

# WritersTalk

A South Bay Branch  
Writers Club Monthly

Volume 14, Issue 6, June 2006 Non-member subscription \$20 per year

Page 1

## WANTED: FIRST-TIME NOVELISTS



Edie Matthews  
Programs Chair

AN EXPOSITION BY EDIE MATTHEWS

Komenar, a new Northern California publisher, is searching for first time novelists, Charlotte Cook, the President of Komenar, said, We're looking for novels that will stay in print, even if they're the author's one and only work." She referenced two examples: Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" and Margaret Mitchell,

"Gone With the Wind."

"Komenar will not bind writers to a long contract," said Charlotte. They are free to go elsewhere with their second book—if they choose."

The company, which was launched May 2005, is seeking books with compelling stories, engaging characters and evocative settings—fiction only and first time novelist only. The genre includes literary, mainstream, historical, thrillers, mysteries, and magical realism. In 2007, they hope to add young adult and eventually, science fiction and humor.

Charlotte Cook grew up surrounded by books. Her parents owned the first bookstore in Lafayette. She often read first editions of Faulkner and John Steinbeck. By was 10 years old, she had three teach, to write and to have a good necessarily in that order.

First, she graduated from Cal with a degree in Psychology and English. Then Charlotte met her husband when they both worked in the Berkeley Public Library. (He was her boss.) For



Charlotte Cook



Komenar  
Published Books

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William  
the time she  
goals in life: to  
marriage. Not

State Berkeley

## WT Profiles

### Jana McBurney-Lin

— By Una Daly



Una Daly  
Contributing Editor

"This year I fulfilled my biggest dream about writing -- to have my first book published", said Jana McBurney-Lin, recent president of the Peninsula branch of California's Writer Club. *My Half of the Sky* follows a young Chinese woman who is attempting to "hold up half the sky" as Chairman Mao directed, but is caught between village traditions and modern life. Due out on July 1<sup>st</sup>, you can read the first nine



chapters at the publisher's website ([www.komenarpublishing.com](http://www.komenarpublishing.com)).

The process of writing the novel

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)

### WIN AWARDS AND RECOGNITION WITH YOUR SHORT FICTION, POETRY, MEMOIR, ESSAY.

\*\*\* See insert on p 12 for "WritersTalk Challenge" and our masthead for submittal information \*\*\*

#### A Look Ahead:

Jun 3, 16 Open Mic, see p15  
Jun 7 Board of Directors Meeting—Beth Proudfoot's  
Jun 14 Gen meeting/Barbash—Lookout Bar & Grill  
Jun 24 Editors Mtg, Orchard Valley Coffee, 10:00am  
Jul ?? Potluck BBQ—Edie's  
Sep 8-10 East of Eden Conference—Salinas

#### In this Issue:

Baldwin—Prowlings	p2	Johnson—Button Drawer	p7
LaRoche/Bauer	p3	Donnell—Where is Green	p8
Mutz—Recap	p4	Levine—The Next Draft	p8
Nipper—Nits	p6	Anon—Getting' Old	p9
Pacini—Remarkable	p6	Galvacs—Great Ideas	p10
Hammocks—Chronicle	p7	Amyx—Lifetime's Supply	p11
		Brisko—CounterCurrents	p12

## President's Prowling —Bill Baldwin



Bill Baldwin  
President, South Bay Branch

### Don't trash yourself!

What do I mean, "Don't trash yourself?" One interpretation would be, don't put yourself down. It's okay to critique yourself and edit yourself – but don't lose confidence and give up on yourself as a writer.

But I also mean, literally: Don't "trash" yourself by throwing away what you've written, even if you don't think it is very good. Hang onto those projects you're thinking of tossing.

My first completed novel, *Homecome*, was actually a diversion. In the early 1990s I was working on a novel. In 1995 I went to Germany (where I had attended college for awhile) alone, then to England with my wife. I quit working on the novel and started a travel book about Germany and England – which evolved in a different novel (*Homecome*).

Now I'm typing up notes for the first novel. I had only been drafting scenes, not creating the full narrative – but I've already typed over 60,000 words.

Once it's all typed, I'm hoping I will be able to produce a coherent draft relatively easily. While typing this manuscript, I've realized that I've actually already written four book-length manuscripts. In addition to the two novels I've already mentioned, I wrote two novellas intended to form a single book. Someday I may figure out a way to form them into a single novel (rather than just two thematically-related novellas – difficult to market!)

And in college I wrote 200 typed single-spaced pages of a Russian-style novel set in Germany. Who knows? Perhaps I can salvage something from that!

The point is, don't go melodramatic and burn something you consider a "sin of your youth" – later on, you may discover that those manuscripts weren't so bad and could be used. *WB*

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

the past 32 years, her husband has been the managing partner of Sunrise Books in Berkeley.

Charlotte accomplished her second goal and has been teaching a number of writing courses throughout the Bay Area.

"The last thing to fall in place," said Charlotte, "was the writing." She earned an MFA in Creative Writing at St. Mary's College, and when time allows, she continues to work on her own projects.

Lately, the bulk of her energy has gone into promoting the Komenar's first two books: "My Half of the Sky" by Jana McBurney-Lin (former President of CWC's Peninsula Branch) and "Over the Edge" by Marc Paul Kaplan.

