



# WRITERSTALK

Volume 15  
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Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

California Writers Club  
South Bay Branch

## HOLIDAY BASH

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2007 6-9 PM

(There is no December General Meeting)

### POTLUCK DINNER

Please bring a dish according to your last name:

A-H Dessert or Appetizer

I-R Main Dish

S-Z Salad or Side Dish

Club will provide beverages.

### GIFT EXCHANGE

Please bring a gift for the exchange in the **\$10** range.



## What's Your Shingle?

### November Meeting Recap

by Carolyn Donnell

Our speakers for the evening were Michael Larsen and Elizabeth Pomada. They came all the way from San Francisco to tell us how to make big money, a phrase that caught everyone's attention. Michael's first words were: "Does anyone know what a shingle is? As in 'Hang out your shingle?'" Hang out a shingle. Hang up a sign. Open for business. Their shingle, Larsen-Pomada Literary Agents, has been out since 1972, and they are Northern California's oldest literary agency, helping writers launch careers for 35 years. See their web site at [www.larsenpomada.com](http://www.larsenpomada.com).

Michael continued by saying that the cover page of your book is your shingle. It is the first thing readers will see. Make sure it is attractive and appropriate.

He quoted a few not-so-good shingles or signs.

- Maternity Ward—No children allowed.
- Mortuary—Layaway plan available.



**Elizabeth Pomada**

Michael and Elizabeth reiterated that although now is the best time to be a writer, competition is fierce. TV, movies, computer games, and more writers than ever are competing for the reader's time

and attention. You must be dedicated to your career.

Somerset Maugham once said, "There are three rules for writing a novel. Unfortunately, no one knows what they are."

*Continued on page 4*

# President's Prowling

by Dave LaRoche  
President, South Bay Writers

## Reminders

While I was browsing an old issue of *Writer's Digest* this morning, an article teased out my interest. It pointed to things we already know, but the reminders were refreshing. Below is a bit of what we *already know*.



A novel, even a short story, my favorite medium, is sometimes overwhelming and even with the right tools is hard to get started. It's a big job beginning a piece, and the "beginning," in itself, can be daunting. The solution—divide and conquer. Break the work up into manageable pieces and lessen the challenge. Develop one character, describe one scene, conjure one thread of the plot; *then* come back for the next one of the many.

Be willing to experiment. If a scene isn't working, change it. If your character isn't behaving, redefine him . . . or her. Give your imagination rein—let it go. Try several approaches until you discover the right one; and, even if you think you have nailed it, give "plan B" a go.

Okay, everyone says "know your characters," and who's ready to take issue with that? But spelling out their hair color and medical legacy on a form is not what is meant. What *is* meant is live with them, get personal, know what they think. I invite mine out for a walk in the mornings, engage them in conversation, hear their views and let them stew over my counterpoint. I must remain on the lookout for the guys in white suits, but when it's over, I do know my characters.

Get to the point. You're writing about something; get to it. Avoid convoluted complexities, pre-empting descriptions, that controlling omniscient voice that must peek into all corners. Forget big introductions, unnecessary backstory—don't gild the lily, just get to the point. And this is often helpful: remember that most readers have been around the block.

Doing is much better than thinking about doing. It's more gratifying, more fun, more guiltless, more heroic, more celebratory—and it sometimes pays money.

Keep your writing simple. Use conveyable language and punctuate appropriately. Try one idea per sentence. This doesn't mean "Dick and Jane"; it means cogent, succinct, understandable construction, even if your ideas are complex.

Give yourself permission to rewrite. It's okay to be eluded by "perfect" the first time around. I'm guilty. I like perfect and have big trouble with this off-the-wall thirty-day novel business, but I do like to rewrite because genius is not in attendance all the time and I want to give it a chance to arrive. Do your best and prepare to do better the next time your savant cycles through.

Well, I'm afraid I went afield of the original article but "prowling" is good fun, and, I've found, quite difficult to contain. **WT**

## Inside

President's Prowling 2  
Editor's Perspective 3  
On Critique Groups 5  
Vicki Burlew Wins  
    Jack London Award 5  
The Business of Writing 6  
Accolades 6  
Interview with Reese Erlich 7  
A Month Outside of Time 8  
Fellowship Grants 9  
NaNoWriMo Continues 9

Are You Now or Will You Ever Be a  
    Superior Parent? 10  
Cop Talk 10  
Christmas at Auchard's 11  
New Members 11  
Nipper's Nits 11  
Cleaning House with Zora 12  
Alice Sebold in Conversation with Kate  
    Evans: Creative Minds 14  
Special Poetry Section 15

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— 0 —

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### Join With Us

We have a membership category that fits you. Dues are \$45 per year plus a one-time \$20 initiation fee. Contact the Membership Chair, Marjorie Johnson.



## WRITERSTALK

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### Submissions

Members of the South Bay Writers Club are encouraged to submit their creative works for publication in *WritersTalk*. Suggested word limits are not absolute; query the editor. Electronic submissions should be text or attached MS Word file sent to newsletter@southbaywriters.com; or mail double-spaced, typewritten copy to

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### Guest Columns

*Almost Anything Goes* (400 words)

### News Items (400 words)

### Letters to the Editor (300 words)

to Andrea Galvacs  
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### Creative Works

Short Fiction (1800 words)  
Memoir (1200 words)  
Poetry (300 words)  
Essay (900 words)

### Announcements and Advertisements

newsletter@southbaywriters.com

An announcement is information of interest and value to writers that does not provide direct economic benefit to its originator. Announcements are published free of charge.

Advertising is accepted on the basis of its interest and value to writers. Advertising rates for Club members, \$7 per column inch; non-members, \$10. We will assist or insist with layout.

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## Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx  
Editor

### Together for the holidays



This is a full issue—full of news about writing and writers, activities within the club, and SBW members' creative works. Contributions in response to the last issue's humor theme were so abundant that I had to carry several items over to this month; in particular, Marjorie Johnson's short story "Cleaning House with Zora." In this issue, I am pleased to bring you yet another talent within our group: Betty Auchard provided the illustration for "Zora." Toward the back of this issue you'll find a special poetry section, which includes Stephen Wetlesen's fascinating "Shoreglitter." My compliments and thanks to all of you who are willing to share your work through *WritersTalk*, and to the contributing editors, who continue to fulfill their assignments quietly, competently, and unflinchingly.

Because there will be no general meeting in either December or January, and the Open Mic schedule is cut back in December, *WritersTalk* will be the common thread that links us together during these two months. I encourage you to make use of it lavishly, with your creative works as well as your thoughts and reflections about your art and craft. I don't feel bound by the suggested word limits. I'd particularly like to publish longer pieces (short fiction is my area of special interest, so I admit to a certain bias there), letting common sense be the guide for length.

At the October general meeting quite a number of people announced that they had novels in progress, about to be sent off, out gathering rejection slips, in search of an agent, or awaiting publication. I think it would be splendid if you novelists would make use of *WritersTalk* to test-market your writing as Michael Larsen and Elizabeth Pomada suggested in their talk at the November meeting (see page 4, bottom of the middle column). Excerpts in the 2,000–5,000 word range would work just fine.

There's no theme for January, but if you need a tickler to get started, let me offer a suggestion: take some trivial event in your life and use it as a germ for a story. For example, once when driving through downtown San Jose I saw an old man standing barefoot on a corner with a pair of shoes whose laces were tied together hanging around his shoulders like a shawl. Wait a minute—forget that. I may want to use it myself one of these days.

On another occasion, I found an empty plastic bottle labeled "Holy Water" in a supermarket parking lot. Coming from a Protestant background, I never would have guessed that holy water was available in half-pint plastic bottles. I was so fascinated by that find that I did some research on holy water, which led to my reading some of the journals of St. Teresa of Ávila, and, ultimately, an experimental short story. Unfortunately, the experiment was not the success I'd hoped it would be, but that trifling experience did lead to some writing, and I can always go back and try again.

If you can't bring a trivial event to mind, then, considering the time of year, how about new beginnings, resolves, or some event that changed the direction of your life? It seems to me that virtually everyone I know has encountered an awakening or circumstance that has jarred them out of their comfortable existence and forced change upon them. How about you? Such an experience could be the basis for memoir or verse, article or essay, flash fiction or novel.

I'll be at the Holiday Bash and hope to see you there. I've attended the last two as Meredy's guest and can attest that it's a great opportunity to enjoy food and fellowship with the members of SBW. This year I'll attend as a member. If you can't make the Holiday Bash, please do take time out from working on your contribution for the next *WritersTalk* to enjoy the holiday season. **WT**

Larsen and Pomada try to offer more help than that, starting with the six golden rules of writing:

“Read, read, read and write, write, write” (novelist Ernest Gaines).

Read what you love to read. Write what you love to read. Ask yourself: how do writers do what they do? A critique group can double its value by adding reading. Read a top-selling book and discuss the writer's methods and techniques.

### Understand how publishers work.

Know that it takes eighteen to twenty-four months from the time your book is accepted until it hits the shelves. Your idea, then, must be able to live for at least two years. About 80 percent of all books sold come from just six publishing conglomerates. Known as the Six Sisters, all are headquartered in New York City, but corporations based in Munich, London, or Sydney own four of them.

