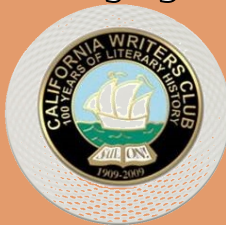


Enjoy!



NOVEMBER
2009



VOUME 3

WEST VALLEY BRANCH

ISSUE 4

The Usual Fare: Food For Thought



FALL BEAUTY: Taughannock falls
above Cayuga Lake, NY
© J. Bridgestone-Smith

Perhaps you have reflected on events in your life and often thought, "Gee, I ought to write a book." Easy to say, but getting it done is another matter. Most people don't know where to begin.

That type of sharing is known as writing a memoir or life writing. Our November 7th guest speaker, **Louise Cabral**, has presented classes and workshops in life writing for over twenty years. She is dedicated to sharing with others the insight, enrichment and spiritual value found in the power of the written word.

Louise Cabral will motivate our membership and interested guests by giving a mini-workshop on how to start and proceed. This will be an audience participation day so bring pen and paper and be ready to share what you would like to write and share with a reader. For more information about Louise Cabral please visit her website at www.louisecabral.com



Louise Cabral

**"Get in touch with the
inner child and realize
startling new truths."**

Kay Ryan



Once a year, the Librarian of Congress bestows the title of Poet Laureate upon a poet

deemed to be worthy by a board of former appointees, distinguished poetry critics, and the current Laureate. In 1985, Congress changed the name to Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. The Laureate receives \$35,000 stipend with a minimum of duties, providing the means to further the recipient's writing. Each gives a lecture and a reading of his/her work annually and introduces poets in the Library's annual poetry series.

Our current Poet Laureate is Kay Ryan of Marin County. She has written six books of poetry, won many distinguished awards, and is presently Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. John Barr, president of The Poetry Foundation, said: "Halfway into a Ryan poem,

one is ready for either a joke or a profundity; typically, it ends in both. Before we know it, the poem arrives at some unexpected, deep insight that likely will alter forever the way we see that thing.

Following is Ryan's poem:

Hide and Seek

**It's hard not
to jump out
instead of
waiting to be
found. It's
hard to be
alone so long
and then hear
someone come
around. It's
like some form
of skin's developed
in the air
that, rather
than have torn,
you tear.**



Previous Poet Laureate Charles Simic is a University of New Hampshire professor emeritus of creative writing and literature. Among his many honors and awards, he received a \$100,000 Wallace Stevens Award from the Academy of American Poets ... on the same day that he was appointed Poet Laureate.

Many Laureates have given generously of themselves to encourage others to love poetry. To name a few, Simic gives writing tips online at www.loc.gov/poetry and teaches a master class for accomplished poets at the Library of Congress. Gwendolyn Brooks (1985-1986) met with and encouraged elementary school children to write poetry. Billy Collins's (2001-2002) website www.loc.gov/poetry/180 brings a poem a day into every high school classroom in the country. Robert Haas (1995-1997) has a program on nature writing for elementary and high school students which continues today.

She Knows How To Work A Story

Kelly Lange is a modern communicator who believes in the old-fashioned work ethic: W-O-R-K ! At our October meeting Lange gripped the mike expertly and warmed up the CWC/WV crowd with stories of her work in the newsrooms of the Southland. If you were to utter "birdshot" or "condominium" or "Gary Coleman" to those who enjoyed her blooper recountings by television news staff, expect a chuckle or two. Or three. Kelly had the delivery of a professional comedienne and some of us laughed till we cried.

And for good reason: Lange is a media professional. For forty years she watched the red light come on over camera one and delivered the news to a Southland audience. She lived and breathed the news and made note of news items that sparked a plot line. When she returned home in the wee hours, too wired from work to sleep, Lange fleshed out her ideas and wrote her mysteries. The ideas for her stories - plots - were inspired by real life news items and juicy murder cases she reported on in the network newsrooms.

"Write what you know!" Lange reminded the CWC writers. The following quote from the LA Times tells us that Kelly follows her own advice:

Review: "Lange lays out her thriller with all the sophistication of a game of Clue, albeit one with a dash of industry verite--in particular, a film premiere scene name-drops and tattles nicely. THE REPORTER is an entertaining mystery made better by Lange's 28 years behind the desk."

Los Angeles Times Book Review
04/07/2002

Yolanda Fintor CWC/WV Talent Scout



Yolanda Fintor volunteered to fill the busy high heels of Program Chairs Leslie Kaplan and Betty Freeman.

Her reason? "The highlights in my life come in decades," Fintor confided to In Focus. "I married in 1953 and had my last child in 1963. I learned to swim at age 38, ski at 48, put pen to paper at 58. " It's time for another project, apparently, luckily for WV.

There was one year that Yolanda refers to as her "dead zone" when rejections to her submissions totaled 100% and she questioned the sanity of continuing this line of work. But she could not stop trying and remembered the advice her first writing instructor had given the class: "A

"Dreamers
have no
plan;
doers are
organised."



Yolanda Fintor and Kelly Lange

How to write what you know in the hopes of publication? Again, the old fashioned work ethic: a serious author is going to work every day on that manuscript. Lange reiterated the familiar formula for shaping one's idea into a finished document: the beginning concept and plot, an outline, journal, and time line. Lange recommends keeping notes on each character for a reminder later in the manuscript or in subsequent books about the same characters.

The material may be written in whatever form the writer prefers, but submission to an editor is another thing. Lange emphasized a professional presentation in a standard format. Find out what type of presentation an agent or editor expects from an aspiring author. If the submission is sloppy or lacking in the right elements, the submission will be sent to the deep six file—trash can. Be a professional, not a hobbyist, if you seriously intends to publish. Or share a mystery.

Dreamers have no plan, doers are organized. And they know the meaning of WORK! When the red light comes on atop your personal camera one, get ready to share your information.

writer must have PERSISTENCE!" Accordingly, Yolanda persistently submitted her work until she was published in senior, women's' and travel magazines.

In 1993, her coauthored cookbook, *Souper Skinny Soups*, was published. She thought she would not surpass this accomplishment, but eventually another idea worked its way into her consciousness. In 2003 her next book, *Hungarian Cookbook, Old World Recipes for New World Cooks*, came into being. A third edition was published in 2009 in paperback form.

At the rate of one book per decade, Yolanda figures she has one more book to get out there. It will be a children's fantasy book for middle readers. The manuscript is completed and ready for a publisher. And the writer is ready to be our Program Chair for 2009-2011.

