



WRITERSTALK

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April 2009

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

April Speaker Frances Dinkelspiel

by Bill Baldwin

Our April speaker is the author of *Towers of Gold: How One Jewish Immigrant Named Isaias Hellman Created California*.



Frances Dinkelspiel
Photo: Ralph Granich

Frances Dinkelspiel is a fifth-generation Californian who grew up in San Francisco. A graduate of Stanford and Columbia, Frances spent more than 20 years in the newspaper business in places as diverse as Syracuse, New York, and San Jose, California.

Her freelance work has appeared in the *New York Times*, *People* magazine, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. She has taught at the University of California at Berkeley. She currently lives in Berkeley with her husband and their two teenage daughters.

In 1998, Frances took a leave of absence from the *San Jose Mercury News* to devote herself to personal essays. Researching her great-great-grandfather at the California Historical Society,

she discovered that he had known such 19th century California figures as Collis and Henry Huntington and Levi Strauss.

Isaias Wolf Hellman's life was, in fact, a classic American rags-to-riches story. A poor immigrant from Bavaria, he became one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the West. Settling in frontier California in the 1850s, he survived floods, droughts, depressions, boom times, earthquakes, fires, and war.

After discovering this much about Hellman's history, Frances quit her job and embarked on a ten-year search for the facts of her forebear's amazing business career.

That search included more than 50,000 pages of documents. She visited relatives all over the country looking for letters and photographs. She visited some of the world's greatest libraries and traveled to Hellman's birthplace of Reckendorf, Bavaria.

The *Los Angeles Times* calls her book "impressively researched and engagingly told." Please join us in welcoming Frances Dinkelspiel, author of *Towers of Gold*.

WT

March Recap

Ellen Sussman

by Carolyn Donnell

The March meeting began with more San Jose State Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest lines. The one about "breaking wind in the echo chamber . . . would never hear the end of it" elicited laughter punctuated with comments like "Do you stay up nights to figure these out?". Another one—"She had a fear of mice but was still eeking out a living at the pet store" brought moans and groans.

The raffle came with an Irish theme, complete with a *Kiss Me, I'm Irish* button. Winner Una Daly actually is Irish, so she won't be givin' out the malarkey if she wears the button. The other prize was a \$40 gift card for Barnes & Noble. Oohs and ahs emanated from the audience. "So—you think that's a good gift," Dave asked? Someone yelled "100." Can't please everyone. Ameena Saeed won the prize. According to Rita, Ameena bought the arm's length of raffle tickets. Good for Ameena.

Andrea Galvacs presented the WT Challenge Awards winners and Meredy Amyx announced the Anthology kickoff sales and acknowledged staff and contributors. Dick Amyx presented a complimentary copy to Dave LaRoche to take to Casey Wilson, president of the CWC board of directors.

Introductions and announcements followed. Guests were introduced and personal achievements noted—see "Accolades." Dave announced upcoming workshops. Bill Baldwin announced his birthday day after tomorrow and the audience sang-out of tune. A choral conductor was suggested as a new SBW officer, or perhaps singing lessons

June will be the short fiction issue—
1000 words maximum.

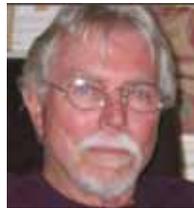
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President's Prowling

by *Dave LaRoche*
President, South Bay Writers

Volunteer!

The great volunteer struggle, the mighty consternation, the monumental difficulty, is simply getting that hand in the air; pulling it out of a comfy warm place and making the commitment. The rest is quite easy. Oh yes, it takes a little time and there are likely those meetings to attend where you may have to listen and be driven to think, but it's a self-induced thing, when it happens, and there are generally refreshments. It's usually once a month, that's twelve a year, which pretty much covers most volunteering and it certainly covers ours.



To be more specific, we SBWriters are as good as the accumulation of volunteers that arrives—I've noticed it takes more than one. It's our willingness and time to apply a little interest that moves the club forward—fulfilling expectations and providing that enlightenment to our members and near public—that's the crux of it. And most of us engaged here find the camaraderie enjoyable and well worth our while.

Here's the thing: the elements of good writing, while complex and numerous for most, are relatively stable, and bringing them to the fore doesn't require a "new-world" expedition. There are, right now, presenting authors, agents, editors, and publishers readily available, and for good reason. They too enjoy the sessions and are eager to help, and ordinarily are appropriately experienced with more than sufficient to offer.

And when we listen to their telling of our craft—as with David Corbett's recent workshop—we are exposed to a cloudburst of info with but a drizzle finding its way to our reservoir. Our ability to write grows in small steps even though deluged with information. It's like catching rain in a bucket. Thus repeating it is part of the drill. David Corbett or "Sally Sisyphus" could be back every year and in ten, we'd yet be filling.

So here we are: "rain-makers" galore, pleased with the opportunity, and we with our buckets at ready. All that is required of those who volunteer is to facilitate the match—rain-makers to rain-catchers. It isn't overwhelming, one only needs to be willing to raise up that hand. Oh yes, there are the supporting functions; administrative stuff that sees us remaining upright, and that too is required.

So where the hell am I going here? Not a mystery, as it's soon the beginning of a new fiscal year with those creeping elections arriving in June. Decide now to put your hand in the air and give your name to a nominating chair. Lets have a slate that is crowded with matchmakers; and, if elected office isn't your "bucket"-o-tea, volunteer for a committee or bring your own project. Let's make our "accumulation" better for a quality next year. **WT**

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California Writers Club South Bay Branch

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Executive Committee

President—Dave LaRoche
pres@southbaywriters.com
408 729-3941

Vice President—Bill Baldwin
vp@southbaywriters.com

Secretary—
secretary@southbaywriters.com

Treasurer—Richard Burns
treasurer@southbaywriters.com

Central Board Rep

Dave LaRoche (acting rep)

Directors

Programs—Bill Baldwin
vp@southbaywriters.com

Publicity and Public Relations—Edie Matthews
publicity@southbaywriters.com
408 985-0819

Membership—Marjorie Johnson
membership@southbaywriters.com

Hospitality—Cathy Bauer
cathy@bauerstar.com

Networking—Cathy Bauer
networking@southbaywriters.com

East of Eden Conference—Edie Matthews and
Kelly Harrison, co-chairs
eastofeden@southbaywriters.com

Open Mic—Bill Baldwin
408 730-9622

Webmaster—Ro Davis
webmaster@southbaywriters.com

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

is the monthly newsletter of the South Bay Branch of the California Writers Club.

Managing Editor

Richard Amyx
newsletter@southbaywriters.com
408 297-4438

Contributing Editors

Bill Belew
Carolyn Donnell
Andrea Galvacs (copyeditor)
Suzette Gamero
Lita Kurth
Victoria M. Johnson
Jackie Mutz (copyeditor)

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

Richard Amyx
994 No. 2nd Street
San Jose, CA 95112

Guest Columns

Almost Anything Goes (400 words)

News Items (400 words)

Letters to the Editor (300 words)

to Andrea Galvacs
junestar@comcast.net

Creative Works

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

Accolades

accolades@southbaywriters.com

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.

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Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx
Editor

A Mere Poem



During the macho days of junior high school, I was warned by my peers that poetry was only for girls and fairies. I definitely wanted to be one of the boys, so I not only avoided poetry, I scorned it, as was the culturally accepted and encouraged thing to do, sexual identity being but one of the many perils of that stage of adolescence.

I'm not sure exactly when the changes took place, but by the time I got to college, at least, I had no doubt that I was a heterosexual male—and I found that I enjoyed reading poetry (but one of a series of discoveries that caused me to doubt the soundness of certain influences of my youth). Likely it was Shakespeare who first sneaked beneath my defenses. There was something about the mathematical precision of his sonnets that appealed to the engineering side of my personality—the challenge of making each line polished iambic pentameter, adhering to a fixed rhyme scheme, and telling the whole story in four quatrains and a couplet.

Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And Summer's lease hath all too short a date
—William Shakespeare, *Sonnet 18*

Having surrendered my poetic innocence, I was able to see similarities between words and music. Just as composers can take the same old notes and arrange them in an infinite number of ways to create new and exciting melodies, so can poets

It was my thirtieth year to heaven
Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood
And the mussel pooled and the heron
Priested shore
—Dylan Thomas, *Poem in October*

take the same old words and arrange them in ways that have very different sounds and effects. Whereas Shakespeare ta-dumps along with military regularity, Dylan Thomas flows like water

around sonorous rocks and through deep, evocative pools, creating sensuous imagery that makes you almost able to smell the seaweed as he takes his birthday morning walk.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, by comparison, uses consonance, assonance, and alliteration for effect, and lots of short, simple words full of fricatives and plosives that nearly cause a tongue wreck when you try to read him aloud, and yet he, too, is able to weave sound and image in a way that makes you sit up in your chair and share in his wonder of his Lord. (And I get to tell you that the device that gives “sheer plod makes plough down sillion shine” its particular character is called *cynghanedd*—pronounced kin-hanneth, approximately—something I can remember from a few

No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-vermillion.
—Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Windhover*

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by
madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn
looking for an angry fix
—Allen Ginsberg, *Howl*

decades ago even when I can't remember what I had for dinner last night.)

