



# WRITERSTALK

Volume 18  
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September 2010

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

## September Speaker

### Kelly Harrison—Why Was It Rejected?

by Colin Seymour

We were counting on our East of Eden writers conference to jump-start relationships with agents and publishers, but now we're reduced to approaching those agents and publishers from afar and sensing the futility to which we're all too accustomed.

We have cause for dejection. But we can learn to avoid cause for rejection.

That's what SBW member Kelly Harrison will be demonstrating as our September speaker. She'll show us 10 (or more, probably) of the typical mistakes that have been sabotaging our submissions for publication.

Harrison is wrapping up a pivotal editing role for the CWC's soon-to-be-published anthology, and she has decades of experience editing for literary magazines (notably *Serpentine* and *Reed*) and officiating lit contests. She has taught not only creative writing at San Jose State but also technical and business writing. She figures she has assessed thousands of poems, short stories, and nonfiction submissions.

So of course, "there are kind of some things you see over and over," she says.

Grammar and spelling mistakes are clearly the most prevalent. "If they can't tell the difference between there, their, and they're, your and you're . . . if you have an its-it's mistake on page three . . . it just sort of builds to the point that hey, I say, 'Nope, I can find better stories out there.'"

Some of Kelly's talk will touch upon topics that were to be emphasized at East of Eden.

Memoirs, she said, are "often lacking in significance. That's one of the things I'll talk about a lot. Why should someone else read it? It comes back to 'so what?' The 'so what' is sort of the reality of the thing." For instance, if you've been tempted to vent about a dog's death, you'd be likely to fail unless "you could connect the dog's dying to something universal."

Even a good premise can't overcome faulty execution, though, and that's usually quickly obvious in the manuscript, she said. "If the story doesn't start well, it probably doesn't move well, and it probably doesn't end well."

The same goes for an interesting character. "It's kind of rare that someone builds a character that *really* isn't likable. Where people tend to fail is in getting that likable character to do something interesting."

That's especially true of protagonists in one of Harrison's favorite genres, mystery. She frequently sees an interesting detective stuck in a "flat mystery," often owing



Kelly Harrison

## East of Eden Canceled

### It's the Economy

by Dave LaRoche

How many times have we heard that? So often that it's become a cliché and easily ignored.

Your East of Eden Working Group *was* paying attention, and, we thought, we'll model this conference accordingly: lower fees, reduced registration expectations, rich and hearty content, extra effort with promotion, and we'll beat those forecasters yet. But as we watched our registration over time, we saw that it wasn't happening.

When it became known that the availability of the Salinas Conference Center was in question and then effectively shut down, the obstacles appeared insurmountable. We then decided that, in order to preserve the credibility that had been built by our past writers conferences, we had no choice but to cancel East of Eden 2010.

We do regret this action, and we apologize to those hearts that were set to go. It's a big disappointment to both those who scraped up the cash to attend and the 50 people who were willing to speak and present.

Yes, this is a big loss for those expecting to attend, and crushing for those who were producing the event: Colin Seymour on acquiring presenting staff, Jerry Mulenberg on program, Rosanne Davis with promotion, Bill Baldwin on contests, Bill Belew with logistics, Cathy Bauer organizing hospitality, and Dick Amyx kibitzing and keeping us on track.

The East of Eden conference is a South Bay hallmark, known and loved in our

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# President's Challenge

by *Bill Baldwin*  
*President, South Bay Writers*

## What is this writing life? And how do we nourish it?

So we all want to be writers, and we all want to know how to do it. How can we be successful? "Teach us to write!" we say. But is it all that simple?

I sit here watching a film about T. S. Eliot and his first wife, Vivienne. I've watched films about the Beat writers. Did I learn anything about writing? I suppose not. Did I learn anything about painting by watching films about Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, or Van Gogh?

Well, I learn something about painters and writers, even if I don't learn about painting and writing! That's some benefit. But what do I learn? Something about how painters and writers approach life. Not how they write or paint, but how they approach life. I've watched movies about composers. That didn't teach me anything about writing music. But it taught me a little bit about how composers live.

But do writers live differently from any other people? Maybe only in the sense that they try to put something into words. We are trying to communicate using words. Some of it involves grammar, it is true, but some of it involves organizing what we want to say. And sometimes, what we are trying to say is not a simple matter of putting a thought down on paper, but of arranging it to produce an effect.

So how do we learn to write? How do we nourish the writing life? We can learn grammar, we can learn plot construction. But the main thing is that we have to read as many different things as we can, and write as much as we can. And learn as much about the written word as we can. And think about what we want to say, and the reaction we want to provoke—yes, provoke!

I hope to introduce an element of reading and writing into our monthly dinner meetings. I hope we can have at least one short reading at each meeting, and perhaps some kind of writing. I also hope that, although we have put the East of Eden Conference on the shelf for 2010, we can provide some events that offer a little of the same experience that East of Eden would have been.

So—for starters—if you are interested, email me with 100 words or so that you think are well written, either your own words or someone else's. Label it "President's Challenge." Maybe I'll read them at next month's meeting!

