



VOLUME 3

WEST VALLEY BRANCH

ISSUE 5

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*Celebrate the happiness
that friends are always
giving, make every day a
holiday and celebrate just
living!*

Amanda Bradley



Make the Perfect Pitch

CWC/WV welcomes published author Lori Wolf, English and ESL teacher at Los Angeles Pierce College and Moorpark College, to the December 5th meeting in the Katzenberg Room. Her topic? How to write a query letter that will catch the attention of today's busy editors.

So many queries cross the desk or websites of most editors that an aspiring author must learn the skills of a promoter and pitch man.

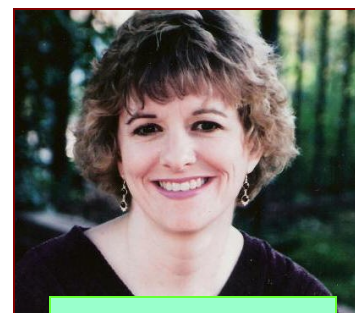
Lori Wolf has expertise with the query genre. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in several journals, such as *Sepia*, *Blue Unicorn*, and *Collages and Bricolages*. Her next installment of the *Quinn McKay* mystery series is currently "making the rounds." She is also working

on a new amateur-sleuth series. Busy writer!

Clearly, this author of current literature may teach us a thing or two about the modern publication market.

Wolf writes: *It is harder today than ever to get published, no matter your specialty. Thus, knowing how to write effective query letters and book proposals is essential. My presentation will discuss ways to make these marketing tools grab agents' and editors' attention.*

Members are welcome to bring copies of their own query letters and proposals for a brief workshop session toward the end of Wolf's presentation. Some might bring a letter that elicited a favorable response so we might note what caught the editor's eye.



Lori Wolf

Make note, members: homework is "assigned" for our next meeting. Bring a query letter or proposal for critiquing under the guidance of our experienced lecturer.

For more info on Lori Wood:

lori@loriwolf.com

Or check out Lori's blog at

howlinlori.blogspot.com/

Memoir Raison D'etre

During the holiday season clans gather together and the different generations get reacquainted. A multitude of family stories are told and retold at the holiday table. Quite often the younger members will listen, mouths agape, and then innocently suggest, "You should write all those stories down. Otherwise, it'll all be forgotten and our kids will never know why something really important happened to you. And affected the whole family." And with this plea in mind, many a memoir is born.

Memoir writing courses are provided by university and private workshop classes. Just type in the term "memoir" on the Internet and watch your screen fill. Any new writer can find the tools and information he needs to start the memoir process. No excuses, Grandpa, in these days of easy access to information. Everything is waiting out there in tech land and libraries.



Memoirs have no set style in today's literature. An author might do a blow-by-blow, nothin'-but-the-facts-ma'am unadorned piece, or attempt an imaginative, creative or perhaps an exaggerated truth-stretching anecdote. In short, memoirs are as individual in content as the individual writing

the personal history. Everyone has their own way of looking at past events, and memoirs reflect the personality of the writer. For example, *Red Scarf Girl* by Ji Li Jiang, *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir* by Frank McCourt and *Life on the Mississippi* by Mark Twain exemplify the variety of the memoir genre.

Thus, there is no one correct way to write a memoir, but there are general guidelines for the writer. The memoir should have focus, not an airy "I remember when..." type of tedious yawn-inducing trivia-loaded account. A skillfully done memoir will

(continued on page 4)

Open the Door to Your Life

Louise Cabral is a multi-talented persona and source of enrichment for many local writers. She strives to help her students discover - themselves. How? By "deeply writing your life story" but not in the form of a stiff artificial memoir. "I hate that word 'memoir'," Cabral confided at our November CWC/WV meeting. "I always prefer 'life writing'." And she went on to demonstrate the techniques of life writing.

"Everyone has a good story," Ms. Cabral assured our gathering, "if one takes the time to find it. I ask my students to find a key, a clue, or a reason for how you've lived your life." Our guest speaker has worked with writers of all ages in classes, lectures and workshops. She calls life writing akin to a spiritual journey.

"I ask my classes to open an imaginary door to your

self. Step through that door and visit the islands of your life." Ms. Cabral demonstrated one way one might open that invisible door. She directed our group to meditate on a very early childhood memory and then try to determine: Why that memory? Who is with you? What is happening? Could that early memory be

"You are not a human being on a spiritual journey, but a spiritual being on a human journey."

Louise Cabral

the catalyst for thoughts and actions in the ensuing years of your lifetime?

"Such thought flows or journeys into self-discovery are the stuff of 'life writing,'" she informed us.

Ms Cabral introduced another exercise that energized her audience:

Finish several phrases such as "I dreaded...", "I hungered for...", "I blamed...", "I loved...", "I fantasized...", "I despaired...", or "I rejoiced...". Soon mental doors edged open all over



Louise Cabral teaches self-realization through "life writing."

the Katzenberg Room, and pens raced across note paper as several "islands" were explored by the lecture attendees.

Sharing of the action sentences gave participants a glimpse into their own and each other's life journeys. Several CWC/WV members determined to follow Cabral's memoir methods in future compositions.

Visit www.louisecabral.com for additional information on Louise Cabral's workshops, cultural events at her Agoura home, and her books: *An Uncommon Bond*, *Islands of Recall*, and *A Pageant of Shadows*



**CWC/WV Secretary
Danielle Ste. Just**



Drawn to the Printed Word



Danielle is a lifelong writer. As a child, she taught herself to type so she could get words down faster. Years later, after she took her BFA in Creative Writing at Emerson College, she moved out to the LA area, and has been a member of the CWC for about 8 years. The camaraderie of fellow writers has been important to her, as well as the support and input of an excellent critique group.

Over the years while a member of a CWC branch, she has served as the Secretary and as a member of the Hospitality Committee of CWC/SFV. Currently, she is on her second stint as a member of the Executive Board, in addition to her role as Secretary of CWC/WV. (Danielle must crave Board meetings. Small joke.)

Danielle writes mainly prose, most of it speculative fiction. Her work has been published in the Emerson Review, Planet Magazine, and Alligator Juniper among others. Her latest fantasy novel is now under submission, and three agents are reading it as we go to print! Names of the agents are printed below so everyone can email their praise.... Another small joke.

But seriously folks, Danielle Ste. Just is an efficient fast-typing secretary who gives our Board meetings an extra measure of good sense and, quite often, a good idea, and that's no joke.

