



# WRITERSTALK

Volume 17  
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May 2009

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

## May Speaker Michelle Richmond

by Bill Baldwin

Our May speaker is an exceptional writer of exceptional books.

Michelle Richmond is the author of four books of fiction, including the *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle* best-seller *The Year of Fog*, a *Washington Post* A-List selection and *San Francisco Chronicle* Notable Book.

*The Year of Fog* has been released in ten languages and is in development with Newmarket Films. *No One You Know* has been nominated for the Northern California Book Award. *Dream of the Blue Room* was a finalist for the Northern California Book Award.

What do you do when your young child disappears? How do you look for him or her? How do you handle the reactions and suggestions of others and your own imaginings about what may have happened and your own responsibility for it? After you have remembered every detail about your last moments together, how do you face not remembering enough? How do you reconcile yourself to your own part in what has happened? Abby Mason faces these questions in *The Year of Fog*.

*No One You Know* also deals with loss and mystery: the unsolved murder of a sister. And with writing: an English professor has turned the sister's death into the core of a true-crime book. Again the present revolves around a past moment of loss.

Loss and the past—realities we all experience; realities we all have to cope with.

Michelle received the 2009 Hillsdale Award for Fiction from the Fellowship of Southern Writers. Her stories and essays have appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *Playboy*, *Salon*, *The Kenyon Review*, and elsewhere.

She is a native of Mobile, Alabama, but now lives with her husband and son in San Francisco. Michelle was a James Michener Fellow at the University of Miami. She has taught at the University of San Francisco and Bowling Green State University. She now writes full time and is at work on a new novel, which will be published by Bantam in 2010.

Readers agree, *The Year of Fog* is gripping—"impossible to put down!" WT



Michelle Richmond  
Photo: Misty Richmond

## April Recap Frances Dinkelspiel

by Jackie Mutz

The April SBW meeting began with the usual fanfare. Our President made his announcements, first-time attendees introduced themselves, and members shared their writing success stories. Dave LaRoche and Edie Matthews touted two upcoming events, the Young Writers Workshop and Board Elections. They urged members to volunteer as a way to get involved in SBW activities.

This was followed by the best part of the meeting: the guest speaker. SBW had the distinct pleasure of hosting celebrated writer Frances Dinkelspiel, author of *Towers of Gold: How One Jewish Immigrant Named Isaias Hellman Created California*. A newspaper reporter for more than 20 years as well as a teacher at UC Berkeley, she found herself intrigued by the story of her great-great grandfather, Isaias Hellman. On leave of absence from her regular writing job, she turned her focus from personal essays to the biography of her ancestor, who had been an important contributor to the development and financial well-being of nineteenth-century California.

There is always a plethora of research associated with any writing. When Frances went to the Berkeley Historical Society to begin her research on Hellman, the librarian asked which of the 40 boxes of documents she wanted to begin with. Very surprised at the quantity of information available, she began with the first box, noticing familiar names such as Levi Strauss and Mayer Lehman, who were business partners of her great-great grandfather. So began her discovery of an interesting man whose life story was buried in musty letters and documents: a German

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

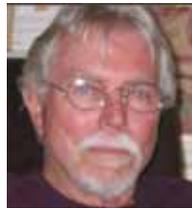
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# President's Prowling

by *Dave LaRoche*  
*President, South Bay Writers*

## A Long Hard Climb Seems Worth It

I enjoy old movies and am amused to see today's stars doing bit parts in the early B's—Bob Mitchum at 18, Liz at 12. And when I was young (before the first Bible was printed), I took up the trumpet and remember the lessons and practice before being allowed third position in the band. That was fourth behind solo Buck Weaver's chair, where the score was mostly rests and whole notes.



So, *what is* the likelihood of a tenderfoot starring the first time out—a violinist soloing at Carnegie Hall before playing the neighborhood park in front of parents and friends, then a conservatory, regional orchestra, and so on? Can we imagine an Olympian with gold before winning a sequence of increasing competitions? (I did airport racing around straw bales in my MG before entering Le Mans.)

So it is with all endeavors, and so it is with writing. All who strive for the prize will first study the craft, and, with practice, progress through a portfolio of increasing accomplishments and wins—assembling a base and adding plateaus of achievement. “Walk before running.” How many times have we heard that, and in how many different ways? Well, it's true, and it's work.

I suggest, and “it's been suggested,” that we work at two goals. At one level, we do a piece into the ground, so to speak. Go over it and over it; get bored; put it down. Then come back through several repetitions, and again—each time improving, if only a word. Call in a writing buddy for his or her take, a critique group several times; a contest or editor, each opportunity sculpting and polishing; each time the work reaching a higher plateau and at a point, we hope excellence.

On another level, we grow personally—through networking, club affiliations, slams and open mics, speaking out on local panels and running projects. With increasing exposure, we grow and mature as writers, and our author's persona evolves through another sequence of ascending plateaus.

The point is, despite the sterling ideas and creative thrill that go into a first draft, success is a slow climb and it is work—consuming, often frustrating and disappointing work. But with the work finished and stature achieved, we have the opportunity to become known and appreciated as writers, and enjoy publication, book signings and interviews; the *New York Times* and Charlie Rose—the Hall and the Gold, and it's worth it. WT

## California Writers Club South Bay Branch

— 0 —

### Executive Committee

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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.



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## WRITERSTALK

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

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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

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

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### Announcements and Advertisements

newsletter@southbaywriters.com

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

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

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# Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx  
Editor

## Well begun is—well, begun



I rarely write—even *WritersTalk* editorials—unless there's a figurative gun against my head. For years, I wondered why this was so, and the lame answer I eventually devised is that I'm always afraid my writing won't measure up. Measure up to what? The impossible standard I set for it, of course.

This isn't writer's block, exactly. I don't think. At the moment, I can think of a number of topics to write about, a few of which may be suitable editorial material and an unfortunately large number of which are probably better not written about at all.

I gave some thought to doing a rant about one of my major hobbyhorses: dangling or misplaced modifiers, the most common error in amateur writing. I hit Google to see if I could steal something instead of actually writing it, and found 61,100 hits for misplaced modifier. Dangling participle showed 64,700. I followed a few of the links. One belonged to a local community college teacher who apparently didn't know the difference between which and that. Another had really lousy fabricated examples. (What had got me going on dangling participles was an example I ran across a few nights ago: "Afterwards, being sunrise, she hadn't learned their stories, but exhaustion postponed the telling." Fabricated examples pale by comparison.) Although it's possible that one benefit of dangling participles is the unintended humor they often engender. The name of the character referred to in that example was not Aurora. But after twenty-seventh or -eighth thought, I decided against the rant. Rants are usually appreciated far more by their authors than by their readers.