Allen Ginsberg, arguably the anthesis of Fr. Hopkins in more ways than one, uses strong verbs

and unlikely adjectives to brand keen social observations onto paper with a fiery anger and energy. The irony here is that this poem, this seemingly undisciplined howl, this *mere poem*—written by a fairy, yet—had the power to rock an entire nation. I have to wonder what my eighth-grade buddies would have thought of that. WT

Accolades

by Carolyn Donnell

I'm filling in for Jackie Mutz this month while she takes care of some business in the real world.

Here are this month's writing success stories:

- **Alexander Leon** launched a weblog on March 3, 2009. The name of the blog is *evolumental.com* and will post pieces that analyze current events within our human developmental nature. Contact Alex at lexleon2000@yahoo.com
- **Audry Lynch** just signed two book contracts with Edwin Mellen Press in Lewisburg New York. Go Audry! She was also a contributor to *Happy Birthday, Mr. Lincoln: A Commemorative Collage*, a collection of writings about Lincoln written and compiled by Pen Women Press (americanpenwomen.org)
- **Bill Belew's** blogs topped 8.3 million page views in February. Wow!
- **Carolyn Donnell** had a poem—"Chrysalis"—published in *Story Circle Journal*. See storycircle.org/MembersInPrint.php. Also, date correction from March *WT*. Poem and photo—Cat Nap, on KDFC.com Pet of the Week—appeared on April 20, not February 20.
- **Joni Ratts'** new novel *Fade to Black* is now on Amazon.com, at Books Inc, Main Street Cafe (Los Altos), and on Lulu.com. See, NaNoWriMo does work.
- **Phyllis Mattson** had an article about a reunion with her students published in the *US-China Review*. She is also giving a book talk at the San Francisco Library on April 4, at 11:00. See her list of events at stevenscreekpress.com/appearances.html
- **Steve Wetlesen** just completed a Poetic Art commission—Wally's Blend—for a family memorial. How many commissions does this make now? Good job! Steve has also been reading poetry at Thursday Gig.
- **Reed Stevens'** new book *Santa Fe Dreamhouse, Encounters in the Land of*

Enchantment is out. Available from online booksellers or your favorite independent bookseller. She also published three articles in broadstreetreview.com, winning a 2008 "Notable" award, and in midwestreview.com—winning a September 2008 "Notable" award.

- **Bill Pack's** debut novel, *The Bottom of the Sky*, will come out on June 10. It was posted on Barnes & Noble and Amazon during March. Riverbend Publishing. See bottomofthesky.com.
- **Swann Li**. I just heard that Swann is away on an MFA Fellowship to Boston University. Congratulations to Swann.

Congratulations to all South Bay Writers. May our successes continue to grow. As always, if the information is incorrect, please email accolades@southbaywriters.com for correction in a future *WT*. Please continue to share your successes. As Jackie says, "Remember, when you succeed, we do too. *WT*"

Journey of a Thousand Wiles: April First Edition

by Lita Kurth

Oh, the work of a writer! Honing one's craft is such an essential task. One could easily spend a lifetime on it. Revising is also crucial. I recall a well-known poet (so well-known that I've forgotten her name—Jane something) saying at a conference that she revised many of her poems a hundred times. There's a fine number for you, but wouldn't those poems be even better if revised a thousand times? And let's not forget the practical work of learning the market, a whole profession in itself. There's subscribing to and reading magazines, analyzing books, endless online winnowing and sifting of publishers' news to see who's buying what and where. And finally, networking is vital, getting together, sometimes, alas, at great expense, to share knowledge and tips, support and inspiration. Taken alto-



Lita Kurth
Contributing Editor

gether, it can seem like a journey of a thousand light years rather than miles. That's why this month, my friends, I'd like to offer you, free of charge, a little shortcut, a faster and more reliable method of getting your book into print and onto bookstore shelves: sleeping your way to the top.

Naturally, this method requires a certain focus and research though not nearly as much as the painstaking, high-sweat work involved in classes and conferences, readings, workshops, and library-going. (There is *some* sweat involved, however, come to think of it.)

A word of caution: Some foolhardy souls have attempted to sleep their way to the top by sleeping with entirely the wrong people, peripheral figures such as postal carriers, owners of photocopy stores, and fellow unpublished writers (talk about sleeping with the enemy!).

Ideally, you should aim for the head of a publishing company or multimedia conglomerate. Say it: Rupert Murdoch.

Tape his picture on your mirror and say your lust affirmations. Failing that lofty goal, look for the head of a news network or ad agency so that he or, as the case may be, she (flexibility helps!) can trumpet to the world your cruelly overlooked collection of poems about gravel. Create enough buzz, and people will buy your work out of prurient interest—which is just as good as any other kind—and will get you on more talk shows.

Succinctly put, here is the straightforward method I'm recommending this month: choose your target, research your target, reach your target. Even with the help of a shortcut, you must discipline yourselves (and in some cases, others, if that's what they like).

Okay, you say, I see how I save time and money on classes, books, and conferences (and writers' club memberships) but isn't there *any* cost involved? Well, yes, there's the little matter of

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WOW! Conference 2009: Women on Writing Celebrates International Women's Day

by Carolyn Donnell

The sixth annual WOW! Conference convened on March 21, 2009, at Skyline College in San Bruno. Women (there were a couple of token males in the audience) came from all around the Bay Area and beyond and ranged in age from 11 to 90-something. The conference featured writers in several genres and workshops on varied subjects ranging from writing your life story, screenwriting, and poetry to hints on finding an agent, getting published, and self-promoting.

Keynote speaker Julia Whitty began the activities by discussing her latest book, *The Fragile Edge: Diving & Other Adventures in the South Pacific*. A documentary filmmaker of more than 70 nature documentaries, she related how those activities shaped her. Her writing grew from a need to record all the stuff (her word) that she couldn't put on the film. The words translated scientific facts from her head to her heart and onto the page. The data is still there, but embedded subtly in the descriptions. Whitty is an environmental correspondent for *Mother Jones* magazine, a blogger on The Blue Marble, and an award-winning author of fiction and nonfiction. She lives in Northern California.

For the morning workshop, I chose "The World Split Open: Finding Your Poetry's Truths" with Elline Lipkin. We read several poems, from Emily Dickinson and Christopher Smart (1722–1771) to translations of Polish poet Renata Goreczynski and Persian Nazim Hikmet. Writing exercises were based on Kenneth Koch's "One Train May Hide Another"—about how one thing, person, idea, may be hiding another one and we should wait until they are all past before judging—and more lyric examples from Pablo Neruda and Lee Young-Li.

Lunch convened in the cafeteria, with people socializing and meeting other writers, while others met upstairs for an

hour of open mic readings. Some new authors, both young and old, read for the first time.

After lunch we migrated back to the Book Talk panel that featured Micheline Aharonian Marcom, Yiyun Li, and Nona Caspers.

Micheline Marcom, descended from Armenian Genocide survivors (her mother was Armenian-Lebanese and her father American), has been haunted by tales of the atrocities she heard from her mother's family. She grew up in Los Angeles, but spent summers in Beirut before the Lebanese Civil War. Her novels revolve around the genocide theme, but are sometimes set in different locales. Her first book, *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*, focuses on that tale. The second, *Draining the Sea*, reflects the same but is reset in Guatemala. She now lives in the Bay Area and is a Visiting Writer at Mills College.



WOW! keynote speaker Julia Whitty autographs a copy of her book *The Fragile Edge* for Carolyn Donnell. Photo: Carolyn Donnell

Yiyun Li grew up in Beijing during Chairman Mao's years and remembers Tiananmen Square. Her parents told her repeatedly to keep a zipper on her mouth, but she found that difficult. She set her heart on coming to America and made it into the University of Iowa, where she planned to get a Ph.D. in immunology. She was accepted, but found herself lonely, and joined an adult education writing group. She was hooked. *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers* is a compilation of ten stories populated by natives and exiles of post-Mao, post-Tiananmen China. She lives in Oakland with her husband and their two sons and teaches writing at UC Davis.

