



Southern California Writers Association

Writers News

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February 19 Speaker

Janice Higgins

Author

Please join us on Saturday, February 19, for a unique look into the publishing process from Janice Higgins. In her speech “The Nuts and Bolts of Writing,” Janice will take us through the process of getting your book published. Whether writing, editing, or performing layouts, Janice shows us the methods authors and publishers must go through to make it happen. Also covered will be what happens after the book is published, including the many aspects of marketing and advertising, possible film options, and that eternal goal of keeping your book off the 99-cent shelf.

A Phoenix native, Evangelist Janice Higgins is a Community Activist; Motivational Coach and founder of Project R.A.G.E. Release Anger & Guilt for Empowerment, an organization concerned with coaching young people on how to deal with anger and guilt through positive and empowering experiences.

Higgins is also the National Author of a series of books, *There Were No Parents Here*, that chronicle the events of her life that lead her to incarceration at the CCWF, the largest women’s detention center in the California, and her eventual redemption. She has traveled extensively sharing her story and her message of encouragement to young people and parents. Evangelist Janice Higgins is a member of Faith Chapel (COGIC) Bishop Roy Dixon. She is also a Volunteer Member of Chapel of Happiness; Central California Women Facility.

So please join us February 19th for an in-depth look at the publishing journey.

Neil Young
VP, Programming
programmer@ocwriter.com

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

Don't Quit Your Day Job!

Published authors and beginning writers are by nature very creative people. They enjoy the process of creating a piece of art by putting words on a page. There are many reasons writers want to write - some for their own personal satisfaction, some to tell a story, some to campaign for a cause, some for fame, some for a living, some to become rich, and there are many other reasons.

One of the first things a writer needs to do is to determine their reason for writing. If it is for personal pleasure, journaling or other non-commercial reasons, continue to hone your skills and enjoy your journey. You can probably stop reading now. However, if it is for a more career or financial oriented reason, then there are many other things to think about and do in addition to the obvious task of creating a published work.

I will attempt to share some mini-lessons, adapted from my years of business experience, for the world of writing. Because of the limited space in the monthly newsletter, these lessons will be high level concepts and additional information on the topics can be found in a variety of resources (thank goodness for Google!). Since many of these topics are not scientific, you will likely find differing opinions and solutions in addition to common trends. My suggestion for dealing with this dilemma is to review several possible approaches and pick the one that makes the most sense, or pick and choose ideas to create your own approach. The main thing is to plan, plan, plan! Even though a plan does not ensure success, most businesses that succeed have a plan.

Over the next few months, I will share a process for project management that I have used in technical writing development projects. This simple six step process can work for any type of writing. Understand, these are steps for managing the systematic process of writing, not the creative process. The steps are: Research, Design, Development, Delivery, Evaluation and Maintenance. While the detail in each step will vary from writing project to writing project, all the steps should be considered. These steps do not need to be lengthy but they need to address key components to ferret out any issues or concerns before you begin writing.

The first step is **Research** (Analysis). In my opinion, this is the most important step in managing your expectations about your project. This is the step that will show you why you "Don't quit your day job" (unless you are independently wealthy in which case you probably don't have a day job anyway). In this step you should develop a business plan of sorts for your book project. Again, the detail of your business plan will vary depending on the type of book you are writing and what your goals are for the book. A highly technical non-fiction, an historical fiction, sci-fi or thriller will all take different amounts of research and analysis. There are many resources available that can lead you through the components of a business plan. A good business plan should include an Executive Summary of the detailed plan. This will be useful if and when you decide to market your book. There are many areas that can and should be included in this step. Some of the primary areas are:

Market Analysis – Is there a market for your book? Who will want to read your book? (who is the audience?) Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT analysis) for your book. Examples: Determine why your book is different and why readers would buy your book. What are the weaknesses of your book, such as too narrow of an audience? Where are the opportunities for your book to sell to special markets – academic, children, young adult, etc? What are the threats to your book (e.g. too many similar books, not enough money to promote properly and so on)? Be really honest here.

