



# WRITERSTALK

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Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

## On October 10 What Does it Take to Be a Writer?

by Alexander Leon

Technically speaking, anyone who produces written text could be considered a writer. However, the word is generally reserved to designate those who do it creatively and professionally. There are many kinds of writers, and though they all have things in common each takes a slightly different skill set and background. Still, the background of acclaimed novelist Barry Eisler is unique—but that alone does not make a writer. So what does it really take to be a writer and how does one get into the writing business?

Find out at the upcoming South Bay Writers' October 10 meeting. Our guest speaker will be none other than internationally known and acclaimed master of the thriller, Barry Eisler, who comes to share with us how he entered the writing business, what worked for him, what it takes, and what he believes "might be useful to anyone else trying to break in."

His talk will encompass "where ideas come from, how to nurture those ideas, and then how you sustain yourself through the long, daunting process of turning an idea into an actual story, and the story into a manuscript, and then, eventually, hopefully, into a published novel."

If you were to ask Barry why you should come to hear him he would further tell you, "As someone who went from being unpublished to being published, I'm in a reasonably good position to offer some insights that might be useful to anyone hoping to undertake the same journey."

Before becoming a writer, Barry dedicated himself to learning all there is to know about the "forbidden knowledge" that in turn the character he created, John Rain, masterfully makes use of. He has avidly studied various martial arts, weapons use, assassination techniques, law, and Japanese, and has also lived in Japan as well as worked for the CIA. Eisler has garnered all this experience to produce the six Rain series novels, which have been translated into nearly twenty languages.

Barry's novels have won various awards, including *Best Thriller of the Year*, *Mystery Ink Gumshoe Award*, and the *Barry Award*. His Rain series books have made numerous "Best Of" lists, including that of the *San Jose Mercury News*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Ft. Myers News-Press*, *Deadly Pleasures*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The books have also been optioned for film by Barrie Osborne, Oscar-winning producer of *The Lord of the Rings*.

So, writers and aspiring writers come learn from thriller, spycraft, mystery master, novelist Barry Eisler. Join us at 6:00 pm at the Lookout Bar and Grill in Sunnyvale for dinner, networking, socializing and mainly to learn from this praised novelist what it takes to be a writer. WT



Barry Eisler reads at Kepler's in Menlo Park, 2007.

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## Cry or Laugh?

The *WritersTalk* editorial staff would like you to laugh until you cry. But you're going to have to do it to yourself—humorous and comical submissions for the November issue will be given special consideration. Give it a shot and tickle all the readers' funny bones!

**On October 10: Literary Costume Party**  
Come to the meeting dressed as a literary character or figure.

# President's Prowling

*by Dave LaRoche*  
*President, South Bay Writers*

## Writers Week

The third week in October is the official writers week in California, so says Assembly Resolution 2170, passed on September 4, 2003. Libraries and writers clubs throughout the State will be celebrating and supporting California's writers past and present. And our own South Bay Writers, one of seventeen branches of the California Writers Club, will join in with posters distributed to book stores and libraries throughout the Valley, a workshop featuring noted writer James Dalessandro, and Barry Eisler at our October general meeting.

The California Writers Club, founded in 1909 by such literary dignitaries as Jack London and Ina Coolbrith, California's first poet laureate, boasts more than 1200 members scattered from Orange County to Marin. Our South Bay Branch, with more than 150 members, is the largest and growing. At South Bay we look forward to a year that brings education, networking and outreach for our club and its members. At this time next year, we will be wrapping our fourth East of Eden conference.

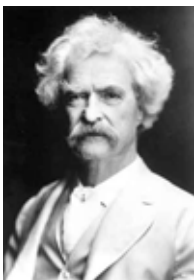
California has given home to many successful writers, from Mark Twain to John Steinbeck to Wallace Stegner, and continues to foster the art. The west coast locale provides a plethora of ideas, endless stimulation, and a muse that runs wild from Needles to the San Simeon. Our educational institutions, K through "evening adult," provide technical information and guidance; and our political bodies are beginning to double-underscore the arts.

Californians in particular recognize a special value in writing as it is a path to our cultural center—a direct means of finding a focus for our multiethnic and economically-heterogeneous population. Thus we have good reason for commemorating California Writers Week and celebrating our California writers.

Take a writer to lunch on October 14. **WT**



**Wallace Stegner (1909–1993)**



**Mark Twain (1835–1910)**



**John Steinbeck (1902–1968)**

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### Join With Us

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



## WRITERSTALK

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

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### Submissions

Members of the South Bay Writers Club are encouraged to submit their creative works for publication in *WritersTalk*. Electronic submissions should be text or attached MS Word file sent to newsletter@southbaywriters.com; or mail double-spaced, typewritten copy to

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### Guest Columns

*Almost Anything Goes* (400 words)

### Repeat Columns

to Una Daly  
unatdaly@mac.com>

### News Items (400 words)

### Letters to the Editor (300 words)

to Andrea Galvacs  
lady\_angal@comcast.net

### Creative Works

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

### Announcements and Advertisements

newsletter@southbaywriters.com

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

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

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# Editor's Perspective

by Dick Amyx  
Editor

## A New Face on the Page



Greetings from the new editor. On paper, I'm probably the second- or third-newest member of the club, but I'm not altogether a stranger. My wife, Meredy, has been a member of SBW for two years; during that time, I've attended several monthly meetings and social functions with her. I've also read her *WritersTalk* fairly regularly, so I have some idea of the kind of newsletter you're accustomed to receiving.

Personally, I'm mostly retired after spending the past thirty years as a technical writer and publications manager. When I was a student, my career goal was to teach college English and write novels, but social and political forces of the time put that beyond reach. The Russians had just put a satellite in orbit, and I was pressured into an engineering curriculum. However, after narrowly escaping from one university without actually graduating in electrical engineering, I did receive a BA in English from another. While I was working on an MA, colleges and universities started graduating huge numbers of liberal arts majors, and there just weren't any teaching jobs available. I dropped out of grad school, knocked around for a while, and finally put the partial EE degree together with the BA in English and drifted into technical writing. Along the way, I edited newsletters like this one in various club settings, and I admit to always having had a warm spot in my heart for the very, very small press.

Thus, today, my writing skills are pretty good, but I think that thirty years of technical writing have reduced my creative imagination to that of a sea slug. And so I finally joined South Bay Writers in the hope that getting back into contact with published writers and fiercely determined practicing writers would help to make my creative juices sizzle.

I think that what *WritersTalk* is supposed to do is keep you up to date on club business, provide you with information about the craft and business of writing, and offer a place to showcase your writing. That's what *WritersTalk* is doing now, so I don't see a need to make substantive changes to it. One thing I would like to see is more different bylines—on both articles and creative pieces. A second thing would be more creative pieces. If I had my way, the newsletter would be about half business and half creative writing. *WritersTalk* is an excellent place for those of us who are easing into making our writing public to dip a toe into relatively safe literary waters. I'm also amenable to publishing a longer work from time to time—a longer story or an excerpt from a work in progress or from something published (assuming that you hold the rights), if you want to give your book a little hype.

*WritersTalk* has a great bunch of contributing editors to lend help with both editing and writing. I am grateful that some of the more experienced hands—Una Daly, Andrea Galvacs, Jackie Mutz, and Suzy Paluzzi—were willing to stay on through the change of editor, and that three new people—Rich Burns, Carolyn Donnell, and Lita Kurth—have signed on. We will be working together as a team to bring you the best *WritersTalk* we can.

A few notes in closing:

Word count guidelines are published both here and on the web. I consider these guidelines to be very broad targets to aim at rather than requirements to write to spec. Although a 3,000-word opinion piece might be a bit much, if it takes you four or five hundred words to say what you have to say, don't worry about it.

Don't forget that the monthly dinner October 10 meeting is also the annual SBW costume party. Costumes are optional, but you're invited to come dressed a literary character or figure.

November will be the humor issue of *WritersTalk*. Genre is not important; making us laugh is.

Finally, remember that the week of October 14-20 is Writers Week. Find someone who's not a writer and invite him or her to take you to lunch. **WT**

# A Talk with Bill Baldwin

by Richard Burns

The funny guy with all the hair and the purple cap who checks that the microphone works at our monthly dinner meetings can carry on three conversations at once. For approximately eight years, Bill Baldwin has been the president of our South Bay Branch of CWC. How many times have we heard him proclaim his mantra, “We are currently the largest branch”? In honor of his long tenure—he’s finally stepped down and handed over the gavel to new president, Dave LaRoche—I took some time at a recent open mic session to sit down and ask Bill to share a few words about himself, the club, and his writing.

Bill recalls that he first started actually writing for his own enjoyment in the eighth grade, jotting down alternate lyrics to hit songs of The Beatles. His parents had encouraged him to read as a youngster, and he always had books, including a young-people’s encyclopedia and some atlases. By fourth grade, he was into mature-reader authors such as H.G. Wells.

In the beginning of his service, probably 1998 or 1999, he said, this branch “had only about 20 members, shrinking down to as few as ten attendees in the summer. But there were a lot of really enthusiastic and capable people.” Edie Matthews and Beth Proudfoot came to mind. By chance, he had won a South Bay Club writing contest put on by the previous president, Susan Edwards, and he was asked by Tina Farell (now Tina Glasner) - possibly secretary then - to write a profile for the newsletter. That led to being on the nominating committee. It seems there was a dearth of volunteers for the presidency according to Bill. “And then somebody said, ‘Oh, hey, you could run for president,’ and the rest is history.”

Over time as president, he learned ways to keep people fairly happy and motivated, solve problems, work together, and to smooth the inevitable ruffled feathers that come up among people.

His vision for the club was to become “the literary center of the South Bay.”

He encourages us all to volunteer for club offices and activities. “There’s no better way to get to meet and really know the people.” When you get involved you have a better idea what’s going on. One way or another you wind up doing some literary thing like writing, editing something, or being a source of information.

Baldwin said his favorite writers conference is the 2006 East of Eden because his novel, *Homecome*, came the closest to being accepted for publishing. “At each conference, I miss publishing my novel by a little less,” he said, a wry smile on his face. His novel had improved measurably because when he read it, either to himself or to an open mic audience, as he put it, “I actually began to enjoy my book, rather than continually finding yet another maddening thing to fix.”

