



Southern California Writers Association

Writers News

www.ocwriter.com

Volume 9, Number 11.....November 2010

November 20 Speaker

Lynette Brasfield

Novelist, Ghostwriter, Editor

A Risky Craft

This November we are proud to welcome Lynette Brasfield for an interactive, two-part speech. Before lunch, Lynette will address making that first impression in “First Principles: Crafting the all-important first line and first chapter.” After lunch, Lynette will cover the risks we need to take as writers in “Take a Risk-- Most published writers wouldn’t be published if they didn’t.”

South African-born Lynette Brasfield is the author of NATURE LESSONS: A Novel (St. Martin’s Press, NY, 2003), which Booklist described as “a gripping first novel...part mystery, part dark family comedy, and part harsh political realism” and Publishers Weekly praised as “thought-provoking...complex and intriguing.” She’s currently completing a new novel, A CONFUSION OF STARS, set in a public relations agency in Orange County.

In 2011, Lynette plans to market herself also as a ghostwriter of memoirs that allow people to take charge of their own legacies, and of family histories that are literally the gift of a lifetime.

See *Brasfield*, page 5

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.



IN THIS ISSUE:

November Speaker.....	1
President’s Message.....	2
October Meeting Highlights.....	3
SCWA News & Announcements.....	4
Writers Corner.....	6

President's Message



REWRITE! by Neal Asher

One of the best short story writers I've found is Neal Asher. His website (<http://freespace.virgin.net/n.asher>) hosts examples of books, articles, short stories, TV scripts and magazine interviews. Many are thought provoking and informative. My favorite story by Asher is *Mason's Rats – Autotractor*, published in the *Solaris Book of New Science Fiction*, volume 2. It is slap-the-floor funny, as well as futuristic and clever. With the author's gracious permission, this month's article is taken from his website, and entitled, "Rewrite!"

"When do you cease to re-write work? Simple answer: when you are no longer improving as a writer, when you feel you have nothing more to learn, when you have achieved perfection. It is an unfortunate fact that some writers do believe this of themselves. They are normally the ones who have achieved success, and are drunk on the adulation of those who think a past participle is something you'll find in a linear accelerator.

"For me revision of a story partially ceases when I feel I have achieved a required effect, might well attain publication, and have more interest in the next project. But while it remains in my processor it is still subject to a critical eye. I don't believe there is such a thing as too much re-writing. You just reach the stage where you can't go any further with a piece and move on to the next. In the process, you jettison the bad and keep the good. You decide, and you base your decision, on what you are after. Publication? Re-write for the market acting on feedback from editors and readers. Personal satisfaction? Don't kid yourself. For my novella for *Club 199* I took a thirty-thousand word story and extended it by ten thousand words to fit it within their parameters, and felt perfectly justified in doing so. As far as I am concerned, good writers are successful writers (though successful writers often degenerate into bad writers).

"There is no quick-fix formula. It is obvious such a formula is profoundly wished for, as the sales of the 'How To' books attest. When questions are posed as to the extent and method of re-writing, the real question being asked is: how do I write well? The first step on the road for ninety percent of would-be-famous novelists is to learn how to use the English language. Get hold of books like 'Fowlers Modern English Usage', 'Roget's Thesaurus', and perhaps a plain old 'Mastering The English Language -S.H. Burton'. For many people the re-write required is the one to turn their masterpiece into something intelligible. It was not until I joined some postal workshops that I found out just how bad it was possible for some writing to be. I also learnt that those writers who really try to get a handle on the language are also the ones who tell the best stories.

"Understanding the structure is all. You're not going to build a suspension bridge if you don't know how nuts and bolts go together. The rest is badly written soap-opera.

"So now you know how the English language works, have put a story together, and are looking at doing a re-write. You have looked at the story objectively and made sure that the bunch of flowers is beautiful rather than are beautiful and your hero still has the same color hair all the way through.

See *Asher*, page 8

October Highlights:

MARK SEVI

How to Adapt

Mark Sevi, screenwriter, founder and president of the O.C. Screenwriters Assoc., and longtime screenwriting instructor at Irvine Valley College, once again generously stepped in to replace a scheduled speaker. A good crowd came to hear Sevi explain “How to Adapt a Novel for a Screenplay.”

Sevi has 19 produced feature films to his credit and more in production, such as *Shadow Bay*. Sevi tells his students in Introduction and Intermediate courses, several of whom were in the audience, “You’re only in this class to sell a script.” He warns that an author is the worst one to adapt his own book. Also, the sale of a book includes its intellectual rights. (Exception: “Your agent can contract you to write the screenplay.”) A screenwriter must “get to the quick” of the original story. He or she must pin down its theme, the core insight or message to be adapted to the screen, as well as its concept, the story’s unique factor—the sizzle, that will sell it. Sevi says, “Think like a marketing wonk.” Interestingly, “[d]ramas are not as driven by theme and concept as generic is.” Easier to sell, a series needs a five-year arc.