Out of idle curiosity, I googled writer's block and found a whopping 8,510,000 hits. The implication there is that nearly three orders of magnitude more writers are concerned about not being able to write than about misplaced modifiers or dangling participles. What that implication may mean, I haven't a clue. Except maybe we're being spared some number of dangling participles.

The Wikipedia definition, at the top of the list, said "Writer's block is a phenomenon involving temporary loss of ability to begin or continue writing, usually due to lack of inspiration or creativity. Writer's block can also be a hindrance even when the writer feels that they already have a story in mind but can get no further than part of that story." (I do hope that before the author of that piece gets unstuck he'll give some consideration to subject-verb agreement.)

Any number of the sites offer the kinds of suggestions that anyone who's been around writing at all has likely heard: Write about something else. Take a walk. Change your underwear. Go somewhere else to write. Write five random words. Talk to a monkey. And so on.

What really got to me about the results page for writer's block were some of the ads. There were, of course, the expected offers of classes, writers' workshops, editors, and literary agencies. But one site guarantees that it can cure your writer's block. *Guarantees*. And for only \$87.00. Even better than that was software that claimed to cure writer's block. I got an immediate mental image of a computer generating text according to some artificial intelligence algorithm specified by the author (Hey, computer, write me some science fiction.). But what it is instead is "A powerful tool that will help you get your ideas out of your head and onto the page . . . [using] our acclaimed visual outliner . . ." I do suppose that a visual outliner would be better for a writer than a tactile outliner or even an auditory outliner. Only \$119, in any event.

Okay, so, now, anyway, where was I? **WT**

# Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

"Spring has sprung," as they say, and here are the success stories for April:



Jackie Mutz  
Contributing Editor

- Dave Breithaupt had a book signing at the San Jose Athletic Club on April 21, 2009, with 32 guests attending and 14 books sold. As he said, "Such an undertaking is exhausting." Congratulations, Dave!
- Carolyn Donnell had two submissions, "Mosaics" and "Closet Artist", accepted for publication in this year's SCN True Words Anthology.
- Donna Fujimoto's short story "Halcyon Hypocrisy" was accepted for publication by *Beyond Centauri*, a quarterly science fiction magazine for young readers. Look for it in their

October 2009 issue.

- Lita Kurth has had historical short stories accepted for a reading at the Working Class Studies Association Conference at the University of Pittsburgh this June.
- Karen Llewellyn has been blogging steadily since last December. Check out [llewellynbook.blogspot.com](http://llewellynbook.blogspot.com) and see what's going on.
- Audry Lynch is teaching an ongoing memoir class the first and third Fridays of the month from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the Saratoga Recreation Department.
- Phyllis Mattson continues to give many book talks—five during Holocaust Remembrance week (three on one day!). She will also have two chapters of her book *War Orphan in San Francisco* published in the Harvard Alumni Association anthology in the near future.
- Bill Pack sent in an update on the anticipated release of his novel *The*

*Bottom of the Sky*. So far, all reviews rave about his book and it has been as high as #194 on B&N's list (think two million titles on that list and there are still two months before the June 10 release date) and as high as #5715 on Amazon. He expects to sell out the first run of 5,000 copies prior to release. Locally, *The Bottom of the Sky* has been featured in the *Saratoga News* and in the May/June issue of *Stanford Magazine*. Congratulations, Bill!

- Joni Ratts' new book *Fade to Black* is now on Amazon. If you go to [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and type in her name, it comes up # 1. Way to go, Joni!

Early summer weather aside, it has been quiet at [accolades@southbaywriters.com](mailto:accolades@southbaywriters.com). Please email me and let me know what writing success stories you have to share. It motivates the rest of us to keep writing. We look forward to hearing from you.  
WT

# View from the Board

by Dave LaRoche

Your Board of Directors met April 8 at the home of Edie Matthews, PR and Publicity Chair. At the start of the meeting, Prez Dave announced that cards had been sent to Clarence Hammonds, remembering him at the time of his Evelyn's passing, and to Rita St. Claire, whose husband has become seriously ill.

## Announcements:

- The Nominating Chair position has been filled by Edie Matthews. Please send her your intentions to run for office.
- The Jack London Award will go to yours truly this year. I am grateful and will be more expressive later.
- An Exploration and Planning Group will meet April 25 to strategize the 2010 East of Eden Conference.
- A member volunteer is needed to set up and manage an annual writing contest, backfilling for Rita St. Claire.
- The self-publishing workshop is on track.

## Upcoming Events:

- Speakers Michelle Richmond, *Year of the Fog*, May 12; Janis Bell, *Clean, Well-Lighted Sentences*, June 9
- The Annual BBQ in July
- Self-Publishing Workshop May 3 with Carla King and Lisa Alpine.

Suzy Paluzzi has agreed to act as Secretary until Rita St. Claire returns.

The Central Board will meet on April 19. The quarterly financial reports are due on the 15th with *no* extensions available.

Current membership stands at 207.

Membership renewals will be accepted beginning in May. The renewal fee of \$45 will extend your membership through June 30, 2010.

Bill Baldwin announced that open mics continue on the schedule as posted in *WritersTalk* and on the website, with the exception that activities at the Prunyard venue were canceled in March.

The April *WritersTalk* was distributed to 236 individuals, including 15 to guests and prospective members, at a total cost of \$247.

The club's website is now hosted by

GoDaddy with attendant email and calendar opportunities, including a wiki-like space. The move is expected to yield better results with fewer errors.

The gift certificate used in our donation raffle seems quite popular as gross raffle receipts have improved. The club nets almost enough to pay for the brownie mix that Hospitality and Networking Chair Cathy Bauer runs through her wonderland baking process.

Anthology sales will pick up as our learning curve moves from the horizontal. This is our first go at it, and while our book is exemplary, thanks to excellent content selection, as well as editorial and design work, our experience with sales is a net zero. Dick Amyx has formed a group to address the sales challenge.

The Young Writers Workshop is on schedule for May 30. Marilyn Fahey and Jamie Miller seek volunteers to help with flyer distribution, registration, seating, lunch, and other logistical tasks.

Bill Baldwin will again be point man for our involvement at the Book Expo this October—expect to hear from him this summer. WT

# The Journey of a Thousand Miles: Managing an Ensemble Cast in a Novel

by Lita Kurth

Rest assured, dear readers, I will not be telling you from experience how to manage an ensemble cast in a novel since my own cast has only with extreme difficulty been wrestled into a somewhat manageable twenty-five chapters and still threatens to fall apart. However, I take heart from the fact that others have managed a novel of multiple characters—and beautifully.



