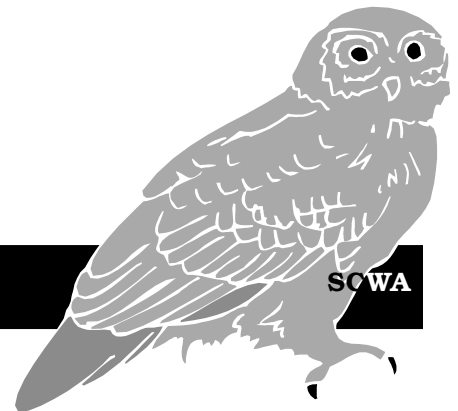


Southern California Writers Association  
**Writers News**



**Volume 4, Number 4** **April 2005**

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**April 16**  
**Diana Johnson,**  
 author, musician

*Shaking Stories  
 from Your Family  
 Tree*



**April 22, 2005**

**President's Message**

Easter season. Spring. The Vernal Equinox. A time of re-birth, of rejuvenation, of shedding the stifling and cumbersome winter galoshes (well, here in Southern California, that might be stretching a point) in favor of something more comfortable. A time to gather renewed energy with the ending of the cold, and the budding and blossoming of all the flowers.

Every year I think, "What better time to have a re-birth of my writing? Why not utilize the energy of the fresh new season as a springboard for creative activity?"

I think that all of us, especially those of us who are getting up in years, have a tendency to become complacent. When we were young, every high was the end of our troubles; every low was the end of the world. But when we reach forty, fifty, sixty, we've seen enough ups and downs to know that there will be nothing for the rest of our lives but a continuing series of ups and downs. We look back and wonder how we survived all the troubles we did; how we failed to appreciate at the time the wonderful happenings that also were bestowed upon us.

*Continued on page 2, column 1*

**April Speaker**

Are you interested in writing your family's stories, recording and sharing a memoir that is both memorable and profitable? Join us on April 16, 2005, as Diana Johnson shares her firsthand experience in her popular lecture, *Shaking Stories from Your Family Tree*.

Johnson has lived that dream by publishing three historical novels and has also published a step-by-step guide called: *Publishing Step-by-Step, What to Do, When, Where and How*.

Johnson, a direct descendent of the great medieval king, Charlemagne, is a member of the **Order of the Crown of Charlemagne** in the United States of America. She is also a member of

the **DAR** and the *Jamestown Society*. Her first book, *Destiny's Godchild*, won the 1999 **B.P.S.C. IRWIN Award** in fiction.

Johnson is a fourth generation Californian, an accomplished flutist and formerly taught music in the Los Angeles and Beverly Hills school districts and is a graduate of both UCLA and CSU Northridge.

To learn more about this fascinating speaker, please visit her on the web at <http://mysite.verizon.net/~billndi/> or e-mail her at [billndi@verizon.net](mailto:billndi@verizon.net).

*Kathleen Tewksbury, Publicity Director*

**Spring Ahead** (Daylight Saving Time)  
 April 3

## President's Message, cont. from page 1

Our writing should be the same way. How many hundreds of times have we sat down at the computer for hours, only to feel disgusted at the gibberish we see on the screen? You get old, you think, "There will be hundreds of more times this happens." Well, we need to remind ourselves that there will be hundreds of times, also, that we think, "Wow! I can really write good stuff!"

Whatever we feel about Easter, about Jesus Christ and the Resurrection, or about springtime, there still is no excuse for not celebrating it in all its wonder, giving thanks for the beauties of nature, for the wondrous sound of the woodlands and fields, the melting of snow, the singing clear brooks. (For those of you who have spent their entire lives in Orange County--yes, there really are such things!)

Whatever you use for inspiration, utilize it to its fullest!

Good luck and good writing!

Roy King, President

Would you like to contribute to the *Writers News*? Comments? Contact the editor at [webmaster@ocwriter.com](mailto:webmaster@ocwriter.com).

