



WRITERSTALK

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Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

May Speaker

Wendy Nelson Tokunaga: Perseverance Pays Off

by Bill Baldwin

Wendy Nelson Tokunaga's road to publication was hardly smooth—her first published novel was the fifth she'd written. She's the perfect example of someone who never gave up on her literary dream and lived to tell the tale. Find out how she did it and how to avoid some of the mistakes she made along the way.

Wendy is the author of the novels *Love in Translation* and *Midori by Moonlight* and the award-winning self-published novel *No Kidding*. She has also written two children's nonfiction books and has had short stories published in various literary journals. Wendy signed her two-book deal with St. Martin's just as she was beginning an MFA in Writing program at the University of San Francisco in 2006. Along with her MFA, she also holds a BA in Psychology from San Francisco State University.

Love in Translation: After receiving a puzzling phone call and a box full of mysteries, 33-year-old fledgling singer Celeste Duncan is off to Japan to search for a long-lost relative who could hold the key to the identity of the father she never knew. This overwhelming place where nothing is quite as it seems changes Celeste in ways she never expected, leading her to ask: What is the true meaning of family? And what does it mean to discover your own voice?

Midori by Moonlight: Midori Saito's dream seems about to come true. Too independent for Japanese society, Midori has always felt like a stranger in her native land. After she falls in love with Kevin, an American English teacher, she readily agrees to leave home and start a new life with him in San Francisco. Dumped then by this too-perfect man, possessing only a smattering of fractured English, little cash, and a visa expiring in 60 days, Midori decides to go it alone, surprising even herself as she hangs onto her "American Dream."

Wendy offers manuscript consulting and is also a writing teacher. She has taught at Books Inc. and Book Passage and will be teaching this fall for Stanford University's Online Writer's Studio. She lives with her surfer-dude/musician husband Manabu and their cat Meow in Half Moon Bay. In her spare time she enjoys singing jazz, cool pop, and Japanese karaoke. Visit her website at WendyNelsonTokunaga.com. wt



Wendy Nelson Tokunaga

April Recap

Jordan Rosenfeld

by Nina Amir

Jordan Rosenfeld, author of *Make A Scene: Crafting a Powerful Story One Scene at a Time* (Writer's Digest Books) and *Write Free! Attracting the Creative Life* with Rebecca Lawton (BeiJaFlor Books), focused her talk on getting published by finding opportunities everywhere.

Sometimes writers find success on a "serpentine path," Rosenfeld said. Therefore, "You must take opportunities where you find them, because they lead to amazing things." She added that writers also must make their own opportunities when the ones they want don't exist.

By repeating her mantra—"Yes"—each time an opportunity presented itself, Rosenfeld has achieved a wide range of success. In addition to two published books, she also edited *Zebulon Nights: An Anthology of LiveWire Readers* (Word Riot Press). She serves as editor and columnist for *Writer's Digest* magazine, and her freelance journalism has appeared in such publications as *AlterNet.org*, *Marin Magazine*, *North Bay Bohemian*, *The Pacific Sun*, *Seattle Conscious Choice*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The St. Petersburg Times*, and *The Writer*. Her book reviews are featured regularly on *The California Report*, a news magazine produced by NPR-affiliate KQED radio. When she isn't writing, she also edits manuscripts for clients.

Rosenfeld related several opportunities that led to her becoming a published author—an event she describes as "writing the right book proposal in the right way at the right time." From the resulting experiences, she offered these tips:

Memoirs start on page 11.

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President's Prowling

by Dave LaRoche
President, South Bay Writers

This and That

“**A**nd what about this table, anyone here?” At meetings we honor our successes. We direct our attention to the rungs in the ladder and cheer a member's latest step. As we recognize these incremental achievements, we also engage in our expanding writers' community. Celebrating that connection is good; as one of us succeeds, so comes the promise to all. So stand up and bring on the applause. “*Let's go to this table, anyone here?*”



We had great attendance at our April meeting: 67 attendees. Jordan was fun and her message motivating. Our attendance has been growing right along—why did so many come? In fact, four guests became members. I think it's the whole thing—the camaraderie and easy exchange, the inviting environment—and yes, of course, the programs. Writers want what we offer and we offer it freely, and we may congratulate ourselves on our cordiality, and—wait a minute—do you suppose it's my jokes?

The retreat was a success, and that makes me happy. It was a NorCal event, you know. Branches ask, “What can such an association do for us and why should we support it?” The retreat is certainly one answer. NorCal Group is a new idea, less than a year old, and yet we have a web presence, a speaker exchange, and a publishing committee looking at methods that suit members' needs. We support one another's events, solve problems, and collaborate. Common interests among branches abound, and we have made this opportunity to sit together and talk eyeball-to-eyeball. And we expect that talk to develop, and to polish those interests to a fine glow, and we expect big things to happen. Stay tuned; join in.

You have heard me talk about outreach, that we owe our community a bit of the value we derive from the benefit it provides—the no-tax status plus an elevation and priority that pushes the gate open when it is thought we do good works. The Young Writers Workshop (Karen Sweet and Suzette Gamero this year and Marilyn Fahey and Jamie Miller last) and the many who supported it are paying back on our behalf, fulfilling expectations and bringing a balance. We *are* doing good, and our Young Writers Program is the proof in the pudding.

Your East of Eden Working Group (emphasis on working) met this past Sunday, as we do once a month (in smaller groups more often), and guess what? The good

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Join With Us

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



WRITERSTALK

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Submissions

Members of the South Bay Writers Club are encouraged to submit their creative works for publication in *WritersTalk*. Suggested word limits are not absolute; query the editor. Electronic submissions should be text or attached MS Word file sent to newsletter@southbaywriters.com; or mail double-spaced, typewritten copy to

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Guest Columns

Almost Anything Goes (400 words)

News Items (400 words)

Letters to the Editor (300 words)

to Andrea Galvacs
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Creative Works

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

Accolades

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Announcements and Advertisements

newsletter@southbaywriters.com

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

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Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx
Editor

OMG OMG OMG!!!!



My brother Don is a jock, and I am a bookworm. Because of this difference in our approaches to life, we've carried out a friendly series of deprecatory exchanges for most of our adult lives. These sideswipes usually take the form of my brother's saying something like, "Yo! What did you think of the Raiders' game last night?" and my responding, "You know I don't follow basketball." Or my asking him, "Have you read Neil Gaiman's latest?" and his responding, "Who?"

And it is for that reason that you could have knocked me over with less than half a feather when he sent me a Mark Twain quote that he had found amusing:

I haven't any right to criticise books, and I don't do it except when I hate them. I often want to criticise Jane Austen, but her books madden me so that I can't conceal my frenzy from the reader; and therefore I have to stop every time I begin. Every time I read *Pride and Prejudice* I want to dig her up and beat her over the skull with her own shin-bone.

—Letter to Joseph Twichell, September 13, 1898

The quote made me laugh right out loud, and I duly forwarded it to Meredy, who responded by saying, "I love the way it expresses the sentiment so perfectly without any caps, exclamation points, or OMGs. I wish today's youngsters would learn something about real expression, which does not require smileys to communicate." And then she said, "Did I just hand you another editorial?"

Being perpetually (and shamelessly) in search of material for editorials, I grabbed my soapbox and jumped right on it, prepared to seize those pesky youngsters of today by their literary lapels and give them a sound verbal shaking. Then nothing happened. I had a beginning, all right, but when I got to the end of the preceding paragraph, I thudded to a halt and ran off to Google for some help with where to go next—and surprised myself with the conclusion I came to.

There will always be the ignorant and vapid among us, and I'm not going to go there. This is about clarity of written—or perhaps even literary—expression, and those folks don't contribute much under the best of circumstances. Virtually since I began to read and speak, I have had a better command of English than many do, yet it seems like only yesterday that I would frequently respond to a friend's comment with "far out" or "Heavy!" OMG!

The smiley or emoticon could have been invented at any time while people were pounding away on Underwood and Royal manual typewriters, yet the first smiley didn't come into being until 11:44 (no a.m. or p.m. designation is given, so a 24-hour clock is assumed) on September 19, 1982. Thus, the smiley is going on 28 years old, and it's taken a good deal of that time for smileys to come into common use. The first appearance was on a Carnegie Mellon Computer Science Department electronic bulletin board. Bulletin boards were the province only of geeks and microcomputer enthusiasts; it took the Internet to bring the smiley to full flower. Check it out: www.cs.cmu.edu/smiley/. The web page is pretty cute. Be sure to click "Read More."

It's my opinion, based now on fifteen or twenty minutes' online research, that "OMG" is as much generational slang or shibboleth as "far out" and "heavy" were in their day: sloppy or lazy speech—using a meaningless sound rather than thinking up and presenting a coherent statement in response to a comment or situation—but not to be taken seriously. A good deal of the use of OMG online is

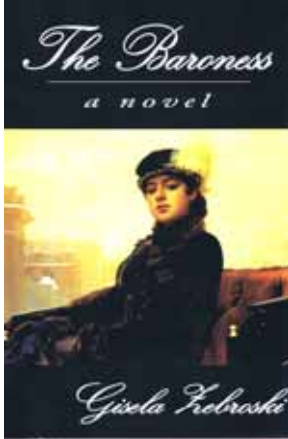
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The Baroness

by Robert A. Garfinkle

The Baroness, by Gisela Zebroski, 481 pages; \$16.95 (paperback; Menlo Park, CA: Inkling Press, ISBN-13: 978-0-971039-3-1)

If you are interested in Russian and Baltic history in the early part of the last century, this novel is a book for you. South Bay Writers author Gisela Zebroski has put together a riveting story



of the forty-year-old Baroness Elisa von Hohenheim and her struggles to keep her family alive through the devastation and depredations of World War I, starvation winters, and the Bolshevik invasions of Latvia after Germany surrendered.

The book starts in 1914, and we see Elisa in her aristocratic life of luxury in prewar Russia. Her elderly husband, Baron Carl von Hohenheim, is a high-level advisor to the Tsar. There is trouble brewing in the land, and their estate buildings and home are set afire by one of their workers, who is wrapped up in the anti-Tsar Bolshevik propaganda. During the Russian Revolution of 1917, the communists confiscate what is left of Carl's fortune and the family flees to Riga, where Elisa's sister and her physician husband Julius (Carl's brother) live. The Reds invade Latvia and more trouble descends on the family. Their three older sons go off to war. One son is killed, one disappears and is not heard from again, and the third son becomes a war hero.

Just when you think all is going to be well with the family, the author throws in another twist and Elisa must sacrifice more of her sophisticated breeding to keep going. Elisa is surrounded by conflict, from the world events that are reshaping her life to the conflict created

Top Six Reasons to Visit South Bay Writers' Website

by Victoria M. Johnson

One of the many benefits of membership is our chapter's website. However, I'll be the first to admit that I haven't been there in a while. So, on a recent visit, I was quite surprised by how much useful information I found. The South Bay Writers website provides a variety of helpful tools for informing, educating, and promoting members.



