



WRITERSTALK

Volume 16
Number 1
January 2008

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club



Marjorie Johnson eagerly displays the juggling set she drew in the Holiday Bash gift rumble.

Holiday Bash Retrospective

December 12 saw the holly jolly Holiday Bash at Betty Auchard's house, where sixty or so festive writers gathered in all major walkways, making it a cozy enclave in which to eat heartily and drink merrily. As always, the pot luck food was fabulous—various appetizers and yummy main dishes such as pasta, chicken, and ethnic dishes such as yam and peanut stew graced the dining room table. On the far side of the kitchen, the breakfast table groaned under the weight of desserts. Cookies, candy, and pie overflowed from tabletop to countertop, sweet examples of all the temptations the holiday season brings.



Cathy Bauer shares a scene from her Georgia childhood.

When appetites had mostly been satisfied, Edie Matthews deftly brought the crowd together for the activities of the evening. First on the program was Cathy Bauer, reading the message from her Christmas card, a growing-up scene from her Georgia childhood. This year's anecdote included Cathy and her brother, a BB gun, a fallen bird, and subsequent bargaining with both Santa and Jesus.

Following Cathy's reading, Edie changed from her cat herder's cap to that of choir director to lead us all in the SBW-infamous rendition of the "Twelve Days of Christmas," for which clusters of people in near proximity are directed to sing one particular line of the song. With ten lords a-leaping in the dining room and nine ladies dancing in the foyer, the song began tentatively but ended in



Edie Matthews leads the choir.

Continued on page 4

A Column of Reminders

No general meeting in January

**Sunday, January 27
Plot Workshop
Registration and continental breakfast start at 8:30 a.m.
Lookout Inn, Sunnyvale
See page 16 for details and registration form**

**Mark your calendars
NOW
During 2008
ALL
general meetings will be held on the second
TUESDAY
of each month**

Tuesday, February 12
General meeting with editor Alan Rinzler
"Challenges and Opportunities for Authors Seeking Publication - An Editor's View"

The fall/winter *WritersTalk* Contest awards period ends on February 15. See page 17 for details.

President's Prowling

by *Dave LaRoche*
President, South Bay Writers

Christmases Remembered

My prowling this January leads me to remembrance of Christmases past.

After I became old enough to drive (legally), Carol and I assumed the Christmas tree chore, relieving our father of the complaining our mother launched when he'd bring back a shape that didn't quite suit her. On one such occasion, after visiting three lots without luck and its drawing on into the night of the Eve, we had found a few trees in a small strip mall in a back neighborhood. There, with our selection in hand, the lot man was saying, "Les see, fer that un ... umm ... nice shape it has ... lookit this smooth taper, top ta bottom. I'll take three-fifty."

"But that's your marked price," I protested. "You said since it's late and you want to close out you'd reduce your regular price. I'll give you two."

"Nup, it's three-fifty. That's a good un there boy, easy bring a dollar more."

Bundled up in an old Mackinaw as rough as a gunny sack, wool scarf wrapped tight and a cap with a tassel, he shuffled around behind his sooty barrel-fire, rubbing his hands in the flames. His nose was dripping off into his bushy mustache and his eyes leaked onto his cheeks. It was six-thirty and crackling cold, and we each had a home waiting to warm us.

"Let's go," my sister said. "There are other trees ... they might be giving away what's left down at Krogers."

As we started back to the car, he spoke up, "Whoa there, don't hurry off... I'll make it three even."

We hesitated a moment then on toward Dad's old Super-Eight Buick with its learning dents.

"Okay, I gotta git home sometime tonight. Two-fifty it is," he shouted after us.

We stopped and looked toward him. "Two is the number and I'm holdin' firm," I said.

He grumbled and did a turn around the barrel. "You drive a hard bargain there youngen." He waved us back. "Okay ... since it's late and I'm shiverin' cold, two it is."

I pulled a couple bucks from my wallet and put them in his dry weathered hand and, in that moment, Carol pulled another from her pocket and plopped it on top of my negotiated price.

"Here ... Merry Christmas," she said. The three of us tied the tree on top of the old Buick and, in silent accord that seemed to sneak up on me, Carol and I headed toward home.

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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

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Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx
Editor

Happy New Year



The holiday season in our household was a particularly good one this year, and I hope yours was, too. When I was a kid, I was puzzled by the rapidity with which Christmas was over. There was at least a month of tension and excitement building and building and building, and then bang! it was over in a day. On December 26, the paper in which the gifts had been wrapped was in the trash, and the tree had lost its luster. (With the perspective of an adult, however, I'm glad that it doesn't take another month for Christmas to wind down—or until July, considering the

apparent ramp-up time these days.)

The holidays are past, and as the days once again get longer while we move into the new year I'd like to thank all of you for your contributions to *WritersTalk* during the past year. I'd also like to thank the *WT* crew—Una, Rich, Lita, Jackie, Carolyn, and Andrea (and Suzy, who had to resign last month for family reasons) for faithfully turning out their columns every month and for the support they've given me. Being the managing editor is really cool because you get your name at the top of the masthead, but all that glory is meaningless if nobody sends you anything to print.

First up in the new year is the plot development and tracking workshop that SBW is hosting on Sunday, January 27. Presenter Martha Alderson, besides being one of SBW's own and the author of *Blockbuster Plots*, is also an award-winning writer, coach, and international plot and story consultant, and a renowned plot development instructor. She regularly teaches plot development courses and seminars at writers' conferences, UC Santa Cruz, and the Writing Salon.

The workshop provides the tools to build, enhance, and energize your story or memoir. Martha will explore the relationship between characterization and plot with a simple visual technique that helps develop and track scenes and their information—the passage of time, the action plot line, the characters' evolution, and the thematic significance of the scenes.

You can learn more about Martha and the courses she offers on her website, blockbusterplots.com.

Register for the SBW workshop either on the SBW website at southbaywriters.com or by mailing in the form on page 16 of this issue of *WritersTalk* along with a check. Make your reservation now to take advantage of the early-bird reduced rate. The registration fee includes a continental breakfast and a lunch.

Let me also remind you that the current judging period for the *WritersTalk* Challenge ends on February 15. If your work in the genres of fiction, memoir, essay, or poetry has been published in *WritersTalk* between last August 16 and this February 15, you're automatically entered in the contest. Full details are on page 18.

I think, in my own slightly biased way, that *WritersTalk* is off to a ripping start for the new year. I know that I have a couple of items in store for future issues that will knock your socks off, and I encourage you all once again to send me a short story, novel excerpt, memoir, essay, poem, or opinion piece that will knock my socks off.

May your new year be happy, prosperous, and productive.

WT

The Journey of a Thousand Miles

by Lita A. Kurth

What is Creative Nonfiction?

Late on a Saturday morning, seven dedicated editors sat around three pushed-together tables in a coffee shop. Around them, people tapped away at laptops, couples made continual eye contact over their cappuccinos, a radio poured indistinguishable music into the air, and the clack of dishes arose faintly from the counter. The seven leaned inward over their cups and papers so they could hear and be heard.

"What's creative nonfiction?" said one. "Nonfiction is fact. That's all there is. There's no creativity involved."



Lita Kurth
Contributing Editor

those of David Sedaris who recently appeared in San Jose.

What *isn't* creative nonfiction? Lying isn't, at least not after the lie has been exposed, a recent case being James Frey's bogus memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*. Exaggeration isn't. Writing "based on the facts" isn't. Historical fiction is not creative nonfiction. Creative nonfiction is telling the truth—scrupulously but beautifully and often after painstaking research.

How popular is this new genre? Almost every creative writing program offers it now as standard fare along with poetry, fiction, screenwriting, and playwriting. Santa Clara University, for example, offers classes each year in Creative Nonfiction. Goucher College offers a creative writing MFA focusing entirely on creative nonfiction. Many, if not most literary journals, these days send out requests for three genres: poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction.

What indeed is creative nonfiction?

Perhaps some of you have never heard of it either. If so, you'll be reassured to know that even experts argue over its meaning and origins. It has been called the New Journalism. It can include literary essays, many memoirs, and much nature writing. I've even seen examples (rarely) in academic journals. What do these works have in common that makes them creative nonfiction? They use fiction techniques such as plotting and backstory, remembered conversations set on the page as dialogue, sensory details, vivid descriptions of setting, metaphors, sentence structures and paragraphs that would be more at home in a novel than in a history book. An author who is often very present, judging, feeling, speculating.

