



WRITERSTALK

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Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

September Speaker Complexity, Obsession . . . and a Bit of Mystery

by Bill Baldwin

We live in a complex world, filled with diverse people and backgrounds. Especially here in Silicon Valley, we live on an edge of the contemporary world. How do writers approach this world and write about it?

Consider Katie Hafner, our September speaker. She's a Bay Area technology reporter and writer, journalist, and author or co-author of five books: *Cyberpunk*, *The House at the Bridge*, *Where Wizards Stay Up Late*, *The Well*, and *A Romance on Three Legs*.

Katie has been writing about technology for more than twenty-five years. She has written for *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, *Esquire*, *Working Woman*, and *Wired*. She has studied German culture and lived in Germany. Much of her work deals with technology and society. But it also deals with human personalities and art.

Look at *Cyberpunk: Outlaws and Hackers on the Computer Frontier*. In connection with this book (which Katie co-authored with John Markoff), Katie was interviewed in *Freedom Downtime*, a documentary film about the case of hacker Kevin Mitnick. Are you scared of hackers, fascinated by them—or both? Do you despise them or respect them—or both? This book deals with several well-known hacking cases. Have you ever wondered “Why do people *do* these things?”

Katie also explored the culture of the computer in *Where Wizards Stay Up Late: The Origins of the Internet*. The many web features that we take for granted now were created and brought into being by humans. How did it all happen?

And how do humans and computers interact? *The Well: A Story of Love, Death & Real Life in the Seminal Online Community* deals with the birth and evolution of one of the earliest and longest-running online communities.

Katie has covered human realities as well as technology. *The House at the Bridge* deals with a house near a famous bridge in Potsdam, about fifty feet from the Berlin Wall. The bridge sometimes served as a meeting place between East and West. Several famous spy exchanges occurred there. What were the human vectors of these Cold War situations?



Katie Hafner
Photo: Evelyn Klebanoff

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August Recap

Erika Mailman

by Lisa Eckstein

The August 11 meeting highlighted projects brought to fruition through hard work. Bob Garfinkle announced that the California Writers Club has recognized the Fremont Area Writers as an official new branch. Networking Chair Cathy Bauer distributed a critique group questionnaire, which she'll use to match interested members with compatible fellow writers. And President Dave LaRoche spoke about a planned CWC reorganization that will improve collaboration among nearby branches, along the lines of the recently formed NorCal Group (August *WT*, p. 5).

When speaker Erika Mailman stepped to the podium, the theme of hard work before success continued. The first thing she told us was that her path to publication was a long and difficult one. “I remember when I was still struggling, I loved hearing people talk about how they got there,” she said. Her story was indeed inspirational.

Mailman grew up planning to become a writer. While studying poetry in graduate school at the University of Arizona, she was required to take a fiction workshop. Though she had participated in short story workshops as an undergraduate, this was the first time she had met real people writing novels. “I started thinking, hm, maybe I would like to write one as well.”

She began her first novel in 1993 and worked on it for eight years. Every couple of years, she would decide the manuscript was ready and send it out to agents. The querying process always produced a little bit of interest. “Either fortunately or unfortunately, it was just

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SPECIAL OCTOBER ISSUE: SPOOKY STORIES

President's Prowling

by Dave LaRoche
President, South Bay Writers

Many Doors

I come away from a well-written book exhausted—like exiting a seminar. I've been rooting down past the story and into what makes a book good. A couple books come to mind that are particularly revealing: *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, "imaginatively supple and morally strenuous" and an education in style and poignant perspective. Another book recently read, though not recently published, is *Underworld*—the first part accredited "the best prose ever written" by *Newsweek* a month or so back. Within, found the secrets of knitting disparate scenes into a rhythmical flow of ordinary life intrigue (not an oxymoron with DeLillo), and a unique approach to vivid descriptions through a clever routing out of our own. Reading an author's development and style with the eye of a writer will heighten our skills and help build our stories into those that grab editors' attention. Better yet, form a reading group and beyond *your* direct view will come that of others, adding value to the entire experience. Talk with Cathy Bauer, our Networking Chair.

I got into this business from a failed other business and, in a sort of time out while gathering my wool, wandered into one of Edie Matthews' adult ed classes and right into her spellbinding, no-exit-available persuasion—and the next thing I know, I'm a writer. Of course there was more and I'm not quite there, but that was my turning point. Edie presented an opportunity available to all of us, an educational opportunity—a chance to step out and into a parallel world where we realize our dreams. Jackie Mutz has those classes now, Edie teaches others, and there are Martha Alderson, Martha Engber, Matilda Butler, Becky Levine, and more who are members that teach or will point.

Cathy Bauer is now championing critique groups. Do you know that about 80% of those who have recently joined SBW and about half of the rest of us when asked say "Yes, sign me up!" And on the other hand, critique group leaders cannot seem to find sufficient members. It's a puzzle—all these writers available and all those places to put them and no apparent way to get them there. But Cathy sees it and believes she can help. She knows critique is another form of critical reading—helping those occupying both sides of the page.

Remember Charlotte Cook, editor extraordinaire and indie publisher who, when she accepts a book, actually reads it. And Alan Rinzler from Jossey-Bass, who gave us the skinny on trade publishers, and though the message was not rosy, what a charismatic messenger. And the self-publishing duo of Alpine and King, who said forget Jossey-Bass, here's another dozen ways to get your book out. And David Corbett, who hyped characters driven by scenes and vice versa until we came to know those influences are inextricably shared. There was James Dalessandro, a

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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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Submissions

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Guest Columns

Almost Anything Goes (400 words)

News Items (400 words)

Letters to the Editor (300 words)

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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

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Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx
Editor

A huge wave crashed over the boat



We all know the basic rules for bringing pizzazz to our fiction: use the specific rather than the general, include plenty of sensuous detail, and be generous with scene rather than setting. Application of these principles goes a long way toward separating the sheep from the goats. They're not complicated, but they seem frequently to be ignored in amateur writing. I've often wondered why, and I finally think I may have hit on one reason. Here's an example of what I'm talking about, from a story I read recently.

A couple sails out of Key Largo for a day of sun and fun on the Caribbean. After several hours on the water, they share bread, cheese, and wine, and then, having had enough sun, go below for some fun, after which they doze off. When they awaken, the boat is wallowing about rather than bobbing on a calm sea. Clyde rushes onto the deck, where he finds that swells are growing by the minute, the sky is darkening, and a storm front is all too near. He makes the eminently sensible decision to get the hell out of there, but when he goes to check his position, he finds that the GPS is not working. Rather than setting a course for nowhere, he decides to ride it out. He drops the sails, ties down everything that's loose, and tosses a sea anchor over the transom; then, just as he's about to go below and snap the hatch shut, . . .

"A huge wave crashed over the boat."

That was all the author gave us. He did a pretty good job with developing the situation—things going from nice to bad and then worse—but nodded off when worse came to even worse. It seems to me that it would have been pretty easy for the author to bring to life the roar of water, the chill of wind, the tang of brine, or the sting of salt in the eyes, and to have Clyde look up into a sky of green water and then share with us Clyde's moment of panic, the dampening of his foul weather gear from the inside, and his final prayers or whatever, but he didn't. Why not?

Some years back, when I was applying for a technical writing position, the interviewer asked, "Do you enjoy writing?"