Sevi suggests using stickers to tab all passages to be kept. Next, since one script page equals one screen minute, the writer must reduce the complexities of the novel to 120 pages, which probably shrink to 110 during production. He then figures out where to start and how to establish the protagonist and “the bad guy” immediately.

If the script is based on nonfiction, such as Sevi’s *Devil’s Knot*, the screenwriters (this profession operates in collaboration) must adapt the “truthiness” of its reality, often having to change or omit details. In production, *Devil’s Knot* is about the prosecution of three West Memphis teens, who effected satanic personas, for murdering three children as part of a cult ritual, in spite of being cleared by DNA testing. Its truth is “We cannot make decisions based on emotions.”

To demonstrate structure, Sevi handed out the synopsis and episode arc he made in adapting Raymond Obstfeld’s best-selling Kensington book series, *Warlord*, a genre work optioned by Sevi. He is currently shopping it as a pilot for a Sy Fy Channel series. “Pilots today are one hour (44 minutes) instead of the older two-hour format.”

In *Warlord*, Ed Ravensmith, a teacher but formerly a special forces soldier, must once again oppose his brilliant but psychopathic commander David Fallows who now commands brutal mercenaries that flourish in the chaos after massive earthquakes have split California from the continent. Theme: A person must fight against an evil without becoming as evil himself. Sizzling concept: Post-apocalyptic, California is an island. Involved is “bad faith,” i.e., a person’s denying his true nature.

Sevi laid out *Warlord*’s structure on a whiteboard, drawing a horizontal line for emotional equanimity. Three acts are divided into four sections of 30 pages each. Act I contains “opening gambit” and backstory. Soon after, the present story starts rising. Next the bad guy is introduced. This act ends with massive earthquakes, “Plot Point #1.” In part Act II a, the action continues to rise to its highest, called midpoint. In Act II b, the action falls far below the horizontal normal to its lowest, “Plot Point #2. Finally, Act III carries the action and conclusion up above the horizontal normal. Sevi commented how he had to change story details, especially in the beginning, because time constrains didn’t allow the buildup the novel has.

See *Sevi*, page 8

SCWA News & Announcements

Member News

The SCWA functions because of the dedication of the volunteers in its membership. We are a not for profit organization; and we have no paid employees. All of our dues and earnings are used to recognize our top notch speakers and to cover the organization's general operating expenses.

The SCWA Annual Board election was held at the October 16th meeting. Below, for membership review, is a list of 2011 SCWA Board Positions and volunteer positions. The 2010 positions will continue until January 2011.

SCWA Board Positions	Board Members	SCWA Volunteer Positions	Volunteers
President	Charla Spence	Assistant to the President	VP Programming
VP Membership & Secretary (VPMS)	Polly Dunn	Assistant to Secretary	Open
VP Programming (VPP)	Neil Young	Assistant to VP Programming	Open
Public Relations Director (PRD)	Larry Porricelli	Assistant to PR Director	Open
Treasurer	Larry Porricelli	Assistant to Treasurer	VPM & Secretary
SCWA Ambassador	Lynnette Baum	Good News Editor	Brennan Harvey
Newsletter Editor, Mail List Manager	David Meacham	Newsletter Reporter	Glenda Rynn
Webmaster	Tony Stoklosa	Assistant to Webmaster	Brennan Harvey
Meeting Coordinator	Sonia Marsh	Assistant to Meeting Coordinator	Brennan Harvey
		Board Member Assistant	Victory Crayne
		Tape Librarian	Shari Walters
		Store Manager	Open
		Assistant Store Manager/Librarian	Open

Thank you to all who participated in the vote, congratulations to all the 2011 board and volunteers; and, a BIG thank you to the 2010 board and volunteers who have served us so well. There are still several volunteer position vacancies. Please consider getting involved and helping a Board member.

Sincerely,

Charla Spence
Secretary, SCWA

NEXT MONTH'S SPEAKER:
December 18, 2010
Kathy Porter



On December 18th, the SCWA is proud to feature our very own Kathy Porter, author of *Earth's Ultimate Conflict*. Kathy will address the best methods in obtaining maximum exposure and sales for your book. She will share with us insider tips, tricks and insight to give you the advantage in this ultra-competitive industry.

Neil Young
VP, Programming
programmer@ocwriter.com

This Month's Speaker (cont.)

Brasfield, from page 1

A former public relations VP and journalist, Lynette's articles on writing and travel have been published in publications such as *Orange Coast Magazine*. She's taught fiction in private workshops and at Cal State Fullerton, and also offers manuscript critiquing services. Two of her clients have been published by traditional publishers. She's a member of the Authors' Guild and a former Board member of the Southern California chapter of the Mystery Writers Association.

