



WRITERSTALK

Volume 29
Number 1
January 2021

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club™

JANUARY SPEAKER: EDWARD PORTER

Five essentials to writing funny

Jamal Khan



Monday
11 Jan • 7 PM
Details to come!

Humor can single-handedly salvage a manuscript from the slush pile. There will always be an insatiable demand for it, regardless of larger literary trends. This is because humor is not confined to any specific genre; even horror

and tragedy can be enriched with specks of well-placed humor by a dexterous writer. At the heart of humor is irony, the upsetting of expectations in a clever manner. On **11 January**, **Stanford Professor Ed Porter** will guide us through five essentials to writing “funny.”

Professor Porter teaches a humor class at Stanford called “I Bet You Think You’re Funny.” He will talk about some of the theories of humor that have evolved over the ages, illustrate them with examples from contemporary fiction and nonfiction, and offer some exercises and principles that we can apply in our own writing. He will also talk about the ethics of humor, and some of the various ends that humor serves within the larger context of literature and culture.

Professor Porter’s writing has appeared in *Glimmer Train*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Catamaran*, *Bar-*

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2021—It’s on!

2020 is history, but 2021 is no mystery – we’ve got you covered with great speakers each month. Join us on second-Monday evenings for scintillating topics, lively discussion, and *hygge*.

Watch your email for all the Zoom deets.

08 February Website Guru **Bill Belew** explains how to “Find & Engage Your Readers”



08 March New York agent and publisher LeeAnne Krusemark talks to us about “Manuscript Formatting & Submission Do’s & Don’ts: Avoiding Simple Mistakes that Cause Rejection”

12 April *New York Times* best-selling mystery writer **Cara Black** will speak about her new book and succesful *Aimée Leduc* series

WT



Between the lines

Edie Matthews

President, South Bay Writers



Ha-ha, He-he

We all need a laugh! Twenty-two has been a trying year, so it's fitting that we begin 2021 with some hilarity! Furthermore, it's said that laughter relieves stress, improves breathing, eases pain, boosts

the immune system, and helps weight reduction. (REALLY?) Consequently, our first speaker, Ed Porter, will give a presentation on the "Five Essentials to Writing Funny."

This is perfect timing since we're also having a **Flash Humor Writing Contest**. A contest with not just the honor of winning but with prizes: first place (\$50), second place (\$30), and third place (\$20)! So you definitely want to tune in for our next Zoom meeting for some tips to help you create the winning entry.

The contest is open only to members. Yes, South Bay Writers membership has its privileges. Non-members are encouraged to join SBW, so they can participate too.

Even though I performed as a stand-up comic for over a dozen years, I never thought of myself as funny. Oh, I knew I could tell a good story, *and* if it was humorous, people would laugh.

One of my early memories of making my mother laugh was while she was quizzing me on the *Baltimore Catechism*. This was compiled of a series of religious questions and answers.

Question: "Who made you?"

Answer: "God made me."

Then my mom asked, "Who is God?"

At seven years old, I replied, "God is a string bean who made all things."

My mother burst out laughing. It took several minutes before I could get her to stop and explain what was so funny. Finally, she said the answer was "God is a *Supreme Being*, not a string bean," and she laughed again.

**At 7 years old, I
replied, "God is a
string bean who
made all things."**

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www.southbaywriters.com

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SBW mission

To educate writers of all levels of expertise in the craft of writing and in the marketing of their work

Join Us!

We have a membership category that fits you. Renewal dues are \$45 for membership through 30 Jun 2021. New member \$65, dual membership \$25, student membership \$20. Contact membership@southbaywriters.com, sign up online at southbaywriters.com, or mail your check and application to CWC-South Bay Writers, PO Box 3254, Santa Clara CA 95055

WritersTalk

The monthly newsletter of South Bay Writers, the South Bay Branch of the California Writers Club

newsletter@southbaywriters.com

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Submissions

SBW encourages writers at all levels to submit their creative work, essays, and reportage for publication in *WritersTalk*. Send submissions and proposals to newsletter@southbaywriters.com

Submissions and proposals must be either included in the body of the email or attached as a Word file. No paper submissions. Graphics should be high-quality JPEGs or PNGs. Submissions will be copyedited, and may be sent back for revision. Managing editor reserves all rights to selection

Word limits

Member announcements (200 words, see below)

News/Essay/Reportage (please submit proposal by 1st of month; draft due 15th of month)

Opinion/Letters (300 words)

Fiction/Memoir (1000 words)

Poetry (200 words)

Deadline

Submissions open year-round

Issues close 15th of month prior to publication

Member announcements

An announcement is of interest and value to writers, does not provide direct economic benefit to its originator, and is published free of charge

Reprints

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Advertising

Announcements of workshops, conferences, and events from other branches of California Writers Club are welcome in *WritersTalk*. CWC is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation, and *WritersTalk* cannot accept advertising of events or services that benefit an individual. To advertise in CWC's *The Bulletin*, see page 15. No political advertising

Change of address

membership@southbaywriters.com

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Our what-not shelf

Renée J Anderson

Managing Editor



"Your new editor is now going to try and write a few lines for the editor's column."

That was the opening salvo written in 1948 by my grandmother Letha Anderson, as she commandeered the editor's desk of the *Grant Herald-Independent*, a rural newspaper serving the village of Grant, Michigan—Onion Capital of the World.

