



**December 17, 2005, Speaker  
Shirl Thomas, book doctor/writer: Editing to Sell**

**Shirl Thomas**, professional book doctor and freelance writer returns to share her editing and rewriting gems of wisdom with SCWA members and guests.

Shirl focuses on problem areas in the writing of both fiction and nonfiction and shows how to solve them. She says; “The writing is easy; the rewriting is hard.”

In 1994, Shirl experienced the value of critique groups and self-editing firsthand, when she made her first attempt at something longer than a half-page poem. Our own **Roy King**, past president **Alice Harpley**, and a few other members of the old NWA group suggested valuable changes that improved her writing. The resulting article, *How to Choose a Writers’ Conference*, was published soon after in *The Writer* magazine and, a couple of months later, the article was included as a chapter in the 1995 *Writers Handbook*, and again in

the 1996 and 1997 editions.

Her helpful critique experience led to an interest in helping other writers to “write it right.” Soon, dozens of writers were in line for her editing help. The word-of-mouth referrals mounted and what started as a minor assist, mushroomed into a successful business. Shirl now uses her sharp insight and expertise in hands-on editing to doctor manuscripts for her current clientele of more than one hundred twenty.

Shirl is in the process of finalizing edits on eleven manuscripts, nine others are in a rewriting status, and two are pending. A few others are currently in the hands of agents.

A smattering of her writers’ publishing credits include: *Zelig’s Odyssey*, by Shimon Camiel (September 2005); *The Sacred Language of Dimensional Prayer*, by Jim Turrell (July 2004); *Back to*

*Work-Fast!*, by Dr. Lynn Joseph, Ph. D. (Fall 2003); *The Art of War*, translated by Dwayne Tarver (April 2002); *Look Younger Longer*, Peggy Canning, M.A. (2nd printing 2002); *The Jewel Carriers*, by Chuck Varney (December 1999) is presently being re-birthed into a screenplay; and Rudolph Terry Shappee’s *Making My Way* (1999) is now mandatory reading for the ninth grade.

A professional freelance writer for thirty-one years, Shirl has numerous publication credits of her own—including articles, humorous quotes, poetry, and greeting-card verses. Her greeting-card material (more than 200 verses and ideas) has been published by thirty-two major companies, including: Amberley, Gibson, Hallmark, Leanin’ Tree, and Rust Craft, to name a few.

Her genuine concern for writers and their problem areas is evident in her constant striving to help improve the flow of each sentence.

**Bring a few pages of your manuscript for Shirl’s critique. She will read parts and use them in a workshop format; or, if you like, you may send a few pages to her ahead of time. Attach to an email to: [shirlth@aol.com](mailto:shirlth@aol.com)**

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 **President’s Message**

*The Newsletter is late, and it's my fault!*

Well, not entirely my fault, because I am only one of the offenders. But making this club run smoothly requires the prompt and timely input of everyone.

I have no idea what virus I have been cross-blocked into oblivion by, and I hope I never see it again. Whether this club had a President's Column, or even whether or not there was a club, was about the farthest thing from my mind as I lay in a semi-comatose state most of this week.

Finally, I recovered enough—I think—to force myself to sit up at this chair before my computer screen, and scribble some incoherent and perhaps idiotic thoughts onto it to e-mail on to Laura.

Then I thought: What if it were Laura who had been sick?

*Continued on page 2, column 1*

## **President's Message**

*(Continued from page 1)*

Sure, we could have run the Newsletter without a President's Column. We could have run it without a speaker bio, a recap of the previous month's presentation, and so forth.

But we could not have run the Newsletter without our Newsletter Editor!

This was one of the first issues we addressed at the Executive Board Meeting. We need to have a backup Newsletter Editor! Pam Rocke, as she has always been willing to do, has graciously volunteered ("graciously volunteered" is almost becoming a cliché, isn't it?) in case Laura gets this horrible virus, or something else.

We still are looking for someone else who can sign checks on behalf of SCWA. Joan Cordova's name is still on the account, but she is no longer officially an officer (we miss you, Joan!) Lawrence Porricelli has volunteered to share the Secretary-Treasurer job with me, but some of you are really missing out on having a good time at our Board meetings! (They are fun! Just ask any of our officers! This is the one thing that R. King as President will insist upon, and make certain does happen!)

It will be great to see Shirl and all of you at the Christmas meeting (or Holiday meeting, for the PC among us). We are eagerly looking forward to meeting once again. (See how a nasty virus can stifle creativity, and lead to a last-resort-of-utilizing-clichés-left-and-right [sorry; couldn't resist throwing that last one in there])!

