

IN FOCUS

ELECTRONIC EDITION

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March Speaker Perret Had Club in Guffaws

By Kathy Highcove

MY THIRD GRADE teacher wasn't a fan," confided Gene Perret to our March 3rd CWC/WV audience. "I was the class clown and I've never stopped crackin' jokes. I'm an expert."

Our guest speaker proved his point as he recounted his career as a professional joke writer. Gene sprinkled one-liners throughout his speech: "You know that when Bush was in Brazil, an aide informed him that there were twelve Brazilians demonstrating outside. Bush said, 'How much is a Brazilian?'"

Our speaker's humorous interjections effortlessly coaxed smiles and guffaws from our assembled membership and guests in the Katzenberg Room.

Gene started his career with a few one-liners for Bob Hope and went on to work as a regular gag man for Hope, Phyllis Diller, Carol Burnett and many others. The 1969 Academy Awards used ten of Gene's lines for the Oscar presenters. His funnyman rep went beyond Hollywood: Gene contributed short jokes for the use of President Ronald Reagan speech writers.

Young Gene was employed by GE in 1959, but he had a strong interest in the humor trade and wanted to learn how to make people laugh. Gene's first gigs were at roasts, private banquets, and company parties. "I was the emcee and I had to get up there and talk, and get laughs! If I did my job, applause! If I bombed, tomatoes! I tried to avoid the veggies!" He also learned to "insult without insulting the guest of honor."

His rep for good yuks spread from the informal emcee settings through the Hollywood grapevine. Bob Hope eventually got the word about Funnyman Gene Perrett. The famous comedian called and asked for

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WV Members to Speak at Next Two Meetings

Board Split over Controversial Decision

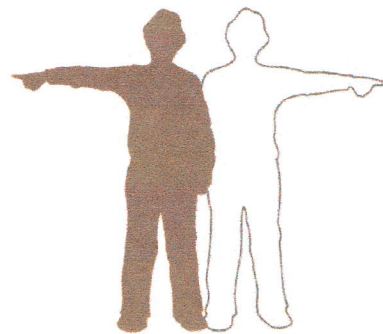
By Diana Johnson

OUR TERRIFIC SECRETARY, Ann Stalcup will be the Featured Speaker for our April meeting, and I will be the Featured Speaker for May. Some of our members from the San Fernando Valley Branch of CWC may wonder how this could be, since that branch made it policy not to allow members of their own branch to take that assignment.

This exclusionary policy is not something handed down from our Central Board. As far as I know, most other branches allow their members to be speakers, when they have something of general interest to say, and experience in saying it. And, the San Fernando Valley Branch used to have our own members as Featured Speakers every once in a while in the 1990's when we first joined CWC.

Your present board, on a split decision, decided to assign us to speak in April and May this year, and leave it to the next board to establish a policy as to whether this is a good idea or not. Ann and I give lectures frequently to groups of all sizes and with many different interests, and we appreciate the opportunity to speak on topics that are particularly focused on writing and writers. As you hear us, please be evaluating whether or not you think having member-speakers is a good idea. And then let next year's board know what you think, as they wrestle with the pros and cons of this issue for our West Valley Branch Policies and Procedures.

If you'd like to be considered as a Featured Speaker in the future, you might inform our Program Co-Chairs. Let them know the



topic(s) you speak on that would be of general interest to our writing members. Provide them with a résumé of your speaking experiences (to whom, where and when) and recommendations from those who have heard you. Naturally, the club membership probably doesn't want to hear you talk on "This is my book. I wrote it. Please buy it." But, if you have personally discovered people, places, and techniques that would be educational, as well as interesting for CWC members, you might let the new board know about it. This might help them as they evaluate whether or not to have members as Featured Speakers in the years to come.

This is your club. We need you to run for an office, serve on the Board of Directors, or offer to take on some other job for our branch. And we need you to talk to the board members. Have an opinion on the policies of

COMING EVENTS

April 7. Speaker, Ann Stalcup.

May 5. Speaker, Diana Johnson.

June 2. Branch elections. No speaker.

July 7. Speaker to be announced.



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 MPTV parking lot. Continue to the other side of the parking lot and exit on the small road. Pass the little traffic circle next to the apartment building and park your car. Be careful not to take an assigned space as you may be towed away. Go through the lobby of the apartment building next to the tree and exit on 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 complex (Villa Katzenberg), 23388 Mulholland Drive, Woodland Hills, CA 91364-2733.