My email is [WABaldwin@aol.com](mailto:WABaldwin@aol.com).

See you at the meeting—or at one of our Open Mics! wt



### Still Seeking Treasurer for Our Club

Although Richard Burns has graciously continued performing the tasks of Treasurer, we really need to honor his desire to step down. If you would be willing to serve on our SBW Board as Treasurer, please contact Bill at [WABaldwin@aol.com](mailto:WABaldwin@aol.com). You will be much appreciated!

## California Writers Club South Bay Branch

— 0 —

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### Join Us

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



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## WRITERSTALK

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

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### Submissions

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

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

### Guest Columns

*Almost Anything Goes* (400 words)

### News Items (400 words)

### Letters to the Editor (300 words)

to Andrea Galvacs  
newsletter@southbaywriters.com

### Creative Works

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

### Accolades

accolades@southbaywriters.com

### Announcements and Advertisements

newsletter@southbaywriters.com

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

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

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# Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx  
Editor

## Works for me



I suppose we might have expected that some people would be reluctant to spend money on the East of Eden Writers' Conference in these parlous economic times, but who would have thought that the City of Salinas would be forced to shut down its conference center? It is, of course, unfortunate that we'll have to miss the talks and workshops that had been planned, but it's also unfortunate that we'll be deprived of the sense of community, the energy, the creative rejuvenation that sends us back to our keyboards with new ideas and new determination—the writers' conference *vibe*.

I completed three years of an electrical engineering curriculum before I went on to take a BA in English (with a creative writing emphasis, even). The economic times being what they were then, I wound up spending fourteen years as a civil engineering technician followed by twenty-five as a technical writer. Because of that background and whatever innate interests drive me, I've always kept one foot in the camp of the physical sciences and one foot in the camp of literature. Whenever I got annoyed with the limited, literal worldview that engineers sometimes exhibit, I'd feel a *need* to spend some time with the poets; and when the poets became a little too insubstantial for me, I'd go back for a grounding in the realities of the physical sciences (like fractals, quarks, and virtual gluons).

A year or so after I left the engineering world behind me, I wanted to get reconnected with a literary community—a writing community—in which I could participate and recharge that part of my soul. Because Meredy was a member of South Bay Writers, I tagged along to a couple of meetings with her, and it was at an SBW meeting that I learned about an adult ed creative writing workshop that Edie Matthews was teaching and signed up for it. Shortly after, I joined SBW too. That creative writing workshop morphed into a critique group when Santa Clara Adult Education ran short on funds—it's an unhappy truth that the arts always get the short end of the stick when funds are scarce—and I've continued to participate there since.

I've lamented too many places too many times that years of technical writing caused my creative faculty to atrophy, but I'll make no bones about saying one more time that a primary reason I've stuck with the local writing community was the hope that its influence could crack me loose and get me writing again.

It seems to be working.

No, I haven't yet written the Great American Novel, but by seeing what others are doing, listening carefully to speakers at SBW meetings, attending East of Eden in 2008, coming to accept the NaNoWriMo philosophy (write now and to hell with everything else; edit and rewrite later), which I had for some time scorned, I'm finally finding myself able to make use of some of the writing techniques I learned academically a long time ago and have had reinforced during the past three years. Writing is coming easier for me, and I now have more words of a continuous narrative in one place than I've ever had before. Whether or not this particular writing is of any consequence is irrelevant: I am both relieved and encouraged by my success in finally being able to sustain the creation of some fiction. And I'm a much happier fellow.

So, although we are deprived of the East of Eden *vibe* this year, we can still find a robust writing community through South Bay Writers and its ancillary activities, and all at bargain-basement prices. A wealth of resources is available to us, and if it will work for me, chances are that it can work for you, too, no matter where your writing interests lie. WT



# Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

It seems the seasons are a bit mixed up in the Bay Area. There have been few blazing days of summer to complain about—fog creeps in at night as we slumber and hangs over the hills threaten-



Jackie Mutz  
Contributing Editor

ing a repeat performance. It feels like fall instead of hot August days and nights. Days are just a bit shorter and night comes earlier. School is around the corner; there is that subtle shift in California seasons, something one feels and doesn't really see until the first fall rains. Suddenly everything is green, a precursor to winter's quiet of rest and renewal come spring.

Sorry to hear about the cancellation of East of Eden as it is such an amazing conference. Hoping more members will

contact "Accolades" regarding their writing news. Four accolades this month:

- **Robert Balmanno** has published his novel *Runes of Iona*, the second in "The Blessing of Gaia" series. You may remember his first book, *September Snow*. He will be doing a twenty-city book signing tour between now and January 2011, mostly here in the greater Bay Area. More info at Bob's website, robertbalmanno.com. Congrats, Bob!
- **Marcela Dickerson** just submitted *Marcela's Memoirs* to a contest in the Chilean newspaper *El Mercurio* to commemorate Chile's 200th Anniversary of Independence. Hope you win, Marcela!
- **Marjorie Johnson** attended the international conference of the Fibonacci Association in Morelia, Mexico. The Fibonacci Association publishes *The Fibonacci Quarterly*, an academic mathematics journal

devoted to number theory. Involved as secretary of the board of directors for 46 years, she has been on the editorial board since its inception in 1963. She was "surprised and thrilled when the association honored me at the conference banquet. They have dedicated the August issue of the journal to me, and they awarded me an engraved clock for my desk for my many years of service." A well-deserved accolade, Marjorie!

