



www.ocwriter.com

# Writers News

Volume 8, Number 9.....September 2009

September 19 Speaker

## Harry Turtledove

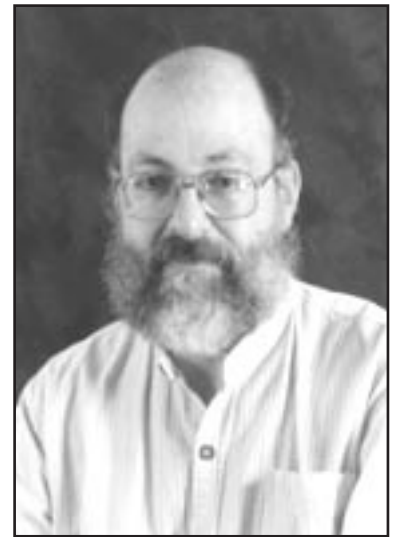
*Internationally Famous Author of Alternative History, Historical Fiction, Fantasy and Science Fiction*

### Playing With History

What would happen if the South won the Civil War? What if an alien invasion force came to earth at the height of World War II? How about a world where the East Coast of North America had broken away from the mainland millions of years ago? \

Widely known as “The Master of Alternative History,” Harry Turtledove is an internationally famous author known for creating “what if” scenarios. His books create breathtakingly realistic worlds where everyone from ordinary people to famous historical figures deal with the political events, social upheavals and technological breakthroughs that shaped their lives.

With over 60 novels in print, Harry Turtledove’s work has been the recipient of many awards over the years. He won the Homer Award for Short Story in 1990 for *Designated Hitter*, and The John Esten Cooke Award for Southern Fiction in 1993 for *The Guns of the South*. His work also garnered him the 1996 Hugo Award nomination for Best Novelette for *Must and Shall*, as well as Sidewise Awards in 1997 and 2002 for his works *How Few Remain* and *Ruled Britannia*, respectively. Turtledove shared the 2008 Prometheus Award for his novel *The Gladiator* with fellow science fiction writer Jo Walton.



A native of Los Angeles, Turtledove dropped out during his freshman year at Caltech and attended UCLA, where he received a PhD in Byzantine History in 1977. In 1979, he published his first two novels *Wereblood* and *Werenight* under the pseudonym “Eric G. Iverson.”

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Turtledove worked as a technical writer for the Los Angeles County Office of Education. He left this position

See *Turtledove* page 4

#### IN THIS ISSUE:

<i>September Speaker</i> .....	1
<i>President’s Message</i> .....	2
<i>August Meeting Highlights</i> .....	3
<i>Critique Committee</i> .....	4
<i>Will Write 4 Food</i> .....	5
<i>SCWA News &amp; Announcements</i> .....	4-7
<i>Writers Corner</i> .....	9-11

# *President's Message*

## *Writing Colonies and Retreats*

In the hustle and bustle of daily life, our cherished writing projects can get lost. Rushing through traffic, cleaning house, shuttling kids from school to soccer, working at a full time job...these tasks often drain us, mentally as well as physically. That's why, writing colonies and retreats offer such treasured moments. When we steal away from mundane, pragmatic chores, when we drink in nature and solitude, we refresh the wellsprings of creativity that make creation possible.



One of the best reasons to attend a retreat is to develop connections with other serious writers. Not only can you meet and mingle with well-known luminaries, but your work may often be reviewed by editors/authors that are "in the know." Many of the following listings are drawn from an article in the Writers Yearbook 2008, written by author and passionate "retreat" writer Jordan E. Rosenfeld. Thank you, Jordan, for reminding us that every retreat should be thoroughly vetted prior to purchase or application.

Atlantic Center for the Arts  
1414 Art Center Avenue  
New Smyrna Beach, FL 32618  
386.427.6975

Artists-in-Residence Program (for National Parks)  
Division of Resource Management  
x: 240

Helene Wurlitzer Foundation  
P.O. Box 1891  
Taos, N.M. 87571  
505.758.2413

Point Reyes Writing Retreat (California)  
Clem Miller Environmental Education Center  
415.663.1200

Soapstone Inc.  
622 E. 29th Avenue  
Portland, OR 97214  
503.233.3936

Vermont Studio Center  
Box 613  
Johnston, VT 05656  
802.635.2727



See *President's Message*, page 8

# GREG HURWITZ AND GAIL CHATFIELD

## *Troubleshooting Suspense and Making History Come to Life*

### **Gregg Hurwitz: “How to Research and Put Together Fiction Thrillers”**

At only 35, Gregg Hurwitz has published his 9<sup>th</sup> book, *Trust No One*, and his work translated into 16 languages. Hurwitz knew in childhood that he wanted to be a writer. Accordingly, he majored in English and psychology, started his first book at 19, and interned with a Hollywood producer during his senior year. A very focused individual, Hurwitz described his research methods that yield real-world information for his thrillers.