Only a few months before, my grandfather Robert Anderson, manager of Grant's Kroger store, had stepped into Michigan Highway 37 and was struck and killed by

a northbound vehicle. The Kroger Company deemed that Letha was not entitled to survivor's compensation, so she and her three teenaged children, Vadah, George (my dad), and Larry, had to find ways to make up the lost income.

Letha did what anyone does in a tight spot—she took over the newspaper. I expect she strode into the editorial office of the *Grant Herald*, still in her black dress, waving her husband's obituary fully marked up in red ink, upbraiding the editor for his hyphenated *-ly* compounds and unbalanced columns, saying he'd best step aside if he had a shred of journalistic professionalism.

Letha's weekly column, "Our What-Not Shelf," was a chatty, intimate space, at times subtle and cheeky, at others profound and magnanimous. "Of course, everybody makes errors," she wrote one week, "though not many have the privilege of having theirs typed up in the newspaper for all to read and enjoy."

Late summer 1950, after the celebrated Onion Harvest Festival had drawn to a close, she expressed gratitude for the festival's organizers: "As I walked down Front Street and all was calm after the hubbub of the past days, it seems almost impossible to find words adequate to express appreciation that is most worthy, but I feel assured the members must possess within themselves the deep satisfaction that their job was well done, and what recompense is more valuable?"

It gives me great joy to join *WritersTalk* as your new managing editor. I will endeavor to meet the standards brilliantly set by my immediate predecessors Marjorie Johnson and Jessica McDole. I am also picking up a torch laid down long ago by a beloved and determined lady I only knew for thirteen years, who would be tickled to see her former column reincarnated and her words in print once again. My grandmother took her settlement case against Kroger all the way to the Michigan Supreme Court, and won! But on the winding road to that victorious day, she raised her three children, earned a degree in education, and became a local public figure, all while preserving for posterity the milestones and stories of friends and neighbors in the *Grant Herald*.

Letha also lived through the 1918 flu pandemic. As we look with hope toward 2021 after this past year-that-shan't-be-named, let us remember that perseverance is like an onion—simmer it long enough with a little of this, a little of that, and you end up with something flavorsome and satisfying. I think that's how the adage goes.

Mask up & stay safe out there. Write!

WT

WANTED



Creative classified ads for a future issue

What is **WANTED** in your life in this very moment, a bowl of macaroni salad to go with your lonely hotdog? A car that makes a Jetsons whirring noise as you drive along? What makes a Jetsons whirring noise as you drive along? What have you **LOST**, the glasses that are sitting on top of your head? What have you **FOUND**, an appreciation for cabbage? **Must be ≤200 chars**, not including header, and in the style of classified ads. Max five ads per author.

newsletter@southbaywriters.com

View from the Board

Marjorie Johnson



On 08 Dec 2020, the usual suspects Zoomed the SBW Board meeting: President Edie Matthews, VP Jamal Khan, Secretary Marjorie Johnson, Treasurer Trenton Myers, Members-at-Large Alfred Jan and Tatyana Grinenko, CWC Central Board Rep Bill Baldwin,

and *WritersTalk* Managing Editor Renée Anderson.

Edie Matthews proposed a flash fiction contest, for humorous 55-word flashes. Details will appear elsewhere in this issue of *WT*.

Kelly Harrison and Tatyana are working on issues with our website. Treasurer Trenton Myers reported healthy SBW bank accounts, and Membership Chair Inga Silva reported one new member; she also said CWC membership is down statewide.

While Open Mics usually occur on first and third Fridays, due to the holidays, Bill announced no Open Mic for 18 Dec or 1 Jan.

The Board accepted Dave LaRoche's resignation from his posts on the CWC NorCal Board and as SBW Bylaws Chair. Bill Baldwin was appointed to finish Dave's term as our representative to the NorCal Board. The bylaws chair is vacant.

The SBW Board meets again **Tuesday, 05 Jan, 7 PM**. Board meetings are open to any interested club member. Attendance is easy: merely send an email to pres@southbaywriters.com, and Edie will send you a Zoom invitation. Bring us your ideas. **WT**

California Writers Club Literary Review

Now open for submissions
through 15 March

calwriters.org/publications/#submit

Member news

Marjorie Johnson

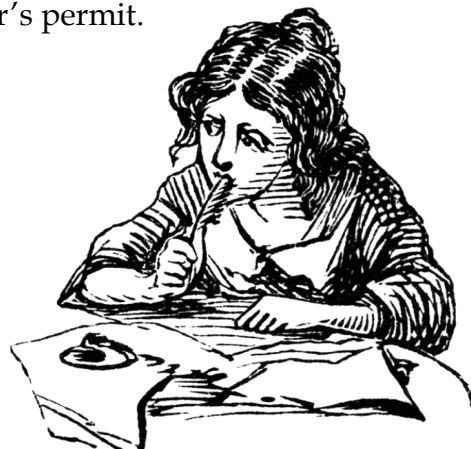
Valerie Estelle Frankel is pleased to announce that she's now editor of an academic series analyzing Jewish SciFi and Fantasy for Rowman & Littlefield. She's happy to publish essays and entire academic books on the topic. Get in touch at valerie@calithwain.com. She's also happy to have sent book one on this topic to the publisher, with lots more to come.

Kelly Miller reports that in the last week of October she entered the "Cover Wars" contest at Author-Shout.com (no hyphen). Five different books were featured in the contest, and readers could vote for their favorite cover once a day for a week. Her cover for *Accusing Mr. Darcy* won, so her book was featured with a purchase link on the website as "Cover Wars Book of the Week." It is free to enter and a great way to gain publicity for your book.

