



WRITERS TALK

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

September
2025

September Speaker: Meg Waite Clayton

by Shari Clare

The South Bay Writers club, in partnership with SASCC, welcomes Meg Waite Clayton as our September speaker. She will take us on “A Writer’s Journey: For anyone who wants to publish, or simply find the courage to write.” As a best-selling author, Meg is now living out her childhood dream of becoming a novelist. Her journey to becoming a full-time writer, however, was not quite the straight path that she might have envisioned. Along the way, she went to law school and became a corporate lawyer. It wasn’t until the age of 32, when she was pregnant with her second child, that she decided to try her hand at writing. She discovered that writing is a lot harder than it looks, and it wasn’t until her son was 11 years old that her first novel was finally published. She has now written nine novels, in addition to numerous articles for major newspapers, magazines, and public radio.



Meg’s most recent book, *Typewriter Beach*, takes place mainly in Carmel, and it includes details about popular locations in that area, such as Tor House and Hawk Tower. This novel is of particular interest to her fellow writers because the main characters are screenwriters, and she has infused some great writing advice within its pages. Another of Meg’s novels, *The Wednesday Sisters*, is also appealing to writers because it centers around a group of women who meet at a park in Palo Alto to share their love of books, and who end up forming a writing group. Meg has been a member of several different writing groups over the years, and is now a member of The Rough Drafts group in Santa Cruz.

The greater Bay Area is a familiar place for Meg, not just as the setting for novels, but as her residence for a good portion of her life. She currently lives in Carmel and she raised her sons in Palo Alto. She also has many great memories of visits to Saratoga, where her parents had lived since the 1970s.

Meg’s work is well-known far beyond the Bay Area. Her books have been published in 24 languages, have been featured on Good Morning America, and have been finalists for the National Jewish Book Award, the Langum Prize, and Barbara Kingsolver’s Bellwether Prize for Socially Engaged Fiction. Her screenplay for *The Last Train to London* was chosen for the Meryl Streep- and Nicole Kidman-sponsored The Writers Lab.

Meg’s novels draw on the history of real women facing challenges and defying the odds to make a real difference in the world. Her inspirations include journalists, photographers, and the women of Hollywood, past and present. Regardless of whether you are already a published author or someone who is just looking for inspiration on how to get started with a writing project, you will not want to miss out on hearing about the compelling and inspiring journey of best-selling author Meg Waite Clayton.

October Preview, Geri Spieler

by Shari Clare

For our October meeting, we will welcome Geri Spieler, a writer who has held many leadership roles within the California Writers Club. Her extensive experience as a journalist was crucial in helping her write and publish the book *Housewife Assassin – The Woman Who Tried to Kill President Ford*. Geri will teach us how to do more effective research during her presentation on “What Reporters Do That Novelists Need to Know: Bringing Journalistic Rigor to Fictional Storytelling”. Stay tuned for more about Geri Spieler in the October edition of Writers Talk.



Presidents Update

Una Daly
South Bay Writers' President



President's Column Sept 2025

Welcome back from the summer holidays! I hope you found some time to write -- maybe you wrote five chapters of your novel or just a long email to a friend. Whatever you wrote or didn't, it's a great time to get back on schedule. I invite you to write about your summer activities just like students returning to school in the fall. I'll start with the trials and tribulations of my garden.

Summer is when I am most active in the garden and water is the single most important ingredient. California native plants, which make up the majority of my garden, vary in their water needs during the summer. Most prefer a well-draining soil where their roots can dry out between infrequent waterings but Santa Clara Valley's pervasive clay soil makes this challenging.

Excess summer moisture can prove fatal to many natives including oak trees. Two mature oak trees in my neighborhood died from summer waterings of nearby lawns and yards. The thinning out of the crown and decrease in leaves were tell-tale signs long before their collapse in five to ten years. One almost crushed my neighbors' house, missing it by two feet. For smaller plants and shrubs, deterioration is much faster but soil amendments and planting on mounds or slopes can provide needed drainage.

My favorite native plant species is salvia, commonly referred to as sage, with over 250 species characterized as "Mediterranean". Their variety lends color, textures, and fragrance. I enjoyed the big showy white sage shrub with silvery green leaves and small sticky flowers before they succumbed to root rot. Fortunately, I have achieved more success with the Pozo Blue, a smaller shrub, which boasts strongly scented purple flowers, when planted on the slopes of my former lawn.