First of all, he has this advice:

- Write the book you’d want to read.
- Write where your feelings are.
- Write what has genuinely interested you.
- Live your life fully; pursue your interests and friendships. You never know where your other interests will go.
- Check your own motives. Honesty? Aggressive/passive?
- Research.
- “Ass-in-the-chair” time. Sinclair Lewis said, “Writing is just work.”
- Get off the blocks early—on page one.
- Give all the characters’ legitimate viewpoints.

Hurwitz’s research has not only put him in such adventures as out on calls with the police and up in helicopters but also undercover in a cult where he observed mind control face to face. “It’s amazing how easy it is to manipulate others. It’s all about tactics, not beliefs.” Cults gain control of a person’s environment first: “The temperature, sugar in the punch, no ties to media, members hang onto your words. You have no privacy; two people go to the bathroom with you.”

Hurwitz found that cults also target those who are mentally stable because they have better resources and are more appealing [in drawing others]. That realization led him to study how commercial interests “manipulate healthy instincts.” The first product of his cult/mind control research is *The Crime Writer*.

For his one-book-a-year pace, Hurwitz first devotes 1-3 months to research and then as needed. To verify specific habits of particular kinds of characters, he hunts until he finds corroborating material. To avoid lawsuits, he alters the three major defining characteristics of any original persons.

His writing schedule is from 8AM-5PM. He sits at his desk with two computer screens: one

on which he’s writing—and the other with his bullet points.

Hurwitz has also written adaptations for films, described as “500 pages of novel to 120 script pages with lots of white”; a TV pilot, “a self-contained story yet open-ended”; and comics, which began when he “called up one of my favorite cartoonists.” These various fields have caused him to retain agents and lawyers in each specialty.

His best book resource for how people can be manipulated was *Influence: Science and Practice* by Robert B. Cialdini.



### **Gail Chatfield: Why Write the Nonfiction Anecdote?”**

After lunch, Gail Chatfield, author of *Dammit, We’re Marines! Veterans’ Stories of Heroism, Horror and Humor*, spoke on “Why Write the Nonfiction Anecdote?” Although Chatfield’s background is in anthropology and entertainment, especially as a longtime assistant to Farrah Fawcett, the dominant influence on her life was her marine father (who died when she was 15). Not only is she a member of the Military Writers Society of

See *Speakers*, page 6

# SCWA News & Announcements

## Alternative History Writing Imagined

*Turtledove*, from page 1

in 1991 to pursue writing full time. From 1986 to 1987, he served as the Treasurer for the Science Fiction Writers of America.

In his talk "Playing with History" Harry Turtledove will share with us his award-winning techniques for researching historical periods and bringing them to life. He will explore, not only the political and social trends of the past, but period mindsets and social etiquette that must be considered when writing historical fiction of any kind. This speech is a must for writers of historical fiction, period pieces, alternative history, fantasy and science fiction.

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

## Note to our readers:

This 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.

Thanks for your patience these last few months.

*Mary Michel Green*  
Newsletter Editor

Contact *Writers News* Editor Mary Michel Green at (949) 361-6581 or [green.mary@cox.net](mailto: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 .....Lynnette Baum  
VP, Programming .....Neil Young  
VP, Membership .....  
Secretary..... Charla Spence  
Treasurer .....Larry Porricelli  
Publicity Director .....Larry Porricelli  
Webmaster ..... Tony Stoklosa  
Meeting Coordinator..... Sonia Marsh  
Newsletter Editor ..... Mary Michel Green  
Tape Librarian.....Sharon Walters

## Membership Information

[membership@ocwriter.com](mailto:membership@ocwriter.com)

## Meeting Reservations

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

# Member News



**Sonia Marsh's** blogging is finally paying off. She was contacted by Marla Jo Fisher from the O C Register and asked to be a guest blogger on the O C Register Blog on Sunday a few weeks ago. They featured her story: "Did I cry when I said Goodbye" about her son leaving for college. Her blog is [www.gutsywriter.blogspot.com](http://www.gutsywriter.blogspot.com).

**Darlene Quinn's** book "Webs of Power" came out in paperback a week ago. Both she and Lynn Price will be featured speakers at the upcoming Writer's Conference in Irvine.

