



# WritersTalk

Volume 18  
Number 12  
December 2010

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club



California Writers Club  
South Bay Branch

**HOLIDAY BASH**  
TUESDAY, DEC. 14, 2010 6-9 PM

## POTLUCK

Please bring dish according to the last name:

- A - H Dessert or appetizer
- I - R Main dish
- S - Z Salad or side dish

Club will provide beverages.

## GIFT EXCHANGE

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

## PARTY PLACE

Gisela Zebroski's House  
1546 Plateau Ave., Los Altos, CA 94024  
RSVP 408 985-0819 OR [www.edie3333@aol.com](mailto:www.edie3333@aol.com)

**Wishing everyone a Merry Christmas,  
Happy Hanukkah & the  
Spirit of Kwanzaa,  
CWC Board Members**

## DIRECTIONS

Take Highway 280 to Los Altos  
EXIT Magdalena Ave.  
Turn EAST (away from the hills) at Magdalena Rd.  
Take first RIGHT onto Hillview Dr.  
Turn RIGHT at Fairway Dr.  
Take the first RIGHT onto Plateau Ave



## November Recap Twists and Turns

by Jackie Mutz

As monthly meetings go, November 9th had some new twists. In addition to the usual announcements and writer networking and just plain old visiting with friends, SouthBay board members decided to infuse the meeting with a little on the spot writer creativity in a table topic and writing exercise. Both were enthusiastically received by members.

All meetings have an agenda. CWC meetings follow one that most are familiar with: introductions, announcements, break, networking and conversation, then the highlight of the evening: the guest speaker, followed by questions at the end. And of course, there is the included meal all at a reasonable price.

But a couple of new added agenda items helped make the evening a success.

### Dialogue Dilemma

Every writer knows dialogue can be difficult. How do you make a conversation sound natural and not forced on the page? A dialogue between two characters can flow or get stuck, just like the Dick and Jane primary reader. During the meeting, a table tent graced each table with questions about dialogue, (often a writer's lament), questions that sparked conversation between writers and aspiring writers. Ideas were exchanged; there was excitement in the room. Ten minutes of verbal exchange passed in the blink of an eye. Attendees loved the exchange of ideas. Conversation happened; maybe the dialogue dilemma was solved for some of us?

### Write Away

Before the guest speaker, Tanya Egan Gibson took the podium and after everyone had eaten, and relaxed after the

*Continue on page 13*

# President's Challenge

by Bill Baldwin  
President, South Bay Writers

## A Word About Our New Dinner Format

Those of you who joined us for our November dinner meeting, in addition to hearing our speaker Tanya Egan Gibson, also witnessed our first attempt at a new meeting formation.

After a few announcements and accolades, we moved into a short discussion of writing topics. We then proceeded to a short writing exercise. We may see some results of that exercise in this very **WritersTalk!**

So...in this tentative new scheme of things, participating in the dinner meeting may lead to...publication (at least in **WritersTalk!**).

Well...yeah. "But what if I have writer's block?"

Then please don't feel pressured to participate in the exercise. But do consider writing down something. If you do have writer's block, try writing down anything that comes into your head. Write down random words if you want to. Just write something.

But—"I don't like to write in a room full of people."

"I don't write (fiction, non-fiction, memoir, whatever)."

"I can't write with a pen—my arthritis."

Well—no one's forcing you. We know different people pursue different genres. We know you may prefer writing alone. We know you may have an issue with pens, or pencils; the lighting; the background noise. We're just giving you a short opportunity to write something. If you prefer, feel free to talk quietly with someone (without distracting others). Or make notes for your project.

Anyway—we're trying to make our dinner meetings more useful to you as writers. Do let us know how you feel it is going—is the new format helpful for you? (And do, if you like, get your submissions in to **WritersTalk!**) WT



Bill Baldwin



### R.I.P. KATHERINE BARR

I received an email from Avery Kinter to inform me that her mother, Eloise B. Kintner (aka Katherine Barr), a former member of South Bay Writers, passed away on October 14th. Katherine was an active writer in the San Jose area up until four or five years ago. Anyone who would like to send messages to Avery can write her at [avery.kintner@gmail.com](mailto:avery.kintner@gmail.com).

Goodbye, Katherine – we enjoyed your writing. Write on in the Big Room upstairs!

California Writers Club  
South Bay Branch



### Executive Committee

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### Join Us

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



## WritersTalk

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

### Managing Editor

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Nina Amir  
Victoria M. Johnson  
Jackie Mutz  
Pat Bustamante

### 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

Bill Belew  
111 W. Arques Ave  
Sunnyvale, CA 94085

### Guest Columns

*Sage Advice* (400 words)

### News Items

 (400 words)

### Letters to the Editor

 (300 words)

to Bill Belew  
newsletter@southbaywriters.com

### Creative Works

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

### Accolades

accolades@southbaywriters.com

### Announcements and Advertisements

newsletter@southbaywriters.com

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

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 with layout.

Authors retain all rights to their works; *WritersTalk* gratefully acknowledges the authors' permission to publish their works here. Contact individual authors for permission to reprint.

**Change of Address:** Send changes of address to the Membership Chair at membership@southbaywriters.com

**Subscriptions:** Nonmember subscriptions are \$20/year; send a check payable to South Bay Writers Club to the Membership Chair.

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# Newseditor

by Bill Belew

## Editor



Bill Belew

At the November SBW monthly meeting we were challenged with a writing exercise. In just 10 minutes we were to write from a choice of several prompts. I used "I feel grateful for..."

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I never cared much whether I had a motorized way to get around until...

Early in the month of November seven friends of mine from the church where I pastor and I went to Sacramento. We all drove up after work on Friday to spend the night so we could be up bright and early, 5:30amish. Our purpose was to participate in a 50km walk/run. That's 31.1 miles in 'American.'

We each started out along with a crowd of another 150 or so other runners and walkers. Five and half, six and a half, eight, eight and half (me), nine and nine and half hours later we all made our way back to the finish line with a deeper appreciation for the fact that we did not have to walk or self propel ourselves back home. I have run 100 miles in a day, but that took me just under 24 hours to do. On a bike, I have done it under five hours. But that was 15 years and two 40lbs ago. Our group came and went to Sacto in four-legged beasts that would get us home in under two hours.

Three plus weeks after the fact and I am still wearing some of the wounds. Blackened and/or missing toenails to be specific. Before that, the inability to stretch out completely and a back that knotted up when I slept and left me walking in the sitting position each morning until it loosened up.

I acknowledge the pain in my legs and feet but the simple fact is they did get me where I wanted to go. All I needed was the will to go and the commitment. The eight of us who participated took pledges before we left that will garner more than \$4000. This money will change the lives of 423 little people literally on the other side of the world. In July of this year on a return trip to India I visited a group of orphans that had been abandoned deep in the jungle of Jakadbanda, India. Our church has taken up the challenge of meeting the daily and permanent needs of these kids and their caretakers...little by little. We realize we cannot save all the needy children in the world, or in India for that matter. But we remember the words of Mother Teresa. "You need not save everyone, just save the ones you can."

On the way home from the walk/run I gave thanks for my car. But I was and am more thankful that the Creator gave me and my friends the will to make a difference and the follow through in tangible form on our desires with action. Now, when I think, "golly, I don't have this or that" I am reminded of something another insightful type, Will Rogers. "I used to complain about not having any shoes until one day I met a man who had no feet."

I thank God I have my feet AND I use them to make a difference.

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Read on in this issue of WritersTalk and you will find four other pieces that were sent in as a result of the exercise. Additionally, there are the regular pieces on blogging, non-fiction, expert advice and writing craft as well as reports on the goings on of SBW and our members. Add to this a new column on poetry. Pat Bustamante has kindly taken up the challenge to devote one page each month in WT to poetry. Got poems? Send them to Pat.

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Since there is no monthly meeting in December. I'd like to offer up a few prompts and encourage members to send me their submissions (250-400 words) for the January issue:

1. I am glad I didn't get what I really wanted for Christmas because...
2. There is something magical about the holiday season and I see it in....
3. If I could give a present to everyone in the world it would be...

Whatever you are doing with your writing, I hope you do it to make a difference.

# Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

You may have noticed a new yellow form titled Accolades and Accomplishments at the table during the November 9th meeting. Instead of announcing your writing success stories, simply fill out the form at the beginning of the meeting and turn it into Bill Baldwin who will pick three to share. The rest will make their way to me for publication in the next month's Accolades column. You may also email me at [accolades@southbaywriters.com](mailto:accolades@southbaywriters.com) as an alternative. Several writers did that last month:

- Claudia Arndt placed 23rd in the Television/Movie Script category of the Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition.
- Bill Belew's blog network reached 35 million page views total to date. Bill was also appointed a faculty member for the San Miguel Writer's Conference, the largest of its kind in Mexico.
- Bob Garfinkle was elected President of the California Writers Club July 2010. A belated congrats Bob!
- Marjorie Johnson took first and second place in this year's Write On! Story Contest, an unlikely event as noted by Tatjana Greiner, Editor in Chief of the contest. Marjorie's stories "The Poisoner's Handbook" and "Our Last Ride" placed first and second respectively.
- Audry Lynch, Steinbeck scholar and author of *The Development of Roy Simmonds as a Steinbeck Scholar as Evidenced Through His Letters: The Life and Achievement of an Independent Academic*, published this year, has received many positive book reviews. She also has been invited to be the Steinbeck Lecturer at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, a three day speaking engagement in March 2011, focusing on her John Steinbeck/James Dean book, also recently published.
- Steve Wetlesen completed two separate paid poetic art commissions, one a class reunion piece and his first haiku poem. Another haiku poem is pending.

# View from the Board

by Sylvia Halloran

South Bay Writers Board meeting,  
11/3/2010

7:00 p.m.

Present: Bill Baldwin, Colin Seymour, Richard Burns, Dave LaRoche, Bill Belew, Nina Amir, Sylvia Halloran.

Approval of October Minutes and Agenda

Motion: (Bill Belew/Richard): To adopt 10/6/10 minutes. Unanimous.

## OFFICER'S REPORTS

### President's report – Bill

Possible changes to dinner meeting format include eliminating introductions and accolades; devoting a portion of the meeting to discussion of writing topics at individual tables; adding short readings by club members; devoting time to actual writing exercises.

### Vice-President's report – Colin

December 14 Holiday Party will be at Gisela Zebroski's home in Los Altos (near 280 and Magdalena).

### Upcoming programs

Tanya Egan Gibson is poised to speak at the November meeting on the importance of setting in fiction, and Becky Levine will speak about critique groups in January.

**Treasurer's Report** as of October 31, 2010--Richard

Oct 12, General Meeting Summary: 61, [62, 52] attendees; 55, [55,44] members; 6 [7, 8] guests; Net Profit = minus \$152.50; Speaker--Mahesh Grossman = \$100; Lookout Bar & Grill = \$976.50.

SBW Assets Balance as of Oct 31: \$22,415; [\$22,005.05; \$21,473]. ([x, y] show previous two months totals.)

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Contact Steve at [scwetlesen@aol.com](mailto:scwetlesen@aol.com) to find out more about his poetry.

Use Accolades as a venue to share the writing wealth so to speak. It can be a huge accomplishment, that new book deal or that you are adhering to a rigorous writing schedule and seeing results. Keep at it, but don't forget to enjoy the holidays by attending the annual CWC Holiday party. See you there. WT

There are 20 sign-ups (so far) for the Linda Joy Myers "Memoir" Workshop, Nov 6. Continental breakfast and lunch will be served.

## Learning Center - Richard Burns

Attendance Oct 19 was 7.

Reminder: Our continuing DVD shows on the life and writing of Mark Twain, a 12-week series to be held 1st and 3rd Tuesdays (Nov 2 & 16, etc.) 7:30 PM to 9:30PM,

Westmont Retirement Community, 1675 Scott Blvd., Santa Clara, CA 95050.

## Central Board – Dave

Next meeting Jan 30

E-business motion to morph Bulletin into "review" being advanced by SBW

Three issues per year

Members contributions only - fiction, nonfiction, poetry

Token subscription cost for hardcopy distribution

Editor and selection board to be named and approved

Paid advertising accepted if writing/publishing pertinent

NorCal Group

Next meeting Dec 4

Discussion will cover three of the following:

Anthology (Redwood)

Contests (Central Coast)

Attracting younger members (Dave LaRoche)

Talent bank (Fremont)

Conducting and promoting workshops (unassigned)

Open Mic: conduct, value, and pitfalls (unassigned)

Event work/cost/benefit sharing between branches - an investigation (unassigned)

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### Membership

Current membership is 196. We have been averaging 3 new members per dinner meeting.

### Newsletter - Bill Belew

November WT was the first to go out -

*Continued on page 8*

# Write and Rewrite: Dialogue Tags and Beats

by Lisa Eckstein

Dialogue is an important part of most stories, and one that many writers have trouble with. The core of any dialogue is the lines that the characters speak, but the words outside the quotation marks also matter, and there are many ways to wield them clumsily.

This sample dialogue demonstrates some common problems. (Note that one mistake not illustrated is incorrect formatting. The passage follows standard conventions for punctuating dialogue in American English. If you aren't familiar with these rules, take the time to learn them.)

"Margot!" Wesley bellowed. "You left the milk out again."

"I didn't," she objected grimly. "It must have been one of the children."

Wesley looked at her. "Couldn't have been. I put the milk back in the fridge just after they went out."

"So?" Margot stood up and got a glass of water. "Does it feel good to think you can prove me wrong?" she queried, looking over at Wesley.

"It's not only about how you never pick up after yourself. It's a health hazard," he snapped angrily.

"But skydiving, on the other hand, is perfectly safe," she responded sarcastically. "Every weekend, no risk at all."

"That's what you're angry about?" he queried in surprise.

"I'll put this away," Margot grimaced, taking the milk carton from him. "Wouldn't want us to be in any danger."

Let's start by considering the many verbs that appear in place of "said." While an occasional expressive verb such as "bellowed" might make a scene more vivid, it's usually better to save the interesting verbs for action, not dialogue tags. Alternatives to "said" draw attention away from the characters' conversation but rarely convey any information about the scene.

There are many ways to ruin a dialogue tag with a pointlessly creative verb. For example, it's redundant to use "objected" for Margot's objection. Instead of telling readers that Wesley "snapped," a more powerful tactic is to show it with the words he speaks. And I challenge anyone to demonstrate how

Margot "grimaced" out that sentence. No matter how many times it's repeated, "said" is always an appropriate choice. Like the ubiquitous "the," "said" is a purely functional word that slips by unnoticed, so don't worry about overusing it.

Adverbs in dialogue tags are another frequent cause of weakened dialogue. The problem with "he said angrily" may not be obvious, but remember "show, don't tell"; the emotion should be shown by the character's words and actions, not told with dialogue mechanics. Either the line of dialogue sounds angry, in which case "angrily" isn't required, or it doesn't, and it needs a rewrite. Adverbial phrases ("in surprise") may lack an -ly, but they have the same issues. Sometimes there's a good reason to use an adverb—"quietly" is difficult to portray in written speech—but in most cases, keep tags free of adverbs and make the dialogue speak for itself.

Does this leave us with line after line of plain, boring "he said" and "she said"? Not at all! In a scene with only two characters, there's no need to identify who's speaking each time. The reader should be able to keep track of back-and-forth conversation without constant reminders. (If that's a problem, the characters might sound too much alike or the scene lacks conflict to distinguish the speakers.)

Furthermore, tags aren't the only choice for attributing a line of dialogue. To give a scene context and show the non-verbal communication that's taking place, include some descriptions of what the characters are doing. These action beats set the scene and also match a character with a line of speech.

But like dialogue tags, action beats can go wrong in a variety of ways. Too many in a scene leaves the reader distracted and dizzy from all the nodding and looking and sitting and standing. Too few gives the unsettling impression that the characters are in a featureless void. In the example passage, "Margot stood up and got a glass of water" comes out of the blue, since there's no previous information about where the characters are located. The beat also fails to demonstrate anything about Margot's mindset, and something's odd about fetching a glass of water during a discussion of milk.

Ideally, action beats aren't purpose-

less and random, but instead complement and strengthen the dialogue. This isn't an easy goal to achieve. When a scene is clear in a writer's mind, it's natural to want to describe every movement. Avoid that clutter by focusing on the most important actions and leaving the rest to the reader's imagination. Even harder, stay away from generic actions that reveal nothing about what's going on beneath the dialogue. "Wesley looked at her" marks that line as Wesley's, and that's about all it does. Aim for beats that help bring the dialogue to life.

Here's the same conversation again, with an improved set of dialogue tags and action beats:

"Margot!" Wesley stomped to the kitchen door with a carton in his hand. "You left the milk out again."

She barely looked up from her book. "I didn't. It must have been one of the children."

"Couldn't have been. I put the milk back in the fridge just after they went out."

"So?" Margot closed the book around her finger and stared at him. "Does it feel good to think you can prove me wrong?"

"It's not only about how you never pick up after yourself. It's a health hazard."

"But skydiving, on the other hand, is perfectly safe," she said under her breath. "Every weekend, no risk at all."

"That's what you're angry about?" Margot stood and snatched the milk carton from him. "I'll put this away. Wouldn't want us to be in any danger."

