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Writing to disciple takes skill, tact

By Bruce Umpstead

Wanted: creative, skillful writing that presents in a sensitive, thought-provoking manner the biblical position on issues affecting the world today.

This is the preamble to the Amy Writing Awards, our flagship program recognizing 15 talented authors for published works in mainstream print media. We just concluded the 22nd annual contest, awarding another \$34,000 in prizes, including the \$10,000 first place prize at the Michigan Prayer Breakfast (May 18).

The competition this year was brisk, but we are redoubling our efforts to foster and encourage more writers to share their faith in newsprint and periodicals.

Maybe you have an award-winning entry inside of you?

You have plenty to write of news-worthy topics. I am impressed by the diversity and depth of the news articles and opinions that I've found through internet searches, pulling spiritual issues from the headlines. For example:

"A deeper religious freedom"—Christian Science Monitor, May 2

Recommends a prayerful response to the Afghan trial of

Abdul Rahman

"Christian leaders call immigration a moral issue"—Houston Chronicle, April 26
Reports on the response of Houston pastors to the immigration crisis

"Christianity, the Brand"—New York Times, April 16
Provides an interesting exposé on the public relations efforts in Christian circles

"The President Who Died for Us"—New York Times, April 14

Sheds insight on the comparison of Abraham Lincoln to Jesus, sparked by Lincoln's assassination on Good Friday, 1865

"The Past Meets the Future"—New York Times, April 13
Contrasts modern and historical views of the democracy-building struggle in Iraq

"More proof that science, religion don't mix"—Dallas Morning News, April 6
Addresses the recent study on the medicinal benefits of intercessory prayer

"Addicts expected to have faith"—Dallas Morning News, April 4

Shares the story of a recovering drug addict in a

Christian recovery center
"Religious intolerance unthinkable, indefensible"—Enid News

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Prayer Requests

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

Please join us in asking for God's direction and for the leading of the Holy Spirit as we work to help Christians obey Christ's mandate to make disciples by teaching obedience of all His commandments.

Amy Prayer List:

- Amy Internet Syndicate— 1000 users by year end.
- Christian writers mobilized and equipped to use their skills in obedience to Christ's call to make disciples.

Bruce Umpstead has been an advisory board member for the Amy Foundation for eight years. He lives in DeWitt, Michigan with his wife and two daughters and works for Michigan State University.

A portion of this article appeared in the Lansing State Journal on May 4, 2004.

Test yourself before your writing is complete

by Shaunna Howat

Some writers think the writing process ends with a flourish: "There! I'm done! I'll send it off right now!"

Actually for many other writers, the whole thing ends with a hopeful sigh after a thorough working-over. Sometimes it's helpful to review the steps to a finished piece to make sure your writing is solid and ready to go.

1. Does your writing follow the thesis you set before yourself—the so-what of the piece? This thesis is your main point, declared early on in one or two sentences. All the other sentences of your article should support your thesis. Anything extra, or whatever detracts from your main point, should be deleted or saved for another article.

2. Does your writing reflect the active voice rather than the passive? Eliminate as many be-verbs as possible (is, am, are, was, were, be, been, *sometimes* being). See how that exercise can liven up your writing.

3. Do you write concisely? Instead of using 22 words, can 12 words say it better? Get rid of the unnecessary baggage of words. Don't be afraid to cut.

4. Do you preach loudly or compel lovingly? Keep a watch out for a preachy tone instead of a discipling attitude. The "thou shalt not" language does not reach today's audience as well. Try to persuade through example, using visual images and analogies that work for

today's audiences. Think about what they care about, what's most important to them, and use answers that will disciple them where they are.

5. Did you let it sit? Dashing out an article quickly, in anger or in haste, may contribute to a confusing, disconnected article that does not communicate effectively. Let the article sit for a day or two and then come back to it. You'll have a fresh perspective and can then polish it and rework those rough areas.

6. Did you pray? Before and during the writing, and as you let the article sit, pray. Ask God to speak His words through you. Let Him use

you as His vessel. And remember that this task of writing to represent the Lord and disciple His servants is a holy task:

"Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.' Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work."

(2 Timothy 2:19-21)

Amy Foundation Blog seeks to enlist discipling writers

"The Best Christian Journalism on the Web"

This spring the Amy Foundation launched a blog, <http://amyfound.blogspot.com/>, for the purpose of tracking the best Christian journalism on the web. Our plan is to regularly identify those news articles or opinions in the mainstream media that represent good faith-based writing.