"Working with a group of talented writers is exactly where I want to be in this decade. I enjoy my position that may enlighten and inspire my fellow writers in the California Writers Club," says our resourceful Yolanda Fintor.

REVIEW AND REFRESH



Dave Wetterberg explains the importance of context in one's writing. So many choices, the thesaurus is full of possible words, but only one word

might communicate just the right meaning.

Word Choice

Am I brave, courageous, bold and/or sinned? Choose the right word.



Chief Gordon appeared in the doorway, his clothes and his skin charred from the flames and the smoke.

The dictionary provides the literal, objective, core meaning of a word, regardless of the word's associations. For example, the words "belly," "tummy," "gut," "abdomen," and "mid-section" are all literally and accurately defined as digestive organs. But the dictionary doesn't take into account what the words are associated with. The writer must do this.



The Word ... is associated with...

belly	belly dancer, Santa Claus, pregnant
abdomen	doctors, medical charts, health class
tummy	babies, cribs, warmth, diets
gut	sweat, beer, blue-collar workers
mid-section	exercise room, boxing, halter tops

Finding the appropriate word for the context is essential to writers. Context is the sentence or the part of the sentence a word is embedded in. For example, the following underlined words all mean the same thing, but they are all inappropriate for the context.

The champ took a hard right to his tummy.
The baby's little gut peeked out from his jammies.
Interns are tested on the heart, the lungs, and the belly.

These examples are, of course, exaggerated, but hopefully they show how a careful revision means taking a second look at your word choices. Have you chosen the best word to achieve the desired effect?

A thesaurus is indispensable to find the right word for the appropriate context. Most computers have a built-in thesaurus. Or one might use Rodale's *The Synonym Finder*.

A synonym is a word you use when you can't spell the word you first thought of.

— Burt Bacharach



Trying Something New

Sometimes a freelance writer is asked to write a new type of story...like restaurant review when one knows nothing about that form of reporting. I agreed to such an assignment and for a few years, my spouse and I ate well once a month and met many restaurant owners and chefs of the Valley dining spots. Most of the experiences were quite pleasant and I gradually learned the ropes. Here are my tips for restaurant reviews:

* Meet the owner right away and learn the name of everyone involved in serving you a free meal. Meet the chef, get their culinary background, listen to their philosophy of their kitchen. Do the same with the owner.

* Make sure you know what you're eating and how to spell it. Take note of the ingredients and learn the variations. Keep a menu if possible. Ask the waitress or chef or owner to mark the dishes you sampled and the prices.

* Go on line and write down the website, the hours and get the right address. Spell everyone's name correctly. Put down the right phone number. The right hours. Double-check.

Often, when we step through the doorway, I know if we're going to have a good time. In a recent visit to a Cuban restaurant the owner/chef greeted us warmly and introduced us to his staff. We were seated and soon the dishes began to arrive.

What a feast. Beautifully crafted and presented for our camera's lens. Cuban wine, rich coffee, rich desserts. Bliss. As we lingered over the demitasse a table of local businessmen stopped on their way out and told me, "We come here every week. Great food." I put the endorsement in the story. Local praise for local talent reported by this local freelance writer. I was ready for more. — K. H.

Recognition!

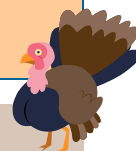


On October 18, I had a phone-in radio interview with host Pierre Wolfe on his Food and Dining Show that broadcasts from Denver, Colorado. My editor at Hippocrates, Inc. had sent him my book, "Hungarian Cookbook, Old World Cooking for New World Cooks." The interview covered a little of my background and the origin of some of the recipes in the book. Yolanda

Breaking News: Dave Wetterberg would like to teach a class in the short story. This would be different from a critique group in that Dave would teach lessons from his experience of thirty-five years as a teacher of advanced placement writing and literature. Reading and studying short-stories from the professionals would be a part of the class as well as writing. Time and location would be based on member interest.

If you are interested, see Dave at the November meeting, call him at (818) 883-9427, or e-mail him at:

dwetter@SBCglobal.net



NO WAY, GOURMET

All I wanted was a roasted turkey

But I ended up with turkey jerky.

The oven was hotter by several degrees.

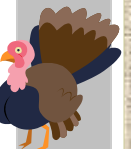
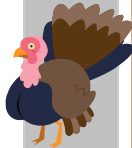
Extra crisp was the breast and so were the knees.

My future as chef remains murky.

— Ken Wilkins



A Thanksgiving Blessing



Please join hands. My thoughts for this Thanksgiving Day: We gather together to feast in a peaceful breaking of bread, offering thanks or good thoughts or nurturing mindsets, to the Creator or The Source or The Universal Truth - yes, I know you don't pray, so just meditate already - for the bounty or produce or organic life forms, in memory of the Pilgrim or Anglo-Saxon Survivors or Post-Columbian Invaders who feasted with the Native Americans or The People or The Wronged Ones after surviving a hellish winter ordained by God or Buddha or Gaia or the Bionic Force. Whoever. And so I'm carving this organic tofu turkey and I invite everyone to please pick up his or her recycled metal utensils...or polymer non-rain forest chopsticks. And now, at long last, it's time to dig each other and dig in.

- K. Highcove



Stanford Writing Contest

Stanford University Libraries, in partnership with the William Saroyan Foundation, announces the launch of the fourth **William Saroyan International Prize for Writing (Saroyan Prize)**. Intended to encourage new or emerging writers and honor the Saroyan literary legacy of originality, vitality and stylistic innovation, the Saroyan Prize recognizes newly published works of both fiction and non-fiction. A prize of \$5,000 will be awarded in each of these categories.

Literary fiction, including novels, short story collections, and drama, will be eligible for consideration for the Saroyan Fiction Prize. Literary non-fiction of any length is eligible for consideration for the Saroyan Non-fiction Prize, most particularly writing in the Saroyan tradition: memoirs, portraits and excursions into neighborhood and community. Entries in either category are limited to English language publications that are available for individual purchase by the general public. Entries must be received on or before **January 31, 2010**. Official entry forms and rules are available at <http://saroyanprize.stanford.edu>

Give it a try. Enter your best material that waits in your files.

HAIKU HUNGER

Singing praises of foods
in seventeen syllables
forms series of haiku.

Coffee: elixir,
my daily pepper-upper;
even weak is good.

