



Southern California Writers Association

Writers News

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Volume 9, Number 8.....August 2010

August 21 Speaker

Mandy Hubbard

Author and Agent

How to Get Published Successfully

Feel like you're hitting every pothole on the road to publication? Learn from someone who has experience as a successful author and an agent. Mandy Hubbard is the author of *Prada & Prejudice*, *You Wish*, and five other soon-to-be-published novels for teens, published by Razorbill/Penguin and Llewelyn Flux. Her books have been published in Indonesia, Spain and France. She is also a literary agent for D4EO Literary, where she represents authors of middle grade and teen fiction.



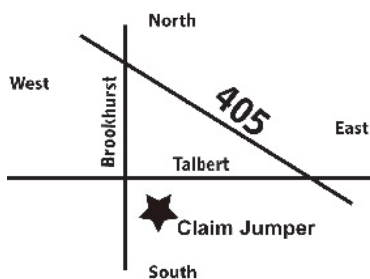
Mandy will cover tips, tricks, and helpful websites, plus she'll throw in a few inspirational examples of writers who struggled through rejection and made it out on top.

Neil Young
VP, Programming
programmer@ocwriter.com

Meeting Location:

Claim Jumper Restaurant
Banquet Room entrance, rear of building
18050 Brookhurst St., Fountain Valley, CA
Restaurant telephone: (714) 963-6711

Registration & Networking: 9:30 a.m.
Meeting: 10:00 a.m.
Lunch: 11:30 a.m.
Afternoon Program: 12:30 p.m.



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President's Message



Your First Line of Attraction

The most powerful “hook” in a book is the first line. A first line should encapsulate the core message without giving plot secrets away. It must capture the imagination of the reader with the tantalizing promise of revelations to yet come, while hinting at the main thread of the storyline.

Steven R. Boyett’s best selling novel *Ariel* starts with, “I was bathing in a lake when I saw the unicorn.” After reading that line who could put that book back on the shelf? This one simple sentence makes it clear that the hero is a boy...not a man. He is innocent, not guilty...pure not corrupt, and faces a world that is a crucible of experience destined to strip away childhood and leave...what? All this is conveyed in less than a dozen words, the first words in the first line of a brilliant literary work.

“Man,” said Terl, “is an endangered species.”

This is the first line of L. Ron Hubbard’s classic *Battlefield Earth*. After reading that sentence, I devoured the first half of the book in one fell swoop, practically without breathing. Why was humanity an endangered species? Who was Terl? What had humankind done to set the feet of their descendants on such a fatal course? Perhaps, my opinion is skewed by my love for fantasy and science fiction, but I believe this single sentence is one of the best first lines ever written.

Hugo and Nebula award winner Orson Scott Card wrote a landmark book titled *Ender’s Game*. “I’ve watched through his eyes, I’ve listened through his ears, and I can tell you he’s the one.” What does this first line do to your heart rate? If your heart doesn’t speed up, your mind doesn’t gear up and your imagination doesn’t steam up, you’re probably dead! What a great “hook,” and what a wonderful first line.

In my paperback copy of *Life Expectancy*, Dean Koontz wrote, *Boo!* And, signed his name. This is my favorite of all of Dean’s multitudinous works, because the entire storyline is foreshadowed in the first sentence. “On the night that I was born, my paternal grandfather, Josef Tock, made ten predictions that shaped my life.” The predictions were more nearly curses and our protagonist had to survive each impossible event to carry the story forward. What a brilliant book. What a great first line!

From classical first lines like, “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times...” to contemporary first lines such as, “My mother drove me to the airport with the windows rolled down,” the first sentence of a book is the very real “hook” that allows an author to reel the reader in. How do successful writers come up with these first lines? Where do they get their inspiration? Through intuition and clarity.

You don’t have to know each twist and turn of your story to be aware of its karmic values. Some writers plot out the storyline, while others make it up as they go along. Both have a general direction, an inner compass that points the way to fate, to challenge, to the adventures through which their characters must pass to reach safe haven. If you are really in love with your story, with your characters, with writing, the first line will come to you. It may not come clear until the entire tale is on the page, but when it does it will “hook” your reader, opening doors of wonder to readers and writers, alike.

Lynnette Baum

President

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Sheila Finch

How to Write in Fields Where You Have No Background

“No secret handshake or secret password will get you into the club of writing. The only way in,” says Sheila Finch, award-winning author of eight novels, stories, nonfiction, and poetry, “is through the backdoor of writing about what *you* like to read and research, not what’s selling.”

The key to writing a believable story centered on scientific knowledge is NOT to have the viewpoint character be the specialist, because technical terms would fill his thoughts. Immerse yourself in research but don’t use any concept you do not understand at the time [you’ll forget later anyway].

Through sci-fi circles, Finch met author Greg Benford, who is also a professor of physics at UCI.

He graciously loaned her some texts by Einstein. To her delight, Einstein’s writings are “in terms I could understand, without mathematics.” Dr. Benford also escorted her on a laboratory tour, which corrected her idealized assumptions. Reality was “grubby labs and no white coats.”

Beyond Google, Wikipedia (“much better now with controls”), and medical libraries, etc., you must directly contact experts: “I’m a writer and I’m writing a book on _____. I’ve done my research but could someone spend 10-15 minutes with me for my questions?” (Notice the specificity of time.) Although one or two “will slough you off”

most will be helpful and even give you tours. “Don’t abuse them.” Have your questions ready. You can weave the sophisticated knowledge into your stories so well that you’ll be perceived as an expert—and chided if you have a trivial mistake.