KH

REVIEW AND REFRESH

Sentence Openers

Observations: Most of the sentences in professional publications – books, magazines, newspapers – begin with the complete subject.

Our new budget is heading for deep trouble.

- Dave Wettererg

When a sentence has an “opener” --- something in front of the complete subject, that is --- it is rarely a long one, usually a short one, and often one word.

Because of this, they re-thought the whole process.

Confident, the astronaut told them to check the star-map themselves.

The most popular openers: Our old English teachers might roll over in their graves to hear this, but the most preferred sentence openers among the pros are **and** and **but**. Examples abound in books and magazines, old and new, fiction and nonfiction.

Openers taken from The Los Angeles Times:

And be sure you contact Medicare.

But there aren't enough companies in Japan.

And for securities held less than six months...

But the similarities are fewer than many think.

Other Various kinds of openers:

Noun cluster: *Knife in his hand, Tarzan stood at the cliff's edge.*

Verb cluster: *Bent by the wind, the birch trees seemed defeated.*

Adjective cluster: *Happy again, Mindy danced all night long.*

Adverb: *Silently, Alonzo walked to the window and looked below.*

Prepositional phrase: *For a minute the UFO hung motionless above the tree line.*

Infinitive cluster: *To keep peace in the family, Raphael apologized to his brother Henry.*

Absolute (a passive voice sentence with the helping verb left out) :

His last arrow gone, Geronimo waited.

Commas and Sentence Openers: If the opener consists of three syllables or fewer, the comma can be left out (“can” meaning “optional”).

At midnight Mr. Newman was worried. By one he was frantic.

With four or five syllables, it can sometimes be left out.

Until midnight Mr. Newman was not worried. After midnight he was frantic.

Any more than five syllables, always plug in the comma

When the clock struck eleven, Sally didn't even notice.

Lessons from Observing the Pros:

Open most of your sentences with the subject.

Avoid long openers

Stick to short openers

Use and and but freely as openers.



Recognition



◆ Dean Stewart's play “Rain Check” won 8th place in the 2009 78th Annual Writers Digest Competition. He also won two Honorable Mentions in the Screenwriting category.

◆ The Beaded Purse Poetry Contest winners have been announced. The poems were submitted without names on the copy. The judges marked their preferences and found, when names were revealed, that Ray Malus won first and second place. Congratulations to Ray, Lillian, Helen and Johanna. Kudos to Lenora Smalley, our CWC Patron of the Arts, for encouraging local poets.

Official results:

First Place

Ray Malus, *Catching A Dream*

Second Place

Ray Malus, *Pegasus*

Third Place

Helen Katzman, *Once Upon A Time*

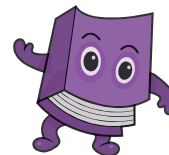
Fourth Place

Lillian Rodich, *Vacant Lots... Lost Playground*

Honorable Mention

Johana West, *Tending His Roots*

Collage Is Here!



Thanks to Bill Hitchins, Lillian Rodich, and Leslie Kaplan, **COLLAGE**, our branch anthology, is finished, has arrived, and will be available to members at the December meeting. Our anthology might be a handy gift for recipients on your gift list this holiday season.

Pre-paid copies will be ready for their owners to pick up. The rest will be sold for \$12.50 a copy. A deal! Come in early to pick up your copy.

Members' Memoirs

(continued from page 1)

have tension, clearly drawn characters, drama and conflict, and then resolution of the conflict. How did this experience create a difference in the life or outlook of the author? What were the important results? Readers should feel a bond with the author's experiences and find a lesson in the story.

Perhaps you've been tempted to write a memoir but don't know how to begin. So many years, so many events... gulp. Relax, there's a way. Join a class or workshop on memoir composition. Basically, a disciplined approach will do the job. First, write down all the events in your life that stand out in your memory, positive and negative. Talk to your family to jog your memory. Mull over your list, and then write down names, dates, conversations, or any kind of detail that help the mental image take shape. Then... begin to write. Write your first drafts quickly without concern for spelling, grammar and exactitude. Quite often more detail will suddenly come to mind in this free wheeling opening round of composition. Read the first draft to a willing listener and be willing to accept suggestions and reactions.

CWC/WV members sent in info on their memoir writing. Responses: and reasons for the memoirs were varied.

Lillian Rodich: "I have been in the process of writing my memoirs for the past 15 years. They are in the form of individual stories, not in chronological order, and being bound into books for my family. Some stories I re-write into fiction form that I might submit for publication. The books are divided into **Childhood Memories, The Rodich 5, The Isenbergs and the Rodich's, Circle of Friends, My Morningside Children (Teaching Memories.)**"

Leslie Kaplan: "Why do I write my memoirs?? Well, one reason is that it makes me feel like I'm reliving my life all over again. Remembering situations that make me laugh or cry is emotionally satisfying and healing. And I hope it will put a smile or a tear to those who may read or listen to them. I'm in the process of organizing about 150 of my life's tales into a book or two. It is a sure way to exercise my memory bank."

Ray Malus: "I've been in some interesting places at some interesting times - and some funny things have happened. I don't mean 'peculiar' (although some of them were). I mean funny. My friend, Joyce (of whom you'll read, later), once said 'Funny things happen to you.' I responded, 'Funny things happen to everyone. They just don't see the humor.' " From Malus' Memoir, *Stories You'd Give A Shit About If I Was Famous*.

Tina Glasner: "As far as the reason to write a memoir, I know I am always telling stories about myself. As I have to listen to myself, even if no one else does, I try to make the story humorous and certainly not always self-gratifying. One day a friend said she bet my memoirs would be a riot. Up until then I didn't know it might all add up to something, or that anyone would want to read it. I have written about only a few episodes of my life so far. Someday, I hope, this episode writing will connect into a book length. Even thinking about this has helped me get insights about my immediate family history and how I carry that forward, bad and good, into who I am."

Sylvia Molesko: "On my once-a-year visits 'back-east' with my daughters and grandchildren, I found myself saying, 'When I was a little girl...' At 4 a.m. one morning, I got up with ideas of what I would want them to know running through my mind. By 6 a.m. I had an outline going from my grandparents through my daughters' high school graduations. A life-writing class at Pierce College, followed by a writing class at One Generation Senior Center took me through the next steps, culminating with copy-writing and publishing a very limited edition of *Memories Revisited*, a copy each for my 2 daughters and their children, my brother, myself and the copyright office.