In addition, Kelly's book *Death Takes a Holiday at Pemberley* was a finalist for Romance in the 2020 Book Excellence Awards, receiving First Place for Romance in the 2020 Royal Dragonfly Book Awards.

For those who write historical novels, Kelly wants you to know that The Historical Novel Society accepts requests for book reviews on their website. If they accept your book for review, they may ask that you mail them a hard copy. She has received favorable reviews from them for two of her books so far. You can get more information about their review policy at HistoricalNovelSociety.org

Marjorie Johnson's news would be sad if it wasn't so doggone funny. When she reported her book sales to the State Board of Equalization for 2018, she owed 96¢. They replied that the amount was too small to go through their system. Now they say if she doesn't report her sales for 2019 they will rescind her seller's permit. **WT**



Off the shelf

Edie Matthews



"I hate it when the weather forecast is a metaphor!"

FICTION

Dark night

Kendad

After socializing with coworkers during happy hour, I drove southeast along a causeway that crosses the Belamy Reservoir in Madbury, New Hampshire.

Driving down the two-lane road, I checked my rear-view mirror and saw only darkness tracking me.

Streetlights and passing cars were not, as usual, fading into the night. No, they were abruptly disappearing into the blackness—vanishing.

With the effect not far behind, I grew anxious at the doom that swallowed my past. To my alarm, it grew closer.

I accelerated—it followed.

"Crap!" I stomped to the floor, my tires clinging onto Littleworth Road—a street name that adorned meaning

that night. I sped on for a full two miles before the past was clear.

Reaching home, I wondered if someone had tainted my happy-hour drink.

Later that night, a dream of the same ghostly episode surfaced. I drove faster and faster, it merged closer and closer, and I could not evade the anomaly. I awakened in panic!

I switched on the light and panted in sweat as I lay there gathering my composure.

Now safe, it was all just a silly dream.

Then blackness suddenly burst through the wall. I scrambled out of bed and ran through the doorway to escape. [REDACTED]

WT

Contest

Flash humor

The Rules

- Word count including title: ≤55
- You **MUST** be a member of South Bay Writers (or dual member). If you're not already, now's a good time to join!
- Submit up to three entries
- Deadline **15 February 2021**
- Email entry to:
pres@southbaywriters.com
- Include 1) a setting, 2) a character or characters, 3) conflict, and 4) resolution

1 Stories must be situational, which means they must have a setting of some kind, even if it's the other side of the universe, the inner reaches of someone's mind, or just the house next door.

2 Characters can have infinite variations—people, animals, rocks, microbes.

3 By conflict, we merely mean that in the course of the story, something has to happen. The lovers argue. The deer flees. The astronauts wait in anticipation. Conflict, which leads us to:

4 The outcome of the story, known by English teachers as resolution. This doesn't necessarily mean that there's a moral—"Justice is its own reward," "In the end, love triumphs"—or even that the conflict itself is resolved. It may or may not be.

5 Hint: notice how the title provides key information!

Hear No Evil

"You're free to go!" Judge Hardy shouts at Clements, who bolts from the courtroom, leaving his twelve peers frozen with disbelief in the jury box.

His ashen-faced lawyer finds him kissing the courtroom steps.

"Do you believe it?" says Clements. "Not freakin' guilty!"

In chambers, Judge Hardy fits a new battery into his hearing aid.

The Lifeguard

I eyed that chick all summer, and she never looked my way.

Strutting around the pool, twitching her butt, adjusting her top, drinking Cokes, ignoring me.

Then one morning she almost drowned. I blew my whistle, dove.

As I carried her out, she squirted water in my eye and laughed, "Thought you'd never notice me!"

Erring Dirty Laundry

Dirty laundry covered the floor.

"Is it sorted, Jim? Linda demanded of her husband.

"Sordid?"

"Yes, sorted," repeated Linda. "It's not a trick question."

Jim froze, terrorized.

"It's all so dirty," Linda grumbled.

"Honest, Linda," Jim stammered.

"It wasn't sordid or dirty. It was only an office infatuation!"

It all came out in the wash.

An Unsatisfied Customer

"Let's talk," she says.

"Why wait?" I instinctively respond.

"I'm seeing someone else. A cooking timer salesman."

"For a limited time only?"

"I'm serious! He loves me!"

"Don't be fooled by imitations!"

"You watch infomercials all day. Every day. You're hopeless!"

"Act now, or else!" I challenge her.

"I'm outta here."

"But wait! There's more!"

We're Still Driving It

The sex was fabulous, furious fornication in the back seat of the green '69 Impala, high on Vegas and cheap tequila.

Not the honeymoon of my dreams, but hell, we're still together after 27 years, three kids, AA.

Can't knock that. Although, come each anniversary, I'm inevitably swimming with the memory of slippery leather.

**Deadline
15 Feb!**

Prizes!
1st \$50
2nd \$30
3rd \$20

A New Year's prayer

Jac Fitzenz

I'm sitting in front of my computer in my so-called office. It's just a second bedroom that my wife and I share as work space.