The blog also provides aspiring writers with examples of spiritual-related topics that are grabbing news around the nation. If you need an idea or perspective to start your creative writing process, visit our blog and see what other people have written on the topic.

We'd appreciate you commenting on our entries and linking to our blog!

After we highlight a good piece of journalism, we email the author and encourage him or her to either submit a qualifying entry to the Amy Writing Awards or work harder at qualifying their next article or opinion.

Do you have something recently published in mainstream media with a Christian message? Did it show up on the outlet's website? If so, email a link to amyfound@gmail.com or amyfoundtn@aol.com and we'll consider highlighting it as part of "the best Christian journalism on the web."

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► **Cover article...**
continued from page 1

& *Eagle*, March 31

Deals with the intolerance of Abdul Rahman's trial in Afghanistan.

Letters to the editor and reader columns provide ample opportunity for authentic dialogue. Such articles can help other readers find answers. A well-written article has the potential to challenge and strengthen the faith of thousands.

Unfortunately, many of the faith-based articles I have read lack professional presentation and tact. And some have been insulting to the general reader. Rudeness is never an effective tool in communicating.

As a preliminary judge for

Amy Writing Awards, I have read hundreds of entries. Here is what I have determined makes for compelling, faith-based writing:

• **Engaging and relevant.** Articles that deal with current topics in a way most people can understand capture readers' attention. "Preaching" does not earn points. Quality pieces are based on topics accessible to everyone.

• **Honest, personal and positive.** Writers earn high marks for dealing honestly with difficult situations, especially when personally affected. A positive perspective when addressing controversial issues keeps people reading and gets the point across,

while self-righteousness is an instant "turnoff."

• **Reinforced with Scripture.** Religious arguments should be tied back to an applicable Bible verse. It's like drafting a free-speech argument and citing the First Amendment. Short, clearly identifiable quotations thoughtfully worked into an article's flow work best.

Do you have something to say about your faith - perhaps something relevant, personal, and engaging? Jesus' teaching encourages us to "let your light shine before men" (Matt 5:16).

There is no better time than the present to share your perspective, so get writing!

New writing group forming

Interested in forming a Christian Writing Group? Pen & Sword reader Steve Halsell is trying to form a group in the mid-Michigan area. He is welcoming writers of any age to join him in forming a group. Contact Steve or Kristin Halsell at 517-268-9939 or steveandkristinh@yahoo.com.

Amy Foundation Newsletter Subscription

Please help us save resources and postage by letting us know whether or not you would like to keep receiving *Pen & Sword* four times per year. **Subscriptions are free** and available to anyone interested in improving writing skills and making disciples thought the secular media.

Please complete the following reply and return to the Amy Foundation. Or send a quick e-mail to AMYFOUND@AOL.COM, including your name, current mailing address, and your interest in receiving the newsletter. **If you have already completed this form, you do NOT need to do it again.**

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What newsletter format do you prefer? Print email/online

Please send a free subscription to the following additional reader:

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City/State/Zip _____

e-mail address (if applicable) _____

Mail to: Amy Foundation, PO Box 16091, Lansing, Michigan 48901; or FAX to 517-321-2572.

Chosen Vision

The Chosen Vision is a ministry that provides a home for six developmentally disabled adults. The home enables residents—six young women at this time—to live in a safe, secure Christian environment.

Chosen Vision began as a dream during the 1980s by friends who met in a Sunday School Class devoted to providing an education experience for adults with developmental disabilities. The dream was to create a home that would provide active, stimulating, Christian environments for these special, chosen people.

On July 1991, the first step of that dream was achieved by forming a non-profit corporation. After many years of work, research, and inspiring others to join them in their dream, a house was located that was an answer to prayers. Through generous

donations and a team of dedicated people, The Chosen Vision, Inc. was able to open its first facility, which was named "The Chosen View Home," in January 2002.

Throughout it all, God has been at work to bring it about. They depend on volunteers for such things as companionship, yard work, painting and general repair and generous donors who have a heart for those less able to care for themselves.

Learn more about Chosen Vision and read stories by Phyllis and Amy Russell about their experience at the home at www.chosenvision.com/.

Winning strategies

Simple tips for turning your writing into more powerful discipling experiences.

