



WEST VALLEY
BRANCH
April 2009



IN FOCUS



Lighten Up, Laugh ...Enjoy the Spring Season

The Ladder of Comedy



Comedy has its levels of sophistication; hence the terms "low comedy" and "high comedy." Low comedy takes in bathroom humor and crude sex. Bathroom jokes are on the lowest rung, the peepee and doodoo jokes most kids like. Sex jokes begin when little Mikey discovers that what's under his diaper is different from cousin Suzy's.

Next rung up comes mindless physical action comedy, stock characters, and sight gags. When Lucille ball gets on the pie-line and it gets out of control, it brings the house down. The Three Stooges still sell. Gilligan's Island had its stock characters: the beauty, the millionaire, etc.. Kramer gets laughs on "Seinfeld" falling down and bumping into doors. Some things never change.

Next up, the "comic incongruity" is like an unparallel line crossing parallel lines. George Gobbels got a long laugh sitting between Dean Martin and Bob Hope on the Johnny Carson Show. "I feel like I'm wearing a tuxedo with brown shoes," he said

Mayberry's deputy sheriff Barney Fife is an incongruity among the more solid parallels of his profession. Sheriff Taylor doesn't let him keep a bullet in his pistol for fear he'll shoot his foot off. Characters out of their element generate laughs. Take a family of hillbillies and put them in posh Beverley Hills. Talk about incongruity!

Comic exaggerations give us a hoot: Archie Bunker's

blindfolded vision of society. I Love Lucy's craziness.

Verbal wit comedy requires listening and double-takes. "Take my wife," says the comedian. "No, really! Take my wife!" "Tough?" says Rodney Dangerfield. "When I was playing football, we sacked the quarterback, then we went after his family."

At the top of the ladder comes high comedy, the use of satire and irony to call attention to the silliness of ideas and institutions. Saturday Night Live is an example. Some irony bites hard. Jon Stewart catches a politico stating one opinion today, then shows clips where the same politico said the opposite thing yesterday, delighting The Daily Show audience.



The best example of gentle irony is Governor Adlai Stevenson's masterpiece to the Illinois legislature vetoing Senate Bill 93, better known as the "Cat Leash Law." The governor's humor creeps up gradually. A cat is a creature entitled to its freedom, he writes. It has a "natural right to roam" around in its neighborhoods. Should he sign this bill, another would surely follow to leash birds and prevent them staining the sidewalks of Illinois.

"For these reasons, and not because I love birds the less or cats the more, I veto and withhold my approval from Senate Bill No. 93."

Classic. I have a copy if you want to read it.

- Dave Wetterberg



Crafting the Comedy Screenplay with Steve Mazur

April brings the freshness and lightness of springtime. And what better way to kick-off this new season than with a writer who makes people laugh and who can give us a few pointers on how to do the same thing? Comedy scriptwriter and performer Steve Mazur, our speaker this month, has written extensively for theater, movies, and TV. A few of his more recent credits, among others, are the screenplay "Without a Paddle II" for Paramount in 2009, and the teleplays "The Crooked E" in 2006, "Heartbreakers" in 2003 and "Liar, Liar" in 1997.

Steve continues to write original screenplays, adaptations, rewrites, and comedy punchups. He has worked for Disney, Imagine, Dreamworks, Amblin, Paramount, Sony, Warner Brothers, Spike TV and FX. Between 1995 and 2000 you may have heard him on KMPC radio as Sam Rubin's sidekick on the "Sam Rubin Show." And Steve has outstanding teaching credentials. In 2005 he received UCLA Extension's Screenwriting Instructor of the Year Award. Put on your learning cap, come to this valuable meeting, and learn how to craft a comedy screenplay.



Steve Mazur

Freelancer Tina Glasner Follows Her Bliss

Tina Glasner, our March speaker, works as a freelance writer, editor and graphic designer. To better understand her chosen field of endeavor let's take a look at the official definition of the freelance profession.

free·lance

1. A person who sells services to employers without a long-term commitment to any of them.
2. An uncommitted independent,
3. A medieval mercenary.



Leslie Kaplan and Tina Glasner

Glasner is surely not a free lance mercenary – we'll cancel out that definition of her journalistic endeavors. And we will forget number 2 - too political. Glasner's type of "freelance" work is closer to the first definition. Glasner revealed to members in our March meeting that she is a literary version of the free agent - a creative type who doesn't stay in a conventional job category like librarian, or engineer, or policewoman. No safe box or cubicle for Tina Glasner! She confided, "I like to get my nose into everything when it comes to writing and publishing." And foresooth, Glasner has written, published, edited, designed book covers, drawn cartoons and helped acquaintances with grant writing in her freelance career. Her talent spillesh over into a whole group of boxes.

