

Zaphon

February 2010



- *Anne Hamilton* ~ Australian Voices Part 2: Is the convict era really over?
- *Wendy Sargeant* ~ reviewing for Faithwriters



Upcoming Omega Writers Events

Sunday – February 7

2 - 5 pm

8 Warana St, The Gap

Omega Writers Meeting

The narrative hook

Craft your 'breakthrough' opening!

Many, if not most, publishing companies are deluged with unsolicited manuscripts. Because of the overwhelming volume received, a significant number of commissioning editors do not read past the first paragraph unless you've already impressed them. In some cases, an editor has made their decision by the end of the first sentence about whether or not to give you a 'go' and send your work out for a reader to appraise.

Bring the first chapter of your manuscript to our first meeting for 2010. We'll be actively working to craft a brilliant opening paragraph for participants.

We'll also be discussing and planning:

Forthcoming Events

(1) Bring Home the Book!

A set of special gatherings designed to support you in getting that book finished, or edited, or re-drafted by the end of the year. A small fee will be attached. For more details of dates and fees, ring Annie on (07) 3375 1775

(2) Writer's Retreat!

An intensive weekend designed to support you with prayer and technical expertise in shaping your writing and bringing it up to publication standard. Date and venue to be decided.

(3) Alpha2Omega Competition

Our fourth annual short story & poetry competition. The theme for 2010: *Life Changes*

Poems: to 40 lines

Short stories: to 4000 words

Prizes:

Short Story: first prize \$250 plus vouchers from Wombat Books to the value of \$100, runners-up \$25 + voucher from Wombat Books.

Poetry: first prize \$100 plus vouchers from Wombat Books to the value of \$100, runners-up \$25 + voucher from Wombat Books.

Entry fee: \$5 per entry or \$12 for 3 entries

Cheques to be made to payable to *Omega Writers*.

Entry deadline: 31 March, 2010.

Queries: inquiry@alpha2omega.org.au

Please read the guidelines. A number of entrants did themselves a disservice last year. When the standard is very high and the quality of the writing makes decision-making very difficult, then all other things being equal, it's those who follow the guidelines who make it through to the final round.

- ❖ No entry form is required; however names must not appear on the entry itself, only on the cover sheet.
- ❖ Name, address, email and title of work should appear on the cover sheet *only*, except for the title which should appear on each page.
- ❖ Entries should not previously have been published or currently under consideration for publication. Entries should not be submitted elsewhere during the competition period.
- ❖ Entries that have previously won prizes are eligible but only if they have not previously been published.
- ❖ Prize-winning entrants grant to *Omega Writers* the once-only right to publish their entries, should the organisation so desire.
- ❖ Entries should be typed, double-spaced, with 3 cm margins, one side of paper only, no staples or pins. Pages should be numbered.
- ❖ By entering the competition, the author warrants that the work is their own original composition.
- ❖ 2 copies of all stories or poems to be supplied in hardcopy. No email.
- ❖ Keep a copy of your entry. Entries will not be returned. They will be destroyed after judging is completed.
- ❖ Members of *Omega Writers* [excluding the executive committee] are permitted to enter.
- ❖ As usual, it is not necessary to write for children and young adults. However, works for that age group will be viewed favourably in the event of a new anthology along the lines of *GROW: Under the Southern Cross*.

❖ **MOST IMPORTANT:** the work need not be explicitly Christian in content but should not violate basic principles of love for God, love of others and respect for creation. This does not mean we want nice, soppy or sentimental stories. If you are unsure how this translates in practice, particularly with respect to children and YA stories and poems, you might like to purchase a copy of **GROW - Under the Southern Cross**.

❖ Send entries to: Omega Writers
P.O. Box 492,
Corinda QLD 4075 Australia

(4) The CALEB Prize

This new initiative by *Omega Writers* has developed as a result of various concerns about the direction of faith-inspired writing in Australia. It is apparent that many of our concerns are also actively shared by various overseas authors. This is a preliminary announcement and more details will be forthcoming in future issues of *Zaphon*.

