



January 21, 2006, Speaker

Sam Weller author of

THE BRADBURY CHRONICLES *The Life of Ray Bradbury*



Sam Weller was introduced to the words of Ray Bradbury even before he was born. During the infamous Chicago blizzard of January 1967, as drifting blankets of snow created white-out conditions in the Windy City, William Weller, Sam's father, read Bradbury's seminal classic, *The Illustrated Man*, aloud to his pregnant wife, Barbara. The baby, nine months in utero, turned and listened with keen interest...

Today, **Sam Weller** is the authorized biographer of one of the

most influential authors of the 20th Century — Ray Bradbury, the poet laureate of the Dark Fantastic; the gatekeeper to October Country; the man who immortalized Green Town, Illinois, the planet Mars, and a dark dystopia where books are banished forever. *The Bradbury Chronicles: The Life of Ray Bradbury* is the first-ever biography of Ray Bradbury, a creator and visionary who, more than any other author, altered the fabric of popular culture.

Sam Weller is the former Midwest Correspondent for Publishers Weekly. He is a regular feature writer for the *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, as well as the Chicago Public Radio program 848. He is a frequent literary critic for the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. He writes about punk rock for *Punk Planet* magazine and his essays have appeared on the National Public Radio program, *All Things Considered*. He is a

contributor to *Playboy.com* and a former staff writer for the alt. weekly, *Newcity*, where he was given the Peter Lisagor Award — the highest honor in Chicago journalism. His short fiction has been published in *Spec-Lit*, an anthology of science fiction edited by the noted SF author, Phyllis Eisenstein. Sam is a frequent lecturer on the life and works of Ray Bradbury, as well as on the writing process and getting published. In February 2004, he was the special guest of the Commonwealth Club in San Jose, California.

Sam Weller is a professor in the Fiction and English Departments at Columbia College Chicago. He lives in Chicago with his wife, baby daughter, and two dogs. He is currently at work on a graphic novel about truck drivers who save the universe, as well as a fictional suspense novel about the real-life Chinese magician, Ching Ling Foo.

Lynnette Baum, V.P. Programming

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🦉 President's Message

I remember growing up in Lawrence, Kansas, and reading our local newspaper, *the Daily Journal World*. As I was not interested in politics then any more than now, I skipped the front page, society pages, editorial pages, and went directly to the sports page.

The sports department at the *Journal World* had two viewpoint columnists, Bill Mayer and Earl Morey. Although I enjoyed reading both, each columnist had his own insights, as well as idiosyncrasies. Mr. Mayer usually wrote more from a human interest standpoint while Mr. Morey dealt more with the facts and statistics.

Still, I used to think I could write a better column than either, and when I grew up, I would do so. (Forget that I planned to go into engineering or mathematics; I knew I was eventually going to be a sportswriter!) I had, even as a teenager, ideas for great columns that neither had explored; besides, I could

Continued on page 2, column 1

 **President's Message** (Continued from page 1)

find faults with both their presentations, especially Bill Mayer's tendency to impart the conservative viewpoint, and castigate (though always thoughtfully and professionally) those whose behavior deviated from the traditional.

Many years later, I came to SCWA and was expected to write a President's Column every month!

Oh, the first few were easy. I had great ideas about writing and creativity I had saved up over the years, and relished the chance--finally! --to get them into print.

Okay. Now, after those ideas were used up, what to write about?

I thought of Jim Murray (because, after all, my main interest in the newspaper still was sports), Melvin Durslag of *The Herald-Examiner*, Red Smith, and of course the current-events viewpoint columnists, the Jack Smiths, the George Wills, the William Buckleys and Robert Scheers.

You know what?

They had to do a column every day!

I get writer's block when I have to write only one column for every twenty of theirs.

Boy, did I ever change my opinion about wanting to be a newspaper columnist.

Even so, I remember how I used to cringe when I would encounter a Murray column that began, "Okay, Miss Marpole, please take this down..." because I knew what was coming: a satiric take of the viewpoint of a traditionalist transported in time to the present day. And I never found any of them funny.