Since then I have folders on my computer desktop with bits and pieces for *Volume 2 - About You* (my relationship with my grown daughters and travel adventures with each daughter and each grandchild, one-on-one adventures, some to foreign lands, others to state and national parks and *Volume 3 - About Me* (writings mainly about myself, my thoughts and activities). In addition I have a folder labeled *Syl's Poetry*, for when the muse strikes."

Ed Braun: "Most of my poems can be considered memoirs. They either describe (1) a personal meaningful experience or group of experiences during a certain period of my life or (2) reflections and views on many areas of personal and common concern based on consideration of my experiences and observations up to the time of writing." edwardbraun@earthlink.net

Yolanda Fintor: "Journal writing captures moments of joy, disappointment, sadness and triumphs. I know that by not recording important events in my life, I would lose those thoughts and feelings, so strong at the time of occurrence, to a capricious, selective and illusive memory process. This kind of writing is also a good venting mechanism because I've given myself permission to write outrageous thoughts I would never express to friends, family or foe. The trick is to sift through what is publishable, avoid slander litigation and determine what is worth the risk of incurring the ire of those you write about."

Claude Baxter: "My children and grandchildren were instrumental in getting me interested in writing something about my past. When physical limitations prevented me from continuing the sports and hobbies of my choice, I turned to writing stories of my past. Before I knew it, I had enough material for a book, then a second book.---- and that covered only the first twenty-eight years of my life!

So now I have a professional editor is going over the books to assure stylistic conformity and consistency. I am learning a lot! I expect to have the edited books, self-published by Lulu, to be available before the end of the year. Those in my family and various friends who read the unedited versions of my two books found them really interesting.

In the meantime I am busy on my third book. It's like a disease! Once you start writing it is difficult to stop, especially if you have a lot to write about. Members of my critique group get to evaluate some of the stories. They can attest to my style which they often describe as fairly formal. That is because of my education in British schools. That influence of more than seventy years ago, has persisted to this day."



Thank You For Sharing

There's a famous old story (which I'm just making up) about two rural neighbors, Ben and Amos. One day, Ben was sitting near the fence that separated their property, eating a banana. When he'd finished, he tossed the peel over the fence onto a pile of garbage that sat on Amos' lot. When asked what he was doing, he replied, "Oh Amos and I are partners. I take the in-nards; he gets the outards."

See? Ben was "sharing."

Our society has the gift of corrupting any noble concept. When I was a boy (and being one of a set of twins, I know), "sharing" was a generous and charitable thing. One took part of something one valued and gave it to someone else — who also valued it. Nowadays, it's just a trendy euphemism for "dumping."

Total strangers will "share" with you the most intimate details of their private lives. The polite query, "How are you?" often provokes either a psychotherapy session, or an op-ed piece. Business conferences turn into 12-step meetings.

"Thank you for sharing." TYFS

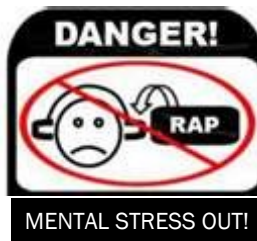
I was asked to write this essay, so let me "share" some of my thoughts.

I don't like Rap music — even if the person sitting in the car next to me does. And I prefer the pounding in my chest to be my own heartbeat, not the product of your super-speakers. **TYFS.**

Forwarding cutesy pictures of animals and syrupy sentimental emails is not the same as writing me a personal note. Any idiot can learn to click the "forward" button. **TYFS.**

The same is true for patriotic and political treatises.

TYFS.



Ditto for "hilarious" jokes. (For the record, the last really original joke was written on March 4, 1913, when Woodrow Wilson asked William Howard Taft, "Does this suit make my butt look big?") C'mon folks. If you've seen it, I've seen it!

TYFS.

I don't care about your wife's or girlfriend's sexual "kinks" — unless SHE wants to tell me about them.

TYFS.

When I ask, "How was your day?" I don't really want a real-time, minute-by-minute recitation. Life's too short. **TYFS.**

PLEASE DON'T
TELL ME MORE!

If you agree with me on an issue, you don't need to restate our position in detail. A simple, "Me too." (or, better yet, "Ditto.") will suffice. **TYFS.**

"How are you?" is an idiom. If I want your full medical report, I'll specifically ask for it. **TYFS.**

At memorial services, let's just assume we all know the "Dear Departed" was a jewel. I've got grief of my own. I don't need yours. **TYFS.**

Not every piece of writing needs to be your memoir. We all had first kisses and lost loves. We've all seen sunrises.

Before you tell me about yours, ask yourself if I'll care. **TYFS.**

You've got an opinion about something? Take a number! **TYFS.**

Yeah. We all get hacked off waiting in line at the Post Office. Tell me about your girlfriend's "kinks," instead. **TYFS.**

When we talk, look me in the eyes. If mine are glazed over, **shut up!**

The thing is, "sharing" is only "sharing" if both the donor and the recipient value the thing that's shared. Anything else is just plain "dumping." It's not generosity; it's self-indulgence. It's not a gift; it's an imposition.

Thanks for letting me share.

- Ray Malus



Growing In Your Heart

The fertility clinics didn't do invitro fertilization back in the Sixties. Instead, they had you take your temperature to see if you were ovulating. After following these instructions in vain

for about a year, we decided to adopt a baby girl and named her Julie. She looked like a Keene painting and had a sadness in her little face which reminded me of Oliver Twist at the orphanage.

My brother Herman and his wife Loretta had the same problem. Finally they too gave up trying to conceive. Instead, they were lucky enough to be able to chose a little baby girl and named her Phylis. A couple

of years later they added a baby boy whom they named Allan.

So our family now had three first cousins and two very happy sets of parents. And that was over forty years ago. Our children are adults now, who had children, which made us grandparents.

In my brothers family there is even a newer generation which makes my nephew Allan the youngest grandfather and my sister-in-law Loretta a great grandmother.

My daughter Julie was very productive and blessed me with four grandchildren. But you don't have to grow families that start inside of you. It's not the only way.

- Leslie Kaplan



A Williamsburg Christmas Card

- Lillian Rodich

It was the coldest December evening I could remember experiencing. I wore three layers of clothing, a knit hood and scarf, gloves and boots. We were told it was twenty degrees, but I would have guessed twenty below!

