



# Writers News

Volume 6, Number 6.....June 2007

June 16 Speaker

## Warren Lewis

Screenwriter, Director

### *From Gutter to Glitter: Writing for Hollywood*



Want to know how “the great ones” crafted story? Attend our meeting in June, and learn at the feet of Warren Lewis, an author with screenwriting credits that include *Black Rain* (Paramount) and *The Thirteenth Warrior* (Touchstone). His topics will include: 1) The three things writers need: craft, process and heart; 2) How non-fiction writers succeed in movie-land; 3) Should my story be a screenplay; 4) Presenting your work to an agent; and, 5) Making movies off the Hollywood lot. Lewis’s experience includes assignments for most of the major studios, including Sony, Warner Brothers and Fox; writing more than 25 original or commissioned screenplays (with numerous re-writes), as well as a recent script, now circulating in the heart of Hollywood, titled, *The Tale of the Bloodstone Riders*, a western set in post civil war Texas.

“I write screenplays because I admired the work of many great screenwriters and wanted to tell stories that way,” Lewis says. “Another reason I chose to write in this format was because, during my school days, it was the era of screenplays, and they were an excellent form of literary training. I know my craft from top to bottom. If SCWA members walk away from the June meeting with a dozen kernels of truth about how to write professionally, I will be satisfied.”

Raised in Brooklyn, Warren served an old fashioned apprenticeship in film making, working on film and commercial sets as an apprentice and assistant film editor in production. After graduating from New York University’s film division, he worked on more than 100 commercials and 15 feature films, in various production capacities. The latter brought him to Los Angeles, where he earned credits as first assistant director on films directed by, among others, Penelope Spheeris and John McTiernan. Lewis was working for Orson Welles when he passed away, and was employed as a first assistant director on a Movie-of-the-Week when he sold his first script.

So, join other avid SCWA members on June 16 for an illuminating meeting. It will truly be a day to remember!

Lynette Baum  
VP, Programming  
therightwriter@cox.net

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# President's Message

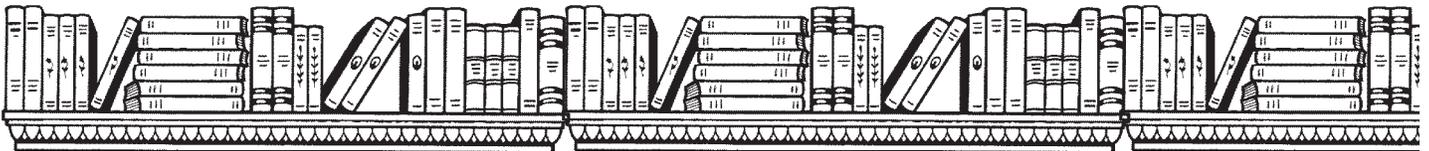
## Story Contest Manager

At the May meeting, not a hand was raised when I asked for a volunteer to be our Story Contest Manager. Well, that won't do! Not at all! Many people have asked when we'll have contests again, so . . . I've decided I'll take the reins myself. I'll explain in more detail in a separate article in this issue.

## Starter Stories

I've had a lot of fun, at the two other writers' groups that I'm a member of, doing short writing exercises that begin with "starter paragraphs." Someone starts a story with a few words, usually only one paragraph, and then leaves the rest for the others to finish. Maybe I'll try that at one of our meetings. If you like challenges, be on the lookout for a chance to dazzle the crowd with your creativity!

*Victory Crayne*  
President  
[victory@crayne.com](mailto:victory@crayne.com)



Contact Writers News Editor Mary Michel Green at (949) 361-6581 or [green.mary@cox.net](mailto:green.mary@cox.net).

## SCWA Critique Committee Open to Members of SCWA

### Nonfiction & Fiction

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This position is open.

### Poetry

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#### Dr. Joyce Wheeler

Joyce will critique up to five poems.  
Please mail your work to Joyce at:

3801 Chestnut Avenue, Long Beach, CA 90807

## Executive Committee

President .....Victory Crayne  
VP, Programming .....Lynnette Baum  
VP, Membership ..... Shelia Cassidy  
Secretary.....Janet de Marco  
Treasurer .....Carolyn Smith  
Publicity Director .....Larry Porricelli  
Webmaster ..... Tony Stoklosa  
Newsletter Editor..... Mary Michel Green  
Associate Editor ..... Belinda Falk  
Tape Librarian.....Sharon Walters

### Membership Information

Shelia Cassidy, VP Membership  
[membership@ocwriter.com](mailto:membership@ocwriter.com)

### Meeting Reservations

Carolyn Smith, Treasurer ..... (949) 675-4244

## MAY HIGHLIGHTS:

### Tom Basinski: *Turning to Crime*

True-crime author Tom Basinski graciously rearranged his schedule to speak to SCWA at the May meeting when a children's author cancelled at the last minute.