But now that I've had to do a few of these, I can understand more and more why he resorted on occasion to that tactic: he just didn't have any fresh ideas that day. (And what human being could possibly come up with a new and intriguing thought every single day?)

Nevertheless, as I sit at my computer, the words come.

Maybe not especially good words, but nonetheless words.

And this is why all successful authors insist upon spending time at the keyboard.

Hey, you're not always going to turn out Shakespearean drama, but you'll always turn out something. But who is to say that won't change with the first re-write? And even if it doesn't, who is to say that banal, mediocre verbosity you regard as drivel might not inspire someone the way Shakespearean drama does?

Good luck and good writing!

Roy King, President

February 18, 2006

**Dorothy
Foltz-Gray**
Writer, Poet

*Strike Gold with
Magazine
Article Writing*

A former editor of books and magazines at *Whittle Communications* in Knoxville, Tennessee, Dorothy Foltz-Gray has been a successful freelance writer, specializing in health and personal essays, for more than 11 years. In February 2006, Dorothy will share the secrets of good non-fiction article writing. Don't miss the gems of wisdom to be shared by Dorothy Foltz-Gray, winner of the 2002 *Mature Media Gold Award* and the successful recipient of the *Tennessee Arts Commission Fellowship for Poetry*.

SCWA Critique Committee
Open to members of SCWA

Nonfiction & Fiction

Roy King 3kings@urs2.net

Roy will take any amount of writing for critique.

He prefers to see the entire ms at one time.

Please mail your manuscript to Roy at:

15772 Heatherdale Road, Victorville, CA 92394

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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Shirl Thomas: Editing to Sell

“‘Self-editing’ is an oxymoron,” says Shirl Thomas, book doctor and writer. She’s been a freelancer for thirty-one years but “just happened” into editing ten years ago. Although she says writers cannot do their own editing, they can consciously avoid some weaknesses, which she enumerated in her presentation, “Editing to Sell.” An intriguing theme and engaging story may not be enough. As a potential buyer examines your work, he or she is thinking, “Would I pay or dole out money for this book?” Thus, the question is about quality in all aspects of the writing.

**... sooner or later
your manuscript
must be in the format that
publishers prefer ...**

Since sooner or later your manuscript must be in the format that publishers prefer, save yourself some stress by formatting correctly from the start. Check out what layouts, margins, fonts, etc., you should use.

To become aware of other flaws, you, the writer, need a critique group of no more than three other persons. When someone else reads your work aloud, you might even catch some redundancy and other problems yourself. For help, Thomas recommends *Getting the Words Right* by Theodore Cheney and *Grammatically Correct* by Ann Stilman.

CHECKLIST OF 10

Use Thomas’s Checklist of 10 to head off the most frequent problems.

1. Prefer active voice verbs to passive ones in narration. If you do not know the difference, check each *was* and other *to be* verbs. Is the subject of the sentence the one that acts or is acted upon? [Active: Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France. Passive: The Tour de France was won by Lance Armstrong.] Thomas says, “Eighty percent of passive

verbs can probably go active.” When the subject acts, rather than receives action, the effect is more powerful. However, in dialogue passive constructions are permissible because people often speak that way. (When otherwise using the word *was*, “put in a better word unless it sounds artificial.”)

2. Avoid redundancy in wordage, especially pronouns.

Show, don’t tell.

3. Show, don’t tell. Prefer action to description.

4. Segue to keep your reader clear on what happens when.

5. Point of view must be consistent. If the story is built around one person, then this protagonist must be the one doing the seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling or smelling. “If not, then you’re out of your POV,” Thomas warns.

6. Choose the right word. Watch out for unnecessary *that’s*; “flakey” adjectives (*pretty*) instead of concrete ones; vague use of *very much*, etc. “In a thesaurus look up the word you want and then look up the suggestions.” Be careful with adverbs in dialogue. Often they refer to “how the person feels rather than acts.” For example, replace adverbs such as *shyly* or *hesitantly* with descriptive verbs such as *stuttered* or *repeated*.

**In a dialogue of two persons,
you can omit the tag line.**

In a dialogue of two persons, you can omit the tag line. If more than two and not all the same sex, be clear as to who says what. Eliminate any dialogue that doesn’t move the story forward. Is information in the dialogue natural or intrusive? For example, after a knock on the door, would the wife inside call out, “David, our son the doctor, is here.”? More natural is “Oh, David’s here. He must be out of surgery.”

