



WritersTalk

A South Bay Branch
Writers Club Monthly

OCTOBER'S SPEAKER—

PENNY NELSON—AGENT & NPR COMMENTATOR

By Edie Matthews

"I wanted to be with writers. I wanted to be with books," said literary agent, Penny Nelson, who is also a popular commentator for National Public Radio, regularly hosting KQED's City Arts & Lectures.



Penny has only been a literary agent two years for Manus & Associates in Palo Alto. (The agency also has a branch in New York.) But twelve years in radio has provided her with an opportunity to know many authors and interview hundreds of best-sellers like Anna Quindlen, Barbara Kingsolver, E.O. Wilson, David Baldacci and John Barth.

Now as an agent, she is interested in representing memoirs, current events, social issues, lifestyle trends, self-help, natural sciences, and sports.

Although Penny represents non-fiction, some of her authors are also novelists. "I have a good sense of fiction," said Penny, who works in an office full of fiction agents. She explained that whether it is fiction or non-fiction, a writer must have a good sense of the trends and know how to develop a new approach.

"There's only ten topics in the universe," said Penny. "Everything that has ever been, has been. Whether it's William Shakespeare, Jane Austin or Phillip Roth, she says there are only a few stories, and it all comes down to the telling of the story.

"That's what publishers want. That's what I look for—you've got to have a fresh angle or, even if you write a good book, you are not going to get published."

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Carolyn Downey Receives Jack London Award

by Una Daly

Congratulations to Carolyn Downey, this year's recipient of the Jack London Award from South Bay California Writers Club. This once-in-a-lifetime award is given for outstanding service to the branch. Our former newsletter editor of many years, Carolyn was replaced earlier this year with an editor-in-chief and three staff members. The current newsletter team is still trying to figure out how she did it all on her own.

"My biggest dream about writing has been realized," said Carolyn, author of *Voices from the Orchard*, a book about the people who worked in the Santa Clara Valley prune and apricot orchards. She interviewed twenty-one people who worked in the fruit industry. The illustrator of the book and one of the workers died during the process, which renewed her commitment to give voice to their stories. The book has had three printings but the constant marketing and promotion proved too physically demanding to

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WRITERSTALK WANTS YOUR CREATIVE PRODUCT—SHORT FICTION, POETRY, MEMOIR, ESSAY.

*** See our masthead for submittal information ***

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President's Prowling— by Bill Baldwin



Like What You Like!

It was George Bernard Shaw who said: “Do not do unto others as you would they should do unto you—their tastes may not be the same!”

I think of this more and more, as I continue to write, while reading advice on writing; and submitting manuscripts to publishers and agents.

I picked up a book by Walter Abisch at our book exchange last evening: *How German Is It? (Wie Deutsch Ist Es?)*. It won the PEN/Faulkner Prize in 1981. As far as I can tell from the Internet, Abisch is largely forgotten in America (he is – or was? – American). But he seems to be well-known in Germany. Well—the book does deal with German identity. But—clearly—some Americans thought highly of him in 1981.

I'm reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*—whose punctuation I find odd (but times change, yes?). I read this first when I was eleven or so.

As a child, I also read *The Wizard of Oz* and many books by H. G. Wells, most notably *War of the Worlds*. Why did I like these books so much?

Why have I nearly memorized “MacBeth” and “Hamlet”—but never read “Othello” or “King Lear”?

Why do I enjoy reading Jack Kerouac – but not particularly *Catcher in the Rye*?

There are books no one would publish. Marcel Proust published *Swann's Way* himself.

But then—why should one person like both Schubert and Schoenberg; Rembrandt and Picasso; Louis Armstrong and John Coltrane; Jerome Kern and Stephen Sondheim; Abba and The Righteous Brothers; Avril Lavigne and Kelly Clarkson?

Like what you like! BB

My advice to you is not to inquire why or whither, but just enjoy your ice cream while it's on your plate -- that's my philosophy.

Thornton Wilder

California Writers Club South Bay Branch

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Join Up

We have a membership category that fits you, dues are \$45 per year plus a *one-time* \$20 initiation fee.

Contact our Membership Chair
Diana Richomme

'W' IS FOR WRITING

By Dan Ingerman

Why do I write? For me the answer is clear: Because I must! It is a passion. As a reader I am only a spectator, a person on the outside looking through a window and waiting to see what happens next. As a writer, I can leap into the scene and become part of the action. I can have debates with the characters, and help them solve life's problems or choose to strap on my big gun and battle evil forces.

