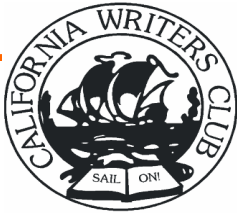


**WEST VALLEY  
BRANCH** OF THE



**JANUARY 2009**



## A WRITER IN THE WHITE HOUSE

As we start the New Year 2009, our nation faces a myriad of problems. We expect the newly sworn-in President to deliver a speech that acknowledges our challenges and gives the nation hope. We need to hear that he has the determination to lead us with confidence toward solutions or remedies for the coming decade. Obama's January 20th Inaugural Address will have millions of watchers and listeners, nationally and internationally.

Barack Obama is no lightweight when it comes to speech writing. He reads extensively, meditates on his message and has consistently crafted timely and stirring messages for the electorate. He finds special inspiration from the Doris Kearns Goodwin's "A Team of Rivals," the back story of the Lincoln Presidency and formation of Civil War policies.

Editorial cont'd on page 4

### PAUSE IN THE PAGEENTRY: A PRAYER

\_ Lillian Rodich

Changes in the midst  
and voices still heard,  
voices of America  
speaking of the beauty and truths,  
speaking of survival  
speaking of growth and conscience.  
Changes in faces and facts,  
played as a drama  
amidst the turmoil  
against a tapestry of truth  
and spirit and integrity,  
America's strong fabric.  
In conscience and concern  
may those who guide be guided,  
mountains remaining majestic,  
waters clean and calm,  
a sky clear of destruction,  
hearts cleansed of malice and greed  
and our country's unity reflecting its heritage.





**Shelley Berman**

## VISITORS IN VERSE



**Lillian Adams**

Sheldon Leonard Berman arrived in the Katzenberg room with his merry troupe of resident poets. In other words, our December guest speaker Shelley Berman presented readings by MPTF residents who participate in his poetry seminar at the Stark Villa. One by one, Lillian Adams, Chris Jenkins, Betty Gay, Jean Tannen and Harold Gould came to the mike. Each participant read a poem by a favorite poet and then shared one of their own poems inspired by the published poet. We noted themes describing forces of nature, silently moving fog and social injustices such as Adam's concern for the ever-present "hungry child." Berman gave himself last billing and read a two page poem - free verse, his preferred form of the art.



**Harold Gould**

In the discussion aftermath, we asked the veteran showman for a definition of free verse. "Hard to define," he replied. "It's an ephemeral form of literature. But free verse will often use metaphor, alliteration, rhythm, interior rhyme, and simile and be of emotional significance - just like rhyming poetry. Free verse is not tossed around prose, a jumble of thoughts. It has structure."

Berman revealed to CWC members a lifetime love of poetry. His current seminars at the Stark Villa present an opportunity to enjoy and share his poetic interests with a group of like-minded folks.

The venerable comedian/actor/lecturer/philosopher/poet Shelley Berman also divulged a personal preference to our CWC membership in the Katzenberg Room: He'd rather be eating fresh mussels on Whidbey Island, in Washington State. "A meal of fresh mussels and a glass of beer...that's heaven!" he confided with a toothy grin. "That's where I'd like to be, getting inspiration for my poetry." May he soon return to his treasured isle. - Kathy Highcove

**First meeting of 2009.** Our January meeting will feature Bob Banner, another legendary MPTV resident. Bob has been in television as long as television has been in American homes, and he has been responsible for some of the most popular programs on television: *Star Search*, *The Perry Como Show*, *Candid Camera*, *Omnibus*, *The Dinah Shore Show*, *Solid Gold*, *Showtime at the Apollo*.

He has done specials starring Julie Andrews, Frank Sinatra, Dionne Warwick, Peggy Fleming, John Davidson, and Bob Hope. Dramas include *The Sea Wolf*, *Crash Landing*, *My Sweet Charlie*, *Yes, Virginia*, *There is a Santa Claus*, and *Real Kids, Real Adventures*. Most of his shows are now considered classics.