Sporting a felt fedora straight out of a film noir, he said, "What's up with the hat? I'm an old-school homicide detective—and I thought I ought to look like one."

Basinski entered seminary after high school, earning a degree in English literature. At 23, he decided to switch vocations and became a cop. He served with the Chula Vista PD for 17 years in patrol, narcotics, sex crimes, and finally homicide. He went on to be an investigator with the District Attorney's office for another 17 years.

In 1983 a writer for *True Detective* magazine interviewed him about a "who-done-it" homicide that had taken six months to solve. Basinski asked him how to get started writing and got the name of an editor in New York City, who hired him following a query letter.

He wrote about his own cases, but there wasn't too much crime in Chula Vista, so he started scouring the newspapers and writing about other cases in San Diego County. Then he penned a *Detective Diary* column about things that happened to him. Once obtained a warrant to confiscate

a marijuana crop, only to find tomato plants. He sold one story about that and a second about the ribbing he got from other cops about the mistake.

He dabbled in writing and made about \$2,000 to \$3,000 a year. Eventually the pulp detective magazines went out of business.

He missed writing. He went to a conference where the speaker said if you are exhausted from being around these people all day, you're an introvert and probably a writer. If you are jazzed up and excited, you're an extrovert and probably not a writer.

He found a great case to write up and sent a query letter to *Vanity Fair*, who hired him to do it! Never got published; it was knocked off by the breaking news of the Sept. 11 attacks and Enron.

Basinski wrote a novel, finding an agent on the Internet. He submitted it and submitted it, never got accepted. He says to sell fiction you have to have a name, a gimmick, or get very lucky. He had a friend who wrote wine mysteries (her gimmick) which were published by a reputable house and sold, but she had to quit and take a day job because she couldn't make enough money to support her family writing.

Shelving the novel, he turned to a nonfiction book about a juicy case. Internet agents

didn't work out, so he went to the bookstore and looked in the acknowledgments of five or six true crime books and noted the agents named there. Wrote them and two weeks later an agent e-mailed him and said "I can sell this book," and did. Basinski has never met his representative, or even spoken to him on the phone; all their business has been done via e-mail or letters.

The basic formula is that the crime must be true, should be a murder and the case should have been closed by conviction. The victim should be likeable. Try to contact everyone involved and if someone refuses to talk, say so. Get to know all the people involved and bring them to life on the page—Basinski described a defense attorney with "testicles of steel." He emphasizes research the heck out of it. Basinski read complete court transcripts – you can look at them and take notes, but not make copies, so it's time-consuming, but you must do your homework.

Basinski isn't in writing for the money. His book ended up paying him about \$1.20/hour. He says a writer makes money in magazines—his *Vanity Fair* story was ordered at 6,000 words and as a beginning writer he was paid \$2 per word, or \$12,000; that's more than he has made on his entire book, for which he received a

See *Highlights*, page 5

# June 2007 Nonfiction Article Contest

All you article writers, get ready to show your stuff! Warm up your pen and pad, or your keyboard, whichever you prefer. Here's a chance to win a free luncheon and some recognition.

We are holding our first ever nonfiction contest this year.

## Rules

- Type up your nonfiction article in one of the following formats: 1) MS Word, 2) Rich Text Format (RTF), if you use a different word processor, or 3) plain old text in an editor. Typewritten entries are not acceptable, since an undue burden is then placed on the judge, who must retype winning entries into a format suitable for e-mailing.
- Write your article in 500 to 1,000 words. That word count does not include the title or your name, just the article itself. Go over the limit by even one word, and your story will be excluded.
- You choose the theme. It can be anything that delights you.
- The contest ends June 30.
- You may submit only one article for this contest.
- Send your article by e-mail to our "agent," Shelia Cassidy, at [rivme@pacbell.net](mailto:rivme@pacbell.net). Make sure you put "SCWA Contest" in the Subject line of your e-mail, where she won't miss it.
- Shelia will keep track of who sent which article, remove all references to your name from your article, and forward all entries at the same time to the judge soon after the deadline, in early July.

Note: If your article depends on identifying yourself, such that removing your name from it would invalidate the text of the article, then your name may stay. Try removing your name, and see if the article still makes sense to a reader.

## Winners

### Criteria for Judging

You may want to pay attention to the criteria that our judge for this contest will be using. All stories will be judged on:

- Originality
- Craft of writing

### Judge

The judge for the June 2007 contest will be Lynnette Baum. As I understand it, she's a tough judge, too, having judged many contests before. So take some time to polish your article before you submit it.

### Future Contests in 2007

1. Submission due July 31: Open theme, short fiction story, maximum 2,000 words. The judge will be Victory Crayne.
2. Submission due September 30: Theme: End of Vacation, a 250-word flash fiction. The judge will be Carolyn Smith.

