



Volume 19
Number 2
February 2011

Monthly Newsletter of the South Bay Writers Club

February Speaker - Clare Mullin

Interviewing: How to pick people's brains

By Colin Seymour

There I was, talking one-on-one with famed ESPN interviewer Roy Firestone, just as I had long pictured it. Except that I was interviewing him.

A writer can be on either end of that equation, says our February dinner speaker, Clare Mullin. She specializes in making people look good on the receiving end of interviews, a skill that could come in handy if you're pushing a book, as



Firestone was doing when I interviewed him at a posh San Francisco hotel for my "Sports on the Air" column in the Mercury News in the mid 1990s.

To make interviewees look good, Mullin employs tactics that also can become vital when you're on the other end of interviews, gathering facts and anecdotes while writing a book or shorter work.

Mullin conducts her interviews on two public-access television programs, and making her guests come off well is the primary allure. She tends to reach out to successful people and ask them to share their wealth of information.

"A strong interview reveals the subject's character far better than a presentation," she says.

Information-enhancement is indeed the ultimate goal of good interviewing.

That was to be the theme at our February 8 meeting all along, as we had lined up Glenn Lovell, the former Mercury News film reviewer, who has interviewed

continued on page 9

Reach Writing Goals in 15 Minutes or Less

by Victoria M. Johnson

Did you set New Year's resolutions for 2011? Are they the same as your unmet resolutions for 2010? If so, please don't get uncomfortable. I'm not pointing fingers. In fact, I too, have unresolved goals carried over from last year and the year before. However, I do meet at least half of my writing goals. While I'll jot down goals for each area of my life, I break down the professional writing goals further. The one aspect we'll delve into here concerns productivity.

Productivity is the amount of 'product' you produce each year. In our case, the product is the number of pages we write. It's apparent that the more pages you write, the more productive you are. And so when we set goals to write a book in

continued on page 10

Drawing Younger Membership Should Expand Our Boundaries

By Colin Seymour
SBW Vice President



I lost a debate that made us stay late at the January 5 SBW board meeting, but our argument about graphic novels was far from a waste of our valuable time. It turned into the best discussion at any board meeting during this 2010-2011 term.

At issue was a full-page set of drawings - a comic! - published not only in the January edition of our SBW WritersTalk but also this issue as part

continued on page 6

Choosing a Topic for Your Blog

by Rik Scott

So, you've been thinking about starting a blog. The process seems straightforward, the tools are widely available and free. People all around you have blogs, and they seem to be doing all right. What's holding you back? One of the most common questions we hear when it comes to starting a blog is this: "What should I blog about?" There's a good chance that much of what you've read about blogging makes it sound like the only way to be a Blogger is to be an expert at something - well, that's true. But I'm guessing you are an expert at something. In fact, you are probably an expert on several top-

continued on page 4

Shared Experience Motivates a Team

by Danita Craft

Becky Levine, author of *The Writing & Critique Group Survival Guide*, and long time CWC member, shared her knowledge on critique groups with CWC South Bay. Ms. Levine has worked with some of her critique group members for over a decade. She says that a critique group can be more valuable than hiring an editor.



Levine said the benefits of a critique group include the support that comes from being with other writers. Sometimes this is encouragement they provide, other times this is the shared joy of discussing character development or obscure facts on etymology.

A second benefit of being in a critique group is motivation. Writers with deadlines are more productive, and critique groups provide deadlines and goals.

Critique groups are a hands-on educational experience. The flaws, fix-its, and awkward passages you find easily in others' writing will be more easy to identify in your own. Levine says, "The more you learn, the more you apply. The more you apply, the more you learn.... This, to me, is the gift of the critique group."

The group should determine goals. Groups that meet in person are more personal, and trust may develop faster. Online critiques are more private – facial expressions and personal responses are easier to hide. The sessions may be more convenient for reasons of geography and time.

Critique groups should choose a size that works. A small group doesn't give enough feedback. A large group can generate too much material.

Choose your genres. Poetry, screen-

plays, memoirs, non-fiction, novels, short stories may not be ideal in the same group. Genre specific groups offer insights that groups with a broader scope would miss. Groups that accept all genres will provide education on more diverse aspects of the craft.

Respect is an important part of critiquing. Don't make writers feel like they shouldn't write. Ms. Levine says when critiquing, "Start with something nice," and "End with something nice." It makes the writer more receptive to the critique and it is less overwhelming.

When you are critiquing, remember that it's the writer's story and your job is to help the writer tell it.

Levine advocates positive language. "It's more constructive and positive to say 'I don't like your hero enough yet,' than to leave off the word yet." Levine advocates using the word, "May" as in, "You may want to...."

Critics must make time to read the work and give a strong critique. Don't skim the parts you don't like, because that is where the writer needs good feedback. It is important to read the work ahead of time, think about it, and provide feedback. She says, "Give what you want to get."

Levine says it's very important to pay attention to emotions when you critique. Pay attention to how passages make you feel: pulled in, happy, bored, confused, angry with the writer or character, lectured, or sad. These emotions are keys to how well the writer is telling the story.

Writers should also be respectful of the critique they are receiving. Critics put time and effort into reading and critiquing. Don't make critics feel like their time and effort is going to waste. Show your respect by listening, thanking the critic, asking questions for clarity, brainstorming if you need help, and not swearing at the critic (until you're alone in your car).

She says, "Don't go with your first reaction to a critique you receive." If you don't understand the response, reread the passage they are referencing.

She also advises writers to plow through to the end then review the critiques and the work as a whole.

When questioned about finding a critique group, Levine suggested visiting a group, attending meetings, and asking

to see the group's work and critiques.

On the subject of people who don't ever revise, Levine points out that many writers don't know how to approach revision.

In closing, Ms. Levine says that critique group response is a powerful tool for authors because it's a brainstorm response. And it's free. WT



Write & Rewrite: Creating Dialogue Talk

by Lisa Eckstein

In my last column, I offered some ideas for effective dialogue tags and action beats: Use the plain, unobtrusive "said" instead of more distracting verbs and adverbs, and select actions that reveal what's happening in the scene emotionally and physically. Now we're ready to move on to what the characters actually say.

This dialogue has some issues:

Allegra crossed the nursing home lounge to the corner where Chester sat alone. "Hey there, Chester."

The old man's slack features snapped into a broad smile. "Oh, hello, Allegra. It is good to see you. I am so glad you visit every Monday after school for your community service project."

"Me too, Chester. So, like, how are you, like, feeling today?"

"Well, I am doing pretty, you know, well, considering. It is nice that the weather has, uh, that the sun came out today."

"I agree." Allegra sank into a chair beside Chester. "Hey, Chester, did you know that, you know, Monday is my favorite day of the week?"

"Oh, that can't be true, Allegra. You must have way more fun on the weekends, going out and partying and stuff."

"No, I do not, because I never get invited to any parties. Nobody at school ever invites me to do anything!"

"Oh, was there something you were hoping to be invited to, Allegra? Is that why you seem upset today?"

"Yeah, that is what I am upset about. Everyone my age is a jerk." Allegra shyly placed her hand on Chester's.

"That is why I would rather spend time with you, Chester."

The main principle to keep in mind when writing dialogue is that good fictional conversation resembles real speech without perfectly imitating it. When real people talk, they pause, they use meaningless filler words such as "well" and "like," and they change direction mid-sentence. They do these things constantly, and as listeners, we

tend not to notice, but if you read a transcript of a normal conversation, the irregularities jump out. Fictional characters (or real people appearing in memoir or other narrative nonfiction) get to speak more eloquently to avoid pages littered with distracting "um"s and "uh"s. Use disfluencies sparingly, at times when you want to emphasize a character's hesitation or discomfort.

A substantial portion of normal conversation is generic, insignificant, and boring. In the real world, Allegra and Chester might discuss the weather for five minutes, but no reader is going to complain that the characters are unbelievable if this topic is omitted from the story. Compress the greetings, introductions, and small talk to "They exchanged pleasantries" or simply skip to the part that matters.

Characters should get to the point and express themselves clearly, but make sure their dialogue doesn't sound stilted. Long, uninterrupted paragraphs in dialogue come across as phony to readers, as do detailed explanations of hard-to-describe subjects such as emotion. The balance between "too realistic" and "not realistic enough" can be hard to find.

One way to give your dialogue that real-ish feel is to read the characters' lines out loud and make changes when the words sound unnatural. Read aloud the sample dialogue, and the lack of contractions is glaring. Merely changing "I am" to "I'm," "It is" to "It's," and so on will make Allegra and Chester sound less like robots. And do they really need to refer to each other by name every time they speak?

Chester's declaration of gladness over Allegra's regular appearance may have seemed to the writer like a clever way to explain the scenario, but Chester isn't addressing the reader. He's delivering the exposition to Allegra, and it sounds fake. Dialogue is not the place to convey information that all the speakers know.

Another unconvincing part of the example is Chester's line about "party-ing and stuff." The words he uses make him sound like someone Allegra's age. Think about how a character's background, as well as the image he tries to present to the world, would affect the way he expresses himself. Give characters distinct voices, but avoid turning them into caricatures.

Despite the writer's mixed attempts to make the speech sound life-like, the sample dialogue feels stiff because the conversation progresses so rigidly. Each statement and question is responded to exactly on topic. Real exchanges aren't as orderly. When Person A asks a question, Person B may not answer, or she might answer a different question, either as a deliberate evasion or because she has differing expectations. Real people miscommunicate and talk at cross-purposes. Adding some conversational disorder to dialogue gives it a natural sound and builds tension.

Another feature of real speech that works well on the page is the use of sentence fragments. People often don't speak in complete, grammatical sentences, and characters sound stilted if they always do. Instead of "That can't be true," how about "Can't be"? Dropping some words -- in accordance with normal speech patterns, of course -- makes dialogue sound snappier.