Charlotte and her publishing staff are actively looking for projects. She will be judging the novel submissions for the East of Eden Writers' Conference—the first-prize winner receives \$200 and may also be chosen for Komenar's next publication.

Join us at the next CWC meeting and learn more about Komenar and how to appeal to a publisher. *EM*



## California Writers Club South Bay Branch

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### Join in With Us

We have a membership category that fits you, dues are \$45 per year plus a one-time \$20 initiation fee.

Contact our Membership Chair  
Diana Richomme

## Need Names?

—Cathy Bauer

Are you having a hard time coming up with names for your characters?

I've discovered a great source that doesn't cost money. It's on-line obituaries. Not only can you find unique names, but it's great when you need multi-generation names, i.e., parents, children, grandchildren, etc. and names for specific regions. I keep a journal just for names and places I find in the obits. Check it out!  
CB



Dave LaRoche  
Managing Editor

## Editor's Itch

It is said a *professional* is a person worthy of the high standards imposed by a defined employment that commonly implies a high degree of knowledge and skill.

And it is argued by some in our circles, that self-publishing is not an appropriate path to print, that those engaged in this antiestablishment process are really not true "professionals." We seem to either buy into this notion or oppose it, but rarely have I heard it discussed...

One might assert it is not the method of publishing that makes a good writer, one worthy of the "professional" attribute, but rather the quality of the writing as compared to accepted "high standards." One can point to esteemed authors whose first works came from self-publishing efforts. (Conversely, there are bums who, through some strange quirk, have been published by venerated houses.)

Let's face it; what it takes to self-publish is money. With appropriate funds, I can publish my grocery list, make thousands of copies, and talk publicly and sincerely about both shopping and publishing experiences. What it takes to get through the hoops at Scribners or Random House is convincing a lot of literary and marketing types that I've written a book that readers will curl up with—a tough screen to get through but when on the other side, I may assume a work of "high standards" and the "professional" status. (I'm doubtful my grocery list will make it.)

I conclude it's the work that makes the "professional." It's the quality of the work... the knowledge and skill, the unique and surprising that goes into the writing that engenders professionalism and not at all the method of production... or the associated blitz.

At the old bottom-line though, it seems reasonable to assume the book that has been through the hoops at Scribners is a better bet for "curling" than the self-published one. Of course, contrary opinions may air. DLR

### Yosemite Writers Conference

Aug 24 – 27

Conference Cost — \$350

Sponsored by nonprofit  
Poets and Writers Inc.

Conference rate at Tenaya  
lodge —\$185 per night  
double occupancy  
(ordinarily large bears eat  
your food)

Many fine writers, editors,  
publishers including  
broadly acclaimed T. Jefferson  
Parker ("resonant,  
literate and powerful") as  
keynoter.

—See—

[www.yosemitewriters.com](http://www.yosemitewriters.com)  
for list of faculty and registration  
info or call  
877-849-0176

## WritersTalk

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### Submittals are invited:

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#### Regular Columns

to Una Daly

#### News Items ≤400 wds

*Ltrs to Ed—In My Opinion* ≤200 wds  
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to Dave LaRoche

Submit as an attachment to email by the  
16th of the month preceding publication.

[newsletter@southbaywriters.com](mailto:newsletter@southbaywriters.com)

or

[writerstalk@comcast.net](mailto:writerstalk@comcast.net)

**Announcements** are accepted on the  
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Contact Dave LaRoche

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## ReCap — May Meeting

—Jackie Mutz



Jackie Mutz  
Contributing Editor

We were blessed with a balmy night as Barbara and I rolled into the LookOut Bar and Grill. There was quite a lively crowd abuzz with the “haps” of the moment. The meeting meandered its way through the agenda; writers ate, wrestled for the scrumptious brownies, jabbered at each other and then came the highlight of the evening—CWC guest speaker, Joyce Krieg.



Joyce Krieg

Currently a UCSC Extension instructor and best selling author of the *Mystery Off Mike* mystery series, featuring fictional heroine Shauna J. Bogart, Joyce’s career as a writer came on the cusp of making a name for herself in business radio as the “first female news anchor” in Sacramento’s all-news station, KFBK. It was there as Promo-

tion Director, she told us her “greatest claim to fame and shame” was helping to discover and launch the career of Rush Limbaugh.

After 20 years in talk radio, she moved to Pacific Grove to write and publish her first mystery novel, figuring it would take about a year. Nine years later, while gainfully employed as a technical writer, she submitted her book to St. Martin’s Press book contest. She won the contest to have her book published and received a \$10,000 advance. There was one catch. She needed to do one last rewrite. And then she was on her way...

By this time the CWC crowd was with Joyce completely. She spoke their language and shared her wisdom:

1. The Mystery genre has a distinctive formula to follow, so use it.

2. Don’t get hung up on the first few chapters. Keep writing. Finishing your novel is a good thing.
3. Don’t send your novel out before it is ready.
4. Be careful of scam artists when you are ready to send out those pitch letters.



And while it is exciting to see her books published (*Murder Off Mike*, *Slip Cue*, *Riding Gain*), she finds joy in the creative process, not so much in the end result. Some tips when writing your mystery novel:

- Place character in an unusual location
- Isolate your heroine (no one believes her)
- The ticking bomb (dead or alive?)
- Creating internal conflict (division in the ranks)
- Cross cutting (swapping scenes).
- End chapters with cliff hanger
- What’s the worst that can happen? Make it worser!