### Membership Information

Pauline Bent V.P. Membership  
[pchavezbent@hotmail.com](mailto:pchavezbent@hotmail.com)

### Meeting Reservations

Roy King H (760) 955-5027  
[3kings@urs2.net](mailto:3kings@urs2.net)

### 2005 Executive Committee

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## The Writer's Tool Box: Rethinking the Stage

by Mike Foley

This month, I thought we could take another look at setting and how it can affect writing. So let's start off by considering this scene:

*Gary entered the Brass Key and glanced around, but Morgan hadn't arrived yet. The place was dark, illuminated only by small lamps at either end of the room, and Gary could barely make out the liquor bottles on display behind the bar. Three older men drank beer at a small table near the door, talking softly. He ignored them, and moved slowly to the rear of the place, where two young guys played pool, laughing with each new shot. Sitting at a nearby table, Gary watched the door, waiting for Morgan, for the man who had destroyed his life.*

*One last payment. Morgan wasn't getting any more than that. One final thousand-dollar envelope and it was finished. If Morgan didn't like it, that was too bad. Gary was willing to take his chances. No more money. No more looking over his shoulder. One last payment and he'd never come back to another place like this.*

The last sentence above offers a key to what's wrong here. Gary doesn't want to come back to that bar, but there's

nothing particularly wrong with the place. In fact, it's not much different than many such bars we've read about in fiction and nonfiction. So the question is--"If there's nothing really bad about that bar, why's Gary so uptight about it?" We could answer by saying that he's upset with Morgan, with being blackmailed, and that he's projecting all that on the bar. That may be the case, but readers don't see it. They only see what's there.

As a result, the setting brings no real power to the scene, to the confrontation that's about to take place. Many readers will simply ignore this and read on, knowing that Gary is about to confront Morgan. That may actually be enough to fuel the story and keep readers hooked. But why settle for that? Especially when the right setting can bring so much more power to your scene.

It isn't uncommon for writers to grow so wrapped up in the story (and a high-tension scene) that they allow the logistics of action or confrontation to dominate. When that happens, it's easy to ignore the possibilities of the "stage," the area your characters will play on. And then when others tell us that our scene is weak, we're surprised. After all, we've done so well with the other elements, it's hard to believe that our scene is lacking anything.

A scene in fiction or nonfiction can go wrong for a number of reasons, but a  
*Continued on page 3, column 1*

## SCWA Critique Committee

Open to members of SCWA

### Nonfiction & Fiction Roy King [3kings@urs2.net](mailto:3kings@urs2.net)

Roy will take any amount of writing for critique. He prefers to see the entire ms at one time. *Mail* your ms to Roy at 15772 Heatherdale Rd., Victorville, CA 92394.

### Poetry Dr. Joyce Wheeler

Joyce will critique up to five poems. Please *mail* your work to Joyce at 3801 Chestnut Avenue, Long Beach, CA 90807.

## Rethinking the Stage, cont. from page 2

weak setting is one of the more common issues. In a scene like the example above, it's simply a matter of rethinking the stage and adding power to the setting. If you think a weak setting might be an issue for you, you have a couple of options.

**1. Go Somewhere New**—Only a few scenes absolutely must take place in a particular location. Most of the time, the setting can be changed completely, while keeping the character action and dialogue just the way it is. You might be surprised at how a complete change of the “stage” can affect a scene. What if we take our original situation and set it someplace new?

*The air outside Daggery was a mixture of cigarette smoke and body odor. Gary moved along the line outside this punk-rock club he had avoided since high school, when the kids he hated all hung out there. Now, five years later, the kids didn't look much different—spiked hair, tattoos, and piercings in places Gary had never considered. It was as if no amount of pain could touch them and as Gary walked along the line, they all sized him up, eyes darting up and down, about to pounce on anything they hated.*

*As he reached the end of the line, a young man stepped out, blocking Gary's path. The kid had fully tattooed arms and a thick spike in the skin near his eye.*

*He pushed Gary sideways, spitting on the side of his head. “Fuck you, Pig.”*

*Ignoring him, Gary walked to the end of the line, his heart pounding. Morgan always wanted to meet in places like this, probably to watch Gary squirm. But after tonight it would all be over.*

*One last payment. Morgan wasn't getting any more than that. One final thousand-dollar envelope and it was finished. If Morgan didn't like it, that was too bad. Gary was willing to take his chances. No more money. No more looking over his shoulder. One last payment and he'd never come back to*

Writers News, April 2005

*another place like this.*

The end of this section hasn't changed, but notice how it now makes more sense. This place is a direct threat to Gary and now his reluctance to return is understandable. Even better, most readers won't want to be in that place, either, and that makes the tension much higher.