- Make your points with facts and logic that the audience will respect.
- Temper your righteous anger and make your points with subtlety and wit, grace and eloquence.
- Read, read, read. You must know something before you have something important to say. It is not enough to have read the latest book from your favorite TV preacher.
- Call editors to get to know them and find out what they look for.
- Select timely topics. Good editors want helpful information on subjects that are headlining the daily news.



Submit Today!

15 writers will receive
\$34,000 in cash prizes

The Amy Foundation Writing Awards program recognizes writers who skillfully and creatively present the biblical position on issues affecting the world today in a sensitive and thought-provoking manner. Qualifying non-fiction entries must have been published in a mainstream non-religious publication.

Winning entries will be re-published in an annual collection of prize-winning entries.

For rules, sample articles and submission forms, visit www.amyfound.org or call 877-727-4262.



The Amy Foundation
Discipling Our Nation in this Generation

Why does God allow natural disasters?

By: James J. Jackson

I recently traveled to Sri Lanka to issue eyeglasses and help rebuild an orphanage that was destroyed in the devastating Tsunami wave that struck much of south Asia on December 26, 2005. Over 40,000 people were killed on this small island, alone.

Many of the Sri Lankan fishermen lost their boats and nets, escaping with only their lives. Their homes were washed out to sea. Most of the women were seamstresses who lost all of their possessions, including eyeglasses, which are critical to their trade.

A fast-moving wall of water over 40 feet high slammed the shore, and, just as quickly, receded, dragging people, homes and possessions back out to sea. It is breathtaking to witness the devastation it left in its wake.

One team member came upon a thin old man, standing alone on the seashore, arms outstretched, crying out to the vast Indian Ocean, "Why have you done this to me? Why did you destroy my family and my boat? Why? Why? "

Bill, the team member, photographed the forlorn man, and later wrote a poem entitled, "Tsunami Man," in which he attempted to express the total sense of loss the man felt, and yet express how even Tsunami Man could have hope in the midst of pain.

Many Sri Lankans and people around the world ask, "Why?" Why does God allow disasters to destroy people and property? Is He angry with us? Does He simply hate us? Why does He allow children to die, and storms and earthquakes to come from nowhere, leaving such total destruction in

their wake?

I didn't speak to the Tsunami Man, but I have spoken with others who asked the same questions, in Sri Lanka and around the world. The answer is always the same. God created the earth and the heavens, as well as all life. Mankind was His crowning glory of all creation, since He created us in His own image.

The Bible tells us that we were meant to live forever, and death and destruction, deterioration and wasting away were not a part of the original plan. Mankind has brought all of the devastation upon ourselves through sin. The author of all sin, Satan, wreaks havoc upon the earth, mankind and everything in creation.

God tells us that the wages of sin is death. The price for all sin required full payment. God knew that we could never pay the price, which is perfection, so He sent His son, Jesus Christ, to live a perfect life and to become the perfect, unblemished sacrifice, to pay the price for all sin. And He offers His free

gift of eternal life to all who will receive it.

God tells us that we live only for a moment in this life, but, our souls will live forever, either with Him in glory, or without Him, which He describes as hell. God will give those who believe in His Son new, indestructible bodies, and will create a new heaven and new earth; believers in Christ will abide with Him forever. That is the message Christ commanded us to bring to the Tsunami Man, and all who cross our path.

Whether we travel across the ocean or within our neighborhood, Christ asks us to reflect His love to all by our countenance, our willingness to help others unconditionally, and by letting others know that they do not have to live lives of despair. He even sends His powerful Spirit with us to give us the words to say and to prepare the hearts of others to hear His message of salvation.

With God doing all of the work, our tiny sacrifice of just making ourselves available isn't very hard to do. Is it? ◀

▶ Disciplined Nation Plan

Continued from back page

Pride
Purposelessness
Rebellion
Resentment
Rudeness
Self-Righteousness
Selfish Ambition
Selfishness
Skepticism
Temperamental
Unbelief or Lack of Faith
Unforgiveness
Ungratefulness
Vanity

The Bible says: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9.

We must:

- *Confront* the subtle sin in our life continuously.
- *Confess* it in submission and repentance.
- *Rejoice* in the love and power of righteousness through His forgiveness.

This article is an example of the Amy Foundation Syndicate, *Real Answers*.™ Each month, *Real Answers* offers several new articles, free of charge, to editors across America. For more information, contact Don Lindman at amyfoundtn@aol.com

Read more at our website at www.amyfound.org.

