



Southern California Writers Association

# Writers News

[www.ocwriter.com](http://www.ocwriter.com)

**Volume 10, Number 3.....March 2011**

## March 19 Speaker

# Mark Sevi

Screenwriter, Lecturer

## *“Developing Novels into Screenplays, Part Deux”*

We are overjoyed to announce Mark Sevi’s return as the speaker for March 19th. We have had lots of requests to hear Mark speak again. Back in October 2010, in his speech “Developing Novels into Screenplays,” we ran over time and hadn’t even touched on everything he had to tell us.

So for March 2011, Mark is back for “Developing Novels into Screenplays, Part Deux.” This will be a continuation of Mark’s look into what happens when the author’s best-selling book is ready for the next stage, bringing that story to the silver screen. Like Stephen King, J.K. Rowling, Neil Gaiman, Dan Brown, Ann Brashares, and Lauren Weisberger, we all hope to see our book turned into a movie and given a red-carpet world premiere.

Mark has made a career developing novels into screenplays. He is a professional screenwriter with nineteen-produced feature films and several more in various stages of production. Mark 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](http://www.ocscreenwriters.com).)

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### 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*

## Finding Your Team

Most people can't know and do everything themselves, nor should they, which is why the focus this year is on synergy. So, how does that apply to you and the business side of writing? As you learned in writing your business plan, you need to identify your management team. For writers, this team might look a little different than for other businesses, but there are many commonalities.

If you are like most writers, you are a starving artist and can't afford to hire people to handle the different aspects of your book development needs. This is the time to think out of the box about how you can get some of this work done. You may be able to negotiate services on a barter basis. You may have skills that they need and you can trade for skills you have; or, at the very least, you may be able to find other writers who will work with you to minimize the amount of time (and expense) by doing some of the work (preliminary editing, graphics, etc.) that you would pay a real professional to do and, in turn, you can do the same for them.

Another approach is to share with the professionals that you are on a limited budget and asked them to tell you what you can do for yourself and what they can do for the budget you have to spend. Good professionals will help you find a solution that meets your needs, if not, keep looking until you find someone who will work with you.

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*Sevi, cont. from page 1*

Mark has taught screenwriting in Southern California for over a decade and a half through Irvine Valley College's community education department ([123getsmart.com](http://123getsmart.com).) He has written articles on the business and craft of writing for Salon.Com, Writers Digest, and many other online and print periodicals. Besides sitting as president on the board of directors of OCSWA, Mark is also a board member of The Media Alliance of Orange County (MAOC) which includes the OC film commissioner, Ms. Janice Arrington. His current film project "Shadow Bay" is in pre-production with director Josh Eisenstadt and Spector's Rock Productions.

So please join us on March 19, as Mark continues talk on taking our novels to that next big step.

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

## February Highlights:

JANICE HIGGINS

# “The Nuts and Bolts of Writing: Marketing Your Book”

Janice Higgins spoke on “The Nuts and Bolts of Writing: Marketing Your Book.” Not only is author and activist Higgins the owner of Epiphany Publishing House, a marketing and public relations firm but also the founder of Project R.A.G.E. (Release Anger and Guilt for Empowerment).

The titles in Higgins’s series, *There Were No Parents Here*, indicate her life story-- *Book 1: From the Eyes of a Child*; *Book 2: No Direction*; *Book 3: There Is Hope*; and *Book 4: Behind These Walls*. Project R.A.G.E. coaches communities in “turning negative behavior into positive behavior,” her own slogan.

The records kept by the Department of Justice, Higgins says, indicate that “70% of the prison population were raised in single-parent homes.” She even lost that status at the age of seven when her mother was murdered. She had to care for five siblings, then eleven children. Kidnapped and forced into prostitution, she wound up on crack and other drugs. In July 1997 she landed in a large California prison for seven months.

Somehow, Higgins “got clean” (and has stayed so for 21 years), began writing, and also became an evangelist. However, her six children “didn’t know who I was until they read my book.” Finally they understood why she gave the advice she did and still does, not only to them but to individuals and innumerable groups. Higgins is the recipient of many public service awards.