Nona Caspers also migrated to Northern California—from rural Minnesota. Her recent book of stories, *Heavier Than*

Air, received the following review from the *San Francisco Chronicle*: "Revving up Willa Cather's naturalism and lesbian undertones with Denis Johnson's deadpan Plains rowdiness, these are tales of wild but not wild-eyed girls and women as likely to be enraptured by the girl next door as by the lay of the land." She is an Associate Professor in the Creative Writing Program at SFSU and lives with her little dog and cat and rubber tree.

I attended the afternoon workshop "What's the Plot? Finding the Heart of Your Play" presented by Joan Holden. Holden served as principal playwright for the San Francisco Mime Troupe 1967–2000 and taught playwriting at UC Davis and SFSU. Our exercise was to read the handout "A Story From Real Life," about an old residential hotel in a California coastal city slated to be torn down by the millionaire owner over the protests of the long-time tenants. We discussed possible plot lines and character developments and how to set the scene. After that, budding playwrights in the workshop asked questions about their own work and received advice from Joan.

The conference ended back in the cafeteria with a reception and raffle drawing. My only regret is that I wasn't able to attend more of the workshops. I highly recommend this conference and hope to see more SBW members there next year.

Women on Writing also has a website that features articles daily articles on multiple topics: author sites, character research, critique groups, editorial services, writer retreats, writing sites, and even a freelance board, just to name a few. They host a quarterly writing contest. WOW! also welcomes queries and submissions. Pay rates depend on the column involved. See details at wow-womenonwriting.com WT

April "Apres-Ski"

If March was both a Lion and a Lamb,
April is a bust and a grand slam.
One snows one's editors with lame
excuses.

Sequel: HURRY,
Slide in on your "schuss's"!

—Pat Bustamante

Writers' Gigs—Too Good to Be True

by Bill Belew

I can't believe the timing. We editors get together once a month to parcel out the duties for the coming month. This past meeting I was handed this month's Writers' Gigs column. I

immediately thought "It's too good to be true." How was it that I was given this assignment at the very time I stumbled upon an unbelievable opportunity? Who says there is no God?

The website is cosmofair.com. The actual job posting that I think would certainly be of interest to the folk who read this newsletter can be found at cosmofair.com—click on "Jobs at CosmoFair" at the top of the page.

The CosmoFair people promise to



Bill Belew
Contributing Editor

provide editorial support. That is, they will do legwork on background information. They will do fact-checking. They will proofread. They will even give professional feedback to you on your drafts. All you have to do is provide the content. Deadline to apply – April 6th, midnight.

Too good to be true? Perhaps. But, apparently CosmoFair is able to generate income via ad revenues as long as it has content. In other words, if your *stuff* is good, it will get read. Getting read means people visit their site, people see the ads, and income is generated for the organization and for the writer.

Cosmofair performs the ad placement. From the site, I can see that they use Google AdSense, ValueClick Media, and Infolinks as their ad providers. All three are very reputable advertisement providers. No problems here. How the revenue is shared is not stated, but my bet is that it is a revenue share based on how much the contributions generate. In other words, there's an incentive to the writer to promote his/her work. The

more it gets read, the greater the revenue, the bigger the share. Other jobs advertised at the site promise a 60% share of revenue. You can't get that from a major clearinghouse.

I checked one other thing about CosmoFair network. The network will generate more than 500,000 visits this month. There are an awful lot of opportunities to get your *stuff* in front of someone. And who knows? Someone bigger might discover you.

There are instructions to be considered at the links provided above. Or you can send me an email at wcbelow@gmail.com and I'll even send your application in for you. Who says *WritersTalk* editors don't love the group? The way I figure it, if anybody in the group *makes it*, it's good for all of us, right?

Just think. All the writer has to do is write. The network provides all the support. Gosh, it seems they do everything except sit me down and move my fingers for me. Does it get any easier than that? *WT*

View from the Board

by Dave LaRoche

Your Board of Directors met March 4 with Cathy Bauer and Ro Davis absent.

Your President reported:

- Member Rick Brost passed away in February. The board approved sending \$100 to his preferred charity, the Arizona Memorial and Museum Remodel Fund in Hawaii, and a card to his wife, Linda.
- Two workshops are in progress: the Youth Writers Workshop scheduled for May 30 and a self-publishing all-day with Lisa Alpine and Carla King for May 3.
- Woody Horn has volunteered to lead a committee on bylaws review, and is looking for people to participate.
- Payment to the Lookout has risen \$2 per meal (only raise since first meeting there in March, 2005); SBW will not increase the cost to members and guests through the ugliest of the recession.

Bill Baldwin announced that Frances Dinkelspiel, and Michelle Richmond are

speakers in the near-term with Erka Mailman, Herb Gold, and Janis Bell likely in the wings.

Rita St. Claire continues with her "Writers Well-Being" project with an article in March issue of *WT* and health and diet pamphlets for the March meeting.

As Central Board rep, Dave reported no news re the SFV Branch disposition; a host of centennial paraphernalia is available for purchase via Dona Rosenthal; and a UP publishing opportunity with finished manuscripts due on April 30—details available.

Marjorie Johnson reported a membership of 201.

Treasurer, Rich Burns reported cash flow down about \$2,000 due to cost of printing and mailing anthology, and that we broke even on the February meeting, discounting the unexpected fee for a second speaker.

Edie Matthews sent out 25 press releases for the March meeting.

Bill Baldwin reports an average of 8.5 attendees at each of four open mics held during the month, and that the

Prunyard B&N provides the best audience venue.

Editor Dick Amyx says the March *WT* issue was 16 pages, mailed to 227 recipients with 25 for PR, ten of which were sent to Toni Pacini to help with her formation of a CWC branch in Sanger. Total cost for the issue \$264.71.

Dick Amyx also reports that the published anthology has been received, comped copies and those ordered directly have been sent, and that at this point in the process we are down \$906. We have to sell 125 more copies to break even on expenses, and if all the remaining copies are sold, the club will realize a gain of \$425.

Marilyn Fahey reports that Valley Presbyterian Church will provide the venue for the Young Writers Workshop, now scheduled for May 30. One presenter, persuasive writing or "How Can I Be Heard," is needed, and a draft of the workshop flyer is complete.

Under the heading New Business, a motion was passed unanimously, with Dick Amyx abstaining, to treat the anthology team to a dinner at the restaurant of their choice. *WT*

LA Festival of Books April 25th and 26th

by *Dave LaRoche*

The Central Board of CWC has taken a booth at the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Books, located on the UCLA campus.

The event takes place April 25 and 26, and book covers from all branches are welcome. If you submitted a cover in previous years, you need not send a duplicate as the display is cumulative.

Send a cover of your book or books (two maximum), or a glossy photocopy of the front cover (same size as the original, not an enlargement), packed flat to Allene Symons, 2373 N. Flower St., Santa Ana, CA 92706. Be sure it arrives by April 10. In an accompanying note, indicate the name of your branch. These covers will not be returned. If you have questions, send to asymons@earthlink.net and mention CWC in the e-mail subject line.

Members who plan to attend are urged to volunteer for a two-hour shift at the booth, where brochures listing all CWC branches with contact information will be distributed. You will meet other CWC members, interact with the public, and be amazed at how quickly time flies. To volunteer, please contact Cyndy Largenticha at cyndycat1234@aol.com. The booth, number 619, is in a prime location with good foot traffic near UCLA's shady Dickson Plaza.

The Festival—with more than 450 authors, 100 panels, 300 exhibitors, six outdoor stages, and two children's areas—takes place on Saturday from 10 to 6 and Sunday from 10 to 5. The event is free though parking is \$9 per day. Author events are free but require advance ticketing except for outdoor venues. Tickets become available at noon on Sunday, April 19, at both Ticketmaster outlets and Ticketmaster.com at \$0.75 fee per ticket.

For further information, including driving directions, map, ticketing and program updates, see latimes.com/festivalofbooks.

Members' books are not sold at the festival nor are the services of individual members promoted apart from the combined book cover display. WT

Remembering Rick

by *Rosanne Davis*

SBW member Rick Brost passed away February 26 at the age of 57. He came to writing not from a childhood ambition or as a lover of literature. He was a movie buff, not a reader. He was always a storyteller, one of those guys who can entertain you with tales that might or might not be true, with an instinct for pace and what makes a story work.

The story Rick told most often about ten years ago was how he met his wife Linda at the Arizona Memorial. He'd tell it as a fairy tale of serendipity, of mid-life love and hope. People said, Wow, what a great story. You should write a book. After enough people said this, Rick said to Linda, "How hard could it be? Let's write a book."

First, Rick wanted to learn how to sell a book. He was not about to invest — what, six weeks? — writing a book if there was no money in it. He went to conferences, built rapport with agents and publishers in ten seconds flat, and told them the story. The pros loved it. They wanted to see the book. After hearing this enough times, Rick started writing.