In Bob's career, he has been honored with 9 Emmy Awards, 8 Christopher Awards, 5 Peabody Awards, 5 Awards of Excellence, and the International Golden Rose.

While working in the industry, he also found time to teach for three years at Northwestern and seventeen years at Southern Methodist. He's an interesting man who looks forward to speaking to us in January.

## WRITE ON! AND ON... WHY AND WHEREFORE ??

\_ Ray Malus

(I have starred several words. I would suggest you look them up in both a Dictionary and a Thesaurus, then meditate on them. Yes, I know you know what they mean. But do you know ALL that they mean – and imply?) OK. Why do we do it? Write, I mean. For me, there are many reasons. I'll tell you some:

It clarifies my thinking. In telling a story to you, I have to organize the facts – and omit the irrelevant details. Alfred Hitchcock once said, "Drama is life with the dull parts cut out of it." How true! I might add, "Comedy is life – with great timing."

The point is, every day brings events which are golden. But like all mining, one needs to separate the nugget from the mud. In writing, I can isolate the kernel of truth\* I've found, and eliminate what obscures it.

Then, I can idealize.



That cherry I just ate was good. But the cherry I tell you about is WONDERFUL. Perfectly ripe! Bursting with juice! Sweet and tart completely balanced, aching to be consumed. It erupted in my mouth. It heated my tongue, and swelled my salivary glands. It was fresh from Eden. Now, THAT'S a cherry!



Star Maker Malus

Also, I get to explore all the nuances of this wonderful language of ours, to choose exactly the right word in meaning, connotation, music and nuance. (Dear Lord! After a year, I'm STILL trying to decide if that woman 'softly smiled', or 'sadly smiled'.) I get to meet the people who live in my imagination, and hear them talk – savor the flavors of their individual personalities. But probably the main reason I write is that it feels so damned good. Every culture speaks of some outside creative influence: Muses, Gods, Inspiration\*. The fact is, every creative person I've talked to describes the act as one of 'connection\*', 'transcendence\*'. I am a hedonist\*, and creation is the ultimate pleasure\*.

I write plays, stories, music, poetry, computer code (yes, computer code!), and memoirs. In most cases, when I read the result, it's better than I am. (If it's not, I toss it – or re-write.) It's not so much an act of creation\*, as an epiphany\*. It's as if I've pulled back the covers on my bed, and found a miracle sleeping there. All I have to do is waken it... and it's far better than I am.

All this would sound like metaphysical twaddle to most people. But you are a writer. You understand that what I'm saying is literal and true. Months later, I read what I've written, and wonder who wrote it. (I usually despair\* afterward, certain I'll never be able to do it, again. But, somehow...)

The process is ecstatic\*. (Sex hell!! Gimme a Word Processor!) You know what I'm talking about. And, like any 'high', it's addictive. I could expand on this indefinitely, but the Editor has set limits.

So there, briefly, are some of the reasons I write. But why do I publish? Ah! There's my 'cliff-hanger'. Next month, eh?



## BUBA'S BIRTHDAY

**"Do my shoes match?" she asks me. It's my grandmother's one hundredth birthday party. "Perfect, Buba. It's the exact same shade of powder blue as your dress". Even her silver hair is tinted blue. "You are absolutely beautiful!"**



**I join my aunts, uncles and cousins in the banquet hall as we form a circle around Buba and dance to the band playing, "Hava Nagila." One by one, we take turns in the center of the circle as we link arms with her and slowly dance her around as in a country western square dance, making sure not to step on her powder blue shoes.**

**What an amazing woman! Queen for a day and loving it! She is the mother of my father and practically raised me when daddy died and my mom had to work. Milk and cookies were always waiting after school.**

**I flew in to Philadelphia from California for this special celebration and now, as I kiss Buba goodbye, she clings to me as though this may be the last time, as she says, "Life is so short."**

**Teary eyed, I knew that this visit indeed may be the last time I see her. She knew that my tears speak of a lifetime of love as she gave her tears back to me.**