I knew that, in the great psych war of job interviews, I was supposed to tell the interviewer that I just *loved* to write and I did it all the time, and so forth, that I loved to write so much that I didn't just read the back of my Wheaties box in the morning, I mentally composed back-of-the-cereal-box copy while crunching away. Maybe I was feeling a little peckish that day, or maybe I didn't really want that particular job, or maybe I was just tired of giving smiling answers to the butthead questions that job interviewers seem to like to ask, so I answered the question honestly: "No," I said, "I don't enjoy writing. Good writing is a heck of a lot of hard work." (Yes, I got the job.)

And that, I think, is why Clyde's creator fell short of the mark. It's indisputably easier to be general rather than specific; to maintain a kind of sensory deprivation rather than pause and think about what a character's environment might sound, smell, look, taste, and feel like; to tell what's happening rather than detail credible action. Good writing *is* hard work, and, as in so many other facets of life, what you put into it is what you get out of it.

"Osgood took a deep breath, sat down and leaned back against a tree, laced his fingers across his lap, and closed his eyes." Okay, what kind of tree did Osgood lean against? I had a redwood in mind. Is that what you saw? What if I told you it was a palm tree? How would that affect your mental picture? Even a little verisimilitude goes a long way. Now imagine your writing rich in detail. WT

How to Write Scary Stories

by Victoria M. Johnson

What makes a story scary? Is it the characters, the setting, or the situation? The simple answer is yes to all three. The complicated answer is it depends. It depends on how the author handles each of these elements and it depends on your reader. What does your reader fear? What gives your reader the willies? What would cause your reader to *freak out*? It's not too difficult to imagine what your reader fears if you draw upon your own fears. Universal fears are things that scare almost everyone—that's the survival instinct at work. So what scares you? What makes the hair on your neck stand up? What makes you sleep with the lights on? Ask yourself these questions as you create your story elements. If your antagonist does not bother you, then you need to try a little harder. If the situation isn't filled with tension, then you're making your work more difficult. If your location doesn't fill your reader with dread, well, sometimes that's okay. Let's look at each of the story essentials more closely.

The three components should be intertwined so that they feed off of each other. Good scary stories tie the character to the setting and the situation. In Stephen King's *The Shining*, Jack, the main character, is a writer who takes his family to a secluded hotel so he can finish his novel. As caretakers, they will be the only people at the hotel during the brutal, snowy winter. It's believable that this character would take his family to the Colorado wilderness setting for free rent, solitude, and time to write. The situation for this character, in this setting, is that either the solitude or evil in the hotel causes Jack to lose his mind. Now, writers are known to be a little crazy anyway, so his wife cuts him some slack. But Jack slowly becomes a violent, possessed man. Would that story work if Jack took his family to a crowded hotel on a bright sandy beach? The story would likely lose its intensity and increasing dread. What if instead



Victoria M. Johnson

of a writer, Jack was a used car salesman? Then why would he spend hours alone at the typewriter? Why would he want months of forced solitude if not to push himself into finishing his novel? The three facets of story are linked together, creating cohesive conflict.

Creepy Characters

If you read the horror genre, you know that the antagonist doesn't have to be a person. It could be an animal, a car, or a disembodied hand. It could be a ghost or the devil. But sometimes creepy characters are the sweet boy next door. In fact, that could be even scarier than all the above because how would you know? You wouldn't—until it was too late. And that builds dread in the reader. Flesh out your antagonist with a backstory, motivation, and conflict no matter what form he's in. Put him in this location at this time for a plausible reason. Strive for a natural fit for this character to unleash his wickedness, anger, or whatever, to the situation of the story.

Sinister Locations

Think of places that are scary on their own: a graveyard, a morgue, an abandoned house, an asylum. The setting alone creates tension. Then find a logical reason to get your character there. Better yet, strand them there. Being stranded adds to the sense of helplessness and doom. So does being confined. Think of the movie *Alien*. The characters were trapped on a spaceship with a human-eating monster. In one intensely claustrophobic scene, a character has to go through the air vent to set a trap. Confinement within confinement! On the other hand, some writers are great at frightening us with settings that are supposed to be safe. Malls, suburban neighborhoods, prep schools, nurseries should be safe, right? We are all the more caught off guard when evil lurks there.

Frightening Situations

What's the situation or premise of your book? Does it lend itself to scary scenes? In Tess Gerritsen's novel *The Surgeon*, a twisted character performs surgeries on women while they are awake. That's chilling. In Dean Koontz's novel *Your Heart Belongs to Me*, the lead character is being stalked by a woman who's the spitting image of the donor of the heart now beating in his chest. In Richard Matheson's *Hell*

House, three people spend the night in an evil house that has been sealed since 1949 to learn the facts of life after death. Does your story's premise touch on a universal fear? Is your character's situation dire by the middle of the story? Does the situation worsen?

Keep the tension building all the way through to the end. Fans of horror know that the story needn't have a happy ending. Even if the protagonist escapes to safety, the menace can live on. This is especially true if you want to write a sequel. These three elements are barely the bones of a good scare story. It's up to you to add the flesh and guts, and, of course, blood. Don't disappoint your readers with wimpy premises or characters, or play on fears that aren't scary. Give your readers goosebumps. Make them worry. Force them to sleep with the light on. WT

Need a Ride?

by Carolyn Donnell

Eyes don't see as well at night as they used to? Neck out of whack? One arm in a sling, or worse (for driving at least), a foot in a cast? But you still want to go to the South Bay meetings and workshops. Correct? I've been in this position, and I know several other members who have been, too.

If you need a ride or are willing to offer a ride to someone, send the following information to



rideshare@southbaywriters.com:

Rider or driver

Name

Address, city, ZIP code

General area (e.g., Willow Glen, or near Central Park)

Email address

Phone

Contact method preferred

I'll do my best to put people in contact with each other according to locale and proximity. The rest will be up to the parties involved. Hope to see you all at future meetings. Until then. WT



Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

This may sound morbid, but I read the obits every morning in the *San Jose Mercury News*. And one thing I have noticed is that there are more people closer to my age that are passing on than there used to be.



Jackie Mutz
Contributing Editor

Although I'm a member of the younger end of the baby boomers, time seems to be marching a little faster than it once did—or maybe I am not walking fast enough anymore? It makes me think of time more in linear terms than abstract. As in how far am I in my writing process? What is my definition of successful writing? And how do I compare that to another's own definition of successful writing endeavors? Here is what I gleaned from the August meeting.

- Betty Auchard's schedule is not for the faint of heart. Recently she interviewed with Pat Vitucci of KGO

for a program called "Don't Invest and Forget" on KRON TV (the show will air Tuesday Sept. 22, at 11 a.m.; Friday, Sept. 25, at 11 a.m.; and Saturday, Sept. 26, at 8 p.m.). And then she was off to Aptos to give a presentation for her fourth Rotary Club in the Santa Cruz area, which she notes is a great audience. Go Betty!

- Bill Baldwin shared that he completed his novel, whereupon Betty Auchard promptly fell out of her seat and onto the floor. Cracked everyone up, but what an accomplishment, Bill.
- Bill Belew's websites billbelew.com and mephistoape.com saw **830,000** hits last month, not 830 as I reported. Congratulations on the very impressive numbers.
- Richard Burns has been invited by San Jose Poetry Center for a reading of his poetry in the near future. Will post the date in next month's "Accolades."
- Suzy Paluzzi's contribution to the mass poem created by new County Poet Laureate Nils Peterson ap-

peared in the August 13 issue of the *Santa Clara Weekly*. A photo was included along with the article.