After an early career in Accounts Payable, additional work as a technical writer, and after learning the results of Johnson O'Connor analysis tests, Glasner moved gradually from working with numbers to learning the patterns of words – writing in all its above mentioned forms. Her membership in the CWC helped her network and work on new writing and editing skills. She learned, as many of us do, by volunteer work that included writing grants, press releases, newsletter publication and graphic design. During the past decade she has worked as an editor with published writers such as CWC/WV member Diana Johnson, author of several books of historical fiction.

"I would never think of doing a book without Tina," Di informed us.

We welcome Tina to the CWC/WV and hope to hear more pointers from her on the challenges and changes in the modern world of editing and publishing.

Read Tina's Ten Tips for New Authors on page 3 of this April InFocus issue.



Aha, Watson! I always suspected the existence of this!

I have been to so many presentations, conferences, and classes where attendees hang on every miniscule detail the speaker has to impart. Must one use a number 2 or number 3 pencil? Must one arise at dawn and write for three hours a day? Are yellow legal pads or 2-1/2" margins the secret to success? Tell us, oh tell us! So I picture Sherlock opening this huge hoary chest and detecting what all of us are sure exists – somewhere, somehow.

- Tina Glasner, taken from "50 – 50: 50 Cartoons – 50 Comments on the Writing Life"

JUNE ELECTIONS FOR CWC/WV

In September 2006, our CWC/WV branch was chartered as the seven-teenth branch of the historic California Writers Club. The first year we were served by a staff of volunteer officers. In June 2007 our first "regular" election was held. Dave Wetterberg was elected president; Claude Baxter, vice-president; Dean Stewart, treasurer; and Dolly Weiner, secretary. Samantha Berley replaced Dolly Weiner and is secretary at present. They served us well.

Now the time has come for West Valley's second round of elections. We have some excellent members well-suited for these positions. A nominating committee composed of Lillian Rodich and Leslie Kaplan has been appointed to seek these members out during the month of April.

At the May meeting the committee will present a slate of nominees. Voting will take place in June, preceded by nominations from the floor.

KEEP IN MIND

"Collage" - California Writers Club, West Valley Branch 2009 Anthology



The West Valley Branch of the California Writers Club will publish an anthology of members' writing, available at the September 2009 meeting. To review the submission requirements, go to our website at: cwcwestvalley.org

Submit by US Mail or in person to:

Lillian Rodich

10030 Owensmouth #51,

Chatsworth, CA 91311

Submit electronically to Lillian at lrodich@yahoo.com

Deadline for submissions: May 1, 2009.

Ten suggestions for successful publishing:

1) Get peer reviews:

Ask people you respect what they think of your concept - that way you'll have practice getting your concept down to 2 or 3 sentences.

Have peers review your outline.

Have peers review your first draft.

Listen, react, revise if necessary - consider hiring an editor.

If readers love your book, ask for their permission to be quoted - or if this is an expert on your nonfiction topic, ask them if they will consider contributing a foreword. Either way, endorsements are solid gold. They can go into your query materials, into your sell sheet, onto your book jacket, or into your flyleaf.

2) Consider purchasing the following books (but see [3]):

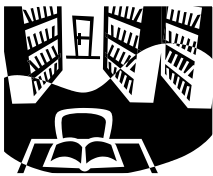
Herman, Jeff: Write the Perfect Book Proposal

Herman, Jeff: Jeff Herman's Writer's Guide to Book Publishers, Editors and Literary Agents [current year] and/or Bowker Staff, Literary Marketplace [current year].

Poynter, Dan: Browse through all titles that have to do with writing, and select the ones that apply to you, *especially* if you want to know about self-publishing.

Kirsch, Jonathan: Kirsch's Guide to the Book Contract

3) Go to the public library:



Consult the books above, without having to purchase them.

Look for books that might be similar to yours - study books that have already sold and everything about them. You're not going to copy from others, instead you are looking for details of organization, style, publishers, agents, cover examples, length, and all sorts of other details that you don't have to mimic, but that you should be aware of.

Use the library catalogue and interlibrary loan features - they're great and they're free.

4) Go online:

Find out about publishers, if they're online.

Do title and subject searches, if possible.

Find magazines that might publish your ideas and let you plug your book. This is a good way to polish your ideas and see if the public is interested. Don't expect to make much money from magazine writing. Use this work as an adjunct to your book concept.

There are many more uses for the Web, such as fact and vocabulary checking, finding target audiences for your book, blogging, finding book tradeshow, and so on.

5) Establish a database and allow 4-6 weeks for replies:

Keep track of your costs, who you mailed to, when you got answers (positive or negative).

After the 4-6 week period goes by, consider your query rejected or ignored.

Consider a reminder note, but also state that you must hear back soon

(2 weeks) or you will interpret this as a lack of interest and you will withdraw the inquiry.