Eating raisin bran,
I ration out the raisins:
one for each spoonful.

Chicken noodle soup:
solace when I'm feeling low,
booster of my mood.

Wholesome apple pie:
symbol of all that is good;
favorite dessert.

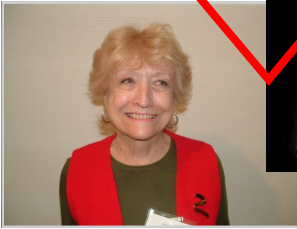
I cut my chicken
into wee tiny pieces;
make it last longer.

Smooth flavor on tongue,
kissing my throat going down:
The joy of ice cream.

Brown blobs melt slowly,
titillating my taste buds.
Cheers for chocolate chips!

Erica Stux

The Cookie



- Geri Jabara

I sit at my round, rock-maple dining room table, my chin resting

on my knuckles. It's 7 p.m. I'm struggling – What to write about for my creative writing group meeting in two days, on Saturday morning? My eyes wander through the kitchen doorway to the white counter top in the kitchen. There the lone chocolate chip cookie sits on the milk glass pedestal cake dish which once belonged to my grandmother.

"Stay away from baked goods. They make your sugar spike," were the words of warning from my nutritionist, who was recommended by my internist. He had tested my blood for diabetes. They just don't understand that I am obsessed with chocolate chip cookies. They don't know that I have been making them for years...some with walnuts, others with raisins and also some with Quaker oats. And, I've had my share of problems with them too. It doesn't matter whether I use butter, margarine or oil, they always come out of the oven brittle hard. Adding an extra egg to the batter didn't help. I even wrote to the Nestle Company, famous makers of the chocolate chips, asking for a solution to my problem. Their recipe on the back of the chip bag is the one I used. Nothing worked.

Now this four-inch munchies was no ordinary cookie from a store-bought package. This one was home made by Julie, my co-worker. She made two dozen of them for our department potluck where they were a big hit. Big, moist and loaded with chocolate morsels. Everyone raved about them!

"Just take one," she begged. "You'll hurt my feelings if you don't at least taste one."

She didn't have to push. I accepted it quickly and folded it neatly in my napkin, and placed it carefully in my purse. So now, there it sits in plain view, taunting me while I try to stir my creative juices.

7:30 p.m. *Don't look in the kitchen. Get your notebook. Look up the laundry list of story ideas you've been accumulating for dry spells like this. What's that line? "When the going gets tough, the tough get going."* Start writing! OK, here's the list I

was looking for. How about this one: *My First Crush. No, this one's better: 5 Tips to Survive a Breakup. Oh, here's one: My Train Ride from Lawrence, Massachusetts to Los Angeles. Ah Ha! This one's appropriate: Writers' Groups – Help or Hindrance.*

8 p.m. Time for a cup of tea, a pick-me-up. I walk past the cookie to the pantry closet. *Let's see, shall I have Peppermint flavor or open the new package of Jasmine?* I remove the cup of steaming hot water from the microwave, set it on the counter top...maybe eight inches away from the cookie. Peppermint is so refreshing! I think I can smell the chocolate chips in the cookie. I try not to look at the cookie as I stir a dash of milk into my tea. It reminds me of when I wake up in the middle of the night. I tell myself if I don't look at the alarm clock, I won't stress about how many hours are left before I have to get up for work. But the sweet smell is getting stronger, causing my mouth to water. That's contrary to what I was told at Overeaters Anonymous: "If you don't eat anything with sugar for three days, you will not crave it, even if you look at it, and can easily resist the temptation." Not true in my case! I haven't eaten anything sweet for a whole week.

8:30 p.m. My writing pad is still blank. It's getting late. My tea cup is empty. I so wanted to get something written before 9 o'clock. I'm starting to fade. *Forget about it. Wash the cup. Go to bed. Tomorrow's another day.* The tea stain is difficult to remove. I fetch the can of cleanser under the sink and scrub away. The chocolate cookie stares me down. I turn my back on it, but cannot escape. Tomorrow it will be stale. I pick it up to examine it ... loaded with chocolate chips that immediately start to melt in my hand. I break off a piece and put it in my mouth. A warm sensation starts at the tip of my tongue and travels to my stomach. I break off another. And then another. I did it! It's gone and I don't care anymore. It was heavenly! I don't even want to brush my teeth, erase the sweetness.

2 a.m. I wake from a deep sleep with heartburn. The antacid I chew by the dim night light doesn't take away the burn in my throat. I follow up with a glass of water with baking soda in it. Then I walk around my bedroom and wait for the burp.

3 a.m. I lie awake and say my prayers, one after another, with a special plea to my Maker. Please keep the chocolate chip cookie monster away from me.

Seize the moment. Remember all those women on the Titanic who waved off the dessert cart.
~Erma Bombeck



My First Hot Dog In America

In the spring of 1955 I arrived in the United States, specifically to Glendale, CA .to live with my cousin—whom I called my aunt out of respect for her age. My eyes were wide open with wonder and newness of the American life style.

Before arriving in the States, I visited the American library in the consulate building in my homeland for the purpose of reading and learning about a new country. I also wanted to become familiar with its people, culture and any pertinent information I could get. The reading sources were limited to the encyclopedia, geography books, information directory and picture magazines such as *Life Magazine*. (My knowledge of English was also very limited at that time.)

My aunt, who was very happy with my arrival, wanted to treat me to a special American meal in a “good American deli,” since she thought that this kind of food was most familiar to me. She took me to the only deli in Glendale.

We were sited at a table near the deli counter, so I could see all the varieties of foods that were being served. When it was our turn to order, my aunt asked me in Yiddish, “ Mine kind, do vilst a heise hont?” (translated: “My child do you want a hot dog?”)

I was dumb founded. It took me a second to think how to reply. As young as I was, I knew that I could not upset this wonderful woman who “adopted “ me as if she were my guardian

parent, and reply with an unappreciated answer. Yet on the other hand I ,who observed the Jewish culture rules of Kashrut, (Keeping a Kosher diet) thought that she was asking me if I wanted to eat a meat item made from dog meat. In addition,a flash of memory entered my mind. I remembered an article in the American consulate library about the Indian tribes in the U.S. who ate dog meat.*

So now I thought: Part of immersing myself in the American life style requires me to make a decision between my religious up-bringing or accepting an American life-style.

