

PHOTO: KEN WILKINS

WV President Diana Johnson introduces Ann Stalcup.

Stalcup Pays Tribute to Leo Politi, the Angel of L.A.'s Olvera Street

by Kathy Highcove

BUR April speaker Ann Stalcup reiterated the Writer's Golden Rule: Write what you know! Then, share what you love! For several years Ann wrote fiction and endured editorial rejections. She then decided to follow her "bliss" and write books based on her interests in peoples, culture and art. The experienced school teacher and world traveler found non-fiction literature her true specialty. She queried the Rosen Publishing Company to write a series for children that described several crafts of the world. Success! Rosen published seven Stalcup books in one year! She has also published over 100 articles that have appeared in number of children's magazines.

The Ann Stalcup website now displays a large collection of her non-fiction publications for children and adult readers.

Ann's books flowed out of her experiences

growing up in wartime England, her three-year world tour as a young lady, and her immersion in the multi-cultural scenes of downtown Los Angeles. In Olvera Street, the Greenwich Village of post-war L.A., Ann met the artist and author Leo Politi (1908-1996) as he sketched at his easel. The resulting twenty-year friendship with Mr. Politi, and then her four year research of his life, led to publication of her latest book: *Leo Politi: Artist of the Angels*.

Ann introduced her Politi book at our April 7 CWC/WV meeting. We enjoyed a slide show of his art and sketches. Leo Politi drew the children of Los Angeles who romped in the market of Olvera Street, the hilly streets of Chinatown and other Los Angeles locales. The artist sensitively drew the faces, forms and scenes of the Mexican

See Stalcup, Page 5, Col. 2

President's Column **You Can't Say No to Betty Freeman!**

by Diana Johnson

BEFORE I step down as president of our West Valley Branch, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the lady who has mentored many of us and without whom there likely would not have been any Southern California branches of the California Writers Club. Of course, I'm referring to Betty Freeman.

In 1985, Betty went to a CWC State Writing Conference in Asilomar, a state park in Pacific Grove, on the coast between Monterey and Carmel. At that time the CWC consisted of some branches, all in Northern California. Betty thought we should have a branch here in Southern California and, in typical Betty fashion, the San Fernando Valley Branch was chartered in 1986 with nearly 100 members!

People came from far and wide, and then created branches of their own, closer to home: High Desert (Victorville), East Sierra

See President, Page 5, Col. 1

COMING EVENTS

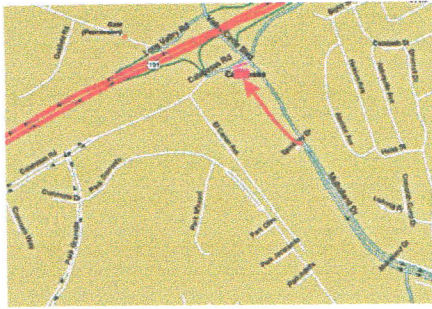
May 5. Speaker, Diana Johnson.

June 2. Branch elections. Program to be announced.

July. No meeting.

August. No meeting.

September 1. Speaker to be announced.



WHERE TO FIND US

FROM the 101 (Ventura) Freeway exit on Mulholland Drive south. Continue to Steven Spielberg Drive. Follow the drive as it turns right then continue through the MPTV parking lot. Exit on the other side on the small road. Pass the little traffic circle 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 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, May 5, 2007
at 1:00 p.m.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President Diana Johnson
V. P. And State Rep. David Wetterberg
Treasurer Dean Stewart
Secretary Ann Stalcup
Membership Arthur Yuwiler
Programs Betty Freeman, Leslie Kaplan
Newsletter Editor William E. Hitchens
Sound, Photographer Ken Wilkins
Site Relations Betty Freeman
Publicity Katherine Highcove
Critique Groups David Wetterberg
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Review and Refresh

By David Wetterberg

The Comma (continued) — Part Two

TO REVIEW PART ONE in last month's newsletter, don't use a comma because you feel that a comma "belongs there" or because you detect some kind of a "hesitation" there. And when you're in doubt, don't put a comma in just to "play it safe." On the contrary, leave the comma out. You'll be right more times than you're wrong.