**Years later, I am dressing my three year old daughter, getting her ready for a birthday party, when out of her mouth came the words of my grandmother. She looks down at her shoes and asks, "Momma, do my shoes match?"**

**P.S. Buba made it to 107**

**\_ Leslie**



**Kaplan**

( New year cont'd from page 1)

As writers, we CWC members will perhaps give extra attention to the words and phrases chosen by President Obama for his first official speech. This introductory national address should clearly outline the direction and the goals of his new Administration. We should feel inspired and hopeful of success, no matter what the challenge. Obama's past speeches have provided many clues to his mindset and future actions as President of the United States.

When a keynote speaker at the 2004 Democratic Convention Obama declared: "This year, in this election, we are called to reaffirm our values and commitments, to hold them against a hard reality and see how we are measuring up to the legacy of our forbearers and the promise of future generations."

And in his acceptance speech of 2008, we heard themes of unity and hope: "...the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity, and unyielding hope... For that is the true genius of America - that America can change." (cont'd on page 7)

## A BIG VOICE PLUS A BIGGER HEART: KEN WILKINS



Ken Wilkins

— Samantha Berley

Ken Wilkins was born in Chicago and raised just south of Rockford Illinois.

After high school, Wilkins attended Wheaton College for a semester until he enlisted in the United States Navy during World War II.

He was stationed in New Orleans honoring heroes who were coming home from the war by writing news articles for their respective hometown newspapers and taking their photos. After the war, he finished at Wheaton College with a B.A in cultural anthropology.

In 1950, Wilkins married and moved to California and received a Bachelor of Divinity degree from what is today known as California State University , Los Angeles.

Through the course of his career, Ken Wilkins started an elementary school from nationals in Ethiopia. Wilkins recalls:

"I started a school for Ethiopian children in the Ogaden Desert. I started with a class of about 20 boys ages 8-22. I taught ESL to the police, soldiers and Arab shop keepers at night. This photo was taken in Kallafo, Ethiopia, a small village about 600 miles from the Capital, Addis Ababa...the real boonies."



Ken Wilkins in Ethiopia with Haile Selassie.

Home in the USA, he taught in LAUSD, spent thirty years as a science consultant for a government sponsored program, and spent over twenty summers as a science instructor for the Museum of Science and Industry.

His literary accomplishments include a published children's book called "Marvin's Mansion" and a variety of works including poetry and short stories published in Ellery Queen Mystery magazine and several CWC anthologies.

Wilkins has been a CWC member since the 1990's and continues to be a valued member for his literary work and his photography for special events and the newsletter.

Ken Wilkins is known in CWC for his limericks. Here's one for 2009:

### NEW YEAR'S CHALLENGE by Ken Wilkins

Santa's returned to his frozen land.  
The diapered baby now takes his stand.  
Promises to keep or to be broken  
Some are secret, others spoken.  
Twelve months from now we'll understand.





## The Fewer-Than-Three-Hundred-Word Personal Essay.

An essay is the extension of a thought. The “thought” part sets the direction the essay is going to take. The “extension” part is the development of that thought by examples and illustrations from the writer's personal experiences.

The writer's presence is an integral part of the personal essay, sometimes through use of the pronoun “I,” sometimes not. Sometimes his/her presence is just felt through the way the material is handled.

**The key to any successful essay is, of course, the writer's ability to use his affinity for the English language to convince ... or to charm ...or to entrap ...or to dazzle .... the reader with his/her observations, experiences, and examples.**

The following sentences contain appropriate thoughts for a personal essay:

I love to hear the sounds of the kids next door.

The first time I baked a birthday cake, it was not a pleasant experience.

Kids today don't know what fun it was to grow up in the olden days.

The kids next door sentence could be developed by describing the sounds the kids make, the kids that make them, and why the writer loves them. The birthday cake sentence could be extended by showing the steps in baking a cake and describing how unpleasant they were. The olden days sentence could be developed with swimming holes, clothespin airplanes, and baseball without Little League.

