

IN FOCUS

ELECTRONIC EDITION

NOVEMBER 2006

VOLUME 1, No. 3

NOVEMBER SPEAKER

*Doug Wood, a
Master of Improv,
Actor, Instructor*

WHAT effect can improv have on your writing? What is improv, anyway? That's what Douglas Wood is going to tell us at the November meeting of the CWC/WV meeting at Villa Katzenberg at the MPTV.

Doug boasts a varied experience in the entertainment industry as a studio writer, actor, instructor and consultant. He now divides his time between writing for television and film and heading development and executive producing for the Animation Lab, a feature animation studio to be built in Israel.

Wood created National Geographic's first animated children's TV series, *Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies*, now being produced. He also created and wrote for the Playhouse Disney series, *Little Einstein*, currently aired on the Disney Channel. His other TV writing credits include the upcoming Playhouse Disney series, *Handy Manny* and *Johnny and the Sprites*, and the Discovery Kids series, *ToddWorld*.

MOST recently, Doug was the story editor on the third season of the popular Playhouse Disney series, *Jojo's Circus*, for which he has written numerous episodes and prime time specials. He also created the live stage show version for Disney's California Adventure. He developed the concept for, and oversaw, 18 interstitial segments for Playhouse Disney featuring Jojo leading interactive yoga positions for children.

Doug wrote the DVD animated features, *Choose Your Own Adventure (The Abominable Snowman)* and the best-selling Warner Bros. mystery, *Scoobie-Doo and the Monster of Mexico*. Colleen Camp Productions recently took an option on his screenplay, *As Is*, a comedy-

Certificates for Charter Members Issued in Oct.

by Diana Johnson

LAST month, I had the pleasure of handing out Charter Member Certificates designed by our editor, Bill Hitchins, to everyone in the audience who had joined our new West Valley Branch by October 1. If you didn't get yours, come to our November meeting and pick it up.

One of your Board's major desires is that we meet and greet our MPTV hosts, getting acquainted and letting them know how grateful we are for the hospitality of the Motion Picture/Television Fund Home. And, of course, we warmly welcome all guests and visitors. In trying to personalize those with whom we may not yet be acquainted, I asked CWC members who were willing, to interview a few residents and guests during the refreshment break. Here is what they learned.

CWC member, Erica Stux interviewed MPTV Resident, Betty Gay. A former CPA, Betty was married to a Paramount prop maker. He worked on *The Ten Commandments*, among others. Betty loves living on the lovely MPTV campus, filled with interesting people and an abundance of activities. Betty's writing credits include the MPTV newsletter, *The Gazette*, as well as poetry.

Our Bill Sorrells interviewed MPTV Residents Howard Flynn and Nancy Renard. A former radio personality, Howard worked with Dick Whittinghill on KMPC, delivering the news. He also did commercials and voice-overs. At 91, he is still active, studying poetry with last month's speaker Shelley Berman. Nancy, a former costumer in motion pictures was head costumer for the long-running TV program, *Dallas*. She's written a few poems, as yet unpublished.

Publicity Chair, Kathy Highcove, interviewed guest Bill Brier. He's an



enthusiastic retiree, ready to write action/drama fiction. He got turned on to writing at a CWC East of Eden Conference. With encouragement from CWC/SFVB President Carol

Wood, Bill is now ready to go—chapter by chapter—with a critique group.

Kayle Birnberg-Goldstein interviewed guest, Jon Sutherland, who teaches at the MPTV home. Jon has been published in 16 magazines and has three books. One has 32 different stories with beautiful pictures. (Another, *Hey D.A.D. Thanks!* was Jon's project when he was my student at a publishing seminar. It's a delightful book, and one that I often refer to when giving talks on writing memoirs.) Jon journals and writes every single day, five days a week. His advice, "Find a mentor to help you with your writing." (Perhaps someone at CWC/WV?)

We hope to see lots of MPTV residents and guests at our meetings in the future. If any CWC members would be willing to interview them on November 4, please get a 3x5 card from me before the meeting and talk to them during the break.

Until then, keep writing. 🖋

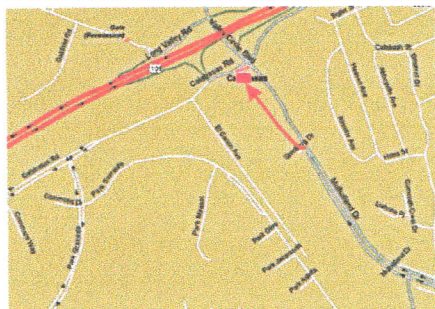
COMING EVENTS

November 4. Meeting. Speaker, Douglas Wood.

December 2. Meeting. Speaker, Tatjana.

January 6, 2007. Meeting. Speaker to be announced.

February 3. Meeting.