Turned out he enjoyed it. He went to more conferences, workshops, retreats. He learned how the game is really played. A sentimental love story, everyone said, will not sell, not big. Publishers want action, drama. Hey, Rick could write drama. He tore into a dark memoir-novel, *The Other Side of Sane*. Linda edited it for him, every draft, every line, over and over. Rick took it to critique groups, pitched it like mad, and got lots of advice on how to make it better, darker, not so dark, different.

And the story about how he met Linda? He hadn't stopped working on it, but the crazy book, that was his ticket, the



Rick Brost

one that might get him on Oprah. He said he'd self-publish the love story someday. He wanted to control that one and its magical message, and he knew he couldn't do that in commercial publishing, not no way, not no how.

When Rick found out he had cancer, he and Linda used the first four of the eight months he had left to polish and publish their love story. He debuted *Aloha, Arizona* in Hawaii and he hand-sold it to people who stayed up that night reading it, came back to say, Wow, what a great story, and buy copies for their friends.

I have no doubt that if a miracle had made the cancer vanish, we would've seen Rick on Oprah one day, promoting *The Other Side of Sane*, soon to be a movie with Clint Eastwood. Rick would've taken a second chance at life by the throat and made his biggest dream come true.

He did get a second chance at love and happiness the day he met his wife in Hawaii. If the story of how they met was magical and inspiring, the one of how they parted in this life, how they made Rick's first writing dream come true, of Linda's steadfast love and devotion . . . Oh, Oprah.

Rick's novel, *Aloha, Arizona*, is listed on the SBW Books by Members web page and on his book's website, harborbound.com. WT

A Silent Voice

Silver starlight streams
Writing Poetry in Dreams—
A Silent Voice Sings.

—*Sally A. Milnor*

Toast to My Future

Grief pressed stories from my heart
And poems that made me cry
Now, over three years later
Human pleasures and
Earthly places are
Teasing me and
Filling my heart
With hope and
Am I glad?
Oh
Yeah
I'm glad that
my grief is just a memory

—*Betty Auchard*

National Poetry Month at South Bay Writers

by Carolyn Donnell

April is National Poetry Month. Celebrate with SBW's poets, including:

- Betty Auchard
- Sara Aurich
- Victoria Ballard
- Richard Burns
- Pat Bustamante
- Una Daly
- Carolyn Donnell
- Jamie Miller
- Sally Milnor
- Jackie Mutz
- Susan (Suzy) Paluzzi
- Steve Wetlesen

Our poets have been published in the SBW anthology, Sand Hill Review, and *WritersTalk*; online sources such as Hazelst.com and karumanta.com/poem.html, as well as commercial websites such as foxhollowherbs.com, calendar.cafepress.com, and zenbreeze.com. A few places where our poets have been (or will be) heard reading include our own South Bay Open Mics, Open Mic at Thursday Gig (third Thursday of the month at Stone Griffin Gallery in Campbell), San Jose Poetry Center, James Joyce Day at O'Flaherty's Pub (San Jose), Gold Rush Writers Conference in Mokelumne Hill, California. Suzy Paluzzi is working on a poetry CD called *Poetry in Motion*.

Poets.org (from the Academy of American Poets) has several suggestions for celebrating this month. The following is from their website at poets.org/page.php/prmID/41.

- Poem-a-day. Get a poem every day in your email box. Subscribe at poets.org/poemADay.php.
- Free verse project. Write lines from a favorite poem on a sandy beach, assemble twigs on a hillside, or chalk the sidewalk. Take a photo, place it in the Free Verse group page on Flickr, or on the Academy's Fan Page on Facebook, or email your photo to freeverse@poets.org. Include the source of your lines in the photo

caption. Photos posted by April 15 will be automatically entered in a contest to win the new *Poem in Your Pocket* anthology and a commemorative piece of jewelry by San Francisco designer Jeanine Payer. Selected entries will be featured on Poets.org.

- Poem in your pocket day. Celebrate national Poem In Your Pocket Day. Thursday, April 30, 2009. Pick a poem you love during April and carry it with you to share with coworkers, family, and friends on April 30, 2009. Let Poets.org know how you will celebrate Poem In Your Pocket Day by emailing npm@poets.org.

Local activities include

- SJSU Legacy of Poetry Day Events Thursday, April 23—SJSU Legacy of Poetry Day. Public reading of poems from SJSU's legacy and today's campus poets. Caret Plaza (outside of King Library, campus side) 11:45 a.m.–1:30 p.m. (see sjsu.edu/reading/poetry.htm).
- Also a monthly Open Mic-Poetry Café at the Library—all writers are welcome. Wednesday April 2 from 6:30–8:00 p.m. Room 229. Call (408) 808-3987 for more information.
- San Jose Poetry Center. Admission free. See pcsj.org for more details.
- Poetry First! Art Object Gallery. 1st Tuesday of Each Month at 7:30 p.m. 592 North Fifth Street, San Jose.
- Poetry Readings at Willow Glen Books. Second Thursday of Every Month at 7:00 PM. 1330 Lincoln Ave. San Jose, CA 95125. (408) 298 8141 or (408) 266 1361. Everyone who attends on this day is invited to read one poem of his or her favorite poet, and one poem of their own. Linda Lappin of Poetry Center San Jose has explicitly invited South Bay poets to come to Poetry First and Willow Glen Readers if you have poems you would like to read (first time readers are welcome).
- Find more activities at poetryflash.org/0904.00_norcal_calendar.html or at sfgate.com. WT



WritersTalk Challenge Winners Announced

Winners of the *WritersTalk* Challenge for the six-month period from August 16 through February 15 were announced at the March meeting.

Memoir: **Marjorie Johnson**, for "To Hypnotize a Chicken"

Fiction: **Karen Sweet**, for "A Secret Lost"

Essay: **June Smith**, for "A Gift from Beyond"

Poetry: **Sally A. Milnor**, for "Autumn Whispers"

Congratulations to all!

Remember, all it takes to be a Challenge contender is to have your writing published in *WritersTalk*.



Marjorie Johnson and Sally Milnor claim their Challenge prize of a certificate and \$40 check.

New Members

by Lita Kurth

Welcome to **Susan Salluce**, giovasue@comcast.net, a fiction and nonfiction writer (in the field of psychology) who has just signed on as a half-year member and lives part-time near Santa Cruz. She plays the drums as well as volleyball and is a specialist in death, dying, and bereavement. She enjoyed East of Eden and plans to relocate to the Santa Cruz area, so she joined South Bay Writers to get to know other writers.

Note: if you became a new member in the last year, and I somehow missed introducing you, please email me at lakurth@yahoo.com. WT

Intelligence and Investigations from the Insider

by Dave LaRoche

Town Council Resolves Pervasive Economic Problem

You will recall from my earlier reporting that Gloria B., the proprietor of a neighborhood bar in our quiet suburb of Detroit, saw her sales falling off due to a general malaise resulting from layoffs and other questionable economic events. In order to reinvigorate transactions, she allowed her autoworker regulars to drink now and pay later—making them feel better and “giving them hope.” Those who weren’t known well paid a small down on each drink until they established a consumption record. She kept a tab for each drinker.

Now, word got around and her business picked up. Both sales and supply increased substantially, and, in order to compete, other local bars adopted her approach.

Responding to her customers’ understandably exuberant demand, Gloria increased her prices. Since the costs were going on the book anyway, no drinker was particularly concerned. Following the advice of her accountant (that being AJ and Friends), she recorded the tabs as receivables, and, as they increased by the day, her quarterlies showed astonishing growth. With these healthy reports, Gloria’s credit was increased at the Osgoods’ bank, where Gloria did business. The bank also encouraged her to borrow more and to establish new neighborhood locations. You see, business was freaking booming and the brothers Osgood wanted in on the growth. It was a sound arrangement, they believed, because they had her receivables as collateral. Gloria, too, was delighted and bought herself a Cadillac at Shipley’s GM, no money down.

The MBAs at the bank’s downtown corporate headquarters, referring to these receivables as *assets*, converted and sold them as securities to their big-time investors. For smaller households in the burbs, some were bundled with

the help of the Harold Hines Brokerage, and common stock was issued. (Harry is tight with the Osgood brothers—his sister, Martha, is married to Orman.)

The securities, in their various forms and denominations, were soon traded on our regional exchange, which, because of productivity cutbacks and outsourcing, was experiencing a bullish ascent. With modest participation from our investing citizens, the prices of these securities began to climb, soon becoming popular vehicles for large institutions, including the retirement funds of unions to which the drinking autoworkers belonged. Seeing their portfolios rocket on these derivatives, the managers of these funds rewarded their employees’ performance with big raises. I covered that in the Thursday evening edition back in the last week of October.