- *Still Life*, a short thriller film written and directed by **Victoria M. Johnson**, was accepted for the Silicon Valley Film Festival. It was screened at the inaugural festival on Saturday, August 21. Way to go, Victoria!

As you can see, different kinds of writing success stories are submitted. So where are yours? We are waiting to hear your news! Remember to email us at [accolades@southbaywriters.com](mailto:accolades@southbaywriters.com). And may the rest of your summer days be lazy, peaceful, and not too hot. WT

## Time Used Wisely A Preconference Workshop

by Dave LaRoche

Thirty-two writers assembled in the airy morning light at the Lookout to discover how to maximize their investment in a conference—any writers conference. The day was Saturday, July 31, and Ro Davis, with her vast experience, was at the podium. Ro has attended or been primary in developing some thirty-odd such events and knows her stuff—and it shows that she knows it. We coffeed up and were particularly attentive.

First we learned to *navigate*—to map our conference routes in favor of our interest. We learned to network, and that a salient feature of a conference is the ideas roaming through the hall: new ways to address old saws; new saws; ways to cut our narrative and combine or disassemble—how to rework to achieve more powerful ideas. Old writing axioms, tried and true but forgotten, and now remembered. Take notes. Ro advised taking recorders. But before you walk through the door, study options and match them to your needs: what, who, when, and where to spend your time.

We learned to pitch: what to pitch and how to pitch it—tips that work. We discovered that a synopsis is not a pitch, and that it's crucial to back away from the narrative in favor of its theme. We learned to be selective when choosing who to pitch; how complete our book needs to be; and when to shut up and breathe. We need to remember that agents, too, are people.

Publishing, as it turns out, is half the job of a writer when the needed promotion is added in. Agents are the gateway to the traditional publishing we seek, and pitching them, done right, is an effective way through. In these sessions it's required that we know our book well, both its content and its purpose; that we know our market and are comfortable working in it; and foremost, that we smoothly articulate the sum of them—in about five minutes. We learned how to do this at this workshop, and that it takes practice.

I am better prepared now, and here's another thing I know. Our preconference workshop is becoming a tradition and is well attended. The secret is out—to maximize investment, we must know what we're getting into, and I believe now we are ready.

I refer to the conference as "investment" even though in these times of today's privation terror we may consider it an expense—there goes the caviar for the rest of the year. But we are writers. We aspire to publish and sell what we write, and that makes us entrepreneurs as well. Yes, we're in business and seeking success. Businesses invest, and the result of that investment is capital that includes tools and the processes for using them. Writers conferences *are* an investment, and the wonder is that we not only get the processes and tools so necessary to the work but learn on the spot how to use them. I can say with certainty that a person who *invests* will leave a conference a much better and more motivated writer, and with a box full of tools.

Since I wrote this, East of Eden has been canceled, and I thought about withdrawing it. However, second thoughts being occasionally fruitful, I decided it was worthy, if not for EoE then for any conference and likely any writers event. What we have learned through the workshop is valuable, and will stay with us through years of attending events—thanks to Rosanne Davis. WT

# August Recap

## Patricia Volonakis Davis

by Jackie Mutz

It was business as usual during the August South Bay Writers meeting as Dave LaRoche passed the gavel back to Bill Baldwin to begin his term as president. Vice President Colin Seymour reinforced the idea that meetings make it possible for us to be a source of support for each other as writers as well as being a place where we can network for opportunity. Other news:

- The CWC state anthology will be released soon.
- Bill read his Kerouac piece too quickly.
- Dave LaRoche announced the unfortunate cancellation of the East of Eden conference due to a lagging economy, a flat registration process, and the shutdown of the Salinas Conference Center.
- Andrea Galvacs announced the winners of the Fall *WritersTalk* challenge consisting of four categories; memoir, essay, fiction, and poetry.
- Cathy Bauer is stepping down as hospitality chair, so there is a vacancy. Dave encouraged members to consider becoming a board member.
- First-time attendees were introduced and many announced their own writing success stories (remember to contact [accolades@southbaywriters.com](mailto:accolades@southbaywriters.com) to get your news in *WT*'s "Accolades" column).

And then it was time for everyone's favorite part of the meeting, the guest speaker. Patricia Volonakis Davis, author of *Harlot's Sauce: A Memoir of Food, Family, Love, Loss and Greece*, opened with a question: Who in the audience was published and did they use a traditional or nontraditional means to do so? (Writing this from an audio tape I do not know how many answered, but I gather there were more unpublished than published authors of books.) Rather than spend her time talking about the book itself or her new book, working title *The Diva Doctrine*, due out in 2011, she focused on the

process of the writer's journey. "No matter how big or small," she said, "whatever your vision, go after it."

