

SLWG Spotlight: *We're Pleased to Present...*

Robin Theiss



**2006 PRESIDENT OF THE ST. LOUIS WRITERS GUILD
SLWG Member Since 2003**

**Literary Fiction, Nonfiction Articles and Essays, Vintage Photos
Freelance Business Writer and Marketing Consultant**

**Board Member: St. Louis Writers Guild 2004-Present
Board Member: Missouri Writers Guild: 2005-Present
Past Officer: Writers' Society of Jefferson County: 2002**

Robin Theiss – Although her present occupation as a freelance writer/author promoter/writers' organization leader might seem a dramatic career departure, twenty-five years working in the health insurance industry were not lost on Robin Theiss. In her career with five different insurance companies and managed care organizations, and her ownership of an insurance consulting firm, which she started, ran, and sold between 1987 and 1990, involved her in a wide variety of technical, strategic, and managerial jobs, all heavily reliant on writing. Some of the duties Robin handled in her insurance work included claims processing; computer database maintenance and design, accounting, auditing, contract development, business correspondence, reports, training materials, operations manuals, user specifications manuals, marketing literature, marketing, and product development. She also authored innumerable press releases, proposals, business plans, corporate presentations, and executive speeches, eventually attaining the executive

position of Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for HealthLink, the Midwest's largest managed care organization, where she worked for eleven years until her "retirement" in 2001.

Robin studied writing and literature at Indiana University, at Webster University, and not too long ago, at Vermont College, acclaimed for its M.F.A. program for Creative Writing, where she focused on Writing and Literature with an emphasis in short fiction. For decades she has participated in numerous workshops, seminars, and conferences to study writing and devoured how-to-write books in her free time. She believes her most valuable education though has come from reading all she could of the authors who are regarded as masters in the various genres she's tackled.

Robin is a multi-genre writer. Her first publication credit was a short-short published by a community magazine in Indianapolis. She has written numerous articles and essays, which have appeared in various trade magazines and regional newspapers and mountains of business publications, including two books, one on claims processing and the other, a managed care industry promotional book on how to stay healthy. (Neither made the best seller lists.) Her recent credits include an article called "What's Your Genre?" which appeared in *Writers Journal* on 2005; she co-authored (with Eric Miles Williamson) an interview of Richard Burgin, short fiction author and editor of *Boulevard* magazine, which has been used extensively by his publicist in a national publicity campaign for Burgin's newest book; she published an essay in *River Road Journal* called "The History of the St. Louis Writers Guild," which was reprinted in "A Celebration of St. Louis Writing," a program booklet published by the St. Louis Writers Guild for its eighty-fifth anniversary; and she just sold a new essay on the topic of book reviewing, which will be published by *Boulevard* in 2006. She's also working on a book of artistic, vintage photographs, which were taken by her grandfather in Huntington, West Virginia in the 1930s, and she enjoys taking her own photographs, too.

Since 2001, Robin's business writing has been focused on large, strategic communications projects for corporations and corporate executives, such as business plans, executive speeches, major events scripting, website content, and corporate presentations. She still does occasional work for HealthLink and other insurance companies, but does not limit her work to the insurance industry. With her brother-in-law, playwright and business owner, Daniel Fenton, she has developed educational lesson plans for Pearson Educational Resources and written grant proposals, fundraising campaigns, and corporate histories. Except in her work for St. Louis Writers Guild, which knows no bounds, Robin does not do newsletters, flyers, or other one-time, small writing projects. "They just require too much effort for too little return," she says. "I regard my freelance work as a necessary disruption to my creative work. Therefore, a freelance project must be substantive to get my creative and motivational juices running. I can get passionate about a large corporate presentation or a speech to be given by a company president. These kinds of projects carry a little fear in with them. Sadly, I've always needed a little fear to get me moving."

Robin also does a considerable amount of freelance publicity work for book authors, which calls for a lot of writing. Her services include creating an author's brand identity, developing press kits and promotional materials, writing website copy, booking events, and pursuing media promotion opportunities. She has worked for some top

national authors, but doesn't like to drop names unless they're needed for business references.

Despite her efforts and success as a nonfiction writer, Robin's real passion has always been fiction. "I am obsessed with the secret worlds of people. I write character-driven short stories and have one novel in progress with a co-author and another of my own that I've been working on for a couple of years. I shoot to entertain a highly critical group of people who have seen it all—the American mainstream literary market." She published a short story, "Checkmate," with *Story Magazine* in the late eighties and has completed others, which she shops around when she occasionally takes the time to market herself. "Marketing my own fiction is hell," she said. "I cannot be objective at all about it. I find writing fiction much more personal and difficult than writing nonfiction. Not only am I perfectionist, struggling to create a perfect fictional world, but I do not have the cache of ready phrases, transitions, and techniques to fall back on like I developed over many years of writing nonfiction. This means every word of my fiction is a major decision for me, but I have to admit that wrestling with language and teasing out images and themes are also what I love about it."

Robin surrounds herself with writers. She is a member of several regional writers' organizations, including the Writers' Society of Jefferson County, Saturday Writers (in St. Peter's), St. Louis Publishers Association, Missouri Writers Guild, and St. Louis Writers Guild. She holds board positions in Missouri Writers Guild and also in St. Louis Writers Guild where she currently serves as President and Chairperson for the Programs and Publicity Committees. Robin's also an enthusiastic supporter of St. Louis-based literary organizations, including its home-based literary magazines, *River Styx*, where she maintains a subscription, and *Boulevard*, where she serves as a senior consulting editor. She regularly attends local literary events. Her passion for Missouri's literary heritage borders on obsession. "I have a profound regard for Missouri authors and, in particular, for the St. Louis Writers Guild," she said. "Its founders' and early members' contributions to national literature were substantial. They deserve public recognition." Atop her soapbox, she can rant that Missouri is a state that has produced many of the world's most notorious contemporary authors, but is rarely acknowledged as a major U.S. literary center beyond its own borders. "Writers organizations can change that," she said. [Incidentally, Robin is not a native Missourian. She was born in West Virginia and grew up in Indiana; however, St. Louis has been her home since 1976.]

Robin says her desire to write began when she was in third grade and wrote a poem about a fairy that her teacher and, later, her parents praised. "That's all the encouragement I needed on that particular day," she said, "to determine the course of my entire life." She has no regrets for all the years she spent working in the insurance industry, but says she always knew it was not her true calling. When asked if she has arrived at her lifelong goal, she said, "I am presently working to perfect my writing, and while I know that perfection isn't attainable or even conceivable, I've still always felt that my own ideas about perfection in any pursuit are a valid aim because they spur me to continuously improve. I've been rigorous at studying technique by the masters of short fiction, paying my dues through close reading and writing practice... It's arduous—sometimes painful, but satisfying, too. The process appeals to me, not the destination. I am also, simultaneously, trying my hand at poetry and trying to make a positive difference in someone's life other than my own. I want to grow and use my gifts, such as

they are, wisely. Working with words and with writers feeds my soul. It allows me to share the best of what I have taken and received. How cool is that? Yes, I think I was born to do this.”

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