NEXT MEETING

Saturday, April 7, 2007
at 1:00 p.m.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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MAILING ADDRESS

c/o Diana Johnson
16417 Superior Street
North Hills, CA 91343-1836

CONTACT

President (818) 894-7903
Newsletter Editor (818) 715-0510
Editor's Cell (emergencies) . . (818) 203-8911
Editor's E-mail whitchins@socal.rr.com

Review and Refresh

By David Wetterberg

The Comma — Part One

Note: There is no rule that says you insert a comma somewhere in a sentence because of a "feeling" a comma belongs there. And there is no rule that says you insert a comma in a sentence because you can feel some kind of a "hesitation." And there is no rule that says that when you're in doubt, "just play it safe" and stick a comma in. (On the contrary, whenever you're in doubt, leave the comma out. You'll be right more times than you're wrong!)

With the Appositive

An appositive is a word or a word-group placed after a noun that interrupts the flow of the sentence in order to identify or supplement the noun. Commas are necessary to set off an appositive.

I haven't seen Tillie and Barbara, two of my closest college chums, since 1977.

In some cases commas are not necessary when the proper name comes second, the relationship is a close one, and the words are few.

My brother Bob and my sister Sue are in the Air Force.

Within the Compound Sentence

The conjunctions *and*, *but*, *or*, *for*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet* are the only words that can join sentences together, and when they do, a comma is necessary before the conjunction.

The car raced off after the shooting, but a

bystander got the license number.

If the compound sentence is a short one, however, the comma may be left out.

The dog barked and Melissa screamed.

Sometimes the pronoun *it* is confused with a conjunction, resulting in a run-on sentence.

(incorrect) *He looked down at the map, it was drenched.*

(correct) *He looked down at the map, but it was drenched.*

(correct) *He looked down at the map. It was drenched.*

(correct) *He looked down at the map; it was drenched.*

With Items in a Series

When only two items are in a series, a comma is not necessary.

The children were afraid of the darkness and the wind.

In the good old days when there were three or more items in a series, commas were necessary to separate each item.

I ate a banana, a handful of grapes, and a sweet roll.

This rule has changed. Now it is correct to omit the last comma.

I ate a banana, a handful of grapes and a doughnut.

Next month—Part Two: Other uses of the comma.

What Can You Count On Anymore?

by Edward Louis Braun

*My physics professor said:
"Though everything changes
The laws of physics do not".
The force of gravity
Is always the same.
An object striking another
Will rebound with a force
Determined by
The hardness of each.
Time moves in an even flow*

*Well I'm here to tell
Things have gone to hell.
As I grow older
Gravity
Gets bolder,
Pulling pills, peanuts,
Pens and pastries
Out of my hand,
To land on the floor.
And that's not all.*

*Filled with soft tissues,
It should come to rest.
Not so.
Miraculously, it bounces
Off other soft tissues,
Flies out of the bag
And falls on the floor,
As if it were a rubber ball
Bouncing off a hard wall.*

*And when you drop a tissue
Directly above the trash.
Air currents
Come out of nowhere,
Carrying it sideways
To the floor.*

*There's more that's eerie
To make you really leery:
Time is supposed to go
In a linear flow*

*But I've noticed it's not so.
And I'm getting sore
At how it's accelerating
More and more.*

*Were Einstein and Feynman
Aware of these anomalies,
But preoccupied
With unified field theories?
Or did they know but
Didn't want to alarm us?*

*Now I'm not here to fuss
But my birthday's
Soon due,
And I can tell you
That's quite a blow,
Since the last one
Was a lot less
Than a year ago.*

From Page 1

March Speaker Perret Makes Club Laugh

five sample jokes. Gene soon had the thrill of a lifetime when he heard Hope deftly deliver three of his lines with the finesse of the expert comedian.

Finesse? Oh, definitely. Not just anyone can tell a good joke and do justice to a good joke writer, Perret assured us. A comedian needs timing to set up the punch line. Good humor is not easy to write or to perform.

"The comic has to hear and emphasize the keyword to make a line go over with the listeners," Gene explained. Professional comedians are just that: pros. And they hire professional writers like Gene Perret who can tailor a joke for their boss like a tailor fashions a custom-made suit.

What does he think of today's talent? He believes that there are a few promising men and women working the clubs and in the film industry today, but Gene has noted that modern humor often gets stuck in the aggressive/negative modes: "They like humor that hurts, or make jokes about somebody getting hurt. They tell us they want to go out and hit somebody."