Interjections

Use a comma after introductory expressions like *yes, no, oh,* and *well*.

Yes, Jim is applying for a scholarship.
No, he probably won't get it.

Modifiers

Use a comma to separate two or more adjectives that modify the same noun.

Marci got a new, challenging job.

Sentence Parts

Use a comma to separate sentence parts that might otherwise cause confusion.

Whenever possible, alternatives should be considered.

Repeated words

Use a comma to separate repeated words

Whomever he loved, loved him.

Dates

Use commas before and after the year when it is used with the month and the day.

The club moved into its new location on October 1, 2005, and began the year with a new enthusiasm.

Do not use commas when just the month and year are given.

The last time she saw him was May 1995.

Addresses

Use commas before and after the name of a state, province, or country when it is used with the name of a city.

We stopped in Salem, Massachusetts, and visited the witch's house.

Do not use a comma between a state and its zip code.

Barney wrote the address carefully: Andy Griffith, 1029 Maple Avenue, Mayberry, South Carolina 56034

~~*

Next month—Part Three: The Semicolon.

MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Ester Ben Shiften will be a guest speaker on April 24 at the Skirball Museum's presentation about China. She also had a short story published in March in *SAJAC*, a widely-distributed Canadian publication.

Nonie Perlas e-mails that she did not have a heart attack as stated in the April issue of *In Focus*. She says Las Vegas has "revitalized me and continues to do so." She lives alone in Las Vegas but is surrounded by the rest of her extended family. She has been recently promoted to a manager in Group Sales & Marketing for Planet Hollywood Spa by Mandara. Her son lives in West Hills, CA.

A STRONG MAN

The strong man is not the good wrestler; the strong man is only the one who controls himself when he is angry. — MOHAMMED, ARAB RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL LEADER (570-632)

CORRECTION

No Meetings in July, August

In the *Upcoming Events* column last month, *In Focus* gave a date for a July meeting. This was an error. There will be no meetings in July and August. The meeting following June's will be on September 1 as stated in the current issue.

The editor apologizes for the mistake.

Some Thoughts

A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle. — BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, AUTHOR, POLITICIAN, INVENTOR (1706-1790)

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. — DALAI LAMA

A Tribute to Lily Pons for the Pleasure She Has Given ~~Me~~ Us

by Edward Louis Braun

ABOUT 10:30 on a Wednesday evening I switched on the TV. A movie called, "I Dream Too Much" came on. I was immediately drawn into this film by its characters and honest simplicity, by the familiar milieu of the early years of my childhood during the Depression. A young couple in a tiny apartment is having difficulty making ends meet. The husband is Henry Fonda. His wife is a charming, happy little woman named Mona who is irrepressible, cheerful and very happy with her life. Her loving words and demeanor say she loves her husband very much. He shows his love for her. I wondered who this charming actress was and why hadn't I seen her in any other movie.

Mona wears a dress typical of the inexpensive patterned cotton dresses so many women wore during the Depression. Her face is radiant with a beautiful natural simplicity, bright wide eyes and an endearing smile. Her husband, a composer, protests that to work he needs time alone without distractions. To please him she goes out into the street. Like a child exploring a new toy, her happy face takes in all there is to see. She looks admiringly at women wearing more stylish clothes. She peers longingly but not unhappily into store windows where beautiful women's dresses and accessories are displayed. As she passes the display window of a restaurant and bakery she sighs for she and her husband are on a meager diet.

SHE notices a street fair and a carousel close by and sees a little three or four year old boy being pushed off the platform by bigger kids. He is crying and holding onto a little paper bag. She picks him up and tries to comfort him. The carousel operator offers her and the boy a free ride. She holds the child in her lap as they ride and sings a song without words (just *la la la's*) to console him while she samples the macaroons in the bag. Her voice is so beautiful that people nearby gather around the carousel to hear

her. As she sings, it finally dawns on me that this is the voice of Lily Pons, the incomparable coloratura soprano. I had not recognized her at first because, when I was in my teens and twenties, I had only seen her in newsreels and she was always in fashionable attire.