Writing takes me on an emotional roller coaster. I sit down at my computer and next thing I know I'm inside the head of a crazed serial killer seeking out my next victim, while remaining just one step ahead of the police. On a whim I'm a school teacher facing down a knife wielding student in a school hallway. The next minute I'm the greatest detective in the world. Everyone is looking to me to solve the biggest crime to happen in the last twenty years, and I will. If you want to know the outcome just turns to the next page. How much better can it get?

Many of my ideas for writing fiction come from true stories; things I've seen on the evening news, as well as my personal experiences as a police officer. For me, the beauty of being a fiction writer is I have a license (at least a literary one) to let my characters kill and steal, blow things up, and drive their cars very fast with total disregard for life or property. They can do pretty much whatever I want and in many cases (at least on the good pages), they seem to have a mind of their own.

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Editor's Itch

Closing Kepler's?

I see Kepler's Books is closing their doors—an owner's retirement? management disruption? a cash requirement? One thing for certain, their closing will be our significant and notable loss.

"I'd like a book about potatoes."

"What is your interest sir; how to raise and prepare? Would you investigate the potato's role in the world economy, political stratagems, religions, or social order? Or would it be their atomic constituency, their origin—perhaps a passable substitute? Is it a more of a philosophical bent you pursue, like *why* potatoes? Or what might be in their absence?"

I get none of this at Amazon/B&N/Borders, rather an AI response to my email or an empty look and a call for the manager.

Kepler's Books is much more than a large rack of reading—shelf upon shelf of all imaginable text. It is, with its people, a "syntopican" with those employed as prodigious as the books that are racked. And if your request is so obscure that they first come up empty handed (a rare occasion), your name goes down and you can expect that 'needle' to be waiting for you on Thursday.

I am reminded of Ozzie's Corner Grocery (when a kid)—fresh cuts, telephone orders and that-afternoon deliveries. And when Ozzie—who knew his stock well and for good reason had your trust—gave way to Krogers Super, the neighborhood wrung its hands in disappointment and prescient alarm.

Today indeed, we have Best Buy/Costco/GreatMall big-thinking with their pink felt markers at exit, and carts that ding fenders in parking lots and clutter the locality. These ubiquitous giants have pushed the "Ozzie's" and "Kepler's", with their comprehensive assistance, right out of our neighborhoods, almost our consciousness.

I will miss Kepler's for a while, more than Ozzie's, as it is my last bastion of personalized, grand-book experience... and I can eat at McDonalds.

WritersTalk

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Submittals are invited:

Guest Columns

— *Almost Anything Goes*

Regular Columns

to Una Daly

News Items

Literary Work

Announcements and Advertisement

Letters to Ed—*In My Opinion*

to Dave LaRoche

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Email to either

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or

writersstalk@comcast.net

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Contact Dave LaRoche

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(Downey from page 1)
continue.

Born and raised in the Bay Area, Carolyn settled in Santa Clara Valley after college and a year of teaching in Hawaii. She raised a daughter and taught elementary school for more than twenty years until a debilitating car accident left her unable to teach anymore. She then decided to return to school and earn her Masters degree in Writing from San Jose State.

“Writing appealed to me because it was something I felt that I could continue for the rest of my life ... in spite of physical limitations,” said Carolyn. She started *Voices from the Orchard* during her Masters program and hoped to write other local histories but the marketing, storing, and distribution necessary is more that she wants to do.

Back as a teacher part-time, Carolyn is teaching ESL to Vietnamese immigrants. Last summer she taught literature and essay writing to fifth through eleventh grade students. She ended up loving it, in spite of her initial misgivings about teaching middle schoolers let alone high school students.

Carolyn enjoys hearing about the successes of others in the club and finds the speakers, workshops, conferences, and newsletter inspiring to her as a writer. Her current project is to get her other writing published which includes a pre-teen novel, short stories, and poems.

“I admire a lot of writers in our club; Edie Matthews for completing her MFA and teaching writing, Betty Auchard for recreating herself as a writer and a resource for recent widows, my cousin Amy MacLennan who is a published poet and is very active in that genre, and all the writers in the South Bay Branch and the Board for making our Branch happen.” UD

September’s Meeting Rcap—by Una Daly

September’s meeting surpassed expectations with a whopping 78 enjoying FD’s biographical review, their own writerly exchanges and the sumptuous offerings from our laudable LookOut. Announcements included invitations to Open Mic—first and third Fridays at 7:30 pm, first at Borders in Los Gatos and third at Barnes and Noble in the PruneYard; read from your own or your favorite—and the costume contest to be staged at our October 12 meeting. Dress up as an author or character and compete for a prize, it’s our Halloween Meeting! And, speaking of unworldly achievement, Cathy Bauer reported that once again her raffle was a financial success with \$147 going into the kitty. Congratulations Cathy.



