



Writers News

Volume 6, Number 9.....September 2007

September 15 Speaker

Robert Gregory Browne and Brett Battles

Internationally Published Thriller Writers

Anatomy of a Thriller



Brett Battles

Know how to write breathless prose? Need tips that hook readers with page-turning urgency?

Learn how to write heart-stopping fiction at the September SCWA meeting, with internationally published authors Robert Gregory Browne and Brett Battles. Browne and Battles, two rising stars in the darkling sky of suspense writing, are experts in crafting fascinating plots and intriguing characters. They know how to build a book from a catchy first line to a smashing finale. And so can you!

You, too, can write compelling plots that move at a break-neck pace. Taut, edgy, outstanding prose can be your hallmark—after learning the anatomy of a thriller from these two exceptional authors.

Robert G. Browne began his writing career by selling a two-part mystery story, *Nothing but the Cold Wind*, to *EasyRiders* magazine. Shortly thereafter, he won the prestigious Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting, sponsored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, and roared onto the Hollywood fast lane. Since then, he has published powerful suspense thrillers, including critically acclaimed *Kiss Her Goodbye*.

Brett Battles's compelling thriller *The Cleaner* has enjoyed a brilliant debut in 2007. Furiously paced, filled with superbly drawn characters and pitch-perfect dialogue, *The Cleaner* puts a powerful twist on reader expectations as it confirms Battles's place as one of the most exciting new talents in suspense fiction today. An expert in peopling heart-pounding plots with edgy characters, he is now elbow-deep in the promising third novel in this series.

Master murder, mystery, and intrigue with Robert Gregory Browne and Brett Battles at the SCWA meeting in September 2007!

Lynnette Baum
VP, Programming
therightwriter@cox.net



Robert Gregory Browne

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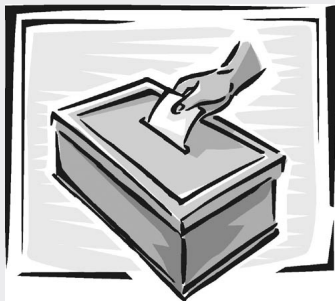
President's Message

"The time has come," the walrus said, "to speak of many things." The time is now and the subject is your selection of officers to lead our great group of writers for next year. Actually, I want to talk with you about YOUR volunteering for a role in helping our fast growing and lively group to continue to offer valuable services to our members.

I've noticed, as I'm sure you have too, that we get out of an organization in proportion to what we put into it. SCWA has become a resounding success in Orange County, growing from 33 members when I took over the VP Membership role in March of last year to 105 members by the end of the year. The rolls took a dip at the annual renewal in January but are back up to 102 members!

Now it would be easy for me to claim a lot of credit for that, but frankly, the credit belongs to those who wrote the checks to rejoin or join. Each person made a decision based on what they thought they'd get out of SCWA. The votes are in and WE ALL win!

People often attend meetings if they like who is speaking or what the subject is. And the more members we have, the more we can attract excellent speakers. For the speakers always ask, "How many attend your meetings?" And of course, the more members we have, the more attend. It's one of those Catch-22 things, isn't it?



The good news is that most of your officers from the last election are willing to serve another year.

Victory Crayne will run again for President. But be warned! This may be her last year.

Lynnette Baum has graciously consented to serve at least another six months as your VP Programming. Lynnette deserves a loud applause for her hard work and success in bringing in many excellent speakers. I've always believed the quality of the choice of speakers we offer is critical to our success. And Lynnette continued to bring in the best. My hat is off to her!

Kathy Porter has volunteered to be a protégé with Lynnette and offer her services as VP Programming later. Thanks a big bunch, Kathy! We hope your novel, *The Guardians*, will achieve the success you desire!

Larry Porricelli has also graciously consented to continue as our Publicity Director. Larry was our Master of Ceremonies at the August meeting. Remember his colorful posters on the walls and his quizzes with prizes? I can tell you from personal experience that this man is a powerhouse of creative ideas.