1. Random House, Inc. a division of Bertelsmann AG (a German corporation)
2. The Penguin Group, owned by Pearson (United Kingdom)
3. Harper Collins, a subsidiary of News Corporation Limited (Australia)
4. Holtzbrinck Publishing Holdings, (Germany)
5. Time Warner Book Group, Inc., owned by Lagardère SCA (a French corporation)
6. Simon & Schuster, Inc., a publishing arm of Viacom (United States).

A seventh biggie is Disney Publishing Worldwide (United States).

See [rickfrishmanblog.com/?m=200706](http://rickfrishmanblog.com/?m=200706) for a more complete explanation.

### Become an Authorpreneur

Michael and Elizabeth kept repeating the term “authorpreneur”. What is an authorpreneur? It is someone who makes a living by coming up with ideas and selling them in as many media as possible.

**Set your goals.** A high goal restricts the writer. You have to earn money. The silver lining for the lower goal is more freedom. If you don't need the money so much, you can write what you want. Be ready to do what it takes.

- “How much did you sell last year?” Writer: “I sold my house, my car, my Rolex, ...”.
- In Elmore Leonard's novel, *Get Shorty*, an aspiring writer asks a Hollywood producer what kind of writing makes the most money. The producer replies: “Ransom notes.”

**Embrace new technology.** Use computers and email lists to build interest. Email blasts, web pages, blogs, and podcasting are supplanting physical advertising. Online publication is increasing too.

**Practice niche-craft.** Find your niche. You can have more than one, but do them one at a time.

**Practice “Guerrilla Marketing.”** Create a market for yourself by building a series. Yin is the art of writing, the flow of the words, creative force. Yang is everything else. Books are sold today in more than just bookstores. Wal\*Mart, Target, Costco, drug-stores, garden shops, pet stores, and airports are just a few of the other book outlets; don't forget online publications.



Michael Larsen

**Develop your craft.** The steps to success are read, research, write, rewrite, and find a good agent/publisher.

**Build your networks.** Family, friends, groups, classes, at work, online. SBW is a great place to start. Critique groups, websites, and blogs can also spread the word.

**Publicize yourself.** Give talks. Join Toastmasters or National Speakers Association, etc., if you are microphone shy. Think about TV/radio interviews and bookstore presentations (don't forget the independent bookstores). Build a national platform that lists everything you have done.

**Test the market.** Self-publishing can be a start, or write a chapter at a time on your webpage or blog and build your reader base a little at a time. Spread your reputation by word of mouth (or word of mouse!). Google yourself. No, this is not an X-rated newsletter. Entering your name in a Google search will give you some indication of your visibility.

**Find an agent/publisher.** Find an agent who really believes in your book and also one who cultivates personal relationships with editors. Elizabeth rattled off several names at various publishing houses faster than anyone could write them down. Do your research.

- I'm not talking about a lifetime commitment. I'm just talking about marriage.
- One cannibal says, “You know, I don't like your publisher.” “Okay,” the other cannibal says, “then just eat the noodles.”

Make your query letter or proposal enticing and irresistible. Irresistible is a word emphasized both in their talk and on their web site. They want to be moved, entertained, and excited.

“Make me cry,” says Elizabeth. Her credo: “A novel begins when I can't put it down.”

Some query letter don'ts:

- Cutesy letter with the drawing of a shoe. “Now that I have one foot in the door ....”
- Dear Ruth. Her name is Elizabeth. Get the names and titles straight!
- Compare oneself to Shakespeare.

Above all, they say to believe in yourself. Have faith. Be passionate. Persevere. Luck is defined as ability meeting opportunity.

Elizabeth represents commercial and literary fiction plus narrative non-fiction, and Michael handles nonfiction. Elizabeth says they will help with editing and revision if they feel a book has potential for their markets.

Larsen-Pomada Literary Agents  
1029 Jones Street  
San Francisco, California 94109  
(415) 673-0939

By Appointment Only: Monday through Thursday, 10:00 am to 5:00 pm, Pacific Time.

Members of the Association of Authors' Representatives, they are also the co-founders of the “San Francisco Writers” and “Writing for Change” conferences. Elizabeth belongs to the American Society of Journalists and Authors.

Go to [www.larsen-pomada.com/](http://www.larsen-pomada.com/) for submission guidelines, tips, and resources.

# On Critique Groups

by G Wayne Dow

Have you ever felt that critique groups are like this?

"What's your name, Mister?"

"Sir! Dow, Sir! G Wayne...Sir!"

"G Wayne? Did you say your name is G Wayne?"

"Sir! Yes Sir!"

"People named G Wayne either screw up verb tenses, or dangle participles. Are you a participle dangler, G Wayne?"

"Sir! No Sir!"

"You disgust me. What are you doing here anyway...G Wayne?"

"Sir, I am here to quickly learn fiction writing, Sir."

"I knew it. You're a damn infinitive splitter. I hate infinitive splitters. You know what we do to infinitive splitters here, G Wayne?"

"Sir! No Sir!"

"We don't bother to read their submissions. Do you want your manuscript to go into a big pile and ROT?"

"Sir! No Sir!"

"You get that pen down and give me ten minutes of whatever comes into your head!"

"Sir! Yes Sir!"

"On the double, Dow!"

"Sir! Yes Sir! What do I write about? I don't know. It was the best of times, the

good is oft interred with their bones, there once was a man from Nantucket. Oh my god, what am I going to write?"

"G Wayne, you're writing too slow. Faster, Dow, on the double! Move, move, move that pen. Dig deeper! Faster! Faster!"

"Sir, Yes Sir!"

It can be scary to let a group of people go through those golden words that came from your heart and point out their faults. I remember, before my first critique group meeting, I was scared to death. I thought these people would rip up my work, smash my ego, and leave me bleeding in the street. To my surprise, it was nothing like that at all. The people in the group were honest and helpful, but yet caring. At the first meeting a bond began to form and I am now proud to be a member of that group called Bill's Garage.

This does not just happen. For a critique group to function properly, the group members should be interested in the genre in which the other members are working. It also helps if the group members are at the same level of ability. The one thing that is most important is the attitude of individual members. Each member should be ready to provide concise and honest advice in a compassionate manner.

As a critique group organizer, I will attempt to help you find a group that is well suited to your needs. The rest is up to you. You can contact me at [gwdow@thepurestform.com](mailto:gwdow@thepurestform.com) or (408) 736-3044. **WT**

# Vicki Burlew Wins Jack London Award

by Bill Baldwin



Vicki Burlew receives her Jack London award. Vicki, Dave La Roche, Bill Baldwin.

Victoria J. Burlew has exhibited dedication above and beyond all required duty. In her role as South Bay Branch treasurer, she streamlined and improved our finance tracking and set a shining example of providing model quarterly reports to the CWC Central Board. In her role as East of Eden Conference treasurer she labored with great devotion and a selfless sense of service to ensure the success of the East of Eden conferences. She has performed these services in the face of personal hardship and near exhaustion. She has, time and again, given her all for the branch. Her example is an inspiration to the members of the South Bay Branch. We look to her with thanks and admiration. We are proud to name her our 2007 Jack London Award winner. **WT**

A similar talk is at [www.bksp.org/secondarypages/articles/agentseditors/MLason1.htm](http://www.bksp.org/secondarypages/articles/agentseditors/MLason1.htm)

## Business

President Dave LaRoche opened the November 14 SBW meeting with announcements from the podium.

- Dave introduced Gary Dow, who has offered to help with critique group advice.
- Alexander Leon—VP/Programs—announced the workshop with Martha Alderson, Blockbuster Plots for January 27, 2008.
- Edie Matthews—Holiday Bash—

Betty Auchard's home, December 12.

- Bill Baldwin talked about Open Mic.
- SBW member Vicki Burlew received the CWC Jack London award.
- Cathy Bauer tempted us with melt-in-your-mouth mints or nuts for the nutty raffle prizes. I'm happy with her brownies. Maybe she should raffle those. Alex kept winning the raffle, but was allowed to choose only one prize.
- New members introduced themselves and all told of their latest achievements. (See "New Members" and "Accolades.") **WT**

## Haiku (with pervasive W's)

War Worn Weary World  
raining tears remembering  
White Winter Weeping

—Sally A. Milnor



## Dec. Decision

Deciding to stay warm and merry:  
No complaining, no words contrary.  
This may last for a month and a day.  
At least til New Year's vows go astray!

—Pat Bustamante

# The Business of Writing

by Suzy Paluzzi

## Paths to Publication: Part III: Getting Published

Getting published is very difficult, but possible. A prior article in this series was devoted to self-publishing. There are many resources available to guide writers through the maze of submitting query letters and proposals to editors and agents. *Writer's Market* is one of several books that have been mentioned by speakers at the SBW monthly meetings. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Getting Published* was also brought to my attention recently by a CWC member. So, rather than summarize the steps involved in the process, I am going to share some publishing experiences with you.

In September at the annual California Poets Festival, sponsored by the Poetry Center San Jose and organized by Sally Ashton, there was a room of small press representatives. The publishers at each table were more encouraging and receptive than I expected. Two of the presses were Bear Star Press and Chatoyant Literature and Arts. I have yet to submit my work.

Regarding small presses, I have heard several stories from authors whom I interviewed that the particular press they were working with folded before their book was released. However, Kate Evans, who writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, had just the opposite experience. "My poetry collection, *Like All We Love*, was accepted by a then fledgling press up in Portland. A friend had heard about this press starting up, so I sent them an email. To my pleasant surprise, they wanted to publish my book. Many of the poems had been previously published in magazines, so I'm sure that helped. Still, a lot of it did amount to being in the right place at the right time," Evans said.