Janet de Marco  
Reporter  
[goodnews@ocwriter.com](mailto:goodnews@ocwriter.com)

*Thanks to Polly Dunn for filling in for Janet de Marco this month!*

## NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:

October 17, 2009

### *Stuart Holmes Coleman*

#### *Writing a Biography of a People and Place*

Stuart Holmes Coleman moved to Hawaii in 1993 to teach, write and surf. His writing has appeared in numerous publications, including Men's Journal, Salon.com, Sierra Magazine, Surfer's Journal, The Washington Post, USA Today, Honolulu Magazine, Hawaii Magazine and Charleston Magazine.

Coleman is the author of *Eddie Would Go*, the only biography of one of Hawaii's greatest heroes, Edie Aikau. It was the winner of the 2004 Elliot Cades Award for Literature, as well as the winner of the "Excellence in Writing Nonfiction" award from the Hawaii Book Publishers Association. His newest book, *Fierce Heart*, was released on April 30, 2009.

In his speech "Writing a Biography of a People and Place", Stuart will be sharing with us his techniques for researching, interviewing and writing biographies of famous men, their communities and people.

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

# October “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](mailto:contest@ocwriter.com) with subject line: October 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 October 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 September 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.



## June First Place Winner:



### *Ticking a Life*

By Glenda Rynn

She had always had a thing about time. It couldn’t be seen, smelled, tasted, heard, or touched--much less delayed for a second, but it was the Master Controller.

As a girl at the piano, she was prisoner of the metronome. When she ran track, the chronometer determined her value to the team. As a wife, she made a game of racing against the hands of her wristwatch to complete chores and duties. As a career woman, she measured her accomplishments against the succession of numbers on her desk digital clock.

Then he came home that day, shut the door, and stood in front of the wall clock. “It’s over.” With his reddened eyes contradicting his set jaw, he went on to explain—and even embraced her briefly.

But to this day all she can remember is that it was 39 minutes and 17 seconds past 6 PM.

**Honorable Mention:** *Coincidence*, by Donna Holland



# August Double Bill: Thrillers and Nonfiction

*Speakers*, from page 3

America and the American Historical Association but also the Third Marine Division Association.

Chatfield has followed the advice of Andy Rooney: "The best classroom is at the feet of an elderly person." Each year she attends the Iwo Jima Reunion Banquet and hears the veterans' stories, which she develops into feature articles. In addition, she also conducts post-combat interviews. Former soldiers answer her ads in the trade journals for veterans.

*Dammit, We're Marines!* is written from several soldiers' point of view. Attentive to style, Chatfield learned how Marines express themselves, especially in countless abbreviations. "Ordinary minutiae often contain vital information." Each story runs about 6,000 words. She has "to tidy up a bit" but she uses their lingo.

To prepare for interviews, whether by telephone or face to face, Chatfield gives each interviewee a list of questions or an outline some time ahead "so they can gather their wits." Her handouts to SCWA included a sheet on how to interview participants with cognitive impairment. Each person signs a permission slip in case she uses the soldier's name.

She begins the interview with a narrow focus. Careful to be conversational, she asks how, when, why questions and "What was it like--?" rather than elicit answers of yes or no. Difficult questions come later rather than first. In addition, where may she see or get photos or memorabilia? Since keeping the interview focused is not easy, she plans on 90 minutes.

Chatfield has a tape recorder or video camera running the whole time unless the interviewee specifically asks that it be turned off. "Never record secretly."

Afterwards, the question is how can she be assured truth has been captured? Comments are often incomplete and memories inaccurate. However, Chatfield looks at these interviews as a mosaic. The

more pieces she has, the clearer the picture. When these unique tales brought her to tears, "the men cried openly and freely." The message of *Dammit, We're Marines!* is that "history is interesting; war is brutal. If there's an alternative to war—do it!"

Glenda Brown Rynn

Reporter

[grynn@cox.net](mailto:grynn@cox.net)

## Who Says Bad Writing Can't Be Funny?

The Bulwer-Lytton contest is one of my favorite things; when I need a good laugh. I have given a few of this year's winners below; you can read them all at <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com/2009.htm>. There are the usual categories such as Romance and Fantasy, but also things like Vile Puns and Purple Prose.

From that Web site:

An international literary parody contest, the competition honors the memory (if not the reputation) of Victorian novelist Edward George Earl Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873). The goal of the contest is childishly simple: entrants are challenged to submit bad opening sentences to imaginary novels. Although best known for *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), which has been made into a movie three times, originating the expression "the pen is mightier than the sword," and phrases like "the great unwashed" and "the almighty dollar," Bulwer-Lytton opened his novel *Paul Clifford* (1830) with the immortal words that the "Peanuts" beagle Snoopy plagiarized for years, "It was a dark and stormy night."