- June Smith had the opportunity to interview finalists at the press hour before the San Jose appearance of *American Idol LIVE* Tour on Sunday, July 12. She was allowed five- to ten-minute private interviews with each of six finalists. For detailed info on this exciting interview, go to suite101.com. My apologies to June for missing this in last month's "Accolades."
- Steve Wetlesen goes live! Starting on August 21, he will appear at the Stone Griffin Gallery for the Campbell Artwalk held on the third Friday of each month, creating poetic art on demand.

Change can happen at any time in our lives. I think I am going to push myself to write more instead of thinking about when I will, at some abstract time in the future. Existential angst maybe, but the present is all we really do have, isn't it? So make the most of each day. Write and write some more and then share your accomplishments with *WT* at Accolades@southbaywriters.com. *WT*

Another Story

by Pat Bustamante

Dear Friends, this is Calla Rose emailing. I've been hiding long enough: time to get in touch . . .

Short on time, lots to tell. It's been ten years since I self-published that novel about the murders in my neighborhood. If I'd thought much about reprisals coming my way I might have shut up. Or changed the details drastically! For those of you who hadn't heard: a month ago I found a copy of my *Book of the Dead* at a Rancho garage sale; bought it, started revising. I visited some of my old neighbors to dish gossip. And wham! Veiled death threats from three people during the yearly "Rancho—Everybody's-BBQ." Right in public. I take that seriously.

Gregory (the murderer) still lives there somewhere. Could he sue me for libel? Any of you writers with opinions: I need to know! Things have really changed, but I did find another home-

less guy in a tent by the creek, same place "Castanyo" used to live. The dumpy little houses were worth big money for a while. Many were replaced by imposing "two-story" places with three-car garages. Now it's "for sale" signs every block and lots of empty uncurtained windows. Dusty weeds higher than my head glare from many front yards. . .

But my friend Brook is still dead; justice never happened, and I still revert to my theme that it is better to be killed than to kill. Castanyo taught me that (his real non-shaman name was Scotty Crumb). The creek is still a marvel of water-of-life harboring fugitive exotic birds, even a misplaced buck deer, huge oaks solemnly leaning over the twisting water and nodding approval. Drought is making the oaks and sycamore show a few black dead sticks for limbs and smog still falls with the rain, trying to match colors with the ebony asphalt of nearby freeways and expressways filled with tortured-tire-dust.

I still love the place. I fear the place. I want to go back: I can't go back. Would my bones end up under a pile of dirt like fellow housewife and buddy Brook's (and her unborn baby)? Drugs are being sold. No change there from the 1980s and, of course, earlier: "summer of love . . . summer of chemical lunacy." I don't look much like a hippie any more. The drug-thing means guns, gangs, all kinds of evil lurking just below the picture-frame of a neat suburban house in a family neighborhood. Nasty to think about (danger too of the possible volatile meth-lab, a bomb in the making)—I am told over and over, "Write about happy things instead!" Don't dwell on those "possible" murders or "possible" drug dealing. I should just shut up. I won't. Publish this email somewhere so everybody hears. I have decided to come back—with vengeance. Nobody lives forever. You murderers, thieves, and abusers out there: threaten me all you like. Will you get me? Or not . . .
WT

View from the Board

by Dave LaRoche

Your Board met on August 5, 2009, with all in attendance but Edie Matthews, Jamie Miller, and Cathy Bauer.

Officer Reports

President Dave LaRoche announced that:

- New officers will meet, date TBD, to establish the new year's agenda.
- A legal workshop, scheduled in for October, has not yet come together.
- Our learning center is fully equipped except for a lead person.
- We will use this year to emphasize and promote writing and publishing.

Vice President Bill Baldwin announced that:

- Speakers are being coached to pass on information helpful to writers in approaching their task of writing. Ro suggested that an interview format might more successfully steer the presenter's content. Dick underscored with speaker needs guidance and perhaps more from the group and more along the lines of critique. In summary, we want speakers who leave us with information we can use, as we are there to learn about the process.
- Next up is Katie Hafner, past *NY Times* technology reporter, tentatively Gerard Jones and comic books, and in November, Larsen and Pomada, agents from San Francisco.

Dave mentioned that minutes from previous meetings are somehow falling through the crack. He will do a search.

Treasurer Richard Burns mentioned that attendance at meetings is good, 50 in June (no meeting in July). Expenditures about equaling revenues.

Central Board rep Dave LaRoche reported that state news includes these items:

- A Central Board reorganization is proposed and the study underway. Should it succeed, regional organizations will be recognized,

state meetings reduced to one, and much greater opportunity for collaboration related to writing and publishing available.

- A new San Fernando Valley Branch has emerged.
- The Fremont Area Writers is now recognized as a branch of CWC—congratulations Bob Garfinkle and Jeannine Vegh.
- You may now receive the *Bulletin* electronically—send your E-preference to Dave LaRoche at pres@southbaywriters.com.
- The Centennial is officially extended until June 2010.
- CWC now has 18 branches totaling 1109 members.
- The next State meeting—Jack London Award luncheon, Garfinkle, chair—will be in November and likely in Oakland.
- State Anthology still breathing on ventilator—in same ward with centennial celebration and CWC History.

Discussion re SBW and Centennial concluded with a decision to put something related to club history on the website should someone want to write it—there were no volunteers from the Board. The president concludes that anything related is purely PR and unless the effort puts a big pole in that tent, there is not much use in pursuing it.

Committee Reports

Membership Chairman Marjorie Johnson: paid membership stands at 171. Dave will send out a letter. Anything better than 80% retention will beat the 2007–2008 year (neighborhood of 160 or more).

Open Mic Chairman Bill Baldwin: Open Mics averaging 8.5 readers—need applications there for the odd nonmember.

Newsletter Chairman Dick Amyx: July and August *WritersTalk*, 16 pp, October to be “spook month.”

Dave for Cathy Bauer as Hospitality Chairman: Raffle will be on hiatus, much work for little payoff.

Dave reporting on workshops: Number four workshop will be in late October.

Anthology Chairman Dick Amyx—

Anthology sales lagging.

Young Writers Chairman Marilyn Fahey: Ramping up for next Young Writers event—maybe a retreat limited to older teens.

East of Eden Chairman Dave LaRoche: Formal EoE reports will be coming to the board soon. Items of interest today: Organization complete, reservations made, program underway, one caterer met, “Why Am I Writing” is theme; sub-theme is “California Conference for California Writers.”

EoE PR Chair Rosanne Davis: Forty responses to EoE content survey, expect more. Old mailing list updated, now 828 names.

New Business

Marjorie moved that we spend \$500 to support our involvement in this year's Book Expo. Seconded by Dick. Approved unanimously; Bill will head up and report if it costs more.

Improving the Branch

Ride sharing, requested by several, will be set up, Carolyn Donnell will administer—those willing and those needing will contact her.

Dave wants to increase the size of the Board with “members at large” elected and privileged in ordinary ways but without a specific portfolio. Two needs are served: (a) the experience readies members, not otherwise inclined, to run for office; (b) provides additional ideas and synergy, perhaps better membership representation. The bylaws would have to be amended to make this possible.