So, the theory is, if you have already been published in journals or elsewhere,

# Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

I missed November's SBW meeting (anybody miss me?) but the WT staff filled in—we do have a great editing team. There is nothing better than working with a group that has synergy and creativity. Not to mention the fun.



Jackie Mutz  
Contributing Editor

It was a busy month for visitors and members alike. Some news may be familiar but the success stories are still unfolding.

- Valerie Wong said her Vancouver book launch of *The Jade Rubies* turned out extremely well. The location and even the weather helped to make it a success.
- Pat Kaspar, a tech writer/editor at NASA Ames for 25 years, edited and formatted the book *2012 and The Ring of Light—When Mankind Finally Grows Up* for her sister, Nancy Shaffron (publisher Author House). A daunting project, it is now available on the Amazon and Barnes & Noble Web sites.

you have a fighting chance. Kate Evans, for example, has had "stories, essays and poems ... published in more than 40 magazines." And she has credentials such as teaching creative writing at San Jose State University and being co-director of the Center for Literary Arts there.

Sometimes it is how we explore the option of being published that works. Margaret Abruzzi told the story that her work was solicited for an anthology because a friend in her critique group offered the publisher Margaret's name. And Kate Evans's book *Negotiating the Self* was originally her dissertation at the University of Washington.

Kate Evans offers some advice. "Something I have been doing in my downtime is trolling the internet for good markets for pieces I have already written. [She is currently working on a novel.] For example, I found this site for *Fifteen Paying Markets for Personal Essays*

- Donna Fujimoto has sold a teen science-fiction short story to an online magazine. Title and publication date to be announced.
- Dale Aycock has published *Starspinner II: Last Man Standing*, the sequel to *Starspinner*. She also has tips for writers. Check it out at [www.dalesbooks.com](http://www.dalesbooks.com).
- Please be sure to tune in and watch author Robert Balmanno talk about his first published novel, *September Snow*, on Sunday, December 16, at 3 p.m. on the Bay Area Vista program on NBC Channel 11. For more information call Bob Balmanno at 408-245-8058 or look on the author's website: [www.blessingsofgaia.com](http://www.blessingsofgaia.com).
- Marsha Brandsdorfer is using a print-on-demand company called Xlibris to self-publish her memoir *The Accidental Secretary*. Check out her website at [www.accidentalsecretary.com](http://www.accidentalsecretary.com) to find out more about this intriguing book.
- Marjorie Johnson announced that she has sold more than 100 copies of her novel *Bird Watcher*.
- Stephen Wetlesen has collaborated with a local watercolor painter to create a poetic work to accompany a

*Continued on page 7*

*and Life Stories*. <http://www.writing-world.com/creative/fifteen.shtml>. *Poets & Writers Magazine* and online <http://www.pw.org/> always has a list of journals that are actively accepting submissions."

Evans adds, "Consider alternative ways to 'public' your work. Go read at public open mics. Consider keeping a blog to 'publish' something you write whenever you feel like it, as I do with my blog [www.beingandwriting.blogspot.com](http://www.beingandwriting.blogspot.com)." She concludes, "If you are looking for an agent, a great site is [www.agentquery.com](http://www.agentquery.com)."

Getting a book published is not impossible. One refrain I heard from the authors I have interviewed is not to focus on the actual publication of the piece, but on the writing. And, I would add, it is important to put your work out there!

Happy Holidays! WT

# Interview with Reese Erlich

by Sarah Bobson

Freelance journalist Reese Erlich spoke at our September 12<sup>th</sup> meeting about how he researches his assignments and how he holds the reader's interest. As an ex-California journalist, I wanted to know more behind-the-scenes information from a reporter who's gathered stories from more than 90 countries. Mr. Erlich, author of *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn't Tell You*, and *The Iran Agenda: The Real Story of U.S. Policy and the Middle East*, graciously agreed to take time out of his busy schedule for a telephone interview.

I asked how Mr. Erlich handles health-related issues while hopping around the globe, often to third-world countries.

"I've been relatively fortunate in that I've never gotten malaria. I've never had a serious accident. People think, you're a foreign correspondent, aren't you worried about getting shot at, or blown up in a terrorist bombing? I'm more worried about being in a serious traffic accident."

What about reporting from war zones? "I don't go to places where there are active wars, or civil wars, where it's too dangerous. For example, I would not go to Southern Iraq right now, below the Kurdish region. I didn't go to Lebanon in the eighties while the war was going on. The danger of either getting killed outright or getting kidnapped is too great. As a freelancer, I don't have the resources to hire lots of armed body-

guards and armored vehicles, and stay in a fortified bunker like the few remaining Western reporters in Bagdad. I will go to areas where there's conflict, where there's government repression, but that's different. I try to go to countries that have either had some major upheaval and have been largely forgotten about, or to places that might be headed for some kind of conflict in the future. For example, I visited Panama not too long after the U.S. invasion, although the publicity had mostly died down, just to see the impact on the people. I visited Eastern Europe after the fall of the old regimes in the early nineties, which was a fascinating time to go, to see what the future had in store. And, of course, I was in Iraq at the end of 2002, just before the U.S. invaded."

For those occasions when he might need medical attention, Mr. Erlich said he will check into a five-star hotel. "You'll immediately have contact with the best doctors, clinics, and hospitals."

Although Mr. Erlich usually writes about political and economic stories, he says he tries to write at least one cultural-related story. He traveled with Sean Penn to the Middle East and wrote about the film industry in Iran. He writes about music, film, and theater, and writes "Jazz Perspectives," which is featured regularly on National Public Radio stations around the country. He just interviewed Joni Mitchell about a new CD she has coming out, a new film of a ballet for which she wrote the music, and a new art exhibit.

I was curious about the friendships Mr. Erlich forms as he travels all over the

world. He said that email makes it easy to stay connected, and that almost every country provides Internet access. "At least once or twice a day, I'll get email from people I stay in touch with in various parts of the world." Some people extend a more hospitable hand. "If you meet someone, for example, from Turkey who's visiting Paris and they say, 'Oh, you have to come and visit me some time,' I warn them, 'Don't make that invitation too lightly because I'm the one person in one hundred who will actually take you up on the offer.' And I do."

Still, war-torn areas can pose a problem. "I tried to stay in touch with some people in Iraq," he said. "I don't know if they died or left the country. It's so chaotic over there you just don't know why you don't hear from someone there. I'm very concerned about a couple of people that I became very good friends with."

Other countries pose a particular challenge. "I had a friend in Cuba who I visited many times in his apartment. On my last trip, I called. The phone was out of order, but that could just mean the lines are bad. I finally went over to his apartment, and the neighbors said he had moved to the U.S., to Buffalo. From Cuba to Buffalo, that's quite a shock. He shuffled off to Buffalo. I tried to find him there, but I haven't been successful."

During his SBW presentation, Mr. Erlich talked about "fighting the good fight" through journalism. I asked him if he ever gets discouraged when he tries to help people, but things don't turn out as he would like them to.

"I'm generally an optimist, a sober optimist, who doesn't look at things through rose-colored glasses. I was in Thailand and heard a story about Burmese refugees working in Thailand and being exploited by local Thai business people. I went up to Maesot, in the north of Thailand, very near the Burmese border. There was a shoe factory making shoes for Reebok. They were paying the workers roughly half the wages they would have paid Thai workers. It was illegal, even under Thai law. I dug out the story, got the facts, then came back here and called up Reebok. They claimed they didn't know

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*Accolades, continued from page 6*

- Christmas train painting that will both adorn a South Bay residence and form the basis for a personalized Christmas card.
- Jean Lee Porter has published her book *The Stone Must Break*. It will be available at Amazon and Barnes and Noble after December 15. Look for her book signing in the near future at the Fairmont Hotel in San Jose.
  - Jean Naggar, agent for Jean Auel (*Clan of the Cave Bear*), has requested Kathryn Madison's manuscript of her second novel *Summoned by the Sea* for

her review. Way to go, Kathryn! So there you have it; a busy November gearing up for the frenzied December holidays. Be sure to bring yourself to SBW Holiday Bash at Betty Auchard's. There you will be embraced by the warmth and camaraderie of your fellow writers, not to mention good food, drink and presents if you decide to partake of the gift game. See you there! And don't forget to send me your special news at [j\\_mutz@yahoo.com](mailto:j_mutz@yahoo.com) for the January issue of *WritersTalk*. Happy Holidays!  
WT

*Continued on page 11*

# A Month Outside of Time

by *Meredy Amyx*

A friend of mine asks the searching question “How have you added value to your life in the past year?” It’s not every year that I have a good answer for it, and yet as the number of years mounts, it seems increasingly important to answer it well. In 2007 I can.

After two years of faithfully fulfilling my pledge to write daily no matter what, I had nothing that actually amounted to a novel. I had characters, character names, character sketches, genealogies, networks of relationships, family histories, outlines, timelines, storylines, log lines, scenes, backstory, themes, research notes, scene-setting photographs, and colored maps of my fictitious locale. What I did not have was a sustained, continuous narrative without gaps and logical breaks. Figuratively speaking, I had stacks of lumber, crates of nails, buckets of plaster and paint, pipes and wires and shingles and glass, but no house.

Writing daily meant fitting in an hour or two in the evening after a long workday and devoting longer periods on weekends, forgoing everything from social events to household chores, never at my best, and never gaining much ground. I spent a lot of energy battling the dreary D’s: discouragement and defeat.

