



March 18, 2006, Speaker

Dave Cunningham, Freelance Writer



Dave Cunningham is a freelance writer extraordinaire. His clients include The Tribune Company, The National Football League, The Walt Disney Company, CBS Sportsline, Nikken Inc., America House Book Publishers, *Good Housekeeping Magazine*, Knight Ridder, The City of Moreno Valley, Sporting News, Cellisis Skin Care and *The Ladies Home Journal*.

A specialist in publications for businesses, publishers and / or individuals who want to communicate with greater impact, his skills include speech writing and coaching, media relations, editing, design, plus a full palette of writing services – corporate, advertising, publicity, websites, newsletters, scripts, ghost writing and more.

Come join the SCWA in March and learn how to make money as a full-time freelance writer!

Lynnette Baum, V.P. Programming

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 **President's Message**

Freedom of speech has been in the news a lot lately.

Not only as a result of the cartoons offensive to Muslims—should the artists be free to express themselves in a manner offensive to others?—but the jailing and fining of Great Britain's David Irving for denying that the holocaust ever took place.

I think most of us immediately think of Dave Burton's immortal quote when he disagreed with a foul called against him in a basketball game, and told the referee, "I disagree with your call, but I'll defend until I foul out your right to make it!"

(Okay, okay, it was Voltaire, and the quote was, "I disagree with what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it." Minor details!)

(I kinda like the Burton quote, anyway!)

But anyhow—just how far should free speech go?

We have libel and slander laws that affect what we say.

How about *Newsmax's* story about how Hillary Clinton was extremely rude to the Gold Star Mothers? They ran it nationwide on their presses. They "...stood by their sources...", of course, but ate a lot of crow when the story turned out to be false. Were they entitled to free speech? And how about Limbaugh, Drudge, et al., who present only one side of a political story, and a slanted one, at that?

How about the *National Enquirer's* story on Carol Burnett? Ask them how "free" that was!

We hear the old adage about "free speech doesn't entitle one to scream 'fire!' in a crowded theater," and yet, no one ever suggests that if the theater's inhabitants are going to panic without verifying that there actually is a fire, maybe they deserve to trample one another to death.

Determining what exactly constitutes free speech has always been a very difficult problem for legislators, as well as philosophers and laymen. In the United States, what it actually means is that we can pretty much say whatever we want without the government putting us in jail for it.

However, employers have the right to fire you for anything you say

(Continued on page 5, column 1)

February Highlights:

Dorothy Foltz-Gray: Editing to Sell

Poetry was the back door through which Dorothy Foltz-Gray came to writing. Using first person, she learned restraint, how to select details, and how to tell a story. Not only a poet now but also a former editor and a freelancer specializing in health and personal essays, she shows other writers how to come in the front door. At the April 29-30, 2006, American Society of Journalists and Authors Conference in New York, she will be moderating a panel on "What Women's Magazines Want" in the Exploring the Markets track. To SCWA she presented "How to Turn Hot Articles into Cool Cash!"

The "free" part of early freelancing means writing many articles for no pay, which does bring in clippings to use with queries. Years ago Foltz-Gray adopted the attitude of "What do I have to lose? Why not pick the place [publisher] I am most afraid of?" Very early she began a practice of sending out a query a day. Additional research on a topic gained more editor interest. "Editors are always looking for new writers."

"A walking Petri dish" before she channeled herself into the health field, Foltz-Gray says to specialize in a field but write for a diversity of magazines. Don't be "a magazine snob."

In a suitable magazine, finding the correct editor may be a challenge. Do you need the Editor-in-Chief? No. The Managing Editor? No. Foltz-Gray suggests calling and asking the Edit Desk to whom to address a query. For her, it was usually the Health Director.

"Queries are the most important things you write when you write for a magazine," Foltz-Gray stresses.