January Highlights:
ANTOINETTE KURITZ, CHRIS REICH, LAUREL CORONA AND
EDWARD HUME
“The Art, Craft, and Business of Writing”

By Victory Crayne, reporter, victory@crayne.com

Chris Reich worked as an investment banker in a Swiss bank and one day decided to give up that rat race and write a novel. His first book, a financial thriller entitled *Numbered Account*, came out just when a financial crisis with old Nazi money stored in Swiss banks became news. His newest books are all thrillers.

Antoinette Kuritz said he's good at it too! If you pick up a Chris Reich book in the afternoon, you won't put it down until you finish it. So start on a Sunday afternoon.

Laurel Corona is a professor of humanities at San Diego City College. She wrote books on different countries. She recommends starting out as a work for hire writer. She writes historical fiction novels now.

Ed Hume came to writing as a journalist writing about crime in the courts. He was offered a chance to write a book about true crime and took a leave of absence from the newspaper. That was 1989 and he's still on leave. His first three books were true crime books. He now writes nonfiction books.

Kuritz: In 1981 a survey said that 81% of Americans say they have a book in them. Almost one million new ISBNs were registered last year. How did you get started in writing?

Reich: I started writing in college, but at age 21 I had no business writing a novel.

Hume: I entered a contest on why we should be kind to animals. I started writing as a career by writing for the college paper.

Corona: I really started writing in college, and I ended up getting a Ph.D. because nobody ever told me to leave!

Kuritz: Most of the writers I've spoken say that if you want to be a writer, pick a regular time to sit your ass in the chair, put your fingers on the keyboard, and write. How did you land an agent?

Hume: I got some recognition for having received a Pulitzer [in 1995].

Corona: I looked at books by authors I like and found their agents. I wrote to one agent. But after two books, the relationship did not work out. Our expectations of each other were different.

Reich: A friend of my parents knew someone in an agency. One guy's CEO was James Patterson. Around my house we call him "Saint James." Patterson recommended him to his agent, Richard Pine.

Kuritz: I've told many writers that you need to have sold five successful books before the average author can say you're making your living just as a writer.

Corona: I still have a full-time day job and I couldn't possibly live on my writing.

Hume: I have other sources of income.

Kuritz: Give us your definition of writer's block.

Hume: The trips to the refrigerator. Actually, the beginnings are the hardest for me. The first 50 pages are a killer. But I've

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NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER: MARK SEVI

March 19, 2011

“Developing Novels into Screenplays, Part Deux”

Back by popular demand, our March 19th meeting welcomes back Mark Sevi for “Developing Novels into Screenplays, Part Deux,” a continuation of his October 2010 speech about transforming your book into a screenplay.

Mark has made a career developing novels into screenplays, being a professional screenwriter with nineteen produced feature films and several in various stages of production. He has also sold pilots for television and is currently shopping the book series "Warlord" to Story and Film Productions as a pilot for a series on SyFy Channel. He is the founder and president of the Orange County Screenwriters Association (OCSWA) a not-for-profit organization conceived to be a connective resource of creative energy and real-world materials for professional and amateur writers and filmmakers (www.ocscreenwriters.com.)

So please join us on March 19 as Mark shares with us his knowledge for making that big transition.

Neil Young
VP, Programming
programmer@ocwriter.

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

Send submissions to editor@ocwriter.com

Critique Groups

For an up to date list of writer critique groups in OC visit www.crayne.com/critique-groups

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“Art, Craft & Business of Writing...” (continued from p. 3)

rarely published anything with the original beginning in tact.

Corona: The first draft doesn't have to be any good.

Reich: Professional writers can't have writers block. It doesn't have to be perfect. Just get it down. For a book a year, it takes me the first six months to write the first 400 pages and three months to write the second 400 pages.

Corona: In one book I was writing I was tempted to jump ahead. I was not interested in what I was writing. I realized if I was not that interested, my readers won't be either.

Kuritz: What do you cut out to hold your day job and write?

Corona: First, sex. Many times, I'm just too tired. I almost never go out to eat dinner. I never see movies. I always make time for exercise every day. I wake up early and write for half a day.

