



California Writers Club – SFV

“Serving the writers of Greater Los Angeles”

THE SCRIBE

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Who'll be the Next Star on Oprah?

By: Stephany Spencer

Happy New Year to our valued members and guests of the Greater Los Angeles California Writers Club!

We're starting out with a great program this January 12th featuring the inimitable husband and wife dynamic duo, literary agents, Ashley and Carolyn Grayson.

Dr. Scott Sonders and I have reviewed the web pages of their literary agency and we are impressed and excited with what we see: Ashley and Carolyn Grayson represent literary and commercial fiction and some non-fiction for adults: including business, self-help, scientific, pop culture, true crime, and mind/body/spirit.

They also represent fiction for younger readers. Clients on their fiction list include Isaac Adamson, John Barnes, Andrew Fox, Barb and J.C. Hendee, Bruce Coville, J.B. Cheaney, David Lubar, and Christopher Pike.

The Grayson's are both members of the Association of Authors' Representation. Ashley is also a member of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. And Carolyn is a member of Romance Writers of America.

Since our membership especially appreciates an interactive production that informs and entertains, we know you won't want to miss the January 12th presentation.



Farah Khalid, member & videographer

So with that said, let me end my piece with this extended "peace" to everyone:

2008 is here, we're another year older, our membership has grown, and our new writers are bolder.

As we enter this New Year, Let us come to our meetings and spread the good cheer, and welcome our members because the thing we do best is increasing what's good. ☐☐

THE WORD MECHANIC

Ramblings from your President

By: Scott Alixander Sonders, Ph.D.

We know that light travels faster than sound. This is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak. So most bright writers know that a good vocabulary and a sense of humor are both useful. But who gives much thought to grammar?



Scott Sonders & Megan Masten

All infants learn to speak their first language by initially understanding its grammar. If this seems like a startling premise, please feel free to check it out. Indeed, if we do not understand grammar, that is the How & Why of language, we are left mostly with What. And "what" is only data, that which requires not understanding but memorization.

Consistently – or at least, persistently – I've suggested to my workshop students that they reread Strunk & White's "Elements of Style." Though not in the league of the Old Testament or the Constitution, it is an important work.

An example of Grammar (homophones):

John and Jane decide to rent a paddleboat on Lake Balboa. Suddenly their boat begins to leak and list. Jane says, "Listen, you know that I can barely swim." John remembers back to his days as a lifeguard and begins tugging Jane toward the shore. Soon though, John begins to tire. About 50 feet from the pier John says, "Listen Jane do you think you could now float alone?" And Jane gasps, "Isn't this a really bad time to be asking for money?"

But even grammar and witty homophones have their limitations. And those can make for embarrassing or amusing consequences. Tone of Voice and Experience sometimes exceed the utility of good syntax. Do you doubt this? Then tomorrow reply to your significant other's proclamation that they love you with a sarcastic "Oh, I love you too." You don't want to see what happens.

An example of Experience:

A friend reported that she'd seen a sign on Reseda Boulevard that read, "Northridge University Center." If she'd not "experienced" CSUN, she might think the sign demarcated the geo center of "Northridge University."

But locals know there is no "north ridge" or a school by that name. Experience tells us that this sign indicates a "center" (i.e. "a mall"), which is located in a Los Angeles suburb called Northridge, and nearby to the eponymous Cal State University.

It gets worse. Looking at that sign, another from her imbroglia of thoughts surfaced. What if there were a second sign that said "Blue Tits?" Okay, don't answer that. Because aside from ornithologists, not many know there is a group of "small plump short-tailed birds" that are indeed called "tits" – which do not vulgarly or otherwise cause "titillation." So perhaps this sign was simply advertising a sale on the blue variety of this bird, at a pet shop in the "Northridge University Center." Now before you accuse me of telling stories like a boy of fourteen, I admit that I actually am. I just look dreadful for my age.

Grammar & Wit aside, I'd like to welcome you to 2008. Numerically that equals a Perfect Ten. And it will be a "perfect 10" of a new year for CWC members. You'll be spellbound by a spate of Guest Presenters who intersect the written word with performances in Music, Stage & Screen. Writers & Poets, Publisher & Agents will abound. [continued on next page...]