Most entries are submitted electronically through the Contest's Web site: <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com/>.

See *Bulwer-Lytton*, page 11

# Retreating for Writing Focus

*President's Message*, from page 2

Villa Mont-Noir  
2266, Route du Parc 59270  
St. Jans Cappel, France

The Writer's Retreat (Starlight, Indiana)  
Box 193, 3141 Beebe Rd.  
Beebe Plain, VT 05823

Dorland Mountain Arts Colony  
Box 6  
Temecula, CA 92390  
909.676.5039

Anam Cara Writers and Artists Retreat  
Eyeries, Beara, Co. Cork, Ireland  
353.(0) 27. 74441  
[info@anamcararetreat.com](mailto:info@anamcararetreat.com)

Redwood Writing Retreat  
Humbolt State University  
Nelson Hall West 234  
Arcata, CA 95521  
707.826.5109

Lew Hunter's Screenwriting Colonies  
340 E. 7th Street  
Superior, Nebraska 68978  
[Lew1@windstream.net](mailto:Lew1@windstream.net)



Writers-in-Residence Deborah Wagner (second from left), Brian Jones (third from left), Frances Browne (second from right) and Liz Lennon (with her back to the camera), and Artists-in-Residence Eileen Wagner (on the left) and Mary Nadon O'Neill (on the right) enjoying lunch on a warm Beara summer's day. From the **Anam Cara Writer's and Artist's Retreat Web site at <http://anamcararetreat.com/>**.

Although I counsel every serious writer to experience a writer's retreat at some point, remember that you can create a nurturing environment at home. Farm out the kids, trade off carpooling with a friend, stop off at the library or just buy a great pair of earmuffs. All of these ideas will bring you privacy and a change from the norm that may spark your inner muse.

That said, I recall a writers retreat at Arch Cape, OR with great affection. Dawns heralded by seagulls and crashing surf, misty mornings aglitter with dew drenched blackberry brambles, followed by sunsets of ruddy crimson laced with the scent of driftwood fires will always enrich my memory. Before leaving, I wrote a poem of hope, scripted it onto parchment, burned the edges, rolled it up and sealed it in a bottle by dripping wax over the cork. Of course, I threw it into the ocean. What else could I do with a message in a bottle? It was the ultimate act of hope. And, maybe that's what writer's retreats are for...for building hopes and nurturing dreams with solitude.

*Lynnette Baum*  
President  
[lynnette@the-right-writer.com](mailto:lynnette@the-right-writer.com)

# Writer's Corner

## Is it Show? How Can You Tell?

By Kirt Hickman

You've heard it before: Never tell something that you can show. This is a difficult concept for many new writers, but it's crucial. It lurks beneath a multitude of self-editing sins: problems from passive voice, to information dumps and narrative summary, to absence of tension and others. Telling the story, rather than showing it, gives it the detached feel of a news article. It keeps the reader from experiencing it as though she *is* the viewpoint character. It leeches the importance--the very life--out of the events.

### What is *Tell*?

How do you know if you're showing or telling? My rule of thumb is simple.

You may state facts:

Gerri threw the contract onto the floor, snatched up her coat and stormed from the room.

Don't draw conclusions for your reader:<sup>1</sup>

Gerri was angry.

In the first sentence, you see Gerri's actions and are allowed to draw your own conclusion that she's angry. This is *show*. In the second, I've drawn the conclusion for you. This is *tell*. Decide for yourself which is more compelling to read.

Consider these examples from a critique submission.<sup>2</sup> The scene is written from the viewpoint of a teenage boy named Ian.

**Tell:** There was someone breaking into the house.

**Show:** The trapdoor burst down and Ian jumped backwards. Dust showered the cardboard boxes that cluttered the closet floor. As soon as the ladder thunked down, a black boot stepped onto the top rung, followed by another.

This example is from the next sentence of the same critique submission.

**Tell:** [Ian's] first thought was that he should probably get help, but he was much too distracted.

**Show:** Before [Ian] could run for help, the shapely legs of the woman in the boots arrested him.

Ian fails to move because of the intruder's shapely legs. This shows that he's distracted without saying, "He was distracted." The phrase "before he could run for help" shows Ian's thoughts without saying, "He thought

See *Show vs. Tell*, page 10

# *Describing without Naming: Show vs. Tell*

*Show vs. Tell*, from page 1

he should get help".

Here's an example in which the same author did a delightful job of showing:

[Rhiannon] leaned forward, her eyes fixed on the artery that had begun to pulse faster as she leaned close to it.