Lita Kurth  
Contributing Editor

Richard Russo's *Empire Falls* is—I'll just say it—the novel I wanted to write. (Perhaps as a consolation I could just type out the whole thing.) He has all the elements I love: backwater characters and locations, family drama, class struggle, truckloads of humor, and even spirituality. One might assume that, in the interests of coherence, several of those items would have to be forfeited, but Russo's Pulitzer Prize winner certainly gives the lie to that! So it can be done—by someone else if not by me. Let's see if we can figure out his methods for handling a big cast, which has to be almost as challenging on paper as it is on a theater set.

*Empire Falls* presents us with nearly twenty non-stock, rounded characters. I'm sure any writer can see the problem with keeping so many pots boiling. Russo, however, moves the plot forward very successfully despite the need to interweave so many characters' experiences. (I admit that when I set the book down for a few nights before taking it up again, I had to think a few minutes before remembering who a few characters were, but that confusion didn't last long.)

One little trick Russo uses, and it's remarkably simple, is to put backstory chapters entirely in italics. (Brent Spencer uses italics similarly in his novel *The Lost Son*.) *Empire Falls* begins with one such chapter that tells the history of the Whitings, the wealthy dominant family of the town, indeed, the very family whose "empire falls."

(Russo said in a PBS interview that the wonderful title was a happy accident, a typo that he seized upon, his original title having been the infinitely less fun *Empire Mills*.) [pbs.org/newshour/conversation/jan-june02/russo\\_5-07.html](http://pbs.org/newshour/conversation/jan-june02/russo_5-07.html)

Using italics in five out of thirty-two chapters that delve into the past (plus a prologue and an epilogue, which are features I love, incidentally) alerts readers to a shift in gears, and once we see the pattern, it's remarkably easy to follow.

Russo also seems to have found a wonderful middle ground between summary and scene, which lets him pass on a lot of information and move quickly from generation to generation of the Whitings. His command of this middle ground between showing and telling also lets him change locale, for example, from *Empire Falls* to Martha's Vineyard.

One always hears about the dangers of summary because in it, the author is "telling," not "showing," but Russo is a virtuoso "teller," partly because of his wry humor. Here are a few samples: "Charles Beaumont Whiting was by then in his late twenties, and his father was coming to the reluctant conclusion that his only real talent was for spending money, though the young man claimed to be painting and writing poetry as well." And: "By moving across the river, C.B. Whiting became the first of his clan to acknowledge the virtue of establishing a distance from the people who generated their wealth." I don't mind those authorial intrusions at all, do you?

Additionally, Russo makes use of what is referred to in writing textbooks as "third person limited omniscient" or at times, colloquially, "the close third." Perhaps it would be more accurate to call Russo's point of view a "fairly close third." Note that in the following sentence, we are not entirely inside C.B. Whiting's head but we're fairly close: "Perhaps he was frightened by the sheer prospect of matrimony, of marry-

ing a girl he would one day want to murder." C.B. Whiting is not the protagonist, so if we are inside his head, we might get into trouble: we can't be inside everyone's head and have a coherent narrative. Not many writers successfully place us inside the heads of more than a handful of characters. The danger of confusing readers about where to direct their attention, where the plot is going, is too great. I wonder if Russo's use of "perhaps" in his sentence about Whiting allows him a little wiggle room. Is he inside C.B. Whiting's thoughts or not quite? Funny what a big difference such a minute choice can make.

Nowadays, the limited or close third is a very popular choice because it offers both intimacy and flexibility. Alice LaPlante, author of an excellent new creative writing textbook called *Method and Madness: The Making of a Story*, says, "... there are many variations of limited third person narrators." Contrary to some claims, LaPlante asserts that limited third is *not* solely "the heart and mind of a single character." (Many other textbooks and instructors say limited third person *is* restricted to the heart and mind of a single character.)

In any case, *Empire Falls* begins with the Whiting dynasty and focuses mostly on C.B. Whiting, but by chapter two, we are inside (or close to inside) the head of our true protagonist, Miles Roby, who runs the Empire Grill, a not-very-fancy restaurant in Maine. Sentences such as "... Miles often wondered if these old buildings were razed, would the town that had grown up around them be forced to imagine a future?" are pretty far inside his head, but even after we meet Miles, we still take side trips into other characters' thoughts and feelings, just as earlier we were inside C.B. Whiting's head or fairly close. In chapter ten, we are clearly inside the head of Miles's daughter, Tick, however: "By far the least attractive possibility is to make an honest effort, and at first Tick thinks that she won't..." Interestingly, we have changed tenses from past to present as well. Why isn't it jarring? My guess is that the consistency *within* chapters allows for the feeling of a smooth flow, and of course, whether it is obvious at the time or not, all of these

*Continued on page 11*

# San Francisco Writers Conference 2009

by Victoria M. Johnson

I've attended a lot of conferences in my journey as a writer. I'm picky when it comes to selecting the big one I'll attend for the year. This time I decided to give the San Francisco Writers Conference, held in February at the Mark Hopkins Hotel, a shot.

The lineup of speakers and topics was impressive, the keynoters promised to be enlightening, and the opportunities to pitch my projects seemed too good to be true. The one drawback to me was the price. I'd never paid that much for a conference before. I weighed the pros and cons and finally decided to shell out the cash and give the conference a try. After my research, I decided this conference was offering features that I hadn't found before.

The Ask a Pro session, with unlimited pitching opportunities to editors from publishing houses like Chronicle Books, St. Martin's Press, Random House, HarperOne, and many more, was the selling point for me. I sat at a round table and heard eight other participants pitch their book to the lone editor at the table. It was a great learning experience to hear what worked and what didn't, what got an editor (and everyone else) excited and what glazed everyone's eyes over.

Others took advantage of pitching to freelance editors (book doctors) to get feedback on their work before pitching to editors or agents. Another popular event for writers of children's books was a rapid-fire critique of their first page from two heavyweights in publishing: Melissa Manlove, children's book editor at Chronicle Books, and Laurie McLean, children's book agent at Larsen-Pomada Literary Agents. Hopefuls lined up for their chance to be discovered as the next *Harry Potter* or *Twilight* author.

For an added fee of \$50, attendees could participate in Speed Dating for Agents,

where you could pitch to any of a roomful of agents such as Donald Maass, Elizabeth Pomada, Ken Sherman, Paul S. Levine. For those who didn't want to pitch their work, there were lots of editor and agent panels offered throughout the conference schedule.

Richard Paul Evans, the mega-bestselling author of *The Christmas Box* and nonfiction book *The 5 Lessons a Millionaire Taught Me*, treated us to a keynote speech that had me and at least half the room in tears. He also shared an inspiring story about how he made the leap from unknown self-published author to bestselling author. He urged us to take big chances and to write who we are. When we try to be commercial is when we lose the truth. He offers a free version of his book *The First Gift of Christmas* at [richardpaulevans.com/richards-books](http://richardpaulevans.com/richards-books).