Kuritz: So you take your best hours and devote them to writing.

Hume: I break a project into a research phase and a writing phase. I set aside so many hours each day to work.

Reich: Work in the morning. Work like you have a regular day job.

Kuritz: Are all of you published in ebook format?

Reich: All of my books are in print. I learned that savvy computers users are not usually book buyers. Actually I sell a lot of ebooks.

Kuritz: It is estimated that seven percent of the market last year went to ebooks. It is anticipated that this will triple this year. Five years from now you may sell as many ebooks as hardcopy.

Reich: Ebooks are expected to slaughter the paperback market.

Corona: My contract now says if the book does not sell 300 copies in four consecutive quarters, the rights revert to me.

Reich: My publisher prints 1.8 million hardcovers to sell one million. I think quality will always win out.

Kuritz: Does your publisher do much for your book?

Corona: I think it's easier to sell your first book than your fourth or fifth book.

Kuritz: How important is a website?

Hume: I get a lot of contacts from the media.

Kuritz: Have a decent photo for the inside of your book. You don't want a glamour photo or people won't recognize you.
Coop space: The two biggest sources of profits for bookstores are rental space in the front of the store and remaindered books (discounted).

Indie bookstores are making a real comeback. A lot of people are pulling away from the big box bookstores. The indie booksellers associations have a list of independent stores. Costs a few hundred dollars.

Kuritz: What are the biggest changes in the publishing industry?

Reich: People are reading less.

President's Message (continued from p. 2)

Marketing & Sales Strategy – How will you market and sell your book, ebook? Special Markets? Will you need a distributor? Will you need a publisher or will you self-publish?

Management – Who will be on your team? Who will do the cover graphics? Who will do the internal graphics? Who will help you edit your book? Who will help you market your book (public relations, agent fees)? Who will help you with the business side of your writing business – accountant, attorney, subject matter experts, distribution, production, other? Every project and situation is different and not all team member skills are needed for all projects. Who do you need?

Financial Projections – How much will it cost to publish, market and sell your book? How much money can you afford to spend? What is the cost to use a traditional publisher? What would it cost to self, or e-publish? Based on your audience, how much do you think you can profit from book sales? Does that cover what you are willing to spend? What is the cost to self-publish? What will it cost for services of your team members listed above? What will it cost for you to promote yourself e.g. cost for book signings, travel, etc.?

Executive Summary – After you have completed your business plan, go back and in one or two pages, summarize your findings into an Executive Summary and place this at the beginning of your business plan. Often times, publishers or agents will review your executive summary to see if it is worth reading further. Think of it as a sort of query letter and the first few chapters of a manuscript – you need show in these pages that you have thought through everything with regard to project. While only a few may ask for this information, the real value is to you. It helps you to think through the realities of your project and solve problems before they arise, as well as help you to make wise decisions regarding expenses you will incur so you can decide if the cost is worth the possible benefit and risk.

I have attempted to share a very high level approach to business-planning for your writing project, in the hope that it will not discourage you but will help you to be realistic about the not-so-glamorous side of the writing process. Just as with any profession, I am sure you can find many people who have not approached the “business of writing” in this manner, and have still been successful, but the odds for avoiding costly failures are greater if you take some time to do the planning “before you quit your day job.”

Next month we will discuss the design and development of your writing project, from a project management perspective (e.g. how do you get it done). Until then...enjoy the journey!

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Writer's Corner

How to Kill a Bad Book Idea

By Patricia Fry

A friend of mine killed a book over the weekend. It was somewhat painful, but it was for the best. I was impressed by her courage and business sense.

Earlier in the week, this would-be author came up with a book idea. She called and emailed several women she knows asking them to get involved. Everyone was excited at the prospect. And then my friend took a brave step. She began a search to find out if there was anything else out there like what she had in mind. There was. So she and the other women put their heads together to see if they could fine tune their idea into something that had not been done in excess before. Sadly, they could not. So the hopeful author unceremoniously killed the book right then and there.