And each one could be written in fewer than three-hundred words, like this one is.

\_ D. Wetterberg



(New Year cont'd from page 4)

On January 20th, 2009, the American public will turn on their television sets and watch the orderly changeover of power. When all principals have gathered on the platform built for the swearing in ceremony, Chief Justice Roberts will approach the lectern. We are informed that he will hold the Bible used by Abraham Lincoln for the same ceremony. Barack Hussein Obama will put his left hand on the Bible, raise his right hand and repeat these traditional words:

"I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Then, at last, we will hear the first address of President Barack Obama. History will be made that hour, and written about by future writers. Perhaps you will be asked someday to write your feelings at this time. Listen well to his well-chosen words.

## CWC/WV MEMBERS LOBBY WASHINGTON

**Dear President Obama, Please consider:**



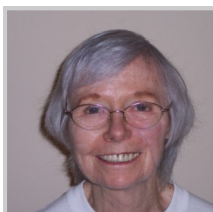
Reforming and further funding senior healthcare- related coverage and the Older Americans Act, so as to provide for our continuously swelling and aging population. California now has the largest senior population in the nation: 5.25 million statewide. However, I hope your administration will support the needs of our seniors and our disabled, not just in California, but nationwide.



Norman Mole-



**Remember your promise to ...**



Sheila Moss

Bring home our military men and women in a timely manner. In addition, I feel strongly that they desire the best medical care they need.

### **Hear the voices from within our communities...**

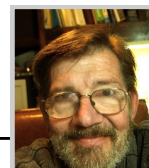
Please repeal existing Social Security penalties: the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset. These penalties have reduced many elderly retired educators to poverty and discourage talented individuals from entering the teaching profession as a second profession. Include Los Angeles County and City workers, highway patrolmen, many firemen and policemen, and postal workers – to name only some of the persons affected by the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Provision laws. As of JUNE 15, 2007, the repeals had 318 CO-SPONSORS in the House, only 10 Representatives had not cosponsored HR 82.

Please see [http://www.calrta.org/NewsEvents.php?id=6&cat\\_id=2](http://www.calrta.org/NewsEvents.php?id=6&cat_id=2) to understand the issue and the plight of teachers and others in half our states.



Sylvia Molesko

### **As you take the reins of Office...**



Ray Malus

I have little hope nor expectations for the coming year. I do have some wishes, but I doubt one person can fulfill them.

I would like to see this Country embrace:

Values instead of Personal Preference

Achievement instead of Entitlement

Opportunity instead of Patronage

Equality instead of Reparation

Innocence instead of Deniability

Integrity instead of Popularity.

There are more. But this would be a good start. Maybe we can talk again, next year.



## OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

No writer would refuse a contract with a major publisher, but we all know the odds that this possibility will ever materialize. Most publishers will not accept unagented submissions and require a program from the author as well as the responsibility of a large percentage of the promotion of their book. Why not try some of the small presses? They will provide more opportunity for publication.



Small presses have smaller staffs and publish fewer books per year than large publishing houses. Yet, once committed, they seem to be able to give more personal attention to their writers. They are just as interested in success as *Random House* or *Penguin*, but are also interested in promotion and distribution for their clients.

Some small presses such as *The Green Lantern Press* in Chicago add an art dimension. *Flood*, a poetry press which usually struggles with circulation, has become hugely successful by concentrating on good poets who have been overlooked. *Red Hen Press*, located here in the Valley, has become nationally known because of the hard work of its editor. If you have been rejected by the big conglomerates, send a query letter to some of these small presses just as you would large publishers along with the usual SASE. Follow their procedures for a successful adventure in getting published during 2009.

*Avalon Books*, considered a small press at 60 books a year, accepts romances, mysteries and westerns for library market, 65% first time authors, 80% unagented. No old-fashioned predictable plots; avoid graphic or pre-marital sex or graphic language.