New Members
Dan Ingerman and Lisa Telford

And Firoozeh Dumas ...

“If you ever find any money, turn it in,” advised Firoozeh Dumas to aspiring writers in the audience. She had just returned \$300, mistakenly left behind in an ATM machine, when an agent called with an offer to publish her memoir, *Funny in Farsi*. Firoozeh regaled us with publication debacles, along with humorous and heartwarming stories of adjusting to Southern California culture upon her arrival from Iran in the 1970s.

Wanting to share the close, extended family that she grew up with, Firoozeh started writing stories for her children when they entered school. After she had written seventy pages, September 11th happened and it became even more important to put a human face on a Middle Eastern family. Unfortunately, when the book was ready for publication, these happy stories were roundly rejected because they did not match how Middle Eastern culture is portrayed in our media. One agent rejected it because there was no oppression.



Firoozeh signing book for Emily Jiang After the Iranian revolution and hostage crisis, her family went through a difficult time as her engineer father struggled to find a job in the face of overt prejudice.

Her agent informed Firoozeh that she would need a quote from a famous

(Continued on page 5)

(Recap from page 4)

person to put on the cover of her book. Not knowing anyone famous, she finally chose Jimmy Carter, because, as she put it, "... he lost his job because of the Iranian situation and so did my father." Even though he had just received the Nobel Peace Prize, he was happy to read the book and signed his quote "Jimmy."

Her parents were not worried about sharing intimate portraits of their family life, but for different reasons. Her mother's English skills did not allow her to read the book and her father didn't think that anyone would read a book that wasn't about the rich or famous. The paperback version has now sold over 75,000 copies and a translation in Iran is being worked on although actual publication could take years.

Firoozeh currently speaks full-time to clubs, schools, and libraries because the urgency of her message in a post-September 11th world is more crucial than ever. *Funny in Farsi* has been added to the California State recommended reading list for 6th-12th grade. When not speaking, she can be found at home with her two children and husband in Palo Alto. UD

Looking for Memories...

Any old documents that may assist in the compilation of the South Bay Branch's history. Anyone having related information: dates, events, people, places, remembered vignettes, please contact Clarence L Hammonds, Club Historian at:

clarencehammonds@juno.com

or see me at the next meeting. Any and everything will be helpful. Thank you.

In My Opinion

NOTHING GOES?

By Andrea Galvacs

The "Anything Goes" ad of the *WritersTalk* newsletter invites readers to submit articles for publication. I've seen only the last three or four issues but the ad appeared in every one of them, and this made me wonder. Most, or many of the newsletter's readers are writers, presumably eager to have their work published yet, nobody submitted anything. Why not?

If asked, people would give all kinds of reasons for not sending anything to *WritersTalk*, such as: they are too busy to even read the newsletter, they've read it but missed the ad, they are busy writing their own projects, they meant to send something but, being so involved with other things, they forgot.

The common denominator here seems to be that people live extremely busy lives. Unfortunately, this is true for most of us, but I would expect that writing is what keeps us busiest of all. After all, writing is what we like to do best and being asked to have our work published should top all our expectations, not to mention inflate our egos.

Of course, there are other reasons too. *WritersTalk* does

not offer any monetary compensation for the submission, not even if it is published. Who cares about money? It's the exposure that counts! Or, perhaps people think that what they wrote is not worthy of publication in *WritersTalk* yet, so they are still working on it. In that case, there is hope!

Whatever the reasons, the space is waiting to be filled and since I listed all the excuses and there are none left, the columns will start pouring in! AG

**HALLOWEEN
ANNOUNCEMENT**

Who is your most beloved author? William Shakespeare? Charles Schulz? Margaret Mitchell?

Your most beloved character? Romeo/Juliet? Snoopy? Scarlett/Rhett?

Dress up as your favorite person, real or imagined, come to the next general meeting and win a prize!

**Wednesday, October 12,
2005, 6:00 p.m.
Lookout Restaurant
605 Macara Ave., Sunnyvale**

Football combines two of the worst things about American life. It's violence punctuated by committee meetings.

-- George Will

Terse Verse
By Pat Bustamante

"Oktoberfest"

October is so sober (for a 'fest)
You'd almost think a "dry state" is
the best.

I drink to thee only with my dotted
i's...

Entering all Fall contests, hopin' Hail!
For the Novelist's First Prize!

This column brings a series of brief grammar lessons by Pat Decker Nipper, a writer, a former English teacher, and a member of CWC...