Yesterday, Laura handed me a photo taken at our last Christmas/New Year's visit to my children in Southern California. Left to right there is Katie and her husband Jeff, a former Hollywood stunt man and all around great human being. Next is Rika, Dan's wife and mother of 10-year-old Hana, a musical prodigy (at least I think so). In between is their oldest son, Peter, now living in Idaho with his wife Ana. Hana is across from Peter and next to her dad, Dan, who met and married Rika while studying in Japan for a couple of years. On Dan's left is his friend Randall, and to his left finally me, Grandpa Jac.

There is nothing special about photographs like this. Grandparents have mantelpieces and refrigerators cov-

ered with them. But this one is heart-rending for two reasons. One is that a person is missing from the table. My second son, Mike, died 25 years ago—at age 30—way too young. He was an extraordinarily loveable person. At his wake one of his buddies said it best, "He deserved better."

The second painful reason is that I divorced their mother 15 years into a very troubled marriage. We never should have gotten together. It was my fault. I was young and stupid and didn't see the signs that we were incompatible. I was selfish. Rather than finding some way to live together, I left.

I married again and started a company. Over the next 30 years, I spent most of my time traveling—4 million miles across 50 countries. I sent postcards to the kids from every city I'd landed in, but that didn't make up for what I had not done. When I was

home, I should have spent more time playing with them. I lived only an hour away. But I was too wrapped up in myself. Now, there they are in this photo, no longer children.

Kate is the youngest at 51 and Pete the oldest at 60. I missed most of their lives. I've explained what I did, why I did it, and apologized profusely for my selfishness. They understand and have forgiven me, which is more than I deserve.

This year I can't visit them because of the virus. God is really making me pay. There is a terrible lesson in my behavior. It is this. Since I fathered these children they are entitled to my life. I brought them here. I can't abandon them, no matter the reason. Please God, end this pandemic so I can be with my kids again.

I'm almost 90. I haven't many years left. Please God. **WT**

IMDb.com

Marty Sorensen

IMDb stands for Internet Movie Database. It's great for looking up the actors in a movie, or the movies with a certain actor, and then if so inclined you can click on any actor and find out their whole filmmaking history. And a short biography. Same for writers and directors.

My name's in there, too. As a producer. It was my son's thesis film at film school, and I did help out, so he put me in. His film was just 15 minutes long, with no commercial distribution—and no pay—but he placed a call for actors in a Hollywood website and got 700 responses. My job as producer was to sort through the photos.

Not surprising, really. Every year all these film schools have the graduating students make films that require actors. And there are lots of waiters available.

My son now works in TV in New York, and when we visited him in Queens we went for coffee. I asked the person behind the counter if she had today's paper. I might as well have asked, "Who's on First?" A nice young woman behind us translated, "He means, do you have the *New York Times*."

I thanked her, and she asked where we were from. I said San Jose. She said she was from Los Gatos originally and is now a singer with the Metropolitan Opera. She asked if

we ever went to Opera San Jose, and we said we did when it was still at the Montgomery Theater, but once it moved to the California Theatre the pricing left us uninterested.

In New York alone, she said, there are 30,000 singers looking for a break—oh, and by the way, if you'd like I'll get you in to see a rehearsal this Saturday with Placido Domingo! We didn't say no.

Hmm. Actors. Singers. What about writers? The thing about writers, you don't need anybody else, not like singers or actors do, anyway. You don't even need a publisher.

Problem is, though, as I've found out, you do need yourself. **WT**

Hide & seek

When I was a young man, I met a girl at a party. Within minutes, the strangest thing happened. We didn't talk about what people in their late teens tended to talk about. Instead we discussed our dreams: not generic dreams, very specific ones. For example, we both wanted to have two biological children and then adopt more.

It became immediately clear that we shared the same dreams, so much so that we began to finish each other's sentences, as we knew what the other was going to say before he or she said it.

My heart sank. I was reeling. I remember thinking, "Uh-oh, how many girls in the whole world could possibly share my exact dreams? Oh no, I'm probably going to end up having to marry this girl and I don't even know her, and I don't even know whether I like her, let alone love her." I was not at all sure this was a good thing and was completely unprepared for this situation.

I ended up asking her out for coffee after the party. At the coffee shop we had a nice talk until it was time for me to drive her home.

She lived with her parents. As I turned onto her cul-de-sac, memories flooded back to me. This was the same street where I had played as a kid on holidays for so many years. We played hide and seek in the dark together along with twenty or thirty other youngsters.

When she pointed to her house, it was the one with the basketball hoop. She and her sisters used to massacre my brothers and me at basketball. I also began to remember instances in high school when she was good friends to the girls whom I flirted with and who used to flirt with me. Always there, at the periphery.

It became clear in an instant. So many times we'd been in each other's lives as we grew up, without having a clue that each meeting we'd been with our future life partner.

She gave me a knowing look and smiled as she could see it all falling into place in my head. She'd known all along that evening.

Six months after that fateful night, we were engaged, and six months after that, we were married.

Thirteen months later, my beloved wife gave birth to the first of our two biological children, both boys. Then we adopted a two-month-old girl from Chile.

We've come a long way since those kids playing hide-and-seek in the dark.

And along the way, we've made our dreams come true.

A knock on the door

I wanted to honor my beloved and celebrate our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary in a special way. This is what a bunch of my friends and I came up with:

My wife heard a knock on the door. When she opened it, she was surprised to see me on one knee directly in front of her, with eleven men forming a semicircle behind me. We each held a long-stemmed red rose and began singing a rousing rendition of The Temptations' song "My Girl." It even included some cool (or should I say, *groovy*) dance moves that the men had come up with and practiced at another location just prior to the knock on the door! We serenaded her, accompanied by a boom box playing the song.