*Homecome* is, by default, in the “literary novel” genre. It touches on contemporary affairs, minorities in modern America, the world situation going back the last decade or so, and explores today’s spirituality. Baldwin said, “In writing a novel you have to juggle a lot of things; you have to sketch believable, consistent characters, keep different threads of the plot going, and somehow keep people’s interest over hundreds of pages.” Probably the most difficult part of writing *Homecome* was structuring such a large work. “I wrote the last 70 pages in only two or three days,” he said. “Somehow, the various threads of my plot, ones I kept holding back on their resolutions, seemed to merge back just about at the right time near the end. I think it worked out okay.” His expression and shoulder-shrug suggested he had been plain lucky in that regard, but I’m guessing it took some rewrites. “There are books about writing *screenplays* that tell you what should happen at every minute of the *movie*, and I used to think that was too formulaic. But I’m beginning to think



Bill Baldwin

now that there’s something about how you tell stories that make things happen at certain exact places.”

“If you’re reading over your novel and there are places that people skim over, try to find a way to just cut those whole sections out. I tried it, and it works,” Bill said. “It’s really hard to write a novel in just one draft. If there’s no tension, no conflict, you need to fix that.” He took another bite of his oatmeal and raisin scone fresh from the bookstore café. Then he continued. “After you’ve really trimmed and polished it, it’s just more fun to read. That work, that persistent crafting [eventually gets internalized]; my writing now is closer to being right the first time.”

Baldwin has been championing these open mic nights at local branches of Barnes & Noble and Borders, where South Bay Branch club members and other interested writers read their works in public. It’s a sort of preparation for when a writer needs to do a public reading with a microphone during a future bookstore signing—that *is* what we’ll all be doing, isn’t it? “One big reason why it’s important for me,” Bill said, “is because when I read my stuff in public, it makes me notice things I have to change. I recognize things in it that make me uncomfortable or just sound wrong. The better the writing gets, the more I enjoy reading it aloud.”

Another thing: don’t let your mischievous cats mess up your precious manuscript. Baldwin keeps at least five electronic copies of the current version. In addition, he copies his novel (and most of the things he’s written) to flash memory, which makes it all more portable as well as secure.

When he needs inspiration or simply some enjoyable good reading, he likes to read E.M. Forster. “I like his style so much; I could just sit there and really appreciate every sentence.” (That evening, at the Almaden Barnes & Noble he read excerpts from Forster’s *Howards End*.) “There are others I like. Works by Christopher Isherwood are amazing, so entertaining,” he said.

Now that he’s no longer wielding the gavel, Bill can spend more time writing or maybe just cruising around in that hat. **WT**

# Fall Writing Contests

by Una Daly

Cool days inspire the muse in many of us writers. The garden is resting and we're home from summer travels, so get out that musty manuscript and shine it up for October and November deadlines. But don't forget about our own CWC South Bay *WritersTalk* Challenge, which runs year round with \$5,000 awards announced in September and March. Any work submitted to us by February 15 is eligible for March awards.

**Academy of American Poets Walt Whitman Award** A prize of \$5,000, publication by Louisiana State University Press, and a one-month residency at the Vermont Studio Center in Johnson is given annually for a poetry collection by a U.S. citizen who has not published a book of poems in a standard edition. Submit a manuscript of 50 to 100 pages with a \$25 entry fee between September 15 and November 15. [www.poets.org/awards](http://www.poets.org/awards)

**American Poetry Review Honickman First Book Prize** A prize of \$3,000 and publication by *American Poetry Review* is given annually for a first book of poetry. The winning book will be distributed by Copper Canyon Press through Consortium. Tony Hoagland will judge. Submit a collection of at least 48 pages with a \$25 entry fee by October 31. [www.aprweb.org](http://www.aprweb.org)

**Bread Loaf Writers' Conference Bakeless Literary Publication Prizes** Publication by Houghton Mifflin and a fellowship to attend the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference in Middlebury, Vermont, is given annually for a first book by a poet, a fiction writer, and a creative nonfiction writer. Submit at least 50 pages of poetry, a novel or short story collection of 150 to 450 pages, or a creative nonfiction manuscript of 150 to 300 pages with a \$10 entry fee between September 15 and November 1. [bakeless@middlebury.edu](mailto:bakeless@middlebury.edu) [www.bakelessprize.org](http://www.bakelessprize.org)

**Briar Cliff Review Writing Contests** Three prizes of \$1,000 each and publication in *Briar Cliff Review* will be given annually for a short story, a poem, and a work of creative nonfiction. The editors will judge. Submit up to three poems of up to one page or up to 6,000 words of prose with a \$15 entry fee,

which includes a copy of the prize issue, by November 1. [www.briarcliff.edu/bcreview](http://www.briarcliff.edu/bcreview)

**Byline Magazine** A large number of writing contests throughout the year, including poetry, fiction, non-fiction. Open to all. Modest cash prizes. [www.bylinemag.com/contests.asp](http://www.bylinemag.com/contests.asp)

**Cutthroat Joy Harjo Poetry Award** An award of \$1,250 and publication in *Cutthroat* is given annually for a group of poems. Submit three poems of up to 100 lines each with a \$15 entry fee by October 10.

**Rick DeMarinis Short Fiction Award** An award of \$1,250 and publication in *Cutthroat* is given annually for a short story. Submit a short story of up to 5,000 words with a \$15 entry fee by October 10. [www.cutthroatmag.com](http://www.cutthroatmag.com)

**Dana Awards Literary Competition** Three prizes of \$1,000 each are given annually for an unpublished group of poems, a short story, and a novel or novel-in-progress. Submit five poems of no more than 100 lines each with a \$15 entry fee, a short story of up to 10,000 words with a \$15 entry fee, or the first 50 pages of a novel with a \$25 entry fee. The deadline is October 31. [www.danaawards.com](http://www.danaawards.com)

**Del Sol Press Robert Olen Butler Fiction Prize** A prize of \$1,000 is given annually for a short story. The winning entry and all finalists will be published in an anthology by Del Sol Press. Submit a published or unpublished story of 2,000 to 8,000 words with a \$16 entry fee (\$5 for each additional story) by November 1. [robcontest@webdelsol.com](mailto:robcontest@webdelsol.com) [www.webdelsol.com/dsp](http://www.webdelsol.com/dsp)

**Dogwood Poetry and Fiction Prizes** Two prizes of \$1,000 each and publication in *Dogwood*, the literary journal of Fairfield University, are given annually for a single poem and a short story. Submit up to three poems totaling no more than 10 pages or a story of up to 30 pages with a \$10 entry fee by October 15. [www.faculty.fairfield.edu/dogwood](http://www.faculty.fairfield.edu/dogwood)

**Elixir Press Poetry Awards** A prize of \$2,000 and publication by Elixir Press is given annually for a poetry collection. A second prize of \$1,000 and publication is also awarded. Submit a manuscript of at least 48 pages with a \$25 entry fee by October 31. [www.elixirpress.com](http://www.elixirpress.com)

**Fordham University at Lincoln Center Poets Out Loud Prize** A prize of \$2,000 and publication by Fordham University Press is given annually for a book-length collection of poetry. The winner will also be invited to give a reading at the Fordham Lincoln Center campus. Submit a manuscript of 50 to 80 pages with a \$25 entry fee by November 15. [www.fordham.edu/pol](http://www.fordham.edu/pol)

**The Formalist Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award** A prize of \$1,000 is given annually for a single sonnet. The winner and 11 finalists will be published in *Measure: An Annual Review of Formal Poetry*. Submit a sonnet with a \$3 entry fee by November 15. [theformalist.evansville.edu](http://theformalist.evansville.edu)

**Georgetown Review Literary Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and publication in *Georgetown Review* is given annually for a single poem, short story, or essay on the subject of redemption. All entries will be considered for publication. Submit a poem, short story, or essay of any length with a \$10 entry fee (\$5 for each additional entry) by November 15. [georgetownreview.georgetowncollege.edu](http://georgetownreview.georgetowncollege.edu)

**Glimmer Train Press Family Matters** A prize of \$1,200 and publication in *Glimmer Train Stories* is given twice yearly for a short story about family. Submit a story of up to 12,000 words with a \$15 entry fee by October 31. Visit the Web site for complete guidelines. [www.glimmertrain.com](http://www.glimmertrain.com)

**Indiana Review Fiction Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and publication in *Indiana Review* is given annually for a short story. Submit a story of no more than 35 pages with a \$15 entry fee, which includes a one-year subscription to *Indiana Review*, by October 15. [www.indiana.edu/~inreview](http://www.indiana.edu/~inreview)

**Inkwell Poetry and Short Fiction Competitions** A prize of \$1,000 and publication in *Inkwell*, the literary journal of Manhattanville College's Master of Arts in Writing Program, is given annually for a poem. A prize of \$1,500 and publication in *Inkwell* is given annually for a short story. Submit up to five poems of no more than 40 lines each with a \$10 entry fee for the first poem (\$5 for each additional poem) or a short story of no more than 5,000 words with a \$15 entry fee by October 31. [www.inkwelljournal.org](http://www.inkwelljournal.org)

**Kore Press Short Fiction Award** A prize of \$1,000 and publication by Kore

*Continued on page 6*

*Contests, continued from page 5*

Press will be given annually for a short story by a woman. The winning story will be published as a chapbook with a print run of 500 copies. Submit a story of no more than 8,000 words with a \$15 entry fee by October 31. [www.korepress.org](http://www.korepress.org)

**Ledge Press Poetry Chapbook Competition** A prize of \$1,000, publication by Ledge Press, and 25 author copies is given annually for a chapbook-length poetry collection. Submit a manuscript of 16 to 28 pages with an \$18 entry fee, which includes a copy of the winning chapbook, by October 31. [www.theledgemagazine.com](http://www.theledgemagazine.com)

**Italo Calvino Prize in Fabulist Fiction** A prize of \$1,000, publication in *Salt Hill Journal*, and an all-expenses-paid trip to read at the University of Louisville's annual 20th Century Literature Conference is given annually for a work of fabulist fiction written in the vein of Italo Calvino. Submit up to 25 pages of a short story, novel, or novella with a \$25 entry fee by October 15. [coldfusion.louisville.edu/webs/as/english/undergrad.cfm?page=creative](http://coldfusion.louisville.edu/webs/as/english/undergrad.cfm?page=creative)