Nipper's Nits

By Pat Decker Nipper

Lesson 7a. More About Apostrophes

Last month's refresher on apostrophes apparently didn't go quite far enough. Other errors with apostrophes continue to appear. Some people perhaps try too hard to be correct and think they need to add an apostrophe to make 'you' and 'they' possessive. This creates an error, since "your" and "their" are legal words that are already possessive.

Some words require apostrophes to indicate possession, like "John's ugly shirt" and "the writer's inconvenient deadline." However, the words "you're" and "they're" are contractions. "They're" means "they are" and "you're" means "you are."

For example, it is incorrect to say, "Hang up you're clothes," or, "Give them they're grades." Those sentences should read, "Hang up your clothes" and "Give them their grades."

Sometimes simpler is simply more correct.d.

Contact Pat at pat@patdeckernipper.com for comments or questions.



On the Web- by Ro Davis

Published authors need to promote their own work. We keep hearing this new rule of the publishing business. Anny Cleven of Borders (June meeting) taught us how to create a bookstore event. Great-looking promotional materials are a must, as is a press kit and, of course, a website. The Internet offers us an international platform, but how do you set your website apart from the zillions out there and drive your ratings up in the search engines?

A case study: Do a Google search on "Jayne Dennis." I'll wait here. The top hits are 2 fan sites for actress Jayne Dennis. But guess what? Jayne Dennis does not exist, except in the pages of Bret Easton Ellis' new novel *Lunar Park*.

This bit of fiction to sell fiction was cooked up by a media wag at Ellis' US publisher, Alfred A. Knopf. Against the trend, this publisher did allocate

an advertising budget, enough to hire a model, wardrobe, and a photographer. The websites cost them peanuts. What they really did (and this cost them nothing) was get the "aren't we just too clever" word out. They got the word to the Wall St. Journal,

A "fake" website is a clever idea

which is how I heard about this story and the novel it's promoting. It's easy to get a top search engine rank on a unique name or phrase is easy. (Remember, there is no Jayne Dennis, not a famous one anyway.) The hard part is getting people to type in that name or phrase. That's what good old fashioned publicity is for.

A "fake" website is a clever idea, though, one I'm filing away for the day my novel gets out of my computer and into print. Non-fiction books are marketed this way all the time. You lure visitors in with interesting and useful information, which happens to be the subject of your book, available for purchase, step right up. *R/D*

Writers Help'n Writers is a new column devoted to seeking solutions, from the membership at large, to serious questions about writing posed also by a member. In an Issue, this one for starters, the question will be stated. Responses are invited and will be printed in the next issue along with the next question(s). As answers come in to the newsletter editor, they will also be forwarded to the questioner—in real time. Both questions and responses may be addressed to

writerstalk@comcast.net

Please keep questions and answers under 150 wds ; subject, "WHW".

Writers Helpin' Writers

There were no member responses to Meredy's complex question regarding event, scene and character concordance over time within a narrative. Outside of a relational database like "Access", with relationships defined and data points populated, the editor offers this.

First, rely on your brain, the most robust relational db around then assist it with prompts using the tried and true index-card method—I use 5x7s:

Identify scenes and characters. Note each on the top of a card. (You have likely done this with characters already including physical, genealogy, emotional and other descriptors important to the work)

Each time a character is affected (physical, emotional, et. al.) by the story in a way that carries on with him or her through the narrative, jot it down on the respective card, noting the event. And, each time that character is involved in a new event or scene, pull the card to the front and note the character's changes and current condition.

Do the same with scenes as they change: flood recedes, power is lost. Note the change on the scene card and when the scene is revisited, even in dialog, pull the card to the front.

Maybe do a third stack for (important) *things*, i.e. a yellow convertible that is damaged then repaired then painted, goes through several owners.

You may find there are fewer cards than originally imagined and if you are diligent, you wont find your reformed alcoholic enjoying a casual drink with his priest who was also the RA's lover in chapter 5.

Next question, also offered by Meredy Amyx:

How do you show an accent in a character's speech without awkward and tiresome phonetic spellings, unwanted humorous effects, and the risk of insulting readers?

WritersTalk readers: Here is your opportunity. Anyone having a suggestion regarding this question, please respond to *WritersTalk* and your answers will be forwarded to the questioner and printed in the next issue.

And of course new questions are entertained.

(*'W'...from page 3*)

Of course, as a fiction writer I get to send in the cavalry just in the nick of time. After a near death experience or two and a host of emotional issues, here comes our fiction hero to make things right with the world again.