Her books for inspiration and guidance during the writing process:

1. *The Writer’s Journey*
2. *Writing the Break-out Novel*
3. *Bird by Bird*

Joyce ended reminding us that any one of us could be the next Frank McCourt, so “scribble, scribble and scribble some more.” **Make time to write and visit your project every day.** To find out more about writing mysteries and getting published, sign up for Joyce’s upcoming class *Creating the Female Detective* through the UCSC Extension, August 5 and 12 in Cupertino. Go to [www.ucsc-extension.edu](http://www.ucsc-extension.edu), and sign up!



Edie and Joyce



LOOK! EoE Bound



Someone we know won the raffle

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)

(RECAP FROM PAGE 4)



**P.S. There were announcements:**

- Edie's class begins—\$3 entry
- Dan Niemi writing contest winner gets you an effective \$500.
- Bill Baldwin for EoE and Bob Garfinkle for Dan Niemi and Basil



Stevens are looking for judges If interested in helping, contact them.

- EoE early registration available to SouthBay members only.
- Book

Group Expo

in San Jose, June 17 & 18. [www.bookgroupexpo.com](http://www.bookgroupexpo.com)

- Elections next month.
- Don't forget open mic—a wonderful opportunity to hear your work flowing melodiously from your own mouth.
- East of Eden, our own conference in Salinas this September—Jean Auel keynoting. See [www.southbaywriters.com](http://www.southbaywriters.com) to register.

(PROFILE FROM PAGE 1)

began 12 years ago while she and her family were still living in Singapore. Although a freelance writer and English magazine editor in Japan, she was new to fiction writing and struggled with point of view and narration. “At one point, I had the whole book in pidgin dialect as my critique group can attest”, she admitted.

She gave the finished manuscript to a friend at CWC to read who really liked it but suggested an editor. “I was a snob about this (due to being a copy editor) ... Until that point I hadn't realized, there were two kinds of editors – copy and content”. Her friend persisted to the point of driving her to the editor's house and paying for the first hour, and after that she was hooked.

“I worked with Charlotte Cook for about three months, and I felt as if I were in a private tutoring class on the art of writing fiction”, said Jana. At about that time, Cook decided to go into book publishing and urged Jana to submit her first hundred pages to the acquisitions team and thus began the journey towards publication.

Originally from Illinois, Jana went to live in Japan after graduating from university; planning only to stay for a year, she remained for six. She wrote her first piece for publication after meeting the only female member of the Japanese National Diet

(like our congress). “I was so amazed that she existed in this male domain – and actually worked in a building that had only

men's bathrooms--I wanted to tell everyone about her”, said Jana.

Jana met her husband, who is from Southern China, while in Tokyo and they moved to Singapore to start their family. After each losing a parent, they decided it was time to move home so their children could grow up with grandparents, aunts, and uncles around them. It could have been China or the US but ... “as my husband is an engineer--and thus Silicon Valley is his mecca--we decided to come here ... in 1999”, she said.

Upon moving to California, Jana emailed many places looking for a writers' group. “CWC was the only group that responded--not only that, they rolled out the red carpet. Teresa LeYung Ryan, current president of the Peninsula branch, called me and said she'd found a ride for me”, she reported. Jana first became vice president and then president, adding “I wouldn't be getting my novel published if it hadn't been for a fellow CWC member who pointed me in the direction of his editor.”

Jana and her husband live in the Santa Cruz Mountains with their four children. Besides writing she likes to knit, swim, hike, and of course to travel. She enjoys the writings of many other authors including: Anita Shreve, Amy Tan, Isabelle Allende, Khaled Housseni, Terry Ryan, Anita Diamant, and Dennis Lehane. *UD*



The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and re-learn. UNK



## Waiting for Remarkable —Toni Pacini

I have lived a life that for the most part is not worth commenting on. I want that one remarkable thing to happen, that one unbelievable stroke of genius to come to me, that one moment that makes all the difference.

When I'm in the "social circle" and all the remarkable people are talking about their remarkable lives, I have to make it up. I tell stories. I write stories. Fortunately I don't believe my stories. I just make them up and tell them in a clever way to compensate for my lack of *remarkable*. My commonness.

I was in wonder, in awe, as a child. I just believed. Why? Don't know. But I knew *remarkable* was coming. I was certain I would collide with something awesome just around the next corner. I would not have been completely surprised, had I discovered I could fly.

As a girl, I believed it would simply be revealed to me in time. I was sure I would soon discover that I was a gifted pianist, a psychic, a prophet of Nostradamus proportions, or maybe a scientist or mathematician. Soon.

As a young woman, I began to doubt. In an effort to maintain the dream, I attached my upcoming *remarkable* experience to another. Prince Charming, the White Knight, or maybe John Lennon. He would come. I would be *remarkable* to him, and his love for me would make me *remarkable* to

## NIPPER'S

## NITS

*This column brings a series of brief grammar lessons by Pat Decker Nipper, a writer, a former English teacher, and a member of SouthBay CWC...*



Pat Decker Nipper  
**Columnist**

### Lesson 15 Verbing Nouns

I once overheard a conversation between two friends where one said,

"Hey, I knew how to party before it was a verb."

Other people have bragged they could "verb any noun."

