parceled out to first readers. This could be interns, they could be college students, they could be just junior editors that are full time on staff, and they’re whipping through them pretty fast. They’re seeing if the subject works, if the query letter works, if the proposal works, does the writing engage? They might read the first chapter or two, and then, that’s a very small percentage of everything that comes in that they’ll pass along to their superior, and their superior then, has to own this and if they took it to what’s called the editorial board, and that’s made up of different people from mostly editorial and executives, and they’ll pitch it and say, “I think we need to look at this.”

Then, it goes to a publishing board, which is, marketing and sales, and the top executives, and it’s a harder sell, because they’re saying, “Haven’t we seen this a million times before? What’s unique? Does this person have a platform? Should we invest the money?” That takes time, and hopefully, if an editor in the publishing house sees real promise, like, “I love this book and I want to see it happen.” They, sometimes, will tell the agent, “I’m going to champion this book. I’m not promising yet,
but it’s going to pub board.” When it’s gone from editorial board to pub board, that’s a big deal even though they haven’t committed anything yet, so look for responses like that, and don’t assume that it means no interest. You said three and a half months, I would say, when it gets close to five months, you may not hear from them, but I’ve been surprised in the past, too. You just never know with publishers.

David: That seems to be a common phrase, behind the scenes with published authors, that you just never know what publishers.

Jerry: That’s right.

David: You speak that from lots of experience there, Jerry. That’s good. Kim, thank you for the question, and do keep us posted on how things go, especially over the next six weeks as you draw closer to that five-month timeframe that Jerry mentioned, eager to hear what’s going on. All right, our producer, Matt, is placing a link into the box on your screen. I want to give everyone a few minutes. We’re still going to do one more question here, but I want to give everyone a few minutes to be able to click on this link, and that’s going to take you inside the guild, as it always does, make sure you’re logged in, and this is a place only for live attendees, to type their question again, to guarantee an answer from Jerry. There’s been so many of you who have written in and given questions that we’re not going to be able to get to but, as Jerry has graciously offered to do, we are going to ... We are going to be able to ... We may have cut
out there just quickly, but just to reiterate, click on the link that’s in the chat box on your screen, type your question again, and Jerry will get back to you.

Elizabeth, Debbie, Sarah, Victoria, Lucy, Peter, Polly, Judy, Carol, Gerry, Katherine, and the dozen or so others that have written in, that I didn’t read, go ahead and type your question again. Jerry would love to give you some feedback. All right, let’s get to the last question of the day. This came from Lucy. Lucy says, “What are tips on layering in backstory without losing what I think is important details, but not slow down the story?” Jerry, you’ve talked about backstory a little bit previously. What do you have to say to Lucy?

Jerry: The key here is, that each time you go back to that, the hints about the backstory, you tell more. For instance, if early on, the characters are talking and one simply says, “Well, we don’t want a repeat of what happened last year.” And the other one says, “Yeah, don’t even ... Don’t have anyone talk about it.” Now the reader knows intuitively this is important enough to put here, that’s a set-up, and it’s going to be paid off, I want to know what they’re talking about, so then, the next time they get to that, you make it more specific. “If we have a repeat of Detroit, this is going to be a disaster.” And the other one might say, “Well, Marsha is not even going to be there, is she?” So you think, “Who is Marsha? What she got to do with it?” Each time you do it, add more and more, and more, until finally, it could be 100 pages in, somebody shows up from Detroit, and maybe
it’s Marsha, and they get into it. You want to make sure that your dialogue is not aimed at the reader.

Their dialogue needs to be aimed at characters, the characters need to talk to each other, and speak the way they would. So often, the biggest amateur mistake in dialogue is to do an information dump and have some character say, “Well, when you took ... stole my boyfriend in Detroit and then ran off to Hawaii and got lost at sea and ... ” It’s not how people would talk. They would all know these details, so they would just hint at them. Then, you might have a character who doesn’t know any of these and says to the main character, “So what in the world happened there? What really did happen in Detroit?” Then, you can start laying it out, and as you say, this is where you put your important details and it won’t slow the story. Plus, all those mentions of the backstory along the way are set-ups and that provides tension in the reader, and that keeps them turning the pages, and that’s our ultimate goal.

David: That is the ultimate goal. I’m reminded, Jerry, as you said that, you may have mentioned this but it made me think of the blog post that you wrote of why backstory is better than flashback that, I believe, was from late last year, so Lucy, that might be a resource worth revisiting as well. Always try and provide as many resources for our guild members as possible, that could be a useful thing for you to take a few minutes to read. All right. Jerry, thank you so much for your time today. Guild members, once again, thank you for your flexibility as we changed course
just a little bit. I do want to encourage you to watch for the notifications and the announcements that we’re going to be sending out. Our shift today is going to have some ripple effects for other content being released and provided to the guild. We’ll obviously make announcements about all of that, but Jerry is working on the next awesome master class. We’ve also got another manuscript repair and re-write coming up soon.

Our standard Office Hours is coming up, so we’ll be making announcements about all of those things, so just watch closely and we’ll look forward to you being a part of our content that’s coming up over the next several weeks. Jerry, anything else as we wrap up today?

Jerry: I just want to thank everybody for being flexible, and I found this invigorating, and I just hope you found it helpful.

David: Agreed, and thanks again for carving out 90 minutes from your day to join us here on the Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild, and we will look forward to being with you again next time. All right, this has been an Office Hour session on the Jerry Jenkins Writers Guild. Have a great day.

To watch or listen to the session, click here.