Heidi stood on the threshold, her deep brown eyes glistening and reflecting golden rays from the late afternoon sun that autumn day. Her expression revealed in turn amusement and embarrassment.

Our audience grew, as neighbors came out to see what was going on. They clapped and cheered us on.

When the song and dance were finished, each man in turn stepped forward and handed a long-stemmed red rose to my beloved, gave her a hug and a kiss on the cheek, and congratulated her. Tears of joy nestled between her eyelashes. Embarrassed, she struggled to contain them. I then presented her with a bouquet of twenty-five long-stemmed red roses—one for each year of our marriage—along with a big hug and kiss.

Everyone clapped and cheered. My friends' kindness and thoughtfulness helped to create a truly magical and memorable evening. While I'd known most of the men for years, I'd only recently met some of the others. Some drove two hours in heavy commuter traffic to be there for a relatively brief experience. They all had other things that they could have been doing. Some had families waiting at home for dinner. Others took time off from work. They weren't professional singers or performers—just regular men who gave a special gift to a special woman and me: an unforgettable way to commemorate and celebrate our major marriage milestone.

The men had fun, too.

Heidi could hold back her tears no longer and they fell, making their way toward the beautiful smile lighting the face of the woman I'd fallen in love with so many years ago.

WT

Pandemic coffee: A story of falling in love

Sarah Brennan

On Tuesday morning I fell in love. Not a lot, just a little. Since the pandemic started I have been in two relationships, and on Tuesday one of those relationships moved to the next level.

When the shelter-in-place orders first began in the spring, I brought my French press coffeemaker out of the cupboard. I was used to drinking industrial coffee from an urn in the teacher's room. I figured I couldn't do much worse.

Oh, but I could. So much worse. It didn't seem to matter what I tried, it was still bad. After being reduced to watching YouTube videos on making coffee in a French press I finally decided I needed better coffee if I was going to survive teaching over Zoom.

A mere three-quarters of a mile away is Park Station Hashery. They open at 8 AM, and I didn't start teaching until 9:30. It became my routine to flop out of bed, put on running tights (you know, so I could pretend that I was doing it for the exercise), grab my phone and some cash, and start my walk. Stopping occasionally to admire and smell the flowers in the Municipal Rose Garden, I would head back home with coffee in hand.

As the weeks passed, the manager and I began to trade stories about her daughter, work, my niece and nephews, and the world in general. We shared stories about our lives and family. At first it was a

greeting, then conversation behind our masks as my drip with a splash of half & half was poured. I looked forward to that time, that simple interaction with another adult, however brief.

The relationship wasn't just with her, but also with the coffee and whomever was pouring. My trips to the Hashery are reserved for the weekends now, but I still walk in and know that they know me and my order. A drip with half & half and a side of bacon. It's the weekend, I'm treating myself.

Once school started I needed a new spot. The teacher's room no longer had coffee, and I definitely wasn't going to go back to my miserable brew. So began the second relationship of the pandemic: Voyager Coffee Shop, my pre-pandemic Friday spot. I would get up early just to have enough time to order a coffee and pastry and be able to sit and enjoy it at the coffee shop. Now, I walk up to the door and place my order, and in no time at all my drip with half & half is warm in my hands.

He was cute and relaxed, and his mask fit well over the tasteful facial hair. Quirky t-shirts and an easy-to-talk-to vibe made getting my morning coffee just a little bit more pleasant. He knew my name before I knew his. In my head I credited him with the choice of music, especially the throw-back Depeche Mode playing on the sound system. Soon enough

most of the people working there knew my order, and conversation flowed easily between all of us, but I especially liked the mornings when Ian took my order.

One day I overshared about ordering the two-person special from the local Indian restaurant despite being single, and he mentioned that he and his girlfriend sometimes ordered more than they needed. I worried he thought I was trying to flirt, and that now things were awkward. It was. Until it wasn't. The easy camaraderie we had developed fell back into place and everything went back to pandemic-normal.

One day just a few weeks ago, I had the "Cheers" moment. I walked in, multiple staff looked up from their tasks and said good morning, and I was asked if I wanted my usual. A warmth spread through my chest, and I marveled that the moment came at a coffee shop, and not a bar.

But Tuesday morning, the easy back-and-forth with Ian led to the ridiculousness of people panic-buying toilet paper upon the announcement that we were moving backward with COVID-19 restrictions. We laughed and then, in all seriousness, he told me that if I got desperate, I could have some of the crappy toilet paper from the store.

It was then that I fell in love, just a little bit, with Ian and Voyager Coffee.

WT

The house of the ten thousand batteries

Marjorie Johnson

I fed her six AA alkaline batteries and she shut up, but only for a week

I recently moved into a “smart house.” Cool. I’ll order it around like Alexa does on TV.

Not so. Everything from the toilets to the kitchen appliances to the light switches and smoke detectors has a remote. Each remote has a mind of its own and uses multiple batteries.

The smoke detectors sense motion and flash colored circles of light when I walk under them in the dark. And they talk to me.

“Alert! Batteries low,” a woman’s voice said from behind me. “Change them soon.”

Shortly thereafter, the message changed to “I need batteries,” and then the more usual shrieking siren.

“Okay, okay. I got the message.” I fed her six AA alkaline batter-

ies and she shut up, but only for a week.