**2. Use the Unexpected**—There may be some cases where a scene must occur in a particular place. For example, if Gary is an alcoholic trying to recover, the meeting in a bar takes on a new significance. But the bar in our first example would still be weak. If you must place people or characters in a particular place, you should (if possible) introduce elements that are unexpected. When readers encounter something they don't expect, they're immediately off balance.

*Gary entered the Brass Key and glanced around, but Morgan hadn't arrived yet. The place was dark, illuminated only by small lamps at either end of the room, and Gary could barely make out the liquor bottles on display behind the bar. Three older men drank beer at a small table near the door, watching him, sizing him up. He ignored them, and moved slowly to the rear of the place,*

*And then he froze.*

*Just ahead of him, a young woman stood stiffly, her body plastered against the back wall, her eyes narrow and moist. Four men stood opposite her, all dressed in jeans and tattered t-shirts, the air around them a mixture of cigarette smoke and sweat.*

*“Okay,” the largest man shouted. “Just stay still.”*

*A moment later, he threw a large knife directly at her head. It grazed her blonde hair and stuck firmly in the wall next to her left ear.*

*She was crying openly now. “I don't want to do this, anymore.”*

*“Shut up,” he told her. “You lost the bet, bitch.” The other men laughed loudly as he prepared to throw again.*

*Continued on page 5, column 1*

## March Contest Winner Hurricane Cake

by Carol Hogan

Aye matey. There we were at sea — my family and me — when the hurricane hit. The unstoppable waves plowed over us like a runaway locomotive, rolling our small blue sailboat first one way, then another.

Each wave deposited a torrent down the hatch, filling the bilge and clothing lockers with a gooey mess of engine oil and salt water.

My wife hunkered down on the bunk, fear and despair in her eyes. My two young children weren't afraid and decided to bake a cake.

Into a bowl went carelessly measured ingredients, soon ladled into a pan and carefully placed in a stainless steel folding oven on top of our gimbaled stove.

It baked. We waited, and listened to the never ending waves. Soon the exhilarating scent of baking chocolate filled the cabin. Our spirits soared. Our mouths watered. We almost sang for joy.

Then the largest wave of all rolled over the boat. The swinging stove went into a dangerous tilt and threw the oven, with the cake in it, across the cabin directly onto my wife's big toe. The chocolate mix oozed through her toes and onto the cabin floor, mingling with the gooey oil and salt water.

I put my arm around her and she burst into tears.

“There, there,” I said. “It will be OK. Mother Nature's almost finished. The hurricane will soon be over and we'll be safe, again.”

“I know,” she sighed with resignation. “But is she going to clean up this mess?”

### Honorable Mention

Dr. Joyce Wheeler - *Sea Story*  
Polly Dunn - *The Artist's Model*  
[www.ocwriter.com/willwrite.html](http://www.ocwriter.com/willwrite.html)

# March Highlights

“Publishers are notorious for not doing much for authors who aren’t already well-known,” says Linda Friedman, who founded **BEAU: Book Events & Authors Unlimited** to address the critical point and often disconnect between a book’s being published and its being sold. Her presentation, *Secrets of Self-Promotion: Genie in a Bottle*, clarified the process.

Understanding that “most authors find self-promotion awkward” and coming from a career in politics, Friedman naturally segued into book publicity while co-owning **Chevalier Books** in L.A.’s Hancock Park. Her twelve years there brought her into contact with numerous writers and emerging writers—and “the hole in the marketplace about how to market themselves.” Now she describes herself only as a “literary advisor and events coordinator.”

First, though, Friedman discussed the differences between a literary agent and a publicist: An agent should charge nothing, recommend improvements, and find a publishing house you are “compatible with.” [The publisher will also ask for changes, but “you have to fight against some you don’t like.” She stresses not taking these issues personally.] Publicists, however, may charge \$1,000-\$10,000 per month to get your book out. In general, they will also write your biography, contact local papers, and get your book into gift and bookseller catalogues. But, she warns, these measures may not make much difference.

What, then, *will* publishers do for an unknown writer? Ms. Friedman mentioned only two things: If you ask, they “will give you money for buttons, posters, book kits—but not for travel, et cetera.” Also, publishers know which experts or specialists to approach for favorable quotes and book jacket endorsements.