Because of the bank’s new profitability and growth, both from leverage in the creation of the derivatives and commissions from their sale, the price of the bank’s stock soared. The board down at Osgood, not wanting to lose those responsible for this laudable insight and achievement, substantially enhanced the pay of the MBAs and their superiors. Bonuses were issued and options assigned making all those associated euphoric and exceptionally wealthy.

Of course our town’s revenue—dependent in part on the sales tax from booze, related transportation tax, securities fees and transfer taxes, commission taxes, and the like—was soon burgeoning. Seeing this rare opportunity, district reps stuffed the budget with long-term goodies for their appreciative constituencies while showing big margins that illustrated the council’s good sense. In the face of the resulting civic exuberance, the council members voted themselves a well-deserved increase in salary.

Now, one day, some months later, with dividends coming due and a few unexpected redemption requests in the bank’s door, a pinched-nose risk manager—not related to the Osgoods and name withheld for personal reasons (but who may have been overlooked with the bonuses)—decided it was time to request payment for some of the more seasoned receivables held. He made a formal request with official

letters to Gloria and her franchisees. Of course, the request was passed down to the drinkers. However, lulled into the complacency of drinks on the tab, the drinkers had not saved a penny. In fact, most were without jobs, were dizzily broke, and thought the request an effrontery. Quite naturally, a harangue ensued.

As news of the illiquidity got out, sell orders were initiated and the securities and derivatives began to lose value—and soon mere loss became sheer plummet. Men at the bank let their telephones ring. In short time, the drinkers without cash at Gloria’s bars were refused seating and deprived of their good feelings. Many became incensed, and often the sheriff was brought into play. This was around Christmas.

Without the liquidating receivables, Gloria’s credibility vanished and her promises went unheeded by creditors. Her lawyer (Hamlin’s father-in-law) advised dissolution. The Osgoods were soon forced to acknowledge a precipitous decline in assets, which curtailed their ability to lend, and their support of local commerce went into the toilet (followed by some of their clients). Harry Hines’ Brokerage lost all standing and could find no one to sell anything to.

The suppliers who had granted Gloria credit, extended her due dates, and happily invested in the securities, were now faced with a new situation. Bankruptcy filings were rampant. Some considered lo-ball offers from out of town buyers.

You see, the BarBONDS, GloBONDS and Feel-goodBONDS had indeed gone *toxic*, and prices had seeped under the floor. The Town Council, now involved, began feverishly to diddle over safety nets. As they appropriately said, “Our town’s economy is definitely and seriously at risk.” The council needed a solution ASAP. “All district reps have been called in from their wintering vacations,” moaned District 12’s Connie Calverson, who had been hurried back from Belize.

Following highly publicized round-the-clock consultations with respected leaders from big institutions, the council

Continued on page 17

TV Is Somethin'

Uncle Jed jist bought himself this funny little box.
 It makes a movin' picture, and I'll be durn'd if it don't talk.
 You set it on the table, and then you plug it in the wall,
 And pretty soon it starts to shine. The sound comes on and all.
 That new TV is somethin', George; it's somethin' to behold.
 You see and hear jist everything that folks is needin' sold.
 And you don't have to figger out jist how to spend yer day,
 'N you won't need no friends no more; they'd jist be in the way.
 Now I don't know jist what it's fer or zactly how it works.
 It can't churn no butter, and it sure don't iron shirts.
 But still I think I'll git me one. You see, I ain't no dope.
 You gotta see that pretty gal that's a-try'n' to sell me soap.
 It's quite a good invention, George. You can see the daily news.
 On Sundays you can see the preacher 'n still not set on pews.
 And if you have to scratch down there, you won't worry what folks say.
 'N when the offerin' plate comes 'round, hell, you don't have to pay.
 Them kids they show, they ain't too bright, smilin' like some fool.
 They's none I ever seen slop hogs and none could shoe a mule.
 Some shows edge toward violence, boy; some, powerful silly, too,
 And some jokes, well, they ain't that hot, so it even laughs for you.
 They talk so strange in Hollywood, we barely know what's said,
 But we is a-learnin' every day what city folks is fed.
 And when the ol' lady winks at me 'n takes me off to bed,
 We tells the kids to watch 'at thing, 'n they sits there like they's dead.
 Now Jed 'n me, we play them tunes fer beer they try to sell.
 They do 'em over lots of times so we could learn 'em well.
 And if you get an achin' head from all the beer you drink,
 They sell all kinds of headache pills. They's mo' 'n you'd ever think.
 Once I said, "Oh, hush up, Jed! I'm tryin' to watch the box,"
 So now I'm here in heaven, George, jist cozy as a fox.
 Ol' Jed turned red, got riled up; he run to fetch his gun.
 I made his day; blew me away jist like Clint Eastwood done.
 That new TV is somethin', George, it's somethin' to behold.
 You see and hear jist everythin' that folks is needin' sold.
 And you don't have to figger out jist how to spend yer day.
 'N you won't need no friends no more; they'd jist be in the way.

—Richard A. Burns

First Quickenin'

First flutter, tiny fists
 or feet feebly beat
 a tune of recognition
 Stymied by the wall—
 Now soft slumber
 Sweet sea of waters
 in movement, in play.
 Heavy melons rest
 the beginning swell
 expanded outward
 making room,
 her form spins in
 my anticipation of
 who she will become.

—Jacqueline Mutz

Wild Flower

Who cares if there is loco-weed.
 We don't raise cows in Silicon Valley.
 I walk the trail where it blows,
 Dusty green greedy fingers for leaves,
 I find I admire its bloom:
 A morning-glory-tinted trumpet
 Mostly white. Grasping any weather, any scrap
 Of dirt.
 Somebody's trying to eradicate me
 Like I'm loco-Jimson-weed.
 Think I will stick around.
 Though the bank account might go under
 I have stubborn roots.

—Pat Bustamante

One of the Girls (for Rose)

What we have here is a cook who eats poems,
who speaks of the Decadents and Post Modernism
as she gouges the spring chicken and jams the garlic
into the joints that have frozen her fingertips.

A bubblegummer convicted of insubordination – of not wearing socks
to gym, who swore zen koans at the principal who expelled her, who plunged
deep into the Sound to celebrate this fate; who stuffed cottonballs into brassiere
to look eighteen and strutted her stuff all morning just for practice,
now her eyes are fluid with the certainty of death chased back for one more daylight,
for the feel of a loaf of bread. As she greases the pan, she will pound out
the alphabet of nothingness, the words of abandon.

She could show woven cuts on wrist behind uniform cuffs of polyester, her
ladder of success defeated. She could click her tongue like a New Year's
noisemaker struck silent, as truth plunges into café hearts, those
leaky vehicles that neither freeze nor melt to correct temperature.

As she adjusts the oven, she may tell you about ovens invented by madmen,
of children killed by engineers or nurses, or women taken and men lost.
History leaks from her mouth.

Disbeliever in gods, in angels of mercy, her jaws tighten a notch with each
order of French fries. She tests with care the temperature of grease, pours oil.
Here she will not sing although she did once at a dance where rockers screamed
and cussed, got high or hummed. Sometimes a tune comes.

Floating out of the freezer like an angel come from hell, she is the one who wouldn't
marry, had her child and then another, who organized a block watch without a single cop
and armed to the woman, held hell at bay, who joined Weight Watchers for a day, grew
heavier, bit the pitbull in the ear, punched the nursery school teacher in the nose
for what could not be mentioned and went to jail.

She's the one they thought would be a movie star if she'd just lose twenty pounds,
who quit each job quoting Melville, saying "I would prefer not to," named her cat Bartleby and watched him die;
got fired from every secretarial job she ever had, quoting Marx and cursing capitalism: pigs; who in her
twenties, old, gave up on Ozzie, dyed her locks green and black then crimson,
shaved the edges with a razor blade and spread the hairs, reading them like the letters in the *I Ching*.

And what she knows best now is cutting, stabbing, plunging knives and roasting pale,
small bodies for human consumption. What she likes best is watching them brown, serving
the fish whole, the eyes glazed over, but still intact; the chicken with legs laced like schoolgirls, virginal.

As the orders come to view come full circle, she knows the order of predictability. In an hour, she
will go home, listen to Twisted Sister or Alice Coltrane rail against the randomness of darkness,
pound out a message with a steak clever the next morning for anyone who can to hear and taste what it is like to
be enlightened
at twenty-two.

—Victoria Ballard

No Room

When my mom decides to run away from home
she packs up her car
with all the things that matter most
to her.

Her guitar
and some books
all her CDs
her clothes
her shoes
Grandma's music box from the fireplace mantle
and the quilt from the bed she shares with Dad.
She jams plastic grocery bags filled with soap
and shampoo
into the small spaces left in between things
and ties a couple of suitcases to the roof.
At the last minute
she throws in a few dishes
towels
and a potted red geranium that guards the
front porch.
Dad tells her not to pack stuff too high
so she can still see out the back window
but she ignores him
and shoves her pillow
between her guitar case and the portable TV.
By the time she's done
there's no room left for anything else.
No room left for Dad.
And no room left for me.