Too little watering is also an issue. This this generally occurs because of irrigation failures where one or more plants have clogged emitters. This summer I failed to notice the problem until one of my salvias died and I'm still trying to revive a mature manzanita shrub, with over half its leaves withered.

In case I've misled you, there are natives who are adapted to wet, marshy environments such as ferns, irises, and sedges and will thrive in areas bordering lawns. Trees such as willow and dogwood, often found naturally growing in creek beds, also appreciate summer water.

What you may wonder does this have to do with writing? Well, maybe nothing, but maybe the TLC that a garden needs has parallels with our writing projects. Setting aside time to focus on our writing is just as important as observing and watering our growing plants. It is important for plants to receive adequate moisture but perhaps we need to let the roots dry out or ask others to review our writing periodically, which leads me to some excellent branch news:

- Two new critique groups launched this summer one focused on children's literature and another on general fiction. We look forward to starting new critique groups as additional interest warrants. The branch could really use a Critique Group Coordinator to help facilitate the various groups and collect helpful resources.
- Our inaugural meeting at our new location, the Saratoga Senior Center, was held August 9 with Professor Nils Michals. Over forty attendees enjoyed his interactive talk on, "Painting Pictures with Words". Professor Michals utilized the Austrian poet Rilke's writings on Cezanne's post-impressionist paintings to illustrate the concept of describing images with fresh eyes. We are excited to have *New York Times* best-selling author, [Meg Waite Clayton](#), join us to share the *Writer's Journey* on Saturday morning, Sept 13, 10:30 am back at the beautiful Saratoga Senior Center (19655 Allendale Ave.)
- Signups for the SBW 2026 Anthology committee continue. [Please use this form](#) to indicate your interest and availability for this exciting opportunity to support the publication of branch writings in a printed review.

WritersTalk

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

Managing Editor—Ryan Davis-Marsh

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Member Achievement and News

An announcement is information of interest and value to writers that does not provide direct economic benefit to its originator and is published free of charge. Advertising of workshops, conferences, and events is accepted from other Branches of California Writers Club. Because California Writers Club is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation, *WritersTalk* does not accept advertising of events or services that benefit an individual. Also, we cannot accept political advertising of any kind.

Submit to: membernews@southbaywriters.com

Change of Address: Send changes of address to mrms@southbaywriters.com, or you can edit your own entry in the member's roster (MRMS).

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Ryan Davis-Marsh
Managing Editor



Traditions

First of all, I would like to thank everyone for their patience for this month's edition. I had the dubious privilege of celebrating my birthday by making an emergency visit to the vet for my cat. While I'm thankful that he seems to be recovering, it was part of a few personal issues that caused some delays in consolidating this month's issues.

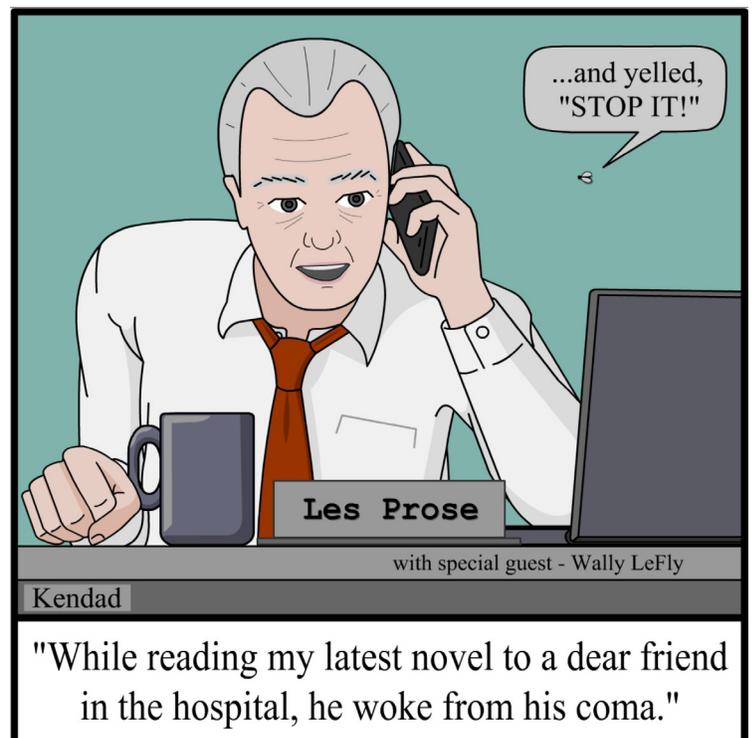
Since I'm talking about my birthday, I find that my birthday is consistently a hard day to celebrate. I find the end of August to be the most uncomfortable time of year, and one where I get swamped with lots of conflicting plans. As such I've created my own tradition of "Rolling Ryan Day", a day that is functionally identical to a birthday but usually just takes place within a month of my actual birthday.