Finally, remember that not all of conversation is words. Well-chosen action beats that show the emotional states of the characters are the body language of fiction. A writer can convey a lot by emphasizing what the characters leave unsaid.

I've revised the sample dialogue:

Allegra crossed the nursing home lounge to the corner where Chester sat alone. "Hey there, Chester."

The old man's slack features snapped into a broad smile. "You're here."

Allegra sank into a chair beside Chester. "You know what I was thinking? Mondays are my favorite day."

"Can't be. You must have more fun on the weekends with your friends. Not here with an old fogey."

"Oh, yeah, like I have any friends. Like I ever get invited anywhere."

"Bad weekend?"

"Everyone my age is a jerk." Allegra shyly placed her hand on Chester's. "I like Mondays."

Try a rewrite of your own, either of this conversation or one from your own work, and don't forget to read it aloud. Now, how does that sound?

Lisa Eckstein blogs about reading, writing, and revising at lisaeckstein.com. WT

Choosing a Topic for Your Blog

continued from page 1

ics. If you are having trouble pinning down the thing you want to write about, the topic that lights you up, the subject you can go on and on about... try this old trick:

Get out several sheets of lined notebook paper. (Note: When you hear how the exercise works, you're likely to assume a single, small sheet will do. Trust me, you're going to want a lot of paper.) You might also want to do this on your computer, but consider going "old-school" just this once. You'll see why in a bit.

At the top of the first page, write "Things I can do"

I want you to think about broad areas of skill rather than any individual accomplishments.

For example, if you do all or even some of the work on your car, know how to cook a soufflé, or you are especially good at workplace organization, love to travel, are excited about photography, music or art... put that right under the main heading.

If you have (or had) an athletic ability, played a sport, are a sports fan, or follow a team closely, put that on the list.

Next, look through your life, and find a minimum of four more broad categories of things you can do, or are seriously interested in. One of them might be "Learning how to Blog." Put each of the four at the top of a side of a page. If you can think of more, get more pages. Keep it up until you can't think of any more broad topics.

Remember, it is possible to create and write a "discovery blog" wherein you invite your readers to learn along

with you about some interesting topic. Now, put each of those broad headings at the top of a sheet of paper. Ideally, use only one side of the pages so you can spread them out and see them all at once, but if you're paper conscious, you can use both sides.

At this point you should have a minimum of three pages, and likely will have several more than that.

Next, under each heading, jot down something you are good at, want to be good at, or are very interested in this area. Then write the next sub-topic.

When you run out of ideas for that broad heading, turn the page over and go on to the next. Keep doing this until you start to see how many things you know about, how many you are already good at, and how many you have a serious interest in.

Just for a moment, hold all the pages in your hand, and get a feel for the weight of them. Then spread them out and look at what you've accomplished. You may be surprised at the width and breadth of your experience.

Lastly, scan through and mark all the most exciting with a number 10, the least exciting with a 1, and fill in the rest. You're voting for your Blog topic, and when you're done, I think you'll be both amazed at how much you know, and more than ready to start your Blog. Finally, consider the words of a person we all think of as a genius. "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life thinking it is stupid." — Albert Einstein.

WT
Richard Scott is a blogger and aspiring novelist. His yet to be published novel, FIVE took top honors out of a field of 450 entrants. He currently serves as the president of the CWC Fremont Area Writers Club.



Playful Workshop Gives Books Game Dan Poynter Spin

by Rik Scott

Dan Poynter's workshop on January 15th was well-attended by members of South Bay Writers as well as a smattering of members from other branches, and was generally well-received.

Mr. Poynter's presentation was smooth, polished, and informative. He started on time, kept things moving with an excellent slide show and an entertaining manner. In fact, more than once I looked up from taking notes and swore I was seeing Johnny Carson standing there.

While the workshop was purposed for nonfiction writers, there was enough information and encouragement to go around for those of us who prefer fiction.

His handout included all of his slides except the short animated pieces--many of which were very funny--and as I look at the handout today I find that I can easily recall and recreate much of what he said.

Of special value was his "notebook method" for putting together a book, growing it, as it were, from the inside out rather than from the first through the last pages. While this technique is particularly useful for nonfiction writers, it does offer a new way for any writer to think about and organize work.

I was so inspired by this technique that I stopped on the way home to buy a notebook and several packs of plastic page holders for a forthcoming project. An author of more than a hundred books, Poynter was well qualified for this presentation. He knows whereof he speaks.

If you missed this presentation, one can only hope you can catch him some time and place in the future. As he pointed out, he flies more than 6,000 miles a week, so he's liable to pop up just about anywhere. WT

SOUTH BAY WRITERS PRESENTS:
A Workshop Led by
Margaret Lucke



The Long and Short of Writing Great Fiction

- Do you want to write a novel?
- Do you prefer short stories?
- What defines a great story, and how do you craft one?
- What, besides length, are the differences between short stories and novels?

Discover the answers to these questions at this workshop. Explore the challenges and rewards of writing both long and short fiction from the first inspiration to the final polished draft. Margaret Lucke will give you tips, tricks, and techniques for artfully weaving characters, plot, and setting into a strong and compelling story. Whether you are new to fiction writing or have lots of writing experience, you'll receive encouragement and practical help as well as useful tips and strategies.

About the presenter:
Margaret Lucke is a writer and editorial consultant. Her novel, A Relative Stranger, was nominated for an Anthony Award for Best First Mystery. She has published more than 60 short stories, feature articles, and book reviews, along with two how-to books on writing, Writing Mysteries and Schaum's Quick Guide to Writing Great Short Stories. She teaches fiction writing classes for University of California, Berkeley Extension and other venues. www.margaretlucke.com.

March 19, 2011
9:30 am - 3:00 pm
Lookout Restaurant
605 Macara Ave.
Sunnyvale, CA 94085
Registration @ 9:00; workshop begins promptly at 9:30; continental breakfast and lunch included.

Students w/ID (up to age 25), anytime \$25
Early Bird (before March 5, 2011)
CWC members: \$35
Non-members: \$45
After March 5 and at the door
CWC members: \$45
Non-members: \$55
Cancellation Policy: \$5 fee through midnight 2/12; \$15 fee 2/12 through midnight 3/12; no refunds after midnight 3/12.

South Bay Writers is a non-profit 501c3

Register and pay by credit card (Paypal) at www.southbaywriters.com

Mail in this portion to: SBW Workshops, PO Box 3254, Santa Clara, CA 95055.
Check Payable to: South Bay Writers (South Bay Writers is a non-profit 501c3)
Name: _____ CWC branch (if applicable) _____
Address: _____ City, State, Zip: _____
Phone #: _____ Email: _____ Amount Enclosed: _____
_____ Early Bird (before 3/5) _____ Regular Registration (after 3/5) _____ Student Registration

Nonfiction Writer Needs Know-how for Book Pitches

by Nina Amir

If you think that only an aspiring author seeking a traditional publishing contract needs a pitch, think again. Every aspiring nonfiction author should take the time to craft a 25-word pitch—even those thinking of independently publishing their books.

Many people know of a “pitch” as an elevator speech. This is the short and creative promotional speech you have ever ready to offer if and when you happen to find yourself in an elevator, lunch line or cocktail party with a literary agent or acquisitions editor. Having this speech prepared allows you to pitch your book. An effective pitch should elicit one response from the person who hears it: “Tell me more.” You should then be prepared with three bullet points that elaborate on the pitch.

However, if you don’t plan on pitching to an agent or editor—for instance, if you plan on independently publishing your book—you should still craft a great pitch. In fact, just as an aspiring nonfiction author needs a pitch prior to actually completing a book, any nonfiction writer planning on writing a book should have a pitch before sitting down at the computer to compose a manuscript. The reason for this is simple: A book pitch helps you focus your idea. If you take the time to write a pitch prior to writing your book, you’ll know exactly what your book is about, which means you’ll write a targeted—and more successful—book.

It’s been said that if you can’t write your book’s idea on the back of a business card, you don’t know what it’s about. That’s why I recommend writing a 25-word pitch early in the process of conceiving your book. At the San Francisco Writer’s Conference, the pitch conference held each year used to require that pitches be 25 words or less (without the title). These days, they allow up to 50 words. (I’ve helped judge the contest for the last two years.)

I suggest you start with 50 words and then to edit your pitch down to about 25 words. A book hook, which should follow your book’s title upon first reference in a nonfiction book proposal, can be as short as 15 words. This sentence is used by a publishing house’s marketing department and functions in much the same way as a pitch, only it is meant to gain readers rather than literary representation or a publishing contract. (For those of you self-publishing your books, you’ll use your pitch or book hook when a potential reader asks you, “What’s your book about?”)

When writing your pitch focus on the basic facts pertaining to what the book is about and also on how people will benefit from reading your book, how it is unique, its special benefits and features. You want to be clear about the added value it offers and why someone should read it. For fiction, don’t try to tell the whole story; it’s impossible anyway in 25-50 words. If you are solving a problem, be sure to mention that and how your solution is different. Squeeze in some information about your market so both reader and agent or acquisition editor get a sense of who would want to read this book. Make sure it’s clear why someone would need this book rather than want it.

Once you’ve accomplished all of this in an enticing manner—and in 25-50 words, you can pitch to an agent, an acquisitions editor, or a prospective reader. When someone asks you what your book is about, you won’t hesitate to answer. Plus, when you sit down to write your book, you’ll know exactly what your book is about and what promises you must keep to your readers. That means you’ll be more likely to write a successful book—one that sells. WT

Nina Amir is the founder of Write Nonfiction in November. Find out more about her services at www.copywrightcommunications.com. Special rates on 1-hour pitch-honing sessions for CWC members. More information at cpywrtcom@aol.com.