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And remember: don't drink and drive. It's much nicer to have a vision of gingerbread than a vision of "blue tits" perched atop a non-existent "center." It's much better to join Cal Writers than Alcoholics Anonymous.

So, please aim your grammar guns at CWC, where literary learning makes for excellent entertainment. Make it a date. Come say "hi" to me on this next January 12th, 2008. □□

REWIND

A Good Bunch of Activities

By: George Hirai

There were around 75 in our audience at the CWC-SVC December meeting, so we had to set up more tables and chairs.

Several fine works of poetry, memoirs, and essays were presented at the Open Mic. Moderator Ethel Ann Pemberton introduced readers and did a great job keeping the presentations to the allotted five-minutes.

New member Farah Khalid was busy throughout the event working as our Videographer for the Open Mic, Featured Member Matt Schliesman, guest speaker Anthony Flacco, the audience, and new and old members schmoozing.

We welcomed six new members including Elizabeth Jaimes, an enthusiastic volunteer, whose great smile greeted people at the door.

The Featured Member was Matt Schliesman, who worked in the corporate world, developing theme park production ideas. He left because, as he said, "I have to write. That's who I am." And so he has: poetry, stage plays, and screenplays. He is currently freelancing and seeking writing assignments. Matt explained that the odds against selling and producing a screenplay are great – and that the opportunity that CWC provides for networking is extremely important.

Matt told us about "Nimbus," which he explained is a spiritual adventure novel.

To him, writing it was post-corporate therapy and a mystical experience. Most of his works are actor/story driven. He is currently working on a "Walton's" meets Green Acres" about an elderly patriarch.



Our Editor, George Hirai

Our guest speaker was Anthony Flacco of Martin Literary Management stepped in for the scheduled speaker Sharlene Martin, who had a family emergency.

As their Acquisition Manager, he read a series of remarkably bad but remarkably humorous e-mail and query letters to their agency. Some were naïve, sarcastic, or dismissive. Ms. Martin titled one letter "Attempts to Win Me Over by Insulting" and another

"Clueless in Seattle (or whatever)." Flacco admitted that the written word in book form is declining and that the paperback reader is a vanishing breed. There are now computer readers.

After his presentation, Mr. Flacco stayed to let more than 20 members "pitch" him their works. That was an amazing and appreciated opportunity.

Again, we had another terrific, well-attended meeting. We continue to be a growing success. □□

THE VIEWPOINT

The Male Therapist: Hollywood Style

By: Dennis Palumbo

Two iconic images, from two memorable films: In *Now, Voyager*, kindly therapist Claude Rains walks in the garden with troubled patient Bette Davis. He's paternal, insightful, and obviously knows what's good for her.

In *The Three Faces of Eve*, Lee J. Cobb helps Joanne Woodward parse out the three distinct personalities tormenting her. Like Claude Rains before him, he's a model of the patriarchal culture, a therapist of unquestionable motives and unimpeachable authority. One of the good guys.

Which begs the question: how did we get from there to Hannibal Lecter? Because, with rare exceptions, that's where we are. Look at how male therapists are currently depicted on film and television. Instead of being caretakers, they're portrayed as troubled, sexually predatory -- even psychotic: Richard Gere in *Final Analysis*. Bruce Willis in *The Color of Night*. Robert DeNiro in last year's *Hide and Seek*.

Moreover, on TV crime shows like *Law & Order* and *CSI*, a male psychologist or psychiatrist is as liable to be the bad guy as any garden-variety contract killer or spurned lover.

Now I know enough from my experience as a screenwriter to be skeptical about Hollywood's notion of *any* profession, but I can't help wondering what's going on. How did the on-screen image of male therapist go from father figure to the most likely suspect?

Maybe this change simply reflects one that's occurred in the culture at large. After all, the past forty years has seen a challenge to the whole idea of male authority. In terms of image, professors, doctors and scientists of the male persuasion have suddenly gone from being saints to sinners. Same with therapists. No wonder today's TV and film writers find them irresistible as villains.

All that education, respectability and power, turned to the Dark Side.

But it wasn't just society's growing mistrust of male authority that turned Lee J. Cobb's gray suit and pipe into Anthony Hopkins' face muzzle and leather restraints. There was also a trend, starting in the 50's, of popular films that threw cold water on the whole concept of psychological treatment as a positive tool to alleviate suffering. Movies like *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Snake Pit*, and *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* all suggested the nefarious ways psychology could be exploited or used for evil.

