



Home
Join
Newsletter
Conference
Writing Contest
Manuscript Review
Tips & Ideas
Resources
Feedback
Member's Pages
Links
Cop Tales 2000
Mailing List
Contact Us

PUBLIC SAFETY WRITERS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

PSWA AFTER CONFERENCE NEWSLETTER

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS

These are some highlights from the conference. If you didn't make it, you truly missed a wonderful conference.

Our Thursday night get-together was the best ever. Those who arrived that day had an opportunity to meet some of the attendees and speakers ahead of time and also catch-up with friends.

With new media equipment, our conference ran smoothly, everyone could be heard, and thanks to Tim Dees we had some special entertainment between segments.

Our first task was to introduce ourselves and if we had a book to give a short elevator pitch. Some of us learned what an elevator pitch really is—and we also found out how varied our attendees were.

The very first panel was moderated by Steve Scarborough, a forensics expert, with Holli Castillo, a lawyer, Jack Miller, a retired military man, and Michael Black, retired police officer, who told us how TV and Movies Get it Wrong. This panel was worth the price of admission. We found out how all of our favorite TV shows from Law and Order, CSI, both NCIS, The Closer and many more get it wrong.

[IT'S NOT A BOOK, IT'S A MOVIE](#)

[HAVE COUCH WILL TRAVEL, SECRETS FROM THE POLICE SHRINK'S OFFICE](#)

[NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN WRITING FOR TRADE PUBLICATIONS—PAPER AND ONLINE](#)

[BRINGING FICTIONAL CHARACTERS TO LIFE](#)

[PUTTING OUT THE FIRE](#)

[SUBTEXT THROUGH DIALOGUE AND ACTION](#)

[WHAT'S MISSING IN YOUR MANUSCRIPT?](#)

[PROMOTION TODAY, HOW IMPORTANT IS IT? WHEN DO YOU START? WHAT WORKS BEST?](#)

[USING FORENSIC EVIDENCE IN STORYLINES](#)

[WRITING WITH A PARTNER](#)

[BIG CHANGES IN THE PUBLISHING BIZ](#)

[UNDERCOVER CHARACTERS](#)

[COP TALK](#)

[WHERE THE HECK ARE WE?](#)

[MILITARY WRITING](#)

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IT'S NOT A BOOK □ IT'S A MOVIE

Christopher Scott Wyatt gave us a lot of information about writing screen plays and movie scripts. Here are some highlights:

Writing for cable TV is the most lucrative.

You could get 6 figures for a cable movie and then your book sales will triple. (From experience, I know you need an agent to sell a book to cable.)

If you have an 80,000 word book it will have to be cut down to 15,000 words, which means you will be losing lots of content. Many novelists struggle trying to adapt their own books to screen plays. Short stories often work better for screen plays.

Cable has more commercials. Minor details of the story will disappear. Internal thoughts are out. No detailed description of settings and action.

Usually the script will be rewritten and the actor may also change it.

Rules and formats matter more during the "pitch" period.

Screenwriters should not give directions, which means don't include camera shots, transitions or other technical directions. If it's not important, don't include it.

An option is for 3 to 5 years. The more the script is rewritten the less money comes to the first author.

A feature film is 60% dialogue, TV film 70% dialogue, Novel, 50% dialogue. Feature Film is driven by action, TV movie, the plot, Novel, the characters.

Wyatt suggested that anyone interested in writing screenplays should buy a good screen writer's guide such as "The Screenwriter's Bible," "Final Draft," or "Movie Magic"

A movie is usually the Hero's Journey. He or she must make a discovery or reach a conclusion he or she believes to be true. To do this, he or she makes a personal sacrifice to achieve the goal. He or she will discover a clue or connection others fail to see.

The villain must believe he or she is superior.

The hero will probably have to race against the clock with moments of doom, early and often.

(Of course there was much, much more, but that'll give you an idea of how much information was given.)