Drawing younger membership should expand our boundaries

continued from page 1
of a series that could eat 10 percent of the news hole of our newsletter during much or all of 2011. Perhaps many members were taken aback.

Let’s move forward instead. We can debate the literary merits of this particular graphic novel, its bent, or even the genre, although my challenge ostensibly centered on none of these aesthetics. But for a club that needs and is seeking to encourage a youth movement in our membership rolls, graphic novels would symbolize our outreach. That’s the ruling thing, the board concluded.

The introductory rendition, WT editor Bill Belew pointed out, is meant to attract his 28-year-old son to our fold through his drawing talent.

My primary objection was to the amount of editorial space the project figures to consume, although it also bothered me that the onset of the project was a surprise that arguably should have been known to us pre-publication.

In my professional newspaper career, I’ve conceived several controversial topics that led to publication, but I always had to submit first to scrutiny throughout the editorial department. It appears, however, that SBW bylaws don’t require the editor to regard the board of directors, or anyone else, as de facto publishers of WritersTalk. And Belew made it plain he “will not be shackled” as editor. He’s right to fight for that.

As for space, Belew adroitly pointed out that our hopes of expanding our operations (and precious editorial space) by making use of our online capabilities might be hastened if demand for the graphic novels were to grow, especially if the supply were reduced in the hard-copy version of the newsletter.

In the meantime, newsletter publication is available to us all, and artistic merit is beside the point. It is too subjective a criterion, and it’s easy to conclude that it occluded my objectivity in this matter. WT



SAGE ADVICE - Engineer your writing projects

by Gerald Mullenburg, PhD

Aerospace-Mechanical Engineer

Why would you need, or even want, information about engineering for your writing project? In many cases mysteries are related to a technical field such as the development of gyroscopes to guide bombing missions during WWII. Or perhaps it could be to describe a character who is, or acts like, an engineer and you want him/her to be realistic. It could be to describe a methodical person who approaches life “like an engineer,” or to help you to flesh-out a character in ways you didn’t think about.

You may need or want some help in describing that behavior, and someone like me can help add the necessary reality to your character. For free. With the understanding of course, that you can use or discard the information as you wish. You may find that your character is not really like an engineer at all but has other interesting traits.

Something engineers are quite good at is developing projects to get things done most effectively (doing the right things), and most efficiently (doing those things right). Thinking of your writing as a project, and it is a project,

View from the Board

by S. Halloran

Ten of us – president Bill Baldwin, vice-president Colin Seymour, treasurer Richard Burns, secretary Sylvia Halloran, membership chair Marge Johnson, hospitality chair Danita Craft and unnamed guest, Central Board representative Dave LaRoche and webmaster-elect Rik Scott – met in Campbell Wednesday night, January 3. Officers’ reports had been emailed to board members prior to the meeting, so our purpose targeted consideration and action. Motions included:

- Approval of 12/8/10 minutes. (Johnson/Seymour)
- Acceptance of Rik Scott’s proposal to assume duties of webmaster for SBW at the rate of \$100 per month with the proviso that items from the former webmaster’s service agreement

there are some simple strategies that may help you better organize what you want to accomplish.

For example, a five step process of Initiating, Planning, Executing, Controlling, and Closing, provides a guide to setting up and completing a writing project. Initiating is defining What you plan to write, Why you want to write it, Who is involved in the story (real or created characters), and When and Where it is happening. Knowing those five *W*’s you can begin laying out your plan for writing which is how you are going to accomplish it. This plan identifies what you are going to do first, second, etc., to get from the beginning to the end using the information you identified in the Initiation phase.

Now, with the planning completed, the work of Executing the plan and Controlling the work begins. When that is finished, you need to bring Closure to the writing by completing the rewriting (as many times as needed).

Now, doesn’t this process sound easy? Probably not. But with this structure you can be more “effective” and “efficient” in your writing. If you want to give it a try, contact me and I’ll do my best to help you apply these steps to your writing project. WT

be incorporated into the proposal (La Roche/Seymour)

- Approval (due to restaurant price increase) to raise general meeting costs to members and guests starting in March 2011: members’ cost rises from \$15 to \$18; guests’ cost rises from \$20 to \$22. (Johnson/La Roche)
- Approval to eliminate first-time guest discount (Craft/Johnson)

Dave La Roche volunteered to chair the Matthews-Baldwin Award Recipient Selection committee. The award will be presented in March to a member who has shown outstanding special service to the club over the year. Content policy and the current editorial style of Writers’ Talk were discussed. Plans for growth strategies, upcoming speakers, workshops and retreats were also discussed.

We adjourned two-and-a-half hours later with no injuries reported. WT

Directory of Experts

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

Asia, Japan, China, Russia, Blogging

Bill Belew
wbbelew@gmail.com

Astrology, Singing

Sara Aurich
saraaurich@comcast.net

Astronomy, History of Astronomy

Bob Garfinkle
ragarf@earthlink.net

Character Development

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Engineering: Mechanical,

Aero, Aerospace

Jerry Mulenburg
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Molly Westmoreland
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Marketing and Management

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Mathematics: Teaching and

History; Fibonacci Sequence

Marjorie Johnson
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Knitting, Harp

Danita Craft
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Teaching and the Arts

Betty Auchard
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Music, Art, Graphics

Benjamin Belew
mephistoape@hotmail.com

I am an expert too, in...

Your Name

Your email address

Interviewing: How to pick people’s brains continued from page 1

the famous and not-so-famous alike. Newspaper reporters interview people every day, largely because the quotes that ensue are crucial to the quality of good news writing and at the very least help a story move along.

But Lovell, who teaches several classes at De Anza College, has been developing vocal problems on class days, so he decided he couldn’t speak at a Tuesday evening meeting.

Mullin, a member of SBW, actually had proposed last fall that she speak to the club this spring, but Lovell was already on the docket. So she steps in to talk to us about both ends of interviewing.

I had to interview her, of course, both to beef up this article and to plot how we’ll make her look good as she deals with SBW’s exacting audiences.

Some of our presenters have written books about experiences that have dictated, more than the craftsmanship of the writing itself, their literary success, but few would wish to share Mullin’s defining ordeal: About 20 years ago she was showering at a local gym when the showerhead burst from its moorings and inflicted a traumatic head injury that impeded her ability to speak.

In the aftermath, she would forget to take medicine and had trouble performing housework. She had to give up her costume design business because she lost much of her hand-eye coordination. It didn’t help that she had been epileptic all along. “I wasn’t very functional,” she says.

Her costume-design equipment aided her recovery as she started making sense of both her short-term and long-term brain functions. “I found that a color wheel, my tool as a designer, helped me start designing my life’s plan.” She says she pulls out the color wheel and re-tracks her goals about twice a year.

As she underwent several other forms of therapy, “what really helped me was joining Toastmasters to learn speaking again.” That led to her two television interview programs, Visions Unlimited and Colorful Journeys of Success, both of which underscore her faith in visualization techniques.

“I tell my guests this is a visual medium, so I tell them to animate themselves. It’s important to place your

attention to the interviewer instead of the camera.” She also advises them to bring material to hold up, “something to show . . . knowing how to hold the book and knowing how to talk to other people about your book can interest them.”

She thinks writing is a visual medium, too.

“One of the key stages of my recovery is I started writing in the dark. I would envision what I wanted to say.”

Mullin’s genres are non-fiction. “I’ve got eight books in progress. The first one is What Is Traumatic Brain Injury?”

“Closest to my heart is Trauma to Triumph. That’s what our soldiers are coming back from Iraq with. This is what any of us can do. We can develop that muscle called the brain.”

After we’ve brainstormed with Mullin on February 8, perhaps interviews with strangers will seem less traumatic. WT

Accolades

by Jackie Mutz

Words. We use them every day to express how we feel, describe situations, to add emphasis and meaning to our lives. They are a lifeline to our own humanity. Words have power; they can make change happen, as MLK did with his words.

Writing is like that; words strung together create a landscape of details richly portrayed on the page. Whether a poem, an essay, memoir, short story or novel, a finished “product” is something to be proud of, as these folks are:

Betty Auchard will be discussing her book *The Home for the Friendless* in an Author Chat on Library Thing, February 7th through the 20th. During that two week period log on to www.librarything.com/groups/authorchat to talk about Betty’s amazing autobiographical memoir of her young years growing up during the Depression era into the college bound beauty she became.

Bill Belew’s network of blog sites continues to grow, surpassing 39 million total. Bill will be on the faculty of Mexico’s largest writers conference (San

Miguel) in February. Google video producer Carol Ogawa and video cinematographer Andrew Bender produced a mini-documentary about Bill at www.ripplemakers.tv.

New member, **Benjamin Belew**, was commissioned to illustrate the chapters of a novel about the history of SF Bay to be released later this year.

Richard Burns has polished eighteen of his “better poems” (including four award winning poems) and made a chap-book titled *Fine Lines of Mine*. Whenever he does a poetry reading, now he has something to sell or hand out to prospective publishers. If you are interested in finding out how to do this yourself or to purchase a copy of *Fine Lines*, see Richard at the next SouthBay meeting, email him at richard5599@att.net, or check out his blog at www.writerichly.blogspot.com.

Pat Bustamante will have two poems published in the “Songs of San Joaquin” Quarterly in Feb.

Rick Deutsch was appointed as a feature article writer in the *Yosemite Gazette Quarterly*.

Graham Flower will publish a technical paper on 500 Gigabytes, DQPSK Transmitter at the International Optical Fiber Conference in Los Angeles.

Bob Garfinkle had a book review published in the December 2010 “Steinbeck Review” of Audrey Lynch’s book.

Victoria M. Johnson’s new book *Grant Writing 101*, published by McGraw-Hill, made its debut in January. You can find out more about it at www.GrantWhisperer.com.

