



Southern California Writers Association

# Writers News

www.ocwriter.com

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## December 18 Speaker

# Kathy Porter

Author

## An Author's Working Journey

On December 18th, the SCWA is proud to feature our very own Kathy Porter, author of *Earth's Ultimate Conflict*. Kathy has had a fantastic year with her book, winning the Indie Excellence Award and Best Books Award. Her work has earned praise from Ray Bradbury and Matthew J. Pallamary, and her second book in the series, *Escape From Nuur* is due out in 2011.

Kathy Porter was born and raised in Endicott, NY, the birthplace of IBM, just a few miles from where Rod Serling, the creator of one of her favorite TV series was raised. As an avid reader Kathy became obsessed with science fiction after reading Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*.

She received plenty of encouragement from her father, a science teacher who



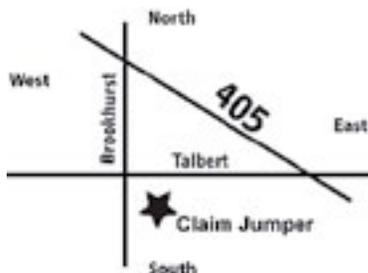
See *Porter*, page 5

### Meeting 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: 10:00 a.m.  
Lunch: 11:30 a.m.  
Afternoon Program: 12:30 p.m.



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# President's Message



## Your True Calling

My earliest memories reveal a fascination with language. Though this passion may have been inborn, I blame the local library. The Multnomah County Public Library, a magnificent three-story building composed of marble floors, granite walls and wrought stone pillars, was built in 1864 and is the oldest public library west of the Mississippi. During my youth, it housed, in addition to ceiling high shelves of books in echoing rooms, a series of open reference stacks. These mysterious, shadowed book aisles were so long that they narrowed toward far away pinpricks of light, like tunnel exits. Here, I happily lost myself in the touch of books, the scent of books, the magnetic pull of well written tales that entranced, as I dreamily drifted from aisle to aisle, with time, unfelt and unnoticed, washing past in an unseen tide.

Of course, my first love was a book.

Was it *Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates* or *The Wind in the Willows*; *A Little Princess* or *The Scarlet Pimpernel*? No matter. I love them still, and their glorious adventures, humble or noble, still haunt my heart.

Reading led to writing.

The lure of writing was far more than the scent of freshly ground pencil lead or the almost painterly look of words on paper. Writing was, and still is, an unconscious, uncontrollable urge, like breathing. If I were to stop writing, I would suffer a very real kind of death. For, writing is my life's work, my true calling.

Does that mean I am not a real writer unless my name tops the New York Times Best Sellers List? Some writers believe that. They believe that reputation or publication or money determine wealth. I don't. Real wealth is the act of writing, the experience of writing, the craft of writing that grows within the soul until it tingles down your fingertips, through your pen and onto the page. Whoever connects the value of writing with fame or fortune, is not a real writer.

My passion for writing introduced me to the sterling members of the *Southern California Writers Association*. For the past six years, it has been my privilege to nurture writerly efforts by serving on The SCWA Board, as either the Vice President of Programming or the President, or both. I have received far more than I have given, for which I am grateful.

Now, stepping out of the limelight, I share this counsel. Write! Write as if your life depended on it... because it does. Write as though generations unborn hunger for your words...because they do. Dismiss all dry, anxious doubts and write! Don't write to please or provoke. Don't write for profit or fame. Write to translate your inner fire into language. Write to share the tenderness native to your heart. Write to release your unique wellspring of creativity.

Write for love...and, love to write!

Lynnette Baum  
President

[lynnette@the-right-writer.com](mailto:lynnette@the-right-writer.com)

## November Highlights:

# LYNETTE BRASFIELD

## The Art of Humor

“You have to go with your instincts,” says Lynette Brasfield, journalist, public relations officer, writing instructor, and author of *Nature Lessons* and new literary mystery, *A Confusion of Stars*. The topic of instincts was inherent in her subject before lunch, “First Principles: Crafting the All-Important First Line and First Chapter,” and her subject after lunch, “Take a Risk,” to which she adds, “Most published writers wouldn’t be published if they didn’t.”

After being introduced, Ms. Brasfield looked around the SCWA audience and said, “You’re a diverse group—especially because you have men.” Then she stated that the first paragraph and first page of a book should also immediately give an impression of its elements.

Establishing these five, first principles is critical. “Everybody’s attention span is quite short these days.”

