

Spotlight on C.V. Herst, alumnus of the UCR Palm Desert low-residency MFA program

BIOGRAPHY:

As a research scientist, I continue on my fantastic voyage, launched forty years ago, to develop vaccines for infectious diseases and immunotherapies for cancer. As a screenwriter, my first feature film, *The Maestro*, entered the commercial marketplace in February of this year after a three-year gestation.

UCR PALM DESERT: Given this background, why an MFA?

HERST: My parents were both artists, and my grandfathers both scientists, so you might say I have a split personality. Although I enjoy participating in various performing arts, writing has always been the best way for me to express myself. As I also value the educational process, just taking a few writing courses wasn't going to be enough. The MFA filled the bill.

UCRPD: What led you to UCR's program?

HERST: Very few of us who work for a living can stop working – or living. UCR's model program, of work-at-home assignments with on-line critiques, combined with intensive twice-a-year residencies, allowed me to share my work and ideas and gain valuable feedback from an experienced group of instructors as well as a diverse population of aspiring creative writers.

UCRPD: Are there any similarities between science and creative writing?

HERST: Stylistically, the two disciplines could not be more different. Scientific writing is cold and impersonal, insisting upon the use of the passive voice, whereas creative writing is passionate, engaging, active writing. Where the two come together for me is by using a clear, strong voice to educate people about science, its benefits and boobytraps. I suppose I could do this 'educating' in a screenplay, but I do want people to *read* it.

UCRPD: What are some aspects of the UCR program that you still use today?

HERST: In the *New Yorker* cartoon, as the Producer Dog says to the Screenwriter, "It's a great script. But lose the cat." Hollywood loves external demons and happy endings, both of which are cozy, gooey traps for the writer to fall into and get stuck. One lesson from the MFA program I hear in my head every time I write is to be constantly on the lookout for taking the easy way out in storytelling. There is more than one type of hero *and* hero's journey!

UCRPD: What is the one piece of advice you would give to others?

HERST: Writing is a process. Giving birth to a new piece of work is a wonderful thing, but you've only just begun. Through your drafts, your work will grow and change and mature. Don't be afraid to step away from your work for a while, or to ignore it completely. You have to give it – and you – a chance to rise to the occasion. Lastly, while you're never really finished with a piece of work, at some point you have to let it go out into the world and seek its place to 'complete the artistic circle,' as a dear friend of mine used to say.