The inaugural CALEB Prize for faith-inspired writing will be open to Australian & New Zealand authors & publishers, including self-publishers.

Eligible books must have been released between 1 January 2008 and 30 June 2010. (This timeframe will only apply to the first year of the CALEB Prize. In future, it will cover only an 18-month period.)

The writing need not be overtly Christian in nature but it must be evident that faith has influenced the work.

There will be 3 sections:

- (1) Fiction (including children's)
- (2) Non-Fiction (including devotionals)
- (3) Poetry

We are looking for quality, innovative thought, elegant presentation, excellent production values and appeal both for, and beyond, Christian readers. These are not all equal factors. We're looking for voices from 'Down Under' that have been muted by allowing marketability to be more important than the message.

The overall winner may come from any of the three sections and will receive a cash prize of \$1000. The winners of the other two sections will receive cash prizes of \$250. Discretionary cash or voucher prizes may be awarded in addition. Winners will be announced and awarded at the Word Writers Fair in Brisbane in November 2010.

Because we are aware that many members of *Omega Writers* across Australia would wish to enter this competition [including this editor], we are in the process of engaging completely independent outside judges.

Jeff Townsend, formerly of CMCA distributors, has kindly agreed to one of our judges. For a small extra fee, you can request a market advice report from Jeff.

What's it all going to cost to enter?

Five books + \$25

One book will be sent to a reviewer so a review will appear on our website.

One book will be used for our **1111 Freebooks** promotion in November. Yes, we're doing it again!

This means you get visibility on our website plus a link to your own website.

The remaining books will go to the judges.

[*On a side note:* Should your book be a recent publication and should you be interested in the possibility of a review in a number of Christian publications, including *Alive* and *Christian Woman* magazines, please contact the editor of *Zaphon*, Annie, who has details of the ever-diminishing number of places reviews can be easily obtained.]

Queries: inquiry@alpha2omega.org.au

More details in the next *Zaphon*.

(5) 1111 Freebooks

Yes, it's going to be on again this year. Same bat-time, same bat-channel. Starting at 11 am on 11 November, it'll be another 'taste of heaven' giveaway for booklovers. There will be new registration procedure this year! More details as they come to hand.

And now, on a personal note:

It's taken almost half my lifetime but my YA fantasy, *Many-Coloured Realm*, is about to be published by Wombat Books. In the decades since I started it, fantasy has become incredibly popular rather than a fringe genre; several of the ideas I thought of myself are less than original now; some of the uncommon names I used are now the heroes of other well-known fantasy sagas. But the things that were really close to my heart are still—almost unbelievably—untouched by any other writer. I always thought I had only half an original idea, but maybe I have three-quarters of one. In the last year, I inserted everything I've learned about numerical literary style and realised that this is probably the first prose work since the gospels to be written that way. (Plenty of poetry and letters but I don't know of any other prose.)

To celebrate, I have heaps of giveaways planned for the web-launch in June. Autographed books by professing Christians who write fantasy are just some of the prizes on offer if you buy this book during the first week of June.

Some time soon www.manycoloured.com will be up and running. Check it out.

Annie

A failure to submit...

You've been warned often enough, so you should know by now the consequences of not sending in your submissions for *Zaphon*.

Yes!!!! If I have to fill space, I get to throw exclamation marks around and write about mathematics, meteorites or the meaning of names. And this issue, it's meteorites that have grabbed my attention once more.

The latest crater discovery is, in fact, in Central Australia. There's an amazing place west of Alice Springs (no, for those of you who've read *The Winging Word*, it's not Gosse Bluff, but it's close!) It's my other favourite place in the Northern Territory: Palm Valley. Howzat for cool?!! Both of the places I've always wanted as settings for a novel are meteorite craters!!!!!!!!!! (Sorry about the explosion of exclamation marks but it is veeeeeeeeeeery exciting.)