My aunt sensed my hesitation of a reply, so instead she told me in Yiddish, “Com, Ich vel dir vi-sin vos is a heise hont” (translation: “Come with me. I will show you what is a hot dog.”)

She walked with me to the deli counter, and pointed to the hot-dogs and said, “Du zast, zey zaine kosher. Es is ge-shriben Hebrew National in Hebreish.” (translation: “ You see, they are kosher. It’s written there: Hebrew National in Hebrew.”)

I turned around to her and said: “A dank, mir rofen zey sausages.”(translation): “Thank you, we call them sausages.”)

I had the hot dog in a bun (something new for me) with mustard, kosher pickles and a root-beer (also a new kind of a drink for me).

Thus began my adventure of life in this great land.



Philly's Favorite Noshes



- Leslie Kapan



I love writing about my home town. Like...the kind of snacks peculiar only to Philadelphia. So let's begin with Hoagies, also known as Italian Subs, and the legendary cheese steaks. The crusts of the rolls were always crisp and crunchy. The sides of onions, fresh or grilled, sweet or hot little peppers... the thought of it makes my mouth water.

Pat's Steaks, the original, was just a hop, skip and a jump away from my house. You'd better believe that it was at least a once a week favorite for the entire neighborhood.

Chocolate cupcakes and vanilla

crumpets made by the Tastykake company (something like Hostess) but much much better. The pastries were in every family's home for milk and cake after school, and more milk and cake at bed time.

One special candy called peanut chews got into all of our teeth. I don't think my teeth could handle it today. I didn't know much about seeing your dentist every three months in those days.

But most of all...I remember THE PRETZEL! The pretzel men, who were mostly Italian, would come to the school yards at recess and call out, “Musteh prets, musteh prets.” And we would all come running for the soft salted pretzel smeared with mustard. I believe they were only two cents when I was in elementary school.

The hard long stick or twisted pretzels were the perfect combination

with ice-cream. It was automatic that every ice-cream parlor had pretzels. When you think of it, it is such a nice contrast. The hard salty pretzel with the soft sweet creamy ice-cream. Heaven on earth, that's what it was, and still is!

Finally, it's impossible to forget Horn and Hardarts Auto-Mat. The vegetables were far more delicious than any cake or candy. For well under a dollar you could get a complete vegetable platter. My favorite combination was creamed spinach , pickled sweet beets , macaroni and cheese and peas and carrots.

Picture the colorful platter. Enjoy the perfection of each morsel. A still life painting come to life. You put your coins into a slot. Then a little window opened and there it was. It's a memory of the past. Another Philadelphia treat never to be forgotten.



Paeon to Thanksgiving



Thanksgiving, oh Thanksgiving,
how we love you,
Thanksgiving

It's the weeklong holiday we live for, year after year. Tents, trailers, campers and motor homes, filled with our family, take over Carpentaria State Park for the week. All the grandkids and great grandkids tear around on bikes, skateboards and surfboards, so fast it makes you dizzy.

There are fifty adults and kids in all; that makes our days fill up with joy and our nights light up with bonfires. One year there was one bonfire with only kids. Our grandson Donald had each kid tell a joke. As I watched them smile and laugh I knew they loved it, and so did I. The buddying up between kids and adults makes everybody relax and have fun at our yearly Thanksgivings. Every day is

friendship day.

Just the memory of those nights around the fire make me quiver...makes me count the days until this Thanksgiving when I can feel the heat of the fire and the joy of the laughter. Friendships give



every-one confidence; every-one needs it, especially all the cousins. Zach and the twins, Adriana and Isabella, racing their bikes up and down the streets of the park; Lennon taking his blind great-grandfather for a walk; Cameron, Devin, and Kaleb talking hockey and baseball; and Marilyn, Jayme and Amanda doing the girl thing as they strut down the street to the beach in their new scanty bathing suits. Even older kids, Chris and Ashley enjoy talking

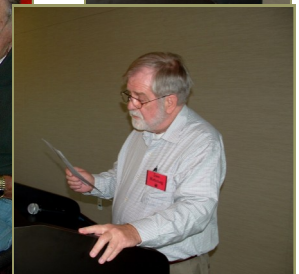
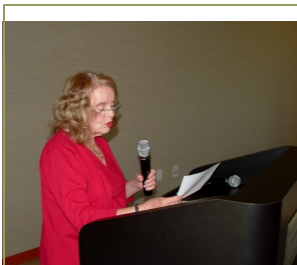
about their college and getting acquainted. Of course there is Nick so proud and happy as he makes his first try at surfing on his uncle Larry's surf board - now there's a grateful friend!

I usually pass out ice cream to all my great-grand kids. One time Lennon showed up with a little Japanese neighbor...a new friend. It made me think that we adults could learn a lot from these kids if we only would watch and listen.

When Thanksgiving week is over and their newfound friends are not by their side all the time, just knowing they have one friend makes it easier for them to face any situation. Having confidence helps them reach out to others and make more friends. Plus, they will have mastered the art of having more fun wherever they go.

- **Gloria Kositchek**

October 2009





The most important thing you need to pack for a trip is a large and resilient sense of humor, especially for Italy.

We were about to go into Sutri, a small medieval town in the Lazio region, for lunch when our host, Massimo, stopped by. We asked him to suggest a restaurant. He said that if we truly wanted the best experience in all of Sutri we should go to *La Gentile*. As he gave driving directions we realized that this restaurant was not exactly in Sutri. He said it was about twenty minutes out of town, driving Italian style. I figured it would take me forty-five minutes.

"Go down to the printer's sign and make a left. Then continue straight for three to five minutes until you see the sign to Ronciglione and make a left turn. Avoid Punto del Lago and make a sharp right and go downhill. Then turn left in about 300 feet. Continue driving always keeping the lake on your left. When you get to Bella Venere you are only two miles from *La Gentile*. The owner is Nello and you tell him Massimo sent you." Thus spake Massimo.

Perhaps I should have stayed with Massimo a little longer to get the directions clarified but we had a previous situation when he attempted to give us directions to get from the Rome airport to Sutri and I've learned that more instructions from Massimo makes for more confusion for me. That trip from Rome to Sutri should have been a one hour trip; after three hours of frustration we finally called him and asked him to come get us.

We had a map which was of limited use. Street signs are rare and never is there a sign to alert you that the road you want is ahead. You may notice an arrow pointing to Rome as you go past the road you were looking for. Someone

spoiled by the wonderfully signed California roads does not have a chance in Italy.

