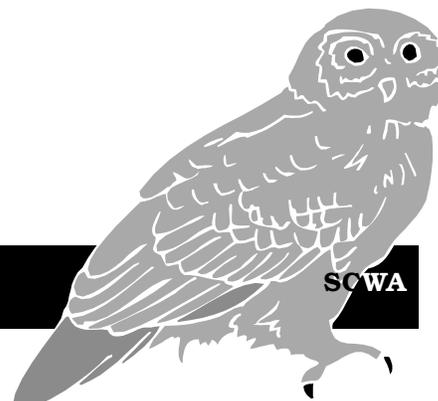


Southern California Writers Association Writers News

Volume 4, Number 8

August 2005



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August 20 Paul LeVine

Literary Agent

How to Make an Agent's Mouth Water: Books that Beg for Representation



President's Message

In case any of you have forgotten, elections are coming up soon!

This year, it has been suggested that term limits might be appropriate for the Board.

The reasons are readily apparent. If you have the same people serving on any board year after year, you get a stagnation of ideas, entrenched troglodytes with their little power bases, and a club without the benefits of fresh, new board members with the fresh, new ideas so essential to any club.

All of us on the present board are honored to be here, and thankful for the support you have given us. There truly is a great deal of trust inherent in the relationship between the rank-and-file of any organization and its governing body.

And no, we are not trying to recruit new board members simply to pawn the responsibility off onto someone else.

Granted, it can be time consuming and tedious on rare occasions. Arrangements have to be made for meetings, speakers, food, collecting dues, providing support for members, and any one of a myriad of related chores. This requires time and effort on someone's part. And it's easy for the rest of us to sit back and say to ourselves, "Hey, I pay dues, and I expect to get my money's worth out of this so-called Executive Board."

Continued on page 2, column 1

August Speaker

As both a literary agent and an entertainment law attorney, **Paul S. LeVine** wears many hats. He specializes in representating writers, producers, directors, actors, authors, publishers, and other companies in the fields of motion pictures, television, publishing, stage, interactive multimedia and advertising. As a literary agent, **LeVine** also represents adult, children, and young adult fiction and non-fiction authors.

Since starting his agency in 1998, **LeVine** has sold more than sixty nonfiction books to more than thirty top publishing houses – successfully promoting many of these works for movies-for-television and feature films.

Currently representing more than 100 titles, with two-thirds^s of these produced by unpublished/new writers, *The LeVine Literary Agency* has sold 25 books in the last twelve months. Grounded in legal experience gained by working in the law department for **Warner Brother's Television** and **Hearst Entertainment**, it is no wonder that **LeVine** has succeeded in representing both established and "new" authors so well!

Join us at our next SCWA meeting on the third Saturday in August, and learn how to make your book irresistible to the right agent!

Lynnette Baum, V.P. Programming

President's Message, cont. from page 1

Well, guys, a news flash: all of us on the Board pay dues, too!

But let's talk about the benefits of serving on the Executive Board.

Serving on the board allows you to formulate and execute club policy directly, rather than simply giving someone your suggestion and hoping they pay attention.

Serving on the board allows you to interact socially with your fellow officers, and any other member of the club (all of you are always invited!) who comes to the Board meeting. Sure, it's work, and sometimes differences of opinion lead to the occasional tense situation. Even so, all of us who have served on the SCWA Executive Board will tell you we are glad we did, and we recommend it to everyone who likes working with others to accomplish the common goal.

Newsletter Editor/Webmaster Pamela Rocke has done a super job. After the great work Doug Shaner did, it was hard to imagine anyone's improving upon the Website, but Pam has certainly done that.

Vice President of Membership Pauline Bent has been masterful in keeping our membership list current.

Membership Information

Pauline Bent V.P. Membership
pchavezbent@hotmail.com

Meeting Reservations

Roy King H (760) 955-5027
3kings@urs2.net

2005 Executive Committee

President	Roy King
V.P. Programming	Lynnette Baum
V.P. Membership	Pauline Bent
Secretary/Treasurer	Joan Cordova
Publicity Director	Kat Tewksbury
Webmaster	Pamela Rocke
Newsletter Editor	Pamela Rocke
Associate Editor	Nancy Darnall
Tape Librarian	Sharon Walters

www.ocwriter.com

Publicity Director Kat Tewksbury has kept the club in the public eye by her great PR work.

Secretary/Treasurer Joan Cordova has consistently provided a terrific set of minutes for the club, as well as offering up her skills, particularly her computer expertise, to fill in other places as needed.

Vice President of Programming Lynnette Baum has been doing a wonderful job—haven't these speakers been marvelous! But V.P.P. can be a laborious, time-consuming effort, and it really can burn a person out in a short time. But it's great for networking, making connections, and generally getting to know established members of the writing community.

