

WriterFest 2006 Article

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Library links aspiring writers with authors

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The Indian Trails Public Library hosts numerous writing groups offering people a chance to write stories and poetry, share them with their peers and get feedback on their work, but on Saturday, the library gave aspiring writers a chance to talk with published writers about the prospects of becoming published themselves.

The library's first WriterFest featured about a dozen Chicago-area authors offering their experiences and advice on how to enter the publishing industry. About 35 people came to the library (which serves portions of Wheeling, Buffalo Grove and Prospect Heights) to ask questions and meet the authors.

"There were a lot of good questions, and I thought the authors were very helpful and articulate people," said Michelle Shapiro, director of special programming at Indian Trails. "I thought it went very well."

The authors also said the crowd was lively and had many interesting questions.

"There was a lot of good interaction with the crowd, and intelligent discussion," said Arnie Bernstein, a Chicago author. "They were well-informed and knew why they were there."

"I was surprised nobody talked about money," said Renetta Dudzinski, an author from Rochelle, "which is the point, really. Otherwise, it's just a vanity thing."

The authors represented a variety of genres including true crime, children's books, science fiction, mystery and poetry. They also represented different avenues of publishing. Some had been published by traditional publishers by selling their manuscripts.

Others tried subsidy publishing, in which the author fronts the costs for production, marketing, distribution and other aspects of the industry. Some had started their own publishing companies.

Local poet

Buffalo Grove resident Michelle True hosts the monthly poetry workshop at the library and helped organize WriterFest. She said having a variety of genres represented, as well as publishers, was not a planned aspect of the workshop, but she was pleased to see it turned out that way.

True approached Shapiro about putting together WriterFest. Shapiro said she had wanted to hold an event featuring authors for years, and let True put it together.

"I was so thrilled when she offered to do it," Shapiro said. "I just offered the space and to get refreshments, and she did the rest."

True said she started contacting authors through various online groups, and had no trouble finding authors willing to participate.

Bernstein said he had attended panel discussions with authors while he was trying to become published, and found them to be helpful. Giving back to aspiring writers was a major reason he attended WriterFest, as well as telling people publishing can be a difficult, but rewarding, road.

"There's a lot of rejection, frustration and you hear a lot of no's," he said. "It takes patience to get through it. It's a racket, but well worth it in the end. You have to know it's part of the business, but if you keep hacking away, eventually something will happen."

Christian novelist

Dudzinski related her experience of trying to get her first Christian novel published. After spending \$6,000 and 18 months trying to get her book into stores, she decided to start her own publishing company.

"I learned a lot over the last three and a half years," she said.

True said she believes it is important for aspiring authors to hear those stories and learn from them.

"A lot of people want to write a novel," she said. "They want to know what publishing is about, but it's hard to find the information.

"We learned it as we were doing it," she continued. "We can help others by saying, 'Here's a trick I learned,' and it feels good sharing."

True also put together a packet of information about all the authors, including their Web sites and e-mail addresses, so the participants could contact the authors with other questions at a later date.

Shapiro said WriterFest was a good opportunity for those who attend the different writing groups at the library to learn more about writing and publishing. The library hosts Poetic License for poets once a month, as well as monthly evening and daytime writing groups.

True said she hopes to be able to host WriterFest at the library annually, bringing different authors each year to give out as much information possible about writing and publishing.