WHERE TO FIND US

From the 101 (Ventura) Freeway exit on Mulholland Drive south. Continue to Steven Spielberg Drive (on the west opposite the shopping center). Follow the drive as it turns right then continue to the MPTF parking lot. Go on to the other side of the parking lot and exit on the small road. This leads to the residential area. Pass the little traffic circle with a tree and park your car. (Be careful not to take an assigned spot as you may be towed away.) Go through the lobby of the residential building opposite the tree (east of the road) and exit the other side. Turn left and Villa Katzenberg is on your right.

MEETINGS

The California Writers' Club/West Valley meets on the first Saturday of each month at the Motion Picture and Television Fund building (Villa Katzenberg), 23388 Mulholland Drive, Woodland Hills, CA 91364-2733

NEXT MEETING

Saturday, November 4, 2006
at 1:00 p.m.

Officers and Board of Directors

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Writing: Western Style

by Katherine Highcove

THE Gunslinger stalked slowly down dusty Main Street. His black hat shaded wary blue eyes as he stared intently at the swinging doors of the saloon. Dusty black boots continued at a predator's pace. Suddenly he stopped dead in the road, spun around and shouted at his parents in...possibly...Swedish:

"Keep filming!" He whipped out his shiny toy pistols. "POW! POW! Take that!" he yelled at a shadow opponent.

The Gunslinger's daddy chuckled as his mother aimed the video camera. The miniature cowboy posed with drawn guns, then ran back to his parents. All three returned to the tour bus parked on the edge of the chaparral. Mission accomplished. Dream fulfilled. A scenario inspired by the Old West, described and visualized by Hollywood's talented screen writers, found the camera lens once more in 2006.

Paramount Ranch, in the far western hills of the San Fernando Valley, has long served the cinema dream-factories. Paramount Studios bought the spread in 1927 to provide space for the earliest Western movies. In the 1950's television companies revived the Western dramas and the Movie Ranch inspired a new generation of writers. In 1980 the National Park Service bought the ranch, rebuilt and spiffed up the Western town sets and welcomed a third generation of film production companies to Main Street.



MANY visitors travel to the park to hike in the hills of Paramount Ranch. Hikers follow horse and coyote trails that thread through the wild grass and chaparral. Some visitors picnic by a stream, or tour the recreated Western town. In the spring, wild yellow poppies and purple lupine attract bees and nature photographers. All year long horse owners exercise their mounts on soft dirt paths.

Many stories wait to be found in the rough country of the golden chaparral. Indeed, the Paramount Ranch has been an inspiring workplace for cinema's top script writers for eighty years. The movie ranch is truly an American treasure. Ask any young Gunslinger. 🍷

You're a Writer? Then Please Write

In Focus is always looking for articles and news from members. So far, only a handful of our members have submitted anything for publication. Please remember that this is the California Writers' Club. You are a writer. So do what you do best and write for *In Focus*.

There are a few don'ts, however. Do not repeat our meeting date and time in your article. These are published elsewhere in every issue. Nor mention the speaker unless you are doing the write-up about him or have a special reason to do this. Same reason. We publish that elsewhere.

Submission does not guarantee publication and the editor reserves the right to edit articles for content, length, spelling, etc. But he will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the submission. He understands pride of authorship.

Submissions should be kept as short as possible due to limited space. It is extremely rare that *In Focus* can use a thousand-word article. Generally speaking, the maximum length should be about 250 words. If you have any doubts, please contact the editor by telephone or e-mail (see Column 1, bottom).

The deadline for submissions is normally the 15th of each month but, depending on circumstances, exceptions can *sometimes* be made. Please contact the editor if you need an extension or feel you have a long article he should consider.

And one final point... Please type if at all possible. It makes it a lot easier on the editor.

Keep your contributions coming!



LIMERICK CORNER

Your asked for a Limerick Corner but only one person turned in any at all. Many thanks to Ken Wilkins for these two. C'mon y'all, get writing.

