

The Free Lancer

October 2009

The Newsletter of the Seattle Free Lances Professional Writers Association
since 1921

October Program

Copyright and Contract Updates

Please join us Tuesday, October 6th, when local intellectual property rights expert, attorney Gary Marshall, returns to share his insights on changes in the publishing world. The Google Settlement, new Print on Demand technology, eBooks, and Digital Readers are all reshaping the book industry. What does this mean for authors?

Gary will be on hand to answer questions and help us navigate through the ever evolving issues of copyright and contract law.

with a demonstration of the new voice recognition software advancements. See Mark's article on p.4.

Upcoming Speakers

- **November 3rd:** YA Authors **Terri Farley and Suzanne Morgan Williams** will be joining us.
- **December 8th:** Best-selling Sci/Fi Author **Greg Bear** will be our special guest.
- **January 5th:** Author Events coordinators **Deborah Schneider** (KCLS) and **Wendy Manning** (Third Place Books) will give their advice on how to produce a successful author event.

Voice Recognition

Following the main presentation, resident computer expert Mark Hennon will be entertaining us

Dues are Due

Annual membership dues of \$35 are due by **October 31**. Please make your check payable to Seattle Free Lances. You can drop off your payment at the October dinner, or mail it to

Sid Johnston,
Membership
1624 31st Avenue
Seattle, WA 98122

SFL Desk Calendar

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September Speaker

Scott Driscoll: The Writer's Role Today

By Leslie A. Engel

Our September guest speaker was Scott Driscoll, freelance writer and writing instructor. Driscoll has published both fiction and nonfiction. He is currently gearing up for the new academic year, teaching literary fiction for the UW Extension certificate program and finishing a novel.

During his presentation, Driscoll discussed a broad range of important topics that nonfiction and fiction writers grapple with in their writing lives, everything from finding work as a freelance writer in this tough economic climate to deciding what makes a good first line in a novel.

It seems that all of our speakers in the past year, whether they are writers or publishers, have spoken briefly about how the economic outlook has dramatically changed the business of writing and selling their work. Driscoll was no different and said that a year ago he was working on six freelance pieces and now he is working on only one. The reasons he gave for this decrease in freelance work was because the "print media is shrinking and editors are doing more of the writing in house." He also added that "no one is really reporting the news, only biased points of view."

It is because of this that Driscoll believes that as writers we need to ask ourselves important and fundamental questions, such as, "what are we writing for and who are we writing for... and why aren't the important stories being written?" Driscoll used an example of poor news reporting from ABC's correspondent Brian Ross who reported on the rise in financial costs due to terrorism.

In Driscoll's eyes, these questions seem irrelevant, because the cost of human life is really what we should be focused on.

As a result of this biased reporting of the news, Driscoll has concluded that "only independent filmmakers are reporting the news" and uses *Sweet Crude*, an independent film directed by Sandy Cioffi as example. The film examines the oil industry's negative impact on Nigeria's Niger Delta.

Driscoll added a second example to prove his point, the best-selling nonfiction book *Nurture Shock: New Thinking About Children* by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman. Driscoll claimed the book is a good model for writers to use because Bronson and Merryman "challenge assumptions," which Driscoll argued as what writers should be doing. He offered an incident from his own life and briefly examined the chapter from the book titled, *Why White Parents Don't Talk About Race.*

In the second half of Driscoll's presentation, he included fiction writing advice from some of his favorite books on writing. Driscoll recommended *Writing Story: Craft Secrets of Dramatic Nonfiction* by Jon Franklin. Driscoll reviewed Franklin's "five focuses," and added that "it helps to keep my thinking organized." The first focus, called the "introductory focus" establishes a problem to be solved. The next three focuses, "should develop the action and deal with the problem," and the last focus, called the "resolving focus," should show the main character taking a final action to solve the problem set forth in the "introductory focus." Driscoll mentioned that the line between

literary fiction and commercial fiction has become more blurred and recalled an incident from his grad school days by paraphrasing one of his professors in which his professor argued to "keep the line all well and good if you never want to be published." Driscoll added, publishers now are "labeling it to sell it."

Driscoll also referenced Donald Maass' list of what makes a novel good. Maass is a New York literary agent and writes books on writing. Driscoll reviewed Maass' four key ingredients: tension or plot, setting, good characters that have a purpose or desire, and that the story should be meaningful. Driscoll then gave ten examples of first lines of novels and asked Free Lances to rate them on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the best and 5 being the worst. The result was an eclectic mix of what was viewed as good and bad first lines. When Driscoll asked Free Lances what made a good first line, participants gave responses such as: strong imagery and using suggestive language rather than explicit language.

Lastly, Driscoll suggested that opening chapters are extremely important. And "in today's world, shorter is better." In grad school he recalled people would give a book about fifty pages to buy into the story, now people give a book about two paragraphs, which a lot of the time translates into buying the book or not. Driscoll credited Maass' advice about the opening two paragraphs of a book and that it should map out the entire book and "give a credible map of the book to follow." Driscoll says that *Empire Falls* by Richard Russo is a great example of the perfect opening paragraph.