We found Lago di Vico, please do not ask me how, after a brief encounter with the carabinieri. There were lots of signs for restaurants as this was a beautiful recreational spot. There was boating and horseback riding and just hanging out in the sun. But there were no signs for *La Gentile*. We did however spot a sign for Bella Venere. We headed in that direction, but apparently when we got there we drove right past it. Sure enough we found *La gentile*. It had taken us over an hour.

Massimo had called ahead so our table was waiting. We were seated immediately. But we were outdoors. Everyone was outdoors. Who would want to be indoors in a magnificent setting such as this? Our table overlooked the beautiful lake. With the sailing boats and bright sun, it was a breathtaking vista.

After about a half hour we wondered if the waitress was ever going to give us menus. I called her over and requested one.

"We have antipasto first then a salad and then your choice of beef, chicken or pork. Would you like some wine?" was the reply.

"We will both have the antipasto, skip the salad, and my wife will have the pork while I have the beef. And please bring us a half bottle of red wine."

Another pleasant half hour passed until the waitress brought us two quarter liters of the local wine, but no glasses.

I flagged down another waiter and requested glasses. He notified our waitress who brought two glasses and an apology. She scampered off and returned a few minutes later with our meals, a fatty beefsteak for me and a beefsteak plus a sausage for Rachelle, no pork unless the sausage counted as the pork. Now if we only had a knife and fork....

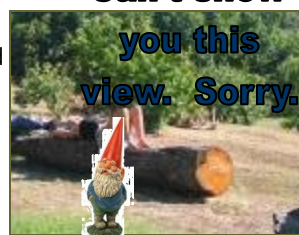
Once again we waited until I could spot the waitress and summon her to the table. She reacted immediately to our request for utensils and sent another waiter to the table with them. Finally, I cut my steak and began the meal. Cold steak is not all that bad, I thought.

When once again I caught a glimpse of our waitress and invited her to our table I enquired about the antipasto which should have been our first course. "Oh my," she exclaimed, and ran off to the kitchen. She "quickly" returned with our antipasto which now served as our dessert. I requested napkins. She brought them.

We now requested our cappuccinos and told the waitress that we were moving to another position where we would have a better view of the lake, Lago di Vico.

As we settled into our new seats and started sipping our coffees I noticed an attractive young woman lying on her back on a large log which normally served as a seat. She had he knees up and

Can't show



had her skirt up even higher so that the top of her green underpants were clearly evident. What an enjoyable view we had; the lake and the

attractive woman. Rachelle was also enjoying it. So much so that she took a photograph. Now the cold steak didn't seem to matter.

No one had left the lakeside restaurant in all of the time we were there and we realized this place was not just for lunch. Of course. Who would drive all the way out here just for a meal? It was the view that was the attraction. People came with their families for the entire afternoon. No rush, no hurry, no glasses, no utensils, no napkins, no menus. Just sit back and relax and enjoy. We were now experiencing the Italian way of life.

But all good things must come to an end and it was time for us and for everyone else to return to our respective homes. I asked for the bill. Our server handed me a small piece of paper with "50.00 Euros" written on it. No itemizing for wine, appetizer, entrees, cappuccinos, bottled water or even service – just the 50.00 Euros – in the Italian way. Not bad for a delightful afternoon by a volcanic lake in Italy's sunny countryside.



"You're a God Damned FOOL!!" my father thundered. He stood and stormed out of the coffee shop. I suppose the other patrons stopped eating and watched. I was too stunned to notice.

When I say, "stormed," I mean it. My father didn't drizzle. He didn't rain. He stormed.

He was a huge man. Towering, he was built like a solid oak door. But he moved with the grace of a ballroom dancer.

His hair, kept dark with Grecian Formula, was short and slicked straight back. It gleamed like onyx. But he had "cow eyes."

His body was toughened from years of hard physical work. His arms were like pistons. His hands were like calloused dinner plates. They could swat your ass so hard your eyes watered and your nose ran. Or they could stroke your head so tenderly that you fluoresced with pride.

He was Odin, Thor, Zeus. And when he bellowed, walls shook.

So I guess the other patrons noticed.

June, his second wife, and I just sat, stunned.

I suppose I should have been embarrassed. I was starring in the Lounge at the Riverside Hotel, in Reno, Nevada. And here we were in the coffee shop — not twenty feet from a large glass-encased billboard — featuring my picture, gaping after him as he roared out of the room.

Nothing untoward had occurred to precipitate his outburst. June and he had flown out from New York to spend a week with me, and preen with pride at "their" son. Until that moment everything

had been idyllic.

My father had not approved my dropping out of college to become an entertainer. But after I'd served a year or so of apprenticeship in the bars of Greenwich Village, he sneaked in to see what I was doing with my life. The techniques of entertainment were a mystery to him, but he was amazed at my ability to move a room filled with total strangers. He became, in truth, my biggest fan.

Performing is an itinerant trade, so we didn't get to see much of each other. But on rare and special occasions, he and my stepmother would come visit on the West Coast. He had a way of not cupping his palms when he applauded, and on tapes recorded from that period, I can clearly hear those dinner-plate hands crashing together like gunshots.

That afternoon, we'd been having a late lunch. My father knew I ate lightly before my evening show — usually just toast or cottage cheese. When the waitress brought the menus and he scanned his, he noticed that "diet plate" was roast beef with a side of cottage cheese.

"Mmmm," he said, smiling at me, "roast beef and cottage cheese. Would you like that, Raymond?"

"No, thanks Dad. But you go ahead."

He did.

I don't have the faintest recollection of what June ordered, but when the waitress got to me, I ordered "just a plain side of cottage cheese, thanks."

She took the order and left.

My father scowled at me. "Why you damned fool. I offered you that."

"No you didn't. You asked me if—"

That was as far as I got. It was then that he exploded.

In the silence that followed his exit, June and I looked, questioningly, at one another. Neither of us had any idea what had touched off his outburst. She just raised her eyebrows, and gestured emphatically with her hands.

After puzzling for a while, I realized what had happened. My father had simply meant that he would share his meal — eating the roast beef, and giving me his cottage cheese — a custom born of a life of enforced thrift.

I waited a respectful time, then folded my napkin, and told June I'd be back in a few minutes.

I took the elevator up to the floor where their room was, and knocked on his door. He opened it, and let me in.