Meeting adjourned at 9:05, next meeting September 2. WT

State *Bulletin* Now Available Electronically

The CWC *Bulletin*—the state newsletter—is now available electronically.

If you would prefer to receive your copy of the *Bulletin* as an Adobe PDF file by email rather than on paper by US Postal Mail, send an email message so stating to SBW President Dave LaRoche at pres@southbaywriters.com. WT

World Premier:

The Letter

by Marjorie Johnson

"She was the last woman in the world to commit murder," wrote W. Somerset Maugham of Leslie Crosbie, the protagonist of his 1924 short story "The Letter." His story inspired a play (which he wrote), several film versions (which he did not write), and an opera by composer Paul Moravec and librettist Terry Teachout, a new work that opened on July 25, 2009, at the Santa Fe Opera.

Paul Moravec won the Pulitzer Prize for *Tempest Fantasy* in 2004. *The Letter* is his first opera, and he described it as a cross between *Tosca* and *Double Indemnity*. Opera is about love and volcanic emotions; the soprano cannot sing high C without a reason. Music is the subtext that tells you what each character is feeling; he used the device of the leitmotif for each character. Music has its own logic, drama has its own logic; opera has to make these move in perfect synchronization. Opera must make

drama sing. He advised that the process of writing and composing is all about revision and trial and error: music is the fine art of repetition. On the light side, Moravec said that, during the writing of *The Letter*, he had a nightmare: trapped in an E minor triad with no escape.

Terry Teachout, drama and music critic of *The Wall Street Journal*, wrote the libretto. "This is a *verismo* opera . . . contemporary English-language . . . with short, filmic scenes like postcards. It's for people, not an egghead opera." *The Letter* is an opera noir, a story of ordinary people who make a few mistakes and find themselves in very deep emotional water. Asked about the writing itself, he said he distilled the dialogue of the play and cut the story to the bone. Every line must be lyrical, like a ninety-minute song, the words adjusted to fit the music exactly. Each aria must fit its character; its words and music distinguish one character from another. The librettist must interlock text and drama with music, but the composer is the senior partner.

Moravec and Teachout agreed that opera is the result of intertwining many

art forms, gently or with a bang, but always with energy. Music carries the words, scenery, costumes, drama, and mood. Their measure of success was an audience involved enough in the story to forget that they were watching an opera.

As to the audience, they arose as one to give a standing ovation. Personally, I was disappointed that no aria gave me enough melody to sing even two bars, but the music fit the emotional mood of tragedy. I liked the smooth changes of scene, integrated into the story and taking place while we watched. The opera house, open air on the sides and behind the stage, is world class with excellent acoustics.

My husband, Frank, gave the opera a B. He liked the music, especially in two scenes where the melody came out—more lyrical, he said. On the other hand, the rest of the music tied the score to dramatic moments as though it were a film rather than an opera. Overall, we enjoyed it and felt privileged to attend the world premier of a new artistic endeavor. WT

Burnt Roses

by Victoria Ballard

Zoe tiptoed into the bedroom though her mother wasn't at home. She threw off her clothes, washed and dried her hair and got out the ironing board. The television was blasting news about the Castro District and a showdown. Nothing to do with her. Tomorrow was her big fashion show, and she fell into a reverie as she hoped everything would turn out good for the sake of her designer friend Mateo. *She loved how his latest short minis swung and hit just above her long black boots. She loved the way her hair would sway as she walked down the runway. She wondered if Mateo were gay but what did it matter; he wasn't her boyfriend. She had Josef for that sort of thing. Dear sweet Josef. So what if he'd gone out on her again? What had it to do with her? He said it meant nothing and he meant it; plus "She" was ugly, certainly fat by modeling standards, some kind of teacher or librarian of no consequence.*

What mattered now was Mother. Why

was she late? Zoe turned on the iron. Mother would be there soon to take care of any leftover sorrow. After all, Zoe was happy now, wasn't she? She had nearly made it in the modeling world. Not a supermodel yet, but damn near. She knew most of them, flew where they flew, did the shows that they did, lived in a loft. Wasn't she nearly one of them? Only Josef didn't fit. Mateo fit a lot better, but Josef she had to hide, he with his working class clothes and construction career. Plus he could care less about clothes and preferred to talk like a socialist about class struggle and strikes and all sorts of nonsense. She could never take him to a party. But they had been lovers since high school. She wasn't ready to dump him for a fancier car. And she had Mateo to calm her fears about being alone.

She leant over the ironing board to iron her long golden hair. She had wanted it more ash, but there was a new stylist sneaking in his own ideas. She wasn't about to let these natural curls get in the way of a sleek, bouncy look on the

runway. She'd have to style her hair herself. Straightening irons wouldn't do it either; she'd take the heat herself. Her cheeks were getting warmer and warmer. *She wondered if she would always be so pretty. If Josef would leave her. If there would be anyone else. If Mateo were really gay. If Mother would ever come home.* She felt the iron sear her cheeks and heard the sound of the hissing iron, then the smell, the stench, of sweet charred flesh, of burnt roses. Mother would be there soon. WT

News from Membership

by Marjorie Johnson

If you need a lanyard or if you did not receive your club pin, please see me at a South Bay Writers meeting.

If your permanent membership ID needs replacement, please email Marjorie Johnson at marjohnson89@earthlink.net.

A Mind Lost: The Dreams of Children

by Chuck Peradotto

Billy plopped on the overstuffed couch in the living room. He looked at his father slouching in his big chair. "Mom said dinner should be ready in twenty minutes."

"Ah-huh."

After a few silent minutes, Bill looked up. "Hi, Billy." As if seeing him for the first time.

"Hi, Dad."

"How was school today?"

"Okay." Billy slid to the floor and started to play with his metal soldiers.

Bill went back to the newspaper with the rustle of paper turning.

"Dad . . ."

No answer.

"Dad . . ."

"Yes, Billy."

"Do you ever know what's going to happen before it does?"

Bill laid the paper on his lap and looked straight ahead as if looking far into the past. "No, no, of course not. That's silly."

"That's what Mom said, too."

Bill picked up the newspaper and rustled another sheet over. "Why do you ask that?"

There was a long silence. Bill thought perhaps Billy had tired of that chain of thought.

"I can sometimes," Billy said softly.

"What do you mean?"

Billy fidgeted and moved some of his soldiers around. "Today . . . Like today."

"What, Billy?"

"I saw Todd fall off the high bars and hit his head."

"Well, I understand you were there."

"I was . . . but I saw it earlier, before school started. Before half past eight."

"What are you talking about?"

"I got to school early, way before the first bell rang. I walked past the bathrooms to the yard to see if any of the other kids were there yet. There was no

one out there." Billy stopped and looked at his men.

"And?"

"I looked away at the baseball field, and when I looked back, Todd was on the high bar. His mouth was moving like he was shouting, 'Look at me, look at me,' but no sound came out." Billy was quiet again. "Then he jumped to the far bar, and he missed and fell to the ground hard, and his head hit the cement that holds the bars."

"What did you do?"

"I ran toward him, and when I got there, his head was bleeding real bad. I turned back to the buildings to see if any teacher was there. But no one was. When I turned back, Todd was gone."

"What happened then?"

"Nothing. I went to the bathroom, and there was Todd and some other kids laughing and pushing each other. He looked fine. Then the bell rang."