Contact Editors, Avalon Books, 160 Madison Ave. , Fl 5, New York NY 100016; 212-398-0222; [www.avalonbooks.com](http://www.avalonbooks.com) for guidelines.

*Forge Books*, accepts submissions for romance, science fiction, general fiction, non-fiction, historical, mystery, suspense and thrillers; No phone calls, no electronic submissions. Query letter, synopsis and first 3 chapters with SASE. Guidelines on line.

Contact Acquisitions Editor Tom Doherty Associates, LLC 175 Fifth Ave. New York NY 10010 ; <http://us.macmillan.com/torforge.aspx>

*Mid-List Press*, publishes book length fiction and non-fiction, poetry collections of at least 60 pages, no children's books. Query by mail with representative chapter, short story, essay or poems. Seeks to increase access to publication for new writers;

Guidelines on line. Contact Mid-List Press, 4324 12th Ave. S. , Minneapolis MN 55407 ; [www.midlist.org](http://www.midlist.org)



Happy New Year with wishes for a prosperous and successful year writing and submitting your manuscripts. If you need any help, call me at 818-340-4285.

\_ Lenora Smalley



# MOBILE MEALS

Each Wednesday Marie and I would  
load the Chevy with cream-colored coolers,  
each holding a sandwich, fruit cup and cookie,  
to be emptied on kitchen tables for the  
bed-ridden or house-bound resident.  
For each, a smile and a cheerful  
"How are you today?" becomes their  
only contact of the day. We knock on  
Mr. Brown's door; turn the knob and nudge  
the door open. "Mr. Brown! Here's your lunch!"  
No response. The bedroom door is open.  
We tiptoe in, see Mr. Brown stretched out  
on his bed. "Is he dead?" Marie asks, alarmed.  
I shush her. What if he heard?  
Would he assume he's already in heaven?  
He stirs, slack mouth agape.  
I steer Marie to the kitchen, we empty  
the cooler and quickly tiptoe out.

\_ Erica Stux



## California Writers Club, Sacramento Branch

### 2009 Flash Fiction Contest

**Deadline: March 31, 2009**

#### Open to All Writers.

Membership in the California Writers Club is not required.

Theme: Open

Prizes: \$100 first place, \$50 second place and \$25 third place

Word Count: 500 words maximum

Entry Format: Submit three copies. All entries must be typed, double spaced using black 12-point Times New Roman font on one side of 8-½" x 11" white paper. For additional pages, put title on upper left hand corner and page number on upper right hand corner.

Cover Page: Type your name, address, telephone number, e-mail address and word count. Include separate cover page for each entry and paperclip to entry.

Entry Fee: \$10 for each submission. Enclose a check made payable to CWC, Sacramento Branch.

Deadline: Must be postmarked by March 31, 2009.

Winners: Winners will be announced in the June 2009 branch newsletter and honored at the June 20, 2009, Sacramento Branch meeting, 11:00 a.m. at Luau Garden Chinese Buffet, 1890 Arden Way, Sacramento, CA.

Winners need not be present to receive their prizes.

Winning entries will be published in the branch newsletter *write on!*

Entries must be unpublished. Entries will not be returned and authors retain all rights.

Submit to:

Evelyn Luscher

CWC, Sacramento Branch Writing Contest

P.O. Box 1157

Citrus Heights, CA 95611-1157

For more information: Contact Contest Chair Evelyn Luscher at [eluscher@sbcglobal.net](mailto:eluscher@sbcglobal.net).

## A GOLDEN MOMENT

He waited behind the podium, hands clasped behind his back. The bronze and silver winners stepped forward to receive their medals and bouquets. When announced, he quickly mounted the high middle level of the dais and waved his arms over his head as the audience cheered and applauded. A Chinese woman in traditional dress came forward with a rose bouquet. The athlete smiled and accepted the flowers. An official walked forward, shook his hand and lifted the gold medal from a tray. The athlete bowed low for the loop of red ribbon to slip over his head, and straightened up as his countrymen shouted "USA! USA!" Grinning now, he looked down at the gold medal, looked up at his family in the stands, then raised the bright bouquet over his head like a floral torch of victory.