—Susan Taylor Brown

From her novel *Hugging the Rock*
© 2006 Susan Taylor Brown

A Closet Artist

He told me I was bad. My adopted father said
no one would ever love me.
But I remember. I was very young
when he and I squished toes together
in the black goo of the minnow pond.
Co-conspirators against mother's disapproval.
No matter she was right. Polio still swam
in muddy waters then.
We wiggled our toes anyway.
He didn't like my music. Kicked the TV playing
Don Giovanni as if Mozart were a mortal offense.
But sneaked in to my recitals. Sat in the back.
And why read so many books? My favorite joy.
A waste of time, he said. But in later years I found
a journal, poetry he wrote for mother, and writings about me.
And drawings. Horses running. Lightning in the mountains.
Electricity and equine snorting nostrils. Emotions
from a closet artist in a country boy's skin.

—Carolyn Donnell

Pilgrimage at Crom Dubh*

I tread the edge of a jutting thorn
grind and crunch
against the sparkle and dark
of ice cracked gravel
against the silent wisp
of earth laden breezes
that pour toward the sea
Skyward I am bound
to prick the seat of heaven
suckle at hues of ruby and violet
at gull call
and far slap of salt foam
to strip naked my wit
absorb, resonate, and reflect

—Sara Aurich, February 2009

* *Crom Dubh* is the ancient name for
Ireland's Mt. Croagh Patrick. The
mountain remains a place of pilgrimage,
and is shaped like a thorn jutting from
the ground.

Castles in the Sky

Angelic thrones and graces
are so lightweight
and flighty
that cotton cumulus
becomes as solid granite
for gentle feet
and bedrock supporting
turreted golden
palatial manors
that only spring
into being
for one ephemeral
miniscule
sub trillionth of a second,
a forever elongated
twinkling of an eyelash,
a static fleeting
transfixed
eternity,
suspended in a ceaseless instant,
so brief that mortals
could never perceive them,
save for the most innocent
little children
and a few lunatics and fools like me
whose eyes have been opened.

—Stephen C. Wetlesen

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Arizona

Huge fingers ripped the earth apart
for the Colorado.
The edges of the canyon walls
show signs of the earth being torn.
The sides forced together would not match again.

Cloud shadows in the canyons
create illusions of colors not there.
Hundreds of miles of nothingness,
interrupted only by the chiseled face
of a mesa or a shelf of rock.

Arroyos and hard crusted dirt
become river valleys,
with quiet cottonwoods and wildflower colors.
Then, the sensuous subtle shades of sand
give way to gradual increases of green.

Once in a while a road,
and on the road a pennant of dust.
Someone is traveling.
There are no dust signs without movement.
There is no creation without signs.

—*Kent Werges*

Promises of Roses

A long bleak winter closes—
A sudden storm reposes.

Departing gloomy clouds
and clearer days ahead —
Raindrops cling to branches
in a barren flower bed,
then transform to soft green buds
and blossoms of bright red.

A returning silver swallow
Triumphantly composes,
Springtime's resplendent
Promises of Roses.

—*Sally A. Milnor*

Heat Lightning

"Heat Lightning," my father called it,
The light that flickered silent in the sky
over the dry-burned hills of my home.
Not the slashing, tearing bolts of Zeus,
of Wotan striking fire from his anvil,
Not the crash and rumble that invites you,
Count "one-one-thousand-two-one-thousand,
three-one-thousand-four—," between flash
and impact of the wave. Or even the thrill
of the count "One-one-thou—," and
the instant crash of this destiny of mine.
This was the lightning stroke,
the path through the air heated to . . .
To what? The temperature of the sun?
What did that mean to me? No more
than did the anvil of Wotan.
But what eerie silent flash lights a cloud
and vanishes silent in an instant? "Heat Lightning."

"Heat lightning," my father called it,
The light that flickered silent in the sky
over the dry-burned hills of my home.
Not the thunder that came with the wind that
buffeted and hammered and probed at
the old house I knew in my young years,
when the rain washed the dusty air clean.
Those storms came toward us like locusts,
swarming out of the ancient deserts of Egypt
or the denuded plains of Kansas, with
a whirrrr and a hummm, all the more fearsome
because man strained to hear his doom approach.
The lightning strikes, barely seen in the dimmed
daylight, must have hit the ground, but not
within my ken. A wind-battered tree, a rock,
a high spot of ground, someone's sheltering home,
It took the strike, not me. Not mine.
Did someone, somewhere, see it as a silent flash,
an instant of flickering cloud in a darker sky?
Did someone call it "heat lightning?"

My father never looked down at clouds
from two hundred miles above, never saw
the silent lightning leap cloud to cloud,
never saw "red sprites" hurled upward, to burst
and reach out to meet the lightning storms
of mighty Jupiter, joining two planets together,
fingertips touching in the tenuous void between.
He never saw "blue jets" or looked down on vast storms
that sparkled like sequined sashes thrown wide across
his Nebraska home. But on hot summer nights,
when the air was damp and heavy, he did look up and see,
and he called it "Heat Lightning."

—*Jamie Miller*

May Workshop

Sunday, May 3, 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

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

Lisa Alpine and Carla King

All About Self-Publishing



Carla King

You have dozens of questions about self-publishing, but when you tried to find answers on the web what you found instead were hundreds of author services companies that want to print and distribute your book. Some are legitimate, some not. How can you find out, and what are the differences in services they offer?

- Is self-publishing really becoming a respected way to publish a book?
- Can I self-publish and then seek an agent or traditional publisher?
- If I self-publish am I shutting the door to publishing my book with a major publishing house?



Lisa Alpine

- How is Print On Demand (POD) different from traditional offset printing?
- Do eBooks really sell? How can I create and sell one?
- Should I let the author services company design my book, or hire an artist?
- How about help with fonts and margins and general page design, and what about editing and proofreading?
- How much should I pay and how many books should I order?
- Will retail booksellers buy a self-published book, and can I hold book signings at their store?
- How do I handle advertising, PR, and interviews, and attract journalists to review my book in newspapers?
- What about marketing, sales, and distribution?
- And all the technical stuff like my website, newsletters, blogs, Facebook, Twitter?

You'll find answers to all these questions and more in this workshop led by Carla King and Lisa Alpine, who have self-published and helped others self-publish their books since 1994. Experienced authors, teachers, social networkers, and marketing experts—they are adventurers of the mind and geo-topography. Check out their websites at carlaking.com and lisaalpine.com.

Early Bird Special—Register before April 15:

CWC members \$45; nonmembers \$55

April 15–30: CWC members \$55; nonmembers \$65

After April 30 or at the door: CWC members \$65; nonmembers \$70

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

Registration fee includes continental breakfast and lunch

NOTE: cancellation in full, less \$5, before April 24. Requests to dalaroche@comcast.net. No refunds after the 16th (hardship exceptions may apply).

Register online at southbaywriters.com

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

SBW Self-Publishing

PO Box 3254

Santa Clara, CA 95055

Make check payable to South Bay Writers

Name _____

Street address _____

City, state, ZIP code _____

Phone number _____ Email _____

Early Bird Special
Before April 15
CWC Members \$45
Nonmembers \$55

Regular Registration
April 15-30
CWC Members \$55
Nonmembers \$65

Student Registration
24 or younger, with ID
\$35

Writer Well-Being: Tips from Colleagues at South Bay Writers

by Rita St. Claire

When I kicked off the Writer Well-Being project a few months ago, I tried to indicate that I'm not an expert at this, just a struggling writer trying to maintain her own health while she sits and sits and writes and writes. Now that I've "gone public," a number of colleagues from our club have given me interesting and useful information.



Rita St. Claire

Dave LaRoche alerted me to an artist, Susan Sarback, who uses a series of moves to soothe her nerves and release tension before she begins to paint. In her book, *Capturing Radiant Color in Oils*, Susan quotes Margaret Durst Corbett, who recommends specific exercises for getting into a relaxed mood. I love the following quote from Durst Corbett:

The race horse in the stall weaves back and forth, not from impatience, but to soothe nerves and release tension. Wild elephants gathering in the jungle rock from side to side and swing their trunks rhythmically waving as in a dance. Immobility and rigidity are the products of civilization and the beginning of tension and nerves. So, free the large muscles of their tension first by rhythmic motion.

The moves Sarback recommends are part of an exercise she calls "the swing" to help artists achieve a relaxed state before they start to paint. My guess is that we writers, who, after all, work on the same creative plane as painters, would benefit from "the swing," too. Though I'm still trying to figure out exactly how to do this lively exercise, once I succeed, I'll let you know how it goes. If it works, I might even demonstrate "the swing" at a meeting.

