

## January 2019 Newsletter

### President's Column

By: Alex Elfenbein

I love the beginning of the year. It's a period of renewal and a time to try new things, change old habits, or reinvent yourself. I think it's also important to appreciate the progress we've made. Last year, the club reached some major milestones. We grew our membership to more than 100 people! We had our most entries ever for the Kathryn McClatchy Short Fiction contest. And, we had several members get published.

I want to thank the previous and current officers for their dedication to the club. I am so grateful to the new officers and volunteers who have offered their time. Each person has brought great ideas to the club, and I'm excited about where we'll go in 2019. Without their help, this club could not exist. Thank you to Barbara Mathes, David Douglas, and Leah Hinton!

This year I want to focus on:

- Promoting our members
- Offering expanded learning opportunities
- Enhancing our club's community

I sincerely hope each WGT member has a stellar 2019. Dream big and take a few concrete steps toward achieving your goals this year. Let me know what you hope to accomplish, and let's inspire one another! I want to hear about your efforts and successes.



## 2019 Board

President	Alex Elfenbein
Vice President	Leah Hinton
Secretary	David Douglas
Treasurer	Barbara Mathes
Membership Chair	<b>OPEN</b> (temp: Barbara Mathes)
Program Chair	Leah Hinton
Communications Chair	<b>OPEN</b>
Website Chair	David Douglas
Social Media Lead	<b>OPEN</b>
Critique Group Lead	Gary White

If you're interested in one of the open positions or volunteering, please email us at [writersguildtx@gmail.com](mailto:writersguildtx@gmail.com) or ask at the next general meeting!

## Membership Renewal

If you haven't renewed for 2019, be sure to bring your checkbook to Monday's meeting or pay online at <https://www.wgtonline.org/membership/>.

**See you on Monday, January 28 at 7 p.m. for:  
PJ Glover's presentation on "Acquiring an Agent"**

## 2018 Flash Fiction Contest Winners Announced



We received the most entries ever for the annual Kathryn McClatchy Flash Fiction Contest. Three people won the top four awards for their excellent stories. The contest was open to members and non-members of all genres of unpublished short fiction. After blind judging by a group of literary judges, the winners were announced at the annual holiday party by Julie Mendel.

Our first place winner was Brian Condike's story "Any Dang Fool." It is featured in this issue of the newsletter. The second place story was "The Bridge" by Sabrina Chapman. The third place story was "A Purple Lizard" by Mary Lou Condike. Mary Lou Condike was also recognized with an Honorable Mention for "Handcuffs." Their stories will appear in the following months' newsletters and are also featured on the WGT website, [www.wgtonline.org](http://www.wgtonline.org).

The WGT Board thanks everyone who took part in this year's contest. Congratulations to the winners!

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**1st Place Story:  
"Any Dang Fool"  
By: Brian Condike**

*Any dang fool can punch cows on a ranch, he mused. Sure, the man needed skills. He had to ride, mend fences, and brand calves—but those were ordinary chores any two-bit cowpoke could handle. Only the best cowboys could drive cattle long distances. Only the best cowboys could trek the Chisholm Trail from Texas to Kansas with a herd several thousand strong. And only the very best cowboys could lead such outings and get the cows to market safely.*



*That's all about to end.* Boots Watson sat on the small rise overlooking the Boss's spread. He rested in the shadow of his horse, chewing on a stem of prairie grass. The old mare stood unperturbed, staring longingly back toward the stables she knew as home. She too was bored.

In the pasture below, twenty horses grazed on prairie grass and prickly pear. Boots and his group would saddle up these mounts before dawn and begin the long journey north. They were driving eight thousand longhorns to the railhead in Abilene. Boots automatically scanned the horizon for movement, searching for rustlers, *banditos*, and Apaches.

*Not many around these days.* This part of Texas had been tamed, almost gentrified. The U.S. Marshalls had chased the rustlers to wilder counties, and the Mexicans across the border. The Army had cleared out the Indians, gathering up whatever Apaches they hadn't massacred and driven them off to reservations. All Boots had to worry about were scorpions and rattlesnakes.

*I'm good at this. Real good. But they don't need me anymore.* There aren't many men who could manage a dozen cowhands and several thousand head over a two-month journey. Only a few men could navigate the canyons and the rivers, the dust and the flash floods. Only a very few could keep the men from killing each other and the herd from stampeding. Boots was one of those few. The Boss said so.

"Looks like this will be the last ride for both of us, old girl."

The chestnut mount whickered and nudged his shoulder. She eyeballed a particularly juicy-looking patch of grass over yonder. She didn't know the Union Pacific Railroad would complete the new train depot in town by next year. She



didn't know tomorrow would mark the last time the Boss would drive his cattle to Kansas over an open trail. She didn't know Boots would no longer be a trail boss and would be relegated to a plain ranch hand. There would be no more trail drives, just train rides.

Boots sighed. *Maybe it was time to settle down.* He was partial to that cute filly over at the dry goods store. What was her name? Jenny. She was a sparse twig of a thing with dark hair, pure skin, and a girlish giggle. Jenny was prettier than a two-dollar Kansas City whore, but without the face paint. She always had a smile for him and teased him about his suspenders and high water pants. Just being near the girl tied his tongue and turned him into a stumblebum. She laughed at his clumsiness and chuckled at his lame attempts at conversation. But he knew she wasn't interested in some old shit-kicker like him. He was twice her size and twice her age.

*Any dang fool could see she had eyes for the blacksmith boy.* Young Terry Wade's muscled arms gleamed with sweat as he worked the bellows and hammered hot metal. He seemed at ease with Jenny, and loved to show off his strength and his skill on the anvil when she came to visit, which was often. She spent a good deal more time at the smithy's than could be accounted for by any business with her father's store. No, she wasn't interested in Boots Watson.

He'd have better luck with the widow Beebe. Alice Beebe worked a small spread three miles to the south, and seemed to be making a go of it since her husband passed away from cholera two winters ago. Boots had met her at the fall harvest hoedown, and was struck by her wholesome looks and down-home attitude. Alice was tough and direct, yet friendly and kind. She'd graciously accepted his offer to dance, and they had talked the whole time so that the dance seemed to have ended before it began. They'd shared some punch, and promised to keep in touch. He never got around to it.



Boots Watson groaned, stood up, and climbed into his saddle. He gently prodded the mare with his spurs and they moseyed back to the bunkhouse. He had to oversee the final preparations for their departure, ensuring Cookie had sufficient supplies for his chuck wagon, and the drovers were sober enough to pack their bedrolls. The cattle were already gathered in the north valley. A final check with the Boss and he'd be good to go.

Boots knew he couldn't live the rest of his life in a bunkhouse. He longed for the several-month cattle drive each year, looked forward to the peaceful prairie and the starlit skies. If this were the last drive from here, he'd have to light out for somewhere less civilized. He heard tell Montana was still wild enough, or Wyoming. They called it Big Sky country. That sounded just right to him.

The thoughts of settling down were just a dream, and a poor one at that. Having a woman to warm his bed every night seemed like a good thing, but it wouldn't outweigh the confines of a small ranch in an increasingly crowded county. Besides, why would any decent woman want an old bow-legged cowboy? The simple fact was that he loved his horse more than anything or anyone, and whiskey comforted him more than most women ever did. No, he loved to drive cattle. He lived to drive cattle. He'd have to move on. He'd have to live alone.

*Any dang fool could see that.*

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