Over the years, Patricia learned much about the business of publishing—she worked as a sales representative for Scholastic, raising sales inventory 150 percent while employed there. She stressed the importance of maintaining a good relationship with your readers, editors, and publishers. Those are the people who help you to get where you want to be—a published writer and author. Not paying attention, being



Patricia Volonakis Davis: edit, edit, edit.

demanding, skipping the editorial process, ignoring fellow writers, ignoring reviews, and not being involved in the marketing of your book, are a sure-fire way not to have success in publishing. (See her satirical July 22 post on Chuck Sambuchino's Guide to Literary Agents blog.)

It is also important to invest the time and money in finding a good professional editor to "weed out the fluff" after your book is finished. In the first edition of *Harlot's Sauce*, some reviews noted there were lots of mistakes (spelling errors). In the second edition, some thought "the last twenty pages went too fast." Her advice? Edit your book and then do it again; listen to your editor and keep an open mind. A good book is one that has gone through some serious editing, ending up a finished product readers will love.

Building a platform for your book is a way to increase the volume of reader-

ship, get your book out there. The purpose of a writer's blog is to attract an audience, which is of course, the people who read your book. In using Facebook, for instance, make sure you know who you are contacting and why. Be logical in how you want to use certain tools to make yourself known. One way to do this is to visit the blogs of authors who are writing on the same subject that you are. Read the blog and leave a comment. Chances are good that that blogger will reciprocate and visit your blog and leave a comment. Readership of a blog doesn't happen by magic; it happens by logic. What you want to do is appeal to people who are interested in the topic of your book. Then set a Google Alert on your name so you'll know who's talking about you. As writers, we are an introspective group wrapped up in our own experience. Blogs are a good way to connect with other writers.

In her book, *Harlot's Sauce*, Salsa Puttanesca is so simple to make that a prostitute can do so in between clients. Given limited choices, it is possible to "make something wonderful anyway." A good example of this is Patricia herself: from a blog posting entitled "From an Older Woman to a Younger One" that went viral came a book soon to be published. It is amazing what can happen in a writer's world. *WT*

## Autumn in the Redwoods

A three-day writers' retreat presented by the Northern California CWC branches and sponsored by SBW.

When: Oct 20–22, 2010 (Wed–Fri)

Where: Pema Osel Ling Tibetan Buddhist Retreat Center in the Santa Cruz Mountains

Cost: \$225 for two nights, three days, including all meals, lodging, and workshop; \$165 for daytrippers (no lodging)

Space is limited to 25. For more information, contact Dale King, [deking8@msn.com](mailto:deking8@msn.com)

# View from the Board

by Sylvia Halloran

Board meeting August 4, 2010

Present were Dave LaRoche, Marjorie Johnson, Colin Seymour, Dick Amyx, Bill Baldwin, Sylvia Halloran, Carolyn Donnell, and Dale King.

Minutes of July 14, 2010 approved.

## Officers' Reports

### President (Bill Baldwin)

- Dale King, appointed treasurer in July, resigned. Richard Burns, former treasurer, helped with the Pitch workshop but doesn't wish to continue.
- Bill Belew stepped down as Workshop chair. Nina Amir agreed to take over.
- *WritersTalk* editor position interests Bill Belew.
- Cathy Bauer retired from Hospitality/Network chair.
- Possibility of changes to dinner meeting structure.
- President attended first annual Capitol City Young Writers' Conference in San Anselmo July 17. James Redford, Paul Kaufman, David Corbett, Peter Beagle, Jane Friedman, Peter Beren, and Verna Dreisbach spoke. SBW could encourage young writers in our area. Karen Sweet and Suzette Gamero are no longer interested in pursuing this.
- East of Eden conference: are there only two choices? Would a shorter conference make any sense?

### Vice President (Colin Seymour)

- August—Patricia Volonakis Davis: How she slathered sauce on her memoir.
- September—Kelly Harrison: Top 10 ways to get your manuscript rejected.
- October—Mahesh Grossman: Ghost Writing.
- November—Tanya Egan Gibson: World-building. How to create fictional settings that excite the reader, shape characters, and propel the characters into action.

### Treasurer (Richard Burns acting)

- Balance on July 31: \$28,390. \$6K goes to State CWC in Aug/Sep.
- Pitch Workshop: 32 paid attendees,

one no-show. Gross Revenue \$705 (23 CWC members of which ~16 SBW; 9 nonmembers). PayPal expenses=\$18.93; Meal expenses (Lookout Restaurant at \$18/meal)=\$630. Net Profit=\$56.07.

- No new treasurer has been found. Richard Burns, Dave LaRoche, and Marjorie Johnson are still signatories on the checking account.

Treasurer's report accepted.

## Committee Chair Reports

### Central Board (Dave LaRoche)

The anthology *West Winds Centennial* moves toward printing at LSI with proofs due back August 3. Will retail for \$16, member discount available.

