

Writing for the Guideposts and Angels on Earth
By Diane Stark, Contributing Editor
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How to Reach Me:

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The Guideposts Writers Workshop Contest:

- Guideposts sponsors a writing contest where the prize is a week-long trip to New York to train to write for Guideposts Magazine. It opens a lot of doors at the magazines and gives you an all-access pass to the editors.
- Word count should not exceed 1800
- It's held in even years – next one in 2024! The window to enter starts in April and ends in June. Winners are notified in mid-August and the workshop is held in October. You can enter as many times as you like and there is no fee to enter.
- Your cover letter is almost as important as the story you send. The editors want to get to know you. Tell them about yourself in a professional, but relaxed way.

Winning the Guideposts Writers Workshop Contest

Elements of a Winning Story:

1. Many Guideposts stories fall into one of four categories: Military/veterans, Pets, Care giving, and Addiction and recovery. Obviously, they publish stories that do not fit into one of those categories, but those topics are of particular interest. Stories that fit into one – or more! – of those categories have a better chance of being selected.
2. Time line is important. You're not telling your whole life story.
3. Include emotion but don't overdo it.
4. Your story needs to be relatable to the reader. Guideposts is not interested in "Super Christian" stories. They want real people who aren't afraid to be vulnerable in their stories.
5. Stories need a take-away for the reader. This take-away is rarely overtly stated but is more implied.
6. Most Guideposts stories fall into the Creative Non-fiction genre. This means that you are telling a true story, but you've used fiction techniques to tell it. Guideposts stories are told in SCENES – usually between 3-5 scenes in a full-length story. When writing a scene, you are describing what happened as though someone were peeking through a window and watching the story unfold. Telling a story in scenes helps you to SHOW the story, rather than just telling it.
7. Guideposts stories always have a problem that must be solved by the end of the story. It doesn't have to be a huge, life-changing struggle. It can be a smaller problem that would be relatable to many people. It can also be more of an internal, mental struggle rather than an outward struggle.

8. Guideposts stories are REAL. They are authentic and transparent. You have to be willing to let the reader into your emotions and your faith journey.

Elements of a Winning Cover Letter:

1. Show that you're not a one-hit wonder. You want to show that if they choose you as a contest winner, you will become a regular contributor to their magazines. They want to select winners who will publish more stories than just the story that won the contest.
2. Your cover letter should show them who you are. Tell them about your hobbies and interests. Tell them about your family. If you've had a super interesting experience – hiked the Appalachian trail, had a near death experience – briefly describe it in your cover letter. You want them to see that you have other stories in you.
3. Tell them about connections you have. Many Guideposts stories are ghost-written so most contest winners mine their circle of friends and family for story ideas. If you have people in your circle who have interesting stories – especially ones that would fit into one of the four categories – let them know. My husband is a veteran, and I made sure to tell them that!
4. If applicable, tell them about other publishing opportunities you've had. If you haven't been published before, that's not a deal breaker. Don't mention previous publications at all.
5. Be friendly, but professional. Do not tell them that your mom loves your writing or that God told you to write this story. Both of those statements show when someone is a beginning writer, and you want to come across as capable, even if you don't have a lot of experience.

BREAKING INTO GUIDEPOSTS AND ANGELS THROUGH DEPARTMENT PIECES

Guideposts and Angels on Earth include short, DEPARTMENT pieces. These appear in every issue of the magazines, so the editors are always on the lookout for these specific themes.

Everyone wants to write the multi-page, full-length stories, but these one-page departments are a great way to break into the magazines. (Until you win the contest and become a workshopper!)

To send your story, go to guideposts.org and click the “Tell Your Story” link. You will fill in your name and contact information. You will copy and paste your story into the box. There is also a pull-down menu for you to state the category for your story. The options include a specific publication or holiday you are trying to write for. There are a few specific departments listed, but they are the departments in Guideposts only.

Unless otherwise noted, all department pieces are 300 words long.

Remember that Guideposts stories must involve a PROBLEM! Guideposts is not a magazine about God. It's a magazine about PEOPLE and how their faith helps them solve their problems. I've written hundreds of stories where one of my kids said something cute and it reminded me of God's love. These can be great stories, but they're not Guideposts stories. In Guideposts stories, the narrator has a problem that they must solve before the story is completed.

One of the best pieces of advice I can give is to read the magazines. You can subscribe to the print magazines or to the email newsletters they send. The only problem with the newsletters is that the department pieces are not usually sent out.

Departments in Guideposts:

Someone Cares – shorter pieces (about 150 words) about people or organizations that do good in their communities

Abundant Table – short prayers of gratitude

Mysterious Ways – stories about events that are unexplainable except through divine intervention

What Prayer Can Do – stories about a unique way that God answered a prayer or a way that prayer changed your life

Writing for Angels on Earth:

Obviously, this magazine prints stories about angels. Most are Heavenly Angels, but some are animals. The magazine also includes stories about humans who do heavenly things.

Like Guideposts, the stories include a problem the narrator is dealing with. Many of these stories are ghost-written. If you know someone who has had an angelic experience, ask if you can interview them and then write and submit their story.

Departments in Angels on Earth:

Heaven's Music – stories about how music impacts us and our faith – they get many stories about hymns – need unique angles

Someone's in the Kitchen – recipes that have special meaning

The Collector – a special collection of items that has meaning – can be angels, but doesn't have to be

He Makes the Winds His Messengers – stories about God using the wind to communicate with us

Only Human? – a story about someone that might be human or might be an angel – they help us and then we never see them again

Lost and Found – stories about a lost item that is then found through a unique way

Earning their Wings – stories about people who have done good things for their communities

A Wing and a Prayer – stories about the impact of prayer in our lives

WHAT TO SEND TO DSTARK@GUIDEPOSTS.ORG:

I would love to look at stories for any of the departments above. I manage the Someone Cares department, the Earning their Wings department, and the Lost and Found department specifically, but you may submit stories to me for any of the departments. Unfortunately, I am not able to give advice via email on stories that you plan to send for the contest, but I would encourage you to form critique groups so you can help one another.

Someone Cares and Earning their Wings both use stories about acts of kindness. Often, the smaller and easier for a reader to replicate, the better it is! Stories about giving compliments, helping a busy mom in the grocery store, being extra nice to a waitress are all winning ideas. Note that stories for these departments should not cost a lot of money to carry out.

I prefer queries to full-length stories. In other words, if you have a first-person story about an act of kindness, please send me an email with a few sentences describing your idea. If I think it will work, I'll ask you to write the story then. This is a time saver for both of us!

I occasionally send out story call-outs for specific things I need for the magazines. If you'd like to be added to this list, please sign up here at the conference or email me directly to be added to the list. Many stories for Someone Cares and Earning their Wings are seasonal, so I might send out an email asking for acts of kindness stories with a Mother's Day theme. Please note that we work about six months ahead, so if you have a seasonal story idea, please send it to me early! If I receive it too late, I can always hold it for the next year though.

I also manage the Lost and Found department. If you've lost and then found an item in a unique way, please send me a brief email describing your experience and I'll let you know if I think it will work in that department.