If you are following up on any subsequent contact (you heard from them at least once) the 4-6 week allowance is still valid. Remain polite and firm. A sale is not a sale until you receive a contract.

Don't let response times repeatedly string out. This adds up - keeping your book out of action. That's not what you want.

The only time you stop doing this is when an agent asks for exclusive right to handle you (and sends a contract) or a publisher accepts you (and sends a contract).

6) Don't pay fees:

If someone wants you to pay for any reason, this is contrary to usual procedure.

People that charge you should be providing a specific service (editing, typing, cover design, layout, printing). Whatever the fee concerns, you should get something in return. An agent makes money when they sell your book, not before.

7) Go to conferences, meetings, tradeshow, and book store events:

Don't believe that just because you met an agent in person that your journey is over. Those who are nice or even enthused about your book can still go back to their office and reject your book. Your book has to stand on its own, so personal face-to-face contact is not crucial. Conduct your submissions in a business-like manner and follow published guidelines. This is all done by the mail, whether you met the agent in person or not.

Events are educational in many ways. Do attend these to learn how it's done, meet all sorts of people, practice pitching your book, mix with other writers, and so on.

8) After you've submitted to agents, go ahead and submit directly to publishers:

It is *not* true that every published book has an agent. The people who say you *must have* an agent are usually agents, naturally. The main thing is that you *must believe* in your book.

As long as the publisher hasn't stated "does not accept unagented submissions," go ahead. But don't forget, if you act without an agent then you should consider using a lawyer to review any contract (and consider doing this even if you have an agent).

9) Set goals and timetables:

How long will you allow for submitting and obtaining replies from agents?

How long will you allow for submitting and obtaining replies from publishers?

Will you consider rewriting or will you move on?

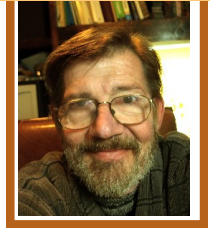
Will you consider putting the work in another form? Book to screenplay or play? Book to short story? Short story to book? Nonfiction to fiction? Adult to young adult?

Will you consider self-publishing and marketing it yourself?

10) Keep faith in yourself and a sense of humor.

“You had to be there.” - the apology of a failed anecdote.

Why is it that things which were so funny to experience fall flat in the telling? We’ve all had the experience of telling an account of something riotously funny, only to be rewarded with blank stares. It’s embarrassing in social interactions. It’s catastrophic in writing. Why does it happen?



The answer is in one well-known word: “timing.” But what does “timing” mean?

Most verbal humor (not all, most) is in the form of a joke. Some jokes work; some do not. Why?

“Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be.” -- William Hazlitt

A joke involves two different stories: the one the person thinks you’re telling, and the one you actually tell. When the two finally clash, it’s funny. The comedy lies in the contrast between the two conflicting realities. It lasts as long as the audience can conceptualize both of them. The trick is to (like “nitro” and “glycerin”) keep the ingredients separate until the last minute, and then slap them together, explosively.

A joke consists of two parts: the setup, and the “punch-line.” The “setup” establishes the “first story:” “what the audience thinks the joke is about. The punch-line reveals the joke’s actual point.

The setup establishes expectations. It provides a reasonable framework for humor. Notice, I said “reasonable.” A setup that stretches credibility — that reveals itself as artifice — simply won’t work. The setup must never show itself to be one. It must be accepted at face value.

The comedy lies in the contrast between the two conflicting realities.

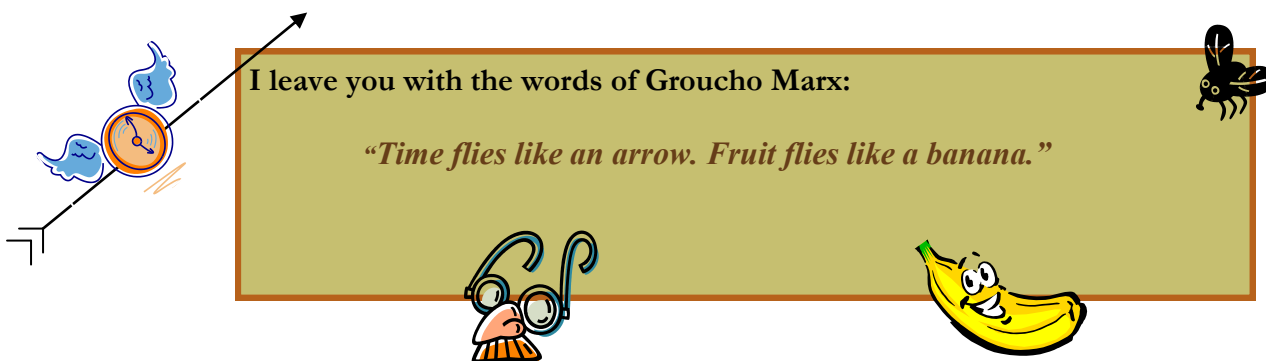
The punch-line must be exactly that: a quick, sharp “jab” that changes the perception suddenly.