### NorCal Group (Dave LaRoche)

- Leadership Conference scheduled for August 22—\$65. Dave moved to approve \$325 to fund participation for up to five officers. Dale seconded. Marjorie offered an amendment to include committee chairmen. The amended motion was approved unanimously.
- Fall Retreat scheduled for October 20 through 22—\$226. Ten are currently registered for the retreat but 25 participants are necessary to qualify for the good caterer. Flyers will be at Tuesday's meeting.
- NorCal itself has no budget and no access to money. CWC branches sponsor projects as members propose them; a separate, temporary account is set up and an insurance rider is obtained.

### Membership (Marjorie Johnson)

- Presently 217 names on roster; 170 have paid dues. Haven't heard from 40 people; 5 people promised to pay.
- Since CWC doesn't require payment until October 15, the August 10 deadline was questioned. Collecting monies and assembling the roster take time. Dave moved that SBW establish September 15 as the renewal deadline, for this year and from this year on. Colin seconded. 6 ayes. 2 abstentions. 2010 payments will be honored as on time until September 15.

### Newsletter (Dick Amyx)

August issue of *WritersTalk*: 16 pages, printed and mailed July 29. Press run: 221 dues-paid members, 12 comps, and

15 extras, total 248. July issue cost: \$269.54.

### Publicity

Colin will keep Edie posted on information she needs to publicize club events.

### Hospitality

Cathy stepped down as hospitality chair. President makes arrangements with the Lookout. Dinner costs \$15.75 per person.

### Webmaster

Hosting service and domain bill arrived, \$58/year. Carolyn, webmaster come October, will handle the contract with the web builder.

### Open Mics (Bill Baldwin)

Number of readings since the last board meeting:

- 7/ 16 (Pruneyard) —7 readings.
- 7/ 23 (Sunnyvale)—11 readings

## Old Business

### New Treasurer

Recommendations for filling the position are welcome.

### 2010 East of Eden Conference

Enrollment languishes, venue uncertain. A decision to continue the effort will be made by August 24, 2010.

## New Business

### Dinner Meeting Structure

Forego passing the mic around; make tables available for welcome and information about writing opportunities. Writing during meeting?

### Future Workshops

Nina is new workshop chair. Four per year, including one for youth.

### Youth Programs

SBW might hold college writing competitions with prizes for paid attendees of CWC Retreats.

Next Meeting September 8, 2010

Adjourned 9:10 p.m. WT

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## Sept. All

Everyone's day in the sun  
Should come: all writers have fun  
With bragging: "See, I'm published here!"

Don't knock it,  
Cash or praise in the pocket.  
Then enjoy that cheer!

—Pat Bustamante



# Writecraft: Advice Worth Repeating

by Lisa Eckstein

As I write about the craft of writing, I sometimes worry that I'm repeating myself. I'm certainly repeating advice that I've learned from other writers, who frequently share the same advice as still others. There's a reason for all this repetition. The tips I've encountered over and over again are the best ones out there. I'll take my turn at sharing:



Lisa Eckstein  
Contributing Editor

**1. Present a scene, not an explanation.** This is what people mean by "Show, don't tell," an instruction that always struck me as enigmatic. Readers want to experience the events of a story along with the characters, so give them vivid action, dialogue, and sensory details, not a recap.

"Douglas and Bonnie argued over the laundry" is far less interesting than a scene in which the argument plays out through hurled insults and undergarments. Instead of stating "Howie felt anxious," describe the physical effects of Howie's anxiety or reveal his troubled thoughts. Avoid generic descriptions such as "Meredith was cute" that neither paint a picture for the reader nor offer insight into the mind of the character who's appreciating Meredith's cuteness.

During important parts of a story, allow the reader to get inside the scene and the characters. At times, however, it will be appropriate to summarize. If the argument about laundry is incidental, a sentence of exposition may suffice.

**2. Leave out the boring parts.** Not everything that happens to the characters has to appear in a story. The logic of a plot often requires characters to undertake the same kinds of actions that bore us in real life: traveling from place to place, deciding what to cook for dinner, getting ready for bed. Unless something significant occurs during these events, sum them up in a few words or skip over them. Writers have the power to move characters through space and time with magic phrases like

"When he arrived at the factory," "After hours of research," and "The next morning."

Repetition is boring. Don't write a scene in which a character reflects on or tells someone about a previous scene. Even if the musing or reporting is intended to offer juicy new insight, take care not to repeat information that the reader already knows.

Stay away from predictable characters, obvious situations, generic details, and cliché phrases. Unexpected alternatives are harder to come up with, but they're rarely boring.

**3. Reveal setting through characters and characters through setting.** Every person views the world from a unique perspective. A newcomer to a city notices different details than a longtime resident, who has different associations than someone who hoped never to return. A woman about to deliver a baby doesn't react to a hospital in the same way as a child with a terminally

sick parent, and their observations are both unlike those of a medical student.

To write descriptions worth reading, adopt a character's perspective on the surroundings. The emotions and memories connected to a place are at least as evocative as the sights and sounds, and they give the reader information about character as well as setting.

**4. Introduce conflict everywhere.** Much of the conflict in a story comes from obstacles that prevent a character from reaching a goal, and it's a good policy to create as many impediments as possible. Other characters are a wonderful source of conflict. Keep pleasant, agreeable character interactions to a minimum or risk a story that drags from lack of tension.