Mary Green has graciously consented to run as your newsletter editor. Most of you don't know this, but Mary has had a difficult year with surgeries, all while she is caring for her aging mother. Nevertheless, every month she continues to put out our fine newsletter. I've been a newsletter editor in other organizations, so I know how much work that job entails. You've done a great job, Mary, and I'm happy to see you running for reelection. It would be difficult to replace you!

As of this issue, Janet DeMarco has declined to run for Secretary next year, for personal reasons. Thanks, Janet, for your accurate and timely board minutes month after month.

Also as of this issue, Shelia Cassidy has not responded on whether she will run for reelection as your VP Membership.

Carolyn Smith, our current Treasurer, would like to see some volunteers to help with the registration desk at our meetings. Can YOU volunteer to help out for an hour or so when the crowds enter the door? Carolyn is inclined to not run for Treasurer, unless she gets some help at the registration desk. So please, if you can help out for an hour or so, it will be much appreciated by everyone!

See *President's column*, page 3

SCWA Elections Coming Up

President's Column, from page 2

But, do NOT think that all the above rascals are automatic shoo-ins for their offices, starting with me. The final deciders are the members.

If YOU would like to run for an office, I support you the fullest in stepping out of the crowd and raising your hand. We NEED new blood all the time. SCWA is growing and can benefit from your contributions. There are many projects we've not had time to implement and we could use your assistance in making them come true. Besides, remember what I said earlier about you get out of an organization in proportion to what you put into it? Many volunteers have told me that they were surprised and pleased by what they learned when they volunteered.

If you plan to publish a book sometime, the networking you can do as an officer or volunteer in the Southern California Writers Association will serve you well! The officers and volunteers get the "inside" leads on many contacts. As your president, I receive emails from time to time for information or referrals on many things. As you can guess, I give the most referrals to those who've helped our organization the most.

So—raise your hand! Step forward when others are timid. SCWA NEEDS YOU!

Bill Thomas (*billjthomas@gmail.com*; phone (562) 431-7795) has graciously consented to run our Nominating Committee for the offices for the October election. If you'd like to discuss running for an office with Bill, send him an e-mail or pick up your phone and give him a call.

Next month, at the October 20 meeting, we will have our elections for officers for next year.

Victory Crayne
President
victory@crayne.com



Possible Learning Opportunity

SCWA member Shirl Thomas asks: Are you aware of the Southern California Writer's Conference set for the end of September? The website for all the info is: *www.writersconference.com*.

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

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
Tape Librarian Sharon Walters

Membership Information

Shelia Cassidy, VP Membership
membership@ocwriter.com

Meeting Reservations

Carolyn Smith, Treasurer (949) 675-4244

AUGUST HIGHLIGHTS:

Jerry Simmons: *Publishing Secrets that Publishers Don't Want Writers to Know - Part II*

The publishing world is divided into two kingdoms of unequal size, says Jerry Simmons, former VP Director of Field Sales at Time Warner Books. The traditional kingdom with its six New York publishing houses, at \$8-9 billion a year, is shrinking. He suggests exploring and mastering the larger kingdom of "Everything Else." Its variable and not completely mapped terrain hauls in \$11 billion annually. Simmons presented Part II of "Publishing Secrets Publishers Don't Want Writers to Know."

"The big is getting bigger, but the business is getting smaller." The big NY publishing houses number only six: Random House (German); Holtzbrinck-has St. Martin's Press (German); Penguin Putnam (Britain); Hachette, formerly Time Warner (French); HarperCollins (Australian-American, Rupert Murdoch); and Simon & Schuster (American).

In the early 1990s, these traditional publishers "became a production process instead of focusing on authors." Their subsequent decline in sales, Simmons thinks, occurred because they modified their buggy whips, so to speak, instead of zooming down the Internet speedway, "the future of book publishing."