Apparently, the English language offers more mutations in parts of speech than most other languages. But we might have gone overboard with verbing nouns. For example, highway crews are now "coning off" lanes and Olympic athletes are trying "to medal," or, worse yet, "to podium."

While these new verbs might be ugly, how often do we "floor the accelerator," or say "we were doored," when somebody opened a car door and knocked us off our bicycles? We become angry at people who "mouth off," or who "eye the waitress." We "elbow our way" to the front of a line, we "nose out the truth," or we "trash the office."

This creative language eventually becomes part of accepted grammar, especially when the media continue to use short cuts to explain what's happening on our highways, in our homes, and with our sporting events.

On the other hand, we are also good at nouning some of our verbs, such as calling a book a "good read."

Contact Pat at [pat@patdeckernipper.com](mailto:pat@patdeckernipper.com) for comments or questions.

others. He would come.

The woman was cold. As a woman I did not want to believe. Survival became my whole focus. All the rest was fairy tale, folklore, an old wives' tale told in the midst of a storm to distract the children. Some were *remarkable*. Some simply were not.

I could believe in a God, I could follow Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi or Allah, they were *remarkable*, but to simply mimic them does not make me *remarkable*. I could study the music of the greats, but I would not be one of them. I could memorize the work of Einstein and yet not grasp the meaning.

No. It's not outside of me. It can't be learned or taught. It can't be borrowed or bought. It cannot even be sought. It is, or it is not.

Now I start my waning years. I face the sum of women's fears. Now like a child and young girl pass, I find the wheels of life reverse, and I believe again what I knew first. So. I'm waiting for *remarkable*, and isn't it a treat, to learn that it's *remarkable*, the circle to complete.

Life's *remarkable*. *TP*

# THE BUTTON DRAWER

—Marjorie Johnson

Beneath the window in her bedroom, my mother kept her 1901 patent pending White sewing machine in its dark polished walnut cabinet. Mother called it 'Herkimer.' The machine folded out when the lid was lifted: black enamel, gold lettering, chrome wheel attached by belt to a wrought iron treadle. It had been her mother's but it always looked brand new; Mother oiled and polished it after every use. Between jobs, she closed the lid and stacked her mending on top.

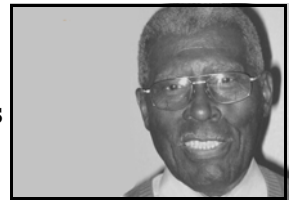
Nothing went to waste in Mother's house. Besides making our school dresses and pajamas, she shortened or lengthened, took in or let out, mended and darned while listening to the radio in the evening. She saved the zippers and reused every garment, crocheting rugs, making quilts. But the buttons went into the button drawer—hundreds of them.

I made doll clothes out of scraps and hemmed my skirts. I embroidered dishtowels and pillowslips, using the eyelet stitch, the satin stitch, and a knot which I called a 'forget-me-knot' so many times that I can't remember its proper name. When I sewed on replacement buttons, I had to start with an extended search through

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 9)

## CWC CHRONICLE SOUTH BAY BRANCH

—Clarence L. Hammonds



Clarence Hammonds

Historian

In my last report about CWC South Bay Branch and its founder, Madge Saksena, I ended by saying, "there is more to this story." This time, however, I am going to take a look at Madge as seen by an earlier writer, before South Bay Branch was chartered in 1987. Actually this branch was in operation in 1986. The article, this time, is by Karen Ettinger. It is addressed to Kathy Maag, Editor of "East", San Jose Mercury News. Here is the highlights about Madge, dated December 11, 1986.

*Dear Kathy Maag.*

*Would you be interested in a feature article on Madge Saksena, founding president of the new, South Bay chapter of California Writers Club? She lives in your readership district, in San Jose 95127. Her accomplishments would be especially newsworthy in January, when the writers' chapter she organizes receives its charter from the statewide association.*

*A senior citizen who won't tell her age, Madge is unusually active and energetic for any age. She is a professional writer, photographer & editor, whose work includes real estate, health, & motivational books; confession and romance stories; plays; personal-experience articles; typing manuals; art and book reviews; craft how-tos; and promotional material.*

*Madge also has taught romance writing, drama, research and creative writing through colleges, high schools and adult education programs. She has been a syndicated columnist, a cable television host, and a newsletter editor for the San Jose Historical Museum.*

*Organizations in which she had been active, include the National League of American Pen Women, other California Writers' Club branches, Romance Writers of America, Romance Readers, Bay Area Writers' Workshop, the Porter Short Story Club and the Photographic Society of America.*

*Madge is the driving force behind the new South Bay Writers Club. Monthly San Jose meetings began in September and have been attended by about 30 local writers and editors seeking information and fellowship.*

(Kathy then ended her article based on this letter from Ettinger by telling everybody how, they can reach Madge.)

As Madge said in the last article I wrote and is worth repeating.

It is:

**"Our purpose is to get writers together and share ideas."**

CH

## The Next Draft — Becky Levine



Becky Levine

Columnist

*Becky is a writer and a freelance editor who is available for copyediting and manuscript critiques. Becky's column will give tips on ways to develop and strengthen your writing style. She can be reached at*

[www.beckylevine.com](http://www.beckylevine.com)

### Be Specific: Build Your Story with Concrete Images

*Some guy got ready then went to a place. He had refreshments then did some shopping.*

No? Okay, try this?