On Saturday, keynote speaker D. P. Lyle, M.D., thriller writer and author of the nonfiction books *Murder and Mayhem* and *Forensics for Dummies*, entertained us with an intriguing story about writing crime novels and thrillers. The next day, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jane Smiley revealed her writing process and offered her sage advice.



Photo: Cheri Eplin

The workshop offerings were unique and included topics I had a real interest in. Some of the ones I attended provided insight on the business side of writing: Building Your Online Platform, Getting Published in Small Presses and Literary Magazines, and How to Set Up a Teleseminar. The selection of workshops included memoir, poetry, nonfiction, children's, and a variety of fiction genres. The fact that I got to visit with my Los Angeles-based agent, who was a speaker, was a bonus. And of course there were organized social events to get everyone networking.

I do highly recommend that you save up for the conference and attend next year. For me, where I'm at in my career, it was well worth the expense. There are two reasons to register early: One, the registration fee is \$495 until

August 31 (not including Speed Dating for Agents). After that it goes up to \$695. Next, the conference usually sells out. For more information go to [sfwriters.org](http://sfwriters.org).

Gather a few friends and get a \$50 per person group discount for five or more. Check out and download the fabulous (and free) teleseminars of past conference workshops at [sfwriters.info](http://sfwriters.info). WT

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## 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  
minuscule  
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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## A May Game

Mother May I?  
Think up some new concept?  
A new ms. to start right away.  
A story or article  
Assignment "in-depth."  
May I mother?  
Can't ask another.  
It's needed yesterday!

—Pat Bustamante

# Time to Renew Your Membership

by Marjorie Johnson

Or join today and save.

Renew today and receive a small gift and a raffle ticket for a free South Bay dinner meeting.

## Benefits of membership:

- Savings on dinner at regular meetings
- Savings on conferences and seminars
- Networking and fellowship with other writers
- Posting on CWC South Bay website, Members' Gallery
- Subscription to *WritersTalk*

## Renewals:

The 2008–2009 CWC South Bay membership year ends June 30. Renewal dues of \$45 keep you a member in good standing through June 30, 2010. Save \$20 by not letting your membership lapse. Renew online or by check using the form below.

## New members:

Get May and June free. Send a check for \$65 with the quick application form below or join online with PayPal.

Mail your check to  
CWC South Bay Writers  
Attn: Marjorie  
P. O. Box 3254  
Santa Clara, CA 95055

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

## New members:

Circle area of interest: novel, short story, poetry, nonfiction, screenplay, journalism, editing, or technical. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you actively writing? \_\_\_\_\_ Seeking publication? \_\_\_\_\_

Has your work been published in the last ten years? \_\_\_\_\_

(If so, please send a list of published work)

Please submit a 1000-word excerpt for active or associate membership.

## Special Bonus Offering

At the May 12 meeting, Membership Chairman Marjorie Johnson will draw one winning name of someone who has paid dues for 2009–2010. That lucky person will win a free dinner meeting. Renew early to get your name into the drawing.

## Mount Hamilton

Patient computers,  
Their eyes search the stars, looking  
For a place like ours.

—Jamie Miller

## Middle School

Sweet innocent child,  
What hopes, young dreams await? What  
hormones rage within?

—Jamie Miller

# June Is Election Month: Nominations Are Now Open

Officers who will guide our club for the next year will be elected from a slate of candidates during the June meeting. Nominating Chair Edie Matthews will accept nominations from now until it's time to cast votes, including at the June meeting.

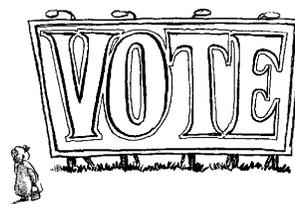
The offices to be filled are President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. These offices form an executive committee, which is the core of your board of directors and the prime mover for planning the next year's events, including monthly programs.

Their vision and energy are critical to the branch's success and your enlightenment and enjoyment. Duties are summarized as follows

- **President** —Leadership, vision, policy, and procedure; appoints chairs with board ratification
- **Vice President** —Advice, programs, presidential stand-in
- **Treasurer** —Financial management, including accounting and reporting of cash flows
- **Secretary** —Keeps branch business records, including taking and maintaining minutes of board meetings; events calendar; and activity prompting.

You are encouraged to get involved: to see your influence felt, your ideas implemented, your growth catalyzed as you apply your creative energy to the club and gain from the inherent association. You may nominate yourself or another who is willing.

All you have to do is send the name and contact information to Edie with the office in which you or your nominee has interest. Send to Edie Matthews at edie333@sbcglobal.net or mail to Edie at 917 Perreira Drive, Santa Clara, CA 95051-4614. WT



# Foster Child

by Jeannine Vegh

The eight-year-old African-American child awoke trembling at the end of his nightmare. He had dreamed of being ripped away from a giant teddy bear and of being pulled down a very dark hallway by a figure he could not see. As he rubbed his eyes and looked around the room, he realized he was not at home. "Where am I?" He sobbed quietly. He looked down and saw he had on strange cowboy pajamas that smelled fresh, like they had just come out of a package. They felt itchy and he scratched. The room smelled different. No odor of urine, or the smell of beer or vomit. Still, terror crept over him as his wide eyes continued to scan the room. Then the doorknob began to twist.

A white lady came into the room. "Hi, I'm Irene. I hear your name is Jacobi."

"Where am I?" he cried out loud. His lips puckered up as he wiped his nose with the new funny-smelling sleeve.

"They brought you here last night. You're going to stay with me for awhile."

"Where's Raggedy Andy?" His doll with one red hair left on its head, and one eye that used to laugh at him in the morning, and tell him funny stories at night. "Where did he go?"

"Why, I don't know. You came here only in a pair of underclothes, and nothing else. We're going to have breakfast now, so wash your face and hands, and walk straight down the hall. I've a baby to go feed now. I'll see you soon."

"Umm . . . okay." He did feel hungry, so he stopped crying. He got out of bed and went down the hall. On the way, he saw a bathroom decorated in pink.

When he entered the kitchen he saw another little boy at the table. He nodded his head.

"Hey—I'm Diego."

Diego had on cowboy pajamas too, and a baseball cap turned backwards. When he talked, Diego had a shiny gold tooth in front of his mouth and a couple on the bottom. His family had just come here from Mexico, but then they yanked him away one day after his mom and dad had a big fight.

"Yeah, I've been here for like a week. I miss my mom. It's hecka cool here, though," he told him, sticking his thumb in his mouth.

"When do you get to go home?" he said as his belly began to make sounds. Both boys laughed.

"Oh, good, you boys are ready for breakfast," Irene said as she came around the corner. "Diego, we don't do hats at the table, remember?" He quickly removed his hat without a word and then jammed the thumb back in its resting place. Irene put bacon and sausage in the oven and began whipping up scrambled eggs.