For me, there is nothing better then to slip away into my fictional world where everything will eventually work out just the way I want it to--my characters wouldn't have it any other way. *D!*

826 Valencia's October Seminar

WHAT: Hands-on seminar exploring challenges and joys of writing a novel

WHEN: Sunday, October 16, 2005 from 5-8 PM.

PANELISTS: Andrew Sean Greer, Bharati Mukherjee, Michelle Richmond, Rabih Alameddine, and Stephen Elliott will moderate.

WHERE: 826 Valencia Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.

HOW: Send a check for \$100.00, pay to and mail to "826 Valencia," 826 Valencia St., SF, CA 94110.

Or go to www.826valencia.org/workshops/adult.

Or visit our storefront at 826 Valencia.

826 Valencia, a non-profit, is dedicated to supporting creative writing among students.

Reminder

Protect Your Work In Progress

by Meredy Amyx

In 1835, Thomas Carlyle lent the manuscript of volume 1 of his masterwork, *The French Revolution: A History*, to his friend John Stuart Mill. An illiterate housekeeper mistook the stack of handwritten pages for waste paper and used it as kindling. The sole copy of this product of Carlyle's literary and historical labors was reduced to cinders and ash in the fireplace.

That worthy gentleman steeled himself to the task and set about writing his book all over again.

This story is often told as an object lesson in persistence and determination, in refusing to be defeated by setbacks, in triumphing over obstacles. Carlyle's work was completed a second time and, together with volume 2, was published in 1837 to great acclaim, and his reputation as one of the major writers of Victorian England was secured.

I cite it for another reason entirely, and it is not as a cautionary tale about where you leave your ms. or even about what you might want to tell your domestic staff concerning your work and what rules you might want to make about the use of documents as kindling. Rather, my fellow writers of the twenty-first century, it is for the sake of one word: *backup*.

If the computer is your medium of composition, you must have backup.

Everything electronic is volatile. Anything we can make in this half-imaginary medium of ones and zeroes can be unmade in a nanosecond, and all trace of its existence erased. When we succumb to the seductive convenience of infinitely revisable text with no retying, endless copies without carbon paper (some of us do remember carbon paper!), cosmetic reformatting at a mouse click, and the ability to transmit enormous quantities of text instantaneously, to multiple destinations, without postage or SASEs—not to mention the joyous prospect of seeing published text containing only the modest errors that we ourselves put in—we must also remember the risk we take. Power failure, hardware failure, fire, flood, or a simple brainless keystroke can be enough to vaporize the work of years. Months. Minutes.

Yes, even the work of minutes can be enough of a loss to mourn. If you have just spent two hours crafting a single paragraph that has haunted you for weeks, and you have got it right, so right that you feel blessed by the angels, privileged to have experienced this moment of surpassing lucidity, humbled by the act of bringing

forth one singing sentence of sublime inspiration and breathtaking insight that came from you know not where, the flower of your intelligence and breath of your soul...and then you click 'Close' without saving... well, forgive me if I say this never happened to Jane Austen or Mark Twain or Charles Dickens or Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose solid, real, handwritten and crossed out and corrected manuscripts can be seen under glass in museum collections where no disc of yours or mine will ever reside.

Ask yourself constantly: How much of this do I want to do over?

The answer should always be, "None."

Save, save, save.

But even saving your file as you go, frequently, and always when you leave your desk (even for just a minute), open another file, answer the phone, or otherwise interrupt your process, won't protect you from the aforementioned disasters. For that you need backup. Here are several suggestions for preserving a safe copy of your precious work in progress so that even a large-scale loss such as befell our countrymen in the South—at least one of whom, guaranteed, was working on a manuscript—won't demolish your masterwork or even cost you your momentum on your project:

- 1 Make a duplicate copy of your latest work elsewhere

(Continued on page 9)

Marin Branch Sponsors Editing For Publication

Presented by Charlotte Cook

Sunday, October 16

InnMarin, 250 Entrada Drive, Novato

\$75 for CWC members; \$90 for nonmembers

Refreshments, lunch and handouts included

Limited to 30 attendees

Send check with name, address, phone number and email to:

Mary Jane Essex, Registration Chair

177 Canal St #10, San Rafael CA 94901

For more info, Email: mjessex@msn.com

Wkshop chair: Barbara Truax, CWCMarin@aol.com

Charlotte Cook holds a MFA in creative writing, is published extensively and has been teaching since 1993. As much as 20% of her students have been published, won contests, and found writing work. She is co-founder of KOMENAR Publishing and has been guest speaker at various and many CWC events including the Jack London Writers Conference,

(Protect from page 8)