*Matt pulled his gray hair into a ponytail, then drove his '78 pickup to Merkel's department store. After drinking the last beer in the glove compartment, he pushed through the front doors and steered straight to the men's department, where he bought the green tie with the horseshoe pattern.*

Are you interested? Do you want to know what the tie is for?

Those paragraphs show the difference between vague and concrete, between generalities and specifics. Details—rock-solid details—make your story real and hook your readers.

Specifics do more than just add imagery to a paragraph, though. Specifics are the stones on which your entire story is built.

Too often, we write along with some knowledge about our protagonist's personality and a basic idea of our story's theme. All of this is important. Yet, at the end of the first draft, our plot seems weak and the overall tone of the piece is flat. Someone might actually say to you—as they did to me—“But what *happens*?”

Specifics drive the action of a story. When you start a story, or a chapter or a scene, make sure you know the character's goal...their concrete, active goal. It's not enough to know that your hero wants to find a cure for the common cold. What does he want to do *today, at this very moment*?

He wants to identify that weird purple residue from yesterday's tests.

He's going to walk into his lab, scrape the stuff into a test-tube, add acetone to it, and stick it under a microscope. Okay, I'm not a chemist. Instantly, though, with those details, you've set him up to meet any of a gazillion obstacles—his partner's sheepdog broke all the test-tubes, the acetone evaporated, budget cuts got rid of the microscopes. You've also set him up for action—what is he going to do next?

You've got specific, vivid details. You've got imagery and interest. And—Hallelujah!—you've got plot. *BL*

### Where is the Green

—Carolyn Donnell

My heart is lonely for a tree,  
a lawn that flows down green and gray  
to a stony brook,  
a meadow of grass and flowers  
with deepening woods behind.

A place to walk  
in solitary contemplation  
of sights and sounds  
obliterated by this urban noise  
and polluted crowding.

Free from the roaring whoosh  
of cars racing by,  
motorcycles,  
rock music  
cacophony,  
loud voices,  
outside after midnight.

Where is the cooing of the doves,  
the chatter of the squirrels,  
the lark's song floating  
on a clean river breeze,  
the rustle of fresh green leaves?

Oh to live outside of sardine cans,  
these cardboard shoeboxes  
we have to call home.  
I swear even the howl  
of a mountain lion  
in a backyard tree  
would be better than this.

### Terse Verse —by Pat Bustamante

#### June Honey?

June oh June  
(What rhymes with moon)  
You and I  
And now 12 months of anthology.  
Each month an ode  
To C.W.C. writers' load.  
--Is it too soon  
To beg that punned-upon readers  
Accept my apology?  
  
(...your punning,  
funning poet, Pat B.)



(BUTTONS FROM PAGE 7)

the button drawer.

On my twelfth birthday, Mother said I was old enough to learn to sew. She showed me how to lay out a pattern along the grain lines, how to cut the cloth, how to make a seam. The treadle sewing machine made an even stitch for Mother but took more coordination than I could muster at first. As Mom put it, "Herkimer can be pernickety." The treadle rewarded smooth footwork with even stitches, but any back-motion broke the thread; I had to stop to turn the piece. I loved the tacketa-tacketa-tacketa and the smooth feel of the chrome wheel under my hand.

First I made a skirt, which used a zipper and one button; then I learned to make a blouse, with darts, facings, and set-in sleeves. Buttons down the front meant another trip to the button drawer; I asked if I could sort the buttons.

I started with white buttons, about half of the drawer. I made piles of the same size, then strung the matching ones on odd-colored leftover sewing thread, strengthened by pulling through bees' wax. I spent many evenings at a big table in the living room, stringing hundreds of white buttons. When I started the colored ones, I found an abalone belt buckle, World War I army uniform

brass buttons, hand-crafted wooden buttons, pearl buttons, shoe buttons, metal buttons—buttons like I had seen in the antique store window. I surprised my mother by selling the buttons to an antique dealer and presenting her with \$50, a large amount of money in 1950.

Twenty years later, I taught my daughter Jan to sew on an electric straight-stitch machine. It wasn't long before a zigzag machine would make button-holes, do the hemming, embroider and sew knits. When Jan was twelve, she made a plaid wool dress that could have come from Nordstrom's, but Herkimer fascinated her. Mom showed Jan how to use it; they always talked sewing when they got together. Jan would help her with the mending, using Herkimer, of course—and to see what treasures were hidden in the button drawer.

Another twenty years went by. When my mother died, I found loose handfuls of stray buttons in the button drawer and the same hard brown chunk of bees' wax. Jan wanted the old treadle machine, something to remember her grandmother.

Now Herkimer sits in Jan's living room with a doily and a vase of flowers, a ghost of its former self, refinished in a light color, the gleaming machine folded inside, never a tacketa. The button drawer is empty. *MJ*

## Getting Older—

There are signs

—Annon

Only the geriatric may excuse any defect in behavior with the utterance, "senior moment"—it's often done for them.

And of course, deference... when seating is crowded in a bus... the theater... high school graduations. And help with crossing streets, negotiating steps, carting groceries and counting change.

Today I bought bananas, fifty-five cents worth. I pulled a handful of change from my pocket, picked two quarters and a nickel and handed them to the cashier leaving seven pennies, among miscellaneous coins, in my hand – not wanting to bother with them.