But in what habitat can you find this beast? Some specimens include Pat Conroy's *My Losing Season*, Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, a literary magazine called *Fourth Genre*, Sherry Simpson's wonderful collection *The Way Winter Comes: Alaska Stories*, the collection edited by Judith Kitchen called *In Short: a Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*. Many essays in the *New Yorker* would qualify, especially

Bash Retrospective, continued from page 1

full-throated singing and laughter as each group tried to outdo the other. Thus warmed up, the revelers cast a couple of the more traditional Christmas carols into the frosty air and then moved on to the gift rumble.



Hostess Betty Auchard (center) talks with her daughter-in-law Bernadette Auchard (right) and Jill Pipkin.

Everyone participating was given a number at random. Then, proceeding in numerical order, people drew a gift from beneath the Christmas tree. But the rules of a gift rumble permit a person to take one of the opened gifts from its owner instead of taking his luck under the tree. The person whose gift has been taken can then either draw from under the tree again or appropriate another person's gift. The fun is that a gift can be "stolen" two times before it

Care for a small taste? Sample these: www.msupress.msu.edu/FourthGenre/ www.creativenonfiction.org/english.uiowa.edu/nonfiction/readinglist.html (a gigantic list divided by subject)

Back at the café, oblivious to the wet sidewalks and gray skies outside the window, the seven editors sipped their coffee, scribbled notes, and discussed a writing contest.

"What categories should we have?"

"Fiction?"

"Obviously."

"Poetry?"

"A no-brainer."

"Memoir? Essay?"

"What if we put the last two under 'Creative Nonfiction?'" someone suggested.

A lively discussion, as they say, ensued.

WT

lands in the final recipient's lap. A few gifts made the rounds, but mostly the crowd was kind this year.

The end of the gift rumble also marked the end of the evening, and people began to depart by ones and fours with farewells and thanks to hostess Betty Auchard for opening her home to us—and perhaps just *one* more cookie.

The Holiday Bash is a wonderful way to share an evening of food, drink, and fellowship with members of South Bay Writers and one of the prototypical good times had by all. We hope to see you there next year. WT

Haiku for a Happy New Year

Hopeful Sunrise Near
Promising Dawn, Dark Clouds Clear
Peaceful Bright New Year

—Sally A. Milnor

The Education of a Fiction Writer #1

by Richard Burns

Hmm, What Type of Story Do I Write?

I sit in front of my computer, press keys on my keyboard, and tell my really cool story. I send it to Random House for publishing. They love it. I look over the first printing of my wonderful novel with pride and watch stacks of them fly off the shelves of the neighborhood bookstore.

It seemed easy enough to me. But that was way back when.

I have learned tons in the past three years of living my dream (after retiring from my day job). For me, developing as a novelist meant and continues to mean writing a lot, reading more current novels in a new way, giving up on two early awful novels of mine, participating in critique groups, taking continuing education courses, testing my prose at open mic readings, madly taking notes at reasonably priced seminars, not dozing off at two dozen presentations by experts at monthly meetings of SBW, and reading many, many how-to-write-a-novel books. Oh, how naive I was.

"It's not a matter of how great a writer you are; it's a matter of the choices you make," James Dalessandro said at his screenwriting seminar.

"And there are so #@S%& many choices!!" said Richard Burns.

Writing a good novel that actually sells is, of course, no easy task. I'm sure it's not easy to become a sculptor, either. But learning, listening, and getting better, hey, I can do that. Developing as a writer is a process. If you're sure that's how you want to spend your time, jump into it with both feet and both ears.

I. Who Is Your Customer?

When I was engineering and designing state-of-the-art electronic components reliable enough for space shuttle missions, our mantra at HP was "quality" in the 70s, "cut costs" in the 80s, and "invent more creative products" in the 90s. In 2001, our mantra changed to

"please the customer." This is not pure altruism. Building a loyal customer base has everything to do with pleasing it. More customers bring in more revenue.

So while creating your novel, make *your* mantra: "Satisfy, please, and delight your customer." Why? Unless you do just that, your novel will not be published. Do the math. Publishers, book stores, and amazon.com must make money. It's true, they can afford to withstand a dud or two, but they must always believe in the potential of the works they accept.

Imagine an average reader, one reader, perhaps even a specific person you know. That person is your customer.

II. What should spark your story and keep it on track?

Starting out and establishing yourself, you should write about what interests you, what you're passionate about. Tell your story as if you were telling it to a specific person, real or imagined. Writing about what interests you (rather than selecting a certain genre) will reduce external constraints on you unique creativity and will capitalize on your energy and passion.

Your story is bound to flow better if you visualize a single person you are telling the story to. This will keep it sounding assured, as if it were already a fact, not just a story designed to make money. It will help give it a natural voice. If that imagined person asks a question—perhaps you have left a key piece of information out by accident—you will need to answer it satisfactorily somewhere in your novel for your hypothetical (average or ideal) reader.

Read *aloud* what you write, and listen as if you were that interested reader. Things that don't sound right and need to be fixed will jump out at you more readily. Reading my works in progress at our club's open mics has helped immeasurably in this regard.

When you are finished, driven by passion and answering questions raised by your hypothetical average reader, then and only then would you consider what type and genre your novel is for marketing purposes. If you land on a formula you know works best for you, of course, you will choose that type and genre of fiction.

III. What kind of book will your novel be?

Perhaps your finished work of fiction will be a *mystery* or a *romance*. Or might it be a *spy* or *action thriller*, a *western* such as Zane Grey wrote, or a *fantasy/science-fiction* romp? These are called *genre* fiction in that they follow fairly fixed patterns of exposition, the customer knows generally what he's getting, and because of this the publishers' marketing plans come from existing templates and are easy to implement. Picking one of the genre types of stories to write will make your book easier to market.

What do I mean by "good" as applied to genre fiction? No one really knows (from a technique point of view). But good genre novels wind up with a lot of readers, a whole lot of readers, and this makes everyone happy, very happy. Having lots of readers and a happy publisher is the definition of "good writing".

If your novel is not among the genre fiction types, its audience will be not so well established, there might have to be an expensive custom marketing plan (or no marketing plan at all) by the publisher, and the sales are likely to be fewer than those of genre novels. It is more of a gamble for the publisher to select it unless it stands head and shoulders above others or its timing and topic are especially fortunate. The non-genre type of book, for lack of any other name, is called *literary fiction*. Unfortunately, since I don't write westerns, science-fiction, romances, mysteries, or action thrillers, the literary novel seems to be the type I'm involved in writing (so far).

III. Fun Quiz

1. Are you passionately interested in your present project?
2. What genre of novel did Agatha Christie write?
3. What genre do you think the Harry Potter books are? *War of the Worlds*?
4. What type is *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown, genre fiction or literary fiction?
5. Classify Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* as to type and genre.
6. What genre is your present project?

IV. Rule of Thumb

"Satisfy, please, and delight your customer." **WT**

NaNoWriMo. It's Over. Or Is it?

by Carolyn Donnell

It's officially over. NaNoWriMo. On November 30, 2007 11:59 pm, the closing bell rang. Did you finish? Are unfinished chores littering your life? Does your family remember who you are?

Do you feel aimless and a little depressed? It's called post-NaNo blues. You needed some rest and I hope you got a fair allotment over the holidays.

So it's over. Right? Not unless you want it to be. The next step is revision. What you have is a first draft, a rough draft (if you're like me—a very rough draft), but the bones are there. Take a break first, though, if you haven't done so already. A little distance from the story will allow your vision to clear before attacking the next phase.

Take more time in the revision phase than you did in the frenzied NaNowriMo phase. Look at the big picture; check plot and pacing and character growth, dialogue, conflict, and tension. All the stuff you were supposed to turn off during the first month. Use that critique group.

On the other hand, remember the motto of NaNoWriMo and don't take yourself too seriously. Take the work seriously—yes, but remember to keep the joy. Be kind to yourself. If you are too self-critical, you will feel the pain of every lost word, every phrase that doesn't work, and perhaps end up talking yourself out of your inspiration. Don't do that. Clean up your baby before you send it out, but don't throw it out with the bath water. Relax. Have fun. And soon you'll be announcing the birth of your new novel. We can hear the applause now.

NaNo groups have a few more ideas to help reach that goal of publication:

There's a new forum on nanowrimo.org—look for “December and Beyond!”