"When do we get to go home?" Jacobi asked again.

Without turning, Irene responded, continuing to work over the stove. "I have no control over that; we have to listen to what your social worker says."

"I've been here . . . for . . . like three days," Diego said, holding up his fingers.

"Very good, Diego." Irene turned to pat him on the head,

"When does the social worker come?" Jacobi asked, feeling very confused about this person. "Do they know my mom?"

"Oh, yes, the social worker knows your family very well. She or he will contact us pretty soon. Diego's will be here on Tuesday. This is an emergency home though, so you only stay temporarily until they figure out what to do with your family."

"I hope my mom is okay. She needs me to comb her hair and wash the dishes. Sometimes I make dinner," Jacobi said proudly, but then put his head down and put his hands over his wiry hair. No one said anything for a long while. Irene served the boys their food and a big glass of milk.

Two days later, Diego left, and Raul came in his place. He was ten and liked to curse. That night he slipped into Jacobi's room and punched him in the face. Jacobi's nose began to bleed, and he yelled for Irene. Raul left the next day, and the house became quiet again. A few days later, a white lady came to see Jacobi. Jacobi figured she must be the social worker, but she didn't say.

"We are going to take you home, Jacobi," the lady said to him, and took him by the hand to lead him away. Irene had packed a brown bag with the few clothes he had adopted since he arrived there. She handed it to Jacobi to carry.

"I put some cookies in the bag for you to eat later," Irene told him, then bent down and gave him a big hug. "You have been a very good boy. I liked having you here very much."

Jacobi smiled and went out to the car with the lady. They did not talk at all. He watched the streets as they drove, wondering where he had been. When they got on the freeway Jacobi watched the cars whizzing by, and the lady kept cursing at the drivers. Finally, they pulled off on an exit and began going down streets that he remembered. On the corner stood Smilin' Joe, the guy who stuck needles in his arms and laughed his head off. Next to him was Ole Bertha, who liked to grab Jacobi between his legs and call him big boy whenever he walked down the streets. He thought that seemed weird, and sometimes he would cross the street before he got near her. Further down, the social worker's car passed by Crack Alley, where people would hang out when the dealer came to town. He had to go there sometimes with his mom,



Illustration by Betty Auchard

and the place gave him the creeps. People looked like zombies and would fight about money. They were always begging the guy to give them credit.

Jacobi's mom had said to him recently, "I'm goin' fix you up with a little job with one of the dealers pretty soon. That way, you can squeeze me a li'l sumpin' on the side."

Jacobi wanted to make his mom happy, but he did not like the drugs. He did not like all the people that came to his house, either. They would be up all night, talking loud and playing music. Sometimes they would come into his room and fall onto his bed. A couple of times, people put their hands in his underwear and felt around. He hated that, but he could do nothing about it, and his mom never came when he screamed. Sometimes they just put their hands on his mouth anyway. Jacobi had sworn himself to secrecy. He could not tell anyone, especially now,

now that they had taken him away from his mom. He did not want that to happen ever again. She needed him.

The lady pulled up to the apartment complex, and Jacobi saw no one there hanging out on the street. "What day is this?" he asked the lady.

"It's Monday, May first. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, welfare day. Show me the money," he said with a grin, as he remembered how happy this day made people feel. It reminded him of being at a festival. People would help each other out to get to the check-cashing place. They would smile. Sometimes the neighbor would cook him and his mom some barbecue chicken, with biscuits and greens. The first became his favorite day of the month. The lady, however, rolled her eyes and went up to the door to knock.

"Brenda? Brenda?"

Within a few moments, his mom came running to the door. "My baby, my baby, oh my god, where you been?" His mom kissed him all over, then pushed him inside the door. "Okay, thank you, social worker," she said with a quick laugh, moving to shut the door.

"Here's my card. Please give me a call. We're still on the case, remember that."

"Yeah, I know, social worker. Gonna do my ten steps an' everything. I'm just glad I got me my boy back."

His mom shut the door and went into the kitchen. She had a pot on the stove, along with a box of baking soda and a roll of aluminum foil. Jacobi saw the powder on the plate next to the burner. The pipes lay next to the plate. He went to his room to lie down and be quiet so he would not disturb his mother. **WT**

*Dedicated to all the little boys and girls in foster care around the country.*

*Visit the author's blog at [jkvegh.blogspot.com](http://jkvegh.blogspot.com)*

## South Bay Young Writers Workshop

### Saturday, May 30

If you have a teenager in your family or a young protégé who might benefit from an inspiring day with some of our own writers, sign them up. Patterned on an event sponsored four years ago by the Peninsula Chapter of the CWC and our own East of Eden conference, our workshop has four sessions:

- Martha Engber—building characters and plot
- Jack Hasling—poetry
- Victoria M. Johnson—writing short scripts
- Panel—Colin Seymour, Mike Cassidy, Bill Belew, and Kim Engelmann: how kids can get their voices heard
- Lunchtime special—Dave Breithaupt's unique and humorous view of how an old guy decided that he could write something as good as what he's been reading.

If you enjoy kids and want to help out, you're more than welcome to join us..

Each topic will fill a 65-minute session. Space is limited to 60 attendees, first-come, first-served. The cost is \$20, including lunch; hardship scholarships may be available. Registration is available online at [southbaywriters.com](http://southbaywriters.com). The workshop will be held Saturday, May 30, from 9 to 3, at West Valley Presbyterian Church, 6191 Bollinger Road (at Miller Avenue) in Cupertino.

Jamie Miller and Marilyn Fahey are co-chairing this event. They are looking for club members to participate the day of the workshop, and they are also interested in ideas about how to publicize the event. You can contact them at [kidswrite09@gmail.com](mailto:kidswrite09@gmail.com).

# Writer Well-Being: When Crisis Hits

by Rita St. Claire

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. To me, this old saw isn't just a cliché. As I write this, I'm living the results of my focus on health. I share my experience in the hope that what has happened to me will help you in your quest for healthy writing.



Rita St. Claire

It's no secret that I've been working on exercise, diet, and losing weight. A few months ago, I kicked off our club's Writer Well-Being project with a short talk at one of our South Bay Writers meetings. I wore an exercise suit and told you the story of how my ankles, calves, and feet swelled to elephant-like dimensions when, for six weeks, I spent 18-hour days typing the first draft of my first novel. From that experience, I learned my lesson: if I was going to be a professional writer, I'd have to sit for long periods of time. Thus, I'd have to compensate with a big increase in exercise.

I worked long and hard to get into the swing. I participated in an exercise and nutrition study at Stanford. My husband and I joined a swim and racquet club where he played tennis and where he and I did strength training under the direction of a personal trainer. Most recently, I took swim lessons with the goal of joining the club's Swim Masters program and maybe even doing the Women's Triathlon with my daughter next October in San Diego.