"So when did the accident happen?"

Billy moved his foot out and pushed slowly at his men. "At afternoon recess, Dad. Half past two."

"I see."

They both were silent, lost in their own thoughts.

Bill cleared his throat. "Has this ever happened before?"

"Yes."

"Often?"

"Yes."

"Are you scared?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

The man and his son were silent a long time, and then the father spoke quietly. "When I was a boy, perhaps a bit younger than you, I could see things like that."

"Really?"

"Yes, and it went on for a few years, but I never told a soul until one day."

"What happened?"

"I saw my father go downtown to the hardware store, the one next to the bank." Bill stopped.

"What happened?"

"Billy, you can never tell anyone I am telling you this, promise?"

"Yes, Dad, I promise. What happened?"

"I saw my father lying in a large puddle, and I knew he was dead."

Billy stared at his father with his mouth open.

"On Saturday, I asked him not to go to town that day. That I thought he would be hurt. I begged him not to go. He got mad at me and said I was making things up and to not be so foolish. When I insisted I wasn't making it up, he said I was lying and spanked me. Then he left." Bill was quiet again.

"What happened, Dad?"

"He went into town, and when he came out of the hardware store, three men had been robbing the bank next door. They ran out the door and right into my father. He had a piece of pipe in his hand when they spun him around. Billy, they shot my father, your grandfather, and he died right there in a big puddle of blood. They must have thought he had a gun."

"Wow."

"Billy, it was Friday, the day before it happened, that I had seen it."

"Did you tell anybody?"

"I told my mother, but after the funeral. She said that was ridiculous, it was a fantasy, and that I was imagining things. She got angry." Bill folded the paper and set it on the side table. "I tried to tell her again a while later. About that day and that I could see things . . . things like you do. Then she got mad and spanked me hard. She said to forget all that childish nonsense and to quit making things up. She said I'd get a whipping every time I talked about things like that."

"What did you do then?"

"Nothing. Nothing, but after a time I couldn't see things before they happened anymore." WT

Poetry Center San Jose Contest

\$500 prize and publication in *Caesura*, the literary journal of PCSJ.

Entry fee: \$10/three poems; submissions open until October 17. Send submissions to PCSJ, Caesura Contest, P. O. Box 33145, Los Gatos, CA 95031. See pcsj.org for full details.

Waiting in the Wings

by Forrest “Woody” Horn

I REMEMBER my experiences with the Purdue Men’s Glee Club more than anything else that happened my first year in college. It consumed so much of my time that I do not recall dating very much. I doubt if that caused too many girls to suffer—but it may have accounted for why my studies did.

The previous year’s graduating seniors provided only twelve *openings* for more than a thousand auditioners. I was one of the lucky ones who became a member of the *unsung* glee club “reserves.” It was composed of two each first tenors, second tenors, baritones, and basses—an octet, which provided our rehearsals a balance of voices similar to the full club.

At that time, the *varsity* glee club performed with a standard complement of fifty-six men. If anyone was sick or had a serious schedule conflict, his place in the ranks was filled by one of the reserves. It was 1950, so they also filled any *permanent* vacancies caused by draft boards.

The reserves attended two 90-minute evening rehearsals each week. They also attended the club’s scheduled *class* meetings from 11 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Those sessions were often spent updating our concert schedule as well as our repertoire with new or reprised numbers to suit the occasion. That limited our actual rehearsal time, so some regulars attended the reserves’ evening sessions to work on new, or brush up on former, standard numbers.

My first meeting with the reserves—conducted by Micky McGuire, the assistant director—used most of the time passing out the sheet music for *all* of the club’s current repertoire. Sheet music was *never* used at performances, so it all had to be memorized PDQ!

I had learned some of the numbers in high school, like the Waring arrangements of “You’ll Never Walk Alone” and the “Battle Hymn Of The Republic”—which Fred Waring admitted had become more identified with the Purdue club than his Pennsylvanians. However, in high school I had learned the mixed chorus arrangements (SATB),

which now I sometimes confused with the men-only version (TTBB).

Just in case a missing regular required one of us to stand in *before* we had learned all the words and music, we were taught how to *mouth the alphabet* enthusiastically—but not too loudly.

I had to get my “set of tails” as soon as possible, since there was no way of knowing how soon I might be called for a concert. The club had arranged for a *student discount* with Geisler’s, a men’s clothing store in The Village. The whole kit and caboodle cost nearly a hundred bucks, a sizable sum for most any student in those days. If any member had trouble coming up with that kind of cash, the club would provide a no-interest loan, similar to the deal I worked out with my grandparents.

Besides the coat and pants, I needed three sets of “whites.” Each set included a shirt, collar, vest, and gloves. This made it necessary to keep up with the laundry, since it was not unusual to have two or more concerts in a week’s time. I also needed suspenders, studs, collar buttons, black socks and shoes. The first time I put everything on, it took me nearly an hour. Eventually, I got it down to twelve minutes, with a favorable tail wind.

The university—Al Stewart, actually—was sympathetic to the out-of-pocket costs for the members to participate, not to mention the incalculable hours. When the club performed off-campus concerts, each member received a generous meal allowance. It was more than enough to eat on and was actually intended to *reimburse* some of our expenses for laundry, bus fares, gas, etc.

The club also arranged for jobs that we could sign up for, like ushering at performances in the Hall of Music, athletic games, or at other university functions. Like a *dummy*, I signed up for ushering at football games and nearly froze my you-know-what! Still, the pay was good enough to help offset my glee club expenses. A couple of our members came to college on a bare-bones budget, so Al used his community contacts to find them part-time jobs whose schedules were flexible enough to accommodate their classes and concerts.

In the eyes of Indiana’s *short-sighted*

legislature, Purdue University and Indiana University comprised *one* state university, *budget-wise*. Simply put, Purdue was assigned Engineering, Agriculture, Sciences, and Home Economics, while Indiana was assigned the Arts, Music, Medicine, and Law. Therefore, they funded only one music department—at Indiana University.

Consequently, the Purdue glee club’s *primary* function was to *promote* our university to prospective students, much like the athletic departments recruited unofficially, so our *budget* came out of promotional funds. The university could not commercially profit from our program, so our concert *per diem* fees were reasonably competitive for affluent organizations, which in turn helped offset our expenses for deserving groups whose funds were limited. Sometimes the club performed at its own expense for worthy groups. We still put on the same caliber of show because Al believed that everyone deserved *only our best*.

To command the fees that the club sometimes charged, the repertoire was frequently updated and increased to provide more variety. That meant, besides perfecting our standard numbers, we were constantly learning new ones.

When the club learned a new number, our work method proceeded as follows. Monday’s rehearsal: run-throughs using the sheet music and working with individual voice sections on troublesome passages. Wednesday’s rehearsal: using the sheet music just the first time, and thereafter, only when *necessary*. Friday’s rehearsal: *no* sheet music, even if we had problems! Any other practicing had to be done on our own time. Now the number had become part of our *standard* repertoire, so you better know it frontwards and backwards.

Some numbers—no matter how many times they are performed—seem to defy your best efforts and become a personal challenge. Mine was “The Star.” Near its end, the first tenors had a high C or its equivalent, marked *pianissimo*, so it could be sung *false*to. There were occasions when everything was just right—you know, like Saturn in line with Mercury and Venus—so that some

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Proof of Lineage

by Carolyn Donnell

"Promise me," Miranda's graveled whisper pleaded as she reached for her daughter's hand. "You have to promise, your best promise, that you will keep this safe."