Audry Lynch gave her Steinbeck lecture to the book group Mayville West on January 5th after they had finished reading *Travels With Charlie*. As a bonus, people were served some of the foods Steinbeck encountered on his trip (five different kinds of potatoes) and whisky in Dixie cups. Sounds like a fun evening.

Make 2011 your year to shine in the writing world. Stick to a writing schedule; join a critique group or writing class (I start teaching another Writer’s Workshop at SCAE, www.scae.org the end of February if interested), anything that will keep you writing consistently. And then send me your writing success stories at accolades@southbaywriters.com. Can’t wait to hear what you have to say. WT

Reach Writing Goals in 15 Minutes or Less
continued from page 1

one year, write 10 short stories, or create a chapbook of poems; we are making a resolution to a big picture goal that taunts and eludes many of us all year long. Rather than feeling like we’re reaching our goal when we write one page or a line in a poem, we end up feeling like we’ll never get anywhere close to accomplishing anything. That kind of unproductive thinking leads to troubles like writers block and, well... unproductivity.

I’m proposing that you break down that big picture goal into doable steps. Instead of resolving to write that big thriller novel, how about resolving to write two pages a day, five days a week. That kind of productivity would add up to 520 pages of draft material. But let’s be honest, we all know writers need days off for vacations, family matters, holidays, sick time, and so on. Here’s the thing, even allowing for all these life interruptions, you can still write a draft of a 400 page novel (and edit it too) in one year at the measly page count of two pages a day. Do the math. (two pages a day, five days a week, for 40 weeks equals 400 pages and allows for twelve weeks worth of interruptions throughout the year, and if you occasionally write three pages, you can make up for it). You don’t even have to sit at your desk for several hours at a time to get those two pages. Read on.

If page count scares you off, try time increments. Try really small time increments like 15 minutes. Surely even on your busiest days you can allot 15 minutes to writing. How much can you write in 15 minutes? Before you scoff,

let me say that many of my Writers Talk articles are written in 15-minute increments. I obviously may need three or four such sessions to complete the draft but I get it written. In 15 minutes I can also write an outline for one of my Blog Talk Radio show episodes, generate bullet points for a chapter of a non-fiction book or an article, create scene notes for a fiction story, or plot a dialogue scene between two characters. If I waited until I had an hour to sit and write I would never produce any work to submit. I’m like you. I have a dozen commitments. I don’t have time to write either. But I can get a thought down, a few sentences, flesh out an idea, etc. At the end of a day or two I have a draft I can work with. Another cool thing is that sometimes when I intend to write for just a few minutes to scribble down an idea I’ll look up and discover that 30 or 40 minutes have passed and I didn’t notice because the writing was flowing effortlessly. And I’m not the only writer who confesses to squeezing in my writing to whatever minutes I have available.

Romantic suspense author, Stephanie Bond, consistently writes 5 novels a year and teaches writers about page production. She says she’ll write on her Alpha Smart keyboard throughout the day whenever she has a few minutes. At the end of the year she’ll have an extra book done that she wouldn’t have produced if she didn’t write during those small blocks of 10 to 15 minutes.

Award-winning romance author April Kilhstrom, the first author I heard talk about the ‘Book In A Week’ method of writing, insists she writes whenever she gets a moment and that those ten minute and fifteen minute

bursts throughout the day (in addition to the few hours she spends daily at the computer) result in a completed draft of a book in about a week. She uses every available free moment to continue writing and at the end of the day she types those notes into her computer. Once she has that draft, she’ll take a few weeks to edit it before submitting the manuscript to her editor.

Bill Belew, the Editor of *WritersTalk*, says he writes a blog post in about 15 minutes. He does this everyday, for several blogs. And look at his annual accomplishments, not only in posts written but his increasing readership. Last year alone he produced something like 5,000 posts and had 20 million views of his blog posts!

Of these three writers above, how many of them would you guess reached their writing goals last year? If you said three, that’s my guess too. Of the writing goals I accomplished in the area of productivity last year, I achieved them by being willing to write in small chunks of time rather than waiting until I had the afternoon to write. Of course I relished those afternoons too, but I’ve found that writing steadily – even 15 minutes at a time – leads to increased productivity. And a productive writer produces pages written. That’s the product we’re trying to sell right? No pages, no product. At some point we do need time for deeper thought but that’s no reason to let minutes go by that could have added to your productivity. See if this practice helps you reach your writing goals. WT

Victoria blogs at GrantWhisperer.com and has a weekly radio show at BlogTalkRadio.com/GrantWhisperer



My First Honeymoon
by Marjorie Johnson

Armed with the optimism and daring of youth, we moved to Weimar, California, to begin our married life. It was the summer of 1955, and we had heard that the TB hospital was hiring. We rented a furnished cottage in a rural area for ten dollars a month, sight unseen, and purchased our housekeeping needs at the army surplus store: a large metal washtub, a metal mop bucket, a one-unit electric hotplate, and two army blankets that said romantically, “US.” My mother had given us odds and ends for dishes and kettles and tableware. We bought groceries as though outfitting a covered wagon: powdered milk, dry cereal, oatmeal, cornmeal, flour, sugar, salt, baking powder, vegetable oil, peanut butter, rice, beans, canned tuna, canned peas; and a dozen eggs, a bag of apples, and one loaf of bread. All our worldly possessions fit into one carload.

During our twenty-five mile drive, we stopped once to exchange a blown tire for the tread-bare spare, twice to cool the boiling radiator, and once more to replace a burnt out fuse with an aspirin tin. The car shimmied whenever it went faster than forty-five miles per hour, but it was just as well, since the brakes weren’t dependable. When we found the narrow country road marked on our map, the engine began a fierce clanging and banging. Red dust boiled behind us as we coasted down the hill with a frozen engine.

A brown-shingled cabin with a tarpaper roof sat between a sprawling oak and a scrubby pine, all surrounded by lilac bushes and poison oak. The rusted screen door opened onto an unfinished porch where yellowjackets had built a paper city in the rafters. The bright blue door opened into a medium-sized bedroom that had a disconcerting absence of square corners – the wall lengths each different, the ceiling four inches higher at one end. A sooty, disconnected stovepipe led to a blackened ceiling from four feet above the

floor. The kitchen had a nonfunctional sink covered with peeling blue paint. In each room, antiquated exposed wiring ran up the walls and across the ceiling through white ceramic rings. The only faucet with running water was outside, and the toilet was up the hill. But the floors were covered with linoleum, and we had electricity and a roof.

We spent a long day scrubbing, sweeping, and exterminating former tenants. After a quick supper of peanut butter sandwiches and apples, we carried in some water to heat over the hotplate and took rather cramped baths in the washtub. Worn out, we sank into bed; also worn out, it sank with us to the floor. When we turned on the light switch, the fuse blew out. We groped in the dark looking for the fuse box and restored order by placing a penny in the circuit. We drifted into exhausted sleep, oblivious to the broken springs in the mattress.

Less than an hour later, a shrieking, roaring, old-fashioned steam engine with a bright search light blasted us out of bed and shook the whole house – the cabin was less than half a mile from railroad tracks. At dawn a woodpecker’s drilling roused us in time to see deer grazing behind the kitchen window and a family of quail walking single-file in the dust. I opened the front door, and the squealing hinge sent a jackrabbit scampering away. As I walked to the outhouse, birds called to each other in the rosy dawn, and a cool, fresh-smelling breeze carried the scent of lilacs.

After breakfast, I walked along a fern-lined path to our landlady’s house. I found a short, white-haired woman standing in her housecoat and watering flowers. I wished her a good morning, and she gave me a hose for our faucet. She told me that railroad workers, who took the stove with them, had burned coal when they lived in our cabin; the walls and ceiling could be cleaned only with fresh paint. Then, she offered me a job to earn a month’s rent.

It was a simple job that she wanted done. Her son had been digging a septic

tank for three years during college vacations. He piled everything that came out of the hole around the edges, and the rock and gravel had to be moved before any more work could be done. I sorted the rocks by size and used her tools: a tongueless and aged child’s red wagon and a broken shovel. The largest rocks went along her rock wall. I filled chuckholes in the driveway with the rest: large rocks on the bottom, medium ones next, smaller ones above, and dirt on top.

After a week of dirty work, it was time to wash our clothes. I carried in water in the bucket, partially filled the washtub, and heated the last bucketful over the hotplate for two hours. I used dirty towels to lift the bucket and poured it into the tub on the floor near the bed, where I rubbed and squeezed dirty clothes. I carried the water outside a little at a time and rinsed the clothes with the hose. There was no clothesline; I draped clothes over fences. My other piece of equipment, the hotplate, double-dared me to learn how to cook beyond my specialty, cookies. I found where blackberries, pears, and apples grew wild. I hiked two miles alongside two-lane highway 40 (now I-80) and collected discarded glass beverage bottles for their deposits to buy bread to go with all that peanut butter. My husband went to work in the kitchen at the tuberculosis sanatorium for \$1.10 per hour and one meal per day, but he had to work a month before he was paid. By payday, we had a cash balance of \$1.16 left from our original stake of fifty dollars.

Camping in the cabin was fun until winter came to Weimar and the dust melted to sticky red clay. It rained, and rained, for twenty consecutive days. The ceiling rained as well, into every can, bowl, and kettle until I couldn’t move in the dark without kicking something over. We covered the bed frame with an army surplus nylon parachute to keep dry. We couldn’t get warm and we caught colds. In my misery, I wished that I lived in a real house.

The honeymoon was over.WT

THE YEAR OF THE RABBIT

By Valerie Lee

According to the Chinese Lunar Calendar, Chinese New Year, the Year of the Rabbit begins its reign on February 2, 2011, ousting the Tiger.

Each year is assigned an animal in a 12-year cycle. Asian people believe that persons have characteristics of animals that ruled the year of their birth just as modern Astrologists believe that people born under a certain sign of the Western zodiac will have common traits.