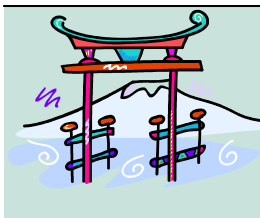
Think of this as a house of cards. The setup erects the house. The punch-line is the card that, when removed, causes the house to fall. The “funniness” is proportional to the size of the crash — the height of the house, and the suddenness of the collapse. Nobody is interested in the fall of a one-story house of cards. And, certainly, no one will react to its being painfully dismantled.

In life, we experience things very quickly. Events are comprehended as flashes - totalities.

In reading, the pace is slower — serialized. An event is dissected into its components, and presented sequentially. So successful comedy is stringent. The setup must present a vivid, real, reasonable picture without losing the reader’s interest with too much detail. The punch-line must change the perception suddenly.

A successful raconteur develops a sense of when his audience will have grasped the setup, and a knack for “pulling the rug out.”





Haiku Corner



The morning sun turns
My skin into reddish scars
From immense distances

Behold the bird sings
Responding listeners are quiet
Contemplating navels

The silver trails of snails
Lace tight the edges of the night
While my beloved sleeps

The bird in that tree
Sings her song so sweetly to
Awaken golden thoughts

The golden fish swims up the steam
The frog jumps in the water
Summer once more comes

- Art Yuwiler



The Play's Their Thing :

*Four members describe their latest
thespian endeavors and productions*



Dean Stewart has a new play opening in May:

"Rain Check" - Steve, a divorced recovering alcoholic whose ex-wife is moving to the east coast with their daughter to start a new life, is attracted to Mindy, who is attracted to Steve, but has had only negative experiences with men, been intimate with women, and is unsure of her sexuality. Together they share a journey of reciprocal self-discovery.

"Rain Check" will be staged twice at the New Works Festival at College of the Canyons between May 13 and 17, 2009.

Ray Malus wrote and directed a chancel play for the Easter season : "Brothers" Cast of 9. 1-Act Chancel Drama (Passion Play) One Performance: St. Nicholas Episcopal Church, Encino. 2 Performances: St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Canoga Park. Presented this past March 2009. Prior work: November 2008: "The Meeting In Durango". Cast of 7. 2 -Act Romantic Comedy. Ran for 3 week-ends, St. Martin's Drama Guild.

Dave Burr will be missing from our April meeting, but it's all for good reason. He will be onstage at the Kavli theatre in the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Center, playing the role of Abner Dillon in "42nd Street". This is a lavish production by Cabrillo Music Theatre, featuring over 40 actors, singers and dancers, with sets and costumes from the original Broadway show. "42nd Street" runs from March 27 through April 5, Thursdays through Sundays, with special matinee Wednesday morning April 1st. Full details are available at www.cabrillomusictheatre.com

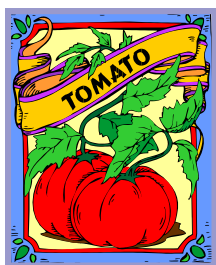
Erica Stux has written a musical based on the children's classic HEIDI. The production is sponsored by Women's Artistic Network, a group based in Simi Valley. HEIDI will be performed in Simi Valley the first and third weekends of May, exact location not decided at press time. Erica tells us, "Plan on taking your children or grandchildren to see it. In next month's IN FOCUS we'll have specific information as to curtain times and location."





A BLESSED CROP FROM A SOUTHLAND GARDEN

We Californians are blessed when it comes to our growing seasons, especially when it comes to tomatoes. Sometimes the plants are carefully planted as early as mid-March. If there's a cold snap, prudent gardeners hold off planting the seedlings until the beginning of April. Extremely cautious gardeners wait until the end of April, remembering cold spells of 41 degrees. My husband and I are impatient; we plant in March. We're gamblers and most of the time we win. That's why we want to share our expertise on raising tomatoes.



Think of it as a how-to-do it primer: *See Sheila and Jerry Reap a Field of Tomatoes*

The first step for an outstanding tomato crop is to prepare the soil. Augment the clay soil with amendments such as chicken manure, forest humus, worm castings and bat guano. Dig down about six to eight inches and then mix in the amendments. Next, buy the biggest plants the veggie budget will allow. Also, buy some tall cages to support the plants or use poles in teepee fashion. Plan on having two feet between plants since they do need room.

Once the plants are in, don't be surprised to find yourself hovering over the tiny plants like first time parents. Examine them for delicate yellow blossoms. As the plants become teenagers, you must support those magnificent tall green plants on trellises or poles.