Some might feel that a birthday is unique or sacred. Celebrating it at a specific time requires us to create space to care about ourselves and encourage others to care about us as well, if only just for one night. Others find the lack of flexibility to be in direct conflict with all the other demands of their life, a birthday on a workday could be much more difficult to attend than a weekend. To me, "Rolling Ryan Day" gives me both the flexibility to choose the time that works best, but also is firmly branded to (admittedly selfishly) center myself and not let the celebration just be another day.

Are there any traditions that you eschew? As a writer, when you build your characters, your worlds, your words, do you create new traditions or do you let the traditions that you have been taught flow through you into your writing?

There's no right or wrong answer, and I would love to hear from any of you who are interested in sharing at newsletter@southbaywriters.com.

Good luck and keep writing!



Dave LaRoche In Memoriam

In last month's newsletter we mentioned how Dave LaRoche passed away in June 2025, and we asked our members to consider writing in sharing their memories as well. Many thanks to everyone who took the time to share and contribute the memories below.

- Ryan Davis-Marsh

He was a strong leader in CWC and a good friend. His wrangling behind the scenes was legendary. Dave was always fair, thoughtful, and never afraid to speak up. His dry wit and his blustering opinions left most of us in stitches. It was a pleasure to work with him. There was always something to be learned. We will all miss you, Dave.

President, July 2009-June 2012

Vice President, July 2012-June 2015

WritersTalk Editor, October 2006-June 2009

Founder and Chairman, NorCal Group, April 2009-March 2012

Representative, NorCal Group, April 2009-November 2014

Representative, California Writers Club Central Board, July 2009-June 2015

Founder and Editor, California Writers Club Literary Review, June 2012-2025

Publications: Fault Zone Anthology and five books.

- Karen Sundback

I personally worked as a newsletter contributor and copy editor with Dave from 2004-2007 and our team met monthly in-person (remember those days) at Orchard Valley Coffee in Campbell. I looked forward to our meetings and we always had good discussions about the upcoming issue and hammered out the details. Dave had a vision and could be a little hard-headed on occasion but most of us enjoyed working with him. And if I say so myself, we had a thriving newsletter in those days especially as email/websites were still optional and members mostly relied on the newsletter for our branch information.

When I assumed the branch presidency many years later, Dave emailed me an encouraging note and referred me to the CWC User Manual written by Bob Isbill, recommending the section "Fifty-five Ways to Build a Better Branch". His commitment to South Bay Writers' and his own writing craft was heartfelt and ongoing.

- Una T. Daly, SBW President

I worked with Dave on the SBW monthly newsletter. He could be cranky at times, but I learned so much from him. If we had an idea to write about, he would say "run with it." That is how my Accolades column began. I had the pleasure of editing his novel *Abducted*. Again, I learned so much from him.

Dave was such a large part of SBW and I will miss him. We all will.

- Jackie Mutz, Past SBW Newsletter Columnist

My unique memory is how Dave LaRoche and Dick Amyx appointed me to be Editor of *WritersTalk*, a position I held for about 7 years. They had fired the then editor, who left in the middle of an issue. The newsletter had to be prepared using InDesign, a complicated program that made me think of Photoshop on steroids. I had never used InDesign. "You can do it," Dave said, "Start with the next issue, deadline in two weeks." Whoa! Dick gave me a two-hour introduction along with a sample issue that could be used as a template. I enjoyed that job.