"Look Dad, I don't know what I said, but I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you."

He grabbed me in that giant bear hug of his. We held each other for a few moments, then he held me at arms length.

"It's OK, Son."

Then a terrible thing happened. His eyes grew moist. He said, "Just don't ever tell me I don't know what I just said." As he did, his voice cracked.

Like the room was being shaken, my world tumbled — cascaded end-over-end. When it settled down again, I had lost my childhood — and our positions were reversed forever. I saw my father as he really was: just a man, aging, shrunken, stooped. A man who knew with certainty that time was stealing his life... and was dreadfully afraid.

I pulled him to me, and held him. Through my own tears, I comforted him — I the parent, he the child. After a while,

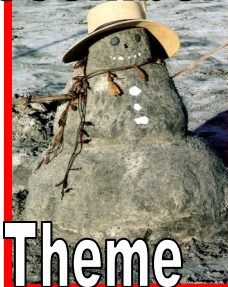
we went to join June for desert. My feelings for him hadn't changed — just my perception of him. And I think I loved him even more as a mortal,

than I had when he was a god.

- Ray Malus



December



Theme

It's hard to believe that one year ago I formatted *In Focus* for the first time. I needed to learn so much about publishing, and there is still so much to learn. I thank all those who have helped me learn the skills and contributed their work to the newsletter. Dave is a great co-editor and Ken Wilkins faithfully sends his photos of the meetings every month. And thanks to all of you who have sent stories, photos, poems and researched stories for *In Focus*.

Next month I'd like submissions about SHARING. We share gifts, insights, information, hobbies, and memories. Share something with your club members next issue. I'm waiting to unwrap your literary gifts

Kathy Highcove, Editor



An Excerpt From

Freshman Mom

The "Thanksgiving thing"

- Karen Gorback



As a kid, I looked forward to Thanksgiving more than any other holiday of the year. The garlicky-sweet aromas of roast turkey and candied sweet potatoes perfumed our little tract house and lingered throughout the evening, as the men played pinocle in the living room and the women picked through turkey bones for leftovers in the kitchen. I always woke up early on Thanksgiving morning to help my mother with dinner preparations; and as I grew, I graduated from polishing the silver to setting the table to the most important job of all -- basting the turkey every twenty minutes.

"Pearl, the turkey's so moist and delicious, even the white meat. What is your secret?" Uncle Murray would ask my mother every year. And every year my mother would look across the table at me and wink, silently sharing our secret knowledge of the extraordinary powers of regular basting.

I still smile at those memories and hope my own children will cherish Thanksgiving as much I did, which is why I was crushed to a pulp when 16-year-old Heather suggested, "Why don't we just skip it this year."

"I agree. It's such a hassle," added Jason, her 12-year-old brother.

"You aren't serious, are you? How can we *not* have Thanksgiving dinner?" My disappointment seeped into the happy memories like sludge from the Exxon Tanker Valdez glopping up the Alaskan coast.

"Yeah, Mom. We know that Thanksgiving is like your favorite holiday and all, but how about we just go to a restaurant or something this year? It'll be a lot less work," the Wise One suggested.

"Great idea! How 'bout we start a new tradition! Maria's Mexican Restaurant for Thanksgiving!" Jason added.

"Hold it, Gang! No skipping Thanksgiving and no Mexican restaurant. We're having Thanksgiving dinner right here like we always do. Don't you look forward to the wonderful smell of roast turkey all day?"

The kids looked at each other for sympathy. Maybe they weren't so keen on

Thanksgiving this year because it would be the first one since the divorce. And while I sensed they might be hurting, I wasn't quite ready to deal with that reality; so instead, I behaved like a mature adult and attempted to mask the pain with talk of turkey and mashed potatoes. Oh, brother.

"Ok, Mom. We'll do the Thanksgiving thing." Heather rolled her eyes in the manner that all teenage girls must perfect before graduating from high school.

"Great. That's better. Now who should we invite?"

"Well, definitely Grandma," offered Jason.

"Good. Grandma." I put an imaginary checkmark on an imaginary list in front of my face.

"And how about Grandma's friend Louise whose husband just died. She'll probably be lonesome on Thanksgiving."

"That's very thoughtful of you, Jason. Who else?"

"Well, how about your best friend Claire?" offered Heather.

"Perfect. Claire will definitely come," I confirmed. "Who else?"

Heather and Jason exchanged a glance, that to the trained eye of an experienced mother, spelled trouble.

"Ok, kids. What's up?"

Silence.

"Sing, or I'm *going to* have this place crawling with cops," I threatened in my best Cagney voice, which was completely lost on the two adolescents. "So what's going on? Are we still discussing the guest list for Thanksgiving, or have we drifted on to another topic?"

"Well, it's just that, you think it's important to have friends, right?" Heather stood up and began circling the table.

"Right, so?"

"I mean, Grandma has Louise, and you have Claire, and Jason has friends, and . . ."

"Heather, the point?"

"Well. . ."

"Sweetheart, what are you trying to say?"

"It's like..."

The poor kid was sweating; and just as she looked toward her brother for moral support, Jason exploded, "Heather has a boyfriend!"

"You creep," screamed Heather.

"You promised you wouldn't say anything! You're lower than pond scum, than moldy, green bread! You're the microbes that the bugs eat, the . . ."

"That's enough, Heather," I out-

shouted her. "Jason, let me to talk to your sister for a few minutes."

"Heather has a boyfriend, Heather has a boyfriend," the little brother taunted in the age-old sing-song that brothers have been chanting to torment their sisters since the beginning of time.

I took a deep breath and turned toward my beautiful teenage daughter with the wavy chestnut hair and big brown eyes, now welling with tears of embarrassment. "So, who is this young man of yours?" Suddenly I was Tevye in Act II of *Fiddler on the Roof*!

She sniffed back the tears and wiped her nose on the sleeve of her tee shirt.

"Well, first of all, his name is Adam."

"Adam. That's a very nice name." I sounded stupid.

"He's the vice-president of the senior class and he scored in the 85th percentile on his SAT's."

"Eight-fifth percentile? Very impressive."

After several moments of silence, I dove for the rescue. "He sounds wonderful, Sweetheart. Would you, by any chance, like to invite him to Thanksgiving dinner?"

Heather's sigh of relief could be heard throughout the free world. Then she threw her arms around my neck like she hadn't done since she was six. I reveled in the moment and then slipped back into reality. "But won't his family mind his being away for Thanksgiving?"