I'm quite happy to share Palm Valley as a setting so let me tell you about it:

- (a) The rare red cabbage palms survive only here in Central Australia. Others of the same species can be found about 850 km away in Qld. Palm Valley is held to be the last remaining remnant of an ancient rainforest which covered Central Australia millions of years ago.
- (b) A legend survives of a group of white people coming out of the west and crossing the desert several hundred years ago from a shipwreck (Dutch?) on the coast of WA. When they could go no further, they settled in Palm Valley. Although this legend has been frequently derided, another older legend has just been discovered to be true.
- (c) The local indigenous people have a legend of a star falling out of the sky and landing in Palm Valley. (Interestingly, they have one about Gosse Bluff too about a group of dancing starmaidens who lost a baby.) This legend was the starting point for an Australian geologist who checked GoogleEarth and was startled to realise the location was seriously circular: that is, shaped like a crater. Evidence has recently been gathered to show that the shape was no coincidence and that is was indeed an ancient crater.

Of course, (a) and (c) are incompatible according to present scientific understanding of earth history. And how the Arrente people could get it so right, not just for Palm Valley, but for Gosse Bluff and Henbury as well, does seem to beg some serious questions which can't be answered easily if we hold to the present dating of the area. So, go to it, folks! There's mystery here to spare for anyone working on an Aussie outback novel.

Australian Voices Part 2

Convicts, colonials and what you should know about Christian books in Australia

Thanks to everyone who responded to the previous article. There wasn't going to be another but the information I gathered from many sources as a result of all those replies persuaded me otherwise. Although this article is about bookstores, it has a huge impact on you, as a writer or aspiring writer, so pay careful attention.

It appears that I'm far from the only person who feels that Christian bookstores in Australia no longer stock the sort of books I want to read. Although I am a booklover, I am discriminating enough not to want to throw my money away by buying *any* book on offer. Moreover, the world is small enough now that I can find something I want anywhere from a tiny shop in the prairies of Canada to a centuries-old bookshop in some backwater of Wales. (And there's one in Virginia USA that, sigh, I'd love to visit but I don't dare, because I know I'd want to buy the whole place.)

So while many Australian Christian bookstores are lamenting the global financial crisis as a source of economic downtown, the factors are more complex than that. Some bookstore chains have actively pursued a policy that has alienated readers like me.

So what is this policy?

I bet you thought the days of convicts and colonials were long gone. It's 222 years¹ since Captain Phillip rocked up to Botany Bay with a cargo of rejects from overseas. How long ago was it when Australia stopped being a dumping ground?

It hasn't, at least not when it comes to books. Generally speaking, Aussie Christian bookstores stock 'remaindered' titles. 'Remainders' are those books sold off for a tiny fraction of their retail value, normally once a publisher decides that sales of the books have peaked.

The consequences for us, both as readers and writers, are enormous. The consequences for Australian publishers are devastating.

Many American publishing houses produce vast overruns of book titles that they expect will be reasonably popular. These vast overruns reduce the unit price of a title drastically, increasing the profit margin. So long as the overrun pays for itself (and it's a very small amount extra), then the publishing company is far better off than it would be, had they just printed what they expected to sell.

But where can the overrun be sold? Yep, they're dumped in Australia, NZ, Canada and

¹ Sorry, but it's mathematics time. 222 is one of those numbers which inherently belong to numerical literary form and which I thus find irresistible. It is to be found as the defining number in the design of the Book of Ecclesiastes. As a mathematical metaphor, it seems to mean something along the lines of 'Vanity! Vanity! All is vanity!' Maybe it's telling us something.

Britain at hugely discounted prices. I always wondered how it was sometimes possible to find books advertised at some of our major chains for a price cheaper than it was available in the US. Not on sale, not on special, just the ordinary price. This is the reason. It's remaindered stock imported from the US in vast quantity.

This allows our bookstores and distributors to increase their profit margins dramatically. Sure, they may pass on some of the savings but by no means all. They may sell for about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the price of a similar sized book in Angus & Robertson or Dymocks but the profit margin is much larger. When bookstores mainly stock remainders (you know, the sort of thing that used to be found in a tray outside a newsagent with a clipped corner or a big black mark across the bottom edge, all for sale at 2 for \$5) in order to keep their profit margins up, then the choices we are given are cut completely away.