- Marjorie Johnson, Past SBW Managing Editor

Dave LaRoche In Memoriam (Continued)

We tend to think of South Bay Writers as a backdrop for our artistic pursuits and continuing academic education, but someone has to run the place and almost no one wants to. What Dave LaRoche taught me was that business and politics were just as important to administering SBW as they are to administering anything.

I was a passive member of SBW my first year. Then Dave yanked me into the leadership structure of the branch as pretty much the staffing director for our 2010 East of Eden writers conference. I never worked harder for this branch, not even as vice president and president.

The branch seemed financially nimble despite our mixed results attracting membership, and Dave kept fiscal responsibilities firmly in our minds. "This is business," he reminded the East of Eden committee during the 2009-2010 push. "This club is a corporation, duly registered in California, and the conference is a project it has chosen to undertake. It will be run as a business."

With the U.S. economy in severe recession, we ended up having to call off the conference, and it still hurts that we were never able to revive it.

But the contacts I made in the personnel role set me up with numerous speaker prospects for our monthly meetings, so I eased into the vice presidency for two years. Dave had relinquished the presidency, and his pressure on me to take on that job ultimately led to two years of that.

He could be rather prickly, but his leadership was actually quite hands-off, and he had seldom discouraged me during that 2009-2010 East of Eden push.

I wrote him a memo that reflected ways he helped me grow:

"Your emails almost always reassure me that I'm doing this job right. I've indeed made it clear to some folks that we're worried about the poor economy's effect on our conference and that we're a non-profit. I've also known all along I have to play games I might consider a bit dodgy. But it's an interesting project, one that any writer worth his salt ought to be willing to do for the sake of experience, not to mention the interests of our club."

I can't think of very many people who did more for the interests of our club.

- Colin Seymour, Past President SBW

I remember Dave's leading our Campbell coffee shop meeting like Una described in her email. (See twin shots of the board coffeeshop meeting, attached). Some of his ideas fizzled, but he certainly grabbed the reins, helped us know each other better, and plan the direction of South Bay Writers. (I was treasurer from 2008 through 2011). He "hired" me to "film" the big Publishers Pathway meeting for Nor-Cal branches. (Three camcorders!) I still have a stack of those DVDs. He founded the California Writers Club Literary Review. I published poems in a few early issues, including the first one (before the editors acquired any taste—just kidding). Because of Dave and SBW, I became a published writer, and I was proud of that. There's more, too much to cover, but he used to host a weekly poker night at his house with Jim Matthews, Fred Johnson, and others. I never play cards with the boys. (Oops, I can't truthfully say that anymore.)

I like collecting photos (see next page) and videoed a few functions which I put on You Tube (see next page for links). These are the old crowd, but some old-timers and even a few young whippersnappers might like seeing candid shots of past faces and activities (Halloweens and a summer barbecue) including a few quick shots of Dave that were quite fun to see again. Enjoy!

- Richard Burns, Past SBW Board Member

Member News

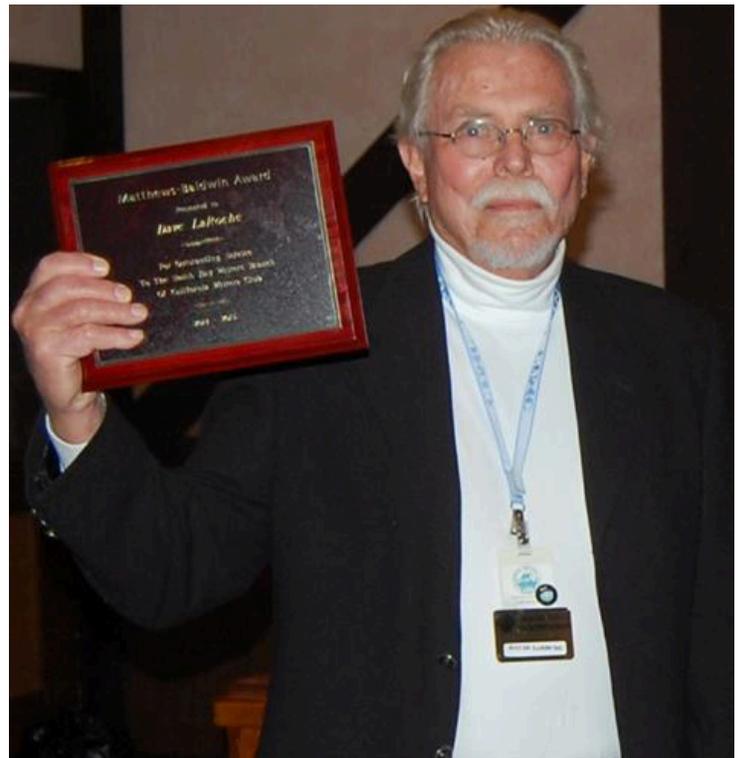
Dave LaRoche In Memoriam (Continued)