With my hand still open she asked, "Wouldn't you like to get rid of your pennies?" I nodded, some in wonder, and while I watched, she reached into my hand and from the rest of the change, counted out five pennies and re-deposited the nickel.

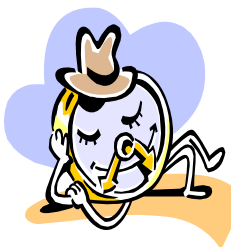
Now I ask, would that happen to a 35 year old? *ANnon*

"It's not the one bullet with your name on it that you have to worry about; it's the twenty thousand-odd rounds labeled 'occupant.'"

—Murphy



Andrea Galvacs  
Contributing Editor



## GREAT IDEAS, MENTAL BLOCKS

I know, I know, you can hardly wait for your issue of WritersTalk to arrive in your mailbox every month. That's because you're dying to read my piece, isn't it? (As if you had nothing better to do!).

Even though I have a whole month to figure out what I'm going to write about, sometimes it takes me almost that long to come up with an idea that I hope will be interesting, informative and entertaining to the newsletter's readers. At my disposal are thirty or, in the case of May, thirty-one days to try to guess people's varied tastes which, on second thought, seems to be a lost cause to begin with.

I put on my thinking cap, but I came up dry. So, I gave up for a few days, hoping that Inspiration would come banging at my door. If that isn't a silly wish I don't know what is. Of course, the elusive thing was either making the rounds helping other writers or on vacation, having a blast.

After thinking some more, I came to the conclusion that my being in a rut isn't my fault at all; the ones to blame are the ancient Greeks. They invented nine muses to inspire people in the arts and sciences. Of these nine, no fewer than four were invoked for the various kinds of poetry: Calliope for epic, Clio for loving, Polyhymnia for sacred and Thalia for idyllic. (Presumably the Greek sages hadn't heard of haiku). Why didn't they invent one for prose? Unfortunately, we will never know but it's a shame; a muse inspiring prosaic writers would be very helpful!

On the other hand, how many writers and scientists rely on muses today? Much more common aids for inspiration, I am told, are taking walks, daydreaming, hitting the computer. I really like the last one! However, none of these was of any help lately, perhaps because I didn't take them seriously enough. I walked from one end of the room to the other, I daydreamed that I was born again with the ability to think of a topic, type its name and have an article or a book ready to submit an

hour later but I didn't dare clobber the computer just in case I would have to type many titles.

Finally, I chose not to think of a topic and start writing whatever came to my mind to see if I could come up with one. The result is what you are reading and I decided that complaining is a perfect subject.

There might be columnists who openly admit that they have difficulties coming up with what to write about, but I don't know of any. So, my subject may be rare, if not unique and producing something hard to find or a first is always a thrill! Trouble is, I don't know how much of a thrill it will give our readers, but I'll take a chance. After all, groaning about a mental block is common enough and acceptable. You wouldn't want to know about my grievances such as my hair stylist using a curling iron to hide the mess he made while cutting my hair, the newspaper not properly wrapped in the plastic bag and delivered into a puddle...

However, I know I'm going to crawl out of this abyss and then, I'll have many ideas and writing about them will be a piece of cake! AG

## A Lifetime's Supply

—Meredy Amyx

I had one of those painful moments of truth the other day when I came to the gloomy realization that I'd reached the point in my career where, if I never buy another spool of gift ribbon, what I have now will last me the rest of my life.

This is not about accumulating or stockpiling things or even about how long it's taken me to put away the last of the Christmas wrappings. It's about lifetimes.

How casually we use the lifetime as a measure! In common speech it's thoughtless enough to be an empty cliché employed for exaggerated effect: "We're planning the trip of a lifetime." "The amount of cumin he uses in a week would last me a lifetime." "It's not as if that job offer were the opportunity of a lifetime." "My aunt keeps a lifetime's supply of shampoo in her bathroom cupboard."

What, exactly, is a lifetime's supply? It's a rhetorical way of saying "a very large quantity" or "an infinite amount." But in the case of my friend's aunt, it would have been just enough shampoo to wash her hair one more time. Aunt Josie was elderly and lived alone with her cat, and her systems needed the support of the little reminder lists that she made for herself:

4:00 Feed Muffie  
4:15 Shower  
5:00 Eat supper  
5:30 Leave  
6:00 Meet Mary at Valley Cinema  
9:00 Write to Catherine  
10:00 Bed

While she was standing in the box office line with Mary at Valley Cinema, she was accidentally jostled by a young man behind her. She lost her balance and fell. She fell in such a way that she hurt herself and could not get up. She was taken to the hospital emergency room and ended up in surgery for a broken hip. Recovery was slow. Two weeks after the operation, complications set in, and a week after that, Aunt Josie died in the hospital. She went to the movies and never came home again.

My friend and her mother had the sad duty of emptying Aunt Josie's apartment, and they found the schedule on her desk. When she wrote it, Aunt Josie was unaware that she then possessed a lifetime's supply, not just of

shampoo but of everything.

What would the media do without the concept of "lifetime"? "The performance of a lifetime." "Lifetime achievement." "A lifetime of service." Or how about advertising? "The sale of a lifetime!" "Lifetime protection." And of course, "Comes with a lifetime guarantee." Now, there's an attractive notion. With a lifetime guarantee, I might know how much a lifetime's supply really is, and I could lay in enough shampoo or cumin or gift ribbon for the duration.