As a reader, this has massive implications. Culturally this is shaping the direction of Christianity in Australia because we're not even being offered a balanced diet, let alone fed one. If this doesn't scare you, it should. A small independent bookstore owner who actually wants to provide a good service her clients (but finds it impossible to get a distributor to come and show her books) said: the reality is that only two people in Australia make the majority of the decisions about what most Christians in this country read. That should terrify us all.

It doesn't matter how godly these people are, they are the gatekeepers who decide what goes on sale and what doesn't. The fact that these people are opposed to Australian writers and Australian writing (for very good commercial reasons) means that the consequences for Australian Christian publishers are dire. Our voices are silenced because Aussie publishers are not competing with the normal wholesale price of American books (difficult enough) but as a general rule, they have to compete with the price of a remaindered book. Moreover they have to keep their RRP down to somewhere close to $\frac{2}{3}$ of what you could expect to pay for a similar sized book in Borders or Dymocks so that the Christian reading public will not think it vastly over-priced compared to books around it.

(And it's not just books: Aussie recording artists face the same problem. They're offered \$2 for a CD that sells for \$29.95 - and it is, of course, not possible for most of them to produce the CD for that price by the time they've paid all the recording and studio fees involved.)

So how does all this affect you as a writer? Well, let's suppose you've taken the plunge and, because you believe that God has given you a message to share, you've self-published. This, of course, has pushed up the price of your book a bit because you've only done a thousand copies or so. Maybe even less.

If you think (as I know a lot of people do) that you will be able to market it to the major chains, please think again. *If you sell a total of*

two dozen to one of them, you are very fortunate. You are doing better than most publishers. Some best-selling writers can't get that many into stores. If you do not receive any reply or even an acknowledgement when you send a sample to one of the chains for their consideration, don't take it personally. One of the chains simply doesn't stock Australian writers or publishers. (Yes, rare exceptions exist regarding this policy, but they are *very rare*.)

It's obviously not seen as problematical that the manager of a bookstore in this particular chain currently writes reviews for a major denominational magazine and openly advertises the price of the book at his store in the review. To give him his due, he has reviewed some of the very few Aussie titles they sell, along with some American books. Regardless of other factors, a position like this should not only be impartial, it should be seen to be so.

I am a Book Review Editor for several different Australian and international magazines and I'm passionate about promoting Aussie and Kiwi books and giving them priority over overseas titles. To be honest, this doesn't make much of a difference for writers and publishers as they try to find access to the buyers in the big chains but I believe things would only deteriorate further if I didn't take this stand. I have had books cross my desk that I think are brilliant, ground-breaking and unquestionably inspired, but that are denied access to stores by the present set-up. In the long term, this is bad business practice. It also sets up an interesting and perilous spiritual dynamic.

I often get asked by writers about how to and who to approach regarding getting their books stocked by Christian stores in Australia. I can only repeat what I always say: *don't assume that quality or the importance of the message or a brilliant price or even the fact your last book was a bestseller will make the slightest difference.* Because I know people who have books in all of the above categories and it hasn't made the slightest difference.

If, by now, you've that figured Australian Christian writers and publishers are hemmed in on every side, you'd be right. I used to think it couldn't get any worse but it has. I'm rather hoping it's so bad, so utterly and hopelessly grim that it's time for God to step in. You know, when He said to Gideon: *there's too many of you. You'd all think you'd saved yourselves.* I'm hoping that there are actually so few options now that He will answer our prayers in this regard.

Because if you've come to the conclusion that there is an option and that option is to approach a publishing house in the USA, wait until Part 3 of this series. However bad Australia is (and believe me, it's truly and unbelievably horrifying), the nature of publishing in the USA has changed in the last year into an even worse nightmare. Don't rush into print just because you've got a book finished. Do your homework first. Lots of it.