Marty Sorensen, Editor of the Sand Hill Review, interviewed Dave back in 2017 covering a wide range of topics from his writing accomplishments to his leadership roles at the California Writers Club.

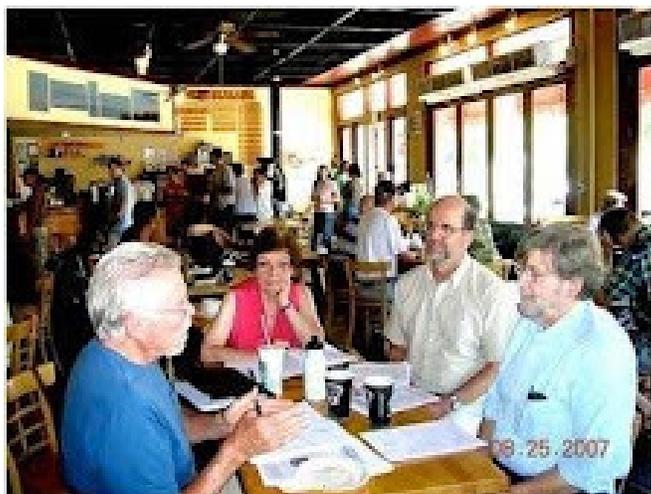
<https://soundcloud.com/user-928057784/shr-podcast-6-dave-laroche>

YouTube Links

July 20, 2008, BBQ, CWC South Bay Branch	https://youtu.be/-xorD_rnkW4 - 4:41
SBW Halloween 2008	https://youtu.be/23Or17FsVP8 - 9:45
Halloween SBW 2010-A	https://youtu.be/EEGPghKkJ5Y - 4:22



Dave LaRoche In Memoriam (Continued)



From **Reena Kapoor**: One of my short plays (comedy) "Art of the Possible" has been selected by the [Bay Area Drama company](#), and will be staged in September 11-14th, as part of their "Shorts Circuit" showcase. See circuit B.

Hope you'll go see it and tell me what you think.

Member **Lorraine Gabbert** had multiple articles published recently in the San Jose Spotlight newsletter including:

[San Jose politicians listen to residents' federal concerns](#)

[ICYMI: Santa Clara County urges vaccinations as students return to school](#)

[Future of East San Jose youth center uncertain after fire](#)

San José Spotlight is an award-winning nonprofit newsroom dedicated to fearless journalism that disrupts the status quo, uplifts marginalized voices, holds power to account and paves the way for change. Our mission is to change the face of local journalism by building a community-supported newsroom that ignites civic engagement, educates residents and strengthens our democracy.