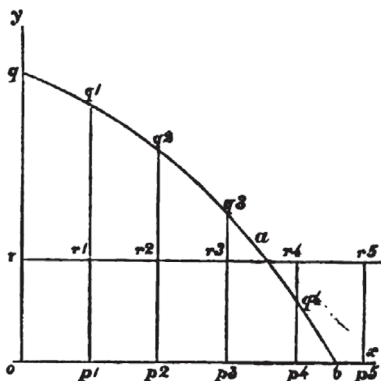
“I need lithium batteries,” the now familiar voice said. “Not alkaline.”

When I visit the toilet in the night, it gurgles happily and a blue light dances around the bowl. Afterwards, it flushes itself. Its remote has twelve choices. I don’t know how many batteries it will consume. I hope it won’t talk to me.

I am reminded of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*, in which the wrongdoing of a generation lived into successive ones and became a pure and uncontrollable mischief.

The previous owner controlled all the remotes on his cell phone with apps, but I’m not app savvy. This house of the ten thousand batteries is, I fear, smarter than its owner and as such, “an uncontrollable mischief.”

WT



Khan, Speaker Edward Porter, *Continued from page 1*

relhouse, *Best New American Voices*, and elsewhere. A native of New York City, he earned an MFA from Warren Wilson College and a PhD from the University of Houston, and has been awarded fellowships at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the MacDowell Colony, and Stanford University, where he was recently granted a Stegner Fellowship. Professor Ed Porter currently resides in Oakland.

Join us at 7 PM, 11 January, for our regular South Bay Writers Club meeting and meet Professor Porter. Watch your email for Zoom log-in details.

WT

Nobody tells this to people who are beginners, **I wish someone told me.** All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there's this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it's just not that good. It's trying to be good, it has the ambition to be good. But it's not.

But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. **A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit.** Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn't have this special thing that we want it to have. We all go through this.

And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, **you gotta know its normal,** and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work. Put yourself on a deadline so that every week you will finish one story. It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions. And I took longer to figure out how to do this than anyone I've ever met.

It's gonna take awhile. It's normal to take awhile. **You've just gotta fight your way through that.**

—Ira Glass

Interview: "Ira Glass on storytelling, part 3," Public Radio International

The power³ of

...one paragraph

I have been afraid of putting air in a tire ever since I saw a tractor tire blow up and throw Newt Hardbine's father over the top of the Standard Oil sign. I'm not lying. He got stuck up there. About nineteen people congregated during the time it took for Norman Strick to walk up to the Courthouse and blow the whistle for the volunteer fire department. They eventually did come with the ladder and haul him down, and he wasn't dead but lost his hearing and in many other ways was never the same afterward. They said he overfilled the tire.

—Barbara Kingsolver
opening paragraph of
The Bean Trees, 1988

The power³ of

...one sentence

It was inevitable: the scent of bitter almonds always reminded him of the fate of unrequited love.

—Gabriel García Márquez
opening sentence of
Love in the Time of Cholera, 1988

The power³ of

...one word

Stratocaster

Coronavirus

Bubble

Maize



Don Burnett Bicycle-Pedestrian Bridge
Cupertino, California
California quail, bronze
Artist, T Aidala; mask artist unknown
Photo, R Anderson

Contests and markets

Carolyn Donnell



NB: NO VETTING has been done by South Bay Writers Club. Listings are for information only. Some contests have been around for a long time and the reputation is known, but some are newer. Please read all guidelines carefully before submitting. And please share your experiences, good or bad

CONTESTS

Regal House Publishing Terry J Cox Poetry Award, A contest posted by Peninsula branch, **deadline 31 Jan** regalhousepublishing.submittable.com/submit

WOW! Women On Writing hosts two quarterly contests: one for flash fiction and one for nonfiction essays. Limit 300 entries. Enter early! **Winter deadline 28 Feb** wow-womenonwriting.com/contest.php

2021 Effie Lee Morris Literary Contest Women's National Book Assn–San Francisco literary contest. Fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. 1st prize \$200, 2nd \$100, 3rd \$50 and publication on the WNBA–SF website for 90 days. **Deadline 31 Mar**

wnba-sfchapter.org/2021-effie-lee-morris-contest-get-ready

Winning Writers

- **Wergle Flomp Humor Poetry Contest** (no fee) Seeks humor poems. Total prizes \$3500. **Deadline 01 Apr**
- **Tom Howard/John H. Reid Fiction & Essay Contest** All styles and themes, fiction and nonfiction. Accepts published and unpublished work. Total prizes \$8000. **Deadline 30 Apr** winningwriters.com/our-contests

Writer's Digest WD's oldest and most popular competition now in its 90th year. Winners announced in the Nov/Dec 2021 issue. **Deadline 07 May** writersdigest.com/writers-digest-competitions

The Vincent Brothers Review Fiction, nonfiction, poetry. Unpublished only. \$25 per accepted item. "House keeping" short story contest **deadline 31 Oct 2021**. Also check back on this site for Deanna Pickard Memorial Prize announcement, a poetry chapbook contest for women over 50 who have not yet published a chapbook.