To begin with we gathered in the old Williamsburg Square and watched the cannoneers (dressed in eighteenth century costumes) "load" cannons with gun powder ready to fire their traditional Christmas round. We stood behind the cordoned off area and shifted weight from foot to foot just to keep warm.

Finally instructions were shouted: "Cover your ears!" And BOOM echoed through our protective hands. Laughter and scattered applause followed each volley. My young granddaughter covered her ears and buried her face in my coat. "Let's go, I can't stand this!" she cried. Still we stuck it out for all ten volleys.

The drum and fifers started the next ceremony. Their colonial black and white and red costumes formed a bright mosaic against the darkening landscape while crisp echoing drums and thin whistles sang in the wind.

Torch bearers marched at the side of the troop and our company

of enthusiastic tourists marched directly behind, following the parade like eager children. Up and down Main Street we marched, little puffs of mist marking our quick breaths.

At last a giant Yule log crackled into view. The crowd gathered around it as our parade slowly dispersed and the torchbearers planted their flame holders by the sides of the street.

We watched as the sky turned black and became a frosty pincushion of stars. Candles were distributed to everyone and flickered in and out of view. Soon a spirit of camaraderie spread through the group with the rekindling of lights. Here and there people sheltered their wavering flames from the wind and laughed as the candles went out and needed to be re-lit with a neighbor's shared flame.

Everyone sang carols together, then gasped in unison when a huge outdoor Christmas tree blazed into hundreds of colored lights. Shouts of "Merry Christmas" exploded into the night! Strangers greeted each other with smiles and hugs.

Two days before I had watched the Hanukkah candles burn brightly in my son's dining room and listened to my grandchildren recite the traditional prayers in Hebrew and sing Hanukkah songs. I watched the candlelight dance in their eyes saying the same prayer, "Peace on Earth."



A HUMOROUS HOBBY

_ Ken Wilkins

I've asked around and haven't found anyone else who shares the same interest in a hobby I find unique and personally motivating as a writer. I'm referring to: Collecting cartoons.

I have three categories that I look for and clip for enlargement and storage in three-ring notebooks: Pets, Married Life and Medical. Each cartoon is a stand-alone, not a comic strip. So far I have three large notebooks in my collection and enough cartoons to perhaps fill another one in each category.

I often wish I had started a fourth category years ago on "Deserted Island" cartoons. You would think that cartoonists would run out of ideas about one or two people stranded on a tiny island about the size of a large coffee table and a single palm tree, but they haven't.

How has cartoon collecting helped my "writing career?" I specialize (if you can call it that) in "Crimes in Rhyme" and "Pet Peeves." I try to end each poem on a humorous note regardless of its other than funny content. Thumbing through my collection usually sets off that certain spark that will help me provide a humorous ending.

I have taken one or more of my notebook collection to the volunteer group I work with each week. Many have seen a cartoon they like, have removed it and hurried to the copy machine to make a copy for themselves. They usually explain, "My dog, Spot, does this all the time." Or, from the Married Life notebook, "This is my husband, ten times over!"

They say laughter is the best medicine. Apart from the Lord's goodness, I ascribe my measure of health to a good sense of humor. Collecting cartoons has helped me maintain it.

"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones." *Proverbs 17:22*

Comedy has to be based on truth. You take the truth and you put a little curlicue at the end." *Sid Caesar*

He who believes that the past cannot be changed has not yet written his memoirs.
~Torvald Gahlin

She's the kind of girl who climbed the ladder of success wrong by wrong. ~Mae West





Christmas Carousel

The carousel turns
while Christmas lights greet the
night
and painted ponies prance to
nowhere
on enchanted silver poles.
The magic tinsel of children
laughing
fills the hour
with their innocence and joy.

Now it is time....
to reach for the golden ring
and share its bounty
with those whose tears
wash over their smiles,
their souls starved
and immune to joy.

It is time
to share our treasures
and our hope
before the gears
grind into silence
and the glitter of laughter
is covered with dust
it is time
before the ponies cease to
gallop
and the music stops.

- Lillian Rodich



TICK TOCK

"Time is wasted on the
young." Did someone say
that? Or, did I come up
with it on my own? Well...regardless of
who said it first...it rings true. The young
believe that they have time for every-
thing...that time holds hands with
youth, stretching it forever without
pausing to inhale...while jumping...or
skipping the cracks in the cement...hair
flying in the wind like a flag.

That's how I was, before time bru-
tally pushed me forward knocking the
braces out of my mouth. My eye glasses
shattered, blurring the cement curb
where I landed ...scraping my knees on
the curb.

I had no regrets before the *tick-tock*
came. Now, I regret that when I was young I
had played the piano, day after day, and did-
n't hide my ballet slippers between the quilts
of my bed...if I ever had those satin slippers,
where did they go?

I wish that...I had kept bits of time in
the pockets of my youth...and the *tick-tocks*
stayed away without reminding me that
time... was following me close behind, almost
stepping on my toes.

Now, the *tick-tocks* follow me ...my
days shrink to nothing just like a sudden
chunk of thunder trips the clouds away.

- Keyle Birnberg-Goldstein



Brief Reflections on Love

All Life Single Wants to Mingle

All life single wants to mingle,
To feel the tingle and tang,
The bang of rockets in the air,
To enjoy one another,
To love, explore and share,
Not spend time alone
In a rocking chair.

I'll Give You Me

Some day I'll take you
Where the sky is lapis blue,
The sand is gold,
And I can hold you
Close to me endlessly.
I'll bring you roses to see,
Perfume to sense,
Delicacies to taste,
Champagne and music
To brighten your day,
And for your touch
I'll give you me.

The Merry-Go-Round For Two

Won't you ride with me
On the merry-go-round of life?
There's only one ride
And it's better side by side.
We could find so many ways
To brighten our days,
With its beautiful music and fun,
The two of us as one
Till the ride was done.



- Edward Louis Braun



It was a hell of a way to start the year, he thought, easing the car up the driveway. Her limp body slumped forward despite the seat belt when he finally hit the brakes. No matter.

But then again, the thought, maybe it was the right time – sort of symbolic. A new start. She had been soaking him for years now, threatening to write it all up in her column. Well, she couldn't now.

He turned his head and sat in the dark for a moment looking at the limp figure hanging from the restraint, a big rag doll. Funny, how much power that gossip column gave her. And she seemed such a sweet girl at first when they met at Big Al's beach house. She country fresh and wide eyed in that light cotton dress. Completely out of place amongst the slick babes in their slick gowns that Al normally had hanging around.