**Margie Strong Medicine Poetry Award** A prize of \$2,500 and publication in *Margie* is given annually for a single poem. Submit up to three poems of no more than 60 lines each with a \$15 entry fee (\$5 for each additional poem) by October 31. [www.margiereview.com](http://www.margiereview.com)

**National Federation of State Poetry Societies Stevens Manuscript Competition** A prize of \$1,000, publication by the National Federation of State Poetry Societies Press, and 50 author copies is given annually for a poetry manuscript. Submit 48 to 70 pages of poetry and a \$20 entry fee (\$15 for NFSPS members) by October 15. [www.nfsp.com](http://www.nfsp.com)

**Nightboat Books Poetry Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and a standard royalty contract is given annually for a book-length poetry collection. All entries will be considered for publication. Submit 48 to 70 pages with a \$20 entry fee by November 15. [www.nightboat.org](http://www.nightboat.org)

**North American Review James Hearst Poetry Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and publication in *North American Review* is given annually for a single poem. Submit up to five poems with an \$18 entry fee, which includes a one-year subscription to *North American Review*, by October 31. [www.webdelsol.com/NorthAmReview/NAR](http://www.webdelsol.com/NorthAmReview/NAR)

**University of North Texas Press Vassar Miller Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and publication by the University of North Texas Press is given annually for a poetry collection. Submit a manuscript of 50 to 80 pages with a \$20 entry fee by November 15. [web3.unt.edu/untpress](http://web3.unt.edu/untpress)

**Ohio University Press Hollis Summers Poetry Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and publication by Ohio University Press is given annually for a book-length poetry collection. Submit a manuscript of 60 to 95 pages with a \$20 entry fee by October 31. [www.ohioswallow.com/poetryprize.php](http://www.ohioswallow.com/poetryprize.php)

**Persea Books Lexi Rudnitsky Poetry Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and publication by Persea Books is given annually for a book-length poetry collection by a U.S. woman poet who has not previously published a full-length collection. Submit a manuscript of 50 to 80 pages with a \$20 entry fee by October 31. [info@perseabooks.com](mailto:info@perseabooks.com) [www.perseabooks.com](http://www.perseabooks.com)

**Perugia Press Poetry Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and publication by Perugia Press is given annually for a first or second book of poetry by a woman. Submit a manuscript of 48 to 72 pages with a \$22 entry fee by November 15. [www.perugiapress.com](http://www.perugiapress.com)

**Poetry Society of the United Kingdom National Poetry Competition** A prize of £5,000 (approximately \$9,800) and a second prize of £1,000 (approximately \$1,960) are given annually for a poem written in English. Submit one poem of no more than 40 lines with a £5 (approximately \$10) entry fee and £3 (approximately \$6) for each additional poem by October 31. [www.poetrysociety.org.uk](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk)

**Quercus Review Press Poetry Series Book Award** A prize of \$1,000, publication by Quercus Review Press, and 50 author copies will be given annually for a poetry collection. Submit a manuscript of 48 to 96 pages with a \$20 entry fee by October 19. [www.quercusreview.com](http://www.quercusreview.com)

**Red Hen Press Benjamin Saltman Poetry Award** A prize of \$3,000 and publication by Red Hen Press is given annually for a book-length poetry collection. Submit a manuscript of 48 to 96 pages with a \$20 entry fee by October 31. [www.redhen.org](http://www.redhen.org)

**Roanoke Review Fiction Contest** A prize of \$1,000 and publication in the *Roanoke Review* is given annually for a

short story. All entries will be considered for publication. Submit a story of up to 8,000 words with a \$15 entry fee, which includes a copy of the prize issue, by November 10. [www.roanoke.edu/roanokereview](http://www.roanoke.edu/roanokereview)

**Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prizes** Prizes ranging from \$1,000 to \$25,000 each will be awarded annually for lyric poems celebrating the human spirit by poets under the age of forty. Submit up to three poems (only one of the poems may be more than 30 lines) with a \$10 entry fee by November 6. [www.dorothyprizes.org](http://www.dorothyprizes.org)

**Silverfish Review Press Gerald Cable Book Award** A prize of \$1,000, publication by Silverfish Review Press, and 100 author copies is given annually for a book-length poetry collection. All finalists will be considered for publication. Poets who have not published a book-length poetry collection may submit a manuscript of at least 48 pages with a \$20 entry fee by October 15. [www.silverfishreviewpress.com](http://www.silverfishreviewpress.com)

**Sow's Ear Poetry Review Poetry Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and publication in *Sow's Ear Poetry Review* is given annually for a single poem. Submit up to five poems of any length with a \$20 entry fee, which includes a one-year subscription to *Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, by November 1. [sows-ear.kitenet.net](http://sows-ear.kitenet.net)

**Sycamore Review Wabash Prize for Poetry** A prize of \$1,000 and publication in *Sycamore Review* is given annually for a single poem. Submit up to three poems with a \$10 entry fee (\$3 for each additional poem) by October 15. [www.sycamorereview.com/contest](http://www.sycamorereview.com/contest)

**Tampa Review Danahy Fiction Prize** A prize of \$1,000 and publication in *Tampa Review* will be given annually for a short story. Submit a story of 500 to 5,000 words with a \$15 entry fee, which includes a one-year subscription to *Tampa Review*, by November 1. [tampareview.ut.edu](http://tampareview.ut.edu)

**Truman State University Press T. S. Eliot Prize** A prize of \$2,000 and publication by Truman State University Press is given annually for a book-length poetry collection. Submit a manuscript of 60 to 100 pages with a \$25 entry fee by October 31. [tsup.truman.edu](http://tsup.truman.edu)

**Tupelo Press Dorset Prize** A prize of \$10,000 and publication by Tupelo Press with distribution through Consor-

*Continued on page 7*



# My Critique Group

by Cathy Bauer

Organizing a critique group isn't easy. As writers, we tend to be protective of our work. The idea of a group of people finding fault with a novel, short story, or poem that you've spent months or years composing is scary. But when we slave over a piece, we often lose perspective. For example, in high school I wrote a story about a neglected rose bush that an old woman tenderly cared for. I didn't even get an A for effort.

I've been a part of a critique group that formed over two years ago with four people. During that time a couple of members dropped out and others have joined. We are at full capacity now with six unique individuals who bring a variety of knowledge and experience to the group.

When we organized, we had no parameters except keeping the group small. Since then we have a drawn up set of guidelines that keep us on course. What works best of us is meeting every other week at 6:00 p.m. Each member hosts a meeting on a rotating schedule and provides a light meal. We chitchat over dinner and get down to business at 7:00. Our goal is to be done by 9:00, but because the purpose is to provide a good review, quality should not be slighted on account of the clock.

Because of the time restraints, the piece to be presented is limited to 2,500 words. Fewer are better. It is emailed to the others a week in advance. Each member prints the piece, thoroughly reads it and redlines any grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure corrections, which are not gone over at the meeting. Comments and suggestions are written on the back of the last page. The redlined copies are brought to the meeting. When the author

finishes reading his/her piece, each member offers comments that focus on plot, character development, believability, etc. The redlined copy is given to the author.

Compatibility is one of the most important components of a critique group. In addition, each member must be sincere, open minded, and receptive. Interviewing prospective members is recommended and it is important that they be as skilled at evaluating someone else's work as they are at writing. Since the goal of the group is to encourage the

author and help improve his or her skills, negative comments must be presented in a positive manner.

I consider myself fortunate to be in a critique group made up of individuals who possess each of the above characteristics. I look forward to reading their works and having them provide insight into mine.

If you have any questions or would like a copy of our guidelines, please email me at [cathy@bauerstar.com](mailto:cathy@bauerstar.com). **WT**

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## Cop Talk

by John Howsden

### Traffic Stops

You've got a latte in one hand, a cell phone in the other, and you're driving across town one evening without a care in the world. Life is good, so good that you feel a warm glow about you, especially on the nape of your neck. Confused, you look into your mirror and realize the warm glow is coming from a bright red light that's bolted to the roof of a police car. Upon closer inspection you see the cop inside pointing a gnarly finger at you and then to the side of the road. Stand by, you're about to see your tax dollars at work.

Racing through your mind are fines, traffic school, and higher insurance premiums. Racing through the officer's mind while he's walking towards your car with his hand brushing against the butt of his gun are conflict, confrontation, and gun play. Great stuff if you're writing a novel, bad if you like living. Since the officer has no way of knowing if you're careless driver, he'll do some in-

Long before he flipped on license plate on the computer to your car was reported stolen. you, he'll offset it a couple of feet Before getting out of his car he'll aim his spotlight into your rear-blinding wall of light. Now that



like a stage on Broadway, the officer will watch for furtive movement—occupants jostling about, reaching under the seat, or tossing something from the car. Barring any signs that you are destroying evidence or going for a weapon, he'll approach the rear of your car, checking the trunk lid to make sure it's not ajar. Confident no one is going to pop out of the trunk, he'll step to the rear of the driver's door, but no further, just in case you might try to knock him into traffic with it. At the same time he'll sweep the interior of your car with his five-cell flash light, again looking for weapons or evidence of any crimes such as alcohol, drugs, or dead bodies. Don't laugh.

Once the officer gets your driver's license, he'll explain why he stopped you, all the time checking you for signs of driving under the influence: bloodshot eyes, slurred speech, or the odor of an adult beverage. If you're clean, he'll take your paperwork and then stand behind his passenger door to scratch you a tag for speeding, maybe.

Provided you sign the ticket and are not wanted, you'll part company at this point. Because you're a good person, you may feel like you were treated like a common criminal—sorry. But also because you're a good person, the officer will go home to his family that night—thanks. **WT**

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*Fall Writing Contests, continued from page 6*

tium is given annually for a book-length poetry collection. Submit a manuscript of 50 to 80 pages with a \$25 entry fee by November 15. [www.tupelopress.org](http://www.tupelopress.org)

**Writers Digest** First place \$3000 for fiction that's bold, brilliant . . . but brief. Send us your best in 1,500 words or fewer. Deadline is Monday, December 03, 2007. Other contests available as well. [www.writersdigest.com](http://www.writersdigest.com) **WT**

# September Recap

by Suzy Paluzzi

Reese Erlich, award-winning journalist, was the speaker for the September meeting.