See *Contest*, page 5

## *New Writing Contests Announced*

*Contest*, from page 4

3. Submission due also September 30: a single-spaced query letter, 1-2 pages; a double-spaced book synopsis, 1-5 pages; and a double-spaced sample chapter, 10-15 pages. This would be like the package you would send to an agent or publisher. The judge will be Victory Crayne.

4. Submission due October 31: Theme: A New Life, a 250-word flash fiction. The judge will be Larry Porricelli.

Judges for future contests may have their own criteria for selecting the winners, so stay tuned.

*Victory Crayne*

Story Contest Manager

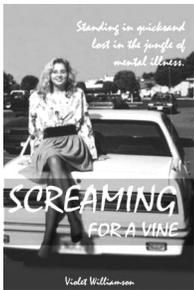
*victory@crayne.com*

### NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:

*July 21 – Terry Whalen*

Author of more than 60 books - published in more than 50 magazines, including *Writer's Digest*

### *Secrets Editors Do Want You to Know*



#### **Mission Accomplished**

SCWA member **Violet Williamson** has published *Searching for a Vine*, an account of her daughter's struggle with mental illness and subsequent suicide.

Violet and her husband, Cliff, rented out their home furnished and have gone on a national book tour in their RV. She will be speaking to

chapters of the National Association for Mental Illness.



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## Speaker Shares Insights on Penning True Crime

*Highlights*, from page 3

\$7,500 advance.

Basinski markets his own book. His publisher will make sure there are plenty of books at a bookstore, but Basinski has to set up the date and pay his own travel expenses. He recommends *Guerilla Marketing* by Jay Conrad Levinson. He made up a press kit and sent it to local media outlets. He also has a Web site at *tombasinski.com*.

*Mary Michel Green*

Newsletter Editor

*green.mary@cox.net*

June 2007

## Writer's Corner

# Perfect Your Content with a Little Help from Friends

by Barbara McNichol

You've noodled through your book concept, you've created an outline that will move the plot along, you've fleshed out that outline with detail. You can now declare the content of your manuscript complete. Pat yourself on the back. Dance the snoopy dance. You've accomplished a lot.

But you aren't finished yet. You need to ask yourself if you've said everything that you want to say. Once you've satisfied yourself that you have, give the manuscript one more critical look to make sure it's complete. Then and only then are you ready for the next crucial step to making your manuscript the best it can be.

### *A Necessary Evil?*

As those of you who've been through the process already know, a peer review is a necessary step in finalizing your manuscript. Peer reviews—sending your book to fellow writers and others “in the know” about your genre as well as readers in your target audience—is both essential and frustrating, but a necessary evil.

The reviewers' role is to help you “see” what you've written. They point out what's working in the text or storyline and what isn't working. They may nitpick on the wrong things and they often take you on tangents, offering suggestions that may or may not advance your ideas.

Still, feedback from reviewers is essential because they bring a variety of perspectives to their enjoyment of a book—as your buyers will. Be prepared for their suggestions to be dynamic and brilliant. Or they could be so far off, you wish you could take back the manuscript and say “never mind.”

To ensure their comments are valuable rather than distracting, guide the process the best you can.

### *Keep Reviewers on Track*

How do you do that? Be specific about what you want peer reviewers to look for. Ask them if the content seems complete or if you have overlooked something important. Also ask them to forgive typos and punctuation glitches—those are addressed in the editing process. But resist the temptation to skip the peer review. The reviewers' questions often reveal muddy spots that need to be cleaned up, or they may simply say “I don't get it” in certain places. Pay attention to that, too. It's easy to get your nose too pressed to the computer screen to see what's actually there on paper.

When you go through this peer review process first, you'll find that people appreciate being asked. What's more, you'll have ambassadors out there when your book finally arrives. But if you rely on them for technical glitches, you could have a patchwork quilt of opinions you'll have to deal with. Best to let your editor ensure a consistency and an eagle eye for precision language. You can't expect that from peer reviewers.

Turn to peer reviewers to help you finalize your content, pinpoint problems, and sharpen your message.

Barbara McNichol writes and edits articles, Web site copy, book proposals, and manuscripts for authors and entrepreneurs. Contact Barbara at 887-696-4899 (toll free) or [editor@barbaramcnichol.com](mailto:editor@barbaramcnichol.com). To learn more, sign up for her e-zine *The Door Opener* at [www.barbaramcnichol.com](http://www.barbaramcnichol.com) and receive a free e-book, *Word Trippers*.

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# Freelance Writers, Arise!

Secretly, most of us want to be freelance writers, writers with an abundance of fascinating, creative projects – writers with a bundle in the bank and a stream of gold flowing down our manuscript pipeline. But, is this realistic? How can you become a successful freelance writer?