President? Ha. All I have to do as is just sit back and watch these folks work!

Even so, we need to keep a constant source of "fresh blood" on the Board. I strongly encourage each and every (I know that's redundant, but I'm leaving it in anyway!) one of you to consider running for office.

Good luck and good campaigning!

Roy King, President

Would you like to contribute to the *Writers News*? Comments? Contact the editor at webmaster@ocwriter.com.

The Writer's Tool Box: Making the Scene

by Mike Foley

Reprinted with permission from **The Writer's Edge**

I remember sitting once in a small restaurant at the southern end of Santa Barbara.

This month, I'd like to talk about scenes and how they can be most effective in your fiction and nonfiction. Questions about scenes do, in fact, crop up regularly in classes and also in my e-mail box. On the one hand, creating a scene seems easy. After all, you know where you want the writing to go and you just give that to readers, right?

Maybe.

On the other hand, you might show that scene to a writer friend or a critique group, only to discover that "this particular scene just doesn't work."

"Why not?" you wonder. "It works for me."

Of course it does. That's because you're close to the material. It resides in your mind and as a result, it's very clear to you. But it's often easy to omit something in a scene because as writers, we see the scene in our mind's eye and assume that readers see it, too. But they don't. And when something's missing, the "hole" in your writing is obvious.

SCWA Critique Committee

Open to members of SCWA

Nonfiction & Fiction **Roy King** 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.

So now let's return to the very first sentence of this article. I'm sure it was obvious to most of you that this sentence didn't go anywhere. It was a setup that died rather quickly. Why? Because the rest of the scene is in my head, where you can't see it. And the mistake is obvious. I left something out and at the very least, it seems weird. The feeling you had when that setup died is the same feeling readers have when one of your scenes isn't working. And that, of course, is what you want to avoid.

The best defense against this is to keep a few "scene basics" in mind. That way you can make sure the scenes in your writing contain these necessary elements. So let's look at a few things that must be present in every scene.

1. Description—When we take readers to a specific place, we need to show it to them. However, the basic description of a scene is often overlooked in work people send me. Most of the time, that's because the writer is anxious to get on with the story and forgets to show the place to readers. So I might see something like, "They met in a small restaurant in south Santa Barbara," which isn't any better than the opening sentence I used. If I want readers to see the place, I might describe the tables, the wall décor, my fellow diners, movement, odors and sounds. I could use any or all of these things. Then readers have a strong image of where they are.

2. Humanity—People or characters should be present in a scene if it's going to work. In fiction, you don't always need people. For example, you could use animals or space aliens as characters. But those characters will still have human traits that readers identify with. In nonfiction, when we visit a place we want to show readers the people who live or work or frequent the setting. Even if the only person in a scene is your viewpoint character

(fiction) or you, the narrator (nonfiction), that's enough for most readers. Someone is there with them, holding their hands. That sense of humanity will deepen everything else that happens in that scene.

3. A Reason—It's fine to describe a place for readers, but unless it's tied to the story or subject matter in some way, they'll think, "So what? Why are you showing me this?" In other words, readers need a reason to be there. In nonfiction, we may have gone to this restaurant to interview someone, to describe a crime scene or to follow a health inspector as he makes his investigation. In each case, the place is linked to the subject matter of the article. However, if we're writing fiction, the reason will be specific to our main viewpoint character. Why is that person in the restaurant? To eat? To think something over? To meet a lover? To confront a mob boss? There could be any number of reasons. The point is readers know why the character is there, what he/she wants, and why this place is important.

4. Action—To put it simply: In any scene, something happens. Readers see movement, action between people, dialogue, etc. If nothing happens, the scene is dead and readers wonder why they've been taken to this place. In nonfiction, we can use quotes from an interview or details of a person's movement as we watch what he does. In fiction, your viewpoint character will try to get what he/she wants by interacting with the place in some way—eating, studying other patrons, interacting with a suspect, spying on someone or even engaging in a physical confrontation. Beware of those scenes that take place entirely in a character's mind, as he/she tries to figure something out. That might be important story information, but quite often, it's simply dull.

Continued on page 5, column 1

July Contest Winner **Cold Comfort**

by Barbara Schnell

I felt his pain when they rolled him into the room. As they set him in place I sensed exhaustion and the discomfort left by the tattered rope around his neck.

"Honey, it'll never work," said Venus de Milo from her niche. "I mean, a little May-December never hurt anybody but young guys can't commit. I dated David for a year and he couldn't keep it in his pants. Looks like this one can't either."

I excused his nudity because he couldn't help it. Neither could I. We were both vulnerable.

"And Romans never did understand Greeks," continued Venus. "Do you know what David gave me for an anniversary present? A bowling ball! What in the world did he think I would do with a bowling ball?"

The only gift I wanted was his love.