Their strategy devolved to "ship more of what sells," thus, more copies of fewer books. Being risk averse, they relied on the same authors with a focus on "back lists," authors' earlier titles—and raised prices. Simmons pointed out "the average price for a hard cover is over \$25." As a result, the *non*-book revenue, for example, at Barnes and Noble, America's largest bookseller, is now larger than its book revenue! Although the ages 12-18 seem "to be buying at the fastest rate in decades," the Harry Potter phenomenon may be skewing those results.

Because the big house system "can devour you if you don't understand it," Simmons offers these "secrets":

- There are no secrets to success; no guarantees.
- A good story sells better than good writing.
- If you say "literary masterpiece," you're dead. But

the writing needs to have been well edited.

- Never let an agent or anyone think you're a one-book author.
- The big house can change the title and/or looks.
- Once published, you currently have only 3-4 weeks of shelf time to sell.
- Ask for 500 books to be in stores around you.
- If it sells, the other houses will flood the big stores with similar material.
- Be prolific: put out a book out every 6 to 9 months.
- Sell a consistent number of copies each time.
- After you earn your advance back, your royalty will be 60-70 cents a book, and you will have no rights.
- You can wind up spending thousands for marketing.
- What is important is not the number of books shipped but the number *sold*.
- Your book will be rejected if it is not able to be categorized for a store shelf.
- Amazon ranking is based on *revenues* from the book, not how many books sold.
- *The NY Times* Best Seller list is compiled from a shifting list of stores. When the big houses discover which ones, they flood these stores with promotional materials.

The kingdom of Everything Else includes university presses, book jobbers, print on demand, specialty markets, gift catalogs, online group discussions, reading group guidelines, blogs, and whatever else your entrepreneurial spirit finds.

University presses (or small publishers) are "legitimate," also publish fiction, accept submitted manuscripts, do not require agents, and will allow you to market yourself under their banner. On the downside, there's usually no advance, and royalties may be only 45 cents a copy. Having limited personnel does not enable much marketing.

Book jobbers, also called "partner-publishing," will help defray printing costs and will restock sold-out retailers. Examples are Ingram, Baker & Taylor.

See *Highlights*, page 5

Further Publishing Secrets Revealed

Highlights, from page 4

Print on Demand does charge for marketing services. However, the marketplace often deems POD to be “illegitimate.” Ninety percent of both types “sell less than 30 copies annually.” Marketing demands time. “It’s better to reach 25 people four times rather than 100 once.”

Specialty and niche markets provide an open opportunity because the traditional publishers “don’t think out of the mainstream.” Simmons says to “go deep” in these, such as churches or clubs. Utilize gift catalogs appropriate for your topic, not just holiday ones. Reach out through independent stations, local newspapers, and especially the Internet.

Besides advertising, the Internet can provide a venue for group discussions of your material—with you in the middle, of course. Make up discussion

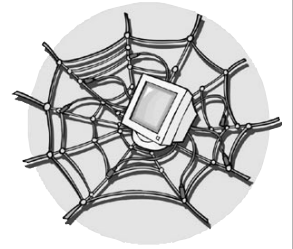
guidelines for the pertinent points of your material and distribute to book clubs.

No author today should be without a blog as a platform.

Your commentary and name there may turn up in the column of a notable newspaper. Amazingly, the swift-moving online world, a powerful magnet, has been thus far a blind spot for the big houses.

For the free newsletter TIPS for WRITERS, email Jerry@WritersReaders.com. See also www.NothingBinding.com.

Glenda Rynn
Member
grynn@cox.net



Advertisements

Agency/Seminars

Keller Media, Inc. is a literary agency and offers author and speaker training in Los Angeles. Visit our website today to learn more about our Fast Proposal Writing Course, e-books, advice and seminars.

<http://www.kellermedia.com/>

Free Book for Authors—One-Time Offer.

Free copy of Patricia Fry’s *The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book*, first edition, for the first 20 new or renewing SPAWN members. Join SPAWN (Small Publishers, Artists and Writers Network) at www.spawn.org. Only \$45/year.