In his introductory piece in the September issue of *WritersTalk*, Alexander Leon posed the questions that Erlich would address in his presentation. “As a writer, how does one go about doing research? And how does one write and hold the reader’s interest?”

Reese Erlich supports in-person interviews rather than those done over the phone. His goal is to present the truth. He accomplishes this by reading multiple resources and traveling. Considering that two of his books, *Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn’t Tell You*, which he co-authored with Norman Solomon, and *The Iran Agenda: The Real Story of U.S. Policy and the Middle East Crisis*, are about highly charged political issues, he is putting himself at risk for expressing his views so publicly.

Erlich has kept his research notes from the past 20 years, so he has a wealth of firsthand information. His tools in the field are usually his pen, laptop, and digital professional quality audio recorder. He feels it is best not to carry too much or to try to accomplish too many levels at once; for example, writing, television, radio, film, etc. Erlich offers his secret that it is wise to do research once and then reuse it in other contexts many times over. He changes his style and technique depending on the place he is publishing and the slant.

The newer book, *Target Iraq*, Erlich wrote by submitting a book proposal with details of the chapters. He was able to accomplish this with an outline. He also was able to avoid being overwhelmed by thinking of each chapter as a separate article, rather than considering the project as a book.

Erlich says to “Be ruthless with your own writing.” He had to cut chapters from his book. “Writing is not for you, but for the audience,” he adds. Keeping a file of post book material is also useful, he advises, for material for speaking engagements and to be better able to write articles to promote the book. “One doesn’t get rich writing a book unless it becomes a movie,” believes Erlich. “If the book pays for your life during that time that you wrote, that is considered a success.”

As a freelancer, this journalist is successful because he is doing several things at one time. For example, a documentary was done about his recent book.

When Erlich began his writing career, he knew only “academic writing.” He learned hands-on about journalism at his job at *Ramparts*. One of the first things was that the most important information is at the beginning, or lead, of an article.



Reese Erlich tells SBW members about going into Iran ostensibly to report on the Iranian film industry.

Erlich considers his profession a gift. “I love words and still would figure out how to write even if I don’t get paid.” Since he travels so much, he finds himself “writing in his mind” at airports. His love of talking to people and meeting them has assisted him in his profession. Erlich summarizes his good fortune: “I can choose the stories I cover, go places, and ‘fight the fight.’”  
WT

## Writing Tips

### Nipper’s Nits

by Pat Decker Nipper

#### Lesson 31. Plural Possessives

A normal plural noun that ends in “s” needs only an apostrophe for possession: “Both of the girls’ dolls had been broken.” If the plural noun is irregular, like “children” or “women,” add apostrophe “s” (children’s, women’s).

When singular nouns end in double “s,” add apostrophe “s.” For example, “The boss’s picture had been stolen.” Or, “The princess’s tiara was worth a fortune.”

The plural form is similar to the singular: “The princesses’s tiaras were worth two fortunes.”

If something belongs to, or is associated with, more than one person whose names are linked by “and,” the apostrophe “s” is placed after the second name: “I gave a donation to Lana and Presley’s school.”

If a proper name ends in an “s,” as in Woods, add “es” for the plural: “the Woodses.”

When plural names are used to indicate possession, an apostrophe is usually enough: “The Woods’ cat.” Some enterprises—including publishing houses—have style sheets that prefer adding an apostrophe “s,” as in “the Woods’s cat.” If you are not required to follow a style sheet, however, you have an option.

Decades are usually written without apostrophes: “I was a child of the 1960s.”

Contact Pat at  
pat@patdeckernipper.com for comments or questions. WT



Reese signs copies of his book *The Iran Agenda: The Real Story of U.S. Policy and the Middle East Crisis*, scheduled for release in bookstores on October 1, after the meeting.



## Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

In California, the change of season is subtle. There is no definite shift from summer to fall as in New England. Yet, if we take a moment, there are signs; in that fall chill in an early August morning and in September when evening arrives earlier. The days a bit shorter, the air sharp with the sweeping of leaves—all reminders of how precious time is and how important it is to celebrate our successes in life.

At every South Bay Writers meeting, the question of who has good writing news to share is asked. And at each meeting, several people stand and share the excitement of having reached a milestone in their writing endeavors such as publication of a story or novel. Some of those who reported at the September meeting:

- Short stories “The Summons” by Meredy Amyx and “Anno Forestem Silva” by Carolyn Donnell received Honorable Mention from the Writers Weekly 24-Hour Writing Contest.
- Robert Balmanno, author of *September Snow*, announced he will be a guest on the television show *Bay Area Vista* to talk about his novel. Look for this show in about three or four weeks on NBC 11.
- Martha Engber, author of the book *Growing Great Characters*, will have a short story published in the literary journal *Iconoclast* in the near future.
- Marjorie Johnson’s novel *Bird Watcher*, about the search for an airplane stolen from Palo Alto Airport, published just last month, will make its debut at the Ninety-Nines Convention of Women Pilots from the Western States in San Francisco on October 5, 2007.
- Steve Wetlesen’s “poetic art” will be featured in Papachay Peruvian Andes Coffee website.
- Valerie Wong has self-published her novel *The Jade Rubies*.

Congratulations to all who have met those writing milestones. Keep up the good work, as they say, and let us know your successes in writing. Email me at [j\\_mutz@yahoo.com](mailto:j_mutz@yahoo.com). WT

## WritersTalk Challenge Winners Announced

Twice a year, in March and September, prizes are awarded to contributors to *WritersTalk*. Members of South Bay Writers need take no special steps to enter this competition; if your piece in one of the designated genres is published in *WritersTalk*, you are a contestant in the Challenge. Winners of the *WritersTalk* Challenge judging period of February 16, 2007, through August 15, 2007, were announced at the September 12 meeting.

### And the winners!

**First Place:** Marjorie Johnson, for her memoir “The Work Ethic of a Mule”

**Second Place:** Rita Derbas, for her poem “Another Option”

**Third Place:** Diana Richomme, for her essay “What I Learned at the JL Conference”

### Honorable Mentions

Meredy Amyx, for her short story “Crying”

Donna Poppenhagen, for her short story “New Love”



*WritersTalk* Challenge winners present at the September meeting, left to right: Donna Poppenhagen, Marjorie Johnson, Meredy Amyx.

## WRITERSTALK Challenge

### What is it?

Twice a year, in March and September, awards are given to contributors to *WritersTalk*. You need take no special steps to enter this competition; if your piece in one of the designated genres is published in *WritersTalk*, you are a contestant in the Challenge.\*

### Genres

Fiction  
Memoir  
Essay  
Poetry

### Judging Periods

February 16 through August 15  
August 16 through February 15

### Prizes

One winner will be selected from each of the eligible genres. Each winner will be awarded a cash prize of \$40.

### Judging

Judging will be done by *WritersTalk* contributing editors and other Club members whom the contributing editors may ask to assist.

\* Eligibility for the *WritersTalk* Challenge is limited to members of the South Bay Branch of the California Writers Club; judges may not participate in the competition.

## New Members

by Lita Kurth

New member **Bill Richardson**, Ph.D., a retired Air Force Reserve major, is interested in learning how to better market his self-published novel, *The Guns of Ticonderoga*. He is willing to share his self-publishing experiences with other members.

WRbigbill@aol.com

"Curiosity and adventurousness" led

**Swann Li** to join the South Bay Writers. A writer whose fiction deals with the follies, tragicomedies, and segregation of human souls, Li is looking for critique buddies who also write about Asia. beida90@yahoo.com is her email address.

**Valerie Whong** (pen name Valerie Wong) who heard of the club through member-friends has just finished her novel, *The Jade Rubies*. She has written in just about every possible genre including reporting for the *Los Gatos Weekly*. Open Mic is one club activity she's really interested in. She is reachable at ValerieWong@juno.com. **WT**

## Bargain Bookstore Opens

by Suzy Paluzzi

On Saturday September 8, Crown Books Liquidation Center launched a store at 20590 Homstead Road (between Stelling Road and De Anza Boulevard) in Cupertino. The bargain bookstore will be open for a trial run for six months and, depending upon customer response, may become a permanent fixture.

Jean Dolan, the manager of the store, said that probably there will not be author book signings, but the store does have other attractions. Consumers can save up to 80% of the original publishers' retail price. Teachers' discounts are offered, and children's books are half price. There are also monthly register specials. For every ten dollars spent, customers are eligible to receive certain chosen titles at a discount. For example, during September, two of Richard Scarry's books and the Webster's *New Thesaurus of the English Language* are among the discounted register specials.

Credit cards are accepted. Baskets are available to tote one's purchases.

The hours are 10 to 8 Monday through Saturday, and 11 to 6 on Sunday. Be prepared for a setting that is simple without the luxuries of other bookstores, but the place is clean and the service good.

On the downside, there are no web orders and no refunds, but exchanges only.

There is a range of selection of genres. The average price for a book is five dollars.

Manager Jean Dolan extends an invitation: "Everyone is welcome. Please come and check us out." **WT**

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## My Writing Rock

My writing rock is my special place  
Nestled in it I create my space  
On it is where I belong  
My thoughts surface clear and strong  
Surrounded by the woodland's sound  
The essence of my soul I've found  
The creaking windblown trees  
The staccato swoosh of the forest stream  
All create the backdrop for my dream

—Suzy Paluzzi

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## Fremont Members Take Barnes and Noble by Storm

by Jeannine Vegh

The second monthly Open Mic took place at Barnes and Nobles in the Fremont Hub on Thursday, September 20. Once again, it was a huge success, with 15-20 people in attendance. There were seven readers who had a variety of topics, yet the energy of the group created synchronicity amongst us.

We had a traveling nurse all the way from Florida, by the name of Annie Bostic-Hollis. Annie had read about us in the *Tri-City Voice* and had participated in Open Mics in her neck of the woods. As an experienced poetry reader, she really knew how to entertain her audience. Bob Garfinkle, who is diligently working on getting an agent for his romantic family drama that takes place in Missouri, gave our audience a little bit more in the saga of the Mullens Family.