An offstage announcer addressed the crowd: "Ladies and gentlemen, please stand for the anthem of the United States of America - The Star Spangled Banner." The gold medalist put his hand over his heart. The familiar anthem began and he stood stock still.

His eyes followed the flag as it rose toward the ceiling. The brown eyes stared steadily upward and he lightly bit his lower lip. The familiar anthem filled the hall. His eyes pooled slightly, and his cheeks flushed a dark pink. He swallowed hard.

His lips began to move and he appeared to sing the last line of the anthem: "O'er the land of the free, and the home of the brave." The music stopped and the cheering erupted again. He smiled tremulously, eyes downcast for a second, and then looked up again at the suspended American flag.

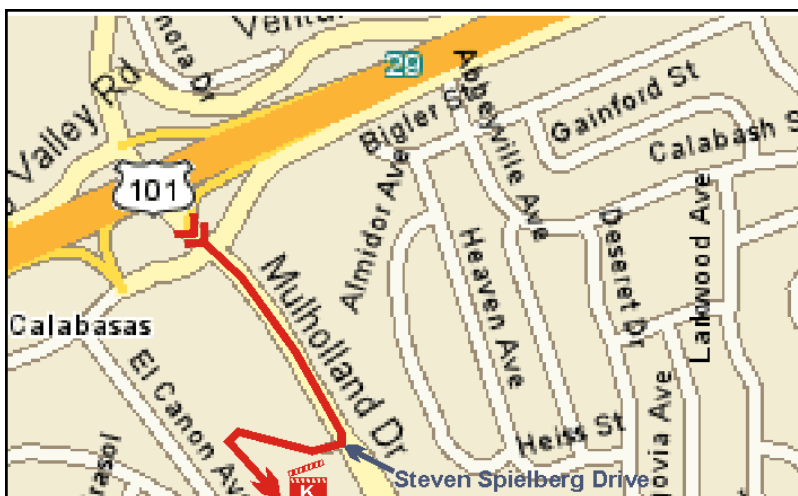
All the winners shook hands, then the three stepped down from the podium. The American gold medalist extended his arms and drew the two other men into an impromptu embrace.

"I'll never forget you guys," he told them. They nodded and replied excitedly in two different languages. They shook hands again, then stepped toward the waiting members of the press and television networks.



"Show us your medals," a photographer called. Three winners held up their medals for the eyes of the world. They all smiled for the photo flash, but the American's grin seemed the widest.

\_ Kathy Highcove



From the 101 Freeway exit on Mulholland Drive South. Drive south to 23388 Mulholland Drive. Turn right onto the Steven Spielberg Drive. Then turn left and follow the route to the large parking lot on the left for Villa Katzenberg. If you are stopped by the MPTF Security, tell the official that you are attending a CWC meeting.

### MEETINGS

The California Writers Club meets the first Saturday of the month at the Motion Picture and Television Fund complex:  
Villa Katzenberg, 23388 Mulholland, Woodland Hills, CA 91364-2733.

### NEXT MEETING

Saturday, January 3rd., 2008 at 1:30 p.m.

### MAILING ADDRESS

c/o Dave Wetterberg, 23809 Friar Street.  
Woodland Hills, CA 91367-1235

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[cwcwestvalley.org](http://cwcwestvalley.org).



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Critique Groups,  
Historian..... Lillian Rodich  
Historian..... Helen Katzman

### **Submission Guidelines**

- 1. Submit a work two weeks in advance of publication.**
- 2. Keep prose short, between 200 and 300 words. Contact editor if work is longer.**
- 3. Poems also should be short, approximately three to four stanzas.**
- 4. The editor reserves the right to accept or reject any work submitted. Space might be limited and the omission based on editing difficulties.**
- 5. Works not used may be stored and used in a future issue of InFocus.**