This article excerpted from the Amy Foundation's self-contained brochure "The United States—A Disciplined Nation in this Generation." You can read the entire *Disciplined Nation Plan* at www.amyfound.org or call 517-323-6233 and order a copy.

First Prize Award of \$10,000

The Martyrdom of Andy

by Ben Burton

So they stoned Stephen, and as they did so, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried aloud, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them," and with that he died. And Saul was among those who approved his murder.—Acts 7:58-60 - 8:1 (NEB)

St. Augustine has said that the church owes the Apostle Paul to the prayer of Stephen. Bible scholars agree that however hard he tried, Saul/Paul could never forget the way in which Stephen died.

Andy was a sweet, amusing little guy whom everyone liked yet harassed just because that was the way one treated Andy Drake. He took the kidding well. Andy always smiled back with those great big eyes that seemed to say, "Thank you, thank you, thank you," with each sweeping blink.

For us fifth graders, Andy was our outlet; he was our whipping boy. He even seemed grateful to pay this special price for membership in our group.

"Andy Drake don't eat no cake,
And his sister don't eat no pie.

If it wasn't for the welfare dole,

All the Drakes would die."

Andy even appeared to appreciate this sing-song parody of Jack Spratt. The rest of us really enjoyed it, bad grammar and all. I do not know why Andy had to endure this special treatment to deserve our friendship and membership in the group. It just evolved naturally - no plan or discussion.

I don't recall anyone ever

mentioning in this connection that Andy's father was in prison; Or, that his mother took in washing and men; or that Andy's ankles, elbows and fingernails were always dirty and his old coat was way too big. We soon wore all the fun out of those. Andy never fought back.

Snobbery blossoms in the very young, I guess. It is plain now that the group attitude was that it was our right to belong, but that Andy was a member by our sufferance. Despite all that, we all liked Andy until that day - until that very moment.

"He's different! We don't want him, do we?"

Which one of us said it? I have wanted to blame Randolph all these years. But, I cannot honestly say who spoke those trigger words that brought out the savagery lying dormant but so near the surface in all of us. It doesn't matter who, for the fervor with which we took up the cause revealed us all.

"But I didn't want to do what we did." For years I tried to console myself with that. Then one day I stumbled on the unwelcome but irrefutable words that convicted me forever: "The hottest corners of hell are reserved for those who, during a moment of crisis, maintain their neutrality."

The weekend was to be like others the group had enjoyed together. After school on a Friday we would meet at the home of one of the members - mine this time—for a camp-out in the nearby woods. Our respective mothers, who did most of the preparation for these safaris, fixed an extra pack for Andy who was to join us after chores.

We quickly made camp, moth-

ers' apron strings forgotten. With individual courage amplified by the group, we were now "men against the jungle." The others decided that since it was my party, I should be the one to give Andy the news.

I? I, who had long believed that Andy secretly thought a little more of me than he did the others because of the puppy-like way he looked at me? I, who often felt Andy revealing his love and appreciation with those huge, wide-open eyes? I can still plainly see Andy as he came toward me down the long, dark tunnel of trees that leaked only enough of the late afternoon light to kaleidoscope changing patterns on his soiled old sweatshirt.

Andy was on his rusty, one-of-a-kind bike - a girl's model with sections of garden hose wired to the rims for tires. He appeared excited and happier than I had ever seen him, this frail little guy who had been an adult all his life. I knew he was savoring the acceptance by the In-group; this first chance to belong, to have boy fun, to do boy things.

Andy waved to me as I stood in the camp clearing awaiting him. I ignored his happy greeting. He vaulted off the funny old bike and trotted over toward me, full of joy and conversation. The others, concealed in the tent, were silent but I felt their support.

Why won't he get serious? Can't he see that I am not returning his cheer? Can't he see by now that his euphoria is not reaching me? Then, suddenly, he did see. His innocent countenance opened even more, leaving him entirely vulnerable. His whole demeanor said, "It is going to be very bad, isn't it, Ben? Let's have it.

"Well-practiced in facing disappointment, he didn't even

No vote taken, no word spoken, but we all knew we had done something horribly, cruelly wrong. We were swept over by the delayed impact of dozens of lessons and sermons. Each of us heard perhaps for the first time, "Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these"

brace for the blow. Andy never fought back. Incredulously, I heard myself say, "Andy, we don't want you."