Each year scientists report that honey bee hives are decreasing. The reason is not yet known, but the situation is bad news. Whenever we see a bee, we try to lure it to the side garden where the tomatoes reside. Jerry and I discovered bees like barbequed steak. Once the aroma wafts in the air, the bees emerge from their secret spots. They prefer their steak medium rare. Be sure to cut the steak into bee size bites and place them on a paper plate. Then carry it to the blossom laden plants. A speedy delivery is of the essence since an impatient bee might decide to nibble on you, envisioning a feast of "Homosapien tartars."

First time gardeners have other problems to consider: blossom drop, leaf wilt and yellow spotted leaves. In the past the experts told us, "Feed them." But others said, "Don't feed; you'll just get bigger leaves." "Cut down on watering." "Increase watering." And finally, "Use Blossom Set." Now we just use common sense.

The only thing they didn't recommend is praying, but we already had that covered. Our litany, developed over the years, goes something like this.

"Dear God, We don't want a lot, but please give us some tomatoes.

A homegrown tomato is heaven. Didn't You name it the love fruit?

Besides its exquisite taste, it's nutritious.

Thank You, Jerry and Sheila "





Jerry intones the words as he places his trusty trowel over his heart. My job is to sprinkle fresh coffee grounds over the garden. We aren't always sure if we will get the answer we want, but we see no harm in asking. So far it seems to be working.

About two months into the growing period, be prepared to celebrate. The newbie tomato gardener is allowed to shout "Hurray!" when he discovers hidden under the lush, feathery foliage a softball-sized tomato. Each day it grows a little more. A watched kettle doesn't boil, but a watched tomato luxuriates in being watched. Don't be too proud to stoop in some impossible positions to discover other fruit hidden near the bottom of the plants. Diligently lift the leafy branches to find the orange-red gems sequestered in secret bowers.

By mid - August you can expect to have your kitchen counter turn into a tomato depot. We caution you not to make the mistake many a beginner makes of refrigerating the bounty. Tomatoes are best eaten at room temperature. My husband always grabs one for his



intertwined with tomato slices, garnished with fresh basil and drizzled with extra virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar. In fancy restaurants it's called "caprese gratin."

But now is not the time to be complacent, for with the advent of tomatoes comes their arch enemy, the formidable foe of all tomato growers — the citron green, many- peded, bright scarlet horned tomato worm. The elusive, camouflaged creature is almost impossible to discern. However, it always leaves a distinctive calling card; block dots of excrement. The tomato worms rampage as they inch and crawl insidiously along the branches. The best time to catch them is early morning or dusk. You have to stare at a branch, and if you're lucky, you'll see the mischievous creatures, devouring feathery leaves on their way to the juiciest tomato on the plant.

Feel free to follow our tactical plan which consists of dividing the watch into four-hour shifts. In sheer desperation, we try yelling at the little red-horned monsters. Our neighbors were not enamored by our high-pitched angry shrieks. Of course, we discover that noise will not deter the beasts. We use our own cunning and subterfuge. Dressed in our own red and green camouflage outfits and holding field glasses, we stand still until we spot the green adversaries. Then we carefully don gloves and pull the stubborn creatures off the succulent branches. Care is required, because they do bite. I won't go into our disposal techniques except to say their fate fits the crime. Fear not.

By the end of August, the tomato worms should finally raise a white flag. The battle is over and your kitchen counter will once again be filled with homegrown tomatoes — albeit fewer in number. In less than a week, however, our once prolific plants slow down. We realize they are that the season is ending. It's time to say "adieu" to the wonderful tomatoes. It's never easy to bid farewell to our tomato season. We tend to get a bit morose, even shed a few tears. But, first time gardener, take heart. Next year as an experienced veteran, you'll be ready for the challenge and enjoyment of home grown tomatoes.



Sheila Moss

FOOLED IN APRIL

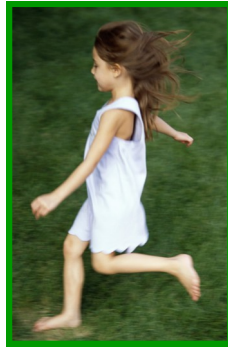
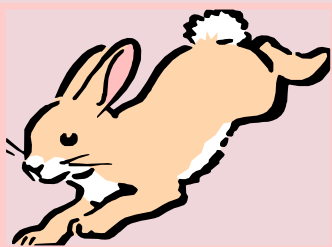
Of course I can fly
Just watch me
I begin to run as I spread my arms
My legs are now running in space

Upward into the sky
Try to catch me I say
Teasing and taunting him
Come on down he calls
I have something to show you
Can I trust him?



Will he reveal my secret?
He dangles the tempting bait
I can't make out what he holds
I float down and land beside him
This he says is Snowball's foot

I found it in the alley he says
Snowball our pet rabbit had run away
He spins the rabbit's foot on the key
chain
I begin to cry
How can he hop?