The Rabbit ranks fourth among the animals in the Chinese zodiac. Those born in 1903, 1915, 1927, 1939, 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999 and 2011 possess one of the most fortunate of the twelve animal signs.

The Rabbit leads a tranquil life, is reserved, artistic with good judgment and he will shine in whatever he does, whether it's law, politics or government work. But he is inclined to be moody and can appear detached or indifferent to people but he's extremely lucky in monetary transactions.

In Chinese mythology the Rabbit or Hare is the emblem of longevity and is said to derive his essence from the Moon. Americans and the Chinese have different views when they gaze up at the Moon. Americans think about the story of the Man in the Moon whereas the Chinese sees the Moon Hare holding the Elixir of Immortality in his hands standing near a rock under a Cassia tree.

Spring festival or Chinese New Year has been celebrated for at least 3,000 years. In Asian Culture, this is the biggest celebration of the year. It is a time to relax, eat, dress up and be with family and friends.

Of course, the first thing is to feast on delicious, traditional foods prepared for this special occasion. During the two week Chinese New Year celebration, meats, fruits, fish, vegetables and noodles will all be consumed because what you eat at your first meal that day will determine your good fortune, your health, your wealth, and happiness.

Many Chinese American families like to make special holiday foods. They spare no expense and are especially lavish with various assortments of exotic

dishes like eggs that become "silver ingot," mushrooms are "opportunities," chicken is "phoenix", and a pork dish is "Golden Coins." Poultry signifies family unity; oranges and tangerines mean wealth and good fortune; while pork provides happiness. A steamed fish means that all good things will last forever.

There are a whole series of braised dishes and stews that are especially appealing during the cold winter months. Beef and pork are particularly popular as they can fire and warm up the body. Even though stews are served throughout the year, below you will find a hearty ox-tail stew recipe that is special for Chinese New Year's celebrations.

Braised Oxtail stew

6 lbs. of Oxtails
2 pounds of stew beef (cubed)
1 Tbsp. peanut or sesame oil
2 cloves garlic

First, rinse off all meats, then Dip oxtails and beef in flour until coated. In a large pot, put in 1 TBSP. cooking oil, add 2 cloves of garlic, and then toss in oxtails and fry until golden brown for about 20 minutes, turn temperature down and let it braise for about another hour.

Add ¼ c. of water if too dry. Slowly add the beef to the oxtail. Braise the meats for another hour. Add a large can of stewed tomatoes and one small can of tomato sauce plus a cup of water and continue to cook for an hour or longer depending on how tender the meat is. At this time, chop up a large onion, some carrots (4-5) celery (4 stalks) small Daikon in slices, substitute 4 large potatoes in cubes instead if preferred. When the oxtails are slightly tender, toss in the vegetables and simmer for an hour or more until vegetables are ready.

Another easy favorite of mine is:

Ground pork and peas

½ lb. ground pork
1 tsp. Sesame oil
1 can of peas
2 cloves garlic
1 onion, chopped fine
1 can of Green Peas
Oyster sauce
Soya sauce

Marinate pork with 1 Tbsp oyster sauce & 1 tsp soya sauce.

In a hot skillet with sesame oil, toss in the marinated pork, stir-fry until pink, and then slowly pour in the complete can of peas. Let simmer for about 15 minutes and then slowly add 1 Tbsp oyster sauce and 1 tsp Soya sauce. Let simmer for 5 minutes more and add 1 tsp sugar.

It's ready - Bon appetit - hope you like these recipes. They have been in my family for generations.

Parents, grandparents and friends will be honored with gifts such as oranges, candy, nuts or pastries. This period promotes benevolence; reunions, family unity, remembrance and people will pay homage to their deceased ancestors.

While many people born in the Year of the Rabbit along with their families, friends and relatives enjoy special foods, events and festivities, much can be remembered from the past and many momentous events that took place during the previous Rabbit years.

On a positive note, in 1903, Ford Motor Co. was founded. Henry Ford with some businessmen from Detroit built their factory to produce cars. He was V.P as well as its chief engineer and he also owned a quarter of the shares.

In 1915, nearly 19 million tourists gathered in San Francisco, the "City Loved around the World" for the Panama- Pacific International Exposition. It was really for the celebration of the Panama Canal completion but San Francisco saw this as a great opportunity to also introduce the newly rebuilt city after the earthquake.

On September 22, 1927, 150,000 boisterous fans packed Chicago's Soldier's Field for the heavyweight grudge match between world champ Gene Tunney and the man he displaced, Jack Dempsey. Flattened by a vicious Dempsey barrage in the seventh of ten rounds, Tunney was granted a reprieve when Dempsey failed to retreat to a neutral corner. Three to five seconds passed before the referee began the customary count of ten. Tunney got to his feet at nine, and went on to victory in the notorious "Battle of the Long Count." Also that same year, many will remember Clara Bow as "The It Girl," after that 1927 movie.

In 1939, Gone with the Wind, star-

ring Clark Gable and Vivienne Lee, set in the period of the American Civil War and its aftermath was released and went on to win nine Oscars.

In 1951 electronic computers went commercial and were used for civilian purposes in America and Britain for information.

On June 16, 1963 Soviet Cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman to visit outer space. She orbited earth 48 times and returned three days later.

In 1975 the World was shocked by a priceless archaeological find in China. Within the sprawling tomb of Ch'in stood 8,000 life-sized ceramic warriors armed with real crossbows, spears, swords, bronze horses and chariots, and more than 10,000 pieces of gold, jade, silk and iron. Archaeologists unearthed the burial site near Xian in Northwest Shanxi province and discovered it be-longed to Emperor Shih Huang-ti during his reign from 221-209. This discovery compared to King Tut's treasure, making Tut look like a pauper.

In November, 1987, at Sotheby's auction house in New York, Australian Beer Tycoon, Alan Bond, bid an astronomical amount for artwork in the amount of \$53.9 Million for Dutch post impressionist Vincent Van Gogh's *Vibrant Irises*. This was the top price then and it was far above expectations for living artists.

In July, 1999, the U.S. won the World cup. The largest crowds gathered at the woman's sporting event at the Rose Bowl to witness U.S and Chinese women soccer teams compete for the World Cup. Forty million Americans watched this event on television. After a scoreless two hours in scorching heat - the U.S. team became the winner at 5 - 4.

On a more ominous note, on October 12, 1915, German officials shot Edith Cavell, an English nurse living in German-occupied Belgium, for aiding in the underground transport of Allied soldiers into occupied Holland.

In 1927 there was violent unrest in Austria with much bloodshed during the summer months. Anti-communist thugs, after being acquitted, started the worst rioting in Vienna where several public buildings were set on fire which sparked many armed clashes between police and rioters.

On August 22, 1939, Adolph Hitler invaded Poland igniting World War II

and he also ordered the murder of all terminally ill patients in German hospitals, to make room for the wounded.

In July 1951, Jordan's King Abdullah was assassinated as he entered the Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem. The monarch had done plenty to anger his fellow Arabs.

In 1963, most people rejoiced and agreed that the world was a better place with the hanging of the Nazi criminal, heinous fiend and killer, Adolph Eichmann.

On July 30, 1975 Jimmy Hoffa, the powerful former president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, disappeared from a restaurant outside Detroit. Hoffa helped build the Teamsters into the largest U.S. labor union and had gone to prison in 1967 for jury tampering, fraud & conspiracy but his 13-year sentence was commuted by President Nixon in 1971.

On Monday, October 19, 1987, the long bull market in stocks and shares came to an abrupt end when the New York Stock Exchange registered a staggering one-day fall in values - twice that of the Wall Street crash of 1929.

It was on July 16, 1999 when the nation mourned the death of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Jr., his wife and her sister in Kennedy's plane off the coast of Martha's Vineyard. State and federal agencies combined efforts to locate the wreckage in 1,100 feet of water.

What is interesting about the Rabbit is that this animal always falls on its feet so people born under this sign are happy, gifted, nice to be with, discreet, refined, and reserved but not overly ambitious.

In 2011, the calm, placid, pacifist, Rabbit are more involved with personal problems than by the great wrongs of the world. Global catastrophes, warfare and famine leave him unmoved. Rabbits love company and like to entertain and their homes are often beautiful because they have excellent taste. This will be a year most welcomed after the ferocious year of the Tiger. It will be a congenial time where diplomacy, international relations and politics will be given a front seat again where we will act with discretion, make reasonable concession without too much difficulty.

Rules, law & order, regulations will not be rigidly enforced. No one wants to bother with these unpleasant realities because they are busy having fun,

entertaining others or just taking it easy.

It will be where all is quiet and calm because everyone has a tendency to put off disagreeable tasks in this free & easy atmosphere.

Money can be made without too much labor. Lifestyles could be languid and leisurely as we allow ourselves the luxuries we have always craved for. This will be a temperate year with unhurried pace.

However, be careful of becoming too indulgent. The influence of the Rabbit tends to spoil those who want too much comfort and thus impair their effectiveness and sense of duty. WT

Valerie Lee is author of *The Jade Rubies*



New Members

by Jackie Mutz

Benjamin Belew (28), son of newsletter editor Bill Belew joined the club in January. Benjamin is an international award winning classical pianist. Ben also worked for a Japanese animation company in Japan where he was raised to be bicultural. Benjamin is a true renaissance man in that he is also an accomplished painter - painting live models, stills in the vein of John Sargent and Norman Rockwell. Ben is also a short story writer. His works can be discovered at

<http://www.benjaminbelew.com>.

Benjamin lives in an artist community in Rising Sun, IN. WT

Mother, Dear

(Thoughts at Her Graveside)
by Richard A. Burns

Mother, dear, wish you were here and not just a photo on the wall,
Standing next to lanky Larry and dressed up for the ball.
Glad I got to see you some, but not enough, I fear.
Now, all too soon, the time has come to say “Goodbye,” my mother, dear.