CONTESTS, CONTINUED

vincentbrothersreview.org/annual-short-story-contest
vincentbrothersreview.org/submissions

LOCAL & CWC

California Writers Club Literary Review reading cycle open for submissions through **15 Mar** calwriters.org/publications/#submit

Catamaran Literary Reader Santa Cruz print quarterly. "West Coast themes. Writers and artists from everywhere." Fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, fine art. catamaranliteraryreader.com

Fremont Area Writers lists many resources on their page, such as contest announcements, publications seeking submissions, freelance jobs, resources for screenwriters, genre organizations, and more cwc-fremontareawriters.org/resources-writers

West Trade Review Reading periods 01 Apr–01 Aug & 15 Aug–15 Dec. Original and unpublished fiction, poetry, and photography by new and established writers & artists. SBW's Kelly Harrison is an associate editor. westtradereview.com/submissionguidelines.html

LOCAL CONFERENCE

Catamaran Summer Writing Conference **25–29 July** (Virtual) Workshops, craft. Keynote speaker Jane Smiley. Poetry, fiction, and nonfiction readings. catamaranliteraryreader.com/conference-2020

OPEN SUBMISSIONS

The Blue Nib Essays, journalism, reviews, poetry, and fiction. Paying market for items accepted for print but not digital. thebluenib.com/submit-to-the-blue-nib-2

Sequestrum: Literature & Art Paying market. High-quality short fiction, nonfiction, poetry, visual arts. Previously unpublished only. Nominal reading fee sequestrum.org/submissions

Thimble Quarterly online literary journal. Poetry, visual art, short story thimblelitmag.com/submissions

FOR POETS

Everywriter List of poetry prizes and competitions everywritersresource.com/best-poetry-prizes

The Literary Nest Online publication. Visual arts also accepted. theliterarynest.org

FOR POETS, CONTINUED

Up the Staircase Quarterly Submit 3–6 poems in a single document; up to 10 JPEGs for art. No previously published poetry, but previously published artwork OK upthestaircase.org/submit

Poetry Foundation poetryfoundation.org

Poetry Pacific eZine, 1 issue/year, published 05 May. poetrypacific.blogspot.com

Trish Hopkinson List of markets accepting reprints trishhopkinson.com/where-to-submit-reprints

Writing Matters Article, “31 Publishers of Poetry Books & Chapbooks” randalssanctuary.wordpress.com/2020/08/11/publishers-of-poetry-books-chapbooks

Facebook poetry groups

- Poetry Center San Jose—PCSJ
- Willow Glen Poetry Project
- Cupertino Poet Laureate
- Santa Clara County Poet Laureate
- Los Gatos Poet Laureate
- Natl Poetry Month poem-a-day challenge
- California Poets
- How Writers Write Poetry Community Group
- No Fee Calls for Poems
- SF Creative Writing Inst drop-in poetry workshops

GENERAL RESOURCES

(* Internet and Facebook presence)

Ace World Pub Submission lists aceworldpub.com.ng/category/latest-opportunities

Association of Writers & Writing Programs awpwriter.org/contests

Authors Publish* List of publishers accepting submissions for fiction, nonfiction, and poetry that do not impose reading fees. authorspublish.com

The Best Writing Contests curated by Reedsy. blog.reedsy.com/writing-contests

Electric Lit Article, “Free or cheap resources for emerging writers” electricliterature.com/free-or-cheap-resources-for-emerging-writers

Freedom with Writing* Submissions, contests, jobs. freedomwithwriting.com

Funds for Writers Contests, submissions, grants. fundsforwriters.com/contests

Hidden River Arts Book award deadlines. hiddenriverarts.wordpress.com

GENERAL RESOURCES, CONTINUED

MWA NorCal Chapter* Mystery Writers of America mwanorcal.org

NewPages news, info, and guides to lit mags, indie publishers and bookstores, creative writing programs, alternative periodicals, and writing contests NewPages.com

Poets & Writers

Contest blog: pw.org/blogs/prize_reporter, pw.org/grants

ProWritingAid Writer’s Community Facebook group

Women’s Natl Book Assn–San Francisco* wnba-sfchapter.org

The Write Life* Articles, “39 Free writing contests: Legitimate competitions with cash prizes” thewritelife.com/writing-contests, and “22 Facebook groups for writers you don’t want to miss” thewritelife.com/facebook-groups-for-writers/

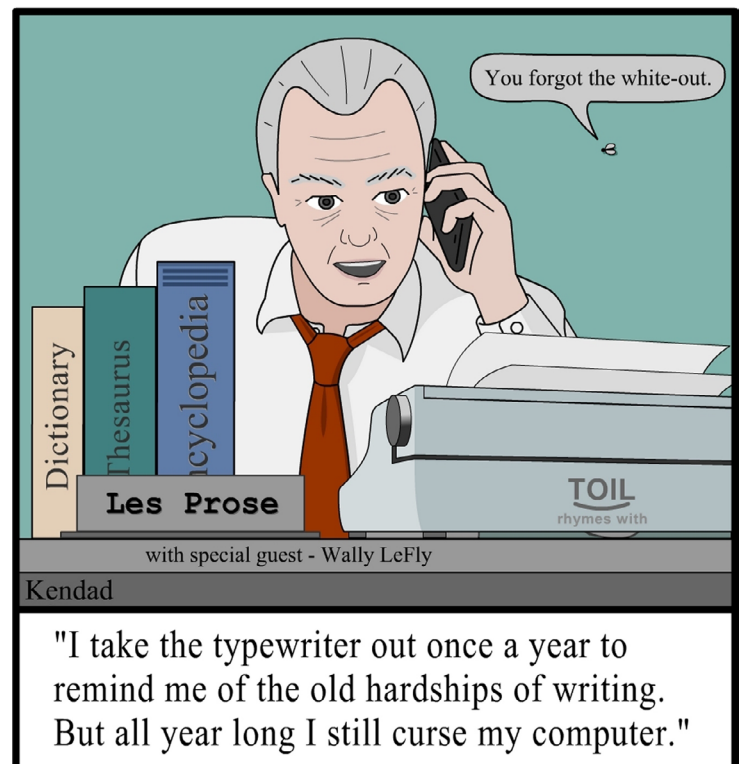
The Writer Upcoming contests, articles, resources. Subscribe to their newsletter writermag.com/contests

Writers Post No Fee Call for Submissions Facebook group

WT

Les Prose Comics

Kendad



Matthews, *Continued from page 2*

I don't know where "string bean" came from — once I sat for two hours refusing to eat them.