There are three subgroups so far:

- Critiques, Feedback and Novel Swaps

- Novel Draft Aftercare
- Life After NaNoWriMo

Also in the SouthBay region (www.nanowrimo.org/eng/node/1066595), see the topic “Read your work on the radio!” If you wrote 50k or more, you can have the opportunity to read an excerpt of your novel on the radio!

The following is from the forum:

“Ann Arbor has a radio program on KFJC called Dancin' In The Fast Lane, broadcast on Wednesday mornings. www.kfjc.org/programming/program_info.php?houroftheweek=54&info_id=10

During one of the segments on that show, “Unbedtime Stories,” Ann reads excerpts from books. For the last few years, she has offered that reading slot to NaNo participants who have successfully crossed the 50k line.

So, if you want to read part of your glorious novel on the radio, cross that finish line and contact Ann Arbor! Her email is AArborKFJC@aol.com.”

Other NaNo related activities include:

- NaNoFiMo—National Novel Finishing Month (December). Goal: 30,000 words.
- NaNoPubYe—National Novel Publishing Year (Year-Round). Goal: Get that NaNoWriMo novel ready for publication! You used to get a free Copy of Your Winning NaNoWriMo Manuscript in Book Form, but that offer may not be available this time. Check the website—<http://www.nanopubye.org/register.php>. They say they will post a Breaking News item if anything changes.
- NaNoEdMo—National Novel Editing Month (March). Goal: Commit to 50 hours of novel editing.
- NaPIWriMo—National Playwriting Month (November). Goal: Write a play in one month.
- NaNoMangO—The artist's alternative to NaNoWriMo (November). Goal: Draw 30 pages of sequential art in one month.
- Script Frenzy—NaNoWriMo's sister challenge (April). Goal: Write a 100-page screenplay or stage play in April. You can use your NaNo username and password to log in to the Script Frenzy site.

SBW members who completed or exceeded the 50K mark were Diana Richomme, Lisa Eckstein, Jeremy Osborne, Suzette Gamero, Marcela Dickerson, and myself. Did I miss anyone?

Lisa was a NaNoWriMo facilitator. Thanks to Lisa, for all the help and encouragement, thanks to Diana for setting up write-in space at Barnes & Noble. And congratulations to everyone no matter what the word count, you have more than you started with. You can't revise a blank page.

See latest NaNo photos at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/cdonnelltx/sets/72157603189448815/> WT



SBW members who crossed the 50k finish line Back row: Carolyn Donnell, Lisa Eckstein; foreground: Diana Richomme, Suzette Gamero. Not pictured: Jeremy Osborne, Marcela Dickerson.

The purifying, healing influence of literature, the dissipating of passions by knowledge and the written word, literature as the path to understanding, forgiveness and love, the redeeming might of the word, the literary spirit as the noblest manifestation of the spirit of man, the writer as perfected type, as saint.

—Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*

Getting It Down

by Joni Ratts

Good grief, tomorrow is creative writing class. I don't have anything to read this week. Well, it's not that I haven't written anything; it's just that I don't have anything I want to read, or that I think is ready to read or that's worth reading.

Don't get me wrong; it's not that I think what I write isn't worth reading, but sometimes I wonder if it was worth writing. Do I have that backwards? I'm sure other writers have similar concerns. At least I hope they do. But, maybe not. If I'm the only one who thinks that way, I'd have to consider that either I'm a worrier, slightly weird or downright paranoid.

Okay, so I do worry a little, but not as a general rule. I mean, I worry about what my kids are doing and whether or not they're making good life choices, but every mother does that — it's normal. And I worry about the state of the world and what the future will hold for my grandchildren, but I don't wring my hands and fret about it. I do have sleepless nights though, but that's because my mind is always swirling

with ideas, not worrying about day to day details.

I mean, to write, to get thoughts and ideas down, I think it takes discipline, creativity, guts, hard work and a whole lot of ego. A little talent doesn't hurt either.

The discipline thing I do fine if you don't count the fact that I've stopped exercising because I couldn't fit it into my overbooked schedule anymore and my endless stacks of to-do lists could paper the walls of my office. I can't help that I'm forever jotting down ideas on the backs of receipts and envelopes and even on menus. See, I do the creativity part with no trouble at all. In fact, I'm excellent in that department. No problem with guts either. Didn't I do that rafting trip and jump off the rock into the swirling eddy? And hard work? I've never let hard work stop me from trying anything.

It's the ego thing that ties me in knots. At my desk writing away, composing my thoughts, I'm always certain the story or the poem at that moment is nothing short of amazing. Surely it will be the next Oprah selection or considered for some top literary prize. Who

wouldn't want to read what I write, my heart and soul are in the words. Then comes the thought, who would want to read them? I do worry about the paranoia thing. That's when I tell myself *don't worry, there's a reader for every writer, just like there's a lid for every pot.*

But that's not entirely true. I have lots of pots without lids. I have lids without pots. I have lids that don't fit the pots I put them on. I didn't buy them that way, but over the years some of my pots have burned or been left behind or just disappeared. Maybe they're with all the lost socks of the world. These things are mysteries to me.

Writing too is a mystery to me. I don't write mysteries, it's just strange and bizarre where my ideas come from. It's like someone else makes the words appear and I have no control over what happens on the page. What I end up with is often curiously disconnected from where I began. The process is both perplexing and surprising.

Well, how about that? I guess my ego has a good handle on things after all, because now I do have something to read for class. Writing, it's weird and wonderful all at the same time. **WT**

Here's a New Way to Crank Up Your Writing Output

by Bob Miller

Funny thing is I've never heard anyone mention this. Could I have discovered a radically new idea, here and henceforth to be known as The Miller Accelerando Method (copyright 2007)?

See, part of my problem is that I have always been an incredibly bad typist. Back in high school in 1953, I took typing. Of course, those old Smith-Coronas didn't have line wrap or all those frills, but all about me, people were successfully getting up to 30 words per minute (which was passing) while I was fumbling along at 15 or so, making so many errors that some of my timed tests actually came out with negative speeds. I'm not much better now, and now I've got haandd treemorrss in the leefftt haaand that cause theesseee annoying multiple strikes.

Ah, but I have come upon a solution that could crank up my typing speed to match my incredibly fertile mind. And it was totally accidental. My computer had managed to scramble all the mag-media copies of an item I was working on, so I was left to copy a paper print. So I put on some music to type to. A favorite of mine. Opera. Rossini's *L'Italiana In Algeri*. I trust you know Rossini? Think the "Largo al Factotum" from *Barber in Seville*. Only *Italian Girl* gets up to some faster tempi. Lots faster. And it pulled me along. My hand didn't have time for tremors. *Mamma mia!* I wound up my metro-nome later and tried to find what I was typing, and got up to 220 beats per minute. Using the typing class average of five characters per word, that's 36 wpm, a Personal Best! And at my age!

Do pick your music carefully, though. Right now I have Imre Kalman's *Czardas Princess* on, and the tempo goes all over the map, since it's based on Gypsy themes. Some of the melodies start slow, at 4-5 wpm and pick up *poco a poco* to 25-27 wpm. Great listening, and my hands never moved so gracefully over the keys, but absolute hell on productivity, even neglecting all those fermatas that I could no more type through than I could have played through.

So there you have it, revealed first at SBW, the Miller Accelerando Method (c.'07). And the best part is that if you block, you can just stop and listen to some glorious music, and if the story never comes back... Well, you still had a great hour. **WT**

Open Mics— SBW's and Others

by Carolyn Donnell

You've written it down. Hooray! Now come practice reading and talking about your work. South Bay Writers Club provides five Open Mic opportunities to stand up in front of an audience, usually made up of your friends and fellow writers, and read your own work. Alternatively, you may, if you wish, read from the works of another author. Or you can just come to listen and support your fellow writers as they read. Each writer is allowed ten minutes of fame and readings should be appropriate for a general audience. Our web page states "Open Mic events provide an opportunity to hone your public speaking skills—very necessary when your book breaks out and you end up on Oprah. (We can dream, can't we?)" So dream on, but do come and practice. Nonmembers and listeners welcome.

Reservations are required if you'd like to read. Specify the date/location desired.

For Fremont Open Mic contact Jeannine Vegh at ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net or Bob Garfinkle at ragarf@earthlink.net

For all others contact Bill Baldwin at (408) 730-9622 or wabaldwin@aol.com).