August Meeting

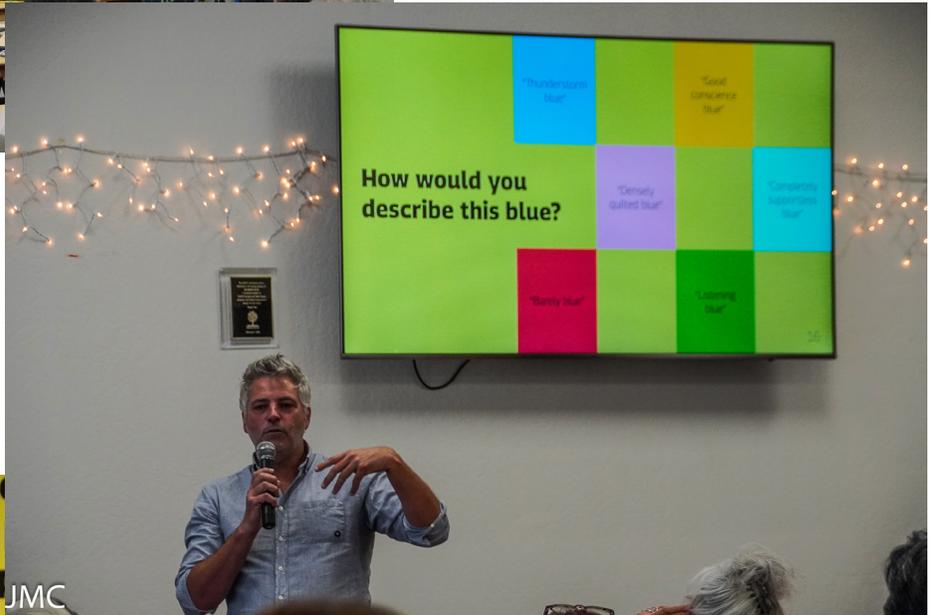
Photos by Joe Ming and Carolyn Donnell



Rilke, Cézanne, and Revisioning the Poetic Image, with Nils Michals



"to test and try ourselves against the utmost"



"our personal madness, so to speak"

Writer's Corner

August Recap: Nils Michals Painting Pictures with Words

by Bill Baldwin
Contributor

How can I do justice to our August speaker Nils Michals' talk on "Rilke, Cézanne, and Revisioning the Poetic Image?" I feel I would need degrees in Literature, Art, and Philosophy, at the least! I'll do what I can. Fortunately, I believe we can provide Michals' slide presentation upon request.

The Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) was strongly influenced by the French painter Paul Cézanne (1839-1906). Rilke viewed Cézanne's work at the Paris *Salon D'Autumne in 1907* (Cézanne had died the previous year). Rilke's visceral reaction brought him to realize the impact of a strong *image*, and from then on, Rilke focused on the "poetic image" in his poems

Cézanne presented objects in a *wholly new way*: thinking in terms of form and color.

So how can *writers* present an image?

William Carlos Williams famously stated: "No *idea* but in *things!*"

Consider *ekphrastic* writing: writing inspired by visual art. What is the importance of *image*?

Consider *denoting* vs. *connoting*: "denoting" is precise, definite; "connoting" deals with *feelings*: suggested, implied.

How can a writer *engage the reader*? Ezra Pound spoke of the "emotional/intellectual complex at a point in time."

Michals showed us several images and asked us to sketch our immediate, emotional reactions.

First image: a photo of a stormy sea. One reaction:

White foam coming after me, dark clouds threatening; impending doom. Wet – loud – crashing!

Next image, in contrast: a photo of a large tree. Reaction:

Blue-green abundant growth springs up against the autumn leaves dying, fighting the sunshine that birthed and sustains it.

What was Rilke grappling with? How can we "write an object?" Michals contrasted the Symbolists and the Imagists. I remembered Rimbaud's comment about the "total derangement of the senses." Should each of us cultivate "our own personal madness?"

Rilke spoke of "holiness" and "integrity." What did he *mean*? Was he a *mystic*?

Final image, a painting: women bathing in a country stream. Reaction:

Warm sunny country afternoon, women safe and comfortable amongst themselves, enjoying water and sky; fields, lake, and distant villages; clouds, cool breeze, contentment – joyful, peaceful bonding – companionship.

For myself, with my experience reading Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf... Michals gave me a lot to think about!

Thank you, Nils Michals – I think I'm in love!

Upcoming Writers Contests and Events

- Open Mic Night - September 19th, Willow Glen Library
- Tom Howard/Margaret Reid Poetry Contest - April 15-October 1, 2025
- The Missouri Review Jeffrey E. Smith Editors' Prize Deadline Oct 1,
- Save the Date, Sound of Story - Jan 24th, Lunch Workshop with Jordan Rosenfield at San Jose History Park.

See more Writing Contest and Publishing Events at <https://southbaywriters.com/writing-and-publishing-events/>

When I saw some veggie meals in the market, I wondered, how come many vegetarian entrees advertise themselves as tasting like "meat?" *It tastes just like beef.* Another bragged, it tastes exactly like bacon. If you don't want to eat meat, why have a meat tasting substitute? Shouldn't the veggie burger taste like... tomato? or potato? or arugula?