However, thanks to the early days of TV, laughter was a common occurrence in our house. I recall the family gathered around the black and white TV set bent over crying with laughter. In those days, the kings and queens of comedy included Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca in side-splitting parodies, Lucille Ball getting tipsy on Vitameatavegamin, and Red Skelton as the goofy Clem Kaddidlehopper.

Laughter gives us strength to face life's trials. Shakespeare used it, not just in his comedies, but also in his tragedies, like in *Hamlet*. My mother used to say, "Make them laugh, make them cry, and you'll have a bestseller."

Now tragedy may be easy to create, but laughter? How do you do that?

There are a variety of ways. For example, exaggeration, double entendre, unexpected surprise, conjuring up a silly image. Here is the description of Ignatius J. Reilly, the outrageous protagonist in the opening of *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole.

"A green hunting cap squeezed the top of the fleshy balloon of a head. The green earflaps, full of large ears and uncut hair and the fine bristles that grew in the ears themselves, stuck out on either side like turn signals indicating two directions at once."

This 47-word description is about the length of what contest participants are asked to write. Actually, you have up to 55 words — that's counting the title. We're looking for quality, not quantity. It could be clever, silly, sophisticated — something that will make you smile, giggle, or guffaw.

Remember, make every word count—even the title. Here's another example:

Red Beans Anne Rice

"Celebrate Mardi Gras with the oldest family in New Orleans," the invitation read.

I knocked on the door and was greeted by a plump, regal, raven-haired lady wearing a purple velvet gown.

"Enter," she purred. "Come meet my family. We've been waiting for you."

Locking the door, she called into the mansion, "Dinner has arrived."

So, my friends, there's nothing to lose by trying. As the lyrics go in the song:

"Make 'em laugh, make 'em laugh...."

Don't you know everyone wants to laugh!

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We at *WritersTalk* are always on the lookout for volunteer proofreaders and copyeditors.

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newsletter@southbaywriters.com



CWC around the Bay

Berkeley cwc-berkeley.org

Central coast centralcoastwriters.org

Fremont area
cwc-fremontareawriters.org

Marin cwcmarin.com

Mendocino writersmendocinocoast.org

Mt Diablo cwcmtdiablo.org

Napa Valley napavalleywriters.net

North state northstatewriters.com

Redwood City redwoodwriters.org

Sacramento cwcsacramentowriters.org

SF peninsula cwc-peninsula.org

San Joaquin Valley
trivalleywriters.org

Facebook discussion group



Join our Facebook group
South Bay Writers Club

Group admin Carolyn Donnell

WT

SBW/CWC Events

JANUARY 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 NEW YEAR'S DAY	2
3	4 VALLEY WRITERS 2 PM	5 SWB BOARD MTG 7 PM	6	7	8	9
10	11 VALLEY WRITERS 2 PM SWB MTG 7 PM	12	13	14	15 OPEN MIC WRITERS TALK FEB ISSUE CLOSES	16
17	18 VALLEY WRITERS 2 PM MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY	19	20 INAUGURATION DAY	21	22	23
24	25 VALLEY WRITERS 2 PM	26	27	28 COLD MOON 	29	30
31						

Ongoing events

Critique groups

Valley Writers Mondays 2-4 PM
via Zoom. Email Marjorie Johnson marjohnson@mac.com

Morgan Hill writers group

We're a critique circle based in Morgan Hill, with members from all over. Long and short narrative, any genre. **Mondays, 5 PM.** Contact Vanessa MacLaren-Wray for Zoom login details cometarytales@gmail.com

SBW regular meetings

2nd Mondays, 7 PM. Watch your email for Zoom login details

SBW Board meetings

Contact Edie Matthews pres@southbaywriters.com

Open mic

1st & 3rd Friday nights. Contact Bill Baldwin 1-408-730-9622 WABaldwin@aol.com

Know of a regularly occurring event for writers? Email newsletter@southbaywriters.com

Ads in CWC's The Bulletin

Bob Isbill (760) 221-6367

Want to increase your visibility? Sell your service? Promote your book? Increase speaker engagements? Pump up your web traffic? Or just send a greeting?

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California Writers Club
South Bay Branch
PO Box 3254
Santa Clara CA 95055
www.southbaywriters.com

MAIL TO

Address Correction Requested

South Bay Writers
February 2021 meeting
Monday | 08 February | 7 PM
Guest speaker Bill Belew

Watch your email
for details!

California Writers Club
Literary Review
Now open for submissions
through 15 March
[calwriters.org/](http://calwriters.org/publications/#submit)
[publications/#submit](http://calwriters.org/publications/#submit)



covid19.ca.gov