Even such recent films as *A Beautiful Mind* depicted the horrendous misuse of electro-convulsive therapy--at the hands, of course, of a coolly assured male psychiatrist. A real Poster Boy for the clueless patriarchy.

However, in terms of the depiction of male therapists, this wary view may simply reflect another cultural shift in attitude toward gender. With the mantle of patriarchal



authority removed from male shoulders, yet with no alternative image to replace it, we find conflicting views as to what men should actually be *like*. The "sensitive" man is suddenly under assault. As a result, there's the sense that being a male therapist has become somewhat unseemly--or, at the very least, suspicious.

As though, for a real man, it was no longer a respectable profession.

So, is the situation hopeless? That's probably over-stating it. B.D. Wong portrays a police psychiatrist on the TV series *Law and Order: SVU* as a positive, effective--though irritatingly bloodless--character. More multi-faceted, and therefore believable, is the testy, driven consultant Dr. Emil Skoda on the flagship series *Law and Order*. Then there was psychiatrist Jennifer Melfi's own analyst on HBO's *The Sopranos*, played as a caring though sadly limpid colleague by Peter Bogdonavich. At least he's not shown having a sexual relationship with her.

Let's face it: from the average person's point of view, the world has become a pretty dangerous, confusing place nowadays. Our most sturdy institutions—government, the church, education--traditionally headed by men, seem to be letting us down. It's no different with psychotherapy. Whether fair or not, I believe the way in which male therapists are portrayed on screen reflects a similar disenchantment with both the profession in general, and its male practitioners in particular.

Like the range of attitudes from guarded suspicion to outright hostility with which priests are currently viewed, male therapists suffer from the failed expectations of a disillusioned public. It only makes sense then that our disappointment would be represented by pop culture depictions of male clinicians as treacherous, coldly calculating, or even unstable. A distorted paternal *imago*, perhaps, buffed to a stereotypical finish by the narrative demands of film and TV.

So that now, to the hallowed images of "tough" private eye, "brilliant" physician and "ruthless" attorney, we can add the unethical, manipulative, and frequently homicidal male therapist. Coming to a theater – or TV screen near you!

Hmm. Sounds like we could *all* use a walk with Claude Rains right about now. □□

BIO: Formerly a Hollywood screenwriter... (My Favorite Year; Welcome Back, Kotter, etc.), DENNIS PALUMBO, M.A., MFT is now a licensed psychotherapist in private practice in Los Angeles.

NOTE: This article appeared previously in expanded form in the APA's Division 51 Bulletin, the newsletter of the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity and is reprinted by permission of the author.

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¹ also: Editor of the Scribe

² also: VP of the CWC-Central Board

FAST FORWARD

Coming in February - Kitty Dill:

Award Winning Journalism Editor...

This will be an exciting & interactive seminar. Kitty gives the inside view about writing and submitting Press Releases, and getting those releases into newspapers. She ought to know, she's an editor for the **Ventura County Star** and their internet "Hub." Kitty will also titillate on what to do when "60 Minutes" shows up at your door.

Coming in March - Linda O. Johnston:

Attorney and Romance Writer...

A practicing attorney armed with a double barrel shotgun, a B.A. in Journalism and a Doctorate in Law! The amazing "Linda O!" juggles her busy schedule to write in the afternoons and teach in the evenings. We've long awaited the info she'll share on the legalese involved in writing. BONUS: bring your questions about writing PR, mystery and romance.

THE WORDSMITH

Visiting the Cornfield, Antietam

By: Lillian Rodich

A blanket of snow
covers dried weeds and crimsoned soil.
Can thirsty earth ever forget
carnage without compromise?
In white silence,
covering a landscape
long unaccustomed to cannon fire
and lost screams -----
suddenly a sharp wind howls
where few are there to hear.
Brother against brother,
from the same womb delivered
to this -- while bitter cold
guards their tomb today
and no one cheers.