To help her husband, Mona bursts into the office of a prestigious opera impresario to convince him to stage her husband's opera. To get rid of her he agrees to listen to one song. He has no interest in her husband's score but is astonished by her unusually beautiful voice. He immediately arranges for her to be formally trained and groomed for an operatic career. She becomes world renowned, but what she values more than fame is the love between her husband and her. It's heartwarming to see the genuine intensity of her feelings for her husband.

LILY PONS (as Mona) sings *The Bell Song* from *Lakme* for which she was famous. She also sings *I Dream Too Much*, a song of enchanting melody and romantic lyrics about the joys of love, reminiscent of the beautiful romantic songs of the 30s and 40s. I recalled hearing this song many times on the radio when I was 9 or 10 years old and loving it for its unforgettable melody and romantic lyrics. (Reflecting on it as I listened to her sing, it struck me how unusual it was for a child to have loved this song and others like *I'll See You Again*, *Moonlight and Roses*, *Beyond the Blue Horizon*, the 20s and 30s songs of Irving Berlin, the songs of Ivar Novello and the music of Victor Herbert, Franz Lehár and so many other great composers of that era.) After Mona has her own little boy, she sings the delightful, *The Little Jockey on the Carousel* while holding him.

IBECAME engrossed in watching and listening to Lily Pons talk and sing. Near the end of the movie, the feeling of pleasure I had up to that point became accompanied by a profound feeling of sadness. The pleasure was from enjoying her presence, the radiance of her face, her beautiful voice, whether talking or singing. The sadness arose from knowing she was no longer alive. I remem-



Lily Pons with her second husband, André Kostelanetz

bered hearing her sing *The Bell Song* on the radio when I was in my early teens, but at that time all I knew about her was her beautiful voice. Seeing her now, as if alive, made me feel I knew the lovely human being and I grew very fond of this woman who was no longer with us. What a joy it would have been to know her! Like so many other exceptional, exquisite women she graced the world for only a short time.

This film triggered many dormant emotions. During the movie and after it ended, I had fantasies about how good it would be to be very young again and be in love with someone like Mona. I remembered other romantic moments of great happiness in movies, like the love duet of Nelson Eddy and Jeanette McDonald in *Maytime*. I recalled the rapport I felt with Renée Fleming when I recently saw and heard her sing, with an angelic expression and voice, the last four songs of Richard Strauss.

THANK God for all the wonderful women artists, the gifted composers and the engineers who made it possible for all of us to see and hear them.

Though Lily Pons is on film and records, pictured in books and in the memories of people who knew her, after a while she will be forgotten, like so many other accomplished persons. In *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary's* Biographical Names, all it says is "Lily Pons, 1904–1976, French-born American soprano."

I must write a letter to Renée Fleming and, while I'm at it, to Leslie Caron, thanking them for the pleasure they've given us. ☺



PHOTO: KEN WILKINS

Diana Johnson, WV President and descendant of Charlemagne.

Charlemagne's Kin to Speak at May Meeting

by Betty Freeman

WITH PRIDE we present our next speaker, Diana Johnson, President of CWC West Valley, a writer of beautiful historical stories based on members of her own family tree. Three books brought tales of Charlemagne's ancestors and their quest to take the crown from the royal Merovingians and later two more books were based on her Colonial Virginia ancestor, William Daingerfield.

Searching for details of French history and her Colonial ancestors brought trips of surprises and delights. The books are historical treasures and have led her to contacts with exciting sources of historical information.

For Diana Johnson, this is only the beginning. She will tell you how to fill in the facts to create authentic, yet readable historical fiction.

Di Johnson was keynote speaker for the National Banquet of the Order of the Crown of Charlemagne in Washington, D.C. You may check her out at www.SuperiorBookPublishingCo.com.

Don't miss Diana Johnson on Saturday, May 5. ☞

West Valley Launches Its Own Website in Speedy Time

CALIFORNIA WRITER'S CLUB, West Valley Branch, has reversed its earlier decision and decided to launch its own Website. The site has been designed by "Mark Paul" Sebar who will be its first Webmaster.