Born in 1913, sweet Gertrude, a little girl.
A mother’s darling princess, a father’s gleaming pearl.
Sometimes glad and sometimes bad and sometimes crawling far,
Sometimes tinkling, sometimes winking, sometimes twinkling like a star.

Your friends all called you Nancy, and you all played hide-and-seek
With sister, Helen, “Ready or not!” and “Remember not to peek!”
You dreamed of things, diamond rings, of travel, near and far,
And, somewhere, sometime, somehow, someway, you’d drive a yellow car.

* * *

But things can really go awry, alas, for you, they did.
That “yellow car” was rusty scrap, your dreams of mansions slid.
Too often broke, you seldom spoke, your face got stiff and hard.
One day the State took you away--five muddy children in the yard.

Mother, dear, wish you were here. Wish you were never sick.
Wish life went always like you planned and not so over-quick.
I’d show you, dear, how I love you, play soft on my guitar;
I’d bring you flowers every day and ride your yellow car.

Now angels came to take you up. Don’t give them any static.
They won’t care how full your cup, how messed-up was your attic.
And, so...
One son is here, your sister’s near, sharing grief and sorrow’s tear,
With memories of yesteryear, my Gertrude, Nancy, mother, dear.

A Light Exists in Spring

by Emily Dickinson

A light exists in spring
Not present on the year
At any other period.
When March is scarcely here...

Three Roses

Rosey Views
Roses are red,
Violets are blue:
YOU can come up with
A new rhyme too...

TERSE ON VERSE

by Pat Bustamante

LOVE POEMS:
Where would we be without love?

If you happen to have that “Hallmark Moment” in your brain because you are fond of a certain someone and Valentine’s Day is approaching: write it down, give it to that person!

Chances are good that you are graded not on “literary skill” but on remembering the day with something truly created by you.

Emily Dickinson (b. 1830 - d. 1886) had to hide her poems, because it was perhaps “not so lady-like” or genteel to practice the art in public.

Be brave, Emily was lucky that someone discerned she had that way with words that makes a poet immortal.

And I would also like to have people turn in quotes (four lines only!) from your favorite poetry by a famous poet.

Subject: March madness, or: “begorra, St. Paddy’s Day!” or something to convince us winter is over?

Please do send short poems for this page: your own work. WT

Happy Valentine’s Day (Again)

by Luanne Oleas

Old lovers and wine
They age just fine
Be my valentine
A 35th time

Rose Whose

Roses are white
Roses are red
Or for your purpose,
Any color instead!

At a Long Beach Bar Part 1

by Richard Burns

(This is the first part of a three part series.)

The man pulled up a stool next to me in the dimly lit tavern. He hollered at the bartender, “Hey, Joe, the usual.” He grabbed at a bowl of pretzel sticks and the pile of square napkins close by. “What’s up,” I said, but I don’t think he heard me. The TV was on kind of loud. After his drink came and a suitable amount of time ignoring me had passed, he said, “You new here?” His wavy, white hair had receded at the side-part leaving a peninsula of wavy hair peeking over the center of his forehead. His face was kind of pointed, reminded me of Victor Borges, only not on stage. He had some years on him, looked worn down by the day, kind of like I felt.

“Who’s playing?” he said. I shrugged. “The Chargers and somebody.”

He watched a play. “At times, I need to get out of the house more than I need to watch a ballgame.” The man turned back, laid his arms on the polished, dark wood counter.

“Me, too.” I adjusted the position of my beer mug, now half empty. Centered it on the little square napkin. “Been a long damn day.” A neon Budweiser sign flashed on and off in the window. “Where I work, one nutty guy, an addict, got to screaming and had to be hauled away.”

For a brief time, I tried to make sense of the comment, but contented myself with ignorance. “Hi, I’m Ron.” I shook his hand. “So, you work Saturdays?”

“Oh,” he said, “my name’s Wayne. “I work ’bout every day.” He sighed and slid a crumpled ten toward the bar tender.

“Where at?”
“Convalescent home, Pacific Haven. I manage it. It’s a couple miles up Highway 1 in Long Beach.”

“Huh. That’s where I drove today.”
“Hmm,” was the response.
“Searching for a place out of my past.”
“No kidding.” He glanced at me.
“Yeah, I hunted for where my brother used to live. No success.”
His eyes searched my face. “Lost track of him, huh?”
“Me? No. Now, he’s dead.”
He scrunched up his face. “Sorry.”
He took a sip of his clear drink on ice--maybe scotch--and let it burn its way down his throat before grabbing a breath.

“It’s been a while. Just been to his grave in Westchester, though. Sometimes, I feel I want to drop in there for him.”

“But you were driving around looking for him in Long Beach?”

“No, looking for the old apartment he used to live at. Actually, I’m not sure I can recognize it. Wasted a lot of gas.”

“Where you from?”
“San Carlos.”

His thick white eyebrows bunched into a frown, like he didn’t recognize it.

“Almost to San Francisco. Don’t often make it down to L.A. anymore.”

“Hmm.” He dabbed the ice cubes with a plastic stick.

“He died a long time ago. Paul, my twin brother, you know, fraternal.” I reached up high and to the side. “He was tall, good-looking, six-foot-six.”

His eyebrows rose quickly and relaxed.

“Good old Paul,” I said. “He was the black sheep, always into something. Threw rocks at the neighbor’s chicken coop, jeez, a long time ago.”

“Ha, we had a chicken coop, too.”
“Constantly in some kind of trouble with Dad. He stole cigarettes from the Ranch Market up on San Fernando Road. He swiped magazines with pages of naked women. The women had those black little rectangles over their nipples.” I grinned.

He rocked forward with a silent laugh.

“We might have been ten or eleven,

just goof-ball kids. Made plastic model airplanes in our shed out back near the incinerator. It was our clubhouse.”
He nodded, looking like he’d been through something similar.

I lifted my mug, taking a long swallow and set it down. “I still remember the day Dad called, October 22, 1993. The police told Dad that Paul fell and hit his head. It happened at the special home for vagrants and crazies where he lived.”

“Bummer,” Wayne said.
Wayne nodded at him and turned to me. “What’s the name of the place in Long Beach? I know this area pretty well.”

“Can’t remember, even. In some ways, it’s a good thing he’s gone.” The last word kind of stuck in my throat.
“Oh?”

The bartender brought the refills.
“He went out of his head when he was, oh, maybe, thirty.” It felt like a smirk spread across my face when I recalled some things. “We fought when we were kids, I remember. Wrestled pretty hard, sometimes.”

“Yeah, my brother and I, the same.”
“But I always loved him.”

His eyes glinted like he was moved by what I said and he showed a tight-lipped smile. He sipped his fresh scotch.

“Today, I brought a whiskbroom to his grave site.”

He turned his head, face all puzzled, but then he ignored it. “Lately, I been to a funeral,” he said at last. “My dad’s gone, now.”

“Eventually, it happens, huh?”
He looked straight ahead at the mirror and the bottles, lined up. The guy seemed to be on my wavelength.

“Ironical, though,” I said. “You never really think it will happen to you.”

“I don’t think on it. If I do, I shoo the thought away.”

“I still feel like I’m eighteen, I mean the way I see the world.”

to be continued...

“Bounding Into 2011”

So a new year begins; another year of writing, another year of South Bay Writers. How can we enhance your writing experience in 2011? We’d like to move you closer to your writing goals: Writing, publishing, selling; building a platform, getting reviews and publicity; whatever – writing success.

But first, the less fortunate news. Due to price increases at the Lookout, we will be raising our own dinner meeting prices to \$18 for members and \$22 for non-members, starting in March. We’ve postponed this as long as we could. On the bright side, I was pleasantly surprised to find sweet-and-sour pork at our January meeting. One hopes for continued improved dinner offerings (including alternatives for people who don’t eat meat, pork, etc.). In any case, I hope you like our evolving dinner meeting format, the discussion topics provided on individual tables, and the time provided for actual writing.

South Bay Writers is expanding in so many directions! Do take advantage of the many opportunities now being offered! Participate and give us your feedback and suggestions! In addition to our monthly dinner meetings, you can now sample:

- Open Mics (four a month).
- Workshops (four or so a year).
- The *WritersTalk* (always looking for contributions)
- Meetup events (facilitated by Bill Bellew)
- Learning Center events (such as the video series on Mark Twain)
- Retreats

Additional opportunities for publishing your work are also being developed. In the past few years both South Bay Writers and the state California Writers Club have publish anthologies. We hope this will happen again, and more frequently!

The state CWC plans to develop the state Bulletin into a publication with a greater literary focus, so watch for increased opportunities to publish your writing there.

In short, the club exists for you, and to further your writing goals. We are trying to provide as many aids as possible to assure your writing success. Let us know how we’re doing, and how we can improve. We’re here for you. WT

2 Things I Know I Know

wait to read the feedback when/if it comes. I do also like to say, I would rather people love me or hate me, but I do NOT want them to be indifferent to me. If readers will grab WT each month just to take a look to see what they like or don’t like, to see what is new or what has gone away, if they will pick it up and read it with the hundreds, dare I say thousands of other potential readers, then I will feel like I have a good edition.

Make a difference. WT

California Writers Club
South Bay Branch
— o —
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Workshops—Nina Amir
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Join Us

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



WritersTalk

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

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Submissions

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

Bill Bellew
111 W. Arques Ave
Sunnyvale, CA 94085

Guest Columns
Sage Advice (400 words)

News Items (400 words)

Letters to the Editor (300 words)
to Bill Bellew
newsletter@southbaywriters.com

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

Accolades
accolades@southbaywriters.com

Announcements and Advertisements
newsletter@southbaywriters.com

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

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

Authors retain all rights to their works; *WritersTalk* gratefully acknowledges the authors' permission to publish their works here. Contact individual authors for permission to reprint.