Victoria M. Johnson
Contributing Editor

1. Informing

There's a blog, an event calendar, a Yahoo group, and more. The home page has information about upcoming chapter meetings and events through December. The site has the scoop on anything you want to know about workshops for our chapter or affiliated with our chapter. Open Mics has its own page with a calendar of regularly scheduled readings. Also, the latest updates to the East of Eden Conference are posted to the site.

2. Educating

Did you know that you can access the *WritersTalk* newsletter back issues to 2005? Did you know there's a cool cumulative index that allows you to easily locate articles by title, author,

by her adulterous love for a younger man, Count Misha Baranowsky. Will they both survive the wars? Read the book to find out.

There is the old cliché of a great read being a page-turner. I found myself putting other tasks aside to read this entire book. Now, that says a lot about the tight plotting the author used in crafting this book. I recommend *The Baroness* to anyone who might enjoy reading the story of the transformation of a woman from one who depends on servants to tend to her every need to one who must find the strength to fend for herself in order to keep her family alive in troubling times. WT

genre, or date? How helpful is that? You don't have to rifle through your stacks of newsletters to unearth that educational article or recap. Come to the chapter website and find it easily. If you want to participate in the "Exploring the Writer's Craft" DVD series, learn about the SBW Learning Center on the home page.

3. Promoting

Here's where the website really excels. Members have the opportunity to be included in the Gallery of Members page.

This is a wonderful way for members to put their bio out there and get a taste of self-promotion. It's a great place to learn what your fellow writers are up to. I encourage all members, published or unpublished, to write a brief bio and submit a gallery page of your own. It's a benefit we should all take advantage of. Members also have a special book page. Books are sorted by type and have links to purchase or find out more about them. Another nice feature of the site is the member spotlight, where the chapter highlights a member who has contributed to the chapter in some way. If you host a blog you might want to post your link on the Member Blog page. If you're curious what this blogging thing is all about, visit some of these blog sites.

4. Celebrating

There are fabulous photos of fabulous events. Meetings, parties, and conferences have been visually recorded for you to enjoy. The chapter likes to celebrate members' successes, and it shows. Members who have won Jack London Awards or Matthews-Baldwin Awards are recognized on the Members page.

5. Networking

The chapter provides a variety of networking opportunities to members. Visit the Networking page to learn more about critique groups, mentoring, and professional services offered by members. The website has instructions for contacting the networking chair for these and other networking questions you may have.

6. Encouraging

I added this point because when you sum up all the parts above, you're

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Don't Miss East of Eden!

by Bill Baldwin

As you may know, every other year our South Bay Writers group sponsors the East of Eden Conference in Salinas. The conference is coming up this September and really is not to be missed. With forty-eight workshops, the ten or more agents, several critiquing editors, and the chance to meet Luis Valdez and Selden Edwards, the conference provides a unique opportunity to hone your craft and pitch your book. You can read your work at open mics, hear the work of other writers, and enter several writing contests.

This year, in fact, you could win a substantial prize for your writing. In addition to the \$200 First Prize and the \$100 Second Prize in each category, we are offering a \$1,000 Grand Prize for the best overall submission. I'm sure this

will keep our judges up late comparing genres—and I hope it will encourage you to submit your work!



Bill Baldwin

July 15th—so you still have two months to polish your work! Entry fee is \$20 per submission. Winners will be announced at our Saturday night dinner.

The four genres for this year's contest are Novel, Short Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry. See our website (southbaywriters.com) for the submission details for each category. The deadline for your entries is

And on top of all this, you have the opportunity to get up to eight pages of your work critiqued by a professional editor or author. Details are on our website. For \$35 per submission you get 15 minutes with an editor appropriate to your genre who will go over your manuscript with you. The deadline to submit manuscripts for critiquing is August 15th. And of course you can also pitch your work to the attending agents.

So whether you are a neophyte looking for information, a more experienced writer looking for advice, or a seasoned veteran hoping for awards, East of Eden has a lot to offer you! And the Steinbeck Center and Steinbeck House are just around the corner! WT

Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

I have a new writing partner; her name is Monkey. Not the individual I expected, she has four legs instead of two, but she will do. Every morning when I sit at the computer, she materializes, her



Jackie Mutz
Contributing Editor

shiny Bombay sleekness waiting to warm my lap. Periodically, she climbs on my desk, her body blocking the computer screen, interrupting my work. It is imperative that my focus not stray too far from her. After all, she keeps me company while I write and must reap her just rewards.

Monkey is an almost all-black female kitty who found her way to me via the old Agnews State Hospital grounds as a feral kitten. But that is another story. Here are some success stories our South Bay writers had to share:

- Richard Burns is attending a ten-week online course on fiction writing presented and sponsored by Random House, South Africa. About eighty

students participate in assignments such as critiquing each other's novels. As part of his virtual classroom experience, he had the beginning and ending of his 110,000-word Shoshone Indian novel, *Sagebrush at Stony Creek*, and a typical dialog scene go through the critique process. As Richard notes, "Those samples from my novel were reviewed by a highly qualified Random House agent, Ron Irwin, now living in Cape Town. Who knows? Maybe, he can connect me with American agents and publishers. Small success, maybe, but it's tremendously encouraging to me." And encouraging to all South Bay writers.

- Pat Bustamante has been busy. The *Song of the San Joaquin*, a quarterly review, accepted a poem, "a takeoff on the crowded commute to the Big Valley from here," for its spring edition. Lost Hills Press is also interested in publishing it as part of a book, Chaparral Poets awarded her Honorable Mention for a poem to be published in *Updrafts*, and she read her poetry at a Poet Laureate convention (she is the only licensed poet in the city of Cupertino). Keep up the

good work, Pat.

- Audry Lynch's article "Between Chicago and Pittsburgh: A Chance Meeting Sheds Light on *The Moon Is Down*" has been selected for publication in the *Steinbeck Review*. She also served on the Literary Row Authors portion of the Pleasanton Poetry, Prose, and Arts Festival Saturday, April 17. Thirty authors displayed their books and answered participant questions. You are an inspiration, Audry.
- Carolyn Donnell had another poem, "Just Enough of a Reminder," put up on Bea Garth's web blog at eosthecreativecontext.wordpress.com.

Monkey (her Japanese name is Saru and no, I did not name her Monkey) has become my motivation for writing. Imagine a kitten-cat being my writing muse, but it works. I find myself at the computer more often; the words come easier when she is purring away in my lap or asleep in the window. It's a comfort thing, I guess. What gets you motivated to write? Email us at accolades@southbaywriters.com. Oh, and don't forget to include your writing success stories, announcements and anything else you want to share about your writing. We're all ears. WT

The NorCal Retreat

A Change of Scenery

Changing Our Scenes

by Richard Burns

What's in a word? Take the word "retreat," for example. Like many words in our language, it has several meanings. Though I didn't know for sure which meaning applied this time, I did know that this retreat was cheap, was nearby, and would stimulate my mind. It posed a timely chance to explore new territories.

From April 5 through 7, some 24 writers got away from it all and gathered 15 miles up a winding road in the redwoods east of Watsonville to rough it, do something different, and think good thoughts.

The CWC-NorCal Writers Retreat at Pema Osel Ling Retreat Center was held in a beautiful setting. Dale King, the instigator and primary project administrator, gave the group a tour around this peace-loving Buddhist retreat, and we settled into our respective cabins or into one of the two main houses, each house accommodating a lot of people comfortably. The spacious living room of the Sangha House was where workshops were held.



The Sanctuary at Pema Osel Ling fosters a contemplative and creative environment.
Photo: Donn Clark

In one of the first workshops, Nora Profit handed out an article she had written asking each of us to look for the lines that carried high emotional impact. Nora spoke about rhythm, how rhythm can make or break an article, and how to recognize bad rhythm. "Read [your work] aloud—real loud. If you stumble on a phrase, fix it. You don't want your reader stumbling on the same phrase." Sentences should feel fast when the action in your scene is

fast, light and frivolous when the conversation is gossipy, slow when you want the reader to pause and think.

She drew from her personal experience as executive director of The Writing Loft—"Where writers become authors." Nora was overflowing with good ideas, watching us closely to eliminate ineffective practices that mark an amateur. "I want to help everyone who has the desire to get published; whatever it takes," she said.

One exercise involved taking a current project and filling in the following blank: "I am writing my novel to prove _____." This is a surprisingly difficult blank to fill in since most of us did not really start writing our brainchild with this question in mind. It certainly adds focus to the project if you can answer it concisely. Most of us tried hard; some of us struck out or settled for a bunt. She sharpened our thinking.

Nora reminded us that we want to effect an emotional response in the reader: "If *you* don't scare, *they* won't care," she said.

In one of the workshops she talked about summary lines—short one-liners that describe what a book is about. One example: For E. B. White's story of a spider and a "terrific pig" entitled *Charlotte's Web*, the one-liner would be, "Where is that farmer going with the axe?" The whole story is about that. Another exercise involved creating great beginning sentences for our own current projects, and we shared those and learned from each other.

"Think in scenes, not chapters," Nora said. Consider: How do I want the reader to feel? What do I want my reader to think? You are in charge of manipulating these things. Ask yourself "Did I do it?" How about word choice, how about tempo of words? Each scene should have an explicit goal; if not, it doesn't belong in your story. Delete adjectives and adverbs, or be extremely judicious in their use. (Nora raved about Pat Conroy's writing and his selective use of adjectives.) Reading is interactive—the writer needs to figure out something the reader needs to hear.

In a mini-class, Nina Amir presented a brief, impromptu tutorial about how she became a columnist for Examiner.com. We could do the same

for our specialty area. Nina touched on creating individual blogging sites and the potential of networking through the Internet—interesting, useful information, especially these days.

Fabulous meals were offered in the dining hall. After dinner we had quiet time to meditate. Some of us took the long stairs down to the Buddhist temple to observe their religious ritual. Others strode the steep, muddy hike down to the retreat's stupa, a ceremonial statue used by monks as a meditation aid. Some of us crashed in our cabins/houses for a few minutes or wrote, presumably refreshed and newly inspired. Folks in the houses could easily socialize, talk about their projects, or point out the window at the deer and scurrying quail.



Alex Leon, Anne Prowell, Betty Auchard, and Jane Glendinning compare notes between workshop sessions. Photo: Donn Clark

When I sat down to listen to one of the final workshops, I didn't know what to expect of the woman dressed in African-motif clothes as big and loud as her voice. She carried a modified gourd strung on the outside with beads, a musical instrument she played, with rhythm, and taught us shy writers to sing a Nigerian song of peace to all interconnected things. Quite a sound.

"I am Luisah Teish," she said, "EcoNest advisor." She spoke of the tradition her father taught her, never to walk into the woods without singing to the trees. She spoke slowly, each syllable rounded and fully finished before beginning the next, loud enough to hear, slow enough to think about what she had to say.

