



Writers News

Volume 7, Number 2.....February 2008

February 16 Speaker

Deborah Halverson

Freelance Editor

Writing for Kids of all Ages, and How to Catch an Editor’s Eye!



Deborah Halverson edited children’s books for ten years—until she climbed over the desk and tried out the author’s chair on the other side. Now she is an award-winning author of books for young readers, including the teen novels *Honk If You Hate Me* and *Big Mouth*. Armed with a master’s degree in American literature and a fascination with pop culture, she sculpts stories from extreme events and places — tattoo parlors, fast-food joints, and, most extreme of all, high schools.

“I know what it’s like on both sides of the editor’s desk,” Halverson said. “It will be a real thrill to talk to aspiring writers at the SCWA on February 16th about what makes great children’s writing and how to catch an editor’s eye.”

Before she penned books for teens, she edited books for children of all ages with Harcourt Children’s Books, working with such authors and illustrators as Norma Fox Mazer, Gary Soto, Jean Ferris, Eve Bunting, Nancy Willard, David McPhail, and David Shannon. Deborah also taught picture book and teen fiction writing for the University of California, San Diego, in the extended studies program.

Now, Halverson works as a freelance editor, conducting word-by-word line editing or more general substantive editing of children’s books, as well as fiction and nonfiction for adults. Currently, writing a third teen novel and a “memoir” about surviving Year One with Triplets, she chronicles the thrills, chills, and spills of being a triplet mom and writer, on her blog: www.DeborahHalverson.com/blog. Halverson lives with her husband and three sons in San Diego, California.

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Lynnette Baum
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JANUARY HIGHLIGHTS:

Elizabeth Yost: *Writing for and Selling to Television*

“The dead teenager in a lake” movie syndrome will never infect the Hallmark Channel. Elizabeth Yost, VP of Development Programming for Hallmark, selects scripts that embody what its articulate audience wants: core values reflected in relationships and emotion. “Make me want to see the characters triumph. Make me laugh, make me cry,” Yost told the packed audience in January.

While the characters are “knowing, caring, warming, charming,” they are not goody two-shoes. The draw of the bad ones is watching them “go through the character arc and change.” Her ideal is American-based stories that are comfortable to watch with her 80-year-old grandmother and her eight-year-old son.

Passion from the heart may be the main factor distinguishing the 30 scripts Hallmark makes yearly from the hundreds received weekly from agents and managers. However, besides staying out of plot ruts, Hallmark wants neither children as leads because of their limited work hours nor any period pieces. If someone says, “I have the perfect Hallmark movie,” Yost knows it will be a period piece because the writer is confusing the movie channel with its parent, the Hallmark Hall of Fame.

Flashbacks, “too easy a way out,” do not work for

television movies: mixing them with commercial breaks confuses the story line for viewers. Occasionally, a flashback will work with the present as bookends [present, whole story in flashback, present] but “use it sparingly.” Humor is welcome, even in a dramatic moment. With comedy, Yost said, “Don’t forgo heart and emotion for a zingy one-liner.”

Hallmark primarily uses settings in and around Los Angeles. Many fine actors here are happy to work with no travel for the 18-24 days of filming. A wise writer may pitch two good stories in the same setting for economical, back-to-back productions.

Yost said, “In five pages I must be connected to something in your script.” In actuality the “dreaded reader” must be enchanted first. This professional prepares a log line, synopsis, and commentary of each screenplay. Yost, an excellent rewriter herself, “often disagrees” with a reader and goes on to work with the author to make the script the best possible. The author needs to be flexible and not “blindsided by only your vision.” The attitude of one of Yost’s favorite writers is “Anything we come up with together is better than anything individual.”

Company policy does not allow her to read unsolicited scripts.

Scripts are optioned, not

bought. If Hallmark options one, it almost always produces the film. (Other networks produce about one out of every ten they option; then out of every five filmed, only one will be aired.) Being precise about Hallmark’s legal limits, Yost recited, “We pay a license fee to a producer to do a movie for us which exhibits on our channel.” She monitors the production daily to ensure Hallmark’s standards and also works with marketers.

Before the writers’ strike, Yost’s buying spree brought in “a robust slate of scripts” awaiting the right time. However, she said the industry has a big need now in this complicated landscape. When asked if a writer would be boycotted later for submitting material, Yost replied, “Can’t say. Contact entertainment attorneys.”

One page of script equals one minute. For a two-hour film with 88 minutes of content, a script should run 100 pages (with your name on each) to allow cutting. Include a cover letter, title page, contact information, and proper format.

Query letters, now accepted by e-mail, must be professional, simple with standard fonts, and to the point. “Be confident but don’t oversell.” Do not cast the movie nor budget it. Include your platform. “Address the actual person.”

For your pitch, distill the best parts of your story and

See *Highlights*, page 3

Writing for TV Explained

Highlights, from page 2

plan to lay them out as if in a five-minute trailer. Rehearse repeatedly before a mirror. Dress appropriately. Some non-controversial, nonpolitical small talk in the office is fine. Speak your dialogue; do not read it. Explain the story's heartbeat and central core. Pitch no more than two ideas. Do not pitch a story idea for someone else to write. "Nobody wants to do somebody else's idea."

Wait for two weeks before following up. Then check back

every two weeks. "If they pass, you can offer changes and fight a little. But then give a "Thank you very much."