1st Friday, 7:30 pm Barnes & Noble, Almaden Plaza

2nd Friday, 7:30 pm Borders, Santana Row

3rd Friday, 7:30 pm Barnes and Noble, Pruneyard Shopping Center

4th Wednesday, 7:30 pm Borders, in Sunnyvale

3rd Thursday, 7:00 pm Barnes and Noble, Fremont

Other Open Mics in the South Bay include

San Jose Poetry Slam

8:00 pm; signups begin at 7pm.

Cost: \$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 St., San Jose

www.sanjosepoetryslam.com
(408) 278-1400

Poetry Center San Jose - Poetry Lounge at The Blue Monkey

Poetry reading and discussion most Tuesdays.

Cosponsored by the Creative Writing Department of San José State University
Free admission

The Blue Monkey Bar and Taquería
1 East San Fernando Street, San Jose
www.pcsj.org

Willow Glen Books

Poetry Center San Jose presents a poetry reading series in the cozy setting of Willow Glen Books. Reading by a featured poet, followed by Open Mic.
3rd Monday of each month at 7:00 pm
Free admission

1130 Lincoln Ave., San Jose
408-298-8141

Sister Spirit, Women's Book Store and Coffeehouse

Women's Open Mic
Every 2nd Saturday 6:30 - 8:00 pm
938 The Alameda, San Jose
(408)293-9372
<http://www.sisterspirit.org>

Thursday Gig's Art & The Spoken Word

Featured artist and poet, followed by open mic.
Third Thursdays 5:00 to 9:00 pm
Potluck, BYOB & soda
New winter season location
15272 Charmeran, San Jose (Cambrian District)
(408) 410-2313 or email
artpages@earthlink.net **WT**

I expected more from literature
than from real, naked life.

—Gunter Grass, *The Tin Drum*

Nipper's Nits

by Pat Decker Nipper

Lesson 33. Foreword/Forward

As writers we use both foreword and forward and probably know the difference, which is partly one of proper spelling. To refresh your memory, a foreword is the section at the front of a book, part of the "front matter." It's usually introductory in nature, and usually written by someone other than the book's author.



The key element in the correct spelling is "word," which should help you remember it. Also the spelling of "fore," which indicates "in advance." If you have a foreword in your book, traditionally you should have an afterword at the end of the book for balance.

If you are the author, you might prefer to use a "prologue," which also requires an "epilogue" for balance. A "preface" acts much as a first chapter, though the pages are numbered in roman numerals; it's usually written by the book's author and doesn't require anything at the end of the book.

"Forward" (preferably not "forwards") refers to the motion of going ahead. It's the opposite of backward.

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

A defensive pose
timed with meaning
adrift in emotion
suffused by pain,
I reach and
the moment slips
like silk my grasp
it eludes you once again
you drift from
my sight
blighted from my soul
a searing reminder
of my aloneness.

—Jacqueline Mutz

Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

Things get a little harried for all of us during the holidays. It seems to me that I breathe in the frenzy of everyone around me trying to get “it” all right, this holiday season thing. And it varies so from individual to individual, from family to family. What I do know is that in spite of the craziness, the holidays are a time of giving and receiving, a time of reflection and mostly gratitude for who and what we have in our lives.

As I have said in the past, an accolade is “an award or high praise.” In writing, it is a friend who encourages you in your writing process. It is the 500th rejection letter received for your Great American Novel that is part of the interesting wall paper in the powder room of your home. It is your friend who received a Pulitzer nomination. It is your student who is happy to have been disciplined enough to write ten minutes every day for the last two weeks. It is me enjoying reporting on SBW success stories. Here are two:



Jackie Mutz
Contributing Editor

From Suzy Paluzzi: “I wanted to send the news that I have been invited to contribute to an anthology series as a woman writer and educator.”

From Swann Li: “My short story “The Thief of Chalk Sticks” joined Glimmer Train’s Short Story Award for New Writers Fall 2007 competition, and ranked as a top 3% finalist. Even though it won’t be published by them, at least it’s something I can share with my club members.”

From Betty Auchard: “The Spanish translation of *Dancing in My Nightgown: The Rhythms of Widowhood* will be published early in 2008. The title will read *Bailando en mi camisón: Al compás de la viudez*. Also this coming spring I’ll be recording the audio book for *Dancing*. Last of all, my second book, *Welcome to the Home for the Friendless*, is almost finished, and my previous publisher, Stephens Press, will do the honors again. Life is good.”

You are right Betty. Life is good. Keep writing and don’t forget to send me

your good news. Email me at j_mutz@yahoo.com. And don’t breathe in the frenzy around. Just breathe. And then smile and keep on writing. Happy Holidays! **WT**

Prowling, continued from page 2

We always decorated on Christmas Eve. Mom made the eggnog and Dad the oyster stew, and there was an abundance of Mavrakos—the very best local chocolate. Friends came and we filled the house with good cheer and, furtively, Mom’s eggnog with bourbon. Occasionally it snowed, and there was always a crackling fire on the hearth. I recall a special night: twenty-five, just out of the Air Force, and I had invited an often-appearing “service buddy” to join in.

A good hearted but boisterous sort, Jim was a square-jawed, stout, and muscular man with flaming red hair who, even on best behavior, was a shade below our mother’s expectation for decorum. She would frown and say, “Now Jim, you don’t really mean that,” and she’d occasionally advise. With a tolerance she couldn’t afford me, she abided his antics and, I judged, was actually quite fond of him.

On this particular night, my two sisters, their college friends, our parents, and Jim listened to Christmas music on the Zenith and twice, carolers at the door. We joked about acquaintances, told exaggerated stories, and decorated the tree while a rare dusting of snow fell gently over the dark of the town. I remember looking out through our front mullioned windows at a streetlamp below and watching the flakes fall gently in its light. The night, silent outside while it gave the town a new look, inside was spirited and filled us with joy.

Later, stoked with full tummies and the sedative eggnog, we headed out to a service at Christ Lutheran. Arriving a bit late, we younger adults were seated in the front pew. (Lutheran churches are filled from the back forward and our mother would rather stand in a parking lot than sit in the front of anything, but she did accept a spot for them both in the third row.)

Just as Pastor George was getting into his message, the monotony of doctrine

Remembering Dorothy K. Dowdell

In December, President Dave LaRoche received a letter from Joan Moore, the daughter of Dorothy K. Dowdell, suggesting that we might want to mention



Dorothy K. Dowdell

the passing of her mother at age 97. It was a gentle introduction to a woman who served several causes, including the CWC. Ms. Dowdell was engaged in promoting our CWC for some 40 years, was past president of several branches (Sacramento in 1953 and later, Peninsula) and was perhaps involved in our South Bay at its earliest time (we have Ms. Moore’s recollection). Ms. Dowdell wrote 27 books during her lifetime, was a Jack London Award recipient, and was central to organizing a writing conference held at Stanford in 1977. It is her kind of work and dedication that makes our club successful, pursuing its aim and achieving its goals. Hats off to the efforts and memory of Dorothy K. Dowdell.

iced over the night’s joy and took its toll on Jim, who dozed and began snoring—little rumbles at first. I prodded. He grunted, leaned into my shoulder, got comfortable, and snored louder. Then, smack in the middle of the miracle of the Christ Child’s appearing in the manger to rid the world of its sins, Pastor George stopped short.

“Florence LaRoche! Is that boy with you? The one with the red hair ... snoring through my sermon?” He pointed his habit-draped arm and accusing finger at Jim—a gesture ordinarily reserved for hell and damnation. “Please do something to quiet him down, he’s disrupting the coming of Christ.”

Jim continued in our Christmas Eve gatherings after that but never again did he go to a service. I’ve always believed it was a thoughtful and well-considered choice. **WT**



*We are the future builders of
Communism,
Following the honorable traditions of the
revolutionary pioneers.
We love our motherland. We love our
people.
Flaming red scarves fluttering on our
bosom...*

The “Song of Young Chinese Pioneers” roars from the huge gray loudspeaker hung on a gnarled willow branch outside our classroom. A few peasants planting rice seedlings in the water fields hear the song and turn back to wave at us. Their wet hands sparkle in the sunshine.

“We will pause here, class. Time for the flag-raising ceremony.” Teacher Chen puts down the textbook on the cement desk in the front, her eyes smiling behind her plastic glasses.

We excited third-graders swarm out of the classroom in threes and twos. The open yard in front of the row of classrooms is already crowded with students from different classes. Groups of girls and boys are chattering and skipping elastic ropes on the cracked earth. Cloudlets of yellow dust and laughter rise from here and there.