Julia had to look directly into her mother's eyes to keep the look of fear and dismay out of her own. Her mother's emaciated face looked more like a skeleton than the delicate flower she had resembled only a few weeks earlier. "I will, Mama. I already promised."

"I can't tell if you know how serious this is, Julia. If it falls into the wrong hands . . ."

"Yes, mama, you told me. It's dangerous. Is that why you were so frightened when you thought you lost it?"

Miranda nodded weakly.

"Why don't we just destroy it then?"

"No!" Miranda's voice came as close to a shout as Julia had ever heard.

"Why not? What is this about?"

"Yes. I have to tell you—now . . ."

Julia stared into the faded mirror on the far side of the room as her mother continued.

"It's not fair." Miranda's voice trailed off as if she were speaking to someone else. "It's too soon. It wasn't supposed to happen like this."

Julia sat at her mother's table. She had long ago ceased to cry every time she remembered her mother, but tonight she felt long-closed tear ducts beginning to reopen. Tomorrow everything would change. If she made the appearance at the designated time. She promised her mother five years ago and she had kept the promise. But tonight she was having second thoughts.

The last five years had been dreadful; loneliness a constant ache, suspicion an ever-present companion.

Life in the village had been difficult enough before her mother died. Miranda had been a recluse with one lone, infrequent visitor at their secluded cottage. Julia's only clues were vague conversations heard late at night when she was supposed to be asleep.

In spite of the isolation, Julia's naturally sunny disposition had won her a couple of good friends. Her mother disapproved, but Julia managed. Margaret and Jane completed an inseparable trio that last year. Walking in the woods and gathering berries down by the stream had been a favorite activity. Margaret's mother was famous for her berry pie, taking a prize at the fair every year. Julia sighed. What she wouldn't give for a taste of that pastry now. She could almost smell the aroma that always wafted on the breeze as they walked up to Margaret's house.

But that was before the wasting illness. Julia's mother, always delicate, had declined quickly. Those last days before her mother descended into fevered incoherence stuck in her mind like a currant in thick honey. The revelations had explained why her mother had been so secretive. The dangers were real.

Julia buried her mother late that night. Packing what she could fit into one bag, she followed her mother's instructions, taking basic necessities and the locket that contained the secrets, and fled to the mountain hut. There, as her mother had promised, Julia found milk and cheese, fresh bread and fruit outside her door once a week. Her mother had instructed her never to try to catch the provider in the act. Too dangerous, she had said. Dangerous. That word again.

If she followed the instructions to the end tomorrow, what would her life be like? Would she ever be able to trust anyone? She would be queen if what her mother told her was true, and rich beyond her own understanding, but she also felt she would be alone. Alone in a great dark castle where she would have to fear usurpers for the rest of her life at worst, and be forced to marry against her will to produce an heir at best. That's what Walter had said. Alone in the dark.

Walter, the shepherd who tended the sheep in the hills and the caretaker of the nearby estate. Walter, with his sunny smile, his highland accent, and his scruffy, friendly dogs. He didn't know who she was. Julia had never told anyone, not even him. But she had coaxed him to tell stories about the king's court. She let him do all the talking. Julia smiled for the first time

that evening as she remembered their talks by the winding stream. Walter was leaving Scotland. Going to a new land, a new found land he called it, to start a new life. He had asked her to go with him. She hadn't answered. Yet.

Tomorrow was the funeral of the old king. Her uncle, her mother had said. The secret in the locket: her father's crest, a lock of his hair, and a code that would unlock the lineage recorded in the great cathedral. All proof that she was first in line to the throne now being vacated. Her rightful place, her mother had said. But it had to remain secret until the old king died. Too many other people wanted the throne and Julia was defenseless ever since news of the death of her mother's midnight visitor, who was to be Julia's protector, reached their ears.

Danger, loneliness, suspicion and fear. A queen's heritage. Julia opened her prayer book and stared at the pressed flowers from the high meadow. No, she wanted sunshine, friendship, love, and loyalty. She wanted Walter. Opening the locket, she placed the contents into a small packet. Now if someone found her locket it would be empty. The brick slid out easily from the fireplace leaving a space just the right size for the packet. It would remain there forever for all she cared. She would tell Walter tonight that her answer was yes. **WT**

Central Coast Writers Spring 2010 Writing Contest

Poetry and short story winners will receive \$500 each, and their work will be published (print and online) in the Spring 2010 *Homestead Review* produced by Hartnell College.

Entry Fee: Short stories, \$15 per story; poetry, \$5 per poem.

Maximum Length: Short story, 4,000 words; poetry: no restriction.

Submission Period: September 15, 2009, through January 15, 2010.

For full contest details, see centralcoastwriters.org

Address questions to ccw-contests@comcast.net

Cupertino, My Kind of Town

by Phyllis Mattson

Cupertino lies nestled at the foot of the Montebello Ridge of the Santa Cruz Mountains, forty-five miles south of San Francisco. I've made my home in many cities full of riches and history since my birth in Vienna, Austria. Growing up there in the 1930s, Hitler's time, I have few good memories. During the next ten years, I lived in San Francisco, then Berkeley, Boston, and San Jose, but I fell in love with Cupertino. It's my kind of town, small in size, but large in character.

My first view of Cupertino—just a place name but not yet a town—was on a brilliant blue spring day in 1960 when apricot and prune orchards, bounded by a horizon of green mountains, were a sea of pink and white blossoms. I was 30 years old, a new mother, on my way to my first game of golf not far from Mountain View, where I lived then. Every move around the golf course revealed a new vista—a giant cliff, a sweet meandering stream (where I lost several balls), beautiful houses on one side and gorgeous trees everywhere. But the view isn't all there is to Cupertino. It has history, character, and civic pride.

Even as the founding fathers of the United States were writing the Declaration of Independence, Captain Juan Bautista De Anza of the Spanish Army was exploring California for mission sites. In 1776, before heading north to San Francisco, his group of 20 slept under a big oak tree, leaving a stone marker (not found until 1906) by what is now called the De Anza Oak. The priest accompanying him gave the name Cupertino to the area after his patron saint. This oak tree still stands on my condo property, visible from my house.

Almost a century after De Anza slept here, Monta Vista, my particular corner of Cupertino, began as a small community of ranchers and orchardists when the area was opened for homesteading. In 1844, Elisha Stephens was the first to homestead here, growing grapes and blackberries. His land, Blackberry Farm, is now a park and the golf course

where I play most Fridays. Soon, there were many other pioneers developing orchards and growing vines, and in 1870, the Monta Vista Winery was built adjacent to the De Anza Oak.

So the town grew, providing work and needing more people to work the ranches. A few San Franciscans, like Fremont Older, the newspaper editor noted for his work against corruption in San Francisco, and Painless Parker, the famous dentist, built huge estates, but there were also tiny summer cottages. A railroad line followed so that people could commute to San Francisco. The hills were mined for cement or were turned into orchards. After World War II, San Franciscans built many little bungalows for weekend retreats on acre plots, a few of which remain on nearby streets. Even in their run-down state they fetch a good price for the land, and are rapidly being rebuilt into mansions. In the 1960s, scientists came to the Peninsula (south of San Francisco and north of San Jose) to work in aerospace, or, like my husband, to develop computers. Cupertino became incorporated in 1965, with an official population of 3,664. Big changes came thereafter.