Keep watching television. The 50-plus cable networks have special niches. The current market upheaval is a great time for new scripts, Yost said. "Just do it."

Sources from Yost:

1. How to pitch: Natpe Pitch Pit at natpe.org
2. To post unsolicited scripts: Inktip.com

3. To find agents/managers: indieproducer.net, wga.org, scriptmag.com

4. To find managers and agents who accept unsolicited material: *Hollywood Creative Directory* at www.hcdonline.com.

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SCWA News & Announcements

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

SCWA Critique Committee Open to Members of SCWA

Nonfiction & Fiction

This position is open.

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

Executive Committee

PresidentVictory Crayne
Co-VP, Programming.....Lynnette Baum
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Membership Information

Edy Gautschy, VP, Membership
membership@ocwriter.com

Meeting Reservations

Brennan Harvey, meeting@ocwriters.com
or message (714) 375-5275

Members Achieve!

Writers' accomplishments announced during the January SCWA meeting were:

1. **Nancy Carlberg:** Completed her 66th book on *How To Do A Genealogy*.
2. **Brennan Harvey:** Received an honorable mention in the 4th Quarter 2007 *Writers of the Future* Contest.
3. **April Jackson:** Freelance editor, edited *The Foot Book*, that will go into print February 15.
4. **Jane Meier:** Has received pre-payment for *Guide for Boys & Girls, ages 9-13* with the Herald Publishing Company.
5. **Frank & Bert Tiplitzky:** Producers/agents, looking for short films for festivals or the Internet. (www.talburtenantertainment.com)
6. **Dr. Joyce Wheeler:** Her Christmas poem, based on Christmas in 1940, was published in the December 2007 issue of the *Long Beach Press Telegram*.
7. **Gail Michael:** Author, speaker, and poet, has a book: *Depression: Floating Through It Without Drugs; An Alternative to Anti-Depressants*. (www.livealifeofpassion.com)



Janet De Marco
Member

Remember!



It's time to renew your dues if you haven't already done so.

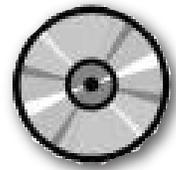
You have three ways you pay:

1. Pay with a check or cash at the next luncheon meeting.
2. Mail your check for \$30 made out to "SCWA" to SCWA Membership, Post Office Box 3192, Huntington Beach, CA 92605-3192.
3. If you have a PayPal account, visit our Web site at www.ocwriter.com, select the Membership link, and select PayPal. One option with PayPal is to use your credit card.



Don't Forget to Shop!

You can buy recordings of previous speakers on both cassette tape and audio CD for the member price of only \$5 each! This is such a valuable resource if you miss a meeting. Our Southern California Writers Association pens are also available for only \$7.50. Just go to ocwriter.com and click on "Make a Purchase."



NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:

March 15

Stephen J. Cannell



"How to Hit the New York Times Best Sellers List!"

Stephen J. Cannell, the best selling author of 12 novels, including the critically acclaimed Shane Scully series, which includes *White Sister*, *Cold Hit*, *Vertical Coffin*, *Hollywood Tough*, *The Viking Funeral*, *The Tin Collectors*, and the latest installment, *Three Shirt Deal*, is the SCWA's scheduled speaker for March 15. Cannell is the author of *Runaway Heart*, *The Devil's Workshop*, *Riding the Snake*, *King Con*, *Final Victim*, and *The Plan*. A feature film of *King Con* is currently in development. The motion picture rights to *Riding the Snake* have been optioned, as well as the rights to his unpublished manuscript, *Love at First Sight*.

An Emmy award-winning writer/producer and chairman of Cannell Studios, Cannell overcame severe dyslexia to become one of television's most prolific writers. In a highly successful career that spans three decades, he has created or co-created more than 40 shows, of which he has scripted more than 450 episodes and produced or executive produced more than 1,500 episodes. His hits include *The Rockford Files*, *Greatest American Hero*, *The A-Team*, *Hunter*, *Riptide*, *Hardcastle & McCormick*, *21 Jump Street*, *Wiseguy*, *The Commish*, *Profit*, and the hit syndicated shows, *Renegade* and *Silk Stalkings*.

So, attending our March meeting is a must!!!

Lynnette Baum
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**February Meeting:
Saturday
February 16, 2008**

DEBORAH HALVERSON

Writing for Kids of all Ages, and How to Catch an Editor's Eye!

(See inside for more on Deborah Halverson.)



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:

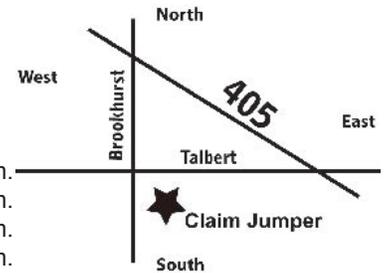
10:00 a.m.

Lunch:

11:30 a.m.

Afternoon Program:

12:30 p.m.



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 February 9: Darlene Quinn, Treasurer, 1310 E. Ocean Blvd., #1703, Long Beach, CA 90802
Check payable to SCWA must accompany reservation, or pay via PayPal online.

After February 9: Brennan Harvey, Meeting Coordinator meeting@ocwriter.com or message (714) 375-5275
BE SURE TO RSVP WHENEVER POSSIBLE! . . . Or register online at www.ocwriter.com/meetings.html



Writers News

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