Apple Weather

By: Georgia Jones-Davis

I bundle up in the surprise
of the San Fernando Valley cold and drive
to the grocery store in its loneliest hour,
after families trek home
with stores for the week,

and the silent checkers eye the clocks in the
Sunday evening gloom.
This is the last thing I feel like doing on a late,
lazy afternoon but I know
that there's still a little fresh bread to be had
and in the vegetable aisle

festive piles of small pumpkins,
Carnival squash, and Delicata,
with their animal-like yellow and orange stripes,
odd-shaped petrified tigers, flowers
from outer space,

plants determined to last forever within their
protective shells
that will not crumble in the savagery of the
season's pageant.
Pears and apples in a doom of crisp fragility
must wave goodbye to their trees.

In the wood and smoke and red leafy dust
of autumn
the squash must be hacked and attacked and
sawed and cracked,
the meat itself dry and bitter as dead hearts before
the fire.

ABOUT WRITING

Having a Writing Career

By: Michele Wallerstein

Are you playing at writing, or do you want a writing career? It sounds simple but this is a loaded question. Are you in Albuquerque or Minneapolis and telling your friends and family that you are writing a screenplay? To what end? Do you have any idea what you should do if you really finish the script? Writing a screenplay is only the first small step. It's what you do next that really tells the tale.

[continued on next page...]

Here are 10 things you need to know about having a writing career...

1. No one sells a screenplay – they “option” it. Don't be misled by the articles in *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter*, or by the verbiage you hear thrown about by people in and out of the Biz. Screenplays are optioned. The Production Company has the option whether to develop the property further or simply hold it for the option time allotted in the contract. Most scripts languish in this spot, sometimes for years.
2. If you set up a script, the Writers Guild protects you only so far as to guarantee that you do the first rewrite. After that event, you may be re-written by any number of other writers. The other “re-writes, polishes, etc.,” in your contract are optional and you may never get to do them.
3. Renewing the option is up to the producer or studio. If you have a six (6) month or perhaps a one (1) year option the production company has the right to drop the project after the initial option period has expired. At that time the material is usually considered old by industry standards.
4. There is no reality in “net profits.” This provision in your contract has little or no value. A Gross profits definition is only given to a handful of very, very successful writers. If you can get a net profit definition that is the same as the movie's stars or producers, you may see some monies.
5. If you don't live in the greater Los Angeles area, you won't have a writing career. If you aren't conveniently located for last minute meetings, you will be too easily forgotten and replaced with the writers who are here.

6. You must have “meet and greet” meetings. These meetings give you the chance to get writing assignments. They give you a chance to bond with development executives and producers who will need writers. They also give you the chance to pitch your original script ideas and that may lead to a development deal wherein you are paid to write your own project.



Michele Wallerstein

7. You must have original pitch ideas in the same genre as the script that you've set up. People in the industry like to know that you are not a “one-shot” writer. In other words if you've written a murder mystery and they need someone to do a re-write in the same genre, they'll want to read another similar writing sample.
8. You must personally follow-up with every person that reads your material. Write those thank-you notes, email new ideas, call with questions, and ask the person to lunch or coffee. Keep up with those people.

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9. If you socialize, you will work. Invite buyers out or over to your home for dinner. Try to form friendships with those people that you like. Even informal get-togethers can be fun and bring your relationships closer. If they want to be around you, they will want to hire you.
10. Continue to write original screenplays as fast as you can. The larger your body of work, the better for you. You will also have more control if you have original screenplays. You will be sought out for new material and remembered.

There are things you need to learn about the business of writing, please contact me with other questions and quandaries, or if you need a professional to review and to help with your screenplays. □□



Auto Sports

By: Mike Austin

Now I like a thrill as much as anyone. I love amusement park rides. In a corporate teambuilding event, I volunteered to climb a 75' telephone pole, then leapt across 8' of air to grab a 1" pipe. But, let's discuss *gearhead* gooseflesh. What's almost as good as your first time? That'd be your first open-track event in a performance car!

For this latent motorhead, my first fast experience was 120 m.p.h. in my Mustang convertible across an empty straight in the wee hours, with no one watching. But slingshotting a Mustang Cobra onto Willow Springs Raceway's straight, as 200 people watch you kiss 135 m.p.h. is completely different. If you consider the religious zeal that gearheads have about cars, a first open-track is almost a rite of passage like a wedding, Bar Mitzvah or Confirmation.

An interesting note about cars and human abilities is this: I asked members of the national Cobra Owners Association what changes I should next make for my car to be faster. Five experienced owners chimed in, "Take a driving course!" It turned out that a driver's talent is 95% of their fast laps.