At any rate, hope the Holiday Season finds you all in good health, and with a plentiful measure of good cheer!

Good luck and good writing!

*Roy King, President*



January 21, 2006

**Sam Weller**

**Author of *The Bradbury Chronicles***

In January our speaker is Sam Weller, author of *The Bradbury Chronicles*, the international best-selling biography about the life of Ray Bradbury. Mr. Weller will not only speak about the making of *The Bradbury Chronicles*, but may invite Ray Bradbury to attend and speak to us during the final hour of our meeting. Don't miss this once in a lifetime opportunity! RSVP's may be helpful as our limited amount of space will fill up fast.

### *November Contest Winner*

## **REINCARLNATION**

By Mike Dunn



Carl was once an artist. His masterpieces could be found on nearly every cave wall in northwest Pangea. He was tragically eaten by a saber tooth tiger one balmy afternoon.

Carl was once a gladiator. His name was chanted by hundreds of thousands of bloodthirsty fans in the Coliseum. He was tragically eaten when Caesar sent in the lions one balmy afternoon.

Carl was once a Mayan mathematician. His contributions helped develop the concept of zero, which is what was left of him after he was tragically eaten by a puma one balmy afternoon.

Carl was once a powerful aristocrat. His very presence exuded sophistication and superiority. He was tragically eaten by a pack of cougars that had escaped from a traveling circus one balmy afternoon.

Carl was once an African warrior. His leadership and

bravery made him a legend across the Serengeti. He was tragically eaten by a cheetah who knew nothing of his legend one balmy afternoon.

Carl was once an animal rights activist. His love for all things living helped shape organizations like PETA that strive to stop animal cruelty. He was tragically eaten by a panther he was rescuing from poachers one balmy afternoon.

Five year old Carl sat at a table one balmy afternoon. His mother made her way into the room carrying something swaddled in her arms. The woman showed the boy a kitten she had found barely clinging to life. Carl could only sit back, place hand to chin, and wait for the inevitable.

### **Honorable Mention**

Polly Dunn – *A California Spin*

H. Henry Minick – *The Tsunami*

[www.ocwriter.com/willwrite.html](http://www.ocwriter.com/willwrite.html)

## November Highlights:

## Alan Russell, mystery writer Killer Mysteries: Making Money with Murder

To hook his own interest in a book idea, Alan Russell, one of the most diverse mystery writers in the field, plays “What If?” To hook his readers, Russell puts his protagonist “where he can be didactic” or where he learns. Definitely hooking his November SCWA audience, Russell presented “**Killer Mysteries: Making Money with Murder.**”

The question “What if you were the son of a serial murderer?” provoked Russell. Knowing that “lots of the monsters fathered children,” he found it difficult but compelling to write *Shame*, “my book from Hell.” It’s a psychological thriller built on murders styled like many that had occurred in the previous generation.

### What ideas captivate you?

Russell says you must write the book you want to write, not that desired by your agent, family, or friends. “Give them a damn good story” by being your own best editor instead of trying to calculate what your editor wants. Russell stresses having enough passion to carry you through the one-to-two years of work. “By the end you’ll probably hate the book,” he smiles. Also, if you’re “chasing a trend, it’s probably too late.”

Regarding mysteries, Russell noted some style changes in the genre: the murders now seem to initiate the plot rather than occur in the middle as they did in 1930s’ mysteries. For example, because *Lonesome Dove* doesn’t “open up” until about page 160, it wouldn’t find a market today since readers have less patience. Plus, today’s thrillers seem to have more murders, but keep this number realistic, he warns.

### Mysteries have other demands.

For the crucial back story, use snippets of specifics but do not stop the forward story motion as a block of information would. The victim’s own back story is important because he/she “must have had a personality.” Sometimes the problem is finding the right antagonist. In addition, the writer must not “hold the hand of the

reader” nor allow him/her the comfort of complacency. The character “needs to scramble” as things go from bad to worse. With a career in this genre, Alan Russell has the odd but useful pastime of collecting ideas of “good ways to die.” Even odder, he’s found that many situations in his novels have since come about!

Lurking in mystery series is an inherent liability: Most are “dead after four books,” declares Russell, giving a nod to Robert Parker. Those authors stopped applying their craft with the vigor they had had earlier. He is weary of the psychopathic sidekick habitually used by one writer. However, even though Russell terms John MacDonald “formulaic” and says the plots of Ross MacDonald are all the same, he likes these two because the former is “ahead of his time in machines” and inventiveness and the latter has “good embroidery.”