- on your system.
- 2 Transmit an updated copy of your entire work to someone else in your household or (if your computers are connected) directly store it on his or her system.
- 3 Copy it onto a CD and store in your home.
- 4 Send it electronically to yourself at work.
- 5 Take the CD to work.
- 6 Send it electronically to a trusted friend or family member out of the area (as long as you have no worries about misappropriation of your original work).
- 7 Send the CD to a trusted friend or family member out of the area (same caveat).
- 8 If you've got a really valuable property—say, a contracted-for screenplay of a bestselling novel—don't fool around. Store the CD and a complete printout in a storage locker, bank vault, or other secure facility.
- 9 Print out hard copy of changed files, chapters, complete drafts, or just changed pages (always with current date on them) as often as necessary to be able to reconstruct from paper.

Consider the following additional measures:

- 10 Use more than one backup method; for example, transmitting a copy to someone else at the end of every work session and backing up to CD once a week.
- 11 Perform alternating backups; that is, don't overwrite your latest backup with another backup copy. Use two locations and alternate in case your newest copy is faulty and could destroy a good prior version.
- 12 Keep at least one copy at a physical location other than your own home; for example, at your workplace.
- 13 Whenever you reach a major milestone, complete something you can't bear to lose, or take a little hiatus from your work, perform a duplicate backup at a higher level of security.

Hardware failure and human error are much likelier causes of loss of data than natural disasters, but they are not necessarily more recoverable. It may be easier to extract data from a disc that was sunk under water than from one that suffered a head crash. Even elite data rescue services that charge \$2000 for expert

recovery techniques using special equipment cannot guarantee results, as my son the serious amateur learned to his sorrow when a corrupted disk lost him 6000 photographs taken over a three-year period. He now transfers everything to CD as soon as he uploads his digital images and before he ever begins to sort and edit them.

Inspired by the tragedy in New Orleans, I made my first CD backup of my in-progress novel last week. I had been copying the complete set of files every night to my husband's shared folder over our household LAN, using not two but three alternating folders, and printing out frequently, but this time I put it on CD. Exactly one week later, last night, a power fluctuation caused my hard drive to fail catastrophically. The whole computer is a goner, flat dead, and I now have a new one on order from Dell. Luckily I have my traveling laptop—a system redundancy that has saved me more than once—and all I had to do was pop my CD in. I'm back in business.

But—I lost a week's worth of work. Got lazy and didn't do a daily backup. Didn't print out my most recently changed files because I was in the midst of a lot of revisions and wanted to wait. And there was this one paragraph that I'd worked so hard on, a paragraph that—well, I'll spare you that personal tragedy, but the more I think about it, the better I think it was.

How much of this do I want to do over? Not any.

If Carlyle had had the choice, I know he'd have said the same thing. *MA*

Retraction

In last month's issue, the poem below was inadvertently attributed to Carolyn Downey, and should have been attributed to Carolyn Donnell. WritersTalk apologizes for this error.

Take a Nap — Carolyn Donnell

Kitty Cat
curled up
sleeping
in the sun
in my favorite chair
in a box
anywhere

Her answer to all life's problems

Take a nap.

YOUR CWC MEMBERSHIP

Thoughts from Diana Richomme,
Membership Chair

Acknowledge Your Accomplishments

What's your latest project or accomplishment? Tell us and you may be eligible for a membership upgrade.

If you're currently a *supporting* member, you can become an *associate* by enrolling in a writing class, joining a critique group, submitting your work to a publisher, or working on a project.

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Membership upgrade forms are available at the meeting registration desk or you can send a request to membership@southbaywriters.com. The membership review board will read your work and determine qualification for the category you are seeking. We also enjoy reading your submissions. It helps us understand our members' goals and interests so we can bring in speakers whose knowledge will cultivate your writing career. DR

(Penny Nelson from page 1)

Penny's career has followed a circuitous route beginning in Portland Oregon, where as a young girl she had a keen interest in exotic animals. At twelve, she worked in the Portland Zoo and later majored in anthropology and international studies at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota. Penny continued her interest in animals, studying bats in the tropics for the Smithsonian Institute, and doing research for universities.

When a project in Philadelphia ended, she began making plans to return to Portland. Then a friend of her field partner, who worked in public radio, told her, "You are a complete radio person. Come to the station. I sure you'll have a job in six months." As a lark, she tried it. Loved it. And six months later, she was working as a researcher at WHYI. She worked on Fresh Air With Terry Gross, and quickly ascended the ladder until she became a program host. Then her husband's job at Stanford brought her to the Bay Area and work at KQED.