Considering publicists’ fees and other limitations, an author must turn to his own

resources or someone like Linda Friedman. Member **Lynnette Baum** spoke up here to say that a writer will usually have about a year between acceptance of publication and publication itself to plan ahead and that the “first four to six weeks, 90 days, are all critical.”

Before publication, Friedman suggests “cultivating a relationship with a local newspaper near you so that word of mouth can help you later.” Consider also local radio outlets. “You have to lean on your friends for this.” In addition, participate in book club discussions. Many of these can be located through bookstores or even neighborhood groups and associations.

It’s Publication Party time immediately upon publication. Ask a friend to host one, Friedman urges. Send out postcard invitations to those you know, such as those in church, synagogue, **American Association of University Women, Rotary Club, Women in Business**, etc.

Next, have a book signing at your local bookstore or go to chains like **Barnes & Noble**. If you have a signing elsewhere and have leftovers, you just pay for shipping the extras back to the publisher. (You or someone must have a seller’s permit from your city. Bookstores have these.)

Friedman also stresses to make certain the bookstores within a five-mile radius stock your book. “See the book buyer: Offer a free seminar and leave a copy. Almost make a pain of yourself.” (Most will not sell books on a consignment basis.)

“Affinity groups” offer an excellent option. If a book is on dog breeding, then take your books to pet stores; you might want to give them a percentage of sales. Put an ad in *Canine Magazine*. “Sometimes publishers will help pay for the ad.”

Your earlier exposure with book clubs can pay off. Friedman says to see if you can organize several book clubs into

one big meeting for book club discussions. If they “aren’t keen on your doing regular selling, offer them the activities through their educational budget.” If you have a backlist, books prior to your current one, see if they are still available. A writer can buy “remainders,” those not yet out of print, for around \$3-4 each and sell them for more him/herself.

Since all libraries have a Friends of the Library group, appear there. Friedman even suggests the **UCLA Book Fair** and the **Hollywood Book Fair**. “Offer yourself as a moderator for a panel.” *The LA Times* Sunday Book Review section contains ideas of places to contact.

Investigate also institutional groups such Hadassah or alumni chapters of your university. In short, brainstorm all possibilities for the reading public.

After lunch, Ms. Friedman put Kathy Porter, Connie Nanasy, and Janet DeMarco one by one in the hot seat as the club brainstormed publicity outlets for them. Porter’s *Gray Guardian* about alien contact and abduction seemed a stumper until its strong environmental factor became apparent. Then besides environmental groups and others, she was advised to contact the Chamber of Business in Eastern New Mexico cities. For Nanasy’s *Love and Betrayal in Texas*, one particularly good suggestion was to investigate the markets that Lifetime Channel works with. DeMarco’s not yet published *Beyond Appearances*, that deals with nursing homes and aging and that “every character is not what you would think,” seemed a natural for AAUW.

In open discussion, Pres. Roy King suggested looking into “Predators and Editors” to “check out agents who are crooks.” He said agents are paid **after** sales, usually 15% on domestic and 20% on international sales.

*Glenda Rynn*

**Members:** You may buy taped copies of lecture from SCWA Tape Librarian Sharon Walters: [swwaltz@surfside.net](mailto:swwaltz@surfside.net).

## Rethinking the Stage, cont. from page 2

Gary turned away and sat at a nearby table, watching the door, waiting for Morgan, cringing when the second knife hit the wall. Morgan always wanted to meet in places like this, probably to watch Gary squirm. But after tonight it would all be over.

One last payment. Morgan wasn't getting any more than that. One final thousand-dollar envelope and it was finished. If Morgan didn't like it, that was too bad. Gary was willing to take his chances. No more money. No more looking over his shoulder. One last payment and he'd never come back to another place like this.

In this case, we haven't changed the basic description of the bar. Instead, we've simply added an action element that creates tension. And while the knife game isn't directly threatening to Gary (at least not yet), it's more than enough to raise concern for readers. Now his reluctance to visit places like this is very clear.

In both instances, notice how tension is the key to raising the stakes in the scene. The settings are more tense than the original and offer a better setup for Gary's confrontation with the man who is blackmailing him. In your own work, consider what will help set readers up for the action to come, whether it be confrontation or a nervous meeting with a possible love interest. Allow the setting to frame that action and provide the best stage for people and characters.