If this were part of a story, I'd expect fewer tags and beats in an excerpt of this length, but this gives you an idea of how well-chosen dialogue tags and action beats can enhance a conversation by showing what's happening physically and emotionally. Without the distracting tags of the original example, it's more apparent that this dialogue contains some good methods for approximating real speech, including unanswered questions and sentence fragments. I'll talk about these and other dialogue techniques next time. For now, go rewrite your tags and beats, and see how much better your dialogue can be! *Lisa Eckstein blogs about reading, writing, and revising at [lisaeckstein.com](http://lisaeckstein.com).WT*

# 5 Dos and Don'ts to Grow Your Blog

by Rik Scott

Here are 5 Do's and 5 Don'ts that will help you grow your blog, increase your audience, and advertise yourself and your work:

**Don't** just copy and repackage other people's work. While it may do for a small audience, eventually it will become clear, and you will lose readership. You must always ADD VALUE to the ideas you "borrow".

**Don't** quit. In these days of almost instant gratification, it is hard sometimes to stay with a project that takes time to reach fruition.

**Don't** hold back. If you have a self-imposed production schedule, and you know you must fill X number of spots each week, don't hold your best stuff for a future posting. In this business you must allow yourself to have a good idea every time you sit down to write. Hoarding your ideas gets you out of the practice of going for the gold every time.

**Don't** bore your readers. Sad or not, it's true that readers these days have a much shorter attention span than they did just 10 years ago. Keep your posts short, crisp, to the point, and by all means entertaining.

**Don't** worry about someone stealing your ideas. If you believe the things you think and write are so important that losing one will break you, trust me, you're in the wrong business. The idea is to just keep producing no matter what.

**Do** look to themes. You'll be amazed how easy it is to write several articles in the same theme. As you work on the first, ideas for the second and third will pop up. In fact, sometimes it is harder to get OFF a theme.

**Do** look for a way to stand out. Finding your voice in writing is considered important. Finding your voice in blogging is imperative. The way you show up to the world is your trademark. Work hard to develop it.

**Do** take a break. Blogging and social networking can overtake you. Get away for a while every day. Mix with people. After all, it is from your interactions with others that some of your best material will be born.

**Do** respect your readers. People who come to your site, or who subscribe, are your customers. Treat them with respect. Punching out a poorly written piece to make a deadline will not earn you the respect of your readers. Each piece you write must be the best you can do THIS time.

**Do** remember that everything you say on your blog, and every comment you make on other blogs, and every tweet and every email you send may come back to bite you in the future. Watch what you say. Nothing really ever goes away from the Internet.

Find other articles on Blogging and Writing on UphillWriting.org WT

*Richard Scott is a blogger and aspiring novelist. His yet to be published novel, FIVE took top honors out of a field of 450 entrants. He currently serves as the president of the CWC Fremont Area Writers Club. His blog is UphillWriting.org*

## Winning Entries

by Danita Craft

The Dear John Letters that won the Halloween costume contest in October were a play on punctuation.

The letters were written by a grammarian to highlight the importance of correct punctuation. Several members suggested that the missives be in the newsletter. Here they are.

-----

Dear John:

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, and thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy--will you let me be yours?

Jane

-----

Dear John:

I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours,

Jane

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## FLIER-ING SQUAD - As a systematic weapon for posting our handbills, member proposes regimen. By Colin Seymour

SBW member Apala Egan has volunteered to post fliers and handbills at three or four of her neighborhood haunts whenever the club needs to advertise conferences or workshops. Those fliers can be a huge factor in the success or failure of our workshops, such as the Dan Poynter workshop scheduled for January 15, not to mention East of Eden, our biannual writers conference.

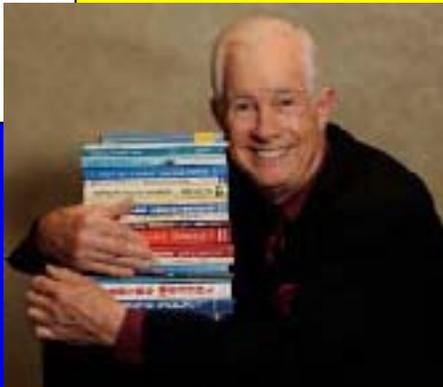
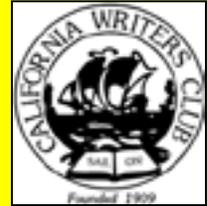
Fliers tend to get passed out at SBW board meetings and similar East of Eden planning sessions, and who knows what happens to them after attendees are liberated from those dreary gatherings. I can't say poster distribution has been my greatest achievement for SBW; let's put it that way. But if we had, say, 12 people doing what Apala has proposed, people we can truly depend upon, we could really penetrate the market.

Nina Amir - cpywrtcom@aol.com and I - vicepresident@southbaywriters.com are soliciting offers and suggestions. For the many of you who would rather sit in gridlock on Highway 237 with a full bladder than endure our board meetings, this may be a way you can contribute to the greatest boon to the club yet devised. WT

# SOUTH BAY WRITERS PRESENTS:

A Workshop Led by

## Dan Poynter



## The New Book Model: Writing, Producing and Promoting Your Book

*Plus! A Self-Publishing Book Fair*

You can make a difference and make a living with your book. A book will bring you more credibility, increased fame and a new profit center.

During this four-hour workshop you will discover how to use new techniques and the latest technology to write your book faster, produce your book for less (printed, audiobooks and e-books) and promote your book more effectively. Dan will share the secrets to finding an agent, contacting a publisher and publishing yourself. He has your step-by-step plan.

Show up with an idea, proposal or manuscript, a book under your arm, or just to learn. This program will propel you into celebrity (published author) status.

### About the presenter:

Since 1969, Dan Poynter has written more than 100 books, including *Is There a Book Inside You?*, *Writing Nonfiction*, *The Self-Publishing Manual*, *The Skydiver's Handbook*, and *The Expert Witness Handbook*. Dan has turned thousands of writers into authors. The media come to Dan because he is the leading authority on how to write, publish and promote books.

**January 15, 9:00-3:30**

**Lookout Restaurant**

**605 Macara Ave.**

**Sunnyvale, CA 94085**

Registration @ 8:30; WORKSHOP begins promptly at 9; continental breakfast and lunch included. SELF-PUBLISHING BOOK FAIR following lunch from 2-3:30.

### SELF-PUBLISHING FAIR

During the last 90 minutes of this event, meet and ask questions of:

- **SBW self-published authors**
- **local print-on-demand and e-book publishers**

### Early Bird (before Dec. 30, 2010)

CWC members: \$45

Non-members: \$55

**Students w/ID (up to age 25), anytime \$25**  
**After Dec. 30 and at the door**

CWC members: \$55

Non-members: \$65

*Cancellation Policy:* \$5 fee through midnight 12/25; \$15 fee 12/15 through midnight 1/8; no refunds after midnight 1/8.

**Register and pay by credit card (Paypal) at [www.southbaywriters.com](http://www.southbaywriters.com)**

Mail in this portion to: SBW Workshops, PO Box 3254, Santa Clara, CA 95055.

Check Payable to: South Bay Writers

(South Bay Writers is a non-profit 501c3)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ CWC branch (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_ Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Early Bird (before 12/30) \_\_\_\_\_ Regular Registration (after 12/30) \_\_\_\_\_ Student Registration

## View From the Board

continued from page 4

using the trial version of InDesign. Final purchase will be made in November for less than \$300.

Contributing editors have grown from 4 to 8 writers. Add to Lisa, Jackie, Victoria and Carolyn: Nina, Danita, Rik and Pat.

Twelve writers are committed "Expert" monthly contributors.

235 WTs printed at a cost of \$290.71

210 Mailed out (one foreign)

25 available for monthly meeting, open mics and meetups.

### Workshops – Nina

Upcoming events

Dan Poynter confirmed. Printing 200 color flyers. Contacting CWC newsletter editors to place blurbs in their December issues. Robertson Publishing and Fastpencil confirmed for self-publishing fair; Marjorie is working on getting 5-10 SBW self-published authors to the fair (hopefully from different PODs).

Myers workshop coming up on Saturday.

### Open Mics – Bill Baldwin

Number of readings since the last board meeting:

Oct. 8 (Santana Row) – 6 readings

Oct. 15 (Pruneyard) – 6 readings

Oct. 22 (Sunnyvale) – 10 readings

An average of 7 readings per event.

A small group of interested people met on Oct. 29th to discuss the current state of our open mics. Participants are sending me their ideas and suggestions.

### OLD BUSINESS

#### New Hospitality Chair

Motion (Dale/Colin): To approve the appointment and accept Danita as Hospitality Chair 5 aye, 1 abstention. Passed.

### CWC Bylaws Revisions

Motion: (Bill Belew/Richard) to instruct Board Representative to vote in favor of Policies and Procedures Unanimous

#### Dinner Meeting Structure

Accolade form to pass out at general meetings- Sylvia

Table talk subject in plastic holders – Danita

Mini-workshop – Nina

Community College Writing Workshop Scholarships

Winner will attend general meeting and read winning submission

#### NEW BUSINESS

Board member expenses

Motion: (Colin/Dave) to reimburse Colin \$90 for Halloween costume party contest prize gift cards; one @\$30 and 4 @\$15.