When my application for a fellowship to a writer’s retreat was rejected, it occurred to me that I didn’t need an institution—I could give myself a retreat. It would take some sacrifice and some planning, but I could do it, meaning that it was within my power.

Hopeless longings being what they are, it is surpassingly fine to know that some things are within your power.

With my husband’s encouragement and support, I decided to arrange my own writer’s retreat. I applied for an unpaid leave of absence from work. I booked a rental cottage under the redwoods in the Santa Cruz Mountains. And I started thinking about how to fulfill the purpose of my sojourn; namely, to dedicate a concentrated block of time to a single writing project and come away

with a novel, or at least the start of a novel, something that resembled or could be or could become a novel. A house, not a pile of raw materials.

One thing I’ve learned in some seventeen years of working in a high-tech environment is that you can’t tell whether you’ve accomplished your goal unless you have defined it in some objective way. You have to answer the question “What does ‘done’ look like?”

My sum total of dearly bought *free* time was one month—time on the calendar, but not on the clock. That duration lent itself naturally to the use of an existing model, the thirty-day novel of Chris Baty’s National Novel Writing Month. I adopted Chris’s book *No Plot? No Problem!* as my guide and its definition as my goal: write 50,000 words in thirty days. For my purposes I knew that the last two words would not be “The” and “End.” Envisioning a full-length novel two or even three times that length, I would have at most half a novel. But the main thing was a commitment to a daily quota of *continuous narrative*. That and nothing else would force the discipline I needed to achieve the purpose of my retreat.

I spent the last few days of September reading through everything I had already done, including the first 19,000 words of narrative written last spring. This was not a strict interpretation of the NaNoWriMo approach, which calls for starting with a clean slate. The program was my tool and not my master.

On Monday, October 1st, I sat down at my keyboard to spend my first day as a full-time writer with no other schedule or obligation in the world outside of basic personal maintenance. *That* was the experience I was paying for.

It was a sublime four and a half weeks. My windows were open, and I felt daylight enter the brain. I was the conduit for some of the smoothest and most lucid transmittal of thought to virtual paper that I have ever experienced. There were days when the writing poured out of me as if from a hidden spring. Ideas gushed like water from a water balloon. Characters became animated, spoke and acted as if they had wills of their own. Events took unexpected turns. Fresh situations arose and themes emerged and insights

gleamed like gold at the bottom of a well. Metaphors and similes burst into bloom like fish erupting from a volcano.

There were other days, more of them, when it was like roller-skating over gravel. I became intimately acquainted with a longer list of D’s, and on day 28 I listed them alphabetically in my journal:

defeat  
depression  
despair  
despondency  
disaster  
discouragement  
doom

I might have added drunkenness to keep up the old writerly tradition, but I don’t have what it takes to be a drunk, which is an ability to keep imbibing after the Stop light goes on. So I was never able to drown the dismal distress of daily drudgery. Instead, with my binders of notes at my right hand and Roget at my left, I barged, clumped, galumphed, lumbered, lumped, plodded, shambled, shuffled, slogged, stumped, trudged, trundled, and waddled on.

And the very act of persevering even when I had no idea what to do next, when I was stuck, dry, and helpless, just grimly adding one word to another in coherent sentences without inspiration or direction—that is where the power came from. That is when I felt like the soldier, the athlete, the saint. That is when I reached deep for things I didn’t know I had. That, more than anything else, is what conferred the sense of triumph when, on day 26, I typed the 50,000th word (it was “said”)—and then kept on going.

On day 30, when I declared this phase of my project complete, I had exceeded my daily quota of 1667 words at the rate of 455.8 words per hour, low by NaNoWriMo standards but not negligible either. I had logged 4.2 hours per day in concentrated time on task, with many more hours spent in research and other supporting activities. And I had generated 53,780 words of sustained narrative that had not been there when the month began. By my measure, that was success.

Do I have a house now, or do I still have just a pile of raw materials? Good

*Continued next page*



question. I don't have a house, not something finished, not something ready to move into. The house is still somewhere in the pile. But now I know the feel of the wood, the heft of the hammer, the ring of the nails. I have learned some things about handling my tools, knowledge that comes only with practice. Although the mansion still exists only as a vision, I have gained a sense of what it means to build something with your own two hands. It will take a while, maybe even a long while, to understand what it was that I actually did during the month I spent outside of time, but afterward I was not the same as before.

Above all, I have known the reality of being a writer, only a writer, nothing but a writer, a writer alone, and all the private things that I learned from that experience are mine to keep. I have added value to my life by giving myself a gift that it was in my power to give, and finding in it new and unimagined treasures. WT

## Fellowship Grants

The Arts Council is now awarding fellowships of up to \$4,000 in each of six different categories to recognize established professional working artists and to enable them to continue to pursue their creative work. Arts Council Silicon Valley remains the only funding agency south of San Francisco that recognizes and awards artists for the continuation of their artistic pursuit.

Literary artists who live in Santa Clara County or in an adjoining county showing impact in Santa Clara County are eligible to apply in the following category:

Literary Arts: memoir & novel  
No specific project needs to be carried out with the funds awarded.

Guidelines and application form:  
[artscouncil.org/grants](http://artscouncil.org/grants)

Deadline for submission: January 11, 2008

For Arts Council assistance, please contact:

Audrey Wong, Arts Council Grants Program Manager  
[awong@artscouncil.org](mailto:awong@artscouncil.org) or  
(408) 998-2787 x214.

## NaNoWriMo Continues

by Carolyn Donnell

From the kickoff on Halloween night to the San Jose Halfway Party on Sunday the 18th, NaNoWriMo writers have been continuing to work long hours. At midnight Halloween night the starting bell rang at Denny's in Santa Clara. I was there, so was Lisa Eckstein, and even our illustrious VP, Alex Leon, disguised as a writer in a red knit cap.

We proceeded to weekly write-ins at the Almaden Barnes & Noble on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9-12. Started and faithfully attended by Diana Richomme, they have been attended by CWC South Bay members and non-members alike with lots of ideas, writing, and cups of caffeine littering the tabletops.

A midpoint celebration was at Stephanie Neal's house on Sunday, November 18. She's a member of RWA (Romance Writers of America), but not



Carolyn Donnell  
Contributing Editor

CWC. We keep encouraging her to rectify that little omission. Many people attended this party. CWC SoBay was represented by Lisa, of course, Diana, new member Suzette Gamero, Sarah Bobson, me, and others. Mostly eating and talking, meeting fellow writers, commiserating about stalled plots and waning characters, and where are you from anyway. A few writers actually spent most of their time at the table writing. Imagine that!

We continue forward. One claims to have 75,000 words already. Diana says she is past 40. At the moment of writing this article I am still slogging toward 30,000. A couple of others even fewer. Poor us. Will we make it? We'll see. But even if we don't, it is still good experience and several thousand words toward a new goal. Check the January newsletter to see who "won."

Until then, you can't revise a blank page, so I need to get back to that novel. See some photos of B&N and the Halfway party at <http://tinyurl.com/2u99e5>

You can see photos of the opening night at Denny's at this URL. Alex, Lisa, and I are in there but you do have to look. <http://tinyurl.com/3xajar> WT



Jon Mahony, Stephanie Neal (who is a member of RWA, but not CWC), Diana Richomme, Meg Keehan, Gillian Wilson, Carolyn Donnell. Jon is writing about a writer having problems with NaNoWriMo; Stephanie, a succubus romance novel (at 75,000 words in mid-November); Diana, a novel involving a family situation comedy and vengeance; Carolyn, another gory antagonist mystery.

# Are You Now or Will You Ever Be a Superior Parent?

by Lita Kurth

Take this short quiz to find out.

1. An appropriate sensory aid for your baby would be:
  - a. a tutor with a Ph.D.
  - b. a bouncy seat with a mirror
  - c. a 12-pack of Diet Pepsi
2. You can find mittens for your young child:
  - a. at Saks Fifth Avenue
  - b. at quality discount stores such as Target, Mervyns, etc.
  - c. in the dirt around the swings at elementary schools
3. To ensure your child's emotional, social, and developmental needs are met, you will need:
  - a. a day nanny and a night nanny.
  - b. to listen to her and bring her into the family bed as needed
  - c. neighbor kids
4. To arrange a stimulating environment for your child, you should:
  - a. rent a small portion of the beach and hire a former Navy Seal as a lifeguard
  - b. arrange frequent visits to sand-and-water play areas
  - c. provide a cat box, cat food, and several cats
5. Children can be encouraged to walk by placing at a short distance from them an irresistible object such as:
  - a. a lifelike replica of a sea urchin from Nieman Marcus
  - b. a stuffed Barney
  - c. a pail of filthy mop-water
6. An appropriate midmorning snack for a toddler might include:
  - a. red caviar
  - b. a slice of whole wheat toast
  - c. dried-up peas and stale Cheerios from the floor by the high chair
7. One way to avoid having a young child destroy your valuables is to:
  - a. build a separate dwelling for the child and her keepers
  - b. place valuables on high shelves or in locked cupboards
  - c. destroy them yourself
8. If you want your child to learn good manners, you should:
  - a. screen the household staff carefully for signs of vulgarity
  - b. set an example of good manners
  - c. give her candy when she says "please" and "thank you"; make her watch the news if she swears.