Venus leaned in to whisper, "And I hate to mention it but he doesn't look too healthy. He's called The Dying Gaul for a reason, y'know."

I could comfort him, I thought as I twisted on my stony plinth. *We could warm each other with affection.*

"I don't know where your head is," declared Venus impatiently, "but I wash my . . . ooohh, I give up."

We've been together for a year. He's still in pain but I think my love eases him. I hope so. I've discovered I really don't know what he's thinking. And I'm positive he doesn't understand me. For our anniversary he gave me a hat.

Honorable Mention

Janet DeMarco - *Art Critic #5*

Carol Gandolfo - *The Model*

www.ocwriter.com/willwrite.html

July Highlights

“Mr. Anal” is what his students call writing teacher, author, and journalist Mike Sirota because he “works them hard” as he aims them towards commercial and professional markets and literary agents. His presentation, *Making Your Book Better Than Good—Because Good Isn’t Good Enough*, illustrated how Sirota enables students to hurdle the obstacles literary agents encounter in the “slush pile”—unsolicited manuscripts.

Sirota says agents generally use two screening methods: A. “I read the 1st line; if OK, I read the 1st paragraph. If OK, I read the 1st page; if OK, I turn the page.” B. “If you have one typo in the 1st five pages, I put it [the manuscript] down and send it back.”

In the first phase of his writing career, Sirota published 13 fantasy novels in the ‘70s and early ‘80s. Six more books came in the late ‘80s and into the ‘90s, but somewhere in there he began teaching writing courses at San Diego colleges and universities and privately. When his best student, whom he had recommended to a publisher, was published, the thrill Sirota felt made him “lose my former ego about my own writing.” He’s been enormously successful. Regarding critique fees, he’s now able to ask, “Can you afford me?”

However, “the business is about expectations,” stresses Sirota, who interviews private students first to see if their expectations are realistic or not. His rules: “Keep your day job” and “Do it because you love it.”

Two books currently becoming prominent have been through Sirota’s hands: *Chasing Dreamtime: A Sea-Going Hitchhiker’s Journey Through Memory and Myth* by Neva Sullaway and *They Poured Fire on Us from the Sky: The True Story of Three Lost Boys from Sudan* by those three boys and Judy A. Bernstein.

Nonfiction is less difficult to sell, but Sirota says, “You have to be famous or infamous to get on the best seller list

or have killed 17 people!” “What are your credentials?” One suggestion he makes is to “try to play the positive: Written by a lay person for a lay audience.”

Regarding Print On Demand, Sirota was advised at a publisher’s conference to submit work as a fresh manuscript to agents and say nothing about having gone the POD route even if you’ve already sold 200 books. On the other hand, a regular publisher may take your book if you’ve sold 5000 copies.

Back to Mr. Anal. Mike Sirota is highly specific in his manuscript advice. Books should hit the 70-85,000-word range. Use 20 lb. bond paper, not fancy bond or rag, with about 250 words per page. Times New Roman is the preferred font. A more recent change is to use italics when needed instead of underlining. Since formats change, use what your agent wants. Sirota enumerated the Risk Points of manuscripts [see Sidebar] that will make agents balk if poorly done. “We don’t want to be your teacher. Come back to us when you’re ready,” they’ll say. However, “you don’t get a second shot with agents, generally,” he notes.

Mr. Sirota generously distributed samples of a nonfiction proposal package and of a fiction package suitable for an agent. He may be e-mailed for a copy at info@mikesirota.com.

On Sat., August 23, Mike Sirota will be conducting a half-day seminar on Risk Points. It will run 9-1:00 at the University of California, San Diego.

by Glenda Rynn

Members: You may buy taped copies of lectures from SCWA Tape Librarian Sharon Walters: swwaltz@surfside.net.

Risk Points

1. Mailer: Use a manuscript box instead of a poor-looking envelope.
2. Cover letter: Should be one-sided, strong type.
3. Synopsis: Story beginning to end. One page is good, but two pages single-spaced may be okay.
4. Title page: Use 28 point font size.
5. Page one layout: Sloppy, unprofessional formats will be turned back. Double-space with a jagged right margin. No double doubles between graphs.
6. Chapter One: Start 1/4 down first page on the actual manuscript.
7. Opening: Good narrative hook.
8. Dialogue: Well structured and interesting. “Must be strong indicator of character.”
9. Point of view: 3rd person limited, past tense is most popular. 1st person also okay, (popular with cozy murder mysteries.)
10. Scenes, locations: Compelling?
11. Characters: Realistic? “Do we love or hate them if we’re supposed to?”
12. Is this simply a good story?
13. Exposition: *Do not* overload readers. *Do* cosmetic editing: remove adverbs and multiple adjectives.

Making the Scene, cont. from page 3

It's far better to have character discover something in conversation or by digging through the environment in some way. As long as something happens to move the writing forward, the scene will work.