SPCK-A Awards

For more information, follow the links:

2010 Young Christian Writers' Award:

Download Entry Form

2010 Young Christian Writers' Award Under

18: Download Entry Form

2010 Christian Book of the Year Award:

Download Entry Form

Captivated!

The name is an expression of the heart falling in love with Jesus and becoming captivated with him and by him. ***Captivated!*** was born at midnight two years ago at the Women's Camp, Melrose, South Australia, when Gwen Leane and Ruth Parker, over a last cup of milo shared their hearts and discussed the possibility of a Christian magazine. There were two things that were needed to start the magazine; one was finance and a graphic artist. Of course there were other issues to overcome as well. However over the ensuing weeks both those needs were met without effort on Gwen's part. She believed the Lord was saying to step out in faith and so ***Captivated!*** was launched in February 2008. A team of 5 people was formed under the covering of local church *Crossroads Christian Centre*.

Recommended Retail Price of ***Captivated!*** is \$5.00. ***Captivated!*** is published three times a year: Feb, June, Oct. It is a non denominational magazine for both men and women. Contact Gwen Leane at gwen.lean@internode.on.net (remove spaces)

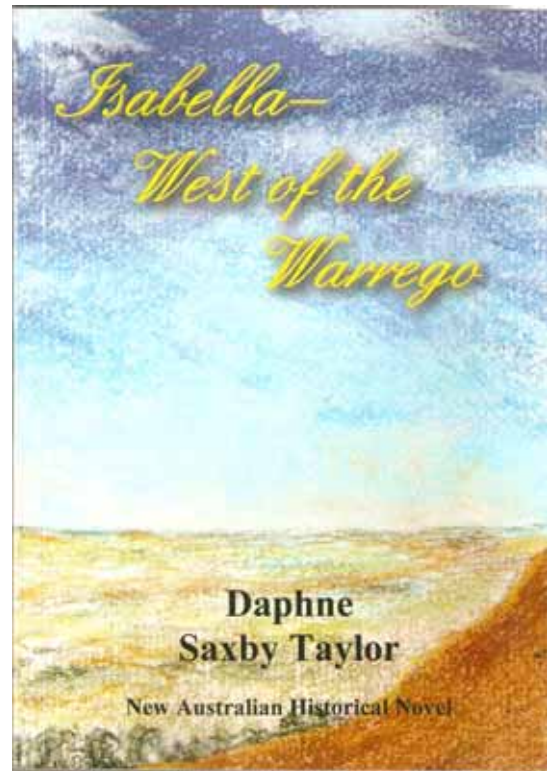
Magazine Madness!

Many great Australian magazines are now available for free in digital format. ***Alive, Christian Woman, Daystar*** and ***Church Today*** as well as several more specialised publications are all available at:

<http://www.mediaincorp.com/newsletter/signup/index.html>

Light the Dark - Christian Party Plan

With an emphasis on books (plus a smattering of gifts), *Light the Dark* is different in every way. Australian and New Zealand products are sold exclusively through this Tupperware-style party plan. *Light the Dark* is looking for suppliers of quality Australian products (either Christian or family-friendly) and for representatives to sell via party plan. See www.lightthedark.com.au for more details.



I have just released my fifth Australian Historical Novel, **ISABELLA – West of the Warrego**. This is my longest, most extensive book yet. It covers a most exciting era in the development, expansion of early white settlement in this country.

As I wrote of the channel country, the long long high sand ridges – the fertile channel between - followed by another ridge, another channel , and another and another for how far? - in memory I was climbing those ridges, slipping in the red sand and awed by the view from the top - an identical channel and ridge , when we made our way through that country, sleeping under the stars, and waking to the wonder of dawn and sunrise.

Many of my characters are based on characters I have known; people who have shared their lives with me; ordinary people, people of high estate, people from all walks of life, men, women, and children, who make up the abundant and fertile tapestry of the people of this land.