Darwin Matheson read a humorous nonfiction piece. Just ask him about the junk dealer named Leo. He also read some anti-war pieces that were quite good. New member Swann Li, read a

short story about a struggling farmer being defaced by the government. Darwin touched base on the perils of the former Yugoslavia and Iraq, while Swann educated us on life in communist China. This isn't a history class; it is good writing that teaches us something along the way. An amazing thing happened at the end of the performance. Swann spoke to a lady in the audience, who was also from China. They both went to the same university. A newspaper article and the California Writers Club brought them together.

The history lesson continued with an amusing story by Randy Fewell, AAUW-Fremont President, who told us the story about a "Mouse Tower" in Bingen, Germany, and then read a follow-up poem called "The Children's Hour," by Henry Longfellow. Quite creepy! Especially if you hate rats, like me. I read two poems from the Amnesty International magazine written by prisoners in Guantanamo Bay. I also read my short story "Down by the Lake," about a woman struggling to get out of a psychiatric hospital. Mary-

Lynn Pelican, AAUW-Fremont Past President, entertained us with some excerpts on successful networking, and her always amazing personality. Annie ended the show with more of her amazing talent and knack for understanding how to win over an audience. Afterwards, we had to close down the store once again, as the audience walked together out to their cars. We had made new friends, gotten new members for both AAUW and CWC, and I believe we are making our mark in Fremont.

The month of October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. I am hoping to have some people there who will enlighten us about their experiences. This will be interspersed with other wonderful readers on a wide variety of topics. We certainly hope you will come out and join our show.

The next Open Mic in Fremont is October 18, 2007, at 7:30 p.m. RSVP to Bob (ragarf@earthlink.net) or me (ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net). Come and join the fun! **WT**

# A View from the Board

## Summary of September Board of Directors Meeting

### Officer and Committee Chair Reports

**President Dave LaRoche:** Dick Amyx has joined the *WritersTalk* team as managing editor. October will be his first issue. Cathy Bauer is our new Hospitality Chair. Her portfolio includes Meet and Greet—Q&A, Hospitality Center, Raffle, Roving Mic, Club announcements, Room Setup/complaints—Q&A. Bob Garfinkle has resigned his position as Branch Rep to the State Board. I will act for an interim period. Discussion of insurance and tax status (currently unchanged). SBW is pursuing a 501(c)(3) tax designation. Discussion from VP Alex Leon regarding auditing. Revenue and expense statements are available from the Central Board.

**Vice President Alexander Leon:** Report on upcoming events. General meetings—October 10, author Barry Eisler; November 15, literary agents Michael Larsen and Elizabeth Pomada. Screenwriting workshop October 21 with James Dalessandro. Vice-President and Youth Committee Chair to meet with Kate Evans of San Jose State University to discuss collaboration for speakers and Youth Committee.

**Secretary Jeannine Vegh:** Received reports from Webmaster, VP, Pres, Treasurer, Open Mic, Membership, and Hospitality.

**Treasurer Jeremy Osborne:** Current CWC Finances: Income for the quarter: \$1,720.00; expenses for the quarter: \$2,484.53; net change for the quarter: -\$764.53; remaining monies: \$21,439.36. Have created quarterly budgets for planning the CWC South Bay yearly expenses. This budget will be modified and updated at the end of the first quarter. The CWC South Bay Branch is set up with a PayPal account to assist with online transactions for our workshops. Volunteered to track and report on progress of side committees and projects outside of officers' direct responsibilities. Reiterated CWC student member policy: Student writers are between 8 to 22.; Central Board requires only \$10 from any student member. Reiterated CWC policy on Writers Week (October 7-14). Discussion about minors needing a liability waiver to participate in Club meetings.

**Membership Chair Marjorie Johnson:** Since the August board meeting, four renewals and one promise. We have 150 members and 41 non-renewals. Two new members joined in August.

**Publicity Chair Edie Matthews:** Went out on September speakers. Will also send out to craigslist and San Francisco Bay Area Literary Arts Newsletter as well.

**Open Mic Chair Bill Baldwin:** The first Fremont Open Mic was a great success owing to Jeannine Vegh's planning and Robert Garfinkle's assistance. The other open mics went well last month, except Santana Row, which had an exceptionally low turnout (3 readers).

**Newsletter Chair Dick Amyx:** Dick Amyx is the new editor starting with the October issue. He gave the board a verbal resume. He has met with the editorial staff and received some pointers on managing the team.

**Website Chair Ro Davis:** Screenwriting Workshop online registration is up and running. The website will be relocated from iPowerWeb to WebsiteSource; cost of this new host will be much cheaper.

**Hospitality Chair Cathy Bauer:** The August raffle produced a net income of only one dollar. Discussion of whether raffle should continue; decided that yes, it will.

**East of Eden Chair Edie Matthews:** Added to the existing lineup are three agents from Larsen and Pomada, also Francisco Jimenez. Trying to line up a tour of Doc Rickett's Lab and nailing down chair people for the committee. Ro mentioned that EOE committee needs a PayPal account independent of the Club. Edie will meet with Ro to set this up.

**Youth Committee Chair Jeannine Vegh:** Made attempts at contact/coordination with a number of youth groups; no success so far. Set up a Club MySpace account;

need technical assistance with presentation. Also need blog writers for the MySpace site. Committee will meet later in September now that school is back in session.

### Old Business

Jeremy presented a draft Member Relations Policy to be reviewed during the month and voted on in October.

### New Business

Moved Matthews to prorate new member dues for partial years. Declared out of order because it conflicts with CWC policy.

Moved Baldwin, seconded Osborne, to increase allocation of \$450 for audio equipment to \$700 to accommodate the actual cost. Passed.

Moved Osborne, seconded Bauer, to spend up to \$250 for posters or countertops – honoring Cal Writers Week and pointing the way to Club membership – to be placed in book stores in the Valley. Passed.

Tabled: Discussion of a workshop in January; this will be put on the agenda in October. **WT**



**Gary Dow, who joined SBW at the September 12 meeting, proudly displays the Cathy Bauer original tee-shirt he won in the raffle that same night.**

# WINNERS

## Summer 2007 24-Hour Short Story Contest

by Carolyn Donnell

In the September *WritersTalk* I recounted how four SBW members had entered the Writers Weekly 24-hour short story contest. The winners' notice arrived at 20:12:22, Sun. 2, Sep 2007. I opened the email and held my breath as I scrolled down to the Top Three Winners.

No one I knew.

Phooey! I almost stopped there, but remembered the other prizes and looked up the winners URL. There we were!

### 20 - Honorable Mentions (in no particular order)

"Anno Forestem Silva" by C. S. Donnell (I confused everyone by using my initials)

"The Summons" by Meredy Amyx.

Hooray! I immediately notified Meredy. We won a year's free subscription to The Write Markets Report and our choice of one e-book. I choose BAM, Book in a Month, by Cyn Mobley.

Two out of four. Not bad, but then I think it should have been four out of four.

I asked each entrant how she learned about the contest. Meredy said she never heard of it before Diana Richomme mentioned it at Edie Matthews's July barbecue. Diana found it through the Writers Weekly website and encouraged the rest of us to participate. Thanks, Diana.

First reactions to hearing about the contest varied. Meredy was skeptical, but decided that it would exercise writing muscles she seldom used. Diana thought it sounded like fun. I agreed. When asked about how they felt now, Meredy said that she was excited and looking forward to the next one. Marcela Dickerson said that if she could enter from Chile, she wouldn't let a little vacation stop her. Diana thought it was not as easy as we thought it would be, but won't allow that to discourage her.

We also agreed that this helped our writing, whether or not we placed this time.

Meredy: "Some pressure helps the creative process."

Diana: "These little steps help build

confidence."

Marcela: "Helped my brain and my writing."

I too proved that I could come up with something in a short time. Meredy thought it was fun rising to the challenge, like solving a puzzle while the clock was ticking. Of course she had a husband who took care of things while she worked. All I have is a cat. And others had distractions of kids, family, travel, etc. No fair, Meredy.

We all remain unanimous in recommending the contest.

Meredy: "Definitely. I would especially recommend it to people who can't

picture themselves doing something like this."

Marcela. "You have nothing to lose and the experience is worth the \$5.00."

Diana, "With door prizes and grab-bags added to awards, chances of winning something are at least 1 in 6."

Writers Weekly (writersweekly.com) claims to be the highest circulation freelance writing e-zine in the world. Contest notice is at [www.writersweekly.com/misc/contest.php](http://www.writersweekly.com/misc/contest.php). The cost is \$5 to register and download the rules.

The winter contest date is January 26, 2008. Watch the website or subscribe to the newsletter for updates. **WT**

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The winning stories, just as they were submitted to the contest, begin on page 13.*

### PERSPECTIVE

## This Writer's Agony

by Susan Mueller

Every writer lives with agony. Here is mine. I have a family story to be turned into a fictional memoir. I have known most of the details for almost 50 years. Yet new nuances peek out now and then.

The details are very painful. There is personal agony in one character that has a monkey on his back. There is another character that fades out of reality due to childhood guilt. One character is murdered. One character, maybe two, are sexually molested as children. There is wealth, family social esteem, fame.

Integrating these characters into a plot that ends with getting the monkey off that back is my plan. So what's the agony, stupid?

This is not my family of origin but nonetheless, I loved them all, except the murdered guy. He is fictional. Putting it all on paper makes it real again. So over several years I have written portions, shared them with a few writers' groups and received accolades. So what is the agony? I don't know for sure. Maybe because it is too real.

One of our recent speakers discussed a minor character that kept speaking to her. I have one too. Jeannine Vegh says she has expertise in psychological perspectives. Wow, my document is

loaded. Any advice terrifies me because, again, it all brings this stuff to the fore.

A lot of famous writers were alcoholics. Now I know why. I don't drink and don't like the stuff. But maybe that is the answer. Maybe I need a kind soul to erase my tablet and send me home.

Actually the agony has not placed me in the quitters' circle. I have a folder of notes to remind me of items as my memory and imagination send up signals. And I bought a little book of 2000 baby names so I could name my characters. Since I am 69 years old, my daughter was a little startled when she saw it.

The format of the document is a series of letters between sisters telling the events. I don't write well in different voices but I write good letters. There is a movie named *My Dinner with Andre*. The story is told by one person and was a very popular movie. I wish I had seen it but do not know where to find it now. My letter writer/story teller has inherited a chest of family memorabilia and letters and finds most of the family facts and confessions in it.