In 1970, 200 years after DeAnza's visit, the Monta Vista Winery and its adjacent land was turned into a condominium complex, Spanish-looking, with red tile roofs and dark brown trim on white stucco, on a ridge overlooking Stevens Creek.

My house has a gorgeous view of the Montebello Ridge, dotted with mansions between the trees. Below me is a park with old ranch buildings, the former McClellan Ranch. When I first moved here, in 1977, before the trees grew big, I could see the red-colored buildings and barns, and sometimes I saw figures working in the community garden. The view recalled some of the Impressionist paintings of workers in the field. I often took morning walks from my house to the ranch, inspecting the growth and development of the plots in the garden, sometimes speaking with the gardeners, maybe snitching a raspberry, then walking along the creek trail lined with huge sycamore trees. I liked looking at the animals kept by the 4H Club—sheep, goats, pigs, and rabbits. In February, the bare limbs of the sycamore branches, like giant

gnarled witches' fingers, stretch to the sun and grow ever taller; in fall they turn a lovely gold and take a long time to become naked again.

As much as I adore the natural beauty of Cupertino, I really love is its dedication to learning. In 1967, one of the great ranches became a community college, De Anza, which continually wins awards for its outstanding programs. It includes a 2,000 seat auditorium, home to symphony orchestras and Broadway musicals, but also used by local dance schools for recitals or religious organizations for large gatherings. Its Olympic-size pool is where I get my exercise. The college was the first to offer water exercises for the old and disabled. All this in a town of barely 4,000 at the time! I was proud to be a teacher there.

The Cupertino School District is *the* school district to live in. The town's dedication to education as well as to open space makes me feel proud. From where I live, there are eleven parks within two miles of my house. Bond issues for schools, libraries, and parks always pass. The library boasts it is the "top ranked library in the U.S. for 5 years." A monthly calendar of events that is sent to residents lists many public events that give evidence of the cultural diversity of our town—Chinese and Indian, among others—and offers many classes for children, adults, and seniors. Our city council is multi-cultural.

Cupertino was a participant, if not a leader, in the making of Silicon Valley—a name for the high-tech Santa Clara Valley, but nowhere to be found on a map. Steve Wozniak, one of the co-founders of Apple Computers, went to the high school next to my complex, and Apple buildings are all over the town, as are 60 other hi-tech businesses. Some would say that Cupertino is the heart of Silicon Valley.

Of course, the town has all the usual amenities, hotels, movies, shops, and an elaborate mall, but what is missing is a "downtown." This deficit has bothered the town's leaders, who held town meetings to gather ideas, but no magic solution has been found. In the olden days, two intersecting main thorough-

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CWC NorCal Group

by Dave LaRoche

This group of ten branches in the northern part of the state met for the third time on the August 22 to discuss the following topics:

- Ideas and successes in building membership
- A database of speakers and how they were received
- How each branch operates; i.e., meetings, events, costs, fees, etc.
- A roadmap for member publishing, potentially including a CWC imprint
- A writing-intensive retreat for next year
- How to put into effect good public relations
- Ideas for improving the state website
- A booksellers network that will shelve members' books

The NorCal Group is about 80% of the CWC membership. Its intent is to develop inter-branch relationships that further collaboration among members; support creative synergy; exploit opportunities for branch cooperation; share successes, problems and solutions; develop goals/activities not as easily pursued by one branch; and generally engage in a manner that furthers our interest in writing and publishing while avoiding work at cross-purposes. Action items are taken and reported, committees are at work and report, enthusiasm pervades, and, in an informal way, we move along, create, and resolve. With the exception of Redwood, all northern California branches were represented at this particular meeting and most are active in off-meeting activities.

Anyone wanting to become involved should contact Dave LaRoche. No special status within the branch is required—only interest in furthering our mission. WT

Sept. Slept

The calendar is like a clock.
Deadlines are the wake-up.
You realize in sudden shock:
Quick! Rewrite—
Needs a shake-up.

—Pat Bustamante

Cupertino

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fares, Stevens Creek Road and DeAnza Boulevard, were the main shopping areas—including a flour mill. That corner now has a small park commemorating the town's origin and is named after the Cali mill it replaced.

In the 1980s there was a big migration of Chinese to Cupertino. They came from Taiwan and Hong Kong with notes in their hands, demanding homes in the Cupertino School District. I used to tutor their children. They now represent more than 60% of the population and have been thoroughly incorporated into the community. Our little town has now grown to nearly 60,000, replete with the amenities of big cities, but still retaining its charm.

Ridgecrest, my own little residential community on De Anza's footprint, has also changed. When I moved here thirty years ago, most of the folks did not have children—they either hadn't started families yet or were finished with parenting. We used to congregate at the pool on weekends, play cards, and have potlucks. Now we have many younger families that moved here to avail themselves of the schools and are busy with their children's education. Now I am the "grand old dame" of the complex, in age and seniority, keeper of the history and the landscape, lucky to have found this incredible piece of land for my homestead.

I still play golf weekly with a group of seniors at Blackberry Farm, Cupertino's municipal short nine-hole public course. Recently, some players in their 80's, some using a walking stick, have had difficulty walking the course. But just today when I arrived to play, Tim, the manager, offered my partners, one man quite bent over and the other mostly blind, a driving cart for seniors so they could continue to play. As I walked along with the cart, I was bursting with pride for my city to think of us old folks even as it nourishes its kids with incredible opportunities for growth and stimulation.

Way to go, Cupertino! You're a wonderful town. WT



Prowling

Continued from page 2

witty fellow, who talked about his book, *1906* (that's when Jack London felt the bar shaking at the Coppa Club, chugged his beer and said, "Let's get over to Oakland and start a club."). And James taught us how to write a screenplay while enjoying it. And let us not forget Tod Goldberg, who filled our tanks with hydrazine for that marvelous trajectory into the polka-dotted char-treuse unknown of our personal creativity. Now who . . . who, without this club, would you have met, and where, without that meeting, would you have picked up the experience?

I read a memoir written by my sister because she is family. I read another by Arthur Miller that I couldn't put down. I want to be like Miller. Edie Matthews got me started, and though it's a long trek, *Timebends*, the man said, and I believe I will make it. This club, and its many doors into various opportunities, are going to help as I open them and invest. I invite you to come along. WT

September Speaker

Continued from page 1

In her latest book, *A Romance on Three Legs: Glenn Gould's Obsessive Quest for the Perfect Piano*, Katie wrote about the intersection of art with the technology of art—in this case, piano manufacture and tuning.

I realized only a few days ago, after owning this book for a year, that the book is about several threesomes. Glenn Gould had said of his favorite piano: "This is the first time in history that there has ever been a romance on three legs." So the first threesome is the three legs of the piano. But the book is actually (it seems to me) about a second threesome: the relationship of Gould, his piano, and the blind piano tuner Verne Edquist—three eccentrics to be sure.

So come and hear how we can write about our complex Silicon Valley culture and how it affects the world. I expect September's talk to be fascinating, challenging, and dynamic! WT

August Recap

Continued from page 1

enough incentive to keep working on that book," she remembered, so she would revise further and start the cycle again. But she never secured representation.