She had to shout above the noise, yelling about how she loved working on the paper. No point in telling her then that's why she got invited. He'd let Big Al tell her himself. Always good to have the press on your side, Al used to say. Of course it did him no good. Nor her either, at least at first. The paper gave her a society column and sic'ed their star reporter on Big Al instead.

He grunted, removing his seat belt and reaching across her still warm, soft body to unlock the door on her side. You'd think with all her money she'd have a car with automatic door releases. She certainly didn't take long to get everything else – big car, big house, swimming pool, waiters bowing to her.

He slid out of the car and moved heavily as he walked around the shiny rear bumper to the passenger side. Get her in the house and push her down the stairs, he told himself. With all that alcohol in her stomach it would look like she came home drunk and slipped going up to bed.

He sighed again. Maybe that's when it started – at Big Al's house, he thought. Maybe that's when she learned about power. Certainly it was then she learned about him, smart Princeton lawyer in Big Al's pocket. Well, both wanted money at the time, he thought. Made no difference to her that he'd turned more-or-less honest now, that he had become a reasonably good judge. She had him. Ruthless bitch.

How those cunning green eyes of hers glowed at parties at the simmered compliments and the little invitations of sycophants hoping to appease her. And she'd play it like a fisherman, a quick taste of the hook in the throat, then a bit of slack, and a little illusion of freedom before the wrenching reality as she pulled the hook deeper and reeled the sucker in. The poor fish would choke in it's own blood on the way to disgrace. The worst part was the sudden loss of hope. That really crushed the soul. Yeah, she loved the look of other peoples terror. He grunted a laugh. She didn't much care for her own, however. Kind of like Ahab suddenly having the whale fight back.

He opened the car door using one hand to keep her body against the seat while the other fumbled for the seat belt release. The thick cotton gloves made the task difficult but they left no prints in the car and no marks on her throat where he squeezed.

Once freed, he slipped his shoulder under her chest and lifted slowly so as not to bang her head on the door frame. The only bruises on her body should be those from falling down the stairs. Slow and careful. That was his motto.

Once her head cleared the car door, he straightened from his stooped position and started towards the back door leading into the house.

No, he resumed, once she really got rolling, she became a terror, a lady Robespierre, the Queen Bee. An invitation to her parties became a command none dared refuse, not for family, anniversaries, or even weddings. Nothing.

The invitation meant at least temporary safety. But when the invitation stopped – then, oh then, one had to worry.

She hadn't invited him to her Halloween party. When he didn't get an invitation to Thanksgiving either, he felt the edge of the axe on his neck.

He had to find out. She had laughed at first, her eyes glowing with triumph. He replaced that with terror. He smiled at the remembrance and the fingers of his right hand twitched even as his left steadied her on his shoulder.

He mounted the three small steps to the house and, with her own key, opened the door to the kitchen. Only the faint green glow of the clock in the microwave broke the darkness. He paused for a moment to let his eyes adjust. At last he could make out the edge of the living room and the turn of the ascending staircase. Carefully he walked towards them and as he entered the doorway into the living room, the lights went on and a dozen voices shouted,

"Happy New Year!

Surprise!"

- Art Yuwiler



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FUNDS FOR WRITERS <http://www.fundsforwriters.com/>
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Writer's Digest's 101 Best Websites for Writers
2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009

The 1937 Ebenezer Church Underpants Fire

By Jan Bridgeford-Smith

After everyone had filled their plates at our 1957 Memorial Day picnic with too much fried chicken, oysters, hush puppies and deserts, Aunt Rudy turned to my mama and said in a real loud voice, "Jo, remember the Christmas Eve underpants fire?" She knew every kid at the table would stop chewing as soon as the word "underpants" was spoken.



"This happened in 1937 when Sister Jo was eight and I was ten," Aunt Rudy said, her voice thick with a southern drawl reserved for storytelling.

"Reveren' Morris was the kind of preacher that liked to scare everybody into repentance. If you were a kid, he'd lean right down into your face and talk about gettin' right with the Lord which was awful 'cause he had yellowy teeth, nose hair that peeked through his nostrils and a smell like to make you fall over. I swear he chewed skunk cabbage and took a bath in Burma Shave."

"Yuck, Aunt Rudy, why'd you say nose hair? That's just disgusting," my sister Grace moaned, wrinkling her nose.

"Rudy," mama interrupted, "easy on the upchuck details."

Aunt Rudy kept on. "Reveren' Morris was happier than a June bug in a dung heap when anybody publicly announced some pitiful behavior that needed forgiveness. Almost no one ever stood-up no matter how much he fussed so at the Christmas Eve service, Reveren' Morris thought he'd be slick. After we were all pleased with ourselves for doin' a harmonious job on Hark, the Herald Angels Sing, he signaled the ushers to hand out small pieces of paper and pencils.

"The Reveren' dragged a table into the center aisle and made a big show of lightin' the candlestick sittin' on top of it. When everyone had a paper scrap and pencil, he said, 'I want you to write down one sin that's been on your heart and when this offering plate comes round, drop your transgression in. I will pro-ceed to read each offense out loud. When your sin is called, stand-up so we can pray for your soul as I hold your wrongdoin' in this flame of salvation sending your abomination up to God in a cloud of smoke.' When that ole' pastor finished, it was so quiet you could've heard a bee suckin' pollen but in those days, people didn't go against a holy man. The plate got to Reveren' Morris overflowin' with paper scraps." Aunt Rudy stopped to gulp sweet tea but us kids didn't dare reach a hand for anything. We were all scared Aunt Rudy'd make us tell something on ourselves if we showed a weakness for food before the story was over.

"Unfoldin' the first scrap, Reveren' said in a deep voice, 'Beryl's underpants. Sinner stand and claim your sin.' His words moved nine year-old Tim-Bob to get up on a pew and announce in a squeaky voice, 'Sir, that's mine. I asked Beryl Swartwood at recess if she'd let me see her underpants cause I heard she got on a pair with ruffles and I ain't never seen ruffly underpants. Beryl hit me on the head with her fist and called me a lustful sinner

then ran away. Maybe my sin don't count 'cause I never did get a look at those underwear.'" Cousin Leonard and the other boys at the table started snickering until Aunt Rudy gave them a look that shut their mouths faster than a dose of castor oil.