"I don't think so. His parents are divorced too; so if he comes here, they won't fight over where he will have Thanksgiving dinner this year."

Guest Writers

Editor's note: I am a member of the International Writers Workshop

www.internetwritingworkshop.org/ - a website that allows writers to meet and critique online. I have virtual conversations every day with writers around the US and the world. My writing has benefited from the discussions and critiques of my online contacts. I've asked two friends from the IWW to share their stories of past Thanksgivings. Their essays are posted on the next page. I hope you'll enjoy their views on Turkey Day family celebrations.

Kathy Highcove

Turkey Day in the Southwest

Kathy Highcove recently asked me to write about food for your Thanksgiving issue, and she could have picked no one more qualified. Indeed I have consumed food my entire life, and for virtually every reason one can imagine: hunger, consolation, gluttony, boredom, celebration, love, parental threats, desire to please, and the time of day, to name but a few.

Thanksgiving gives us one more reason to tie on the bib. It's that wonderful day when we give thanks for football and our God-given freedom to overeat. In 1950s New England, we'd go to a high-school football game that Thursday morning and return home to the aroma of the baked turkey and mince pie that Mom was just pulling out of the oven. She'd make the piecrust with lard and the gravy with bird grease. Clogged arteries were a thing of the future—the near future, as it turned out.

When we sat down at the table, Dad led us in a swift and perfunctory *Bless us oh Lord* for all those delights we really took for granted. Critical questions followed: White meat or dark? (Always white for me.) More stuffing? (Yes, please.) Cranberries? (Yes, please.) Lakes of gravy filled the craters in the mashed potatoes, while salt and pepper rained over all. At one such meal I politely asked my brother's girlfriend to "please piss the butter," causing everyone but Mom and me to get up from the table, choking with laughter. Mom glowered and said nothing.

We didn't know the word tryptophan back then, but we felt its effect as the afternoon wore on. Then in the days after Thanksgiving we'd pick away at the turkey's carcass until there was nothing left of that poor bird but the bones and a plaintive gobble.

Half a century has passed, and now my wife and I live in New Mexico, where the official state question is "Red or green?" referring to one's preference in chile colors. Our holidays have been drained of most of the fat except what we carry around on our persons, but otherwise we still have turkey on Turkey Day. So when my online friend Miz Highcove said, "Hey Bob, what's a Hispanic Thanksgiving like?" I was briefly stumped because I'm not Hispanic (long story short: Papa Sanchez was from British Honduras and swore allegiance to King George).

So I delved into research for a few minutes, and it turns out that Southwest holiday fare isn't much different from what you might expect: mix a bit of chili into the stuffing and go easy on the Pilgrim references, and you're pretty much there. Several Web sources (and you know how authoritative *they* are), say that the real first Thanksgiving was celebrated near El Paso—therefore, near me—by a *conquistador* in 1598. Take *that*, Plimoth Plantation.

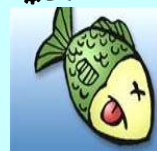
Of course, some original research was necessary, so we went out to eat. A Hispanic waitress told me that on Thanksgiving she likes to serve her family cornbread muffins made with chopped jalapeño, which sounds delicious to me. Finally, a Google search turned up such worthy suggestions as mixing spicy chorizo into the stuffing and combining a sweet and sour chile sauce with a cranberry base. So with a little Googling, you can easily add a Southwestern flair to your Thanksgiving meal.

Just keep an eye on the butter.

- **Bob Sanchez**

Thanksgiving with Grandma Pearl

Creative non-fiction leaning toward memoir



Wasn't no way I was gonna eat that fish. Grandma Pearl's cooking was bad enough on ordinary days, but she'd really sunk to the bottom of the well on this Thanksgiving with a double-whammy: a thirty-pound, dried-out turkey and a slimy monster salmon, head, eyes, lips, fins and all. Grandma rested the heavy pewter platter against her protruding belly as she pushed her way from the kitchen into the overcrowded dining room. "Here it is, folks, the big surprise I promised you, Nedward's salmon, all the way from Eugene, Oregon!" The stink preceded her.

The ten of us squeezed around the table in the hot little room, denting our elbows on the rough, crocheted table cloth, craned to see the fish. Maybe, despite the smell, it would be edible. We'd already given up on the turkey when we'd seen the papery skin and sniffed the burnt pin feathers—Grandma got the turkey cut-price and plucked it herself. Her eyesight wasn't too good though, and she missed a lot. Besides, we knew her Arkansas habits, growing up without refrigeration, she didn't see no need to take up ice box room with a bird she was going to cook in a day or two. It had probably been sitting out on the counter for three days, maybe a week.

She thumped the platter down. The fish, big as a dead cat, stared at us with one cloudy eye.

Ain't he somethin'," she preened. "Two days on the train back from Oregon in my suitcase. Had to change the newspaper wrappings couple a times, but here he is." Grandma was not a reader of people's faces. She was delighted with herself. "Now, dig in everyone! Don't want no left overs."

The candied sweet potatoes were real good. Came out of a can. We finished 'em off. - **Alice Folkart**

Bob Sanchez is an ex-New Englander living in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where he's webmaster of The Internet Review of Books (<http://internetreviewofbooks.com>). In the past, he's been a technical writer and a few other things he'd rather not talk about. You might find his blog (<http://bobsanchez1.blogspot.com>) interesting and his novels amusing. They are *When Pigs Fly* (tinyurl.com/wpffstar) and *Getting Lucky* (tinyurl.com/gettinglucky).

A recently-transplanted Californian, Alice Folkart lives and writes with her trombone-playing husband and 22 lb cat in the quaint windward Oahu town of Kailua. She participates in and helps administer two Internet writing groups, *The House of 30*, a poetry workshop (BlueLine), and the Practice workshop of the Internet Writing Workshop. Many of her short stories and poems have appeared in various Internet and paper and ink literary journals such as *Seven Beats*.

Google both writers to read more of their work..

Elaine
Shevin



The Writing Grandma

Many of our CWC membership were saddened by the recent death of Elaine Shevin, a member of the California Writers Club since the early nineties. Dave Wetterberg writes, "Elaine served on the Board of Directors, and headed many activities for the original SFV/CWC. She began writing short stories in our first established critique group. From the short story, she was inspired to go on and write her first of several novels."