Hua, Chunyang, and I walk with our arms draping over each other’s shoulders. We go together everywhere, even on the trips to the open-air outhouse near the campus entrance.

“Hua, I love your new cloth shoes! Look at those small blue flowers. What fabric is that? Flannel?” I ask.

“Yes, flannel it is. My mother just made them for me. She put three layers of stitches on the soles. Said they would last until the Spring Festival at least.” Hua walks with her feet kicking higher in front of her, an effect of my admiration. Yellow swirls of dust follow our steps as if we were heavenly soldiers harnessing carriages of clouds and fog.

“Rich folks, clearly different; their clothes, made of flaaan—nel ...” a queer voice singing a familiar tongue twister comes from behind us. The word “flannel” is stretched long and lazy in such a sarcastic way that the song never sounded uglier. We turn around to see which troublemaker it is.

Yanyan sticks out her tongue at us. “Ho-ho, little peasants! Who are you to wear flannel? I guess your mother stole

Illustrated by Betty Auchard

Who Are Our Friends? Who Are Our Enemies?

by Swann Li

The glassless classroom windows with only iron grids have made me shiver in winter winds, but now in the spring they give me an unobstructed view of the fields outside our campus. Water fields stretch far like an immense window reflecting the sky and clouds, divided only by grids of earthen banks overgrown with lush wildflowers and weeds. The thick fragrance of the locust tree flowers fills our classroom all day and makes me believe more in what Principal Huang said last week.

“Children, you are the sun of early morning. You are the flourishing flowers of the great garden of our motherland,” he said, his face a beaming sun.

Since then, every day I have felt so lucky to be living in this garden basking in golden sunshine. *How can we invite those children suffering endlessly in capitalist countries over to enjoy this happy life?* I often ask myself anxiously because it pains my heart to know that the sun never rises in their streets and they suffer from the many crimes committed in the permanent darkness.

it.” She gives a scoffing laugh with her hands on her hips.

“Who are you to laugh at us? You daughter of a stinky capitalist!” Chunyang bursts out. It works. Yanyan runs away. The strand of little plastic apples on her ponytail glitters in the mid-morning sunlight.

“A new hair ring every week... Parasite! Hmm!” Chunyang releases the anger from her nostrils.

“Let’s cut her off!” Hua proposes.

“Good!” Chunyang nods, her two ponytails bouncing up and down in the sunshine. Then she turns to me. “Let’s cut her off! Linlin, won’t you join us?”

“Cut her off? What is that?”

“*Aiya*, Linlin, what have you read all those big books for, not even knowing such a common thing? ‘Cut her off’ means we don’t talk to her at all,” Hua explains, “and we roll our eyes each time we see her.”

“If you two won’t talk to her, of course I won’t talk to her either. Yesterday she wouldn’t let me join the rope-jumping game, even though all the other girls pleaded with her. Still, I have never rolled my eyes...” I try to move my eyes from left to right, but they feel quite rigid.

“This way, Linlin,” Chunyang says. “Let me show you.” She looks at me, immediately shuts her eyelids, looks up, and then looks to the other direction.

I practice a few times until Chunyang says it looks fine. I guess I have strained my eye muscles, since my eyes feel sore.

“Tomorrow my mom will fry sweet steam breads. I will bring some to share with you two,” Hua announces.

The mere thought of sweet steam breads makes me swallow some sudden saliva. I put my arms around their shoulders again and hold my friends tighter, feeling their body warmth seep through my sleeves. Then we hurry away to find our class.

Rise up, people who don't want to be slaves anymore.

Build a new Great Wall with our flesh and blood.

Our nation is facing the most dangerous crisis...

The National Anthem cackles with raspy electric noises from the speakers.

Two fifth-grade girls slowly drag the national flag to the top of the weather-beaten wooden pole and tie the string to a peg.

“At ease!” our P.E. teacher shouts crisply. “Now it’s time for Principal Huang to give the weekly talk on current issues.”

“Students! I just came back from a meeting in the county town yesterday. The current situation around us is only calm on the surface. We should heighten our mental defense and not let our guard down. Since our great leader

must be carrying out some antirevolutionary activities behind that door. The round-faced cook Little Wang in the school mess hall is also dubious. He always stares at the chests of fifth-grade girls for too long. I have noticed it a few times. With a sneaky character like that, he could be stealing food from the public mess hall and prying loose the cornerstones of our edifice of Socialism. I should be careful with those two.

Hummmmm. A bee flies into my line of vision. It dances around in the air over us a little bit, and then begins to hover

To withstand the attacks of our enemies, we have to unite and fight shoulder to shoulder.

Chairman Mao recently passed away, many enemies of the Proletariat class crouching around us are ready to strike whenever they get a chance! They will never give up their efforts to overthrow the edifice of Socialism until they are exterminated! Be careful and watch out at all times!” Principal Huang points his right index finger toward his right side and brings it slowly around to his left to strengthen his warnings. “Look all around you and observe carefully. Our great leader Chairman Mao reminded us, ‘Who are our friends? Who are our enemies? This is the first question of our cause.’”

As a well-practiced revolutionary custom, everyone in the school recites after him: “Who are our friends? Who are our enemies? This is the first question of our cause.” High-spirited voices reverberate through the small campus and bounce off the single row of classrooms.

“Good.” Principal Huang nods his gray head, looking satisfied. “Let’s not forget His Greatness’ brilliant direction. Whenever you think you have found an enemy of our cause, report it to me.”

Principal Huang rambles on, but my mind wanders away. It’s scary that there are enemies around us. Still, nobody looks like one. Who might they be? I comb through mental images of people and try to find the ones that I should be careful with. Could old Doctor Zhao be an enemy? He always closes the school clinic door even though he should leave it open. He

over the red plastic apples in Yanyan’s hair. She waves her hand at it, trying to dismiss the bee. The bee flies toward her ear. She jumps up and then squats down with her hands covering her head. The bee flies away. Yanyan opens her eyes and looks around to make sure the bee is gone.

Then a very unfortunate thing happens. Her eyes happen to meet my eyes and lock for three seconds. At the first moment I don’t feel anything. At the second moment I suddenly remember that she is the one my best friends and I will cut off. Being a loyal and devoted friend, at the third moment, I grab this chance to roll my eyes at her. What a hearty and powerful eye-rolling it is! I bulge my eyeballs at her and then quickly press down my tightly creased eyelids in deep disgust, vividly expressing my abhorrence of her. When I open my eyes again, I find that Teacher Chen’s cruising eyes happen to meet mine. She must be checking our concentration level. I square my shoulders and begin to focus on Principal Huang’s talk.

Back in the classroom, Teacher Chen stands before the chattering class, her face clouded. She clears her throat and speaks. “Class, I hope you have taken good mental note of the principal’s talk. The matter of class struggles is not child’s play. To withstand the attacks of our enemies, we have to unite and fight shoulder to shoulder. Internal conflicts are only going to weaken us, and I definitely won’t allow that to happen.

However, just now I noticed that some of us are not as united as we should be." Her eyes, now piercingly serious, suddenly fall on me.

Startled, I instinctively straighten my back.

"You," she points at me, and then points at Yanyan, "and you, come over here." I rise from my cement bench and go to stand in the middle of the aisle. Teacher Chen beckons to Yanyan to come stand by me.

"I notice that you two rolled your eyes at each other during the principal's talk. Now, we can't let such things happen. If we don't rally around and stand like copper and iron walls, we don't stand a chance of survival in the cruel class struggles. Now, Linlin, extend your hand, and Yanyan, you too. You two shake hands now and call each other by name," says Teacher Chen.

Shake hands with Yanyan? No way. Being a town-dweller, she is always so haughty in front of us peasants' kids. I shake my head at her little chubby face. Yanyan also does not move.

Teacher Chen raises her voice. "I am only going to repeat that once more. You two shake hands now!"

She has to train me to be mentally strong, as strong as those revolutionary martyrs.

My hand seems disconnected from my arm. My disgust toward Yanyan, my embarrassment in front of the whole class, and my loyalty to my friends all combine to make me unable to move my hand.

Teacher Chen's face is flushed.

"Last chance! You two shake hands. Then call each other by name. Right now!" she shouts.

My hand just cannot move.

Thwack! A crisp smack sounds in the classroom. Then I realize Teacher Chen has slapped the right side of my face.

The sound of hand smacking flesh reminds me of pig-herders whipping pigs. With my face muscles pulsing in chilly pain, I gape at Teacher Chen.