Unanimous.

Motion: (Dave/Richard) to reimburse Dave \$20 for Mark Twain DVD for Learning Center. Unanimous.

#### State Anthologies

Marjorie will bring extras to general meeting. Bob Garfinkle will bring contributors' free copies. Publication cost is \$4 per volume; Central Board suggests \$8 retail.

#### Minutes in Writers Talk

"View from the Board" informs members about leadership process

Locations for SBW Activities

Bill Belew offered a room in his church building in Campbell for Board Meetings, Workshops and Parties.

Motion (Bill Belew/Richard) To adjourn, 9:20 p.m. Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Sylvia Halloran

November 19, 2010

Next board meeting, December 8, 2010  
WT

## SBW Holiday Bash

by Colin Seymour

The SBW holiday party can test our quest to interact more

I'm bringing my laptop to the SBW holiday party December 14, but that won't make me unsociable.

For one thing, our gathering at Gisela Zebroski's spacious home in Los Altos is the social event of the season. The upper part of Gisela's house even has a party room that probably can accommodate 40, and there's room for lots of folks to congregate around the kitchen. (Learn more about the potluck plans on page 1.) There will be a sense of grandiosity and elegance, so I just might wear fancy duds.

But I'm going to need that laptop. It's going to enhance, not reduce, my interaction with fellow attendees.

I know this because we've been stepping up interactions at our monthly meetings by instituting short discussions about elements of writing and short interludes of actual creative writing.

The combination of interactivity and our quest to have more of our guest speakers help us fine-tune craft and process are, we hope, making the meetings less about selling our work and more about creating it. I am late formulating a speaker evaluation system that many members want us to institute.

Although it was I who stressed greater interaction among SBW members as a goal when I ran for vice president of the club, the credit for instituting these discussions and exercises goes to SBW President Bill Baldwin.

So far they've seemed all too brief, so we're hoping there will several episodes of these discussions and exercises so we can fine-tune them. We'll have more leeway for that at the holiday party.

I've been active in the discussions, but I've been aloof during the exercises. I realize that I don't like to write a rush job without a keyboard.

Lord knows I've written many thousands of rush jobs in my time. My editing duties at daily newspapers, even more than the reporting assignments, tended to entail writing about 10 decently assembled stories each day



with a strong opening and (more often than most journalists), a thoughtful or clever conclusion.

I can nearly always craft a worthy 800-word essay in two hours if I've already gathered the facts, and I can do it in a crowded newsroom or a lonely hotel room. A looming deadline can be stimulating enough to bring me into "the zone."

(Most memorable ever: When famed San Jose State track and field coach Bud Winter died suddenly in 1985, I talked to at least 20 people and wrote a compelling 1,000-word story for Page 1A, all in 95 minutes. It took me a lot longer that 95 minutes to come down.)

A lot of you have just spent a whole month in the zone. That's part of what makes National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) such an attractive proposition.

But a command to take pen and paper and wax poetical for less than 10 minutes about a suddenly revealed topic excites me a bit less than that. At our meetings, I'm wearing an administrative hat and am nowhere near access to "the zone."

Well, not using pen and paper, anyway. But I'm hoping the laptop will improve my attitude toward taking a stab at these exercises.

Marcela Dickerson, Cathy Robbins, Pat Bustamante, Danita Craft and Steve Wetlesen were among the folks who clearly did get into the zone at our November meeting writing about "What I'm Thankful For."

The zone I've been getting into at our meetings is networking -- at a gallop. Those three hours fly by.

Some of you are too shy to behave as I do, but many have been coming out of their cocoons at recent meetings. There's a rumble at the Lookout now that I totally welcome and for which I am inclined to take some credit.

We'll probably have to be careful not to overdo the exercises at our meetings, but adding them to our agenda seems to be a smart move, and it behooves me to get jiggy wid it. The holiday party will be a good place to start.

Bottom line. We're learning as much as ever, and we're having more fun. Let's party on. WT

## How to Take the First Steps Towards Becoming a Journalist

by Nina Amir

So you say you want to become a journalist...The first step you must take involves coming up with an idea you can pitch to a newspaper or magazine.

If you want to write for a newspaper, look for news stories about which the local newspaper might not be aware. Maybe you know a local organization having an event, your neighborhood has had a rash of crime, or a local businessperson recently received an award. These are great news stories to propose.

Magazines often like longer human interest stories that tie into the news or into trends that have been reported in the news. Keep your eyes open and your mind working to news into features, profiles, essays, and other magazines articles.

Once you have a story idea, consider how you will approach it. Will you write in the first person or third? Will you interview experts? How long will it be? Check the publication for which you plan to write and be sure your article conforms to their guidelines. These can be found on line or in guides like *Writer's Market* if it is a national or large regional publication.

Find out how to contact the publication. Most prefer an emailed query, but some local newspapers allow phone queries.

For a news story, query your local newspaper and ask if they are interested in the story and say you would like to write the story. If you have no by lines to your name, suggest to the editor that you are willing to write it on speculation (without pay until they accept it). Or offer to do it for free so you

can obtain that vital first by line.

You can do virtually the same thing with a magazine. Find an idea that does not involve news. Unless you are writing for a news magazine, look for ever-green topics -- those that can run at any time of the year, or articles related to certain themes, like summer, holidays, or issues that concern their readership or their magazine's special niche.

You can also write a personal essay. This isn't as much like being a "journalist," but it might get you in the door with a piece you write in advance and then submit without a query. If accepted, the editor of that publication might be more inclined to accept a query for a reported piece next time.

I don't recommend risking your time and effort without at least an assurance that an editor will consider your work on speculation; essays are the only exception to this rule. They are written "off the top of your head" from personal experience in most cases and don't require research. Many editors don't feel they can commission an essay; they'd rather read it and then accept or reject it.

For most of your ideas, therefore, you'll need to craft a great query letter. Then you're ready to send it out and find out if you have landed your first assignment as a journalist.

*Nina Amir is an editor, author, and writing and author coach who blogs at [www.writenonfictionnow.com](http://www.writenonfictionnow.com) and [www.howtoblogabook.com](http://www.howtoblogabook.com) and writes the National Jewish Issues column for [www.examiner.com](http://www.examiner.com). Her blogs also appear at [www.vibrantnation.com](http://www.vibrantnation.com) and [www.redroom.com](http://www.redroom.com). She is the founder of Write Nonfiction in November. WT*



## SAGE ADVICE

by Sara Aurich

### Singing and Public Speaking: Quick Tips

#### A Healthy Voice

- Drink plenty of water. Room temperature is best; hot water will swell your vocal cords and cold water will shrink them. Cold water can also cause you to cough. When I performed six nights a week, I typically drank 8 ounces of water every hour I sang.
- Depending on your level of sensitivity, you may want to avoid certain foods and beverages prior to singing or speaking in public. Caffeine dehydrates your vocal cords and is found in chocolate as well as coffee, sodas, and many teas. Lemon and dairy both stimulate the production of mucus, and herbs and spices may be a source of irritation. Cinnamon, clove, citrus, and mint all irritate my throat, but do not bother most people.
- If you have a sore throat or laryngitis, avoid talking and coughing as much as possible, and do not sing. Likewise, whispering and clearing your throat with great force can cause damage. Sinus drainage is annoying, but will not damage your vocal cords.
- Never shout, and never sing with great force. Too much air pressure across your vocal cords will cause inflammation, tearing, and the development of scar tissue.
- As a vocal instructor, I found one of the greatest impediments to many beginning singers was body tension, especially in the jaw, neck and throat, shoulders, upper back, chest, and stomach. Becoming aware of your own body tension and learning to release it is essential to a singer or public speaker's vocal health.

#### Better Breathing

Relaxed breathing and enhanced lung capacity relate directly to a singer's ability to project and sustain a full, rich tone. Breathing is a large enough topic to warrant a separate article, but the exercises below should get you off to a good start.

For both exercises, sit on the edge of a chair, keep your back straight and your knees level to or lower than your hip joints. If you become dizzy or light-headed, simply stop for a while. When you're certain you won't hyperventilate, practice these exercises while standing. Your goal is to do each exercise two times a day for five minutes: 20 minutes total per day. If you're able to sustain 30 seconds for each controlled exhalation, you're doing a great job.