Knowing this gal the way I do, I'm pretty sure she'll birth a viable book project one day. It just has to be the right book at the right time.

Are you strong enough to kill a bad book idea or to give up on a book that has been overdone? Are you convinced that your book idea is a good one? How can you be sure? Start by writing a book proposal.

I've known authors who made major changes to their proposed books because of what they learned through the book proposal process. One of my book proposal course students changed the focus of her book midstream and promptly landed a major publisher.

The truth is that publishing is not an extension of your writing. When you decide that you want to be published, you must shift from creative mode to business mode. You must begin to think and act with your head and not your heart.

If you have a book idea, spend some time fleshing it out. What is your vision? What will the purpose of the book be? Who is your audience? How large is your proposed audience? Once you have a pretty good idea as to the direction of your book, step outside your comfortable world and conduct some important research. Find out:

- What other books are out there like yours.
- How many?
- What makes your book different?
- Would your book fill a niche none of the other books do?
- How can you change your book to make it more distinctive?
- Is there a segment of readers that are not being addressed by the books that are out there?

For a nonfiction book, you want to fill a need. For example, there might be dozens of books on parenting the toddler. But has anyone produced a book of practical tips for parents of Downs or Autistic children? There are numerous books for people who adore cats. But has anyone come up with a book on using astrology to make a compatible choice in a pet? Green is a popular theme in books. So your book idea for recycling could be way overdone. What about combining the concepts of becoming more organized around the house with recycling by illustrating how to create something new from things once loved and no longer used?

Writer's Corner (*cont.*)

Fry, continued from pg. 7

Fiction books are looked at in a little different way. For fiction, you want to key into an already popular niche. You would find out what type of books are selling—romance, young adult novels, historical fiction, adventure series, etc. And try to write within that vein. If, however, you love writing poetry or literary works, you need to understand that you do not have a humungously large readership.

As with a rather ordinary memoir by someone who lived a rather ordinary life, there just isn't a lot of potential for works of poetry or some of the more literary genres. You need to know this going in and develop a reasonable level of expectations for your project.

If you want to live a dream no matter the return, then go ahead and produce that book of poetry or that academic tome you want to write. But do so with some knowledge of the market and realistic expectations. If you desire big profits from your writing effort and your investment of time, then you must enter into this business operation with enough savvy to pull it off. How do you get the knowledge you need? By writing a book proposal—a business plan for your book.

A book proposal will help you to determine:

- Whether you have a valid book idea or not.
- Who your target audience is.
- Where your audience is and how you will reach them.
- What else is out there like your book and how you could tweak yours to fit a large niche.
- What comprises your platform and how you can build on it.
- What it will take to promote this book.

Successful authors and publishers kill books every day. Not all book ideas are great. And it is the author who recognizes this who is most likely to succeed. Go into publishing with an unrealistic attachment to your project—without having done the necessary research—and you could be one of the 76 percent of authors who fail every year.

Patricia Fry is the Executive Director of SPAWN (Small Publishers, Artists and Writers Network) www.spawn.org. She is the author of 33 books, most of them for authors and freelance writers. www.matilijapress.com. She is a publishing consultant and book editor. www.patriciafry.com. Follow her informative blog daily: www.matilijapress.com/publishingblog.



“Art, Craft & Business of Writing...” (continued from p. 5)

Corona: The downturn in the economy. Advances are really small.

Hume: Fear is the operative word.

Kuritz: Have you faced when you tell someone I want to be a writer and your family members say “get a real job”?

Reich: My parents supported my writing.

Hume: I came up in journalism in the golden era when newspapers were expanding and people were actually reading them. My parents were glad I had a paying job anyway.

Kuritz: Do you ask yourself what am I going to write that people are going to buy, or do you just write books that are in your heart and mind that you want to write? Alexandra Bengtsson said, “If you want to succeed, don’t have a Plan B.”

Reich: I guess I was born with that gene that says I want to succeed at all costs. I took a couple books that were bestsellers that were models of the form. I said to myself I’m gonna model my books like this. Be humble. Take people’s advice.