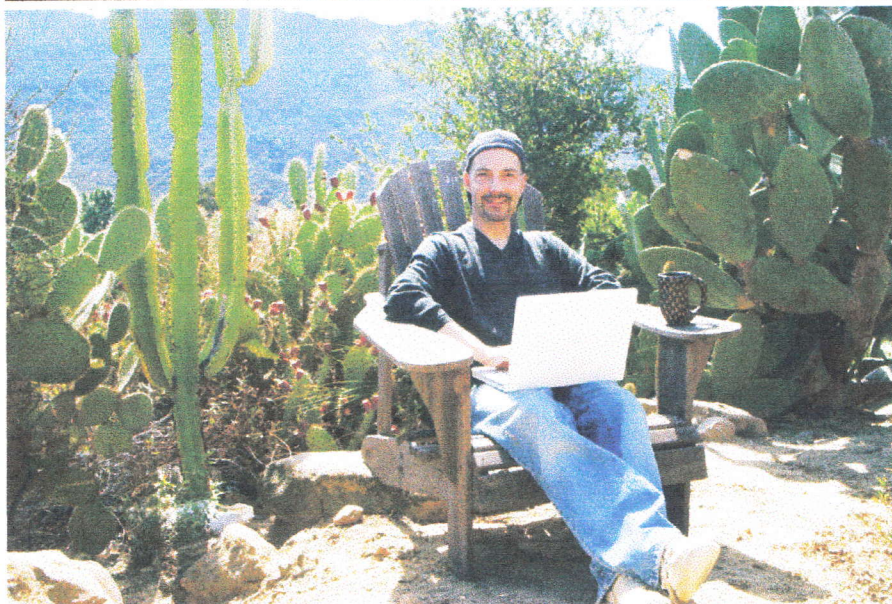
Road Rage

*Freeway driving can cause ugly scenes
Turning peaceful folk into raging fiends.
So, best not to linger
If given the finger
Unless in a tank driven by Marines.*

Messy Mummy

*There once was a very old mummy
Who oft craved food for his tummy
So, he'd sneak out at night
And return with a bite
Which left his sarcophagus crummy.*

KEN WILKINS



Doug Wood at his laptop computer.

NOVEMBER SPEAKER (from Page 1)

Doug Wood, Improv Master

drama set in the funky subculture of garage sales and flea markets with actors Burt Reynolds and Kevin Connolly.

Wood was vice president of Production and Creative Affairs at Universal Studios, Turner Pictures and Warner Bros. He oversaw the development of films including the Annie-Award-winning *Iron Giant*, *Cats Don't Dance* and *Osmosis Jones* with Bill Murray and Chris Rock.

He began his executive career at Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment as Director of Animation. He developed the feature films, *We're Back!* and *Balto* as well as the Emmy-winning Warner Bros. series, *Tiny Toon Adventures* and *Animaniacs*. He was also story editor for *Animaniacs*.

HE was a mentor for aspiring screenwriters through the Chesterfield Screenwriting Project and currently offers online script consulting services (www.WriteWoodScreenplayConsulting.com).

Earlier, Doug was an actor and writer. He wrote and performed original material for Chicago's famous comedy troupe, Second City. This led to seven years as one half of the comedy duo, the Fine Line. They performed comedy sketches across the United States at clubs such as The Improv, The Comedy Store and the Playboy Clubs, as well as two appearances on the *Merv Griffin Show*. This earned him a position as staff writer on NBC's *Motown Revue with Smokey Robinson*.

Wood was nominated for an Emmy Award

and received two outstanding actor awards.

He is founder of *On the Job Improv* (www.OnTheJobImprov.com) in which he conducts customized improvisation workshops for corporations seeking to increase productivity of their employees. The innovative theater games are designed to maximize creativity, improve communication and bring humor to the workplace.

Doug has also conducted specialized improvisation workshops for animators and artists at the California Institute of Arts and the Bezalal Academy of Arts and Design at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has also directed courses for professional actors in a writing program sponsored by CBS, for aspiring actors at AIA Actors Studio and for veteran actors at the Motion Picture and Television Fund (MPTV). ■

CORRECTION

In the October issue of *In Focus*, the editor's note below Elaine Shevin's story, *A Little Girl*, mentioned some books in the process of being published by her. The name of one book was incorrect and the order of publication wrong. The first book is *Green Passion*, not *Dream Passion*. The other books are, *White Swan Mystery – Winds of Time* and later, the sequel, *The Return of White Swan*. These will be followed by *Finding Charles* and *I Believe in You*.

Getting to Know You Through Open Mike

By Leslie Kaplan

It occurred to me that Open Mike is an excellent venue for new and old members to get to know each other better. A short bio about who you are and why and how you became a writer will bring together our members on an interrelated and more personal level. Then, if you read an excerpt of your writing, the interest in you as well as your writing will be elevated. If you just want to – tell, that's fine. If you just want to read or show, that's okay too. But to do both, you must accomplish this in five minutes, so time yourself ahead of time. That way others can have equal time.

Make us laugh...; make us cry. Let us get to know you. Personally, I look forward to Open Mike. It's my favorite part of our monthly meetings. See and hear you there.