Suddenly an electric shock
Enters my nose and jolts me
As I sit straight up
Out of a deep sleep away from this dream
There beside my bed stands my brother

The practical joker
He holds a bottle of smelling salts
Laughing at me as I shake from shock
Fully conscious now I see him
Holding a key chain with a rabbits foot



Just like the one in my dream
Or was it a dream?
Can I really fly every night?
Did I see my rabbits foot twice?
What is real and what is a dream?

My brother dangles his key chain
It's Snowball's foot he repeats
I begin to cry as he says **APRIL FOOL**

- Leslie Kaplan

TAI CHI TEACHER



slowly he starts,
raising his arms to move
his hands like
two birds gliding low
over ripples in a pond.

turning to lean,
raising flat palms to push
back disquiet.

moving sideways,
feet find their place
with care, as if
searching for stepping stones
across a sacred stream.

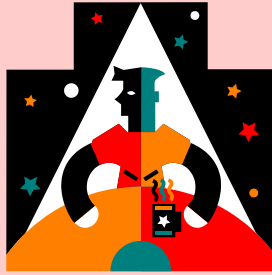
fingers closed
reaching to touch the power
of peace.

waist turning and bending
for the finale,
arms overhead holding a
Moment
of meditative harmony

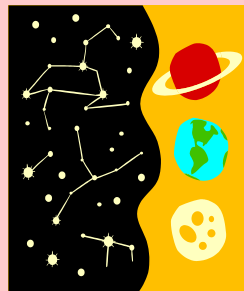
- Kathy Highcove

Is Any of This Real?

When I survey
The world around me
I sometimes wonder
“Is any of this real?”



Animals and people,
Grass, trees, flowers,
Cars and aircraft,
Mountains and oceans,
Racing round the sun
At a dizzying pace,
While the Milky Way
In which we're held
Speeds through space
Towards collision with
Andromeda one day.



How did this come to be
From invisible energy?
Where are you and me
In this fantastic scheme,
Is it all just a dream?



This is so bewildering
To contemplate
I set it aside
And have a plate
Of something sweet
To eat.

- Edward Louis Braun



Flower



Filigree fern-framed,
Coral petals pursed to kiss.
Above, a bud winks.
As the bee thirsts for nectar
I yearn to taste your sweetness.



- Ray Malus

O'Keefe's Can Can Review

Whirling whorls of color,
Petal petticoats flirt and flutter.
Pistol pantalets twist and tease
To the beat of "*Gaité Parisienne*."
Maurice Chevalier struts and winks,
Tilts his straw boater with a cane.



All caught up in step-motion,
Displayed on a gallery wall.

- Mary Shaffer

SPRING TIME



When ever I think about spring
I think about cherry blossom trees.
I think about walking along the river
I think about the Potomac river in Washington D.C.
I see the Japanese cherry trees covered with delicate
Pink-white blossoms-
They give the impression as if each tree is covered with lace
And when I walk along the river
I see the shadows of the trees reflected in the water,
I feel as if I am surrounded within a lacy curtain,
And I feel the beauty, gentleness, free spirit of nature
All around me.

- Marganit Lish



REBIRTH

The Tree People
came to Morningside School,
presenting sparse spikes,
baby trees,
cuddled in paper cones,
nested in a spoonful
of earth sustenance.
Six inches of promise,
fragile, boldly implying
importance.

A pedigree of care
clutched by
a child's curiosity.
A living symbol,
a quiet plea for life,
predicting growth
with nurturing,
depending on inexperience
for a future,
showing faith
in tomorrow
and a child's love.

-Lillian Rodich

A FESTIVAL OF TREES

In April, we will celebrate the gifts that trees give us on Arbor Day. Some people plant new trees, others just think about all the good things we have because of trees and how important they are to our way of life.

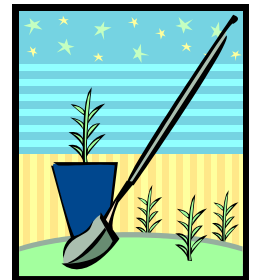
Can you imagine living without wood or paper? Or without fruit and nuts? Trees give us shade on hot summer days. They provide homes and food for birds and many kinds of animals.

Other benefits are not as evident, but are very important. Trees hold the soil down and keep it from blowing away. By soaking up rain water, they prevent floods. Trees clean up the air where it is dirty and smelly.

A man named Julius Sterling Morton, who lived in the state of Nebraska in the late 1800s, had the idea that more trees would be good for the state. Nebraska's first Arbor Day, in April 1872, was a huge success. More than 1 million trees were planted. Other states took up the idea. Today all 50 states have an Arbor Day, though the exact dates may be different.

