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Writers News

Volume 8, Number 8.....August 2009

August 15 Speaker

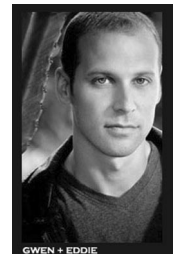
Greg Hurwitz and Gail Chatfield

Troubleshooting Suspense and Making History Come to Life

Special Speaker Exchange...

This Saturday, we will hear from two great writing talents, Gregg Hurwitz and Gail Chatfield. During our first hour, while on a break from his international book tour, Gregg Hurwitz will speak to us about how to research the thriller, how to write in different mediums (from novels to TV to screenplays to comics), and what skills an author needs to succeed. During our second hour, we will hear from Gail Chatfield, published writer specializing in the art of the anecdote, how to record and write from oral histories, and how to deal with editors of non-fiction.

Gregg Hurwitz is the critically acclaimed, internationally best-selling author of *The Tower*, *Minutes to Burn*, *Do No Harm*, *The Kill Clause*, *The Program*, *Troubleshooter*, *Last Shot*, *The Crime Writer*, and *Trust No One*. His books have been short listed for best novel of the year by International Thriller Writers, nominated for CWA's Ian Fleming Steel Dagger, chosen as feature selections for all four major literary book clubs, honored as Book Sense Picks, and translated into sixteen languages.



GWEN + EDDIE

Gregg has written screenplays for Jerry Bruckheimer Films, Paramount Studios, MGM, and ESPN, developed TV series for Warner Bros. and Lakeshore, written Wolverine, Punisher, and Foolkiller

for Marvel, and published numerous academic articles on Shakespeare. He has taught fiction writing in the USC English Department, and has guest lectured for UCLA, and Harvard.

Gail Chatfield has written *Dammit, We're Marines! Veteran's Stories of Heroism, Horror and Humor*, a popular work that has been submitted for award consideration by the *Military Writers*

See *Hurwitz/Chatfield*, page 4

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President's Message

Crime, Mystery and Suspense

Classic stories of crime, mystery and suspense have long inspired modern writers. Stories like, *The Room of the Evil Thought* by Elia W. Peattie; *The Mystery of the Hasty Arrow* by Anna Katherine Green; *The Mystery of Marie Roget* by Edgar Allan Poe; *The Adventure of the Red Circle* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; and, *The Blue Cross* by G. K. Chesterton. Each of these stories touches on a universal theme that possesses broad appeal.



The cursed necklace, the mysterious stranger, the locked room. Oddly enough, it's the simple things that frighten us most, and classic authors took advantage of the fact. What could be more mind chilling than a common heartbeat that comes, not from a human chest, but from under the floor?



Of course, the umbrellas of crime, mystery and suspense now cover a lot of sub-genres. These popular tales include everything from cozy (bloodless) adventures to romantic suspense to “tween” puzzles, and more. But, regardless of “spin” or sub-genres, overall definitions remain the same.

A mystery is a secret, riddle or puzzle. Within the mystery fiction framework we find cozy mysteries (mind puzzles with little action and lots of deduction), the tough P.I. mystery (crammed with non-stop action and blood-spatter), and the cop mystery (where facts and fear are served up as the main course for a police procedural). Crime tales are, as defined by Wikipedia, stories that “...deal with crimes, their detection, criminals and their motives. Sub-genres include detective fiction (including the whodunit), legal thriller, courtroom drama and hardboiled fiction.” The suspense thriller is unlike any other genre. Here we find spy novels, crimes of passion and familiar madness, and always, uncertainty of resolution. Writing from multiple points of view, including the perspective of the villain, is one trick used to heighten the reader's anxiety in a suspense thriller, which usually defines the challenge early-on and resolves it as close to the end of the work as possible.