All this ended about a month ago when my wonderful husband took ill during a ski vacation at Lake Tahoe. There, we found out his spine was collapsing due to lung cancer eating into it. Needless to say, this was a heinous shock. No, my husband never smoked.

Now that my husband has had major, major spine surgery, I'm spending 100% of my time taking care of him, both for his post-op recuperation and also in preparation for his upcoming radiation and chemo treatments. Though I've struggled to get in my daily walk, I'm

learning how to continue to exercise during this time. I am also learning how to be a good nurse, which involves mental strength as well as physical. I'm constantly on the go with little time to rest. I often have to lift things as I help my husband get out of bed and to the walker.

And, you know what? I feel a strength I never knew I had. So much of this strength—mental as well as physical—I attribute to all the good exercise I've done. While nothing could ever have prepared me for a crisis like this, my good diet and exercise now serve me well. I have strength, energy, and stamina to meet the challenges ahead.

My husband may be a candidate for a clinical trial of a new biological drug for lung cancer. Of course, his condition and medical history will have to meet stringent scientific requirements, *but one of the big reasons doctors think he might be a candidate for the trial of the new and somewhat miraculous drug is his excellent health except for the cancer.* His tennis, ballroom dancing, strength training and long hours spent gardening outside have put him in better shape in his late sixties than he ever was as a young adult. This may make a difference in his medical treatments and thus aid his healing process.

While my husband's and my story isn't a happy one, I hope it will inspire you to maintain good health efforts as you continue to write—or to start your own personal writer well-being program if you haven't already done so. We never know when additional demands will be put on our body and mind, or when we'll be called upon to do more than we ever expected. It's good—very good—to be prepared.

Here's a little poem to keep you going. Use it to inspire yourself during this glorious month of May.

## May Apples

I wish I may eat fruit all day;  
I wish I might be thin by night.  
Better yet, we all stay healthy,  
Something one can't buy when wealthy.  
Hence you'll often hear me say:  
MAY writers keep health goals in sight.

—Pat Bustamante



## Recap

*Continued from page 1*

immigrant and dry goods proprietor who fell into the banking business, a person instrumental in the development and growth of California's financial and business world.



Frances Dinkelspiel

After research came the writing itself. Dinkelspiel shared how her background as a reporter was both beneficial and harmful to her writing. As a journalist, she found it easy to deal with factual information, but being a literal writer also made it hard to write narrative nonfiction. She had to unlearn her journalistic habits and learn instead how to develop narrative nonfiction by fleshing out the hard information available. Her advice? Use what information you do have and write around what you don't.

Because there was so much information, trying to stay realistic while writing narrative nonfiction was challenging. There were many dramatic events, such as the 1906 earthquake, that made it tempting to interject what Hellman's own feelings might have been. She found help in her writing/critique group, the "North 24th."

The hardest part after writing the book, an eight-year endeavor, was finding an agent. Why did Dinkelspiel write her book? Freelance writers get more respect when they have published a book. And, as she told us, "It was a fun book to write—a journey of family discovery." An interesting relative, a good story; *Towers of Gold*, a good read.

## Member Profile: Evelyn “Evie” Preston

by Lita Kurth

Are you wondering how to move from a non-writing career to a writing career? Although dramatic instances exist of writers quitting their jobs cold turkey and sitting down at the typewriter the next morning, more frequently it seems to be a gradual process. New member Evie Preston offers her story of such a transition. The author of *Memoirs of the Money Lady: a Humorous Book on a Serious Subject* (which sold more copies than any other local author’s book at the Sunnyvale Borders bookstore) and a financial columnist for *Active Over Fifty* magazine, Evie’s former careers ranged from teaching English and French to being a licensed professional in real estate, securities, and insurance to selling fresh soup to stores. As often seems to be the case, serendipity played a role in her writing efforts.

Serendipity is an aspect of Evie’s latest enterprise, a book about transitions and the little steps and unexpected occurrences that lead to big changes. In her blog (which I found engaging and inspiring) Evie not only discusses her own transitions but quotes readers. One example involves a young woman who agreed to help at an interior design business for a summer to calm her jitters while she waited to hear if a nursing school had accepted her. She turned out to be so good at design and enjoyed it so much that she traded in nursing for architecture school.

Writing has long held a place in Evelyn’s life, even as she pursued other careers. Early on she took writing courses, including one offered by the late Carol Amen. She published an article for the *Redbook’s Young Mother* series, and wrote short pieces, including letters to the editor of the *Palo Alto Weekly*. Eventually, she marched into that office and asked to write a column. It worked.

Later in her career, Evie took a valuable publicity course from Jill Lublin. She also began writing a financial column for the *Active Over Fifty* quarterly, an assignment that dovetails nicely with

her book and the talks she gives on finance for women, and, more recently, on transitions. Evelyn’s writing and publishing experiences are a study in interconnectedness. For example, her book and book readings led her to a woman who sold ads for *Active Over Fifty*. This woman suggested that she contact the magazine. As Evie points out, “the older you get, the more connections you have,” and those contacts can prove helpful in surprising ways. For example, a lawyer friend helped her write an expanded disclaimer at the beginning of her somewhat fictionalized book, *Memoirs of the Money Lady*.

Her memoir, which tells about her entry, successes, and failures in financial services, provided her with daunting challenges for nonfiction writing. She was a professional still working in the field and she did not want to burn bridges. One technique she resorted to was keeping the situation true but giving the people involved a different physical appearance or creating a composite of several people.

Her attractive blog and website were both facilitated by her publisher, a local entrepreneur who produces the *Happy About* . . . books (*Happy About Tax Relief*, *Happy About Working to Stay Young*, *Happy About People-to-People Lending with Prosper.com*), which are short consumer and career books. She found this publisher through her attendance at a rather overwhelming workshop with an agent, an editor, and a publisher. Happy About®, a publishing hybrid between commercial publishing and self-publishing, made it easier for Evelyn to promote and print her book and easier for readers to find it, though the process was not completely free. (You can check out the site at [happyabout.info](http://happyabout.info).)

Perhaps the funniest story Evelyn told involved a wrong number. Of all things, her personal telephone number was listed as that of the Palo Alto Borders. When a Borders customer called her up, Evelyn gave her the correct number and also suggested, “When you go in, look up my book and tell me what you think.” A couple of months later, the woman called to tell her that both she and her neighbor had bought and loved her book and they wanted to take

Evelyn to lunch! From an interpersonal point of view, such events involve more fun and far fewer headaches than a blockbuster book or a movie deal.

You can find Evelyn’s blog at [eviepreston.wordpress.com](http://eviepreston.wordpress.com), and the website for her memoir at [moneylady.com](http://moneylady.com). You may be able to find Evelyn herself at one of our South Bay Writers meetings. WT

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## *Journey of a Thousand Miles* Continued from page 5

side events are tied to the main plot.