But instead, seeing no end to my expected consumption, I've habitually overstocked. I pick up an extra spool of ribbon or two or a half dozen whenever I buy wrapping paper for a particular occasion, or when I'm gearing up for Christmas, or maybe even when I just happen to be passing the gift wrap section of the drugstore and notice a pretty color or remember that I'm running low on peach and lavender. Somehow I always imagine that I have less on hand than I actually do, or fail to consider that even if I ran completely out of peach or lavender, I could make do very nicely with violet or aqua or goldenrod or white or lime green.

And so I found myself belatedly putting away the Christmas wrappings and attempting the futile task of cramming a dozen assorted new spools of ribbon into the box that was going back into the closet. I paused for a moment to look at what I had there: the variety of styles, the spectrum of colors, and most of all the sheer quantity. And that's when I had the thought: I am not going to live long enough to use up all this ribbon, not with all the birthdays and weddings and baby showers and graduations and Christmases I have yet to shop for in the probable remainder of my lifetime.

There in that box of varicolored strips, narrow and wide, crinkle and satin and cloth and tinsel cord for all occasions, there is one measure of my lifetime. It comes without a lifetime guarantee.

And it's finite after all. *MA*

I believe that every right implies a responsibility: every opportunity, an obligation, every possession, a duty.

—John D. Rockefeller Jr.

## WritersTalk Challenge

Creative Writing Awards are offered to those publishing in *WritersTalk*

### Genres:

Memoirs <1000 wds  
Short Fiction <1500 wds  
Poetry <300 wds  
Essays <700 wds  
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An **East of Eden Scholarship** will be awarded during the August meeting for the unique entry received through July 15, 2006

### Entrants:

All work in the genres above, published in WT during the period Feb 15 through Aug 15, 2006 is entered. WT Editors are excluded from participation.

**Judging:** Is to be done by genre-related critique groups (or individuals) of Club membership.

**Judging approach:** Ten points are available for each piece, to be allocated over several categories of grading in each genre. The allotments are available from *WritersTalk* Editors

**The three pieces with the highest scores will win (regardless of genre)**

When you submit to *WritersTalk* and are published in the genres above in the word allotment indicated, you are entered. You need do nothing else.

**Note: Publishing in *WritersTalk*, excluding ads and announcements, is limited to members of the Southbay Branch of the California Writers Club**

## CounterCurrents — A Place for Bill's Fiction

### The Rocky Mountain Way Part II



Bill Brisko

Contributing Editor

What are we going to do with it?"

Well, yes...that is always the question. What *are* we going to do with it? What are we going to do with a bag of grass at a Rock and Roll concert? I mean, what? I wasn't a smoker - tobacco or anything else for that matter. Neither was my brother. Just didn't like the cottonmouth and the crowbar-over-the-head feeling you got afterwards. Dilaudid was more my speed. Besides, you were in enough of a haze from just breathing the air in the Arena. But on the other hand, I wasn't going to give up a big bag of grass either, especially one that hit me in the head unsuspectingly like pennies from Heaven. No siree, we're going to surf this strange wave until she breaks!

"Uhhh," as I looked around nervously, trying to think fast and stall the inevitable at the same time while continuing to be pushed closer to the front doors. "We're going to take it in...and *sell* it."

"Sell it? Isn't that against the law?"

"Isn't that against the law, well..." I started in a philosophical way. "Yes it is. But here we are, we got a bag of grass - free! Somebody just threw it at us wanting to get rid of it, and it's worth a buck or two. So why can't we just take it in and get rid of it and make a few dollars. I mean, somebody already took the chance to buy it in the first place..."

"Well, OK. But I'm not taking it in." And good thing at that. If he were caught with it, I'd be the one taking the fall. And after we were bailed out of jail, it would be double trouble with the Old Man for letting him. No, this one I was going to have to do myself and think of some way quickly, as we were nearly at the front doors.

*"Think it's safe to say  
Time to open fire..."*

Instinctively, I grabbed my camera and took it out of the case. I put the camera, which had the strap on it, around Mark's neck, then stuffed the enormous bag of grass into the camera case. I would just hold the camera case in my hand on the way in; they

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 13)

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never checked it before. This would be how we'd do it.

"OK, you put this around your neck. I'll carry it in the case. We'll sell it once we're inside."

As we got pushed up to the front door, I let Mark go first so I could get the goon who was a little on the short side. Since I towered over him at 6'3", I just held the camera case way over his head in the up-against-the-wall-muthaf---a position and there was no way he could reach it. Once I was standing there for more than a few seconds, the people behind me just pushed me through the door, pushing me right inside. Everyone was so anxious to get off the street and into the building this frigid January night. Nobody gave a shit about a bag of grass.

Arriving inside we served up our tickets and made our way to our seats, just above the height of the floor crowd. Mark and I sat there just waiting, nervously, not even opening the camera case to check out the swag. We were happy to have it, and yet eager to get rid of it at the same time. It was the first time either of us was about to - how should I put it - peddle in it....

About 7 PM I decided it was time to get rid of the stuff. That's right, sell it just before the music started. It was impossible to negotiate a transaction once the sound became deafening. "Where are you going to sell it?" asked Mark.

"Uhh...let's see. Where to sell it? Yes. Let me think. I know! I'll sell it in the bathroom!"