Speaking of meetings, at our last one, Carolyn Donnell told me about a book, *The Writing Diet: Write Yourself Right-Size*, by Julia Cameron. Here's part of what K. Yanar, of Florida, a reviewer on Amazon, has to say about this book:

Julia Cameron advises her readers

to do what many weight-loss experts say works, write about your eating. Her idea is most people overeat because of stress or depression, or some other outside influence. As a writing teacher she witnesses the therapeutic effect of writing in dealing with daily life problems. She instructs readers to write every day. Write about when they eat or when they want to eat. Why they are eating and why they chose the foods they did. She also instructs readers to walk every day, even if it is only 5 minutes, just get some sort of exercise in.

This book sounds like a winner for writers who are trying to develop a healthier lifestyle. I've ordered it and will let you know what I think after I've read it. Reviews on Amazon indicate that the book might be quite good. Of the 27 reviewers there, 17 gave the book five stars, one gave it four stars, and four gave it three stars.

Marjorie Johnson also advises that she's verified a connection between prolonged sitting and having leg cramps at night. For more information, visit this URL: mayoclinic.com/health/night-leg-cramps/AN00499.

I'm delighted at the interest fellow club

members are showing in maintaining and/or improving their health practices, especially efforts to counteract the effects of writing's sedentary nature. A number of members have already nurtured healthy habits. Such colleagues can be a wealth of information and a great support as we work toward our own goals.

We can certainly learn from each other. With this in mind, I'd like to interview fellow club members on what works for them and share those practices with the rest of the club via an article in *Writers-Talk*. If you'd like to share your practices with the club, please e-mail me at Ritastclaire@gmail.com Tell us your story!

As one more example of the wisdom residing in our own club, here's a colleague's poem on the subject. What a great way to get into Spring!

April A-Peel

An apple a day keeps rejections away:
An orange makes the publishers want
to pay.

If you eat a banana
Each manana
And believe fairytales,
Clap your hands while you weigh!

—Pat Bustamante

Hey, I knew him and her when!



Anthology authors came to the March meeting to take a bow and congratulate their fellows. Back row: Suzy Paluzzi, Vicki Wynne, Carolyn Donnell, Steve Wetlesen, Richard Burns. Front row: Pat Bustamante, Luanne Oleas, Edie Matthews, Marjorie Johnson, David Breithaupt, Meredy Amyx, Jeannine Vegh, Dave LaRoche.

Recap, continued from page 1

would suffice. Or just a starting pitch?

After the long list of intros and announcements came the pièce de résistance—the guest speaker, Ellen Sussman, whom Bill introduced as “All American with a touch of France; New Jersey meets California; and literary but spicy.” Ellen came to the microphone with “If I had any kind of singing voice I would do a Marilyn Monroe rendition of Happy Birthday.” “I want it, I want it,” Bill shouted.

Ellen changed the subject from Marilyn to herself. She said she felt that most writers lead solitary lives and that we need each other for support, information, and companionship—to feel less alone. We need to hold each other’s hands through both the writing and publishing processes. She was glad to see our club in operation and to be able to cheer us on.

Odd twists and turns of Ellen’s career led her down many paths. She knew she wanted to be a writer from the age of six and never wavered from that resolve. Unfortunately, she was raised to be a tennis athlete—but she believes that the strict discipline of practice and delivery helped her in later endeavors.

At every stage in her writing journey she thought she had arrived. She went to Johns Hopkins for a year for an MFA (for something to do, as she put it). When she finished, she thought, “Hot damn! I’m ready to go. I’ve got it made.” Wrong.

She wrote lots of stories and essays but didn’t have her first published book in hand until around age 46. “I had at least this many rejection letters from those years,” she lamented as she raised her hands about a foot apart. And yet somehow she kept believing in writing the stories. She even made it to desk of *The New Yorker* editor Charles McGrath, who explained why he hadn’t yet bought her stories.

Finally, she finished her first novel, about the year of her mother’s dying, but it didn’t go anywhere. Looking back, she thinks it was too autobiographical. She says you have to let go of the real story and start making stuff up. It’s difficult to find a good plot if you are too tied to the real life story.

Her agent was wild about the next

novel—*The Affair*. Foreign and Hollywood scouts heard about it. Offers came in from every European country. Germans bought it for a huge advance. Michael Douglas’s producer was interested but never optioned. She made money with this book but she didn’t have a book she could show to friends. She only has a copy in German.



Ellen Sussman

The third book—*On a Night Like This*—sprang from an old buddy of her second husband. The guy, a madcap type—handsome, charming, Bad Boy—had an affair with a woman dying of AIDS. The woman left behind a four-year-old daughter. Ellen asked him what became of the little girl. He replied that he didn’t know (boos from our audience at this point).

The story got under Ellen’s skin. She was unhappy with the ending of his story and set out to give it a better resolution. Ellen knew little about AIDS, so she changed disease to cancer. She also had forgotten about four-year-olds; so she changed the age of the daughter to early teens to match her own daughter’s age. (Ellen’s daughter was with her to help her sell books. People often asks if she is the daughter in the book. No, she isn’t.) The boyfriend in the book transforms because of the struggle, giving Ellen the happy, relatively speaking, ending she wanted.

Only after finishing the book—well after—did she realize that she was writing her own story. She became the parent letting go of the child instead of her own story of losing her parent(s) to

cancer. She had to go in the back door to write the story. If she had gone in through the front door, she says, the effort would not have been successful.

This was the dream book, translated into six languages and a best seller in France and in San Francisco. Forty-nine years and it finally happened. Perseverance got her through.

Ellen also spoke a little about all the essays she has written. Essays in anthologies paid her anywhere from \$100–\$2,000, but the editor is the one who has the ideas, writes and sells the proposals, etc. and gets the money and attention. Writers get . . . well, not much. She decided she was on the wrong end of the business and started her own collection.

A common theme of her stories turned out to be bad girls. The book title became *Bad Girls: 25 Writers Misbehave*. Ellen’s agent told her the proposal was the fastest sell in New York publishing history—gone in 14 minutes! (Ellen says with fiction “you have to write the damn book first.” Nonfiction requires only a proposal and sample chapter). Her editor wanted only A-list writers for the collection, so the book contains a number of diva personalities, like Erica Jong. Ellen whispered into the mic that divas present lots of challenges. The collection is about being a bad girl. It’s not so much about acting out sexually, but about women who are bumping up against rules that society sets for them.

After *Bad Girls*, her editor wanted more. *Dirty Words: a Literary Encyclopedia of Sex* was the result. This book was Ellen’s revenge for her brother’s facts of life advice from their father many years ago. The boy got to ask the father all the dirty words he had heard and the father told him what they meant. All Ellen got was the pamphlet, “Your Changing Body.” Most of us ladies will remember that one.

“Who cares about fallopian tubes,” Ellen reiterated. “Give me an orgy of dirty words.” And so it is. She sat with her family around the dinner table one night and wrote down all the dirty words they could think of. A number of writers were allowed to pick one word and write a poem (one from Pulitzer prize winner Steven Dunn), an essay, or a short story about love and relationships—what we’re all looking for. With

around 100 writers (including Thomas Beller, Antonya Nelson, Pagan Kennedy, Jonathan Ames, Meridith Maran and many others), there's a large range to choose from.

Questions from the audience included:

- **How did you get an agent?** Two good ways to find an agent are at conferences and in the acknowledgements of books you like. Go to conferences and meet all the agents in your area of interest. Then when you contact one say things like, "You expressed interest in my book. We went drinking together—remember? Slept together . . ." Anything to get the agent's attention. The second way is to peruse books you like or think are close to your own book. Acknowledgements will usually list the agent. Find out the rules for the agency and send a query, saying "I read the book and see similarities to my book." Or you could try "I have curly hair like you do." But please, no pink letters or frills or gifts. The agent needs to love your writing and be passionate about your work.
- **Are your titles yours or your editors'?** She got to keep her titles on novels but not on her short stories. What she doesn't like are the book covers, especially the "trashy big lips" on *Bad Girls*. She had no choice. Barnes and Noble especially hated *Dirty Words*. They had to carry it because it came from Bloomsbury, but stuck it in the Brides section.
- **What makes a good personal essay?** The traits are similar to fiction; all skills—setting scenes, good dialogue, character development, telling a good story—are necessary.
- **How long does it take you to finish a book? Do you outline or plot first?** She's not a plotter and doesn't believe in outlining. First drafts come within a year. It's difficult to retain passion if it's much more than six months. She hates rewriting and loves the blank page, so rewriting will take another year.
- **What's your favorite dirty word?** "Well, that's a hard one." Uproarious laughter from the audience caused a small blush. She chose "fob" and "Lucky Pierre." "Do you know their meaning?" she challenged. "I'm not going to tell you, either," she said.