Answer key:

- If most of your answers are 'a's, you can with tremendous effort, become known to your child as his/her parent. Start therapy now.
- If most of your answers are 'b's, you are sickeningly superior. In fact, you're probably lying.
- If most of your answers are 'c's, you should feel ashamed of yourself, but consoled by the fact that you are in the majority. **WT**

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## Me Calling Me

Nobody ever calls me but me. When I look on my caller id mostly the numbers that I see are my own. I have three.

Lots of unknowns, a few family phones. Even some anonymous groans. And I see "numbers not shown."

But by and large the majority is me calling me just to see if anyone out there cares to be really in touch with me.

—Carolyn Donnell

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## Cop Talk

by John Howsden

### You Make the Call

What would your protagonist do?

Feel like being a cop? Following is a description of an actual incident I was involved in while a police officer. After reading the details, take a few minutes and think about how you would have handled the situation, and then email me your thoughts at



JWHowsden961@yahoo.com. In the next column I will share with you some of the solutions offered, and then tell you what we actually did. There is no right or wrong answer. But like any good cop, be prepared to justify your actions.

At three in the morning we responded

to a call of a father threatening to kill his two children. When we arrived at the scene, the father was standing on the front porch of a small single-story duplex holding his 15-month-old in one hand and a butcher knife in the other. Within arm's reach stood his sobbing two-year-old daughter. The man was sweating, swearing, and beside himself. A lawn bordered by a picket fence separated us, and every time we tried to get closer, he'd make slashing movements towards the children. With eyes like a wild as those of a horse and spittle spraying from his mouth, he yelled, "You motherfuckers better shoot me or I'll stab them both!"

At one point he held the infant by his feet, pushing the knife against his throat and screaming, "I'll count to ten, and if you don't shoot me I swear to God I'll kill him." He counted to ten; when we didn't shoot, he poked the infant enough to make him squeal.

After he poked the infant I told him we

couldn't shoot because we were afraid we might hit one of the children. With that, the man sat the infant down on the porch, took two steps to the side and said, "Okay, now shoot me." When we refused to shoot, he walked back to the children and continued with threats of killing them.

This went on for over forty-five minutes, with the children's lives hanging in the balance. We never knew from one second to the next if he would plunge the butcher knife into one of the children. What would you do? What would your police protagonist do?

I realize you want more details, but I'm limited by space and I doubt they'd make any difference. Remember, in police work, it's not so much what you do, but why you do it. There are no pat answers or solutions, but keep in mind a cop is judged by his reaction to this one question—what would a reasonable and prudent man do?

Good luck! **WT**

## New Members

by Lita Kurth

Warm welcomes to the following new members:

Marilyn Smales heard of the South Bay Writers organization through Susan Schuller and Mimi Albert at Berkeley. A novel and short story writer, she looks forward to talking to other struggling writers and taking writing seminars. [msmales@earthlink.net](mailto:msmales@earthlink.net)

David Breighaupt, "Dr. B.", is a retired internist/addictionologist who writes medical suspense novels, the latest of which, *R.I.C.E.*, is about to be published. He is willing to share his clinical expertise and already has found the South Bay Writers a source of networking and marketing. [dlbmlb@comcast.net](mailto:dlbmlb@comcast.net)

Karen Duncan, returning after a short lapse, does professional writing, short stories, poetry, and journals. What prompted her to join was the opportunity to learn more, attend the rewarding conference in Salinas, and be inspired by other writers. [KDuncan@att.net](mailto:KDuncan@att.net)

Gary Singh has written a weekly column and other articles for San Jose's *Metro* for the past two and a half years, and worked as a journalist for six. Currently rewriting a novel, he'd like to talk to others who have published one. <http://myspace.com/siliconalleys> [g Singh@metronews.com](mailto:g Singh@metronews.com) **WT**

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*Reese Erlich, continued from page 7*

anything about it, that they dealt with a subcontractor, it wasn't their own factory. To Reebok's credit, they said, yes, this was a violation of their agreement, that this was against the human rights that they set up for their company. The problem was that the subcontractor would not raise the wages to conform even to Thai law and he shut the factory down. So, an exposé on improving the conditions and the pay of the workers resulted in their being unemployed. Obviously, nobody can foresee something like that happening. There was a human rights worker that I stayed in touch with who said that they were going to reopen the factory and employ people legally later. I found out just a few days ago that the factory reopened." **WT**

## Christmas at Auchard's

by Dave LaRoche

Many of you readers can pass over this and miss nothing as you have already indulged in the comfort, luxuriated in the warmth, been undulated with Betty's hospitality and packed like sardines into the wonderful tradition of the Auchard Christmas. It's a blast-and-a-half and a great way to get acquainted with your club.

Well, Betty . . . she knows the club is growing and she spoke of an annex to accommodate our growth, but I drove by the other night and if it's coming, it will be brought in by Santa Claus. You know she's been successful with her book—a zillion sales, extended tours, TV appearances. I mean she must be quite wealthy by now; aren't all published authors?

"In the event that your annex is not up, consider the Fairmont," I offered. "It's a trivial thing to write a check, and we all would so enjoy it."

"Oh, Dave, I would do it right now but for my schedule," she exclaimed. "I'm far, far too busy to do a jail term for check fraud . . . unless . . . do you suppose they would let me do a signing in there?"

There you are. It will be the same as years past: a few hours of good fun, great eats and the embarrassment of someone opening your gift with a look of enjoyment that turns to dismay and then eagerness to trade it immediately. Oh . . . and we do sing "The Twelve Nights."

So, do come. There will be no announcements from a podium, no roving mic, no speaker and no introductory joke. We do enjoy the season and our fellowship. Somewhere here in the newsletter are the important things to remember: date, time, address, and what to bring. See you there and Happy Holidays. **WT**

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## Nipper's Nits

by Pat Decker Nipper

### Lesson 32. Hyphens

As hyphens disappear, many people cheer. Words that were once hyphenated have now become either two words or single, combined words. According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, these words now stand alone: fig leaf, hobby horse, ice cream, pin money, pot belly, test tube. Others have become one word: bumblebee, chickpea, crybaby, leapfrog, logjam.

Hyphens are still needed to link compound modifiers before nouns, however, such as "a well-rounded musician," "a know-it-all conductor." They aren't necessary in adverbs that end in -ly: "overly compensated CEO."

Use a hyphen with a compound adjective, such as "sweet-smelling roses," or "well-planned maneuver."

When indicating occupation or status, use a hyphen for co-, as in "co-pilot," "co-worker."

Numerical ages used as adjective

phrases are hyphenated, such as, "sixteen-year-old driver," except when the number is already hyphenated: "twenty-nine year old driver." "Simple fractions are also hyphenated: "three-quarters."

If a root word and a prefix might be misread, hyphenate the prefix. For example: "re-evaluate," "pre-empt." Some words are always hyphenated, such as "in-laws" (mother-in-law), "greats" (great-grandmother), and "elect" (president-elect).

Contact Pat at [pat@patdeckernipper.com](mailto:pat@patdeckernipper.com) for comments or questions. **WT**

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## Now

Erasing all Time  
Enveloping this Sublime  
Eternal Moment.

— Sally A. Milnor

# Cleaning House with Zora

by Marjorie Johnson

My husband Wayne's first steady job was in the kitchen at a six-hundred-bed tuberculosis hospital far from town in the California foothills. In those days, TB had no cure; patients were not allowed to leave and children were not allowed to visit. Employees worked split shifts for minimum wage, meals included but no "doggie bags" allowed: packages and bulky jackets were inspected at the gate. One poor fellow lost his job when a pound of butter strapped to his leg melted and slipped out at the guardhouse. Wayne smuggled part of his steak home to me on Sundays; I hoped they wouldn't catch him. Jobs were hard to come by and so were friends.

On one summer Tuesday, Wayne's only day off, I jumped into our old Chevy coupe with a sense of high adventure: Wayne's new friend Fred, another kitchen worker, had invited us to spend the day. I was excited about meeting somebody, anybody, actually.

Fred lived far into the hills in a cabin leased for a dollar per year in return for keeping out poachers, beyond a gravel road that forked into dirt byways with ruts so deep that two wheels of the coupe stayed on the center hump to avoid scraping the oil pan. When we forded a creek, the tires ran over a concrete base, the water not deep enough to swamp the engine if taken slowly, just as Fred had described it.

Three dusty miles later and after bumping through an unimproved dry creek bed, I saw a small cabin with metal chimney and tarpaper roof, the walls rough unpainted lumber. The driveway circled around it as did a barbed-wire fence, completely covered with towels and shirts and draped clothing, and beyond those, discarded tires, pipes and wires, rusted and blackened coil springs from the rear seat of a car or maybe from a sofa. Wayne parked behind a polished sedan and a dented pick-up too dusty to distinguish the color.

Three children, all with dirty round sunflower faces and ragged petal hair and heads flat in the back, played in the dirt yard. They turned to stare, and a tall man ran towards our car. A smiling round-faced woman wearing jeans and a man's shirt waved from the doorway. As she came closer, I saw that she had several missing teeth.

Wayne's friend Fred, lanky, popping brown eyes in a lean face, brown hair starting to recede, beamed as he introduced everybody. "This here's my wife, Zora," he said and pointed at each person in turn. Chuckie, the oldest, was five; Linda, four; and Stanley, two going on three. I didn't meet the baby, Marie, until we went inside.