7. Be consistent in tone and vocabulary, whether in the narrative or dialogue. Do you have a \$10 word among only \$5 ones?

8. Clarity is critical. “Specialists can be too enamored of their material and make it convoluted,” Thomas warns.

9. Overwriting is overloaded description. However, avoid underwriting also.

10. Clichés and trite expressions should pop up only in dialogue when they define the speaker.

**Use the exclamation point
in moderation.**

Thomas also covered specifics in punctuation. “Use the exclamation point in moderation. If the words are exciting in themselves, don’t use an exclamation.” Avoid semicolons in fiction and use short sentences instead. For speech that is stuttered or interrupted, use dashes. However, use ellipses [. . .] to show pauses or the omission of content.

For the troublesome issue of showing thoughts, Thomas says there are three ways: quotations, italics, or he or she thought [that].

Experience has also taught this book doctor some little known details for the conversational tag line: If you are using the word *replied*, put it before the quotation. In books for adults, put the dialogue tag before the quotation. For children’s books, on the other hand, put the tag last.

Overall, Shirl Thomas, whose work all comes from referrals, says, “For a better chance for publication, use an editor. Don’t rest on your laurels.”

Glenda Rynn, Member

MEMBERS may purchase taped copies of lectures from SCWA Tape Librarian Sharon Walters: swwaltz@surfside.net

SCWA News & Announcements

ENCLOSED WITH THIS NEWSLETTER FOR YOUR REVIEW ARE
THE SCWA REVISED BYLAWS
PLEASE BE READY TO APPROVE THEM AT THE GENERAL MEETING
IN FEBRUARY, 2006

SCWA Member **Toni Sweeney** just announced that her short story, *The Cat's Letter to His Mistress* has just been published in the anthology *Animal Magnetism*. *Animal Magnetism* is a collection of science fiction, fantasy, and horror short stories, poems, and artwork, with all proceeds donated to Noah's Wish.

In two to three weeks *Animal Magnetism* will be listed on Amazon.com, but right now, it can be obtained from www.lulu.com/animal.magnetism/

DON'T FORGET—GREAT GIFTS STILL AVAILABLE

The 2005 "Will Write 4 Food"
Flash Fiction Anthology

SCWA PENS
BEAUTIFUL GIFT FOR WRITERS

The January 2006 "Will Write 4 Food" Contest!



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

Submit: One entry per member per month.

Via e-mail: Lynnette Baum,
therightwriter@cox.net

Via snail mail: L. Baum, 17595
Harvard, Ste. C-144, Irvine, CA 92614.

Deadline: Stories must be received on or before January 20, 2006.

Revised Requirements: To facilitate fair judging, put the story title on the top of the page with your **name**



and **day-time phone number** underneath. Only the winning author will be contacted.

Subject Line: January 2006 "Will Write 4 Food Contest" with your

daytime number or e-mail address. (For snail-mail put this information on the outside of the envelope.)
Warning: without the subject line, submission may not be read in time.

Winner: Attends their next SCWA meeting for free. 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 Website.

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.

Lynnette Baum, V.P. Programming

Showing: An Essential Key To Publishing

By Bill Blake



At our September meeting, Julie Ann Shapiro spoke convincingly about the need to show / not tell if we wish to publish our writings. I sat at her table and shared with her that I'm a retired college English instructor who, during my last twenty years of teaching, crammed showing techniques into my students' brains. Since the rhetorics that they brought largely failed to illustrate showing, I concocted a short handout that they mastered. I also insisted that they send at least one essay (and always their research papers) to publishers.

The results were astonishing. In one class of eighteen students, eleven published. In my last six years of teaching, at least forty published. During these twenty years, more than a hundred students received payments from legitimate magazines, journals, and anthologies.

All this publishing took place at Rancho Santiago College, whose students are among the least prepared in California community colleges, in a state housing close to the poorest high school writers in the United States, and in a nation numbering twenty-second in student writing in developed countries. Therefore a question arises. Why does *show / don't tell* (or *tell* → *show* → *tell*) work so beautifully?