Journey, continued from page 4

Victoria's Secret, but don't forget they have January sales! And lingerie can be put to use for years to come, unlike, for example, a self-addressed, stamped envelope and a submission fee or agent's commission.

"But," gluttons for punishment will protest, "won't I be sacrificing my integrity?" "Pshaw," I reply. Once established, you can always write a heartrending confession, complete with epiphany about the error of your sin-ridden path. That kind of book finds a ready market, sometimes even a movie deal. Speaking of movies, don't overlook targets in the film industry, heads of the Motion Picture Association and such—though that particular niche does seem to be somewhat saturated. Above all, abandon the straight and narrow, would-be authors! Sharpen those pencils and your three-inch stilettos (better make that four-inch stilettos) and start plotting! (No, not *that* kind of plotting!) May all your pillows be soft and all your—no, I really can't say that. WT

South Bay Writers Anthology



\$12.50 + 9.25% sales tax
At the meeting.
On the website.
southbaywriters.com

"You'll have to buy the book."

Ellen ended the evening by telling about writing classes she gives out of her house in Los Altos Hills. She doesn't advertise. The only way to register is to get on her class email list (ellen@ellensusman.com). Say that you met her at the South Bay Writers Club meeting. Some of her classes include Novel in a Year, an essay workshop, and weekly fiction workshops. She also works one-on-one as a writing coach, or provides evaluations of manuscripts. Ellen's website is ellensusman.com. WT

Insider, continued from page 9

did save the day. And, with an enormous bailout, they saved the bank, the Hines Brokerage, and the suppliers involved. I recall reporting that on February 1.

Those who had suffered the surprising losses were provided cash from newly issued bonds to be paid for by an increase in future sales and property taxes levied on a population yet to be born but which was "certain to grow exponentially." "Yes, it's a hit that will pervade through many generations," groaned Council member, Ernie Shorts, "but the good news is that the due dates are far in the future."

Now, in the aftermath, a sentiment has grown. Gloria's drinkers have been without booze for a while, and they're suffering. A freshman representative from East Side District 7, Freddie Glick, a man of ambition and charisma (though suspected of receiving support from the new drinkers lobby) has convinced his colleagues on the council that the former boozers are indeed desperate. Depressed over losing their promised retirement due to a fall in the markets, they are in need of the Town's help—and a good shot of bourbon.

After several glorious speeches to the town folk—picked up by CNN—and some twisting of favor-seeking arms on the council, Freddie's Omnibus Bill passed without objection. Tax credits for alcohol consumption were established, bankruptcies forestalled and dissolved through favorable mediation, and a new city-backed line of credit, at a lower fixed rate, was made available to Gloria B.

Today, her new bar—a magnificent expansion—is full every night as drinkers receive council rebates in the form of coupons redeemable at any of the Town's watering holes. Newspapers are abuzz with praise for the council's bold and courageous action in the face of a financial Armageddon, and most local pundits, including this one, surmise that all incumbents will be reelected next fall.

That's the story, dear readers, and until that better day, I remain your trusted Insider. WT

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, send a message to networking@southbaywriters.com or to the club post office box. We will add your listing to our directory of experts.

Asia, Japan, China, Russia

Bill Belew
belew@panasianbiz.com

Astrology, Singing

Sara Aurich
saraaurich@comcast.net

Astronomy, History of Astronomy

Bob Garfinkle
ragarf@earthlink.net

Character Development

ArLyne Diamond, Ph.D.
ArLyne@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

Counseling

Dr. Audry L. Lynch
GLYNCH7003@sbcglobal.net

Engineering: Mechanical, Aero, Aerospace

Jerry Mulenburg
geraldmulenburg@sbcglobal.net

Growing Great Characters from the Ground Up

Martha Engber
marthaengber.com
marthaengber.blogspot.com

Hiking, Backpacking, Scuba, Bicycling, Classic Cars, Running

Rick Deutsch
MrHalfDome@gmail.com; 408-888-4752

Hospital and Nursing Environment

Maureen Griswold
maureengriswold@sbcglobal.net

Internal Medicine/Addiction Disorder/ Psychology

Dave Breithaupt
dlbmlb@comcast.net

Library Science

Molly Westmoreland
mulcarend@hotmail.com

Marketing and Management

Suzy Paluzzi, MBA
jomarch06@yahoo.com

Mathematics: Teaching and History; Fibonacci Sequence

Marjorie Johnson
Marjohnson89@earthlink.net

Philosophy, Religion, Evolution, Construction, Crafts, Norse

Darwin Mathison
darwinunioncity@aol.com
510-471-8944

Police Procedures

John Howsden
jwhowsden961@yahoo.com

Profile Writing

Susan Mueller
susan_mueller@yahoo.com

Real Estate, Horses, Remodeling, Southwest History

Reed Stevens
reedstevens@earthlink.net ; 408-374-1591

Teaching and the Arts

Betty Auchard
Btauchard@aol.com

Television Production

Woody Horn
408-266-7040

The 31st Nimrod Awards The Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction & The Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry

Founded by Ruth G. Hardman

First Place: \$2,000, publication, and a trip to Tulsa for the Awards Celebration

Second Place: \$1,000 and publication

Postmark Deadline: April 30, 2009

Poetry: 3-10 pages of poetry (one long poem or several short poems).

Fiction: 7,500 words maximum.

Details at
tulsa.edu/nimrod/awards.html

CWC Life Member Program

David George, CWC State Membership Chair, announces that a special CWC Life membership program has been approved to celebrate our Centennial year. Life memberships in the club have been offered for many years, and a number of members are already lifers. The cost has up until now been \$675. But beginning today, the Lifetime membership fee is reduced to \$599, a saving of \$76 or almost 12%. In addition to never again owing the club annual dues, life members will receive a newly designed CWC centennial pin and a "rocker tab" that hangs below it announcing the life membership.

I know \$599 is still a lot of money in these challenging times. But at our current fees, the life membership would begin to save the member money after just 13 years. I am first in line to convert my own membership to life status, and I encourage you all to pass this offer along to all of your members. It's good for them, good for the branch, and good for the Club! The special pricing expires at the end of this calendar year—our Centennial year. WT



Silicon Valley Romance Writers of America presents its

All Writers All Weekend! Conference

May 1-3, 2009, Crowne Plaza San Jose/Silicon Valley, in Milpitas

\$100 for SVRWA chapter members; \$125 for nonmembers (Payable by check or PayPal), Registration Fee includes 3 meals on Saturday.

Keynote speakers, Agent appointments, Fun, Goodies, First-Line contest, Author Book signing open to the public on Saturday!

Friday Night Kick-off: cheese and fruit hors d'oeuvres, no-host bar.

Full details at svrwa.com

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>April 2009</h1>			1	2	3 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose	4
5	6	7	8	9	10 7:30p Open Mic Borders Books Santana Row, San Jose	11 10:30A Editors' Powwow
12	13	14 6p Monthly Dinner Meeting Lookout Inn, Sunnyvale Frances Dinkelspiel	15	16 7p Open Mic Barnes & Noble 3900 Mowry, Fremont WritersTalk deadline	17 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	18
19	20	21	22	23	24 7:30p Open Mic Borders Books Sunnyvale	25
26	27	28	29	30		
Sunday, May 3 Self-publishing Workshop		Tuesday, May 12 Michelle Richmond				Future Flashes

Stay Informed!

Sign up for the SBW Email List to receive meeting and event 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

SBW Poets

The San Jose Poetry Center is turning its eyes toward SBW with an interest in showcasing our poets at its monthly readings. PCSJ's host and member of South Bay Writers Linda Lappin is making a personal request. Are you a poet? Would you like to read your work? If your answer is yes, contact Linda by email at captainlappin@netzero.net and have a look at PCSJ's website, www.pcsj.org

South Bay Writers Anthology



\$12.50 + 9.25% sales tax
At the meeting.
On the website.
southbaywriters.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 Readings

First Gallery downtown
Willow Glen Books

Cosponsored by the
Creative Writing Department at
San José State University

Free admission.

See www.pcsj.org for featured guests and details.



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

MAIL TO

Address Correction Requested

Next Monthly Meeting
Tuesday, April 14, 6:00 p.m.

Lookout Inn
605 Macara Avenue, Sunnyvale
At the Sunnyvale Golf Course

Frances Dinkelspiel
author of

*Towers of Gold: How One
Jewish Immigrant Named Isaias
Hellman Created California*

Short Fiction Issue!

June will be the short fiction issue—1000
words maximum. Deadline, May 16.