"Come on in and set a spell," Zora said. She pumped up a kerosene camp stove and put some ground coffee in the bottom of an enamel coffeepot with cold water. When it boiled up, she dropped in an eggshell left from breakfast to settle the grounds. The unscreened windows were open for air; flies swirled lazily, crawling across the dried-on egg yolks on the unwashed dishes. The walls and ceiling were painted glossy dark green and the floor a medium gray; a calendar from the drugstore hung from a sixpenny nail. The baby lay flat on her back in a crib, sleeping and sucking on a propped-up bottle; when she awoke, she stayed there on her back and watched the flies. Zora plunked the coffee cups onto a Formica and chrome kitchen table across the room from an upholstered chair and a matching filthy couch. I thought of my mother's spotless windows and snow-white tea towels; I supposed that boiling would kill whatever germs my stomach acids didn't digest.

Somewhat later, Zora needed something from the store, and Fred said he'd give us all a ride. Outside, he pointed out the automobile's polished wooden dashboard, the shining brass knobs, and the leather seats; I saw my reflection in the bumper. "Zora's father won it in a poker game," he said. "Have you ever ridden in a Rolls

Royce?"

Wayne said no; I had never even heard of one. Four adults, three children and a baby all piled into the car, the smaller persons sitting on laps. In the back seat, Zora told me Fred took that-there wire out of the TB hospital on a garbage truck, hid it in plain sight, he did; she reckoned he could fix nigh on anything.

Zora charged the groceries, too large an account to pay it off on payday. What a terrible trap. Like the song, they owed their souls to the Country Store.

After shopping, Zora packed everything into cardboard boxes, lots of boxes: disposable playpens for babies who wore diapers only at night to keep plenty of fresh air on those tender bottoms, she said. The boxes went into the trunk. The men sat in the front; the rest of us sat two deep.

On the return trip, Fred braked so hard that we almost spilled onto the floor. He waved his arm and pointed down the dirt road. "See that? See that big king snake there?"

"Let's catch him," Wayne said.

The men jumped out and dashed after the rapidly departing reptile. Fred reached down and snatched the snake behind its head with his right hand and grabbed its tail with his left. "Ever see a king snake and a rattlesnake fight? The king snake always wins."

Wayne opened the trunk; Fred put the three-foot squirming snake into a grocery box, folded down the flaps, and closed the trunk. King snakes aren't poisonous, but I wasn't keen on getting acquainted.

Back at the cabin, the men carried in the boxes of groceries, the snake still in one of them, and went out to catch a rattlesnake.

"They'll never find one," I said. I didn't volunteer to unload the boxes.

"Fred says he's gonna bring home a rattlesnake, I reckon that's what he's gonna do. Let's wash up some dishes, let the men unpack the groceries," Zora said. "I don't want nothing to do with no snake."

We finished washing that mountain of dishes, and darned if Zora wasn't right. The men drove back in the pick-up, red dust twisting behind them. Fred came in carrying a covered bucket. "Wayne

got us a rattlesnake, just pinned him behind his head with a forked stick and picked him right up," Fred said. "Now where's that king snake?"

Fred and Wayne emptied everything out of the grocery boxes, and not very neatly, either, but the king snake was not there. They looked under everything and moved piles of clutter around. No snake.

"He must have crawled out of the box," Fred said. "It couldn't have made a dash for the door or the dog would have let us know."

"It must be in the springs of the couch, no other place it could be," said Zora. "I'm not setting there 'til you find that snake."

"Ever see a dog kill a rattlesnake?" Fred moved the bucket to the front yard. I was glad to see it go outside; Zora didn't need a second snake hiding inside the house.

"This old dog is really fast," Fred said. "Knows how to kill a snake by instinct."

"What if the snake bites his nose?" I asked; the men laughed at me.

Fred said to take the kids into the house, all except Chuckie, his oldest. He uncovered the bucket, swung it up and over, and tossed out the snake. Immediately, the rattler coiled up, and Fred said, "Get 'em, Jake, get 'em, boy!"

The dog moved in, jumped back when the snake struck, grabbed it behind the head, shook it hard, and dropped it in the dirt. The dog barked and ran around the rattlesnake, both of them darting in and out. The snake coiled again and struck, the dog jumped out of the way. The dog caught the snake and shook harder. The snake wriggled and slithered; the dog attacked a final time. The dog pulled back and his drooling tongue hung out. The dying snake still twitched.

Fred wanted the rattles; he called them *buttons*. "Be careful, the fangs from a dead snake can still get you," he said. "One time somebody changing a tire, ran his hand around inside to find the nail that blew the tube, but it was a snake fang. Real nasty. The guy sliced his finger with his knife, sucked out the venom, but got it into his rotten tooth. Went right into his brain, poor sucker died."

Fred loved to tell stories, but I wasn't sure I could believe him. I heard Fred talking to Wayne, man talk, "... and my first wife, she was so dumb she used to sit for hours, watch the electricity run out. I said pull the plug when you turn off the light, make sure the electricity all drains out, and she did it, she really did it." Fred laughed and slapped his knees. Fred couldn't pull that trick on Zora, not with kerosene lanterns.

Zora pumped the camp stove, fried up a pound of hamburger meat and boiled potato chunks, floured up the hamburger grease and made lots of gravy. I opened up a can of beans. "You and me, we have to make a meal out of nothing," she said. "Maybe they'll hunt for something better than snakes next time you come on over."

That evening, I was glad to get home to our two-room cabin. We didn't have refrigeration or hot water, but we didn't have flies. I didn't worry about anything so silly as draining the electricity out of a plug, but I did worry about burning the house down whenever I looked at the frayed wiring and thought about that penny in the fuse box. No shower, either. Once I told Wayne he looked like a grasshopper, with his legs doubled up when he bathed in the metal washtub. "Not a grasshopper. A frog under a lily pad," he said, putting the green washcloth on top of his head.

A few weeks later, Wayne and Fred planned a hunting trip. I thought they'd

bag squirrels or a rabbit, and we could make a stew. This time, our trip into the hills followed a heavy rain. Our coupe lurched into the rushing water at the first creek and slowed almost to a stop, slapped by a floating branch, then slipped sideways and crabbed up the opposite bank. At the second crossing, the creek had gone over its banks. Wayne parked next to an old jalopy; we walked single file across a narrow catwalk, planks nailed to a rickety wooden support frame. I couldn't look down at the angry torrent.

When I stepped off the catwalk behind and below Fred's cabin, I noticed its stilts: posts of varying height strung with barbed wire and hung with clothing. Beds, dressers, tables and chairs sat outside. Three kids and a dog wrestled on a lumpy couch, adding a layer of mud and cookies over urine stains. Fred was outside, working on his truck.

Wayne called out, "Hey, Fred, why the barbed wire under your house? Zora need more space to hang up laundry?"

Fred stood up and brushed himself off. "Keeps the goats from butting the floor."

"Goats? You have goats?"

"Used to. Damned goats got under the house at night, butted the floor right under our bedroom. I strung that barbed wire, but then they twanged it with their horns."

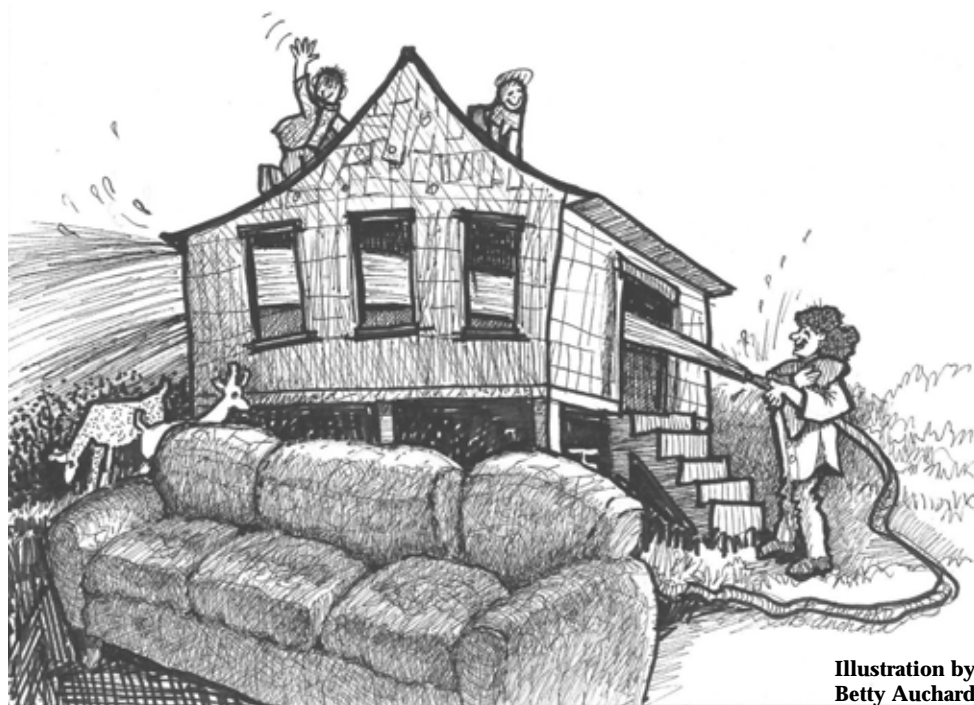


Illustration by  
Betty Auchard

“Look it here,” Fred continued, pointing to the roof of a junked car. “See those dents and wrinkles? Them damned goats, they liked to jump up on the car, dance on the roof. Made a dickens of a noise. We had to get rid of them goats.”

“Hey, Zora,” Fred called out. “We got company. Get on out here.”