Elaine was an enthusiastic personality who believed in total commitment, no half-way effort, no ma'am. And she seemed to have an indefatigable source of energy and optimism. The CWC benefited from her service to the organization in many ways. I remember very interesting speakers from the publishing and television script industry during her term as Program Chair.

And the school children of the Valley benefited from Elaine's ability to enervate and innovate. For several years SFV/CWC sponsored a writing competition for fifth graders in several local schools. Elaine headed the committee for this project and gave it her all. She visited schools, drummed up interest in the fifth grade teachers and children, and coached the groups in how to write a good essay and submit an entry. She helped choose the win-

ners and organized an awards ceremony at a spring CWC meeting.

I remember Elaine directing several CWC men on the best way to arrange party balloons on the stage and transform our rather drab meeting site into a festive reception hall - complete with goodie bags and refreshments for friends and family of the contestants. The guys got busy with the balloons, ladders, tape and streamers and soon had the place spiffed up before the spiffed up children and families arrived for the awards ceremony.

Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein remembers, "I worked with Elaine closely on this project to make more interesting. I would talk to Trader Joe's for a donation of candy or whatever they'd give us for free. I went to Border's Bookstore manager for free books that made the children very happy. Elaine always bought trophies for the winners." The diligent committee Chair also visited several other stores to fill big shopping bags with cookies and little gifts.

No child—whether a contestant or a sibling - went home empty-handed after the awards ceremony. Elaine wanted everyone to go home happy.

In recent years, while under treatment for serious vision problems, Elaine poured her enthusiasm into her books. She would go to book fairs, hunt down agents and publishers and tell them all about her books - *Green Passions* (2003) or *The Winds of Time* (2006). "I stepped in front of him and said, 'Let me tell about this great book. Give me just two minutes.'" A half hour later, Elaine might still be networking with the agent or publisher while making notes the whole time. At our next CWC meeting Elaine would share her news and pointers with the membership. Once again, she shared the wealth with others.

We will remember Elaine Shevin as a longtime participant in our writing community. As her close friend Art Yuwiler emailed to me, "Her passing is a tremendous loss."

Her devotion to writing and family was expressed succinctly in her e-mail address: writinggrandma@aol.com.

"Elaine was a warm and lovable lady and a fine writer. She will be missed," says President Dave Wetterberg. Many of us share those sentiments. - K.H.

Elaine



Where are you, my friend?
You softly left one day...
Did you go swimming in the rain?
Searching for words with every stroke.
But they were already there, my friend
Swaying into the pages of your books...
What do you see, my friend?
Out of the slits of your blurry eyes
Transparent tears like diluted ice
Gently fall to your folded hands...
Are you following 'The White Swan'?
Escaping into the 'Winds of Time'
Dragging your words behind...?
I see you, my friend
Hiding between the pages
Your words like pressed flat-dried flowers
Seeking the sun...
Elaine my dear, dear friend.
You left behind cinders of love
Covering us like a gauzy blanket
For those truly your friends
I see your face, my friend
Like a pale-bluish-gray pearl
Sleeping peacefully with no pain.

Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein @2009



Share Your Special Recipes

The following lists are general guidelines for writing and editing recipes. A standardized recipe has been tested and written to increase the probability that multiple people will achieve the same standard product. A recipe should be written simply and clearly so that the process is easy to read, interpret and perform. It is also presented in a format that adds clarity and is visually appealing. Many published recipes are not standardized. These ideas are recopied from the [Cornell Division of Nutritional Sciences website](#).

Ingredients

- List all ingredients in order of use, as described in step-by-step instructions.
- List the most important ingredients first, if it can be consistent with order of use.
- List ingredients in order of quantity, if they are added at the same time.
- Make sure all ingredients are listed.
- Make sure all listed ingredients are included in instructions.
- Use generic names of ingredients; avoid brand names.
- Use common units of measure. (2 tablespoons instead of 1/8 cup)
- Use the largest unit of measure. (1/4 cup instead of 4 tablespoons)
- Use words, not abbreviations. (teaspoon instead of tsp)
- State market unit with unit of measure in parenthesis. (onion.. one (1 cup sliced))

Preparation instructions

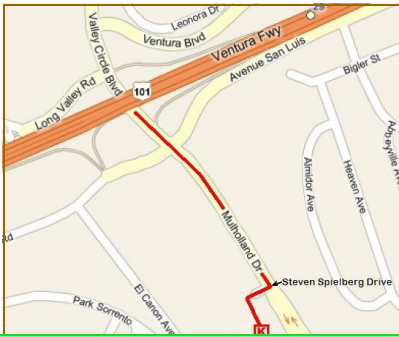
- Include all tasks in preparation instructions. (Wash and slice celery; Preheat oven.)
- State the size of pans and bowls. (large mixing bowl; 9-inch round pan)
- Choose the most appropriate term for the task. (mince, chop, cube, slice)
- Use concise, short sentences. Avoid unnecessary words such as “the”.
- Sequence steps of preparation to increase efficiency. (Prepping all fresh vegetables together).
- State the level of heat on a stovetop. (cook over high heat; simmer on low heat)
- State the power level of a microwave. (Microwave on HIGH.)
- State the approximate cooking times. (Bake 18 to 20 minutes; Microwave 3 to 5 minutes)
- State internal temperature for doneness of meat. (until thermometer registers 160)
- State any visual tests for doneness. (until lightly brown; until toothpick comes out clean)

Other information

- State the number of servings and serving size. (four 1/2 cup servings)
- Make sure the title accurately describes the product. (Apple Muffin or Apple Cupcake)
- Cite the source of a recipe. (“Recipe from” or “Recipe adapted from”)

Additional guidance

- Use an easy-to-read format.
- Use a standard 12-point, sans-serif type. Avoid italics and unusual type faces.
- Use lower case letters in ingredient list except for proper names. (onion; Swiss cheese)
- Test all recipes. Revise ingredients as needed to increase product quality. Revise instructions for clarity.
- Ask others to test recipes. Repeat testing and revision, as needed.



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 the Katzenberg Room. 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, Nov. 7th, 2009 at 1:30 p.m.

MAILING ADDRESS

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Please submit a work two weeks in advance of publication, Edit to keep the work between 200 and 500 words. Poems should also be compact: three to four stanzas. Editor reserves the right to condense for brevity or to correct errors. Some submissions may be reserved for a future issue. Notify the editor if you wish the work returned.



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