My agony confession hasn't solved anything for me but perhaps you will find me as a comrade. **WT**

## Anno Forestem Silva

by Carolyn Donnell

The young bearers carried the Grandmother on her wooden cot to the head of the circle and placed it on top of the platform covered in oak leaves and holly. They backed away slowly, bent in the reverent position allocated to the elders.

Chanters wove their music into the swirling smoke from the sacred fire. The scent of citronella scented herbs and sound merged into a spiral that ascended to the top of the canopy of trees. The ceremony began, for the Centennial - The Year 100 - Anno Forestem Silva, Year of the Open Forest. And for the Grandmother.

The chanting continued, accompanied by the bard with an instrument the old ones called a lap harp. Each section began with a unique chord, followed by a line from the bard and answered the chanters.

Strum . . . The harp spoke.

"Oh ancient ones." The bard continued.

The chanters answered.

"Great Grandmother, mother of our mothers, we attend to your voice.

Forgive us.

Call to us now."

Strum . . . The harp spoke again, changing the key with each new stanza. The chorus droned on. Finally a new chord and a drummer's trill signaled the beginning of the play.

Young girls encircled a campfire. Children made buzzing noises like mosquitoes, while listeners strained to hear the raspy whispers of the narrator.

All heads turned at the sound of footsteps approaching on pine needles, accompanied by a soft drumming. A man emerged from the tree line, dressed in torn clothing and carrying a tattered pack. The little girls screamed as the pack began to move. An infant's cry joined the chorus.

The man looked at the frightened girls huddling around the fire and began to laugh. His laughter rose to near hysteria before melting into sobs. He sank to the ground. The girls gathered around him, comforting him as they escorted him out of sight.

The play ended with a resounding arpeggio on the harp and a loud series of raps on the deerskin drum.

The Grandmother watched the elders as the ceremony continued and the narrator recounted the history of their tribe. Would these new ones be able to keep the tribe true to the Life, the forest life, the only life that had survived the devastation? Or would they slip back into the mistakes and errors of their predecessors?

She was the last of the Rememberers, ones who had been alive during the change - the last of the ones who knew. Some tribe members had already begun to doubt her stories about

*Continued overleaf*

## The Summons

by Meredy Amyx

Somewhere within his being, Miles De Venter heard the summons. The voice awakened an instinct as profound as the call that launches the seasonal odyssey of the geese.

As the days lengthened into summer, he gathered his strength. Gradually he absorbed vitality from the scent of flowers, the buzzing of bees, the roving of foxes, the burrowing of worms.

His feet drew mass from the earth. The shadows fell away, and his mind began to clear. He found himself beside a stream. At first he saw only a ribbon of light, but over the days it resolved into a rivulet sparkling in the sunlight whose warmth he could not yet feel.

A little girl with sunny hair and a radiant smile ran toward him, arms outstretched. Delight welled in him with the bursting sweetness of almond blossoms in spring. His dry

lips whispered "Maybelle," his voice rustling like the yellow grass.

Some distance below, smoke rose from the chimney of a cabin sheltered by old oaks. A white-clad figure appeared in the open door, smiling, arm raised. He swung the little girl onto his shoulders and lifted his hand to wave back. The woman stood awkwardly, balancing the bulk of her distended belly.

"Come see how the corn is growing," Miles murmured to the girl, turning toward the field. The small fingers in his hair were no more than a wandering breeze as awareness dissolved.

The year's longest day passed, and the first full moon of summer, and then the second. It was almost time.

He had grown stronger over the days. Now he sang out "Maybelle" with the voice of robust young manhood. His daughter's heft was solid, her tug on his hair sharp. "Come see how the corn is growing." Discovering each day's changes excited him. Passing among the long, straight rows, he felt an intimate bond with every blade and stalk. He marked the swelling of each maturing ear, watching for the tassels that signaled readiness for harvest. Nature had wrought life through rain and sun, but his was the hand that had thrust the seed into the soil.

But now the joy that bloomed in his spirit as he strode toward the cornfield was smothered by a mounting dread: something terrible was coming, something he was powerless to avert. He gripped the girl's ankles to his chest and felt the rhythm of life within them. Why could he not stay here? Here, in this ripe moment, when all was still golden and fair?

Once the cycle had begun, it could not be stopped.

Miles came into himself beside the stream. The time was upon him, the call was clear. His senses were overfull to the point of pain. The sky burnt his vision. The stream crashed.

*Continued overleaf*

*Anno Forestem Silva, continued from page 13*  
the old world. The imaginings of an old woman's mind, they sometimes said when they thought she couldn't hear them. The youngest ones, who had never known anything except the forest life, had a difficult time believing there was anything else at all, much less the fantastic tales of boxes that talked and metal monsters that carried people on the land, the sea and even in the air. The old civilization's everyday occurrences had become the new world's mythology in less than a hundred years.

The Grandmother retreated down the tunnel of her memories to the beginning of her tribe. She was one of those girls around that campfire, over 100 years ago.

The man had stumbled into the grove. "Everything gone," he kept saying over and over. He claimed to have seen his whole world disappear in a matter of minutes. The sea had risen up and swallowed the town in one ravenous gulp. He had turned and run from the sea-fed onslaught, with a few followers behind. When he reached the summit of the high hill he was alone, just himself and one tiny tot clinging to a tree branch where his mother had flung him in a last effort to save him. Thinking they might be the only ones left on earth, he had wandered until he

came across the camp.

The counselors put him to bed and took charge of the crying baby. It wasn't until the next day that they found out he was telling the truth.

Water levels had been creeping up for decades, but warnings had been dismissed by all but a wary few. Even the increasingly frequent tidal waves, along with the storms, were mostly ignored. After all, they weren't here. Not in England.

Well, there was Tewkesbury back in 2007, under the old calendar. The worst flood ever recorded in England, her father had said. Whole towns cut off, huge areas underwater, mass evacuations, infrastructure paralyzed and grotesquely swollen rivers - all caused by a single day's rainfall.

Global Warming was the cry then, but few listened. She recalled her father yelling, "Fools" more than once at the television screen. Most people said that melting, if any, would take thousands of years. They were wrong.

When the ice caps broke, they split up quickly. The resulting tidal waves were immediate and global. No warning, no chance for evacuation. Rivers followed the oceans, the Thames and Severn, and around the world, the Mississippi, Amazon, Ganges and more.

Mainlands became isolated islands overnight. Cities, and in some cases whole countries, disappeared, buried under oceans of water, mud, disease, death and fear.

The rising waters also brought disease after disease, as if the poles had locked up ancient plagues with the ice, waiting for the heat to release them again on the world. Storms increased, insects destroyed crops, poles came down across the country, power grids ceased to function, communications halted, infrastructures wiped out in less time than it had taken to imagine them.

The only survivors were the ones on high ground that day, who never came in contact with the rising tides of liquid death. They had had to learn to live in the forest all over again. They had to return to the old ways to survive.

The Grandmother had done her best. She hoped it would be good enough. Would what she had seen in her dreams, come to pass? She could read the future, but it could always be changed for better or worse, by the actions of the people.

It was up to them now, she thought, as her spirit joined the smoke and incense and rose to view the mourning congregation below. **WT**

*The Summons, continued from page 13*

The cry of the child pierced his brain, and his responding shout thundered in his skull. His daughter's weight as he heaved her to his shoulders staggered him. Her grip on his hair rent his scalp. At the sight of the woman in the cabin doorway, his eyes bled. His raised hand was leaden, his smile like shattered glass. "Come see how the corn is growing" rumbled like an echo in the dangerous caverns of the earth.

He lurched toward the field, laboring under the burden of the child as though he were a mule bearing a mountain on its back. A sickening fear filled him, the eviscerating horror of every parent who has ever waited long past the expected hour of return, every mother who has ever hovered with hammering heart beside a fevered sickbed, every father who has ever bent in soul-shattering agony over a crumpled form from whom breath has flown forever.

The long, sun-drenched rows, the

blond silks lifting in the breeze like a child's hair. The little girl set down to run among the cornstalks, laughing, calling. The full green ear broken off, the husk pulled back. Juicy yellow kernels, ready, sweet. A deep inhalation of satisfaction. The last moment of peace. The last second.

A growl. A shriek. A roar. The dozing mountain lion, surprised, leaps and pounces. Miles races toward the sound, tearing his way among the stalks, trampling his crop, heedless, screaming. The bloody rag that is his daughter. All instinct now, he bounds toward the beast, grappling to wrench the jaws apart, braving the fierce paws, still shrieking Maybelle's name, until he drowns in blood.

Miles De Venter follows the stream, impelled like a moth toward the distant circle of light. The woods are dark and dense. All around him he feels life throbbing. It sustains him, but it is not enough for the little one he carries. The

burden upon his back is still.

He treads silently among the pines, the soft carpet muffling his steps. A pungent aroma arises from the needles crushed beneath his feet.

He hears a voice, and it is the voice of his summons. A young woman stands in the circle of light, beside a crackling campfire. The voice pulls him closer. Always at summer's end she is here, she or one like her; and around her, the girls, their faces glowing in the firelight. It has been so for a hundred years.

"Miles De Venter was the great-grandfather of our Mr. De Venter," says the woman. "Our camp is on his land. A little way downstream from here is the place where Miles's little daughter was killed by the mountain lion, and he died trying to rescue her. Every summer their ghosts come back here just to absorb enough energy to linger for another year."

Twenty small bodies cluster by the fire. Twenty small red hearts are

*Continued next page*



## The Wild Woman on L Avenue

by Betty Auchard

Accompanied by my brother Bob, in August 2007 I made a pilgrimage to our home town of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, while doing research for my next book. Things had been going very well with the research, and everyone we met that week was courteous and helpful in our quest for information and records regarding our wacky childhood.

On the last day of the trip we went to L Avenue, which turned out to be another wonderful “find” since we discovered three important locations there: the one-room house with no plumbing where five of us lived in 1935; the inviting corner store that housed Hassan Murray’s Market, where we could charge our groceries; and the tiny little house we lived in when Bob was born. That mini-house is located at 3127 L Avenue, about three houses from a dead end. (Going the opposite way, L Avenue crosses the railroad tracks where we lived in another hovel when Bob was one year old. We moved a lot.)