Even settings and details can provide friction when they clash with a character's nature. Drag a shy character

*Continued on page 9*

## WritersTalk Challenge Awards

Twice a year, in February and August, awards of a certificate and a \$40 check are given to contributors to *WritersTalk*. You need take no special steps to enter this competition; if your piece in one of the designated genres is published in *WritersTalk*, you are a contestant in the Challenge. The August winners were

Fiction: Marcela Dickerson, for "Life Sentence"

Article/Essay: Phyllis Mattson, for "Learning to Speak"

Memoir: Julia Crane, for "Gathering Family: An Adoptee's Search for Kinship"

Poetry: Richard Burns, for "My Wife's Ghost"



Available for the picture: Challengemistress Andrea Galvacs, Marcela Dickerson, Richard Burns.

## What Do I Want?

What do I want?

Really, what do I want?

Give me a minute; a day; a year.

Now I've thought on it;

It's getting clearer.

I've made it through the silence.

So here goes:

Why not start with stuff that really counts?

The gift of a handsome face and a fat-free, washboard stomach.

I'm not all that sure I could actually deal with it, but test me.

Give me a knowledgeable, unconfused mind,

A straight tongue, a true voice.

Let me tell it as I see it, easy and honest,

And let all who care to, have a chance to listen.

Give me a journey. Give me a searching, a yearning,

To eliminate my ignorance,

To understand that which I am curious about.

I want to be suffused in positive feelings, laughter, rocking out;

Singing, movement, dancing, and warm smiles from others.

Good times with my kids, with them just one time asking:

"Oh, Dad, tell us about how it was."

Give me a friend or two or six,

Let me have a sense of humor, be often happy, often content.

Grant me the gift of tolerating people I don't agree with.

What do I want?

Let me enjoy the moment, the now, a pace that is sane.

Give me short winters. Protect me from pain.

A world that gets better along my way,

And a life of discovery, tomorrow and the next day.

Along with these, just give me strength, energy, and a courageous attitude of can-do—  
—that's all I want—

A journey with only these . . . and bees and trees . . . oh, yes! . . . and you.

—Richard A. Burns

## East of Eden Canceled

*Continued from page 1*

writers community, and we will come out with another in a couple of years.

We aren't giving up; rather, we're taking a breather while the economy corrects itself and the availability of a venue gets resolved.

We thank all of you for your understanding, and particularly those facilitators, teachers, agents, and speakers who eagerly committed their time. We thank the hoteliers, our caterer, the Turf Club, the CWC branches that helped with our promotion; and the community of Salinas that regularly hosts us. We ask that you keep us in mind for the next East of Eden Writers Conference, when the jewel of the west will shine again.

By the way, there are other, shorter, less expensive conferences this fall. Redwood Branch, up the road in Santa Rosa, will hold a Saturday conference in October. Check [redwoodwriters.org](http://redwoodwriters.org) for details. Or, should you hanker for a drive through the cacti and scrub, High Desert Branch is hosting its conference on September 25; details at [hdcwc.org](http://hdcwc.org).

Again, thank you for your support and understanding; and we hope to see you in the fall of 2012. WT

You must stay drunk on writing  
so reality cannot destroy you.

—Ray Bradbury

## September Speaker

*Continued from page 1*

to "a truncated climactic scene. It starts off well, the tension builds up . . . and then they end the story. The best thing is to hold that tension as long as you can. There are a lot of stories that don't do that."

But this story isn't one of them.

Harrison didn't come all that close to revealing the denouement of her September 14 presentation, but you can be pretty sure it's full of people shooting themselves in the foot. Being there just might save your literary aspirations. WT

## Fault Zone!

*Fault Zone: Words from the Edge*, an anthology of short stories, will be published this fall by the SF/Peninsula Branch of California Writers. Your piece should relate to the anthology's theme in some way. Interpret as you wish and have fun.

First Prize is \$300 and publication in our Fault Zone anthology. Second Prize is \$100. Third Prize is \$50.

Contest deadline has been extended to September 30, 2010. Reading fee is \$15.

Submission rules and details at [cwc-peninsula.org](http://cwc-peninsula.org). Click the Contests/Events tab.

## Write On! Story Contest

The annual Write On! Story Contest, formerly The WestSide Story Contest, is open to all genres of literary fiction. The contest, in its sixth year, is now hosted by the Berkeley Branch of the California Writers Club. Started in the early 1900s by Jack London and his writing friends, the CWC is the third oldest organization of its kind in the country.

First Prize: \$250

2<sup>nd</sup> Prize: \$100

3<sup>rd</sup> Prize: \$50

**Deadline: October 1.** For submission rules and details go to [cwc-berkeley.com](http://cwc-berkeley.com).



# Bug!

by Bill Belew

"I don't like spiders and snakes . . . lah dee dah dee dah." Sing along with me here. It'll help set the mood.

I am not afraid of spiders and snakes. And bugs don't bother me either. The invertebrates apparently also don't strike fear in my Indian friends.