The bathroom at Winterland was a foul, dreck-ridden, seamy place. Besides the floor of the auditorium, it was the dealing hangout for any type of bag, shot, tab, snort...anything you needed. It was also pretty miserable as bathrooms go. It boasted two urinals and two heads, with the courtesy panels only going up to about chest high - leftovers from days when it hosted the Ice Capades. So if you had to really juke

down and take a nasty shit, you might as well put up a sign. For all of those in the Army or Navy, who were used to this in boot camp, you took your shit in the open and got back into rank. But most people around the City weren't, and with all of the perversions a Rock and Roll crowd came with in San Francisco. But I knew this would be the place, and to sell it before the music started.

*"And we don't need the ladies  
Crying 'cuz the story's sad..."*

The bathroom was usually empty before a show, but filled up just before the music started. Guys were always pissing away the excess from the long wait outside, sometimes even while waiting in line. Later they would add stupendous fountains of vomit to the bathroom program. It was a sickening sight. The line outside would actually grow quite long during the evening as the fun started and most just couldn't keep up. Finally, towards the end of the show, there was always the hardcore partier that crossed the line of how much abuse the body could endure, passing out right there on the bathroom floor. That was if he was indeed fortunate, as many passed out on the toilet or in the urinal. They always had the paramedics handy from the Haight-Asbury there to help out. If anyone knew about drug overdoses or alcohol abuse, they did. And there were a few times I noticed the paramedics, in the corner right outside the bathroom door, beating with both fists on somebody's chest when consumption got, indeed, excessive.

Once I made my way inside, I cased the place out for a second, for insurance reasons. I didn't figure there were any narc types inside or anyone else like that, but just wanted to check. You can always tell a narc, their clothes don't smell and their sneakers are washed. After a hard day of cracking skulls for minor joint possession, narc

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cops will *actually* wash their clothes. No self respecting Hippie, or frequenter of Winterland for that matter, was going to smell clean! No sir. So it satisfied me to see that everyone had that 'street' look *and* smell.

It was a very typical bathroom scene in there; guys pissing with one hand, drinking a beer in the other, others working some sort of narcotic by the sink, while still others were rolling joints by the door, and the very, very desperate who were juked down on the toilet – using it for what it was intended for! I eyed everyone cautiously, still being a bit nervous about selling the weed - not knowing that this was probably the safest place in The City to do so. I felt that tingling feeling you get when something's about to go wrong. You know, where the butterflies are in your stomach and it's wrapped up around your neck someplace. Hope this all works out!

"Hey, *anyone* want to buy a bag of weed?"

*"Cuz the Rocky Mountain Way  
Is better than the way we had..."*

Well, let me tell you, there is weirdness and there is downright craziness, and all manner of it broke out in that bathroom. "Right here, buddy," came an offer from the sink. "I got thirty dollars here," said another. A third guy on the urinal with his pecker in his hand dug forty dollars out of his pocket with the other. "Right here, kid," shouted another. I had offers from all over the filthy little place, everyone grabbing at my arm to look at the quality of the grass. "Dude, I'm in for sixty dollars," said another - a joint in his mouth, a beer in one hand, and shaking the last few drops off his dick with the other. Finally, some scraggly looking guy stood up from sitting on the head - I think he had just been wiping up there - and started fumbling around with his wallet, which was chained to his belt somewhere down around his ankles. I did my best to look in the

other direction because I knew what he was doing down there was extremely foul. He was wearing a straw cowboy hat and sunglasses (as it said, there was no *privacy* in the Winterland bathroom!) and some sort of flannel jacket. "I've got eighty dollars right here, partner," he drawled, waving his money around in my face.

"Sold!" I screeched, grabbing the \$80 bucks. I handed him the dope, and he examined it closely, still wiping with the other hand.

"Looks good to me!" he said. And with that, I quickly exited to the main floor. As I was leaving, others were trying to get him to split the lid so they could still get a piece of the action. I was now wishing I had more to sell.

Making my way back to where we were sitting, I split the money with my brother. I was still shaking a little from fear, relief and excitement as I waved the bills in front of his face.

"How much did you get?"

"80 bucks. Eighty dollars! Hell, I mighta been able to get them over a hundred if I kept trying" I said in a confident, cautious way.

"Why didn't you?"

"Same reason you didn't want to bring it in. It's one thing to be caught with it, another to be selling it" I said.

We sat there, quietly watching the concert once it started. I think it was Ronnie Montrose who opened for Joe Walsh. I forget the second band, it mighta been Sons of Champlin. In those days all of the Winterland concerts ran together into a sort of hazed continuum. I guess it's true, if you remember them all too well, you weren't there.

Joe Walsh hit the stage last. As I recall, it was announced he was a little under the weather that nite. But he put on a good show, rising to the occasion from the applause of the crowd. He ended the set with Rocky Mountain Way, and I'm sure there were a few extra people in the crowd who definitely got much higher! *BB*

*Announcements Announcements Announcements*

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General Meeting  
Charlotte Cook  
Jun 14

Open Mic  
Jun 2 7:30p  
Borders, Los Gatos  
Jun 16, 7:30p  
B&N in the Pruneyard

WritersTalk Inputs  
Jun 16

Editors Pow Wow  
Jun 24, 10:00am  
Orchard Valley Coffee

### General Membership Meeting—2nd Wednesday At

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See Map Below