I first ran on-track with Cobra Owners Club of America (<http://www.cocoagoc.org/>). On an October Saturday, in crisp morning air at Willow Springs near Lancaster, I could barely contain myself as I idled into the tech-inspection line.

When you run an open-track, your mission is to drive within your talent, improving your skills while having fun. So, by 4:00 PM on Sunday afternoon I was a more capable driver, and was running with two faster more experienced groups. Nine sessions of 20 minutes each did the trick. Not that anyone was recording the times but I'd guess I was doing laps of the 2.4-mile track in around one minute, 50 seconds.

Searching for different open-track clubs, I found the National Auto Sport Association (<http://www.NASAProRacing.com>). At one of their Willow Springs events, I was now more comfortable inside the limits of my ability. N.A.S.A. insists that first-timers at their events sit for drivers' classroom courses.

In class they'll give you tidbits like this, for example,; at high speed, lifting the throttle in a turn can actually *cause* problems. But, with native experience, a N.A.S.A. instructor grinned and explained, "Let me tell you a little secret about Turn 6 and lifting. Although it's a blind turn and you can't see where you're going, they didn't move it overnight. So you need to trust that it's there, choose your line, put your foot into it and go."

I was surprised to have an ex-racer friend say, "You looked pretty smooth out there, Mike, pretty clean." Although I was a newer driver with a lot to learn, that was very encouraging and I felt like the efforts I made to become a more capable driver had paid well. □□

APPLAUSE

Reptile Skeletons

By: Judy Presnall

At a recent Ventura/Santa Barbara Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) Writers Day conference, I was awarded top prize in the picture book contest. My nonfiction piece, *Reptile Skeletons*, was designated "Most Promising Picture Book Manuscript." The prize is a free 2008 Writers Day conference.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From: Richard Schmorleitz

I'm glad to express how good it felt to attend our CWC meeting in November. The context was new to me: on display, in every nook and cranny of the room, were paintings, drawings and other works of art.

Even better, it was a chance to see some fellow writers dressed for a very different occasion, revealing other aspects of their creative talents. My understanding became clearer as the afternoon unfolded.

I've been a member of CWC-SFV for over a year. How good it felt to at last share something of my own at one of our monthly meetings. Singing *Appalachian Love Song* turned out to be a real treat.

When I asked people to join in singing the last chorus, the audience responded with the warm, full sound of a sing along.

Soon after, a number of people thanked me for doing something so different and I was deeply moved by their response. I'll remind myself of that the next time I take the risk of sharing something so personal with my peers in the club.

Then I was approached by Kay, an artist who gave me as part of her contribution to the afternoon, a drawing of her psychic impression of my creative balance which I felt was right on – an expression of wholeness with which I sincerely agreed.

I became immersed in the project of our meeting. We were to choose one of the pictures displayed and write something about it. While doing that, the artists continued painting. I chose a haiku for a vivid painting of a golden fish swimming beneath a large full moon. To my delight, I eventually learned its title was: "Coy Koi."

I felt in harmony with the painter, Anita van Tellengen, when I submitted my poem for judging. Best of all, my prize for winning was an original watercolor of Disney Concert Hall by Dori Marler. She's also a poet whose work I respect greatly. And her painting will soon find a place in my home.

What a marvelous day all around! Many thanks to the artists who went to such trouble to bring their works, their equipment and themselves. And a special thanks to Scott Sonders and our Board for their imaginative utilization of our meeting time together. □□

JANUARY MONTHLY MEETING

WHO: CWC-SFV - Serving Greater Los Angeles writers

WHEN: Saturday, January 12th, 1:00-3:30pm

WHERE: Encino Community Center - 4935 Balboa Boulevard

GET YOUR 15-MINUTES OF FAME – NOW X3 OPEN MICS!

- 1 –** At our regular monthly meeting at the Encino Community Center.
- 2 –** At Borders Books in Canoga Park. Sign-ups begin at 6:45 p.m. on the third Thursday of every month – 6510 Canoga Avenue
For more info please email: rrdeets@socal.rr.com
- 3 –** At Barnes & Noble in Encino. Sign-ups begin at 6:45 p.m. on the second Friday of every month – 16461 Ventura Boulevard
For more info please email: cwcsfv@gmail.com

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