The key to writing a historically based plot is to find a real person involved in the notable historic situation but one whose name “vanished” afterwards. For example, Finch found and used Diego, the black Moroccan slave of Sir Francis Drake, in *Tiger in the Sky* (*David Brin’s Out of Time*).

Finch has a warning about settings. “Be careful where you set a new idea; you might have to stay with it for subsequent stories.”

Demonstrating how to make a character more authentic, Finch switched to workshop procedure and had everyone present write two lists “as emotionally as possible”: Ten Things I Really Like and Ten Things I Absolutely Dislike. She suggests using a few items from each list for a protagonist. Quoting Ray Bradbury, Finch says, “Readers get the sincerity emotional kernels” because you’re expressing what’s “deeply important” to you. As you change, re-write your list every year.

Next, Finch tackled writer’s block, which she says writers bring on “by thinking too hard” or by worrying they’ve run out of ideas. To help train our brains

that we can write about anything, she had us write a Statement of Conflict by copying an item from the ten things we like into the first blank and then an item from the ten things we dislike into the second blank: “My character wants _____ but is blocked by _____.” Voila, happy laughs of discovery bubbled up from SCWA members as their statements began shaping themselves into plots.

A veteran writing instructor, Finch believes there are five basic plots:

1. *Romeo and Juliet*—Boy/girl meets boy/girl, boy/girl loses boy or girl, etc.
2. “The Little Tailor”—A tale of adventure or quest.
3. “The Man Who Learns Better”—Psychological conflict with inner growth.
4. Story of revenge, like “The Biter Bit”—A person is caught in what he/she usually does to others.
5. *Frankenstein* or *My Fair Lady*—Some things man is not meant to know or do.

Do not be discouraged that there may be only five basic plots. Sheila Finch says, “But you haven’t written your version yet.”

See www.sff.net/people/Sheila-Finch.

Glenda Brown Rynn
Reporter
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July Highlights:

Antoinette Kuritz

Using Your Book to Build a Business: Making Money as You Go

To jump from writer to published author, you need a plan for your role in the business of a publishing conglomerate that must answer to its investors. Antoinette Kuritz, literary publicist and founder of the La Jolla Writers Conference, said.

There's no front door anymore," Kuritz says. Adding a business component to your proposal is smart because "everyone in the food chain wants to know what you're going to do for marketing." Bookstores must *buy* the books they order. A load of unsold books with your name on them means stores will not want your next publication. Leftover books also tend to be damaged. The shelf life for books is "between that of yogurt and milk"—only six weeks—before they are replaced by newer titles. It's not romantic; you are in business.

Kuritz explained that for publicity you must "position yourself" rather than be branded by others. "Branding leads to stagnation." Keep a clear picture of your value and pin down your particular slant with a point or moniker that's only yours. "Life experience counts; don't let lack of a Ph.D. throw you." TV personality Dr. Phil positioned himself as the psychologist with the message of "get real."

Start your publicity and pre-selling early. Basic is an attractive, up-to-date website.

Establish a following on Twitter and Facebook. "Form strategic alliances" with other persons with complementary projects." Develop several speaking topics for selection by groups. Then give them organized, solid content but "don't think you have to present every detail you know." Have a drawing with the caveat "I/We do not share information with anyone." Thus, you'll have mailing addresses for future products. When you've been well received, ask for a letter of recommendation.

Kuritz repeated three times what you need to say at the end of a radio show: "...oh, my gosh, I have so much more information. Well, go to my website to get more." Then, of course, have pre-sell information there three to four months ahead or something to join. Write magazine articles with your forth-coming book mentioned at the end.

IF you had any advance at all, it will be around \$5-10,000. It takes money to make money. [For the average self-published book, "you can put 1,000 copies out by yourself at a \$12,000 cost." Use subcontractors for distribution, etc.] You can't sit in your garret when the time to sell comes. The price needs to be 6-8 times the production costs. Know the publishing date but have advance copies ready when you're on any media. Bring copies when you speak at associations, clubs

[Rotary, etc.], PTAs, religious organizations, etc. "If appropriate, get your book into a school as a 'class-read.'"

Kuritz indicates that models for ancillary products are all around. During an interview on a subtopic, detect if there's interest for an e-book. Create an online club for families, libraries, or other groups with a monthly fee, or you can create a product for schools. For example, Aaron Snyder, featured in the Health section, June 3, 2010, of the *Los Angeles Times*, developed his own method for controlling diabetes when nothing else worked. His book on his diet, mindset, and exercise comes out October 15, 2010. Meanwhile, he's become a trainer. After a radio interview on detoxing, he followed up with a \$5 e-book on the same topic. Monthly he offers recipes, new workout routines, and an interactive component: his followers can post "What I Did." And he's just getting started.

Kuritz improvised about ancillary products with several members for their works-in-progress. She also suggested that we set up a small publishing house for SCWA!

Glenda Brown Rynn
Reporter
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SCWA News & Announcements



Next Month's Speaker:
September 18, 2010

Gayle Brandeis

Gayle is the author of *Fruitflesh: Seeds of Inspiration for Women Who Write*, *Dictionary Poems*, and *The Book of Dead Birds*, a novel which won the Barbara Kingsolver Bellwether Prize for Fiction

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

SCWA Critique Committee Open to Members of SCWA

Nonfiction & Fiction

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

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