When a scene isn't working, consider these elements first. In most cases, you'll discover a weakness in one or more area. And then by adding the missing pieces, you'll see your work come to life once again.

Best of luck with your writing.

*Mike Foley is editor of **Dream Merchant Magazine** and author of more than 750 published stories and articles. He teaches writing in the extension program at UC-Riverside. Foley operates the **Writer's Review** critique service, helping hundreds of writers. Visit Mike's Website: www.writers-review.com*

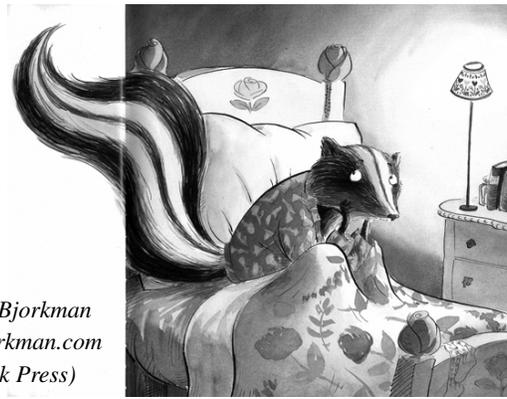
SCWA News & Announcements

Member Publications

Dr. Ron Lavin, SCWA member since 1998, recently had his twentieth book published. The title is *The Big Ten: Another Look at the Ten Commandments*. This is his fifth book in the *Another Look* series (**CSS Publishing Company**.)

Also in the *Big Ten* series are *I Believe: Help My Unbelief: Another Look at the Apostle's Creed*; *Stories to Remember: Another Look at the Parables of Jesus*; *Abba: Another Look at the Lord's Prayer* and *Saving Grace: Another Look at the Word and Sacraments*.

Ron was named to *Who's Who in America* for 2006. He was also named **Christian Writer of the Year** by the **American Christian Writers Association** for 2006.



Art by Steve Bjorkman
www.stevebjorkman.com
(Waterbrook Press)

The August 2005 "Will Write 4 Food" Contest!

The contest is open to members of SCWA. Look carefully at the photo above 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 name and daytime phone number underneath. 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.

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

Subject Line: *August 2005 "Will Write 4 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 August 17, 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

Public Speaking for Authors & Writers

Member, SCWA Newsletter Editor and Webmaster **Pamela Rocke** is interested in helping writers, authors and journalists become better public speakers through the Toastmasters educational program.

As writers, most of us support our writing through speaking, whether giving speeches as our guest speakers do, or at signings, pitch sessions, or interviews.

If you are interested in forming a new Toastmasters Club, please contact Pam at kashka1@cox.net

September 17, 2005

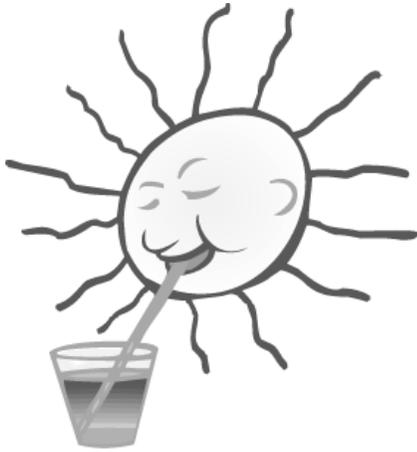
Julie Ann Shapiro
author, freelance writer

Writing Brilliant Short Stories

Join us in September when Julie Ann Shapiro discusses the art and process of writing brilliant short stories.

Shapiro's short stories have appeared in:

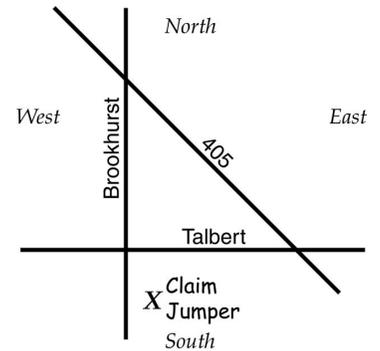
Cellar Door Magazine
Flash Fiction Net
Mad Hatters' Review
Espresso Fiction
...and many more.



August Meeting

Saturday, August 20, 2005

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



Paul LeVine

Literary Agent

How to Make An Agent's Mouth Water: Books that Beg for Representation

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 August 15: Roy King, 15772 Heatherdale Rd., Victorville, CA 92394. Check must accompany reservations. Make checks payable to **SCWA**. **After August 15:** Roy King *home* (760) 955-5027; *e-mail* 3kings@urs2.net — bring check to door. For more information, go to www.ocwriter.com. ***Be sure to RSVP whenever possible!***

Or register online at www.ocwriter.com/meetings.html

Southern California Writers Association

Writers News

Pamela Rocke, Editor

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Laguna Hills, CA 92653