Change of Address: Send changes of address to the Membership Chair at membership@southbaywriters.com

Subscriptions: Nonmember subscriptions are \$20/year; send a check payable to South Bay Writers Club to the Membership Chair.

Circulation: 225

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Newsleditor

2 Things I Know I Know

by Bill Bellew



Bill Bellew

I don’t know a lot. But I do know a few things. Okay, well maybe I know just a couple of things.

I have been blogging professionally for almost 5 years now. When I speak at Meetups and such (this past weekend I presented a 6-hour workshop to the Central Coast Writers Club, later this week I will be speaking to a large group of entrepreneurs in Oakland, the first week of February I will be speaking to an even larger group of new-tech enthusiasts in Santa Cruz and later in February at Mexico’s largest writers conference in San Miguel) I like to open up with a quote from Will Rogers. “If you can do it, you ain’t bragging.”

I have learned some things from publishing over 18,000 articles/posts, receiving over 100,000 comments and being viewed some 40+ million times. I know something about getting feedback.

All writers say they like/want feedback. That’s not true. What the writer really wants to say is they want good feedback, positive feedback, encouraging feedback. Nobody likes being yelled out, told they are stupid, that their mother is stupid, that they came from ancestors who are even more stupid. Sadly, the latter type of feedback is the kind that is most prevalent.

In the blogosphere, the first kind of comment that comes is spam comment. These types of comments don’t count. Another kind of commenter is the troll. This is the person who just tries to pick a fight, tries to get the writer riled and then disappears. A third kind of commenter is the one who only looks for what is wrong, a misspelling that really is nothing more than a typo but they still won’t give the writer the benefit of the doubt. This type of commenter is a fault finder and wants nothing more than to bring the writer down. Yet another kind of commenter is the one who genuinely wants to give feedback, point out an error in a fact, a faulty conclusion based on the content or the way it

was worded, offers additional info to substantiate your point or just genuinely praises the writer for a job well done. Of course, it is this last type that is the most desirable. But they are few and far between.

Another thing I learned about feedback is that if nine people tell you that you did a great job and the tenth says you’re full of that well known stuff, guess which comment you will remember. Critique groups might be the best way to get the best kind of feedback. Last month’s regular meeting was all about critique groups and Danita offers a recap in this issue.

Another thing I know I know is what gets read and what doesn’t. Out of the above mentioned 18,000 articles I can tell you what kinds of content is the most popular, pretty much what has a chance of being read and what doesn’t. It’s not a commentary on the quality of the writing but an observation on the substance. Thomas Edison’s first invention was a secret polling machine. Nobody wanted to use it because everyone wanted to know how the other was going to vote before they cast theirs. Edison resolved to not invent anything unless he knew it was going to be used. Perhaps the writer might consider not writing anything unless they knew it was going to be read.

Here in WT I am experimenting with what I think gets read. The graphic novel on page 7 is one such example. This is episode 2. Richard Burn’s piece on page 15 is another. It is the first of a three part series. I wonder if it will be good enough for readers to anticipate the next issue. There is now a poet’s page, regular articles on blogging, non-fiction, and writing in general. There are articles about upcoming meetings and recaps about past ones. There is a workshop announcement and a recap. And there are a couple of pages about what goes on in between monthly meetings. And there is more. The printed WT is 20 pages. There is also an expanded online version - 24 pages that is in color.

I don’t know if it is all good or bad, I’ll

continued on page 16

What’s a Meetup?

A meetup is a weekly, sometimes twice a week meeting for SBW members and other writers who want to discuss and learn about writing and blogging related topics.

The topics, places, and times can be discovered in detail at:

<http://www.meetup.com/South-Bay-Writers/>

&

<http://www.meetup.com/Silicon-Valley-Bloggers-and-Writers/>

&

<http://www.meetup.com/nonfiction-writing-concept-to-publication/>



Ongoing Critique Groups

The Arm Wavers
Meets downtown San Jose on Wednesdays
Contact: Georgia Platts – gplatts@comcast.net
Closed to new members at this time

Writers’ Salon
Meets in Santa Clara
Contact: Edie Matthews – edie333@sbc-global.net
Closed to new members at this time

Le Boulanger Writers
Meets at Le Boulanger
Pruneyard Shopping Center, Campbell
Contact: Karen Hartley – Sew1Machin@aol.com
All genres; open to all

Northpoint Critique Group
Meets in Cupertino
Contact: Valerie Whong – valeriewhong@att.net
Closed to new members at this time

Our Voices
Meets in Santa Clara
Meets every other Tuesday
7:15 p.m to 9:30 p.m.
Genres: Fiction, nontechnical nonfiction, memoir
Contact: Dave LaRoche – dalaroche@comcast.net
No openings at this time

Valley Writers
Meets: Valley Village Retirement Center, Santa Clara
Mondays 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Contact: Marjorie Johnson – marjohnson89@earthlink.net
All genres; open to all

New Critique Group forming in Campbell
62. S. San Thomas Aquino
Mondays 6:30pm
Contact: Danita - blue2eternity@gmail.com

CWC Around the Bay

These are the published meeting times and locations for the other CWC branches in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. If you’re thinking about attending one of their meetings, be sure to check the website first for details.

Berkeley: Meetings are held on the third Sunday of each month, except for July and August, at 1:30 at the Oakland Public Library Main Branch. cwc-berkeley.com

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

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

Marin: Meets on the fourth Sunday of every month at 2 p.m. at Book Passage in Corte Madera. cwcmarinwriters.com

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

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

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

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

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

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Feb ‘11		1 7:30-9:30 Mark Twain Westmont	2	3	4 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Almaden Plaza	5
6	7	Monthly Meeting		10	11 7:30p OpenMic Borders Santana Row, SJ	12
13	14	15 7-9pm Meetup - Campbell 7:30-9:30 Mark Twain Westmont	16	17	18 7:30p Open Mic Barnes & Noble Pruneyard	19 3-5pm Mega Meetup Potluck Campbell -WMC
20	21	22 7-9pm Meetup - Campbell	23	24	25 7:30p Open Mic Borders Sunnyvale	26

2011 Sandy Writing Contest

www.thesandy.org.

Deadline is February 13, 2011

Check out the
South Bay Writers
Blog
southbaywriters.com
Click SBW Journal—Blog

**South Bay Writers
Open Mic**

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

Contact Bill Baldwin

South Bay Writers Anthology



\$10
At the meeting.
On the website.
southbaywriters.com

Other Open Mics

10Ten Gallery
Last Friday, 6:30-10:00 p.m.
1010 E. Taylor St., San Jose
Al Preciado’s home

Poets@Play
Second Sunday 1 p.m.-4 p.m.
1650 Senter Rd., San Jose
Markham House History Park

In Between Monthly Meetings

February 18

TriValley

hosts

The Myth & Reality of the Hero & Anti-hero from Mythology to Reality and Personal Story

February 18

Tiny Lights 16th Annual
Essay Contest

www.tiny-lights.com/contest.php

February 18-20

San Francisco Writers Conference

February 4

The Booksmith

1644 Haight Street

San Francisco CA 94117

415-863-8688

www.booksmith.com

6:30 – 9:30 PM

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7:30 PM

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March 11

35th Annual Foster City

International Writers Contest

fostercity_writers@yahoo.com

March 15

Annual Writers-Editors

International Writing Competition

www.writers-editors.com

March 19

Our own **Betty Auchard** will be speaking to the Peninsula Writers Branch

March 26-27

Pleasanton Poetry, Prose & Arts

Festival

March 28

Central Valley Writers Workshop 2011
and Short Story Contest

www.centralvalleywriters.com

March 31

Gemini Magazine Short Story Contest

www.gemini-magazine.com/contest.html

May 20-21

Antelope Valley Christian Writers' Conference

www.avwriters.com

info@avwriters.com

July 11-15

Peninsula Writers Branch will host

Oregon Coast Children's

Writers Workshop

www.occbww.com

September 15

Central Coast Writing Contest

www.centralcoastwriters.com

Frozen Reflections

continued from page 23

ing cold gust of wind nearly knocked me off my feet. Winter had begun. The tears had increased to a steady flow down my face, as I embarked on the long walk home. I observed my hands, still shaking slightly. At that moment, another gust of wind struck me, just as a single, white snowflake fell from the sky and rested in the palm of my hand. I looked straight ahead and noticed a freshly painted sign that read, "Welcome to Celeste Falls-Where Blessings Are Created".

National League of American Pen Women
Santa Clara County Branch

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to: ShaRon Haugen 4156 Snowbank CT. San Jose 95135**

Info: haugends@sbcglobal.net 408-238-2340

Be sure to list ALL guests names!!!

Tickets to be picked up at the door!



Frozen Reflections

by Katherine Mibell Mibelli

I had probably driven past this part of Celeste Falls a million times. I know the scenery by heart. On the left, a sign towered over me that read, “Welcome to Celeste Fal-”. Clearly that sign was in need of a new paint job. On the right lay acres of lush trees with occasional patches of farmland. It’s pretty fair to say that I live in the middle of nowhere. Sighing, I glanced at myself in the side view mirror and flinched at the sweaty mess that stared back at me.

The abnormal heat of the late autumn air drifted through the car window as my mom sped through late afternoon traffic. Today wasn’t just a normal day where we were heading home directly after school. I was being driven to the hospital.

My high school ethics teacher had decided that instead of assigning us homework for the week, we would spend four days “being assets to our community,” as he put it. Basically, he was condemning us to what would seem like an eternity of community service. I didn’t even get to pick a service I wanted to volunteer for. Instead, I had to draw a small piece of paper out of the so called “Humanity Cap.” I was assigned the Terminal Ward at the Saint Noah’s Research Hospital.