The “dollhouse” where Bob was born ends in a very tight, crowded cul-de-sac. Tiny houses line the end curve and are set close together on both sides of the street. When we realized it did not go through, we also found that it was very hard to turn the car around on that narrow road. Since no cars were in sight except those parked against the curb, I hurriedly said to my brother, “Just park across this other driveway

*The Summons, continued from page 14*

pounding. Twenty pairs of bright eyes widen as Miles steps from the shadows on cue, and he hears their startled voices cry out. The pulse of their bright lives reverberates like a brass gong through his hollow veins. The bundle on his shoulder stirs.

Gently he lays the small body on the ground. Through her torn face the child smiles up at him. “Daddy!” she cries, and reaches out her arms.

He gathers her in his embrace. “Maybelle!” he sobs. Even as he clings to her, she begins to fade. As the children watch, amazed, he too disappears into a ripple of smoke and imagination. **WT**

and let me pop out to take a couple of photos while you turn the car around. I’m sure whoever lives here will understand if we tell them you were born here 73 years ago.” And I jumped out with my camera and moved farther away so I could get the entire little house in my viewfinder.

Suddenly, a car came *zipping* up that short street right up against Bob’s hood so he couldn’t budge another inch. A mean-looking wretch of a woman rolled down her window and *screamed* at me, “Don’t *ever* block someone’s driveway!”

I said, “I’m sorry. We used to live in one of these houses when we were little, and we’re taking a picture. My brother is trying to turn the car around.”

She didn’t care what I said. She begrudgingly backed up and turned into another driveway so Bob could maneuver his way out of a tight spot. When he was halfway past the driveway where she had temporarily parked, she started to back down toward Bob’s car while he was still creeping to avoid other parked cars. Then she screamed again at the air, “Get the f\*\*\* outta my way!”

By that time Bob was out of her range and he drove way down the street and parked in an open slot. She was now very close to where I was standing to get my picture. She struggled to turn her wheel so she could go up her own driveway two houses away from the one we were photographing. She yelled at me again.

“You two are sure the surprise in a Happy Meal!”

Was that a regional insult or what?

I snapped off a couple of fast pictures and marched down the hill to Bob’s car. I was actually a bit shaky, but Bob never heard what she was saying. He only knew she had been screaming at us and said, “What the hell was that all about?” When I repeated her insults, he was dumbfounded. It was hard to get this awful woman off of my mind.

But eventually, both of us started using her sentences and laughing ourselves silly. If someone was driving too slowly in front of us, I said so no one could hear but Bob, “Get the F\*\*\* outta the way.” In the hotel room in Omaha, if I set my suitcase too far out

## Ode to Papachay Peruvian Coffee High Elevation

by Steven Wetlesen

Deep in the Andes,  
high in the stark mountains  
made famous and  
mystic  
by such places and things as  
Macchu Picchu,  
haunting, heart burning panpipe flute  
music  
and the winding railroads  
ascending  
the steepest,  
angular gorges  
one can imagine  
and some jagged crags that cannot be  
comprehended,  
hard working people  
still meticulously,  
so very carefully  
pick each bean  
deliberately  
by hand  
to create an intense  
dark,  
strong  
but velvet smooth  
liquid  
that is,  
without qualification,  
simply matchless  
throughout the world.

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into the room, my brother yelled, “Don’t ever block someone’s path.” If he was being silly and said something stupid on purpose, I said, “You sure are the surprise in a Happy Meal.”

That one still cracks me up. Whatever in the world does that imply?

Eventually, we got over her rudeness and made up plays that we thought might work like knocking on her door and confessing that we were from *Time* Magazine doing a survey on the friendliness of small town people. We were going to ask to take her picture and send her a copy of that issue so we also needed the correct spelling of her name (we already knew her address), but we wanted to thank her for helping us get a real good story. In other words, we got a lot of mileage out of that harpy’s nasty, inhospitable performance. Bob surmised that she either had serious behavioral issues or had just come from church. **WT**

## The Gravedigger's Daughter

by Jeannine Vegh

Joyce Carol Oates has once again provided us with a gripping tale about a woman who has suffered great tragedies in her life. I myself am a great fan of JCO, as my style is quite similar. The difference being, she is JCO, and I am JKV, so she can do what she wants. I have to refrain from any creativity that I might wish to offer, so that I can be published. I loved the book, but I found myself thinking along the lines of Dorothy Allison, before she became famous. If you remember this keynote speaker from East of Eden 2006, she joked about her early jealousy of other writers. While I revere JCO as a great writer of books fit for any psychotherapist or lover of women's fiction, I am also deeply frustrated about her ability to get away with things my critique group would shun.

First, let me tell you about the book. Of course, the heroine is a woman. If you are a JCO fan, you know she will in some way be violated: sexually, physically, emotionally, or even possibly financially. You know it is not going to be a simple act of violence, but all the men will be perverted in some dark way. Is perversion ever light? Even the good guys have a hint of arrogance, and you have to wonder if there will be some type of abuse. There are no "Knights in Shining Armor" in JCO's books. The good guy is usually the person the woman loves because he at least gives her a break. Yet the great sex always comes from the bad guy, and she can never recover from him [bad] to love the other [good]. The James Dean

character supersedes that of Clark Gable's and in this book, Scarlett does get Clark Gable. But what is it really like to be married to him, when you are still in love with James Dean? Don't think of Ashley, think of James.

This is the first novel by JCO I have read. In the past I have read her shorts. *The Gravedigger's Daughter* is more of a biography hidden within a novel. It was dedicated to Blanche Morgenstern (the gravedigger's daughter) who was JCO's grandmother. Did you know she was Jewish? Me neither. Well, that would explain the timeline for this book and why she wrote it. Finally. This book takes place between 1939 and 1999 (approximately). The heroine Rebecca is born on a ship in New York harbor, while her family is on board after escaping Nazi Germany. Her father, a math teacher and later a printer, because of his ethnicity, can only get a job as a gravedigger in Milburn, New York. They live in squalid surroundings, a cottage in a cemetery. The water is not fit for human consumption. The two sons work back to back with the caretaker for many years, but all their concerns are ignored by the anti-Semitic city council. The father had already decided that they are now American and no one can speak German, or of that "other life," ever again. The children grow up having no real memory of their ethnicity or religion. They are clueless as to the motive for the racial attacks.

You begin to realize the irony that the father mirrors Adolf Hitler. He slowly annihilates them, through mind consumption or emotional torture. While they each try to rebel in their own way, only one survives. The woman. And why does she survive? The man is seduced by her female prowess. He is enthralled by the one who reminds him of himself. Meanwhile, you question in your mind, did these people really survive Nazi Germany for this? Which danger would have been worse? To die in the death chambers, or to die a long slow agonizing death? Cruel punishment on a daily basis has one thread of hope. There is a possibility that tomorrow your luck may change. Yet, once torn, twisted, and confused emotionally, can life ever really be normal again? On some level yes, as long as you know how to wash away the pain at night, so you may sleep peacefully. Though once

you go down a path disguised as truth, you are forever trapped. Vague yes, but this is for you to read.

But Joyce, why did you write this sentence? We are in the 1940's and you are talking about the 1960's. In Part I, 1960's, you give us a hint of the future. This is a couple of chapters. Part II, the history of Rebecca. Within Part II, as you are reading Rebecca's past, up pops one sentence referring to her future from Part I. Never again is the future mentioned like this until you get there. Yeah, I can just hear that now in my critique group. Should it have been written by JKV.

*Bob Garfinkle:* "I got confused when you wrote that sentence about Rebecca and her son. One minute I am reading along about her family, and then all of a sudden you tell me about her son. You need to transition this sentence, so that I can understand where you are going. It should be in italics. You can't just do this one time; you are going to have to make a habit of it, so that the reader knows you go back and forth in time. Otherwise it just comes out of nowhere."

Several chapters are a paragraph or two, nothing more. I am not sure what Bob would say, but I know it would be along the lines of:

"When you're a new writer, you can't take liberties if you want to get published."

In Part III, Rebecca's survival years, JCO throws in a paragraph chapter that alludes to the possibility of sexual abuse. Once in Part II she makes a hint, but never explains. This paragraph, now years later in the novel, is a flashback with an even bigger hint, but no answer. Ever. Who does she think she is? Joyce Carol Oates?!?!? The nerve of her! Plus, the story never tells the end of a couple of characters; you are left wondering what Bob might say.

"Whatever happened to Herschel and Gus?"

In the epilogue, JCO gives us what I believe were real letters. Hmmm. Is this the part where JCO is finally admitting to us that the story was true? Or is she not, because she elaborated on the truth and does not want Oprah's feelings to be hurt? Nonetheless, this is a damn good book and you had better rush out and buy it. You will be darkly entertained. **WT**

### Oct. Octane

Consider the price of gas.  
If you're a writer  
The outlook for obtaining  
Might be brighter.  
We writers, famous  
As a group en masse,  
Can always find  
New fields of gab-and-gas!

—Pat Bustamante

# Meet *Dancing Mama* Author Juliana Richmond

by Una Daly

"It wasn't until I retired and joined a class of memoir writers at Foothill college in the early '80's that I discovered my creative side," reported CWC South Bay member Juliana Richmond. She credits the wonderful teachers, especially the pioneering Mary Jane Moffat, for the inspiration to tell her own life stories. Twenty years later, she has published a collection in the delightful memoir, *Dancing Mama*.

"A strange sound, like the hooting of an owl, woke me in the middle of that July night in 1932," the memoir of an Iowa girlhood begins. From the family's middle of the night escape from floodwaters and their subsequent move to her strict grandmother's house sixty miles away, events unfold through Juliana's ten-year-old eyes.

Because her father, a traveling salesman, was gone from Monday through Friday, her mother passed the time telling stories about college dances and her nine-year career as a home economics teacher. In the era of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, ballroom dancing figured prominently in the lives of young people, and Juliana begged her mother to teach her. Although she found the steps initially difficult to master, Juliana's classmates' and she soon steps of the Shag, Lindy

We follow Juliana the Depression and on and the birth of her first west with her parents, daughter, and we cheer her and into the WWII years

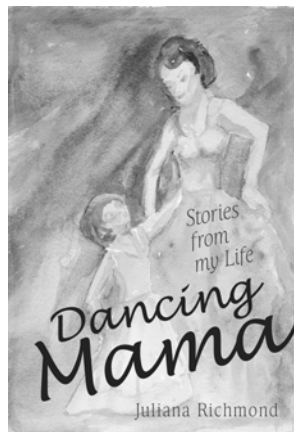
As a reader, you feel in Generous in her depictions, times with her growing the hard times with hope below the surface. After 32 divorced and single for six again only to have her new husband suffer a stroke within a few years. The resulting aphasia distorts his speech making communication a daily struggle, but still they can laugh over misinterpretations of his garbled attempts.