Since then, Penny has interviewed people in all walks of life—politicians, actors, scientists, but prefers writers. "I'm such a dilettante," she said. When she took the position as an agent, it was her goal to spend more time with authors and less time in radio.

"That hasn't completely happened," laughs Penny, in an interview on her cell phone. "I was working in San Francisco at 4 o'clock this morning." Penny credits her career successes to a fervent curiosity about life. "This especially makes you fit for publishing," she said. She loves that she can represent books on a variety of topics from baseball, the art of poetry to the women of Afghanistan.

Among her current clients are Pulitzer-prize winning journalist Paul Watson, and Debra Fine, the author of *The Fine Art of Small Talk*.

Join us at the next CWC meeting when Penny Nelson discusses how to hook an agent and get published.

Lookout Bar & Grill
605 Macara Ave., Sunnyvale
(Sunnyvale Golf Course)

6 PM, Wed., Oct. 12

Members \$15, Guests \$18 (includes Dinner)

The brain is a wonderful organ; it starts working the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get to the office.

-- Robert Frost

THREE WAY MIRROR

by Juliana Richmond

There are many things one must get used to as one ages. Most of them have been chronicled in one way or another, but each person experiences his or her disintegration in his own individual way.

I, for instance and not uniquely, have been looking for several years now and seeing my mother look solemnly back at me, as though in silent reproach that I should have come to such a state so early. In fact, I can remember my mother saying to me one day when I went to visit her in a nursing home (she was in her early nineties then). “It makes me sad to see you.”

Startled, for she always seemed happy to have me visit, I said, “Sad, Mother—why?”

“It makes me sad to see you looking so old.” I laughed and made some dismissive remark, but you can see the conversation stayed with me. Now I know what she meant, for I see my own daughters developing a wrinkle, a gray hair showing or an extra pound on their slim figures, and I know the feeling. It’s not that I begrudge them the pleasure of aging: I begrudge the fact of mine. I lie about their ages, not mine these days.

Last week, I went through one of those milestones that happen yearly, a birthday. No matter how often I say “no more birthdays” somehow they roll around with depressing regularity. In fact, if one got ignored, I would be hurt. And no matter how often I say I don’t feel a day older, I do. Well maybe not a day, but in five-year increments I see changes.

My skin, for instance, once a smooth unblemished blessing, is now my weakest organ. It develops small cancers that need to be excised; it is constantly in need of checking by a dermatologist so that small pre-cancerous bumps can be frozen off. Of course, it wrinkles but that goes with the territory. What I have tried to talk it out of doing, to no avail, is bruising—the slightest brush against a door jamb, or even a tussle opening a package can produce an ugly blue welt that make me look like a battered wife. Or it tears, great three-cornered flaps of skin that the merest contact with a hard object can produce. Fortunately, I have a blood condition (also brought on by aging) that makes clotting really easy so a band-aid usually is sufficient treatment.

Enough of skin. Let’s talk about balance. That’s an insidious loss that comes about so suddenly, you don’t realize it until you’re grabbing balustrades to go down even the easiest stairs, doing impromptu little

jigging steps to recover a balance you didn’t even know you’d lost, or coyly saying to your escort “May I take your arm?” while you try to match his stride in your highest heels, a mere two inches in elevation. I look at women dancing in 3 1/2 inch heels now and wonder how they do it, hardly believing I used to do the same.

Memory is another thing that becomes more tenuous. I’ve always had trouble recalling some names, but now nouns have fallen into the name category. And yet I can come up with an obscure Latin name for a plant I learned fifty years ago without volition. It’s a common enough phenomenon: I don’t pretend to be precocious with my memory failings. There is hope, however. Bert and I are in a memory study program, which requires us to take four large capsules a day of an herb called citicoline. This will continue through the month of August, and I’m hoping by that time he will be remembering daily to close the screen door when he goes outside! I wonder what he’s hoping I won’t keep forgetting.

But some things don’t change. I still love pretty clothes, for instance, and love to shop for new ones. There is always some latent hope that a new outfit will prove to be *the* magical one that will transform me into my younger self: will make me slim and confident and, if not irresistible, at least an object of admiration. I look at the acquisition of new clothing these days as somewhat akin to slaying a dragon in its den. I must run the gauntlet to obtain the prize and fight many battles to slay the dragon guarding the door to youth and beauty. There are certain proscribed steps along the way.

The first is getting in the mood. Shopping is not to be undertaken with a heavy heart, or out of a sense of need, though a slight purpose in the form of an item I could really *use* can be a pusher; a justification for what I know is a self-centered venture. It is an adventure, usually preceded with me at least by a *1/2 off sale* ad in the local paper. An ad like that, read under the proper conditions is like the smell of smoke to a fire horse for me. Who knows what tremendous and irresistible bargain I will find?