Though the site is still under construction, it can now be viewed at www.cwcWestValley.org. One of the features of the site is that anyone can view all issues of *In Focus* to date. In fact, the editor states that if a member has trouble downloading the latest issue, he or she can go to the Website and retrieve it.

At the April Board meeting, the subject was again raised about the site. The Board had previously decided to leave the subject of a Website to the next Board of Directors. However, members had been approaching officers for a change of the decision. It was pointed out that West Valley was the only branch of the California Writer's Club that did not have a Website.

After consideration, it was decided to give the task of the Website to member "Mark Paul" Sebar who has designed several Websites, including one for himself.

"Mark Paul" likes to write his given names with quotation marks. (He gave no clear explanation when asked.)

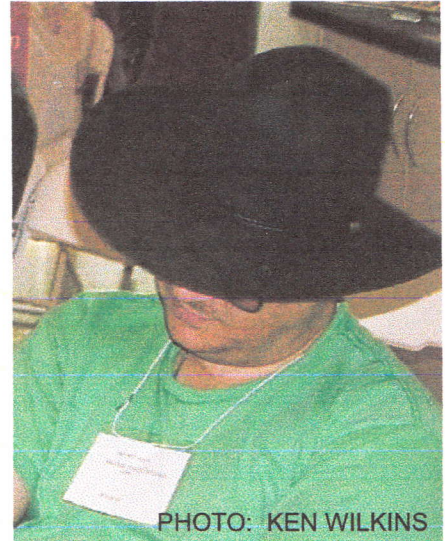


PHOTO: KEN WILKINS

"Mark Paul" Sebar as he appears with his large hat at WV meetings.

After being given the go-ahead, "Mark Paul" had the site up and running within days.

Visit the site and see what West Valley looks like on the Web.

APRIL WV BOARD MEETING

Vice President, Dave Wetterberg, reported that at the Central Board will discuss whether to have a moratorium on the formation of new clubs and to cut the number of Board meetings from 4 to 3 a year to save on expenses. The Board asked Dave to report WV objects to the moratorium on new clubs and feels that a new club should have a minimum of 15 members.

The treasurer's report showed a beginning balance of \$1,055.66 and an ending balance of \$1,115.66. \$45 in dues was paid to the Central Board.

It was decided that Ray Bradbury's talk not be shown at the June meeting but DVDs of his presentation should be available to members. Voluntary donations for the will be accepted and given to the MPTV Fund.

The Board questioned whether the lateness of this month's *In Focus* had affected attendance. Bill Hitchins had technical problems causing its lateness. In future, Art Yuwiler will take responsibility for sending out a reminder e-mail two weeks prior to each meeting. The e-mail will remind members of the meeting date.

The board voted to appoint Member "Mark Paul" Sebar to set it up a Website modeled after the those of other CWC branches. Address: www.cwcwestvalley.org.

Board members were unanimous in agreeing that the three minute members' presentations were a great success.

It was reported that there are nominations for the June election for some positions but not all. The current list will be displayed at the May meeting.

Kathy Highcove was authorized to advertise our meetings more widely.

A new building will be completed in July and the new meeting room will accommodate a larger group. ☞

BITS & PIECES

"Never seek to become a person of success. Seek to become a person of value. Then the success will come." —ALBERT EINSTEIN

Every man over forty is responsible for his face. —Abraham Lincoln, 16th President (1809-1865)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

(from Page 1)

No One Can Say No to Betty Freeman!

(Ridgecrest) Inland Empire, Orange County, and now West Valley and Long Beach.

Betty greeted my husband and me as we walked into our first meeting of the San Fernando Valley Branch at Fallbrook Mall in January 1993. By the end of the meeting we were the ones who stored the coffee makers, paper goods and staples to bring to each meeting. Bill also made the coffee. No one can say, 'no' to Betty. That June they had a full slate of officers, except for treasurer, so Bill and I became treasurers for the branch. We couldn't say 'no' to Betty. She had a vision for the branch, a love for life, and energy that was, and is, unbelievable.

THE SAME THING happened in 1995 when Betty asked me to run for president (knowing Bill would be part of the package). We knew the only acceptable answer was 'yes.' With that we became Central Board representatives and state treasurers.