"By the time Tim-Bob stood down, everyone was laughin' like a bunch a hi-eenas. Reveren' Morris started wavin' his arms tryin' to hush the crowd and knocked over the fat candle. Before you could spit, the paper-filled offerin' plate went up in flames. Pastor got so riled he tried to pick up the thing, forgettin' it was brass causin' him to burn his fingers which made him drop that plate of sins. Poof! the carpeting caught like a match and a snake of fire went right up the center aisle.

"Fortunately, Elder Durlinger and some other men whipped off their Sunday suit coats and started whackin' out the flames before the whole dang sanctuary went up. Meanwhile, Reveren' Morris was over to the baptismal font just a wincin' in pain with his burnt hand stuck in the holy water. Polly Purliner, the organist started playin' This Little Light of Mine endin' the service. Sister Jo and I practically danced outta that church we was so relieved not to have our sins revealed."

"Rudy," mama said, "you got to finish this tale before we all expire from eatin' sun baked potato salad."

"Almost done," Rudy replied. "Daddy, seein' our joy, said, 'Girls, why so gleeful?' But Mother said, 'Herbert, this disaster made clear God's got no interest in sharin' once more in the sorry details of a deed he's already witnessed. C'mon, I need to get my dinner on the table for it's spoilt. Whoever thought we'd be spendin' Christmas Eve covered in hot air and holy smoke.

"We had ourselves a fine meal that evenin' and went to bed excited for Christmas mornin'. Gettin' undressed, I asked Rudy, real quiet, what she'd wrote on her paper. 'Beryl's underpants,' she whispered. 'What about you?' 'Beryl's underpants,' I whispered back. Turns out we were both jealous of Beryl's fancy new underwear. I hoped the ruffles would get all torn up in the wash goin' through the hand wringer. Jo wished Beryl would fall on her butt in the schoolyard and rip the ruffles on the gravel. We laughed so hard we almost peed ourselves.

"So children, that's the story of how the Ebenezer Church almost burned to the ground thanks to underpants. As your gran'mama would say, 'Take care 'bout sharin' your sins lessen you wind-up jus' blowin' smoke an' startin' a fire others got to put out.'"

Aunt Rudy looked around the table and laughed, then took a big bite of fried chicken as my mama called-out with genuine gratitude, "Amen."



J.B. Smith is a freelance writer living in the Finger Lakes region of New York with her pastor husband, a demanding cat and wall-to-wall pictures of her three grown children. Her work has appeared in a Long Story Short, Short Story Library and various regional publications



Jan is my virtual colleague in the Internet Writers Workshop. I enjoy her humorous stories and asked her to share a flash fiction piece with the CWC/WV membership. KH

WHITE CURTAIN

- Clare Goldfarb

The snowflakes were falling all day and all night-- a white curtain fluttering from the sky. The radio said twenty-five inches fell in the



last twenty-four hours and some of the snowdrifts were ten feet deep. As I look out of the window all is very quiet, very white; there are no cars, no people hurrying to work, just snow, wind and rain, all mixed up. Nature is showing it mastery over man.

Today is school. Mom already left for work. My lunch was already prepared and waiting on the kitchen table next to my breakfast. I have to walk a block to the bus and I am not looking forward to trudging through the snow. I willingly put on the heavy woolen stockings Mom laid out for me, the ones I never wear. Today I make an exception. After bundling up, I brave the storm.

Snow is falling lightly. There is a fine white powder, like a carpet, covering everything, making the city look ghostly. The wind is freezing cold. My hands are encased in mittens, which quickly get icicles clinging to the threads. Although I have my scarf tied tightly around my head, my nose is getting red and icy cold. My breath freezes as it explodes in the air. I will be glad when I reach the bus

stop. It is only a block, but walking in the snow piled on the sidewalk makes it appear a mile away. My booted feet are like lead weights as I put one step in front of the other. When I finally reach the bus stop, I am the only one waiting for the bus and I wait and I wait. No bus is in sight. I hope a car passes so I can hitch a ride. But there is no one on the street. It is just the spectral city and me.

I am determined to get to school. I start to walk the ten blocks, normally an easy walk, but not today. Every so often I look to see if maybe a car or even the bus is approaching. But it is just me tramping through the snow. Snow makes the city look so clean. I know as soon as it stops falling, the white pristine snow will get black and sooty from all the chimney smoke settling on the street. My schoolbooks and my lunch pail are getting heavier by the minute. It is harder and harder to walk through the snow. I pull my scarf higher around my face and nose. The wind just whips right through me. By the time I get to school I am going to be a frozen popsicle.

Walking alone feels eerie, icy cold.. The buildings are gray apparitions standing like sentinels guarding their precious possessions. Trees with their branches denuded of their leafy cover sway in the wind. Birds and squirrels, so plentiful in the summer, are nowhere in sight. I wonder were they go for the winter. I learned that birds migrate in the winter to warmer climates. I wish I was a bird and then I could fly south and be warm.

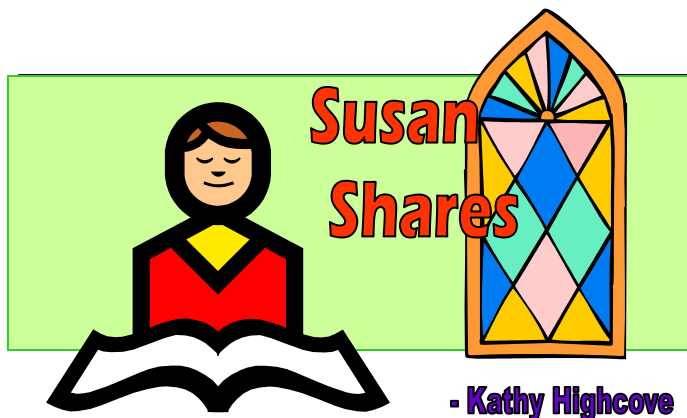
Finally I see the school building. It looks deserted. As I walk up the steps

the doors open and the teacher looks at my small-bedraggled form and says, "Clare, why did you come to school today?" I shrink even smaller right before her eyes and I squeak, "But it is a school day." "It is also snowing", she replies. She sends me to the cafeteria where there are ten other intrepid travelers and another teacher who directs me to take off my wet coat and hang it next to the others draped over the heater. I join the other students hovering over the heater. The room smells of damp cloth. We all look at each other, but not a word is spoken. I think our speech is left outside frozen in the air. After I thaw out, I walk to a table and take out my thermos. I know Mom filled it with hot cocoa. It smells good. I savor the sweet chocolate odor and the warm velvet trickling down my throat.