- **Candle Flame:** Place or hold a lit candle approximately eight inches in front of and three inches lower than your lips. Keep your shoulders level and take a deep breath. Gently blow on the candle flame so that the flame does not flicker, but remains at a 45 degree angle. Your goal is to let out a small, controlled, steady stream of air—just enough to bend the flame.
- **Reading Aloud:** Place a book or magazine article at eye level. Use text you haven't previously read. Keep your shoulders level, take a deep breath, and read aloud as fast as you can. Read quietly, and focus on maintaining consistent volume and speed. WT



## A Memoir-able Workshop on November 6, 2010 with Linda Meyers by Dave LaRoche

Linda Joy Meyers knows her stuff, as does Nina Amir who brought Linda here for our final workshop this year—and let me tell you about it. Memoir was the subject: what to include, how to present the ideas, it's structural similarities to fiction, and the therapeutic value to be gained in the writing.

Linda holds a PhD in Psychology—is a practicing therapist; and in her other hand, an MFA in Creative Writing—has published a book: *Don't Call Me Mother and Becoming Whole: Writing Your Healing Story*.

About 28 folks attended this soirée, and to the client ... er, attendee, felt uplifted and renewed at its finish, as well as better prepared in the area of memoir. And you might have guessed—the James Frey incident flooded into the room as soon as she began talking about truth and our personal recollection of reality. If no other, this notion truth related to memoir is important, and what I gleaned from what was said is this: be nice to your readers. Don't insult them with bald-faced lies, steadfastly stick to your truth but be mindful, we all remember things quite differently and when your sister says—and mine's prone to this—"that's not the way that it happened;" don't fret. Simply reply with a double gin fizz and say, "Dearest sis, we all remember things differently and this is my story." But ... beware to those defending their memory, no punching below the ego.

Memoir, like any story well told, can use arc and a theme, well colored characters, a series of connected scenes and a plot. It also benefits tremendously from a first-person point-of-view, and best to consider all of these—once past the "therapy" and writing for somebody else. Did I say "therapy?"

When we write memoir, we delve into our past, and with it the emotions that tag along. We ferret out of memory the "adventure"—relationships, deaths,

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**Errata:** November Sage Advice was wrongly attributed to Darwin Mathison.

Dave Breithaupt was the author. WT regrets the error.

poverty, that horrible fight with your younger brother who you pounded into submission only to discover he won after all. And there are those incidents that sneak up and surprise us. With each we recall how we felt: our joy and sadness, delight and anger, disappointment, occasionally regret, and well, that's a big load. Dr. Meyers suggests, that while our ultimate aim is "literature," that first slog through is generally crammed with introspection—dealing with the bumps and bruises that never quite healed—and that wandering around in our personal growth can be, and often is, therapeutic. (Wow, there's a revelation ... and think of it as a bargain. Our hour's not up till we say so, we need only go when we're up to it, and our analysis money is still socked away in the bank. I wonder—can I deduct my new couch and those cookies as a writing expense?)

It would be foolish to attempt to repeat all the fine points Dr Meyers discussed. Sufficed to say, writing a memoir, once beyond the tears and obscenities, is a lot like any other narrative—we want to keep our reader engrossed and compelled to continue. It's not a diary, however, or journal but more like an irresistible meal, as I see it. Once the entrée is selected—theme, period of time, and movement—we need toss in a delicious accompaniment including generous amounts of seasoning. And it needs to progress with an arc of change and conclude with desert—a satisfying, sweet, easily digestible end. Of course, the facts need to remain standing.

We like memoir. Many of us write it—the research is done, or easily available, we now know it's therapeutic, and the surveys suggest that today's readers are moving in the memoir direction (probably seeking a modicum of truth). Linda Meyers brought us an enjoyable experience and those who sat in for this workshop surely do thank her. Nina did a great job on production as we got a lot for a nominal price and whata-ya-know, the lunch wasn't half bad. WT

## Publishing Pathways

by Nancy Curteman

The objective of most CWC members is publication of their work. CWC Nor-Cal has created a committee dedicated to helping members realize this goal. At the direction of Dave LaRoche, the Publishing Pathways Committee is developing a resource for all CWC members. The charge of the Committee is to provide publishing and selling options and the related support so that members do not enter the publishing queue with apprehension—or fear that they may be making the wrong choices.

Here is what the Publishing Pathways Committee plans to provide:

- A website that will provide current information, resources and guidance regarding the various publishing pathways such as traditional, independent, electronic and self-publishing.
- A list of CWC members who have already been published who will act as speakers on the topic of what they did to achieve publication.
- A talent/skills bank of well-vetted experts in various aspects of publishing.
- A Mentor at each branch who will be trained by our committee as a resource for branch colleagues who need guidance on their way to publication.

The hardworking committee members who have been meeting since May, sometimes via the internet, have made considerable progress toward achieving these objectives. They certainly deserve our appreciation.

Art Carey - Fremont  
Carol Hall - Fremont  
James Elstad - High Desert,  
Dave LaRoche - South Bay  
Richard Scott - Fremont  
Geri Spieler - San Francisco Peninsula

Nancy Curteman - Fremont  
Marjorie Johnson - South Bay  
Lloyd Lofthouse - Berkeley  
Jim Stewart - Fremont  
Evelyn LaTorre - Fremont  
Jay Swartz - Fremont

The committee will keep CWC members informed of its progress as it moves closer to completing its task. Your suggestions are welcome. The group will carefully consider every idea it receives. WT

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## Open mic for high schoolers?

by Cathy Robbins

I learned just how valuable it can be during the summer, when I mentored three high schoolers in the Breakthrough Collaborative program. The organization draws middle-school students from underperforming public schools and brings them to an independent school campus for six weeks of academic work and other explorations during the summer. In the rest of the school year, it follows its summer students at their schools. In the high school part of the program, mentors work with students to prepare them for

I helped three young women, two rising seniors and one rising junior with writing skills. We read wildly different kinds of writing—three newspaper articles on job hunting for college graduates; the first chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*; a chapter of Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*; and the Declaration of Independence. (The three students had read the Declaration but their teachers had not spent any time discussing it.)

We read the works aloud, and they wrote essays either about the works or about insights into their own lives that they had gained from the readings.

I also had them read their essays aloud, an exercise that helped them greatly, because they could hear their writing problems better than they could see them. But they were so shy that I decided to get them to CWC's open mics. As soon as I asked Bill Baldwin about it, he encouraged the project.

Continued on page 16

# Poet's Page

## Terse On Verse

..by Pat Bustamante\*

(\*Thanks to Dave LaRoche, for the title!)

Recall the band "The Clash"? I do. (I'm old.) Recently I saw an article on "punk style" -- surprise! Their lyrics rhymed. Not that I knew that...

Poetry is as old as the first cave-man thumping on a log (the first music!) and saying "Ugh! A bug!" (first poem in English!)

I want your poems/lyrics/free-verse rants for this monthly column!

But, short ones please..save the long ones for "poetry month" when WritersTalk often features pages of poets. I will try with this column to inspire you. YOU will inspire ME!

Works both ways. Get started here by considering "punk rock songs"? (Rap also counts as poetry.

Don't blame me, I'm just saying.)

"ana rara marba ow burbah Clash City Rockers. /Oo meena dadda gump duh secktical shockas." Quote from article- writer Sparrow, SUN Magazine, Nov. 2010, issue 419...

Translation: "An' I wanna move the town to the Clash City Rockers, /You need a little jump of electric shockers..."

Can you do as good as this? WT

God gave Mia to Sammy and Bill.  
They danced, they cried, for what a thrill.

Mia didn't cry, she began to sing.  
This made her mommy's heart ring  
With joy and laughter and tears galore.  
The only thing better is Mia gave her more  
Love, and smiles and giggles, too.  
After that, then did Mia coo

## December Splendor

by Pat Bustamante

Merry days to you all, fellow scribes  
May you joyfully weather the season.  
I rejoice for this best-blessed of tribes  
'Cause its cheery warmth  
Keeps me from freezin'!

## Dec. (the halls) (With Nobel Prizes)

by Pat Bustamante

Dreams are come by, in December...  
Longer nights, cozy beds.  
Believe in yourself: you're a contender!  
We love your writing. Enough said!  
freezin'!

## Poetry Center San Jose Readings

Art Object Gallery  
1st Tuesdays, 7:30 p.m.  
(September-May)  
592 North Fifth St., San Jose  
Willow Glen Library  
2nd Mondays, 7:00 p.m.  
1157 Minnesota Ave., San Jose  
Free admission.  
See pcsj.org for details.

## SONGS OF YESTERDAY

by Mary Dickerson

The brook sings  
swings glide  
children's footsteps  
already gone by



## Why God Made Mia

by Anonymous

And her Mommy and daddy's heart did melt.  
So, they folded their hands, and on their knees they knelt  
Saying "Thank you, God" for such a sweet little girl  
More precious than an Earth-sized pearl.

Now Mia walks about and in her parents does trust  
Completely in them as they, too, must  
Lean on God who teaches them via  
The little girl He made that we know as Mia.

## November Recap

*Continued from page 1*

dialogue exercise, Nina Amir presented the group with a writing prompt about gratitude, a worthy subject as Thanksgiving was just around the corner. You could write an anecdotal piece that included two or three tips of how to remember to be grateful, concluding with universal wisdom. We began with two sentences:

- We don't always remember to feel gratitude but...
- I feel grateful for...