Sell More Books: Write a Post-Publication Book Proposal

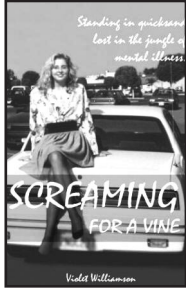
Are book sales slow? Perhaps it’s because you’re targeting the wrong audience, you haven’t established a platform, or your promotions plan is weak. But it may not be too late to experience publishing success. How? Follow Patricia Fry’s FREE guide to writing a Post-Publication Book Proposal. Request this FREE report today. PLFry620@yahoo.com.

NEW—The Author’s Workbook

Patricia Fry offers a prepublication discount on her new *Author’s Workbook* and the newly revised 366-page companion book, *The Right Way to Write Publish and Sell Your Book*. Discount offer good through September 20, 2007.

SCWA News & Announcements

Book Tour Update



Member Violet Williamson and husband Cliff have progressed on their RV book tour for her book *Screaming For a Vine* through Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. They are speaking to their target audience of local NAMI support groups (National Alliance on Mental Illness) along the way.

However, they have also sold books to gas station clerks, RV travelers, waitresses, and postal clerks. They say no one talks about mental illness, but once they start talking about it, everyone has a lot to say and knows of someone the book may help. Next on the trip agenda are the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.



NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:

October 20 – *Lynn Price*

Publisher/Writer/Speaker

“I’ve Written the End, Now What?”

Behler Publications, based in Lake Forest, California, is a small company with a growing list of impressive accomplishments. Lynn and Fred Price, who started the firm in 2002, have worked with some of the most exciting new voices in American literature. From an intimate portrayal of a paralyzed man who impacted nearly all of the B-movies soundtracks of the '50s and '60s to the sensitive portrayal of Robert Taylor—the “Man With the Perfect Face.”

Books that tackle medicine, aging, family issues, death, abandonment, love and prejudice—Behler has produced poignant personal journeys in both fiction and nonfiction, garnering a growing list of publishing awards.

July Fiction Short Story Contest Results

This contest was for a work of fiction on any subject or theme as long as the word count was 2,000 words or less. There were ten stories sent in, but one of them went w-a-y o-v-e-r the word limit so it was disqualified.

The stories are in! The judging began and ended quickly. You see, our judge was very experienced with fiction contests and wasted no time in setting up a system to rate the stories. When it was all done, three stories held the most points. They are:

First Place Story: *Turtle Shell* by Shonika Wright. She wins a nice certificate and a free SCWA luncheon meeting. In addition, since her story used only 750 words, we have room to put it in its entirety in this issue of our newsletter.

Honorable Mention Stories: *Lady in Black* by William Berg and *The Slippery Slope* by Donna Holland. Bill and Donna both received a nice certificate, very worthy of framing.

Congratulations to all three authors! It is interesting to note that the winning story has the lowest word count, evidence once again that a good story does not need a lot of words to “ring the bell” and be a winner.

All three stories will be placed on our website.

Future Contests:

We had planned to have two contests in September. The first is for 250-word flash fiction stories with a theme of “End of Vacation.” This contest will be due September 30. Send your stories to Shelia Cassidy (membership@ocwriter.com).

See *Writing contests*, page 7

Upcoming Writing Contest Cancelled

Writing Contests, from page 6

Shelia will remove your name from the file and forward it to the judge. The judge will be Carolyn Smith this time! So shake your Muse awake and turn his/her attention to the subject of “end of vacation” and see what he/she can come up with in only 250 words, about one page. This will be a challenge for your creative folks out there but the good thing is: you can write such a story in one sitting of three hours. So Muses—go for it!

The second contest that we had planned for September has been cancelled. This was to have been for submissions of a single-spaced query letter, 1-2 pages; a double-spaced book synopsis, 1-5 pages; and a double-spaced sample chapter, 10-16 pages. This would be like the package you would send to an agent or publisher. Unfortunately, the judge (yours truly) has been facing a family medical crisis and will not have time to judge this contest. It was to be an experiment with a different kind of submission, but as with many experiments, this one had to be cancelled. I offer my sincere apologies to everyone who wanted to enter.