Two more determined students come in. After we all thaw out, the teachers tell us to go home. Again I must face the storm, but it stopped snowing and the city is coming back to life. The snowplows are cleaning the streets and the buses are running. As I ride home, I look out the window. The white curtain is now draped over the roofs and the treetops. A white carpet is settled and is beginning to turn gray and slushy. Cars



rush by me, and children who stayed home are already playing in the snow. The city is becoming alive again, the white curtain is now our plaything as we throw snowballs at every moving object.



Susan sneezed loudly as she entered the boardroom. The dratted church landscaping always sets off my allergies, she thought.

"Sorry I'm late, everyone. Had to stop for gas," she told the group. The Good Shepherd Church board members were already seated and her explosive entry interrupted president Ron's report to the group. Nevertheless, the affable Ron turned and grinned at his late arriving Website Chair.

"Gesundheit, Susan, and welcome to the meeting. You just missed our Sharing Circle and now we're moving on to our monthly reports. Please take a seat. Here you go - your copy." He handed her the evening's agenda.

Susan chose an empty chair next to Louise, who smiled a greeting and proffered a platter of cookies. Susan shook her head and studied the outline of reports and topics scheduled for group discussion that evening. Hmm. I'm fifth on the agenda this time. I was fourth speaker last month, she noted, and doodled on the white margins of the agenda. The treasurer droned on about the budget and weekly expenses.

After the Community Outreach Chair finished her report on plans for the annual rummage sale, Ron nodded at Susan, "Your turn...Web MISTRESS, heh, heh." The other chairs chuckled at his heavy handed joviality. The "web mistress" didn't crack a smile and stared at a point somewhere over the president's right shoulder. Ron's grin diminished to a wan smile.

Susan picked up her report and waited for the Board's full attention. She twirled a lank blond tress around a thin finger as she spoke. "I updated the webpage, working through my lunch hour, and just managed to finish the monthly report after dinner tonight. Heavy traffic held me up coming over here, as usual, and then I needed gas when I finally got off the freeway. Here's the website report and the church calendar for next month."

She handed a sheaf of papers to Louise and her blue eyes watered as her gaze tracked the report's passage round the table. Her Kleenex caught another sneeze.

"Bless you," said Louise. Susan ignored the blessing and pushed on with her report.

"I put up the church calendar, inserted sermons, all the monthly info, but... never again, people. Enough busy work. I resign," she announced.

"Susan, wait," said Ron, reaching out as if to pin down the web mistress in her folding chair.

"Don't quit," implored Louise. "We need you, dear. Who else will do our website?"

"My mind's made up. I've heard that church members complain at the coffee hour every week about something - a missed announcement or a tiny typo - that I published on the website. And you," she swiveled around to face Louise, "are one of the worst. I know you criticize me behind my back! You and your friends at the Friday night choir practice. Don't deny it!"

"Susan, I never ... what a cruel thing to say!"

Susan stood up, felt every eye attending, and swept up her notebook. The agenda fluttered to the floor. She stalked toward the door, chin up, shoulders soldier-straight, but she paused in the doorway. She looked back at the surprised faces distributed around the rectangular table.

"Good-bye. I never wanted this job - I was just trying to do Good Shepherd Church a favor. I made time in my busy schedule for church business and all I got in return was complaints. No, Ron, don't call me later. I've made up my mind." She stalked off into the night and crossed the dark parking lot.

Once inside her Honda Civic, Susan locked the car doors and watched over her steering wheel the scene visible through the bright boardroom window. Louise seemed to be crying. Ron handed her a kleenex.

As she drove away she thought, Whew. That's over. When will I learn not to be such a giver?

January In Focus



According to the Chinese Zodiac, the Year 2010 is the Year of the Tiger, which begins on February 14, 2010 and ends on February 2, 2011. The Tiger is the third sign in the cycle of Chinese Zodiac, which consists of 12 animal signs. The tiger is a sign of courage in the Chinese culture. This fearless and fiery fighter has been revered as the sign that wards off the three main disasters of a household: fire, thieves and ghosts.



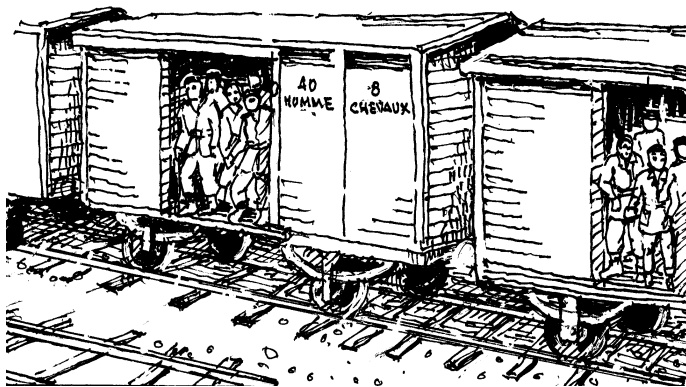
We'll ride the tiger in the coming issue of In Focus. Send me stories of drama and close calls, emergencies and rescues. Do the words "fire, thieves and ghosts" bring anything to mind.? Perhaps you'd like to exorcise a "ghost" and tell us a story of empowerment and successful outcomes. Let's start off the New Year in brave style. **Kathy Highcove**

40 and 8 Box Cars

- Max Schwartz

When the truck from R&R arrived back in Scharding, Austria, bad news greeted them. "We're being redeployed!" announced Major Bergman. "Get your gear together and prepare to leave immediately!" *That was it. No preamble, no explanation, just we're moving. I didn't even have time to brag about my time in Arlon, Belgium.*

After reluctantly throwing away the fishing rod and reel he had hoped to use during Occupation duties, Max climbed on another truck for a short convoy ride to a railroad outside of town where two ancient trains awaited. One, a 1914 vintage freight train with a string of flat cars carrying the regiment's heavy equipment, and the other, also a WW1 train with forty boxcars and four couches to carry the enlisted men and their officers. The motor pool was lucky to drive their vehicles in convoy.



"What do they think we are, cattle?"

"Where are we being redeployed? What the hell does that mean?" Max asked, never imagining that he would be riding the same railroad cars that his father's generation rode during World War I.

"My guess is that we're going to the Pacific to fight the Japanese," answered Pete bitterly. "But then again, maybe not."