Now and Then I Go to the Movies

*Stereos blare forth
in a waterfall of sound that drowns my ears.
I sit in dark chambers,
popcorn vapors and sticky aisles
my only reminders of childhood.
Coming attractions,
dripping with violence,
cut into my consciousness.
And ghosts of the past
are only misty and silent creatures
floating in forgotten corners,
and robbed of their popularity.
The giant screen is inescapable,
demanding my full attention.
I cannot hide from the ugliness
or raw emotions magnified
to death-defying dimensions.
That's entertainment!*

*Once the theater was a palace,
its dimly lit aisles revealing
the warm patina of gold filigree.
And giant chandeliers
sent dancing lights all around us...
then as their crystal elegance slowly dimmed,
the room faded into night.
My heart began to quicken,
while the great crimson drapes slowly parted.
Very soon unforgettable melodies and vivid
colors became my background of reality...
and revealed dreams I could become a part of
as the MGM musical began.*

LILLIAN RODICH

November Is a Month of Few But Important Holidays

by Art Yuviler

THIRTY days hath November," a month of few, but important holidays. Puskin didn't like November when purple shadows grow long and nights are longer still. "And mists above the meadows brooded, A tedious season they await, Who hears November at the Gate." Scott wrote "November's sky is chill and drear, November's leaf is red and sear," and Hooker agreed.

*No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,
No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds,
November.*

Only the poet John Freeman found beauty in the month,

*...no skies lovelier, the clouds are deep
Into their grey the subtle spies
Of color creep.*

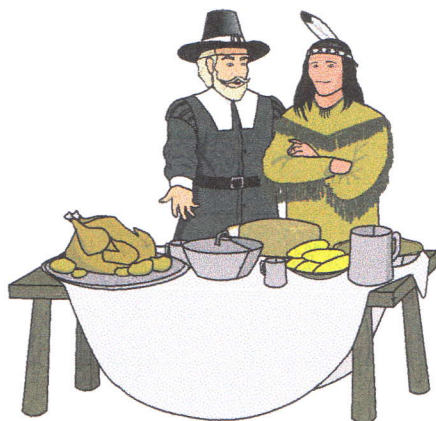
But here in California trees have yet to become golden, vines to glow. November is a gentle, milder month that heralds the Christmas of December and January's New Year.

We meet once more on Saturday, the 4th. ELECTION DAY, the 7th, was established by Congress in 1865 as the first Tuesday of November. Once a time for brass bands, parades and shouting, it has become, for some unknown reason, somehow less important for most people. Only 64% of the 15.5 million registered voters in California voted in the PRESIDENTIAL election in 2004 while only 74% of the adults are even registered!! To many of us, the trend is dismal and bodes ill both for our nation and our way of life. Whatever other tasks you may have that day, PLEASE, PLEASE VOTE ON THIS ELECTION DAY. The nation may depend upon it!!

November 11th is Veteran's Day, set aside to honor servicemen who fought to keep elections free. Originally, called Armistice Day, it was set to coincide with WWI Armistice Day on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918. A general holiday in 1926, it became a national holiday

in 1938 and on June 1, 1954, nine years after the defeat of Japan on Sept 3, 1945, the name was changed to Veteran's Day to honor all veterans. In 1968, Congress tried to make it the fourth Monday in October but changed it changed back in 1978. Since then, conflicts in Korea, Vietnam and, now, Iraq and Afghanistan have swelled the list of casualties and is more important than ever that we honor both the dead and the living.

November 23 – Thanksgiving Day – is to give thanks for living in America at a time of plenty, a day when we slaughter turkeys and



pigs.

The Pilgrims left England on September 16, 1620, aboard the *Mayflower*, headed towards the gentle lands of Virginia. A slight, but terrible miscalculation, sent them instead to Provincetown and later, Plymouth, Massachusetts on a blistery November 21 (or cold December 21 – records are unclear) in 1620. The Pilgrims spent that first winter aboard ship where short rations and sickness (smallpox) killed 47 of the original 120 passengers. In March of 1621, an Indian, born Tisquantum among the Patuxet tribe but

called Squanto, greeted the haggard settlers in English. Without him, the remaining Pilgrims would likely have died and England would have another lost colony.

Squanto's history reads like a novel. Kidnapped as a child by Captain George Weymouth in 1605, he worked in England for nine years before returning home on John Smith's 1613 voyage. Once there he was again kidnaped by Thomas Hunt, one of John Smith's men, and sent to the slave markets in Malaga, Spain. Instructed in Christianity by the Spanish monk who purchased him, he returned to the New World in 1618 only to find his tribe wiped out by smallpox.

Nonetheless, that March Squanto, as interpreter, made peace between the Pilgrims and Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag tribe, and taught the Pilgrims how to fertilize the land with herring, and helped them plant corn, peas, barley and pumpkins. The first Thanksgiving took place that fall over three days sometime, between Sept 21 and November 9, after crops were harvested, cod, bass and wild turkey were prepared and five deer were brought in by order of Massasoit.

Thanksgiving became a national holiday celebrated on the final Thursday on November 3, 1863, by edict of an Abraham Lincoln buoyed by Union gains in the Civil War. Franklin Roosevelt tried to change the date to the next-to-the-last Thursday in November, but in 1941 Congress decided to split the difference and make it the fourth Thursday in November. So it has remained.

Have a good November! Happy Turkey all. ■