Actually, the idea of a day for planting new trees was not new. It goes back to biblical times. The people of the Holy Land realized the importance of trees for their well-being and that of the land. A day was set aside to plant trees, reflected in a Bible verse, Leviticus 19:23: "And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food ..."

The day was first called the New Year of Trees, but later it became Tu Bishvat, meaning the 15th day in the month of Shevat.



Hundreds of years later, descendants of the original tribes no longer lived in the same places. Instead of planting trees, they celebrated the festival by eating fruits and nuts from different kinds of trees. Eating figs, dates, oranges, and almonds — all of which grew in the land of their forefathers — gave them a feeling of connection with that land.

In modern times, the people of the land of Israel are again celebrating Tu Bishvat.

Children are encouraged to plant trees, which are badly needed because of the dry climate. This makes children aware of their country's needs and of the responsibility of all its citizens.

Americans also are realizing the true value of trees. In the United States, some of the forests covering large areas are protected; nobody may cut down trees there. So a festival that started in biblical times still has meaning for us today — perhaps even a more urgent meaning than thousands of years ago

- Erica Stux, author of "Who, Me? Paranoid? Humor, Humor Everywhere."



She's Got High Hopes!

Louisa stretched out on a lounge chair and enjoyed the warmth of spring sunshine. A light breeze rustled the newspapers laid on her lap. A sweet aroma wafted over from her neighbor's garden - perhaps the honeysuckle vine or the flowering jasmine. She looked up and watched the mid-air quarrel between the nesting mockingbirds and a foolish crow, and noted two bright kites floating above a nearby hill. Must be kids on spring break, Louisa thought as she reached for another strawberry. Hmmm. Think I'm forgetting something important that starts this time of year.

She leaned back, closed her eyes and mused: I have had it up to here with the politics, the bad news, worries about the economy and I'm going to just lounge here in my own back yard and relax. Everything is almost perfect. Yet...Louisa looked up at her flowering plum tree... I know I'm forgetting something important. Something goes with spring flowers, birds, strawberries, kites, warm sunshine, relaxing with my puz... A small object flew over the fence and landed on her LA Times crossword puzzle page. Louisa started, quickly sat up and beheld a shiny new ...softball.



"We're really sorry Mrs. Rodriquez!" a boy's voice called from the next yard. "Eddie hit a home run the wrong way!" Two heads poked over the fence.

"That's okay, boys, I'm not hurt. Just surprised me a little. I'll get up and throw it back. Here you go!" Louisa tossed the ball over to a small baseball mitt extended over the fence and then stayed on her feet.

"Thanks, Mrs. Rodriquez. Glad you're not mad."

Au contraire: Joy flooded her soul. She snatched up the paper, pulled out the sportspage and scanned the headlines. "Spring training facility just opened in Arizona. Here's an interview with Martin, our favorite catcher!"

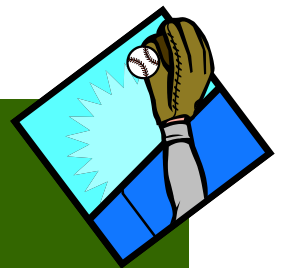
Now she knew what had been nagging at her memory.

"Spring means baseball! Mannywood time! How could I forget the Dodgers? Pla-a-a-y Ball!" Her yells set off warning squawks from the mockingbird home team.

- Kathy Highcove

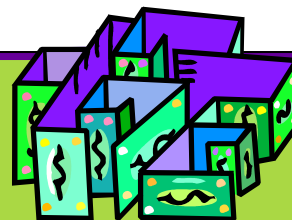
Baseball is a game where a curve is an optical illusion, a screwball can be a pitch or a person, stealing is legal and you can spit anywhere you like except in the umpire's eye or on the ball.

~Jim Murray



The English Language

ASYLUM FOR THE VERBALLY INSANE



Author Unknown -- contributed by Carol Fox

ing-lish uh-sahy-luhm

Editor's Note: Carol Fox received this humorous article in an email and forwarded it on to my email. I looked up the essay on the Net and found several versions in various blogs, but no author listed for this irreverent commentary. The message? English is a mongrel language with inconsistent grammar and spelling rules. Read on for a plentitude of examples!

We'll begin with a box, and the plural is boxes,
But the plural of ox becomes oxen, not oxes.
One fowl is a goose, but two are called geese,
Yet the plural of moose should never be meese.
You may find a lone mouse or a nest full of mice,
Yet the plural of house is houses, not hice.

If the plural of man is always called men,
Why shouldn't the plural of pan be called pen?
If I speak of my foot and show you my feet,
And I give you a boot, would a pair be called beet?
If one is a tooth and a whole set are teeth,
Why shouldn't the plural of booth be called beeth?