Because of *Book 1: From the Eyes of a Child*, Fox TV aired a mini-documentary on Higgins the day before *Book 2* came out, which then sold well. She says, “People are more likely to buy a book that has a cause—rather than one to make us rich.”

Through this new business, however, Higgins learned that too many people wanted to be on her “wagon.” “Beware of people who take your money but don’t do anything.” “I come from the Hood—we want to see everything in black and white.”

Again, Higgins had to fight for herself. She sued to get back her rights from her publicist, gaining them only seven days before the woman died. Wanting to change to another publisher, she learned she’d have to buy or sell out all the previous copies because their ISBN numbers funneled the checks to prior people. She did so for the excess copies in storage of *Book 1*. Then she stuck her new ISBN number over the old ones, sold the books, and gained the proceeds. In the meantime she mastered marketing because she was “determined not to let my book be on the \$0.99 shelves.”

Higgins had to know her market: whom to reach and whom she wanted to change. Publicity and marketing campaigns can run \$3,000-5,000 a month. Higgins advises starting a database with people’s email addresses. On your site, say where you’ll be appearing. Two minutes on TV will prompt sales. Among products like cards, pens, bookmarkers, and T-shirt, she’s found the last two the most useful for her topic with their message of Project R.A.G.E. or No Parents Here. Be careful of wordy handouts: use bullet points. Rather than individual sales for her topics, she favors bulk sales to groups like juvenile hall, corporations, and prisons.

Higgins’s other venues include the 7-11 stores in Thailand, where those convenience stores are “every two blocks.” All her books except two sell on Kindle. She’s also signed onto the long waiting list for Nook. An author cannot appear on Oprah if he/she used a small press or is self-published. In addition, the author needs representation by an attorney, ever since the James Frey scandal with *A Million Little Pieces*.

Higgins’s business, Epiphany Publishing no longer publishes authors but handles their publicity and marketing. It also utilizes social media. See [www.JaniceHiggins.com](http://www.JaniceHiggins.com) and [www.myspace.com/108596966](http://www.myspace.com/108596966).

By Glenda Brown Rynn, reporter, [grynn@cox.net](mailto:grynn@cox.net)

# NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER: PHILLIP MARGOLIN

April 16, 2011

## *“How to Write Thrillers in Your Spare Time for Fun and Profit”*

New York Times best-selling author, Phillip Margolin, will share secrets when he talks about writing mystery and crime novels - "How to Write Thrillers in Your Spare Time for Fun and Profit." Margolin grew up in New York, graduated from The American University in Washington, D.C., and then served in Liberia, South Africa, as a Peace Corps volunteer from 1965 to 1967. He graduated from New York University School of Law and has practiced law in Portland, Oregon for the past 35 years. His riveting and suspenseful legal thrillers are hugely entertaining. His latest book, *Supreme Justice*, is the final installment of a trilogy of page-turning novels. Other novels include: *Fugitive*, *Executive Privilege*, *Proof Positive*, *Lost Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Ties That Bind*, *Gone but not Forgotten*, *The Associate*, *Wild Justice* and more. Margolin's latest novel *Supreme Justice* will be in stores May 18th!

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

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

The **Scare The Dickens Out of Us** ghost story writing contest for 2011 is entering its third year. First place prize of \$1000.00, second place prize of \$500.00 and third place prize of \$250.00 will be awarded this year for the best original, previously unpublished ghost stories 5000 words or less that are submitted. For younger writers, The Junior Scare The Dickens Out of Us ghost story contest, which follows the same rules, offers \$250.00 for first place for writers aged 12-18.

This contest is a fundraiser for the Friends of the Dr. Eugene Clark Library in Lockhart, Texas. The main contest requires a \$20.00 entry fee and the Junior contest a \$5.00 entry fee. The contest is privately funded. All entry fee money goes directly to the Friends where it is donated to the library for library projects.