"Then I reached a point where I just said, maybe this isn't my book. This might not be the one," she reflected. She talked to some friends from the San Francisco Writers Workshop who were in the same situation. One literary novelist had finally earned publication and acclaim by taking the commercial route and penning a thriller, and he said it was worth it. Mailman realized that her favorite genre, historical fiction, always does well, and she reasoned that stories with sex also sell. She began working on a novel about Gold Rush-era prostitution.

Around this time, she got laid off. "It was a blessing in disguise. Suddenly I had free time," she said. She decided to outline her new novel before writing it, and set herself the challenge of writing a chapter a day. She completed the first draft in less than a month. It was only novella-length, but she had a structure with a beginning, middle, and end to revise and work with. "I know for other people, discovery writing is the way to go, but for me, I really need to think about the plot before I write."

Though Mailman had reached a new level as a writer, her struggle for publication was far from over. The querying process for *Woman of Ill Fame* was just as difficult as for the first novel, but finally she connected with an agent. However, after a year of submissions, the agent couldn't sell the book, and their contract came to an end. Mailman kept trying. She approached small presses, but she was repeatedly turned down. "Again I reached that point I had with the eight-years book, where I thought, 'Okay, maybe this isn't my book either.' So I started writing a third book."

The Witch's Trinity was inspired by a taped lecture on witch hysteria, a topic that has always fascinated Mailman. One detail sparked her imagination: women were often accused of witchcraft by their daughters-in-law because the younger women wanted to get rid

of an expendable member of the family during the frequent famines in medieval Germany. "What would it be like to be in that house?" Mailman wondered, and the new novel was born.

The book took eight months to write, and she began the agent search yet again. Then an email arrived from Heyday Books, a small press in Berkeley that had previously rejected *Woman of Ill Fame*: they had a budget surplus and wanted to publish it after all. "It was elation, but also kind of disappointment because I got that news by email, and it was a reluctant 'no' turned into 'yes.' It wasn't that ecstatic phone call I'd envisioned getting one day. But I'm not complaining. That was big news to me."



Erika Mailman responds favorably to a question from Bill Baldwin.

Waiting for the novel's publication was another long ordeal, and in the meantime, she found an agent to represent *The Witch's Trinity*. While the book was out on submission to editors, Mailman thought about nothing else. "But there was one day where I was totally Zen. I just woke up, and it didn't even cross my mind." That day, she received the phone call she'd always dreamed of: her agent told her that Random House had purchased her book. "It took a while, but I finally got that moment I'd craved."

Mailman may someday return to her first manuscript. "I feel like maybe now I could go back and attack it and make something salable, because I learned so much with each subsequent book that I wrote. I think sometimes when you say to yourself, 'Maybe this isn't my book,' maybe the correct way to think about it is, 'Maybe it isn't my book right now.' The best thing I ever did was to set it

aside and work on other things."

Her advice for developing a book is to hammer down the plot and story before beginning to write.

"You want to make sure that you have a story that's got enough of a climax and enough of an impact to make it worth it." Of the publishing process, Mailman said, "It's all a crapshoot, and I realize that I lucked out." But she cautioned that one common mistake is to send out a manuscript before it's ready. She is a firm believer in critique groups and in reading your own work aloud to hear how it sounds. Mailman also suggested a useful technique for historical fiction writers: "I wrote *The Witch's Trinity* just plot, dialogue, the important stuff, and I told my writers group, 'I'm going to go back in later and medieval it up.' And that's exactly what I did. I added details after the fact, once I had the armature in place."

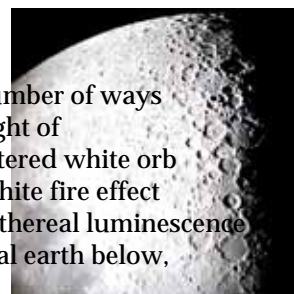
Visit erikamailman.com for more advice for aspiring writers, including a copy of Mailman's own query letter for *The Witch's Trinity*. On the site, you can also read about her ancestor who was twice accused of witchcraft and acquitted both times. Perseverance runs in the family! WT

Selene

I only seek a transfinite number of ways to speak the sight of the moon's cratered white orb and the cold white fire effect of its delicate ethereal luminescence on the nocturnal earth below, all our doings, each hidden rendezvous, and unrevealed thoughts.

—Stephen C. Wetlesen

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He said there's no God
As clouded angels planted
Atomic fig seeds.

—Victoria Ballard

Directory of Experts

Do you have specialized knowledge that might help a writer bring authentic detail to a scene? Send a message to networking@southbaywriters.com or to the club post office box and we will add your listing to our directory of experts.

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Know Any Spies?

Know any spies? Bill Roller, a 25-year member of the Berkeley Branch is working on a book of first-person accounts by children of CIA, FBI, Secret Service, and other similar operatives, domestic and foreign. Contact Bill in confidence at thedearedancing.com or Vivbill@aol.com; (510) 525-9215.

Waiting in the Wings

Continued from page 9

of us could attain the elusive note in *full* voice. Believe me, it was an awesome experience. I achieved this more than once in rehearsals—but never in concert. No matter how hard I tried—short of surgical alteration—this personal goal eluded me.

I was in the reserves less than two weeks before I was called up to make my first concert appearance. I had to mouth the alphabet *enthusiastically* for several numbers. I have never been very tall compared to my peers, so it was not too surprising that I ended up in the front row. I would not have minded it so much if it was not for the persistent fear—like a recurring nightmare—that my fly was open. It never was, but that was not enough to satisfy my nagging apprehension.

A couple of weeks later, some heartless draft board called up one of the club's regulars, and I proudly took his place as the new regular. And another hopeful student from that long line of auditioners took my place *waiting in the wings* of the reserves. WT

CWC Around the Bay

These are the published meeting times and locations for the other 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

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

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

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

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

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

Marin: Meets on the fourth Sunday of every month at 2 p.m. at Book Passage in Corte Madera.
cwcmarinwriters.com

Redwood: Meetings are held on the first Sunday of the month (except for holiday weekends), from 3-5 p.m. at Copperfield's Books, 2316 Montgomery Dr., Santa Rosa.
redwoodwriters.org

Fremont: Meets (except in July, December, and on holiday weekends) from 2-4 p.m. on the fourth Saturday of the month at Mountain Mike's Pizza, 35760 Fremont Blvd., in the Brookvale Shopping Center, one block south of Decoto Road in Fremont. Contact, Bob Garfinkle: ragarf@earthlink.net or (510) 489-4779

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 7P Board Meeting LaRoche residence	3	4 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose	5
6	7	8 6p Monthly Dinner Meeting Lookout Inn, Sunnyvale Katie Hafner	9	10	11 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Santana Row, San Jose	12 11A Editors' Powwow
13	14	15	16 WritersTalk deadline	17	18 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	19
20	21	22	23	24	25 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Sunnyvale	26
27	28	29	30	September 2009		
		October 13 6P Annual Costume Contest Gerard Jones				Future Flashes

Stay Informed!

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

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

Check out the new
South Bay Writers
Blog
southbaywriters.com
Click SBW Journal—Blog

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
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Cosponsored by the
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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, September 8, 6:00 p.m.

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

Katie Hafner
author of
*A Romance on
Three Legs*

**The October issue will
feature spooky stories and
poems.**

Deadline: September 16