She clarified the difference between Myth and myth, the latter meaning someone else's belief, a belief that isn't true. The capitalized Myth is the "belief

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Where, Oh, Where Have I Gone?

by Anna Thumann

How could it happen so fast? When I close my eyes the person I see and the emotions I feel have never changed. But when I open my eyes and look at the reflection in the mirror, I can't relate to the person I see at all.

First of all, how did my body change so much, and I didn't even realize it was happening. Overnight—I swear it happened overnight! I was going to go on a "dream vacation," and I needed some resort-type clothes. My shopping list consisted of a new swimsuit, some cute shorts with matching T-shirts, and a bright little sundress. Well, let me tell you, the whole shopping experience was devastating.

After selecting a few swimsuits, I went into the fitting room to try them on and make my first decision. I don't know why they call them "fitting rooms" because absolutely nothing fits. What happened to my thighs since the last time I donned my suit and slipped into the pool? Someone, without my knowing, must have injected my legs with cellulite, and my stomach with a floatation device. And, as I looked in the mirror and waved my arms in utter despair, the Jell-O filled angel wings waved right back at me.

I remember that trip to Nordstrom as a pivotal time in my psyche. Obviously, my future wardrobes will have to consist of Sheer Energy Pantyhose, support bras, full-length pants with elastic waistbands, and sleeves long enough to keep my arms under cover.

I also decided that from now on when I shop for summer clothes I will leave my glasses in the car. It's amazing how much better I look, through these aging eyes, without the benefit of corrective lenses. WT

May Belly

Don't sit under the maple tree
When you can hike and think. Just see
The difference in writing on-the-go—
Your waistband knows.
Not just "skills" can grow.

—Pat Bustamante

Candidates Sought for SBW Office

by Meredy Amyx

Members of South Bay Writers will cast their votes at the general meeting on June 8th for the four elective officers of the club: president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. As your elections chair, I am now accepting nominations for all four positions. Names of known candidates will be announced at the May general meeting.

You can nominate any member of SBW, including yourself. The nominee must consent to run. If you know someone who you think would make a good officer and Board member, I will welcome your suggestions for possible recruits.

Nominations may also be made from the floor at the June meeting. Nominations close just prior to voting, which takes place in person at the meeting.

SBW President Dave LaRoche has supplied a description of the officers' duties. What follows is an unofficial summary of those duties; more detail is available upon request. Any errors in the summary are my own.

Responsibilities of All Officers and Chairs

- Attend regular and specially called Board meetings
- Participate in guiding Branch business.
- Represent the Club well among members and in the community.
- Aspire, in all Club interests and direction, to fulfill the mission statement:

To assist published, nascent and aspiring writers in the pursuit of their muse and the honing of their craft through conferences, educational workshops, lectures, opportunity alerts and networking; to spread our Branch reputation and credibility through the community so as to be known and solicited as writers.

Summary of Officers' Duties

President—Leadership, Vision, Policy and Precedent

- Leads the Branch productively and collaboratively.
- Envisions and fosters goals and

direction in keeping with governing documents.

- Sets agendas and presides over meetings.
- Makes appointments as needed, with consent of Board.

Vice President—Advice, Programs, Presidential Stand-In

- Advises president and Board in club matters.
- Plans and produces monthly programs, including writeups.
- Assumes the president's duties in his or her absence.

Secretary—Branch Business Records and Activity Prompting

- Records and publishes minutes of official business and tracks progress of action items.
- Archives minutes and official Branch correspondence and transfers archives to successor.
- Ensures Robert's Rules as the guide for conduct of Board meetings.
- Updates calendar of events.

Treasurer—Finance Management

- Plans club budgets and controls flow of money consistent with plan.
- Establishes and maintains bank and/or investment accounts; receives and deposits revenues.
- Authorizes expenditures and signs checks.
- Performs bookkeeping and financial reporting as required.

To place your name or that of another consenting member in nomination for office, send the **candidate's name, position for which nominated, statement of consent to nomination, and candidate's contact information** to Meredy Amyx by e-mail at meredy@amyx.org, or by phone afternoons and evenings at 408-297-4438.

Service as an officer of SBW and participation on the Board permits members to support the club and help guide its activities and events. Work on behalf of the club provides opportunities for learning and exposure in a friendly, collaborative setting. You can gain valuable experience while offering your talents in service to the club for the benefit of all members. WT

South Bay Writers Critique Groups— Part 4

by Carolyn Donnell

This month the critique group series features Writers' Salon, a group that convenes on the second Wednesday of each month at the home of Edie Matthews. The group's history began with a fiction writing class at De Anza College. When the instructor retired in 1998, the group decided to continue to meet. Edie, the last member of the original group, keeps the tradition going.

Participants at the meeting I attended were Deanna McCusker, Helen Vanderberg, C. J. Cannino, Madeline McEwen-Asker, and of course Edie. Absent that night were Kathryn Madison, Donna Fujimoto, and Jackie Mutz.

Deanna McCusker is working on a young adult (YA) novel—her first—titled *Halfway to Cuba*. It's a coming-of-age story about Miguel Morales, a young boy whose life is turned upside down when his mother drowns during an attempt to escape from Cuba. His uncle in Miami won't return the boy to his father in Cuba, and an international feud erupts, fueled by Miguel's declaration while visiting the Pope that he is the Messiah destined to save Cuba.

Helen Vanderberg's work in progress is an "adventure about a Swedish sailor and his journey towards warmer waters and a different kind of wealth than his background and upbringing might imply." She says she hopes it'll be as

fun to read as it is to write. This is Helen's first fiction endeavor. Previous publications were nonfiction.

C. J. Cannino works in YA and adult fiction. The title she is reading in the critique group is *Desert Odyssey*, a YA novel about a kid who discovers his sexuality. *Cell Out*, an adult fiction book about a nine-year-old boy molested by a Catholic priest, has been published. Her other book, *The Cuban Castaway*, is a middle-grade fiction based on the experience of Elian Gonzales. She has also read at Open Mic (Santana Row).



The Writers' Salon: Deanna McCusker, Helen Vanderberg, C. J. Cannino, Edie Matthews, Madeline McEwen-Asker.

Photo: Carolyn Donnell

Madeline (Maddy) McEwen-Asker is writing a whodunit. *Always Check the Name Tag* is based in Santa Clara and features a bigamist who witnesses a murder but has to keep quiet so his duplicitous life remains a secret. She has been published in two anthologies. Maddy is the newest South Bay member of the group.

Edie Matthews leads the group. She is currently working on a novel called *House of Comedy*. The characters and settings are based on her stand-up

comedy experience in Los Angeles. She has also written short stories and a humor book.

The members say there are too many things they like about the group to be able to list them all. Edie says she hates to attend a meeting and not have something prepared to read, so it keeps her writing. Criticism in the group is taken and received as constructive and in the interest of improved writing by saying "This would read better if . . ." rather than "This is wrong." Everyone agrees that the feedback is invaluable. Some other benefits mentioned were improving writing skills and camaraderie. C.J. calls the group her soul-sisters. (She also says she loves sitting in Edie's living room staring at the cool stuff Edie has collected from around the world.)

Copies of chapters are emailed to the others ahead of time, giving members time to read and make notes. The authors then read their selections at the next meeting, and the others go around the room and give their critiques one at a time. A general discussion follows.

This group provides support and encouragement to the members. Two of the members are not native American English speakers, and the group provided advice on terms that might be misunderstood or misinterpreted by American audiences. Having an English teacher as the leader has its advantages as well.

This group is closed to new members at this time.

If you are interested in finding or starting a critique group, you can begin by emailing networking@southbaywriters.com. You can also inquire through the SSBW Yahoo group SouthBay_Writers_Exchange.

It is still my goal to write something about every critique group with South Bay member participants. So if you're currently in a critique group and have not already been contacted by me about featuring your group in *WritersTalk*, you can email the above networking email address with your contact information.

Thanks to everyone for helping to make critique groups and the lessons learned from them more available to all our members. WT

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writers
Conference**

September 24 -26, 2010
Salinas Community Center
Join us in Steinbeck Country

One low price includes:
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▶ all meals & events
▶ multiple pitch sessions
with literary agents

Writing Contest
\$1000 Grand Prize!

\$375 until June 30, then \$435
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Ready to publish? Just starting out?
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Details at SouthBayWriters.com

Writecraft: When You Hate It

by Lisa Eckstein

An ugly truth about writing is that frequently, writers hate it. We're known for being a moody and tortured lot, with the customary explanation given that depression leads to creativity, but I believe it's usually the other way around. The attempt to produce works of genius, even works of adequacy, is difficult, demoralizing, and a danger to mental health.

You're probably familiar with the experience of hating your writing, both the process and the product. We all go through stretches of pessimism and doubt, over and over again, and success is no cure. But take heart! You can not only survive the bouts of loathing but also exploit your hatred to benefit your writing.

First, let's find some perspective on negative feelings about writing. The rewarding areas of life that you invest effort in—friendships, marriages, children, careers—all cause pain from time to time. Why should writing be different from anything else you make a serious commitment to? I trust you don't quit your job or leave your loved ones at the first rough patch, and I hope you won't abandon writing as soon as it becomes challenging or unpleasant. Maybe you choose to write because you enjoy it, but don't forget that writing is hard work.

One common source of writerly despair is our fear that everything we write is terrible. When I'm deep into a project, this anxiety tends to alternate daily with a manic confidence that I'm only hours away from discovery and fame. Of course the reality is somewhere in the middle, for me and everyone else who cares enough about quality to worry about it. If you've devoted time to your writing, what you create has some merit, but until you've taken a work through many drafts and rounds of critique, there's room for improvement. Accept doubt as a normal part of the writing process, never as a sign that



Lisa Eckstein
Contributing Editor

you should give up. Yes, your work could be better. This is always true. Use that awareness to goad yourself into another rewrite or another request for feedback.

Brave writers who take the daunting step of sending work out into the world are most often rewarded with rejection. The meticulously outlined abuse we direct at our own writing has nothing on the crushing power of a cold, impersonal "no" from the publishing industry. There are many ways to react to a rejection letter, including setting fire to everything you've ever written or burning an effigy of the person who snubbed you. More productive options are to treat the rejection as a badge of your courage and progress, submit elsewhere, and contemplate how to make your work still stronger.

Another major cause of unhappiness in writers is not writing. Sometimes we blame the failure to write on our lazy selves for loitering in front of the television or refrigerator instead of keeping that appointment with the writing desk. Guilt is a great way to torment your fictional characters for years, but learn from their example and don't wallow in it yourself. Forgive your past transgressions, and think about how you can stay more focused in the future. Are you avoiding writing because you've lost interest in your current project or because your environment is full of distractions? Consider changes that might restore your enthusiasm.

Not writing is sometimes attributed to an external force called "writer's block." I don't like this term because it implies that a creative block is an abnormal state excusing the writer from working until the obstacle is mysteriously removed. There is no such condition. Getting stuck is part of writing, and getting unstuck is the writer's own responsibility. I have occasional, excellent writing days when whole scenes spill out without pause, but most of the time, every sentence is a struggle. I often want to stop writing for the rest of the day or the rest of my life, but if I gave in to that impulse, I wouldn't have completed all those novel drafts. I wouldn't have even gotten past the two disorganized paragraphs that formed my initial

attempt at this column. Instead, I've persisted, and I've discovered that not writing is a natural component of writing.