Kuritz: Let’s talk about editors for a moment. How important is the editor to the final result that we read in your book?

Hume: The editor is critical because they are promoting your book within the publishing house.

Kuritz: How much of a writing team are you actually with your editor?

Corona: I really appreciate editors. I try to take feedback as meant to tell me when I’m not communicating as well as I could be.

Reich: They may make comments like, “This part is not tense enough. Or make the relationship between the man and the woman closer.” But no one ever gives you specific suggestions, or guess what? They’d be the author! You have to do the heavy lifting yourself. As a writer, you like to hear “I like it. It’s good.” You have to be humble to be able to take suggestions. And that’s where an editor can help.

Corona: One of the things we have to realize as writers is that we’ll never, ever have the luxury of coming fresh to what we wrote. An editor is so valuable because an editor can give you the critical eye of your reader. In the end, we have to figure out how to maximize the experience for our reader. A good editor is your best friend in that regard.

Kuritz: When you are writing, do you ever picture your audience?

Reich: It is so important to think of your audience because you are primarily an entertainer. If you’re writing a chapter and you’re bored with it, you know it’s going to suck. You have to be excited about it.

Kuritz: What do you look for in an agent?

Hume: Trust is the key issue, someone you trust with the well being of your career.

Kuritz: Did your first agent nurture you along at all?

Reich: I have the best agent in Richard Pine. My agent for me is a hundred times more important than my editor. Agents have these relationships with all the publishing companies. Mine has always worked so closely with me that I’m so lucky to have him.

Kuritz: Sometimes your agent will recommend when you should come out in hardcover or in trade paperback? Does your agent do that for you? A good agent will career craft for you, will let you know when it’s time to move from trade paperback to hardcover.

“Art, Craft & Business of Writing...” (continued from p. 9)

Corona: Ask yourself two questions of a new agent you are considering. 1. Has this agent made anybody else's dream come true that is my dream? 2. What is the toughest situation they ever handled with an editor at a publishing house and how did they handle it? Tell me about a time that didn't go so well.

Kuritz: It's important to vet an agent. It's one thing to say, wow, an agent wants me. But don't go all Sally Fields on it.

Do any of you find that putting chapters of your book on your website helps?

Reich: I know that for David Baldacci and John Grisham, if you sign up for their newsletter, they'll send you three or four chapters of the new book. I think it's a great idea because if someone reads that much of your book, and they like it, they'll go out to the nearest bookstore and buy the book.

Kuritz: Have you ever negotiated for books for PR purposes?

Corona: I've never negotiated, but whenever I've gone back to my publicist and say I need twenty more books and here's why and they say okay.

Hume: I've had whatever I've needed.

Kuritz: Advances are going down. I'm hearing these days that the average advance is between 5 and 10 thousand dollars. Are you hearing the same thing?

Corona: I got less than half that for my recent book than for a previous one. But some people forget that the economy has tanked. Some people forget that it's an advance. It's not a gift. If you don't earn out the advance, you won't sell another book.

Kuritz: Once you earn it out, you're golden with them.

Corona: You're golden with them and you start making money.

Kuritz: What are the traits you find common with most writers?

Hume: Most of us have this conceit that if we feel interested and passionate about this, most will feel the same way. And I suppose we have to feel that way about our stories.

Reich: I actually don't like hanging around other writers. I don't want to hear their problems and they don't want to hear my problems. Plus they're also competitors. I've gone to thriller fests and met Scott Turow. And he's just as insecure as I am! It's Scott Turow! Shouldn't he be above this? None of us are above this. We're all so insecure. That's the one defining trait of authors. You're always trying your best but it never seems good enough.

Corona: The one common trait I see is curiosity. They're observers. They watch what goes on around them or what they've read or something that's touched them in their lives becomes food for a story. I think most writers are great observers.

Kuritz: Do you do your own research or do you have a research assistant?