First, showing arouses the reader's senses, feelings, and imagination. Description bestows a potent visual scene. With dialogue, a reader hears

Characters talking. Interior monologue, a superb and generally underutilized technique in non-fiction, encourages a reader to listen to a character's inner voice. Figures (analogy, simile, allegory, et al.) evoke the reader's mental imagery and feelings. Many examples, extended example, and anecdote offer dramatic proofs and stories. Citation of authority and factual detail shove away doubts and cause a *Yes, that's true!* emotional response. In fact, showing punches us at an energetic level. Showing projects hot feminine yin energy, whereas telling displays cold, analytic yang masculine energy. Showing is a sizzling kiss or freezing "Not tonight!" in contrast to a telling statement that Starbucks sells better coffee than Dietrich does.

Second, show / don't tell entrances the reader if consistently applied. I'll describe two student requirements so that you can decide if you want to adopt one. All students had to buy a light and a dark hi-liter pen. Every sentence in drafts slated for critiquing was marked with these pens; showing sentences were marked by the light hi-liter, and telling sentences marked by the dark hi-liter. Seventy percent of body paragraphs had to be marked in light color. If the essay wasn't correctly hi-lighted or failed to light hi-light 70% of central body paragraphs, it was marked NG (No Grade) and returned for rewriting.

One feature of my mid-terms (along with a handwritten essay) was a single sheet with an unannounced topic (such

as "family" or "romance" or "sports") at the top of this sheet. Numbers 1-10 were listed in the left hand margin. The student wrote in the names of the ten showing techniques and next wrote a sentence or two for each respective showing technique. For example, for the topic "family" and the technique "interior monologue," a student might write, "As Mom talked at dinner, I thought, Wow, she sure is a cool lady!" In sum, each student had to memorize all ten showing techniques and apply them in a convincing manner to any topic. The final exam featured an identical assignment.

At our September meeting, our Vice President of Programming, Lynnette, asked me to bring copies of my handout to the next meeting. I failed to attend in October, but in November passed out thirty copies, and twenty more at the December 17 meeting. If anyone wants a handout, explanation, or short analysis of what showing technique would work best in a paragraph, I'll be happy to assist you at our next two meetings, either at lunch or after the meeting. SCWA has served me well, and I enjoy the opportunity to share my knowledge with other members.

SPECIAL THANKS

TO

Sharon Walters: Tape Librarian
Donna Holland: Information Box

**Looking for feature
articles 500-700 words
in length.**



**Are there any
writers out there?**

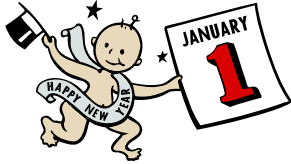
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career successes, failures,
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Laura Sheridan-Long at
Laura@ScribbleMoon.com**



January Meeting:
Saturday
January 21, 2006

Sam Weller — Author of
The Bradbury Chronicles *The Life of Ray Bradbury*
(See inside to learn more about Sam Weller.)

2006



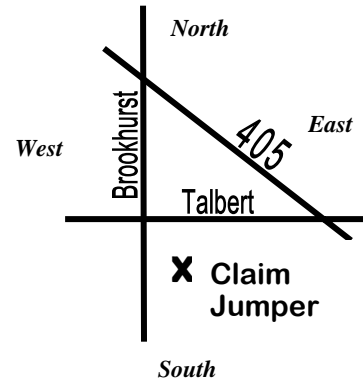
LOCATION:

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 & Program: 10:00 a.m.
Lunch: 11:30 a.m.
Afternoon Program: 12:15 p.m.

Members & Non-Members \$20.00



WALK-INS & GUESTS ALWAYS WELCOME

RSVP before January 16: Roy King, 15772 Heatherdale Rd., Victorville, CA 92394
Check must accompany reservations. Make checks payable to **SCWA**.

After January 16: Roy King, *home:* (760) 955-5027; *e-mail:* 3kings@urs2.net—bring check to door.
For more information, go to **www.ocwriter.com**.

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

Southern California Writers Association
Writers News

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