When I can't figure out what comes next, I might stare at my computer screen for half an hour without a single idea, then get up for a drink of water and think of the answer before I make it out of the room. I solve most of my writing problems while walking, showering, or lying on the floor beside my desk staring at the ceiling. Music, movement, a change of scenery, and writing by hand are other tools that can help when the words aren't cooperating. Discuss your sticking point with someone else to solicit suggestions or to gain the insight that can come from formulating an explanation. After a couple of days chewing on a half-baked concept for this column, I talked it over with the best cook I know, and she had fantastic advice on serving up my message. (But I alone deserve blame for that metaphor.)

Writing is hard, and it's easy to become despondent. Despite the cliché, most writers don't produce much from the depths of depression. So acknowledge your discouragement, but don't let it paralyze you. I promise that you can continue writing even when you hate it, as long as you're willing to give yourself some tough love. WT

Share Your Elevator Speech

If you're going to pitch your novel at East of Eden, you're going to need an elevator speech—a fifty-word answer to the question "What is your book about?"

Even if you're not going to pitch your novel any time soon, writing a fifty-word description of it is an excellent way to help you hone your thoughts and focus on what your book's *really* about.

Send your elevator speech to *Writers-Talk* by May 16. It's a great opportunity to let other SBW members know what you're working on and contribute to shared knowledge about what makes a pitch work.

View from the Board

by Bill Belew

The monthly executive board meeting was held at President Dave LaRoche's home. Dave opened the meeting and Loureen Giordano, Richard Burns, Dick Amyx, Marjorie Johnson, Bill Baldwin, Suzette Gamero, and Karen Sweet were present.

Officer Reports

Meetup site is working to bring in guests. Should remain focused on South Bay Writers.

VP Bill Baldwin reported the following upcoming events: April 13 speaker Jordan Rosenfeld (columnist for *Writers Digest*); May 11—Wendy Tokunaga (novelist); BBQ in July.

Treasurer Richard Burns reported the Mar. 9 General Meeting Summary: 57 attending; 46 members; 11 guests.

- SBW Assets Balance as of Mar 31: \$22,146
- Some 10 postings of PayPal payments for the Young Writers Workshop, plus many postings to register for Blog II Workshop.

Dave reported from the Central Board that the next meeting will be held on July 11 and Bob Garfinkle is running for president. The next NorCal meeting will be May 1.

Membership chair Marjorie Johnson reported that the club is up to 207 people, plus one *WritersTalk* subscriber.

PR chair Edie Matthews (absent) reported PR was sent out to numerous news media for both the April 13 meeting and the April 17 Young Writers Workshop. Bill Belew (absent) reported that two workshops are being presented this month. Meetup—membership is up to 93. Suzette Gamero reported that PR for the Young Writers Workshop included flyer distribution at schools, stores, and libraries, with help from Jamie Miller.

Open Mic chair Bill Baldwin reported that we are beginning to pick up people who have seen our Meetup site. March 5 (Almaden), 8 readings; March 12 (Santana Row), 7 readings; March 19 (Pruneyard), 11 readings; March 26 (Sunnyvale), 11 readings; April 2 (Almaden), 9 readings. Board members suggested Orchard Valley Coffee and Mission Coffee as alternative sites.

Webmaster Ro Davis (absent) reported that April workshops and EoE stuff are up and running.

Hospitality chair Cathy Bauer (absent) said she was contacted by two people this month regarding critique groups.

WritersTalk editor Dick Amyx reported that the April issue was 20 pages, printed and mailed on March 30. Press run was 204 dues-paid members, 12 comps, and 15 extras for a total of 231. April cost was \$286.74, including \$16.74 for printing and inserting the flyer.

Anthology chair Dick Amyx reported that the anthology has seen no recent

sales. 160 copies remain. Board members suggested selling copies at EoE and/or getting someone trained in sales and marketing to take over.

Suzette Gamero reported that 17 had signed up for the Young Writers Workshop. Two are returning from last year. Two scholarships are available.

East of Eden (Dave LaRoche)

- Hotel space and rates confirmed and now on the website.
- Class scheduling complete and staffed with presenters. 48 classes.
- Keynoter and 6 other speakers with agreements.
- \$600 in a directed donation pledged, \$1000 received.
- Promo visits completed with Berkeley, Central Coast, and FAW.
- Registrants to date: at least 16.
- Next meeting on April 18.

Learning Center (Richard Burns)

- Mar 11: 4 attended (DVD lessons 13 & 14); Mar 25: 6 attended (DVD Lessons 15 & 16), including two from Meetup.
- Next classes at Westmont, 7:30 p.m., April 8 and 22.

Workshops (Bill Belew): Currently 17 registered for Blogging Part 2.

New Business: Marjorie Johnson moved that we spend \$35 to join BAIPA, the Bay Area Independent Publishers Association. Bill Baldwin seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment took place at 9:07 p.m.

Next meeting May 5.

Special Board Meeting, Lookout Inn, Sunnyvale

President Dave LaRoche called the meeting to order at 7:25 p.m.

Others present were Dick Amyx, Bill Baldwin, Cathy Bauer, Richard Burns, Suzette Gamero, Karen Sweet. Absent: Bill Belew, Loureen Giordano, Marjorie Johnson, Edie Matthews.

Dave announced his appointment of Meredy Amyx to the office of Nominating Chair for the upcoming 2010 election. A confirmation vote was called for and all present responded "aye." Meredy was unanimously confirmed.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.
WT

Birthing Your Book: How to Conceive a Successful Nonfiction Book (Before You Actually Write It)

- When:** Sat., May 15 & Sat., May 22; 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
Where: 115 Belhaven Drive, Los Gatos, CA 95032
Cost: \$110 (includes 14 hours of instruction and materials)
Bring bag lunch; space is limited to 15 attendees.

Learn how to use the step-by-step process of writing a nonfiction book proposal to help hone and focus your ideas so you can create traditionally published or self-published books that sell—to publishers and to readers!

This is NOT a workshop on how to write a nonfiction book proposal (but you'll learn a lot about it). This IS a workshop about how to use the nonfiction book proposal writing process to conceptualize both the creative and business aspects of a successful nonfiction book.

For more info and to register: go to
<http://www.copywrightcommunications.com/Workshops.html>

Memoirs

AN EXCERPT FROM THE MEMOIR

The Home for the Friendless

by Betty Auchard

I peeled the paper away from a pink cupcake and wandered to the picnic pavilion. The other kids were going crazy over something. I squeezed into the crowd so I could see what all the excitement was about. It was only a few letters carved in the wood. I pronounced it. Everyone shushed me, and someone said, "Betty, be quiet. We'll get in trouble."

"So what does it mean?" No one was talking. I felt stupid and ignorant, so I got up closer and whispered, "Is it a new swear word?"

The oldest girl in the group was thirteen, and she finally said, "Betty, you're only ten, and that's not old enough to understand this stuff."

"What stuff?" I demanded.

"Can't tell 'til you're older."

"How much older do I hafta be?"

"Eleven . . . maybe twelve."

"I can't wait that long."

"You'll have to. You're just too young to know everything."

I didn't like being left out, and I wanted to know everything that minute. I was so down in the dumps that I threw my cupcake away.

I forgot about the letters when I found out that Mama was checking us three kids out of the Home for the Friendless that weekend. We would have to sleep on the floor of her apartment, but we could choose our own radio shows and stay up really late. Best of all, Bobby, Patty, and I would be together instead of in our separate dormitories.

My brother and sister were playing outside when Mama asked how things were going at the Home. I suddenly remembered the word that I was too young to understand. I blurted it out.

"Mama, what does EFF-YOU-SEE-KAY mean?"

She just about fainted, then pulled herself together and asked, "Honey, why do you ask?"

I had no idea our conversation would change my life forever. I explained what had happened at the picnic, leaving nothing out. I told her that a thirteen-year-old said I would have to wait a few years before I understood. "Everybody else knows what it means," I complained.

She paused for a minute then dived in. "Well . . . that's a naughty expression for something that is not naughty at all." I was sitting on the edge of a stool with my toes barely touching the floor. "Yes? Tell me more, Mama."

And she did. My mother said that a nicer term to use was "intercourse."

"What does intercourse mean?"

"Intercourse is how babies are created," she said.

I was thrilled because that was way better than I thought it was going to be. Those girls had been all wrong about me not being old enough to understand. I was in awe.

"Really?" I asked.

"Yes, really. It's when a husband plants a baby seed in his wife's body."

"He plants a *seed*? Where?"

In a matter-of-fact way, my mother said, "He puts his penis into his wife's vagina and plants the seed there."

I wasn't sure I'd heard right. Mama never lied, but that couldn't be the truth.

She proceeded to explain that sometimes the baby seed sprouted and sometimes it didn't. If a husband and wife were very eager to make a baby they had to plant a seed over and over again until it finally "took."

There was something else I had to understand. "Did you and Dad do that?"

"We sure did."

I found it hard to believe that's how Bobby, Patty, and I were made. When Mama asked if I had any more questions, I said, "Nope." *I didn't want any more details.* WT

AN EXCERPT FROM THE MEMOIR

First Girl, First Woman

Coming of Age in the Valley of Heart's Delight

by Mary Tomasi-Dubois

I felt out of place and out of step with the world in this new, alien landscape. It was 1962 and I had only been with the company for a week. As I would find out later, it was like all the other nondescript corporate buildings of the times—large open floors broken only by support columns every twenty

feet or so and departments sectioned off by free-standing walls that could be rearranged at a moment's notice to create new, smaller spaces within the larger expanse.

The frugal mindset of the corporate world was reflected in the boring, off-white walls and nondescript beige vinyl tile floors—shined to a glaring gloss—and the ever-present fluorescent lights hanging ominously overhead, casting their garish light over the space's inhabitants.

Our design/drafting department was separated from the engineering department by office cubicles created for management. Department heads had the coveted windowed side

Continued on page 19

Violet in Saginaw, Michigan

by Susan Mueller

My mother's family is from Saginaw, Michigan. This was a farming, fishing, lumberjack, very German area. It is not far from Michigan State University in Lansing, originally an agricultural college. My great grandfather, John Gross, was married, owned a big farm. His farm won prizes from that college.

His wife died, leaving him with four-year-old Billy, who became my grandfather. Another member of this community died in an ice fishing accident, leaving his wife and their four-year-old son, also Billy. John knew the widow and

called on her. He pointed out that they needed each other and she agreed. He proposed and she accepted. He said he would send his farm crew to pack up her things and she could sell her house. He contacted their minister and the deed was done in two weeks. The Billy parents married and lived on the Gross farm. Somewhere along the way, that wife became blind but was still a very capable farm wife and mother.