Reich: I usually do my own research. It's probably the most fun part of the job. I was just this last week at the FBI in New York for four days with the counterterrorism bureau. I got to suit up with the SWAT and that was super cool! But I have used this great guy in New York named Dan Starr, a researcher for writer who has helped me with stuff. I got him from Ken Follett. He charges five thousand dollars and he'll do a lot of leg work for you. He'll give back tons of reams of information. But I haven't used him for four books. I do it all myself. It's more fun.

Corona: I do it all by myself.

“Art, Craft & Business of Writing...” (continued from p. 10)

Hume: Journalists have to do all their own research.

Kuritz: How important are reviews to the success of a book?

Hume: It's way more effective than advertising.

Reich: I'd written five books and the last book was called *The Patriot's Club*. I had to totally reinvent myself. I was sitting there with a house and two kids in private schools. I can't fail. There was no plan B. I can't get a job. I'm unemployable now. I've been a writer for fifteen years. No one's going to hire me to do anything.

So I sat back and wrote this book called *Rules of Deception*. It all came down to getting a review from the *New York Times*. And there's one reviewer there named Janet Maslin for the *New York Times*. She made *The Da Vinci Code*. Her front page review made *The Da Vinci Code* what it was. And then it just took off.

I was in Chicago before the book was coming out and I learned she was going to review it the next day in the *New York Times*. I was awake, sweating bullets. My life was dependent on this review. And it came on and it was a rave review on the front page of the arts section. They call Amazon the author's crack. Once you start looking at those ratings, that's all you look at. I went to bed that night and the book was ranked at number 200 and it was coming out in five days. I woke up in the morning and it was down to number 22. When I got on the flight from Chicago to New York it was number three. It was a giant bestseller. It sold like 20 thousand copies in one week because of that review. When that one review came out, everyone piggy backed on it. Because when she reviewed it, all the other newspapers started reviewing it. Reviews are so key.

All those author quotes: That is a racket. If I know the guy, I'll give him a quote. Who has time to read all these fictions books? I don't even like reading fiction.

Kuritz: How important is a *Publisher's Weekly* review?

Corona: Getting *Publisher's Weekly* to review your book means you impressed them.

Kuritz: What you have to remember is that the *Publishers Weekly* is read by industry insiders. Then there is the *Librarian Journal* that the librarians read. The booksellers read *PW* and that helps them decide what books they're going to buy and put into the stores. They also read the *New York Times*, but the *NYT* is really geared to the public who is going to go buy the book.

What do you see as a prognosis for the publishing industry?

Hume: They are uncertain now about how to deal with this Kindle and, of course, the economy. They are in indecision about buying.

Corona: One of the very few growing markets is young adults. The Young Adult novel is a relatively new genre, along with graphic novels. So I think there are still some growing markets in publishing.

Reich: Publishing is becoming much more fragmented. There are a lot more book choices out there, which means there will be fewer blockbusters and bestsellers, but for the consumer there's absolutely more choice. Ebooks are making it easier to sell to the public. People are buying more books again. It's never going to die out.

But for people, it's the age 40 and above. If you are 40 and above, you grew up reading hardcover books and you'll never totally give them up. Forty and below, they don't read them as much. There will be some that like them, but they'll be much more enamored of the ebook platform. In textbooks, there's not going to be textbooks. It's all going to be all on your iPad and why shouldn't you? So embrace the future. Don't be a Luddite.

Kuritz: I think there will always be room for good books. There will be room for good authors and good books. Because traditionally, after a recession, book prices go up.

“Art, Craft & Business of Writing...” (continued from p. 11)

Kuritz: Why do you write?

Hume: I was an idealist young reporter. I wanted to save the world.

Corona: I write because I really love to write.

Reich: I love writing for a living. I never consider it work. It is hard work, but I write because it's my profession. I write because it's what I need to do to make a living. I don't have a burning desire to share all my personal secrets and thoughts with the world but I enjoy what I do. I'm really lucky to be pretty good at it. So it's like I found my path with writing and it's definitely the path I have to stay on.

Kuritz: What's the best advice for you to give an aspiring author?

Corona: Don't beat up on yourself while you're doing it.

Reich: My best advice is just this: just write! No excuses. Just do it. If you want to be a writer, just do it and that's that.