Hauntingly vivid still is the stunning quickness with which two huge tears sprang into Andy's eyes and just stayed there; vivid because of a million maddening reruns of that scene in my mind. The way Andy looked at me—frozen for an eternal moment. What was it? It wasn't hate. Was it shock? Was it disbelief? Or, was it pity—for me?

Or, forgiveness?

Finally a fleet little tremor broke across Andy's lips and he turned without appeal, or even a question, to make the long, lonely trip back home in the dark. As I turned and entered the tent, someone—the last one of us to feel the full weight of the moment—started the old doggerel:

"Andy Drake don't eat no cake,

And his sister don't"

Then it was unanimous. No vote taken, no word spoken, but we all knew we had done something horribly, cruelly wrong. We were swept over by the delayed impact of dozens of lessons and sermons. Each of us heard perhaps for the first time, "Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these"

In that long, hushed, heavy moment we gained an understanding new to us then but indelibly fixed in our minds. We had destroyed an individual

made in the image of God with the only weapon for which he had no defense, and we had no excuse, rejection.

Andy's poor attendance in school made it difficult to tell when he actually withdrew, but one day it dawned on me that he was gone forever. I had spent too many days struggling within myself to find and to polish a proper way of telling Andy how witheringly ashamed and sorry I was, and am. I now know that to have hugged Andy and to have cried with him and even to have joined with him in a long silence would have been enough. It may have healed us both.

I never saw Andy Drake again. I have no idea where he went or where he is, if he is. But to say I haven't seen Andy is not entirely accurate. In the decades since that autumn day in the Arkansas woods—I have encountered thousands of Andy Drakes. My conscience places Andy's mask over the face of every disadvantaged person with whom I come in contact. Each stares back at me with the same haunting and expectant look, which became fixed in my mind that day long ago.

Dear Andy Drake,

The chance you will ever see these words is quite remote, but I must try. It is much too late for this confession to purge my conscience of guilt. I neither expect nor want it to. What I do pray

for, my little friend of long ago, is that you might somehow learn of, and be lifted by knowing of, the continuing force of your sacrifice. What you suffered at my hands that dreadful day, and the grace you showed in response, has been twisted, turned and molded by God into a blessing. I hope this knowledge might ease the memory of that terrible day for you.

I have been no saint, Andy, nor have I done all the things I could and should have done with my life. But what I yearn for you to know is that I have never again knowingly betrayed an Andy Drake. Nor, I pray, shall I ever.

Love,
Ben

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DeQueen, AR**

Watch for more 2005 Prize-Winning Entries in future issues of Pen & Sword.

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

This article is taken from the 2005 booklet containing the 15 winning entries to the **Amy Writing Award**. The award recognizes creative, skillful writing that presents in a sensitive, thought-provoking manner the biblical position on issues affecting the world today.

To be eligible, submitted articles must be published in a secular, non-religious publication and must be reinforced with at least one passage of scripture.

To learn more, visit www.amyfound.org or call 517.323.6233



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The United States—A Discipled Nation

A Call to Right- eousness

Righteousness precedes discipling and opens the door to Holy Spirit Power in our lives. When we have no unconfessed sin in our lives (blatant or subtle), the Holy Spirit *works* through us, impacting the lives of others with discipling power - a discipling power following the vision and loving compassion of our prayer life.

To fill great commission vision (“...make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”), it becomes critical to identify the subtle sins in our lives which go unrecognized and unconfessed.

Take a subtle sin inventory of your life and begin the *work* of removal through confession and repentance.

Subtle Sins

Addiction
Anger
Animosity
Anxiety
Bitterness
Boastfulness
Closed Mindedness
Condemnation
Condescension
Covetousness
Critical nature
Deception
Demanding
Discord
Discouragement
Dissension
Dogmatism
Domination
Egoism
Emotional Abuse
Envy
Factions
Fear
Gluttony

Gossip
Indulgence
Guilt
Half-Truths
Hatred
Haughtiness
hostility
Idolatry
Immoral Fantasies
Impatience
Impurity
Inflexibility
Indifference
Insincerity
Intemperance
Irritability
Jealousy
Judgment
Lack of Affection
Laziness
Lukewarmness
Lying
Materialism
Negativism
Prayerlessness
Prejudice

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