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HAVE COUCH WILL TRAVEL, SECRETS FROM THE POLICE SHRINK'S OFFICE

Dr. Ellen Kirschman was terrific, beginning with first telling us that there are no bad questions.

Democracy doesn't work without police.

Most departments pay psychiatrists to do screening of people wanting to be officers and do the job well.

You can't compare cops and firefighters to any other professionals.

Supervisors are the greatest source of stress. Cops expect the bad guys to shoot at them, but feel betrayed by the administration.

In marriages, the cop needs to be able to shift gears before going home. The spouse needs to be able to stand up for herself.

Ellen made great points and has two great books on the subject: *I Love a Cop* and *I Love a Firefighter*.

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NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN WRITING FOR TRADE PUBLICATIONS—PAPER AND ONLINE

John Wills moderated this panel, Michelle Perin, Keith Bettinger, Michael Black, and Tim Dees were panelists.

Tim spoke about the reduction in pages and size of newspapers and magazines. Publishers are delaying payments to authors. The magazines would like a matching ad for an article. Even in trade magazines should have name recognition. Should respond to comments on your articles.

Michelle said there is a much bigger audience with online magazines with more freedom for the writer. You can write about something you haven't done by doing research. She also said, "Don't quit your day job."

Keith stated established magazines often pitched an idea for him to write. He has sold articles more than once.

Michael suggested gathering a bunch of ideas and querying.

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BRINGING FICTIONAL CHARACTERS TO LIFE

Michael Black gave us some great ideas about creating realistic characters.

Know what they are like. Physical characteristics should be told early on before the reader has a chance to form a different mental picture. Should have a back story for each character. Keep a list of all the characters' names so you don't use them over and over.

What's the character's story? His motivations. Any significant childhood events that greatly affected him.

Take the time to build relationships. Pick the right point of view. Show, don't tell.

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PUTTING OUT THE FIRE

Robert Haig, a retired Detroit Fire Captain, showed us a film of the '80s stadium fire in Bradford, England which showed how quickly a fire can spread. He also showed slides of his fireman son who was badly burned while trying to rescue an infant in a burning building. The healing process was amazing.

Dave Doust, a retired Canadian firefighter, showed slides from after 911. A most moving presentation.

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SUBTEXT THROUGH DIALOGUE AND ACTION

Holli had some great suggestions such as:

Having dialogue mean something different than what is actually said.

Relationship issues, perhaps a romantic subplot or strife in a relationship,

In a thriller, you might plant your bad guy earlier, and find out information about him later.

Might have your character instead of answering a question, ask one instead.

When you set things up, there must be a payoff.

Men don't always catch social clues.

Use the character traits all the way through the book.

The original Die Hard movie set up all the motivations for the characters.

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WHAT'S MISSING IN YOUR MANUSCRIPT?

Monti Sikes Moderated.

Publisher Jo Wilkins stated she is most interested in content and a fixed point of view, looks for continuity and too many "was".

Publisher Billie Johnson looks for a strong narrative voice and really wants to be pulled into a story, a fresh approach, and a manuscript that has been edited, and voice is most important.

Editor Marilyn Olson said everyone needs an editor especially if you want someone to read your book. If you want to please an agent, editor or publishers, it must be in shape and without inconsistencies. The style should be appropriate to the subject. The first sentence and paragraph must be great.

Christopher Wyatt, head of creative writing department, said be sure to include the six senses in all your writing and that means smells too. Convey to the reader the inner workings of the mind along the way. Balance the dialogue, action and narration. Every

sentence must move the plot. Keep both fictional facts and real facts true.

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PROMOTION TODAY, HOW IMPORTANT IS IT? WHEN DO YOU START? WHAT WORKS BEST?

I was on this panel along with Kathleen Ryan, Joyce Faulkner, Madeline Gornell and W.S. (Wendy Gager) and was unable to take notes like I did for the other panels, but here's what I remember:

Bookstores are the not the best place to promote unless you're giving a presentation of some sort. Libraries, book and craft fairs are better.