From the first, Betty and I talked on the telephone at least once a week, if not more often. On April 10, 2001, I telephoned Betty, asking if I could drop by. I can't remember now, but it seems I needed to either pick up or drop off something. She hesitated then said, "Come on." When I arrived, her whole family was there in her living room. Her beloved Charles had died that morning, after a long illness, just two days short of their 65th anniversary. They wrapped me into the family, as we planned a celebration of his life, to be attended by family, friends, and many members of the San Fernando Valley Branch.

In December 2002, Betty moved into the Motion Picture Television Fund Home, a gift from Charles, who was an Oscar-winning sound editor. Here she started meeting people, loving everyone she met. The result was a lovely coffee table book, *Behind the Silver Screen* published by Variety. She is about to start a sequel, *Golden Screen*. Betty also took over a garden area that had a lot of weeds and a couple of sad, dried up plants. For her 90th birthday, she asked everyone to bring plants as birthday gifts and we replanted a garden that now supplies beautiful bouquets for the Stark Villa and our CWC West Valley meetings in the Katzenberg.

Continued at the foot of Col. 2



PHOTO: KEN WILKINS

Ann Stalcup's husband, Ed, operates the slide projector for her presentation.

STALCUP: From Page 1

The Angel of Olivera Street

and Asian cultures. His beautiful stories centered on the colorful culture and traditions found in the City of the Angels. We remember *Pedro, the Angel of Olivera Street*, *Song of the Swallows*, and *Moy Moy* just to name a very few of famous Politi picture books. The 1950 Caldecott Medal winner left Los Angeles a legacy of books and murals.

Children around the world enjoy his books, and recognize themselves in the poignant tales of his small characters.

Ann told her CWC/WV audience that Leo

Politi wanted the public to enjoy joyful visions of life. Her admiration of the man and his art has been a strong inspiration for her own art and writings. Politi's death may have "left a hole in my life," but she has compensated beautifully with a true labor of love that honors the gentle artist. Ann's new book is a warm tribute to the Italian-American Angeleno who loved and respected all children, their families and colorful traditions.

VISITORS AND MEMBERS

Sue Gessler attended the California Writer's Club West Valley meeting as a guest in February and became a member the following month.

Currently a Granada Hills resident, Gessler was originally from Michigan where she earned a BA and MA in journalism, specializing in economics, from the University of Michigan. While living in Michigan, she worked for the *Detroit Free Press* and *Jackson Citizen Patriot*.

After moving to Southern California, Gessler worked for GTE/Verizon in internal and external public affairs and customer communications. She took early retirement in 2003 after 32 years. She currently works

President's Message (from Col. 1)

It was Betty's idea to start a new CWC branch in her lovely new setting, and the West Valley Branch was chartered in a record-breaking two months! We love you Betty, and honor you for your impressive contributions to the California Writers Club. ☺

part-time for the Sherman Oaks Chamber of Commerce as Assistant Director.

Gessler plans to turn the information she gathered for the latter into a book that will appeal to U.S. Readers.

Gessler has been working as a volunteer on writing projects for self-help efforts in Honduras. Her projects include an annual report and fund-raising brochure. Another is about gardening for 4-to-6-year-olds. The objective is to change culture and attitudes towards early education. —ANN STALCUP

When asked why they always attend the CWC/WV's meetings, **George and Irene Pulco** replied,

"Because the speakers are great!"

In response to whether they have any suggestions for improving the club, the Pulco's said that the meetings live up to their expectations, but George would enjoy participating in a club-sponsored dexterity class to produce games and fun activities.

—BETTY FREEMAN

ARTHUR YUWILER'S COLUMN

The Pious Fraud of the Almanac



ROUGH winds do shake the darling buds of May," wrote the Bard. Thomas Hardy waxed poetic, writing, "And the May month flaps in glad green leaves like wings," while Sir Thomas Malory mixed metaphors in "The month of May has come when every lusty heart beginneth to blossom and bring forth fruit."

"Ah, here we go gathering nuts in May and I'm to be queen of the May today," so sayeth Mother Goose. But James Russell Lowell pointed out a truth when he said, "May is the pious fraud of the almanac." And so it is, occasionally warm, then wet and cold.