Entries are accepted beginning July 1. The contest postmark deadline is October 1, 2011. Full rules are at [www.clarklibrary-friends.com](http://www.clarklibrary-friends.com).

No publication is involved. Writers retain full rights to their stories. The contest is open to published and unpublished writers, and to local, national and international writers as well.

The only rules are that you write an original, unpublished ghost story and that it be 5000 words or less in length.

### Executive Committee

President.....Charla Spence  
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VP, Membership..... Polly Dunn  
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Newsletter Editor.....David Meacham

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Sonia Marsh, [meeting@ocwriter.com](mailto:meeting@ocwriter.com)  
or message (949) 309-0030

## Writer's Corner

# How Query Letter Can Put Your Article in Print

By Bert Millspaugh

The first paragraph of your query letter should entice the magazine editor to want to read the rest of it. It should also be the first paragraph of your magazine article. See the attached query letter and article. This exciting paragraph will keep your reader wanting to finish you article.

The remainder of your letter should briefly describe your article and why it should be in the editor's magazine. In the December SCWA newsletter, I wrote that the article should have sensory items. Those should briefly be put in the query letter. See paragraph four of my query letter.

And finally tell the editor what photos you are sending and that you are enclosing a SASE. Then mention your qualification for writing the article.

This style of query letters has given me the opportunity to sell many article, most of them before the article was ever written.

Good Luck,

Bert Millspaugh

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### *Query letter example:*

Owens River Query for SCWA  
Albert U. Millspaugh  
Name, address, phone

Date

Editor

Magazine address

Dear .....,

It was early morning as we stepped from the motorhome's warmth at Whitney Portal campground and gazed upward. The sun slowly scaled the Inyo Mountains behind us, ahead Mount Whitney took on a purplish glow that gradually changed to pink, red, orange, and then almost as if King Midas himself touched it, the mountain glowed like a golden jewel against the deep velvet blue sky. Reaching for that golden crown, my son Andy and I started up the trail toward the crest. Below, we could see Owens River Valley spread out between two majestic mountain ranges, the Sierra Nevadas on the west and Inyo-Whites to the east.

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## Writer's Corner (*cont.*)

Millspaugh, *continued from pg. 7*

Hiking is only one of the myriad of recreational opportunities that California's deepest valley and surrounding mountains has in store for RVing enthusiasts. In the past, it provided home sites for Indians, trapping and trade routes for mountain men, and gold and silver for the treasure hunters.

Today it's a door to unlimited recreational activities - camping, fishing, backpacking, water skiing, museum and ghost town touring, or just plain relaxing.

I would like to invite your readers to experience spring in the valley when the meadow grass is green, the cool streams rush filled with snow-melted water, and a profusion of wildflowers are in bloom. In the summer, horses with flowing manes and white face cattle graze in verdant pastures. In the fall, aspens are turning yellow, tawny, and gold, A breath of frost is in the air and you may see snow sprinkling the crested peaks as a prelude to winter.

The article will also describe such places as the 100-million year old Alabama Hills and strange rock formations where the silent screen cowboys came to life; 4000-year old bristlecone pines where you can touch the world's oldest living thing; Palisades Glacier where you can feel the cold of the most southern glacier in U.S.; and Owens Lake where you can witness the historic saga of a mountain lake steamship. Owens Valley is a place of earthquake faults, craters, lava flow, and hot springs. Bones of mastodons have been found and a chain of Indian petroglyphs runs through the area.

Bishop, the valley's largest city, offers golfing, tennis, fishing, and dining under the very crest of the Sierras - also tubing the Owens on Huck Finn day, mule racing on Mule Days, and rodeo on Labor Day.

I will mail the article to you -- including 35-mm transparencies -- upon receiving your request to see the piece on speculation.

I primarily write outdoor and travel articles. I've been published in Westways, Trailer Life, Motorhome, RV West, etc. I have a BA in Technical Communications and professionally, I'm a Technical Publications Administrator.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bert Millspaugh



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