She knew how to manage the small livestock, cook for the farm crew. At night she would bake some pies, put fresh vegetables in a big pot of cold water on the stove, make biscuits, wash and cut potatoes in half for the oven, kill several chickens, pluck them and cut them up for the oven.

Continued on page 20

Gathering Family: An Adoptee's Search for Kinship

by Julia Crane

I sat at my dining room table with all the supplies I thought I might need to make this call. I had my pink notebook and several pens. I had a glass of water ready in case my throat got dry, a pad of blank paper for me to record what she might say and my script of questions to ask. This call had been years in the making and I wanted to be as prepared for this as I had been when I took the Bar exam. I had no idea how she would respond—she could slam down the phone, tell me she never wanted to talk with me again, cry, become hysterical—but there was no way I was not going to make this call.

I picked up the phone and dialed her number.

"Hello?" she answered. It was the same voice I had heard two days earlier.

"Hello, is this Barbara Kodadek?" I asked.

"Yes."

"I'm doing a genealogy study. I called on Sunday and said I'd call back. Do you have some time to answer a few questions?"

"Yes."

"Are you alone?" I realized that it was a bizarre question to ask. Who calls someone up and asks if they're alone?

"Yes, is that important?"

"I just want you to be able to focus on the questions with no distractions," I responded. I made it up and was surprised by how good it sounded. I continued with my script.

"Can you write down my number in case we get disconnected?"

There was silence.

"Do you think that might happen?" she asked, curiosity clearly evident in her voice. Of course it could happen, I thought to myself. If you hang up and don't know how to contact me you'll never get the chance to call me back. But I

couldn't say that, so back to the script.

"It could," I replied. "I'm calling long distance and you never know about these connections."

"Ok." I gave her my phone number.

"So let me start with the first question. Were you living in San Francisco in the 1960's?" I asked.

"Yes, what is this about?" I think she suspected.

"Just a few more questions," I answered nervously.

"Were you born in Minnesota?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Were you a bookkeeper or bank teller?"

"Yes, why are you calling?" Her question came quicker this time and she sounded deadly serious as if it was dawning on her that this was the call that she feared one day would come. I braced myself for the grand finale.

"I have only one more question left. Does the date September 10, 1964, have any significance for you?"

The line was silent for a moment.

"Why are you asking?" she said. Her question was barely audible. I didn't think she could hang up now if she wanted to. It was as if she could see the oncoming lights and was unable to avoid the impact.

I took a deep breath and said the first thing that came to mind.

"Because that's my birthday."

Silence again. We both knew the answer, but she had to say it.

"Does it have any significance for you?" After what felt like hours my birthmother finally answered.

"Yes, it does." She took a deep breath and exhaled.

"I'm so glad I finally found you."

"I don't think I can handle this." I could hear the pain in her voice.

"What do you want?" she asked. I knew this question would come.

"At most, to be your friend. And if not, then, to learn something about myself." WT

The Maida Vale Library— An Interlude

by William Baeck

The city of Westminster in London has twelve branches of public libraries. Like the twelve tribes of Israel, that equates to about one branch per half-million followers. One of those branches, the Maida Vale Library, was just two short blocks from our front door on Sutherland Avenue.

Being in London, which was for me the center of the printed world, I had expected that its libraries would mirror the wealth of literature there, dazzling yard globes reflecting the garden of English prose. What I found instead in Maida Vale was an amiable 1900's brick-and-columned exterior housing a slightly shabby branch library. Worse yet, unheeded that a library is at its heart a house of ideas, the librarians there seemed to have little idea of how to run one.

The first time I realized this was on a wet London evening when I entered with a book I'd just finished, a fat, black doorstop called *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell: A Novel*. There was no drop box for returning books. Not outside, not inside. Instead, patrons waited in the long, slow checkout line, removing their coats as they overheated while they waited, a line that changed by so gradual a process it seemed to moult rather than move, a monstrous snake shedding its Burberry skin as it slithered its way toward the checkout desk. Once at the front of the line, patrons would gaze down at the bundle swaddled in their overcoat and either check it out or return it. In the latter case, they'd announce, "I'm returning this." The checkout librarian would then relieve them of their book, sigh a slightly disappointed, "All right," and place it gently next to her on the floor, as if each return represented a failed relationship, the end of an affair between reader and book.

When it was my turn, I asked Maida Vale's checkout librarian, an émigré with tea-colored hair and a soft Slavic voice,

"Why don't you have a 'Book Returns' box by the front door? That way people could drop them off without waiting in line or interrupting you from checking books out."

"We don't have that," she responded. That was all. She needed no reason why there should not be a return box. There was no return box. There never had been a return box. There never could be a return box. There was no thinking about, let alone outside of, the box.

In place of the box was waiting in line, the most recurrent shared experience in London. Everyone in London eats at least three times a day, uses the bathroom twice that, and waits in line twice *that*. Waiting, in the British mind, is a kind of morality play in which the pilgrimage from the back of the line to the front of the line is a linear expression of destiny, with desire at the back and satisfaction at the front. You don't argue with destiny and you certainly don't swap it for a box called "Book Returns." Destiny for Londoners is something you abide patiently, overheating in your coat as you wait your turn at the checkout desk.

And so my suggestion of a return box would only have been an improvement in an American, better-time-management-equals-more-profit-to-spend-on-fast-food sort of way. As I looked at the librarian, a European well on her way to becoming Anglicized, her brown eyes seemed to hold the brief, sympathetic question, "What's your hurry? What do you have better waiting for you than what you have standing right here in this line of sympathetic folk, in this library, in this warm Edwardian building that is kinder and more humane than the black wet crush of the streets outside?"

Perhaps she wasn't disappointed with me after all, but only urging me to take my ease among Keats and Rushdie for a while, and when I had made my choice, to rejoin the great snake of line-waiters, the procession of pilgrims with their books huddled to their chest, waiting to borrow or return the gift of a writer's thoughts. Meanwhile, it was only the waiting that mattered, it was only the slow journey, it was only a very English sort of life. WT

Stereo Types

by Colin Seymour

Black and White and Read All Over

Two blond toddlers' three-year residence with a poor Negro family in the mid-1950s resonates for the rest of the century.

Prepubescent children don't deliver newspapers anymore, but I had a route throughout fifth grade. I was wild in the streets of Portland and even two larger cities.

That was the year Lloyd Allen, my idol since I was two years old, committed second-degree murder. Lloyd was 25. I read about the murder on Page One of the 52 copies of *The Oregonian* I was delivering.

The murder climaxed a one-year spree of mayhem in my midst that paralleled the paper route. I was just out of fourth grade when my maternal grandfather fell to his death from a

roof he was tarring, inches from where I was refereeing a fuss between my younger brother, Leif, and our grandmother. That autumn, a paper route customer, a young single woman, was murdered in her apartment. Hours after learning that my mentor Lloyd had shot a nightclub owner in a payment dispute, I enthusiastically watched a TV boxing match that killed the loser. Most horrifying of all, a family friend killed herself and her twelve-year-old son.

The bereaved widower had come to live with my father, brother, and me in Northwest Portland, now a tony restaurant enclave but then lower middle class. We lived on my mother's stipend while she attended graduate school in Chicago.

Developing poor study habits and seldom required to account for my whereabouts, I would have been a stronger candidate for trouble had I been black like Lloyd, with whose family Leif and I lived for nearly three years as toddlers in the mid-1950s.

Continued on page 20

Sidetracked by Life

by Sandra Skolnik

Introduction

This book was 30 years in the making, because you see, whenever I sat down to write it, complete it, add to it, edit it, or work on it at all, I got sidetracked by life.

It's sort of like the 4th and 5th steps in my recovery program, in which I was to make a searching and fearless moral inventory and then admit to myself, to God and to another human being the exact nature of my wrongs. Well, I wrote my 4th step, then put it in a drawer to finish later, because you see, I didn't want to share it with another human being, let alone myself or God. Two years later when I finally found someone that I trusted enough to share it with, I took it out to complete and you know what? It was complete. I got sidetracked for two years while I attempted to retain my sanity and my sobriety and to connect with other human beings enough to, say, talk with them.

So, now I'm ready to present my story. I say "present" because it is already written. I must tell you because I believe there is no other story like mine and I don't want mine to die with my body when that time comes—and that time, in the scheme of the universe, is only a blink away. Oh sure, we all

have our stories and I know each one is unique, and every story that I've met has added to the expansion of my soul, my spirit, my all. But I look at my own story and while part of me says it is wrong to toot my own horn, how can I not express gratitude without acknowledging that I am a miracle? For I am a miracle, and it is amazing when I consider that I survived in spite of not having a core supportive and healthy family environment; in spite of the loss of love and deep grief; in spite of cancer; in spite of a headstrong determination to succeed that led only to success in sabotaging everything that would have given me joy, an exciting career, love and rootedness; while feeding my addictions to alcohol, relationships, sex, and later gambling. I am amazed when I consider that I did not end up in jail, an asylum or dead, just another wayward young woman who looked for and could not find my way out of the hell that I lived in as I awkwardly bounced off walls, naive and searching to fill the great big hole in the middle of my being. Perhaps I had to go down the circles of the Inferno with Dante to learn and then rise to Purgatory and continue to work toward the Paradiso and the filling of that black hole.

I am the embodiment of and witness to the issues of the '60s, '70s and '80s and I am still being sidetracked by life. But I hope you enjoy the stories in the way I reveal them because as in every life, the times we live through are only remembered through stories. WT

My Life Story

by Michael Freda

Chapter 27

I don't like people very much, I really don't. I mean, they're all right once in awhile, but most of the time they really aren't worth knowing. But I don't think that's why I don't have many friends. It's funny. When JoAnn and I were married—I mean, not the day on which we were married but during the time while we were married—we hardly had any friends. I never could understand it, either. Here we would have our so-called friends over for dinner and we all would have a really great time, laughing and talking and shooting the shit. We were really good at having a good dinner party, if you could call two couples and their associated kids a party. But anyway, they would be having a really good time. And we would invite them over a few times, and we would have this great party and all. But would they ever invite us to their house for dinner, I mean to pay us back or anything? I suppose the answer to *that* question is pretty obvious. Absolutely not! And it wasn't because they weren't our friends or anything because they were, at least I assumed they were. They really did have a good time. I mean, you can't fake something like that. You can tell when people are being phony, and they certainly weren't being phony or anything. I mean, I saw these people

lots of times, not just when we had dinner, and they were always warm and welcoming. I mean, that was pretty much true with all our friends I remember. We would have them over, we would all have a great time, but they would never invite us over. I could only surmise (I know that's a pretty big word, and you might not know the meaning of it, but I don't feel like looking it up right now, so *you* can look it up) I could only surmise it had something to do with the fact that if they invited us over, they were afraid we would drag our six kids with us or something and it would be too crazy at their house or something. I mean, our kids wouldn't be any trouble or anything. They were pretty well behaved, for kids anyway. They didn't break stuff or make huge messes or anything. Not too much anyway. I forget now what they would do during our dinner parties. I suppose they were playing or something. I don't know. I don't remember. Anyway, I never really could figure it out. It didn't seem all that fair. Like it was *our* fault we had six kids and they didn't. What were we supposed to do, kill them or something? Shove them back into the womb or something? Well, we didn't want to do anything like that or anything. We liked our kids and all. All of them. We didn't want to trade any of them in or anything. We wouldn't trade in even one of them. You'd think out of six, one would be expendable. I don't even remember discussing the issue with JoAnn. It never came up. So I guess we were stuck with our six kids, and never being invited to dinner anywhere. And our kids didn't even eat that much, so it couldn't have been that. WT

Terminal Curiosity

by Jan Becker

Many times I have been accused of having too much curiosity. Family responses to my queries include WHY DO YOU WANT TO KNOW THAT? or I get the eye roll that to me means she is at it again. Friends and strangers just provide that shoulder shrug and a puzzled look.