Zora appeared at the front door with the garden hose in one hand. “Cleaning house,” she said. “I’m just about done.” She had hosed down the walls, ceilings, and floors, but she couldn’t sweep the water out the door. “Darn floor slopes the wrong way.”

The broom flew out the door and Zora dashed back inside. All at once, three shots rang out and water spilled out behind the stilts; she had put three 22-caliber holes right through the floor on the low corner. After a while, we carried everything but the couch inside and went to set a spell over muddy coffee.

Zora held her infant on one hip and pumped the camp stove to heat a bottle; wisps of hair escaped from her barrettes. She fixed more coffee, boiling used grounds in an old kettle; dregs filled the bottom half-inch in my cup. “Babies, all they know is eating, sleeping and pooping, but I love them all,” she said. “I think I’m pregnant again.”

“I’m pregnant, too,” I said. “I got a job in the kitchen, but I only lasted a week. Every time they brought in the food for serving breakfast, I had to throw up.”

“It’s a bitch, isn’t it?” Zora would rather talk about having babies than anything else. She was only twenty-three but already missing several teeth and getting heavy. Would I be just like Zora in a few years?

Two cups of coffee later, the men returned with a big buck, meat for a week, but not for tonight; Fred said the carcass had to hang. Hunting season or not, I knew they had no licenses. So the guard against poachers was himself a poacher as well as a board and wire and who-knew-what-else smuggler.

Fred wiped his face and hands on a fresh towel plucked from the fence and asked, “Hey, Zora, what’s for dinner?”

“Weenie roast, soon as you start the fire. Get us some sticks.”

“Come on, Wayne,” Fred said. “I’ll find us some willow. You can’t use poison

## Alice Sebold in Conversation with Kate Evans: Creative Minds by Suzy Paluzzi

On October 25, Alice Sebold, author of *Lucky* and *Lovely Bones*, read from her new novel *The Almost Moon* at the San Jose Museum of Art. Afterward, she spoke in front of the audience with Kate Evans, local author and co-director of the Center for Literary Arts at San Jose State University.

This was Alice Sebold’s first appearance in San Jose and she immediately set a very casual tone to the evening. A striking woman, Sebold is known for writing about dark subjects. *Lucky*, a memoir about her rape, began as a way to find her main character’s voice for the novel *Lovely Bones*, which she was writing at the time but had put aside.

Alice Sebold said she “explores lifetime backgrounds as part of her process, and writes a lot that never gets published.” After she wrote *Lucky*, she rewrote *Lovely Bones*. It took her two years to find the voice for the character Helen in her new book *The Almost Moon*.

When asked about the difference between writing a memoir and writing fiction, the author said, “I had already done my personal work. Memoirs should serve the people reading them, not the author writing. Writing fiction is more free and thus inherently more challenging.” Sebold shared that she “always wanted to write fiction” and she “wrote poetry as a child” and “writes it as a discipline” now.

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oak or you blister your stomach, and you can’t use oleander or you poison yourself.”

I wondered where Fred would build the fire. Wayne trimmed branches while Fred rolled and twisted newspaper and threw a bucketful of liquid onto the couch. Washing it, this time of night? No: Fred lit a match and threw out a newspaper torch.

Vroom! Flames exploded. The blazing couch lit up the front yard—another sofa skeleton for the junk pile—but I had little appetite for hot dogs roasted over its embers. **WT**

The suburbs is the setting for Alice Sebold’s books. “Suburbia is ‘compost’—where it all is, where all is seething,” she believes. “When I was growing up, I used to wonder what was going on in the house across the street.” And in the “suburbs, there is an obsession about perfection—not only in the physical, like lawns—but people. People hide,” the author stated.

When Kate Evans inquired why all three of her books involve violent acts, Sebold responded, “I want to write books that psychologically move in a compelling way. A violent act only opens the doorway into psychological investigation.”

As a child, the author had undiagnosed dyslexia. “I was raised in a house of readers, and I didn’t read .... Desperation creates a sense of drive.” She started reading, and “poetry was my way in, in high school,” she said. She still writes it now. She read fiction “obsessively,” when she was in her mid-twenties and the old masters when she was in her early thirties.

*Lovely Bones* is currently being filmed. When asked by a member of the audience how involved she is in the film, Ms. Sebold said, “I don’t have a lot of fear and reservations. I am a ‘process freak,’ not a ‘control freak,’ so I am excited to see what they do.”

Regarding her writing “process,” Sebold offered that she is up every day at 4 a.m. because “if you start in the dark, the judges are all asleep.” She is “obsessed with reading” and “especially keeps poetry books near her, to ‘feed her’ while she is working.

One of Sebold’s tips is, “It is hugely important to have writing mentors, especially to teach you how to navigate the life you are going to lead. You need to have examples of how to survive those mean years when there is little money.”

Alice Sebold was forty when she had her success.

Check for tickets to author appearances like Pulitzer Prize Winner Jhumpa Lahiri in the Creative Minds series at [www.SanJoseMuseumofArt.org](http://www.SanJoseMuseumofArt.org)

To learn more about The Center of Literary Arts, San Jose State, see [www.litart.org](http://www.litart.org) **WT**

# Special Poetry Section

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## Are You Missing Something?

Are you missing something? Have you lost your keys?  
Or a run-away list swept away by the breeze?  
It stubbornly sits on the edge of your mind;  
Have you lost a feeling that you left behind?

Are you missing something: a letter, perhaps;  
A bill for insurance you don't want to lapse?  
A fist full of mist, a quick-flying dove,  
Or the last glowing coals of a once blazing love?

Are you missing something: a kiss in the park;  
A hug with a heartbeat; a touch in the dark?  
Or it might just be someone you no longer see  
Like a teary-eyed soul mate. Are you missing me?

—Rich Burns, 1986

## XMAS — 2007

*How to account for the despair?  
Is it the sight of Christmas holly  
Sitting on top of the dumpster  
As if someone were reluctant to  
Lift the cover and end the joy?*

The wreath hangs crooked now;  
Its scarlet bow falls limply  
Like blood flowing from a wound  
While far away the desert winds  
Blow silently over the dead and dying.

Oh, Christ, they say we've forgotten you.  
Shrill voices demand we use your name  
Urged on by those who sit,  
Safe and smug amidst their lies,  
On government thrones where power reigns.

If Christ exists, as some believe he does,  
He walks among the fated young who die,  
Not with those whose taste for greed and death  
Rule supreme over our once-loved land;  
And bows His head in dread and shame.

—F. Srmek Schorow

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## January Workshop

Sunday, January 27, 9:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Registration and continental breakfast begin at 8:30 a.m.

Lookout Inn, 605 Macara Ave., Sunnyvale (at the Sunnyvale Golf Course)

### Martha Alderson's

## Blockbuster Plots



Join with Martha Alderson in exploring the relationship between characterization and plot with a simple visual technique that helps develop and track your scenes and their information: the dates, your action plot line and character development, and the scene's thematic significance.

Martha Alderson MA, award-winning writer, coach, and international plot and story consultant, teaches plot writing workshops privately through UC Santa Cruz and at writers conferences and The Writing Salon. She is the author of *Blockbuster Plots Pure and Simple*.

Early Bird Special—Register before January 13

CWC Members \$50; nonmembers \$65

January 13 and later

CWC Members \$60; nonmembers \$75

Students (24 and younger) \$35 with student ID

**Registration fee includes continental breakfast and lunch**

See over for  
registration form

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## Why I Am As I Am

I have been chided, reminded since birth.  
Of reasons to believe, low self worth.  
Grade school commences, started at once.  
Poor tattered grubby boy, must be a dunce.  
Little they knew, the potential they squelched.  
The hopes with dreams, of feelings they quenched.  
How stomped emotions, from one such as me.  
With sharp-tongued barbs, not caring to see.  
Because a quick verbal punch, keeps them in line.  
By insult, they skewer, to rules pitchfork tine.  
To uncaring teachers, my youth was blessed.  
Get me out the door, was their only quest.  
Beat the peg to the hole, round square did not matter.  
Only get them to conform, quiet the chatter.  
Was all that was expected, to earn a day's pay?  
Never caring realizing, dream hopes thrown away.  
Now! If I was a teacher, I would teach myself.  
To keep unkind brickbat tools confined to shelf.  
Do not browbeat badger them, letting them recall.  
The days they were coached, to fail or fall.  
I would Love and praise them, teach self worth.  
As only Love with compassion, has worth to this Earth.  
When beaten in intelligence, only reinforces hate.  
That is only realized in life, (by me) after it is to late.

Honey draws more bees than vinegar.

—D. Mathison, 1997

## I Am More

I am more than the poor child of  
parents who loved each other and  
together only a few years at a time.  
I am more than a child of divorce.  
I am more than the girl who lived in a  
shelter for two years. Moving, starting  
over, relocating, and beginning again  
made me someone else, the girl who  
knew she was more than she seemed  
to be. I am becoming what was meant  
for me. At 77 I'm more than I was—  
and I am still becoming more.

—Betty Auchard, November 2007

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### Register online at [southbaywriters.com](http://southbaywriters.com)

or clip and mail this coupon (or a copy of it) to

SBW Plots  
PO Box 3254  
Santa Clara, CA 95055  
Make check payable to California Writers Club

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street address \_\_\_\_\_

City, state, ZIP code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Early Bird Special  
Before January 13  
CWC Members \$50  
Nonmembers \$65

Regular Registration  
January 13 and later  
CWC Members \$60  
Nonmembers \$75

Student Registration  
24 or younger, with ID  
\$35



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# Shoreglitter

There are preternatural times  
that stay with you,  
as fresh as when first experienced,  
no matter how old you get.