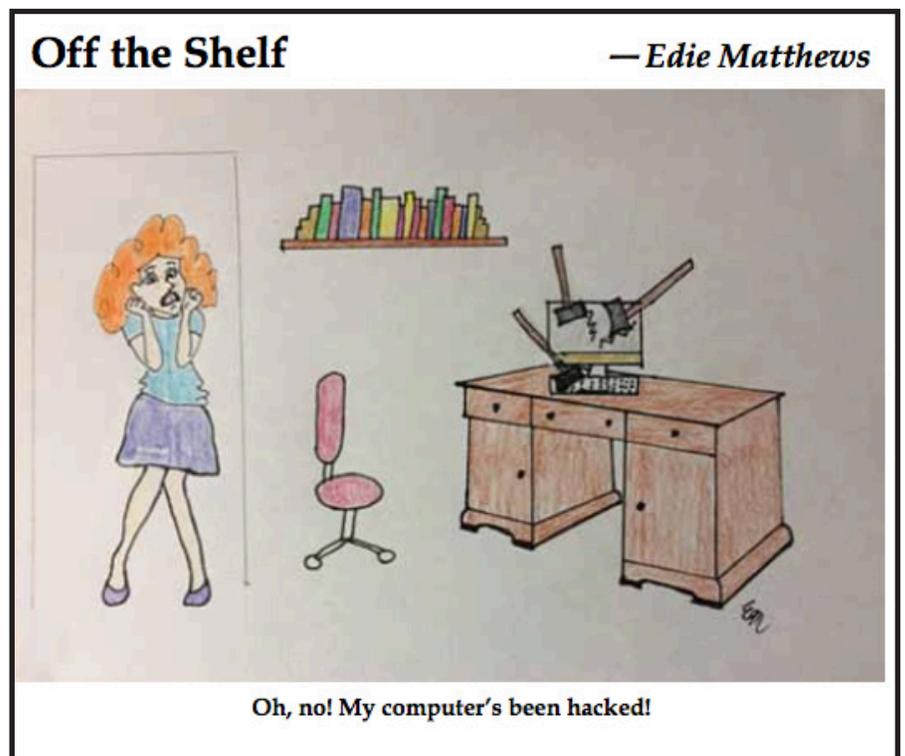
Which brings me to another curiosity about flavors. Our cat gets crunchy food that says it has three flavors, salmon, beef, and chicken. Who tastes it to make sure it really tastes like that? I've never pick up one of the niblets and tossed it in my mouth and said, ahh, salmon. I guess I'd rather eat salmon. If I put a piece of salmon in the cat's dish, does he wonder what it is or does he think, *Hey this tastes like some of my food, how come it's not crunchy??* The fact is, he seems to like my cooked version better than his crunchy one, so there must be a difference.

As funerals are for the living, not for the dead, the packaging on the dry cat food is for the buyer not for the cat. Cats don't know the flavor of salmon, chicken or beef. In the wild, cats don't eat salmon, in fact rarely do they eat fish, as most cats don't like getting wet. While a cat will kill and eat a small bird, in general, chickens are much too big to be killed and eaten by a house cat. And a cat would never have the opportunity to eat beef. Why aren't the flavors mouse, rat, and lizard? Even bugs. These are things my cat eats.

And how are the entrees prepared? Salmon, beef and chicken all taste differently depending on how they're cooked. And why would a cat want to know what their food is supposed to taste like. They don't understand words so it means nothing to tell them, this tastes like... salmon, beef or chicken. If they're willing to eat it, what difference does it make? These are animals that lick their butts. It could be the same food formula developed sixty-some years ago, when they first invented dry cat food and now they're just telling us, it has three people pleasing flavors.

But most importantly, why do cats eat dry cat food? What do the manufacturers put in it to make cats think it's food? Cats are carnivores, they eat meat. At least canned cat food looks like it once could have been meat. Nothing about hard cat food looks or smells like meat (to my nose anyway), but pour it in their dish and they crunch it right down.

Another of the world's mysteries... unsolved.