SUGGESTIONS FOR QUERIES

- ☞ Find out if this editor prefers mail or e-mail. If e-mail, offer to send attachments of clips you've scanned. Attaching is better than pasting since e-mail programs may make changes.
- ☞ If you do not know the editor, use regular mail with three to five clips.
- ☞ If you have a website, suggest the editor look at your clips (URLS) there.
- ☞ For essays, send the entire piece. If this editor is familiar with your work, you can mail the concept with a paragraph or two.
- ☞ Indicate your tone, who you are, what you know, whom you'll interview, some statistics, and "two paragraphs like the writing you would do."
- ☞ If referred to the magazine by another editor, mention that, especially if you have no clips.
- ☞ Do not send multiple submissions.
- ☞ Then wait. A month is enough time for an editor to show interest. Silence may mean "no." Send your query elsewhere, especially if "you're antsy about income."
- ☞ If you've worked with this editor before, make a follow-up call.
- ☞ Overall, you "have to be a terrier. Grab the pant leg and not let go."

Foltz-Gray asks, "How often do you get paid to learn things?" Rhetorical question aside, what is "reasonable pay for a 2,000-3,000 word article?" an SCWA member inquired.

Foltz-Gray responded that 1500 words is the typical length. "Most national magazines pay \$2 [a word]. Non-mainstream pay less." If an editor asks what you charge, "ask for enough" or ask for more than mentioned.

Insist on being paid when the article is accepted and not "upon publication." However, *accepted* may mean after revision to one magazine but after fact checking to another. Foltz-Gray has even changed contract wording to say "on acceptance," which has not yet cost her a job. Always have a signed contract before you submit work! Since your e-mail correspondence "becomes a legal document," save everything from editors for substantiation.

"Harder than you think," is locating real people, "the backbone of magazine stories," for pertinent interviews. You may stumble across related stories, but Foltz-Gray warns, "Editors don't want sad stories."

Requests for rewrites exasperate writers. A new editor may ask for a revision as well as a change in tone. Just do it. "Editors are paying [you] to build the table they want." Do not respond or initiate a discussion with an editor the day the request comes in because you'll overreact. Change or revise only what the editors specifically ask for.

The writing life allows you to stitch the facets of life together. The highest thrills come, Foltz-Gray says, "when the *it* occurs on the page. The rest is tinsel or vanity."

Glenda Rynn, Member
glenda-rynn@cox.net

MEMBERS may purchase taped copies of lectures from SCWA Tape Librarian Sharon Walters: swwaltz@surfside.net

Seeking an Agent: The ~~Ten~~ Twenty Commandments

(PART I of II)

By David Isaak

The writer sends out, and sends out again, and again and again, and the rejections keep coming, whether printed slips or letters, and so at last the moment comes when many a promising writer folds his wings and drops. His teachers and classmates praised him, back in school, his spouse is baffled by the rejections; but the writer's despair wins out. It's a terrible thing to write for five or even ten years and continue to be rejected. (I know.) And so at last, down goes another good writer. Let no one tell you that all good writers eventually get published. —John Gardner (himself rejected for ten years; unpublished through five completed novels—all five of which were finally published to substantial acclaim. Unlike most novelists, Gardner is an author still in print almost twenty-five years after his death...but what if he'd listened to agents and editors for those first nine years and eleven months?)

My advice on dealing with publishers: Let your agent do it. Agents are more important than publishers. Agents are more important than anyone. Which brings me to my advice on dealing with agents. You can't. They won't speak to you. They're too important. —P.J. O'Rourke

Who am I to be talking about this? No one, really. But there are no real experts on getting agents; a successful writer may have only one throughout her entire career, and having many implies there's something wrong. Even agents aren't experts on the subject; they can only tell you what appeals to them individually, and rules and tastes vary widely between agents.

I recently acquired a good agent at a major agency, but it took me three very long years. In the process, I dealt with about sixty of the agent tribe (which is considerably greater than the number of gorillas Dian Fossey studied). I have also met dozens of talented writers who were in agent-search mode, and we've compared notes.

I can't tell you what will guarantee you get an agent, or get published, even if you're a terrific writer with a polished manuscript. Robert W. Pirsig's best-selling *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* was rejected by 121 publishers. *One hundred and twenty-one*. Today there aren't 121 publishers in business.