Best of luck with your writing.

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**Mike Foley** is editor of **Dream Merchant Magazine**, author of 750+ stories and articles, and owns **Writer's Review** critique service. He also teaches writing at UC-Riverside extension. Contact **Foley** at [info@writers-review.com](mailto:info@writers-review.com) or visit his website at [www.writers-review.com](http://www.writers-review.com)



## The April 2005 "Will Write 4 Food" Contest!

The contest is open to members of SCWA. Look carefully at the photo at the top of this column and write a short-short story (maximum 250 words) about what is happening. To facilitate fair judging, put the story title on the top of the page with your daytime phone number underneath. (*No names, please!*) Only the winning author will be contacted.

**Write:** A short-short story (maximum 250 words)

**Submit:** One entry per member per month, via e-mail: Lynnette Baum, [therightwriter@cox.net](mailto:therightwriter@cox.net).

Via snail mail, L. Baum, 17595 Harvard, Ste. C-144, Irvine, CA 92614.

**Subject Line:** April 2005 "Will Write for Food Contest" (Warning: without this subject line, the e-mail or snail mail may be deleted or tossed) with your daytime number underneath. Remember, no author name, please.

**Deadline:** Stories must be received on or before April 13, 2005.

**Winner:** Attends their next SCWA meeting for free. He or she will also be presented with a winner's certificate. The winning story will be featured in the club's newsletter, *The Writers News*, and on the organization's website.

**Criteria:** Contestants must be

members of SCWA. The story must be 250 words or less. No evaluation or comments will be offered on stories submitted for the contest. Only one winning entry per member per year.

Lynnette Baum, V.P. Programming

## SCWA News & Announcements

The Orange County Children's Festival of Books, October 2, 2005, is looking for children's authors to sign their books and speak. For more information, contact SCWA member **Stacia Deutsch**, [htppbooks@cox.net](mailto:htppbooks@cox.net).

To learn more about the Festival, or to reserve exhibit space, visit the official website at [www.otcbf.com](http://www.otcbf.com).

Stacia Deutsch

May 21, 2005  
**Chris Baty**, author,  
speaker  
**Writing A Novel  
in 30 Days**



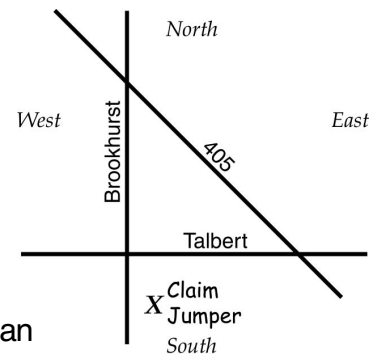
Baty's novel approach to writing fiction helps writers of all genres sidestep the typical problems common to many.

Baty is the author of *No Plot? No Problem!: A Low Stress, High Velocity Guide to Writing a Novel in 30 Days* (Chronicle Books, 2004), and founder of the National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo)—[www.nanowrimo.org](http://www.nanowrimo.org).

## April Meeting

**Saturday, April 16, 2005**

Claim Jumper Restaurant  
Banquet Room Entrance, rear of building  
18050 Brookhurst St., Fountain Valley, CA  
Restaurant tel.: (714) 963-6711.



**April 22, 2005**

**Diana Johnson**, author, musician

## Shaking Secrets from Your Family Tree

Registration & Networking: 9:30 a.m.  
Meeting & Program: 10:00 a.m.  
Lunch: 11:30 a.m.  
Afternoon Program: 12:15 p.m.  
Members & Non-Members: \$20.00

**Walk-ins & Guests  
always welcome**

**RSVP before April 11:** Roy King, 15772 Heatherdale Rd., Victorville, CA 92394. Check must accompany reservations. Make checks payable to *SCWA*. **After April 11:** Roy King *home* (760) 955-5027; *e-mail* 3kings@urs2.net – bring check to door. For more information, go to [www.ocwriter.com](http://www.ocwriter.com). ***Be sure to RSVP whenever possible!***

*Or register online at [www.ocwriter.com/meetings.html](http://www.ocwriter.com/meetings.html)*

**Southern California Writers Association**

# Writers News

Pamela Rocke, Editor

# 453

23016 Lake Forest Dr., Suite A  
Laguna Hills, CA 92653