Violent scenarios have never been the Gene Perret approach to humor. He treasures his memory of The Round Table of comedians, who met regularly in Hollywood restaurants to compare notes, network and practice their new material on their buddies. The gentlemen and ladies of humor sharpened their wits and writing skills as they relaxed and laughed together.

What would be Gene's main message to today's aspiring comedians? "Help people to forget their troubles. Don't center on the negative. Show your audience its okay to see the absurdity in life, and laugh at it. Laughter heals."

Genial Gene Perret left us smiling. Good job: no tomatoes. 🍅

Editor's Note

Because of space and time limitations, several articles submitted for, and worthy of, publication have been omitted this month. These will be published in future editions. One article, a tribute to Lily Pons, submitted by Edward L. Braun, was particularly noted but was too long for the current issue; the Editor did not feel cutting it would do it justice, so it is held over.

However, don't be discouraged. Keep submitting. Hopefully, my computer problems will be over next month.

West Valley's Own Ann Stalcup is April's Speaker

by David Wetterberg

WEST VALLEY is proud to present member Ann Stalcup as our April speaker. Ann is an unassuming, modest lady. To speak with her you'd never know that she is one of our branch's most accomplished, most successful, and most published writers. She has written ten books (so far) and numerous magazine articles. At our meeting Ann will focus her talk on Los Angeles writer and illustrator Leo Politi and the process of writing a biography about his work and life.

Her book *On the Home Front: Growing Up in Wartime England*, based on her own experiences, was chosen by the Children's Book Council as a Notable Children's Book in the Field of Social Studies. It was selected

as an Outstanding Nonfiction Choice by the National Council of Teachers of English. Her biography *Leo Politi: Artist of the Angels* is having a successful run on the bookstands now. She is a regular in *Faces* magazine, and her articles have appeared in many other magazines ranging from *Canadian Horseman* to *National Geographic Kids*.

Ann grew up in Lydney, a small English town near the border of South Wales and taught primary-age children in England and Canada. During a year of world-travel, she met and married an American junior high school teacher and settled in Southern California. Retired from a forty-one year teaching career, Ann now resides in Malibu, substitute-teaches, and writes and writes and writes. 🍷

MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Erica Stux will be autographing her new book *Who, Me? Paranoid? Humor Humor Everywhere* at the Festival of Books on Sunday, April 29, from 2 to 3 pm. Look for her at the Authors' Coalition Booth 610.

Nonie Perlas was a member of SFVB and attended and planned on joining WV but had a heart attack, and moved, suddenly to Las Vegas to be with her son. She reports her son, Raphael says, "Vegas has re-vitalized you Mom!" — and that it has!

ART YUWILER — from Page 4

hunt for Easter eggs and play with real bunnies and small furry chicks which later turn into hens. And on Easter day, adults wear new hats, suits and dresses, and parade along the streets in their Easter finery.

On April 14, 1865 that great emancipator Abraham Lincoln died of wounds at the hands of his assassin, John Wilkes Booth.

On April 18, 1775, Paul Revere began the famous ride culminating in our American Revolution and wresting the country from King George

A day later, on April 19, 1775 a ragged band of Minutemen engaged the mighty British army at Meriam's Corner in Concord.

April 21, 753 BC marks the birthday of the Roman Empire that once ruled the world.

And on April 23, 1616, great Shakespeare died. "A tale told by idiots, signifying nothing." 🍷

March Board Meeting

At the West Valley Board meeting, the treasurer's report showed a beginning balance of \$1,126.03 and an ending balance of \$1,055.66. Expenses included supplies and CWC Central Board dues. It was suggested that it would be appropriate to make another donation to the MPTV Fund at the June meeting.

The branch now has 55 members. Forty-four people attended the March 3 meeting. It was suggested that to promote more conversation between members, colored dots be added to each person's name tag indicating the type(s) of writing each member does.

Editor Bill Hitchins has received positive comments on the newsletter, however he finds that he is not receiving sufficient articles, poems or news items. Anyone wishing to submit something for publication should send it directly to Bill. There was a request that Dave Wetterberg's articles on grammar should become part of the newsletter since they were enjoyed and appreciated in the San Fernando Branch newsletter in previous years.

At the April 7 meeting, members will give a three-minute presentation about themselves and their writing. The presentations will replace the usual five-minute Open Mike spots. In future, Open Mike presenters may either talk about themselves and their writing, or, as is done currently, they may read some of their work.

ARTHUR YUWILER'S COLUMN

April — the Cruellest Month



ELLIOT wrote "April is the cruellest month, breeding lilacs out of dead land..." But April means spring and is not cruel so much as wet.