What I can do, though, is tell you some of the things that seem to lower your chances, and some that seem to increase them.

- 1. Don't spam the universe with e-mail queries, or query too many agents at once.** To be truthful, I've seen the mass e-mail approach work for authors in terms of getting several requests for manuscripts; some writers I know have even acquired agents with this approach. But I don't know anyone who has acquired an agent they *kept* through a mass e-mail query. I'd recommend querying no more than a half-dozen to a dozen at once. It allows you to adjust your query tactics based on the responses you receive.
- 2. Don't ask your friend/teacher/mother-in-law to recommend you to their agent.** Because writer-agent relationships are often complex, asking to be recommended to someone's agent can be one of those awkward questions. Leave it alone. If your acquaintance thinks it's a good idea, they'll bring it up.
- 3. Don't assume that a bad agent is better than no agent.** A bad agent can put your manuscript in limbo for months or years. A bad agent can annoy editors so that they never want to see a word of writing from you again. A bad agent can give you stupid, career-wrecking, block-inducing advice. A bad agent can get your manuscript turned down at every possible house, so that no good agent will take it on (what's the point in marketing a manuscript that has already been shopped all over town?).
- 4. Don't believe everything agents say about themselves or about what they represent.** Agents like to present themselves as something slightly different from what they really are. The most common of these little deceptions is claiming to represent, say, "Time-travel Romances, Romantic Suspense, Cookbooks, and *Literary Fiction*." (Or, "Serial Killer Novels, Soldier-of-Fortune Novels, True Crime, and *Literary Fiction*.") Check their client list, not what they say about themselves. (And don't be so smug, especially if you're telling everybody you're writing 'a literary novel about a plot to kill the President.')
- 5. Don't read too much into rejection letters.** If an agent takes the time to correspond with you, be grateful—much of the time it will be form letters, badly photocopied—but don't automatically assume that what they say has much more insight than what you might get from Aunt Sally. Remember: these people are inundated with paper. They're exhausted and snowblind. If you hear the same thing from several agents, then give it some credence.
- 6. Don't respond with hostility.** At least not overtly. At least not to the agent. No matter how whacko their response may be. Kick the wall, rant to your friends, and then write a nice note thanking the agent...and move on with the intent of making them regret unto their dying day that they rejected you.

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The March 2006 “Will Write 4 Food” Contest!

Write: Look carefully at the photo (center) and write a short-short story (maximum 250 words) about what is happening.

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.

Deadline: Stories must be received on or before March 17, 2006.

Revised Requirements: To facilitate fair judging, put the story title on the top of the page with your **name** and **day-time phone number** underneath. Only the winning author will be contacted.

Subject Line: *March 2006 “Will Write 4 Food Contest”* with your daytime number or e-mail address.

(For snail-mail put this information on the outside of the envelope.) **Warning: without the subject line, submission may not be read in time.**

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 contest submissions. Only one **winning** entry per member per year.

Lynnette Baum, V.P. Programming



February Contest Winner:



Enjoy Your Flight By Donna Holland

There I was, all twisted steel and pathetically bored with life. As a beast of burden, I rolled the same benign path up and down isles of groceries, while kids kicked my ribs. I was in a rut, literally, in the far corner of the parking-lot, when I saw him, strategically scoping the lot for a set of wheels.

“Pick me” I prayed over and over in silent reverence, as if I could will him to walk past all the other carts in the lot. Calloused cold fingers took hold of my handle and yanked me free from my precarious perch, pushing me forward, wheels screeching all the while, proclaiming, “Free at last!”

Larry began his introduction one life’s story at a time. I became his home and companion, and he became my teacher. Larry was a light in an otherwise darkened corridor. This man loved to

fly! He shared stories of Nam and rescue missions as he cooked for and warmed the forgotten. He was a safety net to those lucky enough to call him friend, for the military had earned him respect on the streets. His eyes sparked with warmth, as his memories transported his listeners to breathtaking vistas and cloud studded horizons. At the top of a hill, Larry would hop on my back, arms outstretched, and if dreams were answered, he would have sprouted wings.