In October, we will have another 250-word flash fiction contest, with the theme of “A New Life.” The judge will be Larry Porricelli. So if your story for September did not fare as well as you had hoped, here’s another chance for your Muse to pull off a winner! Only one member may win first place in a calendar year.

Victory Crayne

President/Contest Manager

victory@crayne.com

WINNING STORY—JULY FICTION CONTEST

Turtle Shell

by Shonika Wright



I mumbled a prayer as I took a seat behind the bus driver, Dr. Martin’s voice whispering in my head.

1. *The Compliment*

“Pretty jacket,” I said to a woman across the aisle. Honestly, I didn’t like her jacket. But she was dressed like a nurse or something and it was the only thing I could find to compliment.

“Thanks,” she responded.

I scribbled the victory into my notebook and popped a black cherry truffle into my mouth.

Good girl. Reward yourself.

I’d avoided this assignment all week. I had until 8:30 this morning to use three conversation starters before my next session with Dr. Martin. Three hours to prove I could change.

2. *The Question*

“Excuse me,” I turned to an old man. I should have picked him for the compliment, I actually liked his jacket - a heavy cardigan. “What time is it?”

“What’s that, dumplin’?” His booming voice caught everyone’s attention – jacket lady and two women holding big purses in their laps. I know it’s impossible, but I could feel their breath on me, even from across the aisle. The cheap sausage and greasy eggs the women probably had for breakfast. The phlegm the old guy probably coughs up every morning. And God knows what kind of infected patients the nurse has been touching.

“Umm,” I tried to speak without opening my mouth too much. “What time is it?”

“Sugar, you gonna have to speak up. And take ya hand down from ya face.”

“Never mind,” I mumbled, moving to another seat.

No black cherry reward for that one.

I slid over to the window and practiced my calming breaths. In-2-3, hold 2-3, out- 2-3. It only took fourth breaths. I was getting better.

Beyond the window, the stone city staggered by—each building a Xerox copy of the last. Even the sky is hard and gray this morning.

See *Turtle Shell*, page 9

Something Really New—Presence!

by Bill Blake

Six months ago, my girlfriend bit into me like an eagle grabbing a mouse with its claws. “You’re too *analytical*. Every Sunday you read the *Los Angeles Times* all morning and never talk to me. You analyze everything. I *lose* myself around you. I don’t even know who I am any more!”

Interesting! I thought. Maybe I should *analyze* what she’s saying.

This time, however, I didn’t remain stuck in my habitual analysis. Two sources killed the Old Me. The first might not appeal to you, or work for you, but it was exactly what I required. Two consecutive one-week workshops in Brazil featured drinking three cups of ayahuasca per week. Ayahuasca is a healing plant brew also available in the U.S. with certain religious groups. In the first week, aya ruthlessly trained me to see my judgmental and controlling thoughts. During the second week, the plant revealed the True Self that everyone is: love of nature and people, compassion, and sensitivity to aesthetic and energetic beauty. After my fifth drink, I walked around tearfully crying out, “Thank you Space holding the air that I must breath . . . thank you Earth for being solid so that I can walk on you . . . thank you . . .”

After Brazil, I had the task of cultivating this new awareness. I didn’t want to derail into old thinking patterns. My second source kept me walking on the correct track. After a lifetime of reading self-help books, one finally paid off, Leonard Jacobson’s *Journey to Now*. The Brazil workshops + *Journey to Now* = Something New. That new thing proved empowering and simple, like being in a dark room for decades and then stumbling onto the light switch. Aaahhhhhhaaaaa . . . *now* I see clearly! Let there be light! This light has many names, but the one that most easily settles into experiential practice is *presence*.