The room hummed as people put pens to paper – words flew onto pages. Clearly everyone was enjoying this exercise as much as the first one. How could one not enjoy this activity?

After fifteen minutes or so, a few people read their musings aloud, demonstrating just how amazing it is when you get a room full of writers together. Some would make it into *WritersTalk*, courtesy of our new Managing Editor, Bill Belew.

And then it was time for Tanya Egan Gibson “to explain how to create fictional settings that shape characters and propel them into action.”

### Building a World

Beginning with an example of a “boring, boring story,” Tanya showed how setting plays such an important part of character building. The setting was a restaurant described with random information that had nothing to do with

what was happening with the characters themselves. A flat setting does not enhance characters in a story; a strong, interesting setting makes a good story. She asked the question: should you as the writer invent a fictional world or borrow from the real world?

There are several things to consider when deciding on a setting or where the story takes place. In creating a “fictional world” one might consider: geography, history, flora and fauna, people and their culture, values and customs, language, music, politics and religion etc. The advantage to “making it up from scratch” is there are no attachments, no research; you have more creative freedom not bound by the reality of a place such as San Francisco.

But there are also advantages to borrowing from “real life” as in geography (think San Francisco) because the reader associates with the “real” things peppered in the story. That essence of reality mixed with fiction naturalizes a story, gives it credibility. So should your setting be completely made up or include bits of reality? Whatever the decision, the setting or world should have some restrictions.

Using the Cinderella fairytale as an example, Tanya showed how “restrictions in the world of the real Cinderella force her to act.” Obstacles (wicked step mother, no dress for the ball), force Cinderella to find a way to solve her problem, and push her to take action, thus revealing her true character in the

process. So “a world with restrictions is good for your story.”

### Resources

What are the resources for researching your setting? Where do you go to get the gritty details for the fictional world or the one that already exists? Visit the setting yourself, document what you see in notes, photos, random things, paying close attention to detail. If you can't visit, then newspapers (online or paper), libraries, data bases, YouTube, (see her article in *The Writer* ([www.writermag.com](http://www.writermag.com)) on using the site as a research tool), Internet forums and discussion boards, email other writers about the place in question, or use social networking sites to find out more about a particular place. The resources are endless; just make sure they are credible.

### A Strong “World”

Tanya left us with the notion that it is a strong “world” that helps make a story “real.” A “world,” fictional or real is one that makes things happen, reveals the characters for who they are, and cements their personhood in the story. And it also “provides texture” to the story as well (think theme or symbolism). So think about the world your characters reside in before you begin to write. Decide which world they will live in, a made up world or “real” world and have some fun. You never know where you might end up – Oz was a pretty interesting place after all.  
WT

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## So That's That: A Writing Tip

*by Marjorie Johnson*

A writing tip, short and sweet: delete that. My novel of 110,000 words contained that 1082 times. How could that be?

That five times: I am writing to let you know that I am unable to take you to Disneyland. I know that you were looking forward to that trip, but something so important has come up that I cannot leave home on that weekend.

That once: I am writing to let you know I am unable to take you to Disneyland. I know you were looking forward to the trip, but something so important has come up that I cannot leave home on the weekend.

Or even none: I am writing because I am unable to take you to Disneyland. I know you looked forward to the trip, but my mother's illness prevents me from traveling.

Of course, a paragraph containing that five times is an extreme example of weak writing. However, that can point the way to sentences in need of revising. Whenever you see that in your manuscript, read the sentence out loud without it. If the sentence still makes sense, delete the word that.

Search your manuscript electronically for that. Use Find/Replace to change every that from black to green. After you finish your revision, use Select All to change the text back to black. WT

# We Give Thanks

## Short Exhort

by Pat Bustamante

“WE DON’T ALWAYS REMEMBER TO FEEL  
GRATEFUL, BUT...”

I found the rocks in the creek behind my house. I found out about the “hole” (in bed-rock) under Cupertino, where I live, from seismograph maps. I saw on a NOVA program: Professor Kennett (geology) talk about “The Extinction of Mega-Beasts” and his theory that a death-dealing meteorite hit California 12,900 years ago...and I had some black-and-green rocks to prove it!

The BIG disappointment was: Prof. Kennett eagerly awaited my mailing of “meteorites” to him..but sent them back. Nope. Just rocks! (And he labelled every one.) The NEXT big disappointment: I took another batch of rocks to NASA/SETI and Dr. Jenniskens (ph.D), an astronomer, said: No. No meteorites here: no fusion-crust, no chondrules..and I had been



SO SURE.

By the way: meteorites on the open market at rock shops or mineral conventions go for around \$30 a gram. (I have a 10 lb. rock sample--very “volcanic”--wouldn’t THAT have paid for a self-published book!)

Gratitude? I am grateful for the novel that is coalescing around these rocks: the certainly of catastrophe to ancient “Clovis Man” and the extinction of all of our Mammoth-elephants..but I AM ALIVE.

One of my rocks speaks to me of: ghosts riding in on fragments of a destroyed planet. Atlantis, Mu and other continents that were real...those people came to MY people, MY Earth and spoke (in dreams) to all the prophets and wise-men/wise-women: how lucky we are to be the new-borns, to be starting out! What a grand ride ahead of us!

And what a GREAT story. How lucky I am for all the stories there are, and all the great storytellers, alive or dead! WT

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## On Feeling Gratitude

by Cathy Robbins

I didn’t feel grateful as my daughter turned into Central Park. She was one of nearly 44,000 runners in the 2010 New York Marathon, and we had managed to squeeze to the front of a thick crowd.

The weather was nearly perfect for the runners: brilliant sunshine, clear, almost painfully dry air, and cool temperatures. Some New Yorkers call days like this a “9/11 day,” because that was what the weather was like at that tragic time.

A festive feeling shot through the city’s five boroughs, where spectators stood three and four deep to cheer the runners on. As our daughter passed before us, our small chorus shouted out her name. She spotted us and waved wildly. At that moment, gratitude was nowhere to be seen or felt.

Gratitude, I’ve decided, is a wimpy word, not commensurate with the potent emotions in so many experiences. Some people feel they need to thank someone for the joy or success in their lives. In too many contexts, “gratitude” is a Hallmark moment. “Thank God” trips off our tongues. But I don’t recall God or Jesus ever asking for thanks. Christ’s message was simply, “Love one another.”

So we can set aside gratitude, not because we don’t want to thank anyone but because the joy, humility, or awe in our lives deserve more. I reserve “thank you” for small gestures: for someone who opens a door, passes the salt, or waits on my table.

Thus, for those big moments, instead of something as mundane as “thank you,” we can honor the person who brought us such joy. On Marathon Day, that was my daughter. She had run her first marathon in Boston in 2001. Since then, she had had three children, finished a graduate degree, and started a new venture dedicated to education. “Gratitude” is just too small a word for her courage and persistence and our pride and love.

Also, gratitude – “thank you” – has a finality to it, as if that good moment is gone, and we can move on. Instead, a good feeling properly described can linger and nourish us.

This approach to gratitude extends to other emotions. Let regret remind you how to do something right the next time. Let anger sweep over you, so you can feel its bitterness and then rub it away with the palms of your hands. Face envy head on, roll it around in your mouth, then spit it away.

Finally, reject the myth of “closure” at times of tragedy. If a loved one dies, grief remains forever. Initially, it sears the soul. But its pain lessens, and it becomes a companion that carries memory. Who would want to cut off the memory of a beloved friend or family member?

In short, being precise about feelings and using the right words for those feelings is the writer’s way. WT

# We Give Thanks - 2

## GIFTS

by Mary Miller Chiao

This last holiday season I proved to some of the friends and relatives on my gift list that I do, indeed, give a shit about them. They didn't receive the usual token presents of calendars, earrings, or chocolates. I shopped on line at OxFam America and gave, in their names, the organic green gift of manure. They received greeting cards from OxFam acknowledging their gift and telling them it was "cheaper, greener, and safer than chemical fertilizers" and would be sent to poor global families, or villages, to help increase crops.

Unlike in prior years, I received acknowledgements from every single person who received notice of their aromatic gift from OxFam.

It's difficult to focus on world poverty today. Everyone I know is trying to save money. Some of my friends are out of work and in danger of losing their homes; others have cut back drastically on their purchases. The bottled water and lattes from Starbucks are no longer an option for many, as are the gym memberships. We're all concerned about more problems on the financial horizon. It's easy to put the problems of the rest of the world behind us. After all, isn't it important to take care of ourselves first and then we can take care of others?

But over the next year, 18 million people (9.7 million children per UNICEF) will die from poverty or poverty-related illnesses that are easily treatable such as measles, malaria, and diarrhea. Those of us who view ourselves as poor are not this kind of poor. We still have our cars and our TV sets. We have an infrastructure with police, a legal system, hospitals, transportation, medical care, and stores.