It was a terribly cold and windy night, one when eyes often close for the last time. Larry’s friend Joe took me to the cemetery to say goodbye, where I witnessed his friends tenderly placing feathers like flowers upon his grave. His eulogy was simply “Larry, enjoy your flight!”

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Dorrie Lloyd – *The Bag Man*
Janet De Marco – *King of the Road*

www.ocwriter.com/willwrite.html

✍️ President's Message

(Continued from page 1)

on or off the job that is forbidden by your employment agreement—which more often than not contains the catch-all phrase, “...making statements which could be detrimental to the reputation of the company...”!

Also—how often is someone sentenced to contempt of court for something they said?

Free speech isn't really free (now there's an original thought. Uh huh. Really original.)

As I make suggestions as to what exactly free speech is, or what I think it should be, I'm noticing that there doesn't seem to be a single original idea.

Maybe that's to be expected. No, I don't mean that I'm incapable of any independent thought (although sometimes I wonder!). I'm more inclined to believe it's been discussed for so long and by so many people that all the original ideas are used up!

What do you folks think?

Good luck and good writing!

Roy King, President

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. Please *mail* your manuscript to Roy at:

15772 Heatherdale Road, 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

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Seeking an Agent: (PART I of II)

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7. **Don't make yourself crazy with the synopsis. Some agents don't want them at all.** If great works of literature had to be sold on the basis of their synopses, then no great works of literature would ever have been published. Fortunately, few agents really want them. What they want to see is something very much like the back-cover blurb of a paperback—something catchy that tells them why they should read the manuscript; something that offers them a sales handle for offering the book. Don't give them three or four pages of detailed who-did-what-when. Give them two or three clean paragraphs, with lots of white space, that make the book sound interesting.
8. **Don't be desperate, and don't settle for something that feels wrong.** If someone says they might like to represent your book, but you feel a lack of enthusiasm or commitment from them, stop and think. Get back to them later (or don't). Refuse to let the *if-I-don't-marry-Bob-no-one-else-will-ever-ask-and-I'll-die-a-bitter-spinster* syndrome rule your life. Your book is your baby. Don't hand it over to someone you suspect is a child abuser.
9. **Don't take what one agent says as representing the viewpoints of all agents.** One agent will say, “Your query letter needs to reach out and grab me by the throat!” Another will say, “Don't engage in hype and hyperbole. Give me the facts and can the hysteria.” One says, “Your query letter should tell me something about yourself, your life, your history,” while another has stated, “Anytime I start getting biographical info not related to publication history, I stop reading.” An agent I've talked to even says, perhaps not unreasonably, “I throw away as a matter of principle any letter that says, ‘My new novel is the next *DaVinci Code*.’” What one agent will hold up as an example of a perfect query letter, another will hurl to the floor.
10. **Don't accept what established authors say about the process of getting published.** Doesn't matter if it's Stephen King or Joyce Carol Oates, Lawrence Sanders or Martin Amis; the business landscape in publishing was dramatically different when they were getting established. The whole process looks a lot like getting married, and there aren't any experts on the subject; how often does someone get married, and do they know more, or less, about it because they've been married ten times?

[To Be Continued in Next Month's SCWA Newsletter]





**March Meeting:
Saturday
March 18, 2006**

Dave Cunningham

Freelance Writer

(See inside to learn more about Dave Cunningham.)

*Happy
St. Paddy's Day!*



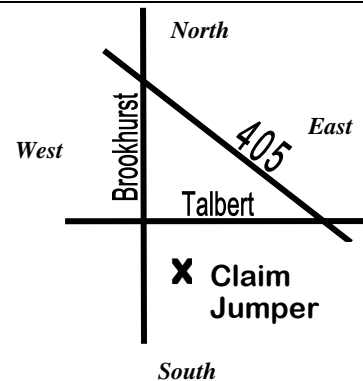
LOCATION:

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 March 13: Roy King, 15772 Heatherdale Rd., Victorville, CA 92394
Check must accompany reservations. Make checks payable to **SCWA**.

After March 13: 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

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