My editor of my first books wrote “*One of your great strengths is that you write out of your own experience. There is a ring of authenticity.*” These are heady words to any author. This is what I strive for. That my reader's heart will also be touched. That he, she will also be moved to tears, or to laughter, as I have been in the writing.

Comments like this one from a recent letter from an older reader of my latest book – “I just can't wait for your next book to come out” – spur me on. They are words sweeter than honey.

So many of you have asked me to let you know when I have another book out – So here it is **ISABELLA – West of the Warrego** priced at \$25. + postage, \$7. 50 in Queensland - \$10 interstate, available only from me.
Daphne Taylor.

Here is a request from Faithwriters, one of the two biggest Christian writers internet forums in the world. . .

We have a mountain of book review requests. and to meet the demand we have to look for more people to help with the reviews.

If you would be interested in being a part of the team, there are just a few things I need from you:

1. Commitment -- if you are sent a book or PDF file of a book, you have to be prepared to see the review through. You can stop being a reviewer at any time after you have finished any reviews you have on hand. So the commitment is only required for the term of any one book assignment.

*2. The ability to write a review that is at least one page long. In other words, no two or three paragraph quickies. To get a feel for the type of reviews we do, please visit:
<http://reviews.faithwriters.com/archives-categories.php>*

3. A sample review of any book you like (or didn't like). 😊

To make it easier to move books from the author to the reviewer, I'm hoping to use a lot more as PDF files. If you have a portable e-book reader that can handle PDF's or Word documents, that will be a real bonus (although not essential at all). Kindle users have this facility. If you don't have an easily portable e-book reader, then we will of course work the old fashioned way (books by snail mail).

If you are interested, please send me a private message here on the boards. Once I hear from you, I'll send you my email address so you can contact me direct.

Love, Deb <http://www.faithwriters.com>

Writing a book review is a good way to get your name into print. Book reviewers on the internet develop a following of people keen to have their own book reviewed. A salutary warning is to be careful who reviews your book, though. If you want to become a book reviewer, the only criteria is to do good reviews and be available to do them in a given time. To answer this ad, you'll also need to join Faithwriters—which is free. Here are the tricks to writing a good review...

Reviews--generally around 800 words in length—are like a persuasive argument either for or against the subject of your review. Hence your personal point of view must not be seen as biased—a tricky technique indeed!

In paragraph one you give your overall impression of the book, play, film, opera, etc. also naming the key players in your chosen genre, e.g. characters, actors, directors.

Wait to paragraph two to summarize your plot. If a film, this is the place where you make comparisons to the book's plot.

Do the actors, characters, fulfill the expectations of the audience, readership, etc? Show this in paragraph three.

Paragraph four details how the setting and themes were written or dramatized. Film reviews should show how the music and special effects enhanced the theme, etc. In paragraph five mention literary devices, symbols, etc. and the interplay between those in film and book, which sometimes vary. Your final paragraph aims to convince your audience of your stance. A clincher will attempt to persuade the audience whether to attend the play, buy the book, and so on. Watch for the next Zaphon to learn of more specialist book review sites.

Wendy Sargeant

Byline: Wendy is a writing mentor, editor and copywriter with the Queensland Society of Editors. To contact Wendy to receive a discount off your next tutorial, edit or advertising material, just let her know you saw this ad. Wendy currently has \$20 off editing and copywriting and \$5 off tutorials. Contact : Wendy Sargeant PO Box 656 CAPALABA Q 4157. www.wendyworkshops@live.com .

Disclaimer: the usual apply. *Zaphon* is a free e-magazine put out by Omega Writers. It's done in the spare time of the editor, Anne Hamilton, and happens when it happens. It is more or less regular (sort of) and generally coincides with one of our meetings or events. Should you have anything which may be of interest to Christian readers and writers across Australia and New Zealand, we welcome your input. The editor reserves the right, should no one contribute, to write about mathematics, meteorites, medieval poetry or the meaning of names. Whichever she happens to be researching at the time. Advertising is free. If your marketing plan doesn't include us, you're not really serious about getting your book noticed.