The very poor are spread across the globe, but the majority live in Southeast Asia and Sub-Sahara Africa. They don't have access to medical care, clean water, food, clothing, decent housing, and education. In some countries, life expectancy is under fifty years and one in five children die before their fifth birthday. Many organizations such as UNICEF and OxFam are helping and individuals such as Bill Gates and Warren Buffet have pledged money, but it still is not enough.

The problems of the world's poor are very complicated. I recently read Peter Singer's book, *The Life You Can Save*. I understand the situation better, and Singer has given me tools to figure out how I can help, and effectively judge charities.

I don't have to make big changes in my life to have an impact on world poverty and save lives. One of the ways I can help is with gifts given through charitable organizations. They give me pleasure; my friends and family appreciate them; and it takes me very little time to shop. Many organizations have on line gift stores. Choose the area of need that best tugs at your heart, and maybe you too can find the perfect gift. WT

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## A State of Mind

by Rita Beach

Gratitude is a state of mind which stays dormant until some sentimental occasion, near death experience, or of course, the Holiday Season.

Gratitude manifests itself at the family get-together at Thanksgiving with a prayer before the feast which reminds us that everybody needs to be thankful for everything, especially family and friends. We have our health, all our own teeth still, and most of us have a job, even though this was not a really good year.

Uncle Kirk lost his job--wife said they caught him drinking at work for the third time. Janie is pregnant again--boy, who didn't see that coming. Cousin John leaves for Afghanistan in two weeks--damn fool signed up for another tour of duty. He should be thankful he made it out alive the last time, but no, he's going back. Dad's suffering with the gout, and Mom



can't remember anything lately, but I'm thankful this year.

Let me offer you some down-home advice during the holidays:

1. Make sure the TV is working, so the football geeks will stay in that room.
2. Buy the turkey and all the trimmings at Nob Hill and claim you did the whole thing by yourself late last night.
3. Don't invite that Baptist preacher that came last year. The food will be cold by the time he says grace and finishes the laundry list of things he thinks we should be thankful for.

The holidays are times to express our gratitude for all our blessings, but what we're really thankful for, is when the season is all over. WT

# What's the Matter with Matter

By: G Wayne

Across the cosmos, my stars are placed. They twinkle a good-humored blue to all who are watching for I am the constellation Hamster. I can look out and see the planets like insignificant globes of paper suspended in space. Most of them are dark with no indication of life or movement, except a scant few. These are the ones that if you watch them long enough you can see sparkles and flashes of light. I feel as if I could just reach out and kick one of them away into space, but no. I cannot interfere with this wonder of creation, as it would affect all creation. The marvel is in the complexity. The pattern within pattern, within pattern, that seems to go on forever and it only stops at the end of perception. I know about this. I know this from the macro to the micro for I am Matter; I am the large and I am the small. I am the planet, the ocean and the land. I am all living things, what they are made of and the still smaller parts.

Matter moves from place to place from time to time and so do I. I never know where I will end up. Once I was popcorn. I grew up as a special type of hybrid corn, better than the ordinary corn. I wouldn't even talk to the ordinary corn. There was a big gap between the fields and that's the way we liked it.

I remember being picked and put out to dry in the sun. I was shrinking and I could feel a tremendous pressure building up inside me. If I could not keep cool, I knew I would burst. Then came that fateful day when I was dumped into the hot oil. The pressure kept building until I could not take it, and suddenly I burst. Oh, it felt so good I was free and I could stretch out; it was the cathartic experience of a lifetime. All my friends were poppin' a beat, and we were dancing. Pop, pop, the Pop Corn Mambo! Pop, pop...and as the steam rose, I moved on.

I traveled from steam to water vapor to rain that fondled the branches of a mighty evergreen. This silver fir was the biggest in the forest and the first to drink of the rain. I was drawn into the powerful trunk and I became the tree. Slowly reaching out to the sky, my tree is embraced by the sun, nurtured by the rain and massaged by the wind. The ground that holds me straight and makes me part of the world provides all that I need to live. For two hundred years I have enjoyed this life and lived in total contentment. I am grateful for every one of those days and the nights; they were all wonderful. Just to be a living thing experiencing the wonder of life was all that...mattered. It was all I needed to be.

I remember the sting of the ax chewing away at my trunk. There was a feeling like the one that the wind would make, but this was violent and fast and then I smashed into the ground. What happened next was so malevolent, so cruel that it is blocked from my memory. All I can remember is the fact that the cutting went on for hours. The next thing I remember is waking up and finding I was a credenza. There was a mirror on the wall across from me and I could see what I looked like. Well, maybe I couldn't see exactly, but the mirror would tell me things. I know that I was so polished it was as if I glowed. You could look deep within my complex grain, seeing pattern within pattern, as far as you could perceive.

I would eventually be sold many times and travel from house to house...each time I was sold for more money. I finally ended up in a museum. That was very nice. Did they pamper me! Constant temperature and humidity, special lighting, and they would polish me every other day like clockwork. It was more great times that would come to an end all too soon. The night watchman fell asleep with a cigarette in his hand and burned the place to the ground.

I changed again. The smoke went up to the sky, but when it cooled I fell back to earth.

I stopped on something smooth and black. It was the hood of an automobile...a 1951 Hudson Hornet. Wow! It was unbelievable, a real automobile, and not just any automobile but a Hudson Hornet! I couldn't wait to become one with-no, to become the car. Unfortunately, I found that this could not happen. I was just dirt on its hood and that is as close as I would ever get to it. I wanted to be that car. I got to be the stupid tree and then that piece of crap credenza. Why couldn't I be the car? I wanted to be a Hudson Hornet. It was just not fair. Then the car started to move. I was frightened. What if I fell off? The car sure did ride nice, but I wanted to know where I was going. I started getting into that fluid motion of the Hudson and just when I started to relax, I saw the sign. I began to stiffen. How could it be; it was just too soon. The Hudson was heading to a car wash. First, I could not become the car, and then I only got to ride a couple of blocks to end up getting washed off? I felt like dirt...I was dirt, and then I was washed down into the sewer with all the other road grime.

I bounced around the earth for a while. Sometime later, I ended up being this constellation with big blue stars. I look out all the time and see the earth floating around like it's something special. I just want to give it a kick. WT

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## Open Mic for High Schoolers

*Continued from page 11*

The students participated in three open mics. Only one had read in front of a group, and the other two had never read. The open mic was a difficult experience for all of them, and one cried during her reading. Their parents and other family members also attended, and the audience supported them.

I know that the students valued the experience even though it challenged them as writers and as people. Using the open mic for high school writers in a structured program might be a good project for CWC. It would have to be a small program, no more than six students, and our members should spend some time mentoring the participants. Breakthrough Collaborative might be a good partner. WT

## “Dancing ...” – An Audio Book Reviewed by Dave LaRoche

How many of us have purchased Betty’s book and put it on the shelf until that time to read it came upon us, or had the time but the queue was full—others long waiting for us to crack their covers? I confess to the latter. I’ve heard her speak (many of us have) and was enthralled with her story. It’s not unusual, the story: a spouse dies after a long-term marriage leaving the other with an empty bag—most everything gone, a life vacated by the very stuff that defines it. In this puzzling situation, some wither and die with the scraps they see left. Others bloom with new freedom once the habit of love and soul-mate is recognized broken. (I didn’t say forgotten.) Betty is of the latter bent. A widow who has found a new life, has breathed deeply and blossomed, has welcomed a metamorphosis and become a woman on the prowl—seeking new adventure and success.

Dancing in my Nightgown by Betty Auchard is now out on CD as an audio book, and available at the ordinary outlets—MP3 compatible. I picked up a copy because I hadn’t yet got to the book but still wanted the whole story. Not only did I get it unabridged, I got her reading it—what a bargain. The quality is excellent; her delivery is soothing. The story of transformation is exciting and compelling, and there’s a marvelous treat: her voice transcends with the story. She begins the first chapter sounding sweet, cautious, and monotone—available but no more, the good wife left over and trying to find her new position. As she locates it, the pace picks up, the tone changes and varies. There are highs, lows, and accelerations; a moderate fortissimo now, then softer, more sedate and occasionally followed by a tickle up the ivories. It’s marvelous how she injects her development into the expression of her narrative—like watching a video. In the end, as you listen, you’ve also felt the person of Betty Auchard as she struggled with her grief, then hitched up her britches and explored the possibilities—adopting then expanding a new beginning.

I no longer have to wait while the dust cover on the book in my queue does its job. I walk; I go here and there in a car; I work at my bench and occasionally have my hands in the dishwasher. All along, I can listen as Betty leads me through the change she experienced as she dropped the grief and the sorrow, donned a new perspective, and went dancing in her nightgown.