I can see it in my mind's eye,  
just like it was yesterday,  
last night.

I am twelve years old,  
it is September,  
the end of  
the Summer of Love,  
and I'm so sorry  
I've missed it,  
being much too young,  
but what I'm about to encounter  
vastly exceeds  
all psychedelic artforms.

My family has gone camping  
at Sunset Beach,  
south of  
Santa Cruz,  
closer to Monterey.

It's nighttime,  
and my father takes us  
hiking through a gap  
in the towering dunes  
down to the boundary zone  
where land and liquid contest  
and,

like every beach in the world,  
these particular sands are  
just so,  
as distinctive and unique  
as a fingerprint.

There's just enough  
faint  
residual light  
from who knows where  
to guide our path.

We trod the gritty wet slime,  
right on the edge of the Pacific,  
where the surf and tide  
have just receded  
leaving a natural fresco  
for nature to paint  
around our feet  
as we move at random.

Periodically,  
ripples of salt foam return  
and as we dodge them,  
we are all amazed to see  
on the newly replenished  
sea plaster  
fleeting bright sparkles  
of microscopic  
bioluminescent creatures  
exploding in split second  
bluish green white flashes  
outlining our shoes  
wherever they touch.

We are walking on a galaxy.

Deep sensitivity,  
heightened awareness  
are awakened in me.

I imagine  
these moist stars  
must go out  
forever  
to all of infinity  
wherever any steps disturb them,  
even those of angels.

These unending  
oceanic glow specks,  
how far does their domain reach?  
I know their hidden realm  
must extend past our sight limits,  
to some unknowable place:  
you can't get there from here,  
as some old farmer once said.

Not yet.

I am a man now,  
older than my father was  
that long ago year,  
and he is gone.

Yet that ephemeral piece of time  
has never left me.  
It is one of those surprising milestones  
we never seek  
that announce the birth  
and growth  
of lifelong  
aesthetics.

Those wave borne  
transient constellations  
will always be there  
calling me,  
evoking a tiny namelessness.

—Stephen C. Wetlesen Copyright © 2007

*To Lisa Bernstein  
Monta Vista High School, Class of 1974  
and  
Monta Vista Elementary School*

# WRITERSTALK

## Challenge

### What Is It?

Twice a year, in March and September, awards are given to contributors to *WritersTalk*. You need take no special steps to enter this competition; if your piece in one of the designated genres is published in *WritersTalk*, you are a contestant in the Challenge.\*

### Genres

Fiction  
Memoir  
Essay  
Poetry

### Judging Periods

February 16 through August 15  
August 16 through February 15

### Prizes

One winner will be selected from each of the eligible genres. Each winner will be awarded a cash prize of \$40.

### Judging

Judging will be done by *WritersTalk* contributing editors and other club members whom the contributing editors may ask to assist.

\* Eligibility for the *WritersTalk* Challenge is limited to members of the South Bay Branch of the California Writers Club; judges may not participate in the competition.

## Darryl Brock at Peninsula Branch

The December 8 Peninsula Branch CWC meeting will feature best-selling writer Darryl Brock, author of *If I Never Get Back*. The meeting will be held at the Belmont Library, 10:00 a.m. to noon. \$15.00

Brock will talk about his brand of historical fiction, which involves a fascination with time juxtaposition and time layering. In his stories, the past is generally an active agent in the present. Using his own experience, Brock stresses the importance of narrative voice and certain other elements of commercially successful novels.

He will also share the ups and downs of the writer's life.

# Directory of Experts

*Do you have specialized knowledge that might help a writer bring authentic detail to a scene? If you are willing to share your expertise, let us know. We will add your listing to our directory of experts.*

## Character Development

ArLyne Diamond Ph.D  
ALyne@DiamondAssociates.net

## Character Traits

Jeannine Vegh M.A. M.F.T.I.  
ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net

## Computer Dingus and Full Time Nerd

Jeremy Osborne  
jeremy\_w\_osborne@yahoo.com

## Doctors' Office Environment, OB-GYN

Dottie Sieve  
pdrsieve@yahoo.com

## Hospital and Nursing Environment

Maureen Griswold  
maureengriswold@sbcglobal.net

## Police Procedures

John Howsden  
jwhowsden961@yahoo.com

## Profile Writing

Susan Mueller  
samueller@worldnet.att.net

## Teaching and the Arts

Betty Auchard  
Btauchard@aol.com

## Television Production

Woody Horn  
408-266-7040



# CWC

## Around the Bay

These are the published meeting times and locations for the CWC branches in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. If you're thinking about attending one of their meetings, be sure to check the website first for details.

**Berkeley:** Meetings are held from **10 a.m. to noon** on the third Saturday of each month, except for July and August. Unless otherwise noted, our meetings are held at Barnes & Noble bookstore, in Jack London Square, Event Loft, Oakland.

<http://www.berkeleywritersclub.org>

**San Francisco/Peninsula:** Meets on the third Saturday of each month from 10a.m. to noon at the Belmont Library, 1110 Alameda De Las Pulgas, Belmont. <http://www.sfpeninsulawriters.com>

**Central Coast:** Meets on the third Tuesday of each month except December at Buzzard's Backyard BBQ, adjacent to the Travelodge, 2030 N. Fremont, Monterey. The dinner hour begins at 5:30 p.m. and the program begins at 7 p.m.

<http://centralcoastwriters.org>

**Mount Diablo:** Meets the second Saturday of each month, except July and August, at 11:30 a.m. at the Hungry Hunter Restaurant, 3201 Mount Diablo Boulevard, Lafayette (corner of Pleasant Hill Road and Highway 24). <http://mtdiablowlriters.org>

**Tri-Valley:** Meets the third Saturday of each month, except July and August, at 11:30 a.m. at the Oasis Grille, 780 Main Street, Pleasanton. <http://www.trivalleywriters.com>

**Sacramento:** Meets at 11:00 a.m. the third Saturday of every month, except July and August, at Luau Garden Chinese Buffet, 1890 Arden Way, Sacramento 95815. <http://www.sacramento-writers.org>

**Marin:** Meets on the fourth Sunday of every month at 2 p.m. at Book Passage in Corte Madera. <http://www.cwcmarinwriters.com>

**Redwood:** Meets the first Sunday of the month, from 3 to 5 p.m. at Marvin's Restaurant, 7991 Old Redwood Highway, corner of William St., in Cotati. <http://www.redwoodwriters.org>

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>December 2007</b>						1
2	3	4	5	6	7 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose	8 11A Editors' Powwow
9	10	11 6-9P Holiday Bash Chez Auchard Los Gatos (See announcement for RSVP and directions)	12	13	14 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Santana Row, San Jose	15
16 <i>WritersTalk</i> deadline	17	18	19	20	21	22
23/30	24/31	25	26	27	28	29
January 27 Workshop Blockbuster Plots (See page 15 for details)			<b>Future Flashes</b>			

## Stay Informed!

Sign up for the SBW Email List to receive meeting and events announcements.

[www.southbaywriters.com](http://www.southbaywriters.com)

## South Bay Writers Open Mic

Read from your own work, from your favorite authors, or just come to listen. See calendar for schedule.

Contact Bill Baldwin  
(408) 730-9622 or email  
wabaldwin@aol.com

For Fremont Open Mic contact  
Jeannine Vegh  
ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net

or

Bob Garfinkle  
ragarf@earthlink.net

## Robert Hass at Barnes & Noble

On Tuesday, December 4, at 7:00 p.m., award-winning poet Robert Hass will appear at the Barnes & Noble located at 2200 Eastridge Loop at the Eastridge Shopping Center in San Jose to read from and sign copies of his new poetry collection, *Time and Materials*.

After reading selections from *Time and Materials*, Mr. Hass will sign copies of his book for fans.

The poems in this new collection—his first to appear in a decade—are grounded in the beauty and energy of the physical world, and in the bafflement of the present moment in American culture.



## San Jose Poetry Slam (Est. 1998)

8:00 p.m., \$6.00

First Tuesday: Open Mic with music by Rebelskamp

Second and Fourth Tuesdays: Poetry Slam with music by Jay Rush

Third Tuesday: Head-to-Head Poetry Bouts with special guests.

At The Britannia Arms

173 W Santa Clara

Downtown San Jose

[www.sanjosepoetryslam.com](http://www.sanjosepoetryslam.com)

## Poetry Center San Jose Announces the Poetry Lounge at The Blue Monkey

Poetry reading and discussion most Tuesdays Cosponsored by the Creative Writing Department at San José State University

FREE ADMISSION

The Blue Monkey Bar and Taquería

1 East San Fernando Street

San José, CA 95113 [www.pcsj.org](http://www.pcsj.org)



**California Writers Club**  
South Bay Branch  
P.O. Box 3254  
Santa Clara, CA 95055  
[www.southbaywriters.com](http://www.southbaywriters.com)

**MAIL TO**

Address Correction Requested

**No General Meeting in December**  
instead  
**Holiday Bash**  
**Wednesday, December 12**  
**See front cover for details**

**No General Meeting in January**  
alternate activity  
**Workshop with Martha Alderson**  
**Blockbuster Plots**  
**Sunday, January 27**  
**See page 15 for details**

**December 16**  
**WRITERSTALK**  
deadline