Then one may be that, and three would be those,
Yet hat in the plural would never be hose,
And the plural of cat is cats, not cose.
We speak of a brother and also of brethren,
But though we say mother, we never say methren.
Then the masculine pronouns are he, his and him,
But imagine the feminine: she, shis and shim!

Let's face it - English is a crazy language.
There is no egg in eggplant nor ham in hamburger;
neither apple nor pine in pineapple.
English muffins weren't invented in England.
We take English for granted,
but if we explore its paradoxes,
we find that quicksand can work slowly,
boxing rings are square, and a guinea pig
is neither from Guinea nor is it a pig.

And why is it that writers write but fingers don't fing,
grocers don't groce and hammers don't ham.
Doesn't it seem crazy that you can make
amends but not one amend.
If you have a bunch of odds and ends and
get rid of all but one of them, what do you call it?

If teachers taught, why didn't preachers praught?
If a vegetarian eats vegetables,
what does a humanitarian eat?
Sometimes I think all the folks who grew up speaking
English should be committed to an
asylum for the verbally insane.

In what other language do people recite at a
play and play at a recital?
We ship by truck but send cargo by ship.
We have noses that run and feet that smell.
And how can a slim chance and a fat chance
be the same, while a wise man and a
wise guy are opposites?

You have to marvel at the unique lunacy of
a language in which your house can burn up as
it burns down, in which you fill in a form by
filling it out, and in which an
alarm goes off by going on.



So if Father is Pop, how come Mother
isn't Mop?

And that is just the beginning--
even though this is the end!

Any questions?

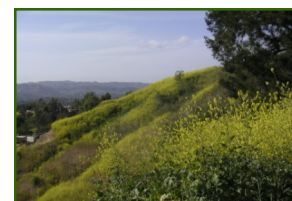
May InFocus

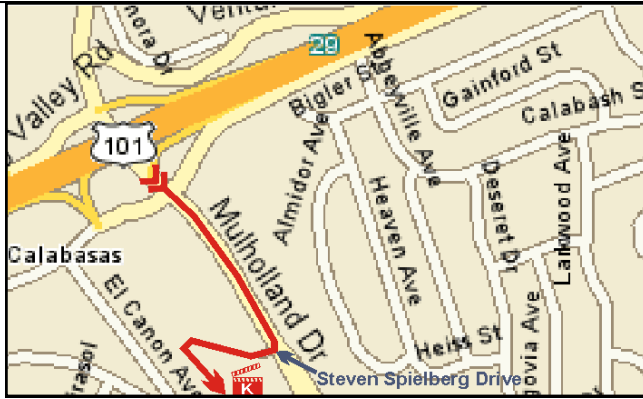
This next issue will feature work by, for and about women.

Send InFocus material with a feminine orientation. I have saved some member submissions that will fit the theme. For example: Expect an entertaining story from Ken Wilkins about the *Pink Lady of Malibu*. With photographs. Stay tuned. Think pink.

Kathy Highcove

P.S. CWC/WV menfolk will have a turn in June.





From the 101 Freeway exit on Mulholland Drive. Travel south on Mulholland and turn right at 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, April 4th , 2009 at 1:30 p.m.

MAILING ADDRESS

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

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Submission Guidelines for InFocus

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.

CWC Celebrates Centennial At the UCLA /Los Angeles Times Festival of Books



What better way celebrate your 100th birthday than a book bash with 140,000 guests? It takes place April 25 and 26 at the nation's largest book event, the 14th annual Los Angeles Times Festival of Books at UCLA.

This year our exhibit booth will feature the new California Writers Club centennial logo, along with promotion of California Writers Week, a map of branch locations, display of our educational mission, a montage display of our members' book covers, and more.

Once again, book covers from all branches are welcome. If you submitted a cover in previous years then you need not send a duplicate as the display is cumulative. Here are the guidelines: Send a cover of your book or books (two maximum), or a glossy photocopy of the front cover (same size as the original, not an enlargement), and send packed flat (not rolled) to Allene Symons, 2373 N. Flower St., Santa Ana, CA 92706. Be sure it arrives by April 10. In an accompanying note, indicate the name of your branch. These covers will not be returned. If you have questions, send to asymons@earthlink.net and mention CWC in the e-mail subject line. Sorry, but we cannot accept cover graphics in a digital format.

Our booth, number 619, is located in a prime location with good foot traffic near UCLA's shady Dickson Plaza with its venerable trees, some as old as CWC. Members who plan to attend are urged to volunteer for a two-hour shift at our booth, where we will distribute a brochure listing all CWC branches with contact information. You will meet other CWC members, interact with the public, and be amazed at how quickly time flies. To volunteer please contact Cyndy Largarticha at cyndycat1234@aol.com

For further information, including driving directions, map, ticketing and program updates, see www.latimes.com/festivalofbooks.

State CWC Board