The word “presence” can denote *connection, attention, alertness, interest, energy transfer, Here-and-Now, and personal power*. We’re all present while gazing at a gorgeous sunset, but not when we’re washing dishes—even though the soap bubbles and glass’s watery surface are sparkling. The mind’s lurking belief of *I don’t like washing dishes* obscures our perception of the objects’ beauty. If our thinking is riveted to yesterday’s skirmish with the boss or tomorrow’s arrival of a taxing mother-in-law, we

aren’t present with the tasty oatmeal in our mouth.

Authentic satisfaction with a relationship rests in the term presence. The word non-presence is the core descriptor for dis-satisfaction. Whether served up by a partner, friend, parent, or co-worker, non-presence burns into us as subtle emotional abuse.

My simple tool is Jacobson’s Step One, *Be present with whatever’s present*. On my nightly walk, if I notice a thought creeping in, I recognize it, salute it, and return to presence with flowers, trees, moon, cars, or lamppost. I follow the same procedure with cleaning, shaving, eating, or conversing with someone. This transfer of attention from thinking to Now is becoming habitual. Jacobson claims that if a motivated person does this Step One exercise of *Be present with whatever’s present* in a relaxed, non-judgmental manner, he or she can stabilize in presence within 3-12 months.

This stabilization in presence also requires Step Two, a close examination of entrapment by non-conscious thinking. A half hour each day I identify which one of the following four “traps” functions whenever non-deliberate thinking occurs: 1) ego resistance to presence, 2) denial of who I am (love, compassion, radiant energy), 3) repression of emotions from the past (for me, mostly anger and shame), 4) entanglement in another (for me, women).

My Step Two practice includes reminding myself that unnecessary conceptual thinking allows me to escape my feelings. Many women cite that evasion in their man.

We must release presence when we think analytically, such as designing a web site or drafting a proposal. I call this “deliberate” thinking. However, we can also be present with the storm of ordinary, non-deliberate thoughts invading our minds. A second exercise on my nightly walk is to devote twenty minutes to being present with the environment (which includes sensations and feelings) even when stray thoughts encroach. If *What a hard day* pops into mind, I continue to be present with the cracks and texture of the sidewalk. With this simultaneity of “ordinary” thought and presence, true mastery of life thus becomes 100% presence except for “deliberate thinking” and sleep.

See *Presence*, page 9

June Nonfiction Contest Winning Story

Presence, from page 8

Identifying presence and non-presence can be tricky. For example, I appeared to be present with my mate by closely listening to her kvetching about her family relationships, and then asking her useful questions. With my help, she improved her relations with her two grown children and colleagues at work. Yet I was *not* genuinely present for her because I possessed a hidden agenda to “help” her change. She finally cognized that fact and told me, “Stop trying to fix me. Just listen to what I say.”

Also, I wasn’t present with my own feelings when around her. I hadn’t asked myself *What do I want?* in our life together. Instead, I obtrusively focused on her—a replay of my childhood fixation developed at four years old: *I’m unworthy and*

I’m causing Mommy to be unhappy, so I have to be gooder. To some degree, all of us possess such ego fixations. Our ego sits in life’s driver’s seat. Observing these fixations *as they occur* allows presence, with its healthy *What do I want?* orientation, to sit in the driver’s seat.

For me, presence—being Here and Now—has been an adventure superior to any other self-improvement path. *Be present with whatever’s present* is play time, with no fixation on results. It has delivered to me a new dimension of aliveness, joy, peace, affection for self and others, and freedom. I give presence an A+ top rating in the glut of self-growth practices.

Honorable mentions for the June nonfiction contest were:

Checkup at the Checkout, by Glenda Rynn and *Go Green by Planting California Natives* by Linda Shortell

July Fiction Contest Winning Story

Turtle Shell, from page 7

It was my fault we were here. Mom thought in a big city I’d be able to get a fresh start. Here, no one knew I didn’t talk to anyone but my mom until I was seven. Here, they’d call it a syndrome, not call me crazy. Hell, in California having a nutzoo daughter’s kinda cool.