When Juliana is widowed in the mid-nineties, she turns to dancing again, "As always dance steps led me back into life, and I had made new friends in the process." It was at the senior center mixer dance that she found her current life partner. Although they share a love of travel and watercolor painting, dancing remains their constant.

Juliana joined CWC a couple of years ago; her easy smile and graceful stride belie her eighty-some years. She submitted the funny, self-deprecating *Three way Mirror* to *WritersTalk* in October of 2006, which every mature woman shopper could reluctantly identify with. Although she enjoys the club speakers, Juliana says, "I think my main inspiration has been the dedication of purpose of the folks I've talked to ... these are people who really hone their craft constantly."

"It has indeed been like a dance, responding to the rhythms and changing steps of life," offered Juliana. The positive feedback from writers and teachers that she admires, coupled with the inner conviction that she could tell a story, are what she attributes her success as a writer to. "I've always wished I knew more about my great-grandmothers," she continued, "so when my fourth great-grandson came along, I decided to get serious about leaving something for [the greats]. I tried to be as honest as I could, and give them a bit of history as well."

Juliana reads the *New Yorker* magazine regularly and admires many authors particularly the work of two Canadians: Carol Shields and Alice Munro, who make their characters come alive on the page. Her current project is to polish up the stories left out of the first book and perhaps publish an addendum for the grandchildren. **WT**



RESOURCES FOR WRITERS

## Writing, the Journey of a Thousand Miles: Step One by Lita Kurth

Brenda Ueland's *If You Want to Write: A Book About Art, Independence, and Spirit* is one of those books that helped me emerge from "the poetry closet," so to speak. I would recommend it to anyone in the creative arts, even already established writers. Why? Bluntly, it gives us the courage to continue. Who could resist the quotation from William Blake she uses as a chapter title: "Sooner strangle an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires"?

In a world of craft books offering questionable advice, Ueland's stands out. Her book mingles practical, concrete examples of how to write (and how not to) with broader reflections on how to live a creative life. One chapter is entitled, "Why Women who do too much housework should neglect it for their writing." And if anyone knew how to live creatively, it was Ueland. She spent seventy-some bohemian years writing books and articles, living to the hilt, and teaching. A true democrat of art, she met Carl Sandburg, joined forces with John Reed and Eugene O'Neill in Greenwich Village, and when she returned to Minneapolis, taught a writing class at the YWCA for many years. She was as generous towards herself as towards others, pronouncing joyously, "I think I was a splendid teacher..." After reading the book, we have to agree.

Though she died in 1983, we can, through this book, participate in her legendary classes, and partake of the joyful, invigorating zeal she expressed towards her students: "Everybody," she proclaimed, "is talented, original, and has something important to say."

Amen. **WT**



## Notes from My Scratch-Pad by Richard Burns

I have a new excuse for not getting to my keyboard right away and pecking away at it, hoping the next chapter of my current project will magically appear.

Ready? It's Charley, my cat.

When I start getting into my rhythm - yes when I get humming, I'm thinking and typing with a sort of driving rhythm - just at the critical moment, Charley, my 23-pound orange-and-white-furred tabby leaps up next to my keyboard, and he meows until I scratch him behind his ear or brush him. After he's stretched out on the table and most of my working papers have been unceremoniously pushed off onto the floor, I put him in his place, that is to say, back down on the floor. He's lucky I don't stuff him and put him on the wall.

No problem for persistent Charlie. He simply waits until I'm humming again, leaps up and this time he settles on my mouse ... what else would I expect from a cat? This makes moving the little pointer thingy around very difficult; spell it: I-M-P-O-S-S-I-B-L-E.

I confess it took me months to come up with a solution because, despite rumors to the contrary, I do love my kitty-cat. But deadlines have a way of forcing a solution. I just wish I had some of the wasted hours back, not to mention the good writing ideas that evaporated when I yelled for the hundredth time, "Charlie, darn it, get off the #@\$\$& keyboard!"

Just wanted to let you know that I can empathize and sympathize with any of you who may have darn good reasons like mine to delay your humming along at your keyboard. Only don't take months to realize your solution. Today, not tomorrow, lock your cat up in the bedroom for a couple good hours of writing the very first time he interrupts you. You'll be amazed how much stuff, really good stuff you'll save into your project file and, with a couple re-reads and re-writes, have ready to submit to your agent or editor. Oh, you've put off finding a good editor, too? Hmm.

Sorry. This is just my funny little article for the month. I can't work miracles. But with the right effort, you

can. Good luck. Oops, gotta go. I hear someone scratching at the upstairs-bedroom door.

P.S. Btw, write this excuse down. It's a good one, and my lawyer tells me I can't copyright my excuses. **WT**

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### Fathers Lost

The children and their mothers cry.  
Left alone after a bomb  
flies into their homes.  
Or a lone plane goes down in flames.

Whether in Bagdad,  
Or Kosovo,  
Or earlier Nam  
Or even World War II.

The fatherless are millions.  
The ones who are left.  
Who live without  
their proper legacy.

My friend's father flew a plane.  
A pilot, daring,  
soared so bravely  
o'er Korean fields.

Shot down one day. She was three.  
They never found that MIA.  
She has a photo on her shelf.  
All that's left of him.

I never knew my father.  
He may have died in the war before  
the one where my friend's father flew.  
Good old WWII.

But we are all alike, alone.  
Whether the name is lost or known.  
We are all fatherless, victims of  
what war brings to us, everyone.

—Carolyn Donnell

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### Dorothy Allison at San Jose State

October 3, 2007, 3:00-4:00 p.m. A conversation and public Q&A, Martin Luther King Library, Second Floor (4th Street downtown).

7:30 p.m. A reading with book signing, SJSU Music Hall.

### New Critique Group

The Tuesday Writers Critique Group met for the first time on September 11. Barnes & Noble in the Pruneyard, Campbell hosts the meeting, which is scheduled for the second and fourth Tuesdays of every month between 10 a.m. and 12 noon. The next critique group discussion will be on October 9. New members are welcome!

## Directory of Experts

*Do you have specialized knowledge that might help a writer bring authentic detail to a scene? If you are willing to share your expertise, let us know. We will publish your offer and add your name to our directory of experts.*

### Police Procedures

John Howsden  
jwhowsden961@yahoo.com

### Profile Writing

Susan Mueller  
samueller@worldnet.att.net

### Character Development

ArLyne Diamond Ph.D  
ALyne@DiamondAssociates.net

### Doctors' Office Environment, OB-GYN

Dottie Sieve  
pdrsieve@yahoo.com

### Teaching and the Arts

Betty Auchard  
Btauchard@aol.com

### Hospital and Nursing Environment

Maureen Griswold  
maureengriswold@sbcglobal.net

### Computer Dingus and Full Time Nerd

Jeremy Osborne  
jeremy\_w\_osborne@yahoo.com

### Character Traits

Jeannine Vegh M.A. M.F.T.I.  
ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net

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### South Bay Writers Open Mic

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

Contact Bill Baldwin  
**408) 730-9622** or email  
wabaldwin@aol.com

For Fremont Open Mic contact  
Jeannine Vegh  
ladyjatbay@sbcglobal.net  
or  
Bob Garfinkle  
ragarf@earthlink.net

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3 7P Board of Directors LaRoche residence San Jose	4	5 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza, San Jose	6
7	8	9 10A Tuesday Writers Critique Group Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	10 6P Monthly Dinner Meeting and Costume Party Lookout Inn, Sunnyvale Barry Eisler	11	12 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Santana Row, San Jose	13 11A Editors' Powwow
14	15	16 <i>WritersTalk</i> deadline	17	18 7:00P Open Mic Barnes & Noble 3900 Mowery, Fremont	19 7:30P Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	20
21 Autumn Workshop James Dalessandro	22	23 10A Tuesday Writers Critique Group Barnes & Noble Pruneyard, Campbell	24 7:30P Open Mic Borders Books Sunnyvale	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	<b>October 2007</b>		
<b>Future Flashes</b>			11/14 Dinner Meeting Larsen and Pomada		December: Christmas in the Auchard annex	

**Xlibris offers** (exclusively) to members of South Bay Writers:

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### San Jose Library Event

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library is proud to present Angel Island Immigration Station, "Ellis Island of the West," featuring a narrated slide show by William Wong on Tuesday, October 23, 6 pm.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library  
150 E San Fernando Street  
San Jose CA 95112  
(408) 808-2388  
[www.sjlibrary.org](http://www.sjlibrary.org)

### San Jose Poetry Slam

(Est. 1998)

8:00 p.m., \$6.00

First Tuesday: Open Mic with music by Rebelskamp

Second and Fourth Tuesdays: Poetry Slam with music by Jay Rush

Third Tuesday: Head-to-Head Poetry Bouts with special guests.

At The Britannia Arms

173 W Santa Clara

Downtown San Jose

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

### Poetry Center San Jose Announces the Poetry Lounge at The Blue Monkey

Poetry reading and discussion most Tuesdays

Cosponsored by the Creative Writing Department at San José State University

FREE ADMISSION

The Blue Monkey Bar and Taquería

1 East San Fernando Street

San José, CA 95113 [www.pcsj.org](http://www.pcsj.org)



## California Writers Club

South Bay Branch

P.O. Box 3254

Santa Clara, CA 95055

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

## MAIL TO

Address Correction Requested

October 10, at the Lookout Inn  
**Barry Eisler**,  
author of the Rain series  
of mystery novels  
and  
the annual SBW costume party,  
to which you're cordially  
invited to come  
dressed as a  
literary character or figure.

**NOVEMBER**  
**will be the**  
**HUMOR**  
**issue of**  
**Writerstalk**

### Next Monthly Meeting—Wednesday, Oct. 10, 6:00 p.m.

Lookout Inn

605 Macara Avenue, Sunnyvale

At the Sunnyvale Golf Course