Miles’s thoughts and feelings predominate, however, and he is the first character we meet in the first non-italicized chapter. Both those strategies help us stay focused on him as the central character. Miles is also connected to every other character in the book and, neatly, has a conflict with nearly all of them. That too helps glue the book together.

It’s surprising how many subtle shifts in point of view (the other worst sin besides telling instead of showing) Russo gets away with. In the seventh chapter, he gives us three points of view within two pages: “. . . Max Roby wanted to know . . .” “Bea was pondering . . .” and “Horace tried to imagine . . .” It shouldn’t be okay to move from head to head like this, but it seems to work for Russo. (Apparently the Pulitzer committee was fine with it.) I suspect the answer lies at least partially in very careful transitions and well-established patterns. (I’d love to analyze every transition in the novel, but I’ve already completed the critical component of my MFA, so I’ll forego that pleasure. Feel free to try it on your own, however.)

Ensemble casts are a bear, no doubt about it, but if you don’t mind breaking a rule or two, apparently they can be managed. The fact that Russo can tell, not show, and jump around a bunch of characters’ heads is good news, right? And whatever happens in terms of sales and honors, just being able to master this difficulty to one’s own satisfaction is a big achievement in itself. Happy tales! WT

## Mac's Late Fate

by Dave LaRoche

A cold mist moved into the 32nd precinct as an easterly blew across the sound. Those few still on the street pulled up their collars as the chill licked their face and crept into their bones. The white globe out front of the station house—"32" in matter-of-fact numbers—was on early, and the mist swirled around it.

Inside, McDougle sat alone in the big room, doodling while waiting for his phone to ring—it was Ida he expected. She was to call about seven and it was now approaching nine—dammit, never on time.

"Hey, Mac!" It was the captain. "Come here for a minute, will ya?"

*Will I? Did he think I was gonna deny him my presence with only a couple years to go? Whatta jerk.* He smiled at both thoughts.

McDougle stood. It took a while, as he was heavy and stiff, not to mention, with two from retirement, on that long slide downhill. "Yeah, I'm coming."

"Say, Mac, I got an assignment for ya. You know Krispy Kremes, don'cha?" He laughed in a way that showed he was in on a joke, and that he might let you in on it too if you first agreed to the humor. Mac figured it was a snide remark about his weight.

Well, whatta ya supposed to do, ridin' around in a cruiser for years, presented with nothin' but temptation: Lou's Polish and Pretzels, Rosalie's Danish, Bud's Bar and Grill, Sal's Taffy, Gino's Pizza and Bakery; not to forget Danny's Dunkeria with its fresh Krispy Kremes—strictly on the house for all cops. Every call that came in was from an eatery it seemed—a stick-up or jostling or rage at a cashier—and they all were grateful and generous.

Mac looked out the window. *God, what a night. A good night to be in off the streets, though not here in the office and not with this galoot. Where was her call? Jesus, Ida . . .*

"Yeah, so I know Krispy Kremes. What of it?"

"I got an assignment for ya. There's been some burning. Not so much as to

be real destructive, but some yahoo out there has been torching the joints—started three so far but the burnin's been caught early, so little harm's done. But we wanna catch this pyro, before he sets a real fire. You don't look so busy, Mac, so get down to the Kreme at 86th and Mason and talk to the manager. See what's to be seen."

McDougle took a breath, then another. "I don't want to ruffle no feathers here, Cap'n, but I'm not your man. First is I'm off duty. Next is I gave up on those Kremes about six months ago and still have about 30 pounds here under my belt that I'm tryin' to get rid of. Last is I don't care much for your chucklin' about it. So ya see, Cap'n, I'm just not your man—'sides, I'm waitin' here for Ida to call."

The Captain got up from his swivel-back and walked in small circles behind his desk, stroking his chin, Mac still standing in his doorway. "Look here, McDougle, I didn't ask . . . You understand that, don'cha?"

The mist swirled around the white globe outside, and for a Saturday night it was unusually quiet—no one in the tanks and no one at the desk, save ole Sergeant Ernie. It was hard to imagine anything in the precinct going wrong, especially the burning of donut shops.

*Why the hell was I hanging around in the first place, and was she worth the waitin' and now this friggin' call to a Kreme.* "I'm tellin' you, Cap'n, I ain't the one. In the mornin' there'll be men eager to do the Kremes—all of 'em. They'll be happy to go sit with a manager, ask a few questions and dunk. How about you wait until then?"

"Mac . . . if you were busy, or if you weren't here . . . if you had anything at all on your plate," he chuckled at the word plate, "I'd let you slide outta this one, but none of that is the case. Now, I'm in charge here, McDougle, and have been for a decade, and now I'm ordering . . ."

The phone on Mac's desk rang. He lumbered over.

"Hello."

"Hi, Mac darling, sorry I'm late. I'm down here at the Krispy Kreme at 86th and Mason. When can you get here?"  
WT

## Get (Book) Smart!

Join us as for a free lecture at the Los Altos Library as we look at ways writers can improve their chances of getting published. The talk will include tips for finding a literary agent, as well as a "behind-the-scenes" peek at the journey of a manuscript as it proceeds from the writer's fingers to the reader's hands. Bring your questions—a highlight of the talk will be the Q & A session!

Presented by CWC member Laurie Gibson, book editor and U.C. Extension instructor, with guest speaker Leslie Fitch, book designer.

Sunday, May 10, 3–4:30 p.m., Los Altos Library (13 S. San Antonio Road, Los Altos). For more information, call the library at 650-948-7683 or visit [www.santaclaracountylib.org/losaltos/](http://www.santaclaracountylib.org/losaltos/)

## 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 judge in any category in which they have an entry.

# Eating Weeds

by Carolyn Donnell



Carolyn Donnell  
Contributing Editor

The aroma of hot olive oil, garlic, and herbs floated down the hall, coming from room 17. The front desk at the school had told me that the gardening class was in Room 17. Someone had obviously made an error. This was a cooking class. I peeked into the room. “Can you point me to the gardening class?” I asked the tall, thin man standing by the door.

“This is it,” he said, looking quizzically over the top of his glasses.

I looked at him skeptically. People were standing around a stove while various items were being torn, sliced, and either dropped into a sizzling wok or tossed into a large salad bowl. Let’s see, hot stove, plants, cooking oil, wok, salad bowl. A gardening class?

I stepped in and took a closer look. At the other end of the room was a sign: Weeds and Wildflowers. Students were classifying and arranging plants on two round tables. One had a sign that said “Do NOT eat” and held plants that ranged from simply annoying to deadly. The other table contained edible plants.