For the first time since mom made me leave my Volkswagen back home, I was actually grateful for the city’s ugly busses. I usually walked everywhere, in mourning for my car. But that day, I’d decided to let the bus driver pull me through the city until I was normal - as normal as I could get without being late for Dr. Martin.

A boy dressed in dark layers appeared as the bus lurched into traffic. Probably 17 or 18. I wondered if he’d be in my classes when school started. Mirrored sunglasses hid his eyes even though the sun wouldn’t rise for another half hour. I hoped he’d take a seat in the back.

Come on, do you want to be the Turtle forever?

The stranger sat down, trapping me between himself and the window. I crossed my legs away from him praying the loose fabric of his pants would not cross the red embroidered border between our seats.

Your fears are part of your shell.

3. The Smile

My lips stretched into a smile. The stranger responded with a grin that made me press myself into the seat.

“Alone?”

I nodded. In-2-3, hold-2-3, out-2-3.

“Pretty girls shouldn’t be alone.” His finger traced the collar of my t-shirt.

The old Turtle would have freaked out. I used to cry every picture day knowing the photographer would touch my chin, twisting me into that awkward pose. Leaving fingerprints that never showed up in the pictures.

You are not the Turtle!

“I’m new here.” In his glasses I saw my reflection. Stretched and distorted, my face almost looked like a real turtle’s. I smiled harder.

“It’s a beautiful city. I can show you around.” His elbow was on the back of my seat and his face only inches from mine. “Show you all the forgotten nooks.”

This was good attention, right? Eye contact, sharing personal space. Even his breath skimming my cheek was okay, I think. I wished Dr. Martin were here.

“Sure,” I whispered.

He led me to the back of the bus at the next stop. As the doors opened, he smiled.

My new friend dug his fingers into my shoulders as he led me off the bus. Dr. Martin would have been so proud of me - I didn’t even flinch.

Writer's Corner

Don't Bypass the Onramp to Publishing Success

By Patricia Fry

Have you discovered that the road to publishing success is rather bumpy? It's not easy to locate the freeway, is it? I've spent much of the last several weeks trying to steer authors and would-be authors toward the onramp. I'm working with clients, of course, but I also get a lot of random questions via e-mail. This week, I received e-mails from two hopeful authors asking, "How can I get my book of poetry published?" Three others asked how to promote their books—these included a self-help book, and two novels. Another budding author e-mailed me asking how to write a book proposal.

When people ask broad questions like these, their lack of knowledge about the publishing industry becomes obvious. There's nothing wrong with being uninformed. We all started out that way. Nor is it a sin to ask questions. That's how we learn. The problem is that most hopeful authors who ask major questions that typically need complex responses, are going to close their eyes, put their fingers in their ears and chant "LA LA LA," when they hear the answers. Most of them don't want to do what is necessary to succeed or even survive in this competitive field.

So how do I respond to these questions? Because I can't stand by and watch authors self-destruct, I always provide them with some specific information and resources they can use. But I also strongly urge them to:

- Study the publishing industry.
- Write a complete book proposal.

Simplistic, you say? Some authors will even tell me, "Been there, done that." But when they turn around and ask me, "How do I find a publisher for my book?" I know they haven't truly finished their homework.

So what do I mean about studying the publishing industry? How does one go about this?

1: Read my book, *The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book*. Also read some of the books I suggest as recommended reading—if you're interested in self-publishing, Dan Poynter's *Self Publishing Manual*, if you are considering a POD fee-based publishing service, Mark Levine's *The Fine Print*, for a wider understanding of book promotion, Brian Jud's *Beyond the Bookstore*, for example.

2: Join publishers' organizations, SPAWN, PMA and SPAN, for example. Participate in their discussion groups, read the articles and check out the resources at their sites and read every newsletter.

3: Subscribe to magazines and newsletters related to publishing. (Read the SPAWN Market Update in the member area of the SPAWN Web site. Read the PMA Independent and SPAN Connection from cover to cover, as well.)