Yet, in these three different types of fiction, there is one universal that can add panache to every tale. Author intrigue. Author intrigue is the singular idea that when the writer identifies and writes about what fascinates him or her that energy is passed on to the reader, like a lit match touching dry tinder. Sound simple? Think of it as a mystery ready to be solved. Write out what you like most in the mystery, crime or suspense fiction that you personally love. If necessary, make a list. Then, set your imagination to work. Weave these elements into your next writing project. The change will surprise you.

Writers exercise the greatest power when they write from the heart. So, discover what touches your heart and let it bloom into words of fire. If you don't discover why you enjoy mystery and suspense, and then apply that to your writing...it would be a crime!

Lynnette Baum
President
lynnette@the-right-writer.com



JERRY D. SIMMONS:

How to Get Past Readers & Shepherd Your Book Through Publication

The New York publishing world is realizing that its business model of 60 years is not working, says Jerry D. Simmons, a 25-year veteran of Random House/Time Warner. Now a publisher himself, he guides writers through the waterways of publishing, all of which are being roiled by the Internet. Like a seer with a paddle, Simmons elucidated publishing's past, present, and future and how to navigate these turbulent times.

Because publishing has a lower profit margin than other corporate industries, this "extremely mature" business has consolidated into six major players with no second-chance practices. Almost all shelf space at Barnes & Noble is reserved for 150,000 titles from the Big Six in specific categories. If your content doesn't fit any of them, "you'll have trouble getting published." Books have only 2-3 months of shelf exposure before removal. (At Costco, if a title doesn't sell in 10 days, it's gone.)

The sell-through rate of hardbacks is 50% at approximately \$28 each. Sell-through for mass market paperbacks [pocket sized] is 50% at \$9.99 each, and the average price for trade paperbacks is \$18. The hard truth about remainders (unsold books): Hardbacks are

returned to warehouses and re-sold. Paperbacks are shredded.

Put aside the romantic idea that this industry's focus is on fostering talent; *it's business, baby*. A publisher needs to sell 10-15,000 books to break even on the initial investment. Of every 10 books, seven never earn back their costs. Ten percent of the books bring in 90% of the revenue. If your book isn't one of those, you will not be published again. Trying to ensure sales, publishers simply "ship more of what sells." Popular authors even employ ghostwriters to crank out potential winners. Authors used to receive \$10,000 advances, but today they average between \$1-2,000 because celebrity books consume big advance money.

Counting Costco and airports, etc., America has 4,000 major book outlets. Only two of the majors sell from their websites. "The others do not wish to compete with Amazon," which the Big Six dominate.

Simmons explained how the business is contracting: "Fewer units have sold every year since 1992." Yet, it manages to look good by increasing cover prices or by selling "more units at a reduced price." "Magazines ship 5-to-1 more than they can sell, to raise ad sales." However, book sections

in non-book stores are shrinking, and newspapers have cut back on book coverage. *The New York Times Book Review* stands alone.

Since the Big Six take submissions only from agents, they also troll public venues especially websites and blogs, even Twitter, for the next good writer with unique ideas to be parlayed into multiple books. Warning: Publishers are wary if too much of your book content is online. "It might grow your readership or sink you." If you appear to be a one-book author, you will be ignored.

To address industry changes, one of the Big Six has hired a CEO from outside the book industry. Shock waves are undulating through the core of 250 persons who make the industry's decisions.

At this time, independent book publishing "is perceived as inferior," but in 2008 more books were self-published than by the majors. "POD [Print on Demand] has taken over the independent world," Simmons says, since "the Internet provides everyone with a platform." However, he stresses that the POD companies, not the authors, are the ones making the money. "Eighty-five percent of the PODs sell less than 30 copies in their lifetime." Currently,

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SCWA News & Announcements

Suspense and History Writing Explained

Hurwitz/Caulfield, from page 1

Society of America and *Bransens Veteran's Association*. She will speak about, why write the non-fiction anecdote, research techniques and sources, preparing for the interview, how to condense hours of audio into appealing stories and the special needs of anecdotal editors.