On the edibles table, I spotted plants commonly thought of as pests: dandelion, mallow, nettles, as well as flowers so prolific they are considered to be invasive—calendula and nasturtium (the latter donating both flower and leaf to a colorful salad bowl). I turned to listen to the teacher, who was lecturing as she stirred the plants in the wok.

The first weed on the menu was dandelion. Most consider it a troublesome weed, but the dandelion is really a multiple purpose wonder. The leaves are good raw in a salad or can be cooked, boiled or in our case, wokked in hot oil. A little bit of lemon helps alleviate the bitterness. Dandelions used in herbal remedies are purported to be useful as a blood purifier, a digestive aid, and a laxative; promote liver function and improve the appetite; and protect the lining of the stomach and joints, thereby helping to relieve ulcers and arthritis.

Mallow was next on the menu. The leaves are shapely and large, looking something like the geranium. Wild mallow grows anywhere—in yards, vacant lots, and beside the freeways here in California. The mallow was merely chopped up and added to the wok. Hot olive oil and garlic will make anything taste good.

Mallow leaves, crushed or blended, are also a treatment for rashes and burns. One of the students said she chewed up a leaf and used it for an emergency poultice while hiking.

Nettle was another plant discussed. Tiny, nearly invisible hairs that produce an intense, stinging pain cover the nettle’s leaves, causing redness and skin irritation. The generic name comes from the Latin word, “uro,” which means “I burn.” However, it will lose its ouch with just a little cooking.

People have been using nettles for food, medicine, fiber, and

dyes since the Bronze Age. You can steam them, freeze them, put them in soups, stews, and other dishes, dry them, tincture them in alcohol. The leaf can also be brewed as a tea. Some people (masochists?) actually find nettle stings invigorating and use them to wake up the body. The claims go on and on. Nettle can make your hair brighter, thicker and shinier, your skin clearer and healthier. Commercial hair and skin care products in health food stores often list stinging nettle as an ingredient.

I wonder who decides which plants are weeds? These plants discussed are not my idea of the dictionary’s definition: unwanted and undesirable. Someone once said a weed is a plant no one has found a use for yet. I don’t think these plants meet that criterion either.

So now if you find yourself lost in the woods, at least you should not have to go hungry. If you know what is what you could survive in the wild. On the other hand, some of the plants on the “Danger! Poison” table look an awful lot like some of the edibles to me. How long would it take to be able to differentiate between the poisonous and the safe? The lunch was tasty, but I believe I will leave it to the grocer after all. WT

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## A Thirteen-Year-Old Girl Pretending She Has a Lover

So she found this phone booth  
Well enough to find the slots, the numbers;  
It was o.k.: she knew there would be silences,  
Ringing off the hook,  
Voices curled under chunks of circuits.  
Or maybe

Robots harsh without cause, withheld messages,  
A mother’s strange soprano or a deadpan voice  
Maybe even: You want to talk to whom?

Wrists dropped, this time she would try  
A real coin or two to make it look good,  
Maybe dial a number from the book,  
Trace veins as if fingers had eyes and with a  
Receiver to cling to, grasp so hard  
It might split in half, reveal its confetti wires  
Like pick-up sticks boiled and wound like spaghetti,  
Like rings of mixed metaphors.

This time she would slip her slender finger in the hole  
That she didn’t need to see  
The hole that was numbered and lettered as if  
It meant a thing to her audience, those  
Blind, those girls standing five yards away  
Who could neither care  
Nor see its destination. Each intent on her own quarters.

She would carry on  
As if she were only guessing what number it was.  
As if they had just had a lover’s quarrel  
As if she needed that ring back.  
After all. As if by some rare chance One kindred soul  
Would hear, would understand and smile just a touch.

—Victoria Ballard

# 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](mailto: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  
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I love talking about  
nothing. It is the only thing  
I know anything about.  
—Oscar Wilde

## Call for Poetry Submissions

When the going gets tough... the tough take a new look at the world around them.

That's the theme of *The Light in Ordinary Things*, the first volume of the new, biannual Fearless Poetry Series. Submissions are being accepted now through May 30 for this thematic anthology, which will be made available to the public in August via the Fearless Books website and Amazon.com. Poets may submit 1 to 3 poems and/or prose poems about any ordinary thing, place, event, or living being looked at in a new light. The subject matter should be common, but the insights extraordinary.

Complete submission guidelines are online now at [fearlessbooks.com/Poetry.htm](http://fearlessbooks.com/Poetry.htm)

# 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.

[berkeleywritersclub.org](http://berkeleywritersclub.org)

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

**Central Coast:** Meets on the third Tuesday of each month except December at the Casa Munras Hotel, 700 Munras Avenue, Monterey. The dinner hour begins at 5:30 p.m. and the program begins at 7 p.m. [centralcoastwriters.org](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). [mtdiablowriters.org](http://mtdiablowriters.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. [trivalleywriters.com](http://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. [sacramento-writers.org](http://sacramento-writers.org)

**Marin:** Meets on the fourth Sunday of every month at 2 p.m. at Book Passage in Corte Madera. [cwcmarinwriters.com](http://cwcmarinwriters.com)

**Redwood:** Meetings are held on the first Sunday of the month (except for holiday weekends), from 3-5 p.m. at the Star Restaurant, 8501 Gravenstein Hwy, corner of Old Redwood Hwy and Hwy 116, in Cotati. [redwoodwriters.org](http://redwoodwriters.org)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>May 2009</h1>					1 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose	2
3 8:30A Self-Publishing Workshop	4	5	6	7	8 7:30p Open Mic Borders Books Santana Row, San Jose	9 10:30A Editors' Powwow
10	11	12 6p Monthly Dinner Meeting Lookout Inn, Sunnyvale Michelle Richmond	13	14	15 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	16 <b>WritersTalk deadline</b>
17	18	19	20	21 7p Open Mic Barnes & Noble 3900 Mowry, Fremont	22 7:30p Open Mic Borders Books Sunnyvale	23
24/31	25	26	27	28	29	30 Youth Writing Workshop
		Tuesday, June 9 Janis Bell				<b>Future Flashes</b>

## Stay Informed!

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

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

## South Bay Writers Open Mic

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

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

For Fremont Open Mic contact  
Jeannine Vegh  
[ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net)

or

Bob Garfinkle  
[ragarf@earthlink.net](mailto: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](mailto:captainlappin@netzero.net) and have a look at PCSJ's website, [www.pcsj.org](http://www.pcsj.org)

## South Bay Writers Anthology



\$12.50 + 9.25% sales tax  
At the meeting.  
On the website.  
[southbaywriters.com](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.southbaywriters.com)

## MAIL TO

Address Correction Requested

**Next Monthly Meeting**  
**Tuesday, May 12, 6:00 p.m.**

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

**Michelle Richmond**  
author of  
*The Year of Fog*

## Short Fiction Issue!

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