This is a great line. It shows the emotions of both characters. Rhiannon, whom you've already surmised is a vampire, leans forward with her eyes fixed on Ian's pulsing artery. It's absolutely clear what she wants, and the author never said, "Rhiannon was hungry for blood." Ian's artery pulsing faster shows his fear or excitement without saying, "He was afraid," or "He was excited." Context will establish which emotion he's actually feeling.

## **How to Show**

Rewrite any sections in which you've told something. To find a way to show it, ask yourself this question: What can the viewpoint character see, hear, feel, smell, taste, or recall, that allows him to draw the conclusions that you've told instead of shown? In other words: How does he know this? If you've drawn a conclusion for the reader, the viewpoint character must also have drawn this conclusion. On what is his conclusion based?

If the viewpoint character has nothing upon which to base the conclusion, no way to know the thing you've told, then the section of *tell* constitutes a viewpoint violation. Delete it and find some other place in your manuscript to reveal the information. Keep in mind, though, that if you move it, it's still *tell*. You must still convert it to *show*.

Be particularly attentive to dialog tags that tell emotion, as in this example:

"Herrera was on board."

"On the *Phoenix*?" Chase said, **surprised**. "What was he doing there?"

You may have shown the emotion well enough through the actions, thoughts, and dialog of the character. If you have, that's good. If not, find a way to do so. Either way, delete the part of the tag that tells emotion.

Below, I offer three ways to correct the passage above. I show Chase's surprise through his actions, thoughts, and dialog, respectively.

"On the *Phoenix*?" Chase glanced at the central hologram, as if it could somehow confirm the news. "What was he doing there?"

"On the *Phoenix*?" *He couldn't be.* "What was he doing there?"

"On the *Phoenix*?" Chase said. "What the hell was he doing there?"

See *Show vs. Tell*, page 11

# Showing vs. Telling

*Show vs. Tell*, from page 10

If you're having difficulty determining whether you've told or shown an emotion, find a way to portray it without using the name of the emotion or a synonym. You can't tell an emotion without using its name or a synonym.

1. Noah Lukeman. *The First Five Pages*. Simon & Schuster. 2000.
2. Excerpts from critique submissions are reprinted with the permission of the original author.

Kirt Hickman has a masters degree in electrical engineering from the University of New Mexico. He has worked with high-energy laser optics, microelectronics, and other technologies relevant to science fiction, and leverages his knowledge and experience to enrich his stories. *Worlds Asunder* is his first novel. His first non-fiction book, *Revising Fiction: Making Sense of the Madness*, was released in June, 2009.

## Winning With Bad Writing

*Bulwer-Lytton*, from page 7

This year's winner:



Folks say that if you listen real close at the height of the full moon, when the wind is blowin' off Nantucket Sound from the nor' east and the dogs are howlin' for no earthly reason, you can hear the awful screams of the crew of the "Ellie May," a sturdy whaler Captained by John McTavish; for it was on just such a night when the rum was flowin' and, Davey Jones be damned, big John brought his men on deck for the first of several screaming contests.

—David McKenzie  
Federal Way, WA

The wind dry-shaved the cracked earth like a dull razor--the double edge kind from the plastic bag that you shouldn't use more than twice, but you do; but Trevor Earp had to face it as he started the second morning of his hopeless search for Drover, the Irish Wolfhound he had found as a pup near death from a fight with a prairie dog and nursed back to health, stolen by a traveling circus so that the monkey would have something to ride.

—Warren Blair  
Ashburn, VA

In a flurry of flame and fur, fangs and wicker, thus ended the world's first and only hot air baboon ride.

Tony Alfieri  
—Los Angeles, CA

The appearance of a thin red beam of light under my office door and the sound of one, then two pair of feet meant my demise was near, that my journey from gum-shoe detective to international agent had gone horribly wrong, until I realized it was my secretary teasing her cat with a laser pointer.

—Steve Lynch  
San Marcos, CA



**September Meeting:  
Saturday  
September 19**

# HARRY TURTLEDOVE

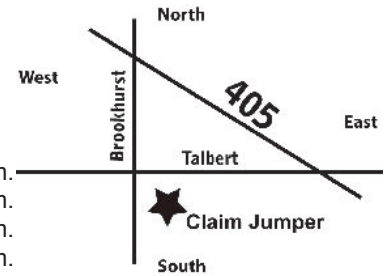
## *Playing with History*

### 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 September 12:

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 September 12: E-mail Sonia at [meeting@ocwriter.com](mailto:meeting@ocwriter.com) or message (949) 309-0030



# Writers News

Mary Michel Green, Editor  
204 Avenida Barcelona  
San Clemente, CA 92672  
[editor@ocwriter.com](mailto:editor@ocwriter.com)