California Writers Club

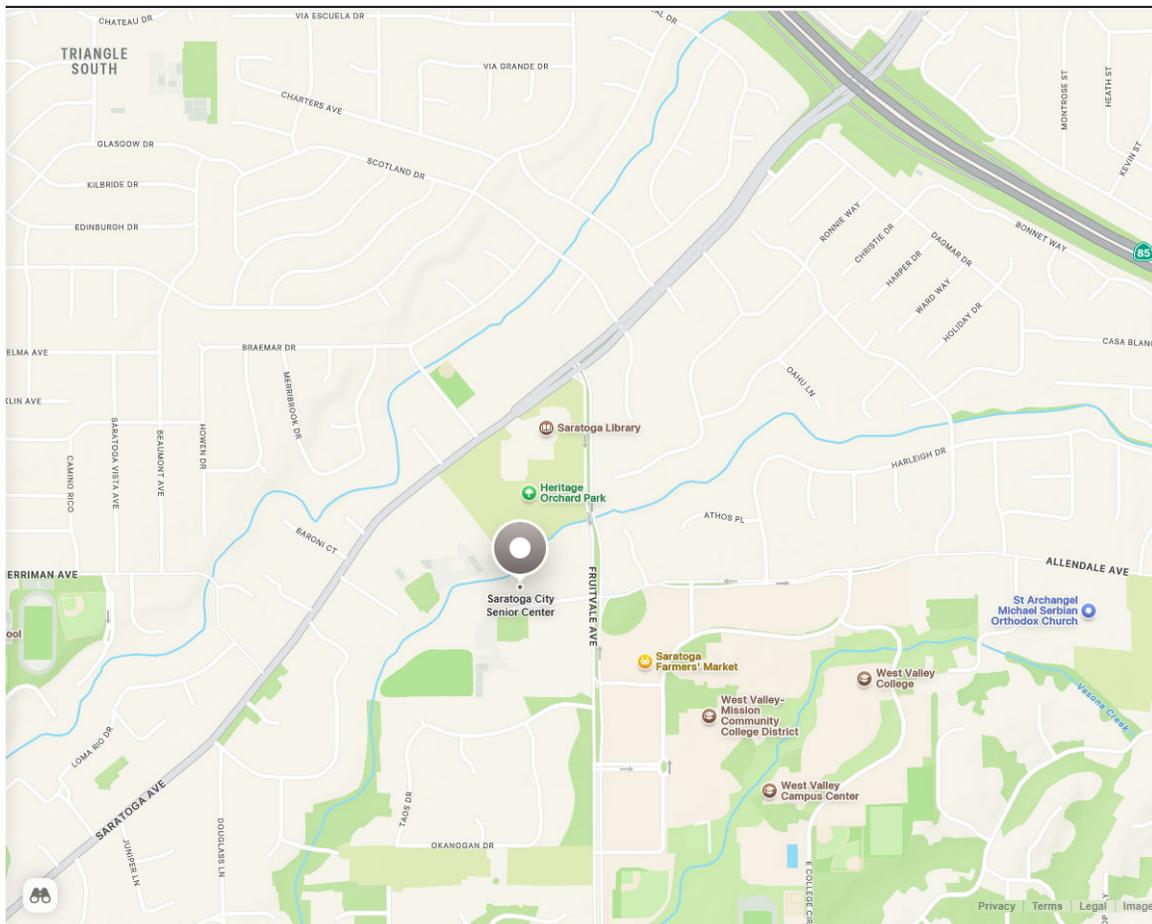
South Bay Branch

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Santa Clara, CA 95055

www.southbaywriters.com

Address Correction Requested



Saratoga Senior Center
19655 Allendale Avenue
Saratoga, CA 95070

From the north: Take 101 south to 85 south. Exit Saratoga Ave, turn right onto Saratoga Ave, then left on Fruitvale Ave, then right on Allendale Ave. On your right.

From the east: Take 680 south, stay on 280, take 17 south, then 85 north. Exit Saratoga Ave, turn left onto Saratoga Ave, then left on Fruitvale Ave, then right on Allendale Ave. On your right.

From the west: Take 280 south to 85 south. Exit Saratoga Ave, turn right onto Saratoga Ave, then left on Fruitvale Ave, then right on Allendale Ave. On your right.

**Saturday, September 13,
10:30 Saratoga Senior Center
Meg Waite Clayton**