However, in my opinion, my curiosity has served me well. This tale will show how curiosity has aided my working career.

My employment adventure started when I did not get a job at the phone company. The November after I turned 16, I decided to get a job. I wanted to earn some Christmas money. My mother thought the job of choice was the phone company. To help ensure that I would get a position, she went with me to apply for the job. Luckily for me they were not hiring because the company was switching from operators to dial. Next, I went to Wolbachs, the biggest department store in town. My mother was going to go with me to apply but was delayed and I had a job before she arrived. After a brief conversation with Rose Smith in the personnel office, I had a job. Rose wanted to know if I was willing to work in Nuts. I said yes. They had a machine that looked very much like a popcorn making machine. Its purpose was to warm nuts. As I reflect back on that, it seems a little odd—Hot Nuts. I don't even remember what kind of nuts. I didn't care. I had a job. The nut machine was a strange start but served as a stepping stone to 3½ years of work which included two days a week and school vacations. I gained so much experience and they paid me 65 cents an hour. Besides taking yearly inventories, I worked in 10 different depart-

ments, including accounts payable. In the accounts payable office I had the fun of operating the switchboard and at the insistence of a supervisor I mastered a ten-key adding machine. I consider this my first step toward becoming a full-charge bookkeeper and eventually an independent accounting consultant.

At college I worked the switchboard and processed mail for the 600 girls who lived in my dorm. Sorting mail was probably my worst job. The mail rarely included the room number and it took forever to distribute it to the appropriate boxes.

I worked in two university libraries, Nebraska and Illinois; one year teaching educationally handicapped children in Illinois. I worked with a talented math teacher at Nueva Day School and helped her develop and market math materials. I conducted math labs and was volunteer coordinator at my children's elementary school.

My next adventure was purchasing agent at two different manufacturing companies. One produced oxygen analyzers and the other one of the first automatic blood pressure monitors. Each position presented a new learning curve; for example, how to meet FDA requirements for noninvasive medical equipment. One time we badly needed a specific switch and, after much searching, I located these switches on a plane heading for America at that very moment. Saved the day. At small companies you get to wear many hats. I did, however, refuse to clean toilets.

Owning a bookstore for 14 years was my top adventure.

Nothing against the phone company, but I am very grateful I didn't get that job when I was 16. I feel my perpetual curiosity has supported my "how do I make this work" philosophy and has led to successful adventurous careers. The bonus: I was paid to learn. WT

Finding Family

by Carolyn Donnell

April 1995. All I wanted was a passport. But my birth certificate, the same one I had used for school and even a security clearance when I worked for NASA, was not acceptable to the passport office. Since I was born in California but adopted in Texas, they wanted either my original birth record from California or adoption papers. My adopted parents had died many years ago, so I couldn't ask them for help. I had always heard that adoption records were sealed, so I didn't feel very optimistic, but I called California's Bureau of Records.

"You're in luck," the clerk said. "Texas never filed adoption papers, so your record isn't sealed." She sent me a copy. Amazing! After all this time, all I had to do was pick up the phone and call. The same was true for the adoption papers.

I pored over new information in the birth record and investigated for a while to no avail. One night, in a pique of frustration, I emailed everyone in the directory of my current email service, CompuServe, in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and

Colorado with the surnames on the certificate, asking them if they knew any of the names.

I had given up hearing from anyone when an answer arrived several weeks later. I held my breath as I opened the email.

"Ethel was my grandmother, and I think Lotta Mae might be my Aunt Pat. Call me. Greg."

My hand trembled as I dialed his phone number. A soft baritone voice answered. I told him I thought Lotta Mae might be my mother.

Total silence came from Greg's end of the phone. I almost hung up. Finally he said, "I'll talk to my dad. I'll call you back by ten o'clock tonight."

We hung up. *Yeah right*, I thought, but about 9:30 p.m. the phone rang.

Greg's excited voice said, "You've found the right family, all right. Dad knows all about it. He's at a meeting tonight, but he will call you tomorrow. I can't give you your mother's number just now, because Dad will want to call her first, but I think you have the right to know that you have a sister and an aunt."

Continued on page 19

In the Eye of the Beholder

by Forrest “Woody” Horn

I REMEMBER looking forward to my first *Life Drawing* class with nude models—almost as much as my dormitory roommates did. They probably expected me to bring back all sorts of erotic drawings. Who knows, maybe I did, too. Obviously, I knew that any serious student of art needed to study the human figure dispassionately, however . . . at that impressionable age young gentlemen still had a tendency to behave like pubescent perverts.

It was 1952, and I was a Fine Arts major at Ohio State University. My instructor, Professor Grimes, had two models, Pearl and Mrs. Gray—the only names I can recall—that he alternated between classes. Pearl was a youngish, maybe thirty-something, black woman with a nice lithesome figure and a fascinating face with sculptured features. Mrs. Gray was maybe fifty-something, sort of stocky and full figured, had some wrinkles and a faint smile, and always appeared tired—but she was actually a tireless model, probably from years of experience.

At the first couple of classes, I suspect the male students were more embarrassed than our models, and some of our coeds seemed to have trouble focusing their attention. Naturally, a couple of our *feminists* were curious to learn if there would be any male models—which we had, once.

Frankly, I was surprised—and some of the other guys were, too—at how quickly we got accustomed to looking at a fully nude model without seeing her . . . naked. Not that it became boring, just . . . natural.

Professor Grimes taught us to start by “getting the essence” of the figure on our drawing before getting “too involved with the details.” Initially, we did “snapshot studies” either in charcoal or black washes. Once, he had us sculpt the model in clay to help us think of the figure three-dimensionally, so we had to move our pedestals around the model. Another time, he had our class assemble at the “flash room”—a unique facility that illuminated your subject in

short bursts of light, which trained you to *see* the *whole* image—and one of our models was a man wearing the *mandatory* jock strap. So much for equal rights.

Pearl had two sons—maybe four and six years old. A child’s figure is proportioned differently, so Mr. Grimes sometimes asked Pearl to bring them along to model. On such occasions, Pearl and her sons wore bathing suits, which I assumed was easier than trying to explain mommy’s shameless contribution to the art world. Like most young children, they were fidgety, so our sketches had to be done quickly. They were shy, too, until when during one of our breaks they saw their images on our drawings. Then they turned into a couple of hams.

This school term had an uneven number of weeks, which our models alternated, so one of them would get to work an extra week. Professor Grimes left it up to the class to decide who we would prefer to draw. Even so, he unabashedly pointed out that “Mrs. Gray really gives you something to grab and put down on the page.”

Most of my drawings were stored in a portfolio locker in Hayes Hall. However, a couple of my sketches—after repeated requests—were brought back to the dorm for some of my lecherous roomies, who had seriously doubted if any nude models actually worked on campus. Frankly, after seeing my work they seemed disappointed.

Once I got acclimated to my new view of life and realized that seeing a nude woman no longer affected me the way it used to, I occasionally worried that my psyche had been . . . damaged? Fortunately, it was *curable*. As soon as I left class and strolled across campus, which allowed my artistic eye to scrutinize the figures of lovely coeds in tight sweaters and skirts, everything returned to normal.

I never became great at drawing animated subjects, but I did gain a new respect and appreciation for the human figure—no matter what its shape, size, or age. I also learned the true meaning of “beauty is in the eye of the beholder”: you see what you want to see. That’s why—after all these years—I still see my wife as the most beautiful girl in the world. WT

Editor’s Perspective

Continued from page 3

purely tongue-in-cheek. The first of 48 definitions of OMG in the Urban Dictionary says, “Possibly the most irritating piece of chatroom vernacular in existence. Often used by teenage girls in chatroom who, for some reason, punctuate their sentences with ‘Like,’ ‘Totally,’ ‘soooooo’ and ‘Lolz.’” Ohdearz.

The smiley was devised as the solution to a problem—bulletin board misunderstandings that resulted in huge digressions or flame wars. Even Scott Fahlman, the inventor of the smiley, said, “Many people have denounced the very idea of the smiley face, pointing out that good writers should have no need to explicitly label their humorous comments. Shakespeare and Jonathan Swift and Mark Twain got along just fine without this.” Read all about it at the URL above.

Although I may well get bored or annoyed with contemporary expression online, I’m not terribly concerned about OMGs or smileys popping up in Pulitzer or Nobel Prize-quality literature, and probably not even Oprah’s Book Club or the Book of the Month.

But for sure, that Mark Twain quote made me lol. :-) WT



The May *WritersTalk* about a week before it landed in your mailbox: a bonanza of memoirs boosts page count.

Rain

Unexpected Rain,
Cascading Remembrances—
Reflections Remain.

—Sally A. Milnor

Vineyard by the Sea, a Memoir About Growing Up in Chile

by *Marcela Dickerson*

1943

Besides my mother, my father, my brother, and I, several other people lived in our house—Mary, our nanny, Ramón, the driver, Matilde the short, fat cook with scanty hair in a bun whose meals were fit for the gods, her assistant, a very skinny girl who also served at the table, and the maid who made our beds and cleaned the second floor.

One evening I was eating dinner in the kitchen before a dinner party, and I saw a pyramid of cream puffs on a tray. Matilde was making sugar strands as thin as hair to cover them with. When the dessert was ready she placed it under the light; it looked like a mountain of gold. It was beautiful!

This was when I discovered the radio. Our maids had a passion for radio and they waited eagerly for their time off work to listen to it. Around 3:30 every afternoon, right before tea time, and about 6:00 p.m. before the dinner preparation started, it was soap opera time. The radio they listened to was a table-top model in the shape of a small church with tan-colored wooden strips set against a material with woven silver threads. It had four dark knobs at the bottom, right above a line covered with clear mica that showed a vertical marker that moved from one number to the next. I knew the numbers for the soap opera's stations, but I was strictly forbidden to touch the knobs.

These programs were totally inappropriate for children, but no one cared if I listened. The radio soap operas were part of

growing up in the real world, which encompassed both children and adults.

The soaps were dramatically acted and had fancy names: "Women's Jail," "Two Crosses," "Maria," and "From Seamstress to Millionaire." All had drama, love, and lust. I could understand most of the love and drama but probably missed all the lust.