Yesterday I was sitting at a table in the upper room of a home in Hubli, Karnataka, India. Parashu sat across from me while his wife, Ranjita, attended to household chores in the background, when out of nowhere (does anybody really know where bugs come from?) I saw a little bug walking across the top of my PC monitor. He looked like a tiny scorpion. Tiny as in itty bitty. And I think it was a he because, well, there was one of those little things sticking out from his body and girls don't usually have such items. Anyway, I shoed (I used a real shoe) him away and life was good for about 15 minutes.

Then he came back . . . and crawled under the S key of my keyboard.

"AAAgH!!!" roughly translated into bug language means, "Get out from under there, you stupid tiny critter, before I upset your unending life cycles and destroy the karma of these fine people who are hosting me. Now!" Bug language is pretty efficient.

Taking me seriously it seems, he immediately headed for daylight . . . but got STUCK! Serious as a heart attack here. The bug got stuck under my S key. No, under the V key. Wait! There he is under the O key.

He couldn't get back out. And I couldn't type or I'd smash his little body, resulting in rotting bug guts under some arbitrary key for the remaining life of my laptop.

What to do? I ripped off the offending S key, muttering, "Why did you let him under there in the first place?" as if talking to an inanimate object was going to help the situation.

Some ten minutes later and after some violent shaking of my laptop, not to mention pounding on its sides by my hosts as if it were a child choking on a pretzel, the little future star of *It's A*

*Bug's Life Part 4* came crawling out. Did I see a smile on his face?

Six hands went after him, one set of hands bent on making bug powder of him and using the residue to make some kind of foreign anti-viral medicine to protect humans from Indian hacks of the most obscure nature.

This next part cannot be made up. The little dude scampered, skipped? (there's that smirk again) into one of the holes next to my touch pad that catch the latches protruding from the opened laptop monitor. He went *beneath* the keys and the keyboard. Forget *It's a Bug's Life*. This guy wanted to be with Brendan Fraser in the next *Journey to the Center of the Earthly Technology*.

More violent shaking. "No! Do NOT bounce my laptop off the wall."

And then someone said, "Let's have some ice cream!"

"What?!"

"Ice cream."

I was trying to get a real virus carrier attack out of my PC and they wanted ice cream? "Okay," says I.

As it turns out, the bug apparently liked (past tense is used here, so you know where this is headed) ice cream too, and sure enough, he came crawling out.

You'd have thought India won the Cricket World Cup. Screaming and shouting and jumping for joy. Dancing and flag-waving by the masses (lots of folk live under one roof in an Indian household). I, meanwhile, reached for my other shoe only because there was no sledgehammer nearby.

Before I could send this once-explorer (on that guy Magellan's ship, no doubt, and left behind by the famous captain because said explorer got stuck under a bed in some brothel in the port of Mumbai) into oblivion, my host grabbed the little fellow, took him to the balcony and set him free. Free to become a computer hardware engineer in his next life for some Indian company hoping to replace Dell, HP, or even that company named after a fruit.

"Why should I hire you? What can you bring to our company that no other hardware engineer has to offer?"

"Well, in a previous life, I investigated firsthand the inner workings of success-

ful laptop makers in hopes of reverse-engineering their design and improving upon . . ."

My hosts smiled, knowing their karma was safe for the time being and that their small kids had not yet seen American Hollywood-type violence firsthand (*Gozilla vs LeRoy the Bug*) and said to me, "Welcome to India."

". . . ?!"

"Would you like some more ice cream?"

"Okay. Now that my computer has been debugged. But I am not putting down my shoe!" WT

There is nothing in the world that should not be expressed in such a way that an affectionate seven-year-old boy can see and understand it.

—Leo Tolstoy

## Writecraft

*Continued from page 7*

onto a TV talent competition or strand an Internet addict in a remote mountain village. For extra discord, challenge the reader's expectations and make the tech fiend neither young nor socially awkward.

### 5. Say more with snappier dialogue.

Written dialogue should resemble real speech but not reproduce it. In real life, people spend a lot of time making unimportant remarks or saying things they've said before. Don't waste space and reader attention on this boring repetition. Skip past the greetings, introductions, and small talk to get to the meat of a conversation.

Characters can still sound authentic while speaking more concisely than real people. Leave in the interesting, obstacle-riddled parts of actual speech: evasion, interruption, misunderstanding. Throw in a healthy dose of disagreement and emotion for dialogue that snaps with conflict.

These five pieces of advice are easy to pass on, but I know they aren't straightforward to follow. Every time I write a story, I find that I need to remind myself of these guidelines again. I invite you to repeat them with me. WT

## Directory of Experts

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

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

Bill Belew  
[wbelew@gmail.com](mailto:wbelew@gmail.com)

### Astrology, Singing

Sara Aurich  
[saraaurich@comcast.net](mailto:saraaurich@comcast.net)

### Astronomy, History of Astronomy

Bob Garfinkle  
[ragarf@earthlink.net](mailto:ragarf@earthlink.net)

### Character Development

ArLyne Diamond, Ph.D.  
[ArLyne@DiamondAssociates.net](mailto:ArLyne@DiamondAssociates.net)

### Counseling

Dr. Audry L. Lynch  
[GLYNCH7003@sbcglobal.net](mailto:GLYNCH7003@sbcglobal.net)