Culled from interviews with 52 'greatest generation' veterans, *By Dammit, We're Marines!* offers eyewitness accounts of combat on the Pacific Front during World War II. Facing an embedded, well-equipped enemy, flesh shredding coral reefs, fever-ridden jungles, mosquito and crocodile-infested swamps and a moonscape sulfur island, these invincible American teenagers destroyed the powerful Japanese war

Contact Writers News Editor *Mary Michel*



machine. Told in their own words, their recollections offer a foxhole view of ordinary young men in battle.

Chatfield is a freelance writer and opinion columnist for the North County Times. She is a member of the Military Writer's Society of America, the American Historical Association, the Southern California Writers Association, and an associate member of the Third Marine Division Association.

So, mark your calendar and bring a friend, this Saturday. Because of the late change in speakers, the SCWA will offer everyone who brings a friend the early bird discount for both parties!

Lynnette Baum
President
lynnette@the-right-writer.com

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

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VP, ProgrammingNeil Young
VP, MembershipLinda Coyne
Secretary..... Charla Spence
TreasurerLarry Porricelli
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membership@ocwriter.com

Meeting Reservations

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

Member News

Gayle Carline has published *Freezer Burn*, A Peri Minneopa Mystery, about a housecleaner turned private detective.

Gayle was a software engineer for over 20 years, until she finally chewed her way out the cubicle and became a freelance writer. She's been writing a weekly humor column, *What a Day*, for her local newspaper, the Placentia News-Times since 2005. *Freezer Burn* is her debut novel.

In addition to her husband, Dale, Gayle lives with their teenage son, Marcus, and a small menagerie of pets. You can visit her at www.gaylecarline.com.

Janet de Marco
Reporter
goodnews@ocwriter.com



NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:

September 19, 2009

Harry Turtledove
Author

Considered "The Master of Alternative History," Harry Turtledove is the best-selling author of over 50 novels in several genres, including alternate history, historical fiction, fantasy, and science fiction. He has won the Homer Award, Hugo Award, Prometheus Award as well as multiple Sidewise awards for alternative history. In his speech "Playing with History," Harry will be sharing with us his techniques in researching and writing historical periods in time, as well as finding the best market for such works.

Neil Young
VP, Programming
lynnette@the-right-writer.com

September “Will Write 4 Food” Contest

Write: Look carefully at the photo (right) and write a short-short story (maximum 250 words) about what is happening.

Submit: One entry per member per month.

E-mail to: contest@ocwriter.com with subject line: September 2009 “Will Write 4 Food Contest.”

Put your daytime phone number or e-mail address in the message, along

with the title of your story. Please attach the story without your identifying information, so the judging will be impartial.

Deadline: Stories must be received on or before 11:59 p.m. on September 13, 2009.

Winner: Attends their next SCWA meeting for free, a \$24.95 value! He or she will also be presented with a winner’s certificate. The winning story will be featured in the club’s newsletter, *The Writers News*, and on the organization’s Web site. Runners-up will also receive certificates and their stories will be on the Web site.

Criteria: Contestants must be members of SCWA. The story must be 250 words or less. No evaluation or comments will be offered on contest submissions. Only one winning entry per member per year, but you August receive as many honorable mentions you can win. At the end of the year, we will try to publish all winning stories in an SCWA chapbook.



***The August meeting is so early that
the deadline has just passed and there
hasn't been time to judge this month's
stories.***

***Both the August and September winning
stories will be in the next issue.***

Shepherding Your Book Through Publication

Simmons, from page 3

the independents are not organized. But a new development is “hybrids,” who will not only “help you publish but who are beginning to have access to B&N.”

The Big Six are taking notice. Some have come up with an altered model of business called “partner publish,” that’s expected to grow 10-15% a year. The NY company will give you a higher royalty margin but with no advance. Royalty rates of hybrids run 12-15% whereas the standard rate is 5-7% of the cover price.”