Nevertheless I listened avidly to the fights among the women in jail, to their pain when they delivered a baby, to the cries of the newborn, and to the hoofs of galloping horses that brought handsome men to their rescue to take them away from unfair punishments.

When I started school a new radio program for children called "The Children's Hour with the Fairy Godmother" was being aired at the time when I arrived home. It had stories, songs, and contests—very modern for its time. I thoroughly enjoyed it—to the point that my understanding parents allowed me to delay doing my homework—and I usually had my tea while listening to it.

There was a huge short-wave Telefunken radio upstairs in my parents' dressing room. It stood on four legs next to the wall, occupying half of the length of the room. In the evening, when Father came back from work, he turned it on to listen to the news of the war. I remember very few arguments between my parents, but the selection of the short-wave programs was one of them. My father wanted to listen to the German station, which was aired in Spanish to the tune of "Lili Marlene," and my mother, even though she had been born in Germany, wanted to listen to the British radio station. Eventually they compromised: Father listened first to the Germans and then Mother to the BBC of London. She wanted to get the full picture of what was really happening in Europe. WT

AN EXCERPT FROM THE MEMOIR

Ghost-Hostess

by *Pat Bustamante*

I live in a haunted house; in fact, every house I've ever lived in has had at least one restless spirit that wants to tell a story. And I've been around to listen for 72 years.

I like a bit of history with my tea. Here's what I read about explorer Juan Bautista De Anza: he discovered (and named) Cupertino as well as lower San Francisco Bay and a little settlement he called "Yerba Buena" ("Mint"), which later became a Big City.

De Anza walked on a pathway near the house I live in now. He came down Highway 9, but that had a different name at the time. He camped by a stream with thirteen of his fellow explorers after a hard trek from Monte Rey-by-the-sea. It was the evening of March 25, 1776. He was proud to have covered "eight leagues in 7 & 1/2 hours." How did he calculate that? Ask a Silicon Valley engineer.

De Anza was fond of a saint, Jose (actually Giuseppe di

Copertino, Italy), who was sainted because while sitting at a refectory table he often rose in the air. He levitated. He was a really happy and high guy!

To cross the next large creek (now called Stevens Creek) it appeared that one needed to levitate. De Anza did not think much of that arroyo but noted that it did have a good side-trail into the hills. Arroyo de San Jose de Cupertino (spelling was casual then) it became.

There was a sow grizzly bear who had two small cubs near where De Anza wished to go, as the Indians signed; but a language barrier prevented the message from being understood. Do not go that way! Bad! Danger! *Very bad ferocious bear!*

I really wanted to tell this ghost-hosting story about how a ghost recently pointed me toward an obituary in an old newspaper I was throwing out, and the obituary was of an ex-husband of a very beloved cousin of mine, whom I had lost contact with, and then . . .

(How do you contact a ghost? Sit down alone with a blank piece of paper, close your eyes, starting writing whatever comes—wait! You turn over the paper and discover a letter

Continued on page 20

Jordan Rosenfeld
Continued from page 1

Publish anywhere you can.

Writing for periodicals serves as a great way to build a reputation as a writer. However, magazines and newspapers want to see previously published clips. “Where are you supposed to start?” Rosenfeld said. “I started wherever I could.”

She recommended writing for anyone who needs an article—a college newspaper, a women’s group, a church. “I say, ‘Take those opportunities.’ You don’t know who’s going to read your writing. You don’t know who you’re going to be put into contact with by simply putting yourself out there.”

Do it yourself! Create your own venue to publish.

Rosenfeld received some of her first clips while in college by creating an opportunity to write. She wanted to start a literary magazine, so she found another woman to help her create it. She interviewed Eve Ensler (*The Vagina Monologues*) and several other famous people for the publication. Although only two issues were published, they produced five great bylines for Rosenfeld. When she later started querying local papers, the editors gladly gave her assignments based on these clips.

Start writing locally and then widen your reach.

After writing hundreds of human interest articles for local newspapers, Rosenfeld branched out. She began querying regional publications for stories. She advises that both fiction and nonfiction writers consider getting this same journalistic experience. “I’m a fiction writer. That’s my path, my love, my passion,” said Rosenfeld, “but the vast majority of things I’ve done have not been fiction related.”

Her journalistic writing experience gave her the background and platform she needed to prove she could write a nonfiction book about how to write fiction. “I couldn’t have foreseen ten years ago that I’d have a book on writing that has afforded me the opportunity to talk to wonderful writers like yourselves. Sometimes I have to pinch myself,” she said.

Use social media to create an “ad-

dress” and connect with readers.

Rosenfeld stressed that, in today’s publishing climate, writers need a blog and must become involved in social media. “If you don’t have blog, you don’t have an address,” she said. “There is no excuse not to put yourself out there in one form or another.”

Writers must be active on social media to attract contacts, fans, tweeples, etc. “Maybe if you are lucky you can just sit back and not do anything. Most of us have to do something to bring those people to us,” Rosenfeld explained.

Writers should want to do something “social” and increase readership on



Jordan Rosenfeld: Saying “yes” to opportunities leads to writing success.

their blogs and traffic to their websites. “Most of us write because we want to connect,” said Rosenfeld. Blogging and participating in social media sites helps writers connect with readers.

Join or start a writing group of some kind, and collaborate with like-minded souls.

It’s important to find writing communities and to spend time with other writers—just as SBW members do when they come to meetings and events to feel supported and motivated by their peers. When Rosenfeld felt hungry for a writing community in Petaluma, she created a reading group that became a network of writers supporting other writers. Additionally, “They promoted events and writing of mine and helped me become a better writer,” she said.

The other writers were grateful that she had started the group. “Be a model for other writers,” she advised. “Start

something. You’d be amazed at the further connections you’ll make.”

Rosenfeld met the woman who became her co-author and co-workshop leader at the reading group.

Consider other media and don’t worry about pay.

Don’t worry about how much something pays when deciding whether or not to take on a project, advises Rosenfeld. Also, be willing to branch out into media other than print. She hosted a radio show as a labor of love and, in the process, interviewed her favorite authors. She then turned those interviews into articles for *Writer’s Digest*, which “paid nicely.” That experience also provided her with impressive experience and platform.

Rosenfeld offered these tips as well but did not elaborate upon them:

- Kill the belief that you can’t get published, that it’s too hard to get published, or that only one way exists to get published.
- Look for areas of need you can fill.
- Be open to feedback.
- Remember to have fun.

Rosenfeld’s story had a moral: Hard work and persistence pay off in the book publishing industry. Not only did she publish three books, *Make A Scene: Crafting a Powerful Story One Scene at a Time* has sold 15,000 copies during the two years it’s been out. The average nonfiction book sells 350–1,000 copies per year. She reported, “The average novel sells 2,000 copies.”

Rosenfeld concluded that her success comes not only from saying “yes” to opportunities but also from “putting one foot in front of the other and following my passions.” Most fiction and nonfiction writers can follow that success model. WT

A writer is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.

—Thomas Mann

Website

Continued from page 4

reminded that you're in a great chapter. The website reflects the people you see each month at the meetings and read about in the newsletter. The officers and volunteers maintain the website to support members' efforts toward achieving their writing goals. Start using the website as a tool and you can't help being encouraged.

When was the last time you visited our branch's website? Now is a great time to rediscover this valuable resource. Go to southbaywriters.com—and while you're there, add the link to your favorites. WT

Retreat

Continued from page 6

you know in your heart, of your people, and as true as the blue in the sky outside."

In Teish's two workshops, we were asked to invent a simple story with one monster, a symbol for some force or company that messes up your planet earth—sacred, delicate Earth—and invent three wishes some power might grant your little created hero to conquer this monster. Teish didn't care what form, be it a children's story, poem, or article of nonfiction.

She wants us to shift our paradigm like she shifted hers long ago. Incorporate eco-friendly traditions into our present and future works, mainstream books; small, innocuous steps that keep the running emotions and genre of our stories intact. Such efforts, Teish is convinced, can help change the world. "We are the creators of today's Myths, after all," she said. "Contribute to solutions, not hatred; not rancor, but discussion. Don't conquer nature as mankind has in the past, but work *with* nature, allowing the delicate ecosystems to be our guides for a change." WT



First Girl, First Woman

Continued from page 11

of the building, affording them a pleasant view of the surrounding countryside, while us "grunts" sat in the middle, exposed like the inhabitants of the proverbial fish bowl.

My entry into this world was awkward, to say the least. I was 20 and the only *woman* drafter in the department, possibly in the whole of the division as far as I knew. (I called myself a drafter, management called me a draftsman—the women's movement hadn't yet begun.) The men had been told of my impending arrival at one of their regular departmental meetings a few weeks earlier. You'd think that would have prepared them to at least accept the fact that there would be a woman working on the same projects alongside them.

They were all stiltedly cordial at first, but after about a week, the interrogation began. Bob was the first to approach my drafting table.

"So how's it going?" he asked, breaking the ice.

"Oh, fine, thank you," I replied timidly. This was the first job that allowed me to apply the skills and knowledge I had gained in school. Even though my classmates in all my drafting classes had been guys, I had never actually *worked* in an all-male environment before. And there were so many of them, everywhere, with only a sprinkling of women, mostly in support functions.

I wanted to do the best job I could, especially being the first female to hold an engineering drafting position. My dad had gotten me the job, and I didn't want to disappoint him.

"So what made you decide to get into drafting?" Bob asked, continuing the conversation in hushed tones, but loud enough for the guys at the surrounding drafting tables to hear.

"My father suggested it. He said I would always be able to find work. And I guess because I like it too."

"So, why didn't you go into nursing or teaching?" Bob replied, not paying attention to, or perhaps not caring about, what I had just said. "Drafting—

that makes you kind of an odd one, doesn't it?"

I didn't know what to say. I must have blushed. That would have been my usual reaction in those early days of my career. Then I think I just smiled and lowered my head in a self-conscious flush and returned to my task.

"You butch?" Bob asked, looking over his shoulder at the other guys while letting out a loud chuckle. I didn't know what to say. I was confused and my mind was reeling. *What had I done to upset him?*

That was my welcome into the male-dominated corporate world of the early '60s! WT

Finding Family

Continued from page 15

Next morning the phone rang on cue. My uncle's first words were, "Oh honey. I hoped I'd get to meet you someday."

I immediately began to cry.

He continued. "We've always thought about you and prayed you were OK." We talked for a while.

Suddenly this heretofore orphan had an uncle and a bunch of cousins in Amarillo, a mother and sister in Minnesota, a niece in Alaska, and two nephews—one in Minnesota and one in Romania. One surviving aunt lived in Seattle. She was eventually able to provide more family history for me.