### Engineering: Mechanical, Aero, Aerospace

Jerry Mulenburg  
[geraldmulenburg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:geraldmulenburg@sbcglobal.net)

### Growing Great Characters from the Ground Up

Martha Engber  
[marthaengber.com](mailto:marthaengber.com)  
[marthaengber.blogspot.com](http://marthaengber.blogspot.com)

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

Rick Deutsch  
[MrHalfDome@gmail.com](mailto:MrHalfDome@gmail.com); 408-888-4752

### Hospital and Nursing Environment

Maureen Griswold  
[maureengriswold@sbcglobal.net](mailto:maureengriswold@sbcglobal.net)

### Internal Medicine/Addiction Disorder/ Psychology

Dave Breithaupt  
[dlbmlb@comcast.net](mailto:dlbmlb@comcast.net)

### Library Science

Molly Westmoreland  
[mulcarend@hotmail.com](mailto:mulcarend@hotmail.com)

### Marketing and Management

Suzy Paluzzi, MBA  
[jomarch06@yahoo.com](mailto:jomarch06@yahoo.com)

### Mathematics: Teaching and History; Fibonacci Sequence

Marjorie Johnson  
[MarJohnson89@earthlink.net](mailto:MarJohnson89@earthlink.net)

### Philosophy, Religion, Evolution, Construction, Crafts, Norse

Darwin Mathison  
[olddinosaur@comcast.net](mailto:olddinosaur@comcast.net)  
510-471-8944

### Profile Writing

Susan Mueller  
[susan\\_mueller@yahoo.com](mailto:susan_mueller@yahoo.com)

### Real Estate, Horses, Remodeling, Southwest History

Reed Stevens  
[reedstevens@earthlink.net](mailto:reedstevens@earthlink.net); 408-374-1591

### Teaching and the Arts

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

### Television Production

Woody Horn  
408-266-7040

### USMC and NASA/Ames

Terry DeHart  
[tdehart@earthlink.net](mailto:tdehart@earthlink.net)

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## Ongoing Critique Groups

### The Arm Wavers

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

### Writers' Salon

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

### Le Boulanger Writers

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

### Northpoint Critique Group

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

### Our Voices

Meets in Santa Clara  
Meets every other Tuesday  
7:15 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.  
Genres: Fiction, nontechnical nonfiction, memoir  
Contact: Dave LaRoche—  
[dalaroche@comcast.net](mailto:dalaroche@comcast.net)  
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](mailto: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](http://cwc-berkeley.com)

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

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

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

**Mount Diablo:** Meets the second Saturday of each month, except July and August, at 11:30 a.m. at the Hungry Hunter Restaurant, 3201 Mount Diablo Boulevard, Lafayette (corner of Pleasant Hill Road and Highway 24). [mtdiablowriters.org](http://mtdiablowriters.org)

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

**Tri-Valley:** Meets the third Saturday of each month, except July and August, at 11:30 a.m. at the Oasis Grille, 780 Main Street, Pleasanton. [trivalleywriters.com](http://trivalleywriters.com)

**Sacramento:** Meets at 11:00 a.m. the third Saturday of every month, except July and August, at Luau Garden Chinese Buffet, 1890 Arden Way, Sacramento 95815. [sacramento-writers.org](http://sacramento-writers.org)

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

## Stay Informed!

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

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<h1>September</h1>			1	2	3 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose	4
			5	6	7	8
12	13	14 6P Regular Dinner Meeting Lookout Inn Kelly Harrison	15	16 <b>WritersTalk deadline</b>	17 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	18
19	20	21	22	23	24 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Sunnyvale	25
26	27	28	29	30	<h1>2010</h1>	
<b>Future Flashes</b>		<b>October 12</b> 6P Regular Dinner Meeting Lookout Inn Mahesh Grossman	<b>October 20–22</b> Autumn in the Redwoods Writers' Retreat			

## Self-Publishing Boot Camp Workshop: Ten Steps to Self-Publishing Success

**October 16, 2010**

SBW members get a \$15 discount for this all-day workshop with Lisa Alpine and Carla King.

For full details and registration, go to [selfpubbootcamp.com/pages/workshops/](http://selfpubbootcamp.com/pages/workshops/) and use this discount code: SBWWS

Check out the new  
South Bay Writers

### Blog

[southbaywriters.com](http://southbaywriters.com)  
Click SBW Journal—Blog

## South Bay Writers Open Mic

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

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

## South Bay Writers Anthology



\$10

At the meeting.  
On the website.  
[southbaywriters.com](http://southbaywriters.com)

## Other Open Mics

### 10Ten Gallery

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

### Poets@Play

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



## 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](http://pcsj.org) for details.



**California Writers Club**  
South Bay Branch  
P.O. Box 3254  
Santa Clara, CA 95055  
[www.southbaywriters.com](http://www.southbaywriters.com)

## MAIL TO

Address Correction Requested

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

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

**Kelly Harrison**  
SJSU teacher, writer, and editor  
**“Why Was It Rejected?”**

*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.