4: Search the Internet. Spend time each week checking out the resources you've already discovered and searching for additional resources, articles, discussion groups and books. Use these materials and sites to gather additional information you need about the industry (your publishing options, how to choose and approach publishers/agents, what are your responsibilities as a published author, etc.).

The second thing you **MUST** do is write a book proposal. Forget about writing it for a publisher. (Although, of course, a publisher will, most likely, want to see it at some point.) The most important reason for writing a book proposal for a nonfiction, fiction and even a children's book or book of poetry, is **YOU**. Here's what you really must know before launching out into this highly competitive field with your manuscript. And this is true whether you plan to land a major publisher; go with one of the many smaller publishers; sign with a fee-based, POD self-publishing service or self-publish (establish your own publishing company). Through the process of writing a book proposal, you will

Book Proposals That Sell

Publishing Success, from page 10

learn:

- 1: Is the proposed book a viable product/is there a market for it?
- 2: Who is my target audience and how large is it?
- 3: How will I reach this audience?
- 4: How will I promote the book?
- 5: What is my competition?
- 6: What is my platform? (Credentials, expertise, following, way of attracting an audience.) If you don't have a platform, start now establishing one.

A well-developed book proposal can tell you whether you have a book at all and, if not, how to tweak it so that it is a viable product.

Of course, all of this should be done before even considering writing a book. Unfortunately, many hopeful and new authors operate on emotions rather than business sense. They haven't learned yet that publishing is not an extension of their writing.

Wake up, folks! Why do you think that more than three-quarters of all books fail? It's because most authors bypass the onramp to publishing success.

- 1: They produce a book that is not well-written on a subject of interest to only a small segment of people or a slant that actually repels the very audience they want to attract.
- 2: Even though they have never written anything before, they trust that they've done it well and don't bother to hire an editor.
- 3: They start seeking publication immediately after placing the last period. When their book isn't welcomed with open arms by the majors, they pay a publishing service to produce it. This is okay, if the author is industry-savvy and understands the contract before signing it.
- 4: They never consider, until it's too late, that they will have to promote the book. Or they don't think this truth applies to them. One hopeful author told me several months ago that his book would sell itself. IF he ever got published and if he didn't change his attitude, I'm pretty sure his is one of the more than 948,000 titles that sold fewer than 100 copies last year.

What's the answer? What is the key to publishing success? It's nothing new—it's not a big secret. Just think back on the other successes you've experienced in your lifetime. What were they based on? If you're candid, your list will probably include:

- Knowledge
- Information
- Research/study
- Experience
- Work/effort/energy
- Persistence
- Practice
- Skills/talent

Yes, your business (sports, parenting, relationship, artistic and other) successes were based on these attributes and activities. It only makes sense that you would consider them when seeking success as an author.

Patricia Fry is a full-time freelance writer and editorial consultant with more than 30 years experience in the publishing industry. She is the president of SPAWN (Small Publishers, Artists and Writers Network) and the author of 25 books including *The Right Way to Write, Publish and Sell Your Book*. See www.matilijapress.com. Visit her informative blog often: www.matilijapress.com/publishingblog.



**September Meeting:
Saturday
September 15, 2007**

ROBERT GREGORY BROWNE & BRETT BATTLES

Anatomy of a Thriller
(See inside for more on Browne & Battles.)

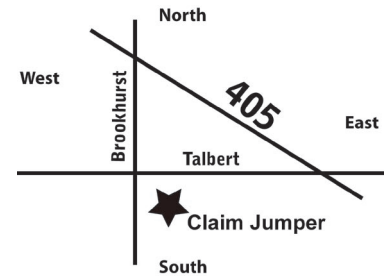


Happy Labor Day!

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 September 8: Carolyn Kimme Smith, Treasurer, 630 Harbor Island Drive, Newport Beach, CA 92660
Check must accompany reservation. Make checks payable to SCWA.

After September 8: Carolyn Kimme Smith, Treasurer, ckimmesmith@ucla.edu

BE SURE TO RSVP WHENEVER POSSIBLE! . . . Or register online at www.ocwriter.com/meetings.html



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