In the first session, Lynette requests members bring the first paragraph of their books written on a piece of paper. She will pick a random few to comment. In the second session, she encourages audience members to share some of the risks they've wanted to take and haven't, or have taken with regard to writing. She will also be available to answer questions about getting published.

So please write down those first paragraphs and join us November 20th.

Neil Young
VP, Programming
programmer@ocwriter.com

Writer's Corner

Voices in My Head

By Polly Dunn

I woke up listening to the voices in my head much like our September speaker had done. The voices in her head had provided the inspiration for books, for poetry, for life. Gayle Brandeis knew how to take an idea and bring out the best in it. I should be so lucky. My voices mumbled. I had difficulties with the message. They seemed to be saying "The world is your oyster".....uh-huh... "the world is your oyster, now go shuck it!" I think the voice said shuck it....but that part of the message was even less clear than the first part.

I wrote down the message. At my age I forget where I write things down as well as the thing I am supposed to be remembering by writing it down. I decided a cup of java would help me ponder this gift I had just been given.

I made coffee and took a cup with me to the computer. I admit that I am not as sharp as I once was... and that possibly I was never as sharp as I once thought I was. I have definite doubts about my own abilities. I decided to Google. I wrote in "the world is your oyster" and up popped 427,000 responses in only .11 seconds. Apparently that voice in my head had made other stops before it got to me. I think this all goes back to that thing about there being only three basic story lines...or is it seven? I think it depends on whose notes you look at. Either way, it's like it's all been said before. What chance do I have to come up with some sort of an original idea? So maybe it was not all about the oysters and probably had nothing to do with shucking (I think that was the word). Maybe the voice was telling me it's all a shell game? No, I refuse to believe that any cerebral entity would suggest that. Was this the result of going to bed too soon after a bowl of clam chowder? No, the clam chowder incident was on Friday night. Voices were sharing something with me. I needed more coffee.

After serious contemplation, I decided on a possibility of what it all meant. I need to open my shell more often and maybe a little pearl of wisdom will show up eventually. I'm thinking that the culturing will come from attending SCWA meetings. Shucks, that has to be the message!

Polly is a long time SCWA member, writer, and newly elected SCWA secretary for 2010.

Critique Groups

A reminder to our members that critique groups can be a valuable forum to improve one's craft. Hailed "a safe place to fail...and succeed" by many published authors, critique groups (should) lend themselves to honest, encouraging criticism you won't hear from your mom, or many of your friends.

SCWA member Victory Crane points us to local groups on her website: www.crayne.com/critique-groups

If you are interested in starting your own critique group and publishing in our newsletter, contact SCWA newsletter editor, David Meacham - david@euphonypress.com

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

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

PresidentLynnette Baum
VP, Programming Neil Young
VP, Membership..... Charla Spence
Secretary Charla Spence
TreasurerLarry Porricelli
Publicity DirectorLarry Porricelli
Webmaster Tony Stoklosa
Meeting Coordinator Sonia Marsh
Newsletter EditorDavid Meacham
Tape Librarian Sharon Walters

Membership Information
membership@ocwriter.com

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

President's Message (cont.)

Asher, from page 2

How does it look subjectively? Where, for example, can you break the rules to the greatest effect? The best of writers are the ones who know how to do this. Steven Donaldson once managed a one-word sentence, that had the skin on my back crawling. (Of course I'm aware that it is not pc to like Donaldson; he's too successful). The word was 'Kevin'. No, not the spotty kid down the road. Kevin Landwaster, who performed the Ritual of Desecration and whose spectre has just stepped through a door from the underworld. I'm afraid no English book is going to tell you how to achieve the same (though 'The Critical Sense' by James Reeves comes mighty close).

"The only way to learn is through hard work, reading, and listening to criticism, though for the latter you must judge what is relevant. There are no substitutes for these, just as there is no substitute for talent. When you re-write you must see the images and feel the effects of every word. You have to decide what to discard and what to keep. There are many sources you can tap to help you make these decisions. But in the end they are your own."

Lynnette Baum

President

lynnette@the-right-writer.com

How to Adapt (cont.)

Sevi, from page 3

When asked privately why he often writes about the dark side and the criminal mind, Sevi said that he is fascinated because he cannot understand why those persons do the awful things they do.

Whereas a novel takes at least a year to write, Mark Sevi can knock out a screenplay in eight (intense) days and loves it. He charges anywhere from \$3,000--\$30,000 a script. "Screenwriting is the most difficult thing I've done but the most rewarding." (He even has a second degree Black Belt.) One of the top agencies for screenwriters, Sevi says, is Creative Artists Agency, known as CAA. Note to beginners: The idea of a penal colony on the moon is clichéd.

Glenda Brown Rynn, SCWA Reporter

grynn@cox.net