Romans called the month "Aprilis" but the closest Latin word is Aprillins, or "open." Perhaps it refers to bursting buds. More likely it comes from the earlier Greek Apro, short for Aphrodite, the goddess of Love.

Mother Goose says that "March winds and April showers bring forth the May flowers." Agnes Mitchell tells of the "pattering of an April shower that makes the daises grow" and Henry Kirke White wrote:

What is this passing scene?

A peevish April Day!

A little sun, a little rain,

And then night sweeps across the plain...

John Moreland pictured "Swords of jade on a thousand hills" as a kind of resurrection while Peel compared April to marriage noting that "April, wet by kind, for love is full of showers."

Monumental things happened in April.

APRIL 1 for unknown reasons is April Fools Day. Usually attributed to sending on pointless errands those not accepting the Gregorian calendar, the explanation is not convincing. It neither explains the spread of the holiday nor its prevalence in countries before acceptance of that calendar. Another theory is that Persipina, daughter of Ceres, was abducted by Pluto, god of the dead. Persipina's voice haunted Ceres as it echoed from endless underground caverns. Presumably this accounts for fruitless searches, but why on April 1? Then too, the mad doings on April 1 may emulate the lunatic-like antics of those avoiding King John in the legendary city of Gotham, in Nottinghamshire. But whatever the true story, one should avoid pointless errands on April 1.

April 2, 1861 marks our tragic civil war started when rebel forces fired on Fort Sumpter. This bloody war tore our nation apart and resulted in 204,000 soldiers killed and 414,000 wounded. The war ended on April 9, 1865 with Lee's surrender.

On April 3, 5767, the 17th day of Nissan in the Jewish calendar, Passover starts and lasts for 8 days. In Exodus, Joseph is sold by his brothers to herders going to Egypt. But in Egypt, Joseph divines the meaning of a Pharaoh's dream and with him stores grain and avoids famine. Driven by that famine, first Joseph's brothers, then Joseph's father comes to Egypt with his family of seventy. The seventy grew and after 400 years, a new pharaoh, Ramses II (1279-1213 BC), second son of Seti I, presumably ordered the Jews into slavery. Moses, together with his brother, Aaron, begged Ramses to let his people go to sacrifice to their God but pharaoh refused. So, with God's help, Moses brought down upon the Egyptians the nine plagues of Blood, Frogs, Lice, Flies, Boils, Hail, Locust, and Darkness. And after each one the pharaoh acquiesced, only to change his mind. When the Angel of Death killed all of the Egyptian firstborn but passed over the houses of the Jews, pharaoh agreed to "Let the people go." Once again, however, pharaoh changed his mind and pursued the Jews with his army. But God, as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, had Moses split the Red Sea (or more likely, the Sea of Rushes) to let his people pass. However, the Egyptian army drowned as the waves swept back. The festival is called Passover because the Angel of Death passed over the Jewish homes.

THERE is no historical record of plagues in Egyptian archives and Ramses II's first born son, Amun-hen-khepeshef, was killed in battle and not at birth. However, Ramses II turned defeat against the Hittites into victory and might not mention unhappy domestic events like plagues.

On April 4th in 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. died at the hands of a bigot, James Earl Ray.

On April 6, 1917 Wilson declared war on the German empire and began the War-to-End-all-Wars.

April 8 is Easter in both Eastern and Western traditions. The most important day in Christianity derives from the Greek, named for their goddess of the dawn, Eos.

Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus two days after his death on the cross. In most Christian churches, the Passover Seder is taken as Christ's Last Supper but the Gospel of John puts it three days earlier.

AFTER much ecclesiastical wrangling it was ruled that "Easter falls on the first Sunday following the ecclesiastical full moon (not the full moon) occurring on or after the vernal equinox on March 21." Unfortunately East and West split on the use of the Gregorian or Julian Calendars. As a result, Western Easter is between March 22 and April 25 while Eastern Easter is from April 4 to May 8. In Western Christianity, Easter marks the end of 40 days of Lent beginning with Ash Wednesday on February 24, 2007, Palm Sunday on April 1, Good Friday on April 6 and then Easter. Eastertide starts on Easter Sunday and lasts until Pentecost, seven weeks later. In Eastern Christianity the holiday begins with Great Lent, goes through a week of Palm and ends on Lazarus Saturday. Then comes Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Easter itself, and Bright Week.

In addition to its ecclesiastical meaning, Easter starts Spring. Children eat chocolate,

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