### More of Russell’s Rules for writing novels:

- **Approach writing like a job.** Some writers need to groom and dress themselves for business before sitting at the computer.
- **First write a five-page, single-spaced outline** of what you think will happen.
- **Key scenes rule:** Pin down the five or six compelling scenes that must be told. Visualize them.
- **Know your strength and make it central.** It it’s dialogue, structure your book so the dialogue is critical.
- **Impose a deadline** on yourself of so many hours of work per week. “Super Glue™ your butt to the chair.”
- **Create specific images, not generalities.** “Great writers do great specifics.”

- **Listen to your bullshit detector:** If something about a scene doesn’t feel right, it’s probably not. At those points, Russell makes the notation SNT for Show, Not Tell and then moves on for the time being.
- To rewrite a troublesome scene, first **visualize it**, choreograph it, and speak the parts aloud. Perhaps visit the real setting.
- **If you feel stopped** because the book is not what you envisioned overall, allow a latitude of 75-80 pages before you go back and re-do.
- **If you still feel something is wrong**, probably it’s not the scene you’re currently on but the support structure you set up.
- **Avoid the sore-thumb syndrome:** slavishly working in all your research.
- **Avoid the horse-near-the-barn syndrome:** racing through the last parts too quickly.
- **Tighten your novel** by cutting out material. Smiling, Russell quoted the advice Elmore Leonard gives:

“Try to leave out all the parts that readers skip.”

- **Don’t take rejection personally.**

However, Alan Russell declares that even if your novel isn’t published,

**“it took you on a journey.”**

*Glenda Rynn, member*

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**MEMBERS:** You may purchase taped copies of lectures from SCWA Tape Librarian Sharon Walters: [swwaltz@surfside.net](mailto:swwaltz@surfside.net)

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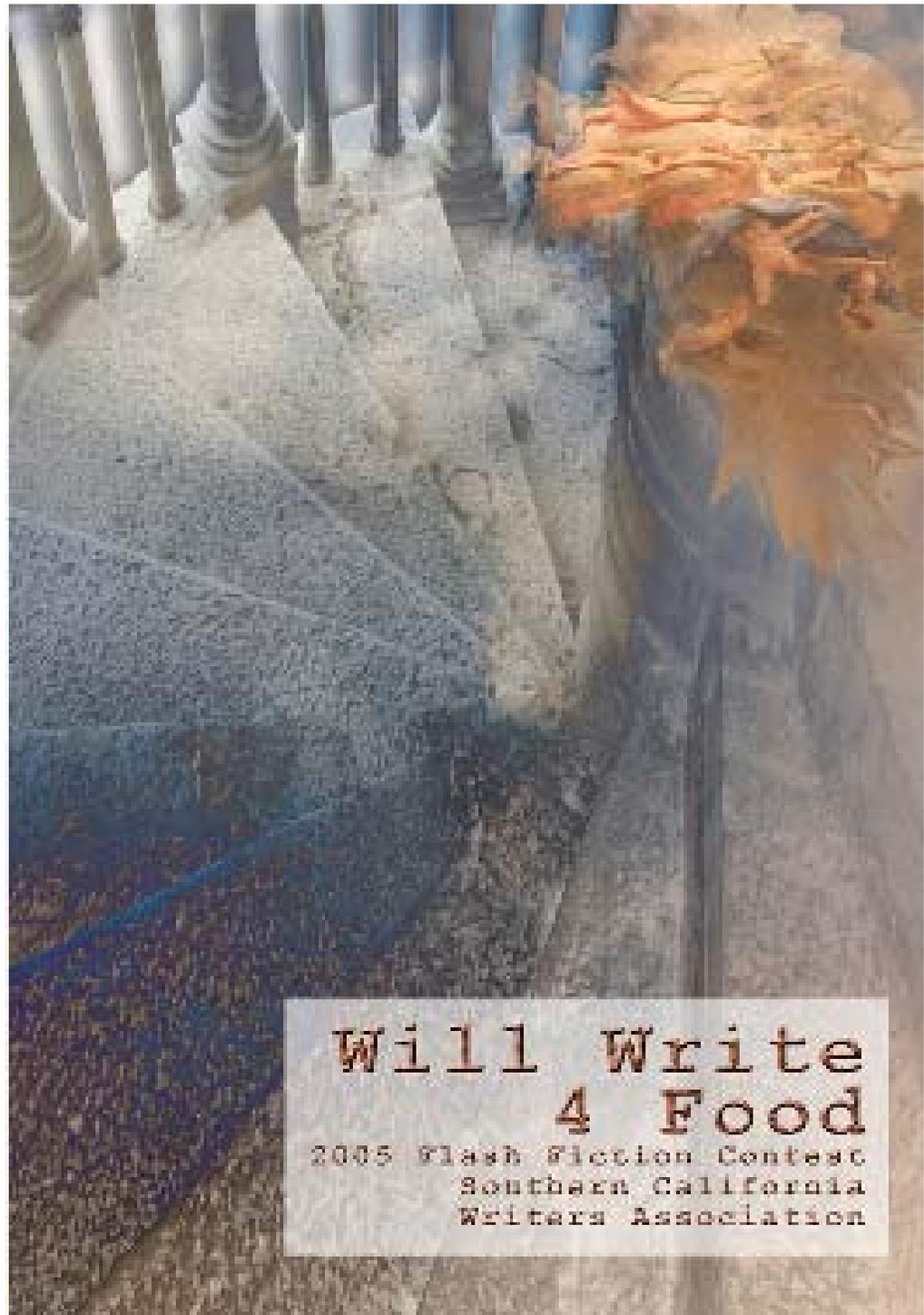
**“Will Write 4 Food” contest returns in January!**