## Dancing in My Nightgown by Betty Auchard A review by Susan Paluzzi

Betty Auchard’s “Dancing in My Nightgown” is a prize. The book takes you on Betty’s journey coping with the loss of her beloved spouse, but it is not a catharsis as much as it is a touching and often comical sharing. We are lead through Betty’s growth from widow to independent woman.

I read the book when it first was released and was struck by the humor within. And while difficult times are common to us all, there is nothing “common” about Betty’s stories. They are personal and unique to her life, and allow us to befriend her by reading her innermost thoughts.

Now I have had the pleasure to rediscover this book through an audio copy. Betty is a natural to read her work. She has a musical background and it can be heard in the lilt of her pleasant voice. The recounting of her memories is more effective in some ways with this medium. She can punctuate pain and elevate us to laughter with the cadence of her voice and the emotion in her telling. The book is read in a conversational tone, and that reaches the listener more, since it is as if she is talking to you alone.

I also was impressed with Betty’s way with words in both renditions. Any author who can use the phrase, “the clang of quarters,” has an ear and eye for writing.

I look forward to reading Betty’s next offering, “The Home for the Friendless.” Any work by Betty is accomplished with care and humor. And every participant in her storytelling, whether it be audio or the printed word, comes away better for it. WT

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### Are you thinking what I am thinking?

Are you thinking what I am thinking?

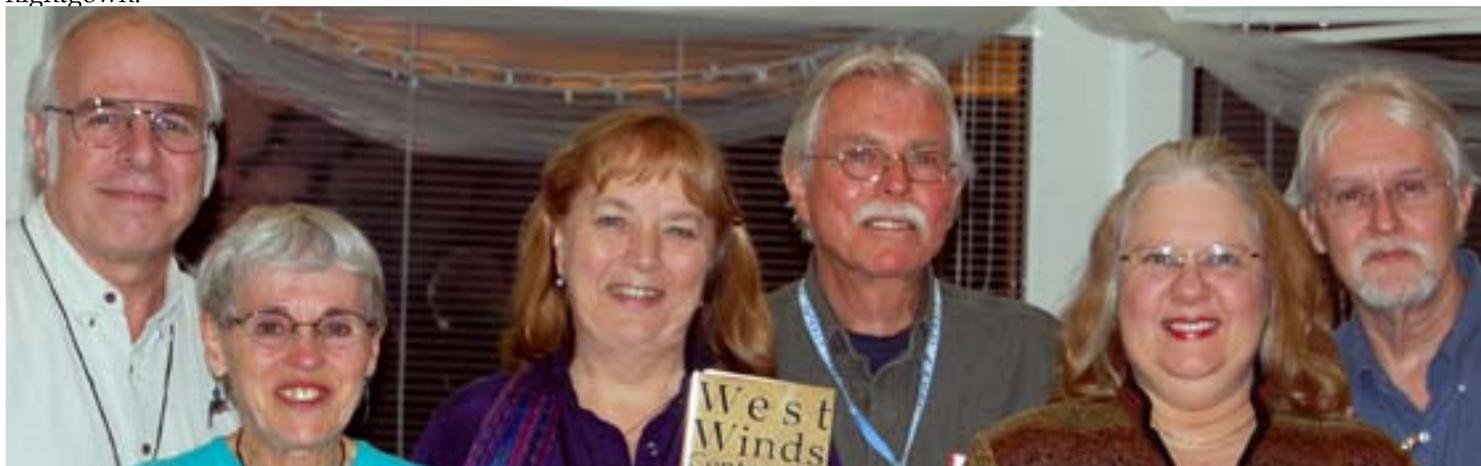
Is it just coincidence that I got not just one but two reviews of Betty Auchard’s audio book. Or do you think that just maybe Betty has reached out to other members of the club to get their opinion on her book in audio form?

What about you? Do you have a book? Why not ask another SBW member to give it a read AND a review and ask them to send it to me?

What have you got to lose?

*Editor*

L-to-R Bob Garfinkle, Majorie Johnson, Carolyn Donnell, Dave LaRoche, Meredy Amyx and Bill Baldwin -  
SBW members published in statewide **West Winds Centennial**



## 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](mailto:networking@southbaywriters.com) or to the club post office box and we will add your listing to our directory of experts.*

### Asia, Japan, China, Russia, Blogging

Bill Belew  
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### Astrology, Singing

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### Astronomy, History of Astronomy

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### Aero, Aerospace

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### Teaching and the Arts

Betty Auchard  
[Btauchard@aol.com](mailto:Btauchard@aol.com)

### I am an expert too, in...

Your Name  
Your email address

## Ongoing Critique Groups

### The Arm Wavers

Meets downtown San Jose on Wednesdays  
Contact: Georgia Platts – [gplatts@comcast.net](mailto:gplatts@comcast.net)  
Closed to new members at this time

### Writers' Salon

Meets in Santa Clara  
Contact: Edie Matthews – [edie333@sbcglobal.net](mailto:edie333@sbcglobal.net)  
Closed to new members at this time

### Le Boulanger Writers

Meets at Le Boulanger  
Pruneyard Shopping Center, Campbell  
Contact: Karen Hartley – [Sew1Machin@aol.com](mailto:Sew1Machin@aol.com)  
All genres; open to all

### Northpoint Critique Group

Meets in Cupertino  
Contact: Valerie Whong – [valeriewhong@att.net](mailto:valeriewhong@att.net)  
Closed to new members at this time

### Our Voices

Meets in Santa Clara  
Meets every other Tuesday  
7:15 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.  
Genres: Fiction, nontechnical nonfiction, memoir  
Contact: Dave LaRoche – [dalaroche@comcast.net](mailto:dalaroche@comcast.net)  
No openings at this time

### Valley Writers

Meets: Valley Village Retirement Center, Santa Clara  
Mondays 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.  
Contact: Marjorie Johnson – [marjohnson89@earthlink.net](mailto:marjohnson89@earthlink.net)  
All genres; open to all

### New Critique Group forming in Campbell

62. S. San Thomas Aquino  
Tuesdays 7-10pm  
Contact: Danita - [blueize@me.com](mailto:blueize@me.com)



## 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 on the third Sunday of each month, except for July and August, at 1:30 at the Oakland Public Library Main Branch. [cwc-berkeley.com](http://cwc-berkeley.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)

**Fremont:** Meets (except in July, December, and on holiday weekends) from 2-4 p.m. on the fourth Saturday of the month at DeVry University, 6600 Dumbarton Circle, Room 204, Fremont. Contact: Richard Scott, [rikscott@yahoo.com](mailto:rikscott@yahoo.com); (510) 791-8639

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

**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)

**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](http://redwoodwriters.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)

**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)

### Stay Informed!

Sign up for the SBW Email List to receive meeting and event announcements.  
[southbaywriters.com](http://southbaywriters.com)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday			
<h1>December 2010</h1>			1	2	3 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza	4			
			5	6	7 7-9p Meetup - Campell 7:30-9:30 Mark Twain Westmont	8	9	10 7:30p OpenMic Borders Santana Row, SJ	11
			12	13	14 <b>Holiday Bash</b>	15	16	17 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard	18 3-5pm Mega Meetup Potluck Campbell -WMC
			19	20	21 7:30-9:30 Mark Twain Westmont	22	23	24 7:30p Open Mic Borders Sunnyvale	25

### What's a Meetup?

A meetup is a weekly, sometimes twice a week meeting for SBW members and other writers who want to discuss and learn about writing- and blogging-related topics.

The topics, places and times can be discovered in detail at:

<http://www.meetup.com/Silicon-Valley-Bloggers/>

&

<http://www.meetup.com/South-Bay-Writers/>

&

<http://www.meetup.com/Silicon-Valley-Bloggers-and-Writers/>

There are more than **1050 members** in these groups = lots of networking opportunities!

### 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

### Other Open Mics

#### 10Ten Gallery

Last Friday, 6:30-10:00 p.m.  
1010 E. Taylor St., San Jose  
Al Preciado's home

#### Poets@Play

Second Sunday 1 p.m.-4 p.m.  
1650 Senter Rd., San Jose  
Markham House History Park

Check out the  
South Bay Writers  
**Blog**  
[southbaywriters.com](http://southbaywriters.com)  
Click SBW Journal—Blog

### South Bay Writers Anthology



\$10

At the meeting.  
On the website.

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

### SF/Peninsula Branch Holiday Open House

Saturday, December 11th  
5:00 pm – 8:00 pm  
The Peninsula Regent  
One Baldwin (at El Camino Real)

### 2011 Sandy Writing Contest

[www.thesandy.org](http://www.thesandy.org)

Deadline is February 13, 2011



**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

**Monthly Meetings**  
**Every Second Tuesday, 6:00 p.m.**

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

Did you know that first-time visitors to our monthly meeting who learn about it from Meetup pay the member's price?