The only time I’ve set foot in a hospital was back in the third grade when I broke my leg during gym class. I rolled my eyes at the thought of how boring the next three hours would be. What was I doing here anyway? Folding sheets?

Just as I began to drift off, we pulled up in front of a gray, cement building. A banner hung across the front of it that read, “Saint Noah’s Research Hospital,” in all sorts of obnoxious colors that had been scribbled in crayon by hyper five year olds. I glimpsed a rose garden beyond a brown picket fence off to the side of the building. I managed to drag myself out of the car and shuffled towards the entrance.

The head nurse was standing in the lobby, dressed in a cotton candy pink uniform, waiting for me. She seemed way too happy for someone her age.

“You must be Sophia!” she cried in her bubbly voice. I nodded with pure disinterest in whatever she was about to assign me. “You’ve been assigned the Terminal Ward, correct?” she continued. Again, I nodded and muttered, “Am I folding sheets today?” The head nurse released what I guess was supposed to be a laugh and replied, “Of course not! You’ll be keeping a very special patient of ours company.”

Great. Rather than folding sheets and counting pillows, I’ve been given the task of providing scintillating conversation, I grumbled to myself as the nurse ushered me down a long hallway filled with small children. Most of them glanced at me with wide-eyed curiosity. Some of them were in wheelchairs with oxygen tanks strapped on the side. I couldn’t help but feel a slight pang of remorse towards these small children who were probably almost never allowed outside.

I was led into a tiny room where a small, frail girl lay in a bed at the corner of the room. Pink paper snowflakes filled the walls of the room along with various finger paintings on an assortment of colored construction paper. The EKG beeped heartily as the nurse slipped to her side and gently shook her awake. “There’s someone here for you,” she whispered. “This is Sophia. She’ll be keeping you company for the next four days.” The girl’s eyes fluttered and opened as she turned to gaze at me with a faint smile.

She was extremely thin and pale. As she rose, I observed a knitted, light pink cap on her head that revealed the fact that she had endured intense treatments of chemotherapy. The nurse left while I continued to stand close to the door staring at this girl who appeared weak in stature. Yet her eyes gleamed brightly with life. “Hello, Sophia,” said the girl in a soft voice. “I’m Aaren.” When I didn’t answer she continued, “You probably aren’t used to seeing children like me. To be honest, I don’t see new faces very often.” I inched closer to her and sat in a small stool next to her bed. “What are you in for?” I asked in a voice that I realized sounded much harsher than I had intended it to be. Aaren let out a quiet laugh and answered, “I have leukemia. I’m monitored closely because my immune system is really weak. I don’t get

to go out very often anymore. The rose garden is my favorite place to go when the doctors allow me to go outside.” She turned to gaze out of her window, which overlooked the rose garden I had caught a glimpse of earlier.

I peered around the room and then it dawned on me to ask a question that had puzzled me from the start, “What’s up with the paper snowflakes?” I asked as I nodded toward the pink decorations. “Isn’t it a bit hot to be gearing up for the holidays?” Once again, Aaren let out a gentle laugh and smiled. “My mother used to call me her ‘petite flocon de neige’. That means little snowflake,” she answered. “I make one each day as a reminder of the gift of life and also of my mother. She’s far away in a happier place now, but these snowflakes make me feel closer to her. I can hear her voice every time I look at them.”

Aaren had barely finished talking when I felt something strangely unfamiliar. I could only describe it as some sort of pit in my stomach. Was this what guilt felt like? I looked away before Aaren could detect the fact that I might have actually started to feel bad for her. Before me sat a girl who wasn’t even allowed to go outside, and all I could do was sulk about being stuck here for the next three hours.

“What’s it like to go to school?” asked Aaren just as I barely managed to step through her door the following day. Her eyes blazed with curiosity as I approached her bedside. “Um, school’s...okay. I guess,” I answered slowly. Aaren continued to stare at me with eyes that pierced right through me. “You’re quite lucky, you know,” she whispered with admiration. “I’ve always wondered what it’s like to go to school with children my age. You must feel so blessed to be able to see your friends every day.” I snorted, “Are you kidding me? Imagine being cooped up in a hot classroom for an hour with thirty rowdy kids while pretending to listen to a sweaty bald guy attempt to lecture us on the Constitution. On top of that, just think of all the teenage drama I have to deal with. Seriously, it’s nothing special.” Aaren pursed her lips and gazed out the window. She remained silent for a few moments. “Would you believe me if I told you I feel blessed that you’re here?” she asked.

Aaren’s question puzzled me. I meant something to her? I mean, I’m used to my friends expressing their thanks, but that was only when I offered to actually do something for them. What had I done for her? For the second day in a row I had forced myself out of a tiny car and dragged myself into her room. What was so special about that? Just as I started to put together an answer in my head, she turned back to look at me with a wide smile and said with excitement, “Let’s make paper snowflakes!”

We probably made every shape known to man. Aaren beamed at the myriad of pink snowflakes sprawled out across her bed while I massaged my sore hands from two straight hours of folding and cutting. I glanced toward the door and noticed a few of the children from down the hallway peering curiously through the tiny window at us.

“Why don’t you ever invite some of the other kids in the ward to your room?” I asked. The smile on Aaren’s face faded and was replaced with an expression of anguish. “I’m not allowed to see them,” she answered. “The doctors said they may endanger my health. Apparently I’m in critical condition.” “Then why am I allowed to see you if you’re in such a fragile state?” I inquired. A smile played at the corners of Aaren’s lips as she turned to stare out the window once more and replied, “Blessings can’t be explained.”

I don’t know why I felt so energetic the next day. Maybe it was because the weather had started to cool off from the irregular autumn heat. I was already rushing out of the car before it came to a complete stop. I hummed a soft tune to myself during the elevator ride to the sixth floor.

“You’re early,” Aaren murmured as I entered her room. I glanced up at the clock that hung over the door. Sure enough, I had arrived twenty minutes early. “I got out of school early today, I guess,” I answered as I sat on the stool next to her bed.

Something seemed different about Aaren today. Her eyes still gleamed with vibrance, yet her face had taken on a sickly grayish-white color. As she gazed down at the rose garden, I knew something was definitely wrong. Her

countenance seemed more solemn and distant than usual. It was as if she were anticipating something unknown to me. I gave her a small smile. “How are you feeling?” I asked. She leaned closer to me and put her hand on mine. “Better,” she whispered with a faint smile.

“When was the last time you visited the rose garden?” I asked. Aaren sighed and closed her eyes. After a few moments of silence she answered, “A year and a half.” Usually I would have answered by saying, “Oh, sorry” and I would have waited for her to say something else. But today I remained silent. I gazed at Aaren as she laid there with her eyes still closed. For the first time, I felt compelled to reach out and gently embrace her. Hasn’t this girl been through enough? I asked myself as I continued to observe her peacefully resting body. I glanced down at her hand, which was still on mine. I flinched as I realized it felt colder than usual in the warmth of mine. Returning my gaze to her face, I pressed her hand lightly.

Aaren smiled as she felt the slight warmth of the afternoon sun touch her face. Slowly opening her eyes, she shifted her body so that she was facing me. “Do you know why I love this room?” she whispered to me. I shook my head. “It’s because of that window,” she continued, gesturing towards the window overlooking the rose garden. “It’s all that I have left of the world beyond this place.” Sharp pangs of sadness stabbed at my gut as I looked down at Aaren, who seemed to grow weaker with every passing minute. Everything about her body seemed to be deteriorating except one thing: her smile.

“Are you happy?” asked Aaren. I looked away as I searched for an answer. She always seemed to have a higher sense of knowledge that I could never understand. How could she find any reason to smile and seek pleasure within the four corners of her room when all odds were against her? Look at me, I thought to myself, I have the world at my feet, and yet I still complain about how gross cafeteria food is. Guilt began to creep through my veins until I felt Aaren squeeze my hand. I looked back at her and sighed. “I don’t know. I guess I am...sometimes,” I answered. “Are you happy?” She smiled at me and turned to look at the pink

snowflakes we had made, which now hung on the wall across from us. “I am now,” she responded.

The following day I made up my mind to arrive at the hospital even earlier than the previous day. Instead of dashing through the sliding doors, I turned and sauntered toward the rose garden. I pushed past the picket fence and looked around. Infinite rows of roses in various sizes and colors stretched as far back as my eyes could see. I headed straight toward a column of pink roses and plucked four of the fullest ones I could find. I wrapped them in a paper towel I had stored in my pocket and headed to the sixth floor.

The hallway seemed too quiet today. I saw a few children here and there pausing to glance at me, as usual, but I shivered at the eeriness. Brushing off this feeling, I approached Aaren’s door, pink roses in hand. Gingerly twisting the knob, I stepped inside, expecting to hear her soft voice asking me another random- but refreshing question.

Silence greeted me this time. I looked around the room. The pink snowflakes and drawings had been taken down and piled on a small table in a corner of the room. Her bed had been neatly folded. I felt a hand on my shoulder and whirled around to see the head nurse standing there. “Where’s Aaren?” I whispered. A pained expression seemed to wash over the nurse’s face as she gave me a solemn stare and looked past me. Then I knew. Aaren was gone.

Trembling, I walked over to the bed and placed the roses across the sheets. I paused to look for a final time out the window at the rose garden before I shifted past the nurse and made my way down the hallway. Everything was a blur. Children’s voices buzzed through my ears in discordant rhythms.

Somehow I reached the ground floor and made up my mind that I would walk home. I walked past the front desk and froze, bewildered, when I glimpsed my reflection in the sliding doors before me. My face appeared moist. Astonished, I reached up and touched my face. I felt the warmth of a fresh set of tears that had begun to trickle from my eyes.

The doors slid open, and a freeze-

continued on page 20