Oh, yeah. I did get the passport, but I didn't make it to Europe. Fate had other destinations in mind that year. WT

Prowling

Continued from page 2

news was that 44 people had registered, and that puts us smack on the sign-up profile we need. And you know why? In addition to a wonderful program (Kent Werges and Colin Seymour), the *message* is getting out. It's a brass band down the middle of Publicity Street, and swinging the baton is Ro Davis. A lot of effort goes into these conferences and this is the fifth. We can be proud, and we can be thankful. WT

Violet in Saginaw, Michigan

Continued from page 12

Next morning the veggie pot was set to cook, the oven turned on for all the food. She had a woman helper from the village to set the big farm tables with dishes, cutlery, one beer per man, pitchers of water. The two women carried the hot food out as the gong bell was rung by the little boys.

The two little Billys, apprehensive about having a new parent, were quickly adjusted to having a new buddy and to sharing the bed. They chased chickens, picked tomatoes in the summer, played happily.

Years later when my Billy Gross was a married adult, he and his pregnant wife, Minnie, drove from Detroit to Saginaw for a visit. It was February, 1907. Their car must have been in that vintage. The car and the roads were probably a rough ride. But they arrived safely in the snowy weather.

Shortly thereafter, Minnie went into labor too soon. My great-grandfather stayed home, Billy hitched up a sleigh and horse and hurried off to town to find a doctor. He failed.

But my blind great-grandmother carefully delivered the new baby, my mother, Violet. That woman knew her stuff. Violet weighed only four pounds. She wrapped the baby in something warm and put her in a box near the wood-burning stove. She fixed up Minnie in whatever way that was supposed to be done. Do you know anybody with a mother-in-law like that?

Great-Grandfather Gross emerged from “hiding” to admire the whole completed scene. The poor Dad, without doctor, arrived back at the farm. He had to wipe down the wet horse and the sleigh and finally go in, to behold the surprising and happy news. WT

Ghost-Hostess

Continued from page 17

the dead person wrote in 1951 answering your current question. Well, it worked for me!)

But this other is the story I started, so I will explain how it turned out with De Anza’s party and the bear.

The priest was made to carry the party’s musket. This was an unlucky choice because first, he was angry at being teased for not being a soldier and not being handy with firearms. And second, the gun was heavy and a nuisance and he did not take proper care of it. He is the one who was responsible for writing down trip notes, and that was enough of a chore for him.

Well, a bear *did* rear up, but it was by the other creek, the Creek of the Crows, by their first camp. That bear was fishing in *my* creek. Everyone was startled and there was some confusion—and the priest decided it was his duty to fire the musket.

He missed, of course. The loud noise did the trick, though! Unfortunately, since he had not swabbed the gun barrel of this musket after its last firing, it did what muskets often did: it blew up. Luckily, no one, not even the bear, was injured.

The priest threw the useless gun into that creek and said words he was going to have to confess to much later.

My favorite ghost, my cousin Myrna May, told me the above story and exactly where to find the remains of that over-two-hundred-year-old musket. And I did! On March 24, 2010, the day before “De Anza Day,” March 25 of 1776. WT

Stereo Types

Continued from page 13

At least I developed good work habits. The *Oregonian* encouraged us “junior executives” to solicit new subscribers, rewarding successful salesmen with en masse tourism. That’s how my brother and I had spent Christmas vacation at Disneyland, staying in gritty downtown Los Angeles, and spring break in San Francisco, barely supervised.

The route had to be delivered seven days a week. We were “independent dealers” who bought papers wholesale, billed customers, and collected. I cleared one-third: \$20 per month.

Daddy was not distant. He was an iconoclast who influenced us in politics, religion, and the arts, and he spent ample time developing our baseball skills. But he was dismissive of our

perils because his own childhood on Chicago’s North Side had been palpably more gritty.

To Daddy, even paperboy Warren Binning seemed like a cherub. Warren, 12, was a smart-alecky blond kid who seemed like a winner. Warren was the best teller of dirty jokes of anybody near my age, except maybe me. We made each other laugh and we shared admiration for a Catholic schoolgirl my age in the neighborhood, so Warren and I started to hang out.

My father found Warren’s brashness refreshing and barely believed my reports that Warren kept shoplifting and exerting “aw, c’mon, be a man” pressure on me to participate. Warren didn’t forsake me for refusing, though.

A year later, Leif and I, having moved to Salem with our mother, spent a day in the old neighborhood. As we waited for our mother to pick us up at 23rd and Johnson, we ran into Warren. His voice was changing. He said he had spent much of the school year in juvenile detention. I asked whether he felt rehabilitated. Apparently not, as I learned when I asked what became of the Catholic schoolgirl.

“I fucked her,” Warren said.

The rape had been the reason for his incarceration. Five years later, Warren raped an eleven-year-old in Salem on Halloween, causing a media sensation.

Media exposure was good for me, though. I was trained to handle any sordid situation. WT

**Do you
have
control issues?**

**Put them to good use:
run for the SBW Board.**

See article on page 7.

Aphrodite
Rodin Gallery
Cantor Center for the Fine Arts
Stanford University

The sun pounds down on her undraped purity.
She gives her whole self to the radiance,
unreservedly,
to the light,
her skin invigorated,
throbbing,
glistening,
reveling in
the sharp piercing white energy,
as she shines the glow back
to its ultimate source,
its intensity transformed
by her raw
femininity.
returned in softened mist reflection
to her Beloved.
She surrenders,
joins with the exquisite
unashamedly.
She feels no fear.
Her refulgent glow explodes
gently fluorescing
the solar penetration.
her soul has encountered.
She raises her arms
high above her head,
as far as skies can reach.

She is about to dive into
the languid pool
where the delightful fluid
will take her soul
and dissolve her separate nature,
yet reintegrate her
as her naked core
serenely melds and blends
with its watery delights,
indistinguishable from the cerulean,
yet more herself
than ever.

In flowing away
in her ecstatic plunge
she will lose her cohesion
then mysteriously
reemerge,
though never again to be observed
in her present contoured shapes,
yet always holding
her sculpted curving form,
immersed forever to become
her own rippling liquid.

Who speaks the intimate paradox?
Rather let her shimmer
in silent
cascading
Cytherean
scintillation,
evoking
the eternal aquatic nude
bodily quintessence.

—*Stephen C. Wetlesen*

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My Wife's Ghost

My wife's ghost is across the table,
Hovering above the chair where my sweetheart used to sit.
It reaches out to me, and yet, I know such an ethereal vision cannot hold me
Nor bid me, any more, her cheery good-bye when heading off to work.

After three months of tears and cleaning out dresses from her closet,
It finally begins to leave me alone, and I'm okay. Then, at any time, it appears once more.
Little by little, though, I push on and encourage myself to live, laugh, and love again.
Strangely, my secret sentinel surprises me. Silently, she seems to approve.

And yet, I do sometimes hesitate; I'm not sure why. Perhaps my visitor watches on the sly.
But if it appears, my wife's spirit simply waves and whispers:
"Oh, go on, go on. Don't worry about stepping on dead leaves
Under the might-have-been tree."

You say they are only dream-like memories streaming by,
Like drifting patches of damp fog dotting my pathway.
But, no, I think not. The visitor is real, real as a steady rain,
Like the winter rains drenching my wife's grave, so cold, so alone.

Once almost tangible, my visitor is fading . . . fading . . . fading at last.
It shimmers just occasionally, and then, only faintly in the background.
Still, it comes to lightly scold me when I'm about to stack the dishes wrong.
Ghosts would know such things, I guess.

—*Richard A. Burns*

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.

Asia, Japan, China, Russia, Blogging

Bill Belew
wbelew@gmail.com

Astrology, Singing

Sara Aurich
saraaurich@comcast.net

Astronomy, History of Astronomy

Bob Garfinkle
ragarf@earthlink.net

Character Development

ArLyne Diamond, Ph.D.
ArLyne@DiamondAssociates.net

Counseling

Dr. Audry L. Lynch
GLYNCH7003@sbcglobal.net

Engineering: Mechanical, Aero, Aerospace

Jerry Mulenburg
geraldmulenburg@sbcglobal.net

Growing Great Characters from the Ground Up

Martha Engber
marthaengber.com
marthaengber.blogspot.com

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

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

Hospital and Nursing Environment

Maureen Griswold
maureengriswold@sbcglobal.net

Internal Medicine/Addiction Disorder/Psychology

Dave Breithaupt
dlbmlb@comcast.net

Library Science

Molly Westmoreland
mulcarend@hotmail.com

Marketing and Management

Suzy Paluzzi, MBA
jomarch06@yahoo.com

Mathematics: Teaching and History; Fibonacci Sequence

Marjorie Johnson
MarJohnson89@earthlink.net

Philosophy, Religion, Evolution, Construction, Crafts, Norse

Darwin Mathison
olddinosaur@comcast.net
510-471-8944

Profile Writing

Susan Mueller
susan_mueller@yahoo.com

Real Estate, Horses, Remodeling, Southwest History

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

Teaching and the Arts

Betty Auchard
Btauchard@aol.com

Television Production

Woody Horn
408-266-7040

USMC and NASA/Ames

Terry DeHart
tdehart@earthlink.net

Ongoing Critique Groups

The Arm Wavers

Meets downtown San Jose on Wednesdays
Contact: Georgia Platts—
gplatts@comcast.net
Closed to new members at this time

Writers' Salon

Meets in Santa Clara
Contact: Edie Matthews—
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
All genres; open to all

Northpoint Critique Group

Meets in Cupertino
Contact: Valerie Whong—
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
Two 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
All genres; open to all

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

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

Fremont: Meets (except in July, December, and on holiday weekends) from 2-4 p.m. on the fourth Saturday of the month at Mountain Mikes 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

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

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

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

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

Orchard Valley Group

Meets: Orchard Valley Coffee House
Meets on Tuesdays
Genre: Full length fiction, screenplays
Contact: Danita Craft—blueize@me.com

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>MAY 2010</h1>						1
2	3	4	5 7p Board Meeting LaRoche residence	6	7 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose	8 11A Editors' Powwow
9	10 6p Regular Dinner Meeting Lookout Inn Wendy Tokunaga	11	12	13 7:30p Learning Center Westmont 1675 Scott Blvd. Santa Clara	14 7:30p Open Mic Borders Books Santana Row, San Jose	15
16 <i>WritersTalk</i> deadline	17	18	19	20	21 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	22
23/30	24/31	25	26	27 7:30p Learning Center Westmont 1675 Scott Blvd. Santa Clara	28 7:30p Open Mic Borders Books Sunnyvale	29
Future Flashes		June 8 6p Regular Dinner Meeting Elections Andrei Aleinikov				

Stay Informed!

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

southbaywriters.com

East of Eden September 24-26

Secure your place now!

Details at

southbaywriters.com

South Bay Writers Anthology



\$10

At the meeting.

On the website.

southbaywriters.com

Other Open Mics

Thursday Gig

Third Thursday, 6:30–9:30 p.m.
411 E. Campbell Ave., Campbell
Stone Griffin Gallery

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

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.

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

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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, May 11, 6:00 p.m.

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

Wendy Tokunaga
Author of *Love in Translation*
and *Midori by Moonlight*

WritersTalk deadline is *always* the 16th of the month preceding the month of issue, and is *always* listed on the calendar inside the back cover.