A. Set up the story question. This question needing to be answered is the engine driving the story. (“Does he want to end his life? Is he dying?”) It may also be the last statement of the first paragraph, such as this from Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom*: “There had always been something not quite right about the Berglunds,” Brasfield said, “Jane Smiley makes an uncovering of the real story behind the mystery.”

B. Establish I/ the voice: Is the voice definite?

C. Show strong emotion: Revenge? Humor?

D. Clarify the setting: Evocative? If in a bad mood, the character will look at the setting or environment in an entirely different way and even interact with it. “Have your character kick the duck.”

E. Indicate what kind of novel it is, not just the genre: Using restaurant as a metaphor for novel, Brasfield asked if it’s a steak house or a fish place. Is the novel comedy, family/domestic drama, coming of age, confessional, historical, political, war, fictional memoir, magical realism, etc.?

Much of the program centered on craft. Members read aloud their own first lines and/or paragraphs for evaluation.

Writing means taking risks. “You get older and think, ‘What have I accomplished in my life?’” You must be willing to open yourself and be exposed. Don’t listen to your head’s negative voices. When people see you sitting at a desk, they think your work is easy. “No,” Brasfield says, “you’re taking risks.” The agony of writing is worthwhile “because you’ll help others.” If only one person in a workshop of twelve likes your book, “that’s good because there are lots of people out there.”

Use your instincts regarding all the *don’ts* you hear about craft: No adverbs, no fragments, no semicolons. “Baloney,” Brasfield says. Mix genres if that works for you.

Regarding the “story question”: Do not answer it too quickly or in too much detail. “Take the reader to the edge of the cliff and let him stay for a while”—but don’t leave the cliff for too long. Meanwhile, what interim question has been raised? “The ordinary can be made to be different.”

**Brasfield continued**

In response to a question about prologues, Brasfield said that many editors don't like them. Prologues are like "a clearing of the throat." A prologue is generally a short chapter covering what happened before the story starts or what happens at the end. If the latter, the book next unrolls the uneven path to that finale. Brassfield suggests not using the word *prologue*. Former SCWA president Roy King says he starts with Chapter Zero.

Throughout the interactions, Brasfield says to copy first lines and/or paragraphs from books on your own shelves and study them.

Recommended word lengths: Novels are between 60,000--80,000 words, novellas are under 50,000, and memoirs are shorter.

(Funny intimate moment: A slender woman, Brasfield quipped that she puts on 30 pounds when writing a novel.)

For writers in anguish everywhere, Lynette Brasfield says, "Dare to be who you are."

(See [www.lynettebrasfield.com](http://www.lynettebrasfield.com) and [www.ghostmemoirwriter.com](http://www.ghostmemoirwriter.com).)

Glenda Brown Rynn, reporter

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GUESTS ALWAYS WELCOME--\$35 AT DOOR; \$30 WITH RSVP  
MEMBERS WHO DO NOT RSVP PAY \$30 AT DOOR  
MEMBERS WHO DO RSVP PAY \$25

**SCWA Critique Committee**  
Open to Members of SCWA

Nonfiction, Fiction and Poetry

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## NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER: December 18, 2010

### *Antoinette Kuritz Facilitates Author Round Table*

The SCWA is proud to kick off 2011 with a speakers' round table conducted by our long-time SCWA friend and industry insider Antoinette Kuritz. Antoinette will be moderating a discussion of the art, craft, and business of writing from three perspectives. Participants will include historical novelist Laurel Corona (*Penelope's Daughter*), Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and author Edward Humes, and espionage and thriller author Christopher Reich (*Rules of Betrayal*).

### **This Month's Speaker (cont.)**

*Porter*, from page 1

sparked her interest and imagination during backyard outings with the family telescope.

As the second to the oldest of seven children Kathy shared a room with her two sisters. During long winter nights Kathy polished her storytelling abilities with her original bedtime stories. To her mother's dismay, Kathy considered her story a success if her sisters lay awake all night haunted by her eerie tale.

After majoring in fashion merchandising and modeling in college, she decided to fulfill her desire to travel to England and Europe, where she stayed and worked for four and a half years in the retail industry at one of London's tourist hotbeds, Oxford Circus. Her daily exposure to several cultures influenced her writing.

Upon returning to the United States, her work eventually took her to Northern California where she met her soon to be husband. They moved to Southern California where she sold real estate until the birth of their daughter Odessa. As a stay-at-home mom, she wrote and told bedtime stories to her daughter. When Odessa attended kindergarten, Kathy took a job at the school district as a kindergarten physical education instructor.