This is the teacher that I really loved before. One cold winter day with heavy

snow, I was the only student to show up at school. She took me into her home and gave me a bowl of half-clear yam starch soup with pork bones. The most delicious thing I ever had! Another time, on seeing me shudder in the cold winds, she gave me a sweater of her daughter's and asked me not to tell my classmates. Being the top student of the class, I always felt she considered me her favorite student.

Now she has slapped my face in front of the whole class!

Before I know it, another smack falls on the left side of my face. Wronged tears well up in my eyes. I gaze into the space in front of me without focusing on anything; I open my eyes wide to let the tears dry quickly; I squeeze my throat muscles to stifle the urge to cry.

Teacher Chen has always seemed to me the most beautiful woman in this small town. She has a fair complexion, big double-lidded eyes, and a curly mouth. She always dresses in an elegant manner and speaks in an educated way. To my shock, her beautiful face is now twisted in anger and her eyes are full of coldness. How can she have changed so much in half an hour? How could a harmless eye-rolling ruin all her kind-

ness to me? I search wildly in my mind for an answer, and I find one.

Teacher Chen has not changed. She just wants to give me some special training, to mold me into one of the best future builders of our country. In order to achieve that, she has to train me to be mentally strong, as strong as those revolutionary martyrs. No matter how the enemies tortured them with chili water, ropes, and bricks, not a single word of the Party's secrets ever escaped their lips. A few slaps on the face suddenly seem so trivial as the scenes from war movies flash through my mind.

Thwack!

Huang Jiguang threw his nineteen-year-old body against the machine gun and muffled the bullets with his chest. His comrades seized that moment to take over the ridge

and win the battle during the Korean War.

Thwack!

Nineteen-year-old Dong Cunrui held a bomb high against a bridge above him with his left hand and pulled the fuse with his right hand. He disappeared with a loud bang and some black smoke. He gave his life for the liberation of our country.

Thwack!

Qiu Shaoyun lay perfectly motionless on a Korean War battleground with flames devouring his body inch by inch. There was a small creek right beside him, and yet he never yielded to the desire to roll into the creek for fear of exposing his comrades.

Several slaps later, my cheeks feel a burning sensation. I never realized my cheeks could be so hot, as if they had just been rubbed with ten red-hot chili peppers. I feel like a drunkard with bloodshot eyes and a red face. Strangely, I also feel uplifted. Everything around me feels unreal, as if I were in a silvery gossamer fog. *Teacher Chen, I won't let you down if I am really caught by the enemies one day. See how well I am dealing with all this physical and mental torture? I am strong, am I not?* I lift my face to Teacher Chen, eager to revel in her approval.

Thwack!

This slap misses my cheek and lands on my nose. One nostril immediately feels spicy and warm, and something trickles down my lips and onto my neck. I wipe at my neck with a hand, which, to my horror, becomes red.

I begin to shiver all over.

"What is this, Teacher Chen?" I clench my teeth tight, holding back tears.

"What is this red thing?"

"See how she holds her breath and shivers? Doesn't she look like she is having a bowel movement?" a boy comments loudly. The class breaks into laughter.

Amid roof-raising laughter, Teacher Chen kneels down so that her face is level with mine, and grabs my shoulders. *She is going to comfort me now, going to tell me it is okay that I failed the last part of her training. I can do better next time.*

Instead she begins to shake my shoulders so that my head bumps back and forth and I cannot see her face clearly. Finally she stops shaking me, and her

eyes pierce the fog in my mind. “Shake her hand right now! Do you hear me?” She squeezes the words through glinting white teeth. She must brush her teeth every day.

A gust of air rushes into the classroom carrying the fragrance of the locust tree flowers, as sweet as this morning’s. I study Teacher Chen’s face for a long moment. For the first time I notice how unsightly the black mole below her nose is. She is still shouting at me, but I cannot hear her words anymore. This is not her “training.” She is really angry with me, and she is slapping me for no purpose other than... slapping.

To my disappointment, I just cannot raise my hand, move it toward Yanyan, and bring all this trouble to an end. I wish I had never rolled my eyes at Yanyan, I wish my sunny life could stay the same and I could go on loving Teacher Chen, I wish I still wanted to invite those children suffering endlessly in capitalist countries to join mine, which was a tremendous garden only this morning.

Letting out a desperate sigh, Teacher Chen turns to slap Yanyan’s face to be fair.

Three slaps later, Yanyan, this soft-spined town-dwelling parasite, begins to cry. “Woo woo woowooo,” she whimpers. Her hand gropes for my hand and takes hold of it. I want to shake her hand off, but cannot resist its fleshy warmth and softness. Our hands clasp together, drooping awkwardly by my crotch.

“Now, call her by name.” Teacher Chen’s pinched face relaxes a little bit.

“Linlin,” Yanyan murmurs.

“We are good comrades,” prompts Teacher Chen.

“We are good comrades,” Yanyan repeats.

“Now,” Teacher Chen turns toward me again, “your turn.”

Eyes are fixed on me from all around, amalgamated as iron and copper walls. *There is no way out of this, is there?* I feel myself ever so slowly rise above the whole class, float toward the cob-webbed wooden beams below the rice-straw thatched roof, lean on one dusty stripped-bare beam. I look down at the crumpled bloody-faced tousle-haired

wide-eyed me in the classroom aisle below.

“Y-Y-Yan—Yanyan,” little Linlin’s voice trembles, “We are—good comrades.”

The weak voice trails off and gets lost in the hopeful atmosphere in the classroom. Little Linlin’s bottom lip droops in the air, her mouth hangs open.

“Now, tell us, why did you roll your eyes at Yanyan?”

As if hypnotized, little Linlin’s lips flap mechanically and monotonously:

“Because my best friends Hua and Chunyang decided to cut her off. So I felt I should cut her off too.”

“Oh, is that so?” Teacher Chen’s voice sounds shrill as she immediately turns to look at my friends in the first row.

Hua shudders, and then she quickly shakes her head, her ponytails flapping back and forth. “No, no, no such thing. She made it up.” She turns around to face the blackboard.

I look down at her familiar face. Three years ago, on my first day in the school, I had fun dragging my little wooden stool all over the classroom and exploring the new world, just as the rest of the class was busy doing. Then I saw a little girl with thick black hair and big gentle eyes sitting by herself, so I moved my stool and sat next to her. We smiled at each other and felt so happy together. Three years later I lost her in five seconds.

Chunyang, now with the teacher’s wrath turned on her, sits dazed for a moment. Then she comes to her senses and resolutely exclaims, “It never happened. We are all good comrades and all good friends. Nobody is snubbing anybody. We should stay united.” Broken images of her carrying me on her back waddling in mud up to her knees and me holding an umbrella for both of us in the beating rain flash through my mind and vanish.

Suddenly Chunyang jumps up from her bench, produces a little red book from her shirt pocket and opens it. “Great Leader teaches us: Who are our friends? Who are our enemies? This is the first question of our cause.”

“Who are our friends? Who are our enemies? This is the first question of our cause.” The whole class stands up repeating. The intoxicating hot sound

waves full of enlightened camaraderie roll past the iron grids on the windows into the open air outside and scare several sparrows on the willow tree into startled flight.

Light-headed and entranced, I gaze down at the roaring class, who have no idea what they are talking about and yet sound so determined and passionate. Who are our friends? People can be your friends at one breath and turn their back on you the next. Who are our enemies? At this moment everyone seems like enemies to me.

I look toward the back of the classroom. On the back wall, a big piece of tattered red paper trembles in the spring breeze. Four big words are painted on the paper for us to live by: harmonious, alert, austere, jovial. I notice for the first time how these words collide in meaning, yet our Great Leader Chairman Mao asked us to be all four things at the same time. He has passed away now, and no one can explain what he meant.

Maybe that is exactly his point: *we can* be different things at the same time. Teacher Chen can be a teacher and an enemy at the same time, can’t she? Hasn’t she often asked me to cook for her when she is not on the campus? *I have cooked the mung bean porridge to a perfect consistency out of my love for her.* Hasn’t she often asked the class to go to her garden and pluck the green worms from growing vegetables? Hasn’t she hidden a copy of *Ancient Sexual Techniques of China* under her pillow? Hasn’t Hua told me she and her sister stole cabbages from the commune’s fields? Hasn’t Chunyang said she wished all the town-dwellers would die in one big earthquake?