The explosion of electronic publishing and Kindle is changing the paradigm. Simmons says that although the Internet drives publicity for books, the Internet itself will become the venue for **content** sales and marketing. “Content” means *electronic downloads*, not *book*. Amazon is worried about controlling content in its first book coming out. “Publishers want to make sure that one book sold is not 100 books being distributed.” Sooner or later, electronic publishers will have to coordinate formats.

Regardless of industry changes, “a good story trumps good writing any day.” But that good story needs quality professional editing. Simmons warns that you still have to market the book, yourself, and/or the message. You have 18-24 months from your signing until publication to create a market for your book’s day in the sun. “If *you* are not promotable, companies will not publish your book.” You have to overcome any fear of the spotlight.

Simmons says to stay away from promoters who offer guarantees. You should not pay for publicity they send out but only for results such as booked interviews and appointments. To check on a promoter’s legitimacy, send Simmons an email: *jerry@writersreaders.com*. You need to study the market by visiting bookstores and reading trade magazines, even online ones like Publishers Lunch. See also *authorsden.com*. “Anything free written about you and radio and TV interviews will sell more than any

ad.”

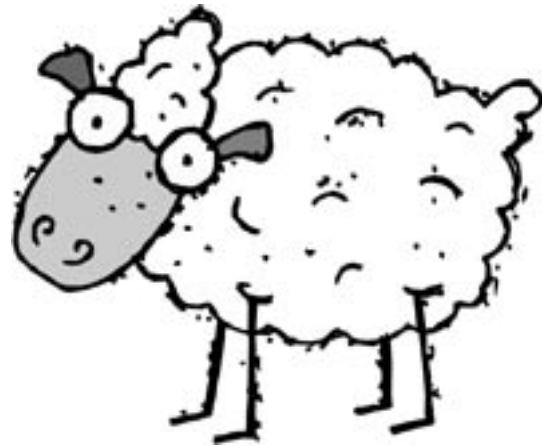
A big warning: “Never negotiate for foreign rights on your own. Your rights will be stolen and you’ll never see a nickel. Use a reputable U.S. agent who knows the international market.”

See *nothingbinding.com* and *writersreaders.com*.

Glenda Brown Rynn

Reporter

grynn@cox.net



Note to our readers:

The September issue will be the last hard copy issue of *Writers News*. Starting in October, publication will be e-mail only, as well as available on the SCWA Web site. The cost of printing and postage continues to go up, and we’d rather not raise membership rates if we don’t have to. In addition, I have severe rheumatoid arthritis in my hands and the folding/labeling/stamping is difficult for me to do. (My 85-year-old mother has been doing it for the last three years.)

The change will also have advantages for readers. Without the need to fit into 8 or 12 pages, sometimes there will be additional content on “The Writer’s Corner.” Illustrations and web links can be in color.



**August Meeting:
Saturday
August 15**

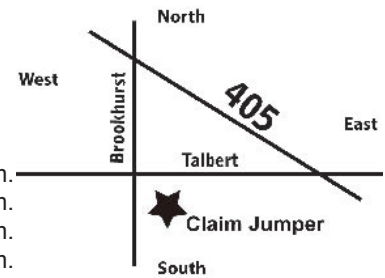
GREG HURWITZ AND GAIL CHATFIELD
Troubleshooting Suspense and Making History Come to Life



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.



GUESTS ALWAYS WELCOME—\$34.95 AT DOOR; \$29.95 WITH RSVP
MEMBERS WHO DO NOT RSVP PAY \$29.95 AT DOOR
MEMBERS WHO DO RSVP PAY \$24.95

BE SURE TO RSVP WHENEVER POSSIBLE!

RSVP before August 11:

Sonia Marsh, Meeting Coordinator, P.O. Box 1585, Huntington Beach, CA 92647-9998. Check payable to SCWA must accompany reservation. Our PayPal online account is temporarily out of commission.

After August 11: E-mail Sonia at meeting@ocwriter.com or message (949) 309-0030



Writers News

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