The decision to become a published author came after a haunting early morning dream that formed the basis for the *Gray Guardians* series.

Kathy has kept up a frantic pace in 2010, doing appearances and meet-and-greets for her new book. In her speech on the 18th, Kathy brings this very recent wealth of knowledge and experience to the SCWA. Kathy will take us through the process of selling both yourself and your book. She will examine the best methods in obtaining maximum exposure and sales. Kathy will share with us insider tips, tricks, and insight to give you the advantage in this ultra-competitive industry.

This is a rare glimpse inside the world of author and book promotion, and a must for anyone who has been, or hopes to be, published.

Neil Young  
VP, Programming  
[programmer@ocwriter.com](mailto:programmer@ocwriter.com)

# Writer's Corner

## A Simplified Approach to Writing the Travel Article

By Bert Millsbaugh

Before traveling, do a little research of your destination, especially some of its history. Make copies of the material and drop them into an accordion organizer to take with you. If you find any brochures of the area, put them in the folder and make a list of any points of interest you've found during your research. If you've found sufficient information, make an agenda of what you will see first and so on. Put a small notebook and pen in your folder.

When you arrive, stop at a visitor's center first, city, park, etc. and gather all the brochures you can find. You will also find them at campgrounds, in lodges, in restaurants, in hotel and motel lobby racks, and in museums. Refine your agenda, then follow it, filling your organizer with the pamphlets as you go sightseeing to visit all or most of the points of interest in the area.

At each point, enjoy your sightseeing. Use your camera to record some of what you see. Write a few words in your notebook, but remember the brochures have a wealth of information.

At each stopping place, talk to someone. Ask museum docents, park rangers, hotel or lodge doormen, or waitresses what unusual occurrence has happened here, or what is unusual about this place. At a desert museum, I ask the curator about her strangest exhibit. She showed me a headless skeleton of a person found in the desert sands with two rusted knife blades in its ribs.

Also at each stopping point, use your five senses to add color to the article: sound, sight, smell, touch, and taste. Hesitate for a moment. What do your senses notice? Then record them in your notebook. These will make your article come alive.

**Sound.** Do you hear any unusual sounds or is it the silence that affects you. Once I stood on the edge of a mountain lake in Alaska and heard a loon call from across the fog shrouded surface, then I heard his mate answer.

**Sight.** While walking through the primeval forest into the presence of California's redwood trees, I saw this huge forest giant so tall I couldn't see the top and so wide the edges disappeared in the surroundings.

**Smell.** As I walked through the door of Schat's Bakery in Bishop CA, the aroma of fresh baked bread touched my nostrils reminding me of the loaves my mother baked when I was a child.

**Touch.** Professor Filburn, curator of the BLM Discovery Center in Barstow, CA, laid a stone tool in my hand. It wasn't the touch of that sharp edged implement that affected me. It was the tingling sensation I felt as I held a

# Writing the Travel Article...

*Millspaugh*, from page 6

knife made by another human 50,000 years ago.

**Taste.** At Yogi Bear campground in Wyoming, I shared the unusual flavor of huckleberry ice cream cones with two excited grandkids who watched Yogi trying to steal the cones.

When you get home, make an outline to follow. Item No. 1 will be a summary. The last item will be the conclusion. In between, will be the individual points of interests you visited. Most travel articles follow a path, such as a roadway, a river, streets in a city, historical route, etc.

Write each outline item on the top of a blank sheet of paper. Separate the brochures by outline items. I do this by cutting the brochures into pieces and taping them to the sheets of paper. If you took sightseeing and interview notes, cut them apart and add them to the sheets. History can be added to each point of interest or as one outline item. These bits of paper will form the backbone of your article. Leave item 1 and conclusion sheet blank.

Next, enter these pages into your computer. If you have an OCR scanner, it will speed up the entries. This is your first draft. Edit to your personal writing style and cut to length. Add the color at this time. Several edits may be required until you are satisfied. The pictures in the brochures and photos will help you to “see” the place as you edit.

Read through your exciting article and write a summary directly to your expected reader. This will be the first paragraph. Then tell them in a short paragraph what they experienced and why they should come back. That is your conclusion.

Following these steps, you will be amazed at how simple it is to write the travel article. Most magazines would like photos, but that’s another story. The query letter is you next step.

Bert Millspaugh

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