Tomorrow, I am going to report all this to Principal Huang, so he knows who the enemies are among us. He will surely praise me at next week’s flag-raising ceremony. I rest my head on the dusty beam and begin to smile. WT



Contests Anyone?

by Carolyn Donnell

This column lists contests with deadlines in January or February of 2008.

Let's start talking about contests by remembering our own.



Carolyn Donnell
Contributing Editor

WritersTalk Challenge

The *WritersTalk* Challenge runs year-round with \$\$cash\$\$ awards announced in September and March. All work in the eligible genres published in *WT* from August 15, 2007 through February 15, 2008 will be eligible for the awards made in March, 2008. Your submissions must be in the hands of the *WritersTalk* editor by January 16, 2008 to qualify. See page 18 for details, or southbaywriters.com/newsletter/challenge.html

WritersWeekly Winter 24-Hour Contest

The start time is Saturday, January 26, 2008 at 12:00 p.m. (noon) Central Time (10:00 a.m. here).

Instructions for the contest can be found here: www.writersweekly.com/contest/guidelines-winter2008.TXT

It would be *so* cool if SBW could make a sweep of the *WritersWeekly* 24-hour contest.

Other Contests

ByLine Magazine Contests

New Talent—Deadline January 4, 2008.

Eating Poem—Deadline January 18, 2008.

Memory Poem—Deadline February 2, 2008.

Prizes: \$35, \$20, \$10.

Entry fee: \$3 or \$5 for three poems.

Humor Sketch—Deadline January 11, 2008.

Personal Experience Article—Deadline, January 11, 2008.

Character Sketch—Deadline February 9, 2008.

Prizes: \$40, \$25, \$15.

Entry fee: \$5.

Guidelines: www.bylinemag.com/contests.asp

Glimmer Train Contests

"Family Matters" Short Story Contest

Quarterly prizes. Short fiction.

Online entries preferred.

Deadline: 1/31/08

Short Fiction

Top prize: \$1,200.00

Entry fee: \$20.00

Guidelines: www.glimmertrain.com/familymatters.html

Very Short Fiction Award

Twice-yearly award for short stories up to 3,000 words

Deadline: 02/29/08

Short Fiction

Top prize: \$1,200.00

Entry fee: \$15.00

Guidelines: www.glimmertrain.com/vershorficaw1.html

Fiction Open

Quarterly prize from a leading journal of short fiction

Deadline: 03/31/08

Short Fiction

Top prize: \$2,000.00

Entry fee: \$20.00

Guidelines: www.glimmertrain.com/fictionopen.html

Poetry-Only Contests

Colorado Prize for Poetry

Prize from university press. Friendly to experimental work.

Deadline: 1/11/08

Poetry Manuscript

Top prize: \$1,500.00 honorarium and book publication

Entry fee: \$25.00

Guidelines: www.colostate.edu/Depts/English/coloradoreview/CPP/index.html

Cultural Center of Cape Cod Poetry Competition

Submit up to three poems or five pages.

Deadline: 1/15/08

Single poem

Top prize: \$1000.00

Entry fee: \$15.00

Guidelines: www.cultural-center.org

Del Sol Press Poetry Prize

A prize, publication by Del Sol Press, and 20 author copies is given annually.

Deadline: 1/15/08

Poetry collection

Top prize: \$1200.00

Entry fee: \$24.00

Guidelines: www.webdelsol.com/DelSolPress/dsp-poetry-competition.htm

St. Petersburg Review Poetry Contest

A prize and publication in *St. Petersburg Review* for a group of poems "reflecting the current social, political, and literary landscapes."

Deadline: 1/15/08

Poetry collection

Top prize: \$1200.00

Entry fee: \$24.00

Guidelines:

www.stpetersburgreview.com

Discovery/Boston Review: The Joan Leiman Jacobson Poetry Prizes

For poets with no published books or chapbooks.

Deadline: 1/18/08

Individual Poems

Top prize: \$500.00

Entry fee: \$10.00

Guidelines: www.92y.org/content/literary_programs.asp#3

Strokestown International Poetry Competitions

Irish literary festival. Unpublished poems in English, Irish or Scottish Gaelic languages.

Deadline: 1/31/08

Individual Poems

Top prize: • 4,000.00

Entry fee: 5.00 EURO

Guidelines:

www.strokestownpoetry.org/compinfo.htm

Academi Cardiff International Poetry Competition

Award for unpublished poems from the national literary society of Wales.

Deadline: 02/01/08

Individual Poems

Top prize: £5,000.00

Entry fee: £5.00

Guidelines: www.academi.org/cipc/

Cleveland State University First Book Competition

Poetry manuscripts by authors with no published books.

Deadline: 02/15/08

Poetry Manuscript

Top prize: \$1,000.00

Entry fee: \$25.00

Guidelines: www.csuohio.edu/poetrycenter/contest1.html

Cleveland State University

Open Competition

Poetry manuscripts by authors with prior book publication
Deadline: 02/15/08
Poetry Manuscript
Top prize: \$1,000.00
Entry fee: \$25.00
Guidelines: www.csuohio.edu/poetrycenter/contest1.html

Kathryn A. Morton Prize in Poetry

Open poetry manuscript contest for US citizens.
Deadline: 02/15/08
Poetry Manuscript
Top prize: \$2,000.00
Entry fee: \$25.00
Guidelines: www.sarabandebooks.org/contest/k_a_morton_prize.html

The National Poetry Series

Manuscript prize for US citizens. Publication by major literary presses for 5 winners.
Deadline: 02/15/08
Poetry Manuscript
Top prize: \$1,000.00
Entry fee: \$30.00
Guidelines: www.nationalpoetryseries.org/

Tupelo Press Snowbound Series

Chapbook Competition

Poetry chapbook manuscripts. Publication by a leading independent press.
Deadline: 02/15/08
Poetry Chapbook
Top prize: \$1,000.00
Entry fee: \$20.00
Guidelines: www.tupelopress.org/snow.shtml

Poetry Magazine Awards

Deadline: rolling
Individual Poems
Top prize: \$5,000.00
Entry fee: none
Guidelines: www.poetrymagazine.org/about/prizes.html

Fiction, Nonfiction, Poetry

Columbia Journal Poetry, Fiction and Nonfiction Contest

Prizes from university literary journal. Best for intermediate-level and up. Online only.
Deadline 1/15/08
Individual Poems and Short Fiction & Creative Nonfiction

Top prize \$500.00
Entry fee: \$12.00
Guidelines: www.columbiajournal.org/contests.htm

Literal Latté K. Margaret Grossman Fiction Award

A prize and publication in *Literal Latté* for a short story. The editors of *Literal Latté* will judge. All entries are considered for publication.
Deadline 1/15/08
Short Story
Top prize \$1000.00
Entry fee: \$10.00
Guidelines: www.literal-latte.com

BkMk Press Ciardi/Chandra Prizes

Two prizes of \$1,000 each and publication by BkMk Press for a poetry collection and a short story collection.
Deadline 1/15/08
Poetry collection and Short Story collection
Top prize \$1000.00
Entry fee: \$25.00
Guidelines URL: www.umkc.edu/bkmk

Highlights for Children

Fiction Contest

Highlights magazine annual fiction contest for stories set in the future. Any unpublished story under 800 words is eligible.
Deadline: 1/31/2008
Children's Fiction
Prizes: Three \$1,000 prizes; published in *Highlights* magazine.
Fees: N/A
Details at tinyurl.com/2lpcc

William Allen

Creative Nonfiction Prize

Essay contest from Ohio State University's literary magazine.
Deadline: 1/15/08
Creative Nonfiction
Top prize: \$500.00
Entry fee: \$10.00
Guidelines: english.osu.edu/research/journals/thejournal/WilliamAllenContest.cfm

The Iowa Review Awards

Prizes for poems, stories and essays from the journal published by the University of Iowa. Very competitive.
Deadline: 1/31/08
Individual Poems and Short Fiction & Creative Nonfiction
Top prize: \$1,000.00

Entry fee: \$15.00
Guidelines: www.uiowa.edu/~iareview/mainpages/iowaaward.html

New Millennium Writings Awards

Twice-yearly award. Seeks a mix of magic realism, fantasy and mainstream entries.
Deadline: 1/31/08
Individual Poems and Short Fiction & Creative Nonfiction (also Short-Short fiction)
Top prize: \$1,000.00
Entry fee: \$17.00
Guidelines: www.newmillenniumwritings.com/awards.html