When Max climbed into a boxcar, he noted white letters stenciled on its side that read **40 HOMMES-8 CHEVAUX**. "That means 40 men or 8 horses," he said.

"Those WW I doughboys must have liked these cars. Otherwise why would the American Legion use 40 and 8 as their logo?"

The regiment set off on the six-day trip to Marseilles, France, for redeployment to the Pacific Theater of Operations. Their new quarters were rickety railroad freight cars with straw-covered wood floors and drafty cracked wood plank walls. Thirty to forty men stood, sat and slept in each noisy, dusty, odorous car, each car only 20-feet long, 8-feet wide, and 8-feet high and rode on four small steel wheels. The men only ate K-rations and to relieve themselves waited for the locomotive's infrequent fuel or water stops. In emergency, they stood at the open doorway and urinated into the countryside.

Max was innovative to be the first to get hot water for shaving. At one of the stops, he ran forward to the engine and pointing to his helmet, pleaded in French and German:

"La eau chaud, s'il vous plait? Bitte. Haben sie heisse wasser fur mir?" (Hot water, please?), The old engineer smiled and turned a handle to allow steaming hot water to come out of the front steam cylinder. Max filled his helmet to the brim, shouted *« Merci beau coup,*" and proudly carried his full helmet back to his boxcar where he shared the valuable water with the other soldiers.

At the next stop at a railroad marshalling area, another train stopped with "displaced" women. When Max's train pulled alongside, he saw scores of female refugees squatting over the field relieving themselves.

"God, there're hundreds of women out there," exclaimed Rex Karnes, unbelievably. They were old and young, fat and skinny. Many wore colorful kerchiefs covering their shaved heads, the sign of collaborators or survivors from concentration camps. The latter were frail skeletons that stumbled weakly back to the box cars..

"They are not a bit embarrassed doing their thing with a thousand GI's looking at them," commented Pete.

"I think we're more embarrassed than they are," said Max bitterly, as he turned his back to the scene. Pete also turned away, "God, we've seen a lot of awful things in this war, but this is terrible." There was not a sound from

(Continued on page 13)

the men in the cars. Most had turned their faces away from the scene in courtesy, thinking of their own wives, sweet-hearts, mothers and daughters being so degraded.

At still another stop, their train slowed down between two parked trains. When it came to a full stop, the men jumped to the ground in the narrow space between the tracks to relieve themselves.

"Oh shit!" Max grunted as he beheld hundreds of gray-uniformed German soldiers jumping out of the adjacent boxcars into the same narrow space. Max and his fellow GI's stood in the narrow space face-to-face with the line of demobilized German soldiers.

An awesome silence prevailed between the two rows of recent combatants. Looking down the rows, Max thought, *So this is our enemy, or late enemy. Their dirty gray uniforms wrinkled peaked caps, and mud-encrusted leather boots were symbols of evil. These were the men we hated and tried to kill.* For the first time he saw them as individuals, as young boys and old men. Some looked like hardened warriors and others were completely defeated *soldaten* of the *Wehrmacht*.

Several minutes went by without a sound between the two groups. They only stared and studied each other. Suddenly one gaunt German with corporal stripes, standing directly in front of Max, asked in a low polite voice, "*Gehen sie zurück nach Amerika?*" (Are you going back to America?") Surprised by the question, Max looked straight at him. The corporal's cold gray eyes seemed to show concern and sympathy. Max hesitated to answer, as he had never spoken to an enemy soldier before as an equal, but only as a victor to a prisoner.

"*Nein,*" said the American in a matter-of-fact, unemotional voice, "*Wir fahren zu eine anderen krieg.*" (No. We're going to another war.)



Soldiers going home and to another war.



Forty and Eights style boxcar in the Army Transportation Museum.

WWII info in this section found on the Wikipedia website

The **Forty and Eight** is an organization of veterans of the United States armed forces. Its official name is "La Société des Quarante Hommes et Huit Chevaux," which is French, and literally translates as "The Society of Forty Men and Eight Horses."

The organization (also known as "La Société") can trace its roots back to 1920, when Joseph W. Breen and 15 other members of the American Legion, who were veterans of World War I, came together and founded it as an honor society for certain Legion members.

The title "**40&8**" comes from the box cars that were used to transport troops to the front in France. Each car had the emblem 40/8 stenciled on the sides, which meant that it could carry 40 men or 8 horses. These cars were known as forty-and-eights. They were seen by the troops as a miserable way to travel, and the new organization was thus called the 40&8 in an attempt to make some light of the common misery they had all shared.

Author's Biography

Max Schwartz worked as a Surveyor/Aide/Designer/Draftsman on the Pan American Highway in Costa Rica, Central America, 1941-1942.

In 1942, 20 year-old Max joined the Army Engineers to serve in European and Asiatic Theaters under Gen. Patton and MacArthur, then discharged as a M/Sgt. after VJ Day. He earned a BE Degree in Civil Engineering at USC, got married, and had three children.

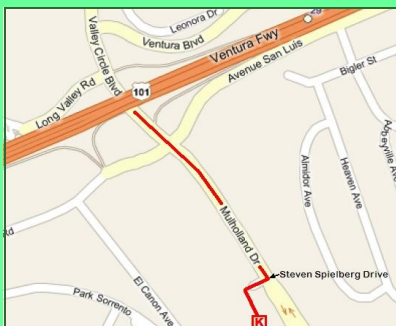
The next ten years, he worked for an engineering and construction company on industrial projects throughout the world. He then formed his own engineering consulting firm and taught at UCLA Extension Civil Engineering for Plant Engineers.

Max began writing and illustrating text books for his class, then wrote technical books for builders and contractors. After he was hooked on writing, he authored many more books on subjects related to his life. These included the Biblical Period, WWII, Pan American Highway, and the latest, History of Military and Civil Engineering.

He's currently working on these books: [The Siege - Story of the Roman Conquest of Jerusalem in AD 70](#), [The Body Bodacious - Story of Artist's Models](#) and [The Hidden Artist - Art as a Second Vocation, or If you want to make a living, be an artist](#).

For more info on Schwartz : www.1306engineers.com





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MEETINGS

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Villa Katzenberg

23388 Mulholland

Woodland Hills, CA 91364-2733

NEXT MEETING

Saturday, Dec. 5th, 2009 at 1:30 p.m.

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Guidelines

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.



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