## **The 2005 “Will Write 4 Food” Flash Fiction Anthology is arriving December 17, 2005!**

**Hear Ye,  
Hear Ye,  
Hear Ye.**

The “Will Write 4 Food” Flash Fiction Anthology will contain all the winning and honorable mention stories from 2005. Perfect for Christmas gifts. You won’t want to miss this. They will be available for purchase at the December 17 meeting.

*Come and get ‘em.  
Hot off the press!!!*



# SCWA News & Announcements

## Member Publications

# Seasons Greetings



**SCWA Member Alan Naves** announces the mass market paperback edition of his medical thriller *Gargoyles* will be released January 2006 by Tor/Forge.



**Looking for feature articles 500-700 words in length.**



**Are there any writers out there?**

**SPECIAL THANKS TO:**

<b>Nancy Darnall:</b>	Associate Editor
<b>Sharon Walters:</b>	Tape Librarian
<b>Donna Holland:</b>	Membership Info. Table
<b>Glenda Rynn:</b>	Meeting & Speaker Recaps
<b>Barbara Coulson:</b>	Meeting Coordinator

Do you have any news to share? Comments? The *Writers News* wants to know. Please e-mail news about your writing career successes, failures, and in-between to Laura Sheridan-Long at [Laura@ScribbleMoon.com](mailto:Laura@ScribbleMoon.com)



**SCWA 2006 Executive Committee**

President ..... Roy King  
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 V.P. Membership ..... Gerri Seaton  
 Secretary/Treasurer ..... To Be Determined  
 Publicity Director ..... Larry Porricelli  
 Webmaster ..... Pamela Rocke  
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 Associate Editor ..... Nancy Darnall  
 Tape Librarian ..... Sharon Walters

**Membership Information**  
 Gerri Seaton, V.P. Membership .....  
 gersea@verizon.net

**Meeting Reservations**  
 Roy King, President ..... 3kings@urs2.net  
 ..... H (760) 955-5027

**SCWA Critique Committee**  
 Open to members of SCWA

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**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 manuscript to Roy at:  
 15772 Heatherdale Road, Victorville, CA 92394.

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**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.



**December Meeting:**  
**Saturday**  
**December 17, 2005**

## **Shirl Thomas: Editing to Sell**

*(See inside to learn more about Shirl Thomas.)*

*Happy  
Holidays!*



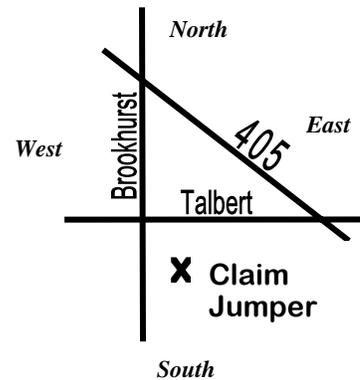
### **LOCATION:**

#### **Claim Jumper Restaurant**

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

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 December 14:** Roy King, 15772 Heatherdale Rd., Victorville, CA 92394  
Check must accompany reservations. Make checks payable to **SCWA**.

**After December 14:** Roy King, *home:* (760) 955-5027; *e-mail:* [3kings@urs2.net](mailto: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**

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