May, like much in the western world, probably got its name from Maia, daughter of Atlas and Pleione, the most beautiful of the seven sisters of the Pleiades, who spent a busy night with Jupiter and gave birth to winged Mercury. In her spare time she also served as the Roman goddess of growth, spring, and fertility. Until 1430, May was variously called Mais, Mayes, or Mai, but it still marks spring.

IN ANCIENT ROME most farmers were much too busy sowing seeds to think of marriage, which they put off until June or July. Indeed, May was regarded as an unlucky month for marriage. "Marry in May and you'll rue the day" was a common saying. But why the month is not called Flora instead of May is a little obscure, since in about 238 BCE the Floralia Festival (named after the Roman goddess Flora, of flowers and youthful, mostly sexual, pleasures) occurred in early May. In those Roman times everyone wore

their brightest clothes for the festival and decked themselves out with flowers. Even animals were garlanded, and goats and hares were let loose to represent fertility. Sexuality was rampant.

Still, May it is, and a month remarkably devoid of national holidays. However, it does have a bird, the nightingale, seldom seen locally; two flowers, the lily-of-the-valley and the hawthorn; and a birthstone, the emerald. May 1 is May Day or Labor Day in every country except the United States, Canada and South Africa despite the fact that on May 1, 1884 it was our unions that went on strike for an eight-hour day. But Grover Cleveland established our Labor Day as the first Monday in September on June 28, 1894 instead. Eisenhower attempted to call March 1 Loyalty Day or Law Day but that fizzled. Yet on May 1, many unionized and non-unionized workers throughout the world still march.

MAY 5 is Cinco de Mayo when 4,000 Mexican troops smashed the 8,000-man French army at Puebla, Mexico, in 1862, removing a possible threat to the Union Army in our own Civil War of 1861 to 1865. It is also the time we meet again. On May 11, 1858, Minnesota was admitted to the Union. May 13, the second Sunday in May, is Mother's Day. I suppose it started with mother worship in ancient Greece and the festival to Cybele, mother of the gods. The Roman spin-off was the festival of Matrolinia, dedicated to Juno, the queen of the gods. But it started in the United States quite differently.

Inspired by Anna Jarvis's attempt to form Mother's Work Days, Julia Ward Howe initiated the Mother's Day Proclamation in 1870, calling for peace between North and South after the Civil War. Anna Jarvis's daughter carried on her mother's fight, finally establishing a "Mother's Day" in Grafton, West Virginia, on May 10, 1908. The custom slowly spread involving 45 states, and finally, in 1914, Woodrow Wilson declared the

second Sunday in May as the first Mother's Day.

ON MAY 14, 1948, Israel became an independent country as the last British troops left Palestine. It was on May 21 that Clara Barton founded what was to become the American Red Cross.

On May 24, 1607, the first English settlement in America was founded in Jamestown Virginia. May 25, 1787, marked the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia with George Washington presiding.

The last Monday of May is set aside for what was once called Decoration Day, now called Memorial Day. Three years after the Civil War, on May 10, 1868, Major General John A. Logan in General Order No. 11 declared that the 30th of May, 1868, shall be set aside for placing flowers on both Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. After the first World War, the day was generalized to include all those who gave their lives in any of America's wars. Lots of different cities claim to have started Decoration Day, and in 1966 Lyndon Johnson gave that "honor" to Waterloo, New York. In 1971, Memorial Day was declared a national holiday by an Act of Congress and designated as the last Monday in May.

OF COURSE, lots of cities, especially those in the South, have days honoring their dead, largely Confederate soldiers, although various names for this day are used. Thus, Mississippi honors their dead on the last Monday in April, Alabama on the fourth Monday in April, Georgia on April 26, North and South Carolina on May 10, Louisiana on June 3, Texas on Jan 19 and Virginia, the last Monday in May. The custom of selling fake red poppies during that day was inspired by Moina Michael, based upon the Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields."

On May 29, 1790, Rhode Island ratified the Constitution and became the 13th state. Wisconsin became the 30th in 1848. Finally, on May 31, 1913, the Constitution provided direct election of the Senate.