The next step, taken after entering the shop, is to find something with sleeves. This is a recent requirement, but my arms need covering these days. It’s a discouraging task, for most of the clothing which does not look like it came from a Lane Bryant

(Continued on page 12)

(Mirror from page 11)

catalog, belongs to the teen age set, or a buyer who spends hours at the gym each day developing strong, flat abs. A dress with an ill defined waistline, and sleeves, and the right color might be a keeper and like a hunter who senses the presence of game and presses on, I keep looking, finally finding a number of possibilities, which have been magically transferred by a pleasant young, slim clerk to a dressing room. Finally, I am ready for the final battle with the dragon—rying on the garments.

This step is the true battle with the beast, cleverly disguised as a three-way mirror, surely the cruellest invention ever foisted on the female sex. Any illusions I have brought into this den are immediately vanquished. There is nowhere I can hide. Front, side, back, no matter which view I examine there is a flaw. How can I be so flat in the rear, so amply padded in front? Shouldn't there be an adjustment here? I've weighed the same since I was in college, but the two inches of height I've lost have merely shortened the distance between collarbone and hips. Where did my waist go? And why does my memory suddenly dredge up a nickname "square bottom" my brother used to tease me with? Why didn't I at least wear shoes with a little heel? Or a girdle? And does my hair always look so blah in the back? The salesgirl knocks gently. "Are you getting along all right in there?" she calls sweetly, and I just as sweetly assure her that I'm just fine. The pile of garments I've discarded grows larger. I haven't the heart to even hang them neatly on their hangars. But, if I'm lucky, there will be one or maybe two untried garments that show distinct possibilities: a top that hits me just right, or a pair of slacks that looks o.k. front on; never mind that it is six inches too long. Suddenly, I'm mixing and matching them in my mind with items hanging in my closet at home, envisioning a necklace with the top or a pair of shoes that will go with the pants. And the price is right! How can I afford not to buy them?

I have not quite vanquished the dragon that lives in the three-way mirror but he is tamed for the moment. There is a way to postpone this battle for another day if I change my mind at home.

"What is your return policy?" I say casually to the clerk as she wraps the garments, "just in case these colors don't work at home?"

But I know they will, and my heart is lifting as I exit the store. √R

JACK LONDON 1897-1902

By Clarence L. Hammonds (*Historian*)

1897

Jack London in a summer month, ninety-seven, He, his brother-in-law Shepard, not to get even, Sailed to join the Yukon Klondike Gold Rush. Here, success of stories was written, no mush While in the Klondike, his health deteriorated. He drank whiskey, ate a meal only if interested. He had scurvy. But his four front teeth, he lost. So he recovered through a Jesuit priest, no cost. Klondike hardships, he wrote *To Build a Fire*, His best short story, a thing one could admire. The story was published in '02 and later in '08. In the story he saw the man as himself, as fate

1898

There were other stories from the Klondike too He left Oakland believing in a work ethic, true. He was active in Socialism, going for education. He hoped to escape the work trap, his situation A way out of poverty was writing as a business, To beat the wealthy at their own game. A mess? Back to Oakland; get into print; struggle to win. This struggle is told in his novel, *Martin Eden* His first published story, *To the Man on Trail*, Was fine, five dollars was offered for its sale. The magazine was slow paying; he almost quit. *A Thousand Deaths*, so forty dollars was a hit.

1900

London was favored by circumstances of writing. There was a new know-how, in magazine printing; Low cost production, a market for short fiction. It meant more writing, London went into action. It was nineteen hundred; he did it good and great. With two thousand five hundred dollars, no wait. Lots of money then, Jack London was on his way. He sold stories to many magazines, and no delay. *The Call of The Wild*, was a very lengthy story, About Buck, a St. Bernard/Collie dog, his glory. Buck, sold more than once, then to a good man He watched this man die. Buck, a *devoted!* Fan.

Announcements Announcements Announcements

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-- Dorothy Parker



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**General Membership Meeting—2nd Wednesday
At**

**LookOut Restaurant
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(Sunnyvale Golfcourse)**

See Map Below

SAVE THESE DATES

Board of Directors
Oct 5, 7p, Richomme's

General Meeting
Oct 12, 6p
Lookout Restaurant

Open Mic
Oct 7, 7p
Borders, Los Gatos
Oct 21 7p
B&N in the Pruneyard

WritersTalk Deadline
Oct 16 to an editor

Editors Pow Wow
Oct 24, 7:30pm
Orchard Valley Coffee

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