First, believe that you are a writer, right now. It's not hard to do. Don't wait until you have sold a bundle of stories to popular magazines before acknowledging your "writerly" talents. Instead, judge your value as a writer by how much you want to write—by your passion for and your dreams of writing.

Do you love the smell of pencil lead? Is the act of writing a joy that makes time fly? Are books magnetic, hypnotic, wonderful portals that "hook" you into reading into the wee hours? If so, you are not only a writer, you're a natural born writer.

Unfortunately, many gifted writers stand timidly on the sidelines of the craft, waiting until the ideal moment or the perfect writing project, which never comes, before labeling themselves as writers. The truth is that anyone who can blithely lose themselves in the library book-stacks is a writer, no matter how humble their writing history.

Second, exchange the price tag you place on your time for priceless experience. Write articles, bios, speeches, poems and stories for free, until you've built up a portfolio. Then, take advantage of corporate downsizing and outsourcing to nurture your image as a budding freelancer. And, don't let this idea of working for free intimidate you. Give it away short-term and you will receive a harvest of dollars for years to come.

From training films to fact sheets to book reviews, writers are in demand. The burgeoning healthcare field needs writers, almost as much as travel, fundraising and PR companies. Hollywood is aching for screenplays with *good* plots...especially, for television. (Check out the reruns!) In short, opportunities for writers in Southern California are endless. So, find an area of interest and jump in. Soon, you will look back on your days of "free" freelancing with affection, while depositing more and more checks into your "writer's" bank account.

Third, don't think - just do it! How many times have you walked through a bookstore, picked up a book or magazine, and, after reading a page or two, thought, "I can write better than that!" (If you doubt this phenomenon, put down this article and go to your nearest bookstore for a reality check.)

The truth is that many writers get published not because they are good writers, but because they think they are good writers. They finish the article, play, novel or poem. Editors like it when writers finish writing. It gives them something to put into print – always a plus!

Freelance writers often make six figure incomes, enjoy a variety of projects and work flexible hours that their neighbors envy. Yeah, I've heard the rumors of poverty and pain. Regardless, I've worked as a fulltime freelance writer for three years, and I'm having a blast!

So, trust the power of your pen, pencil or PC. Think-up something you want to write – then, write it. Believe me, there is always someone willing to read and buy. Remember, a freelance writer is someone who was brave enough to say, "Yes! I am a writer." And, had the courage to start writing...

Lynette Baum  
VP, Programming  
[therightwriter@cox.net](mailto:therightwriter@cox.net)

Patricia Fry is offering a new concept in online classes: Courses on Demand. You sign up when you want to take the course, and you'll receive a lecture and an assignment via e-mail every week throughout the duration of the course. Fry, a 30-year veteran freelance writer and the author of 25 books, including *The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book*, is currently teaching three courses: "Article Writing," "How to Write a Book Proposal," and "Self-Publishing." Learn more at <http://www.matilijapress.com/courses.htm>.



**June Meeting:  
Saturday  
June 16, 2007**

## WARREN LEWIS

*From Gutter to Glitter: Writing for Hollywood*  
(See inside for more on Warren Lewis.)

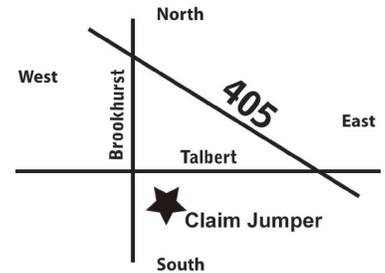


*Summer's Coming!*

### LOCATION: Claim Jumper Restaurant

Banquet Room Entrance, rear of building  
1805 Brookhurst St., Fountain Valley, CA  
Restaurant telephone: (714) 963-6711

Registration & Networking:	9:30 a.m.
Meeting:	10:00 a.m.
Lunch:	11:30 a.m.
Afternoon Program:	12:30 p.m.



*NON-MEMBERS & GUESTS ALWAYS WELCOME — \$30 AT DOOR; \$25 WITH RSVP*  
*MEMBERS WHO DO NOT RSVP PAY \$25 AT DOOR*  
*MEMBERS WHO DO RSVP PAY \$20*

**RSVP before June 9:**

**Carolyn Kimme Smith, Treasurer, 630 Harbor Island Drive, Newport Beach, CA 92660**  
Check must accompany reservation. Make checks payable to SCWA.

**After June 9:**

**Carolyn Kimme Smith, Treasurer, [ckimmesmith@ucla.edu](mailto:ckimmesmith@ucla.edu)**

**BE SURE TO RSVP WHENEVER POSSIBLE! . . . Or register online at [www.ocwriter.com/meetings.html](http://www.ocwriter.com/meetings.html)**



## Writers News

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