Ohio State University Prize in Short Fiction

Unpublished collection of short stories. May include translations of one's own work into English.
Deadline: 1/31/08
Prose Manuscript
Top prize: \$1,500.00
Entry fee: \$20.00
Guidelines: www.ohiostatepress.org/index.htm?/books/series%20pages/osushortfiction.htm

Mary McCarthy Prize in Short Fiction

Fiction manuscript (novel or short fiction collection) by a US citizen.
Deadline: 02/15/08
Prose Manuscript
Top prize: \$2,000.00
Entry fee: \$25.00
Guidelines: www.sarabandebooks.org/contest/mary_mccarthy_prize.html

PNWA Literary Contest

Pacific Northwest Writers Association. First Place Winners are given the opportunity to attend the Agents and Editors Reception at the PNWA Summer Conference.
Deadline: 02/22/08
12 categories including fiction, non-fiction/memoir, poetry, children's, screen writing.
Prizes: First Place: \$600 and the Zola Award Second Place: \$300 Third Place: \$150
Entry fee: \$35.00 per entry (PNWA Member) \$50.00 per entry (Non-member)
Download the application form at www.pnwa.org **WT**

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

Plot Workshop



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

Register online at 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

Resolutions

by Jackie Mutz

I have given up on Resolutions for the New Year, the time to start over, to begin again. To exercise, to eat right, to quit swearing, to say “I love you,” to wake up and smile when my eyes first open, to quit swearing in the car during commute time, to read more, to get rid of all the piles in my house, to be organized and to be disciplined in all areas of my life. And to write. And write and write some more. To get out of my head and into my heart and write today. Talk about staying in the present.

Last year I attended a different kind of New Year celebration, one that began in the afternoon on January 1, 2007. It was sort of a New Age thing where you create a vision board, a collage of what you want to see happen in the New Year. Mine had pictures of lush flowers, tropical island scenes, silver back gorillas; and words such as *health*, *home*,

and, in particular, *no more self-improvement*.

No more self improvement? What a concept. Because, as we all know, there are products and people trying to persuade you to do the opposite. Erase those wrinkles, enhance that body part, read faster, whiten those teeth, write faster, better, get your book on Oprah ... it permeates the senses until ... what? That's when I saw those four words—*no more self-improvement*.

What did that mean? If I was not on that road to continual self-improvement, then what path was I on? (That New Age thing again). And how did that relate to my own writing? I decided that instead of January 1 being the day for resolutions to write and then write some more, I deflated that critical *have to* voice that was always saying how bad I was if I didn't write copious verbiage every minute of my conscious state and just stopped. I took a breath, then another and said the words

aloud—*no more self-improvement*. And then looked at what I had accomplished today: it was 9:00 a.m. and earlier I had awakened to the breathy wind/rain smell of wet pavement. I heard my daughter yelling and felt my dog's warm little body under the covers, my cat's tuna breath as she meowed in my face, that first moment when all was quiet in my head and I could just *let it be* (that New Age Beatles thing).

And then I remembered another word. Gratitude. That I have that drive to write and write some more. That even when I stop for a while I always find my way back to writing. That I am lucky enough to have found such a community of writers in the South Bay branch of CWC. That every day I write should be celebrated as an accomplishment. And that I do not need any New Year's resolutions to, as Jean-Luc Picard said, “Make it so.” Because I am already there, writing away, right now. **WT**

Cop Talk

by John Howsden

The Gamble

The responses to the dad threatening to stab his kids to death were well thought out and ranged from reasoning with him; sending in a dog or sneaking up on him. We tried reasoning but failed; we didn't have a dog, but we did have stealth.



We tricked the dad by promising to shoot him on the front porch if he would put the kids inside the house where they would be safe. Ron, a fellow sergeant and a dad, volunteered to sneak through the backdoor and snatch the kids. After the dad put the kids in the house and came back out onto the porch, I got on the radio and whispered to Ron, who was waiting at the back door, “Go for it.” Ron, knowing he only had a few seconds, quickly crept down the dark hallway to the living room.

Both kids were sitting on a sofa next to the door, scared and sobbing. Although Ron scooped up the kids gently, the infant cried out just as Ron was turning for the hallway.

Hearing the baby cry, the dad shouted, “You bastards tricked me,” and kicked in the front door. With the knife clenched in his right hand, he screamed, “I'll kill you, you son of a bitch,” and started for Ron. Ron, an avid jogger, sprinted down the hallway with both kids cradled in his arms. He made it out the back door and down the porch steps with the dad in pursuit. When Ron rounded the corner of the house and started up the driveway, the dad was right behind him, screaming, “He's got my kids; I'm going to kill him.”

Burdened with the children, Ron was losing the race. Although we were justified in shooting the dad, we couldn't until Ron got out of the way. We could only stand by helplessly as Ron, a friend and fellow officer, ran for his life.

Fearing that the deranged dad was about to stab him in the back, Ron

slipped one kid off his arm and turned towards the dad, now just a few feet away. Staggering backward, Ron drew his pistol and snapped off two shots. The first bullet hit the dad in the stomach, doubling him over. The second bullet hit him in the top of the shoulder, skipped down his spine, and dropped him like a sack of potatoes.

With the dad groaning in pain and the acrid smell of gunpowder hanging in the morning air, we knelt down to render first aid. When we rolled the dad over, he looked at us in bewilderment and said, “You didn't have to shoot me.”

The dad was down, the kids were safe, and we were the luckiest cops alive. We had called the dad's bluff and won. But what if we had lost the gamble? What if the dad had murdered one of his kids, an act so rare that the word describing it—*filicide*—can only be found in an unabridged dictionary? Like the lingering gun smoke in the air that morning, this question won't go away. **WT**

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.

Call for Submissions

Nominations are now being accepted for the third William Saroyan International Prize for Writing. This award, given by Stanford University Libraries in partnership with the William Saroyan Foundation, recognizes newly published works of fiction and non-fiction with a \$12,500 award for the winner in each category. The prize is designed to encourage new or emerging writers and honor the Saroyan literary legacy of originality, vitality and stylistic innovation. This third round of the award is on a triennial schedule, timed to coincide with the Saroyan Centennial celebrations taking place in 2008.

For entry forms and more information on the prize, including entry forms and rules, visit the Saroyan Prize website: <http://library.stanford.edu/saroyan/>

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

Alice LaPlante at Stanford

The Splendid Gift of Not-Knowing with Alice LaPlante

Thursday, January 24, 2008. 7:00 PM.

Pigott Hall (Building 260), Room 113

Free and open to public

<http://events.stanford.edu/events/123/12356/>

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://mtdiablownwriters.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 | |
|-----------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------|
| January | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose | 5 | |
| | | 6 | 7 | 8 7P Board of Directors LaRoche residence San Jose | 9 | 10 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Santana Row, San Jose | 11 11A Editors' Powwow |
| 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 <i>WritersTalk</i> deadline | 16 7:00P Open Mic Barnes & Noble 3900 Mowery, Fremont | 17 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell | 18 | |
| 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Sunnyvale | 24 | 25 | |
| 26 | 27 9:30A-4:30P Workshop Blockbuster Plots Lookout Inn Sunnyvale | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 2008 | |
| Future Flashes | | February 12 General Meeting Alan Rinzler | | | | | |

Stay Informed!

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

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

Martha Engber will be offering an online class in February titled "Passion Play: Create Characters So Real, So Passionate You Can't Put Them Down, and Neither Will Your Readers." Though the class is offered through the Wine Country Romance Writers, you don't have to be a member or a romance writer to take part. Never taken an online class? Here's what you can expect:

- two lessons posted every week on the class web site
- email questions answered within 48 hours
- a weekly iChat session with the instructor and other class members

The cost is \$25. Register by Feb. 1 through WineCountryRomanceWriters.com. For more information, contact Martha: (email) Martha@Engber.com, (web site) MarthaEngber.com, (blog for writers) MarthaEngber.blogspot.com.

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

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



California Writers Club
South Bay Branch
P.O. Box 3254
Santa Clara, CA 95055
www.southbaywriters.com

MAIL TO

Address Correction Requested

No General Meeting in January

Come to the
Plot Workshop with Martha Alderson
Plot Development and Tracking
Sunday, January 27
See page 16 for details

Tuesday, February 12
General Meeting with
Alan Rinzler
Lookout Inn, 6:00 p.m.

**During 2008, all general meetings will be held
on the second Tuesday of each month.**

January 16
WRITERSTALK
deadline