Facebook, blogs and twitter are good for online promotion.

You should start your promotion BEFORE your books is published, get name recognition.

* * *

USING FORENSIC EVIDENCE IN STORYLINES

Chief Deputy Coroner Tom Edmonds showed slides of actual crime scenes and asked questions about what we saw and asked for suggestions as to how what we thought had happened. He also told us physical evidence can lie.

A crime scene is a witness that reveals only a portion of the story.

The investigator must deduce what part is missing and then find the missing pieces.

He also passed around a real skull with bullet holes and asked us to figure out some of the details.

This was a terrific presentation.

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WRITING WITH A PARTNER

W. S. Gager (Wendy) was the moderator and the panelists were Barbara Hodges, Robert and Carol O'Hanneson, Pat Avery and Joyce Faulkner.

Joyce and Pat work together but each one has different skills. Barbara Hodges said much the same and worked mainly through email with partners, except for one. Robert did the writing and Carol did the research and editing.

* * *

BIG CHANGES IN THE PUBLISHING BIZ

I moderated this one, and so don't have as many notes. Panelists were: Michael A. Black, Barbara Hodges, Monti Sikes, Billie Johnson of Oak Tree Press and Tim White of Houdini Press.

Everyone agreed that the industry is in a flux, what with bookstores closing (Borders just announced closing its doors) and the e-book readers becoming so popular.

Barbara Hodges, who like me, has been e-published for years showed her Kindle and

her Smart Phone. These days she uses both to read on. She went around and found out from the authors who had books at the conference which ones were on Kindle and ordered them.

Billie and Monti discussed how the Print on Demand way of publishing a book has changed the industry.

Mike Black talked about how some of the big publishers are in trouble because of the publishing model they've followed for years.

Tim White does all his publishing in-house printing quality books, many of them collectibles.

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UNDERCOVER CHARACTERS

John Wills and Herm Groman shared this great presentation, both had been police officers and worked as FBI agents in Chicago.

They talked about the pitfalls of being undercover such as wearing a wire and being over conscious of it or being nervous. Today recorders are digital and can be more easily disguised.

The person undercover needs to gain the trust of those he is working. Disguises and costumes aren't as necessary as acting natural. Emotions must be real. Have to be an actor 24 hours a day.

There are guidelines to follow to become an undercover officers and a two week program at Quantico to go through. Most are not left undercover for too long. Not everyone is suitable.

Both men told great stories.

* * *

COP TALK

Michelle Perin, once a dispatcher, asked former police officers Kathleen Ryan, Keith Bettinger, Tim Dees and Joe Haggerty questions and the answers had us all laughing. We plan to repeat this next year. They told us stories about first call on the job, making mistakes in public, frustration and the brotherhood.

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WHERE THE HECK ARE WE?

Too often new writers forget to let the reader know where something is taking place. Robert O'Hanneson guided this session with panelist Madeline Gornell, Victoria Heckman, Monti Sikes, and Marja McGraw letting us know that location can be seen through the main character, that if it's a real place, the author needs to do the research, and if it's a fictional place, it should remain the same, the location has a lot of influence on the story.

* * *

MILITARY WRITING

A lot of experience was on this panel with Jack Miller, Pat Avery, Michael Angley, Bob

Doer and Joyce Faulkner

Michael Angely said he writes what he knows but researches what he doesn't know. Pat Avery writes the stories people tell her as does Joyce, writing for others, either memoirs or fictionalized versions. Most try not to use too much jargon or if they do, explain what it means. Each service uses different jargon. Decide who your audience is, may be limiting as to who wants to read the book.

Military thrillers, use a lot of real agencies, add fictional but authentic agencies.

May use actual situations and fictionalize. Decide what matters to the story.

If using technical equipment, use the right words.

Remember in the military there is always a chain of command.

This was a great conference—plan on coming next year.

The End

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